



**The spirituality of Saint Tugdual of Saint-Dolay,  
or the rebirth of the Celtic Orthodox Church <sup>(1)</sup>**

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Bishop Tugdual was canonized at the Holy Presence Monastery on August 11, 1996. His spirituality is a light that shines in the firmament of our Church and I invite you to discover a brief overview of it.

Let us first recall the essential events of his existence which was tormented and rich in trials. It was not an ordinary fate. Bishop Tugdual, whose

civil name is Jean-Pierre Danyel, will remain an enigmatic figure for many, because the life of this holy man was undoubtedly extraordinary.

He is born in Flers, in Orne, on June 22, 1917. His parents abandon him and he is placed in Public Assistance, as it was called at the time. He receives the name Danyel because it was Saint Daniel's Day on the calendar. He remains there until the age of five and is then taken in by his grandparents or perhaps by an aunt, as two versions differ on this point. He is taken to Belgium where he does his first studies. He grew up in an atheist environment, but receives a good education. Virtually nothing is known about his early life.

In 1935, he is in Caen, in Normandy. He then takes on a three-year military commitment, on September 1, 1937. He is still in the army in 1939 when the war breaks out and he is taken prisoner at Donon in the Vosges, on June 24, 1940, Saint John the Baptist Day. He is interned in a stalag in East Prussia for five years. Liberated by the Russians in July 1945, he is taken out on a stretcher because he only weighs 34 kilos! His health is irreparably damaged by the deprivations and conditions of internment. In the midst of this suffering, something momentous is revealed to him: he discovers the Christ thanks to a Belgian evangelist pastor. From then on, his quest for God will never leave him.

At the end of this camp, he withdraws to La Trappe d'Aiguebelle in the Drôme. He is convinced that God is calling him to the priesthood, but according to Roman canons he cannot be a priest because he is born of unknown parents. At the time, it was an unavoidable canonical rule. He does not yet know that all this is part of divine Providence.

He leaves the Trappist life and decides to resume his studies. He enters an institute in Vienna and takes his baccalaureate in Latin-Greek in Grenoble in 1947. He is 30 years old. On the advice of a monastery superior who saw a

vocation in him, he enters a small Russian Orthodox monastery in Mourmelon, where there were five monks. He is finally baptized on May 13, 1949 in the Orthodox Church (he had never been baptized in any of the Churches he had attended) and the same year, on December 25, he receives monastic consecration from the hands of Archimandrite Alexis van der Mensbrugghe. (2) In 1951, he is in Paris, rue Lyautey, to earn his living. It is perhaps during this period that he recites poems in salons, as he confided a few years later. He will always have a soul sensitive to the beauty of creation and to the finesse of feelings on his spiritual journey. It is probably during this period that he studies the three theologies, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. He frequents the Western Orthodox movement, but does not find his place there. At the very beginning of the 1950s, he is in Nantes in a small Latin rite Church. Eventually, he enters the Celtic Orthodox Church, then called the Patriarchate of Glastonbury. He is ordained a priest on July 15, 1951, as pastor of the Saint Grégoire parish in Nantes. Land is donated to him in gratitude for the healing, thanks to his prayer, of a nearly blind person. His reputation as a miracle worker begins to spread. The land is located in a marsh on the edge of a wood in southern Brittany in Morbihan, in Saint-Dolay at a place called Bois-Juhel. He moves there in January 1955, in almost total destitution. This is his will, despite his fragile health. At first, he sleeps under a hut made of bundles of wood despite the cold and the snow. He then builds a cabin covered with reeds, then a wooden chapel and later a permanent construction which he was never able to complete.

His life is now entirely devoted to this grace which has led him to this desert. His eremitical life is austere and extremely poor. He gives himself body and soul to it with great fervor.

In 1955, this Orthodox hermit, on the edge of a wood and in a swamp deemed unlivable, will have to face the intolerance of the local clergy who cannot understand the presence of this priest who attracts many visitors to his hermitage. Indeed, people feel a grace of holiness in this man. His reputation as a miracle worker attracts visitors. The poor and the great of this world knock at his hermitage. They come from far away to obtain relief, sometimes at dusk for fear of facing what people might say about it. Saint Tugdual prays, blesses, exorcises as needed and often the visitor leaves fulfilled. He made people drink water from the well of the hermitage which he considered miraculous. He asks nothing in exchange for the graces that people attribute to his intercession. He remains a poor man and a servant, but many people in the country help and support him. A neighbor who knew him well confided to us one day how impressed she was by his limpid and luminous gaze which seemed to read the secrets of hearts.

Many have testified, in writing, to having received relief and healing through his prayer. He himself says: *"I am in the forest to think of God, my Absolute, and every evening when I consider my poor day in his divine service, I am frightened by the balance of the minutes accumulated without a clear, precise, active consciousness of the Presence of God. I am here to think only of God."*

These few lines speak for themselves: Saint Tugdual is all aflame with the divine Presence to which he has dedicated his hermitage. One might have thought that the holy man would simply be an intercessor with God to come to the aid of his fellow men, a hermit having fled the world for the salvation of his soul. In fact, Saint Tugdual knows that God did not lead him to this desert only to devote himself to prayer, but for a mission that he discerns little by little. He looks into the history and spirituality of the ancient Celtic Church. He

understands that he must revive the great spirituality of the fathers of the Celtic Church of the first centuries. His life will now be imbued with it. He prays day and night, sleeping only at intervals. He often meditates at the foot of a fir tree, facing his hermitage. He reads the entire Psalter every day according to the rule of the Celtic monks. He lives from Holy Divine Providence. If he has nothing to eat, he fasts, sometimes three days in a row. At the same time, he assumes all the full burden of a pastoral mission. The task is immense because everything must be done. One must absolutely start from scratch. He always encounters incomprehension and adversity, but the seed is sown and he trusts in the grace of God.

The hermitage of the Holy Presence becomes the sign of great hope. Very few yet realize that God is giving birth, through his servant, to one of his great designs. In this place, so poor and simple in appearance, the Spirit breathes. The initial parish of Nantes did not abandon him. On the contrary, the hermitage breathes new life into the parish community.

A poem describes the setting and atmosphere:

*Calm and cool valley which welcomes...*

*At the edge of the quiet pine forest:*

*the gate made of rustic poles, a sign:*

*"Hermitage, private property".*

*Vision! At sunset, the monastic cells,*

*to the north, a modest chapel topped with a*

*large silver cross and a bell tower,*

*framed by an austere fence of chestnut wood.*

*On the door J.K.R.T. (3)*

*Near there, the Sacred Well, the Druidic Waters,*

*the Invigorating Fountain, where the sick draw  
having only the hope of this Water which regenerates.*

*Bird songs everywhere!*

*Something whispered that rises hour by hour!*

*This is where the **new Celtia***

*breathe and live,*

*study, work and pray...*

He ardently desires to establish a local Church on the foundations of the great tradition of the ancient Celtic Church. The project is not without difficulties and trials. Intransigence and incomprehension do not only come from the outside. In his own Church, he will have to suffer from strong opposition from his bishop who resides in Belgium. The latter does not understand his fundamental intuition. Besides, he never came to see him in his hermitage. Saint Tugdual also has no contact with the center of the Church which is in London. Many years later, his work and his holiness will be recognized and the primate of the Church, who was then Bishop Séraphim, will authorize the introduction of the cause of his canonization. For now, he is alone and misunderstood, but he cannot abandon the mission that the Lord has entrusted to him. He knows that the issue is vital for the future of his Church. Without this monastic spirituality which characterizes it, the Celtic Church cannot flourish. Despite the obstacles, our holy man is determined to go all the way. After many adventures, he is consecrated bishop on January 6, 1957. He takes the name Tugdual, one of the seven holy founders of Brittany and bishop-hermit of the Celtic Church.

In nearly fourteen years, he only manages mediocly to build a local Church on the foundations that are close to his heart, but the spiritual foundations, fruit of his patient prayers and his asceticism, are well established.

His death comes prematurely. The illness takes him away, in fact, on August 11, 1968, at the age of 51. His health had always been fragile and, since his terrible ordeal in the prison camp, he knew his existence was precarious. On this subject he wrote: *"I have been seriously ill enough, and seriously and frequently sick enough to the point of death, to be able to live with a virtual certainty of my imminent death. How many days, weeks, months, years, decades passed with the delicious slowness of their ordeal which kept me in the immediate perspective of my death. And this is the most excellent thing that there is for a soul because for 25 years, from second to second, from minute to minute, God has given me the enormous grace of exhorting me to ever more repentance, to ever more faith, always more love. From then on, I did not commit the slightest fault that I immediately expressed my repentance and renewed myself through the acts of the theological life. How grateful I am to God for all the trials, tribulations, illnesses and anguish: without them I would only have dragged on a miserable life. By them, I was whipped, harassed constantly and this was very necessary because human nature is the worst jackasses that can be. Divine Providence, through these weaknesses, wanted to strengthen my soul, body and spirit. Thus the Lord, wise and powerful, put me in the exact position to trust Him absolutely."*

His life was a constant oblation to God. In his hospital room, he asks to die alone, face to face with the Christ he loved so much, for whom he spent himself without counting and for whom he devoted 13 years of his eremitical life. Bishop Gall, one of his first companions, celebrated his burial service.

The illness and internal divisions of his Church suggested that not much would remain of his hermitage which was the spiritual center and the rebirth of the Celtic monasticism of the Church. Warned by divine grace, Saint Tugdual knows that this is not the case. He had predicted his succession. It was a few days before he surrendered his soul to God. He was in a lot of pain and had bad varicose sores on his legs. Suffering from dropsy, his body was swollen all over. It was in his last moments that he prophesied to two different people: *“When I die, there will be nothing left, everything will be scattered, but ten years after my death there will be a monastery.”* We arrived in the tenth year and we knew practically nothing about Saint Tugdual and no one in the Church had heard of this prophecy.

Saint Tugdual suffered a great deal in his soul and body. As we see through the text cited above, he had accepted suffering, the tribulation of illness and bodily weakness as a grace which allowed him to grow in the practice of the virtues. All abandoned in the hands of God, he was able to receive this great spiritual force which animated him in all circumstances. He left us his thoughts and spirituality in nearly twenty notebooks. Today we can know what his long path was, strewn with pitfalls, disappointments, but also joy. He describes his thirst for the Absolute of God and continues to call his spiritual children to stay on this path that God revealed to him as the quintessence of the Gospel.

His entire life will have been a communion with the Absolute of God, like the Fathers of the desert and those of the Celtic Church. Undeniably, it relays to us, across the centuries, the spirituality of a Church which never knew, nor wanted, the vicissitudes of the schisms resulting from the fatal political divisions of the Roman and Byzantine empires. He firmly believed that nothing,

and no one, could prevent the rebirth of a Church eight centuries after it had been dormant.

We have published, for his canonization, some of his writings which are entitled: Spirituality of a Celtic hermit, in six meditations. He wrote in a passionate, imaginative style, sometimes dense, but spontaneous, giving free rein to his passionate love of God.

Let us try to approach “Tugdualian” spirituality based on a few extracts from his writings.

### **The inexhaustible treasure**

What is striking, first of all, in his writings is a sort of perpetual rapture before the mercy, the goodness, the total, gratuitous, infinite love of God for his creatures. God gives absolutely everything to each man, here and now, without any distinction. This unspeakable love was fulfilled in Christ. It is in Christ that our humanity is totally regenerated through communion with his divinity. He never ceases to give thanks for this Redemption that he experiences so wonderfully in his being. Christ is the model of perfection in everything. If one enters into communion with Him, all that a soul can desire, for its fullness, is granted to it in full. God never appears, in Tugdual spirituality, as a judge who demands conformity to his law. Nor is there a distant God who cannot be reached.

only after a long and painful initiation. No, God the Father, in Christ, offers the totality of his love. Here is an excerpt from one of his meditations that we published called ***The Inexhaustible Treasure***:

*“We very fortunately have an inexhaustible treasure from which we can, at any moment, take generously of everything that we lack and of which we know*

*that nothing and no one can dry up the infinite riches. It is Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the prototype of regenerated, deified humanity, oh so much! since being a perfect man He did not cease to be perfect God.*

*“He is therefore our holiness. He is our model. We can at every moment, contemplating Him in His Mysteries, drink in His Truth, inspire ourselves with His Attitude, clothe ourselves in His Perfections. He is our Model in everything and for everything, in humility, faith, hope, love, in thought, will, in affection, tenderness, compassion, in study, work and prayer, in reading and conversation, in teaching and example, in life, in death and in resurrection itself. He is the Model of our relationships and attitudes towards authority, both spiritual and temporal, towards the righteous and sinners, towards angels and demons, towards men and towards God.”*

Throughout his writings, Saint Tugdual never ceases to proclaim, in thanksgiving, his wonder at the inexhaustible love of God. His whole life was one of perpetual praise. This prayer, which became a true prayer of the heart, gave him the gift of tears. It was not uncommon for him to be seen shedding tears of compunction during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Many have witnessed it. They were not tears of emotion, but tears of true contemplation of the love of God. It can be said of Saint Tugdual that he was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. He never ceased to exhort men to give themselves to the adorable and sweet divine love which he affirms is an inexhaustible treasure.

### **Rules and customs are relative**

The spirituality of Saint Tugdual is obviously that of the Fathers of the Celtic Church. He is unquestionably orthodox in his faith, but, like his fathers, he clashes with those who see in the Church only conformity to a set of

established rules. The famous quarrel of the disciples of Saint Paul is still relevant today: “I mean that each of you speaks thus: *“I am of Paul.”* – *“And I, from Apollos.”* – *“And I, from Cephas.”* – *“And I, of Christ.”* *“Is Christ divided?”* (1Co 1, 12-13). The question of the hegemony of the Roman Church against which the Celtic Church had to fight throughout its history, arose again for Saint Tugdual. He experienced all kinds of vexations and obstacles against his person and his mission. Rumors that were being circulated, attacks from the pulpit by the local priest asking not to sell him bread to chase him away, a full-blown attack by a group of young people who broke the windows of his hermitage, nothing was spared him. The faith and tenacity of Saint Tugdual could only strengthen with each ordeal. He is in his hermitage by the will of God and he knows that the difficulties will be commensurate with his mission.

For him, as for the saints of the Celtic Church, it is neither Rome, nor Constantinople, nor any other apostolic see which determines the sovereignty of the Celtic Church, but the orthodoxy of its faith, its apostolic origin, since it was founded by Saint Joseph of Arimathea, and its twelve centuries of history which forged its spirit and its tradition. The fullness of life in Christ cannot be identified with the canonical tradition of any Church, nor with all the traditions and canonical laws of the Churches. If the rules are necessary for the structures of the Churches and their respectable customs, they are in no way the criteria of faith and truth apart, naturally, from the holy dogmatic canons of ecumenical councils. He did not deny that each Church necessarily had rules (the Celtic Church had its own), but they could not be uniform. We must not confuse the immutability of faith and the mutability of rules which can change according to the necessity of times and circumstances. The rule is at the service of faith and not the other way around. Father Matta-el-Maskin, abbot of the Saint-Macaire

monastery and one of the spiritual masters of the Coptic Church, joins Tugdual in his vision of the unity of the Church. : “We confess that the coming of your Son into our hearts – “Let Christ dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17) – necessarily creates in us a spontaneous and irresistible attraction towards unity.”(4)

Saint Tugdual distinguished between what he continues to call the Absolute of God in matters of faith and life in Christ and the relativism of the laws necessary for the organization of Churches.

For him, religious confessions, in their effort to claim to achieve the unity and fullness of faith, relativize the holiness of faith in Christ by subordinating it to their ecclesial structure and their legal rules. In other words, he believed that the fullness of life in Christ does not depend on a particular Church, but on the gift of one's life to Christ in whom all perfection is realized. Once again, it was not the faith that he was calling into question, on the contrary, he was ensuring the integrity of the faith in his Church. The Celtic Church has always been orthodox and Saint Tugdual was firm on this point, but he distinguished between the faith, expressed in the Creed by the holy ecumenical councils and lived in the great spiritual tradition of the Church, and the rules canonical principles which structure each Church and which are subject to change.

He denounced everything that relativized this love, the Absolute of God's love in the life of man. He lamented seeing the Churches hide behind their canons or their customs to relativize the Absolute of the Gospel. He had to suffer much because of this from the clergy of the Churches, but he considered it an unspeakable grace to be where God had placed him for the mission He had entrusted to him. For Saint Tugdual, the rebirth of the Celtic Church is quite simply the restoration of the Gospel in the hearts of men, as its Fathers lived

and preached it. It seemed to him that the ecclesiastical straitjacket which had weighed down the Church over the centuries imprisoned the love of Christ. The preaching of the Good News was nothing more than a religious form without relief among many others. For Saint Tugdual, the love of Christ is not a religion. It is the divine, infinite, immutable Love given to man freely and in totality by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the salvation of the world. If Christianity has become a religion, it is because the weight of rites, rules and customs has supplanted the Absolute of Love. He never stops saying that nothing is above the Love of Christ; nothing is more vital than love of one's neighbor and nothing is more important than repentance. For him, that was all that was necessary. He considered his vocation and his mission as a signal grace. Addressing the Churches, he wrote:

*"I render every day, in Christ to God, my very only Father, a thousand and a thousand actions of thanks through his Holy Spirit, for the grace that He has given me, He who has removed my feet from the ecclesiastical mud so that I no longer sink me, by the play of circumstances, by the combination of events, by the force of things, by the gropings, the hesitations, the very condemnations of our masters and men, and above all and more than anything, by its imprescriptible will through all this and despite all this, he made me a hermit in the woods for the sole praise of his glory. Whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or not, whether we recognize it or not, I am forever in His Presence. To all, to each one, to the Churches, to each Church, be in Christ, have the feelings of Christ, love one another. Nowhere in the holy Gospels did Christ say: "Have you the Roman faith? or the Orthodox faith? or the Reformed faith?", but to all these poor people who approached him, he said: "According to your faith, be it done to you." Did he not also say: "This is how you will be known to be my disciples, if you have love for one*

*another." Did he not make it clear, once and for all: "In my Father's house there are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you?"*

*"Being a Christian, that is to say in Christ and of Christ and for Christ in the world, is infinitely, incomparably, ineluctably capital. This is a way to reach the only thing necessary. Brothers let us accept, Churches let us humbly accept our poverty, our miseries, our deficiencies, our shortcomings, our errors; let us confess them. Let us become more and more this lost sheep, entwined in thorns and thorns, but which the good Shepherd seeks and will raise on his shoulders. He will bring back all the lost sheep into his one flock because He is resurrected, He is victorious. To Him be the glory, Hallelujah!"*

### **The Spirit blows where It wills**

The Celtic Orthodox Church is the Church of Christ in its fullness. Our vision of the Church in the early centuries and of history does not correspond to reality. It was not the political center of the Roman-Byzantine Empire which united the Church at the beginning of the 4th century, it was the one and indivisible faith of the first three councils which, by the way, are the only truly ecumenical ones. Saint Tugdual probably did not contest the pragmatism of a visible center as a symbol of unity in the person of a primate, but on condition of not identifying political power and religious life. Holy Colomban, this great missionary of the Celtic Church who was the father of a great posterity, brought Christ to men without worrying about the notion of territorial jurisdiction. He and his disciples founded numerous monasteries in Europe. He ended his life in Bobbio in Italy, where he made his last foundation. He acted in the name of the Church of Christ, in his own tradition, and asked nothing of Rome. He never paid attention to the established Roman dioceses. When he needed a bishop, he

naturally turned to a bishop from the Celtic Church. Saint Columbanus, like all Celtic missionaries of the time, established flourishing monastic communities whose major concern was not to establish a political system or to integrate into it, but to preach and live the Good News of Gospel. The reference to the Pope of Rome was obviously not their concern. He was considered a bishop among others. Celtic missionaries let themselves be led by the Spirit without worrying about jurisdictions. Saint Tugdual wrote a poem about the revival of his Church. It illustrates the above well:

*THE SPIRIT blows where it wills; Only the SPIRIT sees!*

*Only the SPIRIT hears, Only it understands!*

*Those who come seek the SPIRIT there...*

*Those who leave are won over...*

*Those who remain there,*

*give ourselves to HIM and LIVE from HIM!*

*Phalanxes of new pioneers have arisen...*

*And the scythe sang in the whitened harvests...*

*And the ax resounded in the echo of the woods...*

*And the ancients trembled in their tombs...*

*And the Angels in heaven smiled...*

*And the sons of the night*

*drank the first joys of Dawn*

*in flowered chalices*

*overflowing with dew...*

The Celtic Church was not isolated. Celtic bishops participated in several councils in Gaul. Their vision of the Church of Christ was a traditional vision of

the early centuries: Where the bishop is, there is the Church. Each community with a bishop is the Church of Christ in its fullness. Even though Celtic monasteries formed the essential fabric of the Celtic Church, it was the bishops who were its sacramental source. Without bishops, there is no Church, because they are the successors of the apostles on whom Christ founded his Church. The difference is that bishops were not necessarily administrators and “temporal leaders”, as they would become in Roman-Byzantine Christianity.

### **Which ecumenism?**

In the above, his vision of ecumenism emerges. He was deeply and definitively ecumenical. The second chapel that he had built, but which was never completed, was designed despite its small size, with three altars: one for the Catholics, one for the Protestants and one for the Orthodox, three altars, but the same sanctuary. However, Saint Tugdual did not believe much in today's ecumenism or the inevitable politics that arises from it. It is an ecumenism which remains prisoner of the ecclesial system resulting from the past history of a Christian empire and therefore doomed to follow the same faults. Certainly, significant progress has been made, but for him, the principle of unity was quite different.

Saint Tugdual was profoundly ecumenical in the sense that the Church is by nature undivided. He believed that men could not divide the Church of Christ. In fact, the universal Church, Body of Christ, is One and Holy as affirmed in the Creed and each Church sings it daily. She is not only One and Holy because she is the resurrected Body of Christ, but also because she is the living and incarnate love of the Holy Trinity in the hearts of the men who compose her, whatever their denominational affiliation. It has been so since the day it

was founded, at Pentecost, because it was men in the persons of the apostles who received the fire of absolute love in their hearts. The Good News they announced was this, like something impossible to contain without being shared. It was not a revealed doctrinal and legal system that would change the face of the world.

The Church is first of all the ark of the Holy Presence of this love and it will be until the end of time. This is why Saint Tugdual dedicated his hermitage to the Holy Divine Presence. All the vagaries of history, all the canons that the different Churches may have issued will change nothing in the matter. The Church in its essence is not divisible. He was firmly convinced that it was not so much a question of quibbling over the complexity of different theologies or the primacy of this or that concept as of rediscovering, in holiness, the primacy of the first commandment: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Lk 10:27). There is perfect unity, the perfect return to the undivided Church, nothing more, but also nothing less! GOOD Of course, he did not deny the primacy of the faith set out in the Creed and the Orthodox ecumenical councils, but what is faith without the works of love? (John 2:14-20)

It is hard to believe that churches persecuted other churches for political reasons. Certainly, there were councils to preserve the faith from heresies, but how did Christianity go from the gift of love on the cross to persecution by arms? Most schisms were caused by political ambitions under the guise of dogmatic differences. The identification of temporal power with religion is the greatest catastrophe that the history of the Church has known. We always pay the consequences. Let us think of the pre-Chalcedonian Churches, in other words the Copts, the Armenians, the Syrians etc. After fifteen centuries of

anathemas and persecutions, we finally realized that these Churches had the same faith! Let us rejoice in the agreements signed between the different Churches, but fifteen centuries of error... this makes us reflect on the discernment and motivations of the great Churches.<sup>(5)</sup> While meditating on a text from Isaiah (Is 15:7), Saint Tugdual writes: *“Poor men who constantly fall back! Poor, ever-declining Churches of men! Poor temporal institutions that are constantly unsuitable! Everyone makes their own provisions, develops their own dogmas, their own morals, their own canons and their own laws. Everyone claims to be sent by the Spirit, but is it not said, once and for all, that we recognize the tree by its fruits? So why do you hoard and carry your possessions beyond the stream of willows? You started from the Spirit, for a long time He supported you, guided you, carried you, but now from divine Action why do you persist in descending into human action? Christ founded his Church, it is Holy, it is One, it is Universal, it is built on Christ and on the apostles, all the apostles. Is it in Jerusalem, is it in Constantinople, is it in Alexandria, is it in Antioch, is it in Moscow, is it in Rome, is it in Geneva or New York or Buenos- Are we worshipping the living God? Has the hour come, yes or no, when we must worship God in Spirit and Truth everywhere in the world. Ah! if men, Christians first, instead of adulterated foods which exhaust us, turned to the only Solid Food which is the Will of the Father perfectly accomplished in Christ, the Founder of the Church and its eternal Head, and if they listened to his Clear, Clear and Pure Voice, would they still need to gather their own provisions and transport them beyond the torrent of willows? No, because then his Kingdom, which is not of this world, would be unique and visible to this world.”*

For Saint Tugdual, the true believer, the true theologian, is the one who prays, who experiences the light of God. He only conceives this total immersion

of the whole being in the sole love of Christ. A few centuries later, the words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian resonate within him. This 10th century saint of the Byzantine Orthodox Church lived near Constantinople. He recounts in his writings his experience of divine light. Because of his problems with his hierarchy and the school theology of his time, he was derisively nicknamed “the new theologian”. He suffered greatly, was persecuted, chased from his monastery and exiled. Towards the end of his life, he was rehabilitated and, in his writings, we find the accents of Tugdualian spirituality. When he was canonized, he was given the name of theologian because, for the Fathers of the Church, *he who prays is truly a theologian* and the experience of divine Light is the highest degree of participation in divine energies. In the Byzantine Orthodox Church there are only three saints who have been given the sublime name of *Theologian*: Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Saint Simeon.

We can also mention Saint Francis of Assisi. The *poverello* had to suffer from the clergy of his time, from the heaviness of the system of his Church and this until his death. We will remember that when he came to present his Rule in Rome, the cardinals did not want him. They put pressure on the Pope not to accept it. A cardinal, a little more enlightened than the others, or a little less lukewarm, said: “But if we do not accept this Rule, it will amount to saying that the Gospel is impossible to live!” The whole problem is there! Today as yesterday, Christ is suspected of having set the bar too high and the clerical system has secularized the Gospel.

## **The preaching the Gospel**

Saint Tugdual lived the Gospel with the same radicalism as the saints we have just cited, but this radicalism, which rejects any compromise with the world, is at the same time extraordinarily human. Is it not the response to the love of Christ? Love does not break the humanity. He makes it the temple of joy and the fullness of everything in everything. There emanates from his writings, despite sometimes the harshness of his words, a tenderness and infinite patience in his efforts to explain and express the ineffable grace which floods his entire life. In this man flooded with the love of God, who breathes, who lives every second of the love of God, there is not, he says, a single moment when he is not immersed in thought. of God. When he deviates from it, he very quickly repents, and *through acts of the theological life*, he returns to this love. He is absolutely immersed in the grace of the Holy Spirit and he feels an irresistible need to communicate it, to make it known. These writings are passionate, sometimes vehement preaching. He suffers from the indifference or lukewarmness of others towards God. He suffers because “love is not loved”, to use a well-known phrase. His suffering is the same suffering of Christ who wept over the inhabitants of Jerusalem who rejected the love of God (Lk 19:41-44). He truly wept over the world that did not know God, like the great Silouan of Mount Athos who prayed and cried every night because the world did not know the love of Christ. Saint Tugdual was a man of great sensitivity. He possessed her by nature, but she had become entirely spiritual. She was the fruit of his love constantly immersed in the mystery of the cross. He preached with great ease. His sermons were not theoretical teachings, but the life-giving source of his holiness. The faithful loved his homilies and did not mind the liturgies which sometimes lasted almost two hours.

## **The Celtic spirituality of the Church**

Saint Tugdual sometimes uses the term *Celtic spirituality* (*Celtie spirituelle*). He also speaks of those who live in *Celtic fashion* (*à la mode de Celtie*), in other words, they are those who clothe themselves in the Spirit which animated the Fathers of the Celtic Church, without distinction of race or culture. It is important to emphasize that, if Saint Tugdual retained the term *Celtic* to designate his Church, it is not in reference to an ethnic group as such, but to a Church which was and which remains an apostolic Church. It is Celtic like others are Roman, Byzantine or Indian. Like all Churches, it is by nature universal, that is to say one and undivided from the Body of Christ. It is Celtic in its spirit and its spirituality and in this it is distinguished from the others because each Church has its own spirit and spirituality, but this has never broken the fundamental unity of the Churches. Love and diversity find their unity in faith. It is the very principle of the divine Trinity of which the Church is the visible manifestation. If the Celtic Church had been able to maintain its independence from Rome, the face of the Western Church would not be the same today and the destiny of the universal Church could have been different.

Here is an excerpt from a sort of will that he wrote on January 9, 1966. In fact, he suffered frequently and, when he felt close to death, he felt the need to hastily write down his last thoughts because, as we mentioned above, he knew that he could die quickly as his health was so deteriorated. It was in Paris, two years before his death. He had to go to the hospital: *“On the eve of this appointment with God – heart operation – the Absolute said to me: “Give me your heart”. Lord here it is absolutely, God is the only Absolute, everything else is relativity. The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and sent by Christ, is the only leader of the holy Church of the Celts, in all the truth that is the total Christ*

*to the one and only glory of the Father. By the Spirit, Christ alone is my unique Druid (he uses the expression of Saint Columba of Iona) formed in me with all his holy dispositions, virtues and perfections. I go to the Father of lights, of all consolation. Who are the true, truthful and true Celts? These are the fashionable Christians of Celtia, in Christ, in Christ, to the glory of the Father.”*

The Christians of *the Celtic mode*, as he said, are those for whom Christ is everything.

The Celtic Church is therefore not and must not be the exclusive Church of a people or a culture, even if it is primarily aimed at a large part of Westerners. It would be a serious mistake to think so. It is one of the founding currents of Christianity, born from a very ancient civilization which we describe as Celtic and which existed more than a thousand years before the Christian era. Today, we are beginning to gradually understand the scale and richness of this heritage which can help save Europe from a soulless and dehumanizing technocracy. It is a truly peaceful cultural and spiritual revolution which interests the whole world, because it goes far beyond the borders of Western Europe. It is not a question of getting rid of two thousand years of Greco-Latin domination. Cultures are like people: they are made to live together and enrich each other. Is this not the vocation of Christianity? To prevent misunderstandings or nationalist or ethnic temptations, he wrote: *“The holy Church of the Celts, in Christ, cannot be against the Church of Rome, Moscow or Constantinople, or against the Muslim, Hindu or animist faith. It is universalist, in everyone. She collects the eucharistic parcel contained or hidden and she offers everything to the Father through the hands of the Son, in the substantial love of the Spirit. Glory, Praise, Hallelujah!”*

## **Like an earth mother**

Celtic tradition is not a ghost of the past. It is underlying in the daily life of each of us and this is the goal of our publications and our teachings: to show its permanence and its relevance in the life and aspirations of our world today. It is not the specific tradition of a race. It is a substrate, a mother earth in a way, where peoples and individuals, whether white, yellow, black or red, receive from it a spirit, a certain vision of the world. Many believe that Celtic culture is limited to Ireland, Wales, British Cornwall, Scotland and Spanish Galicia. In fact, it is present throughout Europe in multiple forms and expressions, despite diverse influences and population mixing. It is also in the hearts of immigrants who left their land of origin for another continent. The spirit of Celtic culture does not belong specifically to Europe. It is one of the invigorating sources of a particular genius which has presided over the destiny of a group of peoples for more than three thousand years.

It is clear that currently there is a renewed interest in Celtic history, culture and tradition. However, there are pitfalls to avoid. There cannot be pan-Celtism as there was pan-Germanism. Celtic tradition cannot be understood the way Nazism understood Teutonic culture. Any attempt at recovery for political, racial or ethnic purposes can only disfigure it. This would seriously compromise the future of the spiritual renewal that we so need, not only in Europe, but everywhere where Western culture has exported its know-how (and also its errors). Saint Tugdual was aware of this issue. This temptation is real, but Celtic Christianity has completely transcended this classic confinement of cultures on themselves. Celtic culture and tradition, or more particularly their spirit, must be conceived in a universal perspective, even if they remain most alive in their original geographical area.

## **The Celts have forgotten the faith of their Fathers**

Saint Tugdual spoke to all men because let us not forget that the Celtic Orthodox Church was already present in several countries at that time, but often, he spoke first to the Bretons as Christ spoke to first to the Jews. Saint Tugdual never ceased to call the Celts, heirs of their tradition, to return to the faith and spirituality of their Fathers. Once again, he did not limit the Celtic Church to the people of the British Isles and the Bretons, but he thought that the revival of the Church founded by Saint Joseph of Arimathea would first find favorable ground in the hearts of those who are the direct heirs. Every day he meditated on a verse from the Bible and wrote a page or two in a regular notebook. Many meditations were exhortations aimed at his faithful, at the countries described as Celtic and, through them, at all the sons of spiritual Celtia to come: *“Ah! That from this moment in which we speak to each other, there will never be found among us anyone who henceforth does any action without being ablaze with the great, the most fervent and the most ardent love in union, and with, and through Jesus Christ, the Son, the Only One of the Father in whom he has placed all his complacency. Then the hours will pass, the days and nights too, the months will pass away, the years will follow one another and always, more and more, we will advance in this immense assurance that there remains nothing but God and that is all and what in Him, by Him, with Him and for Him we will have accomplished. Because that is losing one’s life, and that is also regaining it for eternity. This love which must be ours, this love which we need, this love which we want, which we must give Him, comes from Him and from Him alone. From Him therefore, we must still ask it, from Him we must still receive it, but He has placed it within our reach, every day, in the gift of his ineffable Eucharist because the gift*

*of the sacred bread of eternal life and the chalice of perpetual salvation, it is the channel, it is the sacrament, it is the guarantee of this gift among us, in our midst and within us, provided that we have recourse to it."*

He wanted his Church to be rid of this lukewarmness which he described as relativism in relation to the holy love of God. He believed that this was the holy Celtic Church in its origins. Saint Tugdual exhorted his Breton brothers to return to the faith of their Fathers. Already, a few centuries later, Saint Gildas de Rhuys, one of the great Breton missionary saints in the 6th century, lamented the lukewarmness of his compatriots.

### **Celtic joy**

At the same time, he was filled with immense hope and perfect joy. In his writings as in life, he sings, he exults, he seems to dance with joy. He loved to talk about Celtic joy: *"The Celts who have reconnected with their great Christian past have only the song of blessing, praise and thanksgiving on their lips. The path of the Christian Celts is, above all, Pure Joy even and especially in the darkest trials and the reddest persecutions. Are they the inhabitants of the White Light or not? If so, how can the dark relativities survive? There are no defeats in Victory. There is no night in the shattered day. There are no dissonances in Pure Harmony. All is Joy and Joy of Joy forever. Joy is the Absolute! Absolute is the Joy of the Lord! Blessed be the Lord, the God of Celtia, because He has visited and delivered his people. The Absolute visited Celtia. What a visit! The Absolute delivered Celtia from its matter, its materials and crowned it with life in the Spirit! The Absolute has delivered his people. What deliverance! So, living forever and ever, the Celts in Christ, how could they cry? Every tear is dried up from their eyes. How could they moan? They no longer have burdens to bear, Christ himself carries them,*

*imports them into God, exports them from relativities and transports them into the Absolute! It's all hallelujah and hosannah! in the Celtia which inhabits the Spirit! Finally here is verified the Word of Christ of truth: "The flesh is of no use! ", but the Spirit is victory in everything, for everything and over everything, down to the Essence of God. The Christians of Celtia feed on the Victorious Bread and in their unique wealth, they have only this Bread to share with all men, but is this Victory Bread not enough?"*

His joy is a song of thanksgiving resulting from this total abandonment and communion with divine life. He is ablaze with a fire of love that he would like to communicate to everyone. He knew how to trade his austerity to share the joy of being together. During meetings or community feasts, he then became a bon vivant. Old-timers remember his liveliness and humor. He sowed infectious joy. The place of spiritual joy was so important to him that he called the Church bulletin *Hol levenez*, that is to say: "Our joy". This bulletin is today an organ of study and liaison between members of the clergy.

## **Forgiveness**

As we have said, Saint Tugdual had to suffer from his membership in the Celtic Orthodox Church. There was no shortage of adversaries and detractors. It is true that he was a pioneer, not always easy to understand. He always forgave everyone although he often suffered contempt and abandonment. Forgiveness was at the heart of his existence: *"It is absolutely certain, and ineluctably certain, that I forgive everything, in detail and in detail, to each and everyone, of whatever opinion, manner, Church, sect, religion, society or race. or nation be it. I forgive everything from top to bottom, in the truth of God. I affirm*

*that my friends will never have had to complain of not having been sufficiently loved, honored and served in my prayer in Christ and in the Spirit."*

The Gospel cannot be a hunting ground for the heretic nor serve as a pretext for human ambitions, although it has often been so. Saint Tugdual never stopped, in all his writings, proclaiming the Absolute of the love of God which must be incarnated in the life of every Christian. He sometimes spoke out against the recurring Pharisaism of the Churches because it seemed to him an insult to the truth of the Gospel, but he never judged or condemned. This forgiveness is based on a fundamental truth: *"The truth does not need defense, it is sufficient in itself,"* he said in a letter dated May 3, 1967, which he addressed to a certain Paul from Brescia. (today Bishop Mael). In response to a Roman Catholic priest, he said: *"The historical truth is that the whole Church of Jesus - Thanksgiving, Light of Light, Joy of Joy, Peace of Peace, Christ, Victory of the Christian, spiritual and Christian Celtic Christ - was then undivided."*

This truth is in this illumination and this perpetual contemplation of love which strengthens one's faith at every moment. Holy Tugdual n He is against nothing, defends nothing, he defends neither the truth nor his faith. Certainly, he speaks of his Church, its tradition and its spirit, but he is not a proselyte. He does not deny the existence of any other Church or religion. Everything it evokes is related to living faith, to living love. It is about living the faith and bearing witness through one's life to the supremacy of love. We do not encounter in him that spirit of gossip and judgment so common among ecclesiastics.

## **The spiritual father**

Saint Tugdual was a spiritual father introducing his disciples daily to the art of his spiritual life through his numerous meditations. This is a constant concern. He exhorts to incessant prayer, to contrition, to the confession of one's faults, to penance, to the total abandonment of one's life in the hands of God through the duties of the Christian life. He knows from experience that faith without works is nothing. If everything is an absolute and infinite gift from God for each faithful, our participation is fundamental for grace to remain in us. In a meditation called *Faith Without Good Works*, he says: *"Religious duties such as the canonical hours of the Divine Office, holy meditation, divine reading, the all Divine Liturgy of the Holy Mysteries and all the exercises of prayer and piety, we must succeed in forming, from these various trainings in spirituality, the clear and definitive idea that they are the backbone of a life dedicated to the service of God. There is no point in claiming to have a life truly given to God if you are not capable of practicing all these spiritual exercises."*

Despite his poor health which continued to deteriorate, despite the suffering, he took care to maintain great fidelity in his religious duties. The observance of monastic offices, fasting, vigil and reception of visitors, including many sick people who came to seek help in his prayer, constituted the framework of his daily life. He had to take care of the training of his clergy and the pastoral life of his emerging Church. It was a heavy task that cost him many deep disappointments. He knew his life was precarious, but he did nothing to soften it. A suitable diet might have been necessary, but he was there to give his life and not to spare it. He keeps saying that everything is grace. He is alive by the grace of God alone and for his unique service.

**A Little summary...**

The entire existence of Saint Tugdual is suspended on the absolute love of God for which he lived exclusively. He never ceased to give thanks to God for having allowed the rebirth of the Celtic Church which had not known the divisions or the vicissitudes of the Roman-Byzantine Empire. She had remained untouched by a corrupt vision of the Christian faith. The monastic ideal was indeed a salutary reaction to the secularization of the Church, without necessarily stopping it. The Gospel, nothing but the Gospel, was the spirit of Saint Tugdual. The rest related to the circumstances and places that make history. Even if God intervenes in the events of the world of men, civilizations and their cultures remain relative to their own time. God is love and He first loved us to save us. It is the experience and the Absolute of this unique, perfect and total love that Saint Tugdual continues to repeat today. Tugdual has restored to men a spirituality free from the excesses of Church history. There are the principles of a new theology in Tugdualian spirituality from which a new ecclesiology arises: the sacramental hierarchy of the Church is not primarily legal, but service and self-giving.

This is the essence of what I wanted to convey to you about Saint Tugdual. There is obviously much more to be said about his spirituality because most of his writings have not been truly studied. I just mentioned the essentials. This man leaves a legacy of unsuspected magnitude. After him begins a new page in the history of the Celtic Orthodox Church. He laid the foundations of the Church on an unshakable rock. She had regained the grace of her apostolic source in 1866. He gave her back the source of the monastic spirit which was the heart of the "Holy Church in Celtia". His life was exceptional and simple at the same time. It is a precious testimony for all of us.

His writings deserve to be our bedside book. They are the testament on which the foundations of this Church of which we are the heirs rest. This is our Holy Grail. We must penetrate the mystery of this Grail so that we can be worthy of participating in it. Let us meditate on his words and be confident that despite the sometimes difficult style of Saint Tugdual, they will lead us into the grace of the Absolute of divine love that he sang so much. The Holy Spirit shines through his sentences. If one truly has an attentive heart, they will penetrate him like a sword of fire.

### **Tribute**

I must confess that I am moved to have written this text. I did not have the pleasure of knowing Saint Tugdual, but I met on the occasion of his canonization witnesses who were his disciples in the persons of Bishop Gall and Father Gildas. Let us not forget Bishop Jeanneret of Switzerland who was unable to participate. He made several stays with young people with the saint. Let us think of Auguste Monier who was part of his clergy and was the companion of his last moments. It was he who was the guardian of the hermitage after his death and who preserved his writings. Let us not forget Father Malo who continued until his last breath, despite the disappearance of his father and master, to recite the entire psalter every day according to the rule of the order of Saint-Colomban that Saint Tugdual had founded. Everyone reported the courage, holiness, humanity, but also the extraordinary personality of this man. Their memories were precious in painting his portrait. We also collected testimonies from neighbors who knew him well, as well as those from numerous pilgrims who visited him. I would like to pay tribute to all those who were, more or less, the guardians, the link, the transmission belt so

that this heritage could reach us, to all the people of the country who welcomed the three first monks who took over the hermitage, to those who remained faithful to the memory of the saint, to all those, finally, who came to show us their attachment. I think we can think of them every time we remember Saint Tugdual.

### **As a conclusion**

I would like to end with a final text from our saint which is perhaps the last prayer he wrote. It is a humble act of thanksgiving to God and a culmination of his whole life:

*Humble Tugdual,*

*the smallest of his family,*

*to all who are in Christ Jesus*

*by the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father:*

*Unalterable peace, superabundant grace, perpetual joy*

*in the service of the All Adorable, All Holy and All Vivifying Trinity and in the Indivisible Unity, both now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.*

*Ten years have passed since the episcopal office was conferred upon us by the holy Laying on of Hands; here are ten years of unspeakable graces accomplished since we were clothed with the evangelical yoke and, we confess and proclaim it, it is the truth: His yoke is gentle and His burden light. So, we cry out, we proclaim, glory to Him who is above, who is below, who is everywhere!*

*That everything was simple, no! That everything was easy, not at all! but that everything contributed to our good, to that of His Church, to His Glory, this we*

*must say and, in everything and for everything, we always must give thanks to Him.*

*What would our humble life be like, hidden in the forest of Celtia, without this breath of our gratitude?*

*Thank you, Lord, Absolute Master, for this blessed forest where You cast the anchor of my life; thank you for this Sun of Justice which presides over my days; thank you for this silence and this peace, ornament of my nights.*

For everyone and for everyone, and for everything: Lord, THANK YOU!

#### Notes

1. Reprint of a lecture given on the occasion of the canonization of Bishop Tugdual translated by Ted Nottingham

2. [https://www.egliserusse.eu/blogdiscussion/Mgr-Alexis-van-der-Mensbrugghe-eveque-orthodoxe-en-France-Amerique-et-Allemagne-theologien-specialiste-reconnu-des\\_a2366.html](https://www.egliserusse.eu/blogdiscussion/Mgr-Alexis-van-der-Mensbrugghe-eveque-orthodoxe-en-France-Amerique-et-Allemagne-theologien-specialiste-reconnu-des_a2366.html)

3. J.K.R.T.: Jezuz Krist Roue Trechour (Jesus Christ Victorious King).

4. Quote from the article L'unité chrétienne (Christian unity) in issue 48 of Spiritualité Orientale magazine.

5. For example, the "Approved Declaration of the II Plenary Meeting of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches" June 24, 1989