

# BOOK REVIEW

*Peines en prison. L'addition cachée*  
**(Punishment in Prison. The hidden charges)**  
Guy Cossée de Maulde SJ

Philippe Landenne SJ, *Peines en prison. L'addition cachée*, preface by Françoise Tulkens, postface by Dan Kaminski Brussels, Larcier (coll. Crimen), 2008, 257 p.

**T**his book is first of all a diary kept for five years (2002-2007) by a Jesuit chaplain in a Belgian prison (Andenne). The author, Philippe Landenne, has held this position for more than twenty years.

The account concerns the prisoners (sentenced to more than five years of imprisonment), management, wardens, administrative staff, psycho-social actors and – because it exists – the “prison system” itself.

These stories experienced on the front line are very hard – deaths in series (six, of which three suicides, between March 2002 and March 2003), a prison wardens’ strike (September 2003) during which two prisoners died dramatically, a riot with obscure origins and heavy consequences, violence among prisoners, rumours of trouble leading to a prisoner losing his job, going crazy and hanging himself, inexistent or inappropriate therapeutic follow up... and less critical at first glance, but profoundly destructive; petty-minded, even humiliating, conduct, leading to feelings of despair and hatred.

The author takes care to be objective in describing the facts and observes the actors around him with respect. He is conscious of his vow of confidentiality yet he cannot escape from the need to see clearly within himself (his difficulties and doubts) and express the reflections that these situations provoke in him as a citizen. In a critical spirit he analyses the exercise of justice in a legally constituted state, in the heart of a democratic society. He refers to official reports drawn up by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). It must be added that these (extracts of which are published in the book) confirm the statements made by Philippe Landenne, establishing uncompromising standpoints and calling for effective enforcement of the *Law of principles concerning the administration of penitentiaries and the legal status of prisoners*, passed by the Belgian Parliament in 2005.

In order to explore his reflections further, the author undertook a six month sabbatical in Canada (2005), where he participated in a formation programme at Queen’s University (Kingston, Ontario), in ‘Restorative Justice’: a healing justice which – taking into account victims, offenders and communities – “attempts to repair offences and promote recovery and growth.”

Prison – the loss of liberty – is in itself a punishment. As the title of the book indicates, the way in which prison functions today adds many other penalties –

the 'hidden charges' which affect relatives as much as the prisoners themselves! Moreover, custody does not really help - in fact the opposite is true - convicted prisoners to reflect on what they have done, enter into a process of restorative justice with respect to victims, rebuild their lives personally or socially or reintegrate into society. At an even more profound level, questions must be raised on the value of custody as a punishment in general, save perhaps in extreme cases. This is what Françoise Tulkens, a judge in the European Court of Human Rights, invites us to do in her preface.

This book deserves to be read and readers should allow themselves be moved deeply by it. Work must be done to build awareness in order for political leaders, trade unionists, journalists and ordinary citizens to overcome the uncontrolled emotions and primary instincts of 'security first' we find them so prone to. In Belgium well thought out laws have been put in place. These must be enforced and the necessary means be resolutely designated.

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*Original French*  
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