GERD-RAINER HORN

WESTERN EUROPEAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY 1924–1959

THE FIRST WAVE

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Western European Liberation Theology

The First Wave (1924–1959)

GERD-RAINER HORN

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My stay in Leuven allowed me to make use of the excellent library resources in the network of KUL libraries. But I also ventured forth to visit private and public archives in various locations in Belgium and France. Since then, I have extended my archival forays, notably to include a series of Italian archives. I thank the directors and the staff at the twenty-some archives I visited in the past ten years for their help and for permission to cite from their resources. The Bologna Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII not only opened its archival holdings for me, but also facilitated free access to its rich library holdings. I thank Alberto Melloni for his generous logistical support.

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The pictorial resources reproduced within these pages hail from two sources. The Picture Archive of the Belgian Worker Priests remains in the apartment of two worker priests—Maurice Cadet and André-Marie Antoine—in Flémalle near Liège, which I first visited in 1999. Maurice Cadet graciously extended his permission to reproduce five photos documenting the little-known history of the Belgian worker priests. All other photos come from the photo archive of Nomadelfia near Grosseto in the south-western corner of the Toscana, which has been the home of the families reconstituting the community of Nomadelfia after the forced closure of the original Nomadelfia near Carpi in the Emilia Romagna, described in Chapter 3. In 2002, I spent an inspiring and productive week as a guest in Nomadelfia. I thank Francesco di Nomadelfia for facilitating the digitalization of the images reproduced in this book, as well as for procuring the requisite permission. Christoph Mick converted the chosen photos into the proper format and placed them in the desirable order.

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Images 1–7 appear courtesy of the Archivio di Nomadelfia.

Images 8–12 appear courtesy of Maurice Cadet on behalf of the Archives des Prêtres Ouvriers Belges.

Introduction

This book is a study of an important paradigm shift in modern Catholicism. After the successful defeat of the modernist challenge in the early decades of the twentieth century, it seemed for a while that, for Catholic traditionalists, business could finally continue as usual. To be sure, there were important issues and problems that needed to be addressed, such as the creeping secularization of industrial Europe, but a bright and radiant future seemed almost guaranteed. Yet, in a curious process that has yet to be fully understood, by the 1930s and, even more so, the 1940s efforts were under way which changed the face of Catholicism in all-important ways. Fuelled by the growing power and self-confidence of the Catholic laity, a series of challenges to received wisdom and an array of novel experiments were launched in various corners of Western Europe. These developments are at the centre of this book.

The moment of liberation from Nazi occupation and world war in 1944/5 turned out to be the high point of these promising paradigm shifts in theology, Catholic politics, and apostolic social action. But by the late 1940s and early 1950s, the forces of progressive Catholicism were fighting—and losing—an increasingly defensive war against resurgent traditionalism within the Catholic Church. I end my narrative on the eve of Vatican II, when some of the last surviving remnants of the crucial working-class apostolate were proscribed by Vatican officials in a move sanctioned by Pope John XXIII.

Amongst a number of motivations behind the writing of this book, one deserves to be mentioned up front. In the age of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, it appeared quite useful to point to an earlier conjuncture in the twentieth century, when forces favouring

progressive changes on occasion felt that history was on their side. There has, of course, been much attention given to Vatican II and the pontificate of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, when the Catholic Church effected a massive opening to the modern world. But it appeared to me incumbent to highlight an earlier period in the development of twentieth-century Catholicism, less readily identified as an era of forward-looking experiments, when, I argue, much of the groundwork for the subsequent conquests of Vatican II was carried out.

Many of the key individuals I foreground in my study suffered some form of repression or relegation on the part of various church hierarchies in the 1940s and, even more so, the 1950s, a story of demotions and exiles I only touch upon in the body of this work. It is eloquent testimony of the intimate link between the progressive thinkers and activists at the centre of my work and the developments associated with Vatican II that a great number of the former were not only rehabilitated but served in important capacities during Vatican II.

Chapter 1 highlights the crucial role played by the development of Catholic Action, and particularly 'specialized' Catholic Action, in spawning a growing self-awareness and self-confidence of lay activists within the Church. In this chapter the focus is placed on the interwar period. Chapter 2 concentrates on the all-important theological and philosophical underpinnings of progressive moves within the Catholic Church. Chapter 3 casts light on certain party-political reverberations of ferment in the Catholic Church. Given that many of the other chapters emphasize developments within francophone Europe, I decided to concentrate on Italian politics instead. Giving prominent attention to some of the less well-known political developments, the two final movements studied, the quasi-millenarian efforts generated by two local priests in the lowland reaches of the Po Valley, could just as easily be classified as apostolic social movements, and they provide a transition to the ensuing and final chapters.

Chapter 4 casts light on an apostolic social movement emerging from the ranks of specialized Catholic Action which has been all but forgotten today. Yet in 1944–6, the Mouvement Populaire des Familles captured local, regional, and national attention in several countries and was regarded as one of the most promising and dynamic social

movements of that time. Chapter 5 investigates apostolic social movements that arose outside the Catholic Action tradition. The worker priest experience in Belgium and in France will be highlighted, at the same time that this relatively well-known and heroic episode of priests in working-class blue is embedded in the more general and far-reaching history of more overarching efforts to fashion an apostolate for the working-class milieu. In my Conclusion, I suggest some reasons why the period of intellectual and activist ferment in the Western European Catholic Church can best be described as Western European Liberation Theology.

Yet, on account of the somewhat controversial title for this study, a brief hint at an explanation for the choice of title may be in order already now. First, Liberation Theology is a term which has gained currency in the context of Latin American religion and politics since the late 1960s. In more recent years, the principles and the practices animating Latin American Liberation Theology have spread to other parts of the Third World, where they have undergone certain creative adaptations and mutations. There is thus no inherent reason why the term could not also be fruitfully applied to the European context as well. Second, Latin American Liberation theologians themselves have been forthcoming with regard to the crucial inspiration they received from the European theologians and activists at the centre of this study. Third, there are countless parallels between the practices and beliefs I analyse in this volume and the daily praxis of Liberation theologians and associated base communities in later decades. I therefore feel justified in the choice of title, though it is, of course, up to the reader to judge.

Finally, a note on what is missing in this book. As this monograph has no pretensions to be an 'encyclopedia' of the Western European Catholic left, some important voices and influential associations are left unaddressed. The guiding principle of my study was the conscious decision to highlight certain central features of this period, and I opted to concentrate on a relatively limited number of individuals, movements, and ideas, but to develop those more fully than would have been possible had I attempted to be more comprehensive. Thus, just to mention some obvious lacunae, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine is, for practical purposes, missing from Chapter 1. Chapter 2 remains silent on the theology

of incarnation, the counterpart to the theology of the mystical body of Christ, which I do address. More importantly perhaps, the closing section of Chapter 2, in highlighting the contributions of three French theologians, sidelines other activist theologians and philosophers, amongst them the Italians Giorgio La Pira, Franco Rodano, and Felice Balbo, or the founder of Économie et Humanisme, Louis Joseph Lebret. In Chapter 3, I made the conscious decision almost exclusively to concentrate on political parties and political movements operating in Italy, leaving developments in other Western European states to the cursory comments at the beginning of Chapter 3. I trust that the reader will understand these (and other) painful choices. The responsibility for these omissions is entirely mine.

Half of the book was written at my desk overlooking the rows of semi-detached houses in Cheylesmore, Coventry. The other half was written in the Theresianenstraat in Gent, literally wedged between a former Dominican monastery and, appropriately enough, a Carmelite convent which has been home to many generations of Carmelite nuns since 1644 and which, in December 2007, also closed its doors for good. May this book contribute its own modest share to revalidate the progressive variant of twentieth-century Catholicism, born in the period I describe in my study, flowering in the 1960s and 1970s, and fighting a rearguard battle ever since.

1

Catholic Action

A Twentieth-Century Social Movement (1920s–1930s)

A VICAR IN LAKEN

At the age of 29, the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn obtained the nomination to serve as vicar in a northern suburb of Brussels: Laken. In 1912, the year of his move to Laken, Joseph Cardijn had been a priest for already close to six years. From 1907 to 1911, however, Cardijn had held a teaching post at the *petit séminaire* in Basse-Wavre, a small industrial town south-east of Brussels, located on the River Dijle, upstream from his alma mater in Leuven, the oldest Catholic university in north-western Europe. Attuned to social questions from early on, Joseph Cardijn had quickly developed sympathies for what was then perhaps the most controversial reform-oriented Catholic organization operating in Europe: Le Sillon, a movement stressing—far ahead of its time—the role of the Catholic laity and aiming for far-reaching social reforms and the establishment of meaningful political democracy, two goals which were then for all practical purposes still widely regarded as utopian dreams, certainly within the ranks of the Catholic hierarchy.[1]

[1] On the *silloniste* sympathies of Joseph Cardijn, see Louis Preneel, 'Kerkbeeld en kerkbeweging in de publikaties van Cardijn', in *Cardijn: een mens, een beweging—un homme, un mouvement* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1983), 46, and Louis Vos, 'Het maatschappijbeeld van Cardijn tussen de twee wereldoorlogen', in *Cardijn*, 150. On Cardijn's biography up to 1912 more generally, see Marc Walckiers, 'Joseph Cardyn jusqu'avant la fondation de la J.O.C.', unpublished dissertation in modern history (Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981), 1–150.

Having acquainted himself with Le Sillon during a voyage to France, a subsequent visit to England in the summer of 1911 familiarized Cardijn with some of the remarkable accomplishments of the English workers' movement in the form of its strong trade union wing, which brought to Cardijn's attention the utility of a well-functioning organization and the necessity to ensure (not only) the financial independence of any such organization.[2] When, in 1912, the newly appointed vicar moved to Laken, some of the intellectual preconditions of what would eventually help constitute an entirely unprecedented Catholic lay organization *sui generis* were thus already beginning to fall into place. The six years Cardijn was to spend in Laken added yet another ingredient to this potent mix.

Until the present day, Laken is best known to the outside world as the location of the Belgian royal residence, tucked away on the leafy green edges of Brussels. Yet, in the run-up to the First World War, apart from the Belgian first family, Laken housed tens of thousands of less aristocratic citizens. Of the 25,000 inhabitants of Laken in 1912, the vast majority were working-class families, often experiencing precarious levels of distress, a reflection of the incontrovertible fact that the parish of Laken was—in sociological terms—a 'semi-industrial' parish. Activated when confronted by a challenge, the young vicar soon began systematically to visit the working-class neighbourhoods in his district, housing complexes 'where priests had not been seen for a very long time'. Appointed to direct the parish's office of women's affairs over and above his pastoral duties, soon Cardijn launched the idea of establishing a local branch of a trade union for the numerous female needle trade workers in his parish. However, the needle trade union, L'Aiguille,[3] never gained more than forty members in Laken, the first of many disappointments for the young Joseph Cardijn.[4]

[2] Vos, 'Maatschappijbeeld', 150.

[3] For a recent biography of the *spiritus rector* of *L'Aiguille*, see Denise Keymolen, *Victoire Cappe: une vie chrétienne, sociale, féministe, 1886–1927* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001).

[4] Marc Walckiers, 'Quarante années qui façonnèrent les conceptions et la personnalité de Joseph Cardijn', in *Cardijn*, 28–31, citations on pp. 28 and 30. A more detailed reconstruction of Cardijn's activities in Laken can be consulted in Walckiers, 'Joseph Cardyn', 151–251.

Nonetheless, Cardijn's efforts on behalf of the disenfranchised labouring poor gained him some notoriety, and in June 1915 Cardinal Mercier chose him to direct the social welfare office for the entire Brussels region. Brussels, the capital city of Belgium, was never a mere administrative centre. By the early twentieth century Brussels had become an important industrial powerhouse, creating a legacy of economic development which has left a major imprint on the Brussels cityscape to the present day. Many of Cardijn's efforts went into the strengthening of the tiny handful of Christian trade unionists he encountered when taking up his new post. Yet, once again, his best intentions were not exactly crowned by resounding success. The number of affiliated Christian trade union members may have doubled in eight years, but the actual numbers dramatized the clear failure of this enterprise. Whereas in 1915 the Christian trade unions counted a mere 2,000 members, by 1923 the numbers had risen to an equally desultory 4,000. In Belgium as a whole, by contrast, the total number of Christian trade union members reached a respectable 180,000. But Brussels was by far Belgium's largest urban agglomeration—then as now. The humiliating failure appeared even worse when compared to the total number of members of affiliated socialist trade unions, the most important—and indeed far more powerful—competitor to the Christian union federation. Total Belgian socialist union membership in 1923 came to a more than respectable 600,000.[5]

As will become clearer below, Joseph Cardijn was a keen practitioner of the empirical method in most concrete circumstances. Thus, the repeated setbacks did not so much exhaust Cardijn's energy as redirect his enthusiasm in new and more promising directions. By November 1917, together with Fernand Tonnet, Cardijn, still relying on a handful of Laken activists, founded a trade union organization specifically designed for young people only, the Jeunesse Syndicaliste. The novelty of this organization was twofold. First, it offered young Belgians an organizational framework which was explicitly not dominated by intellectuals. Second, it recognized the specific needs of youth, whose wishes and desires had been (and continue to be)

[5] All information in this paragraph is taken from Walckiers, 'Quarante années', 33–7.

largely ignored by conventional trade unions, largely run by older—if not elderly—adults.[6] It is time to take a step back from the pressing concerns of the men around Joseph Cardijn and to portray the socio-political background to the remarkable effervescence arising from the working-class districts of Laken, Brussels, and, eventually, the Belgian state, a profound 'cultural revolution' which was eventually to affect important portions of the Catholic world outside Belgium far more than most citizens within that country.

THE CONDITION OF YOUNG WORKERS IN BELGIUM

Uniquely in all of Western Europe at that time, the young Belgian state, founded in 1830, was governed from 1885 until 1919 by a clerical-conservative regime solidly in support of the dominant bourgeois order, with a limited—if slowly expanding—plural suffrage system guaranteeing more than three decades of uninterrupted absolute majority rule. Given the centrality of Catholic Party politicians propping up the status quo, dissident Catholic voices had a particularly difficult time obtaining an audience amongst the political classes. Perhaps the most famous defender of lower-class interests within the Catholic camp in Belgium at that time, the Aalst priest Adolf Daens, met vicious opposition from the entire phalanx of Catholic conservatism within Belgium, with even the Vatican joining in, the latter forbidding Father Daens to hold mass.[7] Anyone wishing to shake up

[6] This sense of generational alienation (and domination) is eloquently described, again, by Walckiers, ibid. 37. On the Jeunesse Syndicaliste experience, see André Dendooven, *Ontstaan, structuur en werking van de Vlaamse K.A.J.: een sociografisch overzicht* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1967), 69–84, and, for brief surveys, Bernadette Joret, 'Préludes à une organisation de la jeunesse travailleuse 1912–1924', in Lucie Bragard et al., *La Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Wallonie-Bruxelles 1912–1957*, vol. i (Brussels: Vie Ouvrière, 1990), 70–8, and Leen Alaerts, *Door eigen werk sterk: geschiedenis van de kajotters in Vlaanderen 1924–1967* (Leuven: KADOC, 2004), 35–6. For greater detail on Cardijn's accomplishments as director of the Brussels Œuvres Sociales see, once again, Walckiers, 'Joseph Cardyn', 252–423.

[7] For an insightful brief survey of Belgian history in the long period of Catholic Party rule, see Els Witte, 'The Expansion of Democracy (1885–1918)', in Els Witte, Jan Craeybeckx, and Alain Meynen, *Political History of Belgium from 1830 Onwards* (Antwerp: Standaard, 2000), 73–103. For an interesting approach to the persona of,

the world of the rock-solid Belgian Catholic hierarchy would have to tread lightly and avoid head-on confrontations.

Though pushed in this direction by dint of circumstance rather than by conscious design to challenge traditional hierarchies, Joseph Cardijn's decision to focus on youth work within the working-class milieu was thus a stroke of genius, as it was bound to call forth more sympathy than condemnation. His pastoral trials and errors when attempting to unionize young women workers in the needle trades in Laken had exposed him at first hand to the working-class youth milieu. With Jeunesse Syndicaliste Cardijn went one step further. For young Belgian workers were indeed in a particular bind. The stranglehold of clerical conservatism propping up the (mostly) francophone Belgian bourgeoisie had resulted in a particularly glaring absence of protective laws limiting the extent and intensity of child labour. Not until 1884 did a royal edict outlaw underground labour in the mining industry for boys below the age of 10 and girls below the age of 14. Not before 1889 was factory work forbidden for children younger than 12. And it was not until 1914 that paid work by children under the age of 14 was finally outlawed. Moreover, this belated catch-up with the rest of the Western European world only came about as a by-product of the law passed in that year mandating obligatory school attendance for children up to that age—an astoundingly late date for such a measure, itself a loud and clear indictment of the underdeveloped nature of social legislation in Belgium under Catholic Party rule.[8]

Given virtually unbridled exploitation of child labour, the fate of working-class children in Belgium was Dickensian indeed. Given the dense public transportation network in the Belgian state, significant numbers of children (and adults) were spared the experience of growing up in bleak working-class estates, but commuting child labourers,

and the controversy surrounding, Adolf Daens, see the film by Stijn Coninx, *Daens* (Belgium, 1992), based on a novel by Louis Paul Boon. The standard monograph on Daens is now Frans-Jos Verdoodt, *De zaak-Daens: een priester tussen Kerk en christendemocratie* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1993).

[8] A short summary of the legislation regarding paid work by children can be found in Louis Vos, 'La Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne', in Emmanuel Gerard and Paul Wynants (eds.), *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier chrétien en Belgique*, vol. ii (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 427–8.

by contrast, had to run the daily gauntlet of sharing cramped rail carriages with their adult co-workers who often mercilessly teased their teen and pre-teen 'colleagues'. Given adult workers' helplessness vis-à-vis their foremen and masters, in the presence of their even more powerless teenage or child co-workers, the latter frequently became the targets for the venting of frustrations accumulated in decades of factory work in subordinate positions. Workplace relationships between adults and children merely mirrored the roughhousing and horseplay characteristic of those frequently long and painful commutes. For female child labourers sexual teasing and exploitation further tormented their hapless existence. 'Hundreds, thousands of youngsters, small boys with a container of coffee tucked under their arms, rush towards their workplaces or stores. An old, worn-out cap, pulled all the way down over their heads, covering their ears, renders it rather difficult to make out more than a small portion of their faces, which already carry all the traces of depravity and indecency and which look, on account of constant rough handling and heavy work, prematurely aged and decaying.'[9]

Yet it was not solely the moral and physical abuses to which child labourers were subjected which led to efforts to alleviate their plight. Catholic social reformers were likewise mobilized by some of the attendant consequences of such circumstances. In the early twentieth century virtually all Belgian children were still baptized, many still attending Catholic schools in their early years, and generally socialized into the well-organized Catholic milieu. But once torn out of their 'safe' environment at an early age by the need to earn money, they soon became influenced by the distinctly secular milieux awaiting them at their workplaces. A process, which affected other countries as well, began to loosen the umbilical cord which had once provided a lifetime of Catholic support from cradle to grave. Roughly parallel to industrialization, working-class milieux in many parts of Europe experienced a distinct sense of loss of interest in Catholic (or Protestant) teachings and religion as a whole. Given that, in Belgium, industrialization first occurred in the francophone southern half of

[9] These are the words of Jozef Bloquaux, the guiding light behind the Antwerp organization De Jonge Werkman (about which more below), cited in Dendooven, *Ontstaan*, 166.

the bilingual state as well as in Brussels, the process of secularization was far more pronounced in Brussels and Wallonia than in Dutch-speaking Flanders. In the mostly rural Flemish north, only Antwerp and Ghent had become major centres of industrial 'progress'. Developing parallel to increasing industrialization and secularization, the influence of socialist ideology began to replace Catholic precepts at an amazing and (for conservative Catholics) deeply worrying speed. Needless to say, the relative weakness of Christian trade unions at that time did not help matters.

Joseph Cardijn's founding of a Jeunesse Syndicaliste thus, ingeniously, killed two birds with one stone. It attempted to boost Catholic trade unionism which had been seriously lagging behind socialist successes in this terrain. And, simultaneously, it centrally focused on working-class youth concerns, an area notoriously underdeveloped even within social Catholicism at that time.[10] Joseph Cardijn, however, was by no means the only Belgian Catholic social activist with the fate of young workers preoccupying his mind. Though conceived of as a regional undertaking, the Jeunesse Syndicaliste remained, for all practical purposes, a Brussels-based affair. A few months after the founding of the Jeunesse Syndicaliste, the young adjunct director of Catholic social services in Antwerp, Jozef Bloquaux, attending a gathering of colleagues in Brussels, was inspired by a presentation by Joseph Cardijn to set up an organization along roughly the same lines. Partially modelled after similar groups in the neighbouring Dutch dioceses of Limburg, the Antwerp-based De Jonge Werkman soon produced a homonymous monthly magazine which, by 1921, had a press run of 3,000 copies per issue.[11] The young Christian workers' associations in Brussels and Antwerp soon turned into magnets, creating offshoots in smaller locations, with francophone supporters orienting towards Brussels as their guiding light. Although the Brussels grouping, as such, was not exclusively francophone, Dutch-language Flemish groupings looked towards Antwerp instead. On 13 April 1924, in Brussels, the Kristene Arbeidersjeugd (KAJ) was officially launched for Flemish supporters

[10] The glaring lack of attention to proletarian youth concerns is highlighted by one of the most prolific writers on topics of modern Catholicism in France, Pierre Pierrard, *Georges Guérin: une vie pour la JOC* (Paris: Atelier, 1997), 98.

[11] On *De Jonge Werkman*, see Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 37–42.

of Bloquaux and Cardijn. Two gatherings for francophone Belgians in May and July 1924 created the francophone equivalent: the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (JOC), headed, once again, by Joseph Cardijn, as well as Fernand Tonnet, Paul Garcet, and Jacques Meert.[12]

THE INNOVATIVE SPIRIT OF THE KAJ/JOC

By the time of the founding of this new organization, split along linguistic lines, Cardijn's original idea of a trade union formation specifically designed for young workers had, however, undergone important modifications, particularly under the influence of the different organizational practices in the orbit of De Jonge Werkman in Antwerp. By inclination believers in the power of the word, both the Antwerp and the Brussels groupings originally carried out much educational work, but the Antwerp activists in particular combined such didactic enterprises with a whole host of activities designed to weld a growing cohort of sympathizers into firm adherents by means of organized leisure activities, such as outdoor games, hiking trips, theatre performances, and camping trips.[13] The trade union-like character of Jeunesse Syndicaliste was thus discarded at the time of the founding of the KAJ/JOC. Growing worries on the part of the pre-existing Christian trade unions operating in Belgium for quite some time, troubled about a new potential competitor, undoubtedly played a role in this decision as well. But the new organization retained its central focus on social welfare measures, side by side with its equally prominent attention to what were regarded as the spiritual needs of its growing circle of members and sympathizers.

[12] Vos, 'Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne', 434–7. When a decision was taken to found a state-wide Flemish association, the name of this group was still De Jonge Werkman; the name Kristene Arbeidersjeugd was not adopted until January 1925. On this, see Marc A. Walckiers, *Sources inédites relatives aux débuts de la JOC 1919–1925* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1970), p. xxxviii. For a description of activism by early proto-KAJ groupings operating in locations other than Brussels or Antwerp, see Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 42–8.

[13] The somewhat distinct modes of operation of the Jeunesse Syndicaliste and De Jonge Werkman are outlined, once again, by Vos, 'Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne', 434–6.

Much has been made in the relevant literature of the famous three-step guiding principles for concrete intervention by KAJ/JOC activists: 'to see, to judge, to act' [*zien, oordelen, handelen* in Dutch and *voir, juger, agir* in French].[14] KAJ/JOC members were to go about their activism in an organized, rational, and quasi-scientific manner. Problems encountered were to be scientifically assessed, properly considered, and only then was appropriate action to be taken. Inasmuch as such proceedings may have trained KAJ/JOC members to become keenly attuned to their social and/or physical environment and to eschew rash reactions based on emotional impulses, the latter a feature characteristic of youthful spirits in most circumstances, such careful social scientific procedures may have done their fair share to promote the maturity of Belgian Catholic youth. But it is often overlooked that this much celebrated central motto of the KAJ/JOC only gradually emerged *after* the founding of the KAJ/JOC. André Dendooven, for instance, points out that the slogan itself was not even coined until September 1925, and for several years thereafter this expression was only infrequently employed. Not until the 1930s did 'see, judge, act' take on a central role in the self-presentation and promotion of the KAJ/JOC.[15]

What was truly revolutionary about the way the KAJ/JOC went about its business was something else. What made the KAJ/JOC into a social movement *sui generis* was the firm resolve of the founding members to create a youth organization which would govern its own affairs. Unlike all other organizations representing youth, members of the KAJ/JOC were to be responsible for their own affairs. No one was to tell KAJ/JOC members what they were supposed to do. Each and every one within these organizations was called upon to do their own share to shape the present and the future of their own organization. 'Amongst themselves, by themselves, for themselves' [*onder elkaar, door elkaar, voor elkaar* or *entre eux, par eux, pour eux*], another central slogan of KAJ/JOC lore, expressed this 'active method' which, ultimately, proved to be of far more explosive content than any other

[14] See, for instance, the relevant section in Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 83–91.

[15] On the gradual emergence of 'the inductive method', see Dendooven, *Ontstaan*, 278–88. A detailed and helpful step-by-step explanation of the mechanism of this three-step approach can be found in An Hermans, 'De verovering van het arbeidsmidden in de pedagogische werking van de K.A.J. (vóór 1940)', in *Cardijn*, 100–6.

single element in KAJ/JOC practice and KAJ/JOC culture. What it meant was that all Jocistes and Kajotters, the terms by which the membership were also known in their respective linguistic home turfs, were encouraged to take up an active and decisive role within the organization and thus within their community and their workplaces. To be sure, there were always going to be some adult mentors, chaplains lending an open ear and responding to any queries. Also, as is self-evident and natural, KAJ/JOC study groups frequently invited experts in all sorts of fields to speak to their local groups, but such expert witnesses did so just like witnesses testifying in front of a judge; they were never substituting for the jury itself.

Crucially, then, the actual running of affairs, at least in principle, was purposefully placed in the hands of the young themselves. In the words of the official JOC Handbook, 'the roles they play within their organization and the services for which they are responsible are a continuous exercise and apprenticeship for their personal growth'; and another passage in the Handbook suggests that 'the *jociste* method elicits the attention, the interest, and the enthusiasm of young workers who must make the JOC *their* organization, *their* action, *their* programme, the various facets of which they themselves must translate into reality'.[16] The basic principles of KAJ/JOC undertakings mandated 'that the young workers themselves shall carry out the direct and concrete propagandistic and organizational tasks, that they shall chair and lead their own meetings, that they produce their own written reports, that they give their own brief presentations, that they themselves figure out the means by which their organization may prosper and grow'.[17] And so they did.[18]

But the growth of the KAJ and the JOC was not only to be expressed in membership figures and elevated press runs of their publications. Crucially, in the process of carrying out their daily

[16] *Manuel de la J.O.C.*, 2nd edn. (Brussels: Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, 1930), 213 and 214, emphases in the original.

[17] Cited in Hermans, 'Pedagogische werking', 94.

[18] Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 538–9, provides total membership figures for the KAJ from 1925 to 1970. On pp. 122 and 157 she supplies two graphs with more detailed information for the take-off years 1928/9 to 1933. For the growth of the KAJ press in the 1930s, see p. 163 of Alaerts's comprehensive study of this Flemish youth group. JOC membership figures can be consulted in a graph on p. 395 of the second volume of Bragard et al., *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*.

routines, over time countless young workers learned to overcome their psychological and other barriers which had hitherto kept them mostly silent and subservient. Constantly encouraged to challenge themselves and to take new steps forward, young Christian workers began to discover each other—and themselves! This process of individual and collective personal growth, which was already extraordinary in the way it transformed young male workers' inner selves, was even more astounding when affecting young women workers' lives. For soon after the founding of the KAJ/JOC, designed exclusively for young male workers, equivalent structures for young female workers saw the light of day on both sides of the linguistic divide, operating under identical organizational principles. Young women workers on the road to self-liberation, of course, had at least one more obstacle to overcome than their male cohorts: namely their male cohorts. For this and other reasons, the determined focus on self-government and self-assertion had particularly pronounced effects among young women workers. In the words of a veteran activist, reminiscing about her socialization within the ranks of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (JOCF): 'The thing that was revolutionary was that a young female worker dared to speak out, dared to act, dared to say what she desired, what young workers desired, especially considering that, up to that point, no one cared about what young workers had to say, and even less so what young women workers had to say.'[19] Or, in the words of another former JOCF activist, the JOCF taught her to dare to speak to authority figures, such as her priest or her employer: 'To dare to speak up in public.'[20]

One more didactic innovation of JOC practices deserves to be highlighted in this context. Teaching and learning was designed to be an interactive process. The confrontational method of an all-knowing teacher frontally addressing a silently listening crowd was

[19] Marguerite Rivoire, 'Une révolution dans nos vies', in *Femmes, famille et action ouvrière: pratiques et responsabilités féminines dans les mouvements familiaux populaires (1935–1958)*, special issue of *Les Cahiers du Groupement pour la Recherche sur les Mouvement Familiaux (GRMF)*, 6 (1991), 31. Marguerite Rivoire had been a member of the French JOCF, but this statement applies to the Belgian case as well, as the French movement eagerly adapted the 'active method', i.e. 'entre eux, par eux, pour eux'.

[20] Taken from the remarkable volume published by Jeanne Aubert, *J.O.C. qu'as-tu fait de nos vies? La Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine: sa vie, son action, 1928–1945* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1990), 354.

eschewed. Round tables, literally, replaced the lectern and the pulpit in internal educational sessions.[21] Certain parallels with new pedagogical methods many decades later are self-evident.[22] And certainly within the inter-war time period, but also in later decades, such conscious decentralization of decision-making powers was exceedingly rare even and especially in radical secular groups: 'Even in left-wing circles, the right of young people to form autonomous organizations was frequently given mere lip-service.'[23]

As we shall discover below, the 'active method' created the perfect preconditions for a process of autonomous radicalization on the part of young Christian workers who were suddenly encouraged to speak their mind. There was, of course, no inherent mechanism which brought about such a development which, to pre-empt one message of this book, eventually helped bring about a progressive Catholic left. But, given the right circumstances and a socio-political context conducive to such an evolution to the left, the stress on the autonomous decision-making powers within the KAJ/JOC created the possibility for such a dynamic to get under way. For the moment, however, it cannot be stressed enough that, certainly at the point of origin of the KAJ/JOC, there was nothing further from the minds of the founders of this current than to foster a radicalization towards the political left.

What propelled Joseph Cardijn and others to create the KAJ/JOC were the same rationales which had motivated Cardijn earlier on in his career: the recognition of a link between industrialization and secularization, the fading influence of the Church over the Belgian working-class milieu, the wish to counteract such nefarious trends, and the desire to relaunch Catholicism as a body of thought and social action which could capture the imagination of the working-class milieu. Based on his experiences in Laken, Brussels, and beyond,

[21] Note here the contribution by Michel Launay to a discussion transcribed by Jan Moulaert, 'De pedagogie van Cardijn: het verhaal van een ronde tafel, Leuven, 18 November 1982', in *Cardijn*, 239–40, but see also the convincing visual evidence on p. 241 of the same volume.

[22] On this complex issue of organizational autonomy and self-government, a topic of great relevance in the 1960s and beyond, see, for instance, the wealth of data assembled in my chapter on 'participatory democracy' in Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 190–220.

[23] Contribution by Rosine Lewin to the discussion mentioned in n. 21: p. 245.

however, Joseph Cardijn had come to recognize that such efforts would be unlikely to succeed if this type of 'missionary' activity were introduced and carried out by outside forces who were strangers to the working-class milieu. The rechristianization of the working class would be the work of the working class itself, or it would not come about. The potential implications of such a method are obvious for anyone who cares to see.

One of the additional novelties of the KAJ/JOC approach to reconquering the contemporary world—under assault from secularizing influences on all sorts of intercalated levels—in order to return their cohort to the body of Christ was their clear emphasis on changing the overall conditions determining individuals' cultural, political, and spiritual needs rather than the individuals themselves. Keenly attuned to the fact that the daily circumstances determining young workers' everyday lives had a powerful influence over their mental universe as well, KAJ/JOC activists primarily focused on changing individuals' environment rather than the individuals themselves.[24] And, given that young Christian workers spent most of their time at their workplace, the focus was thus squarely placed on workplace conditions. 'The notable psychological, moral, and religious state of emergency of young workers at their workstation, in the factory, in the workshop, was the point of departure for the KAJ,' writes one of the most astute analysts of the KAJ/JOC method. Or, in the words of a KAJ Handbook at that time: 'To change the workplace into a cathedral', 'a place where God is actually present'; this is what lay at the basis of KAJ/JOC concerns. 'Get-togethers, meetings, study groups were solely preparatory stages for the ultimate actions of the KAJ, designed to change the environment within which young Christian workers had been placed by divine providence into a Christian environment. Whoever does not understand this, said Cardijn in 1933, has not understood the KAJ.'[25] In the last analysis, it was Christian motivations which propelled young Christian workers to engage with their work environment.

[24] This point is underscored by Michel Launay, 'La J.O.C. dans son premier développement', in Pierre Pierrard, Michel Launay, and Rolande Trempé, *La J.O.C.: regards d'historiens* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1984), 43.

[25] For the citations from her work and for the quote from a KAJ Handbook, see Hermans, 'Pedagogische werking', 107.

FROM SOCIAL TO SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT

Employing the 'inductive method' (to see, to judge, to act), young Christian workers in the first of these three stages (to see) amassed data for copious and detailed dossiers relating to their respective places of employment: 'name and address of the plant or office, the type of business, a list of various departments within this business, data on all young workers employed by the respective workplaces (names, age, addresses, whether members of the KAJ or not), data on the social composition of the workforce (percentage of men, women, young women, managerial personnel, foremen), supplemented with relevant notes on the status of morality, health and safety within the plant.' Then, in the second stage of their 'inductive method', KAJ members were encouraged to reflect upon their conditions and, finally, after concluding their analysis, to act upon their findings.[26] At the final and, indeed, crucial stage of workplace-based agitation, the move towards concrete action, young Belgian Christian workers, however, soon encountered certain limitations imposed on their organization from above. Indeed, it soon became rather apparent that the principle of self-government, experienced like a breath of fresh air by an entire generation of previously disenfranchised proletarian youth, encountered the proverbial glass ceiling. It is time to place the early years of the KAJ/JOC under Joseph Cardijn in a larger perspective.

Louis Vos, the premier historian of Belgian youth movements, has repeatedly emphasized that the KAJ/JOC under the leadership of Joseph Cardijn underwent a series of distinctive shifts in the inter-war period which helped shape (and limit) the extent of KAJ/JOC concerns. In the preparatory stage of his project in the immediate post-war period, when political democracy had finally been established on Belgian soil and when the powerful secular socialist left made major strides in self-confidence and ballot-box success, Cardijn's outlook was crucially shaped by what he regarded as the central role of workers in the post-war Belgian world. As late as 1921 Cardijn

[26] Here, again, I rely on An Hermans's insightful observations, 'Pedagogische werking'; citation on p. 101.

publicly asserted that it was the role of the workers' movement as such, 'the joint, well-considered and well-organized efforts by the workers themselves, by the working class itself, which will [bring about] in an autonomous and independent fashion their material, economic, intellectual, moral, social, and political uplifting', a recipe for working-class self-liberation which Louis Vos justifiably categorized as *ouvriériste*.[27]

Between 1922 and 1932, by contrast, Louis Vos asserts, Cardijn's earlier explicit concern for trade union and political action was no longer present. Instead he turned his attention to the concrete daily circumstances of young workers' lives, a conception of social activism which became the quintessential method of the KAJ/JOC, founded precisely during this stage of Cardijn's personal and political evolution. Then, finally, in the period from 1932 to 1940, Louis Vos asserts, yet another shift can be detected in the views of Joseph Cardijn. Trade union and political action having long been left behind, now the focus of KAJ/JOC concerns increasingly shifted from an analysis of concrete social conditions of young Christian workers towards an emphasis on supernatural forces as the most important factors to consider in recreating a Christian environment for young Christian workers. 'Whereas in the 1920s the formula "to see, to judge, to act" was intimately interlinked with concrete reality,' in the words of Louis Vos, 'in the course of the 1930s the danger of an overly transcendental approach to questions of reality began to loom. The first stage of the formula—"to view"—changed its nature and orientation. It drew less and less from the concrete world of experience,'[28] gazing heavenwards instead. 'Parallel to the mutations of the first step of the JOC formula, "to judge" and "to act" underwent modifications as well. At the basis of such reflections one henceforth no longer finds the needs of young workers, as expressed by young

[27] For the citation of Cardijn, see Vos, 'Maatschappijbeeld', 154; this important article is also the source for much of the subsequent information on the evolution of Cardijn's thought, though note should be taken, too, of yet another highly astute study of the evolution of the Belgian KAJ/JOC by Louis Vos, 'Het dubbelspoor van de Katholieke Actie tijdens het interbellum', in Maurits De Vroede and An Hermans (eds.), *Viftig jaar Chiroleven, 1934–1984: aspecten uit verleden en heden van een jeugdbeweging* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1985), 29–50.

[28] Vos, 'Maatschappijbeeld', 166.

workers themselves, but religious principles. Action now increasingly becomes identified with clerical mission of a fundamentally religious nature.'[29] Along with such a gradual but significant switch from political to social and then to primarily moral and religious concerns came an increasing propensity on the part of Cardijn to acquiesce in the submission of KAJ/JOC considerations to the deliberations and decisions of the Catholic hierarchy, thus tendentially undercutting precisely the most innovative feature of KAJ/JOC practice: the stress on young Christian workers' autonomy.[30] What may explain such an evolution from champion of young workers' self-liberation to cautious upholder of traditional authority structures within the Catholic Church?

Unfortunately, much of the answer remains unclear as, amazingly enough, until today there has still not been a single serious biographical monograph on Joseph Cardijn. Thus, the factors determining the outlook and evolution of the thought of one of the most important personalities behind the ultimate rise of a progressive variant of Catholicism remain rather unclear. Sure enough, there were solid organizational cum political factors which helped shape this personal and intellectual itinerary of Joseph Cardijn. In the course of the 1920s, for instance, the KAJ/JOC became firmly integrated into Belgian Catholic Action. Catholic Action (about which more below) was a—in principle worldwide—movement attempting to evangelize within the heartlands of Catholicism, i.e. to regain for the Catholic Church those sections of modern industrial societies which had fallen victim to secularization along the way. Naturally, given the location of the Vatican in Rome, domestic Italian politics were of prime importance in the determination of the overall outlook of Catholic Action. With Mussolini's firm elevation to dictatorial powers by the

[29] Vos, 'Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne', 455. This did not, of course, mean that the KAJ/JOC stood aloof from some of the major social conflicts in the 1930s, such as the great strike wave of June 1936. But, on the whole, such social engagements in contemporary working-class struggles did not dominate KAJ/JOC activities. Thus, in June 1938, for instance, only less than one-sixth of all JOC adherents were members of a trade union; on this, see Bernadette Joret, 'Dans une atmosphère d'inquiétude 1935–1939', in Bragard et al., *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*, ii. 232–3.

[30] The increasingly spiritual orientation of the Kajotters forms the subject of the detailed description of this process in Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 238–52.

mid-1920s, Italian Catholic Action had renounced open engagement in politics in order to retain its place as a functioning organization under Mussolini's regime. Echoes of this switch soon determined Catholic Action elsewhere, notably in Belgium where Catholic Action became firmly implanted earlier than anywhere else outside Italy. The evolution of Catholic Action from an eclectic and amorphous umbrella organization, assembling all sorts of organizations working for the common cause of rechristianization, towards an explicitly non-political federation surely must have been one factor influencing Joseph Cardijn.[31]

Then, in direct continuity with the streamlining of international Catholic Action, in November 1931 the Belgian episcopacy decreed that all four young Christian workers' associations operating in Belgium, split along gender and linguistic lines, should henceforth be considered 'definitely and above all else a movement belonging to Catholic Action. The decision submitted the youth organizations to the direct and exclusive authority of the Catholic hierarchy. It forbade all political activity and all close links with adult organizations expressly dealing with political concerns.'[32] Such a decision naturally met with some opposition, but the Belgian *primus inter pares*, the Archbishop of Mechelen, reinforced the wishes of the hierarchy by demanding—and obtaining—a new statute for the KAJ/JOC which firmly cut all remaining ties to the Belgian Christian labour movement, firmly placed the KAJ/JOC within the fold of Catholic Action, and which mandated a focus on exclusively educational concerns for KAJ/JOC activists; 'there was hardly any more talk of socio-economic action, and politics was now explicitly excluded'.[33]

[31] The effect on Belgian Catholic Action, and notably on Joseph Cardijn, of this metamorphosis of the outlook and purposes of Catholic Action as a whole is well described in the astute assessment by Emmanuel Gerard, 'Cardijn, arbeidersbeweging en Katholieke Actie (1918–1945)', in *Cardijn*, 124–31, and Emmanuel Gerard, 'Introduction', in Emmanuel Gerard (ed.), *Église et mouvement ouvrier chrétien en Belgique: sources inédites relatives à la direction générale des œuvres sociales (1916–1936)* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1990), particularly 22–31.

[32] Vos, 'Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne', 454.

[33] Gerard, 'Cardijn', 131–2, citation on p. 132, demonstrates the authoritarian *Gleichschaltung* of the KAJ/JOC.

THE BIRTH OF THE FRENCH JOC

This increasing spiritual orientation of the KAJ/JOC, however, was not the only option available to followers of Joseph Cardijn. Like a genie let out of the bottle, the notion and the practice of young Christian workers' self-organization soon spread beyond the borders of the Belgian state. The first such cross-border fertilization occurred in neighbouring France. And it was in France that the organizational and political trajectory of the JOC took on a distinctly differing coloration. If the history of the Belgian KAJ/JOC is inextricably linked to the personality of Joseph Cardijn and Laken/Brussels for geographic location, the equivalent people and place names in France are Georges Guérin and Clichy/Paris.

Like Brussels for Belgium, Paris was never just a mere administrative capital. Paris was home to a significant percentage of French industry, notably the metal industry. Much of that heavy industry settled in a concentric circle around Paris proper, converting formerly leafy green villages into grimy industrial suburbs almost overnight. 'In the decade between 1911 and 1921, the Paris suburbs grew by 239,000 inhabitants; between 1921 and 1931, they swelled by over one million.'[34] In 1927, Clichy numbered 50,039, mostly proletarian, residents at the census date.[35] Only some minutes away from the cultural marvels of central Paris by rail from the Gare Saint-Lazare, scenes reminiscent of the world of Oliver Twist were commonplace and determined the daily reality of most denizens of the industrial belt surrounding Paris. 'As population growth outpaced available services, parts of the Paris suburbs were transformed into shanty towns, full of the privations and miseries that we today associate with the squatter settlements surrounding the burgeoning cities of the Third World.'[36]

It comes as no surprise, then, that Christian beliefs and churchgoing practices were in steep decline in the proletarian districts of Greater Paris. In their 1943 classic wake-up call, *La France: pays*

[34] Michael Torigian, *Every Factory a Fortress: The French Labour Movement in the Age of Ford and Hitler* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), 20.

[35] Joseph Debès and Émile Poulat, *L'Appel du J.O.C. (1926–1928)* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 26.

[36] Torigian, *Factory a Fortress*, 21.

de mission?, Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel start out their very first chapter by describing the contrast between a small industrial town in the mostly rural Maine-et-Loire, where almost everyone was still a practising Catholic, and a random neighbourhood, Bac d'Asnières, in an industrial suburb of Paris, where 'few children have had their first communion, serious and long-term commitment to religion is non-existent, and no one goes to church anymore'; Bac d'Asnières was part of Clichy. 'Here', Godin and Daniel continued, 'we are right in the middle of heathen territory.'[37] Already on the eve of the First World War, barely more than half of all marriages in Clichy were consecrated in religious ceremonies, and a mere 51 per cent of funerals had a priest preside over the proceedings.[38]

Where traditional Catholicism had failed, however, some competing ideologies had fared much better. Largely on account of their dogged defence of the disinherited, the French Communist Party (PCF) filled the space left vacant by the dwindling number of priests and other representatives of the Catholic Church, and by 1925 the industrial belt around Paris was already well on its way to become known as the Red Belt of Paris. Five industrial suburbs elected communists as mayor in that year, providing the PCF with its much-hoped-for electoral breakthrough. One of these five communist suburbs was Clichy. Yet, seven months before the date of the 1925 municipal elections, Clichy had already begun to be called Clichy-la-Rouge, for it was here where the PCF held its fourth congress, launching the party on its road to 'bolshevization'.[39] It is highly likely that the American political scientist Aristide Zolberg was thinking, amongst other suburbs, of Clichy when writing: 'In some Paris suburbs, to grow up communist is as natural as to grow up French.'[40]

Faced with a similarly daunting challenge compared to the one encountered by Joseph Cardijn in Laken and Brussels, the founder of the French JOC, Georges Guérin, decided to take up the challenge

[37] Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France: pays de mission?* (Lyon: Abeille, 1943), 10.

[38] Pierre Pierrard, *Georges Guérin: une vie pour la JOC* (Paris: Atelier, 1997), 96.

[39] The information on PCF presence in Clichy is taken from Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 29–30, and Pierrard, *Georges Guérin*, 96–7.

[40] Aristide Zolberg, 'Foreword', in Annie Kriegel, *The French Communists: Profile of a People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. ix.

when receiving his call to serve the parish of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in Clichy in the summer of 1925. Like Cardijn an early admirer of Le Sillon, Georges Guérin first tried his hand at straightforward educational efforts, coordinating a study group. A historian recalls: 'The young blue- and white-collar workers frequenting the study group, encouraged to do so by Father Guérin, reacted anything but enthusiastically, and the social doctrine [of the Church] did not prove to be a particular point of attraction.'[41] A few months later, on a winter evening in early 1926, a long-time acquaintance, Father Achille Danset, a staff member of the important behind-the-scenes Jesuit think-tank Action Populaire, showed Georges Guérin some copies of newspapers published by the Belgian JOC. Achille Danset, hailing from the Nord, the northernmost region of France bordering Belgium and a region with a constant influx of Belgian workers in search of employment, had been in close contact with the Belgian JOC ever since the head of Action Populaire, Father Desbuquois, had sent Danset as his emissary to the first congress of the Belgian JOC.[42] When he showed Father Guérin the copies of Belgian JOC literature, Achille Danset had just returned from a week-long JOC-led retreat in Namur. Georges Guérin immediately recognized the innovatory spirit of the Belgian JOC: 'That very evening, I subscribed to these journals.'[43]

Already at some point in the course of the preceding year, Georges Guérin had had another formative experience not entirely unrelated to what was to come. At the end of one of the hapless reunions of his parish study group, Father Guérin began to converse with one of the regulars in attendance, a young bookkeeper, Georges Quiclet, son of proletarian parents. Georges Quiclet began to talk about his work. Father Guérin asked probing questions, and a lively conversation ensued. 'And it thus occurred that, for the first time ever, Georges Quiclet encountered a priest who expressed a deep and passionate

[41] Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 34. The *silloniste* heritage of Georges Guérin is highlighted by Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 21.

[42] Paul Droulers, *Le Père Desbuquois et l'Action Populaire: dans la gestation d'un monde nouveau (1919–1946)* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1981), 274. Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 34, situates the encounter between Fathers Guérin and Danset in August 1926, an assertion uncorroborated by other sources.

[43] Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 34.

interest in this young worker's life and in the material circumstances of this life.'[44] 'Suddenly, Father Guérin realizes that asking a worker to talk about his work transforms this person and shapes him into a being who can express himself, who has ideas, who sheds his inhibitions, who comes into his own.'[45] Georges Guérin later reminisced: 'The first seeds of the JOC in France could be found in that simple, unpretentious but apostolic dialogue between a young worker and a priest in search of realistic means of evangelization. The French JOC was born out of this very first study group, limited to a young worker and a poor vicar.'[46]

DIVERGENT PATHS IN BELGIUM AND FRANCE

It would be somewhat redundant to detail the steps taken by Georges Guérin and his closest co-thinkers in the construction of the French JOC. As had been the case in Belgium, similar enterprises had begun to gestate in other parts of France, for similar reasons, above all in the Nord. Various fears of unwanted and unwarranted competition on the part of an array of Catholic organizations had to be overcome, with the most immediately affected one being the cross-class Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (ACJF), a mainstay of French Catholic organizational life since 1886.[47] The success of the Belgian KAJ/JOC served as a constant inspiration and model to follow. And indeed, one of the key events which set the stage for the take-off of the idea of a French JOC was a much-advertised visit by the founding father and the president of the Belgian group, Joseph Cardijn and Fernand Tonnet, to Paris in March 1927, an occasion

[44] Pierrard, *Georges Guérin*, 107.

[45] Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 35. Launay suggests that this 'conversion experience' occurred at the moment when Father Guérin introduced members of his study group to the publications of the Belgian JOC.

[46] Pierrard, *Georges Guérin*, 107–8.

[47] On the ACJF, see Charles Molette, 'Les Origines et les caractères du mouvement de la Jeunesse Catholique en France', in Luciano Osbat and Francesco Piva (eds.), *La 'Gioventù Cattolica' dopo l'unità 1868–1968* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1972), 359–80.

Cardijn used to lobby Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris.[48] A second visit by Cardijn in June of the same year dotted most of the remaining i's.[49] And, as in Belgium, the young, fledgling French JOC not only adapted the 'active method' of the KAJ/JOC, but it likewise copied the focus on changing members' work environment rather than concentrating on influencing individuals. As a slogan, oft repeated in the course of the proceedings of the first national JOC congress in November 1928, prominently proclaimed: 'Before we can convert Christians in the workshops, we must make the workshop Christian.'[50] The social message of the JOC was centre stage from the very beginning.

There are plenty of additional parallels between the evolution of the French and Belgian JOC. Not the least of these was a growing unease—present from the very beginning amongst more than a few—about the fiercely defended autonomy of the JOC. We have seen above how, in the case of Belgium, the episcopal hierarchy imposed some important restrictions on the freedom of movement of the KAJ/JOC. Similar moves were soon taken vis-à-vis their French homologues. In March 1931, the French Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops (ACA) decreed a new organizational statute for French Catholic Action. And the four-year-old JOC found itself firmly placed within the dense network of Action Catholique, the latter defined as 'the coordinating body of existing efforts in view of organizing the activities of all Catholics in conformity with papal directives, with the goal of procuring the cooperation of the laity for the hierarchical apostolate', not exactly a formula to inspire confidence in experiments at self-government. All component parts of Catholic Action were now placed under the custody of the episcopacy, to which the Central Council of Action Catholique was to report, with the General Secretariat of Action Catholique representing the individual movements vis-à-vis the ACA.[51]

Yet, despite the similarity of pathways taken by the Belgian and French JOC, and despite similar responses to the JOC's growing self-assertion and aspiration towards autonomy, in the course of the

[48] On this milestone in the crystallization of plans to launch a French JOC, see Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 57–60.

[49] Ibid. 67–70. [50] Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 43.

[51] See Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 135–6, citation on p. 135.

1930s the two pioneering organizations of young Christian workers on an apostolic mission to rechristianize their work environment and their secularized cohort eventually embarked on separate and distinct journeys. The internal and external conditions determining their outlook—the 'active' and 'inductive' methods (internal) and measures to restrict their autonomy (external)—were nearly identical, but the responses to this dilemma were increasingly distinct.

As we have seen, in the Belgian case, the KAJ/JOC underwent a gradual evolution away from a primary orientation towards the promotion of social concerns of young Christian workers towards an emphasis on moral and spiritual concerns. Such a gradual switch did not go undetected or, for that matter, unopposed. Thus in 1936 one of the co-founders of the JOC, Fernand Tonnet, in a letter to Cardijn criticized the fact that, 'in the face of the fortress of capitalism, you encourage your groups to pray and dance, when what had been expected was that one would mobilize them for a crusade'.[52] But the trajectory was clear and was only interrupted and tendentially reversed by the dislocations of the Second World War, Nazi occupation, and the concomitant tensions of collaboration and resistance.[53]

In France, too, even at the height of social unrest in the mid- to late 1930s, the JOC never centrally questioned the logic of the social system determining the lives of their numerous members. 'Thus capitalism as such was never discussed. Neither did JOC research ever concentrate on issues such as productivity or Taylorism. What captured the attention of the general secretariat, which launched new survey and inquest themes at the beginning of each school year in October, were personal or interpersonal problems more so than more general topics.'[54] But the dynamic of JOC praxis never strayed from the centrality of its social (rather than primarily moral and religious) message, and indeed in the course of the 1930s its engagement with its concrete social environment (rather than supernatural reflections) grew stronger rather than weaker.

[52] Cited in Walckiers, *Sources inédites*, 178.

[53] Alaerts, *Door eigen werk*, 273–340, covers the war years; on pp. 341–495, Alaerts provides a detailed description of the lifeworld of the KAJ up to 1965.

[54] Launay, 'La J.O.C.', 49–50.

INNER DYNAMIC TOWARDS THE LEFT

Jean-Pierre Coco and Joseph Debès, in their fascinating study of the proceedings, the liturgy, and the iconography of the French JOC's tenth anniversary celebration in July 1937, evocatively recreate the atmosphere of that crucial moment. Sure enough, there were no invocations of class struggle terminology to be heard, a corporatist social order was still regarded as the ultimate goal, and employers were often still portrayed as beatific individuals who were genuinely worried about how to guarantee a fair and appropriate income to their workforce. But a close reading of the texts and subtexts of this celebration held in Paris, assembling a gigantic crowd of between 20,000 and 60,000 celebrants, showcases a dynamic organization on the cusp of branching out into uncharted terrain. Taking place just over a year after the strikes and victories of the French Popular Front, the French JOC was clearly champing at the bit. Throughout the massive social crisis gripping France in May and June of 1936, the JOC had firmly adhered to its refusal to cooperate with the communist-inspired trade union vanguard in the General Confederation of Labour (CGT). 'Yet well-trained activists could participate in strike committees in the course of factory occupations,' even if primarily to exert a moderating influence.[55] Or, in the words of another astute observer: 'Officially the Jocistes repudiated all collaboration with Communists in working-class struggles, and although they did not repudiate the strikes of May and June 1936, they sought to soften them in reformist, anti-Marxist and moralistic directions.'[56] But the daily tensions began to leave their mark on an emerging generation of Christian workers who had been encouraged to take their destiny into their own hands. The reminiscences of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts within the prestigious Institut Catholique de Paris, Monseigneur Jean Calvet, leave little doubt about sentiments at JOC grassroots levels. He was particularly taken aback by two observations: 'First, they have a way of interacting with their chaplains (*aumôniers*) which leaves no doubt

[55] Paul Christophe, *1936: les Catholiques et le Front Populaire* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1936), 99.

[56] Oscar L. Arnal, 'Towards a Lay Apostolate of the Workers: Three Decades of Conflict for the French Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (1927–1956)', *Catholic Historical Review*, 73 (1987), 212.

that they indeed tolerate them, even though they are not workers, but under the condition that they [merely] administer the sacraments and air their opinions on current affairs. They are their own masters, aren't they?' Monseigneur Calvet then noted the condescending way in which JOC members talked about the upper levels of the factory hierarchy, the sons of their employers, and the upper ranks of the technical specialist elite: 'These useless beings, these parasites are only tolerated out of a spirit of compassion and mercy and while expecting that they will be replaced by individuals emerging from within their own [the workers'] milieu. Nonetheless, I am told that the movements of specialized Catholic Action [such as the JOC] are designed to put an end to class struggle. In my opinion, they have fanned its flames.'[57]

Thus when, in July 1937, at the mass gathering of the JOC in Paris, the Sunday morning mass, celebrated by the recently ordained young priest Gustave Langlois, one of the very first members of the JOC in 1927–8, proclaimed in front of an audience of 60,000 young Christian workers, 'But we have to ask God for forgiveness, for us, for the entire working class which we represent. Forgive us, oh Lord, that we have not sufficiently hated injustice and war,' it easily could take on a double meaning. 'For we have not always been true to ourselves, we have not always been the instigators, the servants, the saviours, which the working class has been waiting for.'[58] These and similar passages in the liturgy of that Sunday mass, in and of themselves not constituting any new departures compared to traditional JOC oratory and self-awareness, no doubt elicited mixed receptions and widely differing interpretations. A choir performance on Sunday afternoon reinforced the atmosphere of ambivalent combativeness. A JOC soloist demanded for all working-class families: 'Light in the obscurity of the underground mine. Fresh air in the blast furnace of the factory. Poetry amongst the dry numbers of company bookkeeping. Consolation in the face of ordeals.' The closing passage saw the lead actor shout: 'Working class of France! Working class of the world! Build up your courage and gain confidence.' To which the mass choir

[57] Cited in Christophe, *1936*, 100.

[58] Jean-Pierre Coco and Joseph Debès, *1937: l'élan jociste* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1989), 113–14.

responded: 'For a new time. For a new working-class youth.'[59] Again, all these statements, wishes, and chants could be found in traditional JOC repertoires, but under the changed conditions of turbulent class struggle in contemporary France, such pious wishes surely must have taken on a number of conflicting meanings in the minds of more than one participant or observer.

And, indeed, as will become more obvious in later sections of this book, specialized Catholic Action, in particular in France, began to strike out in new directions, fuelled at least in part by the inner dynamic of the JOC's active method and reinforced by the rapidly evolving social atmosphere in France at large. It was a process that did not go unnoticed by contemporary observers and historians alike. Émile Poulat comments on the similarities and differences between the evolution of the French and Belgian JOC: 'Both organizations emerged from within the same integral Catholicism . . . [but] the latter [the Belgian JOC] stuck far more closely to its origins than the former.'[60] Or, in the words of a participant-observer, Jean Boulier: 'If in Belgium the JOC placed the emphasis on the spiritual and on the inner life, in France it accentuated its character as a trade union organization and proletarian demands.'[61] Jociste innovations, above all their emphasis on autonomy and self-determination, were thus no blueprint for attendant radicalization, but they set the stage on which new paradigms of social action could develop and grow.

DEFENDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

What factors may explain the sudden irruption into the rich Catholic associational world of a movement seemingly at odds with the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church? For a worldwide religious institution, focused on the apex in the Vatican, to foster innovative

[59] Coco and Debès, *L'élan jociste* 143 and 147.
[60] Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 177.
[61] Cited in Georges Tamburini, *Une politique d'agir: stratégie et pédagogie du Mouvement Populaire des Familles*, special issue of *Les Cahiers du G.R.M.F.* 10 (1997), 30.

class-based (even though the term 'class' was officially eschewed!) youth organizations, in which individual rank-and-file members were encouraged to strike out on their own, appears at first sight to be a contradiction in terms. But, then, the image of the Catholic Church as an ancient institution dedicated to upholding conservative traditions, seemingly frozen in time, has always been a vision which is persuasive only to those observers who know little about the Church's rich and contradictory inner life. There are a number of factors which help explain the emergence of dynamic social movements of the order of the KAJ/JOC. One crucial ingredient creating the KAJ/JOC spirit was the pre-existing tradition of Catholic missionary zeal oriented towards the recovery of 'lost souls' in the heartland of Catholicism, the industrialized countries of the Occident, rather than the conquest of new souls in the countries of the periphery.

For Joseph Cardijn was by no means the first church activist to note the disappearance of religious convictions in rough proportion to the spread of industrialization. Unsurprisingly for a powerful and wealthy organization which continued to attract some of the brightest minds of successive generations and which placed great stress on the continued refinement of analytical and intellectual skills, the process of alienation from the Church experienced by ever-increasing numbers of low-wage workers as the industrial revolution spread in concentric circles from Britain to Belgium, and then throughout the Western European world, became an object of attention by church figures above all in the areas directly affected by this trend. As early as 1879, for instance, at the occasion of the Fifth Congress of the Italian Opera dei Congressi (about which more below), meeting in Modena in northern Italy, the Modenese Archbishop Guidelli invited the participants to pay close attention to the plight of workers.[62] And northern Italy was by no means at the cutting edge of industrial 'progress' and its concomitant effects.

If the question of labour loomed ever larger in the minds of Catholic thinkers as the nineteenth century came to a close, the origin of Catholic organizations in defence of the Catholic faith goes

[62] Alfonso Prandi, 'Genesi ed evoluzione dell'insegnamento sociale della Chiesa', in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini (eds.), *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia. 1860–1980*, i/1: *I fatti e le idee* (Genoa: Marietti, 1981), 184.

back even further. At the point of origin lay not so much worries about the loss of faith amongst the rapidly increasing numbers of lapsed working-class Catholics but defensive reactions against certain intellectual currents intimately associated with capital rather than labour. The Enlightenment tradition included many adherents to the Catholic faith, but regardless of Enlightenment thinkers' formal affiliation and their private convictions, the overall logic and direction of Enlightenment thought ran counter to the Catholic tradition which emphasized faith and spiritual values rather than reliance on reason or empirical methods. A growing laicist tradition within the emerging bourgeois milieu reinforced this sea change militating against the strong hold—if not stranglehold—of the Catholic Church over society, and thus the very earliest organizations which can be seen to be at the origin of Catholic associations focusing on the retention of Catholic believers in the industrializing world were organizations sponsored and animated by members of the religious and (often) aristocratic elites, designed to combat non-religious or antireligious tendencies amongst the (frequently, but not always) bourgeois elites.

The tracing of the lineage of any intellectual or activist tradition is always fraught with contradictions, but in the case of Catholic defence organizations the case has been made, for Italy at least, that the first manifestations of this trend occurred in Piedmont around 1780, where a grouping called Amicie Cristiane operated until its dissolution in 1811. Renamed Amicie Cattoliche, it resurrected itself in 1817. 'These were small circles of individuals hailing for the most part from the Savoyard nobility, wishing to counteract the influence of freemasonry . . . within the lifeworld of the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie.'[63] The story was roughly similar in other regions of the Western world but, given the centrality of Italy for the Catholic Church, the ensuing description of the development of Catholic apostolic movements, focused on the reconquest of the European lost world of Catholicism, will pay closest attention to Italian developments. For, as we will see, even and especially in the inter-war period of the first half of the twentieth century, Italian debates and Italian reality crucially determined the contours of Catholic organizations

[63] Liliana Ferrari, *L'Azione Cattolica in Italia dalle origine al pontificato di Paolo VI* (Brescia: Queriana, 1982), 9.

and institutions far beyond the borders of the young and fledgling Italian state.

France, Germany, and Belgium were the areas of the Western world where Catholic associations of the kind alluded to above were most prominent, undoubtedly a result of those regions suffering from the consequences of unbridled capitalism and associated intellectual trends earlier than other portions of Catholic Europe, and it was here in north-western Europe where apostolic initiatives of a cultural kind were first coordinated by a series of international gatherings of interested activists and organizations. Once again underlying the centrality of Belgium, the first continental European country to experience industrialization at first hand, the very first such international congress was held in 1863 in Mechelen, the home of the Belgian *primus inter pares*, located just east of the capital city of Brussels and just north of the premier centre of Catholic learning in north-western Europe, the town of Leuven.[64] One of the Italian participants at this gathering in the Flemish Brabant town was Giambattista Casoni.

Inspired by what he had seen and learned in Mechelen, Casoni went on to found, in his home town of Bologna, an Associazione per la Difesa della Libertà della Chiesa in Italia, a short-lived effort shut down the following year by a suspicious government. But the dynamic towards the creation of Catholic organizations, composed of lay and ecclesiastical figures and devoted to the defence and strengthening of Catholic values, could no longer be stopped. Once again in Bologna, in 1867 two members of the aristocracy helped found the Società della Gioventù Cattolica (GC), an organization which survives until the present day.[65] GC soon took the initiative to plan for a general gathering of Catholic Italians interested in the promotion of their faith, along the lines of similar congresses which had already become common currency on the other side of the Alps. The 1874 gathering held in Venice laid the groundwork for the official launching in Florence in 1875 of the Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati

[64] Ibid. 8.

[65] On the founding of these two pioneering organizations of what eventually became known as Italian Catholic Action, see Renato Moro, 'Azione Cattolica Italiana (ACI)', in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini (eds.), *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia. 1860–1980*, i/2: *I fatti e le idee* (Genoa: Marietti, 1981), 181, and Ferrari, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 12–13.

Cattolici, the first real umbrella organization for Catholic activists in Italy, which operated continuously for almost thirty years.[66]

Italian Catholic associations founded after Italian unification differed from pre-existing traditional organizations 'dedicated to charity and welfare measures' not only on account of their specifically cultural and apostolic orientation but 'also because of the large margins of autonomy which they enjoyed with regard to ecclesiastical authorities'. Approval by the episcopacy or the Holy See remained, of course, a given, and clerics paid important and indeed crucial roles within the Opera dei Congressi, 'but this did not imply the existence of an institutionalized system of ecclesiastical control'. Lay and ecclesiastical adherents could be found supporting opposite camps in sometimes acrimonious local or national debates within the Opera, but in an age when 'obedience to ecclesiastical authorities remained a principle beyond any discussion', Popes Pius IX (1846–78) and Leo XIII (1878–1903) preferred to stay in the background, limiting their interference to occasional pronouncements rather than exercising direct and heavy-handed control.[67]

THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

By the time the Opera dei Congressi was in full swing, the 'social question', i.e. the consequences of rampant capitalism for the material and spiritual circumstances of the new class of proletarians, was beginning to take centre stage for Catholic apostolic activists. And from the very beginning of this new trend, the shapers of what became known as the Catholic social doctrine were equally repelled by what they rightfully regarded as two sides of the same coin: individualistic liberal capitalism and the concomitant socialist response. The ways and means to correct the social evolution of modern societies in accordance with Christian principles increasingly became the target of intellectual and activist efforts. By 1891 the situation had become sufficiently critical

[66] On the founding of the Opera dei Congressi, as this organization was usually referred to for short, see Ferrari, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 16.

[67] Liliana Ferrari, *Una storia dell'Azione Cattolica: gli ordinamenti statutari da Pio XI a Pio XII* (Genoa: Marietti, 1989), 6.

for the first great social encyclical to be pronounced: *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII.

One of the key confidants and advisers of Leo XIII, Father Matteo Liberatore, had already made a name for himself as the author of an authoritative study of the variety of workers' associations that were springing up throughout the Italian state, *Le associazione operaie* (1889). Father Liberatore took responsibility for important sections of *Rerum Novarum*, although Leo XIII solicited advice and assistance from many other sources including, once again, the experienced Belgian advocates and practitioners of social Catholicism.[68] It would be excessive to list the details of Leo XIII's path-breaking social encyclical. Let it suffice to highlight the fact that *Rerum Novarum* approved and promoted the idea, if not the necessity, for workers' organizations to see the light of day, workers' organizations, to be sure, that would concern themselves with the defence of workers' economic interest, but that would simultaneously devote even more attention to the positive solution of related moral and religious questions. *Rerum Novarum* was indeed quite eclectic with regard to the kinds of organizations it aimed to promote. It commented favourably on associations assembling employers and workers supposedly cooperating side by side as much as on 'pure' workers' organizations run by and for workers themselves. These 'non-discriminating' organizational ambiguities were, of course, in the last analysis merely a reflection of the fact that the Catholic social doctrine was still in its infancy. *Rerum Novarum* did not yet offer a coherent alternative vision of modern industrial society, though it clearly aroused the interest of the world of Catholicism to the plight of the modern underdog.[69]

Given the relative freedom to express divergent views within the Opera dei Congressi, and given the state of creative flux and indecision within the milieu of the promoters of the social question within the Catholic Church, it should have come as little surprise that

[68] Prandi, 'Insegnamento sociale', 185–6.

[69] On the place of *Rerum Novarum* within the emerging Catholic social doctrine, see ibid., particularly pp. 184–9. But this is also a good occasion to refer the interested reader to two well-informed monographs on social Catholicism up to the First World War, which take a decidedly transnational approach: Alec R. Vidler, *A Century of Social Catholicism 1820–1920* (London: SPCK, 1964), and Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialisation to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

dissensions soon began to tear apart the Opera. Before long, serious differences within Catholic opinion with regard to the labour question shattered the veneer of Catholic unity. Earlier on mention was made of the case of the iconoclastic Flemish Father Daens, who eventually fell foul of the Belgian and Vatican hierarchy. Similar breakaway tendencies emerged in other industrialized countries towards the end of the nineteenth century (about which more in Chapter 3). In Italy Father Romolo Murri took on the role played in Belgium by Father Daens and, given Murri's leadership role within the Opera, it was to a significant extent because of these increasingly irreconcilable and divisive debates within this important organization that in 1904 the Opera dei Congressi was dissolved by a decree emanating from the Vatican Secretary of State. Proponents of a conservative paternalist approach to the social question were no longer willing to give free rein to the forces around Murri, some of whom not only advocated genuine trade union associations, minimum wage legislation, and the establishment of substantive social security legislation, but also clamoured for the extension of the political franchise and the adoption of proportional representation in national parliament.[70] The tensions leading to the forced closure of the Opera were, as we will see, only the first in a long line of disputes within the social Catholic camp, which focused on different concrete topics at various times and in divergent locations, but which ultimately were constantly fuelled by the differing hopes and aspirations expressed and desired by the key players within this milieu: hierarchy and rank and file, ecclesiastical leaders and laity, and sometimes a combination of each of these forces on either side of the relevant divide, all operating within a parallelogram of forces whose outer limits can be defined by the terms 'autonomy' and 'centralization'.

Already in the course of 1902, Pope Leo XIII had begun to tighten the grip of ecclesiastical authority over the Catholic social movement the Church had sponsored over a period of several decades, expressed

[70] On the workings of the Opera, see above all Angelo Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale nell'Opera dei Congressi* (Rome: PUG, 1958). Amongst the wealth of publications on Don Romolo Murri, see Maurilio Guasco, *Romolo Murri e il modernismo* (Rome: Cinque Lune, 1968), and Maurilio Guasco, *Il caso Murri dalla sospensione alla scomunica* (Urbino: Argalia, 1978). A brief survey of this period of Italian social Catholicism can be found in Ferrari, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 20–9.

by 'a shift from remote control and a politics of the promotion of an equilibrium to direct control'. Liliana Ferrari continues: 'The shift was unmistakable, but it was only the beginning of a gradual process which continued throughout the succeeding years, with the decisive support of Pope Pius X' (1903–14).[71] The new umbrella organization designed to replace the Opera dei Congressi, the Unione Popolare, modelled after the German Katholischer Volksverein, never truly fulfilled such a role, and instead there now commenced 'a confusing phase of the history of the Italian Catholic movement, a phase of redefinition and organizational systematization'.[72] It was not until 1915 that Pope Benedict XV (1914–22) created 'for the first time an operational centre furnished with real authority', the Giunta Direttiva dell'Azione Cattolica Italiana, elected by the leadership group of the Unione Popolare, the latter however by now in effect constituting merely one of four pillars of Italian Catholic associational life.[73] The cohesion of this new supervisory body, in turn, was guaranteed by two distinct features, 'in the first place by ecclesiastical control, and then by the structural affinity of the associations composing this body. Men, women, and youth organized on the basis of parish groups, without distinctions of social background or profession, each with their own lay leadership group, at this point still on an elective basis, but under the control of [ecclesiastical] assistants and requiring the approval of the local bishop.'[74]

According to Renato Moro, it was not until 1919 that one could truly speak of the creation of Italian Catholic Action in the modern sense of the word. A series of decisions in that year led 'for the first time' to 'the differentiation between a strictly political organization, composed of Catholics but nominally independent from the Vatican and the episcopacy (the PPI (Partito Popolare Italiano)), and an organization with the specific task to carry out apostolic and therefore religious, social, and cultural tasks, directly dependent on the Vatican and the episcopacy (the AC (Azione Cattolica))'.[75] Still, it was to take a few more years and the appointment of a new pope for Catholic Action to come into its own.

[71] Ferrari, *Una storia*, 18. [72] Ibid. [73] Moro, 'Azione Cattolica', 182.
[74] Ferrari, *Una storia*, 18. [75] Moro, 'Azione Cattolica', 182.

ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

When in 1922 Achille Ratti, Pope Pius XI, decided to deliver his post-election benediction *urbi et orbi* from the central loggia of the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome, this gesture made a profound impression on his contemporaries, for it had been more than fifty years since one of his predecessors had taken such a step. It appeared to signify his openness to the world beyond the Vatican, a genuine desire for authentic encounters with the real world, a new beginning in the history of relations between the Catholic Church and modern-day society.[76] Such expectations were largely fulfilled, although their realization proceeded along uneven lines, and Pius XI's initial wish for the reconvening of Vatican I never did become reality.[77] In what follows, the focus will be initially placed on new departures in the organizational structures and methods of Catholic Action.

Virtually all observers are united in ascribing the real take-off of Catholic Action to the reign of Pius XI. The 1919 reforms under Benedict XV may have created the formal structures which remained the basic pattern of Catholic Action in subsequent decades, but it was Pius XI's reforms, culminating in the October 1923 proclamation of new and streamlined statutes for Italian Catholic Action, which paved the way for the flourishing of apostolic initiatives in Italy and around the Catholic world. The term 'Catholic Action' had been in use, off and on, since the nineteenth century, along with other labels, to describe a variety of activities uniting clergy and laity in defence of Catholic values against the encroachments of the liberal state and, later, the dangers of industrialization. From the beginning of Pius XI's reign, Catholic Action took on a distinct and relatively clearly defined meaning.

In earlier decades the precursors of Catholic Action had been engaged in a variety of tasks, ranging from charity via social welfare measures to political and apostolic projects. From the beginning of Pius XI's rule, Catholic Action was henceforth devoted, above all else, to exclusively apostolic tasks. All other dimensions of

[76] Federico Alessandrini, 'Pio XI e l'Azione Cattolica', in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolico italiano* (Padua: Antenore, 1969), 448.

[77] On the stillborn efforts to reconvene Vatican I in the beginning period of Pius XI's reign, see Yves Chiron, *Pie XI (1857–1939)* (Paris: Perrin, 2004), 147–9.

associational life subsumed under the heading of Catholic Action were now shunted to the sidelines, if not actually officially proscribed.[78] A number of factors probably combined to bring about this specialization, but perhaps the key reason for this particular evolution lay in the politics and cultural context of Europe at that time. Pius XI's pontificate began precisely at the moment when the full impact of the cataclysm of the First World War could be felt throughout the heartlands of Catholicism in Western Europe. The liberal belief in the unstoppable forward march of human progress had been shaken to the core, and amongst leading Catholic intellectuals certain conclusions were falling into place, building on the pre-existing traditions of missionary activity in modern, industrialized societies. If defence of the Catholic faith had become a watchword throughout the entire nineteenth century, if the dislocations of rampant industrialization had then provided a further impetus to strengthen apostolic missions targeted on European societies themselves, the tragedies and horrors of the First World War were interpreted as a call to action to redouble such apostolic efforts as were already in place. 'The conclusion became self-evident: if one wanted to prevent the recurrence of a similar catastrophe, then one must reverse the entire process of Western secularization.'[79] Catholic Action now came into its own.

An astute analyst of Italian Catholicism, Jean-Dominique Durand, summarized the changes introduced in 1923 in the following succinct manner: 'The reforms of 1923 placed lay organizations under the direct authority of the Pope, with the basic principle being centralization and hierarchicization. Italian Catholic Action would henceforth be guided by a central body partially appointed by the Pope. Corresponding to this hierarchy, identical governing bodies were to be set up in each diocese and then in each parish, following the pyramidal structures completely controlled, from the very top to the very bottom, by the hierarchy.'[80] Systematizing the quadripartite

[78] On this elevation of the apostolate to centre place, see, for instance, Étienne Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', in Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *Guerres mondiales et totalitarismes (1914–1958)*, vol. xii of Jean-Marie Mayeur et al. (eds.), *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Desclée, 1990), 222.

[79] Fabrice Bouthillon, 'D'une théologie à l'autre: Pie XI et le Christ-Roi', in *Achille Ratti: Pape Pie XI* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), 294–5, citation on p. 295.

[80] Jean-Dominique Durand, 'L'Italie', in Mayeur (ed.), *Guerres mondiales*, 363.

model developed in preceding years, Catholic Action now followed a precise model in its internal set-up as well: 'one organization for young men, one for young women, one for [adult] women and one for [adult] men. The organizing principle was territorial, the structure pyramidal: parish-based leagues or circles, federations focused on the diocese as the basic unit, national movements.'[81] A tight organizational mandate ensured one leading principle of post-1923 Catholic Action: 'unity within multiplicity',[82] meaning that a panoply of associations, structured along identical lines, would combine into a powerful whole, which would become far more influential than the simple sum of its individual parts.

It was the hierarchical subordination of each level in the pyramidal structure to the next higher step on the ladder which would ensure the monolithic and unitary nature of the entire edifice. The following citation from the *Manuale di Azione Cattolica* spells out this feature in unmistakable clarity: 'Catholic Action is the participation in and collaboration within the apostolate carried out by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Within the Church there thus exists the hierarchical apostolate, which is the most important, the true and intrinsic apostolate . . . and the apostolate of the laity, which is secondary, an auxiliary force aiding the other. The lay activists of Catholic Action are, therefore, not called upon to act on their own. Their task is simply to aid the hierarchy in all circumstances to the best of their abilities.'[83] And an authority on Italian Catholic Action reconfirms: 'The teaching of Pope Ratti in this regard is clear and unequivocal.'[84] A myriad of concrete tasks would constitute the daily bread of Catholic Action thus fortified to face and reconquer the world: 'cooperation with the religious life within parishes and dioceses, the diffusion of Christian culture, the defence of religion, the Christianization of the family, cooperation in educational matters, the distribution of the

[81] Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', 223.

[82] Mario Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica nell'Italia contemporanea (1919–1969)* (Rome: Ave, 1992), 70. The most important passages in the second chapter of Casella's collected writings on Italian Catholic Action, 'Pio XI e l'Azione Cattolica', 67–185, can also be consulted in an abbreviated version, published as 'Pio XI e l'Azione Cattolica Italiana', in *Achille Ratti*, 605–40. All references to this piece, however, will be to the 1992 collection of articles.

[83] Cited in Ferrari, *Una storia*, 35; ellipses in the original citation in Ferrari.

[84] Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 140.

Catholic press, efforts to ensure the compliance of dress styles and public performances with Christian moral values, ensuring Christian solutions to the social question, missionary and social welfare obligations, etc.'[85] Étienne Fouilloux undoubtedly hits the nail on the head when he states, alluding to Antonio Gramsci's famous reference to the distinction between a 'war of position' and a 'war of movement': 'Thus a Catholicism of position transforms itself under the guidance of the Vatican into a Catholicism of movement.'[86]

CATHOLIC ACTION AND POLITICAL ACTION

What appeared straightforward and self-explanatory on paper, however, did not always manifest itself in similarly clear-cut ways in concrete reality. While there was no doubt that a hierarchical structure was a fundamental precept of Catholic Action under Pope Pius XI, the actual ways and means in which this organizational maxim played itself out at the grassroots level were not always precise adaptations of theoretical guidelines. What role, for instance, were lay leaders to play in this pyramidal structure which gave precedence to ecclesiastical control? What was to be the function of parish priests, who, though part of the ecclesiastical 'superstructure', were located at the bottom end of the ecclesiastical hierarchy? And there were other questions which, on paper, appeared to be satisfactorily resolved.

As mentioned above, political action was officially separated from incipient apostolic Catholic Action as early as 1919. In January 1919, the principle of Catholic Action standing 'over and above all problems of purely material and political concern' was first officially formulated.[87] But it appears that, for practical purposes, this mandate to abstain from politics did not become common currency for Italian Catholic Action until the early years of Pius XI. Here, as alluded to

[85] Ibid. 82. [86] Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', 223.

[87] Citation in Mario Casella, 'L'Azione Cattolica del tempo di Pio XI e di Pio XII (1922–1958)', in Traniello and Campanini (eds.), *Dizionario*, ii/1. 89. This article was republished *in toto* with the title 'Il dibattito storiografiche sull'Azione Cattolica del tempo di Pio XI e di Pio XII (1922–1958)', in Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 523–53. All citations will, however, refer to the original publication in *Dizionario*.

earlier on in this chapter, the rise to power of Mussolini played a catalytic role. When the Catholic Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) was outlawed by the fascist state, Pope Pius XI, powerless to avoid this move, recognized that he would now have to rely primarily upon other Catholic organizations to effect some influence over Italian affairs. Thus, hoping to hold on to Catholic Action after the disappearance of the PPI, Pius XI insisted on the non-political nature of Catholic Action with renewed force. 'Thus, between 1922 and 1925, under the direction of the new President of its leadership body, the Milanese lawyer Luigi Colombo, a significant "depoliticization" of Catholic Action was carried out, above all in those sectors that had evinced the greatest sympathies towards the ideals of the PPI and where anti-fascist tendencies had been prominent,'[88] a move which protected Catholic Action but tainted the reign of Pius XI henceforth with the odium of presumed softness towards fascism.

As we will see below, one of the hallmarks of Pius XI's reign was not just the stabilization and standardization of Italian Catholic Action, but the export of those principles into other countries. If the narrowly restricted parameters for political action under Mussolini left little (legal) room for manoeuvre, in other countries the possibilities for engagement in politics remained far more open-ended. Thus, it is important to note that, for all the many statements which unquestionably spelled the end of political engagement within the ranks of Catholic Action from 1922 onwards, a more fine-tuned analysis highlights that there remained some openings for Catholic Action activists in this domain. Here, Pius XI's distinction between 'piccola politica' [politics with a small 'p'] and 'grande politica' [politics with a capital 'P'] played a crucial role. The former was meant to denote what could be regarded as conventional 'politics', i.e. the 'politics of political parties, the politics of the day, the politics of the moment'. The latter—*grande politica*—by contrast referred to the ' "politics of the common good", denoting those efforts designed to "procure and preserve those goods which belong to everyone and which should be provided to everyone": "the sanctity of the family, the sanctity of education, the rights of the Church, the rights belonging to an individual

[88] Moro, 'Azione Cattolica', 184.

conscience, the rights of God." '[89] Pius XI thus left sufficient space for a certain type of political action to continue under Catholic Action auspices. He repeatedly reiterated this loophole, permitting activists of Catholic Action to engage in a certain type of politics, while nominally keeping politics as such off limits. In 1926, for instance, he proclaimed: 'Though not engaging in party politics, Catholic Action is preparing the terrain for the making of good politics, of *grande politica*, is preparing the terrain to shape the political conscience of citizens in a Christian and Catholic manner.'[90] Or, in 1931, in a letter to Argentinian Catholic Action, 'We must take care so that Catholic Action does not interfere in party politics', but Pius XI immediately went on to clarify that nonetheless 'nothing impedes Catholics from becoming members of political parties, for they would thus firmly guarantee that the rights of God would be respected and that the laws of the Catholic Church would be observed'.[91]

Upon closer observation, then, seemingly firm principles tend to dissolve into more complicated and contradictory realities, leaving a certain, and by no means unimportant, amount of manoeuvring space for local or diocesan lay activists, parish priests, or bishops and archbishops. And here we arrive at one of the key reasons behind the detailed exposition of the history, principles, and realities of Catholic Action. Any time a social movement is created and begins to pick up momentum, regardless of the degree of top-down hierarchical control, there exists the possibility for an inner dynamic of social movements towards autonomous action to affect the evolution of such a trend. And Catholic Action in the inter-war time period, described as the mainstay of what was then regarded as 'the Catholic movement', became a mass social movement par excellence. 'Millions of adherents' began to flock towards the individual organizations composing Catholic Action, and 'they constituted the most important mass organizations within the Catholicism of the first half of the twentieth century'.[92] There was, of course, no inbuilt necessity for this dynamic to enter into real or potential conflict with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Given a certain degree of leeway, expressly permitted by

[89] Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 163, which includes the lengthy citations rendered in quotation marks in my text.

[90] Cited ibid. 164. [91] Cited ibid. 172.

[92] Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', 223.

the Holy See, it was often up to the respective national directorates, the respective national ecclesiastical leadership bodies, or, stepping further down the hierarchical ladder, local diocesan leaders to determine the extent of permitted local initiative and autonomy. The case of the evolution of the Belgian JOC and its spiritual leader Joseph Cardijn, described in earlier sections of this chapter, reminds us that conservative paternalism could easily increase rather than decrease as the inter-war time period proceeded.

And, indeed, on the whole, there is no doubt that the degree of openly stated hierarchical control over Catholic Action increased rather than decreased all across the Catholic universe as time went on. 'The part played by lay activists within the hierarchical apostolate tended to diminish' and, paralleling this trend towards the continuous enhancement of the role of ecclesiastical authorities, 'they progressively abandoned temporal concerns for spiritual matters', in the apt expression of Étienne Fouilloux.[93] And here it is worth noting that the case has been repeatedly made that the specific modalities of Italian Catholic Action, forced to abandon open politics by Mussolini's dictatorial ambitions, were thus ultimately responsible for the transfer onto foreign soil of similar strictures against politics, even and especially in countries where democratic rights and civic liberties were—for a while at least—still officially respected. As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, Belgian scholars in particular have rightfully drawn attention to the implications of Italian affairs for the world of Catholic Action in Belgium. Given the quasi-universal application of the Italian model of Catholic Action, when Pius XI narrowed the definition of Catholic Action to henceforth exclude politics, Belgian Catholic Action was forced to execute a similar turn.[94]

In a hierarchical movement focused on the Holy See, such Italocentrism may, at first sight, appear to be self-evident. And, indeed, a closer look at later stages of increasing ecclesiastical control over lay activists within Catholic Action appear to confirm such a powerful link between Italian events and subsequent, closely related, repercussions elsewhere. The year 1931, for instance, was yet another crisis

[93] Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', 223.

[94] Here, above all, the work of Emmanuel Gerard is the central point of reference; see his 'Cardijn', 124, and his 'Introduction', 24.

year for Italian Catholic Action, leading first to the fascist regime's dissolution of all youth organizations belonging to Catholic Action in June of that year. As a result of these clashes, by September 1931 Italian Catholic Action underwent yet a further internal reorganization after protracted negotiations with the regime. Amongst other centralizing measures, local Catholic Action leaders were henceforth no longer to be elected, but they were now to be appointed by diocesan authorities, and all known opponents to the fascist state were explicitly excluded from such local leadership posts.[95] Earlier in this chapter the point was made that, also in 1931, both the French and Belgian JOC were subject to new hierarchical controls on the part of their respective national ecclesiastical superiors. Certainly the timing of the Belgian episcopacy's decision of November 1931 to subordinate the KAJ/JOC to the firm control of Catholic Action and, thereby, the Belgian Catholic hierarchy would suggest the possibility of coordinated action. But the equivalent action vis-à-vis the French JOC had already occurred in March of 1931, and the French hierarchy's effort to streamline and to centralize French Catholic Action, which peaked in 1931, can be traced back to November 1929, the date of Monseigneur Verdier's appointment as Archbishop of Paris.[96] Was there not, perhaps, another factor which pushed ecclesiastical authorities continuously to diminish lay control over Catholic Action, regardless of the powerful winds blowing from the Vatican in Mussolini's Rome? A quick glance at yet another qualitative change of the relationship of forces within Italian Catholic Action—this one in 1939 at the very beginning of Pius XII's reign—may help to trace the contours of a possible answer.

'AUTONOMOUS BEINGS'

In March 1939 Pius XII, in one of the very first official acts after his ascension to the Holy See, executed yet another decisive step in the direction of the removal of lay control over Italian Catholic Action.

[95] Moro, 'Azione Cattolica', 185; but see also Durand, 'L'Italie', 363.

[96] Alain-René Michel, 'Pie XI et l'Action Catholique en France', in *Achille Ratti*, 660–3, and Chiron, *Pie XI*, 201–2.

If in 1931 lay local leaders of Catholic Action could no longer be elected but only appointed by their bishop, the 1939 reforms brought the process to completion. All lay Catholic Action leaders were now removed from their posts and replaced by ecclesiastical figures. Mario Casella, who once again is the authority on this particular stage in the evolution of Catholic Action, makes a convincing case that this move had little to do with the arrival of a new, and supposedly more conservative, Pope but that it once again should be seen primarily as a move by papal authorities to protect a Catholic institution under attack from fascist policy makers. Once again, as had been the case with the reforms in 1923 and 1931, such a move towards centralization should not be regarded as a paradigm shift vis-à-vis Catholic Action by the Holy See, but primarily as a move to protect lay activists and to secure the survival of 'the Catholic movement' from secular attacks.[97] So far so good or, at least, politics as usual.

But Casella then refers to a second motivation behind the 'reforms' of 1939, which suggests that there existed a number of 'obstacles' that were targeted by these measures as well, 'obstacles that had been recognized in the recent past in several dioceses with regard to relations between clergy and laity'.[98] And it is the listing of some of these complaints, mostly tucked away in footnotes in Casella's introductory text, that suddenly provides a brief glimpse into the inner life at the grassroots level of Catholic Action. It is difficult to judge on the basis of these materials how widespread the phenomena alluded to by the rather diplomatic term 'obstacles' really were, although it is instructive to recognize that such complaints were not only given prominent space in the Catholic press, but that they were articulated in public by some members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, including at least one archbishop. And on this occasion it is worth highlighting that the secondary literature on Catholic Action is not particularly 'well developed'. While there are a number of works focusing on Italian Catholic Action and on other national experiences with this apostolic Catholic movement, there exists to date, for instance, not a single transnational study of this social movement which, to quote from a

[97] See Mario Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica all'inizio del pontificato di Pio XII: la riforma statutaria del 1939 nel giudizio dei vescovi italiani* (Rome: Ave, 1985), 7–8 and 15–16, for brief summaries of the events.

[98] Ibid. 8.

contribution to an official anthology assembled at the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Catholic Action in 1968, was then widely regarded as 'the apostolic soul of the Church'.[99] There most definitely is a near-total lack of studies that go beyond the reconstruction of the official 'ideology' and the official structures of Catholic Action and which cast a glance at the variegated and contradictory practices in different locations at various times. For that very reason alone, the brief documentation contained in Casella's piece is worth recounting in some detail.

What 'obstacles' did Catholic Action encounter on the road to apostolic success? Much of the information adduced here stems from a journal called *Il prete apostolo* [The Apostle Priest] published in Turin. Over a period of several years this publication repeatedly chided various 'controversial' practices within the ranks of Catholic Action, which it deemed scandalous, by no means all of which appeared to be generated from Turin. Here are some quotations that get across the flavour of the complaints: 'Are these associations really always and everywhere, including in the large cities, of assistance in the fashioning of the parish milieu and the parish-based apostolate? Or are they not out to create barriers and obstacles to the message of the priests who are attempting to care for their souls? Are the members of certain branches of Catholic Action always and everywhere docile elements, respectful of the parish family, or are they autonomous beings who are trying to avoid the zeal of the parish priest? Are the structures of Catholic Action always positive factors within a parish, or are they not promoters of disintegration?' What was still couched in terms of questions in May of 1936, one month later was rendered without question marks. For *Il prete apostolo* it had now become 'a fact that in many regular parishes the local branches of Catholic Action assume positions that are independent from the parish authorities, and they pursue their autonomous paths wherever possible, acting outside the structures and the programme of their respective parishes'. In August 1936, *Il prete apostolo* became more concrete: 'How can it be justified that not a few Catholic [Action] branches keep their locales open, often attracting sizeable crowds,

[99] Alberto Vecchi, 'Linee di spiritualità nei documenti pontifici da Pio XI a Pio XII sull'Azione Cattolica', in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato*, 391.

precisely during the time when church services are under way in their parish church? How to explain that other local branches of Catholic Action hold their membership meetings and other gatherings precisely at the time of parish services?' The June 1937 issue of the same journal published a letter from a parish priest who denounced that 'practically on every Sunday, under one pretext or another, all or part of the members of the various groups stay away from the parish church because somewhere in the area a meeting is being held, or several meetings simultaneously, get-togethers of branch presidents take place, delegate assemblies, etc.' The answer by the editors of *Il prete apostolo* in turn speaks volumes, drawing a comparative note. The hapless priest was reminded that he was certainly not the only one to experience this plight, and that this state of laxity was by no means a peculiarity of Italy. Attention was drawn to similar situations in neighbouring France where, in the case of the diocese of Tours, 'it was officially pronounced that at least once per month the members of Catholic Action should be permitted sufficient time to spend one Sunday in the parish'.[100]

Also in August 1937, the publication of the seminary training ecclesiastical advisers to Catholic Action, *Assistente ecclesiastico*, saw fit to include an article which reminded its readers that Catholic Action 'should therefore not be misunderstood as the assistance of the hierarchy (divine mission) to benefit the laity, but as the participation of the laity within the hierarchical apostolate', a correction of a curious inversion of Catholic Action precepts, to say the least.[101] Mario Casella reports that 'it was not at all uncommon that [Catholic Action] diocesan and parish leadership personnel approach their own bishops and vicars to present their "directives" [to them] received from the national or diocesan "centre" ' of Catholic Action. And Casella sums up: 'Interpretations of this kind wound up creating within the organization a type of totalizing and directorial mentality.' And, indeed, Salerno Archbishop Monterisi in April 1937 published a strong indictment of what he termed the 'totalitarian' tendencies within Catholic Action, and it came as no surprise that Monterisi

[100] All citations taken from Casella, *Inizio del pontificato*, 24–5; the very last quotation, however, is Casella's own paraphrase of the text in the Turin publication.

[101] Citation, once again, taken from ibid. 29–30.

singled out Catholic Action youth groups for particular rebuke: 'It is the habit of young people, especially at the present time, to believe that all things associated with the past have become antiquated, that they have to be reformed, if not suppressed.'[102]

If such reports can be believed—and there appears to be no reason why such observations would not have been true—then Catholic Action was a far less homogeneous and unitary mass organization than the mere statutory regulations would lead innocent observers to assume. Surely such recalcitrant behaviour could not possibly have been the norm, although the geographic spread and the degree of official attention to this problem suggests that such deviance was by no means a rare occurrence. If Italy under fascism witnessed such a laxity of norms, what of other national experiences of tension between Catholic Action activists and attempted ecclesiastical control? Was the case of Tours, where the officialdom apparently considered it a partial victory to have obtained as a concession that Catholic Action activists should spend at least one Sunday per month attending church services, merely the tip of the iceberg? Could it therefore, possibly, have been the case that the near-continuous imposition of ever stricter norms on the various levels of Catholic Action organizations in Italy, and the concomitant gradual removal of lay members from positions of influence and power, may not necessarily have been a mere—perhaps 'unfortunate and circumstantial'—consequence of Italian conditions which were, to some extent, eventually copied abroad? Could they, perhaps, instead have been a logical response of the church hierarchy in general to pressure for autonomy and control from below? The underdeveloped state of research in this area does not permit the formulation of anything approaching a definite answer in this regard, but at the very least such a question should now be formulated.

The first section of this chapter uncovered a similar dynamic, though—in the case of the French JOC—with a more clearly radicalizing dynamic, in the ranks of an organization set up for young Catholic workers. This is, then, the moment to briefly describe the

[102] All citations, including the quote from Archbishop Monterisi, can be found ibid. 22–3.

specificity and peculiarity of what has become known as 'specialized Catholic Action'.

LEARNING SELF-EXPRESSION

'Unity in multiplicity', one of the organizational principles of Catholic Action, meant the simultaneous coexistence of independent bodies assembling adult Catholic men, adult Catholic women, young Catholic men, and young Catholic women. Within each structure, individuals from all social backgrounds rubbed shoulders with each other, giving literal expression to the desired goal of Catholic unity in the face of an increasingly hostile outside world. And, as was demonstrated with the example of some of the centrifugal tendencies arising within Italian Catholic Action, the attendant degree of social cohesion within such organizations could, given the right circumstances and cultural climate, produce modes of interaction and behaviour which were not exactly planned or desired by the ecclesiastical leadership. But the cross-class nature of such organizations also tended to impose certain limits on the degree and extent of inner cohesion of such groups. As a general rule, the more educated, middle-class, or student representatives within such umbrella organizations dominated associational life and left their working-class cohort to play second fiddle.[103]

It was precisely to break out of this stalemate, marginalizing in particular young Catholic workers and rendering apostolic efforts in working-class communities exceedingly difficult, that Joseph Cardijn and Georges Guérin built up class-specific organizations of Catholic

[103] Informed surveys of these cross-class Catholic youth organizations, which predate the official launching of Catholic Action but eventually were integrated into this movement, can be found in Osbat and Piva (eds.), '*Gioventù Cattolica*', with most chapters illuminating aspects of Italian Catholic youth groups. The difficulties experienced by such mixed-class bodies when trying to attract young Catholic workers are particularly well depicted for the French case in Debès and Poulat, *L'Appel*, 44–55. Amongst the contributions to the volume edited by Osbat and Piva, note, for the countries which produced the prototype organizations of specialized Catholic Action, Charles Molette, 'Les Origines et les caractères du mouvement de la jeunesse catholique en France', 359–80, and Roger Aubert, 'Organisation et caractère des mouvements de jeunesse catholique en France', 271–323.

youth—and with spectacular success. Gathering encouragement and support from open-minded spokespersons of the Catholic hierarchy, most notably Pope Pius XI himself, who, in 1925, received Joseph Cardijn in a private audience and on that occasion expressed his full support for specialized Catholic Action, soon an entire panoply of Catholic Action organizations for specific sociological subgroups began to be set up, initially amongst Catholic youth: for young Catholic university students, young rural Catholic farmers, young independent middle-class professional Catholics, etc.[104] For all practical purposes, however, 'specialized Catholic Action up to the Second World War remained a Franco-Belgian affair'.[105] And even after the Second World War, when specialized Catholic Action took off like wildfire in other parts of Europe and the rest of the Catholic world, north-western Europe and in particular Belgium remained at the centre of this dynamic development, which soon began to manifest itself in international congresses and the setting-up of international umbrella organizations for each (international) branch of specialized Catholic Action. 'All these had their administrative centre in Brussels, a veritable planetary centre of specialization.'[106]

As we will see in later chapters, the most determined and far-reaching moves in the direction of what I call Western European Liberation Theology arose precisely within the ranks of specialized Catholic Action. The logic behind this growing popularity of a radical current above all else within the ranks of specialized Catholic Action is self-evident. The class-based nature of specialized Catholic Action multiplied the social, political, and cultural preconditions for group cohesion to foster and spawn independent and autonomous pathways to collective and individual liberation. Within the confines of this chapter, designed to set the stage for subsequent more detailed elaborations of such novel experiments, it is, however, important to recognize that, without the development of Catholic Action, a Catholic social movement par excellence, specialized Catholic Action would probably never have come about. And, to return to the

[104] One can get a good sense of the almost bewildering welter of Catholic Action organizations, whether 'specialized' or not, operating side by side, in the comprehensive survey of the Belgian scene in André Tihon, 'Association de laïcs et mouvements d'Action Catholique en Belgique', in *Achille Ratti*, 641–56.

[105] Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', 227. [106] Ibid. 230.

theme of the quasi-organic emergence of an inner dynamic towards autonomy and self-determination characteristic of social movements throughout the ages, already within Catholic Action as such, despite a stream of ever more restrictive official mandates narrowing the room for self-expression in the run-up to the Second World War, previously unheard of opportunities were created for rank-and-file activists to test limits and to develop their own ideas.

Mario Casella has done more than anyone to uncover the hidden dynamic within Italian Catholic Action in the age of Mussolini and Pius XI. Here is what Casella has to say about the overall legacy of Catholic Action. Despite the manifold limitations imposed on Catholic Action, he writes, 'it is at the same time true that, even if only on an inferior level and in a context of overall subordination, lay activists in the 1920s and 1930s had certain directional and decisional powers and enjoyed certain responsibilities and possibilities to express themselves and to contribute, on various levels, not only to the application but also the elaboration of pastoral projects and programmes, especially those which (and here the task would be to ask oneself where the limits may have been), by dint of educational and cultural background, apart from apostolic sensibilities, they were in the position to execute.' But there was more: 'There exist precise and significant testimonies that make clear how, in effect, Pius XI and his bishops placed more trust in the laity than may be suggested by certain assertions made by the very same Pope and the very same episcopacy or by certain historiographic claims.'

Mario Casella concludes:

> I do not know whether Pius XI could have done more for Catholic Action or, more generally, whether he could have done more for the promotion of the laity. It is beyond doubt, however, that he did much more than any of his predecessors and that he succeeded in establishing solid bases for future, more fully matured, developments. In the course of his pontificate, and thanks to his teachings, countless lay activists, at the organizational apex as much as in the dioceses or parishes, did not limit their activities to the simple execution of the 'orders' emanating from the hierarchy but, though voluntarily accepting and experiencing the obedience demanded from them, fulfilled their calling intensively and by no means only passively. Out of the school of Pius XI arose and consolidated itself an entire generation of lay activists, full of enthusiasm and the spirit of initiative, capable of making

themselves heard and not only listening to others, giving advice rather than solely translating into practice the instructions of others, capable not only of obeying but of actively collaborating, of becoming active agents and not simply passive spectators in interactions with their bishops and their parish priests, above all when it came to the task of applying pastoral proposals or to elaborate strategies of bearing Christian witness within contemporary society.[107]

[107] Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica*, 179, 180, and 191–2.

2

Theology and Philosophy in the Age of Fascism, Communism, and World War

THE CRISIS OF MODERNISM

In the last analysis, Catholic Action was one of the by-products of the horrors of the First World War and the related disruption of Western European society and culture. The immediate post-war era was perhaps the most important watershed in the extension of the franchise to include the lower classes (if only males in roughly half of all states), and the 1920s was the first decade when social democracy became a serious contender for (parliamentary) power in virtually every Western European state. The rise of mass politics, noticeable since the closing decades of the nineteenth century, had become a seemingly irreversible factor of modern life. Catholic Action, thus, in some respects merely provided a logical and necessary complement to important socio-political changes affecting Christians and non-Christians alike.

But, of course, the cataclysms of 'the Great War' triggered more than 'mere' rearrangements of Catholic associational life. When Pius XI took over from Benedict XIV in 1922, Europe's industrial societies were still suffering from the economic and psychological consequences of war. Italy was in the midst of a near-civil war between the forces of the radical left and the radical right. 'His pontificate began at a time when the First World War had undermined the liberal belief in the constant progress of humanity towards ever increasing happiness.'[1] Few Catholics in the first quarter of the twentieth century

[1] Fabrice Bouthillon, 'D'une théologie à l'autre: Pie XI et le Christ-Roi', in *Achille Ratti: Pape Pie XI* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), 294.

would have identified themselves as 'liberals', yet nonetheless some version of such a view of history had made some inroads even into Catholic minds in the decades prior to August 1914. After all, the post-Napoleonic settlement of 1815 had led to nearly a century of generalized peace in Europe where, with the exception of the Crimean War, at most 'only' two countries were involved in a hot war. Even Marxist socialists, like many Catholics ardent opponents of liberal capitalism, if for fundamentally different reasons, had begun to recognize that standards of living in Western Europe were generally rising. Reformist socialism was consequently gaining ground, if at first surreptitiously, at the expense of orthodox Marxism and anarchism.

The Catholic Church had undergone its own 'revisionist' scare in the course of what is often termed 'the crisis of modernism'. Having been accustomed traditionally to assume quasi-automatically that the dividing lines between Church and state were fluid and ill defined, leaving the Church wide-ranging powers over individuals and societies, the rise of liberalism in conjunction with the general acceptance of scientific beliefs in the course of the nineteenth century generated important new, near-heretical, currents of Catholic belief. Pius IX and Leo XIII had already taken measures to stem the tide of modernism within Catholicism, and indeed *Rerum Novarum* had been a product of the backlash against modernist currents in Catholic thought. But it was Pius X who brought the issue to the forefront and firmly rejected modernist aspirations which he deemed thoroughly inappropriate for the Catholic world. Notions such as popular sovereignty, the autonomy of the individual conscience, tolerance of a plurality of opinions, conceptions of society as being a constantly evolving rather than static entity; such ideas, Pius X asserted, had no place in the Catholic mental and institutional universe. And, in an organization known for iron discipline and hierarchical values, papal condemnations carried clout.[2]

[2] On the 'crisis of modernism', see Émile Poulat, *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste* (Tournai: Casterman, 1962); Maurilio Guasco, *Modernismo: i fatti, le idee, i personaggi* (Milan: San Paolo, 1995); and, for the country where the most famous battles in this culture war were fought, Pierre Colin, *L'Audace et le soupçon: la crise moderniste dans le catholicisme français, 1893–1914* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996). A concise synopsis can be consulted in Rogert Aubert, 'L'Église catholique de la crise de 1848 à la Première Guerre Mondiale', in Roger Aubert et al. (eds.), *L' Église dans le monde moderne (1848 à nos jours)* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 42–64.

On the eve of the First World War, then, it seemed that the Catholic Church had been much more successful in staving off the modernist challenge arising from the growth and maturity of liberal culture than had the Socialist International. But, as we already noticed in Chapter 1 and as will become obvious in this and the remaining chapters, out of the defeat of the modernist current in Roman Catholicism arose—within the ranks of the victorious 'faction'—a powerful new movement which, in the end, posed yet another central challenge to traditionalists within the Catholic Church. And, in a very real sense, this new oppositionist current eventually posed even greater challenges to the Catholic hierarchy. For, tendentially, whereas modernists had been ready to make their peace with liberalism, the next generation of Catholic rebels not only questioned what they regarded as the counterproductive and hidebound values upheld by the Catholic Church hierarchy, but they attacked head-on the foundations of liberal capitalism as well. For the moment, however, in 1922, at the onset of Pius XI's pontificate, such a curious development was still in the distant future. The threatening clouds of modernism were still the talk of the day, though safely marginalized by a cycle of papal edicts, opened up by the 1864 encyclical *Syllabus Errorum*.[3]

THE NEW CHRISTENDOM, MARK I

Given the catastrophic social and psychological reverberations of the Great War, the only true solution to this generalized crisis, in the eyes of Catholic believers, was the reversal of the process of secularization in the Western world. Secularization, a corollary of liberalism, had to be combated by a resurgent Church. To avoid another catastrophe along the lines of the First World War, secularization and modernity had to be opposed. Better yet, the Church began to act on the basis of the principle that attack is the best method of defence. Convinced of the necessity to organize a reconquest, a series of

[3] And indeed repressive moves against 'modernists' still characterized the first years of Pius XI's pontificate: 1922–5; see Étienne Fouilloux, *Une église en quête de liberté: la pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II 1914–1962* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998), 20–6.

innovative measures were taken to ensure victory. Perhaps the single most important *organizational* step undertaken in this context was the streamlining and refoundation of Catholic Action at the beginning of Pius XI's pontificate. Initially, the most crucial *theological* innovation was the sudden centrality of Christ-the-King. Instead of tolerating (ultimately) godless liberalism and modernity, Christians should concentrate their efforts on the reconquest of society for Christ-the-King. A social order where Christian values rule supreme, where Christ-the-King simultaneously makes the law, is judge and jury, and holds executive powers, should become the ultimate goal. Social harmony can only be reinstated if a New Christendom sees the light of day. The most important early encyclicals of Pius XI single-mindedly pursued this particular goal.

His very first encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei*, was published in the first year of his pontificate on 23 December 1922. It called for the establishment of the Peace of Christ via the founding of the Kingdom of Christ. And Pius XI openly called for the implementation of such plans in actually existing societies, without however furnishing many details.[4] The doctrinal theme of the Kingdom of Christ had been a standard subject ever since the time of Pius IX, and it surely must be seen in the wider context of the Church's opposition to modernism since Pius IX; it by no means constituted a novelty as such. Where Pius XI eventually became truly innovative, however, was 'when it came to translate into practical terms how precisely this Kingdom of Christ could become reality in the various sectors of social life'.[5] If *Ubi Arcano Dei* served as the opening shot, the December 1925 encyclical *Quas Primas* 'specified this message'. *Quas Primas*, after labelling laicism as 'the plague of our epoch', announced a new feast day, the feast day of Christ-the-King, to be celebrated on the last Sunday in October, to provide a concrete focus for the volunteer army—staffed by Catholic Action—hoping for a new *reconquista*. Jean-Marie

[4] Jean-Marie Mayeur, 'Trois papes: Benoît XV, Pie XI, Pie XII', in Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *Guerres mondiales et totalitarismes (1914–1958)*, vol. xii of Jean-Marie Mayeur et al. (eds.), *Histoires du Christianisme des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Desclée, 1990), 21–2.

[5] Roger Aubert, 'L'insegnamento dottrinale di Pio XI', in Carlo Colombo et al. (eds.), *Pio XI nel trentesimo della morte (1939–1969): raccolta di studi e di memorie* (Milan: Opera Diocesana per la Preservazione e Diffusione della Fede, 1969), 224.

Mayeur comments: 'The establishment of a New Christendom is at the very centre of the objectives of this pontificate.'[6]

Still, both *Ubi Arcano Dei* and *Quas Primas*, though stressing the centrality of Christ-the-King, gave preciously few 'practical and precise directives with regard to social problems',[7] though it is clear from other statements by Pius XI that, from the outset, he was keenly attentive to such topics. Once again one should emphasize the impact of historical events and processes on Catholic social theory. It was the human suffering during the Great Depression which triggered Pius XI into spelling out (and radicalizing) his discourse on what the New Christendom should look like.[8] The 15 May 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* became the most systematic exposition of the features of such a future Kingdom of Christ. The full title of this encyclical, 'On the Restoration of the Social Order in Plain Conformity with the Principles of the Gospel', already reveals the central message.

This is not the place to analyse this lengthy work which touched on a great variety of issues pertaining to the necessary reform of the actually existing social (dis)order. But mention should be made of several insightful comments on this most important social encyclical of the twentieth century by two theologians and historians of theology who were very much at the centre of the upheaval within the Catholic Church which is the subject of this volume. '*Quadragesimo Anno*, written with a finger on the pulse of industrial society, where gigantic limited companies increasingly control all aspects of economic and social life,' comments Roger Aubert, 'by comparison with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* insists much more on the limits imposed by the common good on the uses of private property, expressing a critical distance from the concept, inherited from Roman law, of the absolute predominance of private property.' 'For the first time, a solemn pontifical document envisaged the reconfiguration of national production from the vantage point of the common good and the necessity of some type of integration of workers into the inner life of enterprises.'[9]

[6] Both citations are taken from Mayeur, 'Trois papes', 23.

[7] Marc Agostino, *Le Pape Pie XI et l'opinion (1922–1939)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1991), 96.

[8] Bouthillon, 'Pie XI et le Christ-Roi', 297.

[9] Roger Aubert, 'Les Grands Thèmes de l'enseignement social des papes de Léon XIII à Paul VI', *Le Foi et le temps*, 22 (1992–3), 262–3.

Marie-Dominique Chenu stresses the forward-looking, optimistic views of Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*. Pius XI is, writes Chenu, 'therefore able to recognize the efforts and the distress of this new class, the working class, and he does so not only with a view to their liberation from their misery, but also while investing them with a historical mission'.[10]

The Kingdom of Christ as the incarnation of deep-seated social reform? Christ-the-King as redeemer of the working class and scourge of the forerunners of today's private equities, joint stock companies? There was more to *Quadragesimo Anno* and to Pope Pius XI, but it is important to emphasize that for Pius XI, certainly in the central decade of his pontificate between 1926 and 1936, the social message of his doctrine regarding the resurrection of the Kingdom of Christ was by no means unfavourable to progressive changes. What at first sight—certainly to outside observers—appears as an esoteric, otherworldly doctrine, the theology of Christ-the-King, could take on concrete meaning for the here and now. 'There is nothing whatsoever ethereal about this doctrine,' writes Fabrice Bouthillon. 'We are not far away at all from the position which a socialist militant could recognize for himself within the forward march of history. In fact, in actuality not all that much separates the theology of Christ-the-King, as put forth by Pius XI, from just about any other modern ideology.'[11]

THE PRIMACY OF THE SPIRITUAL

Pius XI, of course, always remained, above all else, a man of the Church. Though, like most mortals with a keen intellect, consciously and subconsciously influenced by the world around him, as representative of God on earth he could not but stress the primacy of the

[10] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Kirchliche Soziallehre im Wandel: Das Ringen der Kirche um das Verständnis der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit* (Fribourg: Exodus, 1991), 38. A more detailed and highly informative contextualization and analysis of *Quadragesimo Anno* can be gleaned in Georges Jarlot, *Doctrine pontificale et histoire: Pie XI. Doctrine et action (1922–1939)* (Rome: Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, 1973), 247–79.

[11] Bouthillon, 'Pie XI et le Christ-Roi', 297 and 299.

spiritual. The foremost expert on twentieth-century French ecclesiology and theology, Étienne Fouilloux, asserts: 'The line imposed by Pius XI on an initially reticent French Church implies the absolute primacy of the spiritual.' And, of course, to return to the theme of Chapter 1: 'This primacy of the spiritual has as its immediate corollary an emphasis placed on the apostolate',[12] for idealism and voluntarism go hand in hand. 'In this manner', writes Étienne Fouilloux paraphrasing Antonio Gramsci, in a passage already cited in Chapter 1, 'a Catholicism of position transformed itself under Vatican auspices into a Catholicism of movement.'[13]

Pius XI's emphasis on the primacy of the spiritual, however, was merely the tip of the iceberg. As might be expected, Catholic traditionalists, the representatives of the 'Catholicism of position', agreed with Pius XI wholeheartedly—at least on this particular elementary point. But even, perhaps especially, the spokespersons for a renewal of the Catholic Church, the individual thinkers and movements at the centre of this study, found inspiration and support in Pius XI's words. 'Whatever their philosophical differences and different spiritualities, all these *catholiques de mouvement* were concerned to oppose the *primauté du spirituel* to the *politique d'abord* of *Action Française* [about which below]', in the words of a keen analyst of French left Catholicism in the 1930s, David E. Curtis.[14] What held true for French Catholicism applied to other areas of Catholic Europe as well.

But nowhere was this inner conviction of the primacy of the spiritual as explicitly and prominently displayed as in the personality and intellect of the most daring and creative mind in French Catholicism in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain, of whom more below. Like Pius XI profoundly influenced by his environment and contemporaneous historical events, it was Jacques Maritain who penned the justification par excellence for the continued relevance of the primacy of the spiritual in the twentieth century: *Primauté du spirituel*. 'The truth is that Europe has forgotten the subordination of political to spiritual ends. There lies its great

[12] Étienne Fouilloux, 'Traditions et expériences françaises', in Mayeur (ed.), *Guerres mondiales*, 510.

[13] Étienne Fouilloux, 'Le Catholicisme', in Mayeur (ed.), *Guerres mondiales*, 223.

[14] David E. Curtis, *The French Popular Front and the Catholic Discovery of Marx* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1997), 5.

mistake. From this derives that general condition of the oppression of the spirit and the conscience, that contempt in practice for human personality and its dignity, the overwhelming burden of which is everywhere more or less consciously felt.'[15] The French philosopher, soon to go on to even greater fame, explained that 'what principally concerned me, my essential object, was to illustrate certain principles which I considered to be superior to time and circumstance and of universal validity, principles affecting the relations between the spiritual and the temporal which dominate the problems of culture and will always have for the philosopher a privileged interest'.[16] His principal concerns were neatly summarized in the original French title: *Primauté du spirituel*.[17]

Despite his relative youth at the time of writing of this path-breaking volume—he had just turned 45—Jacques Maritain was then already one of the best-known philosophers of his age. 'The influence of Maritain was above all due to his countless personal connections. But it suffices to leaf through the contemporaneous journals to realize his omnipresence within intellectual debates.'[18] The appearance of his book in August 1927 thus served 'to liberate many minds, especially within the younger generation'.[19] For on an epiphenomenal level, *Primauté du spirituel* was a broadside against a—hitherto—even more powerful French thinker, Charles Maurras, the *spiritus rector* of Action Française, a long-lived political movement thoroughly imbued with the spirit of nationalism, royalism, and anti-Semitism. In the early 1920s, Jacques Maritain himself had used the *Revue universelle*, a journal founded by co-thinkers of Action Française, for many of his philosophical interventions. The papal condemnation of Action Française, made public in late December 1926, forced many fellow-travellers of Action Française to reconsider their world views. Maritain's invective against Maurras and his principle of *politique d'abord* [politics first] reinforced a notable shift in thinking—and in

[15] Taken fron the English translation of *Primauté du spirituel*, Jacques Maritain, *The Things That are Not Caesar's* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 85; translation slightly amended.

[16] Jacques Maritain, 'Preface to the English Edition', *The Things That are Not Caesar's*, p. v.

[17] Jacques Maritain, *Primauté du spirituel* (Paris: Les Petits-Fils de Plon et Nourrit, 1927).

[18] Fouilloux, *Une église en quête*, 64.

[19] Ibid. 81.

temporal action—by Catholics from the defence of reactionary values to the advocacy of 'progressive' causes.

If up to 1926 the most dynamic voices of a 'Catholicism of movement' were located on the political right, the double condemnation of Action Française by Pius XI and Jacques Maritain shifted the support base of the 'Catholicism of movement' to the left.[20] And it is this first *aggiornamento* of the Catholic Church, spearheaded by Pius XI and concentrated in the ten eventful years between 1926 and 1936, which opened up a window of opportunity for purposeful and effective action by the protagonists highlighted throughout the present volume. For, by the time Pius XI died on 10 February 1939, fifty-two out of the total number of sixty-two cardinals then living had been appointed by Achille Ratti,[21] who, in 1922, after having left behind his first passion, mountain climbing, which until 1913 had brought him physically closer to the heavens than most other contemporaries, took over the Holy See.[22]

A SECOND RENAISSANCE

The theology of Christ-the-King dates, at the very least, back to the mid-nineteenth century. And an emphasis on the primacy of the spiritual has been a centrepiece of Christian religion for the past 2,000 years. The sudden emphasis on certain aspects of traditional theology, then, need not necessarily imply a conservative outlook. The specific historical, theological, and intellectual context within which these discussions now arose ensured that the uses to which such insights could be put would by no means automatically become

[20] The ferment behind Catholic intellectual production in the 1920s pushing in multiple directions is well described in Philippe Chenaux, *Entre Maurras et Maritain: une génération intellectuelle catholique (1920–1930)* (Paris: Cerf, 1990). For an informative and detailed discussion of the crisis around the 1926 papal condemnation of Action Française, see Jarlot, *Pie XI*, 112–41.

[21] Mayeur, 'Trois papes', 22.

[22] Achille Ratti was an accomplished alpinist up to 1913, when he gave up this sport to concentrate on his calling. On the future Pope's mountaineering exploits, see Yves Chiron, *Pie XI (1857–1939)* (Paris: Perrin, 2004), 47–8; on the year 1913 as the definitive endpoint of his climbing efforts, see ibid. 9.

the prerogative of conservative forces—whether these be expressions of political or theological conservatism. To be sure, by no means all adherents of the theology of Christ-the-King became left Catholics. And the primacy of the spiritual was a cornerstone of all believers—left, right, or, nominally, apolitical. Theological points of view or theological elaborations are almost always open to divergent interpretations. It is the historical and intellectual context which makes one or the other interpretation triumph at various specific historical moments in time.

Nowhere is the inherently value-neutral aspect of much theology more apparent than in the various efforts by scholars in the Catholic Church to return to the sources. For, starting in the late nineteenth century and then gathering momentum in the first half of the twentieth, a veritable movement got under way to rediscover and classify ancient biblical and patristic texts. Initially, these efforts were often imbued with the spirit of lexicology or etymology, blissfully unconcerned with raising any larger interpretative or doctrinal issues. 'The point was on the one hand to resolve problems of literary critique and chronology, on the other hand to carry out philological and archaeological studies of texts,' observed Roger Aubert half a century ago. 'Thus one studied the Mosaic origins of the Pentateuch, the synoptic problem, the chronology of the Pauline epistles or the question of the precise location of Jericho or the exact itinerary of the voyages of Saint Paul.'[23] Frequently, 'one sought above all else to prove that the development of Christian dogma is an historical fact; sometimes, anxious to demonstrate that the recognition of such an evolution in no way threatens our faith, one took great care to indicate the homogeneity of that evolution and the perfect continuity of doctrinal developments over the centuries'.[24] All too often, this return to the sources served to buttress the views of the church hierarchy against any number of theological deviations. Biblical, patristic, or liturgical studies of this sort often had as their crowning achievements the creation of manuals or catalogues, 'showcasing the timid and sterile aspect of a theology understood as a conceptual edifice superimposed

[23] Roger Aubert, *La Théologie catholique au milieu du XXème siècle* (Tournai: Casterman, 1954), 20.

[24] Roger Aubert, 'Les Grandes Tendances théologiques entre les deux guerres', *Collectanea Mechliniensia*, 31 (1946), 20.

on reality', wrote the historian of religion Giuseppe Alberigo, 'instead of feeding on living matter, which is in plentiful supply, always in the process of becoming on account of Revelation which animates history'.[25]

Yet, noticeable already in the last years before the outbreak of the Second World War and then picking up speed in the 1940s and 1950s, the return to the sources suddenly took on a different meaning. Writing in 1954, the Belgian scholar Roger Aubert observed with regard to the revival of patristic studies: 'The characteristic feature of the current patristic renaissance is that, unlike fifty years ago, scholars are no longer searching in the works of the church fathers for apologetic arguments in order to prove the antiquity of professed doctrines or common practices within the Catholic Church. Now one looks at the writings of the Fathers in order to discover what new things they can teach us or, more precisely, what they can teach us again with regard to the store of knowledge we have forgotten many centuries ago.' The same held true for biblical studies as much as for patristics: 'One is far less interested, compared to twenty-five years ago, to carry out purely erudite labour, to address questions of authenticity, of chronology, technical analyses of the theological vocabulary, etc. Instead one seeks to have the message of the Fathers come alive again in all its doctrinal and spiritual richness and, if at all possible, even to rediscover the religious experience of the Christian communities, which expresses itself via these personal testimonies.'[26] Elsewhere the same author highlights that the point of this second wave of scholars returning to the sources was not 'to modify traditional faith, but rather to discern new aspects hitherto kept in the shadows',[27] or, Aubert wrote as early as 1946,

> to discover all those potentialities that are not yet developed or perhaps even forgotten. One returns to the Christian sources in order to become inspired by them and to breathe new life into them. One scrutinizes conciliar or

[25] Giuseppe Alberigo, 'Christianisme en tant qu'histoire et "théologie confessante"', in Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 15.

[26] Aubert, *La Théologie catholique*, 39–40.

[27] Roger Aubert, 'La Théologie catholique durant la première moitié du XXème siècle', in Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimmler (eds.), *Bilan de la théologie du XXème siècle*, vol. i (Paris: Casterman, 1970), 461.

liturgical documents in order to rediscover the conscience of the Church as it has been expressed and specified in the course of the centuries. Already St Thomas said that texts are to theology what experiments are for the natural sciences. Rather than a repertoire of arguments designed to undergird this or that theological or apologetic thesis, Holy Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, and other monuments of tradition constitute fundamental ideas to which one must constantly return, which one must study and love for their own sake, and which must invigorate all future theological efforts.[28]

The more material scholars began to amass, the more they began to realize that 'these scriptural texts cannot be considered primarily as arguments in favour of a thesis'.[29] The more they began to read between the lines, the more obvious it became that these biblical and patristic sources provided food for thought rather than texts to be copied and classified into catalogues or manuals. In short, in the era of fascism, communism, and popular fronts, under the impact of the horrors of Nazi occupation and mass-based armed and unarmed resistance movements, the return to the sources was bound to change its nature and purpose. From an apologetic defence of the hierarchical status quo, this veritable movement to rediscover ancient texts became geared towards tackling 'the urgent task which imposes itself on the science of theology', to quote yet again the prescient and eloquent Roger Aubert, which consists of 'not limiting oneself to retracing the history of dogmas or to scrutinizing their metaphysical implications, but to seeking above all else to highlight the religious value and the vital implications of Christian truths, thus permitting today's human beings to find therein a response to the problems which they encounter' in the real world.[30]

As already indicated, a similar return to the sources characterized liturgical studies from the very beginning of the twentieth century.[31] Here, too, 'the liturgical movement prior to the Second World War

[28] Aubert, 'Les Grandes Tendances', 20–1.

[29] Gustave Thils, *Orientations de la théologie* (Leuven: Ceuterick, 1958), 22.

[30] Roger Aubert, 'Les Mouvements théologiques dans l'Église catholique durant le dernier quart du siècle', *La Foi et le temps*, 2 (1969), 133–4.

[31] A concise survey of this liturgical movement can be found in Thils, *Orientations*, 31–6; the specifically Belgian contribution to liturgical renewal which, just as in the parallel moves of biblical and patristic studies, conformed to the pattern described above, is particularly well summarized in Jean-Louis Jadoulle, 'Les Intellectuels catholiques: de la libération au Concile Vatican II', in Jean Pirotte and Guy

defines itself more as a movement of liturgical restoration than as a movement of reform',[32] with the post-liberation era expressing a sudden role reversal of these two trends. But the liturgical return to the sources provides a good example of the fact that not all pre-Second World War liturgical efforts were of an antiquarian kind, just as not all post-1940 liturgical, biblical, and patristic studies were carried out in the spirit of reform and renewal. 'At the beginning of the twentieth century, liturgical prayer was in fact monopolized by the clergy. The faithful had been reduced to the role of assistants and were forced to limit themselves to acts of strictly personal devotion. Liturgical research in the inter-war time period aimed to restore to liturgy the entirety of its value as a prayer spoken in common and as a key moment in Christian life.' Citing from a 1957 text of reminiscences of this earlier movement, Jean-Louis Jadoulle adds: 'The goal was to have people participate in the liturgical acts and to change our gatherings into communities of prayer. Our method was the return to the sources, the study of tradition.'[33] The significance of liturgical acts, of course, may well escape non-religious observers. It thus may be useful to recall, in the words of another Belgian expert in the field of history of religion and religious thought, Gustave Thils, the place of liturgy in the Catholic faith: '[P]rofoundly vindicated by theology, liturgy always and throughout the ages comprises a set of considerable values. First of all, it carries the value of religious life, for it is liturgy which lets us participate actively in the "religion" of the Mystical Body of Christ.'[34]

A NEW MYSTICISM

With the renewal of patristic, biblical, and liturgical studies during the first decades of the twentieth century well under way, the turmoil and terror of the First World War and the social and political dislocations following in its wake led to a sudden rash of studies investigating

Zélis (eds.), *Pour une histoire du monde catholique au 20ème siècle, Wallonie-Bruxelles* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Archives du Monde Catholique, 2003), 467–9.

[32] Jadoulle, 'Les Intellectuels catholiques', 468.

[33] Ibid. [34] Thils, *Orientations*, 37.

the mysteries associated with key elements of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

> Taking inspiration from Johann Adam Möhler and other thinkers operating within the vitalist tradition of the nineteenth century, taking advantage of contacts with orthodox Christian ecclesiology, made available to the occident in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, but above all enriched by the return to biblical and patristic studies, Catholic theology between 1920 and 1940 devoted itself in numerous books and hundreds of articles to the revalidation of the most mystical aspect of the Church, of the path which constitutes its soul, casting light on the mysteries of divine life communicated by the Church to humanity by the Incarnation of the Word and by its continuous Redemption.[35]

Times of war and social upheaval have always been moments when mysticism and visionaries have been held in great esteem. But there was another conjunctural factor which helps to explain the turn towards mysticism in the inter-war time period, an element related to recent developments in the field of theology. For the crisis of modernism, alluded to in the opening pages of this chapter, had not only resulted in a series of papal condemnations of this movement, but spawned a revival of theological investigations to defend the faith, as interpreted by the church hierarchy. Part of this sought an outlet precisely in the movement of a return to the sources briefly described above, and the methodology of choice was straightforward textual analysis based on reasoned and sober thinking. And, as was emphasized above, certainly nothing was further from the minds of the first generation of these biblical, patristic, and other scholars than to sanction a move towards the creative questioning of authority and open-minded interpretations of texts, which characterized successive generations of such scholars from the late 1930s onwards.

Along with this return to the sources in a 'scientific' and 'rational' manner, in the overall struggle to limit the damage caused by modernist deviations, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a revival of the Thomist tradition. But this neo-Thomism arrived arm in arm with the revalidation of the scholastic tradition. Neo-Thomism, combined with neoscholasticism, was largely responsible for the single-minded orientation towards biblical, patristic, and

[35] Aubert, 'La Théologie catholique', 445.

liturgical studies carried out in the spirit of etymology, straightforward and systematic classifications, and the production of manuals largely devoid of intellectual challenges, and devoted to the defence of views sanctioned by church authorities. The brilliant advances in theology resulting from the methodological breakthrough of Thomas Aquinas, a combination of rational thinking and bold uses of the imagination, were thus divested of their radical edge and utilized for the consolidation of tradition and authority—turning Aquinas upside down.

As an initially mostly subconscious but increasingly conscious reaction against this use of rationality in defence of hierarchical values, the turn towards mysticism in the Catholic Church played an important role in preparing the intellectual terrain which later on allowed the most dynamic Catholic thinkers of the inter-war generation to find a creative solution to the impasse posed by the twin challenges of modernism and reactive neoscholasticism. For the focus on the mystical elements of theology relativized the seemingly immutable truths propounded by neoscholastic scholars. 'It is part of the essence of "mysteries" that they cannot be defined. For that which they express is *per definitionem* indefinable.'[36] The meaning and the essence of mysteries, the ultimate and true meaning of key features in the Catholic faith, cannot be grasped by rational thinking, argued the advocates of a turn towards mysticism in the Catholic Church. But, in a curious dialectic, in the maelstrom of inter-war European intellectual and political cross-currents within and outside the Catholic Church, this seeming defence of irrationality at the expense of reason turned out to be a crucial mechanism by which Catholic nonconformists could reintroduce forward-looking rationality at the expense of dogma.

For Catholic doctrine, the opponents of neoscholasticism and modernism argued, 'is mystery, and concepts can only be understood in an approximate manner. Concepts change their meaning, but the truth remains. Therefore it is not possible for documents and manuals to guarantee continuity, but it is the constant flow of

[36] I take this phrase from the words of a Protestant scholar whose 1969 publication helped in the formulation of this section: Christofer Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche—Öffnung zur Welt: Zwei Aspekte der Erneuerung französischer katholischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 116.

tradition, the object of attention of theologians who are carrying out the return to the sources, which carries the day.'[37] 'In this manner, the stress on the mystic element provides a counterweight to a theology which relies on heavy-handed rationalism.'[38] Mysticism cleared the way for an imaginative, rather than a mechanical, application of rational thought. Thus, what for outside observers at first appears as an inexplicable return to the forces of irrationality, in the concrete context of the struggle of progressive Catholic theologians to break the stranglehold of neoscholasticism turns out to have been a decisive step in the opening up of the Church towards concrete reality. History, indeed, is often concrete.

THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

There was a second, less controversial, revival proceeding more or less concurrently with the revalidation of the mysteries of faith: a sudden rash of interest in and publications on the life and person of Jesus Christ.[39] Symptomatic of this wave of Christological studies may be the œuvre of the most prominent Belgian theologian associated with the 'school' of Catholic thinkers under review: Jacques Leclercq. In 1931 he published his first volume of his *Essais de morale catholique*, entitled *Retour à Jesus*.[40] His second Christ-centred book-length study appeared in the series Unam Sanctam, edited by Jean Daniélou and Yves Congar, perhaps the most influential line of publications reflecting the second renaissance briefly sketched above, the movement to return to the sources. Due to war-related publication delays, Leclercq's *La Vie du Christ dans son Église* only appeared in 1944 but was soon translated into Italian, Spanish, and German, reflecting the ongoing interest in this theme in post-liberation Europe

[37] Ibid. 111. [38] Ibid. 116.

[39] Aubert, 'La Théologie catholique', 430–1, provides a quick run-down of important studies of the life of Christ appearing from the late 1920s onwards. See also Fouilloux, *Une église en quête*, 228–9.

[40] Pierre Sauvage, *Jacques Leclercq 1891–1971: un arbre en plein vent* (Paris: Duculot, 1992), 58.

as well.[41] Leclercq continued to devote much attention to this topic for the remainder of his career.

Each historical period produces specific answers to the problems of the day by drawing on the existing store of knowledge. In the concrete context of Europe between the wars, as always, the menu of options was limited to the prevailing currents of thought. In the case of what became a new generation of inquisitive scholars, the two most interesting emerging 'traditions' were precisely the rediscovery of mysticism and the veneration of Jesus Christ. All it took now was for the two currents to merge. There had, of course, been earlier instances when Catholic theologians had reflected upon both these elements of the Catholic faith, but the big breakthrough occurred in the inter-war time period. True to what we have discovered vis-à-vis the existence of two fundamentally different traditions in biblical and patristic studies—the first generally devoid of nonconformist instincts, followed by a second and more daring cohort of scholars—the mystical body of Christ was initially the subject of 'traditionalist' scholars.

Perhaps the most influential representative of this first generation was Dom Colomba Marmion from the Benedictine monastery of Maredsous. Tucked away in a forested valley on the western edges of the Belgian Ardennes, Maredsous is today known to the outside world mostly as the spiritual—if no longer physical—point of origin of a popular line of homonymous beers and cheeses. From an intellectual and theological perspective, it was Dom Marmion who gave Maredsous much of its claim to fame, publishing two tomes which established him as a first-rate scholar. '*Le Christ, vie de l'âme* [1914] and *Le Christ dans ses mystères* [1919] have undoubtedly been the major factor in reintroducing into modern Catholicism the notion that the essence of Christian life is its ever-more perfect incorporation within Christ.' While others before him had put forth similar views, 'the Father from Maredsous had the fortune to make [his statements] in an always accessible language', writes Louis Bouyer.[42] Maredsous, one should add, continued to make an impact on twentieth-century francophone and European theology and politics. In the Second

[41] Pierre Sauvage, *Jacques Leclercq 1891–1971: un arbre en plein vent* (Paris: Duculot, 1992), 208–9.

[42] Louis Bouyer, 'Où en est la théologie du corps mystique?', *Revue des sciences réligieuses*, 22 (1948), 316.

World War, Maredsous became one of the clandestine headquarters of the Belgian armed resistance to Nazism, with one of its monks, Dom Daniel Duesberg, having obtained the approval of his superior, becoming the first commander of the all-important Armée Secrète (AS) in the industrial province of Hainaut.[43] Small wonder, then, that this opening to the world, coupled with Maredsous's fine scholarly tradition, also resulted in a path-breaking new translation of the Bible, the *Bible de Maredsous*. 'With its extreme concern to provide a modern adaptation', it made waves in the post-liberation francophone world.[44] But, to return to the mystical body of Christ, Don Marmion from Maredsous was merely part of a larger trend.

In 1938 an Austrian theologian could assert: 'One no longer views the Church primarily as a hierarchical organization which, as such, stands aloof from each individual Christian, but one has become aware of the fact that the Church is, above all else, the community of the faithful, a living, compact, and dynamic environment, enveloping each and everyone.'[45] The doctrine of the mystical body of Christ provided the necessary theological underpinning for such views, and by the 1930s it became a much-discussed topic. The œuvre of the influential Belgian Jesuit Émile Meersch alone comprises multiple volumes on the topic of the mystical body of Christ, all published between 1933 and 1944.[46] But already in 1929 the importance of this particular theology had become a commonplace, with Louis Charlier writing in the influential *Nouvelle Revue théologique*: 'Is it possible to foresee on which truths of our faith the intellectual energies of twentieth-century theology will crystallize? It appears to be the case

[43] For a brief biography of André Duesberg (Dom Daniel at Maredsous), see Fabrice Maerten, *Du murmure au grondement: la résistance politique et idéologique dans la province de Hainaut pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (mai 1940—septembre 1944)* (Mons: Hannonia, 1999), i. 185 n. 696.

[44] On Maredsous as resistance stronghold, see Fabrice Maerten, 'Le Clergé du diocèse de Tournai face à l'occupation: la voie étroite', in Fabrice Maerten, Franz Selleslagh, and Mark Van den Wijngaert (eds.), *Entre la peste et le choléra: vie et attitude des catholiques belges sous l'occupation* (Gerpinnes: Quorum, 1999), 150–1; on the Maredsous Bible, see Aubert, *La Théologie catholique*, 11.

[45] Josef Andreas Jungmann, 'L'Église dans la vie réligieuse d'aujourd'hui', *Nouvelle Revue théologique*, 65 (1938), 1036.

[46] Thils, *Orientations*, 96, rightfully draws attention to the work of Émile Meersch, who first published his pioneering two-volume study of *Le Corps mystique du Christ: étude de théologie* in 1933.

that this will happen with regard to the reality of the Mystical Body: Christology and the doctrine of the Church.'[47]

CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

In May 1934, Palémon Glorieux, teaching in the seminary in Lille, close to the Belgian border in France, published a seminal article in *La Vie intellectuelle*. Thirty years later involved in the formulation of the path-breaking Vatican II encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*, in early 1934 Glorieux asked himself the question: 'Dare one ask oneself what our faithful . . . know about their religion?' And he went on to draw the attention of his readers to the fact 'that for many, indeed for most [Christians], the only thing they have retained are the words and formulas emptied of their content, practices and attitudes which have long since been stripped of deeper significance; slowly but surely their religion is devoid of any message and reduced to an empty shell, limited to exterior trappings without inner life.'[48] Palémon Glorieux, one should note, here described the state of affairs amongst the dwindling numbers of faithful, not the vast sea of lapsed Catholics who were, ten years later, brought to national attention by Yvan Daniel and Henri Godin's *France: pays de mission?*

More specifically, Palémon Glorieux was analysing the state of religiosity, the store of knowledge internalized by activists within Catholic Action. 'One must recognize it loyally and straightforwardly: doctrinal teachings in the form in which they are generally distributed to the faithful, to the small flock who statistics tells us constitute a tiny number in the face of the large mass of the non-practising and the indifferent, those teachings do not equip them sufficiently for Catholic Action. They do not instil them with a message which allows them to bring to their brethren the profound, lively, and rich understanding capable of immediately providing solutions to their

[47] Louis Charlier, 'La Théologie dogmatique, hier et aujourd'hui', *Nouvelle Revue théologique*, 56 (1929), 816.

[48] Palémon Glorieux, 'L'Action Catholique et l'enseignement dogmatique', *La Vie intellectuelle*, 28 (1934), 816.

anxieties, of spreading happiness to the bearers of sullen desires, to those that they must rechristianize.'[49] Thankfully, however, Palémon Glorieux continued, 'Christian doctrine is rich enough and dogmatic teachings flexible enough to be able to furnish the appropriate solutions to each century in the history of the Church and to all circumstances it encounters.'[50]

'The activists within Catholic Action are in need of a grand idea, of a solid truth which justifies and supports the total, disinterested, persevering devotion required of them. Thus, if there is one idea which has the chance to respond to this need, to provide full explanations of the sacrifices demanded of them, and simultaneously to support them and to instil into them an enthusiasm for a task which must become for them a pleasant and beloved task, then this is indeed the idea which very recently, in one of his most recent documents addressing Catholic Action, the Pope recalled, while underscoring how this idea is grabbing hold of the lay apostolate: the grand thesis of the Mystical Body.'[51] 'The basic element of life, of joy, the source of energy [i.e. the mystical body of Christ]; this manner of understanding Christian life is at the same time the best response to the objections and the ignorance characterizing the milieu within which they immerse themselves and which the activists of Catholic Action must transform.'[52] And, indeed, there is no doubt that the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ became what could be regarded as the theology of Catholic Action. Two texts emanating from two different poles of European Catholicism in the middle of the twentieth century may further exemplify this truth. The eschatologist Louis Bouyer in 1948 wholeheartedly agreed that 'there is no context where the thesis of the mystical body has been more abundantly discussed than Catholic Action'.[53] The foremost exponent of a theology of terrestrial realities, Gustave Thils, likewise confirms that 'the expression "mystical body" has been appropriated by those faithful who are particularly engaged in concrete action, most notably in social action'.[54]

If the rediscovery of mysteries enveloping the Catholic Church had been the formula permitting a slow rollback of neoscholasticism, the specific theology of the mystical body of Christ allowed the activist

[49] Ibid. 365. [50] Ibid. 366. [51] Ibid. 367. [52] Ibid. 379.
[53] Bouyer, 'Théologie du corps mystique', 323. [54] Thils, *Orientations*, 96.

laity within the Catholic Church to capture more power and to partake in the mysteries which had given the Church much of its stamina and much of its clout. The complement—the dialectical flipside, so to speak—of the theology of incarnation, the theology of the mystical body of Christ claimed part of the aura and radiance of the Church for the laity. Louis Bouyer, in his far-reaching critique of (at least) some of the excesses associated with the theology of the mystical body, recalls the standard and conventional meaning of the *corpus mysticum*: 'Traditionally, the body of Christ, whether mystical or not, where it did not directly refer to the individual physical reality to which the word is properly applied, be it in its natural state or be it in the eucharist, designates the Church and nothing else. Today, by contrast, it is striking to see that the notion is rarely applied in a sense other than to embrace meanings which the concept of "Church" is too restricted to include.'[55] Up to the most recent past, or so defenders of the *status quo ante* claimed, *corpus mysticum* denoted the Church, and the Church in turn was defined as the institution of the Church, its hierarchical structure, with clergy at the bottom rung and the episcopate at the top of the respective national organizations of the Church. But now, or so it appeared, lay people in the Church were beginning to get heard and were beginning to demand a voice. The mystical body of Christ provided laity with a theological opportunity for an extension of their influence, for in the understanding of a growing number of theologians, the mystical body of Christ, i.e. the Church, comprised more than just the clergy and various levels of the church hierarchy. The laity, called into action by Pope Pius XI in a grand crusade to establish a new Christian order and beginning to feel comfortable in this role, now was staking its claim. The laity, too, and not just the clergy, formed part of the mystical body of Christ.

It is here where the contribution of the liturgical return to the sources proved its greatest value by justifying 'new' demands for a redistribution of powers within the Church. For, by uncovering past liturgical practices within the Church, assumed certainties of what were traditionally seen as standard liturgical practices dissolved into untenable assumptions: 'One realizes, thus, that, in reality, it is not the clergy which constitutes the Church but that the Church is the

[55] Bouyer, 'Théologie du corps mystique', 323.

community of all believers, gathered around ministers who are consecrated by Christ.' The increasingly active role of the laity within the Catholic Church, exemplified by Catholic Action, thus led to major new developments within ecclesiology. 'In this way the *corpus Christi mysticum* has become the preferred doctrine of an entire generation. Today we once again understand what the expression "the Holy Church" really means.'[56] To be sure, no one was claiming that the hierarchical structures of the Church would not continue to play a most vital role within the reconceptualized entity of the mystical body of Christ. 'No one is separating—there is no doubt—the "mystical body" from "the Church". But', added the sceptical Louis Bouyer, 'it is said that one wishes to assure the former the largest possible degree of autonomy.' And if the complex set of factors constituting the *corpus mysticum* was slowly beginning to gain a separate conceptual identity from the notion of 'the Church', then the mystical body became increasingly seen as a *locus operandi* where lay people were preponderant. 'We are witnessing a double process, with each string running parallel to the others, a process of laicization and a process of interiorization of the mystical body.' Soon observers became rightly concerned that such bold reinterpretations of the *corpus mysticum* would eventually 'serve to introduce, on the one hand, the "mystical" presence of Christ in areas of human society that normally do not belong to the remit of the Church and, on the other, to facilitate for individual souls a communion with Christ which is only loosely linked to the sacraments or creed'.[57]

At the time of Palémon Glorieux's 1934 programmatic statement, however, such fears were still a long way off. And it should likewise be stressed at this point that notions of the mystical body of Christ long antedate Catholic Action and that, indeed, Catholic Action operated for quite some time with little recourse to the conceptual arsenal of the *corpus mysticum* and even, in some important instances, no references to this notion whatsoever. The *spiritus rector* of specialized Catholic Action, the most concentrated expression of the lay apostolate, Joseph Cardijn, for instance, did not employ the term

[56] Jungmann, 'L'Église dans la vie', 1035.
[57] Bouyer, 'Théologie du corps mystique', 323.

even once prior to 1932.[58] But then, once he discovered the meaning, message, and potential of this concept, Cardijn wholeheartedly embraced the idea and put it to good use. It is perhaps of more than anecdotal interest that the most direct personal influence on Joseph Cardijn in this respect was none other than his acquaintance with Palémon Glorieux, one of the key figures in the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine in northern France in the early to mid-1930s. Some pronouncements by Pope Pius XI around this time likewise aided Joseph Cardijn to appropriate the *corpus mysticum* into his own vocabulary.[59] Last, but not least, it should be noted that, once having embraced the term, Joseph Cardijn quickly realized its utility not just in efforts to rechristianize pagan milieux but as a specific weapon against competing 'mystiques'. On 27 November 1933, speaking in the French Dominican seminary of Le Saulchoir, then still operating 'in exile' across the border in Belgium near Tournai, Cardijn for the first time invoked the *corpus mysticum* as a powerful tool against the attractive powers of the radical right and the radical left or, as he put it, 'the racist and the communist mystiques'.[60]

THE COMPETITION OF MYSTIQUES

By the mid-1940s, the mystique of fascism had lost much of its shine, and the key competitor to Catholicism was firmly placed to its left rather than to its right. The language and the imagery of the *corpus mysticum* continued to serve the apostolic cause and, if anything, the urgency of its message was even more amplified than it had been in the 1930s. Nowhere can this be demonstrated as persuasively as in the writings of one of the most creative and, yet, little-known intellectual and social activists, the Belgian Jesuit Philippe de Soignie. The national chaplain of the Belgian Mouvement Populaire des Familles

[58] Louis Preneels, 'Kerkbeeld en kerkbeleving in de publikaties van Cardijn', in *Cardijn: een mens, een beweging/un homme, un mouvement* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1983), 48.

[59] Ibid. 52–5.

[60] Joseph Cardijn, 'La Mystique de la J.O.C. (Le Saulchoir, 22 novembre 1933)', *La Vie spirituelle*, 38 (1934), 319.

(see Chapter 4) for several years after 1941, he was also the director and editor of a publication series called Bâtir [= to construct], 'a collection of studies for the restoration of Christian society', continuing the efforts begun by Jacques Leclercq and his collaborators on the pre-war flagship journal of Belgian left Catholicism, *La Cité chrétienne*.

In his book-length study on *Working Class Culture and Milieux*, Philippe de Soignie is eminently aware of the socio-psychological relevance of what Christians call 'mystique'. Thus he draws attention to the centrality of labour in the Marxist world view: 'Marxism points out very well the uplifting characteristic of labour, and it manages to construct a corresponding mystique.'[61] And Philippe de Soignie affirms: 'All great contemporary social movements . . . build on a mystique which puts the spotlight on the person of the worker and shows the grandeur of his mission.'[62] Unfortunately, the Jesuit observer continued, Christian workers' associations have all but abandoned even the pretence of providing a viable alternative to the secular left. In a country under Nazi occupation where the secular underground trade union movement was powerfully present, split between dynamic communist battalions and socialist trade unions which, under the able leadership of André Renard, stood even further to the left than the communists,[63] the virtual absence of Christian unions in Wallonia, the francophone, industrialized portion of Belgium at that time, was at first sight a paradox. But here is Philippe de Soignie's explanation on the eve of liberation:

> The heads of our unions, of our mutual insurance companies, of our associations were, on the whole, men of irreproachable devotion, and they led admirable Christian private lives. But the habits arising from years of purely administrative duties, the routines, the attachments to immediate and tangible goals took their toll on them and threatened to divest their actions of all educational and apostolic aspirations. Some of them regretted this and

[61] Philippe de Soignie, *Culture et milieux populaires* (Tournai: Casterman, 1944), 21.

[62] Ibid. 51.

[63] On Belgian trade unions in the 1940s, the key authority remains Rik Hemmerijckx, whose *Van verzet tot koude oorlog, 1940–1949: machtsstrijd om het ABVV* (Brussels: VUB Press, 2003) will remain a standard reference work for years to come. On André Renard, see also Pierre Tilly, *André Renard* (Brussels: Le Cri, 2005), and Mateo Alaluf (ed.), *Changer la société sans prendre le pouvoir: syndicalisme d'action directe et renardisme in Belgique* (Brussels: Labor, 2005).

suffered deeply from this development. The younger members, particularly former members of the JOC, no longer found within the structures set up for adults the same primordial concern for the education and the rechristianization of the masses which had so deeply engaged them during their initial years of working-class action. Consequently, they have gone their own ways or [if they stay within Catholic organizations] they contribute no more than passive agreement in the spirit of resignation. There is no other explanation for the frequent defections of many Jocistes, a fact which is often deplored. Some have drawn the conclusion that the JOC was oriented far too much towards the propagation of its own mystique and thus ill prepared the youth for their role as adults. Should one not, instead, suggest that our workers' organizations have become too much oriented towards material goals and no longer adequately respond to the aspirations of our youth?[64]

The task for Christians should therefore be the construction of a viable alternative to the effective mystiques which have given Marxist forces a tremendous boost. 'To the false mystique, one must counterpose another, richer and more dynamic mystique.' 'By contrast to pagan or purely temporal mystiques, the Christian mystique, through its doctrine as much as through the personality of Jesus Christ, will attract the masses while respecting their conscience and their dignity.'[65] And, of course, it will come as no surprise to the reader who has followed the argument thus far to read Philippe de Soignie's suggestion for what should become the subject of the Christian mystique: 'First of all, the Ideal which it [the Church] presents to the people: the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ.'[66] 'The working class, especially here in Belgium, still sees in Christ the model of all perfection. If the masses are socialist, Christ is regarded as the first socialist; if they are communist, Christ is the first communist. Whether right or wrong, they recognize in the person of Jesus the incarnation of their aspirations. One may make these people believe that the Church betrays them, but one will have a difficult time convincing them that Christ was not the friend of the powerless and the humble. This is a formidable trump card in the hands of the Church. All one needs to do is to present Jesus to the masses. Let us take note of it.'[67]

Political realism was mixed with religiously motivated idealism in the writings of Philippe de Soignie. He clearly recognized that more

[64] De Soignie, *Culture et milieux*, 44–5. [65] Ibid. 58.
[66] Ibid. 125. [67] Ibid. 126.

was needed to convince people of the worthiness of a cause than continuously to repeat arguments. De Soignie was only too aware that 'a mystique cannot be effectively fought by rational discourse or even by concessions'.[68] But what is also ever present in de Soignie's exposition is the underlying Christian humanism of his philosophical outlook. Towards the end of his analysis of working-class culture and working-class milieux, he recounts an anecdote of an intervention by a listener at one of his countless speeches to working-class audiences in Wallonia. The listener's words, and de Soignie's reflections, do not need any additional comments:

> 'Old chap [*Mon vieux*], when we were members of the JOC, they talked a lot about the mystical body of Christ. Well, as you know, the mystical body of Christ, that's all fine and good, but what is the mystical body of Christ? First of all, it's us who make the kids, and then the priests who baptize them and teach them about the life of God!' A very nice response of an exceptionally well-educated activist, one will say in response? Certainly, yes. But how many children of simple folk are incapable of raising themselves to express such noble thoughts? Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, when contemplating the beautiful child of a couple living in dire circumstances, once wrote: 'What torments me is that within each of these human beings, one can visualize, more or less, a person with the talents of a Mozart assassinated in cold blood!' Would it not be more precise and Christian to say: 'What torments me is that within each of these human beings, one can visualize, more or less, Christ assassinated in cold blood?'[69]

FROM A REINTERPRETATION OF THE PAST TOWARDS A DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

In the inter-war years, reform-minded Catholic theologians were, in some respects, not truly innovative at all. The doctrine of Christ-the-King or the Mystical Body of Christ were rediscoveries of ancient traditions, if presented in twentieth-century garb. And it could not have been any different within an intellectual tradition which, in the last analysis, fostered conformity and obedience to tradition.

[68] Ibid. 58. [69] Ibid. 128.

Catholic reformers had to proceed in a manner roughly equivalent to the way nonconformist Marxist scholars had to proceed in the universe of Stalinism, within and outside the Soviet Union up to 1956 or, more likely, 1968. Within the orthodox communist tradition it was impossible to tackle contemporary issues and problems from an innovative angle which challenged party pronouncements or which otherwise could ruffle the feathers of key authorities defending the dominant paradigm. It was much safer, and often the only way to avoid condemnation and marginalization, to focus on medieval peasants in Western Europe or the cycle of popular revolts in premodern China than to analyse contemporary societies, even if—read between the lines—many of the insights of Marxist scholars of premodern societies could be interpreted as thinly veiled challenges to the twentieth-century Stalinist status quo.

An equally hierarchically structured transnational organization operating in many corners of the globe, twentieth-century Catholicism could equally scarcely tolerate open challenges to episcopal rule or, an unthinkable thought, to pronouncements by the papacy. For very similar reasons, the best minds within the Catholic tradition often became scholars of the early modern or medieval world, for here their challenges to received wisdoms appeared less directly threatening to the mental and institutional universe propping up church hierarchies from Rome to Ratisbon and from Mechelen to Madrid. And, inasmuch as reformers wanted to tackle the contemporary age, they found it easiest to chart new ground by finding scriptural support in their explorations of the past. When rediscovering past practices during what I called the second renaissance, of course, modern-day inquisitive minds focused on traditions which served present-day purposes or which could, given the right interpretative push, be employed in the service of twentieth-century causes.

Nevertheless, only after the second wave of dislocations, terror, and resistance to haunt Western Europe in thirty years, culminating in the Second World War, were progressive theologians able to move towards more frontal attacks and open innovations. 'War and resistance enabled the Catholic Church to separate itself to a significant extent from the past', writes Christofer Frey, 'redirecting its gaze

towards the future.'[70] The theology of Christ-the-King and the mystical body of Christ were quickly superseded by new theologies that were no longer couched in the terminology of the past. The reorientation towards a radiant future rather than the glorious past opened up the critical faculties of Catholic scholars to present-day problems in a way that had been unthinkable prior to the Second World War. 'A theology of the body, a theology of work, a theology of progress, a theology of politics, a theology of terrestrial realities, etc.; these themes and countless analogous topics were more and more readily tackled in a sometimes rather diffuse mixture of theology, philosophy, sociology, or literary studies, but sometimes also in thoughtful and solid pieces of work.' And Roger Aubert, the author of these lines, in the immediately succeeding sentence goes on to underscore the link between political and historical turning points and the concomitant paradigm shifts within Catholic theologies: 'This entire trend was stimulated in Germany by the desire to respond to the Nazi challenge',[71] and this confrontation was then extended to most of Europe by the powerful thrust of the Nazi challenge. The theological terrain having been carefully prepared by a judicious return to the sources in the inter-war years, the cataclysm of war, counter-revolution, resistance, and liberation opened up the floodgates of unencumbered new theological elaborations.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY

Nowhere can this be better exemplified than in the development of an explicit theology of the laity. For, in many ways, the entire inter-war period had been nothing but an empirical demonstration of the rising forces of the laity within the Catholic Church. Catholic Action was, by definition, the explicit empowerment of the laity. The theology of the mystical body of Christ, as Palémon Glorieux presciently discovered in the early 1930s, could—and did—become

[70] Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche*, 110. This little-known, insightful, and imaginative study should be mandatory reading for any student of *nouvelle théologie*.

[71] Aubert, 'La Théologie catholique', 448.

the 'ready-to-wear' theological justification for the 'rise of mass politics' within the Catholic Church. But theologians soon felt the need to go beyond the Aesopian formulas which formed the theological stock-in-trade of pre-war theologians. 'Theologians, at least those amongst them who occasionally emerged from their libraries to cast a glance at life, began to reflect on this movement which featured the free development of lay people within the Church. Since before the war this question had begun to catch their attention in Germany. In the post-liberation years, there was scarcely a French theological journal or a publication devoted to religious action which did not devote, sometimes rather substantial, articles to this theme or which did not underscore its importance and topicality.'[72] The first systematic elaborations of a theology of the laity finally hit the bookstores and seminaries in the early 1950s. The two most influential publications were written by theologians who, like most of the figures described hitherto, became rather prominent in Vatican II. The pioneering volume was Gérard Philips's 1952 *De leek in de kerk*, one year later followed by Yves Congar's *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*.[73]

Gérard Philips and Yves Congar, of course, were profiting from at least thirty years of preparatory work. And it would have been impossible for these two thinkers emerging from the fertile activist and intellectual Franco-Belgian tradition, notably including Dutch-speaking Flemish theologians working side by side with francophone intellectuals, to have formulated their thoughts all on their own. Most importantly, in this context as in so many others, it is incumbent to point to the key role played by Pope Pius XI, the patron saint of innovative spirits operating in the age of the dictatorships. Federico Alessandrini, in an important article subtitled 'The Royal Priesthood of the Christian and the Proclamation of a Theology of the Laity', has pointed to the prescient uses of key phrases in various pronouncements by Pius XI, beginning with his very first 1922 encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei*, which makes clear the central role of laity within a broadening definition of the Church. Lay believers are termed 'chosen

[72] Aubert, 'La Théologie catholique', 463.

[73] Gérard Philips, *De leek in de kerk* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1952), and Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Cerf, 1953).

people, the royal priesthood, the holy people, the people of God', 'the stones full of life that make up the holy House of God', 'participants of a holy and royal priesthood . . . '.[74]

But, as we have seen, for the most part, inter-war efforts to promote lay people within the Church still used the images of the mystical body of Christ to promote the active role of the laity. Yves Congar, in his seminal 1953 formulation of a theology of lay people, recalled this pioneering stage in the development of a theology of the laity: 'Round about 1930 there appeared a very marked revival of the idea of the Church; it emerged parallel to the rise of Catholic Action and was partly due to it, and partly bound up with more general factors, among which special importance must be given to the liturgical movements. In the ranks of Catholic Action there was a veritable "craze" for the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ, for active participation of the faithful in the eucharistic liturgy, and so on. People began really to find out again that the Church *must develop*, and develop *through her members*.'[75] Christofer Frey in this context puts his finger on the spot: 'Thus the real accomplishment of theological renewal in France is not really the interpretation and revival of traditional ideas at the appropriate moment, but must be seen instead in the decisiveness with which they explored notions of the expansive width of the Church.'[76] In recent centuries mostly regarded as the unique province of ecclesiastical authorities, the popular groundswell from below exemplified by the rise of Catholic Action extended the boundaries of the Church beyond just the clergy and episcopacy to the entire community of believers.

Yves Congar captures this interplay of the return to the sources and the breaking of new conceptual ground in his discussion of instances of a new vocabulary expressing new trends. Describing recent developments in pastoral concerns and apostolic movements, the author reflects:

[74] Federico Alessandrini, 'Pio XI e l'Azione Cattolica (il sacerdozio regale del cristiano e l'annunzio di una teologia del laicato)', in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolica italiano* (Padua: Antenore, 1969), 452, 455, and 456; ellipses in the original.

[75] Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 54–5, emphases in the original.

[76] Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche*, 152.

This latest movement is at root only a rediscovery of tradition, and nothing expresses it better than the word 'ecclesial', whose use in France goes back to the war years or soon after, when things were indeed happening in French Catholicism. Before the war the only adjective we used from the word *Ecclesia* (Church) was 'ecclesiastical;' but while the substantive had kept its full meaning the adjective was reduced simply to the clerical aspect of the Church. It is significant how little need was felt for an adjective that would express belonging to the people of God or to the body of Christ, without recourse to some other turn of speech. It would be interesting to study the different expressions then in use, and the present uses of the word 'ecclesial.' In any case, there is no doubt whatsoever that the bringing into use of this word corresponds to an attitude towards the Church in which—beyond the aspect of her apostolic instructions, or rites and formulas—the deep and full mystery of the Church, her community or people's aspect, and the active part the faithful have in their life, are again very consciously present.[77]

THE PROMOTION OF THE LAITY

This chapter is not meant to provide detailed analyses of twentieth-century 'new' theologies; instead, it is designed merely to serve as a survey of doctrines and intellectual trends that shaped Catholicism from the 1920s though to the 1950s. Thus, I shall here merely emphasize that theologians like Gérard Philips or Yves Congar by the early 1950s could now openly call for greater powers for lay people within the Church. Thirty years after specialized Catholic Action got off the ground, the time was ripe for open statements of this sort. Reform-minded Catholics no longer felt compelled to 'hide behind' or utilize the hidden possibilities contained within the mystical body of Christ. Here is what Yves Congar had to say in a 1946 summary of what he was to write about in far greater detail seven years later in *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*: 'If lay people have, with few exceptions, no part in the characteristically hierarchical government [of the Church], they do have *an indefeasible right to be heard within the Church*. To act as if they do not exist, continuously to treat them like children who do not speak in the presence of adults and whose

[77] Congar, *Lay People*, 56–7.

behaviour one prescribes without any input on their part; this merely exposes them or reduces them to a passivity which will soon generate lack of interest and indifference, or it will drive them to commit acts of indiscipline and possibly revolt.'[78] Both Yves Congar and Gérard Philips exercised a determining influence on the deliberations of Vatican II. And the Leuven scholar Gérard Philips played an equally central role in the October 1951 First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, itself a product of more than a quarter-century of increasing involvement of lay people within the Church.[79]

Philips and Congar merely formed the tip of the proverbial iceberg.[80] Once again, it was French and Belgian theologians who led this offensive in defence of the laity. Jacques Leclercq, a leading light in Christological investigations since the early 1930s, may stand for many others. In 1947 Leclercq first made waves regarding the emerging theology of the laity with his prescient article on the 'Promotion du laïc'. In 1953 and 1954 he followed this up with two studies on 'Sainteté et temporel' and 'Sainteté des laïcs', both published in a flagship journal of the post-war Belgian Catholic left, *Revue nouvelle*.[81] Another Belgian scholar, Joseph Comblin, made a permanent move to Latin America, where he became a close collaborator of Dom Hélder Câmara. In his *Towards a Theology of Action*, he underscored the novelty of apostolic missions in the contemporary age: 'Today's apostles are no longer monks, Clunisians or Cistercians; one no longer imagines apostolic life to be that of monks living communally and dedicated to continuous prayer in the temple of God. Likewise, it is no longer the preaching mendicant monk who accompanies his evangelical preaching with the living testimony of his detachment and mortification. It is no longer the "missionary," untiring and intrepid fighter against idolatry and heresy, the redoubtable

[78] Yves Congar, 'Sacerdoce et laïcat dans l'Église', *La Vie intellectuelle*, 14 (December 1946), 23.

[79] The path-breaking nature of this First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate is underscored, for instance, in the 'Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate October 5, 1957', entitled 'Guiding Principles of the Lay Apostolate', <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12LAYAP.HTM> (accessed 23 July 2007).

[80] See Thils, *Orientations*, 114–20, for an extensive discussion of the wave of publications on this theme.

[81] Sauvage, *Leclercq*, 216–17.

discussant engaged in vivid controversies, the vigilant defender of the flock of Jesus Christ.' Instead, Comblin, who later on radicalized his teachings and published studies such as the one devoted to the *Theology of Revolution*, noted that: 'Today's apostles are all conscious Christians, ordinary Christians who showcase in their daily life, in their life led "within the world" and "in the midst of the world," the spirit of the gospel and who announce the Kingdom of God while engaged in leading their daily life, in the process of their normal daily activities. It is symptomatic that, until today, no new grand religious order has seen the light of day. This is because the contemporaneous religious order is that of the laity, of Catholic Action, a Catholic Action which is not reduced to some specified institutional expression but spread out to include the entirety of the conscious laity.'[82]

Joseph Comblin here was pushing the boundaries of Catholic Action, influenced by his direct contact with and immersion within the realities of Latin America and Latin American Liberation Theology since 1958. But as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, the boundaries of Catholic Action, including specialized Catholic Action, were felt to be excessively restrictive in Europe too—and as early as the 1940s! Notions extending the remit of lay people within the Church beyond Catholic Action were openly aired—and practised!—in the closing months of war and occupation, with the full implications of such moves manifesting themselves in the immediate post-liberation era.

For the moment, it may suffice to cite a Belgian Jesuit scholar, André Hayen, who, in 1947, had this to say at an international congress held in Charleroi devoted to 'Problems of the Church on the Move'. In his lengthy conference intervention, André Hayen stated that 'a fundamental distinction must be made between the Christian action of lay people and organized Catholic Action. To disregard this distinction leads, in practical terms, to the most harmful consequences. To confuse organized Catholic Action, which is subject to the *direct control* of the hierarchy, with the Christian action of the laity, which is essentially impossible to "organize" and is characterized by *indirect control*, would mean to condemn oneself to fall victim to

[82] Joseph Comblin, *Vers une théologie de l'action* (Brussels: La Pensée Catholique, 1964), 9–10.

one's own choice, to commit either one of the symmetrical errors of clericalism and anticlericalism.' Catholic Action, André Hayen pointed out, 'in normal circumstances is undertaken on the initiative of the laity'. 'But if in the organization of specialized Catholic Action the initiative lies within lay people, the control, advice, and even the actual leadership belong to the authority of the hierarchy and its *direct control*.'[83] André Hayen repeatedly emphasized that both 'traditional' Catholic Action, whether 'specialized' or not, and 'the Christian action of the laity', carried out while living their everyday lives, are important and that each has a place within the Church. But for this Jesuit teacher at the training school for missionaries in Eegenhoven, in the last analysis the second type of missionary action takes precedence over the former: 'The goal of specialized Catholic Action thus appears to be *to assist* lay people, to *be at the service* of the Christian action of the laity rather than to reach specific objectives of "apostolic conquest".'[84] The largely autonomous quotidian actions of the laity which cannot be controlled by the hierarchy should take centre stage, with 'traditional' Catholic Action where church authorities are in control playing a supporting role. André Hayen was well aware of the potential consequences of an exaggerated emphasis on one or the other of these two elements propelling contemporary missionary activities.[85] For who would be there to impose the limits in the heat of the battle? Who could reinforce a 'proper' balance if the laity (or the hierarchy) overstepped their bounds? We will see in Chapters 4 and 5 that such worries were by no means rarefied theoretical concerns.

For the moment, it should be emphasized that what detractors in the Vatican soon began to call pejoratively 'a new theology' contained two major innovations: the ever-widening concept of what should be considered the Catholic Church—and the concomitant opening

[83] André Hayen, 'Sacerdoce et laïcat', in Henry Carton de Wiart et al., *Problèmes de l'église en marche*, i: *La Christianisation du prolétariat* (Brussels: Témoignage Chrétien, 1947), 102 and 103; emphases in the original.

[84] Ibid. 105.

[85] 'Unless I am mistaken, it is above all the second error [anticlericalism] which lies in wait for French Catholics: the refusal to recognize the direct powers of the hierarchy in those instances where it should be expressed. It is not very difficult to show that in Belgium we are instead under threat from the first error [clericalism]: placing the Christian action of lay people at the service of organized Catholic Action under the direct control of the hierarchy.' Ibid. 102.

of the Church to the wider world beyond it. The erstwhile Leuven scholar and lifelong prophet of Liberation Theology, Joseph Comblin, put it like this: 'If in earlier times theology was inspired by the meditations of the monk, subsequently by the disinterested studies carried out within the confines of medieval universities, and finally the controversies of missionaries, one is entitled to believe that theology today is inspired by the flowering of movements of the lay apostolate which aim to realize the Kingdom of God in the midst of our world, to affirm this concretization, and to bear witness of it.'[86] One of the most famous martyrs of the generation of 'new theologians', who perished at the hands of the Nazis while fulfilling his role as chaplain of the anti-fascist resistance in the Vercors, Yves de Montcheuil, wrote in 1943: 'One must seek to reduce the distance between the world of the beyond and its anticipatory reflections. Within Christians there exists simultaneously the aspiration towards a universal communion in God which is willed by itself and, on the other hand, a desire for a transformation of the world and all of its institutions in order to promote from now on an ever-closer communion of an ever-growing number of persons and, consequently, an unrelenting struggle against all that which is effect or cause (or, better: effect and cause) of separation, misunderstanding, hostility or hatred.'[87]

Gustave Thils, in his 1958 survey of recent trends in Catholic theology, gave this account of recent trends in Catholicism: 'For some years now, Catholic theology has been particularly interested in a variety of realities which one can describe by one expression: terrestrial values or temporal values. We note the publication of articles, even books, with somewhat solemn titles such as "Theology of History", "Theology of the Cosmos", "Theology of Social Reality", "Theology and Technique", "Theology and Culture". It is clearly a fashion of sorts. But is it not more than that?' And then the author of a *Theology of Terrestrial Realities*, Gustave Thils, went on to proclaim: 'A theology of terrestrial realities may be of assistance in understanding the goals of the temporal work that lies ahead of us; it may make us see how things have to be transformed, even ephemeral and transitory

[86] Comblin, *Théologie de l'action*, 10.

[87] Yves de Montcheuil, 'Vie chrétienne et action temporelle: préambule à nos tâches de demain', *Construire* (1943), 99–100.

matters, so that they may increasingly approximate the image of God.'[88] 'Twenty years ago', wrote Thils on the eve of Vatican II, 'these kinds of questions were grouped around the general theme of "Christian Humanism"',[89] sometimes also called 'Integral' or 'True Humanism'.

JACQUES MARITAIN

Lay people in the Church were the motor force of changes within the Catholic Church. Without the push from below it is likely that the opening towards the world would have been much more difficult to achieve. Itself part of an overall societal shift towards mass politics in the wake of the rise of the industrial proletariat in the second half of the nineteenth century, the ascension of the laity in the course of the second quarter of the twentieth century engendered far-reaching changes in the workings of the Church. Ultimately, it may also partially account for the creation and popularization of 'new theologies'. But, of course, theologies, like social movements, do not drop from the skies. Theologies are products of endless reflections in the study chambers of individual thinkers, in fruitful interaction with the world outside their windows. In these final sections of this chapter attention will therefore be devoted to the three intellectuals who were the most important individual representatives of the trends discussed in this volume.

The most famous product of—and inspiration for—the wave of innovations analysed in this study was Jacques Maritain's 1936 investigation of 'the spiritual and temporal problems of a New Christendom', entitled *Humanisme intégral*.[90] No other author came even close to assuming Jacques Maritain's status as an *éminence grise* or *spiritus rector* of left Catholic experiments in the late 1930s, the crucial 1940s—and beyond. Paradoxically, Maritain achieved this status

[88] Thils, *Orientations*, 120 and 121. Some of the key works of this Belgian scholar include *Théologie des réalités terrestres* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), and *Théologie et réalité sociale* (Tournai: Casterman, 1952).

[89] Thils, *Orientations*, 123.

[90] Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral: problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle Chrétienté* (Paris: Aubier, 1936).

without ever actively participating in the various concrete manifestations of such trends, highlighted in other sections of my book. His most overtly 'political' act, indeed, was the taking up of the post of French Ambassador to the Vatican from 1945 to 1948. But it was probably in large part precisely because of his abstention from practical politics and the vagaries of social movements which his writings helped to spawn that he could exercise such wide-ranging influence over his contemporaries.

Surely, his earlier fame as fellow-travelling *maurrassien* and subsequent defender of Pius XI's condemnation of Action Française helped to obtain almost immediate attention to his publications in ensuing decades. Yet, even if he had been less established in the world of Catholic philosophy than he certainly was by the late 1930s, the views put forth in his landmark *Humanisme intégral* would have made him the talk of Catholic—but not only Catholic—intellectual circles around the world. A copious writer for another three decades after 1936, Maritain's thought, like that of all imaginative and creative intellectuals, underwent a series of additional permutations in later years, but the centrality of the theses he presented in *Humanisme intégral* was never placed in doubt. Even after the 1966 publication of his semi-revisionist *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Maritain cooperated in the reissue of his seminal 1936 monograph for the third edition of this work in 1968. While entire volumes could be written about the lifetime achievements of Jacques Maritain, in the context of this study of new departures in left Catholic theory and practice, the exclusive focus in this section will be placed on what Philippe Chenaux has aptly termed the 'veritable "little red book" of an entire generation of Catholics'.[91]

[91] Philippe Chenaux, '*Humanisme intégral*' *(1936) de Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 7. This booklet provides a well-informed and well-argued introduction to the monograph which shook the Catholic world. An earlier collection of useful articles on various aspects of this central opus is Jean-Louis Allard et al., *L'Humanisme intégral de Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1988). A convincing full-scale biography of Jacques Maritain has yet to be written. All hitherto existing attempts merely cover a limited amount of aspects of Maritain's rich life. The biographical sketch which comes closest to providing considered comments on the central themes of *Humanisme intégral* is Giorgio Campanini, *L'utopia della nuova cristianità: introduzione al pensiero politico di Jacques Maritain* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1975).

Humanisme intégral is based on six lectures Maritain delivered in August 1934 at the summer school of the University of Santander in northern Spain, a seminar series organized for the most part by co-thinkers of the leading Spanish left Catholic at that time, José Bergamín.[92] Slightly reworked and updated for the monograph edition, Maritain finished his book in the tense and expectant atmosphere between the election victories of the Spanish and then the French Popular Fronts in the spring of 1936. *Humanisme intégral* thus reflects the preoccupations current at that time. In particular, it is worth noting that *Humanisme intégral* was conceived of and written precisely in that moment of inter-war European history when, for the first time since the victory of the March on Rome by Mussolini's blackshirts in October 1922, it appeared that the seemingly unstoppable wave of fascist conquests could finally be halted if not reversed. Two failed paramilitary uprisings attempting to stem the tide of right-wing authoritarian regimes—in February 1934 in Austria and in October 1934 in northern Spain—had galvanized the European left into united and, later, popular fronts. And by the spring of 1936, it should not be forgotten, the hopes invested in united and in popular fronts had not yet been disappointed and adulterated by the rapid disintegration of the French Popular Front after the jubilant summer of 1936, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 17 July 1936, or, for that matter, the full-blown outrages associated with the Moscow Trials, which had yet to get fully under way.

In short, *Humanisme intégral* was written during a moment in European and world history when everything seemed possible, when blueprints for future societies were all in vogue, when the future appeared to be sufficiently open to permit all sorts of experiments, when utopian longings appeared to be within human reach. Jacques Maritain, in his youth a committed radical secular activist before his conversion to Catholicism in 1906, reflects this moment of opportunity and crisis more presciently than anyone else of his generation of Catholic social theorists. *Humanisme intégral* took on all the

[92] Yves Roullière, 'José Bergamín et Jacques Maritain', *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 37 (November 1998), 31. On José Bergamín, a colourful and controversial figure on the Spanish intellectual left, see most notably Jorge Sanz Barajas, *La paradoja en revolución (1921–1943)* (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 1998).

trappings of an open dialogue with the socialist alternative to the coveted new Christian order.

THE NEW CHRISTENDOM, MARK II

Humanisme intégral lays out the contours of the New Christendom which was to supersede the contemporary capitalist disorder. 'There is no need here to bring capitalism to book; its condemnation has become a commonplace that minds with an objection to platitude fear to reiterate.'[93] Christians should devote their energies to work 'towards a transformation of the temporal order'.[94] And 'this transfiguration should extend really, and not only figuratively, to the social structures of humanity and so bring about—in the degree to which that is possible here on earth and in given historical circumstances—a veritable socio-temporal realisation of the Gospels'.[95]

Up to this point, *Humanisme intégral* squarely fitted into the Zeitgeist of apostolic Catholicism in the age of Pius XI. And, indeed, Jacques Maritain had appropriated much of the conceptual apparatus and the language of inter-war Catholicism—e.g.: 'The words "the Church" denote "the Mystic Body of Christ" '[96]—but the signal contribution of Jacques Maritain lay in the concretization—and radicalization—of the contours of this New Christendom. 'It will be necessary to elaborate a social, political and economic philosophy, which will not rest content with universal principles, but which must be capable of coming down to the details of concrete realisation, a task which presupposes an immense amount of work, both vast and delicate. A beginning has already been made in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI, which lay down the general principles.'[97]

Ever mindful of historical constraints, Maritain consistently stresses that it will be impossible to install the Kingdom of God here on earth, but that the best one could hope for would be to work 'towards such a development of social conditions as will lead the masses [*la multitude*] to a level of material, moral and intellectual life

[93] Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938), 107. All subsequent citations are taken from this volume.

[94] Ibid. 114. [95] Ibid. 86. [96] Ibid. 34. [97] Ibid. 113.

in accord with the good and peace of all, such as will positively assist each person in the progressive conquest of the fullness of personal life and spiritual liberty'.[98] Concretely, Maritain called on Christians to concentrate their efforts on making 'this world, according to the historical ideal called for by the varying epochs and, if I may say so, as moulded by the latter, the field of a truly and fully human life, i.e. one which is assuredly full of defects, but is also full of love, whose social forces are measured by justice, by the dignity of human personality, by brotherly love'.[99] Maritain agitated for the construction of 'a society from which, I do not say all forms of differentiation or any hierarchical order, but the present-day severance into classes, will have disappeared'.[100] And, for Maritain, the fitting tools to build such a New Christendom would be a mixture of purposeful action and lofty ideals, 'a community of thought, of love and of will, a passion for the accomplishment of a common aim',[101] which alone could bring humanity close to its goal. 'And because it loves, love looks for the day when there will be no more oppressed classes or castes.'[102]

The New Christendom would simultaneously cherish and value each individual person and the common good. Equality and communitarian ideals would be central pillars of such a new society. Yet Maritain, as we will see, was only too aware of the potential pitfalls of experiments in collectivization. 'For a form of collective ownership to represent an effective defence of personality it is necessary that its end should not be a depersonalized possession. What does this mean?'[103] The French philosopher then went on to detail various safeguarding mechanisms, including his view that such a polity 'needs to be conceived as established from below upwards, according to the principle of personal democracy, with the suffrage and active personal participation of all the interests at the bottom, and as emanating from them and their unions';[104] in short, for all practical purposes, a blueprint for what thirty years later would be called participatory democracy.

Most importantly, perhaps, given earlier efforts by other Catholics to build a New Jerusalem under the guiding principles of medieval

[98] Ibid. 128; translation slightly amended. [99] Ibid. 103–4.
[100] Ibid. 234. [101] Ibid. 230. [102] Ibid. 103.
[103] Ibid. 182. [104] Ibid. 183.

visions of a New Christendom, the New Christendom advocated in *Humanisme intégral* would be fundamentally different from earlier models advocating Christian values to fashion temporal regimes. 'There is only one integral religious truth; there is only one catholic Church; there can [however] be diverse Christian civilisations, diverse forms of Christendom. In speaking of a new Christendom, I am therefore speaking of a temporal system or age of civilisations whose animating form will be Christian and which will correspond to the historical climate of the epoch on whose threshold we are.'[105] And Maritain did not hesitate to fill in the blanks. 'The prime and central fact, the concrete fact which characterises modern civilisations as distinct from that of the Middle Ages, is surely the existence in modern times of a civilisation and a temporal system which admit within themselves of a religious diversity.'[106] Maritain asserted that in the contemporary age 'men united by the same religious faith can have marked differences and oppositions between one another'.[107] Unity would remain the principle on the spiritual plane but 'on the temporal one, the rule is not union but *diversity*. When the objective is the earthly life of men, when it concerns earthly interests and our temporal welfare, or such and such an ideal of the common temporal good and the ways and means of realising it, it is normal that a unanimity whose centre is of a supra-temporal order should be broken, and that Christians who communicate at the same altar should find themselves divided in the commonwealth.'[108]

Such insights led Jacques Maritain to call for a new conception of the temporal order of the desired New Christendom. 'For myself I hold that the historical ideal of a new Christendom, of a new Christian temporal order, while founded on the same principles (analogically speaking) as that of the Middle Ages, will imply a *secular Christian*, not a consecrated, conception of the temporal order.'[109] In sum, not only did *Humanisme intégral* advocate the building of a future non-alienated society based on mutual respect, fraternity, and communal values underpinned by elements of direct democracy, but such a New Christendom would be pluralist, openly including

[105] Maritain, *True Humanism*, 126. [106] Ibid. 159. [107] Ibid. 255.
[108] Ibid. 297–8; emphasis in the original.
[109] Ibid. 156; emphasis in the original.

a variety of religious denominations side by side with atheists in leading positions of the temporal order which would operate largely autonomously from spiritual affairs though, it was to be hoped, with a heavy dose of authentic Christian values at its centre nonetheless. Small wonder that Jacques Maritain was worried about reactions from the church hierarchy.

THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

A second central feature of *Humanisme intégral* likewise did not help to calm the waters of moderate-to-conservative Catholic opinion upon publication of this incendiary work. *Humanisme intégral* centrally addressed the challenges posed by what Maritain clearly viewed as the most influential intellectual alternative to his vision of a New Christendom: the Marxist, socialist, and communist blueprints for a new society. Literally the entire first half of his book was a thoughtful, detailed, and—on some level—eminently empathetic analysis of the achievements and the pitfalls of the socialist world view—and of socialist action. And Maritain here displayed once again his great erudition and his capability for nuanced appraisals of complicated and contradictory processes and currents. Pointing out the culpability of the Christian tradition for having ignored for all too many decades the iniquities of capitalism, Maritain suggests that socialism filled a vacant need: 'However grave its errors and illusions have been, Socialism in the nineteenth century was a protest uttered by the human conscience, and of its most generous instincts, against evils which cry to heaven. It was a noble work to bring capitalist civilisation to trial and to waken against powers which know no pardon the sense of justice and of the dignity of labour: and in this work it took the initiative. It has fought a hard and difficult battle at the cost of innumerable sacrifices, filled with the most moving of human qualities, the self-sacrifice of the poor. It has loved the poor. We can only criticise it effectively while remaining at many points in its debt.'[110]

[110] Ibid. 81.

More specifically, Maritain proved himself to be an astute analyst of the contributions of Karl Marx, whose views on exploitation and alienation under capitalism Maritain termed 'a profound intuition, an intuition which is to my eyes the great lightning-flash of truth which traverses all his work';[111] and Maritain repeatedly highlights the 'deep spiritual tendencies which are immanent in socialism in general',[112] and Marxism in particular. Maritain likewise defended Marx from simplistic accusations of economic determinism. Marx, writes Maritain, 'always believed in a reciprocal action between economic and other factors: economics taken alone were not for him the sole spring of history'.[113] And here, as in earlier elaborations of the outlines of a New Christendom, Maritain's argument was fuelled by the recognition of a distinct overlap between his own and Marx's views. 'It is indeed true', wrote Maritain, 'that economic conditions—as in general all the conditions of the material order—have a profound bearing on the destiny of spiritual activities among men and that they have a constant tendency to bring these under their control, and that in the history of culture they are incorporate one with another: from this angle Marx's cynicism, like that of Freud, has brought many truths to light.'[114]

Writing in the mid-1930s, under the impact of the Great Depression and the politics of united and then popular fronts, Maritain likewise applied his forensic skills in dissecting the communist experiments. He first of all drew attention to the imperative need to separate an assessment of Marxism from an appreciation of the Soviet model but, having said that, he quickly added that one should apply a similarly fine-tuned means of differentiation to the Soviet experience itself. 'This new form of civilisation, born into existence after the sacrifices of millions of lives and irreparable losses, can be summarised briefly, in my opinion, as to its positive content, in so far as it is possible to pronounce on what is only known at a distance and from books, in the liquidation of the "profit system" and of the servitude of men's compulsory labour to the fecundity of money',[115] and Maritain then added: 'However hard the circumstances of life and

[111] Maritain, *True Humanism*, 38–9. [112] Ibid. 47.
[113] Ibid. 38. [114] Ibid. 42. [115] Ibid. 76.

the treatment of human beings, in this country where serfdom and its atmosphere have for so long endured there is at least the feeling that an age-long humiliation of social life has come to an end.'[116]

Yet Maritain's investigative skills and political instincts also laid bare the dark underside of Soviet life in the 1930s, insights that come of course as no surprise when realizing that his informants included not only fellow-travellers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb, but likewise dissident nonconformist communists like Boris Souvarine and Victor Serge. Thus Maritain equally underscores 'the errors and barbarous methods which vitiate the regime and . . . exhibit the complete contempt for human personality, the implacable harshness, the methods of terrorism (more intense than ever after eighteen years of revolution) and the bureaucratic despotism with which it works'.[117] Maritain even went as far as postulating a qualitative difference between Moscow under Lenin and the subsequent hegemony of Stalin.[118] 'Finally', Maritain predicted in a lengthy footnote text, 'it may be pointed out that if the *nationalistic* tendencies manifested in actuality by the communists are, from the point of view of the historic processes analysed in this note, a paradox, they also represent a change which may be of extreme importance in the internal evolution of socialism . . . It seems, however, highly improbable that the internal logic of communism will not rouse some form of secessionist reaction, of which the Fourth International is perhaps a prelude.'[119]

Humanisme intégral's influence on contemporaneous Catholics, however, could only become so all-important because Jacques Maritain was not a lone voice in the wilderness. His thought reflected the turmoil of the 1930s better than any others precisely because he assembled in one volume some of the most pressing concerns of forward-looking Catholics in the 1930s, encouraged by Vatican developments brought to the forefront by the 1926 condemnation of Action Française. But there were others who developed a considerable following.

[116] Ibid. 77. [117] Ibid.

[118] 'This need to transform man, which makes a large part of the greatness of Lenin's revolution, seems today (1936) to have grown lukewarm'; p. 54.

[119] Ibid. 227, emphasis in the original.

THE PERSONALISM OF EMMANUEL MOUNIER

Perhaps the second-most significant Catholic intellectual to gain international attention as a prophet of progressive change was Emmanuel Mounier. Twenty-three years younger than Jacques Maritain, the *grenoblois* Mounier developed a highly charged intellectual and activist profile when still in his twenties. Unlike Maritain, who preferred to act behind the scenes, Emmanuel Mounier sought the limelight of controversy and public exposure in a ceaseless effort to communicate his dreams. Together with a host of like-minded people, Mounier, by the late 1920s, belonged to those Catholic intellectuals who frequently gathered at Maritain's residence in Meudon near Paris for free-flowing conversations and far-flung plans. But Mounier soon developed his own personal profile and, by the time he founded the journal *Esprit* in October 1932, he had struck out in an increasingly well-defined direction.

Although the close personal bonds between Mounier and Maritain weakened considerably by the mid-1930s, their ideas remained remarkably aligned. The Italian political scientist Giorgio Campanini rightfully underscores: 'It is possible to say that no panorama of twentieth-century Catholic culture could afford not to refer in some ways to Maritain and Mounier who, for good reason, personify a type of symbol for the new approach to politics developed by European Catholicism between the two wars.'[120] Campanini points to three significant parallels between Mounier's and Maritain's thought: 'the conscious recognition of the political role of intellectuals; the perception of the cultural crisis of the occident; the critical attention to Marxism.'[121] And the same astute analyst then adds: 'The three aspects which we have highlighted originate from a single common fundamental element, the deep conviction of both Maritain and Mounier of the necessity to heal the prolonged fracture between Christianity and history. Out of the awareness of the political responsibility of intellectuals, out of the combined recognition of the crisis of the modern world and the insufficiency of the answers provided

[120] Giorgio Campanini, *Cristianesimo e democrazia: studi sul pensiero politico cattolico del '900* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1980), 85.
[121] Ibid. 97.

by Marxism; out of this set of factors arose the Maritainian project of "the New Christendom" just like the necessity of a "personalist and communitarian revolution" put forth by Mounier',[122] two closely related concepts which can be considered 'as one essential reference point for all subsequent political reflections'[123] by the cohort of activists under study in this monograph. What was the meaning of Emmanuel Mounier's concept of 'personalism', as his theory of 'personalist and communitarian revolution' was usually called for short?

Based on traditional Catholic conceptions of the sanctity of each human being, whether rich or poor, intelligent or benighted, Mounier's personalist philosophy not only considered each person as the central concrete point of reference for all human praxis in the here and now, but the notion of 'the person' at the same time performed a transcendental role. In a series of brilliant comments, Jean Conilh exemplifies this simultaneously realistic and mystical role of 'the person' in Mounier's world view: 'origin and first principle, the person must be present from the very beginning and at each moment of all undertakings, like an absolute and inalienable exigency which inspires, commands, and supervises the whole and each detail of the collective enterprise. And if the person incorporates the luminous destination of our historic voyage, it is at the same time the point of departure, the indispensable means, and the sole pathway.'[124] Mounier's 'person' represents simultaneously the flesh-and-blood human being in contemporary society as well as its ultimate mystic goal, concrete individuals and the 'new Christendom' all in one. 'The person, for Mounier, is precisely the search for a unity, for which we have a foreboding, but which is never achieved until death.'[125] Mounier's personalism thus entailed the total and unconditional defence of each individual's right towards personal fulfilment in historical space and historical time, at the same time that it called for the creation of ever-improving life circumstances to permit maximum creativity and freedom for all of humanity: 'Consequently, each social transformation, be it economic, juridical, or political, must be based on this norm [i.e. a combination, on the one

[122] Ibid. 99–100. [123] Ibid. 85.

[124] Jean Conilh, *Emmanuel Mounier* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 41.

[125] Ibid. 42.

hand, of inalienable concrete rights and, on the other, the ultimate destiny of the person], must be inspired by this exigency, in order to create step-by-step structures that are more accessible for the person, capable of offering it its singular place and its best chance for full development.'[126]

At the same time, Mounier stressed the ultimate responsibility of humanity—and each individual person—for its own liberation—'the person is solely responsible for its own salvation'[127]—which rendered personalism a most dynamic and action-oriented philosophy, to say the least. Jean Conilh underscores that 'Mounier proposes to us to conceive the person as a "process", a "movement", an "*élan de personnalisation*"'.[128] 'Avoiding its reduction to a mere concept or to have it take on a meaning of a ready-made reality, one must speak about it in terms of movement, activity, of creation.' 'For Mounier,' to quote one last time Jean Conilh, 'even in his most philosophical passages, the point is always to describe the person rather than to define it, to prefigure and to anticipate it not as an abstract concept, but as a concrete task to accomplish, as the axis of a civilization to realize, the medium for the values with which to incarnate the world.'[129]

A number of consequences flowed from this purposeful, action-oriented, voluntarist philosophy of social and individual change. Mounier himself described one such factor in an evocative passage of his 1946 *Qu'est-ce que le Personnalisme?*: 'Herein lies the permanent temptation for Personalism, the tendency to be favourably disposed in principle towards the heretic, the anarchist, the nonconformist, the one who ceaselessly maintains the rights of the dispossessed against the established, the duty of detachment instead of engagement, the protest of the dissatisfied against the satisfied.'[130] Writing in his native France in the 1930s and 1940s, this attitude translated into a fearless recognition of the qualities inherent in the most visible alternative to the detested status quo in the West: a post-capitalist, collectivist, but libertarian order.

[126] Conilh, *Emmanuel Mounier*, 40–1. [127] Ibid. 41.
[128] Ibid. 44. [129] Ibid. 43.
[130] Here taken from the translation, 'What is Personalism?', in Emmanuel Mounier, *Be Not Afraid: A Denunciation of Despair* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 138.

ANARCHISM, COMMUNISM, AND THE NEW LEFT

'We do not believe that the free man must needs be solitary.'[131] 'Personalism, in fact, believes that capitalist structures today are an impediment to the movement towards the liberation of man, and they must be abolished and replaced by a Socialist organisation of production and consumption.'[132] 'Collectivism is not at cross-purposes with Personalism.'[133] Attuned to the contributions of the Marxist tradition which, like Maritain, Mounier viewed as an important milestone on the road to human liberation, though fatally marred by its single-minded focus on exclusively collective rather than also individual redemption, in 1936–7, at the high point of the Catalan Revolution in north-eastern Spain, Mounier discovered the anarchist tradition. 'Up to the point when Mounier acquired a solid understanding of anarchism (Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin)', writes a Flemish observer, 'he had had a negative view of left-wing thought with regard to the person.'[134] The discovery of anarchism, however, opened Mounier's eyes to the liberatory dimension of secular left-wing ideologies and action vis-à-vis individual—and not just collective—liberation. 'Anarchism operated with a deeply grounded understanding' for the multifaceted dimension of what it means to be a human being, 'something which Marxism could bring across only indirectly via scientific means'. 'Some passages' of Mounier's writings on anarchism 'are almost a song of praise for anarchism, as anarchist literature rendered the living human being almost palpable'.[135] For Mounier, anarchism was able to transport three of the most profound human values, 'those of dignity, revolt and emancipation'.[136]

The defeat of the Spanish Revolution removed anarchism from the field of vision of most social theorists, including Mounier, and the forces of international communism became the almost undisputed focal point for disenchanted nonconformists in the 1940s. Mounier

[131] Ibid. 167. [132] Ibid. 195. [133] Ibid. 168.

[134] Geert Bouckaert, 'De houding van Emmanuel Mounier ten aanzien van het communisme', unpublished licentiaatsverhandeling (Departement Politieke Wetenschappen, Catholic University of Leuven, July 1983), 60.

[135] Ibid. 61.

[136] Emmanuel Mounier, *Communisme, anarchie et personnalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 168.

intensified his study of Marxism and in particular communism, leading to thinly veiled, though almost always uneasy, admiration for the latter: 'It is most evident that in France, in 1946, the Communist Party incorporates the confidence and the force of the immense majority and above all of the most dynamic elements within the working class. One may regret this, one may hope or prepare for a reversal of this situation, which is an entirely different question. But as long as the present situation subsists, it commands our attention. To speak of revolution in our industrial age and to believe that one may make the revolution without the working class in central position' is pure childishness.[137] 'To cut oneself off from this elite of action would constitute, for whoever wishes for some degree of participation in this historic effort in these difficult days, a crime against the very goals which one claims to pursue.'[138]

Yet, like Maritain ten years earlier, Emmanuel Mounier's embrace of the communist mystique was far from total and constantly tempered by his astute observations of countervailing trends. 'Will Soviet Russia remain the Leninist Russia, a progressive and spontaneous workers' and peasants' regime, or has it completely and irremediably turned it into a bureaucracy of the state and of the party, grafted onto the revolutionary tree? Does Stalinist Russia wish for the social liberation of other European countries, or does it force the communist parties into a mould which is at first temporizing but subsequently conservative, tending slowly to disarm international socialism to the benefit of its own established power?'[139] 'It is not by accident that the dialogue between communism and Catholicism is more tortuous and feverish than with any other force in the world: in certain ways, one conjures up the other. The only problem is whether communism will give in to its own version of clericalism and become petrified or whether, like the Church, it will countervail this trend by means of

[137] Mounier, *Communisme, anarchie*, 59.

[138] Ibid. 60. His close collaborator Jean-Marie Domenach, who took over as chief editor of *Esprit* in 1957, confided to his diary in 1949: 'I now know that, outside the Communist Party, there exists no real will to change the world, a will which is preferable to all others. It is this fact which constitutes the drama of today.' See Jean-Marie Domenach, *Beaucoup de gueule et peu d'or: journal d'un réfractaire (1944–1977)* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 53.

[139] Mounier, *Communisme, anarchie*, 83.

its inner resources. Ecclesiastical clericalism is officially condemned by the doctrine of the Church. The permanent opposition which it encounters within the Church manifests itself every day in Christian publications and writings. If communism would offer us similar signs of internal liberty, a significant portion of the opposition it calls forth would fall by the wayside.'[140] Socialism 'must not supersede the imperialism of vested interests by the tyranny of collective government. It must therefore discover a democratic form without weakening any measures it might take to initiate or defend its first conquests.'[141]

At various points cooperating closely with French communism in order to change the world, consistently staying aloof from the flagship organization of French post-war Catholicism, the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, Mounier invested most of his political hopes in short-lived political formations espousing a form of 'third way' socialism beyond Stalinism and the capitalist status quo, such as the Mouvement Unifié de la Renaissance Française or the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire. Eventually, Mounier and the individuals and support groups behind his journal, *Esprit*, began to devote their efforts towards the construction of what soon became known as the New Left.[142]

MARIE-DOMINIQUE CHENU

Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier were both lay theologians and were thus not immediately accountable to the church hierarchy. Marie-Dominique Chenu belonged to the Dominican order. An educator, Chenu taught at the Dominican seminary Le Saulchoir from

[140] Ibid. 77. [141] Mounier, 'What is Personalism?', 195.

[142] Michael Kelly, *Pioneer of the Catholic Revival: The Ideas and Influence of Emmanuel Mounier* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 126–9 and 148, refers to hopes and concrete engagements of this sort. Michel Winock, *'Esprit': des intellectuels dans la cité, 1930–1950* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 307–34, devotes an entire chapter to this quest: 'Pour une nouvelle gauche, 1947–1950'. For a solid survey of the post-war evolution of *Esprit*, see now Goulven Boudic, *Esprit, 1944–1982: les métamorphoses d'une revue* (Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe: Éditions de l'IMEC, 2005). The most comprehensive overview of the genesis of the French New Left remains, despite some debilitating conceptual flaws, Jean-François Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau Parti Socialiste: les minorités qui ont rénové le P.S.* (Toulouse: Privat, 1990).

1920 to 1942. Appointed director of studies at the age of 37, Chenu was relegated from Le Saulchoir in 1942 in the wake of the Vatican condemnation of a text based on a lecture he had delivered in 1937 at the seminary then located on the outskirts of the Belgian town of Tournai near the French border.

Copies of the text of his speech were solely circulated in private, but what eventually aroused the ire of his superiors was the straightforward and even, at times, polemical way in which Chenu defended his controversial points of view. What was eventually published under the heading *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* was probably the most unabashedly programmatic statement in defence of the movement to return to the sources, described in an earlier section of this chapter, written prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Openly displaying his repugnance for neoscholastic dogmatism, Chenu's call for the adoption of rigorous social scientific and historical methods was bound to ruffle feathers. It did not simplify matters, surely, that he openly labelled his opponents adherents of a 'theological imperialism which is nothing but intellectual clericalism',[143] contrasting such an antiquated method with actual practices at Le Saulchoir: 'If at Le Saulchoir we occasionally have recourse to manuals for instructional purposes, this has never become the norm. And this is not solely a consequence of having adopted the procedures used for the running of universities; it is the result of our firm belief that true research does not rely on substitutes, no matter how clear and practical they may seem, but on fresh documents, whose limitless riches truly deserve the label of "sources".'[144] And seminary training included multidisciplinary instruction in a variety of disciplines in order to make maximum use of the cherished historical texts. 'It is the product of our conviction that the understanding of a text and a doctrine is intimately related to the knowledge of the milieu from which they arise, linked to the literary, cultural, philosophical, theological, and spiritual context which give birth and concrete contours to them.'[145]

Of all theologians active from the 1930s through the 1950s, Marie-Dominique Chenu was the most intimately involved with

[143] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 122.
[144] Ibid. 124. [145] Ibid. 125.

the various apostolic social movements at the centre of this book (see Chapters 1, 4, and 5). Soon after becoming regent at Le Saulchoir, he had begun to offer the premises for workshops and retreats to activists and chaplains of specialized Catholic Action, above all the JOC.[146] Already in the 1930s known to encourage some seminarians to take on short-term industrial employment during the summer holidays, Chenu later became closely involved in the development of the Mission de France, the Mission de Paris, and the emerging worker priest movement (see Chapter 5). Louis Augros, the first director of the seminary attached to the Mission de France, in 1955 had this to say about the degree of concrete involvement by Chenu in various experiments with regard to the working-class apostolate in the 1940s. Especially Augros's comparison of Chenu with another well-known Dominican theologian, Yves Congar, may pinpoint the singularity of the activist commitment by Marie-Dominique Chenu. 'I did not really get to know Congar, although certain of his books gave me considerable assistance. With Father Chenu, it was totally different. I made contact with him for the very first time in November 1941. And especially from 1945 onwards, we were engaged in continuous collaboration. I may say that at the Mission de France, we are massively indebted to Father Chenu.'[147]

Chenu was 'the first one to introduce a course on Marx' at the post-secondary level in francophone Europe as early as the 1930s,[148] and according to Christofer Frey it was none other than Chenu who first introduced the concept of social class into Catholic social theory at the occasion of the July 1939 *Séminaires Sociales* in Bordeaux.[149] A prolific writer in the central decades under review, the 1930s to the 1950s, Chenu had close contacts with and published numerous

[146] See his account of this cooperation in 'La JOC au Saulchoir', in Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Parole de Dieu*, ii: *L'Évangile dans le temps* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 271–4.

[147] Louis Augros to Père Prieur de Saint-Jacques, 25 November 1955: Archives des Dominicains de France, Fonds Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Correspondance A–G', 'Louis Augros'.

[148] At least this is the claim Chenu made in a book-length interview, *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu: 'un théologien en liberté'* (Paris: Centurion, 1975), 66.

[149] Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche*, 238. Chenu's intervention at Bordeaux had the characteristic title 'Classes et corps mystique du Christ'.

articles in the entire gamut of newspapers and journals emanating from the French Catholic left—from *La Vie intellectuelle* via *Esprit*, *Témoignage chrétien*, *Masses ouvrières*, to *La Quinzaine* and *Jeunesse de l'Église*.[150] Yet Chenu, more than Mounier, was not primarily an activist or journalist but developed a consistent—though, naturally, evolving—theology on a number of important points. In the context of this chapter, emphasis will be placed on Chenu's theology of labour, which is of course closely related to his understanding of the role of economic factors in the era of mass production and Taylorism, as well as his visionary pronouncements on the possibilities inherent in the moment of liberation from the Nazi yoke in 1944.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF LABOUR

Like most left Catholics, Marie-Dominique Chenu was spellbound by Karl Marx's fascinating analysis of capitalism and the processes of alienation and exploitation of labour. But, closely paralleling the argumentation of Marx, Chenu pointed out that salvation for the modern world could likewise be regarded as a product of the rapidly growing economy and corresponding technological progress. On the one hand, again just like Marx, Chenu depicted the limitless tentacles of 'mechanical determinism' affecting ever-expanding aspects in 'the domain of human action: daily routines, housing, meals, family life, interactions, distractions, education, etc.'[151] But precisely to the degree in which economic and technological developments bring about an ever-growing scale of indirect socializations, to the degree in which the forces of production cover ever-larger geographic areas and demand ever-closer interaction and cooperation of economic agents around the world, the contradictions between these objective tendencies towards socialization and cooperation and the

[150] It is precisely this activist and journalistic dimension of Chenu's rich life which is largely missing from the biography by Christophe Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation: The Theology of Marie-Dominique Chenu* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2001).

[151] Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Civilisation technique et spiritualité nouvelle', in *L'Évangile*, 141.

anarchy of capitalist profit-oriented competition will be bound to come into conflict and explode. 'The brutal and material solidarity which the machine imposes becomes the support for a spiritual solidarity of human beings carrying out identical labour from that moment onwards when they begin to sense and know that they are at home within their labouring activity.'[152] 'In other words, precisely where the machine leads to a concentration of human beings carrying out the most repetitive tasks, there begins to grow a network of solidarities which constitute, thanks to this process of socialization, a "community" of labour, a spontaneous and affective awareness of togetherness, focused around their work, common interests, aspirations, and human values.'[153]

Like Maritain and Mounier keenly aware of the important role played by economic conditions in the shaping of society, Chenu repeatedly returned to the theme of the central role of technological progress in providing the preconditions for eventual redemption. 'The liberation of the proletariat, the enhancement of the social and spiritual condition of blue-collar workers [*la promotion ouvrière*], will be brought about by and with the tools developed by technical progress, or it will not come about.'[154] Liberation and true socialization would be the ultimate goal of humanity. But such a 'civilization of labour' could not be constructed 'from the outside', Chenu argued. 'The remedy—or, better: health as such—must emerge from within labour itself'; 'man will be reintegrated into his labour by the process of becoming conscious of the content, the ends, and the values of the social function of their labour';[155] 'the point is to reconcile the worker with his work by means of his recognition, engendered by a combination of psychological and objective factors, of the acknowledgement of his interests, his leisure-time pursuits, his aspirations, of his social function, of the network of his relationships with others—aligned against the restrictions imposed by automatism.'[156] 'By reintegrating the human being into his work, socialization becomes a force for liberation.'[157]

[152] Ibid. 153. [153] Ibid. 154. [154] Ibid. 150.
[155] Ibid. 153. [156] Ibid. 154.
[157] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Pour une théologie du travail* (Paris: Seuil, 1955), 23.

Needless to say, Marie-Dominique Chenu, for all his awareness of the constraints and limits imposed by material circumstances, realized too that working-class liberation would not occur quasi-automatically, that it would have to be carried out by the workers themselves, or it would not come to be. And thus blue-collar workers, for Chenu, took on a most important role in the shaping of the contemporaneous world: 'The working class, in the process of the transformation of the capitalist regime, furnishes the sociological basis for the spiritual liberation of humanity.'[158]

What gave Chenu's analysis of socio-economic trends operating in advanced capitalist societies, in combination with his theology of labour, a particularly acute poignancy was his recognition towards the end of the Second World War that, after a long period of suffering and alienation, humanity stood literally on the brink of liberation. 'One knows this law of physics: a phenomenon, once it has reached a certain level of development, suddenly changes its nature and takes on entirely new qualities.'[159] 'It was towards the end of 1943 or at the beginning of 1944.' Suddenly, in the course of a conversation, 'I forcefully expressed the sentiment that liberation would not only bring about the military expulsion of the enemy but, on a much more profound level, the joyful and triumphant explosion of a social and political aspiration in existence for some time, which would finally lead to the materialization of a protracted economic revolution.'[160] Material conditions had finally matured to a point where a 'communitarian revolution' was on the agenda, which would ring in a new age and produce a 'new man'. Not unlike earlier historical moments of revolutionary change, when certain elements suddenly began to shift and bring about, often in a violent manner, a new equilibrium of forces; not unlike 'a chemical solution which has been stable for a long time and which, suddenly, changes its composition under the impact of caloric or atmospheric conditions',[161] 'large numbers of hitherto amorphous human beings' suddenly were becoming conscious 'of their own power'. 'It is a universal phenomenon which we have

[158] Chenu, *Théologie du travail*, 92.
[159] Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'La Foi en chrétienté', in *L'Évangile*, 120.
[160] Chenu, *Théologie du travail*, 69.
[161] Chenu, 'La Foi en chrétienté', 118.

witnessed in the demonstrations of 1936, this arrival of the masses at a consciousness of themselves.'[162]

The conjuncture of 1944 would allow the long-desired 'communitarian revolution' finally to become a concrete possibility. Economic and technological conditions, combined with the concrete political circumstances of 'revolutionary fermentation', would usher in a new temporal order. 'In this sort of earthquake, the most sensitive centre of disturbance, the geometric location of these various pressures, it seems to me, is . . . the collectivist, communitarian ideal which will henceforth shape all human communities, regardless of concrete size and circumstances, with an intensity which is the precise function of the novelty of this phenomenon.'[163] 'In this manner, the human being chained to the assembly line, dehumanized and proletarianized, in this hour when he practises hatred to the maximum extent, will find what one may call his myth, his ideal goal, his secret enthusiasm, his massive energies: the sense of a brotherly community of human beings.'[164] Mass politics had finally come into its own in working-class blue. 'This is a phenomenon of very large proportions, and the perversions which we can observe around us or elsewhere must not hide the greatness of this fact. And if this is truly a phenomenon of social and of human individual growth, I, as a Christian, cannot but regard this process of humanity's arrival at adulthood with curiosity and sympathy.'[165]

Ultimately, just like Jacques Maritain, who called his *Humanisme intégral* an exercise in practical philosophy which, in turn, he termed a 'science of freedom',[166] Marie-Dominique Chenu was most interested in 'constructing a world for the freedom of the children of God'.[167] In the next three chapters we will see what forms such struggles took in wartime and in post-war life.

[162] Ibid. 117. [163] Ibid. 120. [164] Ibid. 122. [165] Ibid. 117–18.
[166] Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, p. viii.
[167] Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Théologie du travail', in *L'Évangile*, 570.

3

The Politics of Left Catholicism in the 1940s

THE 'FIRST' CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

A survey of developments within the world of political Catholicism may highlight the unusual atmosphere characteristic of the 'conjuncture of 1944' pinpointed by Chenu. Political Catholicism, of course, first emerged in the late nineteenth century, and it included a wide panoply of organizations, from staunchly conservative organizations, such as the Belgian Parti Catholique, all the way to radical democratic currents. The left-of-centre spectrum of Catholic political associations emerging at this time has sometimes been referred to as the 'first Christian Democracy'. Closely linked to the birth of social Catholicism, this 'first' Christian Democracy for the most part arose from the ranks of intransigent anti-modernist elements within the Catholic Church. Intransigent Catholicism was fuelled by its distaste for bourgeois modernism. But what was originally a backward-looking defensive reaction against the rise of liberalism, focused on the return to a mythical golden age of Christendom, soon began to change its outlook. Growing numbers of Catholics began to criticize capitalism without harking back to an increasingly distant and mystical past. Some began to look forward, eventually developing the crucial ideological and activist dynamic which animated the currents investigated in this monograph.[1]

[1] Émile Poulat, *Église contre bourgeoisie: introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel* (Tournai: Casterman, 1977), is the classic study of the contradictory currents at work within intransigent Catholicism.

The close relationship between this 'first' Christian Democracy and social Catholicism can be noted, for instance, in the choice of label—'league' rather than 'party'—adopted by several of the most important organizations belonging to this 'camp' in the early years of the twentieth century. To emphasize the wish for such political associations to operate—and to be regarded—as a social movement rather than a 'regular' political party, in November 1905 Italian progressive Christians founded the Lega Democratica Nazionale, and already in February 1891, some months prior to the publication of Leo XIII's famous social encyclical, Belgian Catholics had launched a Ligue Démocratique Belge. Most frequently including a variety of distinct currents within each grouping, this 'first' Christian Democracy contained, amongst others, social Catholics most comfortable with a paternalist approach to social questions side by side with radical democrats. In various instances, these movements thus eventually underwent a series of splits. It was the left wing, so to speak, of this 'first' Christian Democracy in the age of Leo XIII and Pius X which usually served as inspiration for the radical experiments within the lifeworld of political Catholicism described in this chapter.

Four individuals may exemplify this radical trend within political Catholicism at the turn of the century: the Flemish Adolf Daens, the Walloon Antoine Pottier, the French Jules Lemire, and the Italian Romolo Murri. All four were ordained priests, and all four were leading animators of the most radical Catholic political currents in their respective national terrains. Daens and Murri were even excommunicated from the Church because of their uncompromising attitude in the face of various (secular and) church hierarchies. The term 'democratic priests' [*abbés démocrates*], which is often affixed to a grouping of French priests whose most prominent figure was the combative Jules Lemire from Hazebrouck just south of the Belgian border, should thus properly be extended to cover like-minded clerics in much of Catholic Europe at that time. But, of course, the movement included lay activists in far larger numbers than priests. Perhaps the most influential of these lay Catholics was the Parisian Marc Sangnier. His organization, Le Sillon, provided an inspirational learning environment for a whole host of individuals who became leading figures in the social movements at the centre of this volume, amongst them, as noted, Joseph Cardijn. Le Sillon was promptly condemned

by Pius X, and the organization Sangnier founded after the enforced demise of Le Sillon, Jeune République, never did quite regain comparable status and the influence of Le Sillon.[2] But a dynamic had been set in motion which could no longer be stopped.

Inter-war Europe saw a continuation of the various trends operating within the political Catholicism of the pre-First World War era, although the most radical currents were now usually kept under greater control. Still, even in those countries where one Catholic political party now exercised hegemony within Catholic ranks, various cross-currents continued to make political Catholicism not only a force to be reckoned with but an unpredictable force at that. Few post-war mainstream Catholic parties, however, experienced such a high degree of unrest and radical ferment within their ranks as was exerted by the peasant agitators headed by Guido Miglioli within the Italian Partito Popolare.[3] Independently operating left-wing currents within political Catholicism for the most part did not seriously get under way until the outbreak of the Second World War. In what follows, almost exclusive attention will therefore be devoted to the colourful assortment of unorthodox Catholic political currents operating in the crucial decade of the 1940s. For reasons laid out in my Introduction, the focus of this chapter will be the Italian state. Yet, first, a brief analysis of a conjunctural shift to the left in France, Belgium, and Germany may underscore that the Italian crucible of political Catholicism was by no means unique.

[2] On the kaleidoscope of progressive Catholic political associations in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, a range of publications exists for each respective national context. For informative transnational surveys of this trend, see the relevant sections in Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la Démocratie Chrétienne: XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980); Maurice Vaussard, *Histoire de la Démocratie Chrétienne: France–Belgique–Italie* (Paris: Seuil, 1956); Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005); Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialisation to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); and Alec R. Vidler, *A Century of Social Catholicism 1820–1920* (London: SPCK, 1964).

[3] On developments within Catholic political organizations in the inter-war time period, see the relevant sections in Mayeur, *Partis catholiques*; Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds.), *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM IN POST-WAR GERMANY

In West Germany, for instance, within the newly founded Christian Democratic Union (CDU), in the initial post-war period some notions of 'Christian socialism' occasionally found their way into some documents emerging from within the fledgling CDU. Yet there never existed anything remotely resembling an organized left-leaning opposition, complete with journal publications, within West German Christian Democracy. The leading German left Catholic magazine, *Frankfurter Hefte*, was no party-political affair,[4] and individuals within the ranks of the CDU, cooperating with the *Hefte*, were operating as individuals rather than consciously attempting to construct a network of like-minded CDU members.[5]

The most 'notorious' piece of evidence for the existence of a prominent left Catholic tendency within the structures of the early CDU is the February 1947 *Ahlener Wirtschafts- und Sozialprogramm* whose preamble proudly proclaimed: 'The capitalist economic system does not do justice to the vital interests of the German people pertaining to matters of state and civil society.'[6] And the *Ahlener Programm* had been preceded by even more radical proclamations of the necessity of Christian socialism. Nominally, the Ahlen theses only applied to Christian Democratic activists in the British zone of occupied Germany, for Germany had been carved up among the four Allies, with travel between the respective zones severely restricted and no German-run supra-zonal organizations permitted. But the fame of

[4] For a discussion of the place of the *Frankfurter Hefte* within German left Catholicism, see Martin Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945: Die Presse oppositioneller Katholiken in der Auseinandersetzung für eine demokratische und sozialistische Gesellschaft* (Cologne: Pahl Rugenstein, 1976).

[5] The classic studies of left Catholic efforts within the CDU in what became the Federal Republic of Germany are Franz Focke, *Sozialismus aus christlicher Verantwortung: Die Idee eines christlichen Sozialismus in der katholisch-sozialen Bewegung und in der CDU* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1981), Rudolf Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus in der frühen CDU: Grundlagen und Wirkungen der christlich-sozialen Ideen in der Union 1945–1949* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981), and Ute Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU: Politischer Katholizismus zwischen Tradition und Anpassung* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1987).

[6] Cited in Andreas Lienkamp, 'Socialism out of Christian Responsibility: The German Experiment of Left Catholicism (1945–1949)', in Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard (eds.), *Left Catholicism: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation, 1943–1955* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 207.

the *Ahlener Programm* reached beyond administrative boundaries, and it continued to be invoked by radical forces within (and, increasingly, outside) the Christian Democratic camp for many subsequent decades.

The origins of the *Ahlener Programm* date back to Catholic underground circles in the Cologne area, with its intellectual and theological centre located in the Dominican monastery of Walberberg. Surviving the repression of Cologne-based supporters involved in the coup attempt of 20 July 1944, Father Eberhard Welty[7] published his reflections on the discussions of the aforementioned Cologne resistance circle immediately after liberation under the title *Was nun?*[8] Amongst many other topics addressed, Welty called for a new approach to the regulation of the economy, arguing that, 'first of all, the economy has to be unconditionally reoriented towards the satisfaction of needs, i.e. it should no longer provide for the so-called free market, but for concrete requirements'.[9] While emphasizing the necessity of retaining individuals' right to private property, Welty called for state intervention in economic affairs, as 'the economic order on the basis of untrammelled private property rights has laid bare the absurdity and clear injustice of such an approach'.[10] Extending his theses into a 400-page monograph, for which he penned the introduction two days after American troops liberated the Walberberg monastery on 5 March 1945, Eberhard Welty concretized his vision of a Christian socialist future Germany: 'We cannot understand for what reasons and to what extent a moderate economic socialism would not correspond to natural law and Christianity.'[11]

In post-war Germany, the rebirth of democratic politics initially occurred at a (forcibly restricted) local level. In the important region of Cologne, early efforts to construct a new Catholic or Christian party closely conformed to the designs of Eberhard Welty and his

[7] For a brief biography, note Wolfgang Ockenfels, 'Eberhard Welty (1902–1965)', in Jürgen Aretz, Rudolf Morsey, and Anton Rauscher (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte in Lebensbildern*, iv: *Aus dem deutschen Katholizismus des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1980), 240–9.

[8] Eberhard Welty, *Was nun? Grundsätze und Hinweise zur Neuordnung im deutschen Lebensraum* ([Walberberg]: n.p., [1945]), 32 pp.

[9] Ibid. 26. [10] Ibid. 29.

[11] Eberhard Welty, *Die Entscheidung in die Zukunft: Grundsätze und Hinweise zur Neuordnung im deutschen Lebensraum* (Cologne: Balduin Pick, 1946), 371.

co-thinkers. The first prominent local party platform—the June 1945 *Kölner Leitsätze*—indeed called for a 'true Christian socialism'. The link between Welty's left Catholic vision and the Cologne area Christian Democratic Union—until December 1945 still called Christian Democratic Party (CDP)—was made even more explicit by the decision to hold the workshops which drew up these *Kölner Leitsätze* in the facilities of the Dominican monastery in Walberberg.[12] In September 1945 the various local organizations joined together to form a Rhineland-wide CDP, and only in January 1946 did a unified organization for the entire British zone officially get off the ground. In March 1946, the British zone CDU adopted a new programme which, in contrast to the *Kölner Leitsätze*, stressed the role of private property, but supporters of the Christian socialist ideal refused to acquiesce in this moderate turn, and the spring and summer of 1946 witnessed a renewed and vigorous debate on the relevance and topicality of Christian socialism within the ranks of the CDU. The August 1946 *Essener Leitsätze* can be regarded as a compromise solution, located midway between the *Kölner Leitsätze* and the March 1946 platform, and the February 1947 *Ahlener Programm*, mentioned earlier, was yet another compromise along similar lines between the Christian socialist supporters and more moderate defenders of the priority of private property rights. The tug-of-war between these contending forces continued for a while until the June 1948 economic and currency reform, which hoisted market forces into a position of seemingly irreversible dominance in what then became the Federal Republic of Germany.[13]

Within the British zone, then, the initial post-war period did showcase a Christian Democratic Party where qualitatively different ideological positions vied for attention and support. Other occupation zones saw related, though generally even more localized, efforts which pointed in a similar direction to the pathway indicated in Welty's *Was nun?* A group around two leading intellectuals, Eugen Kogon and Walter Dirks, strove for comparable ideas within the Hessen CDU.[14]

[12] Uertz, *Christentum*, 27–40, is the best source on the genesis and radiance of the *Kölner Leitsätze* and the central role of the Kloster Walberberg.

[13] The preceding section follows the argumentation presented in Uertz, *Christentum*, *passim*.

[14] Lienkamp, 'Christian Responsibility', 205–6, provides a brief and concise overview of Hessen-based left Catholic activists.

But here the limited reach and relevance of such campaigns was even more glaringly apparent than in CDU branches located within British zonal structures. 'The group around Walter Dirks and Eugen Kogon was unable to find support for their ideas, and already in early 1946 they discontinued their active party-political engagement in order to prepare the launching of the *Frankfurter Hefte*.'[15]

A CATHOLIC SHIFT TO THE LEFT: BELGIUM AND FRANCE

A similar process of cautious overtures to the language and the actual practice of social reform initially characterized the Belgian rebirth of political Catholicism under the label Christelijke Volkspartij/Parti Social Chrétien.[16] As was the case in Germany and elsewhere, the experience of war, occupation, and resistance had brought about a notable radicalization of public discourse when liberation arrived, a process affecting the Catholic milieu as much as other sections of civil society. In the inter-war years, Belgian Catholic politics had experienced a tug-of-war between the traditional Catholic elites, harking back to the period of uninterrupted, staunchly conservative Catholic Party dominance of Belgian governments between 1885 and 1919, and more democratically oriented forces, the latter generally emerging from the labour movement wing of Belgian Catholicism.[17] By 1945 the forces favouring an opening and modernization of Belgian political Catholicism were in the ascendancy, indirectly aided by the emergence of a new political party to the left of Christian Democracy, the Union Démocratique Belge (UDB), which had managed to attract many leading Catholic resistance activists and which held two posts in the third post-liberation cabinet. In part to avoid a

[15] Ulrich Bröckling, 'Vorwort', in Walter Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration: Politische Publizistik 1945–1950* (Zurich: Ammann, 1987), 16.

[16] Mark Van den Wijngaert, *Ontstaan en stichting van de CVP/PSC: de lange weg naar het Kerstprogramma (1936–1951)* (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1976), remains the central point of reference in this regard.

[17] Emmannuel Gerard, *De Katholieke Partij in crisis: partijpolitiek leven in België (1918–1940)* (Leuven: Kritak, 1985).

further transfer of Catholic allegiances to this new star on the political horizon of Belgian political Catholicism, the UDB, but partially no doubt also motivated by genuine concern to implement progressive social measures, the newly created CVP/PSC adopted a new platform, its Christmas Programme (*kerstprogramma*), in December 1945. This remained the central reference point for inner-party debates for the two decades leading up to 1968.[18] And, already in 1944, the forces eventually forming the CVP/PSC in August 1945 had given their—rather reluctant and hesitant—assent to the founding document of the post-war Belgian welfare state: the Social Pact.[19] Unlike in West Germany, however, even in the heady days of the immediate post-liberation period, the opening towards the political left never went as far as discussions, let alone adoption, of Christian socialist ideas. The *kerstprogramma*, though advocating a series of social reforms, unambiguously stated: 'Private property is a holy right.'[20]

In France, by contrast, the key post-liberation political party representing the forces of Catholicism—even if it did not officially advertise its Catholic and its Christian roots—adopted the language of radical change much more straightforwardly than its Belgian homologue. Indeed, in the initial months of post-liberation politics, the French Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP) was regarded as the French counterpart of the radical UDB—and not as the sister party of the comparatively much more moderate CVP/PSC. The MRP's founding manifesto, adopted at its first national congress on 25–6 November 1944, minced no words: 'We want a Revolution which will guarantee to each and everyone the right to live in security and dignity. We want a Revolution which will make political and social democracy a full reality.' And the MRP Manifesto did not limit itself to abstract invocations of lofty goals: 'This Revolution

[18] Van den Wijngaert, *Ontstaan*, *passim*; but see also, for the long-range impact of the *kerstprogramma*, Jean-Louis Jadoulle, 'L'Évolution du programme du Parti Social Chrétien/Christelijke Volkspartij (noël 1945–1968): éléments pour une histoire des idées sociales-chrétiennes', in Wilfried Dewachter et al. (eds.), *Un parti dans l'histoire 1945/1995: 50 ans d'action du Parti Social Chrétien* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Duculot, 1996), 343–64.

[19] Emmanuel Gerard, 'De Christelijke Volkspartij en het Sociaal Pact na de Bevrijding (1944–1948)', in Dirk Luyten and Guy Vanthemsche (eds.), *Het Sociaal Pact van 1944: oorsprong, betekenis en gevolgen* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1995), 325–44.

[20] Christelijke Volkspartij, 'Kerstprogramma', in Van den Wijngaert, *Ontstaan*, 115.

necessitates an economy directed by a state which is freed from the powers of moneyed interests, as well as the nationalization of the most important industries, private monopolies, and credit. It likewise includes the participation of the various freely organized trade unions within the running of the economy and individual enterprises.' To be sure, the Manifesto likewise included—in the best French intellectual tradition—grandiloquent phrases divested of much meaningful content, as in, for instance: 'We want a Revolution which will bestow upon France the means to fully realize its destiny.' But on the whole the Manifesto indicated a clear self-understanding of MRP politics as located on the political left.[21]

Small wonder that the MRP quickly emerged as a major attractive force to radicalized Catholics from all walks of life. The first general secretary of the MRP recalls his impressions of the November 1944 founding congress: 'The meeting hall was full of young, energetic, and unknown faces. . . . There were many present whom one was not used to encountering at political events of this nature. A brand new phenomenon: there were many women and likewise a substantial number of workers and farmers, for the movement had developed its roots within the popular milieux.'[22] Another cogent observer reports: 'The overwhelming majority of . . . Catholic resistance activists adhered to the MRP, to which they brought their prestige. Their presence ensured that the moment of liberation would not be accompanied by a wave of anticlericalism.'[23]

In the initial post-war months, to all intents and purposes, the MRP as a whole expressed ideas and proposed solutions which firmly placed it within the orbit of the Catholic left, although the MRP's electorate was likely far more conservative than its leadership appeared to be in the autumn and winter of 1944. But within a year, the MRP effected a collective deradicalization and quickly evolved into a mainstream Catholic organization for which the seemingly utopian longings of the initial post-liberation period soon were remembered

[21] A facsimile reproduction of 'Le Manifest du M.R.P.' can be consulted in Pierre Letamendia, *Le Mouvement Républicain Populaire. Le MRP: histoire d'un grand parti français* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995), 65.

[22] Robert Bichet, *La Démocratie chrétienne en France: le Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (Besançon: Jacques et Demontrond, 1980), 45.

[23] Letamendia, *Le MRP*, 56.

more as nightmares than as dreams. Casting doubt over the degree of conviction of earlier left radical beliefs, no serious and coordinated opposition to this rapidly moderating course emerged from within the MRP's ranks. Most ominously, from the very start the MRP may have attracted large numbers of rank-and-file Catholic resisters, but significant portions of anti-fascist Catholic intellectuals had stayed aloof. Marc Sangnier, Francisque Gay, and Étienne Borne (in addition to some politicians, such as Teitgen, Bidault, Schumann, or de Menthon) were some of the exceptions confirming this rule. But even these powerhouse figures of the intellectual French Catholic left soon developed second thoughts. Marc Sangnier, the founder and key exponent of Le Sillon, then the *spiritus rector* of Jeune République, was chosen as the MRP's honorary president. However, before long Sangnier began to express his 'desire that the MRP return to its roots, that it does not enter into compromises; he notes that the image of the movement has changed since it assumed positions of political power', reports a biographer. Francisque Gay, 'after having been removed from power [within the MRP] in 1948 was sent as ambassador to Canada, a golden exile which removed a witness who had become far too intransigent.'[24]

A full investigation of French left Catholicism in the 1940s in the political sphere would also have to highlight the trajectories of at least two other political parties: Jeune République and the Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance (UDSR).[25] But the case has been made already that, in virtually all Western European states where the forces of political Catholicism were factors to be reckoned with, the immediate post-liberation period experienced a distinct leftward shift within the Catholic camp. The degree of radicalization differed from case to case but the initial trend towards the left was unmistakable and near universal. Nowhere, however, was this leftward shift as prominent as in Italy.

[24] Madeleine Barthélemy-Madaule, *Marc Sangnier 1873–1950* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 278–9, citation on 279.

[25] On the first of these groups, surviving into the late 1950s, see Claudine Guerrier, 'La Jeune République de 1912 à 1945', thèse d'état en droit (Université de Paris II, 1979). On the UDSR in particular, see Éric Duhamel, 'L'Union démocratique et socialiste de la résistance: d'une résistance à l'autre', thèse d'histoire (Université de Paris IV, 1993).

IL GRUPPO DOSSETTIANO

The emergence of the *corrente dossettiano* within the structures of Democrazia Cristiana (DC) was no exceptional occurrence within the lifeworld of European Catholics at mid-century. But the trajectory of this particularly prominent left-wing tendency within a mainstream Catholic party did not entirely conform to the Western European norm. For, whereas elsewhere in Europe, the forces of the Catholic left diminished as the memory of liberation faded to give way to Cold War concerns, the Gruppo Dossettiano marched to a different drummer, garnering support in the course of the second half of the 1940s, reaching a (numerical) high point at the June 1949 Venice DC party congress.

The four most central and prominent individuals animating this dissident current within DC were Amintore Fanfani, Giorgio La Pira, Giuseppe Lazzati, and Giuseppe Dossetti. The eldest of this quartet of activists, Giorgio La Pira, was born in 1906, and since 1933 he had taught Roman law at the University of Florence. The three other key individuals behind this group were products of the relatively open atmosphere reigning at the Catholic University of Milan. Amintore Fanfani (1908) had taught economics at La Cattolica since 1932. Giuseppe Lazzati (1909) did not obtain a permanent teaching post until 1958, but had made a name for himself within the Milanese structures of Catholic Action. Giuseppe Dossetti, the youngest of the group (1913), was likewise associated with La Cattolica, but his leadership within the political current named after him was due to other factors.[26]

[26] On Giorgio La Pira, solid introductory biographies are: Ernesto Balducci, *Giorgio La Pira* (S. Domenico di Fiesole: Cultura della Pace, 1986), and Massimo de Giuseppe, *Giorgio La Pira: un sindaco e le vie della pace* (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2001). On Amintore Fanfani, see Giorgio Galli, *Fanfani* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Dalla pittura al pittore: itinerario di Amintore Fanfani* (Milan: Fabbri, 1987). The recent biography by Marcello Malpensa and Alessandro Parola, *Lazzati: una sentinella nelle notte (1909–1986)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), will remain the standard reference for Giuseppe Lazzati for some time to come. A full-scale biography of Giuseppe Dossetti, by contrast, is still lacking. Important building blocks towards such an overall assessment of Dossetti are: Enrico Galavotti, *Il giovane Dossetti: gli anni della formazione 1913–1939* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Salvatore Fangareggi, *Il partigiano Dossetti* (Reggio Emilia: Aliberti, 2004); Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Giuseppe Dossetti: prime prospettive e ipotesi di ricerca* (Bologna: Il Mulino,

The only prominent *dossettiano* actively involved in the anti-fascist underground, Dossetti belonged to the leadership of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) in Cavriago from its inception. From late 1944 onwards, he assumed the presidency of the all-important CLN di Reggio Emilia. Still relatively unknown when liberation came to northern Italy on 25 April 1945, he subsequently rose, comet-like, within the ranks of DC. As a representative from Reggio Emilia, in mid-May 1945 he was invited to Rome for a national gathering of DC youth. 'It was there—I was absolutely unknown at that time—that I suddenly developed a profile by expressing certain views, by displaying certain capacities as a public speaker, a certain capacity to conduct discussions, so that I was nominated to become president of this gathering of DC youth. And thus I came to the attention of the Christian Democratic heavyweights who came to express their greetings to the youth assembly,' in the words of Dossetti in an interview he gave many decades later.[27] On 3 August 1945, Dossetti was co-opted onto the DC National Council and, the very same day, he was elected deputy secretary of DC.

At this point, however, no member of the aforementioned quartet formed part of a dissenting faction. The only mildly oppositional current within DC at that time was a loose association of individuals around the journal *Politica d'oggi*, whose credentials as a left-leaning group were mostly due to their staunchly anti-monarchist views. As early as 1940, Fanfani, Lazzati, and Dossetti had formed a circle of like-minded critical Catholics at La Cattolica, but this functioned above all as a study group to investigate the tasks and perspectives of contemporary Catholicism from the vantage point of Thomist principles rather than a political opposition current. The four best-known *dossettiani*, in addition to some others in their circle of political acquaintances, notably the young Aldo Moro, in the initial post-war period made one of their first, and one of the most long-lasting, contributions to Italian politics by means of their conscientious and

1998); and, last but not least, Orioldo Mason and Roberto Villa (eds.), *Giuseppe Dossetti: il circuito delle due parole* (Portogruaro: Ediciclo, 2000).

[27] 'Intervista a Melloni', 15 November 1993, 8: Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII (FSCIRE) [Bologna], Fondo Giuseppe Dossetti, 271.

determined constructive collaboration in the drafting of the Italian constitution.

In early 1946, when the moderate and restorationist course of DC politics became the dominant political paradigm in Rome, the seeds of dissension eventually began slowly to germinate, and informal gatherings amongst a number of dissidents began to take place on an irregular schedule. By September 1946, a more formal organization began to be envisaged, and by the end of 1946 Civitas Humana, an intellectual think-tank, had seen the light of day. The first open break with party discipline occurred in December of that year, on the occasion of a debate on the usefulness of continuing the tripartite coalition with the communists and socialists, which the embryonic new left oppositionists within DC continued to defend. Paolo Pombeni locates the moment of 'a fundamental turn' in the strategy of the Dossetti group in the subsequent year.[28] Realizing, however, that it would be more difficult to reform DC's political orientation than to carry out effective change in the Italian Catholics' cultural domain, the Dossetti group, without abandoning their overtly political designs, put their energies into a new journal, *Cronache sociali*, which significantly influenced Italian public life for four important years.[29]

From 1947 to 1951, the Gruppo Dossettiano frontally challenged centrist and conservative tendencies within DC, sometimes opting to step down from party posts, sometimes accepting leadership responsibilities within DC, at other times declining such offers, including cabinet posts. They became DC's most ardent defenders of social justice, consistently attacked laissez-faire ideology, without fail defending state intervention in the economy, finally reaching an inner-party high point at the June 1949 Venice Congress of DC, where their chief motion garnered 35 per cent of the vote.[30] In a dialectic all too common for inner-party opposition groups, the *dossettiani* wavered

[28] Paolo Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano e la fondazione della democrazia italiana (1938–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979), 388. This lively study remains the most thorough investigation of the origins of the *corrente dossettiani*.

[29] On *Cronache sociali*, see Paolo Pombeni, *Le 'Cronache sociali' di Dossetti 1947–1951: geografia di un movimento di opinione* (Florence: Vallechi, 1976).

[30] Giorgio Galli and Paolo Facchi, *La sinistra democristiana: storia e ideologia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), 90–3.

between principled cooperation and overt confrontation with DC's more conservative majority, perhaps thereby ultimately undercutting their potential influence over even more significant portions of DC's membership.

The *dossettiani* never purposefully attempted to organize a distinct inner-party faction or tendency. They viewed themselves primarily as opinion shapers, cultural critics, who could turn around the ship of state by virtue of their powers of persuasion, which they would exercise in any number of contexts. After founding Civitas Humana and then *Cronache sociali*, an attempt was made, as was customary at that time, to form a support group for their journal, Amici di Cronache sociali. But the entire leadership team of the *dossettiani* remained singularly uninterested in helping to create an organized political current, and it thus remained a powerful though curiously amorphous group. The experience ended in a similarly enigmatic fashion when, in June and September 1951, Giuseppe Dossetti assembled his closest supporters for two gatherings to announce his (supposedly) total withdrawal from politics. It spelled the effective end of the *corrente dossettiano*.

For as long as it lasted, however, this current engendered much national debate within and outside of Democrazia Cristiana. An average monthly circulation of 3,000 copies sold ensured that *Cronache sociali* reached a respectable audience. Pombeni's calculations suggest that roughly 9,000 individuals at one point or another closely followed the monthly magazine for at least six months in a row.[31] Its genuinely national distribution, reaching an audience down to the level of provincial towns, ensured a resonance for its beliefs. *Cronache sociali* sold best in regions affected by at least some industrialization, where Marxist parties were forcefully present and acted as serious competitors to DC, where Catholics had been involved in the resistance, and where they had thus experienced at first hand the solid roots of the Marxist-oriented working-class left. In sociological terms, the audience of *Cronache sociali* included far more than a narrow political elite, but above all reached a young, male, intellectual readership of relatively broad proportions.[32]

[31] Pombeni, *Geografia*, 192. [32] Ibid. 150.

THE BIRTH OF THE SINISTRA CRISTIANA

Rome was the spawning ground for the two numerically and organizationally most important challenges to the political monopoly of Christian Democracy in Italy. Unsurprisingly, it was Catholic Action which proved to be a particularly receptive terrain for experimentations in the field of activist Catholicism in the capital city of Italy as well. The Catholic Action group for southern Rome (Roma-Sud), from 1937 onward, charted a new path which turned out to be *sui generis* not only for Italy. Cooperating with a Catholic student group, Dante e Leonardo, this fertile association of working-class Catholics from the poorer neighbourhoods of southern Rome rapidly evolved into a fearless opposition to Mussolini's regime. Catholic sentiments with regard to Mussolini were slowly changing in the 1930s, particularly under the influence of the alliance forged between Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, and the application of some of Germany's racial laws on Italian soil.

Adriano Ossicini, the key activist emerging from this creative confluence of Catholic Action traditions and Catholic student inquisitiveness, on 22 December 1937 gave a presentation at the Roma-Sud headquarters which is generally regarded as the opening shot in an eight-year-long campaign by what eventually became known as the Christian Left. Ossicini not only openly proclaimed the need to pass 'from moral protest to political struggle', but likewise minced no words about the odious tendency of the Vatican to support rather than oppose the fascist regime. Ossicini railed against 'the myth of political unity of all Catholics' and made clear that the most resolute opponents of Mussolini were to be found in the socialist and communist camps.[33] His followers' equally uncompromising protest against Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War further confirmed that something unusual was under way right under the nose of the Vatican in Rome.

Another group of Catholics thinking along similar lines was the circle of students from the Liceo Visconti in Rome who regularly gathered in a Marian convent directed by Jesuits. Whereas Roma-Sud

[33] Citations taken from Francesco Malgeri, *La Sinistra Cristiana (1937–1945)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1982), 18 and 20.

had roots in working-class milieux, the young critics from the Liceo Visconti were keenly interested in ideological concerns and the theoretical dimensions of their anti-fascism. The (later on) most famous individual emanating from this second group was Franco Rodano. Early in 1940, the two groups merged, and by July 1941 the young Romans founded their own political party: the Partito Cooperativista Sinarchico.[34] In subsequent years, this Catholic opposition movement frequently changed its label, in accordance with the evolution of the external circumstances of Italian politics as much as a result of tactical switches. A certain red thread, however, followed this political tendency throughout its brief lifespan, and it is to the outline of their ideology that we now turn.

MARXISM AND CATHOLICISM

The left Catholics from Roma-Sud, reinforced by the intellectual circles of Dante e Leonardo and La Scaletta, soon moved into the orbit of the PCI. But they retained a separate identity from the communist left, at least until late 1945, and they consistently retained their critical distance from one of the ideological fixed points of the communist universe in the mid-twentieth century: the belief in dialectical materialism as the overarching philosophy guiding secular activists in their pursuit of system-transcending political goals. Yet a crucial subdivision of Marxist philosophy, historical materialism, the 'science' of human history and the (r)evolution of human societies over time, was readily embraced. Without abandoning the tenets of Christian beliefs, the forces around Adriano Ossicini and Franco Rodano, reinforced by the Turin philosopher Felice Balbo who in December 1942 assumed a post in the Roman publishing house Einaudi and began to cooperate with the Sinistra Cristiana, broke through the ideological barrier between Marxism and Catholicism, without abandoning the one for the other.

[34] Ibid. 22–3, covers the story of La Scaletta, the circle emanating from networks around the Liceo Visconti, and the subsequent merger with the activists from Roma-Sud.

It is unnecessary to deny the reality of that which is not material, or to construct in a cumbersome manner a religion out of what is anti-religion, or to refuse the revelation of Christian redemption and to replace it with the utopia of a materialist redemption which is propelled by technical progress—at the same time it is necessary to recognize that the economic structures condition and determine in an all-important fashion the world of politics and that, faced with changed situations brought about by the undeniable reality of technical progress, it is necessary and incumbent that new political circumstances emerge, corresponding to those new conditions, continuously adapting and conforming to changing reality.[35]

For a Catholic grouping in the capital city of world Catholicism to proclaim the utility and value of historical materialism was a bold move indeed. We will soon see that such iconoclastic statements were followed up by equally bold practical and political moves. But before turning to the politics of daily life under Mussolini's repressive rule, some additional ideological aspects of the grouping agitating in underground Rome are worth highlighting.

In a special edition of *Voce del lavoratore*, published on 5 March 1945 in Turin, the Sinistra Cristiana, as this current is most frequently called in generic terms, having grown offshoots in Italy's industrial north, reiterated its refusal 'to accept the metaphysics of integral communism, its utopian ideology with its dangers of false redemption'; 'we have confirmed that we have by no means accepted all of Marxism, but only those aspects of it which do not stand in contradiction to Catholic doctrine';[36] but, of course, this vague statement left much room for the creative combination of what these young activists regarded as the best of the Marxist and the Christian traditions. Thus, to focus simply on one particular element of historical materialism, eagerly adapted by these young iconoclasts, the reality of class struggle was seen as endemic to all hitherto existing human societies, in open contrast to traditional Catholic social theory, even many of its progressive avatars, which explicitly and centrally avoided the use of

[35] 'Ai lavoratori di tutte le convinzioni e di tutti le fedi', *Rinnovamento sociale*, 21 May 1945, 6. *Rinnovamento sociale* was associated with the house organ of the Movimento dei Lavoratori Cristiani, *Voce del lavoratore*—in this case the Piedmont edition. On the Movimento, see below.

[36] 'Il M.C.C. nell'Italia occupata assume il nome di Movimento dei Lavoratori Cristiani', *Voce del lavoratore*, Piedmont edition, 5 March 1945, 2.

this key concept in Marxist social theory and political practice. Even towards the end of their brief lifespan, when, as we will see below, the forces around Franco Rodano and Felice Balbo conceded that they had initially placed excessive emphasis on the role of classes in human history rather than on the individual person, class struggle was by no means denied or rejected out of hand: 'One always talks as if class struggle is an invention of proletarian parties. But in reality it is crystal clear that class struggle does not arise because of a mood swing on the part of the oppressed *but because of the fact that they are oppressed*, i.e. class struggle is a product of the oppressors.'[37]

The Marxism of the forces of the Sinistra Cristiana, as developed in the course of the early 1940s, retained a certain critical distance from the official orthodox Marxism exemplified by the PCI. But what characterized the Christian Marxism of Franco Rodano and Felice Balbo—Adriano Ossicini personified the organizational and activist dimension of their group, Balbo and Rodano were responsible for most of the theoretical statements—was not so much a cumbersome and potentially contradictory admixture of elements of classical Marxism and traditional Christian beliefs. Instead, they developed a fine-tuned accentuation of Marxism, drawing on some liberatory aspects of Catholic social theory to criticize the Stalinist inflection of official PCI Marxism—without calling Stalinism by its name, of course, but not without recognizing Stalinism for what it was. A version of Marxism became the lodestar of the Sinistra Cristiana which read, in some respects, like an adaptation of some of the most far-sighted criticisms Marxism had received in the course of the 1930s from some of the key representatives of left Catholicism, such as Jacques Maritain, with the key difference being that the Italians considered themselves to be part of the Marxist tradition and not outsiders.

Though subscribing to the tenets of historical materialism, the Sinistra Cristiana adapted a version of it which, in a certain sense, anticipated a softer brand of Marxism, gradually emerging in the years of the ultimate disintegration of the Stalinist variant in the

[37] *Religione e partito* (Turin: Voce Operaia, 1945), 20; emphasis in the original. A statement critical of their earlier lack of sufficient emphasis on the role of the person as against the centrality of class can be found in the same publication on p. 36.

decades after 1968. Rather than regarding the link between economic substructures and political superstructures as a more or less mechanical relationship of cause and effect, the radical nonconformists from Roma-Sud preferred the view of the material base *conditioning* rather than determining politics, ideology, and other dimensions of the superstructure. 'Here there is no determinism whatsoever, no materialism, no fatalism; for instance, we do not in the least believe that the socialization of large monopolistic companies . . . automatically produces liberty.'[38] The argument was further elaborated and made more concrete, with Sinistra Cristiana theorists denouncing what they regarded as the debilitating determinism of orthodox communist Marxism which, in their view, would lead paradoxically to a fatalist vision: 'But there is more to our critique of Marxism than our replacement of the concept of "cause" by the term "conditioning". Deriving from this alternative, a whole host of other aspects divides us as well. In the first place the rejection of a certain kind of fatalism which traces the future development of history as something which, given actually existing preconditions, must of necessity come about in a distinct and certain fashion. We, by contrast, have absolutely no certainty that the development of industrial societies will of necessity bring about the complete proletarianization of humankind, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the end of class society.'[39]

In the best tradition of left Catholic social theory, the Italian nonconformist Sinistra Cristiana went on to stress its absolute commitment to the values of meaningful democracy as a prominent feature of the future society they were wishing to help construct. Criticizing the communist commitment to the supposedly necessary stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a stepping stone to the advent of a socialist society, the Christian communists, as they called themselves in the early 1940s, uncompromisingly stressed the inherent value of a principled commitment to an extension of democracy rather than

[38] *Religione e partito* (Turin: Voce Operaia, 1945), 15; emphasis in the original.

[39] Ibid. 16. For a vivid contribution to this discussion in more recent years, here setting E. P. Thompson, the pugnacious English social historian, against the most prominent representative of French structuralist Marxism, Louis Althusser, one may fruitfully consult E. P. Thompson's 'The Poverty of Theory or: An Orrery of Errors', in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1978), 1–210.

an—albeit temporary—reduction of democracy.[40] 'And it is because of the very same impossibility to foresee the future that we advocate a democracy which is as wide-ranging as possible,'[41] wrote the Italian iconoclasts. They repeatedly emphasized that 'we who belong to the Christian left, when we are struggling for a workers' democracy, we know that we are not battling for a dictatorship of the proletariat but, by contrast, for the elimination of all dictatorial aspirations', which, in the face of efforts to construct 'a true popular democracy', will become irrelevant as guidelines towards a future, non-alienated society.[42]

As Augusto del Noce has correctly emphasized, for the Sinistra Cristiana the world view of Karl Marx 'must not be judged as a closed system from which one derives a political and social doctrine, on the basis of which politicians, in the narrow sense of that term, discuss the various tactics in order to achieve their goals, but as a reality which is constantly in motion, open towards an unpredictable sequence of events which emerge not on the basis of an abstract dialectic, containing nothing but idealized contradictions, but on the basis of a concrete dialectic, where actually existing contradictions matter more than anything else, and which Marxism encounters in its engagements with and within the real world'.[43] With this open-ended and flexible adaptation of the meaning and the message of Marxism the ideologists of Sinistra Cristiana felt very much at ease, and they consequently saw no need to distance themselves from this philosophical tradition. Indeed, as Del Noce points out, they were

[40] The term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was originally coined by Karl Marx as a sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek description of post-capitalist society where, rather than a small minority of individuals, i.e. the bourgeoisie, perhaps still in combination with elements of the aristocracy, instead the large majority of citizens of a state, waged and salaried workers, would exercise their rule. By the early 1940s, of course, following the Stalinization of the Soviet Union and the parties belonging to the Communist International, recourse to the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' evoked visions of top-down hierarchical hyper-centralization rather than visions of emancipatory liberation. On the changing fate and meaning of this much-contested expression, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', see Hal Draper, *The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' from Marx to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review, 1987).

[41] *Religione e partito*, 17. [42] Ibid. 29–30.

[43] Augusto del Noce, 'Genesi e significato della prima sinistra cattolica italiana postfascista', in Giuseppe Rossini (ed.), *Modernismo, fascismo, communismo: aspetti e figure della cultura e della politica dei cattolici nel '900* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972), 574–5.

proud to proclaim themselves not as 'Catholics *and* Communists' but as 'Communists because of being Catholic'.[44] Or, in the words of del Noce when describing their variant of the Marxist world view: 'It was, literally, the Catholic version of Communism.'[45]

FORGING AN ANTI-FASCIST CONSENSUS?

The Sinistra Cristiana, of course, was by no means content merely to develop a more open understanding of the Marxist tradition for the modern age; above all else, they regarded themselves as political activists. Given a philosophical home base firmly ensconced within the Christian and the Marxist tradition, however, their choice of political action was bound to be somewhat unusual—at least for Catholics. 'The substantially new element introduced by our political programme, inasmuch as it is derived from a Catholic point of view, lies . . . in the decisive and revolutionary promotion of proletarian unity in close collaboration with the other political parties.'[46] Carlo Felice Casula, thus, is quite correct in his observation of the double importance of the Sinistra Cristiana within the context of Italian politics in the first half of the 1940s. The Sinistra Cristiana not only fulfilled a unique role within the lifeworld of Italian (and, one should add, European) Catholicism at that time. It also constituted an original contribution to the rich history of the Italian workers' movement.[47] In concrete terms, the Sinistra Cristiana opted for a close alliance with the PCI.

From the spring of 1942 onwards, the Sinistra Cristiana in Rome, its bastion in terms of membership and collective influence over local politics, not only closely cooperated with the local PCI but, for all practical purposes, for some time Franco Rodano was co-opted into the leadership of the Roman PCI.[48] The Partito Comunista

[44] Augusto del Noce, 568. [45] Ibid. 570.

[46] 'Ai lavoratori di tutte le convinzioni', 6.

[47] Carlo Felice Casula, *Cattolici-Comunisti e Sinistra Cristiana (1938–1945)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976), 11.

[48] Ibid. 90; Francesco Malgeri dates the integration of Rodano into the Rome PCI leadership team to the second half of 1942—see Malgeri, *Sinistra Cristiana*, 35.

Cristiano (PCC)—the name change from the somewhat esoteric Partito Cooperativista Sinarchico was effected in the summer of 1942—kept, however, its organizational independence. Actions carried out by the PCC included most notably an anti-fascist demonstration in St Peter's Square in the Vatican at Easter 1943. But their sympathies for the PCI never precluded close contacts with leading figures in the Christian Democratic Party (DC). During the forty-five days in the summer of 1943 between the dismissal and arrest of Benito Mussolini by King Victor Emmanuel on 25 July and the German occupation of Italy after the announcement of Italy's armistice with the Allies on 8 September, the renamed Sinistra Giovanile Cattolica actually attempted to carry out a two-pronged strategy, once again showcasing its organizational independence and strategic originality. Student members of the group were encouraged to orient themselves towards entrist work within DC; working-class adherents were encouraged to join the PCI.[49]

It is doubtful, however, whether many members of this group followed these directives, and this would not be the last occasion when the membership of the Sinistra Cristiana refused to follow leadership proposals. The sudden ending of what became known as the Forty-Five Days, however, ensured that all such designs soon came to naught. The forceful refusal of the DC leadership to countenance the taking up of arms against the German invaders made the (once again renamed) Movimento dei Cattolici Comunisti (MCC) pull back from overtures towards DC and reinforced its singular course. Armed actions against the Nazi occupiers were undertaken with vigour, and the MCC-led armed division, the Banda Ossicini, operated in central Italy, comprising roughly 1,000 fighters. It was now that a concerted attempt was made to spread the influence of the Sinistra Cristiana to the northern industrial heartlands of Italy. Then, in September 1944, the activists around Adriano Ossicini, Franco Rodano, and Felice Balbo adopted a final new name, Partito della Sinistra Cristiana (PSC), giving organizational expression to their renewed hopes to influence Italian politics. Activists operating in the Nazi-occupied north, however, now operated under the label Movimento dei Lavoratori Cristiani (MLC) until the summer of 1945. The

[49] Malgeri, *Sinistra Cattolica*, 47–52.

PSC/MLC hoped, on the one hand, to attract working-class elements from the broad umbrella constituted by DC. On the other hand, they thereby wished to maximize their potential influence over the all-important PCI, particularly after the latter had modified its tone in the wake of its strategic reorientation effected by what has come to be known as the *svolta di Salerno*.[50]

As was highlighted above, the Sinistra Cristiana had always criticized certain aspects of the PCI's outlook, such as its—allegedly—needless emphasis on the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary transitional stage. Another critical point was the PCI's constant emphasis on the need for revolutionary violence to bring about desired changes. The *svolta di Salerno*, ushering in a period of acceptance of the perceived need to construct a broad national anti-fascist consensus ranging from the PCI all the way to DC and King Victor Emmanuel, encouraged the Sinistra Cristiana to suggest that the PCI continue along this path towards moderation. In October 1945, for instance, the PSC, hoping to rescue the broad anti-fascist consensus which had supported the presidency of Ferruccio Parri as head of the newly reborn post-liberation Italian state, urged the PCI to consider that 'the level on which one must operate today is no longer the insurrectionary vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the concrete idea of progressive democracy, i.e. a view insisting on the collaboration of all healthy elements in our country, Catholics and non-Catholics, in order to guide the process of the democratic and working-class-oriented transformation of the state'.[51]

On 17 November 1945, the PSC's Office for Coordinated Agitation and Propaganda highlighted three crucial moments since 25 July 1943 when, from the PSC's point of view, the PCI had engaged in sectarian behaviour, when 'the Communists, despite having taken various initiatives, three times in a row missed the chance to establish themselves as the party of government, i.e. as a party that would know how to carry through to the end the process of the democratization of the country—and all this because of their ideologically closed

[50] Del Noce, 'Prima sinistra cattolica', 615.

[51] Partito della Sinistra Cristiana, Circolare No. 11, 'Oggetto: aprendo la classe operaia si possono collegare le forze sane e democratiche del paese', 25 October 1945, 2: Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ILS) [Rome], Fondo Partito della Sinistra Cristiana (PSC), scatola 1, fascicolo B 4/2, carta 12.

mentality'.[52] Under the favourable circumstances of post-liberation national unity sentiments, partially enabled by the PCI's *svolta di Salerno*, the PSC saw its most crucial task to be the exertion of pressure on the PCI to rid itself of its insurrectionary mentality. 'Our party must know how to do so, it must be ready to correct the PCI's erroneous insistence on the politics of class, it must push for the creation of a corresponding mentality, which, overcoming the party's ideological predispositions, will permit the free unfolding of a politics of national solidarity, devoid of unnecessary hesitations and cumbersome legacies of the past.'[53]

THE ROAD TOWARDS SELF-DISSOLUTION OF THE PSC

The Sinistra Cristiana, then, certainly in its final incarnation as the PSC, performed the role of a lobbying group pushing for continued moderation on the part of its preferred alliance partner in the circumstances of Italian post-liberation politics. It had not always played such a role. 'Under conditions of clandestinity, the Movimento dei Cattolici Comunisti served to uncover and reveal the conservative role of Democrazia Cristiana, to deconstruct their rightist position varnished with leftist verbiage. Under conditions of legality, it became necessary to review our positions and to adopt new ones that were broader, more open, in order to give our party a wider platform that could accommodate the largest possible numbers of Catholic working-class members.'[54] Francesco Malgeri underscores the pioneering role of the Movimento dei Lavoratori Cristiani, the PSC's sister organization in the Nazi-occupied north, in moderating the Sinistra Cristiana's outlook. The MLC was the first to tone down criticism of the Catholic Church's hierarchy; it was the first to

[52] Partito della Sinistra Cristiana, Circolare No. 15, 22 November 1945, 1: ILS, PSC, sc. 1, fasc. B 4/2, c. 21.

[53] Partito della Sinistra Cristiana, Circolare No. 8, 'Oggetto: con il PC così come è non si ricostruisce', 16 October 1945, 2: ILS, PSC, sc. 1, fasc. B 4/2, c. 13.

[54] Adriano Ossicini [?], 'Memoriale per i compagni del Nord': ILS, PSC, sc. 1, fasc. B 4/1, c. 15.

de-emphasize the necessity of wide-ranging socialization; it was the first to highlight the crucial contributions to be expected from small-scale private property holders; it was the first to tone down criticism of DC.[55] In some respects, the moderation of the PSC, propelled by its MLC affiliate in the north, anticipated the evolution of its preferred interlocutor: the PCI. And, indeed, attention now shifted definitively towards the vast network of forces organized by the PCI.

It thus came as little surprise that the final act of the grouping which had started in the bosom of Catholic Action in Rome was its auto-dissolution as an independent organization and a recommendation for all members to join the PCI, a decision taken at an extraordinary congress held in December 1945. When the hope of attracting working-class members from the ranks of DC failed to materialize, and when it seemed that the politics of national unity was giving way to the predominance of openly reactionary forces, it appeared that the best way forward for the PSC was to effect an organizational fusion with the key political party deemed to be consistently democratic.[56] Francesco Malgeri suggests that one additional—though closely related—rationale for the merger of the PSC with the incomparably larger forces of the PCI was the PSC's anxiety that its continued independent existence might serve as yet another point of contention, driving a wedge between the two key elements necessary for any stable politics of national unity: the PCI and DC.[57]

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNISTS

What was the balance sheet of the peculiar trajectory of the Sinistra Cristiana from Catholic Action to PCI? Organizationally, in terms of numbers, it never played a more than marginal role—with the sole exception of underground Rome. In the final stages of resistance

[55] Malgeri, *Sinistra Cristiana*, 151.
[56] Del Noce, 'Prima sinistra cattolica', 615.
[57] Malgeri, *Sinistra Cristiana*, 189.

prior to the liberation of Rome, the MCC grouping in the capital city could count on 1,000 committed supporters, with the largest Roman underground grouping, the PCI, claiming no more than 3,000.[58] And Rome remained the flagship section of the Sinistra Cristiana in the year and a half of its post-liberation existence. Outside Rome, the PSC had a certain working-class presence solely in Milan.[59] Other than in Lombardy and Piedmont (Turin), the PSC had some local strongholds in parts of Lazio and in several communities in Umbria.[60] Elsewhere, it was mostly due to the devotion of isolated individuals that the forces of the PSC were present at a local level at all. In general, however, what a report from the Adriatic town of Rimini suggested for the fate of the Sinistra Cristiana probably held true for most, if not all, other locations with a PSC presence. In Rimini, the PSC had directed most of its efforts towards left-leaning factions within the local DC, 'but this work has not netted us the hoped-for results'. By contrast, the PSC actions and political orientations had gained it much sympathy within the ranks of the local PCI.[61] But expressions of sympathy did not translate into organizational gains. A report on PSC activists in their two strongholds in the industrial north, Turin and Milan, graphically underscored the potential and the limitations of PSC work. 'The political reality here, as in Turin,' wrote Vincenzo Emiliano from Milan, 'is characterized by a most remarkable ferment of situations reflecting the spirit of the Christian left, situations which emerge spontaneously and which would need to be immediately taken advantage of and given concrete shape. But unfortunately we have few cadres, and slowly but surely the frustrations are rising because of the material impossibility of reaping the seemingly bountiful harvest.'[62]

The real contribution of the short but colourful lifespan of the Sinistra Cristiana was not so much the provision of an organizational and institutional framework for concrete analysis, but instead the creation of an intellectual and ideological tradition *sui generis*: the

[58] Casula, *Cattolici-Comunisti*, 131.

[59] Malgeri, *Sinistra Cristiana*, 208.

[60] Ibid. 239.

[61] Partito della Sinistra Cristiana (Comunisti-Cristiani), Sezione di Rimini, 'Alla Segretaria Politica del PSC', 30 May 1945, 1: ILS, PSC, sc. 5, fasc. B 27, c. 20.

[62] Letter by Vincenzo Emiliano to Adriano Ossicini, added handwritten notation: 'giulio–agosto ? [*sic*] 1945', 1: ILS, PSC, sc. 6, fasc. B 32, c. 8.

attempt to create a synthesis of Marxist and Christian traditions, leading to a non-deterministic understanding of Marxism which stood in the tradition of nonconformist thinkers such as Ernst Bloch, the early Georg Lukács, or the pre-1935 Hendrik de Man, with the added dimension of a liberal sprinkling of basic tenets of Christian beliefs. It was a potent mixture which would find a fitting complement only in some of the bolder elaborations emanating from Latin America in the wake of Vatican II. Perhaps its most immediate legacy was the validation of the communist tradition as worthy of acclaim and deserving the full support of Catholics who take their faith seriously. To those detractors who accused the PSC of paving the way for the victory of godless, atheistic Marxism, the Sinistra Cristiana merely responded that, 'naturally, we cannot ever approve or justify any type of excess, any persecution, any propaganda'. But they then went on to suggest that 'the crimes of communism, seen in a larger historical perspective, pale in comparison to the much bigger wrong effected by the frequently prevailing identification of Catholicism with oppression'.[63]

THE PARTITO CRISTIANO-SOCIALE

Rome was likewise the spawning ground of the second Catholic political party which served as an alternative to the mainstream DC: the Partito Cristiano-Sociale (PCS). Unlike the Sinistra Cristiana, which had at least three equally respected leadership figures—Adriano Ossicini, Franco Rodano, and Felice Balbo—the PSC was dominated by one individual: Gerardo Bruni. Employed in the Vatican Library, where he worked side by side with another 'librarian', Alcide de Gasperi, Bruni began to develop a number of original ideas in the late 1930s, aiming to assemble a cohort of like-minded supporters of a distinct set of political and social initiatives.[64] The decisive step towards the institutionalization of Bruni's ideas was the November

[63] 'Ai lavoratori di tutte le convinzioni', 6.

[64] The 'prehistory' of the PCS is surveyed in Antonio Parisella, *Il Partito Cristiano-Sociale 1939–1948* (Rome: Biblioteca di Studi Cristiano-Sociale, 1984), 1–8.

1941 official founding of what was at first called the Movimento Cristiano-Sociale.[65] What was the contribution of Gerardo Bruni to the kaleidoscope of Italian Catholic parties? How did the PCS differ from both PSC and DC?

As was only natural in times of clandestinity, there were countless personal connections between exponents of all three Italian Catholic parties operating in underground Italy, and indeed DC—or portions of DC—repeatedly offered the PCS a place under their much larger umbrella. But strict organizational autonomy from DC remained a constant during the life of the PCS. In 1944, for instance, a PCS bulletin summarized its view of DC politics in the following short and precise manner: 'The difference between us and Democrazia Cristiana can, *grosso modo*, be described as: (a) lack of direction on the part of DC with regard to the problem of institutions', a reference to DC's unconditional commitment to parliamentary democracy and its hesitations with regard to the future of the monarchy; '(b) imprecision of its programme vis-à-vis the issue of economic reforms; (c) given the interests it is representing, both in lay and ecclesiastical circles, and given the milieux from which it draws cadres, DC is in fact fatally condemned to effect a conservative politics, even if its programmatic statements read differently. This feature alone defines it as a reformist party of the Centre; (d) dependency of DC politics on the politics emanating from Vatican circles.'[66] In another document an identical judgement is expressed in only slightly different terms. DC was regarded as 'predestined, if perhaps involuntarily, if perhaps against its own will, to function as a predominantly conservative organism within the social and economic spheres as much as in the area of [political] institutions'.[67]

If DC never became a serious option, which other allies did the PCS then seek out? Unlike the Sinistra Cristiana, which had always gravitated towards the PCI, the forces behind Gerardo Bruni were immune to the temptations of the communist alternative. Indeed,

[65] Ibid. 8.

[66] 'Bolletino 1944—No. 2', 'Formazione di propagandisti', 1: Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso (FLLB) [Rome], Archivio Gerardo Bruni (AGB), busta 48, fascicolo 1-III.

[67] 'Relazione sulla politica del Partito Cristiano Sociale e i suoi rapporti con la Democrazia Cristiana', 2: FLLB, AGB, b. 45, f. 5-I.

whereas the Sinistra Cristiana embraced historical materialism, while retaining a critical distance towards dialectical materialism, the PCS rejected Marxism *tout court*. Without distinguishing between historical and dialectical materialism Gerardo Bruni openly proclaimed, in the name of the PCS, 'its fundamental aversion to the design of Marxist socialism to introduce a system of truths onto the terrain of politics and civil society which is already totally worked out, internally coherent, and closed to outside influences: a metaphysics, a theology, a dogmatic system'.[68] Historian Guido Verucci has suggested that the PCS's understanding of Marxism was essentially based on interpretations mediated by the secondary literature rather than on the classics of Marxism itself.[69] Such a reliance on hearsay rather than the actual sources themselves, of course, at the very least indicates a lack of serious interest in the Marxist tradition. Where Bruni's criticism reads more convincingly is in his critique of the actually existing communist regime, though even here criticism is expressed in abstract terms vis-à-vis the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as such: 'The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat denotes the system of state capitalism which will replace the regime of private capitalism. Here the workers, the erstwhile slaves, will remain slaves, under the omnipotent, anonymous, and tyrannical rule of an armada of bureaucrats. The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat—a dictatorship where the proletariat is solely a straw man and an instrument—is in effect a dictatorship of the party,'[70] an apt description of Soviet life rather than a description of Karl Marx's vision of a post-capitalist future.

The most challenging aspect of the PCS's programmatic outlook, then, was neither its critique of DC's implicit conservatism nor its castigation of Stalinist dystopia mistaken for the essence of communism *tout court*. Instead, it was the PCS's blueprint for a future non-alienated society which makes the Partito Cristiano-Sociale rewarding

[68] Gerardo Bruni, *Socialismo Cristiano* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1946), 6.

[69] Guido Verucci, 'I cristiano-sociali e la cultura politica del movimento cattolico', in Antonio Parisella (ed.), *Gerardo Bruni e i Cristiano-Sociali* (Rome: Lavoro, 1984), 64.

[70] 'Linee programmatiche del PCS', summer 1944, 11: ILS, PSC, sc. 1, fasc. A1, c. 21.

investigatory terrain. For top-down hierarchical private and state capitalism was contrasted with a system of decentralized communal self-government which Gerardo Bruni, like most left Catholics in Italy at that time deeply influenced by Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, called 'personalist socialism', a socio-economic and political system where 'economic administration is not in principle based on the bureaucracies of public entities, but on the person of the labourer, so that labouring activities are no longer solely a means to obtain a wage and to make a living but simultaneously an inspiration for productive energies and spiritual elevation'.[71] The PCS envisioned a future society in which 'management of productive efforts must by all means be autonomous, free, and decentralized'[72] or, as they put it in their 'Programmatic Outlines': 'Individualistic liberalism seeks to resolve the problem of liberty by rescuing it from virtually all forms of regulation; absolutism does so by suppressing it altogether. The Partito Cristiano-Sociale is striving to make it conform to the rules of social justice and to install within it the criterion of *progressive self-government*.'[73] 'We intend to proceed towards a true and genuine *economic democracy*,' wrote the Partito Cristiano-Sociale leadership in a letter to the Vatican Secretary of State, Giovanni Battista Montini: 'Our anti-capitalism is radical. More radical than that of the communists, as the latter merely replace one capitalism with another.'[74]

Given this vision of a decentralized future society of self-governing individuals and communities, it came as little surprise when, in 1946, Gerardo Bruni gained an important ally in Adriano Olivetti, heir to the Olivetti office machine fortune. Olivetti's personal philosophy had evolved in the direction of advocacy of a communitarian ideology similar to the defining tradition of the PCS. And from the late summer of 1946 until the late spring of 1947, the financial resources of the Olivetti empire were employed in the service of the Partito

[71] Ibid. 12.

[72] 'Il nostro programma', 1943, 1: FLLB, AGB, b. 42-II, fasc. 1-I.

[73] 'Linee programmatiche', 13; emphasis in the original.

[74] Commissione Centrale Provvisoria del Movimento Sociale Cristiano to Mons. Giovanni Battista Montini, 27 April 1943, 1; emphasis in the original: FLLB, AGB, b. 42-II, fasc. 2-c.

Cristiano-Sociale cause,[75] which was to some extent the product of the intellectual marriage of Emmanuel Mounier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. For the quickest way to give concrete expression to the desirable goal of overcoming the inequities of capitalism, the Partito Cristiano-Sociale contended, lay in 'the generalization, as far as possible, of the institution of private property'. 'We are convinced that the institution of private property—for an impoverished environment such as ours—constitutes the most appropriate means which we must above all else employ in order to come close to fulfilling the purpose of an economy which, as the Holy Father has reminded us, lies in making it possible for everyone to benefit from the use of material goods.'[76] How precisely the spread of private property was to lead to autonomous, self-governing communities of free individuals was no more satisfactorily resolved by Gerardo Bruni than by Proudhon but, faced with the only other actually existing alternative to the prevailing system of free enterprise, the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, Soviet style, the PCS's stress on self-governing communities as the basic building blocks of a non-alienated society was likely to have been an appealing one. And, indeed, in the most detailed blueprint of such a vision, Adriano Olivetti's *L'idea di una communità concreta*, the emphasis clearly lay on communal decision-making procedures rather than on the supposed virtues of 'generalized private property'.[77]

Antonio Parisella at one point summarizes Gerardo Bruni's political philosophy in the following telegram-style manner: 'centrality of the person, value of civil society, limits to state power, diffusion of property, etc.'[78] In most countries at most times, such views would rarely elicit much excitement or controversy. In the concrete conditions of Italy in the final years of the *ventennio*, under Nazi occupation, and in the immediate post-liberation period such a combination

[75] On the short-lived cooperation between Gerardo Bruni and Adriano Olivetti, see Valerio Occhetto, 'Il difficile rapporto con Adriano Olivetti', in Parisella (ed.), *Gerardo Bruni*, 275–88.

[76] Movimento Sociale Cristiano to Mons. Montini, 1.

[77] Adriano Olivetti, *L'idea di una comunità concreta* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1950).

[78] Parisella, *Il Partito*, 12.

of factors could and did lead to the formation of an independently operating political party.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL TRAJECTORY OF THE PCS

The organizational trajectory of the PCS can be summarized in relatively few paragraphs. The strongholds of the party were, on the whole, the province of Venetia and the Toscana, although even here the real impact of the PCS was felt most strongly in a few specific, if not unimportant, locations. From late 1942 onwards, Treviso became a showcase example of local influence of the PCS, undoubtedly profiting from the support of an influential former MP for the Partito Popolare, Italico Corradino Cappellotto. Livorno was the equivalent bastion of PCS power in the Toscana. The Genovese Paolo Emilio Taviani had played a certain role in the founding of the Livorno branch of the PCS, and Genoa was an early stronghold of the PCS as well.[79] But the Genoa grouping is rarely listed as a notable bastion of the PCS, in all likelihood suffering the consequences of Taviani's subsequent move into the orbit of DC. An undated summary of PCS activities with a handwritten notation '1944–1945' suggests instead that at that particular time the famous Tuscan hilltop town of Montepulciano had become another centre of Partito Cristiano-Sociale activity.[80] At any rate, Treviso and Livorno remained the flagship sections of the PCS into the post-war period, and it was in those locations that the PCS had a prominent presence within the National Liberation Committees as well.

National Liberation Committees (CLN) in Italy were underground resistance structures typical of those throughout occupied Europe. Often composed of representatives from the locally most influential resistance groupings, they constituted umbrella organizations at a local, regional, and national level with the express task of coordinating the military resistance and preparing for the post-liberation period. CLNs were to play (and did indeed play) key roles as

[79] Ibid. 11–14.

[80] 'Partito Cristiano Sociale', handwritten notation, '1944–1945', appended to the first page: FLLB, AGB, b. 42, Part II, 4-n.

governing authorities in the weeks prior to and following the actual moment of liberation. Had the CLNs been constituted in proportion to the actual local or regional strength of underground organizations, they could have played an important role as organs of popular self-government in the course and in the wake of actual liberation. However, a series of agreements on a national level amongst the most important political parties led to a situation where, with few exceptions, only members of organizations belonging to the groupings that had been included in these national pacts were permitted to hold seats in regional and, indeed, local CLNs—regardless of the actual relationship of forces at a local level.[81]

Neither the PCS nor the PSC had been included in the national agreements pertaining to the constitution of Italian CLNs. Thus, both organizations (but others as well) often found themselves excluded from local CLNs despite a visible presence in a given local underground. The PSC, a notable presence in Rome, for instance, was consistently denied a seat on the Roman CLN. And a similar policy of exclusion applied to the PCS as well. By contrast, local representatives and spokespersons for one of the five (later six) national organizations that had managed to gain voice and vote within the national, all-Italian Central Committee of National Liberation (CCLN) were oftentimes quasi-automatically allotted seats even in those local CLNs where they had had virtually no presence on the ground.

It is a sign of the unusual local strength and implantation of the PCS that their forces were nonetheless given representation within a certain number of CLNs.[82] Most notably this was the case in Treviso and Livorno. In Treviso, indeed, the PCS held the presidency of the provincial CLN, undoubtedly a consequence of the local prominence

[81] For a discussion of the Europe-wide relevance of such underground umbrella groups and some of the contentious issues associated with this mode of political 'business' not-quite-as-usual, see Gerd-Rainer Horn, 'Decentralizzare il potere: la Liberazione nell'Europa occidentale', in Eric Gobetti (ed.), *1943–1945: La lunga liberazione* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007), 195–210.

[82] The PSC, too, had occasionally broken through the artificial barriers imposed by national agreements in a few locations, though mostly in small towns or in certain neighbourhood CLNs, especially in the Milan area and in certain parts of Rome, but never in an important regional centre itself.

of Cappellotto.[83] In Livorno, the PCS had been for practical purposes the sole organized Catholic force in the anti-fascist underground, and the PCS—until some time after liberation—was thus the sole Catholic grouping represented on the Livorno CLN. Perhaps in part because of this peculiar infraction of national rules, the Livorno CLN also included within its ranks other locally important organizations which were excluded from most other CLNs, including the locally and regionally strongly implanted anarchists. And Livorno became an important location whence significant initiatives for a post-liberation survival of CLNs arose.[84]

If the PSC oriented towards the PCI, the PCS focused on the non-communist left as potential allies. On 4 October 1943, the PCS signed a cooperation agreement with the Socialist Party.[85] In the Toscana, the PCS entered a similar pact with the Partito d'Azione.[86] The organizational high point of sorts for the Partito Cristiano-Sociale was undoubtedly provided by the election of Gerardo Bruni to the Constituent Assembly of the post-liberation Italian state on 2 June 1946. But undoubtedly the victory celebrations left a bittersweet aftertaste. For the Partito Cristiano-Sociale had merely obtained 0.2 per cent of the vote (51.088), and it was solely due to the particular election mechanism of this first post-Mussolini national electoral contest that Gerardo Bruni could obtain his seat.[87] The 18 April 1948 parliamentary elections spelled the organizational endpoint of meaningful participation by the PCS in Italian national politics. The party's 46 per cent increase in its total vote merely increased its electoral supporters to a paltry 73,064, far below the minimum number of voters

[83] Parisella, *Il Partito*, 20. On the Treviso local of the PCS, see above all Luigi Urettini, 'I cristiano-sociale di Treviso', in Parisella (ed.), *Gerardo Bruni*, 211–21.

[84] On the Livorno PCS, see Luciano Merlini, 'Il gruppo cristiano-sociale in Livorno', in Parisella (ed.), *Gerardo Bruni*, 157–75; on the iconoclastic composition of the Treviso CLN, see Parisella, *Il Partito*, 27; on CLN initiatives for a greater say for CLNs in post-liberation Italian democracy, see Luciano Merlini, 'Su un progetto di assemblea legislative dei CLN', *Dimensioni* (Livorno), 3/8 (September 1978), 29–40. I thank Marco Giovanetti for transmitting me a copy of this informative and intriguing article by a former member of the Livorno underground and the PCS.

[85] A typewritten, untitled document to that effect suggests 4 October as the date of the agreement extant in FLLB, AGB, b. 42, Part II, 4-b. Antonio Parisella, *Il Partito*, 31, mentions 6 October 1943.

[86] Parisella, *Il Partito*, 32.

[87] Ibid. 61.

necessary for inclusion of minor parties in the incoming parliament: 157,887.[88]

Henceforth the PCS, which continued to operate as an independent force for more than a decade, played a role solely on the fringes of the Italian left. The extant documentation in the Gerardo Bruni Archive in Rome makes clear that the PCS continued to work towards unity agreements with various forces on the nonconformist, non-communist left, putting out feelers towards the Socialist and Social Democrat parties. But a rapid succession of such initiatives and the frequently shifting composition of the targeted potential allies merely underscores their lack of real success. If the first major organizational initiative outside DC, the Christian Left, wound up merging its tiny forces into the gigantic PCI six months after the end of the war, the PCS died a far slower death. Both PCS and PSC, however, left few tangible marks on Italian politics after the Resistance period had come to a close.

DON PRIMO MAZZOLARI

The Christian Left and the Partito Cristiano-Sociale were the most visible alternative to DC on the national playing field, although even the PSC and PCS had no truly national organizational presence. The two movements which are the subject of the closing sections of this chapter were even less obviously *national* organizations of the Catholic left. Neither one claimed such a mantle, indeed neither movement openly proclaimed itself to be a political organization at all. Both movements were localized affairs emerging from the political cauldron of the Emilia Romagna which had seen tremendous social movements organized by the anti-fascist underground and where the post-liberation period witnessed many reprisals on both sides of the political divide.[89] Both movements, however, in some form antedated

[88] Parisella, *Il Partito*, 77–8.

[89] On the resistance in Emilia Romagna, see the exhaustive four-volume study *L'Emilia-Romagna nella guerra di liberazione* (Bari: De Donato, 1975–6); for the Emilia-Romagna as a post-war hotbed of political radicalism, see the two case studies by Massimo Storchi, *Uscire dalla guerra: ordine pubblico e forze politiche: Modena*

and survived the high point of organizational efforts in the early 1950s. For both movements were intimately intertwined with the life and times of charismatic Catholic priests.

Don Primo Mazzolari had fallen foul of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities as early as the 1920s. An inquisitive and fearless man, as parish priest in Cicognara in the Cremona diocese, he had refused the requests of local fascist strongmen to hold a special event in the parish church, bedecked with fascist insignia and accompanied by the Te Deum, after a failed assassination attempt on Benito Mussolini on 4 November 1925. Hauled in front of the prosecuting attorney, Mazzolari was eventually released in large part due to the intervention of the Bishop of Cremona.[90] It was merely the first of many increasingly hostile encounters with the forces of the fascist state. An avid writer, continuously penning articles and books throughout his long career, Mazzolari had openly come out against fascism already prior to the March on Rome. When, on 9 July 1932, he arrived to take up his new post in Bozzolo, near Cicognara, also part of the Cremona diocese, the parishioners received him 'with curiosity and timid respect'.[91] A seemingly ceaseless string of speaking engagements supplemented his numerous writings, making Don Primo Mazzolari—and his views!—well known throughout Italy by the Catholic public which cared to stay informed.[92]

Like virtually all progressive Italian Catholic thinkers of this era, Mazzolari closely followed the developments affecting Catholic theology and Catholic activism in France. Subscribing to *La Vie intellectuelle*, *Esprit*, *Sept*, and, later, *Témoignage chrétien*, Mazzolari stayed on top of the intellectual ferment in French Catholicism, and his writings readily reflect the influence of Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Marie-Dominique Chenu, François Mauriac, or Charles Péguy. In April 1934, at a crucial time in the development of what detractors later on termed *la nouvelle théologie*, Don Primo Mazzolari

1945–1946 (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995), and *Combattere si può vincere bisogna: la scelta della violenza fra resistenza e dopoguerra (Reggio Emilia 1943–1946)* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998), as well as Nazario Sauri Onofri, *Il triangolo rosso (1943–1947): la verità sul dopoguerra in Emilia-Romagna attraverso i documenti d'archivio* (Rome: Sapere 2000, 1994).

[90] Arturo Chiodi, *Primo Mazzolari: un testimone 'in Christo' con l'anima del profeta* (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 1998), 35–6.

[91] Ibid. 41. [92] Ibid. 43 and 59.

first encountered the openly expressed hostility of church authorities. His first book-length publication, *La più bella avventura*, was written in the spirit of defence of an ecumenical approach towards contemporary problems of faith and belief.[93] A somewhat precocious step in the direction of ecumenism, soon to be popularized by Yves Congar in neighbouring France, the Holy Office intervened on 5 February 1935 and ordered the removal of this book from sale, delivering for good measure an official 'admonition' to the author, and asking diocesan authorities to keep close watch over this strong-willed local priest.[94] Further intervention by fascist and ecclesiastical hierarchies continued to make Mazzolari's life difficult,[95] and after 1941 Mazzolari's anti-fascism 'now assumed an openly political dimension, going beyond the essentially religious and moral' opposition of earlier years. He entered into contact with underground opposition figures.[96] Surviving two arrests and interrogations in February and July 1944, on 31 August 1944 Don Primo Mazzolari went into hiding until 25 April 1945.[97]

A PREACHER IN THE PIAZZA

From 1945 until 1948 Mazzolari gave full support to DC, but his engagements in favour of the mainstream tendency of post-war Italian political Catholicism were based on hopes that the radical wing favouring wide-ranging social reforms would soon be in the ascendancy. A 1945 programmatic platform proposal for DC by Mazzolari included the assertion that 'we no longer want to endure, even for

[93] Primo Mazzolari, *La più bella avventura: sulla traccia del prodigo* (Brescia: Vittorio Gatti, 1934).

[94] Chiodi, *Primo Mazzolari*, 47–9, covers the basics of this controversy. In his entry for this book in his encyclopedia of Mazzolari's writings, Aldo Bergamaschi furnishes a detailed overview of this affair; see his *Presenza di Mazzolari: un contestatore per tutte le stagione* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1986), 168–76. For key documents pertaining to this first encounter with the opposition from the Holy See, note Primo Mazzolari, *Obbedientissimo in Christo . . . : lettere al Vescovo 1917–1959* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1996), 99–127.

[95] Note, here, the chapter entitled 'Le due censure: nuove intervento del Sant'Uffizio', in Mazzolari, *Obbedientissimo*, 129–74.

[96] Chiodi, *Primo Mazzolari*, 59–60, citation on 60.

[97] Ibid. 66–9.

just one more day, the oppression of capitalism, that inhumane and anti-Christian construct'. His proposal called for far-reaching land reform, demanding 'socialization', 'co-participation', and 'cooperative ventures'. Large- and medium-scale industrial concerns were to be socialized, and the distribution of goods was also to be carried out by 'cooperative institutions'.[98]

In the meantime, Don Primo continued his frenetic publishing activity and speaking engagements. As a leading Catholic intellectual, Mazzolari could be found, for instance, as a lecturer at a week-long retreat devoted to 'religious culture', sponsored by the Catholic Action Association of University Graduates in Milan. This event, which also included presentations by the leading trinity of *dossettiani*, Giuseppe Dossetti, Giuseppe Lazzati, and Giorgio La Pira, opened with a speech on 'Introductions to the Problems of the Church' by the pugnacious parish priest from Bozzolo.[99] Yet Don Mazzolari's fame went beyond his learned disquisitions alongside other leading figures of the Catholic faith in study circles and retreats.

His popularity was, in large part, due to his penchant for speaking engagements in the open air. Living and working as a parish priest in one of the 'reddest' areas of northern Italy, Mazzolari took special delight in public debates with figures on the secular left. Two days before the crucial national elections of 18 April 1948, he publicly debated with the PCI candidate for Mantua in the town's central Piazza Sordello.[100] In late October 1947, to mention but one other famous event, Mazzolari gave a series of public speeches in Bologna. The first two were devoted to the topic of 'The Christian Revolution' and the third was simply headed 'Comrade Christ'. A newspaper report on the second talk recorded an audience of 5,000 present in the Church of SS Annunziata. A note at the end of this conference report reminded readers that the third and last allocution by Mazzolari would not be held in the Sala Farnese, as had been originally planned, but again in the Church of SS Annunziata, as the Sala Farnese would

[98] Unpublished manuscript, here cited from a 1976 reproduction: Fondazione Don Primo Mazzolari (FPM) [Bozzolo], Archivio Don Primo Mazzolari (APM), 1.3.1.701.

[99] 'Programma del corso di cultura religiosa che si terrà a Milano dal 17 al 22 novembre 1947': FPM, APM, 1.3.1.822.

[100] Note the document pertaining to this event: FPM, APM, 1.3.1.854.

not be able to accommodate the expected huge crowd. Guesstimates for attendance at Don Mazzolari's speech on 'Comrade Christ' are lacking, but a newspaper clipping suggests that 'the Temple of SS Annunziata was literally wedged full with a huge crowd: men, women, belonging to all social strata and to all faiths and convictions'. A captivated audience listened to Mazzolari's speech, followed by the planned response by a local anarchist.[101]

Photographic evidence attests to Mazzolari's ability to attract huge crowds. A photo in the weekly paper of the Cremona diocese, *Vita cattolica*, for instance, shows a throng of people, mostly young Catholics, on a major square listening to the orator.[102] But public debates with representatives of the radical left were Mazzolari's speciality. To this day surviving eyewitnesses of a particularly memorable encounter in Mantua's Piazza delle Erbe recount the following encounter with particular satisfaction and a broad smile. A debate in front of the Palazzo delle Ragione pitted Don Mazzolari against a leading local anarchist, Titto Foti. Respectful towards each other from the very beginning, the speakers grew more familiar with each other in the course of the tumultuous debate. Finally, to the onlookers' great surprise, the initially rather distant speakers wound up embracing each other on the public stage.[103]

Don Primo Mazzolari is well known for his theological publications and reflections which, from the 1930s onwards, touched on themes familiar to readers of the preceding chapter: a widening conception of the Church, a greater role for the laity, a more central attention to the plight of the poor, the recognition of the separate existence of the spiritual and temporal spheres coupled with an exhortation of the need to insert the spiritual *into* the temporal sphere, the theology of incarnation, a theology of labour, and a theology of terrestrial

[101] Various materials pertaining to this series of speeches in Bologna can be found in FPM, APM, 1.3.1.820, including the official flyer announcing the events, various newspaper clippings, including the report on the debate on the subject of 'Comrade Christ', headed 'Anarchici e comunisti a contradditorio con Don Mazzolari'.

[102] 'La gioventù cristiana lavoratrice ha riportata il sorriso nelle nostre piazze', *Vita Cattolica*, 8 April 1948: FPM, APM, 1.3.1.851.

[103] The handwritten text of Mazzolari's speech at this occasion can be consulted in FPM, APM, 1.3.1.788. My account of the proceedings on stage follows the storyline told to the author on 8 April 2002 in Bozzolo by a lifelong resident and parishioner in Bozzolo, Aldo Compagnioni, who was present at the Mantua event.

realities.[104] But in the context of this chapter the focus will remain on the political dimension of radical Catholicism in the 1940s. And here the high point of Don Mazzolari's ceaseless activism was without doubt the 7 January 1951 conference of the Christian Vanguards.

PREPARING AN EVENT

Until roughly 1948 Don Primo gave open political support to the forces gathered under the umbrella of DC. But his patience finally ran out, and it is without doubt due to this growing estrangement from mainstream Italian political Catholicism that Mazzolari decided to supplement his frequent articles and monographs with a journal under his control. First based in Modena, *Adesso* quickly became a leading journal of the Italian Catholic left, further extending the colourful kaleidoscope of Catholic left-of-centre publications which could be found in kiosks throughout Italy in the post-liberation period, such as the Genovese *Il gallo*, the Roman *La via*, or *Cronache sociali*, which we encountered earlier in this chapter. The first issue of *Adesso* hit the stands on 15 January 1949. For the ten years in which Mazzolari was associated with the journal, the average print run hovered around the 4,000 mark, with 2,500 subscriptions providing the backbone of support.[105]

But ever the restless activist, Mazzolari soon widened his activities. Acutely aware of the growing sense of alienation of 'many persons and a fair number of Christian groups' who may still have been formally

[104] On the wealth of publications on the theology of Mazzolari, I have found Giorgio Campanini, *Don Primo Mazzolari fra religione e politica* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1989), who covers Mazzolari's contribution to the discussion of the abovementioned themes, to be particularly useful. For Mazzolari's theology of labour, left largely untouched in Campanini's study, note the important second section in Primo Mazzolari's 1945 masterpiece, *Rivoluzione Cristiana* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1995), 83–127.

[105] Paolo Trionfini, 'Gli uomini e le fortune di Adesso: la diffusione, i collaboratori, la risonanza', in Giorgio Campanini and Matteo Truffelli (eds.), *Mazzolari e 'Adesso': cinquant'anni dopo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2000), 163. Other important studies of *Adesso* I was able to consult include Mariangelo Maraviglia, *Chiesa e storia in Adesso (1949–1959)* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1991), and Lorenzo Bedeschi, *L'ultima battaglia di Don Mazzolari: 'Adesso' 1949–1959* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1990).

attached to DC and Catholic Action but 'who no longer feel at home within the two grand organizations of Italian Catholicism', Mazzolari, on 15 October 1950, launched a new organizational initiative, the Christian Vanguards, in the pages of *Adesso*.[106] In the ensuing weeks a hectic organizing effort ensued. Nando Fabro, the equally indefatigable Genovese publisher of *Il gallo*, became an important point of support outside Mazzolari's home diocese of Cremona, the province of Mantua, and the neighbouring provinces of the Emilia Romagna, where the conference of the Christian Vanguards was eventually held. A frequent epistolary interlocutor of Mazzolari at this time, on 24 November 1950, for instance, Fabro sent Mazzolari a letter with three attachments: 'An Invitation to Form Support Groups for Adesso [*i gruppi di Adesso*]'; a draft statute for such groups, entitled 'Birth and Life of the Groups'; and a programmatic statement, 'The Message for Peace'.[107] But, clearly, the initiative, as such, lay in the hands of Don Primo himself.

The Catholic intellectual Pietro Scoppola summed up the spirit of the enterprise in an article published in *Adesso* on the eve of the conference: 'The friends of Adesso who will assemble at the convention are convinced above all else that they can no longer collaborate within the existing Catholic organizations; they now sense a fracture between their inner convictions and these organizations. The following alternatives emerged: to collaborate with existing movements (essentially Catholic Action and Christian Democracy) in order to renew them from within, or to stay outside and to engage in freer and more independent actions towards new horizons. Confronted with such a choice, they have chosen the second path.' Scoppola emphasized the need for corresponding new organizational structures. 'A journal is not enough to get to know each other and to link one's efforts. Groups [*dei gruppi*] can accomplish more. Above all else they can furnish lively and active support to sustain the life of the journal. And they can organize in various locations get-togethers and discussions, necessary means in order to make others appreciate the problems of

[106] The launch was formally announced in an editorial by Primo Mazzolari, from which I have taken the citations, its headline prominently spanning the top of pages 4 and 5 of the 15 October 1950 issue: 'Le Avanguardie Cristiane si chiamano'.

[107] The numerous letters by Fabro can be consulted in FPM, APM, 1.7.1.3404–3418; the letter with the three attached documents is in FPM, APM, 1.7.1.3413.

which we are acutely aware, and necessary means in order to—above all else—gather those who already now unconsciously sense the same issues but who have not yet formed an adequate expression for these feelings.'[108]

THE CONVEGNO DELLE AVANGUARDIE CRISTIANE

The presciently subtitled conference report in the subsequent issue of *Adesso*—'Full of Hope, Adesso has Staked its Life'—suggests that 'more than 300 friends, arriving from all parts of Italy in response to a simple invitation from *Adesso*', filled 'a teeming hall full of life' in one of the most important population centres of the Emilia: Modena.[109] The list of individuals in attendance reads like a Who's Who of the Italian Catholic left, which was then drifting homeless between DC and PCI. Other nonconformist priests, like Umberto Vivarelli or Lorenzo Bedeschi, were naturally to be counted amongst those present. The former MP for the Partito Popolare and farm labour organizer Guido Miglioli, an independent spirit then closely cooperating with the forces around the PCI, was in attendance. Gerardo Bruni had found his way to Modena. Another activist of the PCS, Silvio Zorzi from Treviso, joined Bruni on the speakers' platform from time to time. The former Christian Democrat Ada Alessandrini, moving ever closer to the PCI's orbit, made her voice heard. Certainly, the aforementioned Nando Fabro and Pietro Scoppola were there. The chairmanship was given to the DC MP Ottorino Momoli, doubtless to emphasize that DC members were welcome as well. And then, of course, there were several hundred less well-known attendees of what was sometimes also billed as the Convention for Peace of the Christian Vanguards. A partial listing of 122 participants suggest that most came from (all over) northern Italy but with a fair sprinkling hailing from central and southern Italy.[110]

After some introductory comments by Mazzolari the first speaker, Don Giuseppe Mandalfino from Delianova (Reggio Calabria), set the

[108] Pietro Scoppola, 'Prepararsi all'incontro', *Adesso*, 1 January 1951, 6.
[109] 'L'incontro di Modena', *Adesso*, 15 January 1951, 1.
[110] 'Convegno di "Adesso" 7/1/51 Modena': FPM, APM, 1.1.70.

tone for this militant gathering. He gave powerful statistical evidence for the persistence of poverty in Calabria, exemplified by a 48 per cent illiteracy rate. Emphasizing his empathy for the suffering of the poor and for the death of innocent victims elsewhere in Italy Don Mandalfino, however, reminded his audience not to forget that 'Calabria dies every day'. Don Mandalfino did not hesitate to become even more concrete: 'I am speaking of the women who, gaining no more than 250 lire per day, are forced to prostitute themselves. This festering wound points to the crucified Christ.' The telegram-style minutes continue to recount Don Mandalfino's manifold denunciations: 'A social context where the hierarchy of human beings is the same as the hierarchy of incomes, where the mafia hugs official Christian Democracy while attending mass.' 'We have a type of DC which is closely linked to the mafia, which is the force that has created political power, wealth, and violence in a vicious cycle.' Official Catholic Action being linked ever closer to the structures of DC, Don Mandalfino left little doubt in his listeners' minds that Catholic Action was part of the problem and not the solution: 'If Catholic Action are the eyes of the pope, then we want eyes that are open.' The Calabrian rebel priest left, likewise, few doubts about the political consequences of the malaise of Calabrian political Catholicism and Catholic Action: 'What do we want from the government and from parties? I will only say that the next time around, we will not strengthen with our votes the supremacy of a party that has emaciated Calabria and which allows Calabria to continue in this state of agony.'[111]

It would be excessive to detail many other individual contributions to a vibrant and—as we will see—contentious debate. It may suffice to suggest that all commentators are in agreement that the dominant theme of the conference was the conjuncturally hot topic of war and peace. Don Mandalfino's invocation of the need for a generalized social revolt did not dominate the proceedings in Modena. But discussions on how to bring about world peace in the age of the Cold War and in the middle of an ongoing hot war, the Korean War, left much room for manoeuvre. Unsurprisingly, it was Mazzolari himself who, in the end, not only called for 'the constitution of a Christian lay

[111] 'Convegno delle Avanguardie Cristiane per la Pace a Modena il 7/1/51', 1 and 2: FPM, APM, 1.170.

third order', but who linked the struggle for peace with the struggle for equality: 'I realize that the fear of the Orient has identified Christ with the Occident, thus tolerating positions that are not Christian. I do not know if Italians will have to march again, but I know that I will never find my fatherland again. Who has swallowed it all up? Who will march? The bourgeoisie, which has never marched but is instead immoral? A people that has Calabria in front of its eyes? Under such prevailing conditions what good will armoured divisions do?'[112]

But not everyone agreed on the strategy and tactics necessary to promote peace. An intervention by the member of the Partito Cristiano-Sociale Silvio Zorzi brought parts of the audience to their feet—but not necessarily in support of his advice. There exist two summaries of his speech. One account suggests that he mainly called on all present 'to seek to reconstruct all the combined forces of the left' in order to bring about a united peace movement. 'Let us go against the stream towards peace while recognizing the just intentions of all participating currents.' And the minute taker then added in brackets: 'Interruption by the presiding officer. Hilarity.'[113] A second account is slightly more specific. After some favourable comments on the communist-dominated peace movements, which many others present viewed as controlled by Moscow, Zorzi called for the recognition of 'the movements in the East, and he condemned the Catholic press which, by spreading pro-war propaganda, places itself against the Pope.' The author of this second account, a certain 'Gelmini', then went on: 'This intervention was repeatedly interrupted because of the somewhat incoherent nature of the exposition.' And then, he adds: 'At certain moments a climate of intolerance dominated the hall.' Immediately afterwards, Gelmini writes: 'Prof. Montesi from Rome now spoke up, and he begins to reproach the attitude of the conference participants with regard to their confrontations with the previous speaker. For that reason he is repeatedly interrupted to the point where he decided to abandon the rostrum and thus declined to intervene further.'[114]

[112] Ibid. 5. [113] Ibid. 6.

[114] '7 Gennaio 1951: Convegno delle Avanguardie Cristiane—Modena', 4–5: FLLB, Archivio Ada Alessandrini, 'Movimenti Cristiani di Sinistra', busta 1, fascicolo 6. A separate prefatory page by what is likely to be the same author as the writer of the conference report itself is signed 'Gelmini'.

Unity was thus hard to come by, even for the militant forces behind the Christian Vanguards. And Don Primo himself had, already, towards the end of the morning session, expressed his doubts whether the divergent views expressed during the proceedings could in the end be reconciled: 'I have the impression that the problem of peace has not come to full maturity in yourselves. I may just be a dreamer.'[115] The correspondent for *Cronache sociali* present at Modena, Franco Pecci, put it like this: 'For the majority of the young people present, the problem of peace was reduced to the question of how to behave in times of war and to the concretization of "conscientious objection".' 'This is why the two final motions presented were two motions that were rather uninspiring—generic and intellectualized as they were—simply repeating well-known points, even if they were just in and of themselves; in sum without any precise qualifications, and certainly not up to the challenges confronting a new and revolutionary movement.'[116]

Pietro Scoppola added his own warnings in the pages of *Adesso* one week after the event: 'In Modena a Christian moral ferment manifested itself, a ferment which constitutes a great promise, but which is by itself not enough to constitute the basis for a political movement.' 'In Modena voices could be heard favouring the setting-up of a political movement. But politics requires precise programmes on concrete problems imposed by the circumstances.' 'In Modena a romantic and expectant atmosphere dominated the proceedings. All ideas and movements are born like this, and the memories of such beginnings will be precious. But when making contact with reality and its problems, it is necessary to specify and root in practical realities this initial burst of energy. To limit oneself to vague and generic statements is to condemn oneself to sterility and inaction.'[117]

Another participant-observer present at Modena likewise recalls the great expectations in advance of the event for which 'some, including priests, setting off from Calabria and Sicily, spent the night from Saturday to Sunday in the train, solely in order to come here

[115] 'Convegno delle Avanguardie', 4.

[116] Franco Pecci, 'Il primo incontro delle Avanguardie Cristiane', *Cronache sociali*, 15 January 1951, 4.

[117] Pietro Scoppola, 'Prospettive dopo Modena', *Adesso*, 15 February 1951, 3.

and to feel part of a new Catholic movement';[118] these expectations, however, were not entirely fulfilled. For, as Mario Pancera opines more than fifty years after the events: 'The miracle which Italy was preparing for at that time was the miracle of consumption and wealth, not the miracle of poverty. The vanguards were not exactly in the vanguard after all; the labour to guide them and to organize them will be a prolonged effort, if one admits for the moment that this task still lies ahead. Perhaps a lifetime will not be enough.'[119]

DON PRIMO'S *KREUZWEG*

A lifetime certainly was not enough for Don Primo. On 12 April 1959, some weeks after having received an official invitation to participate in one of the preparatory commissions of Vatican II,[120] he died in a Cremonese clinic after suffering a massive heart attack while celebrating High Mass in his parish church in Bozzolo. But the eight years and three months between the Modenese *Convegno* and his death were no easy years for Mazzolari. For Don Primo was once again targeted by repressive moves soon after the conclusion of the conference.

On 14 February 1951, Cardinal Schuster of Milan officially distanced himself from *Adesso*, and forbade all clergy henceforth to cooperate with the magazine. On 5 March 1951, *Adesso* provisionally closed its doors, not to reopen until 15 November. In the meantime, the Holy See once again admonished Don Primo and forbade him to preach outside his diocese without explicit approval from his superiors. In 1954 the screws were tightened even further. The Holy See now explicitly forbade Don Primo to preach outside his parish or to publish or give interviews on questions of the day.[121] The *Avanguardie cristiane* died a silent and unannounced death soon after January

[118] Mario Pancera, *Primo Mazzolari e 'Adesso', 1949–1951: un prete e un giornale che cambiarono l'Italia* (Padua: Messagero, 2005), 242.

[119] Ibid. 253.

[120] Claudio Bagnasco, 'Don Primo Mazzolari collaboratore de "Il Nuovo Cittadino" di Genova', unpublished tesi di laura (Faculty of Political Science, University of Genoa, 1998–9).

[121] Chiodi, *Primo Mazzolari*, 81–4. On Mazzolari's run-ins with ecclesiastical authorities in the 1950s, see also *in extenso* Mazzolari, *Obbedientissimo*, 215–78.

1951. In April and June 1951, Giulio Vaggi, the editor-in-chief of *Adesso* since December 1950, still sent out two short open letters to the Gruppi di 'Adesso' e delle Avanguardie Cristiane in the name of the Comitato Nazionale dei Gruppi di 'Adesso' e delle Avanguardie Cristiane, but little activity appears to be recorded beyond these two publications which served to keep some contact with the dispersed readership of *Adesso* in the eight months of its suspension.[122]

DON ZENO SALTINI

Don Zeno Saltini was born in August 1900 in Fossoli near Carpi in the lowlands of the province of Modena. A farm labourer and soldier for a while, a highly emotional discussion with an anarchist friend made him decide to change the course of his life, and he went back to school which he had left at an early age, doggedly pursuing adult education, eventually graduating with a law degree from the Catholic University of Milan in 1929. A leading spirit within Catholic Action in his native Carpi diocese throughout much of the 1920s,[123] after only one year of seminary training he held his first mass, soon taking up his post as parish priest in nearby San Giacomo Rondole.

His apostolic methods in San Giacomo made him a rather unusual figure from the very start. Fascinated by new technologies, Don Zeno soon began to set up and operate a series of cinemas in small towns in the area, first in San Giacomo, where he attempted to utilize the attractions of the 'dream factories' to strengthen the support of locals for the Catholic Church. On Sundays rushing from one cinema to the other, first on a bicycle and later on a motorbike, Don Zeno Saltini held impromptu sermons in the middle of the films, 'while smoking the inevitable cigarette'. Music groups, an equestrian circus

[122] Copies of the two open letters are reproduced in the facsimile reprint of *Adesso* in Giuseppe Albero (ed.), *Adesso: riproduzione fotografica integrale* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1979), 397–402.

[123] Antonio Saltini, *Don Zeno: il sovversivo di Dio* (Modena: Il Fiorino, 2003), 20. More generally on the relationship of Don Zeno and Catholic Action, see Ernesto Preziosi, 'Zeno Saltini e l'Azione Cattolica', in Maurilio Guasco and Paolo Trionfini (eds.), *Don Zeno e Nomadelfia: tra società civile e società religiose* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001), 51–74.

troupe, and the establishment of a skating rink with an adjoining pub formed additional component parts of Don Zeno Saltini's sacerdotal efforts.[124]

Meanwhile Don Zeno developed another element of his parochial and supra-parish activities: providing a home for homeless children. At first housed within the rectory, then in an old villa in San Giacomo, their numbers swelled rather quickly. In 1941, he obtained the able support of the first of many 'mothers by vocation', women who forsook regular matrimony and their own family to take care of the small army of orphans tended by Don Zeno. In order to provide structure to his children's lives, Saltini built and oversaw a small print shop and a carpentry shop, soon supplemented by a maintenance workshop for the technical apparatus needed to sustain his chain of cinemas, which by 1937 had reached eleven halls in the region. Soon other local priests, fascinated by Don Zeno's enthusiasm, agreed to support in their own parishes the efforts radiating from the small community of San Giacomo Rondole.[125]

By the early 1940s, his many sermons throughout the region had made Don Zeno a household name in an area stretching from the lowland regions of Reggio Emilia and Modena province via Mantua province towards Bologna. Then, in 1943, he decided to take one further step. He convoked a gathering of male heads of families who, like Don Zeno himself, were interested in going beyond traditional Catholic charity work and mutual assistance societies by constructing a solid network of solidarity which could overcome the misery and isolation of individual families under the inhuman conditions of unmitigated capitalism.[126] A hitherto rather passive opponent of the fascist regime, Don Zeno then showed his true political colours when the fascist government collapsed. Convoking a general assembly of his parishioners in his church five days after Mussolini's fall, he castigated the fascist regime and exhorted his flock to seize the moment to construct 'a true Christian Social fraternity'. The subsequent reassertion of power by the Republic of Salò found Don Zeno,

[124] I follow the presentation in Saltini's chapter on 'Il cinema della fraternità' in his *Don Zeno*, 35–42, citation on 37.

[125] Ibid. 53–60, a chapter headed ' "Piccoli apostoli," "mamme di vocazione," preti affratellati'.

[126] Saltini, 'La società della fratellanza, famiglia di famiglie', in *Don Zeno*, 61–4.

therefore, rather compromised, and he left with a truckful of young parishioners to seek refuge in the liberated south. 'Without its guiding spirit, the movement [of heads of families he had set up earlier in 1943] dissolved itself.'[127]

In self-exile, spent at first in Pompeii and then, after its liberation, in Rome, Don Zeno engaged in several explorations in search of intellectual and practical support for his various efforts at far-reaching social reform. A wide array of programmatic documents originating from the entire gamut of Catholic and non-Catholic organizations of the non-mainstream left could be found in his travelling library, amongst them key statements by the Christian Communists as well as the Partito Cristiano-Sociale.[128] He likewise utilized his stay in Rome to get to know the shapers of the future DC, 'but these encounters merely served to make him realize, unequivocally and irreparably, the depth of the divide which separated him from them'. A contentious exchange with Mario Scelba in a Roman trattoria made a permanent and dangerous enemy out of the future DC Minister of the Interior.[129]

It was also during this absence from San Giacomo that Don Zeno penned an important pamphlet, *The Social Revolution of Jesus Christ*, which gave written expression to his conviction of the inevitability that capitalism—'the capitalist tyranny'—would be superseded by a social system which was clearly inspired by socialist visions, mediated by the radical Christian views of Romolo Murri, in which bonds of human solidarity would replace the cash nexus. 'And by economic fraternity—you can give it any label you would like—I understand a system where wealth is treated as something created by everyone, so that no one feels justified to use for their own advantage that which belongs to all brothers, according to the criterion of dignity.'[130] Small wonder that Carpi Bishop Vigilio Federico dalla Zuanna, though generally rather supportive of Don Zeno's ambitious designs, asked to comment on the manuscript, reported: 'With regard to style:

[127] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 71–80, citations on 73 and 77.

[128] Note the items listed in Atti e Documenti di Nomadelfia (NOM)-011–07A and NOM-011–09B: Archivio Storico di Nomadelfia (ASN) [Nomadelfia (Grossetto)].

[129] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 89–92, citation on 90.

[130] I have had recourse to a recent republication of this document, Don Zeno [Saltini] of Nomadelfia, *La rivoluzione sociale di Gesù Cristo* (Rome: Nomadelfia, 2002), citations on 102 and 95.

(a) too violent and likely to agitate the masses rather than to educate and uplift them.'[131] But increasingly convinced that he had been called upon to lead a vast social upheaval destined to change the world in favour of Christian and of human values, Saltini, in December 1944, when resident in Rome, attempted to get approval for his project from none other than the Pope. When three months passed without a papal response, on 7 March 1945 Don Zeno decided to take a step into action on his own behalf, convinced 'that the missing response from the Pope was a test imposed by Providence, urging him to proceed under the mantle of solitude as is fitting for a prophet, even if against the hierarchy, in order to propel the Church onto the road of the revolution of Christ'.[132] Don Zeno resolved to submit only to unequivocally formulated admonitions by his superiors. The silence of the Pope was thus interpreted as encouragement. It probably helped Don Zeno that he had by then internalized the new ecclesiology which viewed the Church as 'the mystical body of Christ'.[133]

THE SCHEDULE OF AN AGITATOR

On 1 May 1945 Don Zeno arrived back in Modena, just in time for the celebrations accompanying the consignment of arms used by regional underground resistance units to the Allied forces now in control of northern Italy. The Bassa Modenese was situated within the 'red triangle', the area of the south-eastern Po Valley where liberation forces unleashed a wave of cathartic 'red terror' against real and assumed collaborators with Mussolini's regime. On 5 May, Don Zeno was called upon to address the crowd in a speech at noon in Carpi to pour oil on troubled waters. This speech, delivered in his regional dialect, turned out to be merely the opening shot in a whirlwind speaking tour in which Don Zeno proved himself to be a charismatic

[131] Vigilio Federico dalla Zuanna to Don Zeno, 18 August 1945: ASN, C/AR (Corrispondenza di Autorità Religiose).

[132] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 86. Saltini's chapter on 'La vocazione politica: la rivoluzione di Cristo', 81–8, is once again an excellent point of departure for an understanding of Don Zeno's turn towards millenarian social and political action.

[133] 'La Chiesa è il Corpo Mistico di Cristo', in Don Zeno, *Rivoluzione sociale*, 88.

and accomplished speaker. A partial listing of venues for May and June 1945 alone gives thirty-three engagements.[134] Yet only a fraction of all speeches Don Zeno gave made it onto that particular list. Mario Sgarbossa asserts: 'In ninety days he gave some 130 talks. He began at six in the morning and finished late at night.'[135] Invitations to address the spellbound crowds arrived from communities and organizations, small and large, in the south-eastern reaches of the vast Po Valley plains.

One evening, he recalled, a group of men met him, asking him to address meetings the following Sunday in a number of communities in the Oltrepo Mantovana and the adjacent Bassa Reggiana. He accepted the invitation. The improvised committee informed him then that his first speech would be held at six in the morning, an unusual time for a speech, certainly for Don Zeno, who much preferred the late night hours rather than the first rays of the sun, and he objected that at six o'clock no one would be there to hear him. But the committee insisted and he accepted. Facing the flabbergasted speaker, at dawn on that Sunday a small crowd awaited him. There followed a one-hour speech, leaving enough time to smoke a cigarette while talking to the most enthusiastic listeners, then a twenty-minute ride giving him time for yet two more cigarettes, then another speech. From one village to another several dozen people followed his car on their bicycles to be present at his next address. His capacity to repeat similar ideas by using ever-changing images and metaphors pushed the most eager listeners to listen to him in two or three villages in a row.[136]

In proportion with Saltini's growing popularity, the forces behind moderate Catholicism grew worried about the impact of Don Zeno's whirlwind *tournée*. At least some of the promoters of the cycle of speeches were active communists, 'such as the cooperative where during the evening Don Zeno interrupted his outing in order to eat his evening meal in the familiar company of local peasants, which was dear to him'.[137] The wording of written invitations extended to Don Zeno in the name of local CLNs, military units of the resistance,

[134] 'Elenco delle conferenze tenute da Don Zeno nelle varie piazze tra maggio e giugno': ASN, NOM-012–02-A.

[135] Mario Sgarbossa, 'Don Zeno al 1945', in Don Zeno, *Rivoluzione sociale*, 88.

[136] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 96. On the style and format of Don Zeno's spellbinding speeches, note Fabio Marri, 'Come parlava Don Zeno', in Guasco and Trionfini (eds.), *Don Zeno*, 97–130.

[137] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 97.

or mayors of small towns speaks for itself: 'Together with the entire population of Villanova, the undersigned commando pleads with you to come to this community next Thursday at the occasion of the Feast of the Corpus Christi to transmit to the multitude your much-appreciated and much-desired words.'[138]

The enclosed is to inform you that the entire population of this village and its authorities would wish to be enlightened by the live voice of the illustrious father of so many children, raised and tended to with so much exemplary love, who is of high honour and of great benefit to all of humanity. It would be most welcome if you could deliver a lengthy discourse from the balcony of the mayor's office in order to clarify for the hearts and minds of the many still benighted residents of this community, who are undecided which line to follow, the way forward for the workers in particular—and by workers we mean all those who must sweat either physically or by using their intellect: peasants, sharecroppers, manual workers, employees, housewives. Especially the former [i.e. peasants] need to get an earful [*hanno bisogno di una tiratina d'orecchi*] because, as is certainly the case here in the Modenese, they still tend to be partial towards the fat bourgeoisie [*borghesia grassa*].[139]

The president of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale, Sezione di Poggio Rusco, sent the following invitation: 'We would like to ask you to come to Poggio Rusco to deliver a speech. On the occasion of your visit to the neighbouring village of Villa Poma next Sunday, 17 June, for a speech at nine o'clock at night, you could come to Poggio that same day (in the morning, for instance, at eleven o'clock; then you could stay here in the Mantovana for the entire day as our guest).'[140] The head of the Factory Commission at a major enterprise in Modena, Fratelli Martinelli, asked Don Zeno 'to address your impassioned words to the workers'.[141]

[138] Comitato Nazionale di Liberazione, Corpo Volontari della Libertà, Battaglione 'Barba' to 'Molto Reverendo Dott. Don Zeno', 7 May 1945, the obligatory stamp of the military unit affixed at the bottom of the document: ASN, Corrispondenza di Vari (C/V).

[139] Letter sent on stationery of the 'Comune di Rolo (Provincia di Reggio Emilia)' to the 'Eccelentissimo Don Zeno Santini [*sic*] di Carpi', 17 May 1945, signed by both the mayor and the president of the local CLN, with stamp affixed: ASN, C/V.

[140] CLN di Poggio Rusco to the 'Molto Reverendo Parroco don Zeno di S. Giacomo Rondole', 6 June 1945: ASN, C/V.

[141] 'La Commissione di Fabbrica, Il Capo Commissione' to Don Zeno, 22 June 1945: ASN, C/V.

And then there were invitations by local PCI cells. The Bomporto section of the PCI sent the following handwritten note:

Dear Don Zeno. We are a group of communists who have read your book, 'The Social Revolution of Jesus Christ', for which we would like to extend to you our gratitude and our thanks. Your work, written in simple words, is understandable for everyone, but what counts for even more is that it is able to penetrate into all hearts and that it moves all spirits. Don Zeno, we consider you a true messenger of God and, as such, you have our respect and our admiration for all that you have done and all that you will do for the benefit of the people. Rest assured that we will remain active propagandists for your mission and that we will simultaneously be defenders of your ideas. Excuse us the confidential tone of this letter but, as you are fond of teaching us, more than just being comrades, we are brothers.

A postscript written by another hand added at the bottom of the letter: 'Why is it impossible to find your book in any bookstore in Modena or Carpi?'[142] Another PCI locale sent Don Zeno money for his orphanage: 'The Communist Party, supporting the reconstruction of Italy and the unity of all workers, offers from its heart this modest sum, as we are the party of the poor, to your children.'[143]

Yet it was not just the fact of Don Zeno's popularity and the nature of the groupings which he addressed which caused growing consternation and worry on the part of moderate Catholics and the defenders of the social order. It was the content of his speeches which caused the greatest fears. For not only did Don Zeno spread his gospel of the necessary social revolution in the name of Jesus Christ, but he actively engaged his interlocutors to take concrete steps in the political context of the here and now. He exhorted members of resistance units not to turn in their arms. 'If the bourgeoisie wants to regain power, we will need them,' he repeatedly averred, according to more than one eyewitness, in various circumstances.[144] He railed against the tortoise

[142] 'Partito Comunista Italiana, Sezione "Renato Zambelli"—Bomporto' to Don Zeno, 3 February 1946: ASN, C/V. This letter was written six months after Don Zeno's whirlwind speaking tour of the late spring and summer of 1945, but the substance and the tone can be taken to exemplify popular approval and respect for Don Zeno at all times during his various evangelical missions.

[143] 'Partito Comunista Italiana, Sezione di Camposanto' to Don Zeno, 12 August 1945: ASN, C/V.

[144] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 99.

speed at which promised purges of fascists proceeded.[145] Don Zeno was clearly on a mission. His close collaborators independently recall that, on more than one occasion, he exclaimed upon return from a speaking engagement: 'Now we have the Emilia in our hands.'[146]

The reaction of the church hierarchy was anything but enthusiastic. On 5 July 1945, the first post-war gathering of the episcopate in the Emilia placed the activities of Don Zeno on their agenda.[147] On 10 July 1945 followed the first of many measures by the church hierarchy to rein in Don Zeno's millenarian zeal in the form of a letter by the Bishop of Carpi: 'Molto Reverendo Carissimo Don Zeno, from our most recent conversations I have had with you, you are certainly aware of my opinion with regard to your public speeches. Now, after careful consideration and reflection and in view of the general conclusions reached at the Conference of Bishops in the Emilia, held last Thursday, I believe it is my duty to ask you to suspend your public addresses regardless of the source of the invitation.'[148] The effect of the episcopal admonition may be doubted, as the archives contain subsequent communications indicating continued activism on the part of Don Zeno. On 16 July, Bishop dalla Zuanna forwarded to Don Zeno a letter from the Guastalla diocese complaining of his continued engagements 'to speak in public in our diocese about social questions'.[149] On 20 August the office of the Bishop of Guastalla turned directly to Don Zeno, informing him that he is strictly forbidden 'to preach in our diocese, whether inside a church or in open air'.[150]

Meanwhile Don Zeno's plans took on ever more concrete form. He began to dream about organizing 'a huge gathering towards the end of the year where he will propose to 80,000 or, perhaps, he hopes, 100,000 people . . . the formal constitution of a political movement

[145] See the printed text of a speech Don Zeno delivered on 27 May 1945 in San Benedetto (Mantova), 'Cittadini di S. Benedetto Po. L'Italia è libera': ASN, NOM-012–02-A.

[146] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 99.

[147] Remo Rinaldi, *I movimenti popolari politici di Don Zeno Saltini nella Bassa Modenese* (Verona: Edizioni Fiorini, 2002), 26–7.

[148] Vigilio Federico dalla Zuanna, Bishop of Carpi, to Don Zeno, 10 July 1945: ASN, C/AR.

[149] Letter from the 'Curia Vescovile Carpi', 16 July 1945, including the transcription of the complaint from Guastalla: ASN, C/AR.

[150] Letter from the Vicario Generale, Curia Vescovile, Guastalla to Don Zeno, 20 August 1945: ASN, C/AR.

with which he wishes to disrupt the political equilibrium of the country'. But at this point episcopal opposition obtained support from the Holy See and, after a meeting between dalla Zuanna and the Vatican Secretary of State, the Bishop of Carpi communicated the Vatican's definitive refusal of Don Zeno's plans for a gathering of this sort.[151] On 17 August 1945 dalla Zuanna wrote to Don Zeno, calling the latter's grandiose plans for a monster congress to shake the foundations of the Italian post-war order 'an activity of extreme delicacy with an impact on the public order at a grave moment', and then adds: 'I therefore cannot give you the permission. I will not concede it without having demanded and received instructions from my superiors.'[152] Yet, incredibly enough, Don Zeno still did not give in. Finally, Bishop dalla Zuanna convoked an emergency consultation with other local church officials in Carpi on 29 August. Only then did Don Zeno relent and cancel his plans for the launching of a grassroots movement under his baton.[153]

The indomitable Don Zeno, however, did not yet give up entirely. Though the planned convention never took place, by January 1946 Don Zeno founded a Movement for Social Fraternity [Movimento della Fraternità Sociale]. And in February 1946 a brochure entitled *Per l'umana solidarietà* began to be distributed in which a blueprint for a future non-alienated society of self-managed cooperatives—if with clearly defined paternalist overtones—was spelled out in no uncertain terms, complete with an outline of a constitution for the future, post-capitalist Italian state.[154] In March 1946, Don Zeno once again attempted to obtain approval for his grand plans from the Holy See, but this time Bishop dalla Zuanna quickly intervened decisively to stop this initiative from getting out of hand. It did not help matters that the incendiary brochure, *Per l'umana solidarietà*, was published without the necessary ecclesiastical imprimatur. On 15 March, Bishop dalla Zuanna penned a letter to Don Zeno, telling him in no uncertain

[151] Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 99–102, citation on 99.

[152] Letter from the Bishop of Carpi to Don Zeno, 17 August 1945: ASN, C/AR.

[153] Rinaldi, *Movimenti popolari*, 37–43, covers the events taking place in August 1945.

[154] I padri di famiglia Piccoli Apostoli, *Per l'umana solidarietà* (San Giacomo Rondole: Tipografia dell'Opera Piccoli Apostoli, 1946). This visionary brochure has recently been republished as Il Popolo di Nomadelfia, *La soluzione sociale: Proposta di Nomadelfia* (Rome: Nomadelfia, 2002).

terms that Don Zeno's plans would under no circumstances obtain the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. On 18 March 1946, the sponsoring organizations behind the brochure and the larger project as a whole, the Unione Padri di Famiglia Piccoli Apostoli and the Pionieri della Fraternità Sociale, decided to withdraw the contested publication.[155] Once again, Don Zeno's ambitious plans came to naught.

Paolo Trionfini eloquently concludes the story of the 1945–6 wave of millenarian designs emanating from the south-eastern reaches of the Po Valley plains: 'The attempt by Don Zeno to launch a politically motivated movement to realize "social fraternity" found an insurmountable obstacle in the diffidence of ecclesiastical authorities. The initiative had matured in the historical conjuncture of the post-war period, when the fluid nature of the political equilibrium and the uncertainties of the social context still left sufficient space for unexpected solutions.' With the return to the *status quo ante* Mussolini, 'politics lost its poetic dimension to assume the character of naked prose'.[156]

CREATING *PICCOLI APOSTOLI*: NOMADELFIA

And the prose of post-war Italian (and world) politics did not favour Don Zeno any more than it had favoured Don Primo Mazzolari, Gerardo Bruni, or Alessandro Ossicini. Don Zeno returned to focus on building up his local power base near Carpi. Parallel to his speaking engagements in the heady days of the post-liberation weeks and months, he had in addition taken on the task of the post of deputy mayor in the market town of Mirandola near San Giacomo Rondole, a post he accepted on condition that he become the president of the housing commission run by the Mirandola city administration, whose task it was to find homes for the homeless population created

[155] Unsigned and undated letter with handwritten added notation: '? 18.3.1946' to 'Eccelenza Revma': ASN, NOM-013–03-A. For the context, see Rinaldi, *Movimenti popolari*, 60–3.

[156] Paolo Trionfini, 'Don Zeno e la vita politica italiana (1940–1962)', in Guasco and Trionfini (eds.), *Don Zeno*, 268.

by the vagaries of war. Leading a forceful campaign of requisitions which redistributed excess space from homes and properties of the wealthy local proprietors, Don Zeno further added to his reputation as a Christian Robin Hood in execution of the tasks associated with his administrative post. Having fulfilled his goal of finding housing for the poor, Don Zeno relinquished his position as housing commissar in late November 1945 to the great regret of most residents of Mirandola.[157]

His next major intervention in local public affairs arrived in the context of his ongoing efforts to run his mass orphanage. When, in the autumn of 1943, Don Zeno had fled San Giacomo for the safer confines of the liberated Italian south, he had left behind not only an embryonic social movement, which soon fell apart, but his orphanage as well. This led to the disintegration of this social welfare project in the ensuing nineteen months of his absence as well. Upon his return in early May 1945, he set the wheels in motion to redress this situation. His big breakthrough followed his decision to take over the former Nazi transit camp in his nearby native village of Fossoli, whose barracks and facilities had survived the collapse of the Thousand-Year Reich and the Republic of Salò. On 19 May 1947, in a surprise move which was, however, coordinated to some extent with benevolent local authorities, he raised the stakes in his lengthy negotiations with various local, regional, and national authorities to take possession of the camp's vacant facilities by organizing a caravan of trucks literally to take over the site.[158] In the ensuing years, the commune of Nomadelfia, as the camp of Fossoli was aptly renamed, grew from the 280 persons that had arrived in the backs of the trucks on 19 May 1947 to 780 by September 1948 and to more than a thousand in the early 1950s.[159]

Meanwhile Don Zeno, as ever convinced of the divine justness of his cause, continued a low-level epistolary campaign for his ideals. Fearless to the extreme, he addressed various authorities while mincing no words. Surely, for instance, it could not have helped his cause in January 1947 to have sent a letter to Pope Pius XII in which he reiterated his aversion for the politics of DC: 'I have given my vote

[157] This episode is recounted in Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 103–8.
[158] Ibid. 109–20. [159] Ibid. 133–4.

to DC in the past, but I confide to Our Father that it provoked an indefinable nausea in me.'[160] Or consider the phrases included in another letter addressed to the Holy Father, in which he called the bourgeoisie [*borghesia*] a 'cadaver which [for the moment] survives', and proudly proclaimed: 'If Karl Marx had been a saint in his time, his call for social justice, if it had not been contaminated by errors but filled with the yeast of truth, even if the latter was extremely difficult to digest, would have succeeded in christianizing the world.'[161]

THE MOVEMENT OF HUMAN FRATERNITY

But by 1950 the time was right to start another campaign of open-air speeches to implement his earlier stillborn plan to launch a congress that would change the face of Italian politics and society. In late February, Don Zeno notified the Holy Office that he intended to revitalize the movement he had unsuccessfully animated in 1945 and 1946.[162] The silence which met a renewed attempt to obtain ecclesiastical approval for a large public conference to generate a grassroots social movement was once again interpreted as tacit consent. And so, on 22 August 1950, Don Zeno commenced yet another frenetic whirlwind tour of surrounding communities, in which he developed his vision of a future solidaristic society, whose foundations were to be laid at a conference to be held in Modena on 15 October 1950.[163] Once again Don Zeno visited villages and towns stretching north from the edges of the Apennines, this time focusing on his native province of Modena, to deliver powerful speeches tailor-made to reflect the language and the concerns of the local population seeking

[160] Don Zeno Saltini to Pope Pius XII: ASN, Corrispondenza di Don Zeno ad Autorità Religiose (CZ/AR), 470106CZ.AR.

[161] Don Zeno to 'Beatissimo Padre', 15 March 1948: ASN, 480315CZ.AR.

[162] Rinaldi, *Movimenti popolari*, 100.

[163] 'Discorsi d. Zeno per il Movimento 1950': ASN, NOM-017D-01A. For the various preceding negotiations with ecclesiastical authorities, see Trionfini, 'Don Zeno', 271–5.

to eke out a living.[164] The plan was to end the conference cycle with a series of five consecutive public addresses in Modena's central Piazza Roma between Tuesday, 10 October, and Saturday, 14 October, crowned by the congress itself on Sunday, 15 October. 'Because of the uncertainty of the advanced time of the year, it is advisable to have at our disposal for the aforementioned evenings the Teatro Comunal, which, however, should only be made use of if bad weather would make it impossible to speak outdoors. For the Congress of Provincial Heads of Families, planned for 15 October, Don Zeno wishes to utilize the Stadio Comunale, possibly with the aid of the installation of loudspeakers for the entire day.'[165] In the end, three consecutive days of Don Zeno's powerful speeches in Modena's Sport Palace had to suffice in the final stages of the preparations for the ultimate event,[166] and a few weeks after the congress Don Zeno penned the following account to the Congregation of the Holy See:

The congress was preceded by a cycle of 46 speeches which I delivered in the principal locations of the province of Modena. In all, I spoke to more than 250,000 people. The town squares were filled with throngs of people. For instance, in Carpi the event held in the central square attracted between 25,000 and 30,000 listeners. About fifty *piccoli apostoli* circulated amongst the crowds to listen to comments and to talk to people and often also to have long discussions which occurred here and there in the wake of the speech. On the eve of the conference I could, thus, conclude that the overwhelming majority, indeed just about everyone, were in an upbeat mood expecting that the targeted social reforms could actually come about. About 30,000 copies of the *Proposal from Nomadelfia*, of which I include a copy, were bought by the crowds at the occasion of my speeches. I know that the booklet was studied by many individuals, even in Communist Party cells, and in a very special way by members of DC. No serious objections were encountered. The local press almost entirely avoided coverage, merely announcing the congress with benign and respectful wording. Slowly, ever so slowly, priests and some Catholics began to raise some objections, but with superficial arguments. From the police headquarters I received notice that some wealthy

[164] For an insightful analysis of Don Zeno's speeches in 1950, see Annamaria Campagnoli, 'I discorsi di Don Zeno al popolo nel 1950', in Guasco and Trionfini (eds.), *Don Zeno*, 131–48.

[165] Piccoli Apostoli to the Vice-Mayor of Modena, 20 September 1950: ASN, NOM-017D-01-E.

[166] See 'Discorsi d. Zeno', 2.

individuals complained under the pretext that all this played into the hands of the communists.[167]

Of course, the reality of the conference preparations did not always entirely conform to this idealized vision. In a letter to Monsignor Ottaviani in mid-December 1950, for instance, Don Zeno mentions that the Bishop of Carpi at one point forbade the holding of the congress but finally relented. The Bishop of Reggio Emilia likewise first proscribed and then allowed the 15 October conference to take place. On 3 October, the DC Minister of the Interior, Mario Scelba, forbade the congress to take place, rescinding this measure on 6 October. When, on 15 October, the conference finally did get off the ground, one of the conditions imposed by the authorities was the strict abstention from recourse to loudspeakers for propaganda purposes.[168]

On 15 October 1950, then, about 1,700 people filled the covered Sports Palace in Modena to near capacity. Much of the five and a half hours was spent discussing the *Proposta di Nomadelfia*, which was read out aloud and discussed article by article. An initial speech by Don Zeno at nine in the morning had set the stage. In this Don Zeno repeated the underlying theme of his revived Movement of Human Fraternity, that 'here we have a movement which proposes to the people to change the social system'. 'Here, then, we have men belonging to no matter which political party, who no longer wish to struggle within a capitalist system, but instead under a system of community, of communitarianism, of fraternity in the aforementioned way to live together in brotherhood.'[169] Most of the conference was indeed spent discussing individual points raised in the *Proposta di Nomadelfia*, and undoubtedly Don Zeno Saltini, ever the prophet, dominated the proceedings and played to the assembled crowd. Nonetheless, the desire by Don Zeno to create a social movement which would turn

[167] Don Zeno to the Congregazione del S. Uffizio, late October 1950: ASN, 501000CZ.AR. The *Proposal from Nomadelfia* mentioned in the letter was the brochure *La soluzione sociale: Proposta di Nomadelfia*, mentioned in n. 154 above, which was reissued with the necessary imprimatur at the occasion of Don Zeno's 1950 conference cycle.

[168] Don Zeno to Mons. Ottaviani, 13 December 1950: ASN, 501213CZ.AR.

[169] Transcript of the recording of the 'Congresso di Modena sul Movimento della Fraternità Umana', 15 October 1950, 6: ASN, NOM-017D-02.

the province of Modena, and then Italy, upside down unleashed energies and brought speakers to the fore, in ways perhaps not entirely intended by Don Zeno and his *piccoli apostoli*.

When Article III of the proposed constitution was read aloud, the provision which enshrined male heads of families as the basic unit of the future state, a member of the audience got up and intervened: 'My name is Rota. I am sorry to point out that Don Zeno has forgotten the role of women. Thus women are left completely aside. This would turn out to become a very antiquated society, I mean the one proposed here, without women! Heads of family, heads of family, heads of family [*i padri, i padri, i padri*] . . . Perhaps you should know that a man has no rights whatsoever over a woman, who is a slave . . . because you also are still slaves . . . And what slaves! Thus I feel that Don Zeno has forgotten that being which is called "woman".'[170] An unnamed speaker used this conference as the occasion for a vigorous denunciation of DC and of the Pope: 'I want to say that DC is supported by the Pope, united with the bourgeoisie; for two thousand years now we have been waiting for the return of Jesus Christ, whom they have killed . . . They have always done the same thing, the forces behind DC . . . They are with the bourgeois, and for the people they have never given anything; and they have perfectly betrayed democracy. This ideological lesson will form part of our religious conscience; but one should never again believe in the Pope; for the Pope is the richest man in the world, and he has never given anything of his wealth.' The conference minutes noted 'noises' and objections [*clamori: ohhhh!!!!*] at this point, but the fact of the matter was that such things could be openly aired at this founding conference of the Movimento della Fraternità Umana.[171]

A teacher named Ferrari brought home the larger meaning of the event when exclaiming towards the end of the day-long congress that the key result that was achieved could be described as 'the constitution of a Movement with a revolutionary character. It is an idea which can truly revolutionize many things, an idea whose practical implementation almost everyone regards as a necessity. I have felt it intensely, and I came here with high hopes, with the hope to see here

[170] 'Congresso di Modena sul Movimento della Fraternità Umana', 16, ellipses in the original.

[171] Ibid. 27, ellipses in the original.

something new, something honest, something fine, something useful for the masses, for the people who for the moment—one might say—are tired. Tired after having waited for five years for promises that were never fulfilled, tired after five years without a home, without bread, without a roof, without dignity, without anything. . . . Tired of listening to endless speeches. Here we are finally dealing with a programme which has a solid basis, one which has already been translated into reality; these facts have been proven by experience, by a struggle waged for ten years by this priest, this *signore*, who has managed to build something in a locality the importance of which the people of Modena have not yet fully understood.'[172]

The *Proposta di Nomadelfia* was virtually unanimously approved. Two hundred and fifty individuals immediately signed up for various organizational tasks. 'At the congress the Catholics present gave such an example of serenity and purposefulness that they edified many communists and anarchists present to take part in an enthusiastic and decisive manner.'[173] In a letter to Alfredo Ottaviani at the Holy See, Don Zeno reported on confidential information the Prefect of Modena had communicated to him after the event: 'He has given me to understand that by means of this *convegno* we have shaken up the province of Modena as never before.' Even 'the communists now expect us to bring about liberation if the movement can be affirmed and infused with energy'. Don Zeno happened to add that a weekly publication of the Movement of Human Fraternity, called *Siamo fratelli* [Let Us Be Brothers], would soon see the light of day, whose editor-in-chief would be an ex-orator and propaganda officer for the Communist Party.[174]

ANOTHER STILLBORN REVOLUTION

But, of course, as the reader may surmise, the Movement of Human Fraternity never really got off the ground. And there were many reasons for this failure, some of them virtually identical to the explanation of the subsequent failure of Don Primo Mazzolari's Christian

[172] Ibid. 31.
[173] Letter by Don Zeno to Congregazione del S. Uffizio, late October 1950.
[174] Don Zeno to Mons. Ottaviani, 13 December 1950.

Vanguards to go beyond the initial spark. Above all, Italy stood on the eve of an economic miracle rather than a millenarian revolt. And for Don Zeno even more than for Mazzolari, the fact that an entire social movement was predicated on the charismatic radiance and abilities of a single person must have cast a curse over the corresponding movement from the very beginning. What undoubtedly sounded the death knell for the Movement of Human Fraternity, launched with great fanfare on 15 October 1950, was a combined attack by secular and ecclesiastical authorities soon after it was born in order to shut down once and for all the power base of Don Zeno's vision: the city where brotherhood was law, Nomadelfia, the source of inspiration for many of the congress participants who had flocked to Modena to change their world, and the source of the little apostles, the *piccoli apostoli*, the foot soldiers of Don Zeno's millenarian dream. The story of the closing down of Nomadelfia, erected on the site of Nazi horrors in Fossoli, is too long and complicated to be told in the context of this discussion of Don Zeno's efforts to launch a whirlwind social movement for the second time in less than half a dozen years.[175] The combined and carefully orchestrated efforts of DC and Vatican politics ensured that close to a thousand orphans would be made homeless once again, for a February 1952 decree emanating from the Holy See not only removed Don Zeno from his flock but closed down Nomadelfia for good.[176]

In the meantime, the Movement of Human Fraternity died a similar inconspicuous death, for the energies which could have otherwise been directed towards Don Zeno's millenarian campaign were now mostly expended in defensive moves to stave off Vatican and DC attacks. On 15 January 1951, Don Zeno could still write to the future Pope Pius VI, Giovanni Battista Montini: 'I believe that no force in the world will be able to stem the tide of this Movement which will be

[175] For a brief survey of the wilful dissolution of Nomadelfia, see Saltini, *Don Zeno*, 153–60. For much greater detail, see Remo Rinaldi, *Storia di Don Zeno e Nomadelfia*, i: *(1947–1962)* (Grosetto: Edizioni di Nomadelfia, 2003), 169–388.

[176] Gradually, a new city where 'brotherhood would be the law', a new Nomadelfia, was reborn in the south-western edges of the Toscana, near Grossetto, where, with the aid of a sympathetic heir to the Pirelli tyre fortune, vast tracts of land were bought and slowly turned into land for arable cultivation, creating a community that survives and thrives until the present day. For more information on contemporary Nomadelfia, see <http://www.nomadelfia.it/>.

destined to revolutionize the entire social system of this world.'[177] A coordinating committee for the Movimento was set up and, true to its mission, which stipulated that the movement would not be an explicitly Christian organization, its leading body included, amongst others, the anarchist Victor Rota, who had spoken up during the October conference in defence of women's rights.[178] On 8 January 1951 a Study Day for the promoters of the Movement was held in Modena, and in late January a week-long *Settimana Sociale* took place in San Giacomo Roncole under the auspices of the Movimento.[179] As was to be expected, there was some overlap between Saltini's Movimento and Mazzolari's Avanguardie, the latter also launched in Modena, in January 1951. As a supporter from Podenzana (Piacenza) wrote to one of Nomadelfia's priests on 20 January 1951: 'We are a few friends of Nomadelfia here in Piacenza, and it is time to organize ourselves. We have formed a group of Christian Vanguards, and at the same time we can constitute a Committee in Support of Nomadelfia.'[180] But the dynamic leading up to the 15 October 1950 gathering in the Modena Sports Palace could not be maintained. During the spring of 1951, a number of Movimento initiatives could still be noted in several important north-central and northern Italian cities, including Milan and Turin.[181] But then, for all practical purposes, the movement appears to have faded away. Leaving aside the difficulties such a movement would have faced even under the best of circumstances, the concerted joint campaign by DC and the

[177] Don Zeno to Giovanni Battista Montini, 15 January 1951: ASN, 510115CZ.AR.

[178] That, unlike Nomadelfia itself, the Movimento della Fraternità Umana was explicitly *not* designed to be a confessional movement emerges from a report on a speech by a representative of the Movimento, who, in June 1951, attended yet another in a long list of conferences designed to launch iconoclastic left-wing movements with a prominent left Catholic component. See the 'Promemoria delle Riunioni Private di Correnti Politico-Sociali-Religiose Non Ben Definite', held in Pisa under the auspices of another colourful Italian left Catholic, Aldo Capitini: ASN, NOM-018B-02B. The prominent role played by the lifelong anarchist Leon Victor Rota within the leadership bodies of the Movimento after the Modena conference can be traced in the extant documentation in the ASN.

[179] See 'Aperture della seduta di studio sul Movimento della Fraternità Umana' and 'Avviso' for the Social Week, which took place in the San Giacomo cinema; both documents are in ASN, NOM-18B-01.

[180] Livio Cagnani to Don Ennio, 20 January 1951: ASN, NOM-18B-01.

[181] Rinaldi, *Movimenti popolari*, 127.

Vatican to close down Nomadelfia took the wind out of the sails of the Movement of Human Fraternity.

The Movimento della Fraternità Umana, just like the Avanguardie Cristiane soon afterwards, traversed the skies of northern Italy, hovering over the province of Modena, shining brightly for a while, attracting countless supporters, but collapsing in the end with few visible remains. Nonetheless, the examples of the movements associated with Don Primo Mazzolari and Don Zeno Saltini may suffice to suggest that Italian Catholicism produced a series of iconoclastic—if localized—prophets and associated social movements which went beyond the narrow limits of DC politics but which also outpaced the structures of the (organizationally more traditional) PCS and PSC. Neither the Avanguardie Cristiane nor the Movimento della Fraternità Umana was an openly political party nor a purely apostolic social movement. In some respects these ephemeral proto-organizations were the closest Italy produced to certain developments within French Catholic Action, to which we now turn. At the very least, the experience of the Christian Vanguards and the Movement of Human Fraternity prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that in Italy, too, sentiments at the grass roots did not differ significantly from ferment operating on the other side of the Alps, even though in Italy it never came to the radical experiments within and beyond Catholic Action which will be described in the ensuing chapters. One all-important difference, of course, was the proximity of the Vatican and the political near-monopoly of an increasingly conservative Catholic political party, a combination of factors which served to nip Italian radical Catholic social movements in the bud before they could take on more threatening proportions.

4

The Mouvement Populaire des Familles

FRANCO-BELGIAN COOPERATION

The most influential, if short-lived, mass-based social movement spawned by the first wave of left Catholics under study in this volume was associated with an organization which has been all but forgotten today. The 100 worker priests operating in France and Belgium at that time remain important reference points up to the present in Europe and elsewhere—and not just for observers and activists originating in the left Catholic milieu. By contrast, the more than 100,000 members and activists of the Mouvement Populaire des Familles (MPF), who shook up francophone Catholic Europe in the closing months of Nazi occupation and the first post-liberation years, have left far fewer traces than the (numerically) rather exclusive club of priests in working-class blue. As I aim to demonstrate in this penultimate chapter of this book, however, it was the MPF—most forcefully present in France and in francophone Belgium, but also elsewhere, such as the francophone portions of Switzerland and the Canadian province of Quebec—which best incorporated the spirit of first-wave left Catholicism. What Don Primo Mazzolari and Don Zeno Saltini tried to accomplish but were not allowed to develop beyond the initial embryonic stages of organizational development, the activists in Belgium and France could safely do under the protective umbrella of Catholic Action. The countless unknown activists propelling the MPF into the limelight of the immediate pre- and post-liberation period encapsulate the combined experiences of the various strands of left Catholicism described in preceding chapters in near-textbook fashion—complete with a dynamic which was all their own!

The General Secretary of the Belgian MPF, Raymond Vermeulen, at the first national week of study and reflection organized by the Belgian MPF in the very closing moments—literally!—of the Second World War, from 28 April to 1 May 1945, remarked towards the beginning of his speech that the idea and reality of the MPF had entered Belgium from neighbouring France. Given the role of underground France as an organizational proving ground for new departures in the sphere of Catholic social activism, Raymond Vermeulen reasoned: 'One could therefore easily anticipate that France, which had received the JOC from Belgium, would give us in turn the LOC and later on the MPF.'[1] As will become obvious in succeeding pages, the Belgian MPF was indeed in large part inspired by earlier French experiences along similar lines. But Vermeulen's words of appreciation for the inspiration entering Belgium from its southern neighbour were correct only in the immediate sense. Other participant-observers have pointed out that at the origins of the French experiments of the MPF and the earlier LOC stood once again . . . Belgian developments! The historian of the French MPF, Joseph Debès, for instance, a quarter of a century ago correctly noted: 'The acronym LOC came from the Nord [the northernmost region of France, bordering on Belgium]. That movement in turn had been founded with its central reference point being the situation in Belgium, where a socialist bloc and a Catholic bloc confronted each other, complete with a developed set of respective peripheral organizations.'[2] Or, as the national chaplain for the French MPF, Maxime Hua, formulated it in his opening lines to an important article on the history of the MPF, penned while this history was still in the making: 'At the beginning there was Cardijn.'[3]

The story of Joseph Cardijn, the Belgian KAJ/JOC, the latter's inspiration for the founding of the French JOC, and the differing

[1] Raymond Vermeulen, 'Positions du MPF vis-à-vis des problèmes d'organisation professionnelle, sociale, familiale et politique', in Mouvement Populaire des Familles, *Première Semaine d'études 1945* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 33. The Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne (LOC) was the predecessor organization of the MPF; for more on the history of the LOC, see below.

[2] Joseph Debès, *Naissance de l'Action Catholique Ouvrière* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1982), 23.

[3] Maxime Hua, 'L'Évolution de l'Action Catholique Ouvrière: de la JOC belge au Mouvement Populaire des Familles', *Masses ouvrières*, 3 (1944), 33.

trajectories of the French and Belgian JOC in the course of the 1930s have been amply described in the opening chapter of this study. For a variety of reasons that need not be repeated here, the French JOC experienced a distinct movement in the direction of a certain type of political radicalization in the course of that decade of united and popular fronts, whereas the Belgian original underwent a process of increasing depoliticization and a corresponding focus on spiritual concerns in the 1930s. It thus emerges rather clearly that all three authors cited above, on the one hand Raymond Vermeulen and on the other Joseph Debès and Maxime Hua, are quite correct in their differing ascription of the primacy of French or respectively Belgian influence on the genesis of the MPF. A process kicked into motion by Belgian Catholic young workers in the early to mid-1920s underwent important modifications in the second half of the inter-war period in France, eventually affecting the corresponding adult Catholic working-class milieu. It is thus from the creative interplay of Belgian and of French specialized Catholic Action that a highly distinctive movement, the MPF, eventually sprang forth.

THE LIGUE OUVRIÈRE CHRÉTIENNE

The prehistory of the MPF can be traced back to 1931 when, in the French Nord, a new organization saw the light of day, the Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (LOCF), founded primarily to provide an organizational framework of continuity for activists of the feminine branch of the JOC, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (JOCF), who had come of age and no longer easily fitted into the structures of the youth-oriented movement of specialized Catholic Action. An equivalent organization for 'ageing' male activists within the JOC, initially termed Aînés de la JOC, helped along by the able support of the French JOC's founding father Georges Guérin, emerged in 1932. By 1935 the two groups merged into the aforementioned LOC, which thus became a Catholic Action organization gathering married couples, households, in its ranks. Not only the rather similar acronym, but also its organizational methodology based on the JOC's original 'entre eux, par eux, pour eux', pointed out the lines

of continuity from the JOC to the LOC, providing an institutional umbrella for activists of specialized Catholic Action in the working-class milieu and facilitating the transition from youth to adulthood without losing sight of one's original ideals.[4] 'Amongst its leadership there were readers of *L'Aube* and the weekly *Sept*.'[5]

Not unlike the JOC, the LOC started out, in part, as a social service organization in the tradition of Catholic social welfare provision, long pre-dating specialized or, indeed, 'non-specialized' Catholic Action, though, again just like the earlier JOC, the LOC soon went far beyond such charity provisions, propelled—amongst other things—by its rather innovative structures of self-governance. Yet there soon developed an important difference between the lifeworld of the JOC and the LOC. Both sought to influence individuals by concentrating on improving the exterior circumstances of their respective milieux. But in the case of the LOC, the primary target soon became the overall environment determining the quality of life of LOC members, above all issues of housing, food provision (particularly in the trying circumstances of Nazi occupation and a world war), and other issues of 'consumption', whereas JOC members had made a name for themselves primarily by their orientation towards issues related to (the point of) 'production'. And, indeed, as we shall see, the LOC—and subsequently the MPF—became conjuncturally well known above all because of their provision of direly needed social services for their Catholic working-class milieu.

Initially, however, the LOC did not so much focus on becoming the provider of self-generated services under its own auspices as on becoming an organization taking advantage of and aiding the provision of pre-existing social services offered by other Catholic institutions, such as trade unions, insurance associations, or cooperatives. 'One must create new ones [only] where these services do not exist or where they are deficient.'[6] This organizational conservatism, however,

[4] On the founding of the LOCF and, subsequently, the LOC, see Debès, *Naissance*, 22–3; Bruno Duriez, 'Les Services du MPF: la fin d'un projèt intégral', in Bruno Duriez et al. (eds.), *Chrétiens et ouvriers en France 1937–1970* (Paris: L'Atelier, 2001), 218; and Hua, 'L'Évolution', 35–9.

[5] Debès, *Naissance*, 25.

[6] Bruno Duriez and Jean Nizey, 'Les Services du MPF: entre apostolat et réponses à des besoins', *Les Cahiers du Groupement pour la Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux* [henceforth: *Cahiers du GRMF*], 11 (2002), special issue on: *La Solidarité*

soon fell by the wayside and, as we shall see, a plethora of LOC/MPF-generated initiatives filled the imaginary and, more importantly, the concrete reality of Catholic working-class communities in francophone Europe. For some time, however, apostolic and service-oriented activities sponsored by the LOC/MPF and by the JOC remained 'difficult to distinguish',[7] once again underlining the tight link between the JOC and the early LOC/MPF. Often the organizational headquarters of the respective JOC and LOC initiatives were housed in the same building. And there was a remarkable personal continuity between the leadership groups of JOC and LOC service providers. Full-time organizers for the JOC, oftentimes amongst the 'older' members of this youth group, upon marriage almost automatically transferred into the equivalent leadership structures of the growing network of LOC/MPF initiatives. Only after 1945 'did the distinction between the services provided by these two movements become more clearly defined, although this was still not always the case on the local level'.[8]

Before providing a survey of LOC/MPF concrete engagements in the social service sector, it should first be stressed, however, that, conforming to the spirit first engendered and promoted within the JOC, the organizational principle underlying the seemingly ceaseless stream of LOC and MPF initiatives elevated the self-organization of its membership to central place. A 1942 intervention at a national leadership gathering of the MPF emphasized in no uncertain terms: 'Our greatest efforts shall be devoted to proceeding in a fraternal manner, not in an administrative or paternalist manner.'[9] And Bruno Duriez and Jean Nizey spell out the implications of such a resolve: 'The services dealing with the procurement of a steady food supply, mutual assistance, as well as vacation and leisure-time services will be run by the members of the working class themselves, by the men and women living in the same neighbourhoods, experiencing first-hand identical difficulties, operating under the assumption that the beneficiaries of these services will run these services, while assuring the future of such provisions by means of official [state] recognition

en actes: services collectives et expression des usagers dans le Mouvement Populaire des Familles 1940–1955, 27.

[7] Duriez and Nizey, 'Entre apostolat', 27. [8] Ibid. 28. [9] Cited ibid. 31.

and financial support.'[10] It was a recipe for the autonomous self-organization of working-class communities, and it would eventually entail unforeseen consequences on various levels, going far beyond the difficulties encountered earlier by the fledgling forces of the JOC. It is high time to turn to a description of LOC/MPF activities in the social services sector.

ASSURING FOOD ON THE TABLE

The real take-off of MPF activities[11] in a wide variety of circumstances determining everyday life occurred in the course of the Second World War, propelled by the accompanying tribulations created by Nazi occupation and Vichy collaborationist policies. It is thus only appropriate to portray the gamut of activities engaged in by members and sympathizers of the MPF as it developed in the course of the wartime period. One of the very earliest engagements of the MPF was the provision of its offices and mailing addresses as communication conduits which could serve isolated members of families dispersed by the ravages of wartime incursions and refugee movements to obtain family reconstitution or, at the very least, to furnish information about the whereabouts of missing family members. Geneviève Dermenjian then continues: 'But, very rapidly, this service also takes into account the situation created by the imprisonment of husbands in Germany, the insufficient level of wages, and the lack of an adequate food supply.'[12] And, indeed, as the war and occupation continued, questions of food supply soon took on an ever-growing importance.

[10] Duriez and Nizey, 'Entre apostolat', 33.

[11] I will henceforth use the simplified reference to just the MPF rather than LOC/MPF in virtually all circumstances, as the LOC changed its name to MPF in 1941, and the levels of activism did not reach the elevated levels which made the MPF conjuncturally a household term in francophone Europe until the 1943–6 period, by which time the MPF had evolved significantly beyond its early origins as part of Catholic Action, a development about which more below.

[12] Geneviève Dermenjian, *Dans le combat ouvrier: le Mouvement Populaire des Familles dans les Bouches-du-Rhône 1941–1951*, special issue of the *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13 (2004), 126. As Dermenjian wrote all substantive sections of this volume, I henceforth will cite all her contributions to this volume as if it was a regular monograph, which to all intents and purposes, except in form, it indeed is.

Various measures were undertaken to alleviate this plight affecting (not only) working-class families in France. Collective purchasing or foraging clubs were formed in a number of locations in the never-ending pursuit of alimentary supplies. Starting in 1941, the MPF used its connections to both rural and urban Catholic France in order to garner support for the generally penurious urban working-class milieu, profiting from the generally better-supplied stockpiles of essential foods in rural households. Often rural and urban families were twinned, with selected urban working-class households receiving packages with up to fifty kilos of food supplies from their rural 'partner' family. Certain MPF sections specialized in the purchase of specific goods wherever they could find them, in the process often developing long-term relationships, not always exclusively of the commercial kind. The Marseille MPF section in the neighbourhood of Saint-Pierre, for instance, developed business links to the fisheries sector in Boulogne-sur-Mer on the other side of France. Women members of the Saint-Pierre MPF arrived in large numbers at Marseille's Saint-Charles train station once a week, returning to their neighbourhood with their prams full of the coveted fish. 'Exchanges were likewise organized between entire towns. Mazamet sent wool, Gap eggs and potatoes, and the Belfort region cotton.'[13]

From the very beginning of the wartime period—and probably even from before—date the rather popular MPF-sponsored movements to create *jardins ouvriers* [workers' gardens] or *jardins familiaux* [family gardens], a coordinated effort to create small garden plots or allotments, an idea dating back (within the Catholic universe in France) to some of the 'democratic' priests of the late nineteenth century, like the Abbé Lemire, briefly mentioned in earlier chapters. The primary purpose of such allotments was, of course, the inexpensive provision of a minimal, if limited, food supply. But they were also designed to furnish access to activity (or relaxation) in fresh air, the latter often in rather short supply at a time when industrial work was usually associated with insalubrious working conditions and unhealthy air, and when working-class housing provided an environment which was almost equally unhealthy. But soon these *jardins ouvriers* became rather more than islands of repose and

[13] Ibid. 28–135, citation on p. 135.

physical recovery. Originally the hope was to integrate these *jardins* into the life of the Mouvement Populaire des Familles. Eventually, the expressly declared intention was to have the Mouvement permeate the life of these *jardins*. Alphonse Garelli recalled in an interview that, at a time when civil liberties and democratic rights were at a premium, these gardens could and did develop into centres of oppositional activity *tout court*. 'And we then realized that we became a communication platform for all sorts of people deprived of their usual means of expression: political parties, trade union organizations, etc. They came with us to work in these gardens. But, using these gardens, we also organized festivities, get-togethers, eventually also purchasing clubs and cooperatives. And we soon began to notice that, for them, these gardens provided a means to be amongst themselves, to no longer have to remain silent about one's opinion, about that which one thought. We played the role of mutual assistance group and meeting place for all those people who could no longer express themselves, who could no longer talk about that which interested them, that which truly animated them.'[14] MPF-sponsored *jardins ouvriers* mutated from source of food supply and leisure-time association into locations of anti-Vichy and anti-fascist sociability.

As Garelli points out, allotments sometimes developed into purchasing clubs and, on occasion, purchasing clubs into consumer cooperatives. For obvious reasons, cooperatives as such only developed in the aftermath of liberation but, when they did emerge, the cooperative movement spread like mushrooms in the rain. Some were single one-store affairs, others quickly developed into a network of outlets serviced by one or more warehouses. By late 1947 the MPF cooperative movement encompassed 200 stores or distribution centres with an estimated clientele of 900,000 customers.[15]

[14] Alphonse Garelli, 'Le MPF, la guerre et la libération à Aix-en-Provence', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13, 164–5. The rise of *jardins ouvriers* is described in general terms by Bruno Duriez and Jean Nizey, 'De l'entraide dans une société de pénurie au projet d'organisation collective de la consommation', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13, 65–8.

[15] Duriez and Nizey, 'De l'entraide', 71. For brief portrayals of specific local experiences, see for instance Pierre Audebert, 'Une coopérative de consommateurs à Tours', and Marcel Coquillat, 'La Coopérative "La Familiale" à Aix-en-Provence', both in *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 107–14 and 115–20, or Marcelle Degomme, 'La Coopérative de Lille', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 5 (1988), special issue: *Vingt ans de luttes ouvrières et familiales 1940–1960: le Mouvement Populaire des Familles dans le Nord Pas de Calais:*

PRODUCTION AND FASHION

Most MPF cooperatives were regular distribution cooperatives or grocery stores, although the general hope was regularly expressed that the cooperative movement would eventually tackle the tasks of production as much as the vexing difficulties of fair, equitable, and affordable distribution of goods. But, except for a few such efforts in some provincial centres, such as Bourges or Roanne, producer cooperatives remained the exception that proved the rule.[16] There were, however, some other developments on the MPF-sponsored cooperative front which deserve to be highlighted as well. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, a series of laundry cooperative undertakings were launched in various corners of urban France, aiming to serve their clientele by either one of two (then) available methods. One was the construction of centralized laundromats under MPF control; the second mode of delivery appears to today's readers slightly more unusual. In several industrial centres, such as Roanne, Roubaix, or Saint-Nazaire, movable washing machines were provided that were offered to households in different neighbourhoods on a prearranged schedule to facilitate the performance of one of the most traditional and enduring of all household chores.[17]

espoirs et réalisations, 206–9. For the countless difficulties strewn in the path of MPF activists desiring to set up retail cooperatives see, for the case of Aix-en-Provence, the documentation included in Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, 150 W 208. It should be borne in mind, of course, that MPF cooperatives were by no means the first such enterprises in the French state. For a concise overview of French cooperatives in earlier decades, see Patricia Toucas-Truyen and Michel Dreyfus, *Les Coopérateurs: deux siècles de pratiques coopératives* (Paris: Atelier, 2005) and, in English, Ellen Furlough, *Consumer Cooperation in France: The Politics of Consumption 1834–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[16] For a butchers' cooperative in Laval (Mayenne), see Henri Bourdais, 'La Boucherie coopérative de Laval', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 121–6. For an authoritative statement noting the rarity of true producers' cooperatives in the orbit of the MPF, see Duriez and Nizey, 'De l'entraide', 71.

[17] For an overview of this rather popular service at that time, see once again Duriez and Nizey, 'De l'entraide', 77–82. For specific local episodes, see amongst others Lucien Hans, 'Le Centre Collectif de Lavage de l'Association Familiale Ouvrière de Meudon'; Bruno Duriez, 'A Halluin le Lavoir Familial et d'autres services'; Dominique Loiseau, 'Vie et mort d'un Service APF à Saint-Nazaire'; and Henri Brunin, 'Les 120 machines à laver de Roubaix'; all in *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 129–32, 133–7, 139–46, and 147–50; as well as René Martel, 'Les Machines à laver dans le quartier des 400 maisons à Lille', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 5, 210–17.

Already earlier on, in the immediate post-liberation period, an MPF-sponsored cooperative movement to facilitate clothing repair had seen the light of day. Gatherings were organized to promote self-help and mutual assistance by working-class women, with additional practical hints provided in the regular women's page of the MPF's house organ, *Monde ouvrier*. 'But', in the words of Duriez and Nizey, 'repairing clothing does not suffice. One must also replace such items.' In an age when working-class women could not afford the few items of ready-to-wear clothing available on the market, and when recourse to professional tailoring services was not even an option for daydreams in this milieu, the fashioning of new clothing was a constant object of worry and attention. Hoping to create a bit of elegance and fashion along with the production of the necessary textile goods, working-class women were offered the chance to learn the tricks of the needle trade in six-week-long 'continuing education' sessions. Under the auspices of the MPF this service, called Pratic-Coupe, first developed in 1946 and 1947 in the Nord, then spread to towns and cities across France. By 1950 a separate publication—also called *Pratic-coupe*—provided printed support over and above the regular columns along similar lines in other MPF publications, such as *Monde ouvrier*. 'As always, the stated objective of this service was not solely limited to its utilitarian function. One also meant thereby to assemble the women present, to have them get to know each other, to bring about bit by bit their participation in the Mouvement and in collective action, to "discover the women who will become leaders," to "let them discover that the emancipation of the workers will be brought about by the workers themselves".'[18]

There were other cooperative ventures sponsored by the MPF, such as, for instance, the creation of a domestic assistance service, providing household assistance to families suffering from permanent or temporary difficulties in carrying out all the necessary chores, whether due to a high number of children, illness, or maternity conditions on the part of the usual executor of household chores:

[18] See Jean Nizey, 'Pratic-Coupe: une démarche militante', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 102–5; and Duriez and Nizey, 'De l'entraide', 83–5, citation on 84. The two quotes within this citation stem from articles popularizing Pratic-Coupe in another MPF journal, destined for officials and activists within the MPF: *Meneurs*.

the mother of the family.[19] But here we are already entering another sphere of MPF activity, the provision of certain social services that can best be described in terms other than straightforward cooperative ventures. Such was the case, for instance, also with the service aiming to place children or indeed entire families in vacation homes in the French countryside so that they could at least temporarily escape the limitations of their usually cramped urban environments. In 1947, 200,000 vacation days were spent *in toto* in thirty MPF-run holiday homes. By 1948 forty-eight such vacation spots were administered and run by MPF members. By 1950 the number had risen to fifty.[20]

SQUATTING

There is, however, one additional dimension of MPF 'service work' which must be given prominent exposure, as it was one of the most important ways in which the MPF attracted media attention. Housing for working-class families had always been precarious and usually in rather short supply. Due to the combined impact of the ravages of war—frequently a result of Allied bombardments—and the depopulation of rural France, homelessness became an increasingly common social ill, and the MPF became a key force in defending the rights of the homeless. Squatting became their tactic of choice, with activists taking advantage of a 1945 government decree which envisioned the forcible requisition of empty housing space for needy families. On 8 October 1946, six families took over a huge twenty-three-room mansion in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, which had witnessed an unusually contentious period of social and political upheaval in the closing phase of Nazi occupation, the moment of liberation, and in the aftermath of liberation, propelled in part by a combative Communist Party and an autonomously operating post-liberation Commissaire de la République with solid left-wing sympathies and

[19] On this popular service offered by the MPF, see section 2 of the *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 'Services et mouvement: une liaison problématique. L'autonomisation progressive de l'aide familiale à domicile', 173–239.

[20] Bruno Duriez, 'La Prise en charge collective des loisirs: les maisons familiales de vacances: présentation', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 11, 250.

credentials, Raymond Aubrac.[21] Soon the MPF housing squats multiplied and spread far beyond Marseille to affect more than fifty towns and cities across the land. For the most part targeting large properties, including chateaux, that had been left vacant by collaborators in hiding or flight, MPF activists did not shy away from even the most controversial measures. Once again in Marseille, dressed in working-class blue, MPF activists carried out a sit-in in the bishop's residence to draw the church hierarchy's attention to the plight of the homeless. In the case of the occupation of the Marseille bishop's seat, it was only a misunderstanding that led to incidents with the police, as the Bishop of Marseille was himself rather sympathetic to the fate of the poor. In general, however, most squatters faced expulsions, restraining orders, fines, and prison sentences, which in turn drew attention to their cause.[22]

But their actions were simultaneously quite frequently crowned by success. Moreover, in fact, the quantity of site occupations, as important as they were in dramatizing the plight of the homeless, was less important in facilitating the allotment of vacant living space to the homeless than was their effect as a catalyst for official action on the part of the relevant municipal authorities. Official, legally sanctioned requisitions of empty housing frequently followed initial housing squats by MPF activists, and eventually the administratively sanctioned takeovers far surpassed in number the illegal squats. By mid-1947, for instance, eighteen families had obtained housing as a result of illegal takeovers in the Côte d'Azur's Nice, but another 100 families benefited from official action. And the proportion of legal to illegal requisitions was roughly similar elsewhere. Nevertheless,

[21] For a fascinating social history of Marseille in the crucial years of 1930–50, see the trilogy by Robert Mencherini, *Midi Rouge, ombres et lumières*, i: *Les Années de crises, 1930–1940* (Paris: Syllepse, 2004); ii: *Les Années noires (septembre 1940–juin 1944)* (Paris: Syllepse, forthcoming); and iii: *La Libération et les années tricolores (juin 1944–1950)* (Paris: Syllepse, forthcoming).

[22] Information on the MPF squatting movement is most readily available in the *Cahiers du GRMF*, 7 (1992), ed. Bruno Duriez and Michel Chauvière, special issue on *La Bataille des squatters et l'invention du droit au logement 1945–1955*. On the very first squatting action in October 1946 and the MPF squatting movement in Marseille in general, see Marius Apostolo, 'Justice par effraction: les squatters de Marseille et de Provence (1946–1954)', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 7, 103–24. A list of 53 towns experiencing MPF building occupations can be consulted in Louis Guéry, 'Plus de cinquante villes ont connu des actions de squattage', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 7, 170.

without the initial illegal collective action, it is doubtful whether subsequent legal measures would have come about so quickly or whether they would have happened at all. The total number of housing squats is difficult to determine, but for the city of Marseille alone it has been suggested that by late 1947 600 families had obtained new housing in this manner; by December 1949 the number rose to 2,500. In Angers in western France, to provide one more estimate, 300 families were the beneficiaries of MPF actions.[23] Regardless of whether families obtained housing based on legal or illegal takeovers, there appears to be little doubt that without MPF determination and resolve little action would have been taken to alleviate some of the direst consequences of wartime destruction coupled with the effect of unequal property distribution in French society. MPF housing squats certainly propelled the MPF into the local, regional, and national limelight.

WOMEN IN THE MPF

As was to be expected, such elevated levels of social movement and cooperative activism helped create the preconditions for a number of important—if initially subconscious—changes affecting MPF members and its periphery of sympathizers. One such consequence was a certain, generally unintended, but therefore all the more unavoidable impact on the role of women who, from the very beginning, took on various—including leadership—roles within the MPF. The traditional place for women in Catholic (but, of course, by no means only Catholic) families was in the home. Until beyond the end of the Second World War, women's participation in the labour force in France could only be imagined by Catholic opinion as a temporary or stop-gap measure, fit for young unmarried women, young married women before the arrival of the first child, or for childless widows.[24]

[23] On the interconnection between illegal squats and subsequent administrative initiatives including all concrete figures cited, see Bruno Duriez, 'Les Squatters: la "vraie justice" contre la loi', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 7, 78–9.

[24] Though Anne-Marie Sohn has suggested that there was always a sizeable 'gap' between dominant discourses of domesticity and the 'realities' of a France where, by comparison with some neighbouring societies, married female employment levels

Women were conceptualized as possessing an equal measure of dignity and personal value compared to men, deserving full integration into their social milieu and thus the chance to lead a fulfilled life, but they were simultaneously regarded as not only physically but also psychologically different from men. In the course of their engagements in the ranks of the MPF, however, women were oftentimes propelled into taking up novel positions within their families and communities—whether they expressly wanted to do so or not. As Geneviève Dermenjian, in her remarkable reconstruction of the life and times of the MPF in the Marseille region, states: 'Even if, throughout the 1940s and 1950s and even later, they often remained in the eyes of others and sometimes even in their own eyes "the wife of such and such a [male] activist",' MPF women members and supporters 'could develop a specific form of activity which let them partially shed their customary social invisibility, in the south of France as much as in the rest of the country'.[25]

One of the very first MPF-sponsored associations which saw women in front-rank leading position was the Association of Wives of Prisoners of War, which first spontaneously arose in Roanne, Lyon, and Grenoble in the Vichy-dominated zone from the end of 1940 onwards. In the northern zone of France, administered directly by German forces without the intermediation of collaborators, 1941 was the year when this movement got firmly established. Fused into one national organization in 1944, the final months of the Second World War saw membership rise to approximately 200,000 women members, a figure which by that time also included mothers and fiancées of prisoners of war.[26] Necessity rather than conscious design thus stood at the cradle of women's engagement in MPF life. Similar considerations propelled women into action in other areas of MPF concerns.

were high and the birth rate was low; see Anne-Marie Sohn, *Chrysalides: femmes dans la vie privée (XIXe–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996).

[25] Some general reflections on this topic can be found in Geneviève Dermenjian, 'La Conception de la femme et son évolution', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6 (1991), special issue on *Femmes, famille et Action Ouvrière: pratiques et responsabilités féminines dans les mouvements familiaux populaires (1935–1958)*, 139–60. Citation taken from Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 283. For a contemporaneous reflection on the status of women within the MPF, see the extract from the 1947 piece by Laurence Boutron, 'Le MPF et la libération de la femme', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 187–9.

[26] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 141–2.

But women became most prominent within MPF associational life precisely in the social service and cooperative sector described in some detail in preceding pages.

In the process of everyday struggle to preserve traditional forms and values of cherished family life, a number of important changes began to affect behaviours and mentalities even in the most unsuspected places. The home, *locus classicus* of (not only) Catholic women, thus gradually turned into a catalyst for change.

> The household was no longer solely the place of repose and the blossoming of the family, but it became the logistical home base for women, i.e. what one might call their primary 'space for activist engagements'. It was there where women prepared and carried through their consumer advocacy reunions, where they planned the administration of the various services, where they drew up the lists of visits to make and telephone calls they would have to make when next stopping by the post office, where they wrote the various notes destined for other members of their network which their children or they themselves eventually delivered.

Other aspects of women's daily traditional role took on a double purpose and double meaning as well. Thus, again in a process imposed by exterior circumstances rather than by purposeful design, 'the time devoted to domestic affairs became simultaneously the time to carry out activist engagements. Time spent doing shopping, the afternoon spent with their children in the playground, the wait outside the school when picking up their kids, or the bus trips made in the course of their domestic errands was also used to make contact with the women in their neighbourhood, to publicize the various services offered by this organization [the MPF] and perhaps to ask for a small contribution from others, whether financial or in person.' Likewise the time devoted to activism could also become time to accomplish certain domestic tasks, 'such as repairing clothing or knitting a sweater'.[27] The personal and the political became inextricably intertwined long before the advent of second-wave feminism more than two decades later popularized such a seemingly radical demand, though by the 1970s a changed cultural context engendered a rather different response.

[27] Citations taken from ibid. 285–6 and 288–9.

MPF-related meetings, whether held in a private home or in a designated office space, became the spawning ground for a gradual raising of women's individual and collective consciousness. MPF member Madeleine Maïer recalls:

> It was in these consumer services' meetings where women became aware of the fact that their seemingly insignificant personal problems were general problems, and this of course already constituted a step towards politicization. The mother of a family discovered that the simple process of talking with others was a formidable eye-opener, that others faced problems that were at least as difficult as her own. I have often said that this process was simultaneously an invitation and an opportunity to step outside of one's own shadow. The user services meetings were things which I believed in and which I led often, and I found them most remarkable. Because, when encountering a service which was offered to you, you, the mother of a family, you could discover a world which you never knew existed.[28]

Or, as Geneviève Dermenjian points out in her study of the Marseille-region MPF: 'The meeting was often the space where the *marseillaise* sympathizer became conscious of the reality that her difficulties were of interest to persons other than herself, the location where she spoke out in front of an audience for the very first time and where she learned how to develop her analytical skills.' Gradually, women, hitherto largely kept from participation in public life, developed communication and administrative skills. 'They presented to the public the difficulties facing working-class mothers, the lack of housing options, their discomforts, their financial difficulties. Eventually they formed delegations which went to visit city hall and the prefecture or they chose representatives from amongst themselves to go to lobby various ministries in Paris.'[29] 'Bit by bit women gained competency, casting aside their inhibitions and inferiority complexes when confronting persons in public office who often turned out to be rather ignorant of the matters under discussion.'[30] When supervising domestic assistance workers, or when taking on leadership roles in the sprawling network of MPF consumer cooperatives, women sometimes even

[28] Armand Maïer, cited from an interview with her held in August 1990, included in Dermenjian's 'Les Femmes dans les mouvements familiaux populaires de 1935 à l'après-guerre', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 55.

[29] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 287.

[30] Françoise Villiers, 'Le Choix du MLP', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 63.

acquired important managerial skills rarely available to their cohort elsewhere.

It is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty how many women may have experienced this process as a feminist process of self-discovery. Statements made to that effect during interviews conducted decades later may well have been influenced by the atmosphere in the wake of the rise of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s. Thus, Françoise Villiers's straightforward assertion—'I have always been under the impression that I was working for the liberation of women'[31]—certainly comes across more like a *post facto* statement rather than as a reflection of realities at a time when the MPF shook up the world of French Catholicism. Given the overall climate dominating the lifeworld of (even) the most radical elements within Catholicism at mid-century, the following, equally straightforward, and rather candid assertion by one of the leaders of the Lyonnais MPF, Georges Tamburini, may come a bit closer to the truth: 'The founders of the LOC-MPF certainly never had any intention to work towards the liberation of women.'[32] But what is certain is that men operating within the MPF did not stand in the way of those women who translated feminist or proto-feminist ambitions into lived reality.

As Geneviève Dermenjian, the uncontested authority on women's role within the universe of the French MPF, writes in a preliminary balance sheet of the impact of MPF activism on gender roles within the movement and within individually participating families: 'The male and female activists of the Mouvement were not always aware at the time of the symbolic importance of their behaviour, but they were conscious of the fact that they were indeed giving women considerably more space than was available to them elsewhere in the world of Catholic labour. . . . Without calling into question the social roles of women as mothers, wives, and keepers of the hearth, all this permitted [MPF] couples to experience life in a mutually supportive manner which prepared them for the sea changes of the decades to come,'[33] although this positive description should not be

[31] Taken from an interview transcript made by Geneviève Dermenjian, *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 177.

[32] Georges Tamburini, ' "Le Mouvement" et les femmes', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 162.

[33] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 290.

interpreted as a universal rule. Men, faced with the insistent demand by activist wives for at least temporary child-minding services, did not always respond in a helpful manner. Housework remained the virtually exclusive prerogative of women in the period under observation. And trouble easily brewed in paradise when male prisoners of war returned to their home: 'Before the return of the first prisoners, women had absolutely no precise idea of the sufferings experienced in the camps, and many were disappointed to experience their husbands as embittered, irascible, and physically ill beings, whom they no longer understood or accepted. Without adding to this the fact that countless husbands could not accept the changes which the personality of their wives had undergone during their captivity. Steeled by four years of absence and activism, the wives of prisoners of war had acquired a taste for the meaning and the concrete tasks of such responsibilities, within the family as much as beyond the boundaries of family life. They could not accept to return to the self-effacing role which had been their fate before the war.'[34]

By the early 1950s, women's traditional role as wife, homemaker, and mother began to be questioned for the first time in the pages of the MPF's *Monde ouvrier*,[35] though such ideas had by no means then become a norm within even the most 'enlightened' sections of the Catholic left. Such beginnings of openly feminist discourse were undoubtedly at least as much a result of overall societal and associated socio-psychological changes as a direct consequence of MPF women's activism as such. At any rate, by the 1950s, as we will discover, the MPF had undergone yet another evolution, which placed it increasingly outside the orbit of the *Catholic* left. But even in the years when the MPF was firmly established as part of the rich associational life of French Catholicism, women had already assumed more prominent roles within this important apostolic social movement than in just about any other branch of Catholic organizational life. The top national leadership positions were always equally divided between four men and four women, though this nominal gender equality diminishes as one surveys the gender composition

[34] Geneviève Dermenjian, 'S'unir pour résister (1940–1945)', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 106.

[35] Dermenjian, 'La Conception de la femme', 153–4; and Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 292.

of subsidiary bodies. Nevertheless, in 1946, for instance, the total number of MPF organizers with national or regional leadership roles included twenty-seven women alongside thirty-seven men, diminishing by 1947 to a ratio of 23 : 46. At national MPF gatherings, as a rule, two-fifths of all present were women. 'This is less than one-half, but this is much more than women had obtained—or were given—for example within contemporaneous political organizations.'[36] It must be emphasized, of course, that, as a general rule, men were more likely to be involved in the theoretical elaboration of MPF position papers, whereas women tended to focus on social service work. Nonetheless, for a movement which operated within a milieu which was, almost by definition, not attuned to questions of gender equality, the vast steps forward made by women within the lifeworld of the MPF must count for even more than they would in almost any other circumstances. MPF proto-feminism was, however, not without historical precedent. Although undoubtedly, to a large extent, the consequence of the lived experiences in the course and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, all of this would have been even more difficult to do without the path-breaking groundwork of earlier practices within the JOC. 'Co-responsibility [side by side with men] can be traced back to the education which numerous women [operating within the MPF] had received in the JOC. Having assumed responsible positions within the youth movement, female activists had acquired an autonomy and a personal capacity which they continued to apply in a natural fashion when working in the LOC and the MPF.'[37]

THE MOUVEMENT AND FRENCH COMMUNISM

Before moving on to deliver a balance sheet of MPF activism and to explain its rapid decline in post-liberation France, there is one more aspect of MPF iconoclasm which must be underscored. The forceful presence of the French Communist Party (PCF) at mid-century not only called forth condemnations of communist politics by the Catholic hierarchy but also by elements within the Catholic left.

[36] Dermenjian, 'La Conception de la femme', 151. [37] Ibid. 149.

Nonetheless, for some Catholic activists the PCF was often regarded as a secular complement to the spiritually motivated efforts by the Catholic left. A Marseille MPF activist recalls in a 1994 interview that such sympathizers were by no means restricted to lay activists. As was becoming clear in the case of many of the worker priests in many parts of France (see Chapter 5), in the port city on the Mediterranean 'there was a significant element of the clergy for whom individuals who were not members of the Communist Party were not true members of the working class'.[38] Given this degree of philo-communism amongst elements of the Catholic left, it is particularly noteworthy to recognize that, though by no means shying away from cooperation with communist allies, the MPF unfailingly kept its independent profile and did not hesitate to air its disagreements with the PCF.

Having made its breakthrough as a major player in national politics in the heady days of the Popular Front period (1936–7), the PCF further deepened its credentials as a force for positive change by virtue of its engagement in the anti-fascist resistance movement. Even before the PCF began to participate in various post-liberation coalition governments, however, the party hierarchy had rather suddenly begun to shift its strategy and tactics. From a force generally agitating for radical change, French communism mutated into a movement which still proclaimed the need to defend the workers' cause, but which now also—prior to the outbreak of the Cold War—called upon its members and sympathizers to support the post-liberation regime and to roll up one's sleeves and to engage in efforts to construct, rather than to subvert, the political and economic foundations of the French Fourth Republic. The PCF General Secretary Maurice Thorez's famous dictum 'One must know how to terminate a strike', first aired at the high point of the strike wave in June 1936 and now repeatedly invoked, demonstrated PCF willingness to moderate its line in the area of industrial relations as well.[39]

[38] Cited in 'Femmes et militantes au MPF', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13, 308. The sometimes rather intimate ties between PCF and the French Catholic left are well reconstructed in Yvon Tranvouez, *Catholiques et communistes: la crise du progressisme chrétien, 1950–1955* (Paris: Cerf, 2000).

[39] For some insightful comments on PCF strategy shifts in the closing years of the Second World War and the immediate post-liberation period, see, amongst others, Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, i: *1920–1945* (Paris:

Marseille was a stronghold of radical politics, with a visible presence of PCF notables on various levels of the post-liberation administrative hierarchies. Marseille's mayor, Jean Cristofol, and the Commissioner of the Republic for the Sud-Est region, Raymond Aubrac, were both PCF members. The desire of PCF policy makers to stabilize the post-liberation social order led, however, sometimes to the realization of such PCF initiatives as the fashioning of voluntary labour brigades to rebuild the city, despite the fact that life in Marseille, as in the rest of France, was still crucially affected by the prerogatives of private property, even though the stranglehold of Nazi occupation policies had finally been lifted. On such occasions, the MPF, working in tandem with the JOC, called for a measured application of such volunteer efforts, strongly urging local policy makers to limit such exercises to high-priority items affecting the social infrastructure, warning against the seemingly limitless extension of volunteer work efforts to questionable projects, such as the rebuilding of the hippodrome, or the application of such principles to privately owned factories. PCF and CGT stalwarts soon began to worry about the impact of such MPF/JOC counter-campaigns, and spokespersons for the MPF and JOC 'were regularly and violently shouted down by PCF activists when they spoke out during public meetings'.[40] MPF activists in Marseille developed a network of Labour Action Groups, which soon attracted a certain following. The PCF, consequently, began to worry about being outflanked on its left. Given the MPF's growing local popularity as the key force behind the housing squat movement, this concern was not entirely unfounded, and the PCF

Fayard, 1980), and ii: *1945–1972* (Paris: Fayard, 1981); Irwin Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945–1962* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); and Robert Mencherini, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges: parti communiste, stalinisme et luttes sociales en France: les grèves 'insurrectionnelles' de 1947–1948* (Paris: Syllepse, 1998).

[40] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 188. Alphonse Garelli furnishes some concrete data with regard to the call to volunteer for the construction of facilities for horse-racing events, not exactly a common working-class spectator sport in the *midi*, or the call for volunteer Sunday labour in a privately owned shoe factory; see Alphonse Garelli, 'Nous changeons le monde tous les jours, fada! Le MPF de la libération à la scission de 1951', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13, 203.

local daily newspaper, *Rouge-Midi*, openly criticized the squatters' movement as well.[41]

Underlying the local rivalries between PCF and MPF were differing conceptions with regard to their respective overall objectives as much as considerations of the optimal means to achieve their respective goals. MPF activists campaigned primarily for the collective promotion of their primary clientele, the industrial proletariat as such, as well as for the concrete improvement of daily living conditions of their constituency more than to assure the success of its own Mouvement. Many, if not most, rank-and-file members of the PCF were presumably agitating for very similar goals, but in actual party practice the interests of the organization often appeared to be the primary concern instead. This problematic can be studied in greater detail when looking at the role played by working-class neighbourhoods in the strategy and tactics of PCF and MPF. 'The Mouvement considered the neighbourhood as a miniature world, a location to apply its pedagogy and, until its exit from Catholic Action [about which more below], as its preferred terrain for its apostolate. For communists, said the former [i.e. activists within the MPF], the *quartier* serves above all as a reservoir of activists and revolutionaries [to be recruited], but also of voters. They act in the service of the political promotion of their party.'[42] The MPF stressed the interests of class above those of party, whereas with communist activists—in the views of MPF members and others—the welfare of the party appeared to be often more central than the welfare of the class. 'Grassroots activists within the PCF found that within our [the MPF's] ranks sentiment in favour of promotion of the working class as such was much more pronounced than within the party,' recalls Alphonse Garelli, who for some time had been a member of both PCF and MPF. 'Many comrades within the CGT and PCF joined our ranks. We constituted an active minority within [Marseille] factories, and we had a certain mass base, because the squatters or homeless or refugees in Marseille amounted to 7,000 members, with 4,000 families having obtained lodging; and that provided a solid basis for support.'[43] An additional important difference

[41] The criticisms of MPF squatting operations in Marseille within the pages of *Rouge-Midi* are reported in Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 275.

[42] Ibid. 191. [43] Garelli, 'Nous changeons le monde', 204–5.

between PCF and MPF strategies for social change was the tendency for communist activists to prioritize state intervention as a magic wand, whereas MPF militants saw salvation in self-organization.[44]

Communist hegemony over Marseille left-wing politics was ultimately never threatened by the MPF, but it is well worth recalling another lucid observation by Alphonse Garelli. For, having experienced the inner life of both PCF and MPF, Garelli had encountered not just PCF leadership hostility towards radical grassroots initiatives, but the wrath of another hierarchy as well. As we will learn in the remaining pages of this chapter, the MPF soon encountered hostile reactions to its activist course not just from secular defenders of the political and economic status quo or from opportunistic PCF notables, defenders of a moderating course. The church hierarchy, too, entered the fray—and most decidedly *not* on the side of the Mouvement. Details of this official opposition of the church hierarchy to MPF action will be furnished later on. For the moment, we will again quote Alphonse Garelli, who took great pleasure in likening the structures of the PCF to the structures of the Catholic Church: 'It is quite funny that there was indeed this parallel: the Church which was fearful, and the other church which was likewise gripped with fear. Even before [MPF Labour] Action Groups sprang up, the squatters' movement had embarrassed the communists. They asked themselves how it was possible that people who were not Marxists or communists could intervene in crucial issues, even those involving the rights of private property.' Both PCF and Catholic hierarchies responded in similar fashion faced with principled resolve. 'They were fearful of that vitality emanating from activists who, by means of their labour action, obtained a large audience amongst the working class.' Alphonse Garelli puts the finger on the spot and points out the frustrations of activists like himself, who had lived through the hopes and aspirations of the immediate post-liberation period, when he says, referring once again to the PCF: 'I must say that it acted just like the other church, assuming the support of faithful followers who would go along with the ideas of the hierarchy, contrary to the movement which we wanted, a movement based simultaneously on the individual and collective promotion of simple folk. I have said

[44] Duriez and Nizey, 'Les Service du MPF', 44.

it already more than once: I frequented a church which gave me material support but did not aid in uplifting the spirit; and then I encountered another church which aided my spirit but did not help to make ends meet.'[45]

THE CASE OF SAINT-ÉTIENNE

One of the persistent characteristics of the MPF was its fearlessness in confronting authorities of any kind. There is perhaps no better way to exemplify this characteristic behaviour than the description of a series of altercations between MPF and local authorities in the industrial town of Saint-Étienne. The particular poignancy of the documentation permitting the reconstruction of these events lies in the fact that it reports on MPF action before and after liberation, i.e. MPF confrontations with Vichy and post-liberation authorities alike. Here is what the extant archival sources report.

On 21 December 1943, three members of the Saint-Étienne MPF showed up in the prefect's office, following up on an earlier letter sent to the prefect, demanding immediate improvements in the inadequate supply of milk for the working-class district of Côte-Chaude, home to families with many children. An exchange of letters with the prefect in the first half of January also established that, in the view of MPF activists, milk prices were excessive, and that, by open admission of the prefect, milk prices were the domain of the prefecture. By early February 1944 nothing had apparently changed and the MPF of Côte-Chaude sent another letter to Prefect Boutemy, expressing their hope that 'some day' he may honour the MPF request with a response.[46]

Apparently the Vichy prefect sent two conciliatory and helpful letters on 3 and 25 February 1944, to which Marcel Montcel on 18 March responded for the MPF in an equally conciliatory fashion. But Montcel utilized the occasion to take exception to the verbal mistreatment which one of André Boutemy's assistants, a Monsieur

[45] The citations are from Garelli, 'Nous changeons le monde', 205, 201, and 200.

[46] All the information in this paragraph is taken from the letter of 4 February 1944 by Marcel Montcel for the MPF to Prefect André Boutemy: Archives Départementales de la Loire (ADL) [Saint-Étienne], Vt 97/9.

Courbon-Lafaye, had apparently meted out in a letter that had just arrived in the Côte-Chaude MPF office. Marcel Montcel complained to Prefect Boutemy that Courbon-Lafaye, apart from refusing to offer any concrete solutions to the milk supply problem, had labelled MPF activists 'agitators, liars, and calumniators', a charge the MPF vigorously rejected.[47] Also on 18 March, the Côte-Chaude MPF penned a letter to Courbon-Lafaye, apparently the head of a social service agency, opening their letter with the terse statement that they were 'neither impressed nor intimidated by the aggressive tone and the ever-so-polished words' in his letter of 24 February. They took exception to his contention that they were disturbing the 'social peace' and that they were 'causing trouble among the masses without knowing where to lead them'. Generally castigating Courbon-Lafaye's ineffective actions and offensive language 'strangely resembling a pirouette', the representative for the MPF found only one point of agreement, 'that it is useless to continue this letter exchange in the future. Nevertheless we dare hope that you will call us into your office without any further delay in order to inform us in person of your decision in response to the concrete facts and to the precise questions we have posed in this letter, which will most definitely be the very last one.'[48] The extant documentation does not permit any hint at the sequel to this exchange of letters in the last year of Marshall Pétain's regime. But what emerges rather clearly is the lack of any fear on the part of MPF activists facing the local administration of Vichy France. Not mincing any words, they frontally challenged authorities, no matter that in this instance authority rested with a dictatorship with German backing and presence in the middle of a war.

The documentation resumes shortly after liberation with a series of resolutions passed by various MPF federations in the industrial *département de la Loire*. Addressing the full range of grievances, from the need for housing subsidies to the need for across-the-board salary increases, these petitions permit an insight into the most pressing needs of the working population in that part of France. Two manifestos emerged from Roanne, summarizing the deliberations of

[47] Letter by Marcel Montcel to Prefect Boutemy, 18 March 1944: ADL, Vt 97/9.

[48] Letter by Marcel Montcel to Monsieur Courbon-Lafaye, 18 March 1944: ADL, Vt 97/9. The two citations in the second sentence of this section are quotations from the earlier letter by Courbon-Lafaye.

'2,500 working-class families gathered in five mass meetings held in our town between 12 and 19 September 1944', another one expressing the desires of the 3,500 members of the MPF in greater Saint-Étienne. The extant file includes more protest resolutions dating from early December 1944 and a letter from the deputy mayor of Saint-Étienne, sent to the Saint-Étienne MPF and pointing out concrete improvements.[49]

Apparently things started heating up again in February 1945. On Saturday, 17 February 1945, 3,000 working-class families turned out for a demonstration in central Saint-Étienne asking for short-term and structural changes. A text emanating from this assembly noted that 'it is regrettable that earlier demands and suggestions presented by the MPF have been dealt with ever so irresponsibly and cold-heartedly on the part of certain official milieux', 'that the black market flourishes as well as ever', and 'that, contrary to any common sense, some of the most shameful laws passed under the Vichy regime in order to starve and divide the population to the benefit of the occupiers continue to be upheld and applied'. They closed the petition (*vœux*) with the following threat: 'In case we do not notice any rapid and substantial improvements, we demand that, at the expense of the public purse, a delegation of mothers be sent to Paris, or that the appropriate cabinet member come to Saint-Étienne, in order to demand forcefully and with all resolve the remedies for the situation that we deserve.'[50]

A subsequent meeting with the new post-liberation prefect did not go very well at all, as emerges without question from the last letter in this document collection. On 3 March 1945 the Saint-Étienne MPF began their letter to Prefect Lucien Monjauvis: 'We have purposefully decided to let some time elapse before addressing this letter to you so that we would not be influenced by the emotions and the sentiments we felt after our meeting with you on Wednesday, 21 February. We regret that you have cast doubt over the sincerity and the disinterest of our actions by affirming that "the admirable working class of our region has nothing in common with your Movement" and that "the current period is particularly favourable to exaggerated claims and

[49] All documents can be consulted in ADL, Vt 97/9.
[50] 'Vœux addressés aux pouvoirs publics', n.d.: ADL, Vt 97/9.

propaganda" which we, in your estimation, know so well how to exploit.' In the name of its, by then, 40,000 working-class members in the *département de la Loire* claimed in this letter, the Saint-Étienne MPF vigorously rejected such accusations, which had apparently followed 'multiple demands for a joint meeting which you had never honoured by any response'. And they underscored that its membership wishes to 'no longer be treated as irresponsible minors'.[51]

Again, as in the case of the earlier interaction with Vichy Prefect Boutemy, the sequel to the correspondence with post-liberation Prefect Monjauvis is lacking. But the extant information certainly permits the conclusion that the MPF was truly non-partisan, defying all worldly authorities, whether on the political left or right, in their quest for concrete material improvements. For post-liberation Prefect Lucien Monjauvis was a member of none other than . . . the French Communist Party.[52]

EFFORTS AT UNITED FRONTS

The Mouvement Populaire des Familles, then, doggedly pursued its chosen independent course and did not hesitate to challenge authority. By definition arising from within the Catholic Church, the MPF, as we have seen, did not shy away from applying its sit-in tactics to church authorities, nor did its sympathies with the political left lead the MPF into uncritical acceptance of PCF politicians or PCF strategies. One should, of course, not elevate the MPF into a consistently and exclusively oppositional force. On the whole, for instance, including in the contested terrain of Marseille, the relationship between MPF and PCF has been characterized as a curious and combative mixture of 'confrontation and friendly cooperation, suspicion and goodwill',[53] and the same undoubtedly held true for its interactions

[51] Letter by the Saint-Étienne MPF to Prefect Monjauvis, 3 March 1945: ADL, Vt 97/9.

[52] For a general overview of the MPF in Saint-Étienne, note Jean Nizey, 'Naissance et développement du Mouvement Populaire des Familles à Saint-Étienne', in Denis Peschanski and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Les Ouvriers en France pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, supplement of *Les Cahiers de l'IHTP* 20 (1992), 381–9.

[53] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 192.

with the church hierarchy. Unity of working-class forces was the intermediate strategic goal of the MPF, and in order to reach this aim the MPF engaged in a series of united actions and pragmatic alliances with anyone who professed to strive for the same goal.

In Angers, for instance, coordinated action between MPF housing squat teams and elements hailing from the communist milieu appears to have worked far more smoothly than in Marseille.[54] The MPF opened its ranks to anarchists as much as to communists or to anyone else.[55] In the initial stages of the phenomenal development of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), a close working relationship developed between MRP and MPF, with relations, however, quickly cooling off when the process of rapidly increasing 'moderation' soon began to affect the MRP.[56] In Marseille, for instance, MPF activists participated for approximately two months in distributing the publications of what—in November 1944—officially became the MRP, 'until the evolution of the new political party, judged to be reactionary, led to their retreat'.[57] In the sphere of trade union activity, too, the MPF hoped to forge 'workers' unity'.

In 1945, the MPF National Executive discussed and approved a lengthy report on the necessity to work towards a united front, and a corresponding motion noted 'with satisfaction that united actions had been carried out in various circumstances by both national trade union federations, a preliminary but indispensable stage towards trade union unity',[58] a hopeful prediction which, it soon emerged, turned into its opposite, when the ravages of the Cold War created yet a third rival trade union federation, Force Ouvrière (FO), rather than unifying the two pre-existing confederations. But MPF activists did not cease their relentless efforts in the service of their cause. An autobiographical manuscript by an MPF activist in Orléans, for instance, points out—not without a justifiable degree of pride—that,

[54] Annick Tanter, 'Angers: Christine et le MPF', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 7, 177–228, particularly pp. 177–8 and 189–90.

[55] 'Femmes et militantes aux MPF', interview transcript, *Cahiers du GRMF*, 13, 310.

[56] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 13–14.

[57] Ibid. 97–8.

[58] 'Motion sur l'unité ouvrière', in Mouvement Populaire des Familles, *Travaux 46*, 16: Archives du Monde du Travail (AMT) [Roubaix], Fonds Mouvement Populaire des Familles (MPF), 199701613. The full report on 'L'Unité ouvrier' can be consulted in *Travaux 46*, 3–16.

at the occasion of the May Day celebrations at the onset of the Cold War period, only the MPF was an active presence at both May Day gatherings, one organized by the communist CGT, the other by the moderate FO. By contrast, the author does not neglect to add, the MPF stayed away from the official Catholic labour mass (*messe du travail*) read by the local bishop, which had assembled almost the entire panoply of Catholic associations, from the Catholic trade union federation to the Catholic employers' association. The MPF, the account goes on to say, 'for a variety of reasons did not want to join in this odd admixture of forces which was revelatory of a circumstantial unanimity, a loyal translation of what the Church is advocating for the workers' movement, both sides [workers and employers] inspired by the identical precept: the social doctrine of the Church'.[59]

TAKE-OFF AND DECONFESSIONALIZATION

As this frank account of MPF sympathies in Orléans in the early days of the Cold War period suggests, at a certain point in time the MPF, originally developed and promoted as a constituent part of Catholic Action, underwent a process of increasing alienation from church authorities, which, quite visibly and obviously, could mean that official Catholic demonstrations of support on Labour Day (1 May) were boycotted in favour of active engagement in the gatherings of the secular left. But the process of alienation from official church authorities can be traced back almost to the very beginnings of the Nazi occupation of France. An initial step which first ruffled some feathers amongst church authorities was a 1940 decision by the MPF leadership to establish its organizational network on the basis of neighbourhoods rather than parishes.[60] For Catholics, of course, the parish constituted the basic building block of society rather than the neighbourhood as such. And, even though the rapidly growing numbers of MPF members virtually mandated that, in cases where parishes were far too vast, the neighbourhood would become

[59] Albert Puel, 'Être la chance des autres: entre deux aurores, août 1943–juillet 1950', 107: AMT, MPF, 1997 016 98.

[60] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 177.

the fundamental unit of MPF associational life, church authorities quickly began to warn about the dangers of such an uncoupling from traditional Catholic associational life.

The fears of church leaders soon proved to be more than warranted. By December 1940, the LOC monthly journal, *Meneurs*, officially relegated its Christian credentials to second rank vis-à-vis its desire to represent workers *tout court*.[61] For, in their efforts to attract non-Christian workers to the LOC cause, it soon became all too apparent that the close association with the Catholic Church turned out to be a potential obstacle in recruiting new members. Although expressly welcoming secular members to the LOC ranks, in actual reality such a hoped-for influx of non-Christian members was not everywhere forthcoming. While at this point no one questioned the necessity for a continued Christian directorate for the LOC, it was decided to de-emphasize this dimension in the LOC's daily efforts geared towards 'mass work'. Hence the impending name change at this conjuncture from LOC to MPF. The national chaplain of the MPF, Maxime Hua, recalls: 'The programme of the LOC? No problem in accepting it. Giving a helping hand in order to realize it? Absolutely. But becoming a member? No. One does not provide reasons for such a refusal, but at the root of it lies this: it would necessitate living like a Christian, to be exemplary Christians at home as much as at church, and one does not quite feel up to it, at any rate not yet.'[62]

There were, however, complementary or, to some extent, contradictory tendencies at work as well to further this process of creeping secularization. One of the most important reasons for the spectacular take-off of the MPF lay in the fact that, in Vichy France as much as in the *Zone Nord* directly under German occupation, all organizations of the traditional labour movement—political parties, trade unions, and more—had been outlawed. The MPF, by contrast, due to its express self-definition as a social service organization operating under the auspices of Catholic Action, continued to operate legally, and it thus provided one of the select few safe havens for many activists who, prior to 1940, would never have set foot inside a Catholic group. Given the MPF's promotion of the workers' cause, it became the organization of choice for a fair number of non-Catholic

[61] Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 178. [62] Hua, 'L'Évolution', 46.

labour activists whose traditional organizations had been dissolved. As early as 1941, MPF representatives in western France asserted for the cases of La Rochelle and Saint-Brieuc: 'All trade union leaders have changed their affiliation to the LOC', and this development was by no means an isolated incident.[63] Many of these new recruits hailing from the trade union milieu had been activists within the radical secular CGT.

The voluntary de-emphasis of its Christian self-image and message, combined with the influx of secular members, produced a potent and explosive mix of activists. It was in the years of occupation when the MPF experienced its first phenomenal burst of growth. 'Our local affiliates jumped from ten to 300, 800, 1,500 members', reads one report, and the number of professed believers was soon outflanked by secular forces.[64] A dynamic upward cycle of new members attracting successive waves of new recruits gave the growing numbers of MPF activists ever-increasing levels of confidence and inner resolve. As the war years proceeded, the plethora of social service activities portrayed in earlier sections of this chapter provided the key recruitment mechanism to swell the MPF ranks. But many—and often most—of these new members joining up in the later war period, though rarely seasoned activists unlike the first generation of new members who had switched their allegiance from CGT to MPF in 1940 and 1941, were not necessarily faithful members of the Catholic Church either.

Already in 1941, the movement changed its name from LOC to MPF—a decision at first limited in reach to Vichy France—in large part in order to remove the 'Christian' label. By 1943, the national chaplain, Father Maxime Hua, exhorted MPF organizers in the pages of *Masses ouvrières* that priests should be kept away from intermediary leadership deliberations to facilitate the movement's growth. 'Far from facilitating the conversion of non-Christians who operate within our movement, their presence would make this move more difficult. Only the individuals designated to facilitate such meetings should take part. There will be some skirmishes [over such a move to limit the attendance by priests], but that should be manageable.'[65] By March 1944, the secularization process had become so far advanced

[63] Cited in Debès, *Naissance*, 40. [64] Cited ibid.
[65] Maxime Hua, 'Les Nouvelles Méthodes du MPF', *Masses ouvrières*, 1 [1943], 71.

that MPF leaders—still mostly recruited from amongst the hard core of Christian believers—decided to launch a new publication, *Pages spirituelles*, expressly targeted at the minority of active Catholics within the MPF's ranks.

Such a move had, of course, a contradictory effect. On the one hand, it reconfirmed the apostolic and spiritual roots of the Mouvement. On the other hand, however, it further accelerated the deconfessionalization of the traditional MPF press. 'All specifically religious language disappeared from the movement's press. The growing distinction between Christians and non-Christians gradually emerging over time soon took on a structural character with the organization of the very first group of activist Christians gathered around *Pages spirituelles*.'[66] The occasion of the first national leadership gathering uniting MPF sections from all parts of France, meeting in 1943, was also the very last moment when an authoritative MPF body still openly proclaimed its adherence to Catholic Action.[67] And the MPF by no means abandoned this secularizing course in the post-liberation period. On the contrary! The first national leadership gathering in free France, meeting in Paris on 9–10 December 1944, saw no priests or representatives of the church hierarchy in attendance.[68] By October 1945, worries about the fate of the remaining Christian activists led to the first open call for the generalized institution of regular gatherings of Christian believers gravitating around *Pages spirituelles* to meet as a quasi-subsection or special interest group within the overall structures of the MPF.[69] On 10 April 1946, a further step was taken. A series of decisions officially transformed the MPF into a 'movement fully in the hands of the laity', mandating the removal of priests from all 'regular gatherings on all levels of the organization', which meant that even the officially designated national chaplains were no longer welcome at MPF deliberations.[70] Even though, for the

[66] Debès, *Naissance*, 50. [67] Ibid. 51. [68] Ibid. 69. [69] Ibid. 81.

[70] Ibid. 86. This is the moment to draw attention to yet another in the remarkable series of *Cahiers du GRMF*: No. 2 (1984), *De l'Action Catholique au Mouvement Ouvrier: la déconfessionalisation du Mouvement Populaire des Familles 1941–1950*. I have chosen to reference key events in the secularization of the MPF in Joseph Debès's landmark monograph instead of this special issue solely because of the greater facility with which interested readers may find Debès's book in library resources, compared to the series of fifteen *Cahiers du GRMF*, which are more difficult to locate. The complete set can, however, still be purchased from the Groupement pour la Recherche sur

moment, the MPF continued to benefit from official recognition by the Church, the dynamic towards loosening the ties with the Catholic Church was unmistakable.

THE HIGH POINT OF MPF INFLUENCE

In the sphere of less than half a dozen years, a model organization of specialized Catholic Action had mutated into a radical advocacy group for working-class individuals and working-class communities across France. Without ever shelving its ultimate—and its original!—goal of rechristianizing the increasingly secularized portions of industrial France,[71] the MPF evolved into a constituent element of the radical left. 'A veritable transformation was under way, shifting the apostolic movement towards its object, i.e. towards working-class families and to the masses. From an apostolic movement, the organization evolved into a workers' movement.'[72] By 1948 the General Secretary of the MPF, Marie Fraignier, could openly proclaim in her opening lines to the 'general report' on 'revolutionary action within and by the MPF': 'For a long time now, within the Mouvement Populaire des Familles, we keep repeating these words: "Libération ouvrière, ascension ouvrière, montée ouvrière, révolution, promotion ouvrière".'[73] Within the overall context of its birth and adolescence within the lifeworld of Catholic Action, there is no better way to describe the MPF's 'maturity' by the mid-1940s than by the way in which it freely adapted the classic JOC slogan 'par eux, entre eux, pour eux' [by themselves, amongst themselves, for themselves]

les Mouvements Familiaux: 4, allée du Ternois, 59650 Villeneuve d'Ascq, France, or ordered via regular bookstore channels.

[71] The retention of its original missionary goal is well stated, to mention but one example in the literature, in Duriez and Nizey, 'Entre apostolat', 36–7.

[72] Debès, *Naissance*, 45.

[73] 'Marie Fraignier expose dans le Rapport moral l'action révolutionnaire du MPF 1947–48', *Travaux 49: compte-rendu du Congrès National 1948*, 2: AMT, MPF, 199701613. *Ascension ouvrière*, *montée ouvrière*, and *promotion ouvrière* were all then commonly used terms within the orbit of the Catholic left to denote the same ideas conveyed by other hopeful and determined catchwords, such as *libération ouvrière* [workers' liberation] or, indeed, *révolution*.

to read—by 1945—'par nous, entre nous, pour tous' [by ourselves, amongst ourselves, for everybody].[74] From an organization striving to rechristianize working-class lapsed Catholics by means of aiding proletarian families to improve their everyday life, the MPF had become an all-encompassing revolutionary organization promoting the self-advancement of the laity, largely relying on secular forces, retaining from its original apostolic mission not much more than its occasional invocations of its (in reality increasingly receding) distant goal.

Amazingly enough, the radicalization and secularization of the MPF was paralleled by an astounding increase in members over time. In the second half of the 1930s, the Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne, as the MPF was then still proud to be called, never passed the 6,000 mark, a respectable but on the whole rather negligible membership figure.[75] Then occurred, first, the influx of seasoned labour movement activists as a side effect of Vichy and Nazi repression of the secular left, an infusion of vitality which helped set the stage for the grand take-off in the final years and months of the Second World War, fuelled to an equal extent by the MPF's uncompromising positions and the overall appeal and utility of its social service divisions. By late 1944, according to one source, the Mouvement came close to the 95,000 mark.[76] Another headcount of MPF members came up with 158,500 on 18 February 1945, and yet a third statistic lists 138,076 members at an unspecified moment in '1945'.[77] Whichever figure may have been correct, the immediate post-liberation period unquestionably constituted the high point of MPF membership and generalized influence over part of French (Catholic, but not only Catholic) society. The organizational report for the year spanning mid-1945 to mid-1946 claimed that the MPF could be said to be representing the views of close to one million socially disenfranchised workers.[78] Many of these estimated one million people were not officially MPF members, not so much out of lack of interest or of goodwill, but often because

[74] Here taken from the aforementioned 1945 report on 'L'Unité ouvrière', 15.

[75] Debès, *Naissance*, 25. [76] Ibid. 39.

[77] Ibid. 73, for the higher estimate; see Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 56, for the precise figure of 138,076.

[78] 'Rapport moral sur l'activité du Mouvement pendant l'année 1945–1946', *Travaux 47*, 46: AMT, MPF, 199701613.

they could not afford the membership fee. Thus, the periphery of sympathizers always far exceeded card-carrying members.[79] Figures for the oft-invoked case of Marseille and the surrounding region of the Sud-Est corroborate these guesstimates for national membership totals and the aforementioned general trend. At the high point of MPF popularity, in the aftermath of liberation, the Sud-Est region had approximately 30,000 members, with Marseille alone accounting for close to half of that number.[80] Yet, once again, different ways of measuring membership may at least partially account for sometimes widely varying figures. Thus, at an unspecified time in the mid-1940s, the town of Aix-en-Provence alone had 4,200 families registered in the MPF, 'representing 16,203 individuals', the latter figure presumably including children and adults alike.[81] At any rate, the data pertaining to MPF membership in the Marseille region do corroborate the situation repeated elsewhere: a phenomenal rise up to 1945 and a rapid decline in succeeding years.[82]

Sales figures for the most popular of all MPF publications, *Monde ouvrier*, further demonstrate the conjunctural importance of the MPF in the heady days of post-liberation euphoria. *Monde ouvrier* could rightfully be included in the long list of self-managed cooperatives which helped create the MPF mystique. To a significant extent, *Monde ouvrier* was written and edited by the readers themselves. Each regular section of the paper was linked to a specific platform point in the MPF's general programme. Each coordinator of each rubric in turn relied on a network of collaborators in various corners of France who furnished information, wrote position papers, and, for all practical purposes, formed the backbone of this ambitious journalistic enterprise. 'Without this network, constructed before the project of *Monde ouvrier* got under way, the weekly paper—we were all aware of it—would have never been able to get off the ground,' wrote Paul Bacon, the first general editor of *Monde ouvrier* in a 1991 reminiscence.[83]

[79] The quantitative weight of the milieu of sympathizers, often well integrated into the activities scheduled by the MPF, is well described in Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*, 27.

[80] Ibid. 19. [81] Reported ibid. 53.

[82] These trends are presented for the case of Marseille, the Bouches-du-Rhône, and the entire Sud-Est region ibid. 52–7.

[83] The citation is taken from Geneviève Dermenjian, '*Monde ouvrier*, miroir de l'évolution des femmes', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 6, 198. The standard reference work on

At the high point of MPF influence in the mid-1940s, *Monde ouvrier* was regularly published with a print run of between 150,000 and 210,000 copies per issue which, the 'Rapport moral' for 1945–6 was proud to report, made *Monde ouvrier* 'one of the largest workers' weeklies in the entire country'. In all likelihood, sales reports emanating from various corners of France announcing stellar figures for copies sold were no exaggeration, as was the case in the regional capital of the Dordogne, Périgueux, where a team of seven vendors, aided by an automobile fitted with loudspeakers, sold 700 copies in less than three hours.[84]

POST-1945 DECLINE

The year 1945, however, witnessed both summit and supersession of the MPF mystique. All indicators point to a rapid subsequent decline of MPF influence and membership.[85] What may account for the rise and fall of MPF influence, an organization traversing the skies of French social movement culture in the 1940s like a comet, rising quickly and shining brightly, but then vanishing as rapidly as it had first appeared? As always, undoubtedly a number of factors must account for such an important sea change, and for all the wealth of information uncovered in the course of the more than twenty years of deliberations of the Groupement pour la Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux, relatively little serious attention has been devoted to the causes for the MPF's ultimate decline. One factor, though in all likelihood not the most important one, was a distinct evolution on the part of the most popular MPF-initiated social services or cooperative undertakings to develop a life of their own, increasingly

the experiences surrounding the production and distribution of *Monde ouvrier* is yet another in the serious of remarkable *Cahiers du GRMF*, 4 (1986), ed. Louis Guéry, a special issue on *Monde ouvrier 1937–1957: une presse libre pour des temps difficiles*.

[84] 'Rapport moral…1945–1946', 35, for the case of Périgueux; the figures for average print runs at this point in time can be consulted on p. 37 of the report.

[85] The relevant national membership figures and corresponding numbers for Marseille and the Sud-Est can be consulted in the table on p. 56 of Dermenjian, *Combat ouvrier*.

separate and distinct from the Mouvement itself. If the gamut of services constructed by the MPF in the years of war and occupation were one of the more powerful points of attraction for new members, then the growing tendency towards autonomization of such offerings would certainly have contributed to the diminution of public interest in the MPF itself.[86] More importantly, perhaps, the need for many of the services offered by the MPF may have diminished after the end of war and occupation. If the concrete services rendered by the MPF were a powerful pull, then post-liberation improvements in food supply and other elementary needs of the population may have spelled a natural end to the magic forces of attraction of the Mouvement. But food rationing and other shortages—housing, for instance—continued throughout 1946 and 1947, and such restrictions did not begin to disappear until 1948 and after. Yet the membership decline of the MPF was clear and precipitous immediately after its high point in 1945. Also, on a more general level of analysis of grassroots activism in France, an overall decline in commitment and engagement has been noted in post-war France—but not before the mid-1950s, once again invalidating a possible explanation for the MPF's decline.

Perhaps the most convincing answer to the conundrum of the MPF's fate lies in the unusual circumstances of its growth. For, unquestionably, one of the rationales for its rapid take-off after 1941 lies in its unique position as safe haven for activists and disenchanted critics of Vichy from all walks of life. Geneviève Dermenjian put it like this: 'Inasmuch as the MPF had truly represented, for at least some people, a symbolic opposition movement in the face of power and the occupying forces, it was only logical that individuals ceased their engagements when the challenge receded, be it to retire to the private sphere, or be it to rejoin the political or trade union organizations that were now once more authorized to operate legally, and which suited them better. The Mouvement had thus been considered by its adherents as a temporary organization that served as a substitute for many causes: food procurement, challenges to the regime,

[86] The 'autonomization' and 'differentiation' of MPF services is highlighted by Duriez and Nizey, 'Entre apostolat', 50–1, citation on p. 50.

organizational refuge for political or trade union activists who could no longer pursue traditional venues for action.'[87] The aura of the MPF's wartime efforts still persisted to shine the way to a bright future in the immediate post-war era which was a period of high expectations and great hopes. With the return of the *status quo ante bellum*, i.e. politics as usual, the seemingly unbounded energies channelled by the MPF dissipated before long.

Another factor, of course, operated behind the scenes, a factor which played potentially a very major role. For, as was only to be expected, the creeping deconfessionalization of the MPF did not go unnoticed by church authorities worried about the growing radicalization and autonomization of the movement originally emanating from the ranks of Catholic Action. When the name change from LOC to MPF occurred in 1941, this move was more than symbolic for the development beginning to determine the subsequent evolution of the Mouvement, as we have seen. Opposition arose above all in the Nord,[88] and the new acronym was not adopted for all of France until 1943. With increasing independence from the Catholic fold, voices criticizing the MPF course became more widespread, both within and outside the MPF proper. In general, the parts of France which had experienced the greatest amount of dechristianization were also in the forefront of moves towards deconfessionalization of the MPF itself, as the pressures for such a move were here greater than elsewhere. Translated into geographic regions, this meant that Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, and the south of France in general, less so the Parisian region, pushed hardest for what became the MPF trajectory. The east of France, the north, and Saint-Étienne were the most hesitant areas to sanction such a course.[89]

[87] Dermenjian's reflections on the possible causes of post-1945 MPF decline can be consulted on pp. 54–9 of her *Combat ouvrier*, citation on pp. 56–7.

[88] Debès, *Naissance*, 58.

[89] Fernand Delmote, 'Animation spirituelle et transformation du Mouvement: journal d'un aumônier (Lille, 1941–1951)', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 14, 50. The same MPF chaplain in the Nord goes on to suggest that, in general, southern French MPF activists 'want to be revolutionaries and were so indeed, at the very least in the regions of Marseille and Nice. In the Nord, one is above all else embarked on a reformist course'; see p. 62 of his diary entries.

A RIVAL ORGANIZATION SPONSORED BY THE CHURCH

When the MPF leadership had decided on 10 April 1946 to remove priests once and for all from all levels of MPF actions and to proclaim the lay nature of the Mouvement, yet another decision further contributed to the growing estrangement from the spokesmen and structures of the Catholic Church. *Pages spirituelles*, the publication specifically geared toward the dwindling numbers of committed believers within the MPF, was now officially separated from the administrative apparatus of the Mouvement and, though remaining in the hands of the MPF national leadership, most if not all of them still faithful members of the Church, was no longer considered a publication belonging to the MPF.[90] Out of the network of reading groups and discussion circles formed around *Pages spirituelles* eventually emerged the organizational rival to the MPF. In a process well reconstructed by Joseph Debès, the second half of the 1940s witnessed the slow but steady consolidation of what eventually replaced the MPF within the structures of the Church. This initially rather loosely organized association of like-minded people merely continued, on one level, the work of specialized Catholic Action where the LOC and MPF had gradually abandoned it in the course of the early to mid-1940s, i.e. especially with regard to the spiritual dimension of MPF work. The French episcopate did not remove its mandate for the MPF until 1949. When this decision was taken, however, the path was finally cleared for the rival grouping to take on a permanent and well-defined structure. The official founding of the new Action Catholique Ouvrière occurred in October 1951.[91]

Yet this brief potted history of the role of the Catholic hierarchy in setting up a rival organization to agitate in the (formerly) Catholic working-class milieu should not be regarded as an attempt to ascribe a major role to this particular development when accounting for the decline in MPF influence. The gradual consolidation of

[90] Debès, *Naissance*, 87.

[91] The gradual emergence of Action Catholique Ouvrière (ACO) is the central subject of Joseph Debès's oft-cited *Naissance de l'Action Catholique Ouvrière*, but his careful attention to the prehistory of ACO makes his 1982 monograph an indispensable resource for an understanding of the MPF as well.

the ACO was an almost unavoidable consequence of the MPF's militant course towards deconfessionalization, rather than its catalyst or cause. On the whole, then, I would suggest, the MPF's fate roughly paralleled the fate of other organizations at that time which had set out to change the world without entering compromises with established hierarchies—be they the traditional structures of the Catholic Church or the imposing top-down institutional mechanisms of communist parties. The time was not yet ripe for anti-authoritarian, self-management-oriented movements challenging authorities in all spheres of social and political life. It is thus by no means surprising that the surviving organizational continuities evolving from the French MPF eventually formed one of the original nuclei of what—in the aftermath of 1956 (Suez, Budapest, and Algeria)—became the French New Left.[92]

THE BELGIAN MPF

Compared to its grand competitors on the trade union and political left, the French MPF—despite its conjunctural importance in certain locations of metropolitan France—was nowhere dominant or hegemonic within the forces of the left. 'Nonetheless, it occupied a singular space—as a sort of organizational spur to action, site of experimentation, innovation, education, and communication—within French social life at that particular time.'[93] The same cannot

[92] For what became of the MPF in the later 1940s, the 1950s, and beyond see, above all else, the *Cahiers du GRMF*, 9 (1995), ed. Michel Chauvière, a special issue on *Une communauté brisée: regards croisés sur la scission MLP-MLO de 1951*. A short overview of the MPF's heritage can be consulted in Bruno Duriez, 'Left Wing Catholicism in France: From Catholic Action to the Political Left: The *Mouvement Populaire des Familles*', in Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard (eds.), *Left Catholicism: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation, 1943–1955* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 64–90. A carefully constructed organizational diagram of the MPF's multiple avatars, called 'Arbre généalogique des Mouvements Populaires des Familles', is included in a separate page in almost all of the fifteen *Cahiers du GRMF*—for instance on 443 of No. 9—pointing out, amongst other indications, the confluence of MPF energies into what eventually emerged as the flagship organization of the French New Left, the Parti Socialiste Unifié.

[93] Michel Chauvière and Bruno Duriez, 'Le GRMF: un pari méthodologique: pour une histoire collective', *Cahiers du GRMF*, 14 (2006), special issue on *Faire des militants*, 251.

be said of the other national branch of the MPF under study in this volume, its Belgian section. Practically non-existent in the Flemish part, the Belgian MPF was a phenomenon restricted to the francophone portion of that state, in accordance with the fact that, at the time of the Second World War, the Dutch-speaking areas of Belgium were still solidly in the hands of the Catholic hierarchy. The latter, by contrast, had seen its influence decline in Wallonia and Brussels from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. Wallonia thus became the prime target for a movement called into existence to fulfil an apostolic mission amongst adult working-class Catholics. For the time being, the underdeveloped industrialization in the Flemish portion of Belgium and the corresponding hold of the Church over society in Flanders made an organization like the MPF unnecessary in the Flemish part.

Technically, of course, the Kristelijke Werknemersbeweging (KWB) [Christian Workers' League] fulfilled the role of specialized Catholic Action organization for adult Catholic workers in the Flemish half of Belgium. Founded in 1941, the KWB's membership far surpassed the numbers enrolled in the Walloon MPF, listing 16,029 adherents as early as 1941, rising to 28,067 by 1945, and surpassing the 100,000 mark by 1956. But until the 1950s, it wholly subscribed to the moderate and, indeed, conservative world view of Belgian Catholic Action, and it was not until the 1950s that the KWB began to develop a life of its own. By the early 1960s, the KWB indeed had become the 'critical conscience' of the Belgian Catholic labour movement, and any study of the second wave of left Catholicism in Western Europe would have to pay close attention to the deliberations and the actions of the KWB. But for the period under discussion, i.e. in the short lifespan of the Walloon MPF, the KWB was devoid of most critical instincts, and for all practical purposes there were few meaningful interactions between MPF and KWB.[94]

Precise membership figures for the MPF are difficult to interpret. The annual report of the Belgian MPF for 1944–5 portrays a convincing steady rise in dues-paying adherents from 498 members in

[94] On the life and times of the KWB, see Walter Nauwelaerts, 'Le Kristelijke Werknemersbeweging', in Emmanuel Gerard and Paul Wynants (eds.), *Histoire du Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien en Belgique*, vol. ii (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 501–43; citation on p. 501, membership figures in the table on p. 541.

December 1944 to 2,148 members in August 1945.[95] And it is likely that this rate of increase would have continued for another year or more. A detailed and sober account of the trajectory of the MPF in 1949, for instance, dates the beginning of the trend reversal to 1947, a year later than was the case for the French MPF.[96] A rather optimistic-sounding short presentation of the Belgian MPF's credentials on the occasion of an international conference in Switzerland in July 1948 claimed 10,000 members and added that approximately 50,000 families were regularly reached by the activists of the Belgian MPF.[97] But this was probably an overstatement of the actual Mouvement's reach. The Belgian MPF is likely to have never exceeded a total membership of 4,000–5,000 even at the best of times. Even when taking into consideration the smaller size of Belgium or Wallonia compared to France, the Belgian MPF could never rightfully claim to fulfil an equally important role. Still, a brief glance at the short history of the Belgian MPF may exemplify and underscore some of the key characteristics determining the evolution of this much-neglected transnational Catholic social movement.

The Belgian MPF arose out of the Centrale d'Éducation Populaire (CEP) [Adult Education Service] of the Ligue des Travailleurs Chrétiens (LTC), the umbrella organization for the panoply of organizations operating within the Belgian working-class milieu. The CEP exclusively targeted male adult workers and, for the most part, members of Catholic workers' organizations. The JOC furnished identical services for young Catholic workers; the Belgian LOCF did the same for adult Catholic working-class women. In the course of the second half of the 1930s, older male members of the JOC, facing the loss of their traditional supportive environment in the tradition established by Joseph Cardijn, increasingly complained about the absence of the JOC spirit within the LTC's CEP, the sole port of call for JOC graduates. By late 1940 and above all in the course of 1941, a

[95] 'Rapport général de la 1ère année d'existence du MPF 1944–1945', 5: Centre d'Animation et de Recherche en Histoire Ouvrière et Populaire (CARHOP) [Brussels], Fonds Victor Michel (VM), farde 99.

[96] 'Réunion du 14 juin 1949, Secrétariat Général', 1: CARHOP, VM, farde 104.

[97] 'Entente Internationale du Mouvement Populaire des Familles: procès-verbal de la séance du dimanche 4 juillet 1948 au S.N. du Mouvement Populaire des Familles Suisse', 2: CARHOP, VM, farde 574.

new organization saw the light of day to respond to the perceived organizational vacuum for adult male workers, first labelled Action Catholique Ouvrière (ACO) and then Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne (LOC), the latter name obviously inspired by the pre-existing homologue operating in France for half a dozen years already. The name ACO survived longest in the Centre and Charleroi regions, with both acronyms used side by side for quite some time.[98]

Wartime conditions under direct German administration, similar to what existed in the French Nord, undoubtedly hampered the development of the ACO/LOC though, as was the case in France, the LOC could legally operate under indirect protection of the Belgian Catholic hierarchy. In the course of 1943, the movement began to consolidate when key personalities, including none other than Joseph Cardijn, engaged in a series of deliberations to streamline and unify the fledgling organization, leading to the drafting of a LOC manifesto and a project outline for educational work to be carried out by the LOC.[99] By the summer of 1944 the moment had arrived for yet another quantitative step to be taken. On 17–18 August 1944 the Walloon diocesan chaplains gathered in Namur to draw up statutes and a general charter for the movement. The provisional General Council of the LOC was then officially invited to a meeting on 3 September 1944 at the Brussels headquarters of the LOC to ratify these moves.[100] As fate would have it, an event of great historical importance intervened to delay the founding conference. Precisely on 3 September 1944, the German occupiers fled Brussels, and that very evening the Allied forces made their triumphant entry into the

[98] The aforementioned information is taken from a report by the General Secretary of the MPF, Raymond Vermeulen, 'Les Origines du MPF: son développement, ses positions fondamentales: esquisse d'une solution de quelques problèmes posés par son existence', delivered at a joint meeting with diocesan chaplains in Wallonia on 9–10 October 1946, 1–5: Archives du Monde Catholique (ARCA) [Louvain-la-Neuve], Papiers Raymond Vermeulen (RV).

[99] Insightful written communications between the various members of this planning group, as well as some key documents emanating from this circle, can be found in the Centre d'Archives de la Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine [Brussels], Fonds Paul Garcet.

[100] Letter sent in the name of the Collège des Aumôniers Diocésains Wallons to the members of the LOC's provisional General Council, dated 22 August 1944: CARHOP, VM, farde 99.

capital.[101] On Sunday, 24 September 1944, the charter and statutes of the new movement were finally approved.[102] The charter proclaimed the movement as 'essentially apostolic', striving to rechristianize Belgian workers who had become alienated from their faith. The founding document officially 'repudiated class struggle in all its manifestations', proclaimed as its goal the establishment and consolidation of 'social peace between the classes', and called for the institution of a number of 'practical reforms' to aid in this endeavour, such as the re-establishment of the eight-hour work day, a guaranteed holiday period for workers, and 'the participation of workers within the economic and financial life of the country by means of competent delegates who will represent the interests of labour within management commissions based on parity'.[103] It was a founding document which differed little in spirit from the original impetus animating the French LOC.

The most important structural differences between the French and Belgian LOC/MPF were essentially that, in the case of the latter, adult women workers were never fully integrated into the adult movement and, second, that the Belgian homologue was never officially approved to be part of Catholic Action. The male character of what became the Belgian MPF was originally a contingent consequence of the particular organizational trajectory of the Belgian LOC, which was founded some years after a corresponding adult Catholic female workers' association, the LOCF, had been firmly established. Similar contingent reasons account for the technicality of the non-incorporation into Belgian Catholic Action. The group of Walloon diocesan chaplains which officially launched the streamlined organization was simply not authorized to bestow official Catholic Action status on what became the Belgian MPF. On most other counts, the Belgian movement closely paralleled its French homologue. The parallel went even so far that, when the 24 September 1944 meeting in Brussels approved the charter and statutes, the name of the organization had changed to Mouvement Populaire des Familles.

[101] Letter sent in the name of the same body to the same addressees, 12 September 1944: CARHOP, VM, farde 99.

[102] An official statement to that effect can be consulted in CARHOP, VM, farde 99.

[103] 'Charte du Mouvement Populaire des Familles', citations on pp. 1, 6, and 8: ARCA, RV.

As was the case in France as well, the Belgian MPF, despite its charter's express support for the Mouvement's 'essentially spiritual' mission, from the very beginning devoted at least equal attention to material concerns. Raymond Vermeulen, in his aforementioned October 1946 report, put it like this:

> Given our apostolic goal, could we orient our local affiliates towards the establishment of services which had as their object the provision of material necessities? That was the question which we posed ourselves at the very moment when we launched directives that would lead to the constitution of consumer committees. And we then decided to pay His Eminence Cardinal Van Roey [the *primus inter pares* of the Belgian Catholic hierarchy] a visit to ask him for his opinion. To our question concerning Catholic Action as a type of disembodied entity hovering above the contingencies of everyday life, the Cardinal offered this reflection: 'A pure Catholic Action simply does not exist.' As to the specific Consumers' Committees, he told us: 'You are setting as your goal to take care of lower-class families. There is no other way to do it except to concern yourselves with their immediate needs, if you wish to reach out to them!' We were now more convinced than ever before that, in order to get in touch with the masses, we would have to link up with them at the level where they were at and where they remained approachable.[104]

For the Belgian MPF, too, then, the service sector they constructed became a primary recruitment tool.

Given the smaller scale of the Belgian Mouvement as a whole, the MPF was never able to construct a vast network of a variety of services along the lines of their French counterparts. And even when their services paralleled the French menu of offerings, the overall size was significantly lower. Thus the Belgian MPF, for instance, never managed to acquire and to administer more than two vacation homes, compared to the French MPF's fifty-odd homes.[105] According to one undated authoritative history, the Belgian MPF specialized in four distinct services: adult education, consumer cooperatives, vacation

[104] Vermeulen, 'Les Origines', 7.

[105] 'Note de l'équipe nationale du MPF pour la réunion commune avec les EP, la LOCF et le MOC du jeudi 23 juin 1949', 5: CARHOP, Fonds Mouvement Populaire des Familles (MPF). An article in the MPF's weekly newspaper, announcing the opening of its two vacation homes, complete with photographs, can be consulted in *La Vie populaire*, 19–26 October 1947, 13: 'Enfin! Des vacances familiales!': Archives de l'Évêché de Liège (AEL) [Liège], Fonds Monseigneur Kerkhofs (MK), boîte 89.

homes, and housing-related issues.[106] The organizational report for 1944–5 also listed 'a national service to aid returning prisoners of war',[107] a service which is likely to have fallen into disuse in subsequent years.

But the parallels between the mode of operation and evolution of the French and Belgian MPF went beyond the structural-functional similarities evoked in preceding paragraphs. There was a more 'ominous' convergence of Catholic activists' hearts and minds either side of the Quiévrain. Readers may recall that the name change from LOC to MPF in the French case was more than merely a cosmetic change. In Belgium, too, a tendency towards de-emphasizing the spiritual side of the MPF's apostolic mission could be detected over time. And, just as in France, where the more than symbolic name change was contested in the comparatively moderate north, in Belgium too the switch from LOC to MPF turned out to be contested. The official announcement of the MPF's launch on 24 September 1944 claimed that a 'majority of Walloon regions were represented' at the meeting,[108] but a March 1946 document penned by the MPF affiliates in the Belgian province of Luxembourg notes that the apparently controversial replacement of LOC by MPF had been agreed 'without prior assent by [the LOC's] former leadership',[109] an assertion which is impossible to verify or to refute. Be that as it may, as had been the case earlier on in France, the spiritual mission of the MPF quickly gave way to a focus on material self-help. In May 1946, Raymond Vermeulen noted in a document openly contradicting the MPF's founding charter: 'It is not on the level of the defence of the spiritual and cultural interests of lower-class families where this elite of activists will best leave their mark but in the areas of justice, mutual assistance, and charity.'[110]

Five months later, in a document referred to earlier on, Raymond Vermeulen, having obtained the assent of Cardinal Van Roey for the

[106] 'La Place des services dans le MPF', undated, 1–2: CARHOP, MPF.

[107] 'Rapport général . . . 1944–1945', 6.

[108] The undated announcement, headed simply 'Mouvement Populaire des Familles', is located in CARHOP, VM, farde 99.

[109] 'Rapport d'activité', datelined Arlon, 25 March 1946, 2: Archives de l'Évêché de Namur (AEN) [Namur], A 107.

[110] Raymond Vermeulen, 'Le MPF, mouvement éducatif', 18 May 1946, 2: CARHOP, VM, farde 103.

MPF's concentration on both spiritual and material concerns, went on to suggest: 'Could we have made a distinction between lower-class families depending on the latter's religious or political beliefs? Could we have aided some of them without having aided the others? Could we have refused the assistance of non-Christians who were offering to lend us a helping hand? Such a decision appeared to us then, and appears to us today, contrary to the true Christian spirit of charity, contrary to the true image of Christ, contrary to true Christianity.'[111] And thus the Belgian MPF embarked on a similar path towards the inclusion of non-Christian members amongst its circles of activists as was characteristic of the French MPF, complete with the associated eventual consequences.

In early 1946, the national chaplain of the Belgian MPF, Philippe de Soignie, explained at a meeting of the MPF's National Council: 'You asked us: Will we still open up our deliberations with a prayer? Do we still need the presence of a chaplain? I respond: We Christians do not really need to begin our deliberations with a prayer if our brothers are offended by that. We will respect them; and we love our non-believing brother too much to insist on imposing on him something which he does not love. He knows that there are priests who focus on the spiritual education of Christians, and we will accept them, but under one condition: that such priests will not take up leadership roles. If he acts as a leader, then he shall relinquish such a function; we do not want it. But if he is a priest who helps us out, then he presents no danger.'[112] A brochure penned by Philippe de Soignie, *Mystique chrétienne et ascension ouvrière*, in which the MPF's chaplain spelled out the implications of the MPF's mission, became the catalyst for a wide-ranging series of communications between church leaders, leading Catholic lay activists, and MPF stalwarts. As a commentary on de Soignie's manuscript by the leadership of the Catholic workers' organizations in the province of Brabant Wallon makes clear, what moderate opinion within the Belgian Catholic Church feared most was the likely dynamic engendered by such a radical course. Under the heading 'First Danger: The Abandonment of Christian

[111] Vermeulen, 'Les Origines', 7–8.

[112] 'Compte-rendu sténographique des discussions du Conseil National 3/2/46', 3: CARHOP, VM, farde 103.

Institutions', the Catholic labour leaders wrote: 'Apart from the facts, is there not moreover sufficient reason to fear that those affirmations of "independence", which are wholly justified in certain domains, will create an extremely dangerous "spirit of independence" or "indifference"?'[113] The Luxembourg MPF complained that the national MPF leadership had gone as far as copying 'in certain cases the methods of the [militantly secular] *syndicat unique* and the Union Démocratique Belge.'[114]

Keenly aware of the developments within the universe of the MPF south of the border, voices calling for a reversal of the trend towards deconfessionalization in Belgian MPF circles grew louder. The Bishop of Namur, André-Marie Charue, soon took on a leadership role in this growing campaign to impose limits on the Belgian MPF's course. In a series of documents, the Bishop of Namur warned against the tendency to freely adopt French MPF methods in Wallonia. 'Is it really true that our Walloon regions are as pagan as the [Parisian] industrial suburbs? Even the parish priests in the [radical Walloon region of] Borinage hesitate to accept such an assimilation';[115] and elsewhere he drew attention to major differences between regions in Wallonia: 'In general, everybody is in agreement that one must be flexible and that one must not impose the norms applicable to a profoundly dechristianized area on the region as a whole. As for me, I insist that the directives emanating from [the MPF's] national centre

[113] 'Ph de Soignie "Mystique chrétienne et ascension ouvrière": note des dirigeants des organisations ouvrières du Brabant wallon', 16 January 1946, 4: AEN, A 107.

[114] 'Rapport d'activité', 2. The reference to the *syndicat unique* could have had two possible meanings in March 1946, when this report was written. Up to the end of 1944, a reference to an organization behaving like a *syndicat unique* was most likely to suggest that the targeted organization was expressing hopes for a pluralistic trade union organization which could surpass the political or religious divisions operating in the Belgian trade union sector. From late 1944 onwards, references to a *syndicat unique* must increasingly be seen in the context of the developing trade union confederation of the same name, organized under communist auspices. In either case, the ascription of tendencies similar to a *syndicat unique* highlighted the presumed radical proclivities of the targeted organization, in this case the national leadership of the MPF. I thank Rik Hemmerijckx for this explanation.

[115] Bishop of Namur, 'Note sur le livre de de Soignie: mystique chrétienne et ascension ouvrière', 2: Archives de l'Évêché de Tournai (AET) [Tournai], Fonds Monseigneur Carton de Wiart (MCW), B/4/5.4.

should be prudent and take into account such vital differences.'[116] By November 1946, André-Marie Charue went as far as addressing a thinly veiled complaint about the direction and the dynamic entered into by the Belgian MPF to Pope Pius XII.[117] Not all members of the Belgian Catholic hierarchy frontally opposed the MPF. On 31 October 1946, for instance, the Bishop of Tournai sent his colleague in Namur a handwritten letter in which he noted: 'I would like to ask you to please bear in mind the fact that I am in no way hostile to the MPF. Quite the contrary! And I believe I can also say that the Bishop of Liège appreciates the MPF just as I do.'[118] But the centre of gravity within the Belgian Catholic hierarchy continued to tilt against the MPF.

Another centre of opposition to the MPF trend towards deconfessionalization arose within the Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien (MOC), the successor organization to the pre-war LTC, which had originally spawned the experiment of the LOC in the early days of Nazi occupation and war. Though generally not part of the most conservative section of Belgian Catholicism, the MOC was nonetheless not prepared to sanction the gradual deconfessionalization of the MPF and soon put up a strong opposition.[119] Given the combined careful attention to the trajectory of the MPF by the generally rather conservative Belgian Catholic hierarchy and the forces of the more 'open-minded' Catholic labour movement, it was therefore not exactly surprising that soon the parallels with France emerged on yet another level.

There is no need to give a detailed account of the protracted process of the marginalization and ultimate dissolution of the Belgian MPF, as it roughly coincided with the overall fate of its French homologue. A new and rival organization gradually began to emerge: the

[116] Bishop of Namur, 'MPF: visite, le 24 avril 1946, du de Soignie et de V. Michel', 2: AEN, A 107.

[117] Bishop of Namur to 'Très Saint Père', an added handwritten notation suggesting 'mi-nov. 1946' as the date: AEN, A 107.

[118] Étienne Carton de Wiart, Bishop of Tournai, to the Bishop of Namur, 'Vigile de Toussaint 1946', 1: AEN, A 107.

[119] This tug-of-war between MOC and MPF is well documented in countless position papers strewn throughout the archival holdings consulted. For a succinct analysis and description of this tension, see the relevant pages devoted to the itinerary of the Belgian MPF in Patrick Pasture, *Kerk, politiek en sociale actie: de unieke positie van de christelijke arbeidersbeweging in België 1944–1973* (Leuven: Garant, 1992), 62–71.

Équipes Populaires (EP). In November 1947, a corresponding publication was launched: *L'Équipe populaire: bulletin des dirigeants des équipes de formation et d'action populaire*.[120] By the autumn of 1949, *L'Équipe populaire* for the first time carried as its subtitle the name of a former MPF publication, *Meneurs*.[121] The relevant archival holdings consulted for this portion of Chapter 4 are replete with a never-ending stream of proposals and counterproposals by all affected parties, seeking a solution to the vexing issue of the future of the Belgian MPF, either in the form of a merger of MPF, EP, and the LOCF, the separate continuation of all three streams of adult working-class specialized Catholic Action, or a combination of those two solutions.[122] On 1 August 1949 the MPF's General Secretariat filed legal notice of impending lay-off of its staff, effective 31 October 1949, due to the depletion of all financial resources.[123] Some remnants of the MPF apparently survived for more or less another year,[124] but all traces disappear after 1950. Unlike its French homologue, then, which survived to constitute eventually some of the earliest detachments of the French New Left, the Belgian MPF vanished with no organizational heritage.

[120] I consulted a copy of this first issue in CARHOP, VM, farde 103.

[121] I have consulted this issue of *L'Équipe populaire*, 3/2–3 (October–November 1949) in the holdings of the ARCA.

[122] The single most important archival resource for the reconstruction of the history of the Équipes Populaires will remain, of course, the Archive des Équipes Populaires in Namur. A brief overview of the history of the Équipes Populaires can be found in Guy Zélis, 'Les Équipes Populaires', in Gerard and Wynants (eds.), *Histoire*, ii. 545–63.

[123] This action is reported in a letter sent by the MPF's President, Victor Michel, to the President of the MOC, Léon Servais, dated 8 August 1949, 2: CARHOP, VM, farde 108.

[124] On 18 September 1950, a Liège activist, Alexis Fraiture, for instance, sent a letter to Victor Michel informing him of the status of the latest negotiations between the leadership of the EP and 'the former bureau of the MPF', and Fraiture added: 'As far as I am concerned, there is nothing more to do, and we are moving towards a split': CARHOP, VM, farde 26. A 1950 publication, Charles Depasse, *Les Principales Œuvres libres d'éducation populaire en Belgique en fonction des loisirs des travailleurs* (Liège: Éditions Biblio, 1950) still lists the MPF on pp. 102–3, though proclaiming it as officially defunct.

5

A Working-Class Apostolate beyond Catholic Action

Team Building, Base Communities, and Worker Priests

BELGIAN CRITICS OF TRADITION

Catholic Action, in particular specialized Catholic Action, constituted the vanguard of progressive Catholicism from the 1920s through to the 1940s in francophone Europe, starting with the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (JOC) in the 1920s and culminating with the Mouvement Populaire des Familles (MPF) in the 1940s. By the second half of the 1940s, as we have seen, French activists within specialized Catholic Action for the adult working-class milieu went as far as separating themselves—organizationally, but to some extent also spiritually—from the Catholic Church as such. This, however, did not spell the end of Catholic activism along progressive lines, nor did it prevent the genesis of entirely new forms of the Catholic apostolate within the working-class milieu. Even in the comparatively moderate Belgian case, where MPF activists ultimately remained safely contained within the vast network of Catholic institutions and organizations, voices could be heard—and with increasing frequency and volume—which recognized the limits of Catholic Action and other aspects of actually existing Catholic missionary activity in effecting drastic changes. As we will discover, new forms of organizational methods were tried and tested, focusing on community building and on hoping to turn the tide of the ongoing dechristianization via new and innovatory ways and means of evangelization.

In 1955, the community of Belgian worker priests in the city and province of Liège penned a lengthy report of their history and achievements, which pointed the finger in an exemplary way at the perceived impasse of earlier forms of Catholic missionary activism. Recalling the worker priests' own state of mind at the beginning of their mission (about which more below), the authors reminisced that they had become increasingly convinced of the veracity of 'the feeling—which many priests shared with us—of the insufficient nature and impact of our traditional efforts, even those of Action Catholique Ouvrière (ACO), as well as work within our parishes'.[1] The *liégeois* worker priests pointed out the irrelevance of the Catholic trade union federation in this key industrial region in the Belgian state: 'With regard to Christian unionists, focusing on the [all-important] metal industry in the area around Liège, the [socialist] FGTB [Fédération Générale des Travailleurs de Belgique] has 48,000 and the [Catholic] CSC [Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens de Belgique] 2,000 members.' Within Belgium as a whole, 'the CSC is influential only in [at that time still relatively underdeveloped] Flanders and within small-scale enterprises'.[2] And the team of *liégeois* worker priests went on to decry the fate of that quintessential Belgian contribution to the working-class apostolate, the JOC: 'Is it necessary to recall the grave crisis which is affecting the JOC in the province of Liège? Certain parishes in Seraing and Herstal [bastions of heavy industry in the agglomeration of Liège], for instance, no longer even have a local branch. A significant number of *Jocistes* are not really factory workers. At our workplaces, we have encountered only a few isolated activists of Catholic Action.'[3] 'Most of the JOC campaigners have become employees of the Christian insurance associations or the Christian trade union federation and no longer live a working-class life.'[4] 'This is of course a wonderful example of a human success story! But is this really one of the goals of the JOC and more generally of religion to serve as a kind of springboard for those who are or who become Christians, to elevate themselves to a higher rung on the ladder of social hierarchies?'[5]

[1] 'Rapport de l'Équipe des Prêtres-Ouvriers de Liège', 13 February 1955, 3: Archives des Prêtres Ouvriers Belge (APOB) [Flémalle], Fonds Louis Flagothier, 'documents datés'.

[2] Ibid. 20. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid. 21. [5] Ibid. 22.

The authors of this lengthy report then went on to make a more general point:

> Almost everywhere, we note a profound confusion and identification of belief and religiosity with Christian institutions and associations, i.e. the entire network of social service organizations and Christian movements which are strictly speaking not religious in the narrower sense of that term. But if the majority of Christians themselves no longer know how to make those essential distinctions, should we be surprised that the workers themselves are absolutely incapable of distinguishing between these spheres and that they reject the Church, which they view as intimately linked to these temporal structures which are seen as unacceptable? Let us say it loud and clear: the workers' world is openly hostile vis-à-vis all Christian movements. To them even the JOC is nothing but a franchise operation of the PSC [Parti Social Chrétien].[6]

LA FRANCE: PAYS DE MISSION?

If Belgian critics pointed to the limits of traditional Catholic organizations in attracting new forces to the Catholic fold, including such new 'traditions' as the JOC, French observers were naturally not far behind. Indeed, as early as 1943, what quickly became the single most influential book publication of its kind in francophone Europe drew attention to the need for innovative methods to tackle working-class dechristianization. This bold new study soon began to make waves, pointing to the same complex set of factors as noted by the Liège area worker priests, highlighting what they regarded as obstacles impeding the progress of apostolic missions in the working-class milieu. Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel's *La France: pays de mission?* minced no words: 'The Action Catholique Ouvrière has not taken root amongst pagan workers; it has not been possible to do so yet; and under current conditions governing the priesthood it will remain impossible to do so.'[7] Focusing on the flagship organization of specialized Catholic Action, the JOC, Godin and Daniel became

[6] Ibid. 23.

[7] Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France: pays de mission?* (Lyon: Abeille, 1943), 106.

more specific: 'It is not that the JOC has not tried. It has been created for precisely this purpose; it is above all targeting pagans; the JOC is by nature "missionary". Yes, it is not for want of trying; this much we can affirm after ten years of trials, of struggles, of all sorts of efforts which have been tirelessly repeated. But all this work has run up against a wall', the team of authors continued: 'One cannot construct a missionary movement without a missionary community, and that missionary community is missing.'[8] Godin and Daniel then put their finger on the spot which, to them, pointed in the direction of a key factor behind the ongoing absence of a sufficiently communitarian spirit of apostolic movements organized by the Catholic Church: 'This missionary community is not to be found on the level of the parish, though this is no matter of reproach: it is not within its [i.e. the parish's] power.'[9]

The standard traditional parish was, in the eyes of Godin and Daniel, 'a milieu which was shut to the outside world [*un milieu fermé*]'.[10] Depending on the social composition of the neighbourhoods represented in a given parish, the public face of parishes could differ. But the image of a given parish in the eyes of outsiders was usually rather homogeneous, and the character of a parish would rub off on the local Action Catholique Ouvrière grouping, the latter organized—unlike the subsequent Mouvement Populaire des Familles—explicitly along parish lines: 'some are more working-class oriented, others—and this includes by far the largest number of parishes—are composed of workers with higher skill levels or lower-ranking white-collar employees, a few—in exceptional cases—are dominated by high-ranking employees.'[11] But even in the case of parishes with a predominantly unskilled working-class membership, the prevailing mentality was not likely to attract the average blue-collar worker. Religious institutions and practices—and parish life in particular—tended to neutralize the class character of a given

[8] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 107.

[9] The second half of this citation is taken from the abridged English translation of this landmark study: Maisie Ward, *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), 152; the first half is translated from the original French in Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 107.

[10] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 119.

[11] Ibid. 120.

constituency, even and especially if proletarian in nature, performing the role of a social levelling operation, which would raise lower-class members to a level above that of their average co-workers. 'In extreme cases a proletarian hailing from the parish milieu was closer to a small-scale bourgeois [*bourgeois d'œuvre*] than to a worker in his neighbourhood.'[12] Why should non-religious workers from such neighbourhoods become attracted to such culturally alien communities as were most regular parishes? 'Thus there are entire reaches of human activity in our glorious city of Paris, within the proletariat of our great cities, where the gospel is not being preached, where indeed it cannot be preached.'[13] Recourse to parish-based means of evangelization would thus be almost guaranteed to remain fruitless within classic blue-collar communities.

In traditional Catholicism the parish forms the basic building block of the Catholic Church. What the family is to society the parish is to the Catholic Church. Thus the identification by Godin and Daniel of the elementary unit of Catholic organizational life as an obstacle to evangelization was a bold step indeed, although the authors were careful to add that they by no means wished to abolish traditional Catholic institutions or, indeed, Catholic Action. 'No, one must not get rid of Catholic Action in the parish milieu. On the contrary, one must intensify Catholic Action and—certainly when looking at our missionary terrain—we must alter Catholic Action, sometimes to a very great degree; we must change it so that it may become the yeast within the dough constituted by the parish milieu, for it [the parish] too is in need of a thorough renewal.'[14] More concretely, Godin and Daniel saw a place for both Catholic Action and new missionary initiatives. They called for the side-by-side retention of 'a Catholic Action of conservation, of the perfection and the apostolic education within the parish milieu', while simultaneously underscoring that 'we also need a missionary Catholic Action within the pagan proletarian milieu'.[15]

[12] Robert Wattebled, *Stratégies catholiques en monde ouvrier dans la France de l'après-guerre* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1990), 53.

[13] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 121.

[14] Ibid. 113; here, too, a small section of the English text has been taken from Ward, *France Pagan?*, 156.

[15] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 118.

The lack of true Christian communities in the working-class milieu was identified as the root cause of dechristianization—and not the process of industrialization as such. Godin and Daniel argued that proletarianization and community building were by no means mutually exclusive. 'One encounters many true communities within the world of labour, not on the level of the vast enterprise itself, but within individual departments within a factory, or amongst employees in certain offices, within certain workteams. As imperfect as such communities may be, they manage profoundly to affect the life of these proletarians. It is via this route that socialism has entered the masses with a speed and depth of penetration which we have still not fully understood.'[16] And without such a sense of identification as members of a forward-looking community, no one would be able to construct a movement, let alone a missionary movement. This was precisely what French communism had been able to accomplish in the heyday of the Popular Front period, Godin and Daniel averred. 'If the communists were so strong in 1936 it was because, despite the rather narrow organizational basis of the party as such and undoubtedly because of this, they managed to instil within the people a veritable *movement* (in the sense of that term within the field of physics), which gathered the key dynamic elements of the working class in its wake.'[17] Consequently, *La France: pays de mission?* was a call to action to construct 'genuine life communities'[18] that are Christian, Christian 'communities deeply anchored in the working-class milieu,'[19] in order to regain the initiative. No stone should remain unturned in attempting to create such blessed communities. 'We must labour to ensure that within each of these communities persists an atmosphere of extremely close and enthusiastic friendship, which can give everyone a concrete idea of what it means to bring about that marvellous divine union with the mystical body of Christ.'[20]

No such efforts, however, could ever become successful without the fashioning of a suitable 'missionary clergy'.[21] If traditional parish life had become an obstacle to evangelization amongst the proletarian masses, the inappropriate misuse of parish priests' limited available

[16] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 151.
[17] Ibid. 58, emphasis in the original. [18] Ibid. 120.
[19] Ibid. 110. [20] Ibid. 126. [21] Ibid. 130.

time was Godin and Daniel's chief complaint about the ways in which the priesthood had become misdirected. 'How many hours go to waste in making arrangements for marriages and funerals and such matters, from which the priest could usefully be released for his real and serious work? What to think of the priest who manages the finances, whose role is that of an accountant? Or of the priest-sacristan performing a role which resembles that of an attendant at a storage unit? Surely the Bishop did not ordain them for such occupations as these? And what to make of the priest as director of various parish services, who often more closely resembles a businessman than a preacher of the gospel, with all his various tasks, his imaginative ways of finding solutions, his skill in bringing things off…'

But Godin and Daniel were not only critical about the multiplicity of tasks for which most priests were ill prepared. They likewise castigated the waste of time and energy spent on performing sacerdotal tasks which usually reached a mere handful of firm believers. 'Let us not speak too much about the church service itself which has such an important place in the life of our parish. For instance High Mass, which is often delivered in the presence of deacons and assistant deacons; or Vespers with its two traditional processions each month, services which necessitate the presence of the clergy in order to "edify" the tiny circle of some twenty or one hundred faithful; or Benediction given for thirty, twenty or sometimes just five persons…' 'Oh, how much we would love to arrive at a saner view of such matters and at a better order of priorities for our various activities; first of all evangelization, then the dispensation of the sacraments, then mass, and finally administration.'[22] Godin and Daniel did recognize that, on all too rare occasions, Catholic Action did engage in exemplary 'community building' projects. 'Every time that specialized [Catholic Action] movements behave in the way they should, whenever they are assisted by a clergy in accordance with the importance of such tasks, then the results are absolutely stunning. Is it necessary to point out that in Flers [today part of Villeneuve d'Ascq in the Nord] the Mouvement Populaire des Familles has influence over nine-tenths of the women who are wives of prisoners of war, and that it touches

[22] Ibid. 133; ellipses in the original; portions of the first citation segment are taken from Ward, *France Pagan?*, 172.

more than half of its proletarian population with its service of *jardins ouvriers*?'[23] But such shining examples of successful missionary activity within the industrial working-class milieu were the proverbial exception that confirmed the rule. The task of constructing meaningful communities and the corresponding spirit undergirding such efforts remained to be fulfilled. For Godin and Daniel, the Catholic Church not only had to construct its 'universal community', i.e. the transnational presence of the Church in the form of pilgrimages, international congresses, and so forth, and an intermediate level of 'local communities on the parish level'. On the most fundamental and elementary level of community building, the Church had also to create 'communities based on affinity (base communities [*communautés de base*])',[24] or it would remain an institution of little relevance to the most dynamically expanding and numerous component of contemporaneous industrial society, its blue-collar working class.

CARDINAL SUHARD

Having obtained the respective authorizations to publish such an iconoclastic work, *La France: pays de mission?* appeared in bookstores precisely at the moment when the attractions of Vichy France, initially seen by more than a few French Catholics as the belated arrival of the long-awaited true Catholic France,[25] began to wane. Still, such a bold thesis was bound to ruffle feathers, and publication had by no means been guaranteed. Fortunately for the authors, Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, had been handed a copy of an early version of the manuscript on Easter Monday 1943. After having leafed through its pages earlier that day, Cardinal Suhard began to read it in the course of the evening. 'The hours passed by. The Cardinal keeps reading. Chapter after chapter, he becomes immersed in a world of indifference, of atheism, of immorality, with a thousand concrete examples—some of them veritable dramas—revealing to him the

[23] Godin and Daniel, *Pays de mission?*, 115. [24] Ibid. 126.

[25] This climate of high hopes by important segments of the French Catholic public is well depicted in part I of Jacques Duquesne, *Les Catholiques français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1966), 21–118: 'La Tentation de Vichy'.

existence and the reality [of dechristianization] with an intensity he has never before encountered. When, after finishing the read, he closes the volume, the night is over. It is the morning of Easter Tuesday. The Cardinal has not closed an eye.'[26] On 1 May 1943 Cardinal Suhard personally met the authors. And in September 1943, at the request of the Cardinal, the book was published, complete with a glowing foreword by Georges Guérin, founder of the French JOC and animator of the early French LOC. This affinity, by the way, was mutual, as Godin and Daniel dedicated their cry for missionary attention to . . . Georges Guérin and Joseph Cardijn![27]

Yvan Daniel was a parish priest in Paris and Henri Godin, the chief author of the controversial book, had started his career as a vicar in Clichy, the spawning ground of the French JOC, half a dozen years after the launch of the JOC. Godin soon became a JOC chaplain, above all in the northern reaches of Paris and—for the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (JOCF)—in Vincennes.[28] Who, however, was Cardinal Suhard? Growing up on a farm in western France, Emmanuel Suhard was by no means a revolutionary spirit. But profoundly influenced in his youth by the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII, Emmanuel Suhard retained an open mind and a keen eye for the difficulties facing the underdog in society. Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux in 1928–30, then Archbishop of Reims (1930–40), Suhard was appointed Cardinal in 1935, becoming Archbishop of Paris from 1940 until his death in 1949. When the manuscript copy of *La France: pays de mission?* disrupted his usual sleeping pattern at Easter 1943, Cardinal Suhard had already been exposed to the realities of dechristianization in the vast expanses of his native France. And it remains an open question whether it was the graphic description of the consequences of dechristianization—for which Godin and Daniel's study

[26] Olivier de La Brosse, introductory notes to the chapter on 'France, pays de mission?' in Olivier de La Brosse (ed.), *Cardinal Suhard: vers une église en état de mission* (Paris: Cerf, 1965), 139.

[27] The audience on May Day and Suhard's intervention in view of publication of this œuvre is reported in de La Brosse (ed.), *Cardinal Suhard*, 140.

[28] Biographical information adapted from the useful 'Index' of individual itineraries in Charles Suaud and Nathalie Viet-Depaule, *Prêtres et ouvriers: une double fidélité mise à l'épreuve, 1944–1969* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), 576. A full-scale biography of Henri Godin is Palémon Glorieux, *L'Abbé Godin, 1906–1944* (Paris: La Bonne Presse, 1949).

is indeed most remembered until the present day—which provided the Cardinal with food for thought, or whether it may not have been above all else the proposed remedies advocated by the authors, reported above, which cast a spell over the Cardinal's mind. As we will see, the fearless description of reality contained within this best-selling book's pages soon triggered concrete action in the field of missionary activity by the *primus inter pares* of the French episcopacy. But the story of innovative missionary activities outside French Catholic Action proper begins already much earlier, though Cardinal Suhard was at the forefront of this pioneering venture too.[29]

The origins of French *missions intérieures*, i.e. apostolic activities geared towards the rechristianization of France itself rather than geared towards the conquest of 'pagan' countries in the southern hemisphere, organized outside Catholic Action, go back to the mid-1930s. And, at first sight paradoxically, the earliest calls to action focused on the dechristianization of the French countryside rather than its urban ghettos which had been the target par excellence of the JOC and, later on, the LOC. In 1936–7, when all eyes followed the spectacular developments associated with the French Popular Front, a mostly urban product, Jacques Féron, national chaplain of rural Catholic Action, distributed a report of a voyage across rural France, followed up by two submissions to the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops (ACA), in which he drew attention to the phenomenon of rural dechristianization.[30] At the same time, a lay activist in Suhard's Reims diocese, Victor Bettencourt, President of the Union Catholique de la France, published a series of articles in the flagship French Catholic daily *La Croix*, drawing attention to the same problem. In 1938, Victor Bettencourt published his insights in book form: *L'Apostolat rural: programme d'action catholique: les hommes et les institutions*. Cardinal Suhard furnished the preface to Bettencourt's study, and he likewise supported the proposed remedies which, in Bettencourt's as well as in Féron's case, included the call

[29] The most comprehensive biography of Emmanuel Suhard remains Jean Vinatier, *Le Cardinal Suhard: l'évêque du renouveau missionaire, 1874–1949* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1983).

[30] The 1936–7 report by Chanoine Féron is alluded to in Vinatier, *Suhard*, 110; the 1938 reports to the ACA are mentioned in Émile Poulat, *Les Prêtres-ouvriers: naissance et fin* (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 162.

for the founding of a *séminaire des missions intérieures* and other measures to promote intensive evangelization of parts of the French countryside which, in Bettencourt's formulation, were declared *terres de mission*.[31] Emmanuel Suhard, attuned to the problems of rural France, had already begun as early as 1934 to nominate priests to certain parishes in his Reims diocese for the precise purpose of combating rural dechristianization. In 1937, Cardinal Suhard went as far as declaring an area in his diocese, Châtillon-sur-Marne, a *district missionaire* and designating a team of three priests, headed by the local *doyen*, to lead this pioneering effort.[32]

Parallel to his moves to reinvigorate the Christian presence in the Champagne, Emmanuel Suhard began to coordinate lobbying efforts to create a seminary for 'domestic missions' for all of France: '1937 was thus very well the crucial year which saw the grand designs of the Cardinal ripen.'[33] But by 1937, too, the Cardinal had broadened the remit of such a future seminary: 'the evangelization of towns, especially of the world of blue-collar workers, was no less urgent than that of the countryside.'[34] There is good reason, then, to assume that the fascination with *La France: pays de mission?* was not due to any presumed shock effect when faced with graphic descriptions of the reality and consequences of dechristianization, something with which Suhard was evidently quite familiar. Let us turn to some organizational consequences of the recommendations for apostolic work by Victor Bettencourt, Jacques Féron, Emmanuel Suhard, and others.

THE MISSION DE FRANCE

According to Adrien Dansette, Cardinal Verdier, the Archbishop of Paris succeeded in 1940 by Cardinal Suhard, may well have been the first to utilize the term 'Mission de France' at some point during the

[31] See Victor Bettencourt, *L'Apostolat rural: programme d'action catholique: les hommes et les institutions* (Paris: Spes, 1937). On Bettencourt, see Vinatier, *Suhard*, 110 and 222; Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 162; and Louis Augros, *De l'église d'hier à l'église de demain: l'aventure de la Mission de France* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 46–7.

[32] On Emmanuel Suhard's efforts to evangelize select dechristianized parishes in his Reims diocese, see Vinatier, *Suhard*, 107–10.

[33] Ibid. 111. [34] Ibid. 226.

1930s in an attempt to express the need for an as yet ill-defined project of an interior mission.[35] But it was Cardinal Suhard who, when still Archbishop of Reims, pushed by far the hardest for the creation of what eventually, indeed, became officially known as the Mission de France. Ever since his brief appointment as Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, Emmanuel Suhard had developed a close affinity with the pilgrimage centre in Lisieux, devoted to the cult of St Theresa, the saint of missionaries. When, in 1939, Cardinal Suhard approached Mother Agnès at Lisieux with his idea to establish the organizational headquarters of the Mission de France precisely there, his proposal was met by a rather enthusiastic response. Initially, however, the Carmelite Mother Agnès interpreted the plan as an undertaking to be carried out under the umbrella of the Carmelite order. And a number of bishops, once having been won over to Suhard's idea of establishing a Mission de France, likewise almost automatically assumed that the priests to be trained at the yet-to-be-established seminary would be instructed by members of a religious order. And, indeed, for most members of the church hierarchy, it was difficult to imagine how an explicitly interdiocesan mission could possibly be run by clerics *not* belonging to an order, as each diocese was normally under each respective bishop's control, and an association of regular priests administering an interdiocesan office would be less likely to come into conflict with the differing practices of the targeted dioceses. In fact, Cardinal Suhard approached a number of orders to provide the organizational framework for his Mission.[36]

By the second half of September 1939, however, Suhard had become convinced that his interests would be best served by establishing a seminary where teaching would be in the hands of secular priests. Having made this decision, Suhard contacted the Society of Saint-Sulpice, an association of secular priests with a long tradition of educating clergy. On 24 July 1941 the ACA officially approved Suhard's project and nominally took control of it. At this point the Mission still had neither a material infrastructure nor a teaching staff nor, self-evidently, a student cohort. But, in the words of Jean

[35] Adrien Dansette, *Destin du catholicisme français 1926–1956* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), 144.

[36] On the 1939 negotiations to establish the Mission de France, see Vinatier, *Suhard*, 227–30.

Vinatier, who has done more than anyone else to chronicle the apostolic missions of the 1940s and 1950s, if the material infrastructure was then still lacking, there was at least one other source of support: 'There was hope and there was the Holy Ghost.' Combined with a strange sense of exhilaration and determination gripping Catholic France in this Year Two of Nazi occupation and Vichy, the road to reconquer dechristianized France for the Catholic Church appeared to be wide open. On 5 October 1942 regular teaching got under way at Lisieux with four seminary teachers tending to the needs of the first cohort of thirty students.[37]

The second year of operation at the seminary of the Mission de France saw a total of fifty students at Lisieux, the academic year 1944–5 more than 100. By 1946 their numbers had surpassed 150. By then, twenty communities launched by former seminarians had been established in specially targeted dioceses.[38] It was time to present the Mission de France to the ultimate authority in Rome. For, given the interdiocesan nature of this pioneering project, the survival of the Mission de France would only be guaranteed if Rome approved of it. And, certainly by 1946, the Vatican had obtained numerous and detailed reports on what was happening at the Mission de France, not all of them by any means favourable. What was so controversial about a missionary effort designed to spread the influence of the Catholic Church? Why did Louis Augros, the designated Superior of the Mission de France, encounter a rather guarded response in the course of a whirlwind Tour de France back and forth across the Nazi demarcation line, effected by this Saint-Sulpicien between January and June 1942, when he visited sixty bishops in an attempt to drum up support?[39]

Some of the reluctance of the hierarchy to throw its support behind this project was undoubtedly related to the sheer novelty of such a domestic mission in one of the presumed 'heartlands' of Catholicism.

[37] On the developments surrounding the Mission de France in 1941 and 1942, see, once again, ibid. 231–41, citation on p. 235.

[38] The number of seminarians at the Mission de France is reported ibid.: 242 (1943), 245 (1944), and 247 (1946).

[39] 'If many seminarians and priests sympathized with the project, very few amongst the bishops believed in the success of this institution': Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 56.

But, as the project got under way, enthusiasm on the part of church authorities still remained in short supply. As the outline of the Mission de France emerged more clearly, it became more and more evident that not only was this particular mission entering largely uncharted terrain, but the methods employed to train missionary staff were most unusual as well. They certainly were not designed to assuage real and potential worries on the part of the French ecclesiastical hierarchy, most of the latter being rather comfortably ensconced in—and committed to—the status quo. By no means averse to widening the influence of the Catholic Church, French church authorities were reluctant to strive for this goal at any price. What were some of the worrisome novelties characterizing the Mission de France?

One key characteristic of the inner life of the Mission was the centrality of a communitarian approach. Communal living was, of course, anything but a novelty for Catholic clergy, but what were the rules governing members' interactions at Lisieux? Members of religious orders followed pre-given, time-honoured rules of behaviour governing daily life. Which rules was the Mission to follow? Having consciously chosen not to link up with a religious order, the choice was wide open, but some decisions clearly had to be made. In the end, the guiding spirits of the Mission de France decided on an open-ended approach. Given that seminarians, upon ordination, would enter an uncertain world, with the concrete exterior circumstances of their mission varying from case to case, it was deemed best not to impose any but the most elementary rules on members of the missionary community at Lisieux. As the plan was not to send isolated individual missionaries into the deep pockets of rural and urban dechristianized France but to counter the effects of alienation in a hostile environment by the designation of missionary teams (*équipes*), the decision was reached to organize the inner life of the Lisieux seminary to prepare the future missionaries for life as part of a team. Consequently, rather than imposing uniform rules—whatever their nature—on all members of the Lisieux community, only a few regulations applied to all seminarians, who were told to prepare for the missionary team effort by forming *équipes* already in Lisieux. 'Would it not be preferable to teach individual seminarians and the collective community as a whole to recognize the concrete demands of God's will as they manifest themselves in daily life' rather

than to mandate that they simply conform to a firm set of pre-given rules?[40]

To be sure, a basic framework of daily routines structured life in the Mission de France seminary from the very beginning. Regular daily and weekly prayer cycles, a work schedule and regular rest periods, and other activities for all seminarians and teaching staff formed the backbone of the enterprise. But this is as far as attempts at uniformity went in Lisieux. For, at the beginning of each academic year, each entering class was subdivided into teams of six to eight individuals. Each week, with the assistance of a priest, each team met to reflect on their individual progress towards meeting the demands of their chosen vocation. 'The precise way in which this was done varied from one group to another, as did the discoveries made in the process. At any rate, these exchanges enabled seminarians to get to know each other in a very profound manner, to verify the commitment towards the chosen vocation by all members of the team, and finally to correct any flaws with regard to honesty and generosity of spirit. Everyone was thus engaged in preparing himself for the teams that were to operate in the apostolic terrain.'[41] In the eyes of the Superior of the Mission, this purposeful lack of coordinated rules and regulations had only positive results. 'In the first years we experimented with and experienced with bewilderment the fruitfulness of this assembly of rich contributions made by all participants. There emerged as a result an extraordinary climate of spiritual interactions, of intellectual research, of enthusiasm, and of confidence in the future.'[42]

All of these innovations, of course, flew in the face of the traditional organization of the Catholic Church in general and seminaries in particular. 'At this particular time, the unity of the Church implied uniformity. For priests this began with the seminaries where everything was governed by the same rules, where theological instruction was imbued with the defensive spirit of the Counter-Reformation.'[43] A member of a missionary team in Hussein-Dey (Algeria) recalled in 1954 the harrowing experience of traditional training schools for priests: 'Three years in the seminary in Bourges where we never

[40] Augros, *L'Église de demain*; an excellent source of information on the various innovations practised in Lisieux; citation on p. 58.

[41] Ibid. 58–9. [42] Ibid. 59. [43] Ibid. 83.

encountered any problems, where everything had been resolved in a definitive manner three centuries ago, where above all ordained priests never set foot again because they felt that they were not appreciated there, but instead constantly judged and severely so . . . '[44] Father Louis Augros put it like this: 'The most visible manifestation of the monastic character of classical seminaries was this: except during holiday periods, one never left the seminary compound without a good reason approved by the Superior or without his consent. At Lisieux, however, one frequently left the seminary grounds. First of all, because there existed no leisure-time facilities in the seminary itself. To oblige young people to live for prolonged periods of time surrounded by four walls was equivalent to turning them into prisoners; thus it was impossible.' And then there were all sorts of additional utilitarian reasons why trips to the outside world became rather common: to do some gardening, to obtain provisions during regular business hours of stores, or to help residents of Lisieux to reconstruct their homes after the severe Allied bombardments of the town. 'To which one should add a number of outings with less legitimate rationales.'[45]

'Priests in adjoining parishes who witnessed this compared it with what they had experienced when they had attended their seminaries. Unsurprisingly, they began to pose questions with regard to the seriousness of education provided at Lisieux.' 'Also, many people began to believe that we had eliminated from daily [seminary] life all that which, up to then, had been considered as essential not only for priests but for all firm believers.' As the case of Lisieux began to make waves across the country, young seminarians elsewhere began to complain about the strictness of antiquated rules in other seminaries. 'That is why our way of life became a source of annoyance for other seminaries, and opposition arose in proportion to the way that misinformation was spread and, above all, as the reasons for our innovations became distorted.'[46]

Yet the innovative practices at the Lisieux seminary of the Mission de France far surpassed the non-hierarchical and relatively permissive

[44] Letter to 'Cher Père', sent from Hussein-Dey on 25 March 1954, 2: Centre des Archives du Monde du Travail (CAMT) [Roubaix], Fonds Mission de France (MdF), 1996 028 062.

[45] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 86.

[46] Ibid. 87.

exterior structures of everyday life on the seminary grounds. Louis Augros and his team, supported by Cardinal Suhard, likewise entered uncharted waters in terms of the syllabus taught at Lisieux. 'We were all agreed to refuse the type of instruction most common in the seminaries at that time, a form of instruction where the content was determined by Rome and which was codified to all intents and purposes in manuals approved by the authorities.' Such a traditional approach was deemed justified in circumstances where training was designed to produce traditional priests, who were to be content to provide traditional services to their clientele of faithful believers. In the case of the Mission de France, however, where the targeted clientele was a far more elusive and intractable audience of dechristianized individuals in a great variety of walks of life, such learning by rote was regarded as at best pointless and at worst counterproductive. 'What was to be done? And how? We groped for solutions.' And then, suddenly, a solution was found: 'a return to the sources.'[47]

'If one wanted to present Jesus Christ to individuals from another culture, then one would have to study the sources in order to be effective, i.e. one would have to investigate how Revelation had worked in the various contexts described in the Bible.'[48] 'The Church is running up against a dead-end if it ties itself to a theology seen as universally valid at all times and in all locations.'[49] A more fine-tuned assessment of the teachings of the Church, then increasingly common in the missionary milieu, was just then beginning to discover 'that all theology is tied to a [specific] culture and a [specific] moment in history'.[50] 'Was it therefore not our duty, if we wanted to achieve maximum authenticity, to immerse our faith within the culture or the cultures of our times?' 'Instead of teaching in a systematic manner a theology seen as valid throughout the centuries, we had to imitate the way our forefathers had applied their beliefs, i.e. the church fathers and St Thomas himself.'[51]

Many of the stock ingredients of traditional seminary curricula were absent at Lisieux. 'We even left aside the teaching of Apologetics, a classical institution in regular seminaries.' Instead, another focal point of seminary education at Lisieux—as a contrast, of sorts, to

[47] Ibid. 60. [48] Ibid. 60–1. [49] Ibid. 70.
[50] Ibid. 60. [51] Ibid. 61.

the simultaneous emphasis on the rediscovery of 'ancient' texts—addressed questions related to the applicability of faith in the modern and contemporary era. 'Above all focusing on social justice.'[52] Social justice had become the rallying cry of the labour movement starting in the nineteenth century, yet this was insufficient reason, Augros asserted, for the Church—and certainly the Lisieux seminary!—to neglect this elementary goal of humanity. 'Unfortunately, the Church of the nineteenth century had forgotten all about it', leaving the door wide open to the spread of socialist and communist ideas. The working-class apostolate would, thus, have to confront not only issues of social justice but the solidly implanted socialist movement as well. But Marxist ideology, though consistently upholding social justice as a laudable goal, stood largely in open contradiction with Christian thought. 'How to place Christian beliefs within this intellectual conjuncture?'[53]

CULTURAL IMMERSION

If biblical sources and the methodology of Thomas Aquinas became the target and the lodestar of the teachers and students at the Mission de France, their intellectual curiosity, powered by the social problems of the contemporary age, ensured that the curriculum would not remain limited to Scripture. 'In the wake of liberation arose great interest in the philosophical ideas of Marx, at the same time that the powers of attraction of communism and its close links to the realities of workers' lives were affirmed.'[54] The Lisieux seminary curriculum reflected these contemporaneous concerns. 'Students were encouraged to read Karl Marx and other communist materials, and daily breakfast rituals included reflective exercises on current events as reported in popular newspapers.'[55] One of the papers readily available in the Mission de France's reading room was the French

[52] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 62. [53] Ibid. 63.
[54] Wattebled, *Stratégies catholiques*, 29.
[55] Oscar L. Arnal, *Priests in Working-Class Blue: The History of the Worker-Priests (1943–1954)* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 29.

Communist Party's *L'Humanité*.[56] As Marie-Dominique Chenu, the key theological adviser to the Mission de France, wrote in defence of the inclusion of *L'Humanité* in the newspaper section of the library at the Dominican Couvent Saint-Jacques in central Paris: 'What appears scandalous to me is not that *L'Humanité* is in our reading room and Marx in our regular library', but that such sources are only rarely studied in any great depth.[57]

The proverbial return to the sources, then, for the community of scholars operating at Lisieux, entailed the study of more than purely Christian sources. True to their conviction that, in order to face the problems of today, one would have to be familiar with the key ideologies of the day, Marx was studied alongside St Thomas and St Paul. The objective of the teaching staff at Lisieux was, of course, most decidedly not to place St Thomas and Karl Marx on an equal level. The point was, instead, for seminarians to learn how to 'refuse communism' 'as authentic Christians and not as pseudo-Christians', for 'nothing is more suspect than the passionate anticommunism of mediocre minds'.[58] 'Communism is above all else a passion for justice engendered by the miseries of this world and the injustice and exploitation which is prevalent there. It is this passion which engenders [communism's] revolutionary dynamism.' 'And Christians committed a grave error when, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they believed that one could love God without loving other human beings, without that passion for justice, to love human beings without knowing them. Christian thought has lost its revolutionary motivation.'[59] What was needed was a re-engagement of the Church with some of the most dynamic social forces operating in the contemporary world. And for that one would need an honest appraisal of the contributions and the limits of socialist and Marxist beliefs. 'No pious or sectarian anticommunism. Christians must simultaneously refute communism and anticommunism.'[60]

[56] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 95.

[57] Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Réponse à qui reprochait au Couvent de Saint-Jacques d'avoir l'Humanité dans sa salle de lecture', 2 March 1945, 1: Archives des Dominicains (ADP) [Paris], Fonds Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Correspondance 1942–1947', '1945'.

[58] Unsigned text on how to approach the subject matter of 'Marxisme et catholicisme', undated but probably penned in 1946, 5: CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 0004.

[59] Ibid. 4. [60] Ibid. 5.

More important still, perhaps, the growing community of missionaries in and around the Mission de France became increasingly aware of the fact that the powerful attractive forces of communism, the mystique of Marxism, lay not so much in the persuasive powers of the word but in its exemplary actions. Father Jacques Loew, a pioneer of the working-class apostolate in Marseille, for instance, put it like this: 'Reading *Das Kapital* has probably been insufficient motivation to convince a single person of the veracity of Marxism, just as *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* has been unable to win anyone to Christian ideas.'[61] Marxism convinces by its exemplary actions. And the same, of course, would hold true of the missionaries for the Catholic Church. Only by sharing in the daily routine, the daily miseries but also the daily hopes of the dechristianized masses, by participating in their struggles, would Christian beliefs ever be able to regain access to the working class and rural poor. Or, as the report from a team of Mission de France graduates, operating in Alfortville, put it in 1953: 'One of our team members, a former blue-collar worker, told us that he had been unable to enter into conversations with the workers in his neighbourhood, other than by talking to them for a long time about his former work and by showing that he knew all about the things preoccupying their minds. Only on this basis did trust get established, and only then were they able to pose him the most profound questions on religion and on Christian belief.'[62]

The report on the experience of the most prominent team of worker priests in Belgium, the *équipe de Liège*, mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, is most eloquent and instructive in this regard: 'Today, everybody is in agreement that it is wrong to insist that a Chinese or an Indian "westernizes himself" in order to convert to Christianity, as this would irretrievably link the gospel and the Church to a specific civilization and would thus impose terrible limits on the number of possible conversions. In identical fashion, it

[61] Father Jacques Loew, 'La Mission doit continuer: comment?', 15 September 1955, 11: CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 0026. Jacques Loew, of course, was a guiding spirit of the Mission de Marseille, launched separately from the Mission de France, but remaining in more than solely spiritual communication with Lisieux; see Jacques Loew, *Mission to the Poorest* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), and Jacques Loew, *Journal d'une mission ouvrière, 1941–1959* (Paris: Cerf, 1959).

[62] 'Rapport de la Paroisse N.D. d'Alfortville sur quelques problèmes missionaires', 'Octobre 1953', 2: CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 0026.

must not be a precondition for a worker to abandon his entire way of life and renounce his heritage to become a Christian.'[63] 'We have noticed, and we increasingly see proof of it, that we are still remaining strangers in the workers' world. We are a bit like Italian immigrant workers: they are not naturalized Belgians; they keep to themselves outside the workers' organizations; if they act in a positive and helpful manner, then they are well regarded by their Belgian comrades, but they are not truly integrated into their community. The same holds true for us; we are included and even accepted and held in esteem, but we are not integrated within the proletarian communities, as we do not fully share their entire life circumstances. In effect, our presence within the workers' world is still too passive; we most certainly participate in a portion of the workers' lives, their suffering, their pain, their humiliation; but, if we want to be fully consistent and logical, then we must proceed even further and participate in their efforts to liberate themselves.'[64] Ideally, then, the cultural immersion technique would have to include active participation in social and political struggles in order for missionaries to beome fully accepted members of the working class.

The missionary instincts of Emmanuel Suhard, Louis Augros, and other members of the brains trust guiding the Mission de France and their sympathizers elsewhere in francophone Europe were validated when Lisieux began to send the very first teams into the *terres de mission*. One year after the commencement of teaching activities in Lisieux, by October 1943, the first two teams of Lisieux-trained emissaries from the Mission de France began to operate in two locations in the Eure and, respectively, the Yonne,[65] underscoring the initial focus on rural dechristianized France. As already indicated, by 1946 forty Mission de France teams were agitating throughout France.[66] In April 1948 the first two seminarians who had received the entirety of their seminary training at Lisieux were ordained in a ceremony presided over by Cardinal Suhard.[67] On 25 May 1952, the Mission was proud to announce that no less than 280 priests had gone through seminary training at Lisieux and were then operating in twenty-seven

[63] 'Rapport de l'Équipe', 25. [64] Ibid. 28.
[65] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 243. [66] Ibid. 247.
[67] Jean Vinatier, *Le Cardinal Liénart et la Mission de France* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1978), 27.

dioceses throughout France. Forty-two of them had done all their training at Lisieux; 100 had benefited from the learning environment at Lisieux for part of their seminary training; 89 had spent an internship at Lisieux after receiving their ordination elsewhere; 47 additional priests without a direct experience of Lisieux worked closely together with a Mission de France team. And the author of this report added that, in actual fact, the precise number of members of the Mission was difficult to determine, as there were no hard-and-fast criteria for inclusion. 'In the absence of a canonical statute, adherence to the Mission is mostly determined on the basis of a more or less lengthy stay at the Lisieux seminary, integration into a missionary team, or even just as a result of a personal option or preference.' One hundred and ten members worked in rural teams; 132 in decentralized urban missions; 29 formed part of well-defined urban teams of some importance, such as the Mission de Paris or the Mission de Limoges; 9 were part of the Mission de la Mer, priests working as sailors on commercial ships plying the oceans.[68] Teams sent out from the Mission de France lived and worked amongst their prospective flock; in urban dechristianized France this meant that such teams would live and work amongst the blue-collar working class of proletarian cities and *quartiers*.

THE MISSION DE PARIS

The seminary of the Mission de France at Lisieux soon became a popular meeting spot and place of exchange of ideas for the forces of progressive French Catholicism far beyond the small numbers of seminarians and graduates emanating from this iconoclastic institution. Monseigneur Ancel, later on the founder of a legendary community of like-minded priests and others in Lyon, in which the auxiliary bishop for that city lived for five years (1954–9);[69] Madeleine Delbrêl,

[68] 'Rapport présenté à son Éminence le Cardinal Liénart, le 30 mai 1952, par les Pères Lévesque, Perrot et Giboin', 5 in *Lettres des communautés*, 30 May 1952: ADP, Fonds Chenu, '1951–1953', '1952–3'.

[69] Alfred Ancel published the results of this experience as *Cinq ans avec les ouvriers* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1963).

social service worker in the communist suburb of Paris, Ivry, where she lived as a member of a missionary team from 1933;[70] and Father René Voillaume, spiritual leader of the Petits-Frères de Jésus, a religious order which transplanted its missionary calling from the depth of the Sahara to the industrial factories of proletarian France;[71] these were only some of the unaffiliated sympathizers with the spirit of the Mission de France who came for repeated visits, inspiration, and intellectual exchange. Another frequent guest at the Lisieux centre was the main author of *La France: pays de mission?*: Henri Godin.[72]

In the summer of 1942, even before the Mission de France opened its doors to host the first cohort of students, Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel separately sought out Louis Augros. They inquired about the purpose of the Mission which was then set to commence regular teaching on 5 October. During the first term of the first academic year at the Mission de France, Henri Godin visited almost every week, sharing the community spirit for two or three days at a time.[73] In the course of the frequent extended conversations between Louis Augros and Godin and Daniel held at Lisieux in the winter of 1942–3, Godin and Daniel for the first time aired some of the observations and insights for which they later became (in)famous. Louis Augros encouraged them to take two additional steps: to share their discoveries with Cardinal Suhard and to put their thoughts in writing. Godin and Daniel, who had first met Emmanuel Suhard in late August 1942, followed Augros's advice. Suhard, in turn, suggested that Godin and Daniel continue their reflections in common with the activists at the Mission de France. He also asked them to formulate their ideas in a structured form in writing. Godin and Daniel's *mémoire* eventually

[70] The key literary product of her efforts was published as Madeleine Delbrêl, *Ville marxiste, terre de mission* (Paris: Cerf, 1958), but note also the posthumous collection of some of her other writings, Madeleine Delbrêl, *Nous autres, gens des rues* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). Biographies include Christine de Boismarmine, *Madeleine Delbrêl: 1904–1964: rues des villes chemins de Dieu: récit* (Montrouge: Nouvelle Cité, 2004), and Katja Boehme, *Madeleine Delbrêl: Die andere Heilige* (Freiburg: Herder, 2004).

[71] On Father Voillaume and his flock, see René Voillaume, *Charles de Foucauld et ses premiers disciples: du désert arabe au monde des cités* (Paris: Bayard, 1998).

[72] The Lisieux home base of the Mission de France as communication platform and discussion venue for the multiform individuals of left Catholic France is frequently alluded to in the relevant literature. For two authoritative statements, see Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 26, and Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 75.

[73] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 75.

became *La France: pays de mission?*[74] Cardinal Suhard, when reading that manuscript at Easter 1943, was thus by no means completely unaware of what the typewritten pages contained.

La France: pays de mission? concerned itself with all of urban France. When the authors began to translate their ideas into reality, soon the focus narrowed to Greater Paris. The single biggest French city by far, and an industrial powerhouse when including the belt of industrial suburbs, the idea quickly took hold to maximize the available resources by setting up a special missionary enterprise, exclusively focusing on industrial workers and on Paris itself. The project was officially launched on 1 July 1943 in the office of Cardinal Suhard, with key representatives of the Mission de France, amongst them Louis Augros, in attendance. On 16 September, Cardinal Suhard officially approved the name 'Mission de Paris' for this undertaking.[75] One of the first tasks became the appointment of a Superior for the Mission de Paris. In part because of the controversies surrounding *La France: pays de mission?*—a section of the manuscript had to be cut in order to obtain the imprimatur[76]—it proved to be not very easy to obtain the agreement of chosen candidates for this post. 'Six refused.' Then a parish priest, Jacques Hollande, agreed to confront the challenge.[77] 'In the course of November [1943] the first team was formed.'[78] 'At that moment it [the Mission de Paris] comprised six priests, five of whom had been members of the JOC.'[79]

The final touches of the spiritual and intellectual foundation of the Mission de Paris were applied during a 'study month and conversation for the launching of the Mission de Paris', which was held in two separate locations. The first week's activities took place in the Paris diocesan retreat centre at Combs-la-Ville (19–24 December 1943); from 28 December 1943 to 15 January 1944 the proceedings

[74] For the crucial interactions between Suhard, Godin and Daniel, and Father Augros in the first half of 1943, see Vinatier, *Suhard*, 256–7.

[75] Marta Margotti, *Preti e operai: la Mission de Paris dal 1943 al 1954* (Turin: Paravia, 2000), 42. This Italian-language study is now the most detailed and comprehensive survey of the life and times of the Mission de Paris up to the mid-1950s available in any language. Adrien Dansette, *Destin*, 157, places the founding moment in July 1944, an apparent typological mistake.

[76] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 39.

[77] Dansette, *Destin*, 159–60, citation on p. 159; Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 44–7.

[78] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 261. [79] Dansette, *Destin*, 159.

resumed in the facilities of the Mission de France at Lisieux. The list of participants reads like a Who's Who of French left Catholicism at that time. Apart from individuals who soon became famous in the context of the various missionary activities, such as André Depierre, the list of speakers addressing various issues associated with the launching of the first explicitly urban apostolate outside of Catholic Action included the head of the Jesuit think-tank Action Populaire, Gustave Desbuquois; the Jesuit theologian who would perish as a chaplain of the Vercors resistance, Yves de Montcheuil; the Jesuit gadfly Jean Daniélou; the ubiquitous Marie-Dominique Chenu; the key individuals belonging to the Mission de France; the national chaplain of the Mouvement Populaire des Familles, Maxime Hua; and many others, including, notably, during the last three days of the proceedings, Paris Archbishop Cardinal Suhard.[80]

The undisputed central figure of the Mission de Paris was from the very beginning Henri Godin. The headquarters of the Mission de Paris were located in his apartment in the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris: 47, rue Ganneron. During the evening of 15 January 1944, he had returned from Lisieux, flushed with success and confident of a radiant future for his brainchild, the Mission de Paris. On the morning of 17 January he was found asphyxiated and burned to death in his bed in the rue Ganneron. An electrical heater had apparently malfunctioned and set fire to his mattress while he was sleeping. 'The founding father of the Mission de Paris disappeared amidst the foundations.'[81] For it was precisely 'during the last months of the German occupation and in feverish expectation of liberation that the Mission de Paris undertook its very first steps'.[82]

As such, the Mission de Paris never obtained a proper legal status. Specifically designed as a diocesan institution, it operated as a de facto organization, and only a supervisory body of sorts, the Association Catholique de la Mission de France, obtained full juridical status.[83] The sole member of the Mission de Paris with a distinct set of defined tasks to fulfil was the Superior, who coordinated the group's activities and was responsible for relations with the church

[80] The most detailed reconstruction of the proceedings at Combs-la-Ville and Lisieux remains Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 94–114.

[81] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 61; citation in Vinatier, *Suhard*, 264.

[82] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 265. [83] Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 382–3.

hierarchy. Initially, facilitated by the small number of members at the outset of its activities, weekly general meetings were held by all the priests actively involved. As the number of missionaries swelled, general assemblies were held only twice a month. Each local team (*équipe*)—the general assembly was now termed *grande équipe*—met several times per week. Usually composed of two to three priests, team members did not necessarily share their living quarters. Each local team had as its central task to attract lay activists to the common cause, lay activists who were to become the most important link to reach out to the dechristianized working-class milieu. Priests and lay activists together formed a spiritual community which was to become the basis for missionary exploits.[84] 'Even if the recruitment of the first lay missionaries occurred within parishes and Catholic associations, the activities of the Mission de Paris were held outside these traditional units, aided by the constitution of communities which, by their very nature, became supra-parish organs in which decisions, initiatives, and objectives could go beyond the dynamics of these traditional ecclesiastical institutions.'[85] By 1947, the Superior of the Mission de Paris, Jacques Hollande, reported to an international conference on the missionary apostolate amongst blue-collar workers that communities of like-minded people had been established in seven locations in Paris proper and its industrial suburbs.[86]

With growth in numbers and responsibilities, approval and criticisms alike emerged from various corners of Catholic France. Given that the Mission de Paris was a relative latecomer in the milieu of Catholic organizations devoted to the working-class apostolate, it was less than surprising to find that the classic institutions of the working-class apostolate, Catholic Action in general and the JOC in particular, were not always enthusiastic about the presence of the Mission de Paris. Initially, the hoped-for solution to potential conflicts between Catholic Action and the Mission de Paris was seen to be a seemingly clear-cut division of labour. Catholic Action would retain control over pre-existing local groupings organized within the defined boundaries of parishes. The Mission de Paris would become the guiding spirit

[84] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 76–9. [85] Ibid. 104.

[86] Jacques Hollande, 'La Mission de Paris', in Monseigneur Carton de Wiart et al., *Problèmes de l'Église en marche*, i: *La Christianisation du prolétariat* (Brussels: Témoignage Chrétien, 1948), 163.

behind base communities emerging within enterprises or the dechristianized milieux at large. But already in Godin and Daniel's flagship volume *La France: pays de mission?*, one of the central criticisms raised was the limited and limiting function of existing parishes and largely parish-based Catholic Action organizations. Thus, a series of negotiations and discussions were held between the respective leadership teams to coordinate action and to minimize strife. Nevertheless, various disputes continued to remain unsettled, and the eventual compromise solution reached gave powers of arbitration to diocesan authorities.[87]

By contrast, relationships between the Mission de Paris and the Mission de France were far less contentious. Given the important role played in the launching of the Mission de Paris by forces in and around the Mission de France, this congenial parallel existence of two separate missions was only to be expected. After all, Cardinal Suhard was the godfather for both missionary enterprises, and as Archbishop of Paris he kept ultimate control over the diocesan institution, the Mission de Paris. Yet a certain division of labour likewise contributed to the peaceful coexistence and mutual friendship between the two Missions. Most importantly, the Mission de France was geared towards the rechristianization of all of France, 'rural and urban, working class, bourgeois' and peasant, whereas the Mission de Paris explicitly and exclusively targeted the Parisian working class. Also, the Mission de France relied on priests educated at least to some extent at its own seminary, whereas the Mission de Paris recruited ordained priests regardless of where the latter had obtained their training, but also emphasized (more than the Mission de France) the central role of lay activists.[88] The Mission de France did operate its own teams in parts of the Parisian *banlieu*, but the Mission de Paris consciously avoided conflict by abstaining from setting up its own *équipes* in locations with pre-existing communities affiliated to the Mission de France. Neighbouring communities belonging to both Missions met frequently in apparent harmony to

[87] An extended appraisal of the possible and actual frictions between Mission de Paris and Catholic Action as well as JOC is presented in Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 101–20.

[88] Note the discussion of these distinctions ibid. 131–2, with the citation taken from a 1946 Mission de Paris position paper cited *in extenso* by Margotti on p. 131.

exchange experiences. Likewise, some priests working for the Mission de Paris spent some time at the Lisieux seminary, and several Lisieux seminarians received some training within the communities operated by the Mission de Paris. A number of Mission de Paris priests offered courses at the seminary in Lisieux.[89]

CONSTRUCTING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Such were the differences between the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris. But what were the common threads between the two most famous and most important organizational products in the initial and heroic period of the working-class apostolate in France? Leaving aside its obvious missionary identity, one of the two most important similarities between these two Missions was their common belief in the utility and necessity of the cultural immersion strategy. To recruit amongst dechristianized strata, one must become part of the daily practices of these strata themselves. But the ideologists of both Missions were likewise saying that success could not be assured without the additional ingredient of community building. Only if Christians could demonstrate that they were not only sharing the trials and tribulations of their dechristianized comrades, but that they, the Christians, had something particularly attractive on offer, only then could a mission be crowned by success. The vital ingredient of missionary activity, once one had integrated oneself into the life-world of these largely 'pagan' neighbourhoods, was the construction of lived Christian communities which showcased the possibilities of a better kind of world, base communities, consisting of clergy and laity, which would demonstrate in daily concrete practice, but also by their inner spiritual life, that Christian beliefs and the Christian way of life offered tangible and positive alternatives to the status quo. Both the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris saw eye to eye with regard to this approach.

In his 1947 presentation to the previously mentioned international congress on the working-class apostolate, held in the Belgian

[89] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 132–5.

industrial centre of Charleroi, Jacques Hollande described the beginning stages of such Christian base communities:

> We form 'extra-parish' organic communities. The priests are grouped into small teams of two or three, operating in seven centres in Paris and its suburbs, wearing civilian clothing or the soutane, living in proletarian lodgings or hotel rooms, bearing witness to a life lived in poverty and bearing witness of charity, confident in divine providence, and sharing everything with the laity amongst whom we find ourselves, without engaging in propaganda or otherwise overtly publicizing our doings. Their goal for these communities . . . is to spark off a current of charity, to help it prosper, to reveal slowly but surely what the priesthood is all about, at a moment when they are beginning to get regarded as 'quite sympathetic despite being priests'.[90]

Perhaps the most famous Christian base community operated by the Mission de Paris was their detachment operating in the eastern suburb of Montreuil, headed by André Depierre.[91] A friend of Emmanuel Mounier and a resistance activist in his native Jura, he had been brought to Paris to join the Mission de Paris by the other famous Jurassien animator of the Mission de Paris: Henri Godin. Depierre and his Mission de Paris team in Montreuil were open to cooperation with any other organizations that were ready to join in the common cause, ranging from the locally dominant French Communist Party (PCF)—Montreuil's mayor was a member of the PCF—via the MPF to the local branch of the JOC. The Mission de Paris team in Montreuil facilitated various educational efforts which nurtured the process of consciousness raising on several levels. Self-help became the name of the game, and participating individuals, families, and entire neighbourhoods simultaneously underwent a process

[90] Hollande, 'Mission de Paris', 163. The assertion by the Superior of the Mission de Paris of the absence of propagandistic measures should be taken with a grain of salt. In reality, the methods employed by the Mission were as unusual as the project itself. For instance, midnight mass was sometimes held in a cinema, impromptu sermons delivered in the midst of lunchtime crowds or on top of the steps leading out of Métro stations, and so forth.

[91] The Montreuil base community run by André Depierre was the model for the most famous novel to emerge from this period of ebullience concerning the working-class apostolate in France, a novel oftentimes wrongly interpreted as a literary portrayal of the experience of worker priests: Gilbert Cesbron, *Les Saints vont en enfer* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1952), translated into English as *Saints in Hell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953).

of political education and improvement in daily life circumstances. Leisure facilities were collectively repaired and maintained. Vacation homes for the disenfranchised children of Montreuil were procured and made presentable. Depierre 'participates in neighbourhood street carnivals and festivals, such as the open air dances characteristic of Bastille Day'.[92]

The spiritual and religious dimension, however, was by no means neglected, though not necessarily presented via traditional modes of delivery. The sacraments were administered in unusual settings, such as during camping trips in the open air. Mass was celebrated in courtyards or council houses with everyone invited to partake in Holy Communion. During evening sessions or meetings preparing the celebration of the eucharist, frequently individuals could be heard publicly confessing their sins or reporting on their intended good deeds. These events 'were manifestations of an intense communitarian life which helped power the spiritual dimension of individuals and which helped the people in the neighbourhood to get to know each other'. 'The central moment in the life of this group was the weekly mass which assembled all activists and sympathizers with the young community, source of an intense current of Christian fraternity and human solidarity.'[93]

On the other side of Paris, in Boulogne-Billancourt, two emissaries from the Mission de Paris, Charles Pautet and Bernard Tiberghien, arrived in 1944 without a single local contact facilitating their work. They first linked up with local JOC and JOCF activists who, after learning about the intentions of the Mission de Paris, discontinued their activities within specialized Catholic Action, devoting their missionary work henceforth to the Mission de Paris instead. Gradually, new members were won to the fledgling base community of Boulogne-Billancourt, expanding the hard core of activists beyond its original Catholic Action milieu. Soon 'about fifteen people, above all youth, participated with a certain regularity in the monthly gatherings organized by the two priests, which were held in the house of a different activist each time, and where mass was celebrated'. 'Via their

[92] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 143–4; Arnal, *Working-Class Blue*, 69–70, citation on 70.

[93] Margotti, *Mission de Paris*, 145.

presence at camping trips organized for young workers at Renault, lay activists had also succeeded in familiarizing a number of workers with the Mission de Paris, amongst them several communists. In one department at Renault, the presence and the effort of bearing witness by two male and one female lay team members of the Mission de Paris resulted in the birth of a small group composed of young people who, though having already earlier on in their lives been exposed to some form of Christian education, had become alienated from religious practices for quite some time.'[94]

The Mission de France, the godfather of the Mission de Paris, likewise set out to create Christian communities which became simultaneously self-help groups and spiritual exchange platforms. Although the founding of the Mission de Paris had contributed to the reorientation of the efforts of the Mission de France from primarily rural missions likewise to include urban missions, efforts to reverse rural dechristianization remained an important element of the Mission de France. Adrien Dansette describes a Mission de France team of priests in a rural area of the southern zone of the largely dechristianized centre. 'It comprises three priests who have spent between six months and two years at Lisieux. The oldest one, the team leader, is 35 years old, the youngest 29. They are forming a parish community in the largest location in their sector, and they work together with two other priests—these are diocesan priests—who administer two parishes each.' The zone designated for the Mission de France team was politically split between the anti-communist central *bourg*, counting 2,200 souls, and the predominantly communist countryside with 2,100 inhabitants *in toto*. 'One of the priests has taken up manual labour, particularly during harvest time, as much in order to sustain his team—a communist region does not feed its priests—as to familiarize the lower-class milieu with the missionary enterprise.'[95]

Rural Mission de France teams, almost by definition, generally had a harder time to constitute base communities composed of clergy and laity united, in part no doubt because of the numerically more restricted pool of potential sympathizers, but also on account of ingrained patterns of rural sociability, with locals more likely to regard outsiders as permanent strangers rather than potential allies.

[94] Ibid. 150–1, citations on p. 151.

[95] Dansette, *Destin*, 336–7.

Community building took on slightly different forms, and interactions were more guarded and circumspect, but possibly no less efficient. A priest working as an agricultural labourer at harvest time in the Aube, Claude Terrien, reports: 'One evening I had carried 135 sacks of grain into the attic, talking to the threshing machine operator, a Communist Party member, departmental CGT [Confédération Générale du Travail] delegate for the Aube, when he told me: "Old chap, you being a priest, to do what you are doing, you must be an idiot, or you must be devoted to your faith! Life for you is truly that of the exploited like it is for us. It is unfortunate that your superiors don't agree with what you're doing, for things might change." ' Claude Terrien continued: 'I am convinced that from that evening onward that guy [*ce gars là*] had truly made his communion with the body of Jesus Christ.'

And the same Mission de France activist priest then related another encounter. 'Another true communion happened to a thresher like myself, whom I did not know, who ran out of work because his threshing machine had burned down, and who waited for me one evening at my door because he was hungry. He refused the offer to sleep in a bed because "there are too many threshers like us out there all over the world who have no bed to sleep in". Though never baptized, he may well have made a communion more meaningful than my own with the body of the suffering Jesus Christ.'[96] Neither of the unlucky threshers is likely to have ever joined a Christian community, but in the eyes of this missionary they had indeed experienced a spiritual communication with the mystical body of Christ.

Community building projects were by no means the exclusive preserve of the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris. In the preceding chapter we have seen how the MPF attempted to construct similar networks of self-help and mutual assistance organizations across francophone Europe. Diocesan initiatives by parish priests often accomplished similar goals, thereby indirectly proving that extra-parish initiatives were by no means the only viable method to generate solid base communities. 'Father Augros had built the Mission de France; thanks to Father Godin the Mission de Paris got

[96] Undated letter by Claude Terrien to 'Père', citations on pp. 6–7 and 7: CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 062.

off the ground. Father Michonneau proved that it was possible to construct a *missionary parish*, that of Sacré-Cœur de Colombes.'[97]

Georges Michonneau had begun his community building in Colombes in the early 1940s. Sympathizing with the resistance, the parish offices were placed at its disposal off and on. 'At the moment of liberation, the headquarters of the Red Cross and, for fifteen days in a row, the headquarters of the resistance were located in our building. Thus, when the hour of liberation struck, we were placed right in the midst of our people.'[98] It would be excessive to report on all the methods of proselytizing engaged in by Georges Michonneau and his team. They included door-to-door visits as much as infractions of the mandate to hold mass in Latin. Soon lay activists joined up, agreeing to use their homes as meeting points for neighbourhood get-togethers of the fledgling Christian community of Colombes. Youth committees and household associations [*groupes de foyers*] sprang up as part of the effort centring on Sacré-Cœur de Colombes. Rather than constituting one Christian community, the parish of Sacré-Cœur soon served as the coordinating platform for a federation of local base communities. Reading groups flourished which investigated the meaning and the message of such nonconformist theologians as Henri de Lubac or Emmanuel Mounier. 'Just as the seminary at Lisieux had become a crossroads for missionary research, the presbytery of Colombes became a focal point for all those who wished to transform the urban parish.'[99]

Christian communities took on a great variety of forms, just as they did later on in the 1960s and 1970s,[100] sometimes commencing in the shape of reading groups. A seminarian from Lisieux, not yet

[97] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 290, emphasis in the original.

[98] Ibid. 298. Jean Vinatier here probably cites from the famous book-length report on the parish community in Colombes: Georges Michonneau, *Paroisse, communauté missionaire: conclusions de cinq ans d'expérience en milieu populaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1946), another study published with a foreword by Cardinal Suhard. An English translation appeared as Georges Michonneau, *Revolution in a City Parish* (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1949).

[99] Other than in Georges Michonneau's book-length description, Colombes parish activity is well depicted in summary form in Vinatier, *Suhard*, 290–300, citation on p. 293, and Wattebled, *Stratégies catholiques*, 93–109.

[100] A short survey of the experience of Christian base communities in Western Europe, particularly in Italy and France, between the mid-1960s and 1980, can be consulted in Gerd-Rainer Horn, 'The Spirit of 1968: Christian Students on the Left',

ordained, reported from Le Havre on the formation of one such group. Having made the acquaintance of a young economist, Henri Denis, who published many standard works for his profession in subsequent decades, the seminarian hoped to investigate the possibilities for a theology of labour in a special session with Henri Denis. 'What might this bring about? It is impossible to predict what might happen. But, while keeping this session a purely private affair, we intend to form a small team of people from rather varied backgrounds who all wish to discuss such questions in common and to alert others about such themes. We will see what comes out of it. The participants include half a dozen seminarians from Lisieux, half of whom have finished their studies or have already been ordained, young Christians from differing backgrounds (for example, a teacher in a technical school, a civil servant working for the National Bank [*Trésor*], a young medical doctor, etc.), a small team from the Laboratoire de Leprince-Ringuet, and Father Montuclard, who has expressed his interest.'[101]

Communautés, whether in the incipient form of reading and discussion groups or as fully-fledged parish-based or supra-parish institutions, became the rage, and not only in France. Worker priests in the diocese of Tournai, Belgium, 'with the assistance of several lay activists', 'have built up several neighbourhood associations [*communautés de quartier*]. These have been formed on the basis of several families (3 or 4) who, previously estranged from the Church, have now agreed to undergo instruction or to pray in common under the guidance of the worker priests.'[102] Similar *groupes de foyers*, though with a decidedly more activist component, sprang up in the second half of the 1940s in the diocese of Paris, independently from parish initiatives such as the ones at Colombes and the missionary engagements by the Mission de France or Mission de Paris. In early

in Clyde Binfield (ed.), *Christian Youth Movements* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, forthcoming 2008).

[101] Handwritten letter by Joseph Aulnette to 'Père' [probably Marie-Dominique Chenu], 27 August 1952, 2: ADP, Fonds Chenu, 'Correspondance 1948–1954', '1952'.

[102] Untitled report by the Bishop of Tournai to the Vatican Ambassador to Belgium, [1954], 3: Archives de l'Évêché de Tournai (AET) [Tournai], Fonds Clergé Séculier et Personnel Pastoral du Diocèse (Fonds Clergé), I/10.

1950, the priest animating the Charonne neighbourhood *groupe de foyers* gave the following account: 'Our group is composed of six Christian households. Five form part of the MPF, in which they agitate with differing degrees of intensity. In the sixth *foyer*, the husband is active within the CFTC [Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens]. Five men are manual workers: bookbinder, maintenance electrician, metal worker. Only one, the CFTC activist, works as a bank clerk. One of the women works as a seamstress. All the men were active in the JOC. Four of the women were active in the JOCF or have been influenced by it. Two households are active members of the local section of the LOC.' When the priest arrived on the scene in October 1947, the group already existed. 'Thus I never really experienced the first stage [of community building], dedicated to the creation of a climate of confidence between households and the priest. Therefore I immediately engaged in the second stage, devoted to the promotion of active involvement. The role of the priest is evidently entirely spiritual and doctrinal, and this all the more so as we are dealing with adults and, moreover, activist adults. The lay members nonetheless demand of him that he does show interest in their temporal actions (it would otherwise be a case of inhuman "angelism"[103]), so much the more so as within the spirituality of active engagement the temporal is an indispensable part of the spiritual,' in the words of the group's spiritual adviser.

The choices of activist engagements of the community have been the choices targeted by the MPF, i.e. the campaign for the thirteenth month, Christmas packages for the needy, assistance to minors, housing squats, initiatives directed towards the relevant civil authorities in matters concerning the neighbourhood. But some of these engagements have raised the problem of the household equilibrium in a particularly acute manner. Some have taken on too many concrete tasks, others not enough. In certain cases the wife does not work together with her husband, in others the excessive activism is risking the health of the couple. Fortunately, we have found the means to re-establish that equilibrium, in the eyes of the community, where necessary. Under the pressure of circumstances we have sometimes organized in all

[103] In the eyes of the missionaries operating as part of the working-class apostolate, 'non-participation in the working-class struggle was a form of the heresy called angelism', an apt explanation I take from Arnal, *Working-Class Blue*, 124.

simplicity very searching and nuanced self-criticism and reflection sessions [*révisions de vie*], which have helped each household to discover what may be lacking, whether it be for the 'interior' construction of the *foyer*, or whether it be with regard to 'exterior' actions.[104]

A report on missionary activity amongst the working class in the industrial suburb of Seraing near Liège, Belgium, once again underscores the interaction of spiritual and temporal concerns at the centre of the interests of most active base communities. Father Pierre Baptiste reports:

A small community of practising Catholics begins to take shape. Each Tuesday evening they assemble to celebrate an adapted version of Benediction, which always includes lengthy teachings on a doctrinal subject, as our Christians are often rather 'warped' [*déformés*] in their ideas and in the way they lead their lives. Once or twice per month, they take part in a mass especially celebrated for them and which we try to render as lively and accessible as possible, with everyone participating. These prayer meetings take place in the chapel attached to the factory clinic, a chapel which once served the nurses belonging to religious orders.

Each week ten adult men meet in my kitchen, not all of them practising Catholics or even believers, but sympathetic to our cause. They come above all to 'discuss', as they call it. All sorts of problems are considered including, at their request, religious problems. And to these Thursday reunions we have invited certain religious figures in the past, notably our bishop. This group has set up a mutual assistance service in our neighbourhood. They concern themselves with the needs of poor pensioners and the sick, and they have managed to instil within a fair number of people a communitarian spirit [*souffle communautaire*], a sentiment of charity, something which was in danger of disappearing entirely. They have also organized a savings plan for workers' vacations, which helps households to save up for their time off and to spend their leisure time in a healthy and agreeable fashion thanks to organized group outings.

As the parish does have a local section of the JOC, but into which it is practically impossible to incorporate all local youth, I try to aid them to some

[104] 'Groupe de Foyers d'Action Catholique Ouvrière Adulte', 15 February 1950: ADP, Fonds Chenu, 'Correspondance 1948–1954', '1948–1952'. The campaign for the thirteenth month was an unsuccessful attempt to obtain an extra month's set of social support payments for working-class families. I thank Bruno Duriez for this explanation.

extent by taking an interest in the young male and female workers of our neighbourhood, as well as those of other neighbourhoods who furnish young workers to our factory. We attempt, thus, to build a kind of JOC without calling it such, as this fact alone would suffice to keep most people of these neighbourhoods away from it. We hope to thus prepare an Action Catholique Ouvrière. An intriguing indication of the influence of our actions: in seven months, five families from our neighbourhood begged me personally to baptize their newborn. More than one time, I was asked to assist the dying. I particularly remember that old comrade who, without my presence, would in all likelihood have refused the last rites.[105]

A FASCINATION WITH COMMUNITY

Communautés were all the rage in certain circles in the heady atmosphere of post-liberation francophone Europe, when expectations of a radiant future—both spiritually and in material terms—were gripping the hearts and minds of the populace. Some such communities had, of course, already been in existence before the war, as exemplified, for instance, by Madeleine Delbrêl and her team in Ivry. Another early pioneer of community building was none other than Father Louis Augros, who already in 1935 had introduced team building as a basic learning tool at the seminary in Autun, where he had been Superior before receiving the call to serve as Superior in Lisieux.[106] 'Before the war there already existed fifteen teams composed of priests; fourteen additional ones were created from 1940 to 1944.'[107] But it was from 1945 onwards that the real take-off of base communities exclusively comprising priests began. 'In 1955 alone twenty-one were formed. All told by 1956 285 communities existed, 150 of them being rural missions. Half of them were constituted by diocesan clergy (the majority of the rest belonged to the Mission de

[105] 'Bref mémoire d'activité missionaire dans le prolétariat de Seraing: juin 1946–juillet 1949, par le Père Pierre-Baptiste de Verviers': APOB, Fonds Louis Flagothier, 'documents datés'.

[106] On Augros's pedigree as iconoclastic innovator, a characteristic which, at the moment of his appointment to Lisieux, made some observers rather nervous, fearing the consequences of his 'somewhat revolutionary methods', see Vinatier, *Suhard*, 232.

[107] Dansette, *Destin*, 367.

France and to [the orders of] the Prado and the Fils de la Charité).'[108] In all likelihood these figures reported just for France underestimate the true extent of the wave of community building sweeping not just across francophone Europe. And Adrien Dansette's figures reported here solely included *équipes sacerdotales* [teams of priests].

This veritable movement towards the spread of communitarian ideas within Catholic circles found symbolic expression in two international conferences organized by individuals around the Belgian section of Témoignage Chrétien. At the very least the first of these two gatherings was co-organized by the important centre for the Belgian working-class apostolate, the Ouvriers de N.D. des Pauvres, in Banneux near Liège, about which more below.[109] In December 1947, with the support of the bishops of Tournai and Liège, more than 500 individuals gathered in Charleroi and listened to—and then discussed—presentations on various topics related to the overall theme of the conference: 'The Christianization of the Proletariat'. A key personality in the dense network of Belgian Catholic workers' organizations in post-war Belgium, Hubert Dewez, addressed the question of the relationship between 'The Workers' World and the Church'. The chaplain of the Tournai diocese, Jean Dermine, in turn presented his reflections on the topic of 'The Church and the Workers' Movement'. Father André Hayen gave a lengthy report on 'Priesthood and the Laity', and Tournai Archbishop Carton de Wiart shared his thoughts on 'Several Themes for Reflection'. A number of conference speakers specifically addressed issues related to community building and the need to help foster a spirit of community in the struggle to gain the hearts of the dechristianized proletariat. Father Jean Delepierre cast some light on 'Communitarian Aspects of Christian Dogma'. Father Jacques Loew reported on the Mission de Marseille, and Father Jacques Hollande, the Superior of the Mission de Paris, gave the above-mentioned first-hand account of the latter. The closing address, presented by a young member of the Belgian left Catholic milieu, who would continue to play a role in Belgium's heterodox left-leaning communities for at least another sixty years, Jules

[108] Dansette, *Destin*, 368.

[109] Typescript summary by Jacques Meert of the proceedings at the conference on 'Les Problèmes de l'Église en marche: session d'étude de Charleroi (28–29–30. 12. 1947)', 1: AET, Fonds Jean Dermine, X A.11.

Gérard-Libois, reflected on the theme of 'Human Communities—Christian Communities', and his comments served as an introduction to the second international conference, which was held on 2–4 July 1949.[110]

The follow-up session in 1949 was indeed explicitly devoted to the title of the presentation by Gérard-Libois two years earlier, a theme which had of course also been extensively discussed by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel in their 1943 *La France: pays de mission?*: 'Communautés humaines—communautés chrétiennes'.[111] This second conference in a series of gatherings devoted to the elaboration of 'Problems of the Church on the Move' received the support of all three Walloon bishops, the bishops of Tournai, Liège, and Namur. It would be excessive to list—let alone discuss—the individual contributions made at this second conference organized by Témoignage Chrétien. May it suffice to draw attention to the presentation by Jacques Meert, one of the earliest disciples of Joseph Cardijn and founding member of the Belgian JOC, on 'The Promotion of the Laity and the Missionary Spirit'; a report by a member of the *équipe de Colombes*, Louis Rétif, 'Petit-Colombes, paroisse communauté missionaire'; a first-hand report on community building in an unnamed Belgian working-class suburb by Jean Bouhy, the key moving force behind the *Équipes Populaires*: 'Two Years of Activism in a Working Class Neighbourhood'; and, last but not least, the lengthy disquisition by the Jesuit scholar Émile Rideau on 'Theological Justification of Taking Charge of Base Communities' ['Justification théologique de la prise en charge des communautés de base']. Once again, an activist theologian utilized a term which would come into its own in the second half of the 1960s, *communauté de base*, just as Godin and Daniel had done in 1943. It is clear that, even in the majority of circumstances, when these 'beloved communities', to use a term that became popular in mostly Protestant-run communities in the American rural South in the early to mid-1960s,[112] did not explicitly employ the term 'base communities',

[110] Carton de Wiart et al., *Christianisation du proletariat*.

[111] Jean Bouhy et al., *Problèmes de l'église en marche*, ii: *Communautés humaines, communautés chrétiennes* (Brussels: Témoignage Chrétien, 1949).

[112] The 'beloved communities' set up by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in America's Deep South are briefly described in Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The*

the meaning and the message of these *communautés chrétiennes* was almost indistinguishable from the subsequent *communautés de base*.

The plethora of such base communities also underscored the variety of institutional circumstances out of which emerged the dynamic towards forming community-based missionary enterprises. It is often forgotten that many of these *communautés* were indeed parish-based diocesan efforts. Adrien Dansette quite correctly draws attention to the fact that 'there was no irresolvable opposition between the parish and the extra-parish community', and he goes on to suggest that the contrast between supposedly traditional parish life and supposedly more dynamic extra-parish communities depicted by a number of contemporaneous participant-observers upon closer observation tends to dissolve. In reality, one should be 'casting light on a conflict which', instead of pitting parishes against other institutional contexts, 'opposed two generations of clerics, that of the young priests who clamoured for changes and that of the older priests who wanted nothing to do with such changes (we are simplifying and exaggerating these characteristics here: there are young priests who think like their elder colleagues and there are old ones who act like the young)'. In this context, Dansette points his finger at what he regards as some unfortunate consequences of certain imprudent formulations employed by some of the key advocates of change: 'Fathers Godin and Daniel who, in order to demonstrate the necessity of an apostolic renovation, felt compelled to highlight the insufficiencies of the parish, have thereby created the inexact impression that they disregarded the parish and that they wanted to replace it, at least in part, by extra-parish communities. One makes a point by drawing clear distinctions.' 'No such principled opposition between the parish and the extra-parish community exists, for the one is destined to complement the other. Instead, the point of the exercise was to highlight the contrast of style and to draw attention to the problem of articulating the desired goals.'[113]

Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 195–6.

[113] Dansette, *Destin*, 162–3.

FROM COMMUNITY FOCUS TO WORKPLACE ORIENTATION

Just as in 1944 sympathetic observers, for a while, thought that the dynamically expanding Mouvement Populaire des Familles was the incarnation of the spirit of *La France: pays de mission?*,[114] the immediate post-liberation period witnessed a fascination with the task of creating Christian communities. Yet, after an initial period of missionary successes, the number of conversions began to diminish. And, as the tangible results of community efforts began to decrease, the mystique of community building slowly started to wane, although the number of base communities continued to grow throughout the 1950s. Adrien Dansette suggests that the high point of concentration on community building efforts for the Mission de Paris probably occurred in 1946. In subsequent years the search for new and seemingly more efficient solutions to the problems posed by dechristianization gradually outpaced the construction of base communities. 'Factory work eventually appeared to a majority of Mission de Paris activists as the sole efficient mechanism of working-class penetration. They began to identify themselves with the latter, to participate in the workers' movement, and, for the most part, they ceased to have a keen interest in communities as such [*de s'intéresser aux communautés*].'[115] Not all participant-observers of the wave of post-liberation Christian communities experienced a similar lessening of interest in community building, and even members of the Mission de Paris, central players in the ensuing period centring on the apostolate carried out on the factory floor, never entirely abandoned the base community approach. But a new fascination soon began to occupy the imagination of missionaries amongst the working class, a fascination which found its ultimate expression in the experience of the worker priests.

The element facilitating the transition from the concentration on the fashioning of base communities to the phenomenon of worker priests was undoubtedly the discovery of communitarian ideals

[114] Joseph Debès, *Naissance de l'Action Catholique Ouvrière* (Paris: Ouvrière, 1982), 56.

[115] Dansette, *Destin*, 164.

and a communitarian spirit within actually existing dechristianized working-class communities, facilitated and reinforced by the communitarian ideals and methods of Marxism (communism, for the most part, in the French case; socialism, above all, in Belgium) which had gradually replaced Christian ideology as the natural belief system of choice for working-class communities from the late nineteenth century. The 1955 report by the team of worker priests operating in Liège, referred to at the very beginning of this chapter, put it in unmistakable and elegant terms. Invoking the authority of Paris Cardinal Feltin, who had succeeded Cardinal Suhard after the latter's death on 30 May 1949, the *équipe liégeois* wrote:

> That which is beautiful [as Cardinal Feltin put it to his priests] is that one can discover deep down within the working class that element which is not always present in the other classes which have become overly affected by individualism: a hope, an all-encompassing fraternity, a loyal realism, a communitarian understanding; ever so many values which, for the Church, are ever so many building blocks. And it thus increasingly appears (and the workers, at least the best elements amongst them, are convinced of this themselves) that the working-class milieu constitutes indeed a separate people, a new world, complete with its communitarian and societal ingredients which include, on the one hand, all these [aforementioned] characteristics which have instinctively led them to unify their efforts and, on the other hand, structures such as trade unions, mutual insurance associations, etc.[116]

Combined with the perceived need for maximum integration into working-class communities in order to be able to tackle the task of building up Christian communities to serve as magnets for the rechristianization of proletarian cities, the fascination with the world of labour prepared the terrain for the ultimate move. Community building projects were first supplemented and then, by the early 1950s at the latest, overshadowed by the actions of priests, who were no longer content to socialize with workers, but who took the ultimate step and became workers themselves.

Worker priests are, technically, priests who have taken up industrial labour either as full-time, part-time, or temporary workers in factories where, for all practical purposes, the workforce has little in common with the life of the Church. In the period under

[116] 'Rapport de l'Équipe', 8–9.

consideration, the phenomenon of worker priests was a peculiarity of francophone Europe. How did this particular apostolic mission, which captured the imagination of Christian and non-Christian observers more than any other of the multiform and varied endeavours to rechristianize industrial Europe, get off the ground? How did it happen that, for significant sections of an entire generation of ordained priests, the exchange of the priestly soutane, then still virtually mandatory for Catholic priests, for working-class blue became the ultimate expression of their devotion to their cause?

As was the case with all other variations on the theme of working-class rechristianization, worker priest initiatives did not suddenly emerge from nowhere overnight. Nathalie Viet-Depaule and Charles Suaud have drawn attention to three pioneers of the worker priest experience who engaged in manual labour already prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.[117] The Belgian priest Charles Boland, as long ago as 1921, for some months laboured in a coal mine in Seraing near Liège, spending considerable efforts in the succeeding twenty years to obtain permission to renew this wholly unprecedented experience, eventually obtaining the agreement of Liège Bishop Louis-Joseph Kerkhofs in 1942 to engage in industrial labour for one day per week, in 1945 finally obtaining the go-ahead for his engagement as a priest devoted to full-time industrial labour.[118] Michel Lémonon, later on associated with the Mission de France and member of the team of worker priests engaged in the vast construction efforts to generate much-needed electricity by building artificial lakes and dams, then all the rage throughout the industrialized world, from October 1935 to July 1936 had already worked as an underground mineworker in Saint-Étienne, France.[119] Albert Bouche, soon thereafter national chaplain of the French JOC,

[117] Suaud and Viet-Depaule, *Prêtres et ouvriers*, 7.

[118] Note Charles Boland's autobiography, *Dure perçée: récit d'un premier prêtre-ouvrier (1924–1964)* (Brussels: Foyer Notre Dame, 1968). The story of Boland's two-decade-long efforts to obtain the hierarchy's approval for his apostolate on the factory floor is summarized in Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 188–96. A photo of the Dustin Hoffman lookalike Charles Boland as mineworker graces the front cover of Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard (eds.), *Left Catholicism: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation, 1943–1955* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001).

[119] See Michel Lémonon, *Laurent ou l'itinéraire d'un prêtre-ouvrier* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

founder of the LOC/MPF house organ *Masses ouvrières*, and a worker priest again in the 1950s, when a seminarian at Le Saulchoir in the 1930s worked in a Charleroi (Belgium) coal mine, in the famous wholesale market in central Paris, Les Halles, as well as in the giant Renault factory in Boulogne-Billancourt.[120] Others followed in these pioneers' footsteps, most often effecting their more or less lengthy periods as industrial labourers as part of their training to become priests. Indeed, the Mission de France, long before the term 'worker priest' became a household term throughout Catholic (and non-Catholic) France, though not from the outset of their seminary teaching sessions in October 1942, decided to send its seminarians for work placements in factories throughout France.[121] Yet, whether in the form of short-term internships or unusual individual choices, full-time industrial labour remained an exception throughout the years of the Second World War. Even Fathers Godin and Daniel, most keenly attuned to the need for industrial missions, nowhere in their volume mentioned full-time industrial labour as an element in the struggle to rechristianize proletarian France.

Even by the mid-1940s, when several individuals in both Belgium and France (amongst them Charles Boland and Jacques Loew) had begun to utilize such tactics, the exchange of the soutane for working-class blue was still seen as one of many possible avenues towards the task of the working-class apostolate, a tactic rather than a strategy, much less the preferred strategy of choice. To become familiar with the working-class milieu and to familiarize workers with the various ongoing missions were the twin goals of such—at that time—still pragmatic rather than programmatic efforts. In May 1946, for instance, Louis Augros, presenting the Mission de France in the pages of the MPF's *Masses ouvrières*, was by no means convinced of the phenomenon of worker priests as the missionary wave of the future. 'The Lord may perhaps one day in some manner call upon priests (be it just a few of them, or be it in great number as has happened during the captivity in Germany) to turn themselves into workers, artisans, or farm labourers, not just during a brief work placement

[120] Éric Belouet and Nathalie Viet-Depaule, 'Albert Bouche ou l'itinéraire d'un frontalier', *Les Cahiers de l'Atelier*, 488 (April–June 2000), 3–19.

[121] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 64–8.

but in a permanent fashion. Who knows what the future holds in store for us, which sorts of appeals God will launch in our direction? And in what shape?' As late as early 1948, a prominent representative of the Mission de Paris (which, readers may recall, unlike the Mission de France was specifically devoted to missionize urban and working-class Paris), Bernard Tiberghien, still thought that the future would not solely be assured by priests taking up full-time industrial labour: 'Perhaps the ideal is not that we, the priests, will permanently remain within the factories, but that one day they [industrial workers] will regard us as equals, with the sole added ingredient being the fact that we are priests, so that they may tell us: "Now that we have seen you at work, now that we have seen that you are like a true brother, you no longer have to work in the factory, but you will nonetheless remain one of us." '[122] As Olivier de La Brosse states in his narrative introducing key documents from the pen of Cardinal Suhard, when introducing the purpose of the Mission de France: 'One must underscore that, although everyone was in agreement that one should integrate oneself into working-class life to the maximum extent, the question of manual labour for priests had not yet been raised as a principled issue.'[123]

By contrast, in March 1949, the Jesuit Father André Rétif could write in the pages of the flagship Jesuit journal *Études*, without the need to justify or explain the meaning of his phrases: 'A significant proportion of proletarians in France are aware of the fact that there are priests who have become workers like themselves. And not just for several months in the context of a work placement or internship, but definitively, for life. They have truly integrated themselves into the working class.'[124] What had happened to bring about this remarkable transformation in the public image of the priesthood in France? How and why did the donning of working-class blue become a nationally

[122] Both citations are reproduced in Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 401. A brief biography of Bernard Tiberghien can be consulted in André Caudron, 'Bernard Tiberghien, fils de patron et prêtre-ouvrier', in Bruno Duriez et al., *Chrétiens et ouvriers en France, 1937–1970* (Paris: Atelier, 2001), 144–56. The haphazard and contingent development of the practice of and, later on, the vocation as a worker priest is well reconstructed in Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 394–403.

[123] De La Brosse (ed.), *Cardinal Suhard*, 145.

[124] Cited in Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 402.

recognized trend by the very end of the 1940s rather than a colourful and somewhat peculiar exception?

Undoubtedly a number of factors worked in unison to bring about the growing public awareness of the worker priest phenomenon. Above all, the growing number of priests taking up manual labour eventually turned quantity into quality. In 1946, the Mission de Paris had sponsored no more than six worker priests; at the same time there were merely a handful of others operating in various locations throughout the rest of France. Within a few years, the situation had drastically changed. 'By 1949 in all of France combined about fifty worker priests had been deployed, amongst them close to a dozen members of religious orders, Capucins, Dominicans, Jesuits.'[125] Even so, all told, this first generation of French and Belgian worker priests never numbered more than one hundred *in toto*, attached to a variety of organizations, institutions, and monastic orders. But the repercussions of their apostolic work were now eagerly noticed far beyond the borders of francophone Europe.

FRENCH UNDERGROUND PRIESTS IN NAZI GERMANY

If the naturalization into the vocation of worker priest was, in large part, an unintended process of trial and error, driven by the desire for cultural immersion into working-class communities central to all projects of proletarian missions since the days of the JOC, there was another inspiration behind the choice of full-time industrial labour. Amongst French prisoners of war detained in Nazi Germany, there were approximately 2,800 clerics and several hundred seminarians, as there existed no special dispensation from military service for these occupational categories.[126] Given the harrowing circumstances of daily life in POW camps for the roughly 1.8 million French prisoners, they performed sacerdotal duties to the best of their abilities, but

[125] Dansette, *Destin*, 179.

[126] Wolfgang Knauft, *Zwischen Fabriken, Kapellen und KZ: Französische Untergrundseelsorge in Berlin 1943–1945* (Heiligenstadt: F. W. Cordier, 2005), 38.

the sheer number of the needy soon outpaced their ability to serve. The situation only improved by degree as the German authorities allowed the transformation of some prisoners of war into forced civilian labourers. When German occupation authorities in France introduced a labour draft for young Frenchmen, to be served either in French factories with German top management or in factories in Germany itself, the number of Frenchmen living in Germany further increased dramatically, and so did the need for clerical assistance. By Easter 1943 the first of twenty-five volunteer priests selected to accompany forced labourers in underground missions to Germany left for their destination, a number which by the end of the war had swelled to 275.[127] Some 1,500 French theology students and seminarians were, in addition, drafted for forced labour duties in Germany.[128] Also, lay members and sympathizers of French Catholic Action cooperated in providing some degree of pastoral care, with approximately 1,000 Catholic Action members and several thousand sympathizers reported in the German capital city of Berlin alone.[129] 'The French Church was the only church in Europe which, in the middle of the Second World War and under conditions of illegality, built up a functioning organization for pastoral care of forced labourers in Germany.'[130]

Concretely, then, for the duration of their stay in Germany, whether forcibly as prisoners of war or whether voluntarily and illegally as underground priests, hundreds and, indeed, thousands of French priests experienced the plight of their constituents—POWs and forced labourers—at first hand. Hundreds of priests, certainly those who had signed up as forced labourers to be able to exercise pastoral care in Germany, shared the experience of full-time manual labour.[131] A small but significant minority of an entire generation of French priests thus was exposed to the tribulations and the miseries but also the hopes and the camaraderie of blue-collar workers at the

[127] On the first cohort of twenty-five 'underground' priests sent to Germany, see ibid. 77–86; the total number of 275 priests leaving voluntarily for Germany is reported in Arnal, *Working-Class Blue*, 58.

[128] Knauft, *Französische Untergrundseelsorge*, 82.

[129] Ibid. 124. [130] Ibid. 217.

[131] For a detailed overall view of the working-class apostolate in Germany by the French Catholic Church, see Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 179–375.

point of production, many of these workers belonging to the socialist or communist camp, with most of them at best lapsed Catholics. Catholic priests suffered not just the daily persecutions and insults common to the fate of all forced labourers, but in addition they ran the risk of reprisals from Nazi authorities on account of their illegal mission. A significant number of priests thus were arrested, put into jails, or languished in concentration camps, with some perishing in the process of their underground mission to Germany. For many of those who survived and eventually returned to France, life would never be as it had been before. Many of 'the priests who returned from captivity or forced labour assignments strongly wished to continue that experience of close proximity to the world of labour which had transformed the possibilities of proclaiming the gospel in a particularly profound manner as it had happened in a natural surrounding, animated by the fraternity of human relations'.[132] Along with the ever-growing desire to familiarize themselves with the working-class milieu on the part of seminarians and priests in the immediate post-liberation era, described in some detail above, the experience of the underground missionaries in the factories of the Nazi heartland was the second major influence behind the take-off of the worker priest phenomenon.

MISSION DE BELGIQUE

That the worker priest experience was by no means a consequence of the underground missions to Germany alone is showcased by the case of Belgium, the only other country to witness the development of a worker priest apostolate in the 1940s and 1950s. Prodded by some Belgian clerics to emulate French initiatives and likewise to send volunteers on underground missions to Nazi Germany, the Belgian *primus inter pares*, Cardinal van Roey, at one point approached the German authorities for permission for such an exercise, but his

[132] Jean Vinatier, *Les Prêtres ouvriers, le cardinal Liénart et Rome: histoire d'une crise*, (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1985), 49.

request was promptly refused, and Joseph Ernst van Roey left things at that, never taking any additional steps.[133] But this did not predispose the Belgian working-class apostolate against the development of its own worker priest programme. After all, Belgium had pioneered specialized Catholic Action and experienced the dynamism of the MPF; and Belgian Catholic forces were engaged in their own experiments with community building, hosting the two aforementioned international conferences in 1947 and 1949. As mentioned above, chronologically speaking, the very first worker priest anywhere in twentieth-century Europe was a Belgian priest, Charles Boland, operating in the industrial basin of Greater Liège.

In 1945, at the pilgrimage site of Banneux, south-east of Liège, Charles Boland met Father Damien Reumont, a Capucin. Reumont had participated in external missions to India, had been arrested by the Nazi occupiers for 'intelligence with the enemy', sent to several concentration camps where he had been selected to be worked to death, only to be liberated by American forces just in time. Already in 1933, at the time of the apparitions which turned Banneux into a pilgrimage centre, Charles Boland had interpreted the spiritual message of the local visionary, Mariette Beco—'I am the Virgin of the Poor'—'as a special appeal in favour of the proletariat which has become alienated from Christ and his mother'. Boland and Reumont, sensing a deep affinity in the course of their conversations at Banneux, approached the Bishop of Liège, Louis-Joseph Kerkhofs, for permission to form a group of clergy and laity devoted to the working-class apostolate. A third person soon joined the core duo: JOC activist Hector Cools, who had, like Father Reumont, spent time in German camps, where he had become all too painfully aware of the dechristianization of the Belgian francophone working class and of the insufficiency of traditional sacerdotal measures to reach a working-class audience. Initially envisaged as an undertaking supervised by the Franciscan order, soon a formula was found to allow the recruitment from all other orders and indeed amongst the larger number of diocesan priests. Placed under the direct authority of the Bishop of Liège,

[133] Knauft, *Französische Untergrundseelsorge*, 79–80.

the Fraternity of the Workers of the Virgin of the Poor [*Fraternité des Ouvriers de la Vierge des Pauvres*] got off the ground.[134]

Initially, however, just as was the case in neighbouring France, full-time industrial labour was seen rather as an exception for this association of clergy and laity devoted to the working-class apostolate than as a rule. Still in 1947, for instance, Father Damien Reumont described the programme for the training of Fraternité members in this manner: 'A more or less extended spell in a factory as manual worker is required. This apostolate must lead towards the formation of extra-parish Christian communities that will become increasingly integrated into the respective parishes, which is why a number of priests must undertake to become neighbourhood priests.'[135] And, indeed, even later on, to become a worker priest was by no means the sole favoured vocation for this association of clergy and laity exclusively devoted to missionary activity amongst the Belgian francophone working class. A May 1949 status report suggests that, of the eight priests that formed part of this mission, at that point only three were bona fide worker priests. The Missionaires des Ouvriers de la Vierge des Pauvres, as they began to call themselves after a while, understood their calling to be an integrated threefold approach towards the working-class apostolate, focusing on the point of production, the parish, and the neighbourhood.[136]

The Missionaires des Ouvriers de la Vierge des Pauvres understood themselves to be operating along roughly similar lines to the French Mission de France and Mission de Paris at that time. Indeed, the hope was repeatedly expressed for the Mission OVP, as it came to be called for short, to develop and run its own specialized seminary to prepare Belgian seminarians for the working-class apostolate. An unsigned document, dating from the summer of 1950, suggests that the most desirable training programme for Belgian working-class missionaries would preferably entail education at a Belgian seminary, even if

[134] Information culled from Louis Flagothier and Maurice Lafontaine, 'Notice sur les Ouvriers de la Vierge des Pauvres de Banneux', datelined 'Lisieux, le 8 décembre 1947': APOB, Fonds Flagothier, 'documents datés'.

[135] Father Damien Reumont to Father Marcel Van Laere, 15 October 1947, 1: APOB, Fonds Charles Boland, 'correspondances datés'.

[136] Father Damien Reumont, 'Situation Mai 1949', 26 May 1949: APOB, Fonds Boland, 'Documents'.

ordination might be followed by a year in Lisieux. The unknown author then expressed his wish 'that the bishops will judge it useful or necessary to have a specialized home in Belgium itself where these priests can receive their complementary training for one or two years'.[137] In April 1951, Father Charles Boland aired his belief that the Mission OVP would expand to become a type of Mission de France: 'There is no doubt that it will one day obtain the mission to develop a seminary for priests devoted to the working-class milieu', a Mission de Belgique.[138]

THE *GLEICHSCHALTUNG* OF THE WORKER PRIESTS

Yet Charles Boland's dream never became reality. Not only did the Mission OVP never expand into a Mission de Belgique, complete with seminary and financial assistance from the church hierarchy. Even the Mission de France, not to speak of the Mission de Paris, suffered a number of setbacks and almost had to close its doors. But for various and not always self-evident reasons, mostly having to do with the special mystique of the worker priest apostolate, most attention has thus far been devoted in the relevant secondary literature to the repression meted out by the church hierarchy to the worker priests as such. And, indeed, on some level, the worker priest experience raised a number of controversies almost from the very beginning, which could not easily be reconciled with traditional conceptions of the priesthood. The wearing of the soutane was, by definition, impossible for priests assuming positions as factory or agricultural labourers. And, as part of the cultural immersion technique, worker priests were more likely to engage in certain temporal activities common to the working-class milieu, such as trade union engagements, with some worker priests taking on leadership functions within even the communist CGT, than to concentrate on 'mere' community building.

A minority of worker priests indeed became actively involved in a number of front organizations of the PCF, no doubt in part a

[137] 'Tournai, 27 juillet 1950': AET, Fonds Clergé Séculier, I/10.

[138] Father Charles Boland to 'Excellence', Seraing, 5 April 1951: AET, Fonds Clergé Séculier, I/10.

consequence of the growing social weight of communist parties in the aftermath of anti-fascist resistance which had given a tremendous boost to communism across the continent,[139] a deepening influence of communism which was most heavily felt on the factory floor. In late 1949, even Father Damien Reumont, for instance, never a fellow-traveller of communism himself and writing in his native Belgium which never experienced the same kind of stellar post-war ascent of the communist mystique compared to neighbouring France or Italy further south, wrote as a matter of course: 'Evidently, at this moment communism is the expression of working-class consciousness', although Father Reumont immediately added that 'one must judge communism very severely: it is the biggest contemporary danger to humanity'.[140] Others, particularly some worker priests operating in France, were less immune to the powerful attractions of French and international communism as an emancipatory force. On 28 May 1952, two worker priests, heeding a call from the communist-dominated Mouvement de la Paix, participated in a protest demonstration in central Paris against the visit of General Matthew Bunker Ridgway, the former commander of United Nations forces in Korea and newly appointed Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe. Fathers Louis Boyer and Bernard Cagne were arrested and roughed up by the French police, leading to an *éclat* and an embarrassing situation for Paris Archbishop Cardinal Feltin, who had come to sympathize with the worker priests' cause but who could not publicly defend the participation of priests in communist-led public shows of force. 'Well-informed persons say that the cause of the worker-priests was finally lost on that day.'[141]

The community of worker priests was certainly well aware and, generally, up front about the psychological and political changes they

[139] A good summary overview of the great influence of communist politics in post-war Europe as a whole can be gleaned in Aldo Agosti, 'Recasting Democracy? Communist Parties Facing Change and Reconstruction in Postwar Europe', in Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (eds.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 3–26.

[140] Father Damien Reumont, 'Rencontre des "Prêtres Engagés" à Villecresnes (Seine-et-Oise) les 7 et 8 mai 1949', written on 6 November 1949, 9: APOB, Fonds Flagothier, 'Rencontres Interéquipaires'.

[141] Stanley Windass (ed.), *Chronicle of the Worker-Priests* (London: Merlin, 1966), 60.

themselves had undergone in the progress of their mission, even if 'fellow-travelling' as such remained an exception. A collective statement approved by every single one of the worker priests operating in Greater Paris thus openly averred: 'Of course we have changed. We no longer were merely activists working for a cause, but we turned into individuals whose inner self became transformed in the name of our mission.'[142]

> We now know that the proletariat, left to its own devices, without a class consciousness, without organization, will never succeed in conquering its enemy, who is leading a many-sided assault and who is a hundred times stronger, if not in numbers and in quality then at least by its control over the means of oppression and repression, which run the entire gamut from open and brutal struggle to hypocritical 'good intentions' and the narcotic of religion [*narcotique religieux*]. And we believe that it is our duty to take part in this class consciousness and in these organized actions, and that it is a sign of charity which is as necessary and simultaneously demanding as is the carrying out of good deeds for individuals in need. We have also learned that class struggle is not a moral choice which one can accept or reject, but that it is a brutal reality imposed on the working class. It is a struggle engaged in by the united camp of the rich against the working class, aided on all sides by those forces constituting its pillars; and for the moment, in the eyes of the workers, the Church is one of those pillars.[143]

Small wonder that, by 1952, moves were under way to hem in the worker priest experience which, rather than a promise to extend the influence of the Catholic Church, became increasingly seen as a danger to Christianity within the most influential circles of the Church. The example of the Mouvement Populaire des Familles must have been in the back of the minds of more than one member of the francophone Catholic hierarchy and their overlords in the Vatican, driving home the possibility of a missionary organization devoted to the rechristianization of the working-class milieu evolving into an 'institution' which, to be sure, nominally remained Catholic, but would increasingly conform to the standards of the secular milieu which it had targeted for its Christian mission. Rather than the 'pagan' milieu adopting Catholic ways of life, Catholic missionaries

[142] 'Document [Verte], rédigé par tous les prêtres ouvriers de Paris à l'intention de Son Éminence le Cardinal Feltin', 5 October 1953: CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 0256.
[143] Ibid. 7–8.

were adapting to the secular ways of life of their new environment. Opinions, of course, differed with regard to the attitude to take vis-à-vis this latest twist in the apostolate targeting urban blue-collar workers. The French and Belgian episcopate, for instance, was not united in its response to the perceived danger of the worker priest mission. But regardless of the relationship of forces within the respective national church hierarchies—on the whole less hostile towards continuation of worker priest engagements even in the case of some leading archbishops in France; more sceptical in the case of the majority of Belgian bishops, with the sole solid institutional supporters being the bishops of Tournai and Liège—the winds from Rome were blowing in a direction decidedly opposite to the predominant currents twenty-five or even fifteen years earlier, when the working-class apostolate, then still under Catholic Action auspices, was in the ascendant.[144]

Under Pius XI, certainly between 1926 and 1936, but already to some extent from the very beginning of his pontificate, specialized Catholic Action had received spiritual and material encouragement from the Holy See. Under the impact of the anticlerical excesses of the Spanish Revolution in 1936, Pius XI, towards the end of his pontificate, became more cautious and markedly conservative in his overall orientation. Pius XII picked up where Pius XI left off. Never an advocate of bold reforms, to put it mildly, Pius XII was nonetheless sufficiently open-minded at the onset of his pontificate to permit experimentation with the new forms of the working-class apostolate

[144] The story of the closure of the first-generation worker priest mission has been told in detail many times. Perhaps the most thorough investigation is now a work which places special emphasis on the repercussions within the Dominican order, François Leprieur, *Quand Rome condamne: Dominicains et prêtres-ouvriers* (Paris: Plon, 1989). Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*; Poulat, *Prêtres-ouvriers*, 537–91, the new and final section of his magnum opus, which he appended to the re-edition of his original masterpiece, Émile Poulat, *Naissance des prêtres-ouvriers* (Paris: Casterman, 1965); and of course the relevant pages of Dansette, *Destin*, are informative surveys of the key developments in the sudden end to a promising new turn in the much longer history of the working-class apostolate. In English, see Arnal, *Working-Class Blue*, 137–55; John Petrie (pseud.), *The Worker Priests: A Collective Documentation* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1956), the translation of the original, anonymously edited *Les Prêtres ouvriers* (Paris: Minuit, 1954); Windass (ed.), *Chronicle*; and the translation from the original German, Gregor Siefer, *The Church and Industrial Society: A Survey of the Worker-Priest Movement and its Implications for the Christian Mission* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1964).

at the centre of this chapter. At any rate, given the hesitant, contingent, and pragmatic ways in which these various missions developed, leaving aside the even more amorphous—but for that matter by no means less important—steps undertaken by a whole host of additional church institutions to foster and to spread the concept and the reality of base communities or, as they were then more likely to be called, Christian communities, it would have been exceedingly difficult to halt these developments early on. Conditions of wartime uncertainty, with its difficulties for communication on all levels, in many ways further complicated all actual or potential interventions, be they directed in favour of or against a particular local or national initiative. Yet, only a few years, literally, after the breakthrough of the worker priest option in the late 1940s, the brakes were applied. There had been plenty of early warning signals. But, for all practical purposes, the actual clampdown did not happen until 1953.

On 27 May 1953, Bishop Jean Delay ruled to discontinue the worker priest mission in one of the crucibles of the working-class apostolate, the port city of Marseille. In September 1953, the Vatican informed the French ecclesiastical hierarchy that full-time industrial labour would henceforth no longer be an option for ordained priests. An effort to stave off the demise of this option by a visit to Rome by three French cardinals was not crowned by success.[145] On 19 January 1954, all French bishops with worker priests operating in their diocese sent a collective letter to each individual worker priest, announcing the definitive closure of this option by 1 March 1954.[146] Worker priests in Belgium had been far fewer in number and generally more cautious in their temporal engagements accompanying their spiritual mission. For some months they thus believed that they would escape the fate of their French comrades-in-arms. Yet in July 1954 the Papal Nuncio to Belgium informed Tournai Bishop Himmer of the Vatican decision to close down the Belgian worker priest chapter as well. Bishop Himmer of Tournai and Bishop Kerkhofs of Liège launched yet another last-ditch effort to avoid the inevitable, a campaign taking up much of the second half of 1954, though no longer focusing

[145] Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 69–88.

[146] Unsigned 'Lettre aux prêtres-ouvriers', 19 January 1954: APOB, Fonds Flagothier, 'Correspondance'.

on attempting to obtain continued approval for full-time industrial labour by priests, but merely hoping to convince the Vatican that they, the Belgian bishops, in communicating this decision to their flock, could openly trace the responsibility to Rome instead of shouldering such responsibility themselves, as Rome had first demanded. Rome acceded to this cosmetic change, but the essence of the decision remained unchanged.[147] In the course of July 1955, all eight Belgian worker priests then engaged in full-time manual labour were forced to vacate their positions.[148]

THE TAMING OF THE MISSION DE FRANCE

The nightmare experience of worker priest condemnation received headline news. The troubles affecting the Mission de France, the latter in many ways the laboratory for all sorts of innovative measures in the preceding ten years, including the tendency for seminarians and ordained priests increasingly to take on industrial labour, received less prominent attention. As indicated above, news of the non-traditional teaching and learning techniques had spread to Rome from early on, so that the first official Mission de France delegation to visit the Vatican in November 1946 was told by a top official at the Holy See, Alfredo Ottaviani: 'There are clouds over France.' Still, the delegation—which included Louis Augros and Jacques Hollande, the heads of, respectively, the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris—returned confident in the future of their mission, in part no doubt because of reassuring comments by Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.[149] But the storm clouds building up not so much over France as, more precisely, over the Mission de France were just beginning to gather. Louis Augros, for instance, in his semi-autobiographical history of the Mission de France, refers to repeated

[147] Detailed documentation of their interactions can be consulted in AET, Fonds Clergé Séculier, I/10.

[148] Letter of submission to ecclesiastical authorities, signed by all eight Belgian worker priests, dated 'juillet 1955': APOB, Fonds Flagothier, 'Correspondance'.

[149] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 247–8, citation on 248.

interrogations by various key Vatican officials during what must have been a repeat visit to Rome in 1947.[150]

In late November 1947, the Vatican Nuncio to Paris openly complained about the laxity of rules at Lisieux, in particular about the tendency for the Superior of the Mission, Louis Augros, to let seminarians make decisions which were normally the prerogative of the Superior. 'It was suggested that the seminary resembled far too much a regular university, where students could choose the materials to be studied', and complaints were aired about the minimalist application of regulations regarding the daily comportment of seminarians. Responses by the Lisieux leadership team—such as the statement: 'We are teaching them to govern themselves'—were not likely to reassure the Vatican critics.[151] It was becoming clear that one key rationale for Vatican mistrust of the proceedings at the Mission de France was the fear of loss of control over sections of its missionary clergy. The same fear was expressed vis-à-vis the worker priests a few years later by the same Cardinal Ottaviani in a letter to the Auxiliary Bishop of Lyon and promoter of the working-class apostolate, Alfred Ancel: 'It appears rather obvious that, at the very least in other dioceses, worker priests manifest for all practical purposes and sometimes quite overtly a deplorable liberty vis-à-vis disciplinary or liturgical regulations, a tendency which is highly significant.'[152] For the moment, however, the Mission managed to survive and on 28 May 1949, two days before Cardinal Suhard's death, the Mission de France received a temporary canonical statute from Rome.[153]

Yet the ordeal was by no means over. The worst was, instead, yet to come. Normally, after Cardinal Suhard's death, the new head of the Association of Cardinals and Archbishops, Cardinal Liénart, would have taken over the nominal overall directorate of the Mission de France, but Liénart voluntarily ceded those powers to the new Archbishop of Paris, Maurice Feltin. Feltin later on became a key

[150] Augros, *L'Église de demain*, 87. [151] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 249.

[152] Cardinal Ottaviani to Monseigneur Ancel, 11 January 1951, copy included in a communication by Father Damien Reumont to 'Bien cher confrère', 16 March 1951: APOB, Fonds Boland, 'correspondances datés'.

[153] Vinatier, *Suhard*, 252. The text of this provisional statute can be consulted in the collection of documents edited and annotated by Jacques Faupin, *La Mission de France: histoire et institution* (Tournai: Casterman, 1960), 67–75.

defender not only of the Mission de France but the Mission de Paris and, indeed, of the worker priests as well. For the moment, however, he was rather guarded vis-à-vis the missionary innovations coming from Lisieux, and in April 1951 Cardinal Feltin took the initiative to found a national Commission for Clergy and Seminaries, headed by Cardinal Liénart. Then, in March 1952, Cardinal Liénart went on the offensive. Though by no means averse to all new missionary initiatives, and indeed in 1953 a key personality in the fight to avert the closure of the worker priest experiment, in late March 1952 he presented the Mission de France with a series of far-reaching conditions.[154] Undoubtedly, Rome stood behind some of the harsh decisions announced by Cardinal Liénart.

It had, likewise, been pressure from Rome which had earlier on affected some significant moves with regard to the standard practice at Lisieux of factory internships for seminarians. In 1950 such work placements were deemed no longer suitable by Rome. However, in the words of the Superior of the Mission de Paris, the latter just as much affected by such measures, at first it appeared as if not all was lost: 'This is the official verdict; here is the concrete application of this policy.' In practice, Jacques Hollande went on to say, Cardinal Feltin and others continued to allow such internships, as long as they occurred during holiday periods and did not affect the teaching programme at Lisieux. Yet, ominously, it was reported that Rome was now seriously considering to decree that the key decisions affecting the Mission and the comportment of team members sent on missions to dechristianized France would henceforth be in the hands of the respective bishops and no longer the prerogative of the seminary's Superior.[155]

[154] The key developments with regard to the Mission de France between May 1949 and March 1952, complete with an evocative comparison of the personalities of Cardinal Suhard and Cardinal Liénart, are presented in Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 28–38.

[155] Letter by Jacques Hollande to Father Damien Reumont, 9 August 1950, a document appended on 10 August by Reumont to a longer letter by Reumont addressed to Liège Bishop Kerkhofs, written on 7 August 1950, in which Reumont informed the sympathetic bishop of news reported by several visitors to the Vatican, amongst them Cardinals Feltin and Liénart, primarily with regard to the worker priest apostolate: AET, Fonds Clergé Séculier, I/10.

Then, on 28 March 1952, Cardinal Liénart, on the occasion of an ordination ceremony at Lisieux, announced to a startled crowd the first serious measures casting doubt over the continued existence of the Mission de France. Once again expressing the hierarchy's consternation over the habits of the Mission's leadership team of providing direct advice to its missionaries, thus bypassing the episcopacy's nominal authority, Cardinal Liénart went on to make even graver accusations. The principle of community building, while in and of itself not a harmful measure, if 'pushed too far' could have disastrous consequences, with missionary teams thus becoming 'a substitute for the life of the Church, the various teams winding up being considered as the sufficient reference point in virtually all circumstances, for reflections, judgements, and interpretations of divine will, indeed becoming the sole authority'.[156]

Cardinal Liénart, only too aware of the inner workings of the Mission de France, then went on to attack the Mission's spiritual advisers, without naming names: 'The exclusive recourse to the authority of theologians when determining what should be done' was singled out as bad practice, quite apart from the Mission's open flouting of traditional seminary rules. 'As important and as useful as their role may be within the Church, theologians are neither the guardians of the faith nor the managers of the apostolate. This role is reserved for the bishops.' Given the increasing tensions between the episcopacy and the Mission de France, Liénart concluded with the ominous statement that 'the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops in its session taking place at the beginning of this month has charged me with the task of taking the necessary measures to rectify the various points of contention I have here laid out'. Jean Vinatier, who held an important post at the Mission de France at that time, reports on the reaction to this announcement: 'A prolonged silence greeted this long declaration. The assembled priests had undoubtedly expected

[156] Copies of the 'Monition de S. Em. le Cardinal Liénart, Président de la Commission Épiscopale du Clergé à M. Augros, Supérieur du Seminaire de la Mission de France et à MM. les Directeurs', 28 March 1952, can be found in CAMT, MdF, 1996 028 0169, and in ADF, Fonds Chenu, '1951–1953', '1952–3'. The 'Monition' is also reproduced in Daniel Perrot, *Les Fondations de la Mission de France* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 64–8. Perrot's collection of edited and annotated documents covers *in extenso* the crisis years of 1952–4.

critical if not painful remarks. But they had not anticipated this entire catalogue of reproaches.'[157] On 12 April 1952, Cardinal Liénart informed Father Augros of the precise consequences following from this litany of complaints. Louis Augros was fired as Superior, and the task of directing the seminary was henceforth separated from the task of spiritual guidance of its missionary teams. The various teams would henceforth report to the Commission de Clergé controlled by the episcopacy rather than by Lisieux.[158] To make sure that the new regime would not be stymied by old habits, in the summer of 1952 news arrived that the seminary of the Mission de France was to be transferred away from Lisieux in north-western France to Limoges in the south-west.[159]

Yet the Mission de France's troubles had barely begun. The move to Limoges, designed as a symbolic break with the iconoclastic 'traditions' established at Lisieux, in some ways had the opposite effect. An industrial city with a strong socialist tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, its radical heritage then reinforced by the capable leadership of strong regional underground resistance movements in the course of the Second World War, headed by the nonconformist radical PCF member Georges Guingouin, Limoges had become one of the strongholds of the worker priest experiment in France.[160] Thus, the move to Limoges placed the Mission de France safely away from the controversies associated with Lisieux but right in the middle of the growing storm clouds gathering over the heads of France's worker priests. Seminary students at Limoges, already favourably predisposed towards industrial missions, 'became increasingly attracted

[157] Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 17.

[158] Letter by Cardinal Liénart to Father Augros, 12 April 1952: ADF, Fonds Chenu, '1951–1953', '1952–3'.

[159] Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 44; for Louis Augros's comments on those momentous changes, see his *L'Église de demain*, 92–5.

[160] On the long-established socialist tradition in Limoges, see John Merriman, *The Red City: Limoges and the French Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); for the influential communist underground in the Limousin and the role of Georges Guingouin, who entered Limoges at the moment of liberation riding on a white horse to assume his post as mayor, and who was eventually removed from the PCF's ranks as the 'Limousin Tito', see Georges Guingouin, *Quatre ans de lutte sur le sol limousin* (Paris: Hachette, 1974). For the Mission de Limoges, see Louis Pérouas, *Prêtres ouvriers à Limoges: des trajectoires contrastées* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

to the worker-priest form of ministry'.[161] On 29 March 1953, nineteen seminarians at Limoges explicitly demanded as a condition for advancing towards priesthood that they would be guaranteed missionary posts as worker priests, a demand which was refused by the authorities and which had as a consequence the denial of ordination.[162] Tensions rose to a boiling point.

In May 1953, the Vatican sent an inspector to investigate the inner workings of the seminary. The results of this visit became known in July and August 1953. In early July 1953 Cardinal Pizzardo, a key opponent of 'French innovations', expressed his astonishment with regard to the free availability of Marxist literature at the seminary in Limoges. In late July he followed this up with an order forbidding all further factory internships for seminarians. On 24 August the Papal Nuncio to France announced the closure of the seminary until further notice.[163]

The various missionary *équipes* launched by the Mission de France up to this point were kept in operation, and Cardinal Liénart obtained as a concession that final-year seminarians could finish their studies,[164] but the future was most uncertain indeed. After all, it was at roughly the same time that the Vatican resolved to end the French worker priest experiment and, given the close and growing links between Mission de France and the worker priest phenomenon, decisions affecting one were justifiably seen as portents of things to come for the other. To allow the survival of the Mission de France while shutting down the worker priest project was rightfully seen as a contradiction in terms. Thus, when Cardinal Liénart received a note from the Vatican Congregation of Seminaries on 18 February 1954 announcing the definitive closure of the seminary of the Mission

[161] Arnal, *Working-Class Blue*, 144. [162] Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 69.

[163] Jean-François Six, *Cheminements de la Mission de France: 1941–1966* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 68, and Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 91, give slightly conflicting dates for the July communication by Cardinal Pizzardo. Six, *Cheminements*, 68–9, dates the communication of the decision to close the seminary to 24 August 1953; Vinatier's mention of 24 April 1953 as the decisive date in that regard in his *Prêtres ouvriers*, 70, is surely a typographical mistake.

[164] The retention of Mission de France teams in rural and in urban France is highlighted in Six, *Cheminements*, 73, and Cardinal Liénart's intervention in Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 51.

de France, all hopes appeared to vanish.[165] The deadline for French worker priests to give up voluntarily their full-time industrial missions was, after all, 1 March 1954.

Yet at this difficult moment, Cardinal Liénart, increasingly sympathetic to the Mission de France and even the worker priest phenomenon as such, in a gathering of the Commission Épiscopale which had been set up a few years earlier to impose limits on the seemingly 'libertarian' spirit characterizing the seminary then still operating at Lisieux, called on his colleagues in the Commission to lobby for the survival of the Mission. 'The bishops unanimously approved his stance.'[166] And, seemingly almost like a miracle, given the simultaneous definitive ending of the full-time worker priest apostolate, on 15 August 1954 the Mission de France received its permanent apostolic constitution from Rome! Apparently due to favourable intercession by a number of highly placed Vatican officials, above all Giovanni Battista Montini but also Cardinal Ottaviani, the die had been cast and survival was assured.[167]

Yet there was a downside to the final approval of the continued existence of the Mission de France. The seminary itself was once again relocated, this time to a far less troublesome location: the Abbey of Pontigny in the rural Yonne in lower Burgundy, an ancient Cistercian monastery which now obtained control over the seminary. Furthermore, to ensure that a moderate—and not an uncontrollable and radical—reform orientation would henceforth guide the Mission de France, there was to be a total renewal of the seminary's teaching staff. No one who had taught at Lisieux or Limoges was permitted to resume such functions at Pontigny.[168] Still, when the more than 200 priests associated with the Mission de France met at a general assembly on 14 September 1954, the mood was decidedly upbeat. In their eyes, the Mission de France having unexpectedly obtained official church status, 'it was the sum total of the missionary movements which thereby received official recognition'.[169]

[165] Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 53, captures the sombre mood at this crucial conjuncture for the Mission de France exceedingly well.

[166] Ibid. 54.

[167] Six, *Cheminements*, 85; and, above all, Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 96.

[168] Ibid. 93. [169] Ibid. 60.

THE MISSION OUVRIÈRE

And, indeed, to some extent, this guarded optimism was not entirely misplaced. Those worker priests who had complied with the order to cease full-time industrial labour—only a quarter of all French worker priests, but all eight Belgians, followed these instructions—soon found ways partially to circumvent papal restrictions. A comment by Pope Pius XII, made during a visit to Rome by the three French cardinals in November 1953, appeared to provide a solution to the impasse. The Pope had indicated that three hours of manual labour per day could be permitted after all,[170] thus creating a loophole for continued—if part-time—manual labour. The Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Feltin, after prolonged consultations with others, soon decided to permit even full-time manual labour for priests as long as such a vocation would not be carried out in large factories which had been the location of choice for full-time industrial labour by priests up to 1954. In small-scale enterprises and artisanal workshops, Cardinal Feltin decided, full-time labour would receive his support. Feltin's bold move opened the door for similar permissions in other dioceses across France.[171] Soon the number of priests donning working-class blue rose far beyond the 100 who had exercised this choice in the decade leading up to 1954. Although most priests working as labourers now worked part-time, no less than 600 of them opted for this vocation in the years 1954–9, many of them parish priests or chaplains of Catholic Action organizations, such as the JOC or ACO.[172] Virtually all of these renewed engagements in the world of industrial labour were carried out under the auspices of the Mission Ouvrière.

For, almost immediately after 1 March 1954, a number of French bishops had embarked on a new approach, keen to continue the French Catholic Church's commitment to some form of working-class apostolate even after the most exposed vanguard of this movement, the worker priests, had to be officially disavowed under

[170] Reported on the basis of Cardinal Liénart's personal notes ibid. 150–1, and Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 87–8.

[171] Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 149–50.

[172] Suaud and Viet-Depaule, *Prêtres et ouvriers*, 12.

pressure from Rome. In various locations, amongst them Paris, Toulouse, and the Nord, it was decided to concentrate and coordinate in some fashion the plethora of parallel initiatives aiming to carry out the evangelization of blue-collar workers—though obviously stopping short of full-time industrial labour for priests. Rather than creating yet another new organizational structure to increase further the number of ongoing and roughly parallel ventures, this Mission Ouvrière was from the beginning designed to be a type of umbrella for all sorts of Catholic working-class-oriented missionary enterprises—whether within or outside the structures of traditional Catholic Action, whether run by clergy, laity, or a combination of the above. Within Catholic Action, the JOC and ACO were, naturally, at the heart of this exercise and, with regard to the involvement of priests, a variety of engagements were deemed acceptable. Some initiatives focused on neighbourhood organizing, others utilized existing loopholes permitting part-time industrial labour, a few benefited from the permission to engage in full-time manual labour in artisanal workshops or small companies. 'Three-quarters of these "priests at work" [*prêtres au travail*—the semi-official term used for priests engaged in manual labour after 1 March 1954] in part-time positions originated from the Mission de France. This meant that the Mission de France represented the most important grouping working within the framework provided by the Mission Ouvrière.'[173] For several years operating as a pragmatic and loose de facto organization, on 13 March 1957 the ACA officially set up a National Secretariat of the Mission Ouvrière under the authority of Paris Archbishop Cardinal Feltin.[174] After the setback of 1 March 1954, the forces engaged in the working-class apostolate began to regain their confidence. Chafing at the bit since 1954, by the late 1950s voices could be heard again, and with increasing frequency, clamouring for a return to the *status quo ante* 1954: permission for full-time industrial labour for priests wishing to engage in such a vocation.[175]

[173] Vinatier, *Mission de France*, 162. The Mission Ouvrière as umbrella for the entire breadth of Catholic organizations engaged in the working-class apostolate is also well described in Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 148, and Six, *Cheminements*, 107.

[174] Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 151. [175] Ibid. 164 and 168–9.

AN *AGGIORNAMENTO* OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

In October 1958, Pope John XXIII replaced Pope Pius XII at the Holy See, and Cardinal Feltin had a number of conversations with the new head of the Catholic Church. Soon thereafter Cardinal Feltin invited those French bishops in whose dioceses the working-class apostolate was particularly active to draw up, in conjunction with the forces acting within the Mission Ouvrière, a plan for the reconfiguration of the Mission Ouvrière which would explicitly include full-time industrial labour without restrictions as one of its options. In March 1959, convinced of the reality of a deep renewal apparently under way in the wake of the accession of a new and open-minded Pope, the ACA studied and approved the document which was then forwarded to Rome. On 12 June 1959, with preparations for Vatican II now under way, Cardinal Feltin made a special trip to Rome to back up this grassroots pressure emanating from the ranks.[176]

Rather than ushering in a bright new future for no-holds-barred industrial missions, however, when the official response from the Vatican, signed by the old foe of innovative French methods, Giuseppe Cardinal Pizzardo, Secretary of the Holy Office and Secretary of the Congregation of Seminaries, arrived in Paris on 3 July 1959, the content had the effect of a bombshell. Not only were all demands for an enlargement of industrial missions in the direction of full-time industrial labour for priests firmly rejected, but to the complete astonishment of the leading figures behind the Mission Ouvrière, from now on all hitherto tolerated forms of manual labour were outlawed as well, whether part-time or full-time, whether in artisanal workshops or large enterprises, and the text of the letter even went as far as explicitly proscribing some of the few pockets of full-time industrial missions for priests that had survived the clampdown of March 1954, such as the employment of priests as sailors on commercial ships: the Mission de la Mer.[177] Rather than providing new

[176] Six, *Cheminements*, 137; but see also Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 175.

[177] The most detailed discussion of 'Rome's Last Word' in the secondary literature remains Siefer, *Church and Industrial Society*, 91–104; for easily accessible major excerpts from the letter itself, see Vinatier, *Prêtres ouvriers*, 176–8. In actual fact, it should be noted, the Vatican decision became known to the public slowly rather than overnight. The move to close down, once and for all, even the smallest vestiges of the

opportunities for bold experiments within the Catholic Church, the long-expected *aggiornamento* of the Church was off to a disastrous start. The cycle of left Catholic social movements concentrating on the working-class apostolate, opened up with great promise with the launch of the Belgian JOC in 1924, came full circle thirty-five years later with the Vatican decision to close all loopholes for priestly industrial missions, a decision sanctioned by Pope John XXIII.

worker priest apostolate had been decided on 11 June, one day before Cardinal Feltin's Rome presentation. Feltin was thus already well aware of the move under way several weeks before Pizzardo's letter found its way to Paris. The larger public was not made aware of the surprise position taken by the Vatican until the publication of this letter on 15 September 1959 in the pages of *Le Monde*.

Conclusion

TWO WAVES OF PROGRESSIVE CATHOLICISM

As it turned out, of course, precisely at the moment when conservative forces in the Vatican were seemingly firmly on the offensive against surviving remnants of the working-class apostolate, moves were under way to effect deep-seated structural and theological changes which would bring about a radical new course of action within world (and not 'just' European) Catholicism. And I do not end my narrative on the eve of Vatican II because the world council was unrelated to what came before. On the contrary! Vatican II cannot be wholly understood if one does not place it in a direct line of continuity with the individual thinkers and apostolic social movements that form the subject of this book. In that sense, Vatican II can be seen as the ultimate, if unforeseen, product of the energies unleashed by grassroots activists and forward-looking theologians between 1924 and 1959.

But Vatican II did more than 'merely' bestow the official imprimatur on the ideologies and practices of left Catholicism of the preceding thirty-five years. Vatican II also became the launching pad for an even more powerful 'second wave' of experiments in left Catholic politics and culture in the ensuing two decades. And this 'second wave' of left Catholic theory and practice affected a far larger geographic terrain than the 'first wave' which, for practical purposes, was essentially limited to Western Europe. Left Catholicism from 1959 onwards, to be sure, left an indelible mark on Europe as well,[1] but

[1] I hope to write a sequel to the present work, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Left Catholicism and the Long Sixties in Western Europe, 1959–1980*, at some future time. A first

perhaps the most spectacular explosion of left Catholic sentiments and actions occurred in the extra-European world, initially focused on Latin America. Fuelled by indigenous concerns, but also inspired and influenced by European thinkers and European experiences, what eventually came to be known as Liberation Theology began to make its mark. Finding powerful support and encouragement in the deliberations and reverberations of Vatican II, Liberation Theology truly came into its own in the aftermath of the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín.

And, quite obviously and non-controversially, this Latin American Liberation Theology, soon to spread to other areas of the Catholic 'Third World', differed in significant ways from some of the key tenets of Western European left Catholicism, as described in this book. To mention but one such difference in the realm of theology, Liberation theologians centrally opposed the Maritainian postulate of the separation of spheres, the division into temporal and spiritual planes, a development within inter-war European theology which had left a profound imprint on the communities of believers and activists described in this book. Does not this profound difference in appreciation of a key tenet of Western European 'first-wave' left Catholicism suggest that the title given to this study—*Western European Liberation Theology*—is fundamentally misleading? It is high time to explain the choice of title given to the movements and theologians analysed in this book.

There are undoubtedly significant differences between Latin American Liberation Theology and earlier Western European left Catholicism, just as there are important discontinuities between 'first-wave' and 'second-wave' *European* left Catholicism. But, in many of the most crucial and important ways, on balance, the commonalities between 'first-wave' Western European and 'second-wave' Latin American left Catholicism far outweigh the differences between the two. For a full development of this argument, another book-length study would be needed—of that there is no doubt. But, given the constraints of time, a few pertinent comments may suffice to

assessment of the transnational (European) dimension of this complex development, limited to the realm of student politics, can be consulted in Gerd-Rainer Horn, 'The Spirit of 1968: Christian Students on the Left', in Clyde Binfield (ed.), *Christian Youth Movements* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, forthcoming 2008).

justify the 'provocative' choice of label for this book—and, more importantly, for the individuals and collective agents at its centre.

EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

First of all, leading Latin American exponents of Liberation Theology have been very explicit about the crucial inspiration they received from studying European theologians, from listening to European theologians who transferred (some of) their activities to Latin American shores, or from direct exposure to European experiments of 'first-wave' left Catholicism when attending seminaries and universities in Western Europe themselves. Gustavo Gutiérrez, for instance, who, in the 1950s, received much of his education in Leuven, Lyon, and Rome, 'in the course of conversations did not hide the fact that, while studying in Europe, he had been deeply influenced by the theologies developed within the milieu of French worker priests'.[2] And, indeed, a mere glance at the index of names in Gustavo Gutiérrez's landmark study *A Theology of Liberation* will reveal countless references to key theologians of the 'first wave' of left Catholics in Europe, amongst them Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Teilhard de Chardin, alongside equally copious references to key representatives of the subsequent generation of 'second-wave' European left Catholicism, such as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, or Johann-Baptist Metz, who were themselves largely inspired by the earlier pioneers.[3]

Michael Löwy and Jesús García-Ruiz, in an important—and all too rare!—investigation of the European contributions to Latin American Liberation Theology, have highlighted multiple links between

[2] Ludwig Kaufmann, 'Ansätze zu einer Theologie der Befreiung in Europa? M.-D. Chenu (1895–1990), eine notwendige Erinnerung an französische Impulse', in Heiner Ludwig and Wolfgang Schröder (eds.), *Sozial- und Linkskatholizismus: Erinnerung—Orientierung—Befreiung* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1990), 280.

[3] I have consulted the German translation of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971): *Theologie der Befreiung* (Mainz: Mathias Grünewald, 1992).

specifically French developments, almost all of them linked to the wide array of thinkers and movements highlighted in my study, and the take-off of Brazilian Liberation Theology after 1959.[4] Frei Betto, Leonardo Boff, and Hugo Assmann were only some of the best-known exponents of Liberation Theology who were inspired by Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and others. More importantly, Löwy and García-Ruiz continue, many members of the crucial generation of activists behind the rise of Brazilian specialized Catholic Action after 1959, which provided the all-important social movement dimension which propelled Liberation Theology into the limelight during the 1960s, were likewise inspired by the developments in Europe highlighted in this book. Löwy and García-Ruiz underscore the crucial pioneering role of Alceu Amoroso Lima, a disciple of Jacques Maritain, in preparing the intellectual and activist terrain for subsequent Liberation Theology. Amoroso Lima, profoundly moved by the writing of Jacques Maritain, founded Brazilian Catholic Action in the year which saw the publication of Maritain's *Humanisme intégral*.

By the 1940s, Amoroso Lima—and other Latin American left Catholics—increasingly fell under the spell of Emmanuel Mounier who, as we have seen, personified the activist dimension of Western European left Catholicism much more than Maritain. In addition, Löwy and García-Ruiz emphasize that it is difficult to underestimate the impact on Latin American Catholicism of the ideas and the example of one of the pioneers of the French worker priest experience, Louis Joseph Lebret, and his *équipe* which operated the think-tank and the associated homonymous journal, Économie et Humanisme.[5] From 1947 onwards, the Dominican Father Lebret spent significant periods in Latin America and other parts of the extra-European world, founding a branch of Économie et Humanisme in São Paulo as early as 1948. Another European activist theologian, the Belgian

[4] Michael Löwy and Jesús García-Ruiz, 'Les Sources françaises du Christianisme de la Libération au Brésil', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 97 (January–March 1997), 9–32.

[5] As mentioned in my Introduction, in the interest of brevity I have abstained from mentioning Lebret and Économie et Humanisme in the body of my monograph. For the definitive study of Lebret and the movement he founded, see Denis Pelletier, '*Économie et Humanisme*': *de l'utopie communautaire au combat pour le tiers-monde, 1941–1966* (Paris: Cerf, 1996).

scholar Joseph Comblin, in 1958 made a permanent move across the Atlantic, closely cooperating, as mentioned in Chapter 2, with Dom Hélder Câmara and in later years repeatedly forced to move between different Latin American states on account of the repression meted out by various dictatorships. Last, but not least, in this selective list of concrete links between 'first-wave' Western European left Catholicism and 'second-wave' Latin American Liberation Theology, there is no better way to judge the inspirational impact of one generation of activist theologians on another than to read the glowing appreciation of Joseph Cardijn by Dom Hélder Câmara, then Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, in the introduction to a series of biographical studies of Cardijn in 1969.[6]

Michael Löwy and Jesús García-Ruiz, however, for all their detailed retracing of links between French and Brazilian theologians and apostolic social movements, do not hesitate to point out an important evolution in the appreciation of 'first-wave' Western European left Catholicism by Latin American (here: Brazilian) theologians on the left, exemplified by the changing interests of Amoroso Lima, noted above. Whereas Maritain initially took centre stage for most progressive Catholics in Latin America, from the 1940s onwards his influence was eclipsed by a growing appreciation of more activist thinkers, such as Mounier and Lebret. Maritain continued to be read and studied in Latin America, but he increasingly became the icon of the Christian Democratic wing of Latin American political Catholicism. And on a yet more fundamental level, Löwy and García-Ruiz state that, regardless of whether one is investigating the legacy of Maritain or the impact of Mounier and Lebret, the role of European theologians on Latin American Catholics, in the last analysis, was always limited to providing *inspiration* rather than exerting direct *influence*. 'We are noticing here in an almost ideal-type setting an example of the creative reading [*lecture créatrice*], which selects its sources and reinterprets them in terms which express a new and more radical problematic.'[7] Was Latin American Liberation Theology, after all, a completely new development *sui generis*, which cannot be

[6] Hélder Câmara, 'Préface', in Marguerite Fiévez and Jacques Meert (eds.), *Cardijn* (Brussels: EVO, 1969), 7–10.

[7] Löwy and García-Ruiz, 'Les Sources françaises', 25.

placed in the same category as 'first-wave' European progressive Catholicism?

THE DIALECTIC OF HISTORY

In this final section of the Conclusion, I would like to address the relationship between Latin American Liberation Theology and 'first-wave' Western European left Catholicism. I propose to do so by focusing on the most complicated and enigmatic of the three figures highlighted by Löwy and García-Ruiz, Jacques Maritain. And I will do so with reference to what has become perhaps the most important controversy with regard to Maritain's links with Latin American politics and society, the case of Chile and, more specifically, the Chilean Catholic Church's silence in the face of vicious government repression of the left in the years of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship following the 'assisted suicide' of Salvador Allende on 11 September 1974.[8]

Maritain has, indeed, been a most controversial figure in the Latin American context—and this most definitely within the activist and intellectual communities most closely associated with Liberation Theology.[9] A closer look at the legacy of Jacques Maritain in Latin America, and more specifically Chile—the latter country a *locus classicus* for social conflicts affecting secular and Catholic communities alike—is highly instructive with regard to the legacy of the French Thomist philosopher.

Maritain's closest ally in Chile, both personally and intellectually, had been for many decades Eduardo Frei. In the 1960s and 1970s, Frei became the key political opponent of the Socialist Salvador Allende—before and after Allende's election as President of the Chilean Republic. Virtually all Latin American progressive activists in the 1960s and early 1970s—whether Catholic or not—identified much more

[8] I adopt the descriptor of 'assisted suicide' to denote the death of the elected head of the Chilean Unidad Popular from Jonathan Haslam, *The Nixon Administration and the Death of Allende's Chile: A Case of Assisted Suicide* (London: Verso, 2005).

[9] The most detailed and convincing monograph on this complicated relationship is now Olivier Compagnon, *Jacques Maritain et l'Amérique du Sud: le modèle malgré lui* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003).

readily with Salvador Allende's political project than with Frei, who was then Chilean Christian Democracy's best-known figure. Thus, for Latin American proponents of Liberation Theology, it is clear that Maritain was an unlikely candidate for political or theological 'leadership' in a period when Liberation Theology was beginning to make certain gains.

Yet more importantly—and here we come to the precise relationship between Maritain's teachings and Chilean political reality—the theological assumptions and underpinnings of Maritain's teachings, many observers have convincingly argued, contributed to rendering the Chilean Catholic Church incapable of seeing and acting clearly in the aftermath of the 1974 military coup. Faced with a massive wave of repression, the widespread recourse to torture on the part of the new authorities, and the consistent disregard of the most elementary civil liberties and democratic rights, the Catholic Church experienced almost traumatic difficulties in coming to terms with the realities of Pinochet's military dictatorship. And precisely in this crucial context, Maritain's highly influential postulate of the binary division of the (modern) world into temporal and spiritual realms was employed by the church hierarchy to provide the theological justification for the Chilean Church's reluctance to take an openly political stance against the Pinochet regime. For Maritain had taught Catholic believers that the Church's proper role lay precisely in the nurturing of the spiritual realm, and that the Church would do best to abstain from direct interference in the temporal realm. Catholics as individuals were, of course, expected to engage in temporal concerns, but the influence of the Church would be optimally exercised in shaping Catholic believers' *spiritual* concerns. By refraining from direct engagements in temporal concerns, the Church would thus become more convincingly effective in fashioning the ethical outlook of the mass of individual Catholics engaged in temporal practices and thus—if indirectly—ultimately affect the ways of the world in which we live.

In the context of post-Allende Chile, the crucial flaw in Maritain's teaching, it is argued, lay precisely in the strong mandate which it gave to church officials to abstain from direct interference in worldly affairs. Thus, in Chile after 1973—just as elsewhere in earlier periods—church officials felt constrained to adhere to the strict logic of the division between temporal and spiritual realms. Direct and

open criticisms of the Pinochet regime were understood to be open breaches of such theological guidelines as had, by then, become the rule.[10] The Chilean Catholic Church, faced with Pinochet's brutal rule, thus underwent a long and painful learning process, lasting all too many years, before gradually abandoning a policy inspired by the Maritainian division between spiritual and temporal planes. Crucially, many Liberation theologians were in the forefront of this critique of official church practice in Chile—and of Jacques Maritain. In sum, the Maritainian division into separate spheres was identified as the key theological obstacle to direct church involvement in upholding human rights and in formulating open critiques of the perpetration of state-sponsored crimes in Chile—or elsewhere in Latin America and the wider Third World.[11]

Why, then, my choice of Western European *Liberation Theology* to name a period in the history of Western European Catholicism when Jacques Maritain was held in highest esteem? Is this not tantamount to the abuse of a concept which, in at least the above-mentioned context, became a rival concept to the thought of Jacques Maritain? A full treatment of this subject would require a detailed study of its own. But, for the moment, a few observations may suffice.

First, in assessing the personal and theological itinerary of an influential individual such as Maritain, it is not unimportant to recognize shifts in an individual's outlook over time. Maritain, I argue, was a key pathfinder for progressive Catholicism in the period studied in this book, and his personal politics paralleled his theological role. Initially, i.e. in the first half of the 1920s, as we have seen, Maritain was a sympathizer of the ultraconservative Charles Maurras. More importantly, the subsequent shift, from admirer of Maurras to intellectual champion of the Catholic left, was not his only nor his last political turn. Never a radical *activist*, even in 'the best of days', by the 1950s Maritain began to moderate his views, though it was not until

[10] Maritain's teachings had become rather influential in Europe and indeed throughout the Catholic world in part because his emphasis on the separation of spheres most eloquently expressed certain desires of high Vatican opinion from the reign of Pius XI onwards. Jacques Maritain, however, never became a close ally of any Pope during his lifetime, as differences on other matters often weighed rather heavily.

[11] The most consistent and committed critique of Maritainian philosophy in the context of Latin American politics is William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

his 1966 œuvre *The Peasant of the Garonne* that he openly criticized certain developments associated with Vatican II.

Regardless of his shifting partisan views, however, once he had developed fully his theory of dual spheres, Maritain clung to his all-important thesis of the division between temporal and spiritual spheres. And this is where I come to the *second*, and the more important, argument in defence of my case. The postulate of separate spheres performed different functions depending on time and circumstance. To put it frankly, there is nothing inherently 'conservative' (or 'progressive', for that matter) in this most famous and influential of Maritain's teachings. In terms of partisan politics it is, strictly speaking, neutral. It all depends on the social, political, intellectual, and cultural context of a given location at a specific historical moment.

When Maritain first put forth his theory, 'progressive' Catholics (in most national contexts) had grown increasingly impatient with generally conservative Catholic Church figures directly interfering in worldly affairs, including party politics and the practices of actually existing states. Catholic hierarchies were generally seen to favour right-of-centre, if not outright right-wing (sometimes right-wing Catholic) parties and regimes. Hence the removal of the Catholic Church from the sphere of temporal concerns, such as party politics, advocated by Maritain, was warmly welcomed *as a liberation* by progressive Catholics, who had long been hoping to acquire such a breathing space. Decades later, in totally different circumstances, such as in Pinochet's Chile, the refusal of the Catholic Church to take sides on issues of temporal concern elicited increasingly vocal critiques from the very same 'progressive' camp which had, earlier, welcomed the doctrine of separate spheres with open arms. In sum, Maritain's teachings on the separation of planes could (and did) favour one or the other side within the broad spectrum of opinion of (amongst others) Catholic believers. His doctrine, as such, was, 'politically' speaking, neutral.

A careful reading of William T. Cavanaugh's modern classic *Torture and Eucharist* uncovers certain passages which openly support my interpretation of the 'theological' and 'political' neutrality of Maritain's doctrine of separate spheres. Here are just three short quotations from Cavanaugh's text: 'When the progressive Latin American

church appropriated Maritain in the 1930s and 1940s, it did so to argue against [generally rather conservative] clerical involvement in politics. Here in 1978 [as the brutality of Pinochet's regime began to force the church hierarchy to gradually abandon Maritainian temporal neutrality], the [progressive] bishops' implicit purpose is quite the opposite. Times have changed.'[12] Or take Cavanaugh's approving citation of Gustavo Gutiérrez: 'The distinction of planes banner has changed hands. Until a few years ago it was defended by the vanguard; now it is held aloft by power groups, many of whom are in no way involved with any commitment to the Christian faith.'[13] And, at another point in Cavanaugh's powerful indictment of Maritainian thought in the Chilean context, the author specifically asserts that, despite the destructive impact of Maritain's dual sphere doctrine in Pinochet's Chile, one has to be careful not to blame the theory for its post-1973 effects on Chilean reality. Maritain's thought was not 'the cause of the praxis of a significant sector of the Chilean church, but rather provided the imaginative context necessary not merely to understand that praxis but to move it forward'.[14]

As some of Cavanaugh's (and Gutiérrez's) quoted passages clearly imply, even in Latin America, and specifically in Chile, Maritainian theology was at one point closely associated with the progressive wing in the Catholic Church. Only the subsequent application of dual sphere teachings in a radically altered socio-political context made Maritainian thought a powerful tool for conservative and 'moderate' voices in the Catholic Church's hierarchy and the Church's ranks. In sum, an assessment of Maritain in the (changing!) concrete historical context of the twentieth century does not exclude the Jacques Maritain of the 1930s and the 1940s from the progressive 'camp' within the Catholic Church. To the contrary! At the same time, inasmuch as progressive left Catholics of the 1930s and the 1940s belonged to a clearly identifiable 'progressive' wing of Catholicism and inasmuch as subsequent Latin American Liberation Theology pursued and deepened this activist orientation (albeit in a radically different geographic, socio-political, and cultural context), I feel that

[12] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 114.
[13] Ibid. 179. [14] Ibid. 124.

there is no inherent reason, theological or otherwise, why either one of these two 'progressive' wings of twentieth-century Catholicism could not be labelled by employing a terminology which is habitually used to denote just one of them. Just as the label 'left Catholic' or 'progressive' would not be misplaced if used to describe Latin American Liberation Theology, the term 'Liberation Theology' need not necessarily be restricted to the Latin American left Catholics of the 1960s and beyond.

A comparison with the Marxist heritage might exemplify my point. There is clearly a world of difference between, on the one hand, Herbert Marcuse and Ernest Mandel and, on the other, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Nonetheless, few observers would contend that only Marx and Engels could be labelled 'Marxist'. To be sure, in this hypothetical example, if the organizing label should be, for instance, the category of the post-1956 'anti-Stalinist left', then of course the nineteenth-century German thinkers would not easily fit into this model. If Liberation Theology as such were to be defined exclusively to refer to the specific Latin American variant(s) of left Catholicism, then indeed the individuals and social movements at the centre of this book could not be included. But proponents of Liberation Theology have few objections to the extension of this term to describe left Catholic experiences in other parts of the world in more recent decades, such as those of progressive Catholicism in the Philippines or Sri Lanka or elsewhere, despite obvious differences between elaborations of Liberation Theology in such states and the original, Latin American, model. Thus, it seems to me, it is only logical and fair to utilize this label not just for the extra-European world, but for the European prototype as well.

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Bibliographic Essay

Curiously, there exists no overall history of Catholic Action. The best one can find in the existing literature are surveys of particular national trajectories. On the all-important case of Italy, see Liliana Ferrari, *L'Azione Cattolica in Italia dalle origine al pontificato di Paolo VI* (Brescia: Queriana, 1982), and, above all, Mario Casella, *L'Azione Cattolica nell'Italia contemporanea (1919–1969)* (Rome: Ave, 1992). Perhaps the most important national branch of Catholic Action outside Italy operated in Belgium. And it was in Belgium where Joseph Cardijn invented what became known as 'specialized' Catholic Action. Interestingly, there is still no published biography of Cardijn, and therefore mention should be made of Marc Walckiers, 'Joseph Cardyn jusqu'avant la fondation de la J.O.C.', unpublished dissertation in modern history (Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981). But note also *Cardijn: een mens, een beweging—un homme, un mouvement* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1983), which is indispensable reading as well. On the prototype of 'specialized' Catholic Action, the Belgian KAJ/JOC, the following books are good places to start: Leen Alaerts, *Door eigen werk sterk: geschiedenis van de kajotters in Vlaanderen 1924–1967* (Leuven: KADOC, 2004); the pioneering volume by André Dendooven, *Ontstaan, structuur en werking van de Vlaamse K.A.J.: een sociografisch overzicht* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1967); and, last but not least, Marc Walckiers, *Source inédites relatives aux débuts de la JOC 1919–1925* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1970). On the early French JOC, see, above all, Joseph Debès and Émile Poulat, *L'Appel du J.O.C. (1926–1928)* (Paris: Cerf, 1986); Pierre Pierrard, Michel Launay, and Rolande Trempé, *La J.O.C.: regards d'historiens* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1984); and Pierre Pierrard, *Georges Guérin: une vie pour la JOC* (Paris: Atelier, 1997).

Pope Pius XI's reputation has been overshadowed by his various compromises with the fascist powers of his age. Yet he clearly played an enormously important role in facilitating the opening of the Catholic Church to the modern world. He certainly was the true founder of Catholic Action. No satisfactory biography exists to date, though the recent opening of the Vatican Archives for the years of his pontificate may hopefully produce such a volume before long. For the moment, a reasonable survey is provided by Yves Chiron, *Pie XI (1857–1939)* (Paris: Perrin, 2004). The various contributions contained in *Achille Ratti: Pape Pie XI* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), however, will offer a far greater number of insights to the interested

researcher than the volume by Chiron. Georges Jarlot, *Doctrine pontifical et histoire: Pie XI. Doctrine et action (1922–1939)* (Rome: Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, 1973), is particularly good at contextualizing key developments in the time of Pius XI.

For an understanding of the rise and decline of *la nouvelle théologie*, there is no better starting point than Étienne Fouilloux, *Une église en quête de liberté: la pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II 1914–1962* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998). Yet a far less well-known study, Christofer Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche—Öffnung zur Welt: Zwei Aspekte der Erneuerung französischer katholischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), is an equally astute and complementary overview and should be mandatory reading for anyone wishing to explain the origins of Vatican II. An indispensable document, which is simultaneously a work of historical erudition, is Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1983). Other accessible introductions to the theological innovations which brought fresh air into the twentieth-century Catholic Church cast light on this topic via the study of Catholic social theory. One modern classic along these lines is Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La 'Doctrine sociale' de l'Église comme idéologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1979). The Belgian scholar Roger Aubert has published the vast bulk of his œuvre in the form of book chapters and journal articles. Some of the contemporaneously most important articles were published as *La Théologie catholique au milieu du XXème siècle* (Tournai: Casterman, 1954). An even wider range of topics is covered in the recent translation of key articles by Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003). Highly useful surveys of the state of the arts in the 1950s are provided by another Belgian, Gustave Thils, *Orientations de la théologie* (Leuven: Ceuterick, 1958), which covers Western European developments as a whole. Jean-Louis Jadoulle, *Chrétiens modernes: l'engagement des intellectuels catholiques 'progressistes' belges de 1945 à 1958 à travers 'La Revue nouvelle', 'La Relève' et l'édition belge de 'Témoignage chrétien'* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2003) concentrates exclusively on Belgium in the post-Second World War years. On Social Catholicism in the nineteenth century, a precursor of sorts to the various currents at the centre of this book, the following two surveys are excellent introductions: Alec R. Vidler, *A Century of Social Catholicism 1820–1920* (London: SPCK, 1964), and Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialisation to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

The intellectual atmosphere of the crucial transitional decade of the 1920s is well demonstrated in Philippe Chenaux, *Entre Maurras et Maritain:*

une génération intellectuelle catholique (1920–1930) (Paris: Cerf, 1990). René Rémond, *Les Catholiques dans la France des années 30* (Paris: Cana, 1979), provides a comprehensive overview of some key moments in the life and times of Catholics in the most important Western European country then still a democracy. David E. Curtis, *The French Popular Front and the Catholic Discovery of Marx* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1997), rightfully draws attention to the influence on Catholic intellectuals of the (mostly) secular advances associated with the French Popular Front. The most useful surveys of the effect of Nazi occupation on Catholics in Belgium and France are Fabrice Maerten, Franz Selleslagh, and Mark Van den Wijngaert (eds.), *Entre la peste et la choléra: vie et attitude des catholiques belges sous l'occupation* (Gerpinnes: Quorum, 1999), and Jacques Duquesne, *Les Catholiques françaises sous l'occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1966). On Catholics in the epicentre of the anti-fascist underground in Italy, see Bartolo Gariglio (ed.), *Cattolici e resistenza nell'Italia settentrionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral: problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (Paris: Aubier, 1936), translated as *True Humanism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938), was perhaps the single most important publication influencing the entire generation of Catholic activists under review in this book. Yet, to date, there exists no satisfactory overall biography of this Thomist philosopher. Two insightful studies of his classic 1936 text are Jean-Louis Allard et al., *L'Humanisme intégral de Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1988), and now Philippe Chenaux, *'Humanisme intégral' (1936) de Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Cerf, 2006). By contrast, there are a number of useful biographies of Emmanuel Mounier. Note, amongst others, Michael Kelly, *Pioneer of the Catholic Revival: The Ideas and Influence of Emmanuel Mounier* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1979); John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); R. William Rauch, Jr., *Politics and Belief in Contemporary France: Emmanuel Mounier and Christian Democracy, 1932–1950* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); and the classic study of the journal associated with Emmanuel Mounier: Michel Winock, *Histoire politique de la revue Esprit, 1930–1950* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). The theologian most closely associated with the apostolic social movements at the centre of this monograph is much less well known. And the first serious biography of Marie-Dominique Chenu, the recent study by Christophe Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation: The Theology of Marie-Dominique Chenu* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2001), leaves aside precisely this activist dimension of the key moving force behind a theology of labour. Thus, an indispensable resource for the life and times of Marie-Dominique Chenu remains the book-length interview

Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu: 'un théologien en liberté' (Paris: Centurion, 1975). Given the centrality of the growing role of the laity in the modern Church, a key background influence on all sorts of innovations within European Catholicism at that time, two influential pioneering studies should be mentioned. The more famous one is Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Cerf, 1953), translated as *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (London: Bloomsbury, 1957). Oftentimes overlooked but contemporaneously very influential is Gérard Philips, *De leek in de kerk* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1951), translated as *The Role of the Laity in the Church* (Chicago: Fides, 1955).

The evolution of Catholic political parties is well demonstrated in the relevant sections of Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la Démocratie Chrétienne: XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980), and Maurice Vaussard, *Histoire de la Démocratie Chrétienne: France—Belgique—Italie* (Paris: Seuil, 1956). But note, more recently, Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds.), *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). On the important Belgian case, see, for the inter-war period, Emmanuel Gerard, *De katholieke partij in crisis: partijpolitiek leven in België, 1918–1940* (Leuven: Kritak, 1985). The contributions by Jean-Claude Delbreil, Antonio Parisella, and Andreas Lienkamp contained within Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard (eds.), *Left Catholicism: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation, 1943–1955* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), highlight developments within left-leaning sections of French, Italian, and German Catholic parties from the 1940s onward.

The most influential grouping on the Italian Catholic left was the Gruppo Dossettiano, which operated within Democrazia Cristiana. Essential reading on the evolution of this political current remains Paolo Pombeni, *Il Gruppo Dossettiano e la fondazione della democrazia italiana (1938–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979); Paolo Pombeni, *Le 'Cronache sociali' di Dossetti 1947–1951: geografia di un movimento di opinione* (Florence: Vallechi, 1976); but also Giorgio Galli and Paolo Facchi, *La sinistra democristiana: storia e ideologia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962). On the flagship individual after whom the political tendency was named, there is still no comprehensive biography, but see now Alberto Melloni (ed.), *Giuseppe Dossetti: la fede e la storia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007). However, Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Giuseppe Dossetti: prime prospettive e ipotesi di ricerca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), as well as Orioldo Mason and Roberto Villa (eds.), *Giuseppe Dossetti: il circuito delle due parole* (Portogruaro: Ediciclo, 2000), remain essential contributions to the literature on the enigmatic spirit animating the *dossettiani*. Giuseppe Lazzati

and Giorgio La Pira were two other flagship individuals in the leadership of the Gruppo Dossettiano. Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Giuseppe Lazzati 1909–1986: contributi per una biografia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), and then, more recently, Marcello Malpensa and Alessandro Parola, *Giuseppe Lazzati: una sentinella nella notte* (1909–1986) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), permit access to the most contemplative member of the triumvirate. Giorgio La Pira, by contrast, was at home in politics as much as in prayer groups, becoming a popular mayor of Florence for many years in the 1950s and early 1960s. Amongst a host of writings on La Pira, note Massimo de Giuseppe, *Giorgio La Pira: un sindaco e le vie della pace* (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2001); Ernesto Balducci, *Giorgio La Pira* (S. Domenico di Fiesole: Cultura della Pace, 1986); and, still today a marvellous read, Marcel Jacob, *Giorgio La Pira: Maire de Florence* (Strasbourg: Alsatia, 1955).

Two monographs cover the evolution of the short-lived but important Christian-Communist tradition which emerged in underground Rome: Francesco Malgeri, *La Sinistra Cristiana (1937–1945)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1982), and Carlo Felice Casula, *Cattolici-comunisti e Sinistra Cristiana (1938–1945)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976). For the Cristiano-Sociale current operating to the left of Democrazia Cristiana, note Antonio Parisella, *Il Partito Cristiano-Sociale 1939–1948* (Rome: Biblioteca di Studi Cristiano-Sociale, 1984), and Antonio Parisella (ed.), *Gerardo Bruni e i Cristiano-Sociali* (Rome: Lavoro, 1984). Don Primo Mazzolari, whose ceaseless activism in part inspired the rather conservative Giovanni Guareschi to pen his famous *Don Camillo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1948), has been the object of a number of studies. A useful introduction is Arturo Chiodi, *Primo Mazzolari: un testimone 'in Christo' con l'anima del profeta* (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 1998). On the theology of Mazzolari, note in particular Giorgio Campanini, *Don Primo Mazzolari fra religione e politica* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1989). The post-Second World War activist dimension is ably covered in Giorgio Campanini and Matteo Truffelli (eds.), *Mazzolari e 'Adesso': cinquant'anni dopo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2000); Mariangelo Maraviglia, *Chiesa e storia in Adesso (1949–1959)* (Bologna: Dehoniano, 1991); and Lorenzo Bedeschi, *L'ultima battaglia di Don Mazzolari: 'Adesso' 1949–1959* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1990); and the most recent of these studies, Mario Pancera, *Primo Mazzolari e 'Adesso', 1949–1951: un prete e un giornale che cambiarono l'Italia* (Padua: Messagero, 2005). For the life and times of Don Zeno Saltini, an excellent introductory read is Paolo Trionfini, *Zeno Saltini: il prete che costruì la città della fraternità universale* (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2004). An indispensable resource is now the two-volume biography by Remo Rinaldi, *Storia di Don Zeno e Nomadelfia* (Grosseto: Edizioni di Nomadelfia, 2003), although a separate, less voluminous publication concentrates on the millenarian social

movements animated by Don Zeno in greater detail: Remo Rinaldi, *I movimenti popolari politici di Don Zeno Saltini nella Bassa Modenese* (Verona: Edizioni Fiorini, 2002). Likewise indispensable for an understanding of the radical ideas and practices of this parish priest, whose original Nomadelfia was located less than an hour's drive away from Don Primo Mazzolari's parish, are Antonio Saltini, *Don Zeno: il sovversivo di Dio* (Modena: Il Fiorino, 2003), and Maurilio Guasco and Paolo Trionfini (eds.), *Don Zeno e Nomadelfia: tra società civile e società religiose* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001).

There is virtually no literature on the conjuncturally rather influential MPF. The sole monograph which tells the story of its most important national branch, the French MPF, is Joseph Debès, *Naissance de l'Action Catholique Ouvrière* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1982), a book which sets out to study the origins of the rival organization, which eventually supplanted the MPF within the French Catholic Church organizational universe. But in the process the author spends at least as much time, if not more, on the MPF as on the ACO, which renders this volume a most fascinating source. However, the Groupement pour la Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux (4, allée du Ternois, 59650 Villeneuve d'Ascq, France) has published a remarkable series of *Cahiers du Groupement pour la Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux* over the past twenty-five years, which cover virtually all aspects of MPF activism in great detail and which are still in print.

What Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* is for European left Catholicism, Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France: pays de mission?* (Lyon: Abeille, 1943) is for the working-class apostolate in France. This landmark study can be consulted in an abridged translation as part of Maisie Ward, *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1949). A full-scale biography of the crucial figure, Henri Godin, is Palémon Glorieux, *L'Abbé Godin, 1906–1944* (Paris: La Bonne Presse, 1949). Yet the person who helped more than any other to translate those desires into reality was Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard. The most comprehensive biography of Emmanuel Suhard remains Jean Vinatier, *Le Cardinal Suhard: l'évêque du renouveau missionaire, 1874–1949* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1983), but note also Olivier de La Brosse (ed.), *Cardinal Suhard: vers une église en état de mission* (Paris: Cerf, 1965). A highly readable and illuminating overall monograph on the new departures within French Catholicism is the modern classic by Adrien Dansette, *Destin du catholicisme français 1926–1956* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957). The various contributions in Bruno Duriez et al., *Chrétiens et ouvriers en France, 1937–1970* (Paris: Atelier, 2001), update this picture. Robert Wattebled, *Stratégies catholiques en monde ouvrier dans la France de l'après-guerre* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1990), focuses on events and processes in post-liberation France. On the prototype of French domestic missions, the Mission de France, note

the autobiographical account by the founding director of the Lisieux seminary of the Mission, Louis Augros, *De l'église d'hier à l'église de demain: l'aventure de la Mission de France* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), as well as Jean Vinatier, *Le Père Louis Augros: premier supérieur de la Mission de France (1898–1982)* (Paris: Cerf, 1991). Tangi Cavalin and Nathalie Viet-Depaule, *Une histoire de la Mission de France: la riposte missionaire 1941–2000* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), arrived too late to serve as a resource for this monograph. The crisis years of the 1950s are the focal point of Jean Vinatier, *Le Cardinal Liénart et la Mission de France* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1978). Another important monograph is Jean-François Six, *Cheminements de la Mission de France: 1941–1966* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). The closely related Mission de Paris is now ably covered in Marta Margotti, *Preti e operai: la Mission de Paris dal 1943 al 1954* (Turin: Paravia, 2000). Two translated texts of great interest for the study of the 'communitarian spirit' of those times, prefiguring the more famous developments behind the Latin American 'base communities', are Georges Michonneau, *Revolution in a City Parish* (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1949), concentrating on the transformation of the parish community in Colombes, a working-class suburb located to the north-west of Paris, and Gilbert Cesbron, *Saints in Hell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), covering radical experiments of the base communities in an eastern working-class suburb of Paris, Montreuil. Last but not least, Alfred Ancel, *Cinq ans avec les ouvriers* (Paris: Centurion, 1963), should be required reading for anyone wishing to study the working-class apostolate in the years preceding Vatican II.

The only study to take into equal consideration worker priests in Belgium and not just in France is Oscar L. Arnal, *Priests in Working-Class Blue: The History of the Worker-Priests (1943–1954)* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). The most comprehensive study of the origins of the worker priest experience as such remains Émile Poulat, *Les Prêtres-ouvriers: naissance et fin* (Paris: Cerf, 1999), originally published as *Naissance des prêtres-ouvriers* (Paris: Casterman, 1965). Key accounts by a pioneering worker priest in the port city of Marseille are Jacques Loew, *Mission to the Poorest* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), and Jacques Loew, *Journal d'une mission ouvrière, 1941–1959* (Paris: Cerf, 1959). Another translated text tells the story from the vantage point of another key activist within this milieu, Henri Perrin, *Priest and Worker: The Autobiography of Henri Perrin* (London: Macmillan, 1965). But note also the autobiography of the very first European worker priest, the Belgian Charles Boland, *Dure perçée: récit d'un premier prêtre-ouvrier (1924–1964)* (Brussels: Foyer Notre Dame, 1968). An important study of the underground working-class apostolate by French priests in Nazi Germany is Wolfgang Knauft, *Zwischen Fabriken, Kapellen und KZ: Französische Untergrundseelsorge in Berlin 1943–1945* (Heiligenstadt: F. W. Cordier, 2005), an

experience which served as inspiration for the rapid spread of the worker priests experience in post-war France. A recent survey spanning the 'first' and then the post-Vatican II 'second' wave is Charles Suaud and Nathalie Viet-Depaule, *Prêtres et ouvriers: une double fidélité mise à l'épreuve, 1944–1969* (Paris: Karthala, 2004). Yet another pivotal contribution by the former priest in the Mission de France Jean Vinatier, this time on the worker priests as such, is Jean Vinatier, *Les Prêtres ouvriers, le Cardinal Liénart et Rome: histoire d'une crise* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1985). The tragic end of the worker priest experience has been the direct or indirect focus of a number of studies, such as Stanley Windass (ed.), *Chronicle of the Worker-Priests* (London: Merlin, 1966); François Leprieur, *Quand Rome condamne: Dominicains et prêtres-ouvriers* (Paris: Plon, 1989); John Petrie (pseud.), *The Worker Priests: A Collective Documentation* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1956); and Gregor Siefer, *The Church and Industrial Society: A Survey of the Worker-Priest Movement and its Implications for the Christian Mission* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1964).

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