

# Progressismus gallicus in French and Belgian *relationes ad limina* from 1947 to 1957

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**Abstract** The Church of Pius XII was faced with the major problem of secularisation that accompanied the modernisation of European society. In the post-World War II Catholic world, France and Belgium were pioneers in seeking new pastoral methods that could reach out and involve, in particular, the workers, that social class which was most sensitive to the dynamics of de-Christianisation and religious indifferentism. The *relationes ad limina* of the period allow us to reconstruct a lively and innovative ecclesial landscape, within which the experience of worker priests was the best-known and most debated pastoral response, but not the only one. This article describes this tendency towards pastoral experimentation in France and Belgium between 1947 and 1957, at a time when Pius XII seemed to view *Progressismus gallicus* with fear and concern, but also with some hope.

**Keywords** Worker priests. Petites Soeurs de Jesus. Progressive Catholicism. *Relationes ad limina*. Secularism. Pius XII. France. Belgium Magdeleine Hutin.

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## 1 Introduction

*Progressismus gallicus*: the Spanish Bishop Gregorio Modrego y Casaús used this term in 1957 to refer to the erroneous tendency of some of his priests whom he judged to be led by false zeal, but who once reprimanded, immediately repented.<sup>1</sup> The bishop then distinguished *progressismus gallicus* from Protestantism, from theosophism, from spiritualism, and also from modernism, because modernism, allegedly, was neither present among the faithful nor among the clergy. The same term had been used in 1954 by Paolo Marella, the apostolic nuncio to France, in a report addressed to the secretary of the Holy Office, Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, in which he reported on worker priests.<sup>2</sup>

But what did Bishop Modrego y Casaús mean by *progressismus gallicus*? Who or what was he talking about? Which French realities was he referring to? And Monsignor Marella? In essence, what did French progressivism consist of in the eyes of ecclesial observers from outside France? And how did the Church of Pius XII view this tendency in France and Belgium? To what post-World War II problems did the French Church seek to respond with these pastoral policies judged to be “progressive”? Did the *progressismus gallicus* only concern means and instruments of evangelisation, or did it end up questioning doctrinal, liturgical and theological aspects as well?

Using the *ad limina* visits of French and Belgian bishops as documentary sources, this investigation attempts to answer these questions already addressed by historiography; the research therefore does not aim to offer new knowledge on the question of French progressivism, but to consolidate established historiographical trends through sources not available up to now.

By interpreting these sources we will arrive at the conclusion that the term *progressismus gallicus* indicated not only the action of the worker priests, but also a set of innovative pastoral proposals and attempts – the ‘Gallicanism’ of which Émile Poulat speaks, describing it as “the French way of solving problems, different from the Roman way”<sup>3</sup> – of which the worker priests<sup>4</sup> were, it is true, the most debated and, if you like, radical aspect, but not the only one. It was a tendency towards pastoral experimentation – “an openness to the world and

1 Barcelona 1957, 31. I thank Enrico Baruzzo for the reference.

2 Excerpt from Report No. 2362/54 of 21 April 1954 by the Apostolic Nuncio in France on worker priests, concerning “Progressivism”; sent by Paolo Marella to Giuseppe Pizzardo on 5 May 1955 (Marella, *Rapporto n. 2362/54*).

3 Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 297; Bigo, *Le progressisme*; Duriez et al., *Chrétiens et ouvriers*. Unless otherwise stated, all translation are by the Author.

4 On the worker priests, cf. Poulat, *Naissance* and *Les Prêtres-Ouvriers*.

modern culture”, says Poulat<sup>5</sup> – perhaps not organic, but certainly organised and widespread in the French and Belgian dioceses; an experimentation to which Rome looked, certainly with fear, but perhaps also with some hope, indecisive at first, in this “crisis of conscience between Rome and France”,<sup>6</sup> between condemnation and approval.

Certainly the *ad limina* letters should be analysed by reflecting on the textual genre that was peculiar to them. On this question, common to all the articles in this monographic issue, please refer to the introduction of this volume.<sup>7</sup>

However, the *relations* allow us to reconstruct a point of view – that of a new ‘Gallicanism’ –, the problems present, the proposed solutions, the centre-periphery relations, the vitality of a system.

## 2 The Dioceses and the Documentary Material

The French Church was present throughout the territory, with thousands of parishes and more than a hundred bishops and dioceses. Since it is not possible to analyse all the *relations ad limina* sent between 1947 (the first *relatio* sent in the period after World War II) and 1957 (the last *relatio* viewable at the time of the opening of the archives), the proximity of the dioceses to the history of the working class priests and the new problem of evangelisation of the working class was used as a criterion for selection.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 lists the selected dioceses and their bishops.

**Table 1** Dioceses and *relations* taken into consideration

Dioceses	<i>Relations</i>	Bishops
Paris	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Emmanuel Suhard, Card. Maurice Feltin
Lille	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Achille Liénard
Lyon	1947, 1952	Card. Pierre Paul Marie Gerlier
Marseille	1947, 1952	Mons. Jean Delay
Dijon	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. Guillaume Sembel
Bayeux et Lisieux	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. François Marie Picaud, Mons. André Jaquemin
Poitiers	1957	Mons. Henri Vion

<sup>5</sup> Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 297.

<sup>6</sup> “In Rome one is concerned above all with orthodoxy, with the integrity of doctrine, while in France some bishops consider the apostolic, pastoral, missionary urgency to be decisive” (Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 299). Cf. also Fouilloux, *Une Eglise*.

<sup>7</sup> See also Menozzi, “L’utilizzazione”; Ricciardi Celsi, *Le relations ad limina*.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Marta Margotti for her valuable advice on which dioceses to choose.

Dioceses	Relationes	Bishops
Mission de France-Pontigny	1956	prelatura nullius, Card. Achille Liénart
Reims	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. Louis-Augustin Marmottin
Mechelen-Brussels	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Jozef-Ernest van Roey

The *relationes* studied here are all rather voluminous and often the bishops find it necessary, in order to answer question 96 on social work and Catholic Action, to add a detailed and equally dense annex of some thirty pages. Many of the bishops are prominent figures in the history of the Catholic Church and three of them in particular (Gerlier, Liénart, Feltin and before him Suhard) acted as mediators with Pius XII regarding the demands of the worker priests in the 1950s, working diligently so that the worker priests could return to their job even after the 1954 condemnation.<sup>9</sup> In the *relationes* the bishops are all generally rather obsequious and attentive to what might annoy the Roman interlocutor (they therefore often take care to emphasise that the Code of Canon Law was respected); at the same time, there are bishops – especially cardinals, but also Monsignor Marmottin from the vantage point of his venerable age – who show considerable room for movement and autonomy and also allow themselves the freedom to speak frankly of problems they have in their diocese (e.g., the use of French in the liturgy),<sup>10</sup> of the changes they would expect from Rome (e.g., in the rules concerning Eucharistic fasting),<sup>11</sup> of diocesan practices that do not respect the canons,<sup>12</sup> of the worker priests – even after the *ultimatum* of the French bishops in 1954, strongly backed by Rome.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Cardinal Gerlier allows himself to write all his reports in French, instead of Latin, despite the fact that it was pointed out to him already after the first time that “the canonical law of 4th November 1918 stipulates the use of Latin”.<sup>14</sup> Bishops Lienhart and Marmottin do the same, using French for all information that they consider, as Marmottin says,

<sup>9</sup> Margotti, *Lavoro*, 73-93; *Preti e operai*, 342-53.

<sup>10</sup> Reims 1957, no. 19; Lille 1957, no. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Liénart (Lille 1952, no. 86), for example, writes that he would see it fit if the dispensation from Eucharistic fasting granted one day a week to workers for the evening Mass were granted every day of the week. The modification of the Eucharistic norms also characterised the claims of the worker priests (Margotti, *Lavoro*, 63-84). Indeed, the Roman interlocutor is alarmed and underlines it in red and with a question mark beside it.

<sup>12</sup> For example, on the inventory of the possessions of the diocese (Lille 1952, no. 13; Lyon 1947, nos. 8-11).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Margotti, *Lavoro*, 82-91. Also Dumont, *La condamnation*.

<sup>14</sup> Lyon 1947, 34.

“modern matters”<sup>15</sup> (Catholic and social action, the difficulties with communists and socialists) or for the sociological description of the diocese. The Roman interlocutor, however, seems to take lightly any such liberties committed by these bishops: he highlights them in red, adds question marks and reactions at the edge of the page; but, basically does not react, at least in writing, by asking for more discipline. For example, with regard to Cardinal Gerlier’s report, in French and not very thorough, the minutant writes: “The report, in itself, might not be... exceptional, but Lyon is Lyon, and Cardinal Gerlier is Cardinal Gerlier. It therefore seemed good to me to draft a brief, somewhat euphoric, reply”.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 The Church-State Relationship in France and Belgium

The French bishops complain in the *relationes* about those legislative measures which at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries had radically diminished the Catholic Church’s influence on social life<sup>17</sup> (in particular the 1882 law against the teaching of religion in state schools,<sup>18</sup> the 1884 divorce law, the 1905 *Loi de séparation*). According to Cardinal Suhard,<sup>19</sup> all laws which had been passed by Freemasons. Buildings such as churches and parsonages, but also cemeteries, were owned by the state or by diocesan associations;<sup>20</sup> there were no taxes or tithes and maintaining the clergy was the responsibility of the faithful.

The Church could fund schools, but according to French law had no right to own school buildings, which belonged to secular associations. All the *relationes* attach great importance to free schools (*Ecoles libres*), which were supported by student fees and offerings from the faithful. Cardinal Suhard<sup>21</sup> explains that the *profectus* of these schools is good for the pupils and the Church: indeed, many ecclesiastical vocations are born in these schools and the faith is transmitted.

<sup>15</sup> Reims 1947, no. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Lyon 1947, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Rémond, *La secolarizzazione*; Pelletier, *Les catholiques*; Tranvouez, *Catholicisme*; Fouilloux, *Au coeur*; Poulat, *La question religieuse*.

<sup>18</sup> According to Bishop Picaud (Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 90), “Under the false guise of neutrality, the Christian religion in schools is silenced. Increasingly, this official neutrality becomes hostility”.

<sup>19</sup> Paris 1947, no. 97.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Poulat, *Les Diocésaines*.

<sup>21</sup> Paris 1947, no. 91.

The *relations* also dwell on the *Loi Barangé* and the *Loi Marie*,<sup>22</sup> which extended to students in private schools with graduate teachers the same financial aid that the State granted to students in State schools, but which were frowned upon by secularist political parties; furthermore, the *relations* express concern about the *Loi Billières* being considered in Parliament, which would have helped State schools and not Catholic schools.<sup>23</sup>

In Belgium the situation was different. Indeed, the bishop of Mechelen-Brussels<sup>24</sup> explains that by ancient custom, the ecclesiastical and civil authorities jointly supervised the conservation of ecclesiastical assets and possessions. In Belgium, too, great hopes were attached to school education, where the emphasis regarding relations between the State and the Church was not, as in France, on secularism: in all schools, including State schools, priests or trained lay people taught catechism and sacred history (with compulsory teaching at primary school, but for which exemptions grew as the students got older).<sup>25</sup>

In both States, the war had caused people to flee the cities,<sup>26</sup> but in the post-war period the speed of the industrialisation process had caused increasing urbanisation to the extent that the city of Paris alone had more than 5 million inhabitants in 1957.<sup>27</sup>

France had always been a Catholic stronghold: a powerful and widespread national Church. The number of personnel is astounding: in the diocese of Paris alone in 1947 Suhard could count on 23,000 religious members comprising male and female orders (falling to 11,000 by 1957).<sup>28</sup>

As far as the ministry for workers was concerned, thanks to the JOC (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne) and Godin and Daniel's book *La France, Pays de mission?*, the French Church was experiencing a kind of "myth of origins".<sup>29</sup>

The experience of the Service du Travail Obligatoire in Germany during the war had left its mark on civil society and also indicated new avenues for pastoral care: indeed, lay people and priests had experienced the unity between believers and workers, JOC adherents and communist militants, during the forced labour service in Germany.

<sup>22</sup> Lille 1957, no. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Lille 1957, no. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 90.

<sup>26</sup> The city of Dunkirk, almost destroyed by World War II, had 10,000 inhabitants in 1947, while in 1936 it had 31,000 (Lille 1947, no. 3).

<sup>27</sup> Paris 1957, no. 3. Lienhart (Lille 1957, no. 90) calls it *urbanism*: people move to live in cities and new Catholic schools should be built, but there is a lack of money.

<sup>28</sup> Paris 1947; 1957, no. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Margotti, *Lavoro*, 8.

Among the voices of the *nouvelle théologie*, there was a whole strand close to worker priests and social activism, which proposed a new vision of the priesthood (Chenu, Congar, Poulat). Following the pioneering experience of the Priests of Prado, the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris were born in 1941 and 1943, in an attempt to order and ‘institutionalise’ the passionate enthusiasm of the worker priests.

#### 4 **Enemies of the Faith: “a people immersed in error and materialism”<sup>30</sup>**

The major problem facing bishops and priests was what we might call the ‘shift in Catholic identity’, named according to the various nuances it took on in the eyes of individual bishops: materialism, de-Christianisation, atheism, rationalism,<sup>31</sup> sensualism,<sup>32</sup> religious indifference,<sup>33</sup> secularism, the father of vice and indifferentism.<sup>34</sup> No significant changes in terminology can be noted from a diachronic point of view. Certainly the problems between 1947 and 1957 were not exactly the same; however, by writing very substantial reports, the bishops tend to copy entire parts from the previous *relations*, modifying only the numerical data and percentages, but using the same terms and the same periphrases. The terms therefore change from bishop to bishop and not diachronically.

These trends in society were evident in certain moral and social dynamics that worried the bishops.

First of all, the decline of Sunday Mass attendance and of the observation of the Easter precept: while some dioceses spoke of it generically, in others the bishops were precise. In general, Sunday rest was observed, although not always in the countryside among those engaged in agricultural work; Sunday Mass was attended more by women than by men, the latter representing 35% in the diocese of Poitiers (1957), 25% in the diocese of Lille (1952-57), where only 2% among adult workers attended, and less than 20% in Bayeux et Lisieux (1957) and Reims (1947). The Easter precept was observed, again, more by women than by men, more in the countryside than in the cities. The data varied widely from diocese to diocese and even within the same diocese, as the working environment and gender varied. Certainly, however, they were numbers that worried the

<sup>30</sup> Lyon 1947, no. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Lyon 1947, no. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Paris 1952, no. 100 speaks of “the indifference of the many and the hatred of the few”.

<sup>34</sup> Poitiers 1957, no. 84; Paris 1947, no. 100.

Catholic hierarchy: in Paris (1947) the Easter precept was observed by 20-25% of the faithful, in Lyon (1947) by 50% of women and less than 10% of men, with peaks of 1.6% in the city, in Mechelen-Brussels and Poitiers (1957) the average was 20%, fewer still in Poitiers (1947). Secondly, another way of measuring secularisation was “the aversion to piety and the sacraments”,<sup>35</sup> which was noticeable, for example, not so much in the failure to baptise children as in the delay with which parents took the child to the baptismal font, citing all kinds of excuses.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, the bishops denounced the laxity of customs: in addition to civil marriages, there were many cohabitations, many divorces, civil funerals were on the rise and families tended to have fewer children<sup>37</sup> (only Bishop van Roey<sup>38</sup> uses the term “onanism” for birth control, but in all dioceses this problem is highlighted). Fourthly, young people lived in “softness”,<sup>39</sup> without discipline, “slaves of excessive desire for pleasure” (which is why Cardinal Suhard calls them “vain”<sup>40</sup>); “they want to live according to their desires [...] and certain young women have habits devoid of values”.<sup>41</sup> Fifthly, magazines harmful to the faith were widespread, but also “magazines that excite immoderate affection in the human heart, called ‘the press of the heart’ that have many readers and do great harm, especially to young girls”.<sup>42</sup>

According to the bishops, the causes of this materialism and secularisation were due to different factors. First and foremost, the culprits were socialism and communism (no distinction is made between the two doctrines) spread especially among the workers because “they present themselves as a way to fight against capitalism and present the Church as a friend of capitalism”;<sup>43</sup> this “iniqua materialistarum doctrina” led the workers to gradually fall into vice.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, new errors were mentioned including “Catholics who believe that an agreement can be reached with communism” and “are

<sup>35</sup> Lille 1947, no. 84.

<sup>36</sup> Paris 1947; 1952, no. 86.

<sup>37</sup> In Brussels, for example, 28% of families in 1910 had more than four children, while in 1947 the percentage had fallen to 12%; families with only one child in 1910 were 23%, in 1957 31% (Mechelen-Brussels 1957, no. 88).

<sup>38</sup> Marseille 1947, no. 87.

<sup>39</sup> Paris 1952, no. 100.

<sup>40</sup> Paris 1952, no. 100.

<sup>41</sup> Paris 1952, no. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Bayeux et Lisieux 1957, no. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Paris 1947, no. 98.

<sup>44</sup> Paris 1947, no. 98.



called the progressives".<sup>45</sup> Cardinals Suhard and Feltin,<sup>46</sup> in addition to communism, blamed secularist laws and neutral schools, along with the major problem, highlighted by all, of the war.

An observation needs to be made about the war, since all the reports - more those of 1947 and 1952 than those of 1957 - speak of it: in more detail those of the dioceses that had been directly affected by the conflict, in a more general way those that had only experienced the economic and social repercussions. In the diocese of Lille, for example, "the city of Dunkirk was almost destroyed by the recent war";<sup>47</sup> reconstruction was necessary not only for houses and schools, but also for sacred buildings, churches and for the deteriorated and ruined seminaries. Furnishings, sacred furniture, sacred vestments, church money had been destroyed or stolen.<sup>48</sup> The diocese of Reims had suffered the damages of World War II when it had not yet repaired those of the previous one. While in Paris the archbishop was preoccupied with building new churches because the population was growing fast (also because those who had fled during the conflict were returning to the city), in Lille the bishop was busy repairing churches and seminaries destroyed by the war. Poverty was widespread and because of this, families limited how many children they had and could not afford to send them to private schools.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to material problems, according to Liénart,<sup>50</sup> in the absence of the head of the family, the bonds of paternal authority had been loosened, the scarcity and lack of harvests had been endured, so the desire to enjoy the goods of the present life had spread, and the "notorious propensity for illicit joys, after the abstinence of wartime" had grown, all of which "lead more or less grievously to a less honest life". The war had also affected the life of faith itself: for example, abstinence and fasting before taking communion had fallen into disuse because of the conflict. In wartime, the discipline of priests, who may have been obliged to military service, had also relaxed.<sup>51</sup>

The World War II had also brought the scourge of "double marriages" and, consequently, divorces: in Lille, many soldiers who had returned from the war found that their wives had remarried.<sup>52</sup> Mixed and religiously disparate marriages had also increased (e.g., with

<sup>45</sup> Reims 1947, no. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Paris 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 100.

<sup>47</sup> Lille 1947, no. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Lille 1947, no. 100.

<sup>49</sup> Lille 1947, no. 93.

<sup>50</sup> Lille 1947, no. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Paris 1947, no. 100.

<sup>52</sup> Lille 1947, no. 87.

American soldiers),<sup>53</sup> in this group the bishop of Bayeux et Lisieux<sup>54</sup> also includes marriages with communists after the 1949 decree of the Holy Office.

The problem of Jews who had been baptised in order to save them from persecution also had to be addressed.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, the French *relationes* make no reference to the *Résistance* or the collaboration that took place in the territory during the conflict; on the other hand, the Belgian Bishop Van Roey points out that:

A truly serious and dangerous new problem to be feared is the number of citizens now in prison for unlawful “incivism”. The repression against citizens who in some way cooperated with the German enemy, and who have now all confessed, was too harsh, too broad and indiscriminate. The difficulty of rehabilitating those civilians in the bosom of the nation is not yet urgent, but will only be gradually resolved in the spirit of gentleness and Christian charity.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, among the causes of materialism, in 1947 Suhard singled out tourists, who brought vices to Paris, but blaming foreigners and different religions was quite common: in almost all of the dioceses taken into consideration there was an increasingly multi-ethnic population and communism was widespread, and not only in Lille among the workers who came from abroad (in this case from Belgium).<sup>57</sup> What solutions did the bishops propose to these difficulties in their dioceses? An attempt was made to categorise the interventions by dividing them into ‘traditional’ solutions, which could probably be found in many of Pius XII’s other churches at that time, and more modern and innovative solutions, which probably characterised what outside observers would have catalogued as *progressismus gallicus*. What emerged were a number of decidedly innovative and ‘daring’ elements, so much so that the expression “fit experimentum” or “experimur” returns very often in the *relationes*; these innovative elements sometimes concerned profoundly new pastoral experiments, such as worker priests or worker nuns, but also attempts to innovate traditional ministry methods from within.

<sup>53</sup> Reims 1947, no. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Bayeux et Lisieux 1957, no. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Paris 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Lille 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 84.

## 5 The Proposed Solutions: Modifications to Traditional Structures

The structure of ministry proposed by the French and Belgian bishops was the traditional one, based on the parish – so much so that the Paris reports state that “every Catholic action arises from the parish and has the parish as its goal”<sup>58</sup> – in its three fundamental components: catechism, missions, associationism. Nevertheless, in the richness and multiplicity of the proposals, and in the attempt to innovate them, a certain degree of innovation can be recognised.

With regard to Christian initiation and education, each parish had a strict programme of catechism and extracurricular afternoon activities for children, but also for young people and adults. The diocese of Lille then boasts of using a new method, “which consists of the use of images, examples and also games”;<sup>59</sup> Lienhart once again, in 1952, speaks of “projections” and, regarding the fact that “catechesis per imagines luce proiectas fuit illustrata”,<sup>60</sup> receives praise from Rome. Furthermore, for the training of catechists in 1951, the Higher Institute of Religious Education was founded in the diocese of Lille under the patronage of the Catholic University. Compared to the first five-year period, the number of members was, in 1957,<sup>61</sup> more than doubled (from 80 to 170). Examinations in religious education were also scheduled through the Catholic University.

During the summer of 1946 alone, 450 holiday camps in the diocese of Lille had “given spiritual refreshment to 18,000 children and young people” and there were family homes for those with particularly complex family situations.<sup>62</sup>

In Belgium, the Archconfraternity of the Works of Catechism was in charge of catechism. In 1947, the bishops of Belgium published a new catechism to renew religious instruction in schools,<sup>63</sup> which also included body care through sport. Furthermore, there was also the use of “*exhibitiones cinematographicae*” and periodicals.

Another front in catechesis were the free schools. All the *relations*, both French and Belgian, have countless pages devoted to schools, to the problem of founding new schools, managing them once founded, choosing suitable teaching staff. Since running Christian schools was not easy, the bishops aimed to give them over to religious

<sup>58</sup> Paris 1947; 1952, no. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Lille 1947, no. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Lille 1952, minute.

<sup>61</sup> Lille 1957, no. 91.

<sup>62</sup> Lille 1947, no. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 90.

orders or to involve Catholic parents more in the management.<sup>64</sup> They also understood, however, that in order to ensure quality teaching, they had to find ways to adequately pay teachers in Catholic schools of all types and grades.<sup>65</sup> Cardinal Feltin seemed to have a traditional view, in which Catholic schools were needed to produce more vocations,<sup>66</sup> for Cardinal Lienhart<sup>67</sup> and Cardinal Gerlier,<sup>68</sup> in a more modern perspective, the aim was instead to educate the elites. The CLAP (Certificat libre d'aptitude pédagogique) for primary school teachers was also established in Lille, which included a religious education examination.<sup>69</sup> For both the associations that worked with children and those that worked with adults, the idea was emerging that coordination was necessary between parishes but also between parishes and the diocese, and that it was necessary for some priests and lay people to take care of this full-time.<sup>70</sup>

As far as the preaching of faith was concerned, the traditional method of missions and periodic spiritual exercises was utilised. However, new solutions were also sought, such as "collaboration with radio, television, cinema (cinématograph)"<sup>71</sup> or they wished to innovate the old solutions: in Lille<sup>72</sup> a specialised group of diocesan missionaries was created to deal exclusively with this task, but the mission did not end with several days of preaching, as was traditionally the case. Instead, it began with a pre-mission, in which the missionaries made contact with the parish and its associations; then the mission was not preached in the church, but in the places where people lived, from factories, to neighbourhood gardens, to gymnasiums; finally, after the mission, the missionaries nurtured the relationships they had built in the parish and the bonds that had been formed, carrying out a sort of post-mission.

With regard to associationism, the bishops had so many groups of Catholic Action, social action, parish 'animation' that they had to be described in a separate annex to the report. Many traditionalist groups were listed: the Eucharistic Crusade, Marian leagues, the League of Large Families, Congregations of the Blessed Virgin, pi-

**64** Reims 1947, no. 91.

**65** Paris 1947, no. 100.

**66** Paris 1957, no. 91.

**67** Lille 1947, no. 93.

**68** Lyon 1947, no. 93.

**69** Lille 1957, no. 91.

**70** Paris 1952, no. 100.

**71** Lille 1952, no. 94.

**72** Lille 1952, no. 75.

ous associations, solemn processions of the Pilgrim Mary,<sup>73</sup> Les foyers rayonnants, the Work of Baptism, but also Catholic sports associations. Then there were the Catholic Action and Social Action groups, including Christian trade unions (250 throughout France, for each type of worker), divided into categories and subcategories and always with a male and a female branch.<sup>74</sup> Even in this area of pastoral work in the dioceses, there were priests who were 'detached' from the parish and dealt solely with associations and trade unions, together with leaders who were exempt from work.<sup>75</sup> All this frenetic and energetic activism had resulted, according to Liénart, in a decrease of communists and an increase of Christian trade union members.<sup>76</sup>

Changes to traditional liturgical rhythms were also attempted. For example, to favour workers who could not attend Mass in the morning and fulfil the precepts, the experiment, approved by Rome, of celebrating evening Mass was undertaken. In Belgium, the solution did not seem to yield great results,<sup>77</sup> but the French bishops seem more optimistic: Marmottin gave thanks to the Holy Father for allowing the evening Mass since, for example, in a parish where previously there were only seven women at Mass, there were now 75 people including 20 men.<sup>78</sup>

Each diocese had a Supervisory Council, and priests and teachers at Catholic universities renewed their profession of faith every year through the anti-modernist oath of 1910. However, the bishops also considered it fundamental to oppose social injustices, which they believed favoured communism.<sup>79</sup> They therefore undertook not only to build new churches, new schools, and new seminaries, but also to build new houses, i.e., more dignified accommodation, since many, especially workers, lived in poor material conditions due to both poverty and cramped living quarters.<sup>80</sup> Realising that the poverty caused by the war was detrimental, the bishop of Mechelen-Brussels<sup>81</sup> had also raised the salaries of parish priests.

<sup>73</sup> Reims 1947, no. 17; Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 75.

<sup>74</sup> Jeunesse Chrétienne Ouvrière, Jeunesse des milieux indépendants chrétienne, Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne, Jeunesse étudiante Chrétienne, Action Catholique Ouvrière, Action Catholique des milieux indépendants, Mouvement familial rural, Action Catholique des indépendants, Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétien, Confédération Française des professions.

<sup>75</sup> Lille 1952, no. 98.

<sup>76</sup> Lille 1952, minute.

<sup>77</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Reims 1957, no. 71.

<sup>79</sup> Lyon 1947, no. 98.

<sup>80</sup> Paris 1957, no. 100.

<sup>81</sup> Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 45.

Great importance was attached to the training of the laity, in particular Catholic Action and social action militants:

If the subversion of Christianity drives away from the Church the part of the people that is least learned and lowest in the social hierarchy, we can fight against this tendency by giving greater intensity to the Christian life of those who have remained faithful.<sup>82</sup>

Catholic Action adherents were encouraged to participate in political life, but not in a direct way, that is, by staying outside political alignments and factions.

Finally, not only was it necessary for the laity had to be educated, but also the clergy had to be cared for,<sup>83</sup> for whose training the dioceses envisaged very onerous amounts of expenditure.<sup>84</sup> Priests received traditional training based on the Tridentine model, through seminaries run by the Sulpicians and daily monastic rhythms; once inserted in the ministry, they had to wear the cassock and tonsure, although during the war these customs were relaxed and it was not always easy to convince priests to resume them: however, all bishops claimed that the good practices had been restored, except for the tonsure.<sup>85</sup> The priest could not go to the theatre or attend secular shows, he could not have a maid under the age of 35-40 years (depending on the diocese).

Nevertheless, even within this traditional training, there were signs of modernity: first of all, *urbanitatem* - which was already present in the congresses of the Alliance des Grands Séminaires at the beginning of the twentieth century - was mentioned in the training of seminarians, "the laws of good manners, hygienic precepts and everything that can optimally educate aspirants to the priesthood".<sup>86</sup> Great emphasis was placed on the study of scientific subjects, not just the humanities, and many attended universities<sup>87</sup> even secular universities.<sup>88</sup> Worker priests and labour missionaries had specific training.

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<sup>82</sup> Lille 1952, no. 99.

<sup>83</sup> The clergy in all dioceses are not sufficient to cover the needs of the faithful: only Lié-nart in 1947 does not complain about this and considers that it has sufficient personnel.

<sup>84</sup> The seminar item in the Curie budgets is always the largest item - in Paris in 1956, for example, 146 million francs were spent - together with that for Catholic schools, see Paris 1957, no. 39.

<sup>85</sup> Lyon 1952, no. 47.

<sup>86</sup> Reims 1947, nos. 40-43.

<sup>87</sup> Lyon 1952, no. 40.

<sup>88</sup> Paris 1947, no. 50.

## 6 The Solutions Proposed: *Fit experimentum, experimur*

In the *relationes* more daring and radical experimentation can be seen: not just updates and attempts to modernise traditional pastoral practices, but genuinely ‘progressive’ experiments. If Liénart in 1947 speaks for example of the “missionnaires du travail”, in other reports the bishops speak freely about worker priests, even after the 1954 condemnation. But other pastoral proposals also constitute a ‘progressive’ experiment.

### 6.1 Socio-Religious Research Applied to Pastoral Work

First of all, it strikes the reader that sociological research is applied to pastoral work, probably following the insights of Gabriel Le Bras. This occurs in both French and Belgian contexts: for example, Liénart<sup>89</sup> in 1952 commissioned the School of Social Studies in Lille a socio-religious investigation to define how many people do or do not attend Sunday Mass. Van Roey does not expressly speak of a socio-religious investigation, but in the 1957 *relatio*, in Latin, he inserts insights in the French language that are rich in quantitative data, probably taken, as is evident from a later passage, from a five-yearly census of religious members entrusted by the assembly of the major superiors of Belgium to the Centre for Socio-Religious Research, an organ of the Interdiocesan Centre.

### 6.2 The Worker Nuns

Secondly, in the 1940s the Petites Soeurs de Jesus of Little Sister Magdeleine had also begun to operate in some French dioceses,<sup>90</sup> which divided the Fraternities of its fledgling order into Mission Fraternities, Working Fraternities (Fraternité Ouvrières) and Study and Training Fraternities. The action of the worker nuns was not intended to be confused with that of the militant lay members of Catholic Action: in the first drafts of the Constitutions, Sister Magdeleine expressly says, in fact, not to go to factories or workplaces with a direct aim of apostolate. The worker nuns went there to bear witness to poverty and work, to make themselves similar in their exterior life to their worker brothers, “humbly and silently reflecting among them on all the interi-

<sup>89</sup> Lille 1952, no. 84.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Magdeleine de Jesus, *Contemplative*.

or riches of their contemplative religious life".<sup>91</sup> In 1949, Little Sister Magdeleine presented the second draft of the order's Constitutions to Pope Pius XII hoping to obtain papal approval; among the documents, she presented letters from various bishops who had welcomed the sisters into their diocese, including Cardinal Suhard, who hoped that they would be given canonical recognition, and Cardinal Gerlier who spoke of their "special apostolate".<sup>92</sup> In France in 1949, the Petites Soeurs had a fraternity in Paris,<sup>93</sup> a fraternity of medical and nursing studies in Lyone, a Fraternité des Petites Soeurs Nomades en roulotte in Aix en Provence, in Lourdes. In Damascus, Syria, the motherhouse presented itself as Fraternité Ouvrière. In 1950, Father Caronti, OSB, consultor of the Holy Office, had deemed it necessary to wait longer for the *Decretum Laudis* to be assigned to the fraternity, as the directives of Little Sister Magdeleine "appearing at first sight too new and too bold".<sup>94</sup> They constituted an experiment and were therefore viewed by Rome with much perplexity, as was the character of the founder, said to have "a somewhat surprising ambivalence";<sup>95</sup> some perplexity also concerned the type of mission they were going to perform,<sup>96</sup> but the perplexity about the first aspect was such that the second was almost overshadowed. The sisters recounted their experiences not only in Muslim areas, but also in working-class environments. As early as 1947 they had written *Rapport sur les premières expériences des Petites Soeurs Ouvrières*<sup>97</sup> recounting the experience of two of them, formerly jocists, in Aix-en-Provence in an electric lamp factory since 1946, of four of them in Marseilles in a factory with 120 workers, and of two other sisters in the countryside of Aix-en-Provence since 1947.<sup>98</sup> While in 1958 *Rapport sur les Fraternités ouvrières* was produced covering the period from 1946 to 1957,<sup>99</sup> a sign that in any case this experience was being watched by Rome, which demanded regular reports.

<sup>91</sup> *Lettere relative alle Costituzioni 1944-1957*. Thank for the reference to Saretta Marotta.

<sup>92</sup> *Seconde Costituzioni delle Piccole Sorelle del 1949*.

<sup>93</sup> Paris 1957, no. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Voto del Padre Consultore Emmanuele Caronti OSB circa il *Decretum Laudis* da dare alle Sorelle.

<sup>95</sup> Anonymous notes, "Extreme humility on the one hand, extreme pride on the other".

<sup>96</sup> "Can the church in its prudence give them, without proper experience, final approval, especially since the Institute has to work in such difficult environments?", Voto of father Emmanuel Caronti.

<sup>97</sup> *Rapport sur les premières expériences des Petites Soeurs Ouvrières*.

<sup>98</sup> Already in 1948, PS Magdeleine wrote to Mons. Levnaud, archbishop of Algiers, who had only conditionally accepted their form of working apostolate, to reassure him, explaining how well the sisters were received in the factory environment (Lettera di PS Magdeleine a Mons. Levnaud, 30 aprile 1948).

<sup>99</sup> *Rapporti, relazioni, verbali*.



In the *relations*, Cardinal Feltin puts them among the religious orders, as if they had already been approved by the Holy See, and not among the orders of diocesan authority. Monsignor Delay does the same thing in Marseilles,<sup>100</sup> which adds the Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld to the orders of diocesan authority. Cardinal Gerlier, however, does not mention them.

Monsignor Hanssen, an apostolic visitor to Scandinavia, also reported on the Petites Soeurs, who had a community in Oslo, one in Helsinki, one in Copenhagen and one near the Russian border, in his 1957 report.<sup>101</sup> The concerns he expressed would all be interesting, but we will limit ourselves to a few excerpts that seem particularly significant:

Their ideal is to christianise the workers' environment with their testimony and by working in the factories and living among the workers [...] This house can only be distinguished from other workers' houses by its sign. Here the sisters have only one common room, like all workers' houses [...] a dormitory which is far too small and does not meet the canonical requirements [...] The bishop of Helsinki repeatedly invited them to come and live near a mission, where the priests could help them and the sisters themselves could help the priests; but no, they wished to stay on the Russian border, to pray for the conversion of Russia. [...] Monsignor Muller of Stockholm refused to allow these sisters to enter the country for reasons that I can approve of and which also reflect my own opinion:

1. The Petites Soeurs de Jésus are a kind of worker-nuns, for whom the same reservations apply as for worker priests in France.
2. A group of only three nuns can be of no significance for the working class environment of a big city.
3. The very poor, almost exotic, dress of the sisters does not make a good impression on the very civilised working class of Scandinavia. The bishop does not find it appropriate that among Protestants this type of worker passes for the ideal of a Catholic worker [...].

Therefore, while the apostolic visitor and the bishop of Stockholm were very critical of them, because the same criticism and misgivings applied to them as to the worker priests in France, the Bishop of Oslo in his *relatio* wished instead that their constitutions be approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.<sup>102</sup>

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**100** Paris 1952; 1957, no. 3; Marseille 1952, no. 3.

**101** Relation on apostolic visit to Denmark by Mons. Hanssen in 1957 (Denmark 1957, 89-157). Thanks for the reference to Daiana Menti.

**102** Oslo 1958.

### 6.3 The Société des prêtres et des soeurs du Prado, the Société de la Sainte Famille

The reports from Lyon describe the Société du Prado, a community of brothers and sisters who lived in common and without vows, under the rule of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The society was founded by father Chevrier in Lyon, whose beatification process was underway in the 1950s. It was directed by a superior general, Monsignor Ancel, auxiliary bishop of Lyon. Bishop Gerlier explained that the society was booming. Its works included a clerical school and a small seminary to prepare young men for the priesthood. Three bishops and more than 200 priests had already emerged from this school, of whom 20 were missionaries and 20 religious members. The Prado priests – 116 in the diocese of Lyons, 406 in all – then took care of some 15 parishes in the diocese, made up of the poor and workers.

A similar society of women living a communal life without vows, under the rule of Saint Francis, constituted the Soeurs du Prado, 135 at that time in the diocese of Lyon alone, 163 in all.

Gerlier added the Société de la Sainte-Famille, a congregation of diocesan authority of about 15 religious priests, who were responsible for the technical and religious education of workers.

Thus, male and female religious orders that took care of workers flourished in the 1940s and in the 1950s. This should be the subject of future research.

### 6.4 Missionaries of Work and the Secrétariat national de la mission ouvrière

Bishop Feltin, in 1957, seemed to want to be cautious: there had already been the stance of 1954 and perhaps he glimpsed the condemnation of 1959 on the horizon. He emphasised that, having at heart “the ignorance especially of many workers, to whom some, with loquacious language, preach false doctrines that say that temporal justice must be chosen, rejecting divine charity” he had decided to:

send missionary priests to the workers; we call these priests “missionaries of labour”, rather than worker priests.<sup>103</sup>

He then added that “the pastoral commitment of the Parisian clergy is known to all”, even if at times they have been “more ardent than prudent”. In order to promote the apostolate among the workers and

<sup>103</sup> Paris 1957, no. 100.

provide the most appropriate means to send missionaries to all regions of France, he explained that in April 1957 he had set up the Secrétariat national de la mission ouvrière “so that Christ might be revealed to the workers themselves”. Bishop Marmottin also reflected on the priests who acted more ardently than prudently to find innovative pastoral approaches.<sup>104</sup>

## 6.5 The Mission de France of Pontigny

In the *relationes* there are traces of this experience, one of the best known and most famous examples of ‘French progressivism’; in talking about it, the bishops do not seem to be reticent. For example, they recall the number of seminarians they sent to the Mission de France during the five-year period.<sup>105</sup>

Cardinal Gerlier explained in 1947 that in one of his parishes a missionary experiment was carried out in which six priests, three diocesan and three regular,

live a common life and occupy themselves with all their strength in the sacred ministry, and stand out because they try to adapt their apostolate to lead the wandering sheep back, guided by the apostolate mind called Mission de France.<sup>106</sup>

The Mission de France,<sup>107</sup> about which its Prelate Cardinal Liénart speaks, is based on an observation: “It seems very difficult to reach the factories if one does not lead the life of their workers”.<sup>108</sup>

There is a trace of this in the *relatio* of Bayeux et Lisieux of 1947 because the seminary was established there in 1942 under the authority of the Assembly of French Cardinals and Bishops and Cardinal Suhard. Bishop Picaud hoped at that juncture that the seminary

<sup>104</sup> Reims 1947, no. 76.

<sup>105</sup> Ex. Marseille 1952, no. 41; Lille 1957, nos. 40-43. But other dioceses do not talk about it, although they certainly have priests and seminarians at the Mission (e.g., Paris).

<sup>106</sup> Lyon 1947, no. 100.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Mission de France-Pontigny 1956. Paolo Marella in a letter to Cardinal Adenot Piazza, Secretary of the Consistorial Sacred Congregation, emphasises how the work was so close to Cardinal Liénart, who would be in Rome from 12 to 22 March 1956 and, as ordinary of the prelatore and as President of the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops, would want to confer with him on it (letter in Mission de France-Pontigny 1956). The Cardinal’s travel programme included various meetings to talk about the prelatore, from the Holy Father to the Consistory, the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries, and even to visit Monsignor Tardini and Monsignor Dall’Acqua at the Secretariat of State.

<sup>108</sup> Mission de France-Pontigny 1956, no. 5.

would soon have its own, specific canonical statute.<sup>109</sup> The following *relatio* states that the seminary was moved to Limousin.<sup>110</sup>

In order for it to have a permanent home, the Mission was erected as a *prelatura nullius* by apostolic letter on 23 October 1954 and Cardinal Liénart became its Ordinary on 15 December 1954, after it had been created by Pius XII with the Apostolic Constitution *Omni-um Ecclesiarum* on 15 August 1954; it was located in Pontigny, a famous old Cistercian monastery.

The Mission had originated on 24 July 1941 when the Assembly of Cardinals and Bishops of France had established the seminary of Lisieux in which to educate clerics and young priests deemed suitable for exercising the ministry in regions where the faith was not widely practised.

The houses of the Mission de France in 1957 were grouped into 13 regional congregations led by an elected regional delegate; each regional congregation had several houses whose priests exercised various charismas of the apostolate.

In particular, they cared for workers living among them, the poorest people, immigrants, the psychiatrically ill at the Salpêtrière in Paris, children and adults abandoned by public care, researchers and scientists who had lost faith (in this case, they were priests learned in atomic science and electronic physics), wealthy landowners who were in danger of forgetting the status of farm workers, and unbaptised adults; Cardinal Liénart emphasised that these priests supported militant Christians from getting to those people that Catholic Action and parish works could not reach, fought Marxism by making the Church feel close, fought for social justice, offered religious sociology help to parish priests. They organised missions to workers in factories. They preached through the radio. They were paving the way for the workers' mission that was opening up in Limousine, where Marxism had penetrated so far into the population that it had taken 75% of the vote in the most recent elections.

The Vicar General answered all questions that the bishops put to him and in one year he had already spoken to 30 of the 36 dioceses concerned. The main difficulties highlighted in the meetings were the need to restore peace in houses where, in previous years, there had been ruptures, and then the fact that the Mission de France was not able to send as many priests as the bishops asked for. In addition, according to Monsignor Liénart, many bishops did not fully understand what the charism/task of the Mission priests was. Thus, they expected them to take care of whatever needs the dioceses had.

The Vicar General was Father J. Vinatier, who visited the communities and took care of the priests as well as relations with the bishops.

<sup>109</sup> Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Bayeux et Lisieux 1952, no. 40.

The problem for the priests of the Mission, according to the Bishop of Lille, was that, like many young priests, they were often overworked, so that their nervous system suffered.

Liénart emphasised that none of the priests of the prelature was caught up in modernism or theosophism; a few, but very few, came close to Marxism. The Mission provided for this danger by sending those priests to a less dangerous ministry, when necessary, often convening the teams to talk about the theoretical errors of Marxism and the social doctrine of the church and allowing those priests to cease ministry in order to devote themselves to reflection and prayer for a time. After 12 months of prelacy, Liénart was satisfied because there were many signs of internal renewal and external expansion, which boded well for further progress. The confidence of the French bishops and priests in the Mission grew.<sup>111</sup>

## 6.6 The Worker Priests

Cardinal Gerlier in 1952<sup>112</sup> explains that there exists an experiment in three parishes in communal and missionary life in which the priest works as a factory worker, lives in the presbytery, and performs his priestly ministry on Sundays. Three other such priests live together although they are disconnected/separated from the priests of the parish. He says he is hopeful that the dangers of this form of apostolate will be overcome and that this experiment, which he considers necessary and on which he focuses his attention and courage with great love, will bear much spiritual fruit in the future.

In 1957, i.e., after the project had been discontinued in 1954, Cardinal Liénart speaks<sup>113</sup> of four priests, two in Dunkirk and two in Robiaci, working in the *Mission Operariorum*: they have subsidiary devotion to the bishop and live in fraternal communion with the clergy of that city.

He then launches into an all-out defence of the two worker priests in Dunkirk, one an electrician and the other a driver at the port. He emphasises that this missionary action in Dunkirk is in the planning stage, and ever since it has been led by the two worker priests, there has been diligent participation from collaborating priests from the parishes, militant youth and adults, Catholic Action chaplains, and the various Opera, whereas before only a few young people from JOC and a few militant married couples took part. These individuals said they were incapable of evangelising to fellow workers. “That is why”,

<sup>111</sup> Mission de France-Pontigny 1956, synthetic judgement.

<sup>112</sup> Marseille 1952, no. 100.

<sup>113</sup> Lille 1957, no. 100.

says the bishop, assuming all responsibility, “we prayed that worker priests would join this apostolate”. Liénart’s reasoning is simple: “when the church establishes a mission among the pagans, it sends priests and not lay people”. The beneficial effect of the worker priests infected the laity and also the priests of the Dunkirk parishes, among whom the apostolic impulse was renewed, as the worker priests spoke to the priests of Dunkirk about the spiritual needs of the workers.

Although the priests took care of the workers before, they did not make much effort [...]. Now all the priests of Dunkirk have again been caught up in a serious concern for the cause of the Gospel, which they try to preach together with the lay militants and the worker priests with new hope. Let us add that these priests are very good priests; they faithfully fulfil all their priestly duties, in the course of time they nourish their spiritual life with pious exercises, they spend their free time in such a way as to live united with God, nor do they avoid conversing and talking about religion with their fellow workers, with those comrades who never go to church.

The bishop seems to respond in this way to many of the objections that were made to the experience of the worker priests (accusations of neglecting one’s priestly duties, of neglecting prayer, of converting to Marxism instead of converting to the Gospel). He added that he also hoped that such missions would soon be set up in the towns of Roubaix and Hellemmes, where there are worker priests, but they are still far removed from the context. In the reply minute, the words “He is pleased with the work of two worker priests; one is a motorist at the port, the other an electrician. He says they do a lot of good” are underlined in red and alongside, the minute-taker added: “is it appropriate to mention anything?”. In the response, however, the subject of “worker priests” is not touched upon. It is only recommended that those with an ecclesiastical vocation be protected “a saeculi contagio”.

Even though these were difficult years for the experience of the working priests, Bishop Vion does not hesitate to speak of the fact that his clergy fervently wish to live a communal life and that they are experimenting with this modality in seven districts of the diocese.<sup>114</sup>

## 7 Conclusions

This article illustrates some of the aspects that Bishop Modrego y Casaús and other observers from outside France probably defined as *progressismus gallicus*: it looked in the *relationes* for traces of how

<sup>114</sup> Poitiers 1957, no. 47.

the French and Belgian Church, attempted to innovate the traditional pastoral approach after 1945, with modifications or 'experiments' in various areas of pastoral care. And it searched for traces of how the Church of Pius XII looked at these experiments with doubts and fears, but perhaps also with some hope, given the indulgence employed in the responses.<sup>115</sup>

The *relationes* also say something about liturgical aspects, on which it has not been possible to dwell here. They are of no help, however, with regard to the theological impact of the proposed innovations: the *nouvelle théologie* had in fact become a fundamental question for the Holy See in those years, but the questionnaire of 1918, on which the *relationes* were based, did not include specific questions on theology.

Furthermore, there are topics that are touched on to a lesser degree than perhaps expected, or not at all. For example, there is no trace of the Mission de Paris, which profoundly influenced the life of the Paris diocese at least from 1943 to 1954. The report of Cardinal Suhard is silent on these and other ferments; until the end, moreover, he seems to have the aim of reassuring the recipient by showing that everything in the diocese is proceeding normally, while it only opens up to a more sincere analysis of the difficulties in the final free considerations. Some bishops, then, are more cautious than others, who instead use the *relationes* to plead their own cause in Rome in a more or less veiled way (openly defending the worker priests even after 1954, praising the pastoral experiments, or simply asking Rome for an openness towards issues that had often been made their own by the working class priests themselves, such as the change of the prescribed norms for participation in the Eucharist).

In conclusion, the *relationes* are an interesting and rich source for a detailed description of 'Gallic progressivism'; clearly, by somehow enclosing the bishops' answers inside 'cage' of the questionnaire, they show us only a part of the reality of the French and Belgian dioceses, and only the part which the bishops themselves wanted to make known in Rome. However, they show us the awareness that these bishops had of being an advanced church, at the forefront of some problems posed by modernity: a proud Church of France, which negotiated with Rome concerning the institutionalisation of its charismatic/innovative experiences, and did so with prudence, but also without awe.

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**115** The research does not elaborate on how Rome received the *relationes*, a subject on which further investigation would be carried out. For some reflections on the question, however, please refer to the introduction of this monographic issue.

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