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French Catholics and Their Church: Pluralism and Deregulation

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INTRODUCTION

The crisis in the French Catholic Church has become a sociological commonplace. The statistics showing its weakened state are well known, and each year the supporting studies are unsurprising. Today, if about 65% of the French people say they are still Catholics and choose, for example, religious burials, only 4.5% of them attend weekly mass. A comparison of these figures with those of 1970, when 82% said they were Catholics and 20% were “mass-goers,” speaks volumes.¹ Today France is the country with a Catholic culture where religious practice is the lowest: 35% of Italians and 13% of Spaniards still go to mass each week.²

Catholicism is very unequally diffused in the French population. Youth is under-represented, since only 16% of those younger than 25 appear among practicing Catholics, whereas they constitute 30% of the total population. Inversely, persons 50 and older represent 65%, whereas they are only 42% of the French population. There is also a gender split. Women are over-represented among practicing Catholics; they constitute 61% of the faithful although they are only 52% of the total population. As for occupations, there is under-representation among the blue-collars. Workers are only 18% of practicing Catholics, although they are 32% of the population. In short, practicing Catholics are older and better off than the average French person – which may explain why in certain dioceses of the Paris region the level of donations to parishes is rising despite a drop in the number of parishioners. But this remains exceptional; many other dioceses are on the verge of bankruptcy, like Poitiers. An audit commissioned by Monseigneur Pascal Wintzer in 2013 showed that the diocese was facing a deficit of 1 million euros.

Traditional French Catholic structures have been destabilized by this decline. The number of sacerdotal ordinations constantly shrinks: after 300 ordinations of diocesan priests per year in 1970, there were only 92 in 2013,³ and the intake is too low to decrease the average age of the clergy. In 2011 the median age of 13,822 secular priests was 75 years old. For each priest who is ordained, seven die. This decline translates into growing gaps among dioceses. Langres has 39 active priests (population 180,000) while Rennes has 284 (population 945,000).⁴ To cope with the decline, bishops resort to priests of foreign

¹Catholicism in France in 2009, IFOP study, July 2009.

²<http://www.eurel.info>.

³Conference of French Bishops (CEF), 2013.

⁴“Le prêtre, homme de Dieu, pour l’Eglise et l’humanité,” in *La Documentation catholique*, no 2492, 17 June 2012.

origin (there were 1,517 in 2011). Finally, diaconal ordinations are growing. Dioceses had only 589 permanent deacons in 1990, whereas there were 2,408 in 2012.

The religious orders, despite the embellishment of some younger congregations and orders, are also suffering a net decline. Male religious orders have lost about a third of their personnel in 10 years. In 2011, there were 6,566 monks and friars. In 2013, forty priests were ordained in France, including seven Dominicans, six Brothers of St. John's Congregation, five Jesuits, as well as four members of the Saint-Martin Community.⁵ In 2011, there were a total of 29,433 nuns and apostolic associates, of whom fewer than 3,000 were under fifty years of age. Some congregations dating from the 19th century have simply disappeared. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, 70 congregations disappeared in five years.⁶

The demand for sacraments is also in decline. Baptisms of infants aged 0 to 7 years old have dropped from 458,626 in 1990 to 273,108 in 2011 – but meanwhile the number of births in France has increased. This drop is only very partially compensated for by a rise in baptisms for those aged over seven, which went from 13,504 in 1990 to 27,011 in 2011. Included in this figure are adult baptisms, which between 2001 and 2010 went from 2,363 baptisms to 2,903, a 22% increase. Religious marriages are also receding, going from 147,146 in 1990 to 71,146 in 2011.⁷ These transformations are translated into the calendars of many morose parishes: the priest of Saint-Luc south of Saint-Étienne noted that in one year he celebrated 130 funerals and only 10 marriages.⁸

Parallel to this numerical erosion of French Catholicism, we must note a very strong relativization of belief. A CSA/*Le Monde des Religions* poll published in January 2007 caused a shock, showing the extreme vagueness of faith among the 65 % of the French people who did say they were Catholics: one in two (52% exactly) “believes in God”; 31% say they “don’t know” (if God exists), and 17 % “do not believe” (in God). This shows the quantitative importance of cultural identification with Catholicism independently of actual adherence to the Catholic faith.

The way in which declared Catholics represent God may also be surprising: 79 % of Catholics represent God as “a force, an energy, a spirit” and only 18 % as “a God with whom I can be in personal relation”. Moreover, only 58 % of declared Catholics believe in the

⁵All the following figures come from the statistical annual of the CEF in 2013.

⁶Source: *Bureau des cultes* of the Ministry of the Interior, 2011.

⁷These figures come from the Conference of French Bishops.

⁸*La Croix*, 22 -23 September 2012.

resurrection of Christ; 39 % in the virginity of Mary, and 37 % in the Trinity. Only a belief in miracles is more widespread: 64 %. Beliefs about life after death are also very approximate and confused: 10 % of Catholics affirm that they believe in the resurrection of the dead; 8 % believe in “reincarnation on earth into another life”; 53 % respond that “there is something, but I don’t know what”; 26 % affirm that “there is nothing”.

The prescriptions of the Church institution about sexual matters have rather feeble support among declared Catholics. Already in 1992, 64 % of women for whom religion is “a very important dimension of life” utilized the birth control pill or an IUD (intra-uterine device). This figure is slightly higher (74 %) for women who give “no importance” to religion- Catholics barely differentiate themselves. More recently a 2007 study showed that 26 % of regular mass-goers (or 1 in 4) think that virginity should be preserved until marriage.⁹ In 2009, 75 % of practicing Catholics thought that the Church institution should modify its views on contraception; 68 % on abortion; 69 % on remarriage by divorced persons. But only 49 % thought it should soften its positions on homosexuality.¹⁰ The spectacular demonstrations of the *Manif pour tous* (against same-sex marriage) probably drive much of their success from this fact. The Church’s refusal to equate homosexuality and heterosexuality is the position that merits the most assent from Catholics, whether or not they are practicing.

INTERPRETING THE DATA OTHERWISE: FROM EXPLANATION TO COMPREHENSION

The difficulties that traverse the Catholic Church of France are usually described in terms of these data. But how should we interpret them? The figures must be contextualized in order to be analyzed properly. Danièle Hervieu-Léger has stressed that these changes have taken place against the background of profound cultural evolutions in all Western societies.¹¹ More generally, among sociologists of religion these figures are often conceived in the framework of “modernity”: the statistical tendencies are conceived as illustrations of a process of more long-term secularization. The institution of the Church is supposed to be prey – like many other institutions – to crises of authority and truth that have been provoked by the affirmation of modern individualism.

⁹CSA/*La Vie* study, 2007.

¹⁰Poll by IFOP/*Le journal du dimanche*, March 2009.

¹¹Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d’un monde*, Paris: Bayard, 2003.

However, the way in which many sociologists think of relations between religions and modernity merits being deconstructed, as Johannes Fabian did of the way in which anthropologists have thought of the difference between Western societies and so-called primitive societies.¹² Sociological explanations that rely on the paradigm of modernity put at a distance the social reality of reference by interpretations that systematically overlook the historical uncertainties, the effects of context, and personal motivations, in order to concentrate on structural tendencies like individualization, subjectivisation, pluralisation, and secularization. Placed in the landscape of “modernity,” the social facts are extracted from any contingencies that are inextricably associated with them. The rationales of actors are not researched in a comprehensive way; actors are simply activated by the grand narrative of modernity on the basis of which the researcher interprets their conduct. Empirical studies merely serve to illustrate an already constructed narrative.

We propose getting rid of these kinds of explanation, and instead focusing on a more comprehensive approach. Our ambition is not to determine the causes of institutional changes in the church, but rather to understand how Catholics represent them and experience them.

Our hypothesis is that the “crisis” of the Catholic institution depends less on the changes described by the aforementioned statistics than on the diagnoses that are based on them. The crisis of Catholicism is a “conflict of interpretation, even a schism, about the origin and the nature of the crisis itself”, as François-André Isambert wrote in 1980.¹³ In our opinion, this statement is still pertinent. The crisis, as Jacques Lagroye more recently reminded us, is “a shared reading of certain events, a way of understanding or interpreting what is happening [...]. It is a collective construction of a vision of reality, and thus in itself a reality for the sociologist.”¹⁴ And this is what determines – much more than do quantitative erosions – what the future of the Church of France will be, because it is on that basis that Catholics think of it.

What do Catholics think about the future? How do they perceive the evolution of “their Church”? How do they analyze it? Throughout our study, we have sought to understand how they think about this

¹²Johannes Fabian, *Le temps et les autres: Comment l'anthropologie construit son objet*, trans. Estelle Henry-Bossonney & Bernard Müller, Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2006.

¹³François-André Isambert, “Le sociologue, le prêtre et le fidèle”, Henri Mendras (ed.), *La sagesse et le désordre, France 1980*, Paris: Gallimard, 1980, p. 219.

¹⁴Jacques Lagroye, *La vérité dans l'Église catholique, contestation et restauration d'un régime d'autorité*, Paris: Belin, 2006, p. 25.

evolution, what it is doing to them, and what they are doing with it. We undertake a description of the sensibilities and interpretations of the current situation of the Church of France based on interviews with a cross-section of believers. Understanding these perceptions is crucial because it is through them that Catholics think of their relation with the church institution, and this is how they are engaged in its future. Of course, an approach that focuses on the representations that Catholics have of “their Church” has its limits. We cannot offer an analysis of how the church institution objectively functions, but simply describe opinions about this functioning -- which already brings us a lot of information. All interviews cited in this book come from the survey conducted by the Association of Christian Intellectuals “Confrontations” between 2010 and 2013 (177 semi-structured interviews).¹⁵ Yann Raison du Cleuziou offered an initial analysis of this survey in his book “Qui sont les cathos aujourd’hui? Sociologie d’un monde divisé” (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2014).

As a complement, this description is accompanied by a panorama of recent institutional transformations. The bishops have not remained idle, waiting for the churches to empty (or to fill up again). They have played the card of synods for thirty years (some dioceses have held two, even three), and have tried to adapt parish and diocesan arrangements to ecclesiastical realities. With no more priests to occupy parishes, they have drastically cut the number of parishes. The disappearance of priests has somewhat imperiled the ecclesiastical network and attenuated the community feeling they sustained. Interviews with the Catholics we questioned demonstrate this in filigree. But this undermining of Catholicism as an institution does not necessarily lead to lifelessness among Catholics. Many movements led by the laity, like the *Entrepreneurs et Dirigeants Chrétiens* (Christian Business Leaders and Managers), are enjoying renewed vitality.

What we are witnessing is a recomposition of French Catholicism outside the diocesan territorial and clerical framework. We examine how this framework came about, starting with how Catholicism has interacted with the political field since the French Revolution.

¹⁵Interviews were collected by a team composed of Françoise Parmentier, Geneviève Dahan-Seltzer, Catherine Grémion, Christian Manuel, and Yann Raison du Cleuziou.

CHAPTER I

CATHOLICS AND POLITICAL HISTORY

In France, Catholicism has long been a political subject. On the one hand, the weight of secularism (*laïcité*) and the legal framework do partly determine the way Catholics live and think of themselves. But on the other hand, despite the decline in religious practice, Catholics have maintained the capacity to mobilize to influence civil politics.

THE STATE AND CATHOLICS: A HISTORY OF PRAGMATIC SECULARISM

The second article of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1958) stipulates: “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic [...] that ensures the equality before the law of all citizens, without distinction of origins, race or religion. It respects all beliefs.” But while the principle of secularism is consecrated at the summit of the French judicial order and is given great symbolic value, its practical scope as always remained subject to interpretation. Admittedly, the idea of a “separation” of religion and politics is not relevant in France, where the reality is very different from what the expression “separation of Church and State” implies.¹ Secularism in France is extremely ambivalent due to its history and the varied ways it has been applied.

1789-1799: the Founding Decade

Historically, this ambivalence is primarily explained by the pragmatism of successive post-Revolutionary regimes that had to define or redefine the relations between the state and religion. It is also explained by the close link that the Catholic Church has maintained with French society. After the failure of all the policies that abruptly and radically swerved between pro-religious and anti-religious that were tried in the decade from 1789 to 1799, pragmatic approaches became desirable.

The first step in the juridical secularization of France was the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen) of 1789, a few weeks after the Bastille fell. The Declaration was made under the auspices of “The Supreme Being” and in its article 10 states that “No one shall be disquieted for his

¹Émile Poulat, *Scruter la loi de 1905. La République française et la Religion*, Paris, Fayard, 2010.

opinions, including his religious views". Although this declaration is often thought of as the foundation of the modern legal order, on a religious level it is continuous with the Ancien Régime. Louis XVI had already relaxed the status of Jews and Protestants. The religious policy of the first years of the Revolution was less a break than a modernization of the existing one. In 1789 the tithe (the tax that financed the clergy) was suppressed and church property was nationalized and partly sold as "national goods" (which represented almost 40% of existing real estate);² the counterpart was that it was now up to the nation to subsidize the cost of worship. Consequently, in July 1790, the Catholic Church was nationalized and the provision for worship was rationalized and modernized as a function of the options offered by Gallican thought (i. e. limitation of papal primacy in temporal affairs and the national Church.)³ For example, dioceses thus had to conform to the new geography of *départements* created in 1789. This was undoubtedly a power play, but one that did not exceed what the very Catholic Emperor Joseph II executed in Austria a few decades previously. The secularization of society by measures like the legalization of divorce and the nationalization of civil status were not turned against religion but instead were the application of the principle of freedom or else a rationalization of administration.⁴ It was supposed that Christianity would remain among the rationalized forms as the symbolic and spiritual fermenting agent of the society being invented. During the Festival of the Federation that solemnized the dawning political era, priests wearing tricolor scarves celebrated a high mass.

However, part of the Church would enter into opposition to the Revolution starting in 1791. Most of the bishops and a good half of the lower clergy refused to take the oath of fidelity to the nation, a refusal that was supported by Pope Pius VI, who denounced these unilateral modifications to the organization of the church in French society. The "Constitutional Church" supported by the French state, and the "Refractory Church" supported by Rome faced off against each other. The conflict was both religious and political. Suspicions about the loyalty of Catholics to the Revolution would contribute to the rise of a policy of de-Christianization that culminated under the Terror in 1793.

²Bernard Bodinier & Eric Teyssier, *L'évènement le plus important de la révolution française, la vente des biens nationaux*, Paris: Société des études robespierristes et comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2000.

³Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

⁴Claude Langlois, "Les trois cercles de la laicisation", in *Projet*, n°123, September-October, 1988, pp. 103-104.

Many churches were closed or destroyed, the crosses along roadsides were knocked down, altar objects were profaned and relics dispersed, and finally of course refractory Christians and priests were persecuted and massacred.⁵ After 1792, the religious issue split France between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries and opened a period of profound civil war. Between 20% and 30% of the population perished⁶ before the fall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794) initiated a détente.

The first stage was the decree of “2 Sans-culotides Year II” (18 September 1794). On that day the budget of the Constitutional church was suppressed; therefore the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was implicitly abolished and the state became secular. Then, by a decree in February 1795, the National Convention granted freedom of worship and privatized the church it had nationalized five years before. Religions could be freely practiced and their security was guaranteed as long as their worship services were not held in public. In May of 1795 the churches not previously sold as national goods were restored for religious use.

The intentions of what would be considered the first “separation” of church and state are important to understand. Abbé Grégoire, a Constitutional bishop and revolutionary leader, during his speech of 1st Nivose (21 December 1794) suggested that freedom of worship would remove the counterrevolutionaries’ principal motive for revolt, going so far as to announce: “By this, you would neutralize the political influence of these forms of worship.”⁷ This sentence from Grégoire echoes what François-Antoine de Boissy d’Anglas wrote in the preliminary report on freedom of worship:

It has been shown by experience in all ages that the attraction of religious practices for weak souls grows with the care that is taken to prohibit them. Therefore supervise what you cannot prevent; regularize what you cannot forbid. [...] Be very careful not to force to be practiced underground with enthusiasm what would otherwise be

⁵Michel Vovelle, 1793, *La révolution contre l’Église*, Complexe, Bruxelles, 1988; Jean-Clément Martin (ed.), “La Guerre civile entre Histoire et Mémoire”, in *Enquêtes et documents*, n°21, Nantes: Université de Nantes-Ouest éditions, 1995.

⁶Jean-Clément Martin (ed.), *Religion et Révolution*, Paris, Anthropos/Economica, 1995; Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France*, Paris: Seuil, 1987.

⁷Noël-Laurent Pissot, *Histoire du clergé de France depuis la convocation des états généraux par Louis XVI jusqu’au rétablissement du Culte par le premier Consul Bonaparte*, tome III, Paris: J. Garnier, 1803.

practiced with indifference, even with boredom, in a private house.⁸

The statements of Grégoire and Boissy d'Anglas are important because they laid the basis for the way religions have been thought of since then: not in an ideological way, but in a very pragmatic way, as a function of public order alone. However in 1797 an anti-religious took on, since the loyalty of Catholics (whether refractories or constitutionals) to the Napoleonic Directory remained suspect. Many priests would be deported; moreover, Pius VI supported the anti-French coalition in Europe.

1801-1905: From Concordat to "Discordat"

In 1801, Bonaparte forced on Pope Pius VII a Concordat that put an end to the religious crisis without going back to the Ancien Régime. Worship became a form of public service. Catholicism was recognized as the religion of the majority of the French people but did not have the status of a national religion. Clerics would be functionaries, and as civil servants be dealt with (and paid) by the state. Four great religions were recognized: Catholic, Reformed (i. e. Protestant), Israelite, Lutheran. Relations between the Church of France and Rome were totally controlled: authorization to receive Roman texts was required, as once upon a time under the Gallican system. Congregations (religious orders) were authorized only to the extent they would benefit the state, like the *Filles de la Charité* (Daughters of Charity) who were very useful for dealing with poverty. Apart from the episode when the monarchy was restored (1815-1830) – the Catholic Church temporarily recovered its status as the national religion and benefited from more conservative legislation – state control over religion as established by the 1801 Concordat would endure until 1905.

This equilibrium would be broken when republicans assumed political power under the Third Republic born after the crisis of 1877. Breaking with Maréchal de MacMahon's "moral order", they undertook to secularize the state. A whole series of symbolic measures would feed discord between the Republic and the Church: the suppression of the obligation to rest on Sunday (1879), the dissolution and expulsion of the Jesuits, the secularization of cemeteries (1881), the secularization of hospitals, the suppression of government-sponsored Catholic faculties (1885), the removing of religious emblems in courts, and freedom to

⁸François-Antoine de Boissy d'Anglas, "Rapport préliminaire au décret de liberté des cultes", 1795, article available online at www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/Boissydanglas1795.asp, consulted 4 April 2012.

choose funerals (1887), compelling monastic brothers and seminarians to do military service, and the transformation of the Sainte Geneviève church into a “Panthéon” devoted to the worship of republican “great men” (1889).

The “School Quarrel” pitted the Republic against the Catholic Church over the 1882 law making primary education obligatory and secular, and the stake was control over the teaching of morality. Republicans were trying to fashion an individual who would be autonomous from any social or religious allegiance as the way to sustain the democratization of society. But Catholics perceived this as an attack on the social order, which they thought was indispensably founded on religion.⁹ The clergy was moved to become a veritable force opposing the emancipation of the political field; they tried to subject it to spiritual categories of evaluation.¹⁰ In the context of the Dreyfus Affair (which exposed the Church as tainted with anti-Semitism), the left-wing alliance carried the legislative elections of 1902. The new president of the governing council applied very severe measures against unauthorized schools. Religious orders, because they answered directly to Rome and thus escaped control by the Concordat, would after 1901 be subject to authorization, too. A major share of them went into exile; their property was confiscated. The Concordat situation became untenable: the clergy was hierarchically subject to a government that was pursuing an anticlerical policy.

To escape the resultant “discordat”, the Chamber instituted a parliamentary commission in October 1902 to prepare a new separation of church and state. The separation was consummated in a law of December 1905,¹¹ institutionalizing the principle of secularism in a divide between public and private spheres, which allowed the emergence of a national identity that was differentiated from reference to Catholicism.

The law of 1905 laid down two great principles: the first was the guarantee of the freedom of conscience and the free exercise of worship (art. 1), and the second was that the Republic would not subsidize worship. Then the law created a new system of administering religious

⁹Yves Deloye, *Ecole et citoyenneté. L'individualisme républicain de Jules Ferry à Vichy: controverses*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1994.

¹⁰Yves Deloye, *Les voix de Dieu, Pour une autre histoire du suffrage électoral: le clergé catholique français et le vote (XIX^e-XX^e siècle)*, Paris: Fayard, 2006. Yves Deloye & Olivier Ihl, “Deux figures singulières de l'universel: La République et le sacré”, in Marc Sadoum (ed.), *La démocratie en France, vol. 1, Idéologies*, Paris: Gallimard, 2000, pp. 138-246.

¹¹Jacqueline Lalouette, *La séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat: genèse et développement d'une idée, 1789-1905*, Paris: Seuil, 2005; Jacqueline Lalouette, *L'Etat et les cultes: 1789-1905-2005*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005.

observance: all the property of the four great religions under the Concordat was nationalized and handed over to local communes. The instruments of worship contained in them (furniture, paintings, etc.) were also nationalized. The buildings were placed at the disposition of religions in an unlimited way, and the presbyteries, seminaries and episcopal palaces in a more limited way. The law defined the status of religious association, a status that could be given by the state to a group upon request, along with the right to make use of a place of worship and the objects and furniture associated with it. In return, religious associations had to ensure the site's protection and upkeep. Since their vocation was religious, these associations could not receive subsidies from the state but they would still benefit from an advantageous tax classification. Finally, all religious observances in public space were to be regulated and subject to authorization, including both religious processions and the pealing of steeple bells (arts. 25-36). It was forbidden to affix religious signs to public monuments.

From 1905 to Our Day: Pragmatic Secularism

The 1905 law manifested less the end of the state's desire to control religions than a transformation of the modes of this control. As in 1795, pragmatism as justified by the defense of public order and the national interest remained a durable principle in future management of religious affairs.

For example, the 1905 law has never been applied to the entirety of French territory. In the African colonies its application was suspended because state control over the Muslim religion was deemed politically necessary, and support for Catholic missionaries was useful for the diffusion of French culture.¹² In Alsace and in Moselle, regions on the border with Germany that were reintegrated into France in 1919, the Concordat style was retained out of a desire for appeasement after World War One, and due to strong Catholic political mobilization. Even today in this region, clergy of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Judaic confessions belong to the public service. French Guyanne has a religious public service, but not as a function of the Concordat but as an inheritance from the monarchy,¹³ which translates into public financing of Catholicism.

¹²Raberh Achi, "Laïcité d'empire: les débats sur l'application du régime de séparation à l'islam imperial", in Patrick Weil (ed.), *Politiques de la laïcité au XX^e siècle*, Paris: PUF, 2007.

¹³Emile Poulat, *Scruter la loi de 1905. La République française et la Religion*, op.cit.

Therefore since 1905 the French state has never been totally separated from religion. The Central Office of Religions, which centrally manages all these relations within the Ministry of the Interior, cannot apply a secularism that might be offensive to religious actors who are also its partners.¹⁴ The state and religions must cooperate in the system.

French government has always sought to regulate religious practices indirectly by fostering religious institutions that are capable of training its partners. And when a religion is too weakly institutionalized for it to be able to develop this partnership, then the government invites the faithful to organize themselves and acquire official representatives whom they can trust. This was the case for Islam with the CFCM (*Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*) created by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2003;¹⁵ as Minister of the Interior, he pursued a strategy of recognizing the representatives of Islam in order to supervise Muslims¹⁶ and even fashion a “French Islam”. Nicolas Sarkozy pushed the CFCM to recognize officially that the wearing of the headscarf by women was not a religious prescription.

The state could interfere in spiritual matters even more than that. The 2001 law on sects led to the charge of “mental manipulation”: it gave the state the possibility of interpreting the nature of religious constraint. Even if the state’s proclaimed principle behind its intervention was the struggle against disturbance of the public order and the defense of individual rights and freedoms, the Catholic and Protestant authorities (among others) intervened to denounce their fear of state interference in the definition of beliefs and of legitimate religious forms.¹⁷

The government also got involved in selecting those Muslim imams to whom it would grant a resident visa (*permis de séjour*) for France.¹⁸ The high point of these interventions in the spiritual domain was reached over the issue of the training of imams at the end of the 1990s. In a 2003 report on secularism, the vice-president of the National Assembly argued for the creation of a faculty of Muslim theology that

¹⁴Alain Boyer, “Comment l’Etat laïque connaît-il les religions? ”, in *Archives en Sciences Sociales des Religions*, n°129, 2005.

¹⁵Hervé Terrel, “L’Etat et la création du CFCM”, in Yves-Charles Zarka (ed.), *L’islam en France*, Cités Hors Série, Paris: PUF, 2004, pp. 67-92.

¹⁶Olivier Roy, *La laïcité face à l’Islam*, Paris: Hachette, 2006. Also Solenne Jouanneau, *Les imams en France; une autorité religieuse sous contrôle*, Marseille: Agone, 2013.

¹⁷Jean-Pierre Chantin, “Les sectes en France. Quel questionnement sur la laïcité? ”, in Patrick Weil (ed.), *Politiques de la laïcité au XX^e siècle*, Paris: PUF, 2007, pp. 553- 569.

¹⁸Solenne Jouanneau, *Les imams en France ; une autorité religieuse sous contrôle, op.cit.*

would allow “anchoring Islam in modernity by federating the work of a number of scholars who are engaged in critical work on the Koranic text”. This idea would result in the creation of Islamic studies training at the University of Strasbourg.¹⁹ Thus the state was trying to fashion a kind of Islam that would conform to the values of the French Republic. The law on the wearing of the headscarf in 2004 (or on the full veil *burqa* in 2011) also belongs to this policy of imposing boundaries on what Islam could legitimately require in a national society. The emergence of Islam is also interesting because it reveals the ambiguities of secularism since 1905. Most of the edifices for worship prior to 1905 belong to the state and to the local communities and therefore they pay for their upkeep. This is a form of indirect subsidy to the Christian and Jewish faiths. Muslims do not have sites of worship dating before 1905 and so cannot benefit from this form of support. In order to establish a kind of equity (but also to avoid mosques being financed by nations in the Arab peninsula that might require a wahhabit Islam in exchange), the French government and local communes sought a means of subsidizing the construction of mosques.

Despite everything, at the end of the 20th century Catholic culture remained an important reservoir of symbols for the Republic. Catholicism was used by political parties on the Right as a resource to enable giving back to France a strong cultural identity, and to counter the cultural threat that the immigrant populations represented. Inversely and ironically, Catholics appropriated secularism. Most of them defend it because they are a majority in the nation and its principal beneficiaries. Moreover, many Catholics mobilize secularism to criticize the Muslims, whom they think are transgressing it, for example by wearing the veil or by demands for dietary observance in the public schools. Jean Baubérot has called this situation “Catho-secularism”:²⁰ secularism maintains Catholicism in the position of being a quasi-civic religion while curbing the recognition of Islam. Here the Right and a portion of Catholics find a common interest.

CATHOLIC POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Throughout this history, it is interesting to see how French Catholics have positioned themselves in the political field.

¹⁹Francis Messner & Anne-Laure Zwilling (ed.), *La formation des cadres religieux en France, une affaire d'État?* Geneva: Labor et fides, 2010.

²⁰ Jean Baubérot, *La laïcité falsifiée*, Paris: La Découverte, 2012.

Old Political Cleavages

The political cleavages among Catholics often have a theological origin. Émile Poulat has shown that ever since the French Revolution there exists a cleavage between integralist Catholics (*intégraux*) and liberal Catholics.²¹

Integralists (*intégraux*) never want politics to become autonomous from spiritual power. While they support the engagement of Catholics in politics, it is so that the Church might consider and obtain legislation that conforms to its morality. They think that religious truth gives meaning to all human practices and that legislation therefore must be in conformity with this truth in order to be legitimate. They reject modern values and especially the sovereignty of the people. Exemplars of this current are counterrevolutionary thinkers like Joseph de Maistre (1753 – 1821) and Louis de Bonald (1754 – 1840).

By contrast, **liberals** recognize that religion and politics should be autonomous from each other. They demand the political independence of religion as well as religious independence from politics. While they support the engagement of Catholics in politics, this time it is in the name of their duties as citizens, and their faith springs solely from their private lives. Here we find the position of the editors of the journal *L'Avenir*, who were disavowed by the 1832 encyclical *Mirari Vos* on liberalism, but nevertheless their current would leave a legacy in the next century.

At the end of the 19th century, starting in the Third Republic, this cleavage was transformed into a cleavage over France's *political regime*. Some Catholics saw the monarchy as the natural ally of Catholicism. Inversely liberal Catholics rallied to the Republic and decided to play the parliamentary game in order to influence legislation. Jacques Piou with his *Action Libérale Populaire* was until 1918 the leader of Catholics who adopted a position that was both conservative and republican. After the death of Comte de Chambord in 1883, the last heir of the elder Bourbon branch, and then the invitation to rally to the Republic by Pope Leo XIII in 1892, some of the socially active integralist Catholics like Albert de Mun would join *Action Libérale Populaire*, where they would

²¹Émile Poulat, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral*, Paris: Casterman, 1969. *Eglise contre bourgeoisie. Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel*, Paris: Casterman, 1977. For a synthesis, see Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Vers un nouveau christianisme?*, Paris: Cerf, 1986, p. 248 ff.

work to push social legislation through the Republic's parliament. They fund the social Catholic current.²²

Starting with the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), *integralist* Catholics gathered around Charles Maurras and what would become *Action Française* (a monarchist and counter-revolutionary movement that was formerly anti-Dreyfus). They were at odds with both *Action Libérale Populaire* and the Christian Democrats. Pius X's condemnation of the Sillon movement in 1911 reinforced the position of the royalists, as well as the pragmatism of rallied Catholics who avoided mobilizing the faith to justify their political involvement out of fear of being suspects in the eyes of Rome. In fact, the real rallying of Catholics to the Republic took place against the German enemy in the trenches of the 1914-1918 War. The victory in 1918 and the shared spilt blood endowed the Republic with a solid patriotic legitimacy. Between the two world wars, as the hope for a monarchical restoration dwindled, *Action Française* lost its political effectiveness, although it kept a great intellectual aura.²³ In 1926, Pius XI condemned it.

This enabled a renewal of Christian Democracy that was influenced by the non-conformism of the 1930s.²⁴ The Dominicans of the journal *Sept*, Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain, criticized Catholics' nostalgia for Christianity, arguing that it was by the engagement of Catholics that evangelical values should permeate society. This kind of thinking offered a new synthesis of integralist and liberalist Catholicism, and it would be strongly echoed in the movements of *Action Catholique* where a new generation of Catholic laypersons asserted themselves, as we shall see in later chapters. Their spirituality could be called "puritan": all aspects of life – ordinary, professional, and political – should become a manifestation of the gospel.

World War Two would divide Catholics even more because Maréchal Pétain, when he took power in the Vichy Regime in June 1940, laid claim to a synthesis of Catholic and republican values. Thus at the Liberation in 1944, Catholic conservatism was discredited due to its compromises with the Vichy Regime. By contrast, the Christian-Democrats who came out of the Resistance and were ready to collaborate with the Left were strengthened by the war. Their party

²²Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France, 1822-1870*, Paris: PUF, 1951. See also: Georges Hoog, *Histoire du catholicisme social en France*, 2 volumes, Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1945-1946.

²³François Huguenin, *L'Action française, Une histoire intellectuelle*, Paris: Perrin, 2011.

²⁴Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30, Une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française*, Paris: Seuil, 2001.

(*Mouvement Républicain Populaire*, MRP) became the main political party, adopting a center-left line.²⁵

Integralist Catholicism was split in the post-war era between an intransigent Catholicism and a progressive Catholicism. The two currents contested the dominant political values, the former in the name of a very conservative conception of the social order, and the latter in the name of an ambition to transform the world in the name of justice. During the 1950s, the relation to Communism was the issue that separated these two currents.²⁶ The intransigents saw it as a threat to liberty and property, while the progressives saw it as a utopian aspiration that should incite Catholics to evangelical radicalism and to stop compromising with the established order. This cleavage would be fed by the war in Algeria and decolonization.

The Sixties decade superimposed a new split on preceding ones. Intransigent integralists were in favor of a rather literalist reading of the Vatican Council. They stood in a position of absolute fidelity to Roman authority and did not want to depart from it. They remained attached to the pyramidal and hierarchical structure within the Church and wished for Catholic difference to be clearly asserted in relation to the “world”. This current (formerly dispersed in the face of the progressive avant-gardists) slowly restructured and gradually assumed a dominant place in the Church of France when John-Paul II became pope at the end of the 1970s.²⁷

Meanwhile, the progressive integralists would be even more attentive to changes in relation to the “world” than was the legitimate Council. Its members continued to assert that the Church was “the People of God” and to play down its hierarchical structure. Struggles for freedom and justice, for economic and social development, or against poverty and inequality seemed to them necessary as bearing witness to the Gospel. Therefore they acted in favor of the disadvantaged and did not hesitate to join left-wing movements from time to time. The support of these activists for the Left allowed a new kind of socialism to emerge and to emancipate itself from the influence of the Communist party.²⁸

²⁵Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la démocratie-chrétienne*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1980.

²⁶Yvon Tranvouez, *Catholiques et communistes. La crise du progressisme chrétien 1950-1955*, Paris: Cerf, 2000.

²⁷Laurent Fabre, “Le discours de réattestation identitaire de l’Église de France sous le pontificat de Jean-Paul II”, in Jean Baudouin, Philippe Portier (eds.), *Le mouvement catholique français à l’épreuve de la pluralité. Enquête autour d’une militance éclatée*, Rennes: PUR, 2002, pp. 211-235.

²⁸Denis Pelletier & Jean-Louis Schlegel, *A la gauche du Christ, Les chrétiens de gauche en France de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris: Seuil, 2012; Jean-

Finally in the Sixties, the liberals saw the Council as a vindication for their position. For them faith is an exclusively individual affair and no longer has to occupy a structuring position in society. This is a bourgeois Catholicism.²⁹ In politics these Catholics are positioned to the Right because their interests are more social than religious.

The bishops recognized the political dispersal of Catholics during their assembly in Lourdes in 1972.³⁰ As Jean-Marie Donegani has shown, political pluralism entered Catholic culture.³¹ In fact, political convictions arose from their private lives, and ecclesiastical authorities no longer dare to intervene on these questions. Because of the conservative orientation given the Church by Paul VI and then by John-Paul II, Catholics on the Left took their distance, and even broke with the Church. Today a wide majority of practicing Catholics stand on the Right. Catholics on the Left are in the minority, although the movement for alternative globalization has in recent years given them back some visibility.³² Their weakness is linked to their being doubly rejected: by the Church due to the conservatism of the majority of practicing Catholics, and by the Left due to its secular and anticlerical culture.

During the presidential elections of 2012, in the first round, according to a Harris-Viadeo poll commissioned by *La Vie*, 47 % of those who practice Catholicism voted for the candidate on the right, Nicolas Sarkozy (although among all electors only 29.6% did so), and 17% for the center-right candidate François Bayrou, 15% for the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, and finally 14% for François Hollande on the left.³³ In the second round, they voted 79% or 66% for Nicolas

François Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau Parti socialiste: les minorités qui ont rénové le PS*, Toulouse: Privat, 1990.

²⁹Emile Poulat, *Le catholicisme sous observation: Entretiens avec Guy Lafon*, Paris: Le Centurion, 1983, pp. 186-7.

³⁰Mgr Gabriel Matagrín, *Politique, Église et Foi. Pour une pratique chrétienne de la politique*, Paris: Centurion, 1972.

³¹Jean-Marie Donegani, *La liberté de choisir. Pluralisme religieux et pluralisme politique contemporain*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1993. See also "Identités religieuses et pluralité des rapports au monde", in Pierre Bréchon, Bruno Duriez, Jacques Ion (eds.), *Religion et action dans l'espace public*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000, pp. 211-224

³²Christophe Grannec (ed.), *Les chrétiens dans la mouvance altermondialiste*, Paris: Karthala, 2011.

³³Henrik Lindell, "Sarkozy largement arrivé en tête chez les catholiques pratiquants", 26 April 2012, Cf. http://www.lavie.fr/religion/catholicisme/sarkozy-largement-arrive-en-tete-chez-les-catholiques-pratiquants-23-04-2012-26706_16.Php.

Sarkozy, depending on estimates.³⁴ Although largely on the Right, practicing Catholics were in 2010 much more hesitant than the rest of the French to vote for the extreme right-wing party, the National Front. Since then, more of them (especially the young) give their votes to the party of Marine Le Pen.³⁵ This is explained by the feeling shared by young Catholics of being threatened by Muslims of immigrant origin.

Catholics and Political Parties

In France, the Christian Democratic current has never enjoyed great success. The last major Party of this family, the Popular Republican Movement (MRP), after having a central role in the Fourth Republic, disappeared in the late 1960s. Its activists were dispersed between socialism, the center-right, and Gaullism. Since then, practicing Catholics have voted on the right. But, they do not influence the right-wing parties and cannot determine their political agendas. In recent decades, attempts to politicize the Catholic label have failed. In 1994, Philippe de Villiers created the Movement for France: a political party defending the sovereignty of France against European integration and defending Christian "values" – especially the family. This party, however, has never been able to thrive outside the European elections where he obtained significant results. It has been inactive since 2009.

More recently, within the UMP, Nicolas Sarkozy's Party, the center-right MP Christine Boutin created the Christian Democratic Party in 2009. Her aim was to exchange her electoral support for a defense-of-family policy. In 2006 and 2012, Christine Boutin agreed not to present her presidential bid in exchange for Nicolas Sarkozy's opposition to the legalization of euthanasia and gay marriage. However, the influence of Christine Boutin is quite relative. She has never been accepted as a legitimate representative of all Catholics and her desire to build her political position from a Catholic identity embarrassed many of them. Many see proclaimed Catholics engaging in politics as illegitimate, faith must remain a private matter.

Today, lacking political parties and leaders who might represent them, Catholics are invisible – or almost so – in politics. A Catholic coalition does not exist except through street demonstrations, which are irregular but always surprisingly large-scale.

³⁴Stéphanie Le Bars, "79% des catholiques pratiquants réguliers ont voté pour Nicolas Sarkozy", post dated 7 May 2012, Cf. <http://religion.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/05/07/79-des-catholiques-pratiquants-ont-vote-pour-nicolas-sarkozy/>.

Mass Political Mobilization

On 24 June 1984, 850,000 people (according to the police) or two million (according to organizers) demonstrated in Paris against the integration of Catholic schools into state public education. (The planned law was withdrawn.) On 31 January 1999, about 100,000 people protested the law authorizing civil union between same-sex couples. (The law was passed nevertheless.) On 13 January 2013, a demonstration against the opening of marriage to homosexuals (*La Manif pour Tous* - LMPT) assembled 340,000 persons (according to the police) or one million (according to organizers).

Are these demonstrators really so conservative? Yes, many of them think that the traditional model of the family as sacralized by marriage cannot be superseded. However, among the younger demonstrators could be heard another kind of argument that is much less conservative: a reference to future generations, not wanting the children of same-sex parenting to be guinea pigs, and of course and more generally, the right of children to have both a father and a mother. In this respect, from the perspective of the work of sociologist Bruno Latour, the LMPT could be seen as the ambition to extend democratic representation to the “voiceless”. Representatives of human embryos or future generations should have their place in the “parliament of things”, scientists represent the interests of oceans and bio- species.³⁶ This “human ecology” seems a hybrid of conservatism and progressivism.³⁷

These social segments share a profound sentiment of being demoted in the social hierarchy. They cannot understand their drop in status. They believe they are doing everything right: good families, good, well-educated children, good citizens on the moderate right, honest workers, good Catholics who respect secularism. They think of themselves as the true France and as the legitimate representatives of the silent majority. Yet they feel marginalized by the success of cultural liberalism among the social élites; they fear that homosexuals or gender politics will pervert their children. Their relation to homosexuality is bourgeois: no problem with it, but elsewhere and not here, and most especially, no public identity!

More generally, we must remember that the family is a value that is widely supported by the French in general and *a fortiori* among Catholics, for whom it is both a social and an intimate experience that is intensely valorized. Why do Catholics get more involved than others in

³⁶Bruno Latour, *Politiques de la nature. Comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie*, Paris: La Découverte, 1999.

³⁷Gaël Brustier, *Le Mai 68 conservateur. Que restera-t-il de la Manif pour tous ?* Paris: Cerf, 2014.

defending it? Because they belong to a strongly integrated group whose members share the conviction of benefiting from a privileged relationship to the truth. Commitment is stimulated by both a feeling of being invested in the duty of defending his truth and by the diffuse social pressure that is exercised within the group. The capacity of Catholics to mobilize also testifies to the strength of socialization within Catholicism. Catechism, Catholic teaching, the parishes, youth movements – all endow the individuals who pass through them with a very strong collective identity and insert them in networks.

Beware of hasty generalizations! Nor should we see LMPT as a homogeneous movement. It is split between opponents of homosexuality and those who think that homosexuals should have the right to a civil union but not to a marriage. Moreover, interpretations of LMPT as a Catholic movement have a tendency to erase the complexity and divisions within the Catholic world. We should not forget that about 40% of practicing Catholics are not hostile to the law opening up marriage to homosexuals (Pèlerin poll, June 2013). For pastoral reasons, many priests were embarrassed by the confusion in the public mind between the Church and LMPT.³⁸ Some bishops marched in the demonstrations, but many kept themselves apart. Catholicism came out of the demonstrations very split.

These mobilizations have divided the Catholics themselves, from basic parishioners to bishops. The younger generations of Catholics, characterized by a strong distrust of modernity, think of themselves as a religious minority that should have special rights. Catholics of older generations refuse to follow this communitarian way of thinking of themselves. Younger Catholics think their relationship to citizenship must be configured by their faith; the older Catholics think that the relationship with their faith must integrate the constraints of citizenship and especially secularism.

It is important to note that these street protests show that it is neither the political parties nor the ecclesiastical authorities that are the vectors of the politicization of Catholics. The mobilization of the Catholics comes from civil society: humanitarian NGOs; family associations; associations of spirituality; youth movements, etc. However, these social networks have not been studied. Except in a few studies, Catholic civil society remains largely ignored, which makes irruptions of Catholics in the public debate more unpredictable and surprising. A survey of civil society as a vector of political socialization

³⁸Philippe Clanché, *Mariage pour tous: Divorce chez les cathos*, Paris: Plon, 2014.

and mobilization would be useful for discussing the current influence of civil society in democratic societies.³⁹

The LMPT success shows that political Catholicism has not disappeared. Over the past two years it has shown its survival in an exceptional way: in Spain by draft legislation restricting access to abortion; in France by a series of mass protests against the opening of marriage to homosexuals. This movement has had an influence in Italy, where protests on the same model have taken place, and in Croatia, where a revision of the constitution has made gay marriage impossible. This Catholic mobilization puts new ethical issues on the political agenda. Stein Rokkan showed that Christian Democracy was born from a cleavage between Church and State. One may wonder if conflicts over gender policies are not going to create new forms of partisan cleavage. One may wonder if a new form of conservatism is not being born in the debates around the mastery of "life",⁴⁰ which seems to hybridize Christian morality and ecological concern. Perhaps new political formations are arising from Catholic civil society.⁴¹

³⁹Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁴⁰Hanna Herzog & Ann Braude (eds.), (2009) *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.

⁴¹Pascal Delwit (ed.), *Démocraties chrétiennes et conservatismes en Europe: une nouvelle convergence?*. Bruxelles: Editions de l'université de Bruxelles, 2003.

CHAPTER II

CATHOLICISMS WITH CONTRASTING MATRICES

Unlike the “passing consumers” of Catholic rites, the most “engaged” Catholics have strong convictions about the legitimate definition of Catholicism.¹ Yet the engaged are divided because they defend different and sometimes antagonistic definitions of the faith and the practices that together give a ground for Catholic belonging. While they all think of themselves as faithful, the matrices of their faithfulness are varied and testify to the multiple interpretations that are possible of the Catholic religion. To understand the tensions and dynamics that traverse the Catholic field, we have to examine these matrices.

If we attend to what interviewees say, it is immediately apparent that there is a certain unity among them because they refer to common denominators – the founding role of Jesus, a single God, the need to combine faith and practice, a parish world revolving around a bell tower – and they all situate themselves in relation to the pope and the clergy. But then we observe a fragmentation in the ways of coordinating and prioritizing these various elements. To us it seems reductive to simplify this explosion into a contrast between “right” Catholics and “left” Catholics. Hence in an ideal-typical way, we propose to describe a grid space of positions based on two great axes that configure four cardinal points.

The first axis concerns ways of meeting God. On the one side, there is *inspiration*, meaning the experience of encountering God in practices that are barely codified (or not at all): ejaculatory prayer, meditation, Bible reading, presence of witness, service to the poor, lifetime events, communitarian sharing of goods, contemplation of nature. On the other side, there is *worship*, meaning the experience of a meeting with God in the forms codified by ecclesiastical authorities for this purpose: the sacraments (communion, confession), sacramental elements (candles, veneration of relics, wearing a blessed object) and all forms of codified prayer (litanies of the rosary and adoration of the host).

The second axis concerns the way of putting faith into practice. On the one side, there is *devotion*, meaning engagement in many forms

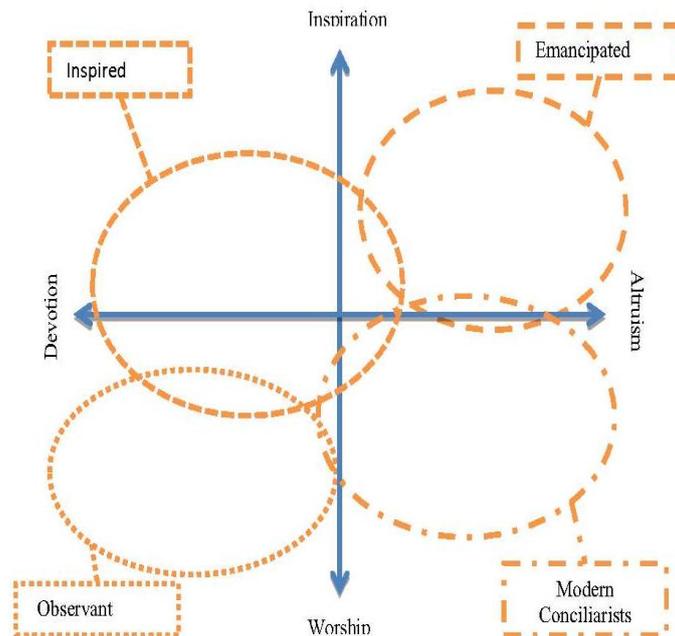
¹Most of this chapter is based on the analysis developed in Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *Qui sont les cathos aujourd'hui? Sociologie d'un monde divisé*, *op.cit.*, chap. 5.

of exercise directed to God, the Virgin, and the saints: prayers, giving praise, songs, and pilgrimages. At the opposite end, there is *altruism*, meaning involvement in works of solidarity with marginalized people (the handicapped, the elderly, children, migrants, refugees, the destitute) and the struggle against the causes of injustice (war, torture, economic inequality, underdevelopment, corruption, illiteracy).

Of course the four poles of *worship*, *inspiration*, *altruism*, and *devotion* come together among many committed Catholics, but most of them have a tendency to stress one dimension over another and therefore we may differentiate among and assign positions to these believers. This does not prevent any Catholic individual from combining these four aspects equally, in which case they would be situated at the intersection of the two axes. In what follows, quotations from interviewees are in italics and a footnote will give a thumbnail sketch of the speaker.

GRAPH:

Positioning Catholics in relation to dimensions of religious practice
 [terms: inspired, emancipated, observant, modern conciliarists]



THE FOUR MAIN CLUSTERS OF CATHOLICISM

This graph allows us to distinguish four main clusters.

1. First, there are the inspired. Their faith has as matrix a direct and personal relationship with God, which arose at a moment of conversion that reconfigured all aspects of their life. *“To say that ‘I know faith’, or that ‘I am experimenting’ is different. For me, I had an experience that I believe is fundamental [...] I received the effusion of the Spirit and I gave thanks, as I put it, because for me this changed my life as a man.”*² The life of faith is thus above all a very personal and informal relationship with God. It is a love story, a route to happiness. The Church is seen as a “walking stick” or guide on this path: *“In everything the church says these days there is an invitation to go along a path to happiness.”*³ The construction of self and conversion are closely linked; the main form of their fidelity to the faith matrix is the perpetual quest for a deeper conversion. “Blessedness”, “joy”, and “blossoming” attend the religious trajectory: *“If God exists, or even if He does not truly, He has helped me to be happy on this earth, and if He does indeed exist, this is light, happiness, plenitude – which means I was not wrong.”*⁴ This joy is not just individual but above all expressed within small communities of converts. This faith is lived in a fuller way in personal or community prayers, in reading the Bible, meeting witnesses, or interpreting signs of God’s will in ordinary life. Among the inspired, worship can also have great importance, as in the Emmanuel Community, for example.

The inspired stress celebration. For them mass is a communal moment to celebrate the Word and God’s Eucharistic gift. Gratitude to God should be expressed in festive forms: *“There is happiness and there is joy. There is beauty. I am sensitive to all that. I did a lot of theater when I was young, a lot of dance, singing. I am a poet and sculptor, too. So for me all this is something that means a lot.”*⁵ The inspired partly

²Bernard, aged 71, divorced and remarried, with 4 children of whom 3 were by his first wife, an aeronautical engineer, from a family of the provincial nobility, has read *France Catholique* at *Fondacio* for 20 years, Versailles, March 2010.

³Agnes, 54, married with 5 children, has been part of Notre-Dame teams, has undertaken study in theology at the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, member of *Fondacio* for 5 years, Versailles, March 2010.

⁴Francoise, 69, divorced, 3 children, administrative secretary at Lourdes hospital, member of *Action catholique des femmes* (ACF), Paris, April 2010.

⁵Helen, 73, married, raised in the Protestant religion in the USA, came to France at age 18, a psychotherapist and trainer in human relations, poet and

share the taste of the observant for hieratic qualities, but this has to be balanced with the mediation of festivity, fraternal gestures among laypeople, by everything that contributes to creating gaiety and allowing spontaneity. The community aspect is also crucial. Mass is the matrix of togetherness that grounds the group: “*Going to mass on Sunday is finding yourselves together in church.*”⁶

The inspired regret the superficiality of mass: “*In churches that are closed or have services and masses as an administrative thing, you have the impression that there is no interiority, it is difficult to pray [...] it lacks inwardness!*”⁷ The inspired are frustrated by intellectualist morality or by doctrines that all too often take the place of the Word of God during masses. For them, the Word should be celebrated and proclaimed in its newness. They prefer to attend masses where “*God speaks*”: “*There are many people who want to go to church, but if they go, do they find enough to fulfill them and to make them stay?*” *I’m not sure. [...] If the homily has hackneyed moral precepts or deals with current events, I think that people did not come for that. What I have discovered, especially thanks to retreats on-line, is that people want to have God spoken about and to hear [just] the Word of God.*”⁸

Altruism may be just as important as devotion, as in Faith and Light or the Arche Community, but still the stress in this cluster is on devotion and inspiration. Most of the inspired are members of Charismatic communities. Arising in the 1970s, these draw on Pentecostalism; their spirituality is centered on the Holy Spirit and personal conversion. Charismatics like “warm” liturgies with dances and modern songs.

2. The “emancipated” cluster’s faith is based on the love of others to which Jesus invites us. They are on the side of inspiration, which they seek in personal reading of the Gospels or reformed living as it is practiced in specialized Catholic Action Movements. Their religious life is structured by the construction of self and oriented to the resolution of questions linked to daily life: “*I open the gospel and there is a verse that is going to touch me and I am going to relate it to what happens to me in this moment – and voila. I am going to take away something to*

sculptress, converted to Catholicism after two years of marriage. Versailles, March 2010.

⁶Annaig, 40, married, 5 children, responsible for the *Chemin Neuf* Community, Paris, March 2010.

⁷Etienne, 49, married, journalist and writer, activist for interfaith dialogue, Paris, February 2010.

⁸Sister Michelle, 40, nun in a new community, historian, experience in Egypt, Paris, May 2010.

help me."⁹ In religious inspiration they seek the resources to find "balance" whether in their lives as couples or as families, or else in their professional situations.

Faith should be lived so as not to become hypocritical. The emancipated Catholics distrust parish life and, more generally, religious worship. Instead, it is within the groups of which they are members that they find ritual manifestations of faith. They want festive gatherings to "recharge themselves" or moments of meditation and reflection to stimulate their personal life. But the success of these occasions – their authentically religious moment – comes from their exceptional nature, as extra-ordinary; the truth of the gathered community must rely on strong affinity: *"Finally, things done in mass, I find that it is not natural enough [...] but mechanical. We repeat words we do not even understand any more. And this truly disturbs me. I prefer [...] a more vibrant side, what I find with the Scouts or when I am at Lourdes, or even at Taizé - I mean gatherings like that create pleasure because I think they have meaning."*¹⁰

The emancipated do not see the Eucharist as the summit of the mass and give higher value to the liturgy of the Word and to preaching. *"When you go to mass, the Gospel and everything that is the word of Jesus teaches us. I don't know, but for me, the Bible gives us, sketches for us, helps us to live – as Christians."*¹¹ So a mass should stimulate necessary reflection on personal progress: *"It is a little foolish to deprive yourself of an hour where you are gathered together, listening to sentences that exceed your understanding, though with some social mixing. Are there other examples in life where you find people who are together to improve themselves?"*¹² The emancipated are seeking an invitation to be reflective, to experience intellectual ferment, as they might find in one of the self-improvement or Bible study groups. *"If the sermon of the priest in my current parish does not touch me particularly and if I have the impression when I leave of not having taken the time to think or of not having managed to contemplate, then I prefer to stay*

⁹Sophie, 30, teacher in a school, responsible for a *Guide de France* troop (15/16 year olds) for three years, had not done Scouting before, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹⁰Juliette, 20, student in Lyon in labor law, responsible for a Scout troop for 6 months, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹¹Delphine, 26, consultant in environmental and technical and commercial security in software sales, responsible for a Scout troop, 2 years a scout, Compiègne, February 2010.

¹²Leon, 76, married, senior official, activist in several welfare associations, Paris January 2010.

home and find the means of thinking in my own way.”¹³ The relationship to Jesus takes place foremost through reflection on life stimulated by reading the Gospel.

The emancipated and some of the inspired think that the language of faith and the Catholic symbolic system are too disconnected from contemporary culture: “I remember something my daughter thought when she was little. One day she had seen a celebration with the gospels and she said ‘But there would be a lot of people in church if it was like that. ‘Often I think of the revolution of the Gregorians; I think that we in the 21st century should make a new revolution in the liturgy so that it has meaning, it is beautiful, and we are carried away together; liturgy is for that, to be carried away together, so that there will be something to sustain us.’”¹⁴

They miss the dynamism of priests, finding that masses are no longer lively and gay: “Well, it’s a young people’s mass, that’s what it is. There are more songs, it’s really even when they do Scout masses, what I see there, this year we began clapping hands, people looked at us like ‘what are they doing, they’re not going to clap hands in church?’ Yeah, yeah, and then suddenly it’s more lively.”¹⁵ So they are waiting for worship to be updated, for the liturgy to speak to them; it must come to find them in their own language and culture.

Fidelity to their faith matrix involves assuming ever more responsibility for all dimensions of human life. For them, it is a matter of living out authentically a love of others in all dimensions of ordinary experience: “The life of a Christian is with people around me, where they actually are, in hardship as well as in joy. It is searching for signs of God at the heart of life, the simple life with colleagues and neighbors [...] To be a Christian is to change your life, and share with others on a daily basis, to fight against fatalism, it means believing that if you push something to move, it will change. It is not waiting for God to make it happen.”¹⁶ These Catholics exercise their faith especially through altruism. In effect, any explicit witnessing seems to them vain if not idolatrous: “In the end, it is not because [...] somebody makes them read Scripture where they talk of God by mouthing the words that we pass

¹³Clemence, 20, studying biology to become a science teacher, leader of a Guide troop for two years, Compiègne, February 2010.

¹⁴Alix, 63, widow with three children, career as nurse and teacher, was a Girl Guide, then involved in *Vie Nouvelle*, MCC, and *Esperance et Vie* for the bereaved, member of *Semaines Sociales*, Rouen, April 2010.

¹⁵Marie, 19, in the school of business management and administration in Lille, responsible for a troop of 15-16 year olds in *Scouts et Guides de France*, Compiègne, February 2010.

¹⁶Marianne, 51, single, directs a social service office, member of ACO, Bobigny, February 2010.

along our faith. I think that nothing except our way of living and our way of doing things, actually does something.”¹⁷ Thus faith means above all living out the values: “simplicity, listening, sharing, work.”¹⁸ The *emancipated* are engaged in many struggles: development of the Third World, alternative globalization, defense of illegal aliens, ecology, solidarity with the homeless. Among them we find volunteers for Catholic Aid, the CCFD, *Cimade*. They are also active in ecological networks and in the sector of welfare economics, and they do not hesitate to cross over into political action when this seems necessary to fight against the causes of injustice.

3. The third cluster is the modern (Vatican II) conciliarists. These Catholics are somewhat older. Their faith’s matrix concerns the transgressions by Jesus of the Jewish social order: his criticism of the Pharisees, his pardoning of the adulterous woman, his dining with a tax collector, his caring for the needy and excluded. Their fidelity to their faith matrix is principally measured by a humanitarian posture, both modest and exacting, of openness to victims and compassion for them.

When they quote the Gospels, it is to affirm them as the one and only “source” and to justify the necessary decentering that Christians should do by turning toward others: “To move toward the poor, people on the fringes, that is what is specifically evangelic.”¹⁹ “The Gospel is the acceptance of other people in all their diversity.”²⁰ They consider that Christian authenticity is measured by the quality of the relationships formed with others. God is encountered in otherness, in the kind welcome extended to the stranger or in a dialogue between cultures. Humankind is God’s icon. For them, following Christ means renouncing the possession of the truth, accepting being transformed by encounters that are actually “calls”, welcoming someone else in his or her difference, without judgment. Letting oneself be shifted and transformed in one’s beliefs and convictions is a necessary kind of asceticism. Such a “displacement” should go so far as to challenge the rules instituted within the Church, up to the point of taking a certain risk out of respect for the other: “The Church should be more exposed, the Gospel constantly exhorts us to that.”²¹

¹⁷Jean, 21, fourth year at ECAM in Lyon, background in the Scouts sin childhood, in charge of a troop of 12/14 year olds, *Scouts et Guides de France* for 6 months, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹⁸Marine, 17, last year of high school, in charge of a troop of 8/11 year olds, *Scouts et Guides de France* for six months, did a year of Scouting before, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹⁹Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

²⁰Pierre, 55, diplomat, practicing Catholic, Paris, May 2010.

²¹Didier, 55, married, Director in a press corporation, Paris, March 2010.

Their Church does not possess the truth and should admit that it should be received from the “world” by letting itself be converted by contact with people: “*The reasoning based on Vatican II is the idea that the Church does not own the relationship to God, own the truth of the relation to God, [...], God is in the relation among people, including those who are not in the Church, and the Church has everything to learn from others, from the encounter with others.*”²² The world is regarded without distrust: “*The world is what it is, we welcome it with its richness of today, with questions, certainly, and as the Christians that we are, there where life has put us, in a diaspora, and well, we try in our modest way to bear witness, to be in dialogue, to be listening, and then to construct, but without condemning the contemporary world.*”²³ Attached to moving toward the poor, like Jesus was, they act as militants, like the emancipated, within the major Christian NGO’s: CCFD, ACAT, Catholic Aid (Caritas), etc.

They are still observant, attached to Sunday mass and to the parish world, and they are often involved in them. For the *modern conciliarists*, mass is a moment of communion when the people of God find themselves gathered around the sharing of bread and wine like Jesus with his disciples on the day of the Jewish Passover. The heart of the mass is the gathering of Christians to share the Word of God and the Eucharist: “*It is an assembly of believers, the people of baptism who walk along and find their path.*”²⁴ Mass is for most of them also a moment when belonging to the collectivity that is the Church is affirmed and celebrated. The manifestation of the presence of God is this privileged moment of unity when different people who share the same faith find themselves together. So the *modern conciliarists* are attentive to everything that symbolizes Christian communion: the participation of the laity, the equal sharing of tasks between men and women, the warm welcome of catechumens, of the divorced who have remarried, of neighborhood down-and-outs, even Christians from other Churches.

Those who proclaim the Council deplore a return to a liturgy that is very solemn and hieratic, with a priest at the center and the laity as

²²Daniel, 55, consultant in social policy, encountered the Catholic faith through his wife, for him the *Semaines Sociales* are a place of reflection and inspiration, but he no longer wishes to go to church, a member of *Alethe*, Paris, May 2010.

²³Claude, 54, a married woman, has 35 years’ experience in education, trained in the public system, and has responsibilities within the management of Catholic Education, Paris, May 2010.

²⁴Tristan, 32, advisor in professional job finding, responsible for a troop of 15/16 year-olds in *Scouts et Guides de France* for one year, member of the *Vie Chrétienne* community, volunteer for *Secours Catholique*, Compiègne, February 2010.

spectators. For them, the beauty of the mass depends on a certain spontaneity, a flexibility that leaves more place for welcoming, exchanging, moments of sharing: “*I think that people’s needs are immense right now, for communication, for sharing of all kinds, and the Church still has the opportunity to meet people; it will have it less and less, in my opinion, with all this abrupt throwbacks to clergy in Roman collar [...]. It is not a matter of converting people with blows from the crozier or anything else, but truly a matter of showing them, not what we know, but that we are trying in every case to help ourselves and help each other, to understand each other and to have some concern for justice and equality.*”²⁵ They are very scandalized by what introduces any differences among Christians: the exclusion of girls from altar service, the exclusion of women from serving communion, the exclusion of the divorced-and-remarried, etc.

Devotion has its place in their practice – possibly the rosary, and reading *Prions en Eglise* or *Panorama*. To nourish their faith, they favor Bible study and exegesis. They frequent religious orders.

Note that although we characterize them as “conciliarists”, this does not mean that other Catholics never refer to the Second Vatican Council. But these Catholics are characterized by unease about current Catholicism, which they impute to the betrayal of Vatican II. For them the 1962-1965 Council has become a sort of Golden Age for which they are nostalgic: a simplified liturgy, openness to the “world”, giving responsibility to the laity, a valorization of struggles against injustice, interfaith dialogue, and recognition of religious freedom. It was the key moment when they appropriated a Catholic identity: “*On the Christian level, I am part of a generation that was drastically changed by Vatican II, by the Council, my first contact was when I made a pilgrimage to Chartres, that was in 1962, when the theme was ‘The Church’, and where I heard it said for the first time that the Church was us. And for me, that was a shock, because for me, before that, the Church was the hierarchy, that is how I saw it. So the whole post-Council evolution was for me an extraordinary awakening, we were very lucky because we met a lot of witnesses who helped us to change.*”²⁶ Under the papacy of Benedict XVI, for the oldest among them, the proclaiming of a “Council” identity is a means of demarcating

²⁵Etienne, 70, married, three children who are indifferent to religion, retired, an autodidact without diplomas, parishioner of Notre-Dame-des-Champs, believes in the place of the laity in the Catholic institution, member of *Alethe*, Paris, May 2010.

²⁶Monique, 68, married, psychotherapist / psychoanalyst, treats many nuns, member of the Council of administration of *Alethe*, parishioner at Notre-Dame-des-Champs, Paris, May 2010.

themselves from neoclassical Catholics. Neoclassical Catholics are rather younger and identify themselves as "Generation John Paul II". They consider that older Catholics have lost pride in their faith. The neoclassicals want to give back to Catholicism visibility in the public space. Young priests wear cassocks and want to restore the sacred character of mass. They lay claim to an intransigent Catholicism.²⁷

4. Finally, the last group is for the observant. Their faith has as its matrix the Passion of Jesus. The Last Supper and the crucifixion are for them the reference points. Jesus offers Salvation to humanity. He gives himself for the redemption of sins and institutes a sacramental relation between humanity and himself. The *observant* are characterized by very strong attachment to forms of worship. Fidelity to the rules of practice prescribed by the Roman authorities is cardinal for them – even if traditionalists may sometimes make a contrast between faithfulness to the old rules and the adoption of the new ones. Their faith relies on very ritualized practices: Sunday mass, celebration of the Eucharist, recitation of the rosary, the saying of grace and blessings, and more occasionally monastic retreats or pilgrimages. For them the mass is the center of their religious life and the principal means of meeting God. The form of this ritualism may be either traditionalist or more innovative and charismatic.

For the observant, it is the Eucharist that is the mass's summit: "You have to tell yourself that it is the bloody sacrifice on Golgotha, that Jesus is there before us, that he gives us his flesh and his blood so that we will have eternal life."²⁸ They are more attentive to what testifies to the divine in a solemn and hieratic manner. The liturgy is conceived as an interface through which personal interiority may be filled with "the heart of the Christian faith."²⁹ Thus it is the priest, as the mediator of the divine, who is placed at the center of the mass. Then, various techniques will be employed to create an extraordinary ambiance: silence, incense, a lesson *ex-cathedra*, and especially a ritual performed in rigorous fashion with meticulous fidelity to the missal.

The *observant* (but also some of the *inspired*) regret the lack of a sense of the sacred, the poverty of the rites, and the absence of meditation – in short, how the liturgy has become banal. The *observant*

²⁷Henri Bourgeois, "Le néo-classicisme catholique", *Études*, 2/2001 (tome 394), pp. 221-232. See also: Charles Mercier, "Permanence d'un catholicisme intransigeant?", *Études*, 10/2013 (vol 419), pp. 353-361.

²⁸Antoine, 39, married, father of a family, director of the Notre Dame team, song leader in his parish, conference Saint-Vincent de Paul, political militant in the UMP, volunteer for the pilgrimage to Chartres with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, December 2012.

²⁹Thérèse, 54, nun and theologian, Paris, April 2010.

especially castigate the insignificance of some songs: “I would condemn to the salt mines the authors of stupid mass songs. As if Jesus, I have seen you’ is going to touch thousands of parishioners! It’s a catastrophe.”³⁰ The liturgical forms of monastic inspiration remain a central reference for them, even when they have adapted to modern forms.

From the Gospels they retain the elements that legitimate a certain posture of opposition to dominant social values: “If we take the Gospel seriously, we would believe that only holiness changes the world!”³¹ “The Church forgets the kernel of its message and its reason for being: announcing the incredible scandal of the death and resurrection of Christ;”³² “Jesus asks us to renounce the world to follow him.”³³ God is encountered outside ordinary social life, in the geographical remoteness of some monasteries, in the silence of the time of prayer, or in the effort of ascetic exercises (pilgrimage walks, fasting, charitable giving) that are offered as a “sacrifice of self”. Thus one must break with the ordinary to encounter God. The quest for Salvation requires the search for “sanctity”, meaning a way of living wholly for God and through God, whether in one’s work or one’s life in a couple, but also by the search for “truth”. The truth according to them lies in the Catholic Church. The world’s values are artificial and fleeting. Fidelity to the matrix of their faith occurs through an effort of personal rectification, of ever-stricter conformity to the moral and religious prescriptions of the ecclesiastical authorities.

These Catholics look for pious and spiritual writing. They are fond of reading the *Magnificat*,³⁴ which takes the place of a breviary even if they do not open it every day. The *Magnificat* is to the observant what the missal is to the “*tradis*” (= traditionalists). It is a sign of belonging to the community of good Catholics because it is an instrument of ascetic zeal. The *Magnificat* also gives them a very patrimonial and solemn image of faith through the reproductions of

³⁰Basile, 62, married, four children, philosophy professor, Paris, March 2010.

³¹Jacques, 52, married, father of four children, founder and director of a Catholic monthly, former royalist militant, publisher, Paris, April 2010.

³²Philippo, 60, of Italian origin, married, journalist and specialist in communication media, Paris, March 2010.

³³Antoine, 39, married, father of a family director of the Notre Dame team, song-leader in his parish, Saint-Vincent de Paul conference, political militant in the UMP party, volunteer for the Chartres pilgrimage with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, December 2012.

³⁴Monthly magazine in pocket format, that publishes masses every day, offers daily prayers and spiritual readings.

paintings that illustrate it. This joins with their taste for beautiful old churches and a hieratic liturgy.

Their search for truth is also expressed in a desire for doctrinal training for understanding the faith. These Catholics are principally looking for knowledge associated with the encyclicals and with more personal writing by recent popes (John-Paul II's theology of the body or Benedicts XVI's *Jesus*, for example) and are especially oriented to the anthropology of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and more generally they tend to be fascinated by philosophy and metaphysics. They also grant importance to altruism, but mostly in favor of those who are victims of the "culture of death" denounced by John-Paul II, like handicapped people and unborn infants.

WORLDS THAT MEET EACH OTHER

The second interest of the diagram is to show the relations that exist among these four clusters of Catholic sensibilities. Of course, there are many intermediate positions possible among these groups. Among young people who are sure of themselves, some are very close to the charismatics and thus on the side of inspiration, while others are very familiar with neo-classical Catholics, with whom they share the desire to make faith visible and to build a community of convinced believers with strong solidarity.

The graph also allows us to detect links that have been formed among these four groups: the observant and the inspired share a taste for devotional exercises, and these worlds intersect in the course of Eucharistic worship. This is quite evident when one observes the audience for the prayer group Abba in Paris, where sometimes the *traditionalists* and more often the *neoclassical* and the *charismatics* find themselves together. The spread of the songs of the Emmanuel Community among neoclassical Catholics and sometimes even among the traditionalists is another manifestation of this affinity. Some communities lie at the intersection of these two tendencies.

The *inspired* and the *emancipated* share a barely codified and very subjective relationship to God. The evenings organized by the charismatic community *Chemin Neuf*, the *Fondacio* sessions, the gatherings at Taizé, the FRAT,³⁵ or the large camps of the *Scouts et Guides de France* at Jambville are meeting spaces for both inspired and emancipated Catholics. We also observe among these groups a certain

³⁵Assembly of youth on the Ile-de-France (greater Paris) each year, alternating between one for the 13/15 year-olds and one for the 15/18 year-olds, with about 12,000 participants.

taste for the spirituality of Ignatius Loyola that is very much in tune with their taste for the Gospels and the priority given to subjectivity.

The *emancipated* and the *modern conciliarists* approach each other in the exercise of altruism. *Secours Catholique*, the CCFD,³⁶ the ACAT,³⁷ and the Food Bank unite them in volunteer and charity work. The *Diaconia* initiative that took place in Lourdes in 2013 shows the whole collective dynamic that exists between these two groups.

Finally, the *modern conciliarists* and the *observant* meet each other because they both give great importance to Sunday mass and to the parish life that is its corollary. These two worlds are not radically opposed to each other, because there exists an intermediate zone between them where Catholics who are very faithful to forms of worship and very altruistic can be found together.

However, it should be noted that two groups are not at all in contact with each other: the *emancipated* and the *observant*. At least, they meet only when the *emancipated* attend mass or within a chaplaincy. Still, with the restructuring of affinities within urban movements and parishes, their paths may rarely cross. This probably explains the low level of friction between these two groups.

And then there are two groups, the *inspired* and the *modern conciliarists*, who are in contact with everybody, the latter due to their historic precedence. These are rather elderly Catholics and they form the bulk of the congregation in many parishes. So they have a wide reach. They are very invested in diocesan councils, and very often the older clergy share their sensibility. In addition, some of the *inspired* join them in being uneasy about the assertion of the “neoclassical” current.

The *inspired* are a minority, but due to the very specific forms of their spirituality – joyous and devout, a solemn and welcoming liturgy – they are attractive to young liberated Catholics, to neoclassical Catholics, and even to professional women and to couples in second marriages. Thus they lie at the heart of the circulation of many ideas and innovations in Catholicism today. They occupy a position of mediation because they can have dialogues with the other three clusters. They constitute a group to which we should pay special attention in the framework of a Church where the clergy, numerically very reduced, is far from providing, by its own internal cohesion (as a sacerdotal group), a reassuring and implicit communion.

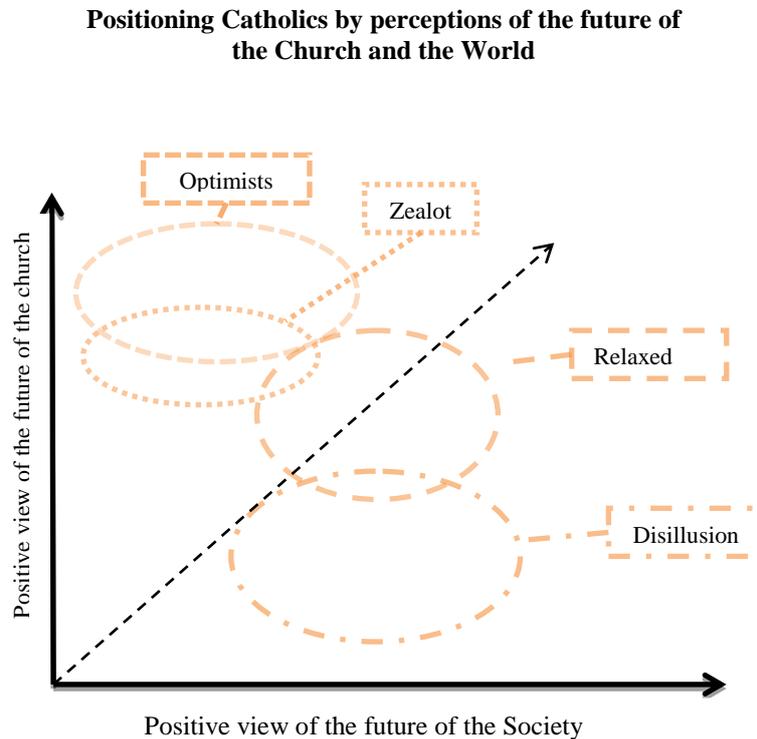
³⁶Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development.

³⁷Association of Christians for the Abolition of Torture. Equivalent to Amnesty International.

DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

As Jean-Marie Donegani has shown, examination of the different representations of the world had by Catholics enables one to detect important religious splits.³⁸ Among those we studied, connecting their visions of the future of society with their visions of the future of the Catholic Church permits us to grasp some affinities and some contrasts.

This diagram allows us to see that the Catholics who have the most confidence in the Church's future are also those who are most pessimistic about the future of society. And this observation also works in the opposite direction. The Catholics who are most skeptical about the future of the Church are also those who have the most confidence in the future of society. In more detail, we can again distinguish four clusters.



³⁸Jean-Marie Donegani, *La liberté de choisir: Pluralisme religieux et pluralisme politique contemporain*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1993. See also "Identités religieuses et pluralité des rapports au monde" in Pierre Bréchon, Bruno Duriez, Jacques Ion (eds.), *Religion et action dans l'espace public*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000, pp. 211-224

1. There are *optimists*, those with very great trust in the Church's future. Here we find many observant Catholics, young and proclaimed Catholics, and a portion of the neoclassicals. They share great confidence because they think the world is going to rack and ruin by refusing the truth borne by the Catholic Church.

In the first decade of the 2000s, the world of unbelief was perceived as a world in perdition that was suffering from a lack of signposts, from a crisis of meaning, and which is dominated by "sinful structures" that organize the exploitation of some people by others. The misery of humankind without God! In turning away from God, people are running toward damnation. But someday the teaching of the ecclesiastical authorities on life, the family, and the economy will be necessarily confirmed and this will create conversions.

Young militant Catholics try to proclaim their resistance to the values of this world by defending alternative models, starting with the heterosexual family order. They stand in opposition to the "culture of death" and defend the right of fetuses to reach birth, of children to be adopted, and of the handicapped to lead a normal life. The focus on the "right to life" often brings them to neglect social and economic issues. They share the ambition to rebuild strong Catholic communities with an affirmed identity and a counter-cultural position with respect to the world. These communities of believers think of themselves as the crucible of many new religious vocations.

Since the pope is the Church figure who is most covered by the media, he is systematically defended against attack because he is for these Catholics both their leader and their representative. They trust him (as well as the clergy) to govern the Church. Paradoxically, for them the solution to the crisis of the Church *is* the crisis! The weak will jump ship, and those who remain will put themselves in battle readiness under the guidance of the clergy, and everything will come back into order.

2. Then there is the cluster of *zealots*. Here we find traditionalists, charismatic communities, and once again the neoclassical Catholics. They have in common the more or less pessimistic vision of the preceding group about the future of society: the *trads* rather more so, the *charismatics* rather less. They have a little less trust in the future of the Church. At the very least, they think that its future is assured if Catholics stop being tepid and revive a practice that is more whole-hearted and authentic: the *trads* want to go backward; the *neoclassicals* want a reform of the Vatican Council in the spirit of Benedict XVI; the *charismatics* are for a full application of the Second Vatican Council, but accompanied by a real movement of interior conversion. They also share the vision of a Church structured into networks of small communities of believers. They think that the future of the Church

depends on the dynamism of these communities, more than on structural reforms of the whole. These Catholics are the beneficiaries of the remaining sacerdotal vocations and their numbers are rising. Thus they are rather optimistic because they think that through the renewal of the clergy and laity, the sensibilities they represent are on the right path to become dominant. So the current crisis in the Church is conceived as a moment of purification, an opportunity to return to a more authentic Catholicism.

3. Then we come to the cluster of the *relaxed*. They are rather confident about the future of both society and Church, but no more than that. Here we meet the charismatic communities, the *Scouts et Guides de France* and the activists within Catholic NGOs who are marked by their international experience. They have barely any confidence in the church system; they expect nothing from the clergy, the bishops, or the pope. They have become very emancipated from them and suddenly they see the multitude of movements of the laity as the guarantee of things to come. The future of the Church is invented in the creativity at the bottom of the pyramid. For them, the Church will get out of the crisis only when it grants this “base” the place it merits. So they are in favor of a redistribution of the powers held by the clergy in favor of the laity, for an equitable sharing of responsibilities between men and women. They consider that the affirmation of the laity will allow a new Church face to emerge, less authoritarian and more modest. Their sensitivity to the “other” legitimates a relationship of solidarity and empathy with non-believers. They try to see the best of what is in the world. But they also think that society might always evolve toward more injustice if nobody is committed to transforming it. Whether within the Catholic Church or in society, the ever-open possibility to agitate and to undertake collective struggles remains their reason to hope.

4. Finally we find the *disillusioned*. They are pessimistic about the future of their Church and worried about the future of society. Here we find women in leadership positions within the dioceses, the divorced-and-remarried, the militants of *Action Catholique*, and even dissident Catholics. Sensitive to social and development issues, they get angry about inequalities, wars, refugees, and displaced populations. They see no improvement in sight. Concerning their Church, they have faith in its message and are very attached to it, but they consider that structural reforms from top to bottom are necessary. These Catholics wish for a Catholic institution that is less of a centralized pyramid, where collegiality among bishops would be less of a hollow slogan, and where the laity, both women and men, would be fully recognized as responsible on a par with members of the clergy. They judge that synods should

become the usual manner of governance at all levels of the Catholic institution. They also want a Church that is less over-arching and totally open to those who are seeking God, whatever their lifestyle: homosexuals, divorced-remarried, etc. This position often makes them critical of Vatican discourses. The return to Latin during mass and the spread of the Roman collar among priests (even of cassocks) give them the impression of moving backward. Due especially to the conservative and “identity-based” character of the young clergy and more generally of young Catholics, as well as due to the shrinking of the social base of practicing Catholics to rather bourgeois strata, they cannot foresee a horizon of possible reforms. This explains their pessimism.

Of course, the first years of the papacy of Pope Francis might have changed the perceptions of all four groups. But our study preceded his papacy.

SHARP BUT LIMITED CONFLICT

How do the people we studied represent the cleavages that traverse Catholicism? Here we find an abundance of descriptions of a conflict of generations, especially among the modern conciliarists and the emancipated, but also sometimes from the inspired.

For example, many research studies contrast (more or less euphemistically) the “young” versus the “old”. One Jesuit we met noted, *“There is an identity movement that dates from fifteen years ago and that has dug a cultural gap that is growing larger between a majority of Catholics who are generally elderly – and it suffices to go into the parishes to see it, and then the young believers, or young priests or young nuns who cling to an identity politics. And this little identity group is not understood by the older group, who could be described as followers of Vatican II. Between the majority conciliar group and the young identity group there is a considerable difference plus great difficulty in communication, even a desire among the younger to teach a lesson to the older!”*³⁹ But listening to the descriptions each makes of the other, we perceive that the criterion of age is usually employed for convenience, since the opposition is not principally “generational”.

The young generations are associated with proclaiming a religious identity without hang-ups and with affirming a conservative religious sensibility centered on worship and hieratic forms: *“The young are more identity-based and more conservative! More attached to claiming a Catholic faith that is very official, very dogmatic, I would say this [about] the 18 to 35 year olds, the young couples with a family [...]. Today to be a believing Catholic when you are 25 is necessarily to be in*

³⁹Pierre, 67, monk, journalist and teacher, Paris, February 2010.

*a tiny minority in that age cohort, so there is necessarily – to compensate for that, to try to explain it – a desire to proclaim it, to try to explain it in a much more explicit way than did the preceding generations who did not have to explain why and how they were Catholics since everybody was, so that question did not arise! Today it is true that faced with the Muslims, with the evangelicals, it is almost necessary to explain one’s faith, because we are no longer at all in a situation where it goes without saying!”⁴⁰ This realization is crueler because Catholics who are older supporters of Vatican II feel they have no posterity. The younger generations of Catholics are ignorant about their elders’ struggles: “*What makes me despair is [...] perceiving that the young are more at Paray-le-Monial*⁴¹, *they gather for the most traditional minority or the Scouts of Europe! And what strikes me is the lack of curiosity among the young about what we have been through. We went from the Middle Ages to modernity. They do not realize where we are coming from, what the status of the Church was in the 1950s in the time of dear Pius XII!*”⁴² This line was associated with Benedict XVI during his papacy.*

A posture of empathy is often affirmed in opposition to “identity Catholicism”: “*We risk going toward a Church that is communitarian, identity-based, rigid, and becomes sectarian; and so, we might effectively have a hard kernel of very strong believers but what is around them is diminishing, if you like, there is an accredited identity that asserts itself rigidly. This is what is at work in religions, it is the ultra-orthodox Jews, it’s the fundamentalist Muslims; everywhere there are normative identity-based reactions, etc. I think that it is dwindling to a hard kernel and chasing away all the people who are on the margins questioning, hesitant, agnostic, seeking, who are much more numerous than the hard kernel!*”⁴³ Another interviewee adds: “*I was in Rome a while ago and a journalist told me [...] the image of Rome seems like Noah’s Ark! There is a fear of the world! This is the real cleavage, fear of the world: the world is going to collapse! The world is doomed with all the -isms – relativism, individualism, hedonism, and materialism – all these terrifying -isms! Faced with that, Noah’s Ark takes onboard what’s working, meaning identity politics; all that is going into the Ark to wait*

⁴⁰Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

⁴¹Paray-le-Monial is the retreat center of the conservative charismatics.

⁴²Claude, 84, Jesuit and theologian, Paris, January 2010.

⁴³Pierre, 48, married, lawyer, has invested his time in student chaplaincies, preparation for marriage, then in the management of the parish assets, has had a spiritual experience of the route to St. James of Compostella with his wife, member of Alethe, Paris, May 2010.

until it's all over; we are not thinking about tomorrow and the day after but instead getting into the Ark!"⁴⁴

At the opposite extreme, many *observant* and even *inspired* Catholics aged between 30 and 50 regret not having grown up in a Catholicism that was sure of itself, asserting its place, defending its values in society and nourished by beautiful celebrations. They do not regret the absence of posterity but rather a lack of transmission, and they sometimes feel rancor toward their elders. Géraldine is a young woman of 35: "I think I had to wait for my studies at Grenoble to discover that young Catholics who are at ease in their faith, actually existed. They took me to monasteries, I discovered new communities, Paray-le-Monial, Opus Dei, all that. In my little provincial town, there were only old folks at mass. The priests, I still remember the chaplain at my school who gave a whole apologetics for the condom during the catechism class. I was in a private school, but they offered us nothing apart from occasional little campaigns of solidarity with victims of earthquakes or against hunger in Africa. I never received a solid religious education. I discovered all that at university from people my age who had the luck to be in Scouts of Europe or to know the Brothers of Saint-John or the Emmanuel."⁴⁵ But Géraldine did not feel she represented a dominant current in the Church of France; on the contrary, she finds that the "Cathos on the Left" are monopolizing the leadership. This generational rancor is a common bond among these young Catholics. They consider that the erosion of religious practice is a consequence of the spiritual tepidness of the Catholics of the 1960s and 1970s.

Statements by interviewees illustrate this inference clearly: "Cathos on the Left, when they happen to have children, transmit to them only their political ideology, but not their faith, too tepid and watered-down to resist the sirens of 'modernity'. So it is logical that over the generations they are disappearing irretrievably. And I am not one to complain about it."⁴⁶ Another adds: "Before, they wanted to open the Church, and the result was that everybody left. And then there was the burial, the yeast was working in the dough [i. e. the kingdom was secretly coming], above all you did not admit your faith, just be there and ride it out – or turn the other cheek. All that has not yielded

⁴⁴Henri-Gérard, 65, married, secular job in a new community in the wake of the charismatic revival, Paris, March 2010.

⁴⁵Géraldine, 35, mother of four children, practicing Catholic family, former server of mass, works in communication, very invested in her parish in the preparation for baptism, Paris, December 2012.

⁴⁶Antoine, 39, married, father, director of the Notre Dame team, song leader in his parish, Saint-Vincent de Paul conference, political activist in the UMP, pilgrimage volunteer to Chartres with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, December 2012.

anything, it has to stop."⁴⁷ For these Catholics it is by manifesting their difference, by breaking with the dominant values, that they testify to their faith. So they do not hesitate to dramatize their religious belonging, whether by wearing a pendant around the neck or demonstrating in public against so-called marriage "for all".

These mutual denunciations between "young" and "old" testify to a conflict over the sharing of parish space between the modern conciliarists and the observant. The fringe of the inspired that is closer to the observant, like the Community of Emmanuel, may also find itself in conflict with the modern conciliarists. The relation to communal worship in these groups is the source of tensions. The definitions of liturgical modes of mass and of parish activities are the subject of competition between these groups, and often the source of conflict over resources. The emancipated and the inspired are rather disengaged from this quarrel. Within French Catholicism, conflict is therefore limited to the modern conciliarists and observant groups, who are both very invested in parishes. But these local splits are all the more violent because it is two conceptions of religious truth that are pitting Catholics against each other.

The shared reference to the Gospels should not deceive us. Their interpretations construct very different ways to be inhabited by the Christian faith and of inhabiting the Church. As can be seen in the table below, Catholics of all four tendencies being described each have their orthodoxy and their orthopraxy. The commandment to love the neighbor, for those who make it the cardinal value of their faith, does not have the same practical consequences as the search for other worldly Salvation.

⁴⁷Flore, 20, was a cub with the Guides of Europe, did charismatic revival camps, educated in a Catholic boarding school, one year of training at Philanthropos in Switzerland, student at the Institute of Comparative Philosophy in Freiburg, January 2013.

Table of Comparison of the Four Clusters

	Inspired	Emancipated	Modern Conciliarists	Observant
Matrix of Faith	Jesus Loves You	Love of Neighbor	All Brothers	Atonement for Sins by Jesus
Form of Fidelity	Conversion	Political Commitment	Compassion	Rectification
Relation to God	Inspiration	Inspiration	Worship	Worship
Preferred Practice	Devotion	Altruism	Altruism	Devotion
Expectation of Mass	Celebration	Reflection	Communion	Sacralization
Disappointment About mass	Superficiality	Disconnection	Clericalism	Secularization
Référence Group	Community	Movement	Local Parish	Affinity Parish

The next chapter will deal with the differences in position in relation to Catholicism as an institution.

CHAPTER III

DIFFERENTIATED POSITIONS ON THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTION

The positions of Catholics in relation to the institutionalism of their faith, to its bureaucratic and hierarchical administration, are extremely variable. The contrast between *seekers* and *dwellers* proposed by Robert Wuthnow,¹ or between *pilgrims* and *converted* described by Danièle Hervieu-Léger,² seem overly restrictive for describing them, as we have found in the framework of our own research.

When Catholics speak about the Church, they defend their conceptions of the functioning of the Catholic institution. Under this rubric lurk particular conceptions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, by which they inscribe themselves in a space of controversy that we could call (following Bourdieu) the *field* of Catholicism.

The “field of Catholicism” is a sociological concept that designates the space constituted by all the actors competing to define what the legitimate definitions of Catholic orthodoxy and orthopraxy should be.³ Thus the field is the controversy that assembles all those who struggle to impose a definition of the practices necessary to be able to legitimately claim Catholic identity. They confront each other for the exercise of religious power. Thus it is an arena where committed Catholics encounter each other and agitate to make their own conception of Catholicism prevail. All of them are driven by fidelity to some conception of the Catholic faith, of the Church, and of what it should mean to be a Catholic.

Those who are at the center of the field are those who dominate it because they benefit from the available resources to impose their definition of a “good Catholic”. The Roman authorities, the bishops and the clergy who are all extremely ultramontane can be found there, but one may also encounter Catholic media figures who benefit from great moral authority without actually being clerics. At the margins of the center there are those clergy who are critical, plus lay historians and philosophers who benefit from a certain authority due to their scholarly expertise or else status as “great witnesses” who are qualified by their

¹Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950's*, Berkeley: University of California press, 2000.

²Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le pèlerin et le converti: La religion en mouvement*, Paris: Flammarion, 1999.

³Cf. Charles Suaud & Nathalie Viet-Depaule, *Prêtres et ouvriers: Une double fidélité mise à l'épreuve (1944-1969)*, Paris: Karthala, 2004, p. 70.

capacity to incarnate Christianity. Beyond that lies a circle of militant laity who are more or less close to the center. Everything depends on the authority they possess or the resources they can mobilize to influence the center. Whatever the case, all those who are situated at the heart of this arena may be called “committed”, while those who are on the periphery and whose attitude is no longer militant can be said to be “passengers”.⁴

THE COMMITTED

Whether members of David & Jonathan (the Christian wing of the homosexual movement) or readers of *La Croix*, peaceful Catholics loyally attending mass, or traditionalists, or adherents of the evangelical Conference of the Baptized, the *committed* share a militant relation to the church as an institution in the name of their fidelity to what is taken as foundational. These currents are in competition to define the boundaries of legitimate religious practices. This takes the form of desires 1) to purify Catholicism of the deviances they find at work in its doctrine or in the customary practice of the faithful; and 2) to recall the need for conversion, since the religious transformation of self is the precondition of a transformation of the Church and the world.

Of course this dual requirement might justify various divergent attitudes within the field. Albert O. Hirschman proposes a classification of members of an institution that is in crisis according to three major categories of attitudes: *exit* (defection), *voice* (criticism), and *loyalty*.⁵ We have shown elsewhere to what extent this typology, although useful, poses problems.⁶ Apart from loyalty, there is a principal alternative for Hirschman: either to become unfaithful and quit the institution (i. e. to defect) or else to remain faithful and protest from within (to voice grievances, etc.). However, Hirschman forgets that breaking away from the institution might be a way of expressing a fidelity to what the institution ought to be but is no longer. In that case, leaving is a means of denouncing the corruption of the institution, its betrayal of its foundation. This is required by a faithfulness that is more authentic than pro-forma adherence. Consequently, rather than contrast those who

⁴Most of this chapter is based on the analysis developed in Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *Qui sont les cathos aujourd'hui? Sociologie d'un monde divisé*, *op.cit.*, chap. 5.

⁵Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970. [French edition, 2011]

⁶Yann Raison du Cleuziou, “Des fidélités paradoxales: recomposition des appartenances et militantisme institutionnel dans une institution en crise”, Michel Offerlé, Jacques Lagroye, (eds.), *Sociologie de l'institution*, Paris: Belin, 2011, pp. 267-290.

protest and those who defect, it seems to us more appropriate to describe the different forms of militancy we observed on the basis of the competing kinds of fidelity upon which they are established.

To understand the different forms of fidelity that are possible within the same institution, we want to employ two ideal-typical figures: the *iconolater* and the *iconoclast*. The iconolater believes that the icon – a rite or catechism or any other instituted form – repeats content faithfully within an established container. By contrast, the iconoclast, like the anti-establishment person or the religious reformer, tries to *re-present* religious content by giving it a new container that brings it up to date, makes it more faithfully present in contemporary times.⁷ Contestation and conformation therefore are two modes of fidelity to the foundation, meaning to the life and message of Jesus in the Gospels and Catholic tradition. What distinguishes them is whether they have faith in the institution or not. Anti-establishment *iconoclasts* attest their faith in what the institution is currently representing in a deformed way by their breaking with what is established in order to re-present the foundational. By contrast, *iconolaters* conform to an establishment that they find pledged to fidelity to the foundational. These two kinds of fidelity necessarily compete with and confront each other, because the pertinence of a conversion to the foundational in one form presupposes that another representation is not possible without compromising the witness.

To understand the relation to the institution of our interviewees, it seems desirable to detect the way in which they articulate the foundational with the establishment. Four major types of relation to the Catholic institution may then be distinguished among the committed: conformity, internal protest, external protest, disengagement.

Conformists: Conviction, Self-Abdication, Personal Accommodation

First, there are Catholics who might be called conformists because they defend orthodoxy and orthopraxy as defined by legitimate ecclesiastical authorities such as the pope, bishops, and the clergy. Or at least if they do not defend them staunchly, they at least bend to them, which is another form of support.

Among the conformists, we find the *convinced* who feel they are confident heirs. They think that the faith and forms of religious practice

⁷We are drawing on a distinction between representation and *re-*presentation (in the sense of affirmation in a form adapted to current times of the principles) as elaborated by Bruno Latour: “Quand les anges deviennent de bien mauvais messagers,” [When the angels become quite bad messengers] *Terrain*, 1990, n°14, pp. 76-91.

that are codified and officially recommended within the Catholic institution are the best definitions of Catholicism. They see the established forms as authentic manifestations of foundational evangelism. The pope is right and “*the Church speaks truth.*”⁸ They constantly train themselves to be able to justify orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This conviction may derive from a feeling of gratitude: some think they owe a lot to the Church for what it has brought to them. So we should not be surprised to find among these activists many young neoclassical priests and bishops.

Conformation may also be justified by *self-abdication*. A feeling of incompetence prevails that justifies adherence to orthodoxy. These activists do not master all the “good reasons” to believe, but they have profoundly interiorized the structures of authority of the church institution. So they place great trust in them, which within the institution recalls them to an orthodoxy and orthopraxy that they never challenge. They believe that all the elements of crisis within Catholicism have either an external cause (modernity, transformations in French society) or an individual cause (presence of merely lukewarm Catholics who lack audacity in transmitting the faith, the secular deviation of Left-wing Catholics). Self-abdication translates into a tendency to challenge oneself but not to criticize the church institution: “*I think the Church recommends what is best for us. You have to be modest before the Church since it transmits to us a heritage of two thousand years, and you have to try to understand it rather than criticize it when you don’t understand it. It’s like that for everything, when I leave mass without having remembered anything, I tell myself that I was too distracted, not that the mass was worthless.*”⁹ While affirming his faith, this person suggests that Catholicism is never totally acquired, that it is a personal journey that never ends. He calls into question the quality of his own investment but not the forms the institution proposes for this investment.

We also find among conformists some Catholics who practice *personal accommodation*. They experience a certain dissonance between their private convictions and the discourse that dominates within the Catholic institution, but this tension does not translate into a conflict of loyalty. These Catholics accommodate themselves to this contradiction without recognizing it publicly or demanding a change in church doctrine. They justify their position to themselves as an exception and are content with this personal arrangement. This is the case with a practicing Catholic who is very invested in her parish yet uses contraception, knowing that this is a transgression: “*In fact, I don’t*

⁸Raoul, 48, auxiliary bishop, Paris, April 2010.

⁹Antoine, 39, married and a father, director of the Notre Dame team, etc., Versailles, December 2012.

worry about this, it's like that, I take the pill because in my life, I don't have much choice, I understand the Church's view, I do not contest it, but this concerns only me. When I go to confession, the young priests do not compromise on that, they play their role, but for me, this doesn't change anything, I already have so many other things to try to do well: work, marriage, the children, prayer. When they say that you have to be open to [new] life, I think that doesn't mean anything, I already have four children ... So, this whole teaching, I set it aside, for me this is not what is essential in the faith."¹⁰ This Catholic woman does not openly demand a change in the norm because she thinks the latter is justified – except in her case. Some Catholics may thus inhabit in a very personal – even transgressive – way the forms of religious life that are officially promoted and yet they present to the outside world a certain amount of conformity.

Internal Protest: Innovation, Recrimination, Speak out

Then among the *committed* we find Catholics who protest more, among whom there is a major split. Those who think that the established forms correspond more or less to what is foundational are going to be in a situation of *internal protest* to the institution. On the other hand, those who consider that the established forms have no particular value, or even betray what is foundational, take a position of *external protest*. They do not think of themselves in relation to the canons of worship defined as legitimate by the church authorities.

Internal protest is the attitude of those who think that the established forms are pretty faithful to the foundational. They do not challenge the established forms of Catholicism: Sunday mass, the sacraments, respect for the authority of the magisterium and the hierarchy... To go to mass every Sunday (or almost) is to recognize the legitimacy of the principal established form of Catholic worship. This practice is a very strong social marker that distinguishes the practicing from the non-practicing, to use common parlance, but the term is widely used even among sociologists. This boundary is permanently objectified by the clergy, who remind their flock of the obligation to attend Sunday mass as “source and summit” of Christian life, but also by Catholic laity who use the regularity of that practice as a criterion for classifying other Catholics and evaluating their legitimacy. The mass-goers might oppose each other over the form of the mass, its meaning, the role played in it by the priests and the laity, but they do not dispute attendance at Sunday

¹⁰Géraldine, 35, mother of four children, practicing Catholic family, former server of mass, works in communication, very invested in her parish in the preparation for baptism, Paris, December 2012.

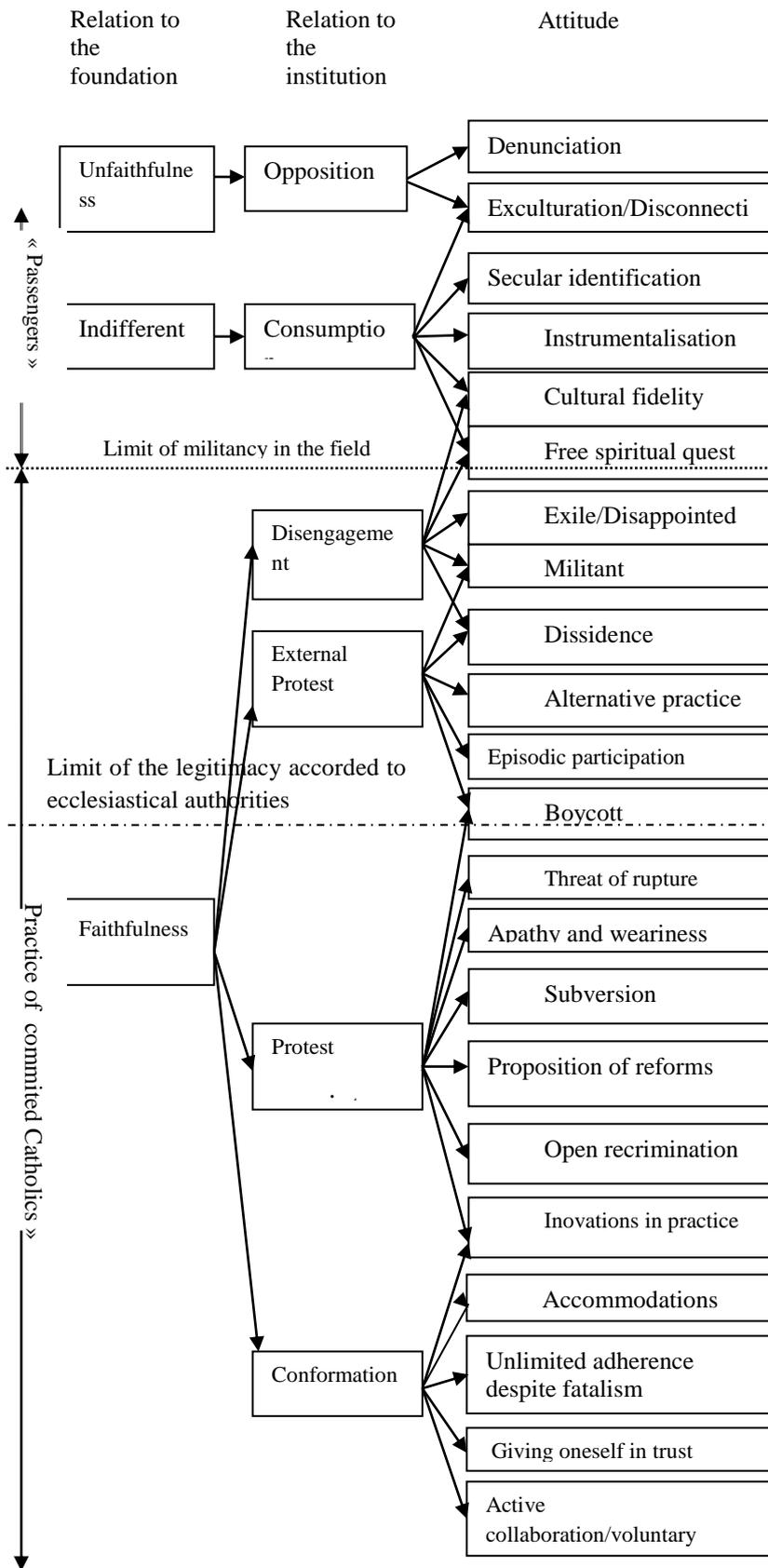
mass as the defining criterion of the legitimate Catholic. Some will admit that it is not terrible to miss a mass from time to time, but this will be an exception because the norm remains the same. If their attitude is one of protest it is because they want to modify marginally the mode of worship or else they consider that the respect Catholics owe to established forms and authorities is overly relaxed.

Among these internal protesters, we should begin by describing the *innovators*. They are situated at the boundary between conformism and protest. Any personal accommodation frustrates them, since they think they are right and are looking for adjustments to the established norms that would result in something more satisfying: “*What is important is to live your faith there where you are, and in whatever context to try to make things move, to work flat out.*”¹¹ Some priests and some laypeople, while remaining within the framework of what is licit, try to make things change a little from the inside and to be innovative in their practices. This is the case of a priest we met who is active in the ACO (Catholic Workers’ Action) and wants to change the institution from the inside, by publicly supporting the cause of undocumented aliens, for example, or by lending his church to Romany families: “*Me, personally, I am a priest, so I am due to my ministry, professionally on the side of the Church, of this Church as it is, on the side of the institution. [...] But I am trying to build the church that Christ wanted, a church of brothers and sisters, a church seeking its Lord who is hidden, that is not at all ‘Presto, here I am’, but is hidden in people, in the little things, it is the little widow who gives three tiny coins.*”¹² This type of commitment to change the church institution from the inside can be observed in diverse directions and with diverse means.

[Diagram: Involvement with the Institution]

¹¹Etienne, 70, married with three children indifferent to religion, retired, autodidact and no degrees, parishioner at Notre-Dame-des-Champs, believes in the place of the laity in the Catholic institution, member of the *Association Libre d’Etudes Théologiques* (ALETHE), Paris, May 2010.

¹²Jean-Claude, 65, priest in the diocese of Paris, lives in a housing project, has created a EAP (Equipe d’Animation Pastorale), member of ACO, Bobigny, February 2010.



The charismatic and more generally the new communities share this innovative posture. They promote a new way of being Catholic that seems to them to conform better to the Gospel. They are rather puritan because they feel that faith should be translated into a transformation of one's entire personal life. The Emmanuel community, by promoting a whole new set of liturgical songs, has both contributed to the transformation of the aesthetics of the mass and has modified Catholic spirituality; references to the Holy Spirit have been substituted for "People on the March" songs of the 1970s and 1980s. In the same sense, by little innovations like the reintroduction of incensing at the altar before the consecration of the host, or the recalling of the conditions necessary to be able to take communion, some young neoclassical priests are reorienting the dominical celebration. Innovators promote alternative practices and discourses but without explicitly denouncing what is established.

Many Catholics who complain and manifest their discontent in a rather latent manner are situated between innovation and open protest, in which case protest may take the form of a public shrug of the shoulders or else many small practices that are more or less explicit. An example is choosing to impertinently address as "*Monsieur l'Abbé*" a priest who prefers to be called by his first name "Serge" – or the inverse. Sometimes this attitude of protest is very discreet, like the interviewee who confided: "*I always feel religious, but I feel very foreign in relation to this huge Church.*"¹ Yet he does not contest but instead conforms to his situation and leads the missions he is given to fruition – but without trying to do more. His lack of zeal is expressed only in his unease; in meetings his silence is telling.

Whatever *protest* actually comes forth is often provoked by a conflict of loyalty that has become unbearable. The women in church leadership whom we have met often feel privately torn between deep indignation and a boundless desire to serve. Some, who have been very engaged in liturgical participation, may decide to resign after the decision of a new priest not to welcome girls among altar servants like acolytes. Withdrawal, resigning, or what could be called more generically *internal defection*, are the usual forms of protest in the church institution. Lacking established procedures or mediating arrangements to officially express discontent with any guarantee of being heard, Catholics quit – and by doing so they sanction the institution by depriving it of their skills. This form of protest is very informal and remains within the framework of conforming to the legitimate religious forms.

¹Paul, 50, Monk, consultant in human resources, Paris, 24 February 2010.

Catholics who *speak out*, for their part, openly denounce what is unacceptable. They publicly voice their criticisms, which may be of various kinds and even antagonistic to each other: ranging from objecting to the machismo of the Catholic institution to protesting an overly desacralized liturgy, criticizing an excessive conservatism in the magisterium or else excessive tolerance by bishops, etc. The associations known as Liturgical Peace and the Conference of the Baptized belong to this category. Protest may also run through the hierarchy, pitting the bishop against the *curé* (parish priest) or Roman authorities against the bishop, and is rather common. A parish leader complained, “*When I learned that the curé had arrived, I wrote to the bishop to ask him to account for this. To take away a young dynamic priest, who had revived the parish, because of an old curé who was jealous and cantankerous, should be unthinkable. ...I told him the whole truth about our curé. Of course, [the bishop] did not answer me.*”² Voiced protest may also occur through the signing of a petition, or even through agitation among Catholic protest groups.

External Protest: Subversion, Boycott, Autonomy

An anti-establishment attitude may result in weariness because of the inertia of the Catholic institution. Some Catholics who have felt marginal for a long time may threaten to break away or else gradually detach themselves from regular religious practice. This frankly tips over into another type of relation to the Catholic institution: *external protest*, the attitude of Catholics who consider that the institution’s authorized forms are either illegitimate or that they betray the spirit to which they should bear witness. Here we find the ideal-type of the *iconoclast*.

This form of protest may occur through strategies of *subversion*: i. e. combining in practice identities that the Catholic institution normally calls contradictory. Subversives displace the official boundaries between the licit and illicit, like the priests who proclaimed themselves to be workers in the 1950s, or Catholics these days who choose as their marriage witnesses (or as godparents for their children) people who are proclaimed homosexuals. Each time this occurs, the transgression contributes to the transformation of established norms by the repudiation of institutional frontiers.

Another possible attitude of external protest is the *boycott*. A conflict of loyalty, when the tension becomes unbearable, may push a

²Antoine, 39, married, father, director of the Notre Dame team, song leader in his parish, Saint-Vincent de Paul conference, political activist in the UMP, pilgrimage volunteer to Chartres with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, Versailles, May 2013.

Catholic to boycott mass. The refusal to practice is both a means of applying pressure and a denunciation of institutionalized deviance: “If this does not change, I am not coming back.” This applies to a 32-year-old researcher, a practicing Catholic, who felt excluded from his church because he was in favor of opening marriage to homosexual couples: “*Like any rather committed young Catholic, I went to mass on Sunday, I made confession pretty regularly and I had a spiritual director. Being favorable to the planned Taubira law [acknowledging France’s history of slavery], this made me not go to mass for three weeks since I did not have the courage to pray with the Church. But deep down, I have had the feeling these last weeks of not existing in the eyes of the Church, of being someone with a low level of consciousness who has not understood anything. To put things very bluntly, I lost any trust in the Church.*”³

External protest may also take the form of *autonomy*. Emancipated Catholics live their faith exclusively among those they choose and according to the forms that suit them. For example, people who are divorced-and-remarried arrange a Christian life within communities or parishes where they are not excluded. The itinerary of liberated thirty-something Catholics also exhibits this kind of dissidence. In a relaxed way, they make a choice within Catholic doctrine and attend mass sporadically as part of the major gatherings they select: the Jambville assemblies, WYD, Taizé. They proclaim their choices and do not cease calling themselves Catholics, or at least “Christians”, but only on their own terms. They become autonomous from the church authorities while remaining within the institution in groups of refuge. At that point, the exclusive belonging to some Catholic group tends to replace a rejected belonging to official Catholicism: “*JOC is my Church first and foremost [...] For years, in truth, we were very satisfied to live, I would say, ‘alongside’ the Church, the institution, that was enough. There really is a risk there, but if one does not want to live with this risk, there are plenty of people who would not be in the Church at all. Because there are people in the Church [just] because there is ACO - if not, they would not be in it. I know many of them.*”⁴ Some traditionalist Catholics adopt this autonomous attitude. They live their faith solely within their parishes and avoid the rest of the Catholics. Their isolation is an explicit protest about the established forms of the religion. They cultivate a defiant attitude toward those who hold authority – bishops, pope – and may even contest their legitimacy. This is all the more

³“Etienne Bernard, 32, researcher in mathematics”, *La Croix*, 26 May 2013.

⁴Pierre, 63, married and father of two daughters and grandfather, militant in CGT [trade union], member of ACO, Bobigny, February 2010.

flagrant when traditionalist priests refuse to co-celebrate chrisal mass with their more liberal bishop. In such cases the position of traditionalists is always ambiguous, lying on the boundary between internal and external protest.

Disengagement: Reconversion, Dissidence, Exile

Finally, among the committed we find Catholics who are on the verge of defection and disaffiliation. Due to their trajectory or else fearing the struggle will lead nowhere, they give up activism. One more step along the path of disappointment or indifference and they quit the ranks of the committed. They are still engaged – but in the process of disengaging.

Militant *reconversion* is one of the paths of this disengagement. Becoming autonomous often has the corollary of promoting an alternative practice. Faith is affirmed as exclusively personal and the supervision of ecclesiastical authorities is clearly refused. Among these Catholics, reservations about the magisterium often derive from a particular understanding of tradition – for example, by referring to the first Christian communities. But note that their Catholic identity is no less institutionalized than that of conformists: social or political militancy is just as totally involving as the fervor advocated by Catholics who assiduously follow the religious organization. They believe that faith is best practiced within irregular gatherings or within small Bible study groups, or even in a particularly intense investment in ordinary life: in hospitality, generosity, tolerance, listening, etc. Some NGOs are staffed by activists who think that this is how to fully exercise their faith. Their fidelity is usually more structured by social or political praxis than by religious or devotional ritualism. By their attitude, they try to institutionalize a Catholicism that is truer and more authentic because it is oriented toward transforming the world. What occurs is that their militancy manages to detach them from institutional Catholicism. Their former faith tends to become a self-sufficient militant investment that no longer needs to be justified by an initial faith or by a definition of what Catholicism should be. They eventually lose sight of the origin of their itinerary and they leave the ranks of the engaged. Their previous preoccupations disappear, as they are totally reconverted to the struggle against illiteracy or in favor of Third World development. This is a centrifugal trajectory that was observed among Catholic militants during the 1970s.⁵

⁵Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire (The Weakness of Believing)* Paris: Seuil, 1987, pp. 220-221.

Protest may also result in another form of disengagement: *dissidence* occurs when a Catholic joins a competing church. This might be the conservative *Sacerdotal Fraternity of Saint Pius X*, or the Networks of Parvis⁶ at the opposite extreme. The quest for a more authentic religious practice may even lead to joining another Christian church, often Protestant. This thirty-something woman who was educated as a Catholic explains: “*My values, my foundation, have not shifted much: God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, prayer, love, the Bible. That’s what’s essential, and because my husband is anti-clerical, intolerant at mass and of the priest’s sermon, anti-papist and Socialist, we had to decide together in which faith or spirit we were going to raise our children. I did not like the pyramidal character of Catholicism, the way the laity was treated like children, and I found the sermons very feeble. Part of my family is Protestant. In the end, that is the direction we turned. They are Christians who know the Bible better than me, have a pastor who is a ‘Doctor in Theology’ who just instructs and guides, without power or authority, [he is] a married man and a father who helps us to think but does not tell us what to think. In the Protestant church, I have the impression that I am more faithful to the essence of my faith than before, at mass.*”⁷

Protesting yet conforming may result in weariness and renunciation. After having protested inside or outside, Catholics become apathetic when their chances of success seem improbable or when their courage is lacking. They lose interest in the tasks they have to assume as a Catholic and perform them against their will; increasingly their flourishing and personal fulfillment is found outside the field of Catholicism. They no longer feel concerned about Catholic identity. This may lead to a conflict with their families. As Bert Klandermans noted,⁸ these “role conflicts” may produce a state of *burn out* (stress and loss of motivation) that ends in disaffiliation. Disengagement from the institution becomes a sort of *exile*, as we see among the alienated.

Disappointment culminates in radical *alienation*, but at the same time this choice paradoxically expresses a remnant of fidelity and the perpetuation of a form of struggle. This is the case with the wounded, the disappointed, and the exasperated, who declare they have “*no more link with the Church*” because of some position or other adopted by the pope. Sometimes they present a precise period in their past as the cause of this alienation: “*I experienced this painfully when the Council did not*

⁶A movement that links many groups of Catholic reformers.

⁷Fleur, 35, married with three children, nurse, former chief Unitarian Guide of France, now a Protestant, Paris, June 2013.

⁸Bert Klandermans, “Une psychologie sociale de l’exit” in Olivier Fillieule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*, Paris: Belin, 2005, pp. 95-110.

engage in any way; gradually everything came undone between the Church and me."⁹ But disappointment reveals an expectation that is still a form of belonging because they remain engaged: "*To be Catholic is not that,*" they often say as a way of setting themselves apart. Bitterness has not yielded to indifference. As long as they say "*let's not talk any more about the Church*" and the topic produces shrugs of the shoulder and sighs of irritation, then the identification and hence a sense of belonging are not totally broken. In other cases, weariness may result in total indifference to Catholicism and in a rather casual exit.¹⁰ In this case, disaffiliation is not a form of protest but the result of a growing indifference to the stakes in the Catholic field.

THE PASSENGERS

Then we find those who are not activists at all. They may be called "passengers" because their relation to the Catholic institution is intermittent and they let themselves be carried along by established religious practices without having an opinion about them. They behave like consumers of religion. Defining the good ways of being a Catholic is not something that motivates them. What does keep them attached to Catholicism is identification, meaning the more or less formal feeling of belonging to Catholics as a group: through faith but also for filial reasons, for the family's consumption of Catholic ritualism at celebrations, or for sharing "values" that are identified with Catholics. Unlike the *committed* (who all share a form of proclaimed fidelity to the Catholic faith, even in antagonistic forms), for *passengers* the maintaining of a Catholic identity is the consequence of a certain indifference to Catholicism as an institution.

Some have an extremely remote relation to the church institution. Although they call themselves Catholics, they are referring to a heritage via the family. Many interviewees begin by saying that they came from a "*very observant family*" – before going on to define their own position. This is a way of recalling to what extent Catholic identity is inherited and remains a marker of social differentiation, whatever one thinks of it later on in life. This is also the case with those who say they are "*Catholics because they are French,*" for whom Catholic identity is totally secular, without any religious dimension. One may call oneself "Catholic" without being personally invested in this identity.

This type of affiliation may likewise be the consequence of belonging to an organization. One interviewee affirmed that his religious

⁹Éric, 70, married, philosopher, was a major activist influenced by French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, Paris, 18 February 2010.

¹⁰Bert Klandermans, "*Une psychologie sociale de l'exit*", *op.cit.*, p. 103s.

life was exclusively the consequence of his belonging to a Scout troop: “*My Christian engagement in fact is solely linked to the Scouts.*”¹¹ In this case, a sense of belonging to Catholicism is determined by a collective norm and not personally. Scouting abounds in this type of profile: “*I come from a Christian and non-practicing family, I do not believe in a religion or in a form of divinity, but I respect those who do believe. So I have been a Scout for a year, without that I would never have gone to mass.*”¹² Here affiliation is less the result of a choice than a certain impregnation – even a more or less imposed conformity.

Passengers consume and utilize Catholic rites for reasons that sometimes have nothing to do with faith. They come searching for forms of celebration that might maintain an identity among members of the same family, with respect to its past or its future. It is a means of procuring one’s own identity, but in a strictly instrumental way, without seeking to integrate this identity into ordinary life.

This form of feeling that one belongs to Catholicism – above all a sentiment of affiliation in relation to a social group in which Catholicism is an important reference – is manifested by only very occasional consumption of Catholic rites. These rites remain necessary for maintaining group identity. This profile resembles that of “festival Catholics” described by Serge Bonnet: while being distanced from the magisterium or from articles of Catholic faith, they conserve a familiarity with the Church, thanks to the Church itself, participating principally in the great rites of passage (baptism, marriage, funerals) and by seasonal festivals (Christmas, Lent, Easter, and the Assumption of the Virgin on August 15).¹³ These celebrations give support to a veritable rootedness in an authentic form of belonging, even if those who turn up for rituals cannot be explicit about why they do. The attachment is to the filial and patrimonial faith, which integrates the person into society and into a local or familial history. It does not lack a religious dimension: palm fronds are brought back home or else deposited on family graves. Catholicism is the only symbolic language known by a most of the population as a way of managing relations with the dead, with ancestors, but also with descendants. Therefore a relation with the Catholic community – even sporadic – remains necessary for them.

¹¹Emmanuel, 20, Scout leader (8/11 year-olds), in engineering school in Nevers, was a cub scout as a child, has attended Catechism but does not practice, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹²Thomas, 14, in high school, comes from a non-practicing Christian family, pioneer in *Scouts et Guides de France* for one year, Rouen, May 2010.

¹³Serge Bonnet, *A hue et à dia, les avatars du cléricisme sous la V^e République*, Paris: Cerf, 1973, p. 120.

Some interviewees do not know how to define clearly how they relate to the Church. They do not practice their faith but their way of thinking is marked by “values”: “*I would have a hard time determining where I am right now. Am I in a situation external to the Church? Certainly in my practices, but less so in relation to the values I have.*”¹⁴ What is the source of these values? They may derive from family upbringing, from the Scouts, or from being educated in a Catholic school. This form of tie – maintained despite growing distance – may be sustained by intermittent practice. For example, some people, although non-practicing and only very partially recognizing themselves in the Catholic faith, still affirm their rootedness in a Christian place or in a particular ceremony: “*I do not practice much any longer because I disagree with certain things in the Church. But whenever I go to Lourdes, at the level of the ceremonial there is something much stronger that I always feel.*”¹⁵ Then there are modes of belonging that are much more distanced, where neither faith nor identification with the Catholic institution is total: “*I am not a regular practicing Catholic; I am not sure I subscribe to all the Catholic dogma and belief.*”¹⁶ (This is the opposite of the doubt that may be found among the committed who have deeply and exhaustively reflected on faith.) Here “*I am not sure*” testifies to indifference; faith is not really at stake for the person. He or she does not feel a need for clarification, yet may still attend mass from time to time.

We see that many relations to the Catholic institution are possible, from total self-abdication to intermittent instrumentalization. Morose minds might see this vast repertory of possibilities as a worrying sign of the fragmentation of Catholicism. However, this phenomenon is nothing new. Moreover, there is another interpretation: Catholicism remains an obligatory period of passage for many individuals. The institution offers practices and the organizational sub-universes that coexist within them, which enable the institution to mobilize more-or-less believing persons, even those belonging to very antagonistic forms of Catholicism. Ultimately, the Church’s capacity to make these diverse profiles coexist is rather exceptional. But *coexistence* is not *communion*. In this respect, the current Catholic authorities’ regulation of this disparate ensemble and management of pluralism seem more and more problematic, now

¹⁴Paul, 58, married, director of studies at CNRS, I, Paris, March 2010.

¹⁵Marine, 17, last year high school, leader of a Scouts et Guides de France troop for six months, had done one year of Guides before, Le Breuil, February 2010.

¹⁶Jérôme, 40, journalist, non-practicing Catholic did not grow up in a Catholic milieu, Paris, March 2010.

that they do not have the advantage of either a numerous sacerdotal corps or a dense territorial network.

CHAPTER IV

INSIDE THE PARISHES: STATUS AND ROLES NO LONGER COINCIDE

Listening to the interviewees, we quickly realize there is a paradox. The categories of “layperson”, “priest”, and even “deacon” have always been used to describe how the church institution is structured. But at the same time, the roles that have devolved on each of these categories often seem rather vague. Our subjects say this is particularly true in the framework of the local parish. In a generic way, we might characterize the problems as relating to a saturation of roles. In effect, while the different kinds of status established for priest, deacon, and layperson are well-identified, the content and boundaries of their functions are less so. Some say that a whole set of functions assigned to priests exceed their real capabilities. Others say that the laity are confined to overly limited tasks – or inversely, that they are taking care of things that should not concern them. The borders between the various roles are blurred and are not unanimously recognized.

In this respect, statements from interviewees cannot be divorced from a general context that has already been detected by sociologists, especially Céline Béraud.¹ Diocesan priests number only 13,000 in the Church of France, and half of them are aged over 75. In 2010, only 6,445 parishes benefited from a resident secular priest, and 725 had a resident religious priest (i. e. in orders). For all other parishes, the priest is no longer in residence; he administers vast geographical areas that are as large as 30 “churchbell-towers”, as does the priest of Limoux in the diocese of Carcassonne. Logically, the extent of responsibilities delegated to the laity has had to be considerably increased. In 2011, the most important dioceses mobilize up to 250 laypersons for tasks that are both administrative and pastoral.² These include laypersons with a “church mission” who have received a “letter of mission” from their bishops. *La Croix* has counted about 9,500 of them, of whom 80 % are women.³ This figure is higher than the 7,000 priests who are younger than 75; there are merely 1,800 permanent and active deacons (in 2009).

¹Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.* Bruno Duriez, “Clercs, nouveaux clercs et laïcs: Fonctions, statuts et autorité dans l’Église catholique en France”, in Martine Cohen, Jean Joncheray, Pierre-Jean Luizard (eds.), *Les transformations de l’autorité religieuse*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004, pp. 107-119.

²*La Croix*, 22-24, September 2012.

³*La Croix*, 26-28, May 2012.

These figures totally change the face of the church institution. Functions like “servants of the community” compensate for the absence of a priest and are performed by the laity, which can pose a problem when there is a demand for a sacrament; they also perform many of the duties of chaplains in schools and hospitals. As Céline Béraud has shown, laypersons and deacons are subject to a high demand for rituals and they must sometimes “cobble together” new rites to respond.⁴ In this respect, we may speak of the “distribution of symbolic goods”, while stressing that laity and priests do not offer the faithful (and those beyond) the same goods. Classically we know that priests possess a “sacramental monopoly,” meaning that they alone distribute the sacraments. But we forget that the laity do offer the faithful symbolic goods in the form of piety (ways of praying, of reading the Bible, of being catechized) and sociality (material help, conviviality). We could call these offers the Clerical Symbolic Goods (CSG) and the Baptismal Symbolic Goods (BSG) respectively. (We will examine this distinction as regarding parish reforms in chapter 5.) The deacons find themselves at the juncture of the two, though rather more on the side of the laity since they are not authorized to “say mass”. In the common situation of ecclesiastical penury, laity and deacons are called upon to fill in for the absence of CSG and by doing so they sometimes assume the clerical attitudes that are associated with them. A worried Vatican in the summer 1997 published an instruction aiming to avoid confusion of roles between priests and laity.⁵ More recently, Benedict XVI warned French bishops visiting *ad limina* about the risk of the clericalization of laity and the laicization of priests.⁶ The Vatican continues to magnify the priesthood in order to dissipate all ambiguities.⁷ But these doctrinal reminders do not deal with the causes of the confusion of roles. If the roles of priests, deacons, and laity are saturated and contested, it is not due to a current of Reformation thinking, but because the many new experiences displace the ordinary exercise of faith and renovate the way Catholics think of themselves.

APPARENT LOSS OF THE SPECIFICITY OF PRIESTS

The old religious justifications for the priesthood are losing their credibility, as Catholicism becomes a foreign universe both for

⁴ Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, chap. 4.

⁵ Instruction sur quelques questions concernant la collaboration des fidèles laïcs au ministère des prêtres, 15 août 1997. Quoted by Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, p. 80

⁶ *La Croix*, 23 Septembre 2012.

⁷ Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 79-88.

unbelievers and for Catholics themselves.⁸ Ultimately the priest is designated as a folkloric character and as a result he may arouse renewed curiosity, as shown by the TV series “*Ainsi soient-ils*” (“So be it”) about a group of seminarians that was first broadcast on the cultural channel Arte in October 2012. A man apart, the priest raises questions yet the rationales for his particularity are poorly understood and do not hold sway with many Catholics.

Three elements characterize the loss of an obvious role for the priest in French society: celibacy, economic status, and a social slide from an authority of function to a personalized authority.

Strange Celibacy

The priest’s lifestyle is made uncommon by the rule of consecrated celibacy, although today this is a more common condition (widows and widowers, the divorced, the unmarried), though it is usually provisional. What distinguishes the priest is having chosen this state: “*The problem of priests in the society in which we live – it becomes very complicated to hold this dogma that the ministry should be reserved for men, single, who are required to have no emotional life – and for their whole life long! This is not possible, is it!*”⁹ As Yves de Gentil-Baichis has noted, in a context where sexuality has become a feature of everyday life, priestly celibacy appears suspect and is interpreted as a potential source of disequilibrium and deviancy.¹⁰ The scandal of pedophile priests reinforced this feeling, even though most of this kind of abuse actually takes place within a family framework.¹¹ Even if celibacy does not pose a problem for current seminarians, celibacy has a hard time being accepted as a legitimate norm that makes sense to the laity. This probably explains why 70% of practicing Catholics are in favor of the marriage of priests.¹² For one interviewee this is paramount: “*The question of married priests is inevitable, in my opinion! I think we should be aligned with the tradition of the early*

⁸Exculturation: the process of the effacement of Catholic culture from the civilization it has contributed to fashioning. Cf. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme: la fin d’un monde*, *op.cit.*

⁹Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

¹⁰Yves de Gentil-Baichis, *Conciliaires ou traditionnels? Enquête sur les futurs prêtres*, Paris: DDB, 2011, p. 30.

¹¹Nicolas de Bremond d’Ars, *Catholicisme, zones de fracture*, Paris: Bayard, 2010, chap. 6.

¹²*La Croix*, 18, June 2009.

Church and with the Orthodox, we have to stop fooling around with this business! This is not a point of dogma!”¹³

The strangeness of chosen celibacy in turn affects the recognized competence of the priest. On sexual matters, the modern conciliarist, the emancipated and sometimes the inspired laity, all consider that priests' words have no authority: “*The problem of priests still seems to me rather central, because the figure of the priest today is incredibly strange in society: these single men who set themselves up – or who are set up – as marriage counselors, as family counselors, people who obviously do not have the capability for that! It's not right!*”¹⁴ Compared to deacons, who do have an outside profession and a family, the priest appears unrooted in the local society where he performs his ministry.¹⁵

Finally, the priest's actual occupations are scarcely visible or desirable. Among the interviewees, apart from the inspired and the observant, few refer to mass and the sacraments. It is as if the liturgical dimension, usually considered as the heart of the sacerdotal vocation, had been downgraded below the most trivial aspects of the priest's ordinary life. For a woman aged about thirty: “*The priest's life is not attractive and you tell yourself it requires an immense force to engage in this sacerdotal life; one has the image of the priest in the countryside with 45 village churches [to look after] and 15 burials a week!*” She does not know what to think of young people her age who go into the seminary: “*You never know if it is good news; you say ‘Well, and why? The poor guy! He didn't meet anybody to marry?’*”¹⁶

Downgraded and in Competition

The priest is no longer a “notable”. He no longer enjoys the authority conferred on him by being stably present in his parish. Now his appointment is of limited duration (6 to 9 years) and the area over which he has authority has become vast and thus dilutes his local visibility. He is no longer the interlocutor of the town mayor, but of many mayors in many towns, which he serves only very part-time.

The depreciation in clerical status is also aggravated by impoverishment. A priest might have a comfortable salary in dioceses

¹³Léon, 67, married, senior official, active in several welfare associations, Paris, January 2010.

¹⁴Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

¹⁵Nicolas de Bremond d'Ars, *Catholicisme, zones de fracture*, op.cit., p. 61.

¹⁶Anne, 29, single, career trajectory in Catholic associations, a Guide de France, training at the *Institut Supérieur de Pastorale Catéchétique*, leader in a major Catholic association, Paris, 17 January 2011.

that fall under the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801, but in most cases he earns between 750 euros and 1,100 euros a month (about 1,000 to 1,500 dollars). So the economic status of priests cannot offset the decline in their social status. They do not even reap the potential benefit of this modest living, since (unlike monks) their image is not associated with poverty. It is their “aura” that seems to be evaporating today; as one interviewee put it: “*To be a priest today is not a staggering social ascension, is it! There isn’t even that kind of aura they once had, there is no erudition, no model of behavior. On the contrary, there is a disconnection with what people experience every day!*”¹⁷ Moreover this remark may explain the care many young priests take to make their situation visible by wearing a Roman collar or even a cassock (especially in Paris). For them it is as much a matter of affirming fidelity to the pope as a desire to attend to their self-presentation and prominence. Wearing a uniform manifests the belonging to a great institution. Due to its almost folkloric character, the cassock also becomes for some young priests an opportune accessory to proclaim their singularity and arouse curiosity and hence contact. The stigmata have turned into an instrument of attraction!¹⁸

Despite everything, note that among the observant and some of the inspired, the scarcity of priests contributes to *increasing* their aura. Young priests are seen as those who give their lives to save the collectivity in difficult times. Paradoxically, then, among observant Catholics the crisis in sacerdotal recruitment reinforces the aura of priests. The vocation assumes a sacrificial dimension and is magnified as a call from God that surpasses human understanding. And this probably explains why the social base of sacerdotal recruitment has lately tended to be reduced to the “classic bourgeoisie”, a class that makes worship observance a constitutive element of its identity. Priests are therefore central to this universe. In this social milieu, the celebration of a baptism or a family funeral by a deacon – or “worse,” by a layperson – is experienced as a form of relegation and injustice.¹⁹ Fortunately, these milieus are also rather fertile in vocations and priests can often be found from within their kinship networks (as wedding announcements indicate) to avoid any disagreement.

¹⁷Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

¹⁸On these new clerical strategies for using vestments in the clergy, see Céline Béraud, “Prêtres de la génération Jean-Paul II: recomposition de l’idéal sacerdotal et accomplissement de soi,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, n° 133, Jan. -Mar. 2006, pp. 52-53.

¹⁹Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 207-208.

Finally, we should note that if the role of the priest is so downgraded, it is also because the priestly vocation is now just one path to holiness among others. Today, many young people think they can live their faith fully through international cooperation, commitment to care giving, living as a couple, or even by pilgrimages. Life-long commitment is replaced by forms of temporary engagement: a year of service to the diocese, two years abroad with *Missions étrangères de Paris* (MEP) or the DCC, etc. Priestly ordination no longer seems necessary if one wants to follow Jesus Christ, and the renunciations that are associated with it seem all the more unjustified.

Persistent Expectations of a “Good Priest”

For the majority of the French, it is not sufficient any longer for the priest to have been ordained. The charisma of the function conferred on him by the sacrament of ordination has moved into the background. To compensate, priests must recreate from scratch (or almost) their own authority by mobilizing their personal resources: charisma, skills, self-presentation, etc. If the priestly status is going through a crisis, that is not always the case with many of them. Many interviewees described positive figures of priests.

Most of the time, Catholics expect priests to incarnate the Catholicism they esteem to be legitimate. The inspired want priests who have been born again, transformed by their encounter with Jesus. The emancipated love socially responsible priests, who make each person reflect on life and may even make the importance of worship quite relative, recalling that the essential thing is the struggle against injustice.

For the modern conciliarists, the “good” priest is someone who does not hesitate to transgress certain positions of the church authorities in order not to hurt people. It is by their capacity to compromise with the norms of the Catholic institution that these priests appear to be men of God, faithful to a form of love and empathy that overflows the established framework. By this “proof of humanity” they are then perceived as authentic witnesses of the Gospel: *“I have close to me examples of Catholics who deliberately – not just out of militancy – ask homosexual friends to participate in liturgies as marriage witnesses or as godparents in baptisms, while knowing very well that in the parish everybody knows that ‘that person’ is homosexual [...] There is a gap between a great part of the base and the official discourse. What is striking is to see sometimes that even the priests demonstrate this gap, they are much closer to Catholics at the base than to the official*

discourse, while still being good priests."²⁰ The "good" priest as thus defined as the one who does not stop at an external situation, but favors interiority, people's spiritual life. Many divorced-remarried people use the figure of the good priest in the same sense. Again, he is someone who is able to welcome them and recognize their faithfulness to Jesus despite the trauma of divorce.

For the observant, good priests are those who make the mass sacral and solemn, who preach well, and especially who do not compromise the rules. For this father of a household, aged 39: "*We got a new curate last Sunday. When I heard his sermon, I said to myself 'that's it, with priests like him, the Church's crisis is behind us. ' He is young, he is dynamic, he delivered a sermon that was really nourishing on being a Catholic today, while our old curé, it was always flat with him, a pile of clichés about the poor and the rich. All the young people left our parish. The new curate says 'a year from now, I want many young people at mass'. With a guy like that, I don't doubt it.*"²¹ We find many analogous statements among the observant and the inspired, and we should not mistake what they are saying. They revere less the charisma of the priest's *role* than his *personal* charisma. The authority of the curate mentioned above depends on his youth, his dynamism, and his ability as a preacher.

An authority of Role That Is Not Imposed

In all cases, we observe the contested authority of the priest's role. It no longer suffices for a priest to be ordained and sent by his bishop; in order to benefit from recognition, there has to be a surplus of personal inventiveness, whether by ritual innovation²² that plays on established rules, or on the contrary, on the audacious reaffirmation of the requirements of the Catholic faith. But in every instance, his performance at getting himself recognized as a priest is bound to divide Catholics between those who recognize themselves in him and the others who do not. The role-play forced upon priests therefore feeds specific audiences and favors the coalescence of parishioners around affinities. It's up to each to choose its priest as a function of his personal

²⁰Jérôme, 40, journalist, non-practicing Catholic, did not grow up in a Catholic environment, Paris, March 2010.

²¹Antoine, 39, married and father, director of the Notre Dame team, song animator in his parish, conference Saint-Vincent de Paul, political activist in the UMP, volunteer for the Chartres pilgrimage with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, December 2012.

²²Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, chap. 4.

charisma.²³ This tendency is especially urban, but is also found (on the margins) in the countryside, although there the “clerical offer” is much reduced. It also occurs in many ranks of the modern conciliarists and the observant.²⁴

This reshaping of the figure of the priest around personal charisma consequently relativizes the statutory definition of the priesthood. In this sense, for some interviewees, the church institution is uselessly depriving itself of good priests by taking away the ministry of those who marry: “*Afterward, I had major regrets in relation to the Church, in relation to two priests we knew [...], who are today both fathers of families and who are happy, and at the same time what a loss for the Church and what a loss for Christians, especially since they were both in working-class missions, and so for that mission – because they were very valuable people, people who united others, who stimulated, where were good listeners and who were motors of the Church [...] – I find this truly a great loss for Christians and for the Church.*”²⁵ Personal charisma also puts into perspective the exclusion of women from the priesthood: “*There are women who are completely competent, who have the caliber to preach, to light up faith in others – whether they are single or they have taken vows or they are married – what does the social status of these persons matter? What counts is what animates them and makes them sparkle. And I think that there, when people talk about the place of women, she is totally competent in preaching, in spreading the Word, all the way to the priesthood.*”²⁶

Ultimately, we may wonder if secular figures who are good managers of human relations – coaches, social activity leaders, business leaders – are not unwittingly substituting for the figure of the priest, forcing the latter in effect to imitate them, whereas once it was the reverse.

²³This is not all that new, especially in a big city like Paris where a choice is possible. Cf. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *En route*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996 [1895].

²⁴ Arnaud Ferron, “Intégrisme et traditionalisme catholique. Réflexions autour de la réactivation d’un mouvement contre-révolutionnaire,” in Jean Baudoin et Philippe Portier (eds.), *Le mouvement catholique français à l’épreuve de la pluralité*, Rennes: PUR, 2002, pp. 206-207.

²⁵François, 44, married, one child, animator in special prevention, came through ACE, then JOC and ACO, activist in SUD trade union, responsible for personnel in his association, Member of ACO, Tourcoing, March 2010.

²⁶Béatrice, 49, married, three children, did catechism, has supervised pastoral care for youths, has been at the center of ACF for fourteen years, Vannes, March 2010.

LAITY EXCEEDING CUSTOMARY LIMITS

The “disappearance of the clerical population”²⁷ has entailed significant modifications in parishes and promoted many laypersons to responsible positions in the church. We will discuss this at length in the next chapter. The consequence is that local Christian communities, especially in rural areas, have acquired an experience of religious life without a priest. Whereas previously the priest was the center of parish social life, and as such the aggregating element of the community, now it is a lay team that occupies this position and performs this function. So when a priest comes in to celebrate mass, he must respond to the expectations of the local community and often bend to its customs. He cannot free himself from their expectations without the risk of offending the lay sensibilities that are indispensable for him. For those leaving seminary, discovering the reduced margin of maneuver that a priest now possesses is often experienced as a tribulation. They sometimes get the impression of being treated as “distributors of sacraments”. Father Jean-Marie Launay, head of the National Office of Vocations, notes that some young priests feel they are “surplus”.²⁸

New Lay Figures take Charge in Practice

The laity is obliged to deal with the penury of priests and must get accustomed to the resulting new “worship landscape”. Whether presiding at funerals or at ADAPs (Sunday Assembly in the Absence of a Priest), the laity must make up for the priest’s absence without encroaching on his ministry. For baptisms and weddings, the deacons take over. In the Church, the hierarchy of functions and roles became concrete in the arrangement of bodies:²⁹ the laity is constituted as an undifferentiated mass, their proper space is the nave, while the priest in his vestments inhabits the chancel. Everything sets them apart: dress, position, and practices. One speaks, the others listen, etc. Constant repetition of liturgies incorporates both parties, priests and laypersons, into the limits of the possible – and hence of the thinkable. Adapting the established bodily postures, or even moving into once prohibited spaces,

²⁷Hervé Le Bras, Monique Lefebvre, “Une population en voie d’extinction: le clergé français,” *Population*, n°38 / 2, 1983, pp. 396-403.

²⁸“Rencontre avec le P. Jean-Marie Launay, coordonnateur de l’équipe du Service national des vocations,” *Lettre d’information de la conférence des évêques de France*, n°990, 28 June 1996, p. 15. Quoted by Céline Béraud, *Prêtres...*, *op.cit.*, p. 257.

²⁹Jacques Lagroye, *Appartenir à une institution, catholiques en France aujourd’hui*, Paris: Economica, 2009, pp. 95-96.

modifies and pushes back the boundaries of what is thinkable - and hence possible. After World War Two, this was the experience of priests who adopted working class conditions by laboring in factories and living among unbelievers as simple laypersons. This experience would revolutionize people's way of thinking about the priesthood.³⁰

Currently this is the experience of many laypersons during funerals, ADAPs, or meetings for social or prayer purposes. Their presence alongside the priest (and sometimes in place of the priest) arouses resistance and is becoming familiar to most Catholics.³¹ However, the absence of the priest still poses problems among Catholics who are non-practicing, because they are attached to an idealized representation of Catholic worship.³² But despite these traditionalist reservations, the presence of laity in most church missions alongside deacons and priests has been institutionalized. At Besançon, says Marie-Claire, an episcopal delegate, "*We appointed a layperson whenever there was no possibility of finding a resident curé. Now, in defined sectors, we systematically appoint a layperson as collaborator even when there is a priest.*"³³

A New Form of Appreciating Rites

These new practices create a space of unprecedented comparison between priests and laity and introduce shifts in the way rites are perceived. Appreciation of the religious quality – even transcendence – of rites no longer depends exclusively on the sacerdotal ordination of the priest. Now it is the individual performance that is being evaluated, for example by a young woman who could be classified among the observant: "*On Easter Sunday, it was an old retired priest who was supposed to say mass. At the start we thought he was late, we were waiting, and then the leader finally assumed he had forgotten and had to concelebrate elsewhere because he was unreachable. Suddenly, she called a deacon in the neighborhood; he arrived at top speed and attempted to improvise. It was brilliant, he preached on the joy of Easter, he was praying, smiling, he had powerful words – in short, in the end we had a ADAP a thousand times better than a mass with Father N. who always does sermons full of fine sentiments but rather hollow. The*

³⁰Nathalie Viet-Depaule, Charles Suaud, *Prêtres et ouvriers. Une double fidélité mise à l'épreuve (1944-1969)*, Paris: Karthala, 2004.

³¹Jacques Lagroye, *Appartenir à une institution, op.cit.*, pp. 97-98.

³²Henri Tincq, *Dieu en France, Mort et résurrection du catholicisme*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2003, p. 221.

³³Quoted in *La Croix*, 26-28 mai 2012, p. 3.

deacon, with all his spontaneity, he put us into the joy of Easter."³⁴ Here we find confirmation of a hypothesis offered by Henri Tincq ten years ago now: "When a bishop writes and signs a letter of mission to a mother of a family, for example, for her to become a chaplain in a school and hospital, it is never a banal gesture. It is really a redistribution of religious power that is going on, even if not a lot of noise is made about it. A redistribution of religious expertise is also taking place, which in time may appear subversive."³⁵

This testimony shows that proper conformity of rites to their established canons no longer suffices for them to qualify as the mediation of God. Often thanks to little innovations on the margin, or else variations on a master theme, the rite may convey the presence of God.³⁶ Sometimes new rites are even "patched together".³⁷ Many Catholics expect from religious celebrations a form of being transported, an introduction to God, or at least a reflective dimension in their ordinary lives. For these purposes, the priest is no longer indispensable. The redistribution has meant the tipping of legitimacy toward the laity, who classically distribute the BSG, and away from the clerics who distribute CSG. The laity gradually impose their skills (piety, sociability) in the domain proper to the clergy, which is liturgy and its extensions.

The second consequence of this new division of religious power is that it may open a way to recover adherence from Catholics who have been disaffiliated. The experience of the diocese of Poitiers shows that the substitution of a layperson for a priest in leading liturgical celebrations allows a congregation that has kept itself on the margins of the parish to come back to closer proximity thanks to the new institutional arrangement. This kind of shift requires us to raise the existence of competition between priests and laity.

Open Competition between Laity and Priests

If by the norms of the Catholic institution the priest's monopoly over most of the sacraments (CSG) makes him the necessary mediator of God, in practice he is marginalized by the transformations of much of

³⁴Géraldine, 35, mother of a family, four children, practicing Catholic family, former server of mass, works in communication, very invested in her parish in preparation for baptism, Paris, December 2012.

³⁵ Henri Tincq, *Dieu en France, op.cit.*, p. 216.

³⁶ Laurence Hérault, *La grande communion. Transformations et actualité d'une cérémonie catholique en Vendée*, Paris: CTHS, 1996. See also by the same author: "Décrire les rites. Pratiques d'ethnologues et d'ecclésiastiques" in *Gradhiva*, 1996, 19, pp. 39-48. Albert Piette, *La religion de près*, Paris: Métailié, 1999, pp. 220-221:

³⁷ Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 147-154.

the laity's relation to rites. The priest's performance remains the object of deference, but meanwhile many believers cannot prevent themselves from comparing it and evaluating it in relation to the skill of other priests and even of deacons or laity: *"When I decide to marry or when I bring my little one to be baptized, what do I do? Well, I am asking for help in taking a distance from what I am living in my conjugal love, from what I am living in relation to the future of this child, to his entering into a community of brothers, of entering perhaps into relation with this Father whom Jesus tells us about ... That is what rites are for. How many funerals today are led by laypersons who speak extraordinary words of life. I remain persuaded that outside the ranks of priests there are plenty of French people, men and women, who are perfectly capable of playing this role, of being in communion, being able to stand back, being able to signify an 'elsewhere'!"*³⁸

This man, easily classifiable among the modern conciliarists, illustrates the underground tendencies at work in French Catholicism. The displacement of the demand for ritualism results in the disenchantment of the priest's role. What counts now is that the "celebrant", whatever his status, has a charismatic competence that makes him qualified in the eyes of his congregation, not just qualified under the norms of the ecclesiastical institution.

We agree with Céline Béraud when she affirms that authority in the Church is being reconfigured around two competences: a competence to master ideas and make arguments; and a more emotional competence that lies in the capacity to create authentic and warm relationships.³⁹ In this respect, the training of priests seems unsuitable. Their way of presenting themselves and of making an argument is out of synch with the ways of doing this that are current in the rest of society, whether in a business world marked by management studies or in a media world marked by sociologists and psychologists.⁴⁰

As one interviewee says, the Church should start to pay attention to what is already being done. He finds that the practice of ministers exceeds their theology: *"Vocations for example, some people think they will come back, I think that there are other forms that are going to happen, meaning that the existential precedes the institutional, so what*

³⁸Guy, 65, married, retired lawyer, activist in an international Catholic NGO, Paris, February 2010.

³⁹Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, p. 57.

⁴⁰Witness the "paths of humanity" training offered by the laity and addressed to priests, with the goal of giving priests a vision of economics and management. More than 240 priests (aged under 50) have done the training. An association between Alpha and Talenthéo has offered since 2013 "leadership training" to clerics.

*is happening in the background will bring a new way of serving the Church and the world, and this will gradually be recognized institutionally – this is a question that preoccupies me and that unfortunately is not well understood by the bishops!*⁴¹ For this modern conciliarist, theology is lagging far behind practice. As a consequence, the repetition of theological arguments against the granting of some sacramental ministries to the laity does not correspond with reality and is perceived as reactionary. Official thinking on the issue is considered antiquated by this sister aged 83: *“I think that a whole revision of sacramental theology must be done.”*⁴² Another interviewee concurs: *“The Council showed us the path to co-responsibility between ordained ministers and laity. I really think the future is moving in the direction of still greater co-responsibility [...]. So I believe that it all remains to be invented.”*⁴³

For our interviewees, good celebrants are those who demonstrate great “humanity” and have a capacity for “welcoming” or “listening”, those who know how to make you “reflect”, who pose meaningful questions, or have a theological or exegetical expertise that allows them to bring the faithful into a better understanding of the faith. It is interesting to note that in the Catholic press more and more laypersons are signing meditations or giving advice on spiritual life. The collection in the weekly journal *Essentials of Life* offers an often-surprising panorama of current Christian spirituality. Monks rub shoulders with publishers, with senior officials, with housewives, artists, teachers ... These days, whatever the priest is, he is no longer necessarily the best qualified.

A New Model of the Ordained Ministry?

Many Catholics’ experience of the equal qualification of priests and laity results in a latent contestation, including among some of the observant, of role boundaries: *“I am not going to fight for the marriage of priests, the issue is even outmoded. It is the question of the priest himself that has to be asked! Are we going to confide solely to priests certain places of communion, places for sharing transcendence, places*

⁴¹Henri-Gérard, 65, married, permanent layperson in a new community formed in the wake of the charismatic revival, Paris, March 2010.

⁴²Mother L., 83, nun, entered the order in 1953, was mother superior of a religious order, experience in Africa, Paris, February 2010.

⁴³Philippo, 60, of Italian origin, married, journalist and specialist in communication and the media, Paris, March 2010.

for sharing Hope? No! We have to get away from status. We are stuck there!"⁴⁴

Mobilizing a sort of "right to communion", many modern conciliarists denounce the state of abandonment in which many Christian communities find themselves for lack of priests: "*For the Eucharist, for example, it is not worth proclaiming 'the-more-you-take-communion-the-better' and then closing the parishes one after the other because there are no more priests. For example, in some regions of Latin America, people wait six months for a priest, and there is a problem! People are going to go elsewhere.*"⁴⁵ They fear that the current reconfiguration of parishes might create deserts of faith by depriving some isolated congregations of any sacraments.⁴⁶ Rather than wait for a return of vocations, they think that the possibility should be open for the laity to fill in for priests or even accede to the priesthood.

Most of our interviewees were rather vague in their proposals, but two tendencies could be detected: 1) some modern conciliarists and some emancipated want to open the possibility of priesthood to a potentially large number of candidates (principally to married men and to women); 2) other conciliarists, some inspired and some observants want to delegate to the laity certain ministries that are currently reserved for priests (sacraments for the sick, Eucharist in certain circumstances, confession, etc.). But they converge in denouncing the impasse created by the current definition of the priesthood.

The status of deacon is almost ignored by the interviewees, perhaps because of the vagueness surrounding his missions. According to the local situation, the deacon could have a role as super-servant at the altar or as quasi-priest – a flexible role. It should be noted that opening up the diaconate to women is not theologically excluded by Rome.⁴⁷ As Céline Béraud suggests, this evolution has become even more probable since Benedict XVI modified canons 1008 and 1009; now deacons no longer share the mission of priests and bishops.

However, this defense of a necessary evolution in status and roles is usually a topic for internal discussion among committed Catholics and

⁴⁴Guy, 65, married, retired lawyer, activist in an international Catholic NGO, Paris, February 2010.

⁴⁵Jérôme, 40, journalist, non-practicing Catholic, did not grow up in a Catholic environment, Paris, March 2010.

⁴⁶This situation already occurs in many dioceses and the bishops have not made a credible response: in their discourse the Sunday mass is still the norm. On this subject see François Wernert, *Le dimanche en déroute*, Paris: Médiaspaul, 2010. The author won the prize for a "young European theologian" for this book.

⁴⁷Céline Béraud, "Le diaconat en France aujourd'hui. Perspective sociologique" *La Vie spirituelle*, March 2013, n°805, pp. 157-168.

is almost never made public, whether within the Catholic institution or outside it. Open contestation of the priesthood remains the privilege of small minorities in networks around the *Golias*, the *Parvis*, the Conference of the Baptized, and among theologians in academic circles. The evolution of Catholicism takes place discretely, far from the noise of militant demands. Above all it takes place in practice through adaptations or innovations that push back the limits of the thinkable and the possible.

THE SUCCESS OF THE BROTHERHOOD MODEL: CHRISTIAN BUSINESS LEADERS

Catholicism is evolving toward forms in which the priest no longer occupies a central position. One might see this as a return of an intra-Catholic anti-clericalism, whose remote foundations are found in Late Medieval brotherhoods. *Entrepreneurs et Dirigeants Chrétiens* (EDC) (Christian Businessmen and Directors) is a good example. They represent a way of leaving behind the Roman system centered on the priest.

The EDC is the sole Christian movement (uniting Catholics and Protestants) that explicitly sets the membership requirement as being a company director. The approximately 2,500 registered members are CEOs or salaried directors, including the liberal professions and some leaders of non-commercial administrative bodies (hospitals, educational establishments). However, they do not claim any exclusiveness, since many directors are already included in other memberships, for example in employers' syndicates. Their representativeness in the Christian landscape allows us to recognize them as a "brotherhood of decision-makers," since that lies at the heart of their status as entrepreneurs.⁴⁸

Working in a Team

Participation in the movement takes the form of teamwork. Except for a few members, adherents or sympathizers, all those registered in the EDC are attached to a local team, which is how the EDC functions. Formerly called a "section", the team gathers ten members, elects a president, and chooses a spiritual advisor. A manual about teamwork describes the desirable ways of working, but each team is organized according to its own decisions. The partners participate (or not) in a monthly meeting, which may (or may not) include a meal and

⁴⁸Nicolas de Bremond d'Ars, "La conscience éthique restaurée des Entrepreneurs et Dirigeants Chrétiens", *Social Compass*, Sage Pub, 59(2), 2012, pp. 159–172.

that takes place in an office or a home. Encounters between teams (generally rather rare) are organized at the regional level. French territory is divided into a variable number of regions, whose contours sometimes evolve depending on the number and location of teams. The legitimacy of belonging to a team is understood on the basis of the movement's project: the personal conversion of business directors.

The first motive for joining is to break the solitude: "*To remove the director from solitude, to speak with peers, to master certain kinds of knowledge about economic life and human relations.*"⁴⁹ A director is defined by his capacity to take personal decisions that orient the business, and this autonomy often leads to feeling alone. This seems to lead business leaders to seek interlocutors worthy of their *faith*, a term is to be taken in both senses, as "religious faith" and as "trust". Joining a team responds to the desire to discuss ethical dilemmas to which practicing Christian faith leads, and simultaneously to tackle professional issues within a circle of peers, without this exchange of views being burdened with professional consequences.

EDC recruits primarily among small and medium-sized businesses, which represent two-thirds of its members, since these are the leaders who have the least management staff (strategic committees, management boards) to help them face economic difficulties and turning points. Corporate executives and top management are recruited principally in the Paris region, while small and medium-sized businesses are proportionally more represented in the provinces.

Although the personal conversion of the director is one of the two official goals of the movement (the second is to influence mindsets), there remains a commitment to give members a permanent spiritual and doctrinal frame of reference. Conversion presupposes a corpus of values and practices deriving from Christianity. Keeping the adjective "Christian" in the movement's name expresses a desire for ecumenicalism that is constantly reiterated. A majority of members are Roman Catholics and the rest Protestants, and the proportions reflect their distribution in society. This ecumenicalism helps nourish, at least in the background, questions of doctrine, especially about *who* incarnates spiritual leadership. In this regard, spiritual advisors have an original place in the movement.

A Spiritual Advisor

Briefly, the members choose their spiritual advisor and the great majority of them are Catholic priests (parish *curés*), and some deacons.

⁴⁹EDC Mission Statement, "Objectif général de la vie en équipe", first point. No date.

There are also some Protestant pastors, and more recently laypersons. In any event, they appear neither to be theologians at the service of members nor to have an internal hierarchy. We find spiritual advisors at the regional and national levels, but they play their role only in relation to members, not in relation to Catholic authorities as representatives of the EDC movement. Meetings of spiritual advisors are sporadic. During the movement's national assemblies (every two years), the bishop of the city, like the bishop in charge of "following" the EDC at the Conference of Bishops of France, is systematically invited to attend, an invitation also extended to the reformed pastor of the town or region.

The spiritual advisor meets with a team chaired by a member, the team president. He represents the "spiritual" support for the members' conversations. He has no resources put at his disposal by the movement; his contribution comes from his own funds, so adherent are reassured there is no parallel hierarchy. Whether layperson, deacon, or priest, whether Catholic or Protestant, the spiritual advisor commits his personal legitimacy to the discussion around the table. If he is a cleric, then an institutional body (*curé*, pastor) may authenticate his statements, but members decide on the dogmatic aspect (whether ethical or theological views or more generally, Bible study). Members take what is said *as personal testimony*.

Thus we perceive a tension that runs through the EDC movement between the members who take charge of the local teams and generally run the movement, and the spiritual advisors whose institutional role is confined within the strict limits of personal participation. The spiritual advisor is not "sent" to the movement, but is approached by one or more members who offer him the post – a coopting that obviously exceeds institutional dimensions.

Defying the Clergy?

What we have just described (tersely) as the EDC example is found in other movements that adopt similar behavior. We might mention the "Alpha groups" (which began in France in the 2000s), and the older movement for sick people "Faith and Light", plus the Notre-Dame Teams for couples, Catholic Scouts, Rosary teams. They are representative of a very old "brotherhood movement" that organized forms of lay piety and sociality in which clerics had a subordinate position (sometimes merely honorific). These modern brotherhoods (with educational, catechetical, mutualist or other purposes) organize the distribution of BSGs according to a scheme of (relative) defiance to clergy control. They played only a limited role in the management of French Catholicism as long as the secular clergy covered the parish terrain. But the withdrawal of the demographic provision leaves

Catholics largely orphaned from their clergy. These brotherhoods, which have not lost their social impact (there are 60,000 participants in Alpha groups, 60,000 *Scouts et Guides de France*, etc.), offer possible structures for Catholic sociality in a new relation to the clergy. The latter keeps the distribution of CSGs but the lay world resorts to it only when necessary (a mass from time to time), which marginalizes the force of clerical government.

The more recent evolution of these movements gives substance to our analysis. Using a professional metaphor – itself borrowed from war rhetoric – the laity has “gone onto the offensive”. Priests are becoming the focus of new ways of “managing professional life”; the goal is to transform their pastoral culture. Two important programs are regularly offered by laity to priests in France.

The oldest is “Paths of Humanity” dating from the mid 1990s, when some Catholic business leaders put together a course in economics for priests. They were worried about the “disinformation” in sermons from parish *curés*, which they found unfavorable to capitalist employers and outrageously partisan to the trade unions. This training won the blessing of bishops under the name *Chemins d’humanité* (www.chemins-humanite.org). Since it started, sixteen classes have graduated from the two-year course. The program is addressed to priests with at least five years of ministry and aged less than 50. At the rate of twelve to fifteen graduates per year, this now represents more than two hundred priests in France (out of a total of 4,500 aged less than 65). They learn how to manage groups, what management means, about the business environment and what the French call the “social partners” (i. e. capital and labor), and so on. All the priests who participate stress the decisive contribution this makes for the organization of their own work.⁵⁰

Clearly this means putting into the foreground the third ecclesiastical *munus* (function), which is government.⁵¹ This same initiative is behind a 2012 proposal for continuing education organized by “Association Alpha” and “Talentéo”, as expressed in the first sentence of its manifesto: “The purpose of the path ‘*Des pasteurs selon mon cœur*’ (*My favorite pastors*) is to prepare priests to govern their community in order to give rise to disciples in a dynamic to make the Church grow.”

⁵⁰Data is available on demand from the leadership, but it has never been compiled.

⁵¹In the Conciliar definition of the priest, the three *munera* (*munus* = duty, function) are to teach, to sanctify, and to govern. The same applies to the bishop. Government is third. Lay people are called “priests, prophets and kings”; hence we see that here, too, the government (king) is the last in order.

In other words, if priests are to be competent in matters of *officium* in the classic sense, the relation they have with the faithful must make use of *lay* know-how. Ecclesiastical culture is gently becoming hybridized with secular culture, on the model of the first Roman period when Ambrose of Milan transposed secular methods to ecclesial functions. The *magistrature* that served as a model for Ambrose and his peers⁵² in organizing Christian religious life is now called *management*. But unlike magistrates, managers' activities do not rely on legal modes and on public spectacle. Management is practiced in a specific relation to the social organization, making constant reference to an articulation between individual initiative ("what is your project?") and collective effectiveness. This means that authority springs from the *strategic* and not from the *sacramental*.

SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN

Among the 9,500 laypersons who work permanently in dioceses, 90 % are women. The share of nuns among them constantly declines. This very pronounced feminization of work in the church institution adds an additional dimension to the problematic of the relation between priests and laity. To understand the problem this poses, we have to start with the fact that today it is principally women who staff parishes, dioceses, and many religious organizations. Moreover, even at the base, there are more women practicing Catholicism than men.⁵³ This strong feminine presence is reflected in this statement by Monseigneur Dubost, Bishop of Evry-Corbeil: "For 35 years, I have had women as boss, as colleagues and as collaborators and contributors [...] and I was well provided for."⁵⁴ The body of the church institution is very feminine,⁵⁵ but its face remains almost exclusively masculine, due to the liturgical monopoly enjoyed by the "ordained ministers." That presents a problem.

⁵²*De officiis*, the founding text by Ambrose of Milan, who adapted the eponymous book by Cicero. See Giorgio Agamben, *Opus dei*, (Paris: Seuil, 2011) for a detailed analysis of this borrowing.

⁵³Claude Langlois, "'Toujours plus pratiquantes': La permanence du dimorphisme sexuel dans le catholicisme français contemporain", *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, n°2, 1995, pp. 229-260. See also Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée & Magali Della Sudda (eds), *Genre et christianisme. Plaidoyers pour une histoire croisée*, Paris: Beauchesne, 2015.

⁵⁴Mgr. Michel Dubost, *Les femmes*, Paris: Mame-Plon, 2002, p. 9. Quoted by Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres... op.cit.*, p. 127.

⁵⁵*La Croix*, 26-28, May 2012.

Subordinated Women

In many parishes, it is the women in charge of animating the liturgy who welcome the faithful to mass, who give instructions and briefly introduce the readings or liturgical sequences. But most of the work done by women remains confined to the shadows. Most of the time they are the main spring of parishes and dioceses, but the person who celebrates mass is always a man. Women do not appear during liturgical celebrations except in ancillary roles.⁵⁶

This distortion between the commitment of women and the modest recognition they earn is manifest in the distribution of power. As one interviewee put it, the highest responsibilities are the exclusive privilege of priests: *“There are young and generous priests who know very well how to have respectful exchanges between priests and laity and between men and women. But let us say that structurally the higher you rise in the institution, the more you see that personal relations are blocked by the structure of clericalism.”*⁵⁷ This situation is concretely translated in the daily life of a laywoman aged 34 who works full-time in charge of pastoral leadership of the young in her diocese: *“Certainly, when I need information from the bishopric, I will write an e-mail and follow up twice more, and I still have no answer, so then I tell Pascal, who is a young priest, he sends an e-mail and gets an answer immediately.”*⁵⁸

The clerical concentration of power has the corollary of power hierarchized sexually between dominant men and dominated women. This scandalizes certain interviewees all the more; they assert that without women nothing would be done, since they provide a significant amount of labor at all levels of dioceses: *“In 2010 we cannot conceive of any kind of organization [...] without making right the difference between men and women. All the more so because the clergy claim sexual difference in order to fight against homosexuality. Alterity is very important; we are in a Church that is only masculine, with only men on the platform, only men in the key posts, and it is totally alarming. It is not normal, for in France if there were no women there would be no Church, everybody knows that. In discussions among bishops at Lourdes, you notice they are surrounded with women in their episcopal councils.”*⁵⁹

⁵⁶Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 128-132.

⁵⁷Marie-Lucette, 72, militant feminist, practicing Catholic, Paris, March 2010.

⁵⁸Myriam, 31, responsible for youth pastoral care in a diocese, volunteer for a year in the Taizé Community, Paris, December 2012.

⁵⁹Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

Women Idealized and Excluded

What is at issue is the anthropology carried by the hierarchization of roles in the ecclesiastical institution.⁶⁰ Many modern conciliarists contend that priests idealize womanhood in order better to exclude it in fact: “*The Catholic institution does not perceive what is at stake in another relation between the sexes: it maintains women, or the feminine on a pedestal that is the counterpart of clericalism. Since the clergy defends the primacy of the masculine, it has to idealize the feminine. It is a dramatic delusion, for it gives the impression of honoring women without taking any account of their autonomy.*”⁶¹ Another conciliarist describes a scene that illustrates this: “*During a debate, whether comically or tragically, when the audience respectfully asked ‘what place do you see for women in the Church?’ a cardinal responded by quoting Sister Emmanuelle [a nun who worked for the poor in Turkey and Egypt] and Mother Teresa. In rugby, this is what is called ‘kicking the ball out of bounds.’*”⁶² The current justifications of the priesthood thus contribute to making the priest interiorize a feeling of women’s inferiority by devolving onto them activities that remain subaltern: “*It is very sad that young men who are generous, who want to turn to the priesthood or the religious life, get imposed on them little by little, like a distillation this superiority of the masculine. [...] They are not content with saying that man is superior, it is deeper than that – ‘man is charged by God with...’ – this is the structure of clericalism. [...] Structurally the Church is mono-sexual.*”⁶³

It is true that the relation between the priesthood and leadership is already considerably stretched due to the lack of priests. Within parishes benefiting from a pastoral council, it is not rare that women are in the majority. But it is still always the *curé* who decides, especially if he is a neoclassical priest: “*Today the young priests are adulated by the young and often they want to remake everything according to their ideas, then you have to make way for them.*”⁶⁴ Whatever her age or experience, a responsible laywoman must give way to a priest if requested. And this is even truer now that priests are rare. This human resources policy is

⁶⁰See the recent book by Maud Amandier & Alice Chablis, *Le déni; enquête sur l’Eglise et l’égalité des sexes*, Paris: Bayard, 2014.

⁶¹Marie-Lucette, 72, militant feminist, practicing Catholic, Paris, March 2010.

⁶²Léon, 70, married, demographer by training, was president of an NGO for development, Lyon, March 2010.

⁶³Marie-Lucette, 72, militant feminist, practicing Catholic, Paris, March 2010.

⁶⁴Myriam, 31, responsible for youth pastoral care in a diocese, volunteer for a year in the Taizé Community, Paris, December 2012.

explained by the desire of bishops to privilege those who give their whole lives to the institution. Maintaining their motivation necessitates giving them strong symbolic rewards⁶⁵ – otherwise vocations might be discouraged.

Laywomen suffer this situation without protesting most of the time. They are invested in a form of sacerdotal representation of their work and they justify their docility in the name of “giving oneself” and “serving the Church”. What they do *not* accept is the extreme precariousness of women in the institution. The space of what is possible for them to do always depends on the reigning priest. One woman saw herself surreptitiously removed from distributing communion by a young priest; another changed parish so her daughter could continue to be an altar girl.⁶⁶ The inferior tasks of hosting mass are consistently open to them: leading singing and taking care of children. This situation questions their faith. Modern conciliarists see it as an exclusion that betrays the message of Christ; the inspired and the emancipated as a superannuated way to work, and female mass-goers as another occasion for acquiring detachment by self-renunciation.

Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood

Many interviewees, especially the modern conciliarists and the emancipated (sometimes the inspired and even the observant) say they do not understand the reasons why women are excluded from ordination, although few go so far as to demand it. As an explicit cause to be advocated, women-as-priests mobilizes only a minority.⁶⁷ In interviews, the issue is often raised as a limit case, to show where things could go if the place of women is not better recognized. On the other hand, the exclusion of women from the diaconate makes people indignant: “*They started to ordain deacons with a vengeance. I did not understand why, suddenly, all these men were ordained when it was we who did the catechism, who did hospitality, who took care of the elderly; we did everything, but suddenly they started to bring out the deacons. Certainly many of them are very good and I don’t question them. But why no*

⁶⁵Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 135-138.

⁶⁶This point is far from trivial; see Céline Béraud, “Des petites filles à l’autel? Catholicisme, genre et liturgie,” in Céline Béraud, Frédéric Gugelot, Isabelle Saint-Martin (eds.), *Catholicisme en tensions, op.cit.*, pp. 241-252.

⁶⁷Sabine Rousseau, “Femmes-prêtres. Histoire d’une revendication,” in Céline Béraud, Frédéric Gugelot, Isabelle Saint-Martin (eds.), *Catholicisme en tensions, ibid.*, pp. 229-239.

*recognition for women? Are they afraid of them? Don't we have the right to speak of ministries in the feminine?"*⁶⁸

The modern conciliarists focus much more on denouncing the link between priesthood and power. According to a sister we questioned, if the priesthood did not appear so exclusively linked to power in the ecclesiastical institution, then perhaps the ordination of women would not be demanded: *"I say that if the fact of being a priest is to exercise power in a parish, yes, then in effect I am absolutely in favor of the ordination of women, but I absolutely believe that the ministry of the priest is not to exercise power, or it should not be. And in my opinion many things, many problems, come from this confusion."*⁶⁹ Another interviewee adds: *"Obviously they say the problem is that women cannot be priests, and one cannot be responsible unless one is a priest, so then it suffices to disconnect the two things. One might very well say that the priesthood is not necessarily a proof of responsibility."*⁷⁰ What remains true is that the priesthood is not just about power. One very feminist interviewee rejects the focus on demands about this: *"When women demand the priesthood, they say 'why do they want the power?' But of course [they say] men only exercise the priesthood as a 'service', this is a semantic game that is terribly perverse, but they do not realize it."*⁷¹ Thus women's demands concern the symbolic status of the priest; many female interviewees do not understand why they cannot represent Jesus, too.

Definitively, the issue of the marginalization of women in the Church originates in the liturgical question. If the active participation of the faithful was once the motor of the liturgical movement that resulted in Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* liturgy in 1963, we perceive that the Church now is experiencing a "freeze": lay-women cannot be installed behind an altar that remains reserved for men. The testimony gathered here converges on the fact that the liturgy still commands institutional power as regards the image that the Church gives of itself and that it sends to women.

⁶⁸Agnès, 57, married, works for the rectorate of Paris in a *lycée*, leadership role in the Scouts et Guides de France and in the Red Cross, member of ACF, Paris, April 2010.

⁶⁹Sister Michelle, 40, nun in a new community, historian, experience in Egypt, Paris, May 2010.

⁷⁰Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

⁷¹Marie-Lucette, 72, militant feminist, practicing Catholic, Paris, March 2010.

CHAPTER V

DIOCESES IN CRISIS

Bishops appear to be overwhelmed. The Catholics in their diocese seem to be escaping them. Many interviewees realize and even state this; there is some corroboration of this state of affairs. We should note that the secular clergy (i. e. not monastic) who serve dioceses suffer most from the crisis in vocations. The male religious orders are also affected, but to a lesser extent, and some new communities are blossoming (like the Saint-Martin Community). But the latter have the privilege of exemption from the hierarchy. It is their provincial superior who governs them, not the bishop. With the overall lack of ordinations, the episcopacy is on its way to losing the principal instrument for regulating religious conduct inside dioceses.

Bishops Increasingly Deprived of Means

The bishop is charged with a geographical area and must watch over the unity between his diocese and the Church Universal. He performs functions of mediation and regulation between the Roman summits and the local faithful. This mission is necessarily proving more and more difficult since diocesan territories increasingly bear little relation with actual Catholicism. In effect, the faithful who live in towns generally choose their parish as a function of taste for the priest, the liturgy, the laity who participate, and the spiritual demography of community. The faithful no longer have a parish imposed by the geographical situation of their residence, unless they live in the countryside where the scarcity of priests makes this choice impossible.

This de-territorialization is favored by the policy of the Holy See that creates personal prelacies and institutes for consecrated life under pontifical law, which thereby escape regulation by bishops. This is the case with the Institute of the Good Shepherd, erected as a “society of apostolic life” under pontifical law in 2006. Thanks to the status granted by the pope, the dissident priests of the *Fraternité Sacerdotale Saint Pie X* who compose it report only to the superior of their institute, who incardicates its members, meaning that he attaches them directly to the Roman Church. In addition, he can freely ordain candidates recognized as suitable for the priesthood.

This tendency toward reconfiguration by affinity has always existed, but what is new is that it is becoming generalized. The decline of the secular clergy contributes to Catholics’ losing a feeling of unity while experiencing the wholesale deregulation of the Catholic

institution. Diocesan standardization gives way to a situation of competition among tendencies. Because there has been no institutionalization of pluralism, these confrontations cannot take place in a peaceful framework, and often end in scuffles behind the scenes, in lobbying maneuvers within churches. Bishops, for example, are caught in pincer movements by active minorities of modern conciliarist, observant, and traditionalist groups who back up their demands with Vatican legislation and threaten to resort to the *Ecclesia dei* Commission if they are refused. Bishops are caught between young priests whom they must encourage and the older ones, because the two generations are far from sharing the same sensibility: “*More than a split between Roman collars and turtlenecks, what to my mind matters is that one side accepts the magisterium being discussed, and the other does not.*”¹

Bishops are also caught between the demands emanating from the faithful and their mission as guardians of orthodoxy. During many synods, demands for the relaxing of canonical rules applicable to the divorced-remarried have been formulated. But bishops feel they have to neutralize them. A synod is typically the pseudo-decision-making process, and the weight of its influence depends on the goodwill of the bishop.² Some debates can therefore be avoided or emptied of their subversive content, and innovative contributions can be disqualified as heterodoxy. The laity want to be taken seriously, for their reflections to be welcomed, and especially for these reflections to be expected and desired: “*It is not so easy to pass messages to the bishops... It would have to be a case of their wanting to be listening to this message!*”³ In practice, synods are procedures for animating a diocese more than for actual participation. They aim to revive the legitimacy of the diocese, but not to recognize within the Church Universal the legitimacy of the divergent positions among some of the laity.

More fundamentally, bishops are caught in the contradictions of their role. Appointed and assigned by the pope, they are comparable to the “prefects” of government administration. They have a role as the pope’s vicar in their area, so their sole local legitimacy derives from whatever ultramontanism exists among the faithful.⁴ This nomination

¹Marie-Françoise, 70, married, senior official, practicing Catholic, militant feminist, Paris, February 2010.

²Jacques Palard (ed.), *Le gouvernement de l’Église catholique, synodes et exercice du pouvoir*, Paris: Cerf, 1997.

³Ludmila, 40, of Catholic culture, sociologist, originally from Eastern Europe, Paris, April 2010.

⁴In the 19th century, French Catholics asked for the Pope’s authority against bishops who seemed too accommodating with the secularism of the new French state. See Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign, 1848-1853*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

favors their deference to Roman power. One interviewee remarked: “*One has the impression that some of their energy is spent on being faithful to Rome!*”⁵ And yet, inside the college of bishops and when communicating with the pope, they are the spokesmen for their local church. The Gaillot affair⁶ showed how the tension imposed by these two missions may sometimes become unbearable. Many bishops resolve this tension by avoiding taking part. Since the 1970s, their discourse is often full of euphemisms to avoid being divisive.⁷ Essentially, they fall back on administering the diocese and steer clear of all forms of speaking out that might compromise the semblance of consensus they want to maintain: “*they manage.*”⁸

This desire to maintain a façade of unity is experienced by many interviewees as sterile hypocrisy that denies the reality of the institution. Conflicts are hidden, even repressed, which exasperates this former priest aged 65: “*It is terribly idiotic, this fear of conflict! The problem [is] that the Church in France is in a very difficult position, the bishops know that it is not enough to invoke the Holy Spirit, but they have such fear of reactivating the great conflicts of the past, they are scared stiff of conflict, [so] there is no debate, nobody talks about anything, I feel I am in an institution where nothing is talked about! They dilute to nothing the spiritual juice on love, and that’s all there is to it. The Church is shut up inside this discourse on love; everybody is beautiful, a gentle bearer of meaning... it is not tenable. Unity at all costs, unity being the great fantasy of the Catholic Church! Unity toward and against all! A schism is always something grave and regrettable, but fine, if 500,000 traditionalists or integrists have a schism, do they have to bother the whole Church with that? Well there you are! I have a tendency to say that.*”⁹

Many laity of all tendencies enunciate a need for the power to speak out and for their speech to be recognized and welcomed as the word “of the Church”, meaning legitimate and meriting being considered. They think this would permit giving a place for their

⁵Georges, 65, former priest, married, journalist and publisher, Paris, February 2010.

⁶ Bishop Gaillot of Evreux was dismissed from his seat in 1995 after having said the Roman Catholic Church should be more open to the poor and to new ideas. He aroused the sympathy of Catholics, who founded an opposition movement called “*les réseaux du parvis*” (litt.: networks of the church square).

⁷Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin, “La sainte famille: l’épiscopat français dans le champ du pouvoir,” *Actes de la recherche en science sociale*, 44-45, 1982, pp. 1-53.

⁸Georges, 65, former priest, married, journalist and publisher, Paris, February 2010.

⁹*Ibid.*

experiences: “*What is missing in the dioceses are some ‘clubs’ of Christians who might calmly, with total freedom of speech, really pose fundamental questions so that the bishops, at one moment or another, ah ... um, would get outside the institution a little, to hear people on the ground. [...] Where are the places where ... now and again, regularly or occasionally, ... Christians can say something, and this speech really goes up to the pastors and bishops?*”¹⁰ One would be mistaken to see this as a reproach about the non-democratic character of the Church. It is more a matter of a desire for recognition of the religious and hence ecclesiastical competence of the laity. The priest has lost his charisma of function. His authority depends now on his personal virtuosity. Many laypeople may lay claim to a religious authority equal to theirs. And so they suffer within dioceses from the perpetuation of a bureaucracy that systematically subordinates laity to clerics and results in the former being disqualified from speaking.

REFORM OF PARISHES IN FRANCE

Confronted with plummeting clerical demographics, the bishops of the dioceses of France have not stayed inactive. In the 1980s, they sought to adapt the territorial arrangement and the organization of their dioceses. This movement severed (no doubt for a long time) the link that tied together the religious and administrative maps of France. In Chapter 1 we saw the system taking shape under the Napoleonic Empire. Its dismantling is a firm sign of the de-coupling of the political will of the French authorities and the life of the Catholic Church. How did this come about?

A Brief History

In the French imagination, the parish is identified with the village church bell, hence with a restricted but largely practicing community. However, the capacity of church buildings shows that religious practice was widely overestimated. Before the second half of the 19th century, many villages had no place for worship that was suitable for gathering all the local population.¹¹ With the Napoleonic transformation for the

¹⁰Claude, 54, married, 35 years seniority in education, trained in the public system, assumed responsibilities in the Office of Catholic Education, Paris, May 2010.

¹¹Hence the question posed by Alain Cabantous: would the capacity of French churches permit a weekly Sunday practice? According to the information that can be gleaned the answer is negative. See Cabantous, *Le dimanche, une histoire*, Paris: Seuil, 2013, pp. 183-193.

nation's geography, the multiplication of *communes*, associated with a concern to control (and to pacify) the land led to a multiplication of edifices as well as of related posts (*curés*). The Church was fully invested in this conquest of territory. While it benefited after the restoration of the monarchy in 1815 from (relative) religious peace, though interrupted by bursts of anticlericalism (as in 1830), it chose to transform its internal organization to adapt to the new political situation. Dom Guéranger launched a vast movement of liturgical renewal in the years 1830-1840, which led to unifying worship around the Roman liturgy and relied on the clergy. This renovation was accompanied by an unprecedented centralization around the pope in the Vatican. Before that movement, the pope's words were disseminated only if French bishops and the French king accepted them – meaning if they found them convenient – as they were before the French Revolution.

The renovated Church, ultramontane in its choices, undoubtedly understood that the local parish might also serve its own purposes. Liturgical unification and geographical dissemination might produce a sentiment of Catholic power: everywhere the same mass, the same vespers, the same functioning of priests! “*The historic role of the Church has perhaps consisted of this: being able to connect each of the faithful, including in village communities that appeared to be the most self-sufficient, to general coordinates that claimed to be universal, long before the State became capable of doing so [...]*”¹²

Catholic citizenship used tools developed for the purpose of reinforcing civil citizenship, and turned to its own benefit the feeling of identity that the state could secure. The formation of parish life was noticed by the state with its own project of controlling the territory, using a logic of stable occupation. Political power had obviously registered the interest that the framing of people by the place of worship could have for its own purposes. All political powers try to stabilize populations on their territories, to better exercise their prerogatives and to ensure long-term peace. Therefore the Catholic religious authorities were constantly in dialogue (contesting or cooperating) with the political authorities, even if this dialogue covered over a dimension of open conflict, about spatially organizing the life of the faithful.

As we saw in the first chapter, the territorial division of Catholic parishes at the end of the 20th century was an inheritance from the Napoleonic state. Dioceses corresponded almost completely with *départements*, parishes with *communes*. Local civil authorities were paired, as it were, with ecclesiastical authorities. The prefect was associated with the bishop, the mayor with the *curé*. Despite the

¹²François Héran, “Le rite et la croyance,” *Revue française de Sociologie*, 27, 1986, pp. 231-263 ; p. 251.

separation of church and state in 1905, this organization endured until the 1980s. The Catholic faithful experienced the Christian life, the practice of their religion, based on their parish church's bell tower. The parish reforms begun at the end of the 20th century spelled the end of this history of the reconquest of the French people.

In the logic of the movement to animate (and control) Catholics in France, parishes prior to the First World War were the object of impressive militant investment. Parishes as distributors of ritual life and piety were transformed at the turn from the 19th to the 20th centuries into parishes of good works: sponsorships, youth organizations like Scouting, clubs for various stages of life, charitable efforts. In the regions that had kept deep Catholic roots (as in western France), parish life represented such a coherent ensemble that the life of inhabitants could be indistinguishable from the Christian life. Places where religious practice could reach more than 90% of the population would form what has been called "parish civilization". Yves Lambert has described the end of this phenomenon as attributable to various causes.¹³

If we take a quick and summary overview of this history, we note first of all the extraordinary resilience of the model of framing the faithful by parishes. Of course, parishes experienced movements and vicissitudes in practice: disaffection and a return to grace have alternated with each other. For example, in the 1950s, a portion of the young clergy decried the parish as a ghetto of the already convinced that posed an obstacle to the mission.¹⁴ But the following decade, it was the devotions and sacraments as practiced in parish churches that were being denounced by the young clergy.¹⁵ Since the 1970s, the emergent crisis of *Action Catholique* organizations turned parishes once more into the principal instrument for framing the faithful. They have since remained the point of support and lever of Catholic authorities. Thus the cardinal-archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur André Vingt-Trois, titled his talk on the diocesan radio station (Radio Notre-Dame, 28 September 2009) "The parish, center and pivot of the missionary dynamic". Movements of revitalization continue to arise. One of the more recent was called "parish cells of evangelization", a movement initiated by Don P. G. in the parish of San Eustorgio in Milan, which spread across Europe (in France, the parish of Sanary-sur-Mer in Provence was its promoter).

¹³Yves Lambert, *Dieu change en Bretagne*, Paris: Cerf, 1985.

¹⁴Henri Godin, Yvan Daniel, *France, pays de mission?*, Paris: Karthala, 2014 (First: Lyon: Éditions de l'Abeille, 1943).

¹⁵Serge Bonnet, Augustin Cottin, *La communion solennelle: Folklore païen ou fête chrétienne?*, Paris: Le Centurion, 1969.

A Changing Society

French society began restructuring in the 1960s. The government created regions, then urged communes to merge (especially effective after a 1998 law), and more pragmatically established structures for inter-communal cooperation – which all helped to reshape a landscape in slow mutation. In the 2000s, restructuring accelerated with a recentering of the major public services. Military installations were drastically reduced (a law on the military in 2008 called for closing 83 sites and moving 33 more), hospitals were regrouped (in 1975 there were 1,369 maternity clinics and in 2008, only 554)¹⁶ and the Gendarmerie and Police were both restructured.¹⁷ Occupation of the land assumed new stakes after the millennium.

For the Church's part, the demographic crisis in the clergy that began to be felt in the 1980s led bishops to concern themselves with a new territorial division of dioceses. Thus changes in dioceses preceded those in civil society. Two similar rationales were at work to maintain the fundamental points of the parish, but a third proposal envisaged a mutation.

First, a majority of dioceses sought to adapt the parish arrangement in light of existing and future personnel. Fifteen years into the future, the number of clergy could be predicted by considering the age pyramid and the number of seminarians in training (976 seminarians in 2000, 101 ordinations of diocesan priests in 2007). In effect, it takes about ten years to “produce” a priest, from the first application to the *Service des Vocations* to leaving the seminary through ordination.¹⁸ It was reasonable, following the clerical criteria and taking into account this prospect for the coming decade, to try to reduce the number of parishes so that, with the help of priests expected to be available at that point, they would all be served. Logically, then, by the suitable legal procedure and after wide or narrow consultation, every bishop abolished a large majority of parishes and created new and much larger ones. In cities, parishes were sometimes maintained, and in less densely populated zones, parishes often coincided with cantons¹⁹ or a “*pays*”. By

¹⁶Source: Annual statistics of health establishments. For hospitals (*Etablissements Publics de Santé* = EPS) from 1995 to 2011, the rate of merger was 9.5% (source: IGAS report of March 2012).

¹⁷Between 2007 and 2012, fifteen mobile squadrons of the gendarmerie (out of 123) were abolished, and four training colleges out of eight. Source: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/a12-150-11/a12-150-113.html>.

¹⁸691 seminarians in 2012 would mean about 70 ordinations in 2020. One could project that there would be between 6000 and 9000 priests at that point.

¹⁹The canton is a civil administrative division that groups together several *communes*.

2012, there were now 13,209 parishes for the 36,000 *communes* in France (source: CEF).

The second route was to legally maintain parishes, combined with uniting services around a canton. In this case, parishes were grouped together into a “parish sector” and the priests lived together in what became the county town of that sector. For example, the diocese of Créteil (in the Val-de-Marne with 1.6 million inhabitants) created 20 sectors that regrouped parishes. Priests were no longer appointed to occupy a single parish but the whole sector. The person responsible for the sector is the *curé* of all the parishes and he organizes services with the priests who are available, following the canonical mode of *curé-moderator* in which the other priests are *co-curés*. Formally speaking, then, this second way of proceeding is different from the first. We will see, though, that it resembles it if we analyze a third route, the reform of the parish arrangement.

First, some additional data is necessary to apprehend the phenomenon of regrouping parishes. Although this data is fragmentary, based on the figures we possess we can project the situation in the whole of France.

Scope of Regrouping Parishes

In the account that the bishops of France presented to the Apostolic Nunciature in 2003, it was indicated that 42 dioceses (with more than 22 million inhabitants) had proceeded by redefining the territory, of which 19 dioceses had synods or a synodic approach, plus more than ten with assemblies or approaches involving diocesan consultation without a synod. We must clearly state what these reforms of dioceses and parishes affected; there are three elements:

1. Reforms of *structure* that concern the governing of parishes and dioceses
2. Transformations in *ecclesiastical actors*, shifting from ecclesiastical exclusivity to a diversified population
3. *Geographical* transformations properly speaking

Basically, the crisis affects the distribution of the Eucharist: the bishop can no longer organize as many masses as he would like. The authorities decided to concentrate the masses in the centers: i. e. county and medium-sized towns. In Montpellier, for example (89,000 inhabitants), regrouping paralleled a re-division of educational services (location of school establishments) and of public services (health, administration). Priests now inhabit the centers and spread out as much as they can to satellite churches. The logical conclusion was to reduce

the number of parishes to construct new ones with one or two centers. As an example, here is some comparative data:

Diocese	Département	No. of parishes	Inhabitants (thousands)	Inhabs. of former parish	Inhabs. of new parish
Angers	Maine-et-loire	418 → 85	733	1 753	8,624
Bayeux-Lisieux	Calvados	724 → 51	648	895	12,706
Bayonne	Pyrénées Atl.	523 → 77	600	1 147	7,792
Beauvais	Oise	706 → 45	766	1 085	17,022
Besançon	½ Doubs + HteSaône	771 → 61	553	717	9,066
Chartres	Eure-et-Loir	389 → 84	408	1 049	4,857
Clermont	Puy-de-Dôme	521 → 32	604	1 159	18,875
Montpellier	Hérault	367 → 67	897	2 444	13,388
Saint-Etienne	Loire	244 → 24	729	2 988	30,375

When parishes are fused, the old parishes often become “church relays”, i.e. small communities charged with local Christian life (laypersons to open and close the church building, to visit people, perhaps provide a little catechesis). This is the context for understanding why the ADAP was organized come twenty years ago: “Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest”. They unfold on the model of the mass, with the distribution of communion but without the Eucharistic Prayer. They often appeared negatively as “mass minus the priest”.²⁰ Except for funerals, which are increasingly run by teams of laity for local burials, the sacraments of birth (baptism) and of love (marriage) take place at the center, where the priests live.

At the center, the *curé* sets up a Pastoral council or an “EAP” (Pastoral Animation Team) formed of delegates from the “relays”, people chosen by the *curé* for a particular skill or position, though sometimes they are elected by the congregation. Even in the event this team functions very well, we should note that it is made up of

²⁰François Wernert, *Le dimanche en déroute. op.cit.*

individuals and so its cohesion is due to the personality of the presiding *curé*. There are many examples where a change of *curé* has modified the quality of the work team. The EAP is joined to an economic council. Sometimes, when finances permit, a permanent salaried pastoral lay person is present. If there is a deacon, he is associated with this work.

In the current state of study of Catholicism, we lack numerical data.²¹ It would be hazardous to offer figures on the number of parish volunteers, for example. Despite this important gap, one may reasonably apply a simple calculation: in a parish of 1,000 practitioners, between 200 and 400 belong to a group or a team of some type (decorating the church, EAP, catechesis, prayer, solidarity with those in need, *Action Catholique*), which would mean the number of “leaders” and delegates is about 80 persons.²²

Understanding the Reorganizations

Thus the parish is diversifying. Anyone traveling in France and looking for access to a parish goes up to a church and reads the notice that informs visitors about its parish life. In appearance, everything is similar: there is an EAP, one or more priests and a map of the parish sector or a list of the *communes* that are served. But differences do exist - although they are difficult to imagine unless one frequents the parish as a resident or as a faithful Catholic. We have outlined two possibilities for reorganization, stressing that in the end the two paths (maintaining parishes or fusing them) ultimately amount to the same thing. But there exists a third route, which was established in the mid 1990s in the diocese of Poitiers – until it was halted in 2012. It significantly diverges from the previous two, although an outside observer who does not possess the necessary background might believe that this strategy for reform is close to the first.

From a functionalist perspective, we have explained why the faithful are attracted to the Church organization by discussing symbolic goods. This perspective rests on the fact that the faithful, when they go into a church or participate in an assembly of believers in their religion (pilgrimage, worship, education, preaching, piety), take a benefit away from this participation. They obtain a “good” or draw a profit from a

²¹Colette Muller & Jean-René Bertrand, geographers and authors of *Où sont passés les catholiques?* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2002) do not furnish numerical data on this point, despite the recognized value of their work.

²²Data gathered by us in an empirical way in various parishes.

“service” that is rendered to them. For example, participation in a prayer group allows a person to face life’s difficulties better, while the disciple of a particular preacher receives new illumination to orient daily life. Close examination of how Catholicism functions reveals that two types of symbolic goods usually circulate among the faithful: on the one hand the “sacraments” (CSG) are easily identifiable. The seven sacraments at the disposal of the faithful are the monopoly of clerics (deacons, priests, bishops) and the parish ensures a distribution of the most commonly used ones: Eucharistic mass, sacramental rites of passage (baptism, marriage), sacraments for the sick, and funerals.²³ Only “reconciliation” (confession) has not been made exclusive, and those priests who belong to a religious order may offer a powerful alternative to the parish.²⁴ The latter still falls within the registers of Christian life, which in fact confers on them a large monopoly for the distribution of CSG. Other goods (BSG) consist of *sociality* (they are produced and received in a *group*) and *piety* (usually around the Word, i. e. the Bible and spiritual texts in a wider sense). Prayers and processions, the teams of *Action Catholique*, charitable groups, and all forms of grouping the faithful that do not need sacraments might be put in this category. The catechesis of children and youth also lie there, even if aimed at access to the sacraments. Because these goods are largely put to use by the faithful (even when the clergy is associated or asked to preside), we have called Baptismal Symbolic Goods (BSG), meaning founded on baptism. In effect, it suffices to be baptized to make use of them.

When France had more than 20,000 or 30,000 priests, they provided most of the BSG in addition to CSG. They mounted the initiative for *Action Catholique* groups, for solidarity, for youth programs (*colonies de vacances*, youth fellowship), for spirituality. They provided the leadership and/or the spiritual contribution. The clergy’s demographic crisis that began to be felt in the 1980s damaged the distribution circuit for both CSG and BSG. Masses were no longer available as they once were, and no priests could be found to organize teamwork or to initiate groups. Of course, the concentration of people in urban centers seemed at first to respond to the dwindling of clerical personnel and not affect the distribution of BSG. Parishes in the 1980s had plenty of laity who gradually took charge of running groups. But the aggravation of the crisis required important revisions of parish life.

²³The increase in crematoriums in France, which are associated with the non-sacramental nature of celebrating funerals, leads to an increase in celebrations outside parish churches. More and more, as funerals are not a sacrament, they are entrusted to teams of laity who perform them.

²⁴For mass, too, but priests of regular orders are almost never invested in parishes.

Two models of reorganization were possible, as we have mentioned. On the one hand, there was geographic recentering, which means concentration with a view to maintaining a human space justifying the central place of the *curé* and maintaining the monopoly on distribution of CSG – with BSG more or less following the regrouping movement. On the other hand, Poitiers (750,000 inhabitants) and some other dioceses tried to transform the balance between clerical symbolic goods (sacraments) and baptismal symbolic goods.

In Poitiers, the diagnosis led the diocesan authorities to disassociate the two circuits of distribution. Since the clergy was not able to ensure CSG distribution while participating in the organization of BSG distribution, why not reserve for priests the sacramental monopoly combining liturgy and sacrament,²⁵ and let the laity ensure the BSG distribution in new ways? The names we have chosen for these two models that are typical of the contemporary Catholic Church endeavor to take account of this differentiation: we call the former the “monopolistic model” and the latter the “coalescent model”. The names refer to the respective major concerns that inspire the reforms: either maintaining as much as possible the old balance between the two distributions of symbolic goods (monopolistic) or stressing the motivating principle of a new balance between the two, derived from authority that is exercised collegially (“coalescent”).

The Monopolistic Model

Grouping into parochial sectors poses a major issue: since the clergy cannot actually be present at all activities, how can the parish be organized to maintain its monopoly over authority?²⁶ The answer is clear: the *curé* cannot guarantee his own presence but he alone chooses the persons who are going to replace him – to “re-present” him. So a *curé* organizes (on Episcopal instructions) a selection of persons suitable to join the Pastoral Animation Team (*EAP*), the economic council, or the “sector council”, and he also appoints the local leader of the “church relay”. Sometimes, he calls on a parish assembly to suggest candidates’ names, but it is he who makes the selection. Teams are composed of individuals who find themselves members of the same team. They owe their responsibility to the *curé*, to whom implicitly they render accounts. The model is *monopolistic* because it maintains the clergy thanks to the process of nomination and organization at decision-making levels. At

²⁵Not all sacraments take a liturgical form (e. g. confession), whereas any liturgy is not necessarily sacramental (e. g. funerals).

²⁶Canon 517-2.

the top of the hierarchy is the bishop, who has chosen the various lay members of his councils (economic, pastoral, and so on).

A perverse effect of this situation is sometimes encountered among priests: the maintenance of a parish organization in which the *curé* is the pivot signifies that any priest can be called upon to perform the functions of *curé*, even if he does not have the taste or competence for it. The *curé*-moderator formula somewhat offsets the problem of competence but creates a second perverse effect: in practice priests form a mini-council of government that is superimposed upon the councils that include the laity.

The structure of parish government lies at the level of the diocese. Diocesan councils (pastoral, catechesis) that include laity and deacons (sometimes monks and friars) coexist with classic structures like the presbyteral Council and the Council of Deans. Conflicts of legitimacy appear. It is not rare to notice tensions: the laity find that priests obstruct, while priests complain about the “power” of the laity and about deacons whose human legitimacy is superior to their own.²⁷ Appointments of priests, for example, are decided in councils where the laity is in the majority, and priests have the feeling of no longer being the direct collaborators of the bishop. The principle of diocesan centralization means that some domains of the Pastoral are decided by the diocese or that common services (catechesis, catechumenate, youth) are no longer under the control of the parish *curé*. This is the case with catechism, special ceremonies (confirmation of youth and adults), and important events that parishes may be firmly asked to hold (especially diocesan assemblies). Centralization also strongly affects financial management: investments or disinvestments are decided at the diocesan level. In recent years, priest-*curés* have rejected this centralization, sometimes by abruptly asserting their authority. In response, lay leaders and volunteers have denounced the “authoritarianism” of their *curé*.

The model tries to articulate clerical authority, founded on the distribution of CSG, with the local authority of the baptized, who watch over the distribution of BSG, which are conceived as an imperfect substitute for CSG due to the hierarchy between the authority of the cleric and the authority of the baptized. In effect, it is always less good to go to a Bible study or catechetical group than to go to mass.

This is the reason why all the councils of the monopolistic model rely on specifically selected members: these diverse teams are formed of

²⁷A deacon is most often married and a father, financially independent. He is often well known locally because he takes part in associations (schools, sports, municipal affairs). The salary of a priest varies according to the diocese: at most 1,500 € a month, very often less than 1,000 €, he has no children or wife and cannot invest himself in local political life.

individuals associated with each other only by clerical designation, but they account for their work personally, not collectively. In certain cases, we find them in competition for legitimacy in the activities of which they are in charge or represent. They usually discover each other only when they are appointed, and some of the energy that should be deployed for pastoral work is spent in interpersonal friction. The second model starts from this realization and offers another vision.

The Coalescent Model

The central question that organizes the coalescent model is the faith of the congregation when the clergy's demographic crisis prevents conducting the traditional parochial model, how can reform ensure an authentic life of faith in the congregation? *"It has become obvious that the urgent question is not the number or size of parishes. It is how they work. Parochial coverage was born to ensure proximity. The priest was the animator and it was all to his honor. This model is today untenable..."*²⁸ The coalescent model's answer relies on the fact that the faithful are used to BSG and they know very well how to distribute them around themselves, and the new organization of this distribution must be established so they may maintain the CSG at their disposal in another mode.

In appearance, the local structures are identical: EAPs – here called "local teams" – and parishes that are too small no longer have a Sunday mass, and the laity ensures daily life; the diocesan level assumes new importance, and the priests are in residence for a vast sector. But parishes are neither abolished nor regrouped. So the fundamental difference relates to the fact that the formation and leadership of local Christian communities do not rely on the same dynamics. Since the BSG consists of *sociality* and *piety*, responsibilities are exercised on the basis of these two values: *"Local teams of animation are constituted by calling upon individuals, according to their charisma, their expectations, and their talents. The women and men who consent to be candidate for the posts of pastoral delegate or delegate for material life are elected by the whole community [...] Other actors are called due to their capacity to assume a precise responsibility. The team is therefore*

²⁸Albert Rouet, "Vers un nouveau visage d'Église" in Rouet, Boone, Bulteau, Russeil, Talbot (eds.), *Un nouveau visage d'Église; L'expérience des communautés locales à Poitiers* Paris: Bayard, 2005.

*constituted of persons who are not chosen by others but who are asked to join together for the good of the community.*²⁹

Thus a “local team” is composed of only five people who first evaluate their capacity to make up a team: one year of preparatory work together that is modeled on already existing teams. This work includes the three baptismal responsibilities: service of prayer, charity, spreading the Gospel – and to that is added services of coordination and management. These five people are committed for three years, a term renewable once, to assume in solidarity the duties devolving on each. The customary life of a team consists of participating in sector meetings (with other teams and/or other members who have the same task), animating teamwork by reading aloud passages from the Bible, welcoming the priest sent by the bishop for the sector. After a year of experimentation, the team is officially installed: during a liturgy, the bishop confers the charge by asking all the members to grasp the episcopal crozier simultaneously. When it is a delegate (a vicar general or episcopal) who officiates, the members place their hands on the Bible or on a cross.

The team is thus present in local life in its collegial dimension. It responds to demands from the inhabitants and organizes or supervises catechesis, the visiting of the sick and isolated, Sunday prayer (not an ADAP but a communal prayer assembly), etc. It has a budget, negotiates with local authorities, and consults with other teams in the sector. It is therefore responsible for the distribution of BSG.

The priest is responsible for dividing up the CSG for the faithful of his sector. During the ceremony of installation of the new team, the bishop officially sends the priest to this team: “You are sent to this local community.” Thus the priest exercises his ministry among the local teams and communities of his sector, which did not choose him but which receive him. He decides as a last resort on the distribution of CSG and watches over the interaction of teams with each other and with the diocese.

In this way diocesan services have reoriented their activities. For example, instead of treasurers meeting at the archbishopric with the diocesan bursar, the bursar organizes meetings locally. Meetings concerning the whole diocese are dispersed – unless necessary. Some monasteries and religious communities have agreed to serve as points of spiritual support for local teams, who go there on retreat or for a day of prayer. One could say that in this kind of parish reform “decentering” does not mean the ascent of activities to the diocesan level, but rather

²⁹Gisèle Bulteau, *Les communautés locales, un chemin d'humanisation*, in Rouet, Boone, Bulteau, Russeil, Talbot (eds.), *Un goût d'espérance; vers un nouveau visage d'Église II*, Paris: Bayard, 2008.

diocesan support coming down to local activities. This support may take the form of a team of “visitors” charged with helping local teams. They visit them but have no operational responsibility. In diocesan meetings, they have no power to make decisions. When Mgr. Rouet had to say farewell to the diocese of Poitiers, there were more than 300 operational teams, with a high rate of leadership renewal. Of course, some priests did not agree with a model that obliged transferring part of the governing authority and thereby deprived them of a sense of accomplishment.

Mgr. Rouet, Archbishop of Poitiers, summed up the options of his diocese in this way: “*In so far as the parochial system places the priest at the center with the laity ‘revolving’ around him – which of course gives a traditional social place to the priest, but risks inflating his ego – so then, as has already been said, with local communities it is the priest who ‘revolves’, going from one to the other. He thus finds a certain (relative) ‘itinerancy’ that conforms to the apostolic manner in which he was ordained.*”³⁰ It sometimes happens that a local team fails to ensure harmony in community life. No study to evaluate the impact of this new model has yet been conducted.

Let us summarize. The coalescent model reorganizes the distribution of both BSG and CSG, whereas the monopolistic model maintains the hierarchy as it is. In both types of reform, widespread consultation supports the decision that is taken. However, the coalescent model poses a decisive foundation that subsequently distinguishes the organization and life of local communities: the whole community and every team are founded on a common recollection of an agreement made to assume tasks together, on a *sociality*. In the monopolistic model, this agreement is not required, and the church actors can only represent their functions on the basis of the clerical model that has always ensured parish life.

It is a fallacy to imagine that the life of parishes, because they ensure the same services and possess the same structures, are modeled on an identical spirit. The coalescent model, to which the new archbishop of Poitiers put an end as soon as he was appointed in 2012, proves the plurality of possible pastoral options. The life of parishes is therefore a *trompe-l’œil*. If the classical functions – catechesis, liturgy, and sacraments – mostly do continue, the ways in which authority is exercised are changing dramatically, without always being controlled. The gradual distancing of clerics, who are increasingly brought back to a

³⁰Albert Rouet, *Vers un nouveau visage d’Église*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

geographical or political center, creates a local void that many laity are asked to fill.

Reading the minutes of diocesan synods, it is not certain that the monopolistic model of parish life is able to respond to the democratic aspirations of the faithful.

THE DIOCESAN SYNOD AS A TOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Since 1983, the bishops of France have widely adopted synods as an exceptional form of government³¹ – all the more significant since the more traditional forms have been weakened by the demographic implosion of the clergy. This movement followed a pre-conciliar period in which the synod fell into disuse: there were only four synods in France between 1918 and 1960.³² Yet by the end of 2012, more than three quarters of dioceses had held one (or even two) synods or synodal assemblies. These cumbersome procedures have arguably become strategic for effectively mobilizing the faithful and the militant, rather than create a larger council for taking decisions. For this reason, it is legitimate to think that synods are responding to the democratic desire of French believers who are dissatisfied with the Roman ecclesiastical framework and who constitute an embryonic lobby – with delicate consequences, since the enlargement of the consultative base of synods cannot help but lead to an implicit change in the status of priests. While the synods revitalized by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) were gatherings of clerics, those of Vatican II included deacons and laity. Priests are no longer primary, despite their customary representation in the presbyteral council.

To hold a synod, the population is summoned by an official invitation by the diocesan bishop. The faithful are invited to group in forums to discuss freely questions and themes submitted for their discernment. In Luçon in the Vendée, as in many other dioceses (Angers, 2005; Bayonne, 2002; Clermont, 2000), Catholics were supposed to make special invitations to their neighbors, even those of little or no belief, and the clergy fostered this openness. Thus 2,150 teams of varying size were set up embracing about 13,000 persons. Specific proposals were made to youth, who participated in the thousands. Overall, 2.5 % of the total population of the *département* was involved in the Luçon synod.

³¹The synod is contained in the first chapter of the Code of Canonical Law that deals with the “internal organization of particular churches”.

³²Louis Trichet, *Les synodes en France aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, Paris: Cerf, 2006.

The more modest synod event in Nancy mobilized groups already set up in parishes and mission services, a total of 101 teams involving about a thousand people. With the composition of teams largely coinciding with the usual activists, one can estimate that the synodal initiative involved those close to the Catholic church of Meurthe-et-Moselle. A few teams invited “non-practitioners” to participate in the deliberations.

The classic schema of a synod includes a primary general consultation that last one year, concluding with feedback from discussion minutes. The same groups work over the following year on a document that is issued by the synod’s pilot team. In principle it develops from the feedback, but also from documents written by follow-up teams that include theologians and experts from various fields. In Nancy, they chose to have team-members work on Biblical texts and not on a document of synthesis. Assemblies of delegates were then convened for the more classic work of elaborating proposals for fresh and narrower discussions around what would later become the Synod Acts.

In all synods, specific liturgies punctuate the event’s phases: an official launch, a general closing, and local or diocesan liturgical activities are interleaved. In Luçon, a pilgrimage walk was a high point of the synod. This ensemble of liturgies creates the divine (or religious) legitimacy of this vast consultation effort.

The Goal of Changes

The bishop convenes a synod with a view to proposing changes in the life of the diocese on three possible levels:

a) The geographical functioning of worship arrangements. The Clermont Synod in June 2000 published this resolution in the first article: “The assembly agrees to consider that the principle of regrouping parishes is a positive asset, on the basis of which we must continue to work.”³³ The first of the three chapters of the proceedings is titled “New Parishes”. The government of the diocese was also subjected to changes. Teams for Parish Animation (EAP) were established or strengthened by vote of the assembly, which in some cases also handed the clergy new functions.

b) In Nancy, the bishop invoked a synodal approach by proposing to modify indirectly the “tools” applied by Catholics: “*The society for which apostolic tools were forged is disappearing. It is no longer a matter of a few adaptations or corrections as could have been done in*

³³Synodal laws of the diocese of Clermont, official document. 2000.

preceding decades. *We are invited to make a profound renewal.*³⁴ But the inaugural speech did not specify to what order these “tools” belong. Should we see them as an allusion to pastoral tactics or else to the analytic grids of ecclesiastical and social bodies like *Action Catholique*? In the absence of precision, we should probably read the speech as a politically prudent prospect for change and a warning about possible tensions, a response that is plausible on the basis of the history of this diocese.

c) Finally, synods – without explicitly mentioning change – try to remobilize militancy with a view to remedying the exhaustion of people’s dynamism. The Bishop of Luçon proposes “*that our Church decenter itself [...]. The goal is to make all the faithful more like missionaries, to find together new paths for offering faith and evangelical happiness to all those who are waiting for and seeking it [...]. We have to find new inspiration for our diocesan church in the direction of the younger generations.*”³⁵

On the other hand, some domains are explicitly deemed exempt from any possible change: doctrine is not a subject for discussion, nor is the organization of worship. In a related way, the disaffection of youth that is felt everywhere is not a topic for explicit desire to change. At the most (as in Clermont or Luçon), people express a “priority concern” and a demand to intensify actions that have already been undertaken. However, as we shall see below, the demands of Catholic people are abundant on these subjects. Lay views are the first delicate outcome from the synodal experience.

All the documents published around synods stress the importance of stages: first, consultations with diocesan bodies, then an official launch (sometimes repeated across different points in the diocese), insistence on liturgical events, intermediate stages, and final closure. A history is thereby set up, which by its lengthy unfolding enhances ordinary pastoral time. It is not only a matter of “before” and “after”: the synod constitutes a time within the overall time-scale and by spreading across the territory, it recharges diocesan space in contemporary memory. The space-time thereby created may be interpreted as the manifestation of the “ecclesiospherical” character³⁶ of the diocesan church. The synod appears as an idealized projection of the diocesan church itself, which is something that can be changed: “*The invitation to*

³⁴“Passons sur l’autre rive” (PSAR), *Eglise 54*, special issue September 2007, p. 4.

³⁵“Marchez, je suis avec vous” (MJSAV), Synodal orientations of the diocese of Luçon, p. 12.

³⁶Émile Poulat, *L’Église, c’est un monde. L’Écclesiosphère*, Paris: Cerf, 1986.

*cross over to the other side amounts to experiencing an interior displacement more than to organizing a change in the church landscape – Even if it is no more than this, even if by all accounts the interior displacements have to take place in an organization and by means of proposals.*³⁷ The bishop further states that “*it is a matter of building the Temple with stones better adjusted to the Holy Spirit ...*”³⁸

New Episcopal Legitimacy

The reasons behind this grand-scale mobilization are mentioned in the bishops’ letters of convocation. We may infer from published documents, too, a concern to confront social modernity, issues like sustainable development and the dissolution of social links.³⁹ In the speech by the Bishop of Nancy already cited: “*The pastoral animators perceive a growing gap between the pastoral arrangements and their application in today’s cultures.*” The bishop elaborates dramatic historical analogies: “*We are summoned to a profound renewal. More exactly God summons us to a renewal analogous – history will judge – to the one to which Christians were called when faced with the collapse of the Roman Empire, or when a civilization of towns and cities, merchants and scholars, developed in the 13th century, or during the shift to the Industrial Age.*”⁴⁰ The title of the synodal initiative alludes to this deliberately grandiose fresco: “*Let us cross to the other side.*”

More modestly, a synod may be convened to tighten links that seem to be distended. At least this fear can be detected in the letter from the Bishop of Luçon: “*The themes of the synod are not foremost, even if they are important. What count most is the experience of church communion that the synod will give us among the baptized of different spiritual and ecclesial sensibilities*”⁴¹ This preoccupation gives rise to an insistence on the synodal assemblies as events, and to the mobilizing and creative virtues of a consensus around specifically liturgical activities.

Documents surrounding synods also reveal a desire to reassure episcopal authority about the implications of an extensive popular base;

³⁷Monseigneur Papin, Bishop of Nancy, 7 September 2005, to pastoral actors; PSAR, p. 8.

³⁸Allusion to I Peter 2:5: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (New International Version). Thus it is not a matter of the interiority of the believing subject. PSAR, p. 8.

³⁹The theme of the “social fracture” has traversed the secular political discourse in France since the turn of the millennium.

⁴⁰PSAR, p. 4.

⁴¹Letter from the bishop to the Catholics of the diocese, 13 May 2004. His emphasis.

the bishops defend themselves against this by recalling that the Church is neither a monarchy nor a democracy. In both events we studied, the bishops took care to retrace minutely the history of consultations prior to the launch. All bodies were mobilized and the practicing population had no cause to feel set aside: “*With respect to the members of these various bodies [Presbyteral Council, Pastoral Council of the Diocesan Church, Lay Apostolate Council], the project of a synod is increasingly mentioned and discussed in the diocese (parishes, deanery, movements, missions, spiritual centers). [...] From these various consultations, a consensus, expressed by votes, strongly emerges for the holding of a diocesan synod.*”⁴² But when the synod is officially launched, the bishop is incontestably in charge of it.

Overall, the actors’ discourses officially show that synods are in principle open to affirming Catholic positions in modern culture, to adjusting the structures of functioning and geographical coverage, and to a lesser extent, to restocking Catholics with practical tools for activism. One may therefore legitimately consider them as potential processes of change. However, the implied necessity of revitalization or transformation of the ecclesiosphere is scarcely perceptible to the actors.

Faced with Grievances, Limited Changes

It is hard to evaluating change in the short-term. When the synod is over, all that remains are the productions: speeches, texts, and proceedings.⁴³ The transformations of practices are still to come, to say nothing of mentalities that may not be perceptible for a long time. These limit the focus of a synod to the few changes admissible by the ecclesiastical institution and that it publicly promotes: acceptance of regrouping parishes and naming priority “targets” for pastoral action (youth, the disadvantaged).

On the one hand, consultation with the Catholic people, organized in narrow ways in the case of synod initiatives or more widely for synods properly speaking, is an innovation that people remember. The experience of free speech is undeniably a novelty – but previous

⁴²MJSAV, p. 12.

⁴³Roman instruction *synodis agendis*, in N° IV, specifies that in no case may a diocesan synod present in its conclusions a desire that affects Church doctrine: “Given the ties that unite the particular church and its pastor with the Universal Church and the Roman Pontiff, the Bishop has the duty to *exclude from discussion* in the synod any theses or positions –perhaps proposed with a view to transmitting to the Holy See a “vote” on this subject – discordant with the perennial doctrine of the Church or the Pontifical Magisterium or regarding disciplinary matters reserved for the supreme or other ecclesiastic authority. ”
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/docum-ents.

experience of earlier synods shows that it is often quickly oriented into a non-subversive direction. The bishop of Nancy insists on this goal when he states in the final declaration (30 March 2008): “*Now I invite you to bring your efforts to constituting and supporting parishes in small village communities or neighborhoods well anchored in local life, sites of sharing life, mutual support, listening to the word of God.*”⁴⁴ Invited to express themselves, Catholics will do so at a very local level, and non-politically.

On the other hand, as an event that breaks with classic pastoral modes (parishes, movements, missions), can the synod be considered a motor of change? Yes, if one appreciates that it creates the possibility of important and exceptional gatherings that take the place of previous liturgical arrangements. In a certain way, the event establishes a new space for the relevance of liturgical and pastoral activity: the diocese.

However, the answer will be negative if we remember that the impetus for synods originated in mobilizations like the JMJ [World Youth Days] and visits from Pope John-Paul II, which they want to imitate, and that they valorize this dimension only to better avoid real demands: a synod for nothing, one might say. The superabundant rhetorical production seems an obvious response to a researcher’s request. In effect, the plethora of minutes of synodal teams move beyond the themes called for by the pilot team to raise the claims and views of the Catholic base. The work of the synod, then, is to transmute any expressions from the faithful that are inadmissible because they challenge the major workings of an ecclesiastical institution (marriage, ordination). Three kinds of demands have arisen at synods.

In Luçon, the first demand bore on divorced-remarrieds. Manifestly Catholics have been affected by ecclesiastical discipline to the extent that it has been internalized. The harm done to the durability of the matrimonial tie hits all these families, and Catholics have made themselves the petitioning relays for complaints about exclusion of these people. (The frequency of this demand in the files is higher than 40 %.) In Nancy in 2008, during a closing liturgy, a speaker departed slightly from the closing remarks, and was applauded at length by the audience of 3,000 when he mentioned this same issue.

The second demand concerned the clergy, raising (right out of the blue) the possibility of marriage, admission of women, and a transformation of working modes. Priests are considered to be remote from real life and their homilies are deplored. This kind of disagreement with the institution appears in about 25% of files.

The third set of demands concern liturgical expression during Sunday mass and at sacramental celebrations, which are felt to be cold

⁴⁴*Eglise* 54 N° 124 p. 21. Emphasis by the bishop.

and distant. Sometimes boredom is mentioned as a factor in disaffection, and it would seem (paradoxically) that the multi-media events initiated by John-Paul II (which are occasionally referred to) created a fascination with musical production displays of the modern American and British type, which in turn may demote ordinary liturgy!

In Nancy, the classic demands relayed by the working groups (often already existing groups) were associated with some novel ones. A demand for discussion groups crops up that combines the characteristics of local proximity with freedom of speech. Horizontal consultation and reticular organization were called for, as opposed to power perceived as hierarchical and distant; there was a corollary demand for autonomy from disciplinary rules. This demand is accompanied (to a lesser extent than in Luçon) by a manifest distrust of the clerical model: clerics are criticized for their exercise of liturgical and parochial power, but some lay leaders are reproached for becoming clericalized.

The long process of collecting and treating the views of the faithful ends with the synod's official closing documents. When the Proceedings are published, they are the end result of an inevitable political process of transmuting the initial demands, but they make it possible to detect whether and how the demands have been honored – or sometimes been discredited. For example, Nancy proposed five orientations, whereas Luçon published five, each subdivided into four, for a total of 20. It could be predicted that there would be divergences from what came up from the forums. The Luçon document carried a self-reflexive dimension by starting with three points trying to legitimize itself: first, rhetoric about the event as validation of the synodic experience, then a reminder of liturgical integration (with great assemblies and more local actions) to furnish divine legitimacy, and finally a history of the synod to establish its procedural legitimacy.

But the principal changes are to be discovered in the formulation of orientations. Minute analysis of the Luçon document shows that demands were taken into account – it is expressed in the orientations – but without mentioning any practical decision. Regarding the family as an institution, while outside the scope of a synod, there were modest proposals: discussion groups to explicitly tackle contemporary issues (homosexuality, family decomposition, psychological issues, parenthood) but also asking the diocese to take responsibility for divorced-remarrieds. This aspect was absent in Nancy. The notion of “sharing groups” (implicitly referring to the synod, perhaps) was advanced but it centered on Bible study. This orientation also figured in Nancy. Almost as an admission of impotence, there is a desire “to form Christians in the importance of Sunday [worship]”; a positive reading may indicate a subtle shift from merely mass to unspecified activities on Sunday.

No synod aims to transform the practices of diocesan churches in France. If no spectacular decision has emerged the reason may lie in the complexity of the procedure itself. The voluntary limitation of the field of discussion – the exclusion of liturgical and moral discipline – renders the exercise somewhat futile. But despite everything, we might detect two ways that synods may change – imperceptibly and indirectly – the functioning of the Catholic Church in France.

The first point concerns the clergy. The synod experience puts the bishop and the Catholic people face to face with each other. Decisions are publicly taken by the bishop as a physical person and not as a bishop whose first desire is to involve his clergy in applying pastoral orientations. One might say that the bishop leaves a synod as the head of the diocesan church and not as the “president of the clergy” vis-à-vis Catholics. In Nancy as in Luçon, the bishop’s speeches established his authority faced with the assembled Catholics. A 45-minute speech supposed to promulgate the diocesan orientations in Nancy, and the bishop’s speech of repentance⁴⁵ in Luçon, both contributed to relativizing the cohesion between bishop and priests, to the benefit of a more organic unity among laity and deacons, priests and bishop. This decomposition of intra-ecclesiastical authorities bears the seeds of a change of governance in the Catholic Church. It is not certain that this can move forward without a redefinition of the role of priests. The clergy is losing its exclusive mediating role.

The second point concerns the experience of free speech, an almost democratic experience that is innovative in France. In Luçon and to a lesser extent in Nancy, the obvious results were that participants manifested the desire for this experience to become the usual mode of Catholic sociality, perhaps in contrast to Sunday Eucharistic gatherings. On this point, the Bishop of Nancy promulgated a clear orientation for its adoption. Moreover, this second aspect clearly refers to the ecclesiosphere since it underlines the exemplary dimension contained in the synodal space-time.

These two notable changes produced by synods – maintaining a specific “church world” within civil society (the ecclesiosphere according to Poulat) and the very partial freedom of speech for the baptized – both have to be interpreted. One might suppose, as an interpretative hypothesis, that synods could be procedures for acclimatization to democracy in Roman clerical politics. This evolution

⁴⁵The Bishop publicly regretted some inappropriate sexual acts in colleges and schools, and apologized for them – although there was no current legal action.

might be the exact counterpart to the liturgical transformation that issued from the Vatican II Council, one relying on a desire for the active participation of the faithful in liturgical activities – but without challenging the liturgical monopoly of the clerics.⁴⁶

A contrary hypothesis that focuses on the narrow scope of decisions taken at the end of a synod, might make a parallel between the synod process and the Napoleonic plebiscites of the Second Empire.⁴⁷ In this case, it would be a fallacy to think of synods as consultative arrangements instituting a form of democracy within dioceses. Since Catholics do not decide on questions posed to them and since they are not able to intervene in the writing of summary papers that carry their contributions, by their responses they simply legitimate the institution that interrogates them much more than they participate in its orientation. Synods are as democratic as plebiscitary elections under the Second Empire! In fact, one or more representatives of the people always govern in a discretionary manner. Bishops only venture into the synodal process when they know exactly what policy to conduct, but they need to give a semblance of legitimacy.

Which hypothesis to choose? A third hypothesis is that the synod-as-event might be a landmark in space-time. The governance during the synod could be exemplary of internal political innovation: the modification of the equilibrium between the faithful and the clerics could take effect in an atmosphere that none of the actors could object to. Not all the relevant documents testify to a happy dynamic balance in collaboration; priests manifested relative pique about the loss of their institutional centrality. The process of collaboration and open conversation would go hand-in-hand with this rupture. At Nancy, the choice of clearly placing the Bible at the heart of the circulation of speech breaks with the old system in which the clerics were dispensers of a doctrine. Yet doctrine was strangely absent from the synods in both Luçon and Nancy – and the observation could be extended to others. This hypothesis is echoed in the subtle modification of the stress about Sunday, no longer just the “day of mass” but called to condense on the local scale the lived experience of the synod: *“That Sunday be also the Day of the Church, when one takes the time for celebration, for sharing*

⁴⁶For a sociological approach to Liturgy, see Nicolas de Bremond d’Ars, *La liturgie catholique; quarante ans de pratiques en France*, Rennes : PUR, 2015 (September).

⁴⁷There were five plebiscites during the Second Empire, with the following results: 1) Yes 92%; 2) Yes 97%; 3) Yes 99 %; 4) Yes 100 %; 5) Yes 98 %.

faith, for catechesis, for fraternal and convivial exchanges, for welcoming the life of human beings."⁴⁸

This consideration of the ecclesiosphere accounts for the way that synods integrate the problems that issue from civil society. The relation to the surrounding culture (patrimonial for Luçon, for example) is integrated into this church world, and the term "beautiful" is a criterion of internal verification. Thus the speech by Monseigneur Santier, Bishop of Luçon, mentions "*the celebration of openness, beautiful, joyous, ... with beautiful and strong symbolic signs*" (1.3.), and "*beautiful and well-prepared eucharistic celebrations*" (1.4.), "*the eucharistic celebration of Pentecost ... when the sun is shining, was magnificent, lilting, inviting and beautiful [...] the beauty of the altar, of liturgical ornaments...*" Also admissible was the theme of solidarity that the faithful should manifest with regard to everybody. In fact this echoes the desire to reinforce links between the faithful, the clergy and church bodies: "*to make the Church the house and the school of the communion.*"⁴⁹ The welcome given to religious plurality, as expressed in Nancy, is another point that supports this analysis. The ecclesiosphere selectively reintegrates the pressures from other "worlds" – in this case, the social environment. We easily understand why demands that directly affect the sacramental framework – marriage, as well as the ordination of priests – had to be relinquished: they might lead the Roman Catholic Church to resemble other churches and dissolve its "ecclesiospheric" dimension. It would no longer be a world unto itself.

Many dimensions of Modernity, notably those that deal with the reorganization of economic and social relations, do not appear in the synods under study. Would a relation to a kind of culture that is clearly patrimonial and artistic suffice to reduce the gap between a civil society on the way to exculturation⁵⁰ and an ecclesiastical institution worried about its survival as a "world"? Is the banishment of doctrine from the foundations of the diocesan consensus the cause of this? We could not say. But we might legitimately ask about the synod process: is a synod enough to make right the vivid tension expressed by the faithful? That is doubtful. The non-treatment of the "clergy" dossier (an issue set aside several times in the work of the Conference of Bishops of France from 2005 to 2011) and the "divorced-remarrieds" issue that was evacuated from synodal decisions, may well produce bitter fruit in French Catholicism.

⁴⁹ Quotation from John-Paul II, used in the title of the speech by Mgr Santier, in MJSAV, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde, op.cit.*

An Urgent Decision?

With the two dossiers on parishes and the synod process, we have adopted the point of view of the organization: the Church has strived to respond to the difficulties encountered by its provisions – its “offer” of services – both from the material standpoint (the lack of priests) as from the standpoint of the faithful (requests for democracy).

The contemporary synodal institution is organized around the democratic question: are the faithful, structured by ordained ministers and by lay leaders, able to make their voices heard? Many synods have taken place against the backdrop of emergent disaffection (drop in Sunday practice, ageing practitioners) or of clerical weakening, and even so they have borne on very dynamic subjects (evangelization, solidarity). When the people have played the game of participation, the minutes do show that the life proposed by the ecclesiastical institution diverges from the representations, wishes, and desiderata of the faithful on fundamental aspects. The status of the clergy (celibacy, authority, competence) is no longer unquestioningly assumed; moral and disciplinary positions, in both method (lack of discussion) and content (divorced-remarrieds) are openly questioned; finally, the “liturgical machine” is felt to be ossified and inefficient. Still, the concrete experience of discussion groups is appreciated for the innovative aspect it brings to Catholic life. The results of what seems at first sight like experience of participatory democracy are quickly exhausted in the bureaucracy that presides at synods. They are not an effective practice of government.

The French context imposes making big decisions. We have seen thanks to the dossier on the decomposition of parishes that these decisions involve representations of the relation between clergy and faithful, and that the balance between what is specific to the faithful (BSG) and what remains an ecclesiastical monopoly (CSG) is deliberately chosen by the ecclesiastical organization. Restructuring the offer of religious goods and services could take place while maintaining the preeminence of the clergy over the whole territory. That would reproduce the mode of circulation of authority as hierarchic – even within the clergy. The faithful who assume ecclesiastical duties simply flow into the mold of the existing institutionalism. The monopolistic model has received the support of most of the bishops in France. The archdiocese of Poitiers had launched another formula for deploying authority that gave laity new interaction with clerical authority. The charismatic functioning of the monopolistic model was succeeded by a coalescent model in which authority drew on the experience of sociality (in church language, from *communion*). The association of two types of authority, that of function (clergy) and that of sociality (faithful) enabled envisaging de-concentration of power and modification of decision-

making. Pursuing the experiment would have permitted evaluating its political relevance in the long-term and its influence on the nascent divergences between open Catholics and identity Catholics.

A third emblematic dossier reveals the scale of tensions that are fraying the relation between faithful and clergy. The terms “open Catholics” and “identity Catholics”, however, do not take account of the distant historic origins of these tensions, or help us interpret their current resurgence in France. We see here an emergent opposition between baptismal authority and clerical authority, because the latter has not ceased trying to organize the Church around its preeminence.

DEREGULATION AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Among interviewees, the evolution of different currents within the Catholic institution is often described through a theatrical allusion that refers to the wings and what is hidden behind the scenes. The backstage struggles within the Church of France are said to be “silent”, “underground” or even “insidious”.

Among the modern conciliarists and the emancipated, and even some inspired, we find various descriptions of an invasion of the Church of France by “*tradis*” and “identity” Catholics: “*They have internet sites that invade us every day: Liturgical Peace, all the Catho blogs that are a trad thing; the Beige Salon (www. lesalonbeige. fr), there are many of them that always send us very nice e-mails, sites like Perepiscopus... ‘I love Benedict XVI’, etc. that are recommended under Roman authority and that have gone to war against part of the hierarchy of the Church of France.*” Someone else adds that “*you have to see the situation today, which is that obviously it is the most protesting people, those who are most active, you could say lobbyists, are more and more of a traditionalist sensibility! But that amounts to 200,000 persons! They are the ones you see acclaiming Benedict XVI!*”⁵¹ Another interviewee similarly describes the Roman microcosm: “*We have made mistakes, we have not paid attention to the fact you had to be present in Rome, we got what we deserve; some of the French bishops are very aware of this lack of presence; and the Church of France let the marginal fractions wheel and deal, like Opus Dei, the réacs, or simply the conservatives ... without wanting to demonize anybody.*”⁵² These two comments share an implicit representation of power: in order to exist in the Catholic institution, you have to have influence and weight. And in order to do so, you have to develop a strategy of presence and lobbying among the

⁵¹Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

⁵²Éric, 70, married, philosopher, was a great activist influenced by Emmanuel Mounier, Paris, February 2010.

ecclesiastical authorities. In the ecclesiastical institution, the rule is the same as elsewhere: a committed minority can be much more influential than a disorganized majority.

Power Depends on the Number of Vocations

Another argument brought to bear by interviewees complements this representation. The power relations among the various church currents depends on their demographic dynamism: *“It seems to me that in France we still have a silent majority that is calmly Vatican II, both from the lay and bishops’ point of view, if I am not mistaken! What is happening – as in all religions today – is that you have an identity current that is younger and much more fundamentalist [...]. So has this current become the majority? It wants to make people believe it is now the majority, and perhaps it is among priests, in any case it is going to become more so because of the age pyramid. I’m more uncertain concerning the laity. This is the real issue.”*⁵³ This demographic argument is found among traditionalists who in order to earn respect often advance less their argument about the “*eternal mass*” than their number of sacerdotal vocations, which is their main strength. This point is made by a priest trained in Écône (the first traditionalist seminary under Mgr. Lefèbvre) who is now attached to Rome: *“The number of seminarians, these are real figures, this is significant for us! I have not done the calculation but this should mean about 18 % traditionalist seminarians, this is proven. Among the diocesan [seminarians], there are also cleavages but the cursor has shifted greatly, meaning that diocesan seminarians today are much more to the ‘right’ – we’re using this term because it is easier – than they were in the 1970s!”*⁵⁴ More generally, many traditionalist observers are rather confident about the future of the Church because they realize that sacerdotal vocations are largely recruited within their tendency: *“Personally I think that in ten years’ time, in France, the Church will be much more Catholic than it is today, since the young priests are much “squarer”. They have a solidly rooted faith. They do not have a credo ‘à la carte’. They do not drop anything. They stand behind the pope.”*⁵⁵

⁵³Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

⁵⁴Jules, 63, priest, traditionalist tendency, professor at the seminary, influenced by Ecclesia Dei, Paris, March 2010.

⁵⁵Antoine, 39, married and father, director of Notre Dame team, song leader in his parish, Saint-Vincent de Paul conference, political activist in the UMP, volunteer for the Chartres pilgrimage with *Notre Dame de Chrétienté*, Versailles, May 2013.

Appointments from “on High”

Finally, appointments are the last instrument in these confrontations behind the scenes. The competition between ecclesiastical tendencies is exercised through the appointment of bishops by the pope: *“Today we no longer hear the Church’s word [...] This is because of – this is my hypothesis – the series of appointments that have been made over the last twenty years that have had a tendency to advance bishops – respectable though they are – who could be called pietists, much more oriented toward a representation of religion based on pietistic practice, sometimes charismatic, but which shows a sort of nervousness about the world as it is and shows an image of a Church that is drawn in upon itself and a practice that is asserted in the most traditional forms, even more so because society does not accept them.”*⁵⁶

Some conciliarists, emancipated and inspired dream of appointments over which ordinary Catholics would have influence: *“In the Eastern tradition the bishop is elected by local communities. In the East, still today, the choice of this form of local election of the bishop belongs to the diocese. [...] Of course we should not romanticize the eastern situation, but election remains the most important criterion.”*⁵⁷

None of these criticisms about the exercise of power within the Catholic institution are unanimous, of course. Some Catholics, especially among the observant and the fringe of the inspired most faithful to worship forms, see the appointment by the pope as guarantee of the independence of bishops from public opinion. Moreover, as we have already said, many young people defend the pope against all criticism because he is the symbol of the group and he is perceived as a sage, a witness of a truth that the world rejects.

Catholics as Spectators but Not Actors

This view of changes inside the institution explains why many modern conciliarist interviewees feel that they are spectators of Catholicism, even when they are very invested in their parish or diocese. They share a certain fatalism, as if it were futile to seek to have any control over the church institution, as if this evolution depended on variables that cannot be mastered: *“There was a time when the Church was traversed by great currents and debates, of course there are always lines of division, some [believers] are close to a progressive view and*

⁵⁶Claude, 60, married, researcher specializing in the Middle East, Paris, January 2010.

⁵⁷Philippo, 60, of Italian origin, married, journalist and specialist in media communication, Paris, March 2010.

others to a minimalist view of the council, but the problem now is there is no longer a debate. Without fanfare what has been institutionalized is identity confessionalism, revived by the fact of living in a context of religious pluralism, but done so without political proclamation, without any kind of proclamation. This is played out in the recruitment of priests, of bishops... What is affirmed is an identity Catholicism that values devotion. What strikes me is that this has been done in an insidious and silent way, and in the total absence of identified currents of opposition. There is *Témoignage Chrétien* [a monthly magazine] and *Golias*, but those groups are extremely small, and of canonic age with nobody to take over.”⁵⁸ This feeling of fatalism derives from the realization that how the Catholic institution is evolving cannot be regulated. Church politics seems to them less considered than arbitrary, taking place randomly via the play of external variables like demography, migrations, social changes, etc.

Limited Protests

Currently there are protests, even if they do not make much noise. They are expressed on the margins, in readers’ letters to the editors of the Catholic press, or in blogs like “Once a week”, “At the table of left-leaning Christians”, “Salon Beige”, and “Life”.

Attitudes of protest are found in all the Catholic tendencies we have discussed. However, when conflicts arise in a parochial context, we find many modern conciliarists and observants protesting. Among the latter, we should emphasize the very specific position of the traditionalists. While defending the hierarchical structuring of the Church and society, while valorizing the respect due to priests and the importance of submission to authority, in practice they are just as anti-establishment and sometimes even as insubordinate (using all the available canonical resources) as the partisans of Church democratization. Traditionalist laypersons have great protest skills. They have real experience of activism within the Church and their local groups are perhaps the most coherent and most effective because of the traditional culture that is valorized there.

Some traditionalist groups can employ very direct actions when necessary. Thus in 2007 some parishioners of Niaffles in the Mayenne occupied their church to protest against the elimination of their mass by Mgr. Maillard.⁵⁹ Since the publication of *Motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum”* in July 2007, groups of traditionalists have benefited from a

⁵⁸Caroline, 38, married, communications advisor, works for a private television channel, Paris, April 2010.

⁵⁹*Le Monde*, 3-4 June 2007.

legal argument to support their demands. The Liturgical Peace association was set up as a veritable lobby for this purpose. It does polls to legitimize its demands for mass as an extraordinary rite, and then mobilizes local networks so as to orchestrate pressure on priests and bishops. Finally, they publish the results of all their initiatives, and if they do not obtain satisfaction they pose as victims of ideological ostracism and run to Rome to vindicate their rights and to discredit bishops as unfaithful to the pope. The evaluation of bishops produced by *Paix liturgique* utilizes the same procedure as *Golias* in its annual ranking of bishops.

Opposite the traditionalists there exist “progressive” networks that want to transform society and the Catholic institution at the same time. The Réseaux du Parvis network, which federates the fifty associations of this movement created in 1999, mobilized Christians to support Mgr. Gaillot when he was appointed to the non-existent archbishopric of Partenia. However, progressives are rooted in the oldest networks: *Parvis* is partly financed by *Temps présent* and the “friends of 68 rue de Babylon”. These networks’ main task is to animate multiple communities: Christians gather together to experience modified liturgies, to promote open theological reflection and to extend a benevolent welcome to those on the margins of the Catholic community: homosexuals, migrants, divorced-remarrieds. They organize major events like the “Forum of Christians in Movement” in the Basque country in March 2012 that drew almost 800 people. An exceptional symbolic action may be undertaken, like the “wild” ordination of a female priest in Lyon in July 2005.⁶⁰

More recently, in 2009, an initiative from Anne Soupa and Christine Pedotti helped create the “Skirt Committee” and then the *Conférence Catholique des Baptisé-e-s Francophones* (CCBF) for Catholic women and men. Their goal was to “unlock” the voices of the laity and to struggle for the development of free opinion within the institution.⁶¹ Refusing to “shut up or leave”, these women wanted to give back to laity and especially women the place they deserve in church institutions: that of Catholic citizens. The “skirt committee” especially promoted the full recognition of women in the institution. Members drew up a map of parishes where women are marginalized and reminded people it is possible to mount a canonic lawsuit to rectify the situation. The position of the CCBF is less anti-establishment than that of *Parvis*. The strategy here is to institutionalize a new lay pole in the institution, but for this activists have to appear as potential partners for the bishops. To make a critique from within the institution requires displaying

⁶⁰*Le Monde*, 27 May 2005.

⁶¹*Le Monde*, 10 October 2009.

deference to established authority, or else that critique will never be heard.

It should also be noted that in certain dioceses, parishioners and some of the clergy have been able to agitate against the bishop's policy, as in Avignon where the Christian movement in the Vaucluse opposed Mgr. Cattenoz. In 2009, eight priests responsible for deanships resigned from the Presbyteral Council to demonstrate their disapproval of the bishop.

In both Parvis networks and the CCBF speaking out is almost the only means of acting: to make a "different" Catholic voice heard in the media and to disseminate through publications a different conception of the institution. Therefore the principal mode of action is intellectual, a matter of enlarging what is thinkable among Catholics in order to open up new possibilities. The force exerted is exclusively symbolic (resignations) or intellectual (speeches and writings) – no demonstration or strike or lawsuit or disruption of liturgies has ever been organized.

Interiorized Docility

Many of our interviewees dream of protest, such as a woman classified among the conciliarists who is very involved in the life of her diocese. She would like to see all the women who work like her to go on strike in order to show how much work they do for the church. There is also a member of a charismatic community who is scandalized by the exclusion of divorced people from taking communion; she dreams of a rather special strike: "What is dear to my heart is to have a national day of eucharistic fasting when Christians would present themselves to the priest, just like that, without taking communion but in communion with all those who are deprived of the Eucharist ... I discussed this with friends and I was extremely disappointed because people said 'in any case, the Church will never budge, so it is a waste of time,' and I said to them 'you've got a nerve, because it will not budge if we do not budge'."⁶² This reaction manifests how much most Catholics avoid anything that could open up conflict. Protest is transformed into dreaming. This very interiorized deference limits the nature of protests but does show to what extent docility is valorized among Catholics, whether observant, modern conciliarists or inspired.⁶³

⁶² Bernard, 71, divorced-remarried, four children of which three by his first wife, aeronautical engineer, from a family of the provincial nobility, read "France Catholique", in *Fondacio* for 20 years, Versailles, March 2010.

⁶³ Jacques Lagroye, *Appartenir à une institution. Catholiques en France aujourd'hui*, *op.cit.*, p. 88 ff.

Catholics profoundly interiorize docility.⁶⁴ Their gatherings always reinforce this docility by bending to forms, whether at mass or during conferences led by a priest. There are very few spaces open for debates in the Catholic institution. At meetings, there may be a first sharing of experiences that then is inexorably translated into defending orthodoxy by priests who make the closing statements. The same process at work in meetings also characterizes the synod consultation process. This absence of a culture of debate contributes to making it even more difficult to speak out. Those who wish to make an official challenge appear all the more radical: “*Today I have the impression that basic Catholics are more afraid to express themselves on subjects that make people angry when they are involved in a parish or in a movement. This was not always the case, for example in the 1970s. There are many committed Catholics who keep mum, but when they are questioned they pour forth what is in their hearts. They are afraid of sawing off the branch they are sitting on. They feel badly in the Church but it is their family. When there is a sudden burst it is seen as extremely violent, even when objectively it is not. Who jumps in fright? The institution... I am not necessarily a smug supporter of the Conférence Catholique des Baptisé-e-s Francophones; when you listen to their speeches they are not revolutionary. But when you listen to staunch Catholics or bishops speak about them, you have the impression that they are furious Catholics who want to smash everything. There is a lack of objectivity. People are so habituated in the Catholic Church not to bring up problems, not to speak openly, that as soon as there is the rumbling of a deviant discourse, something outspoken, they are stupefied.*”⁶⁵

In the 1970s, the Church of France was traversed by multiple controversies – but they were gradually extinguished due to the marginalization of anti-establishment voices. The Gaillot affair in 1995 was the last great open contestation of the 20th century.

Local Accommodations

Céline Béraud has shown that Catholic intransigence about principles is accompanied frequently by a great flexibility of adaptation in practice.⁶⁶ Lacking a decision-making process open to them, the laity organize spaces of relative freedom where the application of canonical rules is relaxed. Each person has encounters that enable setting up a

⁶⁴ Jacques Lagroye, *La vérité dans l'Église catholique*, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

⁶⁵ Jérôme, 40, journalist, non-practicing Catholic, did not grow up in a Catholic environment, Paris, March 2010.

⁶⁶ Céline Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs*, *op.cit.*, chap. 6.

network of parishes and communities of refuge in which he or she will find congenial practices and agreeable priests.

These accommodations contribute to instilling in some Catholics a propensity to put ecclesiastical norms into perspective. For example, among divorced-remarried who are excluded from communion are some who need it for the sake their conscience or for intimacy with God. So they go to parishes where they are not known or else they take advantage of an understanding priest who knows them well. Still others are totally indifferent to the church norm and think that they have a right as Christians to take communion. These situations illustrate how the faithful can make themselves autonomous from the instituted criteria of legitimate Christian practices, but not feel the need to contest them. They do not protest openly except when a change occurs to jeopardize a local compromise: *“There was a new priest, Roman collar and everything, he started by saying before communion that only those who confessed regularly and were not in a state of sin could take communion. For me that is not an encounter with Jesus Christ.”*⁶⁷

Good Reasons to Keep Quiet

In the absence of places where Catholics might make themselves heard in a conventional and institutionalized way, there are also very strong incitements to silence and discipline. The laity often find some personal accomplishment in church involvement. They are grateful for any personal “enrichment” they find in “serving the church” and this satisfaction compensates for the limits of their status and recognition.⁶⁸ Thus some divorced-remarrieds accept their exclusion from the Eucharist even if they reject this norm: *“At each mass, [my] pain competes with grace. To live the faith when you are divorced-and-remarried, without the Eucharist or absolution, is hard. [...] My children feel hurt to leave me seated in the pew when they go to take communion, I tell them that I do not understand, but I obey despite my divorce.”*⁶⁹ Submission despite incomprehension has a counterpart in spiritual gratifications: *“I experience the Eucharist as a spiritual communion since it cannot be physical. There is profound evidence that the Lord is there, in his Church.”*⁷⁰ To openly criticize the institution is to make an admission of failure to conform. Deep inside a feeling of guilt may

⁶⁷ Léon, 70, married, demographer by training, was president of a NGO for development, Lyon, March 2010.

⁶⁸ An attitude also observed by Céline Béraud, *ibid.*, p. 232.

⁶⁹“Entretien avec Béatrice, 51 ans, Versailles”, *Prier*, n°345, October 2012, p. 7.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

hinder speaking out, and of course outside it might be received with reprobation. Consequently many Catholics continue to interiorize their criticism, because to criticize openly would be disloyal, if not a moral error. In 2012, sanctions taken by German bishops against Catholics who refused to pay their confessional tax showed how the holders of authority can maintain this feeling of guilt.

Among the observant and the inspired, this propensity to self-censorship is also reinforced by the feeling that Catholicism is socially in a minority, fragile and prey to a certain ambient hostility.⁷¹ The Catholic institution appears to be very sick and so to “shoot at the ambulance” seems counter-productive. Loyalty also derives from fatigue with criticism. Even dissatisfied Catholics prefer to look away from possible problems and to defend the religious character of the “Church founded by Christ” and the positive aspects of its activity: solidarity, figures like Mother Theresa and Abbé Pierre [the founder of a Catholic charity, Companions of Emmaüs], etc. Some even draw on a certain mystique: the Church’s flourishing depends on God. Therefore contesting the forms of its organization, its lack of media strategy, or its incoherent governance amounts to thinking of it in inadequate materialist ways. For many of the observant, modern conciliarists and inspired, the actions of the Catholic institution cannot be evaluated using the efficiency criteria of any other organization. You have to put yourself in its hands with trust, and God will provide the means ...

From Self-Censorship to Discouragement

Many Catholics have the more or less conscious feeling of enduring their Church. Everything contributes to this: their fatalism about the hierarchical nature of power, the culture of unity, the valorization of self-abnegation, the feeling that the institution is becoming fragile, even a certain providentialist reading of its future. This feeling takes various forms. Many Catholics sublimate the contradiction they might feel between their evangelical ideal and certain aspects of church life. They totally re-center their Catholic life on worship and a personal spiritual quest. They disinvest in the life of their community because they think themselves either incompetent or alien to the very particular world of the clergy and engaged laity.

Others cope with duality by leading double lives. This may mean developing an underground culture within the institution. At most, the laity may share their malaise with each other, within circles of affinity, since there is no means for them to speak out or officially express any

⁷¹ Here again is a phenomenon already noted by Céline Béraud. Cf. *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs, op.cit.*, pp. 227-229.

demands.⁷² And even if the means existed, using them would still be a form of transgression. Consequently liturgical gestures are not always performed with conviction; the feeling of belonging to Catholicism is rarely unreservedly displayed to the outside world: “*I am Catholic, but ...*” A double language obscures the visibility of Catholics.

At the extreme, some Catholics end up losing their religious motivation altogether. The Church is no longer truly *their* Church and arouses mere apathy: “what can be changed?” The impossibility of speaking out and the exclusive nature of institutional power make them inactive and slide imperceptibly into disaffection. Then they become detached. When other committed Catholics become scarce in their familial, social, or professional circles, they stop justifying the image of the Catholic Church as purveyed by the media, and even give up the struggle.

⁷²A classic phenomenon that has been well analyzed by James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

CHAPTER VI

CATHOLICS AND PUBLIC SPACE

When they do make their faith known, with what are Catholics identified? Probably less with the *credo* or Jesus than with the pope, the Vatican, and certain positions on sexual morality. Catholics are not masters of their identity because identification is always a social process. Identities are not essences but relations. Many French people today are no longer engaged in any concrete relationship with Catholics, whom they identify only through the representations they have of them. And these representations are usually derived from the media. The case of Catholics in this respect is not exceptional, since the media have become powerful matrices of collective identities.¹ By the effect of framing and selecting events, they disseminate stereotypical images of reality (e. g. housing project youth, an archaic pope, the “authentic” village) and thereby standardize the representations of social reality.

This poses a problem; some people decry the enduring “mutual incomprehension” between Catholics and the media.² In 1997, Michel Cool noted that the interest of journalists in religious matters was sequential, star-centered, and anecdotal: sequential because religions are only covered in the media during extraordinary events and so their ordinary activities are not followed; star-centered because only a few major figures attract attention (John-Paul II, Mother Teresa, Abbé Pierre, etc.); and anecdotal because what interests journalists is what is curious, folkloric, or extreme. In short, the ordinary life and actions and questioning by the faithful are totally neglected. It must be acknowledged that Michel Cool’s observation has lost none of its pertinence, but might it not be more general? Are not these three forms of framing applicable to *all* topics? Yes, obviously. This changes everything, for now the media treatment of Catholicism may be imputed to the current rules of journalism and not to the particular relation of journalists to religion.

Nevertheless, many interviewees are embarrassed – or even scandalized – by the image that the media convey of their Church. Their resentment is rooted in chronic misunderstandings like the comparison of Benedict XVI to a “German sheepdog” in 2005, the Regensburg affair in 2006 (when the pope addressed violence in Islam by quoting a

¹Grégory Derville, *Le pouvoir des médias, mythes et réalités*, Grenoble: PUG, 2005, p. 79 ff. See also the special issue of *Réseaux*, n°70, 1995.

²Michel Cool, “Les religions dans les médias. Témoignage et propositions méthodologiques”, *Les cahiers du journalisme*, n°3, June 1997, pp. 98-103.

dialogue between a Greek patriarch and a Persian Muslim) the scandals of Recife and Williamson, the pope's statements on condoms in 2009, the scandals of pedophile priests in various countries, and more recently the delegitimation of the Catholic Church's opposition to so-called "*mariage pour tous*" (same sex marriage). Each time, Catholics deplore that the media focus on aspects of Catholicism that for them are marginal. They think they are being caricatured.

In November 2011, the newspaper *Osservatore Romano* organized a seminar to try to analyze the causes of the Church's lack of media success. Well-known Vatican specialists dissected a number of issues arising after the election of Benedict XVI in April 2005. In France, too, various initiatives were made to try to solve the communication deficit of the Catholic institution and to try to overcome the religious ignorance of journalists, such as the creation of Words of Catholics, Media & the Gospel, and the foundation of CEFRELCO by Jean-Luc Pouthier. In addition, bishops got advice from professionals. Among interviewees, the reactions to the negative media coverage of Catholicism are extremely varied.³

IMPOSING THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF CATHOLICISM

As Oliver Roy points out, in European societies, the decline of the great religions is translated into the erosion of the link between the religious and the cultural.⁴ This process leads to the reconfiguration of religious phenomena, especially the development of a new ways of objectivizing religious belonging. Religion as a social phenomenon is reconstructed by a social focus on the strangeness of practices and ideas that are no longer familiar and are therefore disqualified as "rites" and "beliefs". There is also Catholics' desire to differentiate themselves and to invest their religious belonging in a voluntarist way – each person has to prove his or her belonging by righteous conduct.

These expectations converge and participate in the construction of increasingly objective boundaries between those who believe in heaven and the others who do not. This process of social construction of the place of what is religious within society is not a one-way process; it is an observable tendency that arouses diverse reactions from the Catholics we encountered. Some of them refuse to submit to any of the categories of understanding of religion that tend to be institutionalized. This

³Most of this chapter is based on the analysis developed in: Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *op.cit.*, chap. 8.

⁴ Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance. Le temps de la religion sans culture*, Paris: Seuil, 2008.

rejection of the diffuse media expectations of “religion” appears clearly in the relation Catholics have with media images of their faith.

Catholics in the Shadow of a Religion That Is Alien to Them

Many Catholics are disturbed because the media coverage of Catholicism requires them to take positions according to problematics that are not their own and they may not even grasp. The media constructs religion as a phenomenon foreign to contemporary manners and mentalities. The very use of the term “religion” to refer to certain social activities is a form of implicit ethnocentrism.

Journalists, but also part of the French political class, treat all religions from the angle of what is forbidden (food, clothing, sexual, moral) or of rites. What causes a debate is wearing the veil, eating hallal meat, opposition to gay marriage. We can see that this media construction is closely tied to the growing visibility of Islam in Europe and to the reactions it triggers. But Catholicism is caught just as much as Islam in the snares of media framing. Consequently, all religions appear to be closed communities that stand in opposition to the rest of society; they seem both strange and alien to the common world. Thus in the week of 14 January 2013 all the news kiosks displayed the covers of the magazines *L'Express* and *Le Point*: the former's front-page story might be translated “Homo Marriage: Is Hollande Going to Stall?” and the latter's “Meat: New War of Religions”.

What is designated by “religion” are cultures either viewed as remote or relegated to the past. Religion is both *strange* and *alien*: *strange* because the religious is folkloric and thought of as a universe where reason is relegated behind belief; and *alien* because religion is associated with European history or with alien cultures. Views about Islam, a culture that appears to be both a strange faith and linked to aliens, synthesize these clichés. Thus religion appears as an ensemble of beliefs to which individuals choose to adhere, and of rites constitutive of communities and more generally of exclusive identities.

But Catholic identity is contested not solely because of the media framing of religion in general. Catholics rediscover their difference, sometimes with dread, due to the advancing secularization of society. Debates about “marriage for all” required Catholics to learn about how they are different from others. And they rediscover this because of the emancipation of rights of the family (and more generally of legal regimes of the body) from the Christian matrix. Debates about policies of the family, education, gay marriage, the end of life, medically assisted reproduction, and surrogate motherhood⁵ are feebly resisted outside

Catholic ranks. So they are required to step up and to mark their opposition, thereby proclaiming their Catholicism and their convictions. Discrepancies from the social norm gradually separate Catholics from their contemporaries and lead them to think of themselves as different. As French society becomes emancipated, Catholics appear as reactionary. This helps to reinforce the interpretation of most observant Catholics who think of themselves as a minority in unruly resistance to contemporary society. Yet more than 60 % of French people say they are still Catholics. And many modern conciliarists refuse to consider themselves as a minority; on the contrary they stress Catholicism's wide social base.

Catholics Losing Control of Their Image

Catholics no longer control their public identity. They know about the pope's statements through channels external to religious institutions. And these statements appear all the more conservative because the partisans of "progress" see them as proofs of religious archaism. In addition, this identity is constructed at a global level. Thus French Catholics have to justify to those around them such things as statements by the bishop of Recife and the long silence of the Church of Ireland about pedophile priests. Therefore Catholics everywhere have no control over their image. They often find themselves unprotected because they learn about scandals at the same time as the whole world and they don't have time to draw back and find more solid information before having to answer questions from those around them.

On the other hand, Catholics are much less questioned about their ordinary practices and their actual faith life. Their bishop remains unknown to most of their friends and colleagues, while everybody has an opinion about the pope. So whatever they do locally, Catholics have the impression of never being judged on what they are or what they do – but only on the basis of media clichés: *“Today before talking about one's faith or Jesus's message, one is obliged to show credentials by condemning Mgr. Williamson, the pedophile, or by saying that the Vatican is a little world apart, that matters about condoms are more complicated, etc. Only after having cleared away all that can you finally reach the essential, but it is often hard to get there.”*⁶

At the same time, they live this damage to their image less painfully since they are aware of their particularity and are tempted to

⁶Géraldine, 35, mother and householder, four children, practicing Catholic family, former altar girl, works in communication, very invested in her parish in the preparation for baptism, Paris, December 2012.

assert it more explicitly in order to offset the marginalization of Catholic references in society as a whole. This is why the young observant and inspired are rather at ease with media controversies about the Church's positions, which seem to justify their self-understanding as a counter-cultural minority. The identity of Catholics is increasingly heteronomous, and it is partly constructed in reaction to the images of Catholicism and of other religions diffused by the media – and at the pace of a political agenda and news cycle they cannot control (the Humbert affair, homosexual marriage, etc.).

When one listens to interviewees, being Catholic means manifestly and permanently having to manage this double burden that is the image of Catholicism. It means trying to liberate oneself from the hindrances of past debates in order to catch up with today's. It means to have always in your head some remark to dodge topics like the condom, pedophilia, the pope, and chastity before marriage, etc. For Catholicism to advance, the faithful must try to strip away the caricatures that deform it. Or there may be a frantic retreat, like a young student who was asked by his friends to justify the words of Benedict XVI on condoms just because he identified himself as a Catholic: *"I find that it is difficult for Christians to explain to people who do not have a tie with the Church what the pope really meant to say because people believe what the media says and suddenly it is true, and so it is difficult for Christians, you really have to have a link, or else... The media do not help us have a fine image of the Church! In my shared lodging, given that I was the only Catholic at the time, I was not up on the news because I do not watch the TV news, and when I got up I said 'Are you sure?' and he was saying awful things, it was terrible..."*⁷

Catholics now systematically anticipate the omnipresence of a negative image of Catholicism. They adopt specific strategies of self-presentation to try to overcome it, like the 31-year-old woman responsible for ministering to youth in a diocese in the north of France. When she came into classes in Catholic public schools to present World Youth Day, she wore her "coolest" outfit; she used "trendy" language to present a video about World Youth Day with a "trippy" soundtrack from "Lord of the Rings": *"If I don't surprise them by not sticking to the image of a Catholic they might have, then they will not listen to me."* During the election of Pope Francis, this same young woman was irritated by those who came to see her and said: *"You saw what the pope did, the Church is changing"* so she answered irritably, *"We are sick of the pope, the Church is us, it is what we do every day in the parishes or*

⁷Maxime, 24, finishing a law degree, education supervisor for 15/16 year olds in *Scouts et Guides de France* for a *département*, Compiègne, February 2010.

ministering to youth, and every day we have been changing things for a long time."⁸

Strategies for Evading Prejudices

Look at the evasive strategies used by Catholics during demonstrations against the opening of marriage to homosexual couples in 2012 and 2013. During the demonstration in Paris in January 2013, the placard slogans all tried to cut short the anticipated stigmatization of the "Catholic" nature of the demonstrators. Most Catholics wore bright colors, had signs proclaiming the merits of gender parity, and denounced homophobia, proclaimed love of the Republic and defense of the civil code. Their parade was clearly distinct from that of *Institut Civitas*, the music was joyous and techno, the slogans lively – in short, everything was perfectly calibrated in order to limit any confirmation of the caricatures of Catholicism. These communication techniques have become customary among Catholics since the *Life Parade* in 2005 inaugurated them. Catholics, especially the young ones, have interiorized the need to play with façades of self-presentation in order to skirt clichés and shift their image.

It is instructive to compare the parade from the "*Manif pour tous*" with the inaugural meeting of the left-wing think-tank *Esprit civique* in April 2013 at the National Assembly. It is very clear that the initiative for the latter came from Leftist deputies who were variously rooted in the Christian faith; the mission of this think-tank was to revive the Left by means of Christian thinking. And yet what emerged throughout this evening was the impossibility of participants' fully admitting these Christian roots. All the speakers used a great variety of refined circumlocutions to suggest Christianity without actually saying the word: "living source", "good news in politics", "meaning has Meaning for us", "the tradition in which I am situated", "values", "breaking with disenchantment". Thus the designation "pink fish" (pink for the soft Left and fish for Christian) as the logo for the evening was a virtuoso form of identification – simultaneously clear and euphemistic. Deputy Jean-Philippe Malle used veiled concepts like "humanist culture inspired by Personalism" before he finally made a reference to "Social Christianity", but in this context the epithet was a euphemism since he assured people it principally meant "being open to all sensibilities"; Jérôme Vignon, a senior official and president of *Semaines Sociales* bravely called for "non-exclusive openness". This largely Catholic evening in which civic spirit was ascribed to "baptismal fonts" – "laity!" a speaker rushed to

⁸Myriam, 31, responsible for youth ministry in a diocese, volunteered for a year in the Taizé Community, Paris, December 2012.

add – was revealing of a certain social and political norm. Only Jean-Baptiste de Foucauld and Jacques Delors (former European Community President) confessed their Christianity more explicitly, perhaps as a privilege of age. Religion is suspected of sectarianism, loss of liberty, and therefore attendees had to display an irreproachable “openness” before referring obliquely to the religious context, and even then cryptically.

In these strategies of keeping up a façade, we see the awareness of Catholics that the boundary between what is *in* and what is *out* has become of capital importance. For the Catholic organizers of both these gatherings, however different they may be, people can be mobilized only if the gathering is not identified with a group of Catholics, and thus with its status as a minority apart. This commonplace strategy is of crucial importance among Catholics who find themselves encumbered by an image they dread. On both these occasions, the chosen slogans and phases were oriented to denial: this is *not* what you think, I am *not* this and I am *not* that. The protestation of homophilia here, the refrain about openness there – both expressed the refusal to confine Catholics to “religion”. These Catholics try to blur the identity that people want to assign them by straddling the fence. They try to discredit the boundaries of the social representation of the Catholic identity, by which they consider themselves to be evaluated and caricatured. They think their faith does not cut them off from the rest of society and that it is one element among others that compose their identity. Catholics, they think, are *in* the world without being *of* the world. Paradoxically, for some Catholics religious belonging takes the objective form of a perpetual search to make their confessional belonging appear relative.

Media Framing That Plays on Radical Fringes

There are other Catholics who willingly assume “religion” as the ultimate and total identity that distinguishes them. Demonstrators who participated in the procession of the *Institut Civitas* in November 2012 – not all supporters of schismatic bishop Marcel Lefebvre – displayed a kind of specifically religious sociability in order to testify to the natural, political and social order they are defending in the name of God. On this occasion, “religion” was very explicitly thrust into the foreground. Many placards asserted that “Family is Sacred”. Rosaries were brandished, prayers chanted in loud voices, quotations from the catechism had been copied onto banners with their references indicated, reminders that homosexuality is a sin, and flying French flags stamped with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, etc. The *Institut Civitas* owes its media success to this frank religiosity free of hang-ups, which well suits journalists’ demand for the anecdotal.

The current social focus on the kinds of religion that constitute exclusive identities and closed communities, that claim to impose their truths on the outside world, is receptive to traditionalist minorities that find in their being denounced by outsiders a confirmation of the corruption of the world. On the other hand, those who refuse to enter into “religion” and to make their faith the cardinal reference point of their whole lives, find the path is much harder. They have to be in a state of permanent strategic denial in order to restore their image and to redress the image of their Church, and these efforts seem to be in vain if they are not perceived as standing alongside the more neoclassical currents that do fulfill the expectations of a kind of religion that is clearly identifiable with “exotic” forms. Since they have less media exposure, moderates count for less in the religious field, where the most fundamentalist reproach them for their discretion, which they interpret as foot-dragging, if not tepidness. The process of the mediatization of Catholicism influences internal power relation. The image of the Church is also a resource of internal power for them and so the relation to society at large is not the only thing at stake.

POOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

Many interviewees pose the question of the representation of the Catholic institution in the public debate: how should the “Church” be represented? This speculation most often arises from frustration and even indignation: *“Today, for a non-Catholic, what is the Church of France? It is barely even the Archbishop of Paris. And it is probably now only Guy Gilbert (“priest of hooligans”) – it amounts to that.”*⁹ The image of Catholicism is perceived as very unrepresentative of its reality. Its own media figures are very polarized: on one side are the official spokesmen who represent the institution in a very formal and hierarchical way, and on the other side are personalities who break this image by their lack of formalism.

Official Spokesmen out of Synch with Catholic Reality

This dualism might be explained by the journalistic demand, which is something most of our journalist interviewees observed: *“When you speak about the Church, you want a priest or a bishop, you want someone in clerical clothing or else it is not the Church speaking! All that is very media savvy, very basic!”*¹⁰ This clerical monopolization of

⁹Pierre, 5, diplomat, practicing Catholic, Paris, May 2010.

¹⁰Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

the media is related to a transformation of Catholicism, in which Catholic intellectuals have disappeared from public debates: “*When the media wants to know what the Church says, they think more and more of bringing in a church personality ‘in uniform’. The phenomenon of the ‘great Christian’, a layperson who is known to be intellectually responsible, has disappeared – for example Mauriac, Maritain, Daniel Rops, Gilson, Marrou, etc. The media are going after clerics for two reasons: first because in the intellectual landscape there are no competent and representative laypersons any more, and then because they prefer, for their audience and their ratings, to use a church personality. There is a sort of lean cattle period, no ‘catho Bernard-Henri Lévy’ who is dynamic on the screen. The last person of this kind was someone like Maurice Clavel.*”¹¹ Another interviewee notes that since the death of René Rémond in 2007, there is no longer a Catholic analyst recognized in the media to explain and make the Catholic institution understood; by default there are more or less specialized journalists who take this place even when their own religious culture is sometimes weak: “*One point that seems important is that Church is hardly represented in the whole intellectual debate! Or it is caricatured! What seems revealing is that when they want to speak about the Church’s evolution, then it is a problem for the media to find journalists specializing in religious news and there are few theologians or specialists who are capable of making themselves heard.*”¹²

Interviewees also note that this media representation is therefore severely out of synch with the reality of who Catholics are, which affects their message: “*And then you have an image of Catholics only through the austere posture of a Monseigneur Vingt-Trois on television, and if on top of that you are in a town or a village where you don’t have a link with people of the Catholic community or your kids in the Scouts... if you are totally cut off from this reality of the Catholic fabric and you have only the picture from the Church’s official communication, then the message is much harder to accept and be understood!*”¹³ Women and the laity are usually absent, and this realization recurs in the interviews.

Lay Speech That Could Be Better

For the modern conciliarists, the emancipated, and some of the inspired, a whole series of questions seem inadequately treated by “those

¹¹Basile, 62, married with four children, university professor, philosopher, Paris, March 2010. BHL are the initials of Bernard-Henri Lévy, writer and philosopher and media celebrity.

¹²Didier, 55, married, Director of a publishing group, Paris, March 2010.

¹³*Ibid.*

responsible” in the institution because of the lack of laity in responsible posts: “*The declarations of Mgr. Fort (Orléans) on condoms is symptomatic,¹⁴ which made us look ridiculous, we don’t even get a pertinent response ... I don’t like the scientific word... but there is no human response on an appropriate level, I often think of Paul VI’s phrase, ‘the Church as expert in humanity’, today we are expert in what kind of humanity? Where is humanity today? Our responses are all about moral intransigence, we do not compromise, we unsheath our morality like you unsheath a revolver; maybe I am going too far, but we bring out a code rather than an answer; there is no more humanism in the way the Church addresses the world.*”¹⁵ For this interviewee, the whole problem comes from the clergy. According to him, if the laity could speak in the name of “the Church” – on sexual morality, for example – then their discourse would be more human and more flexible: “*When it is a priest who is addressing the faithful, you get the impression of a discourse of authority, in the pejorative sense of the term. In discourse on ethics as applied to sexual relations, words would have more weight if they came from laity who have experience of the situation. Stop to consider that there is the Church on one side and the laity on the other...*”¹⁶

The laity do not have much media visibility; they are only heard when they protest, which does not help to improve the image of their church, observes a journalist from the Catholic press: “*The problem is that the laity don’t dare speak! What makes me somewhat afraid when I see things like the Skirt Committee or the Conférence Catholique des Baptisé-e-s Francophones is that right away there are problems with demands!*”¹⁷ The core of this under-representation of the laity is the question of representativeness: bishops represent the Catholic institution – there is no analogy for laity. But one interviewee notes that this is due to an overly formal and institutional conception: “*If you think of Madeleine Delbrêl, for example, she is never posed in terms of her representativeness.*¹⁸ *We shouldn’t be naïve, the bishops aren’t only in*

¹⁴In March 2009, the bishop of Orléans, Mgr André Fort implied that condoms were not reliable and they could let the AIDS virus through. This declaration aroused indignant reactions in scientific milieu.

¹⁵Claude, 60, married, researcher specializing in the Middle East, Paris, January 2010.

¹⁶Basile, 62, married, four children, university professor, philosopher, Paris, March 2010.

¹⁷Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

¹⁸Madeleine Delbrêl (1904–1964) was a French Catholic author, poet, and mystic.

representation, they aren't involved in just that, but I am not sure it is a good idea to do things like in a trade union, that's all!"¹⁹

One solution might be to diversify spokesmen in the ecclesial institution on the basis of criteria of competence, which would enable giving space to more lay women and men: *"If there was a spokeswoman, that would diversify things a little, showing there are not just men having a monopoly on public speech, if for example on economic questions there were male and female spokespeople [showing] that there was confidence in male and female theologians and laity who have leadership responsibility. The laity must have legitimacy and not be just about representativeness."*²⁰ One interviewee noted that in the Vatican, experiments in this direction had good results: *"The former Vatican spokesman was a layman, and I take this as an example. I think that this is something super. I think that already cuts the feet out from under facile attacks from journalists...I would like that there to be – not always – for the spokesmen of the Vatican to be from the laity, and in France also, perhaps not systematically in every diocese in all circumstances, but sometimes, so that laity could be the voice of the Church. And I think that would be lovely."*²¹

Prefer Witnessing to Religious Cant

The interviewees also noted that the issue is not confined to the person who represents the Catholic Church. The way in which the public is addressed also poses a problem and in this respect substituting women for bishops would not change things much if they produced "cant".²² Many interviewees note that each time a Catholic wants to give a "word from the Church" and tries to convey it with a concern for unity, then his speech is hollow: *"Why doesn't this work? Well, it's always because when the bishops are in front of the camera, if they represent the Catholic Church, they represent the whole body that has to recognize itself in what he says and mustn't be hurt! So they immediately start up a normative discourse that all Catholics must recognize and then they become impersonal and they are no longer heard! [...] What will make their speech get through is when they say 'I'! But they can't do that! It is*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Edmond, 36, married, 5 children, a leader within the Emmanuel Community, Paris, April 2010.

²²The French language plays on the words "bois" (*langue de bois* = doubletalk or cant) and "buis" (boxwood, which is used by the church as an evergreen alternative to palms).

*not possible for them, a bishop does not say I or else he is dead!!!*²³ The official nature of the spokesmen instituted by Catholics removes any credibility and also discredits their statements in advance, perceived as a sort of official cant: *“The Word is not spread because in its formulation it has predetermined answers. You get the impression that they are not taking the problems seriously but are simply concerned with the correct line, a sort of orthodoxy in the answer: the answer has to be orthodox, whatever the form of the question.”*²⁴

This decline in the word of authority is part of the general context of contesting established authorities. The truths codified by institutions are no longer accepted. Increasingly it is the affirmation of the subjectivity of a religious experience that makes the latter communicable and acceptable:²⁵ *“In modern communication, speech is only heard when it comes from a person who personally assumes responsibility for what he or she says; that is the rule! But in the Church as soon as a voice speaks in the name of the Church, then it is not in its own name, it is in the name of a collective in which everybody must agree. [...] We are put directly inside an encompassing body and so it becomes complicated for people to recognize themselves!”*²⁶ Many modern conciliarist interviewees offer Abbé Pierre and Sister Emmanuelle²⁷ as examples to support this realization: *“There are those in the past – people like Abbé Pierre and Sister Emmanuelle – who succeeded from the media viewpoint; with extraordinary personalities, they surely had completely extraordinary interior lives that allowed them – including in the complex situations in which the media dumped them – to pass along a message of hope, a message of love, etc.”*²⁸

For the emancipated, the modern conciliarists and the inspired, the quality of these witnesses does not rest on some criterion of representativeness. Their force comes from their capacity to incarnate evangelical values while displaying their subjectivity: *“You see as soon as someone manages to incarnate in a coherent way the values of the Gospel, this works very well! Abbé Pierre, for example, today we need new figures like that! It works when it is coherent.”* In effect, words spoken by someone who lives by them become appropriate: *“In the*

²³Paul, 50, monk, consultant in human resources, Paris, 24 February 2010.

²⁴Claude, 60, married, researcher specializing in the Middle East, Paris, January 2010.

²⁵See the work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger.

²⁶Paul, 50, monk, consultant in human resources, Paris, February 2010.

²⁷Abbé Pierre (1912-2007) founded the Emmaus movement; Sister Emmanuelle (1908- 2008) was a nun noted for her involvement in working for the poor in Turkey and Egypt.

²⁸Guy, 65, married, retired lawyer, active in a Catholic international NGO, Paris, February 2010.

generation of Sister Emmanuelle and Abbé Pierre we had charismatic figures who said **I** and who said a very ecclesial **I** rooted in the faith! [...] The great charismatic figure is a sort of sign that what is preached and proclaimed is appropriable, that one might become in turn a Sister Emmanuelle or an Abbé Pierre; there was a sort of exemplary quality.”²⁹ Journalists when they are questioned note that the media are demanding “witnesses”: “When the Church communicates through faces and actual persons it works well! There is a great desire for questions of meaning and for spiritual faces.”³⁰

However interviewees speak of these “great figures”, apart from Guy Gilbert, in the past tense. This is probably linked to their modern conciliarist orientation. Young observants would probably add, from very different genres, Frigide Barjot or Christine Boutin (former Secretary of Housing, founder of the Christian Democratic Party). Some interviewees think there is a certain fear among ecclesial authorities of these witnesses because they cannot be controlled. Their discourse is perceived as a risk for the ecclesial institution: didn’t Abbé Pierre pronounce himself in favor of the marriage of priests? Did Mgr. Gaillot bear a good image of the institution or else degrade it by demarcating himself from it? These questions remind us of the implicit shadows that witnesses also bring with them into the television studio. Some fear that these witnesses might compromise the hierarchical structure of the Church. A journalist and regular Catholic considers that this fear is unwarranted: “The problem is we have an intellectual mediocrity that means that out of pettiness, out of lack of ambition, they have not invested the means to have real spokesmen! They are afraid! They are afraid of stars! As soon as you have a champion, they wait for only one thing, which is to get rid of him because he will put the bishops in the shadow on a purely media level!”³¹

How to represent the Catholic Church in the media? This is a much discussed and disputed question. But all interviewees are unanimous on one point. Lacking a relevant presence in the media, Catholicism is “faceless”, which can only contribute to making the message of Catholics blurred: “Once again from the experience I have today: a social body that does not have a face [...] or strong representation in a communication society [...] is not well recognized, is not well perceived.”³²

²⁹Paul, 50, monk, consultant in human resources, Paris, February 2010.

³⁰Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, 26 January 2010.

³¹Jean-Marie, 48, married, practicing Catholic, journalist, Paris, February 2010.

³²*Ibid.*

OPPOSITE STRATEGIES OF VISIBILITY

As we saw in chapter 1, Catholics have always been concerned about the way they might appear in the eyes of unbelievers.³³ During the 1930s, movements for Catholic Action aimed to re-conquer society. Each Catholic was supposed to become a missionary in his neighborhood, in his factory, in his village. Then the Christian was an activist, he wore an insignia and displayed his difference, distributed tracts and participated in great collective celebrations. Starting after World War Two, this strategy of visibility was criticized. The acknowledgement of the de-Christianization of France had the corollary of blaming this strategy as well as the Catholic parish. The religious forms that separate Catholics from their fellow citizens were dropped in favor of strategies of inculturation into the social mass. Charles de Foucauld's way of life was erected as a model; worker-priests adopted the whole way of life of those they wished to evangelize in order to make themselves the "yeast in the dough".

Initially oriented to the working class, this choice to "become indigenous" would become more general in the 1960s. In 1964, due to this missionary ambition that took place through sharing ordinary human life and struggles, the union organizers of the CFTC separated their confederation from the Catholic Church.³⁴ Catholic elites shared the feeling that a radically new society was being born. Consequently, in order for Christianity to have a place, it had to integrate this new world. For this purpose, laity – and priests, too – had to become ordinary people. Catholics invested strongly in social and political struggles. By taking part in "human liberation" they wanted to demonstrate that God responds to human expectations. After the upheavals of May 1968, base communities would push this ambition to the limit by searching in a utopian way to give a new foundation to the ecclesial institution. For example, after 1973 the archbishop of Paris refused to be present at the official grandstand during the Bastille Day parade; he tried to manifest modesty in public.³⁵

The election of John-Paul II as pope marked a turning point that became more perceptible during the 1980s and 1990s. New religious communities broke with the previous strategies. They affirmed a strong

³³Bruno Duriez, "Les catholiques dans l'espace public français", *Cahier de l'atelier*, n°529, April-June 2011, pp. 26-35.

³⁴Frank Georgi, "De la CFTC à la CFDT: un choix chrétien? ", in Bruno Duriez, Etienne Fouilloux, Alain-René Michel, et al. , (eds.), *Chrétiens et ouvriers en France. 1937-1970*, Paris: Editions de l'Atelier, 2001, pp. 183-193.

³⁵Marcel Albert, *L'Église catholique en France sous la IV^e la V^e République*, Paris: Cerf, 2004, p. 182.

confessional identity and revived straight forward proselytizing. Now it was not sharing the ordinary life of people or solidarity with political and social struggles that would make a Catholic credible, but instead the personal experience of an encounter with God. “Witnesses” took the place of activists in helping the Catholic faith achieve greater visibility. Bishops, realizing the rapid marginalization of Christian culture in society, likewise decided to make Catholicism clearly visible in public space: “While social campaigns and ethical demands were both vague and changeable, the Church felt an urgent need [...] to be precise about its credo and its specific boundaries.”³⁶

During the 2000s, this tendency toward the reaffirmation of a Catholic identity would be nourished by a growing distrust of society. In *Le christianisme en accusation*, René Rémond asserted that Catholicism was the most persecuted religious minority in France.³⁷ He accused most especially “media mistreatment” and asserted that journalists abused the Catholic Church with “sarcasm that nobody would dare formulate with respect to Judaism or Islam, which would make a scandal.”³⁸ He was indignant about the skeptical tone with which journalists at *Le Monde* covered the JMJ (World Youth Day): “If any other confession or any other kind of thought had gathered together even a quarter of this immense crowd, would they have got it into their heads to talk about ‘an illusion’? But as soon as it is a Catholic mass assembly, if you really have to measure its success by the evidence of the numbers attending, they have to cast doubt on its significance and its future. Could we find a more typical example of the discriminatory treatment of contemporary Catholicism?”³⁹ That a committed Catholic like René Rémond, experienced in Catholic action movements, cast such a critical look at the world testifies to the profound changes within Catholicism.⁴⁰ The realization of this new “anti-Christianity” would seem to be confirmed by the polemics that followed the election of Benedict XVI in 2005.

Today, the media image of the Church divides Catholics. In 2009, when the statements of Pope Benedict XVI about condoms were on the front page, the readers of *La Vie* were indignant about the pope’s blunder, while the readers of *Famille Chrétienne* denounced media

³⁶Gérard Defois, “Annonce explicite et visibilité de l’Église” in Gérard Cholvy, Bernard Comte, Vincent Feroldi (eds.), *Jeunesses chrétiennes au XX^e siècle*, Paris: Editions ouvrières, 1991, p. 137.

³⁷René Rémond, *Le christianisme en accusation. Entretiens avec Marc Leboucher*, Paris: DDB, 2000.

³⁸*Ibid.* p. 32.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁰Charles Mercier, “René Rémond et le catholicisme français des années 1990-2000” in Céline Béraud, Frédéric Gugelot, Isabelle Saint-Martin, (eds.), *Catholicisme en tensions, op.cit.*, pp. 281-291.

manipulation and “lynching”.⁴¹ The respective positions show how Catholics think of their relation to society and which strategy seems desirable to them. Among our interviewees, we were able to detect four principal types of reaction to the media image of the Church, but note that they do not coincide with the four major clusters of Catholics that we described in Chapter 2.

The Spirituals: Image Is Not Witnessing

First there are those we could call the spirituals: they accord little importance to the media treatment of the Catholic institution. We find them among the inspired, the observant, and modern conciliarists. They realize that misunderstandings are not surprising because there is something essential in the life of the faithful that is now and will always be improper for media coverage: “*The relation to the media is in any case a difficult relation for religions and it will always be contradictory with the very meaning of religion, because religion if one thinks of Catholicism – like all of Christianity – is a religion of simplicity, humility, giving of oneself, of things that are totally anti-media; the media are about the promotion of the individual, about personal power and brilliance!*”⁴² Modesty and humble presence among the disadvantaged would therefore be more effective than the quest for visibility at all costs. For the “spirituals” what counts is the witness that Catholics give in the daily situations in which they are involved: “*I think that the prime communication of the Church is the testimony of these people who live with Christ. [...] And if this testimony is authentic, well then, glory to God! And I think that is good and the communication of the Church is no longer a problem.*”⁴³ Another interviewee, a bishop, adds: “*Since we are in a communication society, I should take the media into account, but the future of the Church does not pass through the media, it passes (I would say) through the testimony of Christians.*”⁴⁴

The Catholic Church should not put extravagant hope in the effect that a professionalization of its communication might have. For one brother, its amateurism is a sign of the authenticity of its approach and the honesty of its intentions: “*I do not like communication that bluffs, that tries to dazzle you; what is good does not make noise, in the sense*

⁴¹Laurent Larcher, Elodie Maurot, François-Xavier Maigre, “Les catholiques et les médias: apprendre à se comprendre”, *La Croix*, 10 April 2009.

⁴²Pierre, 67, monastic, journalist and teacher, Paris, February 2010.

⁴³Edmond, 36, married with five children, has responsibility within the Emmanuel Community, Paris, April 2010.

⁴⁴Jean-Jacques, 70, bishop in a provincial diocese, Paris, April 2010.

that faith is transmitted essentially by witnessing, by dialogue, by being close. And when I say that communication is a false problem, it is in the sense that what is living is going to make itself known. So, I do not consider that this is problem number one, and for me, there is a requirement for truth and to respond, to say who we are, without necessarily displaying a shop window to say who we are.”⁴⁵ He thinks that a well-calculated media strategy would even be a form of secularization of the Church, a slippage toward a less supernatural and more bureaucratic way of functioning: “As a multinational it communicates badly since it does not use good communication systems, but I am telling you that I am rather pleased because again it means that the Church in its apparatus does not accept being a multinational!”⁴⁶

The amateurism of ecclesial authorities is good because in the eyes of the media it testifies to a different hierarchy of values and this differentiates the Church from all other institutions: “I believe that I prefer a Church that communicates badly to a Church for which communication is prime. I think I know from close up how local governments communicate, for example; they communicate well, but for me communication should not be prime.”⁴⁷

For these spirituals, it is up to Catholics to convert and to live their faith wholly, this is the sole means for them to move hearts and acquire social recognition. All the rest is only froth. A communication campaign can go down well at one moment and be a failure the next, due to one equivocal phrase, the uncertainties are such that it is better to concentrate on the essential – that is what members of this first group imply.

The Levelheaded: Working on Mutual Understanding

The second group might be called the levelheaded. There we also find the modern conciliarists, the observant, the emancipated, and even the inspired. What distinguishes them is often their higher educational level and professional proximity to the media universe. These Catholics judge that the media image of Catholics is the consequence of a double ignorance: that about media culture on the part of ecclesial authorities, and that about the Catholic institution on the part of journalists.

⁴⁵Serge, 56, Brother, doctor, worked for a long time in a Third World country, Paris, February 2010.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Béatrice, 53, editor-in-chief in a publishing business, parents were mathematicians engaged in the CCIF and in Pax Romana in Paris, lives in Rouen since her marriage, not comfortable in her parish, member of *Semaines Sociales*, Rouen, April 2010.

Journalists' working methods are directly thrown into question. Many professional journalists acknowledge the profound incompetence of their colleagues: "*When Benedict XVI came to France, certain media outlets that had otherwise well covered the event, out of contempt put reporters in the crowd at the Invalides, and one of the reporters says: 'listen, this is something extraordinary, everybody is shaking hands, an unexpected gesture'; it was the sign of peace! Which means that when a journalist is covering a football match he knows what he is commenting on, but when he is covering a mass he does not know what he is commenting on! This is typically French, it comes from an ex-culturation of religion, but also from a form of contempt, which much surprised our Italian colleagues.*"⁴⁸

What is also called into question is the way journalists frame subjects: "*I know that the pope – this does not interest the press; what is reported is going to be only spicy politico-sexual things. I could say 'failure', but since I know about the press – right now the French press is totally and absolutely useless, is only interested in anecdotes, and so it is not particularly against the Church, but that effectively, in any case, it will only be interested in anecdotes and scandals.*"⁴⁹ The media prefer the anecdotal and the folkloric: "*There is a paradox, which is that there is a folkloric aspect to the Roman Church that interests the media! The more folkloric it is, the more the media takes an interest! That's really something! That's the frame through which they view the Church and the way they can present it.*"⁵⁰ Another interviewee who works in the media confirms: "*Issues of religion or ecclesial issues do not interest the major media very much, except when there is a train that derails, meaning a bishop who says anything at all, whatever the subject, then immediately he has a microphone!*"⁵¹

But the levelheaded also reproach ecclesial authorities for making no effort to play by the rules of the media game: "*Few bishops understand that you have to reflect simultaneously about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it, and to whom – in short have what one could call a communication plan in our jargon; that is not yet among their mental habits.*"⁵² The ecclesial authorities ought to professionalize their communication. A bishop we met admitted: "*We have to do work to understand today's communication codes, and agree*

⁴⁸Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

⁴⁹Pierre, 55, diplomat, practicing Catholic, Paris, May 2010.

⁵⁰Georges, 65, former priest, married, journalist and editor, Paris, February 2010.

⁵¹Pierre, 67, Brother, journalist and teacher, Paris, February 2010.

⁵²Caroline, 38, married, communication advisor, works for a private TV channel, Paris, April 2010.

to enter into them. Communication has its codes, and they have to be accepted and skillfully played."⁵³ Many interviewees stress that church leaders lack teaching skills: *"The extinction of species or biodiversity, I think that for a scientist, it is almost as difficult to truly explain as the social doctrine of the Church, they simply have a technique of communication, of popularization, that makes the message pass into public opinion, whereas on the Catholic side there are no popularizers of the Church's social doctrine."*⁵⁴

The language of Catholic authorities cannot get through to an audience because it is too disconnected from society: *"And then there is the cultural gap ... it is complicated ... it is a gap that makes me suffer over communication because when they speak about the Church, nobody understands; when you say during the synod of bishops about Africa [that] the pope has promulgated a motu proprio... [then you get]'A synod is what? What are bishops? What is motu proprio? ' If you want to reach the greatest number, maybe you should review your vocabulary."*⁵⁵ Another interviewee goes further and asserts that ecclesiastical leaders do not question themselves sufficiently: *"After a while you have to ask yourself about the very nature of the message and about the way it is being expressed! When you are obliged to make excuses every time for things being badly expressed, then there is a problem!"*⁵⁶

And finally, a female journalist notes that the Conference of Bishops of France has a hard time accepting the specific temporality of the media: *"The most recent example is about the issue of the full body veil! There is no communication and sometimes even a refusal to communicate to give a position on the subject! The Church issued a press release that was very interesting; but for example, in my newspaper it was a position that I could not exploit because unfortunately we were no longer in that news cycle, and to give the Church's position ten days after the battle...! That's why!"*⁵⁷

Certain interviewees have the impression that the ecclesial authorities disdain communication: *"I don't think the Church communicates. I think it despises communication, which it considers to be something dirty. So the Church has a tendency to consider that since*

⁵³Raoul, 48, auxiliary bishop, Paris, April 2010.

⁵⁴Didier, 61, professor of public law at a university, from a Catholic but seldom practicing family, has belonged to a higher committee of the university parish until its merger with teaching teams to create the current association "Christians in Public Education", Reims, May 2010.

⁵⁵Pauline, 55, married, journalist, Paris, January 2010.

⁵⁶Didier, 55, married, Director of a press group, Paris, March 2010.

⁵⁷Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

it is dirty, you don't touch it. And I think this is wrong because basically it has always touched what was dirty. You have to go there. But it doesn't go there – or else it goes with tweezers."⁵⁸ Another journalist confirms: *"The Church's communication is useless: first of all, it does not reflect about the language it is using. Then, it is not relaxed: when there is a Catholic leader who speaks, you get the impression that he is speaking to enemies. It is a vicious cycle, if you start to consider the press as the enemy, it does not work. This is the basis of communication. You have to learn to speak to the media, to public opinion, and be relaxed."*⁵⁹

The Defensives: Struggle against Media Discrimination

The third group could be called defensive: its members impute the media image of Catholics to a calculated intention to do harm. Here we find principally the inspired and observant, and more rarely modern conciliarists and emancipated. They challenge not only how the media function, but also the contemptuous attitude of journalists, their manipulations of public opinion, and even their silence about anti-Catholic deeds. They consider that journalists willingly feed a certain "Catho-phobia": *"I think that in France, given that society is very secular, there is an ambient anti-Catholic climate, so that as soon as the pope or any bishop says something, all the media get together and make people believe that what has been said is a stupid blunder! As for me, this year I studied a case of media manipulation when the pope made statements on condoms and it was very clear that the media seized just one sentence to make the pope say everything he did not want to say."*⁶⁰

Exposing Cathophobia, previously done by a few blogs close to the traditionalists (in *Salon Beige*, *Itinerarium*, *Riposte Catholic*, *L'Observatoire de la christianophobie*), spread throughout Catholic opinion after the election of Benedict XVI. It reached its acme with the first street demonstrations against the theater plays by Romeo Castellucci and Rodrigo Garcia in 2011. Meanwhile the Ministry of the Interior observed a rise in the vandalism (even profanation) of Christian sites (churches or cemeteries):⁶¹ during the first eight months of 2012, there

⁵⁸Pierre-Jean, 45, married, 4 children, practicing Catholic, journalist, Paris, March 2010.

⁵⁹Jérôme, 40, journalist, non-practicing Catholic, did not grow up in a Catholic milieu, Paris, March 2010.

⁶⁰Tristan, 32, employment advisor, has led a troop (15/16 year olds) of *Scouts et Guides de France* for a year, member of the *Vie Chrétienne* community, volunteer with *Secours Catholique*, G., Compiègne, February 2010.

⁶¹"Faced with 'anti-Christian' acts, the Church reacts with discretion", *La Croix*, 12 December 2012. To be accurate, account must be taken of psychiatric

were 233 thefts or vandalism in churches and chapels reported, plus 135 in cemeteries characterized as “Christian”. This figure was 5 % higher than the same period in 2011, but the proportion remains minimal in relation to the 45,000 sites of Catholic worship in France. Since then, polemics around “marriage for all” and the statements of Cécile Duflot on the real estate belonging to the Diocese of Paris have contributed to maintain among Catholics the feeling of being a minority that is discriminated against.⁶²

Catholics who consider that Cathophobia is growing in French society often compare themselves with Muslims and Jews. They find the latter are much better treated than they are. They observe that profanations of Christian sites are greeted with indifference from public authorities, in contrast to the profanation of Jewish or Muslim sites. In reaction, many Catholics think they have to defend themselves: by proclaiming their faith proudly by demonstrating and protesting when necessary, even by lawsuits if required. They want to break with a laissez-faire Catholicism; they think that the proselytizing practices of evangelical Christians, or else the defensive practices of the Jewish community of France are the models to follow. “Cathophobia” also develops in ways rather similar to the exposure of “homophobia” in politics. And it is interesting to note that Catholic militants have created on Twitter a “Cathophobia radar” modeled on the “homophobia radar”. It systematically posts all anti-Catholic statements or acts. The feeling of belonging to a minority that is the victim of discrimination is the source of the distrustful relation of these Catholics to public space. This distrust lends coherence to a variety of acts and statements that are aggregated under the label “Cathophobia”.

The Reformers: The Church’s Image Will Change When It Opens to the World

The media image of Catholics gives rise to a fourth type of reaction among those we might call reformers: asserting a distinction between personal Catholic identity and the defaulting ecclesial authorities. We find here the emancipated, the modern conciliarists and some inspired, more rarely the observant. These Catholics think the ecclesial authorities are responsible for the poor media image; their

pathologies: These sick people are strongly attracted by religion, and churches are often open and not under surveillance, contrary to many other non-Catholic worship sites.

⁶²“Y-a-t-il un ‘cathobashing’ en France? ” *La Croix*, 4 December 2012; Mgr. Marc Aillet, “Il y a du 1905 dans l’air”, *Le Figaro*, 1 August 2013. [1905 was the year when church and state were separated in France.]

archaic positions provoke rejection: “*In relation to the statements that were made (especially about birth control) by the pope I have not found that the media have distorted them very much and so I find that for a Church that claims today to be open to the young [...] this seems rather antiquated.*”⁶³ These Catholics have the impression that the Church is regressing by harping about sexual morality and refusing to evolve: “*I feel it is like they are returning to the dogmas of the Church a hundred years ago.*”⁶⁴ These Catholics were on the alert after the election of Benedict XVI and the debates over Regensburg’s views, the Williamson affair, and of course birth control and over confirmation of conservative clerics (which they dread). They like to recall that one can be a Catholic and in favor of the use of contraception, and also support the marriage of homosexuals. More generally, they like to affirm their faith by presenting the exact opposite of the media image of Catholicism. When they do not display their nostalgia for the “open Catholicism” of Vatican II, they proclaim their expectation of a Vatican III.

These four types of positioning of Catholics in relation to media space manifest a major gap between the way contemporary French society functions and the way “ecclesial society” functions. For the spirituals, this gap is desirable because the Church is not “the world”. The levelheaded do not challenge this statement, but they would wish for better mutual understanding. For the defensives, the reactions of the media world are proof of either covert or overt hostility, and reformers turn the same gap against the Church, by demanding that it listen better to the world.

The four positions converge in the direction of the painful experience of a divergence of views within Catholicism, for which there does not seem to be a clear solution. On the one hand, society might be right about media professionalism (and its ecosystem), as well as about society’s choices, while perhaps one might censor a lack of considered judgment of Catholic positions. But if one diverges from these societal choices, then one objects more or less strongly on various points (media seriousness, anthropological options, moral values) to the treatment inflicted on this *grande dame* that is the Catholic Church.

⁶³Eloïse, 21, leader of *Scouts et Guides de France* in Nevers, had not been a Scout before, leads a chaplaincy for middle school students, in higher education, Le Breuil, February 2010.

⁶⁴François, 44, married, one child, specialized prevention, came through ACE, then JOC and ACO, activist in SUD union, personnel and trade union delegate in his association, member of ACO, Tourcoing, March 2010.

The election of Pope Francis considerably upset this classification. Perhaps we should come back to the second diagram in Chapter 2, which described the attitudes of Catholics to the future of the Church and the future of society. The four categories (optimists, zealots, relaxed, disillusioned), although still pertinent, have no doubt been modified: some optimists are now alongside the relaxed or disillusioned, and vice versa. Only a new series of interviews would enable detecting this. But would the outcome actually challenge the variety of positions on the gap between the contemporary Church and contemporary society?

CHAPTER VII

CATHOLICS IGNORANT ABOUT EACH OTHER

Observants aged in their thirties are unaware of the whole history of their elders¹. The reason that the previous religious universe seems so strange and suspect to them is that they are strangers to it. Complaints about the break in transmission are palpable. If one mentions great spiritual figures of the Fifties and Sixties (like Jacques Loew, Madeleine Delbr el, Ren  Voillaume, Yves Congar, Joseph Lebet, Marcel L gaut, Dom Helder Camara) there is no sign of recognition what soever. For young observants there is a blank history between Simone Weil (the philosopher who converted to Catholicism during World War Two) and Pope John-Paul II; the famous beret of Abb  Pierre barely floats above this unknown half century. Yet the 1950s and 1960s were the Golden Age of Catholic thought and theology. Few other periods have offered such a rich corpus of publications in theology and spirituality. This ignorance on the part of younger observants increases the chasm between two eras of Catholicism and nourishes their mutual incomprehension. And a rediscovery of the Vatican II Council will not be enough to fill this gap, precisely because the Council is the source of many of the conflicts. It is often conceived as the sole cause of the evolution of Catholicism during the 1960s and 1970s, but without the social, political, and religious context of the 1950s and 1960s, it would perhaps not have been such a major “event”.² For example, without understanding the influence that the lives of Charles de Foucauld and Th r se de Lisieux had on Catholic spirituality in the 1950s and 1960s, young Catholics cannot understand why their elders grew detached from devotion in order to live a Christianity that they thought was more authentic and evangelical because it embraced ordinary life. Nor do the young understand their elders’ distrust of John-Paul II or Benedict XVI (and more recently the goodwill toward Francis), because they are ignorant about the hopes raised by Vatican II that were dashed. They do not understand that their elders were formed to be activist Catholics, fully-fledged actors in their Church; this is the reason behind their rather anti-establishment attitude to the Roman authorities. Veteran Catholics think of themselves as members of the “People of God” who have the right to speak up.

¹Most of this chapter is based on the analysis developed in: Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *op.cit.*, conclusion.

²Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Histoire du concile Vatican II (1959-1965)*, Paris-Louvain: Cerf / Peeters, 3 vols: 1997, 1998, 2000.

Inversely, older modern conciliarists do not understand anything about their more observant juniors, either; they are no less severe about them than the latter are about the older generation. One symptom is that they interpret young priests' practice of wearing Roman collars as a step backward. They are taken in by the formal perpetuation of tradition and don't appreciate the aspect of renewal. However, choosing the cassock has nothing to do with being obliged to wear it. And the liturgy in Latin, or wreaths of incense, have neither the same charm nor the same meaning for someone born into them than for someone who chooses them out of predilection. This freedom seems surprising to veterans because it is associated with religious forms that they (who grew up at the end of Pius XII's papacy) consider to be regressive and authoritarian. The younger generations do not feel as stifled by these forms as do their elders. For them, these are strictly personal choices, the expression of their freedom. The relation of younger generations to the pope is another illustration. Pope Benedict XVI was defended against attacks because he had become the reference point for the visibility of Catholics; he was seen as the courageous representative of a heckled minority and he had to be supported. And if his teachings were not discussed, it was sometimes less due to discipline than out of a certain relativism: "*The pope indicates the best and the line to follow, and it is up to everyone to adjust to that, according to the individual situation and conscience.*"³ If one follows this line, it is useless to contest the pope. Yet the deference of some young people to the pope is combined with great personal liberty, even with some relativism, as illustrated by their relation to norms about contraception.

What is certain is that the distinction between these two religious universes reflects the profound transformations of French society during the second half of the 20th century. Catholicism has shifted from the religion of the whole French people to an amorphous group with vague contours whose members are divided about the identity to adopt. Thus the problematic of French Catholicism has changed. The older ones had done everything to get out of the ghetto of a religion too sure of itself and unlikely to call itself into question, while the younger ones now search for ways to close ranks to compensate for the way their group has become precarious; it is rediscovering visibility and asserting itself in the face of Muslims and evangelicals. Superficially represented as two age cohorts (many exceptions exist), these religious universes are more fundamentally distinguished by their way of thinking about the relation between the Catholic institution and French society.

³Géraldine, 35, mother of a family of four, practicing Catholic family, former altar girl, works in communication, very invested in her parish in preparation for baptism, Paris, December 2012.

A Conflict between Eras

As Pierre Bourdieu has shown, conflicts between generations are in fact conflicts between modes of socialization. It is not their ages that oppose groups, but the contexts in which their members have been formed.⁴ The worlds in which these two kinds of Catholicism developed are radically different.

In the years after World War Two, the world of unbelief was perceived as a world in which theology was reduced to ethics – the Gospel lived without God – among the working class and Third World peoples. At that time the scandal was the fact that Catholics were not present in these milieus.⁵ This was the absence that the worker-priests and activists in Catholic organizations were trying to overcome. Militant Christians and priests sought to integrate the most ordinary human conditions into their lives, so that ordinary humanity would in turn integrate the ecclesial institution and “purify” it by obliging it to strip away all that was not evangelical. The gaze of unbelievers upon Catholicism was used as a means of objectifying that which in the institution did not conform to the original evangelical foundation.

The 1960s prolonged this questioning while inflecting it. The era was characterized by an enthusiastic faith in technological progress and in the advent of a new civilization. Society was being drastically transformed and a middle class with higher education was emerging. Christians thought they had to break with some of their inherited religious forms in order to rediscover more suitable ones for conveying the Gospel in a new age. The Vatican II Council was welcomed as a call to undertake this effort to find a new foundation for the Christian faith.

This desire to break with the past was also nourished by the memory of the Second World War and the wars of decolonization (Vietnam, Algeria, etc.). The apolitical stance of ecclesiastical authorities appeared to many militant Catholics as tacit support for the established order.⁶ Out of opposition, they considered that Christians should engage in humanitarian struggles to promote justice; without that, spreading the Gospel cannot answer people’s expectations and so it loses credibility. The language of faith should be sought in the “truth of life”,

⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique, esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, Genève-Paris: Droz, 1972, p. 104. (in English, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, trans. Randall Johnson, Stanford University Press 1998).

⁵Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France, pays de mission?* Paris: Karthala, 2014 (First: Editions de l’Abeille, Lyon, 1943).

⁶General De Gaulle, at the Liberation, ha wanted to get rid of the great majority of French bishops, whom he considered had been too conciliatory with the Vichy regime.

that is to say, in the ordinary human condition. It is true that this option for social justice was being conveyed by the whole socio-political context at the time, notably by the powerful Communist party, and it was stimulated by the ban on French Catholics getting involved in politics (after the condemnation of the *Action Française* under Charles Maurras in 1926).

By contrast, the feeling that Catholics were being marginalized in society marked the final decades of the 20th century. The familiar model was overthrown; now Islam and Pentecostalism were asserting themselves in public space. It seemed that Catholicism was being contested by “Christianophobia”.⁷ Debates around statements by Pope Benedict XVI, whether about Islam or birth control, plus the non-recognition by Europe of its Christian roots and the avant-garde theater work of the Italian director Roméo Castelluci (*Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio*) was performed at the Festival of Avignon in 2011) all seemed to partake of the same latent hatred of Catholicism. The success of the 2010 film *Des hommes et des Dieux*⁸ among Catholics might be partly explained by a feeling of identification with a small community taken prisoner in a hostile world.

In this context, young observant Catholic parents focused on three things: ensuring the transmission of the faith to their children, affirming and defending Catholic identity in society, and reviving a form of proselytism. This translated into increasing criticism of Catholic teaching, into a growing demand for schools where confessional identity would be frankly asserted and experienced as ordinary. The most radical of the observant do not hesitate to home-school as a last resort. These Catholics are tempted to take defensive action. In their ordinary life, whether professional or local, they think that the visibility of Catholicism depends on their practice and so they try to assert their confessional identity. This is a direct consequence of the growing visibility of Islam, notes a journalist: “*There are few complexes about religious identity today with the emergence of Islam. People are not wondering about competition, but they are somewhat involved in one-upmanship in relation to the visibility of Islam. The young generations are a little more obliged to show themselves as Catholics in order to exist!*”⁹ Finally, many are invested in the necessary search for a “new evangelization”.

⁷René Rémond, Marc Leboucher, *Le christianisme en accusation*, *op.cit.*

⁸French film by Xavier Beauvois (2010), freely inspired by the assassination of monks at an Algerian monastery in 1996. It won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival and was also a success with audiences.

⁹Fanny, 41, journalist specializing in religious affairs, Paris, February 2010.

Thus the 1960s and the 2000s present rather opposite configurations. But the representation that Catholics have of society plays a prime role in both eras. It is through what Catholics perceive of society that they seek to define what are the necessary Catholic practices. This appears clearly when one compares the clergies formed in these two eras.

In the 1960s, the young clergy tried to break with a clerical status as an obstacle to evangelization by its bourgeois and upper-class façade. So they had to become the “salt of the earth” or the “yeast in the dough”, meaning a tiny invisible thing that changes everything and helps transform humanity. It was also a matter of adopting a modest posture in order to give better access to a Catholicism that was largely dominant at the time and could even appear crushingly so. The priest got in touch with civil society and displayed its habits.

By contrast, in the 2000s the young clergy try to redress priestly status by giving it a visible and explicit identity that will give a face to Christian difference and an affirmation of service to God. So they have to become the “light of the world”, to visibly manifest and publicly affirm their divine vocation, to recall the higher realities of faith. Now they must break with the effacement of Catholicism. They have to cope with its minority character by clearly dramatizing Catholic difference. Whereas the young clergyman of the 1960s forsook the cassock by dressing in an ordinary way, the priest of the 2000s brandished his Roman collar. These two historic configurations have another point in common. The younger generations have constructed their identity in opposition to their elders. May of 1968 is for current young Catholics just what the compromises of World War Two or the 19th century were for the generation of the baby-boomers.

Structures of Ignorance

However, the generations whose identity, imagination, and Catholic practice all developed in these distinct historical matrices do not know each other. Current observant Catholics were socialized by contact with new religious movements or groups of a more conservative sensibility. And the militant Catholics of the 1960s have a marginal legacy in the ecclesial institution because their children do not recognize themselves in current Catholicism, which is too conservative for their taste. This rupture between the generations is a problem because it means that Catholics have only slight awareness of their historicity. Catholics are doubly ignorant of each other: they are ignorant of each other because they are ignorant of themselves as the fruit of a singular historical experience. By default, they tend to think of their own expression of Catholicism as the only authentic and legitimate one.

This lack of reflection about the relativity of forms of the Catholic faith predisposes each to caricature the other and to thoughtlessly appropriate the artificially split representations of Catholicism. The media, by the social power of the representations of Catholics they construct, require all Catholics to take a position based on stereotypes, and thereby they contribute to maintaining simplified representations of the cleavages that traverse Catholicism.

This problem was aggravated since the election of François Hollande as President of the Republic in 2012. In effect, the proposed law on “marriage for all” created tensions between the Catholic institution and a part of French society, which was expressed in many denunciations of the interference of Catholic authorities in national politics. These debates and the way journalism frames “religion” (as we saw in the last chapter) have had harmful effects within Catholicism. The visibility of the most neoclassical fringes of Catholicism has increased, which has contributed to hardening the polarization between observant Catholics who were heavily invested in the “Demonstration for All” (*La Manif Pour Tous*), and the older liberals and progressives who favor compassion toward homosexuals and refuse to adopt a posture of opposition. The latter, while more numerous – almost 41 % of those practicing in January 2013¹⁰ – felt all the more marginalized because the specificity of their religious position was effaced by that demonstration, which was overwhelmingly interpreted as “the” Catholic Movement, which seemed corroborated by the support of some bishops. Some bitterness resulted among modern conciliarists and the emancipated who judged they were being ignored as Catholics. This situation even pushed some to exclude themselves, to suspend their participation in Sunday mass; they do feel legitimate or at-home there as do the more conservative mass-goers.¹¹ Each side tacitly excludes the other from a position as legitimate Catholics.

These phenomena of polarization and exclusion are fragmenting Catholicism. There is no way of regulating this tendency; no structure permits Catholics of different tendencies to meet to learn to know about and respect each other. Dioceses no longer have an instrument to unify and homogenize Catholics; the recomposition of parishes around affinities dissolves the diocesan territory. Catholics are isolated from each other in affinity networks. They maintain relations with ecclesial authorities but not with coreligionists with whom they do not have any affinities. This split is especially notable between observant and emancipated.

¹⁰“François Hollande et les catholiques,” *IFOP Focus*, n°79, 28 March 2013, p. 3.

¹¹*La Croix*, 26 May 2013.

The structures in which Catholics of various tendencies might discuss and debate have disappeared – the Catholic Center for French Intellectuals, for example.¹² The various Catholic journals no longer debate each other. In each diocese there are structures that organize inter-religious or ecumenical dialogue, but nothing exists to stimulate dialogue among Catholics. Yet a demand for this does exist, which explains the success of the *Etats Généraux du Christianisme* organized by *La Vie*, where the podium welcomed representatives of Catholicism’s diverse tendencies. Small initiatives also exist in the dioceses. In Bordeaux, the eldest of the *curés* in the city center regularly organizes a meal for all the *curés* followed by time for conversation and prayer,¹³ where ties of friendship are formed despite the implacable liturgical differences. But these occasions are too rare. Inside the ecclesial institution there is almost no institutionalization of the debate or lay participation. Diocesan synods might once have played this role, especially when they promoted wide participation by “the bottom”. On this precise level, the result is more than mixed, as we saw in chapter 5. This is also what feeds fatalism among Catholics, and its corollary – discouragement. They have the feeling of suffering the decisions made within their institution, on top of suffering from their poor image in public opinion. Without authorized speech and without the possibility of influencing the life of the ecclesial institution, they think that the Church is principally “the hierarchy”. This is what decides and this is what people talk about. Lacking sites for institutionalized debates, they do not develop the capacity for negotiation, which cultivates distrust among them. Structurally, the ecclesial institution produces ignorance among Catholics and hence unregulated antagonism. The result is the impoverishment of Catholic culture.

The Catholic journalist Marc Baudriller, in a book that was rather severe about the militants of *Action Catholique* and “leftwing Cathos”, writes that their “activism” dominates over “prayer and meditation” and that “the preoccupation with social causes stifles that with the ultimate purpose”.¹⁴ But perhaps he is ignoring the link between Salvation and engagement that Jesus made (Matthew 25:31-46), and faithfulness to the grand prophetic tradition (Hosea, Amos, Isaiah)? “Leftwing Cathos” might have been able to draw his attention to this point. The “salt of the

¹²Claire Toupin-Guyot, *Les intellectuels catholiques dans la société française, le Centre catholique des intellectuels français (1941-1976)*, Rennes: PUR, 2002.

¹³A current practice in the clerical milieu, but losing speed due to the diversity of profiles among priests.

¹⁴Marc Baudriller, *Les réseaux cathos, leur pouvoir, leurs valeurs, leur nouvelle influence*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2011, p. 129.

earth” and the “light of the world” seem like two irreconcilable orientations, yet Jesus combines them in the same parable in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-16). The authenticity of his message cannot be transmitted without associating the two, and no doubt Catholicism would gain if its different generations and tendencies maintained a dialogue.

Tension between Nostalgia for Unity and Desire for Pluralism

The Catholic archipelago sometimes seems so broken up that it is legitimate to wonder to what extent Catholics still identify with each other as coreligionists. Do they still accept identifying with each other despite their divergences? Many Catholics whom we met are paradoxical when they express views about the diversity of currents within Catholicism. On the one hand, they are nostalgic for the former unity, and on the other they deplore that some voices cannot be heard and that the Roman magisterium discourages recognition of pluralism. Quite often one may detect that the Catholics who are in a dominant position within the ecclesial system – or at least in a positive growth dynamic – remind others of the need for unity more eagerly than those who are dominated or on the way to marginalization. The latter are more opportunely the apostles of pluralism. Views of the Church are rarely disconnected from a hidden agenda.

Placed artificially end-to-end, some of the interviewees’ statements allow us to envisage how unity and pluralism might be articulated with each other inside the Catholic institution. Superficial unity for the sake of a facade is decried as sterile. For many it is the cause of the inaudibility of ecclesial authorities when they do try to communicate. Nor should unity be the hypocritical legitimation of a uniformity imposed from above, a means of reducing contradictory voices to silence: *“In fact, I think there is a mystique of the body of Christ among high Church officials that means that there is sort of mystique of unity that is quickly confused with uniformity, and any public debate or contradiction is perceived as a personal attack on the body of Christ and it will bleed profusely, so there is no possible debate, and we always agree when we see each other at official functions! [...] But that means everything goes on behind the scenes [...] I think there is a huge institutional problem and that this mystique of unity – you can’t have a row because this hurts Jesus – this is deadening!”*¹⁵

Moreover, unity should not be achieved by means of the exclusion of what does not fit the framework. A Catholic institution that did not

¹⁵Paul, 50, Brother, consultant in human resources, Paris, 24 February 2010.

give rights to sexual difference and that excludes women from responsible leadership would be “*totally frightening*,” says one interviewee. For another, unity that is defined against the world would be contrary to witnessing: “*The people I spend time with cede to this identity reflex, their outlook on the world becomes a mistrustful gaze, you have to protect yourself, you have to remain apart, and I think that cannot be fruitful. [...] Me, I always want to go back to that phrase in the gospel ‘For God so loved the world’, and I believe we should situate ourselves with a gaze of empathy and above all of mercy toward the world.*”¹⁶

So what could unity be built upon? “*In one way or another, you have to arrive at a gathering of living forces! The Gordian knot is the absence of dialogue! See for yourself the great difficulty of getting people to speak to each other, to explain and talk among themselves – this is very, very important!*” exclaims an interviewee in a cassock.¹⁷ A dialogue that goes beyond sensitivities is desired by many who are tired of oppositions, who do not recognize themselves in them and who believe that bridges between these universes can be built.

How do they build them? First, by accepting pluralism: “*The different currents must not claim to be Everything in spreading the Gospel.*”¹⁸ Then, by recognizing that no approach to communion will be authentic unless “*all currents take part.*” Then they have to know how to debate differences frankly and deeply: “*You also have to argue! Don’t be afraid of conflict! Then, turn the page!*”¹⁹ Forgiveness must be on the horizon so that tongues are untied in trust and so that dialogue is truthful. Everything should nourish an exchange that everybody should watch over, since it is a precious link, a communion in action, a unity in ferment.

Many perceive the current fragility of the Catholic institution as an ideal context in which to relearn unity: “*We are a small flock under attack and badly led, and that obliges us to close ranks, and that obliges us to holiness, to a true attachment to Christ, to move beyond all the shams, the prejudices, the misplaced pride. It obliges us to move beyond cleavages and work together.*”²⁰ Another person adds: “*Inside the*

¹⁶Sister Michelle, 40, nun in a new community, historian, experience in Egypt, Paris, May 2010.

¹⁷Jules, 63, priest, traditionalist tendency, professor at the Ecclesia Dei seminary, Paris, March 2010.

¹⁸Guy, 65, married, retired lawyer, active in an international Catholic NGO, Paris, February 2010.

¹⁹Jules, 63, priest, traditionalist tendency, professor at the Ecclesia Dei seminary, Paris, March 2010.

²⁰Edmond, 36, married, father of five children, leader in the Emmanuel Community, Paris, April 2010.

Church [...] there is a culture of excommunication, difficulty in having an internal Catholic ecumenism. I think that this becomes completely derisory in the context of a Catholicism that is itself becoming countercultural and minoritarian. At the same time, I see a second phenomenon that goes in the completely opposite direction. I meet many people who desire to move beyond the boundaries of their own chapel."²¹ Many possibilities are contained in these words, but Catholics must speak to each other so that they may be able to understand each other.

²¹Pierre-Jean, 45, married with four children, practicing Catholic, journalist, Paris, March 2010.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic landscape that we lay out in this book focuses on two essential dimensions. The first is obviously the diversity among Catholics that can be observed today. The second points to the institutional creaking caused by the disappearance of the clergy.

Catholics have probably always been diverse; the multiplicity of religious offers (congregations, movements) is there to attest to a need felt in all eras to increase the number of prongs in the ecclesial rake. However, along with these figures of the modern conciliarist and the observant, the committed and the anti-establishment, there emerges a particular panorama. In effect it is about access to parishes that are guaranteed by the institutional arrangement and by apparent neutrality – the Clerical Symbolic Goods are available to everybody; there is an equality of treatment – yet minimal communion of one parishioner with another. Regular practitioners are undeniably more numerous among the observant than among the anti-establishment, but despite everything the parish system represents a point of reference for belonging to Catholicism.

Our study has shown that the classical typologies are no longer sufficient. It is true that the representation in concentric circles based on practice has long since been set aside. Of course, Catholics are “distanced” from the Church in the practice of CSG, which are episodic, sometimes only occurring at funerals. They are often contrasted with assiduous practitioners who go to mass every Sunday and are involved in parishes at all levels. But finding themselves in the practice of worship with others, either to get closer to them, or to become more distant, says nothing about the complex representations that animate them.

The second way to represent Catholics was to identify them with political positions, notably the “left-wing Cathos” who demarcate themselves from a rather conservative “silent majority”. We have been seeking affiliations that traverse eras, like a “liberal” channel or an “intransigent” one, as in the preceding historical chapter. Our data showed in effect that the 1960s experienced strong tensions between the clergy, markedly at the center of the political chessboard, and a managerial economic world that they did not understand. The “bosses” accused the episcopacy – not without reason – of lending more attentive ears to the demands of employees than to the difficulties that themselves were encountering as influential actors in the economy.

Here we have preferred to stress the complexity and fluidity of positions. The schemas used to classify the modalities of Catholicism

might then serve to highlight the underlying rationales of believers' individual behaviors. On this basis, one could conduct fresh research both on the understanding of so-called "pastoralism", meaning actions undertaken by either clergy (or what remains of them, due to the demographics) as by the faithful. The future may still hold many surprises in the sociology of Catholicism.

Whatever the case, to the extent that there remains a partition between a distribution of clerical and baptismal symbolic goods, we cannot sweep away the issue of the relation to the parish church, if only because the French imaginary still bears this imperiled reality. As proof is the fact that the church's bell tower is the best maintained communal building in France. The budgets devoted to churches weigh on municipal budgets, even when services are not guaranteed. One might say that the local church incarnates the image of belonging that associates all these Catholics in spite of their diversity. In this sense, the fact that only a few Catholics carry out the actual practice is of modest importance as long as sites of worship are spread out over French territory. Now the Catholics of France must face up to the shocks to the institutional landscape, whatever their model of fidelity.

Two basic shifts have combined to sap this institutional system. The first proceeds from the vast opening up initiated by the move of liturgy toward the laity that increased the "active participation" of the faithful in liturgical work. Starting in the first years of the 20th century, it culminated in the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the liturgy by the Vatican Council II. The reform under Vatican II introduced new actors into the choir – the laity. As a consequence, the Council is the representation of equality between clergy and laity, between men and women, which is crystallized in liturgical work. Our study has shown how the gap between, on the one hand, the dynamics of equality and parity that inhabit the representation of citizens (connected to the Western ideal) and the buffers posed by the Roman Catholic Church in order to maintain clergy status, on the other hand, which undermines the feeling of communion.

The second long-term shift whose effects are now in the foreground is the low rate of renewal of the clergy, which leads to a major disjunction between the geographical arrangement and its staffing. In the system inherited from the Napoleonic reorganization, each *commune* (36,000 in France) should have its own church. In fact, except for a few *cantons* heavily marked by historical anti-clericalism (e. g. in the Poitou), a church stands in each village. Their density in towns depends of course on urban history, but we may assert that overall the French landscape is uniformly sprinkled with bell towers. Yet despite the presence of 48,000 priests in the mid 1950s, the Church has never been able to ensure complete coverage by *curés*. Already in 1900 despite

the 60,000 priests in the country, some dioceses (including in the Paris region) lacked priests-in-charge to occupy all parishes. The drastic diminution in the number of priests, perceptible starting in the 1980s, has accelerated clerical depopulation.

This gives a free hand to the laity, first invested with local responsibilities and then with diocesan ones. Priests withdraw into worship, aided by the rise in power of deacons who substitute in their absence. Despite this effort, they do not manage to ensure minimum Sunday masses, especially in areas of low population density. Priests can no longer actively preside (especially for pastoral work like preparation of the liturgy), and are at best present for a moment. Therefore liturgical space is gradually liberated, leading the laity to claim a *de facto* presence in the choir. There is no mass unless the laity organizes it and unless the priest makes himself available.

Thus a) a sociocultural evolution and b) a clerical dearth combine to exacerbate the tensions between laity and clerics. The Roman organization, with its choice to maintain clergy monopoly over the distribution of CSG, becomes less and less relevant in the eyes of Catholics. This disjunction means that a representation of ecclesiastical and universal communion becomes harder to keep up. The fragmentation of Catholics on which we have focused becomes a problem for communion. The “affinity recomposition” – Catholics affiliating with the current most congenial to them – increases this fragmentation. Since the churches do not contain priests any longer – people don’t know where to find them, they are lodging kilometers away or always involved in meetings – priests no longer represent the focal point for Catholic identification. Dioceses may manage the shortage of ecclesiastics but they cannot ensure any regulation of these affinity groups. And so we understand why the conflict becomes so difficult to resolve.

How can the faithful address the differences that separate them in a non-conflictual way? This would require acting in the absence of clerical ministers, and hence in the void left by the clerical social body. A tacit consensus to carry on is the sole response possible in a situation where Catholicism is becoming so fragile. One could say that the parish reorganization model implemented in the diocese of Poitiers between 1995 and 2012 was an audacious attempt to avert the risk of conflict resulting from the penury of priests, while associating laity with a new political definition of their role in the ecclesial institution. But a tacit consensus does not signify a management of differences – or of conflicts.

The Catholic laity did not wait for difficulties to peak in order to scout new paths of Christian life. By relying on the competences that have always been granted them, bearing on the Baptismal Sacramental

Goods (sociality and piety), they regrouped to ensure a different kind of communion that did not rely on clergy. Of course, the forms of this type of organization are not new, since they arise from the classic confraternity model. But the Catholic context gives them new impetus and this is why a path to the future is emerging.

The confraternity model, however, is not able to meet the demand for dialogue, debate, and internal confrontation that is emerging among Catholics. Family divisions risk crystallizing into factions, and most actors are aware of the danger of a break-up. They already perceive the perils due to the disappearance of traditional mediators – i. e. priests. In this sense, the “*Manif pour tous*” did not manifest a sacred union of Catholics, but instead accentuated an internal perception of the lack of dialogue. It introduced a new cleavage since there we saw observant Catholics meeting Muslims and disaffiliated Catholics. Future children and social models of family life are the points of crystallization of identities and public positions. Catholics are led to take charge of these new stakes and are doing so by reconsidering their conformity to the church.

The risk of break-up is thus transferred to those laypersons who cannot claim any marked group identity. They affiliate with groups like Christian company directors (EDC) or Catholic divorced-remarrieds or Scouts, or join Alpha groups. As for those who are less sociable and who have been content until now to rely on the usual parish services – especially the great ceremonies of passage rites (birth, love, death) and of the seasonal calendar (Christmas, Easter, All Saints) – institutional arrangements offer scarcely anything any more. These people are in some way available for the new forms of local religious adherence like the Evangelicals – if spiritual matters still interest them.

Thus the three major characteristics of the evolution of Catholicism in France are affinity regroupings, the eviction of isolated souls, and a consensual institution. What are the possible evolutions? Of course, they could depend on the social conjuncture, which religion scarcely controls. There is no question of our indulging in forecasting on this level.

On the other hand, some of the evolution depends on the capacity for initiative of the Catholic Church. The eviction of the isolated could be slowed if the outcome of the vast debate organized by Pope Francis around the family (divorced-remarrieds, homosexual unions) would enable envisaging Catholic belonging otherwise than on a disciplinary model. A renovated image of the Catholic relation to doctrine might perhaps make it more seductive and even reverse the flight of believers. The issue of the capacity for dialogue would still remain, though. How to replace priests in the role of relating with affinity groups? Today it is difficult to see the church thinking along these lines. Thus it is possible

that the affinity regroupings will continue for at least ten years more, the time it takes for Catholics to absorb the demographic landslide. Then they might push the Catholic hierarchy in its retrenchment, which might in turn lead to new spiritual movements, which (like Sant'Egidio) might adopt the mission of a restoration of debate and of church communion. This is only hypothetical today, and the future remains open.

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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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