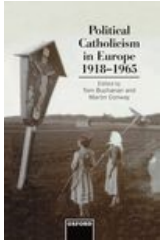

Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203193.001.0001

Published: 1996 **Online ISBN:** 9780191675775 **Print ISBN:** 9780198203193

CHAPTER

1 France

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203193.003.0002 Pages 34–68

Published: April 1996

Abstract

This chapter discusses political Catholicism in France. At the beginning of the 20th century, the great majority of French Catholics were conservatives of one hue or another. But between the end of the First World War and the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the close link between Catholicism and traditional right-wing politics was broken. By 1960, not only had Catholics come to embrace the principle of political pluralism, but it was even possible to discern the advent of a new Catholic left as a significant element on the French political scene. Developments in political Catholicism were not solely responsible for this transformation, but they played a crucial role. The chapter focuses on the opening to the left, particularly in the inter-war period. Building on the solid foundations laid in the years before 1914, the years 1919–39 can be seen in retrospect as a watershed, more so than the period after 1940.

Keywords: French Catholics, French Catholicism, political movements, political pluralism, Catholic left, France, political Catholicism

Subject: European History, History of Religion, Political History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), Social and Cultural History

Collection: Oxford Scholarship Online

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the great majority of French Catholics were conservatives of one hue or another. Many still hankered after traditional monarchy. Others were neo-royalists, supporting the Action Française, the royalist, anti-republican, anti-Semitic, and virulently nationalist league founded at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Headed by Charles Maurras, who was himself a non-believer, it nevertheless attracted Catholic support because of its outspoken defence of the Church's claims to a privileged place in national life in the face of anticlerical attempts to create a secular state and social order. Only a minority of French Catholics heeded Pope Leo XIII's appeal in the early 1890s to rally to the Republic in the movement known as the *ralliement*, which by the early 1900s was represented politically by the Action Libérale Populaire, a republican but still conservative party led by Jacques Piou and Albert de Mun.

Between the end of the First World War and the opening of the Second Vatican Council, however, the close link between Catholicism and traditional right-wing politics was broken. By 1960 not only had Catholics come to embrace the principle of political pluralism but it was even possible to discern the advent of a new Catholic left as a significant element on the French political scene. Developments in political Catholicism were not solely responsible for this transformation, but they played a crucial role. Hence the emphasis in this chapter on the opening to the left, particularly in the inter-war period. Building on the solid foundations laid in the years before 1914, the years 1919–39 can be seen in retrospect as a watershed, more so than the period after 1940.[1]

At the same time, however, it is hoped to show that the equation between Catholicism and conservatism itself requires to be nuanced. The alliance was never as straightforward as it appeared, since on the Catholic
p. 35 side it was prompted less by ↳ common social and economic goals than by a religious outlook which identified the Republican and Socialist left as the enemies of the Church. If French political Catholicism was distinguished by its diversity, one thing all its adepts shared was an attachment to the principle of *catholicisme d'abord*—Catholicism first and foremost. Unlike the Action Française, which preached the doctrine of *politique d'abord*, political Catholics were people who put their religion first.[2]

The feature of French political Catholicism which distinguishes it from the experience of most other countries of Catholic Europe was its failure to develop the kind of mass Catholic Party to be found in, say, Belgium, Italy, or Spain. There was no Catholic Centre Party, or Zentrum, as was the case in Germany. Only the MRP, the Christian democrat party founded at the end of the Second World War, ever looked as if it might assume the role of a mass Catholic Party, and then only for a brief moment. Instead, in France, political Catholicism came in many different shapes and sizes. In one guise, it might be predominantly a movement of religious defence, as was the case of the Fédération Nationale Catholique (FNC) between the wars. More significantly, it manifested itself as Christian democracy, represented in party-political terms by the Parti Démocrate Populaire (PDP) and the Jeune République (JR) in the 1920s and 1930s before flowering as the MRP after 1944. In the French case, however, it needs to be stressed that Christian democracy embraced a wide variety of Catholic social organizations, including trade unions, workers' associations, and youth groups, in addition to political parties. Thus the Confédération Française du Travail Catholique (CFTC), the Action Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (ACJF), and the Jeunesse Ouvriére Chrétienne (JOC) are as vital to the story of Christian democracy in France as the foundation of the PDP, the JR, or even of the MRP. A further constituent element of French political Catholicism was the activity of Catholic intellectuals and journalists, who helped to define and to diffuse doctrines of political action inspired by Christian principles. Figures such as Emmanuel Mounier, Francisque Gray, and Robert Cornilleau, along with reviews such as *Sept* and *Esprit* and newspapers like *L'Aube, La Vie catholique*, and *Le Petit Démocrate* all helped to shape the form taken by French political Catholicism in the mid-twentieth century.

The absence of a Catholic Party in France owed much to the historic divisions between left and right which dated from the time of the French Revolution and which, at the end of the nineteenth century, were expressed primarily in terms of a conflict over religion. Anticlerical Republicans, in pursuit of their ideal of the secular state (the *état laïc*), passed a series of anticlerical laws in the 1880s (the *lois laïques*) and renewed their attack on the Church in the early 1900s, the culmination of their efforts being the Law of 1905 which separated Church and State. Catholics and conservatives, for their part, refused to accept the 'godless' Republic but were fearful of forming an overtly clerical party which they thought might encourage their
p. 36 opponents to even greater excesses. Many therefore continued to defend the ideal of an alliance of ↳ Throne and Altar, which allowed the Royalists to claim that they were the Catholic Party in France.

Moreover, if Catholics liked to imagine their country as one of the most favoured and fervent of Christian nations, 'the eldest daughter of the Church', the reality was that France was much less Catholic than they made out. In consequence, the potential support for a Catholic Party was nowhere near as great as its

proponents supposed. Levels of religious practice varied considerably, according to region, gender, and social class.[3] Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, there were areas which were more or less dechristianized. The countryside around Paris, the Centre, the Limousin, and the Charentes were all places where at best 15 per cent of the population of both sexes fulfilled their obligation to confess and receive communion at least once a year at Eastertime. The situation was only marginally better along the Mediterranean littoral. By contrast, in the mountain villages of the Massif Central, in Brittany, French Flanders, Alsace-Lorraine, the Franche-Comté, the Basque country, and the area around Lyons, religious observance was high. Thus at Saint-Brieuc in Brittany some 95 per cent of the adult population of both sexes went to confession and received the sacrament at Easter in 1912. In class terms, apart from the peasants of such areas of fervent Catholicism, it was aristocrats and bourgeois who were regular church-goers, rather than workers, though it is important not to exaggerate the extent of working-class dechristianization by concentrating attention exclusively on the radical artisans of the cities and the metalworkers of the Paris 'Red Belt' to the reglect, say, of the more pious textile workers of the Nord and Alsace. Without exception, however, whether in Christian or dechristianized areas, women were more visible than men in Church-related activities. Thus in 1900 in dechristianized Chartres only 1.5 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women made their Easter Duties, while in Nantes the comparable figures were 82.4 per cent and 95.7 per cent. Since under the Third Republic all French women were denied the vote, their commitment to Catholicism could not be translated into any political advantage at the ballot box for a Catholic Party like the Action Libérate Populaire. In general, the cause of the Church was not a banner to which the masses were likely to flock in a society where indifference to religion was widespread. Overall, around 1900, only about 25 per cent of the adult population could be counted as practising Catholics, the majority of them women.

1. Origins

It is impossible to understand twentieth-century political Catholicism in France without some appreciation of its roots in nineteenth-century French 'social Catholicism'. The term denotes the doctrines, programmes, and methods adopted by Catholics to address the 'social question'—the complex of problems
p. 37 emanating from the advent of industrialization and a liberal capitalist state—in the light of the social ↳ teaching of the Church.[4] Social Catholicism had its beginnings in the period before 1848, when such figures as Frédéric Ozanam and Buchez formed a minority democratic wing alongside the more traditionalist, paternalist, and hierarchical organizations set up by the likes of Villeneuve-Bargemont and Armand de Melun. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the conservative strain clearly predominated. A crucial influence was the social theory of Frédéric Le Play (1806–82), which stressed the fundamental importance to society of both religion and the patriarchal extended family (*famille souche*). His counter-revolutionary thought encouraged activists such as Albert de Mun, who founded the Œuvre des cercles catholiques d'ouvriers in 1871 and the Action Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (ACJF) in 1886. The former were study clubs intended to reconcile workers and the upperclass élites by working for the resuscitation of an idealized Christian corporate society. The latter aimed at the reconversion of youth to Catholic Christianity through the formation of a spiritual élite. In addition, Catholic industrialists like Léon Harmel, Augustin Cochin, and Benoist d'Azy pioneered various welfare schemes for their own employees.

In France, as elsewhere, publication of Leo XIII's famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 gave a massive boost to a wide range of social Catholic initiatives.[5] Among the more significant was the creation of a French Catholic trade-union movement, which prepared the ground for what in 1919 became the CFTC. New organizations were founded to diffuse social Catholic doctrine: for example the Jesuit Action Populaire, started in 1903, and the Semaines sociales, created in 1904 as a kind of summer school for social Catholic militants. Also important in this regard was the role of a social Catholic press, best represented by the *Chronique sociale de France*, edited from Lyons. One particularly noteworthy feature of turn-of-the-century

French social Catholicism was the active participation of women, who founded their own study circles such as Jeanne Chenu's Action Sociale de la Femme, workers' settlements, *colonies de vacances* and, in 1911, an École Normale Sociale to train an élite of social Catholic women.[6]

As in Belgium, one of the most striking developments of the 1890s was the rise of Christian democracy.[7] In
p. 38 France, this was hailed as the 'second Christian democracy', ↳ the first being that associated with the Catholic Utopian reformers of 1848. Essentially, turn-of-the-century Christian democracy was one particular manifestation of the wider phenomenon of social Catholicism, representing that section of the movement which wished to foster the growth of social democracy, and in some cases, political democracy. Prominent among its adherents was a new generation of clerics soon known as the *abbés démocrates*, who became passionately involved in not just social but also political issues. Two of their number, the abbé Lemire and the abbé Gayraud, were elected to the Chamber of Deputies.[8] In 1896 the nascent movement founded a Christian democratic party at Reims. At the same time, a younger generation of lay Catholics was encouraged to break with the traditionalist conceptions of the *cercles* and to launch more radical initiatives, the most daring of which was Marc Sangnier's Sillon, founded in 1899.[9] The overtly political orientation of such groups troubled both integrist Catholics in France and the Holy See. In his encyclical *Graves de communi* of 1901, Pope Leo XIII sternly pointed out that the term 'democracy' should in no way imply any particular kind of regime. Rather, 'Christian democracy' meant only 'beneficial Christian action among the people'. As one Silloniste pointed out, it was therefore possible to be a Christian democrat without being a democrat.[10] It was because of its continuing commitment to political democracy and to religious pluralism that the Sillon was condemned by Rome in 1910.

Defeated in the short term, the second Christian democracy, and in particular the Sillon, left their mark on subsequent developments. The precise influence of the Sillon remains difficult to quantify because, as Sangnier insisted, the group was first and foremost a friendship. But, even if serious internal divisions arose on account of Sangnier's over-masterful personality, few who passed through its ranks remained unaffected by the extraordinary openness, enthusiasm, and generosity of spirit which they encountered. The Sillon also awakened a sense of mission and, as will be seen, experience of militancy in the group was often a formative one for many of the partisans of French political Catholicism in the years after the First World War.[11] The condemnation of 1910 by no means put an end to Sangnier's own commitment to Christian democracy. In 1912 he founded the Ligue de la Jeune République to carry on where Sillon had left off and succeeded in reviving much of the latter's familial atmosphere and mystique. Deliberately refusing to turn
p. 39 itself into a conventional political party, Jeune République viewed itself as a league for the promotion of ↳ civic education with the objective of liberating France from old-style party politics and rivalries and ending the dichotomy 'between the morality of public and private life'. For Sangnier and Georges Hoog, his faithful lieutenant and secretary-general of the League, the formation of citizens was more important than winning elections, but it is worth noting that the JR advocated a programme of advanced reforms which included proportional representation, women's suffrage, the adoption of the British system for the dissolution of parliament, and the referendum.[12]

Another achievement of the pre-1914 period which laid the groundwork for later developments was the creation of a Catholic press of Christian democratic tendencies. By far the most important organ was *L'Ouest-Eclair*, founded by the abbé Trochu and Désgrées du Loû, the son of an old Breton noble family who was galvanised into political action by Leo XIII's call for a *ralliement* to the Republic and who campaigned on behalf of Christian democracy in the west of France.[13] A collaborator on, and future editor of, the paper was Henri Teitgen (1882–1969), who before moving to Brittany had been active in the Sillon in his native Lorraine. His name alone is indicative of the continuities between pre-First World War Christian democracy and the full flowering of French political Catholicism in the post-Second World War period. Also significant for the future was *Le Petit Démocrate de Saint-Denis*, a weekly started in 1912 by Robert Cornilleau, a former Silloniste from Le Mans, which would become the unofficial party newspaper of the PDP in the 1920's.[14]

It remains true, however, that both before and after 1914 France had no Catholic Party. Not even the anticlerical onslaught of the left in the early years of the twentieth century, which finally ended the century-old Concordat between Church and State in 1905, succeeded in bringing Catholics together in a single political grouping. Some of the reasons for this have already been suggested. Papal opposition was undoubtedly a factor: Albert de Mun's attempt to form a Catholic Party in 1885 had been blocked by Leo XIII,[15] while Pius X, obsessed with threats to orthodoxy both from within and without the Church, tolerated only movements which were devoted either to the defence of religion or to spiritual ends, and only then when they were subject to the control of the hierarchy. Some French bishops tried to establish the kind of diocesan unions which the pontiff favoured, but without much success.

The nearest approximation to a Catholic Party in the pre-war period was the Action Libérate Populaire, founded in 1902 with the aim of continuing Leo XIII's *ralliement* and of combating the anticlerical legislation introduced by the united forces of the Left in the early twentieth century. Led by Albert de Mun in the Chamber of Deputies and organized nationally by Jacques Piou, the party benefited financially from 'laundered' funds from dissolved religious orders and by the end of 1904 had a membership of 160,000
p. 40 divided among some 700 local committees. It also ↳ received valuable support from Catholic women, in particular from those who were members of the Ligue Patriotique des Françaises. After the Separation Law of 1905, the party was disappointed to win only sixty-four seats in the elections of 1906. At the height of the struggle between Church and State, it was evident that, except in the most Catholic and conservative areas of the country, the electorate was not ready to support a party that was seen to be too confessional and 'clerical'. Nevertheless, for the first time under the Third Republic the French Chamber of Deputies contained in its midst a significant group of Catholic deputies.[16]

2. Between Two Wars

Some historians view the inter-war period as a 'second *ralliement*' a time of reconciliation between French Catholics and the modern world which carried on and completed the work first begun by Pope Leo XIII in the 1890s.[17] Certainly, there were encouraging signs of abatement in the religious quarrels which had been inherited from the nineteenth century and which had bedevilled relations between Catholics and Republicans in the pre-war period. During the First World War itself, despite the 'infamous rumour' put about by anticlericals accusing Pope Benedict XV of being a secret supporter of the Central Powers, Catholics had rallied loyally to the Union Sacrée. More than 30,000 priests served in the armed forces, not just as chaplains or stretcher-bearers but as fighting men. Many members of the religious orders, expelled from their country by the laws passed against the congregations between 1901 and 1904, returned voluntarily to enlist.[18] In the immediate aftermath of the war, in the elections of 1919, some 200 Catholics were among the deputies of the Bloc National which swept to power in the most resounding electoral victory obtained by the right since 1870. The new government made no secret of its desire for religious pacification and refused to apply the 'laic laws' to the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine recovered from Germany. It also set about re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and, in a further gesture of goodwill towards Rome, sent an official delegation to be present at the festivities attendant on the canonization of Joan of Arc in 1920. Delicate negotiations were opened with the hierarchy on the thorny subject of the legal framework within which the Church should carry on its activities under the terms of the Separation Law of 1905, and these eventually bore fruit in 1924.

p. 41 The notion of a second *ralliement*, however, needs to be nuanced. Although this chapter wishes to argue that the inter-war period was indeed a time of important new initiatives in the field of French political Catholicism, it should be appreciated that continuities were as much in evidence as change.[19] It is certainly misleading to portray Pius XI as the Pope of a second *ralliement*, or as any kind of progressive. True, he condemned Action Francaise in 1926, thereby depriving it of a considerable portion of its following in the

French Catholic community: but he also connived at the suppression of Sturzo's Popular Party in Italy and concluded concordats with Fascist Italy (1929) and Nazi Germany (1933). The larger project of the pontiff was always to revive and revitalize an intransigent and ultramontane version of Catholic Christianity. As the Pope of Catholic Action, he hoped that the laity might become apostles for Christ alongside the clergy—though always subject to the authority of the hierarchy. What Pius XI wanted was not a reconciliation between the Church and the modern world but a holy crusade against it in the name of Christ the King.[20]

Atavistic instincts also survived in other quarters. In May 1924 an alliance of the left (the Cartel des gauches) returned to power in a cabinet dominated by Radicals and headed by the veteran Radical leader Herriot. Faced with financial problems which he could hardly begin to understand, the premier preferred to divert attention on to the more congenial territory of the 'clerical threat'. Plans were announced to close the embassy at the Vatican, to extend the Separation regime to Alsace-Lorraine and to apply the letter of the laws on association of 1901 and 1904 against the regular clergy. Militant anticlericalism may have gone into decline, but, political anti-clericalism, it appeared, remained as tempting as ever in order to consolidate the alliance of Republicans and Socialists.

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the most striking manifestation of political Catholicism in the 1920s was a movement of religious defence of a recognizably traditional kind, with close links to the French parliamentary right. The Fédération Nationale Catholique was founded in 1924 as a direct response to the policies of the Cartel des gauches government.[21] Its leader, General Castelnau, was hand-picked for the task by the Catholic hierarchy and his brief was to organize a movement which would conform to papal teaching (especially that of Pius X) on Catholic Action. All over France, parish, cantonal, and diocesan unions were formed. Lectures, public meetings, mass rallies and demonstrations were rapidly organized. The character of the movement owed much to the imprint of its leader, whose zeal for religion was matched only by his patriotic ardour. Born in 1851 in the Aveyron into an old Catholic and noble family, Castelnau was a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War as well as of the First World War. The father of twelve children, he lost
p. 42 three sons ↳ in the slaughter of 1914–18 and thereafter remained a die-hard Germanophobe. As a categorical believer in the myth of the Masonic plot, he believed that France in general was in the hands of the Freemasons and that the Herriot government in particular took its orders from the Masonic lodges.

When Herriot fell on 17 April 1925 Castelnau tried to claim the credit for the FNC, though in reality it was the premier's inability to solve the country's chronic financial problems which precipitated his resignation. Nevertheless, there was delight among FNC supporters when Herriot's successor, Painlevé, announced that the embassy at the Vatican would be maintained and that the Separation Law would not be applied to Alsace-Lorraine. Rather than disband the organization on the morrow of victory, however, Castelnau kept it in being as the agency for furthering his designs to restore a Christian social order. While taking care to emphasize that the movement was non-party-political and would not field candidates of its own in elections, he devised a programme for the elections of 1928 to be presented to all candidates which focused on 'freedom of education and association and the maintenance of the religious orders'. FNC supporters were invited to vote only for those candidates who endorsed the programme.

Yet by the late 1920s the FNC's aspirations to be identified as the embodiment of papal doctrines of Catholic Action were being undermined. Castelnau's protestations of political neutrality fooled no one, including Pius XI. While refusing, certainly, to establish his own political party, the General made no secret of his desire to draw Catholics away from 'that somnolent passivity which had cost them so dear between 1870 and 1910'.[22] If not a Catholic Party, the FNC had become a formidable political pressure group, whose terrain, as Castelnau put it, was 'that of la voie publique'.[23] The distinction between politics and public life was too subtle for most people, for it was clearly impossible to have an impact on national life without recourse to some kind of political action. As late as December 1929, on the occasion of the enthronement of the new cardinal-archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Verdier, the Vatican once again described the FNC as the 'principal axis' of Catholic Action in France and Castelnau as the 'guide of the laity'.[24] But the time was fast

approaching when the Pope would make plain the extent to which Castelnau's notions of Catholic Action differed from his own. Renewing the stress on the need for an apolitical stance and emphasizing the benefits to be obtained from forming specialized groups under the control of the hierarchy, Pius XI gave orders for new organizational arrangements to be in place by 1932. A clash between the FNC and Rome became unavoidable, and symbolically, Castelnau was obliged to change the title of his newspaper from *Action catholique de France* to *La France catholique*.

Thereafter, tensions between the FNC and the Holy See continued to accentuate on account of the Vatican's attachment to the kind of pro-League of Nations foreign policy promoted in France by Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, while Castelnau and the FNC remained wedded to the nationalism of the conservative right.
p. 43 In the 1930s ↳ the FNC was far from a spent force—indeed, as the incarnation of intransigent Catholicism and Catholic nationalism it did much to prepare its supporters for the 'National Revolution' which was to accompany the establishment of the Vichy regime. On the other hand, the FNC could no longer claim to be the foremost representative of French political Catholicism, since other, newer, and very different organizations had emerged to contest its primacy.

Not the least of the countervailing forces was that of Christian democracy, which had emerged rejuvenated at the end of the First World War, despite inevitable disruptions and the tragic loss of militants of the calibre of Sangnier's close associates Henry du Roure and Amédée Guiard. Much of the credit for keeping the flames of Christian democracy alive could be claimed by Ernest Pezet, yet another follower of Sangnier, who in 1917 launched a newspaper called *L'Âme française* in an effort to forge links between the 'second Christian democracy' and the different elements of social Catholicism (ACJF, Semaines sociales, and Catholic trade unions). Pezet and his collaborators, who included Robert Cornilleau and Jean Raymond–Laurent, thus became the moving spirits in an attempt to synthesize the political ideals of the Sillon and the social ideals of the social Catholics which was eventually to be realized in the creation of a new political party, the Parti Démocrate Populaire (PDP), in 1924.[25]

On the morrow of the war, the prospects for a renewal of Christian democracy seemed to be enhanced by Sangnier's reconstitution of La Jeune République in 1919, while in the Paris region the group of Republican-Democrats animated by Raymond-Laurent established the Fédération des Républicains-Démocrates de la Seine in June 1919, which had the *Petit Démocrate* as its mouthpiece. Similar networks existed in Finistère, the north, the south-east, and elsewhere, while a new Christian democratic impulse was supplied by the recovery of Alsace, where the German Catholic Centre Party had developed under the Occupation.[26] The success of the right in the parliamentary elections of 1919 brought about thirty deputies 'of Christian democratic inspiration' into parliament and it was the hope of men like Pezet that Sangnier would take the lead in uniting all the different elements into a single movement. He, however, remained suspicious of the conservative tendencies of the Catholic social movement and preferred to devote himself to the twin causes of pacifism and Franco-German reconciliation. Thus it fell to the likes of Pezet and Raymond-Laurent to take the initiative in organizing a new political party of the centre-right out of the combined forces of social Catholicism, the rump of the ALP, and parliamentarians sympathetic to Christian democracy (who, after the elections of 1924, numbered a mere fourteen, most of them from Alsace-Lorraine). The Parti Démocrate Populaire, founded in November 1924, was the result.

p. 44 The choice of name was significant, and arrived at only after considerable debate. The Breton group favoured the title of 'Parti Démocrate', while others, like the Alsatians and figures such as Marcel Prélot, were partisans of the label 'Parti Populaire', for its international echoes and obvious reference to Sturzo's Italian Popular Party, the PPI. The final compromise was intended to signal that the PDP was neither a specifically Catholic Party nor an official Christian democrat party. On the contrary, the party accepted the reality of the secularization of society and strongly affirmed its republicanism.[27]

On the other hand, if not a Catholic Party, the PDP was certainly a party of Catholics, and of Catholics inspired by social Catholic teaching and committed to the ideals of Christian democracy. It is worth stressing that their conception of democracy was as much social as political. The family was identified as the bedrock of society. Protective legislation on behalf of children, measures to stimulate the birth rate, social insurance schemes, and legislation on housing were notable features of its programme. The party was likewise committed to Christian trade-unionism and to developing professional organizations among both the working classes and the middle classes. But the PDP also went beyond conventional social Catholic teaching in its vision of a new kind of democracy inspired by the 'Popularism' of Sturzo, who personally was involved in the development of its doctrine through his collaboration in exile from Italy with the semi-official party review *Politique*, founded in 1927 by Marcel Prélot, an academic lawyer, ex-secretary-general of the ACJF and his leading French disciple and translator. In place of the *étatisme* of Jacobin democracy and the collectivism of Marxist social democracy, Sturzo advocated a 'popular' democracy which would be based on 'intermediary bodies', such as the family, the profession, the commune, and the region, which would act as a 'buffer' between the State and the individual. Another intellectual influence on the doctrinal position of the party was the 'personalist' philosophy of Paul Archambault, director of the review *Les Cahiers de la nouvelle journée* and another former Silloniste. Archambault's personalism affirmed that the greatest of all earthly values was the human person while denying that the individual was the most important element in society. Rather, he argued, there had to be a point of equilibrium between the individual and the social. Archambault's personalism differed somewhat from that of the subsequently much better-known Catholic personalist philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, with whom he engaged in a series of polemics, but it helped to inform the organicist and institutionalist theses defended by the PDP.[28]

In the estimation of some authoritative contemporaries, the PDP was a party of the right.[29] It would be more accurate, however, to view it as a party of the centre, albeit of the centre-right.[30] Refusing to accept the traditional left-right split in the country, it favoured republican concentration in a new and enlarged
p. 45 republican ↳ party. In this respect, it was a continuation of the *ralliement*, as Robert Cornilleau and others openly acknowledged. At its inception, it opposed the Cartel des gauches, but at the same time it repudiated the extra-parliamentary leagues (Action Française and others such as Taittinger's Jeunesses Patriotes). Likewise, the PDP kept its distance from Louis Marin's Fédération Républicaine, the principal parliamentary party of the right, objecting especially to its conservatism on social issues (though some electoral deals were negotiated for the elections of 1928). The PDP was closer to the centre-right Alliance Democratique, and notably to its more liberal wing (Flandin rather than Reynaud), which advocated a 'laïcite tolérante'.

On the other hand, relations with the other Christian democrat grouping, Sangnier's Jeune République, were not good. For Sangnier, the PDP was a reincarnation of the ALP, and too wedded to the right. He himself had become preoccupied primarily with international affairs and with his work on behalf of the League of Nations, disarmament, and Franco-German *rapprochement*. To promote peace, he established an annual Congrès démocrate international, which in 1926 succeeded in bringing together representatives of thirty nations at Bierville. Out of this he created a new pacifist group known as Les Amis de Bierville and in 1932 he gave up the presidency of the Jeune République in order to devote himself to editing a new pacifist newspaper, *L'Éveil des peuples*, and to encouraging the development of youth hostels, or auberges de jeunesse.[31] At this point, some of his followers elected to break with him and turned Jeune République into a formal political party, one which located itself markedly to the left of centre.

Sangnier's strictures on the PDP were not entirely justified. Some of its leaders, like Cornilleau, hoped to establish points of contact with the moderate left, provided that the old clerical bogey could be laid to rest. In an article first published in the *Petit Démocrate* of 23 January 1927 entitled 'Pourquoi pas?' he argued that there were no objections to collaborating with elements in the socialist tradition, since they shared the PDP's commitment to social progress and to spiritual values.[32] At the same time, the PDP refused to contemplate participation in any 'union of the right', particularly if such a coalition were to include the

Action Franchise. For the PDP, Maurras was a sworn enemy, and in turn the party was virulently denounced by Action Française. Likewise, for the conservative and nationalist right, the party remained something of a *bête noire*. In 1929 it was denounced as a party of 'Christian Reds' by Auguste Cavalier, director of *L'Intérêt français*, on the grounds that it had not given adequate support to Catholic and Nationalist candidates in the elections of 1928 and that it not only refused a united front along with 'patriotic Catholics' in favour of the defence of the country and the social order but also supported a pact with socialism and advocated a conciliatory foreign policy towards Germany.[33]

p. 46 The PDP's attitude to the FNC was more complicated.[34] Some like Pezet, ↳ favoured a strategy of 'entryism', so as to build upon links which existed between PDP members and the Federation. Henri Teitgen, for example, spoke at FNC rallies, as did the celebrated orator abbé Desgranges, a future deputy closely associated with the PDP.[35] Pezet himself was general secretary of the FNC and contributed a regular column to its bulletin *Credo* until May 1926. Other PDP chiefs were more overtly hostile to the FNC. Charles Flory, for instance, suspected that it harboured ambitions of becoming the French *parti catholique*. Similarly, some local leaders of the PDP who were also FNC members—for example Facque in the Seine-Inférieure—were unwilling to limit themselves to the official Castelnau line of purely religious defence. Pagés was highly critical of both the monarchist tendencies within the FNC and its extravagant chauvinism. Disputes over international politics, indeed, produced sharp exchanges between the *Echo de Paris*, in which Castelnau was a regular columnist, and *L'Ouest-Eclair*, which supported the League of Nations and efforts at international reconciliation.

In electoral terms, the PDP never became a major force in French politics between the wars. After the elections of 1928, it had some seventeen deputies, most of whom were favourably disposed to the modernizing conservative government of André Tardieu in 1930. The elections of 1932 were a disappointment, reducing the number of deputies to sixteen. In the even more polarized situation of the elections of 1936, parliamentary representation shrank to thirteen. Party membership at this time was around 13,000. Moreover, after 1932 it was evident that the party was itself divided into a right and a left in what was also largely a conflict of generations.[36] The rightist tendency, around Alfred Bour, resented the influence of *L'Aube*, the daily newspaper founded in 1932 by Francisque Gay, and the strengthening of links with the Jeune Republique. The leftist tendency, represented by Bidault, was keen to see the party distance itself further from the right and founded its own youth movement, the Jeunesses Démocrates Populaires, in 1934. But the party was unambivalent in its republicanism. After the riots of 6 February 1934, the serious disturbances outside the Chamber of Deputies which left fourteen people killed and another 236 wounded after clashes between the police and right-wing demonstrators, the party rallied to the new prime minister Doumergue, who assumed the reins of government after the resignation of the Radical Daladier. At the same time, it maintained its hostility to the Fascist leagues and was notably suspicious of Colonel de la Rocque's Croix de Feu, regarded by the left as the most dangerous of the leagues, despite their shared outlook on social questions. (The minority of PDP members who were more charitably disposed to de la Rocque preferred to see him as simply the leader of another apolitical veterans' association.)

Whatever their shortcomings, the Christian democrats of the PDP (and of course, even more so, those of the smaller JR) represented a break with the tradition, still embodied by the FNC, which assimilated Catholics to
p. 47 the politics of the right. The ↳ impact of Christian democracy was significantly reinforced by the founding of a number of new Catholic reviews and newspapers, many—but not all—of which specifically aligned themselves with the Christian democratic tradition, or 'spiritual family', and contributed further to the detachment of Catholics from reactionary politics. Among the most influential of these journals were certain publications of the Dominican Order. *La Vie intellectuelle* was launched as a monthly in 1928 by the Dominican Père Bernadot (with the strong support of Pius XI), and became a bimonthly from 1931. Although its circulation was small (5,000–6,000 in 1934), it drew upon an outstandingly talented team of contributors—men like Etienne Borne, Henri Guillemin, and Pierre-Henri Simon—who were to establish

themselves as some of the leading lights of Parisian journalism. According to the historian René Remond, it played 'an incomparable role' in the evolution of Catholic ideas in the period before 1939.[37] *Sept*, also published by the Dominicans, had a much wider circulation (printing up to 100,000 copies) and a likewise significant impact in its short three-year history between 1934 and 1937 on account of its strong support for the internationalism represented by the League of Nations and its stance against Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia in 1935 (undertaken even at the risk of alienating a considerable body of its readership).[38] Similarly, *Sept* resisted the French right's attempts to portray the Francoist uprising in Spain as a 'Holy Crusade'. It also supported the Popular Front, the electoral alliance of the combined left (including Radicals, Socialists, and Communists) which swept to power in the elections of 1936, giving France for the first time a Socialist Prime Minister in the person of Léon Blum. On the other hand, it rejected the *main tendue*, the outstretched hand of friendship proferred to Catholics by Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez in a radio broadcast of 17 April 1936. In February 1937 *Sept* caused a furore by not only publishing an interview with Blum but also by suggesting that his government was entitled to the loyal support of Catholics. In the wake of denunciations to their superiors, the Dominicans of *Sept* were obliged to cease publication, but its work was carried on by a team of laymen headed by Stanislas Fumet who relaunched the review under the name of *Temps Présent*.

Esprit, launched in 1932, was equally devoted to the project of ending the traditional Catholic association with the politics of the right, but it certainly cannot be regarded as simply another representative of the Christian democratic tendency.[39] Its youthful editor, Emmanuel Mounier, a former member of the ACJF and *agrégé* in philosophy, had no time for conventional politics and conventional political parties and refused to allow his movement to become merely the left wing of Christian democracy. Thus, whereas many Christian
p. 48 democrats associated with the PDP and ↳ other organizations drew inspiration from Mounier's writings, he never returned the compliment, consistently ridiculing their efforts to find a *modus operandi* under the Republican regime. He and his team, he proclaimed, were revolutionaries, 'but in the name of the Spirit'. In his keynote article in the first issue of *Esprit*, Mounier announced his ambition to 'remake the Renaissance' in accordance with Jacques Maritain's dictum of the 'Primacy of the spiritual'. By contrast with the the right, which wished to link religion to the defence of property, family, and country, *Esprit's* 'first duty', according to Mounier, was 'to dissociate the spiritual from politics and more particularly…from the right'.[40]

It would be a mistake, however, at least for the period of the 1930s, to represent Mounier as the quintessential incarnation of the 'new Catholic left'. After the Second World War, he was to be hailed as the pioneer of a new kind of Christian socialist humanism, but as John Hellmann has shown, in the early days of its existence, the politics of *Esprit* were more convoluted.[41] Some, indeed, of Mounier's collaborators, had fascistic sympathies with 'revolutionary' right organizations in France such as the group Ordre Nouveau (prominent members of which were Arnaud Dandieu, Alexandre Marc, and the historian Robert Aron) and Réaction (of Thierry Maulnier) and even entertained an admiration for anti-Hitlerite National Socialism of the Otto Strasser variety. In the spring of 1935 Mounier attended a conference in Rome on the fascist conception of the corporate state, though he came away convinced that the Italians had erred in making the State rather than the human person the primary value. Nevertheless, despite his explicit repudiation of the aims and methods of fascism, by the late 1930s Mounier was insisting on the need to keep one's distance from the left as much as from the right. Essentially, what *Esprit* was seeking was a 'third way' in politics which would be neither right nor left. If Mounier at no time condoned Hitlerism or anti-Semitism, he never wavered in his contempt for the 'established disorder' of the democratic regime under the Third Republic and in consequence, much to their dismay, was scathing about the efforts of Christian democrats to work for improvements within the system.

The group's official philosophy was personalism but it derived its appeal less from any doctrines than from the adoption of a style and attitude towards the world. Helene Iswolsky, an attender at *Esprit's* summer congresses, later testified to its openness, generosity, and idealism (the parallel with *Sillon* is striking) and

also noted the role played by young Catholic women in the group.[42] Its ideas were diffused to a larger public in the late 1930s by a sister review, *Le Voltigeur français*, directed by Pierre-Aimé Touchard, which appeared twice monthly. Its opposition to Nazism was uncompromising. Immediately after the Munich Agreements, it published an article which concluded with the sentence: 'Today, let us refuse to "collaborate" with
p. 49 Nazism or Fascism, on pain of accepting a spiritual and material slavery.'[43] By April ↳ 1939, having denounced Hitler's imperialism and racism, it declared that the only urgent problem to be resolved was how to define 'the tactic of resistance'.[44] Choices which were to become even more urgent under the Occupation were already being made before 1940.

More radical still than *Esprit* was *Terre Nouvelle*, which described itself as the 'organ of revolutionary Christians'. A monthly, founded in 1935, *Terre Nouvelle* was not an exclusively Catholic journal and benefited from the contributions of Protestants such as André Philip, the young Socialist deputy, and Paul Ricœur, the philosopher. Its editor and most dynamic figure, however, was Maurice Laudrain, a Breton Catholic born in Nantes in 1901 who became a skilled worker and a militant in the CFTC and Sangnier's Jeune République. Active in pacifist circles, in 1927, through the influence of Gaston Tessier, he was appointed personal secretary to Mgr. Chaptal, the auxiliary Bishop of Paris, and also became a member of the French Socialist Party, the SFIO. In 1931 he published *Vers l'ordre social*, a call to Christians to fight against the power of money, which appeared with a preface written by Mgr. Chaptal. Soon afterwards however, Laudrain was denounced by both Catholics and Socialists alike. The latter resented his denunciations of Socialist anticlericalism, while the papal nuncio Valeri secured his dismissal from Mgr. Chaptal's secretariat on account of his revolutionary tendencies. While unemployed, Laudrain wrote a book entitled *Socialiste parce que chrétien* which he published in Belgium under a pseudonym and which already contained most of the ideas which *Terre Nouvelle* was set up to propagate.[45] Essentially, the review tried to synthesize the ideas of Christianity and communism and was one of the few Catholic publications not to reject outright the offer of the *main tendue* from the French Communist Party, the PCF, in 1936.[46] Rapidly placed on the Index, it was deemed too radical even by Mounier. Not even *Esprit*, let alone the Vatican, was ready for any kind of Christian-Marxist dialogue in the era of the Popular Front and Stalin's Purges and *Terre Nouvelle* exercised at best a marginal influence.

Much more influential than Laudrain—indeed perhaps the most influential figure of all in the world of Catholic journalism in the inter-war period—was Francisque Gay, the founder of *La Vie catholique* in 1924, a weekly which had a sale of around 40,000 until it folded in 1938.[47] Born in 1885, Gay was yet another ex-Silloniste and had been a seminarian before finding his true vocation as a Catholic journalist and publisher in the cause of Christian democracy (he was a co-director of the firm Bloud et Gay). After Pius XI's condemnation of the Action Française, he committed *La Vie catholique* wholeheartedly to the papal position, at a time when other Catholic newspapers such as *La Croix* preferred to minimize its significance, in the
p. 50 process earning himself the undying hatred of Maurras and of the entire French right.[48] Gay was ↳ also, with Gaston Tessier, co-director of *L'Aube*, the new daily newspaper set up in January 1932 to be the voice of Christian democracy and a further witness to the break between Catholicism and Maurrassianism.[49] Whereas *La Vie catholique* was primarily a religious newspaper, *L'Aube's* mission was explicitly political. As the 'organ of a spiritual family', the paper embodied a 'unity of orientation but diversity of tendencies'. Its overriding concern was to ensure that Catholics could not always be identified with the causes of nationalism and reaction and in consequence it looked for points of contact with the left in the search for social progress and international peace. Collaborators included prominent social Catholics (Marius Gonin of the Lyons *Chronique sociale*, Adéodat Boissard of the Semaines sociales, Joseph Zamanski of the Confédération française des professions) and some of the most talented journalists active in Christian democracy (Robert Cornilleau, Raymond-Laurent and Georges Bidault from the PDP, and Georges Hoog from Jeune Rèpublique). Figures such as Paul Archambault and Jean Lacroix contributed more philosophical pieces.

With 12,000 subscribers in 1934, *L'Aube's* circulation was small, but its political and cultural impact was out of all proportion to these figures. Not only was its readership much larger than its subscribers, since many of the latter were institutional subscribers (schools, religious establishments, and others), but more importantly its views were regularly broadcast on the radio in the daily digest of press comment. With *Esprit* and *Sept*, it did much to dispel the association of Catholicism with right-wing nationalism, especially through its internationalism and rejection of militarism. Its response to Mussolini's ambitions in Ethiopia was to publish (simultaneously with *La Vie catholique, Sept, Le Petit Démocrate*, and *Esprit*) a 'Manifesto for Justice and Peace'.[50] Georges Bidault, the paper's leading commentator on foreign affairs, demanded the imposition of sanctions on Italy (as did the PDP's Ernest Pezet in the Chamber of Deputies). On the other hand, Bidault counselled non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, while refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Nationalist uprising against the Republican government. Without minimizing the atrocities committed by Republican forces against the Spanish Catholic Church, *L'Aube* also reported the crimes committed by the Nationalists in the name of religion and the nation, as did Francisque Gay in a separate publication of his own.[51] *L'Aube* also manifested a special sympathy for the Basques, staunch Catholics persecuted for their Republican sympathies, many of whom arrived in France as refugees. What made *L'Aube* even more notorious, however, was its consistent advocacy of resistance to Nazi aggression and its opposition to the Munich Agreements. Once again Gay sought to publicize the newspaper's position by reproducing its articles on the Czech crisis, along with relevant documents and other articles culled from
p. 51 *Esprit* and the Christian democrat press, in an edited work which he published in 1938.[52] The ↳ stance that would lead many Christian democrats into the ranks of the French Resistance, and make Georges Bidault into one of its leading lights, was evident well before 1940.

If the rise of a significant Catholic press was fundamental to the progress made by Christian democracy between the wars, so too was the continuing vitality of social Catholicism. Social Catholics, particularly those with leadership experience in the ACJF, were at the forefront of the struggle against the Action Française and assumed key roles in the PDP (and later the post-war MRP) as well as writing for the likes of *L'Aube* and *Politique*.[53] The number of adherents to the CFTC increased dramatically, especially after 1936. Having resisted the call of the left-wing CGT (General Confederation of Labour) for syndical reunification and stuck to its own distinctive organization along professional lines as set out in its plan of 1935, it saw its membership soar from 150,000 to 400,000 in the late 1930s.[54] Many of these new members came from the ranks of the Young Christian Workers, the JOC (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne), the archetype of the reorganized and specialized Catholic Action encouraged by the Vatican in the 1930s. Founded by the abbé Cardijn in Belgium in 1925, the JOC began to operate in France in 1927. Its key idea was that the task of converting the working class to Christianity would be carried out by workers themselves. Jocistes brought a new sensitivity to working-class conditions in their work of evangelization and sought to find practical solutions to problems through the application of Cardijn's maxim: see, judge, and act. Their enthusiasm and openness were infectious, as was their courage in openly witnessing to their faith whether through badges, public prayers, or the downing of tools at 3 o' clock on the afternoon of Good Friday. Seeking to bring others to Christ through the spirit of friendship, they succeeded in reaching out to alienated young workers of both sexes and brought them back into contact with Catholic Christianity. At the same time, they taught such people that they did not have to tolerate harsh working conditions. Despite its overt apoliticism, it is no accident that Jocistes participated enthusiastically in the strike wave of 1936, the 'social explosion' triggered by the victory of the Popular Front coalition at the polls.[55]

The model of the JOC was successfully applied to other milieux in the 1930s, leading to the creation of Young Farmers' groups (JAC), Young Students groups (JEC), etc. and their female equivalents, all of which added to the impression of a new dynamism in the world of French social Catholicism. Enjoying the support and patronage of figures such as Cardinal Liénart of Lille and Bishop Dubourg of Marseilles, social Catholics were preoccupied primarily with their mission of re-christianization. In the process, however, particularly when they spoke of the 'new order' with which it was necessary to replace the existing society, they were

p. 52 taken by ↳ French employers and the French right generally to be 'Red Christians'. A typical article written by Louis Bertrand in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* described them as extremely dangerous and as being the dupes of communism and anarchism.[56] That was a gross distortion, of course, but what was certainly true was that, like Mounier and *Esprit*, social Catholics were looking for a 'third way' which would avoid the excesses of capitalism and communism. As such, they could not easily be classified as orthodox conservatives.

It was the hope of Francisque Gay that the manifold initiatives on the part of Christian democrats and social Catholics in the 1920s and 1930s would have a decisive impact on the French political scene. Recognizing that unity among Catholics was a prerequisite for the fulfilment of his ambition, ever since the founding of *La Vie catholique* he strove personally to bring together different tendencies into one fold. By the mid-1930s, however, he admitted to considerable disappointment, since unity appeared to be more elusive than ever. In a 'Confidential Memoir' drawn up for some three hundred or so friends and allies, he posed the question as to why Catholics 'of our outlook *[esprit]* and even Catholics *tout court'* had not been able to exercise power under the Third Republic. Christian democrats in France, he suggested, had won widespread respect (except on the extreme right, where they were hated), but unlike the situation in other countries (Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain), they remained 'simple curiosities having little influence in the mass of the country'. A prime reason for this, according to Gay, was the fear of being taken for a confessional or clerical party—itself an understandable fear, but one consequence of which was an excessive timidity on the part of Catholics to stand up and be counted as champions of their faith. The right, by contrast, had no such inhibitions, even when its spokesmen were Catholics whose strictness of observance left much to be desired. Another problem was fragmentation, and the dissipation of energy into so many different channels, along with the distaste for conventional electoral politics manifested by Sangnier and some of his devotees. Gay also underlined how French political Catholicism suffered from the lack of a leader of the calibre of an O'Connell, a Windthorst, a Sturzo, or a Robles. Sangnier, who might perhaps have assumed the role, was himself part of the problem.[57] What Gay did not say was that he too was part of the problem, because of his own combative character, which alienated not just men of the Action Franchise but also elements of the PDP and other Christian democrats. Thus his candidature in the elections of 1936 at Cholet (Maine-et-Loire) was vigorously opposed by *Ouest-Eclair*, which had no love for *L'Aube* or its editor. His business partner Edmond Bloud also broke with him, while Gaston Tessier and other prominent social Catholics resigned from the paper's editorial team in October 1936.

Perhaps no event did more to highlight—and to exacerbate—the divisions in French political Catholicism than the Spanish Civil War. For those on the right, who probably spoke for the majority of French Catholics,
p. 53 the Nationalist rising was what ↳ the Spanish bishops made it out to be: a holy crusade to defend the Church and Christian civilization against the sacrilegious depredations of the left which included the murder of priests and nuns and the burning of churches.[58] Franco, according to G. Bernoville in *La France catholique* of 9 May 1938, was 'an essentially religious, calm and meditative spirit', whose ideal was that of Christian civilization.[59] As we have seen, Christian democrats viewed the conflict in a different light, and made much of the fact that the Catholic Basques were on the side of the Republic. In *L'Aube* of 3 October 1936 Sturzo himself reaffirmed views which he had expressed in the English *Catholic Herald* that there was neither a crusade nor a holy war, and that atrocities had been committed by the Nationalist troops against unarmed civilians in Badajoz and elsewhere.[60] As an editorial in *Sept* on 7 August 1936 argued, civil wars are the dirtiest of all wars and those which engender the most heinous crimes. The insurgents who had backed the rebel generals and encouraged the mobilization of colonial troops against their fellow-countrymen were therefore as much in the wrong as the Republican anticlericals.[61]

Yet by 1939, however divided, French political Catholicism had established itself as a significant, if still minority, current in French political and intellectual life. The old connection with the traditional right, incarnated by the FNC, had by no means completely disappeared and was still a feature, for instance, of

Cardinal Baudrillart's Institut Catholique in Paris.[62] It also flourished in overtly anti-republican articles in the *Revue des deux mondes* written by Catholic contributors like Louis Bertrand and Victor Guiraud. The latter vituperated against the regime's inability to distinguish between 'the first drunken batchelor to come along and a Castelnau, three times the saviour of France and the educator of twelve children' and deplored the 'tragic experiences of the Cartel and of the Popular Front'.[63] Moreover, in 1939 the new pope, Pius XII, lifted the ban on the Action Française, much to the delight of traditionalist French Catholics. Thus encouraged, some of the latter, like Mgr. Chollet, archbishop of Cambrai, and his amanuensis canon Jules Bouche, a former professor at the Theology Faculty of Lille and once a favourite pupil in Rome of the Action Française sympathizers Cardinal Billot and Father Henri Le Floch, took to denouncing *L'Aube* to the Vatican in the hope of having it condemned for repeating the errors of the Sillon. The newspaper, it was claimed, was the violent enemy of Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain and in French politics supported revolutionary ideas which attacked both the ruling classes and capitalism.[64]

On the other hand, such paranoid denunciations merely serve to illustrate the extent to which political Catholics had succeeded in making new openings to the centre and left of the political spectrum. Talk of *rouges-chrétiens* (apart from the revolutionaries of *Terre Nouvelle*), was greatly exaggerated, as Francisque
p. 54 Gay never tired of pointing out.[65] While the Christian democrats of *L'Aube* made no secret of their ↳ aversion for fascist leagues like the Croix de Feu, they were far from enthusiastic about the Front populaire, the Popular Front electoral alliance of the left which swept to power under Léon Blum, the leader of the Socialist Party, in the elections of 1936. In parliament, the PDP voted against the Blum government, and in that respect it had more in common with the FNC than with the Popular Front.[66] Nevertheless, the distance travelled from the old right was increasingly apparent, especially with the founding of the Nouvelles Equipes Franchises (NEF) in 1938.[67] Yet another initiative of Francisque Gay and the team around *L'Aube*, the NEF again looked back to the Sillon as its inspiration. A league rather than a political party, it set out its claims to occupy the centre ground between right and left and refused to accept that French politics inevitably required adherence to one or other of the traditional blocs. Arguing for a new political order, Georges Bidault and Charles Blondel issued a manifesto entitled *Aux hommes de notre esprit* which was designed to appeal to the broad spectrum of Christian democratic and social Catholic opinion and which succeeded in drawing favourable comment even from Mounier for its emphasis on the need for a fresh start. 'It is no longer a question of defending democracy', asserted the manifesto. 'It is a question of establishing it.'[68] After only a few months, the NEF claimed to have a network of some 150 groups in different parts of the country, two of the most dynamic of them (apart from the Paris group) being Henri Fréville's at Rennes and Edmond Michelet's at Brive. Whether or not the NEF could have gone on to fulfil all the hopes of their founders it is impossible to tell, but what can be asserted with confidence is that, when France fell before the German *Blitzkrieg* in 1940, the activism of groups of political Catholics such as the NEF and *Esprit* bears witness to the dynamism of French Catholic life in the 1930s.

3. The War, Vichy, and Resistance

The catastrophic defeat of France in 1940 spread dismay and confusion among the Catholics of France as it did among the population as a whole. The country was divided into two zones: an occupied zone in the north and along the western seaboard which was directly under German control and a nominally sovereign French state in the south which had its seat of government in the spa town of Vichy. The great majority of Catholics followed the lead given by their bishops in accepting the Armistice and in recognizing the Vichy regime under Marshal Pètain as the established power. In the first few months following the collapse, the question of the legitimacy of Vichy hardly arose. On the contrary, the presence of the papal nuncio Valerio Valeri was a further sign of the regime's good standing with the Church.[69]

p. 55 Most Catholics welcomed the end of the Third Republic and the sweeping away of a political class for whom anticlericalism had been an article of faith, and identified with the declared intention of the regime to organize a 'National Revolution' which would be based largely on a return to Christian moral values. The hierarchy, far from confining itself to recognizing Vichy as the established power, heaped adulation on the new head of state and represented him as the instrument of Divine Providence sent to lead the nation back to its Christian roots.[70] Many lay Catholics were excited by the prospect of playing a full part in public life in a recognizably Christian state. It was therefore no great surprise to find former militants of the FNC such as Xavier Vallat and Philippe Henriot in prominent positions at Vichy. Vallat was first the organizer of the Marshal's Légion des Combattants and then Vichy's notorious Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, responsible for framing and implementing the regime's anti-Semitic legislation. Henriot, the Secretary of State for Information, came to be known as the voice of Vichy Radio and in his broadcasts defended the same concept of a 'Christian civilization', menaced above all by Bolshevism, which he had championed at FNC rallies back in the 1920s. Jacques Chevalier, the Catholic philosopher and former teacher of Mounier at the University of Grenoble, was briefly Education Minister in 1940–1. Social Catholics were particularly attracted to the new order.[71] Eugène Duthoit, dean of the Faculty of Law at the Catholic University of Lille and president of the Semaines sociales, formerly a supporter of Sturzo and of trade-union rights and a declared enemy of Mussolini, agreed with Cardinal Baudrillart that there was no alternative to Pétain, the 'sublime old man who has sacrificed his glory for the country'.[72] Likewise leaders of Catholic youth movements like the Jesuit Père Doncœur looked to the Marshal to restore a sense of the sacred in public life and to prepare the way for a Christian renaissance. Robert Garric, of the Equipes sociales, was enthusiastic about Vichyite youth organizations, while François Valentin, ex-president of the ACJF in Lorraine, headed the pro-Vichy Légion des Combattants. The Jesuit Pére Desbuquois, director of the Action populaire, though anti-Nazi, was strongly in favour of a *politique de prèsence* at Vichy and contributed to the elaboration of Vichy's Labour Charter. Coming from an anti-liberal and traditionalist background, nostalgic for a former social order supposedly founded on religious values, and admirers of authoritarian Catholic regimes such as Salazar's Portugal, many social Catholics readily identified with Vichy and for the first year of its existence, at least, chose to regard it as the embodiment of their own aspirations for a Christian state.

p. 56 Even some of the more advanced elements in pre-war political Catholicism succumbed to the promise of national regeneration under Vichy. Emmanuel Mounier, ↳ for example, despite the misgivings of some of his collaborators, relaunched *Esprit* as early as November 1940, on the grounds that the time was ripe to cultivate the qualities of leadership along with renewed emphasis on community and spiritual values. Some of his pre-war entourage and admirers occupied important positions at Vichy: for example René Gillouin and Robert Loustau (both ex-Ordre Nouveau) were among Pétain's speechwriters, while the economist François Perroux advised the Marshal on family affairs and youth policy. Mounier himself lectured at the École Nationale des Cadres at Uriage, set up to form a new, more moral, and more vigorous élite.[73] Similarly, some of the leading lights of the CFTC, such as the metalworker Jean Pérès, opted for Vichy and endorsed the regime's Labour Charter.[74] Eleven out of thirteen PDP deputies voted full powers to Pétain in July 1940 and Christian democrats were among the most active militants in Vichy's family, youth, and agricultural organizations. Some of their number went further down the road to pro-German collaborationism (newspapers like *Ouest-Eclair* and the Pau-based *Le Patriote des Pyrénées* being cases in point).[75]

Outright collaboration with the Nazis on the part of Catholics (as opposed to adherence to Vichy and the Marshal) was exceptional, but by no means unknown. The most prominent example was Henriot, who used his position at Vichy Radio to make propaganda for the Milice, the French police force founded in 1943 to combat the Resistance alongside the Gestapo. Most of the upper ranks of the Milice were recruited from Catholic circles where the conviction was strong that in the 1920s and 1930s French Catholicism had become poisoned by the spread of democracy through the machinations of 'red Christians'. The Savoy region was a prime example, its most notorious, but by no means sole, Catholic leader being Paul Touvier.[76] Born in 1915 the eldest of a large and strictly pious Catholic family from Chambéry, he imbibed the views of a father

whose intransigent Catholicism was reinforced by his devotion to counter-revolutionary politics (to his dying day he remained convinced of the guilt of Dreyfus). As a modest railway clerk, Touvier joined Colonel de la Rocque's Parti Social Français in the late 1930s, and after the defeat of 1940, became a staunch Pétainist, joining the local Légion de Combattants and then its offshoot, the Service d'Ordre Légionnnaire (SOL), established under the general direction of the extreme nationalist Joseph Darnand with a mission to harass Jews, Communists, and Freemasons. When the SOL became the Milice in 1943, Touvier rose to be an increasingly powerful figure in the organization, ending up as one of its chiefs in the Lyons area. In his subsequent defence of his wartime activities, he claimed that it was the Church which had shown him the road to follow and that his guiding principle was always fidelity to the faith of his ancestors.[77] Certainly,
p. 57 after the Liberation, it was a network of clerics which helped him to escape and campaigned ↳ for his rehabilitation. Twice sentenced to death, in 1946 and 1947, he received a presidential pardon from Pompidou in 1971, but was forced to remain in hiding because of the opprobium that continued to attach to his name. He was finally arrested in 1989, having been tracked down to a monastery of reactionary monks in Nice.

At the opposite pole of the political spectrum to Touvier and his ilk, there were political Catholics who were among the first Frenchmen to constitute themselves into an active resistance to the Nazi occupation. In particular, the originality, precocity, and spiritual dimensions of Christian democratic resistance deserve to be underlined, since they bear witness to the degree to which pre-war attitudes determined the stance taken in 1940 and after.[78] As we have seen, Christian democrats were alive to the menace of Nazi barbarism and aggression well before the outbreak of war. The existence of their pre-war networks centred on journals such as *Sept, Temps présent*, and *L'Aube* made possible the publication and diffusion of an underground press after 1940 (which included newspapers such as *Temps nouveau, Liberté*, and, most famously, *Témoignage chrétien*, the Jesuit-produced organ of opposition to Nazi racial policy which first appeared in November 1941).[79] In September 1940 the printing presses of Francisque Gay were used to produce *La France continue* while those of Marc Sangnier were the source of a wide range of Resistance propaganda before his arrest in February 1944.[80] The first Christian clandestine newspaper, *La Voix du Vatican*, appeared as early as July 1940. Distributed in Marseille, it was produced by a network of schoolteachers at the Jesuit school at Avignon made up of former readers of *Sept* and *Temps présent* as well as militants of the ACJF. The four-page sheet reminded its readers of Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, which spelled out the incompatibility of Nazism with Christian principles, and reproduced messages broadcast on Vatican Radio denouncing Nazi atrocities in Poland.[81] At the heart of the resistance of *La Voix du Vatican* and that of other Catholic groups which resorted to clandestine activism was the profound conviction that Nazism represented the powers of darkness, and posed a dire threat not only to liberty but to the survival of Christianity itself. As Edmond Michelet, a former NEF militant who was to be deported to Dachau concentration camp for his Resistance activities, recalled: 'My position was in some ways more religious than political...(because) Nazism affected essential things'.[82]

Resistance, therefore, was not merely a reaction to defeat but more a continuation of an anti-Nazi crusade that was already under way. During the 'phoney war' period, Christian democrats tried to counter all talk of defeatism and refused to contemplate breaking with allies of France who were determined to stand up to
p. 58 Hitler. After the military collapse, they wanted to fight on.[83] On 17 June 1940 Edmond Michelet ↳ prepared a pamphlet for the citizens of Brive, urging them to ignore Pétain's call for an armistice. Maurice Schumann, a convert from Judaism and a militant of the Jeune République, joined General de Gaulle in London and became the best known broadcaster on behalf of the Free French. Other JR militants started the underground group Valmy in January 1941, which was broken up in October 1942. Among the eighty parliamentarians who refused to vote full powers to Marshal Pétain on 10 July 1940 were two PDP deputies (Pierre Trémintin and Paul Simon) and a PDP senator (Auguste Champetier de Ribes, who was to be arrested in 1942), along with Philippe Serre and Paul Boulet of the *feune République*. From 1940 François de Menthon was the editor of the clandestine newspaper *Liberié*, which was distributed by Christian democrats such as

Pierre-Henri Teitgen in Montpellier, Etienne Borne in Toulouse, Charles d'Aragon in the Lower Pyrenees, and Edmond Michelet in Brive. Eventually, the group fused with *Combat*, the network headed by Henri Frenay and Claude Bourdet and whose members came to include Emmanuel Mounier and Georges Bidault, who in 1943 succeeded Jean Moulin as president of the National Resistance Council (CNR). In northern France, which was occupied by the enemy from 1940, Christian democrats were likewise among the earliest resisters, as, for example, in the group of the rue de Lille, organized by Emilien Amaury of the PDP and including figures such as Ernest Pezet and Raymond-Laurent. Others joined Résistance Nord and a few even found their way into Front National, which was one of the principal organs of Communist resistance.

Christian trade-unionism, another expression of Christian democracy, had its own distinguished Resistance record.[84] Gaston Tessier was one of the founders of Libération-Nord and represented the CFTC on the National Resistance Council. From the first, militants like Paul Vignaux were determined to maintain an independent trade-union movement in the face of Vichy's corporatist tendencies, and above all to resist the imposition of a single and obligatory union as stipulated by the Labour Charter. In the southern zone, links were forged with the CGT and its general secretary Jouhaux in the underground Mouvement Ouvrier Français, which was particularly strong in Lyons and Toulouse.

The specialized groups of Catholic Action were another rich source of Resistance activity. If the JAC adhered to Vichy's Corporation paysanne, students in the JEC tried to counter Vichy's anti-Semitic laws by distributing anti-Nazi and anti-racist tracts, and notably the text of *Mit brennender Sorge*. The introduction of compulsory labour service in Germany in February 1943 met with protests from the ACJF and the JOC. Militant Jocistes, indeed, decided to show their solidarity with the deportees by joining them in exile: some 10,000 cells and 70 federations were established in 400 German cities, which, as in the case of Marcel Callo and others, frequently led to persecution and martyrdom. Abbé Guérin, founder of the JOC was arrested, and the organization's cells in Paris closed down. Other Jocistes, rather than accept deportation to work in Germany, joined fellow workers in taking to the Maquis.[85]

p. 59 While still engaged in the struggle against Nazism, Resistance leaders began to turn their minds towards the shape which France should take at the Liberation.[86] Combat, for example, established a study group in 1942, the Comité générale d'études, with a journal *Les Cahiers politiques*, to examine proposals for reform of the social and economic structures of the country. Members, who included Bidault and François de Menthon as well as the socialists Robert Lacoste and André Philip, met together in Paris at the house of Francisque Gay. Bidault also canvassed the idea of launching a new, broad-based political movement, without being very specific about its character. If any single individual can be credited with giving a decisive push to the creation of such an organization, it was the young JEC militant Gilbert Dru, a disciple of Mounier and admirer of Péguy, who energetically combated Nazi ideas and Vichy in the student milieu in Lyons in his *Cahiers de notre jeunesse*. The suppression of his journal in 1943 spurred him to even greater activism on behalf of what he called 'the Movement', which he conceived of as an amalgamation of the forces of Christian democracy and the French republican tradition. Study and discussion of Dru's project took place in Resistance circles consisting largely of former PDP and social Catholic militants (not all of whom shared Dru's vision of a vast new revolutionary grouping, preferring instead the establishment of a more conventional but viable Christian democratic party) and led to a meeting at the house of Raymond-Laurent on 16 January 1944, where it was decided in principle to launch a new political organization. Initially called the Mouvement Républicain de Libération (MRL), under the direction of André Colin and René Simonnet of the ACJF it prepared a ringing manifesto which called for a revolution at the Liberation to free France not just from the Nazis and Vichy but also from the power of money and the capitalist system. In addition, it endorsed the sweeping changes envisaged by the Resistance Charter drawn up by the CNR. In practice, what was anticipated was a programme of nationalizations, enlargement of the role of the state in the management of the economy, and the establishment of a welfare state, along with the restoration of a democratic republic.[87] Gilbert Dru did not live to see what became of his dreams for a total renewal of his

country: on 17 July 1944 he was captured by the Gestapo in Lyons and on 27 July publicly executed. Whether he would have approved of the direction taken by the reform movement must remain a moot point. For by November 1944 the MRL, had become the MRP.

4. Post-1944

The Constituent Assembly of the MRP was held on 24/25 November 1944 with all the currents of French Christian democracy represented—the two parties of the inter-war years, the PDP and the JR, the ACJF and
p. 60 the specialized groups of Catholic Action, along with the workers of the CFTC.[88] Thus, the delegates present ↳ were conscious of representing not only the new spirit of the Resistance but a v;enerable tradition which, as Maurice Guérin told them, stretched back to Lamennais and *L'Avenir* and embraced the whole history of social Catholicism in France.[89] Continuity was symbolized by the presence at the proceedings of Marc Sangnier, who received rapturous applause when he rose to speak and was elected honorary president of the new organization. The prospects of the party seemed excellent. Its very newness appeared to offer the possibility of a new broom in French politics. On account of its Resistance record, it occupied a role at the centre of national political life which had always been denied the PDP and the JR. Georges Bidault was appointed minister of foreign affairs in the provisional government formed by de Gaulle in September 1944, while other MRP leaders—François de Menthon, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, and Maurice Schumann—were fellow ministers. Participation in the Resistance also reinforced the image of the MRP as a genuinely republican party, which boosted its credibility on the left. At the same time, given that the old right-wing parties had been completely discredited, the MRP was initially the repository of conservative and Catholic votes, which more than any other factor accounted for its astonishing electoral success in 1945 and 1946. In the elections of 21 October 1945, the party polled 4,580,222 votes (23.9 per cent of the votes cast) and won 150 seats. In June 1946 it fared even better, polling 5,589,213 votes (28.2 per cent of the votes cast). In November 1946 it dropped to 4,988,609 votes (25.9 per cent of the votes cast) but won 173 seats as opposed to 166 in June. In the immediate post-war period, the MRP thus emerged, alongside the Socialists and the Communists, as one of the key players in a tripartite division of political power.

Party militants hoped to remake France in the image of Christian democracy. As Albert Gortais put it: 'the doctrine which inspires the policy of the MRP...is founded on a spiritualistic conception of man, on a completely humanistic conception of society'.[90] Society was seen as being made up not of atomized individuals but of natural social groups, which it was the business of the State to protect and to regulate. This communitarian ethic was perhaps the most distinctive and controversial element in the party's doctrine, repudiated on all sides by those who refused to speak its special language. Nevertheless, as developed by theorists of the calibre of Etienne Gilson and Etienne Borne, the doctrine of the MRP amounted to more than vague, high-sounding pieties. Rather, it urged, in Bidault's phrase, a *révolution par la loi* which would complete political democracy with social democracy and steer a middle course between liberalism and Marxism. Idealistic and altruistic, the MRP presented itself as a centre party which rejected the old politics of two opposing blocs in favour of reconciliation and renewal.

p. 61 Though never officially a Catholic Party, the MRP was unmistakeably the principal ↳ incarnation of political Catholicism in post-war France. Of the 204 deputies elected to parliament in the first three elections after the war, more than half came from a background of militancy in Catholic Action. A similar proportion had previously been members of either the PDP or the JR, while around 15 per cent had been active in the CFTC. The Catholic connection with the party remained strong throughout its existence. Thus, in 1959 seven out of thirteen members of the National Bureau were products of Catholic Action, while all the other members had links to some other Catholic organization. Similarly, thirty out of thirty-nine members of the National Executive Committee had previous experience of activism in Catholic groups. In electoral terms, the party was strongest in the most Catholic parts of France—in the West, Champagne, Alsace-

Lorraine, and the South-East. It also benefited strongly from the arrival of a female electorate (French women having finally obtained the right to vote in 1944). A survey in 1952 found that two-thirds of the practising Catholic female population claimed to vote for the MRP.[91]

Yet for all its enthusiasm and idealism, the MRP failed to break the mould of French politics. By 1947 it was already clear that the dream of renewal and *révolution par la lot* was not to be realized. Goodwill on the part of the MRP was not enough to transform the French political scene while other, more potent, forces were at work: the onset of the Cold War, the expulsion of the Communists from government in 1947 and the creation of General de Gaulle's RPF, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français or 'Rally of the French People', in the same year. Disgusted by what he viewed as a return to the party politics of the Third Republic, de Gaulle made no secret of his ambitions to replace the new-born Fourth Republic with a more authoritarian, presidential regime headed by himself. Overnight, the MRP lost the special status it had claimed as the 'party of fidelity' to de Gaulle, a loss reflected in the desertion to the RPF of leading lights such as Edmond Michelet and Louis Terrenoire, the son-in-law of Francisque Gay. At the same time, it lost a significant portion of its electorate among conservatives who had only supported the party *faute de mieux*. In the municipal elections in Paris in 1947 the party lost about 75 per cent of the votes which it had obtained the previous year. The damage was less severe in the legislative elections of 1951, but the party's vote slumped nevertheless to 2,370,000 votes (12.6 per cent of the votes cast) and 95 seats. The comparable figures in the legislative elections of 1956 were 2,366,000 votes (11.1 per cent of the votes cast) and 83 seats.

In the opinion of Francisque Gay, it was a serious error on the part of the MRP leadership to have opted to remain in government in the circumstances which obtained after 1947, and which resulted in the party's identification with the 'Third Force' (the ruling coalition of MRP, Socialists, Radicals, and moderates formed to contain the threat from both the PCF and the RPF) and in consequence with the politics of immobilism so characteristic of the Fourth Republic.[92] In their defence, however, it should be said that the MRP leaders took their commitment to a democratic republic seriously, and were determined to see off the
p. 62 challenge of both ↳ extreme left and extreme right. A more serious charge might be that they failed to adapt their doctrine and programme to the challenges of the times. The party manifested a remarkable lack of flexibility in its almost obsessive pursuit of a genuine centre ground in French politics, appearing ready to go to almost any lengths to prevent the re-emergence of the historical right—left division. Hence its unwavering commitment to the Third Force, and, if needs must, the politics of immobilism. Simply by remaining a government party it underwent a significant shift to the right. To placate the Radicals and moderates, the party was obliged to jettison its more advanced ideals on social and economic questions, all the more so when the MRP's determination to see Catholic schools subsidized by the State as stipulated by the Barangé Law of 1951 embittered relations with the Socialist Party and led it to support the government formed in 1952 by the conservative Antoine Pinay.

Even more disastrous was the party's influence in the sphere of colonial policy, over which it presided for much of the period of the Fourth Republic. At the Ministry of Overseas France, MRP ministers were responsible for some of the most indefensible and damaging policies of the regime: the war in Indo-China, savage repression in Madagascar between 1947 and 1949 which cost the lives of 100,000 people, and the coup against the Sultan of Morocco in 1953. Until 1958 the party upheld the idea of *Algérie française*, though it also favoured reform, and it was to defend this cause that Georges Bidault and others on the right of the party eventually broke away to form their own *Démocratic chrétienne* group which not only remained implacably hostile to de Gaulle's plans for Algerian independence but even supported OAS terrorism. The MRP's commitment to hard-line colonialism is difficult to reconcile with its general ideology and traditions. Idealistically, the party's liberals spoke of spreading economic, social, and political progress throughout France's overseas possessions, but the right of the party remained strongly attached to the traditional 'civilizing mission' of French colonial policy which aimed to assimilate the peoples of the Empire rather than prepare them for independence. Moreover, the Empire had historically been a vehicle for the

spread of Catholicism through missionary activity. Even Gambetta, the early Third Republican leader who promoted the secularization of the French state and society, had stipulated that anticlericalism was not for export. A public opinion poll in 1946 discovered that practising Catholics were more in favour of the maintenance of the colonies than other Frenchmen.[93] Faced with the pressing problems of decolonization which developed after 1945, the MRP failed to look at the situation with a fresh eye. Bidault represented the extreme case of its inability to move with the times. Undoubtedly gifted, he suffered from an over-confidence in his own ability as well as from an addiction to alcohol, both of which left him in many ways a victim of his own past. Continuing to interpret contemporary events in the light of Munich and 1940, he equated any compromise with the Algerian nationalists of the FLN with capitulation to the Nazis.[94]

p. 63 In the area of foreign policy, however, the party arguably showed itself in a better light, though here again it was obliged to abandon many of the aspirations it had entertained in the immediate aftermath of the war. Just as it opposed the formation of two hostile blocs on the domestic front, so too the MRP opposed the division of the world into two camps and aspired to see France emerge as an independent power, bolstered by the resources of its colonial empire. Initially, it sought to maintain Germany in a position of weakness, so as to increase French preponderance in Western Europe. Once again, however, the onset of the Cold War compelled the party to abandon its grand designs, cherished above all by Bidault, but in this instance, largely thanks to the influence of Robert Schuman, who occupied the Quai d'Orsay in ten successive governments between 1948 and 1953, it succeeded in evolving an attractive alternative vision in the form of the European idea. Based essentially on Franco-German reconciliation, European integration became the goal of MRP policy after 1950 and achieved tangible expression in the creation of the European Economic Community in 1956. Born in Luxemburg in 1886, raised in German Lorraine and trained in German law before embarking on a political career in France after the First World War, Schuman epitomized the European idea in his own person, viewing it as a logical extension of his own commitment to a Christian civilization which was threatened by Soviet domination and Communist subversion.[95] If 'Europeanism' was stymied by the return to power of de Gaulle in 1958, it was to be taken up enthusiastically by his successors (and in particular by François Mitterrand) and the MRP can therefore rightly be credited with having blazed a trail which others would follow long after the party had ceased to exist.

Already unable to mobilize more than 8.8 per cent of the electorate in 1956, the MRP, like the Fourth Republic itself, was condemned to death by the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Under the new presidential regime established by de Gaulle, the role of all political parties was diminished, but for a party of the centre ground like the MRP life became simply impossible. However much the party criticized de Gaulle's more authoritarian regime and his nationalistic foreign policy, once the Gaullists succeeded in establishing themselves as the representatives of conservatism, potential Christian democrat voters preferred them to the MRP rather than risk giving victory to the left. In the elections of November 1962, only 5.3 per cent of the electorate voted for the the party (as opposed to 8.3 per cent in 1958) and at the second ballot a substantial number defected to the Gaullists. Most militants accepted that the party had outlived its usefulness. Some, like Pflimlin and especially Maurice Schumann, opted to merge with the new conservative majority in the hope of acting as a Christian democratic leaven within it. Others followed the lead given by Jean Lecanuet and Joseph Fontanet in 1963 in setting up a new opposition party, the Centre Démocrate.[96]

The protracted death and not always glorious life of the MRP should not, however, detract from its very real
p. 64 achievements. Shortcomings it had in plenty. If the ↳ religious training of the leadership fostered a certain idealism and camaraderie, it failed to provide genuine political experience and encouraged a tendency towards cliquishness and sentimentality. Moreover, the Catholic orientation of the party was a weakness as well as a strength, since it confined its support largely to traditionally Catholic parts of the country and saddled it with a confessional image which it found difficult to shed. But the most serious problems encountered by the MRP were hardly of its own making. As a party of the centre, it found itself out of joint with the configuration of both domestic and international politics after 1945. Thus, the high hopes

entertained in the Liberation era were never capable of realization and should not be used as the yardstick by which to measure the party's lack of success. Doubtless, the MRP would have done better to try to make genuine openings to the left rather than allow itself to become first the prisoner of the moderates and Radicals and then the victim of the Gaullists. But, for a monument, at least the party could point to its pioneering work in the field of European policy. It could also take pride in its contribution to the creation of a comprehensive system of social security in the post-war period and the establishment of a very generous system of family allowances during Robert Prigent's tenure of the health ministry in 1946. Moreover, in electoral terms, the MRP had an impact which significantly surpassed that of the PDP in the period between the wars. In the countryside, it made a certain amount of progress at the expense of the old right, while in urban areas, if its appeal was above all to middle–class professionals, it was able nonetheless to convince at least significant numbers of working people, in the Nord and in Alsace-Lorraine in particular, that a Catholic Party need not be their enemy. 12 per cent of the MRP's deputies elected in June 1946 were themselves of working-class origin.

The MRP was only the principal, not the sole, representative of political Catholicism in post-war France. Indeed, other groups, starting with Mounier and *Esprit*, were highly critical of its role and adopted positions much further to the Left. The first review to reappear in Liberated France (in December 1944), *Esprit* no longer maintained its pre-war 'neither right nor left' position but strongly identified itself with a philosophy of personalism which it claimed was directly descended from nineteenth-century French Utopian socialism.[97] In Mounier's view the time was ripe for both moral regeneration and a political revolution that would sweep away the capitalist economy and bourgeois society. The revolution, of course, did not take place, but for a time personalism enjoyed a vogue as the most prestigious intellectual current within French Catholicism, which helped to make Catholic socialism a valid political ideology. Ideally, Mounier would have liked to see the formation of a French Labour party, capable of uniting all the democratic forces in the country between the PCF and the extreme right, and much of his resentment of the MRP derived from its opposition to such a project. Relations with the Communist Party were the thorniest problem of Mounier's last years (he died in 1950). Greatly strengthened by its Resistance record, the PCF
p. 65 was undoubtedly the party which spoke for the great ↳ mass of the French proletariat in the immediate post-war years and Mounier recognized that there could be no revolution in France without its participation. At the same time, he was not blind to the crimes of Stalinism. He therefore attempted to engage in dialogue with the PCF and refused to indulge in the kind of crude Communist-bashing characteristic of the Cold War era, only to find himself misunderstood and attacked by Communists and the right alike.[98] Here again Mounier was a precursor, opening up pathways down which others would follow later.

Some elements of the Catholic avant-garde had a more positive view of communism even in the 1940s.[99] The Union des Chrétiens progressistes, founded in 1947 by André Mandouze and other intellectuals, was a fellow-travelling organisation which refused to abandon the ideals of Gilbert Dru and the Resistance and was soon the object of ecclesiastical sanctions in 1949.[100] Another group, the Jeunesse de l'Église, animated by the Dominican Maurice Montuclard and his brother Paul, dated back to 1936 and had been active in the Resistance. It, too, turned towards Marxism in the search for a more dynamic and communitarian Christianity which would appeal to the working-class.[101] Yet another Dominican, Père Henri Desroches, a member of the study group *Economie et Humanisme* established by his Dominican confrère Père Lebret, aimed at a theoretical reconciliation of Christianity with Marxism in the interests of promoting international peace.[102] The peace movement also attracted other 'red priests', such as the abbé Jean Boulier, who helped Frédéric Joliot-Curie draft the celebrated *Appel de Stockholm* and was subsequently laicized for his collaboration with Communists.[103] All these groups had little time for, and in turn were regarded with suspicion by, the MRP, though it should be noted that the party itself had its dissidents on the left who objected to its increasingly virulent anti-communism. Men like Paul Boulet, Charles d'Aragon, and the abbé Pierre represented a left-wing tendency which eventually led to their expulsion in 1954, while from within

the fold others such as Léo Hamon continued to remind the leadership of the MRP's original ideals and kept up the friendships they had forged with Communists in the days of the Resistance.[104] The advanced wing of the MRP also had an influential mouthpiece in the newspaper *Témoignage chrétien*, which criticized the party for its stance on Catholic schools and colonial policy.[105]

Political Catholicism's shift to the left was reinforced by developments within the social Catholic movement. By far the most dramatic initiative was the worker-priest experiment, begun during the Occupation when a number of young priests opted to join the workers conscripted into the German labour force.[106] Their
p. 66 discovery of ↳ the dechristianized working class tallied with the findings of a report carried out by two priests at the behest of Cardinal Suhard, the Archbishop of Paris, which was published as *France, Pays de Mission?* in 1943 and advanced the thesis that new, missionary-type, techniques were necessary if the French Church was to stand any chance of renewing links with the proletariat.[107] The establishment of the Mission de Paris, a mission to the working classes of the Paris region, followed swiftly in 1944 and brought young priests and seminarians into direct contact with workers on the shop floor. Other dioceses such as Lyons and Marseilles lent their support, as did various religious orders, notably the Jesuits and the Dominicans.[108] But problems arose when some of the priests identified with the workers to the point where they joined in strike movements and in political activities orchestrated essentially by the Communist Party. Right-wing Catholics and employers were outraged and campaigned relentlessly to have the experiment suppressed. For a time the French bishops succeeded in protecting the priests from the anti-Communist die-hards in the Roman Curia, but in 1953 the Holy See put a stop to further recruitment. The movement began to break up as some priests preferred ecclesiastical censure and excommunication to the abandonment of their working-class comrades. Stifled in the short run, the spirit of the worker-priests, however, undoubtedly contributed to the renewal that was to take place under Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.

Catholic Action itself underwent considerable changes in the post-war period.[109] While some members continued to view their commitment in strictly religious terms, others began to insist on the need for transformations in political, social, and economic structures as a pre-condition for an enriched spiritual life. Catholic Action was divided into two groups according to gender in 1945: Action Catholique Générale Hommes (ACGH) and Action Catholique Générale Femmes (ACGF). These adult groups, however, were less dynamic than the specialized youth groups, which initially remained branches of the ACJF. By raising the age limit for membership, the JOC (known after 1950 as Action Catholique Ouvrière) and the JAC made headway in winning new recruits. The latter, for instance, numbered 300,000 in the mid-1950s and by 1961 had taken control of the Fédération Nationale de Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles (FNSEA), the principal farmers' organization. It was the youth movements (with the exception of the JOC) which increasingly insisted on addressing the problems of the temporal realm and in consequence they found themselves at odds with the Church hierarchy who wished them to refrain from meddling with the affairs of Caesar. Torn apart by internal quarrels, the ACJF disbanded in 1956.

The evolution of the trade-union organization the CFTC took place along similar lines. After 1945 the
p. 67 minority Reconstruction current sought to 'de-confessionalize' ↳ the organization and to work for the creation of a socialist society. Sharply critical of the MRP, it opposed subsidies for Catholic schools and steadily increased its support within the union to the point where in 1964 it succeeded in having its name changed from the CFTC to the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT).[110]

Yet another manifestation of the shift from right to left was the new direction taken by the Catholic Scout: movement. A conservative body in the period before the war, after a flirtation with Vichy and the experience of the Resistance, scouting inspired the creation of the group La Vie Nouvelle in 1947, which not only propagated the personalist ideas of Mounier but increasingly took on a left-wing political orientation over the course of the 1950s.[111] The same trajectory can be traced in the story of the Mouvement Populaire des Familles (MPF), founded in 1942 as a fusion of the male and female branches of the Ligue Ouvrière

Chrétiénne (LOC), an offshoot of Catholic Action which before the war had carried on the work of the JOC among the adult population.[112] During the Occupation, however, it had become increasingly drawn into the politics of the Resistance and after 1945 it was denied recognition as a Catholic Action organization. In 1949 it changed its name to the Mouvement de Libération du Peuple (MLP) in confirmation of its changed priorities. In the late 1950s the MLP, joined by most of the JR, formed part of the coalition of left-wing Christians, ex-SFIO Socialists, disillusioned Communists, former Mendésistes, and others who in 1960 constituted themselves into the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU). By 1960 the 'new Catholic left' was clearly a reality.

Its importance, however, should not be exaggerated. Whatever the trends within the élites of Catholic Action, the bulk of the Catholic electorate, as in the past, continued to support the parties of the right. In 1952 only 8 per cent of practising Catholics voted for the left: the rest divided their allegiance between the MRP (54 per cent), Independents (20 per cent), and the Gaullist RPF (18 per cent).[113] After 1958 the central political reality was the resurgence of the Right in the formidable shape of Gaullism, which, as we have seen, thwarted the ambitions of the MRP to mobilize Catholics behind the banner of Christian democracy as in Italy or Germany. The passing of the Debré law in 1959, which provided extensive State assistance to public schools, encouraged the great majority of the Catholic electorate to identify with the Gaullist party as the one best able to defend their interests. The political demise of the General in 1969 in no way arrested the tendency of practising Catholics to side with the right: as late as 1980 an opinion poll showed four-fifths of their number to be so inclined.[114]

Similarly, the rise of a Catholic left should not obscure the survival of a die-hard reactionary Catholic right. Men like Xavier Vallat sought to maintain the alliance between integral Catholicism and integral
p. 68 nationalism.[115] The latter ideology, ↳ discredited at the Liberation, made a steady comeback under the Fourth Republic in the wake of the colonial wars in Indo-China and Algeria, as embittered army officers and their press spokesmen blamed French failures on Communist subversion at home. Newspapers which represented the integral nationalist current such as *L'Observateur catholique* reserved some of their strongest invective for the abuse of 'Christian Stalinists', and throughout the 1950s French Catholic reactionaries bombarded the Holy Office in Rome with denunciations of their co-religionists (like the worker-priests or activists in the peace movement) who appeared to be colluding with the Communist enemy.[116] Integrism, indeed, was to survive even the Second Vatican Council, and resurfaced powerfully in the 1970s in the schismatic movement headed by Archbishop Lefebvre.

Thus French Catholicism remained deeply divided, and in the 1960s its potential was further diminished by a steep decline in religious practice, which finally convinced social Catholics that their original project of re-creating a new Christendom was hopelessly unrealistic. Instead, they began to settle for witnessing to their faith in a predominantly non-Christian world. Yet if political Catholicism in France never enjoyed the more spectacular successes it scored in countries where it gave birth to a mass Catholic Party, in its richness and diversity of expression it nevertheless contributed much to French political life in the twentieth century. Above all, the shift to the left brought Catholics out of the right-wing ghetto where they had been confined at the turn of the century, and in this way served to make France a more genuinely pluralist, tolerant, and democratic society.

Notes

1 The best treatments of French political Catholicism are R. W. Rauch, Jr., *Politics and Belief in Contemporary France: Emmanuel Mourner and Christian Democracy, 1932–1950* (The Hague, 1972) and J. M. Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la démocratic chrétienne, XIX^{e}—XX^{e} siècle* (Paris, 1980). A. Dansette, *Destin du catholicisme français 1926–1956* (Paris, 1957) remains valuable, as does R. Rémond's contribution to A. Latreille (ed.), *Histoire du catholicisme en France*, ii (Paris, 1962). See also F. Dreyfus, *Les Forces re-ligieuses dans la société française* (Paris, 1965) and the work of E. Poulat, esp. *église*

contre bourgeoisie: Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel (paris, 1977). For the wider religious background, the standard overview is now G. Cholvy and Y.-M. Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, 3 vols. (Toulouse, 1985–8), though the 19th cent. is well served in English by R. Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789–1914* (London, 1989).

2 An interesting exploration of this theme is Y. Tranvouez, *Catholiques d'abord: Approches du mouvement catholique en France XIX^{e}-XX^{e} siècle* (Paris, 1988).

3 This paragraph is based on Gibson, *Social History* and Cholvy and Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse*, ii. 171–218.

4 The standard histories of French social Catholicism are J. B. Duroselle, *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822–1871)* (Paris, 1951) and H. Rollet, *L'Action sociale des catholiques en France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1951–8), but they need to be supplemented by J. M. Mayeur, *Catholicisme social et démocratic chré- tienne: Principes romains, expériences françaises* Paris, 1986), which argues for the wider definition of social Catholicism adopted here.

5 On *Rerum Novarum*, see P. Furlong and D. Curtis (eds.), *The Church Faces the Modern World: Rerum Novarum and its Impact* (Winteringham, 1993) and J. M. Mayeur, 'Aux origines de l'enseignement social de l'Église sous Leon XIII', in *Catholicisme social et démocratie chrétienne*, 47–65.

6 J. F. McMillan, 'Women in Social Catholicism in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century France', in W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *Studies in Church History*, xxvii. *Women in the Church* (Oxford, 1990), 467–80: S. Fayet-Scribe, *Associations féminines et catholicisme: De la charité à l'action sociale xix^{e}-xx^{e} siècle* (Paris, 1990).

7 See in general M. Montuclard, *Conscience religieuse et démocratie: La Deuxiéme Démocratie chrétienne en France, 1891–1902* (Paris, 1965) and R. Rémond, *Les Deux Congrés ecclésiastiques de Reims et de Bourges (1896–1900*) (Paris, 1964). For the account of a participant, see also P. Dabry, *Les Catholiques républicans: Histoire et souvenirs, 1890–1903* (Paris, 1905).

8 On the abbé Lemire, see J.-M. Mayeur, *Un prétre démocrate, L'abbé Lemire, 1853–1928* (Paris, 1968).

9 J. Caron, *Le Sillon et la démocratie chrétienne, 1894–1910* (Paris, 1967); J. de Fabrègues, *Le Sillon de Marc Sangnier* (Paris, 1964); M. Barthélemy-Madaule, *Marc Sangnier (1873–1950*) (Paris, 1973); M. Launay, 'La Crise du *Sillon* dans l'été 1905', *Revue historique*, 245 (1971), 393–426.

10 R. W. Rauch, Jr., 'From the *Sillon* to the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire*: Doctor Robert Cornilleau and a Generation of Christian Democrats in France, 1910–1940', *Catholic Historical Review*, 58 (1972), 25–66.

11 Among the witnesses to the formative influence of the *Sillon* are E. Pezet, *Chrétiens an service de la cité, de Leon XIII au Sillon et au MRP* (Paris, 1965) and Raymond-Laurent, *Le Parti Démocrate Populaire 1924–1944: La Politique interieure et extérieure de la France 1919–1939* (Le Mans, 1965).

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14 Rauch, 'From the *Sillon* to the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire'*.

15 H. Rollet, *Albert de Mun et le Parti catholique* (Paris, 1947).

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17 cf. H. S. Paul *The Second Ralliement: The Rapprochement between Church and State in France in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, 1967).

18 On the First World War period, see J. Fontana *Les Catholiques français pendant la Grank Guerre* (Paris, 1990); J.-M. Mayeur 'La Vie religieuse en France pendant la Premiére Guerre Mondiale', in Hisloire vécue du peuple chrétien, ii (Toulouse, 1979); and J. F. McMillan, 'French Catholics, 'Infamous Rumours' and the Sacred Union', in M. S. and E Coetzee (eds.), Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War (forthcoming).

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23 Ibid. 399.

24 Ibid. 404.

25 Pezet, *Chrétiens au service de la cité*, 49 ff. The essential work on the PDP is now J.-C Delbreil, *Centristne et démocratie-chrétienne en France: Le Parti Dèmocrate Populaire des origines au MRP, 1919–1944* (Paris, 1990).

26 M. Vaussard, *Histoire de la démocratic chrétienne*, i. *France-Belgique-Italie* (Paris, 1956), 86 ff.; C. Baechler, *Le Parti*

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29 cf. A. Siegfried, *Tableau des partis en France* (Paris, 1930).

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53 Y.-M. Hilaire 'L'ACJF, les étapes d'une histoire (1886–1958)', *Revue du Nord* (Apr.–Sept. 1984).

54 M. Launay, La CFTC: Origines et développement 1919–1940 (Paris, 1986).

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