



**HAL**  
open science

# From Duties to Rights: Revisiting the ‘Social Catholics’ in Twentieth-Century France

Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel

► **To cite this version:**

Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel. From Duties to Rights: Revisiting the ‘Social Catholics’ in Twentieth-Century France. *French History*, 2019, Special Issue: Social Rights in French History, 33 (4), pp.587-605. 10.1093/fh/crz094 . hal-02526119

**HAL Id: hal-02526119**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-02526119>**

Submitted on 31 Mar 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0  
International License

FROM DUTIES TO RIGHTS:  
RE-VISITING THE ‘SOCIAL CATHOLICS’ IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRANCE

MARIE-EMMANUELLE CHESSEL\*

*French History*, janvier 2020 [doi: 10.1093/fh/crz094]

*Version d’auteure du 16 décembre 2020*

**Abstract** - With regard to the history of human rights in France, one spontaneously thinks of the French Revolution and then of left-wing activists, and particularly socialists. Their opponents, the Catholics, normally considered to be right wing and usually opposed to socialism, appear as a counterpoint. This article argues that some Catholics, especially those who referred to themselves as ‘social Catholics’, also contributed to the adoption of certain rights, in particular social rights, in France in unexpected and paradoxical ways. Their contribution was made through their social activities, visible in their organizations’ archives, more than through their discourse. Social Catholics spoke little of ‘rights’. Yet paradoxically, discourses about ‘duties’ can lead to the defence of rights, especially through the practice of social surveys and the importance of social ‘facts’. Examples are taken from the history of the Ligue Sociale d’Acheteurs, the Union Féminine Civique et Sociale and other French catholic organizations such as the Secrétariats sociaux.

---

\* The author is a CNRS Senior Research Fellow at the Centre de Sociologie des Organisation at Sciences Po, Paris. She may be contacted at [marieemmanuelle.chessel@sciencespo.fr](mailto:marieemmanuelle.chessel@sciencespo.fr). She would like to thank Thomas Bouchet, Nicolas Delalande, Patrick Fridenson, Katie Jarvis, Mark Philp, Paul-André Rosental, Stéphanie Roza, Charles Walton and Olivier Zunz for their comments on previous versions of this text, which was translated by Liz Carey Libbrecht.

In 1909, on the fringes of the Semaines sociales de France, a ‘peripatetic university’ for Catholic social activists, the members of the French social league of buyers (Ligue Sociale d’Acheteurs) met and worked together.<sup>1</sup> Since 1902, this association had contributed to the early rise of political consumerism by emphasizing the consumer’s duty to pay attention to their consumption patterns in order to improve the working conditions of workers and employees. There were some priests amongst them but the founders of the association were laypersons (Figure 1). At about the same time, they created posters and ‘butterflies’, that is, stamps to put on packages and letters to encourage consumers not to mail them on Sundays, so that postal employees would not have too much work that day (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> The aim was to support a labour law limiting work on Sundays, passed in 1906. Members of the LSA had defended the law before it was enacted and, along with others, were striving to ensure that it was enforced.<sup>3</sup>

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1. Members of the Ligue sociale d’acheteurs in 1909. Photo taken during Semaine sociale in 1909. Archives municipales de Lyon, fonds de la Chronique sociale de France, 141 ii 511.

Insert Figure 2 here

Figure 2. Ligue sociale d’acheteurs: ‘Butterflies’ to fight Sunday work for postal workers (circa 1909), Private Collection.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seeking to propagate Catholic social teaching beyond the urban centres of Paris, Lyon and Lille, the Semaines Sociales brought together a varied group of professionals, workers, clergy and students for a week in a different city each summer. Courses were given by experts on the church’s social doctrine and practice. Participants followed these courses but also met together and sometimes organized their own associative work. P.S.J. Bernardi, ‘Social modernism: the case of the Semaines sociales’, in D. Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge, 2000), 277-307, 278-279 and D. Durand (ed.), *Les Semaines Sociales de France. Cent ans d’engagement social des catholiques français (1904-2004)* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For the union butterflies in Michelle Perrot’s collection, P. Fridenson, ‘Le conflit social’, in *Histoire de la France*, vol. 3, *Les conflits*, eds. A. Burguière, J. Revel (Paris, 1990), 371 and 380.

<sup>3</sup> M.-E. Chessel, *Consommateurs engagés à la Belle Époque, La Ligue sociale d’acheteurs* (Paris, 2012).

This example illustrates a paradox. In discussions of the history of rights in France, the French Revolution and then of left-wing activists, in particular socialists, as well as organizations such as the Human Rights League normally occupy centre-stage.<sup>4</sup> Their opponents, the Catholics, considered to be right wing and usually opposed to socialism, appear as a counterpoint. This article suggests that in an unexpected and paradoxical way, and sometimes in spite of themselves, some Catholics, especially those who referred to themselves as ‘social Catholics’ in the early twentieth century, also contributed to the fact that certain rights, in particular social rights, were adopted in France. This contribution was made primarily through their social activities, visible in their organizations' archives, rather than through their discourse.

In the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Catholics in general, and those who called themselves ‘social Catholics’ in particular, spoke little of ‘rights’. This stemmed from their opposition to all forms of liberalism since the French Revolution. Whereas liberalism is based in particular on the idea that every human being has fundamental natural rights, social Catholics generally expressed their opposition to liberalism in all its forms: political liberalism (with the condemnation of the order stemming from the Enlightenment and the Revolution), economic liberalism, and religious liberalism which would reduce religion to the private sphere<sup>5</sup>. Catholics therefore rarely seemed to talk about rights. Instead, they insisted on their duties or ‘responsibilities’: for example, their duty as consumers to protect workers and employees. During the *Semaines sociales*, they devoted few classes to ‘rights’ but many to ‘responsibilities’, the theme of the 1913 *Semaine sociale*.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> E. Naquet, *Pour l'humanité, la Ligue des droits de l'homme, De l'affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> D. Pelletier, ‘Les pratiques charitables françaises entre 'histoire sociale' et 'histoire religieuse'. Essai d'historiographie critique’, in I. von Bueltzingsloewen and D. Pelletier (eds), *La charité en pratique. Chrétiens français et allemands sur le terrain social: XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Strasbourg, 1999), 33-47, 39-40; J.-M. Mayeur, *Catholicisme social et démocratie chrétienne, Principe romains, expériences françaises* (Paris, 1986); D. Pelletier, ‘Le catholicisme social en France (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles). Une modernité paradoxale’, in B. Pellistrandi (ed.), *L'histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne* (Madrid, 2004), 371-387.

<sup>6</sup> See the thematic index published by the *Semaines sociales* in 1928, in which the term ‘rights’ relates to four articles, while the term ‘duty’ refers to two articles and ‘responsibility’ to 17 articles (almost all in 1913).

And yet, paradoxically, when we study the activities of Catholic social organizations, we see that some members defended certain rights through their actions. As in the case of the LSA's advocacy of the limitation of Sunday work, they could support social laws and ensure their enforcement. This paradox is my starting point. It existed in the nineteenth century already among Catholics who did not yet claim to be 'social' but whom historians recognize as forerunners.<sup>7</sup> They were among those who were concerned about the consequences of industrialization and the risk of the working classes' impoverishment for society as a whole. For example, the Catholic Vicomte Albert de Melun endeavoured to improve the effectiveness of the 1841 law limiting child labour, and it was thanks to him that the first significant social laws were passed in 1850 and 1851 concerning substandard housing, pension funds, the crime of usury, legal aid, hospital assistance, and apprenticeship contracts. His discourse referred not to rights, but rather to assistance or charity.<sup>8</sup> The arguments were shared by others and were based on a miserabilist perception of the working classes, shared in particular with Doctor Villermé.<sup>9</sup>

This paradox persisted into the twentieth century, which we will examine here by looking at those who coined the term 'social Catholicism' and who theorized and organized it. The focus here is therefore limited to those Catholics who openly recognized themselves as 'social Catholics'.<sup>10</sup> They referred to the encyclical *Rerum novarum* of 1891 and appeared in places that promoted social Catholicism, such as the Semaines sociales. Although they were part of an older tradition, they openly defined themselves as 'social Catholics' and organized themselves around this identity from the early twentieth century onwards.

I would like to show here that, through action, discourse about 'duties' can lead to the defence of rights. I therefore focus on the study of actors', individuals' or groups' actions,

---

<sup>7</sup>J.-B. Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France jusqu'en 1870* (Paris, 1951).

<sup>8</sup>P. Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe, From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (New York, 1991), 56-78.

<sup>9</sup>C. Lemerrier, "Il faut parler de ce qu'on sait", "Hommes pratiques", "économistes distingués" et législateurs face au travail des enfants (1837-1794)", in C. Charle, J. Vincent (eds), *La Société Civile, Savoirs, enjeux et acteurs en France et en Grande-Bretagne 1780-1914* (Rennes, 2011), 127-145.

<sup>10</sup>M. Turmann, *Le développement du catholicisme social depuis l'encyclique 'Rerum Novarum'* (Paris, 1900); J. Zamanski, *Nous, catholiques sociaux, Histoire et histoires* (Paris, 1947).

both in organizations and in their discourse. Other scholars have already shown that Catholic discourses and actions can be contradictory.<sup>11</sup> For example, Michel Lagrée demonstrated how some Catholics castigated technology and modernism while simultaneously promoting technological progress in their actions throughout this period.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Magali della Sudda's study of early twentieth-century conservative activists has shown how Catholic women promoted the idea of mothers remaining in the private space, yet they themselves were single women speaking in the public space.<sup>13</sup> If we look at these actions, and militant ones in particular, we do not reach the same conclusions as we do if we look exclusively at discourses.

This is not to deny the importance of the discourses and the Social Doctrine of the Church on which these Catholics relied and which they quoted extensively. Since *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, Pope Leo XIII had stressed the need to protect the 'weak and indigent', and had been calling for their protection by the State. Later, in 1931's *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XII noted the construction of a labour law that gradually addressed all aspects of workers' condition: a law 'guaranteeing workers respect for the sacred rights they enjoyed as human beings and as Christians (...). Workers, their health, their strengths, their families, their housing, their workplace, their wages, their insurance against occupational risks, in short, everything concerning the condition of workers, especially women and children, are the subject of these protective laws'.<sup>14</sup> These encyclicals referred repeatedly to the 'dignity' of workers and the need not to treat them as commodities. They also referred to duties, in

---

<sup>11</sup> M.-E. Chessel, B. Dumons (eds), *Catholicisme et modernisation de la société française (1890-1960)*. Cahiers du Centre Pierre Léon d'histoire économique et sociale (Lyon, 2003); M.-E. Chessel, D. Pelletier, 'L'entreprise et les religions. Max Weber, Baby Lou et le bricolage', *Entreprises et histoire*, 81 (2015), 5-14.

<sup>12</sup> M. Lagrée, *La bénédiction de Prométhée, Religion et technologie, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> M. Della Sudda, 'Une activité politique féminine conservatrice avant le droit de suffrage en France et en Italie. Socio-histoire de la politisation des femmes catholiques au sein de la Ligue patriotique des Françaises (1902-1933) et de l'Unione fra le donne cattoliche d'Italia (1909-1919)' (PhD, EHESS-Università di Roma La Sapienza, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> J. Savatier, 'Renouvellement du droit social et promotion des travailleurs', *Semaine sociale* (1964), 225-243 (my translation). Directives sociales de l'Église, *Les grandes encycliques sociales (Léon XIII, Pie XI)*. Les documents sociaux de Pie XII (Lille, 1945).

particular the civic duties of Catholics, citizens or civil servants.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the question of ‘human rights’ was at the heart of Christian social morality in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> These discourses contributed to forging a conception of society in which intermediate bodies played a central role, in which the ‘common good’ had to be defended, in which the State could play a protective role, and in which a ‘third way’ was sought between liberalism and socialism.<sup>17</sup> This ‘corporatist’ conception did not exclude the defence of trade unions distinct from Christian employers’ organizations.

The Catholic Church’s social doctrine calls for two comments. First, lay activists and clerics not only applied and quoted this doctrine, they also influenced its drafting. Moreover, when they cited it, they had some room for manoeuvre, if only by selecting or commenting on the texts, according to the context. For example, in employers’ study circles and those of trade unions, priests made doctrinal notes on the ‘fair remuneration of workers’, ‘the right to strike’, and ‘Christian wage doctrine’. Some of these notes were interpretations of Catholic social doctrine, adapted to particular occupational groups.<sup>18</sup>

One text that comments on the Church’s social doctrine is particularly interesting because we can examine for whom it was intended and how it was used. In 1955, within the framework of a trade union circle (composed of CFTC workers), a ‘labour missionary’, in other words a priest assigned to social issues within the Lille social secretariat, became interested in justice: ‘the virtue that ensures everyone is given their due, that makes all rights respected’. According to him, these rights were ‘essential human rights’ (the right to live, the right to live from one’s work, the right to property, the right of association), rights arising

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Deroo, *Encycliques, messages et discours de Léon XIII, Pie XI, Pie XII sur les questions sociales* (Lille, 1954); A. Deroo, *Encycliques, messages et discours de Pie IX, Léon XIII, Pie X, Benoît XV, Pie XI, Pie XII et Jean XXIII sur les questions civiques et politiques* (Lille, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> A[rchives] D[iocésaines] de L[ille], URCEAS Lille 1960-1980, *La morale sociale chrétienne, support irremplaçable du respect de la personne humaine* (Paris, 1965); S. Moyn, *Christian human rights* (Philadelphia, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> A.C. Stepan, *The State and Society, Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, 1978), 27-45.

<sup>18</sup> ADL, Secrétariat social de Roubaix-Tourcoing, boîte 209, Cercle d’études sociales, Mots du missionnaire du travail : ‘Comment tendre vers le juste salaire’, janvier 1952, ‘Les exigences du bien commun en matière de salaire’, février 1952, ‘Les travailleurs et la situation de l’entreprise’, July – Aug. 1953, ‘Comment la justice ordonne-t-elle la profession?’, Dec. 1955.

from the law (for example, health, safety, minimum wage, etc.), rights arising from contracts and rights arising from collective agreements and professional agreements'. This text was read, and perhaps appropriated, by the CFTC unionists who participated in this circle.<sup>19</sup>

We are interested here in small groups of organized 'social Catholics', who were not quantitatively important in the twentieth century. Even though Catholicism remained the dominant religion, organized Catholics were in a sense the 'losers' of the twentieth century, which witnessed a drop in their numbers. It is nevertheless revealing to see how these Catholics took up their place in the Republic and whether or not they contributed to defending rights.

I draw here on my own research on those organizations that more or less openly claimed to be part of this social Catholic trend: the LSA (1902-1914) and the Union féminine civique et sociale (UFCS), which had existed since 1925 and merged with another organization in 2009.<sup>20</sup> Their rich archival collections, alongside the records of other bodies, such as the 'secrétariats sociaux', information and training structures set up by social Catholics and Christian employers offer an insight into these organizations' use of discourse and activist practices.<sup>21</sup> This research concerned French organizations, but they were fuelled by international circulation. The early twentieth-century consumer leagues were inspired by examples from the United States, in particular, and from other religions (primarily social Protestantism), and were linked to organizations in various countries. They were part of the context of the transatlantic movements of reformist circles that Daniel Rodgers has studied.<sup>22</sup> Like other members of reformist communities, Catholic or other, these activists met at national or international congresses, participated in international exhibitions – sometimes

---

<sup>19</sup> ADL, Secrétariat social de Roubaix-Tourcoing, boîte 209, Mot du missionnaire du travail, 'Comment la justice ordonne-t-elle la profession?', Dec. 1955.

<sup>20</sup> M.-E. Chessel, 'Catholiques militants et réforme de la consommation en France au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. De la Ligue sociale d'acheteurs à l'Union féminine civique et sociale', *Le Mouvement social*, 250 (2015), 9-28.

<sup>21</sup> The archives of the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs were consulted in Jean Brunhes' private collection at the Archives Nationales (615 AP), and the archives of the Union féminine civique et sociale at the Archives du féminisme in Angers. The archives of the 'secrétariats sociaux' were consulted at the ADL. The archives of the Christian employers were consulted in Paris, Lille and Lyon. The Paris collection has since been transferred to the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail in Roubaix (2016 001).

<sup>22</sup> D.T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

setting up their own exhibitions – and invented actions, in writing (butterflies, postcards, magazines) and by other means, such as the exhibition of objects produced at home for example. Modes of action circulated as much as did men, women and ideas.<sup>23</sup>

These groups consisted of women and men, and gender was important. The LSA has usually been studied as a women's organization, but men also played a central rôle in its operation.<sup>24</sup> The UFCS was entirely female. The respective roles of women and men differed in all Catholic organizations but again, gender discourses must be compared to actions.

We know that social rights were not readily granted in early twentieth-century France. They were based on activism and a particular argument, which was based on 'facts'. Thus, women's and children's rights were reformed not in the name of the law, but because of 'squalid' or 'intolerable' descriptions of social reality. As Claire Lemerrier has shown with regard to the 1841 Child Labour Act: 'social laws must be based on facts. (...) If we follow the speakers, the point is understood: the laws on child labour are certainly based on a moral imperative, but this one was born in response to "facts" and is not simply a matter of applying theory'. Facts come from what one has seen oneself, what one has read or 'surveys', whether statistical or not.<sup>25</sup> Through their organizations, social Catholics often investigated social reality in order to better resolve the 'social issue'. This investigative practice, found in many social Catholic organizations, helps to explain how social Catholics, whose discourse most often focused on 'duties', ended up defending rights through their action.

This article will begin by assessing how the two organizations mentioned above worked to defend three types of rights: labour rights, consumer rights and, to a lesser extent, women's

---

<sup>23</sup> C. Topalov (ed.), *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle. La nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880-1914* (Paris, 1999); M.-E. Chessel, 'Consumers' leagues in France, A Transatlantic Perspective', in A. Chatriot, M.-E. Chessel, M. Hilton (eds), *The Expert Consumer, Associations and Professionals in Consumer Society* (London, 2006), 53-69.

<sup>24</sup> M.-E. Chessel, 'The gender of Consumption in 1900. Women and Men in the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs', *L'Année sociologique*, 61 (2011), 125-149; M.-E. Chessel, 'Women and the ethic of consumption in France at the turn of the century: the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs', in F. Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer, Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (London, 2005), 81-98.

<sup>25</sup> Our translation from C. Lemerrier, *Ibid.* For comparative data on Britain: J. Innes, 'Le Parlement et la réglementation du travail des enfants dans les fabriques en Grande-Bretagne, 1783-1819', in C. Charle and J. Vincent (eds), *La Société civile*, *Ibid.*, 99-125.

rights. It will then examine how the transition from ‘duties’ to ‘rights’ was actually effected through the exploitation of ‘facts’, and especially through the use of social surveys.

## I

The LSA’s discourse focused on the consumer’s responsibility to society as purchasers were urged to think about what they bought and when they bought it. For example, buyers were urged not to shop on Saturdays because it created excess work for saleswomen, while the LSA also encouraged consumers to give work to seamstresses in January or February, because these were months marked by unemployment. The implicit message was that it was ‘their fault’ if workers were unemployed and therefore had to act accordingly. At the same time, members of this league only indirectly defended consumers’ rights (which were also their own rights). They wanted clothes that did not give them diseases, they refused ‘cheap’ goods and defended their preference for quality goods (crafts or custom-made products). It was in this context that they claimed to have Charles Gide’s support when he defended active consumers, but this defence of consumer rights was secondary.<sup>26</sup>

As part of its activism, the LSA was more directly concerned with labour laws. It argued that one could influence the working conditions of women and men through one’s consumption. As several of its members were lawyers, most often specialists in ‘labour law’ a specialism that was being established in the early twentieth century, the LSA was involved in several labour law reform campaigns. To this end it collaborated with the reformist community, which included republicans and socialists, at the Social Museum in particular.<sup>27</sup> These social Catholic lawyers (Raoul Jay for example) promoted State action in the economy. Some of these campaigns included demands for the regulation of the wages of women who worked at home (the result was the law of 10 July 1914 on the minimum wage for

---

<sup>26</sup> C. Gide, ‘Le règne du consommateur’ [1898], in *Coopération et économie sociale, 1886-1904*, ed. P. Devillers (Paris, 2001), 187-224.

<sup>27</sup> J. R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France. The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC, 2002).

homeworkers in the garment industry) and calls for limitations on Sunday work (support for the 1906 law on weekly rest and its application).<sup>28</sup> Finally, the members of the LSA called for the improvement of night working conditions for bakers.<sup>29</sup> Their activism, through postcards, complemented their lobbying in respect of these social laws (Figure 3). Thus, without relying on a discourse on workers' rights, the members of the LSA participated in the creation of social legislation. In this way, the organization promoted the integration of Catholic women and men into the Third Republic. Significantly, these social Catholics – primarily from the bourgeoisie – engaged in dialogue with Christian trade unions of workers or employees, which in turn made more direct use of the rhetoric of workers' rights, while the LSA also had special ties with Christian women's trade unions.<sup>30</sup>

If the LSA did not defend consumer rights, who did? In the United States, consumer leagues, which served as a model for the French LSA in the early twentieth century, morphed into consumerist organizations. Whereas they were initially organizations of consumers committed to defending workers' rights, they began to defend consumers' rights. The National Consumers' League, created in 1899 and still in existence, symbolized this evolution from duties to rights.<sup>31</sup> However, this shift did not take place in France. Despite attempts to reform itself, the LSA gradually disappeared around the First World War, and the UFCV took over its role. The latter was created in 1925, not to deal with consumption issues, but to work on the civic education of women. It did however also deal with consumer issues and was officially recognized as a consumer organization in 1961 only when the State sought

---

<sup>28</sup> C. Avrane, *Ouvrières à domicile. Le combat pour un salaire minimum sous la Troisième République* (Rennes, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> F. Jarrige, 'Le travail de la routine. Autour d'une controverse sociotechnique dans la boulangerie française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales ESC*, 3 (2010), 645-677.

<sup>30</sup> J. Chabot, *Les débuts du syndicalisme féminin chrétien en France (1890-1944)* (Lyon, 2003); M. Launay, *La CFTC, origines et développement 1919-1940* (Paris, 1986); A. Favier, 'Egalité, mixité, sexualité: le genre et l'intime chez de jeunes catholiques du mouvement de la Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne (JOC-F), dans les années 68 (1954-1986)', (PhD, Université Lyon 2, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> L.R.Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism. The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, 2000); A.R. Wolfe, 'Women, Consumerism and the National Consumers' League in the Progressive Era, 1900-1923', *Labor History*, 16 (1975), 378-392; L. Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic. The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003).

to organize those bodies. In 2009 it merged with another consumer organization of Catholic origin called Familles Rurales.

The issue of transmission between the LSA and the UFCS was not straightforward. There were clearly legacies between the two organizations. For example, the daughter of the founders of the LSA, Mariel Brunhes-Delamarre, was a member of the UFCS and tried to revive the LSA within it in the period from 1936 to 1938. When producing documents on its own history, the UFCS mentioned the fact that it inherited a concern for consumer issues from the LSA, while the founders of the two organizations, Henriette Jean-Brunhes and Andrée Butillard, also shared an interest in housewives' education. The Ligue de la mère au foyer (housewife's league), which was very close to the UFCS, constituted a consumer training space. But the transition from bourgeois consumers' 'duties' towards workers and employees, to 'consumers' rights' to consume good quality products at a good price was not easy.<sup>32</sup>

Through consumer issues, the UFCS was called upon to act in the public and political arena in the 1950s and 1960s. As Rebecca Pulju has demonstrated, in the 1950s, when it had 70,000 members and good relations with the centrists of the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP), the UFCS helped the authorities to resolve supply problems and then fight inflation. Their action was valued by the government, which was seeking to promote productivity. UFCS activists also educated housewives to carry out their activities in a more 'productive' way: a competition for the best housewife (la Fée du logis – 'fairy in the home') was organized at the Salon des arts ménagers, an annual exhibition that ran from 1923 and came to be seen as 'an evangelist for modern homes'.<sup>33</sup> These two examples of Catholic consumer organizations are not isolated. In 2008, half of the consumer organizations recognized as such by the State were of Catholic origin: they were organizations promoting

---

<sup>32</sup>M.-E. Chessel, 'Catholiques militants', *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>R. Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society in Postwar France* (Cambridge, 2011); N. Rudolph, *At Home in Postwar France. Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort* (New York, Oxford, 2015), 87. On 'Salon des arts ménagers', E. Furlough, 'Selling the American Way in Inter-War France: Prix Uniques and the Salon des Arts Ménagers', *J of Soc Hist.* 26, 1993), 491-519, and C. Leymonerie, 'Le Salon des arts ménagers dans les années 1950. Théâtre d'une conversion à la consommation de masse', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 91 (2006), 43-56.

family values (e. g. Familles Rurales), women's organizations (e. g. UFCS), and a few large federations still little known to researchers (CLCV). In addition to labour law and consumer rights, these two Catholic organizations have contributed, paradoxically and in a roundabout way, to the elaboration of women's rights.

Catholic women's and men's discourse on gender was openly opposed to feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. It differed little from the prevalent discourses in France during that period, when feminists appeared to be a very small minority. At the time of the 1900 Universal Exhibition, Catholic women from the LSA and feminists – who did meet – were unable to work together, particularly because Catholic women refused to identify themselves as feminists and to work with women of other religions. Yet, from 1900, by way of their action, through consumption or other commitments, LSA women organized and acted in the public sphere, using various arenas to talk differently about politics.

A similar pattern is apparent in earlier periods and other countries, where charitable or associative approaches have favoured women's public or even political commitments.<sup>34</sup> For French Catholics, several studies, notably those of Magali della Sudda, have shown that Catholic women's movements allowed women to engage in 'politics in spite of themselves', while being excluded from the franchise and not demanding the right to vote until 1919 (when the Pope withdrew his opposition to women's suffrage). Organizations such as the Ligue patriotique des Françaises, in the early twentieth century, and then the Ligue féminine d'action catholique, urged women to act in the public sphere and worked indirectly to politicize their members.<sup>35</sup>

The UFCS, which took up the torch of consumption issues from the LSA, was created in 1925 precisely to promote civic and social education for Catholic women; in other words, to educate female citizens. While in the inter-war period it certainly did defend the 'family

---

<sup>34</sup> J.R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> B. Dumons, *Les Dames de la Ligue des femmes françaises (1901-1914)* (Paris 2006); M. Della Sudda, 'La politique malgré elles. Catholic Women's Mobilizations in France and Italy (1900-1914)', *Revue française de science politique*, 60 (2010), 37-60; C. Capuano, *Vichy et la famille. Réalités et faux-semblants d'une politique publique* (Rennes, 2009).

vote', proportional to the number of people in the family, from 1944 onwards, the UFCS militant actions sometimes led to political mandates, as the organization urged women to run for office by putting their skills as mothers and housewives at the service of their municipality.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, it resembled Action catholique féminine (which followed the Ligue patriotique des françaises) as both encouraged women to vote and to run for office.

In the 1950s the women's movement was structured by the opposition between two large women's organizations: the UFCS, which was Catholic and close to the Gaullists, and the communist Union des femmes françaises.<sup>37</sup> Some of the membership of both sides were elected to parliament or to municipal councils. By 1952, the UFCS had 450 female municipal councillors in its ranks, women such as Irène Mançaux, a specialist in consumer issues and member of the Ligue pour la femme au foyer and the UFCS, who had been elected a municipal councillor in Châtillon-sur-Bagneux in 1947.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Marie-Madeleine Dienesch, one of the few Catholic women to have had a career in politics, started out in the UFCS in Brittany, which she helped to set up. As a former resistance fighter, she was elected in 1946 as a member of parliament for the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP) and sat almost continuously until 1981. As a supporter of General de Gaulle, she was Secretary of State from 1968 to 1978, in charge of social affairs.

At the time, the UFCS openly opposed contraception and in this respect could not claim to defend women's rights. Moreover, in the inter-war period it expressed a very traditional position on the role of women as mothers, and the measures it demanded (for example, an allowance for housewives) were condemned by feminists.<sup>39</sup> However, recent studies have

---

<sup>36</sup> T. Doneaud and C. Guérin, *Les femmes agissent, le monde change. Histoire inédite de l'Union féminine civique et sociale* (Paris, 2005), 72.

<sup>37</sup> F. Thébaud, *Une traversée du siècle: Marguerite Thibert, femme engagée et fonctionnaire internationale* (Paris, 2017), 496; S. Chaperon, *Les années Beauvoir: 1945-1970* (Paris, 2000), 93; S. Fayolle, 'L'Union des femmes françaises: une organisation féminine de masse du Parti Communiste Français (1945-1965)' (PhD, Université de Paris 1, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Chaperon, *Ibid.*, 210. Archives Municipales de Châtillon-Montrouge. Irène Odette Gabrielle Mançaux, born in 1905, was a shorthand typist in 1946. She was elected 1<sup>st</sup> Deputy Mayor for Social Affairs and School Canteens under the mandate of Marcel Christosome (SFIO Mayor) on 27 October 1947 and re-elected in 1953. She was not re-elected in 1959.

<sup>39</sup> L.L. Frader, *Breadwinners and citizens, Gender in the making of the French social model* (Durham, 2008), 217-219.

shown that the positions of Catholic women, whether militant or not, varied widely, especially from the 1950s onwards. With regard to contraception, a UFCS activist, Cécile de Corlieu, called herself a feminist and participated in the activities of La maternité heureuse ('Happy motherhood'), which was renamed Mouvement pour le Planning Familial ('French family planning movement') in 1960, and contributed to legitimizing the cause of birth control in France.<sup>40</sup> In the early 1960s, the UFCS published a brochure on birth control.<sup>41</sup> More generally, in the 1960s and 1970s many loyal and activist Catholics were out of step with the Church's hierarchy, even within Action catholique organizations controlled by the Church; their distance from the hierarchy's positions was often made in the name of the 'experience' of women and men (i.e. the facts).<sup>42</sup> From 1966, shortly after it proclaimed that it was no longer a catholic organization, the UFCS agreed not to follow the Church's positions on contraception. This was shortly before the Neuwirth law was passed, which legalized the pill in 1967. In 1972 it took a stand in favour of amending the 1920 law condemning abortion. In 1975 the Veil law legalized abortion.<sup>43</sup>

This is not to suggest that these Catholic women were feminists and that they undermined gender norms. Rather, it is to say that recent research (such as that of Magali della Sudda and Anthony Favier) suggests that Catholic positions on gender issues were complex and sometimes out of step with the prescriptions of the Catholic Church (the institutional word of the Magisterium), especially in the 1960s.

---

<sup>40</sup>M. Dubesset, 'Les engagements catholiques au féminin', in B. Duriez et al (eds), *Les catholiques dans la République 1905-2005*, (Paris, 2005), 103-114; S. Chaperon, *Les années Beauvoir*, 254-255; P. Pavard, 'Du Birth Control au Planning Familial (1955-1960): un transfert militant', *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, 18 (2012) [www.histoire-politique.fr].

<sup>41</sup> UFCS, 'A propos du contrôle des naissances', Archives Nationales, 20000062/13, survey conducted by Jan Sutter (1959-1962). I would like to thank Célia Aujard-Catot who reported this in a paper made for her Master's degree in History (Sciences Po) in 2017.

<sup>42</sup>M. Della Sudda, 'Par-delà le bien et le mal, la morale sexuelle en question chez les femmes catholiques', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 35 (2016), 82-101; M. Sevegrand, 'La méthode Ogino et la morale catholique : une controverse théologique autour de la limitation des naissances (1930-1951)', *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* (1992), 77-99; M. Sevegrand, *Les enfants du bon Dieu: les catholiques français et la procréation au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1995); M. Sevegrand, *L'affaire Humanae vitae, L'Église catholique et la contraception* (Paris, 2008).

<sup>43</sup>T. Doneaud, C. Guérin, *Ibid*, 215; S. Chauveau, 'Les espoirs déçus de la loi Neuwirth', *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 18 (2003), 223-239; S. Chaperon, *Ibid*, 317-318.

Thus, from a discourse on their duties as consumers or as women, these Catholic activists came to defend labour rights, consumer rights and even (to a certain extent and later in the century) women's rights. How was the transition from duties to advocacy carried out? To illustrate this evolution, consider the following example. On 25 April 1910, Henriette Jean-Brunhes (who had founded the LSA with her husband) and other women of the LSA were received by the Conseil supérieur du travail, a purely consultative body, to discuss women's domestic work. Why were they being heard? Because their activities as investigators, particularly in sewing workshops, had turned them into experts on the issue of seamstresses' work.<sup>44</sup> Their legitimacy as experts on labour issues stemmed from their different activities, which positioned them as 'witnesses' of a social reality. Through their investigations, writings, exhibitions of home-made objects and postcards, they were thus recognized as legitimate experts on the issue of women's work (Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 here.

Figure 3. A postcard from the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs (circa 1910), Private Collection.

Among the different discourses and practices promoting the transition from duties to rights, it seems that the way in which 'facts' are reported is central. This can be evidenced in various writings of social Catholics during the Semaines sociales. For instance, Jean Brunhes, co-founder of the LSA, and a 'social geographer' by profession, spoke in 1906 about working conditions in the mines. The findings of social geography, he explained, often pointed out 'hidden miseries and consequently can indicate new duties for us social Catholics, gathered here to educate ourselves on all labour and economic issues'. After citing the working and living conditions of miners, he called for 'wise and well-observed regulations' so that the miner's life would not be in constant danger. We thus see an articulation between the facts (miners' living conditions), social Catholics' duties, and the rights implemented by regulations (the law). 'Facts', reported in different ways, were central to justifying legislation

---

<sup>44</sup> M.-E. Chessel, *Le Pouvoir de l'acheteuse* (HDR thesis, EHESS, 2009), 355.

and came from different sources. Jean Brunhes explained the need to regulate women's domestic work (or 'sweating system'): 'As for the facts, on which we have based our thesis, they are abundant, and were pointed out to us by the first Congress for the legal protection of workers, held in Berlin in 1904, and by the most recent exhibition of the domestic industry, also opened in Berlin in January 1906'.<sup>45</sup> Reflecting on the situation of seamstresses working at night, employees toiling long hours or domestic workers' conditions, another league member explained: 'And note that we do not draw this information from novels or even from the articles of sensitive philanthropists, but from the reports of official investigations undertaken by the Ministry of Labour'.<sup>46</sup> Social surveys, which were widely practiced by social Catholics, were one of the sources (among others) of this fact-finding initiative: 'Through surveys, [the women investigators] accepted the idea of legislation, limitation and legal intervention for the protection of work'.<sup>47</sup> This practice of inquiry, which was shared by social Catholics, both men and women, would be key to their activism.

## II

The legitimization of Catholic men's and women's social action required the assembling of 'facts', evidence that could explain social reality, particularly through social surveys. This was nothing new in the early twentieth century. The LSA activists had a heritage to draw on, that of the Playsian school, as twentieth-century Catholic circles were informed by a longstanding heritage, and in particular that of Frédéric Le Play. Several researchers have highlighted Le Play's role as a nineteenth-century Catholic social reformer, but his role as a social investigator is more relevant to the argument here.<sup>48</sup> Le Play lived several lives. First of all, that of an investigating engineer, trained at the École des Mines where he taught at the

---

<sup>45</sup> J. Brunhes, 'La désorganisation de la famille par le travail à domicile. Cours de M. Jean Brunhes', *Semaine sociale* (1906), 140-143, (my translation).

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. A. Audollent, 'Les responsabilités du consommateur', *Semaine sociale* (1913), 351-370.

<sup>47</sup> A. Mény, 'Les enquêtes sociales féminines. Cours de l'abbé Mény', *Semaine sociale* (1909), 391-407, 401.

<sup>48</sup> B. Kalaora, A. Savoye, *Les inventeurs oubliés. Le Play et ses continuateurs aux origines des sciences sociales* (Seyssel, 1989); M. Z. Brooke, *Le Play: Engineer and Social Scientist, The Life and Work of Frédéric Le Play* (Longmans, 1970); F. Arnault, *Frédéric Le Play, De la métallurgie à la science sociale* (Nancy, 1983).

time. Through his travels and research, he developed an empirical investigation method characterized by ‘family monographs’. These were very detailed studies of the lifestyle – work and consumption – of working-class families. His second life, as a leading figure of the Second Empire, began in 1857 when he founded the Société d’économie sociale and its journal, *La Réforme sociale*.<sup>49</sup> This new prominence in the Second Empire had a damaging impact on his image, and the fact that he was subsequently endorsed by the Vichy Regime finally contributed to him being almost definitively excluded as a legitimate author.

Stéphane Baciocchi and Alain Cottureau have recently stressed the fact that Le Play, in this second life, abandoned any ‘direct investigation’. His subsequent works were marked by the reworking and rewriting of his original material and ideological developments. By returning to the original texts – surveys, correspondence, etc. – in order to make them more accessible to the public, Baciocchi and Cottureau have highlighted the richness of the ‘original’ field survey method.<sup>50</sup> This approach has even inspired new research on ‘ethno-accounting’ (*ethno-comptabilité*).<sup>51</sup>

The social Catholics under discussion here inherited as much from Le Play's investigative practice as from his ‘ideology’. This practice of investigation within Catholic circles was to continue in different settings and to have a strong impact on this community.<sup>52</sup> The militant work of the members of the LSA was based on social surveys in which they investigated a wide variety of subjects. From studying the working conditions of seamstresses, bakers or saleswomen in department stores to drawing up lists of employers who treated their employees correctly, these surveys were mainly carried out by women and focused essentially on women’s jobs in areas close to women (domestic servants,

---

<sup>49</sup>M. Nouvel, *Frédéric Le Play. Une réforme sociale sous le Second Empire* (Paris, 2009).

<sup>50</sup>S. Baciocchi and J. David, ‘Esquisse pour une autre anthologie’, *Les Etudes sociales*, 142-143 (2005-2006), 7-17.

<sup>51</sup>A. Cottureau and M. M. Marzok, *Une famille andalouse, Ethnocomptabilité d’une économie invisible* (Paris, 2012).

<sup>52</sup>D. Pelletier, ‘Engagement intellectuel catholique et médiation du social. L’enquête monographique de Le Play à Leuret’, *Mil Neuf cent*, 13 (1995), 25-45.

saleswomen, sewing workshop employees). They were also carried out in spaces where women had a certain legitimacy, as both consumers or employees (for domestic workers).<sup>53</sup>

The Leplaysian heritage is evident in the fact that a ‘continuator of Le Play’, Pierre du Maroussem, partially trained the LSA investigators. As a professor at the Collège libre des sciences sociales, he agreed to advise them on the production of ‘monographs’ (the term used by Leplaysians). He even ran a course for LSA members at the College. Focusing mainly on the clothing, food and housing industries, which du Maroussem had studied, this course included theoretical lessons as well as visits. It was chosen for good reason, for it symbolized Leplaysian investigation’s orientation towards applications other than working-class families. In the 1890s, du Maroussem had himself conducted investigations for the Office du travail (the labour bureau). However, the LSA studied the workplace and not working-class families.

Since Pierre du Maroussem was at the Office du travail, we can assume that proximity to this Office was also a resource for the surveyors. The LSA even published a questionnaire from the Office in its review when it investigated domestic work in the lingerie industry. More generally, visits to the Musée social and other spaces in the ‘reformist nebula’, where LSA members frequented Republicans, were also central to the formation of an investigating ethos. Moreover, as in the reformist nebula as a whole, the LSA was primarily concerned with children and women (men's work was regulated only later).<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the Leplaysian heritage and the spaces for dialogue with other reformers, there was also the circulation of practices within the Catholic community, where many investigations were carried out in general, and with American consumer leagues. French women, for example, often cited a survey conducted by the New York League on department stores. Henriette J. Brunhes also wrote an ‘instruction manual’ for interviewers, in a letter, in

---

<sup>53</sup>M.-E. Chessel, ‘Genre, consommation et enquêtes sociales, La Ligue sociale d’acheteurs au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in C. Charle and J. Vincent (eds), *La société civile*, 293-314.

<sup>54</sup>C. Chambelland (ed.), *Le Musée social en son temps* (Paris, 1998); I. Moret-Lespinet, *L’Office du travail (1891-1914). La République et la réforme sociale* (Rennes, 2007).

which she explained the need to combine documentary research with ‘field’ surveys, the importance of observation and note-taking, and the need to record ‘facts’ and ‘figures’ (and not vague and subjective impressions)<sup>55</sup>. She moreover insisted on the time required for the investigation: at least three or four months. In sum, these women relied on the fact that they were consumers to allow them to investigate bakeries, sewing workshops or laundries. The fact of having ‘seen’ subsequently legitimized their public discourse. During the *Semaines sociales*, men acted as experts and women as ‘witnesses’. It was for this reason that they were invited to give their opinion on the regulation of domestic work. A law was passed in this respect in 1914 but, like many social laws at the time, was never applied.<sup>56</sup>

In the inter-war period, the UFCS’s surveys concerned not the world of work but living conditions and budgets, and here again we find the Leplaysian tradition, even if the inquiries were no longer ‘monographs’. In the 1940s, surveys were conducted using ‘housewives’ notebooks’, in which the prices of food and objects were recorded. In 1946, tables were published in the movement’s journal, giving figures for the father’s monthly wage and for family allowances, to present the living conditions of a household. Mothers were used to produce survey data.<sup>57</sup> After the war, surveys continued to be carried out, not only on consumption but also on the organization of distribution and on urban problems. The UFCS’s action was then part of a broader approach that consisted in focusing on ‘inhabitants’ and the ‘living environment’ (and no longer on consumers). This approach was developed by other organizations fostered by social Catholicism, with sociologists such as Paul Henry Chombart de Lauwe.<sup>58</sup>

Surveys were also conducted by other organizations within the social Catholic nebula, born at different times, throughout the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> At the Association catholique de la jeunesse française, founded in 1886, the survey was seen as a source for training ‘informed

---

<sup>55</sup> AN, 615AP82, Lettre d’Henriette Brunhes à Mme Audollent, 1903.

<sup>56</sup> C. Avrane, *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> M.-E. Chessel, “Catholiques militants”.

<sup>58</sup> O. Join-Lambert, Y. Lochar, ‘Living in the City Differently: The Birth of New Expertise in France in the 1960s and 1970s’, in A. Chatriot, M.-E. Chessel, M. Hilton (eds), *The Expert Consumer*, 167-185.

<sup>59</sup> D. Pelletier, “Le catholicisme social en France”.

and generous citizens' in the inter-war period. In the 1920s, the organization carried out a major investigation into the conditions of municipal life and called on Catholics to fulfil their 'civic duties'.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in the social secretariats, organizations formed at the beginning of the twentieth century to document and prepare the action of social Catholics around the *Chronique sociale de France* and the *Semaines sociales*, surveys were carried out and citizens were informed of their rights.<sup>61</sup> The review *Savoir*, edited by clerics and published by the Union régionale des secrétariats sociaux in the north of France from 1948, contained information on 'family rights', 'workers' rights', the 'rights of the elderly', and so on. Priests were, for instance, supposed to inform the elderly of their rights: 'To ignore them is not only to ignore a fundamental aspect of parishioners' real life, but also to fail to give them charity or to inform them on rights that are very generally unknown'.<sup>62</sup> In parallel, from the 1920s to the 1970s, investigative practices developed in Action catholique spécialisée organizations such as the Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne (JOC), the Jeunesse agricole catholique (JAC), and their female counterparts, along with adult organizations such as the Mouvement Populaire des Familles.<sup>63</sup> For example, in the mid-1930s, the JOCF conducted a survey on marriage preparation, which had two aspects: material, and spiritual. These investigations were at the heart of the activists' work.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Le congrès de l'Association catholique de la jeunesse française sur la vie municipale', *Chronique sociale de France*, mai 1923, 282-285. C. Molette, *L'ACJF (1886-1907). Une prise de conscience du laïcat catholique* (Paris, 1968); A.-R. Michel, *Catholiques en démocratie* (Paris, 2006). These surveys can be consulted at the library La Contemporaine (F/DELTA/RES/0195).

<sup>61</sup> O. Chatelan, 'Un catholicisme social omniprésent mais peu connu : les secrétariats sociaux en France, des origines aux années 1960', *Chrétiens et sociétés*, 22 (2015), 247-266.

<sup>62</sup> 'Quelles activités peut-on proposer à une association familiale', *Savoir* (4, 1947), 2; 'Aux patrons, aux ouvriers', *Savoir*, 13 (1948); 'Les droits des vieux', *Savoir*, 40, 42, 43 and 44 (1951). Citation in *Savoir*, 43 (1951), 2. On the surveys of social secretariats: 'Un problème rural clé : l'avenir des jeunes ruraux. Un effort en vue de sa solution : une enquête en cours', *Savoir*, 56 (1952), 2. On the history of the rights of the 'elderly': C. Capuano, *Que faire de nos vieux ? Une histoire de la protection sociale de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> G. Tamburini, 'De l'enquête jociste à la campagne nationale MPF', *Les cahiers du GRMF (Groupement de recherche sur les mouvements familiaux)*, 10 (1997), 73-105.

<sup>64</sup> P. Pierrard, M. Launay, R. Trempé, *La JOC. Regards d'historiens* (Paris, 1984); J. Aubert-Picard, *JOC, qu'as-tu fait de nos vies? La Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne féminine, 1928-1945* (Paris, 1990). C. Lhotte, E. Dupeyrat, 'La préparation du futur foyer de la jeune travailleuse. Une enquête de la JOCF', *Dossiers de l'Action Populaire* (1937); 'Notre enquête', *L'équipe ouvrière féminine*, 9 (1935) and M.-E. Chessel, A. Egea, 'Céline Lhotte, Elisabeth Dupeyrat, « La préparation du futur de la jeune travailleuse ». Présentation d'un document', *Les Etudes sociales*, 169 (2019), 197-232. On 'facts' at the JOC, A. Favier, 'La révision de vie. Une pratique religieuse méconnue au cœur du catholicisme français', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 186 (2019), 141-162.

## IV

The social Catholic movements, which have become a tiny minority in secular France, have nevertheless contributed to the construction and enforcement of a number of universal rights. Within the framework of a web of organizations, women and men acted together in bodies that were sometimes mixed, sometimes only female or male. They collaborated with non-Catholics, Protestants and the laity, which other Catholics considered subversive at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which earned them several condemnations from the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>65</sup> Their associative action – and the defence of rights stemming from it – made it possible for these social Catholics to be integrated into the Third and Fourth Republics. This was particularly true for women. In associative action, they found a legitimate mode of action and recognition of their expertise in the public sphere, particularly through social surveys.

This was also the case for social Catholic men who, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, used associative or reformist action to carve out a place in an anti-clerical Third Republic. These social Catholics also participated in the genesis of international labour legislation, owing to the presence in their ranks of several Catholic lawyers who participated with others in founding the International Association for the Legal Protection of Workers in 1900. Paul Cauwès and Raoul Jay, professors at the Faculty of Law in Paris and members of the LSA, were the founders, with the participation of other LSA members such as Max Turmann and Jean Brunhes.<sup>66</sup>

Surprisingly, no Catholics or Protestants were involved in the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919. The tripartite structure (States, employers,

---

<sup>65</sup> P. J. Bernardi, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, and Action Française, The Clash over the Church's Role in Society during the Modernist Era* (Washington, DC, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> F. Audren, 'La belle époque des juristes catholiques (1880-1914)', *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques* (28, 2008), 233-272 ; M. Turmann, 'La législation internationale du travail et les chrétiens sociaux', *Revue internationale du travail* (6, 1922), 3-10.

trade unions) did not allow them to be represented as such.<sup>67</sup> However, the Director of the ILO, Albert Thomas, found a solution to allow the presence of social Catholics and Protestants in the ILO movement in 1919: he created two civil servant posts specifically dedicated to relations with Christian circles. Thus, a founding father of Action populaire – a Jesuit organization at the heart of social Catholicism – was appointed to the ILO in 1926. Several people have succeeded one another in this position until today. Similarly, a Protestant representative was appointed until the Second World War. This dual representation was an original way of recognizing the role social Catholics and Protestants played in the genesis of international labour legislation.<sup>68</sup>

This recognition was not coincidental; it stemmed from the sharing of values and practices between social Catholics and the ILO in the inter-war period. The values were those that social Catholics had defended since the early twentieth century: the ‘protection’ of fragile populations rather than rights *per se*. The discourse concerning the protection of children, women, and colonial populations was however shared by social Catholics and ILO officials. It made it possible not to upset the employees on the one hand, and governments on the other. The practices themselves concerned social surveys: as the ILO became a space for investigation and the creation of expertise on the world of labour, it was through this means that the international organization sought to legitimize its action, rather than by relying on the rhetoric of rights. This practice and role dedicated to expertise and ‘facts’ fostered encounters with social Catholics.

---

<sup>67</sup> The same is true for women's associations and cooperatives: S. Kott, ‘From transnational reformist network to international organization. The international association for labour legislation and the international labour organization 1900-1930s’, in D. Rodogno, S. Bernard, J. Vogel (eds), *Shaping the Transnational Sphere, Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s* (New York, 2014), 239-258. On the issue of representation: M. Louis, *Qu'est-ce qu'une bonne représentation? L'Organisation internationale du travail de 1919 à nos jours* (Paris, 2016).

<sup>68</sup> A. Zaragori, ‘L'Organisation internationale du travail et les milieux chrétiens (1919-1969)’ (PhD, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 2018); A. Zaragori, ‘L'OIT, le Saint-Siège et les milieux catholiques africains et latino-américains dans les années 1950 et 1960’, *Le Mouvement social*, 263 (2018), 123-138; A. Zaragori, ‘Voir, juger, agir. Les mouvements de jeunesse d'Action catholique spécialisée et l'Organisation internationale du travail’, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 110 (2015), 188-214; A. Zaragori, ‘Un parcours entre deux mondes: Georges Thélin, l'Organisation internationale du travail et les milieux protestants internationaux (1926-1940)’, *Chrétiens et sociétés*, 22 (2015), 221-246.

Paradoxically, both in France and within the ILO, Catholic employers, who organized from the 1920s onwards, were virtually absent from discussions on social rights. One might have expected Joseph Zamanski (1874-1962), a confirmed ‘social Catholic’ since the early twentieth century, to intervene. A member of the LSA before the First World War, and a frequent participant in the *Semaines sociales*, he had been at the head of a biscuit factory and founded, in 1926, the French Catholic employers' movement, the *Confédération française des professions*, which united several movements that had previously existed. He remained present in this movement until his death in 1962, and during this time, he participated in dinners organized by Andrée Butillard, the founder of the UFCS, where current affairs were discussed.<sup>69</sup> At an international level, one might also have expected that the first two Jesuits to occupy the position of Catholic civil servant at the ILO would have encouraged French Catholic employers to intervene. These two Jesuit priests, Fathers Arnou and Danset, were actually also the first ecclesiastical advisors to the *Confédération française des professions* (before or after their mandate at the ILO).<sup>70</sup>

And yet, the *Confédération française des professions* did not directly lobby to defend certain individual rights that its members had contributed to setting up (for instance family allowances or profit-sharing in companies).<sup>71</sup> Constantly oscillating between public political action and more spiritual action to educate its members, the Catholic employers' organization, which changed its name to the *Centre français du patronat chrétien* in 1948, was virtually inaudible in these debates. The public voice of employers was dominated by other employers' organizations, including the CGPME (*Confédération Générale des petites et moyennes entreprises*) and the CNPF (*Conseil National du Patronat Français*) from 1944 and 1945 onwards. So too, at the international level, a federation of Christian employers, UNIAPAC (*International Union of Catholic Business Associations*) had existed since 1949.

---

<sup>69</sup>S. Chaperon, *Ibid*, 142-143.

<sup>70</sup> Fr. Danset was an ecclesiastical advisor to the CFP from 1926 to 1932, before going to the ILO (1934-1935), while P. Arnou was first at the ILO (1926-1932) and then at the CFPC from 1932 to 1955. A. Arnou, *L'Organisation internationale du travail et les catholiques* (Paris, 1933); M.-E. Chessel, N. de Bremond d'Ars, A. Grelon, *L'entreprise et l'Évangile, Une histoire des patrons chrétiens* (Paris, 2018), 24-26.

<sup>71</sup> S. Pedersen, *Family, dependence and the origins of the Welfare State, Britain and France 1914-1945* (Cambridge, 1993), 224-288, 357-411.

However, at the ILO it was as inactive as the French organization was at a national level. This was undoubtedly due to employers' unity around the International Employers' Organization, on the one hand, and to the diversity of Christian employers' organizations (Catholic and Protestant) at European level.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the surprising silence of Christian employers on the question of rights, organizations led by social Catholics represent a particularly interesting prism through which to view the twentieth-century social history of France. They make it possible to rethink the history of consumption, women, companies, training and other themes. The archives of these organizations – which are numerous and still under-exploited – enable us to examine practices, which may be in contradiction with discourses. There is still extensive research to be done on social inquiry, in particular, in these Catholic circles in the twentieth century.

---

<sup>72</sup>A. Zaragori, 'L'Organisation', *Ibid.* On UNIAPAC : J.B. Gremillion, *The Catholic movement of employers and managers* (Rome, 1961).