



5-1-1992

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Edward J. Woell

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EAPTIZING MARXISM?
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CATHOLIC PRESS REACTION
TO THE WORKER-PRIEST MOVEMENT IN FRANCE.

by
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Bachelor of Arts,
North Dakota State University, 1987

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
1992

T1992
W82

This Thesis submitted by Edward J. Woell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my advisory committee members, Dr. James Vivian and Dr. Gordon Iseminger, whose advice and guidance enabled me to become a better student of history. I am especially grateful to my advisor, Dr. Playford Thorson, who never ceased to support and encourage me as I worked on this thesis.

I will always be indebted to my mother and father for giving me the opportunity to pursue this study. In addition to providing me with financial and moral support, they have taught me the importance of justice and compassion--the foundation upon which this thesis was written.

ABSTRACT

From 1943 to 1954 a small religious experiment called the worker-priest movement took place in France. Journalists throughout the world, including Catholic writers and editors from Great Britain, Ireland, Canada and the United States, provided coverage of the worker-priest movement. How the English-language Catholic press reacted to the movement, as well as what that reaction represents, is the subject of this thesis.

The introduction outlines the major themes of this study, and is followed by two chapters that establish the background and context of the worker-priest movement. Chapter I is an explanation of why the worker-priest movement was initiated in the first place. It shows that there were numerous events and circumstances that led to a large proportion of French industrial workers, "the proletariat," abandoning or neglecting Christianity. Chapter II describes the movement's history in its entirety, but it specifically reveals the facts about the first worker-priest mission, which took place from 1943 to 1954.

Chapter III is an examination of articles written

published in eight Catholic periodicals from Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and the United States, constitute the thesis' primary source material. They are arranged topically, that is, according to the different problems or questions that they address.

The fourth and final chapter is an analysis of English-language Catholic press coverage of the worker-priest movement. This portion of the thesis illustrates why the press reacted as it did and focuses primarily on the accusation that the worker-priests were being heavily influenced by French communists and Marxist ideas. It points out that the Catholic press' allegations that the worker-priest were becoming communists were inaccurate and shows that these journalists were motivated by the collective fear of communism that pervaded the Roman Catholic Church during the years of the worker-priest movement.

The conclusion, in addition to summarizing the thesis, assesses the worker-priest movement as it relates to contemporary developments in the Roman Catholic Church.

INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the twentieth century a small number of French priests left their parishes, donned overalls, took to industrial factories and proletarian neighborhoods, and sought to convert the laboring class to Roman Catholicism. They eventually acquired the name, "pretres-ouvriers," worker-priests, and their mission became known as, "the worker-priest movement."

The worker-priest movement was highly innovative as well as controversial, and for these reasons journalists throughout the world wrote about this peculiar religious experiment in France. Press coverage of the movement, in and of itself, was controversial as well. This thesis considers how one segment of the press, namely English-language Catholic journalists, reacted to the worker-priest movement, questions whether this response was justified, and offers explanations for the press reaction. But in order to explain English-language Catholic press reaction fully, this study also discusses what the worker-priest movement was and why it was initiated. The thesis addresses, therefore, five basic questions related to the worker-priest movement.

First of all, a number of French Catholic clergy initiated the worker-priest movement in 1943 in response to the problem of proletarian indifference to Christianity. This crisis began when the industrial revolution brought about dramatic political, social, and economic changes in France. As these changes were taking place, the French Church ignored or avoided what was happening, and one result of the Church's complacency was that the proletariat gradually stopped practicing Roman Catholicism. That Industrial workers, furthermore, embraced socialist ideologies and labor organizations also tended to distance them from the Roman Catholic Church.

Second, the worker-priest movement itself was part of the French "Social Catholicism" tradition and began as a mission to evangelize the French proletariat. But the worker-priests took it upon themselves to do more than just preach and administer sacraments. Some worker-priests became members of a predominantly Marxist labor union and participated in strikes--a few even took part in an illegal peace demonstration. Church leaders in France as well as at the Vatican disliked the direction that the movement had taken, and less than ten years after the worker-priests began their ministry, the Catholic hierarchy curtailed it. The worker-priest movement all but ended in 1954, but it resumed in a new form in 1965 and it is still having an impact in France and throughout the world.

Third, English-language Catholic journalists wrote about the worker-priest movement as it was occurring, and for several years after the 1953 decision to restrict it. The English-language Catholic press' articles discuss a wide range of issues, especially the more controversial aspects of the worker-priest movement, and they reveal great deal about the historical context in which the movement took place. English-language Catholic journalists seemed most concerned about worker-priests being "infected" with Marxism--implying that the worker-priests were becoming heretical.

Fourth, the English-language Catholic press' accusation that the worker-priests were being influenced by communists was largely unjustified. English-language Catholic journalists misrepresented the worker-priests when it came to the issue of Marxism by distorting some of the circumstances and events surrounding the movement. The Catholic press exaggerated, for example, the significance of affiliations between worker-priests and communists. Contrary to what Catholic journalists reported, the vast majority of worker-priests did not abandon their Catholic faith for Marxism.

Finally, the English-language Catholic press' reaction, or rather the overreaction, is attributable to the pervasive fear of communism that pervaded western Europe and North America--including the Roman Catholic

Church--in the early 1950s. The accusation that worker-priests were tending toward Marxism is, more than anything, indicative of the Catholic preoccupation with communism that existed in English-language countries at that time. The Catholic press was far from being free of this prejudice; on the contrary, it shared in the mentality that communism was a malevolent threat to humanity.

These five answers are dissimilar, but they all seem to share a common theme; they all point to the notion that the Roman Catholic Church as well as the English-language Catholic press, victimized the worker-priests. The French Catholic hierarchy unjustly treated the worker-priests because it ignored the plight of proletarians, but then criticized the worker-priests for trying to correct the problems for which they were largely responsible. Vatican officials did not deal with the worker-priests in good faith and exercised poor judgement in their aggressive pursuit to restrict the movement.

The English-language Catholic press victimized the worker-priests by accusing them of "baptizing Marxism," that is, reconciling Marxism with Christianity, even though it had no evidence for this accusation. English-language Catholic journalists blindly embraced the anticommunist fervor of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s, which is why they misrepresented the worker-priests.

CHAPTER I.

A CRISIS IN FAITH

In 1943, when Catholic leaders sent the worker-priests on their mission, working-class religious apathy was a serious problem for the French Church. It was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, caused by numerous social, cultural, and political developments in French history. What made matters even worse was that by 1943 the French Catholic hierarchy had waited too long to respond to the problem, thereby precipitating a crisis that was far beyond their control.

In some respects, proletarian indifference to Christianity stems from circumstances that existed before the 1789 Revolution. During the "ancien regime" the French Church had enormous political power and influence,¹ and the Catholic hierarchy consisted mostly of men from aristocratic families.² By the eighteenth century the Church and the monarchy in France had developed an interdependent relationship, a "throne and altar" alliance.³ Consequently, when proletarians in the nineteenth century looked at French Catholicism's legacy, they had good reason to conclude that the Church was the working class' enemy. For centuries French Church leaders

had sympathized with the monarchy and aristocracy, while often ignoring the peasants' plight.⁴

The 1789 Revolution, however, abolished the long-time alliance between throne and altar and decimated the French Church. The Republic seized ecclesiastical property and disbanded many religious orders, while most cardinals and bishops lost their political power and influence.⁵ During the Revolution, persecution of the clergy was commonplace and republican leaders propagated ideas that were hostile to Roman Catholicism.⁶ Many bishops and priests emigrated to other parts of Europe because they had refused to abide by the revolutionary edict known as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.⁷

For two reasons, the dismantling of French Catholicism during the Revolution affected the relationship between the Church and the working-class in subsequent years. First, because it had lost human and material resources during the Revolution, the French Church later was unable to aid poor laborers, construct parishes in urban areas, and recruit clergy who could serve proletarian congregations.⁸ Second, the anticlericalism that revolutionaries had preached remained prevalent in France--particularly in regions from which many proletarians originated.⁹ The loss of Church resources and the propagation of anti-Catholicism did not create the dramatic breach between workers and the Church, but it certainly paved the way.

The 1789 Revolution was not the only crisis that confronted French Catholicism during the nineteenth century; the industrial revolution also created problems for the French Church. Although industrialism started slowly and relatively late in France, it nevertheless produced drastic social and economic changes.¹⁰ Initially the French Church did not acknowledge these changes, and it responded lethargically and belatedly to the problems that industrialism had left in its wake.

The French Church denied the need for change because it refused to abandon its then-outdated conception of society. French Catholic leaders failed to realize that the parish was an entirely inadequate social structure for urban settings and that unless they adapted their institutions to urbanized life, the Church would not remain an integral part of peoples' lives. Worker-priest historian Oscar Arnal pointed out that the Church's initial response to urbanization was to raise "eulogies to an idyllic pastoral world which was becoming obsolete."¹¹

The French Church also neglected to do anything about the industrial laborers' horrendous living and working conditions. In the early phase of the France's industrial revolution, a fifteen hour workday for an industrial laborer was quite common.¹² Because proletarians had to work twelve to fifteen hours each day, sometimes including Sundays, they did not have time to attend church.¹³ That

industrial work was very exhausting also deterred workers from church participation. Poor laborers had little time to devote to religion because they had to concentrate their efforts on trying to make ends meet.¹⁴ Social legislation regarding the French proletarians' living and working conditions, for the most part, did not emerge until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁵ If the French Church had advocated social reform earlier in the 1800s, it would have better enabled workers to continue attending church.

When the French Church did respond to the social and economic problems of industrial workers, by and large the reaction was weak and ineffectual. Adrien Dansette, author of The Religious History of Modern France, wrote that the Church had relied on charity to relieve problems of poverty and degradation without "realizing that the development of an industrial civilization had made possible justice as well as charity."¹⁶ In other words, the French Church sought to address the effects of socio-economic problems, namely hunger and homelessness, instead of their causes, such as low wages and unjust employment practices.

French Church leaders could have pushed for legislation to alleviate deplorable working-class conditions, but it was more concerned with achieving a political objective. Throughout the nineteenth century the French Catholic hierarchy invested its political energy in preserving the Church's control over French education.¹⁷

Because it concentrated on this one issue, the Catholic hierarchy did not have any desire to seek economic and social reform.

The French Church realized that in order for it to maintain control of French education, it would have to oppose those who were advocating social reform. Catholic leaders threw their support behind Louis Napoleon and the Second Empire in the 1850s because it was a way for them to obtain their most prized political objective. The French Church's support of the empire was an indirect repudiation of those who sought to improve working-class conditions.¹⁸

By supporting Napoleon III, the French Church joined forces with the middle class, the bourgeoisie, in the hope that Catholicism would regain its one-time omnipotent status, and the new partnership served as a writ of divorce between the Church and the masses. Church historian Joseph Moody wrote that Catholic leaders "rejected any amelioration in the condition of the industrial workers" and that the result of this political action was "the permanent estrangement of the Church from the masses of the French people." Moody asserted that 1848--not 1789--was "the year of decision" for the Roman Catholic Church in France.¹⁹

The French Catholic hierarchy and the bourgeoisie cooperated in thwarting proletarian demands for better pay and improved working conditions. Val Lorwin, in The French

Labor Movement, pointed out that one result of the Church-bourgeois alliance was that French Catholic leaders had sided with employers in labor conflicts. Lorwin wrote:

In this period [the 1850s and 1860s] the alienation of most of the working class from the church of its fathers was consummated. The Church was an established church, associated with authority, with the monarchy earlier and now with the empire to which it rallied, and with the hard-fisted employer. . . . As one Catholic writer [Edmond Pognon] recently put it, the workers "thought they saw God behind the employers, the gendarmes, the judges, all arrayed against the hungry strikers. Could this God be the good Lord? And if he was not good, could he even be true?"²⁰

The French Church's disdain for proletarians was apparent in more than just political affairs and labor disputes, Workers also felt the contempt that many French Catholics had for them whenever they attended church. Most workers were unable to afford the proper clothes that were supposed to be worn during mass, and they had to sit in the back of the church because they could not afford pews. Catholic priests often preached sermons that laborers could not understand or appreciate because they were filled with bourgeois values. The priests told workers that their poverty was God's will and that for them to seek to improve their lot in life was, consequently, a sin. They warned proletarians that they would not go to heaven unless they were meek and resigned to their miserable role in life. Priests, moreover, condemned "concubinage," that is, premarital cohabitation--a common

practice for workers who could not afford the expenses associated with an official marriage ceremony.²¹ For these and other reasons, the workers thought that the Roman Catholic Church was essentially a bourgeois institution-- which was an accurate perception in most respects.

Because the French Church showed little regard for the proletariat, workers had to look elsewhere for advocacy and consolation. Organized labor, unlike the French Church, offered workers social, political, and moral support.²² In some ways, unions gave workers a sense of spiritual fulfillment. D. G. Charlton, in Secular Religions in France 1815-1870, wrote that intellectuals such as Karl Marx and Pierre Proudhon had rejected Christianity, but then had supplanted it with quasi-religions of their own.²³ The degree to which proletarians put their "faith" in Marxist and Proudhonist doctrines, however, is difficult to determine. French history writer Gordon Wright wrote that although there had been many proletarian disciples of socialism, most workers had not strongly adhered to Marxism's "apocalyptic dogma."²⁴

Even if labor unions did serve as a religious "surrogate," however, they could not have assumed this role before the 1890s. Organized labor developed slowly and did not become a predominant force until the turn of the century. In 1864, workers, intellectuals, and cooperatives established a loose affiliation called the First

International.²⁵ During the second half of the nineteenth century French labor organizations grew in popularity as the industrial workforce expanded, and the proletariat gradually developed a class-consciousness.²⁶ The French government legalized trade unions in 1884, and the major industrial workers' union, Confederation Generale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor, or CGT), was born in 1895.²⁷

If indeed organized labor replaced Christianity in the hearts and minds of proletarians, the General Confederation of Labor has the distinction of being the most infamous French "church." Growth in CGT membership over the first half of the twentieth century illustrates the union's popularity. On the eve of the First World War there were six million industrial laborers, about 500,000 of whom belonged to CGT.²⁸ The CGT grew after the Great War, but split into two factions in 1920.²⁹ Under the Popular Front in 1936, the union reunited and claimed a membership of about 1,100,000.³⁰ Immediately after the Second World War, the CGT burgeoned to 5,454,000 members, but by 1953 the General Confederation of Labor had 1,500,000 workers.³¹ Despite fluctuations in its membership, however, the CGT remained the preeminent French labor union during this time.

By the 1930s and 1940s a French industrial worker who faithfully practiced Catholicism was rare; the

proletariat was Catholic in name only. French laborers may not have been Marxists, but most agreed with the more common socialist ideas. By the middle of the twentieth century, French Church activists and researchers noted that traditional religious practices such as baptism and marriage had sharply dropped among proletarians.³²

The enormous chasm that developed between industrial workers and the Roman Catholic Church in France was due to several key developments. The French Church's long-time association with aristocracy and monarchy, its loss of resources during the Revolution, its inability to adapt to urbanization and to address the socio-economic effects of industrialism, the alliance between the bourgeois order and the French Church, the advent of socialism and organized labor--these all contributed to alienating the French proletariat from Christianity.

Religious apathy among poor urban workers was pervasive in every society that had gone through an industrial revolution, and France was no exception. The crisis in faith among French proletarians was extensive and deep, and by the 1940s it occurred to several French Catholic clergy that the problem was very severe. They concluded that they had to find a radical solution in response to the crisis. Enter the worker-priest movement.

CHAPTER I. NOTES

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⁹Joseph N. Moody, Church and Society: Catholic Social and Political Thought and Movements 1789-1950 (New York: Arts, Inc., 1953), 118.

¹⁰Gordon Wright, France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987), 154.

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¹²Wright, 168.

¹³Price, 210.

¹⁴Adrien Dansette, Religious History of Modern France, Volume 1, From the Revolution to the Third Republic (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 300.

¹⁵Wright, 281.

¹⁶Dansette, 361-62.

¹⁷Ibid., 354.

¹⁸Moody, 130-35.

¹⁹Ibid., 130.

²⁰Val Lorwin, The French Labor Movement (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), 10.

²¹Price, 301.

²²Arnal, 49.

²³D. G. Charlton, Secular Religions in France 1815-1870 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 4.

²⁴Wright, 283.

²⁵Ibid., 170.

²⁶Ibid., 171.

²⁷Ibid., 281.

²⁸Lorwin, 43.

²⁹Ibid., 55.

³⁰Ibid., 70, 101.

³¹Ibid., 177.

³²Arnal, 50.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORKER-PRIESTS

The original worker-priest movement in France took place from 1943 to 1954. But in a larger sense, the worker-priest legacy spans a much longer time period. The movement is just one chapter in what can be called the French Catholic equivalent of the "social gospel" tradition, which extends well back into the nineteenth century. Even though the Church restricted the worker-priests in 1953 and then ended the movement in 1959, it authorized the beginning of a similar mission in 1965. Worker-priests are still thriving, and the original movement is still having an impact within the Roman Catholic Church.

Several notable French Catholics called for the Church to work for social and economic reform in nineteenth-century France. They were, in a sense, the forerunners of the worker-priests. During the 1830s the Reverend Felicite de Lamennais attacked the Catholic hierarchy for its long-time dependence upon the monarchy. Lamennais believed that the best way that the French Church could facilitate social equality was to separate itself from the state and from the throne.¹ The writer Frederic Ozanam emerged as a Catholic

defender of the French proletariat in the 1840s. Ozanam supported state control over some industries so that industrial laborers would receive just wages.² Count Albert de Mun wanted the Church to initiate social reform in the latter part of the nineteenth century. De Mun contended that socio-economic problems could be corrected if a medieval institution, the guild, was revived.³ Another Catholic advocate for proletarians was the Social Democrat Marc Sagnier, who had been politically active during the early twentieth century. Sagnier urged French Catholic workers to join the General Confederation of Labor instead of the new Catholic labor unions that were being formed in his day because he felt that the CGT was the only union that could be an instrument for a social transformation.⁴ These men were largely unsuccessful in their efforts, however, because they represented only a small minority in the French Church, and they often were repudiated or condemned by the French hierarchy as well as by the Pope.⁵

A turning point in the Roman Catholic Church came when Pope Leo XIII promulgated his 1891 encyclical, Rerum Novarum. It was the first time that the Catholic Church outlined its position regarding economic liberalism and the Industrial Revolution.⁶ Pope Leo warned Catholics that they could not remain indifferent to the abuses of capitalism. He condemned "the small number of very rich

men [who] have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than slavery itself."⁷ Rerum Novarum gave legitimacy to the efforts of Albert de Mun and other French Catholics who, at the turn of the century, were trying to enact reforms such as fixed salaries for industrial laborers, workers' compensation, and pension funds.⁸

French Catholics began to organize their own unions about the same time that Rerum Novarum was issued, and efforts to create Catholic labor unions continued well into the twentieth century. In 1891 a group of textile workers in the north of France formed the country's first Catholic industrial labor union.⁹ Subsequently, there were numerous attempts to create one nation-wide Catholic labor union. It was not until 1919, however, that "Confederation Francaise de Travailleurs Chretiens" (French Confederation of Christian Workers, or CFTC) was born. The CFTC was the largest Catholic trade union in France.¹⁰ Its leaders encouraged workers to cooperate with employers and the state--in contrast to the General Confederation of Labor, which tended to be more confrontational.¹¹ The CFTC claimed 140,000 members in 1920, a relatively small number when compared to the membership of CGT.¹²

In 1927 "Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne" (Christian Working Youth, or JOC), a labor organization for young Catholics, began.¹³ The JOC movement got off to a

promising start and was a surprisingly successful organization. By the late 1930s it had a membership of 65,000.¹⁴ The "Jocists" comprised the single most important proletarian youth group in France by 1940, but due to the Second World War and German occupation, they splintered into pro-Vichy and anti-Vichy factions.¹⁵

The CFTC and the JOC were attempts on the part of French Catholics to foster Christianity among the proletariat. Despite the relative success of the two organizations, however, most French proletarians were still estranged from the Catholic Church by the outbreak of the Second World War. Two priests pointed out the existence of working-class indifference to Christianity in a report that they wrote for the French Church in 1943. The Reverends Yvan Daniel and Henri Godin published a controversial booklet entitled France, pays de Mission? (France, a Mission Country?).¹⁶ Daniel and Godin wrote that France, due to wide-spread unbelief, was a pagan country and that the working class could not be converted through the conventional structure of the inner-city parish.¹⁷ Daniel and Godin urged that a Christian community--a mission--be established in the midst of the working-class world.¹⁸ They never suggested that priests should become workers, but they did believe that a missionary clergy was a necessity.¹⁹

Daniel and Godin were instrumental in establishing the

worker-priest movement. Actually, the movement started in two ways. On March 9, 1943, the Assembly of French Cardinals and Archbishops met to discuss a plan by German Nazis to deport eight thousand French workers to labor camps in Germany without allowing any Catholic chaplains to accompany them. The hierarchy decided to send to the camps twenty-five priests to the camps disguised as workers. Before the Gestapo arrested twenty-four of the chaplains, they worked along side everyone else in addition to providing pastoral ministry. These clandestine priests, some of whom died in concentration camps, actually were the first worker-priests.²⁰

The Jesuit Henri Perrin, one of the French priests who had been sent to Germany, wrote about his experiences in the labor camp in a book entitled Priest-Workman in Germany. Perrin wrote that at first workers treated him with contempt. Proletarians, according to Perrin, thought that priests were nothing more than men of money, who begged from others because they were too lazy to work for themselves.²¹ But Perrin persevered through all the struggles and formed a small Christian group when he was imprisoned. He returned to France near the end of the war and continued his ministry as a worker-priest.²²

While Perrin was in Germany, a similar worker-priest ministry started in France when Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, the Archbishop of Paris during the Second World War,

initiated an experiment called "Mission de Paris".²³ Suhard, inspired by Daniel and Godin's France pays de Mission?, started to make plans for his missionary project on July 1, 1943. The mission's goal was simple: to convert the Paris proletariat to Christianity. Suhard called for a team of priests to be relieved of all regular duties so that they could concentrate on evangelizing manual and clerical workers in the Paris region.²⁴ The Archbishop had no clear plan regarding how these new missionaries would win over the working class. He believed that they would have to find their own unique way of bringing the gospel to workers.²⁵

Suhard's mission began slowly and at first lacked direction. Initially it was just a Paris-based ministry, but the worker-priest movement eventually spread out to other areas, including Marseille, Lyon, Limoges, and even Belgian cities.²⁶ Those who joined the Mission de Paris were mostly diocesan or "secular" priests, but some were from religious orders--there were Dominican, Jesuit, Franciscan, and Capuchin worker-priests.²⁷ Gradually, the missionary priests applied for manual work positions in an effort to express their solidarity with the laborers and to identify more closely with them.²⁸

The worker-priests tried to integrate manual labor with their spiritual responsibilities. Typically, a worker-priest labored most of the day in a factory or industry,

then held discussions or celebrated mass with his fellow workers in the evening.²⁹ Some worker-priests worked and lived together in small groups, while others lived by themselves in proletarian neighborhoods.³⁰ It was an exhaustive, harsh, and sometimes lonely way of life, but most of the worker-priests accepted these hardships as part of their calling.³¹ They did not expect to convert the French proletariat overnight. Mission de Paris was a long-range missionary endeavor--some called it a "fifty-year gamble."³²

As the worker-priests labored in factories, they increasingly won the respect of the industrial laborers with whom they worked. Most proletarians became impressed with the worker-priests' commitment to the working class.³³ A Dominican priest, Albert Bouche, wrote that when he began his ministry he had encountered a great deal of anticlerical sentiment. Many laborers first believed that the worker-priests were sent by the pope to accomplish some political objective. Bouche added, however, that the animosity subsided once laborers realized that worker-priests were sincere in their desire to help workers. Proletarians and worker-priests exchanged ideas, and many friendships eventually formed.³⁴

The worker-priests were grateful that they had been accepted by their fellow workers, but overall their mission offered very little consolation. The more worker-priests

became involved in the proletarian milieu, the more they encountered working-class misery. Worker-priests experienced the horrendous conditions that proletarians were forced to endure, and they reflected upon what they could do about improving the workers' lot.³⁵ They realized that political activism, although controversial, was a way to alleviate appalling proletarian living and working conditions.

The worker-priests, therefore, became engaged in labor union activities. A few of the priests joined the Catholic labor union, the CFTC, but most of them joined the predominantly communist labor union, the CGT. The worker-priests who joined the CGT defended their membership with the argument that they could not be full-fledged proletarians if they joined the CFTC.³⁶ The worker-priests fought for the rights of workers through their involvement in labor disputes, strikes, and other union activities.³⁷

The worker-priests' labor and political activism sparked a great deal of controversy in France. From the moment of its inception, the movement had been immersed in controversy, and the worker-priests' activism added fuel to the fire. Some Roman Catholics, particularly the French hierarchy and officials in Rome, objected to what the worker-priests were doing.³⁸ Worker-priest involvement in labor unions clearly concerned them, but they had other apprehensions as well.

Generally, criticism about the movement fell into two categories, the first of which was doctrinal in nature. Detractors of the movement believed that it was not the priests' role to become involved in temporal affairs such as manual labor, let alone political activities. They contended that a Roman Catholic priest should be involved exclusively with spiritual matters such as prayer and the sacraments and not with industrial work and labor union militancy.³⁹ They asserted, moreover, that worker-priests were performing duties that essentially belonged to Catholic lay people. These critics added that it would be impossible for a worker-priest to maintain "ecclesiastical virtues" in the secular environment of a factory and that he would not have enough time for prayer and meditation.⁴⁰

The second cause for controversy was that worker-priests, when they became involved in labor union affairs, were openly collaborating with communists and organizations that espoused Marxist ideology. Critics feared that Marxists would indoctrinate the worker-priests and convert them to communism. They thought that it was highly improper for Catholic priests to cooperate with avowed atheists, both in labor union activities and on the assembly lines.⁴¹

The ongoing debate over the worker-priests was the source of many press stories and commentaries during the movement, as many newspapers, magazines, journals, and

reviews documented the movement's polemical legacy. Some of the French newspapers that covered the movement were Le Figaro, France-Soir, and Le Monde.⁴² The worker-priest movement, however, was not an exclusively French media story; articles about the worker-priest were published in periodicals such as Time, The New Yorker, Nation, New Republic, and The New York Times. Roman Catholic press coverage, which will be discussed in the following chapter, was especially extensive. Protestants also learned about the worker-priests through publications such as The Christian Century.⁴³

Criticism of the movement, augmented in part by the press, largely fell on the shoulders of Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, founder of the Mission de Paris. The Paris Archbishop's role in the movement was critical because he stood up for the worker-priests and successfully quelled most of the controversy. When the Paris Archbishop died on May 30, 1949, therefore, the worker-priests lost a most precious asset.⁴⁴ No one was able to replace Suhard nor did anyone have his ability to shield the worker-priests from Vatican criticism.⁴⁵ After Suhard's death, Vatican officials became increasingly concerned about the worker-priest mission's future, and Church debate about the movement continued.⁴⁶

The worker-priest controversy boiled over in the spring of 1952. On May 28 various leftist factions in

France joined in an illegal protest in Paris against General Matthew B. Ridgeway, who had just been named the commander of all NATO forces. The police arrested several hundred demonstrators, among whom were two worker-priests. Several Paris policemen physically assaulted the two priests while they were detained. Supporters of the movement later publicized the police's maltreatment of the two worker-priests, but in doing so they incited even more contention over the movement.⁴⁷

The protest against Ridgeway, perhaps more than any other single event, prompted Vatican officials to take action against the worker-priest movement. The Vatican first moved against worker-priests who were from religious orders when, in August of 1953, Church officials sent a confidential circular letter to superiors of religious orders. The letter demanded that the superiors recall all worker-priests who belonged to their congregations. As a result of this letter, the Society of Jesus recalled those Jesuits who were involved in the movement on December 28.⁴⁸

The Vatican dealt with diocesan worker-priests separately. On September 23, 1953, the Apostolic Nuncio to France secretly met with twenty-six bishops in order to pass on to them the pope's instructions. Two months later, three French Cardinals announced that the movement would be drastically curtailed.⁴⁹ The announcement was the beginning of the end of the Mission de Paris. From that

point on only French bishops could select worker-priest candidates--seminarians no longer could choose to become one. The French episcopacy promised to give all worker-priests better doctrinal education before they began their ministry. The bishops, moreover, stated that they would permit the worker-priests to perform manual labor only for a few hours each day. They restricted worker-priests from participating in strikes and from holding labor union offices and ordered the worker-priests to serve in a parish.⁵⁰

The French Catholic hierarchy asserted that the movement had been restricted for doctrinal reasons. Aix-en-Provence Archbishop Charles de Provencheres explained in a circular letter that worker-priests had abandoned their sacred calling because of their assimilation to the workers' world. The Archbishop wrote:

The priest cannot be a man just like any other: he bears within him a mystery. . . . There will be an assimilation, but this can only take place on condition that his priestly character is not affected. By consecration he is necessarily, in some degree, a man "set apart."⁵¹

De Provencheres was emphatic that the suppression had nothing to do with the worker-priests' collaboration with communists.⁵²

The worker-priests, however, contended that the Vatican did not restrict the movement for strictly doctrinal reasons. They responded to the Vatican decision

in a letter called The Green Paper and charged that Church officials stopped the movement because it was to their political and economic advantage to do so. The worker-priests proclaimed:

We are rejected--as the working class is rejected by the established system--because of our active participation in the workers' struggle. Because the Church--as respects the greater part of her members and her institutions--is defending a system against which we, in company with the working class, are struggling with all our might, because it is oppressive and unjust.

We must be quite clear about this. The Church supports this system because of her own conditions of existence, and because, in her institutions, she is materially bound to it, even in her most charitable endeavors.⁵³

The Vatican responded to this charge by saying that the document endorsed the notion of class struggle, and that the Church could not accept such a struggle, "either in theory or in practice."⁵⁴

Out of the one hundred worker-priests who were in the movement in 1953, approximately seventy-three signed The Green Paper. Those worker-priests who had signed the letter defied Church authorities in 1954 and continued to live as proletarians, while the other twenty-two remained obedient to the Church.⁵⁵

The period between 1954 and 1965 was a time of change and uncertainty for the Church, as it was for the worker-priest movement. The movement continued after 1954, but because worker-priests could only work a few hours a day,

industrial firms rarely hired them.⁵⁶ In 1959 the Vatican ruled that priests could no longer hold even part-time factory jobs and ended the movement.⁵⁷ But the same year Pope John XXIII recognized the need for Catholic renewal and called a Church council. The Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) enacted a series of reforms that paved the way for the worker-priest movement's resumption.

One of the documents issued during the Second Vatican Council was The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, approved by the Council on December 7, 1965.⁵⁸ The document stated the Church's conception of the priest's role in the modern world. In one section, called "Brotherly Bond and Cooperation among Priests," the bishops indicated that a priest could "engage in manual labor and share the lot of the workers." The document implicitly approved of a worker-priest ministry, as long as it followed established guidelines.⁵⁹

Pope Paul VI agreed with the Council decree and permitted the worker-priest movement to resume in 1965.⁶⁰ The Post-Vatican II era has seen the worker-priest movement expand extensively. Currently there are approximately 1,000 worker-priests serving in France. The present pope, John Paul II, is opposed to the notion of worker-priests, but he does not seem willing to suppress the new movement.⁶¹ The worker-priest mission in France inspired Christians to begin similar movements in Canada, Great

Britain, the United States, Japan, Italy, Spain, and a few North African countries.⁶² All of these ministries are indebted to the Mission de Paris and to the original worker-priests who served from 1943 to 1954.

The new kinds of ministries that have emerged throughout the world are far from being the only lasting impact of the original worker-priest movement. Many ideas that were conceived by the first worker-priests are still having an influence upon Christians. The first worker-priest movement was a forerunner of what is commonly called "liberation theology." Worker-priest historian Oscar Arnal wrote that liberation theology "was being discovered and practiced in the heart of western industrialized society years before it exploded from the barrios of Latin America," and that "the worker-priests were a living example of liberation theology well before the term was coined."⁶³

The similarities between the first worker-priest movement and liberation theology indicate that indeed the former was a precursor of the latter. According to liberation theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, one "does" liberation theology. And in order for liberation theology to be done, there must be a condition of socio-economic injustice and oppression. Then there are three "mediations" that liberating Christians undertake: socio-analytical, hermeneutical, and practical. Christians first

determine why there is oppression and what the causes are (socio-analytical). Second, they reflect on scripture to see how God and the chosen people historically responded to various forms of oppression (hermeneutical). Finally, Christians, based on the study of scripture, devise a plan of action that is intended to alleviate the injustices and liberate the oppressed (practical).⁶⁴

The method of liberation theology that the Boffs described is virtually identical with how the worker-priests' approached social injustice and oppression. The worker-priests took industrial jobs because they knew that only by so doing could they experience proletarian oppression.⁶⁵ Consequently, they reflected on scripture to determine what they had to do and how to do it.⁶⁶ They then acted on behalf of the working-class through labor union activity and political involvement. The method of liberation theology, therefore, is not without precedent. For this reason, it is correct to say that the worker-priests were the first to practice liberation theology.

Although the Boffs and other scholars indicate that liberation theology began in Latin America, many of its ideas originated in Europe.⁶⁷ Latin American theologians who began the liberation theology movement were influenced by new theological methods that they had learned in Europe.⁶⁸ French Catholics such as Marie-Dominique Chenu and Jean Danielou were at the forefront of the new

theological approach that the Latin American clergy adopted.⁶⁹ Chenu and Danielou, moreover, were the same men who provided theological guidance to the worker-priests.⁷⁰

The original worker-priest movement lasted a little over ten years, but the dramatic transformation that it had undergone over that period is why the worker-priest movement continues to be important to Roman Catholics. The worker-priests began as mere proselytizers, but they took the initiative to assume roles of active militancy on behalf of the working class. The goal of bringing Christ to the proletariat remained the worker-priests' priority; what accounted for the transformation was the methods that they adopted for accomplishing that goal. They concluded that being a missionary demanded more than preaching and celebrating mass. For the worker-priests, evangelizing the proletariat meant taking an active part in the workers' struggle for social and economic justice.

CHAPTER II. NOTES

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³⁸ Ibid., 86.

³⁹ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 140.

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CHAPTER III.
PRESS REACTION

Eight English-language Catholic periodicals that originated from four different countries provided coverage of the worker-priest movement. The publications had various formats, and they represented a wide range of Catholic political opinion. The Canadian Register, for example, was a strongly conservative periodical, while The Catholic Worker was radically liberal. The remaining publications typically expressed moderate views about the Church and politics.

Two of the eight publications were British: London's weekly, The Tablet, and the Oxford Dominican monthly, Blackfriars. The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, also a monthly, was published in Dublin. The Canadian Register was the weekly newspaper of the Toronto-Kingston Archdiocese. The remaining four publications were United States periodicals, all of which were located in the greater New York area. The Paulist order published the monthly, The Catholic World, but most of its staff were lay people. The Commonweal was a weekly whose staff also were comprised of lay people. The Catholic Worker was a monthly

that was founded by two lay pacifists, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. The last of the eight periodicals was America, a weekly that was written and edited by Jesuits.

The Catholic press in Great Britain, Ireland, Canada and the United States informed its readers about the movement in a variety of ways. First of all, the periodicals often hired foreign correspondents and syndicated columnists--many of whom were French--to write about the worker-priests. Second, the periodicals published stories by their own columnists or reporters who had traveled to France. Third, some of the publications reprinted excerpts from or took their information from European publications such as Le Croix or L'Osservatore Romano. Finally, there were editorials and opinion articles that offered commentary about the worker-priests.

The eight periodicals began their coverage of the worker-priests in 1947, almost four years after the movement began. There were two reasons for the delay in coverage. Catholic editors and writers were mostly interested in news about the Second World War and its aftermath and consequently paid little attention to less newsworthy issues such as the worker-priest movement. Moreover, the worker-priest movement was not extremely controversial when it began and therefore it lacked the drama that would have sparked the interest of many journalists.

The initial reaction of these various Catholic periodicals to the movement was overwhelmingly favorable because editors and writers thought that worker-priests represented a return to early uncorrupted Christianity. The Tablet was the first of the eight periodicals to discuss the worker-priests. Its editors remarked that the worker-priest movement was a "dynamic and aggressive" approach to the problem of proletarian indifference to Christianity.¹ The editors of The Catholic World hailed the movement as "Primitive Christianity Once Again."² Monsignor Jean Calvet wrote in The Commonwealth that the movement was "in the spirit of the early Church."³

Other writers, such as the Reverend Stephen Roche of The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, agreed with Calvet. Roche commented that the movement could not be called an innovation because it was "the life of the primitive Church, the daily life of a Peter or a Paul."⁴ The Blackfriars editors wrote that the worker-priests had "returned to the original apostolic conception of the mission--the mission of the Church to heal and to make whole all of mankind."⁵ Sally Whelan Cassidy of The Catholic World, when she wrote about the worker-priests for the first time, also remarked that the movement embodied a spirit of apostolic poverty.⁶

The reason that English-language Catholic journalists believed that the worker-priest movement resembled the

early church was that the worker-priests' methods of evangelization were similar to those employed by the apostles Peter and Paul. The worker-priests lived and labored in the proletariat's midst, just as the apostles had done in communities in the Mediterranean area. Thomas Suavel, a Dominican, argued in The Catholic Worker that it was necessary for the worker-priests to become proletarians in virtually every respect, including frequenting "those alley ways where everyone lives in filth."⁷ Sally Cassidy believed as well that priests becoming members of the working class was a necessity. She wrote:

Yves' becoming a proletarian, like St. Paul a Greek with the Greeks, was the only way for him to bring Christ to the workers' world. Sharing a proletarian's life, sufferings and hopes, he could speak to them in their own language.

The Catholic World columnist Michael de la Bedoyere likewise conceded that the worker-priests would not be successful unless they became full-fledged industrial laborers.⁹

English-language Catholic journalists initially favored the movement, moreover, because that they admired its founder, Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, the Archbishop of Paris. When Suhard died in 1949, several members of the English-language Catholic press praised the Paris Archbishop for his leadership and holiness. Claire Huchet Bishop wrote in The Commonweal that all industrial workers--practicing and non-practicing Catholics, as well as

communists--had "esteem, respect, admiration," for Suhard.¹⁰ In one of her 1949 columns, Sally Cassidy illustrated the genuine concern that Suhard had had for the Paris proletariat.¹¹ Elizabeth Bartelme of The Catholic Worker praised the Paris Archbishop when she remarked that he had inspired many by his desire to revive Christianity in France and that his interest in social issues had been "a direct result of his holiness."¹²

The early and favorable reaction of the English-language Catholic press to the worker-priest movement was also due to the belief that Suhard's mission was succeeding. As early as 1947, journalists believed that worker-priests were making headway in their attempt to convert workers to Catholicism. Conrad Pepler, a Dominican who wrote for Blackfriars, proclaimed to his readers that "the gulf between the pulpit and people" was being bridged in France.¹³

That same year, Jean Minery, a Jesuit writer for America, illustrated the worker-priests' success in these terms:

"This missionary work, . . . has yielded fruits far beyond anyone's brightest expectations. After two or three years on the job in the factory or living in the workmen's section of the town, these fifteen priests of the "Paris Mission" have already succeeded in getting themselves "accepted" in an environment hitherto hostile to every Christian influence."¹⁴

Neil McCluskey, another Jesuit who wrote for America, concurred with Minery. McCluskey remarked that the worker-

priests were being accepted as "genuine laboring men and respected as zealous priests."¹⁵ An anonymous correspondent of The Tablet wrote that the worker-priests were making progress, but that those who were not involved with the movement were unable to see their achievements.¹⁶

Not all Catholic journalists, however, thought that the worker-priest movement was being effective. Gunnar D. Kumlien, a correspondent for Sweden's liberal Stockholms-Tidningen as well as for The Commonweal, believed that the movement would fail because French workers would not accept the worker-priests as their equals. He wrote:

The worker may think him a nice chap, but tends to look upon him in much the same way as a child would look upon a grown-up who, in order to gain his confidence, would dress and behave like a child.

Kumlien also accused the worker-priests of creating "a new, separated proletarian Church."¹⁷

The English-language Catholic press measured the movement's success mainly in terms of how many proletarian converts the worker-priests had made. Worker-priests, on the other hand, contended that winning converts was only one aspect of their mission and by 1950 they began to join either the CFTC and the CGT and to speak out about unjust labor practices.

That worker-priests were politically active created a number of problems, however. The demands of industrial work, labor union affairs, in addition to having to provide

pastoral ministry, left little time for the worker-priests to relax and rest. In his column called "From My Window in Fleet Street," Michael Bedoyere commented that because a worker-priest had so many responsibilities, he often became fatigued and depressed, which in turn caused him to doubt the "quality of his own spiritual life."¹⁸ Bedoyere argued that due to their tendency to become overworked, the worker-priests should not become involved in labor union activities.

One journalist disagreed with Bedoyere and applauded the worker-priests' political activism. An unnamed writer in Blackfriars pointed out that it was virtually impossible for the worker-priests to ignore the struggle for socio-economic justice. The journalist asserted:

How could one be disinterested as to the lot of a class which one has made his own, and, more precisely, indifferent to improvements which it is essential to work for? If the priest-worker finds himself the most fit person to lead such a struggle, has he the right to be disinterested? For him active struggle for social justice comes from the demands₉ of charity which is at the very root of his activity.¹⁹

English-language Catholic journalists frequently disagreed with one another when it came to such issues as worker-priest activism. The role that the press--both French and non-French--played during the movement was one more source of contention for Catholic journalists. A correspondent of The Tablet remarked that the worker-priests had become quite popular among journalists and

hoped that the press's support would prevent Vatican officials from stopping the movement.²⁰ The editors of America in 1953 seemed to believe that the extensive press coverage was good because it showed people throughout the world that the Roman Catholic Church still cared about common laborers.²¹

John Cogley, however, disagreed with the notion that press coverage of the movement had a positive influence. Cogley, The Commonweal editor in 1953, argued that press coverage was detrimental to the worker-priest movement because the worker-priests' success was contingent upon their ability to remain "obscure and hidden." He added that the worker-priests, due to the press coverage, "have had to live in a kind of merciless fish bowl."²²

Robert Barrat, a writer for The Commonweal, agreed with his editor's position that extensive press coverage was having a negative effect. Barrat felt that French Catholic "regular information bureaus" had undermined the movement through misinforming Catholic officials in Rome about the worker-priests. He took conservative Catholic journalists to task when he wrote:

For the most part these denouncers consist of bitter reactionaries, fearful of the modern world, who rest on the argument that the Church possesses the truth, and refuse to see that that truth needs to be made incarnate in history through the constructive labors of the Christian world. These men are fascists at heart: they have a fixed conception of religion, the priesthood and society, which they refuse to see is somewhat outmoded.²³

One reason for Barrat's lashing out at the "bitter reactionaries" was because they frequently accused the worker-priests of being influenced by communism. The worker-priests' views about Marxist ideology and the French Communist Party, from the English-language Catholic press's perspective, clearly was the most controversial aspect of the movement. The worker-priest movement took place during some of the most frigid days of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union, which is why Catholic journalists were deeply concerned about worker-priests being influenced by communism. Whether or not worker-priests were tending toward communism was initially just one of many contentious points about the movement, but slowly this question dominated English-language press coverage.

From the very beginning of the movement the Catholic press believed that the proletarian environment was perilous for the worker-priests. Catholic journalists feared (later they contended that their fears had been realized) that the proletariat would convert the worker-priests instead of the worker-priests converting the proletariat. In August 1949, The Catholic World reprinted an article from The London Herald, in which Henri Rollet wrote that the workers-priests were living in an environment where communism "bred" hatred. He warned that the worker-priests were in grave danger of adopting

communist class hatred.²⁴ Robert Barrat likewise conceded that communism posed a threat to the movement, but he added that every missionary endeavor in Church history had included many kinds of risks and dangers.²⁵

The primary reason that Catholic journalists felt the worker-priests were at risk was that some worker-priests were members of the predominantly communist labor union, the General Confederation of Labor. The Catholic press contended that by virtue of their membership, the worker-priests of the CGT were indirectly endorsing communist politics and ideology. The Dominican Ronald Torbet, a writer for Blackfriars, thought that membership in the CGT was reprehensible. He wrote:

The "baptism of Marxism" became a catchword of the movement. From this climate of thought there arose what was to become an embarrassment and a scandal for so many active lay Catholics of the working class, namely the spectacle of priests taking leading parts in Marxist-inspired trade unions, demonstrations and movements from which they themselves had been taught to hold aloof.²⁶

Torbet's term "the baptism of Marxism" implied that the worker-priests were reconciling Marxism with Christianity. Blackfriars writer John Fitzsimons thought that the worker-priests were becoming "Christian Progressivists," a name for those who saw no incompatibility between Marxist ideas and Catholic social teaching. He went on to point out the errors of Christian Progressivism, such as the notions that atheism "could contribute to human

progress" and that Marxism was a proven social science.

Neither Torbet nor Fitzsimons, however, provided any proof that even one worker-priest assented to Christian progressivist positions. In fact, Fitzsimons seemed to have contradicted himself when he exonerated the worker-priests from the having been influenced by Christian progressivism. He explained:

While it would be erroneous to suggest any close association between priest-workers and [these] doctrinal errors. . . , it is nevertheless true that many of their defenders--their worst enemies, their friends--did use such arguments as these.²⁷

Catholic journalists were also concerned about worker-priests tending toward Marxism because the rhetoric that some worker-priests used had Marxist connotations. Robert Barrat, for example, wrote about a worker-priest who had mentioned the word, "revolution." The worker-priest said that revolution was needed to rescue the proletariat from spiritual and material misery, but, he added:

Not revolution in the Communist sense of the word. But I do think that an attack must be made on capitalism, money,²⁸ on the anarchy and oppressiveness of laissez faire.

The worker-priests' use of such terms as "revolution" or "workers' struggle" gave some the impression that they had embraced Marxism. Gunnar Kumlien, for example, felt that because worker-priests used terms that were popular in Marxist circles, they obviously had been won over to communism.²⁹

The worker-priests were not the only ones who used controversial terms when they talked about their movement; the English-language Catholic press also employed questionable rhetoric in describing the worker-priest movement. Catholic journalists often depicted communism as a kind of disease or deadly virus that Catholics were supposed to avoid at all costs. For instance, Borisz de Balla of The Catholic World commented that a worker-priest contracted the Marxist virus, which slowly infected a worker-priest "step by step."³⁰ Michael de la Bedoyere also wrote that the worker-priests "became infected" with the notion of class struggle, which inevitably led them to "identify themselves with Marxism and to support such Moscow-promoted campaigns as the 'World Peace Movement.'"³¹ A writer for The Catholic World, D. P. O'Connell, described the worker-priests' political viewpoint in this way:

Many of the clergy are now infected with the belief that there is an inherent incompatibility between the worker and the bourgeois, and that the Church should always line up behind the worker's aspirations.³²

Douglas Hyde, a columnist for The Canadian Register, believed that French communists had duped or brainwashed those worker-priests who tended toward Marxism, as he blamed worker-priest indiscretions on the French communists. He commented:

Side by side with this weakening in their sacred mission as priests, they would be drawn into

Communist campaigns in response to challenges by the Communists who deliberately aimed at their downfall and wished to discredit the Church.

Hyde went on to compare the worker-priests to those who were prisoners of communist regimes:

Doctors who have examined priest-workers have found that their state of physical and nervous exhaustion, a result of insufficient sleep, too hard work and constant nervous strain, is similar to that of men from whom "confessions" have been extracted after weeks of "conditioning" and having sleep denied them, in jails behind the Iron Curtain.³³

The "Iron Curtain" that had been erected in central Europe, as well as the threat of a Soviet invasion of western Europe, frightened Church leaders. But the Catholic hierarchy was also alarmed at the growing communist movement in Italy and France. Bedoyere explained that the Vatican sought to restrict the movement largely because the worker-priests' views about communism created "grave political problems" for the Church in western Europe. According to Bedoyere, Church leaders felt that the worker-priests would influence Catholics in France and Italy to embrace Marxism.³⁴

While most English-language Catholic journalists perceived communism as a threat to the worker-priests, there were several writers who took the opposing view. The editors of America did not seem alarmed about the threat of Marxist contamination. They wrote that "the number of those who succumbed to communism or otherwise failed in their priestly obligation has been so providentially

small."³⁵

The Catholic Worker writers similarly believed that communism was not as threatening to the worker-priests as many Catholic journalists had contended. The newspaper was daring enough to declare that communism, in some respects, was admirable. The Jesuit worker-priest Henri Perrin was allowed to write about his own personal experiences in The Catholic Worker. Perrin thought that the strong "faith" of a communist was commendable, as was the anarchist's liberty and "will to love."³⁶ Dorothy Day--herself a former Marxist--remarked that communists often were more concerned with the welfare of all workers than were their Roman Catholic counterparts.³⁷

Because most Catholic journalists were fearful of the worker-priests becoming communists, they applauded when the Vatican announced in late 1953 that the activities of the worker-priests movement would be curtailed. The editors of America were confident that the lessons learned from the "highly original and courageous experiment" would not be lost.³⁸ They continued to be optimistic about the movement, even when most worker-priests proclaimed that they would not obey the Church decision. In October 1954, the editors wrote that the worker-priest movement, due to the Vatican ruling, had been "purified."³⁹ Sally Cassidy accordingly thought that the Vatican ruling was a positive development.⁴⁰

Michael de la Bedoyere was among those who supported the Vatican decision. In Bedoyere's opinion there was nothing extraordinary about putting restrictions on an apostolate such as the worker-priest movement. Bedoyere saw the imposition of restrictions as a common occurrence in Church history, as a "normal practice in the Church's continuous vigilant watch over the spiritual welfare and apostolic action of the Church of God."⁴¹ Several months later, Bedoyere reiterated his support of Pope Pius XII's decision regarding the worker-priest movement. He stated that the pope was always open to new ideas, that he carefully weighed and experimented, and that he balanced "good results against possibly dangerous ones."⁴²

The Church's official reason for restricting the worker-priest movement was that priests, by virtue of their calling, were not supposed to be deeply involved with manual labor as well as with political activities. But, surprisingly, the Catholic press did not seem very concerned about this issue. Thomas F. Stransky of The Catholic World was one of the few journalists who mentioned the problem. He contended that the daily manual work a worker-priest had to perform defiled "the effectiveness of his priesthood."⁴³ That the English-language Catholic press frequently neglected to mention this issue indicates that journalists probably believed that the political implications of worker-priests collaborating with

communists was the real motive for the 1953 decision.

Even though the original movement was all but over after the Vatican ruling in 1953, the English-speaking Catholic press continued to write about the worker-priests and to speculate on why their movement was curtailed. The Canadian Register reported that the the failure had been due to the worker-priests' "becoming too involved with their work to the exclusion of the work of the priesthood, insufficient preparation and a misunderstanding of the role of authority."⁴⁴

Some Catholic writers thought that the movement had failed because the worker-priests were, in their words, isolated. Unlike a parish priest, who often lived in a parsonage with other prelates, many worker-priests lived in working-class neighborhoods. Sally Whelan Cassidy remarked that the greatest obstacle to the worker-priests was their isolation.⁴⁵ Robert Barrat apparently agreed with Cassidy when he commented that "the worker-priest remained isolated, unattached to any parish, a sort of lonely sniper left to decide what tactics to employ and what weapons to use."⁴⁶

The majority of English-language Catholic journalists felt that the movement had failed because worker-priests had been inadequately trained for their mission. Editors and writers believed that communism influenced the worker-priests because they were improperly prepared to deal with

philosophies that were contrary to Christianity. John Fitzsimons wrote that he agreed with Church historian Adrien Dansette, who had said that the movement lacked thought and direction and that the worker-priests were like "lost children" who had been "thrown, without sufficient preparation, into a totally new kind of existence."⁴⁷

Thomas Stransky also remarked that the worker-priests lacked proper intellectual training, which is why, according to Stransky, they tended toward Marxist ideas.⁴⁸

Bedoyere, too, cited this reason for the movement's failure. He wrote:

Could the explanation [for the movement's failure] lie, at least in part, in the fact that something was demanded in a spectacular degree of a few heroic volunteers for which there has been insufficient training within the modern Church?⁴⁹

Gunnar Kumlien, a strong opponent of the movement, asserted that the worker-priests had been insufficiently prepared because no one had taught them about an important Christian "virtue." Kumlien commented:

The missionaries were unable to preach to the "eternal proletarians" an equally important Christian injunction, one preached to the sick and the suffering: resignation. Job is the exemplar. No suffering is in vain. But in the Communist world, resignation is intolerable. It is the opium of the people. Therefore the worker-priests were caught in an ideological trap.⁵⁰

Blackfriars writer Louis Allen, concurred with Kumlien's notion that the worker-priests had been caught in a kind of trap. But Allen saw the trap taking a slightly

different form:

The dilemma of the worker-priests was a cruel one. "If we share the fate of the working class, we must share in its struggles," declared one, and even though the modalities of the struggle may be--often were in fact--dictated by the Communist Party, . . . they felt they had to participate, in order not to betray their position as genuine workers.⁵¹

For H. A. Reinhold, a journalist for The Commonweal, isolation, poor preparation, or becoming caught in an ideological dilemma were just a few of the problems that had led to the demise of the worker-priest movement. Reinhold maintained that the movement had been "in its execution untimely; in its assumptions unrealistic; in its outcome destructive of ecclesiastical tradition; and in its doctrinal grounds, to say the least, dangerous." Reinhold concluded that the movement had been an experiment "born out of due time."⁵²

Press coverage of the worker-priests peaked in 1953 and 1954, which was when the controversy surrounding the movement was most evident. After 1954, however, there were progressively fewer articles about the movement, and by 1960 only an occasional story about the worker-priests appeared in any of the eight periodicals. The press had exhausted the worker-priest subject and subsequently turned its attention to the Second Vatican Council. Few if any Catholic journalists realized that the movement would reemerge only five years later.

From 1947 to 1960, English-language Catholic

journalists discussed the worker-priest movement extensively and were well aware of the many diverse problems that the movement had posed. They revealed that there were a multitude of difficulties connected with the movement, but they seemed most troubled by the possibility that worker-priests were being influenced by communism. The Catholic press' preoccupation with communism is evident by the number of times words such as "Marxism," "communism," and "class struggle" appear in articles about the worker-priests. Why these journalists made the influence of communism on worker-priests their focus and whether their response was justified are two critical questions left to be considered in this study.

CHAPTER III. NOTES

¹Frank MacMillan, "The Missionary Church in France," The Tablet, 20 September 1947, 183.

²"Primitive Christianity Once Again," The Catholic World, June 1948, 193.

³Reverend Jean Calvet, "The Worker-Priests of France," The Commonweal, 29 July 1949, 385.

⁴Stephen J. Roche, "The Young Priests of France." The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, September 1949, 229.

⁵"The Mission," Blackfriars, December 1949, 566.

⁶Sally Whelan Cassidy, "The Catholic Revival: The Work of the French Dominicans," The Catholic World, March 1949, 474.

⁷Thomas Suavel, "Worker Priests in France. . . ," The Catholic Worker, July-August 1947, 1.

⁸Sally Whelan Cassidy, "The Catholic Revival: Going to the Worker," The Catholic World, June 1949.

⁹Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, December 1952, 219.

¹⁰Claire Huchet Bishop, "Cardinal Suhard," The Commonweal, 15 July 1949, 339.

¹¹Sally Whelan Cassidy, "The Catholic Revival: Cardinal Suhard," The Catholic World, October 1949, 58.

¹²Elizabeth Bartelme, "Cardinal Suhard," The Catholic Worker, July-August 1953, 2.

¹³Conrad Pepler, "Aspects of French Dominican Life," Blackfriars, January 1947, 33.

¹⁴Jean Minery, "The Paris Mission," America, 19 April 1947, 69.

- 15 Neil G. McCluskey, "Christian France Rolls Up Its Sleeves," America, 26 September 1953, 620.
- 16 "Priest-Workers Under Discussion," The Tablet, 31 October 1953, 418.
- 17 Gunnar D. Kumlien, "A New Spanish Approach," The Commonweal, 8 January 1953, 349.
- 18 Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, December 1952, 219.
- 19 "Priest-Workmen: Their Present Position in France," Blackfriars, November 1952, 470.
- 20 "Priest-Workers Under Discussion," The Tablet, 31 October 1953, 417.
- 21 "Priest-Workers in France," America, 28 November 1953, 221.
- 22 John Cogley, "Laborers Are Few," The Commonweal, 2 October 1953, 626.
- 23 Robert Barrat, "Heroes of the French Church," The Commonweal, 8 January 1953, 347.
- 24 Henri Rollet, "Foreign Periodicals: Future of Paris Mission in Doubt," The Catholic World, August 1949.
- 25 Robert Barrat, "The Priest-Workers and Their Revolution," The Commonweal, 7 November 1952, 117.
- 26 Ronald Torbet, "The Evolution of a Mission," Blackfriars, June 1959, 256.
- 27 John Fitzsimons, "Second thoughts on the Priest-Workers," Blackfriars, January 1954, 58, 59.
- 28 Robert Barrat, "The Priest-Workers and Their Revolution," The Commonweal, 7 November 1952, 116.
- 29 Gunnar D. Kumlien, "Communism and the Worker-Priests," The Commonweal, 11 March 1955, 603.
- 30 Borisz de Balla, "The Marxist Influence in France," The Catholic World, March 1953, 415.
- 31 Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, June 1956, 216.

³²D. P. O'Connell, "France Catholic?," The Catholic World, October 1958, 42.

³³Douglas Hyde, "Douglas Hyde Writes. . . ," The Canadian Register, 6 February 1954, 4.

³⁴Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, August 1954, 381.

³⁵"Priest-Workers in France," America, 28 November 1953, 221.

³⁶Henri Perrin, "Church in France," The Catholic Worker, May 1949, 4.

³⁷Dorothy Day, "French Worker Priests and the Little Brothers of de Foucauld," The Catholic Worker, March 1954, 4.

³⁸"Priest-Worker Crisis in France," America, 17 October 1953, 58.

³⁹"New Life for Apostolate in France," America, 30 October 1954, 116.

⁴⁰Sally Whelan Cassidy, "The Catholic Revival," The Catholic World, December 1952, 217.

⁴¹Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, August 1954, 381.

⁴²Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, December 1954, 219.

⁴³Thomas F. Stransky, "The End of the Worker-Priest Experiment," The Catholic World, January 1960, 243.

⁴⁴"Paris Cardinal Reveals Limited Resumption of Priest-Worker Movement," The Canadian Register, 23 October 1954, 4.

⁴⁵Sally Whelan Cassidy, "Priest-Workers and the Little Brothers," The Catholic World, April 1954, 49.

⁴⁶Robert Barrat, "Passing of the Worker-Priests," The Commonweal, 23 October 1959, 103.

⁴⁷John Fitzsimons, "Priest-Workers in France: The Debate Continues," Blackfriars, July-August 1956, 319.

⁴⁸Thomas F. Stransky, "The End of the Worker-Priest Experiment," The Catholic World, January 1960, 243.

⁴⁹Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, June 1956, 220.

⁵⁰Gunnar D. Kumlien, "Communism and the Worker-Priests," The Commonweal, 11 March 1955, 604.

⁵¹Louis Allen, "The Destiny of French Catholicism," Blackfriars, May 1959, 203.

⁵²H. A. Reinhold, "The Worker Priests," The Commonweal, 1 March 1957, 564.

CHAPTER IV.

DID THE WORKER-PRIESTS BAPTIZE MARXISM?

The English-language Catholic press frequently expressed a wide variety of opinions about religion and politics, and so it is not surprising that Catholic journalists did not provide a consensus about the worker-priest movement. Some writers, such as Robert Barrat and Sally Whelan Cassidy, held the worker-priests in high esteem. Writers such as Gunnar Kumlien and John Fitzsimons, however, expressed much apprehension over the movement. Yet if the accounts written about the worker-priests are put into a chronological sequence, a general pattern of press reaction emerges.

From 1947 to 1949, when English-language Catholic press reaction began, journalists were largely supportive of the worker-priests, but by 1950 their sentiments had begun to change. Gradually the Catholic press expressed disparagement about the worker-priests and became critical of the movement up through the 1953 restriction of their activities. Subsequent to the Vatican decision to curtail the movement, Catholic journalists denounced the worker-priests. Their antipathy continued through 1960, at which

time they generally ceased to write about the event.

The gradual change in reaction was due to the way that the movement evolved and also due to how the Catholic press perceived the movement's transformation. During the movement's early years the Catholic press generally believed that the worker-priests were evangelistic missionaries who were spreading the Catholic faith. Initially the press saw the worker-priests as being similar to missionaries who were going to convert masses of people in Africa or India.

Around the year 1950, however, the worker-priests began to get involved in labor union politics and started to speak out against unjust employment practices, and it was at this point that the English-language Catholic press began to respond negatively to these new developments. English-language Catholic journalists admired the movement, but they did not approve of the worker-priests criticizing capitalism and taking an active role against employers. Worker-priest labor union activity, furthermore, was the basis for accusations that the worker-priest were becoming communists.

There was only one problem with the Catholic press's allegations that worker-priests were being influenced by communists--they were largely untrue. The English-language Catholic journalists' proof of these accusations was really no proof at all. The Catholic press did not publish a

single paper, speech, or quote by a worker-priest that served as evidence that the movement had adopted Marxism. Catholic journalists wrote that the worker-priests had been infected with Marxism because much of their activism was done in collaboration with French communists. In other words, the worker-priests were guilty by association; they were culpable because of their affiliations with proponents of Marxism. The collaboration between Catholic clergymen and avowed communists was, in the eyes of the Catholic press, a serious matter.

In the previous chapter it was explained that the Dominican Ronald Torbet's justification for charging that the worker-priests had "baptized Marxism" was that they played leading parts in Marxist-inspired trade unions.¹ That worker-priests belonged to the predominantly communist CGT, however, does not necessarily mean that they were proponents of Marxism. According to Oscar Arnal, most worker-priests believed that the General Confederation of Labor was the union that was most dedicated to the proletariat's welfare. Arnal wrote that the worker-priests indeed had sought alliances with the communists because they had "discovered that their communist friends reflected the Christian mission and virtues better than many traditional Catholics." But Arnal also added that most worker-priests who belonged to the CGT painstakingly avoided party membership and never espoused a "Marxist

weltanschauung."²

The CGT was also the largest industrial labor union in France and therefore was, worker-priests argued, the best representative of the proletariat as a whole. Val Lorwin wrote that in 1953 the CGT had 1,500,000 members, while at the same time only 300,000 workers belonged to the French Confederation of Christian workers.³ In other words, for every one member of the CFTC there were five workers who belonged to the CGT. The CGT, moreover, had greater political power because it had more members than any other labor union.

Another justification for accusing worker-priests of having adopted Marxism was the demonstration against General Ridgeway in 1952, during which two worker-priests had been arrested. Michael de la Bedoyere was one of those who presented this incident as evidence that the worker-priests were being infected with Marxism.⁴ But Bedoyere failed to place the demonstration in its proper context. First of all, the event was an isolated incident; it was not as if worker-priests participated in illegal demonstrations every other week. Also, the Paris police arrested two worker-priests--two out of the ninety or so who were in the movement. Writers such as Bedoyere indicted the whole movement on the basis of what two worker-priests had done.

By no means did the two worker-priests go to the

demonstration in order to show their allegiance to communism. On the contrary, they were pacifists who were demonstrating against NATO forces, the atomic bomb, and French military participation in Korea and Indochina.⁵ They later wrote about their experience and explained why they had attended the demonstration. They remarked that they had joined in the protest in order to send a simple message to the American General: "Ridgway in France means war. We do not want war. Ridgway go home."⁶

The Catholic press could not substantiate its claims that the worker-priests were under communist influence, and so it resorted to using inflammatory rhetoric. Using provocative expressions, it seems, was the only way that English-language Catholic journalists could reinforce their assertions. Many of the articles about the worker-priests contain terms such as "contamination," "infected," and "breeding." They attempted to turn a mere ideology--Marxism--into a disease through the use of such rhetoric. By treating Marxism as an infection, the Catholic press inflated the danger of communism in France. English-language Catholic journalists gave the impression that the worker-priests, because they consorted with French communists, were advocating Marxism.

The primary explanation that Catholic journalists gave for worker-priests gravitating toward Marxism was that they lacked proper intellectual training. They implied that the

worker-priests were becoming communists because they could not see the discrepancy between Christian orthodoxy and Marxism. This explanation, however, is without basis. Before being ordained, each and every worker-priest had been well trained in philosophy as well as in theology.⁷ They were quite aware of Catholic doctrine and realized the intellectual implications of their stand. They believed that their becoming militants in the CGT was a way of responding to fundamental socio-economic inequalities in France. English-language Catholic journalists understated the worker-priests' intellectual abilities because it was a way to justify, in their own minds, why a group of priests would openly collaborate with French communists.

The English-language Catholic press misrepresented the worker-priests in this way because the Roman Catholic Church, as other institutions throughout the free world, was waging a cold war against communism in the 1950s. At that time many Roman Catholics sincerely believed that communism was the embodiment of evil. The cold war mentality is plainly evident in the articles and commentaries that English-language Catholic journalists wrote.

The fear of communism was pervasive among Roman Catholic in the United States during the post-World War II years. Donald F. Crosby, author of God, Church and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church 1950-

1957, illustrated the 1945 anticommunist sentiment of American Catholics when he wrote:

In the final year of the war Catholic anticommunism entered a new phase; what previously had been only one of a large number of concerns became virtually a way of life. American Catholics had only one thought on their minds--the preservation of their years all other issues tended to fade into the background as Catholics in America launched an all-out church from the Marxist marauder. For the next ten campaign against communism, both overseas and at home.

Crosby's thesis is that American Catholic support for the communist crusader, Joseph McCarthy, was considerable--but far from universal. He pointed out that "liberal" Catholics in the United States had strongly opposed McCarthy and condemned his tactics. But even these liberal Catholics, according to Crosby, "sought to expunge communism from American life, though they differed sharply with conservatives over the means to this end."⁹

One of the most popular magazines of American liberal Catholics was The Commonweal, which extensively reported on the worker-priest movement. Donald Crosby asserted that The Commonweal editors "stood second to none in their defiant opposition to communism, finding it anti-democratic, monolithic, and maliciously conspiratorial." Crosby argued, moreover, that these editors were as gravely concerned about communist infiltration of the United States government and other institutions as Catholic conservatives were.¹⁰

Crosby indicated, therefore, that anticommunist sentiment was pervasive among both conservative and liberal Roman Catholics in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is why almost all writers from the eight English-language Catholic periodicals could easily agree that the worker-priests had baptized Marx. With the exception of The Catholic Worker, none of the eight publications dared to question the belief that the worker-priests were being influenced by communism. English-language Catholic journalists followed each other like lemmings, as it were, as they reported that the worker-priests were embracing Marxist ideas.

In some respects the Catholic press's exaggerations about worker-priests tending toward Marxism is understandable. Indeed it is true that more than a few worker-priests expressed an interest in certain concepts that were common to socialism and there was a small number of worker-priests who defected to the French Communist Party. In the few documents that were written by the worker-priests, there are references to terms such as "class-struggle."¹¹ It is also true, moreover, that the fear of communism among Catholics was not entirely unwarranted. In the 1950s many Marxists were speaking about communism's inevitable conquest of the world, and the events then occurring in Eastern Europe and Korea gave cause for concern.

Catholic anticommunism, however, was a blatant overreaction to the threat that communism posed; fear of Marxism in any form among Catholics reached a high level of irrationality. Had the English-language Catholic press gone beyond rumors about the worker-priests, it would have found sincere, dedicated men who were trying to do something about profound working-class misery in France. That some worker-priests were advocating communism was a blatant exaggeration on the part of English-language Catholic journalists. The worker-priests were not guilty of baptizing Marxism. If they were guilty of anything, it was of trying to live the social gospel in both word and action.

CHAPTER IV. NOTES

¹Ronald Torbet, "The Evolution of a Mission," Blackfriars, June 1959, 256.

²Oscar Arnal, Priests in Working-Class Blue: The History of the Worker-Priests (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 94.

³Val Lorwin, The French Labor Movement (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), 177.

⁴Michael de la Bedoyere, "From My Window in Fleet Street," The Catholic World, June 1956, 216.

⁵Arnal, 90.

⁶John Petrie, trans., The Worker-Priests: A Collective Documentation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), 133-34. (no author mentioned)

⁷Ibid., 165

⁸Donald F. Crosby, God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Catholic Church 1950-1957 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 8.

⁹Ibid., 19.

¹⁰Ibid., 19.

¹¹Petrie, 162.

CONCLUSION

Far from providing a complete and comprehensive history of the worker-priest movement, this thesis sought to answer five questions about the ten-year religious experiment. It offered some insight regarding why the a worker-priest movement was initiated and what the worker-priests actually did. More importantly, the study illustrated how the English-language Catholic press reacted to the movement, questioned whether the critical response was justified, and sought to explain why the press reacted the way it did. Beyond answering these questions, however, the thesis also made it clear that the worker-priests were victimized by the Roman Catholic Church as well as by English-language Catholic journalists.

As described in the first chapter, the French Church had a complacent and sometimes even hostile disposition toward industrial workers. The French Church's actions, combined with the effects of urbanization and industrialization, caused French workers to stop practicing the Roman Catholic faith. Clearly the French Church contributed to this phenomenon, for its hierarchy in the nineteenth century largely betrayed their own ideals of caring for the poor and seeking out the Church's lost

sheep.

The French Church of the nineteenth century, therefore, created an enormous problem and left it for future generations to solve. By 1943, proletarian indifference was so severe that the worker-priests faced a virtually impossible task--to bring back an entire socio-economic class to the Church. Much of the Catholic hierarchy unjustly criticized the worker-priests for trying to ameliorate a crisis that the French Church itself had created. The French Catholic hierarchy's criticism should have been directed at their predecessors, for the worker-priests would not have had to collaborate with communists or participate in demonstrations if, in part, the French Church had not been so complacent in the nineteenth century.

The second chapter illustrated that worker-priests' activism was based on the realization that in order to liberate the proletariat spiritually, they first had to free it from poverty and degradation. The worker-priests also discovered that many of their fellow workers--most of whom were communists--shared their goals of improving working-class conditions. Subsequently, they collaborated with communists, therefore, in order to fight for economic justice in France. Those who criticized the worker-priests for joining the CGT refused to recognize that the General Confederation of Labor was the largest and most politically

powerful union in France. The worker-priests wanted to solve working-class problems and they could not have done this if they had been members of the less significant CFTC.

The Catholic hierarchy overreacted to the worker-priests' militancy and moved to curtail many of the worker-priests' activities. Why the Vatican decided to restrict the worker-priests in 1953 is a very critical question. Although Church officials said that they restricted the movement's activities for doctrinal reasons, most worker-priests charged that the hierarchy restrained them because it was economically and politically expedient for the Church to do so. The worker-priests' explanation for the restriction probably is correct, because officials at the Vatican could have tried to resolve what they saw as doctrinal problems through conciliation and negotiation. But instead, the Catholic hierarchy assumed a belligerent posture and pushed the worker-priests into a corner. That Church officials resurrected the worker-priest movement only twelve years after they first restricted it seems to suggest that the 1953 decision lacked forethought.

The worker-priests' membership in the CGT and their outspoken criticism of capitalism also disturbed the English-language Catholic press. Initially, however, Catholic journalists saw the movement as a positive development because it was going to turn heathen communist workers into Catholic converts. It was only when the

worker-priests began to pursue economic and social justice for the proletariat that the English-language Catholic press began to object to the movement. It seems that Catholic writers were concerned about the workers' souls, but that they had no regard for the French proletariat's material welfare.

English-language Catholic press coverage of the worker-priest movement was characteristically superficial and speculative. Most Catholic writers did not take the time to interview the worker-priests themselves and apparently many did not visit the proletarian slums or factories in which the worker-priests worked--to see why the worker-priests became politically active. Much of what was written in the English-language Catholic press regarding the movement was basically rumor and innuendo, and, as a result, English-language readers were not accurately informed about the worker-priests, their mission, or their methods.

The most obvious example of the English-language Catholic press using rumors was their red-baiting of the worker-priests. Catholic journalists made many accusations about worker-priests being influenced by communism, but they had little if any evidence to support their assertions. When they did find some sort of "evidence," the English-language Catholic journalists exaggerated its meaning and significance. That worker-priests were in the

CGT or had participated in an illegal demonstration was no justification for writing that the worker-priests were baptizing Marxism.

Clearly, English-language Catholic journalists leveled this accusation because they shared the pervasive anticommunist fervor that characterized the Roman Catholic Church during the early 1950s. Catholic anticommunism, as a way of thinking, was unrealistic because it tended to view everything in terms of black or white--refusing to acknowledge that there were shades of gray. The worker-priests, for example, were either in favor of communism or against it, for anticommunism could not see any middle ground between the two extremes. Or in another example, the worker-priests were becoming Marxists merely because they had associated with communists. Catholic anticommunism, moreover, glorified the ideals of capitalism, but it ignored the problems that laissez faire economics created and sanctioned. Bearing in mind this kind of mentality, it is quite easy to understand how the English-language Catholic press arrived at its conclusions about the worker-priest movement.

Regardless of their political attitudes and disposition toward Marxism, the worker-priests raised a very important issue regarding the Roman Catholic Church--one which is still relevant. The worker-priests proclaimed that the Church, in order to be faithful to the gospel, has

the responsibility to recognize and respond to basic social and economic inequality. The worker-priests correctly pointed out that for much of its history, the Roman Catholic Church has ignored or even condoned socio-economic oppression. Some worker-priests, as well as liberation theologians, have asserted that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had a valid point when they wrote that religion was an opiate. Over the centuries Christian institutions have used religion as an excuse to permit and perpetuate poverty, discrimination, and gross human exploitation.

Since the Second Vatican Council, however, many Roman Catholics have seemed to recognize that the worker-priests' criticism of the Church had been legitimate. The Catholic hierarchy has turned its attention more toward social problems and is increasingly critical of unjust socio-economic policies. Recent papal encyclicals and pastoral letters are expressing strong concern for economic systems that characteristically augment poverty and human degradation.

The victimization of the worker-priests suggests, therefore, that perhaps the Church was not ready for their mission. What happened to the worker-priests is neither a new nor a unique phenomenon in religious history; it is as old as religion itself. The worker-priests, it seems, were endowed with the glorious and yet most horrible fate of the religious reformer: they were born before their time. And,

like most prophets, the worker-priests suffered rejection because they posed a threat to the religious status quo. Two thousand years ago a Jewish reformer could have been talking about the worker-priests when he said that a prophet is without honor in his own country.

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