
H-France Review Vol. 13 (June 2013), No. 84

Bernard Barbiche and Christian Sorrel, eds., *La Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne, 1929-2009: Actes de la Journée d'Étude Organisée par le Centre National des Archives de l'Église de France. Paris, 7 décembre 2009*. Lyon: Equipes Religions, Sociétés et Acculturation (RESEA) du Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes (LAHRA, UMR 5190), 2011. 283 pp. Notes, table of abbreviations, and bibliography. 20.00€ (pb.) ISBN 9782953792812.

Review by Gearóid Barry, National University of Ireland, Galway.

The scope, purpose and content of this book are easily summarised. This edited collection brings together the proceedings of a one-day conference dedicated in 2009 to the history of the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne, founded eighty years before in 1929. Four articles by historians set out chronologically the history of this Catholic student organization, followed by two articles of reminiscence and self-appraisal by “witnesses” who were participant *jécistes* in the 1940s and 1990s respectively. The greatest bulk of the book, though, some two-thirds, is given over to a biographical dictionary of 1,260 national leaders and chaplains of the JEC in the years 1929 to 1975. For specialists on Catholic youth organizations, therefore, this book might well be something of a godsend. Of what broader interest might it be, though, to the great majority of French historians working outside this sub-category?

In fact, Barbiche and Sorrel's book is of some (limited) interest to the general reader, but to appreciate that significance a broader context is required than that provided by the authors. The need for clear coordinates is all the greater when one considers that twentieth-century France's Catholic youth organizations can be a bewildering alphabet soup of names and alliterative acronyms (JOC, JEC, JAC, JECF, JIC, ACJF et cetera). As my brief survey of the relevant literature will show, these bodies have not been absent from English-language scholarship, but this new book considers one branch of the family—the JEC—that has hitherto attracted very limited published research, even in French. In considering this particular book, I hope this review can itself disentangle some of these organizations for non-specialists and sift the existing literature for their broader significance.

The JEC grew out of a longer tradition of lay student faith-based movements, loosely associated with the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (ACJF), founded in 1886. For all of its important role in the life of Catholics students in universities and in lycée, the JEC has been overshadowed by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement—or Young Christian Workers—better known as the JOC. Catholic engagement with the “social question,” enkindled in the 1890s by papal statements such as *Rerum Novarum* (1891), found a new iteration across Europe and the globe in the interwar years under the banner of Catholic Action. While local initiative remained vital, the papacy wished to galvanize a new generation of Catholics and to channel the various currents of Social Catholicism into a uniform and ultramontane programme of evangelization.

The JOC movement, introduced into France by priest and war veteran Georges Guérin in 1926, blazed a trail for other French Catholic youth movements by addressing workers' concerns and energizing Catholic youth. As Susan B. Whitney puts it, “[u]sing the pedagogical method of ‘see, judge, act’ devised by [the JOC's Belgian founder] Canon Cardijn, chaplains taught Catholic values to Jocists; in

the process, they endeavoured to remake them from head to toe.”[1] Whitney’s own study compares their activism with that of the youth wing of the French Communist Party. Right across the political spectrum, youths donned uniforms and marched in pursuit of various programmes of social hygiene and ideological utopia or spiritual renewal. For Anglophone historians the JOC has exercised, therefore, a relative degree of fascination. Not so the smaller Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne, apart from fleeting references or a series of worthy, but not widely disseminated, research dissertations held in French university libraries. How good a case do the essays in Barbiche and Sorrel’s book make for reconsidering its relative importance?

The particular occasion of this book was the arrival and cataloguing of the JEC’s archive at the central archives of the French episcopate at Issy-les-Moulineaux. The contributors have made use, to varying degrees, of this material. Gérard Cholvy sets out the long pre-history of the JEC. Christophe Roucou considers the years 1929 to 1933. Roucou emphasizes the role of JEC chaplains as leaders and intellectual guides, especially that of Jesuits such as Fr Antoine Dieuzaide of Bordeaux. The JEC was affiliated to the Action Catholique Française, the presiding body which the bishops had created for the totality of French Social Catholicism in 1931. When an ACJF activist Jean Giraud wrote articles in 1933 espousing a pacifist critique of French and German big business, the JEC supported him. This pitched the new organization against General Édouard de Castelnau, doyen of the conservative Catholics who warned Catholic families against these students’ “dangerous utopias and revolutionary doctrines” (p. 35).

The silent displeasure of the French hierarchy on this occasion marked the first in a series of recurring crises in the JEC’s relationship to authority. Nevertheless, the organization grew. The *équipe*, its basic unit, was to be a site of encounter, prayer and action, manifesting “la charité en marche” (p.33). Bernard Giroux writes about the JEC from the 1940s to the 1960s. The years of the Occupation get scant treatment, however. The JEC seems to have followed a familiar pattern in its wartime attitudes, beginning with guarded enthusiasm for Pétain, followed by progressive disillusion. In his witness testimony, historian Yves-Marie Hilaire recalls mountain summer camps during the war where resistance papers such as *Témoignage Chrétien* circulated. Gilbert Dru, a JEC member and thinker of the new Christian Democracy which bore fruit after 1944, died for the Resistance. However, there is no attempt in this book to quantify the levels and nature of such activity in the JEC as a whole. The JEC’s war experience is better summarized in an older study of Vichy youth policy by W.D. Halls.[2] For Giroux, though, it is the late 1940s that marks the moment of greatest success for the JEC as it thrived in its own “apostolic ecosystem” (p. 47). One student leader, the young historian René Rémond, spoke confidently of the JEC’s “intellectual mission” (p. 41).

Decolonization divided French Catholics just as it divided French society. In May 1957, leaders of both the JEC and its female equivalent, the JECF, submitted their collective resignation to the bishops in sympathy with those sidelined in other Catholic youth organizations for opposing the war. In the 1960s, as French universities underwent a massive demographic explosion and a democratization of access, the JEC increasingly made common cause with secular student unions such as the UNEF. Tensions and defections recurred in 1965, this time almost destroying the JEC. *Jécistes* were present in the student contestation of May 1968. As Vincent Soulage shows in his essay on the 1970s, *gauchiste* politics also marked the leadership of the shrinking JEC. His trawl of the newly-available JEC archive reveals how shocked some regional branches were at this revolutionary tone. (After Vatican II, at some JEC masses, the laity, and not just the priest, pronounced the consecration of the Eucharist, in a deviation from rubrics.) The JEC became part of a leftist minority within the French Catholic Church whose radicalism was at odds with a renewed emphasis on Catholic identity from the 1970s, itself a church response to perceived excesses in the immediate post-conciliar period.

The prosopography of leaders and chaplains collated by Bernard Giroux is impressive, even if some of the entries are very short. The very diversity of activists contained in the directory, however, serves to point up a more fundamental lack in this book. Unlike in Whitney’s study of the JOC, there is no

sustained examination of the place of gender in the JEC here, notwithstanding references to its female equivalent the JECF. The reader's knowledge of the broader context in terms of church and national politics is sometimes assumed to be too great an extent. Thus, while a worthy contribution on this topic, Barbiche and Sorrel's book should be read as a specialist's companion. To round out the picture, readers may wish to refer to another recently published edited collection *À la gauche du Christ* where articles by Soulage and Claude Prudhomme fit the JEC into the broader tapestry of left-wing Christian politics in France since the Liberation.[3] Taken together, these books show how the JEC formed intellectually agile activists for global causes as well as for the French *gauche plurielle*.

LIST OF ESSAYS

G rard Cholvy, "Jeunesse Chr tiennes en mouvement(s) en France (XIXe-d but XXe si cle)"

Christophe Roucou, "Aux origines de la JEC"

Bernard Giroux, "La JEC de la Lib ration aux ann es 1960"

Vincent Soulage, "Apr s 1968, le 'moment politique'"

Yves-Marie Hilaire, "T moignage: Quelques moments forts de ma vie de j ciste"

Catherine Thieuw-Longevialle, "T moignage: Les fragilit s de la JEC   l'aube du XXIe si cle"

Jacques Pr votat, "Conclusion"

NOTES

[1] Susan B. Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Durham, N.C., & London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 81. See also, Joseph Deb s and  mile Poulat, *L'appel de la J.O.C., 1926-1928* (Paris: Cerf, 1986) and Pierre Pierrard, Michel Launay, and Rolande Tremp , eds., *La J.O.C.: Regards d'historiens* (Paris:  ditions Ouvri res, 1989).

[2] W. D. Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 292-293.

[3] Claude Prudhomme, 'Les jeunesses chr tiennes en crises (1955-1980),' in Denis Pelletier and Jean-Louis Schlegel, eds., *  la gauche du Christ: les chr tiens de gauche en France de 1945   nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), pp. 323-349; Vincent Soulage, "L'engagement politique des chr tiens de gauche, entre Parti socialiste, deuxi me gauche et gauchisme," in Denis Pelletier and Jean-Louis Schlegel, eds., *  la gauche du Christ: les chr tiens de gauche en France de 1945   nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), pp. 425-455.

Gear id Barry
National University of Ireland, Galway
gearoid.barry@nuigalway.ie

Copyright   2013 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical

Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172