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REVIEW ARTICLE

New Perspectives on Twentieth-Century Catholicism

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James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 352 pp. (hb), $35.00, ISBN: 9780674972100.

Piotr H. Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution," 1891–1956* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), $40.00, xxviii + 391 pp. (hb), 13 b/w illus., ISBN: 9780300225518.

Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), $24.95, 264 pp. (hb), ISBN: 9780812248180.

Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), £71.00, x + 264 pp., 17 b/w illus. (hb), ISBN: 9780199593255.

Piotr H. Kosicki, ed., *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), viii + 225 pp. (hb), $64.95, ISBN: 9780813229126.

Stephen J. C. Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), £81.00, viii + 266 pp. (hb), ISBN: 9780199688487.

Darcie Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity: Religion and the End of Empire in France and Algeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), $99.99, xv + 251 pp. (hb), ISBN: 9781107118171.

Introduction

Until the 1980s the history of the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism in modern Europe was mostly the preserve of the theologically and confessionally defined field of 'church history' or 'ecclesiastic history'. Catholic historiography was sealed off from mainstream (North American and British) historiography, with nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholicism seemingly little more than a backward-looking footnote in the dominant narrative of secular modernity and progress. In a 1991 review article David Blackbourn pointed out that 'historians in the mainstream have commonly considered Catholicism, if they considered it at all, as a hopelessly obscurantist force at odds with the more serious isms that have shaped the modern age'.[1] Within the same review, however, Blackbourn signaled the emergence of timid but nevertheless clear 'signs of a change' in the historiographical direction and a new interest in Catholic history.

Luckily, it was not a passing moment. Ever since, historians have worked hard to integrate Catholicism and its institutions, beliefs and practices into the narratives of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe. Historians have focused their radars on a variety of topics and themes that include – to draw a limited list – the Catholic revival of the late nineteenth century, the controversial role of the

[1] David Blackbourn, 'The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution: A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33 (1991), 778–90, here 779.

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Vatican in the Third Reich and the Holocaust, the plurality of Catholic experiences and the resilience of Catholic identity vis-a-vis the age of the extremes, the intersection of Catholicism and nationalism and the Catholic contribution to authoritarian and democratic forms of politics.[2] Over time, it has become increasingly clear that Catholicism continued to function as a notable component of modern European identity, and that even over the course of the twentieth century – the 'secular age' par excellence – Catholicism did not retreat from the public sphere. Catholics, instead, expanded their field of actions and turned their gaze to a wider range of issues, framing them as religious and ethical matters and claiming authority to speak out and act. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church emerged as a new political, social and cultural power after the First World War, expanding its reach beyond Rome and Europe to regions in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and shaping the international state system.[3]

The notable lack of interest in histories of Catholicism, however, was more a feature of English-language historiography than the literature in other European languages. Certainly, there was no shortage of French, Italian or Spanish-language works on Catholic practices, ideas and politics. In countries like France, Spain and Italy Catholicism has been much more than an official religion; it has been a culture, a way of life and a reservoir of tropes, symbols and images placed at the heart of people's world making. For scholars working in democracies embedded in Protestant culture such as the United States and the United Kingdom, instead, writing on a Latin Mediterranean religion was of little interest. Historians are inevitably inclined to share the assumptions and beliefs of the environment in which they live and work. Catholicism was foreign to most of the English-speaking nations, with the exception of Ireland, and was never central to the political cultures of the United States and the United Kingdom. Moreover, Catholicism did not fit easily in the widespread vision of Europe's twentieth century as the scene of the conflict between secular ideologies and political projects of the left and right.[4]

The historiographical move towards Catholic topics has been, in fact, part of a wider 'religious turn' in European and US historical studies and in international affairs that, from Hugh McLeod's 1981 survey *Religion and the People of Europe* onwards, has increasingly called stories of secularisation, disenchantment and modernism into question, providing a counter-narrative of re-enchantment and re-sacralisation of the world.[5] Several factors have triggered the 'religious' shift: from the waning of

[2] David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarkian Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Margaret L. Anderson, 'The Limit of Secularization: On the Problem of Catholic Revival in Nineteenth Germany', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1995), 647–70; Mary Vincent, *Catholicism in the Second Spanish Republic: Religion and Politics in Salamanca, 1930–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Fréderic Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France, 1885–1935* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1998); Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religion and National Identity in Modern France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); William Patch, 'The Catholic Church, the Third Reich, and the Origins of the Cold War: On the Utility and Limitations of Historical Evidence', *Journal of Modern History*, 82 (2010), 396–433; Brian Porter–Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Patrick Houlihan, *Catholicism and the Great War: Religion and Everyday Life in Germany and Austria–Hungary, 1914–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[3] Giuliana Chamedes, 'The Vatican and the Reshaping of the European International Order after the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 5 (2013), 955–76; Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[4] As noted by Martin Conway, 'Introduction', in Buchanan and Conway, *Political Catholicism*, 1–33, here 4–5.

[5] Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jonathan Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, Religion and Enigma of Secularization', *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 1061–80; Thomas Albert Howard, 'A "Religious Turn" in Modern European Historiography?', *Historically Speaking*, 4/5 (2003), 24–6; Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion in the Transformation of International Relations: the Struggle for the Soul of the Twentieth-First Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Andrew Preston, 'Bridging the Gap between Church and State in the History of American Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 30 (2006), 783–812; Jeffrey Cox, Thomas Albert Howard, Thomas Kselman, and George S. Williamson, 'Modern European Historiography Forum', *Church History*, 75 (2006), 120–62; David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); Victor Viaene, 'International History, Religious History,

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the secularisation thesis in sociological literature,[6] to the insights of the 'new cultural history' that emerged and developed in the 1980s and 1990s, to the post-modern agenda that has encouraged scholars to include religion within their interests.[7] Other motives at the base of the return to religion have political connotations. In recent years political and cultural debates have focused much on the role religion should or should not play in public life, on how religion and secularity can or should co-exist. In the US context, debates fundamentally concern the public role of religion in a multicultural environment, searching for what John Rawls called an 'overlapping consensus' in support of the US version of liberal democracy.[8] In the European context, the underpinning value of religion for modern democratic and constitutional traditions came to the fore as an object of public debate in the context of the writing of the European Constitution (2003–4). The topic was famously taken up in the momentous debates between Jürgen Habermas and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, future pope Benedict XVI.[9] However, and without a doubt, at the global level the overshadowing focus has during the last decades been on Islam and its relationship with modernity and democratic political arrangements. This emphasis has understandably been strengthened by 9/11 and then by the dramatic events related to the 'Arab spring', which saw both secular and religious forces vying for power in the (post-) revolutionary settings, and with Western commentators expressing still more open concerns regarding the growing influence of Islamic currents and their political intentions, domestic and international. Scholars and commentators have explicitly drawn the analogy between Christian and Muslim democracy, wondering whether the history of Catholicism could be of some help in understanding the ways in which Islam might relate to modern secular politics.[10]

Broadly in line with the religious turn, the books reviewed here continue the task of writing Catholicism into the history of twentieth-century Europe. Rather than trying to fit Catholicism in what Charles Maier calls the 'moral narrative' of the twentieth century – the narrative focusing on the Holocaust, its causes and its consequences – these works try to take stock of its crucial contribution to European politics, society and culture.[11] Integrating cultural studies with intellectual history and methods of social analysis, they expand the definition of what constitutes political behaviour, calling into question instrumental and functional perspectives that reduce religion to a mere epiphenomenon, and raising momentous questions about the Catholic engangement with the political, cultural and societal spheres. These works advance compelling and novel arguments – though less original and innovative when compared to the scholarship in other European languages – without completely grasping two interrelated aspects which are in fact crucial for reconsidering the role that Catholicism has played in the twentieth century: the question of transcendence and the power of historical events as transformative experiences, or, in other words, the

Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830–1914)', *European History Quarterly*, 38 (2008), 568–607; 'The Persistence of Religion in Modern Europe', special issue, *The Journal of Modern History*, 82 (2010), 255–517; Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred C. Stepan, Monica Duffy Toft, eds., *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Thomas Brodies, 'Religion and Germany's Twentieth Century', *English Historical Review*, 132 (2017), 1499–1518.

[6] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Rodney Stark, 'Secularization R.I.P', *Sociology of Religion*, 60 (1999), 249–73; Peter Berger, *The Desecularizaton of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[7] As noted by Thomas Albert Howard, 'Commentary – A "Religious Turn" in Modern European Historiography', *Church History*, 75 (2006): 157–63, here 157.

[8] John Rawls *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 143–9.

[9] Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005),

[10] Vali Nasr, 'The Rise of Muslim Democracy', *The Journal of Democracy*, 16 (2005), 13–27; Jan-Werner Müller, 'Making Muslim Democracy: How Religious Ideas Enter Politics', *Boston Review*, 35, 6 (2010), 36–42.

[11] Charles Maier, 'Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era', *The American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 807–31, 826.

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living through critical junctures of history and the subsequent emergence of new ideas and states of conciousness.[12]

Catholic Modernity, Catholic Revolution

In *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church*, James Chappel explores how, when and why the Catholic Church became modern, positively embracing the modern world of pluralism, human rights and democracy. To tackle this topic, Chappel provides a dense and engaging intellectual history that focuses not on popes and bishops but on lay individuals and on movements of ideas in Austria, France and Germany. The received wisdom locates the Catholic embracing of modernity in the 1960s, when the Second Vatican Council recognised with the pastoral constitution *Gaudium and Spes* (*Joy and Hope*) the 'good to be found in the social dynamism of today'. Chappel proposes a radically alternative narrative: it was in the 1930s that Catholics abandoned anti-modernism and the dream of restoring a quasi-medieval form of Christendom and reconsidered their relationship with modern political ideologies. Vis-a-vis the threat of totalitarianism, either of the left or the right, Catholics began to elaborate new ways to engage with the body politic. Instead of trying to overturn modernity and supplant secular modern state and economy, they began asking themselves 'how can we shape secular modernity to our specifications?'[13] To answer the question, two rival strategies – or two Catholic forms of modernity – emerged among Catholic intellectuals and leaders. Both were legitimate ways of updating the long Catholic tradition. Both involved the creation of a private sphere where Catholic beliefs, values and institutions would be protected from the intrusiveness and dubious impartiality of the secular state.

The first strategy, which Chappel calls 'paternal Catholic modernism', congealed around the defense of the sanctity of the patriarchal reproductive family as the protected sphere of private religious values. Catholics could accept the legitimacy and authority of the secular welfare state, so long as its benefits were felt by the family, and so long as Catholic teaching about the family (on abortion, homosexuality, and divorce) were translated into law. Paternal Catholic modernism was linked with the increasing importance of anti-communism in Catholic circles, serving, thus, as the main rationale for Catholic collaboration with fascist or authoritarian regimes that promised to defend the family against communism. 'A focus on the family', Chappel argues further, also helped Catholics to legitimate forms of anti-Semitism, 'which coded the Jews as communist-allied enemies of the Catholic family'.[14] The widespread Catholic turn to authoritarianism and fascism was not a momentary detour on the inevitable path to modernity, but a distinctly Catholic modern phenomenon that aimed at defending and enshrining the Catholic vision of the family as a sacred private sphere. Chappel also shows that paternal Catholic modernism survived the Second World War: it first helped to legitimate the mixture of family friendly welfare state and anti-communism that ensured the success of Christian Democratic parties in post-war Europe (especially in Germany) and then sustained the Catholic mobilisation around questions of sexuality under the papacy of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

The second strategy, or 'fraternal Catholic modernism', was a different story. For a minority of Catholics, the threat of fascism was greater than any danger from the left. Much more suspicious of the state and capitalism than their 'paternal' fellows, these Catholics believed in workers' solidarity, free trade unions and a free press to limit the power of state and market. They did not reject Catholic traditional teaching on family. To them, however, a healthy (Catholic) family life and ethics could not be disentangled from emancipatory socio-political projects. To this end, they were willing to collaborate across ideological and religious borders – with socialists, Protestants, Jews – and craft a new kind of

[12] On 'transformative experiences' see Harald Wydra, *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6, 31–57; Rosario Forlenza, *On the Edge of Democracy: Italy, 1943–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15–6.

[13] James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitatianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridg, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018), 13.

[14] Ibid., 14

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pluralist citizenship. In many ways, these 'fraternal modernists' were more beholden than their paternal counterparts to the ancient totalising Catholic dream of redeeming the world, even if they were unapologetically modern. French philosopher Jacques Maritain, with his commitment to a pluralist civil society and belief in a democracy rooted in the Gospel, was the most important representative of the 'fraternal modernist' line. As its competing paternal counterpart, the fraternal strategy survived across the chasms of the Second World War – never becoming, though, the dominant paradigm of Catholic engagement with the world. It influenced sectors within post-war Christian Democracy, thus entering into a not always easy truce with paternal modernism.

In fact, Christian Democracy of the long 1950s (1949–65 roughly), Chappel explains, expressed a form of Catholic modernism that drew on and made room for both the paternal and the fraternal strategies. The historical conditions of the time were uniquely well suited to the alliance between the more conservative and the more progressive wings of Catholicism. Sexual liberation was yet to come and Catholics, Chappel argues, did not have to confront divisive question about women's liberation. Furthermore, he writes, 'economic growth was stratospheric' and conducive to 'ideological compromise'. Finally, and perhaps most important, Catholics possessed 'vivid memories of the war' and had 'little appetite for deep ideological conflict, gravitating instead toward doctrines of consensus and dialogue'.[15] The coexistence betweeen the two strategies ended in the mid-to-late 1960s. Sexual revolution and the weakening of Christian Democratic modernism led to to a confrontational politics betweeen the two strategies, whose battleground was the sphere of family and reproduction. The fraternal stategies found a renewed radical expression in the Catholic new left of the 1960s and today in the papacy of Francis, with his attempts at re-energising a Catholic ethic that focuses especially on social, economic and ecological matters.

Chappel explores the various forms of twentieth-century Catholic modernity with exemplary scholarship and remarkable narrative and analytical skills, but his monograph raises more questions than it can satisfactorily answer. To begin with, seen from within different historiographical traditions, *Catholic Modern* is much less original and innovative than it might appear from an American and British perspective. For example, scholars working on Italy have explored the complex relationship of Catholicism and modernity and demonstrated that the 1930s were crucial for the development of Catholic alternative forms of modernity.[16] Their scholarship might have strengthened the basis of Chappel's argument. After all, Italy constitutes a theoretically and historically challenging case that ought to stand as a crucial reference point for any reflection on Catholicism and the modern. Italy embodied the institutional hierarchy and spiritual centre of Catholicism and hosted some of the fiercest battles between religion and politics in Western history from the Roman Empire onwards. The only real comparison to this situation, at least for recent developments, is perhaps Turkey; but whereas Turkey in the 1920s abolished the Caliphate and erased any representation of a universal, extra-territorial organisation, in Italy things developed very differently.[17]

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Chappel does not fully break with a secular liberal vision of modernity, and thus does not fully capture the potential richness and deeper challenge of Catholic modernity. Catholics became modern, he argues, when they accepted the modern split between the private sphere of religion and faith and the public sphere of politics and economics.[18] That religious matters belong by definition to the private sphere is sure enough a central (arguably *the* central) assumption of a secular liberal vision of modernity. Yet, as Bjørn Thomassen and I have shown,

[15] Ibid., 187.

[16] Pietro Scoppola, *Crisi modernista e rinnovamento cattolico in Italia* (Bologna, 1969); Francesco Traniello, *Religione cattolica e stato nazionale. Dal Risorgimento al secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007); Guido Formigoni, *Alla prova della democrazia: Chiesa, cattolici, e modernità nell'Italia del* '900 (Trento: Il Margine, 2008); Jorge Dagnino, *Faith and Fascism: Catholic Intellectuals in Italy, 1925–1943* (London: Routledge, 2017); Rosario Forlenza and Bjørn Thomassen, *Italian Modernities: Competing Narratives of Nationhood* (New York: Palgarve, 2016), 57–90; Bjørn Thomassen and Rosario Forlenza, 'Catholic Modernity and the Italian Constitution', *History Workshop Journal*, 81 (2016), 251–71.

[17] E. Fuat Keyman, 'Modernity, Secularism and Islam: The Case of Turkey', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24 (2007), 215–34.

[18] Chappel, *Catholic Modern*, 2, 64, 112, 146.

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Catholic modernity emerged as a historically significant alternative to both socialist and liberal visions of modernity, an alternative that reincorporated transcendence as a legitimate perspective of truth and reason, and re-anchored the sphere of politics in a religiously argued ethos. For example, crucial principal of Catholic social thought – the centrality of the person, a social view of the economy and the defence of non-statal entities from the family to the Church – entered into the post-Second World War Constitutions of Italy, France and Germany.[19] The Catholic philosophical luggage was also translanted in the nascent process of European integration and still today the institutional assets of the European Union reflect traditional tenets of Catholic social thought such as subsidiarity.[20] In so doing, Catholics refused the liberal dictum that religion be confined to the private sphere; in fact, they worked consciously to translate moral and religious values into social and political life – without, of course, reducing the political to the religious (or vice versa).[21] The broader point that must be stressed here is that the most significant thinkers behind Catholic visions of modernity simply did not embrace liberal modernity, even if they accepted some of its features (including political pluralism). They, instead, from within the Catholic tradition, conceptualised a 'competing' modernity compatible with a Catholic religious vision of history and politics.[22] Hence, the Catholic articulation of modernity should not simply serve as an adjustment of Catholic or European history, it must also relate to a more nuanced understanding of the very discourse of 'modernity' and the tension between religion and secularism as it unfolded within Europe in the twentieth century.

Finally, Chappel's distinction between 'fraternal' and 'paternal' modernism is at times overly simplistic and minimises nuances and ambiguities, creating boxes in which leading Catholic intellectuals did not necessarily fit neatly. Piotr Kosicki's *Catholic on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution", 1891–1956* offers an expansion and a correction of Chappel's taxonomy and exploration of the modern. Kosicki examines the intellectual world of Catholicism in Poland and France between the Church's declaration of war on socialism at the end of nineteenth century and the demise of Stalinism in 1956. He explores the influence of French Catholic philosophy on Polish Catholic intellectuals as they tried to come to term with modernity and remake Polish social and political life from the interwar to the post-war era. In his telling, Catholics in France and Poland interested in bringing Catholicism into modernity adopted personalism, a theology and a philosophy exemplified in the writings of Maritain and, especially, Emmanuel Mounier. Central to Catholic personalism was the concept of the 'person', derived from St Thomas Aquinas, and its opposition to the 'individual'. The human 'person' has a spiritual and transcendent quality and destiny, not reducible to material and biological nature, and flourishes only within a community. It is created in the image of God, and thus is endowed with an innate dignity. It is via the transcendent principle that the good of all can be articulated in the first place, opening the way to the creation of a just and peaceful society.

Kosicki shows that French personalism was at the centre of the 'revolution' in Catholic thought that gradually made its way into Poland, first sustaining Polish dissident groups during the Nazi occupation and later serving as a corrective to communism. After the war personalism was on the other side of the Iron Curtain, he explains, the basis for a leftist Catholic new vision for a more just society based on humanitarianism, peace and brotherhood. After all, for Polish Catholic intellectuals and for their French inspirers personalism implied a Christian socialism and an openness to Marxists. Many Polish

[19] Thomassen and Forlenza, 'Catholic Modernity'.

[20] On this see also Rosario Forlenza, 'The Politics of the Abendland: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 26 (2017), 261–86.

[21] Forlenza and Thomassen, *Italian Modernities*, 57–90; Forlenza and Thomassen, 'Rethinking Christian Democracy: Transcendence as Transformation, 1930–1950', paper presented at the American Historical Association annual meeting, Washington DC, 2018; Thomassen and Forlenza, 'Christianity and Political Thought: Augusto Del Noce and the Ideology of Christian Democracy in Post-War Italy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 21 (2016), 181–99.

[22] On the differentiation of pathways to modernity see Bjørn Thomassen, 'Anthropology, Multiple Modernities and the Axial Age Debate', *Anthropological Theory*, 10 (2010), 321–42; Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

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Catholic personalists embraced socialism and Marxism as compatible with Catholicism; some of them eventually turned personalism into craven rationalisation of the Stalinist police State. Thus, the historical function of personalism was to permit Polish Catholics to believe that they were not the collaborators of Stalinism, but part of an international Catholic movement. However, Kosicki shows that other Polish Catholic personalists, either within the country or in exile, chose a different path and turned to anti-communism, including the young priest Karol Wojtyla, the future John Paul II. In the Epilogue, Kosicki briefly explains the influence of personalism on Vatican II and on Poland's Solidarity movement.

Somewhat paradoxically, the personalist vision that had emerged during the war did not manage to clean Polish Catholicism from long-standing anti-Semitic prejudices and pre-existing ethno-nationalist hatred. Poland's Catholic vanguard, Kosicki writes, 'rejected the pogroms that awaited scores of returning Holocaust survivors in 1945 and 1946', but 'they generally believed that pre-war Poland had suffered from a Jewish problem and that the Holocaust had done much to resolve that problem'.[23] Likewise, the odd left-wing hybrid of Polish Catholic ethno-nationalism, based on the 'Catholic Pole' concept as manufactured in the interwar era,[24] found a renewed expression in the post-war era through a fear of a revanchist Germany, which was another reason that reinforced the link between French and Polish Catholics.[25]

Catholics on the Barricades complicates the narrative of Chappel's *Catholic Modern* in several ways. Kosicki suggests that what Chappel defines 'fraternal Catholic modernist', profoundly imbued with a personalist vision, had an ambiguous profile. Mounier and other personalists initially supported the Vichy regime, before turning to Soviet communism and Marxism after the war. The contradiction is only apparent. Both stances stemmed in fact from the same strong disdain of liberal individualism, which Mounier held responsible for 'the established disorder' (*le desordre établi*), his scathing designation for the corrupt parliamentary politics of the French Third Republic and for a political culture associated with the heritage of the French Revolution. After all, Kosicki explains, Mounier's personalism was 'totalistic' if not 'totalitarian', and like totalitarianism promised 'total integration through political power' and 'total control over sovereignity' as a prerequisite to reshaping the world.[26]

Kosicki also explains that the Catholic transition to modernity was a return to the past. In a literal sense, he argues, 'revolution implies a return to the sources, coming full circle'. In the personalist vision for a Catholic reordering of the world, the French masters and their Polish disciples proposed precisely 'a return to the sacred, the restoration of personhood abandoned in the course of the world's secularisation, from the Renaissance to the Reformation through the Industrial Revolution'.[27] Catholic modernity and the restoration of the human person were a return to God, and to the textual sources of Catholicism: the Gospel, Augustine and Aquinas. Yet, Kosicki does not really unravel the full implications of this revolution. Like Chappel, he takes Catholic anti-liberalism and disdain for Europe's liberal institutions as a simple fact of life and not as the Catholic effort to develop and resubstantiate the modern call to freedom from within a Christian tradition, opening the way for an 'integral', 'organic' and also evangelical and spiritual post-liberal order.

Furthermore, Kosicki tells a history that is too linear and too transparent in its causes and effects. Retracing the complex political and existential trajectory of the first democratic Polish prime minister after communism Tadeusz Maziowiecki – from the anti-Nazi activisties to the justification of trials of nuns and priest in the early 1950s, from the rejecton of Stalinism to the Solidarity movement – Kosicki, like Chappel, misses the transformative power of historical experiences and the experiential, transformative aspect at play in the dialectical relationship between politics and religion in periods of

[23] Piotr H. Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution", 1891–1956* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 138.

[24] Porter-Szūcs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 328–59.

[25] In the specific context of Poland, Kosicki argues, anti-Germanism 'assumed the place that anti-Semitism had occupied before World War'; Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades*, 160.

[26] Ibid., 12–3.

[27] Ibid., 308.

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crisis and transition. Polish Catholics became personalists not only because they read Mounier and Maritain, but also because of their experience with war and authoritarian regimes and their reflection on this experience. The experience of war or living under oppression, and the existential uncertainty it entailed, encouraged them to search for a Catholic response to the problem of modern mass politics. The pillars of their education and worldview collapsed, sparking a search for *meaning*. The transformational powers that flow through meaning and experience cannot be contained or even grasped within an analysis that narrows discussion to intellectual motivations, ideological battles and strategic games within the institutional order, where political outcomes are attributed to a set of ideas. In Poland, in France and elsewhere in Europe, individuals were genuinely transformed by forces bigger than themselves. For example, in Italy many young Catholics who had previously embraced fascism or remained apolitical entered active politics and converted to democracy at the time of the Second World War. With the experience of the war and the existential uncertainty this created, young Catholics changed their perspectives on life, politics and the function of culture. From the cultural and social sphere, they made a decisive move into the political realm.[28] The transformative events of the war and human experiences of crisis played a crucial role in the formulation of political ideas and inspiration for political action. Without understanding the profound and existential reasons and the complexity of this transformation, we are ill-equipped to grasp the trajectory of Catholicism and the history of post-war Europe.

Christian Human Rights, Catholic Ideas

Catholic Modern and *Catholics on the Barricades* take Catholicism seriously as a set of philosophical ideas. Over time the emphases of Catholic teaching changed, investing multiple dimensions: from race to gender, from sex to citizenship. Catholic intellectuals introduced into the debate a new set of assumptions and keywords on social and political problems that influenced the subsequent course of history. Most notably, human rights became a lingua franca of Catholic discourse.

With *Christian Human Rights*, Samuel Moyn goes one step further. Challenging the received wisdom, Moyn confidently asserts that the human rights culture that emerged after the Second World War was not the culmination of secular Enlightenment, cosmopolitanism and liberal internationalism,[29] but instead the consequence of a profound shift in Christian, primarily Catholic, thought. It was the project of the Christian right, not, as widely assumed, of the secular left. In his previous work *The Last Utopia*, Moyn demonstrated the importance of the 1970s for the implementation of the modern architecture of human rights.[30] With *Christian Human Rights*, he steps back one generation, reconstructing an alternative genealogy that locates human rights within European political and cultural developments of the late 1930s and the 1940s. Vis-a-vis the threat of modern state totalitarianism, Christian conservative – predominantly Catholic – intellectuals elaborated a language of human rights rooted in Christian theology, that intended to repair the crisis of the old order. This language, he argues, had a decisive stamping and lasting effect on the human rights ideology that won official acceptance in the anti-Soviet Western world.

The connection between human rights and the textual sources of Christianity, including the biblical tradition, or other religions is hardly unknown among scholars.[31] Moyn proposes instead a contingent

[28] Forlenza, *On the Edge*, 202–3; Forlenza and Thomassen, 'Rethinking Christian Democracy'.

[29] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mazower, 'The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 379–98; Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007); Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, R*ené Cassin and Human Rights: From the Great War to the Universal Declaration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[30] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

[31] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Geneaology of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013); Josè Casanova, 'Cosmopolitanism, the Clash of Civilizations and Multiple Modernities', *Current Sociology*, 59 (2011), 252–67.

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and time-bound perspective. He explores four crucial formative moments for the emergence of Christian human rights: the 1937 Irish Constitution, the theology of Maritain, the historiography of the German Protestant Gerhard Ritter and the role of Catholic and Protestant movements in the construction of European human rights institutions.

The language of Maritain made its way into the 1937 Irish Constitution, the first modern constitution to defend 'the dignity and freedom of the individual', while at the same time banning divorce and beginning with the invocation of the Holy Trinity. It then reached unprecedented heights of public visibility in 1942 when in a famous Christmas radio message, pope Pius XII spoke of the 'dignity of the human person' and the necessity to defend 'fundamental personal rights'. Maritain remained a central figure after the war. He inspired generations of Catholic politicians in Europe and South America, played a crucial role in the drafting of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights[32] and inspired texts and debates of the Second Vatican Council. Although Moyn is concerned mainly with (European) Catholicism, he also discusses how personalism and the rise of human rights as a bulwark against totalitarianism burgeoned also within the network of transatlantic Protestantism in the mid-twentieth century. If Maritain was the leading philosopher of human rights, the devout Lutheran Gerhard Ritter was its preeminent historian. In his 1948 lecture 'The Origin and Nature of Human Rights' (published in 1949 in the *Historische Zeitschrift*), Ritter traced the lineage of human rights back to a kernel of Christian ideas, while recognising the importance of Catholic natural law. Quite crucially, Moyn explains, the mid-twentieth-century Christian re-conceptualisation of human rights and democratic politics contributed greatly to the conservative stabilisation of post-war (Western) Europe and the United States. Most notably, the Christian-Catholic constitutional language influenced the Christian movements and parties that refounded democracy in Western Europe, enabling them to draw on the concept of rights for their own political and ideological anti-totalitarian (anti-communist) agenda.[33]

In the final chapter on the creation of European rights courts and institutions, Moyn connects the Christian heritage of human rights and the struggles that Europe faces in integrating Muslim citizens into its legal system.[34] The debate on the use of the headscarf in French public life expose the limits of the modern Western conception of human rights. Their Christian-Catholic origins, Moyn argues, render them eventually hostile to non-Christian values and culture. 'Most of all', he writes, 'if human rights should remain central to collective politics, they would have to come in a version that would finally transcend their Christian incarnation – for in a certain sense, the Muslim headscarf cases show contemporary human rights to be not too secular but not secular enough'.[35] *Christian Human Rights* poses a crucial question: if human rights are so tied to a Christian-Catholic heritage, can they adapt to the complex legal pluralism that today's Europe demand? Can they do the work which so many in the current global world wish them to do?

Moyn's *Christian Human Rights* advanced formidable important arguments and, together with Chappel's *Catholic Modern* and Kosicki's *Catholics on the Barricades*, forcefully reconfigures the way in which historians (should) think about the direction of intellectual and political life in the post-war era. Chiefly, these works correct the neglect of religion in general and Catholicism in particular of

[32] On this see Mary Ann Glendon, A *World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002); John S. Nurser, *For All People and All Nations: The Economical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetwon University Press, 2005).

[33] Forlenza, 'The Politics of the Abendland'; Forlenza, 'A Party for Mezzogiorno: The Christian Democratic Party, Agrarian Reform and the Government of Italy', *Contemporary European History*, 19 (2010), 331–49; Maria Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy: The Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Wolfram Kaiser and Martin Gehler, eds, *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945* (London, 2004); Martin Conway, 'The Age of Christian Democracy: The Frontiers of Success and Failure', in Thomas Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 43–67.

[34] On this see also Rosario Forlenza and Bryan S. Turner, 'Das Abendland: The Politics of Europe's Religious Border', *Critical Research on Religion*, 7 (2019), 6–23.

[35] Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 167.

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many acclaimed historical works.[36] The 1940s and the 1950s were the golden age not only of secular thinkers, but also of figures like Maritain and Mounier in France, Ritter and Waldemar Gurian and Karl Jaspers in Germany and Augusto Del Noce in Italy.[37] The question remains whether Moyn's alternative reading can really replace the geneaology of human rights that goes back to the Enlightenment and the civic conception that emerged and crystallised with the French Revolution. By focusing heavily on the religious hinterland of human rights, Moyn forgets that outside Europe the term 'human rights' has had in the historical juncture of the 1960s and 1970s a revolutionary meaning and was picked up by leftist movements against dictatorship, colonial rule and apartheid.[38]

Moreover, for all its brilliance, the organisation of *Christian Human Rights* is somewhat disjointed: almost every chapter was previously published as a journal article or essay and repetitions abound. Moreover, too often Moyn treats Christianity as a moral movement and not as a lived religion, neglecting the experiential dimension of Catholic politics, culture and symbolism. The same secularising reflex emerges in a too binary distinction of Christian (conservative) right and secular progressive left – perhaps a consequence of Moyn's increasing embeddedness in the US political debate – and in the claim that, because of its Christian heritage, human rights culture today is 'not secular enough'[39] and is instead a 'potentially troubling starting point'[40] for contemporary human rights activists. This perspective obscures the complex mixture of conservatism and reformism within religion (Christianity), and likewise obscures the fact that, as anthropologist Talal Asad has argued in his genealogical account of the secular, secularism must be viewed as something much more than a mere separation of religious from secular institutions of government, since it pressuposes *new* concepts of religion, ethics and politics, and is closely linked to the emergernce of the modern nation state. In Asad's formulation, the secular cannot be seen as the 'rational' succesor of religion but rather emerges as a multilayered historical category related to the foundational premises of democracy and modernity.[41] But exactly the same can and must of course be said with respect to religion itself, which, parallel with formations of the secular, dialectically transforms itself, accommodates new realities and opens itself to alternative readings of the modern.

The Spirit of Vatican II: West and East

Chappel, Kosicki and Moyn forcefully explain that Catholic modernity did not begin in the 1960s with the Second Vatican Council. The Council, however, certainly emboldened politically and socially committed Catholics and gave rise to a significant, and often overlooked, wave of progressive left Catholicism. In *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties*, Gerd Rainer Horn engages with the energies that fed into the Council, the responses it

[36] Karl D. Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*, tr. E. Osers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984); Eric J. Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (New York: Penguin, 1994); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005). There is instead ample space dedicated to Catholic ideas in Jan-Werner. Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011) and in John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Thinking on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[37] Martin Conway, 'Christian Democracy: One Word or Two', *Historia y Religión* (2012), available at http://historiayreligion.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Christian-Democracy-MConway.pdf (last accessed 4 Mar. 2019); Thomassen and Forlenza, 'Christianity and Political Thought'.

[38] Jan Eckel, 'Under a Magnyfying Glass: The International Human Rights Campaign against Chile in the Seventies', in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ed., *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 321–42; Eckel, 'The Rebirth of Politics from the Spirit of Morality: Explaining the Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s', in Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 226–60.

[39] Moyn, *Christian Human Rights*, 167.

[40] Ibid., 61.

[41] Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2003), 1–2.

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provided and the dynamics it unleashed. The book is a sequel to Horn's *Western European Liberation Theology, 1924–1959: The First Wave* (2008), and a companion to his *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America 1956–1976* (2007), and serves, the author claims, to correct the 'silences of historiography'[42] on the Catholic contribution to the protest and radical dreams of liberation of the late 1960s. The first background chapter focuses on the utopian, messianic and apocalyptic character of the theology that shaped the Council and the Church afterward. The following chapters move to consider how these theological dreams translated into development and radical forms of action on the ground. Horn discusses the red or working priests in Italy, Belgium and France (chapter 2), the rise of spontaneous ecclesial or base communities in Italy (chapter 3), Catholic student activism (chapter 4) and the impact of progressive Catholicism on workers and trade unions, especially in Spain and Italy (chapter 5). In the end, Horn explains, progressive Catholicism and the Catholic contribution to the dream of the late 1960s had a short life. The spirit of the Council activated a spiral of Catholic radicalisation and militant commitment, but the impact and confrontation with the reality of an institution reluctant to reform itself resulted in a rapid disenchantment and loss of motivation. The theological discourse linking Catholic salvation to struggle for liberation ran out of steam while the eagerly awaited changes did not come. Catholic militants either gave up with their struggle or joined forces with secular revolutionaries to fight purely secular struggles. The haze of postmodernity made it impossible to build, as they wished, the Promised Land on earth.

Horn has an impressive command of the source material and a total grasp of the topic. Each chapter might be considered a case-study and yet all chapters are connected in a remarkable and convincing way. His work is authoritative and, breaking disciplinary boundaries, deserves to be read widely by scholars of social movements and history of the left, church history and post-war Western European history. For all its strength and depth, however, *The Spirit of Vatican II* overlooks a crucial aspect of post-council progressive Catholicism: sexual revolution and the question of gender and family, which Hugh McLeod has correctly identified as 'the most enigmatic aspect of the religious upheavals' of the 1960s.[43] Horn neglects the socio-political controversies generated by Paul VI encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (*On Human Life*, 1968), which reaffirmed the Church's orthodox view on sex and marriage and condemned artificial birth control. He fails to give an account of the attempts by ordinary Catholic men and women to reconfigure and reconceptualise the *personal* within the orthodox Church teaching on sex, marriage and family in political terms and with the theological-ideological language of liberation and revolution.[44] Consequently, Horn proposes a traditional narrative that identifies the political in structural, materialist and male terms. He also misses the opportunity to discuss the causes and genealogy of the hottest debate and the most crucial struggle internal to the Church of Francis: the struggle over sex and marriage.[45] Despite these limitations, *The Spirit of Vatican II* can be considered a crucial benchmark for understanding the ebb and flow of progressive Catholicism in Western Europe.

The Council did not only trigger the meteoric rise and fall of progressive Catholicism in Western Europe, but also fashioned a uniquely transnational space between the Vatican and the countries of the Soviet Bloc. The goal of the collected volume *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain*, its editor Piotr Kosicki writes, 'is to begin the process of writing Central and Eastern Europe back into the story of the Second Vatican Council, its origins, its consequences'.[46] The volume is a welcome addition to literature and results in an extremely valuable and pathbreaking work that has received little attention

[42] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 259–60.

[43] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 187.

[44] See on this Alana Harris, ed., *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception, and 'Humanae Vitae'* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

[45] Rosario Forlenza and Bryan S. Turner, 'The Last Frontier: The Struggle over Sex and Marriage under Pope Francis, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 57 (2016), 689–710.

[46] Piotr H. Kosicki, 'Introduction', in Piotr H. Kosicki, ed., *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 1–26, here 7.

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from historians: the role of Catholics from the Soviet Bloc during the Vatican and the impact of the council in communist Europe. The rich and useful editor's introduction is followed by five chapters that cover Hungary (Arpád von Klimó), Yugoslavia (Ivo Banac), Czechoslovakia (James Ramon Felak), Poland (Kosicki) and the Vatican's diplomatic affairs in the context of the Cold War (Gerard P. Fogarty).

The received wisdom is that bishops from behind the Iron Curtain had virtually no role during the Council, and that Vatican II had no resonance east of Vienna. Instead, *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain* shows that some Catholics from communist countries, including the young Polish bishop Karol Wojtyla, participated in the Council; it also shows that the spirit of Vatican II triggered a series of pastoral experiments and lay activities that would have been unthinkable prior to the Council. Communist censorship, however, hindered the spread of these initiatives within wider sectors of society. Thus, the ideal of Vatican II faded away and never extended beyond Catholic bishops and intellectuals.

The essays in *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain* reveal that Catholics in Eastern Europe experienced the challenge of modernity in the context of communist authoritarianism, and consequently came to conflate the two. To them, the call for 'freedom of conscience' did not mean, as it did for their fellows in the West, a battle against anti-modernism and in favor of democracy and human rights; it primarily meant instead a struggle to restore their own right to teach catechism in state school and free people from secular decadence and state atheism. In short, the message of the Council could mean, and often meant, different things in different contexts. The Council wanted to open the Church to the modern world, but not every corner of the world was modern in the same way. *Vatican II Behind the Iron Curtain* helps to disembed scholarship on the Catholic Church from Western Europe, in favor or a wider transnational perspective.

Catholicism Between Europe and the World

Throughout the twentieth century the Catholic Church exerted all its efforts toward restoration, renovation and evangelisation, extending its reach well beyond Europe. Its global empire and thus its transnationality implicated Rome in political struggles that spanned continents. Stephen Andes's *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920–1940* and Darcie Fontaine's *Decolonizing Christianity: Religion and the End of Empire in France and Algeria* explore from different perspectives crucial aspects of Catholicism's transnational history.

Andes's work connects interwar Vatican diplomacy to the national histories of Chile and Mexico. During the period 1920 to 1940, Mexican and Chilean Catholics moved increasingly into party politics to combat the secular state and find a solution to the social questions of the time – harsh working conditions, low wages and poverty. The strategies were different, though. Chilean bishops sought to re-energise the feeble Catholic party (*Partido Conservador*) with the injection of new young forces from the Catholic Action. The 1917 Mexican Constitution, the culmination of the revolution that had swept the country since 1910, had prohibited confessional parties. Nonetheless, Mexican Catholics mobilised through worker leagues and clandestine associations that tried to hinder the implementation of anti-clerical legislation. Eventually, Catholic activists called for rebellion and rural militants waged a civil war against the government (the Cristero Rebellion, 1926–9).

Andes explains that both strategies, however, generated frictions between Catholics on the ground and Rome. Catholics' activism posed a problem for Vatican officials. Rome wished to deal directly with secular governments to secure the Church's right without interference from Catholic activists that could undermine its negotiating position. After 1931 the Italian model of Catholic Action – forged in the context of the rise and consolidation of Mussolini's fascist regime – was promoted globally.[47] Essentially, Catholic Action was to be the umbrella organisation of Catholic religious, social and

[47] John Pollard, 'Pius XI's Promotion of the Italian Model of Catholic Action in the World-Wide Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastic History*, 63 (2013), 758–84.

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cultural activism strictly controlled by the hierarchy and forbidden from acting directly in politics. Rome desired to monopolise political power by a redefinition of Catholic activism. However, Andes shows, Mexican and Chilean Catholics were not passive recipients of Vatican policy. Quite the opposite, he writes, 'as the Vatican sought to circumscribe the action of confessional political movements, Catholic activists pushed back against regulation, even rejecting papal attempts to centralise Church authority and universalise Church practices on national and local level'.[48] Consequently, the realm of politics became, Andes explains, a 'contested arena, not only between the Church and the state, but also within the Church itself'.[49] It was precisely this internal struggle that shaped Catholic participation in Mexican and Chilean politics. Political developments in Chile and Mexico, however, followed a different track. Mexican Catholic political organisations fluctuated between fascist authoritarian stances and detachment from active politics until the birth of the conservative and anti-Marxist *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party) in 1939. In Chile, the young Catholic generation of the 1930s challenged the position of the Chilean Conservative Party, which since the 1860s had been the representative of Catholics in politics, eventually turning to Maritain and his mixture of social Catholic thought and democratic politics.

In *Decolonizing Christianity*, Darcie Fontaine examines the central role Christianity played in the decolonisation of Algeria. By Christianity, she means Catholic and Protestant institutions and beliefs in both France and Algeria, with Catholics vastly outnumbering Protestants in both places. Rather than recreating a totalising narrative of Christian engagement in the war, Fontaine reconstructs the complex and pluralistic history of Christian activism, the settler community and its relationship with Muslims and the young Algerian state's attitude toward its religious minorities. Fontaine's aim is to offer a social history of theology.[50] She examines how religious and theological principles influenced Christians' engagement with decolonisation and the construction of post-colonial Algeria, and how in turn Christian action triggered shifts in theological principles. Locating France and Europe as a cultural-religious constellation in a global framework, Fontaine explores 'how Christians in Algeria adapted metropolitan theologies to their local context, and to reshape debates and practices that have long been analysed as uniquely French or European'.[51] She restates clearly the international significance of Algerian decolonisation from an unexplored perspective,[52] adding texture to the understanding of a crucial development of twentieth-century global history.

Drawing on a wide range of interviews and private archives, *Decolonizing Christianity* traces the dramatic transformation of Christianity from its position as the moral foundation of European imperialism to its role as a radical voice of political and social change in the era of decolonisation. At first, Christians saw expansion into North Africa as a modern crusade and a restoration of Christendom in the land of Saint Augustine. Christianity thus provided ideological motivation for the seizure of Algiers (in 1830), for the conversion of mosques to churches, and in general for French imperialism and its supposedly civilisational mission. Between the 1930s and the early 1950s, however, a solid trend of 'social' Christianity (especially Catholicism) arose in France as well as in Algeria, and several Christian groups sought cross-class, intercommunal and interreligious communication and collaboration. The theological innovation and political activism that emerged in Catholicism and Protestantism during the 1930s and 1940s were among the most important inspirations for the engagement of French Christians in the Algerian War. Leading Catholic and Protestant institutions

[48] Stephen J. C. Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

[49] Ibid., 3.

[50] Darcie Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity: Religion and the End of Empire in France and Algeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11–5.

[51] Ibid., 8.

[52] Jeffrey Kames, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

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embarked on the task of rethinking their Christian evangelising mission, looking at Christians who sought to cooperate with Algerians as a model to follow.

The turn towards social justice and self-determination was neither immediate nor dominant. Progressive Christianity remained a minority phenomenon and struggled to overcome entrenched pro-colonial attitudes. Most progressives themselves embraced reform rather than independence until late in the war. In the end, however, the wartime engagement of these men and women transformed their understanding of Christianity in a newly independent Algeria. Therefore, Christianity was definitively decolonised only after the war, when both Catholics and Protestants debated together on how to distance themselves from the legacy of colonialism and reimagine their evangelical mission and vocation of serving the Algerian people in the post-colonial society in the name of justice. Algerian decolonisation and independence influenced therefore debates at the Vatican II and in the World Council of Churches, and the emerging voices of the Third World within both Protestantism and Catholicism gained a foothold in their historically Eurocentric hierarchies. Algerian independence had not only liberated Algeria, Fontaine writes, but also Christianity revealing its 'true face'.[53]

The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile and *Decolonizing Christianity* have many merits. Yet, neither work really explains how religious beliefs exerted their influence on historical dynamics and neither entirely grasps how a religious (Catholic-Christian) reading of the world intertwined time and again with a deeply felt sense of historical crisis which was both civilisational and intimately personal. In South America and in North Africa, the outcomes were not predictable at any stage in this development, and things could have turned out differently. Political outcomes and choices were not simply determined by the positioning of particular individuals actors. Rather, individuals were transformed by the power of critical junctures of history which they lived through. But, in the end, a Catholic-Christian inspired historical self-interpretation came to ground a new reading of what religion could mean within a horizon of transformation and modern politics. And this configuration has be understood as a moving force driving activism on its own terms, taking seriously what Catholic and Christian thinking had to offer – in a moment of crisis and transformation, when the search for meaning and reconfiguration of the world was more intense and urgent – and as a genuine alternative reading to the existing reality.

Conclusion

The titles reviewed in this article demonstrate the valuable methodological and analytical contribution that research on Catholicism can make to the scholarship on twentieth-century Europe. But the work of historians has just begun. Much more could be done and said. Many problems remain and have not been answered. Questions of focus and perspectives, methodology and terminology continue to pose challenges. It remains the historians' task to further expand the state of the research, foregrounding aspects which are problematically absent in existing works, including those reviewed here: the power of historical events as transformative experiences, and the question of theological substance, transcendence and spirituality. Spirituality here means not an intimate and personal essence but rather, in a Weberian sense, as a combination of culture, lived experiences and mentality that eventually shaped political activities, choices and behavior in a given historical time. Catholic European leaders and intellectuals were in fact existentially committed to translating the ethos of the Gospel into a guiding device for persons and political communities. For them, transcendence turned into something much more than an abstract principle. In their experience – particularly in dramatic periods of transition such as the Second World War – it rather emerged as a symbol and a new 'marker of certainty'[54] that grounded and directed their actions and lives in politics, culture and society. Adopting the language of political theorist Eric Voegelin, transcendence was in this context not simply a second order

[53] Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 211.

[54] For the notion of 'markers of certainty' see Claude Lefort, 'The Question of Democracy', in *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. D. Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 9–20, here 19.

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reflection of reality, but a symbolisation of what they were experiencing in their lives.[55] The connections of thoughts and experiences came to the fore with great strenght. From the point of view of these Catholics living through a major critical juncture of history, the realm of politics must be infused with a religious, spiritual and transcendental meaning to avoid moral decadence and loss of the sense of life. This meta-political dimension was needed to prevent democracy and modernity from becoming a mere liberal order which had proven itself defenceless against the threat of totalitarianism.

Historians cannot simply treat Catholicism as a set of ideas or a political philosophy or a series of practices, disregarding the content of religion and the real historical experiences from which changes and transformations emerged. In short, experience matters, but so does what Max Weber termed the 'contents of annunciation'. In his comparative analysis of the *World Religions*, and the rationalisation processes that took place within these religions, Weber began from the premise that a religious ethic 'receives its stamp, primarily, from religious sources, and, first of all, from the content of its annunciation and its promise'.[56] Catholic thinkers took the wording of the Gospel seriously. Historical analysis and interpretations remain flawed if this essential fact is not taken into consideration. I am not suggesting that everything can be reduced to a kind of 'essential' character of Christianity and Catholicism, a position that goes against the entire Weberian framework. To Weber, specific social strata may seek to seize a religious ethic, reinterpret it according to its needs and desires. As Weber goes on to say, 'the type of a religion, once stamped, has usually exerted a far-reaching influence upon the life-conduct of very heterogeneous strata'.[57] The analysis therefore has to account for the way in which a religious ethic inspired, formed and transformed individuals, leaving a lasting impression on subsequent historical developments.[58] The task for historians remains to reflect on Catholicism as an alternative 'political spirituality', to take a cue from Foucault, in the context of twentieth-century European history, thus recognising the spiritual impulse behind politics. It also remains to assess the central role played by religious factors in historical dynamics instead of reducing religion to an ideological factor. It finally remains to critically understand how Catholics tried to reimagine the world through the transformative and creative power of religion, searching for new foundations and a new way to establish a regime of truth and government of the self and of the others.

[55] E. Voegelin, 'Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History' (1970), in E. Sandoz, ed., *The Collected Works*, vol. 12, *Published Essays, 1966–1985* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 115–33.

[56] M. Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions' (1922–1923), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 267–301, here 270.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.; see also, on Weberian concept of 'stamping', Forlenza and Thomassen, *Italian Modernites*, 84–5; A. Szakolczai, *Max Weber and Michel Foucault: Parallel Life-Works* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 23–5.

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