

DON BOSCO AND THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The Church lives and is lived in the present without being imprisoned within it. The present is not the limit of the Church's horizon; it is merely an inescapable environment. As Vatican II expressed it, the Church «exists in the world of today», in our contemporary situation, which keeps pace with the men who shape it.

Don Bosco was a product of the 19th century; of an age like ours, of great difficulty for the Church, and yet also very different from the world of today. Indeed it is hard for us to form any real idea of that world, so deeply has it been buried below the changes wrought by two world wars and by the pace of the technological revolution.

Don Bosco and the Church in the world of the 19th century: I do not wish to repeat here what is familiar to all students of history – the upheavals of the great conflict between the Roman Church and the modern world; the sense of mutual incompatibility that excluded all thought of reconciliation; the intelligence and generosity which this situation evoked in many Catholics as they struggled to survive, to regain lost ground and to make the best of their situation.

The lines of reflection and of enquiry that I shall follow are more modest, even though they have been somewhat neglected hitherto.

1. The historical context

Political and religious history has always been sensitive to hostile *forces* and to the internal and external *conflicts* that resulted. It has paid less attention to the *interests* and *what was at stake* in this conflict except in so far as these affected ideologies. We may find helpful two terms which are not new, classical labels that are in current use, namely *culture* and *civilization*.

Today we are familiar with the diversity of cultures and with the history

of civilizations. Interest in anthropology and international evolutionary processes have made us thus aware.

We can recall that there was once a Christian era; there was also a dream of a Christian civilization that was given expression, we may say, from Lammennais down to Maritain. We describe the meeting between Christianity and these civilizations as a process of «acculturation» and «inculturation»; we think of Christianity as an influence that, within limits, has succeeded, while Christian civilization remains a more problematic ideal. We deplore the conflict of cultures which, with its destructive effects, accompanies the spread of western patterns. On the other hand, the image with which we are left when contemplating the internal history of Europe over the last two centuries is far from being a Christian image.

And yet that was precisely the period when there was a shattering encounter of cultures, like a collision between two continents, a *Kulturkampf*: it was caused by the eruption of a new civilization based on reason, science, progress and democracy upon countries of ancient Catholic, or general Christian civilization.

We fragment this conflict or we attempt to analyse it. We recall the anti-clerical hostility, the twin processes of secularization and dechristianization against which Catholicism reacted with its projected restoration of a Christian social order. In fine we see a Church with one eye on the past and one eye on the future but wholly alien and hostile to the present.

Gradually our vision changed, as the situation evolved and as the features of the age, the relationship of the opposing forces and the shank of their struggle kept shifting. But this unavoidable realism has coloured retroactively our memory and understanding of the past. It is not just a question of a kind of mental black-out; a harsh judgement is also involved. From our present understanding of the world about us we seek the key to an understanding of the past. If we play that game we swiftly lose our own selves and our peculiar identity. We become slaves of the age in which we live and develop such an obsession with it that any clear, objective vision of things past becomes difficult.

Such was my own personal experience during the commemoration of the centenary of the death of P. Emmanuel D'Alzon (1810-1880), the founder of the Assumptionists. I was faced with the task of addressing a conference limited to about a hundred male and female members of the congregation and fifteen or so historians.

My existential question, «How can one today be the spiritual descendant of such a founder? How can one be faithful to his spirit and to his message?», met a wall of academic theorizing. And what congregation founded a century ago has not been faced with answering a similar question?

In the 19th century reasoning followed rigidly opposed positions: Black Italy and White Italy, the two "Frances" (that of Voltaire and M. Homais

and that of St. Louis, Joan of Arc and the Crusaders). Even deeper was the enduring Augustinian view of history, founded on the two cities, an interpretation to which the Enlightenment furnished a secularized counter-version. The 19th century was not so much irreligious as anti-Catholic and anti-Roman. There had never been such a proliferation of new "Christian" sects, of prophets, messiahs and founders of religions – for the most part of short duration. Their common inspiration was a kind of religious humanism which, to the followers of traditional Christianity, seemed no less than blasphemy, an aberration, a contradiction in terms.

The answer from within the Catholic Church was usually ambivalent. On the one hand, she still felt she was in a dominant position, because of her institutional strength and the number of her adherents. On the other hand, she had undergone a revolution for which she had had to pay a high price. The Church felt menaced by an omnipresent enemy of Protean power which was patiently reducing and corroding her influence, an enemy which was overtly active, yet also scheming in the shadows through sects and secret societies. What compromise or reconciliation was conceivable? The only possible answer was *intransigence* with its accompanying tightening of discipline; only thus could one hope to see the reversal of such a deadly situation and the restoration of a society that conformed to Christian laws and was penetrated by the spirit of Christianity.

That kind of intransigence has equally ambiguous foundations. The first element of ambiguity is uncertainty about the Church's position: she still feels she is in the majority, though in danger of waking up sooner or later, and finding that she represents a minority; yet at the same time she feels that in certain respects she is already a minority. The second ambiguity involves a question of values; how can one belong to one's own time when its basic values are unacceptable? How can we resist the nostalgia for what is irretrievably past? And how are we to accept the *things done* in the past without seeking to legitimize the use of violence and the right of might, and without sacrificing to these things a past that was great and remains worthy of respect; without, in other words, disowning ourselves?

The result of all this for Catholics was uncertainty, perplexity and divisions. There were two extremes: one was the milder intransigence of the Catholic liberals who accepted the hypotheses of the past without denying the propositions of the present; the other was the active and fanatical intransigence of the "apocalyptic" Catholics, for whom the present situation was placed within a supernatural context that was altogether more certain than that of the liberals: for them what was at stake was a struggle with God, repentance and penance, prophecies and visions, the manoeuvres of Satan on a greater or smaller scale, terrifying and bloody catastrophes.¹

¹ For example, the widely circulated prophecy of Prémol: «What are these rumours of war and of terror borne to us on the four winds? The dragon has attacked every country, car-

These latter raised their voices, became more shrill, exaggerated their claims. In such a climate the policy of liberal Catholics became increasingly untenable and Catholic opposition to all that was modern was reinforced, making Catholics ever more rigid as their forces were mobilized and closed ranks. In a word, there was a sharp division between the two camps, a division that weighed heavy upon both parties without producing any solution to their problems. It also drove into the enemy camp many Catholics who had a different concept of modern society and of how the Christian life should be lived within it.

I should like to be able to allude to the followers of what I have called *bourgeois Catholicism*, distinguishable from liberal Catholicism by the fact that they rejected the solution of intransigence. For them faith and Christian life were largely a matter of conscience, a private, family matter, since only the individual has the right to influence society. There were thus created two mutually opposed brands of Catholicism in the 19th century, only one of which was recognised by the Roman Church; this caused the other to be unknown by historians and sociologists, because of the initial impossibility of identifying it. What has so far been by chance discovered about it in no way does justice to its real significance.²

This more private form of Christianity, somewhat plain and reserved, is poles apart from demonstrative religion and its militant forms of apostolate. It is the expression of a certain temperament rather than the badge of a group.³

rying with him terrible confusion. Individuals and nations rise one against the other. Wars, wars! Civil wars and foreign wars. What fearsome encounters!». For the «dragon» one must read «revolution». Cf. also the research done by P.G. CAMAIANI, *Il diavolo, Roma e la rivoluzione*, in «Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa» 3 (1972) 485-516.

² One needs to repeat that this «bourgeois Catholicism» was not the religion of the entire bourgeoisie, nor was it limited to them. It was a view of the place and role of religion that appeared as a result of the bourgeois spirit, and its development was determined by bourgeois economic activity. This latter has been connected by Max Weber with the Protestant work ethic; the Catholic bourgeois is therefore Protestant in spirit. The Catholic rigorism that followed on from Jansenism expressed the same spirit in a more extreme form than was found in its Protestant source. The Alphonsian spirit and the Salesian spirit were a tardy antidote originating within that rigorist environment. Positive biographical research is needed if we are to escape from generalizations to a more precise historical and spiritual understanding. B. Groethuysen has tried to do this for the 18th century, but his approach is negative, since he makes the recriminations of the Church his point of departure.

³ «In the depth and purity of our own believing hearts we all seek for a religion without church, without statues, without pictures». The words are those of the Dominican P.A.M. Couturier, a pioneer in the renewal of sacred art. Cf. *La vérité blessée*, Paris, Plon 1984, p. 311. A good example of this alienation of someone caught between two cultures is provided by a recent best-seller written by a country curé in Normandy, Bernard Alexandre: *Le Horsain* (Paris, Plon 1988, in the «Terres Humaines» series edited by Jean Malaurie). He has spent his life in the Pays de Caux, noting the customs and traditions of the inhabitants, yet remaining always «a foreigner» in their midst. Their traditions have changed very little over a

Its representatives included even mystics, as numerous witnesses testify; more often it was a religion of quiet convictions and of pious practises that spanned the whole of life but in which the priest had no part. All that was asked of the priest was that he should "do his job". Yet it is this shared faith which, in spite of basic disagreement about the place to be assigned to it, explains the long survival of an ethos common to "both camps". It was precisely the acceptance of this ethos which permitted Jules Ferry in 1882 to laicize the teaching programme in France's state primary schools. He was convinced that it was possible to suppress the religious foundations of the moral sense without destroying the force of the moral imperative and its expression in society. The teacher would continue as he had done before, to teach «the good old morality of our fathers, our morality and your morality, since we have only one...».

One identical morality? One could already begin to distinguish between the morality born of the Enlightenment, still the privilege of a select élite, and the morality of the ten commandments based on Judaeo-Christian tradition, about which Le Play and Ferry were in agreement, if about nothing else: «Be obedient, do not tell lies, do not steal, do not kill». Even here Catholic and lay morality could be clearly distinguished (as was soon shown when the French parliament voted, in 1884, for the law introducing divorce).

The former, whilst abandoning its earlier rigorism, remained sufficiently strict and demanding to drive the faithful away from the confessional. By remaining austere and unrelenting it felt justified in condemning the opposition as lax and accommodating. This is, however, a one-sided point of view which should be corrected by research into secular morality (still something of a "Cinderella" amongst scholars). The latter, too, had its sensitive points about which it would make no concessions and in defense of which it used language resembling that of Paschal to belabour Catholic laxity. Each camp, in fine, has its own particular features. What else can one say?

There seems to be a general lack of research in this field. We know plenty about the various systems of moral philosophy that appeared during the last century; the history of morals, of behaviour and mental attitudes seems to attract scholars and is yielding interesting information. But there are gaps that need filling in. Leaving aside all theorizing, what is the ethical energy that drives the social groups which at times clash so fiercely about their beliefs and claims? How far are they indebted to the faith and morals of the Catholic Church? Are they all descendants from one and the same interpretation of Christianity?

long period, whilst the Catholic Church has changed greatly in the last generation. The peasants he describes seem to have no interior life at all. The writer has obviously not read Maupassant, who gave a very different impression of that kind of life and felt perfectly home there.

For a long time the differences appeared slight: we were aware of credal disputes but fancied we were agreed about morality. Ethnologists and sociologists will not shake this widespread conviction, though they actually show that morality is not universally the same and that it changes as cultures and civilizations change; moreover it is accepted that morality is a clear signpost indicating the direction in which things are moving. The divergence will increase as moral standards become less universally accepted, as new situations explode traditional approaches and as problems previously unthought of lead to conflicting solutions. One thinks of the conflict between the morality of the Church and State legislation.

Immoralism and amoralism (terms that we French have only used since 1845 and 1907) appear as perversions or personal oddities. Every man has his morality, depending on his view of the world, of society and of other people, a view which he can more or less analyse and internalize. This morality cannot be reduced, by command, to the ideology from which it still remains inseparable. In concrete terms, it is an ethical system, a form of transmitted awareness of how one should behave in varying circumstances in order to conform to the accepted mores of one's society. It is part of a shared inheritance and culture. In this sense there really is a moral culture which shapes the personality of its members.

Like the Roman Church, modern states have cherished the dream of reducing to unity every kind of internal difference. Neither has ever perfectly succeeded: they have had to compromise and learn to cope with this internal diversity. But both have also had to face an unforeseen problem, namely the internal political disagreement and the social and religious upheavals that followed the great revolutionary eruptions which, between 1775 and 1815, shook Christianity to its foundations, from Russia to the Americas. France was only its dramatic epicentre. The «Restoration» could not put back the clock, and the Treaty of Vienna took the changes into account. Everything had changed, but nothing was resolved; and the actual state of affairs was a constant reminder of the fact. Two new protagonists – the nations and the proletariat – had appeared on the scene and were helping to change the rules of the game.

It was a game in which the Church had a double stake: as a Church with spiritual power, and as a Papacy that exercised temporal power over its own states. The Revolution which had now become part of the very life of modern society, appeared as radically evil, a total enemy. As Donoso Cortés was to say, the Revolution is blindly dragging a faltering humanity into a labyrinth to which no one has the door or plan. As Newman said: «No medium between Catholicity and Atheism». The most worrying atheism was not the professed atheism of individuals but the «social atheism» of states and governments which denied God any rights over society, opposed the social dimensions of Christianity and the unequalled public position of the Church,

and practised *indifferentism in matters of religion*, though they protected the various faiths whilst themselves practising none.

From that moment in history a decisive choice became inescapable: either Christ and his Church or the Revolution. The choice could assume alternative literary forms: either Christ or the gun; either Christ or nothing. Thus the Revolution turned into anarchy and nihilism. The former began in liberalism, and both gave rise to socialism. The «either - or» produces a determined «neither - nor»: neither liberalism nor socialism. Liberalism was the key mistake that had deceived even the best of people; but it was already being submerged by socialism and could have no real future. The great challenge was made: a battle to the death between socialism and Catholicism.

In 1866 Mons. Dupanloup, bishop of Orleans, known as a liberal, had published a pastoral letter *On the evils and signs of our times*. Pius IX thanked him in a eulogistic brief: «In your letter, with equal force and logic, you have described and deplored the countless ills which all rightly mourn and which, in these calamitous times, so tragically afflict and disturb both the Catholic Church and human society. You demonstrate and energetically condemn the hateful war declared on every side by unbelievers, condemned sects and instigators of revolution, against God, his Church and its holy teachings. With grief you point out and castigate the numberless evil *ma-noeuvres*, the dangerous opinions, the errors, the perverse teachings with which these enemies of God and of humanity, these audacious spurners of truth and justice, would seek, if it were possible, to destroy the Catholic faith, shake the foundations of society, corrupt and pervert souls, abolish every human and divine right, as they everywhere propagate crime and encourage vice...».

This faithfully reflects a state of mind and a perception of the situation that was very widespread at that period. Four years later came the fall of Rome and the end of the temporal power of the Pope, «the prisoner of the Vatican». The following year saw the Paris Commune. Those two dramatic events seared themselves into the Catholic consciousness and inaugurated a new phase of laicization in society. Mons. Dupanloup was well on the way towards marking a real *retractatio*, and eventually surpassed Donoso Cortés in his strictures on the new liberals. This is borne out by a second pastoral letter of that same year, 1866, on *Atheism and social dangers*: «I know you, you and your *moral aspirations*. If tomorrow a revolt proves to your advantage you will talk of the triumph of principle; but if tomorrow a revolt goes against you, you will talk about the enemy: let us shoot them down without mercy!».

He was accused of a "volte face", of destroying what he had once respected. And yet it was not true: he did not abandon his hopes. He admitted that he had been deluded and gave the reason why, pointing out the

equivocal nature of *modern Society*. Not everyone shares the view of society he always held: «Equality before the law and freedom based on justice, respect for authority, a Europe at peace and prospering, the material and moral improvement of the workers, peasants and "have-nots", moral dignity, and the reconciliation of minds and hearts within a Christian civilization». Such clearly was his Catholic liberalism, tempered by an uncompromising firmness in matters of principle which had been confirmed by the hard lessons of experience.

«No, I am not attacking modern society; rather am I fearful for the society of the future. We all had great dreams. All of us, whatever our background or dispositions, seemed to be sailing together towards a wonderful land that was to be the reward for our efforts; a land that was called the 19th century, modern society...

«But I also have accusations to make. I ask the powerful, what have they done with liberty. I ask the sophists, what do they mean by liberty. I ask the rich, how have they made use of their credit. I ask wealthy young people and those favoured by fortune, what have they done with moral dignity. I ask a corrupting press, what have they done with words: were words given them to spread perversion or light? I ask so many who pretend to represent modern society, why have they burdened it with their own impiety, their own false visions.

«Above all I cry out in accusation against all you who have turned my dream into a terryfying nightmare...».

Within this public area that we call society there evolved a world that was peculiarly Catholic and which gradually ceased to identify itself with society; the principle that governed national religion – *cuius regio eius et religio* – gave way before the modern demands for freedom, above all of conscience and of religion. This Catholic world had two poles, one positive and one negative: a weak pole with a weak power of attraction; a strong pole that repelled strongly. Between them permanent tension and a constant swinging back and forth. The *Syllabus* of 1864 was the most powerful expression of the Church's *non possumus* in the face of modernity and was to become the touchstone, the *Magna Charta* of the Catholic social movement that would develop under Leo XIII. It would take more than half a century for this polarization to reach the critical phase in which «modernism» and «integration» would become the key words. The debate is still alive...⁴

The main lines of this historical process are now well documented and

⁴ This was the reaction of Mons. Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, when he was Nuncio in Sofia, in a letter to his sister on 24 February, 1929. It was shortly after the Lateran Treaty and the *concordazione*, which put an end to the thorny Roman question: «The Lord be blessed! Everything that Freemasonry, in other words the devil, has done for the last sixty years against the Church and the Papacy in Italy has come to nothing». Cf. *Lettres à ma famille*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf 1969, p. 195.

have been illustrated by many monographs in various fields. What remains obscure is *what actually happens* in the course of this endless movement of attraction and repulsion. What are the changes that take place in the great Catholic body, while its internal structure, its relative position and its doctrinal orientation remain untouched? Throughout this period the Church, with its appearance of immobility, encouraged the deceptive impression that it is changeless; that despite its vulnerability as an earthly institution, it remains substantially inaccessible to historical change; all this while it appeared to be subject to the same elementary law of action and reaction which afflicts its members and which it therefore feels as in its own body. We have thus been discouraged from perceiving the profound changes, that, sooner or later, will have to be made.

What is gradually being modified in the Church is *the state of its culture*; however carefully it is controlled, hedged about and protected by the Catholic authorities, it remains exposed to the influences felt by all Christians. The Church is not a walled garden, closed in upon itself. No sealed compartment can ever fully isolate it. The negative judgement passed by the Church on the principles governing the civil and political world cannot drive the Church into a *fuga mundi* or interrupt its reciprocal contacts with the outside world. The Church gives and receives: without such an exchange it could not live; still less could it be faithful to its mission in the world which is its whole *raison d'être*.

One tends to think of this exchange solely in terms of Catholic generosity and initiative or, on the other hand, in terms of the failures and crises that betray our failure to resist the dangerous allurements of worldly company. On the nature of this exchange as real *cultural communication* a good deal of study needs to be done. Such communication presupposes the union of opposites: on the one hand a common culture that allows communication, on the other the encounter of two cultures that have distinct characteristics. Throughout the 19th century, while Catholic culture managed to survive, a completely new culture was establishing itself outside and in opposition to the Church. It was «Liberal» – modern, lay, as the case might be – awaiting the development of a third element, the socialist, which was predominantly associated with workers in industry, though also at times with agricultural workers.⁵

2. Don Bosco and the Salesians in France

All roads lead to Don Bosco, including this one; I was aware of that fact when I set out though I hadn't realised it would be quite so long. I chose it

⁵ I refer you to my book *Modernistica*, chapter III: *Le Catholicisme comme culture*, and chapter IV: *Catholicisme et modernité*, Paris, Nouvelles Éditions Latines 1982.

because Don Bosco's radiant personality and great achievements could easily lead us to forget not just the misunderstanding and resistance that he encountered but, more significantly, their roots in a culture emancipated from the very Christianity which encouraged its growth. We are faced with an important phenomenon that is often overlooked and poorly recorded. I shall give you a late but significant example, the crime of religious association in France at the beginning of this century. The climate was anticlerical, leading in 1905 to the separation of Church and State.

The French tradition regarding this matter went back to the *Ancien Régime*: special authorization was required for any religious congregation. The Revolution forbade religious vows and suppressed congregations. These began to reappear under the Empire and then under the Restoration, but the law remained that all congregations had to be authorized. Five male congregations were soon approved: the De La Salle Brothers, the Spiritans, the Lazarists, the Sulpicians and the Foreign Missionaries of Paris. They are still the only ones officially approved; others remained congregations *de facto*, tolerated by successive governments.

After 1880, when the anticlerical republicans were in control, the tacit compromise was followed by open war: the «secular laws» were passed, and the congregations were in the front line. Two government decrees of 1901 and 1902 obliged congregations to regularise their position by applying for authorization. The decision lay with one of the two Chambers. The religious were divided as to how to proceed. Of the male religious, 61 orders agreed and 90 refused. The prime minister, Émile Combes, split them into two groups: 54 requests were laid before the Chamber of Deputies, who refused them *en bloc* without even examining them; 6 were laid before the Senate, who undertook a minute examination of them.⁶

In the climate that prevailed it was a privilege to find one's case examined by the Senate; almost a sign of benevolence. Amongst the ones thus privileged were two missionary congregations (one was the White Fathers), two contemplative congregations (the Cistercians of Cîteaux and of Lérins), one nursing congregation (the Brothers of St. John of God) and finally, the Salesians. The president of the commission was Clemenceau. Before following the government's directives the commission went into every detail, doublechecked, visited religious houses and discussed things at length. The first five congregations received a qualified acceptance; the Salesians were roundly rejected: 10 votes to 4 in the commission and by 158 votes to 98 in the plenary session.

The Salesians had been in France since 1875, opening about twenty houses here, of which two were in Algeria. They had wisely secularized eight

⁶ The 61st congregation, a small, provincial, nursing congregation, had an unexpected fate: the application was linked to that of a congregation of women with the same name.

of the houses and were requesting authorization of the remaining twelve. They had as many as 250 houses in Europe and South America and the government considered them «one of the most powerful congregations in the whole world», with «their spirit of expansion which some would call an invasion and a monopoly», inspired by «an internationalism quite alien to the French soul».

Historians will not be surprised at the chauvinism of this period when there was much Italian immigration, except that such bigotry is not usually shown at such high government levels. (Today it is racism that maintains the chauvinist tradition). But this was only one aspect of the hostility towards the Salesians.

«We are certainly amongst those who consider that charity, like science, knows no frontiers and we would place no obstacle in the way of any truly humanitarian work merely because it originated in a foreign country. But it would have to be true work of beneficence, and that is something that the work of the Salesians does not seem to be».

The Salesians are accused of making a big show and spending little; this is the secret of their *pseudo-orphanages*.

«Each of these is sited in a building which, like everything else, is the fruit of public generosity. The work is maintained by the fees paid either by the families or by charitable persons (free places are so rare as to be virtually non-existent), as well as by the products of the boys' work and, finally, by offerings and subscriptions.

«The pupils are exhausted. Working in deplorable conditions for health and hygiene, they have to be superproductive. Moreover their work is so specialised that when they leave they don't really know any trade. Add to this that each boy costs almost nothing, because his board is paid by some third party; so he is purely a source of profit. Thanks to all this free labour, and to the amount of work done as a result of the excessive specialization, and thanks to the fiscal advantages that are enjoyed by a charitable association, it is easy to understand the widespread complaints that have surfaced wherever these houses operate.

«As occasion offers, they work as typographers, editors (and what editors! All their publications are aimed against our institutions), wine and spirit merchants, pharmaceutical manufacturers – their economic activity is quite sinister, and their political activity no less so. Amongst all the congregations this is perhaps one that most stands out for its aggressive spirit».

The Senate commission was so struck by the seriousness of these accusations that it felt obliged to verify them. The religious who were allowed to speak were not sufficiently persuasive: the Treasury claimed back the tax concessions, while the prefects either voted against the Salesians or abstained. Ten municipal councils spoke in favour of the congregation but without any discussion and without advancing their reasons. When inspected,

the houses varied in condition: in Paris good, while in three cases they were pronounced deplorable.

Two chief complaints sum up the situation, one concerned with economics, the other with politics. «The semblance of a charity» masks «a commercial and industrial enterprise», at the same time favouring the incitement to civil war. Many good people, and from amongst those least hostile to religious congregations, met together «to restore to the Salesians of Don Bosco their real character as monks, as they secretly indulge their appetites and their commercial instinct under the cloak of religion and disinterested charity».

«This must be fearlessly affirmed, because it is the bare truth. Yes, the Salesians of Don Bosco have opened workshops and oratories, where, under the able direction of expert teachers, they teach the boys entrusted to them a trade. Certainly, they succeed in turning these boys into excellent workmen. We are not contesting that. But what we do confidently affirm is that after two or three years of practical instruction these apprentices become workers capable not only of recuperating for the congregation the cost of their training but of assisting it financially through the work they subsequently do unsupervised».

Are these the saviours of helpless children, the educators of the young? Seen from close up, their halo vanishes, leaving a commonplace image of industrial managers who know how to look after their own self interests and, by using cheap labour, secure the owners profits at the expense of paid workers. They also have numerous advantages over lay industrialists: the donations from pious people, the reduced expenses through sharing a form of community life, the payment of poor wages, while enjoying exemption from taxes. «The Salesians should not deceive themselves! This situation of conflict and of competition in the field of labour which they have engaged in against lay industrialists, has greatly contributed towards alienating the sympathy that today they could enjoy».

On the political level, no one who sets about reading a collection of the *Lectures catholiques*, monthly booklets published for about 50 years by the Libreria Salesiana in Italy, can be in any doubt. Take one example from August 1899, after the pardon of Frère Flamidien, imprisoned for five months as a result of calumnious accusations and subjected to «moral tortures whose refined cruelty exceeded the physical tortures of the Neros of old».

«Has God's hour come at last? The Freemasons have been defeated in their war against the teaching congregations. The "Grand Orient" has been defeated by the "Grand Occident"! Howl away, you jackals; it will not make your discomfiture any less complete!

«... The Masons have been worsted in their encounter with holy water, will they be more successful in their battle against the sword? They failed to obtain the condemnation of Frère Flaminien; will they now succeed in ex-

torting a pardon for Dreyfus? Ah, what a disgraceful question! And how skilful the Jews have been in weaving their plot...».

The way in which the Salesians were defended by their friends indicates the same spirit. The style was aggressive, ridiculing Combes as a «Tartuffe», as an ex-seminarian, and seeing his projected law only as an object for defamatory libel, to be attacked and covered with ignominy because of his perfidy... If Dom Chautard, the abbot of Sept-Fonds, was able to convince Clemenceau and to win his esteem, he certainly did not do it by denigrating the opposition but by demonstrating how the Trappists worked for the secular good of their country, and not in easy circumstances. That was the way to secure a favourable verdict. The great recognition won by the Salesians in the French «expositions» does not make it less true that their work was «simply for gain», and did not merit either recognition or favours, given that «anybody... independently of any congregation» could have done the same. Their's was an «unfair competition with the industry and commerce of our country», as well as an «unpleasant foreign interference in France's political domain».⁷

One must recognise that the senators were as serious and as fair as they claimed to be. There is no reason to doubt it. If we begin by disqualifying them as perfidious sectarians, we prevent ourselves from understanding what really happened. That would be to impose upon the world and society round about us our own good faith, our conviction of being on the side of truth and of doing good, and so we would remain closed to whatever analysis was possible and necessary. That would be to allow ourselves an unfair, and ultimately unhelpful, advantage.

This research, this debate and the conclusions it reaches are not, however, free from question. There is a fundamental lack of material to help us evaluate the evidence. There are no figures, whether for donations, or salaries or expenses or for the supposed profits. We are completely ignorant of whether there was any public check on the works in question or of how such a check might have been made. One thing is clear, the rapid expansion of the Salesians and the obvious quality of their establishments may be taken as external evidence of their prosperity.

The interference in politics is merely an aggravating circumstance. The supporters of the congregations were well known opponents of the Republic. The accusation that the Salesians exploited abandoned youth was born less from real interest in the latter's welfare than from concern for the resulting economic competition, which interfered with market forces, penalizing the industrialists and merchants who did not enjoy the same advantages. Research has not turned up any other complaints, neither from families, nor

⁷ Cf. *Journal Officiel. Projets de lois, propositions et rapports. Sénat.* The sitting of 22 June, 1903, pp. 468-471 (Binder No. 192).