

Editorial

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian

The articles in this issue collectively help to illuminate phenomena and experiences of the Christian Churches between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing on important themes such as modernism and anti-modernism, the growing prominence of women, the socio-cultural and political relevance of Christianity in the United States of America, and the dramatic intertwining of war, peace, and ecumenism in the involvement of the Churches in the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Tomáš Petráček's article offers an up-to-date picture of the modernist crisis in Central Eastern Europe with a focus on the Catholic Church in the Czech lands. His presentation is based on a historiographical review of the main studies on modernism and anti-modernism in that area, which have developed significantly over the last thirty years, following research dynamics that had generally already taken hold in the preceding decades (as is well known, particularly but not exclusively in the French, Italian, German and English contexts) and have never stopped since. Petráček's essay also presents the most characteristic elements of Czech modernism, contextualising them in the historical development of this Church and outlining possible future lines of research. In fact, the issue of "modernism" has been treated for the decades after the crisis of the early 20th century mainly under the label of neo-modernism. Especially the issue of anti-modernism now appears to scholars of the history of Christianity as a long-term problem, which clearly still had a significant impact in the Catholic Church in the mid-twentieth century (Even after Vatican II it was revived, albeit in a considerably changed ecclesial and historical context). This was also one of the outcomes

of the recent Italian-French-German workshop held at Villa Vigoni (Lovenno di Menaggio, 9-12 October 2023) on “The Roman Magisterium in the twentieth Century. New Perspectives from the Vatican Archives”, which provided further insights into the persistence of anti-modernist concerns during the pontificate of Pius XII, both at the level of the papal magisterium and in the vigilance and repression exercised by the Holy Office and other curial bodies (the workshop papers will be published in the next issue of JoMaCC). It is precisely the deepening insight into the documentation preserved in the Vatican archives which constitutes one of the main challenges also for the development of research on modernism and anti-modernism in the Czech lands that awaits scholars in the coming years.

Dries Bosschaert’s and Maite De Beukeleer’s article develops the case of the Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat, a group of active lay women established in 1917 in the Archdiocese of Mechelen in Belgium which combined a Christian vocation with a professional life. The article analyzes its foundation and early development in the 1920s and 1930s, its search for canonical recognition between 1928 and the early 1960s, and the breakthrough that came during the Second Vatican Council with the integration of its identity into the conciliar constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 41, dedicated to the multi-fold exercise of holiness. This article also offers the opportunity to reflect on two areas of tension: that of agency, since the Auxiliaires were women who were unable to both take vows and at the same live in the world such as priests, and that of the tension between the local and global, as a seamless diocesan recognition did not result in an equally seamless recognition by the Sacred Congregation of the Council. The article allows us to delve into a historical experience that is less well known so far, but which had its own evident ecclesial relevance (at the time of the beginning of Vatican II more than two hundred Catholic bishops hosted Auxiliaires in their dioceses) and was part of a broader emergence of lay initiatives whose members wanted to live a life of perfection according to the evangelical counsels, albeit one that takes place ‘in the world’. The article also helps to show how an approach to the Second Vatican Council from the perspective of women can provide new insights into the Second Vatican Council as a whole, and can also be linked to the previous special issue of JoMaCC «Breaking Through the Stained-Glass Ceiling? Case Studies on Female Catholicism and Its Transnational Developments Since the 1950s» JoMaCC, 2023 2(1).

The last two articles in this issue deal with aspects and issues related to Christianity in the United States of America, with particular attention to the implications for social and political orientations and choices, especially those related to the conservative currents and movements of North American Christianity. Because of the role that the USA plays in contemporary history, the influence that the internal

dynamics of churches and Christian movements have, at least indirectly, on the more general dynamics of global Christianity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is evident. Fulvia Dellavedova's article analyses conservative Christians in the 1990s, specifically neo-conservative Catholics and their reaction to John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (a landmark in the debate on Catholic social teaching and its various interpretations) and its social doctrine. This was read as the Catholic Church finally embracing economic liberalism, although progressive Catholics rejected this view and contextualised the development of Catholic social teaching differently. The author considers the publications of Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus, who show both partisan bias in their interpretation of *Centesimus Annus* and a political and economic agenda. The article shows that John Paul II's encyclical soon became a battleground for the conflict between neo-conservative and progressive Catholics, and a landmark in the debate over Catholic social teaching and its various interpretations.

Alberto Concina's article examines the political evolution of the US Religious Right in the 1990s and its changes to adapt to the political scenario, helping conservative Christian groups to transform themselves from an electoral constituency into a more effective political bloc. Through the lens of bio-political issues - particularly the abortion debate, which affected the relationship between the Religious Right and the Republican Party during the Reagan presidency - the author argues that "conservative Christians significantly changed their behavior by adopting a new approach to politics built on give-and-take logic and acceptance of gradualism as a legitimate strategy, which follows from the idea that gradual but steady victories yield more results than landmark decisions" (see *infra*, 74-5). Without losing sight of the ultimate goal of overturning *Roe v. Wade* - the 1973 Supreme Court decision that protected the right to abortion and was overturned in 2022 - the Religious Right pursued the achievement of smaller political goals to undermine abortion practices, following a more pragmatic approach that secured them both a prominent position in the political arena and a winning cultural influence in the 2000s. The analysis is based on articles published in *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of moderate US evangelicalism.

Finally, Piercamillo Falivene's article assesses the attitude of the Christian Churches to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with particular reference to the Catholic Church and the Holy See, on the one hand, and the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate, on the other, as well as the main ecclesiastical institutions operating in the Ukrainian context. This article takes stock of a tragic war that is far from over. In the light of the sources available today, and in a scenario made more difficult by the instrumental propaganda of the war, it accurately records the main interventions of the churches

during the course of the conflict and the resulting impact on ecumenical relations. It also looks at the more general relations between the Holy See and the Moscow Patriarchate, considering the ecumenical dialogue and the relationship between the Christian Churches in the background, in their articulations at the level of religion, human rights and action in society. What emerges is a scenario marked by uncertainties, in the context of an apparent rebalancing of geopolitical relations in the world, which also affects those between the Churches. This does not detract from the fact that, even in the absence of the divisions of Stalinist memory, the Churches can, in the current context, play a relevant role in orienting international public opinion in favour of peace rather than fomenting war.