Horn, Gerd-Rainer: *Western European Liberation Theology. The First Wave (1924-1959)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009. ISBN: 978-0-19-920449-6; 314 S.

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In July 1937 in Paris, a young Catholic priest named Gustave Langlois celebrated mass for 60,000 people. The crowd, mostly throngs of worker-rights activists and laborers, listened as Langlois preached: „Forgive us, oh Lord, that we have not sufficiently hated injustice and war." A soloist followed Langlois' homily, singing for „light in the obscurity of the underground mine, and consolation in the face of ordeals", while a background choir chanted, „Working class of France! Working class of the world! Build up your courage and gain confidence!"

Eccentric personalities like Langlois richly populate Gerd Rainer Horn's „Western European Liberation Theology, 1924-1959". Through a motley assemblage of left-leaning Catholics, this book enables a vivid and thoroughly kaleidoscopic understanding of progressive European Catholicism that emerged in the years preceding Vatican II. His book is a welcome addition to current scholarship tracing the roots of the seismic upheaval inaugurated in the years from 1962 until 1965. It is an invaluable resource for scholars working in the fields of the history of Christianity, modern European history, and twentieth-century theology.

„Western European Liberation Theology" complicates the standard story that towering French thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mournier (both of whom Horn also treats at length) alone enabled Catholicism's mid-century paradigm shift. Horn's story pulls from a massive amount of raw material from German, French, and Italian-language archival sources, introducing readers to names and events that have been, until now, almost entirely unknown in the English-speaking world. In doing so, Horn paints a truly transnational picture, pointing to the international circulation of progressive journals like „Sept" and „Témoignage Chrétien", and his analysis of the Catholic left in Italy (Chapter 3) is ground-breaking. Until this book, very little has been written about progressive Italian Catholicism in English. Take, for instance, the „restless activist" and fiery priest Don Primo Mazzolari, who refused to cooperate with the fascist state, published widely on ecumenism (a decade before Yves Congar would publish his famous works), and in the 1930s and 1940s, debated with leading anarchists in Cremonia on topics like the „Christian Revolution" in front of crowds that swelled to 5,000 (p. 148).

Highlighting its remarkable mobility across Europe, the opening chapters provide a fascinating and sorely needed analysis of Catholic Action. A lay-led movement that began „as a popular groundswell from below" (p. 83) in Belgium to combat child labor conditions, Catholic Action moved to France and Italy, where it flourished and eventually received papal support under Pius XI. With this ecclesiastical sanctioning came closer monitoring, and Catholic Action came to be seen as insufficiently radical for some by the 1940s.

In addition to its internationalist perspective, another key contribution of this volume lies in its integration of two fields that are not often treated within the same analytic frame: theology and social history. Historians of Catholic social thought have long established the late nineteenth-century of „Rerum Novarum" as the epoch in which social issues, particularly around labor, came to the foreground of the Church.[1] But as the story has been told, theological doctrines such as Christology remained oddly ultramontane, static, and untouched (This is likely more than just a historiographical oversight. A French Jesuit theologian recalled in his seminary days theology was left to the „specialists" where it was „left to die, little by little under our care."[2]). But in this period of 1924 until 1959, Horn shows cracks in the edifice. Even Pius XI, who emerges an unlikely hero of this narrative, recasts traditional theological concepts, such as Christ-as-King, as a means of inspiration to

[1] Paul Misner, Social Catholicism in Europe. From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War, New York 1991; Roger Aubert, Catholic Social Teaching. An Historical Perspective, Milwaukee 2004.

[2] Henri de Lubac, Theology in History, San Francisco 1999, p. 232.

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transform the social order behalf of the lower classes (p. 59).

Though „Western European Liberation Theology" hums with the interlocking stories of passionate, even at times combative Catholics, at the end Horn's analysis returns again to Jacques Maritain, introduced earlier in the book's second chapter. Through his impassioned portrait of this French philosopher, Horn's argument culminates: Horn maintains that these experiments in Europe can be understood as „liberation theology", despite his acknowledgement that the phrase „liberation" is typically reserved for the Latin American context. Horn argues that Maritain's influence was and continues to be enormous in Latin America, yet the relationship is marked by deep ambivalence. Maritain's insistence on the ontological distinction between the spiritual and temporal planes was meant, in the European setting, to ensure that the Church's political involvement was only and always indirect. In the Latin American context, the „two planes" model justified the official Church's silence in the face of dictatorial regimes and torture. Thus from the perspective of liberation theology, much more direct political involvement was required, the Maritain's model was deemed inadequate, and continental Europe was thereby gradually written out of the liberation theology story. Horn highlights, nonetheless, that the spirit animating Latin American liberationists, who listen to the situation of the workers, and rethink both Christianity and society from this new perspective, can be traced to these four crucial decades in continental Europe.

There is only one chapter that fits less easily into this otherwise intricately woven tale: chapter 4, which treats the „Mouvement Populaire des Familles", a Francophone activist movement under the umbrella of Catholic Action, active in the mid and late 1940s. The MPF functioned as an outgrowth of „Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine", and this movement drew from the „rich associational life of French Catholicism" (p. 192) claiming over 100,000 members, primarily women, mostly mothers, many of whom had been widowed. Affiliates of the MPF pooled their resources to secure, share, and trade provisions in times of wartime and postwar scarcity. In doing so they discovered, as one member recalled, „that their seemingly insignificant personal problems were general problems, and this of course already constituted a step toward politicization" (p. 190). Many MPF women were according to Horn „fearless" in their confrontation with authorities. This included some clergy members who were critical of their tactics to organize themselves along neighborhood rather than parish boundaries, and their willingness to welcome non-Catholics into their organization. Gradually, the MPF underwent a process of formal deconfessionalization and officially severed ties with the Catholic Church. Yet even before the official deconfessionalization, it struck me how much less „Catholicism" as it is typically understood inhabited this movement in comparison to the others; no charismatic priests rallying the crowds for this cause like Mazzoni; no masses like those led by Langloise, no theologian like Marie-Dominique Chenu offering support like he did for the worker priests. It would have been fascinating to hear this theorized a bit more: How the shift in focus, from a largely male story to a female, changes the narrative, highlighting what this Catholic progressivism could and could not accommodate. It raises questions about its opportunities and its limits, and how infinitely flexible these powerful imaginative resources were, so much so they could, and perhaps had to, spin outside traditional confessional boundaries. This leaves us with a set of fascinating, unanswered questions worth pursuing. Thanks to Horn's work based on twenty years of archival research, he brings to the surface a treasure chest of materials awaiting further investigation.

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