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OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION

SPIRITUAL SANCTIONS AND THE CONDEMNATION OF ACTION
FRANÇAISE (FRANCE 1926-1939)

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Abstract: "Obedience and submission: Spiritual sanctions and the condemnation of the Action française (1926-1939)

The paper questions a use of spiritual sanction that may seem paradoxical: intervention in the political field in the 20th century. In a context of secularisation noted by sociologists and deplored by clerics, religious sanction was used throughout the 20th century in the political field. Le Sillon, l'Action Française, but also Catholics suspected of sympathising with communism were subjected to various types of religious sanctions, the memory of which is still evident today. Less well known is the condemnation of feminism in the midst of the modernist crisis, which drew the wrath of certain members of the Roman Curia on Catholic women professing an egalitarian and democratic feminine spirituality. The case of Action Française is without doubt the one that has been the subject of the richest works. We propose here to return to the 1926 condemnation and its variations by paying closer attention to the process of enunciation and application of the sanction, and in particular to the way in which the clerics interpreted it and put it into practice. The performance of certain rites becomes an indicator of political orthodoxy. More specifically, we will examine the modes of coercion used to enforce the Roman Curia's decision from Cardinal Andrieu's letter and the Holy Office's decree of 29 December 1926 to the lifting of sanctions in 1939 through case studies. We will base our analysis on the documents kept in the collection of the Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and in that of the Apostolic Nunciature of France (Vatican Secret Archives).

Key words: Catholic Church – France – Political History – Action française.

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OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION: THE CONDEMNATION OF THE ACTION FRANÇAISE (1926-1939)

The opening of the archives of the Pontificate of Pius XI, a little more than ten years ago, made it possible to grasp the importance, in the eyes of the Roman Curia and the Apostolic Nunciature in Paris, of the condemnation of the Action française (AF). In 2003, the publication of Jacques Prévotat's thesis *Les Catholiques et l'Action française* marked a turning point in the historiography, proposing a nuanced interpretation of the Condemnation and a detailed mapping of the modalities of canonical sanction of AF (Prévotat 2001a). To this day, it remains the most accomplished and complete work on the crisis opened by the condemnation of the works of Charles Maurras (1868-1952) and the ban on Catholics reading the journal or belonging to the Ligue d'Action française. Analysing the publications drawn from the archives of the Vatican's Secret Archives, Émile Poulat offered a new framework for interpreting the condemnation (Poulat 2010). The reading of a document by Abbé Berto, published by the review *Itinéraires*, thus allows him to qualify the thesis of a strictly political condemnation defended by the supporters of Action française. This review, founded by Jean Madiran (1920-1913), close to Maurras, had the ambition to provide an intellectual base for traditionalist Catholicism in the context of the progressive crisis of the Church. The specialist of the "Modernist Crisis" thus proposed to embrace in the same analysis the condemnations of this "social and political modernism" embodied in different forms by the Sillon and the Action française (Poulat 2010). "At that time, the sociologist tells us, "the Roman Curia did not skimp: it judged and condemned without mercy. It is all these condemnations that provide the guiding thread of what can be called the pontifical line in this chaos of events: like the plague of the fabulist, they spared no current, no tendency, and this is what still explains so many divergences and contradictions in the understanding of this period of the history of the Church today" (Poulat 2010). It should be borne in mind that the pontificate of Pius XI (6/11/1922-10/11/1939) was not only one of condemnation of the AF but also of concern about the "Christian Reds" - those Catholics tempted by Marxism. The penetration of Marxism among Catholics (Pelletier 2018), The reaction of the Secretary of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez (1900-1964), on 17 April 1935, was the subject of a power struggle between the Pontiff, the Holy See and the Church. The reaction to the outstretched hand of the Secretary of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez (1900-1964), on 17 April 1935 was the subject of a power struggle between the weakened Pontiff and those close to him. The Secretary of State vigorously opposed any rapprochement, even in detail, with the supporters of the communist heresy, while Pius XI accepted the principle of a dialogue in the hope of bringing the lost sheep back into the fold of the Church. This position was not accepted and was later adopted by the clergy. The condemnation of the review of Marxist Christians supporting the Popular Front, *Terre Nouvelle*, the surveillance of *Temps présents* and then the unexplained disappearance of the Dominican weekly *Sept*, and the warning issued by the newspaper *l'Aube*, bear witness to the mistrust of the resurgence of modernism and Marxism among Catholics, and among them, the intellectual elite.

For all that, it would seem that the mechanisms for ensuring obedience and orthodoxy deployed towards Catholics suspected of sympathy for Marxism did not have the same intensity as those mobilised to make the ligueurs - and ligueuses - renounce the Maurrassian doctrine. The range of sanctions and censures is far from exhausting the historiography. The present contribution will attempt to shed light on certain points raised by Arnaud Fossier in

his introduction to this colloquium. The members and readers of Action française were not the only ones to be sanctioned to bring them back to religious orthodoxy and political orthopraxy, as Jacques Prévotat reminds us. From the deprivation of sacraments to the ban, via the suspension, the condemnation of Action française showed the whole range of possible applications of canonical sanctions in a secular and republican regime.

Methodology

Our reflection is based on the study of the files relating to the condemnation kept in various collections of the Roman Curia - that of the representative of the Holy See in Paris, the Nunciature, and the Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Secretariat of State and Holy Office. The intra-ecclesiastical motivations for the condemnation and the weight of the French and international political context in the decision of Pius XI and his entourage become apparent. The condemnation took place within a vast movement of profound reorganisation of the laity within Catholic Action, placed under the aegis of the Ordinaries (Episcopate). The dual membership of Catholics in Catholic Action movements, diocesan, and in other political organisations was intensely debated as early as the reform projects undertaken by Benedict XV (1914-1922) (Della Sudda 2019). It was answered in the letter of Cardinal Andrieu, Archbishop of Bordeaux, warning young people, and then in the consistorial Allocution of 20 December 1926. We shall therefore examine the various means by which certain organs of the Roman Curia, through the Ordinaries, intended to enforce the condemnation. In order to do this, we will rely particularly on the collections of the Apostolic Nunciature in Paris, the files of the Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Holy Office. The diocesan archives of Bordeaux, the diocese where the most sanctions were pronounced, have not been examined because the files have disappeared. Nor have we proceeded to an examination of the Penitentiary's archives due to the lack of time for this investigation.

1. NATURE OF ECCLESIASTICAL SANCTIONS

Context

The victory of the Cartel des gauches in the legislative elections of 11 May 1924 disrupted the process of rallying Catholics to the Republic and the rapprochement between the Holy See and the French government. In reaction, a gathering of lay people, the Fédération nationale catholique, was created in October 1924 with the support of the Episcopate (Bonafoux-Verrax 2004), as well as leagues contesting the republican order - the Jeunesses Patriotes (1924), the Faisceau resulting from the Valois split (1925) (Rémond 2016; Dard and Sévilla 2009; Richard 2017). Within the Catholic-inspired groups, the growing tensions between the Fédération nationale catholique and Action française, the league born in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, as evidenced by the complaints preserved in the holdings of the Secretariat of State, constituted, in the eyes of certain members of the Roman Curia and the Episcopate, a favourable opportunity for the publication of the condemnation of Charles Maurras' doctrinal errors.

The choice of the Archbishop of Bordeaux

Bishop Luigi Maglione (1877-1944), appointed Nuncio to Paris on 24 May 1926, contacted the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Cardinal Paulin Andrieu, to ask him to intervene, after the refusal of Bishop Charost, Bishop of Rennes, who was considered to be close to the disgraced

movement. The choice to make Andrieu the spokesman for the warning shot could be explained by the Bordeaux prelate's sympathy for Action Française (Weber 1985, 262). The strategy of soliciting a prelate or a cleric who was sensitive or sympathetic to a doctrine or a movement considered dangerous - but not yet condemned - characterises a habitual mode of managing deviance in the Church. Other works emphasise that the choice would be justified above all by the prelate's 'docility' to the Vatican (Prévotat 2001a, 265-66). The two interpretations are not contradictory.

Indeed, one of the ways to bring a cleric back to orthodoxy without using coercion is to entrust him with the task of defending the heresy or doctrine to which he is supposed to be close. The Pope must rely on a reliable man. The Prelate of Bordeaux, who has always been zealous in applying the directives of the Vatican, seems to offer guarantees of obedience. Moreover, Cardinal Andrieu was a member of two congregations of the Roman Curia - the Propagation of the Faith and the Ceremonial, where the Archbishops of Lyon and Paris were also present. It was imperative to rely on executors whose arms would not fail and thus avoid the episcopate becoming a complacent mediator between the recalcitrant faithful and the pontifical injunctions.

French Catholic Press Silences

On 27 August 1926, *Aquitaine, Semaines religieuses de l'Archidiocèse*, published the letter of Cardinal Andrieu in which he warned a group of young Catholics against the leaders of Action française and their doctrine. The letter was written in close collaboration with the Nunciature (Prévotat 2010a). The text is essentially based on notes produced by clerics hostile to Action française. The argument explains the danger posed by this current of thought and its media for young people. As a school of thought, Action française encroaches on the magisterium's prerogatives in doctrinal matters: "The leaders of Action française have taken care of God. What idea do they have of him? They regard him as non-existent or unknowable, and they declare themselves to be atheists or agnostics" (Prévotat 2010a, 414). Charles Maurras's declared agnosticism, which had led to his works being put on the Index for the first time in 1914 (Prévotat 2001a), is directly targeted here, as is the influence of the movement's leaders on French youth. According to these views, Action française, as a league and as a press organ, threatens episcopal and pontifical authority by claiming to have an opinion on doctrinal questions.

The letter was initially passed over in silence by the Catholic press and part of the Episcopate, no doubt anxious to spare the faithful and adopting a posture of temporisation. The French episcopal body in 1926 'still seems to be hesitating between accepting a Second Rally' and 'the memory revived by the experience of the Cartel of a discordat, and then of a Separation' (Le Moigne 2012, 186). More specifically, some clerics did not want to cut themselves off from their flock by taking measures that would be misunderstood in lands loyal to the AF, such as Cardinal Charost in Rennes or Cardinal Maurin in Lyon. They interpreted their role as that of mediator moderating the ardour of Cardinal Andrieu. In response to the letter, the Action française published articles at the beginning of September contesting the Cardinal's warning and his doctrinal interpretations. The debates were lively. At the beginning of September 1926, the Vatican press organ, the *Osservatore Romano*, gave official status to the warning by publishing the Cardinal Andrieu letter and, a few days later, a letter from the Pope assured the Archbishop of Bordeaux of his support.

The consistorial address and the publication of the Holy Office decree

On 20 December 1926, Pius XI, in his consistorial address, expressed his concern about "the agitation in France concerning Action Française". At his request, the Consultors of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office met to examine the placing on the Index of several works by Charles Maurras, already condemned in 1914, and to add the daily Action française. On 29 December 1926, the decree of the Holy Office was published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and gave the condemnation a universal scope to which the Bishops would have to conform in a uniform manner. The decree first recalls the placing on the Index of the works of Maurras and Action Française and then adds:

"Moreover, because of the articles written and published, especially in recent days, by the newspaper of the same name, l'Action française, and, by name, by Charles Maurras and by Léon Daudet, an article which every sensible man is obliged to recognise as written against the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff himself, His Holiness has confirmed the condemnation issued by his predecessor and has extended it to the aforementioned daily newspaper Action Française as it is published today, so that this newspaper must be held as prohibited and condemned and must be entered in the Index of prohibited books, without prejudice to future investigations and condemnations for the works of the two writers.

The decree was interpreted as soon as it was published. A consensus emerged that saw the Pope's hand and his personal mark on it, as J. Prévotat. As was recalled during this colloquium, it goes without saying that the faithful must comply with this prescription on their own (Théry-Astruc 2019). Nevertheless, as with any official text, interpretation raises many questions that a complex casuistry is required to resolve: if one hears a reading is one guilty in the same way as being a reader? Some set the limit at 6 pages, others define reading as an act that engages the mind. What penalties should apply for reading newspapers? There is discussion about when the censures that apply to the external world should be implemented and under what conditions. These questions were raised in the religious press and by the faithful who asked their parish priest or bishop, and no definitive answer was given on the nature and scope of the censures applied to the faithful who were guilty of reading Action Française or of sympathising with the league of the same name. Some bishops seized on the matter to assert their authority: the dioceses of Paris, Sens, Reims and Cambrai published metropolitan orders concerning the application of the decisions and recalled that "no priest of our respective dioceses, secular or regular, of any dignity or authority whatsoever, has the power, either in confession or outside of confession, to lift the prohibition laid down in the consistorial allocution and the decree of the Holy Office". The *ad limina* visit of Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, was an opportunity for Pius XI to reaffirm his authority: "Since the Sovereign Pontiff himself has placed on the Index prohibited books and the newspaper mentioned, he alone can lift this prohibition and this defence. However, the reading of an official text, however well surrounded by a set of circulars, directives and speeches, always leaves room for subversive interpretations and forms of resistance (Scott 1990).

2. CONDEMNATION IN PRACTICE: CENSURES AND TRANSFORMATION OF AUTHORITY

The ecclesiastical censures proposed and pronounced were excommunication, suspension and ban. A close examination of the decision-making process, of which the archives have kept a trace, highlights the fact that the Pope wanted to 'act alone', particularly because some members of the Roman Curia showed their reserve or even their opposition to the intransigent attitude towards the FA. La Sapinière (Poulat 1969; Della Sudda 2009), an informal fundamentalist network dissolved by the previous pope, revived in the second half of the pontificate. Clerics favourable to the French Action in the Roman Curia and even at the head

of the French seminary in Rome - Mgr Billot - sought to attenuate the scope of the condemnation by, for example, dissociating doctrinal condemnation from political commitment. They all represent pitfalls to be avoided by Pius XI which give a particular form to the condemnation (Prévotat 2010b). Unusually in the bureaucratic routine, it was the Pope who signed the decree prepared by him, and not the assessor of the Holy Office, Cardinal Canali.

Beyond the strictly doctrinal issue of Maurrassism and its perceived negative influence on the faithful, this intervention must be seen as a desire on the part of the Pontiff to control a decision-making process that would otherwise have been compromised by the sympathies of some members of the Curia for the FA. These doubts about the loyalty of certain members of the Curia invite the strengthening of the centralisation at work in the government of the Church by means of a very strict supervision of the episcopate - carefully scrutinised by the Nunciature (Coco 2017) - and a standardisation of episcopal practices according to the new Codex.

The redefinition of the role of the Ordinary in the face of condemnation

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the functioning of the Roman Curia and the Church has been transformed to resemble other modern bureaucracies while retaining ancient features of Church government (Boutry 2002; Jankowiak 2007). For example, the codification of canon law entrusted by Pius X to the canon law specialist Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934)(Delpal 2004) in 1904 led to the publication of the Codex in 1917, which replaced the numerous laws, decretals and jurisdictions that had previously governed canon law (Levillain 1998, 610). Centralisation was accompanied by a diocesanisation that became more pronounced under the pontificate of Pius XI (Ferrari 1989). First used in Italian historiography to describe the transformations in the supervision of the laity within the Catholic Action movements after the reforms of 1931, diocesanisation accounts for a much broader evolution which makes the bishop the pivot of the administration of the Church. This term describes, first of all, the placing under the supervision of the bishops, and not the parish priests, of the Catholic Action movements which had no organic link with the religious hierarchy until then. This strict control exercised by the Episcopate was desired by the top of the Catholic hierarchy and also responded to an expectation of the Italian head of state, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), after the Lateran agreements signed in 1929 between the Church and the Fascist state.

Far from being synonymous with a questioning of ecclesial centralisation, this process strengthened the weight conferred on the Roman Curia in the sense of a "prefectoralization" of the role of the Bishop. The Ordinary or the diocesan Councils are rethought as having to be first of all instances of local execution of a more general policy decided at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in particular at the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and transmitted to the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops which establishes the main lines of action of the lay movements. The way in which the Ordinaries of France were charged with supervising the faithful during the condemnation thus invites us to broaden our analysis of the process of diocesanisation by linking it to an overall movement that was broader than the reforms of 1931 alone.

The implementation of the 1917 Codex reform: making the ordinary an administrator

The concordat situation prior to the Separation of 1905 was that of a bishop who was a

mediator between the political and religious powers, but who also represented his diocese. On the eve of the Vatican Council, the French episcopate expressed its desire to administer the dioceses in a conciliar manner, relatively autonomous from secular power (Gadille 1970). The process of 'romanisation', i.e. control and centralisation by the Roman Curia, which began at the end of the 19th century and was accentuated after the Separation, progressively deprived the episcopate of its role as mediator and representative of the interests of its diocese (Blenner-Michel 2012). This centralisation, objectified in the reform of the Codex of 1917, gives the bishops a role of administrator of the Church. The Ordinary has a power of jurisdiction over his diocese (Can. 335, §1): "Bishops have the right and duty to govern their diocese spiritually and temporally, with legislative, judicial and coercive power, to be exercised according to the rules of the holy canons. But he is above all the executor of laws made by the Supreme Pontiff (Can. 81).

Canon 336 thus limits the bishop's power of interpretation: "Bishops must see that ecclesiastical laws are observed". This is confirmed by Canon 329, which recalls that the supreme authority in religious matters remains that of the Pope, according to a principle of "subsidiarity" to use a term coined later. With a university degree or doctorate in theology, the candidate for the episcopal see must demonstrate the ability to govern and execute the pontifical directives, in the manner of an administrator. In addition, he must be "of good character and have piety, zeal for souls, prudence and other qualities that make him suitable for governing the diocese in question" (Can. 331, §1, 4°). In short, the bishop is less a virtuoso than a member of the elite of "God's servants" from whom absolute fidelity to the Sovereign Pontiff and an ability to apply decisions with zeal and discernment are expected.

A letter from François de Ramel, a deputy, about a contested application of the 1926 condemnation, found in the holdings of the Nunciature, says no different. This lawyer at the Court and deputy of the Gard belongs to a family of jurists attached to the royalist cause, which is exemplary of the support given to the AF by the bar in the provinces (Le Béguec 2008, 109). A connoisseur of canon law, he complained to the nuncio about the impossibility of bringing before his bishop the conflict between him and two clerics who accused him of monarchist sympathies. He specified that 'the powers of the Metropolitan [in this case His Grace Mgr Llobet, Archbishop of Avignon] are rather of an administrative nature and that they are strictly delimited in the Code [of Canon Law]'. He goes on to explain that his only recourse is to the Holy See and thus raises the question of the appeal procedure in the case of unjust excommunication. The Ordinaries, these administrators of the government of souls, are in his eyes only the executors of the sanctions aimed at Catholics suspected of sympathy with Action Française. How will they compose their role to meet the expectations of the institution on the one hand and of their flock on the other?

3. THE DELICATE EXECUTION AT A LOCAL LEVEL

Following the imposition of the Index, the question arose as to the uniform application of this contested decision at the very top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The decree of the Holy Office was followed by a first opinion of the tribunal of the Sacred Penitentiary dated 8 March 1927, which resolved "the cases of conscience referred to it". It was therefore in the Vatican that decisions of universal scope were taken, particularly legal decisions. Initially, the Sacred Penitentiary was competent in matters of internal and external jurisdiction, and at the time of condemnation, it was the tribunal that established penalties and penances for everything that concerned the conscience of Catholics. The opinion of 8 March 1927 was issued at the request of "a bishop" who, concerned about the application of the decision, wanted to know in which cases to use which sanction. The text reveals the embarrassment of the French Episcopate faced with a decision whose scope would be important in the dioceses, given the influence of Action Française on the faithful and on the clerics themselves.

It is a question of establishing a jurisprudence which will serve as a support for the diocesan decisions of justice taken by the ordinary in matters of discipline and thus limit the variable interpretation of the decision of the Holy Office. In the letter that the Bishop of Evreux addressed to the Secretary of State, Card. Pietro Gasparri on 18 February 1927, which was the origin of the Penitentiary's opinion, Bishop Chauvin expressed his concern about the revolt and the consequences for the clergy: "The FA leaders in our dioceses have the mission of leading the clergy into revolt against Rome. I fear that the clergy will be taken in by this because the episcopate seems divided. The priests say to themselves that after all it is not so clear that the Pope's orders must be followed in this sense.

The Penitentiary issued a first opinion on 8 March 1927, which mentioned sanctions against the readers of the newspaper on the one hand and against the members of the League on the other. The order of the questions asked by the prelate indicates the differentiation from the point of view of the religious institution between the holders of religious authority with a soul, the Bishops or Seminary Superiors, and the simple faithful whose practice does not engage the authority of the institution. If there is unanimity to warn and then sanction the readers, in accordance with the simple membership of the League, there is a reserve within the Penitentiary. Among the members of the tribunal, one of the prelates asked that the responses be "softened", in particular the measures concerning the refusal of the sacraments or the prohibition of belonging to Catholic associations, preferring solicitude to sanction in order not to destroy the monarchist cause in France, which must be distinguished from adherence to the doctrine of Action française. This opinion was followed by the Major Penitentiary at the request of Pius XI himself after an audience with his Secretary for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs - Mgr Borgongini Duca on 15 March 1927. The text was backdated and sent first to the Bishop of Evreux and the Archbishop of Bordeaux, then to Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, via the Nunciature, so that it could be published in the *Semaines Religieuses* of each diocese in France.

In spite of this, the follow-up of this jurisprudence in the dioceses varied greatly from one ordinary to another, as is highlighted by various reports sent to the Nunciature or the Secretariat of State. A leaflet published and distributed in the spring of 1927 in the archdiocese of Bordeaux testifies to the resistance to this judgement on the part of the clergy and the faithful. It legitimised various strategies for circumventing auricular confession, which was then one of the means favoured by the clerics to ensure obedience. It thus assures that "the faithful must not believe that they are left at the mercy of a confessor, obliged to answer all his questions", calling into question the confessor's capacity for judgement.

A second opinion was issued by the Penitentiary in November 1928, at the request of certain French ordinaries close to Pius XI - in particular the Archbishops of Bordeaux and Paris - to confirm to the directors of souls the conduct to be followed. The instructions to confessors should leave no room for doubt in order to avoid absolutions and dispensations granted to sinners in confession under the seal of secrecy. He reminds us that the reading of condemned works constitutes a mortal sin. If the sanctions are those inflicted on public sinners, or even heretics, the tribunal nonetheless recalls that the ordinary should 'combine rigour with leniency', that it is better to turn away from evil by persuasion and to give the punishment an exemplary character only in the case of persistence in error (Can. 2214 §2).

4. FROM WARNING TO SANCTION: THE EMOTIONAL AND UNFORMAL REPERTOIRE OF EPISCOPAL AUTHORITY

In accordance with the Codex, sanctions and their interpretation are left to the discretion of the ordinary, even if the jurisprudence of the Penitentiary has a binding value and Pius XI, in his message to the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops, reminds us that ordinaries have

the possibility of lifting the ban and the prohibition of reading *Action française* only "rarely and for serious reasons". The legal measures were accompanied by their dissemination in the religious weeks of each diocese, with varying degrees of intensity: the diocese of Bordeaux, which spearheaded the fight against the "insoumis", published a text on *Action française* almost every week. In a completely different register, the prelates of Brittany, the Midi or the Primate of the Gauls took on their role by adopting a conciliatory attitude.

Persuasion or the conciliatory exercise of religious authority

From a legal point of view, a series of persuasive devices were mobilised, which applied primarily to clerics. According to the notice of the Penitentiary of 8 March 1927, clerics who are "partisans, leaguers or readers (by subscription)" will first be warned, for the internal and external forum, and reprimanded for what comes under the external forum, i.e. what can be seen by the whole social community in which the individual is inserted. Reprimands take the form of a public or secret "monition" or "correction", of which a record must remain in the Secret Archives (Can. 2309). They are the responsibility of the Ordinary. It is by persuasion, rather than by public sanctions, that the members of the regular or secular clergy are warned in order to avoid open contestation of the hierarchical authority and the resulting scandal. "As for the confessors mentioned in No. 3 [those who unconditionally absolve good words and continue to absolve readers and leaders of AF], if, warned, they do not make amends and repair according to their power the scandal given to their penitent, they may, as long as they persevere in their own obstinacy, be suspended from the ministry of confession. Seminarians who continue to have sympathies will be "dismissed as unfit for the ecclesiastical state" (can. 1371). Readers who continue to subscribe to or read the newspaper, the leaders of the movement, and those who subsidise the movement will be considered public sinners and as such [excluded] from all that public sinners are excluded from by virtue of the sacred canons.

The execution of censures

Readers of the *Action française* and those who, because of their membership in the League, are qualified as public sinners are deprived of certain sacraments. They could not be refused extreme unction, but religious funerals were forbidden. Jacques Prévotat listed 121 funerals without priests. A census has yet to be taken of marriages in nigris, in the sacristy. The marriage of Saint-Paul and Sigalas offers an interesting case of a marriage celebrated in the sacristy because of the supposed affiliation of the future wife. On 21 June 1930, the deputy for the Loire Inférieure, M. Le Cour Grandmaison, sent the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr Maglione, a request. Written on the letterhead of the Chamber of Deputies, the letter concerns the marriage of his wife's cousin, who is to be married in August to a young woman, Mlle de Sigalas. According to the deputy, "The family of my cousin fears difficulties for the religious marriage because the mother of the fiancée, Madame de Sigalas, is president of the royalist ladies of Bordeaux". The Nuncio hastened to write to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Mgr Andrieu. On 1 July, Mgr Andrieu informed the Nuncio that the wedding would only be celebrated if the young woman, an *Action Française* activist, renounced "her title as a League member in the presence of the ordinary assisted by two witnesses, and if she refuses she will be married at home in front of the parish priest [ff.48] in nigris according to the rule which I established two years ago, after having consulted the Supreme Authority of the Church. The Deputy protests about the sincerity of the girl and the fact that she has never belonged to the French Action League in a subsequent letter. On 19 August 1930 the wedding was celebrated in the church of Brouqueyran, in the parish of Auros, near the château du Mirail. This wine region in the south of the Gironde has many estates where a landed aristocracy benefiting from the wine trade is still powerful. Resistance to the directives was not only the work of

individuals or families with different types of capital, which constituted as many resources in the face of the ecclesiastical institution.

Resistance can be collective and concern an entire parish, thus giving rise to an extraordinary repression: the ban. This case is sufficiently rare to be highlighted. We have only recorded one case of an interdict for the condemnation of the FA. The case of the ban that hit the parish of Barbentane, a small commune of 800 inhabitants in the Bouches-du-Rhône belonging to the diocese of Aix, for a few days at the end of January 1929, bears witness to the hardening of the sanctions taken during these years 1928-1929. In the heart of the 'Vendée Provençale' (Gaudin 2019), the parish is located near the abbey of Frigolet, which had been put to the test by the politics of secularism a few decades earlier (Cabanel 2000). The Provençal Federation of the AF was active there and the AF section was proud to have only seven republican voters (S.n. 1927). On Sunday 29 May 1927, a royalist rally brought together between 30,000 and 20,000 participants in the small town, confirming the establishment of the AF and the emblematic nature of the place. Léon Daudet spoke there, as did Bernard de Vesins and other speakers. Beyond these occasional gatherings, which were part of the staging of the masses, the AF's royalist and Catholic networks seemed to cover the whole country and the effects of the condemnation did not translate into a drop in membership (Gaudin 2019). The silence that accompanied the publication of the decree in the parish and diocesan press betrayed the sympathy of some of the clergy towards the movement. The dossier of the Nunciature shows the difficulty of the local clergy in enforcing the Episcopate's order in its most rigid interpretation - the parish priest of Barbentane is 'in tears' at home as the faithful enter the church. The bishop had to play an intransigent role in the face of the expectations of the institution, expressed by the Nuncio, in the face of the circumvention of ecclesiastical sanctions by the faithful, particularly by women, who were usually docile and respectful of the hierarchy, but who were heavily involved in AF activism (Dumons 2008; Gaudin 2019).

The specific configuration of the parish, located in the heart of the Midi Blanc (Dumons 2008), favoured a conflict over the legitimacy of the sanction against a prominent Action française member. Following the sudden death of a municipal councillor and member of the Action française, Charles Gautier, on 24 January 1929, religious burial was refused. The AF described the deceased as "one of the most fervent Catholics in the town, and who had been, throughout his life, its most devoted collaborator in parish works". The parish priest had doubts about the way in which he should carry out his role: he asked the Archbishop for permission to administer the sacraments and made this known to those around him. The Archbishop, who is the subject of attention from the Nunciature because of denunciations of his complacency towards the FA, is absent. The refusal of the ceremony was probably taken by the vicar general and then assumed by the archdiocese. The funeral was an opportunity to politicise the conflict: the town council attended, led by the Mayor of Barbentane (S.n. 1929b). The remains of the deceased, who had died without having professed his submission, were brought into the church. The presence of the elected representatives gave a quasi-official character to the funeral and testified to an anti-clericalism that went beyond the political formations attached to secularism. Two thousand people joined the procession and entered the church despite the absence of authorisation from the religious funeral and the priest. The national republican press echoed this, and the event remained in the local chronicle: "In 1929, on 24 January, the parish of Barbentane was banned. The reason for this was as follows: the ecclesiastical authority having refused the honours of religious burial to a Mr Charles Gautier, town councillor and vice-president of the Action Française, the political friends of the deceased violated the defence by fraudulently introducing the body into the church and performing a mock liturgical function" (Perrier 1933).

The clerical authority and, more generally, the sanction are questioned in a public and collective way by the faithful, thus creating the conditions for public scandal. In the absence

of the 'docile but fearful' priest, who cried at home having left the doors open for fear of being broken, it was the faithful themselves who sang the Libera me and made an act of faith by singing the Creed in a situation where their presence in the church was contrary to the Archbishop's will. Men and women - whose presence at a funeral is exceptional in this place - then carried the coffin to the ground while singing the De Profundis. While it is not surprising that the faithful recite the prayers of the dead in the absence of a minister, the singing of the Creed has a subversive dimension that worries the Archbishop. They affirm their faith in the absence of a priest and attest to their belonging to the Church by taking a stand against the decision of the archdiocese and therefore of the Pope. The hierarchy is not only confronted with the resistance of the faithful to the papal directive. It is facing a challenge to its ability to state the truth. For Mgr Rivière, Archbishop of Aix, Arles and Embrun (1920-1930), it was a "schismatic act" that challenged his authority and that had to be sanctioned, as well as "the theory on which it was based, namely that the Church belonged to the faithful who had paid for it and that they could come and pray in it as they wished and bring in whoever they wished". It is not so much sympathy for a condemned doctrine that is sanctioned as the contestation of its authority by the faithful. Thus he issued an order on 24 January 1929 prohibiting all religious ceremonies in the commune.

The Secretariat of State was informed by the Archbishop who, while emphasising the danger which had led him to take this measure, also recalled the leniency he had shown, "in this order I have deliberately avoided violent words: schism, sacrilege, excommunication, pollution of the church and I have said a word of my immense sorrow, wishing if possible to touch some souls and make them return". On 27 January, the Nuncio, who had also been informed, asked the Archbishop to send him the local press to take stock of the scandal. The faithful went en masse to other parishes, thus circumventing the ban. The prelate feared that overly severe measures would provoke a break with the institution which would be akin to a schism: "Instead of being content with these ridiculous external lay processions, with crosses and hidden priests, they will, no doubt, now carry their dead into the country churches where they cannot be resisted by force". On 28 January, confirming the Archbishop's fears, *Le Matin* ran the headline "Women go to Avignon to seek a mass they are denied". The deviance of the women was highlighted in several articles, emphasising the seriousness of the act of resistance which consisted of complying with the decision by giving the appearance of deference, while circumventing it.

There is a lack of information in the nonciature's files about how the faithful submitted and how the ban was lifted. The files were sent to the Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs because of their political nature and because they went beyond the scope of the usual administration of religious affairs. But the sanction seemed to be effective: 'frightened' by the sanction, the other parishes did not 'rebel'. The Catholic notables of the city sent petitions of submission to the Archbishop on 31 January. The ban was lifted by a new order on 5 February. Only the priest and the vicar were removed from their posts. A new priest was appointed shortly afterwards (S.n. 1929a). Busy with the signing of the Lateran agreements, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri only acknowledged the lifting of the sanctions at the end of February, congratulating the Archbishop and the population and transmitting the apostolic blessing of Pius XI.

Did the schismatic act of the Barbentane faithful contribute to the qualification of heresy by Pius XI and to the tightening of the sanctions? In any case, it shows the watchful eye of the curia and the limited room for manoeuvre available to the Ordinaries in accommodating delicate situations with their faithful. In the case of Barbentane, the high media profile of the conflict made impossible the strategy of persuasion or the discreet adaptations of the ritual observed at other funerals.

CONCLUSION

As we mentioned yesterday, some sanctions place the faithful in the situation where they appreciate the degree of application of the sanction and are ultimately the executors of their own punishment or, on the contrary, judge that the sanction is not applicable to them, such as those lords who dispose of their chapel as they please. As many clerics point out, the cases in which the sanction is openly contested, those in which the faithful ask the question of their guilt, are not the most numerous. Aware that many of the faithful, AF readers, have simply ignored the sanction, some adopt a conciliatory position, others interpret their role in a way that is more in line with the expectations of the institution. The configuration, characterised by the social, historical and spatial framework in which interactions take place, is crucial.

It seems to us that the crisis of Action française testifies to a crisis of ecclesiastical authority in the field of political consciousness. This invites us to reconsider the ruptures identified by historiography during the crisis of progressivism in the 20th century. It seems to us that the concept of the Republic of the intimate proposed by Denis Pelletier, which can be seen in the field of sexuality, could encompass the behaviour of the faithful in a broader sense. The definition of politics as a field autonomised from religious authority, promoted by certain Action française leaguers, and, ultimately, the inability of the institution to effectively subdue the leaguers, is an indication of this construction of the intimate, a space in which the individual is protected from religious authority. The scope of this will later be seen in the field of sexuality and morals.

The lifting of sanctions was only made possible with the developments of Charles Maurras and the AF Committee, in the context of the election of Eugenio Pacelli to the throne of St. Peter's, by a Decree of the Sacred Penitentiary of 24 July 1939 *Responsum au Dubium*: "In view of the decree promulgated on 10 July 1939 by the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office concerning the newspaper *l'Action française*, may a confessor absolve a penitent, a member of the *Ligue d'Action française*, who assures that he does not wish to belong to this League unless the Steering Committee of the latter conforms his attitude to the declarations and guarantees contained in the aforementioned decree and its annexes. "

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