

*Des Allers sans retours? Les prêtres français en Amérique latine, 1961–1984, I: L'Appel et la conversion.* By Olivier Chatelan. (Chrétien et Sociétés. Documents et Mémoires, 48.) Pp. 298 incl. 5 ills. Lyon: Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes, 2023. €35 (paper). 979 10 91592 34 5

*Des Allers sans retours? Les prêtres français en Amérique latine, 1961–1984, II: Le Tragique et la conscience.* By Olivier Chatelan. (Chrétien et Sociétés. Documents et Mémoires, 49.) Pp. 378 incl. 1 ills, 3 maps and 3 tables. Lyon: Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes, 2023. €35 (paper). 979 10 91592 35 2

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In these volumes Olivier Chatelan invites readers to discover a ‘battle history’ (p. 23) that is rarely mentioned in the historiography of twentieth-century Catholicism. The conflict that Chatelan has painstakingly researched originated in efforts made by the Catholic Church to send French priests as religious missionaries to Latin America. In September 1961, just prior to the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), Pope John XXIII addressed a message to an assembly of cardinals and archbishops, in which he called for the creation of a new committee of French bishops. This committee adopted as its title the acronym CEFAL (Comité épiscopal France – Amérique latine) and began its work in April 1962 to prepare, direct and support the vocations of secular clergy in favour of Latin America. In Spain and Belgium similar committees had been established, in 1949 and 1953 respectively, with support from Catholic Church leaders in Rome. The CEFAL represented a continuation and broadening of these European-led initiatives. The committee’s remit aligned with Pope Pius XII’s papal encyclical *Fidei donum* of 1957, which offered priests the possibility of accomplishing religious missionary activities in Africa, Asia and America.

Chatelan’s study covers events that took place in France and Latin America over some twenty-five years and the author explains his choice of the start and finish dates for this period. The 1961 papal message is set against the geopolitical backdrop of the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Catholic Church was alarmed by the rise of communism, particularly following the 1959 victory of Fidel Castro’s troops in Cuba. The early 1980s witnessed the end of military dictatorships in Argentina (1983) and in Brazil and Uruguay (1985). Chatelan specifically chose 1984 as a cut-off point for his analysis because on 4 September of that year the priest André Jarlan was killed in Santiago de Chile while on a religious mission for the CEFAL. Although assassinations of clergy had occurred previously, the commemoration of Jarlan as a ‘martyr’ represented a turning point in French and Latin-American church relations. The CEFAL launched a questionnaire in 1984 to gather information from priests, nuns and monks on which to base a self-evaluation of its own work.

Volume i, *L'Appel et la conversion*, details the initial stages of setting up the missions to be undertaken by French secular clergy, the pre-existing models and resources available and the roles of key players within the CEFAL including the committee’s secretary, Michel Quoist, and the chairperson, Guy-Marie Riobé. Covering the years from 1961 to 1968, volume i examines the processes by which the CEFAL identified eligible individuals to send to various countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico,



Peru, El Salvador, Uruguay and Venezuela. It then addresses how early warning signs began to appear, which indicated sources of tension and problems connected with the arrival and integration of the French priests in host communities. Volume ii, *Le Tragique et la conscience*, develops the analysis of fractures within those host communities that deepened after 1968. It portrays the intense difficulties for the CEFAL in managing irreconcilable political differences among priests, bishops and archbishops through the 1970s. Escalating hostility between opposing parties in Latin America, which were external to the CEFAL, threatened French priests' security and culminated in uprisings and violence across multiple settings. The explosive news of Jarlan's assassination in Santiago de Chile sent shock waves through the Catholic Church and shattered the possibility of continuing the CEFAL's activities as before.

Between 1961 and 1984, there were 213 priests from French dioceses who departed to Latin America. A list of the names of these individuals with their diocese of origin, date of departure, country of destination and host diocese forms an appendix to volume ii. By adopting methods of prosopography Chatelan provides a clear view of the range of profiles, including social and educational backgrounds, among the 213 individuals. His study builds upon pioneering biographies of key individuals, such as the charismatic Archbishop Olinda. It takes a broader approach by looking at the experiences of priests who departed to Latin America, the roles of bishops who were responsible for decision-making but remained in France and the attitudes of Latin-American clergy based in host dioceses to which the French priests were sent.

After some controversy and disagreements within the CEFAL, François de l'Espinay was appointed to the role of canon to serve as a senior religious delegate representing French interests across the whole of Latin America from January 1964. L'Espinay, together with the secretary Michel Quoist and the chairperson Guy-Marie Riobé, formed an executive team until 1970. In volume i Chatelan draws mainly on the letters exchanged between these three figures on the executive, as well as minutes of committee meetings, to study the years of optimism about the CEFAL prior to 1968. These primary sources are conserved in the *fonds* of the CEFAL at the Centre national des Archives de l'Eglise de France. In volume ii most of the primary source material that is cited also comes from the *fonds* of the CEFAL, and parts of this archive require authorisation to access for research. Chatelan additionally draws on documents from private archives deposited in French departmental and municipal archives, as well as diplomatic records from the French embassy in Rome and the French embassy in Lima, which are at the Centre des Archives diplomatiques. Chatelan has mined all these collections with sensitivity and rigour to bring to light a diverse set of personalities and types of interactions that were vital to the Catholic Church's project in Latin America.

There were numerous reasons for the difficulties that French priests encountered while trying to integrate in host communities of Latin America. Some of the problems were not specific to the nature of the religious mission, or its geographical location, but rather reflect more common issues encountered by people travelling abroad for a temporary period or with a view to permanent stay in another country. There was the obligation for priests to become proficient in one or more languages spoken locally in a host community. There were also the



challenges of comprehending unfamiliar cultural practices and social expectations. The CEFAL dedicated resources to Spanish language-training. Documentation produced during the committee's work shows the bishops were regularly informed about communication breakdowns and cultural misunderstandings.

Problems that stemmed directly from the special status of French clergy as European representatives of the Catholic Church, and as 'outsiders' living among indigenous populations, were complex and profound. They touched on the very identity of the priest as a human dedicated to evangelisation and expected to uphold the teachings of Jesus Christ. French priests found that in Latin America they were able to push their own personal commitment to poverty to an extreme, because a large proportion of the population in their host country was very poor and accustomed to rudimentary services. Sometimes the threats to priests' physical and mental health were so serious that French archbishops and bishops intervened to insist upon appropriate standards of nutrition and medical support. Loneliness was aggravated by linguistic and cultural differences. When the bishops tried to ensure priests received a basic salary this potentially made the sense of isolation worse because the French 'outsiders' were considered 'rich' by the indigenous population. Chatelan investigates carefully how multiple pressures (material, spiritual and emotional) complicated priests' ability to fulfill their mission for the CEFAL and, in some cases, to maintain celibacy and obedience. Training centres at Pétropolis and Cuernavaca were co-educational sites where French priests interacted with and shared the same accommodation as Dominican nuns and monks. Letters to the CEFAL about these centres contain expressions of alarm about the risks of the apostolic mission being gravely compromised. There was concern about the potential for emotional bonds and sexual encounters between immature students whose religious vocation was at a formative stage.

In the 1970s some French priests were arrested and expelled from countries by national police on charges of political dissent and subversive activities. These procedures were generally quite separate from any disciplinary actions initiated by Church superiors, and the CEFAL did follow closely the allegations brought against clergy on mission, not least to act in priests' defence where necessary. Nevertheless, the revolutionary sentiments genuinely felt by some clergy who identified with the political left could lead them into trouble with right-wing figures who occupied positions of power within the Catholic Church in France. For the generation who had served in the Algerian War, a willingness to obey military orders or respect authority was prone to evaporate in the face of injustice.

*Des Allers sans retours? Les prêtres français en Amérique latine, 1961–1984* is an important 'battle history' that contains myriad insights into the social, cultural and emotional demands of pursuing a religious vocation amid dramatic political upheavals and revolutionary change. It is a riveting book to read and should inspire further research on intercultural and multilingual relations in faith communities around the world.

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