

Post-Second World War Social Christianity and Its Relevance to Pope Francis's Criticism of NATO

A Christian social analysis that continues to be held by those like Pope Francis, who in May 2022 criticised NATO as "barking at Russia's door."

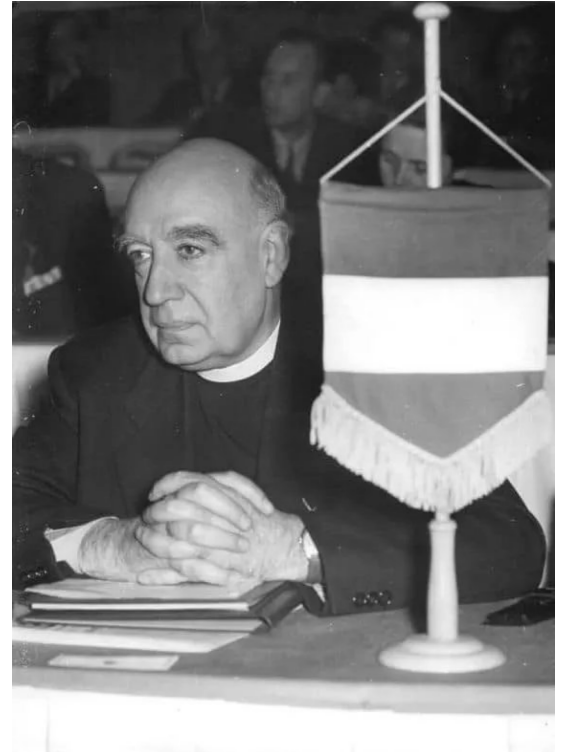
Toby Terrar

Published last year, "I Was a Red Priest", by Father Jean Boulier offers through its protagonist a Christian social analysis that, though now minimised, was widely held in the post-Second World War era and continues to be held by those like Pope Francis, who in May 2022 criticised NATO as "barking at Russia's door." The book is the autobiography of Boulier (1894–1980), which for the first time has been translated from French into English, complete with newly added scholarly appendices, indexes, graphics, and a bibliography, so that it is also a reference work.

Boulier was professor of Christian Legal Principles at the Catholic University of Paris. Over his long life, he published multiple scholarly

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works, his autobiography being one of them. I Was a Red Priest is not



Abbe Jean Boulier at the 7th party conference of the CDU, held in the Weimarhalle in Weimar (September 22nd, 1954). By Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-26513-0007 / Wlocka / CC-BY-SA 3.0, [CC BY-SA 3.0 de](#), [Link](#)

only about Boulrier, but contains a social history of his era from the Christian social perspective. It includes analyses of theology-philosophy, religious associations and movements, liturgy and sacraments, political parties, trade unions, Jewish affairs, early Christianity, European history, and socialist countries and leaders.

For social Christianity in the post-Second World War era—as taught by Boulrier—the main international peace issue that faced believers was the U.S.-led Cold War, waged in order to undo advances made by the working class as a result of capitalism's Second World War debacle. More specifically, the priest-professor took a stand, based on Christian authority, against anti-communism. He also stood firmly against U.S. nuclear policy, as it violated the Christian principles of war and peace. Finally, he took a stand on the side of social Christianity. Regarding social Christianity, he maintained that Christians can be good citizens of the socialist order, but could not accept the bourgeois state and its fundamental law, the one to which all others finally give in: make money, get rich.

In his scholarly writings and his autobiography, Boulrier found Marxism compatible with Thomism, ecumenism, mysticism, liturgy, and church hierarchy. His allies included Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard of Paris and Monseigneur Angelo Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, who in the postwar period was the papal nuncio to France. Dorothy Day, whom the Vatican is considering for sainthood, articulated the opposition between social Christianity and the warmongering of Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Central Intelligence Agency, John Foster Dulles, and Harry Truman. In her Catholic Worker newspaper, Day defended the collaboration of Boulrier and that of U.S.-based priests with the communists.

I Was a Red Priest describes Boulrier's activism beginning in 1912, when he joined the Jesuits. For twenty years he was with the "Company," and then became a priest of the Parisian clergy and an advocate for Jews resisting the Vichy and Nazi governments in the Second World War. In 1950, fighting the same interests he faced during the war, Boulrier helped write and promote the Stockholm Appeal to prevent nuclear war in Korea. The petition gained 273 million signatories, most of whom, as he pointed out, were Christians, not communists. Still later, in 1958, he was convicted of a felony for defaming the French military concerning its conduct in the Algerian War.

In the early 1960s, during the Second Vatican Council, Boulrier worked with theologians Father Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP (of the Dominican Order), and Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens as part of the peace movement. The language in

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the Catholic constitution *Gaudium et Spes* contained the essence of Boulrier's proposed text: "Every act of war which tends indiscriminately to the destruction of entire cities or vast regions with their inhabitants is a crime against God and against man himself and it must be condemned firmly and without hesitation."

Boulrier's activism extended into Eastern Europe, where Christians in significant numbers sided with the communists in the post-Second World War period. This included priests, nuns, and some bishops. There, Boulrier worked with clerical organisations, including the PAX Association in Poland, the Association of Priests for Peace in Hungary, and the Movement of Patriotic Priests and Catholic Action in Czechoslovakia. These groups published Boulrier's writings and sponsored his speaking tours to their countries.

In Boulrier's view, the interests that supported fascism during the Second World War sought to unify Europe in order to destroy the communists. Ultimately, these forces achieved their objectives. They unified Europe and, in time, destroyed the USSR. Today, governments use NATO to make the world a police station in order to enslave the working class.

Believers, like Pope Francis, resist and offer hope. As Boulter put it, this is a multi-millennial war, and present-day Christians are still the first generation.

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- ❖ **About the author: Toby Terrar** is with the Silver Spring Catholic Worker, which helps academic libraries acquire Father Jean Boulier's publications.
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