Decentering American Jesuit Anti-Communism: John LaFarge's United Front Strategy, 1934–39

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Abstract

In 1934, the Society of Jesus was asked to respond at global and regional levels to the increasing threat of world Communism. In North America, the Jesuits initiated plans to meet the twin threats of Communism and atheism. Between 1934 and 1939, two separate streams of Jesuit anti-Communism began to emerge. The first was a macro-style vision grounded in social reconstruction, which the Jesuits called “Establishing a Christian Social Order,” known colloquially as the “xo” program. The other plan was put forward as early as 1934, and elaborated in July 1936 at the Jesuit meeting in West Baden, Indiana, by the writer and editor John LaFarge. LaFarge’s plan, known as the United Front, has never been evaluated by historians. It was a localized program of reactive initiatives meant to meet the gains of the CPUSA with effective Catholic counter-Communist public attacks. LaFarge aimed to recruit students, pastors, and fellow Jesuits to see to it that CPUSA gains in labor, culture, education, government, and churches were met with equal and effective public counterattacks. In 1937, the publication of the papal encyclical *Divini redemptoris* signaled that social reconstruction could become a part of authentic Catholic anti-Communism, indicating the eclipse of LaFarge’s United Front. After 1939, when the Jesuit general Włodzimierz Ledóchowski called for an adoption of the “positive message” of social reconstruction as the dominant means of Jesuit anti-Communism, LaFarge’s more bumptious and militaristic plan began to fade for good. This article chronicles the heretofore unknown struggle between these two antipodes.

Keywords

John LaFarge – Office of Strategic Services – United Front – Włodzimierz Ledóchowski – Popular Front – *Divini redemptoris* – Charles Coughlin – Action Populaire – Institute for Social Order

About one month before the Allied invasion of France on D-Day, the domestic surveillance unit of the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) created a bulletin for its director entitled “the Jesuits and de Gaulle.” The memo, from officer “T3” to Dewitt Clinton Poole (1885–1952), head of the Foreign Nationalities Branch, analyzed an article written by the American Jesuit John LaFarge Jr. (1880–1963) in *America* magazine entitled “And What of de Gaulle?” The OSS was interested in LaFarge’s opinion because in 1944 the American public and the American Catholic Church were still ambivalent about the role Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) might play in the future of France. The Jesuit periodical came to the attention of the American spy organization precisely because of its clarity about de Gaulle. The Jesuits at *America* argued that since de Gaulle was an anti-Communist, he deserved the support of the church. Americans should not be “too cautious” to recognize de Gaulle simply because he had entered into talks with some Communist resistance leaders.¹ For LaFarge, American government and American Catholic interests ought to merge in helping de Gaulle “maintain an effective position against any Communist attempt to dominate the resistance movement and thereby seize power in postwar France.”²

Although much has been written about Communist infiltration of the OSS, Dewitt Clinton Poole’s anti-Communism has never been called into doubt. In fact, as US diplomatic representative at Archangel, Russia, during the Russian Civil War, he described the scourge of Bolshevism in much the same language that Catholic anti-Communists would describe the “red peril” throughout the 1930s. For Poole, “the violence and unreason” of Bolshevism threatened a world revolution that might soon overtake democratic nations around the globe.³ For LaFarge, Communists seemed ready “to fight every day against capitalism until it is destroyed and a soviet government rules in the United States.”⁴ “The

1 John LaFarge, “And What of de Gaulle?” *America* 71, no. 5 (1944): 124–25, here 125.

2 Interoffice memo, T/3 to Dewitt C. Poole, May 5, 1944, microfiche, INT-12FR-807, Foreign Nationalities Branch Files, U.S. Office of Strategic Services (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1988). The writer of the memo was astonished by LaFarge’s remarks because O.S.S. contacts with the Dominican order had “shown strong pro-Gaullist trends,” but LaFarge’s synthesis was “the first such reaction from Jesuit quarters.”

3 Dewitt C. Poole quoted in Regim Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919–1943* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 78.

4 “Red Party in U.S. Linked to Moscow, Browder Admits,” news clipping, box 15, folder 9, Earl Russell Browder file, John LaFarge papers, Georgetown University Library Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington D.C. This is a quote from Earl Browder.

most insistent question concerning Communism,” LaFarge wrote to American Catholics in 1937, “is whether it can happen here.”⁵

Poole had met LaFarge before and was probably not surprised by the priest’s robust anti-Communism. In the fall of 1942, US spy services were startled to observe that the superior general of the Jesuits, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (1866–1942), made a sudden trip from Rome to Switzerland. Poole met secretly with LaFarge on October 28, 1942, and pressed him hard for information. LaFarge refused to offer any information about the trip, but satisfied Poole’s inquisitive nature by supplying him with some contents of Ledóchowski’s recent letter to the American Jesuits about the persecution of the church in Europe. Such a missive was considered *ad usum Nostrorum tantum* (for use only by “Ours”), but LaFarge knew he had to give Poole at least one tidbit. He provided the spy with Jesuit information on ecclesiastical conditions in Belgium and the Netherlands. Still fishing for information on Ledóchowski’s Swiss sojourn, Poole remarked that LaFarge’s “discretion seemed rather to be a matter of principles,” and let the matter drop.⁶ Poole understood LaFarge’s daring in simply meeting with him and that, by revealing the contents of Ledóchowski’s letter, the priest was committing, in Jesuit terms, an act of subterfuge.

By 1944, Poole was assured of LaFarge’s strong anti-Communism. In LaFarge’s eyes, he was simply fighting Communism the same way he proposed to his fellow Jesuits ten years earlier—in what he then called a “United Front” with other anti-Communists who were committed to the active destruction of global Communism. Part of what the clandestine Poole-LaFarge exchange points out is that LaFarge possessed his own independent vision for how the American Jesuits ought to pursue the issue of anti-Communism.

In much of the historiography on Jesuits and anti-Communism, the role of LaFarge seems to have been obscured. Historian Patrick McNamara, in his excellent study of Edmund A. Walsh’s (1885–1956) Jesuit Cold War anti-Communism, characterizes LaFarge’s as viewing of Communism as “just [...] the worst of all isms that he lumped under modernism: secularism, materialism, liberalism, and atheism.”⁷ LaFarge does not come off as a major theorist of 1930s Jesuit anti-Communism. Other scholars have either equated LaFarge’s anti-nazism with his anti-Communism or folded LaFarge’s anti-Communism

5 John LaFarge, S.J., “Communism and the Russian Mind,” *Thought* 12, no. 1 (1937): 196–210, here 196.

6 P. to John C. Wiley, October 28, 1942, Foreign Nationalities Branch Files, U.S. Office of Strategic Services.

7 Southern quoted in Patrick McNamara, *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101.

into his work on interracial relations.⁸ Still others fail to see LaFarge as an anti-Communist at all.⁹ Whatever the circumstance, such characterizations minimize LaFarge's unique vision for American Jesuit anti-Communism in the 1930s, a view that has been largely missed by historians.¹⁰

In moves so far unstudied by historians, LaFarge introduced plans for how the American Jesuits should attack the growing threat of Communism in July 1934 and in June 1935. He called his program the United Front. LaFarge's United Front plan was offered in direct response to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, which emphasized the establishment of a global "popular front" anti-fascist movement. For the Communists, Popular Front initiatives had special advantages, especially within liberal Western governments. In the United States, this approach meant that the CPUSA could shed the stigma of Communism's radicalism by pressing American political culture solely against the gains of fascism and nazism. By harping against fascism, Communists aimed to enter mainstream organizations like labor unions, democratic organizations, and liberal political structures. Charles Shipman (1895–1989), an American CPUSA *agitprop* functionary who was elected to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, wrote that the Popular Front was a "tactical maneuver" used by Communists to fight Hitler, which "required them to shelve some of their most cherished [radical] principles to cooperate with capitalists and bourgeois political parties."¹¹ LaFarge saw right through these tactics. His antidote to the Popular Front was for the American Jesuits to construct a Roman Catholic "United Front" against Communism. LaFarge may have proposed a United Front as early as 1934.

- 8 Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., *The American Jesuits: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 123; Debra Campbell, "The Story Is What Saves Us': American Catholic Memoirs," in *The Catholic Studies Reader*, ed. James T. Fisher and Margaret M. McGuinness (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 27; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 46; of course, the major scholarly biography of LaFarge is connected to his work on interracial relations. See David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911–1963* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).
- 9 Robert A. Rosenbaum, *Waking to Danger: Americans and Nazi Germany, 1933–1941* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 95.
- 10 David W. Southern mentions LaFarge's "Christian Front" concept in footnotes, while highlighting only the race relations implications of LaFarge's new framework. The ominous "Christian Front" wording was an outgrowth in 1936 of LaFarge's original plan that he termed the "United Front." See Southern, *John LaFarge*, 215n2, 215n3.
- 11 Charles Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), x.

This article will argue that LaFarge's United Front proposals signaled that, at least in its early stages, American Jesuit anti-Communism was not univocal, as many histories have suggested.¹² Further, it will argue that two separate styles of plans were put forward between 1934 and 1939 on how Jesuits ought to deal with American Communism: LaFarge's United Front plan, with its emphasis on direct street-level contact in thwarting Communism; and another model, suggested by Jesuits Daniel A. Lord (1888–1955) and Edmund A. Walsh, that focused on meeting Communism by emphasizing Christianity's inherent ability to assuage the root causes of social and economic dislocation in America. While Lord and Walsh pushed centralization as a means to effect their plan, LaFarge's plan was entirely decentralized in both structure and action. Decisions on how to counteract Communist gains were to be made by Jesuits on the ground, in the locality where the Communist effort was most viable. Local Jesuits and their lay colleagues were to fight Communism in their own neighborhoods.

While LaFarge's plan for localized action gained steam early on, the centralized, social reconstructionist approach of Lord and Walsh slowly eclipsed the more pugnacious posture of LaFarge's United Front. By 1939, the reconstructionists would dominate the Jesuit conversation on anti-Communism, as LaFarge and his supporters dropped out of view and conformed to new directions. This article will delve into the effects and consequences of this heretofore unexamined Jesuit minority voice that argued for their "United Front" against American Communism. It will show that in American Jesuit circles for a five year period between 1934 and 1939, there was a short-lived, but intense, under the surface split on how to deal with and defeat Communism in the United States.¹³

"We can now take the aggressive side": Deploying a Theology of the United Front

On April 17, 1934, Ledóchowski issued a letter to the provincials of the United States and Canada entitled, "On Combating Communism." The Jesuit general

12 See for example William P. Leahy, S.J.'s seminal article "American Jesuits and the Social Apostolate: The Origins and Early Years of the Institute of Social Order," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 73, no. 3 (1991): 227–41.

13 Ibid, 234–36; Leahy chronicles the level of acceptance and non-acceptance of the "xo" program, but without mentioning that LaFarge's United Front as the catalyst for the new Jesuit tug of war.

and his American underlings began to single out left-leaning groups and Communist front organizations as destabilizing elements for the progress of Catholicism. It is important to understand the workings of this new framework. In a report on the early reception, perception, and integration of Ledóchowski's directive, an anonymous Jesuit author described his role as a "combatant" in the war against Communism. Just as the Jesuits were called during the Counter-Reformation, so too now they were called to combat "the lies of Communism and atheism, the great heresy of our times, more dangerous probably than any heresy of the past."¹⁴

In responding to this call from Ledóchowski, LaFarge believed that his United Front plan would be well-suited to both the desires of the superior general and the realities of Popular Front tactics. For LaFarge, the Popular Front was all about combat. As historian Gerd-Rainer Horn has argued, the Popular Front as envisioned by Communist theorists was not meant to be a benign social construction. Rather, the Popular Front was described as a "popular front in combat" and as a means of exercising an inevitable "conquest of power" over capitalism.¹⁵ Popular Front initiatives often took the shape of "anti-Nazi Leagues," or "Pro-Democracy" organizations. LaFarge's United Front plans showed a clear understanding of this dynamic.

The writer of the report on Ledóchowski's letter on combating Communism, although anonymous, integrated the language of a Jesuit counter-front, or United Front, directly into his conclusions. "The hour has come," he stated in nearly apocalyptic terms, "when isolated efforts to hold back the tide of atheism and Communism must be consolidated into a united Jesuit front."¹⁶ Just as the Communist International was requiring the unification of European socialist and progressive parties to fight fascism as a "Popular Front," Father Ledóchowski was giving LaFarge and his Jesuit "frontists" a reason to style themselves as a spiritual fighting force.¹⁷ The American Jesuit writing the report called for "a worthwhile, systematized, warfare against the common enemy of Christianity and civilization."¹⁸

14 Anonymous author, report "The Call of Jesuits to Social Order," folder Institute of Social Order – history 1934 (from earliest days) – Author ?, [1], Institute for Social Order collection, bin 660, Jesuit Archives: Central United States, St. Louis, MO (hereafter cited as JA:CUS).

15 Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism, and Continuity in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 156.

16 Anonymous, report "The Call of Jesuits to Social Order," JA:CUS.

17 On the Popular Front see, Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 263.

18 Anonymous, "Call of Jesuits to Social Order," [1], JA:CUS.

The anonymous writer employed an ample amount of martial rhetoric. "There is no questioning the vigor and number of the enemy," he recalled, "we have seen at first hand their resourcefulness." Placing all Jesuit works in the balance, the author stated, "the joint efforts of the Society in America will not be too much if we are to repel the assaults of these brilliant adversaries."¹⁹ Regarding Communist penetration of Catholic programs, the author commented, "Through infiltration they are affecting labor groups, the student classes, the colored, and the foreign-born." More pressingly, the Communists were "appealing precisely to the people who make up our parishes [...] and our students."²⁰

Characterizing the urgency of how things looked in 1934, the author recalled that the battle could not be put on hold. "The enemy is active here and now. The Holy Father and His Paternity count on us for a vigorous defense and a systematic offensive."²¹ The author indicated that plans were laid for a meeting of American Jesuits where plans could be proposed "to parallel communist propaganda with Jesuit propaganda."²²

Ten days later, Ledóchowski wrote a follow-up letter, but one which largely has been understudied by historians. In "On the Need of Vigorously Opposing Modern Atheism," Ledóchowski redoubled his efforts and his martial rhetoric. Conceptually connecting Communism and atheism, he spoke of the "destructive efforts of *Militant Atheists*" around the globe.²³ Ledóchowski was clear in how Communists and atheists ought to be treated, seeing the two concepts as interchangeable.²⁴ "Our first endeavor," he made clear, "ought to be the detection and open denunciation of these frauds." He rallied the global Jesuits, saying, "Let all of Ours realize and be convinced that our fight is with the greatest and most widespread revolt against all that is called God, or that is worshipped."²⁵ By the mid-thirties, many American Jesuits were appropriating the binary and belligerent language of "open denunciation" into how they viewed both atheism and Communism.

19 Ibid., [6].

20 Ibid., [3].

21 Ibid., [6].

22 Ibid., [3].

23 Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, April 27, 1934, "On the Need of Vigorously Opposing Modern Atheism" in *Selected Writings of Father Ledóchowski* (Chicago: Loyola University Press for the American Assistancy of the Society of Jesus 1945), 601. Emphasis original.

24 On this see, "atheistic Communism," paragraph eleven, in the twenty-ninth decree of the twenty-eighth general congregation, *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu* (Rome: Jesuit Curia, 1938), 9.

25 Ledóchowski, "On the Need," 603.

With LaFarge proposing a United Front, he was definitionally employing military language to get his point across.²⁶ Yet, in the matter of martial spiritual rhetoric, the Jesuits had a long and complex past.²⁷ Lorenzo Scupoli (c.1530–1610), the Theatine spiritual writer of the sixteenth century, penned his classic text *The Spiritual Combat* in 1589 and, from the first, found it hard to shake observations about Jesuit influences. “The military symbolism behind the concept of ‘spiritual combat,’” historian William V. Hudon has argued, “echoed the military experience and focus of Ignatius.”²⁸ Some scholars have even ascribed authorship of Scupoli’s book to the Italian Jesuit Achille Gagliardi (1537–1607).²⁹ Whatever the case, Scupoli’s emphasis on asceticism in connection to the influence of the will upon the soul was seen as a personalization and tightening of the Meditation on the Two Standards contained in Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*.³⁰ Here, the meditating Jesuit saw before him Christ, commanding the forces of good, and Lucifer, commanding the forces of evil. One’s decision about which “commander” to follow was a key element in the conversion of the soul.³¹

As Peter McDonough has explained, American Jesuits whose training occurred prior to Vatican II were inculcated into a “combative” mode of study and discipline, especially in the period of their training when they studied philosophy. A Jesuit’s transition from the novitiate, where much emphasis was placed on regimented prayer and reflection, to academic studies where

26 In essence, a front is the foremost line, or part of an armed force. *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*, s.v. “front,” accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001/acref-9780199891580-e-3214>.

27 The French Jesuit theologian Joseph de Guibert (1877–1942) struggled mightily with the idea that Ignatian spirituality was “militaristic.” Having lived in France during World War I, and composing his monumental work on Ignatian spirituality as war clouds gathered once again over Europe, de Guibert concluded that “there is nothing less militaristic, nothing less reminiscent of the drill sergeant, than [*sic*] the spirituality of Ignatius.” The spirituality of Ignatius “was not a spirituality of the battlefield,” de Guibert insisted, and the only combat Ignatius admitted was “spiritual combat.” See: Joseph de Guibert, S.J., *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, trans. William J. Young, S.J., ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources and Loyola University Press, 1964), 172–73.

28 William V. Hudon, ed., *Theatine Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 54.

29 *Ibid.*, 46.

30 Pierre Janelle, *The Catholic Reformation*, ed. Joseph Husslein (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1949), 320.

31 Patrick McNamara provides an excellent summary of this spirituality in his subchapter on the Jesuit Edmund A. Walsh, “The Two Standards: Ignatian Spirituality as a Factor in Walsh’s Anti-Communism,” in McNamara, *Catholic Cold War*, 96–98.

aggression was rewarded, McDonough sees as a move “from the feminine to the masculine.”³² In this transition from obeisance to the acquisition of skills, “combativeness, controlled by obedience, was emphasized.”³³ As Jesuit trainees were granted more autonomy in their lives and in their work, “the program shifted from an almost exclusive emphasis on supervision and religious drill to greater stress on the combative and competitive ethos of the society.”³⁴ The study of philosophy was meant to “promote God’s glory, to widen the influence of the Church, and to slay heresy outright by the two-edged sword of tongue and pen.”³⁵

Taking up this call, North American Jesuits met at Loyola University in Chicago on July 3 and 4 to respond to Ledóchowski’s letters and to figure out precisely how they would “slay the heresy” of global Communism. The meeting was presided over by Edmund Walsh, founder of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and the leading Catholic expert in the United States on Communism. One of the results of the Chicago meeting was a resolution indicating that “there must be a united front” against Communism rather than “any divergence” from the goal of eradicating Communist inroads in the United States.³⁶ While it is unclear whether or not LaFarge attended this original Chicago meeting on Communism, the framework and lexicon that he would readily adopt was not only present but underscored.

The “frontists” who would align with LaFarge wasted no time in acting “to parallel communistic propaganda with Jesuit propaganda.”³⁷ At the same time, in Rome, Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli (1876–1958) was setting to his own battle against atheistic Communism. As historian Giuliana Chamedes has explained, Pacelli was a moving force behind the creation of the Secretariat on Atheism in 1933. For Pacelli, international Communism “had declared war on God himself” and therefore was to be fought openly and with tenacity.³⁸ In addition, when it came to the battle against Communism, Pacelli often used his position in the

32 Peter McDonough, *Men Astutely Trained: A History of the Jesuits in the American Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 149.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 148.

35 Ibid.

36 Anonymous, report “The Call of Jesuits to Social Order,” folder Institute of Social Order – history 1934 (from earliest days) – Author?, [2], Institute for Social Order collection, bin 660, JA:CUS.

37 Ibid, [3].

38 Giuliana Chamedes, “The Vatican, Nazi Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-Communism in the 1930s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no 2 (2015): 261–90, here 269.

Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs to eschew “the wait-and-see approach” of Pope Pius XI (1922–39) and “undermine the Tedeschini-Pius line.”³⁹ Outwardly, the subtle rift between Pius XI and Pacelli on Communism was not noticeable. Only later would LaFarge understand the reality of this split between Pacelli and Pius XI on the transnational struggle against Communism. Meanwhile, in the United States, local efforts were taking shape.

Immediately on the heels of Ledóchowski’s letter and the Chicago meeting, Californian Jesuit Joseph A. Vaughan (1890–1961) triggered the first volley in a so-called “pamphlet war” between the Jesuits and their American Communist foes. In his pamphlet *The Communistic Crisis*, Vaughan was clear and convincing about the role that the Society of Jesus would play in the new confrontation with Communism. As one of the first to move publicly on the issue, Vaughan was convinced that Communism was “both a philosophy and a religion,” with Lenin as its “arch-priest.”⁴⁰ Inevitably, Communism would lead its adherents to “reject all religion, and deny the existence of God and the immortal soul.”⁴¹ At the local level, Vaughan took to the radio to denounce Stalin over the Los Angeles airwaves.⁴² As Jesuit “frontists” such as Vaughan geared-up to confront Communism regionally, geopolitical realignments were taking place so quickly in the early 1930s that Father Ledóchowski’s new North American anti-Communist initiative was in danger of stumbling out of the blocks.

In October 1933, the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement was signed, effectively recognizing the Soviet Union as a US diplomatic partner. Catholics scoffed at Soviet commissar of foreign affairs Maxim Litvinov’s (1876–1951) assurance that the Soviet Union would no longer “permit the formation or residence on its territory of any organization or group whose objective is the overthrow of the political or social order of [...] the United States.”⁴³ Vaughan saw this as mere posturing because the Communist International (Comintern), the Russian-directed clearinghouse for the world revolutionary movement, was not abolished. On top of this, and more important still, in October 1934, the League of Nations admitted the USSR as a permanent member. For US Catholics, it seemed as if the “popular front in combat” was winning battle after battle.

39 Ibid., 267.

40 Joseph A. Vaughan, S.J., *The Communistic Crisis* (Los Angeles, 1934), pamphlet, box 1, Raymond T. Feely Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, [6].

41 Ibid.

42 Michael F. Engh, S.J., “Just Ones, Past and Present,” in *The Just One Justices: The Role of Justice at the Heart of Catholic Higher Education*, ed. Mary K. McCullough (Scranton, PA: The University of Scranton Press, 2000), 25.

43 Ronald E. Powaski, *The Cold War: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1917–1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

While Vaughan found this whole situation demoralizing, he also saw it as a further call to the battle lines. "The Bolsheviks frankly admit that since the United States has recognized the Soviets," he wrote with a wisp of American Catholic exceptionalism, "the only international force capable of stemming the tide of world-wide social revolution is the Catholic Church."⁴⁴ As with most of his fellow "frontists," the choice was one of an isolated American Society of Jesus, spurned by the US government, facing down an international foe with global revolutionary ambitions. In his Ignatian framework, it was the choice of the Two Standards all over again; "it is a question of Moscow or Rome," Vaughan averred.⁴⁵

In June 1935, the Missouri-Chicago Province held a four-day meeting "on Communism and atheism" in West Baden, Indiana. The meeting was crucial to the history of Jesuit anti-Communism because in West Baden two Jesuits were called forward to present entirely separate and nearly diametric plans for how the American Jesuits should deal with the problem of Communism.⁴⁶ John LaFarge, the assistant editor of *America* magazine, and Daniel A. Lord, a Missouri province Jesuit and editor of *The Queen's Work* sodality magazine, would both push for their plans to be adopted by an eager, yet still unsettled North American constituency.

At West Baden, LaFarge's plan was considered first. As an early "combatant," he urged a head-on confrontation with the Communist International, "pooling our experiences and observations as to the existence of this menace."⁴⁷ Employing a martial concept, LaFarge proposed that the Jesuits in the United States form a "United Front" campaign against Communism. Just as the Popular Front had infiltrated and taken over unsuspecting organizations, so Catholics should "plan a United Front" to "gain control of worthy causes, such as [the] peace [movement], Labor, Adult Education, [and] cooperative movements."⁴⁸

44 Joseph A. Vaughan, S.J., *The Communistic Crisis* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1934), 1; Vaughan pamphlet 04–18536, Liturgy and Life Collection, John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

45 Ibid.

46 Donald W. Southern, in his excellent biography of John LaFarge, writes about the 1935 meeting at West Baden, but omits LaFarge's "United front" plan. While Southern refers to LaFarge as a "militant anti-Communist," he does not see this meeting as a tussle between two competing visions of North American Jesuit anti-Communism, as I do here. Apropos to his study, Southern concentrated on LaFarge's interventions regarding work with African-Americans and African-American Catholics. See Southern, *John LaFarge*, 217–20.

47 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, folder Communism, Institute for Social Order Collection, bin 661, JA:CUS.

48 Ibid.

In this way they could beat the Soviets at their own game. LaFarge was alarmed to see that the Soviets had such deep influence in the world of film, literature, and the stage (singling out playwright Clifford Odets, who was then a member of the Communist Party). LaFarge called for the “American capture of Russian Communism” by creating a plan for American intellectuals to co-opt Communism and turn it upside down.⁴⁹ Frederic Siedenburg, S.J. (1872–1939), director of the Chicago Province Anti-Communist Committee, suggested that with a United Front, American Jesuits could “go after” Communists in the same way “the American Legion went after [...] Communism [...] in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).”⁵⁰

Siedenburg’s comment reflected that any United Front plan was bound to be a “fists-up” approach to stopping Communism in the United States. The “United front” plan would consist of meeting the “open propaganda” of Soviet agencies, with an equal counteroffensive of Jesuit propaganda.⁵¹ LaFarge intended his United Front to influence secular newspaper writers, American businessmen, and “Negro intellectuals.”⁵² Jesuit colleges were to be used as special places for the motivation of Catholic students against Communism. The “main tactics” of the “frontists” included “direct instruction of our young college men [...] as to the organized [Communist] movements and their danger.”⁵³ As LaFarge made clear, he would be “training students for combat.”⁵⁴ Siedenburg aptly characterized the United Front with his enthusiastic intervention, “we march together but strike separately.”⁵⁵

While such grand thinking buoyed LaFarge’s listeners, his new formula posed a unique obstacle for Jesuits, men used to a regimented, hierarchical, top-down mode of institutional life. LaFarge’s plan was bereft of any central organizational structure. The United Front, as any military front would be, should

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid. In the early 1930s, US Army Chief of Staff Douglas A. MacArthur extended US Army Military Intelligence Division surveillance to the Civilian Conservation Corps while maintaining contacts with the American Legion. CCC camps were administered by the US Army. See Shelton Stromquist, *Labor’s Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 24.

51 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, JA:CUS. Emphasis original. The secretary at West Baden, was Father Martin Carrabine, S.J. (1894–1965), who directed Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action from 1934 to 1953.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., [7].

55 Ibid., [4].

be spread horizontally throughout society. As LaFarge put it, the United Front should be ready to counter-attack Communist initiatives “in our locality.”⁵⁶

One issue that persistently rankled LaFarge was the 1933 US recognition of the Soviet Union. He proposed the Jesuits adopt a “knock Russia” policy. “Why should we show consideration for Russia?” he asked. LaFarge noted that even though the US had recognized the Soviet Union, “cordiality is lacking,” and that could provide cover for an American Jesuit plan of “knocking” Russia off its balance in their public initiatives and publications.⁵⁷ LaFarge was disgusted with Catholics who refused to stand up to the Soviets, even “our wealthy Catholics [who] ‘pussyfoot’ [around] attacks on Russia and Communists.”⁵⁸

Unfortunately, LaFarge’s fixation with the US recognition of the Soviet Union set him at odds with his confrère, Edmund Walsh. Two years earlier, Walsh had been one of the few Catholic voices to absolve President Roosevelt for Soviet recognition. “Roosevelt has put God back into Russia,” Walsh clamored in approval.⁵⁹ As LaFarge’s United Front plan moved forward, Walsh would maintain a steady, far-off, and critical eye. Oblivious, LaFarge continued to drum up support for his proposal. The United Front was on the march.

One of the first major supporters of LaFarge’s plan was Father Joseph Husslein (1873–1952), dean of the School of Social Service at St. Louis University. Husslein had been studying socialism for twenty-five years, leading to strong conclusions: “I realized no less the thorough, inveterate, and inextinguishable hatred of Christian Faith, Christian culture, and of all religion that underlay the doctrine of Socialism.”⁶⁰ Moreover, Husslein was also averse to social reconstructionist ideas. During the 1910s, he even impugned Walter Rauschenbusch’s Social Gospel movement. Husslein viewed the Social Gospel as anti-Catholic since it excluded all Catholic “dogmas [...] rites [...] sacraments [...] and hierarchy.”⁶¹ For Husslein, no scheme of social regeneration could elide the sacramental structures of Roman Catholicism and remain valid.

The same held true for Communism, with its secretive methods and tactics. “The Communistic method,” Husslein argued in 1935, treasured “the complete

56 Ibid., [3].

57 Ibid., [4].

58 Ibid., [3].

59 Walsh quoted in Thomas R. Maddux, *Years of Estrangement: American Relations with the Soviet Union, 1933–1941* (Tallahassee, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1980), 24.

60 Husslein quoted in Stephen A. Werner, *Prophet of the Christian Social Manifesto: Joseph Husslein, S.J.: His Life, Work & Social Thought* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 12.

61 Husslein quoted in Thomas E. Woods Jr., *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 146.

free and open discussion of all subjects and plans, but once a matter is settled, there is to be blind obedience.”⁶² This was why, Husslein argued, “The United Front” had to be endorsed.⁶³ LaFarge’s United Front scheme presumed blind obedience, kept Roman Catholicism pristine, and pitted Jesuits against Communists by employing the interchangeable tactic of blind obedience. For Jesuits, blind obedience was to goodness and Christ. For Communists, it was a blind obedience to what Husslein called “the standard of Satan.”⁶⁴

Husslein’s vivid endorsement of the LaFarge plan must have come as somewhat of a surprise to Husslein’s friend, Daniel Lord, who soon proposed a plan of his own for American Jesuit anti-Communism. In contrast to LaFarge and the other “frontists” who wanted to “knock” Russia, Lord offered a plan that called for Jesuit anti-Communism to be delivered in a more subtle, yet no less public way. While Lord admitted that, “we can now take the aggressive side,” his plan for social reconstruction was much less pugilistic than LaFarge’s.⁶⁵ It was also a plan of centralization. As Lord’s plan evolved, he came to the conclusion that “you can’t fight atheists and Communists by showing them how wrong they are,” but rather how “right” the “Catholic solution” was for America’s social ills.⁶⁶ Entering into local slugfests with Earl Browder (1891–1973) and the CPUSA was not a part of what Lord had in mind (Father Charles Edward Coughlin [1891–1979] and his “Christian Front” eventually would take up this role).⁶⁷ Lord described his plan as “not [a] content program, but an approach and a method of distribution.”⁶⁸ Lord’s strategy, while not conciliatory

62 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, [4], JA:CUS.

63 Ibid. Emphasis original.

64 Husslein quoted in Werner, *Prophet of the Christian Social Manifesto*, 128n23.

65 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, [9], JA:CUS.

66 “An Integrated Plan for Social Order,” pamphlet, n.d., folder Institute for Social Order Meeting Minutes 003, bin 660, JA:CUS.

67 Enlightening in this respect is a seventeen-page report housed in Browder’s papers at Syracuse University. “The Christian Front,” the report indicates, “was organized by Father Coughlin in New York in August 1938 [... as a ...] necessary crusade against the anti-Christian forces of the Red Revolution. The Christian Front was formed to counteract the Communist Popular Front.” See *The Christian Front: Origin and Purpose*, n.d., Earl R. Browder papers, box 9, correspondence subject file, *The Christian Front, 1938–1940*, Earl Browder papers, Syracuse University Library, Department of Special Collections, Syracuse, New York.

68 “An Integrated Plan for Social Order,” [4], JA:CUS.

to Communism, was socially distributive, much less contentious, and much more centralized than anything LaFarge and his allies were putting forward.

Lord was a formidable voice (and face) of Catholicism during the 1930s. *The Queen's Work* devotional magazine had a circulation of about 100,000. Lord's main vocation was dealing with Catholic youth. He travelled the country giving lectures, leading retreats, and leading youth prayer circles at sodality gatherings throughout the US. For the generation of Catholic youth growing up in 1930s, Lord was nearly a national icon. As a pamphleteer and speaker, he made deep inroads into the American Catholic youth consciousness.

Lord's plan for fighting Communism, had its roots in the "ECSO," a Chicago Jesuit plan generated the year before which stood for "Establish a Christian Social Order." This plan (sometimes referred to in Jesuit terminology simply as "xo") truly was more method than militancy. As Lord explained to his fellow Jesuits gathered in West Baden, his "method" comprised three suppositions. First, that Communism was the most important crisis since the Reformation. Second, that Jesuit "centers" could step in and help the bishops with anti-Communist issues, and last, that the ECSO was "a program," and not a set of tactics.⁶⁹

LaFarge's new United Front proposal threatened to upend Lord's more broad-based program. Lord shied away from any notion that Communism was an "attack" on Catholicism. In fact, Lord's xo project called for dropping the words "Communism" and "anti-Communism" altogether. In his effort to find "constructive" and "original" impulses to fight Communism, Lord suggested that the North American Jesuits, "take the positive stand without mentioning them [the Communists] by name."⁷⁰

Perhaps unwittingly, in unnamings Communism, Lord was committing a political act.⁷¹ By unnamings Communism, Lord was, as philologist R.J. Nelson has argued, stating a "truth without reference."⁷² LaFarge's newly proposed anti-Communist schema was also a reminder that Lord's xo had defanged American Jesuit anti-Communism of its grounding in local, reactive measures of combat. By the end of the West Baden conference, the proponents of Daniel

69 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, [5], JA:CUS.

70 Ibid., [9].

71 On the politics of unnamings, see Jonathan E. Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan*, Asia Pacific Modern 11 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 226.

72 R.J. Nelson, *Naming and Reference: The Link of Word to Object* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 89.

Lord's XO plan held pat, while the "frontists" came away believing that the "United front" action plan would offer the best prospects for defeating Communism in North America.

"The matter is very complicated," Lord explained to his fellow Jesuits, "and it will take lots of time to get up a program."⁷³ Lord's scheme, however, was also a program in search of centralization, and centralization was a concept many Jesuits felt comfortable in supporting. XO offered one thing that LaFarge's contextual and responsive plan of combat did not—the solace of being programmatic. Consequently, what emerged from West Baden was a move to centralize. This, of course, did not bode well for the LaFarge plan since, while their "front" was united, it was also meant to meet the multitude of *local* Communist incursions as they arose. If centralization were adopted, LaFarge and his companions were likely to be eclipsed.

Centralization would make it difficult for them to "strike singly," as they marched together. Local responsive techniques would have to give way to larger centralized planning. On June 23, 1935, a resolution was passed to send a request to Superior General Ledóchowski in Rome for the Jesuits "to centralize and [...] form a permanent national Jesuit institute in America for social and economic research and for the popularization for this program."⁷⁴ As LaFarge saw the mood at West Baden shift before his eyes, he made plans for one last intervention.

LaFarge argued that Lord's resolution should go forward, but with one reservation. LaFarge was wary about North American Jesuits duplicating the Malines Social Code of 1927, a set of European social reconstructionist principles, which Paul Misner has observed failed to keep many Catholics from embracing fascism.⁷⁵ At West Baden, LaFarge argued presciently that the new program should "meet the American set-up, and accord with [the] American mentality."⁷⁶ Otherwise, LaFarge implied, the entire "set-up" might implode, and American Jesuit anti-Communism would be neutered in place. The Jesuits ended their West Baden meeting just before midnight. They were excited to send their request to Rome.

73 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, JA:CUS.

74 Ibid., [7].

75 Paul Misner, *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe: Social Thought and Action, 1914–1965* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 225.

76 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, [4], AJ:CUS.

Discarding “the American set-up”: The Rise of the Social Reconstructionism 1936–1939

While LaFarge waited for American Jesuit governance to move, he wasted no time in pressing forward with this concept of a United Front. In spring 1936, he convinced leaders “of over ten thousand high school and college students [to meet] in Washington D.C.” In opening their meeting, the students used radical language to explain their purpose: nothing less than to “launch a counter-revolution” against Communism.⁷⁷ Meeting at Georgetown University, under the nose of Edmund Walsh (who was not included in the program), LaFarge mobilized the local Jesuit sodality movement as they “mapped out a three-point program to block Communist advances in the United States.”⁷⁸ It was LaFarge who gave multiple addresses, spelling out precisely how to do this, urging Catholic youth to “absolutely oppose the professional agitation of Communism, boycott the works of authors writing sympathetically on Communism, and appeal for support to the masses of the people.”⁷⁹ This was localized Jesuit counter-punching as LaFarge’s original plan envisioned. A resolution of the conference, according to reports, was “to seek a united front of Catholics and non-Catholics to fight the ‘common foe’ of all Christians.”⁸⁰

In September 1936, LaFarge was invited to speak at “a meeting of several hundred Protestant clergy and laymen,” in Asheville, North Carolina, to do just that. As a keynote speaker and consultant to the conference, LaFarge urged the Protestant ministers to unify their ranks against the Communists. “Communism is primarily a philosophy of life that denies man’s spiritual nature and destiny,” LaFarge warned the ministers, “but it is also an organized movement, growing out of a complete philosophy of action.”⁸¹ For LaFarge, the “divided state” of the Protestant household militated against any prospects of concerted counter-action. Communism “incites and thrives on the dissention of its enemies.”⁸² LaFarge counselled unity to his Protestant hosts while at the same time cautioning them not to adopt solely a reconstructionist program. “Mere

77 “Sodality Votes to Make Drive Upon Radicals,” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1936, X8.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 LaFarge quoted in “Christian Front to Combat Communism,” *America* 55, no. 22 (1936): 508–10, here 508.

82 Bishop William J. Hafey quoted in *ibid.*, 509.

social reform," he warned "will not cure [...] the social discontent [...] left to fester among the millions of this country."⁸³

By fall 1936, LaFarge was quickly becoming the Jesuits "man of action" against Communism. He was pronouncing on Communism like an expert and was organizing thousands of Catholic youth and hundreds of interdenominational ministers. The "United Front" student sodality conference on Communism must have stunned Walsh, particularly because it was a show of force on Walsh's home turf. By early December 1936, Walsh drew a line with LaFarge. He sent him a blunt letter, essentially dressing-down LaFarge for his "direct attack" program of anti-Communism. Walsh made clear "That Communism should not only be fought by direct attack but indirectly, as well, by the constant advocacy [...] of civil society is beyond controversy."⁸⁴ The rest of Walsh's four-page letter to LaFarge roundly argued for "the constructive and affirmative aspects of our campaign," citing reconstructionist plans such as the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* and Archbishop Giuseppe Pizzardo's (1877–1970) 1934 comments on the global program of Catholic Action.⁸⁵

Walsh's letter revealed his fear that United Front anti-Communist local counter-attack actions could be viewed by outsiders as blatant political engagement. Walsh made clear that "local application of such programs should be left to laymen."⁸⁶ Walsh indicated that Jesuits could be involved in the training of lay leaders, but "it then becomes their obligation to reduce our common Catholic heritage to concrete application in whatever form local circumstances may suggest."⁸⁷ Jesuits were not to play a part on the anti-Communist front lines.

Perhaps the primary worry for Walsh was that Jesuit priestly anti-Communist activity could lead to identification with then foremost priestly anti-Communist in the United States, Charles Edward Coughlin. In fall 1936, Coughlin redoubled his campaign against Communism, even going so far as to insinuate that Catholic groups or persons who criticized his style were openly aiding the Communists.⁸⁸ In addition, Coughlin was running a surrogate for president of the United States on the National Union for Social Justice ticket. "Serious

83 Ibid., 510.

84 Edmund A. Walsh to Rev. J. LaFarge, December 2, 1936, [1], John LaFarge papers, box 20, folder 9, Edmund A. Walsh, 1934–1936, Georgetown University Library Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington D.C.

85 Ibid., [2].

86 Ibid., [1].

87 Ibid. Emphasis original.

88 See Coughlin's campaign of defamation against the Catholic Laymen's League in George Seldes, *The Catholic Crisis* (New York: Julian Messner, 1945), 122.

consequences could easily result for the Society in the United States," Walsh warned, if Jesuit leadership were to spearhead local anti-Communist agitation. The Society might be open to charges of colluding with Coughlin, or at least imitating his tactics. Presumably in connection with the abysmal showing of Coughlin's candidate in the 1936 presidential election, Walsh wrote, "The recent repudiation of Father Coughlin by the millions who supposedly were loyal followers is a case in point."⁸⁹ Ironically, as LaFarge's plan for a controlled, considered, and local United Front was being undercut by Walsh, Coughlin was beginning to create his own "Christian Front," which would prove to be irresponsible, anti-Semitic, violent, and pro-fascist. Walsh was dead wrong in 1936 that Coughlin had been repudiated by millions. He still had millions more in his back pocket.

On the programmatic level, Walsh and his Jesuit colleague Raymond T. Feely (1895–1965) began putting a program in place to abrogate LaFarge's United Front schema. William P. Leahy's (1948–) important article on the American Jesuits and the social apostolate emphasizes the central role that Feely played in pushing Superior General Ledóchowski to examine the Lord plan.⁹⁰ Feely has been an understudied character in the history of the American Jesuits, but in 1936 he prepared a new proposal for Ledóchowski. While it was composed of both competing strains—combatant and social reconstruction concepts—Feely used Lord's title, "XO – Plan of Action for the Establishment of a Christian Social Order" to headline the report. In opening his remarks, Feely let the Jesuit general know that there was a split in the way the North American Jesuits were proceeding. "The plan of action against Atheism and Communism should proceed along a twofold front," he reported. Without naming LaFarge's United Front proposal, Feely explained that the "first front" was "direct attack upon the organized movements of Communism and Atheism with a refutation of their errors."⁹¹ The second front was "the Catholic answer to Communism [...] the positive proposal of a Christian social order."⁹² Feely's report tactfully melded both schemes, but over the course of its breadth, it clearly signaled that the "first front" approach should be eliminated.

Because Feely refused to even mention that LaFarge had a plan, while contending that the North American Jesuits were "split on two fronts" about

89 Edmund A. Walsh to Rev. J. LaFarge, December 2, 1936, [2].

90 Leahy, "American Jesuits," 236.

91 All quotes are taken from report, "XO – Plan of Action for the Establishment of a Christian Social Order through Jesuit Activity," n.d., box 6, Raymond T. Feely Papers, Hoover Institution Archives.

92 Ibid.

anti-Communism, he effectively thrust the conversation toward the reconstructionist solution. Readers of his report would know of no other option. They would have no idea that LaFarge and his allies also were proposing a comprehensive United Front plan. In the first pages of the report, Feely described the choices as stark: contentious direct action with no central planning or a cerebral and “positive proposal” utilizing the advantages of Catholic social teaching. Feely characterized the two fronts as “negative and positive,” contrasting the frontists in a light which they did not perceive themselves. For the frontists, there was nothing “negative” about facing down Communism.⁹³

After such introductory observations, the rest of Feely’s ten-page report aligned with Lord’s social reconstruction agenda from the West Baden meeting. “The entire plan,” Feely revealed to the Jesuit general, “is summed up in the official title of the movement [...], Establishment of a Christian Social Order.” The informal designation for this phrase was to be “xO,” which was also recommended as “the popular designation of the Jesuit anti-Communist and social movement.” “xO,” then, was Jesuit anti-Communism. The term, however, did not mean direct action anti-Communism, but rather the “movement” for social reconstruction that was embedded in Lord’s plan for the establishment of a Christian social order. Feely informed the general, “Jesuit social action will be referred to throughout this paper as ‘xO.’” With this new designation LaFarge’s combatant agenda had been quashed, or at least subsumed into the larger plan of social action. In the end, Feely described xO to Ledóchowski as simply “a Catholic program of social justice.”⁹⁴ The unnamng of Jesuit anti-Communism was complete.⁹⁵ Soon, LaFarge’s plan would face another hurdle.

In 1937, Pope Pius XI seemed to broach both of Feely’s fronts when he published his encyclical *Divini redemptoris*. The encyclical ranked as the Holy See’s strongest condemnation of Communism up to that time. One historian has even called it “a comprehensive exposé of the evils of this doctrine.”⁹⁶ Even so, some historians have viewed *Divini redemptoris* as more than simply another Catholic attack on Communism. In the final part of the encyclical, Pius suggested various remedies for Communism. He recommended that Catholic counter-action should not be comprised solely of counter-punching. Pius

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93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Foucault called “unnaming” an act of “creative disordering.” See Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 30.

96 Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall, trans. and eds., *Church and State through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1967), 542.

made an oblique denunciation of anti-Communist Catholic militancy as he rounded out his letter. Invoking the 1931 social encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius indicated that a social justice approach emphasizing poverty relief and the rights of the human person might be the best antidote to the scourge of Communism.⁹⁷ As Pius reshaped the fight against global Communism, LaFarge's United Front plan seemed to be facing some serious obstacles.

Amid this backdrop, during summer 1938, LaFarge took his historic tour of Europe that many historians have viewed as being instrumental in shaping his views on fascism and Communism. At the same time, Ledóchowski had come to a conclusion about Feely's proposal for ECSO.⁹⁸ A meeting between LaFarge and Ledóchowski was arranged, and it was in this meeting that the Jesuit superior unveiled his new plan for the North American social apostolate: the replication of the French Jesuit *Action Populaire* system in the United States. *Action Populaire*, a self-styled French Jesuit salon for the discussion of social questions, was to be transplanted to America.

For LaFarge, this news must have come as a tremendous blow. As Belgian theologian Roger Aubert has pointed out, *Action Populaire* and its impulses were grounded in the Malines Social Code of 1927.⁹⁹ In LaFarge's eyes, it was not only the Social Code's inability to ward off fascism that worried him, but the fact that a European-style construction would now be forced upon North American Jesuits. Clearly, the *Action Populaire* schema went against his warning at West Baden that whatever the American Jesuits did, they should do it "in accord with the American mentality."¹⁰⁰

97 On this see, Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56; and Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 72.

98 It is unclear who influenced Ledóchowski to choose this particular construction to meet the severe social requirements of the US economic system. Leahy suggests that Father Raymond Feely, S.J. may have beaten LaFarge to Europe and proposed the idea himself. The twenty-eighth general congregation of the Jesuits was meeting in Rome in 1938. Whatever the case, "an American *Action Populaire*," was the exact opposite of what LaFarge had recommended for the American scene years earlier. On this see Leahy, "American Jesuits," 237.

99 Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), 220.

100 Minutes of the Chicago-Missouri Province Meeting on Communism and Atheism, June 22 to 26, 1935, [4], JA:CUS.

Action Populaire was founded in 1903 by the Jesuit Henri-Joseph Leroy (1847–1917). By 1938, the group had a headquarters on the outskirts of Paris staffed by twelve Jesuits. These French Jesuits were not activists, particularly in the sense that LaFarge recommend at West Baden. For example, rather than fight Communism, their newsletter, *Dossiers de l'Action populaire* only “monitored the growth of Communist influence in France.”¹⁰¹ Its original mission was to act as “a Christian forum for the discussion of social questions.”¹⁰² As the Popular Front in France mainstreamed Marxism after 1936, *Action Populaire* was to become the main information center, conference center, and study center of French social Catholicism. “Lectures, literature, and counseling” were to be the main ways in which *Action Populaire* was to “help others to act,” in accord with Catholic social teaching.¹⁰³ Under the leadership of Gustave Desbuquois, S.J. (1869–1959), who had worked bumptiously with LaFarge in composing the so-called “hidden encyclical,” *Humani generis unitas*, in 1938, the *Action Populaire* quickly moved out of Paris in 1940 and became co-opted by Vichy. Its attempt to ingratiate itself with Marshal Henri Pétain’s new nazi-influenced government would hardly be mentioned by North American Jesuits after World War II.

Finally, after nearly three years, Ledóchowski formalized his directive for North America in a letter to the provincials in January 1939. At the time, Ledóchowski could not have predicted that *Action Populaire* in France would eventually veer toward fascism, but the *Action Populaire* construction was to become the model on which American Jesuit anti-Communism was to proceed. In his letter, Ledóchowski ordered the Americans to establish “a social center [...] located in the city of New York [...] for [...] the struggle against Communism.”¹⁰⁴ For LaFarge, this new model was inorganic, foreign, and certainly seemed to be imposed from the outside and from the top down. Yet LaFarge understood the channels of power within the Society of Jesus. In the same way that he was deferential to his superior general in his work writing *Humani generis unitas*, when it came to the *Action Populaire* suggestion, LaFarge equally conceded.

101 David Curtis, “True and False Modernity: Catholicism and Communist Marxism in 1930s France,” in *Catholicism, Politics, and Society in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. Kay Chadwick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 74.

102 W.D. Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 242.

103 Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 151.

104 Ledóchowski quoted in J.P. Fitzpatrick, “New Directions in the Social Apostolate,” *Woodstock Letters* 88 (1959): 119–20.

For American Jesuits after 1939, Ledóchowski's directive finally gave some clarity. Re-creating the French construct was difficult. In December 1940, John Delaney, S.J. (1906–56) founded the Institute for Social Order (ISO). Delaney had a background in labor education and immediately folded his ideas on “labor schools” into the ISO's brand. Kimball Baker writes, “Delaney came to ISO with an ambitious goal to found a labor school in every Jesuit parish and to link a labor school to every Jesuit high school and college.”¹⁰⁵ Consequently, in its first iteration, rather than replicating the French salon model, the ISO would become the dominant mechanism in connecting Jesuit spirituality with American labor. The ISO would struggle throughout the 1940s to truly identify its mission. It was reorganized in 1943 and again in 1947, both times receiving new national directors. “The Institute is as yet inchoate,” wrote ISO director Leo Brown, S.J. (1900–78) despondently to the Jesuit superior general Jean-Baptiste Janssens (1889–1964) as late as 1948.¹⁰⁶ “It needs status, stimulus, support, and approbation.”¹⁰⁷ LaFarge's warnings about adopting such a scheme had long faded.

Conceived in anti-Communism, the ISO was in danger of trailing off into obscurity. Due to lack of impact, many American Jesuits thought the ISO had been shuttered. “There seems to be fairly widespread opinion,” an anonymous 1945 report indicated, “that the Institute for Social Order has been disbanded [...]”¹⁰⁸ As hot war turned into the Cold War, the social reconstructionists could claim that they had won the battle over local, direct action as laid out in LaFarge's shelved United Front plan of 1936. However, the mechanism for effecting social reconstruction was in serious need of repair. A post-war committee was called together to “make a systematic study of the Institute for Social Order,” and noted that their first priority was to figure out precisely what “the appropriate objectives of the Institute for Social Order [were].”¹⁰⁹

In 1946, Leo C. Brown wrote an urgent letter to his provincial. Brown, a forty-six-year-old labor priest with a Harvard PhD, was an associate professor of economics at St. Louis University. Through his work with labor unions in St. Louis, Brown came to observe the activities of Communists at the local level. Writing

105 Kimball Baker, *Go to the Worker: America's Labor Apostles* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 230–31.

106 Leo C. Brown, S.J. to Joannes B. Janssens, S.J., July 25, 1948, folder: correspondence, 1948–1950, Institute of Social Order Collection, bin 664, JA:CUS.

107 Ibid.

108 “Institute of Social Order,” anonymous report, n.d., “Brown?” in marginalia, folder correspondence, 1948–1950, Institute of Social Order Collection, bin 664, JA:CUS.

109 Ibid. ISO disorganization and mission confusion is noticed by Schroth in *The American Jesuits*, 125.

to his provincial, he remarked, "I have slowly come to the definite conclusion that if Communism is to be contested, we must meet it by organization and action."¹¹⁰ In many ways, Brown, a social reconstructionist who would become the director of the ISO in 1947, was channeling the exact sentiments of LaFarge when he laid out his United Front plan for counter-attacking local Communists in 1936. The struggle between the frontists and the social reconstructionists had carried on, under the surface and under different names, for more than ten years.

Conclusion

During the first days of June 1938, LaFarge found himself in Budapest, Hungary, attending the Thirty-Fourth International Eucharistic Congress. The opening assembly of the congress was presided over by Eugenio Pacelli, the secretary of state of the Holy See, and president of the congress.¹¹¹ Pacelli's address in Hero's Square must have bowled-over LaFarge. His ninety-minute speech encouraged European nations to create "a United Christian Front" against Communism. "Cardinal Pacelli Urges United Christian Front to Fight Foes of Church," would be the headline emerging from his presidential address. Speaking from the heart of Europe, Pacelli called for "heroic measures" to be taken on behalf of the church, which was "faced by a Godless array which opposes the Christian creed." Pacelli urged that "threatened by atheistic Communism, all nations should unite [...] to combat the spread of Communism." "The militant Godless," he warned, "are face to face with us [...] shaking the clenched fist of [the] anti-Christ against everything we hold most sacred."¹¹² This was precisely the sort of "face to face" battle LaFarge had proposed two years before with his own United Front proposal. It was the same de-centralized, "face-to-face battle" that would prompt him to meet with DeWitt Clinton Poole in 1942.

A few days after leaving Budapest, LaFarge was in Rome, where he had his own face-to-face meeting with Ledóchowski. It was at this meeting that Ledóchowski pushed and "was anxious I [LaFarge] should contact *Action*

110 Interoffice Memo, Leo C. Brown, S.J. to Joseph P. Zuercher, S.J., January 14, 1946, folder ISO correspondence, 1946–1947, Institute of Social Order Collection, bin 664, JA:CUS.

111 Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 66.

112 Zsolt Aradi, "Cardinal Pacelli Urges United Christian Front to Fight Foes of Church," *The Guardian*, June 3, 1938, from Newspaper Archive of Arkansas Catholic, scan of newspaper, accessed April 17, 2017, <http://arc.stparchive.com/Archive/ARC/ARCo6031938p05.php>.

Populaire in Paris, and do some investigating there.”¹¹³ The general’s push did not get much more than a mention. It is unclear whether or not LaFarge followed up on the suggestion. “I had already visited the A.P.,” he wrote curtly.

Speaking at a testimonial dinner for him at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in 1952, LaFarge said that he felt very hurt when a colleague once described him as “a champion of lost causes.”¹¹⁴ In connection to his United Front against Communism, historians have had no inkling that it ever was a cause for LaFarge, much less a lost one. If it were a lost cause, it was one which Pacelli, after being elected Pope Pius XII (r.1939–58), implemented robustly during the early Cold War. As he reflected on what it meant to be a “champion of lost causes” to his Waldorf-Astoria audience, “the way in which he said it,” religion scholar Debra Campbell has observed, “signaled to the audience that he knew that the causes so dear to his heart could no longer be dismissed as lost.”¹¹⁵

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113 LaFarge personal notes dated June 8, 1938, John LaFarge papers, box 38, folder 3, Correspondence and Notes from Europe, 1938 file, Georgetown University Library Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington D.C.

114 Debra Campbell, “The Story Is What Saves Us: American Catholic Memoirs,” in *The Catholic Studies Reader*, ed. James T. Fisher and Margaret M. McGuinness (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 27.

115 Ibid.