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Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, Nicolas de Bremond d'Ars & André Grelon, *L'Entreprise et l'Évangile. Une histoire des patrons chrétiens*. Paris : Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2018. 352 pp. 26€ ISBN 978-2-7246-2230-0

Review by Hubert Bonin, Sciences Po Bordeaux & Gretha-Bordeaux Université.

The issue of the link between codes of personal morality and corporate practices in a capitalist and liberal environment has long been a concern for employers, experts, and researchers in corporate history or management. *L'entreprise et l'Évangile* is therefore part of a “classique du genre,” especially since the principal author is a specialist in the history of employers. She is joined by two sociologists: an academic, and a researcher and Catholic priest. The adaptation of the Church to changes in the political and economic realms has always been delicate because of shifting internal power relationships: the roles played by bishops and priests in the spiritual function of Christian employers' groups therefore illuminates the social relations of production and ethics, both individual and institutional.

The book revolves around recurrent questions of legitimacy for employers who must reconcile their Christian values with their management methods and objectives.[1] They perceive an acute discordance between the two when “bad practices” prevail: strained relations with employees (dismissals, strikes, wage claims), corruption cases, competitive methods, etc. Furthermore, the promotion of “good practices” appears difficult in the context of a system that prioritizes profits and growth, while intensified production places pressure on employees whose wages are limited. For Christian employers, entrepreneurship and religious values ought to be intertwined, though this proposition is not simple, as we see in persistent debates between “economics and humanism” (debates which inspired both an association and a magazine between 1941 and 2007).

Thanks to the extensive archival holdings of the National Archives of the World of Labor and interviews with employers, the authors examine the evolution of a dynamic Christian employers' organization, the French Confederation of Professions (1926), which became the Centre français des patrons chrétiens (CFPC) in 1949. The history of the CFPC is perfectly interwoven with the broader history of French employers.

The 1920s saw a renewal of nineteenth-century debates: the Great War and the strong economic growth that followed it encouraged discussions about the relationship between capitalism and the common good. Associations in Lyon and in the Nord (many of which had existed since the 1870s) and trade unions (since the 1890s) felt the need to better define, clarify and share “aspirations” among “Social Catholics,” even though classical forms of paternalism had shown

their limits and the de-Christianization of employees was intensifying, despite the creation of the Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens in 1919 or the Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne in 1926.

An aspiration to collective meditation then crystallized; the tensions of the 1930s, the post-war period (marked by the rise of a productivist economy), and the years 1970-1990 (which were marked by a profound restructuring of the economy and of enterprises), offered many opportunities for discussion. These debates were expressed in local chapters and national organizations, with reports stimulating renewed thinking, and even a newspaper championing the philosophy of the association. From the 1960s onwards, priority was given to the training of young employers, and to the example provided by experienced employers, with different but complementary cycles from those of management schools.

The book identifies key figures who understood the aspirations of their colleagues: Émile Decré, or Joseph Zamanski, who founded the CFP by merging professional and fraternal unions in the 1920s; Yvon Chotard (on the board of the CFP in 1956, president in 1965-70) and Jean-Yves Eichenberger (president from 1981 to 1984). These individuals were sometimes also involved in the life of the Confédération nationale du patronat français, especially from the 1950s to the 1960s. A social commission was established in 1968 that Chotard chaired from 1972 to 1986. He became vice-president of the CNPF in 1981-86, where he worked alongside Georges Chavannes, Pierre de Calan, Marcel Demonque and Gérard Mulliez-Cavrois. Their aim was to stimulate joint reflection and to draw up recommendations for the organization's members. They sometimes doubted their *raison d'être*, and they sought to reconcile personal and capitalist demands. However, the association provided them with methods of social negotiation (when collective agreements are put in place) and of implementing more or less formalized codes of values, which helped them to achieve exemplarity and legitimization through concrete action (employee profit sharing, social justice measures), by reconciling human and economic goals, participating in reflections on corporate social responsibility, and fighting against corruption, or in favour of business ethics.

This book, in which such questions are intertwined methodically and with clarity, contributes to enriching the history of values and ideas, sociological history, and the history of professional organizations within regional territories and branches of activity. Gaps can be noted, however: one wonders about the relative strength of “reactionary” Christian employers compared with these humanists. A discussion of relationships with socio-Christian political parties, especially the Mouvement républicain populaire and even left-wing Gaullists, is likewise lacking. Furthermore, certain themes seem to be overlooked, in particular how these “good” bosses responded to the concentration movement within family capitalism from the 1960s to the 1980s and the subsequent restructuring of regional production systems imposed by the transition between the second and third industrial revolutions in the years 1980-1990. A second book on these themes would be welcome.

NOTES

[1] See also Philippe Bernoux, *Les nouveaux patrons. Le Centre des jeunes dirigeants d'entreprise* (Paris: Éditions Économie humanisme & Éditions ouvrières, 1974); Philippe Laurent & Emmanuel Jahan, eds., *Les Églises face à l'entreprise. Cent ans de pensée sociale des Églises sur l'entreprise* (Paris: Centurion, 1991); Hubert Bonin & Paul Thomès, eds., *Old Paternalism, New*

Paternalism, Post-Paternalism: 19th-21st Centuries (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013); Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel & Denis Pelletier, “L’entreprise et les religions. Maw Weber, Baby Lou et le bricolage” *Entreprises & histoire* 81 (2015): 5-14. Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, Nicolas de Bremond d’Ars, Hélène Frouard, André Grelon & Nathalie Piot, *Origines et histoire du Centre français du patronat chrétien (1926-2000). Rapport final de recherche* (Paris: EHESS & Les entrepreneurs et dirigeants chrétiens-EDC, 2016).

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