

“It was not as simple as it seems”:<sup>1</sup>  
Collaboration, Petainism, and Resistance in  
Vichy France

JAIME AMRHEIN

**I. Resistance and Collaboration in World War II France: An Introduction**

On June 22, 1940, a week after German troops entered Paris, French and German representatives signed an armistice whose terms divided France into two zones. Germany occupied Paris in the zone north of the demarcation line that sliced across France.. The new French government, named Vichy after its new capital city, resided in the unoccupied zone south of the line, called the “free zone.” Technically the Vichy government had jurisdiction over both zones, but German authorities allowed them virtually no power north of the demarcation line. The National Assembly at Vichy voted to grant Marshal Pétain full extraordinary powers over the state on July 10, 1940, fully establishing the authoritarian Vichy regime and Pétain’s *Révolution nationale* (National Revolution). Pétain and the Prime Minister, Pierre Laval, pledged to reorganize France according to the traditional values of “Work, Family, and Country” through their National Revolution program. Months later, meeting in a train station on October 24<sup>th</sup>, Marshal Pétain agreed with Hitler to the official “collaboration” of the Vichy state with the Third Reich.<sup>2</sup>

France was not merely territorially divided. The French citizens were also ideologically and politically divided between collaboration with and resistance to the new Vichy regime. To understand the ways in which the French split in their reactions to Vichy, it is first essential to define the labels being applied to them. Although the

terms “collaboration” and “resistance” can apply to actions in any war, they are highly politicized and provocative when writing the history of World War II. They are used to describe many diverse acts. For example, “collaboration” can mean anything from actively aiding the Nazis with deportations of Jews to working in an ammunition factory supporting the Nazi war effort. “Resistance” refers to anything from survival for a Jew in a concentration camp to violent partisan attacks on Nazi troops.<sup>3</sup> Clearly the definitions of “collaboration” and “resistance” are neither static nor official.

These expressions can refer to occurrences in many countries during the Second World War, but they take on a particular meaning in France under German Occupation. Vichy France had highly concerted efforts of both collaboration and resistance. Historian Gerhard Hirschfeld remarks that these labels must be defined specifically in the French context because “just as resistance in all its forms cannot be seen in isolation from the conditions of repression in which it arises, so collaboration cannot be separated from the social and political conditions which enable it to develop.”<sup>4</sup> In Vichy France, “Collaboration” and “Resistance” refer to very specific movements—hence their capitalization—which grew out of the unique arrangement between Vichy and Nazi Germany. “Collaboration” was the Vichy government’s official cooperation with the Nazis and those who fully supported Vichy’s cooperation were “Collaborationists.” “Resistance” meant the organized movements both inside and outside of France who opposed and fought against Nazi occupation. The Resisters in France were more active and coordinated than in any other country Germany attacked. With the city of Lyon serving as the center of their operations, Resistance movements of all kinds performed a range of actions to thwart the Nazis and the Vichy regime, from physically fighting to publishing underground newspapers to hiding Jews from deportation. Although relatively small in numbers, the Resisters proved to be quite powerful and had a significant influence on the psyche of the French people as the war intensified.<sup>5</sup> A final group, the *Pétainistes* (Petainists) formed

another movement in France that was neither fully a part of the Collaboration nor the Resistance movements. They supported Marshal Pétain and his National Revolution, but distrusted the Collaboration with the Third Reich. These terms are defined more specifically when applied to religious movements during the Occupation.

## **II. Spiritual movements in Vichy France**

The discord between Collaboration and Resistance infected the French Christian community at the beginning of the Vichy government. Catholic and Protestant leaders generally separated into the same three sides as secular leaders: Collaborationists, Petainists, and Resisters. Yet Christian groups and leaders responded in a distinctly spiritual way, different from their secular counterparts. They fundamentally based their decisions to collaborate or resist as they did upon their faith. The theologies of their churches, whether radical or traditional, established the frame for how they viewed the events of World War II and the Vichy regime. Everyone claimed to act in the name of Christ.

How could people who were committed to the same Christian values, read the same Bible, and followed the same Christ have made such opposite decisions? If they really all acted in the name of Christ, should they not have responded in the same way to the Vichy Regime? In dividing among Collaborationists, Petainists, and Resisters, the French Christians during World War II illustrated important distinctions in the Christian Church as whole at the time. A fundamental schism had begun to occur between the traditional religious establishments, both Catholic and Protestant, and the new theology of Christian intellectuals. These tensions became apparent as the different sides separated over the question of how to react to the new realities of Vichy France.

The differences among these groups can be clearly seen through the writings of an individual or group who led each. Cardinal Baudrillard represented the Collaborationists, as a leading Catholic in France at the time and left behind a detailed daily diary of his

experiences during the war. Pastor Marc Boegner, a Petainist, was a central figure in the Christian community as President of the national Protestant and Reform Church organization. He served as an advisor in the Vichy government, acting as the official representative of French Christians. Pastor Boegner also kept a thorough journal of his daily activities and minutes of his meetings with Vichy officials. *Les Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien* (The Journal of Christian Witness) formed a part of the underground press of the Resistance movement. Written by Protestant and Catholic intellectuals, the journal functioned as the mouthpiece of the Christian Resisters. Examining the writings of these three influential leaders or organizations demonstrates that the divisions of French Christians in Vichy France occurred due to fundamental differences in the theologies, authorities, and fears of the Collaborators, Petainists, and Resisters.

### III. *Les Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien*, Resistance

Like the Resistance as a whole, the spiritual Resistance's numbers were small but its voice proved to be influential in France. At the beginning of the Vichy state in 1940, most Christian leaders in France were either Petainists or Collaborators. Therefore, the Christian Resisters became prominent due to their radical actions and thoughts. *Les Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien* (The Journal of Christian Witness) was a clandestine ecumenical tract printed in Lyon, the center of the Resistance movement, by a core group of Jesuit priests and Protestant scholars.<sup>6</sup> A leading scholar of Vichy France, Renée Bédarida, called these journals the "key texts of the spiritual Resistance in France."<sup>7</sup> In the second issue, the founder of the journal, Father Chaillet, a well-known Jesuit theologian, wrote that the *Témoignage Chrétien* was at "the front of spiritual Resistance against Hitlerism."<sup>8</sup> Father Fessard, another Jesuit professor, wrote the first issue in November 1941, titled "France, Beware of Losing Your Soul." Fathers Chaillet and Fessard explained that their mission was to present their "passionate refusal and lucid opposition to the grip of the enemy on our consciences like its establishment on our soil."<sup>9</sup> Throughout the

war, fourteen issues of the journal were printed in total, with its last issue published right before the Liberation in July 1944. They went from printing 5,000 copies of the first issue to printing 60,000 of the final issue, in total printing over half a million copies between 1941 and 1944. After the first two years, they distributed it not just in the free zone, but in the occupied zone as well, making it a national force. The same group started an accompanying newspaper, *Courrier Français du Témoignage Chrétien* (The French Post of Christian Witness) in May 1943 in order to reach a larger audience with a shorter, less intellectual approach. The newspaper found national success, growing from a first printing of 50,000 copies to a final print of 200,000 for the twelfth and final issue in August 1944.<sup>10</sup>

Father Chaillet and Cardinal Henri de Lubac were the editors of the *Témoignage Chrétien* and the leaders of the movement. Cardinal de Lubac, also a Jesuit, was the most important French theologian of the time. His writings were the foundation for *la nouvelle théologie* (New Theology), a dynamic revolution in Christian thought which would eventually transform the official Catholic doctrine. Pastor de Pury, an important Protestant minister, helped run the journal and served as the denominational counterpart to the other Jesuit editors. In the early years, the number of Christian resisters joining them was extremely small. The popularity of Pétain, especially with other Christians, was hard to combat. The clandestine journal, however, soon evolved into a movement. A small group of intellectual laity, made up of students and professors from all disciplines, convened in Lyon to write and work for the *Témoignage Chrétien*.<sup>11</sup> World War II historian Bertram Gordon estimates that the movement was composed of about one-third clergy and two-thirds lay people.<sup>12</sup> Yet in Vichy France as a whole, they continued to be a minority movement, seen as radical and dangerous. The publication and its leaders were publicly condemned by both the state and the church hierarchies. Some members of the organization even died or were deported for their involvement.<sup>13</sup> Yet in spite of the size of the move-

ment the journal undoubtedly made up the nucleus of the Christian Resistance in France.

Many more Christians than those involved with the *Témoignage Chrétien* participated in the Resistance, often in more secular organizations. The *Témoignage Chrétien* was however the only organization specifically and wholly devoted to an intellectual spiritual resistance, a very particular and specific form of resistance. Bédarida gave this explanation, “The specificity of this form of resistance, is to be a battle waged in the name of the Christian faith, with the arms of the spirit, against National Socialism and its neo-pagan regime.”<sup>14</sup> Spiritual resistance fought against fundamental evils that were seen to be in deep contradiction to Christianity. These spiritual resisters battled in the realm of the conscience. This difference between spiritual resistance and other forms of resistance is evident when you compare *les Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien* with other Resistance newspapers, like *Combat* or *Défense de la France* (Defense of France). Most Resistance clandestine presses printed news stories of events, battles, and heroes that were intended to mobilize their readers to physically join the fight. *Témoignage Chrétien* offered doctrinal, theological, and philosophical arguments combined with information supposed to produce reflection.<sup>15</sup> Saving the conscience and the spirit of humanity were the Christian journal’s primary concerns. Spiritual Resistance waged a war with the spirit first and would then eventually propel the person into a temporal fight. The French Christians who were Resisters during the first two years of German Occupation were engaging in a spiritual clash not only with Nazis, but with other members of their own Christian community, the Collaborators.

#### **IV: Cardinal Baudrillart, Collaboration**

At the exact opposite end of the spectrum from the *Témoignage Chrétien* were the Collaborators who fully supported cooperation with Nazi Germany and Hitler without hesitation. Members of this group were just as scarce in Vichy France as the early Resisters. However, scholar W. D. Halls points out that they were possibly the most

visible group. The members of this group were often prominent clergy or laity who led militant organizations before and during Vichy France.<sup>16</sup> For example, Catholics were the leaders of and made up much of the force of the *Milice Française*, Pétain’s para-military, political police force. Another movement, *Action Française*, an antisemitic and nationalist political organization, counted many Catholics among its members as they played a major role in Pétain’s National Revolution. A main characteristic of both of these groups was Catholic fervor combined with militant Collaborationism and support for Pétain.<sup>17</sup> Frequently the most ardent Collaborationist Christian leaders were strongly fascist, pro-Nazi, and anti-communist, as is the case with Cardinal Alfred Baudrillart.

Just as the *Témoignage Chrétien* preached a particular spiritual form of resistance, Cardinal Baudrillart preached a particular spiritual form of collaboration. He based his collaboration on his profound faith in the Nazis and his fundamental opposition to bolshevism. In fact, lay Catholic Collaborationist, Alphonse de Châteaubriant, deeply influenced Baudrillart with his argument in *La Gerbe* newspaper that “Nazism and Christianity were perfectly compatible.”<sup>18</sup> Fortunately, Cardinal Baudrillart kept a detailed daily journal which affords a remarkable look at his reasons for collaboration and his actions during the war. His anti-bolshevism, for example, took a spiritual form; he pronounced that “it is now a crusade against the Soviets: a crusade, pleasing to God.”<sup>19</sup> Baudrillart deeply admired Marshal Pétain in a spiritual sense as well. When Pétain announced Vichy’s official collaboration with the Nazis on October 24, 1940, Baudrillart called Pétain “a benevolent light” and summoned the French people to unite “around the leader and the father who incarnates France today.”<sup>20</sup> He used carefully chosen words with strong spiritual connotations, such as “benevolent” and “incarnates,” to describe Pétain, whom he worshipped as a hero. Unfortunately, he fell severely ill and wrote his last journal entry on April 14, 1942 a month before he died on May 19, 1942 in Paris.<sup>21</sup> He remained entirely loyal to his Collaborationist stance until his death, unlike

the other group of Christians during the German occupation, the Petainists.<sup>22</sup>

### **V. Pastor Boegner, Petainists**

Most Christian leaders in France were Petainist. Catholics and Protestants both largely welcomed the Vichy regime and Marshal Pétain in the summer of 1940. They were not, however, in favor of collaboration with Nazi Germany. Hence, their appellation illustrated that they supported Pétain but not Nazism as did the Collaborators.<sup>23</sup> W. D. Halls explains that they “saw no contradiction in being anti-German,” while at the same time backing Pétain.<sup>24</sup> Although they had objections to Hitler and some Nazi policies, they believed Vichy offered them the best option for the preservation of France. They overwhelmingly displayed their ardent enthusiasm for Pétain and commitment to his National Revolution. Church historian Michèle Cointet writes that “the church of France was fully devoted to Marshal Pétain.”<sup>25</sup> The assembly of the cardinals and archbishops of France issued on July 24, 1941 a declaration explaining their intentions in Collaboration, “We practice, without submission as to an absolute authority, a sincere and complete loyalty to the established power. We venerate the Head of the State and we immediately ask that a union of all the French around him be realized.”<sup>26</sup> In this statement, while the Catholic leadership pledged total allegiance to the state, they indicated some hesitation. They included the qualification that they would not yield to it as to an absolute authority, because the Church was their absolute authority. Nevertheless this declaration held immense sway with Catholics all across the country and precipitated an overwhelming agreement from the vast majority of the lower Catholic clergy. In fact, historian Jacques Dusquesne concludes that so many pastoral letters and declarations in favor of Vichy and Pétain came out in 1941 that they can not all possibly be cited in one place.<sup>27</sup> Protestant leaders, such as Pastor Boegner, also joined the Catholics in their pledges of commitment to Vichy.

Boegner led the French Protestant community and even Christian community as a whole during German Occupation. His son Philippe reflected, “When he speaks, he speaks in the name of the Protestant churches of France and the entire world.”<sup>28</sup> During World War II, Pastor Marc Boegner served as the president of both the *Fédération protestante de France* (Protestant Federation of France) and the *Conseil national de l’Eglise réformée de France* (National Council of the French Reformed Church). He carefully recorded all of his meetings, dealings, and thoughts during this time in his journals which his son has since published. At the beginning of the Vichy government, he was a strong Pétainist, who remarked when Parliament granted Pétain full powers that in his plan “there are some excellent things and some reforms we have asked for since long before the other war.”<sup>29</sup> However, like Catholic leaders, Boegner remained extremely wary of collaboration with Nazi Germany.

The day after Pétain announced official collaboration, Pastor Boegner questioned in his journal, “At what price are we going to collaborate with the establishment with the new European order?”<sup>30</sup> Even though he had reservations, he thought it was important to practice a *politique de la présence* (politics of presence) in the Vichy government, since he served as a member of Pétain’s National Council.<sup>31</sup> By making sure the government “knew French Protestantism existed,” he could “inform, call on, assure that France does not commit actions contrary to honor, and protest.”<sup>32</sup> W. D. Halls concluded that as a result, “his was a voice to which Pétain [ . . . ] listened attentively.”<sup>33</sup> This becomes evident in Boegner’s journals as he held frequent meetings with all the leaders of Vichy, including Pétain, in which he spoke freely and lobbied the leaders on issues he cared about, especially the persecution of Jews which he opposed based on “the logic of the Gospel.”<sup>34</sup> However, this beneficial arrangement quite simply could not and did not last. As Vichy actions against Jews intensified, Boegner was torn “between private outrage and public responsibilities.”<sup>35</sup> After Pétain and Prime Minister Laval ignored his public petition letters to them, he broke from the

government and rallied the French Protestant community around him to publicly and directly join the Resistance, fighting to protect Jews in the name of the Gospel.<sup>36</sup> Over the course of two years, Pastor Boegner moved from the leader of the Christian Petainists to a leader of the Christian Resistance.

Boegner and the majority of the French Christian community observed a form of spiritual Petainism, just as there was spiritual Resistance and Collaboration. A central factor for both secular and religious French Petainists was the seemingly inevitable victory of Germany.<sup>37</sup> Since it appeared the Nazis would eventually conquer, Petainists wanted to protect France from "*polonisation*," or the fate of Poland, which was completely destroyed by the Nazi invasion and occupation.<sup>38</sup> French Christians certainly supported the Vichy regime to avoid this outcome, but their main motivations were specifically tied to their faith and their church. Since many of the spiritual Petainists changed their minds after two years, it may seem like their original adherence was a short-sighted mistake. Cointet explains however that it "came neither from confusion nor from passing blindness," but from their mentalities "justified by the historically bad experiences they lived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>39</sup> A law passed in 1905 had officially separated church and state in France, which many Christians opposed and still disagreed with by the Second World War. When Marshal Pétain declared on August 26, 1940 that "France will cultivate the virtues that make up a strong people: she will put the great truths of Christianity which formed the solid base of our civilization back in honor," it became clear that the Vichy government would practice a religious kind of politics.<sup>40</sup> The restoration of the church in the government attracted French Christians. Vichy France satisfied their nostalgia for pre-1905 government-church relations. Pétain assured spiritual Petainists and solidified their support by appointing Christian leaders, like Pastor Boegner for example, to prominent posts in his government.<sup>41</sup>

Spiritual Petainism would also be the churches' opportunity to re-christianize French society. Jacques Duquesne interprets the basis

of this mentality: “1914-1918 was the big shock, and 1940-1944 is explained by this big shock. The cardinals and the bishops of 1940 were the veterans of 1914, panicked, obsessed with dechristianisation.”<sup>42</sup> France had been devastated by World War I, especially by the massive loss of life. Although they were not technically defeated militarily, they were defeated spiritually. The time between the wars saw a drastic decline in religion in France. Therefore, spiritual Petainists were encouraged by Pétain’s National Revolution plan of promoting “Work, Family, and Country,” all values based in Christianity in their eyes. The Archbishop of Lyon, Cardinal Gerlier, stated that “these three words are ours.”<sup>43</sup> The Vichy government would restore their role in determining the course of the country based on Christianity. Spiritual Petainism was a way for French Christians to win the spiritual battle in France.

If the large majority of French Christians were drawn to these aspects of the Vichy government, why were some not? Why did three groups respond differently to the German Occupation? Spiritual Collaborators, Petainists, and Resisters divided over their theologies, authorities, and fears. The key individuals and groups previously discussed, *Témoignage Chrétien*, Cardinal Baudrillart, and Pastor Boegner illustrate these divisions in their journals.

## VI. Theologies

*Les Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien* represented a radical shift in Christian theology, *la nouvelle théologie* (New Theology), which would later emerge as a major influence for the Vatican II reforms. When the Catholic Church overhauled its doctrine, the tenets of New Theology formed the foundation of it. Today, New Theology is no longer new, it is the official Catholic theology. New Theology induced many changes in Protestant beliefs as well. Inherited from the doctrinal and pastoral revolutions of the two previous decades, the leading theologians that influenced its creation and principles were Cardinal Henri de Lubac, a co-founder of *Témoignage Chrétien* with Father Chaillet, and the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, a

writer for the journal. Their work clearly established the theology of the spiritual resistance.

Four essential parts of New Theology make up the theology of the *Témoignage Chrétien*. First, they focus on the Incarnation of the Son of God in human form as Jesus Christ. They saw his incarnation as the reason for a necessarily spiritual sense to their earthly lives, in the model of Jesus. Second, as a result of the implications of Jesus' incarnation, they believed life requires action and engagement in the reality of humanity around them.<sup>44</sup> They wrote this journal to satisfy their calling, as they said their "witness responds to the unequivocal requirements of Christianity and to the integrity of Jesus Christ's Message." Then they also believed that they were fulfilling this Scripture: "You will be brought before governors and before kings, because of me, to serve as a witness to them and to nations."<sup>45</sup> This illustrates their conviction that through their journal they served as the witnesses God called them to be, engaged and active in the world. In addition, it shows the effects of the Biblical renewal of New Theology. They advocated a return to the Bible and frequently quote Scripture throughout the journal.

Third the *Témoignage Chrétien* also illustrated their belief, stemming from this conviction to witness, in the duty of the apostolate. "Each is responsible for all," was their central principle.<sup>46</sup> Christians had a universal vocation and responsibility for action to protect their fellow man. In his introduction to the first issue, Father Chaillet pronounced this idea, "The Church is one; there is not a closed compartment in her; a lively and active solidarity unites each church to all the churches, to each Christian and his brothers in Christianity."<sup>47</sup> The spiritual Resisters saw the Church as the body that cares for each of its members. Asserting an even more radical concept, they claimed the church must care for each member of humanity, based on the "rights of man," the title of an entire issue of the journal. Influenced by Barth's idea about the divinity of humanity, spiritual resisters fought for the respect of humanity as a whole. Father Chaillet wrote, "In the universalism of charity, [the Church's]

concern does not do an egotistical pulling back along the borders of nations.”<sup>48</sup> Their theology held that the Church’s charity must extend to all nations and to all people.

Fourth and finally, because of their commitment to charity for all, they took their new ideas again one step further and asserted that this charity extended to Jews as well. New Theology “rediscovered the Jewish roots of Christianity.”<sup>49</sup> They focused on the essential attachment of Christianity to Judaism in the Old Testament. This formed a basis for the reason the spiritual Resisters fundamentally opposed antisemitism. *Témoignage Chrétien* titled two issues “Antisemitism” and devoted both to refuting it. They declared, “Christians, we have the urgent duty to witness in front of our brothers, following the enduring principles of our faith, that antisemitism is incompatible with Christianity. In witnessing against antisemitism for truth and for justice, we witness for Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Clearly the doctrines of New Theology grounded much of what the spiritual resisters believed and how they acted. Its absence from Collaborationism and Petainism (at least in the beginning) explains the three movements divisions over theology.

Where spiritual Resisters saw themselves as guardians of humanity, Collaborationists and Petainists followed traditional theology and saw themselves as guardians of the churches’ institutions. Cardinal Baudrillart worried about the “losses suffered as a result of the war, fewer students, mobilization of new students, etc.” that threatened the Catholic Institute where he served as rector.<sup>51</sup> Pastor Boegner concerned himself with making sure the government “knew French Protestantism existed” with his *politics of presence* in the beginning. He wanted to ensure the Protestant Church had a role in the new Vichy government.<sup>52</sup> At least at first, the Collaborationists and Petainists worked to protect the institutions of the churches, not the fate of humanity or persecuted people like the Resisters did. They were not fighting for the respect or rights of man, but the respect and rights of the church. Jacques Duquesne explains this as the fact that “they hardly understood the evolutions – complex, its

true, and rapid – of opinion.”<sup>53</sup> Just as many were not ready for Resistance, they were not ready for the new theology.

Once the spiritual Petainists switched to become clear Resisters of Vichy France, the same principles of New Theology are evident, especially in the defense of the rights of man and opposition to antisemitism. For example, Boegner called on the Protestant community to realize “our duty as good Samaritans in regards to the Jews who suffer all around us.”<sup>54</sup> As mentioned before, Boegner was one of the first spiritual Petainists to intervene and protest on behalf of the Jews. However, in its first two years, spiritual Petainism appeared much like Collaborationism in the absence of New Theology influence. New Theology or lack thereof deeply influenced all of the other actions of these groups. Therefore, it led to another division between them, over the authorities each group felt called to obey.

## VII. Authorities

Resisters and Collaborators split over what they considered the authorities in their lives and how they responded to them. Up until the era of the Second World War, the hierarchies of the church and the state were seen as the two primary authorities in a Christian’s life. Collaborators clung to this principle during German Occupation and stressed the absolute importance of obedience. In a radio declaration broadcast on *Inter-France* on November 21, 1940, Cardinal Baudrillart addressed France and the world on the necessity of obedience to the new Collaborationist government. He declared that “the duty of the hour consists in following the leader, his orders, and his advice. All is not lost provided that we know it is time to choose, to want, to obey.”<sup>55</sup> Baudrillart and the Collaborationists believed that Christians must obey legitimate powers, specifically the state and the Church. To them, the Vichy government was a legitimate established power. Therefore, Christians were required to obey its laws and contribute to the government’s works. Furthermore, the Catholic Church and the leaders of the Protestant churches had officially declared their support for the Vichy state. Hence Catholics

and Protestants were obliged to obey the pronouncements of the established power of their church hierarchies. Jacques Duquesne describes these Collaborationists as “men confined in an old-fashioned way of life, of hierarchical rules from another age.”<sup>56</sup> The Collaborationists adhered to the traditions of the church and respected its long-standing rules. In their eyes, “to disobey, that’s treason,”<sup>57</sup> which is why Baudrillart vehemently condemned Resisters in his journals, such as when he denounced the massive student protests in Paris on November 13, 1940.<sup>58</sup> Obedience to the authority of the state and the church was essential to Christian Collaborators, while Resisters preached obedience to another authority.

Christian Resisters had to go against the long-established rules of obedience and authority the Collaborationists followed. Robert d’Harcourt, a Catholic Resister and a *Témoignage Chrétien* contributor, said that “the sociological body of Catholics is not ready for resistance. Everyone does not have a taste for the life of an outlaw, nor the vocation of a martyr.”<sup>59</sup> They were fighting against the belief that disobedience equaled treason. To be in the Resistance they, in effect, had to disobey two authorities: the state and the church.<sup>60</sup> However, the spiritual Resisters of the *Témoignage Chrétien* movement were able to do this because they believed they answered to a higher authority than the state or the church first: their conscience. They claimed “our battle is one of the Christian conscience, of the conscience period.”<sup>61</sup> Stemming from the radical beliefs of New Theology, they considered that the conscience was the highest authority in their lives. Therefore if the state or the church went against their conscience, they had to disobey the state or the church. The primacy of the conscience was central to the *Témoignage Chrétien* doctrine, as they announced in the introduction to their first issue that they fought “to prevent the slow asphyxiation of consciences.”<sup>62</sup> Spiritual Resisters disobeyed traditional state and church authorities to obey their consciences; spiritual Collaborationists obeyed those traditional authorities, while spiritual Petainists fell in between.

The spiritual Petainists did not believe they had to fully obey the authority of the church and the state. The ability to question and petition these authorities was central to their actions during the German Occupation. Pastor Boegner, for example, used his position on Pétain's National Council to implore frequently the Vichy leaders to end the persecution of Jews. He believed he had the right to doubt and lobby the government. Boegner actually sent the public petition letters to Pétain and Laval that began the move of Christian Petainists to the Resistance.<sup>63</sup> Spiritual Petainists refused to practice blind obedience just because a power was considered to be legitimate; thus they were separate from the Collaborationists in this sense. They were however not like Resisters either, because they did not subscribe to the new belief in the authority of the conscience. On Christmas Day 1939, Boegner wrote in his journal that "the thoughts of these conscientious objectors obsess me."<sup>64</sup> Later he concluded that they were making a "most complete doctrinal error."<sup>65</sup> As Boegner expressed in his journal, spiritual Petainists such as himself were not yet adherents to the authority of the conscience, which separated them from the Resisters. Although they were closer to the Collaborationists in that they did believe it was necessary to obey authority, they differed as they treasured their right to protest. The three spiritual responses to German occupation divided French Christians according to these differences in their perspectives on obedience and authority, yet they were also divided by the different fears they held.

### **VIII. Fears**

Spiritual Collaborators, Petainists, and Resisters fundamentally disagreed over what the greatest threat to Christianity was during German Occupation. The Collaborators united around their intense fear of bolshevism. Cardinal Baudrillart constantly railed in his journals against the evils of anti-religious communism and the dangers of the atheist Soviets. On the day when Hitler declared war on the Soviet Union and began the invasion, June 22, 1941, Baudrillart began his journal entry by stating "this date will remain almost certainly

a major date in history.” At the end of the entry he asked, “Will we vanquish bolshevism? Yes . . . we will tame the enemy.”<sup>66</sup> Consistently referring to communism as the enemy, Baudrillart saw the war in the Soviet Union as a “crusade.”<sup>67</sup> When the German army encircled the city of Kiev, he asked in his journal, “What will happen? A red tsar still, but maybe finally a white tsar? A universal revolution.”<sup>68</sup> To Baudrillart and the Collaborationists, atheistic communism was the ultimate threat to Christianity, to France, to the world. They even formed the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism, to which Baudrillart belonged, to fight the Soviets both militarily and politically.<sup>69</sup> For the Collaborationists, Renée Bédarida explains that “the hatred of atheist communism often weighed much more heavily than the opposition to national-socialism,” which is why they chose to side with Nazi Germany, to defeat the purely evil communists.<sup>70</sup> The exact opposite was true for the spiritual Resisters.

Resisters undoubtedly feared Nazism more than anything else, certainly more than bolshevism. In their first issue, the *Témoignage Chrétien* addressed this difference between these two sides in Christianity:

There is not a Catholic who does not know that bolshevism has undertaken to eradicate religion through violent persecution. Many, however, ignore that National-Socialism is in its foundation radically opposed to Christianity and that, everywhere where it dominates, it unleashed a persecution, less violent, but more dangerous and even more total than communism.<sup>71</sup>

The spiritual Resisters of the *Témoignage Chrétien* movement truly believed that Nazism was the much greater threat to Christianity and to France. In a later issue, they proclaimed that “As Frenchmen and as Christians, we oppose Hitler in battle,” and followed this proclamation with a list of the four main reasons they spiritually

combated Hitlerism. First, Hitlerism had a complete contempt for humanity, justice, and kindness. They believed Hitler and his followers prided themselves on their domination of the weak. Second, they detested the Nazi racial and religious persecution of all kinds. Third, the “neo-paganism” of the regime indicated a depreciation of Christian values. They considered it crucial for the Christian Church to condemn the pagan values of the Nazis or it would slowly die. Finally, they fundamentally opposed the Nazis’ distortion of the Cross in the swastika, transforming the Cross of Christ into a symbol of racism.<sup>72</sup> Whereas collaborationists like Baudrillart meant “bolshevism” when they wrote “enemy,” the word “enemy” in *Témoignage Chrétien* clearly meant “Nazism.” Their intense fear of the domination, racism, and paganism of Hitler and the Nazis made Collaboration impossible for the Resisters. Therefore, Father Chaillet and other spiritual Resistance leaders called for a total and complete rupture with Vichy, because Collaboration with Vichy would mean Collaboration with Nazis.

On the issue of authority, Petainists were closer to Collaborators, while on the issue of fears, they thought more like the Resisters. Nazis were certainly a greater threat than bolshevism. Petainists had reservations about Nazi Germany from the beginning, which put them at odds with the Collaborationists. For instance, Boegner questioned Collaboration with Nazis from the first day, when he asked, “At what price will we collaborate with the establishment of the new European order?”<sup>73</sup> Boegner and the Petainists were originally merely wary of Hitler and Nazism but once the antisemitic policies began to be enacted and intensified, they became vocal opponents of Nazism. In a public letter he sent to Pétain, Boegner denounced the Collaborative practice of deporting Jews, foreign born or not, to Germany for “the terrible fate that awaits them.”<sup>74</sup> Spiritual Petainists eventually joined the Resisters fully in finding Nazism to be the biggest threat to Christianity.

## **IX. “It was not as simple as it seems”**

In reference to the decision of whether to collaborate or resist the Vichy regime, Pastor Boegner wrote in his journal, “it was not as simple as it seems.”<sup>75</sup> In hindsight, popular history and collective memory often vilify the Collaborationists for their compliance and assistance with Nazi Germany and Hitler, while commemorating Resisters for fighting in all forms against their occupiers. Yet, as this paper demonstrated, these judgments are not really just. There were different kinds and levels of Collaboration and Resistance, just as there were countless reasons why a person chose to collaborate or resist as he/she did. The thoughts of Cardinal Baudrillart, Pastor Boegner, and the *Témoignage Chrétien* in their journals demonstrate the difficult choices French Christians made and how they made them. French Christians faced incredible circumstances under German Occupation and their decisions of whether to collaborate fully or partially or resist the Vichy government were never black and white. Complex factors from history, church doctrine, tradition, psychology, and theology contributed to each individual’s response to the regime. One thing, however, united them all: spirituality. All of these groups responded in a distinctly spiritual way, different from their secular counterparts. In this way, another battle should be added to the long list of those in World War II: the spiritual battle of Vichy France, 1940-1942.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 193. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.
- <sup>2</sup> Bertram M. Gordon , *Historical Dictionary of World War II France : The Occupation, Vichy, and the Resistance, 1938-1946* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Yehuda Bauer and Nili Keren, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York : F. Watts, 1982).; Kevin Paul Spicer, *Choosing between God and Satan : The German Catholic Clergy of Berlin and the Third Reich* (2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh, *Collaboration in France : Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-44* (Oxford ; New York : New York : Berg ; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1989), 7.
- <sup>5</sup> Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, 72, 280, 311.
- <sup>6</sup> François Bédarida and Renée Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944 : Les Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chrétien*, (Paris : Michel, 2001).
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>8</sup> *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chrétien*, (Paris,: Éditions du Témoignage chrétien, 1946), 51.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>10</sup> Bédarida and Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944*, 9-32.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, 346.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacques Duquesne , *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, (Paris : B. Grasset, 1986), 153-6.
- <sup>14</sup> Bédarida and Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944*, 21.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>16</sup> Hirschfeld and Marsh, *Collaboration in France*, 80.
- <sup>17</sup> Bertram M. Gordon , *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1980).
- <sup>18</sup> Alfred Baudrillart and Paul Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*, Vol. 3, (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1994)., 11.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.
- <sup>20</sup> Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, 50.
- <sup>21</sup> Baudrillart and Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, 293, 318-9.
- <sup>24</sup> Hirschfeld and Marsh, *Collaboration in France*, 74.
- <sup>25</sup> Michèle Cointet, *L'Église Sous Vichy, 1940-1945 : La Repentance En Question*, ([Paris] : Perrin, 1998), 9.

“It was not as simple as it seems”:  
Collaboration, Pétainism, and Resistance in Vichy France

- 26 Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, 54.  
27 *ibid.*, 51.  
28 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 9.  
29 *ibid.*, 38.  
30 *ibid.*, 53.  
31 *ibid.*, 71.  
32 *ibid.*, 9.  
33 Hirschfeld and Marsh, *Collaboration in France*, 74.  
34 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 9.  
35 Gordon, *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War*, 40.  
36 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*.  
37 Hirschfeld and Marsh, *Collaboration in France*, 4.  
38 Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, 73.  
39 Cointet, *L'Église Sous Vichy, 1940-1945*, 10.  
40 Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, 47.  
41 *ibid.*, 9-10.  
42 *ibid.*, 10.  
43 *ibid.*, 45.  
44 Bédarida and Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944*, 18.  
45 *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chretien*, 195.  
46 Bédarida and Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944*, 18.  
47 *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chretien*, 6.  
48 *ibid.*, 6.  
49 Bédarida and Bédarida, *La Résistance Spirituelle, 1941-1944*, 19.  
50 *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chretien*, 195.  
51 Baudrillart and Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*, 79.  
52 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 9.  
53 Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, 11.  
54 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 198.  
55 Baudrillart and Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*, 10, 701.  
56 Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous l'Occupation*, 11.  
57 *ibid.*, 165.  
58 Baudrillart and Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*, 687.  
59 Renée Bédarida, *Les Catholiques Dans La Guerre, 1939-1945 : Entre Vichy Et La Résistance*, ([Paris] : Hachette littératures, 1998)., 118.  
60 *ibid.*, 121.  
61 *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chretien*, 52.  
62 *ibid.*, 11.  
63 Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 52, 93, 192.  
64 *ibid.*, 15.  
65 *ibid.*, 17.  
66 Baudrillart and Christophe, *Les Carnets Du Cardinal Baudrillart*, 93-4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>69</sup> Gordon, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, 218-9.

<sup>70</sup> Bédarida, *Les Catholiques Dans La Guerre, 1939-1945*, 102.

<sup>71</sup> *Cahiers Clandestins Du Témoignage Chretien*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>73</sup> Boegner and Boegner, *Carnets Du Pasteur Boegner, 1940-1945*, 53.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.