

PART ONE

The Meanings of Conversion—Henri Nick

HENRI NICK WAS BORN in Paris on April 16, 1868. His father, Georges-Henri, who had German roots, was a branch manager for the *Société générale*, the French bank, which had been founded just four years before Henri's birth. Henri lost his father when he was ten. His mother, Hélène Roussel, raised him in Paris, where he began his studies in the humanities, including ancient languages, at the "lycée" Jeanson-de-Sailly, completing his degree ("bachelier ès Lettres") in Montpellier. In the last months of 1885, he entered the Faculté de théologie protestante in Montauban, the main seminary training Reformed (Calvinist) pastors in the south of France at the time.¹ There, among seventy students, Henri Nick struck a deep friendship with two fellow students, Élie Gounelle (1865–1950) and Wilfred Monod (1867–1943), inarguably the two most important leaders of the Social Gospel among French Calvinists in the first half of the 20th century.² It is fascinating to realize that these three young men, who were to play a prominent role in 20th-century French Protestantism, were closely connected right from their student years. The correspondence be-

1. The Faculté de théologie of Montauban, founded in 1808, was transferred to Montpellier in 1919, where it is still in existence.

2. Martin, *Élie Gounelle. Monod, Après la journée*. For the number of students in Montauban at the time, see the speech by Auguste Wabnitz in *Faculté de théologie protestante de Montauban. Séance publique de rentrée le 10 novembre 1887*, Montauban, Granié, 1887, 6.

tween Élie Gounelle, Henri Nick, and Wilfred Monod, which was in part preserved, reveals the deep bond between the three young men.³

HENRI NICK'S THESIS ON THE NOTION OF CONVERSION

In July of 1890, Henri Nick defended his undergraduate (bachelor) thesis in theology, titled *Notion de la metanoia d'après le Nouveau Testament et l'expérience chrétienne*.⁴ Nick's work is quite interesting. Its main objective was to clarify the meaning of the term "metanoia" (Nick translates it as "conversion") in the New Testament. The fact that Nick wrote on that topic is telling. He was, and would remain, very interested in the notion (and even more in the reality) of "conversion."

At the end of the introduction, Nick alludes to his experiences in his last year of studies in Montauban: "If our friends were to find at least in our concluding theses a feeble echo of our religious discussions during the academic year 1889/90—a year which will leave in all our spirits and hearts indelible memories of mutual affection and gratitude toward God—then our labor would find more than its recompense."⁵ The concluding theses, indeed, do not merely summarize the overall argument of Nick's work, which mainly defends the importance of the person's will

3. Bibliothèque de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français (SHPF), Paris, papers of Élie Gounelle, box 5 (018Y5), EG IX/4. An edition of Gounelle and Nick's letters (as well as some by Wilfred Monod and others), from their student years until 1897, is in preparation by Grégoire Humbert and the author.

4. Surprisingly, the original version of Nick's thesis is now preserved in the library of the Harvard Divinity School, where I consulted it. It contains a handwritten dedication, partly cut when the volume was bound: "[. . .] président de soutenance, étudiant qui vous est profondém[ent] reconnaissant de la sollicitu[de] chrétienne que vous n'avez cess[é] de lui témoigner ainsi que Mad[ame] Monod. Puissé-je à l'avenir me montre[r] plus digne de votre chrétienne affection. Dieu me soit en aide. Votre bien dévoué et attaché [en] Jésus-Christ. H. N." On the next page, one finds a list of the "examineurs" who participated in the public defense: "MM. [Jean] Monod, Président de la soutenance, Wabnitz, Montet, Leenhardt." In July 1891, Wilfred Monod defended his thesis on *Les bases psychologiques du dogme de la rédemption* (Montauban, J. Granié, 1891). Two years before, in 1889, Gounelle had completed his training with a study on *Lagnosticisme de M. Herbert Spencer. Étude critique* (Montauban, Granié, 1889).

5. "Nous nous estimerons trop récompensé de ce travail, si nos amis retrouvent tout au moins dans nos thèses finales l'écho affaibli de nos entretiens religieux durant cette année scolaire 1889–1890, qui laissera dans notre esprit et notre cœur à tous d'ineffaçables souvenirs d'affection mutuelle et de reconnaissance envers Dieu." *Notion de la metanoia*, 7.

and its cooperation in effecting religious conversion.⁶ Grace and faith both precede and follow the human will, he carefully notes, but there is a moment when the human will, in its autonomy, is responsible and free to act.⁷ And so Nick's thesis is a critique of "quietism," "fatalism," and the inertia that results from them, as if one should expect everything from God in utter passivity.⁸ Interestingly, the consequences of this emphasis on human action and responsibility are not developed in the study itself but instead in the concluding theses, which Nick mentions in the introduction. There, one finds some of the themes that Nick and his friends had discussed during the preceding year. It is worth quoting several of these theses, as they reveal insights that help us understand Nick's ideals, and his future ministry: "The return of Jesus Christ is conditioned by our faith and the use we shall make of our freedom. Whether we hasten or delay it depends on us. This glorious advent could already be a past event. When the Son of man returns, will he find faith on earth?" (10th thesis).⁹ "Both reason and conscience confirm the notion of eternal punishment. A Christian cannot deny that notion. Jesus allowed this terrible uncertainty to hang over humanity" (13th thesis).¹⁰ "We are saved in order to become

6. See for instance: "Dans notre conversion, il y a un instant précis, un moment où nous sommes seuls artisans de notre destinée. [. . .] Voilà ce que nous apprendrons, si nous étudions des récits de conversion, ou si nous assistons à des conversions; c'est toujours à nous qu'il appartient de nous prononcer en dernier ressort." *Notion de la metanoia*, 56. Or: "La conversion est donc avant tout, d'après l'expérience chrétienne, un acte volontaire [. . .]" (62). This leads, unsurprisingly, to a critique of Calvin's rejection of the possibility of a human "cooperation" with God's salvific action (41).

7. "Voilà la conversion: 1° grâce et foi; 2° volonté; 3° foi et grâce" (70).

8. "Nous ne voulons plus assister à ce spectacle lamentable, d'âmes d'ailleurs bien disposées, qui s'éloignent du christianisme et se perdent, parce qu'elles se lassent d'attendre un salut qui n'arrive jamais. Elles se morfondent en prières, alors qu'elles n'ont qu'à agir, au lieu d'attendre béatement du ciel, dans un mol quietisme ou un sombre fatalisme des sentiments, des dispositions, une détermination qui ne relève que de leur propre volonté. En conséquence, au nom de la vérité, nous ne saurions trop protester contre un prédestinationisme calviniste dont nous subissons encore le contre coup, qui pousse les hommes à attendre tout de Dieu, et engourdit dans leur inertie des gens qui ne sont que trop disposés à l'inaction. [. . .] La volonté humaine peut beaucoup, beaucoup plus que nous le soupçonnons et que notre paresse ne se l'avoue." *Notion de la metanoia*, 72.

9. "Le retour de Jésus-Christ est conditionné par notre foi et l'usage que nous ferons de notre liberté. Il dépend de nous de le hâter ou de le retarder. Cet avènement glorieux pourrait être à l'heure actuelle un fait passé. Lorsque le Fils de l'homme viendra, trouvera-t-il de la foi sur la terre?" *Notion*, 75.

10. "Les peines éternelles se légitiment également devant la raison et la conscience. Un chrétien est coupable de les nier. Jésus a voulu laisser planer ce doute terrible sur

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saviors; our individual salvation is intimately linked to the salvation of our brothers” (18th thesis).¹¹ “The Church is an association of believers who all work for Christ. The faith which saves implies a continuous act of the will” (20th thesis).¹² “The ecclesiastical spirit is a spirit of solidarity and fraternity, but it can only exist in a Church of people who profess their faith” (21st thesis).¹³ “The one who proclaims the truth must above all be its witness” (25th thesis).¹⁴ “The evangelical alliance with all Christians from all denominations is more than an order, it is Jesus Christ’s prayer, in other words it is an order which is being carried out. It is an act of faith and the source of great blessings. Perhaps the only means to practice it loyally, without pettiness, would be to plan a work of evangelization to those who are outside” (27th thesis).¹⁵ “The tendency to always postpone the realization of Jesus Christ’s promises until another century is fatal” (29th thesis).¹⁶ “God is giving some extraordinary opportunities to the Church in our time. It is time for the Church to respond to God’s vision, by taking seriously his promises and his orders, and by advancing for the sake of lost souls onto the path of a conquering Christianity” (30th thesis).¹⁷ And, finally, the 31st—and final—thesis: “The synod will find the kind of popularity to which it is entitled among the Churches only when its essential and only concern will be the evangelization of France and the progress of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁸

l’humanité.” *Notion*, 75.

11. “Nous sommes sauvés pour devenir sauveurs; notre salut personnel est intimement lié à celui de nos frères.” *Notion*, 76–77.

12. “L’Église est une société de croyants qui tous travaillent pour Christ.—La foi qui sauve suppose un acte continu de volonté.” *Ibid.*, 77.

13. “L’esprit ecclésiastique est un esprit de solidarité et de fraternité, mais ne se comprend que dans une Église de professants.” *Ibid.*

14. “Un prédicateur de la vérité doit en être avant tout le témoin.” *Ibid.*, 78.

15. “L’alliance évangélique avec tous les chrétiens de toute dénomination est plus qu’un ordre, elle est une prière de Jésus-Christ, c’est-à-dire un ordre en voie d’exécution. Elle est un acte de foi et la source de grandes bénédictions. Peut-être le seul moyen de la pratiquer loyalement, sans mesquineries, serait de se concerter pour une œuvre d’évangélisation au dehors.” *Ibid.*

16. “La tendance à toujours renvoyer à un siècle à venir la réalisation des promesses de Jésus-Christ est funeste.” *Ibid.*, 29.

17. “Dieu accorde de nos jours à l’Église des facilités extraordinaires. Il serait temps qu’elle réponde aux vues de Dieu, en prenant au sérieux ses promesses, et ses ordres, et en entrant par amour pour les âmes perdues, dans la voie d’un christianisme conquérant.” *Ibid.*

18. “Le synode n’obtiendra dans les Églises toute la popularité à laquelle il a droit, que du jour où sa préoccupation essentielle et unique sera l’évangélisation de la France

From all this, it appears that the notions of conversion and salvation were at the center of Nick's thought, and that he had a very realistic interpretation of it, as salvation from "eternal punishment." Here, Nick's roots in a traditional version of Calvinism are visible. The ecumenical and missionary dimension of his thought cannot be missed either: the Churches are called by Jesus Christ to work together in bringing the Gospel to all people, and thus to contribute actively to Christ's return. The Churches are responsible for the fact that the parousia has not yet taken place. Moreover, Nick had little patience for multitudinous Churches where fervor and sacrifice appeared to be lacking. His ideal, it is clear, resembles that of the "free Churches," but these communities of committed (read: converted) Christians, far from being sectarian and withdrawn from a sinful world, should foster a spirit of "solidarity and fraternity" (21st thesis) and seek "those who are outside" (27th thesis).

Nick had been discussing all of these things with his friends in Montauban. They were a group of eight to ten theology students, and as some of them were graduating, being ordained, and beginning to work in various parishes, a circular letter was organized.¹⁹ On May 27, 1889, Nick sent such a letter to his friends, writing, "As Gounelle notes, it is our understanding of the Christian life which is the foundation for our circular letter and our bond."²⁰ What was the program of this small group? Very simply, but also amazingly ambitiously: the "revival" of France. They called their circular letters "a circular letter for Revivalism" ("une circulaire de Réveil"). The main objective of their lives was "the transformation of the country."²¹

At a time when theological liberalism and orthodoxy were clashing, these students of theology and young pastors, rather than taking part in the ecclesiastical battles and thus contribute to the divide among French Calvinists, were pursuing a different goal: the regeneration of their country.

The members of the circular letter came mostly from Pietist backgrounds. In a French Reformed Church that, after years of tensions, had finally split up into two branches in the wake of a national synod in 1872

et l'avancement du Règne de Dieu." *Ibid.*, 79–80.

19. Those involved in the circular letter were, among others, Nick, Élie Gounelle and Wilfred Monod.

20. "Comme le remarque Gounelle, c'est notre conception de la vie chrétienne intime qui est le fondement de notre circulaire et de notre liaison non pas à 4 ou 5 comme l'insinue malignement Gounelle, mais à 8 ou 10 en comprenant certainement Guex." H. Nick, circular letter from May 27, 1889. Private archives of the Nick family (G. Humbert, Paris).

21. H. Nick, circular letter from May 27, 1889 ("la transformation du pays").

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(the more “liberal” *Union des Églises réformées* now coexisted alongside the *Union des Églises réformées évangéliques*), all of the members of the circular letter belonged to the *Église réformée évangélique*, the more conservative, Pietist and orthodox branch. Their families, in many cases, had been affected by the various revivals in France since the early decades of the 19th century. Élie Gounelle’s father, Gédéon (1839–1917), was a Methodist minister. Wilfred Monod’s father, Théodore (1836–1921), was the pastor of a prominent independent Reformed Church in Paris, the “chapelle du Nord.” Under Wilfred Monod’s influence, Nick had what he called a “conversion” experience.²² Here is how Monod described what happened in November of 1889, at one of the regular prayer meetings he was organizing at the seminary in Montauban in order to “awaken” his fellow students—some of whom were pursuing the ministry for the sake of obtaining a respected position funded by the French government (it was only in 1905 that Church and State were separated in France):

At the beginning of my second year of theological studies, the event—or the miracle—happened during one of the Saturday prayer meetings, on November 27, 1889; suddenly, in front of his comrades, and to their astonishment, the student [. . .] solemnly dedicated himself to God. The example of this memorable conversion led two other students to similar commitments. At the prayer meeting of December 8, the movement grew stronger: confessions of sins, tears, prayers of praise. [. . .] We were beginning to breathe in a Christian atmosphere.²³

With this experience of conversion came a deepened sense of consecration to God and of commitment to the task of preaching the Gospel. But personal conversion was not their only discovery in those months! Monod and his friends, during the year 1890, were also being swept by the “Christianisme social.”²⁴ Together, these two dimensions, namely personal conversion and social concerns, would be crucial for the rest of their lives.

22. “Grâces à Dieu, depuis que je suis converti, je ne suis pas découragé et veux seulement marcher hardiment en avant.” Letter to his mother from November 1889.

23. “Au début de ma seconde année de théologie, l’événement—ou le miracle—se produisit, pendant la réunion de prière du samedi soir, le 27 novembre 1889; tout à coup, devant ses camarades stupéfaits, bouleversés, l’étudiant artiste et aboulique se consacra solennellement à Dieu. L’exemple de cette conversion mémorable poussa deux autres étudiants à s’affirmer dans le même sens. À la réunion de prière du 8 décembre, le mouvement se fortifia: confessions, larmes, prières de louange. [. . .] On commençait à respirer l’atmosphère chrétienne.” *Après la journée*, 83.

24. “Vers 1890, à la Faculté de théologie, nous étions plusieurs étudiants montalbanais que le mouvement saisit, comme une lame de fond emporte au large de paisibles

FIRST ATTEMPTS AT INSPIRING A REVIVAL: MIALET (1890–97)

Before beginning his last year of studies at Montauban, Henri Nick became a pastor-in-training (“suffragant”) at the small parish of Saint-Christolès-Alès, in the Cévennes region, just outside the town of Alès (Gard department, southern France). This was a historical Huguenot region, where stories abounded on the arrival of the “pure gospel” in the 16th century and on the many persecutions Protestants had endured, all the way until the French Revolution. Besides decades of peace here and there, there had been particularly painful periods in the last quarter of the 17th century and the early years of the 18th century, after the Revocation, in 1685, of the *Edict of Nantes* (1598). That period of “wilderness” (“le Désert,” as it is known) was very much present in the collective consciousness of the French Protestant communities. In the first years of the 18th century, a war, the “guerre des camisards,” had shaken the region (1702–5). Louis XVI’s *Edict of Toleration* (1787) put an end to the long era of persecutions, granting civil rights and religious freedom to the Protestants. And so the Reformed Church had slowly begun to rebuild itself in the 19th century.

On August 25, 1889, Paul Minault, a pastor who was ten years older than Nick, came to preach to Saint-Christol and was subsequently named pastor. He would soon become a friend of Nick, Gounelle, and Monod. His nomination meant that Nick had to search for another parish. His prospects were good: even before the end of his studies, his reputation as a young man with a passion for evangelistic mission and revivalism was made among like-minded pastors, who sought to attract him to their own missionary fields or to strategically significant parishes in the struggle against the theologically liberal party.²⁵ Nick’s evangelistic inclinations were so strong that he was not sure whether he should remain within the

baigneurs.” Monod, “Que signifie,” 867.

25. In December 1889, pastor Guillaume Granier tried to convince Nick to seek a nomination in Ribaute. In March 1890, Louis Molines wrote to Nick urging him to go to Monoblet “in order to win a parish and soon thereafter an entire region [“Consistoire”] to the evangelistic cause.” Letter from March 17, 1890. Ten days later, on March 26, 1890, pastor A. Malan suggested that Sommières would be a good parish. On April 1, 1890, Nick’s own pastor and mentor from Montpellier, pastor Teule, summoned him to accept a position in Uchaud. On September 25, 1890, Wilfred Monod wrote to Nick asking him if he would be interested to work in Paris as assistant-pastor for Charles-E. Greig, one of the directors of the MacAll Mission in Paris. Towards the end of 1891, Émile Lenoir, an evangelist affiliated with the MacAll Mission in Marseille, wrote hoping that Nick would join him in Marseille.

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Reformed Church. Should he embark on an independent ministry, perhaps as part of the growing, evangelistic McAll Mission (soon to be named “Mission populaire évangélique de France”), or in the Salvation Army? Wilfred Monod wrote him a long letter arguing that he should not leave the Reformed Church:

Let us affirm clearly, strongly, our right to be friendly with Finney, Moody and Booth and to remain Reformed. We should not give the ecclesiastical partisans any joy by leaving as soon as they excommunicate us. [. . .] Stay with us, please. We have a great task ahead of us within our Church. [. . .] If your principles are incompatible with those of the Reformed Church, let the Church show that to you. Let her expel you. Don't be the one starting the fight. Look: you are the one saying that the Reformed Church needs a revival, and you refuse a call from that Church?²⁶

Nick decided, for the time being, to remain within the Reformed Church. His first position as a pastor was in the village of Mialet, also in the Cévennes region. It was a large parish in size, but small in numbers, with slightly over 1,000 Protestants. The parish only had one pastor.²⁷ Mialet was (and still is) such a historic site for French Protestants that in 1910 a museum dedicated to the memory of past persecutions opened in the vicinity (“Le musée du Désert”).

Nick began his work in Mialet on September 21, 1890.²⁸ He had the great fortune of having one of his closest friend nearby: Élie Gounelle was a pastor in Alès, approximately seven miles away, in an urban environment, focusing his energy on the youth and assisting two senior pastors. Nick and Gounelle went to work on their great task: to foster a “revival” of their parishes and of the people in their areas. Nick and Gounelle's letters from their years as pastors in the Cévennes (1890–96) reveal their constant sup-

26. “Affirmons *nettement, hautement* notre droit de tendre la main à Finney, à Moody, à Booth et de rester réformés. C'est donner trop beau jeu aux cléricaux que de filer modestement dès qu'ils vous excommunient. [. . .] Reste avec nous, je t'en prie. Nous avons une grande œuvre à accomplir au sein de notre Église. [. . .] Si tes principes sont incompatibles avec ceux de l'Église réformée, laisse l'Église te le montrer. Laisse-la te chasser de son sein. Mais ne commence pas, toi, les hostilités. Comment! Tu declares que l'Église réformée a besoin d'être réveillée et tu refuses un appel de l'Église réformée!” Letter from W. Monod to H. Nick, Sept. 25, 1890.

27. For the number of Protestants in Mialet, see Edmond Davaine, *Annuaire du protestantisme français*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1894, 85.

28. In his letter to Gounelle from September 21, 1891, Nick writes that it has been exactly one year since he arrived in Mialet.

port of each other's ministry. During Nick's first year in Mialet, Gounelle came to talk or preach four or five times, and at one point spent three days with Nick.²⁹ Their letters betray a deep friendship, one that would last until Gounelle's death in 1950. As pastors with a special responsibility for the youth in their parishes, the two men were especially fond of recruiting new members for their local branches of the *Union chrétienne de jeunes gens* (UCJG, the French equivalent of the Young Men's Christian Association, or YMCA).

On January 6, 1891, Nick gave his friends from Montauban a summary of his recent activities in his parish:

[. . .] extremely long travels in the rural areas, almost no time to read or to do intellectual work, every once in a while a burial two and a half hours away from my home. On Tuesdays, *Union chrétienne*—on Thursdays and Fridays, meeting of Christians (one in Mialet, the other in a neighbouring village)—I ask each Christian what he has done for Christ during the preceding week, everyone answers, then we come to the Lord and steep ourselves again in his communion. All of that is done very informally. The new converts are joining these meetings and are the most active elements. Finally I must add neighborhood meetings, which are well attended, on the other days. I can't say that we have a revival in the strict sense of the term: no extraordinary manifestation of *God's Spirit, no absolutely intense and irresistible feeling* of God's presence.³⁰

Six months later, Nick counted seventy “converts” in the parish, and regretted that someone had written an article about the “revival” in Mialet in a local Protestant journal titled *Le Huguenot*. The author of the article should simply have written that “God has blessed us.”³¹

29. Letter from Nick to Gounelle from September 21, 1891.

30. “Voulez-vous maintenant que je vous donne un aperçu de mon Église, des courses énormes à la campagne, presque pas le temps de lire ou de travailler, parfois un ensevelissement à deux heures et demi de mon lieu de résidence. Mardi Union chrétienne—jeudi et vendredi, réunion de chrétiens (une à Mialet, l'autre à un autre village)—je demande à chaque chrétien ce qu'il a fait pour Christ durant la semaine et chacun répond, puis nous approchons du Seigneur et nous nous retrempons dans sa communion; tout cela se fait très simplement. Les nouveaux convertis viennent grossir ces réunions et en sont même l'élément le plus actif, plus des réunions de quartier assez fréquentées les autres jours. Nous n'avons pas précisément de Réveil ici: aucune manifestation extraordinaire de *l'Esprit de Dieu, aucun sentiment absolument intense et irrésistible de la présence de Dieu.*” Circular letter, private archive of the Nick family.

31. “Je regrette les exagérations des quelques lignes de Fabre sur Mialet. Dieu nous a bien béni, voilà ce qu'il fallait dire. Le nombre des convertis ne dépasse pas ou guère

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Nick dedicated enormous amounts of energy to his ministry. His letters from that period of his life, and in fact his entire life, reveal his conviction that for him ministering meant giving one's life. The letters that Henri Nick, Élie Gounelle, and Wilfred Monod exchanged in the 1890s contain repeated calls to take care of themselves and to avoid "killing" themselves in their work. This aspect is so recurrent that it becomes a *topos* in their letter exchanges.

Between the regular duties of a parish pastor, the many youth activities, and the evangelistic campaigns in neighboring areas and sometimes in other cities, Nick had plenty of reasons to suffer from exhaustion and to be ordered by his doctor to go to "Les Fumades," the thermal baths near Alès. Both Gounelle and Monod urged him to take some time off. Still, Nick found the time to explore the possibility of marrying a young woman as devoted to the cause of revivalism as he was. On February 28, 1895, Nick married Héléne Lèques, who would take on numerous tasks in the ministry of young women.

Like Nick, Gounelle was working tirelessly for a revival in his parish. And his enthusiasm was beginning to bear some fruits among the youth, in the *Union chrétienne de jeunes gens* (UCJG). Every year, he organized a youth day that gathered hundreds of young people from the entire region, who heard some of the best preachers from the entire country.³² Gounelle shared Nick's vision of a revival, but he was exploring new ways to understand the meaning of "revival": "I am calling for a *revival*, forcefully, passionately; that is the goal. [...] I mean a *revival in all the senses of the term*. I am not looking for neurotic manifestations, but a general awakening of sinful humanity, asleep in the egoism of social classes, in the churches' formalism, in the suffocating atmosphere of church parties, and above all in the almost general indifference. The revival has to come: and for that to happen, we need, *with God's help, through prayer, deep minds and enthusiastic people*."³³

70." Letter from H. Nick to Gounelle, no date, probably around June 1891.

32. On April 15, 1894, for instance, Parisian pastor Charles Wagner talked at Gounelle's "fête de la jeunesse" on the topic: "Be a man!" ("Sois un homme!"). Gounelle describes the program of the day in a letter to H. Nick from March 20, 1894.

33. "[...] je réclame vivement, passionnément *le Réveil*; voilà le but. [...] J'entends *le Réveil en tout sens*. Pas de crises de nerfs: mais un éveil général de l'humanité pécheresse endormie dans l'égoïsme des classes, dans le formalisme des églises, dans l'atmosphère étouffante des partis, et surtout dans l'indifférence presque générale. Il faut que le Réveil arrive: et pour cela, il faut avec *l'aide de Dieu par la prière, des intelligences profondes et des emballés*." Letter from Gounelle to Nick, April 28, 1891.

Gounelle's letter reveals something very important: he was broadening his understanding of what a "revival" might be. Revivalism was not simply about individual conversion to Christ: it also had to be a social, communal reality. Gounelle called for a renewal of "the era of prophetic ministries from twenty-seven centuries ago."³⁴ The Hebrew prophets had shown the way, because they never isolated judgment of idolatry from their critique of social injustices.

In another letter, written in 1895, Gounelle reflected on the meaning of conversion, in an attempt to

deepen the idea of *conversion* from a social perspective. Individual conversion more and more seems to me to always be the conversion of a *living being* who, on the day of its second birth, abandons its egotism, or its pretension to be a self-sufficient, "complete whole," and who reclaims the true understanding of *humanity*, its authentic place in the whole, its role as a worker in society, as a servant of his brothers, as a person who is saved and who in turn becomes savior, as a redeemed person who becomes a redeemer of others. Here individual conversion is essentially a social conversion, since at the end of the day it is only useful to the Species. Converting for oneself is not to convert, for one remains self-centered. There is no turning here, one remains attached to oneself, despite all the purely verbal theology one adopts and utters.³⁵

Nick was not insensitive to such reflections. Like Gounelle, and in great part under Gounelle's influence, he wished to pay close attention to the social dimension of the Christian message. Far from being exclusively interested in what Protestant authors had to say on the social implications of the Gospel, the two friends were reading prominent Roman-Catholic

34. "Il n'y a plus qu'une suprême ressource, celle des prophétiques ministères dont il faut, après 27 siècles, rouvrir l'ère." Gounelle, "Réforme sociale," 34.

35. "J'ai pu lire, réfléchir pendant ces journées de repos forcé, j'ai un peu creusé l'idée de *conversion* au point de vue social. La conversion individuelle me paraît [sic] toujours plus la conversion d'un *organe* qui, le jour de sa seconde naissance, se dépouille de son égoïsme c'est-à-dire de la prétention à être 'un tout complet,' se suffisant à lui-même, et qui reprend la vraie notion de *l'humanité*, sa vraie place dans l'ensemble, la place d'ouvrier social, de serviteur de ses frères, de sauvé qui devient par là-même sauveur, de racheté qui devient rédempteur des autres. . . Cette conversion *individuelle* est essentiellement *une conversion sociale* puisqu'elle n'est en somme utile qu'à l'Espèce. Se convertir pour soi, ce n'est pas se convertir, ce n'est que rester *égoïste*; ce n'est pas se retourner, c'est rester attaché à soi, en dépit de toute la théologie purement verbale que l'on adopte et que l'on débite." Quoted in Martin, *Élie Gounelle*, 33. Gounelle develops these points in "La conversion et la question sociale," 245–67.

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authors such as Père Alphonse Gratry (1805–72), Lamennais (1782–1854) and Lacordaire (1802–61).³⁶ All of these influences led the two men to take part, in July 1890 and in October 1891, in the third and fourth general assemblies of the *Association protestante pour l'étude pratique des questions sociales* (APEQS), in Montbéliard (1890) and Marseille (1891). In 1891 they were among 154 participants.³⁷

The APEQS was the first, and the most important, nationwide association of social Christians in French Protestantism. It had been founded in 1887 by pastor Louis Gouth (1853–1920) and was presided over by Tommy Fallot (1844–1904), the pioneer of the “Christianisme social” among French Protestants.³⁸ Its vice-president was Charles Gide (1847–1932), a well-known professor of political economy at the University of Montpellier. Gide was a leading advocate of new forms of economic cooperation. He had founded a group of social Christians called the “école de Nîmes” and had published several influential works on the concept and reality of “solidarity.” He was a regular contributor to the journal of the movement, the *Revue de théologie pratique et d'homilétique*, edited since 1887 in Vals-Bains by pastor Gédéon Chastand (the journal was renamed *Revue du Christianisme pratique* in 1889, and became the *Revue du Christianisme social* in 1896).

How did Gounelle and Nick become involved in this movement? We know that Paul Minault urged Gounelle to read the paper Fallot had delivered at the second general assembly of the APEQS in Lyon (November 1889).³⁹

The movement Henri Nick and his friend Élie Gounelle joined in 1890 had a history. Before we proceed, it may be useful to retrace some

36. Gounelle mentions these thinkers in “Pourquoi sommes-nous chrétiens sociaux?” in *Travaux du congrès de Paris*, 119.

37. Nick and Gounelle are already listed as members in the acts of the third general assembly (Montbéliard, July 14–16, 1890). But they are not yet listed among the “membres actifs” in *Association protestante* (1889), 25–26, and they were not present at the second general assembly, in Lyon (November 11–13, 1889). See *Travaux de la deuxième assemblée générale*, 10; *Travaux de la troisième assemblée*, 196; *Travaux du congrès de Marseille*, 202–3.

38. Gounelle calls Fallot “l'âme, le chef, l'inspirateur du mouvement.” Gounelle, “Pourquoi sommes-nous chrétiens sociaux?” In *Travaux du congrès de Paris* (1908), 123.

39. “Je débutais alors à Alais dans le ministère, et c'est le regretté Paul Minault—encore un nom que nous devons souligner—qui me fit lire, en l'accompagnant de ses commentaires enthousiastes, le beau rapport de Lyon. Ce style nouveau, humain, débordant de vie, faisait bouillonner nos âmes.” Gounelle, “Pourquoi sommes-nous chrétiens sociaux?” In *Travaux du congrès de Paris* (1908), 123–24.

of its key moments, since the French version of the Social Gospel is relatively unknown.

TOMMY FALLOT AND THE ORIGINS OF THE “CHRISTIANISME SOCIAL” IN FRENCH PROTESTANTISM⁴⁰

The roots of the French Protestant movement known as “le Christianisme social” arguably are found in Alsace, in a rural county called Le Ban de la Roche, known for its textile industry and agriculture. This is the county where pastor and manufacturer Jean-Frédéric Oberlin (1740–1826), on the basis of a deep sense of Christian philanthropy, sought to improve the living conditions of the local population, especially the workers. Gounelle called him the “true precursor of social Christianity in France.”⁴¹ Oberlin’s work was prolonged by his successor Daniel Legrand (1783–1859).⁴² The founder of the “Christianisme social,” Tommy Fallot, was Daniel Legrand’s grandson.⁴³ He was raised in Le Ban de la Roche, where he later began his pastoral ministry. Shaped by Oberlin and Legrand’s legacy as well as by his uncle, pastor Christophe Dieterlen (1818–75), who was a regular visitor of the revival movement led by the German Pietist pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–80) in his parish of Möttlingen (southern Germany), Fallot went on to study theology in Strasbourg and to become a vicar in Wildersbach, a small parish in the county of Ban de la Roche.⁴⁴

Fallot’s Pietist leanings are unmistakable: he could date his “conversion” (October 22, 1865), which took place during a stay in Elberfeld (Wuppertal), a town with deep Pietist roots. At the time, he was reading

40. On the origins of the “Christianisme social,” see for instance Baubérot, “Aspects,” 605–41.

41. Gounelle, “Pourquoi sommes-nous chrétiens sociaux?” In *Travaux du congrès de Paris*, 114. In these pages Gounelle gives a short but interesting survey of the roots of social Christianity internationally.

42. On Daniel Legrand, who had spent several weeks in the home of Friedrich Schleiermacher in Berlin in 1816 and who knew other important Protestant figures of his time, such as August Tholuck, Alexandre Vinet, and Adolphe Monod, see Monnier, *Daniel Le Grand*; Weiss, *Daniel Le Grand*; more recently: Chalmel, “Jean-Luc et Daniel Legrand.”

43. Fallot’s father, Louis, had married Legrand’s daughter Louise-Émilie.

44. Boegner, *La vie et la pensée de T. Fallot*, vol. 2, 34. For the importance of supernatural events of deliverance in Dieterlen’s theology, see Dieterlen, *Étude sur la religion de la Bible* (Paris, 1863).

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Johann Christoph Blumhardt's meditations.⁴⁵ Almost ten years later, in his parish of Wildersbach, he underwent another "réveil" during the winter of 1874–75. While in Paris in 1872, he had met several times the leader of the Holiness movement, Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–99), and he greatly admired the evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1833–99).⁴⁶

Fallot's Pietism went hand in hand with a deep-seated concern for social matters. On August 2, 1872, he completed his theological studies by defending a bachelor thesis on "Les Pauvres et l'Évangile" ("The Poor and the Gospel") in which he lamented the neglect, by the Church, of the poor and the manual laborer.⁴⁷ Soon after his "conversion," on March 7, 1866, he wrote to his friend Gabriel Monod: "Several hundred thousand people live in the region of Wuppertal, where I reside, and there are factories everywhere. The misery which characterizes the proletariat is extreme, and unfortunately—it is sad to say—few among the many Christians who live here understand that there is an immense amount of work, of truly Christian work, to be done."⁴⁸ This sensitivity to the plight of the workers was revived in Fallot's next parish, the "Chapelle du Nord" in Paris, an independent Reformed-evangelical parish where Théodore Monod (1836–1921) called him to be his successor (Christophe Dieterlen, Fallot's uncle, had ministered the parish in the last year of his life, starting in 1874). The "Chapelle du Nord" was affiliated with the *Union des Églises évangéliques de France*.

Fallot arrived in Paris in the spring of 1876 to begin his ministry at the "Chapelle du Nord," where he remained until 1889. From October 13 to December 22, 1878, he preached a series of eleven sermons on the "Our

45. Boegner, *La vie et la pensée de T. Fallot*, vol. 1, 206–10. The book of meditations is the *Sammlung von Morgen-Andachten, nach Losungen und Lehrtexten der Brüdergemeinde, gehalten zu Bad Boll von Pfarrer Blumhardt* (Stuttgart, 1865).

46. Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 30–31.

47. Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 1, 346. Fallot, *Les pauvres et l'Évangile*. Fallot concludes his study, which thoroughly essentializes and generalizes what "the" poor is like, by writing (42–43): "L'Église [. . .] a singulièrement négligé sa mission à l'égard des pauvres. [. . .] Que ne peut-elle comprendre, quand il en est temps encore, l'œuvre admirable qui lui est proposée! [. . .] Qu'elle se décide enfin à considérer ces multitudes dont l'aspect seul suffisait pour remplir de compassion le cœur du Sauveur! Qu'elle abandonne ces alliances avantageuses selon le monde, stériles quant à la cause de Dieu, pour se donner tout entière à ceux auxquels Jésus-Christ s'est donné sans réserve."

48. "Le Wuppertal, où je demeure, compte quelques centaines de mille âmes, et partout fabriques sur fabriques. La misère qu'engendre le prolétariat y est au comble, et malheureusement,—c'est un triste aveu à faire, parmi tous les nombreux chrétiens qui vivent ici, un petit nombre seulement a compris qu'il y avait là une œuvre immense et complètement chrétienne à entreprendre." Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 1, 225.

Father” that represented “a decisive moment of his ministry” and that, according to his biographer Marc Boegner, “inaugurated the preaching of social Christianity within French Protestantism.”⁴⁹ Fallot was making the following argument: “Socialism has drawn a good deal of its program from the Gospel. It seeks to build society on the pillars of justice, something the Gospel seeks to do as well. In that regard, a condemnation of socialism would represent a condemnation of the Gospel and the prophets.”⁵⁰ A storm of indignation followed from people who resented Fallot’s way of drawing parallels between socialism and the Jewish–Christian tradition. Fallot was on the verge of submitting his resignation. In the end, rather than resigning, he turned his attention in the following decade to various matters that were not strictly ecclesiastical in nature, particularly women’s rights. He became the general secretary of the *Ligue française pour le relèvement de la moralité publique*, an association he founded in July 1883. This pioneering work led him to collaborate with the early feminist Josephine Butler (1828–1906) and to give talks all over France to large audiences on topics such as “la femme esclave” (i.e., women enslaved by prostitution).⁵¹ Toward the end of the 1880s Fallot returned to a more ecclesiastically centered ministry, giving lectures on “the advent of social Christianity,” in which he stated: “Social Christianity is Christianity applied to communities of people as well as individuals, it is the Gospel as it becomes a salvation for all and in all realms of life. [. . .] If you wish, call this social Christianity the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth.”⁵²

Fallot’s goal was not to banish individualistic expressions of piety from French Protestantism, but rather to broaden its scope and to make sure Christians did not ignore the practical, social consequences of their

49. “[. . .] une série de onze prédications sur l’Oraison dominicale, qui marquent un moment décisif de son ministère et inaugurent la prédication du christianisme social dans le protestantisme français.” Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 78.

50. “Le socialisme a emprunté à l’Évangile une bonne partie de son programme. Il veut constituer la société sur les bases de la justice; l’Évangile le veut aussi; à cet égard, blâmer le socialisme serait condamner l’Évangile et les prophètes.” Sermon from October 27, 1878, quoted in Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 80.

51. On Fallot’s work in defense of the rights of women, see Rochefort, “Abolitionist Struggle,” 179–94.

52. “Le christianisme social, c’est le christianisme appliqué aux peuples comme aux individus, c’est l’Évangile devenant un salut pour tous et dans tous les domaines. [. . .] Appelez, si vous voulez, ce christianisme social l’idée du Royaume de Dieu sur terre.” Conference from February–March 1888, quoted in Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 161. In January 1902, Fallot wrote to fellow pastor Maurice Hirsch: “[. . .] je me suis précipité d’une façon excessive dans les luttes sociale.” Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 365.

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faith. At the end of the 19th century, Fallot clarified his understanding of Christianity's future:

A social Christianity is going to succeed the era of individualistic Christianity, which shaped my generation. It will be filled with toils and struggles, but perhaps also with blessings. [. . .] When I say that individualistic Christianity belongs to the past, I am only judging a theory. I am in no way condemning *individual* Christianity, for that form of Christianity is a fact, present at all times and all places, and if it were to disappear, Christianity would no longer exist. Individualist Christianity was absolutely correct to emphasize conversion and the personal character of piety. The new creature is the only seed from which the new world can germinate. The excellent men to whom we owe the reawakening of life in our Churches were not wrong in what they did. Their only error was perhaps to think that they had completed the work and that their successors would only have to follow in their footsteps. Such illusions are common among powerful generations. [. . .] Social Christianity has a better understanding of the role of collectivities; it sheds light, for the first time, on the considerable impact of the surroundings ["le milieu"] on personal development. It gives back its importance—an importance which should never have been lost—to the biblical notion of the kingdom of God. It proclaims, to put it succinctly, the good news of divine and human solidarity, which it unearths from the very depths of saint Paul's doctrine, thus helping to complete the practical and social translation, which had been latent since the Reformation, of justification by faith.⁵³

53. "À la période du *christianisme individualiste* qui a façonné les hommes de ma génération, va succéder celle du *christianisme social*; elle sera grosse de labeurs et de lutes, mais peut-être aussi de bénédictions. [. . .] En disant que le christianisme individualiste appartient au passé, je vise une théorie, je n'ai nullement en vue le christianisme *individuel*. Celui-ci est un fait; il est de tous les temps, de tous les lieux, et s'il venait à disparaître, il n'y aurait plus de christianisme du tout. Le christianisme individualiste a eu mille fois raison de mettre l'accent sur la conversion et sur le caractère personnel de la piété. La nouvelle créature est l'unique semence d'où puisse germer le nouveau monde. Les hommes excellents auxquels nous sommes redevables du réveil de la vie dans nos Églises ne se sont pas trompés en faisant ce qu'ils ont fait. Leur seule erreur a peut-être été de croire que l'œuvre était achevée et que leurs successeurs n'auraient plus qu'à marcher sur leurs traces. Chaque génération puissante se fait volontiers de semblables illusions. Le christianisme social ne contredit pas le christianisme individualiste, il implique simplement une conception plus large du plan divin: l'Évangile réglant la vie des sociétés aussi bien que celle des individus. Le christianisme social comprend mieux le rôle des collectivités; il met en lumière, pour la première fois, l'influence considérable du milieu sur le développement des individus; il rend à la notion biblique

That was the program, which would be rehearsed again and again by Fallot's most prominent successors in the movement in the 20th century. The "Christianisme social" was not opposed to individualistic piety, but sought to complement and thoroughly revise it by broadening its scope in order to include concerns about society. These are the ideas Gounelle and Nick were discovering around 1890. Ironically, as Gounelle and Nick were joining the movement, Fallot was withdrawing from many of his responsibilities in it, due to his poor health.⁵⁴

But Fallot had paved the way for a new approach to the pastoral ministry in Protestant Churches. As early as 1878, Tommy Fallot began to host weekly student meetings and to organize several "groupes d'aide fraternelle et d'études sociales" in the industrial neighborhoods ("faubourgs") near the center of Paris.⁵⁵ He founded a "Société d'Aide fraternelle et d'études sociales" in 1882.⁵⁶ Since his arrival in Paris in April 1876, Fallot was collaborating with Robert Whitaker McAll (1822–93), an English clergyman, a Congregationalist who, in 1872, had moved with his wife to Belleville—a neighborhood he had visited a year earlier—to start an

du royaume de Dieu l'importance qu'elle neût jamais dû perdre, et proclame, pour tout dire d'un seul mot, la bonne nouvelle de la solidarité divine et humaine, qu'il fait jaillir des profondeurs mêmes de la doctrine de saint Paul, fournissant ainsi à la justification par la foi la traduction pratique et sociale, qu'elle réclamait en vain depuis la Réformation." Fallot, *Pour aider*, 8.

54. There is some mystery surrounding this crisis, which happened in June 1891, and other reasons might have been involved. In 1926, Gounelle wrote: "[. . .] avec Minault, Neel et L. Comte, j'ai toujours pensé que la maladie justifiait la retraite de Fallot, mais qu'il y avait quelque chose de morbide et de prophétique, à la fois dans certaines conceptions catastrophiques qui l'amenaient à rompre partiellement au moins et pour ce qui le concernait, avec les méthodes de la Ligue, et à ne plus croire 'qu'à des possibilités individuelles.' Ce retour à un individualisme mystique et profond par un pessimisme qui semble la rançon de douze ans de campagnes et de luttes forcées, ne saurait étonner personne aujourd'hui. Mais ceux que Fallot avait entraînés se plaignaient. 'Fallot nous lâche, après nous avoir lancés' disaient Comte, Minault et d'autres. . ." "Le Pasteur Louis Comte," 610. Fallot "crut devoir revenir à une spécialisation plus systématique du pastorat et aux méthodes de l'ancienne Église, sans cesser pourtant d'être très solidariste et très chrétien social [. . .]" (642). But Fallot's close friend and collaborator Louis Comte had a different perspective: in an article from 1904, Comte disagreed with those who thought Fallot betrayed the ideals of the movement after 1893. He writes: "[. . .] on s'est plu à opposer le pasteur d'Aouste au pasteur de la chapelle du Nord; on a eu tort. Je n'ai rien lu de Fallot m'indiquant qu'il ait regretté ce qu'il avait fait et l'esprit dans lequel il l'avait fait." "T. Fallot," *L'Avant-Garde* 6, nr. 94 (Oct. 15, 1904) 93.

55. Boegner, *La vie*, vol. 2, 148.

56. Gounelle, *Le Mouvement des Fraternités*, 91.

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evangelistic mission among French workers.⁵⁷ The choice of Belleville was not a coincidence: a working class and left-leaning neighborhood, it had been the site, in the spring of 1871, of bloodbaths as government troops crushed the revolutionary socialist administration of the capital at the end of the workers' uprising known as the Paris Commune.

There are numerous parallels between McAll's fast growing mission—thirty-five halls in and around Paris, sixty-five in the rest of the country, by 1885⁵⁸—and Fallot's vision, including an interest in mission among the workers, a deep concern for alcohol abuse, for women enslaved by prostitution. And so, for several years, until the summer of 1881, when he had to withdraw because of poor health, Fallot was the secretary of the McAll committee in Paris and the director of the McAll "hall" in La Villette, a neighborhood adjacent to Belleville.⁵⁹

There was, however, a significant difference between McAll's and Fallot's visions: unlike McAll, Fallot did not necessarily intend to convert the workers away from their socialist views! He believed in a basic compatibility between a certain form of socialism (one that refuses violence and materialism) and Christianity. More and more French pastors agreed with Fallot, and so the burgeoning "Christianisme social" was able to consolidate itself through a new association, the *Association protestante pour l'étude pratique des questions sociales* (APEQS), which held its first congress in Nîmes on October 17–18, 1888. As we saw, a few years later, Gounelle and Nick became members of the Association and were thus in contact with all of the pioneers of the "Christianisme social," who were surely delighted to encounter freshly graduated, enthusiastic seminary students who were supportive of their cause.

57. On December 7, 1882, the McAll Mission became the *Mission Populaire Évangélique de France* (*Mission McAll*). See Morley, *La Mission Populaire*, 1993 and Roussel, "R. W. McAll," 390.

58. *Evangelistic Mission in France, Known as the McAll Mission. Thirteenth Annual Report, for 1884* (Edinburgh: Lorimer & Gillies, 1885) 14.

59. "Rev. Mr. Newell, in the Twelfth Annual Report of the Mission, says of the station at La Villette, 'It was sadly run down. Pastor Fallot, who had been so signally blessed at this station, was obliged to relinquish it in the summer of 1881. [. . .] The attendance has dwindled. Last March we found but thirty at the Sabbath-evening service. La Villette is the valley which receives the material and moral slums of Belleville and Montmartre, and is one of the worst quarters of Paris.'" *AMR* 2, nr. 2–3 (April–July 1884) 34–35. Fallot's successor, William W. Newell, Jr., was one of the leaders of the Mission in France. For Fallot's position as secretary, see Elizabeth McAll, *La vie et l'œuvre de Robert-W. Mac-All*, 303. Before working at the hall of La Villette, Fallot directed the hall on the boulevard d'Ornano. He worked at La Villette for four to five years (Mours, *Un siècle d'évangélisation*, vol. 2, 53–54).