

The Thomist Revival and the Debate on Wage Justice in Belgium, 1889-1927

Peter Heyrman, KADOC-KU Leuven

This contribution offers an exploration of the ways in which the Thomist revival affected the multifold ways in which Belgian Catholic intellectuals dealt with the issue of wage justice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Indeed, numerous authors, particularly legal scholars, substantiated the validity of their opinions on wage justice by referencing emerging Catholic social teachings and the revived philosophical framework of Thomas Aquinas. It can be argued that the often surprisingly flexible ways in which Catholic intellectuals dealt with the Thomist legacy are key to understanding the plurality of social Catholicism. This is evidenced by the different and often conflicting stances on many different social issues, including that of wage justice. The relevance of this is somewhat obvious: social Catholicism and the Thomist framework substantiating it would have a particularly strong impact on 20th-century Western European society, not only on pre- and interwar socio-political discourses and practices, but also on the architecture and discourses of the emerging welfare state.¹

To underscore the diversity and path dependency of Thomist scholarship on just wages, we explore this expansive subject across a significant time span. The 1880s emerge as a conspicuous starting point, marking a transformative period for the social role of the Catholic Church. This decade also witnessed the institutionalization of the Thomist revival in Belgium, notably with the establishment of the Leuven Higher Institute of Philosophy in 1889 as a pivotal moment. Our examination spans the crucial era of World War I, extending until 1927. During this time, Belgian neo-Thomist scholarship on social issues gained enduring international significance with the release of a 'social catechism' authored by an International Union of Social Studies based in Mechelen. This *Code Social: Esquisse d'une synthèse*

1 A recent study offering an excellent bibliography on this wide ranging topic: *Fabio Bolzonar, Catholicism and the Welfare State in Secular France*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2023.

sociale catholique achieved wide dissemination in the Catholic world, with editions in no fewer than twelve languages².

The downside of this broad chronological perspective, however, is that we won't be able to offer a detailed analysis of specific debates in Belgian Catholic academic circles on the topic or to demonstrate the legal and societal impact of these reflections and studies. Neither will we really delve deep into the works and thought frames of particular authors. Other studies on wage justice, the recent contribution of Kwinten Dewaele in particular, can help to overcome these shortcomings.³ Additionally, we would like to stress that, although our contribution specifically focuses on how Belgian Neo-Scholastics discussed wage justice, the intellectual debate on the topic was eminently transnational. The Thomist revival also impacted Catholic social thinking in many other domains, e.g. family, property, luxury, usury, or fiscal justice. Catholic stances on wage justice can only be genuinely comprehended when also taking their dealings with these and other topics into account.

The Thomist revival and its impact on legal scholarship

Although the Thomist revival is generally linked to the papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (4 August 1879), its roots go much deeper, even to the 1820s.⁴ The Magisterium's condemnation of ontologism in 1861 was an important landmark. In Italy during the 1860s and 1870s, several authors contributed to the rediscovery of Thomist philosophy and its scholarly application in

2 Union Internationale d'Études Sociales, *Code Social. Esquisse d'une synthèse sociale catholique* (Paris: Éditions Spes, 1927). Successive language editions in Italian, Spanish, German, Polish, Dutch, English, Portuguese, Czech, Rumanian, Chinese (summary) and Japanese (1959).

3 Kwinten Dewaele, *Neo-Thomism and the Debates on the Just Wage in Belgium (1879-1914)*, in: Wim Decock, Bart Raymaekers and Peter Heyrman (eds.): *Neo-Thomism in Action. Law and Society Reshaped by Neo-Scholastic Philosophy, 1880-1960*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2021, 285-318.

4 Thomas C. Behr, *The Nineteenth-Century Historical and Intellectual Context of Catholic Social Teaching*, Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger (eds.): *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, 34-65. John McGreevy, *(Catholicism: a Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*, Norton & Company, 2022, quoting Edward Baring, *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy*, Cambridge MA, 2019, 27) calls the neo-Thomist movement "the world's most global philosophical enterprise".

contemporary research. The breakthrough of the revival, however, is clearly connected to the pontificate of Leo XIII and his plea in *Aeterni Patris* for a restoration of Christian philosophy. As a means to this end, he particularly advocated the creation of neo-scholastic study centres offering intellectual breeding grounds for a new Catholic elite. This call was particularly well received in Belgium, a country with which the pope was well acquainted, having been a nonce there in the 1840s. Highly industrialized and urbanized Belgium was somewhat considered a testing ground, a laboratory for developing valid Catholic responses to the rising social issue and the threat of socialism.⁵ From 1884 until 1914 the country was uninterruptedly ruled by Catholic governments. The social provisions and workers' associations set up by the country's Catholic *hommes d'oeuvre* were closely monitored in Rome. Their expertise and discussions, for instance during the social congresses of Liège (1886, 1887, 1890)⁶, nourished international study-circles such as the *Union catholique d'études sociales et économiques de Fribourg* founded in 1884 by Gaspard Mermillod (1824-1892), bishop of Lausanne et Geneva. Both the discussions in Liège and in Fribourg would, in turn, clearly influence emerging social-Catholic teachings, the drafting of *Rerum novarum* (1891) in particular.⁷

The main protagonist of the Thomist revival movement in Belgium was the Leuven philosopher Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851-1926), who would later become archbishop of Mechelen (1906) and cardinal (1907). From 13 October 1882 onwards, as a young professor, he taught the course *La haute*

5 For the contemporary use of these metaphors, e.g. see: H. Charriaut, *La Belgique moderne. Une terre d'expériences*. Parijs, 1910; Henri Carton de Wiart, *Salut fraternel des catholiques belges à la Semaine sociale de France*, in: *Semaine Sociale de France. Cours de doctrine à de Pratiques sociales: VIIe session – Rouen 1910. Compte-rendu in-extenso, Chronique sociale de France/Vitte/Gabalda, Lyon/Paris 1910*, 515-528.

6 Paul Gérin, *Les congrès des œuvres sociales tenus à Liège en 1886, 1887 et 1890*, Liège, 2002.

7 The first meeting of the *Union de Fribourg* took place on 18 October 1884. It would gather regularly until 1891. During that period the Union counted a total of 52 members from Switzerland, France, Austria, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Canada. Its resolutions particularly concerned wages, credit and the corporative organization of society. Mermillod enjoyed the confidence of Leo XIII and was a member of an advisory council established in preparation of the encyclical. In 1890 he became a cardinal and moved to Rome, which heralded the end of Union. Several attempts were made (1893, 1900 and 1903) to revive it, but without success. On the roots of the Union: Emiel Lamberts (ed.), *The Black International/L'Internationale noire 1870-1878. The Holy See and Militant Catholicism in Europe/Le Saint-Siège et le Catholicisme militant en Europe*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2002.

philosophie selon Saint Thomas, formally linked to the Faculty of Theology but open to all students and even to the general public. As taking the course was strongly recommended, more or less 10% of the Leuven students attended Mercier's classroom in 1883-1884. Over the next eight years, no less than nine doctorates in Thomist philosophy were awarded. In 1887, Mercier pleaded with the Pope for the establishment of an independent institute that would solidify the neo-scholastic project in Belgian academia and broader society. Leo XIII made that same suggestion in his letter to the Belgian bishops of 11 July 1888, also promising a substantial financial contribution. On 8 November 1889, the Leuven Institute of Philosophy or *Ecole Saint-Thomas d'Aquin* was formally established by Cardinal Petrus-Lambertus Goossens (1827-1906)⁸. In 1891, Mercier introduced the initiative at the Belgian Catholic Congress in Mechelen. After some discussions, the Institute was formally incorporated within the university, its programme was ratified by a papal letter of 7 March 1894, the solemn inauguration took place in December that same year.⁹

The founding story of the Leuven Institute demonstrates that the Thomist revival was far more than a scholarly reinvention of a philosophical tradition. Leo aimed at generating a philosophical movement. The transparent metaphysical framework of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), elevated by the Council of Trent at the time of the Reformation as the preeminent philosophical system of the Church, was considered a remedy to for intellectual fragmentation within Western Catholicism. *Aeterni Patris* pleaded for a dialogue between traditional Christian metaphysics and rationalist positive philosophy and science. Just as Thomas had successfully integrated the 'pagan knowledge' of Aristotle in Christian doctrine, so would

8 Françoise Mirguet and Françoise Hiraux, *L'Institut supérieur de philosophie de Louvain (1889-1968)*. Publications des archives de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 21, Bruylant, Louvain-la-Neuve 2008, esp. 21-24 and 63-64.

9 Georges Van Riet, *Originalité et fécondité de la notion de philosophie élaborée par le Cardinal Mercier*, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 4, 79, 44 (1981), 532-565; *Louis De Raeymaeker*, *Le cardinal Mercier et l'Institut supérieur de philosophie de Louvain*, Publications universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1952; *Id.*, *Les origines de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de Louvain*, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 3, 49 (1951), 24, 505-633; *Luc Courtois and Miloš Jačov*, *Les débuts de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie (Louvain) à travers la correspondance de Désiré Mercier avec le Saint-Siège (1887-1904)*, Brepols, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2013; *Kaat Wils*, *Het verband tussen geloof en wetenschap bedreigd. Het Leuven Hoger instituut voor wijsbegeerte en het positivisme (1889-1914)*, *Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis van het katholiek Leven in de Nederlanden* 1 (1992), 388-408.

the resurgence of scholastic philosophy offer the 19th century Catholic intellectual elites a durable metaphysical framework that would enable them to internalise the paradigms of positivist, agnostic philosophy. It would help them to resolve the growingly conflicting claims in modern society over the relationship between natural reason and supernatural revelation. In short, the Thomist revival sought to arm Catholics against secularist modernity and to assist them in reconciling their faith and respect for the scriptures, Church doctrine and tradition with the many new scientific discoveries and insights of the modern world.¹⁰

Following the lines set out in Leo's encyclical, also Mercier's initiative was both academic, pedagogic, pastoral, and apologetic. The Leuven Institute was conceived as a multidisciplinary study and research centre in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas. Its in-house periodical, the *Revue Néo-Scholastique* (1894), offers a good overview. But the newly established structure was also interlinked with many other institutions. The students of the Leuven Law Faculty in particular, were markedly encouraged to follow Mercier's courses and to obtain a baccalaureate in Thomist philosophy. Some of Mercier's close collaborators held degrees in law, for instance, the famous historian of medieval philosophy Maurice De Wulf (1867-1947) or Mercier's successor Simon Deploige (1868-1927)¹¹. From 1895 onwards, Armand Thiéry (1868-1955), another priest, jurist, and close collaborator of the later cardinal, headed a laboratory that would become the cornerstone of the future Leuven School (later on Faculty) of Pedagogical and Psychological Sciences (1923).¹²

Mercier and his team showed particular interest in the emerging social sciences and did not refrain from publicly debating different social issues

10 Jean-Dominique Durand, Léon XIII, Rome et le monde, in: Vincent Viaene (ed.): The papacy and the New World Order. Vatican Diplomacy, Catholic Opinion and International Politics at the Time of Leo XIII, 1878-1903, University Press, Leuven 2005, 55-67; Patrick De Laubier, Un idéal historique concret de société. Le projet de Léon XIII, *Revue thomiste*, 1978, 385-412; Thomas Hartley, Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era, Institute of Christian Thought, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto 1971.

11 Obtained a doctoral degree in Arts (1888) and Law (1889) and was *Licencié en Philosophie* (1890). Main works: *Le conflit de la morale et de la sociologie* (1911) and *Saint Thomas et la question juive* (1902). At the Leuven Institute he taught the courses *Droit naturel*, *Economie politique* and *Histoire des théories sociales*; at the Leuven School of Agriculture: *Législation rurale* and *Le droit social dans ses rapports avec la question ouvrière*; at the Arts Faculty: *Droit naturel*.

12 Kaat Wils, Mercier en de psychologie, *Erscheinungsjahr und/oder Seite?*

and the rise of socialism¹³. In 1886 the *question sociale* quickly rose to the top of the political agenda: in March, strikes and deadly riots ravaged the industrialised regions of Wallonia, in April, the Belgian government installed a national labour commission, and in September, the first of the aforementioned Belgian Catholic social congresses was organised in Liège.¹⁴ During his courses, Mercier repeatedly illustrated aspects of Thomist philosophy by referring to social issues. His first doctoral pupil Théodore Fontaine (1858-1898), would teach the course *Le Droit social dans ses rapports avec la question ouvrière*, destined for an audience of both students of engineering and law¹⁵. Léon De Lantsheere (1862-1912), a legal scholar and the second doctoral student of Mercier, was professor (1895/1899) and dean (1911) at the Leuven Law Faculty. He also played a founding role in the School of Political and Social Sciences, established in 1892 by Jules Van den Heuvel (1854-1926). Concurrently, De Lantsheere actively engaged as a political advocate for the emerging Christian Labour movement. In 1900, he secured a seat as a Parliamentary Deputy and later assumed the role of Minister of Justice in the government led by Franz Schollaert (1851-1917) from October 1908 to 17 June 1911.¹⁶

By offering lectures in the framework of a University extension programme (1902) and creating study circles Mercier's team promoted the revived philosophical framework of Aquinas in broader society. In that respect, we should also mention the different semi-academic and policy-

13 Emmanuel Gerard/Kaat Wils, Catholics and Sociology in Leuven from Désiré Mercier to Jacques Leclercq: a Process of Appropriation, in: Liliane Voyé, Jaak Billiet (eds.), *Sociology and Religions. An Ambiguous Relationship / Sociologie et religions. Des relations ambiguës*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1999, 38-56; Wils, Kaat, *De omweg van de wetenschap. Het positivisme en de Belgische en Nederlandse intellectuele cultuur 1845-1914*, Amsterdam 2005, 326-341.

14 Union Nationale pour le redressement des Griefs, Congrès des œuvres sociales à Liège. 26-29 septembre 1886, Demarteau, Liège 1886. On Doutreloux: Paul Gérin, *La démocratie chrétienne dans les relations Eglise-Etat à la fin du XIXe siècle. L'action de Mgr. Doutreloux*, in: *L'Eglise et l'Etat à l'époque contemporaine (Mélanges dédiés à la mémoire de Mgr. Aloïs Simon)*, Brussels 1975, 225-287.

15 Fontaine was appointed professor at the Leuven Faculty of Law in a newly created chair of Social Law (1886). He was also charged with a course of Moral Philosophy at the Arts Faculty (1890). Main work: *Théodore Fontaine*, De la sensation et la pensée, Peeters, Leuven, 1885; De Wulf Maurice, *Nécrologie: M. Th. Fontaine*, *Revue néo-scolastique*, 5, 20 (1898), 451-452.

16 Peter Heyrman, Léon de Lantsheere, in: Wim Decock and J. Oosterhuis (eds.), *Great Christian Jurists in the Low Countries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, 266-283.

oriented periodicals linked to his newly created Institute, for instance the *Revue Catholique de Droit* (1898-1914) of Edouard Crahay (1872-1945)¹⁷ or the particularly influential *Revue Sociale Catholique* (1897-1920), closely interwoven with the Société Belge d'Economie Sociale (1881) of the legal scholar and historian Victor Brants (1856-1917), a pupil of Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882) and the successor of Charles Périn (1815-1905)¹⁸ in the Leuven chair of Political Economy at the Leuven Law Faculty. For the interwar period, when both aforementioned periodicals were merged into the *Revue Catholique Sociale et Juridique* (1920-1925), we should also refer to the *Revue Catholique des Idées et des Faits* (1921-1970) of priest René Gabriël Van den Hout (1886-1969). All these journals actively participated in the debates on social issues in this period, those on wage justice in particular.

All this illustrates that the Thomist revival was far more than an academic vogue. The growing network of Mercier also showed strong connections to the different Belgian diocesan seminaries and to the training centres of the main male religious institutes.¹⁹ Belgian Jesuit theologians such as Auguste Castelein (1840-1922)²⁰ and Arthur Vermeersch (1858-1936)²¹ par-

17 Professor at the Liège Law Faculty. Main works: *La Politique de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Leuven, 1896; *La réglementation du travail en Suisse : la protection des ouvrières dans le canton de Zurich*; Impr. Polleunis et Ceuterick, Louvain, 1895; *Le remariage d'époux divorcés*, Institut supérieur de philosophie, Louvain 1906.

18 On Périn: *Alina Potempa*, *Wie Katholiken die moderne Ökonomie entdeckten. Rezeptionsweisen in Spätaufklärung und Ultramontanismus*, Brill Schöningh, Leiden 2022, esp. 155-303; *Fred Stevens*, Charles Périn, in: W. Decock, J. Oosterhuis (eds.), *Great Christian Jurists in the Low Countries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, 249-265; *Armand Louant*, Charles Périn et Pie IX, *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, 27, 1952, 181-220; *Id.*, Charles Périn, *Biographie nationale de Belgique*, II, 1959, 666-670; *Victor Brants*, Charles Périn. Notice sur sa vie et ses travaux, *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain*, Van Linthout, Leuven 1906, XLIV; *Paul Michotte*, Un économiste belge. Charles Périn, *Revue Sociale Catholique*, June-July 1905, 267-93 Seitenverweis falsch?.

19 *Thijs De Leeuw*, Neo-Thomism and the Education of a Catholic Elite in Louvain, 1880-1914, *Trajecta*, 21 (2012), 345-372.

20 Professor of theology and philosophy at Leuven University; lecturer at the Theologium of the Jesuits in Leuven; lecturer in Philosophy at the Collège Notre-Dame de la Paix in Namur; *Cours de Philosophie* (1887); *Institutiones philosophiae moralis et socialis* (1889). The impact of the French Jesuit Michel d'Herbigny (1880-1957), who lectured at the Jesuit study centre in Enghien/Edingen should also be highlighted.

21 *Vincent Viaene*, Arthur Vermeersch, un expert au service de la Secrétairerie d'État et du Saint-Office: de l'éthique sociale à la théologie morale, de la société internationale à la société parfaite (1918-1936), in: Laura Pettinaroli (ed.), *Le gouvernement pontifical sous Pie XI: pratiques romaines et gestion de l'universel*, Ecole Française,

ticularly applied the Thomist framework to social issues. But we should, of course, also mention the Dominican study house in Leuven (1856), its Thomas Society (1873) and Studium Generale of Le Saulchoir (1904) with the *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1907-) and the *Bulletin Thomiste* (1924-). The Dominican Georges Rutten (1875-1952), another pupil and confidant of Mercier, would become the main organizer of the Belgian Christian trade union movement and the founder of the *Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond* (ACV, 1912). In 1908, following the French example (1904), Rutten also stood at the cradle of the Catholic Social Weeks, yearly gatherings interconnecting Church, academia, and civil society, where many different social issues were debated. His fellow Dominican Jules Perquy (1870-1946) would establish the so-called Social School of Christian Workers (1922), a university college where, amongst others, the officers and propagandists of the Christian labor movement were trained.²²

The Leuven Institute quickly became a central node of the growing network of neo-Scholastic study centres throughout Europe: Rome, Paris, Lyon, Lille, Fribourg, Luzern, Maria Laach ...²³ But only after the war would the Leuven expertise in social matters be genuinely valorised in an international perspective.²⁴ We particularly stress the role of the *Union Internationale d'Etudes Sociales de Malines*, an international network of Catholic moral theologians and lay experts established in Mechelen in 1919-1920 and chaired by Mercier. Its secretary was the sociologist Maurice Defourny (1878-1953), a pupil of Mercier and Deploige who would succeed Brants in the Leuven chair of Political Economy.

Rome 2013, 405-427; *Vincent Genin*, Arthur Vermeersch on colonial and conjugal morality. A presentist approach to Saint Thomas, in: Wim Decock, Bart Raymaekers and Peter Heyrman (eds.), *Neo-Thomism in Action. Law and Society reshaped by Neo-Scholastic Philosophy 1880-1960*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2021, 241-257.

22 *Thijs De Leeuw*, *Neo-Thomism and the Education of a Catholic Elite in Louvain, 1880-1914*, *Trajecta* 21 (2012), 345-372.

23 A still valid contemporary overview: *Joseph-Louis Perrier*, *The Revival of Scholastic Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, Columbia University Press, New York 1909.

24 *Philippe Chenaux*, *Entre Maurras et Maritain. Une génération intellectuelle catholique*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 1999.

Thomas on wage justice

In order to understand the discussions amongst Belgian Catholic intellectuals on wage justice, it seems advisable to quickly recall some main concepts and ideas of Aquinas on the issue. As John Finnis has rightfully underlined, Aquinas' works, his *Summa Theologiae* in particular, deal with the issue of justice in a very extensive and detailed way.²⁵ His understanding of this cardinal virtue is key to fully comprehend his moral-theologian reflections on socio-economic exchanges. Importantly, Aquinas grounds his understanding of justice in natural law, asserting that there is an inherent moral order in the world that can be discerned through reason. For Aquinas, justice is not just a human invention but rooted in the divine order and the rational nature of human beings. The virtue of justice is, of course, closely intertwined with Thomas' fundamental respect for human dignity, all persons being equal in the eyes of God and an image of the divine nature.

Aquinas, following Aristotle, discerned two types of justice: general or legal justice and particular justice. Legal justice is concerned with the common good and the laws that govern a society. It involves obedience to just laws and the establishment of laws that promote the well-being of the community. Legal justice is integral to maintaining order and harmony in society. The latter category of particular justice further distinguishes two subtypes. Distributive justice deals with the equitable allocation of goods, honours, and responsibilities in society, ensuring that each person receives what is due based on a criterion of proportionality between individual merit and the goods being distributed. The somewhat contractual concept of commutative justice concerns the fairness in exchanges or transactions between individuals and seeks to establish an equilibrium between benefits and burdens. As for labor, Aquinas clearly states that it is mainly directed towards sustaining the laborer. But he also underlines that it constrains sloth and the sinful human nature, and that it facilitates charity, which he—following Saint Augustine—considers the most important theological virtue, as it unites man with God.

Thomas Aquinas perceived wages as closely linked to merit, considering them a compensation for the dedicated service of a human faculty. Conse-

25 John Finnis, Aquinas as a Primary Source of Catholic Social Teaching, in: Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger (eds.), *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, 11-33.

quently, he asserts that it is an act of justice to remunerate individuals for what they invest in a particular service or product. In brief, labor should be justly compensated. The *Doctor Angelicus* deals with wage justice in two different sections of the so-called *Secunda Secundae* of his *Summa*, the first one concerning the fees of counsel and the second on just pricing. In article 4 of *Quaestio* 71 Aquinas maintains that a just fee (for counselling) should be moderate and take into consideration : (1) the persons/parties involved, (2) the matter at hand, (3) the labour entailed, and (4) regional customs. In *Quaestio* 77, articles 1 and 4 in particular, Aquinas handles the issue of just pricing (*justum pretium*). He proposes that all exchanges should observe “equality of thing and thing” (*aequalitatem rei inter eos*), which can be linked to the Aristotelean concept of commensurability and justice in exchange. A just price should be a balanced estimation on the basis of the costs and needs of the seller and the needs of the buyer. Therefore, it is dishonest to sell or buy a thing for more or less than it is worth.²⁶ Aquinas, again aligning with Saint Augustine, views commercial profits as the compensation given in exchange for the trader's labor (*quasi stipendium laboris*). Therefore, these principles were similarly deemed relevant to considerations of wage justice. A salary can be iniquitous because it is too low or too high. In summary, Aquinas regarded the just wage as the standard and customary one, established without coercion or fraud, and reflecting the common judgment of fair-minded individuals.²⁷

26 "vendere aut vilis emere rem quam valeat est secundum se iniustum et illicitum" (Q77). John W. Baldwin, *The Medieval Theories of The Just Price. Romanists, Canonists, and Theologians in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 49, 4 (1959), 1-92; Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: exchange, value, money and usury according to the Paris theological tradition*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters XXIX, Brill, Leiden/New York/Köln 1992.

27 E.g. Raymond De Roover, *The Concept of the Just Price: Theory and Economic Policy*, The Journal of Economic History 18, 4 (December 1958), 422-423; Edd S. Noell, *Bargaining, Consent and the Just Wage in the Sources of Scholastic Economic Thought*, Journal of the history of economic thought 20, 4 (1998), 467-478; Sandrine Frémeaux/Christine Noël-Lemaître, *Qu'est-ce qu'une juste rémunération? Ce que nous enseigne la conception du juste salaire de Thomas d'Aquin*, Management & Avenir 48, 8 (2011), 76-93, esp. 84-85.

Rerum novarum and wage justice

To grasp the diverse nature of Catholic social teachings regarding wage justice in the decades leading up to the First World War, it is crucial to emphasize that certain pivotal texts on the subject, despite referencing Aquinas' legacy, notably diverged from it. This is particularly the case for the encyclical *Rerum novarum* of 15 May 1891, a text that has gained an iconic status in the Catholic world. Before elaborating in more detail on what it decreed on the topic of wage justice, we must underline that encyclicals are not the most accessible literary genre. Present-day readers will likely perceive the instructions as rather ambiguous, occasionally even contradictory and perplexing. When browsing through the document, one might even conclude that it was, above all, an anti-socialist manifesto. Indeed, *Rerum novarum* contains a remarkable number of attacks against and (often strong) condemnations of socialism. In contrast and somewhat as an alternative, Leo extensively argued for social stability and harmony. Professing that a God-given moral order preceded any other factual and normative framework and thus also needed to underpin contemporary political and economic order, the pope advocated the need for a fundamental recast of society from the bottom up, building on its innate social components: family, profession, corporation, and -to a lesser extent- local community.²⁸

The overall vagueness of the text and the contradictions that it contains help to explain the intense debates on how the papal instructions in *Rerum novarum* needed to be interpreted and put to practice²⁹. Major zones of conflict, apart from issues related to wage justice, were its sections regarding the creation of workers' unions with or without involvement of their employers and the need for social legislation. Leo's vision on State intervention in social matters remained vague. *Rerum novarum* urged governments for a *cura providentiaque singulari*, a special care for and protection of wage-earners, given the "misery and wretchedness" (*misera et calamitosa*) pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class" (§37) and the "great inhumanity" they experienced from their "greedy employers" (*cupidos*

28 Joseph Boyle, *Rerum novarum* (1891), in: Gerard Bradley/E. Christian Brugger (eds.), *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, 69-89.

29 *Rerum Novarum: écriture, contenu et réception d'une encyclique*, École Française de Rome, Rome 1997; Francis Python, *La genèse de Rerum Novarum*, *Sources* 37, 3 (May-June 2011), 149-153.

dominos, §61). The creation of independent Christian labour unions was only briefly (and even somewhat reluctantly) mentioned.³⁰

Rerum novarum also contained several remarkable statements regarding ownership. The encyclical advocated the perpetuity (§ 6), inviolability (§ 9) and even sacredness (§ 46) of property rights as "the first and most fundamental principle" (§ 15), and even "the natural right of man" (§22). Contemporary commentaries rightly highlighted that Leo's interpretation, based on the writings of his former professor, the Jesuit Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio (1793-1862), did not fully correspond with the teachings of the *Doctor Angelicus*. Thomas (*Summa* II, II, q. 66, 1-2) had asserted that private property rights, although aligned with natural law, resulted from the *ius gentium*. That the pope professed another opinion is particularly relevant here, as *Rerum novarum* also explicitly interlinked labour, wages and property. Leo asserted that "when a man engages in remunerative labor, the impelling reason and motive of his work is to obtain property, and thereafter to hold it as his very own (§ 5)". Again, this reasoning clearly differed from the motives that Aquinas had mentioned: sustenance, containing sloth and other sins, and facilitating charity. Moreover, *Rerum novarum* even stated that property acquisition was a valid goal of public social policy: "The law, therefore, should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners" (§ 46).

Some instructions of the encyclical on wage justice were very clear. In its famous paragraph 20, *Rerum novarum* offers a long list of duties that employers had to fulfil in that regard. An employer "must never tax his work people beyond their strength, or employ them in work unsuited to their sex and age. His great and principal duty is to give everyone what is just", so it was phrased. The unlawful withholding of wages was strongly condemned: "To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven [...] the rich must religiously refrain from cutting down the workmen's earnings, whether by force, by fraud, or by usurious dealing". Further on in the text (§ 46) salary fraud was even labelled as an injustice that should be legally punished. The transparency of these and other instructions should not surprise us, as they mirrored view-

30 In the (secret) instructions to the Belgian bishops accompanying the official letter *Permoti nos* of 10 July 1895 Leo acknowledged that he preferred mixed workers' associations, only in particular circumstances independent ones could be created. *Maurice Lannoye*, *De houding van Kardinaal Goossens tegenover het arbeidersvraagstuk en de christen-democratie (1884-1906)*, Master thesis History, Leuven 1973, 142-149.

points that had been expressed in Catholic entrepreneurial circles since the 1870s, largely in the footsteps of the emblematic French industrialist and 'apostle of the factory' Léon Harmel (1829-1915)³¹, a confidant of pope Leo and author of a widely distributed *Manuel d'une corporation chrétienne* (1876/77) and *Catéchisme du Patron* (1888).³²

In the years preceding the release of *Rerum novarum*, there was a significant surge of activity addressing the social question throughout the Catholic world. This period witnessed extensive engagement in the form of studies, research, and active discussions. The encyclical's positions on wage justice illustrate how it was clearly influenced by all this. The *Union de Fribourg*, the above-mentioned international reflection group chaired by bishop Mermillod, discussed the issue of wage justice extensively in 1886-1887 and again in 1890-1891.³³ Important input was given by the German Jesuit August Lehmkuhl (1834-1918), professor at the Jesuit college of Maria Laach and author of a very influential *Theologia Moralis*³⁴, and by the Belgian priest and theologian Antoine Pottier (1849-1923)³⁵,

31 *Pierre Trimouille*, Léon Harmel et l'usine chrétienne du Val des Bois (1840-1914): fécondité d'une expérience sociale, Centre d'histoire du catholicisme, Lyon 1974; *Georges Guitton*, Léon Harmel 1829-1915, Spes, Paris 1927; *Id.*, La Vie Ardente et Féconde de Léon Harmel, Spes, Paris 1929; *Heyrman*, Peter Imagining the "Bon Patron Catholique". Industrial Entrepreneurs in Belgium and Northern France, and their Apostolate of the Factory (1870-1914), *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte*, Academic Press Fribourg, 113 (2019) 109-134.

32 *Léon Harmel*, Manuel d'une Corporation Chrétienne, Tours: Alfred Mame et fils, 1877; *Léon Harmel*, Catéchisme du Patron, élaboré avec le concours d'un grand nombre de théologiens, Bureau de la Corporation, Paris 1889.

33 *Guy Bedouelle*, De l'influence réelle de l'Union de Fribourg sur l'Encyclique *Rerum Novarum*, in: *Rerum novarum*. Écriture, contenu et réception d'une encyclique, École française de Rome, Rome 1997, 241-254.

34 *Augustin Lehmkuhl*, *Theologia moralis*, Herder, Fribourg 1885. Other editions in 1886, 1887, 1890, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1910 and 1914.

35 *Dominic Farrell*, Wanting the common good: Aquinas on general justice, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 71, 3 (March 2018) 517-549; *Jean-Pierre Delville*, Antoine Pottier and the Neo-Thomistic Roots of Social Justice, in: Wim Decock/Bart Raymaekers/Peter Heyrman (eds.), *Neo-Thomism in Action. Law and Society Reshaped by Neo-Scholastic Philosophy, 1880-1960*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2021, 279-289; *Jean-Louis Jadoulle*, Question sociale et politique pontificale. L'itinéraire d'un démocrate chrétien: Antoine Pottier (1849-1923), *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis/Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 69 (1991) 300-321; *Jean-Louis Jadoulle*, Anthropologie et vision de la société chez Antoine Pottier (1849-1923), *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 84 (1989), 30-47; *Jean-Louis Jadoulle*, La pensée de l'abbé Pottier (1849-1923). Contribution à l'histoire de la démocratie chrétienne en Belgique, Collège Erasme, Louvain-la-Neuve 1991; *Antoine Pottier*, Ce qu'il y a de

a protégé of the Liège bishop Victor-Joseph Doutreloux (1837-1901) who chaired the above-mentioned catholic social congresses of 1886, 1887 and 1890. Establishing that industrial workers did not enjoy genuine freedom of contract and were all too often victim of coercion, and referring to the Thomist concept of general or legal justice, now also often labelled as 'social justice'³⁶, Lehmkuhl and Pottier argued that workers' wages should not merely depend on contractual negotiations but that also the state had a responsibility, for instance by establishing minima and/or providing a legal framework enabling collective bargaining on the topic. Lehmkuhl also argued for international agreements on the matter.³⁷ Rome wouldn't go that far. In situations involving evident wage injustice and unfavorable working conditions, Leo deemed governmental intervention insufficient to address the intricacies on the ground. Instead, he advocated for resolution through the establishment of "societies and boards" (§45).³⁸

Although several of the ideas voiced by the *Union de Fribourg* were not incorporated in the encyclical, one could nonetheless argue that *Rerum novarum* officialized the compromise reached in this reflection group: wages needed to be evaluated in a double light of economic exchange and negotiated compensation. The encyclical depicted wages explicitly (and maybe foremost) as a retribution and not merely as a contractually fixed price. However, the Dominican scholar and cardinal Tomasso Zigliara (1833-1893), along with the Jesuit Matteo Liberatore (1810-1892)³⁹ consid-

légitime dans les revendications ouvrières, Congrès des oeuvres sociales à Liège. 3e session. 7-10 septembre 1890, Demarteau, Liège 1890, II, 2, 20-48.

36 According to Roger Aubert the concept of social justice emerged in French Social Congresses in the 1880s. R. Aubert, *Développement de l'enseignement social de l'Église en Europe de Léon XIII à Pie XI*, in: *L'Église et la question sociale aujourd'hui*, Editions universitaires, Fribourg 1984, 23-37. In a longer perspective: Jean-Yves Calvez, Jacques Perrin et al., *The Expression "Social Justice" before and after Quadregesimo anno*. Logos: a Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture 22 (2019) 2, 116-150. Leo W. Shields (The History and Meaning of the Term Social Justice. PhD-dissertation University of Notre Dame, 1941, 26) attributes the first use to Luigi Tapparelli.

37 Augustin Lehmkuhl, *La réglementation internationale de la question sociale*. Translated by C. Fritsch, A. Uystpruyst-Dieudonné, Leuven 1896.

38 Boyle, *Rerum Novarum* (Fn. 28) 85.

39 As a neo-scholastic scholar Zigliara was best known for organizing the Leonine edition of the works of Thomas Aquinas. Liberatore, a student and collaborator of Taparelli, is best known for his *Principii di Economia Politica* (1889), but he also wrote extensively in the *Civiltà Cattolica*. He was one of the drafters of *Aeterni Patris*, wrote the first draft of *Rerum novarum* and was coeditor of the final version.

ered as the main editor of *Rerum novarum*, would later opine that the principles in play primarily pertained to commutative justice.⁴⁰ Paragraph 45 of the encyclical reaffirmed that wages indeed resulted from contractual negotiations. "Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages", so it was formulated. But subsequently a reference was made to an underlying "dictate of natural justice, more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner".

The admonishment that salaries needed to meet the sustenance needs of a worker can be considered groundbreaking, although this idea was, of course, firmly embedded in Catholic teachings. "The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime" (§44), so it was stated. We should, however, underline that this crucial paragraph of *Rerum novarum* didn't define frugality and good behavior, although we can suppose that the majority of Catholic readers implicitly interlinked this with the plague of alcoholism amongst the industrial working class.⁴¹ Even though the authors of *Rerum novarum* clearly presumed that the family was the key unit of economic life and that the husband should be the main breadwinner, the encyclical did not explicitly plead for a family wage as Lehmkuhl and Pottier had done. The sustenance needs of the worker's wife and children were only mentioned in the next paragraph (46), again connecting wage justice to ensuring thrift amongst workers, in turn enabling them to save up in order to acquire property.

Over the next decades and even beyond the First World War these inconsistencies in *Rerum novarum*'s paragraphs 44-46 would fuel heated debates on the question if (just) wages also needed to cover the sustenance of the worker's wife and his children, and if so, how many of them and for how long? Within a scholastic perspective, the ultimate question remained if demanding or granting wage-rights beyond the narrow margins defined in the encyclical were a matter of justice or charity. Should an employer, guaranteeing his workers wages beyond those minimal criteria, be labelled as fair or just, or simply as benevolent and merciful? Was he morally

40 Charles-François Turinaz, *Le salaire familial et le cardinal Zigliara*, Le Chevalier, Nancy, 1895. Zigliara headed the commission for the editing of the works of Aquinas established by Leo XIII in follow-up to *Aeterni Patris*.

41 *An Vleugels*, *Narratives of drunkenness (Perspectives in economic and social history, 23)*, Routledge, London 2013.

obliged to do so, or did his voluntary commitment simply confirm his status as a good, charitable *bon patron catholique*? Or as the Belgian Cardinal Goossens phrased it, when writing to Rome in 1892 in a desperate (but failed) attempt to silence the heated controversy on the issue in his country: "Does an employer commit a sin if he pays a salary that is sufficient to sustain a worker, but insufficient to support his family, whether he and his wife have many children or not? If he sins, against what virtue does he sin?"⁴².

Structuring the debate on wage justice in Belgium: Liège/Fribourg versus Angers

Having set the context in which wage justice was debated by Belgian Catholics during the studied period, it is now appropriate to shift our attention to these discussions. As explained in the introduction, it is not my intention to thoroughly analyse the many books, brochures, and articles that were devoted to the topic. These writings are notably extensive, frequently scholarly, yet also highly argumentative, resulting in a significant degree of repetition. Authors expressing their perspectives on how they believed the pope's instructions should be interpreted and implemented frequently delved into semantics. They intricately explored the meanings of particular words and concepts, for instance what needed to be understood as a normal, conventional, necessary, vital or as an (absolute or relative) family wage. A derivative issue was the need or permissibility of State intervention on the matter, and, later on, the question if alternative forms of remuneration, such as family bonuses, should be considered part of the wage or not, thus subject to commutative justice or just a matter of charity. Nearly all the authors called in the encyclical and the philosophical legacy of Aquinas to substantiate their views.⁴³ Unsurprisingly, the debate

42 The answer to Goossens was published: *Alphonse Eschbach*, *Le minimum de salaire d'après l'encyclique R.N.*, *La Science Catholique*, 15 April 1892, 385-389; *Giovanni Antonazzi and Gabrielle de Rosa*, *L'Enciclica Rerum Novarum e il suo Tempo*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1991, 58, fn. 23. On the intermediary role of Goossens: *Jan De Maeyer*, *De wending van de kerk naar het volk, 1884-1926*, in: *Jan De Maeyer, Eddy Put, Jan Roegiers and Gerrit Vanden Bosch* (eds.), *Het aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, Halewyn, Antwerpen 2010, 100-171.

43 Major publications on the issue: *Charles Périn*, *L'économie politique d'après l'encyclique sur la condition des ouvriers*, Librairie Lecoffre, Paris 1891; *Id.*, *Note sur le*

on family wages also became intertwined with the growing importance that the Church attributed to this innate social entity and its crusade against declining natality.⁴⁴

While positions evolved and fault lines were often indistinct, contemporary scholars and later on also historians have attempted to bring some clarity by identifying two so-called 'social schools,' denoting the dioceses where bishops particularly endorsed their interpretation of *Rerum novarum*.⁴⁵ The "Liège-Fribourg school", linked to bishops Doutreloux and Mermillod was labelled progressive and showed itself increasingly intertwined with emerging Christian democracy. It was carried by a new generation of

juste salaire d'après l'encyclique *Rerum novarum*, Desguin, Mons 1892; *Id.*, *Premiers principes d'économie politique*. Seconde Edition, revue et complétée, suivi d'une étude sur le juste salaire d'après l'encyclique *Rerum Novarum*, Lecoffre, Paris 1896; *Auguste Castelein*, *Le problème social et l'encyclique 'Rerum novarum' avec un appendice sur la théorie du salaire et de la participation aux bénéfices*. Rapport du Congrès des catholiques du Nord, à Lille, Schepens-Istas, Brussels-Leuven 1892; *Id.*, *La participation aux bénéfices et la théorie du salaire*, *La Réforme sociale*, 16 February 1893, 290-296; *Id.*, *Léon XIII et la Question sociale*. Mise au point, Dewit, Brussels 1914; *Gustave Cooreman*, *L'encyclique Rerum novarum et les industriels*, Siffer, Gent 1891; *Arthur Verhaegen*, *Le minimum de salaire*, Siffer, Gent 1892; *Charles Lagasse de Locht*, *Le minimum de salaire: communication faite le 26 mars à la Société d'Economie Sociale, La Réforme Sociale*, 16 April 1892, 565-576; *Sébastien Nicotra*, *Le minimum de salaire et l'encyclique Rerum Novarum*, *Société Belge de Librairie*, Brussels 1893; *Edward De Gryse*, *De contractu conductionis scolasticae* disseruit, De Meester, Roeselare 1895. A good interim overview in: *Arthur Vermeersch*, *De la justice légale, à propos du salaire*, *Revue sociale catholique*, t. II, 1897-1898, 33-41, 65-74, 108-114. See also *Vermeersch*, *Quaestiones de Iustitia ad usum hodiernum scholastic disputatae*, Beyaert, Bruges 1904, 530-602. Also a broad analysis of the disputed passages, particularly on the family wage, in: *G. Cooreman*, *L'Encyclique Rn et les industriels*, Siffer, Gent 1891 'extr *Le Magasin littéraire et scientifique*. A perspective from the 'New world': *John Augustine Ryan*, *A living wage*. Its ethical and economic aspects. New York: Macmillan, 1906.

44 *John T. Noonan*, *Contraception. A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, Harvard UP, Cambridge/Londen London? 1986.

45 *Paul Gérin*, *Les écoles sociales belges et la lecture de Rerum Novarum*, in: *Rerum Novarum: écriture, contenu*, 267-289; *Id.*, *Catholicisme social et démocratie chrétienne (1884-1904)*, in: Emmanuel Gerard and Paul Wynants (eds.), *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier chrétien en Belgique*, University Press, Leuven 1991, 1, 59-113. In a broader perspective: *Paul Misner*, *Social Catholicism in Europe. From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1991. We should also consider James Chappel's distinction between a 'paternal' and 'fraternal' current within social-Catholicism: *James Chappel*, *Catholic Modern. The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2018.

socially engaged priests, catholic politicians, and *hommes d'oeuvres*, often with ultramontanist backgrounds but increasingly devoted to a “turn of the church towards the people” and the establishment of catholic popular mass movements countering the rising success of socialism.⁴⁶ Their efforts need to be evaluated in the light of the hesitant political democratization of Belgian society in the 1890s, with the granting of universal manhood suffrage moderated by a plural voting system (1893), and the introduction of a proportional voting system (1899). Although most of them voiced corporatist views, Christian-democrats increasingly appealed for a social legislative framework, for instance regulating minimum wages, working hours and conditions. In their struggle for political representation of the emerging Catholic popular movements, they openly challenged the political monopoly of the conservative electoral associations and repeatedly threatened to create a separate party. Such dissidences, particularly those involving priests, horrified Catholic establishment.⁴⁷

The opposing, more conservative group of authors, originally supported by bishop Charles Freppel (1827-1891) of Angers, fiercely rejected the Christian democrat reading of *Rerum novarum* as too materialistic and steering dangerously close to socialism. Or to paraphrase a then popular metaphor, they warned that in such an understanding of ‘social Catholicism’ the adjective had a tendency to devour the noun. Many of the authors with a more conservative perspective were connected to the French *Revue Catholique des Institutions et du Droit*⁴⁸, the influential networks of Catholic industri-

46 Emiel Lamberts, *The Struggle with Leviathan. Social Responses to the Omnipotence of the State, 1815-1965*, University Press, Leuven 2016; Emiel Lamberts (ed.), *Een kantelend tijdperk / Une époque en mutation / Ein Zeitalter im Umbruch (1890-1910). De wending van de Kerk naar het volk in Noord-West-Europa / Le Catholicisme social dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Europe / Die Wende der Kirche zum Volk im nordwestlichen Europa*, LUP, Leuven 1992; Jan De Maeyer, 'Démocratie catholique' et 'démocratie chrétienne'. Toile de fond d'une controverse idéologique à la fin du XIXe siècle, in: J. De Maeyer/V. Viaene (eds.), *Worldviews and worldly wisdom. Religion, ideology and politics 1750-2000*, University Press, Leuven 2016, 75-88.

47 Jan De Maeyer, *De Belgische Volksbond en zijn historische antecedenten*, in: E. Gerard (ed.), *De christelijke arbeidersbeweging in België 1891-1991*, University Press, Leuven 1991, II, 19-65; Jos Verdoodt, *Kerk en christen-democratie. De Katholieke Kerk tegenover de christen-democratie in België, inzonderheid tegenover de door haar als dissident beschouwde priester Adolf Daens en diens medestanders (1890-1907)*, PhD dissertation Gent 1988.

48 Cathérine Fillon, *La Revue catholique des institutions et du droit, le combat contre-révolutionnaire d'une société de gens de robe (1873-1906)*, in: Hervé Leuwers/Jean-Paul Barrière/Bernard Lefebvre (dir.), *Élites et sociabilité au XIXe siècle: Héritages, identi-*

alists in Northern France and Belgium and the conservative wing of the *Fédération des Cercles Catholiques et des Associations Conservatrices*, the main party-structure of the Belgian Catholics, lead by Charles Woeste (1837-1922).⁴⁹ Despite the publication of several original works to support their conservative positions, their discourses continued to be heavily influenced by the writings of the aforementioned jurist Charles Périn.⁵⁰ While Belgian Christian-democrats increasingly embraced State intervention in social matters, these conservative intellectuals kept on offering fierce opposition against social legislation, considering this an assault on private enterprise and entrepreneurial freedom. 'Angers' only endorsed minimal regulations, such as those pertaining to Sunday rest, child and women's labour, or excessively prolonged working hours. Further State intervention in social matters was considered unnecessary and unwanted.

Protagonists of 'Angers' furthermore stressed that the encyclical had advocated that "no human expedients will ever make up for the devotedness and self sacrifice of Christian charity" (§30). They rejected the idea of separate or independent workers' organizations and emphasized the crucial, somewhat fatherlike responsibility of employers in preserving and re-establishing social harmony, specifically referencing Leo's pastoral message to the French bishops of 8 February 1884, and his encyclical *Humanum genus* (20 April 1884). These earlier papal directives had encouraged many Catholic

tés, Publications de l'Institut de recherches historiques du Septentrion, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2001, 199-2018; see also: Audren Frédéric/Patrice Rolland, *Juristes catholiques*, *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques*, 2008, 2, 227-231; and *Id.*, *La belle époque des juristes catholiques* (1880-1914), *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques*, 2008, 2, 233-271.

49 The 'école d'Angers' was sometimes dubbed as the *Ecole des Patrons du Nord* or as the *Ecole de Mouvaux*, de location of the centre Notre-Dame du Hautmont where the Catholic entrepreneurs of that region organised retreats for their workers and themselves under the guidance of Jesuits. *L. Garriguet*, *Question sociale et Ecoles sociales*. Introduction à l'Etude de la Sociologie, Bloud, Paris 1909, 112-113; *Peter Heyrman*, *A conservative Reading of Rerum novarum through a Neo-Scholastic Lens*. The Jesuit Auguste Castelein (1840-1922) and the Belgian *Patrons Catholiques*, in: Wim Decock/Bart Raymaekers/Peter Heyrman (eds.), *Neo-Thomism in Action. Law and Society Reshaped by Neo-Scholastic Philosophy, 1880-1960*, KADOC-Studies on Religion, Culture and Society 29, UPL, Leuven 2021, 199-239.

50 *Jan De Maeyer*, *Belgium from 1831: a model for the ultramontane movement in Europe or a model student of the Black International?*, in: Olaf Blaschke/Francisco Javier Ramon Solans (eds.), *Weltreligion im Umbruch. Transnationale Perspektiven auf das Christentum in der Globalisierung*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York 2019, 273-291.

industrialists to 'Christianise' their factories through the establishment of apologetic and devotional initiatives, diverse social provisions, and deliberative structures facilitating dialogue with their workers. The networks of conservative Catholic industrialists in Belgium and Northern-France, for instance the members of the *Association Catholique des patrons du Nord* (1884)⁵¹, the *Association des Patrons Chrétiens de Charleroi* (1890) or the Belgian *Association des Patrons et Industriels Catholiques* (APIC, 1894) were quite startled by the content of *Rerum novarum* and didn't understand why the pope, who only a few years earlier had applauded and encouraged their paternalist social commitment, now called them greedy and clearly opted for other strategies, even tolerating the creation of labour unions without their involvement. Therefore, the authors connected to those entrepreneurial networks above all stressed the passages of the encyclical that were aligned with these positions, for instance, those on the inviolability of property rights and their link to paternal authority. They asserted that *Rerum novarum* had not condemned capitalism nor free competition, but had merely pointed to some abuses, which were due to the absence of religion in social relations. Proponents of 'Angers' did, of course, not question the validity of the encyclical. But they often offered a remarkably one-sided reading of the text. Some even downplayed the papal plea for government intervention and social legislation by confronting *Rerum novarum* with other papal encyclicals such as *Immortale Dei* (1885).⁵²

That the debate in Belgium on how to read and implement the encyclical became intricately interwoven with that on political democratization helps to explain its fierceness. The Belgian bishops exhibited clear divisions, prompting them to tactically delay the disclosure of the encyclical's contents until February 1892. Some of them, notably Doutreloux in Liège and Antonius Stilleman (1832-1916) in Ghent, endorsed or, at the very least, tolerated the participation of their priests and ultramontanist *hommes d'oeuvres* in Christian workers' organizations and their advocacy for social and political rights. Others feared this evolution because of its possible impact on the

51 Robert Talmy, *Une forme hybride de catholicisme social: L'Association Catholique des Patrons du Nord (1884-1895)*, Lille Facultés Catholiques, Lille 1962.

52 Peter Heyrman, *Imagining the "Bon Patron Catholique". Industrial Entrepreneurs in Belgium and Northern France, and their Apostolate of the Factory (1870-1914)*, *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte*, Academic Press Fribourg 113 (2019) 109-134; *Id.*, *Belgian Catholic entrepreneurs' organisations, 1880-1940: a dialogue on social responsibility*, *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte / Journal of Business History* 56 (2011) 2, 163-186.

unity of the Catholic Party. The hesitance of the bishops, increasingly petitioned by both factions to substantiate their positions, clearly fuelled the debate. In September 1892, the *Ligue Démocratique Belge/Belgische Volksbond*, a federation of the country's main catholic *oeuvres sociales*, including the first Christian labour unions and cooperatives, organized its first congress, urging for, among other things, social legislation, a more just tax system and a law establishing minimum wages in enterprises executing public contracts. On that last issue it also initiated a nationwide petition which generated huge public response.⁵³ Their conservative opponents reacted fiercely. The Belgian APIC even published an extensive memorandum, documenting the (supposedly) high average wages and low cost of living in Belgium, questioning the "exaggerated interpretations" of the encyclical by the Christian-democrats and strongly refuting the idea that commutative justice obliged all industrialists to offer their workers minimum wages, let alone family wages or steady employment⁵⁴. It took the Belgian bishops several months, until September 1894, before they publicly refuted these minimal and somewhat misleading interpretations of *Rerum novarum*⁵⁵. But even their intervention didn't silence the discussion.

While the proponents of 'Liège-Fribourg' invoked *Rerum novarum* and Aquinas' reasoning on legal justice to plead for clear and legally enforced minimum (family) wages, more conservative authors stressed the paragraphs in the encyclical on the mere contractual nature of labour agreements and the 'local customs' that were in play. Labour contracts, like prices, were merely subject to commutative justice, so they argued. The idea that workers were entitled to a share of their company's profits, as an extra to the salary that they had "freely and equitably" negotiated with their employer, was strongly refuted. At first, the proponents of Angers simply rejected the overall idea of minimum wages. They even argued that, accord-

53 Some main protagonists of the *Volksbond*, Arthur Verhaegen in particular, would continue to put minimum wages on the political agenda over the next decade. *Jan De Maeyer*, Arthur Verhaegen 1847-1917. De rode baron, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1994, 273-74, 275, 310, 358.

54 *Mémoire sur la situation de l'industrie en Belgique et sur la question ouvrière adopté par l'Assemblée générale des patrons catholiques*, Société belge de librairie, Brussels 1894.

55 See the discussions on the memorandum of the Belgian APIC: *Heyrman*, A conservative reading (Fn. 49) 19-23. The Belgian APIC even published a response to the letter of the bishops: *Jules Dallemagne*, Défense du mémoire sur la situation de l'industrie en Belgique en réponse à une lettre des évêques belges du 24 septembre 1894, Demarteau, Liège 1895.

ing to the papal instructions, wages below the sustenance level should not necessarily be labelled as unjust.⁵⁶ Later on 'Angers' particularly combatted the family wage, or at least continuously offered a minimal interpretation of the concept, asserting, as the encyclical had done, that industrial salaries should only be sufficient to guarantee the livelihood of the "sober and honest worker" himself.⁵⁷

In retrospect, it must be admitted that the fierce resistance mounted within conservative Catholic circles in Belgium against the Christian democrat reading of *Rerum novarum* was quite successful. In 1892, the newly established High Council of Labour formally rejected the idea of legally established minimum wages. Over the following decades, the Catholic governments would never take the idea seriously into consideration. Belgian prewar social legislation on wages remained quite meagre.⁵⁸ The legal dispositions of August 1887, June 1896 and July 1901, above all concerned the way in which wages needed to be paid: in full, in cash, in a neutral place, so without coercion to spend them in a factory shop or bar. Belgian law also limited the confiscation of wages and offered labourers some rights to check how their salaries had been calculated.⁵⁹ The laws formulating general requirements for workplace regulations (1896) and labour contracts (1900) contained supplementary rules, for instance, on how the times of disbursement needed to be publicised. Also the other pieces of social legis-

56 The context specific nature of wages, the factual economic circumstances, were particularly stressed by Charles Périn. Whiling invoking the legal maxim "Nemo dat quod non habet", he argued that lowering wages in times of crisis was justified, if employers recoiled from this, this was a matter of charity, not of justice. *Charles Périn*, Note sur le juste salaire, 6 and passim; *Id.*, Premiers principes d'économie politique (ed. 1896), 400.

57 A good example was the fierce dispute between the Belgian conservative Jesuit Augustus Castelein and the French Christian democrat priest Paul-Antoine Naudet (1859-1929) at the *Assemblée des Catholiques du Nord* in Lille in late November 1892. *August Castelein*, La participation aux bénéfices et la théorie du salaire, La Réforme sociale 16 February 1893, 290-296. A response by Naudet and the consecutive comments of Castelein in La Réforme sociale, 16 March 1893, 466-469 and 469-471. See also *Charles Périn*, Premiers principes d'économie politique (ed. 1896), 393-396.

58 *Jo Deferme*, The Influence of Neo-Thomism on Catholic Social Policy-Making in Belgium, 1880-1914, W. Decock, B. Raymaekers/P. Heyrman (eds.), Neo-Thomism in Action. Law and Society Reshaped by Neo-Scholastic Philosophy, 1880-1960, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2021, 121-139.

59 *Jo Deferme*, Uit de ketens van de vrijheid: het debat over de sociale politiek in België 1886-1914, UPL, Leuven 2007, 119-121; *Alfred Delcroix*, Loi du 16 août 1887 portant réglementation du paiement des salaires aux ouvriers, avec commentaire théorique et pratique, Hoste, Ghent 1890.

lation that were voted before the war, remained quite modest: a regulation of the employment of women and adolescents in industry (1889), a legal framework for establishing professional unions (1898), the obligatory insurance of workers against industrial accidents (1903) and a law on Sunday rest (1905). In 1904, a royal decree fixed the working day for women and adolescents in some major industrial sectors. Five years later, another law limited the working day in mines to nine hours. In social matters, the state mainly stuck to a supporting role as a subsidizer of social provisions and associations that matched the needs of the different societal groups. Mutual pension funds, health insurances and vocational training were particularly encouraged.⁶⁰

That the conservative factions within the Catholic party before the war were able to mount such a successful opposition to further social legislation, should maybe in part be attributed to the remarkable and increasing prosperity that the country enjoyed in its *belle époque*. The markedly improved working conditions in industry somewhat smoothed the social tensions in Belgian society, although the country witnessed continuous socialist agitation, particularly on the topic of general suffrage. Meanwhile the Christian democrats were somewhat placed in the defensive. Their opponents pointed to the divisive impact of their actions: the Catholic majority in Parliament declined from 68% of the seats in 1894, over 57% in 1900, to 51% in 1910. The pleas for more unity in the party were significantly supported by a noted conservative shift of the Magisterium in social matters from the late 1890s onwards. *Graves de communi re* (1901), Leo's second encyclical on the social question, again confined social-Catholic activism to its traditional moral and religious dimensions and explicitly rejected its political application under the flag of Christian democracy. Leo stressed that the social question was "above all, a moral and religious matter, and for that reason must be settled by the principles of morality and according to the dictates of religion" (§11). Within the Belgian episcopacy, several more conservative figures were appointed, for instance Martin Rutten (1841-1927) in Liège and Charles Walravens (1841-1915) in Tournai. That Mercier, a known supporter of the Christian Labour movement, became Archbishop

60 Griet Van Meulder, *Mutualiteiten en ziekteverzekering in België (1886-1914)*, in: Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine, XVII (1997), 1-2, 83-134; Guy Vanthemsche, *De beginjaren van de sociale zekerheid in België 1944-1963*, VUB Press, Brussels 1994.

in 1906 somewhat adjusted the balance.⁶¹ But he too had to navigate the more conservative course of the Vatican in social matters after the election of Pius X on 4 August 1903.⁶² Let us merely mention his *Motu proprio 'Fin dalla prima'* (1904), his condemnation of modernism in the encyclicals *Lamentabili sane exitu* and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (September 1907), his denunciation of *Le Sillon* (1910) and the introduction of an antimodernist oath to be taken by all priests.⁶³

Despite all this, from 1907 onwards, when several leading Christian democrats were finally granted government responsibilities, Belgium gradually shifted towards a more progressive political course. But the overall democratic breakthrough can only be situated after the war. In 1918-1921 several important social-political advancements were realised, such as (simple) general suffrage for men, the statutory regulation of working hours (8-hour day and 48-hour week), the lifting of the last restrictions in the Belgian Penal Code on labor strikes, the establishment of structures for social consultation and collective bargaining (also on minimum wages), a consumer price index system fostering the protection of the purchasing power of inflation-crunched wages, the introduction of a progressive and declaration-based income tax, the outline of social insurances for wage-dependents etcetera.⁶⁴ Following some wartime French examples, Belgian employers increasingly granted their workers family allowances. They organized themselves in regional/sectorial structures, the so-called *caisses de compensation*, in order to align the allocations granted and to mutually compensate their contributions, regardless of the number of children of

61 On Mercier's support for the Christian trade unions and Rutten, see: *Emmanuel Gerard*, *Ontplooiing van de christelijke arbeidersbeweging (1904-1921)*, in: E. Gerard (ed.), *De christelijke arbeidersbeweging in België, 1891-1991*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1991, I, 123-126.

62 *Jan De Maeyer/Leo Kenis*, *La création d'une intelligentsia catholique en Belgique dans la perspective de la crise moderniste. L'optique du cardinal Désiré Mercier*, in: D. Praet, C. Bonnet (eds.), *Science, Religion and Politics During the Modernist Crisis. Science, Religion et Politique à l'époque de la crise moderniste*, Institut Historique Belge de Rome/Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, Brussels/Rome 2017, 179-192.

63 Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *Le Sillon de Marc Sangnier et la démocratie sociale. Actes du colloque des 18 et 19 mars 2004*, Besançon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, Besançon 2006; *Peter Bernardi*, *Social Modernism: The Case of the Semaines Sociales, Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*. Ed. Darrell Jodock, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 277-307.

64 *Emmanuel Gerard/Frederik Verleden*, *De schaduw van het interbellum. België van euforie tot crisis 1918-1939*, Lannoo, Tiel 2017.

their workers. The whole system would be legally established and made obligatory in 1930.⁶⁵

Catholic intellectuals in industrialized Northern France and Belgium acknowledged that they needed to attune Church teachings to the radically changing political, socio-economic, and cultural context of post-war society. But updating Catholic social teachings was far from evident. The new pope Benedict XV (1854-1922) and his Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri (1850-1934) indeed followed a less conservative course in social matters than Pius X, but the hesitant and even suspicious way in which the Vatican dealt with the newly formed League of Nations and the International Labour Bureau (1919) as manifestations of an "internationalism outside traditional Roman internationalism"⁶⁶, didn't bode well. On the contrary, when writing to the French network that sought to restart its annual Catholic Social Weeks in 1919, Gasparri stated that *Rerum novarum* was more topical than ever, as the encyclical explicitly reminded patrons and workers of their mutual rights and duties.⁶⁷ A new social encyclical was not in the works. As no action was to be expected from Rome, the social-Catholic networks in Belgium and France autonomously reflected on how postwar social phenomena and tensions should be calibrated on Catholic social teachings and tradition. They were alarmed by the growing discontent in the working-class districts. A separation between the popular masses and the Church had to be avoided at all costs. The leaders of the Christian Labor movement, in particular, confronted as it was by a growingly popular socialist and even communist competitors, urged for updated guidelines and instructions. Prevailing Catholic teachings on social issues, so they argued, were all too often represented as anti-socialist and therefore framed as conservative.

65 Vanthemsche, De beginjaren (Fn. 60) 35-40; Guy Vanthemsche/Maurice Defourny, Projets de statuts pour une caisse de compensation des allocations familiales, UFASC, Brussels 1921.

66 Vincent Viaene, Arthur Vermeersch, un expert au service de la Secrétairerie d'État et du Saint-Office: de l'éthique sociale à la théologie morale, de la société internationale à la société parfaite (1918-1936), in: Laura Pettinaroli (ed.), Le gouvernement pontifical sous Pie XI: pratiques romaines et gestion de l'universel, Ecole Française, Rome 2013, 405-427 (esp. 408-414).

67 The letter, dated 29 June 1919, was widely shared in the Belgian journals. See for instance: Vers l'Avenir, 26 July and 9 August 1919, Journal de Bruxelles, 25 July 1919 and La Libre Belgique, 7 August 1919.

A first but somewhat failed attempt was the *Congrès d'Economie Sociale Catholique* organized in Liège in September 1920. This event to which not only Mercier but also his colleague bishops of Liège, Namur and Tournai had lent their patronage, was framed as the successor of the famous congresses in that same city in 1886-1890. A long list of topics was discussed, including that of wage justice, building on a report presented by the aforementioned Dominican scholar Jules Perquy.⁶⁸ While carefully aligning his prose with the contents of *Rerum novarum*, he again intricately reflected on the (subtle) differences between the *juste salaire*, the *salaire minimal*, the *salaire vital* and especially the (*sur*)*salaire familial*, commenting on the growingly popular practice in industrial enterprise of granting workers family allowances. As regards to women's labour he also made the (remarkable) statement that Catholic understanding of the just wage didn't differentiate between the sexes. "*Pour un travail spécifiquement masculin, ou exécuté indifféremment par les hommes ou par les femmes, le salaire minimal doit être le même pour la femme et pour l'homme [...]* Quant au juste salaire, à travail égal, salaire égal", so Perquy argued.⁶⁹ The discussions following his presentation demonstrated that the conservative resistance against the Christian democrat stances remained extremely well organized. Mainly due to the interventions of the Jesuit scholar Valère Fallon (1875-1955)⁷⁰, the whole session on wage justice again bogged down in semantics, resulting in vague conclusions reasserting that the fair determination of wages was a matter of commutative justice and that it depended on a common estimation, taking into consideration the economical context, local customs and the social benefits that workers enjoyed, family allowances, pension and health insurances in particular. No conclusions were formulated on equal pay for men and women.

68 Jules Perquy, *Salaire familial et salaire féminin*, Congrès d'Economie Sociale Catholique, Liège (Xhovémont), Septembre 1920. Rapports et discussions, Secrétariat des Œuvres Sociales, Liège 1921, 123-137. In this context, reference should also be made to the discussions on social issues in the 'Moral Section' of the Fourth Provincial Council of Mechelen of (April/October) 1920, aimed to attune the Belgian Church not only to the new Roman codex (1917) but also to the dynamics of postwar society. We particularly refer to the decrees (under Title VI) on wage justice & usury (65) and strikes (67). *Acta et decreta Concilii provincialis Mechliniensis Quarti anno MCMXX Mechliniae habiti*. Mechelen: Dessain, 1923, 38-49.

69 Perquy, *Salaire familial* (Fn. 68) 133-134.

70 A good overview of his ideas in: Valère Fallon, *Principes d'Economie sociale*, Bommans, Leuven 1921.

The disappointing results of the Liège congress probably instigated the then immensely popular Cardinal Mercier to radically change tack. He now readily embraced the plan that the eminent Lille jurist Eugène Duthoit (1869-1944) had brought before him a few months earlier to revive the Union of Fribourg, but now in Mechelen and under Mercier's patronage. The first meeting of that *Union Internationale d'Etudes Sociales* took place on 21-22 October 1920.⁷¹ At first, the group merely encompassed French and Belgian scholars, but over the following years also experts from the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, England and Switzerland were coopted. Mercier and his entourage, still clearly traumatized by the war and the atrocities committed in occupied Belgium, explicitly excluded participants from Germany and Austria. Although several balances were honored, for instance between laymen and priests, between diocesan and regular clergy, and in the latter category between Dominicans and Jesuits, the exclusively male and francophone membership of the Union showed a predominantly socially progressive profile. Only a few members expressed the perspective of the Catholic bourgeoisie and industrialists. In late 1921, Mercier reflected fondly on the Union's second session as "two days of intimate contact with true French and Belgian friends, all equally devoted to the Church and to the interests of the world of labor".⁷²

The issue of wage justice was prominently on the agenda of the Union. Resolutions on the topic were formulated both in 1921 and 1923, albeit linked to related topics such as the shareholdership of labour, family allowances and social insurances. The discussions were based on papers pro-

71 On the foundation history: *Giovanni Hoyoïs*, Les origines du 'Code social' de l'Union de Malines, in: Album Professor Fernand Van Goethem, Standaard, Antwerpen 1964, 577-605; *Eugène Duthoit*, Le Cardinal Mercier et le Code de Malines au service de l'économie humain, 1920-1926, in: E. Duthoit (ed.), *L'économie au service de l'homme*, Flammarion, Paris 1932; *Leen Van Molle*, Croissance économique et éthique catholique: les points de vue de l'Union de Malines dans les années vingt, in: Eric Aerts (ed.), *Studia Historica Oeconomica. Liber Amicorum Herman Van der Wee*, LUP, Leuven 1993, 317-335. An analysis of the first 8 years of activity of the Union in: *Peter Heyrman*, "Updating Social Catholicism. Désiré Mercier and the International Union of Social Studies (1919-1927)", in: Jan De Maeyer and Kristien Suenens (eds.), *Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851-1926). Revisiting Old Themes and Exploring New Directions. Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851-1926). Revisiter des thèmes anciens et exploration de nouvelles orientations*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2026 (Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique). (forthcoming).

72 Letter of Mercier to Duthoit, 20 Oct. 1921, in the archives of Duthoit at the Archives Diocésaines de Lille, box 'Cardinal Mercier-Union de Malines'.

vided by Antoine Pottier and the Lille priest Paul Six (1860-1936) in 1921, and by the French Jesuit Gustave Desbuquois (1869-1959) and Mercier's confident Maurice Defourny in 1923.⁷³ In September 1924, it was decided that the Union would publish its resolutions as a concise list of instructions, a sort of Catholic social catechism. Mercier would not live to see its release. The 1927 *Code Social: Esquisse d'une synthèse sociale catholique*, edited by Duthoit and Defourny, contained 143 instructions, neatly arranged in five sections, resp. dealing with family life, civic life, economic life, International life, and -at the explicit request of Mercier- also supranatural life. No fewer than seven of the Union's resolutions (114-120) explicitly handled wage justice, several others referred to the topic.⁷⁴

The *Union de Malines* reverted the older concept of the vital wage (*salaire vital*) as being the minimum employers were required to pay in justice. Vital wages not only needed to cover the subsistence of the worker and his family but also their contribution to social insurances against accidents, sickness, old age and unemployment (114).⁷⁵ Another resolution (106), invoking both Saint Bonaventura and *Rerum novarum*, labelled the payment of insufficient salaries as usury. The authors deliberately avoided specifying the Thomist category of justice that was in play, but conversely asserted that the requirements of justice went beyond this definition of minimum wages, offering grounds (both in justice or in equity) for increases in the context of growing production and greater prosperity of the employer (115). The message was clear: for the *Union de Malines* a sustenance wage did not necessarily equate a just wage !

As the Union had thoroughly deliberated on the co-shareholdership of labor as an alternative to socialist calls for nationalization, it strongly recommended (though not mandated) converting the final portion of the

73 See the discussion papers: *Paul Six*, Le problème du Salarat - Hier et aujourd'hui : exposé et conclusions. s.d. [1921], 6 p.; *Le salaire juste et l'actionnariat du travail par Monseigneur Pottier*, s.d. [1921], 3 p.; Gustave Desbuquois, *Les allocations familiales et la justice commutative*, s.d. [1923], 14 p. and *Les assurances sociales. Quel doit être l'organisme d'assurance par M. Defourny*. 11 p. [1923] in the archives of Eugène Duthoit at the Service du Patrimoine et des Archives of the Institut Catholique de Lille, 733 and 735.

74 *Union Internationale d'Études Sociales*, Code Social. Esquisse d'une synthèse sociale catholique, Éditions Spes, Paris 1927, 111-115. See e.g. also resolution 29 (on family wages), 63 (child allowances), 70 (unemployment)....

75 That salaries needed to be sufficient to cover the contributions of workers to mutual insurance funds, those against unemployment in particular, was also mentioned in instruction 70.

salary into company stocks. This approach aimed to encourage the gradual substitution of capital shares with labor shares (117-19). The best way to guarantee the application of the rules of wage justice, the Union asserted, was to conclude collective labor agreements between distinct associations of employers and workers in permanent liaison structures (116). Social insurances needed to be legally established, organized on a professional basis, co-managed by employers and workers, and should enjoy public support. As the Union strived towards a *meilleure péréquation des ressources et des charges familiales* (63), it applauded the growing willingness of employers to grant family allowances. Although it did not pronounce itself on the matter, the Union preferred that those bonuses be incorporated in the aforementioned social negotiations and labor agreements (120). During the discussions, Mercier himself had strongly asserted that they were an integral part of the wage.⁷⁶ The Union, however, did not deliberate or formulate resolutions on gender pay equity.

The impact of the *Code de Malines*, as the booklet was soon nicknamed, warrants additional research. Nevertheless, it is evident that the resolutions and the more democratic interpretation of Catholic social teachings they articulated found widespread resonance across Catholic Western Europe. The *Code Social* was published under the authority and *imprimatur* of the Archdiocese of Mechelen. Its editors made great efforts to obtain a papal approval or recommendation of their guidelines, but Rome would never formally endorse them. Despite the membership of Oswald von Nell-Bruening (1890-1991) from December 1928 onwards, the Union of Mechelen appears to have been completely left out of the drafting process of *Quadragesimo anno*. This new encyclical, preponderantly reflecting German scholarship on social matters, articulated quite distinct or even conflicting positions. As a result, the 1934 edition of the *Code de Malines* was thoroughly revised. Although several of the dedicated resolutions were somewhat rewritten, the main positions on wage justice remained unchanged.⁷⁷

76 *Compte-rendu de la IV^e session tenue à Malines les 26-27-et 28 septembre 1923* in: Archives Eugène Duthoit at the Service du Patrimoine et des Archives of the Institut Catholique de Lille, 735; *Hoyois, Les origines* (Fn. 71) 588 and 590.

77 *Hoyois, Les origines*, (Fn. 71) 601-602.

Some concluding remarks

This contribution sought to underscore the impact of the Thomist revival on the ways in which Catholic intellectuals, legal scholars in particular, dealt with the *question sociale* in the decades before and after 1900. Our examination of the neo-Scholastic infrastructure in Leuven specifically concentrated on its intricate connections with the Law Faculty. We willingly recognize that the Belgian case is unique in many aspects, and further in-depth research is needed to explore how the Thomist revival influenced legal scholarship, social policy, and civil society in other national contexts. But the prevailing literature on the topic already illustrates that the societal and legal impact of this Church-initiated philosophical movement, which extended throughout the entire Catholic world, should not be underestimated.

We also aimed to demonstrate the multiformity, even fluidity of Catholic social teaching, which is still all too often presented as a monolithic intellectual tradition. Particularly through the lens of wage justice, it becomes apparent that these instructions and the Thomist framework in which they were embedded could serve different and even contrasting agendas or, as James Chappel phrased it, provide ammunition for many different causes.⁷⁸

Our analysis particularly focused on the somewhat contradictory ways in which *Rerum novarum* dealt with the issue of wage justice, and the subsequent discussions between Christian-democrat and more conservative Catholic intellectuals, resulting in a semantic stalemate. The main fault lines between the two factions proved to be quite robust; their arguments were reiterated throughout the whole period, before and after World War I. It was only thanks to a remarkable initiative of the Belgian archbishop Mercier that this deadlock was broken and an updated, more democratic Catholic understanding of wage justice prevailed. Although the social code of Mechelen was not officially covered by Rome and would also be somewhat overrun by later instructions of the Magisterium on social matters, *Quadragesimo anno* in particular, it proved to be quite influential, even finding a durable reflection in the set-up of the welfare state, especially in Belgium.

78 James Chappel, The Thomist Debate over Inequality and Property Rights in Depression-Era Europe, in: Rajesh Heynickx and Stéphane Symans (eds.), So what's new about scholasticism? How Neo-Thomism helped shape the Twentieth Century, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2018, 21-38.