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Recommended Citation

Droel, Bill () "Review of Cardijn Studies: On the Church in the World Today; Lay Movements as Structures of Grace, Part One," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, 93-94.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol5/iss1/18

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Book Review:
***Cardijn Studies: On the Church in the World Today;
Lay Movements as Structures of Grace, Part One***

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Cardijn Studies: On the Church in the World Today; Lay Movements as Structures of Grace, Part One. Stefan Gigacz, editor. Adelaide, Australia: ATF Press, 2018. Paper, 73 pp., \$34.95 AUD, \$23.77 USA, ISBN 978-1-925679-44-1.

This issue of the *Cardijn Studies Journal* contains talks from a July 2018 conference at Mt. St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, Ohio on the legacy of Cardinal Joseph Leo Cardijn (1882-1967) of Belgium. Beginning in 1912, Cardijn developed an intriguing style of young adult faith formation, called specialized Catholic Action (capital A). It soon enough spread around the globe.

The journal essays primarily deal with the United States. In his introduction Stefan Gigacz gives a thumbnail history of specialized Catholic Action in the U.S.; Paul Murray of Siena College details the experience of one U.S. Catholic Action movement, Young Christian Students (YCS); and Lauri Przybysz contributes an overview of another U.S. organization, Christian Family Movement (CFM). The essays have international references and the conference itself had international participants, including from the Republic of Guinea, El Salvador, Chile and Australia.

Cardijn Studies and these talks from Cincinnati highlight central themes of the Catholic Action formation method. First, is the necessity of companions in the faith. CFM, for example, does not recommend that a couple try by themselves to keep their vow of steadfast love. It advocates for peer relationships and friendship, Przybysz says. CFM is for “Christian companions in action, co-workers in the vineyard.” No one can make sense of the spiritual life alone. The meaning of life unfolds, though always partially, through group experience, conversations and shared prayer.

Second is the distinction between general parish or para-parish groups and specialized Catholic Action. Membership in a devotional group, discussion group or church-based social events is open to all. By contrast, Catholic Action is specialized, not because it is loftier but because the groups have a unifying identity, a significant degree of autonomy and they succeed or fail due to their own creativity and dedication. Each of Cardijn’s movements had several cells with a unique occupational or educational character. The original 1912 Cardijn group was for women in apparel jobs. He fostered other groups for soldiers, factory hands, clerks and students.

The term Catholic action (lower case *a*) was used in the years before Vatican II (1962-1965), says Kevin Ahern, a young teacher at Manhattan College, in his contribution to the journal. “The prevailing model of general Catholic action [was] a ministry aimed toward” young adults. The agenda for these general Catholic action groups was largely imposed. The hierarchy and local clergy looked to the laity “to reclaim Christendom and guard against the perceived dangers of communism and modernism” or what today is called secularism. It is true that specialized Catholic Action was defined as an extension of the hierarchy’s mission. In time, however, a tension emerged

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in Catholic Action between the hierarchy-tethered notion and a baptism-centered lay apostolate in which Christians independently influence their community, their jobsite and their family.

Ahern continues: Cardijn's specialized Catholic Action was "an inductive or bottom-up model" in which young adults formed one another in an apostolate of like-to-like; "It contrasts with the new ecclesial movements." It also "contrasts with many lay groups linked to religious congregations [and] from many contemporary models of working with young people, where the direction and decision making is left to professional youth or campus ministers."

The third characteristic of Cardijn's method of formation is group-determined action. The only formation that lasts is "a spirituality of action," Ahern emphasizes. Though they are worthwhile, "sharing, discussion and prayer [groups] are insufficient if they do not lead to action." Ahern quotes Cardijn: "The study circle without works is a dead study circle." Or as the CFM motto quotes St. James: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."

The "inductive, specialized and participatory approach" of Cardijn is time consuming. But its *observe-judge-act* formula proved successful as thousands of Christian leaders emerged from Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students, Christian Family Movement and other groups. Nowadays when Catholics in the U.S. "get involved in the church," the phrase usually refers to an intra-parish ministry. This often, unfortunately, means a committee that considers how the parish can survive. Such involvement has its place, but what about Catholic groups whose task is to inspire and support Christians in their vocations in the world? Insights from the Cincinnati conference and from *Cardijn Studies* suggest that ordinary Catholics should properly assist the world and thereby build up the whole church.

Cardijn Studies is published once annually. The issue considered here is volume two, number one. It is the current issue, though it carries a 2018 date. Its URL is <https://atfpress.com/product/cardijn-studies-on-the-church-in-the-world-of-today>. Gigacz is handing off editorial responsibilities for the journal in order to fully devote himself to Cardijn Institute of Australia (www.josephcardijn.com). It is the premiere resource for Cardijn history and has connections with several contemporary Cardijn groups around the world. Some of Cardijn's talks were published in 1955 as *Challenge to Action: Forming Leaders for Transformation*. The book has been out-of-print, but now the Institute makes it available as a free download.

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