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Heads, delegates, candidates, and groups in the Juventud de Acción Católica Argentina (JAC), 1940-1950

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Abstract. This study deals with how the profile of young Catholic activists was constructed within the ranks of the Juventud de Acción Católica (JAC) in the 1940s and the 1950s, based on a set of publications for the training of the *jacistas*. The experience undergone by the Catholic youth is defined in terms of a prescriptive cosmovision about the earthly world, the spiritual world, and eternal life that was implicit in the language, the mentalities, and the representations of this world of shared beliefs. The focus is on the discursive/formative constructs of the groups and their respective hierarchies – heads, delegates and candidates – who would renew Catholicism's ability to re-Christianize society under the precepts of the Catholic Church in the future. In a society dominated by the political engineering of liberal policies, the alleged danger of Marxism, and the expansion of capitalist consumption, youth was conceived of in terms of vitality, renewal, and spiritual strength.

Keywords: youth; Catholicism; pedagogy; Church; Christianity.

In Latin America, Catholicism has a strong presence in the social sphere and across the political spectrum, with a missionary imprint involving robust historical and cultural ties that stretch back to the time of the Conquest. One way in which Catholicism spread its evangelical message was through youth. Understood as representing regeneration, vitality, and strength, youth was one of the pillars erected by Catholic integralism to extend its sphere of influence and promote the reproduction of religious culture. Founded in the 1930s, the Juventud de Acción Católica (JAC) emerged as one of the most dynamic branches of Acción Católica Argentina (ACA).

This study looks closely at the subjective implications of being a Catholic "youth." We ask how the young people who joined the JAC in 1940-1950 (a period in which the organization expanded considerably in terms of membership, albeit with some fluctuation) were regarded, organized, and educated. It should also be noted that in the 1950s, there were changes in the way the Church related to youth, such as the popularization of youth summer camps, rural missions, and folk dances held in parish halls, which expanded in subsequent years (Lida, 2012).

Taking into account the role played by the president, the delegate, the aspirant, and the group as a collective for youth integration within the parishes and for expanding the apostolate beyond them, in this paper we provide a profile of the young Catholic activist as envisioned by the Church hierarchy.

For this study, we primarily use four publications that were aimed at the JAC: the *Boletín del Dirigente,* the *Boletín en Jefe, Cenáculo*, and *Aspirantes.* These publications were references on theoretical formation and the circulation of information, and serve as an interesting starting point in elucidating the ideological framework whose purpose was to discipline the Catholic community with regard to the ideal of transcendence (life after death).[1] Other sources analyzed include the newspaper Sursum and the newsletter Conquista, parish reports from the youth sectors, and circulars issued by the Archdiocesan Council of Buenos Aires.

It is worth mentioning that there is no "one youth" per se, but, rather, a range of youths that coexist in a given context. Therefore, to speak of youth is to contemplate the relationship between young people and the adult

1 In contrast to so-called immanence – understood as our lived experience in the world around us – transcendence, in traditional philosophy, refers to the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. As such, for the Catholic Church, there is one terrestrial (temporal) destiny and another that is celestial. The life of human beings is seen through the lens of this philosophical material. This, according to the publications analyzed, was the mission of the "apostolate cell" and the spiritual base of youth.

world, institutions, and socially and culturally established norms, and the patterns of socialization manifested on this basis. In a nutshell, youth is not a biological stage but a cultural status in which the young as a constructed social category do not have an autonomous existence – that is, they are on the margins of the social body, and are immersed in a network of multiple and complex social relations and interactions.

In the aftermath of World War II, youth acquired the status of a social category. The welfare policies of the United States and Europe fleshed out the idea of a more visible youth, with the enrollment of many young people in high school and their establishment as a focus of interest, within the capitalist mode of production, for the cultural markets. The notion of youth gained a density of its own, and it began to be conceived of within certain cultural, rather than biological, parameters. Slowly, this paved the way to the socio-cultural changes of the 1960s: mutations in gender relations, openness to a sexuality less hampered by traditional taboos, and an expansion of youth sociability. A sizable number of youths questioned the old structures that dominated social conventions.

Following Juan Antonio Taguenca Belmonte, the youth-adult contraposition involved two types of ideals built around youth: that self-constructed by the young, and that erected by adults. As the author points out, the different types of approaches to youth, both in the cultural and the sociological spheres, can be complemented by conceptual analysis – albeit not without difficulties. The conceptual acts as a theoretical compass for empirical practice generated through social action (Taguenca Belmonte, 2009, p. 160). In this case, we have continued with the efforts to reconstruct the ideal of Catholic youth and its underlying concepts established by the Church. These were founded on the internationalization of religious culture and on practices and customs designed to forge a specific "young being." Thus, the experience of the JAC sought to inculcate in young Catholics these concepts within an established cosmovision of the material/spiritual world and of transcendence. This cosmovision was implicit in the languages, the mentalities, and the meanings of this world of shared beliefs.

While various works have shined a light on the relationship between youth and Catholicism, the operation and culture of the JAC, the disciplining of the body through Catholic scouting, and the activism of the Catholic Worker Youth (Juventud Obrera Católica, JOC) and its relationship with Peronism, there has been less attention paid to the formation of youth and

the functioning of the centers of the organization.[2] It should be noted that from the 1930s, other representations of Catholic youth as well as Catholic Worker Vanguards (Vanguardias Obreras Católicas) – offshoots of the Workers' Circles (Círculos de Obreros) – took on a dynamism of their own, and were, on occasion, detached from the hierarchy. Within this context, this is a contribution to the studies that deal with the relationship between the Church and youth. Finally, the article forms part of a line of research that enquires into the ways in which "distinct" youths participated in the dissimilar spaces of socialization and interaction, generating culturally distinct identities.

1. Origins of Catholic Action. JAC structure, regulations and centers

In Europe, Catholic Action emerged in countries such as Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, and Austria between the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. In 1931, at the height of Italian Fascism, Pope Pius XI conferred a new scope of intervention for the organization. This was because Fascism had eliminated the Italian branches of Catholic Action: scouting, the sports and university associations, and finally, Italian Catholic Action Youth. By agreement, on September 3, 1931, Pope Pius XI signed the "Italian statute," which reduced Catholic Action's field of intervention to the strictly parochial and religious so as to avoid collisions with the Fascist state (Escartín, 2010).[3]

In Argentina, ACA was founded in 1931 in a context in which re-Catholicisation of the country was an objective of the Church. The organization sought to dismantle the influence of liberalism in the governance of the political institutions. However, at the start of the 20th century, the goal of catholicizing society had already crystallized with the creation of Workers' Circles, inspired by Father Federico Grote. The mission was to bring workers under the wing of the Church, tackle the promises of social equality proffered by anarchism and socialism, and, and at the same time, resist "liberal positivism."

The coup d'état led by General Uriburu in 1930 was the prelude to an identification between Church and the army. Both shared a worldview whose common denominator was a fear of foreign ideologies and the rejection of liberal institutions which, by way of example, had banished God from schools with Law N° 1420 and its provisions for free, open, and secular

2 See Bianchi (2002); Lida (2012); Acha (2011); Blanco (2015a, 2015b); Cammarota (2015); Cammarota & Ramacciotti (forthcoming).

3 For the construction of the Fascist state, see Gentile (2005).

education. The political climate of the 1930s, was a key moment for the expansion of so-called Catholic integralism, given the crisis of liberal institutions that was exemplified by the advent of fascism in Europe.

The objectives of Catholic integralism were to infiltrate the state and society, presenting itself as a way of life that was applicable to all aspects of modern society. This integral and confessional interpretation was opposed to the private and secular conception of religion, which was the premise of political liberalism. These ideas materialized at the 1934 International Eucharistic Congress, held in Buenos Aires. The integralist Catholic discourse connected with a series of phenomena that characterized everyday life in the modern city (leisure, tourism, consumption, mass entertainment, and politics) and gained ground in that period – as exemplified by the case of Father Virgilio Fillippo, whose Catholic works were unremittingly released by the publisher Tor (Lida, 2013, p. 2).

The process of identification between the nation, the Catholic faith, and the deprivatization of religious symbolism – crucifixes and Virgins began to appear in public establishments – led to a kind of "clericalization of public life." The Church attempted to expand its sphere of action in order to conquer civic space through the creation of new mass organizations that absorbed pre-existing lay associations, placing them under the control of the upper echelons of its hierarchy (Di Stefano & Zanatta, 2000, pp. 377-409). Moreover, it adopted a highly politicized Catholicism with nationalist, "criollist," and Hispanisist sympathies.

Another of ACA's traits was its secular character, in that it was an organization composed of lay faithful working organically within the institution. In addition, like its Italian counterpart, ACA had four wings (men, women, young men, and young women). From the Belgian model, it borrowed occupational and professional "environment-based specializations": employees, university students, workers, and so on (Blanco, 2015b, p. 3).

As we have mentioned, ACA and its youth wings grew between the 1930s and the 1950s, albeit with some fluctuations. The peripheral character of Catholicism in relation to the sociocultural sphere in the late 1920s prompted Catholics to establish media, publications, and differentiated spaces for sociability, while a renewed Catholic culture was invested in the development of a set of institutions, *habitus*, and self-representations. Testament to this was the multiplicity of publications issued by ACA, which promoted, in turn, courses on Catholic formation (Zanca, 2012, p. 2). The movement's publishing activities allow us to study the frameworks of dissemination, and the organization of resources used to sustain the religious hierarchy's mode of intervention. Unlike the newspaper *El Pueblo*, whose

popular slant made it a mass publication not directly associated with the upper echelons of the Church, or the magazine *Criterio*, which catered to a Catholic intellectual audience (Lida, 2012), Catholic youth publications were limited to distribution within the parishes. They sought to shape the dimensions of youth experience and present profiles of behavior based on certain moral and religious canons.

Of these publications, the *Boletín del Dirigente*, which first appeared in late 1938, stood out. The High Council appointed Manuel Bello, the leading figure of Catholic youth, as its editor. Bello edited the newspaper until 1943, and was succeeded by Julio César Aranda, who took charge from 1944 to 1945, before again Bello returned to edit the publication. In its early days, the *Boletín* styled itself as a guide on what the centers and their leaders should do week by week. Over time, the publication started to address the problems that stood in the way of the apostolate's development. The final edition was published in February 1947. It was replaced by a monthly publication *Cenáculo*, which was aimed at all parish leaders. Both *Boletín en Jefe* – a publication launched in the early 1940s – and *Cenáculo* were sent to their subscribers. The pages of *Cenáculo* featured an article on spiritual formation, instructions on monthly activities, and technical information related to training for heads. Another publication, *Aspirantes: The Magazine of Argentine Candidates* was founded on June 15, 1936. Meanwhile, the newsletter *Conquista* was geared toward candidates from the centers, and was published by the Archdiocesan Council of Buenos Aires; it first came out in November 1945. The publications were printed with the economic support of the High Council. Activists had a moral obligation to subscribe to them, and to secure a group of lay readers outside the parish.

The ACA program aimed to form young people in Christian values and to work toward "the salvation of souls, the grandeur of the Church and the Nation." The JAC, as the youth wing, was overseen by the High Council, based in Buenos Aires. This council, under the jurisdiction of the Argentine episcopate, was the maximum authority within the organization. The JAC was open to males only and affirmed a set of values and behavior associated with masculinity: strength, bravery, courage, and organization. This model of masculinity was in contrast to the role it conferred upon women, who were relegated to the domestic sphere and educated to play the role of future mothers, as envisioned by religious doctrine. The JAC's structure was based on the Spanish model (Fullana & Montero, 2003).

According to ACA regulations, the JAC center, as the association's main cell, brought together the members. The structure was divided into five types of centers: the parish center; local centers (created in existing popu-

lations within the borders of a single parish); boarding centers, made up of the students in each one; centers for high-school students; and centers for university students. Each center was comprised of two sections: the Full Members Section, which brought together those aged between 15-30, or until marriage; and the Candidate Section, open to boys and young adolescents aged between 10-15, after which they went on to become provisional full members. To be accepted as a full member, it was necessary to frequent the Sacraments, demonstrate sufficient knowledge of religion and the history of ACA, and not be enrolled in associations whose programs or tendencies were not in keeping with the spirit of the Church (Asociación de los Jóvenes de la Acción Católica, 1946, pp. 23-33).

The women's centers were structured along the same lines (girls, young women, and women). At the top level was the Parish Board, presided by the parish priest. At the archdiocese level, the Archdiocesan Board was made up of the Archdiocesan Board of Young Men and the Men's Board. It was also composed of the Archdiocesan Board of Young Women and the Women's Board – that is, the structure at archdiocese level echoed that of the parish level. The four archdiocesan councils gathered at an Archdiocesan Board presided by the bishop. This central board answered to Rome directly through the bishop.[4] It should be noted that the young men were classified as "men" once they turned 35 or when they got married, while young women were subject to the same criteria, but could also choose to join the League of Catholic Ladies (Liga de Damas Católicas) at 30 years of age (Acha, 2010).

The JAC promoted different activities in which young people participated, with a delegate acting as intermediary. These activities could be: a) vocational; b) worker-oriented (economic-social); c) civic action-policy; d) attracting and keeping members; e) campaigns; f) religious education-academic freedom ; g) coordination with the youth center; h) environmental; i) family action; and j) positive press coverage. All these committed the parish to getting involved in various social spheres. Each year, the centers held an assembly for all members, in which they reported on the work done and reflected on the major problems affecting the operation of the center (Asociación de los Jóvenes de la Acción Católica, 1946, pp. 32-33). Finally, the young Catholics came together at the federal assemblies, where JAC heads and pioneers met. The first such event took place in Buenos Aires, and in subsequent years participation was mandatory. The assemblies in Rosario

4 Interview with Alfredo Biernat (November, 2016).

(1935), Córdoba (1937), Tucumán (1940), Mendoza (1943), Buenos Aires (1946), Santa Fe (1949), Córdoba (1952), Luján (1955), and Rosario (1958) (X Asamblea Federal, 1958).

2. The head and the group

JAC's formative ideal for young Catholics was based on a masculine model involving a comprehensive education: moral, physical, and sexual. Taking that scheme as our starting point, we will analyze the different educational and hierarchical structures proposed by the JAC. The organization's teaching had three objectives: piety, study, and action for training of future leaders. In consideration of this purpose, the heads were prepared at Cenacle meetings, which were intended to be practical. According to the *Boletín del Dirigente*:

> The Cenacle Meeting is extremely important because there – by way of Formative Thoughts – we enlighten the minds of the Heads regarding their duties and their mission.
> But it is not enough to know. It is necessary to work. And the true formation of the Head will be achieved by making him work continuously, observing his work, and guiding and correcting him[5] (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1945c, p. 14).

The Cenacle meetings revolved around a central idea, for which a passage from the bible was quoted; for example, the agony of Jesus, and Mary's behavior in response to the "insolent Jewish rabble." The leaders had to apply the narrative of the holy book to the lessons and teachings. The meetings were organized into four weeks of study and reflection exercises in order to forge the religious psychology of the heads. For example, the 1946 Cenacle consisted of four stages of preparation, with the following agenda: "The leaders of the victory" (first week), "The gentlemen of the kingdom" (second week), "I also have other sheep" (third week), "the sower has appeared" (fourth week). In turn, each stage was divided into internal and apostolic activities. The delegate was required to prepare the meetings with great care and dedication, and was thus persuaded to divide these meetings into four parts: the first was formative, beginning with spiritual thinking under the guidance of a priest advisor; in his absence, the delegate himself was entrusted with leading the event. The texts included "El Joven y Cristo" by Tihamér Tóth, the missal, the Gospel, and the book of readings published by the JAC. The second part covered the study plans prepared by the delegate, which were later published in the *Boletín del Dirigente*.

5 This and all subsequent quotes are translations from the Spanish by *Apuntes*.

The third part featured an outline, again prepared by the delegate, of the activities and problems associated with the everyday life of a center. Finally, in the part entitled "Preparation of the heads," the delegate was charged with overseeing the formation of these members, sending out an agenda in advance and taking care to avoid improvisation in his opinions (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946b, p. 14).

The head and the group had to be connected in a kind of symbiotic relationship. Given this relationship and the conception of the group as a live cell of the JAC, the *Boletín en Jefe* reflected:

> When does the Group live?
> The group lives […] when the Head knows how to make it live.
> This is the great secret.
> And the group lives when all of its Candidates are content to be members of this group […]. This feeling of contentment among all Candidates, who are content with their Group and their Head, is what constitutes the "Spirit of the Group." A group without spirit equates to a group without life (*Boletín del Jefe*, 1949a, p. 20).

Thus, the guidelines were laid down for a psychology of dependence and religious restraint based on a referential hierarchy. The secret of leadership was to "lead with lots of charity as Jesus would" (*Boletín del Jefe*, 1949a, p. 17). The heads were required to report on the progress of their groups in terms of attendance, payment of dues, and the Catholic affirmation campaign, which sought to attract more believers to the Church. Meanwhile, the delegate was tasked with awakening responsibility in the heads and ensuring they played an active part in the meetings through proposals and discussions. It should be recalled that a newsletter, *Cenáculo*, was published for the heads, with an annual subscription.

The group was organized in a particular way. It had to be uniform, with an equal number of participants. In the first session ("Foundational meeting"), a group reference was chosen based on "manly and modern" names, in keeping with the model of masculinity mapped out by Catholicism and in honor of the martial heroes of Argentina (San Martín and Belgrano, among others). Likewise, a motto was chosen, with representative examples including: "The eagles will overcome," "With Christ until death," "United we will overcome." The group patron was then selected, followed by a characteristic slogan or chant to be used in games, outings, or social gatherings (*Cenáculo*, 1947a).

The delegates and heads were also prepared at schools whose courses had to be attended by all members of the center. In 1944, the Archdiocesan

Council decided to establish the National School of Candidate Heads to fulfill the requirements of the centers. The patterns of the readings to be digested at this school gives us an outline of the institution's educational objectives, based on four overarching items:

> 1) The call of the Great King: Who called me? Why did I come to be Head? My dignity as Head. The new Crusade. My Responsibility. The reward that awaits us.
> 2) The Small Brotherhood: The Society of Seven. Vieytes's Soap Factory. The Mysterious Signs. The war report.
> 3) On the battlefield: The example that attracts. When nobody sees you. At each step. Know. Make the most of it. Seventy times seven. Always cheerful. The secret weapons.
> 4) The Internal Competition: Without competition there is no Fun Section. How it is done. Games, only soccer? Outings and excursions. The rewards. How to obtain them (*Guía de la VI Asamblea Federal*, 1946, p. 61).

On this platform, the heads gained influence over the group by setting an example in everyday life, guiding and orienting their men. Moreover, the role of the head extended to concern for the whereabouts of their candidates beyond the parish boundaries:

> Do you know what books your boys read and what they hear at school?
> Sometimes there are professors or teachers who teach things contrary to the Faith, or tell immoral jokes.
> There are teachers who make their students read inappropriate or **dirty** books.
> Speak to them, ask them often what books they are made to read. Make a note of them and ask the Delegate or the P. Advisor. The same goes for the things you hear from your teachers, in History class, Religion, etc.
> You must defend your Candidates! (*Cenáculo,* 1947c).

The apostolic work fostered humility and a spirit of sacrifice to overcome the big obstacles that the earthly world imposed. The study sessions at the centers sought to permeate the subjectivities of the young people who participated. To ensure that study was kept on track, it was recommended that each center adopt the text "Doctrina de vida (La promesa mesiánica)," whose contents served as a didactic guide. As to spiritual thinking, this was left to the discretion of the advisor. Given the impossibility of a single delegate covering the wide range of responsibilities assigned to him – groups, subsections, and meetings – it was decided to create the position of subdelegate.

The *Boletín en Jefe* recommended the formation of these individuals by way of "[…] timely and prudent observations." As a vehicle for formation, participation was recommended in the apostolate schools that the diocesan delegation organized periodically (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1945b, p. 119).

One of the most outstanding concepts of the Catholic activist universe, the apostolate cell, remains to be clarified. Led by the center and its delegates, the members were grouped into these entities by employment category: employees, workers, professionals, or university students. It was incumbent on each young person to spread the missionary message and lead by example in their environment. The president of the center controlled the actions of the apostolate cell, and held weekly colloquies with each member.

For its part, the apostolate collective set three objectives: preparation, implementation, and reinforcement. The president, aided by the group heads and leaders, was prepared to train the members. For this purpose, he drew on the "apostolate cell notebook." This book also included a file divided into two parts: young people and environments. In the former, the characteristics of each young person in the parish were recorded and classified by prospects of outreach and conquest. The classification categories were: good Catholics, lukewarm, indifferent, ignorant on religious matters, cool, atheists, declared enemies, and active enemies. All of the youth meeting places – schools, factories, societies, libraries, coffees, and bars – were recorded in the file (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946b, pp. 6-7). These were not the only classification and monitoring methods: Catholic conduct, allegiance to the dogma, and progress and setbacks in the missionary exercise could also be measured by a different means.

3. Group psychology, quantification, and value

Center members had to be selected with care. According to Manuel Bello, the targeted youngsters had to be bright, with natural aptitudes and an intense supernatural life (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946c, p. 37). In turn, the leader had to establish himself as a true director of apostles. In the words of Bello, the leader was an individual who belonged not to himself but to the association and its center, to which he had to give his entire body (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946c, p. 42).

The advisor was charged with the selection of these leaders based on a set of psychological qualities for testing the latent possibilities of the apostolate. It was recommended that the prospective leader be confronted with the Christian deficiencies of the environment in which he acted, in order to compare this feeble Christianity with the evangelical ideal. This served as a means of awakening in him "[…]the apostolic demands of his baptism

vis-à-vis the decadence of the environment, gradually exciting in his soul a concern for souls" (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946c, p. 42). The candidate was also urged to complete a systematic study of the doctrine of the "mystical body" in order that he develop a clear Christian consciousness.[6]

The use of quantitative and qualitative measurement enabled a characterization of the young men at the centers. In a separate study (Cammarota, 2015, pp. 214-215), we describe the annual competitions held in the parishes to develop the Christian ideal and the pedagogical structures. The competition "Want" had such an outlook: the pre-candidates for the parish, local, and high-school-student sections took an exam on religious culture, as part of the competition's penultimate annual target (November-December). The competitions for the boarding centers were held in the months of October and November. The score obtained was added up and divided by the number of approved candidates in each section, while the average exam grade (ranging from 1 to 10) and an assessment of the life of the section (from 1 to 5 points) were added to the total score (Cammarota, 2015, p. 215). Finally, the results of each competition were taken to the Archdiocesan Council of Buenos Aires.

These competitions and the various campaigns and surveys provided a picture of the work and the level of spirituality of the members and candidates. For example, the 1946 survey, published in the *Boletín del Jefe*, was composed of eight topics, which in turn were broken down into three questions: These topics were: a) you and your subdelegates; b) your heads; c) your candidates; d) structure of the section; e) recreation; f) activities; g) your candidates and their environment; and h) publications. The surveys, the responses to which are not available, were sent to the senior candidate delegate (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946a, p. 185).

Meanwhile, a systematic record of the members' movements in their parishes was kept in the "List of reports." The list corresponding to the Immaculate Conception Center of Morón Parish (Centro Inmaculada Concepción de la Parroquia de Morón) in the western part of Buenos Aires province detailed the number of provisional and approved members and the movement of members within the parish. Item B concerned the design of the duties to be fulfilled: study meetings, piety meetings, Sunday mass, monthly communion, social gatherings, section meetings, major

6 "According to the doctrine of the "mystical body," the Church is a body – the body of Christ – composed of individuals who act in a way that is organized by the dogma. By way of this body, Jesus Christ performs a unifying and life-giving action. This is because, according to doctrine, there is supernatural life (divine grace) in the Church.

subsection meetings, minor subsection meetings, student subgroup meetings, worker group meetings, meetings of the cenacle of heads, and other events (Parroquia de Morón, 1948). Another reporting model divided up the activities of the center into four quarters. For instance, the account for 1951 contained the following:

> Delegate: Gerardo T. F. (19 years old, studies and works).
> Subdelegate: F. A. (17 years old, studies and works).
> Subdelegate: J. C. (Studies and works).
> In the first quarter of this year 10 (ten) members participated in the section: 1 (one) approved; 5 (five) provisional and 4 (four) listeners. Meeting attendance: Good.
> During this quarter the approved member J. V. was expelled from the ranks […] (Parroquia de Morón, 1952).

On the dynamics of the meetings:

> The meetings were held in separate groups, in which each delegate presented a topic. The catechism of Perseverance, Sacred History, the Rule of the Candidate was studied; as spiritual reading: The Evangelical Saints (Parroquia de Morón, 1952).

However, if individual behavior was to be modeled on the Christian ideal, the group where such behavior was molded or corrected, was the most important formative and educational space within the JAC.

4. Group and candidate

Adolescence was visualized as a period of crisis. According to the *Boletín del Dirigente:*

> Because the adolescent who emerges from his quiet and small infant world, on the one hand, sees the construction of a self that is isolated and different from the things among which he moved as a child, and on the other, he sees a dizzying array of a thousand different possibilities, molds, forms.
> There is materiel for everything […] and that is precisely why a dangerous stage ensues […] (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1945a, p. 118).

Thus, the group's agenda had a strong psychological component that influenced the behavior and the intellectual development of the youths. The pedagogy of the candidate ("formation of the candidates") aimed at the comprehensive formation of the human being; that is, to set the individual on a course towards the full realization of his potential based on his own particular conditions. This potential had three directions: humanity,

Christianity, and the apostolicity of the individual. It should be recalled that the boys in the candidate section ranged from 10 and 15 years of age.

The psychological aspects of the group were measured on two levels: in terms of its members, and in terms of its psychological dynamism and, thus, its self-value. This had a therapeutic value that benefited the community: "While it is the us and not the ego that is the center of interest, individualist behavior loses its meaning within the Catholic world." "On the other hand, by developing individual potential with the beneficial stimulus of community development, inhibitions are overcome" (Anonymous, n.d., p. 3).

The therapeutic value of the group's activity could be seen, according to the cited document, in the role it played in activities such as mountain climbing or during camps. There, the egocentric satisfaction openly demonstrated during one's infancy disappeared. The acceptance of scouting as an activity for forming and contemplating nature incorporated this dimension (Cammarota and Ramacciotti, forthcoming). In this regard, one of the most important tributes to the well-constructed group were the personal contributions of the youths. For example, all of them had to participate in preparing the bulletin board or fliers to raise funds. These common goals aided in creating a spirit of solidarity. For their part, competitions were a means of pursuing a community ideal that everyone was required to attain; for example, through the above-mentioned contests the JAC held across the parishes.

The group meetings, according to the minutes to which we have access, were monotonous, schematic, and ritualized, involving prayers and readings of material such as *La religión explicada* – a text approved by the Ministry of Justice and Public Instruction for state high schools on April 11, 1945, *Introducción al estudio de la vida de Jesús* (1943), and others authorized by the upper echelons. Prayers were based on the contents of the Argentine Episcopate Program. However, there was recognition of the danger posed by the monotonousness of the spiritual exercises. According to the *Boletín del Dirigente*, there was no need to multiply these candidate exercises since they triggered fatigue in children, giving them a false idea of the Catholic religion. The exercises were not an end but the means to achieving piety by striving for the incorporation of a total Christianity in study, the streets, the school, or the family. With regard to the saints and the apostles, it was necessary to inculcate in the youths the ideal of sainthood as a pure state of nature, making amends for the actions of those "lazy, amorphous Christians without the capacity for irradiation" that the Catholic schools warned of (*Boletín del Dirigente*, 1946c, p. 43).

The activities developed by the head had to awaken a genuine interest in the candidates for the group, making them feel that they represented a necessary cog in the machine:

> Put one in charge of collecting dues, another can direct the wall display, that one there can take the register. These minor roles include the second Head, who in agreement with the Delegate, you can choose to help you with the apostolate and to replace you if it's necessary (*Conquista*, 1949).

Asceticism, obedience to the hierarchy, and sacrifice were the topics that dominated the ethos of the preparation of heads, delegates, and candidates. The disciplined body thwarted the danger of the rusting or oxidation of souls, caused by the terrestrial life that conspired against spiritual formation. For example, vacations were a latent hazard that precipitated spiritual idleness:

> Bodies invigorated by air, sun, activity. The intense movement turned into growth... They are almost athletes. But… your spirit, my dear Candidate? Has it been invigorated too with the pure air that is prayer, that binds you to God? […] Or on the contrary, by taking care only to enjoying yourself, has your soul, neglected, without spiritual activity, been covered with rust, like a machine that doesn't work? (*Aspirantes*, 1955, p. 1).

The body of the group and the candidates was the body of Christ. Given that the so-called "kingdom of Christ" is not conceived as natural by Catholicism but as supernatural, the body of believers could not be dissociated from this yoke; therefore, the body:

> […] dear Candidate, must be worthy of God. Your body must be sacred. Your body must be pure. Your body must serve you in bringing God to the world […]. From there, the instructions or the rule for the Candidate is clear: The Candidate is PURE in thought, words, and actions (*Aspirantes*, 1957, p. 7).

By disciplining the body, the youth not only prepared himself to face the earthly world with Christian ethics, but to extend the status of abnegation and sanctity to reach transcendence. The candidate was urged to react with horror to the profanation of the body, equating it to the burning of a church. To maintain purity, the candidate delegate vouched for the moral conduct of his charges, taking the top boys from his section off on candidate retreats. Only six candidates from each parish participated in these, so as not to exceed the capacity of the venue. In March 1944, the spiritual retreat had 72 participants made up of candidates and delegates, and took place in the following parishes: Nuestra Señora de la Piedad, Nuestra Señora de

Buenos Aires, Nuestra Señora de la Divina Providencia, Nuestra Señora de Pompeya, Resurrección del Señor, San Francisco Javier, Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Nuestra Señora del Buen Consejo, Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia, Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, San Benito, and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y Santa Rosa. All participants included representatives of the 13 sections (Consejo Arquidiocesano, 1944).

In summary, the group tended to the colonization of the candidate' subjectivities, Christianizing the body to preserve it from a world subsidized by the precepts of modernity – the same modernity that had distanced God from terrestrial centrality. Youth was conceived as a means of revitalizing the missionary nexus that communicated the faith and the Church, and the men had to be kept in a state of purity given the moral decadence exhibited by society as a whole.

5. Youth, heroism, and the decadence of the world

This so-called conquest of a new world demanded actions of valor and sacrifice, which were likened to the chivalrous wars of the 12th century. Thus, the military metaphors deployed in Catholic publications tended to give examples based on heroism and its standing:

> If an officer – writes Father Plus – communicates to his soldiers an order from the commander to leave the trenches and face death and this order consists of no more than words written on paper, the soldiers will not move. But if the officer leaps first, then the soldiers will follow him (*Boletín del Dirigente,* 1945c, p. 13).

As the members entered youth – which was marked by a change of section following three or more years of work – they progressed on to the youth centers. Military terminology was again deployed to illustrate the change: according to the publication *Cenáculo*, "promoting youths" meant a "change of guard;" leaving "military school," a euphemism used to refer to the section; and submission for inspection in the "cadre of officers" (*Cenáculo,* 1947a, p. 1).

The martial illusions and the figures of heroes, martyrs, and traitors, pure and impure, coexisted with the sacred passages of the Bible, gaining immediate proximity to the life of the group:

> I, as Head, have been entrusted by Jesus in his army – like the Saints – to a vanguard position: leading more boys from the Group, looking for them, encouraging them, visiting them, leading them, making them study and conquer.
> If I am loyal and fight in my position, one day I will go from

> Head of Vanguard to Head of the Victory, with All the Saints. I want to vanquish, I want to lead my men to Victory! (*Cenáculo*, 1946b, p. 5-6).

The candidate, according to the discursive material, formed part of a "vigorous and virile squadron" and a "conquering militia" with a legionary character (*Sursum*, 1958, p. 123). At a macro level, the homeland and the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman community were synonymous in terrestrial terms. The "Dialogue Mass" given at the 6th Federal Assembly in 1946 contained the following exaltation:

> Chorus: The opprobrium, should be forgetten! Let us look to the sun! We will follow the path of the missionaries! The route that the sword always protected in this land of ours! And we can see up ahead the peerless figures of Francisco Sonalo, and Rose of Lima, and with rectitude of bronze, Belgrano and San Martin.
> Narrator: You are missionaries and conquistadors! The Cross is being raised, the flag at its highest. Your soul in grace carries a new sign […].
> Chorus: We herald the light from the stars that Spain bequeathed us! (*Guía de la VI Asamblea Federal*, 1946, p. 31).

By reviving the figures of the heroes, a historical tradition was emphasized that rescinded the meddling of foreign ideologies or the intrusions of the religious trends that had deserted traditional Catholicism. Literally, the Earth was not to fall into the hands of those declared enemies by the Church: Marxism, liberalism, or Protestantism. With regard to liberalism, there is an extensive literature available (Caimari, 1994; Stefano Di & Zanatta, 2000). Suffice it to say that despite the discourse of the Church in the 1930s and 1940s, the dream of the institution was framed by Catholic integralism and a theocratic imaginary. Its aspirations revolved around founding a regime of "Christianness." According to Di Stefano and Zanatta, the Church's determination during these decades to destroy the political-institutional engineering of the liberal regime instead of trying to gain more space within it proved to be ineffectual (2000, p. 419).

One of the concerns of the Catholic hierarchy was the relationship between the Church, youth, and the modern world. To what extent did the institution get through to youths who were captivated by new consumer trends, the promises of sufficiency, and hedonism?[7] During the 1940s and

7 On the subject of consumption, see Milanesio (2014).

1950s, attracting youths to Catholicism was one of the main concerns of the Church. It was there that Catholicism focused its efforts when battling against these new trends, such as the development of new codes of conduct and patterns of behavior that affected relationships between men and women and between parents and children. On top of that, in the late 1950s, Manuel Bello made the strongly self-critical observation that generational renewal within the organization had practically stalled (Acha, 2010, p. 34).

These urgent problematics must be placed within the context of their sociohistorical roots. For Catholicism, the decadence of modernity was confirmed by Kantian philosophy, whose thinking led to the exaltation of the self, glorifying human nature, and the affirmation of its sufficiency and terrestrial independence.

As we have seen, youth was envisioned not for worldly pleasures but for heroism, bravery, and sanctity, while the missionary character of its endeavors and the destiny of transcendence were foregrounded. Can any of these elements be regarded as pre-modern values that were related to European reactionary or counter-revolutionary thought of the 19th and early-20th centuries? We consider the answer to be affirmative. It would seem that inter-war Catholicism was a departure from or a rejection of the 19th and 20th centuries – a reaction against the Enlightenment, rationalism, and secularism. However, the debate on this issue is still ongoing and continues to motivate historians (Di Stefano, 2011; Lida, 2012).[8]

The Catholic publications analyzed here recalled these old structures. For example, on the occasion of the 10th Federal Assembly held in the city of Rosario in 1958, the editorial of the *Sursum* called out on behalf of Christ. As the editorial had it, in the new world the voice of Christ could again be heard to anoint the apostolic youths. Rosario, it went on to argue, would be the Cenacle that would seal this consecration of apostles, and from their meetings would emerge "a better youth, en route to their destiny as promoters of a new world." The world that needed to be left behind was

8 According to Eric Hobsbawm, these elements were intertwined in three types of coexisting movements in the 20th century. The author calls the first strand one of "old-fashioned authoritarians or conservatives," characterized by its lack of a concrete ideology beyond anti-communism and the rejection of liberalism. The second was so-called "organic statism," a defense of conservatism and the traditional order that combined fear of class struggle with acceptance of the social hierarchy and a recognition of the "estates." This gave rise to corporatist theories that displaced liberal democracy with the representation of groups and strong state interference. This strand prevailed in some Catholic states, such as Portugal under Oliviero Salazar and, to a lesser extent, Franco's Spain. Finally, Hobsbawm cites the fascist states, which were predicated on the inadequacies of reason and rationalism and the superiority of instinct and will. What the old-fashioned reactionaries of the 20th century had in common with the fascists and the Catholic Church was all of the above-mentioned (Hobsbawm, 1998, pp. 120-121).

founded on technological development, the rise in consumption, and the alienation of God from all centrality (modern secularization). Appealing to the soldiers of other times, *Sursum* made the following declamation:

> *Jacista*,[9] the Master is there and wants to see you. He needs to see you, and above all you need him. Vacillations have entered your life because you have clashed with the thinking of an old world and you were born into a new world. You searched for a future for your life like you dreamed of, big, generous, and you didn't know what to do with the present that lied about it. And in today's society, you came to fear that there would be no place for your ideals (*Sursum*, 1958a, p. 1).

Modernity was presented as a world without certainties. According to Taylor, modernity represents a change of understanding of society, of God, and the world, but essentially it is an affirmation of the common life – a mixture of practices and new institutional forms in scientific, technological, productive, and urban terms. Modernity is a conception of a secular age without its sacred counterpart. This involved a change in the social imaginary, a new moral order that transformed the understanding of the cosmos and of transcendence (Taylor, 1992, in Morello, 2008, pp. 106-107). The old structures of pre-modern societies, where the individual was born in a place that was naturally ordered and pre-established by the intervention of God, had fallen, and uncertainty disassociated human life from the transcendental.

In this crusade against an increasingly dehumanized and anti-Christian world, Catholic youth was increasingly portrayed as one of its foremost spiritual reserves. All of the youth-oriented Catholic publishers invoked terms such as "overcome," "courage," and "conquest," which were interlinked with the endeavor of bringing the Church to the social body as a whole. "Conquer" was understood to mean the attraction of new youths to the Church, but also implicitly required the vanquishing of bad thoughts and worldly temptations, such as sex and the superficialities that governed the interior of the individual. Thus, the *Conquista* editorial pointed out: "He who knows how to overcome himself knows how to conquer." To conquer, one had to be pure and strong, thwarting the "voices of evil" (*Conquista*, 1950, p. 1).

Along similar lines, the editorial of *Sursum* reproduced Pope Pius XII's address. In his estimation, the reconstruction of a better world was necessary.

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9 A member of the JAC.

This entailed looking out for those youths who were subject to "so many pitfalls" in a world that deafened them with its "racket," that disoriented them with its relativism in terms of truth and error, captivated them with its polychromy, debased them with its vulgarity, and shackled them with its lewdness. Thus, the task of conquering corrupted souls was pressing, as the enemy was becoming ever more multiform, fraudulent, and invasive (*Sursum*, 1958, p. 2). This enemy had banished God from the nuclear family, crushing his authority and, as a consequence, marriage now resembled a union of interests or of pleasures and maternity was experienced, by the mother, as a burden (Asociación de los Jóvenes de la Acción Católica, 1946, pp. 14-15).

The city was a space that endangered dogma, and was thus one of the centers of youth de-Chritianization. The moral corruption of souls was likened to the aggression of venereal diseases, which jeopardized the organic constitution of citizens and the future of the nation. Physical and moral hygiene were conceptualizations that brought together a series of metaphors surrounding the body of the good Christian. Paradoxically, while it was in the cities that Catholicism proved more vigorous and attained its greatest organizational and material successes, the fearful glances towards the urban world escalated (Mauro, 2014, p. 239).

Despite the manifestation of the Catholic world as a homogeneous space without ideological or generational ruptures, conflicts within it were not slow to emerge during the years that followed. As José Zanca (2012) has pointed out, after World War II, Cristian humanism established itself as an anthropology that broke from a theology bound to the traditionalism of the 1930s. At that time, at least some young Catholics saw in Christian humanism the possibility of social redemption beyond the Church hierarchy - a change of strategy that allowed them to combine politics, religion, and lay activism outside the parishes. This humanism implied greater confidence in human potential and its capacity for enjoying freedom. This, coupled with the establishment of a political party that represented Christians in civil society, allowed some perceptions to be altered. Christian humanism introduced a series of changes that questioned the authority of the hierarchy, since inter-ecclesiastical conflicts had generated a trend toward the desecration of religious power. Elsewhere, the aftermath of World War II was also a period that reconsidered the relationship between God, religion, sin, and the priesthood. It is worth asking, therefore, what repercussions these vicissitudes had within the JAC, as well as how the process affected declining membership rates and the lack of generational renewal at the upper levels of the youth wing.

6. Conclusions

This study has allowed us to explore the ways in which the "different youths" were regarded in a given period by various institutions that projected discursive aspirations on the social front. Particularly within Catholicism, youth was viewed as a metaphor for virility, change, sanctity, asceticism, heroism, and virtue. The profile of the young Catholic activist hinged on this spiritual vision. As we have seen, the JAC was one of the most active youth vanguards within ACA. A series of formative thoughts aimed at the Christianization of the social body, in line with the precepts of the Catholic Church, weighed upon its activists. Through this Christianization, the *jacistas* were prepared to face not only the terrestrial world; the practice of abnegation, solidarity, and obedience to the dogma were the primary conditions for reaching transcendence, or the kingdom of heaven.

In terms of its structure, the JAC was conceived of as a living cell, and projected a strong psychological component onto the subjectivities of the youths; it also had a therapeutic value that could be measured and quantified through surveys, competitions, and adventure "games," such as scouting. The characterizations obtained allowed the group to influence the behavior of children and adolescents, at least in terms of the discursive interventions.

The group was hierarchical; at the summit was the delegate, who took charge of the formation of future heads and candidates. Both the delegates and the heads had to lead by example, guiding the destinies of young Catholics in a world in which, according to Catholic integralism of the 1930s, had relegated God from his centrality.

One of the action matrices was the apostolate cell – that is, the missionary activity of the children and youths in all the environments in which they acted or served: the school, the workplace, the workshop, or the university. This apostolate was directed by the center and its leaders. The members were grouped according to their working environments, and in each environment the youths had to spread the missionary message and lead by example. The capacity of the apostolate cell to attract more believers to the institution was connected, according to the afore-mentioned Catholic publications, to the degree of conviction, willingness, and effectiveness of the message internalized by the youths as part of their everyday activist activities. This became one of the central concerns of the Catholic hierarchy: attracting new boys and youths to the Church by battling against the new sociocultural modalities, trends, and norms that had slowly mutated between the 1940s and 1960s. We must therefore ask why these changes did not lead to a regrouping of meanings within the JAC in the 1960s, when other Catholic

youths opted to be active in political spaces, encouraged by the tenets of Christian humanism that had emanated from the religious institution itself.

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