**Marguerite Fiévez and Jacques Meert with the collaboration of Roger Aubert, (Preface Dom Helder Camara) (English Translation Edward Mitchinson), *Cardijn*.**

**Preface**

Cardijn led us to see in the most objective way possible; to judge events in the light of the gospel; and to act in consequence.

What is he to us now that he is no longer on earth? What is the real value of the message he gave to the world? How are we going to live up to his example? He was, without any doubt, an apostle, a man who was sent. He came to help young workers to know themselves as human persons, as sons of God, charged with a mission that only they could fulﬁl. He came to help them gain conﬁdence in themselves, to organise and to ﬁght, in a peaceful but determined fashion for the dignity of work and of men who work.

Seeing him and hearing him, you were left with the enduring impression of a man whose whole reason for living was the YCW. Morning, afternoon, evening, talking, chatting, travelling, awake or asleep, his thoughts were on young workers.

He spoke with such conviction that workers incapable of understanding a word of French understood him - in his own unforgettable French!

He believed in the role of the laity and he gave it a value in times when the layman was still forgotten in the Church. The YCW is at the very root of the lay apostolate and especially of that aspect of it which taught lay people to see their apostolate in terms of their daily surroundings.

When the second Vatican Council, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, worked out its doctrine on the laity,[1](https://sites.google.com/a/josephcardijn.com/joseph-cardijn-com/preface---dom-helder-camara#sdfootnote1sym) one could see the extent in which Cardijn had been a prophet and a pioneer.

Without being a history of the YCW this book tells the story of the numerous and tiring journeys which Cardijn had to make, the conferences he gave and the branches of the YCW he saw in growth throughout the whole world.

But what is the real value of Cardijn’s message in the world of work, in the real life of workers and other social classes and in the development of mankind?

Before attempting an answer let us look for a moment at two men identiﬁed also each in his own way with human development; Karl Marx and Joseph Lebret.

No one should be surprised if we mention Marx in connection with the biography of Cardijn. There are, after all, germs of truth even in systems which are basically false.

In a world which exalted capital, Marx gave value to man as a worker. He even thought that the working class would put an end to the class struggle.

In the course of a half-century, the world has seen a spectacular marxist experiment; the USSR, undeveloped as it was, succeeded in becoming, through its worker dictatorship, a top power, capable of measuring up to the USA. But in a half century, the USSR became itself an empire, committing the same sins as the capitalist ones. At the two sessions of the UN Conference for Trade and Development,[2](https://sites.google.com/a/josephcardijn.com/joseph-cardijn-com/preface---dom-helder-camara#sdfootnote2sym) the egoism of the USSR had reached the same scale and intransigence as that of the USA.

Another important marxist experiment is on its way; in communist China. Will there be any greater opening up in the maoist interpretation of Marx? Has humanity anything to hope from their cultural revolution? Impressions of the confrontation between China and the USSR easily recall what goes on in the midst of the capitalist world. How true it is that atheistic humanism ends by being inhuman and even anti-human!

Now we can think of Lebret? Would he have seen things more clearly if he had known that, in our own days, the struggle would be no longer just between individuals (employers and workers), or between groups (social classes), but between the developed and the under-developed world?

What mystery was it that led Cardijn and Lebret, both men of the Church and both apostles of humanity, along parallel paths? Why did they meet so seldom when they were so near? Lebret’s concern was on the level of technique, structure, leadership. Cardijn put the accent on educating the hearts and minds of men, above all those of young workers.

Cardijn and Lebret both saw very well that the social struggle in our times is of planetary dimension; that the gap is every day widening between the under-developed and the developed world; that the confrontation between North and South, between rich and poor countries, is far more important than that between East and West, between capitalism and socialism.

The workers are at the heart of the confrontation. Workers in the developed parts of the world are tempted to settle into the relative comfort they have won, to become bourgeois. Their reaction in this struggle will be decisive. That is why Cardijn’s preoccupation with the working class must be pursued and intensified, without, of course, paternalism or looking backwards.

But in the under-developed countries the workers, on their own, will not be able to change the inhuman structures, which wreck every effort towards the genuine development of the whole man and of all men. Nor in the developed countries can the workers alone bring about changes of structure which will lead the developed world to give, not just aid but justice to the under-developed world.

Our best homage to Cardijn is our will not to stop at what he has done, but to find out and undertake what he would do if he came back on the earth. In meetings big and small, he loved to say, as we all remember “forward!” A herculean task awaits us and time presses.

HELDER CAMARA, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife.

**Notes**

[1](https://sites.google.com/a/josephcardijn.com/joseph-cardijn-com/preface---dom-helder-camara#sdfootnote1anc)In the decree on the apostolate of the laity; in the Constitution on the Church, Chapters 2 and 4; and all the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

[2](https://sites.google.com/a/josephcardijn.com/joseph-cardijn-com/preface---dom-helder-camara#sdfootnote2anc)Held successively at Geneva and New Delhi.

[3](https://sites.google.com/a/josephcardijn.com/joseph-cardijn-com/preface---dom-helder-camara#sdfootnote3anc)Joseph Cardijn, Laymen into Action, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1964.

SOURCE

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