

FR FRANK LOMBARD (1910–1967)

Rev. Dr Bruce Duncan CSsR

Frank Lombard was born in Brighton Victoria on 24 April 1911, the youngest of five children and third son of John Lombard, member of Victorian police and Bridget (nee Collins), who had emigrated from Ireland in the 1880s. Frank spent his childhood at Brighton and Berwick before his father a policeman, moved to Ivanhoe police station. Lack of formal education prevented him rising above senior constable in his thirty years of service, and reinforced in him the desire to provide a good education for his children.

Frank attended the State Primary school at Berwick, then Parade Christian Brothers in Melbourne to the Leaving Certificate. He completed Matriculation at the new St Kevin's Christian Brothers College in Toorak. Though his marks were above average, he inclined rather to sport.

His family was strongly religious, especially his mother, and his father had three sisters enter religious life. After a retreat in 1927 at the seminary at Werribee, Frank decided to become a priest. He returned to St Kevin's to study Latin, during which time his mother died.

In the seminary he gained a reputation for being not too bright and was the butt of jokes. However, he grew to 6'2" and 17 stone; he had a splendid physique and ability in football, tennis, athletics and especially swimming. However, he caught tuberculosis in 1933 and had to spend twelve months in the Greenvale Sanatorium in Melbourne. After his return to the Werribee seminary in 1934, he was ordained by Archbishop Mannix on 26 July 1936 at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.

From his first posting in 1937 to Northcote parish he developed a keen interest in youth. Within a few months he had formed study circles for the Catholic Young Men's Society, which catered for young working men over the age of 20.¹

During 1938 he was inspired to combine the spiritual drive of Catholic Action for youth with the natural energy of youth sporting activities. As chaplain to a boys club which played football in the Catholic Boys' Legion competition, he considered first setting up a junior section to the Holy Name Society to encourage monthly communion. Within a year, he had nearly 200 male youth enrolled in the parish junior section of the Holy Name.

During the first half of 1939, Lombard learned more about YCW principles from some current literature, but especially Kevin T. Kelly's pamphlet, *Young Christian Workers* of July 1939. He did not consider himself a scholar, but he had a unique ability to translate ideas into the Australian cultural context, so he began to see how the ideas of Canon Cardijn could be used.

In July 1939, a priests' committee was formed to develop YCW in Australia, with the encouragement of BA Santamaria, at that time assistant director of the Australian National Secretariat for Catholic Action (ANSCA). In March 1940, Kevin Kelly relinquished to the committee his role as official correspondent with the Belgian authorities of YCW. Kelly had had himself named as correspondent because of disagreements with ANSCA about the role of Catholic Action, and the priests' committee too was to be jealous of its independence.

The YCW employed what it called the 'see, judge, act' method – that had been developed by Cardijn, and aimed to help young workers internalise Catholic religious values and to apply them in their work situation, to draw others to the faith, combat exploitation and improve working conditions. After discussing a short passage from the Gospel, with the guidance of a prepared leader, each small group would then evaluate the members' life or work situation in the light of the Gospel and determine on some action to change the situation for the better. At their next meeting, members would discuss and evaluate their action, and repeat the process. Thus the process was geared to encourage youth to use their own judgment and to take action on their own initiative after evaluating evidence, called an enquiry, which could be on any topic. However, party-political activity was rigorously excluded.

Much of this social focus in Cardijn had to be modified in Melbourne because of the Second World War and because Lombard's initial effort was to attract all youth into Catholic social activities, football or learn-to-dance classes, as a means to reinforce religious practice.

Archbishop Mannix appointed Lombard an army chaplain in March 1940 on three-monthly tours of duty and he was away from his parish groups during the following year. Santamaria wrote a pamphlet, *How to start the JOC*,² in March 1940, drawing on Belgian sources, but the priests' committee preferred their own literature and that of Kevin Kelly. In mid-1940, Mannix appointed Lombard the YCW Melbourne chaplain, outside the control of ANSCA. Lombard expanded his groups in October 1940 to

take over the Catholic Boys' Legion which became YCW in September 1941. By this time, the strong-willed Lombard was unwilling to have YCW come under the control of ANSCA or to follow its direction.

Lombard was appointed curate at Collingwood in September 1942 to give him more time to move about the archdiocese, and the following September, Archbishop Justin Simonds, the new coadjutor to Mannix, was appointed bishop in charge of national YCW which had been established earlier in the year. Against ANSCA, Simonds strongly supported Lombard's views about the independence of YCW.³

Not only did Lombard have a remarkable charisma for working with youth, he was a splendid public speaker, especially to large crowds, like the Catholic Action rallies at Xavier College, Kew, which attracted crowds of 20,000 for the 1942 rally, 30,000 in 1943, and between these two figures till 1949 when they were discontinued. The youth sections numbered from 5000 (in 1944) to 12,000 (in 1945). These rallies were a feast of Catholic militancy, with flags, marching displays, sporting events and religious services.

The YCW expanded rapidly in 1943 to 47 groups by October 1943, numbering 4,000 members in Melbourne. It ran learn-to-dance classes, savings schemes and sporting activities. In 1943 it had 51 football teams and 38 cricket teams, as well as offering swimming, athletics and boxing.⁴ Its newspaper, *New Youth*, became monthly from June 1944.

YCW reached its high point in 1947, with 3,300 members in Melbourne, 18 per cent of the Catholic age cohort at the time, and extending services to 55 per cent of the age group. But by 1951 increasing social mobility helped reduce Melbourne membership to 1400, though parish organisation was strengthened again by 1954, when its membership was only 875 in 47 parishes.

The YCW introduced housing schemes and helped promote legislation allowing housing co-operatives in Victoria in 1944.⁵ Between 1945 and 1960, YCW sponsored twenty housing co-operatives which financed 2600 homes. Co-operative housing societies in general in Victoria helped people buy 37,000 homes. It also promoted trading co-operatives from 1949, which by 1961 had 2600 members and sales of more than one million pounds.⁶ From 1956, the YCW promoted parish credit societies, and formed a Co-operative Permanent Building Society in 1957. From 1952, YCW also offered an insurance service. It ran a youth training centre, 'Maiya Wamba' (aboriginal for House of Youth) in Cheltenham, and established a Men's Extension Committee to raise funds (this later became YCW Holdings Melbourne).

Fr Lombard became strongly opposed to BA Santamaria's Movement. Fr James McInerney had been transferred by Mannix from an air force chaplaincy to establish Catholic Action groups in factories in Melbourne. As one of the two ecclesiastical assistants to ANSCA, McInerney hoped to draw on the YCW membership for leaders for these factory groups engaged in the struggle against the communists, but by mid-1944 YCW was distrustful of the Santamaria Movement. Santamaria had to defend his conception of Catholic Action to Archbishop Simonds who feared that ANSCA was taking YCW in a wrong direction; in June 1944 Simonds argued that Catholic Action had to change social and economic conditions.⁷

In July 1945, the lay secretary of the YCW, Frank McCann, put to Archbishop Simonds Santamaria's plan 'for what the YCW regarded as an official link with the trade unionists'. Simonds rejected any official link.

After the Catholic bishops approved the formation of the Catholic Social Studies Movement (CSSM) in September 1945, the YCW priests' committee delegated Fr Lombard and Fr G. Coghlan to discuss with Santamaria co-operation against communism. As YCW included young male workers up to the age of 25, Santamaria saw them as a natural base for trained and motivated recruits for his Movement, but did not want the YCW setting up groups in factories which could complicate the work of the Movement or lead Catholics in another direction. Lombard did not join these discussions.

Santamaria made a second approach to the YCW in October-November 1945, proposing combined committees of his Movement and YCW members to fight communism in the unions. Lombard did not want to see YCW become preoccupied with the communist issue and, with the support of Simonds and the priests' committee, declined. Simonds did not want the YCW to be politically involved or swamped by older men, but he allowed a loose association and individuals to become involved.

The disagreement was referred to Mannix, with Lombard determined to hold his ground even if it cost him his parish. When Mannix did not appear to make a decision, Lombard asked him what would happen to the YCW if it did not carry out the Archbishop's command. Mannix replied that he had not commanded anything but expected Lombard to interpret his wishes. According to David Kehoe, in 'great trepidation, Fr. Lombard stuck to his decision. But the archbishop did not order the Y.C.W. to co-operate with the C.S.S.M. on Mr. Santamaria's terms', and continued to support the YCW publicly.⁸

Santamaria again approached the YCW after the 1946 Easter

conference of the ALP, but was again rebuffed. Instead he turned to the Catholic Young Men's Organisation which was not a Catholic Action body and hence not so concerned about being non-political.

However, as he was about to go overseas, Simonds wrote to Santamaria concerned about serious conflict between ANSCA and executives of the Catholic Action bodies, particularly that these were not to become involved in the political work of the CSSM, as the YCW was not restricted to being a 'a mere parish society, as you suggest ...' He nominated Fr Lombard as one of the YCW representatives, and insisted that Catholic Action was not under the control of any other organisation.⁹ However, the Episcopal Committee for Catholic Action said that YCW for the time being was not to develop factory or 'locational' groups, but remain with parish ones.¹⁰

Lombard continued to push strongly for the independence of YCW from ANSCA, and at a conference of priests in September 'clashed repeatedly' with Santamaria, with Lombard wanting the priests' committee to assume control.¹¹ Santamaria wrote to Mannix that three times he had visited Lombard only to be rebuffed. YCW refused to accept the co-ordination of ANSCA.¹² The Episcopal Committee said the priests could form an advisory committee, but the co-ordinating role was to be done by ANSCA.¹³

In January 1947, Simonds wrote to Santamaria about the 'politicising' of Catholic Action and competition between the Movement and the YCW. Santamaria rejected charges of 'dictatorship' over Catholic Action and held his ground.¹⁴ At the next Episcopal Committee meeting, however, Simonds had ANSCA'S co-ordinating role reduced to an advisory one, with final authority lying with the bishop in charge of each movement.¹⁵

Having secured the independence of the YCW from Santamaria's Movement (CSSM) and ANSCA, the friction between Lombard and Santamaria did not lessen. There was no great difference about current Catholic ideology in general. The YCW shared many of the ANSCA ideas, and was also concerned about communism, but only in the first half of 1944 did it run a national enquiry on communism, and while encouraging members to belong to their unions, only half in fact did so. The YCW saw communism as one urgent issue among others, and did not give it its top priority as did the CSSM.

Lombard and other Catholic Action chaplains strongly objected to Santamaria's dual position as head of Catholic Action from late 1945 and of the political CSSM, and his repeated efforts to co-opt the resources of Catholic Action into the anti-communist fight. In addition, the YCW

method encouraged the independence of workers and did not agree with the Leninist model of the CSSM under tight centralised control.

Sharing the same building, the conflict between two views of Catholic Action continued. Santamaria wrote to Mannix on 28 November 1948 offering to resign. He thought the approach of individual charity supported by Fr Charlie Mayne, Ken Mitchell and others doomed to failure; he argued for reform of institutions, with 'large scale action on legislative, political, economic and cultural lines'. Santamaria wanted YCW, the National Catholic Girls Movement (NCGM) and the Melbourne Secretariat of Catholic Action moved to another building, and that Mannix personally direct the secretaries and chaplains to follow ANSCA policy.¹⁶

However, Mannix did not move against Lombard, and could not do so against Simonds. The Episcopal Committee in March 1949 reiterated ANSCA's 'final authority in all that pertains to the finances and the administration of all the Movements'.¹⁷ Santamaria's definitive move was to have the bishops approve a special statement in early 1950, *Catholic Action in Australia*,¹⁸ demanding the allegiance of all Catholics to Catholic Action and reinforcing the authority of ANSCA over the Movements. While excluding party politics, Catholic Action was not just concerned with individual apostolates, but concerned to create social and cultural forces favourable to Christianity. One of its objectives was to prepare apostles for the work in trade unions and in rural reform especially.¹⁹

Meanwhile, in September 1949 Lombard had gone to England and Europe as a ship migrant chaplain at government expense to expedite the dispatch of young British migrants to Australia. On 17 March 1950 he secured government agreement for the migrants to come to Australia. Over the five years till January 1955, YCW was to bring out and help settle 150 migrants, especially through their migrant hostel at Hawthorn.²⁰ While in Europe, Lombard investigated the YCW in England, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, and met Cardijn and other YCW leaders. This visit confirmed his view that the Australian YCW had made the right decision to try to influence the mass of workers and not just the leaders.²¹

Lombard in 1950 objected to Simonds to reports that Santamaria wanted to appoint either WE Crowe or John Maynes to be assistant secretary of ANSCA, and instead suggested the YCW's Ted Long for the position.

The YCW especially resented the CSSM getting the lion's share of Church funds. The priests' committee stated in mid-1952 that while the national Catholic Action movements received only £250 each, £7000 went to the CSSM. While entire Catholic Action in Australia received

only £5000, part of even this subsidised the CSSM because it paid Santamaria's salary. The CSSM had expanded its staff to 30 full-time people at 252 Swanston Street, but YCW and the NCGM had to cut their staff in half and reduce salaries to the minimum. Moreover, three priests worked full-time for the CSSM, and Catholics had the impression that the CSSM had superseded Catholic Action. Simonds put the YCW case to the bishops who increased funding for 1953 to £500.²²

The priests' committee in 1952 also objected to the Movement attempting to conquer political parties and its general political activities which were rousing sectarianism against Catholic Action.

Santamaria complained to Mannix in November 1952 about the 'process of attrition' against the Movement and the hostility of YCW which had hindered CSSM recruitment.²³

Amid mounting acrimony in the Catholic Action movements, in October 1953 the Catholic Action chaplains asked the bishops to separate the CSSM from Catholic Action. Under increasing pressure and an increasingly public conflict with the Catholic Action movements, Santamaria proposed the separation of his Movement from Catholic Action, but he would remain secretary of the National Catholic Rural Movement and retain control over the annual social justice statements.²⁴

Lombard was irate at Santamaria's letter impugning his obedience to the bishops, and strongly contested his arguments.²⁵ The Episcopal Committee for Catholic Action itself divided bitterly on the issue, Mannix, Henschke and O'Collins wanting to maintain the current arrangement, and Simonds, Beovich, Toohey and presumably Duhig were opposed. Mannix refused to allow a motion separating the two organisations, to the intense dissatisfaction of Simonds.²⁶ Simonds made public his dissent at Archbishop Eris O'Brien's installation in Canberra/Goulburn, when he said in his address that O'Brien would 'set his face sternly against any attempt to involve the Church in underground political intrigue.'²⁷

The annual meeting of the bishops on 28–29 April 1954 was finally forced to act on the disputes within Catholic Action. Santamaria argued his case strongly, modifying slightly his 'Religious apostolate and political action' speech, arguing that the Movement may have pioneered a new method of Catholic political organisation for other democracies.²⁸ However, the bishops ruled against Santamaria, who rescued as much as he could by separating the youth movements but not the National Catholic Rural Movement or the social justice statements. In March 1954, the CSSM offices moved from ANSCA to Gertrude Street Fitzroy, and in April 1954 ANSCA closed down.

In 1954 Lombard for health reasons retired as YCW chaplain. However, at his farewell from YCW, the diocesan seminarians booed him and his close friend and deputy leader of the Australian Labor Party; Arthur Calwell, who was also speaking of Lombard's contribution.²⁹ Lombard was appointed parish priest of Clayton in January 1955,³⁰ a parish of 1800 families. He worked energetically to develop a lively community and build thirteen classrooms, a hall and additions to the convent, a presbytery and a church.³¹

Lombard suffered a severe heart attack in 1960, and remained in hospital from March to December 1960 only to be totally invalided for the next seven years. He died of a stroke at Clayton on 28 July 1967 at the age of 56, just three days after his hero Cardijn died in Belgium. Lombard was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery.

Dedicated to young workers and middle-class youth, Lombard's primary emphasis was on the active and intelligent practice of Catholicism. He was tough, determined and strong willed, and some found him authoritarian and difficult to work with; but most admired his manly example of personal discipline and dedication. Critics thought he gave too much emphasis to sport, but it proved an effective way to enthuse and interest youth. Personally he was very frugal and a humble man despite the limelight. According to Bishop John Kelly, 'he under-estimated his own very considerable, intellectual abilities', but compensated for this by his remarkable leadership abilities.³²

Note on sources

Most of the YCW records have been lost, but are summarised in David Kehoe's draft history of the YCW in Melbourne (1982–83). Records consulted: the YCW records at Phillip Island, as also the Melbourne Archdiocesan Archives (MAA). Much more detail on the YCW and the CSSM is contained in my *Crusade or Conspiracy: Catholics and the Anti-communist Struggle in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001).

Interviewees: Fr Lombard's only remaining sibling, his sister, Lena Murphy; YCW workers Frank McCann and Ted Long; Fr Lombard's housekeeper, Mrs Winifred McCusker; Lombard's curate at Collingwood, Fr Jack Brosnan; and colleagues Fr Charlie McCann (Templestowe, Vic.) and Fr Kevin Toomey (retired, Mt Eliza Vic.).

The following agreed to read the draft this article on Lombard for comment: Frs Toomey, Brosnan and Charlie McCann; Ted Long and Frank McCann; and St Helen Lombard (Frank's niece).

Endnotes

- 1 David Kehoe, Draft history of the YCW in Melbourne, Ch. 4: 'A Priest', Melbourne YCW archives, pp. 1–3.
- 2 The JOC were the French initials for the YCW, Young Christian Workers' Movement in English. The members were at times referred to as Jocists.
- 3 Kehoe, Draft History, 'Military Service', pp. 64ff.
- 4 Kehoe, Draft History, Ch. 4: 'A Priest', p. 90.
- 5 Kehoe, Ch. 7: 'To educate, serve and represent: the family', pp. 46–7.
- 6 Ted Long, *Helping each other through co-operatives*, Melbourne: ACTS pamphlet, 10 January 1962, pp. 5–6.
- 7 Santamaria to Simonds, 28 June 1944.
- 8 David Kehoe, Draft history of the YCW, Ch. 8: 'Work', p. 67.
- 9 Simonds to Santamaria, 29 March 1946.
- 10 Minutes of the seventh meeting of the Episcopal Committee on Catholic Action, Melbourne, 29 April 1946.
- 11 Gerard Henderson, *Mr Santamaria and the bishops* (Sydney: Studies in the Christian Movement, 1982), p. 31.
- 12 Santamaria to Mannix, 1 October 1946.
- 13 Minutes of the Episcopal Committee on Catholic Action, eighth meeting, 24 October 1946.
- 14 Andrew Campbell, *Politics as a vocation: a critical examination of BA Santamaria and the politics of commitment 1936–57*, PhD, School of Social Sciences, Deakin University, 1989, p. 190.
- 15 Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix*, pp. 195–6.
- 16 Santamaria to Mannix, 28 November 1948.
- 17 Minutes of the thirteenth meeting of the Episcopal Committee on Catholic Action, 15 March 1949.
- 18 *Catholic Action in Australia: official statement of the archbishops and bishops of Australia associated in the national organisation of Catholic Action* [Melbourne, 1950], p. 3.
- 19 *Catholic Action in Australia*, 18.
- 20 Kehoe, Ch. 10: 'A new Australia and a new world', pp. 9–10.
- 21 Kehoe, Ch. 8: 'Work', p. 3.
- 22 Kehoe, 'Military Service', p. 74.
- 23 Santamaria to Mannix, 11 December 1952.

- 24 Santamaria to Episcopal Committee, [n.d.] in YCW file, MAA.
- 25 Lombard to Episcopal Committee, [before 17 November 1953], in YCW file, MAA.
- 26 Minutes of the 20th meeting of the Episcopal Committee on Catholic Action, 17 November 1953, MAA.
- 27 *Catholic weekly*, 7 January 1954, p. 3.
- 28 [Santamaria], Observations on the principles of action of the Organisation, April 1954.
- 29 Bruce Duncan, Interview with Bill Cassidy, YCW youth camp, Phillip Island, 5 July 1995.
- 30 EJ Long, 'Father Lombard's contribution to the Church in Australia', *Advocate*, 17 August 1967.
- 31 JJ McLean, 'Fr Lombard looks forward to "great day"', *Advocate*, undated cutting, after May 1967.
- 32 Bishop Kelly [Melbourne], Comments on David Kehoe's draft history of the YCW, 6 May 1984, in YCW papers, Phillip Island.



Fr Lombard (left), Cardinal Cardijn (right), 1957
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