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The Clerical Response to a Totalitarian Political Religion: La Civiltà Cattolica and Italian Fascism

Abstract
This article offers a close reading of the discourse on Italian fascism within the authoritative Italian Jesuit periodical La Civiltà Cattolica. The author shows that, when confronted with the fascist movement, La Civiltà Cattolica made no moves to oppose the regime, instead positioning itself so as to negotiate with and accommodate the fascist rhetoric. This decision was driven in part by the close alignment between the politics of Catholicism and fascism, and further fostered by the absence of a viable alternative political power.

The article also illustrates the manner in which Catholic intellectuals intuitively perceived some aspects of fascist totalitarianism and the ‘sacralization of politics’ as threatening, particularly when confronted with manifestations of what was termed ‘political heresy’, along with certain features of fascist associationalism. However, despite their concerns no explicit rupture between Church and regime ever eventuated; on the contrary, some accounts imply an intended merger, however unstable it may have proven, between the ‘religious’ and ‘totalitarian’ goals of both parties.

Keywords: Catholicism, fascism, Italy, Jesuits, political religion, totalitarianism

The Catholic Church has always maintained a strong political hold on Italian society. For centuries, that grip was wielded directly by means of the Church’s domination over the Papal States. However, after losing that supremacy to the newly established Italian nation in the period 1861–70, the Church instead established a strategic network within existing and new associations, endeavouring to compensate for its loss of temporal power. Particularly from the commencement of the Pontificate of Benedict XV in 1914, and even more so with the elevation of the Archbishop of Milan, Achille Ratti, to the role of Pope Pius XI in 1922, the Church increasingly favoured this ‘alternative’

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form of Catholic politics. Correspondingly, Catholic Action gained greater importance, stimulated further from 1920 onwards by the Vatican’s reticence with regard to the Catholic Partito Popolare Italiano.

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pius XI was confronted with a new, fierce player in the Italian political arena: Mussolini’s fascist movement and party, which was developing an increasingly ‘totalitarian’ interest in society, and a tendency towards ‘sacralizing’ its politics. As such, the fascist regime, which grew ever more present and powerful, can be seen as showcasing a partially shared approach to obtaining popular consensus. It is the echo of this very situation that this essay now traces out in the pages of one of the main Catholic periodicals during the ventennio fascista: the Jesuit La Civiltà Cattolica (henceforth ‘LCC’), and this most specifically in relation to the following questions: what was the clerical reaction to Italian politics in general, and, more particularly, to the politics of fascism; what stance did the journal’s discourse assume regarding one of the central myths of the fascist sacralization of politics, that of Italianism (italianità) and, reaching back yet further, ‘Romanness’ or romanità; what was LCC’s view on a major aspect of fascist totalitarianism: that is, its development of an all-pervasive associational network? What was the Jesuits’ reaction toward what was arguably the dominant feature of the fascist sacralization of politics, its ‘heretical’ cult of the duce and its elevation of the state to an ultimate supremacy, the latter summarized in the notion of ‘statolatry’? Did the Jesuits define Italian fascism as totalitarianism and as a form of political religion, and if so, what kind of understanding of these phenomena do their writings reflect? Regarding all of the above-mentioned aspects, was the predominant attitude one of criticism or of compromise, or did LCC utilize a number of different approaches? Finally, what contribution can the use of the concepts of political religion (or its less explicit variant ‘sacralization of politics’) and of totalitarianism offer to the study of Catholic ‘politics’ during the ventennio?

With the birth of the liberal, secular Italian State, and with the so-called ‘Roman question’ remaining unresolved for many decades, the Popes increasingly sought to reinforce the Church’s foothold in society by means of associations such as the Opera dei Congressi e Comitati cattolici and Italian Catholic Action (Azione Cattolica Italiana). These organizations can be seen as manifestations of Catholic ‘political’ intervention in civil society, situated not at the level of party politics, but at the level of structural organization of society. This interest became explicitly manifest in the field of professional organization after the publication of the Papal encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891). Subsequently, the experience of the first world war brought about a growing need for change and spiritual renewal, with many a Catholic expressing their longing for the ‘re-christianization’ of the nationalized Italian masses; for a new Christian order.\(^2\) In response, the Vatican intensified its outlined ‘political’ interest in

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Italian society, which led, among other things, to a reinvigoration of Catholic Action under Pope Benedict XV (1914–22).

Halfway through Benedict’s pontificate, these efforts were strengthened by the Pope’s endorsement of the newly created Catholic (lay) political party, the Partito Popolare Italiano, founded by Don Luigi Sturzo in 1918. However, this foray into politics at the party level was short-lived: only two years later, the Vatican withdrew its support for the party, mainly because it had resisted Vatican demands that it form an alliance with moderate conservative liberals standing in local and general elections held in 1920 and 1921, in an apparent effort to create a political counterweight to the Socialist Party, following the chaos of the ‘Red Two Years’ from 1918 to 1920. This process continued in 1922, at the start of the Pontificate of Pius XI (1922–39), who was against the creation and development of Catholic political parties, giving preference, as had already become clear in his time as Archbishop of Milan, to the development of various forms of Catholic associationalism.

When the fascist ‘March on Rome’ took place on 28 October 1922, Pius had been in the Vatican less than a year. From the very outset, both ‘parties’ actively endeavoured to establish a modus vivendi. Whereas Mussolini saw the Church as an instrumentum regni which he simultaneously wooed – for example by introducing religious instruction into primary schools and allowing the display of crucifixes in public spaces – and intimidated – see below for the regime’s attacks on Catholic Action – the Pope adopted a more Realpolitical attitude, considering fascism to be at that moment the most viable political option. In his view, and in light of the ‘lesser options’ offered by liberalism and socialism, fascism was capable of establishing the conditions seen as ideal by the Vatican for the above-mentioned ‘re-christianization of society’, such as social order and discipline, but most particularly the establishment of an anti-liberal and anti-socialist, authoritarian and hierarchical State.

As noted, Pius XI piloted the Church’s move towards intervention in civil society at an organizational level. When viewed in relation to the project of ‘re-christianization’ of society, the Church’s approach could be termed as

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3 On Benedict’s abandonment of the Partito Popolare, see John Pollard, Catholicism in Modern Italy (London and New York 2008), 79.
5 Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni (Turin 1948), 594.
6 Cf. Pollard, Catholicism, op. cit., 84; and Giovanni Miccoli, Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione: Studi sul rapporto chiesa-società nell’età contemporanea (Casale Monferrato 1985), 120.
7 This idea of a ‘Catholic restoration’ of society (Pietro Scoppola, ‘Considerazioni conclusive’, in Paolo Pecorari (ed.), Chiesa, Azione Cattolica e fascismo nell’Italia settentrionale durante il pontificato di Pio XI (1922–1939) (Milan 1979), 1275 (all translations from Italian are our own)) has even led some scholars to define the phenomenon of ‘clerical fascism’, as a tendency, inherent to (a minority of) Catholics, to see in the fascist regime a means to perpetrate the proposed reconquest of society by a nationalized, ‘fascistized’ Catholicism. On the phenomenon of ‘clerical fascism’, see Roger Griffin, The “Holy Storm”: “Clerical Fascism” through the Lens of Modernism, Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 8(2) (2007), 213–27; and John Pollard,
a ‘total’,\(^8\) ‘totalizing’ or even (sociologically and psychologically) ‘totalitarian’\(^9\) drive. The Pope characterized the Church’s ambitions in similar terms,\(^10\) endeavouring to forge the latter into an institution that pursued its goals ‘combattively’, in the name of Jesus Christ ‘the King’ (Cristo Re: cf. the Papal encyclical Quas Primas, 1925).\(^11\) In this context, the Vatican’s gradual abandonment of the Partito Popolare can also be seen as a ‘tactical’ choice not to compromise itself in the game of party politics, furthered by the fact that the Partito Popolare adopted an outspokenly anti-fascist stance.\(^12\)

For the duration of the ventennio, the competing institutions of fascism and Catholicism developed a mutual relationship of ‘give-and-take’, which led eventually to the Conciliazione of 1929, a pact which comprised not only the Lateran Treaty (essentially a politico-territorial deal between two nations), but also a ‘Concordat’ which specified the civil rights and duties of both parties. Although the actual implementation of these agreements was to prove somewhat problematic (see below), the two parties never experienced a radical rift or schism, managing to maintain a troubled yet reasonably stable relationship.

Such Catholic ‘politics’ have recently been scrutinized in relation to the ‘totalitarian’ and also somewhat ‘religious’ core attributed to Mussolini’s movement.\(^13\) The focus maintained by Pius XI on projects such as Catholic Action and the intended re-christianization of Italian society could be seen as fostered and intensified by the interest in the organization of civil life shared between Church and regime. It seems that the regime became both ally and competitor to the Vatican in the social field, particularly through the creation of leisure and professional organizations, and more generally through the increasingly all-invading presence of the fascist party – arguably the prime catalyst of fascist totalitarianism (see below). In addition to this, the regime also conveyed

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\(^11\) On this idea of a ‘combative’ Church, see De Giorgi, ‘Linguaggi militari’, op. cit. In this context, as well as for an analysis of the mentioned project of a ‘reconquest’ or of a ‘re-christianization’ of Italian society, see Emma Fattorini, \textit{Pio XI, Hitler e Mussolini} (Turin 2007), 20–4.


a highly ethereal discourse on fascist reality, developing an almost ‘cultic’ way of functioning, both socially and politically, while simultaneously promoting various ‘myths’ touted as fresh, vitalizing realities for the new, fascist Italy. Fascism has thus been identified by a number of scholars as a form of ‘political religion’, linked closely to fascist ‘totalitarianism’. Hence, before embarking on our analysis of LCC, we will first turn our attention to these two concepts.14

Scholars have increasingly focused on Italian fascism’s reliance upon the development and diffusion of a specific discourse that is seen as simultaneously constituting and reproducing fascist reality. Subsequently, a series of myths central to the ideology of Italian fascism has been identified. Along with the myth of regenerative, cathartic violence, and linked to it, the myth of war (seen as a purifying, vitalizing experience for the nation),15 these also included the ‘palingenetic’ myth of the Italian nation,16 inspired and underpinned by the purported heritage of the ancient Roman past, a concept referred to as romanità (see below). This myth of the Italian nation led in turn to the development of an ideal concept of a fascist ‘new man’, part of a nation surrounded by the fascist ‘new State’17 and led by the duce. Eventually, the duce himself became the object of a myth which, during the 1930s, grew in status until it began to overshadow even fascism itself.18

Whereas such a ‘mythical drive’ indicates a religious or at least sacral essence, a more ‘tangible’ indication of the religiosity of the fascist movement is its aesthetic, ‘cultic’ predisposition. This became evident in the development of the stile fascista, a new symbolic language which included elements such as the ‘Roman salute’, the fascist lictors, a specific type of architecture which led to a style christened stile littorio or ‘lictor style’, the founding of città nuove or new towns (Littoria, Sabaudia,...),19 urbanistic policies on a colossal scale and finally, in a broad and general sense, a vision of the Italian people, united in the piazza, as active participants in fascism’s ‘aestheticization’

14 On the position of the Vatican, and in general of Catholics, in Italy in the period 1815–1945, see Pollard, Catholicism, op. cit., 6–107. See also Guido Formigoni, L’Italia dei cattolici: Fede e nazione dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica (Bologna 1998).

15 In this context, see Giuseppe Conti, ‘Il mito della “nazione armata”’, Storia contemporanea 21 (1990), 1149–95.

16 In this respect, see Emilio Gentile, La grande Italia: Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo (Milan 1997). See also Roger Griffin, ‘Il nucleo palingenetico dell’ideologia del “fascismo generico”’, in Alessandro Campi (ed.), Che cos’è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerca (Rome 2003), 97–122.

17 On the Stato nuovo, see Emilio Gentile, Il mito dello stato nuovo dall’antigiolittismo al fascismo (Rome and Bari 1982).


of politics. These factors all contributed to the conception of a microcosmic ‘melodrama’ in which social life itself became, in a sense, a form of artistic creation, a Gesamtkunstwerk that simultaneously replicated and promoted the new fascist reality.

Many of the above aspects led to the conceptualization of Italian fascism, along with other ‘totalitarian’ movements and regimes including nazism and the Soviet Union, as ‘political religions’. In an early paper dealing with this subject, Emilio Gentile proposed that this phenomenon centred essentially around a process of state ‘sacralization’, or what could be defined as a form of ‘statolatry’, and that its goal was the national integration or ‘nationalization’ of the Italian masses, a process whose roots can be located in the French Revolution. Gentile elaborated upon these theses in his groundbreaking study Il culto del litorio, offering an extensive analysis both of the various myths that underpinned the fascist determination to sacralize politics, and the aesthetic means by which the ‘cult’ of fascism was promulgated.

In 2004, Gentile further refined his understanding, arriving at the definition of the phenomenon of ‘political religion’ as ‘a type of religion which sacralizes an ideology, a movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth, considering it the primary and indisputable source of the meaning and the ultimate aim of human existence on earth’. In other words, a form of religion that lacks the central role of a transcendent deity, whose space is instead occupied by a ‘secular entity’, that is, the new, and in the case of Italy fascist, state. For Gentile, the idea of political religion should not be used as an ‘essentialist’ definition of fascism; rather, this concept should be integrated into a

24 Emilio Gentile, Il culto del litorio (Rome and Bari 1993). This study was published in English as The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy (Cambridge 1996).
combination of interrelated phenomena, leading, for example, to the following result:

fascism is a modern political phenomenon, which is nationalistic and revolutionary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist, organised in the form of a militia-party, with a totalitarian conception of politics and the State [see below], with an ideology based on myth; virile and anti-hedonistic, it is sacralised in a political religion affirming the absolute primacy of the nation understood as an ethnically homogeneous organic community, hierarchically organised into a corporative state, with a bellicose mission to achieve grandeur, power and conquest with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and a new civilisation.26

In other words, a reading of Italian fascism should uncover an identity more complex than the single phenomenon of political religion, and it is precisely such an exclusivist, unilateral reading which has led to intense debate. In this context, it seems that criticism of the theory of political religion has primarily been based on two central arguments: (a) the fact that the term ‘religion’ is used to describe a form of sacralization that does not involve the veneration of a transcendent deity; and (b) the question as to whether this phenomenon requires a community of ‘believers’ in order to exist. In our opinion, the validity of such objections depends on (a) the understanding of the concept of religion, and (b) the nature of one’s ‘reading’ of Gentile’s theses.

The former issue is perhaps the most simple to address, as all depends on whether one opts for an ‘essentialist’ or functionalist, durkheimian understanding of the concept of religion.27 Indeed, if one opines that the involvement of some deity is a necessary condition to be able to speak of religion, then the use of the term ‘political religion’ should be altogether abandoned.28 However, for all its conceptual ‘correctness’, such a process does not alter much, as we are still left with the reality of fascism’s tendency to ‘sacralize politics’; indeed, abandoning the concept of ‘political religion’ for this reason would add up to not much more than a ‘formal makeover’, which leaves the essence of Gentile’s thesis intact.

Concerning the second question, the existence of a ‘community of believers’, again much depends on the value one attaches to the latter aspect: if it is concluded that an analysis of fascism as a ‘political religion’ is conditional upon fascism being able to count on the unconditional support and heartfelt dedication of a large part of the population, then this idea should rightfully be

28 This, for example, seems to be the opinion of Richard J. Evans who, in his introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Contemporary History dedicated to Richard Steigmann-Gall’s The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919–1945 (Cambridge 2003), states that ‘religion is nothing unless it involves a belief in the supernatural and in an eternal, unchanging God or gods’: Richard J. Evans, ‘Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate’, Journal of Contemporary History 42(1) (2007), 6.
questioned and possibly abandoned, as there is no real way of knowing up to what point Italians actually ‘believed’ in fascism. However, even if one can, and indeed should, investigate to which degree people actually ‘believed’, and even if it would turn out that only very few actually did, in our opinion such a quantitative argument cannot constitute a valid argument to define or determine a qualitative category such as religiosity.

Hence, in this study we attribute a specific value to the notion of ‘political religion’ or, alternatively, of fascism’s ‘sacralization of politics’, even if only as a heuristic tool or device. In doing so, we are fully aware that it can be connected to a series of analytical concepts in company with which it is able to constitute a ‘cluster’ of interconnected conceptual notions: palingenesis, revitalization movement, revolution, new man, new state, anthropological revolution, totalitarianism, etcetera.

Another central element of fascist activism was the regime’s reliance on a single-party system in its quest for a total ‘ politicization’ of existence and the resulting conquest of society. The Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), founded in 1921, was responsible for large-scale fascist interventions in civil life at the level of leisure and professional associations, and was also heavily involved in educational and health issues. A study of the extensive analyses of the PNF identifies it as a militia-party which perpetrated the regime’s attempts at a ‘total’ takeover of society. True to its squadrista origins, the militia-party always to some extent acted as though fascism was an ‘army on the march’. The ultimate goal of fascism was the forging of a nation comprised of ‘new men’ living within a ‘new state’: as Mussolini himself famously declared, ‘everything within the State, nothing outside of the State, nothing against the State’.

29 This is one of the elements which Roger Eatwell put forward in a 2003 essay on the concept of political religion, retaining however a certain value of the concept as a heuristic tool: Roger Eatwell, ‘Reflections on Fascism and Religion’, Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 4(3) (2003), 147, 162. On the heuristic value of the concept of political religion, see also below.


The objective of attaining a ‘totalitarian’ control over civil life was pursued mainly by means of intervention in society’s associational structure – see, for example, organizations such as the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* and the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* – whereas another powerful means of increasing the regime’s stronghold on society was the device of the manipulation of time: with the introduction of national holidays such as 21 April, the *Natale di Roma* or ‘Birthday’ of Rome; the annual celebration of the March on Rome on 28 October; and the addition of the year of the *era fascista* (which began the year of the March on Rome) to the traditional Christian calendar year, active attempts were even made to ‘fascisticize’ the nation’s very experience of time, with the fascists aiming at ‘naturalizing’ fascist discourse and inserting it into the nation’s identity. Such a ‘totalizing’, ‘totalitarian’ drive was inherent to fascism from its early beginnings as *squadrismo*, and it survived and thrived throughout the *ventennio*, organized and managed by the activist militia-party, and fed by the regime’s reliance upon a form of secular, political religion, binding Italians together in a solid, monolithical unit, indeed in a *fascio* as it was initially conceived.

A ‘radical transformation of social and economic milieus’ was being attempted, and this by a system that could be characterized as

> an experiment in political domination undertaken by a revolutionary movement, with an integralist conception of politics, that aspires toward a monopoly of power and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new State based on a single-party regime, with the chief objective of conquering society; that is, it seeks the subordination, integration and homogenisation of the governed on the basis of the integral politicisation of existence, whether collective or individual, interpreted according to the categories, myths and values of a palingenetic ideology, institutionalised in the form of a political religion, that aims to shape the individual and the masses through an anthropological revolution in order to regenerate the human being and create the new man, who is dedicated in body and soul to the realisation of the revolutionary and imperialistic policies of the totalitarian party, whose ultimate goal is to create a new civilisation beyond the Nation-State.

As lengthy and complex as this definition of fascist totalitarianism might seem, it is of great value for the purpose of this study, in that it does not approach the concept as something merely ‘static’, but rather as a collection of interacting, ‘synergic’ characteristics, each intimately intertwined. In other words, this definition offers a ‘dynamic’ description of Italian fascism, which is characterized as an ‘experiment’ in totalitarian rule – a characterization that in our opinion can also to some extent be applied to its ‘religious’ ambitions – and not as a ‘platonic’, ideal and full realization of a supposed ‘totalitarian model’. The Catholic response to this ‘totalitarian’ fascist interest in Italian society will be investigated in the following analysis of the pages of *LCC*. However, before

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commencing this process, first we need an overview of the nature and function of this authoritative journal.

The Jesuit journal LCC was founded in 1850 by Father Carlo Maria Curci, as a direct response to the then urgent need to maintain and if possible expand Catholic religious dominance across the Italian peninsula and, more generally, across the greater European continent. Confronted with the growing threat of liberal anti-clericalism, the Church actively sought to utilize ‘modern’ media such as the press in order to diffuse its message, as is further evidenced in 1861 by the foundation of the newspaper L’Osservatore Romano, which was subsequently acquired by the Vatican, coming to act as the unofficial voice of the Pope. In addition, the creation of LCC can also be linked to our earlier observations regarding the Vatican’s ‘political’ interest in Italian society since the period of Italian national unification known as the Risorgimento (1815–70); one could assert that the journal was conceived primarily as a type of Catholic ‘think tank’, as a tool used to sustain Catholic efforts to ‘(re-)conquer’ Italian society after losing not only significant temporal power (the Papal States), but also control over civil issues such as education and marriage, a need which became all the more urgent once the Sinistra came to power in 1876.36

From its very foundation, LCC was linked closely to the Papal court. Tellingly, the journal owes its very existence, apart from the zealously of Curci, to Pope Pius IX, whereas the head of the Jesuit order, Jean Philippe Roothaan, seemed reluctant to lend his support. Reporting to the Pope on a regular basis, LCC’s ‘college of writers’ was widely regarded as an ‘unofficial spokesperson’ for the Holy Father (cf. also L’Osservatore Romano), a premise which in some cases also counted for individual contributors,37 all members of the Jesuit order. The Superior General of the order allowed all to function in relative autonomy; each contributing member had attained, after years of scholarship, a high degree of specialization in some particular field of study. With their appointment to the journal being termed full-time, the Fathers of LCC were able to dedicate the majority of their time to editorial activities. They did so following a regime of rigid discipline, working in relative solitude, with the exception of two-weekly gatherings during which the entire college discussed all contributions. These ‘brainstorming sessions’ guaranteed a certain degree of homogeneity, and they are indicative of the intention to ‘speak’ with one, cohesive ‘voice’. Supporting this observation, all articles were published anonymously, at least until the end of the 1920s.

As one of a few Italian Catholic publications with very intimate ties to the Holy See, close scrutiny of LCC is of particular value to anyone wishing for a

36 For an incisive analysis of the general context, see the chapters ‘Catholicism and the Liberal revolution (1815–70)’ and ‘The Catholic recovery’ in Pollard, Catholicism, op. cit., 6–48.
37 This has notably been the case with Father Antonio Messineo, who became part of the journal’s college of writers in 1932 and whom we will encounter further on in our study. Cf. Giorgio Campanini, ‘Messineo, Antonio’, in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini (eds), Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia 1860–1980, vol. II, I protagonisti (Casale Monferrato 1982), 371.
better understanding of Papal politics from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. Not only did this periodical frequently reproduce and comment upon speeches and encyclicals delivered by a succession of Popes; it also closely followed societal tendencies that it considered to be of relevance to (Italian) Catholics. Hence in the following pages we submit a study of the way in which LCC positioned itself in the political and societal debate during the ventennio fascista, when the Church saw itself surrounded by an Italian nation increasingly dominated by a party, and eventually a regime, that developed a totalitarian state structure, showing an increasing tendency to ‘sacralize’ politics.38

Following the example set by the Vatican, LCC never explicitly endorsed a single political party, not even the Catholic Partito Popolare Italiano. From its very conception, the journal showed a mainly positive regard for the party,39 but accompanied this attitude with a certain reserve that increased over time. Tellingly, although the Partito Popolare enjoyed some success in the 1919 general elections, LCC’s concern evidenced more interest in the results of the socialists.40 Following the Vatican’s lead, the journal seems to have preferred to support and encourage intervention on the social level, by means of such movements as, for example, Catholic Action, to any direct involvement in the purely political field.


In this context, in an article published in 1920, the subject of Catholic Action was given absolute priority over the Partito Popolare, in light of the necessity of an ‘intellectual restoration, which is above all moral and religious, of modern society’.41 a statement that prefigures the previously mentioned interest, particularly manifested by Pius XI, in the Catholic ‘re-conquering’ of Italian society. Support for the Partito Popolare was always highly tempered, with LCC refraining from openly and one-sidedly supporting the party, pointing out that if the Vatican were to openly endorse any political party, it would inevitably lead the Vatican to compromise itself in the dangerous game of party politics.42 Pius XI’s ‘political’ opinions clearly inspired this line of thinking,43 especially after the publication of the Papal encyclical Ubi arcano in December 1922. The political fate of the Partito Popolare had by now been practically sealed, at least as far as the Vatican and LCC were concerned. What can arguably be termed the final blow to the Partito was given shortly after the Matteotti murder, in a piece published in LCC in which fascism is depicted as some sort of effective antidote to socialism, with which political faction the popolari would inevitably have had to collaborate in case of a victory over fascism: LCC urged people to support the fascist regime, suggesting that it was the best available option for maintaining order and peace in Italian society.44

Although LCC very quickly came to treat the fascist movement with the utmost caution, initially, albeit very briefly, it was treated as if on a par with other political factions, especially in the months preceding the fascist March on Rome; in this period, LCC remained steadfastly neutral, plainly refraining from taking political sides, adhering to the spirit of the Pope’s statement that religion ‘must be the basis of legislation, the force of the social organism, the principle regulating human actions’,45 while also adhering to the policy of obedience to the ‘powers that be’.46 However, primarily because of the predominant atmosphere of uncertainty regarding which party would prevail in the current climate of brutality, violent strikes and the accompanying threat of (fascist as well as socialist) revolution – all of which, to the Church, equalled violence and chaos – the journal maintained its highly sceptical view of all political factions, both right and left. However, because socialism and communism had traditionally been the Church’s most outspoken political foes, the main articles containing statements of a political nature published within this period harshly condemned (socialist) strikes.47 Indeed, leftist

41 Anonymous, ‘“Unione popolare” e “Partito popolare” in Italia’, LCC, I (1920), 301.
46 Cf. Anonymous, ‘Crisi di Stato e crisi di autorità’, LCC, IV (1922), 204.
47 Cf. Anonymous, ‘Lo sciopero secondo la morale cattolica’, LCC, I (1922), 122: ‘a general strike can never be compatible with basic principles of Christian charity’. The studies focusing
ideologies were depicted as evil, and sometimes linked with the journal’s traditional antisemitic discourse.\(^{48}\)

As a consequence of the Church’s interest in the organization of civil life (see above), and with the demise of the liberal, laic state drawing near, much attention was paid to the dangers and limits of state intervention, notably in the field of education and culture. As is evidenced later in this study, some of \(LCC\)'s more explicit political opinions were voiced in articles concerning such matters. Because liberalism had become the primary target, it was precisely the concept of liberty, or more particularly the suppression of the Catholic interpretation of this concept, that was used as a weapon against the laic, liberal school system;\(^{49}\) however, fascism was not (yet) portrayed as offering a particularly better option, because the current movement was perceived as being

the result of the contradictory dividedness of Italians, a powerless last ditch attempt of old liberalism, of freemasons, farmers, rich industrials, journalists, dishonest politicians and other such people. They are, we repeat, the people we hold mainly responsible for the present religious and moral perversion of society.\(^{50}\)

This discourse evolved rapidly once the March on Rome took place, on 28 October 1922. In the very first article dedicated exclusively to fascism following the March, the anonymous author focused on the weaknesses of the liberals, and more particularly on those of the socialists; also, while initially referring to the ‘mussolinian genius’,\(^{51}\) he expressed no outright positive or negative opinion. From this moment on, because it was yet unclear as to the way in which the new ruler would direct, and hopefully moderate, his revolutionary ambitions, prudence remained the recommended attitude.\(^{52}\)

However, some months later the tone shifted quite radically, with the journal now referring to what it termed fascism’s ‘great ideal virtue and its elevated sense of the nation’.\(^{53}\) With his movement having proved an effective


48 This, for example, depicted Jews as people coming ‘from the worst parts of the ghettos that are scattered everywhere along the Russian borders, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian people: and from there, carrying all sorts of pestiferous infections, they have taken with them all the insanities of the most ardent bolshevist communism’: Anonymous, ‘Il Sionismo dinanzi all’opinione dei non ebrei’, \(LCC\), III (1922), 129. See also Anonymous, ‘La rivoluzione mondiale e gli ebrei’, \(LCC\), IV (1922), 121. On the journal’s antisemitic discourse, see Taradel and Raggi, \(La segregazione amichevole\), op. cit.; Intrieri, ‘La polemica sul razzismo nel 1938’, op. cit.; as well as Nelis, ‘Negotiating the Italian Self’, op. cit.; and Lebovitch Dahl, ‘The Role of the Roman Catholic Church’, op. cit.

49 Cf. for example Anonymous, ‘“Funzione educativa” e “carattere etico” dello Stato’, \(LCC\), III (1922), 217–29.


51 Anonymous, ‘La rivoluzione fascista’, \(LCC\), IV (1922), 511.


weapon against the Church’s old liberal enemies, and although a certain degree of prudence remained necessary, Mussolini was henceforth promoted as being a ‘breath of fresh air’, a man writing, and thinking, in a somewhat ‘crude style, but one of sound sincerity, and a rather uncommon form of lucidity’. Even though fascism was still one of the ‘new filiations of liberalism’, and while its continuing dependency on violence was being explicitly condemned, LCC urged that the new government be obeyed with ‘docile obedience’, a statement motivated by the preoccupation to avoid something ‘worse’, i.e. a liberal or socialist alternative. In this all but uncommon Realpolitik (see above, Pius XI), fascism should not be judged by its ‘internal intentions’, but rather by its realizations, or, as it was termed, ‘by the social fact’.

From 1925 onwards, and especially after the unrest following the Matteotti murder in June 1924, support for Mussolini’s maintenance of power thus became a recurrent topic, motivated by reasons similar to that outlined above, that is, a fear of ‘social dangers’ such as liberalism and bolshevism. As a consequence, it was necessary for LCC to deal with criticism regarding the ‘political’ position held by some Italian Catholics. It did so in a review article entitled *Politica e cattolicismo*, and also, somewhat more pointedly, in *Politica e azione cattolica*; while characterizing the Vatican’s position as pursuing a ‘serene impartiality’, the latter article neatly side-stepped any in-depth discussion regarding the involvement or interest of Church authorities in political life by deflecting the debate towards a discussion, or rather a dissection, of the notion of ‘politics’.

Henceforth LCC increasingly and perpetually encouraged Catholics to obey the authorities, and in 1929 a repeated accusation regarding Catholic ‘collaboration’ with the regime was dismissed as being unjustified by means of an extensive evocation of the merits of the government’s actions toward the Church, as exemplified by the recently concluded Lateran Pacts. Running parallel to a discourse on the political ‘usefulness’ of fascism as, among other

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56 Anonymous, ‘Fallimenti del liberalismo e “un futuro ordinamento costituzionale”’, *LCC*, II (1924), 98.
things, a beacon against bolshevism, the criticism of liberalism also continued unabated in the early years of the fascist dictatorship; it was sometimes linked, as had indeed been the case with bolshevism, to LCC’s traditional negative discourse concerning both Jews and freemasons. Subsequently, during the 1930s, the journal’s party-political discourse underwent no substantial change, maintaining its policy of obedience to the government as the best option for the future of the Italian nation. As we will show, aside from the relative support LCC offered the fascist movement in the purely political field, and its ongoing endorsement of fascist corporatism, it is a symbiotic notion of Catholicism and Italianism which, despite the inevitable episodes of friction, proved to be one of the major points of convergence between LCC and the fascist dominance over Italy.

In light of the mentioned project of a ‘conquest’ of Italian society, and while maintaining its traditional reservations about what it considered to be excessive and extreme forms of nationalism, LCC developed an increasingly nationalistic discourse. Parallel to what we have previously discussed concerning its discourse on politics, the journal initially developed its ideas on Italian identity in the context of contributions that dealt with education-related issues. These contributions presented a hybrid Catholic/Italian identity, resulting in a series of religiously coloured patriotic messages promoting national greatness and unity, in which the Catholic Church functioned as a factor of cohesion and direction. They promoted an ideal situation of a synthesis comprising the notion of *italianità* and the Catholic faith, intended towards reaching an ‘agreement between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, necessary and fitting for a Catholic nation such as Italy’.

The notion of *italianità* was proposed as an element that could enhance social cohesion, and repeated references to the common goal of ‘true national greatness’ were used to put pressure on the fascist regime to moderate its excessively violent outbursts. As previously mentioned, this was an object of major concern to LCC as well as to the Vatican, both before and after the March on Rome. In addition, and paralleling this tendency to emphasize the value offered by the Catholic religion to the national cause, studies were also dedicated to a number of failed efforts from the start of the Risorgimento to create a strong sense of Italian identity.

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67 Cf. Anonymous, ‘Il pericolo giudaico e gli “Amici d’Israele”’, LCC, II (1928), 343: ‘It is they [politicians and journalists in general] who have prepared and sometimes also unchained, together with the generation of the sons of Giuda, against the Catholics and the clergy, religious persecution, and that antichristian battle which was the sad outcome of the entire liberalesque and masonic motus’.
68 This position was already manifest soon after the first world war, as is for example evidenced by Anonymous, ‘Errori di nazionalismo e nuovi danni alle missioni cattoliche’, LCC, IV (1920), 443–50.
71 In this respect, see for example Anonymous, “L’unità d’Italia” e la disunione degli italiani’, op. cit.
Once the ‘revolutionary’, or in any case highly chaotic, political situation had become relatively stable, throughout the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s LCC’s promotion of the virtues inherent in some degree of nationalism continued unabated, for example in contributions such as ‘Patria e patriottismo’ and ‘Un po’ di nazionalismo per la nostra lingua’, which made a case for linguistic *italianità*. The value of nationalism was further promoted by means of in-depth discussions, as illustrated in an article written by Father Messineo, LCC’s foremost expert in political matters, concerning ‘Il concetto di nazione nella filosofia dello Stato’. At that moment, with the fascist regime increasingly emphasizing its imperialistic ambitions in the period leading up to the Ethiopian campaign, an even more outspoken concept of Italian nationalism could be developed. In this context, Father Brucculeri conveyed the following message:

Certainly, the damaging impact from the imposed sanctions will leave us with the taste of ashes and poison; but not without also offering us some advantages, the most compelling and important one of these being . . . a revitalized and reunified sense of national consciousness, intensifying our sense of political unity. The resulting renewed expression of Italian spirit . . . is considerably more valuable than anything we possess within our treasury, and more potent than a vast number of military divisions and cannons.

In the subsequent ruling climate, riding a wave of combative, roaring patriotism, articles appearing in LCC repeatedly stressed the advantages of a union between nationalism and Catholicism, as exemplified in a review of a book which deals with the necessity of a ‘fusion of nationalism and religion’, and even more so in a contribution dealing with the ‘Mostra Augustea della Romanità’, a grandiose exhibition held between 1937 and 1938, marking the bimillenary celebration of Roman emperor Augustus, which made an explicit

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74 Cf. Anonymous, ‘Un po’ di nazionalismo per la nostra lingua’, op. cit., 410: ‘clearly in Italy, when the Italian language is concerned, there is no defence of the latter, but rather a full liberty to offend it, and let it be offended; and this to such a point that the language, which we call the national language, is so to speak becoming ever more international, that is, in reality, barbaric. Against such an internationalism or barbarism we put nationalism, of which we here intend, and will try to defend, with the means given to us, the validity’.
76 A. Brucculeri, ‘Religione e patria’, LCC, IV (1935), 441. Together with his positive attitude regarding fascist corporatism (see below), it is without a doubt such writings which made John Pollard define Father Brucculeri as a ‘clerical fascist’: cf. Pollard, ‘“Clerical Fascism”’, op. cit., 433. On Father Brucculeri, see Giorgio Campanini, ‘Brucculeri, Angelo’, in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini (eds), Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia, A–L, III/1, Le figure rappresentative (Casale Monferrato 1984), 134–5; Moro, La formazione, op. cit., 491; and Sani, ‘La Civiltà Cattolica’, op. cit., 21–7.
identification between Augustan and fascist Rome.\textsuperscript{78} The Mostra Augustea made a significant contribution to the regime’s highly propagandized identification between ancient and contemporary Rome and became the focus of much media attention. The exhibition, which can be seen as an element central to the fascist ‘aestheticization of politics’ or, using Gentile’s terms, in fascism’s ‘cult of the Lictor’, was covered by \textit{LCC} by means of a grandiloquent discourse developed on the subject of national greatness and pride, based on a fusion of Italian, Catholic and Roman identities.

Father Ferrua’s article contained an unmistakable rhetorical echo of the fascist discourse regarding the regeneration of Italy, inspired by the spiritual heritage of ancient Rome, and evoked not only the fascist myth of the \textit{Stato nuovo}, but also the highly fertile myth of ‘Romanness’ or \textit{romanità}, which, as has been noted,\textsuperscript{79} at times incorporated both pagan and Christian concepts of Rome. While maintaining its insistence upon a spiritualized notion of \textit{italianità}, \textit{LCC} showed itself receptive towards this aspect of fascism’s ‘mythical thrust’, which it interpreted incisively, using even the words of Mussolini, as the insertion of a faraway past in a ‘modern’\textsuperscript{80} project of national renewal, aspiring to the achievement of an idealized future.

Using the same line of reasoning, Father Ferrua observed that evidence of the fact that we live in a new climate ... doing as the Leader wills ... is the fact that we have been able to organise and present such a perfect exposition, not merely comprised of


archaeological pieces, but of the whole of Romanness, of the world. It is highly significant that the conveniently adapted site that was chosen to house it, is that building in the Via Nazionale, which had seen, some years earlier, the exhibition of the Fascist Revolution.  

When read alongside his extensive treatment of the *Mostra Augustea*, which in itself clearly identified the links between romanità, italianità and fascism, Father Ferrua’s explicit reference to the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution strongly supports the notion that LCC had at this point succumbed completely to the myth of italianità and, also (although maintaining a determinedly non-pagan focus and having some reservations about the concept in its entirety), of romanità.

In contrast to its discourse on other aspects linked to the function of fascism as a totalitarian, political religion (such as the notion of statolatry, as to which see below), this shared agenda of the insistence upon Italian national greatness, originating from the myth of Catholic, and fascist, italianità and romanità, was maintained without any fundamental changes until the period immediately prior to the second world war. Even when the war had started, an article entitled *La difesa della Romanità* typified the *Mostra Augustea* as a ‘grandiose review of Roman civilization, organized in the “Augustan Exposition of Romanness”’, which ‘has taken place only very recently, and nobody denies how essentially Roman in its ideal genesis, and how essentially modelled on the examples of the Roman Empire is that concept of a new empire of Rome, which has very recently started its resurgence on the seven hills’.  

As previously mentioned, an important facet of the ‘fascistization’ of society, of the drive to gain totalitarian control over society, was the creation of organizations such as the youth organization *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and the after-work association *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*. At a purely professional level, the development of a corporative system, which promoted the integration of all components within the field of labour into one organic whole, united these aspects of fascist associationalism. Fascist corporatism generally met with Catholic approval, mainly because of its convergence with the principles of Catholic corporatism as inspired by the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*; however, fascism’s growing ‘totalitarian’ interest in education, and particularly in its associational structures (an interest which was to lead directly to measures...

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82 A. Ferrua, ‘La difesa della Romanità’, *LCC*, III (1940), 321. Possibly this phrase is an echo of a Mussolini speech, that is, the famous 1936 Proclamation of Empire: ‘Empire of peace, because Italy wants peace for itself and for all and decides to go to war only when forced by imperious, irrepressible necessities of life. Empire of civilization and humanity for all the people of Ethiopia.…. In this supreme certainty, hold high, legionnaires, the signs, the steel and the hearts, to salute, after fifteen centuries, the reappearance of the Empire on Rome’s fatal hills’: Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (eds), *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini* (Florence 1951–81), vol. 27, 268–9.
the regime would take against Catholic Action), resulted in episodes of heightened tension between the Church and the fascist state.83 This ongoing tension regarding Catholic Action, which on a number of occasions resulted in direct confrontation between religious and State authorities, following attacks on Catholic scouts in 1926 and attacks on various branches of Catholic Action in 1930–1 and 1938, figured to only a minor degree in the pages of LCC. Although a substantial number of articles had been dedicated to Catholic Action, in the latter writings, apart from two quite critical contributions on the scouts,84 only once could the discourse regarding the conflict of interest between Church and regime be described as critical; that is, when the harsh judgment of the Catholic newspaper L’Osservatore Romano was cited.85 Hereupon, references to the conflict surrounding Catholic Action became almost completely non-existent, after an article that outlined the agreement between Church and regime on 2 September 1931.86 At first glance, such a silence may seem rather unexpected, in light of the importance of the matter to the Vatican. However, it becomes perfectly understandable when considering that LCC’s headquarters had previously come under attack from fascist squadristi,87 in an act of aggression linked to the regime’s increasing mistrust in Enrico Rosa, the periodical’s director. Also, in 1929 LCC had been subject to the censorship of an issue containing an article written by Rosa which was highly critical of the regime.88 As a consequence, the journal subsequently chose to avoid taking a polemical stance in this matter, leaving explicit statements to the Pope, and reserving any criticism for a still negative, although somewhat politically safer, discourse on the tendency of fascism, and more generally of totalitarianism, to be tempted, in the ‘religious’ field, into committing acts of what was termed ‘political heresy’ (see below).

Because of fascism’s negative and even aggressive (see above) attitude towards Catholic associations, LCC’s stance on aspects related to the organization of civil life was one of the utmost prudence, with the journal often opting for complete silence on the subject. An example of this is the scarce attention paid to the creation of the after-work organization Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, which resulted in only one very brief and concise book

83 Such observations can already be encountered in some of the earliest studies on the relationship between Catholicism and fascism, such as Jemolo, Chiesa e Stato in Italia, op. cit., 614; and the introduction by Ernesto Rossi to Francesco Luigi Ferrari, L’Azione Cattolica e il ‘regime’ (Florence 1957), XI.
87 Ghizzoni, Educazione e scuola, op. cit., 310.
88 On this episode, see Ghizzoni, Educazione e scuola, op. cit., 304–7.
review, along with a timely caution to the regime that it should act prudently and not interfere with the Catholic trade union. However, this tense situation did not preclude LCC from highlighting points of convergence between Church and regime, as is evidenced by a discussion of the Pope’s encyclical *Divini illius magistri*, in which the anonymous author points out the Holy Father’s great respect for the (fascist) state: ‘As a Master of Truth, He not only grants the State all that which it can rightfully claim, but He also grants it the highest dignity, which it is entitled to demand, based on the supreme authority over civil society granted it by God’.

Once the 1930–1 crisis concerning Catholic Action, breaking out shortly after the *Conciliazione*, had been averted, and bearing in mind the highly forced nature of LCC’s silence regarding that conflict, later opinions expressed regarding the government’s civil policies were generally positive: for example, those treating laws regarding the question of marriage and even the *Dopolavoro*. In extreme cases, such as when compared with the situation in nazi Germany, fascist Italy could even be used as an example, or in any case as a ‘lesser evil’: ‘Let it be God’s will that, for the true good and the true greatness of the noble and Christian Germanic nation, its leaders look for inspiration toward... the example of Italy’. Although still viewed with some reservations, the 1938 *Mostra del Dopolavoro* was hereupon depicted as a product of the government’s ‘multifaceted activity aimed at the material, and moral, elevation of the people’, in a discourse which remained fundamentally unaltered until the fall of the regime, clearly manifesting the determination with which LCC, even though it continually faced the risk of physical attack, sought incessantly to negotiate Catholicism’s position in society.

Finally, with regard to the matter of professional organization, the development of the previously mentioned corporative system, which was seen as being partly inspired by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum novarum*, was applauded from the very beginning by LCC, as was the *Carta del lavoro*.

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90 In this regard, Father Balduzzi is being cited in an unequivocal manner: ‘It remains essential to the concept of the trade union... for it to be a freely constituted association, owing to a natural right. As a consequence, the State has to recognize and defend it, and cannot monopolize it... We are not in favour of a single Trade Union, as it is often the fruit of utopia or intimidation. We want free trade unions’: Anonymous, ‘Le recenti disposizioni dell’azione cattolica sul movimento professionale cristiano’, *LCC*, IV (1925), 439.
92 See, for example, F.M. Cappello, ‘La disciplina della Chiesa e le cause matrimoniali’, *LCC*, II (1933), 214–26.
93 See, for example, Anonymous, ‘Recensione a “La Carta del lavoro nel suo primo decennio”’, *LCC*, II (1937), 569.
94 M. Barbera, ‘La gioventù nella Germania razzista e totalitaria’, *LCC*, II (1938), 16.
95 A. Bruculeri, ‘La Mostra Nazionale del Dopolavoro’, *LCC*, III (1938), 224.
of 1927. The effective development of the corporative system, or in any case the ‘collaborative attitude of employers’ and workers’ organisations’, both in Italy and elsewhere around the globe, was being presented as a means of aiming ‘towards industrial peace’. Indeed, contrary to the tensions outlined above involving the societal boundaries and scope of both the fascist and Catholic associations, at the professional level corporatism came to be seen as a point of convergence between Catholic and fascist social thought. It was ‘one of the noblest achievements of social Catholicism’; despite its obvious limitations, it was also a system seen as offering ‘the key to a way out of the present chaos’. From the mid-1930s onwards, this positive, ‘symbiotic’ interpretation of corporatism as a fusion between Catholic and fascist social theories gradually became one of the central ideas around which the journal’s discourse would subsequently pivot, as can be seen in a series of articles by Father Brucculeri, LCC’s economist, as well as in a number of book reviews. This readiness to ‘negotiate’, as will be discussed more extensively in the following section, was particularly evident in the way in which LCC dealt with the tendency of both fascism and totalitarianism towards committing acts of ‘political heresy’. Not surprisingly, this sacral, religious aspect inherent to fascism was the only point on which Church and regime were unable to reach a formal agreement.

The final key point of this essay concerns a recurrent argument that LCC directed as a critical tool against any political ideology that manifested a tendency to elevate to an absolute level, to ‘sacralize’, anything other than a transcendent deity, be it the nation, state, race or a single man; LCC labelled such demonstrations ‘political heresy’. In the context of the ‘sacralization of politics’

100 See, in this regard, the article entitled ‘Corporative Economy’, which presents corporatism as a good choice, especially in comparison with socialist and liberal alternatives, but also adds the need to ‘adopt some elevated ethical principles’: A. Brucculeri, ‘L’economia corporativa’, LCC, IV (1933), 571. In the same way, a book review warns against too strict an interpretation and implementation of corporative principles, which should ‘keep in touch with reality’: Anonymous, ‘Recensione a “Luigi Razza, La Corporazione dello Stato fascista”’, LCC, IV (1933), 632–3.
101 A. Brucculeri, ‘La crisi presente e le sorti del capitalismo’, LCC, III (1933), 253.
seemingly inherent to fascism and other forms of totalitarianism, this argument is of particular relevance. An opening, more general observation is that it was only at a rather advanced stage of its existence that \textit{LCC} introduced the thought that fascism itself might constitute a form of political heresy – this stance in contrast to some of its features or representatives, such as philosopher Giovanni Gentile, or the cult of the \textit{duce} (see below) – instead saving its ammunition for the traditional liberal, and more specifically bolshevist, enemy, and also for nazism.

Here, as was the general rule when dealing with any topics concerning politics (see above), some of the journal’s more outspoken judgments can be found in articles covering subjects related to the field of education, one of the preferred topics of \textit{LCC}’s authors (see above). The overall message was clear: it was important that the state be obeyed, but the state itself should also steer clear of the field of education and, on a more abstract level, the field of ethics, ‘because we cannot contradict natural law, which comes before, and is superior to, the State, because the State-divinity is an absurdity which does not exist, which is a nonsense’.\footnote{Anonymous, ‘‘Funzione educativa’’ e ‘‘carattere etico’’ dello Stato’, \textit{LCC}, III (1922), 142.} As a consequence, authors expressed particular concern regarding the liberal, laic educational system, seeing it as the source of ‘all possible kinds of errors and sects’.\footnote{Ibid.} As will be evidenced further on, this form of ‘heresy’, which can also be described as ‘statolatry’, was viewed increasingly as posing a danger to many modern nations, amongst whom was (in this case the still liberal) Italy.\footnote{Cf. Anonymous, ‘Crisi di Stato e crisi di autorità’, op. cit., 200.}

Mussolini’s government was at first partially shielded from criticisms such as those outlined above, at least in terms of explicit referrals. This was partly due to the school reform of 1923, which had reintroduced the study of religion into the primary school curricula, and which was as a consequence judged quite positively.\footnote{Some of the articles on the subject are: Anonymous, ‘L’insegnamento religioso nella scuola: Propositi del Governo e spropositi dei liberali’, \textit{LCC}, I (1923), 321–31; Anonymous, ‘Gl’insegnanti di religione nella scuola primaria pubblica’, \textit{LCC}, III (1923), 234–45; Anonymous, ‘La riforma scolastica e nuove esigenze di coltura’, \textit{LCC}, IV (1923), 428–41; Anonymous, ‘La nuova riforma scolastica’, \textit{LCC}, I (1924), 385–93; Anonymous, ‘La nuova riforma scolastica’, \textit{LCC}, I (1924), 505–17; Anonymous, ‘L’insegnamento religioso nella Scuola e nella Parrocchia’, \textit{LCC}, III (1924), 31–46; and Anonymous, ‘L’insegnamento religioso nelle nostre scuole cattoliche’, \textit{LCC}, IV (1924), 299–309.} However, even at this early stage, \textit{LCC} focused on issues involving ‘sacral’ matters and, rather tellingly, began to emphasize the constant dangers posed by the involvement of the ‘pantheistical’ state in educational affairs.\footnote{Cf. Anonymous, ‘La nuova riforma scolastica’, op. cit., 517.} Subsequently, a long series of articles then concentrated on philosopher Giovanni Gentile, fiercely criticizing his idealistic philosophy and concept of the ‘ethical State’ as being highly contradictory of basic principles of the Catholic faith, and thus, implicitly, as being forms of heresy, especially since Gentile voiced an intention to subordinate the Catholic faith to his
ideal State. Another implicit, but unmistakable instance of criticism directed at the regime’s tendency towards sacralization was published in 1929 – the very year of the *Conciliazione* – with the journal offering a treatment of the ‘apo-
theosis of living man’, voicing a distinct warning regarding the heretical character of the by now full-blown personality cult of *il duce* Mussolini.

Outspoken accusations of ‘political heresy’, however, condemning an entire movement or ideology, were explicitly directed only at liberalism and socialism, at least until the early 1930s, when nazism commenced its steady rise to power. One of the first mentions of that movement appeared in 1931, located in a piece that discussed the violent and propagandistic means by which the nascent movement had already gained support. The article condemned nazism for its radical attitude towards the Catholic Church, as well as for its extreme nationalism, terming this appropriately as a ‘religion of the race’. However, in later writings, published once Hitler had taken power, a more cautious attitude was adopted, and a discourse of diplomacy deployed; one stating, among other things, that despite any concerns the author may have held about nazism, ‘it is just to demonstrate the praiseworthy features of National Socialism, and commendable to await the moment when, once they come to understand more fully the reality in which they find themselves, the leaders of the party orient their political line with more intelligence than we have been able to observe thus far, notably in regard to some ultra-racist principles’.

Around the same period in which the above words were published, the Vatican and the nazi government reached a mutual agreement or concordat (1933). Unsurprisingly, in light of our earlier observations, an element of major concern to the Vatican was the effect the deal might have on Catholic Action.

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111 Of the fact that this is not always done through a highly developed intellectual discourse, testifies the following citation of a book by Belgian Henri De Man, characterized as being ‘of a rich and brilliant intelligence’: Anonymous, ‘Il tramonto del Marxismo’, *LCC*, IV (1929), 36. ‘The significance of the *Capital* of Marx, as a bible of socialism, does not so much depend on the contents of the book as it does on its form, which has rendered it especially apt at acting as a revelation from above... the *Capital* owes large part of its magical prestige precisely to the circumstances which discourage many of its readers from the very offset: its undigestive length, its hermetical style, its ostentative erudition, its algebrical mysticism. The crowds – and not only the ignorant ones – nearly always treat the wiseman, whose name they revere, as the African negro treats his village sorcerer’: ibid., 45.
113 Anonymous, ‘Recensione a “Dr. H. De Vries De Hekelingen, *Die nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung*”’, *LCC*, I (1933), 481.
114 In this regard, see E. Rosa, ‘A proposito del Concordato della Santa Sede con la Germania’, *LCC*, IV (1933), 217–29; and ‘Il Concordato della Santa Sede con la Germania’, *LCC*, IV (1933), 331–46.
maintained an attitude of vigilant diplomacy, as exemplified in Father Barbera’s attack on Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhundert, written by the nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg. However, LCC’s criticism was not yet directed at the entirety of nazi ideology, an observation to which it should also be added that even Hitler did not approve fully of Rosenberg’s book – his disapproval being common knowledge at that time. Indeed, it was not until Germany announced a series of new laws regarding sterilization and eugenics – an initiative driven by the principle of the ‘near divinity of nation and race’ – that LCC’s discourse on nazism became radically, and outspokenly, condemnatory: in the words of Father Messineo, (nazi) absolutism could now be understood as being ‘this heresy of our century’. From this point onward, Hitler’s ‘religion of the race’, along with the negative attitude toward Catholics displayed by his government, would be constantly and completely condemned, such condemnation expressed in the fiercest of terms by Father Rosa, who is now well known for his opposition to nazism and fascism. After the nazi Anschluss of Austria, Rosa among other things wrote of the ‘apostasy, no longer partial, but total and absolute, from Christian faith and civilization: the ultimate abyss of Protestantism, “racist nazism” returns to ancient paganism’.

In spite of this increasingly condemnatory stance against ‘heretical’ nazism, LCC embarked on no direct treatment of the unarguably ‘religious side’ of

118 A. Messineo, ‘La concezione dello Stato nel Terzo Reich’, LCC, II (1934), 348.
121 This attitude reflects notably in a series of contributions by Father Brucculeri in 1938–9: ‘Il concetto cristiano dello Stato’, LCC, III (1938), 19–32; ‘Il concetto cristiano dello Stato’, LCC, III (1938), 385–98; ‘Il concetto cristiano dello Stato’, LCC, IV (1938), 395–410; ‘Il concetto cristiano dello Stato’, LCC, IV (1938), 524–34; and ‘Il neopaganesimo’, LCC, IV (1939), 348–51. It would also be at the basis of two of Father Messineo’s contributions, published in 1940. As Renato Moro pointed out, these did not distinguish nazism from fascism (Moro, ‘Religione del trascendente’, op. cit., 60). This cautious attitude can be interpreted in two ways: namely as on one hand the product of fear for the consequences to which an explicit condemnation would have inevitably led, or on the other hand as a deliberate choice to criticize both ideologies at once. The articles: A. Messineo, ‘Il culto della nazione e la fede mitica’, LCC, III (1940), 206–14; and ‘L’amore e il servizio della nazione’, LCC, III (1940), 275–87.
122 More than from his writings in LCC, this engagement by Father Enrico Rosa is evident from his writings in the journal Studium. For more information on these writings, see Moro, La formazione, op. cit., 420–8. For more information on Enrico Rosa, see also F. Malgeri, ‘Rosa, Enrico’, in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini (eds), Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia, M–Z, III/2, Le figure rappresentative (Casale Monferrato 1984), 736–7; and Martina, Storia della Compagnia di Gesù, op. cit., 167.
123 E. Rosa, ““Nuova orientazione” o “disorientazione”?”, LCC, II (1938), 401.
Italian fascism, of its ‘sacralization of politics’ – although in this aspect fascism was admittedly somewhat less outspoken than nazism. As stated previously, the journal limited itself to the explicit criticism of the regime’s most prominent philosopher, as well as, perhaps more significantly, the personality cult that had sprung up around its leader. However, LCC did criticize indirectly fascism’s promotion of the idea of an absolute state and nation; authors writing in LCC actively condemned similar tendencies in German nazism at a time in which both regimes were becoming increasingly involved. In addition, an implicit, but unambiguous condemnation of fascism as a form of political heresy was developed in a long series of articles written by Father Messineo in the years from 1938 to 1940. Within these texts, the author meticulously deconstructs the desire to sacralize nation and state inherent in all totalitarian regimes, making no clear distinction between any of the latter. Clearly, this analysis (which would later take the shape of a monographical volume) was now alluding directly to Mussolini’s regime, openly warning of the dangers of excessive nationalism and of an all-pervasive state, or in other words the dangers of political heresy, translated into the notion of statolatry.

This reading of the interwar years of the Jesuit periodical La Civilta Cattolica evidences the particularity of the situation in which the Italian Church found itself during the fascist ventennio, when the fascist state (physically and metaphorically) surrounded the epicentre of the Catholic world. When confronted with a new fascist movement as it steadily tightened its grip on Italian society, the Vatican, along with LCC, made no moves to oppose the regime, instead positioning itself in such a manner as to negotiate with and accommodate the fascist rhetoric. This decision was driven in part by the close alignment between the politics of Catholicism and fascism, and further fostered by the absence of a viable alternative political power.

This article’s focus on fascist totalitarianism and on the regime’s ‘sacralization of politics’ relates to the relevance of both concepts for the study of fascism, and their applicability to the Catholic Church, the quintessential religious institution. From 1870 onwards, the Vatican developed a ‘societal, political arm’, in what can be characterized as a ‘totalitarian’ form, at least in its intentions, of Catholic associationalism, which under the guidance of Pius XI was being moulded into a counterweight and competitor to the fascist regime’s interest in controlling Italian society. Catholic intellectuals intuitively perceived some aspects of fascist totalitarianism and the ‘sacralization of politics’ as


125 Antonio Messineo, La Nazione (Rome 1942).
threatening, particularly when confronted with manifestations of what was termed ‘political heresy’, along with certain features of fascist associationalism. Whereas the Jesuit writings as found in *LCC* never explicitly referred to fascism as a totalitarian political religion, it is hoped that our identification of certain implicit references to this and related concepts, and the resulting analysis can be used to explain certain clerical positions regarding aspects of Italian fascism, and that they have a certain validity, even if ‘only’ as heuristic tools, as a means of broadening and enhancing the study of fascism. To these reflections we should finally also add that no explicit rupture between Church and regime ever eventuated; on the contrary, some accounts seem to imply an intended merger between the ‘religious’ and totalitarian goals of both parties, however unstable such may have proved to be, such as in the assimilation and promotion of the myth of *italianità*, and the drive towards corporatism.

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