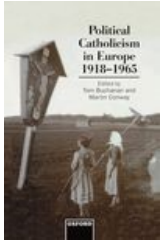

Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965

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CHAPTER

2 Italy

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the development of political Catholicism in Italy between 1918 and 1968. It focuses on the relationship between the ecclesiastical hierarchy, especially the Papacy, and the various organizational forms that political Catholicism took in this period, and on the interaction between the Italian Catholic movement in general and the political activities of Italian Catholics. After 1918 this meant essentially Catholic Action and the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) and after 1945 Catholic Action and the Democrazia Cristiana (DC).

Keywords: Italian Catholics, Catholic Action, political Catholicism, Italy, political movements, Catholic Party, Catholic activism, Partito Poplare Italiano, Democrazia Cristiana

Subject: European History, History of Religion, Political History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), Social and Cultural History

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1. Introduction

The history of political Catholicism in modem Italy stands apart from that in most other European countries for a number of reasons: the long history of Catholic hostility to the State, the key role which the Papacy played in the ideological and organizational development of Italian political Catholicism, and the completeness of its triumph in the parliamentary arena in the post-war period, which has allowed the Catholic Party uninterrupted dominance of governmental power until very recently. Yet that history has otherwise much in common with the history of political Catholicism elsewhere, so that in this survey of the development of political Catholicism in Italy between 1918 and 1968 many of the themes will be the same as those which feature in other chapters. In particular, emphasis will be placed on the relationship between the ecclesiastical hierarchy, especially the Papacy, and the various organizational forins which political Catholicism took in this period, and on the interaction between the Italian Catholic movement in general

and the political activities of Italian Catholics. After 1918 this meant essentially Catholic Action and the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) and after 1945 Catholic Action and the Democrazia Cristiana (DC).

Another very important strand is the ideological development of Italian Catholic activism, both in terms of the input of papal social teaching and the response of Catholic political thinkers and politicians to non-Catholic and even anti-Catholic sources of economic, social, and political ideas. Similarly, the geographical and social bases of Italian Catholic political activism, and especially of its electorate, from 1905 onwards, require careful analysis, as do the relations between overtly party-political forms of Catholic activism in Italy, and its social and economic manifestations, especially the Catholic trade unions and peasant leagues.

Finally, Catholic political pluralism, both inside and outside the mainstream Catholic movement, with a recurrent tension between the intransigent and more conciliatorist tendencies, are a characteristic of the development of Italian political Catholicism in this period. It also needs to be stressed that Italian political Catholicism has a long pre-history prior to the end of the First World War. For this reason, considerable attention will be devoted to the origins and development of the Italian Catholic movement in the late
p. 70 nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without this ↳ background, it is almost impossible to understand the development of political Catholicism between 1918 and 1968.

2. The Origins of political Catholicism in Italy: From the Opera dei Congressi to the Giolitti-Gentiloni Pact

Modem Italian political Catholicism was called into being by the Holy See in a special set of circumstances for clearly defined purposes, in essence as the agent of the Papacy in its struggle against the Liberal State in the nineteenth century. The processes of national liberation and state-building carried out by the moderate liberal political class during the course of the Risorgimento steadily ate away at both the territorial sovereignty of the popes in the Papal States of central Italy and the legal privileges, landed property, and social influence which the Church enjoyed elsewhere in the peninsula. The final destruction of the temporal power of the Papacy carne with the occupation of Rome in September 1870 and its proclamation as the capital of Italy. The response of Pius IX was to breathe anathemas and excommunications against the 'subalpine usurpers' (the Savoyard royal family) and all others who had assisted in the despoliation of the Church. Thus was born the 'Roman Question', as the Church–State conflict was called, which was to poison Italy's internal politics and complicate its foreign relations for several decades.[1]

More practical methods of protest were also adopted: already in 1864 the Roman Curia had issued the *Non Expedit*, a decree forbidding Catholics to vote or offer themselves as candidates in the elections of the Kingdom of Italy. This had the effect of reducing the already tiny electorate by half, and depriving the new state of the talents of some of its most gifted citizens. But the most effective form of protest, and of defence against the secularism and anticlericalism of the Liberal State, was the creation of a Catholic movement, starting with the Società della Gioventú Cattolica (Catholic Youth Association) in 1868.[2]

The first forms of Italian political Catholicism were thus essentially 'anti-system'; obedience to the Pope took the form of the most intransigent hostility to the Liberal State and all its works. In their newspapers, in their youth and recreational groups, and at their regular congresses, which gave the original Catholic movement its name, the Opera dei Congressi, Catholic leaders, elencal and lay, inveighed against the evils and iniquities of both political and economic liberalism. Capitalistic individualism was the object of particular criticism, and on this basis the Catholic movement shifted naturally towards the organization of the Catholic masses, especially in the country-side. Even before the publication of Leo XIII's social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, the movement was seeking to organize the Catholic masses and insulate
p. 71 them from liberal anticlericalism. The next step would be to create more specifically economic ↳ institutions for paternalistic, benevolent purposes: peasant co-operatives, *casse di risparmio* (credit banks) and eventually embryonic organizations for Catholic workers.

As a result: of its intransigence, the Italian Catholic movement adopted the psychology and rhetoric of an alienated subculture. Not surprisingly, therefore, during the 'end-of-century crisis' of the 1890s, when Italy was racked by recurrent economic difficulties, and resulting social distress and disorder, many Catholic leaders found themselves tarred with the same brush as their counterparts in the other alienated subculture struggling to emerge in Italy at this time: the working-class movement. Several Catholic organizers, including priests, such as the intransigent leader Don Davide Albertario, were thrown into prison as subversives along with Anarchist, Socialist, and Republican leaders.[3]

From its inception in the 1860s, the strength of the Italian Catholic movement lay in the North: in Venetia, north-eastern Lombardy, and southern Piedmont, in that order. More specifically, it was concentrated in the provinces of Belluno, Padua, Treviso, Vicenza and Verona, Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Sondrio, and Cuneo. Outside these 'white' areas, as they were known, there were some isolated enclaves of Catholic strength in central Italy, such as the Marches on the Adriatic coast, the province of Lucca in Tuscany, and in the South the province of Lecce (Apulia), the eastern coastal strip of Calabria, and parts of the interior of Sicily. All these provinces were primarily rural and agrarian: the Catholic movement rarely had a strong following in the great industrial or regional capitals. Milan, the centre of a particularly strong Catholic tradition, the Ambrosian Church, was the exception to this rule, and only then in a partial fashion because, as a result of industrialization, the rivai working-class movement there grew rapidly in strength. The strength of the Catholic movement in its heartlands can be explained by a number of factors, the first of which was the efficiency of the Habsburg and, to a lesser extent, Piedmontese educational systems which ensured the emergence of an educated rural and small-town middle class on which the leadership of the network of Catholic organizations carne to depend. These same cadres were eventually to provide the bulk of the local leadership of the PPI in the 1920s. Also very important was the fact that Catholic culture in Lombardy and Venetia during the Risorgimento was predominantly nationalist due to the presence of the national enemy, Austria, whereas in the Papal States it was strongly anti-nationalist given the stance of Pius IX. Thus Emilia-Romagna and Umbria developed a strong anticlerical tradition by way of reaction. Finally, in the white provinces, the parochial clergy was closer to the peasantry because it was largely recruited from its ranks. It is, therefore, no accident that of the six Italian popes this century, five—Pius X, Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul I—came from the peasantry or rural nobility of Lombardy and Venetia. By way of contrast, in most parts of the South ecclesiastical patronage was exercised by the local landowning élites and the parochial clergy were thus identified with their patrons in the minds of the peasantry. The future

p. 72 leader of the Catholic Party in the 1920s, Fr. Luigi Sturzo, had to ↳

p. 73 ↳

p. 74 ↳

struggle against the 'clerical, clientelistic torpor' of his native Sicily[4] and Carlo Levi in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, and more recently Frank Snowden in Violence and Great Estates in the South of ltaly,[5] provide vivid examples of the alienation of the Church from the Southern rural masses. This weakness of ecclesiastical influence in the Mezzogiorno was exacerbated by the strong survival of local superstitions and paganism, and by the poor education of the rural clergy.

Table 2.1. Regional distribution of Popolari and Christian Democrat support, 1913–1979

Region	Popolari-Christian Democrat														Core areas
	1913*	1913†	1919	1921	1924	1946	1948	1953	1958	1963	1968	1972	1976	1979	
Piedmont	2.7	0.2	19	22	11	35	48	40	41	36	40	40	36	34	Cuneo
Liguria	7.4	0.3	20	24	13	32	46	39	40	32	35	35	34		
Lombardy (VdA)	14	11	30	26	17	39	52	46	45	40	45	44	41	40	Bergamo-Breisc ia-Sondrio
Veneto	25	14	36	36	23‡	49	60	53	55	53	52	52	51	50	Padua. Vicenza
Fruili	—	—	—	3.2	8.2	47	57	50	44	43	43	43	42	37	Udine
Trent (Triest)	—	—	—	6.5	23‡	57	50	45	43	39	38	38	33	31	Trento
Emilia	—	4.4	18	19	8.0	23	33	30	30	26	28	27	28	27	
Tuscany	0.9	0.4	20	19	5.4	28	39	34	35	30	31	31	32	30	Lucca
Marches	—	5.2	27	30	10	31	47	42	43	38	39	39	39	38	Macerata
Umbria	—	—	17	16	5.3‡	26	36	31	33	30	29	30	30	29	
Latium	—	—	26	22	5.3‡	33	52	37	38	33	40	35	36	37	Frosinonc
Abruzzi	—	—	7.2‡	7.2‡	1.7‡	42	52	41	46	45	49	48	44	46	Chieti
Molise	—	—	7.2‡	7.2‡	1.7‡	40	56	46	55	51	50	55	51	55	Campobasso
Campania	—	0.1	18	14	1.6	34	50	36	42	40	43	40	40	42	Caserta

Apulia	—	—	10	10	6.7	33	49	38	44	43	44	42	42	43	Lecce
Basilicata	—	4.5	—	4.2	3.3‡	31	48	41	47	42	49	49	45	44	Potenza
Calabria	—	—	18	19	3.3‡	34	49	41	47	44	42	39	39	43	Cosenza
Sicily	—	3.6	12	13	4.5	34	48	36	43	39	39	39	42	44	Catania
Sardinia	—	—	12	11	5.6	41	51	42	47	42	43	42	40	38	Nuoro
TOTAL	6.0	4.2	20	20	9.0	35	48	40	42	38	39	39	39	38	

* Conservatore cattolico.

† Cattolico.

‡ Part of a larger electoral district.

SOURCE: P. Farneti, The Italian Party System: 1945–1980, S. E. Finer and A. Mastropaolo (eds.), Francis Pinter, London, 1985.

Map 2.1.

The Catholic heartlands of Italy.
SOURCE: P. Farneti, *The Italian Party System: 1945–1980*, S. E. Finer and A. Mastropaolo (eds.), Francis Pinter, London, 1985

It is, however, not enough to say that Catholic associationalism's greatest strength lay in Northern rural society; in practice, its greatest appeal was only to certain strata of that society—the landed aristocracy, the small-town professional bourgeoisie, and the property-owning or tenant peasantry and some of the *mezzadri* or sharecroppers, as opposed to the *braccianti* or day-labourers. This also explains the Catholic movement's relative weakness in Emilia-Romagna and most of Tuscany, and also in the Lombard provinces of Milan and Mantua, where the rural, wage-earning proletariat was strong and where it gave its loyalty to agrarian socialism. Even so, charismatic peasant leaders like Guido Miglioli were able to attract support from rural, proletarian elements, such as the *braccianti* on the rich dairy-farms, hence the modest strength of the Catholic peasant leagues in the province of Cremona. Catholic trade-unionism also made modest gains; in 1914, for example, the 'white' trade unions had a membership of over 100,000 whereas the socialist General Confederation of Labour (CGL) counted six times as many supporters.[6] Catholic trade-union strength lay mainly among professionals, for example teachers, and women workers, whereas the CGL drew support from workers in heavy industries.[7]

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the only discernible division within the Catholic movement had been that between intransigents and conciliatorists, that is between the rigid upholders of abstentionism and hostility to the Liberal State, and those like bishops Bonomelli and Scalabrini who sought some form of accommodation with liberalism.[8] On the whole, the lay leaders of the Opera remained obedient to the intransigent line; even social reformists like Filippo Meda insisted at the turn of the century that they were following a policy of 'preparation in abstention' Nevertheless, the experience of the crisis of the 1890s had had the effect of toning down the intransigence of the Catholic movement as a whole. More stress was now put on social issues, rather than the Roman Question, and on the threat posed by Socialism.

p. 75 There had already emerged in the Catholic world an influential lay movement which, in journals such as *Annali cattolici, Rivista universale*, and the *Rassegna nazionale*, struggled against the restrictions imposed by the 'Syllabus of Errors' and the *Non Expedit* in an attempt to insert Catholics into the political life of Italy, by means of a 'national, conservative party' that would embrace both Catholics and Liberate of goodwill.[9] The national conservatives were drawn in the main from the Catholic *haute bourgeoisie* and landed aristocracy especially, but not exclusively, of northern and central Italy. Indeed, in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, the Catholic bourgeoisie was building up powerful interests in the financial sector of the economy, especially banking and insurance; in agriculture; and to a lesser extent, manufacturing industry. In addition, they acquired a controlling influence over the Catholic press and therefore the Catholic movement as a whole.[10] They also became the leaders in those political activities permitted to Catholics by the *Non Expedit*, notably local government, and when the ban was relaxed at a national level in 1904 they were among the first Catholics to enter Parliament. Committed to a clerico-moderate position, that is to alliances with the less avowedly anticlerical elements of the Liberal establishment, they were to become, as Capitani D'Arzago, a Milanese political notable observed in 1908, to all intents and purposes merely the Catholic wing of the Liberal ruling class.[11]

The Italian invasion of Libya in 1911, which was strongly supported by Catholic financial interests clustered around the Bank of Rome and through the newspapers which they controlled, brought some clerico-moderates, as they were by now called, closer to the extreme right-wing Nationalist Association. When the majority of the clerico-moderates voted for Italian intervention in the First World War in 1915, all the ideological preconditions for the later Catholic conservative alliance with Fascism had already been fulfilled.[12]

Catholic intransigence, on the other hand, took a different direction. Those intransigents of a social reformist bent founded the Christian democracy movement. They were inspired by *Rerum Novarum* and by Pope Leo XIII's other major encyclical *On the Christian Constitution of States*. A further influence were the writings of the Catholic sociologist Giuseppe Toniolo, whose Milan *Programme of Catholics* υ*is*- à -υ*is Socialism* was predictably paternaliste, stressing the duty of work, the social function of property, supporting the formation of labour unions but condoning the use of the strike weapon only as a last resort. Led by two priests, Romolo Murri and Luigi Sturzo, the Christian democrats eventually elaborated a programme of economic, social, and political reform which, in the event of a Catholic entry into national politics, aimed at a radical transformation of the Liberal State. The Turin Programme of 1899 advocated
p. 76 proportional representation, the need to encourage ↳ small property-formation, and administrative decentralization, all policies that were to remain hallmarks of political Catholicism in Italy until long after the Second World War.[13] In the short term, the Christian democrats concentrated on the further development of Catholic economic and social organizations, especially the trade unions and the peasant leagues, as part of direct action to help the Catholic masses.[14]

If the Christian democratic programme was different from that of the clerico-moderates, then so was their membership, which broadly represented the Catholic small-town and rural bourgoisie—small businessmen and professional parochial clergy, and the organizers of the Catholic trade unions and peasant leagues—with a sprinkling of more prominent intellectuals. By 1903 they had captured effective control of the Opera, but the new pope, Pius X, feared both their radical reform programme and the heretical, modernist, tendencies of Murri. This induced him to break the hold of the Christian democrats by dissolving the Opera and reorganizing the Catholic movement into various associations more directly dependent on the hierarchy.[15] After this setback the Christian democratic leadership dispersed: Guido Miglioli continued to work for his beloved peasants; Don Sturzo moved over to head the major organizational legatee of the Opera and forerunner of Catholic Action, the Unione Popolare; and Murri drifted further and further into disobedience to the Papacy, becoming a radical member of Parliament.

The election of Pius X marked an important milestone in the history of Italian political Catholicism in another sense. Impressed by the success of Catholics in defending the interests of the Church in local government in his native Venetia and alarmed by the rise of the working-class movement, whose militancy reached a peak in the general strike of 1904, the pope decreed the suspension of the *Non Expedit* on a limited basis for the general elections of 1905. Catholics in some key northern constituencies were permitted to vote either for acceptable Liberals or even to stand as parliamentary candidates themselves, in order to keep out the Socialists. The result was to establish a pattern of clerico-moderate alliances with the Liberals, the 'party of order', and to permit the entry of Catholics into national political life for the first time. Catholics stood and were elected in 1904 and 1909, and in 1913, with the introduction of virtual universal adult male suffrage, twenty-nine Catholics were returned.

This development did not, however, signify the emergence of a Catholic Party in Parliament. From the outset the Vatican, which controlled Catholic political activity through the Unione Elettorale, stressed the distinction between *cattolici deputati*, that is deputies who happened to be Catholics, and *deputati cattolici*, i.e. deputies who saw themselves as officially representing Italian Catholics. The latter was emphatically ruled out. In any case, the disparate nature of the Catholic parliamentary group, which included both clerico-moderates and others of a more Christian democratic orientation, meant that they rarely voted as a block.
p. 77 Nevertheless, their ↳ participation in the parliamentary process was to prove a useful experience for future representatives of the PPI.[16]

Even more significant for the future was the outcome of the 1913 general elections. As a result of the pact between Giolitti and Count Gentiloni, the president of the Unione Elettorale, dozens of Liberal candidates sought and obtained Catholic electoral support according to a set of conditions laid down by the Unione, in order to protect their seats against an expected Socialist onslaught. Gentiloni actually claimed that over two hundred Liberal MPs owed their election to Catholic support.[17] Certainly, Gioiitti's parliamentary majority was saved thanks to Catholic support, and it is clear that a mass electoral base existed for a future Catholic Party even before the outbreak of the First World War.

3. The First Catholic Party: The PPI, 1918–1926

Though the Papacy, and some sections of the Italian Catholic movement, had opposed Italy's intervention in the First World War, Italian Catholics played their part loyally in the war effort, both at home and at the front.[18] The patriotism of Catholics thus removed one of the last major obstacles to their direct and successful participation in Italian politics, for it gave the He to charges that Catholics were unpatriotic. But the Italy in which the PPI was born, had been dramatically changed by the war itself. The Italy of 1918 was one of radical economic, social, and above all, political change. The PPI was one of the major organizational representatives of this new mood.

The emergence of the first Catholic Party onto the Italian political stage in 1918 inevitably required the approval of the Holy See. That this was reluctantly, grudgingly, given is clear from the testimonies of Benedict XV and his secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri. As Gasparri later explained, he saw the PPI as merely the 'least bad' of allparties.[19] The Vatican was seriously concerned about the political dangers posed by a Catholic Party with a priest, Don Luigi Sturzo, at its head. Perhaps, more fundamentally, the Vatican feared the consequent loss of direct control over mass, Catholic political aerivities. Its worst fears on this score were to be realized in 1920 when the new party refused to enter into those traditional clerico-moderate alliances with the Liberals which the Church hierarchy believed to be necessary in the fight against the Socialists at the crucial local government elections of that year. This failure of the Popolari to do their 'duty' lost them much sympathy both among the local episcopacy and in the Vatican.[20]

To appease the Vatican's concerns, Sturzo and his colleagues insisted on describing their new party as 'aconfessional', i.e. not as a Catholic Party but simply one based on Christian principles and open to all 'free and strong men' This position, however, outraged the members of the intransigent faction which emerged
p. 78 at the party's ↳ founding congress in 1919. It also failed to convince the secular press, which insisted on portraying the party as the secular arm of the Church. It could be argued that the Church got the worst of both worlds: on the one hand, all the mistakes and failings of a party led by a priest were laid at its door, on the other hand, the aconfessional party's commitment to the defence of the Church's interests seemed less than enthusiastic. The 1919 party programme devoted only six lines to those interests, and managed to avoid mentioning the Roman Question at all.[21] The party's relationship with the Vatican was, therefore, from the outset, a difficult one.

The January 1919 appeal of the founding committee, and the programme adopted at the Bologna congress contained no other elements of which the Holy See could have disapproved. On the contrary, they were fully in line with papal teaching on the family and freedom of education, and with mainstream Catholic thinking on economic and social questions. They were also very dose in spirit to the original, end-of-the-century Christian democratic programmes, placing a strong emphasis on the need to protect small property, the need for tax reform and agrarian development, and, given the Sicilian origins of Sturzo, the commitment to Southern development is not surprising. Nor is the inclusion of proposals for administrative decentralization, proportional representation, female suffrage and the election of the Senate, which typified the spirit of *dicianovesimo*, that is the radical reformism that affected all parties in the aftermath of the war. Similarly, the PPI was explicitly Wilsonian in its foreign policy proposals though this was to become rather more muted when the Treaty of Versailles was actually signed and the Pope made public his objections to the peace settlement.[22]

The 'take off' of the new party was dramatic: within a few months of Sturzo's first appeal, it had received the virtually unanimous support of the Italian Catholic world, the newly independent Catholic trade-union organization (CIL) and the Catholic peasant leagues, the Catholic press, most of the affiliated organizations of the Unione Popolare (which was renamed 'Catholic Action', to avoid confusion) especially those of youth, all the Catholic deputies in Parliament, and the bulk of the parochial clergy.[23] Only the episcopal bench remained rather more cautious in its attitude. Moreover, the results of the 1919 general elections, conducted under proportional representation and full universal male suffrage for the first time, confirmed the strength of support for the Popolari in the country at large—the party won 20 per cent of the votes and 100 out of the 508 seats in Parliament, making it the second largest parliamentary party after the Socialista.[24]

The election results also confirmed that the party's electoral base was to be found in the traditional
p. 79 heartlands of Italian Catholicism. Venetia, with 35 per cent, and ↳ Lombardy, with nearly 31 per cent, gave the party its highest electoral scores. In the 1921 general elections the north-eastern province of Trento, acquired under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the home base of Alcide De Gasperi, later to be Sturzo's successor as leader of the PPI, also polled a very high vote for the party. Outside the North-East only Le Marche (27.3 per cent) and Latium polled in excess of the party's national average. In the South, no region achieved this level of support, and in some regions like Lucania it barely reached 5 per cent of the vote. It is hard to tell how far this electorate was specifically Catholic, there being no sociological studies of the electoral base of the PPI, but it is precisely the concentration of Popolare votes in the white provinces that suggests that this was largely the case.[25]

Ironically, the breadth of support for the PPI in both the Catholic movement and the Catholic electorate was to prove a weakness as well as a strength, for the party was always to be highly heterogeneous, spanning virtually the whole are of the ideologies and interest groups to be found in the Italian Catholic world. In particular, it brought together in an unnatural and short-lived alliance great landowners at one extreme, and landless labourers at the other. This alliance quickly fell apart under the impact of agrarian fascism in northern and central Italy in 1921 and 1922.[26] The party divided into recognizable factions from the the start. On the right there were the intransigents grouped around Padre Gemelli, friend of Pius XI and later rector of the Catholic University of Milan. On the centre-right were the clerico-moderate grandees like Grosoli, Santucci, and Crispolti who effectively controlled the Catholic press. The centre, led by Luigi Sturzo, was the dominant force in the party, including most of the torchbearers of early Christian democracy and the bulk of the white trade-union leadership. And on the left were men like Guido Miglioli whose socialist leanings had inspired him to suggest the name 'Party of the Christian Proletariat' at the Bologna congress. It is interesting to note that some men of Miglioli's inclinations could not accept the policy of the party and in the 1921 general elections the dissident Popolari and the Cristiani del Lavoro won 30,000 votes between them in Lombardy and Venetia.[27]

As time went on, not even the charismatic leadership of Sturzo, who as a priest and as the last historic leader of the original Christian democratic movement commanded unrivalled authority in the party, was able to hold these divergent factions together. Indeed, the fact that Sturzo was a priest was a source of weakness to the party, for as such he was forced to lead the party from outside Parliament and his priestly status was ultimately to prove the Achilles' heel of the PPI, because he was subject to the canonical sanction of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Despite its weaknesses, and its relative newness to parliamentary life, the new party was called upon to play a key role in Italian politics following the 1919 general elections. While it had probably robbed the Socialist Party of a greater electoral vietory than it actually achieved in 1919 (the latter won 150 seats and therefore
p. 80 became ↳ the largest party in Parliament), what was more significant was that the PPI, by monopolizing the Catholic vote, also deprived the Liberals of their parliamentary majority. The Socialists, true to the decision taken at their 1912 congress, refused to participate in 'bourgeois politics'; thus no government could now be formed or sustained without the support of the Popolari. Each of the six cabinets formed between July 1919 and October 1922, and including Mussolini's first government, contained at least two Popolare ministers and several under-secretaries of state.[28] Finance and/ or the treasury were usually in the hands of the Popolari as well as agriculture, and in 1921, in a move unprecedented in the history of Liberal Italy, a Catholic became minister of justice.

In February and July 1922, as the parliamentary crisis of the Liberal State deepened, Filippo Meda, veteran Catholic politician and the leader of the parliamentary caucus of the PPI, was asked by the King to take the premiership. Much to Sturzo's dismay, Meda refused because of his unwillingness to shoulder the burdens of high office. Meda's refusals deprived his party of the opportunity to play a dominant role in politics, and probably also the last real chance to preserve Italian democracy.[29]

The party's experience of parliamentary politics was not an entirely happy one: the demands of a modem, mass party, with a fixed programme, did not square with the traditional, transformist tactics of the Liberal notables who headed Italian governments in this period. Governments carne and went with increasing rapidity partly because of the bitter rows between the Popolari and a succession of Liberal premiers—Nitti, Giolitti, Bonomi, and Facta—over the failure of the latter to implement policy commitments made when the governments were formed.

By the beginning of 1922, the failure of the Liberal State to grapple with the many economic and political problems facing it, and in particular its failure to deal with the spread of Fascist squadrist violence in the northern and central regions of Italy, had provoked a serious parliamentary crisis. In the summer Bonomi's newly formed government fell precisely because of an explosion of violence in Guido Miglioli's home town, Cremona. By October Luigi Facta's first government had also fallen, and it was at this point that the King in his desperation had turned to Meda. But rampant Fascist violence in the provinces was not only paralysing Italian parliamentary life, it was also having a divisive effect on the PPL The fissiparous tendencies in the party manifested themselves in pro-Fascist manoeuvres by the party's rightwing. The party's intransigent tactics during the ministerial crises of 1922, which led to the downfall of the first Facta government and the still birth of another, that of Giolitti, alienated Catholic conservative opinion. In June the Marquis Cornaggia-Medici made his first attempt to establish a conservative alternative to the Catholic Party by founding the short-lived Unione Costituzionale. In July Prince Francesco Boncompagni-Ludovisi resigned the Popolare whip and joined the Nationalists, and in September the eight Popolare senators protested to
p. 81 Sturzo about the party's ↳ alleged flirtations with the Reformist Socialists. The direction in which the Catholic conservatives, both inside and outside of the PPI, were moving was that of Popolare participation in a government: of 'National Concentration', headed by a Liberal leader such as Giolitti and including all centre and right-wing groups, the Fascists not excepted.[30]

The Vatican was also becoming more openly criticai of the PPL The election of Pius XI in February 1922 had accelerated this trend, for he was even less sympathetic towards the party than his predecessor had been. Thus, during the parliamentary crisis of October, which culminated in the Fascist March on Rome at the end of the month, the Vatican clearly regarded the entry of the Fascists into government as an absolute necessity if political stability was to be restored, and as a result pressurized the Popolari into supporting the government which Mussolini formed at the beginning of November. As Mussolini set about consolidating his power during the next two years, the Vatican increasingly threw in its lot with Fascism, motivated by the belief, which was obviously encouraged by Mussolini, that he could solve the Roman Question, which the PPI had signally failed to do. In the spring and summer of 1923 the Vatican encouraged Catholic political pluralism by giving the nod to the emergence of another pro-Fascist, Catholic, conservative political grouping, the Unione Nazionale, and in July it dealt a powerful blow to the PPI by ordering Sturzo to resign as party leader.[31]

Very quickly, the PPI fell apart. In July fourteen right-wingers broke ranks, thus allowing the passage of the Acerbo Law, Mussolini's electoral legislation which abolished proportional representation and awarded two-thirds of the seats to the party which polled the largest number of votes in excess of a quarter plus one. As Santarelli has pointed out: 'If the Popolari had not split...proportional representation would not have been abandoned, and in that case Mussolini might not have been able to make use of those lists of "national concentration" which in the elections of 1924 permitted him to consolidate his power.'[32] The collapse of the PPI was, therefore, a major factor in the eventual triumph of Mussolini and Fascism.

When Parliament was dissolved in March 1924, a quarter of the Popolare deputies elected in 1921 had either been expelled or had seceded, and the entire Popolare contingent in the Senate also defected, taking with them those Catholic newspapers controlled by Grosoli's Trust. In the ensuing elections, thirteen Catholic candidates (mostly ex-Popolari) stood in Mussolini's 'big list' and a strong appeal to Catholics to vote for Fascism was made through Grosoli's newspapers.[33] The Vatican's abandonment of the PPI was completed during the Matteotti Crisis of 1924, when the reformist Socialist leader was abducted and murdered by Fascist thugs. In the ensuing political maelstrom, the attempt by the Popolari to exploit the last chance of
p. 82 removing Mussolini by forming a coalition government with Matteotti's party and ↳ others, was publicly denounced by Pius XI.[34] By the end of 1926 the PPI, along with the other democratic, anti-fascist opposition, was dissolved and the new Fascist dictatorship forbade its reconstitution.

4. The Fascist Interlude

With the dissolution of the PPI, Pius XI and his secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri, had achieved two long-sought-after aims, the re-establishment of papal control over the Italian Catholic movement and the re-establishment of a direct interlocutory relationship with the Italian state, free from the embarrassing complications created by the existence of a Catholic political party. They were thus able in the period 1926 to 1929 to bring to a successful conclusion negotiations for the resolution of the Roman Question which culminated in the signing of the Lateran Pacts. As a quid pro quo, they instructed Italian Catholics through Catholic Action to vote for the single Fascist list in the 'plebiscite' of 1929, thus effectively returning to the policy of Pius X when he relaxed the *Non Expedit* twenty years earlier. Though the Vatican's 'marriage of convenience' with Fascism was disturbed by disputes over the precise competence of Catholic Action in the youth, labour, and recreational fields in 1929, 1931, and again in 1938, when the introduction of the Racial Laws added a further cause of conflict,[35] there was, nevertheless, a high degree of convergence between the Church and Fascism in the areas of economic, social, and even foreign policy until 1938.[36]

In these circumstances, and given the totalitarian ambitions of the regime, there was very little space for autonomous political activity by Catholic laymen. After the demise of the PPI, the only Catholic groups which managed to retain a place, albeit marginal, in Italian politics were the two clerico-fascist organizations, the Unione Nazionale which was essentially an aristocratic clique, and the Centro Nazionale Italiano, which continued to be active in Parliament, loyally endorsing the legislation on which the Fascist dictatorship was built between 1925 and 1929. After 1929, how-ever, both organizations were brutally discarded. Thereafter, clerico-fascist politicians, like Stefano Cavazzoni for example, found a new role as mediators between Fascism and Catholic financial interests.[37]

Full-blooded Catholic anti-fascism was even less successful than clerico-fascism. Only a handful of Popolare leaders followed Sturzo into exile (De Gasperi was caught trying to leave Italy, arrested, tried, imprisoned, and eventually released into the custody of the Vatican). In any case, the differences between Sturzo, Ferrari, Donati, and Miglioli—whose strange odyssey eventually took him to Moscow—prevented
p. 83 the formation of a Popolare party-in-exile on the lines of the Communist, Socialist, ↳ or the radical-reformist Giustizia e Libertà organizations. Sturzo's anti-Fascist activities in Britain and America had a minimal influence on Catholics in Italy.

The majority of the ex-Popolare politicians retired into a private life relatively undisturbed by police harassment. Only two overtly anti-fascist organizations succeeded in attracting significant Catholic support during the years of the regime: the Allianza Nazionale (National Alliance) of Lauro De Bosis, which was not strictly Catholic in ideological orientation and was quickly crushed by the police in 1931, and the Movimento Guelfo D'Azione (Guelf Action Movement) of Piero Malvestiti. The latter was unique in being the only truly Catholic anti-fascist movement to be indicted before Mussolini's Special Military Tribunal.[38] Catholic anti-fascist activity was also carried on inside the associations of Catholic Action, indeed Catholic Action became the focus of most Catholic 'political' activity from the mid-1920s on-wards, as the Vatican had intended it to be. But it was a very different Catholic movement now from the one that Sturzo had presided over on the ève of the First World War. The dissolution of the PPI in 1926 had been followed very shortly by that of the Catholic trade-union confederation. And despite the financial resources and political influence of its clerico-fascist proprietors, the bulk of the Catholic daily press also went under in the mid- and late 1920s; by 1929 only Catholic newspapers under diocesan control managed to survive. With the trade unions went a lot of the other economic and social organizations—especially the peasant leagues and the co-operatives—and the financial effeets of Mussolini's revaluation of the lira in 1926 had a devastating effect on Catholic banks and credit unions, which in turn was one of the causes of the decline of the Catholic press.[39] By 1929 the Catholic presence in Italian civil society had been significantly reduced, even in the rural heartlands, and Catholic Action, the core of the Catholic movement was suffering a haemorrhage of its membership.

The Vatican seems to have been more or less acquiescent in the other 'demolitions' of Fascism, but when the embryonic regime laid violent hands on the Catholic youth organizations, the Pope became alarmed. It was precisely in order to save these organizations that the Vatican took the initiative to open negotiations for a comprehensive settlement of the Roman Question in August 1926.

Article 43 of the resulting Concordat of 1929 was of crucial importance to the future development of political Catholicism in Italy, for it ensured the survival of Catholic Action as the only autonomous, non-Fascist organization in Mussolini's so-called totalitarian state. In the short term, Mussolini sought to restrict the activities of Catholic Action further, especially during the crisis in relations between the Vatican and the regime in 1931, which was partly prompted by the activities of the ex-Popolari. The youth organizations were also the target of Fascist wrath, but in the subsequent reconciliation of September 1931, they survived.
p. 84 Thus FUCI, the ↳ Catholic students' organization, and Movimento Laureati, the graduate movement, were to provide under the moral and spiritual direction of Mgr. G B. Montini (later Paul VI) the nursery for much of the post-war Christian Democratic leadership. As Renato Moro has demonstrated, the post-war Catholic élite of trade-union leaders, party secretaries, ministers, and prime ministers including P. E. Taviani, G. B. Scaglia, Aldo Moro, Emilio Colombo, Guido Gonella, Beniamino Zaccagnini, Giulio Andreotti, and Mariano Rumor, was largely the product of these organizations.[40] But the autonomous space for debate and development of Catholic social and political ideas was very restricted. Catholic Action was under Constant police surveillance. As a result, the price of survival was to pay lip-service to the policies of the regime: corporatism, imperialism, and racialism. Whereas in 1929 Catholic Action had instructed Catholics in rather general terms simply to vote in the elections of that year, five years later it ordered, 'Go to the polis and vote for the government of the Honourable Mussolini'.[41] There was, however, a pseudo-debate on corporatism, or rather on the corporative institutions which Fascist Italy had created between 1925 and 1939. Though Pius XI had implicitly criticized Fascist corporatism's 'monopoly privilege' as being incompatible with Catholic social teaching in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, academics at the Catholic University of Milan like Amintore Fanfani and Francesco De Vito supported Fascist corporatism in their publications, and like Fr. Brucculeri of the Jesuit journal *La civiltà cattolica*, they tentatively suggested ways in which the system might be improved and made to accord more fully with Catholic principles.[42] Again, though the Vatican strongly opposed Mussolini's alliance with Hitler, and his subsequent entry into the Second World War on the side of Nazi Germany in June 1940, Italian Catholic lay opinion was more divided.

Politically conscious Catholics began to prepare for the post-Fascist future long before Mussolini was toppled from power in July 1943. Sturzo in exile and De Gasperi in the Vatican library had ampie rime to meditate on the short-lived and unsuccessful experience *of popolarismo*: both carne to the inescapable conclusion that its fatal weakness had been its poor relations with the Vatican, a lesson that De Gasperi was to apply successfully after 1945. FUCI continued its vigil and in 1936 the Movimento Laureati began its Religious Culture Weeks at Camaldoli, from which emerged new ideas for the future of social Catholicism.[43] Thus, as elsewhere in Europe, the 1930s and early 1940s provided the crucial, formative period for the emergence of the post-war Italian Catholic intelligentsia.

Just as active Catholic participation in the First World War had been one of the prerequisites for the emergence of the PPI in 1919, so Catholic participation in the armed Resistance against the Nazi occupiers
p. 85 and the Fascist Social Republic from ↳ September 1943 to May 1945 helped to wash away the 'sin' of collaboration between the Church and Fascism, and gave a patriotic chrism to the re-emerging Catholic political forces. Few Catholics gave serious support to Mussolini's Social Republic, whereas in the Veneto, Friuli, Lombardy and Piedmont, and Emilia-Romagna regions there was widespread support from both the parochial clergy and the peasantry for the partisans. A variety of Catholic groups and individuate raised, trained, and led partisan bands—the Osoppo Brigades in Friuli for example, were the creation of elements from the local Movimento Laureati, the Fiamme Verdi Tito Speri brigade in Brescia was organized by local Catholic Action, Piero Malvestiti played a crucial role in the Comitato di Liberazion (CLN), the ruling council of the Resistance in Milan, and Enrico Mattei ended up commanding a small army of partisans under the Christian democratic banner. Italian Catholics thus paid their passage and earned a secure place for their leaders, with De Gasperi at their head, in the first Resistance Unity government of 1944.[44]

5. The Rebirth of Italian political Catholicism, 1943–1945

At its rebirth along with the other major anti-Fascist parties after the fall of Fascism in 1943, Italian political Catholicism exhibited strong signs of pluralistic tendencies. Though the core of the reborn Catholic Party gathered around Alcide De Gasperi, the historic leader of political Catholicism and nuclei of other former Popolare leaders like S. Jacini and Migliori in Milan, and Spataro, Cingolani, and Sceiba in Rome, other new groups with divergent ideological positions had appeared on the scene. The emerging cadres formed by Montini in FUCI and Movimento Laureati were not so divergent in their ideas from old-style Popolarismo, though their guiding principles, as enshrined in the Code of Camaldoli, differed in some significant respects frorn De Gasperi's programme for the Democrazia Cristiana (the Christian Demoerats), published in 1944, which became the founding charter of the new party.[45] The ideas of *ex-guelfisti* like Piero Malvestiti and other Catholics who took part in the Resistance tended towards a more consciously Catholic 'third way' between capitalism and communism (though without any corporatist overtones) and were later to be incorporated into the Republican constitution.

A more advanced position was represented by another Catholic active in the Resistance, Enrico Mattei. Together with the leaders of the re-emerging Catholic tradeunion movemient, Gronchi and Grandi, he gave the most explicit commitment to the need for the State to intervene in the economy in the interests of social justice. The position of Giorgio La Pira, university professor and later mayor of Florence, was even more radically different. Inspired by the belief in the need for a profound religious and moral transformation of
p. 86 society as the true basis for social justice, La Pira ↳ was committed to a Catholic integralist view of politics, which required the active and dominant participation of the Church. But the most extreme of all Catholic political groups to emerge in the aftermath of Fascism were the Christian Socialists of Leghorn and the Christian left or Communists of Rome. Influenced by their contacts with the mainstream, Marxist left, they advocated a workers' revolution as a social expression of the Gospel. Neither movement secured a mass base for its activities, and the members of the Rome group were excommunicated by Pius XII in 1949.[46]

Ironically, when faced by the difficulties of Italy's immediate, post-war economic situation, its dependence on US capital and the DC's lack of a competent economic élite, all the various social theories of the Catholic Party were forced to give way to the *laissez-faire* policies of an old-fashioned liberal, Luigi Einaudi, who was co-opted by De Gasperi to organize Italian reconstruction.[47]

The political pluralism latent in all this ideological diversity was not to take any significant organizational form after 1945, though it was later to manifest itself in the emergence of factions inside the Catholic Party —particularly after the death of De Gasperi in 1954. The various groups in fact very quickly coalesced into an essentially compact and united Christian Democratic Party, thus providing De Gasperi with the organisational base to bring about the triumph of Christian Democracy between 1945 and 1948. De Gasperi's clever tactical manœuvring was also assisted by the confused politics of the CLN, which laid claim to the government of post-Fascist Italy. Another, vital, factor was the concern of both the Vatican and the USA about the threat from the Communist Party, which had assumed the dominant role in the Resistance. The DC leader's first stroke of luck was to be chosen as a compromise candidate for the premiership when Ferrucio Parri's administration was brought down by the conservatives in December 1945. As the first 'Catholic' prime minister, and also as minister of the interior, the key ministry controlling the prefects or provincial governors and the police, De Gasperi was able to exploit the enormous political and ultimately electoral advantage which these two great offices gave an Italian politician. His hand was greatly strengthened by the tactically neutralist role which he insisted that his party should play in the contentious referendum on the monarchy which took place in June 1946, and the DC emerged at the accompanying general elections as the largest of the three mass parties (the others being the Socialists and the Communists) with 35 per cent of the vote.[48]

The role of the Vatican was crucial to the success which the new Catholic Party achieved. After the collapse of Fascism, and even more so after the abolition of the monarchy, the Catholic Church was the strongest surviving national institution in Italy, a phenomenon that Federico Chabod appropriately compared to the
p. 87 situation following the fall of the Roman Empire.[49] Along with the USA, with which the ↳ Vatican had established a dose working relationship during the course of the War, the Vatican was one of the two arbiters of Italy's fate in the immediate post-war period. But the support of the Vatican for the DC was by no means guaranteed in 1945. There is clear evidence that Pius XII and some of his closest advisers, influenced by the troubled history of the Partito Popolare in the 1920s, were not convinced of the need or desirability of committing themselves to a Catholic Party. Only the insistent lobbying of Mgr. Montini, and the DC's 1946 electoral success weaned them away from earlier plans to resuscitate a clerico-moderate alliance between the Catholics and a leading liberal politician such as Orlando. It was not until 1947 that the Vatican finally dropped its reservations. The defenestration of the Socialist and Communist parties from government, and De Gasperi's success in inserting a clause into the republican constitution which confirmed the Lateran Pacts against fierce opposition from the Socialists and other lay parties, finally convinced the Vatican that the DC was the only reliable instrument for the defence of its interests in Italy.[50]

It was also Vatican diplomacy which won acceptance for De Gasperi and the DC and smoothed the way for De Gasperi's highly successful visit to Washington in 1947.[51] As the Cold War situation developed, it became clear that the DC was the only credible answer to the challenge from the Communists and the Socialists, and thus it won financial and moral support from both the Vatican and the USA in the crucial elections of April 1948.[52] In particular, thanks to a Vatican policy of total commitment, the very substantial forces of Catholic Action were thrown into the contest on the side of the DC. Having survived the Fascist era intact, whereas the organizations of the working-class subculture had had to be virtually rebuilt from scratch, Catholic Action was by now Italy's largest and most effective voluntary organization, with branches in every single one of the peninsula's 24,000 Catholic parishes. Through the Civic Committees of Luigi Gedda, the Catholic vote was in this way mobilized on a massive scale.[53]

There was also another obvious reason for the success of the DC in 1948—the fear of Communism. In the shadow of the Prague coup and under a massive propaganda barrage, the DC was seen as the ark of salvation by much of Italy's middle class. The 1948 general elections therefore witnessed a kind of Giolitti-Gentiloni pact in reverse, with hundreds of thousands of voters forsaking the Liberal and other right-of-centre parties to put their faith in the DC. As a result, the party won 48 per cent of the vote and, due to a quirk of the system of proportional representation, over 50 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In the short space of less than fifty years Italian political Catholicism had made the transition from being an anti-
p. 88 system ↳ movement to being the dominant party of government, and remained so until the early 1990s.

The support of the Vatican, however, proved to be a mixed blessing for De Gasperi and the DC. Catholic success in the 1948 elections gave rise to a spirit of Catholic triumphalism, to a climate of confessional intolerance which led one historian to de-scribe Italy in the 1940s and 1950s as 'the Papal State of the Twentieth Century'.[54] Thanks to Italy's Napoleonic, highly centralized, administrative system, Catholic power at a national level was effectively replicated at the level of local government, creating a repressive atmosphere for both political and religious minorities,[55] and the Italian Catholic world sought to match political dominance with the establishment of cultural hegemony over Italian society as well. In these circumstances, Pope Pius XII tended to see the DC as merely the long, secular arm of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Without a solidly established organizational base of its own, the DC under De Gasperi had to fight hard to escape the more extreme demands of the pope and his advisers, including one that would have resulted in a legal ban on both the Communist and Socialist parties, and during the 1952 local elections in Rome, De Gasperi was only able to avoid being forced into an alliance with the reviving forces of neo-Fascism by a technical loophole.[56]

6. The DC after De Gasperi: Fanfani and the New Model Party

The period of DC triumph was, in any case, to be of short duration. Within less than five years of its massive 1948 election victory it was clear to all that such a feat could not be repeated. Though the rigours of the Cold War had not abated, large sections of the middle classes had become alienated from their erstwhile saviours. In particular, the application of the DC's reforming policy in the South, through the passage of a land redistribution measure, enraged local élites. To counter the growing threat from both the right and a resurgent Communist Party in 1952 De Gasperi reluctantly pushed through Parliament an electoral law amendment which would give the party, or coalition of parties, with the largest number of votes in excess of a quarter 51 per cent of the seats. This 'swindle law', as it was dubbed by its Socialist and Communist opponents, bore an unfortunate resemblance to Mussolini's Acerbo Law of 1923, and this was probably another reason why the DC lost votes when the elections were held.[57] With its vote reduced to just over 40 per cent in the 1953 elections, the DC was condemned to rule for another ten years with a precarious, unviable parliamentary majority provided by support from the small centre parties—the Social Democrats, the Liberals, and the Republicans. The consequences for De Gasperi personally were more serious in the
p. 89 short term: he failed to form a government and ↳ was relegated to the sidelines as party secretary. His death the following year was a further serious blow to the Catholic Party.

Amintore Fanfani sought to take over the mantle of De Gasperi's authority without any enduring success and the DC has subsequently never had an undisputed national leader. It thus become more and more of a coalition of party factions. Faced by the risk of further electoral decline, Fanfani also sought to create a new model party built around an autonomous party organization with an electoral base independent of the Church and Catholic Action and with sources of party funding other than from Confindustria, the private sector employers' association with which the DC had been closely associated. As Giorgio Galli, the leading authority on the post-war Catholic Party has put it, Fanfani no longer wanted the DC to be 'the servant but the leader of the (Italian) Catholic world'.[58] Fanfani's project had only limited success as far as the party's structure and electoral base were concerned, but the pursuit of funding from the public-sector companies had more success and initiated the process whereby they became incorporated into a system of state clientelism. The creation of a ministry of state holdings in 1956 and the withdrawal of the state companies from membership of Confindustria in 1957 brought the state sector more directly under the control of the politicians. In this way, in the longer term certainly, the DC was to become more independent of both the Church and organized Italian capitalism.

By 1953 the Christian Democrats' electoral base already possessed characteristics that were significantly different from those of the PPI in the 1920s. The hard core of electoral support for the Catholic Party remained the Catholic subculture of north-eastern Italy and the other white areas, and it still relied heavily on the capacity of Catholic Action and collateral organizations like the Catholic trade unions and Coldiretti (the powerful farmers' association) to mobilize the vote elsewhere. But the electoral success of 1946, when the DC won 35 per cent of the vote as opposed to the 20 per cent which the PPI achieved in 1921, is explained by another factor—the introduction of female suffrage in 1945. It has been estimated that in the 1950s and 1960s more than 60 per cent of DC votes in local and national elections carne from women.[59] In addition, as has been seen in the 1948 elections especially, the DC benefited from desertion of the parties of the centre-right by middle-class voters.

Another important feature of the 1946 and 1948 elections was the unprecedented support which the DC won in some southern regions. In particular, the party managed to establish small strongholds in Abruzzi and Molise, and in Basilicata, the latter being a region where the Popolari had hardly existed as an electoral force in 1921. This new support can largely be explained in terms of the DC's success in exploiting the 'Southern political system', that is in tapping into the more traditional electoral resources of clientelism and mafia, by means of the ministry of the interior and the prefects.[60] History was repeating itself; just as in 1861, when
p. 90 the local landowning élite had joined forces with the new Northern moderate Liberal unifiers of Italy in a ↳ 'tacit alliance'[61] and in 1924 when the Southern notables jumped on the bandwagon of Fascism, thus giving the Fascists 80 per cent of the vote whereas they had hardly been represented at all in 1921, so in 1946 and 1948 substantial elements of the southern landed élites chose to throw in their lot with Christian Democracy which, as the party of the prime minister, seemed to offer the best defence of their class interests. The success of the DC in stabilizing these new sources of electoral support was to depend upon the capacity of local leaders to put down solid, enduring roots in their areas. Despite the setback in 1953, this they largely succeeded in doing, using control of the ministry of public works, the Southern land reform agency, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (the development agency for the South), and such other institutions as the ministry of posts and telegraphs and the ministry of transport (state railways) which provided an almost unlimited source of jobs for southern constituents. Like the Socialists, the Social Democrats, and the Republican Party in the 1960s, from 1948 onwards the DC in the South became a largely clientelistic party and also one deeply penetrated by organized crime: the Mafia in Sicily, the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, and the Camorra in Naples.[62]

Even more novel and more fruitful were the DC's attempts to exploit the massive state sector inherited from Fascism for electoral purposes. As a result of the operations of IRI—the Industrial Reconstruction Institute established during the Great Depression to bail out 'lame duck' industries and banks—according to Ricossa, 'after 1936, the Italian state owned a proportionately larger part of industry than was the case in any other European state with the exception of the Soviet Union'.[63] Though Enrico Mattei had been given the task of dismantling this massive state sector, beginning with AGIP, the petrol distribution firm, by capitalizing on the discovery of natural gas in the Po Valley, he added a massive new dimension to that holding—ENI, the State Hydrocarbon Agency. This he used to intervene in the restructuring and modernization of Italy's economic system, with greatly beneficial effects during the economic miracle in the late 1950s and early I960.[64] Thus, after the Second World War, the Italian state had a controlling interest in economic activities ranging from transport (railways and airlines), to engineering, chemical, energy, and foodproducing industries. In addition, the State controlled, directly or indirectly, the lion's share of Italy's major banks. It is also clear that Mattei was the first Christian Democratic politician to use systematically the funds of a state-controlled industry to influence internal party struggles, largely, it should be said, in order to promote the interests as he saw them of the industries themselves.[65]

p. 91 In fact, the Fascists had already pioneered the use of jobs in the state bureaucracy, the party, the corporations, and possibly in the state economic sector too, for the purpose of 'manufacturing consensus'.[66] In the 1950s and 1960s Fanfani and his Christian Democratic allies followed suit on a larger scale, colonizing industrial undertakings, banks and credit institutions, and the media industries with their appointees in order to reward political favours, win electoral support, and guarantee access to new sources of party funding.[67] In consequence, voting behaviour in Italy has been increasingly conditioned by personal, clientelistic relationships between the voters and the parties. In this way, the DC became, like Fascism before it, a kind of 'party of the State' or 'regime', and one which by 1968 had been in power uninterruptedly for longer than Fascism.

Whatever the long-term implications of the strategies outlined above, in the short term, that is from 1953 to 1963, the DC found itself in an increasingly difficult, seemingly untenable position in Parliament, and one that was not significantly alleviated by the results of the 1958 elections. A narrow and fragile parliamentary majority of the DC and the centre parties condemned Italy to short-lived, ineffective coalition governments. The exploitation of the Cold War card, the continued reliance on appeals to the fear of Communism, provided no escape from this situation: on the contrary, the Communists actually gained in electoral strength in this period.[68] Only a more radical strategy, namely an 'opening to the left', with a splitting of the alliance between the Communists and the by now thoroughly discontented Socialists, and the absorption of the latter into the governing majority offered any realistic chance of escape from this situation. But this initiative was blocked by conservative elements in the DC, the US administration, and above all by the intransigent hostility of the Church hierarchy. Under the leadership of Pius XII they refused to countenance any compromise with the still Marxist-orientated PSI.

Relief carne with the death of Pius XII and the election of John XXIII in 1958. Papa Roncalli's new course on the international plane, the first tentative steps to-wards Vatican Ostpolitik, paralleled the DC's opening to the left in Italian, domestic politics. More important even than that, was John XXIII's determination to disengage the Church from his predecessor's policy of total involvement in Italian politics. Though obstructed by conservative elements in the Italian episcopate, and even in the Roman Curia itself,[69] the Pope managed to establish the principle that Italian Catholic lay politicians had the right and even the duty to make fundamental changes of direction by themselves. His encyclical *Pacem in Terris* was the final green
p. 92 light for the experiment in a centre-left coalition which, even if it was to prove largely unsuccessful ↳ in its objective of bringing much-needed economic and social reforms to Italy, at least unblocked the immobilism that had prevailed since the 1950s, and extended the life of Christian Democratic political hegemony. Under a succession of prime ministers who were mostly veterans of FUCI, starting with Aldo Moro, and with the blessing of their former mentor Montini, who was elected as Pope Paul VI in 1963, the DC succeeded in splitting the left and reducing the Socialist Party to the status of a dependent governmental ally.[70]

The failure of the reformist project of the Centre-left can be explained by a number of factors, but there are those who argue that it was a result of a deliberate choice on the part of the DC, which was afraid that the effeets of reform would be to upset the precarious balance of social forces on which its electorate was built.[71] Whatever the explanation, there can be no doubt that the trend towards state clientelism accentuated from the mid-1960s onwards, the DC strengthening its links with a 'state bourgeoisie' composed of finance speculation and parasitic bureaucratic elements, all feeding on the patronage resources provided by control of the governmental apparatus, be it national, regional, or local, and the vast public sector.

7. The DC and the Beginnings of Secularization: Vatican II and the economic Miracle

John XXIII's other great initiative in the *aggiornamento* of the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962–6), was also to have a powerful impact on the future of political Catholicism in Italy. Its stress upon freedom, the role of the laity—both in the liturgy and in other ecclesial matters—, and above all the primacy of the individual conscience, led to a brief flowering of Catholic political pluralism. At one level, it encóuraged new ventures in community—*communità di base*—and a re-surgence of Catholic intellectual freedom which expressed itself in the *cattolici del dissenso* (dissident Catholics) and was to reach its culmination in Catholic opposition to the referendum against the divorce law in 1974.[72]

The most important example of autonomous, Catholic lay activism is provided by the ACLI—the Associations of Italian Catholic Workers. Founded as a point of reference and guidance for Catholic workers inside the unified Italian General Confederation of Labour, which was born out of the Resistance unity in 1944, the ACLI spearheaded the eventual break-up of the confederation and the return to a separate Catholic trade union confederation, the CISL, three years later. In the 1960s the ACLI increasingly moved away from the positions of the parent body, Catholic Action, and from the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and
p. 93 under the ↳ leadership of Livio Labor it had established a wholly autonomous role for itself by the end of the decade. In the 1972 general elections, Labor was to launch the first major experiment in Catholic political pluralism since the war by offering an alternative list of left-wing Catholic candidates under the name of the Movimento Politico dei Lavoratori (Catholic Workers' political Movement), but had no success in winning seats.[73] The impulse towards Catholic political pluralism also took a more dangerous form, as far as the DC was concerned, with the tendency of increasing numbers of Catholics to ignore the instructions of the eclesiastical hierarchy and to vote instead for the Socialists and Communists. The near-monopoly of the Catholic electorate by the DC had finally been broken.

These tendencies, and an even broader cultural crisis of Italian Catholicism, were also encouraged by momentous changes which had been taking place in Italian society as a whole since the mid-1950s—the effects of the economic miracle, and of the cultural conquest of Italy by Anglo-American influences. The miracle had set in motion profound economic and social changes—industrialization, urbanization, and an accompanying migratory shift from countryside to town and from the South to the North, all of which helped to break or at least to transform radically the ties between the Church and hundreds of thousands of Italian Catholics.[74] The traditional values of Italian Catholic culture—'frugality, private property, family and the subordinate position of women, the myth of the land, acceptance of one's social status and the virtue of obedience, and the castigation of atheists, sinners and revolutionaries'[75]—were also challenged by the bombardment of Italy by Anglo-American consumerist and essentially secular culture through the cinema, television, and popular music resulting in a diminishing acceptance of these values, especially among women and young people.

Thus even before the student upsurge of 1968 and the trade-union agitation of the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, which were to set in train a decade of social unrest, spawning new social movements, it is clear that Italian society was already going through processes of radical social change. The impact on the Catholic world was dramatic; attendance at mass slumped, from 69 per cent of the population in 1956 to only 48 per cent in 1968. There was an equally dramatic slump in support for Catholic associationalism, membership of Catholic Action falling from 3.3 million in the mid-1960s to 1.65 million in 1970.[76] Perhaps even more significant than these figures was the outcome of the 1974 referendum: the substantial majority in favour of divorce clearly demonstrated that the Church's ability to influence Italian civil society was in decline. As a result of secularization, the base of the Christian Democratic electorate in the Catholic community was beginning to shrink. The process had thus already begun whereby the DC was to be transformed into a more conventionally middle-class, conservative party.[77]

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8. Conclusion

It is clear that the Papacy played a crucial, determining role in the evolution of political Catholicism in Italy both before and during the period under discussion. It was the Papacy which called it into being, permitted it to enter the parliamentary arena, and grudgingly allowed it to take the shape of an organised mass political party, yet effectively destroyed the chances of the survival of the party between 1922 and 1924. During the Fascist interlude, it was Pius XI who prepared for the post-Fascist future by preserving FUCI and the Movimento Laureati in the 'island of separateness' that was Catholic Action. And having failed to Christianize and clericalize Fascism as he intended, he at least was able to ensure that Catholics, in the shape of the emerging cadres of those organizations, would be in a strong position to fight for the political succession after the fall of the regime.

Similarly, the rebirth of political Catholicism in the post-Fascist era, and its electoral triumph in 1948, would have been impossible without papal intervention and support. There is no parallel between this situation and the history of political Catholicism elsewhere in Europe. This is hardly surprising: the role of the Catholic Church in Italian politics has always been determined by a factor which is obviously missing in every other Catholic country—the presence of the Papacy. Given that presence, the Catholic Church in Italy speaks with a greater and more direct authority than elsewhere, for at the risk of stating the obvious, its head is no mere cardinal primate, but the Bishop of Rome, the Vicar of Christ, and the infallible head of the Church throughout the world. And the Church-State conflicts of the Risorgimento period, and especially the Roman Question, bound the Papacy and Italian Catholics very closely together. As Falconi has described it, the Papacy has always regarded the Italians 'as an essentially levitical people', at the service of the 'Servant of the Servants of God'.[78]

For this reason, until the election of John XXIII in 1958, *all the* popes in the period under discussion showed great reluctance to concede real political autonomy to the Italian Catholic laity. Until 1929 the organized, mass Catholic movement was seen as an invaluable *forza di manovra*, a lever to be used in the Vatican's tortuous but improving relations with the Italian state, and particularly in the pursuit of the Papacy's major goal up to this point—a reversal of the losses of territory, property, legal privileges, and social influence which it had suffered during the Risorgimento. This policy carne into increasing conflict with the growing cultural and political maturity of Italian Catholics, the sharpest examples being in 1904 when Pius X effectively pro-scribed the first Christian democratic movement and, even more brutally, in the mid-1920s when Catholics were forced to accept papal policies that contributed to the downfall of Italian democracy.

On the other hand, the Vatican's revivification and reorganization of the Unione Popolare into Catholic Action, was ultimately to provide both a line of retreat for many ex-Popolari after the demise of their party,
p. 95 prompting bitter rows between the ↳ Vatican and the regime over their political activities in 1929,1931, and 1938, as well as providing a launching pad for a new Catholic Party in 1943. That experience of Catholic Action did, however, produce a new breed of Catholic politicians who, crushed between the theocratic authoritarianism of Pius XI and the totalitarian intolerance of Mussolini, were arguably more conformist, and more obedient to ecclesiastical authority, than their predecessors in the PPI had been.

The DC was also more heavily dependent upon Catholic Action than its pre-cursor, relying upon that organization for the continued recruitment of its cadres and the mobilization of the Catholic electorate. Fanfani's efforts to build up a party organization and electoral base independent of Catholic Action resulted in a dilution of the Catholic nature of the party as Cold War tactics and clientelistic operations began the process of transforming the DC, a typical religion-based, inter-class party, into one that was more broadly representative of the middle and lower middle classes. It can therefore be argued that the PPI, despite its self-proclaimed aconfessionality and its difflcult relations with the ecclesiastical authorities, was a more genuinely Catholic party during its short existence than was the DC.

The determining influence of the Papacy is less clearly discernible in the development of the ideologies of Italian political Catholicism, except in so far as it crushed the Marxist tendencies of the extreme left-wing margins of the Catholic movement in the early 1920s and 1940s. The formative spiritual and ideological influences of Montini on the FUCI and Movimento the Laureati in the 1930s and early 1940s, and in particular his introduction of many future leaders of the DC to the ideas of Jacques Maritain, was achieved despite serious misgivings on the part of the Vatican authorities.[79] In the same period, Fascism acted as a catalyst for a general rethinking of political ideas and tactics on the part of many Catholic activists: the most obvious examples being Sturzo and De Gasperi, but of great importance also were the political theorizing of Piero Malvestiti and the Guelf movement and of La Pira and his friends in Florence. The experience of Fascism also ensured the effective abandonment of corporatist ideas, even by some of their most notable proponents, such as Fanfani and Paolo Emilio Taviani. Given the intellectual ferment that had preceded the refounding of the Catholic Party, it is especially ironic that after 1946, faced by the realities of government, of electoral politics, of Italy's economic plight and powerful US influences, the DC developed a working ideology of pragmatism. The ideas of social Catholicism have increasingly been relegated to parliamentary and conference oratory and to the rhetoric of periodical journalism. Since then, the Christian Dernocrats seem to have come to terms with the reality of international, and Italian, neo-capitalism. If the Catholic concept of social solidarity survives in practice in Italy then it is in the form of widespread and endemie clientelism. And if *Pacem in Terris* provided the ideological justification for the opening to the left, it appears to have had very little effect upon the evolution of DC policy in the 1960s other than, perhaps, to justify the continuation of a large public sector.

p. 96 As Webster has pointed out, 'It is always a mistake to write of Catholics in Italy, or elsewhere, as a block. Within the general limits of obedience to the Holy See there is room for all but the most radical differences.'[80] Very wide differences there were in-deed inside Italian political Catholicism, and they would probably have been wider and more radical but for papal intervention against such radicalism, usually it has to be said, radicalism of the left. In the early 1920s, as we have seen, Catholic political pluralism was positively encouraged, as the Vatican sought to undermine the PPI's monopoly of the Catholic electorate, but once the Vatican had decided to make the DC its agents in Italy, such freedom was prohibited in the name of the political 'Unity of Catholics'

The dilution of the ideological patrimony of Italian political Catholicism was, as we have seen, largely the result of new electoral strategies. The geographical and social bases of Italian political Catholicism remained essentially the same until 1946. Electorally speaking, the PPI never succeeded in attracting very much support beyond the traditional geographical and social boundaries of the Catholic movement out of which it had developed. Only the party's restricted success in winning votes from landed élites in the Campagna, Apulia, and Sardinia gave any hint of the spectacular electoral success that the DC was to win for itself in the South after the Second World War.[81] Indeed, this success was partly responsible for making the DC a national party in a way in which the PPI emphatically was not. Bearing in mind the DC's other success in attracting broader middle-class support through anti-Communism and clientelism, it could therefore be argued that by 1968 it had realized the dream of many Catholic political activists of the last decades of the nineteenth century, namely the creation of a national conservative party.

Notes

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