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**GINO BEDANI**

**CHURCH AND STATE  
IN ITALIAN HISTORY.  
ORIGINS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS.**



**University College of Swansea**

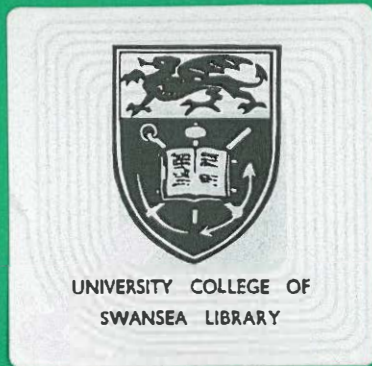
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**CHURCH AND STATE IN ITALIAN HISTORY.  
ORIGINS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS**

**Inaugural Lecture**

**Delivered at the College  
on 1 February 1994**

by

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Italian**

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA  
1994

of my talk. So although I focus on a less flattering aspect of their combined history, and in the case of the Church, at least, the optic is inevitably coloured by the vision of the renegade, my hope is that any feelings which may have found their way into my analysis have been channelled constructively.

It is now more than a quarter of a century since I came to Wales to be a student of Italian, and for most of that time I have had the good fortune to have first as mentor, and then as colleague and Head of Department, Professor Frederic Jones. I recall vividly something he used to say to me, early in my career, when we discussed college politics in Cardiff. Fred is a Welshman, of course, and he would say: 'Gino, what you must understand is that you can't trust the Welsh. They're much more cunning than the English.' Of course this is not true - the English are every bit as cunning. Fred's comment was hyperbole. But it was also part of a healthy instinct for national self-criticism, something familiar to anyone who knows about Italy, where collective self-disparagement is something of a national pastime. In the case of Italy, though, we are dealing with a mental conditioning that has deep historical roots, and in which national self-criticism has some justification. At the moment the country is undergoing a particularly painful process of transformation. For two years we have witnessed almost daily revelations of corruption, and incarcerations on an unprecedented scale, as if the country is trying to purge itself of a social affliction which has reached intolerable limits.

But the problem goes deeper than the individual criminal acts which have been making the headlines. It is about a system which has spawned networks of patronage, where party power, in parts of Italy, has merged with organized crime, promoted illicit finances, and invaded vast areas of Italian society and used them as fiefdoms for the distribution of favours. Italy is often described as a *partitocrazia* (a word which means 'rule of the parties'). Top posts in national TV stations, banks, state industries, the health service, have long been

distributed not on the basis of professional competence but according to a system for which the Italians have another word - *lottizzazione*: a method of sharing the spoils as part of coalition bargaining.

It is against this deep-seated malaise that Italian society is reacting. The judiciary is active as never before. Political parties have broken up, reshaped themselves, shed corrupt leaders. New political forces, like the Democratic Alliance and the separatist Northern leagues, have emerged. Many political leaders have been discredited; the present Prime Minister, for instance, has never been a member of a political party; he is a former Governor of the Bank of Italy. Almost a third of the country's MPs are on trial on charges of corruption.

How far back should we go in analysing the problem? Italy is both one of the oldest and one of the youngest countries in Europe. First united by the Romans in the 3rd Century BC, it did not become a unified nation-state in the modern sense until 1861. But within months of the life of the new Parliament, a deputy by the name of Petrucci della Gattina wrote a small book in which he complained about the links between the Camorra and numerous Neapolitan politicians: 'Non fecero che impinguare i loro, non obliando punto sé stessi, considerando la cosa pubblica come affare di famiglia.'<sup>1</sup> One of the founding fathers of the new state, Massimo D'Azeglio, wrote to his wife in 1866: '...se tu sapessi che congiura d'imbroglioni e d'intriganti si distende sull'Italia, ne tremaresti anche tu'.<sup>2</sup> Between Unification and the turn of the century the new state was beset by a series of scandals

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<sup>1</sup> 'They have done nothing but line the pockets of their families, not forgetting their own, because they think of the public domain as a family preserve.' F. Petrucci della Gattina, *I moribondi del palazzo Carignano*, Milan, Perelli editore, 1862, pp. 187-9.

<sup>2</sup> 'If you knew what a band of swindlers is emerging all over Italy, you too would quake at the thought'. Cited in S. Turone, *Politica ladra. Storia della corruzione in Italia 1861-1992*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1992, v.

involving prime ministers, top politicians, corrupt police officials, judges and bankers. Witnesses were killed, honest judges removed. In recent years a number of histories of corruption have been published which have exposed the continuity of these corrupt practices from the time of Unification, through the fascist era and beyond.<sup>3</sup> We now know a great deal about dealings between the Allies and the mafia before the end of the Second World War, that allegations of political corruption back in the 1940s were suppressed, and since then there have been murdered journalists, drowned ministers, inexplicable suicides, and a pillaging of public resources that makes one suspect that recent revelations are simply the tip of the iceberg.

A number of explanations have been put forward for this state of civic disintegration. One argument is that Italy was unified in the 19th Century on the highly centralised Napolconic model which stifled strong regional identities. Unity was maintained at the centre through deals with powerful local politicians who could otherwise cause trouble. This way of buying off potential opponents, what Italians have called *trasformismo*, became deeply ingrained in Italian politics and has infected the whole system. Others have argued that since Unification government administration has been increasingly colonized by southern personnel, who have brought with them the systems of patronage typical of the South. There are those who have focussed on the period after the Second World War and argued that the fear of a strong Communist Party allowed the christian democrats to remain permanently in power, and left the country without alternating governments. This enabled christian democrats to occupy the state, reward their coalition partners, and even privately come to terms with the opposition, thus giving rise to another peculiarity of Italian politics, a form of government

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<sup>3</sup> To name but a few: S. Turone, *Politica ladra. Storia della corruzione in Italia 1861-1992*, op. cit.; F. Cazzola, *L'Italia del pizzo*, Turin, Einaudi, 1992; G. Galli, *L'Italia sotterranea. Storia, politica e scandali*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1983.

known as *consociativismo*, in which everybody colludes in the system because there are pickings for all.

These analyses are not mutually exclusive, and all can lay claim to some explanatory power. There is, however, one other aspect of the problem which has received less attention, the religious dimension. The catholic historian Pietro Scoppola, with his usual ingenuity, has recently revamped an old catholic claim, but in an interesting way. 20 years of Fascism, he argues, because of the regime's methods of mobilising behaviour and attitudes, created a society accustomed to mass mobilisation. After Fascism's collapse, it was not possible to return to the old democracy, which was managed by a detached elite. After the war, liberals and republicans, part of this elitist tradition, had no mass followings. So that, for the majority of the population, the Church and the christian democrats stepped in as guarantors of stability against the communist threat.<sup>4</sup> Despite all its faults, therefore, the system has endured because of the deep reserves of social solidarity and democracy within the Italian catholic tradition. But the country's failure so far to build a solid civic culture must to some extent be shared by the two major subcultures. On the communist side for focussing for too long on its revolutionary heritage. On the catholic side, the Church has not been able to respond to a rapid secularization of Italian society, and create a sound framework of public morality.

Much as I admire the work of Scoppola, I have to say that his interpretation attributes a little too much to the democratic spirit of Catholicism. Partly, this is because it does not reach far enough back into Italian history, and take sufficient account of how Italian Catholicism has been shaped. I want first of all, therefore, to broaden the historical range of the critique. But I also want to focus on a unique feature of Italian history which sets it apart from all other countries, catholic or otherwise. Germany, for example, may have suffered a

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<sup>4</sup> See P. Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1991, pp. 99-108.

order are clearly distinguished. In both these areas, the Papacy has had a uniquely inhibiting role in Italian history.

In connection with the lack of territorial unity, we must remember that the Papacy could not have maintained the status of a universal institution if it had become politically subject to any one Italian ruler. Its very spiritual supremacy required it to protect its political sovereignty, making and breaking alliances with internal or foreign powers at will. But its ability to call upon catholic rulers outside Italy to act as protectors of its interests, simply added complications to the already existing fragmentation of the peninsula. So that, while outside Italy national Churches frequently contributed positively to a sense of national identity, internally, the requirements of the Papacy were inherently divisive.

The question of secularization is a separate, but related, issue. In his recent history of corruption in Italy, Sergio Turone considers it relevant to note that 'per molti secoli, dalla caduta dell'Impero romano in poi, gran parte della penisola italiana è stata politicamente una teocrazia'.<sup>7</sup> The theocratic doctrine that the Pope had inherited from St. Peter supremacy over all monarchs was first announced by Pope Gregory VII in 1075 (*Dictatus papae*). But even this doctrinal issue embroiled Italy in a special way. Just over a century later, Innocent III restated the doctrine, but added a critical element to it. In his encyclical *Sicut univertatis conditor* he reasserted the authority of the Papacy over the Empire, but continued: 'Ambedue questi poteri o guide hanno avuto i loro seggi in Italia il qual paese quindi ottenne la precedenza su ogni altro per divina disposizione. E perciò se pure noi dobbiamo estendere l'attenzione della Nostra provvidenza a tutte le province tuttavia dobbiamo con particolare e

<sup>7</sup> '...for many centuries, from the fall of the Roman Empire, a large part of the Italian peninsula was a political theocracy'. Turone, *Politica ladra*, p. vii.

paterna sollecitudine provvedere all'Italia.'<sup>8</sup> We have to bear in mind, therefore, that as other nations gradually asserted their independence from Rome, continued Papal control over Italy was sanctioned by divine command.

The debate over theocracy was the first doctrinal issue to register a secularizing tendency in christian Europe. At the level of christian teaching, the first great secularizing moment, and this is a personal view, the development which fractured the universalism of the theocratic doctrine, was in fact a revolution in christian theology brought about by the work of Thomas Aquinas. This Italian Dominican broke dramatically with the anti-rationalist tenor of the Patristic tradition and brought to the heart of christian thinking an unprecedented respect for the autonomy of reason. His system was based on the idea that the natural order was distinguishable from revelation, and provided a human rationale on which to base society. God himself had created the world in this way. Henceforth it would be possible to challenge theocracy in the name of Christianity. The Ghibellines could be anti-clerical without being anti-christian. In the politics of the time the temporal power of the Church became a live issue within Christianity, debated by thinkers and poets alike. Thus when we meet Pope Boniface VIII in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, that Pope who liked to dress up in Imperial garb, to boast that he was Emperor no less than Pope, renowned for his avarice, his violence and other unmentionable unpriestly vices, he is such a thoroughly nasty piece of work that Dante makes him the only character in the *Divine Comedy* to have a place reserved for him in Hell before his death. He is to be placed among those guilty of simony, the sale of ecclesiastical appointments. They are plunged head-down into burning holes in rock, with their legs flailing

<sup>8</sup> 'Both these powers or guides have had their centres in Italy, so that this country has acquired pre-eminence over all others by divine disposition. Thus, while we must extend our loving care to all provinces we must do so with a special and paternal solicitude in the case of Italy.' C. Falcori, *Storia dei Papi e del papato*, 4 vols, Rome-Milan, CEI, 1967-1972, vol 3, p. 659.

by those historians who write as if the Papacy, and Julius II in particular, in wanting to rid Italy of foreign powers, were almost precursors of Garibaldi and Mazzini. Julius II, a skilled warrior who was equally at ease in military armour or Papal vestments, certainly did want to rid Italy of the French. He organized the Holy League in 1511 for this purpose. But this was to increase Papal power. He was the Pope who, for a few towns in the Romagna had earlier been willing to sacrifice Venetian territory to the French, the Spaniards, the Swiss and others. The Venetian historian Paolo Sarpi pointed out some hundred years later that the Papacy had by this time lost many of its privileges throughout the rest of Europe, and was trying to compensate by retaining as much power in Italy as it could.<sup>12</sup> As John Thomson has argued in his important work on the period, *Popes and Princes*, the development of a sense of national identity was less advanced in Italy than elsewhere in Europe. And one of the main reasons he gives for this is 'papal intrigue'.<sup>13</sup>

A figure who does express the emerging needs on the peninsula was, of course, Machiavelli. His writings contain a demand for a science of government free of theological interference. Alongside this there is a cry of desperation for a ruler capable of uniting the war-torn playground of foreign powers and mercenary armies that was his homeland. As my colleague Remo Catani has recently reminded me, Machiavelli blames the Papacy because: 'Non essendo adunque stata la Chiesa potente da potere occupare l'Italia, né avendo permesso che un altro la occupi, è stata cagione che la non è potuta venire sotto uno capo.'<sup>14</sup> Later,

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<sup>12</sup> See P Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1982, pp. 325 and 327.

<sup>13</sup> John A. F. Thomson, *Popes and Princes 1417-1517*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1980, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> 'Since the Church has neither been able to occupy the whole of Italy, nor allowed anyone else to occupy it, it has been the cause why Italy has never come under one head'. *Discorsi*, Book I, chapter 12, section 5.

after the shock of Martin Luther's successful challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church, when the Counter-Reformation was in full swing and the Council of Trent had set up the Index of forbidden works, one of the first authors to honour its roster was Machiavelli.

The Council of Trent established for Catholicism a code of discipline, the effects of which would be felt for centuries. Never again, it was decided, would the Church's teaching authority be undermined as it had been by the protestant revolt. Although the effects of this tightening up of doctrinal control would be felt far and wide, the importance of its success in Italy was critical. More than a century earlier Pope Eugene IV had written to the Emperor: '...by the grace of God there are no heresies in Italy ... the Italians are true and good catholics, as they ought to be'.<sup>15</sup> I do not think for one moment that Eugene IV functioned with his eyes and ears firmly shut. The sub-text of his letter, however, was '...see how well I have my own patch under control'. Galileo, for instance, was not condemned for his ideas alone; there were even Jesuit scholars who supported his views. Galileo wrote his scientific works in the form of dialogues. One of his stock characters, Simplicio, an Aristotelian stooge, was especially set up to propose absurd solutions to difficult questions. This enabled Galileo to highlight the weaknesses of late Aristotelian science. His enemies used two arguments to persuade Pope Urban VIII to prosecute him. One was that the stooge Simplicio was meant to represent him, the Pope; the other, that the Spanish hierarchy, a powerful lobby within the Church, were broadcasting that the Pope had little control over the spread of ideas in his own territory, that he was a kind of theological wimp. In both ways, territorially and doctrinally, whenever the Papacy needed to assert itself, it was inevitably an Italian territory or individual who paid the price.

This is not to say that in the centuries which followed Papal aspirations were meekly

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<sup>15</sup> Thomson, *Popes and Princes*, p. 30.

accepted. Indeed, almost inevitably Italy developed one of the most vigorous anti-clerical traditions in Europe. Evidence published in 1991 now suggests that Giordano Bruno, the renegade Dominican burnt at the stake in 1600 for heresy did not go to England simply to pick fights with Aristotelian dons in Oxford. John Bossy seems to have solved one of the great Elizabethan mysteries. He has almost certainly established that Bruno was none other than the Elizabethan spy Henry Fagot.<sup>16</sup> He had no sympathy for the new religion of England, however, simply an intense desire to do anything which would contribute to the downfall of the Papacy. The Venetian Paolo Sarpi was a servite priest, who defended the independence from Rome of his native city and claimed for his government normal civil jurisdiction over the clergy. This provoked a Papal interdict on the city, and Sarpi himself escaped with a physical beating in a dark alley and a few stab-wounds. Pietro Giannone, a historian who performed a similar function in early 18th Century Naples was less fortunate. At this time the Vatican, again concerned about its image, was worried that the local Inquisition in Naples was ineffectual, and threatened to take jurisdiction out of diocesan control and exercise it directly from Rome. Giannone had to escape from Naples and spend the rest of his life in exile, eventually dying while detained in a Turin prison at the request of the Roman curia.

During the 18th Century the Papal States were almost a byword for inefficiency and bad government. As Harry Hearder has pointed out, there were no lay experts on its governing council until 1847.<sup>17</sup> Yet there were important figures in the rest of Italy who wished to reform the secular state: Genovesi, Galiani and Filangieri in the South; and Muratori, Verri and Beccaria in the North. Worthy of special mention is a short work by

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<sup>16</sup> See the compelling work by John Bossy, *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair*, London, Vintage, 1992. (Published in 1991 by Yale University Press).

<sup>17</sup> H. Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento*, London, Longman, 1983, pp. 112 and 181.

Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene* (*On Crimes and Punishment*), a devastating critique of the confusion, corruption and tyranny at the heart of judicial systems. This brilliant and lucid little book, in translation, became something of a bestseller in Europe and North America. It advocated the abolition of torture and the death penalty, the drafting of laws in the vernacular, the elimination of judicial privileges for the nobility, and proposed that the main concerns of the legislator should be the ideal of 'la massima felicità divisa nel maggior numero'.<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Jefferson and the French Philosophes were ecstatic in their praise. In Italy the work produced a wave of apoplectic rage, and was immediately placed on the Index as sacrilegious. Beccaria had also had the temerity to argue for a clear separation between sin and crime. Sin, he claimed, could be judged by God alone. Only crime, which by definition was damage to society, was the concern of judges. He infuriated the conservatives of his time, as he would undoubtedly have done those of our time, with his belief that those who governed should not concern themselves with the private morality of their subjects. At this point we are on the eve of the French revolution.

The French Revolution and its aftermath were part of a rising tide of secularism. There were also mounting claims by governments to control the Church in their own realms. The Papacy was forced to accept a series of humiliating losses of privilege, particularly at the hands of Napoleon. This provoked at the heart of Catholicism a profound ideological reaction to all ideas associated with the demise of the old order, whether revolutionary or not. The timing could not have been worse for Italy, for just as patriots and many intellectuals early in the 19th Century began to aspire to a united Italy, they not only awakened the Vatican's territorial fears in the worst possible way, but were also faced with a developing corpus of

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<sup>18</sup> '...the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. C. Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene*, ed. R. Fabietti, Milan, Mursia, 1987, p. 25.

condemnations covering all the new democratic and liberal ideals which were to be the foundation of the new state.

The Risorgimento, the movement which led to a unified Italy, encompassed a wide variety of aspirations, some widely shared, others hotly contested. Unification was eventually achieved through a combination of elements: foremost were Piedmontese initiative, the great skill of Cavour in mobilizing conservative-liberal opinion and his dexterity in handling the major European powers. Some of the most interesting tendencies of the earlier phase of the Risorgimento, such as the democratic republicanism of Italian Jacobins like Giuseppe Compagnoni and Matteo Angelo Galdi, along with the Federalism which developed later of Cattaneo and Ferrari, and the radicalism of Pisacane, were defeated by the conservative liberalism of Cavour. But although Unification was really the achievement of an elite, and there had been nothing like the involvement of the petty bourgeoisie in the French Revolution, nevertheless, Italians were debating for the first time the values and ideals on which the new nation was to be founded.

In this situation the stance of the Papacy, with its powerful hegemonic potential among the popular strata in Italy, was critical. How did it respond to developments on the peninsula? There were a number of Catholics who took a positive view of the Risorgimento, but they were unable to win over those in the Vatican who counted. In 1832, for instance, Pope Gregory XVI produced an encyclical (*Mirari vos*) condemning the liberal Catholicism of the French priest Hugues Lamennais whose ideas were infecting Italian Catholics. Freedom of conscience and the press, ideas central to the developing spirit of pluralism, were condemned as the absurd products of a delirious mentality. So hostile was he to anything which could have furthered the cause of Italian unity, that with an attitude more suggestive of a red Indian chief than a Pope, he conducted a campaign against railways, banning these infernal 'tracks

of the devil' in Papal territory.

An influential work written some twenty years later by the Italian Jesuit theologian Luigi Taparelli attempted to make the Church engage more realistically with changing times.<sup>19</sup> Taparelli argued that Christianity was compatible with the idea of elections, but only for office bearers. Elections should not imply popular sovereignty. Moreover, the separation of powers was a dangerous doctrine which fragmented the social order, and divorced politics from morality. This was the basis of the Church's condemnation of Liberalism as atheistic, since it promoted the idea that moral values could be generated in the secular order, and even without reference to the Gospel.

These condemnations were not aimed at Italy alone. But the intensity and frequency of Pius IX's denunciations cannot be properly understood outside the context of events in Italy. Try to imagine - Catholic Italy, whose special relationship with the Papacy had been guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, who had ensured that every Pope since 1523 was Italian, was being united under the banner of a secular state. It even threatened to deprive the Papacy of its independent status. In 1864 the Pope published the encyclical (*Quanta cura*) which became known as the 'syllabus of errors'. In it he denounced the principal errors of the time, including the concepts of progress, Liberalism, and the idea of the religiously neutral modern state. The threat to the Vatican's territorial independence, moreover, was simultaneously a threat to its teaching authority. This is why, in July 1870, as the newly formed Italian government was planning to annex the Papal States, as if to draw attention to the threat to this teaching authority, the doctrine of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed. Nevertheless, the annexation took place a few months later. Unification was complete. But just when a sense of nationhood needed to take root by bringing the population into the political life of the new

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<sup>19</sup> *Esame critico degli ordini rappresentativi nella società moderna*, Rome, 1854.



nation, Pope Pius IX, in September 1874, issued a decree, the *Non expedit*, forbidding Italian Catholics both to vote in national elections and to stand as candidates for parliament. Although it was subsequently relaxed on two or three occasions, to allow Catholics to vote against the emerging dangers of socialism, this ban was not officially lifted until 1919. The new Italian nation thus came into being with its population officially disenfranchised, and with the Church doing everything in its power to undermine it. When, therefore, we denounce the weakness of the Italian parliamentary system which allowed Fascism to come to power, we must ask a simple question. How was Italy to build popular consensus around the institutions of liberal democracy when the Papacy, to which most Italians turned for moral guidance, was preaching that recognition of the new state threatened its very existence?

Although the response of the Catholic laity to modern developments was not uniformly hostile, the most powerful response sanctioned by the Church was what commentators have called Catholic Integralism. This is best described as the promotion of a 'Catholic world', no longer theocratic, but tightly coordinated, with parallel organizations of lay Catholics in every walk of life, under the guidance of the Church. Its aim was to hegemonize society as much as possible. In the 1930s there were even forms of Integralism which speculated about the possibility of a Catholic form of society to supplant Fascism. The founding of the Catholic Partito Popolare Italiano in 1919, however, although it may have the appearance of an Integralist initiative, was certainly not so in the mind of its founder, Luigi Sturzo, a Sicilian priest with a profound attachment to democratic principles. His intransigent anti-Fascism proved an embarrassment to the Vatican, which sent him to America in 1923; so that with the effective exile of its leader, added to the Fascist ban on opposition parties, organized Political Catholicism was short-lived.

It re-emerged after the war in 1945 as the Christian Democratic Party. But postwar

Italy was a new world. The simple fact was that the two major subcultures which emerged to contest the field were the Catholic and the Communist, two 'worlds', if you like, which had not been nurtured on the ideals of liberal democracy. Despite the positive experience of the anti-Fascist alliance, the drafting of a remarkable Constitution, and the establishment of a democratic framework, liberal democratic values as such were the cultural preserve of political leaders with no mass following. That Catholics and Communists were able to contribute so much to establishing democracy in Italy was due in no small part to the exceptional qualities of their two leaders, De Gasperi for the Christian Democrats and Togliatti for the Communists. But like Togliatti in the case of the Communists, De Gasperi was not wholly typical of the membership of the party at large. Most Catholics had been deeply influenced by 100 years of developing Integralism within the Church, a Church whose massive influence over his party made De Gasperi nervous. But it was impossible to keep this influence in check.

What, precisely, were the effects of Catholic Integralism? Pietro Scoppola, amongst others, has himself pointed out that already by 1946, Vatican officials were putting pressure on De Gasperi to break up the anti-Fascist alliance with the left, and urging Christian Democrat leaders to oppose the idea of a secular state. They were to ensure that the new Constitution should be based on the teachings and traditions of the Church. Pope Pius XII was still suspicious of the very concept of a secular state.<sup>20</sup> Having spent a number of summers in the archives in Rome reading the debates of the drafting committee for the Constitution, I can certainly confirm what Scoppola has argued.

There was a disturbing Integralism in many of the Catholic arguments. On a number

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<sup>20</sup> See Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti*, pp. 141 ff. and pp. 224 ff. See also G. Long, *Alle origini del pluralismo confessionale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1990, pp. 36 ff.

of their demands, such as compulsory religious instruction in schools, the retention of the Concordat agreed between the Vatican and the Fascists, which made Catholicism the religion of state and gave the Church a wide range of privileges, the arguments were the same: catholics were a 98% majority, therefore the proposal for a secular state was as irrelevant as it was undemocratic. Divorce and contraception, for example, were not civil rights, even for non-catholics. Priests who left their ministry were punishable by canon law (not protected by civil law), and could not be employed in the state sector.

If the lack of pluralism in the thinking of many catholic leaders was evident, it was even more striking in the case of the clergy, which adopted a more visible public profile after the Christian Democratic Party electoral victory in 1948. By this time the Cold War was in full swing. The reaction against the communist threat, which witnessed a low point in civic tolerance, was led by the Vatican. A Papal decree in 1949, for instance, excommunicated all catholics who bought, read or sold communist newspapers or publications, and anybody associated with communist organizations of women, students, artists, trade unions, etc.. A number of recent studies have shown that at the same time as the Papal prohibition against communist organizations was being declared from pulpits and christian democrat platforms, the country saw the most intense mobilization of catholic forces since the Counter-Reformation.<sup>21</sup> In itself the creation of catholic associations of lawyers, trade unionists, women, artists, teachers, bankers, etc, had a positive value. These active and energetic organizations brought vast sectors of the population into active participation in national life for the first time in the country's history. But by telling catholics that it was laudable for

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, M. Casella, *18 aprile 1948: la mobilitazione delle organizzazioni cattoliche*, Galatina, Congedo Editore, 1992; also by the same author, *L'azione cattolica nell'Italia contemporanea (1919-1969)*, Rome, Editrice A.V.E., 1992; F. Traniello, *Città dell'uomo. Cattolici, partito e stato nella storia d'Italia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1990.

them to organize in this way, and at the same time denouncing and excommunicating communists for doing the same, the Papal condemnation destroyed the fragile spirit of toleration and pluralism that catholics had built up alongside communists in the short years of the Resistance, and drove each side back into its ideological ghetto. The activity of the Vatican in promoting catholic organizations, with an endless stream of Papal messages and audiences for the benefit of their leaders, expressed a vigilance over affairs in Italy which paid homage to the spirit of Innocent III in the 12th Century. The Vatican was in effect promoting a policy of social saturation. While on one level it activated large sectors of the population, at the same time it was promoting a sectarian colonization of society by catholics, which was subsequently adopted as a political strategy by the Christian Democratic Party.

The Christian Democratic Party, in projecting itself as a catch-all agglomeration of catholics, was expressing precisely this globalizing strategy. And while it benefited enormously in terms of electoral support, it did so at the expense of clear policy directions. Since, as a catch-all party it could not contest power on the basis of a distinct political line - because it was attempting to hold together catholics who were on the right, the centre and the left of the political spectrum - the 'social saturation' approach was its most viable alternative. This enabled it to penetrate vast sectors of Italian society, but it became a substitute for policy in enabling it to retain power. Thus catholic Integralism is, in my view, at the heart of the *partitocrazia*, that penetration of all aspects of Italian society by political parties for which the country has become famous. Catholic Integralism was a deeply ingrained mental habit which catholic leaders transported with ease and naturalness into their political behaviour. It would have required special efforts not to do so. The extension of the *partitocrazia* to other parties was the result of the sharing out of the spoils which became necessary to enable christian-democrat-led coalitions to last.



The corrosive effects of this social saturation strategy on Italian life have now become evident. Read any of the numerous books now published on corruption in Italy to see how the determination to stay in power at any cost led politicians into all forms of corruption: organized crime, bank frauds, illicit profits of all kinds, the perversion of the course of justice, and even assassination. But what about the moral teaching of the Church - did this not have a restraining effect on corrupt politicians and leading citizens? Undoubtedly, for many Catholics, and for the most visible forms of corruption, it did. But it was systems and procedures that had been contaminated. The problem was structural and systemic, whereas the Church's morality was highly personal and individualistic. Therefore, although Catholic critics may well blame the Church for failing to develop a civic morality, they have not, to my mind, seen the link between the civic degradation they condemn and the 'social saturation' policy originally promoted by the Vatican with such force in Italy.

On the theological level Scoppola's criticism of the Church is that its moral teaching has been obsessed with sexual behaviour and the evils of the affluent society. Its recourse to the eternal truths of faith has been too abstract, and has not addressed the problems of a highly developed modern state. The Gospel does not provide detailed codes of practice for persons in positions of public responsibility, for choosing between competing contracts, for appointing managers and leaders to top positions, or for the citizen when completing tax returns. This may all be true. But my own critique on the doctrinal level is of a different kind. After the establishment of the Italian Republic in 1948, open criticism of the secular state was no longer a feasible option for the Papacy. The global political climate had simply changed too much. Pius XII's response was to transform the Vatican's centuries-old hostility towards the secular state into a lofty detachment which patronised its values. But in doing so, it also undermined the state's authority. Let me quote you a section from a typical manual of moral

theology still being used for the training of priests in Italy in the nineteen sixties and seventies. The section in question deals with taxes, but its approach can be generalized for other areas of state transaction. After stating earlier in the work that the citizen is required to pay taxes for the common good, and in the section in question that the law of the state ought to be obeyed, it proclaims that the law, however, is subject to a higher moral tribunal, that of religious justice: 'La morale religiosa, che conferisce una più alta dignità alle leggi civili, non può e d'altra parte non deve forzare il comune senso morale, e così con la severità della lettera danneggiare la vera giustizia sociale. Perciò: nella dichiarazione delle imposte non si deve esigere l'adempimento meccanico di prescrizioni burocratiche, escludendo le reali contingenze.'<sup>22</sup> A common approach of priests trained in Italy was to reassure concerned penitents that the state expected respondents to under-declare, and that tax levels were set accordingly. A population whose only experience of the state was first to have it reviled by the Church and then to see it assume the grotesque shape of fascism was only too receptive to this invitation to treat its demands with license. The 'social saturation' strategy was thus accompanied by a strong ideological perspective on the secular state which relativised its values and encouraged an indulgent attitude towards those who transgressed its norms. It is not purely incidental that tax evasion in Italy has reached higher levels than anywhere else in Western Europe. It is this ability to play fast and loose with the laws of the state which embroiled the Vatican Bank itself in one of the most shameful scandals of recent years. In a labyrinthine web of unexplained events worthy of the Renaissance Papacy, one of the chief

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<sup>22</sup> See G. Mausbach, *Teologia Morale. La morale speciale*, vol. 3, Alba, Edizioni Paoline, 1956, p. 68 for the earlier statement. 'Religious morality, which confers a higher dignity on the laws of civil society, cannot, on the other hand, and must not distort the common moral sensibility, and do harm to a true sense of social justice through excessive severity in the letter of the law. Therefore: in tax declarations one must not demand the mechanical execution of bureaucratic prescriptions, leaving out of account the real conditions of life.' (p. 298)

promoters of Vatican finance, Roberto Calvi, God's banker as he was known, is said to have gone all the way to Blackfriars Bridge in London to hang himself. It is the same flexibility towards the laws of the state in the name of a superior justice which enabled an irritated christian democrat Prime Minister, Ciriaco De Mita, when quizzed on television in the 1980s about the hundreds of thousands of fraudulent invalidity pensions in the South, to state that workers in the North had the cassa integrazione (a kind of redundancy benefit), whereas in the South the unemployed had the invalidity pension. The fact that by secular standards this was illegal, promoted by southern politicians for votes, often protected by the mafia, was not enough to break through this contorted sense of justice. To put the case in a nutshell, imagine the public domain in the hands of a christian democrat system implementing this corrosively indulgent morality, and you have the picture of civic corruption which has recently burst its bubble.

Why has the bubble burst now? Essentially, since the 1960s massive social changes have transformed Italy into a genuinely secular society. New attitudes and values began to undermine the ability of the christian democrats and others to keep the lid on the gurgling cauldron of simmering decay. Slowly but inexorably the loss of public faith in politicians began to grow, and complaints about political corruption and the low quality of public accountability reached a crescendo in the late 1980s. With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, even the anti-communist scare lost the remains of its diminishing capacity to secure votes for the christian democrats. Something was needed to spark off the explosion and release the potential for change that had been growing in Italy since the sixties.

About two years ago, the owner of a cleaning company in Milan, Luca Magni, decided that his profit margins were too small to continue paying handouts to local politicians in order to retain his cleaning contracts. He went to the judge Antonio di Pietro, who arranged to have

him wired, and successfully incriminated the socialist party link-man Mario Chiesa, who eventually decided to reveal all he knew. This was the event that triggered the avalanche of prosecutions which has swept over the whole country involving hundreds of businessmen and leading public figures. The judge di Pietro symbolizes the younger generation of judges shaped by the reforming protest movements of the late 60s and 70s, now coming to maturity. He has captured the public imagination. He and his colleagues are giving expression to the widespread determination that has emerged in the country to see the process of renewal through.

Will it succeed? In my view, despite the emergence of the separatist Northern Leagues, in many respects because of them, the Italian public is now aware more than ever before of the meaning of a sense of nationhood. But a genuine respect for the authority of the secular order must replace the cynicism which centuries of Papal hostility towards the secular state and its values have bred within its uniquely susceptible Italian sphere of influence. But Catholicism is not the Papacy.

This Christmas, a Sicilian priest created something of a sensation by announcing from the pulpit that he had refused absolution to a young man who had confessed with genuine remorse to being involved in the killing of the anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone. The priest refused to absolve the young man in question because he would not go to the secular authorities with what he knew. This refusal to give absolution has broken with a long tradition in moral theology, or at least, if I may borrow a term from Gladstone, 'Vaticanist'-orientated moral theology, that unless a third party risks being wrongly prosecuted for the act in question, a priest should not insist as a condition of absolution that the penitent report himself to the civil authorities. Father Turturo rejected the claims of the 'higher moral tribunal' argument and insisted that the penitent had to shoulder his civic responsibility. This, in my

view, is a profound departure from the moral prevarications that have had such a damaging effect on the development of a civic culture in Italy. It constitutes a courageous act of solidarity with the values of the secular order. I look forward to the response of those catholics like Scoppola who are calling for the development within the Church of a more incisive public morality. Catholics are far from absent from the numbers of those working for change in Italy. They continue to provide courageous priests, heroic judges who daily risk their lives, and honest politicians, all bringing to their activity the deep reserves of human solidarity and selfless commitment that their faith inspires. They, alongside others, will contribute to the renewal of their country if, living in a pluralist society, they will know how to take seriously Christ's admonition to render to Caesar what is Caesar's.

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