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The Roman Question Before and After Fascism

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The Roman Question Before and After Fascism¹

By Luigi Sturzo

BY 1910 I had been for five years Mayor of Caltagirone, Provincial Councilor of Catania, and National Councilor of the Association of Communes of Italy, as well as one of the leaders of the "Municipalist" movement against State centralization, so that I was never missing from the Congresses of Communes.

It was at one of these Congresses, at Catania, that, between sessions, I was requested by various journalists to explain how I could reconcile my position as mayor and priest with the Catholic thesis that Rome should be returned to the Pope. I replied simply that that was not my thesis, that I did not doubt that Rome was the capital of the Kingdom; I hoped, however, for a pacific solution of the Roman Question.

Journalists are made for journals: forthwith there appeared in one of the Messina newspapers (I cannot recall its title) an enormous headline: INTERVIEW WITH DON STURZO—ROME NO LONGER THE POPE'S or words to the same effect. The clerical journal of Florence *L'Unità Cattolica* used the news as the basis of a thoroughgoing attack on "Don Sturzo". The Cardinal Secretary of State, at that time Merry del Val, wrote a letter to the Bishop of Caltagirone asking him to make an inquiry at once into the facts of the case. Invited by the Bishop to write a report, I declared that I had not understood at all that I was giving an interview; that it was merely a matter of an exchange of ideas while people were taking sherbets and refreshments in the halls of the Congress; that at any rate, I had expressed my own idea and I could not change it, since it was a matter of conviction.

The incident ended there. But my surprise and admiration were

¹ This article was written after reading *Church and State in Fascist Italy* by D. A. Binchy. (New York:Oxford University Press, 1942.) This discussion follows the book in its various points.

great when, a few months afterwards, I had a private audience with Pius X; the Pope, as I entered and knelt, opened out his arms and welcomed me with these words:—"Come, Mr. Mayor, come."—and after I had drawn nearer he added: "Has no one excommunicated you yet?"—"No one", I replied, "And who could do it except Your Holiness?"—"I shall not excommunicate you, dear Sturzo", said the Pope; then, smiling, he added in a low tone: "Watch out for the others who suspect you."

I have spoken of this intimate episode many times with friends, but this is the first time that I have written about it, and I do it for two reasons: first, in order to show what was the mind of Pius X on the Roman Question and what was the opinion of those who surrounded him. It was, perhaps, this environment that prevented him from realizing his dream of a reconciliation.

In addition, I am interested in noting how certain questions cannot be treated openly before they come to maturity, without throwing suspicion on those who discuss them. And yet it is necessary that there be such pioneers, in order that the terrain may be cleared and the solutions may be made less difficult.

Today it is easy for a Catholic to say that Rome could no longer be given to the Pope after the fall of the Temporal Power. That statement before 1929 (date of the Lateran Treaty) was already tolerated by many, although there were those who protested. But to make it in 1910, or in 1900, or in 1880 would have indeed been a cause for "excommunication". Abbot Tosti of Montecassino had to endure the disavowal of his friend Leo XIII, and Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona had his publication on the Conciliation placed on the Index of prohibited books.²

Another personal reminiscence will serve to show how difficult it was in the past to declare oneself against the temporal power of the Pope in ecclesiastical circles. One of my professors in the Gregorian University between the years 1894-97 was Father Billot, later Cardinal until he resigned under Pius XI, according to report, because of the

² Cf. Binchy, pp. 51-54.

Action Française affair. He maintained the thesis (nor was he alone in this) that the temporal power was so closely connected with the principle of the Pope's independence in his universal ministry that it could be qualified as a *dogmatic fact* and, as such, it could be defended even with earthly means.

Difficult and in many cases presumptuous as it is for a student to disagree with his teacher, still the thesis of the *dogmatic fact* sounded harsh to us youths of the generation following the fall of the Temporal Power. Especially was this true for those who, like myself, took delight in history and could well affirm that in many instances the Pope, with all his Temporal Power and sometimes because of his Temporal Power, had been neither free nor independent, either because of external pressure or because of internal agitations. I do not say that all the observations made by us youths were valid, nor that the discussion was exempt, here and there, from prejudices; I simply wish to point out that it was becoming difficult even to discuss the problem from a theoretical point of view because of the suspicions that were aroused against those who might not have been one hundred per cent "temporalists".³

Pius XI's act in solving the Roman Question by renouncing every temporal pretence over Rome and the other provinces of the former Papal State (although it was a post-factum renunciation, juridical and not political) freed the minds of millions of Catholics, in Italy and out of Italy, from the uncertainty created by the fact that they could not defend the former temporal rights of the Pope, although, at the same time, they wished that the Pope might be free and independent.

From this arose the great wave of general feeling of gratitude towards Pius XI, who was praised as one of the greatest modern Popes. The adulation of Mussolini was still greater because he represented the Italian Government, which not only had taken Rome by force of arms but for a long time had rejected the idea of a conciliation for fear of anticlericals and Masons, although that was debated in papers and books. "The Man of Providence" had finally arrived; the man who accepted, in addition to the Treaty, the Concordat, too

³ During his life Contardo Ferrini, who is about to be beatified, was suspected as a "cold Catholic" or even a "Liberal" because he was not *temporalist*.

—the two pacts by means of which, according to the words of Pius XI: "God was restored to Italy and Italy to God".

Fortunately, the favorable opinion about the "Man of Providence" did not last long in the Pope's mind; some time before his death he realized fully the evil brought by Fascism into the religious, moral and international field. Many were his declarations, open and veiled, against the theories and practices of Fascism. His opposition to the racial laws and his continual appeals against exaggerated nationalism carried the imprint of an anguish which never left his spirit. We know that Pius XI had prepared on the tenth anniversary of the Lateran Treaty one of the most courageous acts of his pontificate, a discourse to the Bishops of Italy assembled at Rome, which (according to report) was on the subject of the then present state of the Church. But he died on February 10, 1939, and the new Pope (his former Secretary of State), wishing to follow a line of pacification towards the Fascist Government, locked that document in the Treasury of State Secrets.

Binchy's book, *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (which ends at the very date of Pius XI's death) can be regarded as the most serious and conscientious work ever written on this theme not only by Catholics (since Binchy is a Catholic) but even by non-Catholics of any country. In it we find breadth of view, precision of fact, abundance of detail, information concerning the attendant circumstances, liberty of appraisal, and independence of judgment.

The author informs us in the Preface that he had already written seven chapters of the history of the Roman Question from its beginning to the time of the advent of Fascism. But, since the book was too long, he was obliged to replace them by only two chapters; the First and the Second that constitute "a very brief outline of the history of the *dissidio*" (page VII). It is too bad that this had to be, because, judging from the two chapters, we should have had a work truly interesting and, on various aspects, original.

Binchy is one of the very few foreign Catholics who has tried to understand the Italian Risorgimento, getting away from the prejudices and inexactitudes which for a century have been current in almost

all books, encyclopedias and periodicals written by Catholics outside of Italy. In one place Binchy says, "It is even more important to remember that the quarrel between the Church and the Risorgimento was conditioned by history, not by theoretical incompatibility. There was nothing inherently anti-Catholic in Italian nationalism; on the contrary, the movement originally drew most of its strength from Catholic sources." (p.17).

Binchy does not hesitate to call a spade a spade. For instance, concerning Pius IX's policy towards Italy he observes that Pius IX "was a child in political matters, impulsive and changeable, and his genuine affection for Italy might well have caused him to reverse his *non possumus* and come to a generous, perhaps even imprudent arrangement with the House of Savoy" (pp. 21-22). This affirmation by Binchy may be historically contestable; he himself explains it shortly afterwards by making it clear that the attack on the temporal power gave the impression of being a fundamental attack on the Papacy, the Church, and the dogmas. Pius IX no longer made any distinction between the national question and the religious question. And because the historical process always evades absolute definitions and surmounts the clash between ideas and facts, a paradox resulted in Italy, a paradox that Binchy notes humourously (and one that was expressed more discreetly by Senator Scialoja in 1929) by stating that "the Roman Question was created by a Government of Catholics and settled by a Government largely composed of agnostics." (p. 24)

The Temporal Power of the Popes in the nineteenth century could not be regarded in the same way as in the preceding centuries. The Papal State had been a State with an absolute regime, like all the other States of Europe, in the hands of ecclesiastics who governed paternally and who defended it against the appetites of the external powers, sometimes by means of neutrality, sometimes through leagues, sometimes through papal authority, when this gave no offense to Paris, Madrid, or Vienna. The type of State that came into being after the Napoleonic wars and the Congress of Vienna was different; it was subordinated to a European policy of reaction against the ideas of the American and French Revolutions, against the aspirations of

oppressed nationalities towards independent and free regimes, against the very constitutional forms already adopted with limitations in France and Bavaria in 1815, in Spain and Sicily in 1812. The Popes of that time, from Pius VII to Gregory XVI, not only accepted the Austrian policy but opposed even constitutional forms wherever they were initiated, even in Latin America, thus placing Catholics and bishops in difficult positions with respect to their countries.

It was inevitable that the Pontifical State should become the home of revolutions against the authoritarianism of the Papal Government, and, hence, the experimental field for the political and police repression of the period. As long as Italy remained entirely under absolute governments devoted to Vienna and within the sphere of Austrian policy, the Papal State was very little different from them, except for the additional disturbance caused by the fact that ecclesiastics ran the government at a difficult and tempestuous time, and exercised enormous power. But when the first revolutionary insurrections occurred and when the first concessions by the ruling princes in granting constitutions were made, that whole political system collapsed into pieces.

Then there came 1848 and, afterwards, the wars of the Risorgimento; Europe changed its political and military aspect several times; all the States successively obtained their constitutions. In the Europe of that period there remained only three absolute powers; the Pope in Rome, the Czar in St. Petersburg, the Sultan in Constantinople; precisely in those States where political power was bound to ecclesiastical power. Napoleon III could not be counted in with them, in spite of the dictatorial power that he exercised, because he had been nominated by universal suffrage (real or not) of a character historically and politically transitory. Napoleon I had not been able to establish a new dynasty in the name of the French Revolution; neither could Napoleon III establish it in the name of a *coup d'etat*.

The Pope's position was far more difficult than the Czar's or the Sultan's because his State was small and his power was religious and not military. Surrounded as he was by the free and liberal Italian State, the Pope must needs rely on the army of a great power, France, and the support of a strict police. When these two supports, too human

and too hated, failed him (the French troops were withdrawn for the War of 1870, and the police force was unable to prevent revolutionary infiltrations that easily crossed the boundaries of the small State), the Pope was already a prisoner before the breach of Porta Pia, of September 20, 1870. If that breach was an offence against the double right of the Pope, religious and political, it was also the mark of an historical maturity which it would have been impossible to arrest. The Temporal Power, as a Papal State, had had for more than a thousand years an historical task of extraordinary range; now, like every form of a passing reality, it, too, was being transformed into another reality more adapted to its times.

That Papal Rome, as a self-sufficient entity, as an administrative ecclesiastical system, and as a political State could no longer survive was perceived by Catholics and priests of high worth like Cardinal Consalvi, and later, by the Abbé Rosmini and the Theatine Gioacchino Ventura. All three stood for the widest reforms, since they still believed that the Pope should preserve the appanage of a State, but that the State should no longer be an absolute one. Ventura, the friend of Pius IX, had warned repeatedly that "if the Church will not march with the people, the people on that account will not stop their march, but will continue marching without the Church, out of the Church, against the Church: that is all. And who could then calculate the evils for the people and for the Church?"⁴

It was not a question, as they thought, of simple administrative and social reforms, nor of a constitution which at bottom left every power to the Pope; it was a matter of political transformation through which the people should decide its own fate. Pius IX experienced the popular enthusiasm of the whole world because of his utterance, "God, bless Italy", for the amnesty he granted to political criminals, and because of the constitution he granted to the Romans. But all these things vanished when he perceived that they were heading towards the separation of the State from the Church, towards the secularization of the political power, and towards liberty of conscience and religion.

⁴ Cf. Cf. *Discorso Funebre per i morti di Vienna—Introduzione e Protesta dell'Autore.* (Vol. I, Milano-Turati, 1860.)

On the other hand, the enemies of the Papacy did not cease to provoke not only political disorders but essentially religious quarrels as well. Freemasonry, with a vigour that hitherto it had not possessed, accentuated its struggle against "Temporalism". Binchy justly notes that "the extent of their (the Masons's) influence has been greatly exaggerated by clericals." (p. 40) What happened in Italy at that time was this fact: the clericals, keeping themselves politically separated from the majority of the population, thought that they saw in everything the hand of Freemasonry, though, in reality, this was often very insignificant. (Indeed, in small towns it was only the air of secrecy that made certain gentlemen important.) On the other hand, the Liberals of the time, far from a direct contact with Catholics and the clergy, always thought that they saw the shadow of the "Jesuit", who for them was the "Mason" of the Church. This suspicion made several years of the reign of Pius IX and also of Leo XIII very difficult ones.

Looking, from a distance of more than half a century, at what then happened, that is to say, at the change of tone from the implacable condemnation of Pius IX to the calm reasoning of Leo XIII, one can observe what great relief the latter brought into the Catholic world with his discussion of modern problems; his presentation of them in the least offensive manner, even when he disapproved and refused to accept current solutions for these problems; his invitation to study and action for their solution. In practice Leo XIII accepted all the political experiences of the time; he encouraged the French clergy and Catholics to accept the Republic; he sought to interpret in a suitable manner the political liberties that the whole civilized world had already acquired through so many struggles. Two mottoes took on great significance when he uttered them: "*God made nations curable*", and "*If Democracy becomes Christian, it will bring great good to the world.*"

With regard to Italy Leo XIII's policy was not so broad. He was the only one who could have won over the resistance of the Roman Curia to a renunciation of Rome; he had this idea for a moment, but he did not carry it out. The times were not mature. Those who had

preached to the four winds that Pius IX would be the last Pope, had not given up the fight against the Papacy and were working so that Leo might really be the last one. That was the time when the intellectual world was bloated with Positivism; *Science* and *Progress* were the magic words with which one hit the obscurantism of the Church. Italy was not alone in experiencing the spell of the revolt against the Christian tradition. But in Italy this revolt (whose singer was Carducci, a great poet in many ways) was doubled by a breath of Ghibellinism which had become a national ideal: Italy finally liberated from the Papacy and mistress of herself.

The passage of time was necessary to attenuate on both sides the feelings of an irreducible conflict. There was needed, too, a policy without shadows on the part of the Papacy towards Italy, so that there would be no further occasion for suspecting possible intrigues with the powers adverse to Italy. Under Leo there were no intrigues, but there seem to have been some imprudent hints, so that with the coming of Pius X, the Pope who stated simply: "*If they gave me Rome, I shouldn't know what to do with it*", even the spirits hostile to the Papacy had to disarm.

Today, after the Conciliation has been concluded, when we look at almost a century of history of the Roman Church, we can say that Pius IX was the Boniface VIII of the modern epoch. Historical similitudes often are carried too far; but there are in the depths of history recurrent lines which reveal the perennially human and providential background in their reciprocal interactions. Boniface closed the epoch of the mediaeval Papacy and his Bull *Unam Sanctam* had the phraseology and historical motivation of what was to die with him and the dogmatic conclusion of what was to remain perennial. After him there was Avignon, the struggles of the rising nationalities, the reform that begins to peep through with Wycliff and Huss: it was a new world.

In the same way Pius IX closed the period of the Church allied with the Monarchies, that of the Counter-Reformation (from the Treaty of Westphalia to the French Revolution) as well as the period of the Holy Alliance and the Restoration. His protests against errors

and new systems did not give life back to what was dead. All that political past was buried with the Breach of Porta Pia.

From the religious and perennial point of view, however, Pius IX gave a living soul to the modern world by himself proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and by defining through a new Council the dogma of Papal Infallibility. The Council, which is not yet closed, is an act of Church unity. The four Popes who followed have remade the Catholic world spiritually, but, they, too, have had much troubles in politics. There was the problem of the Roman Question which was for everyone a stumbling block. More agile than the others, Benedict XV acted in such a way that for him that question was not an impediment. However, he had to deal with Article 5 of the London Pact, the Gerlach affair, and the occupation of Palazzo Venezia. Finally, he took the initiative in receiving the heads of the Catholic States who came to Rome, and of abolishing the *non expedit* which had deprived the Italian State of the cooperation of organized Catholic forces. Thus we come to Pius XI to whose lot it finally fell to remove from the Church every residue of Temporal Power, or, rather, to reduce it to a juridical and religious symbol, "*The State of Vatican City.*" He accepted the solution offered him by the Fascist government. The solution under such circumstances created a delicate situation, which in various ways, was undesirable and dangerous. Today when Fascism has fallen, one can see better what a rough period Pius XI and Pius XII have traversed.

In order to evaluate today's situation, it is necessary to understand the various elements of the solution of the Roman Question given by the Lateran Treaty, by the Concordat, and the other acts attached to them. For this purpose, Binchy's book is truly invaluable. Students of "diplomacy" (in the old sense of the word) will not find in it either the text of the original act, or the various names of the signatories and the witnesses, or the maps and other useful documents; but historians and students of social and religious facts will be aided by it in comprehending the true range and the various implications of the unique problem that was solved on February 11, 1929. Binchy places

the historical, juridical and religious matters in the right perspective and within the drama of the facts. Thus the evaluation of the men, documents, discourses, letters and interviews succeeds in being not only interesting and current, but as the nearest as possible to reality.

The first question that arises in one's mind is the one that has been asked many times (Binchy, too, mentions it): How did Pius XI ever induce himself to negotiate with Mussolini, knowing so well as he did who Mussolini was, how he had come to power, and how he maintained it, through violence, crimes, falsehood, and tyranny? He himself had publicly protested against the destruction of the Catholic clubs of Monza (1924) and the disbanding of all the sport societies, including the Catholic ones (1927). Moreover, it was well known that the philo-Catholicism shown by certain Fascists was for the purpose of deluding the clergy and gaining their support. The elimination of the Catholic Labor Unions which had formed a confederation of more than a million and two hundred thousand workers and peasants had been opposed by Pius XI since he, as Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, had learned to appreciate their social and moral activity.

The answer to this question, however, was given by Pius XI himself, either in the phrase that the Concordat had given "Italy back to God"—which he firmly believed to be true—or that other phrase he uttered during the lively controversy that followed the signing of the Treaty, when he said that he was "ready to negotiate with the devil if thereby he could save a single soul"—a phrase that was deemed apposite for the correction of the other inconsiderate utterance he had made about "the Man of Providence."

On the other hand, Pius XI, coming from a family and an environment of conservatives (Lombardian conservatives could well be called reactionaries), greatly feared Communism which he had experienced directly in Poland when he was there as Papal Nuncio, and accredited Fascism as a movement of order and security, in spite of its really blameworthy methods. Binchy discusses this point, and it is worthwhile to cite him at length:

"True, those writers who have accused him of exaggerating the menace of Communism and of the spread of Bolshevism to other

countries have been made to look singularly foolish in the light of recent events. It was not that the Pope exaggerated the dangers of Communism; it was rather that he mistook the defenders of traditional Christian civilization against the new barbarism. He believed that democracy was too feeble and incoherent to serve as a dam against the Communist tide, and a strange irony made him turn to the new form of authoritarian government as offering the only hope of successful resistance. He was not, of course, blind to the religious dangers inherent in Fascism and its equivalents elsewhere, but he failed at first to recognize that these dangers nearly all sprang from the essential similarity between these systems and Communism, that all forms of authoritarianism—Fascist, Muscovite, or Hitlerite—have far more in common with each other than any of them has with traditional Christian polity. Nor had he at the time of his election any real appreciation of the forces that give democracy in the hour of crisis a strength and toughness far greater than the most rigid authoritarian system can command; like so many continental ecclesiastics, he identified democracy with that particular brand of secularist Liberalism which it had assumed in his own country. Further, his ideal of Catholic Action, in which the faithful of each country should be organized 'outside and above party politics' made him view with disfavour the existing Catholic parliamentary parties, nearly all of which had strong democratic leanings; witness the indifference, not to say satisfaction, with which he viewed the dissolution of the Popolari in Italy. Perhaps too he was not free from the delusion which is even still common, and to some extent excusable, in ecclesiastical minds: that the authoritarian form of government which is indispensable to the Church should also be most beneficial for the State. If so, he was to learn by bitter experience that the totalitarian State, with its claim to control the whole spiritual life of its subjects, is far more dangerous to religion than the most 'indifferent' or secularist democracy." (pp. 85-86)

Binchy does not ask why the Catholic clergy (the Latin, especially, but the rest as well) should maintain that the authoritarian regime is more advantageous to the Church and religion than the constitutional, democratic regime. Nor does he ask why it was that Fascism was believed to be authoritarian when it had defined itself as *revolutionary* and *totalitarian*.

We can easily answer the first question by pointing out the fact that historical events had bound the Church to the old monarchies, to systems of reciprocal support; this was "natural", we assert, during the period of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, when Reformation kings played the role of Popes in their countries, while the

Catholic kings were more or less regarded as ecclesiastical rulers⁵ who sometimes even resisted Rome. The separation began with the American Revolution, and America then was nine-tenths Protestant. The experience of the French Revolution ended with a secularized government that sometimes tried to control the clergy. Little Belgium was separate but the Catholic party fought its own religious battle, just as the Centre in Germany and the Irish in London fought theirs. But at Rome then, as under Pius XI, they preferred to deal with the various Governments through diplomacy and concordats, rather than to leave Catholics completely free to fight their own political battles.

For the same reason, up to the last war, Rome counted upon the ruins of the old monarchies, Vienna and Madrid, in spite of all the political, religious, social and moral disillusionments of the past. For the same reason, too, the French clergy was monarchical even after the appeal of Leo XIII; and the *Action Française* was protected and helped by some members of the French clergy up to the condemnation (1926) and even afterwards.

That Fascism should have been believed to be an *authoritarian* system, in the traditional meaning of the word, and not *revolutionary* is to be attributed to Mussolini's propaganda and to his method of double dealing. Many imagined a Mussolini or a Fascism of their own conviction: if the facts turned to be otherwise, either it was Mussolini who deceived Fascism or it was Fascism that deceived Mussolini. Those people hoped that, as time went on, Mussolini and Fascism would become that reality which they wishfully imagined. Certain Catholics created the myth of a "Catholic Fascism"; and, in rebound, the Fascists the other myth of a "Fascist Catholicism". Each one went along his own jolly path.

The error was a psychological one, partly emotional and voluntary, partly resulting from historical and political ignorance and from the intoxication of success which caught everyone in its train. A sociological fact of primary importance was completely forgotten: that Fascism, in order to be a return to authoritarianism, would have to

⁵ For example: The King of Spain acted as Apostolic Delegate in the Tribunal of Inquisition and the "Ecclesiastical Monarchia" of Sicily, suppressed by Pius IX, had power as Apostolic Delegate for some centuries.

create the conditions suitable to authoritarianism: historical princes, juridical tradition, religious conviction, class division with a closed organization so as to constitute virtually a caste system. It was impossible that even a genial man, with a band of companions deprived of convictions and moral principles who formed the nucleus of the central political party, could possibly reconstruct a social order and structure in which the Church could give worth to her moral principles and inculcate them in the people.

The incompatibility between the Church and Fascism (see Chapter XII in Binchy) were such that no declaration concerning the "Religion of State" (Chapter XIII) could fill the gap. The conflict was innate, fundamental, irremediable: the acceptance of a Catholicized Fascism (as was done by several in Italy) was a deceit for the Church itself and for the people. The day of clarification must needs come: the fall of Fascism has hastened it today; but already the war itself, wanted and preached by Fascists as the only means for the renewal of the world under the dominion of the Axis, had caused the bandage to fall from the eyes of many Catholics of Italy and of other countries of the world.

The central point of the question was (as it still is today, since, although Fascism has fallen, its derivations have not disappeared) whether and to what extent Catholics could collaborate with a totalitarian State in which, by definition, no individual liberty exists and there is complete subordination of everyone and everything to a blind, sovereign will. This question was discussed by this writer in his book, *Politics and Morality*⁶ and in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* of Louvain.⁷ The thesis sustained here is that in a free regime all collaboration is *morally* possible because all dissension is politically permitted; whereas in a totalitarian regime, on the contrary, since political disagreement is not permitted, collaboration becomes *morally* impossible.

⁶ *The Ethics of Political Collaboration* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1938). Cf. Chap. V.

⁷ October, 1938.

But then why is it, the adversaries of the Church ask, that for over a century down to our day Catholics have been more for reaction than for liberty? From the historical point of view it can be answered that there has been among Catholics a stronger democratic minority holding free ideas and policy (I do not say *liberal* in order to avoid misunderstanding) which for a century has struggled and is still struggling on the side of democracy and liberty: history records in this group the names of O'Connell, Lacordaire, Montalambert, Father Ventura, Rosmini, Windthorst, Toniolo, and a thousand others. The parties called Catholic, Christian Democratic, or Popular have a history that must come to the surface. But on the other side there has been historically fear: fear of *Liberalism* first, of *Socialism* next, of *Bolshevism* finally. Many Catholics belong to the bourgeois class; the clergy itself (of whatever descent it may be) is more or less disposed to support the conservative classes: all that has absolutely nothing to do with the Church itself *as such*, but it influences *human* attitudes of all religious centers, Catholic or Protestant. And if, on the other hand, one takes into account the fact that all extreme parties like to call themselves *revolutionary* and often take as their point of departure the denial of Christianity (Rousseau, Marx, or Lenin), it can be seen how this fact, too, has its importance, even today, in the historical attitudes of the papacy.

I know that some think that there is a "dogmatic" (?) impossibility for Catholics to be democrats: they often cite the celebrated distinction made by the *Civiltà Cattolica* at the time when the *Syllabus* was issued (1864) between *thesis* and *hypothesis*, maintaining that the Catholic *thesis* is reaction and authoritarianism (expressed by the *Syllabus* and other Papal documents) and the *hypothesis* is liberty and democracy, to be accepted only as a tolerable reality, as is done by American Catholics. Thus, they arrive at the conclusion (opposite to the one reached by the writer of these pages) that Fascism is protected by the Church as more suitable to her than Democracy.

I should like to take this opportunity to try to destroy the myth that has been created around this matter of the distinction between *thesis* and *hypothesis*. The *thesis* constitutes the ethical and religious principles of society which Christianity asserts and proclaims. The

hypothesis constitutes the various historical realizations of society, wherever, in one way or another, they are effectuated and put into concrete form in institutions, customs and laws of diverse worth. Thus, the living reality is always an *hypothesis*, i.e. a given realization (unfortunately incomplete and limited, as men are in our individual lives) of those principles that are eternal, since they are based on the natural law and on revelation.

Political society may be authoritarian, patriarchal, feudal, aristocratic, democratic, or mixed. Any one of these realizations is not the *thesis*; it is the *hypothesis*. In each realization there will always be deficiencies from the ethical and religious point of view, wherefore, reforms will *always* be necessary, and there will always be a struggle to eliminate these deficiencies. The Church has proclaimed a thousand times that she is indifferent to any political form whatsoever, provided morality and religion are respected. But she accentuates first one point then another of the ethical and religious principles, according as they are lacking in society. Thus the *Syllabus* defended the religious (*not* political) supereminence of the Church when, in the name of Liberalism, it was deprived of many traditional rights. If the clergy, in defending the Church, often defended those regimes to which it was bound, it did so for two reasons: because the historical system is changed with difficulty and not without struggles involving ecclesiastical organization, though not the Church; and, secondly, because of the lack of experience of a regime of liberty in which the Church might have such advantages (human, of course) as would compensate for the too costly ones derived from the support given to the monarchies or the aristocracies on which was constructed the society of the eighteenth century and the hastily reconstructed society of the Restoration in the nineteenth century.

If, today, Catholics accentuate (as do Maritain and the French Personalist movement) the rights of the human person in a society that they call "pluralistic" and find a broad basis for their stand in pontifical documents, it is precisely because present-day society is individualistic and hence the accent is put more upon the person. During the centuries following the Reformation, society was rather

Communitarian (in closed unities); the accent at that time was put on the rights of the single communities represented by the head: *Cuius regio illius et religio*. Neither in the first case, nor in the second were all the ethical and religious theses of the social system actualized; we simply have to be content with the immortal values represented by the theses, and the limitations of human conditioning, individual and social, represented in fact by the hypotheses.

Today we say that Democracy is the regime that is closest to social perfection. Yesterday many Catholics, supporting themselves by St. Thomas (according to me without understanding his mind) saw social perfection in Monarchy. While we cannot admit a deterministic human progress, we must grant the fact that humanity makes progress in its experiences, and that between a monarchy (absolute, of course) and a democracy there is no comparison. But, everything in its time; human hypothesis (or realizations) are infinite. A monarchy *à la Charlemagne* (which is not according to my taste) is preferable to a democracy like that between 1792-1795 in France.

From the viewpoint of history the mistake made by Pius XI was in believing that after the Liberal-Democratic experience of the Risorgimento, Italy could return to an authoritarian system, already outdated, by means of the imposition of an armed party, Fascism; and that, once the power was obtained, the social classes and organizations would adjust themselves under the double monarchical-dictatorial system. Thus he thought of the Concordat as a means for influencing morally the political structure of Fascism. He did the same thing with Hitler: but he well perceived that with neither dictator could he "concord" or *collaborate*. With the fall of Fascism, for a little while there ceased in Italy those threatening attitudes (even when not expressed), those requests for compromising aids, that cooperation given without conviction, with continual interior resentments, often revealed in generic or cryptic terms in discourses and encyclicals composed to tell the truth and avoid conflicts at the same time. What insupportable years were those from 1929 to 1943! ⁸

⁸ Under the Nazi occupation Fascists have again renewed their malevolent policy towards the Church.

In his conclusion, *Future Outlook*, Binchy puts as a heading to Chapter XXV a quotation from Pius XI's discourse to the Lenten preachers on the very day of the *Conciliation* (February 11, 1929): "another doubt: what will tomorrow bring? This question leaves us still more tranquil, because we can answer simply: We do not know. The future is in the hands of God, and, therefore, in good hands." In uttering those words Pius XI showed his tranquil conscience in having authorized the signatures of the Lateran Treaty as an act of duty, and, hence, his faith in Divine Providence.

From the spiritual point of view there ought not to be and there is no man more tranquil and calm than the good Christian who, with a pure conscience, awaits events, even when it may happen that involuntarily he has prepared the way for results contrary to those he would zealously desire and had intended.

In the present case, human prevision leads us to see a better future for the Church in Italy than in the past, the whole past from the *Risorgimento* to our day.

First of all, there are no longer any motives for combat against the Church in the economic field, as was the case a century ago when ecclesiastical mortmain occupied almost a third of national property; nor are there insurmountable motives for struggle in the political field, as during the time of the Temporal Power, which was an obstacle both to the unification of the Kingdom of Italy and to the formation of a constitutional regime as a basis for political liberties.

The experience of Fascism has caused even the most retrograde Catholics to comprehend that in the twentieth century one can no longer return to an authoritarian system except through the superimposition by force of a single class or a single armed party upon the rest of the population. And if this party demands the help of the Church, it involves the Church in the violent acts and in the abuses of the political power.

Of this experience Binchy gives a complete picture, objective and critical, always supported by the facts. The episode of the Ethiopian War, although attenuated by Binchy in its ethical implications, will

always remain a dark blot of shame on the civil and religious history of Italy.

From this episode and many others, and from the nationalistic—excessively nationalistic—tone of some of the Italian clergy, even influential members, there has resulted some difficult problems.

The Church has always been characterized by the internationalism of its own activity. In the Ancient Era, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Period, the Roman Clergy and Roman thought had never been particularist, but universal. The work of Rome, of the Pope, of tradition had always been on the universal plane. This, not only because the Bishop of Rome is Peter's successor and shepherd of all the faithful, but, also, from the human point of view, because the traditional, juridical, political and social education led to the surmounting of every local and Italian particularism. From this point of view, the Temporal Power served to preserve the clergy from provincialism and to strengthen in it a truly universal spirit.

After the capture of Rome in 1870, during 59 years of discord, the clergy of the Curia (and many of the rest) remained aloof from the participation in problems of national interests. They remained bound to the Pope in his perennial protest as the defender of those rights which the State would not recognize. But after the Lateran Treaty a fury of nationalism burst forth in Italy, a nationalism identified with Fascism, and both appeared as united to the Catholic idea. Never did Italy experience a nationalistic fever like that of the past twenty years, a fever that gripped much of the people and the clergy. An exception to this fever were those of democratic ideas and those in direct contact with the wretched condition of the poor, such as the country parish-priests.

That is how we may explain what not even Binchy succeeds in comprehending, believing, as he does, that in many cases it was a dire necessity for priests and members of Catholic Action to show themselves almost more nationalistic than the Fascists themselves. We do not deny that in tyrannical regimes hypocrisy and adulation often take the place of truthfulness and criticism. But in the present case we perceive a genuine nationalistic feeling; perhaps sixty years of

repressed nationalism in ecclesiastical ranks and also the ideal (purely religious) of a real conciliation between Italy and the Papacy had generated an insuperable subjective illusion. Many were dragged beyond what was opportune.

Pertinax, the well-known French writer, raising the problem of the relation between the Church and Italian nationalism as soon as the conciliation had been concluded, proposed as a remedy the changing of the number of Italian and non-Italian cardinals to strengthen the international spirit of the Roman center. Such a solution would have its attendant inconveniences, like every compromise solution. It is necessary that the structure of the ecclesiastical center be adequate to its importance, that its tradition be vivifying and perennial, that the political debates of the various States enter the Bronze Gate already internationalized, that the environment be saturated with its own character. That has been and is the special virtue of the Roman Clergy and that of the lay world that has specialized in the services of the Vatican.

There has been a disturbance; the disturbance will pass: other priests, Italian or foreign, will become *Romanized*; Rome must be called anew to her function of universal city.

Let it not be believed that the environment of a capital city, of a center, of a tradition bound to a material reality such as a city, is unimportant. Paris is what it is because it has a tradition of politics, culture, and art that neither New York, nor London, nor Berlin has. Rome has been Papal from the time Constantine abandoned it until 1929. In the period of the liberal governments, too, an attempt was made to make a political Rome, or a worldly Rome, or a Rome of modern edifices. A complete *fiasco*: the Monument to Victor Emmanuel that was to mark the beginning of an historical national greatness, seemed, and it still does today, an absurd intrusion within the walls of Rome. Mussolini cut, mended, destroyed, remade: forums and statues, civil and military buildings. Fascism was to be the historical synthesis of two empires in the world: the Roman and the Catholic. A failure! Rome became Papal once again when the Allied bombs fell on San Lorenzo and when, on the night of July 25, the

people acclaimed the Pope for the fall of Mussolini, the Pope who had not had and could not have had any part in it.⁹

Tomorrow, Democracy will be remade in Italy. The Roman and Vatican clergy, after the hard Fascist experience, will remember the past days with bitterness and will guard itself carefully from accentuating a nationalism that is out of tune both from the temporal and the spiritual point of view.

But the future popular Government will have to renounce, for its part, any attempt to transform Rome into a lay and political city (after two attempts have failed), any attempt to stamp it with buildings of a new grandeur to vie with the ancient Rome. Let Rome be the Capital of Italy, well and good; but Rome is more than ever the Seat of Catholicism. The Pope will finally experience, for himself, too, as well as for his curia, that liberty that will be enjoyed by the citizens; and he will see that the spirit of peaceful collaboration in the same capital will impose on him: no collaboration in a policy that might be repugnant to the Christian spirit, as Fascism was. Nor will he be compelled to protest against a suspicious and hostile government, as he had to do for many years after the Risorgimento.

Italians are still discussing whether the Lateran Treaty will last; whether the Concordat will be respected. This writer has examined that matter in an article in this *Review* (Vol. 5, No. 1, January 1943), and has no intention of repeating here what he wrote then. The Lateran Treaty which solved the Roman Question is an historical document that no one in Italy will be able to cancel. The Concordat will perhaps be modified by mutual agreement, perhaps it will survive, perhaps it will be abolished for an amicable separation. Everything can happen: but Divine Providence guides the Papacy—through the hardest experiences—to an ever greater importance and elevation, so that the terrestrial supports on which it counted in the past become ever less necessary and less useful, while the moral and spiritual authority of the Pope emerges ever more luminous over the whole world.*

⁹ The occupation of Rome by Nazi and "Republican Fascists" is one of the historical recurrences for the papal Rome. They will go away; Rome will be free again.

* Translated by Angeline Helen Lograsso.

