



FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

Spring 1983 | Vol. IX, No. 1

CATHOLICISM, LIBERALISM, THE RIGHT: A SKETCH FROM THE 1920'S

John C. Rao

In the analysis which follows, John Rao attempts to disarm the non-traditional criticisms of modern Catholic political theory that it is subservient to right wing political movements and doctrinally malleable in pursuit of the Church's own (selfish) interests. Rao's article is, in effect, a case study suggesting that the criticisms are false. The study involves a careful synopsis of the views expressed in the 1920's by the editors of La Civiltà Cattolica, a Jesuit journal uniquely allied to the papacy; it provides, in addition to the evidence for Rao's case, a superb analysis of liberalism, fascism and legitimate Catholic action.



CATHOLIC POLITICAL THEORY PRIOR TO THE ASCENDANCY OF WRITERS SUCH AS JOHN Courtenay Murray is not a field that is widely studied or seriously understood by many Americans. This is especially true of Catholic political thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time which was nevertheless marked by an abundance of careful clerical and lay analysis of Western institutions and aspirations. The shape of Catholic thought of this period is frequently attributed by Americans to factors less than intellectual and far from generous in character, as well as to peculiar aberrations of the Latin mind. It is accordingly dismissed.

This somewhat gratuitous attitude is maintained when discussing the relationship between Catholic political thought and what is known as "Catholic Action." Emphasis is placed upon the Church's predisposition, on non-rational grounds, towards right-wing, authoritarian movements, and her consequent willingness to create, alter, or ignore political and social "doctrines" to encourage them. Alternatively, attention is directed to the Church's interest in the exercise of raw power, and to her variable estimation of the importance of her own teachings, based upon their momentary ability to promote or to restrain Roman strength. What non-opportunistic and objective rationale could possibly be conjured to defend the way in which the Vatican has urged the development of Catholic political and social movements, and, then, with baffling frequency, intervened against them? Whether cohesiveness of theory or coherence of thought and action are concerned, many American observers have felt that the Catholic political world has little to say for itself.

The purpose of this article is not to argue that Catholic political theory and Catholic Action before the period of important American influence in the Church were necessarily correct and judicious. Neither is it to deny the self-interested, opportunistic, and even purely unintelligent elements that have entered into Catholic formulations and guidelines for action. Instead, the purpose will be limited to a demonstration of three broad points: the fact that theoretical speculation was indeed taken seriously at Rome; that, while firmly anti-liberal, this speculation was not irrationally twisted to serve the needs of "the Right"; and that apparently opportunistic and inconsistent actions may be partially explained as attempts to prevent what can be described as "back-door" secularization—a secularization

occasioned by one's friends. The Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, published twice monthly in Rome since 1850, will serve as the reference for illustrating these points; the 1920's will be their proving ground; reactions to two rightist movements with which the Church has been associated-Italian Fascism and L Action Francaise-will serve as laboratory specimen.

LA CIVILTA CATTOLICA

La Civiltà Cattolica is an instructive key to Catholic political thought for several notable reasons. This periodical maintained a reputation for having close, cordial ties with the Vatican, and for serving as one of its spokesmen. In recompense for seventy years of unswerving support of the papal cause, it had received Vatican funding, enjoyed easy access to the Holy Father, and been granted his public blessing and frequent commendation. Secondly, *La Civiltà Cattolica* has a long-standing commitment to Catholic political and social theory, a mission which it fulfilled by providing reflective essays, satirical articles, novelettes, news commentary, book reviews, and verse on every variety of contemporary issue. *Civiltà* writers were influential in the development of documents ranging from the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) to *Rerum novarum* (1891). Finally, the Jesuit journal was noted for the consistency intentionally cultivated by its editors, a coherence that enables it to be studied as one piece, the work of a particular school of thought.

Such unity and persistence may have been partially due to the clarity of the *Civiltà's* first Jesuit editors, including, most importantly, Padre Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio (1792-1861). A brother of one of the Risorgimento premiers of the kingdom of Sardinia, Taparelli was a follower of St. Ignatius admired even by the Society's opponents. His works on the natural law, and his critique of European liberalism as an outlook founded upon a fatal separation of the individual and social character of the human person, exercised an undying influence on *Civiltà* authors. Praised by Leo XIII, Taparelli's memory was also promoted by neo-Thomists throughout Europe-a result of his re-introduction of St. Thomas' writings into Italian seminaries after a long period of disfavor. Taparelli's reputation enjoyed further enhancement in the 1920's after the re-publication of his main works by the *Civiltà*, the timeliness of his assault on liberalism, and the homage of Pope Pius XI, who had translated some of his writings into German while heading the Ambrosian Library in Milan.¹

Vatican influence, consistency of purpose, and the reputation of its editors all played a role in elevating *La Civiltà Cattolica* to a position of power in the Catholic world. Its peculiar structure, half intellectual and half commentary on current events, makes it an apt instrument for penetrating the secrets of Catholic thought and its connection with Catholic Action, as these were understood in Rome.

LIBERALISM IN THE 1920's

A European continent devastated by the First World War, decimated by starvation and disease, and troubled by civil disturbances offered few grounds for general optimism in 1920. Those problems which were not exacerbated by impassioned front-line soldiers returned to unemployment in broken economies, were fuel for the cynic, anxious to cripple all faith in material and moral regeneration.

The editors of the *Civiltà* were by no means sanguine in the face of such despair. "We foresee more ferocious warfare", they explained as the decade commenced, "more difficult conditions for the good, a more menacing future for society as a whole".² Party passions seemed inevitably to accompany civic action, justice in economics seemed to be a utopian dream, and international order a chimera. Meanwhile, the European horizon darkened with the promise of a Bolshevik bloodletting or the victory of American materialism.³

Nevertheless, the *Civiltà* encouraged its readers, all hope for a rebirth of Catholic order need not be abandoned. Indeed, the very disappointments of a war that belied certainty in a never-ending progress had radically increased sympathy towards the Church. Moreover, Catholics could take heart from the instruction and inspiration offered to them by a century of Christian political and social writings unprecedented in both their scope and their number; writings among which could be counted the works of Taparelli. Most importantly, Catholics were clear with regard to the source of European decay: liberalism, with its failure to understand that the existence and exercise of authority were essential to the dignity of the individual and the maintenance of a civilized society.⁴

The general culpability of liberalism as an attack upon authority was always central to the journal's outlook. Liberalism, constructed upon an erroneous faith in the individual's ability to achieve the good without the

assistance of authority, represented the secularization of an atomistic tendency already present in embryo in the sixteenth-century heresiarchs. It treated the human person as though he were a self-sufficient entity, a citadel threatened only by the evil from without. At first, roused by a rapacious bourgeoisie anxious to reduce Church and State restrictions on the growth and use of personal wealth, liberalism sought merely to prohibit authority over economic matters. Soon, however, more advanced brethren objected not simply to the object of authority's exercise, but to authority in itself, at least when wielded by men other than those freely admitted by the autonomous individual. Still more progressive liberals began to include among authorities to be tamed the leaders of subsidiary corporate entities, and even fathers of families. Finally, certain spirits, the most radical of all, could not bring themselves, out of misconstrued love for the individual, to endure the impudence of what were but intellectual and internal authorities: Away with the tyrannies of standards of beauty, of conceptual truths, of the structure of logic and linguistic forms!

Each individual liberal might disapprove of the increased zeal of his next most radical brother-in-arms. None, accepting the disdain for authority implicit in liberal thought, could develop a convincing rational ground for limiting social wreckage. Cry all that moderate liberalism might do, it "cries against the consequences of principles that it has established."⁵ The less radical attacks of the eighteenth century had fertilized the soil for the egoism, passion, and offhanded injustice of the twentieth. Present-day madness was explicable after one visit to the schools created by the liberal state but yesterday. The tumbrils carting the Girondins to the embrace of the guillotine rolled through streets resounding to the hymns of liberty which these partisans of the Revolution had themselves composed. Thus, the ironic end of the liberal experiment is not the benefit of the individual; it is his oppression and destruction.⁶

Three consequences of the liberal assault on authority, three examples of the dangers suffered by the individual as a result of it, were seen to stand out in the most vivid relief after the First World War. The first of these was the passage of legitimate state authority into the hands of partisan groups, each subject to passions which were then moulded into grandiose ideological keys to the perfection of society. "Everything," the *Civiltà* wrote, "has been obscured and overturned due to the lack of a social sense, in order to serve the triumph of

individual and collective egoisms." This "abdication of authority" before "private powers" was "the most unhealthy error," detrimental to the satisfaction of legitimate personal needs and goals.⁷

How had the abdication come to pass? A basic assumption of early liberalism had been that emasculation of the authority of Church and State would "free" the individual, whereas it had, in fact, "freed" only the stronger and better-organized to exploit their fellow-citizens. The theories of democratic liberalism, which recognized the need to give to the weakened state some basis of operation against embryonic anarchism, afforded such powerful partisan groups an effective means of justifying their own extortion and oppression. A "purified" state, one which was not really an authority in the old sense, but a simple mouthpiece for the "will of the people," need not fear degeneration into becoming an instrument of tyranny. Indeed, its roots in the "will of the people" might entitle it to new mystic powers, to perform all manner of tasks. For how could the people oppress itself?



Easily, the *Civiltà* maintained, since "the people" played little role in the whole process. Any partisan group, whether sincerely or cynically, could manipulate this argument. Incited by a given passion and liberalism potentially blessed and divinized them all—the "party" could rush for control of the arms of the weakened state, insisting that it was transmitting into action the "will of the people" for an unquestionable good. Opposition, even from a numerical majority, need not cause special difficulties. It would merely indicate to the party the lamentable persistence within the population of the influence of former "real" authorities, which were, by definition, unacceptable. Such forces had drugged the people into expressing what was actually not its will at all; popular opposition was a subconscious plea to crush the remaining oppressors of the individual. The faction, understanding this, interprets what the will of the people would be, were the last vestiges of the influence of older authorities eradicated. A state directed by the will of the people, interpreted by the liberating faction, could proceed to the complete destruction of all remaining hostile social institutions. Since potential private usurpers of the functions of the weakened liberal state were legion-cap-

italists, the press, union, madmen—the hostile institutions destroyed must eventually cover all surviving authorities. Hence, the liberal idea ends with the individual confronting an oligarchic “pseudostate” licensed to do whatever it pleases in his name, even against his will.

Another aspect of this “power-slippage” is the fact that the “parties” created are ideological in character, as is the basic attack on authority. Liberalism can never admit that there is something evil in the individual himself. Instead, it assumes that there must be yet another enemy authority in the thicket, one last obstacle to the Dignity of Man. Each partisan group, inspired by its pet passion, argues that the satisfaction of this desire, and the tumbling of the social fortress preventing its final victory, will inevitably usher in the Millennium. This becomes its article of faith, or, at the very least, its passport through a liberalized Europe seduced by such language. So deeply had the liberal spirit affected the Western world that any competing faction refusing to combat that spirit directly would find itself promising its own ideological key to social ills, with a faith that no critical evidence could alter. Partisan Europe in its ideological guise could only survive together with liberalism, since the destruction of social authority alone could pave its pathway.⁸

Economic injustice for the individual was a second consequence of the liberal assault upon authority, and this, the journal claimed, had reached a truly climactic stage after the War. Why? Because it now existed in not one but two forms, capitalist and socialist, both of which crushed the human person. Atomistic liberalism, justifying an individualism which sinful men quite eagerly aimed at material ends, provided the capitalist with his ticket to a destructive journey across nineteenth-century Europe. Capitalism as a whole then firmly insisted that eye had not seen nor ear heard the benefits that would result from economic liberty, from submission to the law of supply and demand. The weakened state collapsed before its desire, or became its ideological tool. Justice to the capitalist was but the assurance that the defenseless and the unambitious received no protection from his demands, and the European continent was littered with the results of his “freedom.”

Socialism, given this background, was a providential scourge for indifference to human suffering. Yet socialism suffered from the same atomistic materialism as its enemy; it was capitalism writ large. Human beings, in the socialist mind, were indeed nothing more than indi-

vidual atoms inevitably engaged in conflict on the basis of their economic interests. The goal of the exploited was simply that of combining their strength in order to become the exploiters, crushing the real individual right to private property. Born from materialism, which compares man to the beast, the *Civiltà* complained, socialism simultaneously misunderstands the life of the spirit, the dignity of the person, and the value of human life. If capitalism destroyed property for the bulk of the population in the name of the individual’s unlimited freedom, its socialist child did so under the banner of the community, exacting indignant retribution for parental severity. Moreover, a movement like the socialist, based on masses of the population, was a microcosm of the liberal state; power within the socialist organization was invariably exercised by an oligarchy of commissars and petty bureaucrats interpreting the membership’s will. Attack either socialism or capitalism without understanding the essential question of the importance of authority for the individual, and the human person is the ultimate loser.⁹

A third disaster might also be traced to liberal disdain for authority: exaggerated nationalism and utopian internationalism. If one justifies the autonomy of the individual, the legitimacy of individual passions, a door is opened for a nation that believes itself to be entitled to violate all moral tenets for self-aggrandizement. Leave the state weakened and the opportunity develops for yet another variety of ideological usurpation: the capture of the instruments of government by patriotic fanatics with their own vision of that upon which the will of the people ought to focus. One need only consider the reprehensible attacks upon priests and nuns of differing nationalities during the War, the vilification of Germans during and after that conflict, and the senseless injustice of the Allied nations in the Treaty of Versailles to realize the depths to which national feeling had fallen. Who was the ultimate loser in these developments? The individual, taxed, conscripted, brutalized, and sacrificed without concern to the needs of Moloch.¹⁰

Once again, however, the reaction to this “liberal” error, promoted by utopian internationalists, was equally destructive. The “nation”, for such men, becomes the last authority to crush before the commencement of the Year of Jubilee. But the nation, the *Civiltà* maintained, is an essential framework for the development of the individual; it is merely the misinterpretation of its true character in the liberal context of things that ought to be criticized. Individuals exist as particular creatures of flesh

and blood, sharing a language, a family past, customs, and real interests with only a limited group of other human beings. Rejection of the nation, and an attempt to replace it with a baseless “League of Nations” with no roots in European society would simply ensure the appearance of a weak liberal “super-state”. Power in this organization would flow to the strong and the better-prepared rather than to the people, just as in the liberal state. Thus, a supposedly common international government would be—and was in fact—the tool of the victorious Allies and the financial magnates that controlled them. The errors of the Treaty of Versailles, which had artificially created weak nations, ignored their dangerous proximity to strong ones, and trampled the just interests of the defeated powers, would feed exaggerated nationalism, “and please God that a new and more profound destruction does not take place”.¹¹

The *Civiltà* editors quite clearly believed that solutions to any given contemporary problems required unification of what had been put asunder: authority and the individual. Thus, for example, they were quite willing to contemplate state aid to farmers, land reform, and, in the ultimate extreme, expropriation of large holdings in order to combat agricultural indebtedness and semi-peonage. Was this designed to destroy the principle of private property? No. It was intended to promote its widespread dissemination in the context of the common good. Again, recognizing the unbalanced conditions created by capitalism the editors argued for strong state action in defense of workers, the absence of which excused such potentially dangerous expedients as trade unionism and strikes. Indeed, the *Civiltà* encouraged a Christian syndicalist movement which would organize workers to obtain their rights and seek participation in the ownership and management of industrial concerns. Was this meant to incite a class war against the rich? No. The *Civiltà* wished merely to reiterate the social responsibilities of wealth in a time when the harmonious “corporate society” of the Middle Ages had disappeared.¹² Finally, on a somewhat different plane, the editors carried on a rather vigorous campaign for a true “concert of Europe”, built upon the successes of European diplomacy after Locarno, and making use of the League structure. Would this supersede the nation? Again, no, for it was to the particular nation that the European owed his efforts and his loyalty, a “league of nations” being intended solely to give expression to the limitations within which the individual people, like the individual man, was obliged to work.¹³ Catholics had to realize, the *Civiltà* explained, that attempts to deal

with any given contemporary problem must be made within the general context of a theoretical defense of the goodness of authority as such. Liberal atomism must be uprooted. Otherwise, serious difficulties lay in wait for a Catholic restoration of society. Some might take the Church’s support for the rights of the poor as an indication of the justice of the socialist cause. Others might see in her moderation and her interest in protecting private property a command to encourage the lethargy of so-called conservatives. Catholics had to be taught that both the “Left” and the “Right”, despite superficial similarities on specific points, were not frameworks within which they could comfortably work. The Left, which often pinpointed the errors of previous less radical liberal movements, and hence might accidentally make common cause with the Catholics, was the direct carrier of the anti-authoritarian seed. The Right, which sensed the importance of authority, and therefore appeared to strike at atomism, did so mainly because its terrified members saw their own interests threatened. They established a line beyond which they refused to allow the forces of change to penetrate, regardless of whether or not this boundary was rational, or the interests defended just. Catholics could not be the allies of accidentally-correct atomists or irrationally-authoritarian aristocrats and bourgeois. Their battle was with an atomism that had created certain illicit conditions which many members of the Right would falsely preserve due to fear of change.¹⁴

Was a Catholic Party a fit instrument for a restoration of Christian society? The *Civiltà* was firmly convinced that it was perhaps the worst expedient to which a Catholic might turn. A “party” formed in the twentieth century would very easily succumb to the spirit of the times, and begin, in competition with its opponents, to offer an ideological program for the solution of all manner of problems; either this, or it would become rigidly conservative. A “Catholic Party”, anxious to win the battle for control of the state, might not only begin to treat the idea of a struggle among different parties as natural, but would inevitably demand a party discipline on issues about which Catholics might legitimately disagree. Moreover, parties having a structure and law of their own party leaders would be tempted to equate the victory of a Catholic Party with the victory of Christianity. Accomplishing nothing, they would hamper the real transformation of all things in Christ.

The *Civiltà* argued that a serious attempt to rebuild society along Catholic lines would have to ac-

comply several things simultaneously. It would first of all be obliged to ensure the survival and progress of Catholic education, so that society could continue to know what Christianity entailed. Secondly, it would require the existence of issue-oriented Catholic pressure groups, "Catholic Action," which would promote specific Catholic approaches to a variety of social problems. Such groups, while political in the sense that they would seek to exert pressure on the state, would nevertheless avoid partisanship. Their issue-orientation would prevent their commitment to a given party, avoiding the pitfall of forcing Catholics to adopt a wide spectrum of positions on topics about which no one need speak as a Christian. It would hinder them from becoming ideological instruments, since they existed to make the state respond to Catholicism, issue-by-issue, not to concoct a grandiose scheme whereby they became the state and offered their own ideological key to happiness. Hence, Catholics could be brought together politically only on matters of religious importance; no statement need be made on matters about which Christians could disagree, no party discipline exacted on non-essentials.

Finally, Catholics would have to keep their eyes open for statesmen susceptible to pressure from Catholic Action. If men could be found who were not frightened by the use of authority, who disliked the constant struggle for power among parties, and who refused to build an ideology out of their self-interest or their particular political suggestions for dealing with current problems, Europe could entertain hope. Such men might exercise authority as Catholics desired, but not due to some ideological program. Their actions would not have to be interpreted in the context of either Left or Right.¹⁵

FASCISM

Fascism, in its "doctrinal" form, was anathema to the editors of the *Civiltà*, and was condemned by them as being anti-Christian.¹⁶

Catholics are not able therefore to approve, much less to support fascism, as they cannot support or approve socialism, both the one and the other being opposed to the most elementary principles of Christianity.

Did fascism believe that authority was divinely-instituted, shaped, and limited? No, the editors answered. Did it recognize the need to subject individual passions to precepts of right reason and revelation? No. Indeed, it was a

movement in which "brutality is allied often with lust and other passions of wayward youths."¹⁷ Was international order one of its more heartfelt concerns? Its encouragement of nationalists like D'Annunzio did not endear it to the *Civiltà* in this regard. Perhaps social justice was a major fascist aim? Hardly. The "gregarii" were the Black Hundreds of a dying plutocracy ready to utilize any instrument to protect itself. Fascism was the natural home for ex-liberals, ex-socialists, and exasperated bourgeois unable to deal with the consequences of their fundamental principles, unwilling to see chaos sweep the land, and, hence, forced to deal with their crumbling world by means of frank, willful use of power.¹⁸

... liberalism is always constrained to make up for moral weakness, for the defect of law, with the abuse of material force, and thus to pass from an excess of license to the other extreme of tyranny.

Such we have seen and we still see in the deeds of fascism, even without recognizing it as a direct work of the government, or a specific institution of the 'liberal state' which has, at the very least, tolerated and fomented it.

Nevertheless, the *Civiltà* could not help but see in the fascist movement a tool for restoring the authority of the state, and an instrument fit to destroy the modern spirit. "Doctrinal" fascism was, to a certain degree, an artificial plant. Many fascists were simply supporters of "action" to end the crisis of post-war Italy, and went no further in formulating ideological principles. Obedience to the will of the leader, who might then be able to judge the practical steps that had to be taken, was their single unquestionable axiom. The "Duce," whose authority was thus exalted, had shown himself to be a man of enormous organizational ability, who knew how to exploit the deficiencies and errors of both liberalism and socialism, and who could also dominate the population as a whole. This non-ideological fascism struck at anarchic individualism, whatever its potential doctrinal flaws. Even the honesty of the fascist glorification of brute force, as opposed to its hidden acceptance by liberalism, could aid in building a path back to an understanding of the value of social authority.¹⁹

The roar of the *fascisti* which orders 'enough' to this disorder was like a signal of battle that had to find sympathy and consent in the crowd of tired, disgusted, self-interested, and honest, who, even while applauding the goal of the fascist organizations, did not approve the method.

A consistent *Civiltà* policy, given the two-fold character of fascism, had itself to be somewhat complex. The editors determined that fascism would have to be steered away from any dogmatic statement of its irrational principles, and kept to its emphasis on action, order, and authority. This would deal heavy blows to the spirit of the modern world. Secondly, Catholic Action would have to be developed more fervently, and Catholic pressure exerted to ensure that whatever actions Mussolini did take were Catholic in their approach. Thus, a Catholic order of things could gradually be constructed without the mediation of a Catholic Party, itself tempted to accept the idea of party contests in a liberal state, or to turn the social teachings of the Church into an elaborated partisan ideology. This policy would, of course, require the strictest Church unity.

The general approach is clear throughout the journal's pages. Any justification of the paganism, immorality, violence, and statolatry of some fascists was vigorously condemned, as much after the march on Rome as before. The only good that such apologiae served, the editors argued, was that of showing the ultimate consequences of liberal theories of power and popular sovereignty. Evils that might stem from fascist "doctrines," such as the murder of Senator Matteotti in 1924, were eagerly identified and connected with their liberal roots. The fascist murder was seen as a frank application of that which liberals and socialists, with their attack on objective truth and their praise of revolution, had been arguing for years.²⁰

Similarly, helpful actions of the fascists were perhaps even excessively praised, and combined with exhortations to further good works. Let Mussolini make a reference to the help of God in Parliament, tinged though it might be with Mazzinian pantheism, and the *Civiltà*, seduced, would erupt in expression of the sympathy that it had aroused. Could he but cap his triumph over his enemies with a triumph over his own passions! Let the fascists publish works such as that by Giuseppe Bottai, *La marcia su Roma*, which urged the regulation of the overly-violent "gregarii," and the *Civiltà* was quick to second its wisdom. Let fascism, irritated by liberal and socialist opposition, launch an attack on popular sovereignty, or even on the "protestant" roots of the modern spirit, and the journal's editors urged the more balanced and rational advice of a Taparelli and the papal social encyclicals. Fascists were frequently right. If they could be consistently right on the proper subjects, they might

begin to be right for Catholic reasons.²¹

The task of the *Civiltà* may be clarified by examining its approach to several specific issues. The "statolatry" and basically anti-Christian sentiments of fascism were identified and criticized in such actions as Giovanni Gentile's educational reforms. Gentile did not show any desire to abandon state claims to control over education. The fascist reform suggested the construction of "a new form of monopoly on the part of the pantheistic state."²² Gentile himself was a Hegelian who believed that advanced students in secondary schools and universities should receive a philosophical education which would transform the character of their earlier Catholic religious education. Nevertheless, even in the midst of theoretically bad measures, the Church was receiving incalculable benefits. At least a primary school Catholic education was encouraged. In practice, the fascists were conceding to the Church more than the liberals had done, and with much better grace.²³



One issue which demonstrates the double-edged character of fascism in the mind of the *Civiltà* was that of fascist syndicalism. Fascism, the journal claimed, had, in a pragmatic maneuver, shed its formerly anti-proletarian image upon obtaining power. Its desire for unity and action led it to condemn the class struggle, and also to sense the need for some kind of cooperative, just, industrial system. Otherwise, the tenor of Italian life would be darkened by the sullen hostility of a large segment of the population. This seeming recognition of the rights of workingmen offered hope for the reconciliation of management and labor.

The minute, however, that "pragmatic" fascism attempted justification of its new, pro-corporate arguments, it revealed its erroneous principles, and manufactured an ideological position. "Doctrinal" fascism, founded upon the concept of the Leader, whose will is transmitted through the state, conceived of syndicalism as a dependent, monopolistic, instrument of the government. Not only would such a "workers' movement" prove to be distasteful to laborers, but, lacking historical roots, it would remain ungainly and uncontrollable, subject to breakdown or easy Bolshevik penetration. The only so-

lution to the industrial problem was a free syndicalism, Catholic in spirit, opposing both the class struggle and the taint of owner or state domination.²⁴

Just as yesterday Catholics were against red precursors and masters of monopoly, so also today they remain firm advocates of true liberty in face of the encroachment of fascist exclusivism. Neither the brutal club of reactionaries, nor the paternalistic umbrella of conservatives is useful against the socialists whirlwind. It is necessary to take refuge in a more spacious and solid edifice ... the professional organization.

La Civiltà Cattolica was clearly obliged to defend both Catholic education and Catholic Action along with any toleration of fascism. Teaching of the Catholic ethos, and the presence of strong pressure groups were essential to manipulation of a potentially unsound fascist outlook. Hence its critique of the effort to create in the Balilla a compulsory and monopolistic youth movement, completely fascist in character.²⁵

The *Civiltà* was under no such compulsion with regard to the Italian Popular Party, whose implicit claim to being the “Catholic Party” it denied. From the very aftermath of the march on Rome, the journal urged the “popolari” not to oppose the fascists in a way that would encumber the real work of the Church in Catholic Action. The *Civiltà* expressed concern that the Popular Party might endanger “a solid national reconstruction,” incite certain fascists “to return to the deprecated method of violence,” and lead more excitable blackshirts to confuse Catholic Action with Dom Sturzo’s group, though it “has nothing and ought to have nothing in common with any political direction.”²⁶

Unfortunately, the journal argued, the Popular Party was pursuing just the sort of policy that revealed the problems of a “Catholic Party.” Faced with a government legitimately-established, open to suggestions from the Church, anxious to restrict the license encouraged by nineteenth-century liberalism, and also popular, Catholics ought to count their blessings. They should sense in Mussolini’s critique of the liberal state the spirit of their own hostile arguments. Instead, the Popular Party was interested solely in the maintenance of the liberal party system, which was, indeed, essential to its partisan goals. An interest in “democracy” was by no means illicit, but the rise and fall of democratic states, especially hypocritical ones, was not something of moral importance upon

which the cause of the Church depended. It could not be made a Catholic issue. Catholics had a primary concern for the common good, which, as Church doctrine had long taught, was not tied to any particular form of government. It was ironic, the *Civiltà* noted, that Catholic voters, who had been allowed to participate in Italian politics to fight the socialists, were appealed to by the Popular Party to join now with liberals and the Left in general to defend “democracy” against a friendly government. Join with men who showed little sympathy for Catholicism, and who would turn against the Church at the earliest moment, for the sake of a non-essential issue? Why? Because the “popolari” had succumbed to the spirit of the age, and wanted it to be proclaimed to be Catholic.

The *Civiltà* continued its attack on the “popolari,” despite charges of servility and opportunism, always stressing the same theme. Indeed, opposition seems only to have strengthened the *Civiltà*’s bluntness. There was no hope of a Catholic state in Europe under present circumstances, the editors wrote. One had in Italy the second-best thing: a friendly, though somewhat irrational authority, open to Catholic influence, which, in addition, had no intention of abdicating its power. It would be servile to do nothing against an unjust action of this government; it was by no means vile or opportunistic to accept an historical reality, with all its inconveniences—just as one accepted civil marriage or the Third French Republic—and aim it towards the good. A similar approach would have been necessary, though with less chance of success, under liberalism and socialism, legally constituted. But to commit the Church against an historical reality, so predisposed to work for the common good, for the sake of the survival of parties and the partisan spirit, was a betrayal, a secularization of her mission. If the Church appeared to be running the risk of associating herself with fascism by supporting the legal government, this was a fact of life with which she had to live. She would run the equal risk of appearing to support socialism by opposing it, and should not, in that case, have the right to claim that her actions were due to a salutary obedience.²⁷

The *Civiltà* believed that the Lateran Treaty of 1929 demonstrated the legitimacy of the policy that it had advocated. For modest concessions, great benefits had been gained. Catholicism was recognized as the sole religion of the state, education was in the Church’s hands, and, as a result, the old territorial issue had been resolved easily. Even the sequestration of one *Civiltà* article, fol-

lowing its criticism of a ferocious speech by Mussolini in the Parliament interpreting the Concordat in an unacceptable sense, gave little indication of a general change of outlook. Would as much have been gained had the government been entrusted to a Catholic Party committed to the partisan spirit of the liberal state? This, the *Civiltà* was convinced, was doubtful.²⁸

L'ACTION FRANÇAISE

L'Action Française, comprising, as it did, a school of thought, an important daily newspaper, and a league for political action, certainly ranks as one of the most significant of rightist movements. Guided by Charles Maurras and his lieutenants, *L'Action Française* sought the restoration of the legitimate monarchy, the reinvigoration of provincial institutions, the defense of the classical tradition, and the strengthening of the Catholic Church. Such themes were emphasized due to a consciousness of the necessity of strong authority at all levels of human life for the flowering of individual achievement, and because of the conviction that they were, in fact, the historical basis for French greatness. *L'Action Française's* consequent attack upon anti-clerical legislation won for it numerous adherents among Catholics, giving it great influence in seminaries, at episcopal palaces, and even in the College of Cardinals.

L'Action Française, which seemed to be at one with *La Civiltà Cattolica* in centering its battle round questions of authority, and which was certainly a more pro-Catholic ally than Italian fascism, was burdened with papal condemnations from 1926-1939. The Jesuit journal tenaciously supported and amplified Rome's position. Identification of the rationale for the *Civiltà's* often bitter attack on *L'Action Française* will further help to clarify the question of Church involvement with the Right.

One ground for the Jesuit periodical's assault upon *L'Action Française* was what it labelled the "exaggerated classicism" penetrating the movement. A pagan sensuality made of some of Maurras' works, and practically all of those of Leon Daudet, a "school of corruption" which even "the worst pages of the lustful D'Annunzio could not surpass."³⁰ Classical egotism found expression in Maurras' praise of the "strong man," his disdain for the weak, and his willingness to justify such pagan institutions as slavery. The proud spirit of Celsus and Julian the Apostate ran through Maurras' claim that the Roman Church had purified with Hellenistic culture what would

otherwise have been merely a Jewish slave religion.³¹

So intent were the *Civiltà* editors upon stressing this point that they tried to depict *L'Action Française* as a determined opponent of Catholic social teachings. Maurras and his followers, they argued, exalted the material world above the spiritual, coming, then, "to the defense of the possessors of riches, of individual and social force as in paganism." Their gods were "force and capitalism." *L'Action Française* and "so-called conservatives" who appreciated it were "all too often deaf to hearing the voice of the Church and backward in practicing it"; they were indifferent to or fearful of "seeing the rights of the people or their social conditions improved"; they maintained a spirit "rigidly aristocratic in the worse and anti-Christian sense of the word." "The movement was incapable of understanding Christian charity, and, thus, was guilty of a social modernism that rejected the teachings of Leo XIII and Pius XI."³²

Finally, the *Civiltà* complained that "exaggerated classicism" fomented the violence associated with *L'Action Française*. Maurras mobilized youth for political protests "little in conformity with the dignity of Catholic demonstrations."³³ Despite Catholic teachings regarding obedience to the form of government generally accepted in a given nation, he preached the coup de force. Most ominously, given the journal's concern for international order, his belief in the sufficiency of strength for the attainment of national ends led him to pressure France into a consistently overbearing and unjust policy towards a humiliated Germany.³⁴

Maurrasian positivism complemented and completed the classical element of the movement. It was positivism that really cemented Maurras' materialism, even though his sole interest in the quantitative was cloaked by his respect for it in history and tradition. *Politique d'abord* the slogan revealing Maurras' conviction that order and stability were primarily dependent upon a political re-ordering of France, indicated his subordination of all spiritual matters to the return of the King. His demand for a monarchical restoration, innocent in itself, but erroneous should it contradict the Church's admission of the theoretical validity of all governmental systems, demonstrated his secondary concern for religion. Indeed, such a restoration would not necessarily help the Church at all, but, rather, promote "a simple return to the religious and moral conditions of France on the eve of the Revolution."³⁵ Maurras would protect the Church

for political reasons only, “in function of the French national interest”, “and not for “the profound principles of Christian philosophy.”³⁶ The clergy would then be forced to bless monarchism and capitalism, and bear the hatred caused by a “narrow-minded politics of ‘conservative at all costs’.”³⁷ *L’Action Française*, though anti-liberal, was anti-liberal in an unacceptable fashion:³⁸

In combatting liberalism with its false liberties, it passes to the defense of a censurable absolutism or of another form of at least debateable return to the old regime. In defending nationalism, it passes to a condemnation of all forms of ‘internationalism’, including the spirit of pacification among peoples, etc. In demanding, in conclusion, the principle of authority, it exaggerates and changes its nature, substituting, for example, the idea of material force and violence for that of moral force, justice, and love...

It was, in fact, a secularizing influence, guilty of religious liberalism:³⁹

They have discredited political and social liberalism by giving way to an indeed worse form of liberalism, religious liberalism; this is not a good means of serving the cause of a-monarchism that wants to reserve for the Catholic religion the first place in society, at least as an element of order and as the best auxiliary of authority.

Catholics, therefore, could agree with members of *L’Action Française* only in an accidental sense:⁴⁰

These men are indeed able to agree with us in some practical approach, or on some speculative point: as, for example, in rejecting revolutionary liberalism and similar things; but the agreement could never be complete, being determined *per se* by reasons diverse in motivation and ends opposed in intention.

La Civiltà Cattolica’s understanding of Maurras’ commitment to capitalism and to pagan immorality was erroneous. Nevertheless, its attack upon *L’Action Française’s* ideological character, founded upon the necessity of the monarch, was clear. Maurras’ followers certainly did

see themselves as the “Party of the Catholics,” at least in the *Civiltà’s* conception of the term, and therefore, deserved criticism from the journal’s perspective. If the Italian Popular Party needed to be harnessed due to its commitment to democratic liberalism, then *L’Action Française* had to be criticized for its determined support of the monarchy. Catholics did not have to take a stand on such issues. It was precisely the failure of Italian Fascism to insist upon “ideological purity” that allowed the journal to tolerate and support the kind of approach it condemned in *L’Action Française*. Just as the editors pointed to the malleability of fascist programs in the 1920’s as an indication of the justice of their pro-Mussolini stance, so did they emphasize *L’Action Française’s* stubborn reaction to the papal condemnation as a sign of its “doctrinary and practical political modernism.” A “Catholic movement” opposing the Church exemplified the secularization frightening the editors.⁴¹

Only one element of *L’Action Française* avoided the *Civiltà’s* criticism: the “League” led by the Catholic, Bernard de Vesins. The League had been designed as a pragmatic pressure group, it did not require a political platform to function, and it had fought good Catholic fights against anticlericals and masons. It was, in a sense, a “Catholic Action” organization, since the bulk of its members were practicing Christians. As practicing Christians of “good sense,” however, they were urged by the *Civiltà* to cease following “unbelieving and licentious novelists” as leaders. They were acting as Italian Catholics might have done had they taken D’Annunzio as their leader. Catholic Action or secularized partisan organization: there was no other choice.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Three goals were established for this article. It was designed to demonstrate the “serious” character of Catholic thought before the period of major American influence in the Church, to illustrate Catholic independence of “the Right,” and to explain seeming inconsistencies of thought and action on the basis of a fear of “back-door” secularization, coming from friends of Christianity.

NOTES

This article is based upon a reading of La Civiltà Cattolica (Naples/Florence/Rome, 1850-present) in the period 1920-1939. References are to that periodical unless otherwise stated. The reader is urged to consult the Civiltà itself for the full complement of articles which support the author's argument.

1R. Jacquin, *Un frere de Massimo d'Azeglio: le P. Taparelli d'Azeglio 1793-1862* (Paris, 1943); P. Pirri, S.J., ed., Carteggi (*Biblioteca di storia italiana recente 1800-1870*, xiv, 1932); "Il nostro centenario," 1949, ii, 7; A.C. Jemolo, *Chiesa e stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni* (Turin, 1948), p. 190; "Le colpe della civiltà nelle barbarie contemporanea," 1928, ii, 3-15.

2"L'auspizio del nuovo anno," 1920, i, 6-7.

3"Pericoli sociali dal liberalismo al bolscevismo," 1925, i, 97-102; *Impressioni d'America*, 1928, i, 251-259; ii, 28-41, 208-222.

4"La restaurazione morale e la 'Rerum novarum'," 1920, i, 120-135; "Liberalismo in pena," 1923, ii, 209-218.

5"L'incoerenze e 'piaghe sociali' dell'ora presente," 1921, i, 100; "Speranze, timori, e moniti nell'allocuzione pontificia," 1925, i, 20.

6"La follia del naturalismo nel 'folle anno' che è finito," 1920, i, 97-109; "I moniti delle ultime elezioni," 1921, ii, 385-395; "Liberalismo in pena," 1923, ii, 209-218; "I fallimenti del liberalismo del liberalismo e il 'celpo di stato; nella Spagna," 1923, iv, 97-105; "Le colpe della civiltà nelle barbarie contemporanea," 1928, ii, 3-15.

7See note 6; Also, "Nuovi fallimenti della politica," 1922, i, 97-106; "Crisi di stato e crisi di autorità," 1922, iv, 202; "Per il nuovo anno ai nostri lettori e amici," 1922, iv, 385-390; "Crisi di civiltà," 1923, i, 129.

8"Funzione educativa' e 'carattere etico' dello stato," 1922, iii, 133-146, 217-229; "La pacificazione in Italia e il nuovo appello del papa," 1922, iv, 291-301; "Per il nuovo anno ai nostri lettori e amici," 1922, iv, 385-390.

9"La parola del papa e i capisaldi della restaurazione sociale nell'ora presente," 1920, ii, 108-118; "Il congresso del partito popolare a Napoli," 1920, ii, 281; "La passione di Cristo rinnovellata nella sua chiesa," 1921, i, 485-495; "La pasqua cristiana e la concordia dei popoli," 1921, ii, 3-13; "Per la pace industriale," 1922, iv, 12-21; "L'apostolato operaio e la dottrina sociale della chiesa," 1932, iv, 432-440.

10"Errori di nazionalismo e nuovi danni alle missioni cattoliche," 1920, iv, 443-450; "I moniti del presente nell'allocuzione del santo padre," 1923, ii, 481-490; "Il nuovo invito del papa alla pacificazione dei popoli," 1923, iii, 113-123.

11"Il grido di dolore delle piccole nazionalità oppresse," 191, iii, 245-248; "Feste e lutti di guerra," 1921, iv, 289-296; "L'Europa senza pace," 1922, i, 311-319; "Nuovi fallimenti della politica," 1922, i, 101; "Patria e patriottismo," 1923, iv, 486.

12"Compartecipazione industriale," 1920, i, 401-410; "La settimana sociale di Roma," 1921, i, 52-60; "Il problema della terra," 191, ii, 396-411; "Lo sciopero secondo la morale cattolica," 1921, iv, 409-421, 491-502, 1922, i, 121-129; "Per la pace industriale," 1922, iv, 12-21, 237-248, 415-427; "Rassegna sociale," 1924, i, 325-340; "La conferenza del lavoro e la libertà sindacale," 1927, iii, 218-227, 1928, iii, 233-243.

13"Dalla nota di Benedetto XV al patto di Locarno per la pacificazione dei popoli," 1925, iv, 385-398; "Lo spirito della chiesa e l'organizzazione internazionale dei popoli," 1926, iii, 305-317; "Il problema della pace internazionale," 1926, iv, 127-137.

14"La parola del papa e i capisaldi della restaurazione sociale," 1920, ii, 108-118; "Il regno sociale di Cristo e la restaurazione della società," 1921, ii, 481-493; "La parola del papa e il giornalismo cattolico," 1923, i, 481-490; "Liberalismo in pena," 1923, ii, 209-218; "I fallimenti del liberalismo e il colpo di stato nella Spagna," 1923, iv, 97-105; "L'autorità sociale secondo la dottrina cattolica," 1925, iii, 257; "La sovranità universale di Cristo re e i suoi fondamenti teologici," 1925, iii, 481-491, iv, 3-13; "La rivoluzione spagnuola e i suoi insegnamenti," 1931, ii, 289-298; "Lo scioglimento della compagnia di Gesù nella Spagna," 1923, i, 289-300; "Individualismo pagano e l'individualismo cristiano," 1932, i, 409-423.

15"Unione popolare' e 'Partito popolare' in Italia," 1920, i, 289-301; "Il congresso del partito popolare a Napoli," 1920, ii, 269-281; "Funzione educativo'," 1922, iii, 217-229; "L'istruzione obbligatoria," 1921, iv, 137-149; "La parola del papa e l'azione cattolica in Italia," 1923, ii, 97-106; "L'unione dei cattolici e la divisione dei partiti in Italia," 1925, i, 385-394; "Politica e l'azione cattolica," 1926, i, 385-394; "I principii dell'educazione cristiana nell'insegnamento

del papa,” 1930, ii, 230-231.

16“La guerra fratricida in Italia e il ‘grido di pace’ del papa,” 1922, iii, 363; “I torti dei partiti e il dovere dei cattolici,” 1921, i

17“Le feste centenarie di Dante e la gazzare dei sovversi in Italia,” 1921, iv, 5-6.

18“La pasqua cristiana e la concordia dei popoli,” 1921, ii, 3-13; “I moniti del papa,” 1921, ii, 391; “Le feste centenarie,” 1921, iv, 6; “Il trionfo del re pacifico nel xxvi congresso eucaristico di Roma,” 1922, ii, 485-495; “Funzione educativo,” 1922, iii, 133-146, 217-229; “L’unita d’Italia,” 1922, iv, 97-110; “Garcia Moreno,” 1922, iv, 205-214; “Crisi di stato e crisi d’autorita,” 1922, iv, 201.

19“La rivoluzione fascista,” 1922, iv, 509; “L’unita d’Italia,” 1922, iv, 97-110, 193, iv, 289-298; On Nazism, see 1925, iv, 378 and “Il nazionalsocialismo in Germania,” 1931, ii, 309-327.

20“Liberalismo in pena,” 1923, ii, 218; “Fallimenti del liberalismo e ‘un futuro ordinamento costituzionale,’” 1924, iii, 97-110; “La delinquenze nella vita pubblica e gli oportuni moniti della Chiesa,” 1924, iii, 193-206; “Sotto il velame della questione massonica,” 1925, iv, 215-230; “Gioia e dolori ne11’ailuczazione pontificia,” 1926, i, 25-32; “Principii di dottrina cattolica circa lo stato e la convivenza civile,” 1927, i, 9-106; “La rinascita siciliana e la funzione sociale dell’autorita,” 1927, ii, 491-504; “I rinnovati richiami del papa,” 1927, iii, 15-20.

21“La pacificazione in Italia e il nuovo appello del papa,” 1922, iv, 291-301; “La rivoluzione fascista,” 1922, iv, 511-512; “I festeggiamenti e i problemi del rinnovamento fascista,” 1923, iv, 289-298.

22“La nuova riforma scolastica,” 1924, i, 385-398, 517.

23“La riforma della legge sulle opere pie,” 1924, ii, 34-40; “Principii di dottrina cattolica circa l’educazione della gioventu,” 1926, iv, 193-200; “Il senatore Gentile e gli ‘allarmi della Civiltà Cattolica,’” 1926, iv, 442-446; “Il nuovo codice penale italiano,” 1927, iii, 482-489, iv, 193-200; 1930, iv, 481-488.

24“Fascismo e sindacalismo,” 1923, i, 412-423; “Le recente disposizione dell’azione cattolica sul movimento professionale cristiano,” 1925, iv, 437, 440.

25“Il senatore Gentile e gli ‘allarmi della Civiltà Cattolica,’” 1926, iv, 442-446; “Principii di dottrina cattolica circa l’educazione della giaventu,” 1926, iv, 193-200; “L’accordo fra la Santa Sede e il governo italiano per l’azione cattolico,” 1931, ii, 549-552.

26“Il iv congresso del partito popolare italiano,” 1923, ii, 272.

27“La curruzione della vita pubblica e l’azione cattolica in Italia,” 1924,ii, 481-492; “L’unione dei cattolici e la divisione dei partiti in Italia,” 1925, i, 385-394; “La parte dei cattolici nelle presente lotte dei partiti politici in Italia,” 1924, iii, 297-306; “L’eco del nostro articolo per la parte dei cattolici nelle lotte politiche,” 1924, iii, 481-494; “Crisi di stato,” 1922, iv, 193-204; “Politica e cattolicismo,” 1925, iv, 481-490; “Autorita e opportunismo politico,” 1928, iv, 385-395; “L’ora di Dio,” 1929, i, 295.

28“L’ora di Dio,” 1929, i, 293-295; “La ‘conciliazione italiana’ e la riconciliazione della societa con Dio,” 1929, i, 481-488; “Pace Christi Italiae reddite,” 1929, iii, 289-294; “Tra ‘ratifichi e rettifiche’: ‘la parola del papa,’” 1929, iii, 97-105.

29“Ancora dell’Action Francaise’, un po’ di storia,” 1927, i, 385-398.

30“La polemica intorno alla ‘Action Francaise,’” 1928, ii, 142; “Rivista,” 1928, i, 145-151.

31“L’equivoco dell’ ‘Intelligenza’ nell’Action Francaise’ e il magistero della chiesa,” 1927, iii, 385-398; “La crisi dell-Action Francaise’ e gli scritti del suo maestro,” 1929, iii, 481-494; Revista: ‘Lo spirito dell-Action Francaise’ a proposito di ‘intelligenze’ e di ‘mistica,’” 1930, iv, 531-538; See, also, note 30.

32“L’equivoco,” 1927, iii, 398; “La lunga crisi dell’ ‘Action Francasie’ e le sue cause,” 1929, iii, 427-428n; “Il ‘libro giallo’ di una pretesa potenza,” 1927, iii, 336-337; “Il primato spirituale e la polemica su ‘l’Action Francasie,’” 1927, iv, 235-241; Also, notes 30, 31 above.

33“I moniti del papa nella recente allocuzione,” 1927, i, 26; Also, 1927, iii, 89, 181-182, 1936, i, 436-437.

34“Lo spirito,” 1930, iv, 535; “La conferenza di Genova e la voce del papa,” 1922, ii, 193-202; Also, note 33, above.

35“La crisi,” 1929, iii, 487; “Ancora,” 1927, i, 385-398; “La lunga crisi,” 1929, iii, 428.

36“Ancora,” 1927, i, 385-398; “L’equivoco,” 1927, iii, 398.

37“L’equivoco,” 1927, iii, 398; Also, note 32 above.

38“La questione dell’Action Francasie’ e le sue ripercussione,” 1927, i, 297-298.

39Quotation of Pius XI, 1927, ii. 476; Also, 1928, i, 145-151; “L’equivoco,” 1927, iii, 385-398; “Lo spirito,” 1930, iv, 531-538.

40“La questione,” 1927, i, 297-298.

41“La questione,” 1927, i, 264, 567-569, iii, 3-14, 352; “Il rinnovati richianu del papa contro le dottrine sovver-
titrice della societa,” 1927, iii, 15-20; “La polemica,” 1928, ii, 135-142; “Il ‘libro giallo’,” 1927, iii, 329-344; “La parola
augurale del1932, i papa,121” 1928 La63-64; “Dopo la composizione dell’ “Azione Cattolica’,” 1932, I, 121-136; “sot-
tomissione del “Action Francaise,” 1939, iii, 193-202.

42“La questione,” 1927, i, 292; “Ancora,” 1927, i, 385-398; “II ‘libro giallo’,” 1927, iii, 341,344; “Il primato
spirituale,” 1927 iv 235-241; Also, 1927, ii, 280-281, 1928, i, 568-569.

43See, for example, “Lo spirito,” 1930, iv, 531-538.