

Alberto Giasco (2013) *Cattolici e fascisti. La Santa Sede e la politica italiana all'alba del regime (1919–1925)* (Bologna: Il Mulino), 575 pp., ISBN 9788815245205, €40.00, soft cover

Alberto Giasco is a key member of the research group based at Bologna's Foundation for Religious Sciences, John XXIII, working in the newly (2006) opened Vatican and Church archives for the papacy of Pius XI (1922–39). In *Cattolici e fascisti*, he provides one of the first major studies of the early years of the Vatican–Fascist regime relationship since the opening of those archives. The only comparable work is that by Giovanni Sale, *Fascismo e Vaticano prima della conciliazione* (Jaca Book, 2007). Following Sale's example, in addition to his 300 pages of text, Giasco offers 250 pages of primary sources.

As Giasco notes in his first chapter, which surveys the evolution of the relations between the Holy See and the Italian Fascist regime throughout the entirety of Pius XI's reign, the great bulk of earlier work on this topic has focused on one of three periods: the making of the Lateran Accords (concluded in 1929); the brief but intense battle over Catholic Action (1931); and tensions linked to the pronouncement of the regime's new racial policy in 1938, accompanied by Mussolini's increasing embrace of Hitler. The need for a study that takes advantage of the newly available archival evidence to look in detail at the first years of this Vatican–Fascist relationship is indeed clear, and Giasco provides much insight into its complex dynamics.

This is history from the Church perspective. Giasco does an excellent job exploiting a variety of Church archives, including not only those in the Vatican, but also the central Jesuit archives, the archives of *Civiltà Cattolica*, and other Church sources. He does not attempt to look at the vast quantity of material on this relationship as seen from the Fascist side, relying here on earlier published studies. The author also aims for a sophisticated audience: paragraph-length quotes in the original German, French and English language are given with no translation. Following his initial overview, one long chapter each is devoted to the years leading up to Mussolini's assumption of power (1919–22); the first Mussolini government (1922–24); and the crisis over the murder of Giacomo Matteotti (1924).

In his first chapter, Giasco properly sets the historical context: a Vatican preoccupied with the threat of Socialism in the wake of the Russian revolution, and with the social disorder spreading through both urban and rural Italy. Although initially Fascism was seen as foreign to the Church, yet another manifestation of a de-Christianized society – indeed even a puppet of the Church's *bête noir*, masonry – Mussolini masterfully exploited the pope's yearning for a restoration of the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy. He offered a bargain: an end of liberal Italy's separation of church and state in exchange for Church support of his rule. As Giasco shows, this bargain gestated in a period of regular Fascist violence against priests and Catholic organizations. The Holy See quickly came to distinguish between 'good' Fascism and 'bad' Fascism. As Giasco puts it, 'Good fascism is that which responds to the desires of the ecclesiastical authorities, that which invokes God during its official demonstrations or reintroduces the crucifix in classrooms.' By contrast, 'Bad fascism is that which ... introduces rites and symbols of a pagan stamp in the nation's life' (pp. 44–45). In lamenting the violence against priests and Catholic groups, the Vatican and Catholic papers blamed it on 'bad' Fascists who were not under Mussolini's control. For his part, Mussolini was able to portray himself as the only one in a position to keep a lid on these wayward Fascists and to

elevate the Catholic Church to the position of official state religion. In all this, he was helped by his argument that Fascism and the Church shared the same enemies, enemies he was in the best position to repress: liberals, socialists, and masons.

A key part of the story of these years is how the Church distanced itself from the Italian Popular Party (PPI), and Guasco offers a thorough account. Founded in 1919 and headed by a priest, Luigi Sturzo, the PPI was one of the major obstacles Mussolini faced in solidifying and maintaining his power. How Mussolini was able to convince Pius XI to withdraw clerical support for the party is well told here. By the time of the first elections under Mussolini, in the early spring of 1924, the pope had forced Sturzo from the party's leadership. The PPI (like the socialist parties) found it almost impossible to campaign amidst widespread Fascist violence and intimidation. Yet, while the Vatican protested the violence against the PPI, it alternated these protests, as Guasco shows, with regular praise of Fascism's favourable actions towards the Church and a distinction between the good work of Mussolini and the Fascist authorities on the one hand and the lamentable action of out-of-control individual Fascists on the other.

The chapter on the Matteotti affair makes clear how close Mussolini came to falling from power in the wake of the Fascist murder of the socialist leader. As Guasco shows, the PPI leadership was convinced that the king was ready to appoint a new, non-Fascist prime minister. Guasco details how the pope aggressively intervened to prevent the king from deposing Mussolini by preventing any PPI support for the coalition that would be needed to bring Mussolini down.

The author includes 150 documents as an appendix to the book. These are taken from a variety of sources: including the archives of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, the Vatican Secret Archive, the central Jesuit archive in Rome, and the archive of the Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica*. He includes too a number of published articles from the Vatican-linked press and a few published primary documents. Together this body of materials offers a rich basis for understanding the Holy See's evolving attitudes and actions in the early years of Fascism.

*Cattolici e fascisti* is among the earliest major works to explore the recently opened Vatican and Church archives for the papacy of Pius XI. It does an excellent job of showing how the Holy See came to throw its support behind Mussolini and how it helped make Italy's Fascist dictatorship possible.

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*Italian Silent Cinema. A Reader* is an incredibly rich text, a must-read for anybody interested in studying the beginnings of cinema in Italy and its multifaceted, interdisciplinary and complex history. In particular, the book is a valuable research tool for conducting work on the period of the so-called golden age of Italian history, 1908–15.