

ITALIAN CATHOLICS AND THE TRANSIT TO POST-FASCISM, 1943-1945

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The FUCI was the official organisation for the laity of Italian Catholic Action for the university sector and exists until the present day.¹ As such, it was an important element of the lay Catholic world within Fascist Italy, as well as having a wider presence within Italian society. Thus, the study of the FUCI provides a means of studying the dynamics of Catholicism within Fascist Italy. At the same time, however, the FUCI has a wider significance for the study of Catholic politics and intellectual ideas within Italy, as a remarkably large proportion of the future Christian Democrats who would rule the destinies of the country after the Second World War received much of their intellectual training in the ranks of the federation.² Additionally, in the 1925-33 period, the central ecclesiastical assistant of the organisation was Giovanni Battista Montini, the future pope Paul VI.

Keywords: FUCI-Facism-Catholic- Christian Democrats-Paul VI

CATÓLICOS ITALIANOS Y EL TRÁNSITO AL POST-FASCISMO, 1943-1945

La FUCI era la organización oficial para los laicos de la Acción Católica Italiana para el sector universitario y existe hasta el día de hoy. Como tal, era un elemento importante del mundo católico laico dentro de la Italia fascista, además de tener una presencia más amplia dentro de la sociedad italiana. Por lo tanto, el estudio de la FUCI proporciona un medio para estudiar la dinámica del catolicismo dentro de la Italia fascista. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, la FUCI tiene un significado más amplio para el estudio de la política católica y las ideas intelectuales dentro de Italia, ya que una proporción notablemente grande de los futuros demócratacristianos que gobernarían los destinos del país después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial recibió mucho de su formación intelectual en las filas de la federación. Además, en el período 1925-1933, el asistente eclesiástico central de la organización fue Giovanni Battista Montini, el futuro Papa Pablo VI.

Palabras Claves: FUCI-Facismo-Católicos-demócratas cristianos-Pablo VI

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¹ Histories of Italian Catholic Action and more broadly of Italian Catholicism in the modern era abound. See, for example, J. Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy. Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London and New York, 2008); F. Traniello, *Religione cattolica e Stato nazionale. Dal Risorgimento al secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna, 2007); A. Acerbi (ed.), *La Chiesa e l'Italia. Per una storia dei loro rapporti negli ultimi due secoli* (Milan, 2003); G. Verucci, *La Chiesa cattolica in Italia dall'Unità a oggi 1861-1998* (Rome and Bari, 1999); E. Preziosi, *Obbedienti in piedi. La vicenda dell'Azione Cattolica in Italia* (Turin, 1996); M. Casella, *L'Azione cattolica nell'Italia contemporanea (1919-1969)* (Rome, 1992); M. Guasco, *Dal Modernismo al Vaticano II. Percorsi di una cultura religiosa* (Milan, 1991); G. Penco, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia nell'età contemporanea 1919-1945* (Milan, 1985); A.C. Jemolo, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia. Dalla unificazione agli anni settanta* (Turin, 1977); P. Scoppola, *La Chiesa e il fascismo. Documenti e interpretazioni* (Bari, 1971) and D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (Oxford, 1941).

² Aldo Moro, Giulio Andreotti, Paolo Emilio Taviani, Giovanni Leone, Emilio Colombo, Mariano Rumor, Amintore Fanfani, Mario Scelba, to name but just a few, were all active members of the FUCI .

Despite its importance, the existing literature on the FUCI is still somewhat sparse and mostly of an apologetic nature, perhaps due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the studies have been written by former *fucini*, as the members of the association were known. Moreover, the bulk of the existing historiography on the FUCI has unsurprisingly tended to focus on the formation of the Christian Democrat elite and the intellectual and religious itinerary of the future pontiff, Paul VI. Many of these studies have been characterised by a limited sense of a proper historical dimension, and have neglected other important aspects of the history of the FUCI, such as its place within lay Catholic life in the 1920s and 1930s and its engagement with the principal intellectual trends of the time. It is these shortcomings which this article sets out to address.³

Richard J. Wolff has asserted that from approximately June-July 1943 the *Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana* (FUCI) was embarked on an ‘open and undisguised ...propaganda for a post-war Christian Democratic state’.⁴ However, this vision of the Catholic students association firmly united behind a sole political project and party is far removed from the historical truth. Above all, with Mussolini’s removal from office on 25 July 1943, the vast

³ For studies of the FUCI see T. Torresi, *L'altra giovinezza. Gli universitari cattolici dal 1935 al 1940* (Assisi, 2010); M.C. Giuntella, *La FUCI tra modernismo, partito popolare e fascismo* (Rome, 2000); *FUCI. Coscienza universitaria, fatica del pensare, intelligenza della fede. Una ricerca lunga 100 anni* (Milan, 1996); R.J. Wolff, *Between Pope and Duce. Catholic Students in Fascist Italy* (New York, 1990); R. Moro, *La formazione della classe dirigente cattolica (1929-1937)* (Bologna, 1979); and G. Fanello Marcucci, *Storia della FUCI* (Rome, 1971).

⁴ R.J. Wolff, *Between Pope and Duce. Catholic Students in Fascist Italy* (New York, 1990), 212.

majority of the *fucini* were concerned with other issues than the formation of a political party, principally the future of Italy as a nation-state and the enormous task of rebuilding the country after a devastating war. The bulk of the Catholic intellectuals insisted that the desire – evident among many of the former *Popolari* – to return to the liberal regime that had prevailed in the peninsula previous to the rise to power of the Fascists had to be rejected as an unrealistic possibility. The nation had to fight the temptation of considering the generation that had grown under the sign of the *littorio* as ‘a nonentity, dried up by the education received by the past regime’, adding that no one could doubt that ‘even the *fascio* had known how to obtain some good results in some areas’.⁵ Indeed, this was evidence of the profound fracture caused by the Fascist regime during its twenty years of government in the Catholic world, where the new generation had little or no contact with or knowledge of the generation of Luigi Sturzo and Alcide De Gasperi.

Relations between the two generations were not devoid of conflicts, precisely because of their different historical, cultural and social traditions. De Gasperi, for example, had harsh words for the generation that had been educated under Fascism. Writing to a leading member of the *Movimento laureati* on 10 September 1943, Sergio Paronetto, the future Christian Democrat Premier declared that ‘unfortunately I am persuaded more and more that Fascism is a congenital mentality of the younger generation’.⁶ For their part, the young Catholic intellectuals felt that they could not find in the former *popolari* adequate intellectual partners for their mission of rebuilding the nation. The by then national president of the FUCI, Giulio Andreotti, who would nevertheless join the ranks of the Christian Democrats in mid-1944, had criticised a year earlier the older cohort for wanting to erase the Fascist totalitarian past with a ‘sponge stroke’ and for considering the Italian defunct regime as ‘an incidental parenthesis in the historical process of our country’. He accused them of wanting a mere re-establishment of the political system that had existed in the country prior to the March of Rome, neglecting what Andreotti considered to be the fundamental task of undertaking a reasoned and balanced assessment and a revision of the political

⁵ ‘Possibilità di un ordine nuovo’, *Azione fucina*, 31 July 1943.

⁶ M.R. Catti De Gasperi (ed.), *De Gasperi scrive. Corrispondenza con capi di stato, cardinali, uomini politici, giornalisti, diplomatici* (Brescia, 1974), vol.II, 271.

system that would take into account both the old order and the totalitarian experience.⁷ Striking a similar chord, the *fucina* Bianca Pignoni complained how in current-day Italy youth Italy youth was forgotten and marginalised from the most pressing issues of the day, while the while the men who in her mind belonged to another era lived ‘feverishly for political action, action, superficial spectators who have lost the capacity for any understanding of the spiritual spiritual forces’.⁸

While some leaders of the emerging Christian Democrat Party, such as Giuseppe Spataro, reached out actively to the *fucini* to collaborate in their new political enterprise,⁹ many in the federation did not immediately respond warmly to this invitation. Giulio Andreotti, had to acknowledge in a letter to Adriano Ossicini that ‘I have received from the leaders of the ex-Popular Party the printed text of which I send you a copy...I would appreciate if together we could take a look at this policy document, that in my opinion will not be received enthusiastically by the youth’.¹⁰

It is true that Giulio Andreotti presented his resignation as national president of the FUCI at the end of June 1944 to enter the ranks of the Christian Democrats.¹¹ The former central ecclesiastical assistant of the FUCI in the 1925-33 period, Giovanni Battista Montini, who championed the cause of the political unity of the Catholic world, was quick to react to Andreotti’s choice and congratulated him in the sense ‘that a decision like yours...cannot find obstacles from those who like yourself, like all the friends of the Good, want to serve as best as possible the good cause’.¹² Nevertheless, this sense of moral high ground which Montini accorded the Christian Democrat party was not shared by large numbers of the Catholic intellectuals. Giulio Andreotti, in a letter to Alcide De Gasperi had to recognise that between Catholic Action and the Christian Democrats there ‘did not reign that harmony that should be

⁷ Giulio Andreotti, ‘Quelli di Prima’, *Azione fucina*, 18 August 1943. For a similar opinion expressed by Andreotti see his letter to Mgr. Giuseppe d’Avack written at the beginning of September 1943 in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.’Presidenza 1943/44’.

⁸ Bianca Pignoni, ‘Forza dei giovani’, *Azione fucina*, 25 May 1945.

⁹ In a letter dated 31 July 1943 Spataro wrote to Andreotti that ‘we expect from our friends from the FUCI a true and proper collaboration for the formulation of a programme that must not exclude the masses, that look at us with great trust’. The letter is in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.’Presidenza 1943/44’.

¹⁰ Andreotti to Ossicini, 31 July 1943 in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.’Presidenza 40-46’.

¹¹ In a letter to Father Gilla Gremigni dated 28 June 1944, Andreotti explained his decision as demonstration of his will to ‘bring into the political arena that spirituality and disinterest that constitutes the strength of Catholic Action’. The letter can be found in Archivio della Presidenza Generale dell’Azione Cattolica, b. 24.

¹² Montini to Andreotti, 6 July 1944, in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.’Presidenza 1943/44’.

by now natural, spontaneous, wholehearted' and offered himself as mediator between the competing elements to resolve the difficult situation.¹³

There were some *fucini* who went even further in seeking to rescue some of the principles that Fascism had allegedly stood for. This was the case for example, of who after the fall of Mussolini at the end of July 1943, acknowledged some of the of the defunct regime. Among them, he recalled how the Italian experiment had challenged the rise of atheistic communism and how it had, in principle at least, the moral principles of Catholicism, especially through the signing of the Lateran Pacts February 1929. Olivi concluded defiantly, stating that in his view, those Catholics who accepted communist or liberal ideas were far more in conflict with the teachings of the than those who had collaborated with Mussolini's regime.¹⁴

In face of the mounting pressures that came from the Christian Democrats to the members of the FUCI to enter into the ranks of their political structures, it was probably the ecclesiastical assistant Emilio Guano who most forcefully and vehemently defended the independence and the freedom of action of the *fucini* in the political realm. Emilio Guano, unlike Andreotti and Montini, saw a virtue in the plurality of political options offered to the Catholic students, as long as these political parties did not contradict the principal tenets of the Catholic Church. He insisted that the FUCI's main task should remain one of cultural and religious formation and that in order to fulfill its goals the federation should remain aloof from party politics, adding that no leader of the FUCI could belong simultaneously to a political association.¹⁵ And, against the growing pressures that came from Alcide De Gasperi, Guano resolutely responded that he refused to accept that 'Christian Democracy should be the only and necessary outlet to which a Catholic university student should turn his political activity'.¹⁶ Going further, the Genoese ecclesiastical assistant firmly repeated to De Gasperi 'that Catholic Action preserves the firmest autonomy and distinction in the face of any political party...essentially because a party is always just a concrete party of programme and action in which the doctrine and discipline of the church are not necessarily

¹³ Andreotti to De Gasperi, 11 July 1944, in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.'Presidenza 1943/44'.

¹⁴ Antonio Olivi to Andreotti, 28 August 1943, in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.'Azione Fucina 41-43'.

¹⁵ See, for example, memorandum from Emilio Guano to the regional ecclesiastical assistants of the federation, 6 September 1944, in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.'Azione Fucina 40-44'.

¹⁶ Guano to De Gasperi, 29 October 1944, in Archivio Emilio Guano, b.5,'Corrispondenza 1938-55'.

represented'.¹⁷ Guano finally concluded his missive to De Gasperi by confessing that he was not persuaded that the opportunity existed 'to cement the forces that inspire themselves in Christianity in a sole political party, not even under the present circumstances'.¹⁸ What Guano wanted to avoid and, in this sense he would be proven right by the history of post-1945 Italy, was to avert the 'danger that a certain party came about to be seen as the political organ through which the church operates secretly'.¹⁹

Moreover, contrary to the widespread assumption that the *fucini* immediately joined the ranks of the Christian Democrats after the fall of Mussolini in July 1943, many of its most distinguished members joined other political forces. Some of them initially joined the Social Christians led by Gerardo Bruni, such as Giorgio Bo and Paolo Emilio Taviani,²⁰ while others became members of the Catholic Communists. Among the latter, one can mention Giorgio Bachelet, Giuseppe Mira, Sergio Paronetto, Luigi Pediconi, Pasquale Saraceno and Gino Barbieri.²¹

Another issue that greatly troubled the Catholic intellectuals in the 1943-45 period was the perceived crisis of the sense of nationhood after the armistice of 8 September 1943. This was a preoccupation that went far beyond the fact of military defeat. The crisis of the idea of the nation was perceived to go to the heart of the most intimate moral and spiritual foundations of the civic community. In face of the reality of a country split in two and occupied by mutually-hostile foreign powers, the ecclesiastical assistant Emilio Guano commented sadly how this tragic situation had been faced by the Italian populace who possessed extremely weak spiritual resources, in response, he called with a sense of urgency to 'renew in ourselves the moral sense...we need to re-educate ourselves with a sense of dignity...and interior liberty'.²² Likewise, for Ivo Murgia, the Italians of the time were a self-defeated people, with little to no moral, social or civic awareness of the chaos that the country was undergoing. In Murgia's view, the Italian of his day was 'a tired man, sceptical, disoriented and exasperated'.²³ In a similar vein, Giulio Andreotti, representing the thoughts and feelings of many *fucini*,

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ C. Brizzolari, *Un archivio della Resistenza in Liguria* (Genoa, 1974), 373ff.

²¹ C.F. Casula, *Cattolici-comunisti e sinistra cristiana (1938-1945)* (Bologna, 1976), 128-29.

²² Emilio Guano, 'Sguardo sul mondo', *Azione fucina*, 10 December 1944.

²³ Ivo Murgia, 'Il nostro tempo', *Azione fucina*, 10 December 1944.

proclaimed that the armistice of 8 September 1943, beyond the military and political failure that it represented, also marked a ‘moral and spiritual’ collapse of the nation.²⁴

However, it was probably Salvatore Satta, who enjoyed very close ties to the intellectual associations, who provided the most penetrating analysis on the subject of Italian identity. Between June 1944 and April 1945 he wrote his book *De profundis*.²⁵ According to Satta, the armistice of 8 September 1943 had found ‘an Italy without ‘indifferent to the misery to which it has fallen’ adding his famous expression: ‘The the homeland is certainly the greatest event that can occur in the life of an individual’.²⁶ Indeed, the symbolic date of the armistice had witnessed the escape from Rome of the Victor Emmanuel III, and Marshal Pietro Badoglio, first to Pescara and then to Brindisi. had dealt a very hard blow to the image of the state, embodied in the monarchy after the collapse of the Mussolinian myth. The great majority of the Italian population felt abandoned, just like the hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers who either deserted their military duties and weapons and desperately fled for their respective home-towns or surrendered to the Germans without making the slightest effort to resist.²⁷ The dissolution of the army was one of the most evident and visible signs of the breakdown of the old state and also of the end of the idea of a united nation. For many Italians there remained nothing to fight for except personal salvation and most sought refuge in the private sphere of the family.

In this crucial and critical historical context, for Salvatore Satta the death of the homeland left men and women deprived of one of their fundamental sheltering skies, in a situation where ‘the problem of existence’²⁸ assumed primary importance. Indeed, in his perspective the day of the armistice was dangerously confused by many of his fellow citizens with peace and the end of the war, when in reality for Satta the ‘real’ and most challenging of wars was just beginning after 8 September 1943. It was a conflict that was to be fought in the realm of the individual citizen’s conscience. It was a war of man against himself, a conflagration of purification and expiation, a ‘bloody

²⁴ Letter from Andreotti to Guido Anichini, 22 September 1943 in Archivio della Presidenza della FUCI, b.’Assistenti 1941/48’.

²⁵ S. Satta, *De profundis* (Milan, 1980).

²⁶ *ibid*, 16. The noted Italian historian, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, has taken up and developed Satta’s main theses in his monograph *La morte della patria. La crisi dell’idea di nazione tra Resistenza, antifascismo e Repubblica* (Rome and Bari, 1999).

Satta expressed the view that the disbandment of the army and the escape of the Italian soldier rendered every one of them ‘beggars’. See his *De profundis*, 174.

²⁸ S. Satta, *De profundis*, 17.

examination of self-conscience of a multitude of Cains in front of the Lord'.²⁹ According to Satta, this self-examination was necessary above all due to the fact that, in his mind, the immense majority of the Italian people had from the start of the conflict wished the defeat of their own country during the Second World War. This tragic situation was caused above all by the mistake made by many of his fellow country-men in asserting, and in this it is not difficult to read a veiled criticism of some anti-Fascist forces, that the only ones who truly loved the nation were those who desired its defeat as a means of getting rid of the Fascist government, a position that the Catholic author considered at best naïve and that did not take into account the wider and more profound effects that this would mean for the concept of nationhood and the civic fabric.³⁰ In this tragic spiritual crisis that affected the Italian nation he blamed first of all the King and Badoglio, who should have been the symbols and ultimate defenders of the Italian state. Instead, both of them, according to Satta had found themselves 'incapable to fight, incapable not to fight', so that 'the monarch and the general found themselves driven towards the worst path possible, that of compromise, which was necessarily the path of betrayal'.³¹ The Italian people, led by their government, instead of fighting for a true war of liberation had handed over their conscience to the new British ally, who apparently was fighting for the cause of liberty, but for Satta, it was an external and negative sense of freedom. Indeed, he had harsh words for the British forces. The British conception of liberty, according to the Catholic writer, was one 'at the service of wealth' and, thus, it was a war not at the service of true liberty.³² For Satta it was the duty of Italians themselves to reconstruct the sense of nationhood, without the help of foreign powers, a true sense of homeland, which inevitably contained by definition a universal idea.³³

Satta's views may have been unusual in his outspoken criticism of the Italian people. But the disappointment he expressed reflected the views of many former *fucini* who had invested in the 1930s in the ideal of a Catholic-inspired regeneration of the Italian nation. For those such as Satta, the prospect of a return to the parliamentary politics of the past was in many respects unappealing.

²⁹ *ibid*, 21 and 186-87.

³⁰ *ibid*, 19 and 71-73.

³¹ *ibid*, 157.

³² *ibid*, 77. Indeed, Satta displayed a strong degree of Anglophobia. In another passage of *De profundis* he referred to England as a 'massive corporation'. See *ibid*, 95.

³³ *ibid*.

The case of Aldo Moro

Aldo Moro provides a further interesting example of some of the trends discussed above³⁴, not only because of his belated enrolment in the Christian Democrat party but also because of his wider interests and forms of engagement displayed during these two fundamental years, which ranged from the already discussed topic of the death of the nation, to the role of Catholics in politics, anti-Fascism and the reconstruction of Italy. Above all, his position during this period can be characterised as the primacy of ethics and morals over party-political considerations, his preference for a pluralist stance in the options available to Catholics in the political realm and by a consistent mistrust towards the cultural, social and political models of the pre-Fascist Catholic movement.³⁵ Between 1943 and 1945 his writings were mostly limited to his contributions to two periodicals of his native Bari; *La Rassegna* and *Pensiero e Vita*. Both of these publications were oriented towards positions that were very different from those of the former Popular Party.³⁶

Moro, like Satta and others in the FUCI, thought that the nation had entered into a period of crisis after the armistice of 8 September 1943, a time of dissolution and disintegration in the civic and communal structures of the country. Italy was undergoing a chaotic time in its history, a period when ‘we understand each other less, we feel less the ties of brotherhood and the considerations of the interests of the nation are overcome by the game of resentments and sterile criticisms’.³⁷ He harshly criticised the monarchy as a symbol of the state for its attitude after the armistice and the way in which it had taken a position of ‘painful and extraordinary holidays for the

³⁴ For these crucial years on the ideological and political itinerary of Aldo Moro the literature is not extensive. See, for example, L. La Rovere, *L'eredità del fascismo. Gli intellettuali, i giovani e la transizione al postfascismo 1943-1948* (Turin, 2008), 181-9 and the slightly apologetic contribution by his nephew and historian R. Moro, ‘La formazione giovanile di Aldo Moro. Dall’impegno religioso a quello politico’ in S. Suppa (ed.), *Convegno di studi in memoria di Aldo Moro nel ventennale della sua scomparsa* (Bari, 2001), 51-96.

³⁵ A. Giovagnoli, *La cultura democristiana. Tra Chiesa cattolica e identità italiana, 1918-1948* (Rome and Bari, 1991), 209-10 and F. Traniello, *Da Gioberti a Moro. Percorsi di una cultura politica* (Milan, 1990), 235-43.

³⁶ R. Moro, ‘La formazione giovanile di Aldo Moro. Dall’impegno religioso a quello politico’, 67.

³⁷ A. Moro, ‘Si comincia’, *La Rassegna*, 23 November 1943.

institutions...and the moral energies' of the country.³⁸ Above all, for the young Moro, Italy was suffering from a severe crisis of faith in its own moral resources to recover from the catastrophe of the Second World War. The Italian people were living through a period of 'spiritual disorientation' when they preferred 'renouncement to combat' and that had led them more and more to retire into the private sphere, 'bitterly concluding that nothing had changed and that nothing can'.³⁹

Nearly a year after the armistice the situation had not changed much according to Aldo to Aldo Moro. The Italians, with the downfall of Fascism, after some rapid and somewhat somewhat superficial optimism, had succumbed to a state of disorientation, indifference and and confusion. Without clear objectives or plans of action, devoid of a vigorous will to intervene and reorganise the national community, the Italian masses 'had returned home and home and let others act for themselves'.⁴⁰ In this state of passivity, the country had undergone undergone a transition from a totalitarian state to a situation of anarchy. The ensuing result was that in present-day Italy 'the State barely exists...its authority is compromised, and with this, its possibility to act'.⁴¹

Aldo Moro put much of the blame for the existential and political predicament of the nation on the proliferation of political parties that, in his opinion, were not up to the standards of a true and humanistic democratic politics. According to the outlook of the young Catholic intellectual most of the existing political formations lacked a sense of idealistic impetus to offer to the Italian people.⁴² Moro often spoke during these turbulent times of the 'coarseness and emptiness of official politics'⁴³ that did not and could not take into account by its very nature the inner world of men and women and their personality. In this sense, he was a strenuous advocate of a meta-political world, where people would achieve their inner liberation and possession of the self.

Indeed, in an article of February 1945 he held forth eloquently about his mistrust of traditional party politics and his faith in the meta-political realm of existence:

³⁸ A. Moro, 'Monarchia o Repubblica', *La Rassegna*, 9 November 1944. For more on Aldo Moro and the idea of the death of the fatherland see E. Gentile, *La Grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo* (Rome and Bari, 2006), 306-8.

³⁹ A. Moro, 'Crisi di fiducia', *La Rassegna*, 9 March 1944.

⁴⁰ A. Moro, 'Prospettive', *La Rassegna*, 10 August 1944.

⁴¹ A. Moro, 'Ricostruire lo Stato' *Pensiero e Vita*, 10 March 1945.

⁴² A. Moro, 'Crisi di fiducia', *La Rassegna*, 9 March 1944.

⁴³ A. Moro, 'Il peso del dolore', *Pensiero e Vita*, 23 December 1944.

Our position is in the opposition; our duty lies beyond politics. We have no aspirations to govern, because we know that this apparent rule resolves itself in an impotence to govern the spirits... We want to talk the language of the spirit, of art, of thought and religion. We do not seek power since it makes us fearful. Power could render us conservatives... possessive of a selfish and personal liberty. It could habituate us to compromise and duplicity. And we want to be free, free with all the liberty of the spirit, so that we can condemn all that has to be condemned.⁴⁴

Italy was experiencing, according to Moro, a situation where there prevailed a ‘dangerous unilaterality of political parties’⁴⁵, where the latter attempted to monopolise all the social, cultural and political expressions of the Italian people. Moro passed, during these years, severe judgment on the democratic credentials of the political parties of his time, including the Christian Democrat party. He was of the opinion that true democracy was a rare creature in the political formations of his country, although there was a feverish and, at times, unbearable, ‘democratic rhetoric’.⁴⁶ What predominated in the nation was a version of democracy that was preoccupied with a game of arbitrariness and compromises and an arrogant will for dominion that did not pay attention to the moral elevation of the masses or their integration into the life of the nation.⁴⁷ Rome had become, in the eyes of the Catholic intellectual, the capital of self-centredness, a city where democracy and government more generally was perceived as the dominion of small hypocritical factions rather than as the rule of the people – an arrogant and artificial self-contained world that qualified every divergent opinion as ‘fascist or neo-fascist, so it can deny it the right to be taken into consideration’.⁴⁸ True democracy did not exist at all in the Italian capital, precisely because the political parties, which contained elements of ‘totalitarian intransigence and partisan violence’, did not recognise the legitimacy of pluralism of ideas and opinions.⁴⁹ The political parties had understood democracy in a solely external fashion, without taking into consideration the fundamental moral issues it involved and the immense spirit of sacrifice and renewal that it warranted. Democracy, if it was to be a vital experiment

⁴⁴ A. Moro, ‘Perchè siamo all’opposizione’, *La Rassegna*, 1 February 1945.

⁴⁵ A. Moro, ‘Per una nuova democrazia’, *La Rassegna*, 15 June 1944.

⁴⁶ A. Moro, ‘Allettamento all’assolutismo’, *La Rassegna*, 17 February 1944.

⁴⁷ A. Moro, ‘Le difficili vie della democrazia e della pace’, *Pensiero e Vita*, 8 January 1945 and idem, ‘Da massa a popolo’, *Pensiero e Vita*, 20 January 1945.

⁴⁸ A. Moro, ‘Roma capitale dell’egoismo’, *La Rassegna*, 15 March 1945.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

in post-Fascist Italy, had to eschew the mistakes of pre-Fascist liberal democracy and its many pitfalls. As late as June 1945, the young Catholic intellectual still considered that the nascent democratic form of rule that existed in the peninsula was ‘chaotic and unconscious’.⁵⁰

In this complex political and social environment, not even the Christian Democrat party escaped Aldo Moro’s disapproval. Above all, he criticised Alcide De Gasperi’s political formation for being overtly simplistic and more concerned with winning over the masses with the traditional weapons of the ‘old’ political parties, a feature that in the end, rendered the Christian Democrat party utterly unable to render justice and express the complexities and rich social, political and cultural nuances of the Italian Catholic world.⁵¹ Furthermore, Moro saw the danger – and in this sense the subsequent history of republican Italy would prove him right – of De Gasperi’s men trying to monopolise the Catholic idea and with this the possible embarrassing situation of the Italian Church being identified with a political party. In Moro’s view, Christianity represented the highest experience of moral and spiritual responsibility, an experience that was undermined in the political arena when its representatives entered into the typical strategies of compromises, cunningness and political and moral flexibility.⁵²

However, during the unsettling 1943-45 period Moro did not limit himself to a diagnosis of the malaises that in his perspective afflicted the Italian nation. He additionally proposed some solutions to the predicaments from which his country and fellow citizens were suffering. For the young Catholic intellectual, true liberation was above all an existential act. In early 1945, following the Christian message, he wrote that in order to get rid of the external evils that Italians were enduring it was mandatory ‘to liberate us from ourselves...to recover our soul. We expect, in this possession of the self...to truly promote the liberty of the spirit’.⁵³ It was a call to Italian men and women to conquer their inner freedom, ‘an interior revolution, modest, simple in its forms but radical and overwhelming, the revolution of understanding and of love’.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, during this period in the ideological trajectory of Aldo Moro, he went also beyond the realm of meta-politics and descended into the sphere of politics as such. One of his main concerns was with the concept of the ‘people’ and how to organise them in a fruitful social-political community. This delicate historical and cultural process required a strong

⁵⁰ A. Moro, ‘Democrazia e vita morale’, *La Rassegna*, 11 June 1945.

⁵¹ A. Moro, ‘Per una nuova democrazia’, *La Rassegna*, 15 June 1944.

⁵² A. Moro, ‘Bisogno di chiarezza’, *Pensiero e Vita*, 3 February 1945.

⁵³ A. Moro, ‘Liberazione’, *Studium* n.1-2 1945.

⁵⁴ A. Moro, ‘Uomini di pace’, *Pensiero e Vita*, 22 July 1944.

element of education of the masses in an effort to nationalise them, an attempt in which the state was to play a dominant role according to Moro. Above all, what was needed in the realm of politics was to ‘make it more human’ in order to bring closer together the spheres of sociability and politics.⁵⁵ In the ruinous situation that Italy found itself, for Moro the first task to be undertaken was clear: ‘the moral and political re-education of the Italian people’.⁵⁶ This implied the construction of solid moral foundations upon which to undertake the difficult path to a post-Fascist era, and to inculcate in the minds of Italians a responsible and constructive attitude towards societal and political affairs.

In this projected new state, Aldo Moro assigned a pivotal role to the notion of a true democracy, since the new state had to be a democratic one in order to encompass all the vital forces of the nation. Above all, for the young Aldo Moro the essence of democracy lay in the respect and recognition of the dignity of the person and his rights within society wedded with the high responsibilities that such a conscious participation in societal and political affairs entailed. Democracy was inseparable from liberty, a concept which Moro underscored was not to be confused with ‘arbitrariness, tyranny, fictions of popular and deceitful mystiques’ but to be grasped as a rich substance of moral and ethical life.⁵⁷ Democracy was the reign of the constructive responsibility of all the citizens of a political community in which equality of rights and duties should not be approached with a mathematical exactitude, but in terms of a parity of dignity. Moro went further, claiming that democracy lived and functioned thanks to an ‘aristocracy that sustains and vivifies it ...to realise its great aim of human improvement’.⁵⁸ During this period, Moro therefore had a somewhat elitist and pedagogical concept of democracy. Faithful to the traditions of the FUCI, he conceived of a democracy where every citizen was called to play his or her role but where the more refined spirits would play the leading role. Or, as Moro liked to put it, ‘the soul of democracy is an aristocracy of the spirit’.⁵⁹ In his democratic thought, Moro further distinguished between a ‘formal’ and a ‘substantial’ version of democracy. The former was a false conception, a sheer will of dominion, while the latter was the ‘true’ democracy. Moro was convinced that the existence of elections and democratic institutions was not sufficient to generate a true and proper democratic order.

⁵⁵ A. Moro, ‘Per una nuova democrazia’, *La Rassegna*, 15 June 1944.

⁵⁶ A. Moro, ‘Allettamento all’assolutismo’, *La Rassegna*, 17 February 1944.

⁵⁷ A. Moro, ‘Orientamenti’, *La Rassegna*, 4 January 1945.

⁵⁸ A. Moro, ‘Da massa a popolo’, *Pensiero e Vita*, 20 January 1945.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

‘Substantial’ democracy was above all the awareness by a people of its right to govern and the claim to recover the moral dignity of every individual. In this sense, a ‘substantial’ democratic order ‘does not deny, but multiplies man’.⁶⁰ Indeed, in the mind of the Catholic intellectual, democracy came to be seen not as just another form of government among others but as a sort of ‘natural’ and supra-temporal political order. He spoke of the ‘eternal truth of democracy’ which he identified with the construction with a burgeoning better life for every man and woman.

In making these points, Moro was both reflecting his debt to the ideas of the FUCI but also, through his personal reflections, going beyond them. However, Moro’s writings demonstrate the importance of avoiding limiting chronologically or organisationally the influence of the FUCI. The association did have a considerable influence on how Italian Catholics responded to the Fascist regime; but it also had a broader import for the making of a Catholic mentality in Italy across the middle decades of the twentieth century, and which continued well beyond the 1940s. Indeed, as Moro’s subsequent long career demonstrated, the *fuscini* in many respects provided the leading figures in the Christian Democrat party, but also in the Church and in other spheres of Catholic spiritual and associational life until the 1970s.⁶¹

Placed in this longer context, the importance of the FUCI appears threefold. Above all, the FUCI was responsible for making concrete the concept of the Catholic intellectuals, not as isolated individuals, but as a collective grouping in Italian society. This was not of course unique to Italy, or to Catholicism. Throughout Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, groups of primarily young educated men were to the fore in projects of political and social renaissance, which reflected the energy of intellectual commitment generated by the solidarity created by a common education.⁶² The FUCI was in this respect very much a product of its time: a similar organisation would not have been possible in Italy prior to the First World War, or after the social and institutional changes of the 1960s. But it is also an important and powerful example of this phenomenon, and one which has been unduly minimised by concerns with how far the

⁶⁰ A. Moro, ‘Ricostruzione’, *La Rassegna*, 15 August 1944.

⁶¹ See, for example, F. Malgeri, *L’Italia democristiana. Uomini e idee del cattolicesimo democratico nell’Italia repubblicana*, (Rome, 2005); A. Ghirelli, *Democristiani. Storia di una classe politica dagli anni trenta alla Seconda Repubblica*, (Milan, 2004) and A. Giovagnoli, *Il partito italiano. La Democrazia Cristiana dal 1942 al 1994*, (Rome and Bari, 1996).

⁶² K. Chadwick (ed.), *Catholicism, politics and society in twentieth-century France*, (Liverpool, 2000); M. Conway, *Catholic politics in Europe, 1918-1945*, (London, 1997); T. Buchanan and M. Conway (eds.), *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965*, (Oxford, 1996) and J. Hellman, *The Knight-Monks of Vichy: Uriage, 1940-1945*, (Montreal and London, 1993).

FUCI “resisted” Fascism, or paved the way for the Christian democratic politics of the post-war era.

Secondly, the *fucini* reflected the importance of issues of ideology in the Catholic intellectual politics of the 1930s and the 1940s. Much of this thesis has been concerned with words rather than matters of organisation. This choice was deliberate, reflects the way in which ideas rather than the institutional relations with the Church the state had the predominant influence on the way in which the FUCI conceived its relationship to modern society. The leading figures in the FUCI were people who took seriously, which again reflected the maturing of a distinctively Catholic intellectual Italy since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶³ But they also contributed to those As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, and as the richness of Moro’s concluding reflections well demonstrate, the *fucini* were not content simply to repeat or recycle the ideas of others. They developed important perspectives on the role of Catholicism in a society that they defined as modern, as well as the role that Catholicism could play in making that society more human. Here again, they were not alone; but they were indisputably important; a point which has been unduly neglected in histories of Catholic intellectual thought which adopt a predominantly Franco-German axis (with a stopping off point in Louvain) in their analysis of Catholic intellectual history.

Finally, the FUCI also matters in terms of politics. This was true less in terms of the specifics of political engagement, but more in the sense that the *fucini* marked the emergence of a new seriousness and scope in engagement in politics in Italy on the part of Catholic intellectuals. The PPI of Sturzo was not primarily a party of intellectuals, and it remained strongly marked by the defensive preoccupations of Catholic parties of the first decades of the twentieth century. The FUCI, however, was different. On the one hand, the authoritarian structure of Fascist Italy precluded direct engagement in electoral politics; but, on the other, the enforced disengagement from electoral politics brought about by the regime contributed to the maturation among the *fucini* of a different, and in their mind, higher attitude to politics. Once again, as Moro’s comments demonstrate, politics was a domain to be taken seriously by the FUCI, and in which mere electoral jousting, as the Christian Democrats at times seemed to represent, was not good enough. Here again, their ideas had legacies for the post-war era. The

⁶³ See, for example, A. Giovagnoli, *La cultura democristiana*, and idem, *Le premesse della ricostruzione. Tradizione e modernità nella classe dirigente cattolica del dopoguerra*, (Milan, 1982).

perception that the Italian Republic of the 1946 period was dominated by the polarisation of Communists and Christian Democrats has often served to minimise unduly the richness of the political debate of that era. The rapidly modernising Italy of the 1950s and the 1960s was also one which had an increasingly vibrant political culture, and one in which Catholic intellectuals, with their diverse forms of political engagement (and occasionally abstention) played a role.

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