CATHOLICISM AND THE ITALIAN FASCIST MYTH OF ROMANITÀ: BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSENT

Jan Nelis
Universiteit Gent, Belgium. E-mail: jan.nelis@ugent.be


Abstract: Drawing on current scholarly research on “political religions,” as well as on the “politicisation” of religion, this article presents a study of the Jesuitical periodical La Civiltà Cattolica, of which it analyses the years 1922-1943. The specific focus is on the Catholic discourse on Roman antiquity: as the fascist regime made ample use of a supposed “spiritual” heritage from antiquity –an idea which was summarised in the notion of romanità (“Romanness”) –, the Catholic press reacted by defining its position in this debate, especially with regard to the relationship between pagan and Christian, fascist and Catholic Rome. This study joins the already extensive body of research concerning the fascist myth of romanità.

Keywords: Catholicism, Jesuits, Italian fascism, romanità, political religion, religious politics, discourse analysis, propaganda.

Since the milestone work of Emilio Gentile, Italian fascism has repeatedly been analysed as a form of “political religion,” an approach which takes into account factors which traditionally are not included, or are considered as only minor features. First of all, there is the role of culture, which is seen as not only “determined by” politics, but also as actively determining the latter activity, sometimes even as a form of politics in its own right. In this sense, literature, the visual arts etcetera can be studied as active participants in the creation of fascist reality. The same can also be said for the masses. Another central feature is the religious, mythical predisposition of early fascist leaders and of their supporters. As a consequence, fascism’s religious core was made up of various myths, “stories” –in the etymological sense of the Greek muthos- which informed about fascism’s origins and nature. Apart from the myth of the nation, the myth of the Great War (which was seen as a purifying experience), and the myth of the uomo and Stato nuovo, one idea in particular stood out as central to the creation of the new, Italian fascist identity: a spiritual heritage from Roman antiquity, better known as romanità (“Romanness”).

When one observes Mussolini’s discourse on antiquity, it seems so that already quite early on, he realised the effectiveness of an identification with the greatness of Roman antiquity. Even if initially opposed to all that invoked the city of Rome, its inhabitants and its history, he quite suddenly changed his mind, baptising his 1922 takeover of power the “March on Rome,” in a clear reference to Julius Caesar’s example. From now on, the myth of romanità would penetrate the most diverse levels of the cultural spectrum, such as architecture, sculpture, painting and, last but not least, scholarship of antiquity.

Whereas many of the above aspects have been the object of extensive research, the relationship between romanità and traditional Catholic religion has only led to a very limited amount of publications. These mainly focus on the way in which antichisti (classicists, historians of antiquity and archaeologists) and literary authors inserted references to Catholicism and Catholic antiquity in their discourse on pagan antiquity, in order to promote the idea of pagan Rome as a praeparatio of Christianity, and of Christian Rome in its turn as a forerunner to the ultimate, fascist and Catholic, “Third Rome.”
As this aspect has been exclusively studied from the viewpoint of non-clerical agents, the present paper intends to widen the scope, by considering the way in which an important Catholic periodical, the Jesuitical *La Civiltà Cattolica*, handled issues related to (pagan and Christian) antiquity during the heyday of romanità, the *ventennio fascista* (the twenty years during which fascism was in power, from 1922 until 1943). In so doing, it contributes not only to the mentioned study of fascism as a political religion, but also to the degree of ‘politicisation’ of traditional religious discourse.

1. *LA CIVILTÀ CATTOLICA* AND ANTIQUITY DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE *VENTENNIO FASCISTA*

After the October 28, 1922 fascist March on Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s discourse on antiquity does not undergo any substantial changes: in the same way as fascism itself is apparently only considered to be a phenomenon of minor, temporary importance, the new regime’s interest in ancient Rome does not seem to be of major concern. Indeed during the twenties the myth of romanità does not yet possess the rhetorical strength and omnipresence which will characterise it during the thirties. As a consequence, the Catholic discourse on antiquity can remain relatively unaltered, in some cases even questioning, or contradicting, the increasing fascist appropriation of the ancient past.

Generally speaking, contributions dealing with antiquity (articles and above all book reviews) are characterised by two major tendencies: predominance of themes related to Christianity (and linked to this omission of paganism) and opposition to the idea of pagan Rome as a *praeparatio* of Christian and fascist Rome. In other words, no clear echo is produced of the sort of romanità which is at that time being developed by numerous antichisti (cf. supra).

Being a confessional publication, *La Civiltà Cattolica* has only one interest when treating with historical subjects, one agenda: stressing the importance of Catholic faith. As a consequence, in a 1923 review of a book on the Roman Empire by Gaetano De Sanctis, who arguably was one of Italy’s most prominent antichisti, criticism can be based on the judgement of none other than Dante Alighieri, author of the religiously initiatic poem *Divina Commedia*. The periodical keeps a constant, vigilant, focus on religious themes and aspects, as can be seen, among other things, in a 1924 review article of a dictionary of Christian archaeology and liturgy: whereas the overall tone of the review is positive, the author’s depiction of early Christians as “insultors of Rome” is being condemned.

Only very hesitatingly, pagan antiquity is being given its “due:” apart from a continuous series of reviews of books concerning Latin poet Vergil (cf. infra), only in 1925 a book on the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill is being considered important “per la Roma classica e per la cristiana insieme”, whereas in the same year imperial Rome can be presented as the “più grande potenza civile del mondo antico”. However, the reviewer quickly adds that the mentioned greatness only counts “fino all’avvento del cristianesimo”.

In some contributions, pagan antiquity is not only being ignored, but even criticised, or in any case strongly dissociated from its Christian follow-up. Most of these texts are published near the end of the twenties, when, after Mussolini has become a dictator, romanità increasingly starts to invade fascist propaganda. Whereas for example in 1926 Vergil can still be presented as the ancient poet who incarnates “un’età che ingenerò i germi della civiltà del mondo, ed ebbe preparato e spianato il campo della pugna e della vittoria ai banditori del Vangelo di Cristo”, in subsequent reviews no more references to the poet’s apparent religiosity can be found. Furthermore, the notion of romanità, by now indissolubly linked to fascism, is only mentioned once, and in a very prudent manner.

*La Civiltà Cattolica*’s preoccupation to distance itself from fascist reception of antiquity reaches a high point at the beginning of the thirties, when two articles are published in which, through the figure of Vergil, the idea of pagan romanità as a precursor to Christian Rome is rejected. This is done by literally stating, among other things, that “Virgilio […] non scorse il Messia, non divinò il Salvatore Nazzareno.” As it has become the privileged domain of fascist propaganda, pagan Rome and its “greatness” are now increasingly ignored by *La Civiltà Cattolica* or, when mentioned, criticised and deprived of their originality.

Such can for example be seen in a review article of Luigia Achillea Stella’s *Italia antica sul
The last time an identification between pagan and Roman antiquity is clearly avoided, is in a 1932 book review in which the reviewer asserts that the author “è riuscito a comporre una sintesi fondazione e compaginazione della Chiesa…” 25

As we will see in the following paragraphs, from now on La Civiltà Cattolica’s tone will shift quite radically –apart from a continuous, albeit less vehement, stress on Vergil’s, and in general Roman antiquity’s, pagan character-, increasingly resembling the ever more present non-clerical, fascist discourse on romanità.

2. THE THIRTIES: CHRISTIAN ROMANITÀ

Only after Church and State has reached a political (the Lateran Pact) as well as a civic (the Concordato) entente in 1929, and after a subsequent conflict with the fascist government on the role of the Azione Cattolica has been resolved, some aspects of fascist romanità are able to infiltrate the Catholic discourse on antiquity. Mainly there are two tendencies: a recognition of the value of the Roman past to its Christian follow-up -sometimes translating itself into the idea of antiquity as a praeparatio of Christianity-, and an increasing presence of contributions dealing with aspects of fascist romanità, whose merits are increasingly being lauded.

The first time references to a certain degree of familiarity between pagan and Christian Rome can be found, is in two 1933 book reviews26. Whereas these implicitly suggest rather than affirm the aforementioned thesis, a subsequent review of a publication on Vergil goes all out in its appreciation of how the book’s author presents Vergil as “maestro fra i gentili, apostolo della pace, voce dell’aspettazione universale,” and of how he “fa vedere come l’opera di lui sia una buona preparazione umana per la carità divina…”27

In 1934, an even more explicit interpretation of romanità can be found when Father Rosa writes about the “idea della romanità, della cultura cioè e della civiltà che Roma ha recato al mondo, specialmente dopo il rinnovamento portatovi dal soffio divino del cristianesimo, che fece di Roma il vero centro della Chiesa e la capitale del mondo: caput orbis”28. Not surprisingly, such thoughts are expressed in a review article of publications by the fascist and Catholic Istituto di Studi Romani, an institution closely linked to, among others, Jesuit Father Pietro Tacchi Venturi –who mediated during the negotiations leading up to the 1929 agreements, as well as during the Azione Cattolica conflict- and fascist politician Giuseppe Bottai29.

As Nazism starts its rise to power, La Civiltà Cattolica, and the Catholic Church, feel threatened by this new “religion of the race”30. Consequently, a more elaborate form of Christian romanità, or rather romanesimo, is being developed, especially by Father Messineo, author of some of the journal’s most politically explicit contributions. This is for example the case in Studi sul germanesimo, which, even if limited to a review of some major publications concerning the subject, offers a blueprint of later thoughts on the value of Roman and Christian universalism as opposed to German mysticism. In his text Messineo points at, among other things, the “necessità di un ritorno al romanesimo, valore eterno e fondamento indispensabile a ogni verace civiltà, se si vuole salvare l’Occidente dalla crisi morale, religiosa e civile alla quale va incontro, spinto dalle forze di dissolvimento, che lo minacciano di rovina”31. In this period however, the idea of a fusion between pagan and Christian Rome will only resurface briefly, namely in Father Rosa’s Gli estremi opposti nella crisi della civiltà, which opposes Nazism (and Communism) to Roman, Christian universalism, which he sees incarnated in the principles of Roman Law32. For a more outspoken, albeit hesitant, “baptism” of romanità we have to wait until the end of 1937, when an article is dedicated to the commemoration of the death of Roman emperor
Constantine. In this text Father Ferrua, in charge of the majority of the journal’s contributions dealing with antiquity, states that by converting to Christianity, “Costantino si mostrò [...] di un’intuizione profonda a comprendere il vero bene dei suoi popoli, e merita plauso e gratitudine per averlo saputo volere con un atto così [...] ‘rivoluzionario’”33. In so doing, he underlines the emperor’s Christian sensibility, as well as his Romanness. Moreover, through the depiction of his role as “revolutionary,” he links him to Mussolini’s fascist revolution, as well as to the duce’s seemingly benevolent attitude towards Catholicism, as evidenced by the signing of the 1929 agreements.

Not unexpectedly, it is also Ferrua who will comment upon the 1937-1938 archaeological exposition Mostra augustea della romanità (cf. infra). A foretaste of his coverage of the event: “Vi è un caso tipo che dimostra, e non si potrebbe più eloquentemente, la forza grande di attrazione della Romanità. È il Cristianesimo. [...] In realtà esso è Augusteo, almeno nel senso che Cristo volle nascere sotto Augusto e nel suo impero”34.

Hereupon an anonymous article published in 1938 repeats the impossibility of an ideological “marriage” between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy35. Indeed, for La Civiltà Cattolica, both nations represent highly irreconcilable world views, namely that of the “civiltà romana e cattolica, latina e universale,” as opposed to the “nebuloso mito razzista, negatore dei supremi valori spirituali”36.

Near the end of the thirties, fascism, and with it romanità, starts to lose its appeal. Whereas in his grandiloquent style Father Ferrua keeps on repeating the idea of a fusion between pagan, Christian and fascist Rome37, Father Bruculeri can now again deny any spiritual affinity between Catholic and pagan antiquity, considering the latter “ripugnante”38. Even if limited to a treatment of ancient totalitarianism, such statements already announce the journal’s changing stance during the fourties.

3. THE THIRTIES: FASCIST ROMANITÀ

La Civiltà Cattolica does not only develop the idea of a religiously inspired heritage from Roman antiquity, but it also increasingly hints at the value of non-Christian romanità, parallel to the romanità discourse of antichisti, propagandists etcetera. Indeed with tensions between the Vatican and the regime having largely been resolved, by the beginning of 1933 the periodical is increasingly positive in its appreciation of Mussolini’s political use of ancient Rome.

The first time this tendency manifests itself clearly, is in a review of a book suggesting the possibility of a “Mediterranean union.” Quite significantly, the reviewer does not make any reference to religion, but focuses on the importance of ancient Rome as a factor of cohesion, since “Roma lasciò orme incancellabili e germi fecondi di una coscienza unitaria in tutti i popoli, in cui portò le sue aquile vittoriose”39. This effort is followed by a review of a book on religion and fatherland, in which the author refers not to Christianity, but to the “pietas in Deum et in patriam degli antichi Romani, dei quali egli [the author] giustamente si compiace che tante glorie siano state rinnovellate in questo decennio di nuovo regime”40. Consequently, the main quality of a book on Roman historian Livy is the “idea [...] di svelare il sentimento di romanità che [...] informa l’opera di Tito Livio”41, whereas the highly controversial Via dell’Impero is referred to as “nuova e grandiosa”42.

In 1936, when fascist Italy has become an “empire,” explicit references to the virtuousness of ancient Rome’s imperial expansion can be made43. This is given an additional boost by the prospect of 1937-1938, the year of the bimillenary celebration of emperor Augustus: through the organisation of a vast exposition (the mentioned Mostra augustea della romanità44), as well as through conferences, radio programmes and even stamps, the latter was lavishly commemorated as the emperor of peace, empire, law and order. The regime made ample use of Augustus to increase its popularity, even going so far as to distribute free train tickets to allow people from all over the country to visit the exposition.

La Civiltà Cattolica adds its touch to the omnipresent propaganda of the events surrounding Augustus through the publication of the mentioned article by Father Ferrua45. In a contribution unlike any other we’ve encountered so far, the latter does not refrain from exalting the fascist regime’s interest in antiquity, comparing Augustus, “duce del suo popolo”46, to Mussolini. In so doing, he produces clear echoes of the sort of propaganda that can by now be found not only in popular press, but
even in scientific, or pseudo-scientific, studies: “... dappertutto vuole avere senso la parola d’ordine del Duce, scolpita sull’architrave dell’ingresso: italiani, fate che le glorie del passato siano superate da quelle dell’avvenire, e quell’altra in fronte alla sala dell’Impero: ‘Io non vivo del passato; per me il passato non è che una pedana, dalla quale si prende lo slancio verso il più superbo avvenire’. Questo per verità è spirito nuovo"47.

Ferrua will continue to make similar efforts, for example in a 1938 contribution on the so-called Ara Pacis Augustae, the “altar of peace” Augustus erected in 9 BC48. However, as we’ve stated before, near the end of the thirties the fascist regime starts to lose ground, especially as un-popular racial laws are being declared, and as Italy’s fate becomes all the more dependent on Nazi Germany’s. In this context, critical opinions can again be voiced49, even if in a very prudent manner. As we will illustrate in the following, during the forties, after its temporary flirt with fascist propaganda, La Civiltà Cattolica will return to its traditional line of action.

4. THE FOURTIES: RETURN TO NORMALITY

At the beginning of the forties, the illustrated process of forced cohabitation between pagan and Christian Roman antiquity can be inversed, as evidenced by the publication of an article entitled Virtù pagana e virtù cristiana50. Another way in which La Civiltà Cattolica deals with the heritage of fascism’s exclusivism in matters concerning Roman antiquity, is by appropriating the concept of romanità to Church-related subjects with no direct relationship to the fascist regime. This is for example the case in two articles entitled Alle fonti della ‘Romanità’ della Compagnia di Gesù (1534-1541)51, and in two subsequent pieces on pope Leo the Great’s romanità52. The first of these implicitly criticises the relativity of fascist, and of any non-religious, use of antiquity: “Il fascino della Roma fondata da Romolo poteva essere ed era realmente per i Romani antichi molto attraente. Ma per noi uomini del secolo XX non è che un mito [...] Ora il fondamento vero della perennità di Roma non è la leggenda, ma la storia. E questa storia ci riconduce non a Romolo, ma a Pietro, e attraverso Pietro a Cristo, del quale egli è umile vicario. Soltanto Cristo, che è la verità e la fermezza in persona, può essere la garanzia della stabilità di Roma eterna, non le opinioni umane che cangiano, o le deboli forze umane che vacillano”53.

As global war becomes inevitable, popular support for the fascist regime quite rapidly goes downhill. The resulting spiritual, existential void is claimed by its traditional occupant: Catholic religion. With the Vatican increasingly distancing itself from fascism, La Civiltà Cattolica’s focus now shifts towards a discourse on the Church’s value as a universal institution, apart from an increase of the discourse on “Italianness” or italianità. As a consequence of this process, references to fascism becomes ever more rare. Instead the periodical conveys a concept of national identity54 in which there is not much room for the myth of romanità.

As romanità had been too intricately linked with the use Mussolini had made of it, in postwar Italy its sphere of action has been mainly restricted to history books and articles such as the present paper. However, now and then it has resurfaced, up until the present day: when Gianni Alemanno ran for mayor of Rome in Spring 2008, he did not refrain from repeatedly referring to ancient Roman greatness. After his election, some of his supporters could even be seen bringing the fascist “Roman” salute in front of Rome’s city hall: a reminder of the dangers of the use of myth and identitarian discourses in politics.

NOTES


10 Indeed during the first years of fascist rule only a very limited amount of contributions was being dedicated to the subject. See, for example, Anonymous, “La rivoluzione fascista”. La Civiltà Cattolica, IV (1922), 502-512, and Anonymous, “Fascismo e sindicalismo”. La Civiltà Cattolica, I (1923), 412-423.

11 Cf. Anonymous, “Recensione a ‘Gaetano De Sanctis, Storia dei Romani, Vol. IV: La fondazione dell’impero’”. La Civiltà Cattolica, II (1923), 252-253: “Questo giudizio del De Sanctis non s’accorda con quello dell’Alighieri, il quale, accennando alle vittorie dell’Africano [Scipio Africanus], canta che ‘l’alta provvidenza con Scipio difese a Roma la gloria del mondo’” (Par, XXVII, 61)…”


15 Ibid.


secondo libro dell’Eneide con note esegetiche ed estetiche di Francesco Vivona”. La Civiltà Cattolica, I (1930), 262-263, and Anonymous, “Recensione a ‘G. Loreta, La zoologia in Virgilio’”. La Civiltà Cattolica, III (1930), 165-166. The only exception to this is Anonymous, “Recensione a ‘Gino Funaioli, Esegesi Virgiliana antica’”. La Civiltà Cattolica, IV (1930), 353-354, which however does not speak out clearly concerning this aspect.


22 This speech, presented at Perugia’s Università per Stranieri on October 5, 1926, was arguably one of the most important blueprints of romanità propaganda. It has been re-published in Susmel, Edoardo and Duilio (eds.), Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini. Vol. 22. Florence, La Fenice, 1957, 213-227. For more information on the nature of this text, partly written by antichista Ettore Pais, see Visser, Romke, “The Correspondence of Ettore Pais in the ‘Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio ordinario’ (ACS, Roma)”, in Polverini, Leandro (ed.), Aspetti della storiografia di Ettore Pais. Naples, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002, 159-170.


24 Note that the author uses the neutral romanesimo instead of the more ideologically tainted romanità.


29 On the Istituto di Studi Romani, see La Penna, Antonio, “La rivista Roma e l’Istituto di Studi Romani. Sul culto della romanità nel periodo fascista”, in Näf, Beat (ed.), Antike und Altertumswissenschaft in der Zeit von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus. Mandelbachtal and Cambridge, edition cicero, 2001, 89-110, and Visser, Romke, “Da Atene a Roma, da Roma a Berlino. L’Istituto di Studi Romani, il culto fascista della romanità e la ‘difesa dell’umanesimo’ di Giuseppe Bottai (1936-1943)”, in Näf, Beat (ed.), Antike und Altertumswissenschaft. op. cit., 111-123. A preliminary study of this institute’s archives, which we undertook in Spring 2008, showed the close ties between its president, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, and various religious officials, among which also Father Barbera, a contributor to La Civiltà Cattolica. As a letter by Galassi Paluzzi to Barbera illustrates, these contacts were more than mere formalities; indeed they reflect the religious inclination of the Istituto’s president, as well as his interpretation of romanità: “… mi rivolgo ancora una volta a V.R. domandando di pregare e di far pregare in modo speciale per la nostra Istituzione e per chi, come il sottoscritto, ha il compito non facile di dirigerla. Di tale collaborazione soprannaturale l’Istituto ha bisogno, non solo per quelle sue iniziative che tendono a mettere nella dovuta luce scientifica tante glorie e tante benemerenze della Roma Cristiana; ma ne ha bisogno anche perché abbiano esito felice e completo –sotto ogni aspetto- tutte le altre iniziative, con le quali si vuole raggiungere una visione unitaria organica –e quindi vera- della Romanità e della missione gloriosamente terrena e imperitutamente celeste che la Provvidenza ha voluto affidare a Roma in ogni secolo dall’antichità ai giorni nostri; e infine perché queste ricerche scientifiche e queste iniziative culturali giovino a far tornare nelle menti e nei cuori la luce delle verità naturali e soprannaturali delle quali Roma è stata e sarà depositaria e maestra.” (letter to Father Barbera written on December 10, 1936, to be found in Rome, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, archivio storico: Affari Generali, busta 220, fascicolo 2) 30 See, for example, Barbera, M., “Mito razzista anticristiano”. La Civiltà Cattolica, I (1934), 238-249, López, U., “Difesa della razza ed etica cristiana”. La Civiltà Cattolica, I (1934), 574-587, and “Difesa della razza ed etica cristiana”. La Civiltà Cattolica, II (1934), 27-42, and Messineo, A., “La nuova religione della razza”. La Civiltà Cattolica, III (1934), 225-239.


34 Ferrua, A., “Per il centenario della morte di Costantino”. La Civiltà Cattolica, IV (1937), 484.


36 Ibid., 289.

nella “Istituto di Studi Romani”. La Civiltà Cattolica, II (1938), 293-303.


43 This was for example the case in a review of a book edited by the mentioned Istituto di Studi Romani: Anonymous, “Recensione a Istituto di Studi Romani, Africa Romana. 58 tavole fuori testo”. La Civiltà Cattolica, II (1936), 503-504.

44 On this exposition, which presented one of the rare antichisti who in 1931, when asked to pledge an oath of allegiance to the regime, initially protested, even if finally taking the oath all the same. He did this in the following manner, in a letter conserved in Rome’s Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Fascicolari Personale Insegnante e Amministrativo, II Versamento – 2° serie, busta 36): “La nuova formula del giuramento – a prescindere dal fatto che in un insegnamento in fondo tecnico non so come possa trovare adatta applicazione-implica, in una dizione indeterminata, non solo l’adesione e la doverosa osservanza di tutte le norme che erano o sieno divenute leggi – a cui non mi rifiuto- ma la preconcetta, anticipata, pregiudiziale adesione a tutto un ignoto, indefinito, illimitato complesso di proposte ed azioni, che, come membro del Senato, io sono chiamato, almeno ne termini dell’ordine costituzionale esistente, a giudicare con la parola e col voto; a tutti gli eventuali disegni, progetti, iniziative ed imprevisti svolgimenti, che, come membro del Senato, io sono legalmente e doverosamente chiamato a criticare, a respingere, ad emendare e possibilmente abrogare con la parola e col voto.” (letter to the Ministry of Education, November 25, 1931) On the oath, or giuramento, see Boatti, Giorgio, Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini. Turin, Einaudi, 2001. Cf. also a 1939 article on the reconstruction of the Roman Senate by Ferrua, who deplores the destruction of a seventh century church, however not without first having pointed out the merits of the fascist regime (Ferrua, A., “La Curia del senato romano”. La Civiltà Cattolica, III (1939), 60-70: 62).


46 Ibid., 481.

47 Ibid., 487.


49 This is for example the case in a relatively positive review of a book by Ettore Ciccotti (Anonymous, “Recensione a Ettore Ciccotti, Profilo di Augusto”). La Civiltà Cattolica, III (1938), 263: Ciccotti was one of the rare antichisti who in 1931, when asked to pledge an oath of allegiance to the regime, initially protested, even if finally taking the oath all the same. He did this in the following manner, in a letter conserved in Rome’s Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Fascicolari Personale Insegnante e Amministrativo, II Versamento – 2° serie, busta 36): “La nuova formula del giuramento – a prescindere dal fatto che in un insegnamento in fondo tecnico non so come possa trovare adatta applicazione-implica, in una dizione indeterminata, non solo l’adesione e la doverosa osservanza di tutte le norme che erano o sieno divenute leggi – a cui non mi rifiuto- ma la preconcetta, anticipata, pregiudiziale adesione a tutto un ignoto, indefinito, illimitato complesso di proposte ed azioni, che, come membro del Senato, io sono chiamato, almeno ne termini dell’ordine costituzionale esistente, a giudicare con la parola e col voto.” (letter to the Ministry of Education, November 25, 1931) On the oath, or giuramento, see Boatti, Giorgio, Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini. Turin, Einaudi, 2001. Cf. also a 1939 article on the reconstruction of the Roman Senate by Ferrua, who deplores the destruction of a seventh century church, however not without first having pointed out the merits of the fascist regime (Ferrua, A., “La Curia del senato romano”. La Civiltà Cattolica, III (1939), 60-70: 62).


54 On this process, see our article Catholicism and the Demise of Fascism, Racism and Colonialism, to appear in the journal Italian Studies in Southern Africa.