ITALY, FRANCE, AND THE VATICAN[1]

BY LUDOVIC NAUDEAU

If I were asked to define Mussolini's policy, I should say, judging from his own words, that this former Socialist is fully convinced that Italy can never be happy while confined within her present frontiers. His message to his fellow countrymen is: 'Instead of fighting each other and ruining ourselves by partisan strife, let us get together, discipline ourselves, act like true Romans, and wait for a chance to seize some rich booty elsewhere. Let us make an end of our everlasting debating. We have better things to do. Follow my lead. What do our little winnings from each other amount to in our overpopulated Italy, compared with what we can get by dividing up the globe?'

In other words, 'the great proletarian nation,' as the Italians sometimes call themselves, is giving up class war, which yields it no profit, in order to wrest its riches from some foreign nation. . . .

I have been told repeatedly in different parts of Italy that children are being brought up with the idea that their country, although she was the savior of civilization in the World War, has been shamefully cheated by her allies. This doctrine is also constantly preached in the press. We may well ask ourselves, therefore, what ultimate intention lies behind this agitation. What is the purpose of inculcating in the young people of Italy a fanatical conviction that it is their duty to redress an abominable injustice done their nation? How are we to reconcile such teaching with Italy's commitments at Geneva and Locarno?

To be sure, the Fascisti are frank enough on that point. They declare openly that they do not believe in peace. They consider the Locarno accords pure trickery, and delight in ridiculing them. When you converse with Italians you at once discover that they are looking forward to the next war. An Italian paper recently boasted that Italy was the only European na-

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tion that had recovered its strength and fighting spirit after the drain of ten years ago.

One of my Italian friends, an exceptionally intelligent man who is friendly to France, said to me one day: 'It is already nearly ten years since the World War ended. It is about time to be looking for another one. This idea of enduring peace is Utopian. Locarno won't change anything. The rest of the world wants to go to sleep, trusting in the status quo, but Italy has escaped that attack of lethargy and is boiling over with energy.'

'Quite possibly,' I replied; 'but if I were an Italian I 'd be a little worried to see my country officially dissenting from the ideas that seem, at least for the time being, common to all the rest of Europe. When a number of Powers are more or less sincerely trying to cultivate a European spirit, it is neither pleasant nor prudent to set one's self up against that effort. Finally, it is simple logic to conclude that the belligerent nations remember the war and its lessons with a vividness in direct proportion to their suffering.'

Italy's present obstreperousness is that of an overpopulated, high-strung, ambitious nation spurred to action by what Proudhon called pauperism — a craving for food. When Italians call themselves 'the great proletarian nation' they make an argument of their needs and interpret them as rights. But they do not like to have other people call them proletarians.

Their claims are the natural protest of a prolific nation against a status quo which they consider insupportable. Left without colonies, the Italians fear that they may not be able to procure the raw materials they need, and that they will not be able to provide for their surplus people. To-day seven millions of them are living abroad; two hundred and eighty Italian newspapers, one hundred and fifty-seven of which are in America, are published outside the Kingdom. An enormous expansive force is compressed under the national flag, and inevitably produces a high temperature.

As a result, Fascist writers have turned covetous eyes toward different parts of the world — toward Australia, which they say arbitrarily excludes their immigrants; toward Canada, where a sparse population occupies a continent; toward Russia, certain of whose territories they think should be placed under a European mandate. They continually lament that some of Germany's African colonies were not given to them. They say that Asia Minor was their promised land, and from their Isle of Rhodes they cast covetous glances toward Anatolia. *Idea Nazionale* writes: 'The present map of the Mediterranean must be changed, and that can only be done by force.' Another Italian publicist protests because so many huge colonies are owned by other Powers — 'one of which has no surplus population, and can exploit its possessions only with foreign labor.' I have been struck, during my stay at Rome, by the number of people who have told me bluntly that Italy intends to get the Portuguese colonies.

A well-known national writer, Signor Francisco Coppola, recently declared: 'When we talk of erecting an Italian Empire, we mean a colonial empire, an empire outside of Europe, an empire beyond the sea.' The *Duce* personally protests that he has no particular territorial objective in view. All that he is so exigently demanding in Tunis is that we make permanent and definitive the present provisional arrangement by which the children of Italians born in that country may retain the nationality of their parents. I believe Mussolini is perfectly honest in this

matter, but some Italian journals harp upon the alleged wrongs suffered by their fellow countrymen in Tunis, and picture them as martyrs deprived of their liberty and the right to earn their daily bread. How are we to pick and choose among these contradictions? If the Government means what it professes, why does it permit such articles to be published?

Mussolini also says: 'You have so much to trade with, from Tunis to the Near East. We have many things to talk about. Are you so wrapped up in Syria that you cannot see that we are the preponderant commercial Power throughout the Levant, and even as far as the most distant Black Sea ports?'

Haunted by memories inherited from Genoa and Venice, Italy has dreamed for these many years of becoming supreme in the Ægean Sea and along the coasts of Asia Minor. Since her war with Turkey she has clung tenaciously to Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands, which are such convenient bases of operation against the neighboring mainland. In 1917 the Allies reserved there for Italy a zone which included Smyrna. Almost immediately afterward, however, the English repudiated the bargain and encouraged the Greeks to seize Smyrna, from which they were later disastrously ejected. But if the Italians had occupied Smyrna, they would not have stayed there, any more than they stayed at Adalia, which they held for a time, or than we French remained in Cilicia.

Does Italy wish France to turn Syria over to her? There are plenty of well-informed Frenchmen who would be ready to do so if they felt certain that this would end, once for all, Italy's nagging. But as long as that nation is in its present mood, have we any guaranty that our act of generosity would not be taken as a sign of weakness and merely encourage the making of new demands upon us?

However that may be, we should persuade Italy, by a policy of justice and wisdom, that we are her friends. We should do all in our power to assure to her the raw materials her industries need. Neither country can afford to waste its energy on fruitless rivalry as to which is the leader of the Latin races. We have more important things to think about than such purely decorative distinctions. The two countries are jointly interested in preserving peace and the freedom of the sea in the Mediterranean, and in enforcing the terms of the treaties against the Central Powers.

Our Italian friends complain that they lack resources to support their growing population, which increases by half a million every year. Yet their cabinet ministers proclaim defiantly that they intend to maintain this birth rate. That is entirely their own affair. But it is hardly prudent for them to employ this argument to justify the right to interfere in the affairs of other nations. Italy's rapid increase in population, moreover, does not come from Piedmont and Lombardy, her industrial provinces, whose intelligence and enterprise rule the country, but from the more backward provinces of the South. That is something upon which Italy should meditate. The increment to her people comes from the poorest, the most ignorant, and the most superstitious section of the country. We cannot permit the whole course of European civilization to be changed by that phenomenon. Such pretension would be absurd. On the other hand, it would be equally unjust to refuse offhand to recognize the importance of this factor in Italy's domestic problem.

France, far from wishing to block Italy's progress, as some of our friends in the Peninsula unjustly suspect, would

be happy to see her acquire a colonial empire extensive enough fully to occupy her energies. . . . But let us say frankly, as long as she is forced to show the consideration that she does to-day for Great Britain and the British fleet, she is not likely to engage in enterprises that have not first been approved by London. In speculating upon Italy's policies, therefore, we must not forget that they are determined by a controlling force outside of Italy, which we must constantly keep in mind.

Fascism seeks the favor of the Vatican. It has made religious instruction compulsory in primary schools, and has authorized the clergy to choose the teachers who give that instruction. It has created chaplaincies in the Army, restored the Cross to the Capitol, and otherwise advertised its respect for the national faith. Mussolini himself has attended important religious ceremonies, and has encouraged others to do the same.

How do the Italian clergy receive these overtures? One of the best-informed men in Italy tells me that they are divided into three approximately equal groups. The first has been won over by the Fascisti and is working with them; the second is undecided and waiting for further developments; and the third, which includes the lower clergy, who are in closest contact with the people, is bitterly hostile to the Fascisti and devoted to the doctrines of Don Sturzo. The high policy of the Vatican is enigmatical and inscrutable. An institution nearly two thousand years old, catholic in the etymological sense of the word and regarded by millions in all parts of the world as their spiritual centre and gateway to salvation, can pursue long-range policies and disregard the transitory phenomena of the day.

Attempts to use Catholicism to aggrandize Italy are not entirely new. But Mussolini has been more outspoken and sensational in proclaiming this intention than any of his predecessors. In his speech on the twenty-first of June, 1921, when he was still merely the chief of a little Fascist group, he declared: 'I affirm that the traditions of the Latin world and of Imperial Rome are now represented by Catholicism. . . . I am greatly distressed by seeing national churches organized, for they stand in my eyes for millions and millions of people who do not look constantly toward Italy and toward Rome. For that reason I believe that, providing the Vatican will renounce its claim to temporal power, as I think it eventually will, Italy ought to give the Holy See all the aid, physical and otherwise, in her power; because the progress of Catholicism throughout the world is a matter of interest and pride to every Italian.'

But has Mussolini, since his rise to power, made the world forget his public profession of atheism on the twenty-fifth of March, 1904, at the People's Palace in Lausanne? Is the Preface to his *The True John Huss* forgotten, where he wrote, as recently as 1913, 'In publishing this little book I trust that it will arouse in the hearts of its readers hatred for all kinds of tyranny, whether spiritual or profane, whether theocratic or Jacobin'? On the twenty-eighth of September, 1919, when addressing at Milan the Garibaldians back from the Argonne, he said: 'I should love a pagan nation which chooses battle, life, struggle; which does not believe blindly in revealed truths, and which despises miraculous panaceas.'

Someone has said that only imbeciles never change. Mussolini has a perfect right to change his belief. But is it absolutely certain that there is not, hidden away somewhere in the capacious pigeonholes of Vatican archives, a

complete file of Mussolini documents, including his project for confiscating the property of the Church?

The Fascisti have hoped from day to day to end the dispute which has made the Pope a voluntary prisoner ever since the King of Italy entered Rome. The Church keenly feels her loss. She will not be consoled by summary solutions. Confident in her own eternity, she patiently waits for the better day she believes will come. But Fascist Italy has definite aims. It concentrates on narrow and warlike nationalism, while the Sovereign Pontiff incarnates internationalism — impartial love for all mankind. How are these antagonistic sentiments to be reconciled? The Papacy is entirely Italian. Its General Staff is entirely Italian. But the Holy See is universal.

Another obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the fact that the Fascisti won their victory over the body of the Popular Party — the pet, and some say the child, of the Vatican. We should have to go back in history to trace the beginning of the Church's effort to create a democratic Catholic Party of its own in Italy. The Pope sought to save the country from a Socialist revolution, and his remedy was the antidote of Christian Socialism. Out of this campaign emerged suddenly on the eighteenth of January, 1919, the Popular Party — which, in order not to compromise the Vatican, declared itself nonconfessional, and claimed to be independent of Catholicism. Playing upon Italy's persistent memory of her mediæval free cities, its leaders appealed with wonderful success to regional and local patriotism. It adopted the catchwords and the insignia of the mediæval communes; and in the election that year, under the leadership of Don Sturzo, it captured one hundred seats in Parliment. This was two thirds as many as the old and powerful Socialist Party commanded. Like the Socialists, the *Popolari* condemned the war, and they promised the people radical social reforms. The two Parties were enough alike to be bitter rivals; but their common pacifism made them an object of attack for the fighting Fascisti, who had no toleration for their doctrines and refused to discriminate between them. In fact, the Fascisti employed the same tactics of physical violence against the Popolari that they did against the Communists and the Socialists.

Nevertheless, when Mussolini seized power the Popular Party permitted its members to join the first Fascist Cabinet. But this truce was very brief; and three months later its ministers resigned and the Party passed over to the Opposition. Mussolini's followers devoted the following year to wiping the Party off the map. That was a tougher problem than suppressing the Socialists, because the Popolari were grouped around their priests. Simultaneously Mussolini tried to persuade the Vatican that he could protect it better than its chosen servants. In return for important concessions to the Church, he asked the Holy See to withdraw recognition from his opponents. The Holy See partially complied with his demands by dismissing Don Sturzo as Party Secretary and by forbidding priests to be members of political associations; but it let Don Sturzo continue his political agitation.

Reports have been current repeatedly that the Vatican and the Fascisti were on the point of reaching an agreement, but something has always happened to prevent an understanding. After the elections of 1924, the Fascisti of Brianza, angered because the Popolari had not voted as they wished, assaulted them on the public streets, wrecked their houses, and pillaged their coöperatives. The Pope imme-

diately sent fifty thousand lire to the victims, whereupon certain Fascist newspapers began to abuse him violently.

Early this year the Fascist authorities had worked out several legislative reforms peculiarly agreeable to the clergy, but in a public interview a Fascist subsecretary unfortunately used this phrase: 'We wish to pass from a state of latent warfare to a state of quasi coöperation.' *Osservatore Romano*, the organ of the Vatican, at once announced that the projected law was entirely the work of the Government, and that the Holy See would not be content without 'the full liberty and independence, both real and apparent, and visible to the whole world, to which it has an imprescriptible right.' This article started a violent controversy. Farinacci, Secretary-General of the Fascisti, roundly denounced the Popular Party and the Church, and called Cardinal Gasparri, the Papal Secretary of State, 'a vulgar demagogue.' The Pope answered this by presenting the Cardinal in question with a valuable medal, accompanied by a letter referring to his high services and calling him 'the authorized interpreter of our thought.'

Still another difficulty has arisen out of the suppression of all non-Fascist labor organizations, including the Catholic trade-unions. One strong point of the Church in Italy has been its social work among the people, and the Vatican was supremely interested in defending these unions. Ever since the new labor decrees, therefore, a silent struggle has been going on between the Church and the State over that issue. . . .

Two fundamental principles are in conflict at Rome. One affirms the brotherhood of all mankind, the other the survival of the fittest and the extermination of the weak. I do not venture to say which of these two doctrines holds the greater element of truth. I merely point out that they are as irreconcilable as fire and water. The Fascisti would strengthen Catholicism, as a power to be employed in the interest of Italy . . . but they want a Black Shirt Pope. . . .

Evidence is accumulating that these developments are being followed with close attention by the higher dignitaries of the Roman Church in all parts of the world. If Mussolini's ambitions are realized even partially, they may modify the whole constitution of Catholicism. As long as Italy was a congeries of little states, and as long as she represented humanitarian and pacifist liberalism after her unification, no one resented the fact that the highest dignitaries of the Church — the cardinals and the Pope — were Italians. This spiritual primacy, consecrated by centuries, was by general assent accorded to a nation which until recently has taken no part in world rivalries.

But this situation will be radically changed if Italy proceeds along the path which Fascism has cut out for her. To-day she is a kingdom of forty-two million people absolutely under the thumb of a patriotic clique, which makes no secret of its world-embracing ambitions and designs. Fascist Italy dreams of empire. She ridicules the sentimental humanitarianism of Geneva and Locarno, and exalts the cult of force. Her mentality is essentially pre-Christian, and she cannot be false to it without betraying herself.

Under these conditions some eminent Catholics are beginning to question if it will be wise to allow the Italian clergy to monopolize, hereafter, the administration of the Holy See to the extent that they have done hitherto, with the free consent of the Church in other countries. Can a Bismarckian Italy, mouthing the ancient jargon of Pan-Germanism, retain the ineffable privi-

lege of supplying its guides to the Catholic world? Not long ago the *Dublin Review*, one of the principal periodicals of a country profoundly devoted to the Roman faith, inquired pertinently: 'Is n't the Universal Church as a matter of fact run almost exclusively by Italians? Would it not be wise to make our ecclesiastical administration more international?'