

# NEGOTIATING THE ITALIAN SELF: CATHOLICISM AND THE DEMISE OF FASCISM, RACISM AND COLONIALISM

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## **Sommario**

*Questo contributo analizza la rivista italiana La Civiltà Cattolica, una pubblicazione religiosa molto influente. Si interessa al modo in cui durante il periodo 1935-1949 questioni di colonialismo, razzismo e antisemitismo vennero inserite nel discorso tradizionalmente nazionalista e religioso della rivista. In questo modo, il presente studio illustra come sotto il fascismo nozioni di identità vennero trattate in un contesto religioso, e come dopo la caduta del fascismo venne promosso un messaggio di italianità cattolica, tramite una parziale riscrittura del passato.*

## **Introduction**

Since the fall of the Italian fascist regime, scholars have analysed the relationship between the Vatican and the ideology that held Italy in its grip for over 20 years. The most obvious link is the 1929 agreement between the (fascist) Italian State and the Vatican State, creating what can be characterised as a situation of ‘mutual symbiosis’, or at the very least mutual tolerance<sup>1</sup>. In this context, one can ask fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> Selected general studies on the relationship between fascism and the Church: D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, 1941, Oxford University Press, London-New York-Toronto; Arturo Carlo Jemolo, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni*, 1948, Einaudi, Torino:587-686; Tripodi Nino, *I Patti Lateranensi e il fascismo*, 1959, Cappelli, Bologna; Christine Alix, *Le Saint-Siège et les nationalismes en Europe 1870-1960*, 1962, Sirey, Paris:252-281; Pietro Scoppola, *La Chiesa e il fascismo. Documenti e interpretazioni*, 1976, Laterza, Roma-Bari; Sandro Rogari, *Santa Sede e fascismo. Dall’Aventino ai Patti Lateranensi. Con documenti inediti*, 1977, Forni, Bologna; John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and*

questions regarding the cultural, identitarian aspects of the Church-regime relationship. For example, during the twenties and thirties was there such a thing as an Italian, fascist and Catholic identity? Were these three identities clearly separated, or was some kind of synthesis achieved – or at least pursued? What was the situation regarding two central identity-related issues, namely colonialism and racism? Specifically, how were the Italian, fascist and Catholic ‘Self’ defined in relationship to the geographical, and/or racial, ‘Other’?

It is this last question, that is to the largely unexplored<sup>2</sup> ‘international’ side of the Church-fascism relationship, that this paper addresses. This is done through a close reading of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* on the basis of an analysis of all contributions between 1935 and 1949. Although *La Civiltà Cattolica* cannot be entirely identified as the ‘voice of the Church, it is an interesting and representative case study because of the influential nature of the publication. The specific focus is on the way in which, in the last decade of the fascist regime as well as directly after its fall, aspects of colonialism, racism and anti-semitism were inserted into the journal’s traditionally strong Italian and Church-oriented discourse. On a more abstract level, this paper illustrates how issues of identity, such as ‘the Self’ and ‘the Other’, were handled in a religious context during the fascist period. The paper further outlines the way in which, after the annihilation of fascist identity, a new, Catholic and Italian identity was promoted through a process of re-utilising, forgetting and re-writing the past.

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*Italian Fascism, 1929-32*, 2005 (1° 1985) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-London-New York; Giovanni Sale, *Fascismo e Vaticano prima della Conciliazione*, 2007, Jaca Book, Milano.

<sup>2</sup> Alfredo Canavero, *Introduzione: Cinquant’anni di storiografia sul ‘movimento cattolico’ italiano*, in: Eleonora Fumasi, *Mezzo secolo di ricerca storiografica sul movimento cattolico in Italia dal 1861 al 1945: contributo a una bibliografia*, 1995, La Scuola, Brescia:7-74(70).

## Italian fascism, the Holy See and *La Civiltà Cattolica* in times of colonialism and racism

As already indicated, it is important to avoid viewing the Church and ‘Catholicism’, as a monolithic whole; even if the two were intimately linked<sup>3</sup>, different currents and discourses existed and continue to exist within both. One of these was the influential discourse developed by *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Established in the mid-nineteenth century, the journal has been the subject of a limited number of anthological<sup>4</sup> and analytical studies. In the context of our specific focus, that is *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s dealing with colonialism and racism during the last ten years of fascism and in the immediate post-war period, some of these are of interest. Before proceeding, therefore, we will first present a brief *status quaestionis*.

An important early study is Ennio di Nolfo’s analysis of the journal’s role in Italy’s immediate post-war international policy<sup>5</sup>. However, the article’s title, which refers to Italian foreign policy decisions post World War Two, is quite misleading as its main focus is on *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s position on issues related to Italian national political life and its condemnation of international communism. Questions of identity are not raised<sup>6</sup>, particularly those concerning other nationalities. Arguably belonging in the same category is a book by Roberto Sani, who focuses on Italian political

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<sup>3</sup> Canavero, *Introduzione: Cinquant’anni di storiografia sul ‘movimento cattolico’ italiano*, op. cit.:12.

<sup>4</sup> See Gabriele De Rosa, *Civiltà Cattolica 1850-1945. Antologia a cura di Gabriele De Rosa* (4 vols.), 1971, Landi, s.l.

<sup>5</sup> Ennio Di Nolfo, ‘*La Civiltà Cattolica*’ e le scelte di fondo della politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra, in: *Storia e Politica* 10/2, 1971:187-239.

<sup>6</sup> Except from the general assessment that the journal presented the message of an “identità tra il concetto di buon cattolico e quello di buon italiano, cioè l’idea che non si potesse esser buon italiano senza essere buon cattolico”. Di Nolfo, ‘*La Civiltà Cattolica*’ e le scelte di fondo della politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra, op. cit.:224.

life in the period 1945-1958, centring his discourse on the role of politician Alcide De Gasperi<sup>7</sup>. The only author who discusses colonialism is the Jesuit Giacomo Martina. He studied, among others, *La Civiltà Cattolica*'s attitude towards the Italian fascist Ethiopian campaign, an attitude which he describes as “una certa simpatia per le gesta degli italiani, [...] un sincero sforzo di equilibrio, [...] una fedele riproduzione dei discorsi più salienti del papa, [...] un lungo esame [...] delle ragioni che potrebbero giustificare l'espansione coloniale”<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the journal's stance on racism David Bidussa spoke of an opposition “che non inerisce i principi, bensì i metodi”<sup>9</sup>, a ‘formal’ attitude which he shared with Martina, who echoed Scoppola's<sup>10</sup> idea – and that of many others – that fascist racism was the consequence of the *intesa* with Germany<sup>11</sup> and that the journal's opposition to racism seemed to have been motivated mainly by opposition to the refusal of mixed marriages<sup>12</sup>. Ruggero Taradel and Barbara Raggi provide a

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<sup>7</sup> Roberto Sani, *‘La Civiltà Cattolica’ e la politica italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1945-1958)*, 2004, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.

<sup>8</sup> Giacomo Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, 2003, Morcelliana, Brescia:270.

<sup>9</sup> David Bidussa, *I caratteri ‘propri’ dell'antisemitismo italiano*, in: Furio Jesi Centro (ed.), *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista*, 1994, Grafis, Bologna:113-124 (115).

<sup>10</sup> Scoppola, *La Chiesa e il fascismo. Documenti e interpretazioni*, op. cit.:316. A recent tendency – although not shared by all – is for Italy to *fare i conti* with its racist past, as racism – or rather anti-semitism – can hardly be portrayed as a silent adoption of another State's policies: “[...] il razzismo antiebraico in Italia non matura nel 1938 come ‘carta politica’, ma si basa su componenti presenti nella società e nella cultura italiana. In altre parole il discorso delle leggi razziali è un discorso italiano, non la traduzione italiana di un discorso tedesco e dunque ha una sua autonomia e anche una sua coerenza; è strutturato su caratteristiche culturali di lungo periodo che complessivamente risultano ancora fortemente presenti nella società italiana alla data di oggi.” Bidussa, *I caratteri ‘propri’ dell'antisemitismo italiano*, op. cit.:114.

<sup>11</sup> Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, op. cit.:276.

<sup>12</sup> Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, op. cit.:277. He also

thorough analysis of *La Civiltà Cattolica*'s treatment of what was called the 'Jewish question'<sup>13</sup>. Writing from what Martina considers "pregiudiziali discutibili"<sup>14</sup>, both authors are quite harsh in their condemnation of the way in which anti-semitism was tolerated and even fed by *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and then almost totally ignored after the Second World War, when the "mano che si prodigava – ma non ovunque – a salvare vite era la stessa che aveva propagandato e continuava a propagandare una visione dell'ebraismo demonizzante e distorta [...]"<sup>15</sup>. Such an outspoken negative opinion contrasts quite clearly with that put forward by Martina, who diminishes Jesuit involvement, in which he is supported by Luigi Intrieri, who recently delivered an – all but polemical – account of the way in which *L'Osservatore Romano* and *La Civiltà Cattolica* dealt with racism<sup>16</sup>.

Due to their specific focuses and orientation, the aforementioned studies leave considerable room for further research and interpretation, especially concerning aspects which could be considered, if not a heritage of, at least closely linked to the fascist

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followed Chiron's minimalist description of Pope Pius XII's scarce interest in his predecessor's condemnation of fascist racism (cf. infra), stating only that, after having read the draft encyclical letter in which Pius XI condemned racism, the new Pope "non ritenne opportuno pubblicarlo". Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, op. cit.:280. See also Yves Chiron, *Pie XI (1857-1939)*, 2004, Perrin, Paris:388: "On a parfois reproché à son successeur, Pie XII, de n'avoir pas repris ce projet d'encyclique. Aucun pape n'est lié par les projets de ses prédécesseurs." In the same context, when writing about Pius XII (who was Pope from 1939), Hitler and Mussolini, Angelozzi Gariboldi chose not to discuss fascist racism, and mainly focused on this Pope's position in the international political debate. See Giorgio Angelozzi Gariboldi, *Pio XII, Hitler e Mussolini. Il Vaticano fra le dittature*, 1995 (1° 1988), Mursia, Milano.

<sup>13</sup> Ruggero Taradel / Barbara Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole. 'La Civiltà Cattolica' e la questione ebraica 1850-1945*, 2000, Riuniti, Roma.

<sup>14</sup> Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia (1814-1983)*, op. cit.:278.

<sup>15</sup> Taradel/Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole. 'La Civiltà Cattolica' e la questione ebraica 1850-1945*, op. cit.:155.

<sup>16</sup> Luigi Intrieri, *La polemica sul razzismo nel 1938: 'L'Osservatore Romano' e 'La Civiltà Cattolica'*, in: Pietro Borzomati et al. (eds), *Chiesa e società nel Mezzogiorno. Studi in onore di Maria Mariotti, Tomo II*, 1998, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli:865-901.

period. As has been previously mentioned, our analysis focuses on the way in which *La Civiltà Cattolica* handled two issues directly linked to the creation of Italian identity, before, during and after the war: colonialism and racism. This is done through a chronological screening of the journal's articles and book reviews from 1935-1949.

### ***La Civiltà Cattolica* and colonialism: consent and consciousness**

Especially during the period 1935-1937, with the conquest of parts of Ethiopia, colonialism again became an issue of political relevance in Italy. Consequently, *La Civiltà Cattolica* set out to 'contextualise' fascist Italy's growing tension with Ethiopia by publishing a series of studies treating various aspects of colonialism and territorial expansion. The main aim seems to have been to underpin Italy's call for territorial expansion by adopting the idea of 'vital space' or *spazio vitale*, while at the same time stressing the civilising mission (*missione civilizzatrice*) of both the nation and its primary religion.

The subject of colonialism is first introduced indirectly in an article reviewing Spain's colonisation of the West-Indies<sup>17</sup>. Stressing the fact that the colonies benefited immensely from the Spanish occupation, the author refers to the idea of the abovementioned 'civilising fever' by characterising Spain as a "nazione civilizzatrice"<sup>18</sup>. Towards the end of 1935, political reality is already treated in a more specific manner in an article on the Bari-based *Fiera del Levante*. Dedicating part of his article to Catholic missions in the Levant<sup>19</sup>, Father Rosa cites Mussolini, in what could be interpreted as an *apologia* for (future) military aggression. The idea of *spazio vitale*, which was to be

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<sup>17</sup> G.M. Sorrentino, *L'opera della Spagna nella colonizzazione delle 'Indie Occidentali'*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935 I: 406-410.

<sup>18</sup> Sorrentino, *L'opera della Spagna nella colonizzazione delle 'Indie Occidentali'*, op. cit.:409.

<sup>19</sup> E. Rosa, *La 'Fiera del Levante' in Bari*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935 IV:14-24 (18-19).

at the heart of future studies, also features: “Non si tratta di conquiste territoriali [...] ma di una espansione naturale, che deve condurre alla collaborazione fra l’Italia e le genti dell’Africa [...]”<sup>20</sup>. In the same issue, a contribution indirectly justifies Italy’s presence in Ethiopia by analysing the benefits of Jesuit missionary work in terms of offering a fitting counterweight to a tradition of what is seen as ‘corrupt’ Ethiopian Christianity, influenced by Islamism<sup>21</sup>. Aside from a review article which fiercely defends the Church’s role in the abolition of colonial slavery<sup>22</sup>, two other articles on Abyssinian Christianity<sup>23</sup> repeat the negative image of religious corruption, thus contributing to the argument that colonialism in the region was needed on ‘civilising’ grounds: “Questo è il Cristianesimo degli Abissini, ridotto ad una larva, anzi ad un mostruoso miscuglio [...]”<sup>24</sup>.

In 1936, the year of the actual annexation of Ethiopia, a series of follow-up articles appear on themes such as territorial expansion, *spazio vitale* etcetera. At the same time, a selection of book reviews maintains a constant focus on the African continent. Whereas economic reasons are not considered a justification for colonial expansionism<sup>25</sup>, the debate centres mainly around two poles of interest: the need to ‘civilise’ indigenous peoples – linked to the ‘universal’ civilising mission of the Church – and the conditions necessary for nations to obtain their ‘vital space’. The former issue is

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<sup>20</sup> Rosa, *La 'Fiera del Levante' in Bari*, op. cit.:17.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, *Etiopia religiosa*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, IV: 89-105-93.

<sup>22</sup> A. Bruculeri, *Schiavitù coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, IV:415-416.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, *Il cristianesimo degli Abissini*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, IV:366-377 and Anonymous, *Il cristianesimo degli Abissini*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, IV:478-487.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, *Il cristianesimo degli Abissini*, op. cit.:486.

<sup>25</sup> A. Messineo, *Necessità economica ed espansione coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, I:378-394 and A. Messineo, *Diritto di espropriazione e diritto di espansione*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, II:13-28.

first treated in a book review, in which the reviewer highlights the difficulties faced by missionaries in Africa, in a religious echo of the idea of the ‘civilising mission’ which the regime also used to legitimise its aggressive policies<sup>26</sup>: “[...] vincere la diffidenza del Negro verso i Bianchi; [...] far capire che il Dio, da lui ammesso ma lasciato in disparte, è il solo che si deve amare e figlialmente temere: questi sono gli scogli principali [...] ai quali [...] si deve aggiungere per molti la bigamia”<sup>27</sup>. Three articles are then dedicated to the theme of colonial expansionism and the ‘propagation of civilisation’<sup>28</sup>: whereas the first one sets out the interpretive framework, the second one states that the propagation of civilisation is no justification for military intervention – but the author adds an important, and debatable, condition, namely “se non esiste presso i popoli barbari un dovere rigoroso di giustizia di adeguare le loro istituzioni al progresso generale dell’umanità [...]”<sup>29</sup>. This element made indirect approval of Italy’s aggression in Ethiopia possible. Apart from claiming that it had been provoked by Ethiopia, Italy indeed partially presented the war as a war on slavery and as the only solution after all possible peaceful means had been exhausted: “Il titolo della difesa degli innocenti, per salvarli da morte o liberarli dalla schiavitù, è legittimo, e può [...] fornire la causa giusta di un intervento armato nella vita interna dei

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<sup>26</sup> On fascism’s foreign policy, see, among others, Angelo Del Boca (ed.), *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, 1991, Laterza, Roma-Bari, Denis Mack Smith, *Le guerre del Duce*, 1993, Mondadori, Milano and Collotti Enzo, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922-1939*, 2000, La Nuova Italia, Milano.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione di P.G. Ciravegna, M.d.C., ‘Pagine di Vita Missionaria Africana’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, I:75.

<sup>28</sup> A. Messineo, *Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, II: 99-110, A. Messineo, *Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, II:290-303 and A. Messineo, *Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1936 II:374-386.

<sup>29</sup> Messineo, *Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale*, op. cit.:295.



popoli arretrati, supposto sempre che si siano prima adoperati i mezzi pacifici senza effetto alcuno”<sup>30</sup>.

The impossibility of a peaceful solution was also to be at the core of the discussion around the right to ‘vital space’. The ground having been prepared by an historical article on territorial annexation in the Catholic tradition<sup>31</sup>, the possibility of armed intervention on the grounds of provocation is dealt with<sup>32</sup> in a contribution that directly prepares a more general study entitled *Passione di popoli e crisi di civiltà nell’ora presente*. This article justifies the fascist regime’s aggressive policies in Africa on the grounds of provocation and the exhaustion of peaceful means, adding a touch of divine authority, as “agli amatori di Dio ogni cosa si rivolge in bene, anche il male: *diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*”<sup>33</sup>. Whereas this text still avoids going into detail, some weeks later an anonymous author states that the Italian people “era persuaso di non avere voluto nè molto meno provocato la catastrophe [...]”<sup>34</sup>. The exhaustion of peaceful means to enlarge, in the case of strict necessity, a nation’s ‘vital space’, finally becomes the main focus of the journal’s discourse on colonialism as it dedicates a series of long articles to related themes<sup>35</sup>, presenting the notion of ‘necessity’ as a just reason for

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<sup>30</sup> Messineo, *Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale*, op. cit.:386.

<sup>31</sup> A. Messineo, *L’annessione territoriale nella tradizione cattolica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, I:190-202.

<sup>32</sup> A. Messineo, *L’annessione territoriale nella tradizione cattolica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, I:291-303.

<sup>33</sup> E. Rosa, *Passione di popoli e crisi di civiltà nell’ora presente*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, II:3-12 (11).

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *Letizia di popolo e visione di pace*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, II: 353-357 (353).

<sup>35</sup> A. Messineo A, *La vita dello Stato e il caso di necessità*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, III:123-134, A. Messineo, *La vita dello Stato e il caso di necessità*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, III:197-208, A. Messineo, *Necessità di vita e diritto di espansione*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, III:363-373, A. Messineo, *Necessità di vita e diritto di espansione*, in: *La*

expansion. The last two of the above studies also contain a discussion on the meaning, and validity, of a nation's right to 'vital expansion'. Although they account for some sixty pages in total, the articles never clearly define such notions, rather leaving these open to interpretation.

Albeit to a lesser degree, in 1937 the above discussion continued amidst the development of an increasingly nationalist discourse approving of and sustaining colonial expansion. More specifically, three studies are dedicated to the theme<sup>36</sup>. In the first one, Father Messineo states that the principle of 'vital necessity' does not limit itself to the condition of life-threatening danger, but also to – and these words must have pleased the authorities at the time – “quando il pericolo riguarda la perdita probabile dell'integrità e sanità dell'organismo sociale, dell'onore, indipendenza e prestigio dello Stato”<sup>37</sup>. Also, colonial expansion is all the more harmless, indeed, it is even an advantage to “terre ancora incolte, parzialmente disabitate e ricche di risorse naturali abbandonate all'incuria”<sup>38</sup>.

So far we have seen how, through *La Civiltà Cattolica's* continuous insistence on themes related to colonialism, important obstacles to Italy's aggressive foreign policy were systematically removed, promoting an attitude of growing support, accompanied by an increasing nationalist discourse. Although this discourse was not necessarily or in any case explicitly pro-fascist, it was to become ever more widespread. This can be seen, for example, in a book review by

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Civiltà Cattolica 1936, III:451-460, A. Messineo, *Estensione e limiti del diritto di espansione vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, IV:363-375 and A. Messineo, *Estensione e limiti del diritto di espansione vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, IV:455-469.

<sup>36</sup> A. Messineo, *Emigrazione e diritto di espansione vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, I:304-318, A. Messineo, *Emigrazione e diritto d'espansione*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, I:410-421 and A. Messineo, *Emigrazione e diritto di espansione vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, I:524-532.

<sup>37</sup> Messineo, *Emigrazione e diritto di espansione vitale*, op. cit.:318.

<sup>38</sup> Messineo, *Emigrazione e diritto d'espansione*, op. cit.:421.

Angelo Piccioli<sup>39</sup>, as well as in the following section of another book review, in which the reviewer uncritically, and positively, accepts the writer's judgement of what is termed "la politica ostile del Negus contro la penetrazione pacifica dell'Italia, nonostante l'esistenza di convenzioni liberamente accettate, i suoi scopi aggressivi contro le due colonie africane, le razzie operate a danno delle popolazioni in territorio sottoposto al dominio italiano [...]"<sup>40</sup>.

In 1938-1939, with the achievement of fascism's colonial empire, racism becomes a central issue in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (cf. infra). Consequently, colonialism-related discussions move to the background and are largely confined to book reviews, which echo the journal's support of Italy's colonial policies and repeat the idea of provocation by Ethiopia, the need for Italy – peacefully – to obtain its vital space etcetera. The only subject which is still covered to some extent is the question of international mandates, which arose mainly from Germany's demand to reclaim its former colonies. Being generally opposed to Nazism, the journal does not deem such a claim to be acceptable. The three relevant articles by Father Messineo are essentially limited to a discussion of the legal context of the issue, as always based on an exhaustive treatment of the relevant secondary literature, which makes them of lesser interest to us<sup>41</sup>.

At the outbreak of war, the focus clearly shifts. Apart from a series of book reviews, the issue of colonialism is now only treated indirectly, such as in a discussion of themes linked to the idea of *spazio vitale*. Rather than being generated by an interest in colonialism, these studies are a consequence of the raging war and the

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<sup>39</sup> A. Messineo, *Libri coloniali*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, IV:156-161.

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione di Corrado Zoli, 'La conquista dell'impero'*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, III:174-175:174.

<sup>41</sup> A. Messineo, *I mandati internazionali e la Società delle Nazioni*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, I:218-228, A. Messineo, *I mandati internazionali e le Potenze Alleate*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, II:17-29 and A. Messineo, *I popoli arretrati e l'istituto del mandato*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, II:317-332.

questions arising out of it. The first of Father Messineo's articles discusses the theme of the *grande spazio*, which the author summarises as the 'sphere of influence' of a nation, as opposed to the *piccolo spazio*, with which the idea of *spazio vitale* can to some extent be identified<sup>42</sup>. The second study is then dedicated to this last idea; Messineo's viewpoint now seems to change, largely due to the dramatic contemporary context in which the territorial interpretation of *spazio vitale* is compromised<sup>43</sup>: "La via da battere è diversa, se non si vogliono ripetere, aggravandoli, gli errori del passato [...]"<sup>44</sup>. The above idea of the 'sphere of influence' or *grande spazio* gains momentum: even if in a subsequent article the 'classical' thesis of territorial expansion as justified by 'necessity' is still sustained to a certain extent<sup>45</sup>, it is the *grande spazio* which is at the centre of the discussion presented by three final articles dedicated to the topic<sup>46</sup>. In a sense, the elaborate treatment of this notion was to prepare, and sustain, the journal's future plea for Italy to regain control, not as an 'occupying' but as a sort of 'housekeeping' force, of its former colonies.

### ***La Civiltà Cattolica*, racism and anti-semitism**

Apart from its traditional battle against 'godless' communism, as well as the aforementioned discourse on colonialism, during the second

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<sup>42</sup> A. Messineo, *Spazio e diritto*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1941, IV:153-163 (154).

<sup>43</sup> A. Messineo, *Bisogni vitali e spazio vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, I:271-281 (278).

<sup>44</sup> A. Messineo, *Lo spazio vitale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, I:112-121 (121).

<sup>45</sup> A. Messineo, *Caso di necessità e dilatazione spaziale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, II: 73-81(80).

<sup>46</sup> A. Messineo, *Il grande spazio*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, II:202-210, A. Messineo, *La ripartizione spaziale e il suo principio regolatore*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, II:339-345 and A. Messineo, *I grandi spazi e l'ordinamento internazionale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1942, III:75-81.

half of the thirties two other issues were of crucial importance to *La Civiltà Cattolica*: Nazism and the 'Jewish problem'. Because Nazism persecuted the Church, *La Civiltà Cattolica* fiercely attacked it, while feeding, or in any case developing a discourse similar to, anti-semitism. Both topics, that is (Nazi) racism and anti-semitism, were always treated separately, producing, as we shall see, a very confusing message.

Early in the second half of the thirties, the confrontation with Ethiopia was at the heart of fascism's international policy. Consequently, during these years, this subject accounted for most of the space given in *La Civiltà Cattolica* to issues related to *italianità* as opposed to the non-Italian. Hence, in the 1935 and early 1936 volumes, we encounter only a limited number of studies involving race-related arguments. The first one is a 1935 book review in which the anonymous reviewer applauds the author's condemnation of the Nazi regime's anti-religious policies, in a plea against "gli errori, gli equivoci e le esasperazioni del nazionalismo e del razzismo"<sup>47</sup>. Some other studies then condemn Nazism, but above all, it seems, because of its negative attitude towards the Catholic Church... In other words, at the time racism did not yet seem to be a big issue<sup>48</sup>.

From the point of view of contributions involving racism and anti-semitism, 1936 presents itself as a fairly quiet year, until the publication of the review article on the 'Jewish question'<sup>49</sup>. Whereas in two previous reviews of a book on Jewish inscriptions<sup>50</sup>, as well as

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<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione di Alois Hudal, 'Rom, Christentum und deutsches Volk'*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, I:303-304.

<sup>48</sup> This is notably the case in Anonymous, *La persecuzione religiosa in Germania*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1935, III:426-431.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, IV:37-46.

<sup>50</sup> A. Ferrua, *Epigrafia ebraica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, III: 461-473 and A. Ferrua, *Epigrafia ebraica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, IV:127-137.

in a study on Jewish and Christian funeral rituals<sup>51</sup>, no mention was made of Jews presenting a ‘problem’, we suddenly encounter a text in which the reader is presented with a melting pot of prejudices against Jews, who are depicted simultaneously as financial imperialists and communists. Furthermore, based on a book which is considered to be “un’opera, dove [l’autore] espone obiettivamente, ed anche con benevolenza e spirito di carità cristiana, il giudaismo della dispersione”, Jews are presented as “profittatori”<sup>52</sup>. Whereas one could still attribute these claims to the writer of the book, some remarks are solely attributable to the *La Civiltà Cattolica* author, such as for example the statement that “non pochi dei giudei costituiscono un grave e permanente pericolo alla società”<sup>53</sup>. Excluding any form of aggressive persecution, the author further suggests that Zionism could be a good option, but avoids uttering a definitive judgement on the issue, in an evasive conclusion which states that the real battle, the real issue at stake, is the contrast between “il comunismo distruttore ed il Cattolicismo [...]”<sup>54</sup>. As we shall see, this last element will also feature in *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s solution to the Jewish question.

In 1937, an increasing number of articles are dedicated to the search for a solution to the Jewish question. In the first one, *La questione giudaica e il sionismo*<sup>55</sup>, the author initially continues to stress the benefits of Zionism, as well as the possibility of a union between Arabs and Jews<sup>56</sup>, but finally concludes his plea by discarding Zionism, stating paradoxically that “attuato lo Stato

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<sup>51</sup> A. Ferrua, *Sulla tomba dei cristiani e su quella degli ebrei*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1936, IV:298-311.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica*, op. cit.:40.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica*, op. cit.:43.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica*, op. cit.:46.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica e il sionismo*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, II:418-431.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica e il sionismo*, op. cit.:427.

sionista, i giudei abbandoneranno la loro aspirazione messianica di dominio del mondo e per conseguenza la loro doppia preponderanza, capitalistica e rivoluzionaria”<sup>57</sup>. The next study, *La questione giudaica e le conversioni*, repeats the above ideas, characterising Jews as “speculatori e rastrellatori d’oro, messianici e rivoluzionari”<sup>58</sup>. It suggests a not unexpected solution to the problem, namely the conversion of Jews to the true, Catholic religion, which was to be promoted as the only and exclusive way to resolve the question. The imposition of a new, Catholic identity is the solution offered by *La Civiltà Cattolica*; in spite of its highly negative opinion of Jews, the journal at the same time is harshly critical of anti-semitism, or at least what it considers as such, as this is officially “condannato dalla Chiesa [...]”<sup>59</sup>.

Matters then become more confused as, following an article criticising racism towards black people in the United States<sup>60</sup>, in 1938 an even more negative discourse on Jews is presented although it is also accompanied by a condemnation of racism and anti-semitism. The solution to the Jewish problem lies, on one hand, in Christian *carità*, but, on the other hand, in a ‘healthy’ amount of *prudenza* towards Jewish people<sup>61</sup>. The solution of conversion to Catholicism is maintained<sup>62</sup> and, in a suspiciously anonymous article, old prejudices

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<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica e il sionismo*, op. cit.:431.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica e le conversioni*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, II:497-510 (497).

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous, *La questione giudaica e l’apostolato cattolico*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, III:27-39 (39).

<sup>60</sup> M. Barbera, *Giustizia tra le ‘razze’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1937, IV:531-538. A central figure in this article is Father La Farge, who would work on Pope Pius XI’s never finished encyclical letter condemning racism (cf. supra).

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Gino Sottocchia, ‘Sotto la maschera d’Israele’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, I:460.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a G. Natti Dubois, ‘Ebrei e cattolici in Italia’*, in: *La Civiltà*

are repeated, such as in the idea of the “dominio della nazione giudaica, detentrica dell’alta finanza e per mezzo di essa del dominio, più o meno larvato, del mondo”<sup>63</sup>. As has already been noted, racism is condemned, but that criticism limits itself to Nazi racism, as opposed to ‘Latin’ spiritualism and universalism<sup>64</sup>, a thesis which was to be repeated in a characterisation of German racism as “recisamente e manifestamente ripugnante alla dottrina cattolica”<sup>65</sup>. In this context, the concept of race is the product of mere “acrobazie del pensiero, vere aberrazioni mentali collettive”<sup>66</sup>, but at the same time Jews can continue to be treated with condescension, such as that found in Barbera’s contribution on Hungarian Jews<sup>67</sup>. Towards the end of 1938, the year in which the “ubbriacatura razzista sembra voglia espandersi fuori i confini della Germania”<sup>68</sup>, one more contribution dealing with racist, anti-semitic issues was published, under the title *La questione giudaica e ‘La Civiltà Cattolica’*<sup>69</sup>. Here again the author defends his journal’s past, and present, stance on the question of ‘anti-semitism’. Indeed, *La Civiltà Cattolica* did not consider itself anti-semitic, and it

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Cattolica 1938, II:74-75.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous, *Intorno alla questione del sionismo*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, II:76-82 (76).

<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, *Germanesimo razzista e romanesimo cattolico*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, II:289-292.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, *La ‘teoria moderna delle razze’ impugnata da un acattolico*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, III:62-71 (62).

<sup>66</sup> A. Messineo, *Gli elementi costitutivi della nazione e la razza*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, III:209-223 (219).

<sup>67</sup> M. Barbera, *La questione dei giudei in Ungheria*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, III:146-153.

<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Guglielmo Schmidt, ‘Razza e Nazione’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, III:364-365 (364).

<sup>69</sup> E. Rosa, *La questione giudaica e ‘La Civiltà Cattolica’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1938, IV:3-16.



officially condemned any form of racism – or what it considered to be such – simply by denying the validity of the very concept of ‘race’ itself. In this way, Father Rosa could produce echoes of past prejudices, based on a *calque* of the ideas of Christian *carità* and *prudenza*: when dealing with Jews, any Catholic’s goal must be to “impedirli semplicemente dal loro mal fare ed a premunire gli altri dalla loro strapotenza [...]”<sup>70</sup>.

Following the official proclamation of racial laws in the summer of 1938, *La Civiltà Cattolica* criticised the new governmental policies, while trying to explain, and defend, its stance on the ‘Jewish question’. In a first study, entitled *Alla ricerca di una soluzione*, the author tries to find a way out of the situation of “disagio morale”<sup>71</sup> in which Italian Catholics find themselves. In his discussion of fascist racism<sup>72</sup> – of which Jewish Italians were the main victims –, Father Messineo tries to bypass the rather embarrassing question of anti-semitism by reiterating previous efforts to divert the core of the discussion towards the validity of using notions of race and racism, asserting that “la Chiesa non ha mai fatto questione di razza”<sup>73</sup>. Questioning the very existence of ‘races’, as well as the ‘political’ consequences of the supposed existence of racism, Messineo leaves the final solution to the problem in the hands of Science, and to the Pope (who, as we have noted, did not adopt his predecessor’s

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<sup>70</sup> Rosa, *La questione giudaica e ‘La Civiltà Cattolica’*, op. cit.:4.

<sup>71</sup> A. Messineo, *Alla ricerca di una soluzione. Chiarimenti e distinzioni*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, I:203-213 (203).

<sup>72</sup> For more information on fascist racism see, among others, Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo. Mussolini e la persecuzione antisemita. Nuova edizione ampliata*, 1993 (1° 1961), Einaudi, Torino, Jesi Centro Furio (ed.), *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell’antisemitismo fascista*, op. cit., Giorgio Israel/Pietro Nastasi, *Scienza e razza nell’Italia fascista*, 1998, il Mulino, Bologna and Valentina Pisanty, *La Difesa della Razza. Antologia 1938-1943 (con una prefazione di Umberto Eco)*, 2006, Bompiani, Milano.

<sup>73</sup> Messineo, *Alla ricerca di una soluzione. Chiarimenti e distinzioni*, op. cit.:206.

encyclical letter on the subject)<sup>74</sup>. In *La civiltà e le sue moderne involuzioni*, Father Brucculeri is much more daring and critical than Messineo, and he even uses irony as a weapon; he argues that race has never changed civilisation, but that the contrary has often been the case, stating that the “morti [...] agiscono ben poco col sangue, ma colle idee feconde”<sup>75</sup>. Father Trossarelli then answers to Messineo’s call for a scientific analysis of the racial question, suggesting that the notion of race could only be used to some extent after much further research<sup>76</sup>. Hereupon Messineo indirectly attacks racist Nazism through a philosophical analysis of its glorification of the nation and its leader, which he sees as a central element in Nazism’s *apoteosi dell’uomo vivente*<sup>77</sup>. Subsequently, Brucculeri not only questions racism, but also nationalism in general, a tendency which is to be confirmed by two articles in which Messineo treats the idea of the nation as a “valore essenzialmente relativo”<sup>78</sup>.

All this, then, is quite suddenly interrupted by the threat of war. Some publications still touch upon racially related issues, but rather through book reviews than through full length articles. For example, a review of a book entitled *L’orgueil juif* is concluded by the repetition of the thesis that the Jewish question is to be resolved through a combination of Christian *carità* and *prudenza*<sup>79</sup>, whereas the

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<sup>74</sup> Messineo, *Alla ricerca di una soluzione. Chiarimenti e distinzioni*, op. cit.:213.

<sup>75</sup> A. Brucculeri, *La civiltà e le sue moderne involuzioni*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, II:110-120 (116).

<sup>76</sup> F. Trossarelli, *Eredità biologica e mutazioni*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, II:340-355 (355).

<sup>77</sup> A. Messineo, *Dal monismo biologico all’apoteosi dell’uomo vivente*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, II:420-435 (420-421).

<sup>78</sup> A. Messineo, *La nazione valore essenzialmente relativo*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, III: 203-214 and A. Messineo, *La nazione valore essenzialmente relativo*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1939, III:302-312.

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a H. de Vries de Heekelingen, ‘L’orgueil juif’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1940, I:151.

condemnation of racism is echoed in another review of a book by Lucien Valdor<sup>80</sup>. As the war begins, and as it becomes clear that fate will not be on fascism's side, racial problems become less and less of an issue in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. The same is true of anti-semitism or, as the journal puts it, its opinion on the 'Jewish question'.

As we have illustrated, from the mid-thirties until World War II *La Civiltà Cattolica* had a particular attitude concerning racism, anti-semitism and colonialism. The journal condemned racism, especially the Nazi version, but from 1938 on also, albeit very prudently, its fascist counterpart. It did so in an ambiguous manner, trying not to offend the fascist regime by staying in line with its policies as far as possible. Moreover, in a series of articles the journal continued advocating its traditional discourse on the 'Jewish problem', which was strongly in line with the then widely diffused racial prejudice against Jews. As we have seen, until then the discussion of colonialism centred around two points. Firstly, the general message of developed nations' – including of course Italy's – mission to 'civilise' underdeveloped peoples was conveyed. Secondly, the journal provided ample space for discussion around notions such as 'vital space', which underpinned the Italian nation's claim to expand its overseas territories. This brings us to another focal point: *La Civiltà Cattolica*'s sustainment of a particularly Italy-oriented discourse in which authors did not limit themselves to conveying the Church's 'universalist' message, but also gradually developed a nationalist message, a message of Catholic *italianità*. As we shall see in the following discussion, this tendency was to continue after the war.

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<sup>80</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Lucien Valdor, 'Le Chrétien devant le racisme'*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1940, I:474.

### ***La Civiltà Cattolica* after World War II: Post-war Catholic *italianità* and the shadow of racism and colonialism**

After the war, *La Civiltà Cattolica* hastily tried to forget Italy's 'fascism' as a disease from which the nation had healed without leaving any significant traces. It would be too extreme to speak of a process of *damnatio memoriae*, but various efforts were nonetheless made to relativise the fascist past, for example by presenting fascism as a sort of 'occupying force' – cf. the above-mentioned idea of disease – or, by stressing extenuating circumstances: “La vera colpa degli italiani sembra questa: di non sapere o, peggio, non volere scegliere gli uomini adatti a governarli [...]”<sup>81</sup>. In general, one could argue that *La Civiltà Cattolica* tried to rationalise what had happened during the last twenty years by clearly distinguishing the notions of fascism and Italianism from one another, much in the way it had previously done when dealing with anti-semitism/racism. A double tendency could be observed: whereas 'political' nationalism was being condemned, Italian nationalism, in the sense of the awareness of a national identity and cohesion based on *italianità* and religion, lost none of its appeal: “Nei tempi moderni essa [the Church] ha condannato il nazionalismo politico, [...] ma non ha deprezzato la nazionalità in se stessa, nella quale ha visto un valore umano naturale, un elemento prezioso dell'ordine generale e dell'armonia dell'universo: la cui ultima fonte risale a Dio, creatore e ordinatore sommo”<sup>82</sup>.

Indeed, *La Civiltà Cattolica* cultivated and reinforced Italian identity, which it linked closely with Catholicism. Thus the 1929 agreement between fascist Italy and the Church was characterised as

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<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Carlo Bozzi, 'La tragedia degli italiani vissuta da un italiano'*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, II:78.

<sup>82</sup> A. Messineo, *La Chiesa e la nazionalità*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, I:249-260 (260).

“quel monumento imperituro del genio politico e giuridico italiano”<sup>83</sup>; after which, in an article on *L'ora presente e l'Italia*, a plea was launched in favour of a greater role for religion in what was meaningfully called “la nostra Italia”<sup>84</sup>. Catholic *italianità* became the essence of the newly revived nation, a fusion between a series of abstract values inspired by Catholic religion. The nationalist rhetoric became ever more eloquent, echoing that of the recent past, with the addition of a more religious tone:

“Intenderemmo tante cose: il vero titolo della nostra nobiltà innanzi al mondo; la genuina fisionomia italice e il nostro dovere di esserle fedeli; l'anima cristiana dei nostri maggiori; l'arte italiana che è tutta religiosa; la fioritura impareggiabile dei nostri santi; fino al significato universale, e potrebbe dirsi cosmico, del recente convenire tra noi dei più qualificati sacerdoti di tutti i popoli, per formare intorno al Vescovo di Roma quasi il senato religioso dell'umanità. E misureremmo insieme l'altezza dell'Uomo bianco che vive in Vaticano, al disopra degli spazi e dei millenni [...] Essere buon italiano contiene anche l'essere cattolico; esser anticattolico contiene per noi l'essere traditore della Patria. [...] Viene, la nuova età: sarà certamente nel nome di Cristo; noi la vogliamo sposata col nome d'Italia!”<sup>85</sup>

Simultaneously, the general message, especially concerning other religions, became one of tolerance, reconciliation and reflection: “Al presente la Chiesa dà esempio di larga tolleranza, di dolcezza e di rispetto verso ogni ceto di persone [...] Oggi la lotta si conduce nel

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<sup>83</sup> S. Lener, *Chiesa e Stato, oggi, in Italia*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, IV:91-104 (104).

<sup>84</sup> R. Lombardi, *L'ora presente e l'Italia*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, I:12-24 (15).

<sup>85</sup> Lombardi, *L'ora presente e l'Italia*, op. cit.:21-24.

campo delle idee e qui resta”<sup>86</sup>. Consequently we also see the end of the ‘Jewish problem’, which is now largely ignored. Apart from the reference to the Nazi holocaust in an article on the Nuremberg trials<sup>87</sup>, we also find in a review of a book written by a rabbi who had converted to Catholicism, reference to the ‘ideal solution’ to the Jewish question formerly put forward by the journal<sup>88</sup>. The review is very positive, condemning Nazi racism and the persecution of Jews, “rendendo omaggio alla generosa carità del Papa, del Clero e dei Cattolici, che hanno protetto e salvato, anche a loro rischio, migliaia e migliaia di Israeliti”<sup>89</sup>. Whereas this was often true, especially in the city of Rome, the reviewer notes that the author uses *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s writings as a guideline, but he only mentions Father Messineo’s studies on issues such as race, nation and State, without dedicating a single word to the journal’s traditional stance on the Jewish question, except from one page in which the book deals with the subject of Zionism. In a subsequent article on the Nuremberg trials<sup>90</sup> the holocaust, arguably one of the most serious crimes perpetrated by Nazism, remains remarkably absent; the author instead focuses on the legal side of the trial. The last time anti-semitism, or rather the holocaust, is mentioned is in an article on the *Patti*

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<sup>86</sup> A. Oddone, *Lo spirito di tolleranza nella pratica cattolica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, II:133-143 (142).

<sup>87</sup> S. Lener, *Dal mancato giudizio del Kaiser al processo di Norimberga*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, I:332-342.

<sup>88</sup> In a 1948 review article of a book on Jewish philosophy, in which the reviewer limits himself to a discussion of philosophical and religious aspects, this was to remain the sole outcome of Judaism: “Ma il pensiero giudaico ritroverà se stesso e la sua funzione [...] sol quando [...] riconoscerà il suo tragico errore e accetterà nel Cristianesimo il suo naturale sviluppo e complement [...]” C. Lo Giudice, *La filosofia ebraica*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, II:293-296 (296).

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Eugenio Zolli, ‘Antisemitismo’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, II:375.

<sup>90</sup> S. Lener, *Diritto e politica nel processo di Norimberga*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, III: 92-106.

*Lateranensi*. Here Father Lener evokes an episode in which he witnessed the deportation of German Jews. While condemning what he saw, he remains very concise in his comments on the situation in Italy: “Ora, sono molti coloro che dicono male degli italiani. Forse qualche difetto ci sarà davvero: e chi non ne ha?”<sup>91</sup> This is, as far as the present study is concerned, the last time anti-semitism and the ‘Jewish question’ are mentioned in *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

The increasingly nationalist discourse referred to above was also to become a central element in the discussion on colonialism: in the immediate aftermath of World War II, *La Civiltà Cattolica* began criticising the way in which the victorious nations (England, the USSR and the United States) treated the rest of Europe, including, most importantly, Italy. As Father Messineo stated, after the war Italy and Europe were subject to the “volontà di tre potenze extraeuropee [...], le quali [...] a null’altro mirano, se non a costituirsi le basi di un dominio duraturo e imperturbato”<sup>92</sup>. Italy had been ‘betrayed’ by the international community, especially by the newly formed UN<sup>93</sup>, which ‘served’ the interests and *egemonia* of the Anglo-Saxon nations<sup>94</sup>. As a consequence, the journal heavily criticised the way in which post-war peace negotiations were being held<sup>95</sup>, fearing, among other things, that Italy would be deprived of its former colonies. An example of this

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<sup>91</sup> S. Lener, *I Patti Lateranensi alla Costituente italiana (Discussione di una discussione)*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, II:214-225 (219).

<sup>92</sup> A. Messineo, *Da Londra a Mosca*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, I:85-94 (90).

<sup>93</sup> A. Messineo, *La ratifica del Trattato di pace con l’Italia*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, III:3-11 (9).

<sup>94</sup> A. Messineo, *I paradossi della politica internazionale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, II: 3-11 (5).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. the words of Father Messineo: “[...] tutto ormai è preordinato e stabilito per soffocare i popoli sotto la nuova dittatura dei nuovi e vecchi imperialismi [...] La storia dirà quanto tali imperi fondati sull’ingiustizia e cementati col sangue e le lacrime altrui saranno duraturi: la sua nemesi non tarderà a venire.” A. Messineo, *La Conferenza di Parigi*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, III:369-378 (378).

criticism is found in an anonymous book review which mentions the “tentativo britannico di spogliarci senza motivo delle nostre poche, sudate e insanguinate colonie prefasciste”<sup>96</sup>. The Paris Peace Treaty of February 10<sup>th</sup> 1947 hence is labelled a “giorno di lutto nazionale”, as it offered Italy only one advantage, namely to become a member of the UN<sup>97</sup>.

From this point onwards, the discourse of *La Civiltà Cattolica* centres around and unconditionally supports the Italian desire to be allowed to continue, as a *regime tutelare*, governing its former colonies. It does this by stressing the value of Italy’s millennial civilisation, in wording very similar to the rhetoric produced during the Ethiopian conflict. As *La Civiltà Cattolica* never supported fascism per se, but had always centred its political and identitarian discourse around *italianità*, and, more importantly, *cristianesimo*, its basic message was able to survive the post-war anti-fascist purge practically undamaged: “Non esulavano certamente da siffatto programma [the Italian colonialist spirit] i propri interessi, ma essi venivano ragionevolmente coordinati con quelli delle popolazioni, cadute sotto la sua sovranità, verso le quali l’anima italiana, formata sotto il soffio costante della civiltà cristiana, non avrebbe nemmeno potuto tenere quell’atteggiamento sprezzante, mostrato da altre potenze colonizzatrici”<sup>98</sup>. Italy needed to regain its former colonies not only in the interest of the indigenous peoples, but also because of its growing population<sup>99</sup>, its lack of primary resources and simply

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<sup>96</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a Gioacchino Volpe, ‘L’impresa di Tripoli (1911-12)’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1946, IV:209.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous, *Giorno di lutto nazionale (10 febbraio 1947)*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, I:422-430 (429).

<sup>98</sup> A. Messineo, *L’Italia e il mondo coloniale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1947, IV:385-395 (385).

<sup>99</sup> In this regard, we also encountered an anonymous book review, in which the reviewer criticises the book’s social darwinist approach to history, but hails the fact that, when talking about colonialism, the author “imbrocca la giusta via, quando si fa a sostenere che per il popolo italiano l’espansione coloniale è una questione di vita, imperiosamente proposta



because of its ‘right to live’ – a clear echo of the former debates around the idea of *spazio vitale*. Furthermore, Italian colonists were seen as “pionieri di una superiore civiltà”<sup>100</sup>; instinctively aiming to fulfil what was previously referred to as their ‘civilising mission’, because

Per se stessa la millenaria cultura italiana, della quale è imbevuto [...] ogni animo, con le sue idee universalistiche soffuse di profonda e larga umanità, rende [...] organicamente incapace l’italiano di riguardare con disprezzo le popolazioni di differente civiltà, colore o razza, verso le quali egli si rivolge con un insuperabile senso di umanità, come ad uomini degni di rispetto e di aiuto.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, a 1948 article by Messineo paved the way for a final series of contributions which seemed to be aimed directly at making a desperate<sup>102</sup> case for Italy’s role as *regime tutelare* of its former colonies, or at least some of them. This first article prepares the way for the following three, which are of a more political and legal nature<sup>103</sup>. It stresses Italy’s Christian *umanità* through a long

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dalla densità della popolazione...” Anonymous, *Recensione a Pasquale Turiello, ‘Il secolo XIX ed altri scritti di politica internazionale e coloniale’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, I: 525-526 (526).

<sup>100</sup> A. Messineo, *Sulla sorte futura delle colonie italiane*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, I:127-138 (134).

<sup>101</sup> Messineo, *Sulla sorte futura delle colonie italiane*, op. cit.:135.

<sup>102</sup> For example, Libya is even now being considered as a region under “occupazione nemica”. Anonymous, *Recensione a Giacomo Caputo, ‘Schema di fonti e monumenti del primo cristianesimo in Tripolitania’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, IV:178.

<sup>103</sup> A. Messineo, *Missionari e teologi assertori del regime tutelare*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, IV:255-269, A. Messineo, *Il regime tutelare delle colonie e il diritto internazionale*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, IV:477-489 and A. Messineo, *Dal mandato all’amministrazione fiduciaria*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, IV:579-593.

justification, and praise, of Spanish colonialism in the Americas, a period during which “il grande ed elevato concetto di una colonizzazione diretta principalmente al perfezionamento morale e civile delle popolazioni indigene, segnatamente mediante la diffusione della fede cristiana, non fu perduto mai di vista”<sup>104</sup>. We are now nearing the end of *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s, and Italy’s, colonial demands: apart from two final book reviews of conferences held in Florence, during which Italy’s claim was discussed, and above all supported<sup>105</sup>, the issue is touched upon for the last time in 1949 by Father Messineo, in an article on the UN and Italy’s colonies. The tone has now become utterly pessimistic: “Intorno alla possibile preda [the former Italian colonies] si sono scatenate tutte le passioni politiche, anche le meno nobili, hanno fatto ressa, per scontrarsi e cercare di elidersi, tutti gli interessi, eccetto quelli delle popolazioni locali e i più universali della collettività internazionale, ai quali non è stata dedicata la minima attenzione”<sup>106</sup>. As history has shown, in the end Italy did not get its colonies back and had to resort to emigration to ease the pressure of its the size of its population on its native soil. That is, of course, a different, albeit related, issue.

## Conclusion

Aspects of identity are always very negotiable and volatile, and often include elements drawn from centuries-old, or even millennium-old, traditions. Furthermore, a definition of the ‘Self’ directly or indirectly

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<sup>104</sup> A. Messineo, *Il regime tutelare delle colonie e la storia di un’idea*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1948, IV:20-34 (30-31).

<sup>105</sup> Anonymous, *Recensione a AA. VV., ‘Amministrazione fiduciaria all’Italia in Africa. Atti del secondo convegno di Studi coloniali (Firenze, 12-15 maggio 1947)’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1949, II:336-337 and Anonymous, *Recensione a AA. VV., ‘Atti del terzo convegno di Studi africani (Firenze, 3-5 giugno 1948)’*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1949, III:304.

<sup>106</sup> A. Messineo, *L’organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite e le colonie italiane*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1949, II:492-503 (496).

implies a definition of the subject in relation to the 'Other'. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Italian situation was no different in this: Italianism was fed by a long tradition of nationalism, including a discourse on the nation's need for territorial and colonial expansion, as well as by the factor of religious cohesion. This situation did not dramatically alter with the advent of fascism. As the case of *La Civiltà Cattolica* has illustrated, the Italian Self was presented as a combination of *italianità* and *crìstianesimo*, with the journal relying heavily on the nation's, and its religion's, greatness through colonialism. In this context, there was no place for racism: whereas *La Civiltà Cattolica* considered its traditional discourse against the Jews not to be anti-semitic, it fiercely condemned racism. In contrast, it totally justified colonialism through the nation's, and its religion's, civilising mission, as well as through its need to breathe, that is its need to obtain its *spazio vitale*. After the disappearance of fascism, *La Civiltà Cattolica* could continue, and even amplify, its discourse on Catholic *italianità* and 'politically correct' colonialism. Catholicism tried to reclaim its place in Italian society, filling in the void caused by the – temporary – death of fascism. However, as is illustrated in the case of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in the process some elements were deliberately erased from memory: first and foremost racism but above all the rather embarrassing issue of anti-semitism.

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