

Editorial

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The research on Pius XII has been flourishing for some time – among several studies, we would like to mention the important book written by Giovanni Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII. Vaticano, Seconda guerra mondiale e Shoah* (new updated edition, Milan: BUR, 2007, the first edition is dated to 2000) and, as an extensive biographical profile of Eugenio Pacelli, Philippe Chenaux's volume, *Pie XII. Diplomate et Pasteur* (Paris: Cerf, 2003) – and is receiving a further significant impulse from the opening of the archival collections relating to Pacelli's pontificate in the various Archives of the Vatican in March 2020. The almost simultaneous outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded but not prevented the development of new, articulate research and contributions, resumed in very recent times.

The present *JoMaCC* special issue is devoted to “The Church of Pius XII after World War II (1945-58). The *relationes ad limina* as Sources for Historiographical Reflection”. First of all, as far as the period of interest is concerned, the choice was that of going beyond the most investigated phase of the Pacellian pontificate, that of World War II. This period has always attracted the attention of public opinion, as well as of historians, in order to understand the Holy See's attitude in the face of World War II and the Shoah, its relations with European fascist totalitarian regimes in the last phase of their existence, as well as with the Soviet Union and more generally communism. Despite the attention on the dense, complex, dramatic period covering the first six years of Pius XII's pontificate, from 1939 to 1945, from

a chronological point of view, it was the post-war period which was the scene of about two-thirds of the entire Pacellian papacy: a trivial, but nevertheless important observation. Certainly, the post-war period was inevitably deeply conditioned by the choices made in the previous phase of the pontificate. Nevertheless the Holy See and more generally the Roman Catholic Church were placed in a new scenario, in which the world order was being rearticulated at the level of international relations and political balances, of socio-economic developments, of cultural expressions, of religious experiences.

Secondly, the *relationes ad limina*, viz. the reports written by the bishops for their periodic visits to the Roman Curia, constitute the golden red thread that runs through all the contributions in this second *JoMaCC* issue, insofar as they constitute the main, if not the only exclusive base of documentation used by the authors. This is an archival source based on an ancient custom, which has seen interesting developments over the centuries.¹ The regulation concerning the *relationes ad limina* in the twentieth century was shaped by the important changes made under Pius X, who, as part of the reform of the Roman Curia carried out in 1908 with the apostolic constitution *Sapienti consilio*, transferred the competencies in question to the Consistorial Congregation. With the decree *De relationibus dioecesis et visitatione sacrorum liminum* of 31 December 1909,² this new dicastery issued a wide-ranging and detailed questionnaire called *Ordo servandus in relatione de statu ecclesiarum* (with 150 questions),³ extending the obligation of *ad limina* visits to all the diocesan ordinaries and fixing the timeframe at the level of five years. Following the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which reserved canons 340-342 to the *ad limina* visits, the Consistorial Congregation under Benedict XV published a new questionnaire with 100 questions on 4 November 1918,⁴ followed on 16 April 1922, at the beginning of the pontificate of Pius XI, by similar provisions of the Propaganda Fide for the missions, with a form with 90 questions to which was attached a compendium of information on the situation of the missions.⁵ These two texts were still in force for the episcopal preparation of the *relationes ad limina* during the pontificate of Pius XII.

With regard to this specific type of texts, we would like to highlight a few specific elements that are present, also implicitly, in the

¹ Cf. the contribution of Enrico Galavotti in this issue.

² Cf. AAS (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*), 2 (1910), 13-16.

³ In AAS, 2 (1910), 17-34.

⁴ Cf. "De relationibus dioecesis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 487-503.

⁵ Cf. "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios, praefectosque apostolicos ac missionum superiores: de relationibus missionum, singulis quinquenniis exhibendis", in AAS, 14 (1922), 287-307.

different articles of this special issue. First, the use of this type of documentation lends itself to serial investigation from a diachronic point of view, and to a comparative investigation from a spatial and thematic point of view. In this way the authors of this issue have understood it in general terms, although each one has then offered specific insights of the historical situation and the geographical contexts on which they worked.

As serial historical source documents, the *relationes* are predisposed to form the basis for a comparison of the similarities and differences that the various local, regional, and macro-regional situations present. If their interpretation is not pushed too much, the documents in question can open up a stimulating perspective on the church of Pius XII because they offer surveys capable of showing not only the point of view of the top, constituted by the Holy See who dictated topics through fixed questions, but also that of the hierarchy below the top. Their reports were certainly not an immediate expression of the 'base' of the churches, but this base was at least indirectly present in the more or less meticulous diocesan reports handed in by the bishops.

Although the questionnaires predispose to a comparative use of information, they also convey, at least in part, a standardisation and seriality that can sometimes lead to reductive views, which is not quite functional for the representation of particular local conditions. For instance, the questionnaire invites the bishops to provide the information on the general condition of the diocese only in their first report. This can be explained by the desire to shorten the reports but reveals also a somewhat static view of historical phenomena which are presumed to remain stable over the short/medium term.⁶ However, the final question in both the 1918 and 1922 questionnaires⁷ asks for a summary judgment about the state of his diocese, and thus offers the bishops a personal space of reflection that leads to a possible insight into further local aspects and problems.

Moreover, we must consider that the *relationes ad limina apostolorum* are reports to the Holy See on the state of the ecclesiastical circumscription entrusted to episcopal care and are potentially conditioned by a defensive psychological attitude that tends to push bishops to mitigate problematic aspects or to trace their causes to phenomena and subjects outside its jurisdiction and even the church. If this is true in general, it should be verified on a case-by-case ba-

⁶ Cf. respectively S. Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 487, pars III; e S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios", AAS, 14 (1922), 288, "Animadvertenda", no. IV.

⁷ Cf. respectively S. Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 502-3, no. 100; e S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios", AAS, 14 (1922), 301-2, no. 90.

sis, through comparison with other sources, such as, for example, the reports of apostolic visitors or the acts of pastoral visits, but also sources external to the ecclesiastical institution, such as reports of state organisations, insofar they provide information on the activity of religious communities or the religious behaviour of the local population. In this special issue, however, the articles privilege the source of the *relationes ad limina*: when read together, these source documents open up a first broad look, even geographically speaking, at the various local Catholicism(s) in the immediate post-World War II period and, albeit to a lesser extent, of their relationship with the Holy See and its Roman conception of Catholicism.

This issue consists of eight contributions aiming at covering a vast geographical area - from the United States to ex-Yugoslavia, passing through Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, and the Scandinavian peninsula - between 1945 and 1958.

Although local specifics emerge, which are dictated by very different geographic and historical conditions such as the greater or lesser impact of World War II on the material conditions or the consequent establishment of governments of opposite ideological orientations in the different analysed countries - we are at the dawn of the Cold War -, it is possible to trace common focal points and problems, which are somehow typical of the church(es) under Pacelli: the threat of indifferentism or materialism, anti-Protestantism, the attention on Catholic education, the defence of family life (against mixed marriages, contraception, abortion, divorce, etc.).

Above all the concept of indifferentism stands out as the enemy of Catholicism: in Spain bishops began to speak of a religious indifferentism “which had nothing to do with the anticlerical hostility of the years of the civil war and took on different aspects depending on the diocese”, being named as materialism, de-Christianisation, atheism, rationalism, sensualism, religious indifference, secularism; in the United States the expression “material humanism” becomes a container in which to place nearly all the “errors and dangers” that the bishops feared: atheism, agnosticism, secularism, communism, Protestantism; even in the ‘highly civilised’ and ‘advanced’ Scandinavia “religious indifferentism has horribly grown”. According to the bishops, the causes of this materialism and secularism were due to different factors, but the major culprits were socialism and communism on one side (see the Italian case in particular) and secularist laws, non-denominational schools, and Protestant influence on the other side. Also, the war was mentioned as an important factor. Cleverly enough, the German bishops spoke about a ‘double’ materialist threat: that of ‘practical’ materialism in West Germany (initially provoked by “the state of extreme necessity, which left practically no room for consideration of the religious sphere, and which could be accompanied by an accentuated search for sensible pleas-

ures in a context of great deprivation” and eventually by an abundance of available goods which was also able to affect family morality), and that of dialectical materialism in the GDR (from Marxism, promoted and spread by the political authority). This second materialism is also the object of fears and of complaints by the Yugoslavian bishops, namely as the *materialismus theoreticus* supported by the Communist government that also fosters other ‘evils’ such as divorce and abortion.

The defence of family life, threatened by secularised societies, is strictly linked to this topic. The majority of the *relationes ad limina* reveals how the local episcopates in this post-war period are greatly anxious about the preservation of the Catholic family and the respect for morality within married life. The sacred character of marriage is perceived as endangered by neo-Malthusianism, ‘onanism’ (contraception), abortion, euthanasia, etc. These biopolitical issues would become more and more relevant in the 1960s, but concerns about the disintegration of the traditional family find their origins already in this context. Particularly in non-Catholic countries such as the United States, Germany and Scandinavia, Protestantism is identified as a major factor of this degeneration.

An important tool for reconquering society for Catholicism is seen in Catholic education, in schools. In Spain, following the reform measures of primary and secondary education issued between the end of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, schools assume a confessional character with the bishops’ applause; both French and Belgium bishops attach great importance to Catholic education (independent schools in France, *écoles libres*, where many ecclesiastical vocations are awakened; in Belgium also to public schools, where priests or trained lay people teach the catechism and sacred history); the US bishops perceive schools as an indispensable battleground and constantly report the establishment of new parochial schools, which never seem to be sufficient in number, and almost all of them stress their strategic importance.

The elements outlined here are, of course, not the only possible interpretative reading of the documentation presented in this special issue and common traits should not simplistically obscure relevant specificities. Just to mention a couple of them, the French *relationes ad limina* of the period allow us to reconstruct an innovative ecclesial landscape that was labelled as *progressismus gallicus* (indicating here not only the action of the French worker priests, but also a set of innovative pastoral proposals and new approaches) perceived with fear and concern by the Vatican, but also with hope by other local episcopates.

The very complex situation in ex-Yugoslavia speaks also about repression: “when it comes to talking about the clergy, the religious, the tones, especially in 1946-48, resemble those of real war bulle-

tins: we find lists of priests arrested or killed". In an anti-religious state such as the communist one, the question of survival became central, and the documentation shows both Catholic resistance and attempts of *détente*.

Finally, a particular study concerns the usefulness of the German *relationes ad limina* from the perspective of the history of Catholic ecumenism. Omissions and silences on important embryonic ecumenical activities within well-known German dioceses can be traced back mainly to a problem of 'literary genre', that is, "to the main purpose of the *relationes*, which rather than providing a complete snapshot of the state and activity of the diocese had to focus on statistical data, on figures regarding access to the sacraments, and thus justify the lower frequency of the Easter precept by referring to the spread of indifference and materialist ideology among the faithful".

Although the *relationes ad limina* can be a limited and problematic source, in this special issue the contributors tried to enhance their potential, highlighting what they are able to say about the local situations but also within the more general relations with the Catholic Church as a whole. A comparative reading of all the articles of the issue helps us to know more about the pontificate of Pius XII, but also about the local churches of his time.