

The Agony of the *non expedit*

1. The World War: A Decisive Turning Point?

Historians have traditionally seen in the Great War — except for certain anticipations during the war in Libya¹ — the rupture that put an end to the ‘case of the Italian conscience’, well before the Lateran Pacts were signed in 1929.² This allowed Catholics to become full members of the nation, to shake off accusations of anti-Italianism, support for the Triple Alliance and disaffection with the country, which constituted the onerous legacy of the events of the Risorgimento. After this demonstration of loyalty on the part of the vast majority of Italian Catholics,³ with the small exception of the non-interventionist minority, it would in fact have been unthinkable to return to the pre-war situation, relegating them to the margins of political life and preventing them from participating in the national reconstruction, with the risk, among other things, that their dissatisfaction would be intercepted by the socialists. On the other hand, the neutralist attitude of the Holy See, together with the decision not to abandon Rome once the war had begun, constituted the most effective refutation of the anti-clerical accusations that had been levelled against the Pope for decades, namely, that he was waiting for the opportunity of a war in order to take sides against Italy. According to this historiographical interpretation, therefore, the war laid the foundations for the return of Catholics to Italian politics,

- 1 On the rise of Catholic nationalism at the time of the colonial enterprise, see Francesco Malgeri, *La guerra libica (1911–1912)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1970). For a more recent contribution concerning the position of the episcopate, see Giovanni Cavagnini, ‘Soffrire, ubbidire, combattere: prime note sull’episcopato italiano e la Guerra libica (1911–1912)’, *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, 8, 1 (2011), pp. 27–44, and Giovanni Sale, *Libia 1911: i cattolici, la Santa Sede e l’impresa coloniale italiana* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2011).
- 2 Domenico Massè, *Il caso di coscienza del Risorgimento italiano* (Alba: Società Apostolato Stampa, 1946).
- 3 In this regard, see the contributions of Pietro Scoppola, ‘Cattolici neutralisti e interventisti alla vigilia del conflitto’, Alfonso Prandi, ‘La guerra e le sue conseguenze nel mondo cattolico italiano’ and Carlo Bellò, ‘Miglioli e il movimento contadino “bianco” nel periodo bellico’, in *Benedetto XV, i cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale: atti del convegno di studio tenuto a Spoleto nei giorni 7–9 settembre 1962*, ed. by Giuseppe Rossini (Rome: Cinque Lune, 1963), pp. 95–151, pp. 153–206 and pp. 429–44.

Benedict XV. A Pope in the World of the ‘Useless Slaughter’ (1914–1918), dir. by A. Melloni, ed. by G. Cavagnini and G. Grossi

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the constitution of their own political party and thus the definitive abolition of the *non expedit*, which, after all had already been greatly moderated by the efforts of the Unione elettorale cattolica (Catholic Electoral Union) presided by Vincenzo Ottorino Gentiloni to forge alliances with the liberals against socialist candidates, efforts which were tolerated by the pontificate of Pius X.⁴

In reality, Benedict XV had placed the abolition of the *non expedit* on the agenda of topics for the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs already at the beginning of his pontificate. From the first consultation of the Congregation on this subject (March–July 1915), there emerged a Holy See now oriented toward the clear condemnation of the so-called Gentiloni Pact and of clerical moderatism and determined to promote an autonomous, organized presence of Catholics in parliament, planning the creation of a party. It was the contemporary entry of Italy into the war that caused the project to be postponed until after peace had been achieved.⁵

The withdrawal of the *non expedit*, therefore, rather than being ascribable to the dramatic consequences of the world war, was rather the result of a long agony, inscribed into the very history of the prohibition from its origins, in that it was inherent in the temporary nature of a strategy that the Holy See was never able to choose definitively. The same hypothesis of the constitution of an autonomous party of Catholics had been introduced several times in previous pontificates, even advocated by Leo XIII, while the risk of clerical moderatism, later effected by Pius X, had long been considered the main reason for maintaining the ban.

The present contribution proposes, therefore, to retrace briefly the history of this debate that took place entirely within the Apostolic See in order to contextualize the final outcome better: the choice of Benedict XV to consent to the birth of the Party. However, in the context of a topic widely investigated by historians,⁶ it will

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- 4 This is the interpretation of Arturo Carlo Jemolo in *Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni*, 3rd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), pp. 413–16, adopted until John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Chapman, 1999), p. 163. The participation of the Catholic Filippo Meda, who was Minister of Finance in the government led by Paolo Boselli constituted on 18 June 1916, should also be recalled.
- 5 See the careful reconstruction of the minutes of the Congregation provided by Alberto Monticone, 'Benedetto XV e il non expedit', in *Democrazia e coscienza religiosa nella storia del Novecento*, ed. by Augusto D'Angelo, Paolo Trionfini and Roberto Pasquale Violi (Rome: AVE, 2010), pp. 13–38.
- 6 Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Non expedit: storia di una politica (1866–1919)* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1971); Gabriele De Rosa, 'Il non expedit e La Civiltà Cattolica', in Gabriele De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia*, 2 vols (Rome: Laterza, 1966), I: *Dalla Restaurazione all'età giolittiana*, pp. 95–120; Giacomo Martina, 'Il non expedit', in *Il pontificato di Pio IX*, ed. by Roger Aubert, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Turin: SAIE, 1970), II, pp. 849–54; Maria Franca Mellano, *Cattolici e voto politico in Italia* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1982); Filippo Tamburini, 'Il non expedit negli atti della Penitenzieria apostolica (1861–1889)', *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 41, 1 (1987), pp. 128–51; Stefano Gizzi, 'Le osservazioni del cardinale Antonio Maria Cagiano de Azevedo sulla liceità di far parte del parlamento italiano', *Pio IX: studi e ricerche sulla vita della Chiesa dal Settecento ad oggi*, 21, 1 (1998), pp. 50–60; Andrea Ciampani, 'Orientamenti della Curia romana e dell'episcopato italiano sul voto politico dei cattolici (1881–1882)', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 34 (1996), pp. 269–324. For a long time, the scarce public knowledge of the position taken by the Holy See, combined with the inaccessibility of the archive of the Apostolic Penitentiary (opened for consultation only in 2011), made it almost

be privileged a perspective that is as unprecedented as possible, shedding light on the debate within the Holy See by means of the papers of three crucial dicasteries of the Roman government: the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Holy Office and the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs.⁷ For reasons of space, therefore, the contemporary evolution of the so-called Catholic movement,⁸ along with the parallel strategies of the internationalization of the Roman Question pursued by papal diplomacy, are presupposed.⁹

2. From Its Origins to Leo XIII: The History of a Provisional Strategy

The origins of Italian Catholic abstentionism cannot be attributed to directives of the Holy See or pronouncements of the pontiff but to an article by a famous Catholic publicist. As is well known, it was in fact the priest Giacomo Margotti who, in January 1861, launched from the columns of the Turin newspaper *L'Armonia* the famous slogan 'neither elected nor electors', destined to become the banner of intransigent Catholicism.¹⁰ Margotti promoted the abstention campaign because he was convinced of the impossibility of using the electoral process to influence the process of Italian unification. This conviction was confirmed by the experience

impossible to reconstruct the chronology of the Vatican pronouncements with any precision. This explains the wide divergence of dates and documents in the various historical reconstructions, which for a long time could almost exclusively make use of articles in the press. The reason for the difficulty encountered by historians resides in the very secrecy allocated to the debate within the Holy See and, in the decision, maintained during the pontificate of Pius IX and Leo XIII, at least until 1886, not to publicize the resolutions made by the various dicasteries charged with tackling the issue. They preferred to circulate general private responses given individually to the bishops, who submitted an official question in this regard to the tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary.

- 7 For a more detailed and better developed reconstruction, see Saretta Marotta, 'L'evoluzione del dibattito sul *non expedit* all'interno della curia romana tra il 1860 e il 1889', *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 68, 1 (2014), pp. 95–164.
- 8 On this, some of the most famous titles in that season of research, both Catholic and secular, that began after World War II and which concerned the social and religious history of Italian Catholicism after the confirmation of Christian Democrats as leaders of the country, overcoming the previous historical paradigm of the confrontation between Church and state, are: Giorgio Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia* (Rome: Edizioni Rinascita, 1953); Fausto Fonzi, *I cattolici e la società italiana dopo l'Unità* (Rome: Studium, 1953); Angelo Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale nell'Opera dei congressi (1874–1904)* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1958); De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico*; including the well-known work *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia, 1860–1980*, ed. by Giorgio Campanini and Francesco Traniello, 3 vols (Turin: Marietti, 1981–84).
- 9 See Jean-Marc Ticchi, *Aux frontières de la paix: bons offices, médiations, arbitrages du Saint-Siège (1878–1922)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2002); Laurent Kölliker, *La stratégie d'internationalisation de l'audience politique du Saint-Siège entre 1870 et 1921: vers un règlement de la Question romaine* (Geneva: Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales, 2002); *The Papacy and the New World Order: Vatican Diplomacy, Catholic Opinion and International Politics at the Time of Leo XIII (1878–1903)*, ed. by Vincent Viaene (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005).
- 10 Giacomo Margotti, 'Né eletti né elettori', *L'Armonia*, 8 gennaio 1861.

of the elections of 1857 and 1860, with Catholics unable, in the ballot system of the time, to attract enough votes. The elections of 1857, then, which had seen their own discreet success (and the victorious candidacy of Margotti), had been annulled by Cavour under the pretext of 'abuse of spiritual weapons', accusing the clergy of having exercised moral coercion over the electorate.¹¹ Italian intransigents were, therefore, convinced that the boycotting of elections was the only viable means of stopping the process of national unification, or at least of inducing it to hold the pontiff's cause in greater consideration through a moral blackmail (or, rather, the concrete protest in particular at the intention to annex Rome), which was also a practical blackmail since the lack of the support of Catholic voters to the government alliance would have left the government more fragile in the face of the opposition of the republican and radical left. While this objective is the complete opposite of what would later persuade Pius X to loosen the ties of the *non expedit*, agreeing to an alliance with the moderates,¹² it clearly emerges that the abstention was considered a temporary measure, awaiting possible international solutions to the Roman Question and in the hope that in the meantime the fragility of the new Italian State would lead to its implosion under the weight of its own contradictions and the opposition from the left.

When, in the aftermath of the plebiscites, the bishops began to ask the Apostolic Penitentiary how to handle the absolution in the confessional of electors and elected representatives correctly, the Holy See, which had not yet provided directives, given that the abstention was the result of a spontaneous practice of the faithful, opted at first for an attitude of prudence, preferring neither to take a position nor to respond, particularly in regard to questions that came from territories already belonging by law to the Kingdom of Sardinia.¹³ The reasons that advised against opposing the abstentionist practice for the time being were principally: (1) the need to remain in a state of protest against the usurpation of the temporal domains of the pontiff, awaiting a rapid restoration of the status quo; (2) the impossibility of recognizing the right of representation in a territory, the former Papal States, that until then had held that the legislative power was reserved to the pontiff alone; (3) the capital problem¹⁴ of the oath of loyalty to the sovereign of Italy and to the laws of the state that the newly elected would have to swear in parliament, an oath that, in addition to implying recognition of the *fait accompli* and of the constituted power, would

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- 11 Carlo Pischedda, 'Una battaglia liberale: Cavour e le elezioni del 1857', in *L'Italia nel secolo XIX: aspetti e problemi di una tradizione contesa: atti del Convegno in onore di Giuseppe Talamo* (Roma, 18–20 ottobre 1995), ed. by Sergio La Salvia (Rome: Archivio Guido IZZI, 2002), pp. 51–78.
 - 12 However, it remains to be seen whether this opinion had a real impact on electoral behaviour. Statistical analysis seems to indicate that, until at least the conquest of Rome, the majority of Catholics continued to have access to the ballot boxes *en masse* (if one can speak of mass voting in liberal Italy under conditional suffrage), satisfying their national patriotic sentiment. See *Compendio delle statistiche elettorali italiane dal 1848 al 1934*, ed. by Istat, 2 vols (Rome: Failli, 1946–47).
 - 13 This is the practice described by the Grand Penitentiary, Antonio Maria Cagiano de Azevedo, in a report presented in March 1965 to the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (ASV, Archivio Particolare di Pio IX, Oggetti Vari, n. 1945).
 - 14 Paolo Prodi, *Il sacramento del potere: il giuramento politico nella storia costituzionale dell'Occidente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

also have entailed a legitimization of those ecclesiastic laws, for example the Siccardi Laws, which had been approved by the parliament in Turin in the 1850s; (4) finally, the concern for the reaction of Catholic public opinion abroad, which might have provoked schisms against a Pope perceived as a 'chaplain of the King of Italy', or more simply a decrease in the contributions to Peter's Pence, the main source of Vatican income after the collapse of the Papal States.¹⁵

In 1866, however, some years after the Unification and in the embarrassment of not yet having given the ordinaries any clear decision on the matter (and probably also in the knowledge that the hopes of a restoration were progressively fading), the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs indicated as a norm to the bishops the maximum *ad impendenda mala et ad promovenda bona* (i.e. that at all costs the bad should be impeded and the good promoted), leaving them to evaluate independently on a case-by-case basis how to regulate themselves.¹⁶ However, this instruction, which advised the ordinaries to be prudent, provoked very diverse forms of behaviour: the bishops in the ecclesiastical region of Piedmont, for example, went so far as to impose on the faithful the obligation to participate in all elections, both local and political,¹⁷ triggering a violent opposition in the press, which was forceful enough to make it necessary for the Holy See to issue a clarification.¹⁸ This came in

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- 15 After Pius IX's exile in Gaeta, the collection of Peter's Pence had already assumed an innovative character, not only thanks to the markedly enlarged proportions, given the striking impact on the public of the image of the persecuted Pope, but also thanks to the tendency to create formal organizations expressly dedicated to it. Between 1860 and 1870, the annual contributions increased to the point of making up almost a third of all the revenue of the papal budget. During the pontificate of Leo XIII, the awareness of the economic importance of the offerings moved the Vatican authorities to set up commissions and regulatory mechanisms to administer the donations. See Annibale Zambarbieri, 'La devozione al Papa', in *La Chiesa e la società industriale (1878–1922)*, ed. by Elio Guerriero and Annibale Zambarbieri, 2 vols (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1990), II, pp. 63–76; Silvio Tramontin, 'La raccolta dell'Obolo di san Pietro a Venezia durante il pontificato di Pio IX (1846–1878)', *Pio IX: studi e ricerche sulla vita della Chiesa dal Settecento ad oggi*, 1 (1972), pp. 295–309.
- 16 'It is agreed that, when requested, the bishops, on the occasion of their elections, should recall the duty that awaits the faithful to do everything possible to impede the greatest evil and promote the good' ('Si conviene che, a richiesta, i vescovi, in occasione delle elezioni, ricordino il dovere che corre ai fedeli di fare tutto il possibile per impedire il maggior male e promuovere il bene'); AAEESS, *Rapporti dalle Sessioni*, 1866–67, vol. 23, fasc. 6, sessione 386, f. 364, final resolution of the Congregation on 27 November 1866.
- 17 In November 1867, the Piedmont bishops 'were unanimous in declaring that it would be very useful to take part in all elections, whether municipal, provincial or political, to encourage good people to make use of their electoral right and to do everything possible so that they could elect people worthy of the mandate entrusted to them' ('furono unanimi nel decidere che sia cosa convenientissima di prender parte a tutte le elezioni sia comunali, sia provinciali, sia politiche, di eccitare i buoni a far uso del diritto elettorale e di fare quanto si può perché riescano elette persone degne del mandato che loro si affida'); see the minutes of the plenary assembly reported in Mellano, *Cattolici e voto politico*, p. 21.
- 18 At the centre of the controversy was *L'Unità Cattolica*, the newspaper founded by Margotti after he was removed from *L'Armonia* precisely because of his abstentionist positions. On this, see Maurizio Tagliaferri, *L'Unità Cattolica: studio di una mentalità* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993). The debate led the Pope to discover and publicly declare, in the pages of the *Giornale di Roma* on 21 January 1868, that 'nothing had changed, that the Holy See still stood firm in the principles already

the form of the first papal *non expedit*, which bore the date of 1868, seven years after the proclamation of the Unification of Italy. This pronouncement, provoked by the controversy in the press and the fear of a split in the Catholic camp (fears that would arise again several times during the following years, influencing the decisions of the Roman Curia), was however equivalent to a consideration of appropriateness limited to the 'present circumstances', maintaining the need to remain in a state of protest against the loss of temporal power.¹⁹

The annexation of the papal city and the transfer of the capital from Florence to Rome did not substantially change the Holy See's attitude towards the *non expedit* (apart from causing the resignation of Vito D'Ondes Reggio and Cesare Cantù, who until then had defended the Catholic cause from their parliamentary seats with the personal, secret approval of Pius IX),²⁰ while it reinforced the abstentionist propaganda that succeeded in making the boycott of the elections the banner that distinguished militant, intransigent Catholicism.²¹ Indeed, after Rome was taken, many Catholics extended the application of *non expedit* to local elections. This interpretation was never encouraged by the Pope, who in 1872 firmly reiterated the difference that permitted, indeed impelled, Catholics to take part in local administrations, precisely because the municipal and provincial councillors were not required to swear the oath of loyalty that would entail recognition of the sovereignty of the King of Italy and the laws of the Kingdom.²²

manifested and that anyone who thought and wrote differently was deceiving himself' ('nulla erasi cambiato, che la S. Sede stava sempre ferma nei principii già manifestati e che s'ingannava chiunque pensasse e scrivesse diversamente'); see the reconstruction of the journalistic debate provided by 'Cronaca contemporanea', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 19, 3 (1868), pp. 361–62.

- 19 'Wanting then to apply the general principle to the particular case, and considering everything that is currently being sanctioned in Italy to the detriment of the Church, which would be morally impossible with the participation in the elections to procure a remedy and remove the serious evils that afflict society and the Church, having finally taken into account the complexity of the present circumstances, they agreed that they had to respond *non expedit*' ('Volendo poi applicare il principio generale al caso particolare, e considerando tutto ciò che presentemente si sta consumando in Italia a danno della Chiesa, che sarebbe moralmente impossibile col concorso alle elezioni procurare un rimedio e rimuovere i gravissimi mali ond'è afflitta la società e la Chiesa, avuto in fine riguardo al complesso delle presenti circostanze, giudicarono concordemente doversi rispondere *non expedit*'); AAEESS, Rapporti dalle Sessioni, 1868, vol. 27, fasc. 8, sessione 388, f. 502, final resolution of the Congregation on 30 January 1868.
- 20 Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Non expedit*, p. 24. On the assent of Pius IX to the presence of Cantù and D'Ondes Reggio in parliament, see Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, pp. 112–13.
- 21 After the seizure of Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica* thus declared: 'We attributed this increase in abstentions to an increase in faith [...]. We know that there are Catholics who deplore this action of the mass of their brethren. But we also know that the sovereign pontiff never deplored it' ('noi ascriviamo quest'aumento nelle astensioni ad un aumento nella fede [...]. Sappiamo che v'ha cattolici, i quali deplorano questo procedimento della massa dei loro confratelli. Ma sappiamo altresì che il sovrano pontefice non lo ha mai deplorato'); De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico*, I, pp. 98 ff.
- 22 Pius IX declared to the Roman parish priests on 2 July 1872: 'One of the means to prevent the progress of impiety and the perversion of youth could also be to compete in local and municipal elections, which do not entail any real obligation to take the oaths prohibited by the conscience of Catholics' ('uno dei mezzi onde impedire i progressi dell'empietà ed il pervertimento della gioventù, potrebbe anche essere il

If in 1868 the *non expedit* had been established as a temporary measure in anticipation of eventual developments and solutions to the Roman Question, in 1876, fifteen years after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, the Holy See found itself noting the need for a change in strategy. The fall of the Historical Right did not bring about, in reality, that civil revolution or the subversion of the monarchic system, which had always been associated with a possible seizure of power by the left. If Catholics had abstained from the polls mainly to accelerate the alleged disintegrative process of the state in the hope that the rise to power of the left would lead to a republican revolution, and hence to an international war of restoration, the peaceful establishment of the Depretis government matured in the pontiff and the cardinals a more certain awareness of the irreversibility of the loss of temporal power and the ineffectiveness of the Catholic boycott, which in the long run was proving counterproductive. It was for this reason that a decisive turning point was reached on the issue of the *non expedit*, which this time was handed over to the Holy Office and no longer to Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. At the end of November 1876, just a few days after the death of Secretary of State, Giacomo Antonelli:

All the Eminences have generally agreed to the *licere*, and that, considering the condition to which the public situation has been reduced, particularly for everything that concerns religion and the rights of the Church, it is not only a *right* but the *religious duty* of Catholics to take part in political elections.²³

It is interesting to emphasize, precisely in relation to the developments that would later take place in 1919, that at that time the cardinals of the Holy Office did not foresee the formation of a party, being perfectly aware of the impossibility of such a project given the great divergence of political opinions within the Catholic ranks. They imagined, therefore, that Catholic representatives ‘will be neither right nor left, but free in questionable matters of political interest; they will always be united in one body when it is a matter of the defence of the sacred principles of religion and justice,’²⁴ that is to say, only on the occasion of a vote on ecclesiastic laws or

concorrere alle elezioni amministrative e municipali, che non traggono seco verun obbligo di giuramenti vietati alla coscienza dei cattolici’); ‘Cronaca contemporanea’, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 23, 4 (1872),

p. 233. Moreover, in 1871, in the very city of the Pope, the birth of the Unione romana per le elezioni amministrative (Roman Union for Local Elections) was possible, aimed at bringing Catholic votes to bear on the Campidoglio. On the Unione romana, see Andrea Ciampani, *Cattolici e liberali durante la trasformazione dei partiti: la ‘questione di Roma’ tra politica nazionale e progetti vaticani (1876–1883)* (Rome: Archivio Guido IZZI, 2000), pp. 111 ff. and Filippo Mazzonis, ‘L’Unione romana e la partecipazione dei cattolici alle elezioni amministrative in Roma (1870–1881)’, *Storia e politica*, 9 (1970), pp. 216–58.

- 23 ‘Tutti gli Em.mi sono convenuti in massima del *licere*; e che alla condizione a cui è ridotta la cosa pubblica segnatamente per tutto quello che si riferisca alla religione ed ai diritti della chiesa, non solo è un *diritto* ma è un *dovere rigoroso* dei cattolici di prender parte alle elezioni politiche’; AAEESS, I periodo, Italia, pos. 227, fasc 48, ff. 22–23, minutes of 30 November 1876.
- 24 ‘Non saranno né destri né sinistri, ma liberi nelle questioni opinabili di particolari interessi, saranno sempre uniti in uno sol corpo, dove si tratta della difesa dei sacri principii della religione e della giustizia’; AAEESS, I periodo, Italia, pos. 227, fasc 48, f. 21, ‘Manifesto pel giuramento dei deputati cattolici’ (draft attached to the penenza of the Holy Office of November 1876).

on the Roman Question, while for the rest they could freely align themselves with the different ranks. However, this turning point in favour of electoral participation, which in the early stages was prepared by asking journalists 'not to deal further with the principle upheld until now of neither elected nor electors and let it slowly fall by the wayside',²⁵ was blocked by Pius IX who, evidently of the opposite opinion, after having apparently approved this resolution, a few months later, in January 1877, signed the famous brief to Count Giovanni Acquaderni that historians have recorded as an end to the subject that had never been so clear before then.²⁶

This was the situation that Leo XIII found himself having to contradict as soon as he became pope. In 1879, in the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, the examination of the lawfulness of a possible participation of Italian Catholics in political elections began.²⁷ The debate ended only three years later, in 1882, due to the contemporary plans of the government for the extension of electoral suffrage which, extended to the male population with a minimum degree of literacy, would triple the number of those eligible to vote and would give access to the polls to social classes more directly subject to the influence of the socialist movement. The cardinals preferred, therefore, to wait for the definitive developments of the reform before assuming a standpoint.²⁸ In the meantime, twenty-two bishops in the peninsula were consulted, and they were all favourable to permitting Catholics to vote. In particular, the Patriarch of Venice, Domenico Agostini, emphasized that, with the new suffrage, 'the Church has not changed, social conditions and circumstances have changed,

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- 25 'Non si occupassero con calore ulteriormente del principio fin qui sostenuto né eletti né elettori e lo lasciassero cadere appoco appoco'; AAEESS, I periodo, Italia, pos. 227, fasc 48, f. 23, minutes of 30 November 1876.
- 26 The text of the message was published in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 9 (1876), pp. 581–83. The Pope blamed this reversal on his own Secretary of Briefs who had composed the text, which he signed without reading it. However, Pius IX's wish, by now at the end of his pontificate, to change nothing in order to leave the matter to his successor, is evident. The background to this story was recounted by Lorenzo Nina at the meeting of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs on 21 February 1881; AAEESS, II periodo, Stati ecclesiastici, pos. 1030, fasc. 329, f. 20.
- 27 The letter of the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Włodzimierz Czacki, to the consultors Camillo Guardi and Placido Schiaffino is dated 17 January 1879. By order of the Pope, he instructed them to prepare positions on the question of political elections that would be submitted in the following months to the examination of the cardinal members of the dicastery; AAEESS, II periodo, Italia, pos. 335, fasc. 102, ff. 111–12.
- 28 For some time, Depretis had promised a revision of the electoral law, which was then implemented with the 1882 reform. It was based more on the level of literacy than on the census and extended the vote to 7 per cent of the population. This threshold was still far from the universal male suffrage implemented in France as early as 1848, but it almost tripled the active electorate foreseen by the previous system, which was the one used in the Kingdom of Sardinia. While waiting for the electoral reform, the plans to abandon specific criteria based on the census or on categories made it easy to predict that this would certainly have entailed access to the vote even for sections of the population previously excluded because they were less well-off. These were especially workers, sympathetic to the demands of the socialist movement that in those years was being organized in increasingly structured forms. See Giovanni Sabbatucci, *Le riforme elettorali in Italia (1848–1994)* (Milan: Unicopli, 1995); Maria Serena Piretti, *Le elezioni politiche in Italia dal 1848 ad oggi* (Rome: Laterza, 1995).

and the Holy Church finds appropriate today what it did not consider appropriate yesterday.²⁹ These were the premises for the change in course and the beginning of the strategy that historians have called ‘preparation in abstention.’³⁰ While, on the one hand, Catholic journalists were invited, as they already had been in 1876, to present access to the polls as lawful in the near future, on the other hand, the faithful were encouraged to register to vote in order to be readier for an immediate withdrawal of the *non expedit*, with a manoeuvre that remained easily justifiable even with the need to allow the burden of Catholic abstentionism to emerge quantitatively. For its part, the Penitentiary, as in 1866, began to respond in writing to bishops *pro nunc non expedit*, while orally inviting them to handle the requests on a case-by-case basis, especially where there was a need to oppose a particularly disliked or totally anti-clerical candidate.³¹

Leo XIII’s intention was that the *non expedit* should be abolished in order to permit the birth of a large Catholic political party, along the lines of the German Zentrum, which in his opinion would truly be ‘the only means that Providence has left to the Holy See at this point in time for a civil life to be restored to the Church, for social respect, not the illusory protection of the laws of the country, to be restored, in the midst of the nation such as it is.’³² This would be a party that would make not only a temporary alliance but its own neutrality pay dearly, every single time; it would, therefore, serve to prevent Catholics who were elected from being individually incorporated into the liberal ranks.³³ If, in the end, these plans did not come to fruition, it was due to the abrupt, intransigent change in Leo XIII’s policy over the two-year period 1887–88, which continued until the end of his pontificate. The rise of Mariano Rampolla to Secretary of State,³⁴ the exacerbation of Francesco

29 ‘Non muta la Chiesa, mutano le condizioni sociali e le circostanze, e la S. Chiesa trova opportuno oggi quello che ieri non giudicava tale’; AAEESS, Rapporti dalle Sessioni, 1882, vol. 15, fasc. 6, sessione 556, D. Agostini to Leo XIII, 8 April 1882 (attached as summary 3/A to the ponenza of 1882). The originals of the letters of bishops to the Pope sent on the occasion of this consultation can be found in AAEESS, II periodo, Italia, pos. 335, fasc. 110–11.

30 Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, p. 183. The formula was also used, and thus ratified, many times by *L’Osservatore Romano* (26 May, 2 and 11 June 1880).

31 This is the reconstruction furnished by the Apostolic Penitentiary in a document dated 27 February 1889, published in Tamburini, ‘*Il non expedit*’, p. 140. See also the testimony of bishops Giovanni Battista Scalabrini and Geremia Bonomelli in *Carteggio Scalabrini Bonomelli (1868–1905)*, ed. by Carlo Marcora (Rome: Studium, 1983), pp. 70–75.

32 ‘Il mezzo unico lasciato dalla Provvidenza in questo periodo di tempo alla S. Sede perché fosse ridonata alla Chiesa la vita civile in mezzo alla nazione come tale, le fosse restituito il rispetto sociale e la protezione non illusoria delle leggi del paese’; ponenza of 1879 in AAEESS, II periodo, Italia, pos. 335, fasc. 103.

33 Eduardo Soderini, *Il pontificato di Leone XIII*, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1932–33), II (1932), p. 20.

34 Guido Aureli and Crispolto Crispolti, *La politica di Leone XIII da Luigi Galimberti a Mariano Rampolla, su documenti inediti* (Rome: Bontempelli e Invernizzi, 1912); Jean-Marc Ticchi, ‘“Avec lui il n’y en a que pour la France!”: remarques sur la contribution du cardinal Rampolla à la politique de Leon XIII’, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée*, 116, 1 (2004), pp. 199–241.

Crispi's anti-clericalism, the disappointing conciliation attempt of 1887³⁵ and finally the new international equilibrium manifested in the renewal of the Triple Alliance (also signed by the highly Catholic Austria and understood as a defensive pact that simultaneously recognized the territorial integrity of Italy)³⁶ all occasioned a profound change in the elderly Pope, similar to that produced in Pius IX after his exile in Gaeta.³⁷

In the meantime, the systematic dispensations granted orally by the Penitentiary did not remain secret for long and, as in 1868, were immediately opposed by the intransigent press, requiring a new explicit clarification from the Holy See, which took the form of the famous note of the Holy Office of 1886, reaffirming the presence of a prohibition in the *non expedit* formula.³⁸ This official step backwards, which was to relieve the Holy See of the embarrassment of having in fact renounced the *non expedit*, did not in any case indicate a definitive closure and was limited to a declaration of principle, which did not sanction a problem of illegality but only of opportunity.³⁹ As before, the Penitentiary continued to respond to the bishops, *tolerari posse*.⁴⁰

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- 35 Virgilio Procacci, *La questione romana: le vicende del tentativo di conciliazione del 1887* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1929); Antonio Quacquarelli, *Il padre Tosti nella politica del Risorgimento* (Genoa: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1945); Fausto Fonzi, 'Documenti sul conciliatorismo e sulle trattative segrete fra governi italiani e S. Sede dal 1886 al 1897', in *Chiesa e Stato nell'Ottocento: miscellanea in onore di Pietro Pirri*, ed. by Roger Aubert, Alberto Maria Ghisalberti and Ettore Passerin d'Entrèves, 2 vols (Padua: Antenore, 1962), I, pp. 167–242.
- 36 Luciano Trincia, *Il nucleo tedesco: Vaticano e Triplice Alleanza nei dispacci del nunzio a Vienna Luigi Galimberti (1887–1892)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001).
- 37 Soderini, *Il pontificato*, II, pp. 398–402; David I. Kertzer, *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Pope's Secret Plot to Capture Rome from the New Italian State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004).
- 38 'In order to remove any doubt, the Holy Father, having heard the opinion of my colleagues, their Eminences the general cardinal inquisitors, has ordered that it be declared that the *non expedit* contains a prohibition' ('A togliere ogni equivoco il S. Padre, udito il parere di questi Em.mi signori Cardinali inquisitori generali miei colleghi, ha ordinato che si dichiari il *non expedit* contenere un divieto'); circular of the Holy Office to the Bishops of Italy, 30 July 1886, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 19 (1886), pp. 94–95, draft and Italian translation in AAEESS, II periodo, Italia pos. 384, fasc. 126, f. 23.
- 39 Later, *La Civiltà Cattolica* would clarify that 'the Pope did not intend and could not affirm about this [political] participation nothing but the illegality that is proper to things prohibited only because, in certain circumstances, the Pope believes them to be [...] not expedient to the good of the Church' ('non intese e non poté affermare di tale concorso se non quella illiceità che è propria delle cose proibite soltanto perché, in determinate circostanze, il Papa le crede [...] non espedienti al bene della Chiesa'); see [Salvatore Brandi and Angelo De Santi,] 'I cattolici italiani e le elezioni politiche', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 55, 4 (1904), pp. 549–50.
- 40 If the elections of 1880 had already seen a considerable participation of Catholics as electors and as those elected, in 1900 the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs noted impotently how in the elections of that year even priests had gone to the polls and how a parish priest was even seen to take up the post of chair of the polling station; AAEESS, Rapporti dalle Sessioni, anno 1900, sessione 886. The political climate had also changed, with Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti dampening the tone of anti-clericalism, initiating the attitude that Jemolo called 'conciliation in indifference' ('conciliazione nell'indifferenza') and aiming to involve Catholics progressively in the fight against the socialist threat; Jemolo, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia*, pp. 366 ff.

3. From Relaxation to Oblivion: The Pontificates of Pius X and Benedict XV

The pontificate of Pius X had been underway for a year when the first general strike in Italy, proclaimed in September 1904, profoundly shook public opinion. In the hope that Catholics would not remain indifferent to the danger of a revolution, Giolitti dissolved the parliament and called for new elections, counting on forming a 'partito dell'ordine' ('party of order') to weaken socialist opposition.⁴¹ At the insistence of the Catholics from Bergamo and the Bishop of Cremona, Geremia Bonomelli, Pius X gave private permission to go to the polls: 'Do as your conscience tells you,' he had been forced to say in an audience.⁴² Three 'representatives who were Catholic,' not 'Catholic representatives,' were elected, mainly from the Bergamo area, but from this moment on a new period began, which saw Catholics and governments side by side in the struggle to maintain public order.⁴³

The elections of 1904 and 1909,⁴⁴ therefore, constituted the general test of the politics of clerical moderatism, publicly sanctioned the following year by *Il fermo proposito* ('society [...] must be preserved at all costs,' was the explanation adopted by the encyclical to justify the weakening of the *non expedit*)⁴⁵ and by the birth of the Electoral Union, which arose from the dissolution of the Opera dei congressi.⁴⁶ However, Pius X, while permitting a substantial, public omission of the *non expedit*, avoided an official abolition of the ban throughout his pontificate, which inevitably would open the way to the formation of an autonomous party of Catholics, as he was convinced, contrary to the position of Leo XIII, that this would ultimately bring the Roman Question to a standstill. It was preferable, on the contrary, while

41 Giuliano Procacci, *La lotta di classe in Italia agli inizi del secolo XX* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992).

42 'The Pope, who had followed the speech with his elbow on the table and his head resting on the palm of his hand, remained a few moments in silence and then, raising his eyes to heaven, in a slow, serious tone, exclaimed: "Do as your conscience tells you". "Have we understood well, Holiness? We can interpret that as a yes?" "Do as your conscience tells you. I repeat". "Thank you, thank you, Your Holiness"' ('Il papa, che aveva seguito il discorso, col gomito sul tavolo e la testa appoggiata al palmo della mano, rimase alcun poco in raccolto silenzio e poi — alzando gli occhi al cielo — con lenta e grave parola esclamò: "Fate quello che vi detta la vostra coscienza". "Abbiamo ben compreso, Santità? Possiamo interpretare che è un sì?" "Fate quello che vi detta la vostra coscienza. Ripeto". "Grazie, grazie Santità"'); audience of Paul X with Paolo Bonomi and Pietro Cavalli, reported in Gianforte Suardi, 'Quando e come i cattolici poterono partecipare alle elezioni politiche,' *Nuova Antologia*, 1 November 1927, pp. 118–23 (p. 118). See also Gabriele De Rosa, *Storia politica dell'Azione cattolica in Italia*, 2 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1953–54), I (1953), pp. 295–96.

43 Alberto Agazzi, 'I cattolici bergamaschi e l'attenuazione del *non expedit*: contributo alla storia del decennio 1904–1913,' *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 58 (1971), pp. 53–77.

44 In the elections of 1904, Catholics had 8000 votes, i.e., 0.5 per cent of the 1,593,886 votes, passing in 1909 to 4 per cent of the votes (73,000) and from three to sixteen representatives. See Giovanni Schepis, *Le consultazioni popolari in Italia dal 1848 al 1957* (Empoli: Caparrini, 1958).

45 Pius X, *Il fermo proposito*, *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 37 (1904–05), pp. 741–67 (§ 18) <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11061905_il-fermo-proposito.html> [accessed 10 January 2019].

46 Gambasin, *Il movimento*, pp. 544 ff.

maintaining a formal opposition to the state of affairs, to negotiate the Catholic vote with the promise of supporting some programmatic points that were dear to the Holy See.⁴⁷

These were the foundations of the Gentiloni Pact of 1913, an experience that was later condemned by Sturzo's People's Party. It was motivated by the concrete fear of a victory of the socialists following the entry into force, in June 1912, of the new electoral law that sanctioned universal male suffrage for citizens over thirty years of age, tripling the number of those able to vote, bringing it to 24 per cent of the population.⁴⁸ The pact was conceived in secret, but, in an interview released after the elections, the president of the Electoral Union, Vincenzo Ottorino Gentiloni, revealed how a full 228 representatives had entered parliament, agreeing to the pact on seven points that guaranteed the support of the Catholic electorate.⁴⁹ The revelation sparked controversy and recriminations from the different sides but also the rebellion of many Catholics, given that only 29 of those elected were declaredly of the Catholic faith.⁵⁰

The pact was the pinnacle but also the demonstration of the inadequacy of the politics of clerical moderatism experienced during the pontificate of Pius X. With only a partial removal of the *non expedit*, what Leo XIII had strenuously opposed indeed came to pass, that is, an accommodation of Catholics 'on the right' of the political spectrum in support of the governing powers. The youth of Romolo Murri's Christian democrats also had attributed the *non expedit* with the merit of having protected Italian Catholics from being contaminated by the conservative cause.⁵¹

Once elected to the papacy with the name of Benedict XV, Giacomo Della Chiesa, who, among other things, in 1887, as collaborator of Rampolla in the Congregation

47 The attitude of Catholics during the local elections was exemplary in this regard, with the withdrawal of their candidate when opposition to a socialist was not indispensable, for example, in the case of a ballot that had seen the prevalence of liberals and Catholics with the defeat of the left-wing candidate; Agazzi, 'I cattolici bergamaschi', pp. 62 ff.

48 Those able to vote were thus 8.6 million. After the end of the Libyan campaign, Giolitti in fact declared: 'We cannot send people to get themselves killed and then deny them the vote, saying that they are not worthy' ('non si può mandare la gente a farsi ammazzare e poi negarle il voto dicendo che non è all'altezza'); Agazzi, 'I cattolici bergamaschi', pp. 71–72. In 1918 the age limit was lowered to 21 years of age.

49 The interview appeared in the *Giornale d'Italia* on 8 November 1913. The shocking number was also confirmed the following day by *L'Osservatore Romano*. See also Maria Serena Piretti, 'Il Tevere più stretto: la relazione del Conte Gentiloni a Pio X sulle elezioni del 1913', *Contemporanea*, 2, 1 (1999), pp. 65–78.

50 On the positions taken by Catholics elected to parliament before and after the Gentiloni Pact, see Guido Formigoni, *I cattolici-deputati (1904–1918): tradizione e riforme* (Rome: Studium, 1988).

51 'Thanks to the abstention we have avoided compromising ourselves by an irremediable present in order to preserve ourselves for a future that cannot be taken away from us' ('Mediante l'astensione noi abbiamo evitato di comprometterci in un presente insanabile per riserbarci intieri ad un avvenire che nulla può toglierci'), thus Romolo Murri, 'Propositi di parte cattolica', *Cultura Sociale*, 16 May 1899, reported in *Dal neoguelfismo alla democrazia cristiana: antologia di documenti*, ed. by Pietro Scoppola (Rome: Studium, 1963), p. 113.

for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, was sent to the Italian bishops to consult them on the issue,⁵² was persuaded that the strategy of maintaining restrictions on the Catholic parliamentary delegation and entrusting the task of representing the interests of the Catholic electorate precisely to that liberal class that insisted on not pursuing a conciliation with the Church in Italy had by now turned out to be harmful to the Holy See.

On 8 March 1915, the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, convened by its Secretary Eugenio Pacelli, thus met to discuss in the first place the dissatisfaction that had arisen after the Gentiloni Pact, a dissatisfaction that had already emerged during Benedict's first audience with the leaders of the *Unione popolare* (People's Union).⁵³ From the debate, the cardinals' profound disappointment became evident, both at the results of the operation, with elected candidates who in the end had proved to be unreliable and not very compliant with the criteria laid down in the agreement, and at the harmful image that a merely partial attenuation of the *non expedit* cast on the episcopate, who were involved in questionable choices and methods, denounced above all by Cardinal Domenico Serafini in regard to the local dispensations that had made the persistence or not of the prohibition appear to be a mere political choice:

The dispensations are given in favour of one of the candidates, while the *non expedit* itself is maintained for the competitor. They are therefore personal matters, the *non expedit* removed in favour of an individual becomes an electoral weapon; and all of this mixes ecclesiastical authority with electoral battles.⁵⁴

It was therefore decided to remove the bishops from the political arena, entrusting the evaluation of candidates and the appropriateness of suspending the *non expedit* on a case-by-case basis no longer to the central management of the Electoral Union but to local committees composed of the laity, constituency by constituency. Another sign revealing Benedict XV's confidence in lay responsibility was the fact that the draft circular addressed to the Italian bishops on the subject was submitted for revision — an absolute novelty in the practice of the Holy See — to the leaders of the new Catholic Action, which were at the same time reformulating the statute of the People's Union:⁵⁵ 'There are good Catholics, fond of the Holy See', Cardinal Filippo

52 The summary of the mission written by the prelate is in AAEESS, II periodo, Stati ecclesiastici, pos. 1075, fasc. 346–47.

53 Its president, Giuseppe Dalla Torre, and other leaders were received in audience on 8 September 1914 (Monticone, 'Benedetto XV', p. 20).

54 'La dispensa è data in favore di uno dei candidati, mentre il *non expedit* stesso è mantenuto per il competitor. Sono dunque questioni personali, il *non expedit* tolto in favore di un individuo diviene un'arma elettorale; e tutto ciò mescola l'autorità ecclesiastica nelle lotte elettorali'; AAEESS, Congregazioni particolari, Italia, vol. 70, sessione 1194, minutes of 8 March 1915.

55 With the reform of 25 February 1915, Benedict XV instituted the central committee for Italian Catholic Action, giving the People's Union 'the high task of impressing on Catholic Action a programmatic direction and of turning Catholics and their organizations toward unity of thought and harmony of

Giustini said in one of the sessions; 'Why not trust them and leave the bishops and parish priests out of the electoral battles?':⁵⁶

The developments of the war did not allow for the practical implementation of the decisions taken during that spring of 1915, and the circular to the bishops, even though it was ready, in the end was not sent. In any case, the preparation of this plan marked a decisive change in direction with respect to the past, showing from the beginning of the pontificate a clear desire to accord greater autonomy to the laity. Even the possibility of consenting to the birth of a Catholic party had been raised in consideration of the heated debate among the cardinals, which had brought to light opposing views on the matter. On the one hand, in fact, there was the position of former Secretary of State, Pietro Gasparri, who spoke of having opposed the proposal for the formation of a party presented by some Catholics in the past precisely because they had declared that they would not include the solution to the Roman Question in their programme.⁵⁷ On the other hand, various prelates, such as Cardinal Serafini, believed that the only way not to expose the ecclesiastical authority was to configure the new political entity as openly non-denominational.⁵⁸ The preparatory document of the session had, after all, already expressed the fear that the Pope would be considered 'the head of a political faction who would compete every time in these often fierce electoral battles with the danger that he and his cause would be defeated'.⁵⁹ In this discussion, the arguments undoubtedly echo what would later be used by *La Civiltà Cattolica* in February 1919 to comment, the day after the birth of the People's Party, on Sturzo's non-denominational option:⁶⁰

The new 'People's Party' is not, is not called and cannot be called, in accurate terms, a 'Catholic party'. And this is not only because 'Catholic' means universal,

purpose' ('l'alto compito di imprimere all'Acì un indirizzo programmatico e di volgere ad unità di pensiero e concordia di propositi i cattolici e le loro organizzazioni'); see Silvio Tramontin, 'Unione popolare', in *Dizionario storico*, ed. by Campanini and Traniello, I/2 (1981), pp. 394–95.

- 56 'Vi sono buoni cattolici, affezionati alla S. Sede — aveva detto il card. Filippo Giustini in una delle sessioni — perché non fidarsi di loro e lasciare i vescovi e i parroci al di fuori delle lotte elettorali?'; AAEES, Congregazioni particolari, Italia, vol. 70, sessione 1195, minutes of 5 April 1915.
- 57 AAEES, Congregazioni particolari, Italia, vol. 70, sessione 1194, minutes of 8 March 1915. Gasparri referred to the existence of the proposal without revealing the name of those who put it forward. Given the frequent contacts during those months of the Holy See, and Gasparri in particular, with the heads of the People's Union for restructuring Catholic Action, Monticone in any case assumed that the idea was aired in the course of those meetings; Monticone, 'Benedetto XV', p. 28.
- 58 In this sense, Cardinal Serafini stated, 'It would instead be better in Italy as in other Catholic nations to form a non-denominational political party which would avoid divisions between Catholics and could receive the indications of the bishops without involving them directly in the political electoral contest' ('sarebbe invece meglio in Italia come nelle altre nazioni cattoliche la formazione di un partito politico non confessionale, che eviterebbe divisioni fra i cattolici e potrebbe ricevere le indicazioni dei vescovi senza coinvolgerli direttamente nell'agone politico elettorale'); AAEES, Congregazioni particolari, Italia, vol. 70, sessione 1194, minutes of 8 March 1915.
- 59 'Come capo di una fazione politica, che scenda in lizza a ogni momento per queste battaglie elettorali, sovente accanitissime, col pericolo di uscirne vinti, egli e la sua causa'; AAEES, Congregazioni particolari, Italia, vol. 70, sessione 1194, ponenza of March 1915.
- 60 On the birth of the People's Party, see Francesco Malgeri, 'Partito popolare italiano', in *Cristiani d'Italia: chiese, società, Stato, 1861–2011*, ed. by Alberto Melloni, 2 vols (Rome: Treccani, 2011), I, pp. 1109–22.

international, while the new Italian party is naturally national, but more accurately because, in being national, it can find itself lacking, either by defect or by excess, that is to say not conforming to the same just needs of Italian Catholics, as well as foreigners. By default, let us say, insofar as it avoids — even without an express renunciation — questions for which Catholics, as Catholics, still invoke, and must invoke, the solution. [...] Although the programme affirms the ‘freedom and independence of the Church in the full exercise of its spiritual magisterium’, it forgets to add that which is no less important, nor less necessary than the magisterium, that is to say, the ministry and the empire or jurisdiction [...]. By excess then, because the new party seems to others that it errs its programme, in so far as, on the contrary, it includes other different claims, in the moral, economic and social fields, including those that are strictly political, to which Catholics can more or less reasonably adhere, but to which they are in no way obliged, on the strength of their principles.⁶¹

Retracing, in the documents of the cardinals’ congregations, the evolution of the policy of the Holy See in regard to the question of the *non expedit* has made it possible to bridge the apparently abrupt transition that took place between the politics of clerical moderatism and that rapid precipitation of events that at the end of the war had led, after a very limited consultation of the episcopate,⁶² to the birth of the Italian People’s Party, to the successive and immediate dissolving of the Electoral Union and finally to the announcement of the abandonment of the *non expedit*, an announcement made known — without any official act but through, once again, a

61 ‘Il nuovo “Partito popolare” non è, non si denomina e non si può denominare, con proprietà di termini, “partito cattolico”. E ciò non solo in quanto “cattolico” significa universale, internazionale, laddove il nuovo partito italiano è naturalmente nazionale, ma più veramente perché, in quanto nazionale, può trovarsi pure manchevole, sia per difetto, sia per eccesso, cioè dire non conforme alle stesse giuste esigenze dei cattolici italiani, nonché degli stranieri. Per difetto, diciamo, in quanto prescinde nel suo “programma” — e sia pure senza espressa rinuncia — da questioni di cui i cattolici, in quanto tali, invocano ancora, e debbono invocare, la soluzione. [...] Sebbene si affermi nel programma la “libertà ed indipendenza della Chiesa nella piena esplicazione del suo magistero spirituale”, si dimentica di aggiungervi quello che non è meno importante, né meno necessario del magistero, cioè dire il ministero e l’impero o giurisdizione [...]. Per eccesso poi il nuovo partito può sembrare ad altri che pecchi nel suo programma, in quanto v’inchiude al contrario diverse altre rivendicazioni, nell’ordine morale, economico e sociale ed anche strettamente politico, a cui i cattolici potranno più o meno ragionevolmente aderire, ma non vi sono punto obbligati in forza dei loro principii’; [Enrico Rosa,] ‘A proposito del nuovo Partito popolare italiano’, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 70, 1 (1919), pp. 272–74.

62 In fact, only the bishops of the Veneto region were consulted through a request in a letter from the Patriarch of Venice, Pietro La Fontaine, who on 30 November 1918 had asked in the name of his brother bishops for clear directives in political matters. The opinions received can be found in AAEESS, Italia, 1918–1922, pos. 955, fasc. 345 and 346. See Giovanni Mantese, ‘Una risposta del card. Pietro Gasparri all’episcopato veneto sul ricostituendo movimento cattolico (1918)’, *Bollettino dell’Archivio per la storia del movimento sociale cattolico in Italia*, 15, 2 (1967), pp. 140–51; Antonio Scottà, *La Santa Sede, i vescovi veneti e l’autonomia politica dei cattolici: 1918–1922* (Trieste: Lint, 1994).

private response on the part of the Apostolic Penitentiary⁶³ — five days before the elections of that year, scheduled for 16 November.⁶⁴

Far from being an abrupt shift after the events of the Gentiloni Pact, the abandonment of the *non expedit* therefore appears, in the light of the reconstruction proposed here, the result of the slow degenerative process of a strategy that was already largely disregarded at the local level. Designed with the aim of affecting the political affairs of the new Italian State, in the long run this strategy had turned out to be a golden-gated prison cell. While Benedict alone had the courage in the end to destroy it, his predecessors had already for a long time devised various strategies by which to escape from it.

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- 63 It was first *L'Avvenire d'Italia* that on 8 November 1919 announced the Holy See's renunciation of the instrument of the *non expedit*, with words that repeated almost literally those of the aforementioned resolution of November 1876 of the cardinals of the Holy Office: 'The constitution of the People's Party was a fact that made [the *non expedit*] superfluous [...] now that a political party corresponding to their principles has arisen in Italy and as such is able to be the end of their public activity and the subject of their responsibility [...] the participation of Catholics in the political struggle for the Italian People's Party has become a right and yet a duty for them, and the People's Party asking for a vote for its candidates [...] does not ask for anything that is in contradiction [...] of the supreme authority of the Church' ('la costituzione del Partito popolare è stato un fatto che lo ha reso superfluo [...] ora che è sorto in Italia un partito politico corrispondente ai loro principi e come tale capace di essere il termine della loro pubblica attività e il soggetto della loro responsabilità [...] la partecipazione dei cattolici nella lotta politica a favore del Partito popolare italiano è divenuta un diritto e però un dovere loro; e il Partito popolare domandando il voto per i suoi candidati [...] non chiede nulla che sia in contraddizione [...] verso l'autorità suprema della Chiesa'). To justify this assertion, the paper stated that 'precisely in these days, to the formal question that was posed by an ecclesiastical authority, whether it was licet for Catholics to vote, the same Sacred Penitentiary responded "affirmative" without any limitation or reserve' ('proprio in questi giorni, alla domanda formale che da un'autorità ecclesiastica è stata posta, se sia lecito ai cattolici accedere alle urne politiche, la stessa S. Penitenzieria ha risposto "affirmative" senza alcuna limitazione o riserva'). Three days later, *L'Osservatore Romano* on 11 November 1919 confirmed the news: 'We also confirm the existence of this response' ('anche a noi risulta l'esistenza di questo responso'). See Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Non expedit*, pp. 154–55; Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, pp. 175 ff.
- 64 On 16 November 1919, the first general elections in Italy with universal male suffrage and a proportional system gave the Italian People's Party 20.5 per cent of the votes and 103 representatives, showing that it was an indispensable force in the formation of any government, especially one with the socialists at 32 per cent and 156 seats.

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