

ALBERTO MELLONI

THE PIUS XI EUROPEAN NETWORK

Between the many weakness and the great potential of Europe, historical research as well as contemporary history deserves a special place. Mistreated as a part of “tourism and heritage” programs, the history of the 20th century should have been the real preamble of the EU constitution. The founders and dreamers of the peaceful Europe we now live in (some of us since 1945, some since 1956 or 1968, other since 1999) thought of an open space of freedom and prosperity: what they had in their eyes was not a dispute about roots, rather a vision of the tragedy they left behind.

World War II, the Shoah, and very soon the new nuclear threats constituted real dangers to curb that was plain for all Europeans to see. When the moment came to change the paradigm, from *memoria in re* to *historia rerum gestarum* – this historical fact disappeared.

And the entire constitutional building of the Union was undermined by this hidden pathology; during the crucial passage of the constitutional building it became a more and more visible issue. If I may presume, I would say that this specific unbalanced deficit – the lack of a common idea on one European history – is among the reasons for the constitution’s collapse.

It is true for me, and I guess also for many colleagues here and all over Europe who accepted a cooperative approach in the building of an EU network for the study of the archives, policies, doctrines of Pius XI. A network capable of coordinating scholars, schools, research centers – and also approaches, political visions, differences in method and style around historical research on the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the years of totalitarianism.

When in 2006 the Holy See announced the opening of the Archivio Segreto Vaticano for 1922–1939, historical research involved in this specific field – at the crossroad between church history, political science, international relations, social history, theology, etc. – was actually in poor condition and humiliated by what had happened after the 1980's.

The previous Vatican archive opened to scholars –, i.e., Pius X and Benedict XV – did not attract coordinated research at all. Individuals and institutions did more or less what they wanted to do. Only a few monographs and a few articles may be considered in the higher ranks of historiography. The best edition of sources on the subject was produced by the very Prefect of the Archive, F. Sergio Pagano – which honors his high role not only with an exquisite kindness to all scholars, but also with a personal commitment to the hard work of a critical editor.

In the meantime the years 1939–1945 remained a battlefield for a history affected by the übertribunalisierung explained by Odo Marquard: the origins of totalitarian systems, the explosion of Nazism and anti-Semitism, the War and the Shoah... – all this was a debated issue and the harshest quarrel came on what the Church, and mostly Catholicism, the Vatican, and the Pope did or omitted to do at that time.

Therefore the opening of the years 1922–1939 of the ASV was an opportunity to rescue the bad reputation of the historian in general and the historian of the Roman Catholic Church, in particular.

To study what the Roman Catholic Church has been in those almost twenty years in all its multiple dimensions (Holy See, dioceses, parties, movements, lay people, etc.) was something much more “general” than expected: between 1922 and 1939 Catholicism was much more than a fragment of a large spectrum of actors on the public scene; the study of ecclesiastical archives says more than the study of the military elites, or philosophers or businessmen.

To focus on the Roman Catholic Church means to “dive” into something common and deep inside European society: it means to work on a level where weakness and forces – moral weakness and moral forces – are face to face: it means to touch the competition between totalitarian views, as the tentative title of our network says.

The opening of the ASV was and is a real challenge for EU historians and of EU history, in our view: for many of us who had the chance to come together and cope with research perspectives which are different and not opposed.

My colleagues and friends here in Münster Professor Hubert Wolf, in Rome the Director of the Section in the EFR Jean-Francois Chauvard and his colleague Laura Pettinaroli were the first ones who agreed to talk about a coordinating effort between the national circles that almost spontaneously arose in Germany, France, and even in Italy.

Germany has started a program we today celebrate in such an important lunch honored by the presence of many important guests such as my friend the Ambassador Mordechai Lewy, and by the friendship of President Romano Prodi who deserves our most sincere gratitude for the endorsement he gives our program tonight.

France did co-ordinate three research groups focusing on Action française, missionary strategies, and the functioning of the Roman Curia in which the Ecole has tradition and Continuity.

Italy through fscire, the Bologna Foundation for Religious Studies, tried to create links between scholars with different foci, and all aware that new sources on Church-and-Fascism relations will change our perception of the issue. It is now supported by a National research program group – a PRIN, in the Italian acronymous – among the three Universities of Rome, Verona, and Modena/Reggio Emilia.

Each of us has received different support from the National Government and/or Agencies – and here again the differences which are the substance of Europe become evident and, for an Italian scholar, very sad.

However, we realized that the new sources call for a reconsideration of some common ideas. The confrontation with the different and expanding totalitarianism in the Twenties and the Thirties represented a real challenge for the Papal government that offered a variety of nuances – made of cooperation, competition, affinity, distance, fight. Mostly the very fact of a mass society implied for the Vatican new partners and the reshaping of its views about society, parties, and politics. These aspects, if appropriately studied, may also underline the democratic impulses

which derived from these years by the Christian-Democratic leaders of the post WW2 era, who were urged from these experiences to create the view of a common future for European diversities and pluralism.

These new materials offered to the scholar may be wasted in the false option between apology and polemics: or it could be at the core of a collective effort, carried out by the most important research institutions in Europe, with the best scholars on an international scale through a coordinated effort of active cooperation.

For such a purpose we decided to work on the establishment of an European network for the study of Totalitarian truths between conflict and agreement in the years of Pius XI's rule and the study of political ideology and the Holy See in the archives pertaining to Achille Ratti's papacy may be placed as the mission of this network. The founding institutions I mentioned did agree on five goals:

- 1) to test the network, as we did in Milan, Rome and here;
- 2) to foster the circulation of scholars and their priorities;
- 3) to optimize the definition of research topics;
- 4) to establish a "school" at the 3rd EU academic level and beyond;
- 5) to share a common view on the scientific duties of truth, originality, impartiality and fair behavior toward colleagues, third parts and sources which are required for academic cooperation and archival research.

The willing could come aboard and participate as David Kertzer and Dina Porat did by offering seminars and symposia. The members will also cooperate sending applications to EU agencies as well as to private donors in order to increase the good use of the ASV and any other public or private archive.

The response has been tested in the past year, – since the conference held in Rome in March 2009 and again in March 2010, where the Ecole française gave room to its fellows and to many of us as guest speakers; – then in Milan in June 2009, on Pius XI keywords, whose proceedings are published here in Münster by the Lit Verlag and edited by one of the network scholars, Alberto Guasco, and a researcher of the University of Venice, Raffaella Perin; – now in this conference in Münster, whose program shows the capacity of the Münster dream team to gather ideas, scholars and decision makers – again in October in Providence, Rhode

Island, at Brown University where David Kertzer and Charlie Gallagher are working on the North American Pole of this program – and hopefully at some point next year in Tel Aviv and later (why not) in Vilnius.

By now the centers and people involved into this program, besides all the German Colleagues I have met here and in Munich last June, are represented by their book and their work.

Alcal. de Henares, Feliciano Montero Bologna,
Alberto Guasco, with Lucia Pozzi, Sergio Apruzzese, Mara Dissegna
Brown, David Kertzer
Cambridge, John Pollard
Columbia, Victoria De Grazia
Fiesole, Magali Della Sudda, IUE Fiesole
Firenze, Francesco Margiotta Broglio
Frankfurt, Klaus Arnold
Geneva, Charles Gallagher
Leuven, Lieven Boeve
Lille, Jacques Prévotat
Lvov, Antoine Arjakovsky
Lyon, Jean-Dominique Durand, Claude Prudhomme
Milan, Agostino Giovagnoli and Elisa Giunipero
Modena-Reggio, I myself with Gianni La Bella and Alfonso Botti
Moscow, Eugenia Tohareva
Pernanbuco, Luiz Carlos Marques
Rome 3, Carlo F. Casula, with Liliosa Azzara
Rome, Ecole, Jean-François Chauvard, Laura Pettinaroli
Rome 2, Francesco Piva, with Lucia Ceci and Filippo Frangioni
Rome 1, Emma Fattorini and Giulia D'Alessio
Toronto, Michael Marrus
Trno, Slovakia, Emilia Hrabovec, member of the PCHS
Venezia, Giovanni Vian and Raffella Perin
Verona, Maurizio Pegrari
West Virginia, Gerald Fogarty
West Ontario, Robert Ventresca
Wien, Rupert Klieber

Beyond this list there is the real opportunity of this network: namely dozens and dozens of young scholars in their first stage of academic career, who are bringing new insights in to this field in which also a totalitarian way of making historical research is very visible. Namely the idea that indeed we may work out some millions of documents and papers only to prove that what we were supposed to know was right. A new generation of young historians may work on equal foot with their supposed masters in this network and the benefit will be impressive for both I think.