

La preghiera e la grande guerra. Benedetto XV e la nazionalizzazione del culto in Italia

by M. Paiano, Pacini Editore, Pisa, 2017, 311 pp., €21,00 (soft cover), ISBN: 9788869953057

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social conditions in Italy, it was inflected by global trends. The tactic of the *attentat* emerged simultaneously in different countries, and most of the Italian assassins had experienced exile and migration. Yet the book alludes to this transnational reality somewhat cursorily.

At the same time, the *attentats* drew inspiration from established traditions of democratic violence and tyrannicide, which were an important part of the Risorgimento epic. After unification, this violence was enshrined in mainstream culture and public discourse, which extolled assassins such as Felice Orsini and Agesilao Milano. The first generation of Italian Libertarians were often disappointed Mazzinians, who provided a direct bridge between Risorgimento and Anarchism. The authors contend that the post-Risorgimento cult of martyrdom shaped the Anarchist vision of the *giustiziere*, although the book could have delved more into the cultural history of martyrdom and heroism in the Anarchist movement. In part, the authors claim, this helps explain the difference between Anarchist violence in Italy, where it was envisioned as tyrannicide, and in Spain and France, where it was more indiscriminate and tended to target the entire upper class.

In short, the causes for the *attentat* stem from Italian soil, and not from the head of an exiled Russian firebrand. This is a compelling argument and the authors defend it convincingly. The source base of the book is slightly underwhelming, as it relies heavily on Italian-language secondary literature. The authors, however, use the evidence intelligently, and, while the social perspective of the book could have been complemented by greater attention to intellectual, cultural, and transnational trends, Pernicone and Ottanelli have clearly opened new ground, and their original, commendable book will be a necessary reference for students of *fin de siècle* Anarchism and Italian social history.

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La preghiera e la grande guerra. Benedetto XV e la nazionalizzazione del culto in Italia, by M. Paiano, Pacini Editore, Pisa, 2017, 311 pp., €21,00 (soft cover), ISBN: 9788869953057

Maria Paiano's book has come out in the commemorative period of the Great War (1914–18), defined by Benedict XV as 'the useless massacre'. Although such publications have concerned themselves with the war, their main focus has been on a pope who was forced to face up to the war's consequences as pastor of the universal Church. A brief look at the volume in question may lead us to believe that this book is one of the many historical and literary analyses of themes

that have nothing to do with the concrete problems of those years. But a more careful reading of the central chapters, especially the second and third ones, shows us that this is not so. In fact, the work closely touches on what appears to be a delicate phase in the relationship between patriotic values and faith, and between political and spiritual power. The book is supported by a considerable set of absolutely valid archival and bibliographical material.

Throughout the narrative documentary journey, the author's first step is to highlight the position of Benedict XV, which is in close continuity with his predecessors, but with an undoubted and strong inclination toward a prayer for universal peace, an argument evident in his first Encyclical *Ad beatissimi*. The central points in the first chapter are patriotism and Catholic nationalism. The author focuses on a first fundamental function: to act as a deterrent for Protestant propaganda so that Catholics become 'true interpreters of the national spirit' (p.31), and real soldiers who manage to reconcile military virtues with Christian ones. The true Catholic cannot but love the homeland and God. All this happens through the concrete proposal of specific prayers, the reading of booklets of devotion, and even making the extreme sacrifice for the homeland 'of which the sacrifice of Christ was a model' (p.50). It is in this historical juncture that the theme of prayer is inserted in relation to war. Paiano underlines the necessity of the publications directed towards the soldiers and their almost obsessive insistence on the utility of religion for the army and for the state (p.61).

Although Italy was still in a position of neutrality, the Pope, as Pastor, asked all believers to adhere to his desire for 'impartiality and moderation' so that Catholic worship would not become 'a patriotic exposition' (p.66). The absolutely pacifist orientation of Benedict XV, as already mentioned, is well evidenced by Paiano, especially with regard to the devotion to the Sacred Heart associated with the Marian devotion. The pontiff seeks in every way to 'save' from the nationalist drift that was very strong in Italy, France and Austria. Such deteriorating devotion soon faced severe discomfort. It is interesting to note that there exists a well-documented list of the various 'booklets' of devotions and prayers published in different parts of Italy, filled with religious elements, mixed with patriotism, where the soldier was urged 'to pray and take communion, but making himself available for martyrdom' (p.95). In these booklets, the authors tried to unite disparate elements: civil, military, moral duty, the comfort that only faith could give. All this served to motivate them towards a war that was if not just, then at least acceptable as a defense of the homeland and of Catholic values in a Christian way. Paiano notes in particular the interesting interventions of the Jesuit Oldrà and of 'La Civiltà Cattolica'.

All this could not have pleased Benedict XV. His reference to the first meaning of prayer as peace in those years of destruction is well known. The pontiff had great difficulty with many strongly patriotic and nationalist Italian bishops, who ignored his directives, and did not disdain Eucharistic celebrations and blessings of flags. The Veneto area was certainly one of the most involved regions, perhaps because of its proximity to the battleground. The case of the consecration of the Italian army to the Sacred Heart by Agostino Gemelli, medical officer, and Armida Barelli who was his faithful disciple and secretary is worthy of attention. Paiano is keen to underline the strong patriotic and nationalist element present in the initiative desired by Gemelli.

The latter had already received strong appeals from both the Holy See and the superiors of his Order. But Paiano might have done well to make a distinction with respect to Barelli, although he certainly helped Gemelli in the preparation of everything necessary for the act of consecration which took place on 5 January 1917. Barelli had a passion different from that of Gemelli. In fact, she had genuine feelings of devotion and love for the Sacred Heart, to whom she consecrated her whole life.

In any case, Benedict XV took this opportunity to turn this initiative in favour of the just cause by making devotion 'a tool to build the social kingdom of Christ' with 'behavior conforming to the charity with which the Sacred Heart was in conformity' (p.167). Moreover, as Paiano observes correctly, the Pope knew that the soldiers needed to feel protected and that their faith was often of a superstitious nature. Therefore, this may be linked to the possession of blessed objects which the Pope himself had willingly sent to those who requested them. In any case, the pontiff was firm in his principles to 'reorient' a visible direction of the patriotic mark organized by the Catholic Youth in St. John Lateran just on the eve of the Italian war.

Going back to the volume and above all looking at the final chapter, Paiano's excellent research effort celebrates the figure of Benedict XV and his commitment to keep Catholics united in the ideal of peace more than war, even though these attempts were often rejected by his own bishops or zealous patriotic priests. The defeat at Caporetto did the rest. Even if the Pope conceded that the *Te Deum* should be celebrated for victory, the prayer for universal peace remained his fundamental intent. It seems to me that in the end, the figure of Benedict XV that emerges is the most important content of this beautiful work by Paiano.

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Huellas y recorridos de una utopía. La emigración italiana en la Argentina, by Fernanda Elisa Bravo Herrera, Buenos Aires, Editorial Teseo, 2015, 371 pp., \$33.00 (soft cover), ISBN: 9789877230048

The objective of our book review is to bring to the readers' attention a largely unexplored area of research that may offer new insights to scholars and students of modern Italian Studies, both in the United States and Italy. Although many scholars have examined in depth the representation of Italian emigration to the United States in literature, cinema and television, there is still much to be discovered concerning the Italian presence in the region of Rio de la Plata and the traces that it left in the collective imagination of both Argentina and Italy. Between 1871 and 1910 about 3.4 million individuals migrated to Argentina, 55 per cent of those being from Italy. Several notable