

Pollard, John, *Catholicism in Modern Italy (Religion, Society and Politics since 1861)*. London-New York, Routledge, 2008, 256 pp.

Por Jan Nelis.
(Universidad de Gante, Bélgica)

With his new book, John Pollard has delivered the first comprehensive English-language study on Catholicism and Catholics in Italy from the period leading up to national unification (*Risorgimento*) until the present day. Indeed much has been written on the subject, but mostly by a variety of Italian speaking scholars. As such John Pollard's effort is very much appreciated, not only as a basic and fundamental contribution to academic scholarship on the subject, but also for a public less familiar with the particular subject matter of religion in Italian society. Part of the Routledge series on *Christianity and Society in the Modern World*, the new volume *Catholicism in Modern Italy (Religion, Society and Politics since 1861)* adopts a clear chronological focus. The book's accessibility and comprehensiveness highly benefit from this, as the complexity and specificity of Italian society, religion and politics all too often present themselves as a barrier to those with an interest in Italian history, whether they be students or scholars in a somewhat advanced stage of their careers.

The first chapter incisively analyses the problems with which Italian Catholics were confronted during what Pollard terms the 'liberal revolution', i.e. the period from 1815 until 1870, when national unification was finally completed, 9 years after the Italian nation was officially born, however still without Rome as capital. The chapter clearly sets out the lines along which the tense relationship between nation and State would be determined in the young Italian State, only to be resolved in 1929, the year of the *Conciliazione*, a pact which comprised not only the Lateran Treaty (essentially a politico-territorial deal between two nations), but also a 'Concordat' which specified the civil rights and duties of both parties. The reader gets a clear view of the meaning of Catholic religion to Italians' everyday lives, as Pollard consequently adopts a double focus, switching between the *macro-* and *microstoria* of *il cattolicesimo italiano*.

The second chapter, entitled *The Catholic Recovery*, shows how Catholics and Catholicism slowly but steadily gained ground after 1870, the

year of what was arguably the greatest crisis the Church had to endure in the nineteenth century. However, this was not a steady, unilateral process, as different popes and other ecclesiastical personalities all had their ideas, and influence. This analysis is continued in the next chapter, which adds a very important aspect to the discussion, i.e. the enormous impact of economic development on Italy, which near the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed the phenomenon of overseas migration – development was arguably stronger and earlier abroad than in Italy-, as well as the birth of a working class which developed its own set of values and demands. Consequently, the social question became paramount to Italian Catholic politics, and it would remain so until long after the Second World War. Most importantly, Catholics' responses to socialism and fascism would co-determine much of the Italian political and societal field in the first half of the twentieth century, and would continue to do so for many years after the fall of fascism, when the so-called *democrazia cristiana* tightened its grip on Italian society.

However, this is not until after Italy had seen a disastrous war, followed by the rise to power of fascism (chapters 5-6). It is against this background that Italian Catholicism not only obtained political satisfaction, i.e. through the mentioned *Conciliazione*, but also through Pope Pius XI's insistence on the development of various forms of Catholic associationalism.

All these aspects are expertly treated by John Pollard, and put in a historical perspective which consequently allows for an in-depth analysis of Italian post-war Catholicism (chapters 7-9). Of these last three chapters, the first one illustrates Pius XII's interest and intervention in politics and power; the chapter is aptly entitled *The age of Catholic 'triumphalism'*. Indeed this period signifies the high point of the Vatican's grip on Italian society, a grip which only weakened – even if only to a lesser extent on a political level- after the passing of Pius XII, in a period of economic development and increasing secularisation and modernization (chapter 8).

The final chapter adds some reflections on the last 30 years, which are termed an age of 'religious pluralism'. Even so, as Pollard clearly points out, Catholicism continues to be a cornerstone of Italian society and culture. Indeed, it could be argued that "the Church's

influence is still the 'default' characteristic of the nature of Italian society and politics today. Despite a long secular, even anti-clerical tradition in Italy, as Ezio Mauro has described it,

there is the lack of a 'laic culture, conscious and confident of itself and its values, and capable of giving substance to them in politics and legislation'." (p. 175)