

Le pontificat romain dans l'époque contemporaine The Papacy in the Contemporary Age

sous la direction de | edited by Giovanni Vian

Documents from the Vatican Secret Archives Concerning the Pontificate of Benedict XV The *Positiones* of the Consistorial Congregation

Alejandro M. Dieguez

(Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Città del Vaticano, Italia)

Abstract This brief overview sheds light on certain aspects of Benedict XV's pontificate: the conditions of dioceses and the bishops' pastoral governance; the monitoring of religious practices and the particular needs of specific regions and nations; and the supervision of disciplinary matters regarding preaching and the clergy's participation in politics or social life (i.e. dancing parties or membership at associations such as the Knights of Columbus). Through a review of primary sources, this contribution demonstrates a growing attention toward the non-European world manifested by the Church's concern for emigrants as well as through an interest in Protestant proselytism. Furthermore, specific records indicate a gradual process of modernization taking place within the Church: for example, the projection of films in churches or the clergy's use of modern means of transportation.

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Keywords Church and Modernity. Benedict XV. Roman Curia. Consistorial Congregation. Vatican Archives.

Some time ago the Vatican Archives celebrated the fourth centenary of their foundation by Pope Paul V (1612-2012). However, they are far from being an unalterable institution, solidly rooted in a remote period of history. The periodic insertion into the archives of new records helps to renew and expand its documentary heritage, opening up the way to new possibilities of research.

For example, through the deposition of documents made by the Congregation for Bishops on 14 and 15 November 2011, the Vatican Archives have

acquired more than a thousand *Positiones* (each *Positio* is a file containing all the documents dealing with a particular topic) of the Consistorial Congregation, from the time of its reform in 1908 until the end of 1921, that is for the pontificates of Pius X and of Benedict XV.¹

It is sufficient for us to have even a vague awareness of the competencies of this dicastery and of the widely-ranging activities undertaken by Cardinal Gaetano De Lai, whose idea it was to set up this Congregation and who was its first secretary over a long period of twenty years (1908-1928),² to be able to recognise the potential for research which is to be found in this deposit, which preserves records ranging from the constitution of new ecclesiastical districts to those concerned with the appointment of bishops and with the pastoral direction they were to exercise.

The purpose of this paper is to offer some general remarks on certain key matters, following the re-ordering recently given to the whole of this deposit, in order to bring out what specific questions attracted the attention of this dicastery at the local, regional and national levels during the pontificate of Benedict XV (born Giacomo della Chiesa, 3 September 1914-22 January 1922).

1 Introductory Remarks

1.1 The Activities of the Consistorial Congregation According to the Areas of Its Competence

Among the tasks that the apostolic constitution *Sapienti consilio* had entrusted to the Consistorial Congregation, the main one was most certainly that of choosing bishops and of exercising vigilance over their government

1 These notes do not focus on another of the deposits of the Consistorial Congregation, namely that of the *Ponenze* (the summaries of the *Positiones* provided for each of the cardinals gathered in plenary session), stored in the Vatican Archives since 1969 but only recently made available to researchers under the index number 1277, because that summarized information needs to be integrated with that of the relative *positio*, which is the object of this review. However, the collection of the *Ponenze*, available for the period 1909-1938, although not always complete, can offer researchers a general overview both of the major issues addressed by the cardinals of the Consistorial and of those particular problems which arose during the different pontificates which were considered to warrant special attention.

2 At the time of Pius X, Cardinal De Lai was considered “the strong man, the key personality of the pontificate” and “a dignitary who was both powerful and feared”. In spite of this, according to Rocco Cerrato, his influence would be diminished “drastically” during the pontificates which followed and his activity would be reduced “to functions of a merely representative nature”. Such statements need to be evaluated in the light of the new archival sources to which access has become available in recent years, especially those of the Consistorial Congregation. Cf. Cerrato, “De Lai Gaetano”. See also Azzolin, *Gaetano De Lai*; and Wolf, Schwedt, Lagatz, *Prosopographie*, 419-21.

of the dioceses. From this over-riding concern arises even the nomenclature employed by the dicastery for the classification of its *Positiones* in the archive; the latter were called *Personal* when they concerned investigations about the suitability of candidates for the episcopacy or at least into the conduct of certain ecclesiastics, *Pastoral governance* when they related to the conduct of the bishops and *Special* when they had to do with questions either of a general or of a specific nature, but which involved an entire region or an entire nation as such.

1.2 The Personal Positions and the Scrupulous Search for Suitable Candidates for the Episcopacy

We will focus our attention, then, first of all on the *Personal positions*, where we shall find not only those candidates for the episcopacy who were then in fact chosen, but also those whose candidacy never came to the stage of their being appointed. This part of the archives is a source which is at the same time one of such great value by virtue of the biographical profiles which can be built up from it and also one which is of such a very sensitive nature by reason of the various pieces of information which were reported, that the law on ecclesiastical archives has chosen to keep it secret from 1922 onwards.³

Among the *Positiones* on those priests who were then chosen for the episcopacy, we can point to those on Angelo Roncalli (*Bergamo*, prot. 876/16), Alfred Baudrillart (*Paris*, prot. 356/17), Ildefonso Schuster (*San Paolo fuori le Mura*, prot. 300/18), Cesare Orsenigo (*Milano*, prot. 853/20), Luigi Fogar (*Gorizia-Gradisca*, prot. 903/20), Maurilio Fossati (*Novara*, prot. 928/20), Celso Costantini (*Concordia*, prot. 321/21). But the Consistorial Congregation also established files on members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy on the basis of the years in which they were in active service, on the occasion of some events in their lives or, more simply, upon their deaths. For example, we find files of some substance dedicated to cardi-

³ Cf. John Paul II, *La cura vigilantissima*, Apostolic Letter, 21st March, 2005, art. 39, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 97, 2005, 372: "Sono da considerarsi riservati e segreti gli Atti dei Conclavi, lo spoglio dei documenti dei Sommi Pontefici e dei Cardinali, i processi vescovili, i documenti di foro interno, le posizioni relative al personale della Santa Sede e dello Stato della Città del Vaticano e le Cause matrimoniali, oltre che i documenti indicati come tali dalla Segreteria di Stato" [The *Acta* of the Conclaves, the documents of the correspondence of the Supreme Pontiffs and of the Cardinals, those of the trials involving bishops, documents pertaining to the internal forum, *Positiones* relating to the personnel of the Holy See and of the Vatican City State and documents of matrimonial causes, as well as those documents designated as such by the Secretary of State are to be considered as reserved and secret]. Since the law does not apply retroactively, this reservation of secrecy has been applied to records from the pontificate of Pius XI onwards.

nals such as Antonio Agliardi (*Bergamo*, prot. 530/15), Vincenzo Vannutelli (*Ostia*, prot. 1522/15), Pietro Maffi (*Pisa*, prot. 792/18) or on bishops such as Guido Maria Conforti (*Parma*, prot. 593/18).

Besides these, files can be found relating to the activities or to particular episodes in the lives of certain priests and religious, whose undeniable abilities were yet far from being compatible with the dignity of being a bishop. Among these we may mention Agostino Gemelli (*Ancona*, prot. 764/15), Luigi Sturzo (*Caltagirone*, prot. 366/15), Ernesto Vercesi (*Milano*, prot. 884/16), Giovanni Genocchi (*Russia*, prot. 267/20), as well as many others.

1.3 The Positions on the State of the Dioceses and on the Pastoral Governance of the Bishops

Of great interest also are the positions on the *State of the dioceses* and on the *Pastoral governance* of the bishops. The Consistorial Congregation received from the bishops themselves or from the nuncios or they obtained from other informants these various diagnoses of the religious and moral state of the population, which were of value in leading to suggestions for interventions to correct matters or in helping to define the profile of a candidate being proposed as a bishop in the case of vacant sees. In some cases it was a question of periodic reports, which were almost routine, usually categorised by protocol with the formula "state of the diocese" (among which mention may be made of *San Cristóbal de Habana*, prot. 1502/14; *San Miguel* - El Salvador, prot. 21/16; *Borgo San Donnino*, prot. 722/16; *Macau*, prot. 414/20: on the condition of dioceses vacant for two years; *San Juan de Puerto Rico*, prot. 820/21: on the state of the diocese after the death of Msgr. William Ambrose Jones).

In other cases the reports are more detailed, focusing on particular aspects or symptoms of defects in the administration of the diocese. So, we move from simple reports on the running of the diocese (*Colle di Val d'Elsa*, prot. 496/20; *Bertinoro*, prot. 736/21) to the "strange way in which the bishop acts" (*Arras*, prot. 41/16, and *Albi*, prot. 930/17), to an enquiry into the governing of the diocese by the integralist bishop Giovanni Volpi (*Arezzo*, prot. 785/17), to indications of the way the bishop treats his clergy (*Lille*, prot. 819/19).

We will not linger on the inevitable complaints on the bishops' governance of their dioceses; instead, we shall limit ourselves to pointing out those directed to the archbishop who, in 1911, was seated on the *cathedra* of St. Petronius (*Bologna*, prot. 1525/11), which depicted him as being arbitrary, if not indeed as a tyrant, as superficial as unjust. This is a portrait which, to put it mildly, conflicts with the picture handed down by others and with his subsequent work as Benedict XV.

As for matters concerning assemblies and the collegial activity of the *munus* of the bishops, the documents which have been analysed bring to

light only a few references to diocesan synods (*Concordia*, prot. 1038/14; *Angers*, prot. 1320/14; *Huaraz*, prot. 2027/14; *Montefeltro*, prot. 69/16; *Antigonish*, prot. 726/21).

There are also relatively few pieces of evidence, at least among the *Positiones*, concerning the relations between the Holy See and national and regional episcopates and the conduct of their periodic meetings.

For example, one of the *Positiones* concerns the presidency of the Canadian episcopal conference (*Canada*, prot. 70/16), others refer to meetings of the bishops' conferences of *Cuba* (prot. 836/16 and 875/21), Nicaragua (*Managua*, prot. 1042/17), *Perù* (prot. 1549/15) and *Venezuela* (prot. 110/15).

As for regional episcopal conferences abroad, we have only one reference, to that of *Durango* in Mexico (prot. 600/21), whereas for Italy there are some *Positiones* on the gatherings of the bishops in the Marche (*Fano*, prot. 438/16, relating to the regional seminary), in Umbria (*Perugia*, prot. 584/18, concerning measures against negligent clergy and parish priests) and in Puglia (*Bari*, prot. 522/21).

Finally, there are other questions pertaining to the calling of a regional council in Sicily (*Catania*, prot. 839/14) and to the second provincial council of *Cartagena* in Colombia (prot. 976/15).

1.4 The Special Positions on the Religious State of Life and the Particular Needs of Certain Regions of Countries

Other *Positiones* of the Consistorial Congregation, mostly under the protocol of *Special*, refer to the condition of religious or to the particular needs of some regions or countries. A quick review of the boxes just as they stand, in alphabetical order of place, leads us to a close examination of the tendencies of certain Catholics and publicists in *Belgio* (prot. 454/17), to the condition of the Church in *Canada* (prot. 1018/16), to the denunciation of an attempt at separation by the clergy in *Cecoslovachia* (prot. 101/20), and to an evaluation of the system of tithes in the republics of *Colombia-Equatore* (prot. 93/21).

For Chile, one *Positio* concentrates on the anomalous conditions in that Church (*Santiago de Chile*, prot. 755/16) and another on religious assistance to the inhabitants on Easter Island (*Santiago de Chile*, prot. 239/17).

There are numerous references to the way ecclesiastical matters were going in *Cuba* (prot. 721/18), to the condition of religion on that island (prot. 693/21), to its political situation and to that of the whole Central America (prot. 821/21) and to the situation of the apostolic delegation and to that of religion in relation to the Cuban government (prot. 822/21).

Among the *Positiones* concerning *France*, we find references to a circular letter to all the faithful about a national pilgrimage to Lourdes, with a reference to the apparitions of La Salette, rashly signed by the French

bishops (prot. 823/16), to the recruitment of future ecclesiastical vocations (prot. 370/17), to information provided by Cardinal Dubois about diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican (*Rouen*, prot. 401/20).

Two *Positiones* relating to Germany dealt with the religious condition of the German population during the war and with the condition of children in the Ruhr (*Germania*, prot. 678/16 and 381/20 respectively).

After describing the unfortunate condition of the population on the island of *Haiti* (prot. 1280/15), there are files on the conversions of Anglican clergymen (*Inghilterra e Galles*, prot. 510/19) and on the disadvantages of appointing Irishmen to episcopal sees in England (*Inghilterra e Galles*, prot. 588/21).

The *Special* positions on general issues concerning *Italia* range from the method for teaching the catechism (prot. 878/17), to theosophism (prot. 1062/18), to an association for the defence of the clergy (prot. 224/18), to freedom for schools (prot. 107/19), to religious education for teaching sisters and for their respective pupils (prot. 617/21), and once again to methods for teaching the catechism (prot. 900/21).

In the case of *Messico*, understandably, the files are restricted to the state of persecution of the Church (prot. 699/14) and to religious freedom in this nation (prot. 478/21).

Besides these, reports have been preserved on the religious situation in *Paraguay* (prot. 872/20), while, for *Perù*, remarks on statistics about the secular clergy are to be found (prot. 546/18), already a source of worry for the dicastery during the preceding pontificate.

There are two files relating to Poland, to its situation (*Polonia*, prot. 924/16) and to conditions obtaining in Polish territory, finding itself already under Russian control (prot. 520/21).

Romania was subject to examination as to religious assistance to the army (prot. 257/19), while for Scotland it was to do with mixed marriages (*Scozia*, prot. 153/19).

On the other hand, there are numerous *Positiones* related to the United States, concerning those of their parish priests who were immovable (*Stati Uniti*, prot. 435/15), the Italian press in the States (prot. 1232/15), the report on the Catholic schools in America and the Catholic Educational Association (prot. 1206/15), to religious assistance for the army (prot. 883/17), to a secret mission entrusted by the Pope to the religious Joseph Schwarz, procurator general for the Redemptorists (prot. 255/19) and, subsequently, to rumours as to probable diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the United States (prot. 622/21).

Then, during the pontificate of Benedict XV, the Consistorial Congregation devoted particular attention to the religious condition of the small South American republic of Uruguay, which was the object of a very attentive apostolic visitation undertaken by the Redemptorist José Johannemann (*Montevideo*, prot. 603/17, 132/20, 250/20), who later returned to report on the same topic again (*Argentina*, prot. 270/21).

Finally, as to the republic of *Venezuela*, the dicastery's attentions were directed to its ecclesiastical archives and to valuable objects of the Venezuelan Church (prot. 542/17).

1.5 Overseeing the Discipline of Clergy and Faithful

Some of the *Positiones* recently opened up examine requests for fostering the pastoral and material well-being of the clergy, while others are limited to specific aspects which are more directly of a disciplinary nature.

Among the former, we may highlight the documentation of the pastoral letter of bishop Henri Bouquet on the renewal of priestly life (*Chartres*, prot. 152/20) or those files on various provisions for the economic needs of the clergy (*Langres*, prot. 701/19; *Malta*, prot. 723/19 and *Saint-Claude*, prot. 761/19).

Among the latter there is a *Positio* concerning the proposal of the bishop to impose weekly confession on the priests (*Santa Severina*, prot. 1859/14), others are limited to those clergy involved in spiritism, precisely in the region from where the new pontiff came (*Bologna e Romagna*, prot. 563/15), to clergy attending schools for state officials (*Poitiers*, prot. 261/16), to priests threatening to strike (*Recanati-Loreto*, prot. 495/19), and to Masonic propaganda, in which some priests were involved (*Gaeta*, prot. 846/21).

There was no lack of petitions concerning very practical questions, such as the use of the English suit, the clergyman, for secular and regular clergy (*Cuba*, prot. 1229/15), the request of the Lazzarists for dispensation from having to wear the cassock in public (*Panama*, prot. 201/16) or that of a bishop to be allowed to wear a white cassock (*Guayaquil*, prot. 580/20).

A matter that could be set aside in a chapter of its own is that relating to the participation of the clergy in politics. Already during the pontificate of Pope Sarto, the Consistorial Congregation had received, for example, a complaint of an anonymous priest about ecclesiastics being political candidates in Spain (*Barcelona*, prot. 1337/13) and a whole box had been gathered about the conduct of a number of Italian priests at the time of the political elections of 1913, dealing also explicitly with the case of priests being candidates for election to town councils (*Italia*, prot. 914/14).

Similar *Positiones* were not lacking in the new pontificate, noting, for example, the dissent of the Argentine bishop Zenon Bustos y Ferreyra and his colleague Carlos Echenique Altamira, the auxiliary of Tucumán, about setting up a Catholic party (*Córdoba*, prot. 838/15).

In Italy, though, attention seemed to be focused upon the new party founded by Don Luigi Sturzo. Apart from two reports about town council and provincial elections and about electoral committees being held in church in the diocese of his brother, Mario Sturzo (*Piazza Armerina*, prot.

1408/14 and prot. 925/16), the *Positiones* from the pontificate of Benedict XV contain directives concerning the Italian Popular Party (*Perugia*, prot. 497/19), instructions about the political and administrative elections of 1919 (*Italia*, prot. 704/19), reports on some sympathisers of the Italian Popular Party (*Italia*, prot. 894/19) and on the priest Nicolò Licata and his office as political secretary of that same party (*Girgente*, prot. 838/20).

The file created about blessing a Fascist penant (*Termoli*, prot. 358/21) seems to anticipate the changed political climate which would take place during the next pontificate, that of Pope Achille Ratti.

As for discipline relating to the faithful, the *Positiones* do not seem to have records of anything extreme. Unlike the pontificate of Pius X, during which interdicts were imposed on three populations for having seriously affronted their bishops and for having threatened them with death (*Adria*, prot. 996/09; Tuntla Gutiérrez, a "coven of the Masons" in Mexico, *Chiapas*, prot. 2097/12; and Galatina, *Otranto*, prot. 2177/13), during the seven years of Benedict's pontificate this serious measure was only adopted on one occasion and that was in regard to a parish of *Poggio Mirteto* (prot. 519/20), in the diocese, it is better to make this clear, of which Cardinal De Lai would become ordinary in 1925.

Among the associations which attracted the attention of the Consistorial Congregation during this period, the Knights of Columbus, with their secret rituals, stand out, being present in a number of *Positiones* relating to the nations of North America: *Canada* (prot. 487/15), *Messico* (prot. 79/19) and *Stati Uniti* (prot. 96/19). Another file, however, put forward the doubt in more general terms about providing ecclesiastical assistance to associations such as the Knights of Columbus (*Saint Cloud*, prot. 844/20).

1.6 The Strict Supervision of Shrines

In comparison to the preceding pontificate, during which the Consistorial Congregation had to concern itself with the administrative control of the goods of the shrine of Loreto (*Recanati-Loreto*, prot. 2168/12) and of Lourdes (*Tarbes et Lourdes*, prot. 31/13), the seven-year pontificate of Benedict marks a notable increase in the surveillance exercised by the dicastery in this area.

There is a voluminous documentation of fully eight files concerning the running of the shrine of Oropa (*Biella*, prot. 590/17), while the shrines of St. Francis of Paola (*Cosenza*, prot. 628/19) and of Our Lady of Itri (*Gaeta*, prot. 70/20) would be the objects of apostolic visitations. Other *Positiones* relate to the shrine of Our Lady of Tindari, recalled to itself by the Holy See (*Patti*, prot. 17/20), and that of our Lady of Pompei, with multiple annexes (*Pompei*, prot. 136/20).

1.7 Apostolic Visitations as an Instrument Obtaining Information and for Intervening in Urgent Cases

Like his predecessor, Pope Giacomo Della Chiesa continued to make use of sending extraordinary visitators, specifically appointed by him, to address various emergency situations.

Among the visitations for dioceses abroad, we have those undertaken in what is now the Venezuelan diocese of Ciudad Guayana (*Guayana*, prot. 629/15) and in the capital of the Republic of Uruguay (*Montevideo*, prot. 603/17 and 250/20), without forgetting the famous visitation of Msgr. Achille Ratti to Poland, ordered by the Pontiff, though through the Secretariat of State.

Among the Italian dioceses which were the object of apostolic visitations were included the church and capitol of St. Nicola (*Bari*, prot. 549/17, the diocese of *Patti* (prot. 452/19) and, as has been noted above, the shrines of St. Francis of Paola (*Cosenza*, prot. 628/19) and of Our Lady of Itri (*Gaeta*, prot. 70/20). This does not alter the fact that other inspections were conducted, always under apostolic authority, without the Consistorial Congregation knowing of them, such as that conducted in the diocese of Arezzo prior to the removal of bishop Volpi.⁴

As for Termoli and the supposed lack of patriotism of its bishop, the visitation there was no more than a false alarm, provoked by the high-handed actions of an ex-brother who was also a fraudster (*Termoli*, prot. 894/20).

1.8 The Care of Migrants

Four years after the reform of the Curia, by the motu proprio *Cum omnes* of 15 August, 1912, Pius X himself decreed a further extension to the competencies of the Consistorial Congregation, entrusting to it the spiritual assistance of all migrants of the Latin rite and also the control over the emigration of priests.⁵

There are a number of *Positiones* concerning this question, with marked attention to the phenomenon of Italian migration. A review of this could take its starting point from the complaints of hostility to Italians (Italo-phobia). Msgr. Duarte Leopoldo e Silva, archbishop of *São Paulo* (prot. 1205/14), moving on to the recourse, once more on the part of Italians, of neglect in providing spiritual care on the part of parish priests in the North American diocese of *Hartford* (prot. 795/20), to the request of a Japanese priest with extraordinary faculties to provide spiritual assistance to the numerous Japanese colony in the state of *São Paulo* in Brazil (*Botucatu*,

4 Cf. Vian, *La riforma*, 20 and fn.

5 Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 4, 1912, 526.

prot. 43/21), to the documentation concerning the National Catholic Welfare Council for immigration in the States (*Stati Uniti*, prot. 825/21), to the proposal to set up a Catholic organisation for Italians in North America, inspired by a scheme of Fr. Semeria for the “sons of Italy” (prot. 883/21), to the attention given to the various national parishes (Italian, Polish, Lithuanian), still in the United States (prot. 211/21).

2 Other Possible Lines of Investigation

2.1 The Church and the Modern World

According to Gabriele De Rosa, the pontificate of Pope Giacomo Della Chiesa “gave considerable attention to bringing the Church into line with the modern needs of the apostolate throughout the whole world”.⁶

In the light of this statement, then, it may be possible to analyse some of the *Positiones* of the Consistorial Congregation which deal, for example, with cinematographic projections in church. This question had only one precedent during the pontificate of Pius X, relating to the request for the faculty to conduct projections in church, derogating from the decree of this same dicastery of 10 December, 1912 (*Versailles*, prot. 2055/13), but the matter was re-presented during the seven-year pontificate of Benedict XV with a number of nuances, with requests for the use of cinematography in the bishop’s palace at *Nola* (prot. 274/15), for hiring an ex-chapel for the use of cinematography (*Potenza-Marsico Nuovo*, prot. 475/15), for dispensation from the decree on cinematography on the part of the vicariate apostolic of Tananarive in Madagascar (*Africa*, prot. 137/16), for the request to make use of cinematography on a single occasion in churches in a diocese in Ireland (*Dromore*, prot. 468/21).

Another pointer which reveals a changed attitude to new instruments of apostolate is that of the use of the notorious bicycle. Leaving behind two prior *Positiones* on the punishment of Canon Antonio Tani and of two other priests for having travelled on bicycles (*Arezzo*, prot. 1581/11) and on the request by some other priests to be allowed to use the bicycle (*Faenza*, prot. 78/13), during the pontificate of Benedict XV the Consistorial Congregation became more disposed to grant permissions when faced with such requests (*Brescia*, prot. 1805/14; *Cuneo*, prot. 243/16), *Camerino*, prot. 572/16, *Crema*, prot. 777/16)... up to the point where the question was resolved in a qualitative leap: in 1916 the bicycle had to give way to the motorcycle (*Foligno*, prot. 28/16) and to the car (*Reggio Emilia*, prot. 893/16).

6 Original text: “attento allo studio dei mezzi per un adeguamento della Chiesa alle esigenze moderne dell’apostolato in tutto il mondo”. De Rosa, “Benedetto XV”, 615.

In any case, it is possible to detect a rupture in the reasons offered for the changed attitude towards the speed-cycle in the response in 1916 of Cardinal De Lai to Msgr. Dalmazio Minoretti, then bishop of Cremona on this question:

As for the bicycle, it is not the case that we should be completely against it. It is a means of moving, as are the horse, the donkey, the carriage, the car and the motorised bicycle. Its abuse is to be condemned, but using it can be not only good, but at times even necessary, especially in parishes which are very large and which are in the valleys. Usually, parish priests are not rich enough to be able to afford a horse and carriage. Using a bicycle, a priest can get himself quickly to where he is needed and perhaps save a soul that, otherwise, would be lost. Would not this alone be more than a sufficiently good reason not to impose an absolute prohibition on the bicycle? Everything rests on forbidding the abuses which can arise. I attach a letter sent to the bishop of Foligno and to some other bishops in this regard. I recall that the blessed memory of Pius X used to say to me: "In all honesty, I forbade the bicycle in Mantua from the beginning, but I ended up by seeing that it was not something that was to be condemned as such and I had to make exceptions and concessions". The present pontiff said the same to me when he was in Bologna. (*Crema*, prot. 777/16)⁷

Another phenomenon found repeatedly in the files which have now been made available, to the point where it became almost a thorough nuisance, is that of Catholic benefit dances in North America.

At the first indication of problems and of abuses, which reached us in the last months of the pontificate of Pius X (*Baltimore*, prot. 417/14) there followed on a fairly regular basis other *Positiones*: that on dances in Canada and in the United States (*Canada*, prot. 1150/15), that on some dances (*Albany*, prot. 657/18), another on a recourse concerning dances for pious works (*Winnipeg*, prot. 289/19), on the bishop of *Salt Lake City*

⁷ Original text: "Quanto alla bicicletta non è il caso di essere assolutamente contrari. È un mezzo di locomozione come il cavallo, il somarello, la carrozzella, l'automobile e la bicicletta a macchina. L'abuso è da condannare: l'uso può essere non solo buono, ma anche in taluni casi necessario, specialmente nelle parrocchie di grande estensione e di pianura. Ordinariamente i parroci non sono così ricchi da poter avere cavallo e carrozza. E con la bicicletta può il sacerdote portarsi presto dove è chiamato, e forse salvare un'anima che altrimenti potrebbe perdersi. Non sarebbe sol questo un motivo più che sufficiente per non proibire assolutamente la bicicletta? Tutto sta nel proibire l'abuso che se ne possa fare. Le unisco copia d'una lettera diretta al vescovo di Foligno, ed a qualche altro vescovo in proposito. Ricordo che la s.m. di Pio X mi diceva: "Io veramente a Mantova da principio proibii la bicicletta; ma finii per vedere che non era poi cosa tanto condannevole, e dovetti fare eccezioni e concessioni". Lo stesso mi diceva l'attuale pontefice, quando era a Bologna".

who was present at a dance (prot. 889/19), finishing with that on charity balls (*New York*, prot. 473/20).

On the other hand, for anyone who likes becoming caught up in research on precedents to the conciliar reforms, two *Positiones* may be relevant.

The first draws its origins from a proposal of Fr. Alberto Bartolomasi, brother of the more well-known Msgr. Angelo, bishop of the Forces, who, immediately after the war, offered a partial solution to the question of the cassock worn with a riding coat (*Roma Orbis*, prot. 898/18).

The other consists in a memorandum on Msgr. Heinrich Swoboda, expert in ancient history and professor in the faculty of theology at Vienna University, on the use of secular languages in the Latin rite, transmitted by the nuncio, Valfré di Bonzo, with the warning that it “touches upon questions of such a serious nature and of such vital importance as to revolutionise the present state of the liturgy in the Latin Church” (*Roma Orbis*, prot. 450/19).⁸

2.2 Preaching

Pope Benedict's concern that preachers should not bring to the pulpit historical or poetic dissertations, or political or juridical disquisitions, following his discourse to the Lent preachers of Rome on 19 February, 1917, gave birth to the encyclical *Humani generis redemptionem* of the following 15 June, on preaching the word of God (*Roma Orbis*, prot. 348/17).

The following *Positiones* make reference to queries or reports of abuse in preaching: *Noto*, prot. 672/17; *Saint-Claude*, prot. 1/18; *Alger*, prot. 345/18; *Montréal*, prot. 702/18. The *Positio* of *Caiazza* speaks of doubts of a more specific kind, concerning the regulation of sacred preaching (prot. 461/19), while that of *Mallorca* (prot. 214/19) has preserved its bishop's pastoral instruction on preaching.

Leaving aside here concrete cases of faculties being granted to specific and known preachers, such as Fr. Jules-Auguste Lemire (*Nice*, prot. 250/19) or the Barnabite Giovanni Semeria (several cases), it is right to give attention to some *Positiones* about speeches (*Tivoli*, prot. 660/14), about some speeches by clerics on the war (*Wien*, prot. 83/15), about the prohibition of funeral discourses for soldiers who had fallen on the battlefield being held in church (*Termoli*, prot. 1402/15) and about the attitude of bishop Rocco Caliandro against speeches being made *pro bello* in that same diocese (*Termoli*, prot. 197/18).

8 Original text: “tocca questioni così gravi e vitali da rivoluzionare tutto l'attuale campo liturgico della Chiesa latina”.

2.3 Attention to the Missions

The impulse given during the pontificate of Benedict XV to the missionary movement, in a state of serious crisis in the aftermath of the armed conflict, can be summed up in the encyclical *Maximum illud*, directed by the Pope to the heads of missionary groups on 30 November, 1919, and this can be found above all in the archives of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind certain *Positiones* of the Consistorial Congregation which reflect this same interest, obviously in relation to territories subject to the jurisdiction of this dicastery. Thus, we find documents about the Indians of *Messico* (prot. 374/14), the foundation of the mission to Chaco Paragauyo (*Asunción*, prot. 75/18), abundant material (4 files) on the missions to the Indians of North America (*Stati Uniti*, prot. 821/19), apart from requests for missionaries (*Colombia*, prot. 903/19), supported in the case of the Philippines also by the scarcity of local clergy (*Manila*, prot. 757/21). To the lack of classrooms we owe the request to be allowed to run schools in colombian rural chapels (*Ibague*, prot. 58/20).

2.4 Inter-Religious Relations

The search for documentation on relations with the Jews in the *Positiones* of the Consistorial Congregation produces meagre results; only one file has been preserved, going back to the pontificate of Pius X and relating to the sacrificial rituals (*Bressanone*, prot. 2113/12).

By contrast, much more is to be found on the subject of Protestant proselytism, a topic which arises for the first time in the last months of the pontificate of Pius X in relation to a complaint against Protestant propaganda at Ripabottoni by the bishop of *Larino* (prot. 119/14). Subsequently, several *Positiones* return to the matter: from the report of Protestant intolerance in the school at Eton (*Northampton*, prot. 1161/15), we move on to Protestant propaganda in *Venezuela* (prot. 543/17) and on the American continent (*America Latina e del Nord*, prot. 796/21), to the mobilisation against assigning an area for the construction of an evangelical church in Chianciano (*Chiusi-Pienza*, prot. 582/18), to Protestant penetration in *Perù* (prot. 749/18) and in general to Protestant and rationalistic propaganda (*Roma Orbis*, prot. 15/20).

2.5 The Consistorial Congregation and the Upheavals of the Great War

There are many *Positiones* connected to contingencies generated by the war in the immediate post-war period which called for the intervention of the Consistorial Congregation, stemming not only from bishops and clergy, but also from various the populations affected.

First of all, it was to offer guidance on the ministry of the bishop in the “redeemed” territories (referring to Istria, Trieste and the Southern Tyrol or Alto Adige, which had been called “unredeemed Italy” or “Italia irredenta”; *Belluno-Feltre*, prot. 1252/15) and not only did it have to concern itself with the complaint of a bishop about the excessive concentration of troops and about profane speeches in churches (*Crema*, prot. 1041/17), but also with the conduct of a bishop during enemy occupation (*Concordia*, prot. 5/19).

The Consistorial Congregation intervened in favour of the clergy first of all by issuing rules concerning clerical, religious and priest soldiers after their military service, collected in a voluminous *Positio (Roma Orbis)*, prot. 586/16). It continued then by concerning itself with priest refugees (*Italia*, prot. 877/17), with the economic conditions of the clergy *post bellum* (*Italia*, prot. 51/19) and with the condition of priests in occupied regions (*Italia*, prot. 105/19), *Positiones* which would make us think that there was an exclusive concern for the Italian clergy, were it not also for the thanks received from a French bishop “for all that you have done for the priests of the armed services” (*Moulins*, prot. 389/19).⁹

Special attention was given also to spiritual assistance to refugees in the region of Venice (*Italia*, prot. 631/18), a common ordinary being appointed for the refugees (*Italia*, prot. 738/18) and measures being adopted for religious assistance in occupied countries (*Italia*, prot. 925/18), and for religious assistance for Italian-speaking Catholics in Dalmatia (*Croazia*, prot. 384/21).

Statistics relating to sacred buildings which had been damaged in the war at Nancy seems to be the only evidence of a case which was non-Italian (*Nancy*, prot. 283/19).

2.6 National or Regional Issues

The *Positiones* also contain echoes of some of those questions of national or territorial character which were at the root of the conflict of the First World War and which, at times, broke out in later conflicts, also at times closer to us.

For Canada some of the *Positiones* examine the opposition of English Catholics to the archbishop of *Ottawa* on the school question (prot. 943/14), as well as the information transmitted from *Québec* by Msgr. Louis-Adolphe Paquet on nationalism in Canada (prot. 738/20).

In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, emerges from the papers the problem of the union of the Czech clergy with the German (*Praha*, prot. 984/17).

9 Original text: “per quanto si è fatto per i sacerdoti militari”.

As for *Ireland*, files have been preserved on the episcopate and on national independence (prot. 557/19) and in general on the Irish question (prot. 924/20).

In the post-war period there are a number of matters relating to territories annexed by Italy, concerning the Slovene clergy (*Gorizia-Gradisca*, prot. 145/20), the demands of the Yugoslav clergy (*Gorizia-Gradisca-Lubjana*, prot. 221/20), and the attempted separation of Aquileia from Gorizia and its immediate dependency on the Holy See (*Gorizia-Gradisca*, prot. 798/20).

2.7 Some Apparent Cases of Exceeding Competence

At times, when the bishops called the attention of the Consistorial Congregation to certain questions, this dicastery was compelled to address them, even though they might have fallen within the sphere of other offices. For example, of matters pertaining to the competence of the Congregation for Rites, it concerned itself with the question of the sounding of bells and of extra-liturgical songs on the island of *Malta* (prot. 594/16) and with the work on the crypt and of the recognition of the body of St. Nicola (*Bari*, prot. 228/17).

The question of the introduction of electric lighting into the churches of *Caracas* (prot. 777/15) fell, instead, within the competence of the first office of the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments. Then, on some other occasions, it continued to interest itself in the supervision of seminaries and of colleges, notwithstanding the fact that Benedict XV had removed from the Consistorial matters of "the government, discipline, temporal administration and studies of seminaries" and had assigned these to the new Congregation for Seminaries and University studies by the *motu proprio Seminaria clericorum* of 4 November, 1915.¹⁰

In fact, we find some *Positiones* on the religious teaching in the Italian College of Peru (*Lima*, prot. 973/18) and on the seminaries of Tivoli, Concordia and Adria (*Tivoli*, prot. 118/20).

Among matters which could fall under the Holy Office are some reports on certain experiences in schools *sui generis*, or which were presumed to be such, like those of the lay school of don Francesco Mari, previously in the grip of modernism (*Nocera Umbria-Gualdo Tadino*, prot. 1779/14), of the "School of moral life for mothers and young ladies" of Guglielmina Ronconi, in favour of which even Msgr. Umberto Benigni had intervened (*Senigallia*, prot. 681/16) and of the "Brotherly love" school of the priest Nicola Masi (*Napoli*, prot. 1130/16). Into this same area of competence

¹⁰ Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 7, 1915, 493.

fell also the traditional miracle of the Holy Spine, the relic of the Passion in the custody of the Palatine basilica of St. Nicola (*Bari*, prot. 284/21).

3 Conclusion

Even just a rapid survey of the archives can help to recover the lively atmosphere of this pontificate, strongly marked by the events of the Great War and by the emergence and greater intensity of questions of national and regional interest and boundaries.

Apart from matters linked mostly to the old continent, from the papers of the Consistorial Congregation, greater attention to the world outside of Europe, in particular towards the vast American continent, can be seen.

A careful analysis of the *Positiones*, here referred to only from the outside, will help also to reveal any ruptures and any points of continuity with the preceding pontificate.

Some of the topics treated would suggest a process of modernisation or at least some level of attenuation in the application of norms sanctioned previously (for example, the dispensations for using cinematography in church or the use of rapid means of transport on the part of the clergy).

Then, it may be possible to assess how far other phenomena which had been strong features of the pontificate of Pius X such as modernism, which seems to have persisted to a lesser extent or in the new guise of theosophism or of political commitment, in Italy through the Italian Popular Party, of which the archbishop of Perugia, the Benedictine Giovanni Beda Cardinale, caused it to be noted that

those priests who are the more enthusiastic for the new party and who cooperate with it in a more active way are precisely those who, in times which are more or less remote, were professing doctrines suspected of modernism and who were supporters of the autonomous and independent social movement". (*Perugia*, prot. 497/19)¹¹

¹¹ Original text: "i sacerdoti più entusiasti del nuovo partito, e che vi cooperano con più attività, sono precisamente coloro che in tempi più o meno remoti, professavano dottrine sospette di modernismo, ed erano fautori del movimento sociale autonomo ed indipendente".

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