

THE VATICAN AND ITALIAN FASCISM. 1929–32: A STUDY IN CONFLICT by John E. Pollard. *Cambridge University Press*, pp xiii + 241, 1985. £22.50.

The Italian religious scene has changed drastically since Pius XI and Mussolini signed the Concordat of 1929. Only last year, in 1985, a new Concordat, ratified with the agreement of the Left-wing political parties, described Catholicism as 'a' religion instead of 'the' religion of Italy. Even thirty years ago 69% of Italians were prepared to claim that they attended church regularly, but now that figure has fallen to about 20%. It is a question nowadays whether central and northern Italy are any more Christian than England, while the condition of the South, even apart from the problem of the Mafia, has never been a recommendation for Christianity. The nineteenth-century Risorgimento united Italy politically, but left the Italians divided and the Pope in opposition to the new state; Fascism seized power briefly by exacerbating social conflicts, and then tried to retain power by damping them down, which explains Mussolini's willingness to make allies of Church and State; the national movement, a second Risorgimento, which brought Italy back to life in 1944 and sustained it through a generation of Christian Democratic ineptitude, seems to have separated the State, gently but firmly, from Catholicism as a major element in modern Italian culture. The most that a conservative Pope like John Paul II can hope for is a stemming of religious indifference.

The story of Italian Catholicism from 1848 to 1980, therefore, is one of declining social influence, and it suggests that perhaps Italian popes were not the best popes for Italy. Dr Pollard's thoroughly researched book throws some light on this decline, because he has concentrated on the period when Pius XI made a vigorous attempt to establish a clerical, confessional state in the place of an Italy which he regarded as saturated in 'liberalism'. If the Pope assumed that Mussolini sympathised with this dream of a restoration of the ancien régime, it was because the dictator had favoured Catholic education, replaced the legal immunities of the clergy, banned excommunicated priests from public employment, and so involved the Catholic Church in the control of marriage law that the introduction of divorce was virtually impossible. Further Catholic advance meant a crusade against allegedly immoral books, plays and films, the further revival of Catholic institutions in education, youthwork and industry, and a campaign against Protestantism, which the Vatican thought was increasing in Italy, and interpreted as 'liberalism' at prayer. Dr Pollard thinks that Pius XI hoped for no more than a corrective partnership with the Fascists: Fascism, however, had to be accepted politically, whereas Protestantism need not be tolerated at all. It seems to have come as a shock to the Pope that Mussolini had no intention of permitting the Vatican to limit the totalitarian ambitions of the Fascist state. In fact, many leading Fascists were anti-clerical; they protected the Italian Protestants who, Dr Pollard says, were actually better off under Mussolini's government than they were to be in the 1950s, when the Christian Democrats were in power. As it was, 'in the 1930s Protestant propaganda and proselytism was a concern of the whole Catholic movement, and as such a high priority on Catholic Action's list of evils to be eradicated from Italian society'.

Once Mussolini had made clear that he was determined to have absolute authority over Italian society, and that in his eyes the Catholic Church existed to give him a certificate of respectability, Pius XI still had a choice: he could have imitated the isolation of Pius IX in his later years, when he refused to acknowledge the reality of an Italian state which would not be what he wanted it to be. In Dr Pollard's opinion, however, Pius XI never broke free from the habit of compromise which he had learned in the negotiations for the 1929 Concordat. Despite his formal protests against the cult of war and violence, for example, Pius did nothing further to oppose the inculcating of these virtues into Italian youth by the Fascist régime. And although he attacked anti-semitism in principal in 1938, and fought a rearguard action to prevent the introduction of a ban on marriages between Jews and

Gentiles (itself a flagrant breach of the Concordat), he finally gave way along the whole front in January 1939 because he feared that Mussolini might scrap the Concordat altogether. It did not, in fact, last another half-century. What Pius had really compromised, however, was the claim that the papacy has stood out firmly against the 'modern world': faced with the paradox of Fascist reactionary-modernism, he could not maintain a policy of opposition to a régime which ostensibly glorified the family and rejected 'Bolshevism'. And all this was perfectly obvious to that other Italy outside the Vatican, not all of it Catholic and some of it Communist, which would not compromise resistance.

Dr Pollard's workmanlike account of all this helps one to understand why a majority of Italians returned to a moderate civic liberalism after 1944 and sat lightly to the Church's claim to authority. What was not easily forgiven was the Vatican's willingness to take advantage of an authoritarian state to try to change united Italy into a modified version of the old Papal States. European Catholicism had accommodated the loss of the temporal power very easily; by 1900 only a handful of French Catholic royalists really cared. Historians speak of the papacy as being strengthened by what happened. In the Vatican, on the other hand, the sense of loss was acute, the wound did not heal. But Pius XI misread the signs of the times when he imagined that the new Fascist régime offered a means by which some of the lost authority could be recovered, and that miscalculation affected the Vatican's powers of recovery after the national revolution of 1944. Little by little it begins to look as though the Curia was right all along, as though the loss of the temporal power did not strengthen the papacy, but deprived it of the chance of becoming the centre of a modern state. Modern Bologna, for example, is the work of the Bolognese, and not of the Papacy which once governed there, and it is the lack of this hard experience on the ground which still makes it difficult for the leadership of the Catholic Church to come to terms with progress.

JOHN KENT

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY. THE IMPACT OF COMTEAN POSITIVISM by T.R. Wright. Cambridge. Pp xiii + 306. £27.50.

It is easy to make fun of Comte. A naive systematizer, who tried to reconcile several incompatible strains in the thought of his time, he was at once a romantic enthusiast in his worship of woman, and a naive materialist, who thought that the transitory theories of scientists could never be superseded. He was, as Mr Wright says with judicious understatement, 'frequently surprised at the "desertion" of men who had never been his disciples.' His letters are full of complaints of persecution and conspiracy, characteristic of egomaniacs. He took phrenology seriously. And it is hard to resist a smile when we find that this most rigid of theorists of monogamous romance, who absolutely forbade the remarriage of widows, was separated from a wife who could always get money from him by threatening to come and live with him. While he found his 'ange' in Clotilde de Vaux, who was not his wife, he decreed absolutely that every other man must find the 'ange', where he himself only found a 'démon'—in his wedded wife.

Nevertheless, the story of his influence on England is a fascinating one, and Mr Wright is to be warmly congratulated on the lucid and discriminating way in which he has told it. His book is not flawless (how many books are?). He is less at home in dealing with Comte's literary influence than with the history of the positivist movement itself. He is in some methodological difficulty in dealing with the case of George Eliot, since he is sometimes tempted to attribute to direct Comtean influence elements in her work which both Comte and she borrowed from the general Catholic tradition. (The cult of the Virgin Mother is an example.) And he makes a bad slip when he tells us that Lydgate in *Middlemarch* thought of joining the Saint-Simonians, but omits to add that he did so 'in order to turn them against some of their own doctrines' (*Middlemarch* cap. XV). More important, he does not