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## ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

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INŠTITUT ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

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Vito Saracino\*

# The Criticism of Liberalism in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1860–1880: Reflection and Perspectives

## IZVLEČEK

### KRITIKA LIBERALIZMA V REVIJI *LA CIVILTÀ CATTOLICA*, 1860–1880: RAZMIŠLJANJA IN POGLEDI

Študija obravnava kritične poglede na liberalizem, objavljene v italijanski jezuitski reviji *La Civiltà Cattolica* med letoma 1860 in 1880. Revija je začela izhajati leta 1850 pod papeževim pokroviteljstvom kot ključno orodje za obrambo katoliške civilizacije pred ideološkimi nasprotniki, vključno z liberalci, prostozidarji, socialisti in komunisti.

Razvoj revije je analiziran v okviru različnih tematskih sklopov, kot so uvodniki, politične kronike, teološki eseji, filozofske razprave in recenzije. Revija vsebuje predvsem strogo kritiko liberalnih ekonomskih načel in poudarja katoliško razumevanje skupnega dobra pred svobodo posameznika. Opozarja tudi na moralne in družbene nevarnosti, povezane z liberalizmom.

*La Civiltà Cattolica* predstavlja liberalizem kot temeljno nasprotje ustaljenega verskega in družbenega reda ter ga povezuje z ateizmom, komunizmom in spodkopavanjem tradicionalne avtoritete. V študiji so osvetljeni tudi odzivi revije na politično dogajanje v Italiji in Evropi, vključno z zaskrbljenostjo zaradi razširjene volilne pravice in vloge katoliških združenj v javnem življenju. Podroben pregled člankov in uredniških stališč razkriva ideološki konflikt, ki je oblikoval sodobno politično misel in odzive katoliške cerkve na izzive sodobnosti.

*Ključne besede:* Liberalizem, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, katolicizem, 19. stoletje, Italija, politična ideologija

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## ABSTRACT

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*This study examines the critical perspectives on liberalism as expressed in the Italian Jesuit periodical La Civiltà Cattolica from 1860 to 1880. Founded in 1850 under papal authority, the journal acted as a crucial platform for defending Catholic civilisation against ideological opponents, including liberals, Freemasons, socialists, and communists.*

*The analysis details the journal's development through various thematic sections, such as editorials, political chronicles, theological essays, philosophical treatises, and reviews. Notably, the periodical rigorously critiques liberal economic principles, emphasising the Catholic understanding of the common good over individual liberty. It also issues warnings about the moral and social risks associated with liberalism.*

*La Civiltà Cattolica depicts liberalism as fundamentally opposed to the established religious and social order, linking it with atheism, communism, and the erosion of traditional authority. The study also highlights the journal's responses to political developments in Italy and Europe, including concerns about expanding suffrage and the role of Catholic associations in public life. Through a detailed analysis of articles and editorial positions, this work reveals the ideological conflict that has shaped modern political thought and the Catholic Church's reactions to the challenges of modernity.*

*Keywords: liberalism, La Civiltà Cattolica, Catholicism, the 19th century, Italy, political ideology*

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## Introduction

*La Civiltà Cattolica* is the longest-running periodical in the Italian language. It was founded in Naples in April 1850 by prominent members of the Jesuit order and received support from Pope Pius IX. During his exile in Gaeta from 1848 to 1850, Pius IX devised a new strategy to safeguard temporal power, recognising the printed press as the most effective instrument for this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The editorial stance of the magazine is marked by a strong defence of Catholic civilisation against perceived enemies of the Church, including liberals, Freemasons, socialists, and communists. Uniquely among its competitors, *La Civiltà Cattolica* publishes two issues per month. This innovative decision enhances reader loyalty, as audiences regard the magazine as a valuable resource for understanding a society in rapid flux.<sup>2</sup>

The publication quickly reached a circulation of 13,000 copies per issue, largely thanks to the involvement of prominent writers in the editorial office. Notable figures

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1 Jacques Melchior Villafranche, *Pio IX: sua vita, sua storia, suo secolo* (Bologna: Tipografia Felsinea, 1877), 100–02.

2 Gaetano Greco, "La Civiltà Cattolica nel Decennio 1850–1859: Appunti sulla pubblicistica reazionaria durante il Risorgimento," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, Serie III, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1976): 1095.

included the first editor, Carlo Maria Curci; philosophers Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio and Matteo Liberatore; physicist Giovanni Battista Piancani; and writer Antonio Bresciani.<sup>3</sup>

One feature that quickly made the magazine the most widely read in the Catholic world was its systematic structure, which was consistently repeated with each issue. Each volume, nearly 1,000 pages long, followed this pattern: it began with an introduction focusing on news related to papal life, followed by sections on political news, debates on pastoral choices, writings by Church Fathers, theological treatises, philosophical essays, and reviews of books and theatre.

The second section, *Riviste della Stampa Italiana* (Italian Press Reviews), offered an overview of Italian politics and included highly regarded bibliographical notes filled with insights and literary suggestions.

The next section was *Cronache Contemporanee* (Contemporary Chronicles), which was divided into two parts: *Cose Italiane* (Italian Affairs) and *Cose Straniere* (Foreign Affairs). This segment, reflecting the extensive global network of the Society of Jesus, included contributions from foreign correspondents, which were among the few means available to readers to learn about the realities of other countries at that time.<sup>4</sup>

The last page bears the papal Imprimatur, an important seal of approval for Catholic scholars seeking knowledge of modernity but intimidated by the risks of reading the liberal press.<sup>5</sup>

This contribution adopts an interdisciplinary and systematic approach, incorporating fundamental discourse analysis to examine rhetorical strategies, linguistic tropes, and persuasive mechanisms. It focuses on elements such as recurring logical corollaries and conceptual history, tracing the semantic development of “liberalism” from a concept of individual freedom to one associated with moral disorder. Additionally, it investigates the historical context of political ideas, illustrating how arguments develop over time. The analysis highlights discursive strategies such as binary Manichaeism, prophetic irony, and biblical references used to undermine opponents.<sup>6</sup>

This article is based on relevant literature and materials. It includes a careful analysis of primary sources and a selection of numerous articles from the Jesuit magazine, organised by thematic categories. The analysis mainly relies on original paper editions, although digitised issues are also used. Additionally, the sources are complemented by an extensive and relevant international secondary bibliography, with consistent citations from contemporary journals that explore key points in depth.

The presentation of individual articles and thematic focuses is deliberately precise, clearly illustrating the development of arguments and discursive strategies on major themes. These themes include the delegitimisation of ideas through accusations of

3 Francesco Dante, *Storia della Civiltà Cattolica (1850–1891). Il laboratorio del papa* (Roma: Studium, 1991), 15–27.

4 Pia Carmela Lombardi, *La costruzione dell'altro. Corrispondenti fra Italia e Germania dal Kaiserreich alla Prima guerra mondiale* (Roma: Aracne, 2025), 9–11.

5 Vito Saracino, *‘Abbiamo bisogno di scuole e di maestri!’ Connessioni fra sistemi educativi e culturali tra Italia e Albania* (Chieti: Solfanelli, 2025), 27–38.

6 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), 215–34.

hypocrisy and apocalyptic forecasts concerning the liberal state, all within the broader context of international studies on Catholic political language at the end of the 19th century.<sup>7</sup>

The temporal analysis covers the period from 1860 to 1880, a pivotal era when the Holy See definitively lost its temporal authority. This study presents an interdisciplinary perspective that combines media studies, social history, and the sociology of cultural processes. While earlier research has concentrated on the relationship between magazines and the rise of fascism, as well as their links to other denominations, this study shows that even in the late nineteenth century, the press could influence public opinion. Specifically, it emphasises how the press actively opposed liberalism and helped shape the concept of conservatism.<sup>8</sup>

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## The Head-on Clash Between the Jesuit Magazine and Liberal Ideology (1860–1870)

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The term “liberalism” first appeared in the magazine within its first ten years. However, in 1861, with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, it became a symbol of the ideology seen as the enemy, to be opposed as a precursor to socialism and anarchy.<sup>9</sup>

The extensive dossier, divided into four articles titled “Limits of Economic Freedom”, addressed vital issues within the liberal system. At the beginning of this analysis, the concept of the Christian common good was summarised to help readers compare two different perspectives on understanding reality. This concept was defined as the “external implementation of the moral order among citizens”.

To fulfil this obligation according to their conscience and have the right to utilise the necessary means, individuals often face obstacles from material causes and, more importantly, from the wrongdoing of others. To address these challenges, the Creator provided us with society (*adiutorium simile sibi*), where all honest individuals collaborate to support one another. Through this collective strength, they can overcome the opposition posed by a few wicked people and the resistance from material circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

After praising and explaining the principles of a society based on the mutual aid that God provides to humanity, the text argued that liberal governments lacked

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7 Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 45–67.

8 Vito Saracino, “The slow revival of linguistic and cultural relations between Italy and Albania during and after the Cold War,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, No. 30 (2025): 654–73.

9 Stefano Figuera and Andrea Pacella, “Italian catholic social thought from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century and the debate on solidarity and subsidiarity,” *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, No. 3 (2021): 279–308.

10 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. X, No. 12, 1861, 558–59.

legitimacy because they impoverished the population through excessive taxation of basic necessities. The Papal States were presented as a model for taxation; however, they suffered from significant bureaucratisation, unlike liberal states that had implemented centralised, uniform tax management systems.<sup>11</sup> The papal propaganda employed strong language to criticise these issues:

These rulers essentially tell the poor man: “You struggle to feed and clothe your children with the sweat of your brow. Yet, despite this, you must take half of the meagre bread that barely sustains them from their mouths, so that I may pay for the comfort of the rich, the pleasures of the gardens, and the convenience of travellers with their hunger.” Is there any justice in this demand? If that father voluntarily sacrificed his family’s necessities for the luxury of his fellow citizens, would you consider him guilty of extravagance or poor management? And does a ruler who imposes such hardship on thousands of poor families deserve to be called a public administrator?<sup>12</sup>

The second article continued its critique of the new leaders, accusing them of superficial idealism and promoting an inconclusive pursuit of progress. A recurring theme was the fear of societal impoverishment, with blame consistently directed at the greed of the bourgeois ruling class, which consisted of professionals and intellectuals:<sup>13</sup>

It is unreasonable to prioritise the hopes of future generations over the well-being of the present. This perspective reflects the views of certain publicists who burden their subjects with great hardships while reassuring them with promises of a bright future for their children and grandchildren. When we say that a ruler must coordinate relations among citizens, this principle must be understood in the context of the order that, according to the laws of eternal justice, binds individuals living in real relationships. Just as it would be unjust – and indeed absurd – for someone to remove grass and herbs from their neighbour’s field to make the land more fertile for their heirs, it would be just as wrong for a ruler to aim for the happiness of future generations at the expense of those living today.<sup>14</sup>

The text presented an expanding list of accusations against parliaments, portraying them as costly institutions led by unqualified individuals.<sup>15</sup> It echoed Pius IX’s opinion that parliamentarianism was an incurable disease. He argued that this system left public affairs at the mercy of arbitrary decisions, causing ongoing injustices and numerous scandals.

11 Giovanni Marongiu, *La politica fiscale dell’Italia liberale* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2019), 5–16.

12 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. X, No. 12, 1861, 563–64.

13 Roberto Romani, “Fiscalità Cattolica e fiscalità liberale: Taparelli d’Azeglio e La Civiltà Cattolica, 1850–1876,” *Contemporanea*, No. 1 (2013): 7–37.

14 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 695–96.

15 Professore Romano, *I Fatti della nuova Roma contro la salma di Pio IX* (Ratisbona: Pustet, 1885), 735–80.

Since the people wanted to be sovereign, they demanded the power to regulate and oversee public spending, hoping this would lead to a more economical government. Our readers, as well as those who fund government operations, are aware of the savings achieved and the reassurance that money is being spent wisely. However, regardless of whether a government is wasteful or economical, it is only reasonable that it should regulate expenditures while in power. The government must ensure public order; it is responsible for determining the means to achieve that goal. Now, consider a scenario where public order falls under a monarch's authority. Would it be just to limit his freedom to utilise public funds and pursue competition, while still expecting him to be accountable for the common good? Certainly not. This resembles the type of despotism observed in the parliamentary states of the continent, where each new administration that assumes power immediately demands fresh initiatives and personnel, often dismissing numerous minor bureaucrats.<sup>16</sup>

The hope was that parliamentary governments would serve as a transitional phase before a return to the past. To justify restoration, particular emphasis was placed on the unique challenges faced by liberal governments in their early years in power.<sup>17</sup>

Before proclaiming tyranny due to a perceived lack of freedom or anarchy because restrictions are imposed on those in power, we must pause to reflect seriously. We need to remind ourselves that, in the intricate machinery of public society, principles are absolute; however, their application must be tailored to many considerations that make progress variable, conduct challenging, and judgment reckless.<sup>18</sup>

The third article entirely rejected any possibility of reconciliation with the liberals, effectively ending the internal debate within the Catholic community for the time being. *La Civiltà Cattolica* expelled several members of its editorial staff, including its first editor, Carlo Maria Cucci, who had supported an agreement between Pius IX and the liberal states that would have led to ecclesiastical reform and a subsequent period of renewed Christianisation.<sup>19</sup>

As long as people keep interpreting freedom as the unrestricted indulgence of all passions, it is clear that the two concepts – freedom and order – will always clash. In this context, freedom is simply a licence for chaos granted by unrestrained passions. You can compare reconciling this notion of freedom with order to the reinstatement of Italian princes against a faction that responds only to force and is assured of non-intervention through that force. This is similar to the so-called Roman question,

16 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 697–99.

17 Remo Ceserani and Lidia De Federicis, *Il materiale e l'immaginario: la società dell'antico regime* (Torino: Loescher, 1980), 222–24.

18 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 704–05.

19 Giandomenico Mucci, *Carlo Maria Curci. Il fondatore della Civiltà Cattolica* (Rome: Studium, 1988), 23–88.

which seeks to ensure temporal authority for the Head of Catholicism, while still allowing reforms for a faction that recognises no other reform than the abolition of Catholic principles in state governance. All these issues are equally contradictory and therefore unsolvable.<sup>20</sup>

*La Civiltà Cattolica* believed that any dialogue with the state of Piedmont was impossible, as the latter was considered a supporter of anticlericalism and paternalism.<sup>21</sup>

You can substitute Carlo Alberto and Piedmont with any other country and responsible government, and the response will be largely the same. To protect what is essential, there is no need to alter its nature. Those aiming for a particular outcome should regulate the means to achieve it. If people are sovereign, they should manage their finances responsibly, even if that occasionally brings them to the brink of disaster. However, this potential downfall should remind us to tolerate some financial mismanagement by leaders when they are responsible for managing the treasury, without expecting them to change the fundamental laws of nature for this reason.

For a conscientious prince or administrator, what principles should be followed when determining the taxation of subjects for the common good? These principles constitute the second category of corollaries previously mentioned, which we will now examine.<sup>22</sup>

The Jesuit magazine acknowledged the role it had established in the ongoing anti-liberal campaign across Europe. It was well known that the in-depth articles published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* were often cited in the pastoral letters of various bishops, who urged the faithful to steer clear of liberalism. As a result, the rationale behind this approach was explained in detail.<sup>23</sup>

Liberalism openly endorses the idea that the majority can oppress the minority. We use the term “oppress” deliberately, because enacting laws that reflect the will of the majority – despite being unnecessary, unhelpful, or unjust – constitutes true oppression. This is akin to violating an individual’s rights, even if it is done in the name of the majority. Justice can argue both for the individual against the many and for many against one. If justice favours the individual, the sheer number of violators becomes irrelevant; whether you multiply them a hundredfold or more, their actions remain a significant violation. This only increases the shame of the many for oppressing those who are powerless to resist. Ultimately, regardless of what Rousseau may argue, you cannot turn injustice into law.<sup>24</sup>

20 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XII, No. 12, 1861, 144–45.

21 Faustino De Gregorio, *La legislazione sardo-piemontese e la reazione cattolica 1848–1861* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1999), 68–70.

22 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XII, No. 12, 1861, 150–52.

23 Giovanni Antonazzi and Gabriele De Rosa, *L’Enciclica Rerum Novarum e il suo tempo* (Roma: Edizioni Maggiori, 1991), 41–42.

24 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XII, No. 12, 1861, 153–54.

One notable feature of these writings was the stylistic use of corollaries,<sup>25</sup> in which each article ended with a natural conclusion that prompted readers to draw insights from the analysis or reasoning presented. For example, this is evident in the conclusion of the extensive investigation into economic liberalism:

It is important to consider whether complex problems in social economics can be solved using simple principles. Some advocate complete freedom and laissez-faire economics, suggesting that rulers can do anything to promote the health of the people. They believe that by applying these universal principles, they have addressed the challenges of economic freedom. While universal principles are vital, their application must recognise the complexity of nature, which includes both diversity in individual circumstances and universality in overarching concepts.

By aligning the actions of those in authority with the realities of the world, we can attain true freedom – the security and fulfilment of individual rights. Furthermore, this alignment can foster a greater sense of unity, encouraged by cooperation among individuals and organisations working for society’s common good.<sup>26</sup>

After an extended discussion divided into four essays, the editorial team shifted its approach to analysing the phenomenon of liberalism. They moved on to shorter pieces examining the consequences of implementing liberal policies, exemplified by the article “Freedom in Economics”. In it, the authors reflected on how the concept of wealth differed between the Christian and liberal perspectives. The Church viewed wealth as a tool for growth and progress, while modern society often sought luxury for its own sake.<sup>27</sup>

Wealth is vital for sustaining life and fulfilling the responsibilities inherent to each individual. It should be managed freely by personal reason, which acts as the guarantor of one’s actions before the Creator. Regarding sustaining life, it is clear that there are two key functions that reflect the Creator’s intent for each person: I) Providing for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, which are essential for the body to support the spirit and accomplish the mission given by the Creator to every person born on Earth. II) Propagating, when in accordance with the Creator’s will, by establishing a new family and raising new worshippers of the God of the Universe.<sup>28</sup>

This discussion of the concept of wealth explored the tensions between the papacy and the French state. It adopted a Manichean perspective, systematically criticising every policy enacted by the French government. The centralist model of France was condemned for allegedly exacerbating the crisis of local autonomy in Vatican City and ultimately leading to adverse consequences for the people. Centralism was portrayed as harmful in this context.<sup>29</sup>

25 Antonio Cestaro, *La stampa Cattolica a Napoli dal 1860 al 1904* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1965), 109–11.

26 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Limiti della libertà economica*, Vol. XII, No. 12, 1861, 281–82.

27 Cecilia Carnino, *Lusso e benessere nell’Italia del Settecento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), 235–37.

28 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *La libertà in economia*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 543–45.

29 Nicola Picardi, “Alle origini della giurisdizione vaticana,” *Historia e ius*, No. 1 (2012): 2–24.

The great scourge of modern societies is centralism, which we carefully distinguish from social unity. Social unity brings together different parts without encasing them, connecting them for the common good while allowing some degree of individual independence to be maintained. In contrast, centralism idolises the idea of a unified state, sacrificing not only administrative freedom but also the vital resistance of its constituent parts. This transformation alters and morally diminishes the state itself, reducing it to a mere tool of private advantage, serving the interests of its rulers.<sup>30</sup>

*La Civiltà Cattolica* also spearheaded a joint effort by numerous Catholic newspapers to oppose the initial attempts at universal suffrage in Europe. Conservatives believed that expanding the electorate would have disastrous consequences, distancing the faithful from the Church of Rome's principles. They pointed to the situation in France as a cautionary example. In response, the Catholic Church proposed restoring the political representation from the Congress of Vienna:<sup>31</sup>

Ancient forms of representation not only depicted true groups of people organised by their members or corporations but also reflected their genuine interests, needs, rights, and affections. So, how were these corporations, or organic members of the social body, formed? As mentioned earlier, each was established to achieve a specific good. The family sought a comfortable domestic life; the municipality aimed for an orderly arrangement of families within a territory; the Church strived for morality and religion among individuals; the judiciary sought fair courts that should be respected and obeyed; the university aspired to flourishing and focusing on renowned academic pursuits; the arts sought their own honour and benefits; and, similarly, all of this also applied to the army and the administration.<sup>32</sup>

The intense anti-liberal sentiment present in this text demonstrates how the anti-liberal campaign became central to Pius IX's papacy. His legacy is characterised by a reputation as a champion of bigotry, a depiction vividly captured a century later by Luigi Magni in the film *In nome del Papa Re* (In the Name of the Pope King), which remains one of the most accurate cinematic portrayals of 19th-century Italy.<sup>33</sup>

In the early years of his pontificate, specifically between 1846 and 1856, Pope Pius IX did not appear as resistant to conciliatory solutions and compromises with the liberals. In contrast, nowadays, the emphasis on order often comes at the expense of individual freedoms.<sup>34</sup>

Order and freedom are not opposites, as some may believe; rather, they are two interconnected concepts that increase or decrease together. When freedom increases, order also increases, and when order decreases, freedom decreases as well. But

30 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *La libertà in economia*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 546–48.

31 Giovanni Rosa, "La questione religiosa in Parlamento," *L'Italia Evangelica*, No. 1 (1881): 162–63.

32 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *La libertà in economia*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 549–50.

33 Franco Montini and Piero Spila, *Il mondo di Luigi Magni. Avventure, sogni e disincanto* (Roma: Rai Eri, 2000), 34, d35.

34 Elena Zaroni, *Scienza, patria, religione. Antonio Stoppani e la cultura dell'Ottocento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), 201–08.

what do we mean by order? It refers to the full realisation of rights. And what do we mean by freedom? It is the assurance that there are no barriers to exercising one's rights. Therefore, limits on individual freedom are a vital condition for social and economic liberty, provided they are imposed in accordance with the principles of justice and propriety.<sup>35</sup>

Five years passed, and the attacks on modern society shifted focus, now targeting the printed press and the freedom of the press, both fundamental to a secular society. This particular assault occurred in 1868, when Italy was experiencing significant growth in cultural and public spaces such as cafés, reading rooms, libraries, and newspaper libraries.<sup>36</sup> In the article titled "*La libertà della stampa giudicata dai liberali*" (The Freedom of the Press Judged by Liberals), secular intellectuals were accused of double standards.

When liberals are in government and aim to govern wisely and consistently, without the constant fear of revolution or uprising, they profess to uphold liberal principles in theory. They declare that freedom of the press is an invaluable right. They strive to maintain this freedom for topics that do not directly affect the government or administration, such as morality and religion, which can be easily undermined by unrestricted opinions. While they emphasise the importance of great principles and achievements, in practice, liberals tend to exercise caution regarding freedom of the press. They often adopt restraints and arguments suggested by the Church or clerics, particularly when it concerns the general defence of religious, moral, and civil interests.<sup>37</sup>

The Catholic Church responded to the challenges of modernity by intensifying its bishops' pastoral letters and launching new Catholic periodicals. Nevertheless, a sense of unease persisted between the Church's leadership and its grassroots. Bishops increasingly sought clarification from the Congregation of the Index as doubts and interpretive conflicts arose over the now-widespread practice of reading, which was beyond ecclesiastical control.

The Congregation of the Index, once a conservative stronghold, now faced significant debates and conflicts that shaped its history. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, although lacking a formal institutional role, enjoyed considerable freedom to engage with conservative governments and individual members of the Italian political class. Its ambitious aim was to secure state recognition of the Church's role in guiding public morals and to re-establish ecclesiastical censorship, which would limit the freedom of the press:<sup>38</sup>

The Church clearly articulates its opposition to the idea that freedom of the press is inherently good. It condemns this notion and insists, as much as possible, that

35 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *La libertà in economia*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1861, 551–52.

36 Hubert Wolf, *Storia dell'Indice. Il Vaticano e i libri proibiti* (Roma: Donzelli, 2006), 25–65.

37 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *La libertà della stampa giudicata dai liberali*, Vol. II, No. 18, 1868, 25–27.

38 Francesco Traniello, *Religione Cattolica e stato nazionale. Dal Risorgimento al secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 60–66.

nothing should be published without prior review, especially when it pertains to morality and religion. While the Church firmly upholds this principle – one it will never compromise – it applies it with flexibility in practice. In areas where it has influence, there exists a genuine freedom that any wise person can appreciate. It aims only to prevent actions that, in other contexts, wise individuals would punish after they occur. Conversely, liberals, despite endorsing the misleading principle of press freedom, often find it necessary to compromise in practice to prevent chaos. Consequently, some liberal newspapers have advocated preventive censorship rather than being bound by specific press laws. These observations regarding the pitfalls of press freedom are made by individuals who sincerely uphold liberal ideals and are committed to the fundamental principles established in 1789, as well as to modern society and progress. However, they also value a stable, strong government, which sometimes leads them to act in ways that contradict their liberal convictions.<sup>39</sup>

The parliamentary crisis of the Menabrea government, a notable representative of Cavour's right-wing faction, prompted *La Civiltà Cattolica* to issue a bleak forecast concerning the future of the liberal state. In their essay "*Autobiografia del liberalismo italiano*" (Autobiography of Italian Liberalism), they warned that, without formal recognition of the Church's role, the liberal state risked losing its popular support.<sup>40</sup>

The Chamber poses significant dangers to the country, causing harm and undermining liberal institutions. Given our current difficult situation, we can only hope for a quick resolution. The best course of action would be to send the Deputies back to their constituencies to reconnect with the realities of the nation. In other words, they should learn from Italy – wise and Catholic – about how misguided those are who claim to be its representatives, as they only embody what Italy despises.<sup>41</sup>

The potential collapse of the Italian state was supported by statements from politicians and liberal newspapers such as *Perseveranza*, *Gazzetta d'Italia*, *Nazione*, *Corriere Italiano*, and *Il Diritto*. *La Civiltà Cattolica* was convinced that restoring the status quo was possible, given the constant reversals of fortune and the fragmentation of the political landscape. These factors had led to frequent government reshuffles, which merely slowed the decline of the Italian government. Moreover, unfounded rumours about Vittorio Emanuele's serious illness circulated internationally, prompting foreign ministries to consider possible global repercussions.<sup>42</sup> This chaotic situation was described in detail:

39 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *La libertà della stampa giudicata dai liberali*, Vol. II, No. 18, 1868, 28–34.

40 Valerio Castronovo, *La nascita dell'opinione pubblica in Italia. La stampa nella Torino del Risorgimento e capitale d'Italia (1848–1864)* (Bari, Roma: Laterza, 2004), 4–14.

41 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Autobiografia del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. VII, No. 20, 1870, 7–8.

42 Stefania Magliani, *XX settembre 1870: "Roma tutta appartiene agli italiani"* (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2021), 34–38.

In Italy, the liberals have become synonymous with disorder, deficit, bankruptcy, anarchy, discredit, and dishonour. The accumulation of hatred and contempt directed at them, as well as the institutions they established, is something Italians have experienced at first hand as they've been oppressed and tormented by liberalism. However, this situation has now turned into a source of amusement for many, as people watch these leaders air their dirty laundry in public. It has become obvious to everyone, without the need for extensive investigation, what level of trust and respect should be granted to each of the so-called honourable members. People are aware of who is truly honourable and who is merely honourable in name. It is known who has amassed wealth and how, as well as those who will, unfortunately, die poor in a lavish palace. Generally, it is believed that those who had no qualms about stealing from the altar would have even fewer reservations about stealing elsewhere. By stealing from the altar, they have metaphorically brought home the burning coals, as the well-known fable suggests.<sup>43</sup>

In an optimistic yet ironic tone, a forthcoming capitulation of the House of Savoy or a future explicit request for support from the Catholic Church to reintegrate Italy into pro-papal Catholicism was prophesied:<sup>44</sup> “feeling abandoned and betrayed by its young liberal allies, who had previously sought its support for financial gain, it was now returning to its old and trusted friends among the gentlemen, conservatives, clergy, and even, surprisingly, the Jesuits”.<sup>45</sup>

The article “The Decline of Liberalism”, written around the time of the capture of Porta Pia on 20 September 1870, does not anticipate the entry of Italian troops into Rome and continues to regard the concept of a liberal society as a merely temporary phase:<sup>46</sup>

A certain Catholic spirit seems to be reemerging worldwide, revitalising and uplifting a society that has become corroded and infested by liberalism, which appears to be waning in many areas. According to those who monitor shifts in public opinion, this Catholic spirit is on the rise in various places. The fact that liberals have dominated almost everything for the past twenty years hasn't been the root cause of this changing tide. They promised many good things but delivered only tears and disappointment. Consequently, the famous saying “we were better off when we were worse off” has become increasingly relevant, not only in Italy, where it is well-known, but also in several countries affected by false modern liberalism.<sup>47</sup>

Although Italian public opinion was beginning to discuss the demobilisation of troops in the Papal States, this news went unnoticed by *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which

43 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Autobiografia del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. XI, No. 19, 1869, 12–14.

44 Piergiorgio Grassi, *Storia della Chiesa Riminese* (Rimini: Pazzini-Guaraldi, 2015), 10–18.

45 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Autobiografia del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. XI, No. 19, 1869, 15–16.

46 Claudio Fracassi, *La breccia di Roma 1870: le passioni, gli inganni, il papa, il re* (Milano: Mursia, 2020), 70–81.

47 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Il decrescere del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. XI, No. 21, 1870, 129–30.

continued to praise the Roman stronghold for resisting the lure of liberalism. This misunderstanding originated from the extensive pro-papal campaign in Rome during the twenty years from 1850 to 1870, a period in which over 200 newspapers were established in support of Pius IX. Among these, those employing aggressive language, humorous parodies, cartoons, and caricatures of their opponents were particularly successful. Praise continued to be expressed along these lines: “These Roman people, governed solely by the law of God and the Church, stand in contrast to the fundamental principles of modern society. They alone enjoy the true benefits of progress and have become objects of admiration and envy. It can truly be said of them: *Beatus populus cuius Dominus Deus eius*.”<sup>48</sup>

Rome did not face these challenges alone. The magazine highlighted the efforts of Catholic newspapers in liberal countries, where these publications managed to bypass censorship and oppressive laws aimed at silencing Christian voices. In an attempt to provoke the reader, it drew a comparison between Catholic journalists today and the early persecuted Christians, listing the countries willing to stand up against liberal adversaries.<sup>49</sup>

In Bavaria, Belgium, and Portugal, Catholics appear to be gradually emerging from the constraints imposed by Masonic influences, to varying degrees. Similar changes are clearly imminent in Austria. In France, there is a stronger resolve than ever to support Rome, which global liberalism would prefer to see abandoned. In Italy, liberalism is currently being exploited, despised, and divided, leading to its decline. This is because, among Protestant and heterodox peoples and governments, Rome and its civil and religious authority are regarded with greater respect than Italy and other seemingly stronger liberal states. The anti-clericals are diminishing as Providence seems to have permitted the very excesses of evil to open the eyes of many, who, driven by personal interests, feel compelled to support and defend what the Pope represents, upholds, and preaches. This movement reflects an emerging trend towards sound Catholic principles, which now appear to politicians as the only viable foundation for maintaining material order and protecting economic interests.<sup>50</sup>

The article concluded with the Pope’s firm defence against attacks from the liberal class, emphasising the unbreakable bond that developed between the pontiff and the Catholic press. Pius IX was probably the first pope to recognise the power of the printed word and to cultivate a close relationship with journalists. During his papacy, he met with journalists multiple times, receiving as many as 600 in a single meeting and offering advice on how to oppose liberal impiety.<sup>51</sup>

48 Riccardo Calimani, *Storia degli Ebrei di Roma* (Milano: Mondadori, 2017), 206–08.

49 Bonfiglio Mura, *Studi filosofico-polemici sulla società moderna* (Roma: Tipografia dell’Osservatore Romano, 1863), 258–60.

50 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Il decrescere del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. XI, No. 21, 1870, 131–33.

51 Józef Sebastian Pelczar, *Pio IX e il suo pontificato sullo sfondo delle vicende della Chiesa nel secolo XIX* (Torino: Berruti, 1911), 67–68.

## ***La Civiltà Cattolica* in Defence of Papal Infallibility against Liberal Catholics (1870–1880)**

During the third decade of *La Civiltà Cattolica's* existence, significant events that altered the relationship between Catholics and liberals in Europe should not be overlooked. In 1870, the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the withdrawal of French troops from Rome allowed the Italian soldiers to enter the city, effectively ending the pope's temporal power. This event, marked by the capture of Porta Pia, also led to the suspension of the First Vatican Council. Nevertheless, the Council established the dogma of papal infallibility and upheld the Church's moral and temporal authority.<sup>52</sup> In 1872, the article "*Saggio di teologia liberalesca*" (Essay on Liberal Theology) accused certain Italian liberal figures of failing to respect the dogmas set forth by the Council.

Bonghi is truly absurd! He is an amateur, and a particularly inept one at that. If you were to ask him a question about the catechism, he would likely answer with several mistakes. Yet, despite this lack of knowledge, he carries himself with the arrogance of a Master of Divinity, even in front of the Pope and the entire Episcopate. Not only does he attempt to instruct them, but he also reprimands them. And for what reason? For allegedly succumbing to a clear contradiction.

It is also worth noting that Bonghi considers himself a philosopher and seems eager to demonstrate his supposed intellectual prowess. He argues that since bishops have ordinary and immediate power over their congregations, the Pope cannot possess the same type of power, as both being of the same nature would create a mutual exclusion. This keen observation reveals that the ordinary and immediate power of a subordinate pastor, like a bishop, is fundamentally the same as that of a supreme pastor, such as the Pope.<sup>53</sup>

Ruggero Bonghi was criticised for being arrogant and smug because he represented a form of Catholic-liberal thought that was strongly opposed by the Jesuit magazine. Despite this, Bonghi approached the topic with a secular and critical mindset. He acknowledged the Church's moral authority but argued that the Pope should renounce temporal power, limiting his influence to the spiritual realm. This, he believed, would ensure religious freedom for citizens.<sup>54</sup> These views conflicted with the strong defence of Pius IX's authority, which is why the article concluded with an accusation of heresy: "Let Bonghi and his peers come forward to acknowledge what they have reduced themselves to through their obstinacy: they have become not only schismatics but also openly heretical, resembling infidels. In doing so, they have incurred the gravest of sins, which can be seen as a perversion of morals."<sup>55</sup>

52 Paolo Petruzzi, *Chiesa e società civile al Concilio Vaticano I* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1984), 27–32.

53 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Saggio di teologia liberalesca*, Vol. V, No. 23, 1872, 164–69.

54 Walter Maturi, *Ruggero Bonghi. Stato e Chiesa* (Milano: Garzanti, 1942), 22–28.

55 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Saggio di teologia liberalesca*, Vol. V, No. 23, 1872, 174–78.

Besides liberal Catholics, France also faced accusations, as it had long been regarded as the birthplace of anti-clericalism since the French Revolution. The article “*Amor patrio e liberalismo*” (Patriotism and Liberalism) criticised the liberal assumption.

The most absurd, if not the most foolish, claim made by liberalism is that it has the exclusive right to appropriate all the good, whether true or false, that humanity currently enjoys. Before 1789, the world was shrouded in the darkness of the Middle Ages, suffering under the weight of superstition, engulfed in disgrace and misery, and largely unaware of concepts like homeland, national pride, and public welfare. The introduction of immortal principles advocating for human rights, which spread from France to the rest of Europe, revived what could only be described as a necropolis of civil society at that time. It brought forth a new spirit, light, passion, and industriousness among the people, leading to the remarkable sense of patriotism that astonished the world during the eras of Mirabeau and Bonaparte in France, and later Cavour and Lanza in Italy. Without this regenerating force, civilisation would remain in a deep abyss of shame and degradation.<sup>56</sup>

After the fall of Rome, the Catholic press became a platform for clerics who, with an intolerant and disparaging attitude, criticised the order and existence of the liberal state.<sup>57</sup> They dreamed of a catastrophe for what they viewed as a usurping and godless government, defined as:

Modern liberalism can be regarded as an adversary of all revealed faith and authority, and as an apostate straying from Christ and His Church. Consequently, its inherent disdain for all supernatural truth logically leads it to oppose even natural truths, aiming to undermine the comprehensive understanding and certainty granted by God. As long as it conflicts with faith and opposes Catholic science, it will not hesitate to draw any conclusion, no matter how extreme, and will pursue its consequences to the fullest extent. Catholic doctrine is deeply intertwined with the truths of nature, forming a single fabric that appears differently when viewed through the lens of reason or faith. This fabric cannot be separated without tearing. Unfortunately, the zealous attacks of modern liberalism on Catholicism force it, against its own intentions, to contradict nature in its fervour to dismantle faith.<sup>58</sup>

The pages of the Jesuit magazine addressed the accusation of a perceived lack of patriotism among Catholics towards the Italian state. They justified the indifference shown by moderates towards a nation that had neglected its Christian roots, suggesting that this oversight could lead to inevitable decline,<sup>59</sup> because:

Their lordships recognise no other Italy than their own. Anyone who is not part of their group is considered an enemy of the homeland. This results in an unusual

56 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Amor patrio e liberalismo*, Vol. VII, No. 23, 1872, 19–21.

57 Fausto Fonzi, *I cattolici e la società italiana dopo l'unità* (Roma: Studium, 1953), 53–59.

58 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Amor patrio e liberalismo*, Vol. VII, No. 23, 1872, 21–23.

59 Gabriele De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1966), 235–37.

situation where a significant portion of Italy, approximately eighty percent, views itself as hostile. If you ask the moderates who they see as the fiercest enemies of the homeland, they will point to the immoderate democrats right after the Catholics. Conversely, the immoderate democrats claim that it is the moderates, following the Catholics, who oppose them. The moderates demand in the name of the homeland what the immoderate democrats resolutely deny, also in the name of the homeland. In Parliament, which represents factions rather than the nation itself, you will find as many definitions of the homeland and differing views of Italy as there are factions. For some, the homeland lies in a confederation of small republics; for others, it exists within the current constitutional monarchy. Some envisage the homeland in a Mazzinian statute, while others see it in today's subalpine statute.<sup>60</sup>

Those who still hoped for collaboration with the Kingdom of Italy faced a clear rejection. Since Cavour's era, the central theme of liberal politics had been to depict the Papal States as a place where the Pope's presence had become intolerable.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, "they sacrificed all the most beautiful, noble, and useful institutions of their homelands for the cause of their party-homeland, indiscriminately attacking anything that opposed the destructive spirit of anti-Christian liberalism."<sup>62</sup>

During the previous decade, radical liberalism had been under attack. Now, however, the magazine's editors criticised the more moderate segments of the opposing ideology, accusing these moderates, as highlighted in the article "*Il liberalismo moderato e la persecuzione religiosa*" (Moderate Liberalism and Religious Persecution), of complicity in the religious persecution of Catholics in Europe.

Liberalism, which has come to dominate many nations, should show a notable level of tolerance and careful thought regarding religious matters. Since it would have recognised that religious rights and practices had existed among the people before its rise, it ought to have protected them as much as possible. From 1789, when it gained prominence in France, to the present day, when it governs large parts of Europe, it can be stated with certainty that liberalism has consistently persecuted the Catholic Church within Catholic communities and has meddled with their most cherished rights of conscience. The unjust, sacrilegious, and oppressive laws enacted to suppress Catholicism have resulted in bans, exile, imprisonment, confiscation, destruction, and the most terrible forms of suffering.<sup>63</sup>

After the formalisation of the Non Expedit in 1874, in which the Pope prohibited Catholics from participating in the political life of a united Italy, *La Civiltà Cattolica* shifted from being a hub of journalistic innovation to becoming the voice of the most intransigent faction of European clericalism. This group continued to label liberalism as a deception and called it a "war".<sup>64</sup>

60 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Amor patrio e liberalismo*, Vol. VII, No. 23, 1872, 29–31.

61 Stefano Tommasini, *Roma, il Papa, il Re. L'unità d'Italia e il crollo dello Stato Pontificio* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011), 60–69.

62 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Amor patrio e liberalismo*, Vol. VII, No. 23, 1872, 30–32.

63 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Il liberalismo moderato e la persecuzione religiosa*, Vol. I, No. 23, 1874, 515–16.

64 Vittorio Gianangeli, "La stampa cattolica marchigiana di fronte alla svolta clerico-moderata del 1904," *Quaderni storici delle Marche*, No. 7 (1968).

Liberalism replaces the concept of God with that of man, placing human will and strength at its centre in every aspect of life. Consequently, the conflict that liberalism has initiated with the Church is not only philosophical, scientific, and moral but also political and material. This struggle is fundamentally about challenging the absolute despotism present in the world, which the Church uniquely and effectively opposes by safeguarding the freedoms entrusted to her by Christ.<sup>65</sup>

It appears the magazine was unable to accept the consolidation of the modern state, instead opting to criticise liberal governments such as those in France and Spain. This is exemplified in the essay titled “*L’impotenza del Liberalismo*” (The Impotence of Liberalism):

Since 1789, liberal France, built on the ruins of its once-glorious Christian monarchy, has only managed to create fragile structures and flashy machines that, with every strong gust of wind, collapse and ignite. Over the years, twelve liberal governments have fallen in succession, each more pitiful than the last. There has been a continuous cycle of creation and destruction, reminiscent of Penelope’s weaving. Spain, by its example, amplifies the situation in France. For about forty years, this region has embodied a wretched spirit, where proponents of liberalism have conducted their destructive experiments. It has become a symbol of the tools used by liberal demolitionists. The current state of society is a chilling testament to the deadly art and devastated science of our modern barbarians. Recently, some of the most unrestrained newspapers in Madrid described the situation as follows: “Our beautiful language no longer has the means to express our ills and to condemn those responsible for our ruin. There is no government, no politicians, no homeland, and even civilisation is in jeopardy. Weak laws, lost dignity, anarchy, vandalism, banditry – a system of crime endorsed, indeed promoted, by the executive power. When demagoguery reigns over the peninsula, its fruits will be murder and plunder.”<sup>66</sup>

In the past, the magazine had conducted thorough analyses of the challenges faced by liberal society. However, at this point in history, it focused on the absence of religion in the public sphere as a scapegoat. This perspective promoted a secular and materialistic view of society, leading to a significant moral and social crisis.<sup>67</sup>

The primary reason for liberalism’s ineffectiveness lies mainly in its system, particularly in the fundamental principle it is based on: freedom. This focus on freedom often comes at the expense of authority. Whether we accept it or not, human morality – both on an individual level and within society – fundamentally relies on God as the ultimate source of all authority. Those who openly reject God’s authority over humanity inevitably end up questioning all other legitimate sources of human authority. This is inherent to the nature of things and aligns with the unchanging order of reason.<sup>68</sup>

65 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Il liberalismo moderato e la persecuzione religiosa*, Vol. I, No. 23, 1874, 520–22.

66 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Impotenza del liberalismo*, Vol. II, No. 25, 1874, 129–31.

67 Pietro Scoppola, *Crisi modernista e rinnovamento cattolico in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968), 40–48.

68 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Impotenza del liberalismo*, Vol. II, No. 25, 1874, 132–33.

The article proceeds with a critique of the concept of freedom of worship,<sup>69</sup> because “Liberalism, in contrast, adopts a fundamentally different stance. While it acknowledges the right to religion and truth in our Catholic countries, it also elevates impiety and error to a position of recognition. It views the respect shown to religion, truth, and eternal justice as mere accidental occurrences. The state that emerged from the principles of 1789 permits Catholicism but nothing beyond that.”<sup>70</sup>

Beginning in 1874, two new terms emerged – communists and socialists – which, in the following decade, would replace liberals as the primary focus of the Catholic press. The essay “Moderate Liberalism and Democracy” suggested that moderate liberals would eventually be overtaken by more extreme factions. Furthermore, moderates were criticised for adopting certain ideologies.

The Church’s aversion to ignorance is evident; however, liberalism simultaneously undermines and diminishes religious influence. While it promotes education by expanding universities and secondary schools, favouring the press, and establishing popular schools, it can go to extremes that may be inappropriate. For example, it encroaches on parental authority by enforcing compulsory primary education. Although the Church promotes literacy and cultural education among the people, liberalism actively seeks to diminish and dismantle religious culture. It abolishes public holidays, mocks divine worship, humiliates the clergy, and fully secularises education, often treating religious instruction as merely optional. Additionally, it allows insults directed at the Church, its dogmas, rites, and principles to appear in literature, newspapers, engravings, and even in theatres and public venues.<sup>71</sup>

Moderates were often viewed as accomplices in the struggle against religious orders carried out by liberal states. Evidence of this collaboration can be found in a pamphlet written by the liberal-moderate Giuseppe Piola, which emphasised the need for a clear separation between church and state:<sup>72</sup> “In the book under the misleading title of ‘Freedom of the Church’, a genuine code of servitude for the Church is compiled. The Italian parliament is criticised for having given too much power to the Church, sacrificing the most sacred and inalienable rights of the state in the process. The book also suggests ways to restore those rights.”<sup>73</sup>

By the end of the decade, the innovative spirit and depth of argument that had distinguished *La Civiltà Cattolica* among Italian periodicals seemed to fade. This shift occurred as the journal adopted a more critical stance towards its opponents, becoming a mouthpiece for the latter years of Pius IX’s pontificate. This change is evident in the article titled “*Una stolta speranza del liberalismo italiano*” (A Foolish Hope of Italian Liberalism), which emphasises the impossibility of dialogue with the Kingdom

69 Pasquale Marica, *Stampa e politica in Sardegna: (1793–1944)* (Cagliari: La Zattera, 1968), 6–21.

70 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Impotenza del liberalismo*, Vol. II, No. 25, 1874, 138–39.

71 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Il liberalismo moderato e la democrazia*, Vol. IV, No. 25, 1874, 53–54.

72 Giuseppe Borghi, *La Civiltà Cattolica e la sua azione culturale* (Roma: Studium, 1985), 120–44.

73 “La Civiltà Cattolica,” *Il liberalismo moderato e la democrazia*, Vol. IV, No. 25, 1874, 60–61.

of Italy. The article argues that as long as the ruling class continues to desire the Pope's demise, productive communication cannot take place, stating that it is

incorrect to argue that Catholics follow the Vatican's doctrine out of respect for the personal merits of the Pope. If that were true, their adherence would not be genuinely Catholic, as it would depend on human rather than divine reasons. In fact, Catholics accept the Pope's dogmatic decisions because he is regarded as infallible in his role as Pope. They also accept his non-dogmatic teachings because they see him as the voice of God and the teacher appointed to us by Christ. Conversely, liberals who have lost their faith do not understand this. They focus only on the man behind the Pope, and, judging Catholics from their own perspective, assume that when the Pope's human qualities diminish, the faithful should also lose their affection and lessen their filial piety.<sup>74</sup>

After directly challenging liberal thinkers and writers, an effort was made to undermine the strongest arguments presented by the liberal magazine *Il Diritto* regarding the Roman question and the role of the Pope. This publication was chosen because it served as the antithesis of the Jesuit magazine, advocating moderate liberalism and constitutionalism in post-unification Italy. It addressed important issues such as the defence of institutions, the role of the state, and the promotion of civil liberties, thereby shaping the cultural formation of the ruling class,<sup>75</sup> much like *La Civiltà Cattolica* did in the past. *Il Diritto*, perhaps unintentionally, supports our argument by stating that the freedom currently granted to the Pope has been excessive. This implies that such freedom should be restricted. In fact, he has frequently encouraged the government to take action in this regard.<sup>76</sup>

In 1878, Pius IX died and was succeeded by Leo XIII, marking a turning point in the Catholic Church's approach as it gradually opened to dialogue with the modern world. Nonetheless, there were still significant moments of crisis, such as in 1880, when the Coppino Law was introduced, abolishing compulsory religious education in schools.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, the Italian government continued its secularisation policies, limiting the clergy's privileges and suspending the three million lire per year allocated under the Guarentigia Law.

*La Civiltà Cattolica*, despite lively disagreements among its editors, several of whom felt fatigued by its extreme anti-liberal stance, chose to remain the official voice of Catholic conservatism.<sup>78</sup> In later editions, the political debates diminished, and the magazine reverted to purely theological discussions,<sup>79</sup> losing its prominent voice as the new pope adopted a more moderate approach.

74 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Una stolta speranza del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. IV, No. 28, 1877, 262–64.

75 Michael Stoellis, *Geschichte des öffentlichen Rechts in Deutschland* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1992), 100–43.

76 "La Civiltà Cattolica," *Una stolta speranza del liberalismo italiano*, Vol. IV, No. 28, 1877, 267–69.

77 Vito Saracino, *Giuseppe Bucci. Storia di un educatore nel passaggio dalla società liberale all'età fascista* (Bari: Adda, 2018), 20–21.

78 Giovanni Sale, *La civiltà cattolica nella crisi modernista (1900–1907): fra intransigentismo politico e integralismo dottrinale* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2001), 8–11.

79 Laura Valente, *La stampa liberale in Italia nel Risorgimento* (Roma: Edup, 1998), 18–21.

The obscurantist phase of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, despite a subsequent shift in editorial stance, continued to shape public perceptions of Catholic journalism. Notably, Francesco De Sanctis referenced this period in his essay “*L’Ebreo di Verona*” by Father Bresciani, while Antonio Gramsci discussed it in his “Notebooks of Prison”. Gramsci criticised Catholic journalists as the epitome of the “grandchildren of Father Bresciani”, who was one of the Jesuit journal’s most reactionary contributors. He condemned these individuals as conformist, mediocre intellectuals who promoted didactic, moralistic journalism and literature lacking aesthetic and ideological depth.<sup>80</sup>

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## Conclusions

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The historical and social analysis of the individual articles published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* between 1860 and 1880 is vital for understanding the key historical and cultural events of a pivotal period for both the Catholic Church and European history. The rigorous method employed, which involves careful reading and comparative analysis, emphasises the magazine’s strong opposition to liberalism, which it regarded as a threat to traditional religion and the established social order.<sup>81</sup>

The innovative value of this essay lies in its examination of liberalism, focusing on reconstructing the ideological debate and communication strategies of the period. It emphasises the role of *La Civiltà Cattolica* not just as a propaganda tool but also as a cultural and political centre of resistance amid significant changes in Italy and Europe. The magazine served as a key instrument for engagement between the Church and the State, reflecting the tensions and challenges caused by political, social, and cultural modernisation.<sup>82</sup>

The period under review is marked by the crisis caused by the papacy’s loss of temporal authority and the emergence of the Italian state. *La Civiltà Cattolica* exploited this situation to advocate a vision of society rooted in Catholic values, firmly opposing liberalism, which it considered a fundamental cause of moral and social decline.

This essay deepens our understanding of the Catholic press of that era by going beyond merely describing its ideology. It provides insights into the cultural and political dynamics of post-unification Italy, portraying the magazine as a strategic vehicle for spreading papal and Catholic doctrine. It sets out key coordinates for understanding the development of Catholic political thought throughout the modern period.

In-depth studies on topics such as this article can serve as a foundation for further exploration of other issues discussed in *La Civiltà Cattolica*’s articles, including the strengthening of conservatism in Europe, the Kulturkampf, and the relationships between the Papal States, the Germanic States, and the Kingdom of Italy in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>80</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 2125–30.

<sup>81</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Movements in a World of Nations without Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 112–35.

<sup>82</sup> Vito Saracino, “La presenza della lingua italiana nel sistema politico, educativo e culturale albanese (1855–1943),” *Meridiana*, No. 110 (2024): 217–43.

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### Vito Saracino

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## KRITIKA LIBERALIZMA V REVIJI LA CIVILTÀ CATTOLICA, 1860–1880: RAZMIŠLJANJA IN POGLEDI

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### POVZETEK

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Članek vsebuje analizo kritik liberalizma, objavljenih v jezuitski reviji *La Civiltà Cattolica* med letoma 1860 in 1880, v ključnem obdobju, ki sta ga zaznamovala združitve Italije in izguba posvetne oblasti papeške države. Predstavljeni so struktura, občinstvo in uredniški pristop revije ter kako je ta postala ključno orodje za obrambo

“katoliške civilizacije” pred domnevnimi sovražniki, kot so liberalci, prostožidarji, socialisti in komunisti. Študija se osredotoča na analizo najpomembnejših rubrik (politične kronike, kritike italijanskega in tujega tiska, teološke in filozofske eseje), ki razkriva, kako je revija sistematično povezovala liberalizem z moralnim neredom, družbenim propadom in spodjedanjem tradicionalne avtoritete.

Ob pozornem branju glavnih zbirk spisov, predvsem niza “Meje ekonomske svobode”, se pokaže, kako so jezuitski avtorji v imenu krščanskega skupnega dobra nasprotovali liberalnim ekonomskim doktrinom, previsoke davke, parlamentarizem in meščanski pohlep pa označevali kot oblike krivičnosti do revnih. Liberalizem je prikazan kot predhodnik socializma in anarhije, ki temelji na napačni ideji svobode, razumljene kot nebrzdana strast in zato nezdružljive z redom. Analiza osvetli diskurzivne strategije, kot so binarni maniheizem, dramska ironija, svetopisemske reference in uporaba “izpeljav”, ki bralce usmerjajo k protiliberalnim sklepom.

V metodološkem smislu članek združuje konceptualno zgodovino in analizo diskurza ter sledi semantičnemu premiku “liberalizma” od pojma individualne svobode do oznake za moralni in politični nered. Stališča revije umešča v širše mednarodne razprave o katoliškem političnem jeziku in uveljavljanju konservativizma v Evropi ter pokaže, kako je revija *La Civiltà Cattolica* delovala kot propagandno orodje in kulturnopolitično središče upora proti modernosti. Študija ugotavlja, da je imela revija pomembno vlogo pri oblikovanju katoliškega nasprotovanja liberalizmu in konservativnega katoliškega odziva na izzive vzpostavljanja narodov, demokracije in moderne države v Evropi konec 19. stoletja.