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**Italian Australians, the Church, War and  
Fascism in Melbourne 1919-1945**

by

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**Declaration**

**Except where otherwise indicated**

**this thesis is my own work**

**Anthony Cappello**

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## Introduction

In Melbourne, outside St. Patrick's Cathedral there is a statue of the Irish Catholic rights campaigner, Dan O'Connell.<sup>1</sup> Its importance and strategic placement is to demonstrate the strong Irish roots of the Catholic Church of Melbourne. In addition, on a number of occasions, our current Archbishop, George Pell, has reminded Catholics in Melbourne of our strong Irish links. There is no doubt that the Irish have played a major part in Australian Catholic Church history, but I question the notion that they have been the only contributor to the Australian Catholic Church in Australia. This interpretation produces a situation where other cultural groups are either ignored or overlooked. There is no better example than the description of Patrick O'Farrell who assesses the contribution of the Italian community in the following paragraph:

Within many parishes migrants were subject to strong pressures to assimilate, to adopt Australian religious ways and to drop their own. This pressure conflicted in particular with the Italians' desire to retain their own form of worship- notably their saints' days, statues and habits of devotion. Some parishes bluntly refused to accommodate such differences of Catholic behavior; in very few were they welcome. As a consequence, many Italian Catholics- disposed by their background to anti-clericalism- deserted the parish churches, and the regular practice of their religion. Where they remained, their participation in, and contribution to, Australian Catholic life was relatively small.<sup>2</sup>

Although I single out O'Farrell, numerous Australian Catholic Church histories fail to acknowledge the Italian contribution at all. It comes as no surprise that none of the Australian Catholic Church histories (written to date) do not mention the Italian Jesuit fathers who were chaplains to the Italians in Melbourne, Vincenzo de Francesco (1921-1934) and Ugo (Hugh) Modotti (1938-1945) and their influence in the life of the Catholic Church during 1919 to 1945. Those who do write about the Italian contribution begin their assessment after the Second World War and regard the Italians as latecomers. Yet, the evidence illustrates that there is sufficient data to demonstrate that there was an Italian contribution before the end of the Second World War. In fact, there is considerable evidence revealed in this thesis that the Italian contribution was not only important but also crucial in changing the nature of the Australian church from its predominately Irish beginnings.

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<sup>1</sup>Early in April 1999, Dan O'Connell was moved to the side of the Cathedral. In his former place a new statue of Daniel Mannix has been erected.

In the years 1919-1945 there was a world war, there were fascists, communists and movements such as the Campion Society and Catholic Action, internments, major Episcopal changes, escaped POWs and American secret agents, and associated in all of these areas was the Italian community, particularly its chaplains. This thesis argues that the Italian contribution to Australian Catholic history during the years 1919- 1945 cannot remain merely a footnote or a paragraph. This thesis challenges O'Farrell's argument, that the Italian contribution was relatively small, and instead will demonstrate that the Italian contribution, despite pressure to assimilate, was significant and, in fact, focal to an unfolding political drama.

While the thesis is limited to Melbourne, there is some overlap into other states. The thesis revolves around two central characters, Father Ugo Modotti and to a lesser extent Father Vincenzo de Francesco. Regarding the Salesian Fathers who arrived in Melbourne in 1925, because their interaction with the Italian community was minimal, I have only made passing references, which concern their relationship with either Father de Francesco or Father Modotti. The description of Father de Francesco's contribution is limited to one chapter compared to Modotti (who has five chapters), because the events during de Francesco's chaplaincy were minor compared to Modotti's period. Furthermore, there was far more material available on Modotti than on de Francesco.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the formation of the Italian State in 1870 and the interpretation of the unification of Italy by the Australian Catholic Church, which from its earliest days was prominently Irish.<sup>3</sup> Following this I introduce the Italian community in Australia, which I argue, is a minority within an Irish Australian Church. In introducing the Italian community, I pay particular attention to its first signs of unity with the newspaper *Voce D'Italia*. The second half of chapter one focuses on Father Vincenzo de Francesco, chaplain to the Italians of Melbourne from 1919 to 1934, and his ministry amongst the Italian community. The role of de Francesco is used as a platform to look at the pressing questions of Fascism and *Italianita*, which are discussed in chapter two. Also assessed in chapter two is the lay<sup>4</sup> input of the Italian Catholic community and events overseas such as the Abyssinian invasion and the Spanish Civil War.

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, Revised Edition (Sydney, 1992) 404.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Duncan, "From Ghetto to Crusade: A Study of the Social and Political Catholic Opinion-Makers in Sydney during the 1930s." Doctorate of Philosophy. Sydney University. Sydney 1987. 1-6.



Chapter three introduces us to Father Ugo Modotti and his contribution to Melbourne during 1938-1940. The focus of this chapter is Modotti's role in introducing counter fascist moves against the Italian Consular Officials by carrying out the mandate of the Archdiocese, which included assimilation of the Italian community. Chapter four assesses the support from the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, towards Fr. Modotti and the Italian community. Members of the Italian community, with the advent of war, became enemy aliens, as did their chaplain. This protection and support shown by the wider Catholic Church to those who suffered the fate of internments and injustices becomes important in understanding that the Catholic Church played a central role in supporting the Italian migrants. Chapter five introduces Panico's attempt to install Australian born bishops rather than bishops from Ireland. Mannix becomes Panico's main target, but with Modotti and Mannix developing strong links, Panico starts his attack on Modotti with the aim of discrediting Mannix. Chapter six evaluates the beginnings of the communist-Catholic battles of Melbourne. The famous Labor party disputes of the fifties are well documented elsewhere, and this chapter looks at the earlier battle within the Italian community. The climax builds into chapter seven where Panico implements his Roman policy, but in order to do this, he ends the Modotti and Mannix plan of controlling the chaplaincy of the Italian community. Important in this chapter is the significance of the Italian community in determining the successful implementation of the Roman policy.

In my analysis of the Italian community I will argue how it developed with its first chaplain, Fr. Vincenzo de Francesco 1920-1934, how it continued to expand without a chaplain during 1934-1938, and how it further impacted on the Australia Catholic Church scene with Fr. Modotti during the years 1938-1945. Furthermore, I will assess the role and influence of Father Modotti and the Italian Community on the wider Catholic Church, especially in the areas of politics, both church and secular. Also discussed is the role of the Apostolic Delegate and its relationship to the Italian community and to the wider predominantly Irish community. The reader must note that I am demonstrating, by discussing all these different components, that the Italian contribution was not merely a footnote in the bigger story of the Australian Catholic Church. Thus the heading of my conclusion, "*Italian Australian Catholics: More than a Footnote.*"

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<sup>4</sup> Lay- laity, the non-clerical members of the Italian community.

My main source of information for this thesis has been the Australian Archives, Commonwealth Investigation Bureau files years 1940-1945. Other important sources have been the Jesuit Archives, Melbourne Catholic Diocesan Archives and, to a lesser extent, the Santospirito Papers. The author has opted not to conduct oral interviews, due to the advanced age of those still alive. Rather I have opted for written correspondence with those alive or related to the people in question, which I believe has worked well in this instance.

The author concedes that there are still many questions that need answers, and sources in Italy could shed more light on the issues in question. It has not been possible to access the sources in Italy because of availability. Let me acknowledge the importance of the contributions of Gianfranco Cresciani and Patrick O'Farrell. While Cresciani does not write favorably on Modotti and the Catholic Church in general, his contribution in making known the struggles of the Italians during 1919-1945 has been valuable and needs recognition, while Patrick O'Farrell has been and is one of Australia's best Catholic historian and I have relied on his contribution and framework.

A thankyou also to all who have assisted me with the writing of this thesis:

Father John Raccanello CS, for translating and support, Val Noone, my first supervisor who inspired me to start writing and helped with my candidature, Fr. Tom Daly, for access to the Jesuits archives and helpful background information to the Jesuits, the staff at Australian Archives, Val Adami jnr, for information sent to me on his father. Bruce Stegelman, my lift mechanic friend who teased out many ideas in the lift wells! Father Robert Hale, for material about Big Sur and especially for the photos of Father Modotti's place of burial, Fr. Diego Lamaro, for background information, Father Dominic Murphy, for use of the Dominican Library and support, Paul Ghanem for use of the Yarra Theological Library and support, Father Gerard O'Callaghan, for photos and background information on the Italian community, Br. Peter Swain, for background information on the Salesians, Jane Trewin and the staff at VUT, SIACS Department, Dr. Giorgio Santoro, for information on his father and for support. My parents are thanked for their continual interest and insights into *italianita'*, Maria Triaca for allowing me access to the Santospirito collection and Mr. Anthony Santospirito for background information on his mother.

This thank-you deserves a paragraph of its own. My supervisor, Ilma O'Brien, has tirelessly worked with me on this thesis with comments, advice and direction. There are also those little things which have helped, having the meetings half-way, helping me to access material, giving me part-time work as a Research assistant, writing me references and being very supportive. I am most grateful. The experience has been valuable.

I cannot leave out my best friend Brigid Cappello. I met her in my first year of my thesis, I married her in my second year, we became parents this year, and she continues to share her thoughts and dreams with me. And, of course, Liam and Clare Cappello who both will truly benefit from the culture of their nonni!

## Chapter One

### The Beginnings

The Australian Catholic Church consisted mainly of Irish migrants and was very much a minority in Australia, which was predominately a protestant population. Within this Irish Catholic minority existed a further minority, the Italian Catholic. This Italian minority, after the First World War, found a focus by publishing its newspaper, *Voce D'Italia*, and then with the arrival of its first Italian chaplain to Melbourne, Father Vincenzo de Francesco. In this chapter, I will discuss how de Francesco and the Italian community associated with the Italian Consular Officials as the community became clustered around the parish of Saint Ignatius in Richmond, making St. Ignatius the centre of Italian Catholic life in Melbourne.

#### *Unification of Italy*

On September 20, 1870, Italian troops occupied Rome ending the territory governed by the papacy known as the Papal States. The papacy was reduced to the small confines of the Vatican as the annexation of the Papal States ensured the unity of the Italian peninsula from the North to the South. This unification of Italy, at the expense of the Papal States, created opposition from the Catholic hierarchy who refused to recognise the new kingdom of Italy, as argues historian H.A.L. Fisher: "The Church ... was bitterly hostile to the kingdom which had shorn it of its patrimony and deprived the Holy See of its ancient political pre-eminence."<sup>1</sup>

In Melbourne, the *Advocate*, the official newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, responded to the reduction of the temporal power of the Pope and the loss of papal territory by publishing a letter of protest from the bishops of Ireland. The letter stated: "Our Holy Father Pius IX is a prisoner in the hands of his enemies. He has been robbed even of his personal liberty... he has been torn by brute force from his children whose voice cannot reach his ear..."<sup>2</sup> There was no unified Australian protest; any protest that did come forth came as an Irish protest through two of the signatories of the Irish statement. These two

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<sup>1</sup> H.A.L. Fisher, *A History of Europe, Volume II: From the Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century to 1935*. (London, 1971) 1053. In fact, the Church forbade any Catholics to vote. The ban was known as the "Non Expedit", and it was lifted on November 11, 1919. John Molony, *The Emergence of Political Catholicism in Italy*, (London, 1977) 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Advocate*, December 31, 1870, 5-6.

signatories were bishops from Australian dioceses, Daniel Murphy of Hobart and Timothy O'Mahoney of Armidale.<sup>3</sup> The *Advocate* at the same time also condemned the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel, referring to him as the "bandit king."<sup>4</sup>

Catholics in Australia were presented with the view that the Italian State, which robbed the Pope of his liberty, was in opposition to the faith. At the same time, the First Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church pronounced the dogma of Papal Infallibility which entailed that, on matters of faith and morals, the Pope was infallible. The Pope, the highest earthly authority in the Church's hierarchical structure, was a victim of the Italian State. The Melbourne response to the situation of the Papacy was expressed by Bishop James Goold, Archbishop of Melbourne, who stated in his Lenten Pastoral letter of 1871 that "the Kings of the earth have stood up, and the princess met together with the applause of the wicked against the Lord and his Church."<sup>5</sup> The standoff between the Italian State and the Church ended with the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929 between Mussolini's fascist government and Pope Pius XI in which the Papacy was paid compensation for lost territory. Mussolini, a one-time socialist, had come into power with force and terror in 1924. The *Advocate*, in fact, described Mussolini in 1929 not as a devout Catholic but nevertheless a Catholic.<sup>6</sup>

The Irishness of the Australian Catholic Church was its major defining characteristic, right up until the Second World War. In 1901, 87% of priests in Sydney, for example, were born in Ireland,<sup>7</sup> although this figure began to decline after the First World War with the opening of the seminaries in Werribee, Victoria and Manly, New South Wales. The Irish in Australia were the largest ethnic minority group in Australia who held strong resentment towards its Protestant Monarch and Protestant Constitution. The Irish developed what has been described as a ghetto culture, characterized by their fidelity and identification

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Advocate*, December 31, 1870, 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Advocate*, supplement, March 4, 1871, front page.

<sup>6</sup> *Advocate*, February 2, 1929, 24-25.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Dwyer and Graham English, *Faith of Our Fathers and Mothers* (Melbourne, 1990) 4.

with the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> Within this Irish Australian Catholic ghetto existed a further minority, the Italian Catholic.

In 1913, Melbourne saw the arrival of the Irish Catholic cleric, Daniel Mannix, appointed in Ireland as co-adjutor bishop with the right of succession to Archbishop Carr, the then Archbishop of Melbourne. Daniel Mannix was born in Charlesville, County Cork, Ireland, to parents Timothy and Ellen (Cagney) Mannix.<sup>9</sup> He was to become the pillar of the Australian Church, and a constant nuisance to the British Commonwealth. Why? Because Mannix was not an ordinary cleric, he was a strong supporter of the Irish Republican Movement with a "passionate dislike of British Imperialism."<sup>10</sup>

Australia fought in the First World War, 1914-1918, as a part of the British Empire, while in Ireland in April 1916 a rebellion by Irish nationalists was quashed by the British government. Regarding the rebellion, Mannix argued that the British government, with its shifty policy in regards to Home Rule, had unwittingly led to the uprising.<sup>11</sup> The First World War set Catholics further apart with the "No" to conscription stance taken by Mannix in the conscription referendum. For the Australian Protestant, the "No" stance taken by the Archbishop provided "proof of the old accusation that Catholics were disloyal."<sup>12</sup> On the battlefields, Italy and Australia fought as allies, an interesting point to note, especially when looking at the internments of Italians in Australia during the Second World War. It is also worth noting that a few Italian migrants fought for Australia during this war. The Italian paper in Melbourne, *Voce D'Italia*, acknowledged their contributions by featuring articles and profiles on these Italian-Australians in the Australian army. John Bona was one example whose profile appeared in June 1919.<sup>13</sup>

Italian migration to Australia occurred in several stages. The first stage of Italian migration comprised religious men, priests, missionaries, gold seekers and Swiss Italian farmers. The second stage of Italian

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<sup>8</sup> B.F. Duncan, "From Ghetto to Crusade: A Study of the Social and Political Thought of Catholic Opinion-Makers in Sydney during the 1930s" Doctor of Philosophy, (Sydney, 1987) 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Murphy, *Daniel Mannix*, (Melbourne, 1948), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop*, (Melbourne, 1988) 132.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy, *op.cit.* 33.

<sup>12</sup> M. Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand*, (Ringwood, 1987) 179.

<sup>13</sup> *Voce D'Italia*, June 5, 1919, 3.

migration to Australia comprised predominately professionals.<sup>14</sup> After the First World War, Italian migration to Australia took a fundamental change. This was mainly due to the restricted quota in the United States, which severely limited the number of Italian immigrants to the USA. The Italians now looked to Australia to fill the void and so the influxes of Italian migrants followed. Significant numbers of Italian migrants came from the Aeolian Islands who were characterized by their strong devotion to the Catholic faith and their patron saint, Bartholomew.

Italians in Victoria began to settle in three suburban areas within Melbourne and two regional areas outside Melbourne. Within Melbourne, Italians settled in the suburbs of North Melbourne, Richmond and Carlton. These settlements were distinguished by the respective parishes of St. Mary's Star of the Sea, North Melbourne, St. Ignatius Richmond, and St. George's Carlton. Meanwhile, in regional areas Italians settled in Wonthaggi and Werribee. The Wonthaggi community included miners, although many of the Italians had no mining experience. The Italian Werribee community, on the other hand, included market gardeners.

In 1919, the Italian community in Melbourne published a newspaper called *Voce D'Italia* (Voice of Italy picture 1A). The remarkable thing about the newspaper was that its editors were non-professional migrants. The committee for the paper included Giuseppe Briglia, Domenico Boffa, G. Carra, V. Ricco and Giuseppe Santamaria.<sup>15</sup> The mention of the committee is significant, as many of them were later to have involved themselves with one or more of Father Ugo Modotti's committees in 1938. (I will introduce Father Ugo Modotti in chapter three).

*Voce D'Italia*, while being patriotic, was a non-political newspaper. In its first editorial, it established that this newspaper was to be "the voice of the homeland and the courier of the Italians."<sup>16</sup> Although it claimed to be non-political, the newspaper nevertheless ran series of articles on Bolshevism. However, this was done in a cautious manner: "The above title [Bolshevism] must not make afraid the readers of *Voce D'Italia* and to reassure them, I at once declare that I will not take side in politics, and will neither condemn nor

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia*, (Richmond, 1988) 80.

<sup>15</sup> *Voce D'Italia*, April 10, 1919, 6. The microfilm used to view *Voce D'Italia* at the State Library of Victoria was in poor condition. Many pages were unreadable.

praise Bolshevism."<sup>17</sup> The paper was also admittedly anti-Austrian with numerous anti-Austrian articles. This was because Italy had fought the First World War primarily against Austria and such anti-Austrian propaganda was to be expected.<sup>18</sup>

*Voce D'Italia* claimed to speak on behalf of the Italian Community, and tried to promote Italian culture among the Australian population by producing the paper in Italian with an English translation of the main articles in the back pages. Furthermore, it was so innovative that it had an Italian grammar lesson on the front page for those wishing to learn the language. Still, the paper needed subscriptions in order to continue printing and with only a small Italian population, it had to fold just two years after the release of its first issue. *Voce D'Italia* was not to make the impact which later Italian Australian newspapers were to achieve. It does, however, go into the history books as a paper that attempted to draw bridges between two cultures, by a small Italian community in a remote part of the world. It was, also, the first newspaper in Melbourne that promoted Italian-Australian culture by printing a bilingual edition.

### ***Coming of Fascism and the Catholic Church***

On October 28 1922, Benito Mussolini, escorted by his fascist terror squads, marched on Rome. The King of Italy with little resistance agreed to an audience with Mussolini, which ensured the rise of Fascism to power in Italy. From 1922, Mussolini governed within the confines of the existing parliamentary institutions until 1924, but after 1925 he introduced laws that made Fascism a totalitarian power. The Popular Party (PPI) of Don Luigi Sturzo (who was himself a priest), whilst being an autonomous party, received considerable support from the Catholic Church in Italy and was strongly opposed to Mussolini's Government. When the PPI sought to collaborate with the Socialists in September 1924, in the hope of stopping the fascists gaining totalitarian power, the Catholic Church withdrew its support culminating in words of condemnation by Pius XI which saw the death of the PPI and the monopoly of Italian politics by

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<sup>16</sup> *Voce D'Italia*, April 3, 1919, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Voce D'Italia*, November 27, 1919, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Voce D'Italia*, May 8, 1919, 5.



the Fascists.<sup>19</sup> The fascists of Mussolini were preferred by the Papacy to the possible collaboration of Socialists with Catholics.

The Fascist Government, before the defeat of the PPI, made several concessions to the Church. These concessions included the reintroduction of religious teaching in primary schools, the recognition of Papal Titles, and the establishment of the 'Feasts of SS. Peter and Paul', 'Corpus Christi' and 'The Annunciation' as public holidays in Italy. Furthermore, crucifixes, removed by the previous liberal governments, were returned to schools, universities and tribunals.<sup>20</sup> Of particular importance to later politics in Melbourne was the return to the Jesuits, by the fascist government, of the home of the order's founder in Rome, the "Casa di S. Ignazio."<sup>21</sup> This benevolent gesture to the Jesuits was to ensure an amicable tolerance to the fascist ideology by some Jesuits.<sup>22</sup> It was also from this house that a Jesuit emerged to work in Melbourne in 1938.

In February 1929, Mussolini gave the Papacy its biggest concession, with the signing of the Lateran Treaty. Since the seizure of the Papal Territories in 1870, the Papacy had been a prisoner in the Vatican. With the Lateran Pacts, the division and stand off between the Italian State and the Papacy ended. The Papacy in the Pacts received 108 acres in the heart of Rome, known as the Vatican City, and a sum of money comprising 750 million Lire in cash and 100 Million Lire in consolidated stock. The latter was compensation for lost territory.<sup>23</sup> In return for the concessions made by Mussolini, Catholicism became the religion of Italy as proclaimed by the State and the Papacy in turn acknowledged the existence of the Italian State.<sup>24</sup> Back home in Melbourne, the good news of the Lateran Pacts became front-page news for Catholics. The *Advocate* produced an article: "Viva il Papa Re: People Acclaim Triumph of Sovereign Pontiff, King and Mussolini praised for Acts of Justice".<sup>25</sup> The writer of the article was certainly biased, leaning towards the Papacy; however, it did acknowledge Mussolini as a "man of genius."<sup>26</sup> The Lateran Pacts ended the conflict between the Italian Government and the Vatican, thus ensuring Fascism, for a short time, a

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<sup>19</sup> John Molony, *The Emergence of Political Catholicism in Italy* (London, 1977) 188-190.

<sup>20</sup> D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, (London, 1941), 138-142.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Letson and Michael Higgins, *The Jesuit Mystique*, (Chicago, 1995) 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> Italian Bulletin of Commerce, Commercial Supplement to the *Corriere degli Italiani in Australia*, August 1929, Vol.1. No.8. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Denis Meadows, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, (New York, 1960) 226.

<sup>25</sup> *Advocate*, February 2, 1929, 24-25.

favorable place in the Catholic mind. This is an important element in understanding why there was a degree of tolerance towards Fascism by many in the Catholic Church. The ability to negotiate with the church convinced many of the diplomatic nature of the Mussolini's government. Canon lawyer Francesco Pacelli, brother of Eugenio Pacelli (who became Pope Pius XII) referred to Mussolini's fine character in the negotiations of the Lateran Pacts: "reasonable but quite intransigent on essential matters of principle, extremely broadminded and generous on all secondary points."<sup>27</sup>

### *Father Vincenzo de Francesco*

In Melbourne, before 1920 there was no Italian born clergy nor were there any Masses said specifically for the Italian community. The participation of Italians in the Catholic life of the Australian Catholic community in this period was, according to one source, most distressing.<sup>28</sup> While the source used was written in 1928, the situation prior 1920 could only have been worse.

It was in 1921 that Italian Jesuit Fr Vincenzo de Francesco was appointed as chaplain to the Italian community of Melbourne. Father Vincenzo de Francesco was born in 1885 in Messarcola, Caserta, north of Naples. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1900 at the age of fourteen. After twenty years of studying for the priesthood, interrupted by the First World War, he was ordained.<sup>29</sup> Soon after ordination, de Francesco headed for Melbourne to take on the role of migrant chaplain. De Francesco arrived in Australia on October 23, 1920, having traveled with an Irish religious, Brother P.J. Barron, the provincial of the Christian Brothers in Australia.<sup>30</sup> The picturesque scene of the two religious men is an important: one, an Irishman sent to control one of the biggest religious orders in Australia, the Christian Brothers, and the other an Italian to look after the small minority Italian community of Melbourne. The two symbolized the state of the Australian Church in 1920. Archbishop Mannix was overseas when de Francesco arrived in Australia in October 1920. In early 1921, Archbishop Mannix was in Rome, where he met Pope Benedict. Mannix was

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Binchy, *op.cit.* 178.

<sup>28</sup> Report of a Two Month visit to the Italian Settlement of the Herbert River" by Rev. Fr. Mambrini, reproduced in full in G. Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates*, (Sydney, 1988) 103-104.

<sup>29</sup> G. Germier, "I Nostri Morti," *Societas*, January-April 1975, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Vincenzo de Francesco to R.P. Provinciale, July 2, 1923, *Lettere Edificanti dei Padri della Compagnia di Gesu': della Provincia Napoletana 1921-1923*, (Naples, 1924) 92.

however unsuccessful in attempting to visit Ireland.<sup>31</sup> The British government went as far as intercepting the liner headed for Ireland that Mannix was on board, and escorting him off the liner and taking him on board a warship to Britain.<sup>32</sup>

De Francesco upon his arrival found a community of migrants who spoke little or no English, were not well educated, and had no social welfare agency working on their behalf. B.A. Santamaria recalls these days of childhood where the Italian community were isolated and discriminated against, not only by Protestants but also by Catholics: "we learnt to take the appellation dagoes and not to challenge the superiority of our white Protestant or Catholic tormentors. There were too many of them."<sup>33</sup> Despite the difficulties faced by the Italian community, the advantage of having an educated Italian priest for their care did not seem to matter as according to de Francesco, the Italian community did not welcome him on his arrival. This disappointment he shared in a letter to his Provincial in Naples:

my first encounter with the Italian people was not all that encouraging, they looked at me with suspicion and indifference, with the occasional interrogation: What do you intend to do? Why did you come?<sup>34</sup>

De Francesco believed that the Italian community found his coming as interference and were quite resentful that a priest came to remind them of "those obligations... that they had neglected."<sup>35</sup> Still, despite his early difficulties, the Italian community soon realized that de Francesco was a friend. Motivated by the arrival of the "Re D'Italia" with 650 Italian immigrants on board, de Francesco published a booklet entitled, *A Little Guide for the Italians in Australia*. The guide contained prayers and useful information for new migrants, including a dictionary, common phrases and a guide to the pronunciation of English words. De Francesco also involved himself with the Dante Society where he took part in several fund raising events.<sup>36</sup>

By 1922, de Francesco realized the extent of caring for the Italians and that the vast spread of the community was going to make his duties extremely difficult. He estimated that in Melbourne alone the Italian community numbered approximately three hundred to four hundred families. Not only had he to

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<sup>31</sup> Murphy, *op.cit.* 108.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 101-102, Michael Gilchrist, *Daniel Mannix: Priest and Patriot*, (Melbourne, 1982) 90-94.

<sup>33</sup> B.A. Santamaria, *Against the Tide*, (Melbourne, 1981) 5.

<sup>34</sup> Fr. Vincenzo de Francesco to R.P. Provinciale, July 2, 1923, *op.cit.* 93.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

care for these families, he also had parish duties at St. Ignatius, Richmond, such as being in charge of *Bona Mors* (Society for a Good Death), the Apostleship of Prayer society and the Altar Boys' Sodality. Ultimately, the non-Italians at St. Ignatius Richmond were also touched by de Francesco's charisma as he led these groups.

### ***De Francesco and Fascism***

The year after the arrival of de Francesco, saw the arrival of the Salesians to Australia. Bishop Ernest Coppo and other Salesians were invited to take over the Kimberley mission from the Pallotine Fathers who, being German, had suffered as a result of major restrictions placed on them by the Australian government during the First World War. Later after being unsuccessful in the Kimberley, the Salesians moved to Diamond Creek where they attempted to start an agricultural school.<sup>37</sup> This venture also failed, but with the suggestion of Father de Francesco and with the financial help of Mannix, the Salesians settled in "Rupertswood," Sunbury in 1927.<sup>38</sup> On June 27, 1927, Father John Cerutti, Father Emmanuel Manassero and Father Michael Maiocco settled in Rupertswood followed later by Brother Asselli. Maiocco, who was born in Piedmont (in the North of Italy), took over as acting superior. The Salesians, who were mainly of Italian origin, did not involve themselves in any way with the Italian Community, leaving de Francesco to care solely for the spiritual needs of the Italian community. Elio Capra SDB, in a brief history on the Salesians, emphasizes this observation, that the early Salesians did not involve themselves with the Italian Community at all, but as a small consolation, the order's first hired employees were of Italian background.<sup>39</sup>

With the rise of Fascism in Italy, the Salesians seemed unaffected by the cult of Mussolini. The reasons for this was that their religious constitution did not allow any political involvement and also because the Salesians had very little to do with the Italian community. Some of the laws in the Salesian constitution

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<sup>36</sup> A. Mayne, *Reluctant Italians?* (Melbourne, 1997) 56.

<sup>37</sup> E Cooper and J. Ayres SDB, *The First Twenty-Five Years: 1921-1946*, (Oakleigh, 1967) 1-14

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> E. Capra SDB "The Salesians at Rupertswood, 1927-1934: A Study of the Sources", September 1975, Catholic Theological College, Melbourne.

stated: "Every publication of a political nature is forbidden"<sup>40</sup> and "a severe ban is placed on bad talk, blasphemy, quarrelling, stone throwing and everything which is improper or scandalous, as also on gambling and political discussions."<sup>41</sup> Br Peter Swain, remembering many of the early Salesians during the time of Fascism recalls that:

The Salesians did not discuss fascism with us during those years. Some of them may have had views on fascism but I do not recall hearing any of them, and I was often in a position to listen to them when they were talking among themselves.<sup>42</sup>

On Father Cerutti, Swain recalls: "He never discussed politics. Knowing the man, however, I would say that he would have opposed fascism."<sup>43</sup>

Such a disassociation with Fascism was not so apparent with de Francesco. First, de Francesco like the wider Catholic population was fearful of the emergence of Bolshevism (later to become Communism). Those Italians in Australia who professed to those creeds he quickly dismissed. In a letter to his Provincial in Naples in 1928, for example, de Francesco wrote about the Communists and Socialists who met at the Matteotti Club. In his letter he argued that "many will be lost" if influenced by them who according to de Francesco were "Veneti and Friulani" (Northern Italians).<sup>44</sup> There were, however, Southern Italians in the Matteotti Club as well. The fact that de Francesco associates them as 'Northern Italians' is interesting, especially when de Francesco was of a Southern Italian background. There is certainly a hint of Southern-Northern enmity in de Francesco's letter. The Matteotti Club, formed in 1927 by Francesco Carmagnola,<sup>45</sup> consisted of members of the Italian Community opposed to Fascism- but, moreover, ideologically committed to Socialism, Communism and Anarchism. The club took its name from Giacomo Matteotti, an Italian Socialist brutally murdered by Mussolini's squads.

With the depression of the 1930s affecting every facet of the Australian population, Italians in Melbourne like many other Australians were beginning to look at Mussolini and his style of government with pride.

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<sup>40</sup> *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis De Sales*, (London, 1925), 21.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 121-122.

<sup>42</sup> Br. Peter Swain SDB, Letter to the Author, May 21, 1995.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*

<sup>44</sup> Fr. Vincenzo de Francesco to R.P. Provinciale, October 8, 1928, *Lettere Edificanti dei Padri della Compagnia di Gesu' della Provincia Napoletana: 1924-1930*, (Naples, 1931) 323.

Fascism appeared to many to be a solution to the problems caused by the depression. As early as 1923 Harry Sutherland Lawson, the premier of Victoria, on his return from Italy in 1923 declared Mussolini as the man whom providence wanted to lead Italy,<sup>46</sup> while the Premier of New South Wales George Fuller praised Mussolini as the man who saved Italy from Bolshevism.<sup>47</sup> From this approval, Italians began to display exterior manifestations of Italian patriotism.

While the Aeolian community had a strong devotion to their Patron Saint Bartholomew, in 1928 de Francesco brought out a painting of Our Lady of Pompeii who he consecrated as Patron of the Italians in Australia. For its inauguration, de Francesco invited the Italian Consulate General, Antonio Grossardi, the Apostolic Delegate, Bartolomeo Cattaneo, and the men's and women's fascist groups.<sup>48</sup> Later in 1928 when the fascist movement celebrated its ninth anniversary at the Temperance Hall, Melbourne, de Francesco was present and blessed the women's banner.<sup>49</sup> The last strong indicator of de Francesco's tolerance of the fascists is a photograph taken at St. Ignatius, Richmond, around 1930 (Picture 1D). Here we see de Francesco posing with male members of the Italian community wearing their black shirts. Finally, his service to the Italian community and his ability to work with the Italian Consular Officials earned him in 1933, together with S. Pellegrini and Mr. Boffa, the Knighthood of the Italian Crown.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that during 1928-1933, Fascism in Italy was at its early stages and its acceptance in Australia was widespread.

Although de Francesco was openly associated with fascist festivities, he was primarily concerned with the pastoral welfare of the Italian immigrants in Melbourne. This concern for the welfare of the Italians included fascists and antifascists. Moreover, one could argue that his ideology was Catholicism best demonstrated by some of his early religious concerns, such as Protestantism, and the phenomenon of mixed marriages. In a letter to his Provincial in 1926 de Francesco wrote: "I now know first hand the wicked

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<sup>45</sup> Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, *Australia's Italians 1788-1988*, (Melbourne, 1989) 84-85.

<sup>46</sup> Cathcart, *op.cit.* 33.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Fr. V. de Francesco to R. P. Provinciale, October 8, 1928, *op.cit.* 322.

<sup>49</sup> *Advocate*, March 29, 1928, 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Advocate*, March 30, 1933, 14.

effects of mixed marriages, especially when the wife is Protestant.”<sup>51</sup> For Catholics in Australia, mixed marriages, virtually unknown in Italy, were a major pastoral problem. Professor Patrick O’Farrell argues that the church’s policy on the prohibition of mixed marriages by the Irish bishops was, for the Irish Catholic “imperative to the survival of the Catholic Church.”<sup>52</sup> The fear was that “indifference and Protestantism” would swallow up the Irish Catholic community.<sup>53</sup> On another occasion, de Francesco helped John Antonio, who was 90 years of age, re-commit himself to the Catholic faith. When the man died after renewing his baptismal vows, de Francesco rejoiced since this man had died a Catholic.<sup>54</sup> De Francesco also engaged in attacking those who attacked the Catholic faith, as was the case with the suppression of the Catholic uprising in Mexico by the anti-clerical Plutarco Calles. In moving language at a function at St. Mary’s Hall in Geelong, de Francesco described the martyrdom which the faithful were experiencing by the revolutionaries who were men “without conscience.”<sup>55</sup> De Francesco also established a centralized area of worship for the Italians, that of St. Ignatius Richmond where the statue of Our Lady of Pompeii, which has remained a focal point of Italian Australian Catholic devotion, is still found today.

In 1934, de Francesco became Provincial of the Jesuits in Naples, ending his time in Australia. Frank Virgona, who was the proprietor of the ABC coffee shop in Geelong and a good friend of de Francesco, organized his farewell. At his farewell, Archbishop Mannix praised de Francesco as one who knew every Italian family in Melbourne.<sup>56</sup> Mannix called de Francesco the Italian community's best friend and hoped that another Italian priest would replace him very soon. On his return to Italy, de Francesco, on taking the role of Provincial of the Jesuits in Naples was to experience the fascist regime first hand. After his role as Provincial, de Francesco continued to work as a Jesuit with the grassroots of the Neapolitan community until his death in 1974, at the age of 89.

De Francesco, in ministering to the Italian community, identified major difficulties. In a vast land, the Italian community was widespread, isolated and surrounded by Protestants. Moreover, some Italians were

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<sup>51</sup> Fr. V. de Francesco to R. P. Provinciale, August 15, 1926, *op.cit.* 309.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, (Sydney, 1992) 203.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* Pamphlets such as *Marry Your Own*, D. A. Lord, (Melbourne, 1934) were widely circulated. See Picture 4E.

<sup>54</sup> Fr. V. de Francesco to R. P. Provinciale, July 2, 1923, *op.cit.* 95.

<sup>55</sup> *Advocate*, May 16, 1929, 17.

socialists, communists and anarchists. It is not surprising that amongst these forces against the Catholic faith, Fascism could be considered an ally to the Italian Catholic community. Fascism in its early stages generally did not undermine Catholic teachings and under this acceptance, the Italian community was free to associate with the fascists. It was, however, Communists, Protestants and mixed marriages that, according to de Francesco, would result in the Italian living in Australia being “lost”.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There are many reasons why Italians in Australia during 1919-1934 looked towards Mussolini with pride. First, the Italians were a minority. Second, they were a minority within the Irish Australian Catholic Community. Thirdly, the wider Catholic Church in Australia, because of the Lateran Pacts, looked towards Mussolini with respect. The Lateran Pacts elevated Catholicism to the national religion of Italy. Furthermore, as John F. Pollard argues in his book *The Vatican and Italian Fascism 1929 to 1932*: “In the midst of the turbulent, tormented and almost apocalyptic world, from the view of the Vatican, Fascist Italy seemed to be a haven of hope, peace and tranquility and a bulwark against Communism....”<sup>58</sup> Fifthly, with the depression Mussolini's government was unscathed and continued to place order and prosperity to Italy's economic problems. Finally, several Australian political leaders publicly approved the Government of Mussolini. Therefore, to the Italian in Australia, Mussolini was a figurehead of pride and this pride came as a relief to the isolation and discrimination endured by the Italian Community. Out of this pride evolved the notion of *italianita'*: pride in one's Italianness, distinct from pride in the ideology of Fascism. This notion of *italianita'* will be discussed in the next chapter.

Father Vincenzo de Francesco, during the years 1919-1934, identified himself with the Italian community. Like the wider community, de Francesco respected Mussolini as someone who restored peace with Catholicism. Not forgotten, however, was de Francesco's religious contribution to the Italian community in which he cared and helped the Italian migrants, restored their faith in the Church and unified them in having a central place of worship, that of St. Ignatius Richmond. This contribution has not been forgotten.

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<sup>56</sup> *Advocate*, June 21, 1934, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Fr. V. de Francesco to R. P. Provinciale, October 8, 1928, *op.cit.* 323.

<sup>58</sup> John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, A study in conflict*, (Cambridge, 1985) 188.



In fact, de Francesco received a special mention in the commemorative booklet of the centenary of the St.

Ignatius Church in Richmond published in 1967:

The list of those priests is a long one, too long to record here, but there is one name we feel cannot be left unmentioned, Fr. Vincenzo De Francesco, an Italian Jesuit who came here from Naples in 1921 to serve the spiritual needs of the great number of Italian-speaking Catholics of Melbourne. He was attached to the Richmond parish and during his years here, worked unceasingly and tirelessly for his beloved Italians. For them he was a true father, to whom they could turn with confidence in all their troubles, spiritual and temporal... he was recalled to Naples in 1934...The memory of his goodness and kindness is still fresh in the minds of many of our older parishioners....<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *St. Ignatius Church, Richmond, Victoria, 1867-1967*, (Richmond, 1967) 11.

# PICTURES: CHAPTER ONE

## ITALIAN VOCE D'ITALIA ENGLISH

### Corriere degli Italiani in Australasia

ANNO 11  
 GIOVEDÌ 11 AGOSTO 1910  
 N. 32  
 Melbourne  
 GIORNALE SETTIMANALE  
 PERIODO WARELY

#### POSTA.

In ogni settimana:  
 A Melbourne 20 Agosto  
 A Sydney 19  
 A Adelaide 18  
 A Fremantle 17  
 In partenza per l'Europa:  
 Da Melbourne 18 Agosto  
 Da Sydney 17  
 Da Adelaide 16  
 Da Fremantle 15

#### Voce d'Italia

11 Agosto 1910.

#### Dopo Versailles

La vittoria raggiunta da Woodrow Wilson, in una conferenza internazionale, ha una importanza che si può dire storica. Ma non è solo la vittoria del presidente americano che ha fatto sì che la conferenza di Versailles si sia svolta in modo così pacifico. È anche la vittoria della democrazia che ha fatto sì che la conferenza di Versailles si sia svolta in modo così pacifico. È anche la vittoria della democrazia che ha fatto sì che la conferenza di Versailles si sia svolta in modo così pacifico.

#### PREMUDA L'Affondamento della S. Stefano



Come tutti ricordano, la S. Stefano fu affondata da Luigi Ilmarinen e dai suoi compagni nel porto di S. Stefano il 10 giugno 1910. Il fatto che la S. Stefano fu affondata nel porto di S. Stefano è un fatto che tutti ricordano.

#### How to Learn Italian

The Italian language is very easy to learn and understand. (For Rules of Grammar) See the book. Personal Phrases (Singles of the Verb) In the book. The book is very easy to learn and understand. The book is very easy to learn and understand. The book is very easy to learn and understand.

#### Voice from Italy

11 Agosto 1910.

#### After Versailles.

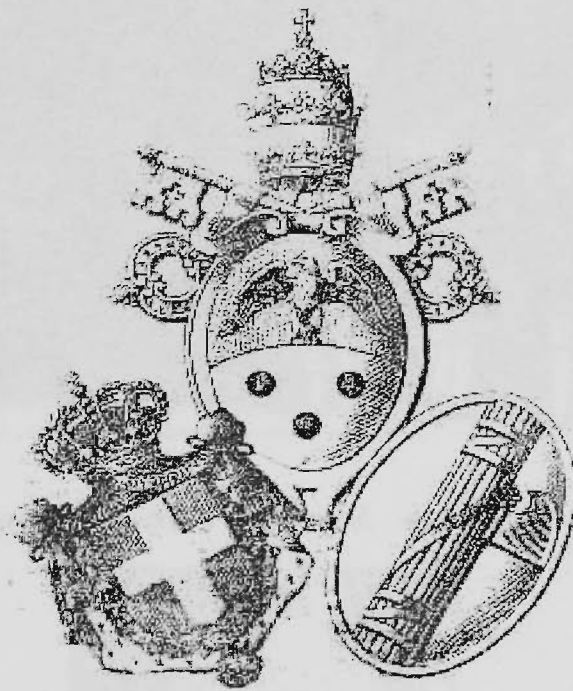
A note forwarded a few days ago from Melbourne, containing a short account of the conference of Mr. Wilson, is a very interesting one. The note is a short one. The note is a short one. The note is a short one.

IA: Voce D'Italia.



Father Vincenzo de Francesco

# LA CONCILIAZIONE FRA L'ITALIA E IL VATICANO



11 FEBBRAIO 1929 - VII

ISTITUTO NAZIONALE L. V. C. E.

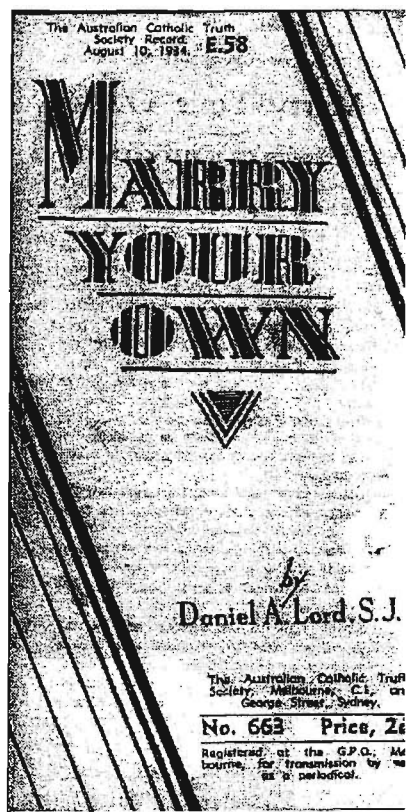
ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI STUDI GIURIDICI BERGAMO

The Conciliation between Italy and the Vatican. This Picture is taken from a souvenir edition of the event, which is found at the Caroline Chisholm Library in Melbourne. The Caroline Chisholm Library was formally the Central Catholic Library.





1D: Father Vincenzo de Francesco with members of the Italian Community wearing their Blackshirts.



1E: *Marry your Own*, circulated pre-war pamphlet from the Australian Catholic Truth Society.

## Chapter Two

### The Priestless Years 1934-1938

After the departure of Father Vincenzo de Francesco to Naples in 1934, the Italian community in Melbourne was for the next four years without an Italian chaplain. The Catholic Church in Melbourne, concerned with the welfare of its Italian migrants, began to lobby Rome for a replacement, which took place in 1938. In the interim, the Italian community remained closed within its own ethnic shelter. Within this shelter the Italian Consular Officials, the Italians who were anti-fascists and Italian business people within the community engaged in a battle for the control of the community. The vast majority of the Italian community during 1934-1938 allied themselves with the Italian Consular Officials who promoted the ideology of Fascism. Despite this association between the Italian community and the Italian Consular Officials, most outward manifestation of fascist sympathy on the part of the Italian community was, as I will argue, due mainly to *italianita*'. The Catholic Church, as I will also argue, began to oppose Fascism and opposed its influence in the Italian community especially with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the Italian Racial Laws. However, the Spanish Civil War, which made Communism not Fascism the greatest evil to humanity for the Catholic, overshadowed such emerging opposition.

With the departure of Father de Francesco, the Italian community's connection with the wider church remained with the parish of St. Ignatius, Richmond, where de Francesco worked during 1921-1934. In Werribee, the connection was with Corpus Christi, the Catholic institution for training men for the priesthood. At Corpus Christi six Sicilian families worked the property. They gathered their homes together to reproduce their village of origin, Vizzini, found in Sicily.<sup>1</sup> The chaplain at Corpus Christi was a Jesuit, Father Thomas Johnstone, and one his students was (then seminarian) Gerard O'Callaghan (2A). Both men involved themselves closely with the Italians at Werribee and O'Callaghan even mastered the Sicilian dialect.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Mantello, "Their Words... My Words... Our Words: A Reflection on Oral History with Reference to Italian Immigrant Identity in the Werribee Community during World War II", BA Honors, Melbourne University, (Melbourne, 1981) 21.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard O'Callaghan cited in A.S. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with Special Reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains 1919 -1945," Fourth Year Thesis, Yarra Theological Union (Melbourne, 1995) 63.

Although the Werribee community had Italian speaking priests such as O'Callaghan, there is no indication that the larger Italian community, clustered around St. Ignatius Church in Richmond, had access to Italian speaking priests, despite the argument by Pino Bosi, in his book *On God's Command*, that the Salesians said Masses for the Italian community during 1934 to 1938 at St. Ignatius, Richmond.<sup>3</sup> This is contrary to the evidence and to the recollections of Brother Peter Swain, a Salesian, who recalls:

there is no evidence of the Salesians saying Mass at Richmond. I was a student at Salesian College during the years 1932 to 1938. The Salesians used to go out on supply and many of them told us about their weekends when they returned. I do not recall any of them speaking of Richmond.<sup>4</sup>

The reason to stress this information that there was no Salesian involvement with the Italian community during 1934-1938, is to emphasize the Italian community's isolation from the Catholic Church during this period. At Saint Ignatius, Richmond, there was no chaplain allocated for the Italian community by Archbishop Daniel Mannix.

The years 1934 to 1938 were crucial years in the area of politics for the Australian Catholic. Earlier, during the First World War, Archbishop Mannix urged Catholics to vote "no" to conscription in the Conscription Debates of 1917. This in effect set them further apart from the wider Australian Protestant population. The depression soon followed and it affected Australia severely with one-third of all Australians unemployed during the height of the depression. With such prevailing conditions, Archbishop Mannix continued to voice his position on political issues and in 1931 while addressing the members of the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS), he stated that Capitalism had failed "to distribute the wealth of the world for the benefit of humanity."<sup>5</sup> In that same year in Italy, Pope Pius XI condemned Socialism stating that "no one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist."<sup>6</sup> To the Catholic, it seemed that they had to steer a middle course between the two extremes. A further complication for the Italian living in Australia was that the Italian Consulate Officials working in each state promoted Italian Fascism. Therefore, with no

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<sup>3</sup> Pino Bosi, *On God's Command*, (Sydney, 1989) 95.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Swain SDB, Letter to the Author, May 21, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Murphy, *Daniel Mannix*, (Melbourne, 1948), 162.

<sup>6</sup> Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," May 15, 1931, *Catholic Social Thought: A Documentary History*, (Maryknoll, 1992) 62.

Italian chaplain to offer advice and moral guidance the Italian community was at the mercy of the Italian Consular Officials on the one side and the anti-fascists within the community on the other.

In 1931 the encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Quadregesimo Anno* defined a political middle course for the Catholic. This middle course was to favour the Italian Consular Officials. As with Mannix, in the last paragraph, Pope Pius tried to define a middle course for the Catholic by rejecting both Capitalism and Socialism. He offered an alternative similar to the Italian fascist government. He argued for "corporatism,"<sup>7</sup> however, unlike the Italian form of fascist corporatism, which remained under the direct control of the fascist government, Pope Pius XI argued, and argued strongly, for "free" corporations.<sup>8</sup> This gave the impression that the Italian fascist regime, although in need of reform especially in the area of freedom, was the closest to the Catholic model.<sup>9</sup>

### *Italianita'*

After being on board an Italian liner in 1934, the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, remarked in a press statement that as a result of Mussolini and Fascism in Italy the various grades of the Italian society were uniting.<sup>10</sup> This example of James Duhig's approval of the fascist regime demonstrates the positive perception of Fascism by some Australian leaders. The reasoning for such an approval was that Italy, unlike Australia was less affected by the depression. Relations between Italy and Australia reached a peak in that same year, when the Governor of Rome presented to the City of Melbourne for the city's centenary "a reproduction in bronze of the historic wolf of the capital [Rome]". The Commonwealth Minister for External Affairs at the time, John Grieg Latham replied by thanking the Italian Government expressing that there "will be a lasting evidence of the cordial relations which have so long existed between Italy and Australia...".<sup>11</sup> To the Italian living in Australia these endorsements by Australian leaders made Fascism and Mussolini look acceptable, igniting the notion of *italianita'*.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, "paragraphs 76-96", pages 59-64.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, "paragraphs, 92-96", 63.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, (Mystic, 1998) 77.

<sup>10</sup> Italian Consular Papers, no. 5462, November 28, 1934, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

<sup>11</sup> J.G. Latham, Minister for External Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia to Italian Consul General, August 21, 1934, Italian Consular Papers, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

Many of the Italian Consular Officials in Australia were appointed before the rise of the fascist regime in Italy. This was the case with the Consul General, Antonio Grossardi who came to Australia in February 1920 at the age of 37 years. His experience of the fascist regime was second hand. Nevertheless, he and the Italian Consulates across Australia promoted Fascism within the Italian community by organising parades, marches, ceremonies such as the blessing of the fascist banners, and meetings. They also had a direct role in establishing the fascist branches known as *fascios*. Three of these *fascios* were found in Victoria. They were situated at South Melbourne, Werribee and Wonthaggi. The South Melbourne *fascio* found at the Club Cavour was, according to its former secretary Mario Spierani, merely a "social organisation" that gave assistance "to the poor Italians".<sup>12</sup> Another *fascio* member, Filippo Maria Bianchi, recalled in 1944 that during 1934 to 1938 the *fascio* only met twice a year.<sup>13</sup> Margaret Bevege, in her book, *Behind Barbed Wire*, also argues that: "membership of the Fascist Party did not appear to involve the political commitment shown by the Nazis." Further, in the same paragraph she writes, "it had a strong social ethos."<sup>14</sup>

The migration of Fascism to Australia was made possible by the work and promotion of the Italian Consular Officials. Here Fascism was embraced by some, and rejected by others. However, for many Fascism had very little political significance. That is not to say that there were not committed fascists. Rather there needs to be a clear distinction between those Italians in Australia who were dedicated to the ideology of Fascism and those who associated themselves with the fascists for cultural and business reason and out of *italianita'*. Father Thomas Augustine Johnstone during the war defined *italianita'* as "Italian feeling and Italian sentiments, [which] does not mean anything political."<sup>15</sup> While another definition of *italianita'* was found in the memoirs of Amelia Tilbury who recalls in her biography, written by her grand daughter Maria Triaca in 1985, that "support for Italy was more a way of showing our solidarity with our background- our *italianita'*- rather than an approval of Mussolini or the fascist form and

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<sup>12</sup> Mario Spierani, interviewed by C.F. Sexton, November 5, 1943, Australian Archives, South Australia, series DA01\0, item 5563.

<sup>13</sup> Aliens Tribunal, F.M. Bianchi, April 20, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, series V/16878S

<sup>14</sup> Bevege, *op.cit.* 60.

<sup>15</sup> Father Thomas Augustine Johnstone, Aliens Tribunal of Salvatore Pante, May 13, 1941, Australian Archives, Victoria, series MP529/3 file no. Pante. S.



style of government".<sup>16</sup> *Italianita'* was not necessarily an ideological manifestation but a sort of apolitical patriotism. It was apolitical because the Italian migrants upon leaving Italy were now committed to Australia. The recollections of Claudio Alcorso, an Italian Jewish refugee, attests to the commitment of Italian migrants to their new homeland Australia: "Apart from a handful of declared fascists... Italians had migrated to Australia to improve their status in life and had no intention of returning to Italy..."<sup>17</sup> However, there were some Italians who hoped to return to Italy shortly upon arriving in Australia. Maria Paoloni was one example, and she shared her experience in an essay contained in the book *Give me Strength*. Paoloni's hope was for an early return to Italy after four to five years in Australia.<sup>18</sup>

Gianfranco Cresciani, in his book entitled *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945*, also demonstrates the uncommitted association to the ideology of Fascism shown by many in the Italian community in the following sentence: "they [Italians] all declared themselves Fascists, while in fact they were not; they all raised their hands in the Fascist salute and applauded at the right moment, in effect they were indifferent".<sup>19</sup> While Cresciani does not acknowledge their participation as *italianita'*, his description does show a symptom of *italianita'* which was that it thrived on patriotism thus creating a commonality with Fascism.

According to research conducted by Maria Mantello on Werribee and Patrick Delmastro on the Sammarinese, there was very little political commitment to Fascism during this period by the Italians in question. Rather they were economic migrants fully committed to establishing themselves into the life of Australia and they had little interest in politics.<sup>20</sup> Robert Pascoe also states in his book *Buongiorno Australia* that "most Italo-Australians were ideologically uncommitted, but accepted allegiance to Mussolini as the price they would pay for remaining within the shelter of the immigrant community."<sup>21</sup> Regarding the activities of the Club Cavour, an Italian social club where the *fascio* resided, Sir James

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<sup>16</sup> Maria Triaca, *Amelia, A Long Journey*, (Melbourne, 1985) 132.

<sup>17</sup> Claudio Alcorso, *The Wind you Say*, (Pymble, 1993) 18.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Paoloni, *Give me Strength*, eds. A.M. Kahan-Guidi and E. Weiss (Sydney, 1989) 65.

<sup>19</sup> G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, (Canberra, 1980) 158.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Mantello, Werribee at War, *Melbourne Historical Journal*, Volume 14, 1982, 106.

Patrick Delmastro, "The Sammarinese in the 1920s and 1930s", *Conference Proceedings "Italians in Australia"*, (Melbourne, 1986), 49.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia*, (Richmond, 1987) 88.

Gobbo argues that "it was no secret that the Cavour Club for a while had a fairly political flavour but, for the vast number of the participants there was no ideological commitment".<sup>22</sup> Finally, in Werribee, the local non-Italian population apparently did not know of any fascists during this period. James Phelan at an Aliens Tribunal in 1941 illustrates this by his answer to following question: "Are you surprised to learn that [Salvatore] Pante [the Italian whose case was being heard] was a member of that [Fascist] organisation in Australia?" to which Phelan answered "I never knew they had an organisation in Australia".<sup>23</sup>

As I have previously stated the Italian Consular Officials in each state promoted Fascism. The vast majority of the Italian community's involvement in these activities was merely out of *italianita'* and was not ideological. In times that are more recent, we can see the very clear example of *italianita'* by the life and death of B.A. Santamaria. In his autobiography, Santamaria, speaks about his *italianita'* "from the food we ate to the music we enjoyed, our way of life was unmistakably Italian. Perhaps this explains why a deep love for all things Italian, from its history to its literature to its music, prevails in me today."<sup>24</sup> According to *the Age* writer Les Carlyon, Santamaria was an "old-fashioned Australian nationalist and quintessentially Italian".<sup>25</sup> *Italianita'*, as described by Santamaria, was a way to be Italian in a climate that was hostile to the immigrant. In Australia, under the guise of Fascism, *italianita'* was allowed to be expressed and it was at the expense of being associated with Fascism. In fact, *italianita'* was an Australian phenomenon. An Australian phenomena because it came about from the discrimination and isolation felt by the Italian community, as a consequence of a people in diaspora. The sociologist Anthony Giddens states that an ethnic minority tends to have a sense of "group solidarity" sharing a "common loyalty and interest"<sup>26</sup> manifested in this instance as *italianita'*.

The earliest written expression of *italianita'* comes from Fr Thomas Augustine Johnstone during an Aliens Tribunal of Salvatore Pante in 1941 mentioned above. It could well be that *italianita'* was used to shield the

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<sup>22</sup> James Gobbo, "Italians in Victoria and the Second World War," May 19, 1988, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Aliens Tribunal, Salvatore Pante, May 13, 1941, Australia Archives, Victoria, series MP529/3, file no. Pante, S.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Helen Woods, "The Family behind the Man," *News Weekly*, March 21, 1998, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Les Carlyon, "Slayer of False Gods Joins his True One," *News Weekly*, March 21, 1998, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, (Cambridge, 1989) 245-247.

fact that there was real ideological commitment to Fascism by the Italian community of Australia.

However, the evidence before 1940 is insufficient to draw this conclusion.

Three examples of prominent Italians during this period give us a picture on the levels of commitment of those associated with the *fascios*. The three chosen have particular relevance later with their association with the Italian chaplain to the Italian community in 1938. The first example is Soccorso Santoro who, according to his son Giorgio Santoro, was a fascist. The authorities thought the same in 1940 and interned him when Italy entered the war. Yet, the anti-fascist crusader, Professor A.R. Chisholm, was the first to write in his defense, claiming in a letter to the Australian Authorities that Santoro was "indifferent" to Fascism.<sup>27</sup> Gualtiero Vaccari was regarded as a fascist by the anti-fascists,<sup>28</sup> holding onto his Italian citizenship until 1938. He had supported the Abyssinian invasion and was seen at all Italian Consular Official events but the authorities never suspected him. Robert Pascoe, in Vaccari's defense, argues that his involvement with the Italian Consular Officials was purely based on trading and commercial needs.<sup>29</sup> Last, but not least, was Filippo Maria Bianchi. He too had outbursts of patriotism that identified him as a fascist. In his pro-fascist newspaper *Il Giornale Italiano*, there were no anti-British articles, nor was he supportive of the Berlin-Rome axis. Bianchi, like Vaccari was business orientated, but the authorities considered him the most ardent fascist in the Commonwealth.<sup>30</sup> Despite having been given such a high security status from the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau in 1938 the Prime Minister of Australia, Joseph Aloysius Lyons, wrote to Bianchi expressing gratitude to Bianchi and to the staff of *Il Giornale Italiano* after Bianchi assured him of his allegiance to Australia:

I was delighted to receive the assurance of the Managing director of the Italian journal [Bianchi], that the energies of the Italian settlers in the Commonwealth are and will be permanently directed to promoting the advancement of Australia.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A.R. Chisholm, letter to the authorities, July 11, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, series B741/5, Item V23146.

<sup>28</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.*, 209

<sup>29</sup> Pascoe, *op. cit.*, 88

<sup>30</sup> Report of the Aliens Tribunal of South Australia, August 3, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V/16878S.

<sup>31</sup> J.A. Lyons, Prime Minister of Australia to the Managing Director of *Il Giornale Italiano*, published in full *Il Giornale Italiano*, June 1, 1938, Front Page.

The notion of *italianita'* grew out of isolation from the Catholic Church, (where pressures to assimilate were evident<sup>32</sup>), as this isolation avoided any pressures to assimilate. It was uncertain if the wider Catholic Church, which began to distance itself from Fascism during 1934-1938, saw *italianita'* as a problem during 1934-1938, but they quickly stamped it out in 1938 with the appointment of Father Modotti as their Italian chaplain. Before 1938 within the Italian community, not all were isolated from the Catholic Church as some second generation Italians crossed the bridge to help shape the Australian Catholic Church. B.A. Santamaria was one such example.

### ***B.A. Santamaria***

Bartholomew Augustine Santamaria was to become one of the most influential Australian Catholics<sup>33</sup>. Santamaria was born in 1915 to Italian migrant parents. His father Giuseppe Santamaria was a fruit shop owner from the Aeolian Islands and in 1919, upon returning from a short visit to Italy with B.A. Santamaria as a child, he became involved in the Melbourne newspaper *Voce D'Italia* as one of its editors. It could be this early influence that led Santamaria to a journalistic career.

In 1934 Santamaria along with Valentino Adami, approached Daniel Mannix to discuss starting a Catholic paper that would be called *The Catholic Worker*. Valentino Adami, the older of the two, was also of an Italian background. His grandparents migrated from Italy in the 1850s. Mannix agreed to the proposal for the Catholic paper and with a shoestring budget, the first issue of the *Catholic Worker* appeared in February 1936 (2C). The *Catholic Worker* was modeled on the American *Catholic Worker*, started by Dorothy Day,<sup>34</sup> and the Australian edition was not only critical of Communism but also equally critical of Capitalism. It stated in its first issue: "the new Communism is only the old capitalism plus a little missionary fervor. Both are the illegitimate offspring of the same diseased materialism".<sup>35</sup> The *Catholic Worker* had an important part in bringing together Archbishop Daniel Mannix and B.A. Santamaria, as

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<sup>32</sup> "Within many parishes migrants were subject to strong [my emphasis] pressures to assimilate..." O'Farrell, op.cit. 404.

<sup>33</sup> Mr. B.A. Santamaria was one of the few lay Catholic men to have been given a full state funeral.

<sup>34</sup> B.A. Santamaria, *Against the Tide*, (Melbourne, 1981), 16

<sup>35</sup> *Catholic Worker*, February 1, 1936, Front Page.

with Irish origins thought in Australian terms...".<sup>42</sup> With the influx of people from Malta, Croatia and Asia, now no longer making the Irish in the Australian church a majority<sup>43</sup>, the opinions of Kelly and O'Farrell are open to question. The fact, not stressed by O'Farrell and Kelly was that the Campion society was a step in the direction away from the Irish ghetto, as it "threw off its Irishism"<sup>44</sup> as argues Labor historian Niall Brennan. A step away and a step forward. Making the step possible was the Italian contribution, not backward looking but forward looking: "It reached out for a broader awareness of the Church, more in terms of European thought...".<sup>45</sup>

### *Abyssinian Crisis*

In 1936 Italy invaded Abyssinia and the invasion began to concern the wider Catholic Church community. To the Italian Consular Officials the Italian case for the invasion was going to be difficult to sustain against a very hostile Australian media.<sup>46</sup> *The Argus* following the British condemned the Italian attack and argued for a worldwide boycott of Italian goods.<sup>47</sup> Prominent Catholics in Melbourne, on the other hand, responded somewhat differently. Upon hearing of an Italian assault on Abyssinia the editor of the *Advocate* spoke of Mussolini as "waving a big stick over Abyssinia." It also condemned all imperialism including the British.<sup>48</sup> Mannix, while not supporting Italy, gave reasons why Italy would act as the aggressor: "the treaty of Versailles left Italy with no possibility of an expansion of territory, and Italy, rightly or wrongly- I think wrongly- has taken the opportunity of making war on the poor unfortunate Ethiopians."<sup>49</sup> Mannix, also, used the opportunity to condemn British Imperialism: "The Italians were said to be dropping bombs upon the Abyssinians, and much was said about it. Bombs have been dropped on the Indians [from the

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<sup>42</sup> O'Farrell, *op.cit.*, 397.

<sup>43</sup> There are no reliable surveys that show the ethnic break-up of the Catholic Church. However, according to a survey of Catholic schools in Sydney in 1988, over 50% of school children were of a non-English speaking background. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson of Sydney, concludes that the figure could have only increased since 1988 and that the "assumption that the Australian Church is English-Irish is still strong in the minds of many people... and in many different ways migrants are still expected to conform." Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, "Nothing so Ugly, Nothing so Beautiful: The Catholic Church in Australia in 1996", *Halifax Papers*, (Homebush, 1998) 31.

<sup>44</sup> Niall Brennan, *The Politics of Catholics*, (Melbourne, 1972) 14.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Italian Consulate, Melbourne to Minister for Popular Culture, Rome, undated- late 1936, Italian Consulate Papers, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne. See also "A Summary of Italian Fascist Activities and Propaganda in Australia, December 1936", found in full in *Migrants or Mates*, (Sydney 1988) 183.

<sup>47</sup> *The Argus*, October 14, 1935, 9.

<sup>48</sup> *The Advocate*, July 11, 1935, Front page.

<sup>49</sup> *The Advocate*, October 17, 1935, 12

church historian Patrick O'Farrell acknowledges: "while still an undergraduate, Santamaria began an association and friendship with Archbishop Mannix which lasted until the Archbishop's death."<sup>36</sup>

Santamaria was also one of the earliest members of the Campion society. The society, which began in 1931, consisted of Frank Maher, Denys Jackson, John Merlo, Valentino Adami and Kevin Kelly. The Campion society was a movement fostering lay Catholic intellectual thought based on the ideas of Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, who were English Catholics. Denys Jackson, in 1933, began writing in the *Advocate* under the pen name "Sulla".<sup>37</sup> He was an important influence on B.A. Santamaria and Valentino Adami. Santamaria joined the Campions in late 1931. Furthermore, it was as a member of the Campion society that Santamaria established the *Catholic Worker*.<sup>38</sup> The development of the Campion Society was seen as a moving away of the Irish ghetto<sup>39</sup> and in that moving away there prominent lay persons, Santamaria, Merlo and Adami, were of an Italian background.

B.A. Santamaria's contribution to Australia was significant. His policies, which greatly influenced the Australian political scene, were based on his Italian upbringing and heritage and his Catholic faith. During an interview in 1992, Santamaria recalled that most of his social and political ideas were products of his Italian heritage, and that his Catholic faith had little influence on his views.<sup>40</sup> On a lesser note recently, Jesuit, Michael Kelly, for an interview for the *Good Weekend Magazine* is quoted as arguing that Santamaria's was "Religiously... European, rural peasant Catholicism." Furthermore, follows that sentence by stating that Santamaria was "theologically illiterate."<sup>41</sup> Also referring to Santamaria's background was church historian Patrick O'Farrell who, upon reflecting on the life of Santamaria, argues: "He... represented two new phenomena in Australian Catholic lay life, non-irishism and dedicated social enthusiasm... many in the movement [that Santamaria started] had European rather than Irish origins; those

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<sup>36</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, P. *The Catholic Church and Community*, (Kensington, 1992) 399

<sup>37</sup> C. Jory, *The Campion Society & Catholic Social Militancy in Australia, 1929-1939*, (Sydney, 1986) 71

<sup>38</sup> Santamaria, *Against the Tide*, 16

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Campbell, "A Critical Examination of B.A. Santamaria and the politics of commitment, 1936-1957" Doctorate of Philosophy, Deakin University, (Melbourne, 1989) 32. Other members of an Italian and European background involved in the Campion Society were Bernard Vosti, Ray Triado and John Bongiorno.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Florio, "The Social Theory of B.A. Santamaria," 4<sup>th</sup> year Honors, Latrobe University, Melbourne, 1992, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Cameron Forbes, "The End of the War" *Australian Magazine*, September 23-24, 1995, 18.

British] but they were scarcely allowed to hear anything about it."<sup>50</sup> On another occasion at East Camberwell, Archbishop Mannix spoke out against such aggressors as Italy. Mannix also strongly pointed out the paradox involved by countries such as Britain and Russia (Britain with its atrocities against the Irish) condemning Italy. Mannix argued that he deplored all aggressive wars, by "Italy France, Russia or Britain."<sup>51</sup> According to Andrews many Catholics in Australia did not support the League of Nations especially when the Holy See was excluded from the League and the "communists", meaning Russia, were included in 1934.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the events in Abyssinia gave Catholics a cautious warning that Fascism could not be trusted.

Alfred Stirling, an Australian diplomat working in Rome, in his autobiography gives an interesting picture of the reaction to the crisis in Italy and how the British were seen in the light of economic sanctions. According to Stirling "it seemed to me that the anti-British feeling grew less further South."<sup>53</sup> Following on from Stirling's experience, one could further argue that many Italians in Australia being even further geographically South and who had migrated from the South of Italy, would not have possessed any anti-British feelings and perhaps weren't interested in the Abyssinian campaign? This is consistent with Werribee where the Italians who were mainly from the South of Italy, (according to Fr. Johnstone), did not take much interest in the matter and "were glad to be out of it".<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, there were instances of support for the invasion by some Italian community members. Community businessman, Gualtiero Vaccari, for example, issued a statement supporting the invasion entitled "An Italian point of view on the Abyssinian question."<sup>55</sup> Dr. Soccorso Santoro, one of the community's doctors wrote a play entitled "Alla Corte di Addis Abeba," and organised rallies for the Italian Red Cross for their work among the indigenous Abyssinians,<sup>56</sup> and the Italian Consular Officials organized gold collections for the campaign.

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *The Tribune*, May 7, 1936, Front Page

<sup>52</sup> E.M. Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crisis, 1935-1939*, (Canberra, 1970) 11.

<sup>53</sup> A. Stirling, *A Distant view of the Vatican*, (Melbourne, 1975) 6.

<sup>54</sup> Testimony of Father T.A. Johnstone SJ cited in , Salvatore Pante's Aliens Tribunal, May 13, 1941, Australian Archives, Victoria, series MP529/3, file no. Pante, S.

<sup>55</sup> "A Summary of Italian Fascist Activities and Propaganda in Australia, December 1936" cited in full in *Migrants or Mates*, ed. G. Cresciani, (Sydney, 1988) 183.

Within the Campion society the invasion had several supporters. It is important to note that we were at the end of the period of colonization and Italy was quite late in gaining access to the spoils. Bearing this in mind Denys Jackson strongly supported the Italian case, dismissing the Abyssinians as "slave riding barbarians."<sup>57</sup> Before the Italian invasion Jackson had questioned the practice of slavery in Abyssinia carried out by the Amhara rulers.<sup>58</sup> Jackson's views, however, were not as simplistic as they seem. Jackson saw the possible implications in Europe if Italy collapsed, because of the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations. He argued, Hitler would seize the opportunity to attack Austria, making Mussolini "preferable to communism or Hitler in Central Europe, and therefore he should be supported, even if it meant sacrificing Abyssinia."<sup>59</sup> Like Mannix, Jackson also condemned British and French Imperialism.<sup>60</sup> Valentino Adami, also a supporter of the Italian position organised a meeting for the Campion society in which he presented a pro-Italian case.<sup>61</sup> Santamaria made one editorial comment on the matter in the Campion newsletter suggesting those against the Italian case to follow Jackson's writings on the matter.<sup>62</sup>

The authorities saw Santamaria in a different light. According to a 1936 Police report on Fascists in Australia, Santamaria had attempted to extend the activities of the *fascio* to Melbourne University. It stated that Santamaria was the editor of the *Catholic Worker* "a strong anti-Communist church organ."<sup>63</sup> There is no evidence in the report to support the claim of attempting to start a *fascio* by Santamaria. The police report speaks of Santamaria being a leader of "the group." The only group the investigator could be alluding to was the Campion Society, yet it is ridiculous to suggest that the Campions were merely a cover-up name for undercover *fascio* members. The accusation is as comical as the conclusion drawn from it. The accusation also fails to acknowledge that the *Catholic Worker* was as critical of Capitalism as it was of Communism. The *Catholic Worker*, based on the American model of the *Catholic Worker*, founded by Dorothy Day, who in the United States was far from being associated with Fascism. In fact, Dorothy Day

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<sup>56</sup> Giorgio Santoro, "Dott. Soccorso Giorgio Santoro, M.D., M.CH.O.-1902-1961", *Newsletter of the Italian Historical Society*, Vol.2, No.2., October 1991, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Jory, *op.cit.*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> *The Advocate*, April 14, 1935, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Andrews, *op.cit.*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Jory, *op.cit.*, 71-72.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> "A Summary of Italian Fascist Activities and Propaganda in Australia, December 1936", reproduced in full in G. Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates*, (Sydney, 1988) 189.



had to fight off the tag of being a communist right up until her death. It seems that the policeman who wrote the report based his accusation on the simple fact that Santamaria was of "Italian parentage."<sup>64</sup>

### *Il Giornale Italiano*

The local Italian newspaper in Melbourne, *Il Giornale Italiano*, supported the Abyssinian invasion. When sanctions were imposed on Italy by the League of Nations the writer of an article on Filippo Maria Bianchi stated Bianchi's support for the invasion and his willingness to defend Italy: "No sooner had the League of Nations voted for sanctions against Italy, he [Bianchi] was amongst the first ones to volunteer for service on any fronts...".<sup>65</sup> Such an article was sensationalist and Bianchi was to explain its contents later at an alien's tribunal. Despite the patriotic tone of the article on Bianchi *Il Giornale Italiano* was founded in 1933 with a committee comprising Italian Australians and Anglo-Saxon Australians. In the syndicate, eventually called Cosmopolitan Publishing, were Filippo Maria Bianchi, Franco Battistessa, who both migrated to Australia from Bombay, Mr Corrado Demayda and Mr Percy John Portus, who was also the advertising manager for O'Brien's publishing and Mr. Aubrey as the accountant. Valentino Adami later joined the team.<sup>66</sup>

F.M. Bianchi and Franco Battistessa first met in India in 1922 where Battistessa founded the Fascio in Bombay. Both Bianchi and Battistessa had military backgrounds, Bianchi as a volunteer with the Italian army, leaving the army in 1919 as a lieutenant<sup>67</sup> and Battistessa as a member of the Fascist squad called the "Randuccio" who had escorted Mussolini in his march on Rome in 1921.<sup>68</sup> Bianchi supported the Mazzini Movement, which opposed the fascist movement. With the rise of Fascism, Bianchi moved to Bombay, India. In Bombay both Bianchi and Battistessa started several Italian publications but left Bombay in 1928 amidst controversy. The Italian Consular Officials in Bombay quickly alerted Italian Consular Officials in Melbourne of the impending arrival of Battistessa and Bianchi:

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* It is important to recognize that this conclusion is based on the evidence presented by the policeman and according to this evidence one can safely argue that there was no evidence to support the policeman's claim, apart from Santamaria's parentage.

<sup>65</sup> *Vade Mecum*, June 30, 1936.

<sup>66</sup> Aliens Tribunal of F. M. Bianchi, April 20, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V\16878S.

<sup>67</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Lt. Tackaberry, June 29, 1940, Australian Archives Victoria, file number V\16878S

<sup>68</sup> G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, (Canberra, 1980) 55.

...be careful of Franco Battistessa on whom charges are framed of administrative nature and others. Battistessa sailed suddenly twenty-seventh February from Colombo steamer Hobson's Bay bound for Sydney together with Filippo Bianchi and Amleto Ambrosi of whom also be cautious.<sup>69</sup>

The reason for their departure, revealed later in 1940, was that Bianchi and Battistessa had been accused of embezzling funds from the *fascio*.<sup>70</sup>

The Italian Consular Officials first opposed *Il Giornale Italiano*. Antonio Grossardi, the Consul General, threatened Bianchi with expulsion from the *fascio*. Grossardi, who founded the *Italian Courier in Australia*, three years earlier, saw *Il Giornale Italiano* as a counter paper.<sup>71</sup> The Italian Consular Officials did finally accept the paper and agreed to contribute articles from the *Touring Club Italiano*, who would publish a page every fortnight. Despite the fascist contribution, Bianchi's later argued during an Aliens Tribunal that *Il Giornale Italiano* was "non political."<sup>72</sup>

In May 1937, Bianchi approached the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, asking him to write religious articles which would make *Il Giornale Italiano* part of a "stenuous drive towards the renewal of the old time Italian zeal for the Holy Catholic Church".<sup>73</sup> Such was the isolation from the Catholic Church in Melbourne that Bianchi approached an interstate bishop. To Mannix there was to be no association with the Italian Consular Officials, *Il Giornale Italiano*, and Fascism. Neither could be trusted. It is important to note that Mannix clearly disassociated himself from Italian Fascism and anyone who supported Fascism. In the *Advocate*, he personally did not write any articles supporting Mussolini nor did he address Mussolini as "Il Duce," opting for "Signor."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Royal Italian Consulate General of Bombay to Italian Consul General, Melbourne, March 7, 1928, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V\16878S.

<sup>70</sup> Sgt. C.B. Foulds to Inspector Keefe, M.P.I. Section, August 8, 1940, Australian Archives, New South Wales, series ST1233/1, item N25326.

<sup>71</sup> Aliens Tribunal, Filippo Maria Bianchi, Adelaide, April 20, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, series V/16878s

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Duhig, May 19, 1937, cited in T.P. Boland, *James Duhig*, (St.Lucia, 1986), 254

<sup>74</sup> A reading of the *Advocate* reveals that Mannix never personally condemns nor praises Mussolini. On the Abyssinian question, as I have mentioned previously, Mannix did not support Italy's invasion.

## *The Crisis in Spain*

To the relief of the Italian Consular Officials the crucial turning point and a distraction away from Fascism, for Catholics in Australia came with the Spanish Civil War, beginning in July 1936. Here the forces of General Franco (The Nationalists) attempted to overthrow the Popular Front government of Manuel Azana (The Republicans). The Australian media quickly rose to the defense of the Republicans by condemning Franco. The church in Spain, fearing persecution under a left wing liberal government, supported Franco. For many Catholics, the war was black and white; it was a fight between God and the devil. Santamaria in his autobiography recalls the impact of the war: "it was the Spanish Civil War, which reshaped my own priorities and those of my colleagues of the Campion Society... It was primarily the matter of freedom of religion from persecution by the State."<sup>75</sup> Mannix, even stronger, referred to the battle as a standup fight between God and the Church versus Communism and the devil.<sup>76</sup> Articles condemning the Republicans and the Communists of Spain were found weekly in Catholic papers with headlines such as: "The Spanish Terror: Satanic Ferocity against Priests and Nuns"<sup>77</sup>, "Terrorism and Massacre in Spain"<sup>78</sup> and "Christ crucified in Spain."<sup>79</sup> To further the wave of anti-Communism in the church was the release of the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* in early 1937 by Pope Pius XI. The message of the encyclical was anti-Communist stating: "Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever."<sup>80</sup> The encyclical was widely distributed. The pamphlet in two years sold 87,000 copies in Australia. Other pamphlets such as "Red Menace in Australia" sold 43,000 copies and "For God and Spain" 30,000 copies.<sup>81</sup> For the Italian Consular Officials in Australia this anti-Communist propaganda by the Catholic Church was to work in their favor. Mussolini's aggression and dictatorship was now less important than the Spanish situation. The church shared Fascism's dislike of the Communists. The two shared a common foe, Communism.

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<sup>75</sup> Santamaria, *Against the Tide*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Jory, *op.cit.*, 81.

<sup>77</sup> *The Tribune*, October 1, 1936.

<sup>78</sup> *The Tribune*, October 8, 1936

<sup>79</sup> *The Tribune*, June 7, 1938

<sup>80</sup> *Divini Redemptoris*, March 28, 1937, Anne Fremantle (ed) *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context*, (New York, 1956) 261-162.

<sup>81</sup> Jory, *op.cit.*, 81-82.

In 1938 at the Eucharistic Congress in Newcastle all the bishops of Australia were present. Father Thomas Augustine Johnstone of Werribee gave a speech in which he declared: "there is no more bitter enemy of the truth of God than the Communists."<sup>82</sup> Santamaria also gave a paper at the congress in which he not only condemned Communism but equated it with Capitalism: "between Capitalism and Communism there lies no difference... Communism deprives the masses of liberty, but it was Capitalism which paved the way by depriving them of property."<sup>83</sup> Present at the congress was the Apostolic Delegate Giovanni Panico who also condemned Capitalism and "atheistic communism."<sup>84</sup>

Archbishop Giovanni Panico became Apostolic Delegate to Australia in March 1936. His appointment to Australia carried with it a specific mission. This mission was to break the Irish influence in Australia especially in the area of nominating bishops by Mannix and his confreres.<sup>85</sup> From the outset, Panico began his assignment by forcing the resignation of the Irish born coadjutor Archbishop of Sydney, Dr. Michael Sheenan. Roman-trained Norman Gilroy replaced Sheehan, which secured a Roman appointment after the retirement or death of Archbishop Kelly in the country's largest diocese.<sup>86</sup> Later at the congress, Panico reminded the other bishops that in the 150 years of the history of the church in Australia the most important event "has been the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation."<sup>87</sup> The position of Apostolic Delegates was found in countries, mostly Anglo-Saxon, which did not have diplomatic relations with the Papacy. Panico in attempting to break the Irish influence in the appointment of bishops was in fact carrying out Roman policy, which began with Monsignor Bartholomew Cattaneo, Apostolic Delegate to Australia in 1920. The policy was set out in the Apostolic Letter entitled *Maximum Illud*, in which it stated: "Anyone who has

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82 T. A. Johnstone SJ "Conversion of Australia," *The Story of the Regional and Eucharistic Congress 16-29 February 1938* (Newcastle, 1938) 260. This is the same Johnstone who later gave testimony at the alien tribunal of Salvatore Pante.

83 B.A. Santamaria, "Pius XI and Social Justice" *ibid*, 106.

84 Dr. Giovanni Panico, Civic Reception at Newcastle, February 15, 1938, *ibid*

85 According to Santamaria, Panico was "tilting at windmills" as the record of Australian born appointments was already underway with the seminaries in Werribee and Manly. B.A. Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix, a biography*, (Melbourne, 1984) 182. See also- Patrick Ford, *The Socialist Trend in the Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand*, (Melbourne, 1988) 170-171.

86 *ibid*.

87. Dr. Giovanni Panico, "Congress Banquet at Town Hall", February 18, 1938, *op.cit*, 228

charge of a mission must make it his special concern to secure and train local candidates for the sacred ministry. In this policy lies the greatest hope of the new Churches...".<sup>88</sup>

The Irish question in the Australian church had been a matter of concern since the establishment of the Australian Church. The first Archbishop of Australia, Bede Polding was an English prelate who endured numerous struggles with his Irish clergy<sup>89</sup>. In 1873 Polding argued that for the "good of religion and the unity of all peoples it would be an advantage if some Bishops were of different origins [other than Irish]".<sup>90</sup> Polding also argued that if Irish bishops were sent out it would insult the Australian church, which would be identified as an Irish Church.<sup>91</sup> From the outset, Panico was determined to change Australian practices, from its Irish influence in the appointment of clergy to the way the funds of the Propagation of the Faith were distributed. On this matter, Panico strongly criticized Archbishop Kelly of Sydney. In a letter to Rome, Panico argued that Kelly kept one-third of the money collected for his own use, as according to Panico this was not necessary because the Sydney diocese was the richest in Australia with "not one aborigine."<sup>92</sup>

It was with the advent of the Spanish Civil War that the Italian anti-fascists in Australia became active and united in their fight against war and Fascism. Luigi Stellato, a Calabrian market gardener, and Matteo Cristofaro initially formed the group in 1934. The aim of the "Italian Group Against War", as they called themselves, was to oppose the expansion of Fascism amongst the Italians in the community, attract former members of the Matteotti club and more importantly gather the best elements of Italian anti-fascists in Australia for the Communist Party.<sup>93</sup> This last aim was to ensure total opposition from the Catholic Church. In 1938 the group members numbered thirty-five and were also members of the Communist Party.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Pope Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud", 1919, *The Christian Faith*, (ed) J. Neuner and J. Du Pius, (London, 1990) 343.

<sup>89</sup> Marion Sitzmann. *Roots of Faith in Australia: Salvado, Ullathorne, Polding*. (Petersham, 1992) 46-51.

<sup>90</sup> Bede Polding cited in Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, (Sydney, 1992) 201.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> J. Waldersee, *A Grain of Mustard Seed: The Society for the Propagation of Faith and Australia 1837-1977*, (Sydney, 1983) 374.

<sup>93</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.* 120.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

In 1938, Italy introduced her racial laws. *The Advocate* responded somewhat diplomatically, as it was now more concerned with Nazism and Communism. The *Advocate* acknowledged that the policy was by "no means a Christian policy"<sup>95</sup> but also reminded its readers the reason for its laws. The reason for the racial policy concluded the *Advocate* was to avoid race confusion because of the possible "contamination" of Italian settlers in Ethiopia.<sup>96</sup> Later the *Advocate* reassured its readers that the Jews in Italy "enjoy all rights and privileges of citizenship, nor is there any question of depriving them..."<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, certain members of the Italian community, after the Berlin/Rome axis, began to distance themselves from any fascist connections. This was the case of Soccorso Santoro and Gualtiero Vaccari. According to a police report both Vaccari and Santoro "have continually opposed the same and they freely and consistently expressed their disapproval of such an alliance [Pact of Steel] whenever the opportunity presented itself."<sup>98</sup>

Late 1937 saw the commencement of Catholic Action in Australia. In Melbourne, its members emerged out of the Campion society ensuring a non-Irish approach. The organization was to comprise lay full time members and a chaplain. An Episcopal committee directed the appointed laymen. Dr. Mannix headed the Episcopal Committee. The director of Catholic Action was Frank Maher with B.A. Santamaria as his assistant. Catholic Action was a movement in Italy for lay people defined in 1931 as "the participation and the collaboration of the laity with the Apostolic hierarchy."<sup>99</sup> Bruce Duncan in his book *The Church's Social Teachings from Rerum Novarum to 1931*, stresses that Catholic Action was a general term for Catholic cultural and political activity.<sup>100</sup> In Italy, Catholic Action remained solidly resistant to Fascism and after the war Catholic Action emerged to form the Christian Democratic Party which would govern Italy for the next fifty years.

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<sup>95</sup> *Advocate*, August 18, 1938, 1.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Advocate*, September 1, 1938, 16.

<sup>98</sup> Police Report submitted to Inspector Browne, June 13, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, series B741/5, item V23146.

<sup>99</sup> Pope Pius XI, "Non Abbiamo Bisogno," June 29, 1931, *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context*, (ed.) Anne Fremantle, (New York, 1956) 243-144.

<sup>100</sup> Bruce Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching from Rerum Novarum to 1931*, (Melbourne, 1991) 114.

## ***Conclusion***

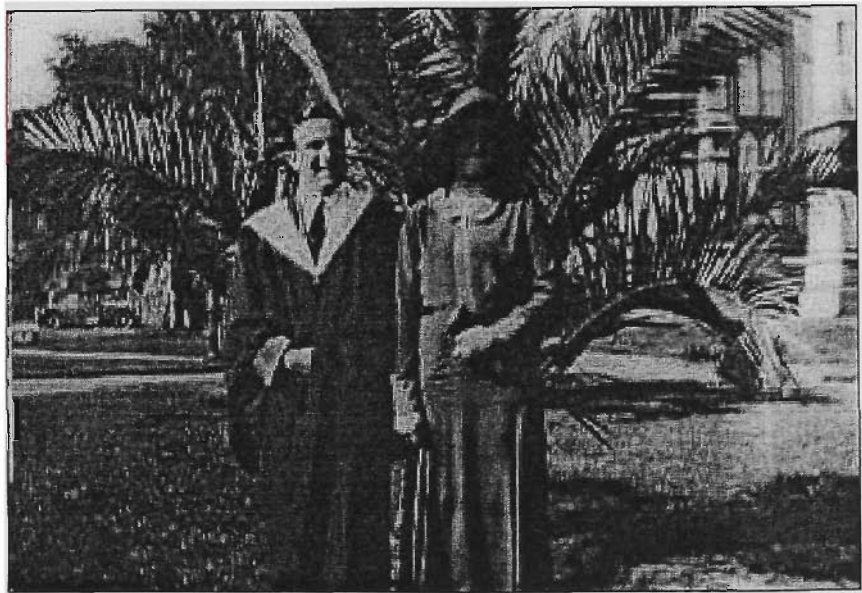
In sum, during the years 1934 to 1938, with no Italian chaplain, the Italian community was isolated from the Catholic Church. Out of its isolation, and under strong influence from the Italian Consular Officials, developed the notion of *italianita'*, which was mainly apolitical while being patriotic and uniquely Australian. Meanwhile there were some second generation Italian Australians such as B.A. Santamaria and Valentino Adami who involved themselves in the Catholic Church in Melbourne. Their role was groundbreaking as they assisted in the expansion of the Catholic Church away from its predominately Irish outlook. The Catholic Church, during 1934-1938, because of the Abyssinian aggression and the racial laws of 1938, distanced itself from Fascism. However, with the Spanish Civil War, the Catholic's concern was not with Fascism but with Communism, which became the greater evil, reducing Fascism to the lesser evil.

With the appointment of an Italian Catholic chaplain in 1938, the unity of the Italian community with the Catholic Church was imminent. Only two years earlier another appointment would also influence the Italian community and the Catholic Church, that of the Apostolic Delegate Giovanni Panico who would ensure that the Australian church would change directions. At the heart of this change in direction was the Italian community.

**Pictures Chapter Two.**

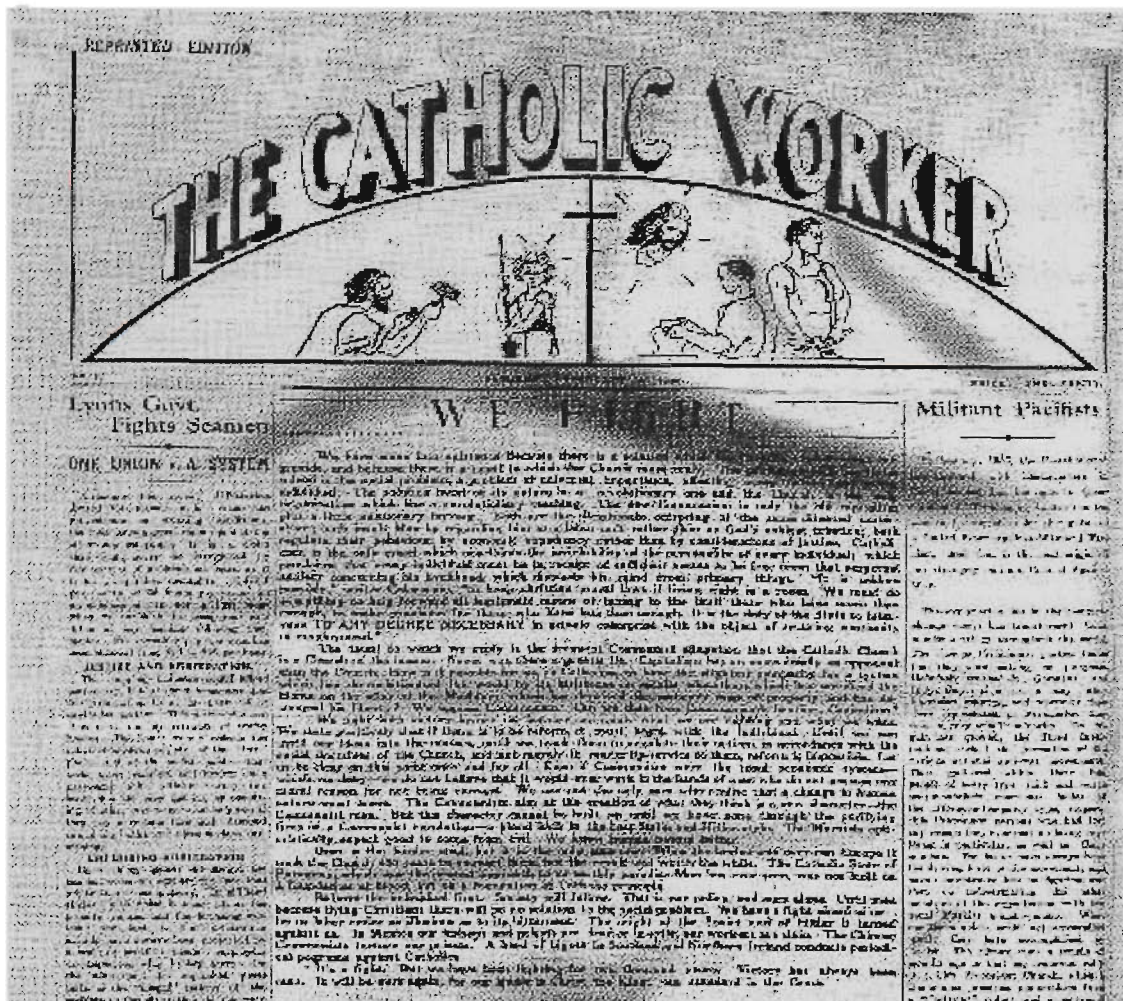


Picture 2A: Father Gerard O'Callaghan



2B: Valentino Adami with his wife at the day of his graduation in 1931.





2C: The first issue of the *Catholic Worker*.



2D: Mr B.A. Santamaria.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Father Ugo Modotti 1938-1940**

The year 1938 saw the arrival of Father Ugo Modotti, appointed chaplain to the Italian community of Melbourne. In this chapter, covering the time of his arrival in September 1938 to the interruption of war in June 1940, I explain how Modotti contributed to the Italian community of Melbourne by implementing the assimilation policy of the Melbourne Catholic Church towards the Italian community. His policy was, in effect, anti-fascist, which upset the Italian Consular Officials who sought collaboration with him. Particular attention is also directed in this chapter towards Modotti's religiosity, his attitude to Fascism and his anti-fascist actions and to the reason why Modotti incorporated the anti-Communist and anti-protestant approach to the faith as practiced by the wider Irish Australian Catholic community.

#### ***The Appointment of Father Ugo Modotti***

Since the departure of Father de Francesco in 1934, Mannix had been anxious for another Italian Jesuit to work with the Italian community. Without a chaplain, they had been left with the Italian Consular Officials as their main source of influence. At the other end of the political spectrum, extreme anarchist and communist members of the Italian community were also beginning to make inroads into the Italian community.

In 1938, Mannix got his request with the appointment of the Jesuit Father, Ugo Modotti, to the chaplaincy of the Italian community in Melbourne. Father Ugo Modotti was born in Basiliano, Udine, Italy, on May 2, 1897. He did his training with the Jesuits at the Gregorian University in Rome, 1918-1920, and then in India 1921-1925. He was ordained in 1926 in Calcutta, India. During 1927-1936, Modotti worked as the principal of St. Joseph's College in Mangalore, India (3A). Modotti returned to Rome in 1937 and it was there, while working as the Procurator of the Jesuit Missions in India, that Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (later to become Pope Pius XII) approached the General of the Jesuits, Father Wladimir Ledochowski, about

sending a Jesuit to work with the Italian community in Melbourne.<sup>1</sup> Modotti's fluency in English could have been a major factor in securing his appointment to Australia. Apart from his fluency in English, Modotti was also a talented scholar, having completed studies in the Arts and Classics.

All Catholic papers in Melbourne wrote about the appointment and subsequent arrival of Father Ugo Modotti. The *Advocate* stated for its welcome "Venice, India, Australia: Brilliant Jesuit comes among Us."<sup>2</sup> The article acknowledged Modotti's high educational and priestly qualifications, stating that Modotti had recently been vice-principal of St. Aloysius College in Mangalore, India. The article also stated that Modotti's mission in Australia "is approved by the Duce."<sup>3</sup> With the Italian Consular Officials promoting the fact that Modotti had met Mussolini, the *Advocate* strongly reminded its readers that Modotti's mission was "purely religious and has no political significance whatever."<sup>4</sup> It was clear by this admission that the *Advocate*, and moreover the Archbishop, wasted no time in disassociating himself, the paper, the Italian community and its new chaplain from any links to the fascist regime of Mussolini. While Mussolini approved Modotti's mission, according to Mannix any political links were nonexistent.

Shortly after Modotti's arrival in Australia, the Catholic community gathered to celebrate his appointment, at St. Ignatius' Church Richmond. Present at the gathering were Archbishop Daniel Mannix, Mon. Patrick Lyons (Vicar General), Jesuit Fathers W.J. Lockington and J.S. Bourke, Father Matthew Beovich (later to become Archbishop of Adelaide) and Bishop Ross SJ, who was the Archbishop of Hiroshima, Japan. There were also important civil leaders such as Labour Ministers, J.H. Scullin and Bert Cremean, Italian consul Ernesto Arrighi and the Mayor of Richmond, Paul Carroll.<sup>5</sup> At this meeting, Mannix spoke about the objective and purpose of Modotti's mission in Australia. The first and foremost objective was that Modotti was here to work for the "spiritual needs of the community,"<sup>6</sup> as distinct from any political, social or

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by Father Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> *The Advocate*, September 1, 1938, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Advocate*, September 22, 1938, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

ideological needs. The second objective mentioned by Mannix was that Modotti was to assist in the process of assimilating the Italian community. According to Mannix, assimilation meant, "without ceasing to be Italians in sympathy and in culture, the young Italians in time would virtually become Australians."<sup>7</sup> This definition was contrary to *italianita*'. In assimilating the Italians, *italianita*' was to be sacrificed. These two objectives were to run counter to the attitudes of both Fascism and the Italian Consular Officials towards emigration and assimilation.

The Italian Consular Officials saw Modotti's arrival as an opportunity to consolidate fascist ideals and help crush the anti-fascists. Upon hearing of his appointment, the Italian Consulate in Melbourne wrote to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressing their delight, as Modotti was "a fascist and an Italian and has had the honor of being received by the Duce in Rome."<sup>8</sup> As previously stated, the *Advocate* indicated that "his mission has no political significance whatever", but this did not stop the Italian Consular Officials from trying to obtain Modotti for their own purposes by immediately organizing free subscriptions for him to Italian fascist newspapers such as "*Popolo d'Italia*," "*Giornale d'Italia*" and "*Gazzetta del Popolo*."<sup>9</sup> The Italian Consular Officials, with the aid of Mannix, also collected money for the purchase of a car, a Fiat, for Modotti who was then one of the few Jesuits in Melbourne at the time to have a car. The major contributors to the purchase were Archbishop Mannix, Gualtiero Vaccari, Severino DeMarco, Filippo Maria Bianchi, Valentino Adami, Fr Matthew Beovich, Fr Patrick Lyons and Dr Soccorso Santoro.<sup>10</sup> Father Modotti, being unsure of Australia's practice of payment for priests, presumed that the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided funds for his mission, as was the practice in Italy. Here was a fundamental difference in practice between Australia and Italy. In Italy, priests were funded by the State, whereas in Australia, funding was by the contribution of Catholics through the almsgiving of its faithful. The Italian

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<sup>7</sup> *Tribune*, September 1938.

<sup>8</sup> Italian Consular Officials to the Foreign Office in Rome, June 20, 1938, Italian Consular Papers, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Royal Italian Consul, Melbourne, July 27, 1938, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>10</sup> Sottoscrizione per L'automobile di Padre Modotti, Australian Archives ACT, *ibid*.

Consular Officials made it clear to Modotti that the practice in Australia was different from Italy and that no funds would be provided from the Italian Government.<sup>11</sup>

The possibility of a collaborative approach between Modotti and the Italian Consular Officials looked unlikely from the outset, as it became apparent that Modotti was going to be indifferent to them. It soon became like a chess game between the Italian Consular Officials and Modotti. Both wanted control of the Italian community, one for the State the other for the Church, making the Italian community their pawns. A fascist initiative taken by the Italian Consular Officials would be followed with a counter initiative. The first move was taken by the Archdiocese, with the *Advocate's* assertion that Modotti's role was purely religious. In the background there were also the anti-fascists who were strongly against Fascism, therefore opposing both the Italian Consular Officials and the Church whom they considered associated with the fascists.

Father Ugo Modotti's appointment to Melbourne was quite significant. A tall, highly educated Jesuit, who was quite fluent in English, his appointment as chaplain to a small Italian community in a remote part of the world was peculiar as argued by Sir James Gobbo who remembers Modotti as "a cut above the sort of person one might expect to be sent to act as migrant chaplain in a far distant country."<sup>12</sup> Why would Rome send such a distinguished scholar to look after a small Italian population in Melbourne? Perhaps his appointment was to coincide with Archbishop Panico's mission of breaking Mannix's influence, as outlined in chapter two, or was the appointment a fascist initiative through which Modotti would assist the Italian Consular Officials in instructing the Italians?

To further understand the appointment and position of Father Modotti, it is important to have an insight into the religious mind of the new chaplain. One thing we can say about him is that he was a priest of his

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<sup>11</sup> Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri to Italian Consul, Ernesto Arrighi, June 20, 1938, Italian Consular Papers, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

<sup>12</sup> James Gobbo, "Italians in Victoria and the Second World War" An Address given for the Italian Historical Society at the Italian Institute of Culture, May 19, 1988, 8.

era. Like many priests of his time, Modotti would have resented the Italian State and the annexation of the Papal States, but would have rejoiced over the Lateran Treaty, which gave the church back some of its glory. His Christendom was hierarchical, with the Pope on the pinnacle and temporal rulers below. Capuchin Father Owen O'Sullivan speaks about this notion of Christendom in his book *The Silent Schism*, in which he argues that until 1963 popes were crowned, cardinals were princes and the Vatican functioned like a royal court.<sup>13</sup> The church had a "divine right" to govern the rest of society;<sup>14</sup> Mussolini, as a layperson was part of the church and was accountable to it. This is demonstrated by a quote from Pope Pius XI, who at the College of *Propaganda Fide*, on July 29 1938, said: "let not Catholic Action be attacked ... to the one is to attack the other [being the Church] to attack them both is to attack the Pope... and whosoever strikes at the Pope dies...."<sup>15</sup> Further insights into the mind of the priest of this period come from Tony Flannery, a Redemptorist sociologist who, in his book entitled *The Death of Religious Life*, looks at the key characteristics of the religious of this period. While Flannery offers several characteristics, the first two characteristics are relevant to Modotti in this first instance. The first characteristic is that the spirituality was negative.<sup>16</sup> Life, world and creation were set apart from the spiritual and divine, causing a conflict between the body and soul. The religious mind looked to the afterlife. Governments and all non-religious institutions were viewed negatively. Communism was opposed because it based itself on the materialistic understanding of humankind. An example of the necessity of the spiritual as opposed to the temporal (material) is evident in an article written by Modotti published in 1938: "the modern world ... has lost every vision, supernatural and that superior authority that controls all events... In a word the world has lost its soul."<sup>17</sup> The second characteristic Flannery offers is that only the "properly informed conscience was one that agreed with the church."<sup>18</sup> To disagree with the church was to disagree with God. The above quote of Pius XI is one example: "whosoever strikes at the Pope dies...." Therefore, introduced to the Italian community in Melbourne in 1938 was a priest dedicated to the spiritual values, who was

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<sup>13</sup> Owen O'Sullivan, *The Silent Schism. Renewal of Catholic Spirit and Structures*, (Dublin 1997) 8.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *The Advocate*, August 25, 1938, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Tony Flannery CSSR, *The Death of Religious Life*, (Dublin, 1997) 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Vade Mecum*, October 1938. Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

authoritarian and deeply grounded in the Catholic faith, which Italy had embraced with the signing of the Lateran Treaty. The Church came first and the world second. As Modotti expressed in *L'Angelo della Famiglia*: "... true wisdom has given back to Italy its true character, its soul through religion, ensuring its unity and greatness...".<sup>19</sup>

### ***L'Angelo della Famiglia***

Filippo Maria Bianchi was the first to approach Modotti regarding a journalistic enterprise, suggesting he write a religious page in *Il Giornale Italiano*. Modotti refused, after consulting Mannix<sup>20</sup>, and instead embarked on his own journalistic venture. His venture was the publication of *L'Angelo Della Famiglia* (3B) which, under the auspices of Mannix, was placed within the jurisdiction of the Australian Secretariat of Catholic Action,<sup>21</sup> making *L'Angelo della Famiglia* the first Catholic Action journal in Australia. *L'Angelo della Famiglia* was, according to Modotti, a "purely religious paper", that brought "the Word of God"<sup>22</sup> to the Italian community. This was consistent with Modotti's separation of the temporal and the spiritual realms. The journal was a work of Catholic Action based perhaps more on the Italian model and was a journal for the laity using religion as a way to reform the Italian community in exile. Its only reference to Mussolini was in the February 1939 issue, in which Modotti acknowledged Mussolini's role in the signing of the Lateran Pacts: "It is right that we Italians affirm the right reverence towards this day [February 29th the day of the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929, not Mussolini] that has signaled for Italy a happy beginning of a new era."<sup>23</sup> This statement, rather than praising Mussolini's form of government, shows Modotti's support for the superiority of the Church by its rights having been declared in the Lateran Pacts. To Modotti, the Lateran Pacts were a small but significant recognition by the Italian Government of the superiority of the Church over the temporal.

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<sup>19</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, January 1939, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>21</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, January 1939, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February 1939, 1-3.

Modotti's refusal to contribute to *Il Giornale Italiano* is an important datum. Had he participated in *Il Giornale Italiano*, Modotti's spiritual writings could have reached a far greater audience, rather than just those Italians attending Mass, who according to Modotti were 10%, as 90% of Italians did not attend Mass.<sup>24</sup> Further to his refusal to participate in *Il Giornale Italiano* and his embarkment on producing *L'Angelo della Famiglia* from scratch, Modotti was approached by Francesco Pisano to help with the establishment of the *L'Italiano* paper in Melbourne, a paper which was already well established in Brisbane. The suggestion to approach Modotti had come from Gualtiero Vaccari. By introducing *L'Italiano* in Melbourne, Pisano hoped to end Bianchi's publishing enterprise, as Bianchi at the time had the monopoly of the Italian newspapers in Melbourne. Previously, Pisano had been an agent for *Il Giornale Italiano*, working under Bianchi. After a quarrel with Bianchi, Pisano offered his services to Albanese, the editor of *L'Italiano*. What followed was a court case in which Bianchi sued Pisano for breach of contract. Vaccari defended Pisano. Bianchi won the court case and both Pisano and Vaccari had to pay court expenses and compensation to Bianchi.<sup>25</sup> Modotti refused Pisano's offer to work on *L'Italiano*, thereby refusing to take sides in the struggle to control the readership of the Italian language papers. He did, however, allow F.M. Bianchi to be the publisher of *L'Angelo della Famiglia*.<sup>26</sup> Bianchi and Vaccari continued their feud with each other, with Modotti at times caught in the middle.

### ***Assimilation***

The biggest barrier and opposition to the Italian Consular Officials' control of the Italian community was the process of assimilation pursued by Mannix and in turn by Modotti. Assimilation entailed letting go of any attachment to Italian culture. It was a process of absorption into the Anglo-Irish culture. In fact, assimilation is best described by Charles Price, who defines an aspect of assimilation as follows: "the country takes in food (the immigrants), and digests them (assimilates) so that they have no trace of their

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<sup>24</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>25</sup> Explanation of Report k.306 by internee F.M. Bianchi, March 10, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file no. V/16878/S, *For Pisano approaching Modotti*- Section Officer, Section 2A to the Deputy Director of Security, Brisbane, May 27, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>26</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, April 1, 1940, back page.



culture and customs”.<sup>27</sup> The body, physically changed by the intake of this new food, still remains the same person. Australia is still Australia despite having eaten a little bit of Italy. It was in the area of religion that assimilation caused major problems for the Italians. The church, in attempting to assimilate the Italians, found itself in a difficult predicament, which became known as the "Italian Problem".

The approach to the Italian problem began as early as 1927 when the Apostolic Delegate, Bartholomew Cattaneo, asked Father Mambrini, a Franciscan working in Queensland, to report on the religious practice of the Italians. In his report, Mambrini concluded that the lack of religious participation revolved around a language barrier which resulted in a lack of sympathy between the Italians and the clergy. Factors such as the Italians' dislike of money collections in the church, which they had not experienced in Italy, contact with Protestantism, also largely absent from Italy, and a lack of education all contributed to the absence of the Italian migrant from the Sacraments of the Church.<sup>28</sup> In Melbourne, during 1920 to 1934, Father de Francesco had successfully increased the participation of the Italian Catholics. Archbishop Mannix, following the success of de Francesco, still believed assimilation to be the solution to the Italian problem. In 1939, B.A. Santamaria, following Mannix's (and possibly that of all Australian bishops during this period) policy of assimilation, wrote about "The Italian Problem in Australia." Santamaria acknowledged that the Italian problem was primarily a cultural one as, according to the Irish Catholic practice, Mass attendance and the strict observance of the Sacraments conflicted with the relaxed devotional attitude of the Italians. Modotti, now in Melbourne, was the key to rectifying this problem by assimilating the Italians into the Irish practice of strict religious observance of the Sacraments<sup>29</sup>. Santamaria, like Mannix, had every

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<sup>27</sup> C.A. Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, (Melbourne, 1963) 201.

<sup>28</sup> Fr. Mambrini, "Report of a Two month visit to the Italian Settlement on the Herbert River", 1923, document cited in full in *Migrants or Mates*, (ed) G. Cresciani, (Sydney, 1988) 97-109. According to Mambrini the solution rested on importing an Italian priest rather than using any of the existing Australian/Irish clergy.

<sup>29</sup> It may well be argued that there was nothing so Irish about the strict observance of the sacraments. However according to Price: "nor do these semi-pagan cults [practiced by the Italians] with their absence of any systematic Christian code of conduct fit easily into the more rigorous requirements of the Irish Catholicism prevalent in Australia...". Price, *op.cit.* 70. O'Farrell, also refers to Australian practices, but judging the demographics of the Australian Church it could well be substituted for Irish: "within many parishes migrants were subject to strong pressures to assimilate, to adopt Australian [Irish] religious ways and to drop their own", O'Farrell, *op.cit.* 404. Finally from an Italian perspective there is Father Pittarello: "For Australians, religion is a set of observances; for Italians religion is "the spice of life": it gives them reason for celebrations...". Pittarello, *op.cit.* 88.

confidence in Modotti's success in eradicating the "Italian problem": "that the Italians will respond to these special efforts on their behalf is proved from the remarkable success, which has already attended the work of Fr. Modotti in Melbourne."<sup>30</sup>

Modotti, from the very onset of his work in Melbourne, carried out the instructions of Mannix to assimilate the Italian community.<sup>31</sup> It was because of this commitment that Modotti had his first disputes with the Italian Consular Officials, who reprimanded him for participating in the assimilation policy of the Archdiocese.<sup>32</sup> In assimilating the Italians the notion of *italianita'* became insignificant. Italian patriotism, if it were to be tolerated, now involved being good Catholics, as Ruggero Romanin remembers a Modotti cliché, "to be a good Italian is to be a good Catholic".<sup>33</sup>

Mannix's policy of assimilating the Italians, carried out by Modotti, began with the concept of decentralisation<sup>34</sup>. Decentralisation was simple. Instead of having the Italians attending one Mass at one location, they were encouraged to attend Mass in their own parishes. To enforce this, Fr. Bernard Stewart said the Italian Mass at St. George's, Carlton and Fr. O'Hanlon said the Mass at Our Lady Star of the Sea West Melbourne. Modotti, who was situated in Richmond, said the Mass at St. Ignatius. By doing this, the Italian community was not clustered around a particular church but was spread out around three parishes, engaging locally in the life of these parishes.<sup>35</sup> During de Francesco's chaplaincy the Italian community was unified at St. Ignatius Richmond, but now with Fr. Modotti the Italian community was split and integrated within their local parish communities. Modotti did remind parishioners that both Stewart and O'Hanlon "spoke correctly our beautiful Italian language."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> B.A. Santamaria, "The Italian Problem in Australia," *Australasian Catholic Record*, Volume XVI, October 1939, no.4, 305.

<sup>31</sup> Statement by Father Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne. See also *The Advocate* September 22, 1938. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Ruggero Romanin, interview with the author, for the thesis: A. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic in Melbourne, with special reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945" (Melbourne 1995), see also *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February 1940, 2; and *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, April 1940, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Statement by Father Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne. Modotti states in this document: "As advised consistently by His Grace the Archbishop, I followed the policy of decentralisation by which the Italians would attend religious ceremonies in their own parish churches..."

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, April 1939.

Another important aspect of assimilation was the language. While Modotti, Stewart and O'Hanlon said the homily (sermon) in Italian, the rest of the Mass was said in Latin and Mannix required that the homily be followed by an English translation.<sup>37</sup> The ideal was that eventually there would be no need for the homily to be said in Italian, as Italians would speak fluent English rather than their native tongue. To ensure this would take place, English classes were organised for the Italian community. These classes, held in the evening at North Fitzroy, had sixty adults learning English in July 1939.<sup>38</sup> The teachers included Valentino Adami, Domenico Boffa and Severino DeMarco.

Apart from assimilating the Italians, Modotti also organised social alternatives to the fascists as part of his counter fascist measures. This was the case with the *Gruppo Cattolico Femminile*. The *fascio femminile* was a fascist social group of women, organised by the Italian Consular Officials. It was the *fascio femminile* who organised gold collections for the Abyssinian War Campaign. Modotti, to counter this group's influence in the Italian community, organised his own women's group called the *Gruppo Cattolico Femminile*.<sup>39</sup> This became the Catholic alternative to the Italian Consular Official's women's group.

As well as the Italian Consular Officials, there were the antifascists. Modotti's troubles with these were to emerge after Italy entered the war (after June 1940). Prior to the war, it was Mannix, not Modotti, who became concerned about their existence. When, in 1939, the anti-fascists planned to open a school for Italian children, Mannix responded by asking Modotti to do the same. The Italian Consular Officials, who had their own Italian classes at the Dante Society, strongly protested to Modotti. This third lot of classes, according to the Italian Consular Officials, was seen as an anti-fascist move on the part of Modotti.<sup>40</sup> It is clear that Mannix and Modotti, by choosing to open their own school rather than using the existing classes available at the Dante Society, showed their concern to develop a third way, independent of the anti-fascists and the Italian Consular Officials.

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<sup>37</sup> James Gobbo, *The Italian Heritage of Victoria*, (Melbourne, 1985) 14.

<sup>38</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, July 1939, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, August 1939, 7

Modotti was opposed to the anti-fascists because they were communists and anarchists. Cresciani's book, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945*, links Modotti's opposition to the anti-fascists as evidence of his Fascism.<sup>41</sup> Cresciani claims in his book, *Migrants or Mates* that Modotti believed his religious task was to stop Italians "from becoming atheists and communists."<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that Modotti believed this to be his mission. His opposition to Communism was part of the wider Catholic Church's opposition to Communism. For the Catholic, Communism was materialistic and incompatible with the spiritual values of Catholicism. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, printed in 1939, for example, defined Communism as materialistic, deterministic, hostile to religion, family and the rights of people.<sup>43</sup> Modotti's role, however, was not only to stop Italians from becoming atheists and communists, but also to help the Italians deepen their belief in God. To Modotti, the Catholic faith was the crux of civilization. To Modotti, it was a question of defending Catholicism, rather than Fascism as preached by the fascists. His approach to his Catholic faith confronted anything that was in opposition to that faith. Communism, with its materialistic interpretation of man and godless philosophy, was in opposition simply because it undermined the Catholic faith. It was not, however, only Communism that undermined Catholicism. During the years 1938 to 1940 Modotti's major pastoral concern that occupied his thoughts was the threat of Catholics mixing with Protestants. In February 1940, Modotti wrote in *L'Angelo della Famiglia* about Catholics in secular and Protestant schools, arguing that "secular and Protestant education ... is a poison that kills the soul..."<sup>44</sup> In April 1940, Modotti dedicated several pages of the journal to a dialogue between himself and a friend, Toni, whose brother was to marry a Protestant. The dialogue was a long explanation as to why the marriage would be a disaster unless the woman became a Catholic.<sup>45</sup> Modotti also attacked those Italian men who refused to take part in a Eucharistic procession as "cowards".<sup>46</sup> Instead, he argued, "look at the Irish... they are Catholics and they are not ashamed".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Statement by Ugo Modotti, 15th April 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne

<sup>41</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia*, (Canberra, 1980) 187.

<sup>42</sup> Gianfranco Cresciani, *Migrant or Mates*, (Sydney, 1988) 96.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Attwater (General Editor) *Catholic Encyclopedia Dictionary*, (London, 1931) 117.

<sup>44</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February 1940, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, April 1940, 10ff. The genre of this dialogue between Toni and Modotti is similar to the dialogue between Fr. Lord and Dick, found in the ACTS pamphlet, *Marry Your Own*, (Melbourne, 1934).

<sup>46</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February 1940, 6.

<sup>47</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, April 1940, 10.

Father Modotti was also quite artistic, but his artistic flair was religiously motivated. For example, in June 1939, Modotti wrote a play entitled “Ritratto di un Madre” (translated “Portrait of a Mother”). The play, which starred local members of the Italian community, began at 8pm, but Modotti requested that people arrive at 7.15 for a brief religious talk.<sup>48</sup>

Another example of Modotti’s religious zeal is found in an article he wrote that was published in *Vade Mecum*, a quarterly magazine found in *Il Giornale Italiano*. The article appeared in April 1939 and was titled “A World without Soul.” The article has been interpreted as evidence for Modotti’s Fascism, used in 1945 by the anti-fascists, by Cresciani in *Fascism Anti- Fascism and Italians in Australia* and more recently by Marcello Montagnana in an article entitled: “The anti-fascist movement, *Italia Libera*, as it is presented in the pages of the newspaper *Il Risveglio*”.<sup>49</sup> The article, in sum, speaks about a world on the brink of destruction because of its failure to recognize the necessity of religion. The following sentence, however, has come into question by Modotti’s critics:

history- impartial judge- will say how far-sighted and wise was Benito Mussolini’s domestic policy that in understanding the value of religion has wanted to return to the homeland as a better guarantee of that renewal and of that grandeur that has made Italy the mother of the people.<sup>50</sup>

Both Cresciani and Montagnana, when citing *Vade Mecum*, end their quotation after the word “policy,” failing to include the crucial remainder of the sentence. On face value, if the only words quoted are “history – impartial judge – will say how far-sighted and wise was Benito Mussolini’s domestic policy...”<sup>51</sup>, then a pro-fascist conclusion can be argued. However, the remainder of the sentence is crucial in putting the quote into its proper context, thus allowing a more fuller interpretation. First, Modotti does not elevate Mussolini with any titles. There is no usage of the words “Il Duce” or any other accolades. Secondly, there is a specific mention of only Mussolini’s domestic policy, thereby excluding Mussolini’s international policy. From this, it can be concluded that Modotti may well have disapproved of the

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<sup>48</sup> Church Flyer, St. Ignatius Richmond, June 25, 1939, Modotti Scrapbook, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne

<sup>49</sup> Marcello Montagnana, “Il Movimento Antifascista Italia Libera attraverso le Pagine del Giornale Il Risveglio”, *Italians in Australia: Historical and Social Perspectives*, ed. G. Rando and M. Arrighi, (Wollongong, 1993) 142n

<sup>50</sup> *Vade Mecum*, October 1939, copy of the full article found in Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

Abyssinian campaign and the Berlin-Rome axis. Thirdly, Mussolini's far-sightedness and wisdom are only accredited because he has allowed religious renewal. In Modotti's mind, it is because of the Lateran Pacts and concessions made to the church, and only insofar as Mussolini is kind and willing to co-operate with the church, that the adjectives "wise and far-sightedness" are used.

Finally, another example of Modotti's disassociation with the Fascist ideology is that he never used the fascist calendar. Fascist newspapers, letters and telegrams always stated the fascist year, taken from its founding in 1922. In 1938, for example, *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, if Modotti shared the fascist ideals, would have been dated the XVI year. However, nowhere in the *L'Angelo della Famiglia* did Modotti use this calendar.

### *Opera Religiosa Italiana*

Early in 1940, Modotti and Mannix began to make long term plans for the Italian community. Included in these plans was the purchase of a house. The house was to be used by Father Modotti, who would recruit more Italian Jesuit priests and together they would create a nerve centre for Italian Catholic renewal.<sup>52</sup> The plan that included the house became known as the "Religious House for Italian Renewal" or "Opera Religiosa Italiana." The plan was to be funded by the Italian community, with the support of Archbishop Mannix, who was the first contributor to the fund. Gualtiero Vaccari informed the Italian community of the *Opera Religiosa Italiana* in an article in the *Italo-Australian*, in which he explained the "exact conditions of the donations".<sup>53</sup> According to the article, if the plan failed there would be no refund of donations under £1. Failure would mean that Modotti was unable to find other Jesuits from Italy to work in Melbourne with the Italian Community. If the plan did fail, there would be a refund of funds received over £1.

In May 1940, Modotti gathered the Italian community at St. Georges Hall in Carlton, where he launched the plan with the Italian community. On that night, a committee was also chosen, namely Severino DeMarco,

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<sup>52</sup> Church Flyer, St Ignatius Richmond, May 1940, Modotti Scrapbook, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne; and Anthony Cappello, "An Object of Espionage", *The Overland*, number 150, Autumn 1998, 98-99.

<sup>53</sup> *Italo-Australian*, May 25, 1940, translated by E.M. Jones, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490

Dr. Soccorso Santoro, Gualtiero Vaccari and Giuseppe Santamaria. B.A. Santamaria also had a role as the secretary of the committee.<sup>54</sup> B.A. Santamaria, apart from his role on the committee, was very absorbed in the Catholic Social Studies Movement, which began to fight the communists in the ALP. Santamaria recalls in his autobiography that it was during this period that his friend, Bert Cremean, suggested that he “should approach Archbishop Mannix with the object to see whether the Archbishop could be persuaded that the Communist challenge ... should be resisted...”.<sup>55</sup> The launch of the *Opera Religiosa Italiana* was a success and on the night over £550 was collected, with Carmelo Virgona of East Malvern donating £150. Other large contributors were Gualtiero Vaccari, Severino DeMarco, Giuseppe Santamaria and Frank Virgona.<sup>56</sup>

The *Opera Religiosa Italiana* was to be challenged and postponed, first with the onset of war and second with the Apostolic Delegate who had already begun to voice his opposition to the idea. His opposition would be clearer and more open when the plan reappeared in 1944. Modotti and Panico had had several encounters during 1938-1940, one such encounter occurring when Panico instructed Modotti to approach the Consul regarding his moral behavior. According to Modotti, Panico instructed him to tell the Consul in Sydney to send home the woman he had brought back from South America, as the Consul had a family back in Italy.<sup>57</sup> Why did Panico instruct Modotti to perform such a task? Particularly when the Consul was in the same city as Panico? Modotti followed through his instructions, and while the Consul agreed to send the woman back, he responded by requesting that Rome recall Modotti home to Italy. One could argue that Panico’s instructions were intended to ensure a fall-out with the Consul that would guarantee Modotti’s recall to Italy. Panico, already concerned with Modotti’s amicable working relationship with Mannix, may have felt that Modotti was not helping in implementing the Roman policy. It is also possible that Panico did not want to damage his relationship with the Consul by challenging him on his moral behavior, and therefore sent Modotti to do the unpleasant task. Modotti’s obedience to Panico, to the point of carrying out his dirty work, was not anything peculiar or particular to Modotti. According to Flannery’s study of the

<sup>54</sup> Statement by Father Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>55</sup> N.M. Moloney, “B.A. Santamaria’s Religious Apostolate and Political Action” Fourth Year Thesis, Melbourne University, 1990, 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Italo-Australian*, May 25, 1940, Australian Archives ACT, op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to the Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

religious priest from this period, one strong characteristic was that “obedience” was the “primary” and the “most important virtue.”<sup>58</sup> According to this premise, Modotti who objected to the task<sup>59</sup> nevertheless obeyed his superior Panico, and such an act was virtuous.

One minor, but significant, point about Modotti’s work with the Italian community was that whilst carrying out the wishes of the Archbishop in assimilating the Italian community, Modotti was also introducing to Melbourne, via the Italian community, the Italian Catholic Action model. As in Italy, Catholic Action opposed Fascism by counter measures and offered alternatives to the fascists. This same approach appeared here. Modotti, through his work, offered counter fascist activities such as *L’Angelo della Famiglia* which was an alternative journal to *Il Giornale Italiano*. *Gruppo Fascio Femminile* was matched by Modotti’s *Gruppo Cattolico Femminile*, and minor events such as the theatre drama that he organized were all under the heading of Catholic Action. This, in fact, was to become the norm of Australian Catholic Action, which gathered momentum after the Second World War in Melbourne after B.A. Santamaria became its director. The link is apparent when looking at B.A. Santamaria’s 1938 article on the Italian problem, where he continually praises and acknowledges the work of Catholic Action in Italy. Santamaria submitted the first draft of the article to Modotti, who wrote the following paragraph which Santamaria then included in his published draft:

But the actual revival [in Italy]... has been due to the Catholic Action Movement, which in Italy has worked miracles. The work of Italian Catholic Action, especially in problems concerning youth and education, has often been conducted despite the bitterest opposition from the Fascist regime.<sup>60</sup>

Santamaria states how to tackle the Italian migrants: “The second is the potential value of Catholic Action organizations, which are likely to develop in Australia in the near future.”<sup>61</sup> Santamaria, thanks to Father

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<sup>58</sup> Flannery, *op.cit.*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to the Fr. Rev. Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>60</sup> Santamaria, “Italian Problem in Australia,” *op.cit.* 304. Also, the first draft of this piece is found at the Jesuit archives in Melbourne with five pages of editorial comments made by Modotti. This paragraph was written by Modotti, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 298.



Modotti, indirectly claims in the following paragraph that Australia had this model of Italian Catholic Action:

...Italians will respond to these special efforts [which as I have argued is possibly modeled on Catholic Action] on their behalf is proved from the remarkable success which has already attended the work of Father Modotti in Melbourne.<sup>62</sup>

The office of Catholic Action opened on January 24, 1938, eight months before the arrival of Modotti. What is important is that prior to Modotti's arrival, there was an uncertainty about the role of Catholic Action, as Santamaria recalls: "I was not ... quite clear what we were expected to achieve other than to expand group organization on the Campion model throughout Australia and New Zealand."<sup>63</sup> Further, in his autobiography, Santamaria makes an ambiguous statement that, "Catholic Action was a phrase with a different connotation in Italian but unfortunate in the Australian environment."<sup>64</sup> What does Santamaria mean by the word "unfortunate"? In his earlier biography, *Against the Tide*, this statement appears as a footnote. In his revised edition, entitled *A Memoir*, published in 1997, the statement appears in the body of the text, as if Santamaria wanted to emphasize it in his later life. Perhaps Santamaria preferred the Italian model of Catholic Action where it became a church organ that supported the Italian political party, the Christian Democrats.

The question remains: was Australia's Catholic Action, which initially emerged from Campion society that was modeled on the Jocists movement from Belgium, undergoing a change during 1938-1940? Did this change incorporate Italian elements of Catholic Action? Could the answer be that with the combination of the work of Father Modotti and the encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI, *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, Catholic Action in Australia was Italianized?<sup>65</sup> This conclusion would account for Patrick O'Farrell's argument that the movement's ideas, which emerged later out of Catholic Action, were "European rather than Irish."<sup>66</sup> Lastly, what links did Santamaria have with Italy? Apart from his father's influence, Santamaria's other

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid*, 305.

<sup>63</sup> B.A. Santamaria, *A Memoir*, (Melbourne, 1997) 33.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, 32.

<sup>65</sup> *Italianized, Italianization*: is the word used by me to describe Italian ideas penetrated or being absorbed into the Anglo-Celtic culture. For example, an Anglo-Celtic family eating pasta is the Italianization of that family's cuisine. Italianization is different from *italianita*, which is Italian pride and sentiment by Italian-Australians living in Australia.

Italian links could have emerged from the work and teachings of Father Ugo Modotti. While it is known that Santamaria's 1939 article was edited and altered by Modotti, one wonders if more of Santamaria's ideas and writing came under the influence of Modotti? If this is the case, Modotti's influence in Australia is more profound than previously stated.

### ***Conclusion***

In summary, in the years 1938 to 1940, Father Ugo Modotti carried out the instructions of Archbishop Mannix in assimilating the Italian community, which ultimately entailed the religious conversion of the Italian community. This policy of assimilation was the policy of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Modotti was certainly faithful to this policy. Modotti, in assimilating the Italian community into a more Irish approach to the Catholic faith, which suited the largely protestant environment, was at the same time introducing into the Irish mould elements of Italian Catholicism.

Finally, there is little evidence to support the notion that during 1938-1940, Modotti sided with the fascists, or that he was a fascist priest. Modotti had a typically clerical understanding of his faith, free from worldly politics, and free from worldly affairs. To him, the world was without a soul and for it to have life, it needed religion. However, it needed religion only in the form of Catholicism, which is why Modotti opposed Protestantism even more than Communism. The Australian Security authorities, as we will see in chapter four, had an entirely different interpretation of the work of Modotti during these years.

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<sup>66</sup> O'Farrell, *op.cit.*, 397.

PICTURES— CHAPTER THREE.



3A- Father Ugo Modotti and his niece, Lisetta (c1934).



3B- Father Ugo Modotti in 1938.

# Corriere Religioso degli Italiani in Australasia

Anno 2—N. 4

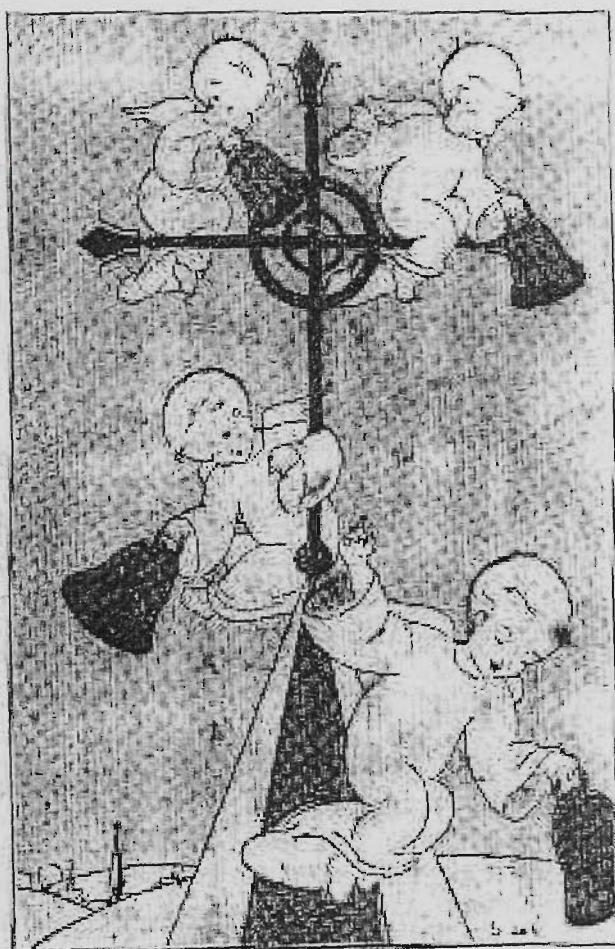
1 APRILE, 1941

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## L'Angelo della Famiglia

Secondo Bussa 18/7/1941



Director:  
St. Ignace, Richmond, R.I.  
Melbourne, Vic. PAUL J. JONES

DEN. 1148. 1149.  
Nelle campagne, campo sacro — Voi di Dio — salite  
santire l'eco armonica dell'Alleanza, l'equilibrio che si sta spie-  
gliando nelle mille torri e rampanti fasciati dal sole  
splendente d'Italia.

3C- L'Angelo della Famiglia

## Chapter Four Italy enters the War

In 1940, after Italy entered the war, many of the Italian civilians living in Australia were arrested and interned. One of the motives for this internment policy was the fifth column myth. There were also other motives, besides the fifth column myth, grounded in racial intolerance towards the Italian community. With the Italians isolated and considered as enemy aliens, the Catholic Church stood for their protection, even preventing the internment of its chaplain, Father Modotti. This, however, placed the authorities in an awkward position where in attempting to have Modotti interned, they faced a possible fallout with the Archbishop. Such a fallout could have been catastrophic. Notwithstanding, Father Modotti, undeterred by the authorities' efforts, continued his duties as chaplain to the Italian community, even extending his chaplaincy to the internees. This work of Father Modotti in assisting the internees became, in many ways, the strongest response made towards helping the internees by the wider Catholic Church in Victoria and therefore his role was significant. This also strengthened Modotti's link with the Italian community.

### *The Internments*

On June 10 1940 with fascist newspapers in Italy declaring: "the moment we have awaited for 50 years has arrived. The Italian people will fight their French and British enemies with the greatest determination",<sup>1</sup> Italy declared war on the allies. This set the Australian Authorities on automatic pilot, carrying out arrests, Australia wide, of Italians suspected of being sympathetic to Fascism. Regardless of being naturalized or not, any sympathy, association, or hint of Fascism merited arrest and internment. The *Argus* reported the arrests of Italians with the heading "Prompt Round-up of Italians" where it stated:

Months of incessant investigation, and "split-second timing" at the critical moment, enabled Commonwealth authorities yesterday to carry out with quiet efficiency the greatest round-up of aliens in the history of Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Victoria had, by far, the lowest number of internees, numbering 170 while Queensland had over 2216 internees.<sup>3</sup> James Gobbo and Robert Pascoe credit the low number of internees to the strong support for the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Argus*, June 6, 1940, Front Page.

<sup>2</sup> *The Argus*, June 12, 1940, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ilma O'Brien, "Internment of Italian born and Unnaturalised British subjects of Italian Origin," *War Internment and Mass Migration*, (Rome, 1992) Table 1, 92.

Italians by Archbishop Daniel Mannix.<sup>4</sup> Although the authorities might have considered his influence, another reason for the variations in each state was that internments were dependent on the premiers' discretion. This is the view of one such internee, Claudio Alcorso.<sup>5</sup> Supporting his view is the fact that in Queensland there was equally strong support for the Italians by Archbishop Duhig, as there was in Melbourne, but this did not stop the large number of internments in Queensland. Perhaps the most convincing argument is put forth by Dr. Ilma O'Brien in which she argues that the variations in numbers in each state were because of the different perceptions by the security heads in each state towards local conditions including attitudes to civil rights, prejudice towards Italians and the maintenance of public morale.<sup>6</sup> In Queensland, due to the Deputy Director of Security, "a hint of fascist sympathies was sufficient to merit loss of liberty."<sup>7</sup>

If we look back between the years 1934 to 1940, four events reshaped Australian attitudes to Fascism and Mussolini, resulting in suspicion towards the Italians. These were the Italian invasions of Abyssinia and Albania, the death of the Catholic Prime Minister, Aloysius Lyons in April 1938, (this is according to Cresciani who hints at Lyons sympathy towards Fascism because he was a Catholic<sup>8</sup>), and the Berlin-Rome axis. These events made Italians an international threat to the security of the Commonwealth and consequently created the fear of a fifth column.

The phrase "fifth column" was not an Australian phenomena as it first appeared in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War when a Nationalist General told Republicans defending Madrid that besides having four armed columns outside the capital, he had a fifth column waiting within to rise and fight for him.<sup>9</sup> The Commonwealth's fear of a fifth column has been attributed to Sir Neville Bland who, as the British Ambassador to Holland, attributed the German victories in Holland to German minorities acting as agents for the invading German forces. In fact, argued Bland, the same fifth columnist assault would happen in

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia*, (Richmond, 1987) 90, and James Gobbo, "Italians in Victoria and the Second World War," an Address given for the Italian Historical Society at the Italian Institute of Culture, May 19, 1988, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Claudio Alcorso, "Gli Italiani in Australia Durante La Seconda Guerra Mondiale" *Italo-Australiani: La popolazione di origine italiana in Australia*, (Torino, 1988) 52.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, *op.cit.* 90-1, 99.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*: the two Deputy Directors of Security in Queensland were R.B. Wake and later J.C. McFarlane.

<sup>8</sup> G. Cresciani, "The Internment of Italians in NSW," *Australia, Australians & the Italian Migration*, (Milan, 1983) 68.

<sup>9</sup> I.C.B. Bear, (General Editor), *Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, (Oxford, 1995) 353.

Britain unless German and Austrian citizens were interned.<sup>10</sup> In Australia, papers such as *The Melbourne Truth* aggravated this fear further. In an article, for example, two days before Italy declared war, the *Melbourne Truth* alerted its readers to the dangers of the fifth column claiming that "Australia needs to wake up! The danger and the menace [of a fifth column] is here. The times call for stern action."<sup>11</sup>

A week later, when Italy had entered the war and some Italian civilians in Australia were interned, the *Melbourne Truth* wrote a more attacking article on those Italians who were still not interned. In the article titled "How to deal with Italians in our midst," the writers called on the public to identify those Italians not interned. It went insofar as to claim that "reserves of police aided by troops" were busy protecting those Italians who were not interned, which led to the neglect of far more important duties.<sup>12</sup> The article acknowledged that North Melbourne was an alarming situation where 2000 non-interned Italians resided.<sup>13</sup> The strong anti-Italian tone of such articles did not emerge after Italy's entry into the war, rather it is argued that the fifth column was a bogey set up to justify already existing racial tensions towards the Italians<sup>14</sup> that "... enabled the racist element in Queensland society, who had raged a cold war on Italian settlers for the previous half century, to consummate their smoldering hatreds."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the almost paranoid fears of such papers as the *Melbourne Truth*, Italy's entry in the war and the subsequent internments that followed in Australia were hardly anticipated by the Italian community. The Sydney Italian Australian newspaper, *Italo-Australian*, rather than promoting fascist slogans or justifying reason for war had, for its editorial on June 1 1940, an article entitled "Warmth of Italian Sentiments Towards Australia" in which it stated: "we feel that native born Australians will join Italo-Australians in endorsing the Italian officials' recognition of friendly relation existing between Italy and the Commonwealth."<sup>16</sup> It also set as its goals: "to assist in every way possible the maintenance and further

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Bevege, *Behind Barbed Wire*, (St.Lucia, 1993) 51.

<sup>11</sup> *The Melbourne Truth*, June 8, 1940, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *The Melbourne Truth*, June 15, 1940, 14.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ilma O'Brien, *op.cit.* 89. G. Cresciani, "The Bogey of the Italian Fifth Column: Internment and the Making of Italo-Australia" *War Internment and Mass Migration*, (Rome, 1992) 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Dignan, "The Internment of Italians in Queensland" *War Internment and Mass Migration*, (Rome, 1992), 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Italo-Australian*, June 1, 1940, Front Page.

development of the friendship of less troublous years."<sup>17</sup> Another example is told by Jim Cairns, who as a special branch policeman, remembers the day after Italy entered the war, arresting the Italian market gardeners in Werribee. On the day in which they came with trucks to arrest them he was surprised to see the gardeners in the fields, in their gumboots, working away as they did every other day.<sup>18</sup> Even a cartoon in the *Argus* several days before Italy's entry in the war had Mussolini dragging a reluctant lamb up a hill that had a sign pointing war. Inscribed on the lamb were the words "Italian people." The significance of the cartoon was that in the mind of the cartoonist no Italian wanted war, even if Mussolini headed in that direction (4A).

In Melbourne, among those arrested were Filippo Maria Bianchi, Soccorso Santoro and Father Ugo Modotti. Both Bianchi and Santoro were interned. Gualtiero Vaccari was not suspected.<sup>19</sup> A security alert on May 10, 1940 judged Filippo Maria Bianchi a fascist when an unknown "reliable source" notified the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau of Bianchi's association with Fascism.<sup>20</sup> As discussed in chapter two, Bianchi as director of *Il Giornale Italiano* did not endorse pro-fascist articles, nor did he personally write anti-British or anti-Commonwealth articles. Bianchi did belong to a *fascio* and in 1934 had shown a film entitled "Mussolini Speaks," at the Arcadia Theater in Sydney. According to Inspector Wilson of the New South Wales police, the film was shown for commercial purposes as a dispute between Bianchi and an investor took place.<sup>21</sup>

On the June 11, 1940, police raided *Il Giornale Italiano* ending the existence of the newspaper. The police arrested Bianchi along with his staff members.<sup>22</sup> Just two days before Bianchi's arrest, Franco Battistessa, editor of *Il Giornale Italiano*, wrote to Bianchi worried about the prospects of Italy entering the war. Battistessa had just returned from Newcastle where he hoped to secure more advertising for *Il Giornale*

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Gobbo, op.cit. 6.

<sup>19</sup> There are no police files available on Vaccari. Furthermore on a listing of suspected Melbourne fascists, Vaccari is not mentioned, "Fascist Members of Melbourne", Australian Archives, Victoria file number v/16878/s

<sup>20</sup> I.b. Subsection, Intelligence Section, Eastern Command to I.b. Subsection I.S.G.S. Southern Command, May 10, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria file number V/16878S.

<sup>21</sup> Such a dispute could demonstrate that some of the Italian immigrants were more interested in prosperity and financial security rather than politics. Reference No. 1/24648/II Inspector Wilson, MPI Section I.S.G.S. Eastern Command, December 11, 1940, Australian Archives, New South Wales, Item N25326, Series ST1233/1.



*Italiano* from the Grand Stores that had just opened. In the past, Grand Stores promised Battistessa to advertise in *Il Giornale Italiano*, but due to the events of Europe, the management of Grand Stores had changed its mind.<sup>23</sup> Battistessa feared the worst, but prayed that the Vatican would intervene and prevent Italy's entry into the war.<sup>24</sup> Battistessa, like Bianchi was not ready or willing to be involved in any war. Earlier in 1938, Battistessa wrote an article entitled "Italy, England and Peace" in which he argued "Italy wants peace and friendship with England. Anglo-Italian fraternity not only has endured for centuries but was cemented by the blood spilled together as allies...."<sup>25</sup>

Soccorso Santoro suffered the same fate as Bianchi, being arrested and interned. Santoro unlike Bianchi had a major advantage. He had an Anglo-Saxon wife and through her efforts, he remained interned for only six weeks.<sup>26</sup> Santoro in the past had publicly boasted of Italy's invasion of Abyssinia and refused to have anti-fascists as members of the Dante Society.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, Gualtiero Vaccari was not arrested. Nonetheless, Gualtiero Vaccari, like Bianchi, was a member of the *fascio* and only became an Italian citizen after Italy's invasion of Albania.<sup>28</sup> Vaccari also donated sums of money to appeals for the homeland.<sup>29</sup> A possible reason for his political immunity was that he worked for or had worked closely with the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau during 1935 to 1940 in supplying information on Italians suspected of being fascists.<sup>30</sup> He most likely was the source for the above information on Bianchi.

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<sup>22</sup> Captain Matthews, 1st Southern Command, Police Report, June 12, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V/16878/S.

<sup>23</sup> Franco Battistessa to F.M. Bianchi, June 9, 1940, Australia Archives, Victoria, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Il Giornale Italiano*, January 26, 1938, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Captain E. Hattam, Department of Defense Minute Paper, July 15, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, series B5741/5, item V23146.

<sup>27</sup> Beryl L.V. Browne, Police Statement of the Dante Alighieri Society, Melbourne, August 16, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Lina Bianchi, February 27, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V/16878S.

<sup>29</sup> *Il Giornale Italiano*, June 7, 1939, 8.

<sup>30</sup> G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, (Canberra, 1980) 81.

## *The Arrest of Modotti*

The most surprising arrest was that of Father Ugo Modotti. On June 11, 1940, Lieutenant General of Southern Command, J. L. Whitham, signed the recommendation of the "particulars of persons for internment." The particulars were of Father Ugo Modotti.<sup>31</sup> According to the details on the arrest warrant, "such detention is considered necessary or expedient in the interest of public safety".<sup>32</sup> On that same morning, Major Browne telephoned Inspector Hattam of Southern Command asking that action regarding the "apprehension of Fr. Modotti be held in abeyance."<sup>33</sup>

The previous day, Major Browne had met up with Monsignor Patrick Lyons who argued Modotti's case stating that Modotti was an antifascist rather than a fascist.<sup>34</sup> After this meeting Major Browne concluded:

as a result of the examination, and particularly in view of the assurance given by the Administrator [Mons. Lyons], with the consent of the Archbishop I would suggest... that he be not interned.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Major Browne's telephone call, on June 11 1940, two officers attempted to arrest Father Modotti. B.A. Santamaria recalled the arrest where two plain clothed police officers arrived at Manresa, Hawthorn, to arrest Modotti. One police officer opened the door of the police car hoping that Modotti would enter. Modotti refused, slamming the door of the car shut without entering.<sup>36</sup> Modotti then took off in his Fiat to Raheen in Kew, the residence of Archbishop Mannix, with the police officers following in their police car. Upon their arrival at Raheen, Mannix, unimpressed with the situation, summoned Brigadier Street, Minister for the Army to whom he protested about any action contemplated against Fr. Modotti. Brigadier Street, after assessing the case, promised Mannix "that no further action be taken" against Fr. Modotti.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Particulars of persons for Internment. (signed) F.R. Burton, J.F. Whitham, A.M.F. Southern Command, June 31, 1940, Australian Archives ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Captain E. Hattam to G.S.O. M.I. Southern Command, June 11, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Major Browne to G.S.O. M.I. Southern Command, June 11, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> B.A. Santamaria cited in A.S. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne with special references to the political convictions of its Chaplains, 1919 to 1945" (Melbourne, 1995) 56. See also A. Cappello "An object of Espionage" *The Overland*, Autumn 1998, 98-99.

<sup>37</sup> D. Mannix to F.M. Forde, Minister for Army, March 26, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490

The Commonwealth Investigation Bureau (C.I.B.) believed Modotti was a fascist. To support this belief the C.I.B. needed evidence. This evidence was collected and compiled by Inspector Hattam who stated in a covering letter to his superior:

Although there is no evidence that he [Modotti] has actually been a member of the Fascist organization, there is strong and conclusive evidence that he has been closely associated with Fascist activities.<sup>38</sup>

This conclusive evidence argued by Inspector Hattam came with the arrest warrant and was attached as an appendix.

The first document in the appendix was a letter written by the Italian consul in Sydney to his superiors in Rome in which he stated: "I have the honor to forward the list of periodicals published in the Italian language in the Commonwealth."<sup>39</sup> On top of his list, we find "Corriere Religioso degli Italiani in Australia, Director Ugo Modotti." The paper that the Consul was in fact speaking about was *L'Angelo della Famiglia*. The other papers mentioned were *Il Giornale Italiano*, *Italian Bulletin of Commerce*, *Italo-Australian* and *L'Italiano*. The Consul's letter ends with the declaration: "The first four are openly Fascist."<sup>40</sup>

The second document in Hattam's appendix was a list showing the people who donated funds for Modotti's car back in September 1938. Those on the list suspected as being fascists were marked with an "x". The reason for including this list by Hattam was to show the links that Modotti shared with the fascists. Those on the list marked with the "x" were F.M. Bianchi, P. Orecchini, S. Pagliaro, S. Santoro, A. Fabris, A. Bartolini, M. Speirani, both Triaca brothers, S. Vanella and F. Valente.<sup>41</sup>

The next document in the appendix was the *Advocate* article heralding Modotti's arrival. Hattam in using the article paid special attention by highlighting the sentence: "Fr. Modotti's mission in Australia is approved by Il Duce."<sup>42</sup> The last five documents in Hattam's appendix were five letters from the Italian

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<sup>38</sup> Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix 7 of the Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, "Copy of letter by Lubrano, June 5, 1939." Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

<sup>41</sup> Appendix 6 of the Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, *ibid.*, "sottoscrizione per l'automobile di Padre Modotti", *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 5 of the Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, *ibid.*, "Article from the Catholic Weekly, The Advocate, September 1, 1938." Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

Consul in Melbourne to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Rome. The letters, dated from July 1938 to November 1938, spoke of Modotti's appointment to Australia where the Consul suggests how he and the other consular officials could be of some assistance to him.<sup>43</sup>

To further his case, Hattam added that on October 6 1938 at the Club Cavour, Father Modotti said the Mass and during his homily reminded those present that: "the Church and the Fatherland were indivisible".<sup>44</sup> To this, Hattam acknowledged "of course there is nothing sinister in this expression."<sup>45</sup> Later that day festivities continued in the afternoon ending with a gathering of Italian fascists. According to Hattam, there was no conclusive evidence that Father Modotti was present although it was possible that he may have attended.<sup>46</sup> Hattam also noted that at the viewing of the film "Hitler's journey through Italy" in April 1939, to be shown at Werribee's Mechanic's Institute, it was announced that Father Modotti may be present.<sup>47</sup> These are surprising pieces of evidence, as Hattam could not ascertain if Modotti was present at either meeting.

The arrest of Modotti demonstrates how poor was the evidence used to arrest Italian civilians living in Australia where the authorities had to go to great lengths in piecing together evidence in order to arrest and intern civilians that would otherwise not stand to scrutiny in any court of justice. The internments although based on a fifth column fear emerged out of racial fear and bigotry. The evidence to support that Modotti was a security problem was unconvincing. Rather Modotti was a leader and a leader within the Italian community and this worried the authorities who had him arrested. What the authorities did not expect was that the Archbishop, Chaplain-General of the Australian Armed Forces, would defend Modotti. A fallout with Daniel Mannix could not be risked by the authorities and it therefore meant that Modotti was to avoid internment. Modotti, nevertheless, was charged and placed on parole.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix 4 of the Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, *ibid.*, "Translations from the Italian Consul in Melbourne to the Ministry of Foreign affairs, June 30, 1938 to 21 September 1938". Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 6 of the Report of Captain E. Hattam, I.b. Southern Command, June 24, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

### *The Catholic Church and the Internments.*

After Italy's entry in the war, the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico, was quick to defend his neutrality stating "that he was a citizen of the Vatican...."<sup>49</sup> The authorities, however, reacted somewhat differently and considered sending Panico back to Italy:

My dear Prime Minister... The Foreign Office are now anxious to obtain the views of the Commonwealth Government as to the general question of the advisability of taking steps to secure the replacement in all British territories of any members of Apostolic Delegations who are of enemy nationality...<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, the wider Catholic Church responded in defending the Italians in Australia. Mannix, making this distinction between the spiritual and the temporal, declared that Italians are Catholics, therefore, in matters spiritual they "are loyal to the Holy Father [the Pope]."<sup>51</sup> Mannix, like Modotti would have regarded the spiritual realm as the important realm and the temporal as less significant. Mannix did, however, deplore the extension of the war to Italy.<sup>52</sup> Archbishop Duhig had argued earlier in May that it was unthinkable that Italy would enter the war with Germany. When the war broke out Duhig made the distinction between fascists and the Italians where the fascists were at war while the Italian people were loyal to the church.<sup>53</sup>

Neither Mannix, Panico nor Duhig initially spoke out against the internments. The closest sympathy the Italian community received was an *Advocate* article stating that no "helpless law-abiding citizen within its borders shall be insulted or assailed because he or she happened to be born in another land."<sup>54</sup> The following week the *Advocate* also condemned acts of "victimization" such as "employers dismissing their Italian employees."<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile the hardship experienced by the Italian community and such attacks against them were favorably reported in other newspapers. In one case reported in the *Melbourne Truth*, youths attacked an Oakleigh shop believed to belong to Italians. To the writers of the *Melbourne Truth* this

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48 Statement by Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>49</sup> *The Argus*, 19 June 1940, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Whiskard, Office of the High Commissioner, United Kingdom, to Right Hon. R.G. Menzies, Canberra, October 14, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, series A1608/1, item L33/1/5.

<sup>51</sup> *The Advocate*, June 12, 1940, 5.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> T.P. Boland, *James Duhig*, (St. Lucia, 1986) 303.

<sup>54</sup> *The Advocate*, June 13, 1940, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *The Advocate*, June 20, 1940, 6.

attack was a major disappointment as the shop's owners were not Italian and this sort of action "didn't find favor with the laws of the land".<sup>56</sup>

Many of the families of the internees were uncertain of the duration of the war. Maria Paoloni, having an interned husband, believed that the war would last twenty years.<sup>57</sup> It was in this air of uncertainty that the Catholic Church under the direction of Mannix and Modotti initiated the "Archbishop's Committee of Italian Relief" with the aim of aiding the Italian families in the Commonwealth and those Italians who were interned.<sup>58</sup> Monsignor Patrick Lyons, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, headed the committee as both President and Treasurer. Modotti's role on the committee was to distribute the funds collected to whoever was in need.<sup>59</sup> Mannix was the first to contribute to the fund, donating £100 at its first appeal.<sup>60</sup> Before Christmas, Modotti wrote to the leaders of the Internment camps requesting "a detailed list of requirements to enable the Archbishop's Committee for Italian Relief to do whatever we can in this matter."<sup>61</sup> Captain Proctor, the camp commander, responded favorably to this request and for Christmas the internees received Christmas hampers. Included in the hampers were spaghetti, cheeses, black olives, garlic, toothbrushes and religious books.<sup>62</sup> The last item, religious books, was consistent with Modotti's strong religiosity, never missing an opportunity to preach Catholicism!

The welfare of the internees and their family also became a concern to Father Ciantar who offered his assistance to Fr. Modotti. Father Joseph Ciantar, a Salesian priest of a Maltese origin, lived at the Salesian Boys hostel in Sydney Road, Brunswick. Born at Valetta, Malta, on June 7, 1893, Ciantar trained as a Salesian in England, coming to Australia in 1938.<sup>63</sup> Under Modotti's direction, Fr. Joseph Ciantar organized film nights at St. Ignatius showing films on his founder Don Bosco. Admission was two pence

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<sup>56</sup> *The Melbourne Truth*, June 29, 1940, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Maria Paoloni, *Give me Strength: Italian Australian Women speak*, A.M. Kahan and Elizabeth Weiss (eds), (Sydney, 1988) 69.

<sup>58</sup> Statement by Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Letter of Fr. Modotti to the Italian Parishioners of St. Ignatius, December 13, 1940, Modotti's Scrapbook, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne

<sup>61</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to the Leaders of the Italian Camps at Tatura, December 5, 1940, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>62</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to Captain Karber, December 21, 1940, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>63</sup> *Profiles of Salesians*, (Melbourne, 1985) 17-20.

for reserved seating, one pence for unreserved seating and children were at half price.<sup>64</sup> The money collected from the film night was donated to fund the work of the Italian committee of Italian relief.

The internment camps improved with time and in 1942 they were in fine condition with a library, café, canteen, recreational huts and a workshop.<sup>65</sup> Still, they had a “desolating sense of isolation.”<sup>66</sup> The internment camp at Hay, for example, had a triple fence of barbed wire, which surrounded the prisoners with watchtowers guarded by soldiers with machine guns.<sup>67</sup> The two camps housed a thousand men in 32 wooden huts that created episodes of tension. Furthermore, fascists and anti-fascists were interned together and such tensions resulted in violence and in one case death, as with Francesco Fantin in 1942. On a lighter note, lesser tensions such as snoring also prevailed. Lumberto Yonna, an internee cleverly drew cartoons describing the life in the camps and in one cartoon drew what happens to the snorer: “if someone nearby snores, don’t say anything just throw him a shoe.” The cartoon cleverly depicts this (4B).<sup>68</sup>

It was not only the Italian members of the community who acknowledged the great need of the Archbishop’s Committee of Italian Relief. Major Maltby in 1941 in response to Modotti’s request on behalf of the committee wrote to Modotti stating “Prisoners have much idle time on their hands and anything you may do to relieve the monotony of their internment will be greatly valued and faithfully distributed.”<sup>69</sup>

Modotti did not find the work easy and was at times quite frustrated. In a letter to Antonio Jannucci,

Modotti shared some of his frustrations:

Here things are becoming always more difficult. No one can leave his own district without permission of the police and almost all the men have now gone into the camps organised by the "Man Power", to cut wood. It is another form of internment. So they have broken up all the families bringing great hardship.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Church Flyer, St. Ignatius Richmond, December 2, 1940, Modotti’s Scrapbook, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

<sup>65</sup> Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates*, 201.

<sup>66</sup> C. Pearl, *The Dunera Scandal*, (Melbourne, 1983) 70.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Lumberto Yonna, Cartoon “Incidents of Life and Internees,” *Australia’s Italians*, Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien, (Melbourne, 1989) 55.

<sup>69</sup> Major T.K. Maltby to Father Ugo Modotti, October 2, 1941, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>70</sup> Fr. Ugo Modotti to Antonio Jannucci, September 18, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

Modotti's work with the Italian internees has come into question by Gianfranco Cresciani who claims that Modotti's work "inter alia" consisted of sponsoring the release of the fascist leaders who were interned.<sup>71</sup> Cresciani cites the example of three fascist leaders: Mario Speirani, Franco Valente and F.M. Bianchi.<sup>72</sup> There is no footnote to support Cresciani's claim although the three letters relating to these appeals are found in the Jesuit Archives in Melbourne, Australia. Furthermore, Cresciani also claims that there is no evidence that "he ever made representations to the government in favor of an anti-fascist."<sup>73</sup>

The argument by Cresciani that Modotti represented the cases of Mario Speirani, Franco Valente and Filippo Maria Bianchi is worth a closer look. Modotti approached none of the three men, nor did they ask Modotti for assistance in their release. Cresciani's claim, therefore, already becomes questionable.

The first appeal mentioned by Cresciani was Mario Speirani. Formally the secretary of the *fascio* in Melbourne, Speirani had migrated to Australia in 1927 and was employed as a chemist.<sup>74</sup> After his internment, Speirani did not write to Modotti seeking release, but rather Speirani's request was that his "wife and children be interned"<sup>75</sup> with him. This was because "my meager savings having been exhausted, my family found itself in a destitute situation...."<sup>76</sup> The request for the internment of his wife and children was made to both Mannix and to the Attorney-General. The authorities, citing "compassionate grounds," rejected the request.<sup>77</sup>

The second appeal was that of Franco Valente. Mr. Valente's wife wrote to Archbishop Mannix in quite a dramatic manner stating: "Your Grace, hear the sorrowful appeal of a poor wife and mother who turns to your Christian charity."<sup>78</sup> The letter went on to appeal that Mr. Valente's health was in such a bad state, according to Mrs. Valente her husband had been in 17 different hospitals since internment, and she hoped

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<sup>71</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.*, 188.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Report of V.11022, Mario Speirani, June 6, 1944, Australian Archives, South Australia, file D/1901/0.

<sup>75</sup> Mario Speirani to Attorney General, November 25, 1942, Australian Archives, South Australia, *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Deputy General of Security to Deputy Director of Security, Victoria, January 14, 1943, Australian Archives, South Australia, *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Mrs. C. Valente to Archbishop Daniel Mannix, undated, late 1940, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.



by appeal that he could be sent to a local Melbourne hospital so she could visit him.<sup>79</sup> The letter was passed from Mannix to Santamaria to Bert Cremean to the Camp leader back to Santamaria who passed it onto Modotti with a note stating that nothing could be done.<sup>80</sup> What was notable about the exchange of letters was Santamaria's involvement.

Finally, there was the case of Filippo Maria Bianchi. It seems that from the outset of his internment, Bianchi never sought the assistance of Modotti. His first appeal to the Australian Authorities included the following referees: Mr. Portus, Mr. Webb, Hon. Kiernan MLC and Archbishop James Duhig.<sup>81</sup> Bianchi lived in Melbourne but used the Archbishop of Brisbane rather than the local Archbishop of Melbourne. Bianchi only wrote to Mannix about the Werribee Market growers, asking for their release. Bianchi, in fact, as leader of the internees at Camp Hay in May 1941 was not on talking terms with Modotti. Bianchi accused Modotti of being a liar, suggesting that Modotti was worthy of "the isolation of lepers."<sup>82</sup> Bianchi later apologized to Modotti.<sup>83</sup> The reason for the dispute between Bianchi and Modotti is unknown. Therefore, Cresciani's claim that Modotti's work in the internment camps consisted in the release of these three prominent fascists seems unlikely.

In the same file, found in the Jesuit Archives in Melbourne, is an appeal by Modotti on Salvatore Pante. Cresciani in his criticism of Modotti's "inter alia" fails to mention his case and the cases of people who were not considered fascist heads. Modotti did appeal to Mannix on Pante's behalf. The reason for his appeal was that Mrs. Pante was in very bad health with a possibility of ending up in a mental home.<sup>84</sup> Modotti also made a list of some of the injustices towards the internees and with the assistance of Mannix, wrote a report to the Australian Authorities, detailing some of these injustices. These internees were not

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> B.A. Santamaria to Father Ugo Modotti, December 11, 1940, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>81</sup> F. M. Bianchi to Lt.Col. Tackaberry, Tatura, June 29, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V/16878S.

<sup>82</sup> F.M. Bianchi to L. Bianchi, May 30, 1941, Australian Archives, New South Wales, series ST1233/1 item no. N25326.

<sup>83</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Father Ugo Modotti, July 27, 1943, Australian Archives, Victoria, file number V/16878/S. Letter paraphrased by Military Censor.

<sup>84</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to Archbishop Daniel Mannix, September 25, 1941, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

any of the above mentioned internees. Of particular concern to Modotti was the case of Luigi Pedrini who, being unable to pay his mortgagee due to internment, had lost his farm of 18 years.<sup>85</sup>

The Archbishop's Committee of Italian Relief continued its work long after the war and long after Modotti's departure. Under the directorship of Angelina Santospirito, its role later extended to sponsoring Italians in migrating to Australia and assisting the new arrivals once in Australia. It was as late as 1946 that its contribution was recognized by the Vatican when Pope Pius XII sent a message of thanks to the committee for its work, as the committee had donated 3000 blankets to Italians abroad in Italy.<sup>86</sup> The Archbishop's Committee for Italian Relief was also one of the first lay organizations in Australia to have a female lay chairperson.

## *Conclusion*

Ilma O'Brien argues that leaders in the Italian community who had an ability to negotiate both cultures and whose education was of a higher level were considered a high risk to Australia's security and were interned.<sup>87</sup> This was clearly the motivation in Modotti's case. Based on little or weak evidence the authorities, after Italy's entry in the war, set out to intern Father Modotti. Modotti, however, avoided internment because the Australian Authorities were faced with a fallout with the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, who stood in defense of his priest. Modotti, although he avoided internment, did not retreat into the background, but remained in the frontline by assisting in the welfare of the internees and their families. The assistance of Fr. Modotti and the Archbishop's Committee for Italian Relief towards those affected by the internments was important and the committee would be transformed into more significant work with the migration that followed the War. The war and internments helped form a strong link between the Italian community and the Church especially with its Archbishop who made their care his priority.

Finally, the question of internments needs to be looked at carefully and understood as a bleak period in Australia's history. Racial intolerance, justified by the creation of the fifth column myth, allowed the

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<sup>85</sup> Fr. Ugo Modotti to Daniel Mannix, September 11, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, series A1608, item AA19/1/1.

<sup>86</sup> *The Advocate*, March 18, 1946, 7.

unnecessary internment of Italians. Italians in Australia, both naturalised and unnaturalised, were imprisoned because of the simple fact that they were not of a British descent but of Italian descent.

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<sup>87</sup> Ilma O'Brien, "Internment of Italian born and Unnaturalised British subjects of Italian Origin," *War Internment and Mass Migration*, (Rome, 1992) 94.

PICTURES CHAPTER FOUR.



4A- *The Argus*, days before Italy's entry in the War. The cartoonist's understanding of the Italian people was that they did not want war. Therefore, such a cartoon could have roused sympathy to the Italians, however, in many instances this was not the case. Italians were still interned, despite the cartoonist's perception.





4B Life of the internees by Umberto Yonna- this cartoon depicts what one does to stop someone from snoring- "throw a shoe at his head".



Picture 4C: Broken Hill 1945, Fr. Modotti, Bishop Fox, Fr Gerard O'Callaghan, Fr. A. Bongiorno with members of the Italian Community.

## Chapter Five

### Modotti, The Authorities and POWs

Modotti continued to work within the Italian community, and with the arrival of Italian prisoners of war (POWs) his work increased. Added to this was the work brought upon by the internments. Meanwhile, tensions between himself and the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico, increased as Panico continued to implement what has become known as the Roman Policy. Modotti himself was to contend with the Australian Authorities who became suspicious with the escape of Italian POW, Edgardo Simoni, who the authorities believed was sheltered by Modotti. Yet, if Modotti was involved so too was the Archbishop, Daniel Mannix. Did Mannix's protection of his Italian chaplain go as far as allowing an escaped POW on run to find refuge within the Church? Furthermore, why did Mannix, a senior cleric in the Australian Catholic Church go to great lengths in protecting his Italian chaplain?

#### *Messages to Vatican City*

As soon as Italy entered the war in June 1940 the Apostolic Delegate to Australia, Giovanni Panico, was instantaneous in clarifying his nationality: "Archbishop Panico... said tonight that he was a citizen of the Vatican, a neutral sovereign state, not an Italian citizen".<sup>1</sup> The government, despite Panico's claim to neutrality, thought otherwise and inquiries were made to have Panico, who was of an Italian nationality, replaced by an Apostolic Delegate of an allied nationality.<sup>2</sup> Such a move would most likely have been welcomed by the Chaplain General of the Australia Armed Forces, Archbishop Daniel Mannix.

In December 1940, the Australian Authorities changed direction and granted several privileges to the Apostolic Delegate, which included permission to visit the internees and to receive broadcasts from the Vatican on matters affecting the health and spiritual welfare of relatives of persons in internment.<sup>3</sup> Due to the arrivals of more POWs in 1941, the workload became excessive for his office. To lessen the load on himself and his office, early in 1942 Panico appointed priests located in the community areas where large

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<sup>1</sup> *The Argus*, June 12, 1940, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Whiskard, High Commissioners Office, United Kingdom, to Right Hon. R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, October 14, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, series A1608/1, item L33/1/5.

<sup>3</sup> War Cabinet Minute, November 13, 1940, Australian Archives, ACT, series A5954/1, item 674/3.

proportions of Italians were found to assist him with the work. Those appointed were Monsignor O'Donnell in Leongatha, Monsignor Grogan in Ingham, Doctor Kelly in Ayr, Father Hickey in Innisfail and Father Ugo Modotti in Melbourne.<sup>4</sup> When the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau and the Australian Government, who regarded Modotti as a security threat, received the news of the appointment of Father Modotti, the authorities acted from the highest office in the country. Immediately, the Prime Minister, John Curtin wrote to Panico stating:

It has come to the notice of the Commonwealth Government that your representative in Victoria, the Reverend P. Ugo Modotti, has communicated with Italians resident in that state advising them that you will now undertake to transmit messages to their families in Italy through the Vatican City.<sup>5</sup>

Prime Minister Curtin also reminded Panico that the arrangement that Modotti claimed was far beyond what was initially agreed upon by Panico and the authorities.<sup>6</sup> Panico replied by stating that Modotti was not his representative but rather a member of the Archdiocese of Melbourne under Daniel Mannix.<sup>7</sup> Panico immediately conceded that abuses had arisen and would avoid using Father Ugo Modotti as his intermediary.<sup>8</sup> When recalling the episode to the authorities later in 1943, Modotti stated that the abuses that Panico and the Australian Authorities referred to were printed forms that Modotti used, for people wishing messages to be passed on to Italy. These forms once filled in would then be sent on to the Apostolic Delegate for transmission of the messages. The authorities, fearing espionage, apprehended these forms.<sup>9</sup> Soon afterwards Father Meagher, Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia was informed by Panico that:

I wish to inform you that for reasons beyond our control, he is no longer permitted to receive and forward to the Apostolic Delegation messages from Italians for messages for transmission to the Vatican.<sup>10</sup>

If Modotti was, as Panico stated, under Mannix's supervision, why did Panico inform the Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr. John Meagher? Panico's secretary, Father Thomas Cahill informed Modotti himself that

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. John Panico to Right Hon. John Curtin, February 10, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A373/1, item 5792.

<sup>5</sup> John Curtin, Prime Minister to Dr. J. Panico, February 3, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A373/1, item 5792.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Dr. John Panico to Right Hon. John Curtin, February 10, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A373/1, item 5792.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Statement by Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

messages between the Italians and the Vatican go directly to Panico.<sup>11</sup> The incident becomes more ironic when Panico at first requested Modotti's help only to repudiate him after the so-called abuses happened. Furthermore, Panico made it quite clear to the authorities that Modotti was under Mannix's supervision, therefore implying that Mannix's credibility was questionable. Perhaps Panico's aim was to discredit Mannix's creditability so Archbishop Justin Simonds could replace him as Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces.

In 1942, when Archbishop Justin Simonds of the Archdiocese of Hobart was appointed, in secret without Mannix's being fully consulted, as his co-adjutor bishop of Melbourne, Panico saw the embarrassing situation of having an Archbishop in Melbourne with no real authority or work and saw the possibility of replacing Mannix as Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces with Simonds. Max Vodola argues this point: "Simonds appointment to Melbourne and [sic, had] incurred the wrath of Mannix in the process, the delegate must have guessed that things would be difficult for the ill-fated coadjutor. The kingmaker [Panico] was determined to thwart the influence of Mannix and enhance the status of Simonds."<sup>12</sup> What followed was an exchange of letters between Mannix and Panico. In this context, one can see the significance of Modotti's episode of the messages to Italy in which Panico used the incident to attempt to tarnish the Archbishop's reputation. Mannix could not be trusted, because his subordinate Fr Modotti could have been passing valuable information to Italy through the Vatican Radio. If these allegations were true, then Panico could argue that Mannix was involved in espionage. Therefore, replacing Mannix as the high ranking Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces would be in the best interest of the Australian war effort. Panico had it all planned and he had the suitable replacement, Justin Simonds. Panico's plan, however, was unsuccessful as pressure from the authorities was required, but the Australian Authorities did not seem to make the link that Panico was alluding too. After a meeting in Melbourne "it was decided that His Grace [Mannix] should continue to be Chaplain General and that Fr. McCarthy should continue as Deputy".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. John Panico to Fr. Meagher, February 10, 1942, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne

<sup>11</sup> Father Thomas Cahill to Father Ugo Modotti, June 23, 1942, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>12</sup> Max Vodola, *Simonds a Rewarding Life*, (Melbourne, 1997) 42.



### ***Modotti and the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau***

Although Modotti escaped arrest in June 1940, in 1943 he was still regarded by the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau as a threat to the national security of Australia. In April 1943, his inquisition by the police got a strong response from Archbishop Mannix who intervened by instructing Modotti to write a statement of protest to the Australian Security Forces. In the statement, Mannix expressed his own protest and views on Modotti's treatment by the Australian Authorities by a covering letter where he stated:

Like Father Modotti I am amazed at the way in which the officials of the Commonwealth have treated him, and I add my strongest protest against their unwarranted and unjustifiable interference with his work as a priest acting under my supervision and authority.<sup>14</sup>

Also coming to Modotti's defense was Father Tim McCarthy, Deputy Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces. McCarthy was to defend Modotti on a number of occasions and this he did strongly. In this instance, McCarthy claimed that Modotti was an "antifascist" rather than a fascist. So strong was his anti-fascism, claimed McCarthy, that the Italian Consulate Officials in early 1940 appealed to the Apostolic Delegate requesting Modotti's return to Italy.<sup>15</sup> On another occasion McCarthy wrote:

the attacks made on him from both sections- Fascists and Communists- are the cause of false reports that have been circulated concerning him; each side anxious for its own end to diminish the undoubted power for the good that this hard-working priest exercises over the Italian people.<sup>16</sup>

McCarthy was certainly well informed on the background of the relationship between the Church and Fascism in Italy. In fact, at the time that McCarthy wrote the above letter, he had in his hands the book *Church and State in Fascist Italy*. The volume found in the Central Catholic Library in Melbourne bears his signature with the date March 1943 (5A and 5B).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Memorandum prepared by Monsignor Lyons cited in Vodola, *ibid.* 43.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Mannix, Archbishop of Melbourne to Australian Security Forces, April 15, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>15</sup> Comments by Father Tim McCarthy, April 13, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Father Tim McCarthy, Deputy Chaplain General, to W.B. Simpson, Director General of Security, April 22, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, (Oxford, 1941) This copy from the Catholic Central Library bears McCarthy's signature with the inscription March 1943. See pictures 5A and 5B.

McCarthy especially defended Modotti on the way he was questioned regarding a Mr. Ramaswami who approached Modotti requesting money.<sup>18</sup> Mr. Ramaswami was a soldier stationed at Albury who was on leave. Mr. Ramaswami knew other Jesuits in India and used Modotti's links with India as an excuse to befriend him, in the hope of obtaining a financial donation. The C.I.B., on the other hand, interpreted the visits of Mr. Ramaswami to Modotti as an exchange of information in which Ramaswami disclosed army movements of ship and news about Middle East Operations. To these accusations McCarthy protested to the Director General of Security, W.B. Simpson, stating:

Now my dear Bill, by a strange coincidence I know the said Ramaswami very well indeed... On each occasion he came for the same purposes as he visited Father Modotti, namely that he might borrow or beg money for his fare....<sup>19</sup>

Towards the end of the letter, McCarthy stressed the fact that: "It seems a very strange coincidence that my own personal experience of Ramaswami should be the same as that of Father Modotti."<sup>20</sup> McCarthy ended the letter with a strong defense of Modotti claiming that: "instead of being a hindrance to the Australian war effort he is one of our closest allies."<sup>21</sup>

### *The POWs, the escape of Simoni*

April 1941 saw the arrival of 2000 Italian POWs from Egypt. This increased to 5000 in December 1941.<sup>22</sup> Among those arriving as a POW in December 1941 was Edgardo Simoni, who was captured in January 1941 in Libya by the Australian Sixth division. Upon his arrival in Australia, Simoni was imprisoned at the Murchison POW camp where he wasted no time in planning his escape.<sup>23</sup>

On June 6, 1942, Lt. Edgardo Simoni escaped from the Murchison POW camp. Having disguised himself as a part of a working party, Simoni marched out of the camp and then, by stealing a bike, cycled in the direction of Shepparton. For ten months he remained on the run, as Fitzgerald writes:

During the ten months Simoni was free an unremitting and strenuous

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<sup>18</sup> Statement by Ugo Modotti, April 15, 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>19</sup> Father Tim McCarthy to W.B. Simpson, April 22, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> Fitzgerald, *op.cit.* 13.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 11.

investigation of his whereabouts, covering all parts of the State, was carried out. Investigators tracked him to widely separated localities including Shepparton, Buffulo, Bairnsdale, North Melbourne and Ascot Vale, but could not catch him.<sup>24</sup>

Simoni was eventually captured on April 6, 1943 in Mildura at a farm of a naturalized Italian. One anonymous source claims that his capture was due to an undesignated telephone call to the authorities by Father Modotti.<sup>25</sup> Modotti was said to have informed the police after hearing rumours about Simoni's immoral adventures with some of the local women.

Before Simoni's capture, the Australian Authorities were considering the security status of Father Modotti:

several reports including special verbal reports from Captain Hehir and Captain McDonnell indicate that he has been confining his attentions solely to his spiritual duties and in this respect is greatly admired by his people and the Heads of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>26</sup>

To which the Deputy Director of Security responded immediately:

For your information, I have decided that no further steps shall be taken to restrict the activities of Father Modotti. I have verbally advised Dr. Lyons in Melbourne to this affect and now propose to invite Father Modotti to assist us in our dealings with the Italian Community in Victoria.<sup>27</sup>

Later in July 1943, the Commonwealth Investigation Bureaus from Victoria and Queensland made plans to trap and arrest Modotti. In fact, for this Intelligence trap the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau hired a secret agent from the American Armed Forces.<sup>28</sup> The sudden change came about after the arrest and questioning of Edgardo Simoni, as the authorities concluded that Modotti had been involved.

The Commonwealth Investigation Bureau alleged that Simoni forged his false identity card from Modotti's identity card.<sup>29</sup> John Clement McFarlane, Deputy Director of Security of Victoria, went so far as to argue that the following events took place during the escape of Simoni:<sup>30</sup> Upon escaping, Simoni presented himself at Modotti's residence, Manresa. Here Modotti took Simoni to Umberto Fabbro who took Simoni

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> A.S. Cappello. "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945." 4<sup>th</sup> Year Thesis, Yarra Theological Union, (Melbourne, 1995) 71.

<sup>26</sup> Deputy Director Security of Victoria, dossier, May 22, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, file A3671/S, item C62490.

<sup>27</sup> Deputy Director Security of Victoria to Director General of Security, May 22, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> Dep. Dir. of Security, Qld, R. Wake, to Director General of Security, July 5, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> Director General of Security to the Deputy Director of Security, Queensland, July 1, 1943 Australian Archives, ACT,

<sup>30</sup> Dir. Gen. of Security, W.B. Simpson to Dep. Dir. of Security, Qld, July 1, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

to a barber who dyed Simoni's hair blonde. Simoni was then sheltered in North Melbourne, by anti-fascists and then by the Valente and Gobbo families. This was all arranged by Modotti. However, gossip in the schoolyard by children forced Simoni to flee, which he did, arriving at the railways where he worked under a false name until he was tracked down. After managing to avoid capture, Simoni presented himself again to Modotti who moved him into another house in North Melbourne. It was here that rumors emerged and a dispute between Simoni and Modotti followed which was resolved at a meeting organised by Archbishop Mannix at Parade College, Bundoora.<sup>31</sup> The account falls short of Simoni's arrest. On Modotti's link with Simoni's identity card, in 1944, it became evident that the document was "stolen" from Modotti.<sup>32</sup> The fact that a meeting called by Mannix, which involved an escaped POW, is quite remarkable. Did the Archbishop know of Simoni's movements?

As I have argued, it was established that Simoni forged Modotti's identity card. This re-ignited security fears about Modotti. In typically reactionary fashion the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau responded by devising a plan to trap Modotti. An American CIB, code name, Colletti, was recruited by the Australian Authorities to carry out what would have been one of the low acts in Australian investigation intelligence.<sup>33</sup> The plan, thought up by Deputy Director of Security of Queensland, Robert Wake, was to have Colletti pretend that he was a deserter of the American Army and while Modotti was administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Colletti would approach Modotti in the confessional and ask him for help to desert from the American Army and for Modotti to provide somewhere for him to hide.<sup>34</sup> The plan failed, as according to the official account, Mannix did not allow Modotti to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation from the confessional. This was fortunate for the Australian Authorities who were beginning to wonder how to use the evidence from the confessional in a tribunal.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Investigation Report on Father Modotti's responsibility in shielding the escapee Simoni, March 6, 1945. Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*. I have had the archivist of the Christian Brothers to look in the House's diary during the period 1942-1944. In doing so there was no evidence of such a meeting taking place. Brother, J.L. Kelty to the author, October 27, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Deputy Director of Security, Victoria, John Clement McFarlane, Memorandum, August 3, 1944, Australian Archives, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>33</sup> Deputy Director of Security, Queensland, R. Wake to Director General of Security, July 5, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*. There is some confusion on the part of the CIB on the agent's name. According to this letter, he is Colucci not Colletti.

<sup>34</sup> Deputy Director of Security, Queensland, R. Wake to Director General of Security, July 15, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

Modotti's position as Italian chaplain unofficially extended to the Italian POWs. In some cases, POWs became distressed with the hardships of imprisonment and war itself, some because of the failure of Fascism and the uncertainty that lay ahead for Italy. However, out of 17, 131 POWs, 18 committed suicide, one was shot by a guard and 116 died of natural causes.<sup>36</sup> Modotti was to assist in some small way by helping with some of the prisoners' discomfort as the examples of Vincenzo Bambina,<sup>37</sup> Rinaldo Bellinceri,<sup>38</sup> and Antonio Gerluca who requested medicine and spiritual comfort, reveal.<sup>39</sup> Certain POWs after the end of the war returned to Australia to settle here permanently. It is here that the role of Modotti plays a major part. Gaspare Renda, for example, wrote to Modotti on May 26, 1945, begging Modotti to obtain "some transmission of news to some higher person" for his repatriation to Australia since "Australia has produced an abundance of food since the prisoners have been working on farms".<sup>40</sup> Salvatore Rollo, another POW, wrote to Modotti in June 1945 asking for assistance in staying in Australia, as Rollo hoped to marry in Sydney as soon as the war was over.<sup>41</sup>

The POWs began repatriation to Italy with the first ship leaving in August 1945. It was only in 1946 that the *Advocate* questioned the treatment of the Italians in these camps. In particular, the episode in Rowville in which a POW was shot by a guard where the *Advocate* was strong in its criticisms: "The shooting of the Italian POW on March 30, which precipitated the inquiry, may well open up the most shocking chapter in our history of violation of Geneva conventions."<sup>42</sup> The shooting of a POW by a Captain Watherson, could have been avoided if the Australian Authorities made taken far more notice of a letter written by Angelina Santospirito from the "Archbishop's Committee of Italian Relief" where she stated:

At the prisoner of war camp at Springvale there is a certain Captain Watherson who is a veritable Nero. He is always drunk and treats the POW shockingly....As this has been going on for some time. I would be happy if some move were to be made to end this affair...<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.* 181-183.

<sup>37</sup> Vincenzo Bambina to Father Modotti, April 20, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, file A3671/S, item C62490.

<sup>38</sup> Rinaldo Bellinceri to Padre Ugo Modotti, May 22, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Fr. Ugo Modotti to Antonio Gerluca, June 19, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Gaspare Renda to Rev. Dr. Jordan, May 26, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Salvatore Rollo to Rev. U. Modotti, June 3, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *The Advocate*, April 10, 1946, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, 153.

In less than a month after Arthur Calwell tabled in parliament Mrs. Santospirito's letter, Captain Watherson fatally shot POW, R. Bartoli who was "allegedly" trying to escape.<sup>44</sup>

These two questionable episodes in Australian military history need reflection. The first was the attempt to place a spy in the sacred space of a confessional. Why did the authorities need to go to such lengths? The second was the shooting of an innocent POW in 1946 well after the war was over. These are two low points in Australian military history.

### ***Conclusion***

Mannix was the Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces, a position that he held dearly. With the appointment of Simonds as his co-adjutor, Mannix's reluctance to delegate prevented Simonds from establishing a role in Melbourne, which the position of Chaplain General would have addressed, as well as being a personal loss to Mannix. The "kingmaker" Panico attempted to replace Mannix as Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces with Simonds. It was within this picture that the dispute of Father Modotti with the Australian Authorities on passing on messages via Vatican radio has a more fuller perspective. It was here Panico attempted to use the episode to discredit the reliability of Mannix, as Modotti was considered a high security risk by the authorities and had employed the intervention the Prime Minister of Australia himself. Panico was unsuccessful and Mannix remained as Chaplain General. Furthermore, coming to Modotti's defense was the Deputy Chaplain General of the Australia Armed Forces, Fr Tim McCarthy. His defense of Modotti almost guaranteed immunity from the Australia Authorities until the escape of the POW Edgardo Simoni, where fears of Modotti's creditability re-emerged.

It is very likely that Modotti was in some small way involved in the concealment of Simoni. Modotti himself concedes in 1945 that "at times I was placed in a most delicate situation by these prisoners...."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 154.

<sup>45</sup> Fr Ugo Modotti to John Meagher, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

Simoni was, in fact, an anti-fascist<sup>46</sup> which leads to the question did Modotti also assist anti-fascists? Did Mannix know of Modotti's activities and if so, did he assist in any way with Simoni's hideouts? If the answer is yes, Mannix was adopting a very independent position, especially as Chaplain General of the Australian Armed Forces. Alternatively, did Mannix believe that escaped Italian POWs posed no threat to the Australian war effort? Remarkably, all this took place during June 1942 to April 1943 at a very critical time in the Pacific region for the Australian nation where the Japanese were threatening our security. Furthermore, it was only seven days after Simoni's capture, April 13, 1943, that Mannix instructed Modotti to write a protest on the treatment that he was receiving by the Australian Authorities which suggests that Modotti had Mannix's full support. This also suggests that Mannix had Modotti in his long-term plans for the renewal of the Italian community of Melbourne.

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<sup>46</sup> Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, 87.

25.

ART-GENERAL

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

1867-1868

Washington, DC, 22nd April, 1943.

Abstract

May I be permitted to add my own impressions of Father Meddetti whom I have known since his arrival in Australia. I have not the slightest doubt but that Father Meddetti is one of the finest characters I have ever met, and that his work in Victoria has been directed only to the spiritual welfare of the people committed to his charge by the Archbishop, and to their temporal needs arising from the poverty and distress incidental to the accidents of war. I am convinced that the attacks made on him from both sections - Fascist and Communist - are the cause of false reports that have been circulated concerning him; each side anxious for its own ends to diminish the undoubted power for good that this hard-working priest exercises over the Italian people - power used to make them better subjects of the country of their adoption. I am prepared to stand security for his future conduct and would suggest that in any future interrogation of him or of any other priest (or religious) in similar circumstances I should be called in for consultation and that I should be present at any interrogation that security officers desire to make.

Leaf Counting

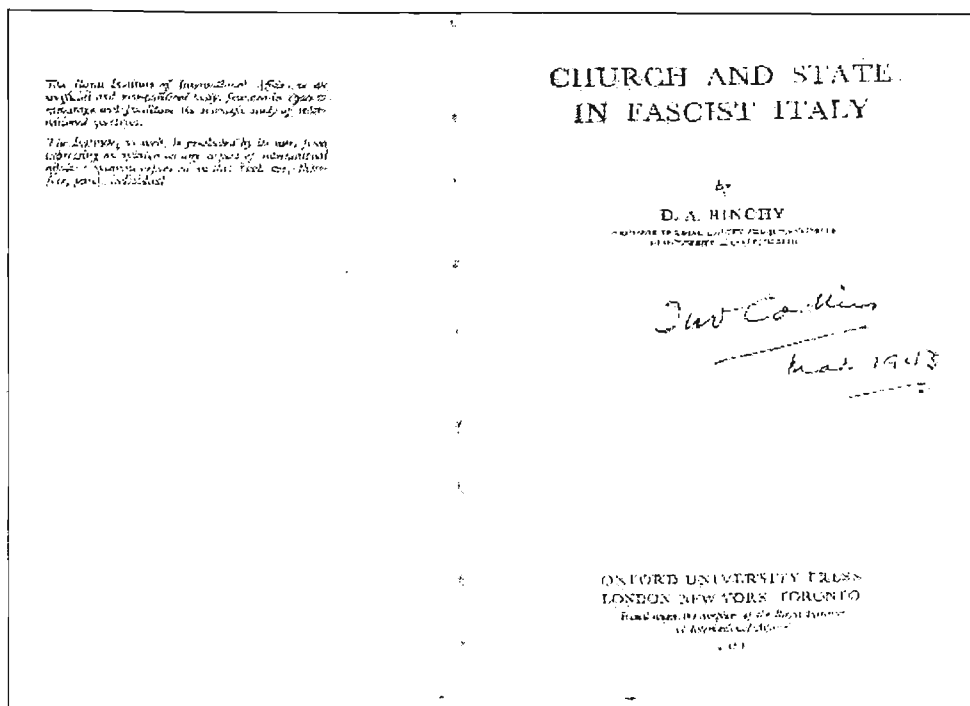
Brigadier W. E. Simpson,  
Director of Security,  
CAMBRIDGE, N.C.T.

~~SECRET~~

A307:  
News  
5-6-49c

Q





5B: A copy of the book, The Church and Fascist Italy, published in 1940. Note, the signature on this copy in which it reads “T.McCarthy, Mar [March] 1943”.



Fr. Tim McCarthy with some of the First Communicants at St. Fintans in 1949.

## Chapter Six

### Modotti and the Political Control of the Italian Community

After 1942 hostilities between the left and the Catholics within the Italian community escalated. The antifascist *Movimento Italia Libera (MIL)* and Modotti along with the Catholic Church in Melbourne became embroiled in a struggle for influence. The hostility intensified when the *MIL* set out to fill the political vacuum in the Italian community caused by the closure of Italian clubs and newspapers. This aim was resisted and opposed by the Catholic Church, because of the *MIL*'s links with Communism. The dispute came to a head at the public meeting in September 1943, with the news of the appointment of Gualtiero Vaccari as Italian Liaison Officer whose appointment has been attributed to Fr Modotti and Archbishop Daniel Mannix. The last part of this chapter looks at the editorial battle for the control of the Italian Community, firstly by *MIL*'s newspaper *Il Risveglio* and by Modotti-Mannix attempt to start a Catholic counter paper. These episodes between the left and the Catholics within the Italian community are quite significant because they became a prelude for the wider Catholic Church in Australia which after the war took up its own fierce battle against the left.

#### *The Movimento Italia Libera (MIL)*

On September 2 1942, Massimo Montagnana, Omero Schiassi, Matteo Cristofaro and Mr. P. De Angelis formed an antifascist Italian-Australian group known as the *Movimento Italia Libera* (Free Italy Movement) similar to the Garibaldi alliance, which existed in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in 1928, Omero Schiassi had founded the Anti-fascist Concentration of Australasia.<sup>2</sup> In fact, some of the members had also belonged to the *Matteotti Club* in Melbourne. After 1940, with Fascism no longer in existence in Australia the anti-fascists seized the opportunity to fill the political vacuum in Italian community and promote Communism through the *MIL*.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Montagnana *I Rifugiati Ebrei Italiani in Australia e il Movimento Antifascista MIL, 1942-1946*, (Cuneo, 1987), 50.

<sup>2</sup> G. Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates*, (Sydney, 1988) 120.

Schiassi became the cult figure behind the MIL. He was also its main inspiration. According to Robert Pascoe the MIL was a "one-man operation,"<sup>3</sup> Schiassi being the one-man. Gianfranco Cresciani in his book, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922 to 1945*, dedicates his final chapter to Schiassi, who was born in San Giorgio di Piano, near Bologna, in 1877. In 1924 after the rise of Fascism, Schiassi escaped to Australia.<sup>4</sup> At Melbourne he found employment at Melbourne University and became close friends with Professor A.R. Chisholm, Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Professor Chisholm in his book, *Men were my Milestones: Australian Portraits and Sketches*, also dedicates a chapter to Schiassi whom he describes as "a modest figure academically, a queer little foreigner... but a great idealist, a fine scholar, an honest and most lovable personality".<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Chisholm's chapter on Schiassi is by far the most reliable biography on Schiassi available to date. Nevertheless, according to Cresciani, Schiassi spoke so well, "that fascists flocked to his lectures and anti-fascist rallies, to enjoy the flourish of his eloquence."<sup>6</sup> Schiassi's politics were also quite radical and in many ways contrary to the apolitical nature of the Italian immigrant in Australia. Schiassi was a socialist of the radical Italian tradition far removed from the moderate Australian Labor Party version of Socialism. It is surprising, therefore, to read novelist Sally Morrison describe Schiassi as a "Socialist of the Moderate Left."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, Morrison has not read Professor Chisholm's description of Schiassi's Socialism in which he states: "for he was a most convinced and unshakable Socialist (of the 1848 variety)"<sup>8</sup> being "anti-clerical and anti-Christian."<sup>9</sup>

Other prominent members of the MIL were Matteo Cristofaro, "a Communist" according to Cresciani,<sup>10</sup> Marcello Montagnana and Francesco Carmagnola. Francesco Carmagnola was born in 1900 at San Vito, Vicenza, Northern Italy. As a militant anti-fascist, Carmagnola had migrated to Australia in 1922 to escape Fascism. On arriving in Australia, he worked as a cane cutter in North Queensland and as a factory worker in Melbourne. In 1927, he founded the anti-fascist Matteotti Club. A professed anarchist, Carmagnola's

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<sup>3</sup> R. Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia: Our Italian Heritage*, (Richmond, 1987) 88.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 119.

<sup>5</sup> A.R. Chisholm, *Men were My Milestones: Australian Portraits and Sketches*, (Melbourne, 1958), 125.

<sup>6</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.* 119.

<sup>7</sup> S. Morrison, "The Antifascist Policy of the Novel Mad Meg," *Italian Historical Society Journal*, (March 1995, Volume 3, No.1, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Chisholm, *op.cit.* 118.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 119

reputation as a militant anti-fascist was acquired in Townsville in 1932 after assaulting the Italian Consul, for which the court later acquitted him.<sup>11</sup> It is important to observe that with strong left wing backgrounds of people like Schiassi, Montagnana, Cristofaro and Carmagnola, and with the Catholic Church's almost paranoid fear of Communism, the Catholic Church in Melbourne did not embrace the MIL with open arms.

### *Modotti and the MIL*

As mentioned earlier, with the pro-fascist conservative forces depleted, the MIL moved quickly to try to secure political support within the Italian community. It had very little opposition from a depleted, demoralised and fragile Italian Community. For some within the Italian community, Communism looked on course as the successor to Fascism. While others who were associated with elements of Fascism in Australia these unfolding events looked dim as Bianchi reflected: "the world is marching inevitably towards the left."<sup>12</sup> It soon, however, became evident that there would be an obstacle to the MIL gaining political control of the Italian community in Melbourne and it would be the Catholic Church with Father Ugo Modotti as its front man.

The first encounter between Modotti and the antifascists was in 1938 when Modotti met Carlo Simeoni. It was shortly after the death of Simeoni's son, in November 1938. Father Modotti visited the family encouraging them to have the deceased boy's funeral performed according to the Catholic rites. Although it was to be a merely religious occasion, the conversation according to Simeoni turned out to be a political brawl. In the conversation, Modotti told Simeoni that he "had had an interview with Mussolini before he left".<sup>13</sup> On further reading of Simeoni's account that appears as a statutory declaration signed in February 1943, the claim becomes somewhat dubious. Simeoni claims: "I Carlo Simeoni ... do solemnly declare... that ...on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1938 [note the year of claim]... I received a visit from Father Modotti."<sup>14</sup> Simeoni continues in the declaration that on that night, Modotti said the following: "that after the axis victory [in

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<sup>10</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.* 208.

<sup>11</sup> F. Cavadini, "Italiano, Anarchico, Antifascista: Francesco Carmagnola," *Nvovo Paese*, April 1986, 26-28.

<sup>12</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Lina Bianchi, March 25, 1943, Australian Archives, Victoria, file no. V16878/S.

<sup>13</sup> Statutory Declaration of Carlo Simeoni, February 4, 1943, Australian Archives. ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

1938] Australia would be divided between Germany, Italy and Japan....”<sup>15</sup> How did Simeoni or Modotti know in 1938 that Italy, Germany would unite with Japan to form the axis powers? Lastly, why did Simeoni wait until February 1943 to issue a statutory declaration? The answer could well have been that the political contest was becoming inflamed and MIL set out have him discredited as a fascist.

Earlier, in 1942, it seems that Simeoni and Modotti still had an amicable association as during the construction of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes at St. George’s Carlton, Modotti had hired him as a Laborer. A childhood recollection of Ruggero Romanin at the building of the shrine recalls that Simeoni during the construction placed himself in the place of the statue of Mary suggesting that he was more appropriate than the Madonna in which Modotti responded “no way.”<sup>16</sup> Romanin also recalls that during this period Modotti and Simeoni would always greet each other with a handshake and then ended up arguing on political matters.<sup>17</sup>

As the MIL began to find the inevitable taking place due to Modotti’s anti-Communist propaganda their frustrations turned towards Modotti. They described him as a fascist, and in fact, as the head of the local fascist branch, in 1943.<sup>18</sup> In April 1943, Massimo Montagnana wrote to the New South Wales leader of the MIL, Tom Saviane, about the problem of Catholics not joining the MIL. This, he claimed, was because Italian Catholics in Australia were “terribly reactionary.”<sup>19</sup> The reason for Catholics not joining the MIL, Montagnana spelt out in another letter: “Arthur Calwell is the head of Catholic Action- being a fascist group, in union with the Jesuits [Modotti], they conduct a terrible campaign against MIL.”<sup>20</sup> It is evident by

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Ruggero Romanin cited in A.S. Cappello, “Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945.” (Melbourne, 1995)

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Tom Saviane to M. Montagnana, Date unknown, approx. 1943. MIL Papers, Mitchell Library, N.S.W. Marcello Montagnana is another good example referring to Modotti as a fascist often in his writings. M.Montagnana to Tom Saviane, April 21, 1943, MIL Papers, Mitchell Library, N.S.W.

<sup>19</sup> Montagnana, *op.cit.* 84.

<sup>20</sup> M. Montagnana to Tom Saviane, December 30, 1943, MIL Papers, Mitchell Library, N.S.W. Further the MIL campaign against Modotti turned bitter as on one occasion upon hearing that Modotti was in hospital suffering from an ulcer, Saviane hoped: “that Father Modotti suffers, [for] he is one less fascist”. On another occasion Cristofaro wrote to a colleague in Mexico arguing that in Melbourne they, the antifascists, had only one saboteur against them and it was of the “ultra pro-Nazi” type. The person he was referring to was Father Modotti. Tom Saviane to M. Montagnana March 29, 1944 and M. Cristofaro to Dr. Francesco Frola , June 26, 1943, MIL papers, Mitchell Library, N.S.W.

this letter that the blame for their failure to take hold of the politics of the Italian community was placed at the feet of Modotti.

### *The Surrender of Italy*

In July 1943 the Fascist Grand Council in Italy dismissed Mussolini as the leader of Italy. Mussolini was immediately arrested and imprisoned. Meanwhile, the allied forces occupied most of Southern Italy.

Marshal Pietro Badoglio, successor to Mussolini, opened talks with the allies and in a direct turnaround signed an armistice with the allies. With Germany occupying the North of Italy, Mussolini rescued by the Germans and installed as a puppet leader of the Nazi occupied north of Italy, Italy seemed to be heading for civil war. In Australia, Bianchi saw the surrender of Italy as an opportunity for his release: "now that our Government has signed an armistice, I do not wish to remain in here a minute more than is necessary."<sup>21</sup> This was not the case, and Bianchi remained interned, only to be assaulted by another internee for his support of the Badoglio Government <sup>22</sup>

With the events in Italy the conflict between the MIL and the church in Melbourne intensified. Here both sides, the MIL and the Catholic Church, saw an opportunity for a new regime in Italy. Both were fully aware that Fascism had failed the Italian people. The former hoped for a left-wing government while the latter opted for the Popular Party of Italy (PPI). The journalists of the Catholic newspaper in Melbourne, *The Advocate*, wrote about the possible revival of the PPI, hoping that Sturzo's regime would hold the balance more evenly between the North and South of Italy given that Sturzo, (who had been exiled to England by the fascists), was himself a Sicilian.<sup>23</sup> This was the first time the *Advocate* acknowledged the importance of the PPI as a Catholic political party.

To celebrate Italy's surrender and to celebrate ultimately the imminent end of Fascism, Archbishop Mannix conducted a meeting with the Italian community at the Cathedral hall, in North Fitzroy. More than 1200 Italians attended. The Archbishop first addressed the people, as did Father Ugo Modotti followed by Labor

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<sup>21</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Lina Bianchi, September 21, 1943, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V/16878S.

<sup>22</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Camp Commandant, March 31, 1944, *ibid*.

MP, Arthur Calwell.<sup>24</sup> During his speech Calwell criticized the Australian government's handling of the Italians and compared the situation to the United States of America where Italians were never regarded as enemy aliens.<sup>25</sup> Also present at the meeting, amongst the crowd, were members of the MIL. It is not clear why the MIL were present at this meeting. What expectations could they have had? Was it because one of the speakers on the night was Labor MP Arthur Calwell, a moderate socialist who had spoken at previous MIL functions? Were they hoping that he would promote their cause?

At the meeting Mannix spoke of Mussolini: "history will call him one of the big men of the century. Like many other big men he seems to have failed."<sup>26</sup> The following speech was reported in the *Advocate* and mentioned briefly in the *Argus*. Cresciani, oddly, claims that Mannix said the following:

I say that Mussolini is the greatest man living today. His will go down in history as the greatest Government Italy has ever had. The cultural, educational civilization created by him, Italy and the world will always admire and hold it as the greatest in the history of the globe.<sup>27</sup>

The odd and ironic quotation that Cresciani repeats comes from an even more obscure source. The source cited was the minutes of an MIL meeting found in the Cristofaro papers,<sup>28</sup> Matteo Cristofaro being a member of the MIL. Despite Cresciani's claim it seems unlikely that Mannix would make such a statement since he had never been a supporter of Mussolini, in contrast to Duhig who in 1943 was still referring to Mussolini as a star and insisting that he was not in the same category as Hitler.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, such a speech in its controversial form would almost certainly have been reported in the *The Age*, *The Argus*, *Melbourne Truth* or even *Smith's Weekly*, but all seem not to mention it. It seems that the only people to have heard the speech in its controversial form were the MIL. Not only has Cresciani decided to repeat this obscure source, so has Marcello Montagnana, son of one the MIL founding members, Massimo Montagnana, who uses the same source in his book: *I rifugiati ebrei italiani in Australia e il movimento antifascista MIL, 1942-1946* translated as *Jewish Refugees in Australia and the Anti-Fascist Movement, Italia Libera, 1922-*

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<sup>23</sup> *Advocate*, September 16, 1943, 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Advocate*, September 23, 1943, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*. (Canberra, 1980) 210.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* 219n.

1946. Montagnana claims the only reason that it was not reported at all, apart from the Cristofaro minutes from a MIL meeting, was because "the Melbourne papers naturally don't report these sections of [Mannix's] discourse".<sup>30</sup> One asks the question; why would they not report such a controversial speech? In the past, anything remotely controversial was picked up by most papers, the invasion of Abyssinia in 1936 being one example<sup>31</sup> where Mannix admitted "the publication of the protest gave an opportunity to all and sundry to hit back at me".<sup>32</sup> Montagnana, also, in the above book claims that the Australian Catholic Church was "anti-Communist and anti-Semitic."<sup>33</sup> It could be argued that Mannix was anti-Communist but the claim that Mannix and the church in Melbourne were anti-Semitic is unfounded.

Perhaps the MIL exaggerated Mannix's speech as a reaction to Calwell's speech on the night. Arthur Calwell, Labor MP followed Mannix's speech with a bombshell to the MIL's members present at the meeting by stating "that they're [MIL] not rendering any service to the Italian community... by maintaining that body in existence".<sup>34</sup> Calwell in the past had attended and even chaired some meetings organized by those involved with the MIL movement<sup>35</sup> and his unexpected criticisms caught the MIL by surprise. As Cresciani adequately expresses it, "the piece de resistance was the intervention of the federal minister for information A.A. Calwell... now he took a completely unexpected stand".<sup>36</sup> Not only did his comments surprise the MIL but his announcement on the appointment of Gualtiero Vaccari as the liaison officer between the Italian community and government departments stunned the MIL as it was a post that they were hoping to obtain.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> T.P. Boland, *James Duhig*, (St.Lucia, 1981) 303.

<sup>30</sup> Montagnana, *op.cit.*, 62.

<sup>31</sup> See page 36 of this thesis.

<sup>32</sup> *The Advocate*, April 19, 1944, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Montagnana, *op.cit.* 61.

<sup>34</sup> *The Advocate*, September 23, 1943, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Cresciani *op.cit.* 129.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* 210.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* 210-211.



### *Appointment of Gualtiero Vaccari*

Gualtiero Vaccari's influence in the Italian community was to be significantly increased with this appointment. Born in 1894 in Ferrara, Italy, he migrated to Australia in 1912. In Australia he studied accountancy and soon became an agent for several Italian companies. He was by all accounts an ambitious and a successful man to whom leadership was his self-calling. Furthermore, he was to become, by nature of his position, disliked by the MIL. Schiassi, in fact, referred to Vaccari's political outlook and his subsequent appointment as liaison officer as Stalin betraying the Communist Party, and then asking to become a member of the British Conservative Party.<sup>38</sup>

With Vaccari's appointment the MIL reacted with bitter disappointment sending a letter of protest in December 1943 in which they claimed that Vaccari was still a fascist.<sup>39</sup> Bianchi, who also disliked Vaccari, saw the appointment of Vaccari as the work of Modotti, writing to his wife arguing that the appointment was "rather astonishing, and left me to ponder on his very good luck!"<sup>40</sup> Bianchi's wife, Lina Bianchi, responded by announcing that: "He [Vaccari] even bought the Church, which as you know was Father Modotti and Archbishop Mannix, and it was they who put him on that pedestal".<sup>41</sup> Bianchi's concern was his release from internment, which was now dependent on Vaccari representing his case, but with the pre-war lawsuit against Pisano and Vaccari, Bianchi saw his chances for release diminish.

Filippo Maria Bianchi remained interned until August 1945. Writing on his situation in 1944, Bianchi conceded that his prolonged detention was due to the "famous law-suit" (See page 34) between himself, Pisano and Vaccari.<sup>42</sup> The police censor, in fact, interpreted the name Pisano as a code word for a man from Pisa.<sup>43</sup> When Bianchi was finally released, he and his family moved to Sydney. Bianchi, undeterred by his internment experience continued to contribute in the life of the Italian community in Sydney and in 1969

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* 220n.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> F.M. Bianchi to Lina Bianchi, February 2, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V/16878S.

<sup>41</sup> Lina Bianchi to F.M. Bianchi, February 18, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> F.M. Bianchi to his wife, February 20, 1944, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V/16878S.

<sup>43</sup> Censor's Comments, *ibid.*

was founder of the APIA club in Sydney, whose membership was 9000, the largest Italian social club in Australia.<sup>44</sup>

Vaccari's appointment, however, was most likely solely the work of the Director General of Security.

Vaccari had been a gatherer of information for the Australian Authorities before the war and was seen favorably as an intermediary by them. In addition, Vaccari's ambition could have also contributed.

Cresciani claims that the nomination came from a letter to the Prime Minister John Curtin from the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix.<sup>45</sup> The citation that Cresciani uses to make this claim is far from being conclusive. The letter by Mannix to Curtin does not mention Vaccari at all.<sup>46</sup> Mannix does suggest that he is happy to nominate a representative if asked to but does not put a name forward.<sup>47</sup> It is more likely that the authorities took up the idea of Mannix, that there should be a representative between the Italian community and the government, but chose their own representative. Someone experienced in working with the authorities, someone who helped gather pre-war information on the fascists, that someone was Vaccari.

Modotti, on the other hand, was still experiencing difficulties with the authorities, and was being followed across the country by security officers. In June 1944, for example, Modotti visited the Apostolic Delegate in Sydney. As he stepped off the express train from Melbourne undercover surveillance officers followed his movements. As the Deputy Director of NSW noted: "In accordance with arrangements made with Captain Heir, as Father Modotti proceeded direct to the Church establishment, surveillance was discontinued".<sup>48</sup> Being regarded as highly suspicious by the Australian Authorities is also another indication that someone like Modotti would have had little or no influence in obtaining Vaccari a position on the government board.

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia. Our Italian Heritage*, (Richmond, 1987) 204.

<sup>45</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit.* 211.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Mannix to John Curtin, September 13, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT series A1608/1, item AA19/1/1.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Deputy Director of NSW, S. Jackson, to J.C. McFarlane, June 13, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

The MIL remained bitter, as Vaccari's position was a pseudo-consular position, a linkage between the Italian community and the Government. To the MIL, the blame for their failure in securing this position was laid on Modotti. A letter of an MIL supporter can best sum up the bitterness and dislike towards Modotti:

...the fact is that there is an Italian priest here called Modotti and he is neither man nor priest. He is really a Fascist animal... and the sheep here still support him, but now his authority is already beginning to wane while the importance of Italia Libera [MIL] and of the antifascists is becoming great.<sup>49</sup>

### *Il Risveglio and the Church*

Late in 1944, the MIL began publishing the newspaper titled *Il Risveglio*, translated "*The Awakening*." The paper, like the MIL, supported left wing causes. It did occasionally look towards some Catholic writers like Sturzo.<sup>50</sup> The paper was distributed among the internees and Italian POWs. Some Italian POWs saw *Il Risveglio* as leftist propaganda.<sup>51</sup> One POW, Paolo Venzaghi wrote to Calwell protesting on the paper arguing: "I have been disgusted with its irreligious and communistic propaganda...."<sup>52</sup>

In September 1945, Modotti published the letter from Paolo Venzaghi in *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, which appeared as part of the West Melbourne parish newsletter, *The Stella Maris*. This letter brought a response from the editors of *Il Risveglio* in a front-page article titled "The Truth According to Modotti"(SD). Here the article claimed:

The editorial, "For God and for the Truth," written by the Jesuit Father Modotti, and a letter from a POW, Paolo Venzaghi which follows, are both very illuminating. Both contain and express all the principles of fascism.<sup>53</sup>

The newspaper clearly worried Modotti and the wider Catholic Church. Having editorial control of the Italian community was an advantage that the MIL had gained over the Catholic Church.

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<sup>49</sup> Pasquale D'Aprano to S. D'Aprano, December 18, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>50</sup> *Il Risveglio*, June 13, 1945, 3.

<sup>51</sup> F. Lenti to Col. Chisholm, February 9, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A7919/1, item 10030.

<sup>52</sup> Lt. P. Venzaghi to Hon. A.A. Calwell, August 5, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>53</sup> *Il Risveglio*, October 3, 1945, front page.

During 1940 to 1944 there were no other papers published for the Italian community apart from *Il Risveglio*, although *L'Angelo della Famiglia* appeared in 1944 in a reduced form as part of the *Stella Maris* newsletter. The authorities rejected any earlier attempts to start an Italian Australian paper including the request of Valentino Adami for permission to publish a journal in English for the Italians in 1940.<sup>54</sup> Modotti along with Mannix became concerned at the possibility of the MIL's newspaper being distributed amongst the Italian community and looked seriously at starting their own political paper that would counteract the influence of MIL's *Risveglio*.

According to Gianfranco Cresciani, the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico also was concerned with *Il Risveglio*'s progress and approached, out of all people, B.A. Santamaria to start a new counter paper.<sup>55</sup> The source that Cresciani uses is a letter to Fr. Modotti from Fr. John Meagher, Provincial of the Jesuits. This letter, however, is no longer found at the Jesuits Archives in Melbourne. It has been either destroyed or lost. B.A. Santamaria, when interviewed in 1995 actually denied the episode, arguing that at this time he was busy editing his own political journal called *Freedom*,<sup>56</sup> later to become *Newsweekly*. Actually, Santamaria denies any involvement with Modotti and the Italian community during this period. It is important to note the various other activities that Santamaria was involved in at the same time as this episode. One such organisation was the National Catholic Rural Movement, which Santamaria wrote about in his book, published in 1945, entitled *Our Mother, Our Earth*.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, concerned with the communists in the Labor Party, Santamaria was working in the secretive Catholic organisation, which eventually became known as the Movement.<sup>58</sup> What was significant about the movement was that its aim had similar parallels with Modotti's work against the MIL. The MIL was in many ways a Communist organisation infiltrating the Italian Community. Santamaria's movement concentrated on the same aim as

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<sup>54</sup> E. Hattam, Captain Southern Command, Report on the Italian Newspaper Il Giornale Italiano and Cosmopolitan Publishing Company, June 12, 1940, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V\16878S.

<sup>55</sup> Meagher to Modotti, April 11, 1945, cited in G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*. (Canberra, 1980) 210.

<sup>56</sup> B.A. Santamaria cited in A.S. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945." (Melbourne, 1995).

<sup>57</sup> B.A. Santamaria, *The Earth- Our Mother*, (Melbourne, 1945). Introduction page gives the background to his work with the NCRM.

Santamaria noted: "the movement was formed in 1941 with the specific objective of meeting, defeating and if possible destroying the Communist penetration of the trade union movement and of the Labor Party branches throughout Australia...".<sup>59</sup>

The plan to start a paper by Panico and Santamaria failed and Cresciani produced a source that shows why the plan failed. According to a police file, the Victorian bishops opposed the idea.<sup>60</sup> Catholic Action also, according to Cresciani, opposed the idea. The attempt to start the paper was eventually taken up by Guiseppe Briglia, a musician by trade but also a close friend of Father Modotti. This attempt also failed as it was knocked back by the authorities.<sup>61</sup> The irony here was that B.A. Santamaria was the assistant director of Catholic Action. In addition, it may be the case that Mannix opposed Panico's idea because of the rivalry between them. The source that Cresciani uses in making the claim is a document from the Australian Archives, Commonwealth Record Series A446, item 57/67255. Ironically, this source has been destroyed:

As you requested, I also examined our holdings for the record numbered A446, 57 67 255. I could not locate it amongst our holdings and so rang the Department of Immigration to find out whether it was in their custody. They checked their listings and informed me that unfortunately this record was recently destroyed.<sup>62</sup>

When asked for a copy of the document, Cresciani referred the author back to the Australian Archives. The two pieces of evidence that Cresciani uses to base his claim of a paper that was to be published by Santamaria and Panico have either disappeared or been destroyed. B.A. Santamaria also denied the event actually taking place. Therefore, the two destroyed letters clearly invite speculation that Santamaria's involvement could have been quite significant and possibly controversial, so much so that those documents have been destroyed. On this point, however, I am merely speculating.

Nevertheless, a third group of letters, possibly undetected in the past sheds some light, that seems to support the second piece of evidence at least, which is a link between B.A. Santamaria and an Italian/Australian political paper to counter the MIL's *Risveglio*. They come from the censor's extracts

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<sup>58</sup> B.A. Santamaria, *Against the Tide* (Melbourne, 1981) 72-73.

<sup>59</sup> B.A. Santamaria, typed transcripts from Santamaria interview for A.S. Cappello "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with Special Reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945." (Melbourne, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> The Victorian bishops being Daniel Mannix, James O'Collins, Richard Ryan and John McCarthy.

<sup>61</sup> Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*. (Canberra, 1980). 210.

from letters between Paul Magi, Giovanni Boggio and Father Ugo Modotti. The first letter is from Paul Magi who writes in May 1945 to Dr. Giovanni Boggio, an Italian English internee. In this letter Magi informs Boggio of a meeting between Modotti and Santamaria. At this meeting, according to Magi, the suitability of Boggio's qualifications for his involvement in: "this new paper... one, in the sense of a purely Catholic paper... with one page in English and three in Italian" was discussed.<sup>63</sup> During the time of writing Magi, Modotti and Santamaria were waiting for permission from Canberra to start the paper.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Giovanni Boggio replied immediately stating his limitations in assisting in such a venture as his qualifications were in the scientific field.<sup>65</sup>

Later in June 1945, Modotti wrote to Boggio informing him of the impending launch of the new weekly newspaper. What was important with this letter were the comments by the censor: "I think the paper in question has been knocked back by customs ... application was made by Briglia."<sup>66</sup> This censor's note supports the information contained in the destroyed Australian Archives letter that Cresciani cites. The authorities for some unknown reason did not allow the newspaper to be printed. As for Boggio, he returned to London on the July 1, 1945 on board the *Dominion Monarch*.<sup>67</sup>

It comes as no surprise that in 1947 a Catholic paper began in Sydney, with the help of the Capuchin Fathers, who were good friends of the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico. The paper was called *La Fiamma*, "The Flame," founded to "counteract the poisonous influence of a leftist and pro-Communist Italian newspaper [*Il Risveglio*] then printed in Sydney."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, it was quite possible that Panico did suggest to Santamaria, not Modotti who was on Mannix's side, about founding the paper. What Panico was not aware of was how committed Santamaria was to Mannix. In fact, the suggestion to Santamaria could have been in confidence, yet Santamaria informed Mannix who opposed the idea. It is likely that Mannix,

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<sup>62</sup> Kate Cummings, Access Officer, Australian Archives, to the Author, May 1, 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Magi to Giorgio Boggio, May 31, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367\1, item C62490.

<sup>64</sup> Rev. H. Modotti to Giorgio Boggio, June 6, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Giorgio Boggio to Rev. Hugh Modotti, May 31, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> Censors notes on Hugh Modotti to Giorgio Boggio, June 10, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> Acting Director, C.I.B. to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, ACT, April 17, 1946, Australian Archives, ACT, series A1067\3, item IC46/1/1/1.

<sup>68</sup> Cresciani, *op.cit. Migrant or Mates*, 243.

in turn, knowing the mind of Panico, tried to start an Italian Australian newspaper before Panico, only to have it rejected by the Australian Authorities.

What was not clear was if at some stage Panico supported *Il Risveglio*. Modotti in his letter to J. Meagher in December 1945 makes a particular reference to this: "it has to be regretted that the *Risveglio*'s editors boasted at least at the beginning of the friendship with the Apostolic Delegate, and of the protection he afforded them."<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Father Ferruccio Romanin argues that the failure of Modotti to return to Australia after 1945 was because Modotti accused the Delegate of sympathizing with the editors of the *Il Risveglio*.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, there is no reference to Panico in *Il Risveglio*, or any clues that would support Panico's involvement in the pages of the paper. Finally, an indirect reference in a letter from Tom Saviane to Matteo Cristofaro of the *Italia Libera* in which it states "How is Panico with you"<sup>71</sup> seems to leave the door open.

Modotti recommenced *L'Angelo della Famiglia* in August 1944, as mentioned before, as a part of the *Stella Maris*, and began distributing it among the POWs. Modotti did make it clear that *L'Angelo della Famiglia* "adheres strictly to a religious-cultural programme and does not seek to enter into politics."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Modotti included a section where questions could be answered, but once again reminded his readers: "anyone desiring replies concerning doubts on matters of religion and morals- questions on politics are strictly excluded- may write...."<sup>73</sup> Yet, *L'Angelo della Famiglia* did reply to the question: "Can a Catholic be at the same time a Communist?" Modotti did not answer this question, rather it was Father Herbert Jordan, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, who answered the question. His answer embodied the orthodox Catholic position of that time:

Communism is essentially anti-religious and intrinsically bad... If Communism were solely a social matter for the betterment of the worker's condition, the church would have nothing to say. But, only too well. Communism is also a

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<sup>69</sup> Ugo Modotti to Fr. J. Meagher, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>70</sup> Ferruccio Romanin SJ cited in A.S. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919-1945." (Melbourne, 1995), 77.

<sup>71</sup> Tom Saviane to Matteo Cristofaro, September 29, 1944, Italia Libera Papers, Mitchell Library, NSW.

<sup>72</sup> Major H. Scudds, Commandant, Sandy Creek Prisoner of War Camp to Security Service, Adelaide, July 5, 1945, Australian Archives, Victoria series MP742/1, file 175/1/149.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*.

philosophy of life- that is, it teaches false principles that are altogether opposed to the Catholic faith...<sup>74</sup>

## *Conclusion*

There is no better quotation to conclude this chapter than the following:

In 1945, one might have expected the Italia Libera Movement [MIL] to have become very strong... But it fell right away. In part, this may have been due to its imported almost paranoid, anti-clericalism.<sup>75</sup>

The attack on Father Modotti by the MIL and its supporters, both during the war and after the war, emerged out of the MIL's failure to win the political allegiance of the Italian community. Modotti during these years resisted the MIL and the authorities while caring for internees, Italians in the community and the POWs. The plight of the Italian community raised by Modotti led Mannix to write to the Australian Authorities, which resulted in the appointment of the Italian Liaison Officer. However, with the authorities suspicious of Modotti, they called on the pre-war friend, Gualtiero Vaccari. The MIL's failure to obtain this position only intensified their dislike of Modotti. The MIL, on the other hand, could not have entered into a relationship with Modotti because the Catholic Church's major adversary was Communism and the links with the communists were too apparent with the MIL. This brings us to the quote from James Gobbo which clearly stated why this movement failed to win the political allegiances of the Italian community, although it was expected to.

This battle of Australian Catholicism against the Communists was an early indicator of things to come after the war. The anti-Communist Catholic crusade which included Santamaria eventually led to the famous Labor Party split of 1954. However, within the Italian community with Modotti as its frontman and Santamaria as one of its players, the Catholic crusaders had an early training run with the defeat of the MIL. This defeat at the hands of Modotti, Mannix and in many ways Santamaria, gave the Australian Catholics more confidence as it set out to weed out the Communists in other Australian political arenas.

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> James Gobbo, "Italians in Victoria and the Second World War," (Sydney 1988) 14.



Finally, the appearance of *Il Risveglio* prompted the Catholic Church to respond by producing its own counter paper. Yet what eventuated was another in-house battle between the forces of Panico and the forces of Mannix. Panico made a mistake in choosing Santamaria, who clearly sat on the side of Mannix. Mannix, alert to the mind of Panico, arranged Modotti with Santamaria to start an Italian Australian counter paper in Melbourne. The authorities, who always considered Modotti as a security threat, did not allow this venture to proceed. Panico was eventually successful in 1947 in starting *La Fiamma*, which ended the editorial control of the MIL's *Risveglio*.

## PICTURES CHAPTER SIX

[illegible]

5C: The Truth According to Modotti, Front page, *Il Risveglio*.

The first issue of *La Fiamma*.

## Chapter Seven

### Modotti and the Religious Control of the Italian Community

The period from 1944 until the end of 1945 was marked by the contention for the chaplaincy of the Italian community in Australia, which ultimately led to the removal of Father Modotti from Australia. The religious renewal of the Italian community (*Opera Religiosa Italiana*), reintroduced by Mannix and Modotti, became a vital key in continuing the successful implementation of the Roman policy<sup>1</sup> carried out by the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico. It was in the implementation of the Roman policy orchestrated by the Apostolic Delegate that the Australian Catholic Church underwent a change, from being a predominately Irish Church to becoming a more Australian Church. The Italian community was fundamental to that change.

In 1944, allied forces in Italy, in an effort to force out the Germans, besieged Rome. When allied bombings occurred, the Australian bishops strongly protested by issuing a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, the American President and the King in which they stated:

We detest and abhor the policy which, in this war, has brought destruction, especially from the air, to so many historic cities and death to so many unoffering civilians. We deplore these callous outrages wherever they occur. But Rome and the Vatican City stand apart. Rome, we are assured, is a city of no military importance...<sup>2</sup>

Panico was not one of the signatories.<sup>3</sup> The Archbishop of Adelaide, Matthew Beovich, took it a step further, organising a “monster meeting” in the Adelaide town Hall.<sup>4</sup> It was also no coincidence that earlier

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<sup>1</sup> This so called Roman Policy carried out by Panico is attested by a number of sources: Richard Hall. “Should you ever go across the sea from Ireland...” *Eureka Street*, March 1995, 24-28; K.J. Walsh. *Yesterday's Seminary: A History of St Patrick's Manly*, (Sydney, 1998) 226-229. A.A. Calwell. *Be Just and Fear Not*. (Hawthorn, 1972) 4, 128ff. Colm Kiernan. *Calwell: A personal and political biography*. (Melbourne, 1978) 190-193. Patrick Ford. *The Socialist Trend in the Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand*. (Melbourne, 1988) 170-171. Max Vodola. *Simonds, A rewarding Life*. (Melbourne, 1997) 32ff. Michael Gilchrist. *Daniel Mannix Priest and Patriot*. (Melbourne 1982) 160-161. B.A. Santamaria. *Daniel Mannix, a biography*. (Melbourne, 1984) 182.

<sup>2</sup> *The Advocate*, March 19, 1944, 7.

<sup>3</sup> The bishops who signed were, James Duhig, Daniel Mannix, Redmond Prendiville, Norman Gilroy, Matthew Beovich, Ernest Tweedy, Justin Simonds, John Carroll, John Heavey, John McCarthy, Richard Ryan, John Norton, John Coleman, Edmund Gleeson, James O'Collins, Terence McGuire, Thomas Fox, Romuald Hayes, Otto Raible, Hugh Ryan, Basil Roper, Thomas McCabe, Francis Henschke, Francis Xavier-Gsell, Alfred Gummer, Patrick Farrelly, Anselm Catalan.

<sup>4</sup> *The Advocate*, April 19, 1944, 5.

in February 1944, Father Modotti was showing slides of famous shrines in Italy<sup>5</sup>, which could have been his way of letting those in the Church know what was at stake if the allies began bombing Italy.

### ***Panico and Mannix***

Equally concerned about the fate of Rome was Giovanni Panico. Panico, as I have mentioned in chapter two, came to Australia with the objective of ending the Irish influence in the appointment of bishops. Beginning with Bartholomew Cattaneo in 1917, Rome was adamant that an Australian Episcopacy would now comprise Australian born rather than Irish imported priests. The so-called “Roman policy” ultimately created tension between the Roman Curia, represented by the Apostolic Delegates, and the Irish-Australian hierarchy. Instances of this tension date back to the first Archbishop of Sydney, English Benedictine, Bede Polding who complained in 1873 about the appointment of Irish bishops, which he argued would insult the Australian church as people would identify it as an Irish church<sup>6</sup>. This confusion was very apparent, as bishops in Australian dioceses would sign Irish Bishop statements such as the 1870 document, mentioned in chapter one.<sup>7</sup> Rome tried to rectify the problem by appointing three Italian born bishops to such dioceses, E. Torreggiani in 1879, John Cani in 1879 and later Bishop Ernest Coppo in 1923. However, by the time of Panico's arrival in 1936, the Irish stronghold was still apparent and Panico secretly advised those around him that the task allotted to him was to “break the influence exercised in the appointment of bishops.”<sup>8</sup> It was only in 1936 that Simonds became the first non-Irish Archbishop in Australia at that time. With the ambitious Panico carrying out his mission and Daniel Mannix, who represented the pinnacle of Irish Australian Catholicism, trying to hold his ground, there developed quite a strong animosity. Arthur Calwell recalls the less than friendly rivalry: “there was bad blood, real bad blood, between Panico and Mannix and I’ve got the whole story from Mannix’s own lips.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1937, Panico targeted Australia’s biggest bishopric, that of Sydney. This began with the resignation of the co-adjutor Irish bishop, Dr. Michael Sheehan. His resignation seemed strange, as the Archbishop of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Advocate*, February 9, 1944, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Marion Sitzmann. *Roots of Faith in Australia: Salvado, Ullathorne, Polding*. (Petersham, 1992) 46-51.

<sup>7</sup> see page 5.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Ford, *The Socialist Trend in the Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand*, (Melbourne, 1988) 170.

<sup>9</sup> Colm Kiernan, *Calwell A Personal and Political Biography*, (Melbourne, 1978) 191.

Sydney, Michael Kelly, was approaching 90 years of age, and upon his death, Sheehan was certain to become his successor. It is argued by a number of sources that Panico pressured Sheehan into retirement.<sup>10</sup> In the place of Sheehan was appointed Roman trained (Australian born) Norman Gilroy, who according to one biographer was more in tune with the Roman model that Panico was addressing than the existing Irish Australian model. The reason was that Gilroy belonged “to a mould and school of Catholic thought that was antithetical in almost every facet to that of Dr. Mannix, the Irish transplant and agitator... it was a mould that emphasized loyalty to both Rome and Australia...”<sup>11</sup> The new bishop, Norman Gilroy, had the right of succession, which occurred in 1940 making him the Archbishop of the largest diocese in the country. Next, Panico targeted the Melbourne Archdiocese and during 1940 to 1946, Panico maneuvered and schemed to have Mannix weakened with the appointment of Dr. Simonds to co-adjutor with right of succession. Panico’s strategy was simple, to replace Irish bishops with Australian born Roman trained bishops as was the case with Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>12</sup>

In 1944, Panico targeted Mannix’s trusted Vicar General, Patrick Lyons, by appointing him as Archbishop of Christchurch, New Zealand. Santamaria interprets this as Panico: “sending the Archbishop’s invaluable backstop as far from Melbourne as his own jurisdiction as Apostolic Delegate extended.”<sup>13</sup> Mannix, undeterred, appointed Arthur Fox as Administrator and things continued as they had before. A further hindrance to Panico’s aims was Father Modotti who, as the high-profile, senior Italian priest in Australia, was competent, reliable, loyal and able to tackle the post war migration of Italians soon to come upon Australia. All this would occur under the guidance of Archbishop Mannix.

It is important to recall some of the difficulty that Modotti experienced with the Apostolic Delegate as mentioned in previous chapters. First, as soon as it became apparent to Panico that Modotti was loyal to Mannix, Panico wrote to the Secretary of the State, Cardinal Maglione who held the second highest office

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<sup>10</sup> Graham, Williams, *Cardinal Sir Norman Gilroy*, (Sydney, 1971) 49. Michael Gilchrist, *Daniel Mannix, Priest and Patriot*, (Melbourne, 1982) 160. Patrick Ford, *The Socialist Trend*, (Melbourne, 1988) 170, B.A. Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix*, (Melbourne, 1984) 185, Richard Hall, “Should you ever go across the sea from Ireland” *Eureka Street*, March 1995, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, *op.cit.* 15.

<sup>12</sup> A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Melbourne, 1972) 153.

<sup>13</sup> Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix*, 187.

in the Vatican, requesting Modotti's return to Italy.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the role intended for Modotti in Melbourne was not to work with Mannix but rather to weaken Mannix's administration by assisting Panico in implementing the Roman policy. This is an ambitious argument, although Panico, in a letter to Archbishop Matthew Beovich of Adelaide does hint at the minds of Modotti's Jesuit superiors being different to the current mind and vision of Modotti.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, why did Rome send a highly educated and talented Jesuit to work with a minority ethnic community? The true nature intended from Modotti's mission will not be known as the Vatican archives remain unopened.

With Modotti clearly working on Mannix's agenda, Panico sought to remove Modotti from Australia. His manoeuvres began in 1940 when Panico ordered Modotti to challenge and question the Italian Consular Official in Sydney about leaving the woman he had with him, as he already had a wife in Italy. Later in 1942, there was the episode of Modotti assisting with passing on messages to and from Italy via the Vatican which saw Panico denying Modotti's appointment. In 1945, Panico possibly even supported *Il Risveglio*, a paper strongly opposed by both Mannix and Modotti. Modotti himself conceded that difficulties existed with the Apostolic Delegate.<sup>16</sup> The tension between Modotti and Panico was acknowledged by the Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr. John Meagher who, in a letter written to an English Jesuit, wrote: "he [the Apostolic Delegate] is not much in favor of the Italian community in Melbourne [with whom Modotti was working]" and that the care and welfare of the Italian community "is not his but Dr. Mannix's business".<sup>17</sup> On the Parish level, Modotti's altar boy Giovanni Baptista Stella, through his wife recalls the tension between Panico and Modotti.<sup>18</sup>

Panico feared Modotti's visionary and leadership skills, which would only have worked in Mannix's favour. His success was already evident with his work with the Italian community. Ruggero Romanin recalls Modotti's visionary example when he gathered himself, G. Santamaria, G. Briglia, Dr. Santoro and G. Stella in 1945 to discuss how they were going to help with the religious task of looking after the mass

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<sup>14</sup> Father Modotti to John Meagher, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>15</sup> Archbishop Giovanni Panico to Archbishop Matthew Beovich, October 16, 1944, Brisbane Catholic Archives. T.P. Boland passed the two pages of the three-page letter on to the author.

<sup>16</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to the Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne

<sup>17</sup> Fr Meagher to Rev. Dughe, January 22, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

migration of Italians which was anticipated.<sup>19</sup> Some meetings were held at Giuseppe Santamaria's house. Amongst Italians in Australia, rumours of family reunions and repatriations of Italians to Australia spread fast and Modotti was the man to approach as letters as early as 1942 testify:

Fr. Modotti is here for the apostleship of the Italians a holy spiritual mission which bears great fruit. When peace comes... he will carry on this work in the North also...<sup>20</sup>

Dr Poldy writing in 1944 stated:

Australia is preparing to undertake immigration on a vast scale. Regarding your case in particular I spoke to Padre Jesuit Ugo Modotti.... and he has promised that he will take up your interests....<sup>21</sup>

The paradigms of the Australian Church were going to change, as there were to be more Italian migrants from Europe and their contribution was only going to increase. On one hand, the religious practice of the Italian community, as interpreted by Modotti and Mannix, in a largely protestant culture, was in need of reform, by assimilation into the Australian Church. On the other hand, Panico needed Roman control of this community as a power base for the success of the Roman policy, in which assimilation was opposed. Overall, both wanted control of the Italian community for their own ends. It is here that the Catholic Church, towards the end of the Second World War, looked at changing direction, with the Italian Community as the axis for that change.

With Mannix and Modotti re-establishing the *Opera Religiosa Italiana*, initially launched in May 1940, through the purchase of a house in Hawthorn, Panico, in order to weaken Mannix, had to stop Modotti and his *Opera Religiosa Italiana*. It is important to stop here and reflect on this major convergence in the Australian Catholic Church, for Panico's plan of having a more indigenous church with Australian-born bishops, as opposed to the Irish prevalence, depended on who was going to control the Italian migrants. Yet, defending the Irish archetype was an Italian Jesuit.

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<sup>18</sup> Maria Stella to the Author, June 7, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> A.S. Cappello, "Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne with special references to the political convictions of its Chaplain's, 1919 to 1945" (Melbourne, 1995) 78-83.

<sup>20</sup> Extract from Post and Telegraph Censorship Bulletin No. 16, M.F. Toal to F. Bocchino, September 11, 1942, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. J.J. Poldy to Egr. Dott. Gerolamo Leda, December 17, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

## *Opera Religiosa Italiana*

As mentioned in chapter three, early in 1940 Modotti proposed a plan called "*Opera Religiosa Italiana*" which was to open a mission house where Italian Jesuits under the direction of Mannix would conduct the religious renewal of the Italian community. The mission house would cater for the spiritual and social needs of not only the existing Italian community but also the forthcoming post-war Italian migrants, Australia-wide. The committee formed to run the plan included such names as B.A. Santamaria, Giuseppe Santamaria, Gualtiero Vaccari, Severino DeMarco and Dr. Soccorso Santoro as its president, with Fr. Modotti as the organizer and founder of the plan. Unfortunately, the following month war broke out postponing the plan. However, in late 1944, the proposal of an Italian religious house resurfaced resulting in the purchase of 182 Power Street, Hawthorn. It was planned that Modotti would set out to Italy to find more Jesuits who with him would form the backbone of Italian Catholic chaplaincy work not only in Melbourne but also across Australia. The plan led by Modotti was to be under the direct influence of Archbishop Mannix. For Panico, the plan had to be stopped because if successful, the shift of power, due to the number of forthcoming post war immigrants, would return to Mannix.

In Adelaide on September 29 1944, Panico attended a bishop's meeting where Modotti proposed the *Opera Religiosa Italiana*. All the bishops agreed except for Panico who argued that it "would not meet the spiritual needs of the Italians".<sup>22</sup> The real reason, however, for his objection was the mere fact that the idea came from Modotti. Modotti had been in Adelaide for the previous four weeks working closely with the Archbishop of Adelaide, Matthew Beovich, on an Italian mission. After the Adelaide meeting Panico made alternative arrangements. He invited the Capuchin fathers to Australia to work with the Italian community, as he skillfully asserted in a letter to Matthew Beovich, Archbishop of Adelaide, only a fortnight after the meeting:

It may be of interest to you to know that the Archbishop of Sydney has allowed the Franciscan Fathers to have a new foundation in the Archdiocese of Sydney... You will be further interested to know that I have another plan .... for the assistance of Italians in the whole of Queensland.... As for your Archdiocese... it would be good for a Salesian Father to be brought out....<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Giovanni Panico to Archbishop Matthew Beovich, October 16, 1944, Brisbane Catholic Archives.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*



Thus by these actions, Panico was isolating Mannix from working with the Italian community. The Capuchins recall their invitation to work amongst the Italians came thanks to the "enthusiasm and encouragement of His Excellency John Panico."<sup>24</sup> As in 1944 "he [Panico] had approached the Archbishop of Brisbane, Sir James Duhig and had suggested to him to ask the Capuchins to send some Italian priests..."<sup>25</sup> Modotti's plan which had the agreement of the Australian bishops, was hijacked by Panico's counter plan to invite the Capuchins to Australia. This alternative plan of Panico was immediately set in motion and now moves to end the *Opera Religiosa Italiana* rested on Panico's ability to remove Modotti completely from Australia. According to Father Meagher, if Modotti was not successful with the *Opera Religiosa Italiana* then the order would abandon the Italian apostolate.<sup>26</sup> Panico, possibly aware of the *Opera's* dependence on Modotti, intensified his actions to stop Modotti becoming settled in Australia. This he could have done in two ways. First Modotti needed to become a naturalized Australian citizen. Secondly, Modotti needed approval from the Jesuits and he needed additional priests from Italy. If any of these two conditions were not met then it would end the *Opera Religiosa Italiana*.

Mannix, knowing the urgency of the matter, met with Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia, Fr. John Meagher on October 16, 1944. At the meeting Mannix informed Fr. Meagher that the time for Italian Jesuits working with the Italian community had presented itself, "therefore" as Meagher noted in his letter to the Vicar-General of the Jesuits, Fr. Norbert de Boynes, "the Archbishop asks that our order should set up a community of Italian priests for the Melbourne diocese in this house."<sup>27</sup> Secondly, Mannix wrote to Dr. Evatt, Attorney General of the Australian Commonwealth Government, asking for permission for Modotti to travel to Rome for the purpose of finding priests: "It is my desire to send Rev. Hugh Modotti to Rome on a special mission in connection with his work for the Italian Community. Father Modotti's mission would be to bring from Italy some priests who would be suitable for the work among the Italians in Australia."<sup>28</sup> Fr. Meagher, however, noticed opposition in the Apostolic Delegate, who according to

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<sup>24</sup>"Celebrating 50 years of Capuchin Presence in Australia," *Sandal Print*, Vol. 32. No., September 1995. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Fr Meagher to Rev. Dughe, January 22, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>27</sup> J. Meagher SJ, to Fr. N. de Boynes SJ, October 27, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Mannix to Hon. H.V. Evatt, Attorney General, November 23, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid.*

Meagher, "completely misunderstands Modotti",<sup>29</sup> and if Father Modotti fails to find priests this would "displease Dr. Mannix and many bishops... on the other hand..." the Apostolic Delegate would be "pleased".<sup>30</sup> With Panico following the Roman policy and with John Clement McFarlane, Deputy Director of Security, Victoria, highly suspicious of Modotti, it was conceivable the two would unite to stop Modotti becoming settled in Australia.

John Clement McFarlane, Deputy Director of Security, first of Queensland and then Victoria, was highly critical of Modotti. During 1944 and 1945, McFarlane would continuously write letters criticizing Modotti to W.B. Simpson the General Director of Security. To McFarlane, Modotti was a fascist and a danger to Australia's security. This was the case right until December 1945, when Italy was no longer an opponent. McFarlane's suspicion went as far as requesting the interception and the censoring of letters from Fr. Meagher, Provincial of the Jesuits.<sup>31</sup> This was done and during 1944 and 1945, Fr. Meagher's letters were scrutinized by the Australian Authorities. In December 1944, McFarlane wrote to Simpson concerning Modotti's trip to Italy arguing that "in view of Fr. Modotti's known activities in Australia, the above program is fraught with danger to the Allied cause, the more so seeing that Father Modotti must have many contacts in India...".<sup>32</sup> In August 1945, McFarlane wrote, "Father Modotti from the time of his arrival in Australia has demonstrated his strongly Fascist tendencies on many occasions..."<sup>33</sup> On one occasion after giving a page of reasons why Modotti was a fascist, McFarlane did concede:

It is felt that in fairness to Fr. Modotti it should be pointed out that from an ecclesiastical point of view his work among the Italian community since he came here has been of the highest possible order...<sup>34</sup>

The recognition of Modotti's ecclesial work stopped there with McFarlane concluding: "but it is fairly obvious that he has used his ecclesiastical authority and calling as a means of furthering his activities as a political agent and therein his danger to security."<sup>35</sup> Late in 1944, McFarlane informed W.B. Simpson that Panico was "critical of Fr. Modotti's activities and would assuredly veto Modotti's impending departure".<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. Meagher, SJ, to Rev. Dughe, SJ, January 22, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, November 21, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>32</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, December 5, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, August 11, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, August 8, 1944, 1944. Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W. B. Simpson, December 11, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

When the news hit the authorities of Modotti's desire to be naturalized, McFarlane once again intervened arguing that "he [Modotti] is not loyal to the British Empire, nor is he, in my judgment a fit person to receive the benefits and privileges of British citizenship."<sup>37</sup> McFarlane was also worried by the support shown towards Modotti by Father Tim McCarthy, Deputy Chaplain General who according to McFarlane would "uphold Fr. Modotti and would get him out of trouble."<sup>38</sup>

Robert B. Wake and his Queensland counterpart John Clement McFarlane were no friends of the Italian community and the two arguably were responsible for the unnecessary detention of many Italians. Both used "distorted translations"<sup>39</sup> of letters which resulted in having a 59-year-old reinterned, to placing a spy on a seven year old child<sup>40</sup> or having a spy put in the confessional box, both of these security heads were certainly over zealous. In the case of Robert Wake, in the biography of Labor leader, Doc Evatt who was a friend of Wake, there is an interesting summary of Wake's theory of "guilty by association." The theory (which easily fits into some methods of investigations used against Modotti) argues that if person "A" was associated with person "B" and person "B" was believed to hold suspect views then it could be assumed that person "A" shared those views.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in the case of Modotti being merely associated with the Italian Consular Officials who held fascist views was sufficient to hold him having the same fascist views. The book also explains Wake's later paranoid views in which the Vatican the United States and ASIO were in some way connected in a conspiracy against Australia.<sup>42</sup>

With the help of Archbishop Mannix and Federal Minister Arthur Calwell, Father Modotti applied for naturalization. Notwithstanding, there were delays in the process because, according to W.B Simpson, Modotti had not handed in his application forms.<sup>43</sup> Simeoni of the MIL wrote a protest letter against Modotti's application for naturalisation in the classified section of *the Argus*, as did McFarlane, who

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<sup>37</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, August 11, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, December 11, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Dignan, 'The Internment of Italians in Queensland' *War, Internment and Mass Migration*, (Rome, 1992) 65.

<sup>40</sup> Censor's Recommendations on the letter by Miss Joyce Bianchi to F. M. Bianchi, July 11, 1943, Australian Archives, Victoria, file V/16878/S.

<sup>41</sup> Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale and Wayne Reynolds, *Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar*, (Melbourne, 1994) 387

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> W.B. Simpson to Acting Secretary, Department of Immigration, August 28, 1945. Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

persisted in his protests. In fact, Simpson noted when submitting his approval for Modotti's naturalization that he was in possession of another memorandum from McFarlane arguing against Modotti's naturalization.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, according to a telegram dated August 28, 1945, Modotti was granted naturalization.<sup>45</sup> And once again in Rome in 1958 Modotti was re-naturalized: "you will be pleased to know that Father Modotti was naturalized at this office on Tuesday last, 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1958"<sup>46</sup> Arthur Calwell wrote from Rome. This was when Modotti was living at the Hermitage in Arezzo, Italy. Therefore, in January 1946 when departing for Italy to fetch more Italian priests for the *Opera Religiosa Italiana*, Father Ugo Modotti was a naturalized Australian citizen.

With naturalization granted, the *Opera Religiosa Italiana* looked to be on track. Earlier in April Panico had met with W.B. Simpson. It is not sure what discussion took place at the meeting, only that Modotti was the subject.<sup>47</sup> One could only guess the discussion concerned the prevention of Modotti's return to Australia. Panico could have informed Simpson of Modotti's position within the Vatican. It is known that Panico requested information on the activities of Father Modotti from W.B. Simpson,<sup>48</sup> and as we have seen in chapter four, the investigations of the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau were quite questionable, yet any official evidence would be harmful to Modotti. If Panico received the much needed information from the Australian Authorities, Panico could have used the evidence when presenting his case to the Vatican against Modotti returning to Australia.

In December 1945, Panico made the big move. Pope Pius appointed thirty new Cardinals and in Australia the younger Norman Gilroy was appointed Cardinal. His nomination certainly came from Panico. Mannix, his senior, had been overlooked. In a move that would ultimately embarrass Mannix, Arthur Calwell issued a statement on December 24, 1945 in which he stated:

The news that Archbishop Gilroy has been created a Cardinal will be received with very mixed feelings by Australian Catholics. While

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> For a copy of the telegram see Anthony Cappello, "Capuchin or Jesuit," *Italian Historical Journal*, Volume 4, No.2, July-December 1996, 8. Also Cablegram, Department of External Affairs, October 19, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A1064/4, item IC45/22/2/3.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur A. Calwell to Lena Santospirito, January 10, 1958, Calwell Papers, Letter provided to the author by Mary Elizabeth Calwell.

<sup>47</sup> W.B. Simpson to Dr. Giovanni Panico, April 11, 1945, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

there will be congratulations for the new Cardinal, widespread consternation and bitter resentment will be felt that the honour which rightly belongs to the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Mannix, should have gone elsewhere, and to quite a comparatively junior member of the Australian hierarchy... Unfortunately, during the years, the Vatican has had to depend on a representative whose limited ability and equally limited knowledge of Australia and Australians has ill-fitted him to influence the destinies of the Australian church. If the Catholic Church in this country has come to age to the extent that she can now claim an Australian-born Cardinal, the time is surely ripe when she should have an Australian-born Apostolic Delegate. For reasons which appear to me to be valid, I hope that Archbishop Panico's influence in Australian church politics, and in Australian affairs generally, will cease with his early return to Rome.<sup>49</sup>

It was these comments that ended the possibility of Modotti returning to Australia. In one of the biggest moments in Italian Australian church history, Modotti was accused and had to defend himself before the Pope himself against the accusation of inspiring the above comments of Calwell as Father Norbert de Boynes, General of the Jesuits, told Calwell: "certain criticisms were made to me concerning him [Fr. Modotti] and his work in Australia; amongst these was the suggestion that he inspired your statement of December 1945...."<sup>50</sup> Calwell, in an attempt to rectify the situation had written to Fr. Norbert de Boynes appealing on Modotti's behalf. De Boynes, however, replied by arguing that the matter had passed onto the Secretary of the State, who was the Pope himself.<sup>51</sup> It was also clear from de Boynes reply to Calwell, that the Apostolic Delegate had made many criticisms about Modotti.<sup>52</sup> Modotti's superiors in Italy, upon his arrival, placed him on the staff of Vatican Radio, thereby preventing his return and the establishment of *Opera Religiosa Italiana*.

Modotti was made the scapegoat for Calwell's outburst against the Apostolic delegate. Modotti in Italy hoping to find priests soon found that events in Australia, such as Calwell's outburst, prevented him from returning. Calwell had, unintentionally, played the final card which secured the successful implementation of the Roman policy. Panico was successful, and Modotti's failure to return ensured the failure of the *Opera Religiosa Italiana*. The Jesuits, as they had already indicated they would, without Modotti's return abandoned the Italian chaplaincy. With Panico's success in implementing the Roman policy the bitterness

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<sup>49</sup> Calwell, *op.cit.*, 128-129.

<sup>50</sup> N. de Boynes SJ to A.A. Calwell, October 22, 1946, Calwell Papers, (a copy provided by M.E. Calwell)

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

and dislike of the Apostolic Delegate came to a head. It comes to no surprise that at the Second Vatican Council, some twenty years later, the Australian bishops were still outspoken towards the role and significance of the office of the Apostolic Delegate, arguing that they had little time for them at all.<sup>53</sup>

Before Modotti departed in early 1946, he placed 182 Power St. Hawthorn, in the hands of Giuseppe Romanin and his family. Modotti and the Romanins were both Friuliani and to Modotti they could be trusted. The house was also baptized "Villa Gonzaga" only to be changed by the Capuchins in 1949 to "Riva Torto."<sup>54</sup> When the Capuchins tried to occupy the house in 1949 problems occurred. Mannix, according to the Capuchins "was not too keen" on the Capuchins.<sup>55</sup> While the ownership of the house was referred to Rome by appeal.<sup>56</sup> After the appeal the Archdiocese of Melbourne finally sold the house to the friars in 1955. The Mannix- Modotti dream was over. The Italian community was in the hands of the Capuchin friars and out of the hands of Mannix. The Roman policy was well and truly in place, to be fully implemented when Simonds would take over as Archbishop of Melbourne and therefore set the Roman policy on *terra firma*. This final hurdle, however, was not to happen for another twenty years.

Panico was correct in addressing the problem of the Irish dominated Australian church. With the influx of Italian migrants that were to come from Italy and various other ethnic groups, it was vital that the move away from the traditional Irish approach to the Catholic faith began earlier rather than later. One can get a glimpse of the Irishness of the church by recollections of T.P. Boland in the first quote who as a child recalls the extent of the Irish dominance in the mainline Australian church and Peter Dalseno who also recalls as a child

The Great Day [St. Patrick's day] was kept alive by the churches. We started celebrations with a sung Mass. To the unmusical noises in the sanctuary we responded with well-trained choirs, but the climax was undoubtedly the Hail, Glorious St Patrick, Dear Saint of Our Isle. I can recall being unaware of some ambiguity in 'our Isle', but not being troubled by it. What the few boys and girls with German and Italian names made of it,

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Xavier Rynne, "Letters from the Vatican", *Destination Vatican II*, CD-ROM, (Allen, 1997)

<sup>54</sup> *Ricordo de Santuario di S. Antonio e dei Fondatori*, (Melbourne, 1969) 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> *Sandal Prints*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

it did not occur to us- or to them- to enquire.<sup>57</sup>

Peter Dalseno on his friend:

He was Italian by birth, Australian by domicile, and Irish in spirit. He learnt much of Irish folklore, came to revere the Shamrock, admired John MacCormack the tenor, idolised St. Patrick for his exploits with the serpents of Ireland, and loved listening to the Irish brogue. His only pet resentment was the Sisters' assertion that the Irish were stronger Catholics than the Italians....<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, in the commonly known Journal *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, John Hennig in 1944 wrote an article entitled: "Ireland's Spiritual Empire: Church Dedications in Australia", in which Hennig concluded:

Thus, up to the most recent times, in dedications of churches and of educational, ecclesiastical and charitable institutions, Australasia has established a lively connection with her spiritual mother-country, a bond of faithful gratitude and a document of Ireland's enduring significance as an Island of Saints.<sup>59</sup>

Yet today this thinking is still very prevalent as noted by Sydney bishop Geoffrey Robinson: "the assumption that the Australian Church is English-Irish is still strong in the minds of many people..."<sup>60</sup>

On reflection, Panico was certainly anti-Irish or rather was against an Irish Australian church. He set out clearly to end this connection. In fact, when the Irish ambassador to Australia, Mr. Thomas Kiernan arrived in Australia, the news made headlines in all Catholic papers.<sup>61</sup> Panico, on the other hand, avoided the occasion and traveled to New Zealand.<sup>62</sup> To Panico, the Irish ambassador to Australia had little significance.

With Gilroy now a Cardinal his ascendancy was to ensure the continued work begun by Panico. Panico had finished his task and finished it successfully, even leaving his secretary Thomas Cahill as co-adjutor bishop to the Canberra-Goulburn diocese. Cahill was Australian born who had an Italian mother. When rumors of the appointment of Panico as Apostolic Delegate in Ireland surfaced in Autumn 1946 Dr. Thomas Kieran,

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<sup>57</sup> T.P. Boland, "Growing up Catholic in Brisbane, 1929-1945, *Australasian Catholic Record*, LXV, No.3, 1988, 260.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Dalseno. *Sugar, Tears and Eyeties*. (Brisbane, 1994) 136.

<sup>59</sup> John Henning, "Ireland's Spiritual Empire: Church Dedications in Australia" *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, March 1944, 184.

<sup>60</sup> Bishop Geoffrey Robinson. 'Nothing so Ugly, Nothing so Beautiful: The Catholic Church in Australia in 1996'. *Halifax Papers* (Homebush, 1998) 31.

Irish ambassador to Australia, Eamon de Valera, Irish Statesman, and Archbishop James Duhig protested strongly to Rome claiming that Panico was anti-Irish.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, Peru was to be Panico's destination and he left in 1946 to take up a diplomatic role there.

Although a very complex issue with many factors contributing, tensions between Melbourne and Sydney continued right until 1957 when Santamaria's movement, which was Melbourne based, caused the Labor Party split in 1955, the Sydney episcopacy appealed to Rome which led to the Vatican's 1957 declaration that "a confessional political party and confessional trade unions were not desirable in Australia...".<sup>64</sup> Simonds, whose appointment to Melbourne by Panico had made him wait 21 years to become the Archbishop of Melbourne, within 24 hours after Mannix's death dismissed Mannix's close friend, Santamaria, from the highly influential Catholic TV session Sunday magazine.<sup>65</sup>

Father Ugo Modotti, after his departure from Australia never returned. In Rome, his superiors moved him to Vatican Radio where in 1949 he interviewed General Franco.<sup>66</sup> There were, however, attempts to bring Modotti back. Arthur Calwell, for example, wrote to Lena Santospirito in 1947 stating, "anything I can do to get Fr Modotti back to Australia will be done..."<sup>67</sup> But such were the charismatic qualities of Modotti that his post Australian experiences made his Australian experience look quite insignificant.

In 1948, Modotti worked against the Protestant infiltration at the University in Buenos Aires.<sup>68</sup> In 1950, Modotti left the Jesuits and joined the Camaldolese order in Arezzo Italy. The Camaldolese were an order of hermit contemplatives. Then in 1959 as a Camaldolese, Modotti and the monk Don Aliprando Catani set out for the United States to lay the foundation of the first Contemplative Hermitage in the United States. Such was his character that when the two monks became penniless and were at the brink of failure, Catani

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<sup>61</sup> *The Advocate*, February 12, 1947, 7.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Dermot, Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican, The politics and Diplomacy of Church-State Relations, 1922-1960*, (Cork, 1995) 208-213.

<sup>64</sup> W.J. McCarthy, *James Patrick O'Collins: A Bishop's Story*, (Melbourne, 1996) 111.

<sup>65</sup> Santamaria, *A Memoir*, *op.cit.*, 210.

<sup>66</sup> *The Advocate*, January 20, 1949

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Calwell to Mrs. Angelina Santospirito, June 12, 1947. Letter kindly copied for the author by Maria J. Triaca.

<sup>68</sup> *Central Californian Register*, December 16, 1971. Copy provided to the author by Gloria Mary Marshall, Secretary to the Bishop, Diocese of Fresno, USA.



returned to Arezzo, but Modotti continued. Eventually, Modotti found a site at Big Sur, California and he also found a benefactor, Henry Paul,<sup>69</sup> and with his financial donation, the first foundation was laid in 1959. Yet, controversy seemed to be his shadow and in 1960, a dispute broke out between himself and the Superior General of the Order, who removed Modotti as Prior of the American order. On this occasion, however, the Vatican supported Modotti's case.<sup>70</sup> In 1960, Modotti left the Camaldolese and still as a priest was sent by Cardinal Montini to Puerto Rico where he founded the journal *El Debate* and became Rector of the Seminary of Ponce. Whether he actually founded the seminary is unclear.<sup>71</sup> In 1965, Modotti represented the Puerto Rican bishops on the commission looking at the first draft on Deacons at the Second Vatican Council. Modotti was very much in favor of married deacons. Finally in 1966, he returned to United States and worked in a parish in Fresno, California, near the Monastery of Big Sur, California. He became a naturalized American citizen and incardinated into the diocese of Fresno. In June 1971, Modotti entered formal retirement and in December 1971, he died in his sleep.<sup>72</sup> His final resting place was at the Monastery at Big Sur, where a simple wooded cross bears the name Father Hugh Modotti (6D).

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<sup>69</sup> Father Robert Hale, Big Sur, USA, email to the author, March 4, 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Matus, *Nazarena: an American Anchoress*, (New York, 1998) 64-65. Fr. Matus writes a less than favorable account of the dispute. Matus's bias is in defending Julia Crotta who had Don Anselmo as her spiritual director. Don Anselmo dismissed Modotti after Modotti successfully and single-handedly established the Big Sur foundation. Thomas Matus does not even mention Modotti by name but rather states "a former Jesuit who, having lived for many years in Australia...".

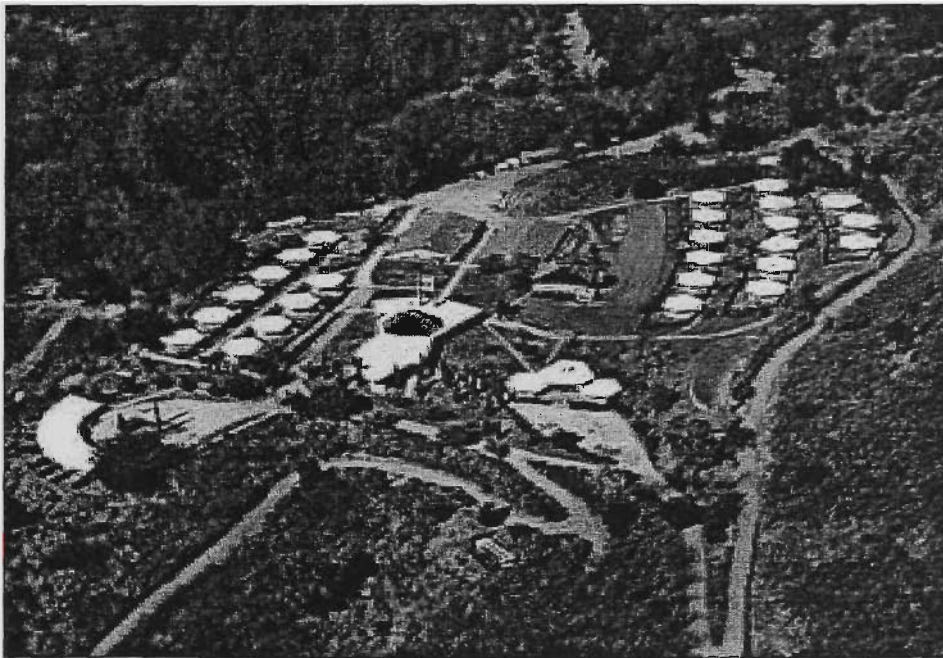
<sup>71</sup> There is no claim by Modotti himself on the establishment of the Seminary however on a timeline of his life there is stated: May 1960: Founded and named Rector of the Interdiocesan Seminary of Ponce. The author found in the Santospirito collection, Melbourne. Many letters written to Angelina Santospirito form this Seminary. However, Professor Arnaldo Gierbolini Rodriques to the Author, April 17, 1996 cannot find any evidence of Father Modotti in Puerto Rico, contained in a letter from Rev. Msgr. Roger Mahony to Priests of the Diocese, December 13, 1971.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Hale, email to the author, March 4, 1998. Father Robert Hale kindly provided photos of Modotti's resting place.

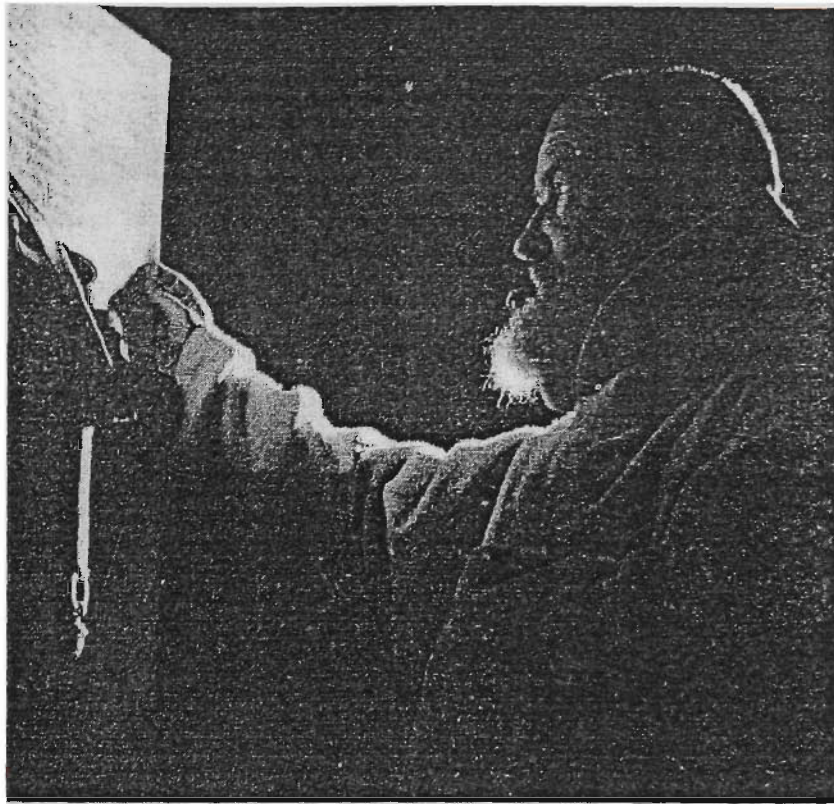
## PICTURES CHAPTER SEVEN



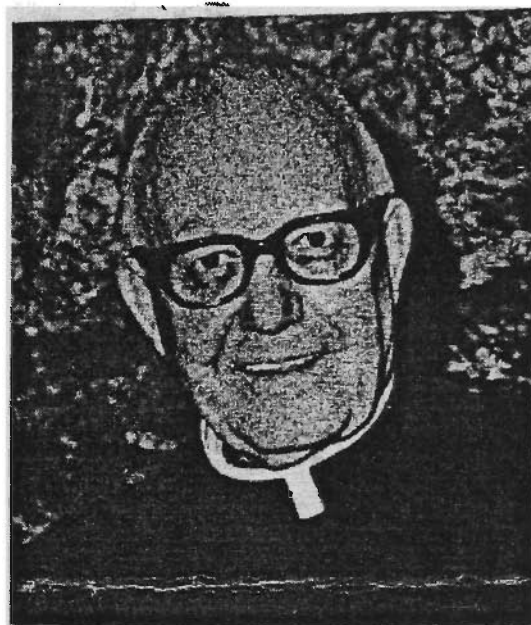
6A- The home of the Capuchin Fathers today, 182 Power Street Hawthorn. Modotti initially purchased the house in 1944.



The Big Sur, New Camaldoli Hermitage, California, founded by Modotti in 1958. This is a recent shot. Modotti is buried on the left side of the Monastery on the hill. (Photo taken from Home Page of the Order).



Modotti as a Camaldolese Monk, Rome 1960.



Father Modotti in his later years in Fresno.

## **Conclusion**

### **Italian Australian Catholics, More than a Footnote**

During the years 1919 to 1946, the Australian Catholic Church underwent an important change. The change was from 'being' a predominately Irish Australian Catholic Church to 'becoming' an Australian Catholic Church, although the latter is still imperfect, as it was when the transformation began during those years. The thesis demonstrates how the Italian community was the 'pivot' on which this change took place. Panico's Roman policy, as I have called it, of appointing Australian-born bishops to assert the influence of Rome rather than Ireland was instrumental in this change, and the allocation of the religious apostolate of the Italian community to the Capuchins by Panico continued the trend. The latter was significant in itself as far as the Capuchins were not to adopt the policy of assimilation. No longer were they under direct control of Mannix and the policy of assimilation. Gone were the expectations that no Italian homily would be said without an English translation, as the Italians would learn English, gone was the expectation that the Italians were not to meet in one parish but worship in their own local parishes. With the Capuchins in charge of this apostolate, later reinforced by the Scalabrinian Fathers, the Italians were never assimilated. This is not to say that there was no pressure for the Italians to assimilate into the Irish practice, but, by removing the control of the Italians from the hands of Mannix and into the hands of Panico's appointed clergy, the Italian community was free and autonomous enough to develop in their own indigenous ways and in doing so have greatly contributed to the life of the Australian Catholic Church.

Panico knew the importance of weakening the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix. Furthermore, he recognized that the Australian episcopacy had to change from being Irish dominated to Roman orientated. Gilroy was appointed Cardinal and his appointment as Cardinal drew a strong reaction from Calwell who believed that the crown belonged to Mannix. Panico was also conscious that if *Opera Religiosa Italiana* was successful then the influence of Mannix in the new era of the post-war migration would have increased and exceeded the scope and control that Gilroy now had, and that the control of the Italian community in Australia was crucial in the execution of the Roman policy.

Panico's ruthlessness towards Mannix and his confreres was necessary. This ruthlessness has been interpreted by some as anti-Irish.<sup>1</sup> The method used to dismiss Modotti was also harsh. To Panico, it would have been annoying to see a fellow countryman working against the Roman policy. Modotti's loyalty to Mannix was strange, though it was the same loyalty that Santamaria had to Irishism in Australia, to which Niall Brennan exclaims:

What happens then when an earnest, dedicated, and single-minded young Italian with a yen for politics, religion and crusades finds himself as the head of an amorphous mass of grumbling Irish Catholics looking around for a suitable Enemy to punch.<sup>2</sup>

O'Farrell's argument that the Italian contribution to the Australian Catholic Church was minimal needs reviewing,<sup>3</sup> in the light of my argument that the religious apostolate of the Italian community was paramount in changing the direction of the Australian Catholic Church. Even if the centrality of the Italian community in changing the direction of the Catholic Church in Australia was less than fundamental, the Italian contribution was still notable. If we review the period covered in this thesis, we can see noteworthy Italian contributors. We see with the establishment of the Campion society where some in the Catholic Church of Melbourne "threw off"<sup>4</sup> its Irishism and in that process we find the Italian names of B.A. Santamaria, Valentino Adami, John Bongiorno and John Merlo. Father de Francesco who, apart from working with the Italian community, also involved himself with other parish activities, therefore leaving his *italianita* on the wider Australian church. Then comes the influence and contribution of Father Ugo Modotti who during 1938-1945 embodied Italian Catholic life in Melbourne. The implications of his contribution remain fairly dormant, even though many clerical and influential lay Catholic persons in Australia during 1938-1945 were in some ways aware of his work. Even insignificant details like the beginnings of the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, which had in its commencement members of the Italian community, encouraged by Modotti as was its first president Father B.D. Stewart, assisting and contributing to its formation. Modotti also alerted the Australian bishops to the important task of caring for the Italian community. At the present moment in the Australian Catholic Church someone like Modotti is urgently needed as we would remind the Australian bishops that the Italian community is now a major

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<sup>1</sup> A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Hawthorn, 1972) 4.

<sup>2</sup> N. Brennan, *Politics of Catholics*, (Melbourne, 1972) 16.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History, Revised Edition*, (Sydney, 1992) 404.



contributor to the Australian Catholic Church, not a minor chaplaincy issue. The Italian contribution has been significant and the problem has been the inability to recognise this Italian contribution because of prejudices dating back to the actions of the Apostolic Delegate, Giovanni Panico. In fact, the focus on the Italian characteristic of church-going on special occasions, such as Christmas and the feast of St. Anthony, and lack of regular participation in Sunday Mass has overshadowed the recognition of their contribution. Father Pittarello, however, best answers this in his study *Soup without Salt* where he rightfully demonstrates that “Italian migrants were much more religious and attached to their Church than they were often given credit for...”.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident in many Australian Catholic, social and political histories where the relationship between Mannix and Panico is discussed, that there is a missing link. This thesis argues that Father Modotti is that missing link. If Modotti was included or interwoven in the many written disputes, we find that we have a more complete picture of the unfolding of events. For example, on the commencement of *La Fiamma* in Sydney, Melbourne’s attempt to start a paper with Mannix’s and Modotti’s involvement was unknown. Then there was the attempt of Panico to replace Mannix as General-Chaplain of the Australian Armed Forces with Archbishop Justin Simonds. The dispute makes a little more sense with Modotti’s squabble with the passing on of the Vatican messages, where the concern of the authorities and subsequent suspicion led the Prime Minister to question Modotti’s involvement. This gave Panico an opportunity to discredit Mannix so that an attempt could be made for Simonds to replace him as General-Chaplain. On Arthur Calwell’s comments about the appointment of Cardinal Gilroy, mentioned by various authors<sup>6</sup>, what is missing is the outcome whereby the blame from the Vatican for Calwell’s statement was placed on Father Modotti.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the implementation of the Roman policy where Panico with great determination removed the possibility of Mannix and Modotti caring for the Italian community and consequently bringing the Italian community into the heart of religious politics must be considered. Even the Capuchin friars have

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<sup>4</sup> Brennan, *op.cit.* 14.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Pittarello, *Soup without Salt*, (Sydney 1980) 89.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Gilchrist, *Daniel Mannix: Priest and Patriot*, (Melbourne, 1982) 187-189. A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Hawthorn, 1972) 128-134. Colm Kiernan, *Calwell, A Personal and Political Biography*, (Melbourne, 1978) 190-192.

<sup>7</sup> In his autobiography, Arthur Calwell writes in details the events of his criticism of Panico, but fails short in admitting that such comments were to create problems for Father Ugo Modotti.

been reluctant to disclose the reasons behind Modotti's failure to return which ensured them of the Italian chaplaincy of Melbourne.<sup>8</sup>

Still entangled in mystery is the later political divide that saw Calwell and Santamaria on different sides. Perhaps also notable was the fact that Santamaria's 1938 article "The Italian Problem in Australia" was not only proofread by Modotti but also edited with the inclusion of an important paragraph. If Modotti had such an editorial input in Santamaria's 1938 article, did Santamaria inherit some of Modotti's ideals, and did Modotti edit any more of Santamaria's writings? The parallels are noteworthy and as a passing reference in 1960, Lena Santospirito asked Modotti to pray for the two men, Calwell and Santamaria, who were under great sufferance and on different sides.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. B.A. Santamaria is one of the most influential persons in Australian Catholic history. Santamaria's claim to fame was his involvement in Catholic lay thinking, which led to the Labor Party Split in 1955. Santamaria's and much of the Catholic Church's preoccupation in Melbourne was with getting rid of the Communists. Remarkable, as it seems, the community from which Santamaria takes his roots, the Italian community, was where we noted another battle between the Catholics in Melbourne against those aligned with the Left. Within the Italian community Mannix, Modotti and Santamaria, opposed the MIL (*Movimento Italia Libera*) from taking control of the political minds of the Italian community. Modotti did not just sit back and watch this anti-Communist crusade develop during 1938-1945, he was, rather, instrumental in the formation and influence of Italian Australian Catholics who impacted the wider Australian community with their Catholic Social Teachings.

Within the Italian community, anti-Modotti writings have continued to this day.<sup>10</sup> The reason is, arguably, that Modotti was successful in preventing the *Italia Libera Movement* (MIL) from taking control of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ricordo Del Santuario di S. Antonio e Dei Fondatori*, (Melbourne, 1969) 17-21.

<sup>9</sup> Angelina Santospirito to Father Ugo Modotti, July 5, 1960, Santospirito Papers, Italian Historical Society, Melbourne.

<sup>10</sup> The most recent is the novel, *Mad Meg*, by Sally Morrison, (Port Melbourne, 1995). Although it is full of historical errors it reads on page 234: "a clerical chappie, whose enthusiasm for Mussolini was infectious..." and on page 274

Italian community during 1943-1945. It was not merely because the MIL believed that Modotti was a fascist. In fact, there is more evidence to support de Francesco as being fascist than Modotti, but de Francesco was never the subject of attacks that Modotti was and no anti-de Francesco writings have appeared. The defeat of MIL was at the hands of Father Modotti who, with the Catholic Church, opposed them simply because they were Communists. Modotti also wanted the Italian community to be Catholic and being Catholic could not and would not accommodate communists, socialists, atheists, agnostics, and even Protestants. Modotti promoted Italian culture via the Italian community while he too absorbed the Irishness of his fellow clergy.

### *Epilogue*

This leads to the man at the centre of Italian Australian church history in Victoria, Father Ugo Modotti. It would be best to quote Father Modotti as to reflect on his motivation:

Only God is great; everything else passes; and life no matter how long, one day must end. And then, as Jesus said to his Apostles what would it profit to have gained the whole world but to have lost your soul.<sup>11</sup>

The quote shows, like his 1939 article “A World without a Soul,” that the Catholic faith was above all the most important possession a person needed. It was an uncompromising position, anything contrary to the faith was “a poison that killed the soul.”<sup>12</sup> Modotti went to great lengths to demonstrate this, especially as a penniless Camaldolese monk later in his life and as for many in the Italian community who lost land, houses and family, his philosophy was relevant. Only God was sufficient and only faith in God, within the Catholic boundaries, as Modotti strongly informed his community: “When we do our duty as Catholics and are with the Lord, we have every good reason to hold our heads high....”<sup>13</sup> Modotti was certainly a leader and during his life his leadership skills were to get him into complex situations. He respected authority, never opposed it, but was not afraid to leave when the authority became intolerable. He recognized the suffering of the internments and joined in their cry for justice. He challenged the need to care for the Italian migrant community by putting it on the table at an informal bishops meeting in 1944 and he emphasized the

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“...their monsignor who is from Rome, publishes a weekly bulletin called Angel of the Family....’ Also Marcello Montagnana, *I Rifugiati ebrei italiani in Australia e il movimento antifascista Italia Libera*, (Cuneo, 1987) 37, 38, and 38n. Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia, 1919-1945*, (Canberra, 1980) 187-189.

<sup>11</sup> Father Modotti, Circular to the Parishioners, Adelaide, Mission, attachment, Letter from Deputy Director of Security, S. A. to Director General of Security, August 30, 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, file A367/1, item C62490.

<sup>12</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February 1940, 6.



importance of the Italian community in the future of the Australian church. The question remains what could Modotti have achieved if he remained in Australia? Nevertheless, the Modotti legacy remained. As an illustration, the appointment of Angelina Santospirito to the Archbishop's Committee for Italian Relief by Modotti was symbolic because she was a woman in a leadership role and she and the committee assisted in the post war migration of many Italians. There were also the vocations Modotti's work inspired, Fr. Ferruccio Romanin, Fr. Francesco Bongiorno and Diego Lamarro are just three examples. Even the present Governor of Victoria, Sir James Gobbo, acknowledges Modotti as one of those inspirational people that influenced his life.<sup>14</sup> Here it is only Modotti's Australian experience which are recorded. What Modotti achieved in the United States, Argentina and Puerto Rico is still waiting to be uncovered.<sup>15</sup> It is fitting, therefore, to end this thesis with the last paragraph of Modotti's final letter in Australia to his Provincial John Meagher in December 1945, as it sums the honesty and spirit of his Australian mission:

Before leaving, while I feel that I must thank God for having helped me so much in this work, and carried me through my difficulties, I must also admit a number of defects due either to inexperience or pressure of work, but I can say that I did try my best to do whatsoever I could for the welfare of my community, always asking advice and direction from his Grace and your Reverence in all matters I thought important.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, February, 1940, 10.

<sup>14</sup> M.Candappa, "Sir James Prepares for Top Office" *Kairos*, Volume 8, Number 2, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, I have had trouble in accessing some letters from the Santospirito Collection, although I have permission to access the letters from the Santospirito family.

<sup>16</sup> Father Ugo Modotti to Provincial, December 31, 1945, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne.

## Closing Pictures.

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
ARCHBISHOP'S ITALIAN COMMITTEE  
in the presence of  
His Grace the Archbishop  
Most Reverend D. MANNIX, D.D., LL.D.  
and  
The Hon. A. A. CALWELL, M.H.R.  
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND IMMIGRATION

• • •

**MUSICAL  
ENTERTAINMENT  
AND  
PRESENTATION**

*A Tribute  
from the Italian Community to  
Rev. H. MODOTTI, S.J.  
in Recognition of His Magnificent Work*

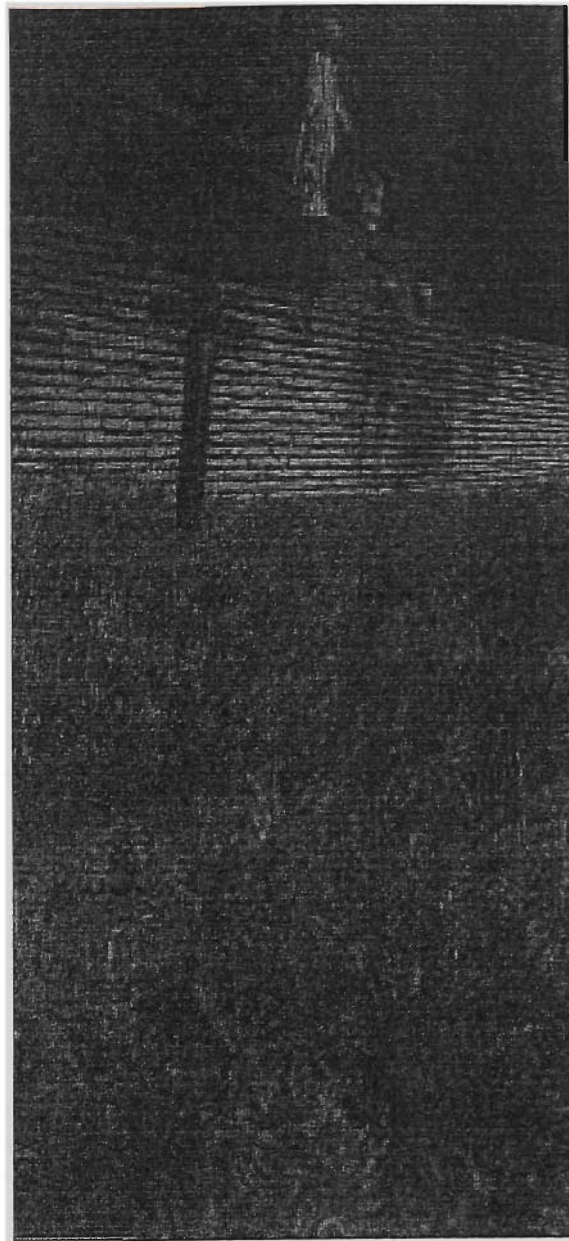
• • •

**Cathedral Hall**  
Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

**Sunday, 9th December, 1945**  
at 7.45 p.m.

ORCHESTRA AND MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT:  
Maestro G. Briglia

Gala night organised to thank Father Ugo Modotti for his contribution to the Italian Community of Melbourne.



The final resting place of Father Ugo Modotti, Big Sur, California.

## Picture Credits

### Chapter One:

*Voce D'Italia*, State Library of Victoria. Photo of de Francesco taken from- *Ricordo del Santuario di S. Antonio e dei Fondatori*, 1969, Padri Cappuccini, Melbourne. Booklet on the Lateran Pacts from Istituto Nazionale, 1930, *La Conciliazione fra Italia e il Vaticano*, L.V.C.E, Bergamo, copy found at the Caroline Chisholm Library, Melbourne. Photo of Blackshirts at St. Ignatius, Richmond from Frank Conte, found in *Italians in Australia*, Ilma O'Brien, (Melbourne, 1998). Cover of the Pamphlet, *Marry Your Own*, Daniel Lord, (Melbourne, 1934). Pamphlet loaned to the author by Mr. Michael Casanova.

### Chapter Two:

Photo of Father O'Callaghan kindly donated to the Author by Fr. Gerard O'Callaghan. Photo of Valentino Adami and his wife, kindly donated to the author by Valentino Adami jnr. *Catholic Worker* first Issue, State Library of Victoria. Photo of B.A. Santamaria, taken from *A Point of View*, (Melbourne, 1969).

### Chapter Three:

Photo of Father Modotti with Lisetta from the Santospirito Collection, used with permission. Photo of Modotti taken from- *Ricordo del Santuario di S. Antonio e dei Fondatori*, 1969, Padri Cappuccini, Melbourne. *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, Australian Archives, ACT, series A367/1, item C62490.

### Chapter Four:

*The Argus*, State Library of Victoria. Cartoon from Yonna, photo taken from Ilma O'Brien, *Australia's Italians*, 1788-1988, (Melbourne, 1988). Photo of Fr Modotti and the Italian community in Broken Hill, kindly donated to the author by Fr. Gerard O'Callaghan.

### Chapter Five:

Letter to the W.B. Simpson by Fr. Tim McCarthy, April 22, 1943, Australian Archives, ACT series A367/1, item C62490. A copy of book *Church and Fascist Italy*, by D.A. Bincy (Dublin, 1940) with the signature of Fr. Tim McCarthy. Book found at the Central Catholic Library. Photocopy of the title page in possession of the author. Photo of Fr. Tim McCarthy with first communicants, taken from David Moloney, *From Mission to Mission*, (Melbourne, 1987), page 47.

### Chapter Six:

Copy of *Il Risveglio*, Mitchell Library, N.S.W. Copy of *La Fiamma's* first issue, Italians Australians Records Project, VUT.

### Chapter Seven:

182 Power Street, Hawthorn, photos taken by the author. The Big Sur Hermitage, taken from the website: [www.contemplation.org](http://www.contemplation.org). Photo's of Modotti in his later life from the diocese of Fresno, USA.

### Closing Photos:

A Parish flyer, copies from Fr. Romanin scrapbook, Fr. Modotti's final resting-place, Big Sur, photo taken by Fr. Robert Hale and kindly donated to the author.

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Box 96/3/2 Army Chaplaincy 1938-1956

Box 96/3/3 Immigration 1938-1956

### Mitchell Library, NSW

Italia Libera papers- 1943-1945.

### Italian Historical Society, Melbourne

Italian Consular papers 1934-1940, *on microfilm*

Santospirito Collection- 1945- 1968

Modotti's scrapbook- 1938-1945

*Referred to as Modotti's diary, however it is merely a scrapbook in which Modotti pasted newspaper clippings, and other material relevant to his work. There are no personal journal entries by Modotti himself.*

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