REQUIEM FOR A NATION

Religion and Politics in Post War Italian Cinema

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TO MY NATION

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Not an Arab people, not a Balkan people, not an ancient people but a living nation, but a European nation: and what are you? Land of babes, hungry, corrupt governors employed by landowners, reactionary prefects, small lawyers smeared with grease and with dirty feet, liberal functionaries carcasses like bigoted uncles, a barrack, a seminary, a free beach, a whorehouse! Millions of petit bourgeois as millions of pigs feed gouging under the unharmed villas, among colonial houses peeling now like churches. Exactly because you have existed, now you do not exist, exactly because you were conscious, you are unconscious. And only because you are Catholic, you cannot think that your evil is all evil: the blame of every evil. Sink to the bottom of this beautiful sea of yours, clear the world.

TOMASO SUBINI

PASTOR ANGELICUS AS A POLITICAL TEXT

After the First Vatican Council in 1868, which stated Papal infallibility, the figure of the Pope assumed increasing importance within the Catholic Church, generating in some cases a genuine devotion. Nevertheless, during the last century (and even more so now) such devotion has run the risk of bordering on idolatry. I am here referring to that particular idolatry which in the modern mass media system is dedicated to the so called “media icons”, for example to movie stars and popular television characters. John Paul II has provided remarkable examples of what it means to be a “live broadcasted Pope”, having a camera filming him even in the moment of his death. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to Pius XII’s pontificate, first of all for the obvious reason that the media system generating media icons became full-blown precisely when he was pontiff, extending its influence into every sphere of public life; secondarily, because Pius XII became immediately aware of the potential of mass media to spread his image, his words and his teachings. Pius XII’s considerable media exposure probably reached its climax with the film Pastor Angelicus, which in this essay I intend to analyse as a political text. The research that I carried out in several Catholic archives¹

¹ This research is part of a broader project dedicated to the study of the role of Italian cinema in the negotiation processes of religious and social conflicts in Italy between the 1940s and the 1970s. The project draws on the tradition of studies (well developed in Italy) on the Church and the Catholic movement in relation to processes of modernization. More specifically, the project studies if, how and when the Church used modern means of communication (and in particular cinema, at the centre of the media system in the period) with the aim of carving out a space for itself in the complex dynamics of a modern mass society. The goal of the research is to retrieve data in order to reconstruct the profile of institutions and
has given me the opportunity to shed new light on the close connection between _Pastor Angelicus_ and the Vatican’s political goals. I will show how the Vatican used this film politically in two different periods: on its first release and, five years later, on the election campaign for the first republican parliament.

**Pastor Angelicus and Fascism**

Towards the end of the Thirties, in the wake of the encyclical titled *Vigilanti cura*, Catholics became increasingly active in the field of cinema. Their activity, however, bears witness to the mixed feelings that they harboured towards cinema: on the one hand, they feared it for its great influence on people’s perceptions; on the other hand, they tried to gain control of the new medium to “yield it for specific pastoral stances”. The Catholic Cinematographic Centre’s (henceforth: CCC) productions, inaugurated in 1942 with _Pastor Angelicus_, responded to the latter need. Ideated to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pius XII’s ordination as bishop, the film narrates the pope’s life using found-footage drawn from several sources (Luce Institute, News on the March, older shootings by the same CCC) edited together with new sequences shot on location in the Vatican by CCC’s cameramen following Pius XII’s activities for several months, showing the pope at work in his office, during his daily walk or having his audiences.

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Produced by a centre established by the Ecclesiastical Authority, _Pastor Angelicus_ is a genuine expression of the Catholic apostolate in the field of cinema. In fact, this film is an action of apostolate, an instrument of Catholic propaganda. As such it should be considered by all priests and believers, especially those engaged in the Catholic Action.
The political nature of *Pastor Angelicus* is particularly evident if the film is contextualized in its own times, characterized as they were by rapid political changes. The ability to respond adaptively to such changes accounts for the film’s political purpose. As Gedda writes in a letter dated 1944, the film production started in December 1941, on the occasion of Pacelli’s episcopate jubilee. It is worth mentioning that Gedda, in the same letter, defines himself as the sole “responsible” for the production. Few months earlier, the German invasion of the Soviet Union had been launched by three army contingents directed by the same commanders guiding the 1940 invasion of France. The German army believed that within three to six months of their invasion, the Soviet regime would collapse from lack of domestic support. In that case, Great Britain would certainly have accepted Hitler’s peace offer, rejected after the fall of France; the war would have ended, and Hitler and Mussolini would have been the governors of Europe.

The cover of the 1942 July issue of the magazine “Cinema”, directed by Mussolini’s son, Vittorio, featured a frame of the film under production representing the Pope. The issue also contained a presentation of *Pastor Angelicus* from the point of view of the Fascist regime. After stressing that Pius XII is Italian, the article describes the film as “an apotheosis that unites Rome and the Pope, signifying the greatness of the eternal Rome at whose foundation is grafted the miracle life of Christ who is Roman.” “Christ is Roman” was “a catchy little formula”, coming from a well-known verse of Dante, employed often at that time “to explain the providential mission assigned to the city of the Caesars and the Popes, and now continued by Fascism.”

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8 “Quella Roma onde Cristo è romano” (Purgatorio, XXXII, 102).
been protecting them. Only the Resistance groups (and in particular the communist ones) and the Pope took advantage of this political and institutional void. In fact, these two forces, the Communists and the Catholics, would compete for the political power in the immediate aftermath of the war. For these reasons it can be argued that Pastor Angelicus played a key role to spread a positive image of the Pope in a very crucial moment.

Yet, Pastor Angelicus is not an anti-Fascist film, for a simple reason indicated, among others, by Gianni Baget-Bozzo: “Christian anti-Fascism was a widespread position among Catholics, but it was not a position of the Church”. Rather, Pastor Angelicus is a film that gradually became autonomous, freeing itself from Fascist control. However, the Pope started his campaign as guide of an exit strategy from the crisis in the very moment in which he asserted an autonomous presence in the institutional void created by the collapse of the State. It should be pointed out that the film was a work in progress continuously modified to be adapted to rapidly changing political landscape. The CCC had been filming the most significant events that happened in the Vatican since the late Thirties. For the first time, Pastor Angelicus gave concrete expression to a finished media product, in line with the Vatican’s political goals and communication ambitions of that period.

Let’s consider the period during which the film is produced: the production of the film took one year, from December 1941 to December 1942. Whilst the initial project, illustrated and described in an archival document titled Promise, was very cautious in order to avoid disappointment amongst the Fascist regime and to achieve a balance between the intentions of the Catholic and the Fascist propaganda, the final product seemed to present Pius XII as an alternative to Mussolini. Even better, it presented the peace advocated by Pius XII and the war proposed by Mussolini as mutually exclusive. Promoting such a view when the Axis began to lose the war was unacceptable for the Fascist regime, which withdrew the film from Italian distribution. The gap between the project’s initial aspirations and its actual reception should be understood in the changed context in which its production developed. Mostly a year passed between the design and the distribution of the film. During this period, Mussolini’s war had proved far from easy to win and it seemed as if Italy would probably lose it. Elena Agarossi explains:

The Italian defeats in Africa and Russia in the second half of 1942 [...], especially the one at El Alamein, led to a series of timid attempts by the Italians to make contact with the Allied forces [...] to sound out Allied intentions regarding an eventual separate peace.

As early as December 4, 1942 (few days before the release of Pastor Angelicus), the German ambassador in Rome had to deliver the following threatening statement: “A separate peace aimed at keeping the war away from the Italian mainland would automatically make it a theatre of war”. During the 1942 fall, the course of the Second World War in the Mediterranean basin had suffered an irreversible turn in favour of the Allied Powers. As Claudio Pavone underlined, in all countries occupied by the German army (in France and Yugoslavia, for example),

the resistance got truly under way only towards the end of 1942, when Stalingrad, the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa, and El Alamein showed, for those with eyes to see, the turn the military tide had unequivocally taken.

11 “L’antifascismo cristiano fu una concezione diffusa tra i cattolici, ma non fu una posizione della Chiesa” (Gianni Baget-Bozzo, Il partito cristiano al potere. La DG, di De Gasperi e di Dossetti 1945-1954 [Florence: Vallecchi, 1974], p. 52). On relationship between Church and Fascism see David Kertzer.

12 The idea of establishing a permanent production activity would, from then on, never ceased and years later, in 1983, John Paul II, realizing its importance, institutionalized it with the foundation of the Vatican Television Centre. See Dario Viganò (ed.), Telecamere in San Pietro. I trent'anni del Centro Televisivo Vaticano (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2013).


16 Claudio Pavone, p. 51.
We do not know precisely what information the Vatican intelligence had about the development of war. It is likely that the Vatican, at the end of 1942, could not foresee the coming total collapse of the Fascist State. However, what we can say with a fair degree of certainty is that the Pope (as the other heads of state) was already fully aware of the growing difficulties that the Axis armies were facing. It might be also because of “the increasingly widespread realization that Italy was on its way to catastrophe”\textsuperscript{17} that the film was changed.

The stated purpose of the original project was to convey Rome as much as the Pope: “As the background of the [film’s] first half is Rome [Urbe], as the background for the second half [...] can be represented by the Vatican”.\textsuperscript{18} Originally the film was clearly divided into two parts: the first one was supposed to be dedicated to the State and the second one to the Church, in perfect Concordat-style. It is difficult to assert whether Gedda was aware that his film was pursuing goals which were contrary to the Fascist regime and consequently simulated a concordance of interests that never existed; it might be possible, however, that he realized later, when the production was already underway, that Catholics could have exploited the film to pursue new objectives, in accordance of the new political context delineated by the war crisis.

The film, in Gedda’s perception, ran the risk to be blocked by the Fascist censorship. In a document, written after having obtained the censorship visa and entitled Report around the film Pastor Angelicus, Gedda confessed that he was “worried about difficulties of [...] political nature”.\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps he was worried because the film was no more what it was supposed to be. Anyway, in the same document we come to know that the film has been seen by Minister Alessandro Pavolini and by the Director of Cinematographic Central Office Eitel Monaco, “who wanted to personally replace the ordinary censorship board”\textsuperscript{20} and that after “very few and minor changes”\textsuperscript{21} requested by the Minister, the film was allowed to enter the final stage of production in order to be released in December with its regular censorship visa. Nevertheless, few days later, Pavolini realized that he had underestimated the danger of the film and ordered its removal, as witnessed for example by the American Jesuit Vincent McCormick who sharply described life in wartime Rome on his diary: “Here in Rome it [the film] only ran for a few days, and was ordered off the screen by the civil authorities. The Pope became too popular, it is said: it led to demands for peace”\textsuperscript{22}.

Pastor Angelicus and Communism

Another factor to ponder when considering Pastor Angelicus as a political text, is its function during the electoral campaign in the early months of 1948, which saw the democratic front of Communists and Socialists opposed to the Catholics led by Alcide De Gasperi. With the aim of supporting the electoral propaganda, Gedda deployed four trucks equipped with film projectors, speakers and microphones and sent them to Southern Italy. Each truck was operated by a technician, who was responsible for screening the film, and by a trained propagandist, whose task was to deliver, at the end of each projection, a suitable lecture. In the three months preceding the 1948 election, the trucks visited nearly 130 areas,\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} Elena Agarossi, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{18} “Come lo sfondo artistico del primo tempo è costituito dall’Urbe così lo sfondo del secondo tempo [...] può essere rappresentato dalla Città del Vaticano” (Prenessa, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, serie XV, file 2, folder 6).
\textsuperscript{19} “Preoccupavano le difficoltà di indole [...] politica” (Luigi Gedda, Relazione intorno al film Pastor Angelicus, 1942, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, serie XV, file 2, folder 6).
\textsuperscript{20} “I quali volerò personalmente sostituirsi all’ordinaria commissione di censura” (Luigi Gedda, Relazione intorno al film Pastor Angelicus, 1942, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, serie XV, file 2, folder 6).
\textsuperscript{21} “Pochissime e leggere modifiche” (Luigi Gedda, Relazione intorno al film Pastor Angelicus, 1942, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, serie XV, file 2, folder 6).
\textsuperscript{23} For a complete list cfr. Mario Casella, 18 aprile 1948. La mobilitazione delle organizzazioni cattoliche, (Galatina: Congedo, 1992), pp. 213-230.
within the southern region called Lucania. An updated version of *Pastor Angelicus* was screened in every village.

Lucania was known as one of the poorest regions of Italy. It is difficult to understand what it meant to live in this area in the post-war period. One’s propagandist report affirms:

I have found great misery in many villages: barefoot children walking on the snow in full winter […]. From time to time I entered the homes of poor people and was amazed to see how they live in houses with no toilets, all packed in one room where you eat and sleep in the most terrible promiscuity.  

During those years, Catholics were not the only group interested in Lucania’s social and political situation. The publication, in 1945, of the novel *Christ Stopped at Eboli* by communist writer Carlo Levi, very well-received in Italy and abroad, provoked a swift reaction on southern Italy’s issues which regain interest and attention in the cultural and social agenda. Eboli, a small town near Salerno, was at that time considered the farthest bastion of civilization, where the road and the railway terminated. Accessing the area beyond that point, one could reach Lucania, a desolate land forgotten by God, Christ, and all that the word ‘Christ’ meant in terms of civilization for the Catholics, had never set its foot there.

The success of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* urged many left-wing intellectuals to visit Southern Italy, with the aim of personally experience the condition of poverty in which half of the Italian population was living. Among them, we find the communist anthropologist Ernesto De Martino who guided some famous ethnographic expeditions. Few years later, following the teachings of Levi and De Martino, Pier Paolo Pasolini decided to set part of his *Gospel according to St. Matthew* in Lucania. In this sense, a case that stunned everyone. While a Communist militant walked around among the crowd filling the huge square […] telling his followers not to give any sign of disapproval, the Secretary of the Communist Section, less clever than his colleague, when the majestic figure of the Holy Father appeared and was welcomed by a thunderous ovation, pronounced indecent words to one of his close companions and made a vulgar gesture, which was witnessed by the common people with indignation. When he arrived home he felt an acute pain in his groin and his right hand was suddenly paralyzed. He has not been able to vote, and doctors fear that they will not be able to save him, since they suspect him to have cancer. We are trying to save his soul, at least.

The tone used in the propagandists’ reports bears witness to the crucial importance of cinema for their own purposes: “This
form of propaganda has proved exceptionally effective. The trucks sometimes ventured “in villages where people had never or almost never seen a car, much less a cinema. The reception by the population has been extraordinary and vibrant. As soon as the truck reached a village, crowds of people came swarming around it.”

Another propagandist provides us with his daily schedule:

In every village, every morning I held meetings with Catholic Action’s members, talking very clearly about the obligation to vote and illustrating the guidelines of the Holy Father. [...] The film screening was always held either in the afternoon or in the evening, awaited by people, be them on our side or not.

The final remark is crucial: while only Catholic Action’s members attended the conference, the screenings were attended by all villagers, even by non-Catholic people.

Screenings usually took place in the evening, in the main square. The lecture was held between the first and the second half of the film, following a practice used in those very same years by another important propagandist, the Belgian Dominican Félix Morlion. It is worth spending a few words on the figure of Morlion, whose activity is closely related to the topic of this essay. Morlion arrived in Italy from the USA in 1944. He travelled with the support of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He had the reputation of being an expert in psychological war and propaganda techniques. The following year, he founded the International University of Social Studies Pro Deo, which soon became “the reference point for the ideological collaboration between the Vatican and the American government against the influence of communism in Italy.” In the aftermath of the war, the Italian Communist Party obtained a large following among workers and peasants. Although the party members were mainly belonging to the lower classes, its Secretary Palmiro Togliatti also sought to reach out to the middle class. In its attempt to penetrate society in all its areas, the Italian Communist Party came into conflict with the Church. The extraordinary growth of the Italian Communist Party alarmed even the Americans, who considered Italy as their strategic base in Europe for fighting the Cold War and would not allow the country to be under the influence of the Soviet Union. Morlion developed a method of his own to use cinema for propaganda, named ‘cineforum’, which he also theorized. The format, based on the “presentation-discussion” formula, is explained by Morlion with the following words: a cineforum presents a great film after which our ideas gain a more concrete intensity thanks to discussions and explanations. No (communist) branch chief can prevent his comrades from watching a free screening.

26 "Questa forma di propaganda si presenta di una efficacia veramente eccezionale" (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Olivier Menchi, Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso carrosioni cinematografici nel mezzogiorno, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).


28 “In ogni paese durante la mattinata tenevo le adunanze ai soci di AC parlando molto chiaro riguardo all’obbligo del voto e illustrando loro le direttive del Santo Padre. [...] La proiezione cinematografica si svolgeva sempre il pomeriggio o la sera, attesa da tutti, nostri o non nostri” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Olivier Menchi, Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso carrosioni cinematografici nel mezzogiorno, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).

29 “Il punto di riferimento per la nascente collaborazione ideologica contro l’influenza del comunismo in Italia tra il Vaticano e le diramazioni del governo Americano” (Ennio Di Nolfi, “La storia del dopoguerra italiano e il cinema neorealista: intersezioni”, In Il neorealismo tra cinema e storia, tra cultura e politica, duplicated proceedings of a convention held in Turin, November 16-17, 1989, p. 20).

30 “In the mid-1943 the PCI had a membership of approximately 5,000. During 1944 it expanded to 502,000. By the fifth congress of the party in December 1945 this figure reached 1,771,000” (Stephen Gundle, Between Hollywood and Moscow [Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000], p. 23; originally published as I comunisti italiani tra Hollywood e Mosca: la sfida della cultura di massa, 1943-1991 [Florence: Giunti, 1995]).
Announcing the screening of a surprise film at the end, the public is essentially trapped by curiosity between the two films.\footnote{31}

Already a weapon against Fascism, \textit{Pastor Angelicus} thus became one against Communism during the post-war years. The public, cornered between the two halves of the film, was reminded by propagandists about “the priority of the moment: to work for the triumph of the Church, to be loyal to the Pope, to work for the Pope, bearing in mind the importance of the battle that awaits us in April”.\footnote{32}

According to propagandists’ reports, the screening of \textit{Pastor Angelicus} aroused enthusiastic reactions:

It was moving to hear the thunderous applause when the white figure of the Pope appeared on the screen. Sometimes men with communist lapel badge carefully followed, with tears in their eyes, the day of the Pope as it was shown on the screen.\footnote{35}

\textit{Pastor Angelicus} was named by the public “the cinema of the Pope”\footnote{34} and the chance to see it was welcomed as “a gift from the Pope”.\footnote{35} In short, the widespread perception was that the Pope personally sent his film as a gift to the poor people of the South. The propagandists describe some “moving episodes”\footnote{36} which help us understand how the film spread the Vatican’s propaganda:

At Senise (Potenza) the evening after the screening of the film a speaker from the Popular Democratic Front held a rally in the square spewing forth insults against the Church, the Pope and the priests. At the end of the rally, a young peasant climbed on the stage where the communist speaker had been, took his arm and told him breathlessly in his dialect: “You’re an idler because you are going around to deceive us poor people, who don’t know how to respond, but here we have a ‘movie professor’ who knows well what should be said and in the meantime I want to tell you that what you told us is not true: we saw the Pope last night and we heard how much charity he does all over the world”.\footnote{37}

\footnote{31}{“Un grande film all’inizio, dopo il quale, sotto forma di discussione e di spiegazioni, le nostre idee acquistano una più grande intensità concreta tra gli spettatori […] Nessun capocella riesce ad impedire ai compagni di assistere ad una proiezione cinematografica gratuita. Essendosi annunciato che un film a sorpresa sarà proiettato alla fine, la gente è praticamente imprigionata dalla curiosità tra i due film” (Félix Morlion, \textit{Conclusioni su un’azione decisiva per ridurre l’influenza comunista in Italia}, 1950, archive of the Province Romana di S. Caterina da Siena OP, at the Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Roma, PR.B.III.8.14).}

\footnote{32}{“L’imperativo del momento: lavorare per il trionfo della Chiesa, essere fedeli al Papa, lavorare per il Papa, tenendo ben presente la importanza della battaglia che ci attende in aprile” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menchi, \textit{Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso corrispondi cinematografici nel mezzogiorno}, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}

\footnote{33}{“Era comunque sentire gli applausi scroscianti quando sullo schermo appariva la bianca figura del Papa. Erano alcune volte uomini col distintivo comunista all’occhiello che con le lagrime agli occhi seguivano attentamente la giornata del Papa con ‘era rappresentata sullo schermo’ (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menchi, \textit{Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso corrispondi cinematografici nel mezzogiorno}, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}

\footnote{34}{“Il cinema del Papa” (cfr., ad esempio, Rocco Pellettiere, letter to Giuseppe Lazzati, March 10, 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}

\footnote{35}{“Un regalo del Papa” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menchi, \textit{Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso corrispondi cinematografici nel mezzogiorno}, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}

\footnote{36}{“Episodi commoventi” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menchi, \textit{Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso corrispondi cinematografici nel mezzogiorno}, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}

\footnote{37}{“A Senise (Potenza) la sera dopo la rappresentazione dei film un oratore del Fronte Democratico Popolare ha tenuto nella piazza un comizio omitando ingiurie contro la Chiesa, il Papa e i sacerdoti. Terminato il comizio un giovane contadino sale immediatamente sul balcone dove parlava l’oratore comunista e prendendolo per un braccio gli dice animatamente nel suo dialetto: ‘Sei un vagabondo perché vai in giro ad ingannare noi poveri gente che non sappiamo rispondere, ma è qui il professore del cinema che saprà risponderti ed intanto lo ti dico che non è vero quello che tu ci hai detto perché il Papa l’abbiamo veduto ieri sera e abbiamo sentito quanto carità fa in tutto il mondo.’” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menchi, \textit{Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso corrispondi cinematografici nel mezzogiorno}, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).}
At Chiaramonte I had to screen the film until three in the morning because the crowd did not want to move out of the room, they kept saying: “It’s the first time we see the movie, the Pope has made this gift to us, why do you want to send us away so soon?” 38

The young people from Verzino, a village without electricity, reached me by climbing to Savelli in order to see Pastor Angelicus and there they spent the night standing around a brazier with a few litres of wine I offered them. In order to test them, I asked why they made such a great sacrifice on a cold and stormy night only to see Pastor Angelicus, and they told me: “You can often see the Pope in flesh, we have never seen him, we may well make this sacrifice to see him at least on screen”. 39

Conclusions

The analysis of the documents concerning Pastor Angelicus preserved at the Catholic Action’s archive provides an image that is far more complex than the one offered by the literature on the subject, starting from Carlo Falconi’s 1954 article, where the author states that “with Pastor Angelicus prof. Gedda and the Catholic Centre […] tried to substitute the Duce’s myth with the rising icon of the pontiff”. 40 Such interpretation has been endorsed by both Gian Piero Brunetta in his Storia del cinema italiano, 41 and by Mino Argentieri in his influential study on Italian cinema during the World War II, 42 and, in more recent times, by Federico Ruozzi. 43

Yet, the political nature of the film did not only aim to free the Church from fascism, but it also achieved other goals that arose at different moments and to which it proved remarkably pliant. Archival documents (in particular the film’s treatment: Premessa, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series XV, file 2, folder 6) illuminate an aspect that has frequently been overlooked: the original idea of the movie was in perfect Concordat style. Therefore, it may not seem paradoxical that the film could have, at the beginning, even facilitated the relationship with Fascism (although the original project shared only a part of the regime’s propagandistic aims), while later on it began to pursue new and initially unforeseen goals when it became evident that the Fascist regime would no more be part of the political landscape in the aftermath of the war. In very much the same way, once the collaboration between different anti-fascist forces was no more a necessity, and with the 1948 elections (which were already ruled

39 “I giovani di Verzino paese della Sila sprofondati di luce elettrica sono saliti da me a Savelli (n. 1070) per poter vedere il Pastor Angelicus e ivi hanno poi passato la notte in piedi attorno a un bracciere con pochi litri di vino da me offerti, avendo io chiesto, per provvarli, come mai per vedere il Pastor Angelicus avessero fatto così grande sacrificio di una notte fredda e di bulera, mi fu risposto: ‘Voi il Papa lo vedete in carne ed ossa spesso, noi no l’abbiamo mai visto, possiamo ben fare questo sacrificio per vederlo almeno in cinema’” (Accursio Ajassa, Bartolo Paschetta, Giovanni Cavina, Oliviero Menichi. Relazione sulla attività di propaganda svolta attraverso caricature cinematografici nel mezzogiorno, January-April 1948, Isacem, Fondo Presidenza Generale, series VI, file 54).
43 Federico Ruozzi, Pius XII as Actor and Subject. On the Representation of the Pope in Cinema during the 1940s and 1950s, in Daniel Biltereyst, Daniela Treveri Gennari, Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 158-172. Gianluca della Maggiore adopts a different perspective, presenting the film as "one of the most mature outcomes" of the "cinematographic embrace between the Church and fascism", as a "constant and overt collaboration at almost all stages of the film’s production […] when there were only faint hints that events would turn in favour of the Allies" (La Chiesa e il cinema nell’Italia fascista. Riconoscere cattoliche, progetti totalitari, prospettive globali (1922-1945), PhD dissertation in Storia e scienze filosofico-sociali, Università degli Studi di Roma “Tor Vergata”, XXXVII ciclo, p. 315).
44 Gianluca della Maggiore, pp. 104-117.
by Cold War logic) approaching, the film began serving new political aims, this time with an anti-communist function. *Pastor Angelicus’s* remarkable pliancy to different political goals finds further confirmation in its ‘open text’ form, changing through time by having sequences added or removed according to the needs of the moment.\(^{45}\)

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**CENSORSHIP ITALIAN STYLE**

Catholic policies and programming in 1950s Roman parish cinemas

Catholic film policies in 1950s Italy were clearly dictated by the Censorship Commission of the Centro Cattolico di Cinematografia\(^1\) (Catholic Cinema Centre), which issued regular guidelines about what films were acceptable by the Vatican and, therefore, allowed to be screened in religious venues. If, in theory, the network of parish cinemas was meant to function as an indirect way to censor immoral film content, the reality, however, was very different. In practice, films that the CCC considered unsuitable to be screened in parish venues were often shown in religious cinemas. So far – as information on parish cinema programming is patchy and inconsistent – no research has been conducted which looks at the extent to which the Catholic Church’s attempt to moralise programming in parish cinemas was successful. This chapter will use Rome as a significant example of contrast between official policies and programming practices in the city which was the centre of the Catholic world, housing the Vatican, the Catholic curia and all the main Catholic administration offices. Catholic programming of the Roman parish cinemas listed in the online archive of the local edition of the newspaper *L’Unità* will be analysed. A research into what religious venues screened will offer a better understanding of the dynamics at play between the educational and censorial intentions of parish cinema networks in the mind of the ecclesiastic establishment and the actual processes put in place by the local exhibitors to attract audiences and run a profitable business.

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\(^{45}\) A thorough and detailed study of the film’s textual variants has not been produced yet.

\(^1\) From now on CCC. The CCC was established in 1935 with the intention of exercising a ‘moral control over films to be screened in public and religious venues’ (Elena Mosconi, *L’impressione del film: contributi per una storia culturale del cinema italiano, 1895-1943*, [Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2006], p. 266).