

Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera della Dc. Nazione, Europa e Comunità atlantica (1943-1954)* / *Myths and ideology in Christian Democrat Foreign Policy. Nation, Europe and the Atlantic Community (1943-1954)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 253.

In an international context like that of the Cold War choices in foreign policy strongly affected matters at home. Thus, Paolo Acanfora, whose fine book is devoted to the DC under De Gasperi, focuses on the Catholic party's political and cultural elaborations in the field of international affairs. Moreover, the post-war years were crucial for Italy, who had to choose her place in a world torn between the USA and the USSR. The nation, Latin civilization, Europe and the West were issues that stood at the centre of reflection and debate throughout the intellectual world and, obviously, in Catholic culture. It can, indeed, be stated that positions in the field of foreign policy are an indication of the various attitudes existing in the country and in the Christian Democrat party.

All components of the DC shared their revendication of the Christian civilization and its importance, as it had developed in western society over a period of two thousand years; they also shared their conviction as to the Catholic identity of the Italian nation and this – in the wake of a tradition that had already begun with Vincenzo Gioberti – represented an element that justified the role of political Catholicism. It is no coincidence that in his 1996 monographic study, Agostino Giovagnoli had defined the CD “the Italian party” [*Il partito italiano. La Dc dal 1942 al 1994* (Laterza: Roma-Bari, 1996)].

The definition of Italy's foreign policy was not – Acanfora notes – either linear or obvious. The first declarations by members of the DC on international issues expressed great hopes for the country's future: whilst Italy came out of the war as a defeated party, she should recover – they maintained – the central role she deserved for the contribution she had made to the progress of humanity and for having left her mark in history from both a civil point of view (ancient Rome) and a religious one (Christianity). Moreover, as a bridge nation between Europe and the Mediterranean, due to her geographical position and tradition, Italy had the role of promoting dialogue and mediation between different cultures. The theme of Roman and Christian identity obviously produced different outcomes compared to the rhetoric of the fascist régime. Whilst Mussolini had elaborated the myth of a “state religion” with strong authoritarian overtones, in Christian Democrat culture ancient Rome was the symbol of a civilization of legal rights and the place where Christian spirituality had first started to spread. These convictions had their roots in reflections on the crisis of European identity, which had marked part of the Christian world and particularly French Catholic culture in the period between the two world wars.

The peace treaties led national politicians back to bitter reality and the awareness that the balance in world power had shifted in favour of the two superpowers: thus Italy would not be able to play a role of great international importance. This did not prevent the CD's leaders continuing to stress the themes of Roman and Christian identity. After 1947 – particularly as the Marshall Plan took shape and with the

split away from the left-wing parties – De Gasperi’s group also began to move towards a choice in favour of the western world.

De Gasperi placed the “Latin” identity – peculiar to our nation – in relation with western civilization, understanding Italian foreign policy as a building block in the construction of a supra-national entity: the western community was seen as a development of the national community, as well as an expression of democratic and Christian civilization. European unity – in his opinion – evoked the idea of a Christian Europe previous to Luther’s reforms. What de Gasperi had in mind was a union of western Europe capable of sustaining an equal relationship with its Atlantic partners. In this perspective, they took the decision for the country to uphold the Atlantic pact.

De Gasperi’s political line aroused perplexity in some quarters of the Vatican, because, despite the Catholic church sustaining the political marginalization of communists in Italy (ex-communicating them in 1949), it had trouble overcoming its diffidence towards the Protestant world in America and conceiving of western ideology as adhering to the latter’s system of values. On the other hand, diffidence towards modernity, as it had developed from the French Revolution onwards, was a well-known characteristic of the Catholic world and was not really overcome until Pope Roncalli and the new spirit emerging from the Second Vatican Council.

There was no lack of resistance and perplexity within the party, either. In particular, the group that formed around Giuseppe Dossetti continued to sustain Italy’s Latin and Mediterranean identity and expressed perplexity about the bipolar division of the world and Italy’s place alongside the United States. Dossetti’s intention was to avoid exasperating any reason for conflict and above all avoid cutting all ties with the masses who supported left-wing parties in Italy. Membership of the Atlantic Alliance – in his opinion – risked creating a radical and irremediable rift within the country.

Italy should, instead, position herself as a mediating force between the two superpowers, both incapable of expressing the values of the Christian tradition. The conviction progressively took root in Dossetti’s group that the alternative to exasperated bipolarity was a federal Europe, politically independent, though not completely detached from the Atlantic context: basically this meant economic integration as a prelude to political integration.

In reality – as Acanfora’s research demonstrates – De Gasperi, too, agreed with the substance of this proposal, i.e. the idea of building a united Europe within the Atlantic community. The difference, compared to Dossetti’s group, was the priority always given to projects for European unification, which De Gasperi did not come to until the last few years of his political mandate. What Dossetti and his group most feared was that Europe would lose the originality of the project for maintaining its identity and that it might be constituted “under the auspices of [political] conservatism” and anti-communism, far from any real concern for the people.

Acanfora analyzes how the “myths” of foreign policy allowed the DC to elaborate a cultural and political perspective and its own ideology and vision of humankind, society and the world. What these politicians came up with had great significance for the European project that was to develop in the years to come, as well as for outlining the identity of the new Italy after the years of fascist nationalism and the tragedy of the war.

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