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Benedict XV: A Historiographical Reading (Part 1)

A man whose voice was greatly ignored during his own lifetime, Benedict XV (1914-1922) seemed to be destined to suffer the same fate even after death. For decades historiography left this pope undisturbed, forgotten in that silence with which death wraps up the fate of most men. Destined to become, with the exception of John Paul I's short pontificate, the most forgotten pontificate of the twentieth century, few attempts have been made to study this man, his action and legacy, so much so that it has become symptomatic to describe him as the unrecognized,¹ indeed the unknown,² pope. Historiography has even shied away from studying in depth the reasons for such forgetfulness.³ The fact that this relatively short pontificate, only seven years and five months long, was largely marked by the Great War and its aftermath, ending exactly when the rampant nationalistic sentiments so forcefully denounced by Benedict XV were taking over Europe, certainly hindered a positive evaluation of this personality. Just nine months after his death, in Italy, the *Marcia su Roma* on 28th October 1922, secured power to the Fascists. The emergence of the totalitarian systems is the

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¹ See Fernand Hayward, *Un Pape Méconnu. Benoît XV* (Tournai-Paris: Casterman, 1955).

² See John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope. Benedict X (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London-New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999).

³ See Giovanni Battista Varnier, "Benedetto XV e i problemi della società contemporanea," in Letterio Mauro ed., *Benedetto XV. Profeta di Pace in un mondo in crisi* (Bologna: Minerva Edizioni 2008), 327.

main reason for the total neglect in which the legacy of this pope of peace was to remain wrapped. Indeed, he had raised his voice against the very path which Europe had embarked on: a path marked by an unjust peace, which would only lead to a repetition of that “inutile strage”⁴ – the tragedy of another World War.

Naturally, every pontificate is determined by the particular historical context in which it develops. It also, in part, depends on a combination of factors, such as the personality, the *forma mentis* and the background of the reigning pontiff, who seeks to set the general tone, the agenda, the priorities, the manner of action of the Holy See. Therefore, a historiographical study of the pontificate is a necessary starting point, to understand what aspects (events, particular actions, or even relationships) have captured the attention of historians. Comprehending these points of emphasis will help us discover what aspects have been ignored in the study of this pontificate as the priorities set by the historiography of the period, inadvertently betrays its neglects. It is necessary to comprehend both aspects to determine the inner-workings of ecclesiastical government at its highest echelons to reveal the ecclesial vision advanced by the pontificate of Benedict XV.

The studies produced so far on this pontiff will be considered in a chronological order, developing from the limited evaluations produced by his contemporaries in the period following his death, to the first steps taken towards a rediscovery of this greatly neglected pontificate after the Second World War. A second part will consider the increase in interest showed in this pontificate, coupled with a certain diversification of themes, following the opening of the Vatican Archives in 1985. A third and final part will then consider the studies produced in the last decade, with the exception of the most recent ones currently being published to mark the first centenary from the First World War. This present work tries to highlight the revelations, contributions, emphasis, continuity, as well as dependencies exposed by the authors who have studied this pontificate.

The studies considered amount to 71 works, and will be divided in the following manner:

⁴ Benedict XV, *Peace note*, 1 August 1917: see Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico (d'ora in poi S.RR.SS.), Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari (d'ora in poi AA.EE.SS.), Stati Ecclesiastici III, Guerra Europea, 1914-1918, Pos. 216, fasc. 9-11, Iniziative Pontificie per la pace. Nota del 1/VIII/1917, III, fasc. 11, Insetto 2, ff. 268r. 271r., 1 Agosto 1917: Proposta di trattativa di Pace della S. Sede. Nota definitiva: *Ai Capi dei popoli belligeranti*; ff. 273r.-275r.: Nota in latino: *'Moderatoribus Populorum Belligerantium'*.

	Periodization	No. of Authors
Period 1	After his death	15
Period 2	Rediscovery post-Second World War	21
Period 3	After the opening of the Vatican Archives	23
Period 4	In the last decade	12

The studies considered were published in Italian, French, English, German and Dutch, and can be so divided:

Language	Number of publications considered			
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Italian	7	7	8	8
French	5	1	1	1
German	2	1		
English		1	2	
Dutch	1			

It is important to note that this present study in no way attempts to be exhaustive in its survey of works published and which relate in some way to this pontificate, but limits itself largely, but not exclusively, simply to works deemed significant in understanding the diplomatic relationship between the Holy See and key States on the international plane in the period.

Timid Steps towards a Rediscovery

Somehow in death, as indeed during his lifetime, Giacomo della Chiesa was always to find himself on the wrong side of history. His relative obscurity before ascending to the papal throne may be due to various factors. Although, some held it to be due to the charge of modernism, this is unlikely, as shown by the esteem that Pius X himself showed towards him, not only in choosing to consecrate him bishop himself, but also in entrusting to his care what was deemed at the time, a pastorally sensitive see, such as that of Bologna.⁵ In all probability the move to Bologna was in itself the means to remove him from Rome, after becoming an obstacle to intransigents such as Merry del Val. In effect, this opened for him his ascension to the papacy.

⁵ See Danilo Veneruso, “La contrastata ascesa di Giacomo della Chiesa verso il pontificato,” in Letterio Mauro (ed.), *Benedetto XV. Profeta di Pace in un mondo in crisi* (Bologna: Minerva Edizioni, 2008), 349-350; Danilo Veneruso (1932-) was a professor of contemporary history at the faculty of political sciences at the University of Genova.

Some authors fully involved in the Catholic movement, such as Guglielmo Quadrotta,⁶ previously secretary to *Don* Romolo Murri, had published a documented defence of the Holy See's actions during the war even before Benedict XV's death. In a period when sentiments flew high, this work evolves within the wider context of the just war tradition, as the author seeks to explain the neutrality maintained by the Holy See during the war. In contrast to Pius X, he describes Benedict XV as a political pope who returns to the politics of Leo XIII, a dialectic: an assessment that would become a *topos* in the whole tradition. In so doing, the author holds that Benedict XV called upon the cooperation of that wing of Italian Social-Catholicism previously alienated by the anti-modernist movement within the Roman Curia. Quadrotta uses the relationship between Great Britain and the Holy See to show Italian Catholics how necessary it was for their government, in the prevailing circumstances, to resolve its relationship with the Holy See, considering the moral prestige that the latter had now acquired on the international plane similarly to what Cantalupo later does in using the French case.

The essay of Roberto Cantalupo, *Francia e Vaticano*, published immediately after Benedict XV's death and the election of his successor, must be regarded as polemical and imbued by a spirit of blinding nationalism. It interpreted the reconciliation between France and the Holy See as a purely diplomatic exercise, which France had pursued solely for political purposes, and to which the Vatican had bent only to increase its prestige on the international plane with no spiritual fruit to the faithful. The work serves to shed light on the reaction of Italian public opinion on seeing the arrival of Jonnart, the first French ambassador, after the

⁶ See Guglielmo Quadrotta, *La Chiesa Cattolica nella crisi universale. Con particolare riguardo ai rapporti fra Chiesa e Stato in Italia* (Roma: Casa Editrice "Bilychnis", 1921), 74. The author describes Benedict XV as "Il papa politico, forte del consenso della massa cattolica italiana, con l'ausilio della stampa, si accingeva alla sua opera intesa a ricondurre il Papato nel concerto delle Potenze mondiali". He publishes in appendix an important series of documents including the responses to a questionnaire carried out by the author in 1916 among eminent members of the Italian public, most importantly numerous members of parliament, as to whether or not, in the context of *Legge delle Guarentigie*, the roman pontiff was to be invited to participate in a future peace congress, other documents relating to the Holy See's peace efforts during the war, and documents pertaining to the relationship between the Holy See and Italy (notably the Italian Episcopate) during the war. Guglielmo Quadrotta (1888-1975) was an Italian journalist. He was also active in Catholic Action and founded the *Associazione degli uomini cattolici*, which would be the basis for the foundation in 1945 of *Democrazia Cristiana*.

reconciliation to convince the Italian nation of the inevitability of embarking on a similar road as that opened up by Benedict XV's politics towards France.⁷

On the occasion of the unveiling of the monument to Benedict XV in Saint Peter's Basilica in 1928, Francesco Vistalli published an extensive biography of Benedict XV,⁸ commissioned by the same cardinals responsible for the erection of the monument. Although, as *La Civiltà Cattolica*⁹ commented, it was still too early to publish a definitive biography, it serves us well to take this well-documented work as our starting point for considering the historiographical tradition surrounding him. It presents a rich collection of materials: information, documents, testimonies, as well as citations from the acts, letters, and speeches of Benedict XV, which could serve as an important treasury for future historians.

In 1935, in the biographical entry on Benedict XV by E. de Moreau in the *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques*,¹⁰ the author gave precedence to his ecclesial action, avoiding the political, as he rightly considered it too early to pass a definitive judgement on the pope's action during the war. The entry most usefully concludes with a list of works published in the decade or so following Benedict XV's death. Despite the author's cautionary approach, the list betrays a strong preference for works on Benedict XV's action as regards the war, witness to an apologetic battle, as authors from the victorious and the defeated sides sought to justify their respective positions.

Other biographical works of a general nature were also published in different languages in this period, among which we can cite the following: in the Italian language, a biography by R. Degli Occhi, as well as memoirs published by

⁷ See Roberto Cantalupo, *La Conciliazione Franco-Vaticana. Con una appendice sui rapporti fra l'Italia e il Vaticano* (Roma: Società Editrice Politica, 1922); Roberto Cantalupo (1891-1975) was an Italian politician and member of the Fascist National Party. He also served as the Italian ambassador to Egypt, Brasil and Spain. After the Second World War, he again served as a member of parliament on the liberal ticket.

⁸ See Francesco Vistalli, *Benedetto XV*, con la prefazione del cardinale Alfonso M. Mistrangelo Arcivescovo di Firenze (Roma: Tipografia Vaticana, 1928): Francesco Vistalli was a catholic priest and historian, provost of Chiuduno (Bergamo).

⁹ See "In memoria di Benedetto XV," in *La Civiltà Cattolica* IV (1928) 440: In its review, praises the work of this pious priest capturing the laudative and panagerical nature that necessarily imprints such publications. Quoting Mistrangelo, it lauds Vistalli for presenting "Benedetto XV nelle sue complessa nobilissima figura storica, convinta di fare e all'età nostra, che ha ammirato, venerato ed amato, da un capo all'altro del mondo, il Papa della Giustizia e della Carità, cosa graditissima, e alle età venture, opera preziosa di luce, a rischiarare una figura del più imponenti e grandiosi, che abbiamo sfolgorato sul Soglio di Pietro".

¹⁰ See E. de Moreau, "Benoit XV," in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1935), 167-172.

G. Semeria in which the patriotic spirit is overwhelming, as he presents the four Popes “venuti tutti dopo la tragedia del ‘70, hanno variamente spianato le vie e collaborato [per la Conciliazione]”;¹¹ those by G. Goyau and A. Battandier in French; that of J.P. Kirsch in German and the one by J. Corver in Dutch. More specialized studies published during his lifetime are those in French by Y. de La Brière and by H. Cousin, specifically on the temporal power of the popes and the unresolved Roman Question, as well as in German by Ehrle on this same issue¹².

Ten years after his death, Benedict XV's journalist and friend, Filippo Crispolti, published his personal memories of four pontiffs, a popular genre in this period, the final part of which is dedicated to Benedict XV. Although, the account contains interesting details, it is of an apologetic nature and highly lauds the pontiff. When it comes to Italian concerns, it is also imbued with the patriotic spirit of the age. At home in the curial environment, the author identifies the similarities as well as the differences between Rampolla and his secretary and disciple “nel quale ‘si preannunziava un nuovo Consalvi’”.¹³ Needless to say, this work was not meant to be historical in nature as it presumes to narrate nothing more than memories with a few reflections about them.¹⁴

¹¹ Giovanni Semeria, *I miei quattro papi*, Milano, 1932, 9; Giovanni Semeria (1867-1931) was a barnabite priest, orator and writer, one of the most prestigious figures of Italian Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century.

¹² See Luigi Degli Occhi, *Benedetto XV*, (Milan, 1921); Semeria, *I miei quattro papi*, Milano, 1932; J. Corver, *Benedict XV* (Bergen-op-Zoom [1922]); J.P. Kirsch, “Benedikt XV,” in J. Kardinal Hergenröthers ed., *Handbuch der allgemeinen Kirchengeschichte. Sonderdruck der Nachträge* (Fribourg-en-Br., 1925), 75-89; A. Battandier, “Benoît XV,” in *Annuaire pontifical catholique* (Paris, 1923), 33-64; G. Goyau, *Papauté et chrétienté sous Benoît XV*, Paris, 1922; Y. de La Brière, “Le pape Benoît XV,” in *Études cxl* (1914) 452-471; Fr. Ehrle, “Von Pius X zu Benedikt XV,” in *Stimmen der Zeit LXXXVIII* (1915) 201-219; Henri Cousin, *Le temporel des papes et la question romaine* (Besançon: H. Daragon, 1922); Fr. Ehrle, “Benedikt XV und die Lösung der römischen Frage,” in *Stimmen der Zeit XCII* (1917): 505-535.

¹³ Filippo Crispolti, *Pio IX, Leone XIII, Pio X, Benedetto XV. Ricordi personali* (Milano-Roma: Edizioni fratelli Treves, 1932), 148; see F. Crispolti, “Nel decennio della morte di Benedetto XV,” *Nuova Antologia* CCCLIX (gennaio-febbraio 1932): 35-57; Filippo Crispolti (1857-1942) was an Italian journalist, writer and politician. Of an aristocratic family, he came to be associated with the moderate wing of the lay catholic movement. As a journalist he collaborated in *L'Osservatore Romano* and later in the bolognese Catholic daily *L'Avvenire*. See also Giovanni Crispolti, “L'epistolario Semeria-Crispolti,” *Barnabiti Studi* 27 (2010): 289-310.

¹⁴ See F. Crispolti, *Pio IX, Leone XIII, Pio X, Benedetto XV*, 158: The author comparing the more open Benedict XV (cites the Latapie incident) to the reserved Rampolla (“ministro dei più ‘abbottonati’”) has the following somewhat revealing words to say: “Il quale [Benedetto XV], per compenso, sia pur profittando della maggior libertà di movimento che gli dava l'alto seggio, superò il maestro nella ricchezza e nella risolutezza delle iniziative pratiche, nelle

Giambattista Migliori's biography must be included in this same genre. Although it preserves a certain originality, it is written in a popular style in keeping with the needs of the general audience to whom it was addressed, due to the author's journalistic experience. Yet it makes no particular effort to avoid a strongly apologetic and often panegyric style prevalent in such publications. The work gives preference to Benedict XV's image as a pastor, contrary to those who held the pontiff as none other than a diplomat and a political pope, although the author does not ignore these aspects either. A certain patriotic tone also stands out in line with the general political climate of the time.¹⁵

Following the Second World War, a first serious step towards a rediscovery of Benedict XV was undertaken by Fernand Hayward. His biography entitled *Un Pape méconnu, Benoît XV*¹⁶ revisits, in broad strokes, the life of this pontiff, caught in the height of the storm of a raging war and widespread incomprehension, a situation which seemed to justify the prophecy of the oft quoted Irish monk Malachi, "Religio depopulata". But unfortunately, Hayward's work falls short of that scientific rigour one would expect from such a publication. Nevertheless, he is to be given due credit for signalling out the principal themes: war and peace, canon law, the emergence of the Italian Catholic political movement, Catholic Action, openness towards the East, the concern for Catholic missions, and that solicitude for all nations born out of the pontiff's vocation as universal pastor, as well as his humanitarian concerns, thus carving out a clear agenda to which historiography would keep returning time and again. Also worthy of note is the well-researched work by Walter Peters, *The life of Benedict XV*, although inevitably

quali, occorrendo, era pronto a rompere la tradizionale lentezza romana. In lui l'escogitare, il deliberare, l'eseguire erano una cosa sola, e l'uomo d'azione, ossia in certo senso l'uomo di Stato, prevalse sempre al diplomatico vero e proprio, mentre tale era rimasto Rampolla. Il quale gli fu simile invece - ossia gli fece scuola avesse avuto bisogno il Della Chiesa - nella pietà religiosa dominante la politica, nella dedizione assoluta agli interessi della Santa Sede, nel sacrificio intero di ogni gloria propria quando ci fosse un dovere da compiere; quando a questo titolo bisognasse affrontare interpretazioni fallaci dei propri intendimenti ed aversioni almeno temporanee contro i propri atti"; 154: In a letter, dated 18 December 1913, which Benedict XV wrote to Crispolti thanking him for the condolences expressed at the death of his master, Benedict XV expresses these revealing words "forse nessuno ha avuto col compianto Cardinale una sì lunga dimestichezza come l'ha avuto io, nessuno è stato da lui prediletto come lo sono stato io".

¹⁵ See Giambattista Migliori, *Benedetto XV* (Milano: La Favilla, 1932). The popularity enjoyed by this biography is evidenced by the fact that it was re-published as late as 1955.

¹⁶ See Hayward, *Un Pape méconnu. Benoît XV*.

limited by the author's unfamiliarity with the European context, especially the complex Italian political theatre in which this pope operated.¹⁷

A true milestone is constituted by the conference held at Spoleto in 1962. Given its success it seemed that the rediscovery of Benedict XV was assured. However, it was to remain an isolated voice and the legacy of this pontificate quickly receded back into relative obscurity. Spoleto brought together historians from every historiographical current, and the wide array of contributions was published the following year in a volume entitled *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*,¹⁸ which deserves credit not only for truly opening up the debate on themes that will remain a constant in the reflection on this pontificate, but also for the vividness of the debate which the volume transmits in its integrity. But once again, the historical context worked against Benedict XV; the timing proved unfortunate, as in the 1960s, at the height of the cold war, the world divided in two blocks. What Benedict XV stood for, his true legacy, was once again deemed contrary to the spirit of the age. At a distance of nearly half a century from the Great War, the conference represented an attempt, especially by Catholic historians to truly enter into the thick of the historiographical battle ground over sensitive matters, such as the war in itself, the misunderstood politics of peace advanced by Benedict XV, and the emergence of Catholic autonomy in Italian politics. The contributions manifest the contrast between the "Catholic universalism" of Benedict XV and widespread nationalism, between the clear denunciation of the "inutile strage" and the clerical attempts, evident in the episcopal pastoral letters of the time, to justify war. In attempting a history from below, there is an effort to widen the dialogue beyond the clear-cut assumptions of "bellicisti vs. pacifisti", towards a true understanding of that struggle within the Catholic conscience when confronted by the war. The political, spiritual and theological originality of Benedict XV's denunciations of the just war tradition also emerges as the pontiff steers away from widely held justifications such as that of a 'quasi-holy war' advancing the cause of religion, or the suggestion that war serves to bring about the purification of a morally corrupt society.¹⁹

The contributions start by considering the general context, as Mario Bendiscioli's *La Santa Sede e la guerra*, in which he remarks on that

¹⁷ See Walter H. Peters, *The life of Benedict XV* (Milwaukee, 1959); see Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, xiv.

¹⁸ See Giuseppe Rossini ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale. Atti del Convegno di Studio tenuto a Spoleto nei giorni 7-8-9 settembre 1962* (Roma: Edizioni 5 Lune, 1963).

¹⁹ See Rossini, "Prefazione," in *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, v-xi.

historiographical operation in which history once again takes the role of tribunal, an exercise which brings the reserve of the Holy See in sharp contrast to the documents made available by the various nations in their attempts to impute culpability to their opponents.

Pietro Scoppola returns to a consider the Italian Catholic conscience faced by war, as he explores the struggle between neutralists and interventionists, through whose pangs the Italian catholic movement fully entered the political arena;²⁰ Heinrich Lutz confronts what was still considered an uncomfortable heritage, that is the German catholic response to the war and its consequences.²¹ Friedrich Engel-Janosi²² departs from the positive attitude expressed by Austrian diplomacy to the election of Benedict XV, to move to Austria's response to the papal initiatives, concluding his entry with the pontiff's concerns for the dire straits Austria was reduced to after the war.

The second part of this volume presents a wealth of contributions, ranging from Angelo Martini's landmark study of *La nota di Benedetto XV alle potenze belligeranti nell'agosto 1917*,²³ to Rodolfo Mosca's assessment of Article 15 of the

²⁰ See Pietro Scoppola, "Cattolici neutralisti e interventisti alla vigilia del conflitto," in *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, 95-151.

²¹ See Heinrich Lutz, "I cattolici tedeschi di fronte alla guerra ed alle sue conseguenze," in *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, 323: Having struggled in their opposition to the *Kulturkampf*, by the beginning of the war, German Catholics had lost sight of the universalistic vision of Catholicism, and: "I cattolici avevano incondizionatamente assunto dai loro concittadini non-cattolici questa fede nell'efficacia assoluta ed esclusiva di garanzie di politica di forza e militari. Sarebbe errato voler vedere in questa aberrazione nazionalistica e machiavellista solo un errore puntualmente verificatosi ad un oscuramento del senso di realtà, subentrato *'ad hoc'*. Si subirono, invece, le conseguenze dell'adeguamento, sviluppatosi passo a passo nel corso dei decenni, dei cattolici alla mentalità ed ai metodi della nuova politica tedesca"; Heinrich Lutz (1922-1986) was a German-Austrian historian, and professor of modern history at the University of Vienna.

²² See Friedrich Engel-Janosi, *Benedetto XV e l'Austria*, in *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, 343-358.

²³ See For the contemporary Catholic reaction in defence of the *Peace Note*: Giuseppe Dalla Torre, "L'appello di pace del papa e la risposta di Wilson," *Nuova Antologia* CXCI (settembre 1917): 188-196: Monti reports that Benedict XV mentioning this article, affirmed to him that "[è] ispirato dai concetti della Santa Sede": Monti, *Diario*, 26 Settembre 1917, 89-90; count Giuseppe Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto (1885-1967) was an Italian journalist, fully involved in the Italian lay catholic movement. In 1912, Pius X nominated him as president of the 'Unione Popolare'. Sharing Benedict XV's vision for the resolution of the Roman Question, and the Christian restoration of society, in 1915, he was nominated president of the 'giunta' that was to direct Catholic Action. In 1920 he assumed the direction of '*L'Osservatore Romano*'; Filippo Crispolti, "Intorno alla nota di pace," *Nuova Antologia* CXCI (settembre 1917): 197-203; An

London Treaty, to lesser known aspects, such as Spain's offer of hospitality to the pope rendering necessary the abandonment of Rome presented by Renato Mori. Other nationalistic concerns emerge in the American Catholicism's reaction to the war studied by Bariè, that of Polish Catholics by Meysztowicz, that of the English by Musco, that of the Hungarians by Pásztor and that of Latin-American Catholicism by Scarano. After considering also the attitudes of as diverse a spectrum as that which ranges from Italian bishops (Monticone) to farmers' attitudes to the war (Bellò), the volume concludes by Angelo Tamborra's contribution *Benedetto XV e i problemi nazionali e religiosi dell'Europa orientale*,²⁴ in which he finely presents the relationship between the political and the religious dimension in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment of these Christian minorities. This issue, like most others touched upon, would, in the future, constitute a whole area of reflection in its own right.

Interest in the biographical milieu persists, as shown by the detailed entry in Gabriele De Rosa's *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, outlining the principal moments of Benedict XV's curial career and pontificate, in which this pope again emerges as a true son of Rampolla and heir of the Leonine pontificate, "proteso a restituire alla Chiesa una posizione di prestigio nei rapporti con le grandi potenze"²⁵. The author insists on showing how the "egoismo nazionalistico"²⁶ which the pope denounces from his very first encyclical *Ad Beatissimi*, proved to be the main hurdle for all the diplomatic initiatives undertaken during and after the war. This entry, which reveals a particular interest in Italian affairs, illustrates the reaction of this national Catholicism to *Ad Beatissimi*, as well as the various positions towards the issue of neutrality.²⁷ Carefully illustrated with

apologetic pamphlet as to Benedict XV's action during the war, is the following: Giuseppe Quirico, *Fatti e non parole. L'opera del Santo Padre Benedetto XV durante la guerra* (Roma: Civiltà Cattolica, 1918).

²⁴ See Angelo Tamborra, "Benedetto XV e i problemi nazionali e religiosi dell'Europa orientale," in *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, 855-884.

²⁵ Gabriele De Rosa, "Benedetto XV", *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 8, Roma 1966, 408-417. This entry was republished in *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, III (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), 608-617; Gabriele De Rosa (1917-2009) was a historian and Italian politician. Fully involved in the *Democrazia Cristiana*, his name is tied to the study of the Italian Catholic movement, especially for his publications on Alcide De Gasperi and Luigi Sturzo.

²⁶ De Rosa, *Benedetto XV*, 609.

²⁷ See Rosa, *Benedetto XV*, 613: "Della politica di Benedetto XV si può ripetere ciò che scrisse Giuseppe De Luca: 'La S. Sede fu neutrale: ma la neutralità le costò, possiamo dire, una doppia guerra: guerra con gli uni, guerra con gli altri. La Santa Sede non poté far nulla di bene, che subito non fosse tratto a male'"; see Giuseppe De Luca, *Il Cardinale Bonaventura Cerretti* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), 209.

citations from a wealth of principal works published till then, the diplomatic, political, humanitarian, theological and ecclesiological action of this pontiff, De Rosa's study constitutes a critical introduction to Benedict XV's life and actions, enriched by an extensive concluding bibliography.

Heavily conditioned by that naive optimism of the post-conciliar Church, the polemical reading presented by Carlo Falconi, in his consideration of Benedict XV, places this pope in opposition to Pius X, Pius XI and Pius XII. True to the spirit of the age, the author concludes that the patrimony of the Benedictine pontificate, could only then be truly appreciated, and this in the light of the so-called "Johannine revolution". Thus the limits of this pontificate were that:

Della Chiesa nacque troppo tardi (al posto di Pio X egli avrebbe evitato alla Chiesa l'isolamento dal mondo civile e l'assurda crociata modernista) e morì troppo presto (senza poter risparmiare al cattolicesimo ed al mondo gli avviliti compromessi coi totalitarismi del suo successore)... Doveva toccare agli orrori della seconda guerra mondiale e in particolare all'inadeguata condotta di Pio XII nei loro riguardi, di farne rivalutare l'eccezionale valore.²⁸

As regards the publication of sources relative to the First World War, the volume edited by Wolfgang Steglich, *Des Friedensappell Papst Benedikts XV vom 1. August 1917 und die Mittelmächte*²⁹ is obviously significant. This volume publishes a wide variety of diplomatic documentation produced in 1915-1922 by the German, Bavarian, Austro-Hungarian and British foreign offices, thus not only setting the much discussed *Peace Note* within its wider context, but also clarifying the reasons for such a generally negative response to it. This documentation explains the use Erzberger made of the *Peace Note* in the Weimar National Assembly against the Imperial government, especially in the disastrous situation this institution found itself in as a result of the war.

Another interesting study related to the war, is that by Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *La fede e la Guerra. Capellani militari e preti-soldati*. Although, it has nothing to say specifically on Benedict XV, the manner in which it describes

²⁸ Carlo Falconi, *I Papi del ventesimo secolo* (Milano, Feltrinelli editore, 1967), 166-167. Carlo Falconi (1915-1998), ordained in 1938, left the priesthood in 1949 to become a journalist, and wrote on Catholic matters.

²⁹ Wolfgang Steglich (ed.), *Des Friedensappell Papst Benedikts XV vom 1. August 1917 und die Mittelmächte. Diplomatische Aktenstücke des Deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes, des Bayerischen Staatsministeriums des Äussern, des Österreichisch-Ungarischen Ministeriums des Äussern und des Britischen Auswärtigen Amtes aus den Jahren 1915-1922* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1970).

the diversity of reactions among the Italian military chaplains to the papal *Peace Note*³⁰ is noteworthy.

Danilo Veneruso takes up a neglected aspect of this pontificate, through a study dedicated to *L'Azione Cattolica Italiana durante i pontificati di Pio X e Benedetto XV*,³¹ and assesses in great depth the challenges that the Italian Catholic movement went through during this pontificate. Inherited in a paralyzed state due to the anti-modernist crusade, the Italian Catholic movement fully entered the social arena during the war years, only to split in two branches in the second part of this pontificate:

l'uno rappresentato dal CIL e dal Partito Popolare, realizzava il momento e la tradizione politica, economica e sociale; l'altro, rappresentato dall'Unione Popolare, dalla Società della Gioventù Cattolica Italiana, dall'Unione fra le donne cattoliche italiane con la sezione giovanile e della FUCI maschile e femminile, realizzava il momento e la tradizione formativa nel senso più lato del termine³².

Whereas the first progressively evolved towards a certain independence from the hierarchy and an a-confessional position, the second, still closely tied to the Holy See, found itself to be unprepared to fully take up its formative role. Veneruso attributes such aridity to a variety of factors, not excluding Benedict XV's insistence on the Catholic presence in the social arena, afraid that such a vacuum would quickly be taken over by anti-Catholic movements, but such an emphasis proved detrimental to Catholic Action's ability to assume a cultural and formative aspect. True to a prevalent preoccupation at the time, a concern born out of that very spirit which imbued the post-conciliar years during which he wrote, the author cannot but lament the fact that the laity failed to achieve that mature understanding of their vocation, which would have permitted them to go beyond the purely polemical, and truly take up their proper role in the

³⁰ See Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *La fede e la Guerra. Capellani militari e preti-soldati (1915-1919)* (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1980), 96-98; Roberto Morozzo della Rocca is the ordinary professor of contemporary history at the *Università di Roma III*. He has especially researched the relationship between nationalism and religion in Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Albania in the 18th and 19th centuries.

³¹ See Danilo Veneruso, *L'Azione Cattolica Italiana durante i pontificati di Pio X e Benedetto XV* (Roma: Editrice A.V.E., 1984).

³² Veneruso, *L'Azione Cattolica Italiana durante i pontificati di Pio X e Benedetto XV*, 161; For a study on the situation of the Italian Catholic Movement during the war: see also De Rosa, *Storia del Movimento Cattolico in Italia. Dalla Restaurazione all'Età Giolittiana* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1966), 577-624.

apostolic and evangelization mission of the Church, something that Catholic Action would only achieve later, out of its direct confrontation with Fascism.³³

Conclusion

Unfortunately, in the following decades, historians did not immediately take up the revival augured by the success of the Spoleto conference in 1962. The real breakthrough only came with the opening of the Vatican Archives in 1985. Since then, there has been a constant revisiting of this figure, and even if the themes largely remain those determined in Spoleto, these are treated in greater depth, as historians have benefited from the greater amount of archival material now available for their study. The importance of the publication of particular sources, such as diaries and memories compiled by key players in this period, cannot be ignored.

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³³ See Veneruso, *L'Azione Cattolica Italiana durante i pontificati di Pio X e Benedetto XV*, 161.