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Il calcio e l'oratorio: Football, Catholic Movement and Politics in Italian Post-War Society, 1944-1960

*Fabien Archambault**

Abstract: From the end of the 1940s, football became a shared and national culture in Italy since the Church had chosen the game to establish its presence in all strata of society. The Catholic elites, both the governing class of Christian Democrats and the clergy, paid attention and esteem to football because, on the one hand, they considered this associative form of sociability an efficient instrument of pastoral mediation and, on the other hand, as a means of implementing political projects. So the Catholic view of football was composite: a favourable ground for religious training and a means of promoting a Christian social order. The practice was integrated in the network of oratories and parishes on the one hand, of sports associations managed by laymen on the other. These channels of diffusion were gradually concentrated within the Centro Sportivo Italiano (CSI) under the authority of the Vatican.

Introduction

In 1982, Giulio Andreotti did not hesitate to state that during his life he had professed a double faith: in God and in the AS Roma. The title of his contribution to a collection of articles published by Walter Veltroni, the current mayor of Rome and at that time member of the central committee of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), used a wording that he liked very much: “Il calcio logora chi non lo ama” (football wears down those that do not like it).¹ One has to give credit to Andreotti’s sincerity. The passion he asserted and expressed

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¹ Giulio Andreotti, “Il calcio logora chi non lo ama”, *Il calcio è una scienza da amare. 38 dichiarazioni d'amore al gioco più bello del mondo*, ed. Walter Veltroni (Milan: Savelli Editori, 1982) 29-30.

for football was not necessarily false, especially if one keeps in mind that he began his political career as under-secretary of State to the Council Presidency in charge of sports, among other things, from 1946 to 1954. It illustrates the esteem and the attention the Catholic elites paid to football in the post-war period, both politically (the governing class of Christian Democrats) and ecclesiastically (Eugenio Pacelli, Pope under the name of Pius XII, was called “the sportsmen’s Pope”). Precisely, at the end of the forties, when it replaced cycling as the great popular sport, football became a shared and national culture in Italy since the Church had chosen it as one of the vectors of its presence in all strata of society. The Church made the choice of football because, on the one hand, it considered the associative forms of sociability that were its basis an efficient instrument of pastoral mediation and, on the other hand, it saw it as a privileged means of promoting its political projects.

What was the purpose of this mediation? Where was the message spread and who were the actors? The Catholic view of football was initially composite: a way of supporting any eventual spiritual call and a favourable ground for religious training, a means of promoting a Christian social order, a way to confront the civil society. It also carried its own recognition, likely to give place to an intrinsically Christian practice. These ecclesiological ideas define the ideological framework of a practice implemented in the network of oratories and parishes on the one hand, of sports associations managed by laymen on the other. These channels of diffusion were gradually concentrated within the *Central Sportivo Italiano* (CSI) whose files are preserved at the offices of *Azione Cattolica italiana* (AC) in Rome. Through these archives and also through biographies and memoirs, one can study the actors: on a national level there were the leaders of the Catholic Action and the Christian Democratic party, on the local level the parish priests and the leaders of sports clubs.

L’oratorio

Let us first clarify the terms. Originally the word oratory meant “a place of prayer, a chapel within a building where one goes to pray”. This meaning has gradually changed into “a meeting place for groups of young people with various activities that generally end by a time for prayer”.² The oratory always belonged (and belongs) to a parish and thus corresponded to the French *patronage* (youth club). It was especially in the second half of the 20th century and at the initiative of the Salesians (*Societas S. Francisci Salesii*), a religious

² Maurilio Guasco, “Prémices italiennes: l’Oratoire de Don Bosco”, *Sport, culture et religion. Les patronages catholiques (1898-1998)*, ed. Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique (Brest: n.p. 1999) 39-49.

clerical Congregation founded in 1859, that this was established. The primarily urban and Nordic character of the Italian Salesian network was a result of the findings of their founder Don Giovanni Bosco who reckoned with the industrial society requiring new forms of association.³

As stated by Umberto Eco, “the brilliant character of the oratory is that it establishes a moral and religious code for those who attend it, but that it also accommodates those who do not follow that code. Thus the project of Don Bosco includes the whole Italian society of the industrial era”.⁴ According to the *Atti del V congresso degli oratori festivi salesiani* it welcomed young people independent of their social position: “[A]ll young people of whatever their class or origin, are welcome to the oratory with a preference for those who are abandoned or ignorant because they are in the greatest need of education and training”.⁵ In the same source one can read that “[t]he aim of the oratory is to retain the youth on Sundays and holidays through recreational, honest and pleasant activities after they have attended the holy service. The religious and moral function is the most important goal, the rest is just accessory and a means to make the young participate”.⁶

The origins of the catholic sports and recreational movement can thus be found in the Salesian oratories. The Salesians had the intuition to realize around 1860, that bodily exercises, at the birth of the industrial society, was one of the principal meeting grounds for the popular masses and particularly the young. Physical training thus became an important part of the pastoral directed towards the youth. The first gymnastics sections appeared during the pontificate of Leon XIII. Gradually they became independent of the oratory network⁷ and later established themselves as *società sportive*; they were organized within the *Federazione delle Associazioni Sportive Cattoliche Italiane* (FASCI) in 1906.

Originally the catholic hierarchy was distrustful of football that had been introduced to Italy in the later part of the 19th century. It considered it too

³ See *La parrocchia in Italia nell'età contemporanea* (Rome-Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1979); Luigi Martini, “Dai santi educatori all’associazionismo di massa”, *Sport e società* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1976) 118-126; Ilaria Macconi, “La parrocchia negli anni cinquanta”, *Tempo libero e società di massa nell’Italia del Novecento*, ed. Istituto milanese per la storia della Resistenza e del movimento operaio (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995) 411-430. For a general overview, Stefano Pivato, “Movimento cattolico e questione dello sport”, *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia*, vol. I, t. 2 (Torino: Marietti, 1981) 142-145; Philippe Rocher, “Valeurs du sport catholique, valeurs catholiques du sport. L’Église catholique et le vélo”, *Le Mouvement social* No. 192 (July-September 2000): 65-97.

⁴ Umberto Eco, “A lezione di don Bosco”, *L’Espresso* 15 November 1981, 105.

⁵ *Atti del V congresso degli oratori festivi salesiani*, Torino 17-18 maggio 1911 (Torino: Tipografia Buona Stampa, 1911) 5.

⁶ *Atti del V congresso* 35.

⁷ Except in the Piedmont and in Lombardy where the oratories continue to manage the associative sports movement until the fifties.

violent and especially as a protestant sport. But the first Christian Democrats with Romolo Murri at their head, saw it as one of the symbols of modernity and a way of confronting the civil society and therefore encouraged its spread among Catholics. They improved the image of football matches and allowed them to express a courageous spirit of competition: to measure themselves against the secular associations and thereby to establish a social and political position that went beyond the sports event itself. Thus it wasn't by chance that the Christian Democrats' sport took on intensively competitive forms particularly in the traditionally anticlerical regions such as the Emilia or Romagna where at football encounters between catholic and secular associations, the *tifo*,⁸ for one or the other team "invariably took on a political partiality" and where the victory served to affirm "the prestige of the ideas one defended".⁹ This conversion of the Catholics to football was reinforced in the 1920s while it hadn't yet become the favorite sport of certain Fascist officials who still preferred traditional games such as the *Bocce*¹⁰ or the *volata*, a mixture of football and rugby.¹¹ Nevertheless, though the FASCI was broken up in 1927 and all catholic sports activities forbidden in 1931,¹² football was still played in secret in the parish oratories and came to light again in 1943.

The parishes remained the ideal place for sports activities. The parish structure, with its recreational centre and its football field, represented a major attraction for the young and often their only real place of entertainment, particularly in the suburbs of the big cities or the areas under development. Quite a few parishes acquired a football field in the post-war years and thanks to the oratories, sports, that had once been the domain of the privileged class, spread among the whole population. According to Carlo Falconi in 1954, the total number of football fields run by the catholic associations rose to 2 017,

⁸ This expression appears in the twenties and expresses both a participation and a supporter illness. Its origin is no doubt the adjective *tifico* that describes someone who has typhoid fever, the *tifo*. The pathology of the *tifoso* expresses itself by a partisan and contagious passion that the sick person cannot fight against. By extension it designates all the practices of the "militant" supporters of a football team and generally of the most passionate ones. See Giorgio Triani, *Mal di stadio. Storia del tifo e della passione per il calcio* (Rome: Edizioni Associate, 1990) 72.

⁹ Livio Bedeschi, *Il modernismo e Romolo Murri in Emilia Romagna* (Parma: Guanda, 1967) 57. Cited by Stefano Pivato, *Sia lodato Bartali. Ideologia, cultura e miti dello sport cattolico (1936-1948)* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1985) 12.

¹⁰ Stefano Pivato, "Il pallone senza football", *Storia e Dossier* No 84 (1994): 74-79.

¹¹ It did not really become so until the thirties when it was perceived as an instrument of consensus by the regime. See Paul Dietschy, "Peut-on parler d'une idéologie du football dans les années trente? Étude comparative de la France et de l'Italie", *Sport et idéologie*, Actes du colloque de Besançon 26-29 September 2002, to be published.

¹² The 2 September 1931 agreements stipulated that the Fascist organisations had a monopoly on sports activities. See Sandro Rogari, "Azione Cattolica e fascismo. Come la Chiesa si difese da Mussolini", *Nuova Antologia* (1978): 392-444 and the bibliography on the relations between the AC and Fascism in Mario Casella, *L'Azione cattolica alla caduta del fascismo. Attività e progetti per il dopoguerra (1942-1945)* (Rome: Studium, 1984).

spread over the country: 1 326 in the North, 422 in the Centre, 192 in the South and 77 in the Islands. Out of a total of 327 dioceses, 91 had fields, particularly in the South and in Sardinia and Sicily.¹³

The biographies, memoirs and autobiographies of the priests constitute an invaluable source to penetrate the world of the oratories. For example, Don Lorenzo Marchi, parish priest in Sant'Agnese in Rome at the time of the liberation, who was worried about the decline in attendance of mass and catechism by the young in the neighbourhood, wrote:

Particularly today when we see sports and leisure associations inspired by lay and sectarian sentiments, appear and prosper, it is the parish priest's duty to keep his eyes open and favour, as far as possible, all initiatives of that kind. None are to be excluded, be it gymnastics associations, theatrical representations, cinemas, concerts, ball games, libraries etc.¹⁴

He added:

It's useless to protest or grumble against dancing halls or fashion if we are not prepared to put in place effective measures to win the battle. Either we are awake, decided and active or we will be overrun.¹⁵

Regarding catechism for the children he suggested:

At ten o'clock holy mass, mass for the children... From eleven to twelve, catechism for the small ones. At noon a film. At one o'clock ball games. With this system we have obtained a considerable increase in the boys' participation in catechism.¹⁶

The oratories became an important reference point of civil life in the climate of misery and lack of institutions of the post-war years, particularly in the suburbs of the big cities where the war damages were aggravated by the lack of even the most elementary structures of assistance or sociability. The commitment of the parishes to recreational and supportive actions are shown in Roberto Rossellini's film *Roma città aperta* from 1944, where Aldo Fabrizi in the role of a parish priest, referees a football match played by children that he is in charge of after the soup kitchen.

Still in Rome in 1945, the *Centro Oratori Romani* (COR) was created through the initiative of Arnaldo Canepa. In the first articles of its statutes from 1962 it says: "An association of catechists that want to take care of the religious instruction and the Christian education of children by creating and leading oratories for Sundays and weekdays according to our methods".¹⁷ The target group was the marginalized youth in Rome's suburbs as can be seen by the first actions in the Quadraro zone where since 1931 the lay brothers of the

¹³ Carlo Falconi, *La Chiesa e le organizzazioni cattoliche in Italia 1945-1955. Saggi per una storia del cattolicesimo italiano nel dopoguerra* (Torino: Einaudi, 1956) 408.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Marchi, *Esperienze pastorali* (Rome: Coletti, 1949) 168.

¹⁵ Marchi 169.

¹⁶ Marchi 149.

¹⁷ Piero Castro, *Arnaldo Canepa, cuor di fanciullo* (Rome: Castro, 1993).

Terzo ordine francescano had taken care of about thirty youngsters. In 1941 a committee “for the children” was established in the Congregation of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul and in February 1944 Canepa suggested to distribute “a good soup” to the inhabitants of the area and to help the most destitute. In 1955 there were about 55 oratories and 560 catechists in Rome, and the number of participating youths was approximately 17 500.¹⁸ If you look at the 1954 AC directory the figures are even higher: in a total of 141 parishes with 1 770 476 inhabitants there were 96 parish oratories, 26 kindergartens, 98 cinemas, 91 libraries and 74 football fields. In the Milan diocese with 1 486 000 inhabitants there were 879 parishes with 369 oratories, 341 kindergartens, 323 cinemas, 307 libraries and 57 football fields. The number of oratories tended to decrease as you went south: thus in the Naples diocese with its 1 486 000 inhabitants and 243 parishes, there were only 2 oratories, 12 kindergartens and 20 cinemas.¹⁹

Sunday oratory and weekday oratory, spiritual training lessons, recreation or sporting competitions – those were the activities spread by the parish. As Piero Castro notes in his biography of Canepa: “[L]essons in religion, games, training, matches: they should all be accessible for everybody... [E]very boy should find it possible to participate in all these activities in the oratory”.²⁰ The characteristic trait of the oratory was to guarantee that anybody who entered should be able to freely participate in all its activities. In 1960 the COR was present in 107 parishes. It had especially spread to the *borgate*²¹ parishes where it represented the only real possibility for the youth to have a social life and to develop mutual relations. In 1954 there were 5 387 oratories in Italy, in particular in the North (4 074) while the Centre (751), the South (287) and the Islands (275) were far behind.²²

Furthermore, as the historian Luciano Rossi writes, the oratory turned into a breeding ground for professional football players: “Oratory and football tend to coincide in the period following the second world war without losing its educational aspect”.²³ You can take the example of Gianni Rivera, born on August 18, 1943, at Alessandria (Piedmont) and who enters the A-series in 1959: “My first team was called Don Bosco, a parish team, with a priest who was both trainer and radio reporter”.²⁴ In that respect the history of the oratories and the history of professional football tended to coincide.

¹⁸ Nicola Zagotto, *Il movimento pastorale catechista nella diocesi di Roma. Il Centro oratori romani* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1980) 29. Cited by Ilaria Macconi.

¹⁹ *Annuario dell’Azione cattolica italiana* (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1954) 3, 361 and 169.

²⁰ Castro 151.

²¹ The *borgate* means the suburbs.

²² Falconi 50.

²³ Luciano Rossi, “All’oratorio. Divagazioni e memorie sul gioco del calcio”, *Lancillotto e Nausica* No. 1 (1984): 6-15.

²⁴ Oreste Del Buono, and Gianni Rivera, *Un tocco in più* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1966) 21.

Football also filled the role of religious mediation. This pastoral via sports took place in the oratory through the mediation of the priest or the vicar. Don Camillo is the best-known literary example: He is the trainer of the Braves, the parish team that defies Peppone's Dynamos. But Don Camillo is also the local secretary of Catholic Action and his team would certainly have been a member of the CSI, the federation of catholic sports associations.

The Catholic Sports Associations

On June 11 1944, while Rome was still occupied, the *Centro Sportivo Italiano* was founded by the leaders of *Gioventù italiana di Azione cattolica* (GIAC). Luigi Gedda, who became its president, had published a paper called *Lo sport* since 1931 where he insisted that football should not be left in the hands of the Fascist hierarchy.²⁵ But though the new CSI took over the role of the FASCI, it also played a role in the Catholic Action's leaders' strategy of active support for the Pope's project to restore a Christian social and political order.²⁶

In its new statutes adopted in 1946, the *Azione Cattolica* defines the CSI as a promotional organism ("*Ente di promozione*") "dependant" of the national leadership but with the position of *opera* ("work") in the GIAC.²⁷ Which meant that although the AC kept a right to oversee the general political orientation of the CSI, it was not a movement that was organically dependent of the central organisation; on the contrary it kept a considerable autonomy of operation. Thus the CSI opened its local committees (the *Unioni sportive territoriali*) to non-members of the AC. It also applied a synthesis of the two forms of catholic supervision of sports that existed before Fascism.

Its organisational structure was actually a copy of the old FASCI model: a national Presidency leads 18 regional committees that were in turn split into provincial subcommittees. But the reference unit in the latter was either the province or the diocese. Thus the *Unioni sportive territor* were either lay sports clubs or sports associations with their roots directly in the parish or the oratory. When the latter were in majority in a *provincia* or a diocese, the functional

²⁵ "There is no state that does not directly or indirectly take an interest in sports events, by favourable or restrictive measures, but that always indicate their importance" in Luigi Gedda, *Lo sport* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1931) 11. On Luigi Gedda and his activities see Carlo Falconi, *Gedda e l'Azione cattolica* (Florence: Parenti, 1958) and the synthesis by Agostino Giovagnoli, "L'Azione Cattolica Italiana dal 1948 al 1958", *Chiesa e progetto educativo nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1945-1958)*, ed. Luciano Pazzaglia (Brescia: La Scuola, 1988) 117-154.

²⁶ On the establishment of the "Catholic hegemony" in the Italian society and politics and the development of the AC between 1943 and 1948, refer to Jean-Dominique Durand, *L'Église catholique dans la crise de l'Italie (1943-1948)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1991).

²⁷ See Liliana Ferrari, "Gli statuti dell'Azione Cattolica del 1946", *Italia contemporanea* No. 130 (1978): 57-83.

unity was the zone committee or the autonomous zone committee led by a clergyman. Furthermore the regional or provincial committees had clerical advisers. The old lay structures of the FASCI and the parish network of the Catholic Church thus lived together within the CSI²⁸ that constituted a compromise between the two heritages. In the *Stadium*, its national magazine, an article titled “How to choose a name” (November 19, 1944) bears witness to this fact:

To choose a name that is not an obstacle to the success of the young forces. It had rather be a name that does not refer to a Saint or any name referring to the Madonna or the Lord. In the case of meetings or tournaments where the team or the athlete belonging to a Sportive Union with such a name were to lose, the adversaries may lack respect for that team or that athlete but also indirectly for its name and thus for the Saint or even worse for the Lord. You can be related to the name of your association or the patron saint of your parish to the extent that you can very well talk about the Sports Union belonging to the Association Saint... In the choice of a name for the Sportive Union you can refer, apart from to the memory of all those that have fallen for their country, to the glorious names of so many of our unions that serve as examples: *Viribus Unitis, Virtus e Labor, Fortitudo, Aurora, Fides, Robur e Virtus, Voluntas, Juventus, Forti e Liberi, Concordia...*

Luigi Gedda's project was intended to assure the central role of the CSI in the organisation of Catholic sports. The circulars tell about the intention to absorb the parish and oratory networks to which there was sometimes some resistance.²⁹ In 1949 the Roman leadership established a list of oratories that had not yet joined³⁰ and decided to ask the Papal Curia to intervene in order to put pressure on those bishops that still resisted.³¹ At the head of the CSI, Gedda established the sports version of the “quantitative” line (Renato Moro)³² that he had imposed in the AC from 1934 to 1944 and that was characterized by the reinforcement of the means of mass communication.³³ In 1951 the representatives of 69 provincial committees and 55 zone committees – i. e. 1 473 sports associations with 33 000 members – met at the third national congress.³⁴ Gedda also tried to make the CSI unavoidable in the new post-fascist sports structures. In September 1943, following the logic set out in his letter to field-marshal Badoglio on August 11, 1943, where he proposed the

²⁸ *Archivio Storico* of the AC (Asac), *fondo GIAC, busta 877*, report by the *Consiglio Direttivo Nazionale* of the CSI, 1951.

²⁹ The correspondence between the national management and the provincial committees of Tuscany and Lombardy show a resistance by the clergy to leave the management of the sports equipment to the CSI.

³⁰ *Archivio del CSI (Acsi)*, *fondo I, busta 8-sottoscicolo (s.f.) 3*.

³¹ Acsi II-4-s.f.11 (Corrispondenza con gli Uffici vaticani).

³² Renato Moro, *La formazione della classe dirigente cattolica (1929-1937)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979).

³³ Particularly the press, the cinema and the theater.

³⁴ Natale Bertocco, “Dagli albori al IV Congresso”, *Stadium* (1953): Nos. 11-12.

collaboration of the Catholics with the new government,³⁵ he suggested the co-optation of the AC leadership in the management of the *Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano* (CONI), the tutelary organisation of Italian sports.³⁶ The CSI tried to impose a sharing of competences where the CSI would manage the amateur sports movements.³⁷ Even though this attempt failed, the CSI was nevertheless recognised as a “privileged” partner. The Ministry of *Pubblica Istruzione* that was led by the Christian Democrats without interruption from 1947,³⁸ systematically delegated the responsibility for sports activities in the educational system from primary to university level to the CSI.³⁹ Within the *Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori*, an organisation inherited from Fascism that had been active in the *L’organizzazione del Dopolavoro*,⁴⁰ the presence of old cadres from the CSI was massive and permanent at all levels. In 1952, the *calcio* management of the CSI congratulated itself on its success to infiltrate the leadership of the *Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio* and the CONI.⁴¹ In an internal memorandum 1947, Gedda was happy to have convinced Giulio Onesti, president of the CONI and a socialist, to join the ranks of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC).⁴² From 1948 onwards the *Stadium* editorship consisted, apart from Luigi Gedda and Giulio Onesti, of Bruno Roghi, a member of the AC who had become a reporter of the *Gazzetta dello sport* after the Milano curia bought it in 1945.⁴³

These sociability networks played an economic part as well. In the name of the necessary unity of Catholic movement and calling on the friendship that united them, Gedda and the CSI leadership regularly requested “exceptional” financial aid from the Council Presidency and the Ministry of *Pubblica Istruzione*.⁴⁴ Actually the income from membership fees, the distribution of

³⁵ A letter published by Teodoro Sala, “Un’offerta di collaborazione dell’ACI al governo Badoglio (Agosto 1943)”, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea* IV (1972): 517-533.

³⁶ Luigi Gedda, *Dieci anni al servizio dello sport* (Rome: CSI, 1955) 19.

³⁷ Progetto di carta dello sport, Acsi I-46.

³⁸ Guido Gonella was the Minister of Public Education from February 1947 (the third De Gasperi’s government) to 1955 (the Scelba’s government) except for seven months in 1954 when he was replaced by the liberal Martino.

³⁹ Acsi II-5 (Corrispondenza con il ministero della Pubblica Istruzione). See Angelo Gaudio, *La politica scolastica dei cattolici. Dai programmi all’azione di governo 1943-1953* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1991); and Giorgio Chiosso, “I cattolici e la scuola dalla riforma Gonella al piano decennale”, ed. Pazzaglia 303-339.

⁴⁰ The *Dopolavoro*, literally “after work”, was an organisation created by the Fascists to take care of the workers’ leisure after working hours. See Victoria De Grazia, *Consensus e cultura di massa. L’organizzazione del Dopolavoro* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1981).

⁴¹ Minutes from the meeting June 24 1952, Acsi IV-1-s.f.3.

⁴² Acsi V-5-s.f.2.

⁴³ The financial arrangements that allowed the cardinal of Milan, Ildefonso Schuster, to buy *La Gazzetta*, the biggest sports daily in the country, from count Alberto Bonacossa, an old Fascist cadre, are mentioned by Gianni Brera, *Storia critica del calcio italiano* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975) 193-194.

⁴⁴ For example the letters from Carlo Carretto to Guido Gonella on May 10 1947 (Acsi V-5-s.f.3) and from Luigi Gedda to Giulio Andreotti on September 25 1948 (Acsi V-6-s.f.6).

newspapers in the parish libraries and the public schools, the yearly subventions from the CONI, the AC, the government and the Vatican, were never sufficient to cover the expenses of advertising and promotion, the costs of public meetings⁴⁵ and the cost of building and maintaining the sports facilities.⁴⁶

The provincial and local committees also exercised purely political propaganda activities. In a national circular from January 1948, the CSI members were reminded that they are firstly the “missionaries of God” and militants for the AC.⁴⁷ In that respect they were concerned by the political mobilisation of the DC in preparation for the elections April 18, 1948, and in February they received a list of arguments to use in discussions with the militants from the communist, socialist, republican, monarchist and neo-fascist parties in the election campaign.⁴⁸ As in the case of the civic committees created by Gedda,⁴⁹ the CSI sports associations, whose branches assured the social presence of the Catholic movement, were committed to the battle led by the AC to defend the Church. The correspondence with the field committees thus shows the local methods of confrontation with the communists. For example in a letter addressed to Gedda November 17 1952,⁵⁰ the slightly bitter parish priest in Massa Maritima, Tuscany (“you never sufficiently insist that we are here in a Soviet zone, in Siberia, full of un-christianised Christians”) complained that half his football team had deserted to the “competition” i.e. the local section of the *Unione Italiana Sport popolare* (UISP), close to the Communist Party.⁵¹ At the request of the CSI committee in Magliano Sabina, a village in Lazio, the bishop raged against the communist association from the pulpit: “Don’t send the youngsters to the Polisportiva Lepanto, over there it’s the devil and whoever participates will end in hell!”⁵² When that kind of a warning did not suffice some leaders appealed to the forces of order. In January 1951 the Ostia Antica *carabinieri*, following a complaint by the priest/trainer

⁴⁵ Notably the *Pasqua dello sportivo*, organised yearly by the provincial committees and that culminated by a meeting at Saint Peter in Rome on Easter Sunday whose purpose was to show the strength of the Catholic sports movement.

⁴⁶ This explains the vigorous fight by the CSI to recover the assets of the *ex-Gioventù italiana del Littorio*: in 1946 a national list of claimed football fields that were “wrongly” used by the communist and socialist sports associations was established (Asac-GIAC-814, 815). The conflict wasn’t resolved until in the early eighties.

⁴⁷ Acsi III-3-s.f.15.

⁴⁸ Asac-GIAC-800.

⁴⁹ On AC’s civic committees created for the parliamentary elections on April 18 1948, see Mario Casella, “Le origini dei Comitati Civici”, *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia* No. 2 (July-December 1986): 446-534, and by the same, *18 aprile 1948. La mobilitazione delle organizzazioni cattoliche* (Galatina, Lecce: Congedo, 1992).

⁵⁰ Acsi III-7-s.f.48

⁵¹ On the UISP founded in 1948, see Fabien Archambault, “Communisme et football: les possibilités d’un football populaire dans l’Italie républicaine”, *Sport et idéologie*.

⁵² “Miracolo a Magliano”, *Pattuglia* (the weekly publication of the *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana*) No. 8 (February 1951).

of the local CSI team, prohibited the *Associazione Sportiva UISP* to use their usual playing field.⁵³ It had been given to the communist militants by prince Aldobrandini in 1946 under condition that “it not be used for political purposes”⁵⁴ but actually this act had not been approved by the CONI. Nevertheless, in July the CSI organized its summer tournament there and despite their protests, the UISP players were not allowed to use it in their turn. The “objective of the [priest] was to force the youngsters who wanted to play football to join the Catholic Action. But the gambit didn’t always work. On the contrary, five good players who played in his team joined ours as a sign of protest. And we went to play at Ostia Lido instead. Thus the priest who wanted everything, ended up empty-handed [*un pugno di mosche in mano*]” according to the president of the UISP association at Ostia who was also the secretary of the local section of the PCI.⁵⁵

These examples show that Guareschi’s parable in the story of Don Camillo, rather than treating in a simplified or caricaturistic manner the political stake of sports activities, show in a schematic manner worth a paradigm, the behaviour and the principal means of the rural areas of the Emilia-Romagna just after the war.⁵⁶ In the village society in question, football thus crystallizes the ideological contest. The colour of the football shirts symbolizes that they were a part of opposite political views: “Red with a sickle, a hammer and a star nicely intertwined with a D” for the Dynamos and “white with a big B on the breast”⁵⁷ for the Braves. After eight months of intensive training on both sides, Don Camillo let the communist mayor know that in order to prove his sympathy for the most ignorant members of the village, he would “generously” let the team called “the Dynamos” play against his “Braves”. Facing this condescending tone Peppone lines up “the guys from the red team” at attention, back against the wall, and shouts at them: “You’re going to play against the priest’s team. You’d rather win or I’ll bash your faces! The Party orders it for the honour of the oppressed”. “We will win”, the players reply in chorus. In the same manner Don Camillo, while claiming not to “threaten them”, exhorts his

⁵³ *Archivio di Stato di Roma, fondo Direzione della Pubblica Sicurezza, serie Partiti Politici, busta III (Partito Comunista 1951), s.f.65 (Ostia)*. The provincial archives are full of police reports on the surveillance and repression of the opposition parties, in particular the PCI, and thus of their collateral sports organisations; notably during the “*scelbismo*” period, a name borrowed from the Minister of the Interior (from May 1947 to February 1954) and then Council President (from February 1954 to July 1955) Mario Scelba. On this “crusade” against the “fifth column” according to De Gasperi’s words, see Marco Barbanti, “Funzioni strategiche dell’anticomunismo nell’età del centrismo degasperiano 1948-1953”, *Italia contemporanea* No. 170 (March 1988): 39-69.

⁵⁴ “La storia di un campo sportivo”, *Pattuglia* No. 5 (3 February 1952).

⁵⁵ “La storia di un campo sportivo”.

⁵⁶ Giovanni Guareschi, *Mondo Piccolo “Don Camillo”* (1st edition 1948; Milan: Rizzoli, 1991). This book starts the *Don Camillo* series.

⁵⁷ Guareschi 142.

youngsters that the “honour of the parish”⁵⁸ is at their feet. The historian Maité Riou notes: “Local public life is organised according to the principle of an ideological duality and a doubling of the network of sports socialisation”.⁵⁹ Giovanni Guareschi manages to create a literary fiction that helps to explain the forms and rituals of sociability that accompany the different political strategies.

A comparative analysis of the number of members of the CSI and the UISP nevertheless reveals certain apocalyptic tendencies in the ecclesiastic hierarchy’s statements. Actually during the 1950s the number of members of the UISP never exceeded 70 000 and even though the football confrontation definitely took place it was limited to the regions where the PCI influence was strong and where its sports associations were established. In 1950 43% of the 66 385 football players and 46% of the 1 244 *società* were concentrated in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, the remainder in the Piedmont (14% and 15% respectively) in Liguria (8.3% and 11%) and in the South (11% and 3%).⁶⁰ On the other hand the CSI, starting from its original base in the “white” regions Lombardy and Veneto, managed to spread to the areas where the communist hold was well established, in particular in the Emilia.

The CSI conquered new territories starting from the biggest urban centres. The associations then gradually spread to medium-sized towns and then the small ones. In 1959 the process was completed in Lombardy⁶¹ and in Veneto where the rural areas had been reached; the same was occurring in Piedmont. In the Lazio the development was at an intermediary stage while in Liguria, in the Marche, in Umbria and in the South it had only just started – in particular in Abruzzi and in Calabria. The penetration of Emilia-Romagna in a hostile environment that no doubt stimulated the efforts, was spectacular: the Emilian committee was in second place following Lombardy, Reggio Emilia having played a central relay role (a real “bridge-head”) in this expansion. Well, it was precisely one of the villages of this region, Brescello, that inspired Guareschi... On the other hand Tuscany resisted and Lucca, a modest city by demographic standards of the region, remained its biggest committee.

⁵⁸ Guareschi.

⁵⁹ Maité Riou, “Engagements sportifs et vie politique dans l’Italie du nord de l’après-guerre dans les *Don Camillo* de Giovanni Guareschi (1908-1968)”, *Sport, relations sociales et action collective*, Actes du Colloque de Bordeaux October 14 and 15 1993 (Talence: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme d’Aquitaine, 1995) 301-313.

⁶⁰ *Pattuglia* No.42 (22 October 1950).

⁶¹ Nevertheless the CSI did not manage to federate the whole associative sports movement in Milan if you judge by the figures available in the Comune di Milano, *Il Assemblée dello sport milanese. Palazzo del turismo, 26-27 maggio, 18-19 novembre 1961* (Milan: Tipografia Tamburini, 1961), the spirit of independence of the powerful *Federazione degli Oratori Milanesi* and its hesitation towards the Rome’s attempts to centralise may be an explanation.

Regional and provincial committees	1949		1959	
	Sports unions	Members	Sports unions	Members
Lombardy	272	5767	711	43116
Bergame	75	1675	122	2645
Brescia	38	744	96	2771
Mantova	17	589	49	1730
Milan	114	2196	208	9076
Veneto	96	2942	309	9486
Padova	17	77	66	1748
Treviso	25	746	40	1476
Verona	11	1058	78	2212
Vicenza	26	648	34	858
Piedmont	84	2155	401	10016
Torino	60	1605	112	3731
Liguria	74	1092	162	3881
Genoa	51	797	105	3914
Trentino	31	363	78	1814
Trento	31	363	65	1698
Friuli	12	25	92	1945
Udine	12	25	80	2098
North	69,5%	72,5%	47,6%	57,1%
Lazio	51	1006	159	5755
Rome	49	973	131	3820
Emilia	58	984	447	15090
Bologna	2	31	33	1110
Modena	1	12	42	1085
Parma	6	85	31	860
Piacenza	12	227	25	762
Reggio Emilia	25	517	108	3432
Tuscany	31	506	227	4453
Florence	14	204	27	415
Livorno	6	117	12	116
Lucca	11	185	24	645
Marche	12	308	124	2919
Pesaro	12	308	32	623
Umbria	16	70	88	2234
Perugia	8	44	9	417
Terni	8	26	15	512
Centre	20,5%	17%	28,4%	24,7%
Campania	25	933	232	4330
Avellino	-	-	42	873
Benevento	-	-	22	494
Naples	11	578	70	1772
Salerno	-	-	19	422
Puglia	34	549	141	5567
Bari	-	-	25	821
Molfetta	-	-	51	2373
Calabria	6	114	42	727
Reggio Calabria	-	-	22	433
Sardinia	8	104	151	3940
Sicily	9	103	223	5807
Catania	-	-	30	762
Palermo	-	-	24	658
Siracusa	-	-	29	833
Abruzzi	-	-	63	1629
Campobasso	-	-	22	383
Lucany	-	-	27	412
South	10%	10,5%	24%	18,2%
Total	819	17021	3677	122961

Figure 1: Members and geographic distribution of the CSI football associations⁶²

⁶² Acsi, *fondo Tesseramento, busta 1*, s.f.3 and 9. It indicates by regional committee and in numerically declining order, the number of associations that play football and their members in 1949. In 1959 they are 88% of the *Unioni* and the football players are 78% of the members. There is also a list of the main provincial committees in alphabetical order.

But the hegemonic intentions of Gedda also found adversaries in the Catholic movement. The collateral⁶³ sports organisation of the DC, the *Centro nazionale Libertas*, founded in 1946 by Enrico Giammei, had been integrated in the structures of the CSI thanks to the popular success of its Christian Democratic football teams that had been created in Rome's suburbs since 1944⁶⁴. The *Libertas* teams participated in the CSI championships and the inscription went through its mediation. But from 1952 the Amintore Fanfani faction wanted to create a mass party more independent of the Holy See; the deputy Arrigo Paganelli was then nominated to head the *Libertas* that broke with the CSI. At that time it consisted of 500 sports associations with 9 000 members.⁶⁵ It organized its own *calcio*⁶⁶ championships and participated alone in the DC election campaign for the May 1953 elections. Its athletes were "the militants of the crossed shield [*lo scudo crociato*, the emblem of the DC] during the 12 months of the year. They carried the flag on their breasts and became a vector when bringing it onto the playing field in the manner of a poster"⁶⁷ – which sometimes involved a certain risk: On May 16, 1953, the *Libertas* players from Frascati, a village in the only Tuscany province (Lucca) that voted in majority for the Christian Democrats, were "savagely attacked by PCI militants for political reasons" during a football match at Livorno. Four of them had to be sent to hospital with multiple fractures.⁶⁸

The CSI management criticised these factions of "sectarian and Dossetian inspiration"⁶⁹ and went ahead with numerous exclusion procedures against "militants that had forgotten their Christian duty: to defend the Holy Father".⁷⁰ The mass demonstration organised at the Vatican on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the CSI in 1955⁷¹ took place in a climate of defiance vis-à-vis

⁶³ The *collateralismo* refers to the cloud of organisations that allow the presence of the political parties in the associative world whether it be for educational, playful or economic reasons. The militants generally joined on a personal basis. On this subject see Agokip Manoukian, ed., *La presenza sociale del PCI e della DC* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968).

⁶⁴ On the beginnings of *Libertas*, see Felice Fabrizio, *Storia dello sport in Italia. Dalle società ginnastiche all'associazionismo di massa* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1977) 141-142.

⁶⁵ Andrea Damilano, ed., *Atti e Documenti della Democrazia Cristiana (1943-1967)*, vol. I (Rome: Edizioni Cinque Lune, 1968) 177.

⁶⁶ According to Papa and Guido Panico, the *Libertas* football teams were rather few (thirty-four in 1951), in *Storia sociale del calcio in Italia. Dai campionati del dopoguerra alla Champions League (1945-2000)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000) 36.

⁶⁷ "Il III Convegno Nazionale della Libertas", *Libertas* No. 16 (1952).

⁶⁸ Archivio Centrale dello Stato, fondo Ministero dell'Interno, serie Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, D14-b107, No. 7 660.

⁶⁹ Acsi I-4-s.f.62. From 1944 to 1951 when Giuseppe Dossetti retired from politics, he was among other things, one of the leaders of one of the DC's factions considered as "the left wing" of the party that wanted a larger autonomy from the Vatican. See Paolo Pombeni, "Il "dossettismo" (1943-1951). Premessa ad una ricerca storica", *Nuova Rivista Storica* (1974): 79-132.

⁷⁰ Acsi I-4-s.f.69.

⁷¹ There is a detailed report about it in the *Osservatore romano* of 11 October 1955.

the *Libertas*, that had not sent any official representatives: the pope Pius XII flattered CSI's action outrageously, a sports organisation that "was principally recommended for Italian Catholics".

A football theology?

In this context football became more than propaedeutics to religious training. The editorial pages of the *Stadium*, published by the AC in the national magazine of the CSI since 1944, spread the theological concepts of intrinsically Christian sports and football.⁷² A lot of room was given to the numerous speeches by Pius XII who supplied the theological references of the Catholic sports ideology. On Whit Sunday, May 20, 1945, he made a speech that legitimised the spiritual and moral value of the Catholic sports action where he stressed that it was "an efficient antidote to flabbiness and comfortable life" because "it awoke the sense of order and taught the search and the control of oneself, the disregard for danger without boastfulness or faint-heartedness". Sports, an expression of vitality, would contribute to giving the *Azione Cattolica* militant the self-assurance and authority necessary to "stop and put down a blasphemy, an obscenity, a dishonesty by a glance, a word or a gesture in order to protect the youngest and the weakest against provocations or dubious attention".⁷³ Pius XII did not add much to the sports ideology that had already been developed by the Catholic world, but he stressed the offensive aspects and the confrontation with a civil society within the framework of the fight against communism during his pontificate.

But football was not only a means of confrontation: it became importantly, a way of filling out the religious training. In 1948 the catholic journalist Generoso Dattilo stated apropos of Valentino Mazzola, a member of the AC and the captain of *Torino* that had just won its fourth *scudetto*,⁷⁴ "you can also honour Christ by winning the championship".⁷⁵ Education through football was in perfect symbiosis with the cardinal principles of training where ethics and Catholic pedagogies promoted such values as obedience, submission, suppression of individuality and subordination to the Church's authority. Thus in a sermon 1947, the bishop of Prato, Pietro Fordelli, explained,

⁷² According to my calculations, 38% of the articles in *Stadium* between 1948 and 1952 were about football

⁷³ *Lo sport nell'augusta parola di Pio XII* (Rome: Centro Sportivo Italiano, 1957) 15.

⁷⁴ The Italian championship title.

⁷⁵ Generoso Dattilo, "Mazzola, campione della fede", *Stadium* No. 6 (June 1948): 4-5. There Dattilo used an expression coined by Gino Bartali. Stefano Pivato has shown how the Catholic press under Luigi Gedda's impetus, stirred the "christian" champions to take apart the fascist and later communist "idols": "Miti e modelli educativi: Gino Bartali", *Pio XII*, ed. Andrea Riccardi (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1984) 335-345.

Sunday, the day of the Lord must be sacred. First faith in Jesus and then in football. And football won't be less exciting but rather more beautiful and authentic if our youths play it after having approached Christ and been uplifted by his word and his love.⁷⁶

In 1956, the bishop of Lecco, Libero Tresaldi, had a *Preghiera del calciatore* (a football prayer) recited in his presence:

Oh Lord/Thou has given us strong and agile bodies/We thank Thee and offer
Thee the joy of our game/When we commit ourselves to victory in the field/
We also commit ourselves to conquer ourselves/We want to be loyal and
obedient, brave and humble/Pure and generous. That the Grace of the Lord be
always present in our undertaking/Amen.⁷⁷

In this Christian perspective, the football match was supposed to reproduce the structure of a hierarchical society where the subjects (the players) obeyed orders given by their superiors (the captain of the team). It was a question of suppressing the initiative spirit of the player and to exalt the pleasure of submission to the captain's authority. The educational profile of football in its Catholic version was a logical result of the theoretical principles of an education of an authoritative and repressive character. Football actually became the metaphor of a society led by the Church and its ministers who dominated its subordinate and faithful subjects: "Submission to authority is the first lesson you learn when playing football" Aldo Notario wrote in *Stadium*⁷⁸.

Thus, football was a successful instrument of political and religious domination for the Church in post-war Italy. In his note dated October 29 1947, John Ward, an employee at the British Embassy, commented the policies of the PCI and the DC in the following manner:

The two parties make great efforts to get the support of the young population. While the communists put all their money in the construction of ball rooms for the people, beauty contests and other initiatives that bear a stamp of Hollywood, the Christian Democrats have been more clever by extending their hegemony over the sports world, in particular that of football.⁷⁹

We have identified the mediators from the Pope to the parish priests via the leaders of the *Azione cattolica* and a principal place of mediation, the oratory. The Catholic elite tried to integrate the oratory in a highly hierarchical national structure that in turn served the global project of restoring a Christian society. The practice of *calcio* was closely related to this place (to the point where *calcio d'oratorio* became a manner of speech in the daily language) but particularly at its height in the 1940s and 50s. It went so far that Nanni Moretti in *La Messa è finita* in 1979 used the metaphor of football to illustrate the de-

⁷⁶ Acsi, V-E-155, *CSI Prato, 1946-1986 40'anni di storia* (Prato: CSI Prato, 1986) 26.

⁷⁷ Acsi, V-G-190, CSI Lecco. Da 35 anni al servizio dei giovani, nella Chiesa e nella comunità civile (Lecco: CSI Lecco, 1985) 18.

⁷⁸ Aldo Notario, "Editoriale", *Stadium* No. 1 (1953).

⁷⁹ Cited by Paul Ginsborg, *Storia dell'Italia del dopoguerra ad oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989) 154.

christianisation: The young priest who had just arrived from the seminary settles into an empty and abandoned Roman parish; the noise of children playing football in the dilapidated oratory wakes him from his nap. He joins them and wants to play with them and tries a few dribbles but they push him over, trample him and continue their game... At the end of the seventies the young Italians did not need an *oratorio* any more to kick a ball.