

## 7 Formation of the Fascist Doctrine

### MUSSOLINI'S EVOLUTION TO 1925

Mussolini and his Fascist followers have been accused of inconsistency. The charge is warranted. Yet, in a sense, Mussolini's evolution was quite consistent, but only from the standpoint of his having remained true to the demands of a strong personality with an over-developed ego. These demands might require the taking at various times of positions which, by any other standards, would involve blatant contradictions. Since the Fascist movement has been so closely identified with its founder and leader, it will be useful to mention briefly the high points of Mussolini's career.

Mussolini was born in 1883. Like Hitler, he came from the lower middle class and he suffered hardships in his youth. But, unlike Hitler, he was enough of a rationalist to look to economics for an explanation of his own difficulties and those of his generation. He became a socialist and rose to a position of leadership in the Italian Socialist Party. In 1912, he became a member of the executive committee of the party and editor of the party organ, *Avanti*. In 1915, however, when the socialists refused to support the war, he severed connections with them. With money—given him, according to one version, by Frenchmen desirous of bringing Italy into the war—he founded the newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, which remained his mouth-piece to the end.

Mussolini participated in the war until he was discharged from the army in 1917, when he returned to his newspaper work. He did not develop a definite political platform until 1919, when he evolved a not too precise blend of his earlier socialism with his more recently acquired nationalism. He still lacked a suitable policy toward the Catholic Church. In keeping with his fusion of traditionally antagonistic elements, his approach to established differences of outlook was iconoclastic. As Nietzsche and Sorel had justified violence, he eulogized war and brutality and scoffed at cultural traditions. Before the Fascist Party was founded on March 23, 1919, and for years thereafter, Mussolini was close to the Futurists who, under the

leadership of Marinetti, assailed every value that was even slightly rooted in tradition.<sup>1</sup> During this period Mussolini still opposed the monarchy and spoke in favor of a republican form of government devoid of church influence.

Typical of the flexibility of the Fascist mind was Mussolini's statement of his opportunism which he has always defended as a basic Fascist principle:

Fascism was not the nursling of a doctrine worked out beforehand with detailed elaboration; it was born of the need for action and it was itself from the beginning practical rather than theoretical.<sup>2</sup>

Mussolini's break with his fellow socialists in 1915 is an illustration of this opportunism. While still claiming he was a socialist, he began to seek the support of the middle and upper classes. Fascist rowdies, organized as "squads," began to break up socialist meetings.<sup>3</sup> The propertied classes, frightened by such episodes as the occupation of the factories in 1920, approved of these tactics, and the wealthy began to subsidize the Fascist movement. For the first time, the Fascists gained thirty-five seats in parliament at the elections of 1921.

The inability of parties to organize stability, reflected in a succession of increasingly weak governments and in a general loss of faith in the value of parliamentary institutions, was responsible for Mussolini being called upon to form a government on the occasion of the relatively innocuous episode of the "march on Rome" in October, 1922. With this event began the second period of Fascism, which lasted until 1925.

This period was characterized by opportunistic maneuvering. At first, many concessions had to be made; a number of cabinet posts were held by non-Fascists and the Fascists themselves constituted but a small minority in the Chamber of Deputies. Furthermore, the good will of the capitalists was needed for the financial support of the party and they could not yet be safely antagonized.

<sup>1</sup> Futurism is a revolutionary movement in art. It repudiates tradition and extols the "esthetic" qualities of the machine. It developed in Italy about 1910 and was led by F. T. Marinetti.

<sup>2</sup> Benito Mussolini, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, authorized translation by Jane Soames, The Hogarth Press, London, 1933, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> See below, p. 161.

Mussolini meanwhile recognized the desirability of producing a philosophic doctrine for Fascism. In 1921 he had written to a friend: "If Fascism does not want to die, or, worse still, to commit suicide, it must now supply itself with a doctrine."<sup>1</sup> But so anxious was he not to be tied down too rigidly by such a doctrine that he added: "Yet this shall not, and must not, be a robe of Nessus, clinging to us for all eternity, for tomorrow is something mysterious and unforeseen. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The philosophical construction of such a theory took place during the first years of the third period of Fascism which lasted from 1925 until 1936. During these years, Fascism gave up its last few compromising features and its caution. It became politically stabilized and its totalitarian tendency began to emerge. Significant of the change, the relations between Mussolini and Marinetti were severed; the Charter of Labor<sup>3</sup> was proclaimed in 1927; a thorough internal reform purged the government and all stages of local administration of nonconformists. The corporations came into existence in 1934, following the creation of a Ministry of Corporations as early as 1926.<sup>4</sup>

When Mussolini decided upon the creation of a Fascist doctrine, his choice for the work fell upon his friend, Giovanni Gentile. Gentile was Italy's foremost philosopher of idealism who, as minister of education from 1922 to 1924, gave Italy its first Fascist school system. Alfredo Rocco, minister of justice, was another whose writings helped to clarify the spirit of Fascism. In addition, Mussolini himself did some teaching on the subject.

#### GENTILE AND ROCCO: 1925-1935

Gentile and Rocco represent respectively the more moderate and more radical types of Fascist intelligentsia. Gentile was too scholarly to be able to maintain his influence for long. Rocco, a rabid and cynical nationalist, distrusted human beings even more than did Gentile. Between them, they provided Mussolini with the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by H. Arthur Steiner, *Government in Fascist Italy*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1938, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 156-157.

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp. 158 ff.

spiritual and intellectual bases for his later writings and statements.<sup>1</sup>

Gentile began to link the Fascist movement to the idealism of the Risorgimento. Condemning the scientific and economic materialism into which, he claimed, the Italian state had fallen after its unification, he contended that the action of the Fascist squads had initiated a new period that would restore Italy. For him, the nature of Fascism was threefold. First, the conception that totalitarianism was not a political device but symbolized "the whole will and feeling of the nation."<sup>2</sup> Second, "Fascism is not a philosophy. Much less is it a religion. It is not even a political theory which may be stated in a series of formulac."<sup>3</sup> Fascism, according to Gentile, was a rigorous application of Mazzini's "Thought and Action." The Duce formulated his views and executed them at the same time. This meant that Fascism was anti-intellectual, and Gentile did not hesitate to emphasize the fact. He believed that intellectualism is the "divorce of thought from action." Third, according to Gentile's interpretation, Fascism was not merely a political system. It was more, for it was "politics" in the all-embracing Aristotelian sense. Its focal point is the national state. "Both Fascism and nationalism regard the state as the foundation of all rights and the source of all values in the individuals composing it."<sup>4</sup> But Fascism transcended by far the conception of nationalism since it regarded "the state (as) a wholly spiritual creation."<sup>5</sup> Instead of class rule found in a non-Fascist national state, the Fascist state was a "people's state and, as such, the democratic state *par excellence*. The relationship between state and citizen . . . is accordingly so intimate that the state exists only as, and in so far as, the citizen causes it to exist. . . . Hence the enormous task which Fascism sets itself in trying to bring the whole mass of the people, beginning with the little children, inside the fold of the Party."<sup>6</sup> Gentile accepted Hegel's meta-

<sup>1</sup> Their writings appear, in condensed form, in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Gentile, "The Philosophic Basis of Fascism," *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1928.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Gentile, *loc. cit.* For Aristotle, "politics" meant the sum total of social and political life.

<sup>5</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

physical definition of the state and its spirit. Just as men are part of the *Weltgeist* or *Volksgeist*, so citizens are part of the state. Mussolini himself expressed this required surrender of the individual when he wrote: "All in the state and for the state; nothing outside the state and nothing against the state."

The peculiar use of the words "freedom" and "democracy" by the Fascist philosophers merits special attention. Gentile stated that Fascism was democracy *par excellence* because "freedom can only exist in the state, and the state means authority," while freedom, in liberal countries, meant "action against the state." So, to reach this goal of a population unified in the ideals of the state and no longer interested in the problems of their own existence, a new mentality must be produced. Instead of scientific materialism, spiritual idealism must be planted in the hearts of men, women, and children.

Alfredo Rocco was less spiritual and more sociological in his definition of Fascism. Being a political animal, man, he said, could not help living in social groups which were all part of the human species. If the human species wanted to survive and develop toward progress, it must consider successive generations and not just any contemporary "collection of individuals." To think in terms of individuals was atomistic and mechanistic. Against such a conception of a "society for the individual," Fascism wanted the individual to think in terms of society. "For liberalism, the individual is the end and society the means; . . . for Fascism, society is the end, individuals the means, and its [Fascism's] whole life consists in using individuals as instruments for its social ends."<sup>1</sup>

Freedom was permissible so long as the citizen used it in the interest of the state. The state was absolute and groups of individuals existed only in relation to the state. Having a will and personality, the Fascist state was a *Stato Etico* (ethical state). Citizens acting in the interest of the state could not help acting ethically right. What were the peculiar ethics of the Fascist state? Mussolini answered the question by saying that "Fascism rejects the doctrine of materialism and any doctrine which attempts to explain the intricate history of

<sup>1</sup> Alfredo Rocco, "The Political Doctrine of Fascism," International Conciliation Pamphlet 223, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1926.

human societies from the narrow and exclusive standpoint of material interests.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast, “Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and heroism”<sup>2</sup> and not in actions influenced by economic motives.

Under such conditions, the Darwinist theory of permanent strife was reinterpreted and stressed. Fascism “believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace.”<sup>3</sup> This, then, was the ethics of the Fascist state: War is neither good nor evil but an experience of the race; it stimulates heroism and courage; without wars there would be no competition, only retrogression and decay. “To die or to suffer for such a triumph is not to die or to suffer at all, it is to live forever.”<sup>4</sup> The life of the individual had little value under the circumstances; only the life of the state was valuable. Life consisted of a series of sacrifices for the state. One might compare the enduring of privations for the state with the punishments which medieval saints inflicted upon themselves for the sake of their devotion to God. The doctrine became a religion even though Mussolini and his followers denied it.

*FASCISM FROM 1936 TO 1940*

The last period of the development of Fascism started in 1936, after the conclusion of a political, economic, and cultural treaty with National Socialism. The formation of the Axis required the introduction of some new features into Fascism in order to permit the coordination of all political and spiritual forces between the new allies. During this period, the Chamber of Deputies voted itself out of existence, in 1938. Parliamentary government as such had ceased to function as early as December, 1925, when the chamber had to give up its legislative responsibilities to the cabinet which shared them with the Fascist Grand Council. Furthermore, as a necessary concession to Germany, in 1938 Italy adopted the racial policy of the National Socialists, thereby completely reversing the Duce's earlier position in regard to the racial myth. Mussolini had emphasized that there were no pure races left, that cross-

<sup>1</sup> Palmieri, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Mussolini, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Palmieri, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

ing of races had often produced excellent results, and that race is not a reality but a "feeling." "National pride has no need of the delirium of race."<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Semitism was introduced as a matter of political expediency. A country collaborating with Germany had to ostracize and persecute Jews and "non-Aryans" for the sake of totalitarian alignment. No one could say that the Italians are a pure race. They are, on the contrary, a good example of an intermingling of many races from many lands, including non-European strains bordering the Mediterranean Sea. In the course of history, northern and southern European, Jewish, and Near-Eastern elements produced what today is the Italian people. However, anti-Semitism having become the official policy of the Fascist government, publicized in the press, there began to appear in Italy some of the same vagaries that have characterized the racial policy of the Nazis. The Italian people as a whole did not take with enthusiasm to Mussolini's reversal of his race policy, which may explain why its carrying out was relatively milder than in Germany.

In addition, during this last period of Fascism, the idea of a great rejuvenated Roman empire was taken up in earnest. The idea was not an invention of Fascism; the memory of Rome had never died in Italy. But the pre-Fascist governments of Italy had pursued for the most part a policy which, devoted to the national interest as it was, and playing with fair skill and success the game of power politics, had nevertheless been a policy of limited aims, rooted in a sound estimate of the balance between ends and means, that is, in a correct appraisal of the real power and resources of Italy.

Playing on the chord of national pride, anxious to produce some spectacular achievement, and taking advantage of the confused international situation which followed the resurgence of Germany, Mussolini finally embarked upon the Ethiopian adventure. The ease of his conquest and the successful defiance of the half-hearted sanctions imposed by the League, gave the regime a considerable, if temporary, measure of popularity at home. As might be expected, Italian Fascism, inextricably tied to the Nazi chariot, reached the

<sup>1</sup> Emil Ludwig, *Conversations with Mussolini*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1933, pp. 69-70.

height of its totalitarian character when it entered the Second World War on Germany's side. Easy victory seemed within reach. But the initial success was destined to be short-lived. Fascist opportunism had driven Italy into the war; it now lost Ethiopia and Lybia; in fact, the whole Italian colonial empire was soon at the mercy of the Allies.

Soon after the Allied forces had begun to invade and occupy Sicily and a part of southern Italy, Benito Mussolini, creator of Fascism and dictator of Italy, "resigned" on July 25, 1943. Three days later the Fascist party, for twenty years all-powerful in Italy, was dissolved by a new Italian government headed by Marshal Badoglio. Fascist rule in Italy had collapsed under the impact of the Anglo-American offensive.

Fascism, created by the sword, perished by the sword. But the ideas it proclaimed are far from dead. They live on in various forms and disguises. Fascist-inspired governmental organization, economy, and outlook have not been eliminated through Fascist collapse in Italy. Their potential danger to society remains. For this reason, the study of Fascism must by no means cease. On the contrary, it must be continued and intensified wherever democracy is regarded as the only tolerable way of life and the only desirable approach to a better future.

#### *THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FASCIST DOCTRINE*

At the end of twenty years of evolution, the Fascist doctrine could have been formulated broadly in the following terms: "The State, as conceived and realized by Fascism, is a spiritual and ethical entity for securing the political, juridical, and economic organization of the nation, an organization which, in its origins and growth, is a manifestation of the spirit."<sup>1</sup> The state is all-important. It alone can be free. Man, being a social animal, can live only in groups. Together these groups form society. Without authority society cannot develop and be led toward progress and prosperity. Consequently, the principle of authority is a divine principle. If the state tolerated any higher authority, it would be God. However, God is not permitted to interfere in the business of the totalitarian state; he becomes a mere figurehead. The highest form of

<sup>1</sup> Mussolini, speech of March 10, 1929, quoted by Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 27.



the state is the national state. It is "not only the present, it is also the past, and above all, the future."<sup>1</sup> This means that the national state is a historical concept and that its progress from the past to the future and not the well-being of one particular generation must be considered when policies are devised. Adhering to this belief, the leaders of the national state endeavor further to strengthen national unity and consciousness with spiritual forces.

The state, according to Fascism, creates its own morality and is not bound by any conventional ethics. The introduction of racialism was one aspect of its basic opportunism; the attacks against Ethiopia, Greece, and France, another. "Fascism is above all action and sentiment," said Rocco. The state will adapt itself to circumstances. Outer events and not inner aims are the forces that drive the Fascist state to its destiny. Its historic mission is to end the era which was initiated by the French Revolution and to replace it with the new "Roman Era"—even though this contradicts Mussolini's earlier declaration that Fascism was no export article.

The individual citizen has a reason for existence only if he is consciously and subconsciously a part of the state. Actions of individuals must be subordinated to the general good. It is the leaders of the state who determine what is good or not. The individual must not even try to find a place for himself in society; it is the business of the state to put him where the leaders decide. Since a parliamentary state cannot take care of him, the solution lies in the corporate state which is part of the Fascist ideology. The Fascist individual should find his happiness in the "happiness" of the state. Such happiness is not of a hedonistic nature. The Fascist, like the ancient Roman, is not interested in leading an easy and pleasurable life. He must be "austere, serious, and religious," ever aware of his moral responsibilities and spiritual tasks. Liberty, as understood in democratic countries, Fascists reject as dangerous for the state. No individual, they say, should be "superior to the state." The Kantian interpretation of freedom<sup>2</sup> is taken over and sharpened by Palmieri who states poetically that "in the Fascist conception, to be free means to be no more a slave of one's own passions, ambitions, and desires . . . to will what is true and good and just . . . in

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 44-45.

other words, to realize here in this world the true mission of man.”<sup>1</sup>

Who, then, was called upon to rule a people so “austere” and war-minded as Fascist Italians? The leader and his party. As in other totalitarian countries, there was only one party in Italy which was completely identified with the state. The position of the party was officially recognized when the Fascist Grand Council was elevated in 1929 to the rank of a state institution, and when the secretary of the party was made an *ex officio* member of the Council of Ministers in 1937. The civil service became coordinated in the years after 1925.

The Duce’s rule was absolute. While formally his position might appear less powerful than Hitler’s, since the crown was retained, his capacity of president of the Grand Council and Head of the Government, responsible to the king alone, made him in law as well as in fact the uncontested ruler of Italy.

Similarly, the Fascist party, as has often been pointed out by Italians, was not a party in the traditional sense but a legalized organ of the state. Thus it may be said that the members of the party hierarchy were at the same time state officials.

At the very center of the Fascist state the system of corporations<sup>2</sup> played a capital role. But before this most important socioeconomic aspect of Fascism is discussed, the relationship between Fascism and the Catholic Church should be surveyed briefly.

#### THE FASCIST STATE AND THE CHURCH

Mussolini at one time was an avowed atheist. In 1904, during his sojourn in Lausanne, he made a speech entitled “Man and Divinity.” He formulated his thesis in the following words: “God does not exist. Religion is absurd in science, immoral in practice, and a malady in man.”<sup>3</sup> However, when he thought that the time had come to break with his earlier type of radicalism he tried to come to terms with the church. While he himself did not become a good Catholic, he made peace with the church by concluding the Lateran Treaty in 1929. By this agreement, the Church of Rome and the Fascist state recognized each other, thus ending the dispute

<sup>1</sup> Palmieri, *op. cit.* p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 158 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Speech of March 26, 1904, first published by the International Library of Rationalist Propaganda in the same year; reprinted by *L’Idée Libre*, February, 1929.

between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See that had lasted since 1871. The Fascists acknowledged the sovereignty of the Papal State, Vatican City, and its right to maintain diplomatic representatives. A concordat made the Catholic religion the state religion to be taught in all schools. The Fascist government agreed to pay to the Vatican 750,000,000 lire in cash and 1,000,000,000 lire in government bonds in final settlement of all outstanding obligations. The Fascist state was apparently to be a Catholic state.

But this was neither a retreat of Fascism nor a restoration of the ancien-regime type of "law and order." Certainly Mussolini was anxious to secure at home and before the outside world the sanction of respectability. The maneuver was very successful since there developed a widespread tendency abroad to look upon "Catholic Fascism" as a desirable state of conservatism.

Yet the Lateran Treaty had two aspects overlooked by those who believed that it guaranteed a moderate development of Fascism which would serve as a splendid bulwark against the tide of Bolshevism. The first was the fact that the Catholic Church, under Pope Pius XI, officially recognized the Fascist regime. Pope Pius XI had not only stated that Mussolini was "a man sent by Providence" but also that Mussolini was a man who, like himself, did not believe, as the pope expressed it, in the "ugly fetishes of liberalism." Pius XI had much occasion, in subsequent years, to regret his readiness to deal with the Fascists. He loathed the introduction of racial policy so contrary to the very spirit of the Catholic Church. In September, 1938, he remarked to a group of Belgian pilgrims:

*Sacrificium Patriarchae Abrahae.* Mark well that Abraham is called our Patriarch, our ancestor. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the thought and sublime reality expressed in his text. It is an antipathetic movement. We Christians have nothing to do with it. Through Christ and in Christ we are of Abraham's spiritual descent. No! It is impossible for Christians to take part in anti-Semitism. . . . Anti-Semitism is intolerable. Spiritually, we are Semites.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless the church had recognized and approved the existence of the ultranational Fascist state and thereby put itself, by

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by *News from Belgium*, Vol. II, No. 31, August 1, 1942, edited by the Belgian Information Center, New York

implication, in the position of having given its moral sanction to Fascism.

The second aspect, also detrimental to the church, was the fact that Mussolini's interpretation of the treaty did not quite correspond to the Vatican's view. For Mussolini soon proceeded to state that "the Catholic religion has a pre-eminent position in Italy, but other religions must neither be persecuted nor otherwise interfered with."<sup>1</sup>

The Fascist claim that the state is infallible and the contention of the church that it is the sole possessor of truth and guide to its interpretation made a conflict between the two almost inevitable. Very soon after its conclusion, in February, 1929, it appeared that the treaty in itself was not enough to dispose of the antagonism between the church and a state which sought to exercise its control over all aspects of the citizen's activity. The conflict broke out over the alleged activity of the Catholic Action.<sup>2</sup> The Fascists resorted for a time to the familiar tactics of the squads and, in May, 1930, on the plea of political activity in violation of the concordat, Mussolini ordered the dissolution of Catholic Action societies.

This was only the beginning. The church had many reasons to be dissatisfied with the Fascist interpretation of the concordat. In this particular case, the pope countered by issuing an encyclical about Catholic education, inevitably one of the sharpest points of difference. The reply came from the secretary general of the party, Augusto Turati, who stated that the totalitarian character of Italian education should be stressed even more.

Again a compromise was reached when Turati visited the pope. In a "second concordat" with the church, the Fascist government apparently yielded by granting the Catholic Action organizations the right to spread religious and moral propaganda which in no way opposed the Fascist regime. When the Catholic organizations used the new breathing spell to rally and to divide their members into "professional groups" for the discussion of various vocational problems, the Fascists denounced this action as hostile to the basic laws of the state. This time the church was unable to avoid the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Carlo Sforza, *Neither Liberty nor Bread*, edited by Frances Keene, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1940, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> An organization founded in 1922 by Pius XI to coordinate the activity of Catholic societies.

suppression of Catholic youth associations in May, 1931. To no avail did the Holy See protest against this measure which it regarded as illegal.

The formation of the Axis in 1936 weakened further the significance of the concordat. The church realized that the degree of reverence of the Fascist state for the authority of the Holy See depended wholly on the political "necessities" of the moment. This state of affairs was quite to be expected for the total state cannot, by its very nature, tolerate any organization whose political and spiritual power may interfere with its own. The severance of the church from the state was easier in Germany where Catholicism has regional influence only and Protestant Prussia carries great weight in the formation of policy; the Protestant Church is part of the state and without political influence unless supported by it.

The Catholic Church and the Italian state, as the result of the formal agreements between them, could not help but become closely associated with each other in the public mind. To that extent the Latcran Treaty and the Concordat do not represent a fair *quid pro quo*. The Fascist state was able to present itself as enjoying the sanction of the church, both toward the outside world and before its own people, while in exchange it yielded nothing of its own principles and characteristics, fundamentally inimical to the Christian outlook. While the church chose not to use the opportunity of making a clean break with Fascism, there is little reason to believe that the more rabid pagan tendencies of Fascism, represented by such exponents as Roberto Farinacci, made a deep impression in Italy.