

# Becoming a saint in politics



Victoria Martin. October 2018

# An Oxymoron?

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men”

Lord Acton, 1887

# Pius XI: Political charity

- “Nell’ambito della politica, che riguarda gli interessi della società intera (...) è il campo più vasto della carità, della carità politica di cui si può dire che nessun altro le è superiore salvo quello della religione”
- “The political arena, which regards the interests of the whole society (...) is the biggest field of charity, of **political charity**, of which it can be said that there is no higher one except that of religion”

*Allocution to the directors of the Federation of Italian Catholic University Students” 18  
December 1927*

# Christian Politicians...



**Not all of them are in the process of being beatified...**

# Beatification/Canonisation

The Church doesn't 'make' saints, but 'declares' the sanctity of some remarkable persons

## **Change of perspective**

Mons. Bernard Ardura (Schuman's postulator): not the success, but the coherence of their faith all through their lives. So there are many unknown saints who failed in human terms

# Not one model

## They had in common

- **Bordering regions, multiple identities & languages**
- **Christian upbringing and youth social engagement – A bishop as mentor (Benzler & Endrici)**
- **Politics understood as service, a personal sacrifice**
- **Sense of humour and friendship**
- **Responsibility towards the others, and to future generations – contact with the young**
- **Christian Democrats open to work with others**

# Not one model

## ROBERT SCHUMAN

- Celibate
- Shy, would have preferred to live in a monastery
- Was an independent member in the political parties
- Did not like the Word “Christian” in a political party

## ALCIDE DE GASPERI

- Married, 4 daughters
- Very open and passionate, passion for politics
- Was a strong leader and founder of PPT and DC
- Called his party “Democrazia Cristiana”

# Youth

- *Upbringing - Mother*
- *Unitas*
- Bishop Willibrord Benzler – *St. Thomas & Social Doctrines Encyclicals*



# Public engagement, a vocation

- “Am I wrong in thinking that you are considering the priesthood, and you think that it is the only practicable way for you? Dare I add that I have a different opinion? In our society the lay apostolate is needed urgently, and I cannot imagine a better apostle than you, honestly... You will remain secular because that way it will be easier for you to do good, being that your only concern. I am categorical, right? I just think that I can see to the bottom of some hearts and I believe that holy saints in the future will be saints dressed in suits.” *(Henri Eschbach, sept. 1911)*

# Vocation

- He is asked to engage in politics in 1918 to contribute to the transition based on: his good technical knowledge of French and German law; trusted by both communities; known for his honesty
- First in the city hall, and he tells his friend: “Politics is a great lady of dubious reputation who often endangers her friends”

# Successes and mistakes

- Concordat - Defended religious education for all, in cooperation with Jews and Protestants
- WWII – Refugees
- June 1940 – he stays as minister with the first government of Pétain. On 10 July 1940 he votes in favour of granting all powers to Pétain
- Back in Metz he was arrested by the Gestapo, imprisoned and then he escaped
- After the war, in 1994, he is accused of “national indignity” for having collaborated

# Christian at heart, not a label

- After WWII Christian Democrats held secret meetings in Geneva: *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* (Robert Bichet, Georges Bidault). Adenauer & De Gasperi
- Ardura: “Schuman never preached – except in his book *For Europe* at the end of his life – but he acted as a Christian. I can’t see him saying ‘We must reach out to Germany because we are Christians’, but because it is the only way to achieve peace .”

# Open to all

- Briefly in government, with super high inflation and constant strikes. Very tough, and personal attacks – “boche”
- Open to work with all – Mitterrand was his minister
- Adhered to the values of the Republic: Jacques Maritain, Marc Sangnier and the “ralliement”, as opposed to *Action Française* and Catholic monarchists.

## André Philip (Socialist minister)

“What first struck me about him was how his interior life shone forth; he was [...] a dedicated man without personal desires, without ambition, of a total sincerity and intellectual honesty, who only sought to serve where he felt the call to serve. By tradition he was conservative, hostile to innovations, by temperament he was peaceful, shy and hesitant. Often he hedged, delayed his decision, tried to finesse with the call he felt in the depth of his conscience. Then, when there was nothing else to do and he was sure of what his interior voice was demanding of him, he would brusquely take the most courageous initiatives and push them to their logical conclusion, unmoved by critics, attacks or threats.”

# Other sources

- Always Saint Thomas & Popes' teachings
- Peace: Maurice Blondel (*Philosophie de la paix*, 1939). Philosophy of action, theory of will.
- Jacques Maritain and Henri Bergson: Evangelical roots of democracy
- Friends with Romano Guardini and Hendrik Brugmans

# A “Vatican Europe”

“A Vatican Europe is a myth. The Europe that we envisage is secular both in the ideas on which it is based and by those who put them in practice. They take neither inspiration nor instruction from the Holy See. At the same time Christians have played a significant, sometimes leading, role in the creation of the European institutions. There is a sort of predisposition, a coinciding of concerns, which makes Christians open to European ideas. But they have never sought a sort of monopoly nor conceived some clerical or theocratic ulterior motive; besides, that would be completely utopian”

# Last three years

- He was ill and forgotten: 1959 diagnosed with cerebral sclerosis. In 1961 he has an accident and since then remains in bed
- 1963: Adenauer receives De Gaulle in Bonn, before the Elysée Treaties. Adenauer wrote to Schuman
- Humility of his book, *For Europe*

# Audacity and serenity

'We are all instruments -- however imperfect-- of a Providence who uses them to accomplish grand designs which surpass us. This certainty obliges us to a great deal of modesty but also confers on us a serenity that our own personal experiences would not justify if we consider them from a purely human point of view.'

*Letter to Robert Rocheford, friend and biographer, in 1942*

# Alcide De Gasperi



# Youth

- Poor family in Trentino-Alto Adige (Austro-hungarian Empire at the time)
- University in Vienna – Social engagement & cooperatives
- MP in Vienna – People's Party (PPT)
- After WWI, becomes an Italian citizen and politician

# Politics as passion & mission

- Cicero, *De Re Publica*

“There is nothing in which human virtue approaches the divine more closely than in the founding of new states and cities or the preservation of existing ones.”

De Gasperi's comment on this quote:

“By this he meant that there is no more serious task and no greater and higher responsibility than that of dealing, in leading positions, with the politics of states.”

# Politics as passion & mission

“ I felt at that time and I feel today, although my perception is a Christian one, what the ancients felt: governing a state creates an intimate link with God, our Father, and creates an immediate responsibility towards the people; but towards the people as bearer of the divine will by which we are ruled”

# Sharing his love/passion with his wife Francesca

- “Francesca io non voglio essere più solo innanzi a Lui [...] vieni io ti voglio con me e che mi segua nella stessa attrazione come verso un abisso di luce...”
- When he proposed, he asked her to share his vocation and live in poverty, because he intended to be an honest politician

# Lights and shadows

- He took part in the first government of Mussolini
- The long dark night. 1926 he resigned: “I hope to God that my sacrifice helps to save the fruits of so many years of work! You can imagine that the pill was very bitter. Leaving like this, after twenty years, is not at all agreeable and I am not without concerns for my future.” *(to Sturzo)*

# Always in God

- He meditated and wrote comments on Saint Augustine, Saint Paul's letters and the *Imitation of Christ*.
- He wrote: “Forgive me Lord, as I take Your prayer with me in my work. It permeates everything that I do, I pray to You in my work and in all of myself that I give”.

# Always in God

- His daughter, Lucia, spiritual guidance (example of Moses' loneliness)
- “Pray to your Jesus to have mercy on me and to make Him understand that without that Presence I would not have the courage and would not be able to bear the great burden which I have taken on” (during a government crisis in 1951)

# Working with all

“Leaving aside the major and fundamental ideals and from which the various parties’ manifestos draw their inspiration, everything in politics is relative, and it would be absurd to rule out cooperation with such and such a Party, when that cooperation could in some way serve the supreme interests of the country which are the direct purpose of politics.” (1922)

# Conscience & responsibility

- Catholic Action and the local elections in 1952  
'Please explain my argument [to the Pope] as frankly as possible:
  - 1) If the Holy Father will consider it, so much the better.
  - 2) If the Holy Father - for His own reasons - does not find it convincing, but leaves me free to choose, I shall take the necessary action, as I am convinced that my argument is in keeping with the events of history, and certain that I am acting in the best interests of Italy and the Church.

# Conscience & responsibility

3) If the Holy Father decides otherwise, I shall in that case retire from political life. I am a Christian, I am nearing the end of my days and I shall never act against the express wishes of the Holy Father. [...] I shall retire from political life as I cannot in all conscience take political action that I consider to be damaging for my homeland and for the Church. In such a case others will replace me”.

# Faith + expertise

“There is no doubt that our support in matters connected with the Church is full and sincere. This is also true of the moral and social guidelines set out in papal documents which have daily nurtured and formed our vocation for public life. [...] Virtue and faith are not enough, however, for our work in the social and political arena; we need to create and nurture an instrument in keeping with the times: the Party, that is to say a political organisation which has a manifesto, its own methods, independent responsibility and is democratically financed and run.”

# Passion for Europe

- The most ardent defender of federalism
- “The Schuman Declaration made the human ideal of bringing people together more concrete. Ut unum sint’.”
- Speeches: Europe is already a cultural unity (Antiquity+Christianity, dignity of the human person and rule of law).
- The spiritual elements are united, now we must unite the material elements

# Final days

- “The EDC is the thorn in my side”
- “I have done all I could and my conscience is at peace”
- Prayer of the good death with his wife and three daughters (except Lucia)

# Conclusion

“Inspired” politicians

Enthusiastic = filled with God