

Fascism and Catholicism: rivals or collaborators?

SOURCE 10.1 Pope Pius XI on Benito Mussolini, 1929

He is a man sent by providence. He has brought God back to Italy, and Italy back to God.

FOCUS ROUTE

As you read through Chapter 10, make notes under these headings:

- Why did Mussolini want the support of the Catholic Church?
- How did Mussolini win that support?
- Evidence that the Concordat with the Catholic Church was a success for Mussolini.

What was the role of the Catholic Church in Italy? Although the overwhelming majority of Italians claimed to be Catholic (over 90 per cent), their actual level of commitment varied. In the 1930s it is estimated that only five to ten per cent of Italians took communion regularly; another 20 per cent attended church at least every other Sunday; and a further 50 per cent considered themselves good Catholics! The Church was deeply involved in most aspects of Italian life, influencing everything from high culture to popular customs and morality. It controlled a strong network of educational, welfare and financial institutions. The Church was especially influential in the countryside, where peasant communities relied on their priests for news and views of outside events.

At first glance, the fulsome praise in Source 10.1 by the leader of the Catholic Church for Mussolini looks like a case of mistaken identity! For Mussolini was a former revolutionary socialist, who had described religion as a 'malaise of the brain', who remained an ATHEIST throughout his life, and led a movement which used violence to achieve and maintain power, and glorified war.

However, Pius XI knew what he was saying. Mussolini realised the importance of the Church, and was concerned to secure its support. So it was Mussolini who settled the Church-state quarrel that had plagued the kingdom of Italy since its creation. For many Italians, this was the greatest achievement of their DUCE. However, the compromise with the Church also served to limit Mussolini's attempt to create a new nation of committed Fascists.

CHART 10A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10 Fascism and Catholicism: rivals or collaborators?

- A** Why did Mussolini end the Church-state quarrel? (p. 174)
- B** How did relations develop after the Concordat? (pp. 175-77)
- C** Review: Fascism and Catholicism: rivals or collaborators? (pp. 178-79)

A Why did Mussolini end the Church-state quarrel?

At the beginning of his regime, Mussolini made conciliatory moves towards the Church (Chart 10B). This was part of his initial policy of favouring the social, economic and administrative ELITE to consolidate his regime. He was also continuing the improvement of relations between Church and state that had begun before the First World War.

A clear area of conflict, however, was Fascism's claim to be a TOTALITARIAN regime, which should not allow a powerful alternative set of beliefs. However, if he could win the support of the powerful Church, then the acceptance of a potentially rival doctrine was worth it. Mussolini also considered that the Roman Catholic Church encouraged people worldwide to look to Rome for leadership, which was a source of pride for Italians. Furthermore, an agreement with the Pope would certainly boost the Fascist regime's international image.

The Church worried about aspects of Fascism, although it was initially far more concerned about the danger of SOCIALISM. Mussolini seemed a far better bulwark than the previous Liberal state had been. Fascism and Catholicism shared other attitudes, such as the need for order, discipline and respect for hierarchy; the acceptance of an infallible leader and hostility to LIBERALISM and materialism. They also had a similar approach towards the family and the role of women. In addition, Corporativism seemed similar to Christianity's stress on social harmony. If the regime could provide a stable AUTHORITARIAN state, then there was reason to believe that Catholicism could flourish.

Early progress on reconciliation was slow, but after three years of negotiations a formal agreement was reached. This comprised a political treaty recognising the independence of the Vatican; a financial convention giving the Church compensation; and a Concordat* regulating Church-state relations.

Activity

Read Chart 10B and look at Sources 10.2–8.

- 1 What were the main reasons why Mussolini wanted an agreement with the Pope?
- 2 What do you think were the most important gains for him from the Concordat? What did the Pope gain?
- 3 How might the fact that the Church became such a major holder of state bonds affect its attitude to the state?

CHART 10B Mussolini and the Catholic Church

- a) Early measures, 1923
 - Increased clerical* salaries
 - Religious Education reinstated in elementary schools
 - Crucifix restored in schoolrooms and courts
- b) The Lateran* Pacts, 1929
 - i) Lateran Treaty (a political treaty)
 - Vatican City*, 109 acres in Rome, made a SOVEREIGN state
 - The Pope recognised Rome as the Italian capital.
 - ii) Financial Convention
 - Church given 750 million lire (about 30 million pounds) plus 1000 million lire in bonds as compensation for lands lost at unification
 - Church thus became largest holder of state bonds
 - iii) Concordat (regulating Church–state relations)
 - Catholicism recognised as the sole religion of the state
 - State veto over major Church appointments
 - RE in secondary as well as elementary schools
 - Church marriages recognised by the state
 - Church control of divorce
 - The state accepted the existence of CATHOLIC ACTION.
- c) Later relations
 - 1931 quarrel over Catholic Action. The Pope condemned some of Mussolini's statements as heretical.
 - 1931 Pope issued a critical ENCYCLICAL*, 'Non Abbiamo Bisogno' ('We have no need'). Compromise reached
 - 1938 Church critical of ANTI-SEMITISM

The basis of the Concordat was not challenged. The Church took part in the everyday life of Fascism. Priests participated in ONB activities. For example, at the 1938 Campo Dux meeting, the Mass began with the Fascist anthem *Giovinezza*, then a call for the divine being to aid Mussolini in his quest for EMPIRE. The PNF secretary served as the altar boy, and at the elevation of the host 15,000 youths drew their bayonets and pointed them to the sky. The ceremony ended with a prayer for the Duce.

Priests and party officials co-operated in campaigning against modern dancing, short skirts and decadent films. The slogan 'Per il papa e per il duce' (for Pope and Duce) stressed the unity of Church and state. A Catholic journal urged Catholics to 'go to the polls and give your vote for the government of the Hon. Mussolini'. Clergy gave Fascist salutes, and their pastoral letters praised the Duce. The Church hierarchy welcomed the 'crusades' against heathenism and BOLSHIEVISM in Abyssinia and Spain. However, beneath the official reconciliation, there was some criticism on both sides. Some RADICAL Fascists considered the Concordat a betrayal of their aims. Some priests were concerned about their hierarchy's close identification with the Fascist state. When in 1930 the Archbishop of Milan openly praised Fascism, 300 of his priests circulated an open letter of protest saying good Catholics could not accept Fascism.

Furthermore, there were two major quarrels between the Church and the government in 1931 and 1937–38. The government considered Catholic Action was extending its role into areas claimed for the state, and closed down several of its branches. The Pope responded by publicly criticising the regime, in an encyclical printed in the papal newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and in foreign newspapers. A compromise was reached that Catholic Action would just run strictly religious, educational and recreational activities (though not sport), and would become more decentralised. The second quarrel, over anti-semitism (see page 182), developed into a broader challenge to the nature of Fascism. The Pope and priests publicly criticised the government for infringing Christianity by forbidding marriages between Jews (some of whom had converted to Catholicism) and Italians.

What was CATHOLIC ACTION?

This was an international body set up by the Catholic Church in 1863 to organise Catholic laity* to defend Catholics and the Church. It had various sections, of which the most important was concerned with youth. With the end of Catholic unions, the Popolari and the Catholic Boy Scouts in the mid-1920s, Catholic Action became the only lay body supporting the interests of Catholics. Its position was formally recognised in the Concordat*, and it was declared apolitical (not involved in politics). However, its existence continued to cause considerable tension with the Fascist government, with its claims for totalitarian control. By the 1930s it had a membership of over one million, and remained an obstacle to full Fascist MOBILISATION of the Italians.

Church glossary	
Here are explanations of some Church vocabulary used in the text and sources. Terms are marked with * in the text.	
Cardinal	high-ranking Catholic priests (there were about 120 of them)
clerical	to do with the clergy/priests
concordat	an agreement
diocese	area presided over by a bishop
encyclical	letter from the Pope sent to all bishops
laity	non-priest members of the Church
Lateran	name of a palace in Rome where the Concordat and other agreements were signed
Monsignor	title given to priests
Pontiff	the Pope
Vatican City	the area around the Vatican Palace and St Peter's Church in Rome, controlled by the Pope

Although Mussolini benefited politically from the agreement, which helped establish the broad consensus of the early 1930s, the Church ultimately made more lasting gains. The Church continued its mission in its network of welfare, social and cultural institutions based on Christian rather than Fascist principles, which probably helped to undermine the impact of Fascist propaganda.

In the 1930s there was a considerable religious revival, with the numbers of church marriages, church schools and priests all increasing. The circulation of the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and the activities of Catholic Action also grew. The careful Church leadership, with its 'don't rock the boat' approach, allowed the Church to weaken the totalitarian pretensions (claims) of the regime, and through Catholic Action it was able to provide an alternative environment for its one million members. Its students' federation, FUCI, helped the Church to emerge as a major political force with a new generation of leaders after the collapse of Fascism.

SOURCE 10.2 Extract from a 1928 official text on Fascist culture

As there is only one official state religion which is the Catholic faith so, too, there must be only one political faith . . . [just as] religious dogmas are not to be discussed because they are the revealed truths of God, [so] Fascist principles are not to be discussed because they have come from the mind of a genius: BENITO MUSSOLINI.

SOURCE 10.3 Extract from *Fascism, Doctrine and Institutions*, 1934, by Mussolini

The Fascist State is not indifferent to religious phenomena in general, nor does it maintain an attitude of indifference to Roman Catholicism, the special positive religion of the Italians. The Fascist State sees in religion one of the deepest of spiritual manifestations [revelations], and for this reason it not only respects religion, but defends and protects it.

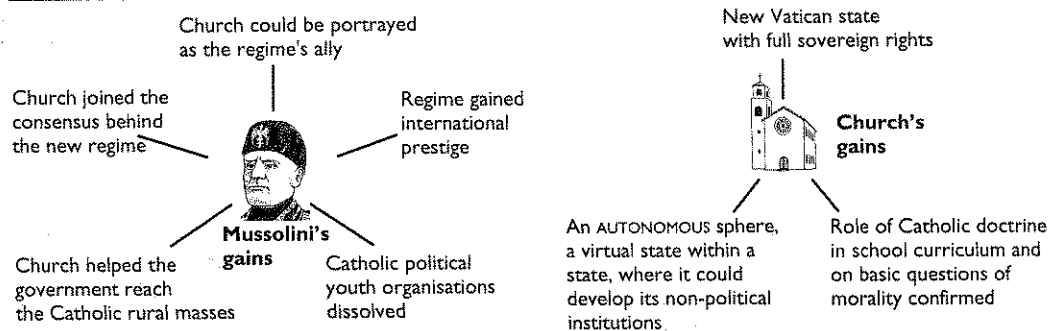
The Fascist State does not . . . seek, as did Bolshevism, to efface [erase] God from the soul of man. Fascism respects the God of ascetics [monks], saints and heroes, and it also respects God as conceived by the ingenuous [innocent] and primitive heart of the people, the God to whom their prayers are raised.

SOURCE 10.4

A postcard celebrating the Concordat*, showing the King, the Pope and Mussolini



CHART 10C Who gained what from the Concordat*?



Activity

- 1 What do Sources 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4 show about the relationship between Catholicism and Fascism?
- 2 Who does the *Time* correspondent (Source 10.5) think benefited most from the Concordat*?
- 3 What can you infer about the attitudes to the Church of the authors of Sources 10.5 and 10.6?
- 4 What does Source 10.7 suggest about the position of Mussolini, the King and the Church in Fascist Italy?
- 5 What evidence is there in Source 10.8 that in this encyclical* the Pope was attacking the very idea of Fascist totalitarianism?

SOURCE 10.5 The American magazine *Time* assesses the Concordat*, 1929

Mussolini . . . watched Cardinals and Monsignors* marching to the ballot box, attended by blaring brass bands and wildly cheering throngs . . . Never before have Princes of the Church shepherded their clergy and people to vote in a parliamentary election . . . Il Duce has restored a mite of earthly authority to Il Papa and last week cinema machines proved how mountainous is the Pontiff's* gratitude to the Dictator . . . [Three Cardinals*] proceeded directly from the celebration of High Mass to vote at the head of their clergy. Pollsters estimated that His Holiness's influence had flung into the scale of Fascismo at least one million extra votes. Last week's election statistics prove that those Italians who went to the polls are 98.28 per cent pure endorsers of the Duce, a record eclipsed in the US only by Ivory Soap.*

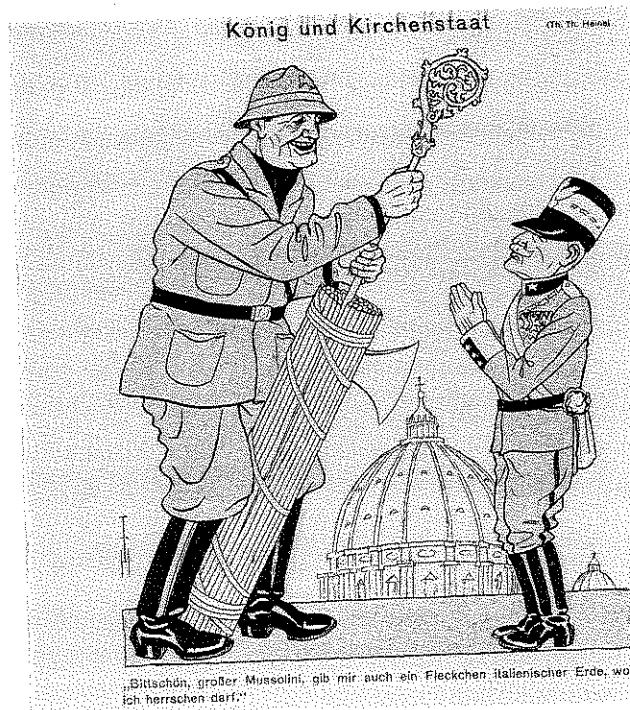
SOURCE 10.6 Borgese, a Professor of Literature who was exiled in 1931, assesses the Concordat*

There was no reason why Pope and Duce, whom a parallel destiny had brought in the same year to Rome, should not come together: no reason except in Christ; but Christianity was by no means the most decisive factor in Pope Ratti's mind. He was sure that he loved Italy; it is sure that he hated DEMOCRACY and Socialism . . . the ruthless anti-Christianity of Fascism . . . was nothing to him.

The Church became ancillary [an aid] to atheistic tyranny, and tyranny rewarded it by making it supreme in the elementary cell of society, the family. Marriage and divorce became a MONOPOLY of the Vatican, and the priest lent his hand to the squadrist in . . . national violence and international anarchy . . . Over her new black shirt Italy donned her old black gown [dress of the clergy].

SOURCE 10.7

A German cartoon from 1929. The title is 'King and Papal States' and the caption reads 'I beg you, great Mussolini, to give me too a corner of Italian territory where I can govern'



SOURCE 10.8 Extract from the encyclical* 'Non Abbiamo Bisogno', June 1931

A conception of the state which makes the rising generations belong to it entirely, without any exception, from the tenderest years up to adult life, cannot be reconciled by a Catholic either with Catholic doctrine or with the natural rights of the family. It is not possible for a Catholic to accept the claim that the Church and the Pope must limit themselves to the external practices of religion and that all the rest of education belongs to the state . . .

[The Church has a] universal and divine mandate to educate children [and to stop the regime's effort] to monopolise the young . . . for the sole and exclusive benefit of a party and of a regime based on an IDEOLOGY that clearly resolves itself into a veritable [truly] pagan worship of the state.

C Review: Fascism and Catholicism: rivals or collaborators?

In some respects, the Catholic Church collaborated with and buttressed Fascist rule. The Concordat* greatly boosted Mussolini's popularity. But though this helped Mussolini as leader, it hindered his attempt to forge a new Fascist nation. The strengthening of Catholicism in schools, and the continued growth of Catholic Action meant that many Italians encountered another perspective, which was sometimes similar to Fascism's, as over women, family and anti-Bolshevism, but sometimes different, as over respect for human life and militarism. At times this tension became public, as the Church criticised the regime and resisted its pressure. At other times, the Church hierarchy supported the regime. For many Italians, the varying responses of local priests was the greatest influence.

This complexity has led historians to develop different emphases on the extent of rivalry and collaboration. Some, like Pollard, stress the 'fundamental philosophical incompatibility between Catholicism and Fascism'; others, like Miccoli, stress how their alliance was not 'merely tactical' but reflected an 'essential consonance' (agreement).

Let us conclude by examining some historians' assessments of Church-state relations during the Fascist era.

■ Activity

- 1 The papacy has been criticised for its approach to Fascism. From the historians' extracts (Sources 10.9–13), draw up two lists, one of evidence defending the Papacy, the other to criticise it.
- 2 Read the extracts from Ciano's diary (Source 16.2 on page 260). What do they reveal about Mussolini's attitude to Pius XI?
- 3 'Assessment of who gained most from the Concordat*, and of the relations between Church and state is a complex issue.' What evidence do the extracts from historians provide to support this view?
- 4 Organise a debate between two priests, one who favours collaboration with the Fascist government, and one who advocates trying to oppose it. (Decide on a particular date for your debate.)

SOURCE 10.9 Clark, pp. 155, 254 and 256

- a) *The pacts were a triumph for the Duce. The cost was negligible, the benefits huge. Mussolini had solved the Roman question; he could count on worldwide prestige and a chorus of admiration.*
- b) *The Catholic Church was the greatest obstacle to any 'totalitarian' regime in Italy. All the others, Parliament, press, opposition parties, unions, could be smashed or emasculated [weakened]; but not the Church.*
- c) *Although the Church undoubtedly contributed to the Fascist consensus between 1926 and 1938, she was also a rival who was building up her strength.*

SOURCE 10.10 C. Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, 1994, pp. 226–27

The resolution of the Roman question was a great political coup for Mussolini. It increased his personal prestige, internationally as well as at home; and more importantly, it allowed Fascism to realise the dream long harboured by the Liberal state of using the Church as an instrument for securing mass political consent . . .

However, the reconciliation with the Church was bought at a high price. By conceding independence to Catholic Action, with its large network of parish-based organisations, Fascism surrendered any serious claim to a monopoly of ideology.

SOURCE 10.11 Koon, pp. 117, 142

- c) *The history of Church-state relations during the Fascist period is one of substantial collaboration, punctuated by periodic confrontation and almost continual tension.*

The Church proved to be as tenacious a competitor as Mussolini had feared.

Both sides paid a price for the 1929 conciliation. Intransigent [obstinate] Fascist rhetoric notwithstanding, the regime had, however grudgingly, been forced to accept the Church's role in education and socialisation. The Lateran Accords guaranteed the presence of the Church in the Italian schools and in Fascist youth groups. The existence of Catholic youth groups over the years provided an alternative to Fascist conformity . . . The most serious dispute between the regime and the Church, in 1931, never led to an open break. The Pope charted a cautious course, willing to concede tactical victories in his overall strategy to preserve the gains of conciliation. Fascism never succeeded in totally co-opting the Church, but the Church, in the years after 1929, was never a rallying point of organised anti-Fascism.*

SOURCE 10.12 J. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, 1985

Given the 'ideological convergence' between the Vatican and Italian Fascism, it is perhaps not surprising that in the 1930s the Church ... was very active in its role as part of the 'bloc of consensus' underpinning the Fascist regime.

SOURCE 10.13 R. Grew, 'Catholicism in a Changing Italy', in Tannenbaum (ed.), *Modern Italy*, 1974, p. 268

To opponents of Fascism, the Church seemed ... inextricably implicated in Fascist policy, particularly during the Ethiopian War, for which bishops and clergy frequently expressed the most unrestrained support. Even the denunciations of particular Fascist policies were expressed in temperate [mild] tones that seemed a significant contrast with the fulminations [angry outbursts] against the Liberal MONARCHY.

Yet the Church ... did resist the persistent attacks on the remaining forms of Catholic Action and did formally denounce Mussolini's racial policy in late 1938. No opposition to a complete totalitarianism was more formidable.

FOCUS ROUTE

1 After studying Chapter 10, copy and complete the following assessment chart on the Concordat*.

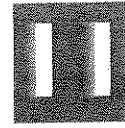
	Mussolini	Church
Why did they make the agreement?		
What did they gain from it?		
What were its potential disadvantages?		

2 The Concordat* has been described as Mussolini's greatest, but least Fascist achievement. Do you agree? And if so, what does that tell us about the nature of Fascist Italy?

3 How did Church-state relations develop after 1929?

Key points from Chapter 10

- 1 There were fundamental differences between Catholicism and Fascism, but also grounds for co-operation.
- 2 The Catholic Church was a very powerful body in Italy, and from 1922 Mussolini tried to improve relations with it.
- 3 In 1929 a Concordat* and Lateran* Treaties were signed.
- 4 The Catholic Church gained formal recognition as Italy's state religion; freedom to operate as a religious body; agreement on the status of the Vatican City*; and compensation for lost territory.
- 5 Mussolini gained a veto on key Church appointments, and the support of the Church hierarchy.
- 6 The Concordat* greatly boosted Mussolini's popularity.
- 7 The survival of Catholic Action provided an alternative environment for many of those uncommitted to Fascism.
- 8 Relations later deteriorated, with tension over Catholic Action and anti-semitism.
- 9 The Church remained as a powerful influence, and survived to influence Italy's political development after 1943.
- 10 The Concordat* has been described as Mussolini's greatest but least Fascist achievement.



How effective was Mussolini's radicalisation of the regime in the late 1930s?

FOCUS ROUTE

As you work through Chapter 11, consider

- why Mussolini tried to radicalise the regime in the late 1930s
- what forms his policy took, and what its effects were.

For most of the time Mussolini was in power he generally co-operated with the ELITES, and disappointed some of the RADICALS in his own party who expected a Fascist revolution. However, in the late 1930s it appears that Mussolini tried to radicalise the regime. This chapter looks at why he did this and how successful he was.

CHART 11A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11 How effective was Mussolini's radicalisation of the regime in the late 1930s?

- The Reform of Customs: silly or significant? (pp. 180–81)
- Why did Mussolini adopt anti-semitism? (pp. 182–83)
- Review: How effective was Mussolini's radicalisation of the regime in the late 1930s? (p. 184)

SOURCE 11.1 Mussolini in conversation with Emil Ludwig, 1931

The whole country has to become a great school for perpetual political education which will make the Italians into complete Fascists, new men, changing their habits, their way of life, their mentality, their character and, finally, their physical makeup. It will no longer be a question of grumbling against the sceptical, mandolin-playing Italians, but rather of creating a new kind of man who is tough, strong-willed, a fighter, a latter-day legionary of Caesar for whom nothing is impossible.

Activity

- What measures did Mussolini take to try to create a new Fascist man?
- In what ways can his campaign be seen as significant?

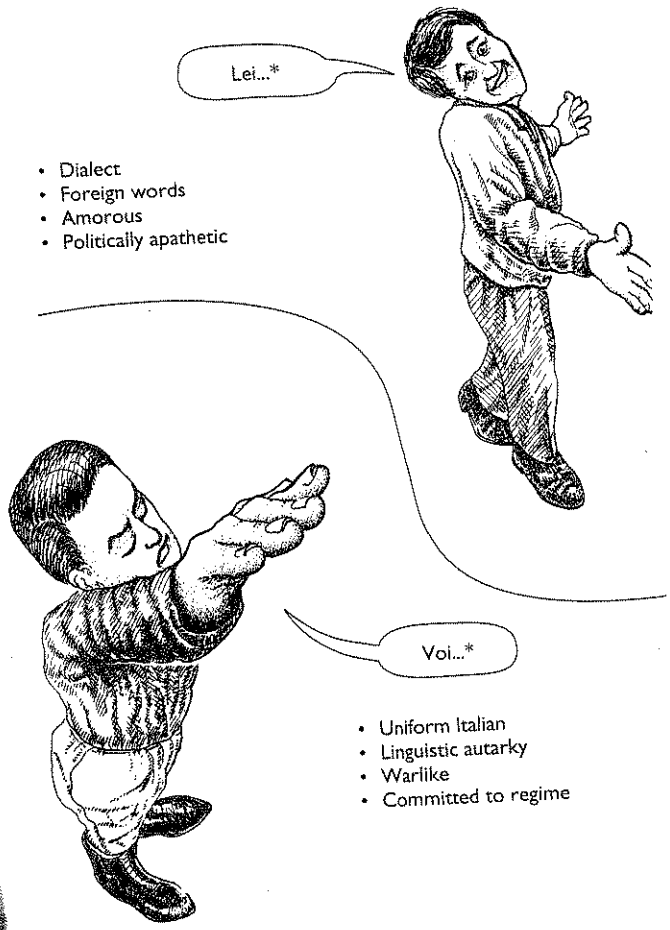
A The Reform of Customs: silly or significant?

In 1938 Mussolini tried to abolish the use of the friendly form of 'you', and the use of the handshake. This so-called 'Reform of Customs' can be seen as rather ridiculous, and such changes in themselves are of little significance. Certainly, they are often not given much stress in accounts of Fascist Italy, or are just used to poke fun at Mussolini's regime. However, it could be argued that they were illustrative of a much more fundamental shift of emphasis in the regime in the late 1930s. Greater radicalism became evident, something which can also be seen in educational and institutional changes, in foreign policy and in the introduction of ANTI-SEMITIC policies. What lay at the root of these changes?

From the beginning Mussolini had been trying to change the way Italians thought, to make them proud of being members of his new Fascist Italy. He hoped this would also influence their behaviour – that they would work harder, fight better, and have more children. However, by the mid-1930s Mussolini and some other Fascists like Starace and Bottai seem to have despaired of their countrymen. Most Italians had failed to take on board the Fascist spiritual revolution. Mussolini criticised what he called their 'BOURGEOIS mentality' – meaning that they were PACIFIST, complacent, and materialistic. They were too attracted to the WESTERN DEMOCRACIES and they needed toughening up. As Mussolini said to Ciano in July 1938, 'Henceforth the revolution must impinge on the habits of Italians. They must learn to be less sympathetic in order to become hard, relentless and hateful – in other words masters.'

With the conquest of Abyssinia in 1936, and the growing likelihood of European war, it seems that Mussolini became more determined to try to forge a nation that could meet its IMPERIAL and aggressive destiny.

CHART 11B The 'traditional' Italian (top) and the new Fascist man (bottom)



- Dialect
- Foreign words
- Amorous
- Politically apathetic

- Uniform Italian
- Linguistic autarky
- Warlike
- Committed to regime

*'You'

SOURCE 11.2 Mussolini demonstrating the 'passo romano', or goose-step



SOURCE 11.3 Fascist leaders showing how fit they were. All key party officials were ordered to learn how to ride horses and motorcycles. Party leaders had to do gymnastics – so pot-bellied, ageing Fascists could be seen in gym kit running, bouncing on trampolines, and even jumping through hoops of fire



SOURCE 11.4 Party leader Starace leaping through a hoop of fire



Talking point

In what circumstances can racism develop in a society? Does it normally originate from above, with government encouragement, or from popular feeling from below?

Activity

Look at the Sources 11.6–9 and Chart 11C. What do they tell you about:

- Mussolini's attitude towards Italian Jews
- the Church's attitude to Jews
- Mussolini's policies on Italian Jews?

SOURCE 11.6 Mussolini in conversation with the German writer Emil Ludwig in 1932

Of course there are no pure races left; not even the Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the energy and beauty of a nation. Race! It is a feeling, not a reality; 95 per cent, at least, is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today. Amusingly enough, not one of those who have proclaimed the 'nobility' of the Teutonic [German] race was himself a Teuton . . . Anti-semitism does not exist in Italy . . . National pride has no need of the delirium [madness] of race . . . Italians of Jewish birth have shown themselves good citizens, and they fought bravely in the war. Many of them occupy leading positions in the universities, in the army, in the banks.

B Why did Mussolini adopt anti-semitism?

Another apparently more radical policy designed to harden up the Italian people was the adoption by the government of anti-semitism. Anti-semitism is one of the policies most closely associated with the Fascist regimes of the 1930s in the public mind. However, there were many differences between Italian Fascism and Nazism. This is clearly shown in their approach to Jews.

Initially there was very little anti-semitism in either Italy or the Fascist Party. Italian Jews made up under one per cent of the population. Most of them were deeply integrated into Italian life. There was no 'Jewish problem'. Italian Fascism was not anti-semitic; indeed a disproportionate number of Jews were members of the PNF. For sixteen years Jews received the same benefits and restrictions from the Fascist government as other Italians.

Yet in 1938 Mussolini introduced racist DECREES, discriminating against Jews (see Chart 11C). This change of policy is normally seen as a reflection of his subservience to Hitler, which in some ways it was, despite Mussolini's denials. It was not, however, imposed on Mussolini by Hitler. Mussolini chose to try and imitate Hitler. But anti-semitism was also a product of other trends, both international and domestic, and can be seen as part of the general radicalisation of the period. This has been well explained by the historian Bernardini.

SOURCE 11.5 The Italian historian Bernardini in an article 'The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-semitism in Fascist Italy', in *The Nazi Holocaust, The Final Solution outside Germany*, ed. M. Marrus, 1988, pp. 230, 238

His decision to formulate a policy which would weld together racism and anti-semitism was purely voluntary and flowed naturally from the confluence of Italy's imperial policies, the IDEOLOGICAL tenets of Fascism, and Italian national interests as enunciated [put forward] by IL DUCE . . .

The emergence of official anti-semitism . . . must be viewed not as a momentary aberration [mistake] on the part of Mussolini or the Grand Council, or as an attempt to honour the Nazis by copying the Nuremberg Laws. It was, rather, cut from the same cloth as the rest of Fascism's final costume and was an attempt, once and for all, to eradicate the vestiges [remains] of earlier values and mores [customs], to transform the Italian people from top to bottom, and to present the world with a truly new man, homo fascistus.

Both Mussolini and the Catholic Church made ambivalent statements about race and anti-semitism, as the following sources show.

SOURCE 11.7 Mussolini in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, September 1938

History teaches that while EMPIRES are conquered by force of arms, they are nevertheless maintained by prestige. And to have prestige it is necessary to develop a clear racial consciousness which establishes not only the sharpest differences between races, but also levels of superiority.

SOURCE 11.8 Mussolini commenting to friends in 1938

Race, it makes me laugh. But there are reasons of state which I must obey. In Italy racialism and anti-semitism are being made to appear as important politically as they are unimportant in real substance. The racial purity of this nation over which have passed so many invasions and which has attracted so many peoples . . . is clearly absurd.

SOURCE 11.9 The attitude of the Catholic Church

a) *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1924

The Jew is the most tenacious enemy of Christianity.

b) Pope Pius XI, 1938

Catholic means universal; it is not racist, NATIONALIST or separatist. Why, unfortunately, did Italy have to go and imitate Germany?

The position of Jews in the 1920s–mid-1930s

- About 50,000 Jews in Italy
- Hundreds of Jewish refugees moved to Italy.
- In 1938 10,000 were members of PNF.
- There were two Jewish government ministers: Finzi, Interior Undersecretary and Member of Fascist Grand Council 1922–24; and Jung, Finance Minister 1932–35.
- Mussolini had two Jewish mistresses.
- Mussolini criticised Hitler's anti-semitism.

However,

- Some Fascists, e.g. Farinacci, were anti-semitic.
- Mussolini occasionally made anti-semitic comments. These were 'ideological racism', i.e. criticising Jews for their beliefs or actions (e.g. that they were anti-nationalist) not 'biological racism', i.e. attacking Jews as inherently (biologically) inferior.

The position of Jews from 1935

- 1935 attack on Abyssinia and proclamation of the Empire encouraged development of racism to justify and buttress imperial control.
- 1936 decrees banning mixing of races in Abyssinia
- 1936 Axis alliance with Nazi Germany
- July 1938 Propaganda Ministry published MANIFESTO of Italian Racism.
- 1938 Racist decrees:
 - Jews banned from mixed marriages
 - No Jews in state service, e.g. civil service, schools, military (though exceptions were granted, mainly on grounds of previous war service)
 - No Jewish children in state schools
 - Jews not to have Aryan servants
 - Jews not allowed to own large firms
 - Foreign Jews expelled

Reasons for racist decrees

- Mussolini's desire to emulate (keep up with) Hitler; to strengthen the Axis
- Development of racist feelings during Abyssinian campaign
- Several Jews were prominent in the international campaign for sanctions against Italy over its attack on Abyssinia.
- Jews involved in some opposition groups, e.g. Rosselli brothers (see page 185)
- Implicit in Fascism as it developed in the 1930s and became more radical, with the Reform of Customs, were attacks on the bourgeoisie, a greater attempt to create a 'new Fascist man', and hostility to the BOLSHEVISM, INTERNATIONALISM and materialism associated with Jews.
- Internal pressure from Fascist radicals, e.g. Farinacci

Effects of anti-semitic measures

- Resented by many; unpopular; seen as Mussolini kowtowing to Hitler
- Along with Reform of Customs, turned many influential Italians against the regime
- Pope publicly critical; King privately
- One in twelve university teachers sacked
- Not properly enforced: Italian forces occupying captured territory, e.g. Nice, 1940, hindered Nazi attempts to deport Jews to extermination camps.
- German occupation in 1943 led to 9000 Jews being sent to extermination camps.

Significance of measures

- Show how Mussolini was coming under German influence
- Show harmful effects of Abyssinian campaign
- Show radicalisation of Fascist regime in the late 1930s
- Show limited impact of Fascism
- Contributed to declining support for Mussolini

HOW EFFECTIVE WAS MUSSOLINI'S RADICALISATION OF THE REGIME IN THE LATE 1930S?

SOURCE 11.10 A racist notice ('This shop is Aryan')



SOURCE 11.11 A cover of the newspaper *The Defence of the Race*





Review: How effective was Mussolini's radicalisation of the regime in the late 1930s?

Other policies also reflected a greater attempt to fascistise the Italian people. A full Ministry of Popular Culture was created in 1937, and youth movements were placed under Fascist Party control with the creation of GIL. The Fascist School Charter of 1939, and the vast expansion of OND and the attempt of this and welfare and women's organisations to 'Go to the People' illustrated greater stress on creating a more committed nation of Fascists.

Mussolini began to talk more to his colleagues about replacing the MONARCHY, and became less concerned with appeasing the Church. In 1939 the new Chamber of Fasces and Corporations replaced the old Parliament. All this illustrates the shift of emphasis in the regime, from measures geared to reassure the elite to ones designed to strengthen contact with the masses.

However, this attempt at radicalisation was not accepted by the Italian people. The abolition of the handshake, the efforts to change the language and the introduction of goose-stepping were regarded with a mixture of hilarity and irritation by the greater part of the Italian population.

The anti-semitic decrees were also not popular, and were not properly enforced. It was only after Mussolini's overthrow in 1943, when the Germans took over northern Italy, that Italian Jews were sent to extermination camps.

Radicalisation did, however, along with the regime's growing links with Nazi Germany, serve to arouse concern amongst the elite about the direction of the regime. Doubts were raised as to whether Mussolini was the best protector of their interests. These concerns were to escalate during the Second World War.

Key points from Chapter 11

- 1 In the late 1930s Mussolini introduced the Reform of Customs to try to toughen up the Italian people.
- 2 He was also disillusioned with the way the bourgeoisie were not fully embracing Fascist ideals.
- 3 This was part of a broader radicalisation of the regime.
- 4 In practice the Reform of Customs brought only superficial changes to society.
- 5 Italy was not traditionally an anti-semitic country.
- 6 Racism began after the conquest of Abyssinia.
- 7 In 1938 it developed into anti-semitic legislation, which was partly imitation of Nazi Germany.
- 8 Anti-semitism only had a major impact when the Nazis occupied Italy from 1943.
- 9 The introduction of anti-semitic policies further alienated the elite from the regime, and was generally unpopular.
- 10 The Reform of Customs and anti-semitism illustrate how the regime was losing touch with the Italian people by the late 1930s.