

*The Fascist Government, the Holy See and the Prohibition of  
“Mixed” Marriages 1935-1938*

by *Michele Sarfatti*

**Abstract**

*In the spring of 1936, during the war against Ethiopia, dictator Benito Mussolini began sending directives to Italian authorities in Africa against so-called “mixed unions,” from which “mixed-race” children were born. In the fall of 1938, the Fascist government permanently banned marriages of Italian citizens “of the Aryan race” with “Camites” and “Semites” of any citizenship. This essay tells the story of that course and documents the fact that the 1938 ban on “racially mixed marriages,” which unilaterally amended the Concordat, constituted a clear victory for Mussolini over the Holy See and the Catholic Church. It thus demonstrated the strength that fascism had at that time.*

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In 1938 the question of the prohibition of “racially mixed” marriages, i.e. those between an Italian citizen “of Aryan race” with a person of any other “race,” was at the centre of a serious conflict between Fascism and the Roman Catholic Church, that is, between the government of the Kingdom of Italy and the government of the Holy See. The matter was raised by the Fascist regime, which Mussolini had been steering for some years towards the building of a national racist State.<sup>1</sup>

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Translated from the Italian by Loredana Melissari.

<sup>1</sup> Michele Sarfatti, *Il fascismo alla costruzione di uno Stato nazional-razziale: cittadinanza, unioni bianchi-neri, leggi antiebraiche del 1938*, in *Culture antisemite. Italia ed Europa dalle leggi antiebraiche ai razzismi di oggi*, eds. Annalisa Cegna and Filippo Focardi (Roma: Viella, 2021), 87-105. For their help in locating some documents I wish to thank Annalisa Capristo, Alessandro Cassin, Giovanni Coco, Mara Dissegna, Giorgio Fabre, Roberto De Rose of the Archivio centrale dello Stato, Stefania Ruggeri of the Archivio storico del Ministero degli affari esteri and the librarians of the Biblioteca Minerva del Senato della Repubblica. The acronyms used for the archives are: AAV = Archivio apostolico vaticano, Vatican City; ACS = Archivio centrale dello

Already in 1937, the two sides had debated (at first only indirectly, it would seem, but later face-to-face) the question of marriages between Italian citizens (who were considered “Whites”) and African subjects, reaching what the Holy See saw as a sort of alignment. The confrontation that took place the following year, on the other hand, ended with a clear display of supremacy on the Fascist side. Benito Mussolini’s success in declaring a blanket legislative ban against all marriages of this type in November 1938 was a significant event. The present essay reconstructs the main aspects of the historical process that led to this outcome, highlighting the documents pertaining to the two sides.

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In July 1935, while the Fascist dictatorship was engaged in the preparations for the attack on Ethiopia, Mussolini received an *Appunto* (note) titled “L’impero mussoliniano non deve essere un impero di mulatti” (Mussolini’s Empire Must Not Be an Empire of Mulattoes). The text warned of the likelihood of numerous “unions, either transient or permanent,” between young Italian colonizers and Ethiopian women, leading to an increase of “*misti*” (half-bloods), a prospect that would not be hindered by religion, “which impels us towards brotherhood.” In order to avoid this, the note continued, a range of measures would have to be put into place, including “not encouraging concubinage and even less marriage with people of color.”

On August 8, Fulvio Suvich, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (the Minister being Mussolini himself), sent a copy of the document to the office of the Minister for the Colonies (here too, the Minister was Mussolini, and Alessandro Lessona was the Under-Secretary), and wrote in the accompanying letter:

The Duce has [...] ordered that an action plan be urgently submitted to Him, in order to avoid a generation of mulattoes to spring up in East

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Stato, Rome; ARSI = Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome; ASMAE = Archivio storico del Ministero degli affari esteri, Rome; ASSS-SRS = Archivio storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i rapporti con gli Stati, Vatican City; AUSSME = Archivio dell’Ufficio storico dello Stato maggiore dell’esercito, Rome.

Africa. This Ministry [of Foreign Affairs] will be obliged if you will keep us informed of the steps undertaken in this matter.<sup>2</sup>

The “urgency” referred to the drafting of the plan, not to its implementation, which was not mentioned.

“Transient” relationships meant occasional ones of whatever kind, including prostitution. “Permanent” relationships included both cohabitations governed by local customs, often termed “*madamato*” by the colonizers,<sup>3</sup> and actual marriages, governed by Italian law. The “*madamato*” practically existed only in the colonies, while marriages (even if very few in number) were to be found also in the mother country.

The letter of August 8, made no mention of the passing of a law that would increase the repression of the “*madamato*” and would have been necessary in any case to formally prohibit new marriages. Such a prohibition, however, would have impinged on the Lateran Pacts between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See, signed six years earlier, which stipulated that marriages performed by the Catholic Church were to be automatically recorded in the Civil Register of the municipality. It is important to note that the Concordat of 1929 did not apply to Italian colonies. However, in the colonies there were laws in force which incorporated the Concordat’s rules on matrimony.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sottosegretario agli Affari esteri to the Ministero delle Colonie-Gabinetto, with a copy to the Ministero della Guerra-Gabinetto and the Ministero della Stampa e propaganda-Gabinetto, August 8, 1935, enclosing a document titled “Appunto Riservato – L’impero mussoliniano non deve essere un impero di mulatti” (Confidential Note – Mussolini’s Empire Must Not Be an Empire of Mulattoes); in AUSSME, Di, b. 110, fasc. 7, sfasc. 64; quoted in Giulia Barrera, “Colonial Affairs: Italian Men, Eritrean Women and the Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea (1885-1941)” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2002), 1.

<sup>3</sup> See at least Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea (1890-1941)* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> “The Concordat between Italy and the Holy See shall not be implemented in the Colonies. However, by virtue of Art. 43 of the Organic Law of Libya and of Art. 53 of the Organic law of Italian East Africa, the changes made by the Law No. 847 of May 27, 1929 to Section 5 of Book 1 of the Civil Code for the implementation of Art. 34 of the Concordat are applicable” [“Il Concordato fra l’Italia e la Santa Sede non è applicabile alle Colonie. Sono tuttavia applicabili, in virtù dell’art. 43 della Legge Organica della Libia e dell’art. 53 della Legge Organica per l’A.O.I., le modificazioni che la Legge 27 maggio 1929 n. 847 ha apportato al titolo V° del Libro I° del C.C., in esecuzione dell’art. 34 del Concordato”]; Ministero dell’Africa italiana – Direzione generale per gli affari politici to the Ministero dell’Africa italiana – Direzione generale degli affari civili, October

I have been unable to find documents proving that the “action plan” requested by Mussolini in August 1935 was being worked on while the bloody invasion of Ethiopia was taking place. Moreover, shortly after the proclamation of the empire on May 9, 1936, the government issued the Royal Legislative Decree No. 1019 of June 1, 1936, titled *Ordinamento e amministrazione dell’Africa Orientale Italiana* (Internal Polity and Administration of Italian East Africa), which did not introduce new restrictions on marriages and limited itself to confirming, at Art. 28, that the “woman married to a subject” became herself a “subject” and was therefore no longer a “citizen” (a principle that had already been established in the 1927 law on Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, whose inhabitants, however, were styled “Italian Libyan citizens” and not “subjects,” and in the 1933 law on Eritrea and Somalia).<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the military campaign, Mussolini did in fact issue individual orders against “alliances” and the procreation of “misti.” On May 11, 1936, for instance, he telegraphed: “In order to ward off from the start the dreadful and not far-off consequences of *meticismo* [the procreation of half-breeds] I direct that no Italian—be he soldier or civilian—may remain in the viceroyalty [Ethiopia] over six months without a wife;”<sup>6</sup> and on May 26 telegraphed a list of instructions, including the “ruthless fight against any tendency towards *meticismo*.”<sup>7</sup>

A sort of “action plan,” on the other hand, emerged from the body of provisions concerning the “relationship between citizens and natives” in the “social sector” contained in the “fundamental principles” of the directives “for the organization and the optimization” of AOI (Africa Orientale Italiana = Italian East Africa), that Lessona, who had been appointed Minister for the Colonies a few weeks earlier, sent on August 5, 1936 to Rodolfo Graziani, Governor General of AOI and viceroy

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[between 27 and 31] 1937, “Matrimoni fra nazionali ed eritree”; in ASMAE, Ministero dell’Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

<sup>5</sup> Kilian Bartikowski and Giorgio Fabre, “Donna bianca e uomo nero (con una variante). Il razzismo antinero nei colloqui tra Mussolini e Bülow-Schwante,” *Quaderni di storia* 70 (July-December 2009), 181-218; 198-202. See also Gianluca Gabrielli, “Il matrimonio misto negli anni del colonialismo italiano,” *I viaggi di Erodoto* 13, no. 38-39 (June-November 1999), 80-91; 87-89.

<sup>6</sup> Benito Mussolini to Pietro Badoglio and Rodolfo Graziani, May 11, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 18, fasc. 21, sfasc. 6, ins. “1936: maggio 22-31.”

<sup>7</sup> Benito Mussolini to Rodolfo Graziani, May 26, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 26, fasc. 29, sfasc. 32; carbon copy in ASMAE, Ministero dell’Africa italiana, Gabinetto, Archivio segreto, b. 160, fasc. Direttive – Competenze.

of Ethiopia. On the matter we are examining here, the Minister urged the Governor to “deal with the utmost severity—in accordance with the Duce’s orders—with the issue of ‘madamismo’ and of ‘*sciarmuttismo*’ [prostitution],” favouring the immigration from Italy of families rather than single colonists and the transfer of prostitutes “of the white race,” and proceeding to the immediate repatriation of “those—particularly if senior civil servants or officers—who cohabit or maintain stable relationships with native women.”<sup>8</sup> Marriages were not mentioned. The phrase “Duce’s orders” was but little employed in the other sections of the long document.

To summarize, the period from July-August 1935 to August 1936 saw a crescendo, beginning with Mussolini’s request of a plan and reaching its conclusion when a plan was sent to the colony. At present, however, we are unable to document if during those twelve months there was simply a gradual increase in harshness, or if Mussolini and the other ministers decided not to start this action while the war was still going on, or if they decided to proceed step-by-step so as to allow time both for the racist propaganda to take hold and for senior civil servants and officers who were in a “madamato” relationship to decide on their own how to adjust (by breaking off the relationship or by converting it into marriage).

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In late 1936 it was decided to ban by law all “permanent unions” that did not constitute an actual marriage. This shift from order to law marks a qualitative leap in the management of the racist campaign.

On January 4, 1937 Minister Lessona sent the Council of Ministers the draft of a royal decree-law by which Italian citizens (but not other European citizen) who were in a “conjugal-like relationships” (not a “conjugal relationship,” therefore) in Italy or in the colonies with a subject of AOI (not of Libya, therefore) or with a comparable foreigner, were liable to be sentenced to a prison term of one to five

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<sup>8</sup> Ministro per le colonie to governatore generale dell’Aoi, August 5, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 26, fasc. 29, sfasc. 32; carbon copy in ASMAE, Ministero dell’Africa italiana, Gabinetto, Archivio segreto, b. 160, fasc. Direttive – Competenze.

years. The original title read *Measures for the integrity of the race*.<sup>9</sup> The decree banned both new and already existing “relationships” of this kind. The penalty that could be applied was high. Making Italian citizens punishable was probably considered to require a state law. It was the first openly racist law of the Fascist Kingdom of Italy.

It should be noted that the decree provided a simple factual definition of the “madamato” and did not establish a penalty for the male or female subject involved. It did not define the two groups, and this could lead to very complex situations, such as a possibly opposite treatment of two “mixed” brothers with different legal status (for instance, one might be an Italian citizen, having been acknowledged by the “White” parent, and the other a subject).

The Council of Ministers approved the draft at the meeting of January 9. On that occasion, following a request by the Minister of Finance Paolo Thaon di Revel, it was decided to change the title to *Provvedimenti per i rapporti fra nazionali e indigeni* (*Measures concerning the relationships between nationals and natives*).<sup>10</sup> Eventually this was changed to *Sanzioni per i rapporti d'indole coniugale fra cittadini e sudditi* (*Sanctions for conjugal-like relationships between citizens and subjects*). As a result of this change, the decree's title no longer expressly mentioned the word “race,” while retaining its racist nature.

In the report accompanying the draft of the decree-law, Lessona wrote: “The time of circular letters containing warnings [...] is at an end; the time has come to establish penalties.” He went on to specify that “actual conjugal relationships” had not been banned as this “had been judged inappropriate in view of the spirit informing the Lateran Pacts [...], at least for the time being.” He also reported that marriages were “quite rare. [...] Nonetheless, if they were to occur, there would be no lack of police measures (such as *confino*—internment—and expulsion), political sanctions (the cancelling of party membership) and disciplinary actions, such as the discharge from service for civil servants.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Draft of Royal Decree-Law “Provvedimenti per l'integrità della razza,” with covering letter of January 4, 1937 by Renzo Meregazzi, chief of the Minister for the Colonies' office; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

<sup>10</sup> Appunto del Ministro delle Finanze, January 9, 1937; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Report accompanying the Draft of the Royal Decree-Law “Provvedimenti per l'integrità della razza,” with covering letter of January 4, 1937 by Renzo Meregazzi, Chief of the minister's office of

The report's content was summarised in a short *Appunto* (note) for the Duce dated January 8. It contained, among others, the following passage:

The above-mentioned penalty cannot be applied in the case of occasional intercourse, nor does it apply to legitimate unions. The latter being quite rare, it was judged inappropriate to ban them, at least for the time being, in view of the spirit informing the Lateran Pacts. However, should these legitimate unions occur, police measures should suffice to prevent their spreading.<sup>12</sup>

The dictator wrote by hand his usual “Sì M (Yes Mussolini)” right next to this last phrase.

On January 10, reporting on the approval of the draft, Mussolini's daily *Il Popolo d'Italia* called it “a drastic and rigorous legislative measure,” adding that “mixed” marriages had not been prohibited, because “in addition to various kinds of considerations, the danger posed by legitimate unions is not at all serious or worrying, since they occur very rarely and can always be fought by any means necessary.”<sup>13</sup>

On that same January 10, Virginio Gayda wrote in the important fascist daily *Il Giornale d'Italia* that the decree did not ban the “much rarer” marriage “between Whites and Coloureds,” stressing that this “is a sacrament that requires the Italian state, signatory of the Lateran Pacts, to respect its spirit and an act which for the Catholic faith is not contingent on prior limitations of race. We are confident, however, that the Holy See is no less anxious than the Fascist government to preserve in White Catholics their original spirit that can never be the same as the Blacks' and that, with its serene composure, plays so great a role in the conservation of the momentous work the Church has accomplished in the world.” Furthermore—having perhaps read the ministerial report accompanying the decree's draft—he too admonished: “There will be after all no lack of means to

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the Minister for the Colonies; in ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

<sup>12</sup> *Appunto per il Duce*, January 8, 1937; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

<sup>13</sup> “Energici provvedimenti a tutela della razza nelle terre conquistate,” *Il Popolo d'Italia*, January 10, 1937.

repress mixed marriages too, be it through the State's and the Party's disciplinary powers towards civil servants and card-carrying members, or through the powers of the police, with measures of varying degree."<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, on January 9, the same day on which the Council of Ministers had met, Lessona had published in the daily *La Stampa* an extremely harsh article against "the mating with inferior creatures" and against the "meticci." The article did not describe the contents of the decree's draft. It stated instead that "the most serious cause, and one that still needs to be taken into consideration," of the high number of "meticci" in Latin America was the "the patronage granted by the Church to mixed marriages, blessed by Catholic rites as a way of redemption from free unions."<sup>15</sup> This open attack on marriages, published on the very same day that the draft of a decree outlawing only the "madamato" was being approved, reads like a sort of warning to the Vatican and needs to be seen in connection with the "We are confident ... that the Holy See is no less anxious than the Fascist government" claim asserted the next day by *Il Giornale d'Italia*.

Lessona's mention of "redemption" was openly disputed not long afterwards in an article by the Jesuit Angelo Brucculeri: "In the matrimonial doctrine of the Church, difference of race does not constitute an impediment. The Catholic missionary will not hesitate in the least to redeem by means of the sacrament the free unions between parties of different ethnicities." Brucculeri nevertheless praised the decree, which by then had been issued, writing that it "is a timely measure of prudent and far-seeing policy" and adding: "This however does not mean that the State cannot, should the high number of such unions [recte: marriages] cause an obvious social harm, inhibit them by indirect means."<sup>16</sup>

Nothing has been ascertained that might enable us to look upon the article written by the Jesuit as an official reaction by the Vatican, and the references to the Holy See by ministers and Fascist newspapers in January do not appear to be the result of a formal consultation between the two states, which is never hinted at. Only in the following summer and autumn is such a consultation documented.

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<sup>14</sup> Virginio Gayda, "Difesa e lavoro dell'Impero," *Il Giornale d'Italia*, January 10, 1937.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Lessona, "Gli italiani nell'Impero. Politica di razza," *La Stampa*, January 9, 1937.

<sup>16</sup> Angelo Brucculeri, "Chiesa e Stato nella politica della razza," *Antischiavismo* 49, no. 1-3 (1937); quoted in Lucia Ceci, *Il papa non deve parlare. Chiesa, fascismo e guerra d'Etiopia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 165.

The decree's progress through the various stages of the legislative process was marked by a noticeable slowness: it was approved by the Council of Ministers on January 9, 1937, promulgated as Royal Decree-Law no. 880 "*Sanzioni per i rapporti d'indole coniugale fra cittadini e sudditi*" on April 19, 1937, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* (Official Journal of the Kingdom of Italy) on June 24, 1937 (thus coming into force on that date), was "converted into law" (a formal parliamentary ratification required for all decree-laws issued by the government) with a minor change by Law no. 2590 of December 30, 1937, published on March 3, 1938. The gap of almost six months between the approval of the draft by the Council of Ministers and its actual coming into force may have been intentional, to allow Italian citizens the time to break up existing "relationships." The reason for this, in my opinion, is that racist colonial Fascism did not wish to act with sudden harshness against its own colonial civil and military senior staff and to inflict too many punishments on "Whites" within sight of the "Blacks."

The decree's text read:

An Italian citizen who in the territory of the Kingdom or of the Colonies maintains a conjugal-like relationship with a subject of Italian East Africa or with *a foreigner belonging to a population having traditions, customs, as well as social and legal notions similar to those of the subjects of Italian East Africa* [emphasis added], shall be punished with a prison sentence of one to five years.

When the decree was converted into law, the phrase emphasized here was replaced by "*or an assimilated person.*"<sup>17</sup>

"Madamato" relationships could be ended either by breaking them off brusquely (for instance if the Italian partner left the colony) or by turning them into marriages. The press had already pointed out the steps that the government intended to take against the latter option. We also know that the King's Prosecutor in Eritrea (i.e. the representative of the executive power within the judiciary) had ordered—the exact date is not known, but somewhat earlier than October 1937—

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis added.

all registry offices to “defer, at least for the time being and awaiting instructions,” the recording in the Civil Register of any “mixed” marriage performed only with religious rites.<sup>18</sup>

It is highly likely that it was this order which led to the following episode and to a direct talk on the issue between the Holy See and the Italian State. On July 28, 1937 the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Church informed Eugenio Pacelli, Secretary of State of the Holy See, that the Vicar Apostolic of Eritrea had reported a not entirely clear objection raised by the local Italian authorities when they were requested to “formalize unions and legitimate the offspring” of “mixed” marriages that had been performed only according to Catholic rites.<sup>19</sup> It is quite likely that this refers to the stop to the recording of “mixed” marriages already mentioned. On July 31, Pacelli had this information forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio to Italy, Francesco Borgongini Duca.<sup>20</sup> On August 5, Borgongini Duca informed him that he had seen both the Under-Secretary of the Interior Guido Buffarini Guidi and the Minister Lessona, and that they had assured him that “mixed” marriages were not banned either in the territory of the Kingdom of Italy nor in that of the colonies. The latter had stated—wrote the Nuncio—that

I have wondered if it would not be advisable to simply prohibit marriages between the two races, but I stopped short of doing this because, pursuant to the Concordat, I could not ban marriages that the Catholic Church considers valid for superior reasons of which I, as a Catholic, acknowledge the supernatural premises.

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<sup>18</sup> Governo dell’Eritrea to Governo generale dell’Africa orientale italiana and other recipients, October 4, 1937 (copy); in ASMAE, Ministero dell’Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

<sup>19</sup> Segretario per la Sacra congregazione per la Chiesa orientale to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, July 28, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d’Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., foglio 79.

<sup>20</sup> Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede to Nunzio apostolico in Italia, July 31, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d’Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., foglio 81.

The Nuncio added that Lessona had told him:

that he did not view unfavourably that people who up to that moment had been living in an illicit union should regularize their situation through matrimony: a further advantage would derive from this, namely the conferment of citizenship to the meticci. He pleaded with me, however, that in the future the Church would assist in deterring from unions between people of different races, in order to avoid the birth of mulatti, who are degenerates.<sup>21</sup>

On this last point, the Nuncio had promised the Minister that he would let him know “my opinion,” that is the official view of the Holy See. The Holy See consulted with the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments, Domenico Jorio, who in his lengthy opinion wrote that “the Church may and even must, within the proper limits, amply provide the requested assistance through its Missionaries, by exerting its persuasion to prevent such hybrid unions,” without however banning them entirely; and that, should the government in future enact a law prohibiting them, the Church should abstain from celebrating religious weddings “save for the proper exceptions suggested by canonical praxis.”<sup>22</sup> The opinion was forwarded to the Nuncio, who on October 1 reported to Pacelli that he had seen Lessona “to whom I have explained the doctrine of the Church and also the limits within which the Missionaries will be able to support the Government’s directives.”<sup>23</sup> It would seem that he had reported Jorio’s opinion to Lessona in full. Content and tone of the correspondence suggest that there had not been any earlier official or off-the-record consultation between the two governments on the issue. The minister’s question and the Nuncio’s answer are suggestive of an agreement, albeit a verbal and informal one, and probably sincere on the part of the Vatican.

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<sup>21</sup> Nunzio apostolico in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 5, 1937; in ASSS-SRS, Fondo Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1040, fasc. 720, fogli 21-23.

<sup>22</sup> Prefetto sacra congregazione dei sacramenti to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 24, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d’Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., fogli 91-92.

<sup>23</sup> Nunzio apostolico in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, October 1, 1937; in ASSS-SRS, Fondo Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1040, fasc. 720, foglio 37.

As for the Italian party, late in October of that same year, in the correspondence arising out of the above-mentioned refusal by the government of Eritrea to register “mixed” marriages that had been celebrated only with religious rites, the Direzione generale per gli affari politici del Ministero dell’Africa italiana (General Directorate for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Italian Africa) informed the Direzione generale degli affari civili (General Directorate of Civil Affairs) of that same Ministry that “from the hints that have been dropped on this issue it would seem that the Holy See is inclined to agree that it is advisable that marriages between nationals and native women be not allowed.”<sup>24</sup> In spite of its hypothetical tone (“it would seem ... inclined ... be not allowed”) the phrasing seems to me to twist Borgongini Duca’s words.

Meanwhile, in May 1937, Lessona (whose department had been renamed Ministry of Italian Africa) had sent the Parliamentary Committee for the planned reform of the First Book of the Italian Civil Code a letter with “general instructions” on the questions of “mixed” marriages and of the conferment of citizenship to the “meticci,” stating that the former “must not be allowed” and that the latter “must be equally prohibited.” After examining the issues, however, the Committee in its conclusions suggested that these matters be ruled “rather than by legal criteria [...] by political criteria, which may be changed according to the needs that may arise,” that is “through special provisions, rather than solemnly in the Civil Code”; and in any case referred the final decision to the government, which probably possessed and could evaluate “aspects that are not available to the Committee.”<sup>25</sup> Already in May, therefore, Lessona had made known intentions that differed from what he would tell the Nuncio in August and in October.

On March 31 and on April 1, 1938 the Senate debated the bill for the budget of the Ministry for Italian Africa, which was no longer headed by Lessona, having been taken over by Mussolini himself some months previously. Both Giuseppe Facchinetti Pulazzini, the senator who read out the report presenting the budget,

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<sup>24</sup> Ministero dell’Africa italiana – Direzione generale per gli affari politici to Ministero dell’Africa italiana – Direzione generale degli affari civili, October [between 27 and 31], 1937, “Matrimoni fra nazionali ed eritree”; in ASMAE, Ministero dell’Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

<sup>25</sup> *Atti della commissione parlamentare chiamata a dare il proprio parere sul progetto del libro primo del Codice civile “delle persone”* (Rome: 1937), 349-351, 359, 483 and 761; quotation on page 483.

and the new Under-Secretary for Italian Africa, Attilio Teruzzi, briefly mentioned the issue of “mixed” marriages, again stating that it would be inadvisable to ban them and claiming that, anyway, none had been performed recently.<sup>26</sup> Neither of them hinted at possible changes to the legislation. Teruzzi’s speech, with its allusion to “problems of a superior nature” that had earlier advised against prohibiting such marriages, was published also in the main government magazine on the colonies.<sup>27</sup> In a public occasion, therefore, the Ministry’s message was similar to the one conveyed to the Vatican; and this time it was even more evident that Mussolini was behind it.

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Meanwhile, between 1935 and 1936, Mussolini had decided to set Italy on a course towards a general anti-Jewish policy of a racist nature. The undertaking was complex and therefore required time.<sup>28</sup> Its operative and public launch was linked by the dictator himself to the circulation of an ideological text on all the various aspects of racism.<sup>29</sup> The document, sent out on July 14, 1938, was titled *Il fascismo e i problemi della razza* (Fascism and race issues) and may be called the Fascist Manifesto on Race.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Atti parlamentari, Senato del Regno, Legislatura XXIX, 1ª sessione 1934-38, Discussioni* (Rome: 1938), 3833 and 3853.

<sup>27</sup> “I problemi dell’Africa Italiana nel discorso del generale Teruzzi al Senato,” *L’azione coloniale* 9, no. 13 (April 7, 1938); quoted in Gianluca Gabrielli, “La persecuzione delle “unioni miste” (1937-1940) nei testi delle sentenze pubblicate e nel dibattito giuridico,” *Studi piacentini* 20 (1996): 83-140; 115.

<sup>28</sup> Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 2006), 95-128 [Italian edition, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, definitive edition, (Torino: Einaudi, 2018)]; see also Giorgio Fabre, “L’informazione diplomatica n. 14 del febbraio 1938,” *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 73, no. 2 (May-August 2007): 45-101.

<sup>29</sup> Giorgio Fabre, “I segreti sono ancora in quei ministeri,” *Contemporanea* 19, no. 4 (October-December 2016): 617-633; 617-618.

<sup>30</sup> “Il fascismo e i problemi della razza,” *Il Giornale d’Italia*, July 15, 1938 (already on sale in the afternoon of July 14); see Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell’elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, 2nd ed. (Torino: Zamorani 2017), 30-35 and 191-193; Id., *Il cielo sereno e l’ombra della Shoah. Otto stereotipi sulla persecuzione antiebraica nell’Italia fascista* (Roma: Viella, 2020), 33-42.

The text, arranged like a decalogue, proclaimed the existence of an Italo-Aryan “race,” clearly distinct from the Jewish and the African “races.” The last point stated:

The purely European characteristics of Italians, both physical and psychological, must not be altered in any way. A union is acceptable only within the European races, in which case one cannot speak of an actual hybridism [...]. The purely European character of Italians would be altered by the cross-breeding with any extra-European race, bearer of a civilisation dissimilar to the ancient civilization of the Aryans.

The preamble to the decalogue made reference to Fascism and to the Ministry of Popular Culture, thereby giving the text an ideological-cultural slant (of a so-called scientific nature); the point quoted here stated a principle (the only one among all ten of them) that could be immediately converted into law. The tone and the words employed indicated that “not acceptable” unions also included marriages. If the diary kept by Ciano, Minister of Foreign Affairs, is truthful, Mussolini informed him on July 17 that he was “working on a measure that would prohibit marriages of Italians with people of another ethnicity, including the Jewish race.”<sup>31</sup> The committee entrusted with preparing the anti-Jewish laws had been installed on June 1.<sup>32</sup>

The pre-announcement contained in the document instantly alarmed the Holy See. The prohibition would affect not just marriages between “White” persons and “Black” subjects, which was the issue the Holy See had been dealing with the previous year, but also marriages in which the “Black” (or the “White/Black ‘mixed-blood’”) was an Italian citizen, as well as those between a person “of Aryan race” and one “of Jewish race” (or of any other race). According to the rules of the Church, if the “White” or “Aryan” was a Catholic and their spouse was christened or, at least, had pledged to raise the children in the Catholic religion, the union could be celebrated in a church and would therefore be entitled to the automatic registration agreed upon in the Concordat. Moreover, marriages of this kind had

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<sup>31</sup> Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1980), 159.

<sup>32</sup> Giorgio Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce. Mussolini dal ministero dell'Interno alla Repubblica sociale italiana*, in co-operation with Annalisa Capristo, (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 87 and photo no. 6.

important theological implications, particularly if the spouse belonged to a Jewish family. Therefore, during the first bilateral meeting after July 14, which took place on July 20, between Bonifacio Pignatti, ambassador of the Kingdom of Italy, and the Secretary of State of the Holy See, the latter—according to Pignatti’s report to Ciano—“steered the conversation towards the issue of marriages between Catholics and Jews, specifying that in this matter Canon Law makes only one distinction, that is between people who are christened, between whom marriage is always permitted, and people who are not, who require a dispensation by the Church.”<sup>33</sup> If the conversation is reported faithfully, Pacelli’s words were more a warning than a real protest, as none could be raised against an ideological text at a time when it was still unknown which legislative measures would follow it. They show however that the Vatican was aware of the new situation, and that perhaps the matter had already been debated internally.

In his report to Ciano, the ambassador wrote further:

In view of a possible slight revision of our legislation on mixed marriages, I believe it to be my duty to draw attention, so that it can be given proper consideration, to the content of Art. 34 of the Concordat. [...] [Because] Canon Law acknowledges as valid the marriage between christened spouses (Canon 1012) regardless of any other consideration.

At that date, therefore, Pignatti seems not to have been informed by his minister of what the latter had written in his diary: clearly the information Ciano had received from Mussolini (if the diary is truthful) had come with a request for secrecy.

In the days that followed, the Italian side seems to have deliberately avoided bringing up the issue of Aryan/Jewish marriages. The communiqué on the Manifesto issued by the Fascist National Party on July 25, and the *Informazione Diplomatica* (Diplomatic Bulletin) no. 18, released by the government on August 5, once again stressed the need to put an end to all unions between “Whites” and

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<sup>33</sup> *Ambasciatore d’Italia presso la Santa Sede to Ministro degli Affari esteri del Regno d’Italia*, July 20, 1938, carbon copy; in ASMAE, *Ambasciata d’Italia presso la Santa Sede*, b. 102, fasc. 1, sfasc. 1.

“Blacks,” but did not mention those other unions.<sup>34</sup> In the frequent meetings between the representatives of both states, dealing with various questions that were of importance to both, Italians did not dwell on the issue of the latter kind of marriages. On July 26 Pignatti saw Pius XI and in his report to Ciano wrote that he had simply told the Pope that: “The Jewish problem is a collateral issue, not the main one”;<sup>35</sup> on July 30 Borgongini Duca saw Ciano and told Pacelli that, on the “question of Jews,” the minister “has not offered any further clarification on the problems I had addressed.”<sup>36</sup>

The Holy See continued to mark its disagreement, constantly stressing how the question of Aryan/Jewish marriages was linked to the Concordat. On July 30, in particular, the Nuncio reported:

I then proceeded to speak to him [to Ciano] of the care the Church has always exerted to prevent not only the concubinage between Whites and Blacks, but also to discourage their marrying. [...] In this regard I also alluded to what I had stated last year to Minister Lessona on behalf of the Holy See [here he mentioned the reports of August 5 and of October 1, 1937]. Regarding Jews, I declared my concern because in Germany [...] [whereas] in Italy, on the contrary, there being the Concordat, it would be impossible to prevent the marriage between a converted Jew and a Catholic.<sup>37</sup>

The day after this meeting the Nuncio wrote a summary of the matter for the minister. The note was never delivered, probably because events overtook it; it did however set forth clearly the position of the Holy See. For a start, the Holy See “congratulated” Italy on its action against “the concubinage between Italians and natives of colour” that had led to the Royal Decree-Law of the previous year and

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<sup>34</sup> Partito nazionale fascista, *Comunicato*, July 25, 1938; in Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 35-37 and 194; *Informazione diplomatica* 18, August 5, 1938; in *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>35</sup> Ambasciatore d'Italia presso la Santa Sede to Ministro degli Affari esteri del Regno d'Italia, July 26, 1938, no. 3819/82R; in ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede, b. 102, fasc. 1, sfasc. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Nunzio della Santa Sede in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 2, 1938; in ASSS-SRS, Congregazione degli Affari ecclesiastici straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1054, fasc. 728, fogli 46-48.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

explained the reasons behind the “very rare dispensations” granted by the Catholic Church to “religiously mixed” marriages between persons belonging to the two groups. The note then added:

No less care has always been taken by the Church to prevent the marriage between Christians and Jews, by establishing a diriment impediment, which renders such unions not just illegitimate, but also null and void. [...] Pursuant to Art. 34 of the Concordat, this diriment impediment is acknowledged by the Italian State for religious marriages. [...] In some very rare cases, and always for weighty reasons of conscience, a mixed marriage has been permitted by granting dispensation from the diriment impediment.

Only after expounding all this, the note dwelled on “racially mixed” but “religiously homogeneous” marriages, which in Africa and in Italy were the more frequent kind:

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the Catholic Church cannot, because of divine law, hinder the marriage between two christened believers, whatever their origin or their race, although it will endeavour to advise against it whenever it anticipates that the marriage may have a less happy outcome both for the prospective spouses and for the any future offspring.<sup>38</sup>

On August 6, Pius XI sent Father Pietro Tacchi Venturi, who for several years had been an unofficial intermediary between the two sides, a note with instructions for a letter that the Jesuit was to submit to Mussolini as if he had himself received it from the Pope. The note was about some points concerning Jews, one of them

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<sup>38</sup> Nunziatura apostolica d'Italia, *Appunto*, August 1, 1938 [date added only on the carbon copy], n. 6359, with a handwritten note “non consegnato” (not delivered); in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica in Italia, b. 9, fasc. 5, fogli 88-92.

being: “What happens to marriages?”<sup>39</sup> The letter that Tacchi Venturi then read and gave to Mussolini on August 8 stated:

[...] Many aspects of the question, such as those regarding converted Jews who live as good Catholics, or the children born of Jews who obtained a dispensation to marry a Catholic woman, and others of a similar nature, cannot be solved, particularly where a Concordat is in force, without reference to Canon Law, which in Italy regulates marriages.<sup>40</sup>

In the short space of a few days, then, there had been the Fascist pre-announcement that those marriages would be banned, and the warning by the Vatican that it intended to defend what had been agreed upon in the Lateran Pacts of 1929. This stance arose mainly from the reasons, both religious and diplomatic in nature, that have already been mentioned. The Church, maybe, was also concerned that future Italian laws might affect even already existing marriages, or that families legitimized only by the Church might be accused of concubinage or excluded from social welfare.

In the weeks that followed, the question of marriage was clearly treated as a minor issue in the accounts of the talks and in the public statements by both sides. It was not even included in the agreement reached on August 16 between Mussolini and Tacchi Venturi on the “problem of racism and Judaism” and on the *Azione Cattolica* (Catholic Action).<sup>41</sup> Nor was it touched upon in the Fascist anti-Jewish legislative measures approved by the Council of Ministers on September 1 and 2, which dealt with foreigners, education and other issues.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Memorandum (“mente di udienza”) with Pius XI’s directions to Pietro Tacchi Venturi, August 6, 1938; in ARSI, Fondo Pietro Tacchi Venturi, b. 73, fasc. 2143/a, foglio 14; cf. Giorgio Fabre, “Un ‘accordo felicemente conchiuso’,” *Quaderni di storia* 76 (July-December 2012): 83-154; 108.

<sup>40</sup> Text in form of a letter of instruction from Pius XI to Pietro Tacchi Venturi in preparation for a meeting of the latter with Mussolini, written by Tacchi Venturi by order of the Pope, August 8, 1938 (handwritten draft, presumably identical with the typescript handed to Mussolini); in ARSI, Fondo Pietro Tacchi Venturi, b. 73, fasc. 2143/a, fogli 19-20; Fabre, *Un accordo*, 109-110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-154.

<sup>42</sup> Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 47-54 and 195-198.

Early in the same month of September 1938 it was made known that the Grand Council of Fascism would deal with the “problem of race” at the meeting scheduled for October 1, as announced earlier. The dictator’s sudden departure for the conference in Munich caused this first meeting to be postponed to October 6. It was at this later session that the Grand Council of Fascism approved the *Dichiarazione sulla razza* (Declaration on Race).

Mussolini had devoted a great deal of time to the preparation of this document. The handwritten text, that appears to me to be its first detailed draft, had probably been written in the first ten days (perhaps towards the end of the first ten days) of September 1938. It already included the prohibition of “racially mixed” unions: “The Grand Council of Fascism decrees: a) the prohibition of marriages between Italian men and women with persons belonging to the Semitic or Hamitic races, or to other non-Aryan races.” This wording remained unchanged through all successive drafts, including the final one approved on October 6.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the ideological principle stated in the Manifesto of July 14 was transformed into a political directive. The dictator, therefore, had decided not to grant the Holy See’s request.

The Holy See, on the other hand, seems to have been taken unawares: they had fully lent credence to the verbal assurances given a year earlier by Lessona and Buffarini Guidi; they thought that the Italian State, being Catholic, would in any case respect the principle that any changes to the Concordat needed to be agreed upon; they hadn’t seriously considered that Fascism might be capable to draw up plans independently and to carry them out on its own (although the Lateran Pacts of 1929 had shown clearly that the regime was capable of undertaking changes of historical relevance).

The *Dichiarazione* of October 6, 1938 established the new legal frame for State antisemitism. The document ended with the words: “the laws that shall be drawn up without delay by the various Ministries must take inspiration from the directives issued by the Grand Council.”

The ideological and cultural manifesto of July had thus been followed by an official and political declaration, which in turn announced a specific legislative

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<sup>43</sup> Gran Consiglio del fascismo, *Dichiarazione sulla razza*, October 6, 1938; in the newspapers of October 7, 1938 and in Partito nazionale fascista, *Foglio d’ordini* 214, October 26, 1938; Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 60-67 and 199-201.

text; such a complex framework is rarely seen during the Fascist era. In my opinion, it was in order to allow this plan to unfold that in August and September the Italian side had avoided to discuss with the Vatican the issue of matrimony.

When the *Dichiarazione* was made public, there were several protests on the part of the Holy See, followed by complex negotiations with the Italian government, which this time around agreed to discuss the issue. During the discussion, the Vatican asserted again all the principles and aspects already set forth in its warnings and protests in late July and early August, suggesting some mitigations and exceptions to the law that was then being drawn up. Mussolini, on the other hand, amended the law's draft so as to render liable to punishment any "racially mixed" concubinage, a category that included also "mixed" couples cohabiting after a marriage performed only according to Catholic rites. In the end, however, the text approved by the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Italy on November 10, 1938, issued as the Royal Decree-Law no. 1728 of November 17 1938, titled *Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana* (Measures for the defence of the Italian race), published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno* on November 19, and which came into force on December 4, curtly stated only the basic principle: "The marriage of an Italian citizen of the Aryan race with a person belonging to another race is prohibited. The celebrated marriage that fails to comply with this prohibition is null and void."<sup>44</sup> This rule (which did not invalidate "racially mixed" marriages celebrated previously) translated into legal terms, without changes, the *Dichiarazione* of October 6 by the Grand Council of Fascism.

It should also be added that on November 27—that is, in the days between the publication and the coming into force of the decree—Buffarini Guidi, Under-Secretary of the Interior, wired the Prefects (the chief government officials at provincial level) to start at once, "by order of the Duce," to "prevent" the

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<sup>44</sup> Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 70-90 and 202-207; on these negotiations see also Giovanni Coco, *Il labirinto romano. Il filo delle relazioni Chiesa-Stato tra Pio XI, Pacelli e Mussolini (1929-1939)* (Città del Vaticano: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2019), vol. II, 1040-1043 and 1056-1077; Roberto De Rose and Micaela Procaccia, "Le carte Buffarini Guidi all'Archivio centrale dello Stato (1938-1945)," *Contemporanea* 23, no. 3 (July-September 2020): 415-432; 415-420.

celebration of new “mixed” marriages.<sup>45</sup> This happened at least in one case, namely that of a wedding planned for December 1, in a church in Brescia.<sup>46</sup>

On November 2, the committee established in the Vatican to examine the issue reached the conclusion that, should the prohibition come into force, the Holy See ought to issue a public protest.<sup>47</sup> And on November 14 (that is, after the decree had been approved by the Council of Ministers and before it was issued) “L’Osservatore Romano” denounced in harsh terms the “wound [*vulnus*] inflicted on the Lateran Concordat,” because the prohibition on these marriages decreed by Italy “unilaterally infringes something that was agreed upon in a bilateral pact.” The article also explained that the prohibition was not in keeping with doctrine, because “races have never been a discriminating factor among the Catholic believers,” because “everyone, whatever their race, is called upon to be a child of God.”<sup>48</sup> The text made no mention of the many other racist and anti-Jewish rules contained both in that Decree-Law and in the other decrees issued in September. Its closing sentences hinted at the slim chance of a last-minute agreement with the government. In short, the article’s content and tone were those of a strong diplomatic protest against unilateral changes to an international treaty. For the Holy See the new decree was something of a slap in the face. Apart from this article in the newspaper, however, there were no further public reactions by Pius XI. Even the project of an encyclical on racism and anti-Semitism, which he had entrusted the previous June to the Jesuit John LaFarge and his group,<sup>49</sup> and had since languished, and does not appear to have been revived in November. The note in L’Osservatore Romano, moreover, called “*vulnus*” the unilateral change to the

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<sup>45</sup> Viviana Muscio, *Le leggi razziali a Taranto*, p. 15; in <https://fdocumenti.com/document/le-leggi-razziali-a-taranto-le-leggi-razziali-a-taranto-linteresse-per.html?page=1>, accessed: June 10, 2022; Marino Ruzzenenti, “La capitale della Rsi e la Shoah. La persecuzione degli ebrei nel Bresciano (1938-1945),” *Studi bresciani: quaderni della Fondazione Micheletti* 15 (2006): 7-232; 49; Andrea Bianchini, “La persecuzione razziale nel pesarese, 1938-1944,” in *Studi sulla comunità ebraica di Pesaro*, ed. Riccardo Paolo Uguccioni (Pesaro: Fondazione Scavolini, 2003), 107.

<sup>46</sup> Ruzzenenti, *La capitale*, 48-50.

<sup>47</sup> Valerio De Cesaris, *Vaticano, fascismo e questione razziale* (Milano: Guerini studio, 2010), 226-229; Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 1071-1073.

<sup>48</sup> “A proposito di un nuovo Decreto Legge,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, November 14-15, 1938.

<sup>49</sup> Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *L’encyclique cachée de Pie XI. Une occasion manquée de l’Eglise face à l’antisémitisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995); Peter Eisner, *The Pope’s Last Crusade: How an American Jesuit Helped Pope Pius XI’s Campaign to Stop Hitler* (New York: William Morrow, 2013); Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 950-951.

Concordat, not the passing of racist and anti-Semitic laws.<sup>50</sup> Basically, the Vatican abided by the agreement reached in mid-August 1938 between Mussolini and Tacchi Venturi, i.e. that there would be no public protest against those laws, although that agreement obviously could not include matters that were part of the international treaty between the two states.<sup>51</sup> It should further be noted that, after the prohibition had come into force, the Holy See continued to ask for it to be softened, but to no avail.<sup>52</sup>

For Fascism, the passing of the ban on “racially mixed” marriages was a success. For the time being, it is impossible to prove that Mussolini had been pursuing this outcome since the summer of 1935, because at times it is easier to discern the immediate aims of his actions than their strategic purpose. However, I am fairly sure that by late 1936 he had this end result in mind. As to the time needed to bring his plan to completion, one should consider that he had a fair amount of experience in letting things mature and then abruptly speeding them up. We can see evidence of this in the carefully crafted progression during the second half of 1938 from Manifesto to Declaration to Decree-Law, aimed both at establishing a racist and anti-Semitic state and—as we have seen—at bringing about a breach of the Concordat.

What mattered primarily to Mussolini was the overall plan. The Lateran Pacts (which he had wanted, after all) could not be allowed to be an obstacle to the course he was now pursuing. He felt that the transformation of Fascist and totalitarian Italy into a racist and anti-Semitic state was a mighty task, to be undertaken and pursued without hesitation. If one may resort to military terminology: Mussolini and his Fascism obtained a clear victory against the Holy See, and in denouncing the “*vulnus*” the latter ultimately certified its own defeat.

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<sup>50</sup> Paolo Zanini, “La Chiesa e il mondo cattolico italiano di fronte alle leggi antiebraiche,” in *L’Italia ai tempi del ventennio fascista. A ottant’anni dalle leggi antiebraiche: tra storia e diritto*, eds. Marilisa D’Amico, Antonino De Francesco, and Cecilia Siccardi (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2019), 188-190.

<sup>51</sup> Giorgio Fabre, *Un accordo*, 83-154.

<sup>52</sup> De Cesaris, *Vaticano*, 231-234; Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 1088 ff.

Moreover, a comparison between the timelines of the Fascist regime and the Vatican highlights that in mid-1938 the Duce and the pope simultaneously set in motion the process aimed at producing two texts on the subject of “races.” On June 23 Mussolini summoned the young anthropologist Guido Landra for the next day, to entrust him with the preparation of the first draft of an ideological manifesto;<sup>53</sup> on June 24 Pius XI summoned LaFarge for the next day to entrust him with the drafting of an encyclical.<sup>54</sup> Leaving aside the fact that only the first of these plans came to completion, the two projects were unique in Europe, sharing the same foundational nature but setting forth opposite views. The documents known so far do not allow us to infer some direct connection between the two projects, but the almost exact coincidence of dates is a further strong sign of the fact that the growth of racism and antisemitism in Italy and on the continent had by that time become an explosive issue.

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<sup>53</sup> Guido Landra, *Cronaca*, September 12, 1938, Guido Landra family papers, quoted in Aaron Gillette, “The origins of the ‘Manifesto of racial scientists’,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 305-323; Guido Landra to Benito Mussolini, September 27, 1940, in ACS, Segreteria particolare del duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 476, fasc. 183.506, published in Mauro Raspanti, “I razzismi del fascismo. Appendice,” in *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista*, ed. Centro Furio Jesi (Bologna: Grafis, 1994), 367-368; Fabre, *I segreti*, 617-618.

<sup>54</sup> Eisner, *The Pope*, 55-56, where the Author draws attention to John LaFarge, “Memo on conversation with Holy Father, June 25, 1938”; in Georgetown University Library, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, John LaFarge S.J. Papers, box 38, folder 3. Cf. also Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 951, where the author draws attention to the list of Pius XI's audiences for June 25, 1938; in AAV, Prefettura casa pontificia, Udienze private 35, foglio 1050.

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