

11 “The last crusade”? The Italian public opinion in front of the conquest of Jerusalem in 1917

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Introduction

On 11 December 1917, the British general Edmund Allenby, commander of the Allied Egyptian Expeditionary Force, entered Jerusalem accompanied by Colonel Jean Philpin de Piépape, the commander of the French contingent, and Lieutenant-Colonel Francesco d’Agostino, at the head of the Italians forces. The Muslim rule over the Holy City was ended after seven centuries. The storming of Jerusalem had limited strategic importance, but from December 1917 the British press and propaganda emphasised the military victory by evoking the vocabulary of the crusade and the popular imagination of the medieval expeditions.¹ Numerous articles, pictures, volumes and public speech, these last ones held during public commemorations, depicted the military episode like the realisation of the medieval crusades and the Allied soldiers like “new crusaders”, insisting on the historical parallels between the medieval expeditions and the Allenby’s campaign, and recalling historical figures, like Richard the Lionheart, to celebrate the victory.² The British Press Bureau had initially invited the press not to define the military operations against Turkey as a modern crusade, so as not to cause friction with the hundred million Mohammedans who lived in the British Empire.³ However, at the beginning of 1918, the Press Bureau adhered to this narrative, not least because pressed by the General Staff and the Foreign Office, and produced many propaganda materials, including a film entitled *The New Crusaders*.⁴ In the British war memories, the campaign of Palestine was often remembered as “the last crusade”.⁵

- 1 Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917. Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 247–294; Mike Horswell, *The Rise and Fall of British Crusader Medievalism, c. 1825-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 113–136.
- 2 James E. Kitchen, “‘Khaki crusaders’: crusading rhetoric and the British Imperial soldier during the Egypt and Palestine campaigns, 1916-18”, *First World War Studies* 1 (2010): 141–160; Stefan Goebel, “Britain’s ‘Last Crusade’: From War Propaganda to War Commemoration, 1914-1930”, in *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and the Modern Age*, ed. David Welch and Jo Fox (London, 2012): 159–176 at page 161.
- 3 Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, 260–262.
- 4 Luke McKernan, “‘The Supreme Moment of the War’: General Allenby’s entry into Jerusalem”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 2 (1993): 169–180.
- 5 Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, 288–289, 293–294.

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Until December 1917, the Italian press paid little attention to the Middle East Theatre. The Italian public opinion was primarily interested in the combat on the Austro-Italian Front, particularly after the Caporetto's disaster (24 October–12 November 1917).⁶ Moreover, the *Regio esercito* participated in the Sinai and Palestine Campaign with a small contingent (500 soldiers).⁷ Nevertheless, the great part of the Italian press and the authorities and the interventionists enthusiastically celebrated the capture of the Holy City and the contribution of the Italian forces, insisting on the moral and political importance of the conquest. Similarly to the United Kingdom, most of pro-war political forces, the so-called interventionists (nationalists, democrats, conservatives, etc.), tried to make sense of the victory by evoking the medieval crusades, commemorating the historical role of the Italians in crusade expeditions and exalting Jerusalem's occupation as a decisive stage of the "civilising crusade" of the Entente. However, both in Italy and the United Kingdom, the word 'crusade' was used in a secularised way and actualised according to the propagandistic representation of the war as a "righteous crusade" of the civilised nations against the "barbarous" German enemy.⁸ Since the 19th century, the word 'crusade' and the crusading language were widely utilised in the propaganda campaigns of secular politics, in order to obtain a large popular mobilisation and an absolute dedication to achieve the proposed objective. Nevertheless, the contemporary Catholic culture, in spite of the extent use of the crusading language to summon the faithful in various spiritual activities (for example, the "Rosary Crusade" of Pope Leo XIII), rejected this secularised usage: the crusade was a holy war called and blessed by the pope.⁹ For this reason, the great part of the Italian Catholic community while legitimising the conflict as a "just war", rarely qualified the warfare and the conquest of Jerusalem as a crusade.¹⁰

In view of this, this chapter aims at analysing the reactions of the Italian authorities and public opinion to the conquest of Jerusalem in 1917, in order to observe how and to what extent the word 'crusade' was used to define and interpret this event in the Italian political debate. To present a complete framework, the paper also discusses the refusals to use the term. The case study constitutes a passage of no secondary importance for the general history of the word 'crusade'. The takeover of the Holy City, in fact, easily inspired references to the historical crusades and

6 Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War. Germany and Austria-Hungary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 332.

7 Antonello Battaglia, *Da Suez ad Aleppo. La campagna Alleata e il Distaccamento italiano in Siria e in Palestina (1917-1921)* (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2015), 118.

8 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *La violenza, la crociata e il lutto, La Grande Guerra e la storia del Novecento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 103–105.

9 To clarify the meanings that Catholic culture of the time attributed to the word *crusade*, see "Crocesignati" and "Crociata", in Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, vol. 18 (Venezia: Tipografia Emiliana, 1843), 274–303. See also: Marco Giardini, "The reception of the crusades in the contemporary Catholic Church. 'Purification of the memory' or medieval nostalgia?" in *The Crusades in the Modern World*. ed. Mike Horswell and Akil N. Awan (New York: Routledge, 2020): 75–90.

10 Daniele Menozzi, "Crociata". *Storia di un'ideologia dalla Rivoluzione francese a Bergoglio* (Roma: Carocci, 2020), 49–74, 103–129.

analogies between the medieval expeditions and the world war. The circumstance brought out the ways of using and qualifying the word ‘crusade’ by the different constituents of the Italian scene. The subject will be investigated through the printed sources, such as newspapers, magazines and propaganda leaflets, which also inform us about public meetings. Due to the extensive nature of the subject, this chapter will firstly focus on the behaviour of Italian authorities, moreover on the heterogeneous currents of the secular interventionism, and finally on the clergy and Catholic public opinion, considering the position of the Holy See on the event.

The Italian authorities

The Italian civil authorities reacted enthusiastically to the taking of the Holy City and attributed symbolic meanings to the event. Speaking to the Chamber of Deputies (12 December 1917), the Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, a liberal exponent, defined the event as a crucial stage in the civilising war of the Entente and implicitly recalled the crusades. According to Orlando, the episode evoked “venerable traditions and glorious memories, which have been the reason, the essence and *raison d’être* of the history and civilisation of the great Christian nations”.¹¹ The government understood the propaganda value of the conquest of Jerusalem to encourage the public opinion, which was still demoralised due to the defeat of Caporetto. On 15 December, the Minister of Education, the socialist reformist Agostino Berenini,¹² decreed that teachers would have to explain the importance of the event to the pupils through historical and literary references.¹³ The ministerial circular also intended to stimulate public initiatives across the country. Many local authorities responded to the call and, with the support of the patriotic associations, organised public commemorations in evocative and historical places.¹⁴

The Italian authorities adopted a communication strategy to celebrate the event similar to the British one, albeit in a minor tone: the conquest of Jerusalem acquired sense and importance through the connection to the medieval crusades. The pretextual use of historical topic was frequent in the pro-war public speech, but the Italian propaganda and the secular political forces used only marginally medieval themes.

11 *Comunicazioni del governo* in Atti parlamentari, Legislatura XXIV, I Sessione, Discussioni, 12 December 1917, 15106.

12 Stefano Rodotà, “Berenini Agostino”, in *Dizionario Biografico degli italiani*, vol. 9 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967).

13 “Notiziario italiano. Ministro P.I. Bernini propone approfondimento sulla presa di Gerusalemme”, *Stampa*, 16 December 1917; “La presa di Gerusalemme e le scuole”, *Idea Nazionale*, 13 December 1917.

14 “Le manifestazioni patriottiche al Gianicolo”, *Messaggero*, 17 December 1917; “Commemorazioni. La caduta di Gerusalemme”, *Lavoro*, December 16, 1917; Salvatore Romano, *La liberazione di Gerusalemme. Conferenza del prof. Salvatore Romano* (Palermo: Stab. D’arti grafiche G. Fiore & figli, 1918); Filiberto Bassani, *La liberazione di Gerusalemme: conferenza tenuta al R. Liceo Mario Pagano ed alla R. Scuola Normale femminile principessa Elena di Campobasso il 20 dicembre 1917* (Campobasso: Tip. De Gaglia e Nebbia, 1918); Francesco Bernetti Evangelista, *Discorso tenuto a Roma in Arcadia nella solenne tornata commemorativa per la liberazione di Gerusalemme* (Fermo: Stab. Coop. Tipografico, 1918).

The Middle Ages recalled a politically fragmented and militarily weak Italy, united only on a linguistic-literary level and squeezed between the Papal State and the Holy Roman Empire, which was considered the ancestor of the Habsburg monarchy.¹⁵ The secular interventionists occasionally used the word ‘crusade’, but with secular and modernised connotations which had nothing in common with the historical events and with the meanings attributed to the term by the Catholic culture. Only the Nationalist Catholicism regularly used the medieval topic, such as the battle of Legnano, a clash between the Imperial army of Frederick “Barbarossa” and the troops of the Lombard League, a military alliance of the municipalities of Northern Italy and symbolically led by Pope Alexander III.¹⁶ These historical events were evoked for purely propaganda purposes, without historicising them.

The government reversed the trend and placed an episode of the world war in relation to the medieval past. However, the Italian propaganda operation suffered from the lack of great national crusader heroes such as Richard the Lionheart for the United Kingdom, or Saint Louis (king Louis IX) for France.¹⁷ Various historical episodes and historical-literary personalities, considered representative of the Italian ‘crusader’ identity, were mobilised for this propaganda campaign: the poet Torquato Tasso, author of *La Gerusalemme liberata*,¹⁸ and the heroes of this poem, such as Tancred of Hauteville, the *Lombards on the First Crusade*, the operatic *dramma lirico* of Giuseppe Verdi, and, beyond the medieval crusades, the naval battle of Lepanto (1571).¹⁹ In Rome, the largest commemoration of the victory, organised by the municipality and the patriotic associations, took place at the poet Tasso’s oak on the Janiculum, where a large procession of students and pro-war politicians laid a laurel wreath.²⁰

The secular interventionism

Most of the secular interventionist politicians re-proposed this representation of the event, but with different nuances and intensity.²¹ The interventionism front, which controlled the public bodies, was composed of heterogeneous political forces, from the revolutionary left to the nationalistic right. Mostly the liberal-conservative and nationalist exponents, who had assumed a predominant role in the interventionist side after the Caporetto disaster, recalled the theme. Generally,

15 Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, “Il medievalismo e la Grande Guerra in Italia”, *Studi storici* 56.2 (2015): 251–276.

16 Pietro Borzomati, “I cattolici calabresi e la guerra 1915-1918”, in *Benedetto XV, i cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, ed. Giuseppe Rossini (Roma: Arti grafiche italiane, 1963): 447–482 at page 476.

17 Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87–91.

18 J.G. Strutt, *La quercia di Torquato Tasso cantore della Gerusalemme liberata* (Roma: Metallografia E. Calzone, 1917).

19 Luigi Goretti, *Gerusalemme liberata e il pensiero di Gesù. Conferenza* (Roma: Tip. Forense, 1918), 12.

20 “Per la liberazione di Gerusalemme. Gli studenti romani alla quercia del Tasso”, *Guerra italiana*, 30 December 1917.

21 Adorni Daniela, “Orlando al governo”, in *Gli Italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*, vol. 3.1, *La Grande Guerra: dall’Intervento alla “vittoria mutilata”*, ed. Mario Isnenghi and Daniele Ceschin (Torino: Utet, 2008): 501–515 at page 502.

this political area qualified the conquest of Jerusalem as a crusade to show that Entente and particularly Italy had fulfilled a centuries-old aim of Christianity. On 16 December, during a commemoration in Rome at the statue of Marcantonio Colonna, one of the main admirals of the Holy League fleet in the battle of Lepanto (1571), the conservative senator Rodolfo Amedeo Lanciani gave a speech and brought “a greeting to the combatants of Lepanto and to the new crusaders of Allied arms, who at this solemn hour carried out the centuries-old vow of the Christian peoples”.²² According to conservative politician Arturo Reggio, the episode demonstrated that the war against the Central Powers was a Christian struggle, to such an extent that the Entente soldiers could be defined as martyrs of the national and Catholic cause: “Pope Urban II, risen, could hand over the Cross to them, repeating the words of the Council of Clermont: ‘Christ himself rises from his Sepulchre to hand over the Cross to you. [...] May it shine on your arms and on your banners: it will be for you the prize of victory or the palm of martyrdom’”. By conquest the Holy City, the Entente combatants had renewed the deeds of their medieval precursors: “If the culture, the means, the weapons of the new crusaders are very different from those of the companions of Pius Geoffrey, the attitude of the soldiers of England, France, Italy [...] cannot be changed: like the ancient crusaders, they fought the barbarism of the crescent increased by German discipline”.²³ In many circumstances, the use of the vocabulary of the crusade led to embellishing speeches with anti-Islamic aspects.

In some cases, the conquest of the Holy City and, by extension, the war were placed in direct continuity with the medieval crusades. A pamphlet, published by the *Comitato romano di organizzazione civile durante la guerra* (an association politically close to the conservatives and nationalists),²⁴ declared it right from the title: *La IX crociata: gli eserciti di Inghilterra, Francia e Italia sotto il comando del generale E. H. H. Allenby liberano Gerusalemme dal dominio dei Turchi* (The 9th Crusade: the armies of England, France, and Italy, under the command of General E. H. Allenby, liberate Jerusalem from Turkish rule). However, once again, the author of the pamphlet used the word ‘crusade’ in a secular way: in fact, the Allied soldiers were defined as the “new crusaders of law and freedom”, rather than the defenders of the Christian faith, and the conquest of Jerusalem was presented as an ancillary aim, basically useful to demonstrate that Italy had divine support: “‘God wills it’, we can repeat it for our national crusade”.²⁵ Furthermore, the booklet, taking up typical themes of anti-German propaganda,²⁶ demonised above all

22 “Al vincitore di Lepanto Marcantonio Colonna”, *Messaggero*, 17 December 1917.

23 Arturo Reggio, *La liberazione di Gerusalemme* (Brescia: F. Apollonio & C, 1918), 8–9.

24 Alessandra Staderini, *Combattenti senza divisa. Roma nella Grande Guerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995), 41.

25 Comitato romano per l’organizzazione civile durante la guerra, *La IX crociata: gli eserciti di Inghilterra, Francia e Italia sotto il comando del generale E. H. H. Allenby liberano Gerusalemme dal dominio dei Turchi* (Roma: Tip. Impr. Gen. D’affissioni e pubblicità, 1918), 11–12.

26 Anne Morelli, “La Grande Guerra: alle origini della propaganda moderna”, in *Costruire un nemico. Studi di storia della propaganda di guerra*, ed. Nicola Labanca, Camillo Zadra (Milano: Unicopli, 2011): 8–15.

Austria-Hungary and Germany, underlining that their alliance with the Ottoman Empire had broken the unity of Christianity.

The nationalist right and, sometimes with more intensity, the interventionist revolutionary left²⁷ resorted to the vocabulary of the crusade to attack the pope, as well as to make sense of military victory. According to them, the Holy See should finally have openly supported the Entente, which had achieved a historical papal aim. The *Popolo d'Italia*,²⁸ Benito Mussolini's newspaper, criticised Benedict XV for his neutrality, while he should have "been the happiest for this liberation that was a centuries-old dream of all Christianity".²⁹ The newspaper took advantage of the conquest of the Holy City to condemn again the appeal for international peace, made by the pope in August 1917³⁰. Mussolini wrote, using an anti-Islamic tone: "therefore, the massacre was not 'useless' and without the massacre – without the war – Jerusalem would still be Turkish, and the cross would be overwhelmed by Mohammed's crescent".³¹ In the face of this, the *Popolo d'Italia* and other tabloids near to the interventionist revolutionary left increased the criticisms against the Italian Catholics, often accused of not supporting the war cause with conviction, inviting them not to obey to the Holy See, because the pope ran against the interests of Catholicity.

The liberal-democratic and social-reformist interventionism³² also referred to the crusade, but often – as *L'Illustrazione Italiana* made – to emphasise the differences between medieval expeditions, motivated by "the hatred for those with a different faith from our", and the "new crusade"³³ of Entente, inspired by universal objectives and carried out by multi-ethnic and multi-religious force.³⁴ The democratic intellectual Giulio Provenzal underlined that the Entente conquered Jerusalem to "free those lands from all intolerance" and not for "the religious fanaticism of the crusades".³⁵ However, some exponents and newspaper of this political area had different approach. In the concluding oration of the Janiculum commemoration, mentioned above, the Minister Berenini drew a parallel between "the crusade sung by Tasso", which arose from the "desire to free the tomb of Christ from the Ottoman barbarism", and "the present crusade that nations are fighting for the law and the justice

27 Giovanna Procacci, "Gli interventisti di sinistra, la rivoluzione di febbraio e la politica interna italiana nel 1917", *Italia contemporanea* 138 (1980): 49–83 at pages 78–82.

28 Mussolini's newspaper officially held extreme left-wing positions, but during the war it had gradually embraced nationalism and imperialism. Paul O'Brien, "L'Audacia della 'grande voltata'. Benito Mussolini", *Gli Italiani in guerra*. vol. 3.1, *La Grande Guerra*, ed. Isnenghi and Ceschin: 384–392.

29 Ottavio Dinale (Jean Jacques), "D'ogni erba un fascio", *Popolo d'Italia*, 16 December 1917.

30 Maria Antonia Paiano, *La preghiera e la Grande Guerra. Benedetto XV e la nazionalizzazione del culto in Italia* (Pisa: Pacini, 2017), 213.

31 Benito Mussolini, "Il Convegno di Udine", *Popolo d'Italia*, December 27, 1917

32 Renate Lunzer, "Dare un senso alla guerra: gli intellettuali", in *Dizionario storico della prima guerra mondiale*, ed. Nicola Labanca (Bari: Laterza, 2014): 343–355 at pages 348–350.

33 "La presa di Gerusalemme", *Illustrazione italiana* 50 (1917), 500.

34 See also: Luigi Albertini, *Venti anni di vita politica*, vol. 2, *L'Italia nella guerra mondiale*, vol. 3, *Da Caporetto a Vittorio Veneto: ottobre 1917-novembre 1918* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1953), 395; Luigi Einaudi, "La capitolazione di Gerusalemme", *Corriere della Sera*, 11 December 1917.

35 Giulio Provenzal, "La Palestina e il sionismo", *Idea democratica*, 15 December 1917.

against the current Ottomans, who have become servants of a more refined barbarism, adorned with false civilisation”.³⁶ The politician evoked the medieval expeditions but re-interpreted the word ‘crusade’ in a secular sense, to glorify the conflict as a clash of civilisations against barbarian nations. To strengthen the demonisation of the Wilhelminian Empire, Berenini built a parallel between the Muslim states, which controlled Jerusalem in the 10th century, and Germany. This was not an isolated case: various circles of reformist socialism even seemed fascinated by the crusader past. The newspaper *Il Lavoro* described the conquest of Jerusalem as “an event of world importance” that marked the return of “European Christianity” and of the “banner civilisation” in Jerusalem, “as at the time of the Crusades”.³⁷

The Holy See and the Catholic public opinion

The conflict upset the balance of the Italian Catholic community (the clergy and the faithful), divided between the obedience to the homeland and the loyalty to the pope, who called for peace.³⁸ The Italian Church and the organised laity contributed crucially to the war effort and to building consensus for the conflict, to regain a prominent role in the Italian scene. However, they had political difficulty in fully embracing the positions of the secular interventionism. Firstly, the “Roman Question” remained unresolved: in fact, the Holy See and the Italian government did not have official relations and Catholics were still significantly under-represented in Italian politics. Moreover, the Catholic intransigent circles,³⁹ while supporting the war effort, intensely criticised the excesses of interventionist speech, like the instrumental use of the Faith for propaganda purposes or the frequent attacks against the pope, the clergy, and the Catholic community. The great part of the Italian episcopate, to not increase the distance from the papal course, legitimised the war, but refused the explicit sacralisation of the conflict and encouraged both the prayers for the victory and those for the peace. However, during the conflict and particularly after the Caporetto defeat, the pro-war rhetoric entered into the religious speech and the Italian Catholic community gradually assumed national-Catholic positions, opening the path to reconciliation between the patriotism and faith.⁴⁰ The conquest of the

36 “Cerimonie religiose e civili a Roma per la liberazione della Terra Santa. Alla storica quercia”, *Avvenire d'Italia*, 17 December 1917.

37 “Un avvenimento mondiale”, *Il Lavoro*, 11 December 1917.

38 Guido Formigoni, *I cattolici italiani nella prima guerra mondiale* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2021).

39 The advocates of Catholic intransigentism taught that all social and political action ought to be based on the Catholic Faith. Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 15–71.

40 Daniele Menozzi (ed.), “Religione, nazione e guerra nel primo conflitto mondiale,” *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo* 3.2 (2006): 305–422; Id., *Chiesa, pace e guerra nel Novecento. Verso una delegittimazione religiosa dei conflitti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008): 15–46; Id., “Strumentalizzazione della religione, sacralizzazione della guerra e delegittimazione religiosa dei conflitti”, in “*Inutile strage*”. *I cattolici e la S. Sede nella Prima guerra mondiale: raccolta di studi in occasione del centenario dello scoppio della Prima guerra mondiale (1914-2014)*, ed. Lorenzo Botrugno (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2014): 637–658.

Holy City could have facilitated this reconciliation, because the Entente had fulfilled a centuries-old goal of Christianity. After all, during the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), the clergy resorted to the ideology of the crusade and martyrdom in order to sacralise the conflict and the fallen, despite the clear opposition from Pope Pius X.⁴¹

Indeed, the Italian Catholic community welcomed the conquest of the Holy City but distanced itself from the celebrations and the tones of interventionism. This attitude was probably influenced by papal conduct. Consistently to the intransigent standpoint,⁴² Benedict XV refused to compare the conquest to the medieval crusades, as it is evident from some private conversations between the high Roman hierarchy and the Italian and French *chargés d'affaires*, for many reasons. First of all, the Entente also included peoples of Protestant confession and non-Christian religion (Hindus and Muslims), whereas the crusades were animated by Catholic States. Secondly, the liberation of Jerusalem was not the final aim of the conflict, but a consequence of the struggle against Turkey and Germany in the Middle East.⁴³ The Holy See, moreover, feared that the British would support Zionist projects in Palestine. Furthermore, as illustrated by *Civiltà Cattolica* (a periodical published by the Jesuits in Rome), the crusades represented a reference model for the Catholic culture of the time, in which the society was permeated by Christianity and the secular political power was subordinated to the ecclesiastical authority. On the other hand, the world conflict did not pursue religious objectives, but imperialist aims, Christendom was divided, and the society was torn apart by social conflicts and secularisation.⁴⁴ These articles in the Vatican press anticipated the contents of the pope's public speech. In his Christmas address to the Sacred College of Cardinals, Benedict XV, avoiding parallels with the crusades, stated that the conquest of Jerusalem should be interpreted as an invitation to pacify Christian society by laying down arms and recomposing the religious rifts.⁴⁵ After the disclosure of the Christmas address, the nationalists and the interventionist revolutionary left harshly criticised the pontiff's speech and compared it to the "Papal Note" of August 1917.⁴⁶ The main Catholic press reacted unitedly to the attacks against the pontiff,

41 Matteo Caponi, "Liturgie funebri e sacrificio patriottico I riti di suffragio per i caduti nella guerra di Libia (1911-1912)," *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo* 2 (2013): 437-459.

42 Giardini, "The reception of the crusades", 76.

43 Carlo Monti, *La conciliazione ufficiosa: diario del barone Carlo Monti incaricato d'affari del governo italiano presso la Santa Sede: 1914-1922*, ed. Antonio Scottà (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), vol. 2, 223-224; Charles Loiseau, *Politique romaine et sentiment français* (Paris: Bernard Grasset Éditeur, 1923), 72.

44 "La festa di Gerusalemme in un antico sacramentario liturgico", *Civiltà Cattolica* 1 (1918), 50.

45 "Discorso del Santo Padre al Sacro Collegio Cardinalizio, 24 dicembre 1917", *Civiltà Cattolica* 1 (1918), 17-18.

46 Celeste Ausenda, *Importanza politica e morale dell'occupazione di Gerusalemme* (Soresina: Tip. Mariani, 1918), 7; "Dio e popolo", *Messaggero*, 26 December 1917. "L'allocuzione natalizia", *Idea Nazionale*, 27 December 1917; Francesco Scaduto, "La Santa sede e la presa di Gerusalemme", *Riforma italiana* 7 (1918), 8.

stating in his defence that Benedict XV had remained consistent with his role as the father of the whole of Christendom.⁴⁷

Benedict maintained a neutral position, to safeguard the international standing of the Holy See, but authorised the religious commemorations of the victory.⁴⁸ Thus, while the bells of all Rome rang out to celebrate the victory, the bells of St. Peter’s Basilica remained silent.⁴⁹ However, the Catholic clergy and laity generally accepted the papal interpretation and, for this reason, refused to employ the ideology of the crusade in connection with operations in Palestine. For the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving to God for the victory, Cardinal Basilio Pompilj, the papal vicar, recalled that “the new liberators of the Holy Sepulchre do not all carry in their hearts, like the strong crusaders of the pious Godfrey, the holy unity of the faith willed by Christ”, alluding to the presence of non-Catholic and non-Christian soldiers among the allied troops. The memory of the crusades was functional to condemn the degeneration of contemporary society. Pompilj was indirectly polemising secular interventionism and their interpretations, stating that only the Church could “give this event the true character, the true meaning that makes it great in the eyes of faithful”.⁵⁰

Among organised Catholicism, the exponents of intransigence categorically rejected any use of the ideology of the crusade to characterise Middle Eastern operations and polemised with the interventionists. They highlighted the profound differences between the medieval crusaders, models of the perfect Christian warrior, and the nations of the Entente, religiously disunited and guilty about the European bloodbath.⁵¹ The editor of *Unità cattolica*, Ernesto Calligari, described General Allenby as an unwitting executor of divine designs and, therefore, his name could not be placed “next to those of pious Godfrey, Baldwin, St Louis King of France, the Knights of St John, the heroes of Rhodes”.⁵² Leading exponents of National-Catholicism, like the journalist Filippo Crispolti, refused to qualify the military victory as a crusade. Crispolti admitted that the operations in Palestine recalled the crusades, but the military episode had above all a palingenetic significance: the taking of the Holy City became a premonitory sign of the restoration of Christian society.⁵³ Most of the Catholic public opinion also had difficulty in resorting to the crusade ideology for doctrinal reasons. The Catholic culture of the time defined

47 Vindex, “Logicamente”, *Unità cattolica*, 22 December 1917; “La campagna disfattista contro i cattolici. L’allocuzione del papa e il giudizio dell’onorevole Barzilai”, *Corriere d’Italia*, 26 December 1917.

48 Paolo Pieraccini, “Il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme (1918-1940). Ritratto di un patriarca scomodo: mons. Luigi Barlassina”, *Il Politico* 63.2 (1998): 207–256 at pages 211–215.

49 Monti, *La conciliazione ufficiosa*, 223–224; Loiseau, *Politique romaine et sentiment français*, 72–73.

50 Basilio Pompilj (Vicar General of Rome), *Invito sacro a ringraziare per la liberazione di Gerusalemme* (Città del Vaticano: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1917). See also: Arturo Marchi, *Lettera pastorale 1918: Mancanza di fede* (Lucca: Tip. Editr. Baroni, 1918), 3–4.

51 “Dimostrazione per la conquista di Gerusalemme”, *Unità cattolica*, 13 December 1917.

52 Mikros (Ernesto Calligari), “Gerusalemme Liberata”, *Unità cattolica*, 14 December 1917.

53 Filippo Crispolti, “La liberazione di Gerusalemme”, *Avvenire d’Italia*, 16 December 1917; Mikros (Ernesto Calligari), “Gerusalemme Liberata”, *Unità cattolica*, 14 December 1917.

‘crusade’ as a form of Christian legitimisation of the war, sanctioned by the papal proclamation. Therefore, the conquest of Jerusalem could be considered part of the Entente’s “just war” but could not be defined as a stage or completion of a crusade.

Nevertheless, a minority part of the Italian Catholic community did not share the Holy See’s approach and tried to make sense of the conquest of Jerusalem by making analogies with the medieval crusades. The archbishop of Ancona, Giambattista Ricci, summoned the people to celebrate the victory “on the hill where so many times the ships of Ancona sailed to the Holy Land and [...] to win at Lepanto”.⁵⁴ Some prelates and parish priests, who gave homilies during celebratory masses or at the end of the *Te Deum*, celebrated the Middle Eastern operations by resorting to the vocabulary of the crusade. According to the archbishop of Capua, Gennaro Cosenza, “the glories of this second liberation” needed to be sung by an illustrious poet such as “Torquato Tasso”, who celebrated “the first liberation”⁵⁵ with his poem. Some speeches mingled war propaganda and religious languages, combining themes of anti-Germanism with the anti-Islamic repertoire, characteristic of the ideology of the crusade. The provost of Barga cathedral, Alfredo della Pace, stated that “the Turkish crescent” was a “sign of regression and barbarism”, while the “Latin cross” was a “sign of civilisation, victory, peace”.⁵⁶ In his homily for the *Te Deum* in the church of the Gancia in Palermo, the Franciscan friar Francesco Giordano asserted that “Jesus [...] came back with our flags” to Jerusalem, even though “Mohammed and Martin Luther” were united “against the new crusade, [...] in defence of iniquitous usurpation and ignominious desecration”. Hence, the soldiers of the Entente deserved to be called “the new crusaders”.⁵⁷

For Giordano, like for other personalities close to national-Catholic positions, the conquest of Jerusalem offered arguments to further the path of nation’s “re-catholicisation” and legitimise the secular religion of the homeland. By extolling the Italian contribution to the medieval crusades and by presenting Italy as the guide of the “new crusade” in Palestine, these speeches intended to remember and emphasise Italy’s role as bulwark of the Church.⁵⁸ In this sense, the bishop of Sarsina, Ambrogio Riccardi, raised the Savoy cross as the banner of the new crusaders and affirmed that the “Christian world” festively celebrated the moment when “the tricolour with the white cross in the middle” took the place of the “hallowed Turkish flag”.⁵⁹ These positions sometimes gained public visibility in the initiatives of Catholic youth

54 Quoted in Luigi Bruti Liberati, *Il clero italiano nella grande guerra* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1981), 109.

55 Gennaro Cosenza, *Discorso letto nella Metropolitana da S. E. Mons. Gennaro Cosenza nella commemorazione della Liberazione di Gerusalemme il 26 dicembre 1917* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Stab. Tip. Progresso, 1918), 38.

56 Lucia Ceci, “Religione di guerra e legittimazione della violenza”, in *Benedetto XV. Papa Giacomo Della Chiesa nel mondo dell’“inutile strage”*, ed. Alberto Melloni, Giovanni Cavagnini and Giulia Grossi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017): 179–189 at page 181.

57 Francesco Giordano, *Jerusalem: Discorso recitato la sera del 16 Dicembre 1917 nella Chiesa della gancia in Palermo* (Palermo: R. Sandron, 1917).

58 Menozzi, *Crociata*, 124.

59 Ambrogio Riccardi, “La risurrezione di Cristo e la risurrezione dell’uomo. Lettera pastorale alla diocesi di Sarsina per la Pasqua 1918”, *Bollettino Ufficiale per la diocesi di Sarsina* 3 (1918): 34–35.

associations, which organised commemorations to mobilise the faithful, with the permission and support of the clergy. The “Italian Catholic Youth Society” summoned the population to celebrate the victory of the “Christian armies”, whose united flags flew in Jerusalem “like the banners of the crusaders of Godfrey of Bouillon”.⁶⁰ The Roman Youth Federation had a reproduction of the First Crusade flag blessed and later placed it in the Sacred Treasure of St. Peter’s Basilica.⁶¹

Conclusion

The conquest of Jerusalem stimulated various reactions in heterogeneous Italian public opinion. Similar to the United Kingdom, the institutions and much of the interventionist tried to make sense of the event by defining the operations in Palestine as a crusade. It should be underlined that the pro-war political forces, except for some minority, were solid in the interpretation of the event, highlighting the progressive convergence of left and right interventionist radicalism. However, the secular interventionism, after its initial enthusiasm, soon lost interest in the military episode, due to various factors. First of all, the public opinion was focused on the Italian front’s operations, where the *Regio esercito* was resisting the Austro-Hungarian offensives. Secondly, various liberals and democrats rejected these interpretations, judging the medieval crusades negatively, and called for an objective assessment of Middle Eastern victory: other events of the European war, such as the capitulation of Romania, would have needed more attention.⁶² Finally, apart from a few isolated demonstrations, the conquest was received rather coldly by the Italian population.

The reasons for the popular indifference were mainly the weariness and demotivation of the population, worn out by war. Nevertheless, the interventionists blamed the Italian ecclesiastical community of having kept an overly composed attitude in the face of the victory in the Middle East, thus influencing the population. For nationalist interventionism, the conquest of Jerusalem was above all an opportunity to attack the Holy See for its neutralism, asking the pope to finally take a stand in favour of the Entente. As we have seen, this did not happen and, to a large extent, the papal policy was accepted by the Italian Catholic community. With different approaches, the Catholic clergy and organised laity solemnised the event but appeared generally reluctant to explicitly use the ideology of crusade with secularised and actualised meanings, foreign to contemporary Catholic culture, due to theological and doctrinal reasons. In conclusion, it is evident that most of Italian Catholicism assigned a precise connotation to the term, as we have explained, and positively valued the imagery of medieval expeditions. The word ‘crusade’ not only evoked the myth of “the lost golden age of Christendom” but represented a model to be inspired by in order to pursue the project of re-Catholicising the contemporary society.

60 “Dopo la liberazione di Gerusalemme. L’appello ai giovani cattolici italiani”, *Avvenire d’Italia*, 15 December 1917.

61 “La Gioventù Cattolica Romana depono sulla tomba di S. Pietro il vessillo della Prima crociata”, *Corriere d’Italia*, 24 December 1917.

62 “La capitolazione di Gerusalemme”, *La Stampa*, 11 December 1917.