

Nuova Rivista Storica

Anno C, Gennaio-Aprile 2016, Fascicolo I

Abstracts

ALBERTO BELLETTI, Daniel O'Connell's funeral oration by father Gioacchino Ventura, 1847: an attempted conciliation between Catholicism and Liberalism as well as Democracy in Italy

The funeral oration in memory of Daniel O'Connell was delivered on the 28th and 30th June 1847 in the Roman basilica of Sant'Andrea della Valle. O'Connell had died in Genoa some days before. The Theatine Gioacchino Ventura, a distinguished man at that time, was asked to preach the oration. In the funeral oration Father Ventura indicated O'Connell as a role model. The former maintained that Christians had to imitate the latter by looking for freedom through passive resistance and active obedience and by keeping within the law. The passive acceptance of an oppressive regime, especially in religious matters, was not a Christian value. Violent rebellion was also wrong.

Father Ventura also affirmed that not only did O'Connell fight for freedom through religion, but he also promoted religion by using freedom. According to Father Ventura, this fact proved that the Church did not need protection from absolute monarchies; on the contrary, it could preserve itself under democratic regimes, too. Father Ventura's oration caused great controversy. Many people hoped for a reconciliation between their political expectations and their religious feelings, so Ventura's speech seemed to pave the way for it. Actually O'Connell was one of the first people who combined Catholicism with liberalism and democracy.

Ventura could openly claim those opinions because Pope Pius IX, who had just been elected, at the beginning of his pontificate appeared as a reformist open to new ideas. He personally designated Ventura to preach the oration. At the end of 1848 the situation changed, Pius IX started to appear more conservative, so he had to escape from Rome to Gaeta. The "Roman Republic" was proclaimed in Rome. The Theatine escaped from Rome to France before the restoration of the papal power. There, after having declared his submission to the Church (who had condemned one of Ventura's speeches about the revolts in Vienna), he could remain a priest.

When some years later Ventura started to speak about political matters again, he had deeply changed his ideas. He approved the Napoleon III government, but requested he recognise the supremacy of spiritual power. Ventura died in 1861. During his life he had often changed his political opinion, but not his basic principles, remaining a Catholic priest until his death.

In the 20th century the Democrazia Cristiana, the Italian Catholic Christian Democratic party, has occasionally looked to him as a precursor. Father Luigi Sturzo, particularly, was deeply influenced by the thought of the Theatine.

Keywords:

*Daniel O'Connell
Gioacchino Ventura
Liberal Catholicism*