

## CATHOLIC SPORTS IN ITALY: AFTER WORLD WAR II UNTIL SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

DEPORTE CATÓLICO EN ITALIA: DESPUÉS DE LA SEGUNDA GUERRA MUNDIAL HASTA EL CONCILIO VATICANO II

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### Resumen

En Italia, el deporte católico tiene una importancia fundamental para el desarrollo del sistema deportivo italiano como lo conocemos hoy en día. La historiografía ha estudiado el origen y desarrollo de este deporte, concretamente lo que sucedió durante el primer cuarto del siglo XX, es decir, los trabajos de Stefano Pivato y especialmente de Felice Fabrizio. Este texto tiene el objetivo de explorar el desarrollo y la importancia que este deporte tiene con la esfera nacional del deporte a partir de su reconstrucción después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Este período coincide con los años del Concilio Vaticano II (CVII) por un lado y los Juegos Olímpicos de Roma por el otro, y el deseo de mostrar la influencia recíproca que existe entre estos acontecimientos. También se explicará el Centro Sportivo Italiano (CSI) y su contribución al sistema deportivo en Italia durante este tiempo, de los Juegos Olímpicos de Roma en 1960 y sobre el impulso que CSI dio a difundir el espíritu olímpico entre los población, del CVII y la influencia que este evento tuvo en la dinámica de la CSI. No son muchos los que saben que el Concilio habla también acerca de los deportes, en particular en la Constitución *Gaudium et Spes*, un documento en el que la Iglesia da atención a los signos de los tiempos y escucha el mundo contemporáneo, y se abre hacia la investigación y el diálogo. Esta actitud de apertura dio la oportunidad a los padres conciliares para reflexionar sobre el deporte como un importante fenómeno social del siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** deporte católico italiano, CSI (Centro Sportivo Italiano), CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano), el Concilio Vaticano II, Juegos Olímpicos de Roma (1960).

### Abstract

In Italy, catholic sport is of fundamental importance for the development of the Italian sport system as we know it today. Historiography has studied the origin and development of this sport, exactly the happenings in the first quarter of the twentieth century, that is the works of Stefano Pivato and especially of Felice Fabrizio. This paper has the aim to explore the development and importance that this sport had to do with the national sphere of sport starting with its reconstruction after the World War II. This period coincides with the years of the Second Vatican Council (CVII) on one side and the Olympic Games in Rome on the other, and wish to show the reciprocal influence that exist between these events. It will be also be explained the Centro Sportivo Italiano (CSI) and its contribution to the sports system in Italy during this time, the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960 and about the push that CSI gave to spread the Olympic spirit among the population, of the CVII and the influence that this event had in the dynamics of the CSI. There are not many who know that the Council speaks also about sports, in

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particular in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, a document in which the Church give heed to the signs of times and listens to the contemporary world, and opens for further research and dialogue. This attitude of openness gave a chance to the conciliar Fathers to reflect about sports as an important social phenomenon of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Italian catholic sport, CSI (Centro Sportivo Italiano), CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano), Second Vatican Council, Olympic Games in Rome (1960).

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## 1. The beginning of the Centro Sportivo Italiano and its organization

The Centro Sportivo Italiano (CSI) begun in 1944, in a very particular historical moment. Exactly in those years when Italy was in a very delicate and complex situation after the war. Italy could not declare freedom of war, and signs of scares and wounds were still very evident. Sufferings were not only in material things, but also in morals and social things. In front of this scarcity and uncertainty, a ray of hope came out from the Catholic World. Pope Pius XII, on Christmas Eve of 1943, in a radio message, he called all Catholics to give a hand, to “cross lines” and courageously prepare themselves for a joint action, and be part of the “reconstruction of a new social World”<sup>1</sup>. It was not the first time that Pope Pius XII, had through radio, drew the attention of the catholic World. He had done it not only to send messages of consolation and encouragement in situations of scattering because of the tragic reality of war, but also to help and put ethical-moral foundation that would contribute to build –once the war is over– a renewed Italian society<sup>2</sup>.

But that radio-message on Christmas Eve, gave a particular impact to the Italian Catholic sportive world, in fact the Management of the Catholic Action<sup>3</sup> immediately, through its main representative Mgr. Evasio Colli<sup>4</sup>, approved the establishment of an organization that will concentrate on sports, the CSI. To promote this initiative, it was left in the hands of the Gioventù Italiana dell’Azione Cattolica (GIAC) through its president, Luigi Gedda. Being a medical doctor and an eminent personality of this catholic movement, Gedda was not naive to such a new initiative. In fact, in 1931 he had written a small essay about Lo sport, that showed not only his interest towards the development of this phenomenon but also the knowledge of its importance. Strongly guided by his interests, Gedda immediately got to the point, thanks to his long and troubled preparation he had during the time of imprisonment of Rome, and was ready for the new sportive organization<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “Natale di guerra”, radio message of Pius XII, of 24<sup>th</sup> December 1943, in: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/speeches/1943/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_spe\\_19431224\\_radiom-natalizio-popoli\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1943/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19431224_radiom-natalizio-popoli_it.html), (consulted on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Preziosi E. (a cura di), Gedda e lo sport. Il Centro Sportivo Italiano: Un contributo alla storia dell’educazione in Italia. Molfetta (Ba): La Meridiana, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> It was jannuary 5, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Felice Fabrizio, Storia dello sport in Italia: dalle società ginnastiche all’associazionismo di massa (Rimini-Firenze: Guaraldi Editore, 1977), 135.

<sup>5</sup> Luigi Gedda, “Il discorso di Pentecoste”, Stadium: Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano. 28 maggio 1945,1.

Also the Catholic Action was very much engaged in sports. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it established a Federation for the Catholic Sportive Associations (FASCI) that gathered together those groups which, because of being religious, were not accepted by the Italian Federation of Gymnastics. FASCI, in a span of 20 years managed to group together many associations and young athletes throughout all Italy, and succeeded to reach strong numbers that confounded the Fascist Party who, because wanting to establish a fascist Nation, they wanted to upper hand also to educate the youth through the physical training and drill. For this reason in 1927 the FASCI had to dissolve.

Therefore, the CSI became the ideal follow-up of the FASCI and its “compactness”, “solidity” and “efficiency”<sup>6</sup> became patrimony of its glorious past and necessary points of the new Centro Sportivo which, together with its important catholic organizations present throughout all the national territory, became the spring-board and strength of its effective insertion in the national sportive system.

Its Statute and Regulations –empirical in defining its social structure– were published in the *Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano* on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1944 and, in the same newspaper, the aim of the catholic sportive institution were explained together with its two trends, that is the propagation and the athletic tactics of sport.

Its first aim, sport is “an instrument appealing to youth” and “a school of morality and living” and defines that “Unioni Sportive” are a “collective morality”. These therefore were seen not only as a collective place for young athletes but also as a community where many others could find a space of “Christian and moral sound behavior”. The fathers, for example, could involve themselves in practicing a popular and recreational sport. The mothers and sisters, on the other hand, with their CSI card, could also benefit from the same concessions meant for all members, attend shows and take part “at excursions of cycling or at any other suitable game and useful to the physique of women”<sup>7</sup>. In truth the “Unioni Sportive” should be present from the “cradle not only sportive, but also social enthusiasm and vitality”<sup>8</sup>.

Its second address is, the technical and national sportive movement to promote a “calm development of the Italian sport”, but in this purpose it needed the recognition of the Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano (CONI) and that of its Federations.

First official step was made on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1944, when a group of representatives from CSI met Giulio Onesti, extraordinary commissioner from CONI, to present the new association. CONI, in accepting the aim and nature of CSI acknowledged the strength that could be gained from such initiative in the sportive field, especially in the youth and propagative ones, and assured them of the concession to act in his province<sup>9</sup>.

“Building” and “weaving” therefore were the works and effort that CSI wished to keep to reach its objectives in its first years of existence. “Building” the foundation of

<sup>6</sup> Tecnicus, “La nostra tessera”, Stadium. *Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano*. 20 Aprile 1945, 1.

<sup>7</sup> [s.n.], “Anticipazioni sull’attività 1945”, Stadium. *Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano*. 10 febbraio 1945, 4.

<sup>8</sup> [s.n.], “Anticipazioni sull’attività 1945”, 4.

<sup>9</sup> [s.n.], “Accordi col CONI”, *Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 19 novembre 1944, 1.

an organized structure through its openness to new members in the Catholic Action, in parishes, in oratories, in colleges, or through enrollment in independent sportive associations, but always inspired by catholic principles. In this way, in fact, the CSI had always a bigger involvement in the “youth fields”. It was then necessary to work to keep alive the harmony between the Federations and CONI. These bonds were needed so that CSI could involve itself in a stronger way within the national sports, in order that it will not be at risk to remain an Entity closed in itself, and be in opposition to a situation created at the beginning of the century, now almost long forgone.

Strong in such an orientation, the Catholic Entity proposed itself as a regulatory to all the activity of the “Unioni Sportive” affiliated in it, and established contacts with the civil Authorities that had to do with sports, to organize the competitions at a national level, without ignoring any manifestation of regional or diocesan character. Then, with the view to organize the technical training of instructors, referees and officials, provided according to the necessities of the various sports; such as stadiums or swimming pools. It also suggested and dedicated open spaces where to organize manifestations of international character<sup>10</sup>.

In all these situations, CSI had explicitly considered very well in its statutes in describing its organization aspect, that the roots of the “Unioni Sportive” needed, as described above, at intermediate level met the provincial and zonal committees<sup>11</sup> involving themselves in technical organizational aspects, while the diocesan sportive Officials had the propagation and moral assistance function. Above all, there was the directive Council, elected by the National Congress, which was formed of technical and study commissioners<sup>12</sup>. Apart from this, a particular element that characterized the catholic Entity was the presence of an “ecclesiastical consultant”. Such figure used to participate at the various levels of the organization<sup>13</sup> and it guaranteed that all proposed activities were always attached to the ethical-moral principles according to the foundation of the CSI.

## 2. CONI and its reconstruction period

It is important to note that after the war, the situation of CONI was in the becoming. In fact, the Entity was first commissioned and left in the hands of Giulio Onesti, a young socialist advocate, who had the power to liquidate and preserve its property. But this was not possible because of the grave situation that the Italian sports found itself into after the downfall of the fascist movement. No money was found, most of the sports buildings were destroyed, the adjacent organization of CONI was dissolved, but still worse was the fact that the sports activity, known as a “creature” of the regime, was looked upon and despised. So, in front of these circumstances, the

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<sup>10</sup> cfr. CSI: Statuto e regolamento del Centro Sportivo Italiano (Roma Ave, 19[45/46]) 6-7; cfr. also Alberto Greganti, Cent"anni di storia nella realtà dello sport Italiano , vol. II (Roma: CSI, 2006), 43.

<sup>11</sup> The local committees oversees where the provinces of the place were too much widespread and populated, cfr. Aldo Aledda, I cattolici e la rinascita dello sport italiano, (Roma: Società Stampa Sportiva, 1988), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Greganti, Cent"anni di storia nella realtà dello sport Italiano , 43- 44.

<sup>13</sup> Csi, Statuto e regolamento del Centro Sportivo Italiano, 5-8.

socialist advocate decided to safeguard the Entity from its collapse and strengthened it by establishing a new directorship for CONI<sup>14</sup>. He emphasized on the plan of national unity between CONI and the Federations, and among the many problems that were put on the table of the Giunta Esecutiva, Onesti selected the most important issues, mainly regarding the finance<sup>15</sup>. Thus, he guaranteed a legislative frame<sup>16</sup>, by leasing a competition of betting and prediction as designed by the journalist Massimo Della Pergola<sup>17</sup>. Thus came into effect a system of subsidy that made CONI independent from government, and this, after taking off the percentage from income, the prices and the dues to the Ministry of Finance, the remaining is managed by CONI. “CONI and the State must be two different and separate institutions governed in the name of democracy and be kept apart from each other”<sup>18</sup>. This way of operation the sporting system distinguished the Italian system from that of other countries and thus registered a specific and very original way still in operation these days.

Being put into action the resolution about the financial situation, on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1946, Onesti resigned from his post of extraordinary Commissioner and was elected as President of CONI. He chose to help him, some trustworthy people, first of whom is Bruno Zauli<sup>19</sup>, who was made general secretary. He was a distinguished person in the field of sports and, “rather than a technical person [Zauli was] one who delivers. It was he who put the framework of the national sports, while Onesti had the task to keep away the sharks of politics, dipping his mouth in Totocalcio’s pan”<sup>20</sup>. His help was imperative also to bring other contributors to the “court” of Onesti, such as Saini<sup>21</sup>, the excellent organizer, who was made general vice-secretary of CONI, and Marcello Garrone<sup>22</sup>, who in 1955 was called to strengthen the secretary of CONI.

Once the organizing structure was in its place, CONI had full and exclusive authority, in the scene that it was the overseer in all fronts: in the international field, from its nature, it had to establish contacts with the International Olympic Committee (CIO) and labor so that the sanctions imposed on the Italian sports, due to the war events, will be cancelled and so could install a new climate of trust. On the other hand,

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<sup>14</sup> Fabrizio, *Storia dello sport in Italia*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Archivio del Coni (d’ora in poi AC), III Faldone: dalla 20 all’31 riunione, 20° riunione della Giunta esecutiva, Roma 24 novembre 1948.

<sup>16</sup> “Onesti and his collaborators studied the possibility to call the measurements of law that gives advantage to CONI with regards to the games and competitions for betting on sportive activities” in Marco Impiglia, *L’Olimpiade dal volto umano: Tutti i giochi di Roma 1960* (Roma: Libreria Sportiva Eraclea, 2010), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Impiglia, *L’Olimpiade dal volto umano*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Impiglia, *L’Olimpiade dal volto umano*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> An ex-director of the fascist sportive movement, graduate in medicine, was journalist to “Il Littoriale”, curator to the press-office of CONI and of FIDAL, of which he also was collaborator, councillor on the FIGC, he was also interested about rugby, was one of the founders of the Italian Federation for medics of sports, within the IAAF, see Impiglia, *L’Olimpiade dal volto umano*, 32-44.

<sup>20</sup> Impiglia, *L’Olimpiade dal volto umano*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> His carrier was marked by multiple offices and of the creation of the Institutes, one of which the Credito Sportivo (1959).

<sup>22</sup> Also being member of GUF during the fascismo, he was the head of the Italian envoy for the Olympic Games in Melbourne, head of the technical organization for the Olympic Games in Roma and, helped by Cenzo Banculli, was director of Totocalcio; apart proposing to Onesti formative structures of the direction frames.

in the national level, it did not only had the task of the competitive sporting activity through the Federations, but also it had the responsibility of setting up all sports facilities, seeking the right contacts to find support from the government and, as we shall see later, he was also interested in promoting gymnastic sportive education in schools<sup>23</sup>. In this particular delicate time of reconstruction, side by side with politics that concerns CONI surfaced on the national sportive scene some related realities such as the CSI just emerging, but also that of the Centro Sportivo Libertas, or the Associazioni Sportive Socialiste, or the Unione Italiana Sport Popolare, etc., (later known as Propagation Entities) that equally dedicated themselves to sports, but because they eventually cropped up collaterally to the parties and became instruments of proselytism, especially at the beginning.

### 3. CONI and CSI

At this point it is important to note that, in order to reconstruct the history of CONI at that time, but also of CSI itself, one has to understand the relationship between the two and how this relationship developed during that time, leaving for later consideration the historic aspect about the other Entities of Propagation.

About the first encounter and their mutual recognition between the two sportive Entities, the national and the catholic, is already mentioned before, but in fact it was not the only one. In this complex era of CONI's commission, had in fact established study Commissions<sup>24</sup> on some important issues to solve, that is of the sports buildings, of finance, and that which regards to the relationship between physical education and sports, that about the relationship with the allies, etc., and some CSI representatives, of whom the most famous Gedda, took part in. They accepted to try to give their concrete contribution for the resume of the italian sports movement<sup>25</sup>, but –at the same time– it was evident that a certain reciprocal intent between CONI and CSI existed. The Commissions, were dissolved after two years, when, during the second meeting of the Giunta Esecutiva of the new CONI, discussed that the Commissions were, in fact, “overcome by the development and the new directive rules”<sup>26</sup>.

In the meantime, CSI, with its activities aimed mainly at the young generations – firstly those aimed at the scholastic population, with the “Championships for middle class students”, already since 1945<sup>27</sup>– was praised by various representatives of CONI and of the Federations with words of appreciation about the clear ideas, the specific

<sup>23</sup> Impiglia, L'Olimpiade dal volto umano, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Marcello Marchioni and Franco Cervellati (a cura di), La Giunta del Coni: Il traguardo delle 1000 riunioni (Firenze: Centro studi per l'educazione fisica e l'attività sportiva, 2012), 19-20.

<sup>25</sup> [s.n.], “Nostre rappresentanze nelle commissioni del Coni”, Stadium: Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano, 10 Febbraio 1945, 4.

<sup>26</sup> AC, I Faldone dalla 1 alla 11 riunione, Giunta Esecutiva del Coni anni 1946-1947, 2° riunione, Milano 17-18 agosto 1946.

<sup>27</sup> [s.n.], “Propagandare l'atletica leggera: i campionati studenti medi”, Stadium: Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano, 10 febbraio 1945, p.4.

ability, and sound capability to organize, and the diligent collaboration in the field of spreading of sport from the part of the catholic Entity<sup>28</sup>.

Care, attention and cordiality continued to grow between the two main sportive protagonists for sports at that time, but there were hectic moments of great tension too. For example when, immediately after the agreement between the football Federation to be able to organize its football activity in the south-central zone, it did not renew the agreement. Or when, in July 1946, Onesti and Zauli presented a project of laws meant to make amends for the gap in the fascist law of 1942<sup>29</sup>, – according to Gedda– it was meant to create a monopoly on all Italian sports on the part of CONI, because it would have given the right to associate as it was going to be introduced in the new Constitution<sup>30</sup>. The problem went on for long time. Luigi Gedda, denounced to Alcide de Gasperi, the president of the Council at the time, the “divisive spirit” of CONI and its attempt to monopolize, rather than the agonistic national activity, all the sportive practice<sup>31</sup> and, in November 1946, during the first National Congress of CSI, a counter proposal was presented, known as: La “Carta dello sport”. This was subdivided in three units: the first speaks about CONI, the second treats the sportive activities non-olympic, and the third the physique-educative and recreation<sup>32</sup>. But both projects did not materialize, because no intervention from the government came forward<sup>33</sup>.

In spite of this uneasiness the disposability of CONI in terms with CSI did not diminish. In fact at that same period of time –November 1946– Gedda sent a written request to Onesti to receive contribution towards the “huge cost” in favor of the “Students’ Competitions”, together with a gift of encouragement and recognition to the teachers of Physical Education that excelled in organizing the manifestations. The Giunta of CONI approved the request<sup>34</sup>. Thus, since that moment onwards –thanks to the beneficial contribution of Totocalcio– CONI continued to distribute, in favor of CSI –but also in favor of other actions of propaganda–, a contribution always most be considerate, with one condition that its action was aimed for the prosperity of the sportive youth. From a contribution of about a million Italian lire in 1947 it raised to four million in 1948, eight millions in 1949<sup>35</sup>. 1950 was the turning point, because a written agreement was signed and sealed the relationship between CONI, the Federations and CSI<sup>36</sup>. This stabilized the boundaries of competence that left each one of them to work without much difficulty and brought an end to any occasion of

<sup>28</sup> [s.n.], “La domanda è stata: cosa ne pensi del Csi?”, Stadium: Notiziario del Centro Sportivo Italiano, 28 maggio 1945, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Legge istitutiva del CONI: Legge 16 febbraio 1942 n. 426.

<sup>30</sup> Greganti, Cent’anni di storia nella realtà dello sport Italiano , 83.

<sup>31</sup> Francesco Bonini, Le istituzioni sportive italiane: storia e politica (Torino: Giappichelli Editore, 2006), 128.

<sup>32</sup> Greganti, Cent’anni di storia nella realtà dello sport Italiano , 85.

<sup>33</sup> Greganti, Cent’anni di storia nella realtà dello sport Italiano , 87.

<sup>34</sup> AC, I faldone dalla 1 alla 11 riunione, IV Riunione Giunta Esecutiva, 20 novembre 1946.

<sup>35</sup> AC, I Faldone: dalla 1 all’11 riunione, 7 Riunione Giunta Esecutiva del Coni, 7 maggio 1947; 10 Riunione Giunta Esecutiva del Coni 18 ottobre 1947; III Faldone: dalla 20 all’31 riunione, 24° Riunione Giunta Esecutiva del Coni 23-26 aprile 1949; 30° Riunione Giunta Esecutiva del Coni 14-15 dicembre 1949.

<sup>36</sup> AC, III Faldone: dalla 20 all’31 riunione, 31° Riunione Giunta Esecutiva del Coni, 18 gennaio 1950; [s.n.]“La convenzione Coni –Csi”, Stadium, a. V [1950], n°9, 2-4.

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hostility. This convention was reviewed and renewed every season and that same year the contributions from CONI to CSI raised to twenty-one millions of lire.

#### 4. End of Fifties and beginning of the Sixties

Tensions between CONI and CSI were non-existent and the climate between them was always that of more collaboration throughout the years. As evidence, we can mention the support that CSI, together with the other Propagation Entities, gave CONI in the pre-Olympic period. These were the years 1958-1959<sup>37</sup> and it was very much needed, in preparation for the *Giochi di Roma* 1960, to saw a sound Olympic conscience that was still lacking in the Italian peninsula. In fact, different from other countries, the percentage of activity in sport among the youth was still very low because of the widespread “deadly illiteracy”. The CSI, also on this occasion, took new initiatives to approach the biggest number of youth to attend the field of sports or to the athletic tracks with the aim to enkindle interest and excite them, seeking to imply the diffidence that the same youth impose in their ability and to keep them away and attract them freely to a practical activity. As a result the diffusion of sports in those years was still very scarce and, in spite of all propagation done among the youth from the various Entities, the active participation in the sportive activity remained very limited.

The relative data of the Central Institute of Statistics 1959<sup>38</sup> gave a picture that explains "some aspects about holidays and sports among the population". It explained the sportive situation of that epoch and helped to understand what was the reality. Data that helped to see how people were employing their free time and which were the sportive activities practiced as continuity but not with the purpose of professionalism.

These results were not very encouraging, in fact they evidenced that the persons that practiced sports were little more than 1.3 million and, as reported in percentage of the total of the population, constituted only 2,6%, of which only 0,5% were women. A limited situation, either from the numeric point of view, or from what regards the gender and especially the type of the practiced sport. Few also were the utilized establishments, that left much to be desired in the number and quality. It is so much so that frequently the activity was held in the open air in establishments that were not well equipped, or little spaces.

A remote situation with regards to today shows that 22,8% of those who practice sport in continuity<sup>39</sup>. Data that emerges in an Italy of the Sixties, that in the political point of view was still seeking new equilibrium. In fact after a phase characterized by a strong Christian Democrat centralization, new solutions were sought in the leftist politics. A society that was still establishing itself according industrial world and that had at its disposition those theories known as the “economic boom”. But this situation to equip the sporting field, because of the obstacles not yet solved in the political field

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<sup>37</sup> Teja, Angela and Palandri M. Mercedes. “La Journée Olympique, ou comment faire naître l’esprit olympique chez les jeunes”. Paper presented at the International Conference in sports history, Rouen, Normandy, October 29-31, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Istat: Indagine su alcuni aspetti delle vacanze e degli sport, Nota e relazione n° 13, 1960.

<sup>39</sup> Annuario Statistico Italiano 2010 - Indagine Multiscopo “Aspetti della vita quotidiana” (novembre 2010).



as Donato Martucci reminded us in one of his article in 1967, obstructed the spread in a larger scale. In fact, only when questions like hygiene, food, work, low income, and education are resolved the State could think about sport. Then, and only then, when the welfare of citizens were better, the government could raise his attention and face situations not of primary importance and indispensable, like that of spreading of sport.

As much as the difference between south and center of the country permit, between the contribution of the urban cities and the rural ones, between the troubled social classes and that of the workers. The political attention was lacking towards the physical activity as it was treated as a problem of secondary importance, certainly not vital and therefore could wait. But, above all these concrete facts, one had to overcome another trap, a bigger one, the mentality of that time. Most families, in fact, thought that sport was a waste of time, and could hinder the scholastic or labor career, or, still worse, that the famous “air bursts” could cause fearful consequences to health. Also because of the religious restraint that the practice of sport could distract people from their duty and responsibilities of their families or from their time reserved to the religious obligations. News and arguments highlighted in the “Stadium” pages, a periodical of CSI, where Luigi Gedda, Generoso Dattilo, Aldo Notario, Natale Bertocco, Nicola Pavoni, Silvio Gatti and others used to write, praised the physical and moral benefits gained from physical activity, and that there were a variety of disciplines to look into, beneficial to all.

Here therefore only those who new about sport, thanks to their family habits, or who were strongly pushed and motivated instinctively or wanted to be involved into sport, could find time and space to this section. The sportive societies, the entities like CSI, the Unione Italiana Sport Popolare and all other Entities of propagation became places where such objectives could be realized and were realities to associate because they were completely dedicated to sport with immense passion and dedication.

This state of arrest from sports, was raised also by Bruno Zauli in an interview given in the occasion of a meeting “A policy about sports towards the education of youth”, in 1962, organized by CSI during the VII National Council and of which we give this extract:

*It is true that the roman Olympics, the Olympics that I was one of its organizers, almost for ten years appealing to bring them to Rome, did not bring the results expected. It was like a feast that take place in a poor house of farmers when, to receive guests, they bring the silver cutlery, cakes, special meals and many dressings: then soon as the feast is over the house will return to its poor state as before. The true battle for the Olympics is educating, and bringing sport to many. There comes many champions, who needs to be loved and appreciated for their sacrifices, because if they are true sportsmen, or true enthusiasts, should be the result of many others<sup>40</sup>.*

Two years had passed since the roman Olympics, but the situation remained the same, still stagnant, and the sport was still very far from becoming a habit for the Italians. All the good work, initiatives and proposes brought forward in the roman Olympics seemed to disappear. At least this was one of the official subjects that CONI denounced. Such thought was also expressed by Giulio Onesti, who in the same

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<sup>40</sup> Csi, Una politica sportiva per l'educazione della gioventù, ed. Corrado Biggi and Giulio Olmetti (Roma: Csi, 1962), 100.  
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occasion has affirmed how times changed more slowly than desired and expected. But he was ready to support concrete initiatives that open the door of sport to youth, with a clear and evident invitation to the action of CSI. An official policy from the part of CONI towards youth had to wait to be put in practice.

“The true battle for the Olympics is educating, and bringing sport to many”. The subject that was deal with was very recurrent in those years, at least for CSI. And the words of Zauli not only sounded in a favorable environment, but also helped to amplify the assiduous works held by the CSI to spread and pervade the sport among the most young. CSI had already the physic-educative functions very clear moving “inspired by Christianity” above all as a practice for the free time, and how this could help to become better Christian citizens, as an ideal to propose to all “young group”. Thus it was ready to help again and involve itself concretely and collaborate with the politics that favors youth. Like for example the investigation launched by the Entity about “Sport and the town hall”, that developed into a meeting held at the round *palestra* at the *Foro Italico*, that is at the heart of the educative sports at ISEF<sup>41</sup> in Rome, April 1960, to be aware of the situation of the sports buildings in Italy. The presence and the access to the buildings that posed a fundamental question so that the choice of sport can be truly democratic.

Initiatives and motivations, these the CSI, strengthened the orientations that in the course of time were offered by the Popes in contrast to the sportive phenomenon and that emerged at the Council’s period. This phenomenon slowly slowly gained bigger proportions as time went bye. Among the various meetings between Pope Pius XII and the CSI is important to recall the one that happened in May 1945, on the feast of Pentecost, in which the Pope defined sport as a means and not an aim. Or the one held to remind the tenth anniversary of its foundation in 1955 in which emphasized how sport can help to reach higher horizons in regards to natural and Christian values. Also Pope John XXIII had words of approval and stimulus for the reality of CSI and praised the physical activity can be a useful instrument of the harmonious and complete development of the personality of youth. Thus the words of the Popes have shown those key points upon which should be considered the catholic sports, therefore how it should be practiced. Guidelines that the CSI made its own and tried to put them into concrete action. It is difficult at this point not to remember again Luigi Gedda, the figure that was the trait d'union between the ecclesiastic hierarchy, the catholic faithful and sports.

#### **4.1. The Ferment in the Church in the Sixties**

Those same years, the Sixties, were for the Church years of ferment, those of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII had announced in 1959, and in 1962 opened the first session, and ended in December 1965 with its final session in the presence of Pope Paul VI. The call was unexpected. It brought together about two thousand bishops coming from every corner of the Earth to discuss important problems which regard to the Church and its image in the coming times. It was in fact the biggest catholic discussing assembly that took place in history in which a vast and wide plural experiences, of culture and of thought. This situation helped an opening for the Church

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<sup>41</sup> Istituto Superiore di Educazione Fisica  
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in comparison to the various realities and encouraged new exchanges and new collaborations. This circumstance brought with it a load of renewal, when compared with history and with its humanity. One could see how this air had helped, after wide discussions and re-elaborations, the mature decisions that led to the approval of the documents of the Council. In these documents one could see the most efficacious ways the Church is present in the world. Also sports was not left out and CSI in particular.

## 5. Compare sports in a theological reflection

Here I refer mainly to the text from the Constitution: *Gaudium et spes*, the last of the four Constitutions to be approved by the conciliar Fathers, totally compiled during the Council. The text was made of two prefaces, nine chapters –divided in two parts–, apart from an introduction and a conclusion. Sports is mentioned in Chapter II, (II part, sec.3 at n. 61) where we read as follows:

*“...Opportunities for the same education are to be found also in the societies of today, due especially to the increased circulation of books and to the new means of cultural and social communication which can foster a universal culture. With the more or less generalized reduction of working hours, the leisure time of most men has increased. May this leisure be used properly to relax, to fortify the health of soul and body through spontaneous study and activity, through tourism which refines man's character and enriches him with understanding of others, through sports activity which helps to preserve equilibrium of spirit even in the community, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races. Let Christians cooperate so that the cultural manifestations and collective activity characteristic of our time may be imbued with a human and a Christian spirit” (II cap., II p., 3s., n. 61).*

This extract about the “exercises” and about “sportive manifestations” is inserted in a more broad discourse with regards to “the promotion and progress of culture”, that introduces the second chapter of the second part, and it has been inserted in a Constitution that gives sports high importance<sup>42</sup>. Culture is mentioned as a means through which the person reaches a high level of mature human life, in which he succeeds to define his whole person, made of soul and body. Culture, as such, is not always the same in itself, but knows how to change, and strives towards higher forms through the progress of “precise” science, the psychological studies, the historical science, the changes in the ways of life leads man to make his critical sense more perfect, to understand the depth of manifestation of the human activity, to consider the happenings in their evolution and their change. Thus, also the urbanization, the popular culture, the new means of communications leads to new ways of thinking, of doing things, to apply free time that leads to a more universal form of culture, even if in respect to the diversity of the various geographic reality. Also the sports is part of this because it is considered as promoter of the human person in its various aspects, and also because it became a common phenomenon that characterizes a certain style of life.

Sports is a means of physical and spiritual perfection of man already been treated several times by the Popes during the twentieth century, but it was important and

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<sup>42</sup> As in any Constitution, it founded, and founds also today, a fundamental and referral act that defines the relationship between the Church in the contemporary world.  
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highlighted that something new and very clear in the mentioned citation, and therefore that it refers to the sports as a place where people meet, being per nation, race or condition. Sports is the place where people, although very much different, can feel to be part of the same human race and assert their rights. A sport that speaks a universal language and that it could be understood by all. It is an ecumenical sports.

This universality of the sports, Rome had lived some years before, in the occasion of the XVII Olympics. It was a brief span of time that the Italian Capital lived in August 1960, eighteen days in all, where athletes, trainers, workers, tourists and common people coming from any part of the world and called for this worldly event to compete in the sportive games, which took place in a peaceful atmosphere. Their stay, although rapid and short, was characterized by the fraternal and friendship shown by the people of Rome. Pope John himself, in an occasion of the audience granted the directors of CIO, has emphasized how much praiseworthy was the collaboration between all the people of the world in support of the values that push towards “a universal fraternity” and how much without doubt such an experience of the sportive manifestation had contributed in favor the relationships between persons that with them did not know each other and thus it has also happened to mature the knowledge the various cultures and traditions of the same, becoming personal and therefore deep and bearing fruitful experiences. This experience is rendered shareable also thanks to means of communications that properly grew in those years advanced and progressed in technique and technology.

Besides these considerations, one needs to note how references to sports were inserted only in the final reduction of the Constitution, thanks to the solicitation of Mgr Lucien-Sidroine Lebrun in the mane of the other 41 French bishops. Having to go to research among the Acta Synodalia of the CVII, it was possible to read the dissertation of Mgr Lebrun he made to the conciliar Fathers in the Latin language and from which we wish to make this extract, in English translated from Italian, one of the passages most interesting:

*II. Fundamental value of the sportive activity. The main value of the sportive activity is a particular effectiveness for the integral benefit of man, uplifting the whole personality.*

*Indeed strength, movement and harmony of the same human body are presented in the games as the rays of the virtue and of the beauty of the Creator, as in the Scriptures: “The Lord created human beings out of the earth... According to his own nature He endowed them with strength, and made them in his own image” (Sir 17,1.3).*

*Apart from this, across the will, abnegation, constancy and fortitude are necessary for the sportive achievement, is seen in the penetration of the soul in the human body. Such beneficial dominance of the soul upon the body and, as a result, this docility of the body that gradually grows in comparison to the soul, even more today are found in the methods adopted to prepare the training.*

*On the other hand, the sportive activity helps more the growth of some qualities of man who spontaneously aim at being of service to the common good, but are to be strengthened so that they'll serve even more towards this goal. They are: the mentality that is called “esprit d'équipe”, the accuracy and finesse in the perception, the quickness to decide, the steadfastness in the effort, the repetition in opposition. It refers to these*

*virtues in the daily common language when we refer to that which in the daily life has the sportive mentality ("l'esprit sportif").*

This extract is not only interesting, but in my opinion, it is also innovative, and it highlights this particular consideration that the conciliar Fathers had about sports, and about the benefits that could come out of it in the social contest. Considering the fact that this was expressed at a time now considered long ago.

First of all, sports were considered as "an instrument to reach the full human culture". This affirmation signs the absoluteness of sports from culture, which is a whole that to be complete and finished needs every single part, therefore also that of sports, a social phenomenon par excellence.

Also René Maheu<sup>43</sup>, a famous philosopher in France, in the Sixties and the Seventies, when reasoning about the relationship between athletics and culture, he considered both as positive elements, "human disciplines that has a social function and a well defined role in the formation and in the full development of the personality" and, continued, "both contribute to the richness of the human heritage" influencing each other.

The French bishops, then, noted "the repetition in opposition", that is to know how to react in defeat repeating the test (one of the fundamental psychological aspects: mens sportiva). The precision and the finesse in the perception are important because it permits to pay attention and to be sensible to the circumstances. To be ready in decision, without uncertainty, knowing that whatever happens, whatever being the outcome of the choice, it leaves in heritage an experience that becomes a treasure to the successive circumstance. Thus the steadfastness of the effort, the tenacity that is fundamental to render an objective fulfilled. All these characteristics together, were noted by the French Fathers among which the quality of man directed towards the common good and expressed synthetically in the expressions "esprit d'équipe" and "l'esprit sportif".

The origin of Lebrun<sup>44</sup> and the other Conciliar Fathers who signed the request was French, and it highlights once more the sensibility of this people with regards the sportive phenomenon. Also René Maheu was French. And we know that the French, together with the English, were the first fond supporters of the Olympics ideas of Coubertin in which one remembers that its architecture was harmony, the synthesis of beauty and equilibrium, or the sports thought to be an "invitation" to peace in the world<sup>45</sup>. These thoughts we find them in the French Monsignor's dissertation.

Père Didon is the brain behind the motto of CIO: "Citius, altius, fortius", that had strongly encouraged Coubertin in his progress to rediscover the Olympic Games in this modern times. He was a Dominican friar, very influential among the religious thinkers in France, at the end of the eighteen hundred. Therefore we can, with the imagination of sportive spirit, we can see an opening towards sports promoted by a French bishop who

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<sup>43</sup> René Gabriel Eugene Maheu (1905–1975), was a professor of philosophy and sixth general director of the UNESCO (1961-1974)

<sup>44</sup> Lucien-Sidroine Lebrun (1896-1985) was Autun's bishop in Borgogna, from 1940 to 1966.

<sup>45</sup> Rossella Frasca (ed), *Religio Athletae. Pierre de Coubertin e la formazione dell'uomo per la società complessa* (Roma: Società Stampa Sportiva, 2007).

most probably knew the principles of the followers of Coubertin and his Dominican inspiration<sup>46</sup>.

## **6. The impetus came from France, but Italy follows, thanks to CSI**

The impulse came from France, but Italy follows, thanks to CSI. The catholic Entity of sports in fact gone through a progressive renewal with the “aim”, in the “educative practice” in the acts that successively elaborate an educative sportive itinerary. In this way we can say started –implicitly- a new conversation between faith, sports and pastoral work. Besides in the conciliar document (Lumen Gentium) for the first time, in the history of the Church, it gives the its role and therefore it finds its dignity within the Church. Thus they began to speak about the sportive associations of Christian inspiration and of Christians involved in the sportive animation. This made a introduction to transformation that, in 1968, led to the autonomy of CSI and of its proper mother organization: the Catholic Action and, favored the unification of this with the twin female association, the FARI (Federazione Attività Ricreative Italiane 1971), within a year, with the consequent participation, of women and men, in the responsibility of the association life. Then, all these signs were also integrated in the statute in the 1976.

## **7. Conclusions**

In the light of what has been said we can conclude highlighting the originality of the thought of the conciliar Church with regards to sports by understanding to value the cultural need of the physical activity and the important answer of the catholic sports particularly the CSI, as taught by the conciliar Fathers. These had acknowledged that sports has fundamental values that leads man to his integral benefit, exalting the whole personality, in favor of the growth and give a privileged movement for “promoting the progress and the culture”. This is indispensable so that society can move forward towards higher levels of civilization and progress.

The value of culture that in the world of the laity –as we have seen– was ready to be launched not only for the reasons mentioned above, but also because still considered negatively by the intellectual world that inevitably associated itself to the sports world, because this reminded a contest that properly had been of the past reign.

Then, the fact that it was some French religious to make the cause of the sports within the council halls, emphasized again on a different mentality, within the ecumenical community, can become an experience and richness able to overcome the territorial boundaries or those mere countryside that in other situations could be an obstacle.

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<sup>46</sup> France, in the sixties, went through a movement of expansion at its fundamental level, but stalled at higher level. France has always gave importance to sports at schools engaging many resources, with the risk to neglect the Olympic preparation. The result is, therefore, that to have a people of the esprit du sport.

We have already spoken about the direct consequences of the life of CSI. Now, that from the part of the catholic world is trying to propose a new method of sportive education that "saves sports"<sup>47</sup> in some way in a more lively genuine expressions of our society, in expressions more appreciated and known by youth, instrument of new apostleship and evangelization – alluding to the Scuola of thought<sup>48</sup> of the Italian Episcopal Conference that is at its third year of experience– once more the historic knowledge helps us to treasure tradition (in this case the one found in the *Gaudium et spes*). The CSI testifies this in its history and with its existence and progress within the Catholic Church<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Edio Costantini, *Dio salvi lo sport* (Molfetta (Ba): Edizioni La Meridiana, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> The outcome of these three years in: Edio Costantini, *Uno sport per l’uomo aperto all’assoluto: Cultura educazione spiritualità* (Roma: Ave 2013).

<sup>49</sup> We thank Padre George Attard for the English translation from Italian.

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