

«L'esport és com a casa a l'Església» ('Sport is at home in the Church') (Pope Francis, 30 September 2022). The diocesan archives house those of the territorial committees of the Italian Sports Centre

Angela Teja, Italian Society of Sport History and Italian Sports Centre

«The Church is close to sport, because it believes in the game and in sporting activity as a meeting place between people, for the formation of values and fraternity. That is why sport is at home in the Church, especially in schools and oratories or youth centres» (Pope Francis, speech to participants at the International Summit on Sport for All, September 30, 2022)

With this phrase, Pope Francis clearly and simply highlights the mutual exchange that has existed for more than a century (at least since Pierre de Coubertin's visit to the Vatican in February 1905) between the Catholic Church and the world of sport. On September 29 and 30, 2022, at the summit in the Vatican, during which he spoke these words, more than 250 people, experts in sports and in various religions from all over the world, were convened to debate the topic «Sport for all. Cohesive, Accessible and Tailored to each person». Not about highly competitive sport, that is to say, about records and results, but about the sport that is accessible to everyone, the amateur, as the Pope himself prefers to call it, the sport tailored to each person, and from which nobody is excluded. This is the type of sport mainly concerning the Italian Sports Centre (CSI), signatory to the agreement that I will refer to in my speech.

I will begin by recalling that summit because, to a certain extent, the agreement and the archival project in force contain the beginnings. The 2022 summit is, in fact, the culmination of the meeting between the Vatican and the world of sport, which was very interesting for those who wanted to know the history of sport as a complex phenomenon, also with spiritual roots. It was an in-depth continuation of what happened in September 2011, when the School of Thought «A sport for men» of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) was created. It was the basis of an exchange of points of view aimed at a better understanding of sport in its multidisciplinary nature. This school's regular meetings were reserved for a group of experts, including leaders of sports associations, diocesan directors of the Pastoral of Sports, coaches, teachers, trainers, sports educators, university students and seminarians..

The Catholic Church's interest in this world, which has become increasingly decisive with the birth of sport at the beginning of the 20th century, and has since been a constant feature in papal speeches¹, was already systematized in 2005 within the Office of Sport of the Vatican Dicastery for the Family, Laity and Life. The aim was to express the Christian point of view on sport in an official document, since sport had an «ambiguous» meaning, ranging from participation in business to participation in leisure.²

The School of Thought «A sport for men» lasted until 2017, since at the same time the Department of Faith, Culture and Sport was established within the Pontifical Council for Culture (2016), which began to maintain increasingly close and frequent relations with the international official sports world, in particular with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The Catholic Church was therefore the first to realize the importance of sport as a general cultural good and welcomed it in what we could

¹ The most recent text on the subject is that of A. Stelitano, *I papi e lo sport. Oltre un secolo di incontri e interventi da San Pio X a papa Francesco*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome 2015.

² Intervention by Monsignor Josef Clemens during the XXV Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Family, Laity and Life, November 25, 2011. It can be consulted at <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/it/eventi/assemblee-plenarie/la-questione-di-dio-oggi/rassegna-stampa.html>.

call its «Ministry of Culture», with a trusted undersecretary then to the sportsman Monsignor Melchor Sanchez de Toca, a former Spanish athlete.

The history of this «friendship»³ between two seemingly distant worlds, the Catholic Church and sport, is complex and varied, rich in multiple connections with society and, in particular, with what revolves around sport, that is to say, sports associations and, among these, the Catholic ones. For this story, still partially written in Italy,⁴ the documents collected in the archives of the CSI and of each of its territorial committees are fundamental. The latter, the creation of which is contextual with their birth, add up to 134 in the national territory and they were created according to the subdivision of the dioceses.⁵ The aim was to manage to take over the peripheral activity, promoting the activities of the national CSI. They have always been a fundamental component of this Sports Promotion Entity (EPS)⁶, as can be seen in the different statutes and regulations, which are updated and adapted over time; the last one is from June 2018. The CSI was one of the promoters of the CEI School of Thought, and its history, already a hundred years old (if you consider its predecessor to be the Federation of Italian Catholic Sports Associations (FASCI), which debuted in 1906), is kept in the archive containers. Fortunately, many of the CSI operators have preserved memories of their activities, both tangible and intangible. It would therefore be significant that the awareness of the importance of preserving and protecting the same historical memory takes root and spreads among the young generations of leaders, educators and athletes, so as to avoid the risk of losing the connotations of this history. And all this to maintain our heritage of Catholic athletes, whose role must continue to be fully valued in the history of Italian sport.

Having given this introduction, I feel it is the best way to highlight the importance and value of the agreement that the CSI stipulated with the Association of Ecclesiastical Archivists (AAE), in 2018, for safeguarding its sports documentary heritage.

The diocesan archives

Dioceses (from the Greek διοίκησης, meaning «administration») are the result of administrative subdivisions of the territory that have been transferred from the ancient Roman world to the Church.

³ This is the term that several popes have used to define this relationship between the Church and sport. A valued term derived from scientific diplomacy.

⁴ In a few words, if we want to quote the main Italian historians who have dealt with the sport of the Catholic movement, we can mention Felice Fabrizio, head of sports historiography in Italy, who was the first to dedicate his studies to this sector: *Alle origini del movimento sportivo cattolico in Italia*, Sedizioni, Milan 2009. Then Stefano Pivato, in particular with *Sia lodato Bartali. Ideologia, cultura e miti dello sport cattolico (1936-1948)*, Lavoro editions, Rome 1985. Alberto Greganti has spent his whole life collecting documents from the CSI archive and writing its history: *Cent'anni di storia nella realtà dello sport italiano. Dalla FASCI al CSI*, Litostampa Ist. Grafico, Bergamo 2006. Antonella Stelitano has studied in particular the period of Pius X (with Q. Bartolatto and A. M. Dieguez: *Pio X, le Olimpiadi e lo sport*, Casa Editrice San Liberale, Treviso, 2012), and then devoted himself to the already mentioned compilation of the speeches of the popes on sport. I myself have discussed the subject in conferences and at the School of Thought of the CEI, as well as in international texts, including «Le sport et les catholiques en Italie à la fin du XIX^e et au début du XX^e siècle» in L. Munoz, J. Tolleneer (editors), *L'église, le sport et l'Europe. La Fédération internationale catholique d'éducation physique (FICEP) à l'épreuve du temps (1911-2011)*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2011, p. 45-57.

⁵ As already stated in the Regulation of 1944, Art. 29: «Provincial committees are promoted and established at the initiative of the Regional Youth Council of AC [Catholic Action], in agreement with the diocesan office of sports of the provincial capital where the same committee will be established or (if the provincial capital is not an ecclesiastical diocese), in any case, in the diocese on which the capital depends». See *Statuto e Regolamento del Centro Sportivo Italiano*, organizational collection of the CSI, ed. AVE, Rome, s. d. [1944].

⁶ Currently, there are 15 EPS in Italy, officially recognized by CONI.⁶ The CSI is the «oldest» (1944).

Each diocese is governed by a bishop, who may be assisted by vicar bishops, and it is divided into several parishes. The peripheral structure of the CSI was not formed on the territorial basis of the Italian provinces, but instead on the basis of the dioceses; certainly a significant fact from a historical point of view, which now comes to the fore in the 2018 agreement. For the CSI, going to the diocesan archives in search of spaces where they could entrust their materials was, therefore, like «coming home». This historical experience is fundamental to understanding the intimate union that has always existed between the CSI, which was born in Rome as a project of Catholic Action in 1944, with the war still going on, and the Church.⁷

Since 1983, the diocesan archives constitute an institute of preservation where documents of historical importance are kept (c. 491 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law) under the responsibility of the bishop and the management of a chancellor. Since 2000, in Italy there has been an official relationship of State-Church collaboration to preserve and be able to consult the archives of historical interest and the libraries of ecclesiastical entities and institutions. According to the historical events of each constituency, the Diocesan Historical Archive can boast a very old heritage, even dating back to the High Middle Ages. In the historical archives, in addition to the documentation related to the bishop and the episcopal curia, it is also possible to preserve archive collections produced by various entities, which generally operate in the diocesan territory or are related to it: seminaries, parishes, confraternities, associations, groups and movements, charitable and/or educational institutions. From this perspective, the diocesan archives can therefore house those of the CSI.⁸

The «Born to run» project and the CSI-AAE agreement

The agreement between the CSI and the AAE is part of a project that was born in 2017 in the context of an exhibition of documentary and iconographic material organized by the CSI for the annual meeting in Assisi with its entourage. It was part of a cultural project, started that autumn, to recover useful material for the exhibition, with the proposal to draw up a census of the archives of the territorial committees. Subsequently, the idea of an organic project was born to preserve, classify and assess the documentation present in each of the CSI committees. These are, in fact, the important stages for safeguarding its history. In addition to statutes, correspondence, acts, etc., the documentation also includes a rich iconographic and photographic multimedia corpus, with medals, plaques, cups, posters, newspapers, attractive materials for a target audience that does not necessarily have to be just historians and scholars, but also young people who are curious about the origins of sport. Notoriously, it is among the languages most loved, understood and emotionally closest to them, so the topic of sport can be a formidable instrument of apostolate for the Church and, more generally, for the formation. And the AAE understood this perfectly and also realized that it was a pioneering project, since in Italy there is still no centre for sports archives.

The next step was the signing of the agreement on July 6, 2018 by M. Gaetano Zito, at that time president of the AAE, and the president of the CSI Vittorio Bosio, and today it appears to be an original experiment. The agreement, in fact, sought to develop a joint action for the assessment of the CSI

⁷ In a report to the Superior Council of Catholic Action dated December 14, 1946 on the fruitful activity of the second year of the CSI's existence, in addition to referring to the number of athletes and members (30,000) and the provincial committees already in operation (62 of the 96 Italian provinces existing at that time and twenty in the constitution phase), reference is made to the 200 diocesan offices of sport and to hundreds of championships in various sports specialties. An impressive activity which surely gave rise to a wealth of documentation.

⁸ Visit <https://www.beweb.chiesacattolica.it/beniarchivistici/aggregatore/1/Dove+-I+Soggetti+Conservatori+%3A+Archivio+diocesano>.

archives, through comprehensive training and cultural initiatives that could demonstrate the richness of the archival heritage of the CSI structures, at the service of their dioceses. The agreement is still valid and it refers to the presence of «diocesan archives that they have offered to integrate the archives of the CSI». Specifically, the agreement is along the same lines as what the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Assets of the Church (*La funzione pastorale degli archivevi ecclesiastici*) said in 1997, in which it is established:

«with regard to archives, it is necessary to develop a pastoral attitude, considering that their preservation prepares for future cultural developments and their assessment can mean a valuable encounter with current culture and offer opportunities to participate in the integral progress of humanity.

»Safeguarding archival heritage, which is part of the Church's goals, can make a valuable contribution to the new evangelization. By properly benefiting from all the cultural goods produced by the ecclesiastical communities, it is really possible to continue and increase Christian's with the contemporary world.»⁹

The agreement between the CSI and the diocese represents, above all, the will to cooperate between two Catholic institutions, to live fully the awareness that man is a unicum of soul, spirit and body. A project that is not at all easy, whose evolution is not always favourable, but it is tenacious. In relation to the National Historical Archive of the CSI, the work of its reorganization was presented in May 2018 and it is located in Rome within Isacem, the Institute for the History of Catholic Action and the Catholic Movement in Italy «Paul VI», with all the history that made the CSI the main entity in the reconstruction of sport in post-war Italy. The materials found at Isacem have been declared «of considerable historical interest by the Lazio Archives and Bibliographic Superintendence» and are available for consultation.¹⁰

The training

At the beginning of September 2024, the 1st Archival Training Course for CSI sports operators will take place.¹¹ It will consist of an experimental course and will aim to help those responsible for the CSI committees (starting with those in Sardinia) to reorganize their archival materials.

The course will last for eight hours and the importance of the preservation and safeguarding of documents and iconographic material will be discussed, after a historical introduction about the CSI and the relationship between the Church and sport, as well as a focus on the diocesan archives. Next, the different phases of archival planning will be presented. Afterwards, the management of the archive will be discussed, from the current archive to the historical one, with the drafting of the document classification sheet and the discard sheet. Finally, the issue of the preservation of materials will be addressed.

⁹ It can be consulted at

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/pcchc/documents/rc_com_pcchc_19970202_archivi-ecclesiastici_it.html [last accessed on 28th June 2024].

¹⁰ <http://www.isacem.it/it/fondi-archivistici/centro-sportivo-italiano-1943-1993-csi>

¹¹ The course will be taught with the expert help of archivist Rosalba Catacchio, who has already collaborated with the «Born to run» project.

A growing awareness

The Church, over the years, seems to have understood the value of the role of sport, both from an educational point of view and, especially recently, as an instrument of peace between peoples. In times like the ones we live in, we feel the need to preserve our history, while we are going through a real change of era. Not thinking about history and the archives that guard and transmit it means wanting to forget, hide, facilitate oblivion and the silences that often testify to the impositions of rulers, or simply wanting to «self-exile» from the community in which we live, preferring to «be an uprooted people» that renounces belonging to a collectivity, to quote again the words of Pope Francis (Speech at S. Marta, October 5, 2017).

For its part, sport is an instrument of aggregation, solidarity, protection of human rights and peace, and the Church finds fertile ground in it for its youth ministry and for the apostolate in general. This also explains his growing «friendship» with the CIO, and this first agreement of a cultural nature, which might seem limited to a circumscribed sector, the CSI, actually hints at his clairvoyance in the sector of training young generation. Making history, safeguarding it, transmitting it and making it socially useful is, in fact, one of the main goals, and archives are therefore a valuable and irreplaceable instrument.

The future, national reflections

The safeguarding of sports archives in Italy is a matter that has only recently begun to find some adequate answers along a path that is not at all easy and that began at least thirty years ago. In a brief summary, some information will be given on Italian planning in relation to sports archives to better understand how the CSI has seized the opportunity to be at the forefront in Italy in this sector.

The effort that will be made will be to raise awareness that the CSI archives contain little-known historical materials from local realities that, although coordinated by a central body, developed most of the activities on a local scale and produced materials and valuable and unique archival cores. The inventory of these archives is the key point in the transition from a modality of mere preservation or collecting to the awareness that these materials, if rearranged and valued, can contribute to composing the great panorama of the history of Italy in the 20THcentury.