

LIDA, Miranda, 2013, *Monseñor Miguel de Andrea: obispo y hombre de mundo (1877-1960)*, Buenos Aires, Edhasa. 268 pp.

The ecclesiastical career of Miguel de Andrea and the reconstruction of his rise and consolidation as an important figure in Argentine Catholicism provides a vantage point and a privileged perspective to gain an understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the Argentine Catholic Church during the first half of the last century. In her biography, Miranda Lida provides a solid study of a transcendental period in the history of Argentine Catholicism and she does so by thoroughly reconstructing the multiple facets of the personality of a monsignor whose candidacy for archbishop of Buenos Aires provoked a serious crisis between the Argentine government and the Vatican in 1923.

This careful study analyzes Monsignor De Andrea's relations with the Catholic clergy and laity but it also reconstructs in detail his links to Argentine social and political elites as well as his particular approach to social Catholicism and the participation of popular sectors in public spaces. This original contribution can be added to the sustained process of producing new studies of religious history in Argentina, which already has led to a solid institutionalization of research proposals and a profound revision of our understanding of the complex relations between society and religion in Argentina in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In addition, this biography is part of a collection of biographies edited by Juan Suriano and Gustavo Paz, whose purpose is to fill a gap in Argentine historiography: the scant attention paid to biography, dismissed as a minor genre, by academic historians who prioritized other types of historical approaches more related to "structural" analysis. As part of this series, Lida's work also stands out on its own merits. In her reconstruction, we can see the talent of the Bishop of Temnos for increasing opportunities for access to leadership groups, for promoting initiatives from within social Catholicism, and for creating a pastoral discourse that generally endeavored to avoid the extremism of "exaggerated" nationalism or categorical political alignments that reduced the scope of action to relations with the political class or the social circles of the elites. It is also interesting to note that this research into the practices, strategies, and initiatives of De Andrea appears to reveal an image of an Argentine Catholic Church that is neither very organized nor hierarchical (even in a period initially viewed as one in which there was an increase in centralization and a hierarchical model of organization was established). This situation would have allowed a considerable leeway for individual initiatives by prelates and the construction of trajectories that did not necessarily correspond to the observance of institutional procedures.

Despite the characteristics of the genre of biography, with the greater attention it affords the subjectivity of actors and their strategies, the study of De Andrea's public

activities nevertheless allows us to see the limits of the institutional growth that took place in the first decades of the century, which meant that he prioritized obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy over the autonomy of actors. Paradoxically, it was this same bishop who, in 1919, had to face the efforts of the Catholic hierarchy to discipline various Catholic lay associations.

If links to political and social power allowed De Andrea to confront a number of parochial initiatives and others directed at more specific social sectors (such as the Federation of Catholic Associations of Employees [Federación de Asociaciones Católicas de Empleados]), this relational capital, which the bishop had already learned to accumulate from his early years as a priest, quickly marked him apart from other priests of his generation. This came despite resistance during his rapid ascent, which became visible in the polemics of 1923 regarding the Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

From the point of view of the history of ideas, Lida observes that the figure of De Andrea did not have an excessively distinctive profile in relation to the lay and ecclesiastical actors of the inter-war period. It is therefore not surprising that the author provides an "integral" view regarding the forms that Catholicism acquired in the first half of the 20th century, but it is interesting that the parish priest of San Miguel deployed a diversity of resources to achieve his conception of the relations that should exist between the Church and society. This lack of a clear and obvious contrast between De Andrea and the rest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy leads, indirectly, to the proposal of an interpretation that differs from approaches presented by those who have sought to find, in the rejection of De Andrea's candidacy for archbishop, the presence of contrasting models of Catholicism in a Church whose intransigent characteristics were deepening. In any case, despite discussing this reconstruction of the facts, the biography describes the pastoral activities of a priest who promoted forms of Catholic associationism that were not directly integrated into Catholic lay networks and that departed from the militant discourse that was characteristic of, for example, Catholic Action (Acción Católica) in the 1930s.

This study of the trajectory of De Andrea, as well as contributing to an understanding of Argentine Catholicism in the first half of the 20th century, provides a window into understanding the complex relations between the Church and politics in the period between the beginnings of politics of the masses and the rise of Peronism.

In this context, the suspicions of tactical and ideological opportunism on the part of De Andrea (for example, his attitude toward the coup d'état against Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930 and the not necessarily subtle changes in his rhetoric, which was conservative, anti-communist and corporative) persistently linger over the long trajectory of his life, and

Lida accurately uncovers these ambiguities. On the other hand, as the biography warns, if the ways in which De Andrea interacted with a variety of political and social sectors left him exposed to the accusation of being somewhat "leftist" (although others remember his contacts with the "oligarchy"), the existence of the variety of such groups and actors nevertheless fits in well with what historian Loris Zanatta calls "the myth of the Catholic nation," which was so useful for the Catholic church in the 1930s. Still, and significantly, it was the initiatives inspired in social Catholicism that would end up leading this bishop to confrontations that would reinforce his modest "liberal" credentials.

This biography maintains a dialogue, starting from the introduction, with those accounts that identify De Andrea – without much inquiry – with Catholic liberalism. In any case, as noted in Chapter 9 this was a "journey to Catholic liberalism" which was not without its contradictions, ambiguities, and continuities with Catholic discourse in the 1930s. This journey was completed as a result of De Andrea's closeness to Allied sectors during the Second World War and his relationship with Christian Democratic groups, in addition to his growing criticism (expressed or not) of the advances of the Peronist state and its particular model of social justice, so different from his own attempts in previous decades.

Martín O. Castro*

CONICET, Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana Dr. E. Ravignani, Untref, Buenos Aires

* Email: martincastromdp@yahoo.com.ar