



ERENEWS

EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Are you a student in Roma Tre?

Our newsletter is classified among the "other activities" of the DSU's educational offer as an activity that entitles you to 6 cfu (area F).

Are you a student in another university?

EREnews can also host trainees from other universities, following the signing of an agreement between the university of origin and Roma Tre. The internship, which lasts 150 hours, allows students to obtain 6 cfu, can be carried out entirely online and requires the student to take part in editorial meetings and to collaborate in the creation of an issue of the bulletin (press review on a given topic; writing of a fact sheet on a specific European school system and a contribution to the monographic section, article or interview).

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A new logo for EREnews

We dedicate a small space within this issue of ERE to present our new logo, conceived and developed by Filippo, Luciano and Martina of the editorial staff and created by graphic designer Gaia Nasta. Differing only in the presence or absence of the European religious education baseline inserted in the arch, we created two different alternatives for the logo, designed for different purposes: the first, with baseline, will be the official logo, which you will see displayed on the website, on issues of the bulletin and for events; the second, without baseline, will instead be useful as an icon for the magazine's social channels.



The actual logo is characterised by a blue arch and the intersection of the horizontal lettering ERE and the vertical lettering NEWS in red with the exception of the connecting E, which is also blue. The arch, not by chance formed by three arches, is intended to be a reference to the logo of Roma Tre, the institution that owns the bulletin, while maintaining its own uniqueness. In creating it, we thought of it as an entrance into the subject matter of the bulletin and, therefore, we inserted the descriptive subtitle of the bulletin within it. The blue colour of the arch, the connecting E and the baseline also derives from that of the Roma Tre University. We have, however, flanked it with the red of the rest of the lettering, not a vibrant colour but the same intense, warm colour that we believe best represents some of the issues addressed by EREnews (inclusiveness, multiculturalism, religious plurality). In this way, the name of the magazine, thanks also to the interlocking of the two colours, also becomes part of the logo and image.

Finally, we have enclosed the arch and the lettering in a circle, also blue, designed as a 'mobile' element: on those occasions when it is necessary, it can be removed without the logo losing its specificity.

We hope that this initiative will be welcomed and shared by you readers.

Thank you all!

Filippo, Luciano, Martina

ERENews

European Religious Education Newsletter

EDITORIAL

By the editorial staff

Is the Italian public university secular? What does secularism mean?

We have constructed this issue of ERENews starting from the questions mentioned above.

Cardinal Zuppi's invitation to give a lectio magistralis as part of the inauguration ceremony of the Academic Year of the Roma Tre University was an event that

caused debate and that involved us: in addition to the event itself, we immediately realised that apart from the symbolic and ideological aspects, this fact deserved to be examined in depth on various levels and it was a challenge and a stimulus for us. This generated a very rich debate within the editorial team.

Readers will discover that there are no obvious answers on the subject, but that the picture that emerges is diverse and heterogeneous. The monographic section of this issue, therefore, represents the diary of a first journey that we have undertaken as part of the longer journey that we want to dedicate to the theme 'University and secularism - public space and secularism'.

The issue is enriched, as usual, by the space dedicated - in the first part - to the press review, editorial releases, conferences and seminars; in the second part, in addition to the aforementioned monographic section, the section on "school legislation and the teaching of religion/religions" is dedicated to Poland.



FIRST SECTION

Reasoned press review

Keywords: religions, ethics, public school, teaching, students, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Denmark, USA, teaching Islam, Europe

In this first section we offer news, insights and reflections on the world of schools, with a special focus on the topic of teaching religions and/or ethics in schools in various European countries.

EUROPE.

Teaching Islam at school: a way to prevent radicalism or to facilitate radicalization?

By Federica Candido



The subject of religious teaching in public schools is an issue that gives rise to ideological debates between different cultural visions, especially when such debates are triggered by experiments and innovations on the subject such as the introduction of Islamic religious teaching.

In Europe - despite the significant presence of people of the Muslim faith and the constant growth in the number of pupils belonging to this religion and enrolled in European public schools - only a few countries such as Belgium, Austria and Germany have introduced the teaching of the Islamic religion in public schools in a structural manner.

In other countries, a series of experiments are currently underway, criticised by radical right-wing movements, aimed either at the introduction of Islamic schools financed by the State (as is the case in Holland) or at the establishment of a religion course in State schools with several options (Catholic, Islamic, Protestant, Jewish, Orthodox, or the morals course) as is the case in Belgium.

And it is precisely from the specific case of Belgium that a lively discussion has begun regarding the quality of this teaching, the training of the teachers who teach it and the publishing proposal that supports this type of teaching. This discussion involves not only education professionals and scholars in the field but also political and institutional authorities. In fact, the need to address all these areas is also dictated by the ever-increasing number of students who decide to avail of Islamic religious instruction in Belgium (at present, there are 70,000, and in 2021, only 15.6% followed the Catholic option, while 23.7 followed the Islamic one). Specifically,

the publishing industry is also starting to move with publishing novelties on the subject: this is the case in Flanders with the publication for the Van In types of the textbook entitled "Sira", which, along with the study of the Koran, provides for the analysis of historical sources as well as encouraging reflection on a series of topics such as citizenship, global warming, bullying, and the defence of rights.

This topic certainly needs to be approached from several angles, especially in light of the demographic changes affecting this segment of the population. There is no doubt that promoting knowledge of Islam is a way to prevent radicalisation and, at the same time, a tool to defuse prejudices and stereotypes dictated by false knowledge or ideological positioning. However, the obstacles - both political and economic - are many, just as there are many aspects that need to be addressed from here on.

Read more:

- <https://europa.today.it/attualita/ora-religione-islamica-scuola.html>
- <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/more-islamic-lessons-in-swiss-schools-/48486912>
- <https://theconversation.com/salam-ramadan-mubarak-4-ways-schools-can-bring-ramadan-into-the-classroom-202385>
- Ina Ter Avest, *Introduction to Special Issue: Islam and/in Education in The Netherlands, Religions 2022, 13(4), 374* – Download here: https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/4/374?type=check_update&version=1
- <https://www.vanin.be/methodes/secundair-onderwijs/godsdiens/sira/>

GERMANY.

Teaching of religion, ethics and civic education in Germany: the debate
By Sara Giorgetti

The fifteenth State Student Council of Baden-Württemberg (LSBR) has recently expressed itself in a document¹ that is a clear indication of the strong



¹ <https://lsbr.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Das-Grundsatzprogramm-des-15.-Landesschuelerbeirates-Digitale-Version.pdf> .

desire for change and modernisation of the school system felt by German students: the issues brought to public attention by the young people of the student representation range from the shortage of teaching staff to the opening up towards a digital, multicultural and inclusive school that adequately prepares girls and boys for the new challenges of the world of work. The students, however, find little attention in school curricula to civic education: in their view, adequate preparation on the constitution and democratic values is not provided, and it would therefore be appropriate to devote a few hours of curricular teaching to civic education, so as to make young people aware citizens and prepared to exercise their rights in a democratic state. But where would these teaching hours come from? The students' proposal is to reduce the hours dedicated to religious instruction (currently two a week), in favour of those devoted to ethical and democratic education.

The following is a brief excerpt of the proposal formulated by the students' representatives:

“Längerfristig fordert der LSBR zudem, die Gesamtkontingente für das Fach Religion in der Sekundarstufe I zugunsten der politischen Bildung zu verringern, denn nur so kann garantiert werden, dass die Schülerschaft in Zeiten der globalen Umbrüche wahrhaft den Herausforderungen gewachsen ist, ohne dass dies negative Auswirkungen auf die Stundenpläne der Schülerinnen hätte”.

The statement was variously accepted and interpreted by the different souls of society. While on the one hand the Central Council of the Confessions (Zentralrat der Konfessions Freien) approved and relaunched the document signed by the students, supporting their right to a public and secular education, on the other hand Baden-Württemberg's prime minister, Winfried Kretschmann, who represents the Catholic and conservative wing of the Green party, strongly rejected the proposal, because religious instruction in Germany is the only school subject that has a constitutional guarantee. In fact, within the German Constitution, it is expressly indicated in Article 7.3 as a curricular subject to be offered in all State schools: "Der Religionsunterricht ist in den öffentlichen Schulen mit Ausnahme der bekenntnisfreien Schulen ordentliches Lehrfach" ("Religious education is an ordinary subject in State schools, with the exception of non-confessional schools")².

Representatives of the Catholic Church also spoke out against the students' proposal, arguing that there is no incompatibility between religious instruction and political education, and that there is therefore no valid reason for reducing the hours devoted to religious instruction. The head of the religious office in Stuttgart, Pastor Gerhard Neudecker, declared that the student council with its request to reduce religious instruction hours in favour of civic education is creating a contradiction that in reality has

² https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_7.html

no reason to exist, since religious instruction is also aimed at the moral growth of students and the study of one subject does not exclude the other³.

To read the students' declaration:

<https://lsbr.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Das-Grundsatzprogramm-des-15.-Landesschuelerbeirates-Digitale-Version.pdf>

To read the article of the Constitution on religious instruction at schools:

https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_7.html

For more information:

<https://hpd.de/artikel/politische-bildung-und-ethik-statt-religionsunterricht-21027>

<https://konfessionsfrei.de/lsbr-ethik-statt-religionsunterricht/>

<https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/kretschmann-kritisiert-schuelerforderung-100.html>

<https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/43398-katholisches-buero-verteidigt-religionsunterricht-gegen-schuelerbeirat>

<https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/43363-schueler-fordern-mehr-politik-statt-religionsunterricht>

GERMANY.

Confessional religious education or no faiths in the schools?

By Giulia Nardini

The debate on how religion should be taught at school is the central theme of various press articles in German newspapers. Experts, journalists, pedagogues, educators and students express their opinion about which method (confessional or non-denominational) to adopt, which teachers (lay or witnesses of faith) should teach religion and whether the subject can be substituted by the teaching of ethics and morals.

³ <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/43398-katholisches-buero-verteidigt-religionsunterricht-gegen-schuelerbeirat>

The researcher Klaus Zierer and the Catholic religion teacher Thomas Gottfried are convinced that religion cannot be taught without the witness of faith. What they claim is that the religious experience of faith is necessary in order to solve the existential questions of the human being: "Yes, because the human being is a reflective being, a being who is looking for a meaning and for answers to existential questions at the beyond experience and reality. People have always believed that faith is a part of being human and religion is a part of our civilization. The community of believers is precious to everyone. Beliefs, values, religious norms and above all rituals have a special role in the religious life".



It is necessary that faith as a human attitude and practice, should be part of the educational mission of the teaching of religion. The school has the task of training and promoting human beings in all different dimensions, this is also stated in the German Basic Law. The two experts argue: "Those who focus only on the cognitive side of human being reduce the human being to a single dimension, which is ultimately non-human: this does not recognize the multitude of areas of the personality and neither the interaction between them. Knowledge alone does not make a person."

Although schools are not churches nor places for the proclamation of the faith and the administration of the sacraments, it must be recognized that religious instruction today does not represent a lobbying interest of the churches, indeed it costs millions and is not economically advantageous for the churches, indeed it is a gigantic loss-making business from an economic point of view. Furthermore there is no mission of conversion since the 1960s and there is no trace of oppression, in fact the data confirm it: in the 2019/2020 school year around 66% of all general school pupils in Germany (3.8 million) has attended religious education courses, despite the choice of ethics as a substitute subject being available, but the percentage of faithful, on the other hand, is around 4% (920,000).

Furthermore, there are still many parents who ask for their children to be admitted to religious education even though they do not belong to any religious denomination or they are from a different religion. According to Zierer and Gottfried this happens because they hope to learn those values useful for understanding our democratic society. In fact, constitutional values, above all fundamental and human rights, can be understood in terms of Christianity as well as Enlightenment and humanism: "religious education is much more than moral education. Religious education creates authentic witnesses and encounters with the faith. An existential confrontation with the questions of life is possible [...]. Acquiring specialized knowledge about religions from an impartial point of view is not enough, but a meeting to be able to

authentically experience religion is needed: teachers who live the faith, whose contents they want to explain and make understandable according to their own conviction. Just as environmental education or political education can only be imparted by passionate teachers, for whom the corresponding attitudes and values are also of existential importance, religious education can also serve to develop the personality. Religiosity is part of the human being like language, thought, physicality and creativity. Children and young people in particular ask themselves existential questions: where do we go after death? Why does the world exist? Why is there so much suffering in the world?”.

Who are the teachers suitable to accompany this religious education?

According to the two experts, the teachers of religious education should be theologians who believe in some faith and religion, these are able to explain the deeper meaning of festivals and traditions, compared to teachers who have only studied the content of the teaching without any inner involvement: "Education religion is based on theology as academical science that has been tested for centuries. Just as theology is involved in current scientific developments, religious education is based on modern didactics and is committed to the prevailing quality standards of empirical educational research. Consequently, didactic and pedagogical competence are pivotal in addition to technical knowledge. However, the pedagogical competence of religion teachers is based on their beliefs, this is the only way in which they can be motivated and taught effectively from an educational point of view in the long term". In conclusion, religious education must be able to give an answer to the question about God without indoctrinate. This is the great challenge of religious education: "Why should we renounce to an entire subject so important for human education? The conclusion must be different. A yes to religious education and a yes to its further development in the sense of a clear commitment and a realistic project. If this is successful, not only will the churches become full again, but our society could also become closer within it".

Many other educators, journalists, experts, pedagogists, teachers and students support the opposite thesis: faith must be banned from the schools! The various arguments are set out in an article by Parvin Sadigh. In the opening words, Sadigh compares religious education to political education: "Let's imagine: the SPD chooses a professor of politics. Parents who are not members of the SPD can enroll their children in CDU, Die Grünen or Die Linke classes. The AfD complains that if everyone can do it, then so can they. The last generation argues, why should only parties be allowed to teach when fewer and fewer young people want to get involved? Children whose parents do not belong to any party have free hours instead of political lessons, they are bored in lessons in the parallel class or receive so-called substitute lessons, possibly given by a teacher who has undergone a training course on the political system in few weekends”.

Furthermore, each state has different needs and offers different solutions: in Lower Saxony, the churches are evaluating the possibility of unifying the Catholic and Protestant classes. In Saxony, where two-thirds of children do not want religious

education, there are ethics lessons at all school levels. Only Brandenburg has the word Religionskunde, i.e. a scientific study of religions, also in the subject title. Hamburg and Bremen, on the other hand, let the church continue to determine the lessons and teachers and, with the consent of the Muslim associations, call it "religious education for all".

Scholars like Wanda Alberts say that many parents are misled or misinformed. They often don't know that these are confession-oriented classes and that they can also non enroll their children. Very often religions other than Christianity are taught from a Christian perspective in substitute subjects or in so-called religious education for all. Other religions are portrayed exotically or aspects perceived as dangerous are brought into focus, while Christianity represents what is morally valuable. Many Christian concepts, such as the sacred, would also be transferred to other religions. This often happens without that the teachers realizing it. Alberts says that hardly anyone in Germany is used to talk about religion in a secular way, also because religious studies are rarely taught in schools in a historical-critical and non-denominational way.

Although teachers are allowed to reveal their political beliefs, the so-called prohibition for abuse of power applies, so they must provide scientifically valid information in class so then the students can find their own attitude.

For religious education instead, science is taboo, confession is the goal. The Catholic or Protestant Church has the right to do so.

Concluding, Sadigh explicitly states that learning about religions should have a place in school – on a historical-critical scientific basis. In fact, religions do not only belong to the daily life of many people but have shaped cultures and their rituals. Extremist currents, both political and religious, suggest the identity and belonging of people in an increasingly polarized world. Therefore it is useful that the various religions are taught by an historical-critical method so that every child has the opportunity to develop their own attitude and practice tolerance and curiosity.

Churches, mosques, synagogues or temples should remain accountable to the faith.

At school, neither the principal nor the pastor should be able to determine the beliefs of the children.

<https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/schule/2023-04/religionsunterricht-bildung-kinder-werte>

<https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/schule/2023-03/religionsunterricht-abschaffung-schule-religionskunde>

<https://www.zeit.de/hamburg/2023-03/religionsunterricht-fuer-alle-hamburg-schueler>

DENMARK.

The laws concerning the veil at school: various proposals.

By Michele Trabucco

In Denmark, the government has blocked a bill to ban the *hijab* in primary schools. The veil for girls and women of the Islamic religion is a distinctive sign of the choice of adherence to faith. The origin and above all its direct link with the indications of the Prophet are controversial, in fact the Koran does not specifically mention the obligation of the veil but generically invites women to modesty: Sura XXIV in fact establishes:

Tell the believers to lower their eyes and keep their shame and not show too much their beautiful parts, except what appears from the outside, and cover their breasts with a veil and not show their beautiful parts to anyone other than their husbands or their fathers.

It is worn starting from the age of puberty, i.e. between the ages of 9 and 12, as it indicates the maturity reached in order to be able to make an informed choice of faith. It shouldn't be an obligation, like all the practices and rites of a religion, but only the result of a responsible, free and conscious choice. It is a symbol of religious devotion and is worn as an act of Sharia observance.



In reality, there are different types and styles of veil: from the *burqa*, which totally covers the head and face, to the *hijab*, which covers the head and neck leaving the face completely uncovered, the *chador*, which only covers the shoulders and the top of the head, finally the *niqāb*, typical of Saudi Arabia, which completely covers the female figure but leaves the eyes visible.

In some countries with a Muslim majority it is compulsory to wear it. In Iran since 1983 a law requires all women to wear the *hijab*, as well as in Tunisia and Turkey. In Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, the *burqa* is mandatory.

On the other hand, the headscarf has become the subject of debate in some Western countries, sometimes giving rise to tensions and clashes between the defenders of the headscarf, as a sign of identity and cultural and religious belonging, and the defenders of freedom of choice and not to bind a certain type of dress deemed disrespectful of the dignity and freedom of women.

We must go back to 2011 for a first judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (EDU) concerning the Islamic veil in *Dahlab v. Switzerland* (European Court of Human Rights, application n. 42393/9, *Dahlab v. Switzerland*, 2001, available here: <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-22643>). Since then, several and numerous causes have been addressed regarding the freedom or otherwise to wear the veil.

Thus, while in Austria a law was approved in 2019 that prevents primary school girls from wearing the *hijab* in class, the Danish government recently rejected a bill proposed by the

Danish People's Party which wanted to prevent girls from wearing the *hijab* in class, partly going against the recommendations of a parliamentary commission which had indicated the veil as one of the tools that create discrimination in the Danish female population.

Does the veil as an element and symbol of distinction or of belonging to a religion in the name of freedom? It is an issue that arises in various countries and which questions its meaning for women and society as a whole.

Read more: <https://iqna.ir/it/news/3488729/danimarca-governo-rifiuta-piano-per-vietare-hijab-nelle-scuole>

This problem is also frequent in various other European countries, such as in **France**, where the very strong and rigid lay tradition has frequently sparked debates. The last episode told concerns the fashion of wearing traditional clothes linked to one's religion, in particular the Islamic one. Thus “in French high schools Islamic clothing is predominant. Veil, abaya (traditional Islamic dress for women) and kamis (Muslim tunic for men) characterize the new Parisian fashion”, as revealed by the 2022 survey by *L'Opinion*. **Here the article:** <https://lanuovabq.it/it/islam-in-francia-il-velo-a-scuola-diventa-una-moda>

Similar episodes are also reported in non-EU countries. In **India**, in 2022 "the state of Karnataka banned the wearing of the hijab during lessons, requiring girls to deprive themselves of their identity and exacerbating social tensions between Hindus and Muslims, which were followed by weeks of protest". The debate is open and very heated also in the Indian subcontinent.

Read more: <https://ecointernazionale.com/2022/02/lindia-divieto-indossare-velo-nelle-scuole-pubbliche/>

In **Iran** last April the Minister of Education confirmed the validity of the law that prohibits those who do not wear the headscarf from attending school. The need for girls to wear a religious dress to access education is confirmed in a very clear and rigid way, to comply with the prescriptions of Islam and sharia.

Read more:

https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/esteri/iran_velo_associazione_scuola_studentess_e_perche-7326272.html?refresh_ce

USA

The manifestation of religion in public schools

By Michele Trabucco

The United States Supreme Court recently ruled *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* to 'acquit' a teacher-coach at a school in Bremerton, Washington from charges of demonstrating his religion at a school sports event by praying on the sidelines of the football field after his respective game school classes and receiving a disciplinary sanction from its director for not listening to and following the instructions to interrupt the prayers. The gesture had raised a controversy because it was carried out by a teacher during his working hours at school and in front of his pupils. The Supreme Court proved him right. This ruling has reopened the debate on religion in the public space of the school.



Here the article <https://news.northeastern.edu/2022/07/28/freedom-of-religion-public-schools/>

The mayor of New York says: "when religion is removed from schools, guns enter"

In a press conference on March 1, 2023 following the Interfaith Breakfast meeting in New York, Mayor Eric Adams reaffirmed his position as a man of institutions who cannot be separated from his religious beliefs. The church cannot be separated from the state, because the state is the body and the church is the heart, removing the church means killing the body-state.

Here the article: <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/nyc-mayor-eric-adams-says-america-took-prayers-out-schools-guns-came-schools>

SECOND DECTION

Reports of new publications

By Federica Candido

Michele Caputo, “**La religiosità come risorsa. Prospettive multidisciplinari e ricerca pedagogica**”, ed. Franco Angeli, 2022.

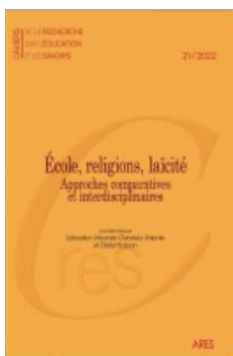
Michele Caputo
LA RELIGIOSITÀ
COME RISORSA
Prospettive multidisciplinari
e ricerca pedagogica



This volume offers an introductory synthesis of the human sciences that deal with religion and religiosity, with a particular focus on the pedagogical perspective and the scientific training of those working in the religious field: teachers, educators, catechists, but also presbyters. The essays collected in the book, all of a remarkable scientific and philosophical level, emphasise how the educational effects of religiosity are not only important on an individual level, but intervene on the entire spectrum of social and political life, touching the very foundations of citizenship formation in a pluralist society.

Sébastien Urbanski, Gabriela Valente e Didier Boisson, “**École, religions, laïcité: approches comparatives et interdisciplinaires**”, 2022.

This issue of Cahiers de la recherche sur l'éducation et les savoirs takes an international look at the place of religion in state schools. In particular, it examines teaching content, relations between political authorities and schools, and educational and training situations. The subject is a complex one, for at least two reasons. The first concerns the socio-historical processes that have led to the concept of 'religion' becoming polysemous. The second relates to the political principles that seek to define the space and limits of the social role of religion in different countries.



PAST EVENTS

By Martina Cittadini, Filippo Mariani



“International Forum on World Religions”

Department of Education Sciences, Roma Tre University, Rome 1-4 March 2023

The International Forum on World Religions, organized by Roma Tre University in collaboration with ICSOR (International Center for the Sociology of Religion), FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia), Fondazione Bruno Kessler, and the Institute of Sociology, brought together experts from various disciplines to stimulate international debate on religions from March 1-4. The Rector of Roma Tre University, Massimiliano Fiorucci, inaugurated the Forum together with Professor Paola

Perucchini, full professor in Developmental and educational psychology. From a sociological perspective, the topics addressed major world religions with a focus on emerging new spiritualities. The initiative was born in an attempt to create new spaces for discussion on a topic, the religious phenomenon, that seems to proceed slowly due to "linguistic barriers" and the "dominance of scientific groups and academic leadership."

Read more: <https://www.uniroma3.it/articoli/forum-internazionale-sulle-religioni-del-mondo-317289/>

Keywords: University of Rome Tre; religious phenomenon; cultural differences.

"Confronting Each Other in the Mediterranean: Meetings of Civilizations on the Shores of the Sea"



'Conversazioni d'arte'

Per il ciclo: *Mediterraneo. Culture, scambi e immaginari condivisi*

Confrontarsi nel Mediterraneo: incontri di civiltà tra le sponde del mare interno.

24 novembre 2022 – ore 14.30-17.00

"Confronting Each Other in the Mediterranean: Meetings of Civilizations on the Shores of the Sea" represents the fifth stage of a series of talks dedicated to the civilizations that over time have met along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Promoted within the "Conversazioni d'arte" program framework, the program was broadcast on Slash Radio Web starting on 24 November 2022. The talks follow a diachronic path that retraces the history of cultural encounters starting from ancient times; it then focuses on the theme of the complex historical phenomenon of encounters between the Christian and Islamic communities. The talks are available on Slashradioweb's social media channels.

Read more: <https://dgeric.cultura.gov.it/conversazioni-darte-confrontarsi-nel-mediterraneo-incontri-di-civilta-tra-le-sponde-del-mare-interno/>

Keywords: civilizations; meetings; Mediterranean Sea.

"Protestantesimo. "Quale ora di Religione?"

"Protestantesimo" is an Italian television series produced in 2022 by RAI, directed by Michele Lipori and hosted by Claudio Paravati, which aims to tell the public about Protestant culture and faith in Italy and the World. The episode *"Quale ora di Religione?"* was broadcast on 14 May 2023 and hosts Prof. Mariachiara Giorda and Luca Baratto. For the duration of 30 minutes, viewers are taken inside the tangled subject of religious instruction in schools. "Is there room for knowledge of religious pluralism in today's schools?" is the question the authors try to answer through an in-depth exploration of the alternative hour.

Read more: <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2023/04/Protestantesimo---Quale-ora-di-Religione---14052023-80777778-c707-45b0-91e3-5c5aa01355c8.html>

Keywords: Protestantism; religious teaching; religious pluralism.

NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Call for papers

By Martina Cittadini, Filippo Mariani

*“7th International
Conference on
Culture and History
(ICCH 2023)”
Vienna, Austria
25-27 July 2023*



7th International Conference on Culture and History (ICCH 2023) Vienna, Austria 25-27 July 2023

ICCH (International Conference on Culture and History), in collaboration with Loyola Marymount University and Utrecht University, is organizing the seventh edition of conferences dedicated to international, cultural and historical debates through a call for papers. The series was inaugurated in August 2017 in Barcelona and saw the participation of academics and scholars. The themes that will be the focus of the seventh edition are the anthropology of development, gender studies and sexuality, anthropology of religion, cognitive anthropology, media anthropology, politics, legality, and many other disciplines.

Read more: <http://www.icch.org/#>

Keywords: international debate; culture; history.



The online journal "Open Theology" collects interdisciplinary contributions on the theme of religion. Recently, two calls for papers have been curated on the topic of religious phenomena. The first is "Religion and Spirituality in Everyday Life", edited by a group of scholars affiliated with universities in Brazil and Argentina. The theme revolves around religious and spiritual practices and their interpretation within contemporary society and daily life.

The second is "Political Theology and the State of Exception: Critical Readings on the Centenary of Political Theology & Roman Catholicism and Political Form by Carl Schmitt," which aims to reinterpret Schmitt's critical ideas (1888-1985) on theology, economics, politics, and law.

Read more: <https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/opth/html#overview>

Keywords: online journal; religious phenomena; contemporaneity.

"9th Annual Meeting on Christian Origins"

Bertinoro, Italy, 21-23 September 2023



CISSR

"9th Annual Meeting on Christian Origins" Bertinoro, Italy, 21-23 September 2023 The 9th Annual Meeting on Christian Origins is organized by The Italian Center for

Advanced Studies on Religions (CISSR), located at the University Residential Center of Bertinoro. The CISSR (founded in Bologna in 1999) has been committed since 2014, through the involvement of expert scholars, to create spaces for scholarly discussion on the history of early Christianity and welcomes interdisciplinary contributions on the topic. Anyone can become a speaker during the meetings, the only requirement being thematic relevance. The topics of the 2023 call for papers include Anthropological investigations concerning Religious Forms and Practices; Before and after Reimarus: Discourses and Practices around Jesus from the Early Modern Period. New Perspectives & Methodologies; The Bible and Conflict; Contexts of Early Christianity; Discussion of books to Second Temple Judaism; Esotericism and Early Christianity; Explorations of Peoplehood in the Ancient Mediterranean; From the History of Exegesis to Reception History and Beyond; Gospel of Thomas, Nag Hammadi, and Gnosticism; Historical Jesus; Issues of Method: New 'Secular' Approaches to Early Christian Research; Jewish History and Hellenistic Judaism; Johannist Constellation: Systemic Questions and Different Answers. Sources, Locations, History; Mark and the Other Gospels; Oral and Written Sources of Early Christian Texts; Papyrology and Early Christ Groups; Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity; Re-dating Early Christian Text; Re-exploring the Apocryphal Continent: Texts, Paratexts, and Contexts; Religious Practices and Experiences in Hellenistic, Roman Judaism, and Early Christianity; Religious Transformation in the Roman Imperial Period; Women in Early Christianity.

Read more: <https://cissr.net/call-for-papers/>

Keywords: Christianity; interdisciplinary; religious practices.

MONOGRAPHIC SECTION

Secularism and academia

Introduction

By Filippo Mariani and Sara Giorgetti

The invitation extended to Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi at the inauguration of the A.A. 2022/2023 of the University of Roma Tre was a pretext and a motivation for us to reflect more on the *vexata quaestio* about the Italian public university being truly secular. The involvement of the cardinal, who is close to the Community of Sant'Egidio, in the context of the ceremony immediately generated protests from the UAAR, which engaged in a collection of signatures with the intention of obtaining the cancellation of the invitation in the name of "the fundamental principles of our (Italian, ed.) order in general, secularism and pluralism, and of the university one, science and reason, specifically"⁴.

But what is meant by 'secularism'? Is it right to exclude, in the name of the principle of secularism, religious exponents from the life of public universities?

According to some, like the UAAR, certainly yes, according to others, who sometimes do not even see the problem, no. For another party, however, the answer is less clear-cut. Exclusion, in fact, would undermine the exchange of ideas that is one of the fundamental prerequisites of university teaching. The point, therefore, would not be to exclude religions from any public institution, but to involve them in a pluralistic way, that is, to ensure that none of them takes a privileged position.

In 2023, however, an invitation to Cardinal Zuppi is understandable if one recalls his personal history, namely when he successfully engaged as a mediator in the civil war in Mozambique in the early 1990s. The Vatican of Pope Francis is, to date, perhaps the only Western state that is concretely seeking a diplomatic solution to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and it is news of 20 May that Matteo Maria Zuppi was entrusted by the Holy Father with 'a mission [...] to contribute to easing tensions in the conflict in Ukraine, in the hope [...] that this may initiate paths of peace'⁵. The cardinal spoke of education for peace and respect for human rights as opposed to the faults of war and the culture of walls in his *lectio magistralis*, expressing concern for a European Parliament that rejects with a large majority the possibility of opening negotiations.

While the University of Roma Tre invited Cardinal Zuppi to talk about peace and rights, the University of Salento proposed the same topic to the director of *Limes* Lucio Caracciolo. However, is it possible to say that one choice is better than the other, invoking the principle of the secularism of the university? The Roman university should have invited another specialist on those topics, avoiding a representative of the Catholic Church just because he is a representative of the Catholic Church? Certainly, it would seem more

⁴ <https://firma.uaar.it/zuppi-a-roma-tre/>

⁵ <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2023-05/sala-stampa-vaticana-missione-cardinale-zuppi-ucraina-pace.html>

sensible to discuss, as mentioned, the possible 'exclusivity' of the Catholic faith, over others, in such events. In any case, a lecture such as Cardinal Zuppi's, entitled 'Education for Rights and Peace', raises other questions as well. Although the lecture's message of peace is very clear, the same cannot be said about rights. In addition to the right to culture and the right to peace, Zuppi mentions more vague concepts such as the right 'to freedom from fear' or the 'right to hope'⁶. A choice that reinforces the UAAR's criticism of the invitation to speak about rights education addressed to a representative of a Catholic Church that is often reluctant to obtain what should be considered fundamental rights in a secular state (assisted suicide, abortion, gender equality, equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community, etc.) and which are not mentioned at all in the speech. This absence lays a solid foundation for a further question: what kind of confrontation should the Italian public university have with the Catholic Church or other religious faiths? Inclusiveness means renouncing the values that a secular university should make its own as a cultural hub or, on the contrary, education should go in the direction of an 'inclusive secularism'⁷. In other words, borrowing and extending to rights the concept expressed by Mario Ferrante at the Opening Ceremony of the 2015/2016 academic year at the University of Palermo, according to which the different identities of each individual make him or her unique but, at the same time, a person like all the others?

The monographic section of this issue of *Erenews* opens with the very question that arises spontaneously when dealing with these observations: what is secularism?

After an initial collection of phrases by leading figures from the world of politics and the Catholic Church, who briefly give their views on the question, we have studied the term 'secularism' from the perspective of three contemporary thinkers: the Indo-Catalan philosopher and theologian Raimon Panikkar (Barcelona, 1918 - Tavertet, 2010), the Italian theologian Carlo Molari (Cesena, 1928 - Cesena, 2022) and the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (Rome, 1942). These three figures, coming from extremely varied cultural horizons, each interpret the concept of 'secularism' and the dualistic State-Church relationship in their own way, providing a tangible demonstration of the complexity and multiplicity of facets that the issue can encompass. Subsequently, we have chosen to propose an analysis of the relationship between secularism and law, with a particular focus on the national and European context: starting from the Italian Constitution and some elements of Italian and international law, we have asked ourselves what are the legal terms and concrete elements that connote the secular nature of a State.

It was only after this analysis that we decided to try to specifically investigate the relationship between secularism and the academic world, limiting the focus of this issue

⁶ https://apps.uniroma3.it/ateneo/memo/files/allegato_70396ea0-5cb7-49b4-aa25-f357e7ec343a.pdf

⁷ Ferrante, *Diritto, religione, cultura*.

to Italian universities alone. We therefore asked ourselves whether the Italian university can be defined as secular and whether there is a single way of understanding this concept throughout the country or whether, on the contrary, the same term is interpreted on a daily basis according to a multiplicity of facets, which characterise each single university. Firstly, the statutes of universities were examined, a reading of which revealed a clear distinction between private and public universities. Our attention focused above all on public universities, which understand the theme of secularism in a free and varied manner, as emerged from a sample analysis carried out on the statutes and the inauguration ceremonies of the academic years. On these occasions, leading figures from the Italian and international scene are called upon to speak: the choice of the personalities invited sometimes provides interesting food for thought in order to investigate how each university interprets the concept of 'secularism'.

We leave to the conclusions at the end of this first dossier of ours dedicated to 'secularism and the academic world' an in-depth analysis of the results achieved and the further steps we believe it is necessary to follow.

Secularism in a few sentences of famous people

By Giulia Conti

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| <p>Over the years and in particular since 1984, the year of the revision of the Lateran Pacts, famous personalities have expressed their views on the secularism of the State, providing different and sometimes opposing visions of the principle of secularism that, despite not being explicitly stated, appears in numerous articles of the Italian Constitution. Here are some examples:</p> | |
| MARIO DRAGHI, 2021: session of the Italian Parliament on ddl Zan | “Our State is a secular State, not a confessional State (...) It is not indifference of the State to the religious phenomenon, secularism is a protection of pluralism and cultural diversity”. |
| GIORGIA MELONI, March 2023: speech at the presentation of the book 'L'atlante di Francesco' by Jesuit A. Spadaro | "I have never been in favour of the idea that religious symbols should not be displayed in our public offices. To display them is not to impose something on others, but to say who we are. That symbol also teaches me about the secularism of the State". |
| PAPA FRANCESCO, May 2016: Response to the question on 'good secularism' by S. Maillard and G. Goubert | "A state must be secular. Confessional states end badly, but everyone must have the freedom to externalise their faith. If a Muslim woman wants to wear a veil, she must be able to do so. Likewise, if a Catholic wants to wear a cross, he must be able to do so". |
| CARDINALE ZUPPI, September 2022: interviewed by Marco Damilano | “Secularism is fundamental, the Church is the first that is attentive to distinctions. This does not mean that one's spiritual and religious convictions do not have a consequence on the practical choices that must be made in secularism. Everyone must make their high contribution. I think Christians must have even more of a sense of concern for the common thing and also the necessary responses, always with secularism”. |
| CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, journalist | “The secular State is the guarantee of religious pluralism. This apparent paradox is the simplest and most elegant of political truths”. |
| CESARE PAVESE, <i>Il mestiere di vivere</i> , 1935/50 (ed. 1952) | “To desire a secular State is logical on the side of non-believers, it is an achievement, a step forward - it is absurd on the side of Christians. The priests, the hierarchies, the pope must deal with politics: Dante could divide the spheres of pope and emperor, because it was implied that the emperor made a Christian policy”. |

Philosophical Reflections on Secularism

By Isabella de Paolis

Introduction

This article is about the concept of secularism from a philosophical-gnoseological point of view. The different meanings of the word *secularism* and the debate around them come, to a certain extent, from the various layers of connotation and significance given to the term. My focus is on the various interpretations that relate to contemporaneity. In our daily lives today we relate, often unconsciously, with the principle of secularism whenever we talk about the impartiality or neutrality of the State with respect to the religious phenomenon, about the recognition of all religions or about the juxtaposition between religious precept and civil duty. We often reflect on the consequences of various actions or theorizations around this concept, still we scarcely are able to provide a definition of the term secularism.

In the philosophical field many thinkers have discussed secularism. In this paper my interest is not to deal with a general overview that has occurred in recent decades as, rather, to present three thinkers of our time: the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and theologians Carlo Molari and Raimon Pannikar who, with their extraordinary lives and experiences, have contributed to enriching new nuances to the term secularism. The choice fell on them because the abstract idea of secularism is strictly linked to its practical declination in the social context; and all of them have distinguished themselves not only for having spoken of secularism but for having dealt - albeit in a different way - with the secular state in a very personal, original and independent way, representing voices out of the choir that lead us to reflection and personal reworking.

A Premise on Secularism

Before devoting myself, however, to the three great scholars, I would like to frame the concept of secularism within the European panorama, emphasizing the great passages that have alternated over the past historical periods, up to the present day.

Secularism, in fact, means first of all understanding the weight of a series of social changes that have taken place over the centuries and that have contributed to the characterization of the current narrative. According to the Canadian Charles Taylor, the birth of the secular age is linked to the reforms of the sixteenth century that led to the transformation from the medieval to the modern man, or the transition from Christianity to Catholic modernity. From a humanist society, therefore, based on the presence and acceptance of a recognized and shared moral order, we have passed to a more free awareness from external conditioning that has led to the exaltation of the principle of subjectivity and individualism (in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries) and which, in turn, has generated a complex and contradictory scenario.

Consequently today we face an idea of secularism that is open to a dialogue with the otherness, which questions itself and welcomes various requests and manifestations, raising new questions and proposing unsolved questions.

It is appropriate, in this regard, to emphasize how the Eurocentric vision of the concept of secularism based on the religious versus the sacred - that is, chronologically, State/Church distinction, temporal/spiritual power separation, distance of the State from

the Church - is as far from the North American "post-durkheimian culture", as it is, evidently, from the Islamic oriental societies.

Thanks to Charles Taylor for having identified the semantic complexity of the term secular in its relationship with different cultural and ethnic narratives we have recognized the distance between the European and the American scenario, on the one hand, and among the European framework and the Islamic one, on the other. In the case of the United States, the bond of the individual with the sacred - as an individualistic matter or as collective one and vice versa - is, for cultural reasons linked to the coexistence of different ethnic groups and immigrant communities, an essentially personal issue that must be read as a kind of exclusive and intimate relationship with the religious fact, albeit within a multiform and constantly changing society. As regards, however, the Eastern world - and especially Islam - it is appropriate to emphasize that the ethnocentric arrogance (Taylor, 2011) distinguishes the European Church and the State, as well as the subsequent steps of separation Church/ State and the removal of religion from the public space. This paradigm cannot be applied to the panorama of Islamic countries devoted to the sharia.

My proposal is to change the angle of view and put aside the axis from the reciprocal relationship State/Church. The focus, instead, is on the management of the liberal-democratic State regarding the various religious beliefs, taking into account the different forms along the synchronic and diachronic lines.

There is no doubt that this type of secularism provides a kind of "exit" from the "recognized" religion towards the overcoming of the sacred/profane diadic vision and the welcome to a democratic society that admits religious diversity. In this regard, it would be desirable to achieve religious pluralism at a normative level thus recognising and accepting the various identities.

It would be appropriate, for a better understanding of the current horizon, to relate secularism to the issues of secularization and religious pluralism: this helps us to focus the ambiguities and contradictions of the current religious scenario. Secularization is a category proposed by the classical sociology of the nineteenth century to explain the process of modernization as a consequence of the marginalization of religion (Durkheim, 1893). As the result of clear signs of a changing society that saw a retreat of traditional religious structures in favor of a modern urbanization linked to industrialization, the secularisation was reversed by the contemporary sociological perspective that identifies the presence of various forms, ways and practices of religious belief (Eder, 2002), within the global public sphere.

Today in many European states we are witnessing a conflict between secular cultures and religious phenomena more than a confrontation between the religious faiths. In many secularized societies the different forms of religious communities are still socially perceived as relevant factors of the intermediation between individuals and the State. In addition, alongside the great religious traditions there are other and different forms of religious belongings that have a new impact on the constitution of personal identity and on the interpretation of social relationships.

Notes on contemporary secularism

Following I will focus on the salient points of the interpretation of secularism by three multifaceted and free thinkers, Raimon Pannikar, Carlo Molari and Giorgio Agamben in order to provide insights that can stimulate reflections and personal reworkings. Although different from each other for background, education and experiences, all three are united by the firm awareness of the importance of the approach of the dialogue within the epistemological paradigm on secularism.

Their life experiences have led them to a very personal interpretation of secularism both in the speculative and in the practical reality; this led them often opposed to the secular state.

The Indo-Catalan philosopher and theologian Raimon Panikkar - son of a Catholic mother and a Hindu father, received priestly ordination in 1946 - was inspired by a very personal vision of pluralism to reflect on secularism. During his life he experienced a fourfold identity: he was a Christian, born such and educated to Christianity; Hindu, due to his paternal origin, a creed which gradually emerged during his life; Buddhist, because of a deep inner work on himself; secular, as a result of his relationship with the Western world. Complex personality, sum of so many contaminations - of blood, of religions, of cultural formation and of academic activity - he wrote an encyclopedic production, comments and impressions generated by life experiences and not only by speculative investigation. A progressive priest, he was suspended a divinis, that is, the Church took away from him the power to exercise sacred order because he contracted a civil marriage in Catalonia, in 1984. In the West he became a symbol of naive rebellious progressivism, a spokesman for new-age philosophical movements and disobedient Catholicism.

His innate curiosity for the world and for cultures, his free and bold spirit in approaching things and people, his interest in all religions have led him to speak of intra-religious dialogue as a fundamental and essential element of our society, in which no religion can think of surviving independently. He postulated "inter-in-dependence" to explain the relationship between the different religions that should be open to meet and accept the other ones. For this reason, Raimon Panikkar has been admonishing the Church whenever he found it enslaved in positions of closure and defense, stating "Those who are afraid of losing their faith will lose it".

At the basis, therefore, of his reflections on secularism there is a spiritual dialogue that is also political and social, which wants to establish an awareness of the weight of freedom itself in terms of self-determination to build bridges of hope, in the name of sharing. A thought that does not admit monism and that has often been accused of sliding into syncretism and pantheism although the only purpose of the Indo-Catalan philosopher was to have realized that no culture and no religion are isolated and, therefore, cannot do it by themselves.

The reflection on secularism of the theologian Carlo Molari is, as well, founded on the importance of dialogue and confrontation. He was ordained a priest in 1952, graduated

in theology and law and taught at the Pontifical Lateran University from 1955 to 1968, at the Gregorian from 1966 to 1976 and at the Urbaniana from 1962 to 1978. In 1974 Monsignor Carlo Molari's book *La fede e il suo linguaggio* was judged not to conform to the Catholic doctrine and he was forced to leave the academic teaching in 1978.

With reference to the secularism debate, the thought of Carlo Molari moves from the proposal of a dialogue between divergent positions and convictions in order to bring to light different and distant experiences and lead to a participatory and hopefully proactive confrontation.

His personal experience of freedom above everything and above everyone and the reasons for his conversions were generated by his theological vision which links world and space within an evolutionary process based on the category of relationship: "Life is relationship ... First comes the relationship, then comes our individuality that grows through relationships. Often we think that first we become people or we are individuals and then we establish relationships, instead the opposite is true: first there is the relationship within which we arise as individuals". This is not the place to discuss Carlo Molari theology but my interest is to emphasize the relevance of the position of the thinker and how his inspiring idea of spirituality («This is why we pray: not to ask God to do something in our place, but to ask God to become able to do what life today asks to us») led him to combine faith and reason, spirituality and practical sense, religious values and the common good. I am not interested in investigating the relationship between Carlo Molari and theism, atheism, post-theism or pantheism nor on the stages of his process of mystical spiritualization as, rather, to emphasize that his thought is characterized by a fluidity of theological vision that spur towards a constructive function of secularism, within an evolutionary perspective: "In this sense today we must defend secularism, also at the theological level: that is, we must take on the commitment to find the reasons inside the dynamics of history and creation to show what is the truth of life".

The reflection of the Roman atheist philosopher Giorgio Agamben on the discourse on secularism is undoubtedly much more concerned with eschatology. An active advocate of all personal freedoms, he has repeatedly publicly expressed his disapproval of various control policies - from protests against US counter-terrorism measures to social distancing campaigns during the management of Covid-19.

His most recent thought on the current situation, which he defines in full "epochal crisis [...] that has not yet explained all its potential" is as follows: «We are facing the exhaustion of cultures; I do not see a new issue either on the secular side, nor on the Christian side. We are all motionless, fixed on a present, which we try to make up somehow». It would be the case, hopefully, to return to his proposal of a few years ago within the debate on secularism in public space. His indication is to frame the role of the Church within the tension between the Messianic time - that of the gap between the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam habba* of the Jewish tradition - and the historical time - and to investigate the short-sightedness of the Church itself in the "to grasp what Matthew 16,3 calls the signs of the times, *ta semeia ton kairon*". The result is the absence, today, of a dialectical and reciprocal link between the State, or economy of government, on the one hand, and the

Church, or economy of salvation, on the other hand; as a consequence of that our contemporary society is coping with a state of permanent crisis due to an hypertrophic presence of the law. As, for instance, the state of exception, when power is poured into one individual and "the legal-political system is transformed into a deadly machine".

Therefore Giorgio Agamben's proposal is to return to the dualism of republican Rome or medieval Europe characterized by the opposition senate/people and temporal power/spiritual power through a relationship of coexistence in the public space. Our society, according to the aforementioned philosopher, is trapped in the attempt to make legality coincide with legitimacy that is, in fact, delegitimizing and leading it adrift.

The Roman philosopher has focused on the problem of the crisis of our society - which has lost both legality and legitimacy - commenting on the extraordinary gesture of the deposition of Pope Benedict XVI and pointing the finger at the institutions. According to him the question is not so much linked to the fact that the institutions are not delegitimized because they fall into illegality, but rather the evidence that lawlessness is so widespread because the powers have lost awareness of their legitimacy. Hence his personal distrust of the judiciary power because a crisis that concerns legitimacy cannot be played on the same field of law and, consequently, a society - like ours - which tries to make legality coincide with legitimacy is experiencing a deep crisis of decadence, far from a true democracy. A solution would be to re-establish the institutions of auctoritas and potestas - or spiritual power and temporal power - they regain their own spaces and their own sphere of action, without overlapping.

The indignation of the Roman philosopher against a passive role of the Church in the current public life is well known. This led us to the common thread of the article, or the need for an effective and constructive commitment of the institutions in order to foster a debate that questions the ambiguities and contradictions of the current secular social space.

Conclusion

The brief thoughts on secularism by three original and sometimes inconvenient thinkers underline a shared tension to dialogue, active participation and effective involvement of all the actors gathered around the idea of secularism. A dialogue that, paraphrasing a well-known text to experts, must necessarily take into account all the faces of secularism in our plural, multicolored, multi-ethnic and super-different country.

Dealing with public space is still very tortuous, even when the philosopher Claudia Mancina suggests to us her vision of inclusive secularism based on the three pillars of: neutrality of public institutions, full religious freedom and equality between religions. I believe, in fact, that the affirmation of state neutrality and equality between religions are two antithetical ideas; welcoming religious diversity should be a task of the institutions themselves, through a bridging model of governance in order to guarantee and legitimize the coexistence of several different religious faiths in society.

If, in social life, the role of stakeholders is to identify the needs of institutions and administrations, to coordinate political and legal activities and decisions, the role of thinkers, philosophers and theologians is to reflect, to speculate and to argue on various concepts and paradigms questioning the very essence of today's issues. This will lead to enrich the contemporary progressive dialogue from different points of view. Hoping that such original philosophical-theological perspectives could foster a greater effective shared civic responsibility in public life.

Secularism and law

By Luciano del Monte

A key element for the coexistence of religious communities in Italy is the secularism of the State, which is not enshrined in the Constitution. However, although its presence is not expressly expressed in it, it results from the combined provisions of Articles 2, 3, 7, 8, 19 and 20. Relevant is precisely the Art. Amendment No 3 states: "*Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignità sociale e sono eguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, di opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali [...]*"⁸.

A legal turning point on this issue came with the sentence of the Constitutional Court no. 203 of 11 April 1989 (Official Gazette no. 19/04/1989, no. 16), with which the principle of the secular State was definitively consolidated. Starting from a question of constitutional legitimacy, raised regarding the teaching of religion in Italian schools, the Constitutional Court has definitively sanctioned "*il principio supremo della laicità dello Stato, che è uno dei profili della forma di Stato delineata nella Carta costituzionale della Repubblica*"⁹. This sentence, however, did not put an end to the problems related to secularism: for some authors this sentence puts Italy in



⁸ Cf. <https://www.senato.it/istituzione/la-costituzione/principi-fondamentali/articolo-3;> <https://www.governo.it/it/costituzione-italiana/principi-fondamentali>. Transl.: "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions [...]"

⁹ Cf. [https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=1989&numero=203.;](https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=1989&numero=203.) <https://www.uaar.it/uaar/premio-laurea-uaar/2011/visigalli-laicita.pdf>. Transl.: "the supreme principle of the secularism of the State, which is one of the profiles of the form of State outlined in the Constitutional Charter of the Republic"; "the Court would have disappointed expectations because, with this ruling, "it used the principle of secularism as a justification for the teaching of the Catholic religion".

a totally different position compared to other international models; according to others instead *“la Corte avrebbe deluso le aspettative in quanto, con tale pronuncia, “ha utilizzato il principio di laicità come fondamento giustificativo dell’insegnamento della religione cattolica”*¹⁰. A further point of view and reflection on this issue is offered by Nicola Fiorita who states: *“gli anni che sono trascorsi [...] dalla sentenza n. 203 del 1989 non sono stati caratterizzati soltanto dalla perdurante inattuazione del principio costituzionale di laicità, ma anche da una sottile neutralizzazione del principio stesso [...]”*¹¹. The final result of this neutralization is realized, according to N. Fiorita, through *“il combinarsi di diversi tipi di norme che rappresentano [...] omissioni di laicità, di azioni indifferenti alla laicità e di azioni avverse alla laicità.”*¹². As a result, there is a departure from the secular principle and even *“un risultato anti-laico”*¹³.

From the ecclesiastical point of view, the Catholic Church does not provide any proper definition of secularism; however, he claims the Christian roots of the latter, as Pope Pius XII affirms in his speech given in the Vatican Basilica on March 23, 1958: *“[...] come se la legittima sana laicità dello Stato non fosse uno dei principi della dottrina cattolica; come se non fosse tradizione della Chiesa il continuo sforzo per tenere distinti, ma pure, sempre secondo i retti principi, uniti i due Poteri; [...]”*¹⁴. As far as an openness of the Church towards secularism is concerned, it is good to recall the position expressed by Pope Benedict XVI during his speech held in Paris on September 12, 2008, in which he stated: *“In questo momento storico in cui le culture si incrociano tra loro sempre di più, sono profondamente convinto che una nuova riflessione sul vero significato e sull’importanza della laicità è divenuta necessaria. È fondamentale infatti, da una parte, insistere sulla distinzione tra l’ambito politico e quello religioso al fine di tutelare sia la libertà religiosa dei cittadini che la responsabilità dello Stato verso di essi e, dall’altra parte, prendere una più chiara coscienza della funzione insostituibile della religione per la formazione delle coscienze e del contributo che essa può apportare, insieme ad altre istanze, alla creazione di un consenso etico di fondo nella società.”*¹⁵.

¹⁰ Transl.: “The Court would have disappointed expectations because, with this ruling, “it used the principle of secularism as a justification for the teaching of the Catholic religion”.

¹¹ N. Fiorita, “L’insostenibile leggerezza della laicità italiana”, in «Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale» 2011. Transl.: “The years that have passed [...] Sentence no. 203 of 1989 have not only been characterized by the continuing non-implementation of the constitutional principle of secularism, but also by a subtle neutralization of the principle itself [...]”.

Ibidem. Transl.: “The combination of different types of standards that represent [...] omissions of secularism, of actions indifferent to secularism and of actions adverse to secularism”.

¹²Ibidem. Transl.: “The combination of different types of standards that represent [...] omissions of secularism, of actions indifferent to secularism and of actions adverse to secularism”.

¹³ Ibidem. Transl.: “An anti-secular result”.

¹⁴ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1958/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19580323_marchigiani.html. Transl.: “[...] as if the legitimate healthy secularism of the State were not one of the principles of Catholic doctrine; as if it were not the tradition of the Church to keep distinct, but also, always according to right principles, united the two Powers; [...]”.

¹⁵ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-elysee.html. Transl.: “At this moment in history when cultures are increasingly intersecting with each other, I am deeply convinced that a new reflection on the true meaning and

With regard to the definition of "secular" it must be emphasized that this term can have different meanings depending on the language and cultural context in which it is expressed¹⁶; in Italy and more specifically in the Catholic Church, it is an autonomous constitutional condition, juridically protected by canon law, in which all the points that outline the obligations and rights of the lay faithful are reported¹⁷; like all the faithful, *"sono tenuti all'obbligo generale dell'apostolato e hanno diritto di impegnarsi, [...] ad animare le realtà temporali con lo spirito evangelico. Con il sacramento del matrimonio i l. possono edificare la famiglia attraverso il ministero coniugale che costituzionalmente compete loro. Possono inoltre rivestire, se ritenuti idonei dalla gerarchia, determinati uffici ecclesiastici."*¹⁸.

Finally, it is necessary to focus attention on the issue of secularism at the European level and at the European Union level; the European panorama is quite varied regarding the way in which individual states administer their relations with religion: *"alla Francia, il cui modello di laicità è tradizionalmente ispirato al separatismo, si affiancano paesi confessionali come il Regno Unito, dove il sovrano è anche capo della Chiesa, per giungere poi a stati concordatari (Italia) o ad ordinamenti dotati di una Costituzione nei quali è contenuto un esplicito riferimento a Dio o ad una determinata religione"*¹⁹. However, the one just mentioned is an organization in the process of being outdated, in fact, *"in Francia vige una legislazione di sostegno alle scuole cattoliche; in Gran Bretagna [...] assistiamo ad una consistente apertura nei confronti delle minoranze religiose che non si riconoscono nella Chiesa anglicana; in Spagna [...] il principio di laicità ha assunto un ruolo assai diverso rispetto a quello sinora avuto in passato"*²⁰.

importance of secularism has become necessary. Indeed, it is essential, on the one hand, to insist on the distinction between the political and religious spheres in order to protect both the religious freedom of citizens and the responsibility of the State towards them, and, on the other hand, to become more clearly aware of the irreplaceable role of religion for the formation of consciences and of the contribution it can make. together with other instances, the creation of an underlying ethical consensus in society".

¹⁶ Cf. <https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.1448/72966>.

¹⁷ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/ita/documents/cic_libroll_224-231_it.html; https://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_it/p123a9p4_it.htm.

¹⁸ Cf. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/laico>. Transl.: "They are bound by the general obligation of the apostolate and have the right to commit themselves, [...] to animate temporal realities with the evangelical spirit. With the sacrament of marriage, l. can build up the family through the conjugal ministry that constitutionally belongs to them. They may also hold, if deemed suitable by the hierarchy, certain ecclesiastical offices".

¹⁹ Cf. <https://oikonomia.it/index.php/it/368-il-principio-di-laicita-nell-ordinamento-dell-unione-europea>. Transl.: "France, whose model of secularism is traditionally inspired by separatism, is flanked by confessional countries such as the United Kingdom, where the sovereign is also head of the Church, to then arrive at concordat states (Italy) or systems with a Constitution in which an explicit reference to God or to a specific religion is contained".

²⁰ Ibidem. Transl.: "In France there is legislation to support Catholic schools; in Great Britain [...] we are witnessing a consistent openness towards religious minorities who do not identify with the Anglican Church; in Spain [...] the principle of secularism has assumed a very different role than it has hitherto had in the past".

Analyzing instead the issue from the jurisdictional point of view of the European Union, it should be noted that within the treaties that protect fundamental human rights, such as the Maastricht Treaty (1992), that of Amsterdam (1997) or the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union proclaimed in Nice (2000), “*non è dato rinvenire alcuna espressa menzione del termine “laicità”, così come quello di “laico” per qualificare l’atteggiamento dell’Unione nei confronti del fenomeno religioso*”²¹. This is because there is no Community legislation, but it is the individual States that must organise themselves on these issues, respecting, of course, fundamental rights. However, this could lead to jurisdictional problems within individual European states precisely because there are no specific guidelines, placed from above, on the subject.

In any event, the issue changes from 1 December 2009, the date of entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon²², since it inserts a new provision according to which “*1. L’Unione rispetta e non pregiudica lo status di cui le chiese e le associazioni o comunità religiose godono negli Stati membri in virtù del diritto nazionale. 2. L’Unione rispetta ugualmente lo status di cui godono, in virtù del diritto nazionale, le organizzazioni filosofiche e non confessionali. [...]*”²³. It emerges therefore that at the European level there is a sort of secularism “*pluralista e inclusiva, nel senso che l’Unione [...] è separata dal fenomeno religioso ma al tempo stesso rispetta tutti i diversi orientamenti, con i quali mantiene un dialogo aperto, trasparente e regolare.*”²⁴.

University and secularism

By Federica Candido and Francesco Carta

Is the Italian university secular?

We have tried to answer this question in the following section: 'University and secularism'.

The Italian university world is variegated. As is well known, alongside public universities there are also private universities that enjoy an autonomy directly proportional to the institution that finances them. If the latter is religious, it goes without saying that the

²¹ Ibidem. Transl.: "no express mention of the term "secularism" can be found, as well as that of "secular" to qualify the Union's attitude towards the religious phenomenon".

²² Cf. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/italy/it/scoprire-l-europa/il-trattato-di-lisbona>.

²³ Cf. <https://oikonomia.it/index.php/it/368-il-principio-di-laicita-nell-ordinamento-dell-unione-europea>. Transl.: "1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States under national law. 2. The Union shall also respect the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations under national law [...]".

²⁴ Ibidem. Transl: "pluralist and inclusive, in the sense that the Union [...] it is separate from the religious phenomenon but at the same time respects all the different orientations, with which it maintains an open, transparent and regular dialogue".

question posed at the beginning is meaningless. The Università Cattolica of Milan, for example, clearly expresses its link with the Catholic religion from the very first lines of its statute, committing itself to promoting "an appropriate higher education and an education informed by the principles of Christianity, with respect for the autonomy proper to every form of knowledge, and according to a conception of science placed at the service of the human person and civil coexistence, in accordance with the principles of Catholic doctrine and in coherence with the universal nature of Catholicism and with its high and specific demands of freedom"²⁵. The ultimate purpose of the university is clarified as follows: "The Catholic University, in accordance with the spirit of its founders, makes its own the objective of ensuring a presence in the university and cultural world of people committed to addressing and resolving, in the light of the Christian message and moral principles, the problems of society and culture"²⁶. Other universities in the country offer the same opportunities for reflection. Universities of pontifical right, for example, have a missionary purpose, clearly expressed in their statutes. Let us take as an example an article from the statutes of the Gregorian University: "According to the teaching of the Church, the Gregorian University promotes an education that takes into account the intrinsic relationship between faith, reason and culture, takes care that the students, in the course of their studies, make the unity of knowledge their own in the distinction and respect of its multiple expressions and offers them the instruments capable of proposing themselves as paradigms of action and thought useful for the proclamation of the Gospel in a world marked by ethical-religious pluralism"²⁷.

We immediately realised that it was necessary to rethink and recalibrate the question posed at the beginning. Our work, therefore, starts from a more circumscribed question, which looks towards a well-defined horizon: is the Italian public university secular?

The question in this case takes on an obviously provocative tone because it could be taken for granted that the Italian public university is secular since the institution that promotes it is secular. We have decided, however, to programmatically question this assumption and investigate whether it is really so.

The reader is therefore accompanied on this first journey: we have tried to sound out the statutes of a significant sample of Italian universities and, at the same time, we have tried to identify the tendency adopted by Italian universities with respect to the invitation and involvement of secular or religious personalities during official moments such as the inauguration of Academic Years.

²⁵ Università Cattolica of Milan, Tit. 1 art. 1 comma 2.

²⁶Università Cattolica of Milan Tit. 1 art. 1 comma 3.

²⁷ Gregorian University, Art. 10. 2.

What do we mean by 'secularism' in public space? How is 'secularism' understood and interpreted in the academic sphere? When and why is a religious authority invited as such within a secular institution such as the public university?

These were the questions that served as our guide and challenge.

Statutes of the Italian universities

By Francesco Carta

Is the Italian university secular? This is not as trivial a question as it might seem.

First, the Italian university world is diverse. Alongside public universities there are also private universities that enjoy greater autonomy in accordance with the body that finances them. If the body that finances them is religious, it goes without saying that the question is meaningless. The Catholic University of Milan, for example, clearly expresses its link with the Catholic religion from the very first lines of its statute, committing itself to promoting 'an appropriate higher education and an education informed by the principles of Christianity, with respect for the autonomy proper to every form of knowledge, and according to a conception of science placed at the service of the human person and civil coexistence, in accordance with the principles of Catholic doctrine and consistent with the universal nature of Catholicism and its high and specific demands for freedom'²⁸.

The university's ultimate goal is clarified as follows: 'The Catholic University, in accordance with the spirit of its founders, makes its own the objective of ensuring a presence in the university and cultural world of people committed to addressing and resolving, in the light of the Christian message and moral principles, the problems of society and culture'²⁹.

Other universities in the country offer the same food for thought. Universities of pontifical right, for example, have a missionary purpose, clearly expressed in their statutes. Take for example an article from the statutes of the Gregorian University: 'According to the teaching of the Church, the Gregorian University promotes an education that takes into account the intrinsic relationship between faith, reason and culture, takes care that students, in the course of their studies, make the unity of knowledge their own in the distinction and respect of its multiple expressions, and offers them the tools capable of proposing themselves as paradigms of action and thought useful for the proclamation of the Gospel in a world marked by ethical-religious pluralism'³⁰.

²⁸ tit. 1 art. 1 para. 2

²⁹ tit. 1 art. 1 comma 3

³⁰ Art. 10 (2)

The question, in short, must be recalibrated and limited to Italian public universities: Is the Italian public university secular?

The question in this case takes on an obviously provocative tone because it could be taken for granted that the Italian public university is secular since the institution that promotes it is secular. We decided, however, to programmatically question this assumption and investigate whether it is really so.

To this end, we tried to interrogate what can be defined as the identity card of every university: the statute. This is a pivotal identity instrument in which the university presents itself in its essential characteristics.

We chose as our sample the statutes of some of the most important Italian universities, giving preference to those in the regional capitals in order to have as complete a representation as possible of the national territory³¹.

Of the 24 statutes analysed, 9 contain a direct reference to secularism, which is usually expressed in the first title/heading listing the principles and aims of the university³². A few examples:

- Università degli studi Ca' Foscari Venezia: 'The University affirms its secular, pluralist character and free from any ideological, confessional, political or economic conditioning' (Tit. 1 art. 1 paragraph 2)
- University of Palermo: According to the principles of transparency and efficiency, the University affirms its secular, pluralist and independent character from any ideological, religious or political orientation. It promotes the development of a culture based on universal values such as human rights, peace, economic, social and environmental sustainability (tit.1 art. 1 paragraph 5)
- Tor Vergata University:
 1. The University:
 - a) affirms its public function and its secular, pluralistic and independent character from every ideological, political and economic orientation;

³¹ We have considered the statutes of the following universities: Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria; University of Bari; University of Tor Vergata; University of Padua; University of Turin; University of Palermo; University of Cagliari; University of Florence; University of Naples Federico II; University of Milan; University Sapienza of Rome; University of Roma Tre; University of Valle d'Aosta; University of Genoa; University of Bologna; University of L'Aquila; University of Molise; University of Basilicata; University of 'Magna Graecia' Catanzaro; University of Trento; University of Ca' Foscari Venice; University of Trieste; University of Milan Bicocca; University of Salerno.

³² These are the following universities: University of Tor Vergata; University of Palermo; University of Cagliari; University of Naples Federico II; University of Bologna; University of Molise; University of Basilicata; University of Ca' Foscari Venice; University of Trieste; University of Milan Bicocca; University of Salerno.

b) guarantees the freedom of expression of thought, association and assembly, in order to

achieve the full participation of all its components in the democratic life of the university community with respect for political, cultural, ethical and religious convictions (Title 1, Art. 2, paragraphs a and b)

In the other cases the word 'secularism' is not mentioned but the secular character of the institution can be clearly inferred from the references to values such as non-discrimination for religious ideas and plurality. The discourse is therefore analogous to that on the secularism of the Italian state, as clarified by Constitutional Court ruling no. 203 of 1989.

A few examples:

- The University of L'Aquila has legal personality and full capacity under public and private law. It has a pluralistic character and is independent of any ideological, religious, political or economic orientation (Title 1 Article 1 paragraph 4)
- Sapienza University of Rome: The "Sapienza" pursues its aims with respect for the dignity of the human person, pluralism of ideas and transparency of information and procedures. The "Sapienza" safeguards the full freedom of ideas and the expression of political, trade union and religious freedoms; it guarantees all staff and students the necessary conditions to express and freely communicate their thoughts; it ensures equal opportunities in work and study. The "Sapienza" has adopted a code of ethics (Tit. 1 art. 1 par. 6).
- University of Cagliari: The University works to achieve its aims with teachers, researchers, managers, technical-administrative staff and students, in compliance with the ethical principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities. The University values the pluralism of ideas and the development of the individual. (Article 1.4.)

Although the presence of the term "secularism" in some statutes appears to be of particular importance, especially in relation to the absence of the term in the Italian constitution, it seems clear that universities present themselves right from their identity charters as secular institutions, although they do not commit themselves to a precise definition of the term.

Faced with the great variety of interpretations of secularism that we have found in the speeches of prominent public figures, in the reflections of intellectuals and even in official documents issued by Italian and European secular and religious authorities, it is therefore appropriate to ask how the university conceives of its being secular.

The provocative question we might ask ourselves is therefore the following: is the university therefore secular if by statute it says it is? Just as Italy, in fact, professes to be

a secular state and according to some observers in fact is not - discriminating, for example, against other religions through the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools - so, too, for the universities, it is at least legitimate to investigate how secularism is declined and experienced.

Methodologically, it is somewhat difficult and risky to carry out this investigation, which we believe can only be completed with a wide-ranging sociological type of research that we hope to pursue in the next issues of the journal.

Cardinal Zuppi's invitation to Roma Tre, however, has suggested to us that it is precisely the invitations to the opening celebrations of the academic years, i.e. the occasions on which the university - united in all its members - provides a public image of itself, that might contain eloquent clues for reasoning on the issue and for beginning to lay the foundations for future investigations.

Celebrazioni di avvio dell'Anno Accademico: chi viene invitato? Uno studio delle tendenze dell'accademia italiana

Di Federica Candido, Sara Giorgetti e Filippo Mariani

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to take a general overview of the trends adopted by Italian universities with respect to the choices they have made in involving illustrious personalities who have excelled in various fields of knowledge and human endeavour.

We decided to study how over the last 10 years (from A.A. 2012/2013 to A.A. 2022/2023), from North to South, Italian universities have conceived and organised the inauguration ceremonies of their Academic Years.

Not being able to review all Italian universities in detail, we have nevertheless tried to account for the heterogeneity and the variations on the subject and, on the basis of the categorisations adopted by Censis that divide universities into 'mega', 'large', 'medium' and 'small', we have decided to analyze the *modus operandi* of the following universities:

- For Northern Italy: Statale di Milano (mega); Ca' Foscari (large); Brescia (medium).
- For Central Italy: Sapienza (mega); Roma Tre (large); Macerata (small).
- For Southern Italy: Palermo (mega), Catania (large), Salento (medium).

We realise that this starting choice could lead to partial and not truthful results, but this practice seemed to us the most suitable and the most honest to attempt an initial approach to this topic. There is in fact no such thing as 'Italian practice' but, as readers

will be able to verify in the course of their reading, in the conception and construction of official ceremonies, such as the inauguration of Academic Years, links are woven in with the history of the territory in which the university is rooted, the different political and ideological positions of the boards of trustees, the historical climate, the urgencies that are felt and the need to deal with them (among the most striking examples, we need only mention the world lockdown due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine).

The research

North Italy

With respect to the Northern Italy, the team decided to focus its analysis on the following universities: University of Milan (mega), University Ca'Foscari Venice (large) and University of Trieste (medium).

From an initial overview, it is evident that the **University of Milan** over the last ten years has sought to address multiple issues ranging from the protection of women's rights to innovations in the technological and medical fields to the in-depth study of topics specifically linked to the world of culture. By way of example, suffice it to mention that for the inauguration of the Academic Year 2022/2023, among others, was invited the Iranian activist Rayhane Tabrizi, one of the most authoritative voices of Iranian dissidence in Italy against the Ayatollahs' regime.

In 2020/2021, in the presence of the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella and the Minister of University and Research Cristina Messa, the Dean Elio Franzin opened his lecture entitled "Presence and Future" with a greeting to the authorities and a remembrance of the victims of the pandemic.

In 2019/2020, the lectio magistralis was entrusted to Marta Cartabia, President of the Constitutional Court. In 2017/2018, female figures are again the focus of the opening ceremony of the Academic Year: Vera Vigevani Jarach (Madre de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora), Estela Barnes de Carlotto (President of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) and Yolanda Morán Isais (coordinator of Fundem - Fuerzas unidas por nuestros desaparecidos en México, Region Centro) are three women who represent the passionate and unwavering commitment to the search for the truth about enforced disappearances in Argentina and Mexico and to defending the rights of victims and their families.

With regard to aspects more pertinent to the artistic world, in 2016/2017 Ennio Morricone was received the *laurea honoris causa*, and in 2015/2016 the writer and intellectual Amos Oz was received the *laurea honoris causa* too.

Finally, worthy of note, also for the purposes of our study, is the inauguration day of the 2014/2015 academic year, whose themes were justice and legality, civil commitment and pluralism of ideas. During the ceremony, *laurea honoris causa* were conferred to Don

Luigi Ciotti, Don Virginio Colmegna and Don Gino Rigoldi. The motivations underlying the awarding of the degree in "Public and Corporate Communication" to the three priests emphasised their prolonged and extraordinary commitment in favour of the rights of the weakest, the construction of fairer social relations and education in constitutional legality.

As part of the celebrations for the start of the Academic Year, **Ca'Foscari University of Venice** in the last ten years has involved, in addition to prominent figures from the political arena, authoritative exponents of the cultural world (both scientific and medical as well as humanistic). Not to be noted in the last ten years is the involvement of personalities from the religious sphere during the inauguration of the Academic Year.

The **University of Trieste**, classified by Censis as a 'medium university', has also interspersed the involvement of personalities belonging to different spheres in organising the ceremonies of inauguration of the Academic Year over the last ten years. Generally speaking, lectures from scientific and medical fields predominate, all of which have in common an attempt to imagine how research can contribute to social progress. Again, we are not informed of the invitation of figures belonging to or pertaining to the world of religion.

Central Italy

With regard to central Italy, we examined the universities of Roma La Sapienza, Roma Tre and Macerata, which were classified by Censis³³ as mega, large and small universities respectively, on the basis of the annual number of enrolled students.

Analysing the A.A. inauguration ceremonies of La Sapienza³⁴, and in particular reading the names of the personalities invited in the last ten years, it is clear that there is a predilection for leading figures in the national and international political and scientific context. Some of the most illustrious guests include: President Sergio Mattarella, who has repeatedly invited and spoken (A.A. 2015-2016, 2019-2020, 2021-2022), several Presidents of the Constitutional Court such as Paolo Grossi (A.A. 2016-2017) and Giuliano Amato (A.A. 2022-2023)³⁵, who was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Political Studies, as well as Nobel Prize winners such as Rainer Weiss (Academic Year 2017-2018) and Giorgio Parisi (Academic Year 2021-2022), professor of physics at the University of Rome, who presented his *Lectio Magistralis* entitled 'The Sense of Science' at the presence of the Head of State.

³³ <https://www.censis.it/formazione/la-classifica-censis-delle-universit%C3%A0-italiane-edizione-20222023/gli-atenei-statali>.

³⁴ <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/notizia/inaugurazione-dellanno-accademico-2022-2023>.

³⁵ https://news.uniroma1.it/15092022_1730#:~:text=Gioved%C3%AC%2015%20settembre%202022%20alle,2023%2C%20720%C2%B0%20dalla%20fondazione.

For the celebrations at the beginning of the Academic Year, the University of Roma Tre³⁶ prefers invitations to esteemed members of the international academic community such as Carlo Rovelli, Director of the "Centre de Physique Théorique" University of Aix-Marseille (A.A. 2017-2018) and Matthew Anthony Evangelista, Professor of History and Political Science, at the Department of Government at Cornell University in NY (A.A. 2016-2017); in other occasions, he invited institutional figures, such as Marta Cartabia for A.A. 2021-2022 (President of the Constitutional Court), Laura Boldrini, who was then President of the Camera dei Deputati (A.A. 2013-2014) and the then Minister of Education Stefania Giannini (A.A. 2015-2016). Occasionally, the Athenaeum's top management chose to have prominent figures from the Catholic Church speak, such as Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture (A.A. 2018-2019) and Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference (A.A. 2022-2023). Although in both cases mentioned, the topic of the *Lectioes* presented by members of the clergy did not have a theological content, but focused on global problems and challenges, these invitations nevertheless caused some perplexity, at least in part of the students³⁷, also because eminent figures of other religious faiths have never been invited to the inauguration of an Academic Year to offer a *Lectio Magistralis*.

In the Marche region, and in particular in the University of Macerata³⁸, there is a tendency to invite as guests for the inauguration of the Academic Year political personalities holding prestigious institutional positions, such as Maurizio Martina, Undersecretary of State in charge of EXPO Milano 2015 (A.A. 2013-2014), Sandro Gozi, Under-secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for A.A. 2015-2016, and the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, who spoke on the occasion of the celebration of the 730th anniversary of the Foundation of the University. In the A.A. 2021-2022 the guest of honour was Maria Cristina Messa, as Minister of University and Research, while for the A.A. 2022-2023 Anna Maria Bernini, the current Minister of University and Research, was invited to attend the ceremony by teleconference. The University of the Marches demonstrates close cooperation with the local diocese: until 2015, a mass celebrated by the bishop of the Diocese of Macerata, Tolentino, Recanati, Cingoli and Treia for the university community every year included in the programme of celebrations for the inauguration of the new academic year. Due to the 2016 earthquake, the university's Aula Magna is still inaccessible, so the last celebrations took place at the Lauro Rossi Theatre, while this year the event was held in the newly restored St. John's Cathedral. This choice, which generated quite a bit of polemics³⁹, was explained by Rector John McCourt as follows: "It

³⁶ <https://www.uniroma3.it/ateneo/cerimonie-istituzionali/>.

³⁷ <https://firma.uaar.it/zuppi-a-roma-tre/> ; <https://www.ilsussidiario.net/news/card-zuppi-lezione-a-roma-tre-studenti-fuori-da-universita-chiesa-contro-lgbt/2493607/>.

³⁸ <https://www.unimc.it/it/ateneo/umanesimo-che-innova/inaugurazioni-anni-accademici>.

³⁹ <https://blog.uaar.it/2023/03/13/la-clericalata-della-settimana11-luniversita-di-macerata-inaugura-lanno-nella-cattedrale/>; <https://corriereuniv.it/universita-di-macerata-studenti-protestano-per-linaugurazione-dellanno-accademico-in-una-chiesa-scelta-irrispettosa-luniversita-e-laica/> .

is a symbolic context, we want to emphasise the importance of the work done as a symbol of rebirth. It is a success story that we want to highlight. We were the ones who asked for it from the Diocese, which granted it to us".

Southern Italy

Among the state mega-universities in southern Italy, the University of Palermo was considered. In the last ten years, there have been no interventions by personalities from the religious world at the inaugurations of the various academic years. Along with the invitations of the ministers of universities and research in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, there are numerous appearances by political figures, such as Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in 2016-17 or the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Layen in 2023. This last year, the theme was sustainability and ecological transition, together with the implementation of the PNRR funds. Only in the year 2015-16, which also included the participation of the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, among others, the professor of canonical and ecclesiastical law Mario Giuseppe Ferrante gave a lecture entitled *Diritto, religione, cultura: verso una laicità inclusive*.

The point of the speech was to investigate the right modalities of integration and religious identity within a secular state like the Italian one, with the definition of the term secularism as “recognition of the equal right to develop the different religious, linguistic, ethnic identities that ‘make each person an individual different from the others and each individual a person like all the others’”⁴⁰. From the point of view of the law, it must act as a tool to mitigate the tensions that can arise in a society that is less and less uniconfessional and more and more multi-religious, avoiding both indifferentism and prohibitionism, two paths that can encourage the risk of radicalisation. The proclamation encourages a juridical attitude similar to the English one, that is, balancing exceptions to state legality in the name of religious belief wherever possible and instead keeping all the fundamental rights of citizens inviolable. Thus, it is said to be desirable “a common law on religious diversity that combines ‘law’, ‘religion’ and culture’, creating a regulatory system to mediate new social conflicts”⁴¹. respectful of a secularism of the state to be understood as inclusive but also identity-based.

The University of Catania, recorded among the large universities in the CENSIS ranking of Italian universities, often held the opening ceremony of the academic year in the Aula Magna Santo Mazzarino of the Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena, Catania. The choice of venue did not, however, link the theme of the event to secularism or the religious sphere in general; on the contrary, the topics discussed were very varied. Once again, the guests belonged to the secular world, ranging from the invitation of the

⁴⁰ Ferrante, *Diritto, religione, cultura*, p. 39.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 21.

President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano in 2013-14 in a ceremony attentive to the future of young people and the need for incentives for them to remain in their homeland; to the invitation of Professor Massimo Cacciari for the 2015-16 academic year, who gave a *lectio magistralis* entitled *Luoghi e confini*. The lecture criticised the concepts of walls, barriers and borders that are increasingly present in European political action. Concepts that are “particularly tragic for Sicily, a land historically on the border [...] the Union’s last frontier with respect to the great and unstoppable migrations from Africa and the Middle East”⁴². A change of vision and a landing place for a different policy can start precisely from European universities, which for centuries have been places of knowledge, growth and cultural guidance that can transform the ever-increasing barriers into thresholds. They would not be capable of erasing or destroying the identity of individual European peoples; on the contrary, they would be useful in understanding and properly governing relations with other peoples and cultures.

While for the inauguration of the 2019-20 academic year the ceremony was moved to the Massimo Bellini theatre and for the following one was held online due to the Covid-19 emergency, for 2021-22 it was back in the church of San Nicolò l’Arena and dedicated to female scientists on the occasion of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, with a tribute dedicated to Rita Levi Montalcini and the participation of the Minister of Universities and Research and Senator for Life Elena Cattaneo, who gave a speech entitled *La necessità di studiare, la responsabilità di condividere*. The inauguration ceremony for the next academic year, 2022-23, was also held in the Benedictine Monastery and saw the conferral of an honorary doctorate in Physics on Massimo Inguscio, who gave a *lectio magistralis* entitled *Fisica quantistica: da filosofia della natura a tecnologia per il future*.

Among the small and medium-sized Italian universities - again according to the same CENSIS ranking - the University of Salento confirms the trend recorded for the other locations in southern Italy, with invitations to exponents of secular society such as Sabbino Cassese for the 2017-18 year or Roberto Cingolani for the following one. After the years 2020-21 and 2021-22 during which the opening ceremony for the academic year focused on pandemics and health, for the year 2022-2023 the theme chosen for the inauguration was “Verso un nuovo assetto geopolitico”, with a *lectio magistralis* given by Lucio Caracciolo, editor of the magazine *Limes*. The *lectio* focused on the theme and risks of war between Russia and Ukraine in a Europe now accustomed to peace; on the theme of emigration and demographic decline; and on the theme of social and institutional cohesion. The three topics, says Lucio Caracciolo, although linked, rarely enter the public debate, which is instead focused on the problem of immigration, in reality much less incisive than emigration: fundamental in this sense is the “capacity of the territory to keep the brightest young people [...] because if we do not have children we

⁴² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gV_uUnkYGI0

have to take them”⁴³. There was no shortage of criticism of differentiated autonomy in the presence of University and Research Minister Anna Maria Bernini, perceived as an attempt at further internal division when instead trying to go beyond diversity and conflict between cultures.

Lucio Caracciolo’s invitation to speak, among other things, about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, although approached from a geopolitical point of view, is perhaps ‘specular’ to that of Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, an ecclesiastic, who in the same 2023 gave a *lectio magistralis* on education to rights and peace at the inauguration of the academic year of the Roma Tre university. The two universities, taken together, demonstrate how universities, centres of knowledge and culture, can and must address social, cultural and political issues from both a secular and a religious point of view. Considering the sample taken as a whole, there are still more speeches by secular personalities in society, although ceremonies are not infrequently held in ecclesiastical venues. What seems to be missing, in a matter of religious and cultural plurality, is the participation of exponents of religious faiths and cultures other than Catholic and, in general, Western.

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⁴³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ-prbcDqZY>

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Conclusions

By Francesco Carta

Gaber said: 'In my opinion, Italians are Catholic and secular, but even the most secular like the pope's blessing. You never know'. With his usual finesse, the great Italian singer-songwriter ironically captured a characteristic of Italians: that of being deeply Catholic even when they are not.

Questioned by the appeals that have been launched against Cardinal Zuppi's presence at the Roma Tre University, in the monographic section of this issue we began to talk about secularism and universities starting with a simple question: what is secularism?

The answer does not seem to be unequivocal: starting from the speeches of various public figures to the juridical elaboration on the subject, passing through the reflections of some intellectuals, we have noted that “secularism” is a multiform concept that lends itself to being integrated (and perhaps instrumentalised) in a plurality of discourses.

Yet on one fact at least there should be no doubt: the Italian state is secular. And so should all public institutions, including universities.

Our survey of the Italian university, however, has thrown up a few surprises. Only in some statutes, for example, does the word “secularism” appear explicitly. In others, the presence of the concept hovers among the regulations concerning non-religious discrimination or equal opportunities in education, but no direct reference is found. This reflects, in truth, the Italian constitutional reality itself: the word “secularism” is not present in the constitution although many articles make explicit reference to it. The tendency of some universities to include the word “secularism” in their “identity cards” must therefore be emphasised: both because it mirrors how the discourse on secularism, at least after the many interventions of the constitutional court, is increasingly entering the legal language and because it seems to be linked to the increasingly pressing desire

of some parts of civil society to see this concept reaffirmed. The proposal to amend Article 1 of the constitution is only the most resounding example of this latter desire being grasped by at least part of the political world.

If the university is secular by statute, it is not certain that all universities interpret their being secular in the same way.

The profiles of the personalities invited to the inauguration of the last 10 academic years, i.e. to the most symbolically important events in university life, show that the universities pay constant attention, whether voluntary or involuntary we do not know, to preserving their secular character. Among the universities surveyed, only Roma Tre and Macerata were on some occasions less aware that the involvement of representatives of the Catholic Church could have caused protests in the name of secularism. It seems to be possible to note that the problem was not so much in the involvement of personalities belonging to the confessional world *per se*, but in the fact that such an invitation could inevitably prejudice, given the absence of contradictory debate and the possibility of asking questions that characterise a *lectio magistralis*, that plurality, including the religious one, which should be one of the prerequisites of secularism. The risk of this type of invitation consists, that is, in confirming a privileged position of the Catholic Church that cannot be reconciled with the secularism of the state. The absence on these important academic occasions of any other personalities belonging to other Christian denominations or religions seems to confirm this analysis.

In the next issue of EreNews, we have decided to explore this topic in more detail. First of all we will try to investigate how the university declines its secularism in other spheres of academic life (in the allocation of contract lectures, in the management of relations with university chapels, in the relationship with confessional student associations, etc.), secondly we will try to investigate, through a questionnaire, what is the perception of secularism by students, lecturers, administrative staff, and finally, we will try to make the Italian experience dialogue with other European experiences.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

By Luciano Del Monte

Teaching religions at school: Poland

The education system in Poland

The education system in Poland has undergone several changes and the latest changes were the reforms of 1999 (the school reform reduced the school years of primary school from 8 to 6 and raised the compulsory school age from 14 to 18 years) and 2017 (elimination of middle school). Public education must be accessible to all and students must be offered a place by their local district school; alternatively, for those who have the possibility, there are non-public schools (for example, Montessori, Waldorf and International Schools) for a fee which do not necessarily have to follow the curriculum and organization established by the Ministry of Education.



There are also schools for "national minorities", where classes are held in German, Ukrainian and Belarusian, and special schools for children with disabilities.

The school path is divided into three levels of education: prior to the first level we find the "pre-primary" school (optional and accessible from 3 years with duration up to 7 years); the first level of education is based on "primary" school (compulsory, with a duration of 8 years); the second on the "secondary" school, with the possibility of choosing between high schools (duration of 4 years), technical schools (duration of 5 years) or a vocational school (duration between 2/3 years and divided into two phases); and third, where you can choose between traditional universities, higher education institutions or public colleges⁴⁴.

Evolution of religious teaching

In the events of the legal regulation of religious teaching in Polish public schools there have been two periods so far: the first until 1945 and the second from 1945 to 1992.

In pre-1945 Poland religion was a compulsory school subject, while with the advent of the communist regime "a policy tending to the atheization of the whole society" was

⁴⁴ Cf. <https://elabedu.eu/it/sistema-educativo-in-polonia/>.

established; during this regime only twice, in 1950 and 1956, "the teaching of religion returned to Polish schools on the basis of 'agreements' between the Polish Episcopate and the Government"⁴⁵, but nevertheless "The teaching of religion was definitively removed from schools with the 1961 law on the development of the system of public education and education"⁴⁶.

It will be necessary to wait for the "Education of the Ministry of National Education of 3 August 1990 on the "return of religious teaching in schools in the school year 1990/91"⁴⁷ to see the return of religious education in Polish state schools and then the decree of the Minister of Education of 14 April 1992, which will definitively sanction the guidelines for religious education in Polish schools of all levels. In 2021, the Minister of Education, Przemyslaw Czarnek, announced new changes to this structure⁴⁸.

Since 1992 the teaching of religion has been organized according to very precise criteria: within pre-primary, primary and secondary public schools there is the possibility to choose (this is decided by the parents of the pupil or by the pupils themselves in secondary schools) between teaching religion, ethics or making use of the possibility of not choosing either of the first two options.

Religious education is based on curricula developed and approved by the competent authorities of churches and other religious associations and submitted to the Minister of National Education. The religion taught in Polish schools is Christian-Catholic, a decision taken by the first post-communist government in 1990, and provides curricula and teachers (often priests or nuns) chosen by the competent authorities of the churches and then presented to the Minister of National Education. However, as reported by the decree of April 14, 1992, there is the possibility, after organization, to create ad hoc classes for the teaching of other religions⁴⁹.

Religious instruction (Catholic or otherwise) is organized and administered following the following points:

1. "Participation or non-participation in pre-school or school activities relating to religion or ethics shall not be grounds for discrimination on the part of anyone.

⁴⁵ Cf. <https://dadun.unav.edu/bitstream/10171/16412/1/ICXXXI6204.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Cf. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/04/22/polish-education-minister-to-stop-pupils-dropping-both-religion-and-ethics-classes/>.

⁴⁹ Cf. <https://www.prawo.pl/akty/dz-u-2020-983-t-j,16794677.html>.

2. In pre-primary schools, religion lessons are included in the day's program. In primary and secondary schools, religion and ethics classes are included in the weekly curriculum.

3. Schools are required to organize religion classes for a group of at least seven students. For a smaller number of religion lessons should be organized with an interclass or inter-school group.

4. If fewer than seven students (pupils) apply for the teaching of a religion of a particular denomination, the authority managing the school, in agreement with the relevant church or religious association, shall organise religious education in the establishment or extracurricular catechetical point.

5. Where students from schools run by several bodies are involved in an inter-school or extracurricular group, those bodies shall, by agreement, lay down the rules for the conduct of teaching"⁵⁰.

The 1992 decree also administers the aspect related to teachers of religion: a school hires a religion teacher only on the basis of sending (by of the aspiring teacher) of a certification issued: in the case of the Church Catholic by a competent diocesan bishop; in relation to other churches, or religious associations by the competent supreme bodies. In addition, the revocation of this certification is equivalent to the loss of permission to teach religion in that Determined school.

Hours devoted to religious instruction in pre-primary, primary and secondary of all types is carried out in the form of two preschool classes or two hours weekly school meetings. However, the number of religion lessons can be reduced only with the consent of the diocesan Bishop of the Catholic Church or higher authorities of other Churches and other religious associations.

With this organization over the eight years of primary school there are more hours dedicated to teaching religion (608 hours), compared to those dedicated teaching history (342 hours), geography and biology (190 hours) and chemistry, physics, Music and art (152 hours). Even in secondary schools there are more hours of religion compared to those of physics, chemistry and biology⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Cf. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/01/07/catholic-teaching-in-decline-at-polish-schools-as-churchs-influence-wanes/>; <https://konkret24.tvn24.pl/polska/duza-liczba-godzin-religii-mniej-fizyki-sprawdzamy-popularny-wpis-ra983921>.

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