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Guillaume Silhol

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GOVERNING CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ITALIAN STATE SCHOOLS:
BETWEEN THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, 1974-
1984

SUMMARY

This article focuses on the redefinition of Catholic Religious Education in Italian State schools, from compulsory religious instruction into a non-compulsory discipline of “religious culture”, by analyzing how the issue is framed and negotiated by political, religious and educational actors between 1974 and 1984. The negotiations between governmental and Church representatives in the revision of the Concordat led to attempts at a compromise on Religious Education, its regime and its guarantees for students’ choices. However, social movements and school reforms forced various actors and institutions to reframe it in non-confessional, pedagogical and professional terms in public arenas. “Religious culture”, as a category promoted by teachers and intellectuals, became both a social problem and the main justification for the ownership of the Catholic Church over the problem.

Keywords: Religious Education– Concordat – Social Movements – Social Problem – Schools

The revision of the Concordat between the Italian State and the Roman Catholic Church is often presented as a major shift in Italian ecclesiastical law, made possible by the involvement of the Parliament¹, and as the beginning of the inclusion of a different appraisal of religion in Italian society, with an officially secular State². The various domains concerned by the Agreement on the revision of the Lateran Treaties and its implementation include aspects as diverse as ecclesiastical tax, religious marriage and Catholic Religious Education (*insegnamento della religione cattolica*, hereafter IRC). This highlights the role of the ulterior jurisprudence in providing a definition of the secular character of the Italian State as a

¹ Francesco Margiotto Broglio, “Il negoziato per la riforma del Concordato tra governo e parlamento”, in: *Concordato e Costituzione. Gli accordi del 1984 tra Italia e Santa Sede*, ed. Silvio Ferrari (Bologne: Il Mulino, 1984), 9-29.

² Marco Ventura, “L’eredità di Villa Madama: un decalogo”, *Quaderni di diritto e di politica ecclesiastica*, 1 (2014), 67-90.

supreme constitutional principle: in particular two sentences of the Italian Constitutional Court respectively on the non-compulsory character of the alternative hour to IRC and on the possibility for opting-out students to leave the school³. An important part of the research focuses on the legal consequences of the revision of the Concordat, in particular the guarantees on religious freedom and the use of school premises for electives and other types of religious instruction⁴. A few studies have been conducted in disciplines other than ecclesiastical law, in particular in political history, centered on the production of the Agreement or on the bilateral commission⁵. In the case of IRC in State schools, most research is centered on students, their skills and the effects of pedagogy⁶. Some attention has been granted by historians of education to the reforms and the curricular changes of IRC⁷. Yet, these studies have mostly been conducted separately from the Concordat as an international legal and political process, and from the politicization of IRC. This article proposes a complementary perspective with a socio-historical analysis of the requalification of IRC, in the research field of religion in public policies⁸. Neither a mere semantic change nor a one-sided secularization, the conflictual redefinition of the former Religious Education (*insegnamento religioso*, hereafter IR), from a compulsory weekly hour of pastoral lessons to a non-compulsory subject of “religious culture”, with the explicit “Catholic” adjective in art. 9.2 of the 1984 Agreement on the revision of the Concordat, is but the most visible aspect of a case study of the governance of religion⁹.

From the perspective of political sociology, this research has been conducted on archives from political parties and teachers’ unions over the period 1974-1991, completed with a survey of main Italian newspaper articles on these topics from digital databases and with 25 semi-structured interviews with actors involved in “religious culture” social

³ Italian Constitutional Court, Decision 203/1989, 12-04-1989, and Decision 13/1991, 14-01-1991.

⁴ Nicola Fiorita, *Scuola pubblica e religioni* (Tricase: Libellula, 2013).

⁵ Agostino Giovagnoli, “Guido Gonella tra Chiesa e Stato (1968-1982)”, in: eds. Giuseppe Bertagna, Alfredo Canavero, Augusto D’Angelo, and Andrea Simoncini, *Guido Gonella tra Governo, Parlamento e Partito*, 2 (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007), 505-528. Alessandra Berto, *La revisione del Concordato tra Italia e Santa Sede. Un lungo cammino (1969-1984)*, PhD thesis in history (Padua: University of Padua, 2011), <http://paduaresearch.cab.unipd.it/4271/> [access: 09.04.2014].

⁶ Guglielmo Malizia and Vittorio Pieroni, “L’evoluzione dell’insegnamento religioso in Italia alla luce delle ricerche sul campo”, in: eds. Roberto Romio and Sergio Ciatelli, *Educare oggi. La didattica ermeneutica esistenziale. Scritti in memoria di Zelindo Trenti* (Turin: Elledici, 2017), 128-141.

⁷ Emilio Butturini, *La religione a scuola. Dall’Unità ad oggi* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1987). Mariachiara Giorda and Alessandro Saggiaro, *La materia invisibile. Storia delle religioni a scuola. Una proposta* (Bologna: EMI, 2011).

⁸ Niels Reeh, “Danish State Policy on the Teaching of Religion from 1900 to 2007”, *Social Compass*, 60-2 (2013), 236-250.

⁹ Luciano Pazzaglia, “L’insegnamento della religione nei dibattiti culturali e pedagogici dall’ultimo governo Moro alla revisione concordataria (1974-1984)”, in: eds. Luciano Caimi and Giovanni Vian, *La religione istruita. Nella scuola e nella cultura dell’Italia contemporanea* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2013), 251-282.

movements. Social movements are defined as formal or informal networks of actors that use various types of resources (material, intellectual, political...) and frames of perception to achieve specific goals. The aim of the article is not to draw a history of Church-State relations, but to analyze the social construction and stabilization of definitions of “religious culture” as a category of public policy. It follows the hypothesis that these competing movements produce constraints and opportunities for Catholic institutions and government officials to endorse “religious culture” as a paradoxically consensual, functionally ambiguous category, to justify the preservation of IR in State schools with its own group of teachers. This diachronic and critical perspective also uses concepts from the study of social problems. A social problem is defined as a situation publicly and collectively deemed detrimental, requiring a political solution. It embodies one peculiar definition of a situation amongst others, including competing definitions as a “non-problematic” case in public arenas and behind closed doors, as in the example of the historical redefinition of drunk driving, from an erratic individual behavior to a public threat according to physicians and lawyers in postwar America, studied by Joseph Gusfield¹⁰. In this case, “religious culture” in Italy has acquired rival meanings: a necessary subject and professional skill that should be secularized for some groups of Catholic teachers and intellectuals; an ambiguous pedagogical expression that should not be left to religious organizations for dissident Catholics and secular activists; and a justification for leaders of the Christian Democratic party (hereafter DC) and the Catholic Church hierarchy to preserve an IR controlled by dioceses. Conflicts over the definition of a problem are made visible by public rhetoric and competing frames on religious issues¹¹. Indeed, governing a problem in a policy sector requires symbolic control and the capacity from groups and institutions to claim its ownership¹². While the revision of the Concordat consisted in collective writing and producing a political compromise, it interfered with administrative aspects of the governance of religion in schools beyond curricular changes: this rewriting occurred after 1986, once IRC had already been redefined as default “religious culture”¹³. The redefinition of IR into IRC was inseparable from expert talks behind closed doors as well as from protests in public arenas (education, Parliament, journals...), on rival definitions of what should be taught in State schools. Three phases can be distinguished in

¹⁰ Joseph R. Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-driving and the Symbolic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹¹ Luca Ozzano and Alberta Giorgi, *European Culture Wars and the Italian Case. Which Side Are You On?* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹² Claude Gilbert and Emmanuel Henry, “La définition des problèmes publics : entre publicité et discrétion”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 53-1 (2012), 43-46.

¹³ Damon Mayrl, “Administering Secularization: Religious Education in New South Wales Since 1960”, *European Journal of Sociology*, 52-1 (2011), 111-142.

this analysis: a first phase of confidential Church-State mediation (1974-1976), a second phase of attempts at making a political compromise with the drafts of article 9.2 of the Agreement on IRC (1976-1981), and a third phase of politicization and school reforms which favored the reframing of “religious culture” as both a social problem and an official justification (1981-1984).

1. RELIGION IN SCHOOLS AND THE CONCORDAT, 1974-1976

In the aftermath of Unification and conflict with the Papacy, Religious Education was legally excluded from official curricula in the national education system with the 1877 Coppino Act. This regulation changed with the fascist regime: in the 1923 Gentile Act and in the framework of the 1929 Lateran Treaties (art. 36), IR was defined as “the foundation and coronation of the public instruction system”, compulsory for pupils from primary to secondary schools and initially justified by Public Instruction Minister Gentile as a “minor philosophy” for the youth. The legal provisions on teachers and Church control became part of the policy of Conciliation between the Italian State and the Holy See, through the recognition of the State of the Vatican, despite conflicts on Catholic Action movements¹⁴. After the inclusion of the Lateran Treaties in the 1947 Constitution of the Italian Republic (art. 7), the implementation remained largely unchanged apart from revised primary school curricula in 1959. IR was part of school routines, with the possibility of exemption used by parents of students from religious and secular minorities. Although Catholic IR in schools remained formally distinct from catechism in parishes, the main professional training initiatives and organizations relied on Catholic catechetical associations and diocesan structures until the 1970s¹⁵. The first attempts at integrating IR teachers into regular Public Instruction services, favored by Christian-Democrat representatives in the wake of the democratization of the first-degree secondary school (*scuola media*), began as they were still priests for the most part in secondary schools, whereas IR was taught by schoolteachers in primary schools¹⁶. Yet, most debates occurred in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council: the creation of a National Office of Catechism under the Presidency of the Italian Bishops Conference (hereafter CEI) in 1961 and the gradual disconnection between the DC and Catholic associations favored new frames and claims of professional pedagogical

¹⁴ Emilio Butturini, *op. cit.*, 9-83.

¹⁵ Franco Bolgiani, “La catéchèse en Italie”, *Les quatre fleuves*, 11 (1980), 95-124.

¹⁶ Francesco Margiotta Broglio, “Lo stato degli insegnanti di religione nell’ordinamento statuale”, *Rivista giuridica della scuola*, 2-6 (1963), 770-797.

skills. A 1970 document by the CEI, “The Renewal of the Catechesis”, argued for new contents and methods for IR, compatible with the aims of the schools, and a few groups of IR teachers in secondary schools adhered to Catholic teachers’ unions such as the SISM-CISL¹⁷.

Consequently, the first attempts at redefining IR as a pedagogical problem preceded the abrogative referendum on divorce in 1974, which marked a defeat for the DC and the Catholic Church. The negative result forced the DC to relaunch a process of revision of norms of the Concordat, including IR. After May 1974, the President of the Council of Ministers, Aldo Moro, asked the Italian Ambassador to the Holy See, Gian Franco Pompei, to negotiate on the matter with the Catholic hierarchy. The first talks on the revision of the Concordat in 1975 between the ambassador, and the Secretary of the CEI, Archbishop Enrico Bartoletti, revealed a gap between political parties and the Church. The first proposal from the CEI consisted in a merely symbolic withdrawal of the formula “foundation and coronation of the Public Instruction system” to retain a compulsory IR. Instead, a significant part of the left-wing of the DC, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) seemed to agree to make all IR non-compulsory¹⁸. Pompei presented a draft of eleven articles in 1976, with the abolition of the compulsory regime of IR and its organization on request of parents and students. However, the newly formed government led by President of the Council, Giulio Andreotti (DC), in June 1976, sustained by a “non-defiance vote” from the PCI, disqualified the ambassador’s proposal, in favor of negotiations with Vatican officials¹⁹.

2. NORMALIZING OR REFORMING CATHOLIC IR, 1976-1981

Senator Guido Gonella, cofounder of the DC, former Minister of Public Instruction (1946-1951) and Catholic intellectual close to Andreotti’s right-wing faction, was then appointed as President of the governmental delegation in the bilateral commission. The two other scholars in the delegation were Arturo Carlo Jemolo, a jurist and specialist of Church-State relations with a “liberal Catholic” stance, and Roberto Ago, another international law jurist, closer to secular sensibilities²⁰. As a public intellectual distant from the DC, Jemolo was known for his stance on the “obsolescence” of parts of the Concordat and for his criticism

¹⁷ Luciano Caimi, “L’insegnamento della religione nel quadro della pastorale della Chiesa. Dalla fine della guerra alla revisione del Concordato (1945-1984)”, in: eds Luciano Caimi and Giovanni Vian, *op. cit.*, 239-245.

¹⁸ Gian Franco Pompei, *Un ambasciatore in Vaticano. Diario 1969-1977* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 456-458.

¹⁹ Gian Franco Pompei, Letter to Giulio Andreotti, 06-08-1976, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 163, fasc. 10

²⁰ Nomination Decree, 15-10-1976, ASILS, f. Gonella, s. 3.2.5.3, b. 88, fasc. 11

of the “ignorance in religious matters” among Italians²¹. While Gonella used his social capital in both the DC and the Catholic Church, the two other members were appointed as “technical” experts, reputedly distant from politics. Conversely, the Vatican delegation was made of two prelates and diplomats from the Council of Church Affairs, Agostino Casaroli (president) and Achille Silvestrini, and a Jesuit Canon law jurist, Salvatore Lener. As Gonella and Jemolo were both members of a previous commission on the Concordat in 1969, they worked on the basis of Jemolo’s proposal. In the case of IR, the 1969 draft on art. 36 of the Concordat stated that “the principles of Christian religion [were] part of the spiritual heritage and Italian historical tradition” to justify the teaching of IR in State schools²². After a few meetings between October and November 1976, the commission handed over a first reduced draft of 14 articles, in which art. 9-2 tackled Religious Education with the explicit “Catholic” adjective (IRC)²³. The draft was read entirely by President Andreotti in the Chamber of Deputies and discussed, including art. 9-2:

The State, recognizing the value of religious culture, and considering the affiliation of the vast majority of Italian people to the Catholic Church, ensures Catholic Religious Education in all public schools, infancy, elementary, medium and medium-secondary, in accordance with particular agreements as regards members of other confessions. Current dispositions for infancy and elementary schools remaining valid, at the act of inscription in medium and medium-secondary school, pupils who have the required age, or their parents or tutors, state whether they intend or not benefit from such school subject²⁴.

The two justifications based upon “religious culture” and the rhetoric of numbers were criticized by left-wing deputies, in particular by socialist Deputy Gaetano Arfè, who stated that the PSI would support a revision of the whole Concordat and the end of the regime of

²¹ Arturo Carlo Jemolo, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia, dalla Unificazione a Giovanni XXIII* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), 330.

²² “Riassunto Commissione Gonella (1969)”, 9, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 162, u.a. 1

²³ Apart from an intermediary version in 1977, all successive drafts followed this order: preamble, art. 1 on mutual independence between Church and State, art. 2 on the mission of the Church, art. 3 on Church organization, art. 4 on religious personnel, art. 5 on places of worship, art. 6 on religious holidays, art. 7 on Church institutions, art. 8 on matrimonial norms, art. 9 on Catholic interests in the education sector, art. 10 on Catholic higher education, art. 11 on chaplaincies, art. 12 on artistic heritage and catacombs, art. 13 on procedures of ratification and art. 14 on bilateral commissions for implementation of the agreement.

²⁴ Giuseppe Dalla Torre, *La riforma della legislazione ecclesiastica. Testi e documenti per una ricostruzione storica* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1985), 362-365.

State religion only if the “facultative” character of IRC was explicit²⁵. Most DC deputies approved the draft, while the PCI endorsed a non-separatist and pro-revision position. However, as the case of IR remains one of the most discussed, along with matrimonial and property issues, the technical debates were translated in the sphere of political mediation, from the second of the seven drafts between 1976 and 1984. The members of the governmental delegation had to produce a broader political compromise, by alternating between argumentation in public arenas and bargaining with Church diplomats behind closed doors²⁶. Between 1977 and 1981, “religious culture” was both a secondary legitimization in collective writing, and the object of marginal professional claims from teachers and Catholic activists. From the second draft, the new regime of IRC in art. 9-2 was justified by “the value of religious culture”, by the “development of the character of youth” and by the spiritual and historical heritage of Italians. In his speech to heads of Senate groups in June 1977, President Andreotti openly quoted “experts in pedagogy” as an authoritative source. He described the respect of subject choice as a guarantee for religious freedom and a didactic matter, rather than a “referendum for or against religion”²⁷. The mediation for the second and third drafts of the Agreement in the parliamentary political arena showed the conflictual character of IR among other issues. Subsequently, Gonella took part in sixteen external working reunions with all the political parties represented in Senate in October and November 1977. He had to mediate with proposals from experts and officials of left-wing parties, such as Senator Paolo Bufalini for the PCI, Senator Giovanni Spadolini for the Republican Party, and Francesco Margiotta Broglio, a jurist specialized on Church-State relations and advisor in the PSI, who criticized the “pedagogical” justifications and the vague modalities of choice²⁸. However, Gonella was aware of adamant criticism voiced by Catholic Church diplomats about the “risks of dilution” of religious transmission, if “religious culture” prevailed over doctrine and if an excessive freedom of choice was granted to students²⁹.

Meanwhile, two types of social movements contributed to the construction of “religious culture” as a social problem, contesting IR publicly and separately from the Concordat. The first mobilization of expert criticism came from jurists of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities and, mostly, from officials of Protestant Churches. Indeed, in November

²⁵ Notes on the first draft on the revision of the Concordat, FSSFT, f. Arfè, s. IV, b. 66, fasc. 13

²⁶ Claude Gilbert and Emmanuel Henry, *art. cit.*, p. 47-56

²⁷ “Dichiarazioni del Presidente Andreotti ai capi-gruppo del Senato”, 22-06-1977, 16-18, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 163, fasc. 5

²⁸ “Partito Socialista Italiano. Incontro del 19-11-1977”, 10-12, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 162, u.a. 4

²⁹ “Testo con Silvestrini, Giacchi, Fumagalli, Ciprotti, Dalla Torre, Lajolo”, 27-09-1977, 1-2, ASILS, f. Gonella, s. 3.2.5, b. 78, fasc. 90

1976, the same governmental delegation led by Gonella was put in charge of talks with three scholars representing the Union of Waldensian and Methodist Churches of Italy (*Tavola Valdese*), President Giorgio Peyrot, Sergio Bianconi and Giorgio Spini, two jurists and a historian. The negotiations aimed at producing an internal law Agreement (*Intesa*) of recognition of the *Tavola Valdese* by the State, based on art. 8 of the Constitution for non-Catholic religions. Their proposal on religion in schools, written in art. 9 and 10 of the first draft in 1978, defined religious transmission as a duty of the families, not of State schools. It asked for the respect of freedom of conscience of non-Catholic students in general and it required limiting the organization of IR to the first or the last hour of schooldays. It also endorsed the possibility of creating alternative lessons on “religious phenomenon and its implications”³⁰. Later negotiations reached the point of open conflict with the governmental delegation in 1981, leading to Jemolo’s confidential proposal to Gonella to abruptly cease these talks because of their counterpart’s stance on IR³¹.

Furthermore, initially marginal social actors began protesting publicly on the issue of “religious culture” by claiming the matter should not be governed by the Concordat, but guided by pedagogical and professional principles. Indeed, the political configuration of the late 1970s, with a dominant left-wing faction in the DC, favored actors opposed to the existing system of IR in teachers’ unions, in universities and in left-wing Catholic associations. These moral entrepreneurs can be analytically distinguished in four categories according to their positions related to the Catholic Church and to the public instruction sector: intellectual, educational and dissident Catholic activists, and secular activists³². Most of them belonged to the first two categories: IR teachers or intellectuals linked to the professional journal *Religione e Scuola*, and activists from teachers’ unions. For example, between 1978 and 1984, a group of IR teachers from the section of the SISM-CISL in Turin actively asked for a regular professional profile, and for a “historicized”, secular IR in secondary schools³³. Other proposals included cultural revisions of a Catholic IR, or the institutionalization of a dual system (*doppio binario*) of Catholic and non-confessional IR from Catholic historians Pietro Scoppola, elected in Senate in 1983, and Luciano Pazzaglia. The latter argued that “religious culture” was a legitimate pedagogical object for the full development of character,

³⁰ Draft of the Agreement between the Italian Republic and the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, 04-02-1978, 11-12, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 163, fasc. 6

³¹ Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Letter to Guido Gonella, 02-03-1981, ACS, f. Jemolo, b. 27, fasc. 52, sottof. 1

³² Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 147-153.

³³ “Sintesi della prima assemblea degli insegnanti di religione della CISL di TORINO”, FIGT, f. SNS CGIL Segreteria Regionale, b. 92, fasc. 263

and for the necessity of “religious literacy” in society³⁴. Other activists in secular teachers’ unions such as CGIL-Scuola aimed at replacing IR by critical notions of history of religions³⁵. As these debates gained visibility in newspapers, they shaped an informal consensus, from secular actors to left-wing Catholics, on IR as the “weak spot” of the Concordat.

3. “RELIGIOUS CULTURE”, SOCIAL PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION, 1981-1984

From the third draft of the Agreement on the revision of the Concordat in 1978 to the final, seventh in 1984, the two justifications of “the value of religious culture” and the inclusion of the principles of Catholicism in the historical heritage of the Italian people remained stable elements of art. 9-2³⁶. However, the extent of precision on students’ rights and on control of teachers by the Catholic Church varied in the following paragraphs of the drafts, and the destabilization of the political majority made the revision of the Concordat unlikely in the early 1980s. The fifth draft written in 1980 was not discussed either in Parliament or in the Presidency of the Council, and the outcome of the 1981 referendum on abortion was deemed provocative by the Church hierarchy. The definitive failure of the “historic compromise” between the DC and the PCI, as well as financial and political scandals such as the *P2* and the *Banco Ambrosiano*, favored precarious five-party governing coalitions (*Pentapartito*) from 1981 to 1992, involving the DC, the PSI, the Republican Party, the Social-Democratic Party and the Liberal Party³⁷. The first cabinet led by a non-DC President since 1948, Republican Giovanni Spadolini, summoned a technical commission, presided by Judge Vincenzo Caianiello, with Francesco Margiotta Broglio, Antonio Malintoppi, an international law jurist close to the Republican Party, and Catholic lawyer Pio Ciprotti. Their alternative draft mentioned the only justification of “religious heritage” in art. 9-2 on IRC, while insisting on guarantees of choice and freedom of conscience. After Jemolo’s death in 1981, Gonella and Ago criticized it informally as humiliating and as unreasonable to negotiate with the Vatican³⁸.

Simultaneously, two attempted reforms of educational policy publicized “religious culture” in the governmental agenda separately from the Concordat, and they provided

³⁴ Luciano Pazzaglia, “Come cambierà l’ora di religione”, *Corriere della Sera*, 16-02-1977, 9.

³⁵ Anna Maria Marengo and Marcello Vigli, *Religione e Scuola* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1984).

³⁶ Presidenza del Consiglio, *Un accordo di libertà: la revisione del Concordato con la Santa Sede* (Rome: Presidency of the Council, 1986), 462-463

³⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *L’Italia del tempo presente. Famiglia, società civile, Stato, 1980-1996* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 276-280.

³⁸ “Colloquio del Sen. Gonella con il Presidente Spadolini a Palazzo Chigi”, 08-02-1982, 2-3, ASILS, f. Gonella, s. 3.2.5, b. 87, fasc. 163

opportunities for moral entrepreneurs to promote a redefinition of IR against its ownership by Catholic institutions. Indeed, a commission of fifty-nine experts including Luciano Pazzaglia, presided by Liberal Senator Giuseppe Fassino and Catholic pedagogy scholar Mauro Laeng, was put in charge of writing new curricula for primary schools in May 1981. The final report, was handed over to the Minister of Public Instruction Franca Falcucci (DC) in November 1983: it promoted the withdrawal of IR, replaced by “the study of religious facts and phenomena”³⁹. Meanwhile, in June and July 1982, the parliamentary debates on the reform of secondary schools led to the isolation of DC deputies on the defense of the inclusion of “Religious Education” among the basic knowledge and skills of all students. Conversely, PSI and PCI deputies disagreed over the explicit lack of a “facultative” character for IR, while secular activists in left-wing unions used petitions to reinforce the teaching of history of religions in high schools. In addition, in November 1982, the Catholic journal *Religione e Scuola* organized a congress in Rome, with representatives of major political parties, to promote a cultural reform of IR separately from the Concordat⁴⁰.

In front of these open contestations, the Catholic hierarchy adopted a defensive strategy, from the Vatican to the CEI. The pedagogical proposal of Catholic intellectuals, which entailed the distinction between IR in primary schools and “religious culture” in secondary schools, was publicly denounced in the pontifical rhetoric of “complementarity and distinction” between catechesis and IR⁴¹. The proposal of a curricular reform in primary schools was not implemented by the Minister of Public Instruction, as the revision of the Concordat found relevance again after the 1983 general elections. After the formation of a coalition government led by Socialist Secretary Bettino Craxi, the opportunity of new relations with the Catholic world, independently from the DC, gave strategic value to the revision, which was restored to the governmental agenda. This move was also likely to show a “united front” between the PSI and the PCI on the Concordat, while the two major left-wing parties fought over the deindexation of basic wages on inflation. Two new members of the governmental delegation were appointed to replace Jemolo and Gonella, deceased in 1982: Catholic jurist Pietro Gismondi, and Paolo Rossi, a former social-democrat deputy and judge.

³⁹ Francesco Bevilacqua, *Verso la scuola elementare del duemila. Testi programmatici a confronto. Invito ad una lettura critica dei programmi per la scuola elementare nel testo elaborato dalla Commissione “Fassino”, con il riscontro delle indicazioni contenute nei programmi Ermini del 1955* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1984), 250-255.

⁴⁰ Lino Prenna and Flavio Pajer, *Società civile, scuola laica e insegnamento della religione. Atti del Convegno Nazionale di “Religione e Scuola”, 17-19 novembre 1982* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1983).

⁴¹ Pope John Paul II, “Insegnamento della religione e catechesi, ministeri distinti e complementari”, *L'Osservatore romano*, 07-03-1981.

Consequently, the “Concordat-framework” was endorsed by PSI officials and advisors to conclude talks, leading up to a final version which stated in art. 9-2:

The Italian Republic, recognizing the value of religious culture and considering that the principles of Catholicism are part of the historical heritage of the Italian people, will continue to ensure, in the framework of school aims, Catholic Religious Education in public schools of all orders and degrees. In the respect of freedom of conscience and parents’ educative responsibility, the right to benefit or not from this discipline is guaranteed to everyone. Upon enrollment students or their parents will exert such a right on request of school authority, without entailing any form of discrimination related to their choice.

This version was presented in Senate in January 1984 by President Craxi, who stressed the justifications based on “religious culture” and guarantees of religious freedom, while Pietro Scoppola’s stance was isolated in the DC. The Agreement on the revision of the Concordat was approved by the majority and the PCI, then signed by President Craxi and Cardinal Casaroli on February, 18th 1984. The “technical aspects” in the 5th Additional Protocol to the Agreement, such as the time slot of IRC, professional training, textbooks and curricular changes, remain undecided. The signing of the *Intesa* with the *Tavola Valdese* three days later confirmed the transition to a new system of governance of religion in Italy, opening a phase of conflictual implementation on IRC until the 1990s.

The hypothesis of causal relations between “religious culture” as a category of public policy in the Italian education sector, and the negotiations and justifications of interests, is confirmed by the analysis of the socio-historical redefinition of Catholic IR between 1974 and 1984. Rather than a direct outcome of secularization on the religious socialization of youth, the reduction of possible alternative policy paths played a central role in the requalification of IR into a default discipline of “religious culture” for students. This category became a “cause without opponent” because its ambiguity was the product of protests and conflicting uses, as a social problem as well as a justification to preserve the interests of the dominant religious institution in Italy. Despite the external consensus of the hierarchy, this situation was blurred in the Catholic Church in early 1984. Some liberal bishops had to dissociate themselves from promoters of the *doppio binario*, while more conservative bishops, in conformity with the Vatican, anticipated and tried to limit some outcomes of an interpretation as a non-

compulsory status: the marginalization of IRC in schools and a massive opting-out of parents and students⁴². Although the implementation did not produce any significant statistical drop in the following years, this redefinition brought about changes in the groups previously involved in IR. Most Catholic activists adhered or resigned themselves to the new IRC, often deemed unsatisfactory by teachers' unions and by *Religione e Scuola*, which entailed a formal professional training in dioceses after the December 1985 Agreement between the CEI and the Ministry of Public Instruction. The gradual recruitment of a majority of lay Catholics as IRC teachers by dioceses, up to 28.000 teachers nowadays, favored the practical and symbolic redefinition of their professional claims in terms of precarious employment conditions. Simultaneously, advocacy coalitions against the implementation of IRC were formed between secular teachers' unions, Protestant and Jewish organizations, such as the National Committee School and Constitution in 1986. They used petitions, local opting-out campaigns and partly successful legal actions in administrative courts, based on the interpretation of the secular character of State schools. However, they avoided costly actions such as promoting alternative subjects or trying to undo the Concordat, even by involving anticlerical groups and political actors outside the coalition like the Radicals or some strands of the PCI. As in other European countries, the "technical" aspects of the governance of religious education in schools, including the revision of IRC curricula after 1986, were the other side of the coin of politicized debates in public arenas⁴³. From a comparative perspective, the paradoxes of the ownership of the problem of "religious culture" by the Catholic Church in Italian State schools show the relevance of cases that have a structural role in the governance of religion in States but are less visible than contemporary controversies on Islam in Europe.

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ASILS: Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome

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⁴² Claudio Chelli, Italian ambassador to the Holy See, Confidential letter to Giulio Andreotti, 26-04-1984, ASILS, f. Andreotti, s. Vaticano, sottos. 10-4, b. 163, fasc. 10

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