

# Diffused Religion and Civil Society in Italy

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## Abstract

“Diffused religion” is to be understood in at least a double sense. First of all, it is diffused in that it comprises vast sections of the population and goes beyond the simple limits of church religion. Besides, it has become widespread, since it has been shown to be a historical and cultural result of the almost bi-millennial presence of the Catholic institution in Italy and of its socializing and legitimizing action. However values diffused in the Italian civil society can be considered as a form of conflict with the established institution of Catholic Church. Civil society shows a peculiar trend towards civic freedoms and ethical pluralism. Although the Catholic perspective is dominant, the civil society prefers a different system of values, even though not so much different from ecclesiastical social doctrine. This way there is a public space where religion is not the reference point and other perspectives take place.

**Keywords:** civil society; diffused religion; politics; state; Italy.

## Introduction

Civil society is often mentioned to emphasize the existence of a social reality tending to reflect the society as a whole, but also to be differentiated from public institutions or public relevance institutes within the same society that are in charge of it in order to supervise it.

Thus, the State is a structure deriving from civil society, but is deputed to hold its destiny in its hands in political, legislative and financial terms. Also the Church operates within society, as an organized religious form, although somehow it tends to prescind from society through its own hierarchical structures, which are often engaged in dictating ethical norms and procedural indications.

Therefore, there is a substantial ambiguity in civil society itself: it is independent, but it finds itself in a position to have come to terms with other derived entities, which are at the same time able to condition it, sometimes quite heavily.

The contrast between civil society and the State, between society and the Church (or the Churches), falls within a series of methods which are typical of the relations created between all social individuals as single members and the various institutions present in society in which they are placed.

This ambiguous condition implies *ad intra* and *extra* trends which are not easily manageable neither by a single individual nor by social groups nor by the legislation in force. When the question is related to make ethical choices, the gap tends to expand alienating individuals and groups from the institutions, enhancing an already apparent distance which is then emphasized by contingencies.

Especially when an institution such as the State or the Church aims at imposing its own point of view (which is the one expressed by an elite of “special” individuals governing the institution either temporarily or permanently), the conflict with the citizens or the believers intensifies, and can lead to forms of protest, or even of refusal and rejection.

Indeed, many revolutions, if not all, arise precisely from such a divergence of options and interests. Some tend to maintain the dominion from the conferred and exercised power, the other to resist taxation and the various attempts to hetero-direction. The result is often a strongly dichotomy: the two parts do not communicate, they keep their positions, they defend their independence, and above all they do not find an agreement. To sum up, compromise does not seem to be part of the habits of a society that tends to claim its historical primacy over state and religious structures, and refuses interference on its attitudinal and behavioral decision making process.

### **The idea of diffused religion**

‘Diffused religion’ is a concept that needs clarifying (Cipriani, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1992, 2001, 2017). The term “diffused” is to be intended in at least two ways. First of all, it is ‘diffused’ in that it involves vast sections of the Italian population and goes beyond the simple limits of church religion; sometimes, it is, in fact, in open contrast with church religion on religious motivation (cf. the internal dissension within Catholicism on the occasion of the referendum on divorce and abortion.) Secondly, it has become diffused, since it has proved to be a historical and cultural result of the almost bi-millennial presence of the Catholic institution in Italy and of its socializing and legitimizing action. The premise for present day ‘diffused religion’ have been laid down in the course of centuries.

As we said, ‘diffused religion’ concerns broad strata of the Italian population. Many studies have consolidated this conviction over time. However, its most relevant aspect is still the strong historical-geographical – that is, cultural – rootedness of the religion most practiced in Italy. It is precisely the strength of tradition, the practice, the family, and community involvement which make the adherence to the prevalent religion compelling and almost insurmountable. Where socialization within the family does not reach, pastoral and evangelizing activity moves in, carried out in a capillary way by priests, and lay parish workers.

What ‘diffused religion’ really consists of can be understood even by observing its peculiarities. In a broad sense, its presence is also clearly visible in forms which are

not as evident as church religion, but which are not totally invalidated, although this visibility may appear somehow intermittent.

Values widely shared among Italian society can be considered as a form of dissension with the established institution of the Catholic Church. Italian society shows a peculiar trend towards civic freedom and ethical pluralism. In terms of attitudes and behaviour, Italians appear to disagree with the Church official teachings. Although the Catholic perspective is dominant in many contexts, Italian society prefers a different system of values, though not so very different as regards the Catholic social doctrine. It is like a separate sphere which promotes models of freedom and open discussion, not always in line with the Catholic Church views. Thus a public space is created, where religion is not the only reference point, and other perspectives come into place, somehow building a defence against the Catholic Church influence and religious socialization.

In reality, diffused religion is both diffused 'in' (through) many channels of socialization and education (mainly in schools and universities) and diffused 'by' (thanks to) specific structures and actions of values proposals. As a final outcome, it is also diffused 'for' (in favour of) other specific religious groups and movements, given that - apart from the intents of the so-called church religion - we can observe the spreading of other creeds (the easy proselytism of other Christian churches, as the 'Jehovah's Witnesses', or of 'sects' of oriental origin etc.), as well as the trend towards ethical and/or political choices. In brief, it is permissible to think of religion as being 'diffused' through the acceptance of other religious experiences at individual or group level, and also because it represents a parameter which can be referred to with regard to moral and/or political choices in the social context.

### **The role of diffused religion**

Diffused religion, that is that set of values, practices, beliefs, symbols, attitudes and behaviours which do not completely conform to the official model of church-religion, coincides almost entirely, or at least for a great part, with a significant part of civil society.

Diffused religion does not perfectly overlap civil society, but it certainly constitutes a statistically relevant quota of it. In other terms, it embraces a wide range of civil society, and it is representative of its main trend as regards orientations, at least towards the Church (or the churches). Therefore, it can be said that it is not the whole of civil society that coincides with diffused religion, as the latter includes church-religion, as well as atheism, indifference, agnosticism. Nevertheless, diffused religion seems to interpret some essential expectations whose importance is signified by their influence on the whole society.

However, diffused religion must be distinguished from civil religion. It is not a question of finding in it Rousseau's old idea (1712-1778) as expressed in his *Social Contract* (chap. VIII, book IV), or the more recent concepts of Bellah (1967). Neither fits the Italian case. Rousseau's idea was developed in the context of the XVIII century, with a pedagogical-philosophical connotation; Bellah's concept, although sociological, was related to the territory of the United States, with characteristics totally foreign to the Italian peninsula (from the concept of elected people to that of the centrality of the biblical texts). Above all, substituting the idea of religion itself with that of society does not seem to be legitimated: one thing is religion, another is society, at least as regards sociological analysis. In conclusion, civil religion and civil society cannot be compared to one another, being two separate elements. At most, one could speak of a diffused religion within civil society, and eventually about a civil religion (to be redefined each time) within civil society.

On the other hand, the role of diffused religion is primarily that of providing self-defence to non-conformist believers, those believers, that is, who are not tuned on the wave length of the ecclesial teachings and the directives of ecclesiastical hierarchy. An unwanted effect of a diffused religion not particularly oriented to ignore or contest the official dictates, must obviously be taken into consideration: there is a certain propensity towards an accentuated individualized thought and action, with the result that also the tension between civil society and active participation to social and political citizenship is loosened.

Such loosening can also constitute the premise for further developments, so much that it can further authoritarian outcomes, due to the absence of public and community concern interest.

Recent political events in Italy, that have led to the creation of parties like the *Lega Nord*, and *Forza Italia* (later named *Popolo della Libertà*), as well as of the *Italia dei Valori* ('Italy of Values'), are significant pointers to this possible effect.

However, diffused religion constitutes also a space for debate, that can take place outside the ecclesiastical aegis, and suitable to promote friendly relations, to create and develop public opinion, to defend human and civil rights, to respect the plurality of ideological positions.

Diffused religion is also part of the religious society involved in political society (state, parties, unions) and thus must take into account different interlocutors, both within its confessional benchmark and outside (State, parties, unions).

If one can take for granted that civil and political society are intimately connected and mutually functional, the same can be said of diffused religion itself, which is able to legitimate, although indirectly, the religious structure constituting its own scenario.

In conclusion, it is an 'inextricable intricacy': diffused religion supports the Church anyway, and both, together, support civil society of which they constitute a significant part. Also the action of each single individual has a supporting significance, as their obedience to existing rules contributes to the reinforcement of the *status quo*. The conscience of the individual as a believer and as a citizen does not fail even when confronted by dramatic situations; indeed, it is in the presence of those situations that a fundamental faithfulness emerges, that allows the justification or at least the non-blaming of facts not entirely consistent with the roles played and with the religious or political responsibilities.

Differently from church-religion, diffused religion does not allow, in general and *per se*, the creation of associations that could prelude to further engagements at civil society level. It is, nevertheless, indubitable that it constitutes a privileged and adequate space for wide-spectrum critical reflections as regards the state and politics, and the entire civil society. The latter finds in diffused religion itself an important lever to oppose the state, as diffused religion is in fact a sort of gym that trains individuals to freedom of mind, to critical observations, to detailed analysis.

All this happens, usually, independently from 'three-line-whips', and therefore in a tendentially open form, not subject to pre-constituted indications. Basic religious values persist, but do not become conditioning and exclusive: at the most, the lack of places and times devoted to exercising public debate can create difficulties, a reason why one must be content with extemporary conversations in bars, in sitting rooms, or during a convention – which is temporary and whose participants rarely meet and are therefore unlikely to act together in a social action that could be relevant within civil society.

### **Diffused religion and civil society**

Despite a certain Diaspora that can be noted in the various forms of diffused religion, it is society itself trying to create some order and offer some plots to follow, with the aim of regulating feelings and orientations, relations and differences.

However, there is something peculiarly common to see a diffused religion and civil society convergence: it is the presence of values guiding individual actions according to a social key and for community integration purposes. Such values are so decisive – in defining what diffused religion represents – that it is possible, after due consideration (with data on hand), to talk also about a religion of diffused values. This means that such values are spread and experimented in the framework of primary and secondary socialization, but then persist for a long time, and end up by reverberating in civil society, where religious belief and practice can fail (as what is currently happening), although those ethical references coming from the same diffused religion continuously

re-emerge, even by that diffused religion (not accompanied by a regular practice and/or is rather critical towards the religious *establishment*).

The obtained result is then a decisive contribution to the integration of civil society itself, even with the necessary differences.

Moreover, the most relevant alliance is between diffused religion and civil society against the State. There is a tacit mutual understanding aimed at saving interests and instances of single social actors. This represents an extraordinary promotion of democracy itself. It is not by accident that the weakening of civil society implies a sliding towards authoritarianism. And, if diffused religion is not anymore able to exercise its power through values, it *de facto* opens the way to totalitarian solutions. In conclusion, diffused religion and civil society seem to share the ethical character of the idea of reality, so as to reduce the possibilities of development of selfish results, based on mere individual interest.

Both diffused religion and civil society avail the use of the family and its socializing action, that induces new generations to acquire a particular vision of the world, a decisional autonomy in ethical choices, a critical ability, a conscious orientation in the activities to start both as regards the use and the consumptions.

Another domain uniting diffused religion and civil society is the voluntary work. Indeed the latter falls also within the characteristics of church religion, but it is particularly developed between subjects that although they do not regularly practice religion and strict observation of ecclesiastic norms, nevertheless, are engaged in generous actions, unpaid, at the service of the social community, that is civil society. Non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, and service networks are all forms where both individuals, who are religiously oriented, and others, who are engaged for the public good without asking much in change, can be found.

In conclusion, the Italian civic tradition was not born by coincidence, but is rooted in the presence of a dominating religious form, Catholicism, which since centuries has shown a particular attention to this sector.

### **Secularization and civil society**

For several decades religious phenomenon specialists have strived in discussing about secularization, death of God, end of religion, or – on the contrary – religious revival, return to God, expansion of the influence of religion. In various cases we have witnessed some change of mind, softening of the tones, in some cases 180° change course. For example, let us refer to Sabino Samuele Acquaviva (1971), already known as the theorist of the eclipse of the sacred, and Harvey Cox (1968), the prophet of the secular city. The former has later had to specify that he intended only to talk about

the end of the magical use of the sacred (Acquaviva, Stella 1989), the latter has just had to simply admit to have made a mistake on the future of religion. But even the promoters of a strong restart of religious practice have then had to change their minds.

In any case, what has been missed is a serious confrontation with empirical reality, with the results of serious and rigorous scientific researches, without prejudices; or, when there has been a reference to empirical reality, approach has been partial, not contextualized, too easily generalized referring to a quite varied and mutable reality. But, above all, there has been no reckoning with the weight of historical roots, traditional cultures, diffused religious socialization, the weight and the influence of confessional structures, often widespread and quite efficient in their action (despite all immediate appearances to the contrary).

Following the various waves of empirical researches and sociological theorizations, that have, at first, raised serious doubts on the real possibilities of persistence of religion, and then have emphasized a supposed revival of religion, founded on some empirical and rather impressionistic observation, not confirmed by more rigorous inquiries, it seems difficult, today, to deny that the religious fact is still a central interest for the greater part of the population (whether Italian or other). In view of this situation, as recent studies prove, it is not possible to discuss civil society leaving aside the religious issue. Yet, it is often by taking religion as a point of reference that actual trends can be identified and future developments of civil society can be imagined.

In the last few years, in almost every domain of civil society, issues involving the religious point of view have repeatedly arisen: they range from abortion to divorce (two topics which were rather debated in the past, also becoming the object of passionate referenda), to the use of stem cells, to euthanasia, to the presence of religious symbols in public places, to the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools and the funding of confessional schools, to homosexuality and the use of the pill, from evolutionism to relativism, from the relationship with Hebraism to those with Islam, from the use of Latin in liturgies to civil marriage.

The debate takes place almost exclusively between representatives of one or the other position, who sustain opposing theses. Besides, the debate takes publicly place, within the entire civil society (at least potentially, because in fact often the debate is carried out by specialists who think they are the holders of the topic to be sustained in favor or against a given perspective).

This demonstrates that the awareness related to the existence of civil society, different than the State and the church, belongs to an exclusive intellectual circle, of well-prepared politicians and of church exponents who are rather alert as regards the political value and real consequences of some of their verbal expressions.

Regarding the rest, almost everything remains in the shadow and in the vagueness of a little understandable diatribe, made of malleable numbers and motivations cunningly presented.

Finally, civil society in its wider sense, which should be the main character of the debate, ends up by being *de facto* deprived of its role, so much that only specialists and experts can be delegated to debate an issue which should instead of common and public interest.

This implies that on typically religious topics, decisions at legislative level are taken by governors and member of the parliament belonging to the ruling majority, while social forces, electorate and citizens contribute very little. Moreover, there are also a number of alternate courses that see each time this or that party, or this or that member of the parliament, acting in favor or against the option officially sustained by the Church – according to the advantage they can take in that moment.

There can be profound motivations and personal convictions, but it is difficult to understand which are the decision criteria at the basis of the members of *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democrats), to avoid the introduction of a reference in the European Law to Christian religion as the majority religion (of the same opinion, were De Gasperi and Adenauer, but also others); it is also difficult to understand why today's politicians who belong to centre and are close to the Catholic Church have sustained the contrary, launching a campaign in favour of the inclusion of 'Christian roots' in the European legislation.

### **Laity and civil society**

Recently the new watchword in the theoretical analysis and in the intellectual debate on the role of religion within civil society seems to have become "laity", with particular reference to the state, to public institutions, to educational activities (especially in schools, at public level). In reality, it does not constitute a complete novelty, because there are scholars who have already talked about laicization rather than secularization, indeed with a meaning which is different from the one that is nowadays the object of ongoing diatribes.

Definitely, there is an interconnection between the *tópos* of laity and that of religious pluralism in civil society. The one and the other have to dialogue with the resilience of religion that after the multi-decennial blast of secularization has kept a basic solidity. The reasons at the basis of pluralism can be pragmatic, based on convenience: given the persistence of religion, the only possible government seems to be that of widespread permissiveness. This choice does not take into account the difficulties created to all those who expect to be able to have larger autonomous and egalitarian spaces, and, on the contrary, they must leave their space to others, and even tolerate

the newcomers: the inclusiveness becomes *de facto* a sort of exclusion for those who are already within a given system. A more reflexive pluralism appeals to the values of justice, liberty, legitimization and socio-political duty in order to render positions which are different from the pre-existing ones, acceptable. The risk might force on liberty even those who disagree and having the right to disagree; another risk is to ask, even to those who do not want recurring to it, to apply the so-called equality of respect, a concept still existing, as *filótimo*, in the Greek culture of the villages (Cipriani, Cotesta, Kokosalakis, van Boeschoten, 2002).

Gian Enrico Rusconi (2000) is since a long time an intellectual who constitutes a true reference point as regards the *querelle* on laity. He has become such because of the solidity and rigour of his ideas, being present for more than forty years in the field of public polemic on religion and civil society. He is then a protagonist and a master interlocutor, careful, documented, respectful. According to him, the novelty of our present times can be found in the offering by the (Catholic) Church and by the (Christian) Churches of a public ethic. This *per se* produces elements of conflict with the lay approach tending to avoid a religious contribution to the same ethic, as if God was not there (the well-known *etsi deus non daretur*). In reality, the Church and the Churches do not object to the laity of the State, but refer to a so-called healthy laity built upon their basic parameters. This is where the reaction of laity starts, as it does not appreciate forms of *diktat* coming from institutions that are not the State.

Major misunderstanding is probably in the classification of dictatorship of the relativism that some exponents of the so-called church religion (an old term which is quite dear to Rusconi himself) see in the affirmations by the lay part preferring, on the contrary, to speak of a consensual regulation of ethical principles and of their application to civil society and within the State. On one hand there is the authority of the faith criteria, on the other the authority of the citizens as a whole (civil society), including various kinds of believers (also “differently believing” as Rusconi likes to say).

It is often sustained that lay public ethic can differ, in some tolerable measure, from the private one. On its hand, religious public ethic seems to be more compact, but also for it there can be differences in the private domain. Moreover, the major distinction derives from the different procedure that has been put into practice in the two perspectives: in the lay perspective, there is more inclination towards deciding in each case, while in the religious perspective what counts is a general *corpus* of principles, valid for any issue.

Therefore, the lay person does welcome the intrusion of divine in the operational choices deriving from the rights defined through rational and consensual procedures; and, then, he/she asks to the religious person to adapt to the rules of a lay state. In other words, the convergence between faith and reason does not find support

outside church-religion. But the lay position does not legitimate at all, Rusconi adds, the absence of any moral rule, yet it covers other rules based on a consensual ethos, although it cannot be easily drawn by civil society.

Rusconi, while contesting Böckenförde's thesis (1991, 1999, 2007) that Christian religion is able to provide the normative premises missing from the secular, observes that the Christian historical roots might have been transformed in lay motivations, and agrees on the habermasian requests for a renunciation by religions to an exclusive possession of truth, in name of a real dialogue between them, in order to appreciate science, and to accept the lay supremacy in the field of law.

At the same time, it could also aim for restoration of theological teachings in State universities in a non-confessional perspective, but with a rigorous wide-spectrum scientific research, with the possibility to increase a prolific interdisciplinary openness such as those that have been at the basis of the exemplary dialogue between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (Ratzinger, Habermas 2007). This could be a way of making prejudices and resistances end, but, most of all, to allow the qualitative level of scientific approach to the themes of laity and religiosity, bioethics and bio-law, role of religion in civil society and within the state, raise. In that sense the worry demonstrated by many, including pope Benedict XVI, on the future of education in Italy should be widened.

Another worry, that has recently re-emerged (De Rita, 2008), recalls the confusion between sacred and saint: the former is given by the link with the divine mystery, the latter by the presence of faith in civil society, that is the more and more active role of subsidiarity of the Italian Catholic Church in the territory of the country, in the social domain, substituting the State, and in public roles. In particular, according to Giuseppe De Rita, it is from managerial skills of Catholicism (on moving easily between sacred and saint) that the ever increasing space occupied by Catholic religion in the public sphere derives, raising therefore reprises of individual and state lay instances.

It is worth to remind us that even many years ago, Italo Mancini (1983) did not think in the same way; theologian and philosopher of religion at the University of Urbino, he, presaging, stigmatized the culture of the presence of the sacred (marked with a capital letter by him) and saw in the saint the true salvation, in contrast with that of the sacred, false and violent. According to him, the saint was the pure faith, separated, not subject to the earthly interests and, therefore, not enslaved to the sacred as its *management*, in terms of earthly power within society. The saint, the divine, should not be confused with the human dimension of a certain kind of sacred, that wants to engage in the completion with the lay strength in the profane world. It is not by chance, Mancini stressed out that the neo-Hebrew distinguishes between saint, unmentionable, and sacred, immediate and manipulating. Now, the new Italian right wing tends to confine the saint within minority and marginal domains, very related to identity, while, instead, valorizing the sacred, vital, active, operational in the concreteness of everyday like and politics.

Too much space and too much literature would be needed to discuss here the justness of one or the other distinction. It is better to substantiate and underline some aspect of the question. First of all, whether we call sacred or saint the action of the churches in society has consequences and raises problems. Moreover, recurring to the two classifications, at least, in relation to the public role of religion, creates other separatenesses, not able to be solved by definitions, given that they are interchangeable, according to the ideological and intellectual perspectives of those who make use of them. In conclusion, it should not be underestimated that to criticize a superficial confusion of terms, and then, creating another is not the best service that can be rendered to the understanding of reality. This is why, methodologically, it seems more appropriate to use two terms, which at least in general seem to be less ambiguous: church, singular and/or plural (intended as historical organization with its own hierarchy, structures, associations, movements and individual believers, practitioners, adherents), and religion (intended as a whole of activities referring to an inspirational matrix of a spiritual, metaphysical kind; but also religiosity has similar characteristics, and therefore a further explanation would be needed).

### **Religion and civil society in Italy**

In conclusion, the function of religion and religiosity in the Italian civil society is still evident, just because of the 'normative value and content of behaviors in all spheres of life, from private to public life, from family to economy, from information to politics and so on' (Donati, 1997: 10), nevertheless, its features are changing.

It is not by chance that a new broad spectrum of sociological research is emerging, both quantitative and qualitative (the last one dates back to 1994-1995), which is able to individuate and measure the real impact of the new dynamics.

For the moment there are some empirical data acting as a reference and that have proved to be rather stable, apart some exceptions. In the research entitled *Religiosity in Italy* (Cesareo, Cipriani, Lanzetti, Rovati, 1995), the presence of different types of religion was ascertained: there is a 'Oriented church religion (hetero-directed)' (9,4%), a 'Reflexive church religion (self-directed)' (22,6%), a 'Modal primary (diffused) religion' (16,5%), a 'Modal intermediary (diffused) religion' (21,6%), a 'Modal perimetric (diffused) religion' (21%) and lastly a 'Non-religion' (8,9%). Essentially, greater part of the population and thus of civil society – more or less – identifies itself just through a religious belonging calculated in 91,1%. A later inquiry (Garelli, Guizzardi, Pace, 2003) ascertained that those who do not belong to any religion have more than doubled, reaching 18,8% (a percentage which is rather close to the European average that had been recorded in 2005 by *Eurobarometer*) while Catholics were stable at 79,2% and other religions below 1%. It is not difficult to imagine that in the following period there has been an increase in the belonging to Islamic religions, which had already emerged before.

Naturally the situation varies from region to region, from town to town. In a research carried out by the archdiocese of Urbino (Parma, 2004) – in central Italy – ‘integrated’ Catholics were 36,3%, ‘individualists’ 26,6%, ‘secularized’ 25,1%, ‘distant’ 12,1%. In the Sardinian diocese of Oristano (Cipriani, Lanzetti, 2010) the ‘militant believers’ are 22,78%, ‘critical believers’ 32,78%, ‘peripheral believers’ 28,33% and ‘non-believers’ 11,94%. Instead, in the archdiocese of Chieti-Vasto in Abruzzo Region (Di Francesco, 2008), youth is divided between believers and dubious-uncertain (although the latter would be more numerous than those peers who define themselves as skeptical-believing): on the horizon is possible to discern a civil society that is less connoted by a solid religious confession. A further evidence of this can be found in a study on those students who do avail themselves of the opportunity to study the Catholic religion at school (Castegnaro, 2009) although it seems that according to 20% of the interviewees it is not satisfactory. Something similar can also be noted amongst the youth in southern Latium (Meglio, 2010): practicing-believers 45,1%, non-practicing believers 50,9%, non-believers 3,9%. Similar data can also be found in a qualitative research carried out in the diocese of Vicenza (Castegnaro, Chilèse, Dal Piaz, De Sandre, Doppio, 2010), which confirms that the values of civil society are somehow stable, and presumably in that which follows immediately after in temporal order; after all, the slogan taken as a reference is based in fact on values, although it expresses a critical attitude towards impositions of any kind, that is: ‘values yes, rules no’ to which a certain refusal of the institutional hierarchical authority corresponds: nonetheless ‘youth substantially confirms the same hierarchy of values of their fathers’ (Castegnaro, Chilèse, Dal Piaz, De Sandre, Doppio, 2010: 64) and therefore there would not be a peculiar interruption within the same civil society, which is based on family values and respect for the neighbor, as well as religious and social engagement (Buzzi, Cavalli, De Lillo, 2007: 155), together with a marked individualization of the religious feeling, at times in terms of spirituality (new keyword that tends to substitute the terms religion and/or religiosity) (Giordan, 2006, 2007; Tirri, 2008). At the same time, the values of ‘active citizenship’ (in Italy it has been promoted by an organized movement), pro-social activity (with rather ancient roots), altruism, assistance, voluntary work are evident.

Lastly, in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Tellia, 2010) religious pluralism is increasing, thanks to a massive immigration of Orthodoxies (28.000 people), Muslim (24.000), Protestants (2.500) and believers from oriental religions (2.500 animist and 1.500 Hindu). Further south, in central Sicily (Introvigne, Zoccatelli, 2010) it emerges that religions such as Pentecostal Protestantism, Waldenses movement, the so-called free churches, Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, New-apostolic, Orthodoxies, Buddhists, Baha’i, Reiki association, Scientology, and especially Muslims, are finding their way through.

## Conclusions

In this rather stratified scenario it is possible to find traces of a tendency towards *civiness*, despite difficulties and problems, resistances and uncertainties. In Italy, in particular, the Catholic church, the Christian churches, and more recently settled religious confessions, sometimes prevent, sometimes contribute to maintain a strong sense of belonging to civil society. Contingent elements, which are related to contexts and people, can condition its development. Nevertheless, the sociological interpretation of the Italian case elaborated by Pierpaolo Donati some years ago can be largely shared: he sustains that 'in the cultural system the need to revise the dominating tendencies in which more and more weaker values and a sort of anomic pluralism seem to prevail. The family has been somehow reevaluated. Mass media have faced the problem of providing a more correct information, and sometimes they have also expressed new ethical codes (such as the Treviso Charter, as regards the protection of childhood from mass media). Science has faced the problem of its responsibilities a bit more. Religion has shown a new vitality through the raising of new spiritualities, both neo-monastic and laic. But all this has taken place in limited areas. In general, cultural socialization processes and the processes of mass communication have not succeeded to structure themselves according to dynamics that respond to ethically virtuous minima demands' (Donati, 1997: 49).

Such conclusion should, nevertheless, be empirically verified, especially now, after more than a decade from its formulation. It is a fact, anyway, that the most recent researches stress out that religion has an aptitude of adequate resilience, not only in restricted domains, as religion is culturally dominant and diffused. Even in case of scandals, protests, abandonments, religion – whether in church form or other – maintains its own incisive public function, at least as a parameter for value reference, in close continuity with the past (Cipriani, 1992).

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