

Religious Diversity in Italy and the Impact on Education: The History of a Failure

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Abstract

Cultural diversity and plural religiosity characterize today's Italy. These characterizations are traits of contemporary migration flows, which have put the country among the top receiving destinations in all of Europe since the 2000s. While diversity and religious pluralism have become politically salient issues in current public debate, these traits have contributed to forging the Italian national identity for centuries.

The different relationships entangling Italy's political and cultural institutions and the education system traditionally regard the search for a common path that conciliates religion, religious diversity and secularism as a confrontational and divisive field of action. Actors who are involved in this field, from teachers to NGOs and the Italian Ministry of Education, work to find strategies to adjust the needs emerging from relatively new religious environments. An increasing share of students coming from a diverse population and religiosity are disrupting the long-established cohabitation of the Catholic Church and the State in the public sphere.

This article tries to present different models about thinking, teaching and dealing with religions in Italy in the last 20 years, highlighting the opportunities, limitations and weaknesses associated with these attempts. If the resources of knowledge and the development of teaching skills available in schools are important for the processes of social integration, then the legislative framework, the decisions, and the services of political institutions are pivotal for the monitoring and management religious pluralism. By and large, the public school system is still tailored in prevalence to Catholic religion, festivals, customs, and precepts. Three focuses (religious education, school canteens and the case of crucifix) help to show how non-secular practices and politics have missed, until now, the opportunity to deal with pluralism.

Keywords: Religious diversity, public places, secularism, education about religions, school canteens, religious symbols

Introduction

Nowadays, Italy can no longer ignore the history of these religions – the many Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, the oriental traditions (Filoramo and Pajer 2012) – which have contributed to forging its identity throughout the centuries and animate a present day characterized by diversity and by continuous exchange and mobil-

ity (Naso and Salvarani 2012; Pace 2011, 2013a; Marzano and Urbinati 2013; Giordan and Pace 2014; Ventura 2014)

In 2013, people belonging to non-Catholic religious communities (Caritas-Migrantes 2013; Cesnur 2013; Melloni 2014) were between 4,343,000 and 6,428,307 (7-10,5% of the popula-

tion: among them 26% Italian citizens and 74% non Italian citizens): Muslims (1,500,000) Orthodox (1,400,000), Evangelicals (650,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (400,000), Hindus (135,000), followed by Protestants, Jewish, Sikh, Mormons e Baha'i (less than 60,000). The principle of "laïcité positive" (Giorda 2009a), as applied to education, can refer to the knowledge of the religious phenomenon and of religions in general, in the respect of differences and faiths (or non-faiths), in personal (non) religious beliefs. In this sense, places of meeting, exchange, and education are multi- and inter-cultural laboratories which should spearhead all new challenges for creating processes for peaceful interactions and cohabitation among cultures, including religious cultures (Willaime 2014).

Especially due to immigration fluxes during the last two decades, Italian schools today are characterized by strong diversity: Italian residents with foreigner origin (3-17 years) are 851,579, 10% of the population; this is a constantly growing number when we consider that in 1994/1995 they composed less than 44,000 students (Colombo and Ongini 2014)¹. The International Charter of the Italian School Mean also indicates that several languages² are spoken in the country: the Romanian language is the mother tongue for 800,000 people in Italy, followed by Arab (more than 475,000 people), Albanian (380,000 people) and Spanish (255,000). The same variety is found concerning cultures and religions. Though national census in Italy does not include questions about religious affiliation, and, though relevant statistics according to Ferrari and Ferrari (2010, 431-433) are not totally reliable, a majority of the population, one way or another, still identify as Catholic and are affiliated to the Catholic Church, while about four percent are members of other religions or other Christian denominations. Here, as in many other countries

¹ <http://demo.istat.it/strasa2014/index.html> e <http://demo.istat.it/pop2014/index.html> (last accessed 23/09/2015).

² Istat, *Condizione e integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri*. 2011-2012.

in Europe, an increasing number of the population are Muslims (about one million), primarily due to immigration, in particular from Morocco.³ Catholicism, furthermore, is often said to be central to Italy's collective identity as well as to its culture and national heritage. However, critics as well as younger generations and pupils attending school observe that the Italian culture and life are no longer as Catholic as they once were (Mazzola in Willaime 2014).

In the following paragraphs I will explore and analyse how Italian schools accommodate religious diversity, situating them in the European context⁴ (Willaime 2007; Keast 2007; Catterin 2013; Davis and Miroshnikova 2013; Jödicke 2013; Pajer in Melloni 2014: 59-97;). Utilizing data collected from Italian and European bibliographies and information from my fieldwork conducted in schools (2011-2014, consisting of workshops with students, interviews with professors and families) as well as incorporating the results of a survey about school canteens (2013-2015), I will show how religious diversity challenges the infrastructure between relations of the State and the Catholic Church in Italy. Schools and the educational field represent a heuristic way to analyse the socio-cultural transformations occurring in the country, which serves as a good mirror of the society and a tool to analyse the relation-

³ According to statistical figures from OECD annual report 2013, Morocco is one of top three immigrant countries in Italy (OECD 2013, 324). In Pajer (2007) the statistical numbers of religious adherence are Roman Catholic (85,0%), Protestants 0,9 %, Orthodox 0,9%, Muslims 1,5%, Jewish 0,05% and Others 12,1% of the total population of 57,8 million. (Ferrari, Ferrari 2010, 431).

⁴ A pivotal document as a reference for intercultural education about religions, faiths and beliefs, both for believers and non believers, are the Toledo Guiding Principles On Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, 2007: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>, last accessed 23/09/2015. See also 'Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?' (REDCo) was financed by the European Commission 2006-2009: http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/47525_en.html (last accessed 23/09/2015).

ship between the State and the Catholic Church (Prisco 2009). Three focuses – religious education, school canteens and the case of crucifix – help to show how practices and politics have challenged to deal with religious diversity and pluralism.

Teaching (one) religion

Historical facts concerning Catholic Religious Education

The majority of pupils in Italy are educated at public schools (about 90% of the students in 2014; about 65% of non-State schools are Catholic)⁵. In the Constitution, Article 33, in reference to “private schools”, states that entities and private persons have the right to establish schools and institutions of education at no cost to the State. The Republic guarantees the freedom of the arts and sciences, which may be freely taught, and also establishes general rules for education and institutes State schools of all branches and grades. The law, when setting out the rights and obligations for the non-State schools which request parity, ensures that these schools enjoy full liberty and offer their pupils an education and qualifications of the same standards as those afforded to pupils in State schools.

Private schools are mostly Roman Catholic (an average of 75% over the last 20 years)⁶: Concordat of 1984 (Act No. 121 of 1985) strengthens the general protection granted by Article 33 of the Constitution and the general laws regulating the inclusion of private schools in public education. Article 9 of Act No. 121 of 1985 provides a specific guarantee of freedom and autonomy of Catholic schools⁷.

⁵ A comprehensive description of the Italian education system (reference year 2012-13) is presented by EU through *Europedia (European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems)* <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Italy:Overview> (last accessed 23/09/2015) and in UNESCO (2012). Both presentations have provided the background for this passage.

⁶ Data: Italian Ministry of Public Education and the Catholic schools federation FIDAE 2011-2012.

⁷ Article 10 of Act No. 121 of 1985 secures the autonomy of ecclesiastical educational establishments, and

For decades, a large section of the public opinion has opposed State funding for private schools. Reflecting this position, some legal experts have argued for a strict interpretation of the ‘at no cost for the State’ (“senza oneri per lo Stato”) clause, emphasizing the principle that State funding of private schools is constitutionally illegitimate (Ventura 2013: 195). This has become a marginal position, but establishing a system of equal State funding of State schools and private schools meets a large opposition in the country; defence of the priority of State schools embodies a consolidated pattern, deeply rooted in the national customs. Today the debate has shifted from whether the State should fund private schools or whether full parity in State funding of State and private schools should be established. Catholic Bishops have taken a clear stand in favour for the latter position and have put pressure on governments. The credit crunch and the debt crisis have deepened the divide between those who push for full parity, who criticize the inefficient State schools, while defenders of the impoverished State school are the victims of neo-liberal cuts in the State budget. If State funding of private schools remains below European standards, parity in the recognition of degrees has been basically achieved. Also, private schools integrated in public education enjoy extreme freedom, with little, if any, State control on the effective compliance of private schools with the agreed-upon standards (Ventura 2013: 195-196).

Concerning the teaching of religion in public schools, the political environment, which had so radically changed with the passage to a Republic and with the adoption of constitutional regulations, did not change the established agreements of 1929⁸: in Italian schools, the usual period of religion as catechetical education, a compulsory

a framework for civil recognition of academic degrees delivered by Catholic institutions.

⁸ The Lateran Pacts, including the Concordat, a Treaty establishing the State of Vatican City, and a financial settlement, were signed on 11 Feb. 1929 and ratified by the Italian Parliament on 27 May 1929 (L 27 May 1929, No. 810).

discipline from which parents were allowed to withdraw their children, continued for several decades after 1946. It was only in the '60s that it began to appear necessary to identify and implement choices, which could establish a new relationship between school and religion, which would take into account heretofore unheard of examples of cultural and religious pluralism, thus acknowledging the presence of children coming from families with different views or practices concerning religion. Discussions held in the late '70s were crucial, and they paved the way for the turning point in 1984: different points of view were discussed, sometimes expressing colliding positions which could not find a common ground.

Even prior to 1984, the year in which the Concordat between State and Church was renewed, there had been heated debates concerning the various options relative to the teaching of religion/religions. During this time, the 1984 Concordat⁹ signed by Bettino Craxi and by the secretary cardinal of the Vatican, Agostino Casaroli, established a non-compulsory confessional period of Catholic religion, no longer intended as catechetical education, but rather as a cultural approach to the religious phenomenon from a Catholic point of view (Guasco 2001). It was also established that Catholicism was no longer the only religion in the Italian State and, with respect towards the right to freedom of conscience and towards parents' educational responsibility, it was guaranteed that every student at every form and level of education could choose to attend the Catholic religion period or not.

Thus, since 1985, Catholic religion has been taught in every level and type of public school. This complies with the Church doctrine and in respect to the students' freedom of conscience, imparted by teachers who have been considered suitable by the religious authority and have been assigned, in full agreement, by the school authority.

⁹ The 1984 Concordat amends the 1929 Concordat and voids art. This is 1 of the 1929 *Lateran Pacts*, concerning the confessional nature of the Italian State.

In kindergartens and primary schools, a willing class teacher that is considered suitable by the religious authority can teach this subject. An agreement between the appropriate school authority and the CEI – Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (Italian Episcopal Conference) has established the following: the curricula for the various types and levels of the public schools; the ways in which said subject is organised, including its position within the frame of the other lessons; the criteria for choosing textbooks; the professional profiles for choosing the teachers. Currently, the Ministry, subject to an agreement with the CEI, establishes the curricula for the religion's lectures for each level and type of school, with the understanding that it is the latter who has the competence to define their conformity with the doctrine of the Church. IRC is thus provided, financed and guaranteed by the State and space is provided for it in the normal curriculum of the public school (Giorda and Saggiaro 2011; Giorda 2014a).

Kindergarten is assigned a yearly total of 60 hours (one and a half hours per week), primary school is assigned two hours of IRC per week, while I and II level secondary school are assigned one hour of IRC per week. Catholic schools of every level and type were assigned additional hours, in compliance with the Educational Offer Plan established by each school. As for grading, instead of marks and examinations, the teacher drafts a special report for the student's parents. This report, attached to the school report, comments on the student's interest in the subject and the benefits that he or she is gaining from the class.

As for the teachers, the necessary criteria to be able to teach this subject are established by the Agreement between the Italian State and the Catholic Church, according to which in kindergarten and elementary schools IRC can be taught by section or class teachers, which the religious authority has deemed to be suitable. It is possible for laymen and deacons, priests and religious people possessing the necessary qualification (diploma issued by an institute for reli-

gious sciences recognized by the CEI) to teach religion.

Since 2003, after having passed an open competition (written and oral test concerning general teaching and training techniques), 70% of the teachers are hired permanently; all religion teachers possess not only a professional license, like other teachers, but also a special warrant issued by the local Bishop who recognises their suitability to teach; it should be noted that in the last years this activity has generated increasing interest among laymen and women rather than among religious people (Giorda 2009b; Giorda and Saggiaro 2011).

The amount of students attending CRE declined during the 2012/2013 school year (OSReT 2014)¹⁰:

- 88.9% of students attending IRC (-0.4%)
- 11.1% of students not attending (+0.4%)

Only in secondary school:

- 82.1% of students attending IRC (-0.9%)
- 17.9% of students not attending (+0.9%).

The regulation provides for several options as alternatives to the IRC: an alternative activity period established by the school itself which should, as suggested by the 1986 Ministry Circulars Nos. 128, 129, 131, and 131, address topics concerning ethics, values, tolerance and peace. This activity should be imparted by any teacher who is available at the time. Another option is tutoring (revision, in-depth studying) or, for high school, a study activity without the presence of any teacher, within the school premises; lastly, an option that is often used is the early exit from school (or delayed entry). Statistic data from 2013 shows that 55.6% of the upper-secondary schools choose this option, while only 7.2%

offers an alternative educational option (OSReT 2013)¹¹.

The agreements between the state and religions and denominations other than the Catholic Church (“Intese”), also concern teaching their religion in public schools¹². They identify and defend the right of pupils and parents belonging to the relevant denomination not to attend classes teaching Roman Catholicism. Contrary to the case with the IRC, these religions or denominations have to finance the teaching themselves and the time for teaching must be found outside the regular timetable. Besides, while IRC is also a ‘regular’ school subject in terms of the fact that grades are given to the pupils attending it, this is not so in the case of other kinds of confessional RE. This system also stipulates the right of the relevant denomination to organize the

¹¹ See: <http://www.osret.it/it/pagina.php/100> (last accessed 23/09/2015). See also S. Ciatelli *Il contesto legislativo e amministrativo per l'effettiva attivazione delle attività didattiche alternative all'Irc*: http://www.ircagliari.it/back_end/files_news/29.pdf (last accessed 23/09/2015).

¹² The cults which are currently permitted in Italy are partially regulated by an Agreement (Intesa) with the State; concerning the latter case in these agreements, the status is as follows: agreements were signed with the Waldensian Church on 21st February, 1984 and on 25th January, 1996, with the Assemblies with the Lord in Italy on 29th December, 1996, Act No. 516 dated 22nd November, 1988 approved the agreements of 29th December, 1986 and again on 6th November 1996, with the Unione Comunità Ebraiche in Italia (UCEI – Union of Jewish Communities in Italy). Agreements with the UCEBI, Unione Cristiana Evangelica Battista d'Italia – Union of Christian Evangelic Baptists in Italy, were signed on 29th March, 1993 and approved with Act No. 116 dated 12th April, 1996 and with the CELI, Chiesa Evangelica Luterana in Italia – Lutheran Evangelic Church in Italy, on 20th April, 1993, approved with Act No. 520 dated 29th November, 1995; the Apostolic Church in Italy, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Holy Archdioceses in Italy and the Exarchate for Southern Italy, UBI – Italian Buddhist Union), the Italian Hindu Union were approved in 2012 act. No. 246 while agreements were signed, but are not yet approved, on 4th April, 2007 concerning the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's witnesses.

Source: http://www.governo.it/Presidenza/USRI/confessioni/intese_indice.html#2 (last accessed 23/09/2015).

¹⁰ Data are aligned with the trend over the last twenty years. All schools:

- 93.5% of students attending IRC in 1993/1994 school year
- 92.7% in the 2003/2004
- 88.9% in the 2012/2013

See: <http://www.osret.it/it/pagina.php/100> (08/2015).

teaching of religion in State schools, under two conditions: a congruous number of students will have to request the activation of the teaching, and that teachers shall be paid by the denomination. Article 10 of the agreement with Waldensians, stipulates that in case arrangements are made for classes teaching Protestantism in State schools by Waldensian teachers, this must be paid by the ecclesiastical authorities (gli oneri finanziari sono a carico degli organi ecclesiastici competenti). The same phrasing is reiterated in Article 12 section 3 of 2007 intesa with Mormons enacted in 2012.

Current debates concerning CRE

In the last decades, cultural and academic environments have promoted projects, petitions and events concerning religious education which have had, or at least have attempted to have, political repercussions. I shall take into account projects on a national level, as addressing the multitude of local experiments would take this paper too far away from its original intent (Giorda 2013).

- 2002: A governmental initiative bill (dated 1 May 2002) addressing religious freedom was proposed: the need, felt and endorsed by multiple parties, to change by law and update both the concept and the application of the relationship between the Italian State and religions, is part of a process which buries its roots in the layering of complicated situations. In this context, the educational component finds its place in article No. 12 ("Education in schools"), which for the moment appears to still be temporary and not definitive.

- 2003 witnessed the *Colloquio interuniversitario e interdisciplinare, Società multiculturale, scuola italiana e cultura religiosa (Inter-university and inter-subject talks, multi-cultural society, Italian school and religious culture* – Rome, 23rd May 2003), featuring various speeches made by specialists representing public and ecclesiastical universities, among which were the Waldensian Faculty of Theology in Rome, and other cultural centres in Italy: the group underlined the need to take into consideration the new condition of

religious pluralism, to focus on the education in school as a tool to suggest a cultural path within this pluralism; this initiative, along with its great cultural implications, failed to receive a response from the political environment.

Another route which should be mentioned is the one taken by the Gruppo di Vallombrosa (September 2005), which included teachers and scholars whose proposal emerged during the annual meetings held in the Vallombrosa Abbey by the Western-Eastern Committee of the University of Firenze and by the The Laboratory of multi-cultural and multi-religious relations of the Faculty of Political Sciences of Siena.

A document written by the Gruppo di Vallombrosa (September 2005), entitled *Public school and religious culture in a pluralist and multi-cultural society*, did not have political repercussions or concrete actuations; its main objective was to "establish a self-sustaining course, with its specific subject, addressing the issue of religious culture, mandatory for all, and managed directly by the school [...] free of confessional or trans-confessional contents (Genre and Pajer 2005).

- 2006: The debate was renewed in March, when the Ucoii (Unione delle comunità e delle organizzazioni islamiche d'Italia – Union of Islamic communities and organizations in Italy) asked, against the indications written in the Manifesto dell'Islam d'Italia (Italian Islam Programme), the establishment of Islamic religion education in Italy (Giombi 2006). In 2009, the request for a period of Islamic religion study was submitted, but it did not yield any change. To introduce in both public and private schools a period of Islamic religious studies, either optional or as an alternative to Catholic studies, is the proposal made by the vice minister for Economic Development Adolfo Urso.

- 2009: Another important episode was the debate which arose after the ruling of the TAR (Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale – Regional Administrative Court) of Lazio: with ruling No. 7076 dated 17 July 2009, the TAR of Lazio allowed two appeals addressing the annulment of the Ministerial Orders issued by the former

Minister of Public Education Fioroni for the State Examinations of 2007 and 2008, which required the evaluation of the students' attendance to the Catholic Religion Education course in order to establish the overall school credits, and thus the full inclusion of Religious Education teachers during the assignment for marks.

- 2010: From the world of politics, thanks to the dialogue with the academic world, and especially with La Sapienza University of Rome and the teachers of the Master in Religions and cultural mediation, the proposal of Honorable Melandri addresses the introduction of a mandatory period in the curriculum of "introduction to religions" as a secular and technical subject, no longer as an alternative to the optional CRE period (or to other potential creeds and faiths), but rather a subject managed by the Miur as an autonomous subject and separately evaluated as an integral part of school education and training¹³. The bill was submitted on 16 September 2010 and is currently under debate.

- 2012 : In September, the Minister of Education, Francesco Profumo, highlighted the importance of pluralism in schools and the need of new tools to manage this; another time, after this declaration, the question was at the core of the public debate¹⁴.

In November 2014, with reference to the consultation promoted by the government of Matteo Renzi preparing a reform of public school ("La buona scuola"), some Italian professors of historical-religious subjects, belonging to SISR (Italian Association of Historians of Religions), had addressed a document to Stefania Giannini of the Ministry of Education. They were asking for a meeting to discuss the possibility to insert

an hour of "Storia delle religioni" in school curricula¹⁵. This meeting has not yet occurred.

Several schools have organized various kinds of non-confessional courses on history of religions as an alternative to IRC or as an extra opportunity for pupils. Some observers remain rather pessimistic with regard to the prospects for a change of the current situation (Bossi 2014)¹⁶. Exploratory alternative teachings have been conducted on a local basis, often upon the initiative of a coalition of non-Catholic denominations supported by local councils. Freelance historians, anthropologists and sociologists have also been involved in projects of this kind, along with many teachers of Roman Catholicism. Innovative textbooks have been prepared, announcing a new era in which non-denominational comparative religion will be taught along with, or instead of, doctrinal Catholicism (Willaime 2014; Andreassen and Lewis 2014). However, the level of intellectual, cultural and juridical movement has never, at least until today, been met with any results on the national level: every attempt to change status has been frustrating. Projects and designs have remained on paper and have never been made into concrete options, neither *de facto* nor *de iure*.¹⁷

The confessional religious education, the CRE, has become closely linked to the politically powerful idea about Italian culture and national identity as deeply influenced by Catholicism, and it seems – also with regard to the Constitution – difficult to imagine that secularization and the increase in religious and cultural diversity can lead to rapid and immediate changes (Mazzola in Willaime 2014; Ferrari in Davis and Miroshnikova 2013). As Enzo Pace has recently demon-

¹³ Please see the report published in IRInews 2/2010, p. 14 (<http://www.olir.it>, last accessed 23/09/2015). I shall quote directly the 16th September 2010 Bill of Law (*Atti Parlamentari* – 3 – *Camera dei Deputati* – 3711 XVI LEGISLATURA – DISEGNI DI LEGGE E RELAZIONI – DOCUMENTI / Parliament Acts – 3 – House of Representatives – 3711 XVI LEGISLATION – BILLS OF LAW AND REPORTS – DOCUMENTS).

¹⁴ See: <http://benvenutiinitalia.it/storia-delle-religioni-una-proposta-per-il-ministro-profumo/>. (last accessed 23/09/2015).

¹⁵ See: <http://sisr.unime.it/>. (last accessed 23/09/2015).

¹⁶ For an up-to-date frame of the situation and the current debate: Arrigoni, Conson, Però 2014 and http://iers.unive.it/files/2014/03/Baseline_Study-RE-in-Italy.pdf, last accessed 23/09/2015.

¹⁷ See the recent work of COPLES, the Italian National Commission about pluralism, religious freedom and education for religions: http://www.chiesavaldese.org/aria_press.php?ref=36 (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

strated (Pace 2013b), in comparison with other situations in Europe (Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr 2012; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Middell 2015; Perez-Agote 2012), Italy appears to have become secularized while remaining faithful to its image, memory and identity as a Catholic country, thanks to the Church's organizational strength. It is no longer a Catholic country in terms of many Italian people's practices (Marzano and Urbinati 2013), but the Christian Catholic Church and Catholics conserve its authority and influences politics, economics and culture (Ferrari and Ferrari 2010).

Italian school canteen service

Because of the differences in diet and eating habits among children attending Italian schools, public institutions such as primary schools and their canteen services have to increasingly consider the diversity of religious and traditional beliefs regarding nutrition. Fundamentally, food consumption can be considered a religiously and culturally-defined social issue, and can be used as an instrument for inclusion and social cohesion¹⁸. The Italian school system has been experimenting with strategies to manage these dynamic and constantly changing scenarios where different cultural habits and behaviours are interlinked.

Eating is a pedagogical act; the promotion of healthy lifestyles is strongly based on food education. Besides being a source of sustenance moving from its cultural, environmental and social implications, food strongly represents a cause of celebration and serves as a vehicle for learning respect for one another.

The school canteen may represent a place where one can build commensality and knowledge in matters of food, instilling important values for the population.

Food and food traditions are tools representing the cultural diversity and act as a reading key for an education based on variety, pluralism and

social inclusion. To conclude, food represents a tool useful to avoid the diversity rejection and to promote religious and cultural equality.

School canteen services clearly represent an important arena in which it is possible to promote one's wellbeing, in terms of nutrition, a healthy lifestyle, culture and education. Kevin Morgan and Roberta Sonnino declare that "At a first glance, the aim to serve in schools healthy and locally produced food seems to be easy to realize; but it is not, in various European countries, easy to do" (Morgan and Sonnino 2008). We can say the same for Italy: the problem in our country seems not to be related to the inadequacy of school canteen service; each municipality plays an active role in offering healthy foods in school meals.

The development of nutrition policies and food practices is one of the aims of public policies. The Italian Department of Health, in order to promote and improve people's health, produced a document entitled *Nutrizione. Approfondimenti: strategie di educazione alimentare*¹⁹ (*Nutrition. Food Education Strategies*) which points out how health disease in childhood might be linked to an excess of protein, fats and rapid-absorption sugars, which can be detrimental to a child's health. The main documents and guidelines concerning health and food in Italy are represented by:

- LARN (Recommended levels of Consumption of Energy and Nutrients) produced by SINU (Italian Society for Human Nutrition)²⁰;
- Guidelines for healthy, Italian nutrition, produced by INRAN (National Institution for Food and Nutrition);
- Guidelines worked on by the Department of Health and named *Strategie per l'educazione alimentare (Nutrition. Food Education Strategies)*.

In order to encourage educational and health institutions to coordinate their efforts in pro-

¹⁸ Collected data in Italian, English and French is available at: https://www.academia.edu/9596476/2014_report_Food_religion_Benvenuti_in_Italia_ (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

¹⁹ <http://www.comune.torino.it/servizieducativi/ristorazione scolastica/doc/lineeguidaregione.pdf>, (last accessed 23/09/2015).

²⁰ http://www.sinu.it/html/pag/nuovi_larn.asp, (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

moting health through nutrition, the Minister of Health is promoting a monitoring system, OKkio alla Salute, alongside other local projects.

Regardless of these efforts, the problem may concern limits regarding social, environmental and especially cultural sustainability and quality in terms of food in schools. The issue may be linked to the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion, generated by the educational system and the food practices within schools. Are special menus inclusive or not? Why? As we know, the enormous number of special menus led to a fragmentation of food practices and sometimes to a *ghettoization* of children asking for it (Giorda 2014b).

In particular, although a survey conducted by Slow Food and including 50 Italian schools showed how 79% of the schools offer the possibility for each family to choose from menus built with medical or ethical and religious considerations, there are several cases in which schools refuse to offer this service (Fiorita 2012).

While in the case of education (religious teaching/education about religions) there are national regulations, in this case practices and norms are locally based since every city has the possibility of choosing ways of organization and management of the service; as a consequence, more variety and difference based on scalarity (small villages, medium and big cities have different opportunities). In order to have a general framework of strategies in management diversities in school canteens, we suggest 3 different models useful for analysing school menus and canteen services: *Family-based model*; *Ontological rejection model*; *Cultural identity rejection model* (Giorda 2014b).

The first model includes the experiences in which the educational institution establishes direct contact with families, in order to be aware of the families' and pupils' needs. This is the prevalent model within Italian schools; for each family it is mandatory to complete and fill out online forms with required information. Through this information, each family can illustrate its

own needs, depending on medical or ethical and religious issues.

The application of this model may be considered as *good practice*, since it also guarantees and protects the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression, according to canteen logistical considerations.

Combining food needs due to both medical and religious needs, this model defends religious and ethical pluralism.

Regarding the menus, there are many possibilities:

- *fixed formula system*, canteen menu, from which it is possible to exclude some foods;
- *fixed formula menu and alternatives*, canteen menu, from which it is possible to exclude some foods and to indicate some alternative options, because of ethical or religious reasons;
- *mixed system*, canteen menu, from which it is possible to exclude some foods and to indicate some alternatives; both for medical and ethical or religious reasons.

Although several school canteen services are important educational resources and they have an important role in the provision of food to students, and although school canteens should reflect the educational goals of the school and support and complement student learning, some municipalities in Italy decide not to differentiate types of menus because of cultural and religious needs. One of these municipalities is Adro (Brescia) – *ontological rejection model* – who decided (2010) to offer a menu without pork in the school canteen only if this request is accompanied by a medical certificate, thereby proving a medical condition. Moreover, it represents a form of cultural discrimination, directed towards associations and religious groups, which leads to the denial of a basic right – the possibility to actively choose nutritious foods in school according to one's own religious or cultural need without a medical certificate, which, of course, cannot be related to a cultural or religious need.

Concerning the third model, the cultural identity rejection model, we can remember the case

of Albenga: when the representative of the local administration of the municipality of Albenga proposed to introduce *halal* meat in the school canteen in order to actively promote social inclusion, Enpa – Ente Nazionale Protezione Animali (Italian Authority for Animal Protection) criticized the proposal, considering *halal* slaughter as a barbaric rite²¹. The *halal* way of slaughter, made by a deep incision with a sharp knife on the neck cutting the jugular veins – even if stunning the animal before slaughter (as in Western and Italian slaughterhouses) – should, in the opinion of the Enpa representatives, never be promoted, above all in public institutions such as schools. Quite the same polemics occurred in Sarzana in 2014, regarding the idea of serving *halal* meat at school canteen²².

In the last years, the most interesting case is the management of the canteen service in Rome between 2002 and 2008, which has been called the “the food revolution at school”. During those years, the municipality decided to invest in the quality of school meals, promoting a participatory process that involved not only institutions and companies, but also families and the children that use the service, working with sustainability, and organic and fair-trade products (Morgan and Sonnino 2008). The aim of the project was to combine cultural, social and economic needs and demands, and connect these with the quality and the healthiness of food. In this period, local authorities promoted different methods in order to improve the quality of service. The related project brought about the publication of a Handbook of Transcultural Nutrition.

The increasing and continuous presence of migrants has prompted health care administration to support a research project to promote the culture of diversity. Considering the importance of dietary differences in the process of adaptation to a new culture and new context of belong-

ing, the Handbook of Transcultural Nutrition (*Manuale di alimentazione transculturale*) can be considered a useful tool to combat any difficulties (Morrone, Scardella and Piombo 2010).

After this revolutionary experiment in Rome, things came back to “normality”: nowadays, the school canteen service offers a menu articulated onto nine weeks; it is a seasonal menu changing each term and offers a range of nutritious choices (with reference to fruit and vegetables seasonality) in order to increase an awareness of sensible eating and to maintain healthy lifestyles. Moreover, the menu is prepared with the aim to meet specifications for the content of meals with reference to nursery, primary and secondary school meal needs. For any other meal options, the request should be compiled by the family doctor using indication contained in Model I (food allergies or intolerances) and Model L (food irregularities or chronic pathologies); this request should be sent to the canteen manager. Even if there is no form for meal regime change for religious reasons, it is possible to discuss this possibility with the canteen nutritionists²³. There is still much room for progress and improvement regarding these matters.

Children’s nutrition is the result of the economic, cultural and social level of a family, taking into account its religious background, level of secularization and social interaction. According to this statement, pluralism (cultural, religious, linguistic) means innovation – also in matters of nutrition.

Religious pluralism requires education, reflection, and inter-religious dialogue. School canteen service represents another good *arena* to analyse the management of diversities in the school system. It might enable pupils to stand together, more profoundly respecting one’s own differences. In Italy, some initiatives such as *Dream Canteen*²⁴, (a Slow Food network), might repre-

²¹ <http://www.uaar.it/news/2011/09/27/albenga-sv-enpa-no-carne-halal-nelle-mense-scolastiche/> (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

²² See: http://www.ilsecoloxix.it/p/la-specopia/2014/07/03/ARGGo21-polemica_musulmani_scopia.shtml (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

²³ http://www.comune.roma.it/wps/portal/pcr?jppagecode=mense_dses.wp (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

²⁴ <http://www.slowfood.it/educazione/filemanager/pages/pcm/PCM%20Internazionale.pdf> (last accessed: 23/09/2015).

sent the introjections of those values, but this is currently not enough.

Social inclusion should be considered the key, while education should be considered the venue, to enhance inclusion and pluralism, religious and otherwise.

Schools, teachers, paediatricians, nutritionists, and education authorities in matter of nutritional practices play a pivotal role. Concerning a pluralist canteen service, even if much has been done, there is still much to do. An innovative approach is needed, leading to nutritional habits, so that *in ultima ratio*, scientific knowledge of cultural food might enhance the success in nutrition education programs.

The possibility of building more homogeneous and inclusive menus is becoming clearer and clearer in order to deal with the changing food identity of the students using the canteen. More inclusivity may move from a re-thinking of the served meat quantity in school meals. Since 2012, I've been coordinating "A table avec les religions"²⁵ in different European cities: 15 primary schools (Bucarest, Milano, Parigi, Roma, Tirana, Torino, Saragozza, Sesto Fiorentino), including 5,350 students and 4,1000 families. According to the *data* gathered by the project, the meat issue represents the most prominent problem in building menus, both for cultural and religious reasons, and its exclusion does not mean a problem for the majority of the surveyed

²⁵ The surveys aimed to collect *data* with reference to:

- significance of religious and cultural pluralism in schools
- (children's and families' personal *data*);
- religious dietary laws within selected families;
- perception of religious pluralism in school canteen service.

With reference to the multicultural nature of the cities, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic, French, English, Spanish, Chinese and Romanian. Response rate is a crucial factor in evaluating the reliability of survey results; the response rate was almost 67%. For the details of the project, see: www.benvenutiinitalia.it and Giorda 2015: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022564> (last accessed: 23/09/2003).

families. The school meal represents a third of daily meals, and a quarter of weekly meals.

Beyond the protection of both food practices and cultural and religious pluralism, is there any possibility of creating an innovative menu? If we consider food practices as a set of knowledge concerning products and their preparation that exists in different areas of the world, school meals might be conceived with reference to the synergy of differing traditions, cultures and religions, depending on the individual. School may provide a model for positively influencing children's eating habits through hands-on education about nutrition and through community involvement. Overall, even if numerous initiatives have been undertaken to enhance school canteen service with emphasis on social inclusion and cohesion, much more still needs to be done. Workshops able to deal with children's and school staff's education concerning foods and food practices represent one such initiative. Learning the benefits from supporting religious and cultural diversity as a fundamental value within society seems to be a good starting point.

Last but not least, the crucifix

In the last decades the display of the crucifix in State schools has been defended not as a religious symbol, but as a cultural and national symbol (Ferrari 2011; Luzzatto 2011; Beaman 2013; Giorgi and Ozzano 2013)²⁶.

Both in political and cultural debates, discussion revolves around three different cultural and religious meanings of the crucifix: a sacred/religious symbol, a symbol of cultural heritage and national/western identity, and a universal symbol of tolerance and freedom.

Because of the ambiguous juridical framework and these meanings, different frames have emerged about the crucifix displayed in public spaces and particularly in schools.

²⁶ For a complete national and International bibliography, see: www.olir.it (section: "analisi e approfondimenti"), last accessed: 23/09/2003.

As Alberta Giorgi has recently shown (Giorgi and Ozzano 2013), the Italian debate stands out in relation to the rest of Europe because it was the only significant debate about Christian symbols in public schools to be raised in a EU member state. Additionally, the issue was enlarged to involve Europe, with the ECHR and the development of oppositions, coalitions and tensions (Annicchino 2010).

The obligation to display crucifixes in schools goes back to the times before Italian Kingdoms were unified, in which the Catholic Church detained the monopoly of instruction. The practice was maintained in the early system of public education in the Kingdom of Italy after it was unified. However, as a result of tensions between the Catholic Church and the State, and following the secularization of Italian society, the obligation of displaying crucifixes was hardly met. In an effort to enrol Roman Catholicism to its cause, Fascism endeavoured to restore the crucifix in classrooms. In Circular No. 68 of 22 November 1922, a few weeks after the Fascist takeover, the Ministry of Education took position against the lack of compliance with regulations regarding the crucifix.

A new relationship between State and Church began, marked by unilateral measures. Among these were the introduction of doctrinal Catholic instruction in primary State schools and the reintegration of the crucifix in public places and State school classrooms²⁷, where it had been previously removed for being seen as the symbol of Roman Catholicism. It was thus seen as inappropriate in the school of a modern State committed to liberalism and separation.

Under the Republican Constitution, in an increasingly secularized social climate, the crucifix disappeared from many schools. The display of the crucifix was overtly challenged after the Concordat of 1984, declaring that Italy was no longer a Catholic State. In an Opinion of 27 April

1988 (No. 63), the *Consiglio di Stato* proclaimed that the display of the crucifix was not incompatible with the secular environment of Italian State schools: the price to pay for 'saving' the crucifix was to emphasize its cultural dimension instead of its religious meaning. In fact, the crucifix, the administrative judges held, was not the symbol of the State religion, but it symbolized a universal value independent of any specific religious creed.

But the story wasn't over yet.

In the context prosecuting someone for refusing to serve as an election inspector in a polling station where a crucifix was displayed, the Court of *Cassazione* / Court of Cassation in 2000 held that the presence of the crucifix infringed on the principles of secularism and impartiality of the State; the court upheld the principle of freedom of conscience of those who did not accept any allegiance to that symbol. It expressly rejected the argument that displaying the crucifix was justified because of it was a symbol of 'an entire civilisation or the collective ethical conscience', and also of 'a universal value independent of any specific religious creed'²⁸. However, something different occurred in the following years. In the Lautsi case on the crucifix (2002-2011), after having exhausted national remedies – as we will see – the applicants complained to ECHR that the display of the Catholic symbol in State schools' classrooms violated their consciences (Ventura 2013: 69, 204-207).

The Lautsi case had originated in 2002, but Ms. Soile Lautsi applied to the Court of Strasbourg on 7 July 2006 in her own name and on behalf of her two children, Dataico and Sami Albertin, after the Italian administrative courts had dismissed her claim (Palma 2011)²⁹. Ms. Lautsi alleged that the display of the crucifix in the classrooms of the Italian State school where her children attended breached her right to ensure that they receive education and teaching in conformity with her cultural philosophical con-

²⁷ In particular, the presence of the crucifix was made compulsory through two Royal decrees of 1924 and 1928. See Art. 118, R d 30 Apr. 1924, No. 965; and Art. 119, R d 26 Apr. 1928, No. 1297.

²⁸ Cassazione 1 Mar. 2000, No. 439 (2000).

²⁹ See Antonio J. Palma 2011: http://www.olir.it/areetematiche/75/documents/palma_lautsi.pdf, last accessed: 23/09/2015.

victions under Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, as well as her freedom of belief and religion under Article 9. A unanimous chamber of the ECtHR concluded that the compulsory display of a symbol of a particular faith, exercised by public authority in relation to specific situations subject to governmental supervision, particularly in classrooms, restricts the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their convictions. It also infringes on the right of schoolchildren to believe or not believe. The Court was of the opinion that the practice infringes upon those rights because the restrictions are incompatible with the State's duty to respect neutrality in the exercise of public authority, particularly in the field of education. Italy was condemned for the violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 taken together with Article 9 of the Convention³⁰.

The European Parliament, acting collectively, supported the previous view of the Italian government, arguing that in this specific context religious symbols had a secular dimension and should therefore not be removed. The Grand Chamber reversed the 2009 decision on 18 March 2011³¹ and three fundamental assumptions presided over the judgement. Firstly, the Court disappointed those who believed that at the core of the question was the incompatibility of the crucifix as the symbol of the State and the constitutional principle of Italy as a secular State. Instead, the judgement read that it was not for the Court to rule on the compatibility of the presence of crucifixes in State-school classrooms with

the principle of secularism as 'enshrined in Italian law'. Second, the Court recognized in Italian authorities a wide margin of appreciation, taking the view that the decision whether or not to perpetuate a tradition falls in principle within the margin of appreciation of the respondent State. The third assumption, which the Court found in favour of the Italian government, was that the Court accepted the heavy discrepancies in Italian case law in the subject matter, and the uncertain nature and reach of the disputed regulations. The Grand Chamber did not accept the claim by Ms. Lautsi that the presence of the crucifix had a negative impact on non-Catholic pupils. The Court argued that there is no evidence that the display of a religious symbol on classroom walls may have an influence on pupils, so it cannot reasonably be asserted that it does or does not have an effect on young persons whose convictions are still in the process of being formed (Ventura 2013).

The ECtHR ended up endorsing the view of the Italian government that the crucifix had to be regarded as a "passive symbol" whose impact on individuals was not comparable with the impact of "active conduct". In addition, the European Court stated that the applicants had to conform to the will of the majority since it is compatible with the Convention that 'the country's majority religion' enjoys a 'preponderant visibility in the school environment'. The judges bought, without any serious scrutiny, into the inaccurate version by the government that 'Italy opens up the school environment in parallel to other religions'. The Grand Chamber concluded that the display of the crucifix did not violate the Convention.³²

It was decided to keep crucifixes in the classrooms of the State school attended by the first applicant's children. Thus, the authorities acted within the limits of the margin of appreciation left to the respondent State – exercising the functions it assumes in relation to education and teaching – in the context of its obligation to

³⁰ Lombardi Vallauri v. Italy [2009] ECtHR (No. 39128/05) (20 Oct. 2009) para. 45. Lautsi v. Italy [2009] ECtHR (No. 3081406) (3 Nov. 2009) para. 57. ³¹ Lautsi v. Italy [2011] ECtHR Grand Chamber (No. 3081406) (18 Mar. 2011). On the political background and implications of the case see P. Annicchino, *Winning the Battle by Losing the War: The Lautsi Case and the Holy Alliance between American Conservative Evangelicals, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican to Reshape European Identity*, 6 *Religion & Hum. Rights* 213 (2011).

³¹ Lautsi v. Italy [2011] ECtHR Grand Chamber (No. 3081406) (18 Mar. 2011). On the political background and implications of the case see Annicchino 2011: 213.

³² Lautsi v. Italy [2011] ECtHR Grand Chamber (No. 3081406) (18 Mar. 2011) para. 36.

respect the parents' rights to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. The idea, widespread in the public and political debate, that the crucifix is a part of the Italian culture and history clearly still shows that Italy, despite its growing pluralism at the social and popular level, in cultural terms and from an institutional point of view, still mostly perceives itself and acts as a Catholic country.

This marks the end of the story – for now.

Final remarks

This short overview of the world of school and the world of cultural political institutions demonstrates that the intellectual and cultural movement has not been able to influence the political agenda and hasn't yet reached any formal results on a national level; moreover, there is a deep *iatu*s between the Italian families (and students) and the attitudes of politicians. Referring to this, among the most important problems are the absence of a laws concerning religious freedom in Italy, the frame of the ambiguity of the Constitution (privileges of the Catholic Church vs. secularism), the near-impossibility of intellectuals to influence political elites, and the *stabilitas* of Italian politics (opposite to continuously changing society). In this scenario, the level of the public and social sphere has other pressures and needs which are not answered at the level of politics and policies.

Regarding educational concerns, projects and designs have remained on paper and no innovative practices were proposed or enacted. The cultural debate has only had short-term concrete consequences within a local reality. These final remarks would be different if I had taken into consideration proposals and tests carried out on a more local level, since on the municipal, provincial and sometimes regional level the relationship between schools and cultural and political institutions has been constructed. Local examples can attest that, as I've said, it is possible to find virtuous cases and positive examples of activation of religious education courses, thanks to

the active involvement of local government representatives, majors and deans of schools. In all the cases, experimentation took place in selected schools of the same city over some years³³.

Different specialists coming from various fields agree that religious and inter-religious issues are quite relevant to the future of Italy (Melloni 2014, where there is a report on the knowledge/illiteracy about diversity and pluralism in Italy, built by contributors from different research fields), but policies are totally inadequate. As Giorgi writes (Giorgi and Ozzano 2015), both centre-left and centre-right supported the inclusion of Catholic schools into the public system, including the issue into the political agenda without many conflicts. The rightist parties have been defending the role of Catholicism in the Italian education system – as a neo-liberalist issue –, whereas the leftist parties maintained a position against both the role of the Catholic schools and Catholic instruction in public education. They didn't, however, concretely support the possibility of teaching about religions. Moreover, the prejudices between the right-wing Catholic and/or clerical and the left-wing reformers and radicals is equally strong on both sides.

In contemporary Italy, in a context marked by a Catholic Church which always keeps its public role, even in a political system no longer distinguishable by the presence of an only Catholic party (DC), the increasingly diverse range of social and political actors are far to write their own cultural and religious issues in political *agenda*.

Especially in the last 3 decades, Italian society has become increasingly varied mainly due to unprecedented inflows of immigrant populations, which diversified the spectrum of religious beliefs in the public space and the request of freedom of worship. This is not to deny or under-

³³ Among the most recent examples I would like to quote the IERS Project coordinated by the University of Venezia, Cà Foscari, which aims at responding to the educational challenges of an increasingly multicultural and multireligious Europe: <http://iers.unive.it/> (last accessed 23/09/2015).

rate other forms of diversity already present in the Italian society from the beginning, including the presence of important religious and linguistic minorities, but it is true that religious diversity has become a more central aspect of the society and the public discourse with the presence of immigrants.

Considering Italy in the larger European context, I assert that this country offers a special and original focus to consider the ambiguity of unsolved tensions between the authority and Constitutional privilege of one Church, the secularism of the juridical frame and the plural and super-diverse reality. Obviously the relationships between religion and education in the European States show many differences, related to historical and contextual factors, such as the degree of religious variety within the society (mono- or multi-religious), the historical relations between religion and politics within the country, the country's traditions, and, above all, the conceptions about the nature and aims of the State education and/or the State schools' religious education (Hull 2002). According to Willaime (Willaime 2014), some convergences can be traced among different European countries, such as a growing integration of religious education with the overall goals of public education, an increasing openness to religious plurality into schools' curricula, and an increasing amount of tensions and conflicts; on this last point I think Italy has reached a good European standard.

The numerous shortcomings that the system has had and continues to have are oppositions of political and cultural visions, entrenched on opposing fronts and unable to find common ground upon which to build a constructive dialogue; the irrelevancy of the education problem concerning historical and religious issues; the "positive discrimination" in favour of the Catholic church evident in the public system; the fear of disturbing a consolidated balance which, however, appears to not be able to answer to the requirements of today's society and the questions which spontaneously rise from a world of school users whose knowledge and acknowl-

edgement of the number and differences of religions is exponentially rising and is inversely proportionate to the same knowledge within the political institutions.

It's not only a matter of assigning funding, but rather of addressing cultural and political challenges (or limitations): only the acknowledgement of these challenges in their full complexity will grant the resolve and the strength, both cultural and political, to continue to propose thoughts, to amend documents and to re-submit to the attention of the Italian institutions suggestions and experiments to be assessed and implemented.

Some indicators point at the paralysis of law and religion as the result of an unhealthy articulation of religion and politics: this would result from the ineptitude of political and religious actors to enact a general bill on religious freedom replacing the antiquated 1929 Act on 'admitted cults'; from the unbalanced system of "Concordato" (privilege of the Catholic Church) and Agreements (system of "Intese" for – some of – the other religions); from the lack of an appropriate policy towards Italian Muslims but also the Orthodox Roman community who are the major contemporary minorities. As I have tried to show, deep contradictions and silences between different actors and the *iatu*s between politics/jurisprudence/intellectuals/citizenship – emerging by the media and recent research – are well attested by the case of religious education, school canteen service, and the crucifix.

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