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Introduction

Religious actors and bio-politics

Today the Catholic Church plays a different role in the Italian political system with respect to the past. For about half a century, since the beginning of the post-war period, the Church was represented in the political scene by the Christian Democratic party (DC). Delegation and collateralism characterised this phase. But in the early Nineties, with the demise of the First Republic and the collapse of the DC, the Catholic Church embarked on a new public presence and on a revised political representation strategy.

Once the Catholic Church moved beyond the collateralism strategy it became an “extra-parliamentarian” actor [Magister 2001]. By means of the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference) and its President, Cardinal Ruini, the Catholic Church has followed a strategy of neutrality from political parties and from political alliances. It has played its game on the political scene as a lobby, directly, without any intermediary. In other words, its political representation has moved <<from the party to the pulpit>> [Kalyvas 1996].

Over the last few years this political scene has been complicated by the eruption of ethical issues into the public debate. So called bio-politics – life as moral value – is now at the core of the political agenda, as a new frontier of the social question [Bobba 2007, 77]. This means that stem cells, medically assisted fertilisation, abortion, RU486 pill, “biological will”, euthanasia and cloning, together with other social issues, including the family first and foremost, have become issues where politics – and Catholic MPs in particular – have to lay down the law.

Ethical bipolarism and political bipolarism have become interlaced in the public debate, and the confrontation among political and religious actors has become very heated.

Over the last few years, the Catholic Church has played a direct and resolute role, taking a public stand, trying to influence political decisions. It has acted in the socio-political scene as a political entrepreneur, mobilising resources and taking advantage of the context and the (open) windows of opportunity in the political structure.

Moreover, during this phase, in particular starting from the last general elections (April 2006) it has been possible to see the Catholic Church (and the Catholic universe) draw closer to the centre-right coalition (CdL, House of Liberty). The 2006 election was won by the centre-left coalition (The Union), and the Catholic Church was labelled, in a provocative way, as an opposition Church.

Actually, this category over-simplifies a complex situation that we will attempt to examine in this paper. In short, the Catholic Church has probably gone beyond the “neutrality phase” and, in the meantime, has exacerbated the difference between the two political coalitions, and between the Catholic MPs who belong to the two coalitions. It is also possible to see a relevant cleavage inside the majority alignment, so that a bipartisan Catholic front has emerged when ethical issues are discussed.
About this paper

This work aims to give an answer to the guidelines of this workshop. The basic question is in the title itself: Religion and Politics: Conflict or Cooperation? But there are also two specific questions: why and how – in our case – the Italian Catholic Church acts in the domestic socio-political scenario? In order to do that the paper follows this outline:

1) a brief reconstruction of the scene in order to contextualise the past and current roles of the Catholic Church in Italian politics and society;
2) drawing a sort of map that focuses on the political opportunity structure and includes actors, resources and cleavages. This will be done taking into consideration some important events that have happened over the last two years which have allowed the Catholic Church to impose itself in the public sphere;
3) a case study will be analysed: the draft law on de facto couples (Dico);
4) in the conclusion we will try to give an answer to the questions which have given rise to this work.

1. Catholics and politics: a question which comes from the past

“Neither candidates nor voters”

Since the unified state was born (1860), Italian social and political history has been deeply intertwined with the role of the Catholic Church and the Catholic universe. The so called Catholic question arises when the new Italian state was not recognised as legitimate by the Vatican state. Parish churches, parishes, the faithful, Catholic associations and elites were mobilised against the new state institutions.

Neither candidates nor voters was a famous formula launched by a Catholic periodical of that age (1861), which became the official Vatican position (Non expedit encyclical letter by Pope Pio IX, 1874). For forty years Catholics were excluded from the process of nation building. Only in 1919 with Pope Benedict XV did the Vatican allow Catholics to enter into political life, and in the same year a Catholic party, the Popular party of Don Luigi Sturzo, was founded.

The political unity of Italian Catholics

The Catholic question has dragged on till now and has changed over time. An important turning point was the birth of the Christian Democracy party (DC) in 1942, founded by Alcide De Gasperi along with other Catholic figures. Since then the relationship between Catholics and politics has taken the form of political unity, which has deeply characterised the social and political history of the post-war period till the early Nineties.

Political unity means that among Catholics voters there was an almost exclusive orientation toward the DC [Mannheimer and Sani 1987; Cappello and Diamanti 1995]. In 1994 the party collapsed and from it were born new
political actors: the Popular party, CCD, CDU, then UDC, Udeur. Later on the Popular party, along with other moderate parties, gave rise to a new political entity: the Margherita (Daisy). The fragmentation of Catholic-inspired parties and the diaspora of Catholics — MPs, electors, political and association leaders — between the two coalitions (whether in Catholic-inspired parties or in others like Forza Italia) have complicated the framework where the relation between Catholics and politics takes place [Diamanti and Ceccarini, 2007, 43-46].

With the demise of the DC and the collapse of the First Republic, the political unity phase also concludes.

Today, just 7% of Italian electors are in favour of the political unity of Catholics, and among practising Catholic voters this percentage is just a bit higher: 9%. According to public opinion, Catholic voters should be free to vote any party (41% of the overall population and 29% among practising Catholics: see Table 1).

### Table. 1 The political unity of Catholics is often discussed. What solution do you think is right today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Unity</th>
<th>Practising Catholics</th>
<th>Overall population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholics should vote for a single party of Christian inspiration</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics should vote for the parties that chiefly express Christian values</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics can vote for different parties, of any ideology, while seeking to assert in these parties Christian values</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics can vote for any party without posing particular problems of their conscience</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/not indicated</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for *La Repubblica*, February 2007

In fact, over time, the religious meaning of voting for the DC weakened. To address this phenomenon, scholars began referring to a “state-sponsored party” rather than a “church-sponsored party” [Allum 1984]. This is due to the governmental role of the DC and the secularisation process. Voters are people who follow “a majority religion” [Garelli 1991]—this definition was used to classify those Catholics—the majority, in fact—who described themselves as Catholics but who adopted a morality—and therefore a style of attitudes and behaviours—that differed sharply from the instructions and recommendations of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Moreover political unity was defined as a myth [Pace 1995], since in reality it was quite relative, and only a collective belief in it survived. And long before the collapse of the DC, it was emphasised that the DC continued to be “a” party of Catholic voters, but was no longer “the” party of the Catholic electorate [Arturo Parisi 1979: 85, see also Cappello and Diamanti 1995; Scoppola 1997, 2006; Galli 1968, 1993; Franco 2000; Diamanti and Riccamboni 1992].
All the same, the demise of the DC also served to eliminate the lingering doubts. With the demise of the DC came the end of the period of Catholic concentration (and the idea of concentration) within a single party. From the party to the pulpit: an extra-parliamentary Church

The end of the First Republic coincided with the related demise of not only Catholic political unity—never achieved, in reality—but also the prevalence among Catholics of voting for a single party or alignment. Already, in the 1994 elections, the Catholics distributed their votes among alignments and parties without shifting the political equilibrium in a specific direction [Diamanti 1997: 336]. The same thing happened, subsequently, in the elections of 1996 and those of 2001 [Diamanti 1997: 347; Cartocci 2002: 191-192], despite the sharply differing outcomes, in favour of the centre-right in 2001 (and in 1994); and in favour of the centre-left in 1996.

This shift in the electoral orientation of Italian Catholics reflected and accompanied other shifts, which characterised the political choices offered and the strategies of the Church and the Catholic universe [Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007].

We have already mentioned the fragmentation and diaspora of Catholics since the 1994 general election. From the perspective of these voters the situation is quite new. After fifty years they have lost their reference party (DC) –the myth of the political unity – and they are faced with a plurality of Catholic inspired political subjects.

At this point a key question to answer might be: how does the Catholic Church face this situation of political fragmentation and diaspora?

It must be said that the Church had considered the crisis of the former political representation model long before the traditional Italian political system collapsed. Clergy higher in the hierarchy kept away from the DC and, in general, from political parties. The Catholic Church started to act autonomously and to be critical towards the parties, because they were discredited by voters and far removed from society. The risk was that the Catholic Church would also be touched by this kind of evaluation.

In this phase the role of Cardinal Ruini becomes very important; he became CEI General Secretary in 1986, and was President of the same institution from 1991 to 2007. His project affirmed the Church’s autonomy in the realm of politics—all collateralism aside. Ruini theorised and implemented an “extra-parliamentary Church,” as Sandro Magister defined it [2001].

Over the course of the post-war period, the Church had entrusted the representation of Catholics to the party. In the Nineties, following the crisis of the First Republic and the DC, this approach was reversed. The Church decided not to encourage new Catholic parties or move to support any of the existing Catholic parties. Instead it transferred the task of Catholic representation “from the party to the pulpit” [Kalyvas 1996].

This process dates back to the second half of the Eighties. Cardinal Ruini, following the second Ecclesial Convention of Loreto, held in April of 1985, laid out a plan for the Church’s new public presence, in agreement with the Vatican (especially, in the wake of the social encyclicals issued by
Pope Wojtyla) [Brunelli 1995; Melloni 2007]. The bishops had become aware of the disintegration of the Italian political system in time, and in 1991 during the CEI XXXV General Assembly it was clear that political unity had progressively lost importance, in favour of unity in moral terms.

Soon afterwards Cardinal Ruini’s Cultural Project (oriented in a Christian sense) takes shape. The aim was to imprint its views on Italian cultural life, making the presence of the Church and its ethical perspective stronger.

**Political neutrality and unity in ethical values**

Another important turning point was the 3rd Ecclesial Convention held in Palermo in 1995. On that occasion the same Pope, Wojtyla, made a clear reference to the idea that different political orientations and party loyalties can coexist among Catholics. He also stressed that the Church must not become involved in party decisions, but it is necessary that Catholics who belong to different political orientations be consistent with the common values [Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007, 46].

The fragmentation of the party-related experience of Italian Catholics led the Church to embrace the principle of “unifying tension” among Catholics, based on the content of the Church’s Social Doctrine, rather than adhering to a specific party. Another major point of reference consisted of “active neutrality,” which attributed a central role to fundamental ethical values, rather than to the support of one of the two major alignments emerging in the electoral system following the elections of 1994.

Therefore, the Church progressively acted more independently in support of its own values and interests, by exerting “pressure” on parties and institutions, taking advantage of its own diffuse territorial organisation and relying on the public credibility it possesses both on the national level in Italy and worldwide [Casanova 1994; Garelli 2007]. This stance was reinforced by the great power of social attraction exerted by Pope Wojtyla, who was Polish and only marginally interested in Italian politics. Instead, the Pope devoted his efforts, his commitment, his mission to universal problems.

Some recent affairs (and trends)

The Catholic question was affected by certain events that happened in 2005 and 2007. These events allow the relationship between the Church and politics to be re-drawn and give some clues to the way this relationship has changed over the past ten years.

The episodes in question inform the study of how the Church has been acting today, which windows of opportunity are now opened in the socio-political context, which alliances have taken shape in the political scenario, which cleavages have become crucial, and which resources have been used by the religious actors. The episodes referred to above are the following:
- the election of Pope Ratzinger, April 2005;
- the referendum on medically assisted fertilisation and stem cells, June 2005;
- the General Election, April 2006;
- The Dico draft law, February 2007.

This last item, which is our case study, concerns the debate and mobilisation around the legitimisation of de facto couples. A draft law was presented in February 2007 and the issue is still an open question.

2. Bio-politics: elements and moments in the Italian scenario

The Vatican and the CEI: the continuity of a united front

The election of Pope Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), in April 2005, has been an important turning point in the relationship between the Church and Italian politics. As already mentioned above, this Pope is particularly interested in Italian domestic affairs, in comparison with his predecessor Pope Wojtyla (John Paul II). The conflictual relationship between politics and religious actors in this present phase may be a consequence of this interest. Moreover, issues on the political agenda that can be considered of an ethical nature are very important for religious actors and the confrontation becomes animated. Meanwhile, political actors use these issues to shape their identities, build alliances, and try to gain consensus.

If Pope Wojtyla was a “pastor”, Ratzinger is a “theologian”. John Paul II named Ratzinger Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981. Originally this institution was called the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition, as its duty was to defend the Church from heresy. Today the aim of this institution is to promote and safeguard the doctrine of faith and morals throughout the Catholic world.

Cardinal Ratzinger left this role when he was nominated Pope, during which time the Italian public debate was centred on issues concerning bio-politics. The election of Pope Ratzinger has reinforced the previously strong continuity and perfect agreement that characterised the relation between the Holy See and the Italian bishops (CEI).

This has happened for two main reasons: a) the attention which the new Pope pays to the Italian case and b) the common vision that Cardinal Ruini and Pope Ratzinger have of the Italian case.

In fact, an expert observer underlines¹ that Ratzinger and Ruini both work towards making the Italian case a sort of “export model”, a reference point for other Catholic Churches in the western secularised world.

The Pope himself, in his speech for the 4th Ecclesial Convention (held in October 2006 in Verona) said about the peculiarity of the Italian Church:

«[…] Here, in fact, the Church is a lively reality - and we see it! -, which conserves a capillary presence in the midst of people of every age and level. Christian traditions often continue to be rooted and to produce fruit […]».

¹ See Sandro Magister’s web site http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/, cf. [Magister 2007]
Opinion polls continually show that the Catholic Church is among the institutions which enjoy the highest level of social trust (Figure 1).

Figure 1. How much trust do you have in the following organisations, associations, social groups, and institutions? (percentages of those who stated having much or very much trust)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law enforcement</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The President of the Republic</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The School</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Union</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Municipality</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Judiciary</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Region</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederal Trade Unions</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associations of Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Companies</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stock Exchange</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: survey Demos for La Repubblica – November 2006 (N=1500)

Table 2. Citizens who define themselves Catholics and the main reason they define themselves as such (percentages among those who declare themselves Catholic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those who define themselves Catholic</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I was born into a Catholic family</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I believe in this faith</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I am devoted to Catholic values</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is part of the history &amp; culture of my country</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007
About 27% of Italians are regular churchgoers, and nine out of ten define themselves as Catholics, even though among them 49% say that they are Catholic just for family reasons, and 10% give traditional and cultural motivations (Table 2).

Religious actors are fully aware that Italy is a deeply secularised country, but the higher clergy are also conscious that the Catholic Church still has a strong normative role in the society itself [Cesareo et al. 1995; Garelli 1991; 1996, 2007; Pace 2007]. The role extends beyond practising believers, as Figure 2 demonstrates, as the relevance of a Catholic upbringing is widespread among Italians independent of their level of religiosity.

**Figure 2. How important do you consider giving your children a Catholic education?** (percentage values based on religious practice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall population</th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Occasional</th>
<th>Non-practising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very or fairly important</td>
<td>98,2</td>
<td>97,3</td>
<td>75,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very or not important</td>
<td>10,1</td>
<td>22,6</td>
<td>22,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>0,8</td>
<td>1,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007 (N=1445)*

In other words, Italy is seen by the Church as a “laboratory”, characterised by ideal conditions, where it is possible to try opposition to the de-Christianisation process, *laicism* and *rationalism* which affect western societies, as claimed by the Church. Summing up, Italy is a sort of export model, as one can read in the Pope’s words:

« [...] The Italy of today presents itself to us as a profoundly needy Land and at the same time a very favourable place for such a witness. It is profoundly needy because it participates in the culture that predominates in the West and seeks to present itself as universal and self-sufficient, generating a new custom of life. From this a new wave of illuminism and laicism is derived, by which only what is experiential and calculable would be rationally valid, while on the level of praxis, individual freedom is held as a fundamental value to which all others must be subject. Therefore, God remains excluded from culture and from public life, and faith in him becomes more difficult [...]. If we can do it, the Church in Italy will render a great service not only to this Nation, but also to Europe and to the world, because the trap of secularism is present
everywhere and the need for a faith lived in relation to the challenges of our time is likewise universal». (Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the participants of the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, Verona, 19th October 2006)

Experts have noticed that, recently, in countries like Spain or Portugal, there has been a stronger response from their domestic Churches, in respect to the past, to the debate on ethical issues [Magister 2007].

In other words, the Italian model seems to be working; it seems to have stimulated other European Churches to oppose political decisions concerning ethical values, such as abortion, homosexual marriage, euthanasia, and so on, in a more determined way.

What is important for this paper’s aim is to give an explicit answer to one of the two basic questions the workshop seeks to address, which is: Why do religious actors intervene in the political scene in order to influence the decisional process? In our case this question could be re-written in the following way:

Why do the Italian Church, CEI and the Vatican react to ethical affairs in a very determined way compared to what happens in other countries?

One answer could be found in the specific characteristics of the Italian case. The widespread Catholic presence in the society, the spatial proximity of the Holy See to the Italian scene, the strong link between the Vatican and Italian Bishops\(^2\), which means a continuity among the universal, national and local Churches\(^3\) and, as we will see, resources to mobilise, and a particular political structure, make the Italian case a favourable “laboratory”.

Mobilisation and de-mobilisation strategy (25.9%: the referendum failed)

On 12\(^{th}\)-13\(^{th}\) June 2005 the referendum on medically assisted fertilisation and stem cells (L.40/2004) was held. The aim of the referendum movement was to modify some parts of the law in order to make it less restrictive.

Even though this law was not completely accepted by the Church hierarchy, it was nonetheless considered an important law because it safeguarded certain principles regarding the defence of life. Firstly, the equalising of the mother’s life to the life of the embryo. This is an important juridical principle in order to re-open the debate on the abortion law and its legitimacy\(^4\). It is easy to imagine how much was at stake in this referendum; it became a sort of revenge for the Catholic movement after it had lost the 1981 referendum on abortion. Yet basically the referendum was an important occasion to affirm the fundamental principles of Ruini’s cultural project. The CEI started working right away with the goal of invalidating the referendum. The Church mobilised its resources – above all associations and the media – and became active in a de-mobilisation campaign of the

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\(^2\) Under Wojtyla, Cardinal Ruini was the Pope’s Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, a position he still holds under Ratzinger.

\(^3\) In Italy there are 222 bishops who lead the same number of dioceses.

\(^4\) The law on abortion was approved in 1978 and in 1981 a referendum to restrict the terms of this law was held, but the referendum question proposed by the Catholic life movement was rejected by the majority of the Italian voters (68%).
electorate, with the goal of failing to meet the referendum quorum, as actually happened.

*Association network* – the Catholic universe – which consists of a plurality of groups, associations and movements widely spread throughout the territory – appeared strongly united on this occasion.

Mobilisation in order to de-mobilise the electorate was an extremely important task in failing to meet the referendum quorum. The large number of Science & Life committees were strategically organised for this purpose. They included not just the bigger and traditional Catholic associations but also many smaller religious groups\(^5\). Paola Binetti – a doctor and member of a bio-ethical committee – was the leader of this network, coordinating a number of initiatives (seminars, meeting, demonstrations, etc.) on the ground. In the 2006 general elections, she was elected for the centre-left coalition (Daisy).

*Media* – Communication resources and the use of different kinds of media was a fundamental strategy of the Church.

- on the one hand, religious actors have their own media structure at their disposal [Ceccarini 2001]: new-media (on-line forums, hundreds of websites, blogs, etc.), satellite tv or traditional media outlets such as radio broadcasting, daily newspapers (*Avvenire* and *L’Osservatore Romano*, respectively the CEI’s and the Holy See’s organs), a network of 140 diocesan weeklies, press agencies like SIR, widely circulated magazines like *Famiglia Cristiana*, and some niche journals for the Catholics elites and intelligentsia.

- and on the other hand, in reference to the media, the higher clergy, Catholic figures (politicians and public personalities) and those referred to by current affairs journalists as the “faithful atheists”\(^6\), played an important role in the “lay” media: making statements, releasing interviews or taking part in talk-shows and tv programmes as guests or opinion leaders.

Religious actors and Catholic personalities widely used the media resources, promoting the Church’s point of view in the public sphere. This kind of presence from the “top”, together with the associations’ diffuse work from the “bottom”, contributed to transmitting the Catholic message to

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\(^5\) Charter members of this committee were thirty associations: Azione Cattolica, Forum delle Associazioni Familiari, Movimento per la Vita, Rinnovamento dello Spirito, Comunione e Liberazione, Compagnia delle Opere, Cammino Neocatecumenale, Focolari, Comunita’ di Sant’Egidio, Centro Sportivo Italiano, Farmacisti cattolici, Federazione Mondiale Associazioni Medici Cattolici, Acli, Agesci, Cisl, Coldiretti, Cif, Fuci, Movimento Cristiani Lavoratori, Meic, Misericordie, Movimento dei Genitori Cattolici, Confederazione Italiana Regolazione Naturale Fertilità’, ARIS (Istituti socio-sanitari), Forum nazionale Associazioni trapiantati, Associazione talassemici della Liguria, Confederazione Italiana Consultori Familiari di Ispirazione Cristiana, Coordinamento delle Associazioni per la Comunicazione (CoPerCom), Associazione Cattolica Operatori Sanitari (ACOS), Associazione Medici Cattolici Italiani.

\(^6\) “Faithful atheists” are defined as those lay public figures who do not have a tradition of social or political involvement in the Catholic arena – because they are ex-communists, liberals, conservatives, etc. – but who distinguish themselves for their public support of positions very close to Church principles, in particular those linked to the Christian roots of European cultural identity as well as bio-politics issues.
society. In the end, the referendum movement’s argumentations – also for other reasons – passed into the background (Ceccarini 2005, 862; Manconi 2005, 993-96). The *quorum* was not reached because only 25.9% of electors went to vote, and the referendum was invalidated.

**Election 2006: a window of opportunity**

The last Italian general elections were held on 9th-10th April 2006. The centre-left coalition won and Romano Prodi became prime minister. Three things from this election are particularly interesting for the aim of this paper:

a) The voting behaviour of practising Catholics moved towards the centre-right coalition (The House of Liberty led by Berlusconi);

b) The distribution of seats in the Parliament which reveals concrete problems in the Senate chamber for the majority;

c) A transversal presence in both political coalitions, majority and opposition, of Catholics MPs.

These elements contribute to putting the centre-left government in quite a weak situation. This means that there are windows opened in the political opportunity structure for the lobbying action of religious actors.

**Voters and the political offering.** Over the last few years the public debate has revolved around ethical issues. These issues, among others, also characterised the last electoral campaign. The voting behaviour analysis [Segatti 2006a] shows that a higher percentage of practising Catholics voted for the Centre-right coalition compared to the previous election (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre-Right</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-Left</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between the Two Coalitions</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Segatti 2006: 89

It is likely that the presence of radical-libertarian parties in the centre-left coalition intimidated some moderate practising Catholics with respect to economic and ethical issues [Segatti 2006b]. The electoral campaign was particularly heated on bio-politics issues and a sort of continuity between the Church and the centre-right coalition took place in the public representation. In fact, the Catholic Church today is seen by public opinion as being much closer to the opposition than to the political majority (Table 4).
Table 4. In your opinion, the Church today is closer … (percentage values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…to the centre-right / to Casa delle Libertià (House of Liberties)</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to the centre-left / to L’Unione</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to neither of the two sides: the Church is outside of the political debate</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…depends on the issues in question</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t know / no response</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007

A weak and unstable majority. The social and political cleavage mentioned above could also be seen at the institutional level [Diamanti 2007]. The situations of the majority in the two parliamentary chambers are quite different (Italy uses a perfect bicameral system). The distribution of seats produced a stable majority in the Chamber of Deputies, but in the Senate the government coalition has just two seats more than the opposition. This has led to a condition of un governability. The decisional process is always uncertain, especially on issues concerning bio-politics, where Catholic senators are present in both coalitions.

A bipartisan and influential minority. The demise of the DC and the fragmentation of Catholic political representation led to the diaspora of Catholics engaged in politics. This modality of political presence for the Church has become very important and efficient over time. Catholics involved in politics, in both coalitions, are an influential minority [Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007]. They have gained an important role in the public debate, in particular some Catholic figures who show an “intransigent” position and are strongly oriented towards defending moral values in the political process. The current affairs press has defined them teodem (to address certain MPs of the centre-left) and teocon (for those of the centre-right). These two parliamentary components are united when the political debate takes on ethical issues; it emerges as a sort of transversal axis. This situation, in other terms, represents a window of opportunity for the Church to protect its interests.

Summing up

We have outlined above some episodes which show the presence of a democratic conflict between religious and political actors, on issues regarding ethical questions. Politics and religion take shape as a sort of interweaving which also involves an important theme for democracy; the laity of the state.

In fact, very often, this topic has been publicly addressed, in particular in the political debate. The harsh confrontation among the various party actors involved in these topics is also a way to define their political identities, in a phase where ideologies are weaker than in the past.
The Church itself over the last two to three years has taken part in the public debate and on the media scene frequently and directly. It has used different outlets and resources. It has also taken advantage of the context, in particular, of the (open) windows of opportunity in the political situation.

Having now outlined the general framework, we are going to take into consideration our case study: the question of *de facto* couples.

3. The case study: the draft law on *de facto couples* and the parliamentary quicksand

The civil union: from the election programme to the (Senate) seats

The electoral programme of the centre-left coalition\(^7\) included the following point on page 72:

*Civil Union*. The [centre-left] Union coalition will propose the juridical recognition of the rights, prerogatives and licences to persons who belong to *de facto* couples. With the aim of defining the nature and quality of *de facto* couples, neither the gender of the cohabitants nor their sexual orientation is diriment. As a qualifying criterion, instead should be considered the system of relations (sentimental, charitable and of solidarity), their stability and voluntariness.

This issue soon became a delicate topic and a political battleground. The Church took part in the debate defending the concept of the traditional family. This reaction is firstly due to the fact that gender was not a discriminating element in the legitimisation of *de facto* couples. For this reason the issue is seen as a Trojan horse in the Catholic perspective; at first homosexual marriage, and then also the extension to these couples of the possibility of adopting children.

Legitimisation of *de facto couples* actually is not a new issue, but during the 2006 electoral campaign this policy – known as PACS (Patto Civile di Solidarietà; Civil Solidarity Pact) – was widely discussed among electoral competitors. Once the centre-left coalition was in office two ministers - Rosy Bindi (Minister for family policies) and Barbara Pollastrini (Minister for equal opportunities), the first a Catholic and the second a leftist – proposed a draft law named DICO (Diritti e doveri dei conviventi – Cohabitants’ rights and obligations).

It is manifest that these two figures were chosen not just for their institutional roles, but also for the mediation between the two main – in electoral terms – political cultures which are present in the centre-left coalition: reformist left and democratic Catholic traditions.

There were, in any case, those who made objections to the draft law presented, from leaders of the radical left to Catholics leaders (i.e. ex-DC politicians like Clemente Mastella, the current Minister of Justice, but also among the teodem MPs).

\(^7\) [http://www.fabbricadelprogramma.it/adon/static/programma-unione.pdf](http://www.fabbricadelprogramma.it/adon/static/programma-unione.pdf)
Considering the framework described in the first part of this paper, it is quite easy to understand that it will be very difficult for this specific law to be approved in the parliament and in particular in the Senate chamber.

In the end, from the brief reconstruction outlined above it clearly emerges that the idea of the influential minority is actually something concrete in the Italian political scenario. The division between the coalitions and especially within the government alliance is particularly crucial, and in the meantime the cross-party presence of Catholic MPs makes the decisional process about ethical issues concretely uncertain.

The Church, politics and the “binding” Pastoral note

As we have seen so far, the lobbying action of the Church passes through resource mobilisation – above all through associations and the media – and also takes advantage of the opportunity windows left open in the socio-political context. By means of this strategy, religious actors intervene in the political scenario and in the public debate, including important Catholic figures such as the Pope, higher clergymen like the CEI President or General Secretary, and well known bishops or cardinals. The mobilisation of Catholic groups or movements on the ground emerges as a complementary action in a multi-pronged lobbying strategy.

During the last few weeks public demonstrations have taken place in the streets, in favour of Dico\(^8\), for example, where some ministers have physically participated (i.e. Pollastrini was on-stage), and others have taken part only through the media, making a statement on maxi-screen (i.e. Bindi). Other ministers, like Mastella, adopted a polemical stance and skipped the march. This shows how the confrontation has also become been lively among different members of the majority.

On the other side, Catholic actors have had and are preparing counter-demonstrations, like Family Day\(^9\). Minister Mastella, and also certain majority MPs announced that they are going to participate in this public march. It must be taken into consideration that this kind of initiative receives wide media coverage and becomes part of the public debate, following a sort of circular logic. Furthermore, these events are also good occasions for the actors involved to manifest their political identities.

The strategy followed by the Church seems to be particularly successful. It enters into the conflictual lines which characterise the Italian political system, taking advantage of the open windows of opportunity mentioned above.

Ethical questions first seem to divide the centre-left from the centre-right coalitions, and secondly (but not less importantly) the cleavage runs inside the centre-left, within the different political cultures that compose this (unstable) alliance.

An important move recently made by the CEI is the Pastoral note, “binding” for Catholics MPs, as it was defined by the Church hierarchies.

\(^8\) This demonstration, which could be called “Dico day”, was held the 10\(^{th}\) of March 2007 in Rome.

\(^9\) This demonstration, Family Day, will be held the 12\(^{th}\) of May 2007 in Rome.
This document was discussed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March at the CEI Permanent Commission. It is an explicit message to Catholics involved in politics to defend <<non negotiable>> moral values. The document was written by the Italian bishops taking into strict consideration what the Pope, just some days earlier, had said about these values in the Apostolic Exhortation entitled Sacramentum Caritas:

«[…] Here it is important to consider what the Synod Fathers described as eucharistic consistency, a quality which our lives are objectively called to embody. Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. Evidently, this is true for all the baptized, yet it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as respect for human life, its defence from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one's children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms (230). These values are not negotiable. Consequently, Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel particularly bound, on the basis of a properly formed conscience, to introduce and support laws inspired by values grounded in human nature (231). There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29). Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them (232)». (Sacramentum Caritas, 13 March 2007)

This exhortation of the Vatican is a very important document, since it has been widely interpreted as the pontificate programme, in which the Pope reminds Catholic MPs in particular of their responsibility to propose and to vote certain policies. This document, together with the CEI’s pastoral “binding” note, gives the idea of a unitary and consistent (communication) action set up by these two important religious actors. It also directly tells Catholic MPs to vote against the Dico legitimating project.

The Church strategy goes beyond the action of institutional pressure on decisional processes, places and actors, which is an “invisible” activity. The strategy also extends to the local dimension, to the territory, into the parish churches. These actions are per se very important in spreading the message, but especially so when they take advantage of wide media coverage, like in the following episode.

On the occasion of the Easter celebrations, in particular during the traditional blessing of the houses, a pastoral letter was delivered to families in the cities of Florence and Rome. The bishop of Florence (Cardinal Antonelli) wrote the letter and Cardinal Ruini signed the foreword of the letter. Its content defends the traditional family and pressures politicians to produce and broaden family policies. It also stresses the risk of confusing the concept of the family with other forms of cohabitation:

«The family founded on matrimony is not only a community of love, but also an institution of public interest; and as such it should be recognised, safeguarded, supported and valued by the public authorities that have the specific responsibility of promoting the common good. […] It is to be hoped for that the politicians, in developing laws and measures, listen not only to social forces, but also to the associations for the rights of the family. In particular, it is to be hoped for that a strategy is developed to be able to gradually arrive at giving very important concrete aid: an offering of new opportunities regarding the home and work, tax rates (IRPeF, ICI) […] the realisation of an adequate network of services, the effective implementation of the freedom of education, so that not only the well-off, but also the
poor can choose without additional financial burdens a non-state public school, if they desire it. [...] Regarding the family, the position of de facto cohabitations and homosexual couples is very different. These cohabitations do not entail the assumption of obligations and duties towards society. They take shape instead as a private relationship between individuals, analogous to the relationship of friendship, for which no one dreams of requesting juridical recognition. It is not right that they have the same rights of the family, given that they do not have the same duties. Their needs should find a response in the rights recognised for individuals» (Letter to the faithful, Archbishop of Florence Cardinal Antonelli).

Religion, society and the DICO draft law

At this point in our discussion a good question to answer could be the following: what is public opinion response to this public presence of the Church and its lobbying action?

The public stance of the Church on bio-politics issues, and more recently the mobilisation against the Dico, have produced interesting changes in attitudes and in public opinion, as demonstrated by longitudinal surveys. In particular, the trend of attitudes regarding the hypothesis of legitimisation of de facto couples reflects this change.

Figure 3 The centre-left government has recently proposed a law on DICO, that is regarding de facto couples who live together stably outside of marriage. The law provides for extending the rights that married couples enjoy to these couples. Would you say you were in favour of or opposed to a law of this type? (percentage values of those who responded “in favour”)

![Graph showing percentage values for public opinion on DICO law](image)

Source: Demos-Eurisko

* For the findings prior to March 2007, a different question was used: “More and more couples decide not to marry and to live together stably outside of marriage. For some time law proposals have been discussed to extend to these couples the same rights that married couples enjoy. Would you be in favour or opposed to a law of this type?”

---

10 Cf. the dossier Demos-Eurisko issued in the newspaper La Repubblica, 18 March 2007 (Articles written by Ilvo Diamanti, Fabio Bordignon and Luigi Ceccarini)
The last instalment of the Demos-Eurisko opinion poll, February-March 2007\textsuperscript{11}, shows that half of Italians are in favour of the Dico law, that is in favour of the legitimisation of \textit{de facto couples}. But this position scored higher during the period October 2004 – June 2006, about 60%, that is to say about 10% more than the current percentage (Figure 3).

This trend could probably be explained by the heated public and political debate on these kinds of issues, in which religious actors have played a central role over the last few years. Consequently, this draft law may be seen today as more of a threat for the traditional family institution than it was in the recent past. Among practising Catholics one out of three (33%) is in favour of this policy, while among non-practising citizens the percentage is nearly double (60%).

When religious attitudes and political orientation combine, opinions become more radical, and it is possible to observe significant differences between the two electorates (Figure 4).

\textbf{Figure 4. The orientation of those in favour of the DICO law among the different segments of voters}

\begin{center}
\hspace{1cm}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (graph) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
      \hline
      \textbf{Population} \\
      \\
      \textbf{PC-V} \\
      \textbf{PC-CR} \\
      \textbf{V-CR} \\
      \textbf{PC-CL} \\
      \textbf{V-CL} \\
      \hline
    \end{tabular}
  
  \end{tikzpicture}

  \begin{tabular}{c}
    \textbf{0\%} \\
    \textbf{50\%} \\
    \textbf{100\%} \\
  \end{tabular}

  % in favour of DICO law

\end{center}

\textit{Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007 (N=1445)}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Legend:} & \textbf{PC-CR}=Practising Catholics Centre-Right voters, 22.9\% & \textbf{V-CR}=Centre-Right voters, 39.0\% & \textbf{PC-CL}=Practising Catholics Centre-Left voters, 67.9\% & \textbf{V-CL}=Centre-Left Voters, 81.3\% \hline
\textbf{PC-V}=Practising Catholics voters, 32.8\% & Overall population, 50.3\% \hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{11}The data were collected on two separate occasions: 19-20 February and 12-13 March 2007, by GfK Eurisko for \textit{la Repubblica} daily newspaper. Methods of data collection: CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing); Sampling: 1445 cases, representative of the Italian population aged 18 and over. Rosalba Rattalino (Eurisko), participated in the research design and coordinated the CATI segment. Demos \& Pi dealt with composing the questionnaire and the data analysis. The research project was designed by Ilvo Diamanti, Fabio Bordignon, Luigi Ceccarini and Natascia Porcellato (University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”).
The politicisation effect which characterises this issue is quite evident: 68% of practising Catholics among centre-left voters are in favour of Dico, while only 23% of practising Catholics who vote centre-right alignment support the Dico law. In other words, at the same level of religious involvement, political orientation contributes to radicalising opinion on an issue like the Dico.\(^\text{12}\)

The trend shown above, which testifies a considerable reduction in public favour towards the legitimisation of *de facto couples*, is consistent with other attitudes detected by the Demos-Eurisko survey.

In fact it is possible to see in terms of social-moral acceptability, that certain behaviours or personal choices - concerning family, sexuality, life and so on - are less tolerated socially compared to the past (Figure 5).

As could be predicted, there is a sharp difference in the attitudes demonstrated by practising Catholics and non-practising citizens. This trend reflects the perspectives that religious actors have strongly supported on the public scene in recent years, which were explicitly addressed to the defence of life as a moral value and the traditional family, sexuality and so on.

**Figure 5.** Now I will read you a series of behaviours. According to your moral point of view, are they acceptable or wrong? (data by percentage of those who feel that the behaviour proposed is acceptable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation of an unmarried man and woman</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex between an unmarried man and woman</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a child out of wedlock</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An extra-marital affair</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality, relations between people of the same sex</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Demos-Eurisko for *La Repubblica*, February-March 2007 (N=1445)*

It is interesting to see that the concept of family is for the most part seen by people as the union between a man and a woman, by means a marriage ceremony – regardless of whether the ceremony is religious or civil – (56%). Support for the role of a formal ritual, civil or religious, has

\(^{12}\) This consideration is also confirmed by diverse models of logistic regression we have performed. See note 13.
increased by +8% in three years, and the idea that ‘family equals cohabitation’ has slightly declined (-3%) as shown in Figure 6.

It must also be said that what we have illustrated above are just perceptions. The traditional family in Italy is also facing a deep crisis and new kinds of families and young couples who live together without getting married are progressively increasing. But the opinion climate we have attempted to outline is very interesting for our purposes. It reflects, in fact, the ethical admonishment issued by the Church after a phase in which religious actors have been very active on the public scene. Summing up, it appears that Italians have paid more attention to the moral recommendation now, but this consideration is not as linear and direct as it seems.

Figure 6. Without considering what the law says, what does being a family mean for you? To be a family... (percentage values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A church wedding is necessary</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary to marry, either in the municipality or in the church</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is enough for two people to live together under the same roof</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t know / No response</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007 (N=1445)

In fact, our data do not offer evidence in favour of increasing religious awareness. Some indicators collected in the same survey reveal that the percentage of Italians who say that religion occupies a fundamental or important place in their life perspective has decreased from 62% to 55% in three years (Table 5). In the meantime, the Church’s exhortation concerning moral issues and people’s life behaviours is today considered “very important to follow” at the same level as in the past: 25%. Moreover, most Italians interviewed say that the Church’s recommendations are important but that people should behave according to their own consciences (57%; Table 6). This perspective is also shared by nearly half (49%) of regularly practising Catholics. These data suggest that there is ample space for the privatisation of the Church’s exhortations, which leads to a lifestyle that is autonomous and individualised in respect to religious rules.

In the end, what emerges is a sort of contradiction on the social level; on one side there is increasing attention to morality which is consistent with the recommendations of the Church. On the other side, religious attitudes
are not more widespread in comparison with the past and the attention paid to Church exhortations is also at the same level as in the past. This framework supports and strengthens the idea that public opinion on bio-politics and ethical issues is established firstly on political grounds and in the current public debate, and only reflects religious attitudes on a secondary level.

Table 5. What position does religion occupy in your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively important</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely irrelevant</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for *La Repubblica*, February-March 2007; 2003

Table 6. How do you consider the teaching of the Church in respect to people’s morality and life (values, family, sexuality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important, should be followed</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful, but each person should behave according to his/her conscience</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper, the Church should concern itself with other things. Above all faith</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively, should never be followed</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t know, no response</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for *La Repubblica*, February-March 2007; 2003

Ethical or political bipolarism?

The social orientations illustrated above probably depend on the debates which have taken place in the public sphere and particularly on the heated tones of the political confrontation. In our interpretation, the political cleavage counts more than the ethical one. In other words, political actors have appropriated moral value topics and inserted these issues into the political debate [Fiorina 2005], in order to delineate their identities during this current confused phase. The subject of bio-politics is used to build political alliances and create difficulties for antagonistic political parts (between and within the coalitions) with the aim of political positioning in the context of public opinion and in the political market [see also Ricolfi 2001; Quagliarello 2006].
Ethical bipolarism, as the expression of divergent value systems, ends up intertwining political meanings [Bobba 2007]. This weaving becomes particularly significant for the political actors who use it to distinguish themselves in the age of the “permanent campaign”. This is particularly true for those issues which are deeply politicised like the Pacs/Dico issue. In fact, regarding other ethical themes, like abortion or euthanasia, social orientation is less “explained” by political variables than by religious ones.13

The acts of pressure on politicians by the Church are not socially accepted on a wide scale. Most of those interviewed (61%) do not agree with the Church’s pressuring Catholics MPs to vote against the de facto couple law (Figure 7). This means that they do not approve of the pastoral “binding” note. This position is also widespread among practising Catholics: 44%. Among occasional churchgoers this opinion is held by 62%, and of course it is even higher among non-practising voters (73%). Among practising Catholics, 61% of centre-left voters do not agree with the CEI’s pastoral “binding” note, and on the other side, 35% of practising centre-right

13 The table below reports Negelkerke’s $R^2$ values. Logistic regressions were performed adding the independent variables in successive blocks (1° block: only intention of voting behaviour; 2° block: only frequency of attending mass; 3° block: both the previous ones; 4° block: socio-demographic variables (gender, age, level of education) were added. The dichotomous (in favour vs. opposed to) opinion towards Dico law, euthanasia and abortion was considered as the dependent variable.
voters also do not agree (81% of all centre-left voters; 53% of all centre-right voters). So, it is politics that seems to polarise these orientations.

In order to complete this framework of Italian public opinion, it has to be said that three out of four citizens support the idea that Catholic MPs must above all feel free to follow their conscience when voting on the Dico law. This position is also supported by 63% of practising Catholic voters (Table 7).

Table. 7 The Catholic Church is opposed to the draft law on de facto couples, the Dico. How do you think the Catholic politicians should vote? (percentage values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious practice</th>
<th>Political orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the direction given by the Church</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First follow the position of the political party</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote freely according to his/her conscience</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t know / No response</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007 (N=1445)

Figure. 8 The Church, Catholic parliamentarians and politics according to practising centre-right and centre-left voters (percentage values)

Source: Demos-Eurisko for La Repubblica, February-March 2007
Data show that there is not such a great difference between the two electoral segments: 75% among centre-right voters and 86% among the centre-left electorate. This gap is wider if practising Catholics are taken into consideration: 66% among the centre-right churchgoing electorate and 86% among the centre-left. A large portion of Italian voters seem to have a clear idea of the line that separates religion and politics. In other words, they appear to have a well-defined idea of laity, defending the autonomy of the MPs’ task from the pressure of the Church and its exhortations (Figure 8), even though they recognise the right of the Church to intervene in the public sphere.

In conclusion, with particular regard to the Dico question, the Clergy’s action finds favour only in a part of the political realm – especially among centre-right party leaders – but at the societal level this action is less supported by public opinion. A lay orientation seems to be widespread among citizens in general and also among practising Catholics, which underscores first and foremost the autonomy of parliamentarians.

4. Conclusion: Why and How?

This paper has explored the outline presented earlier with the aim of uncovering clues in order to give a preliminary answer to the basic questions of this workshop. In these final lines we will try to synthesise what has emerged thus far and then tackle the following two questions: why and how (Italian) religious actors try to influence the political decisional process.

Why? Italy as a laboratory

The Italian context is characterised by certain peculiarities: a) historical – widespread cultural, political and social Catholicism, the closeness (also spatially) between the universal (Vatican) and national Churches (CEI); b) contingent – political bipolarism and its own cleavages; c) as other western countries it is a secularised society.

This scenario makes the Italian case a sort of ideal “laboratory” where the Church can experiment its strategy against the privatisation of religion, and also against laicism and rationalism, which have touched western societies in late modernity, as has been stressed by the highest members of the clergy.

In this perspective Italy becomes a sort of “export model” in order to stimulate other national Catholic Churches, with the basic aim of reinforcing the Christian values in which western societies have their roots. Moreover, this stance goes beyond the Catholic milieu, and is supported by centre-right leaders and intellectuals, for example by “faithful atheists”, and intertwines the political debate on the preamble of the European Constitution, concerning the recognition of Europe’s <<Christian roots>>.
How? Opportunities and mobilisation

The second basic question was how religious actors try to influence the political process. Two answers have to be given. The first one concerns the structure of the socio-political context and its windows of opportunity. The second one refers to the Church as a political entrepreneur, that mobilises different kind of resources:

1. The political opportunities structure

The first answer is related to the context, where the Church – which could be seen as political actor – plays its role. This answer refers to a couple of classical elements of the theory of the Political Opportunity Structure: a) the unstable alliance and b) the system of influential alliances (Table 8).

Regarding the instability of the alliance it is clear now that:

a) the majority has concrete difficulties in approving their political decisions in the Senate;

b) there are divisions within the majority, between the radical left and the Catholic cultural area, and among Catholics themselves.

These two elements are effective windows of opportunity for religious actors whose aim is to influence the decisional process. The repeatedly strained relations within the majority alliance on ethical issues and the lack of safe seats in the Senate to assure a real majority during voting makes the parliamentary iter for the Dico law - as well as for other bio-politics policies – very difficult to get approved.

With respect to the second point of the political opportunity structure, that is the influential system of alliances, an additional two distinct elements must be recalled. The first one refers to the institutional level, the second one is related to the societal level.

a) among Catholics MPs, there is a sort of bipartisan alliance which includes the more “intransigent” and active components, teodem on the centre-left and teocon on the centre-right. Also, other Catholic political personalities and public figures (conservatively or traditionally oriented, “faithful atheists”, or those who are simply politically motivated) take part in this “alliance” whose main aim is to defend – consistent with the Church’s stance – <<non-negotiable moral values>>.

b) regarding the electorate, practising Catholics have recently voted more towards the centre-right coalition in comparison to past general elections. This suggests that ethical bipolarism is a sort of channel where political bipolarism takes place. As we have seen, a sort of alliance emerges between centre-right oriented practising Catholics and the Church positions which creates a wider cleavage within the Catholic electorate.
These opportunity windows touch upon two diverse, but important, contexts: the institutional context and the electoral context. This situation makes the terrain for the actions of religious actors particularly fertile.

Table 8. The socio-political context and the political opportunity structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-political context traits</th>
<th>Windows of opportunity</th>
<th>Political process repercussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instability of the alliance</td>
<td>- Governing majority (in the Senate) with just a few seats more than the opposition</td>
<td>- Great difficulties for the Dico law to be approved in the Senate chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Divisions within the majority between the radical-libertarian area and Catholic representatives</td>
<td>- Permanent tensions among majority components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System of influential alliances</td>
<td>- Catholics MPs: transverse components of Catholics involved in politics within the two coalitions</td>
<td>- The instable majority in the Senate renders the pressure of religious actors on decision-making particularly efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Catholic electorate: the voting shift of regular practising Catholics towards the centre-right coalition.</td>
<td>- The cleavages found at the institutional level corresponds to those in the social and electoral realms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Unity and continuity of the political project between the Vatican and the Episcopal hierarchy</td>
<td>- The political continuity between the CEI and Vatican assures consistent lobbying action by religious actors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The Church as political entrepreneur

The second answer to the basic question about how, refers to the Church as a political entrepreneur. In other words, the Catholic Church could be see as a rational actor that is able to mobilise different kinds of resources in the socio-political context (Table 9). In this case mobilisation takes on three different meanings:

- mobilisation;
- de-mobilisation;
- counter-mobilisation.

Mobilisation: over the last few years the Church has mobilised public opinion, Catholic universe organisations and Catholics involved in politics, with the main purpose of defending its ideal interests (moral values). There are basically three channels used by religious actors, the territory and its groups, the media and institutions:
a) *on the ground* the multi-faceted world of Catholic associations was mobilised. This complex universe has found strong unity on these ethical issues (i.e. Science & Life committees for the 2005 referendum);

b) *in the media realm*, traditional and new Catholic media were widely used in combination with a constant presence in the “lay” media system (public and private TV, radio, newspaper, magazines etc.). A canny use of communication is also testified by the coordinated official documents issued by clergy hierarchies at different levels (local: bishop’s pastoral letters; national: CEI’s pastoral note; universal: Pope’s Eucharistic exhortation). All these communication actions entered into the public debate (i.e. against the Dico draft law);

c) *at the institutional level*, the Church itself but also different Catholic groups, fora, associations and movements put pressure on Catholic MPs and politicians who are sensitive to these ethical issues. This lobbying action is not always a “visible” activity.

**De-mobilisation.** During the 2005 referendum the mobilisation campaign was accompanied by a de-mobilisation action. The aim was to avoid that the quorum was reached in order to invalidate the referendum results. All the channels and resources mentioned above were used for this purpose (on the ground, media and institutional). Thanks to the physical abstention, the social de-legitimisation of the institution of the referendum itself (due to a wide and inappropriate use made of it in recent years), the objective difficulty for supporters of the referendum movement to explain the questions, the summer period (June), and the direct activism of high level Catholic personalities, the referendum failed.

**The counter-mobilisation.** To the dynamic of mobilisation and de-mobilisation could also be added some episodes of counter-mobilisation. Among these, it is important to note the Family Day march, the Catholic counter-demonstration of what we could call “Dico Day”. Bipartisan support and participation highlight the complexity of the cleavages and alliances which characterise the Italian political scenario. The media system plays a crucial role in both demonstrations, contributing to intensifying debate and exasperating the confrontation among the different points of view. Media coverage and the number of people who take part in the demonstrations are a show of force and give an idea about the strength of the two positions. Demonstrations are also a good occasion for the political actors involved to manifest their identities and to situate themselves on the electoral market.
Table 9. The mobilisation: actions, channels and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Resources / characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mobilisation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Public Opinion</td>
<td><strong>In the territory:</strong> Catholic Associationism, Science &amp; Life committee initiatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Catholics (the faithful)</td>
<td><strong>Media</strong> (traditional and new media): The use of the lay and Catholic media systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Catholics involved in politics</td>
<td><strong>Politics:</strong> Catholic leaders and MPs, and “traditionalist” deputies and senators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>De-mobilisation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Politics:</strong> Catholic leaders and MPs, and “traditionalist” deputies and senators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Electorate</td>
<td>In addition to the resources listed above the Family Day demonstration will take part in the debate (media visibility) and it emerges as a Catholic response to “Dico Day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Counter-mobilisation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Church hierarchies, Catholic universe and Catholic politicians</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(an example)</td>
<td>**In addition to the resources listed above the Family Day demonstration will take part in the debate (media visibility) and it emerges as a Catholic response to “Dico Day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Family Day</td>
<td>**In addition to the resources listed above the Family Day demonstration will take part in the debate (media visibility) and it emerges as a Catholic response to “Dico Day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Official document</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vatican</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(three examples)</td>
<td><strong>CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Sacramentum Caritas</td>
<td><strong>Archdiocese of Florence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- CEI “Binding” note</td>
<td><strong>Institutional structures of the universal, national and local Churches. Consistence and complementarity of the issued contents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Florence Bishop’s Pastoral letter</td>
<td><strong>Institutional structures of the universal, national and local Churches. Consistence and complementarity of the issued contents</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Religion and Politics: Conflict or Cooperation?**

The final question we would like to address is the one which gives the title to the workshop: *Religion and Politics (in Italy): conflict or cooperation?*
Benedict XVI’s papacy programme exhibits the <<Christian distinctive>> as a basic element. In the name of faith he intervenes in the Italian socio-political scenario, much more than John Paul II did. For that reason, the relation between religion and politics has never been so conflictual as in this phase since the beginning of the first Republic. Bio-politics issues are now central in the political agenda, and in this phase political actors use them to delineate their own political identities, to gain electoral consensus and to build political alliances.

The risk is that political bipolarism turns into ethical bipolarism, as was recently addressed [Bobba 2007]. It is not just a coincidence that one out of four Italians sees the Church as closer to the centre-right position. Only a few voters consider the Catholic Church a “friend” of the centre-left. And today, unlike the recent past, just a minority of practising Catholics would vote for the centre-left coalition. This situation is, probably, a sign that the relation between the Church and politics is entering into a new phase. Throughout the history of the Republic, the Church never seemed to be “one-sided”. Between the right and left it positioned itself “behind” the centre or equidistant from the parties.

Today, in some senses, the Italian Catholic Church is closer to the opposition.

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14 Itanes research programme showed that the moderate Catholic electorate are “late deciders” in higher percentage and sensitive to traditional issues, cf. Itanes 2006.
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