1. Introduction

‘Communion and Liberation’ (CL) is a powerful religious movement, widely known in Italy and very active in the political sphere. In Lombardia, the richest Italian region, its exponents hold the leading political positions, such as the regional government, and they have important roles in the economic field, especially in the private healthcare system.

In this paper we focus on the relationships between CL and Italian politics in the ‘Second Republic’ (1993-on going), by analysing CL representation of its political role as well as by pointing out the political opportunity structure in which its success took place.

The national and international literature on the movement could be divided into two main groups, or waves, of analysis. The first wave mainly gathers studies of Italian scholars, carried out between the end of the 60s and the early 80s (Bianchi and Turchini 1975; Cavallaro, 1976; Centro Operaio 1975; Ottaviano 1986; Saraceno and Rusconi 1970). These critical studies focus on the political character of CL, and defines it as an ‘integrism’ group. The main directions of research revolve around CL story, socio-economic composition of members, organizational structure, ideology and especially its political vision and the representations of its role within society. The interpretative frame could be generally identified as a Marxist one. The studies of the first wave collect sociological studies based on interviews, surveys, and participant observation. Even though these studies are very specific in the analysis of CL, especially on its political dimension, there seems to be a lack in the analysis of CL recent development. Indeed, the first wave stops before the huge change in the Italian politics occurred in the early nineties. When the ‘First Republic’ (1948-1992) and the Christian Democrats - its governing party - collapsed, the Italian political landscape has been affected by a huge change, with the rise of Berlusconi and the party of Lega Nord (see section 4). Therefore, there is a lack in the analysis of the political role of CL in the ‘Second Republic’ (1993-on going).

The second wave of analysis, both national and international, uses a religious study perspective and frames CL as a religious movement with a political character. These studies focus on CL as a religious community, on its internal organisation and on its religious issues.

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1 The paper is the first part of a larger research project. We would like to thank Roberto Biorcio and the members of Laboratorio PolisLombardia (University of Milano Bicocca), for their useful comments and criticisms. The text could be divided as follows: Emanuele Polizzi mainly focused on sections 2 and 4, Alberta Giorgi on 1 and 3, while the conclusions are a joint effort, as well as the text analysis.
Abbruzzese 2001 and 1991; Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2006; Bova 2005; Gervasi 2007; Guolo and Pace 1998; Marzano 1997 and 1995; Pace 1998; Zadra 1994). Most of the second wave studies define CL as a ‘fundamentalist’ group. Nevertheless, the categories of integrism and fundamentalism seem to be mute with regard to the complex mechanism of interplay between religion and politics played by CL. Specifically, it has been really successful in balancing its local and ‘community’ nature with the capacity of playing on a national political and religious arena. In the last decades, the introduction of the subsidiarity principle for politics (governance) and policy (devolution) rescaled the political arenas, and the local arenas have been gaining more power (see sections 3 and 4). First of all, the introduction of the direct election of mayors and regional governors, together with the devolution of some important welfare competences (such as the healthcare and the social assistance systems), caused a huge empowerment of the local lobbies. Secondly, the introduction of the Welfare subsidiarity gave private associations and organisations an important role of services providers, funded by the public system.

CL is organised as a movement which involves a wide network of individuals as well as organisations operating in the economic field (Compagnia delle Opere, see section 2). Therefore we need to take into account the political capacity of playing at different territorial horizons, framing the relation between CL and the political system in a multilevel governance perspective, while the previous analyses mainly focused either on the national or the local level. Hence, even though our analysis revolves around a single movement, its outcomes could be useful in the analysis of the relationships between religion and politics, in a multilevel perspective.

Communion and Liberation has a strong identity, which combines both traditionalism and modernity, and it managed to enlarge the numbers of its adherents as well as its social, economic, and political presence, starting from Italy and spreading in about seventy countries all around the world. Therefore, we can consider Communion and Liberation as an example of a successful religious movement in the contemporary political landscape.

In this paper, we aim to combine the analysis of CL discourses and the analysis of the political opportunity structure. Specifically, we focus on CL self-representation of its political role and on how the changes in the political landscape may have affected the CL-politics relation in the last decades.

We analysed 672 articles published between 1996 and 2011 on Tracce – Litterae Communionis the movement official magazine, monthly issued. We narrowed the analysis of CL discourse on politics (Van Dijk 1997: 25) to a specific arena (Krzyzanowski and Wodak 2008; Hardy and Phillips 2002): the self-representation of identity on the official magazine, addressed to an internal audience. The articles sample is based on the research topic, therefore we selected editorials, articles focusing on national and international political issues, on social problems, and on the role of religion in society. We then codified the texts in order to specifically highlight CL representation of its own identity, politics and political activism, common good, relationship with the Catholic Church, and the role of religion in society.

The second section of the paper focuses on the story of CL as a movement. Then, CL self-representations of identity and politics are analysed. In the fourth section we list the changes in the political system which could be considered as useful opportunities for the movement development and growth. Finally, we draw some conclusions in section five.

2 Apart from the two waves, we can find: CL publications (Camisasca 2001, 2003, 2006, Ronza 1976); Church-related publications (see, for instance, Favale 1991); and critical journalistic enquiries (such as De Alessandri 2010; Pinotti 2010).
2. The story of CL

2.1. Origins

The story of CL begins in 1954 in the classrooms of Liceo Classico Berchet, a high school downtown Milan. In that year a young priest, Don Luigi Giussani (Don Giussani), decided to quit his job as a theology teacher at the local seminary, to teach religion to teenagers attending public schools. The young priest realized that even if Italy was historically a Catholic country, Christian religion was almost irrelevant in young people's real lives. According to Don Giussani, the most popular cultural and political movements of modernity, namely Socialism or Liberalism, were essentially atheistic and did not admit the presence of religion in public life (Bianchi and Turchini 1975; Camisasca 2001). In his view, non-religious cultures became hegemonic in ordinary people's everyday life and even those groups that openly maintained their religious roots - such as Catholic youth organizations - were weak and shy in the public sphere with respect to the secular groups. With the purpose of making young people aware of the risks of losing the gift of the faith in Jesus Christ, Don Giussani decided to start from one of Milan upper class schools, well known for its teacher and headmaster proudly secular and liberal approach (Abbruzzese 1991; Saraceno and Rusconi 1970).

Don Giussani's teachings aimed to shake students up by using a provocative approach. He presented Christian life as a revolutionary proposal that could not leave people indifferent: they were called to rethink and rebuild every aspect of their life, even their social and political activities, as a way to affirm their Christian identity. This position was a reaction to the distinction between religious and secular domain proposed in those years by many Catholic philosophers and theologians, such as Jacques Maritain: a distinction which ended up becoming a sort of breaking dualism between faith and social life (Camisasca 2001; Formigoni and Vecchio, 1989). If many students reacted to this approach by strengthening their agnostic convictions, many others were stuck by this radical approach and Don Giussani's charismatic personality. Most of them started following his proposals and activities. In a little time, Don Giussani's new approach and popularity spread all over the city. His success was due not only to his innovative proposal but also to his role in Azione Cattolica (AC, Catholic Action), back then the largest Catholic organization in Italy: as a matter of fact, Don Giussani was serving as a spiritual assistant for the local AC high school students section, Gioventù Studentesca (students' youth, hereinafter GS). By the beginning of the ‘60s, the name of GS became strictly connected to Don Giussani leadership and this connection allowed him to reach many students in other high schools and become the leader of the largest Catholic students group, both in Milan and in other towns of Lombardia. Under Don Giussani’s leadership, GS members had an intense community life, full of different activities organized on the basis of high schools groups. One the one hand, GS groups organized everyday prayers, masses and spiritual encounters about faith and everyday life. On the other hand, they organized charity activities, such as helping poor family children in the suburbs of Milan or educating them following the Catholic faith pillars (Camisasca 2001).

To understand the popular success of GS, it is useful to look at the Catholic environment in which this experience took place. In the aftermaths of the Second World War, under Pope Pius XII, the Italian Catholic Church was deeply committed itself to struggle against Communism, not only in the political arena, but also in the cultural arena. To follow this purpose, the most important Catholic organization for lay people, Catholic Action (AC), was strongly mobilized in civic groups (Comitati Civici) in order to lead their public life and

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3 Italian public schools curricula include religion lectures delivered by people chosen by the Catholic Church local authorities. Until the revision of Concordato (1984) the attendance to religious lectures was compulsory.

4 GS had been founded in the late ‘40s in Milan.
prevent the influence of the powerful communist organizations, particularly over the working class (Guasco 1987; Riccardi 2007). With the urgency of this purpose, the Catholic church was deeply engaged in the campaign against Communism, but the huge effort for the political struggle had the effect to weaken the spiritual dimension of the AC activities.

Therefore, the mobilization of moral and material resources on High schools students, who were too young to be involved in the election, was almost neglected by AC. In this situation, Don Giussani proposal sounded as a strong source of cultural and spiritual energies for young people. Moreover, some other features of GS made it more appealing for youth, such as the overcoming of the traditional division between males and females, and the use of a language more connected to emotions than moral duties.

The growth of the new movement threatened to trigger competitive phenomena between CL and the older Church structures. In order to integrate GS with AC, in 1965 the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Colombo, imposed Don Giussani to quit the direct responsibility of the movement, but at the same time called Angelo Scola, one of Don Giussani most important disciples, to become president of FUCI (Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana – Italian Catholic University Federation), AC university branch.

2.2. The ‘68 Turning Point and the New Identity

Despite the Catholic hierarchies prudential position, the middle of the ‘60s GS was becoming a growing movement also in universities. Most of the students who joined GS in high school organized GS groups and activities in the new academic environment and gained a lot of new followers. Some members were sent to Brazil to join missionary groups and spread the movement overseas. Yet, in the same years, the wave of the ‘‘68 was already starting to spread over the Italian universities, as well as in many other Western countries. The criticisms of the students movement to the traditional bourgeoisie were not foreign to the ideas of GS: anti-authoritarianism, anti-capitalism, criticism to the cultural conformism, criticism to hypocritical division between private and public life. All these values were essential elements of both movements. At the same time, GS ideology had some fundamental differences from the ‘68 students movement: its objectives were less political than educational, and the change they pursued was to answer to people’s needs only through the faith community membership (see Saraceno and Rusconi 1970).

Differences and similarities between GS and the ‘68 students movement created tensions and conflicts inside Don Giussani movement. Many GS members saw the ‘68 as the opportunity to fulfil their deepest aspirations, but Don Giussani and a minority of members saw it as a threat to the movement religious (but not political) nature. At the end of the ‘68, only a minority of members kept their affiliation to Don Giussani, while the majority quit the movement to join the overall students movement.

Therefore, the ’68 was a turning point in the story of GS. After a short period of confusion, Don Giussani, back to direction, tried to clarify the identity of his movement, as a reaction to the problems and the ambiguities of the previous period. In his view, from that moment on the position of CL toward the political dimension should not be misunderstood anymore: the objectives of the movement had to be only and clearly religious and not political. The movement purpose was to educate people to the encounter with Christ in their practical and ordinary life. Political activities were not neglected, but they had to be considered only as a way to defend religious principles and to promote the liberties of civil society groups. Moreover, Don Giussani established a more radical principle of internal communion, in which

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5 In June 2011, Angelo Scola has been appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as new Archbishop of Milan after Cardinal Tettamanzi. Previously, Scola had been provost of the Lateran University and Patriarch of Venice.
the obedience to the leadership had to be seen as the most important condition to follow Christ and to remain in the movement. It was a sort of new foundation of the movement, in which even the name had to be changed: from GS to Communion and Liberation (CL), in order to underline the end of a story and the beginning of a new one (Camisasca 2001 and 2004; Bianchi 1984, Ottaviano 1986).

This new beginning had important consequences on the development of the movement. The cultural position of CL became more and more reactive to the positions of the Italian leftist groups coming out from the '68 and the exclusive religious objectives became more explicit in every activity. Three kinds of activities were developed in this period: 1) Providing profit and non profit services for students’ everyday needs, such as bookshops or canteens, as well as for families’, such as schools, social assistance for children, housing services, job placement services; 2) Fostering cultural campaigns to promote the visibility of CL identity and values, through the creation of magazines, book publisher and conferences; 3) Entering the political arena to elect CL representatives in political institutions, in order to facilitate the movement economic activities and to promote its cultural campaigns at the same time.

2.3. Reaching the political power

In 1975, CL created a new organization to coordinate its political activities: the Popular Movement (MP). With this name, CL entered the ruling party of the time, Christian Democrats (DC) and started to elect some of its members in the city councils, regional assemblies and even national and European parliaments. Most of them managed to become important leaders of DC and to reach important government positions at a local level during the ‘80s (Camisasca 2003). In ‘92-’93, as DC was practically destroyed by corruption scandals in which even some MP members were involved, CL decided to step down from politics for a while. MP was closed to wait and see how the Italian political system would evolve after the crisis of ‘92-’93.

Moreover, in the late ‘80s, a new organization was created inside CL, to coordinate its economic activities: Compagnia delle Opere (Company of Works – hereinafter, CdO, as it is informally called). This organization gained more and more importance within the movement, as Don Giussani, in 1987, indicated the horizontal subsidiarity, which means the concrete organization of local action to support economic and social activities, as path of political commitment. When Popular Movement was closed, CdO was seen as the holder of the MP legacy.

When a new bipolar equilibrium was reached, in 1995, the most part of CL members chose to support the centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi and started a new political strategy. In 1997, former of Popular Movement president Roberto Formigoni entered Berlusconi’s party, Forza Italia. Inside this party, Formigoni also founded one of its most powerful political currents, even after Forza Italia merged into a wider rightist Italian party. Apart from the national strategy, in local areas where the centre-right was very weak, even some centre-left leaders received the support of CL (Pinotti 2010).

Since then, CL focused its political energies on the regional level, as the institutional reforms of the ’90s had devolved many resources and powers to regions. In 1995, CL managed to candidate one of its leaders, Roberto Formigoni, as governor for Lombardia, Italian richest and most populated region, where CL is has a strongest power - and to win against the centre-left coalition. Then, CL was able to place its members all over the huge

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6 The Formigoni’s current in the new party (PdL) is called Rete Italia. It has been founded in 2000 at the Rimini Meeting (see Rete Italia website).
administrative regional bureaucracy, to provide a lot of resources to its profit and non-profit services by reforming subsidiarization public policies\(^7\) and to build a very effective consensus strategy which allowed Formigoni to be re-elected four times and to reach the record as the longest region president of Italian history.

Now CL is widely known as the leader of Lombardy politics, and one of the most powerful groups of Berlusconi’s party. Furthermore, Formigoni is expected to be one of the likely successor of Berlusconi as the next centre-right coalition leader.

3. CL self- and politics representation

A movement identity could be studied in several different ways (Voegtli 2009). In this paper, we decided to focus on CL self-representations by analysing the official monthly international magazine Tracce – Litterae Communions\(^8\) and by comparing the academic literature on the topic. Specifically, we focus on CL representations of: CL, religion and religion in society, instruments of social and political change, aims of political changes (idea of the common good), and, eventually, politics and political commitment.

3.1 How CL defines the movement itself

Since the beginning, CL self-definition revolved around the mission of education. It was indeed a movement developed in secondary schools, focused on the support for the youth (see the previous section; Bianchi and Turchini 1975). Facing the transformations of modernity, GS was conceived to have a specific focus on youth education, by taking care of their enquiries and difficulties of becoming adults. Moreover, after the 1968 internal crisis, GS redefined its priorities by stressing once again the mission of education and by claiming to be a-political (Centro Operaio, 1975; Saraceno and Rusconi 1970). CL (1969) never lost its focus on education: to be involved into the movement means, first of all, to attend the weekly catechesis ‘School of Community’. During the years, the education principle slightly enlarged its targets and meanings, including adults as well as youngsters. The most important moment in the movement life is the annual Meeting, which takes place in Rimini at the end of the summer. The Meeting is a moment of collective debates, and several important public and political personalities are invited to give a speech\(^9\).

The movement also includes some internal groups, that could be considered as inner circles. The Fraternity\(^10\) (more than 50,000 people, according to CL website) consists of several local groups of people and families who share religious commitment by attending to Fraternity meetings (including an annual retreat) and contributing, financially and otherwise, to Fraternity initiatives. Another organisation is the Fraternity of St. Joseph, whose members live their vocation through virginal devotion (poverty, chastity, and obedience) and periodical

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\(^7\) In the meanwhile, during the ‘80s and ‘90s, CL economic activities grew and were structured in a consortium of companies, until becoming the largest economic consortium of Lombardy.

\(^8\) Tracce is published in 11 languages. Each edition consists of some ‘local’ or country/area-specific articles and of some shared articles (translated). Our analysis focused on the Italian edition.

\(^9\) In 2011 (32\(^{e}\)) edition, for instance, the Meeting will host, among many others: the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano; the Chief Executive Officer of Intesa San Paolo banking group Corrado Passera; Tiziano Treu (PD, Democratic Party, cent-r-left) senator and former Minister of Labour and Social Security; Maurizio Sacconi (PDL, Party of Freedoms, centre-right) Minister of Welfare.

\(^10\) It was recognized as a Lay Association of Pontifical Right on February 11, 1982.
meetings. Also Memores Domini live in virginal devotion\textsuperscript{11}. Moreover, members of Memores Domini, which is a private association, totally devote themselves to God and live together, sharing all their wages and goods, with the mission of embodying Christianity in their work-life. CL-related groups also include two clergy associations: the priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St Charles Borromeo, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption.

The Company of Work (Compagnia delle Opere) was founded in 1986, ‘The Company of Works unites in a network tens of thousands of members between small and medium-sized businesses, charitable and cultural associations, and not-for-profit organizations with headquarters in Italy and abroad’ (CL website). Their members are not necessarily involved in CL life, like members of the other groups, but ‘do religion’ through their work. The Company of Works has a crucial role within CL, since it is an example of devotion within the economic field. Moreover, the movement of CL has been always based on friendship and mutual support: therefore, a network of businesses and charities also provides opportunities and services to members. The CdO is meant to be not just an association of business, but, as its former president, Giorgio Vittadini, explains, ‘it is first of all a place of passionate discourses about personal and others’ experiences [… ] where to share the deepest enquiry on the meaning of work as well as the most trivial questions on everyday working life.’ (124s_g00).

CdO is a network connecting businesses and charities, to make real the presence of religion even in the economic field.

To specify the organisational structure and the goals of CdO, Vittadini clearly states:

‘The first project of CdO concerns the single business and it is carried out by the single associate. Starting from our shared ideals, everyone tries to make their business an example of creativity and charity, respecting the market rules. The second project, that is in fact both a desire and an encounter, is accomplished when our associates join a network of operative friendship in order to promote jobs, development and solidarity. […] Services that we are developing are meant to support everybody’s development. Today, we want these services to support families and youngsters, too: this is the aim of CdO Persona. Associations of individuals (attorneys, accountants, physicians, nurses, dentists, architects, pharmacists) make even the professionals important actors of CdO, similarly to the medieval guilds. From Avsi to Co.Export, the European Network of Ge.Fi. develops, finally, the idea of a foreign CdO. Many of the entrepreneurs of CdO, as well as in their own businesses, invest in what is commonly called "welfare", i.e. in those works related to the needs of all. They are works of charity, education, culture, that are not supported by ‘professionals’ of volunteering, but by entrepreneurs who understand the need to help through their capacities and means also the development of others. Finally, in recent years the ‘political’ weight of the CdO has increased, not as a power but as a judgment and cultural proposal. Interventions on school and non-profit, and the introduction of the word "subsidiarity" in the Italian Constitution are examples of the CdO historical incidence also on the shape of Italian State. The "less State, more Community" could be more than just a dream. In Lombardy and in other regions is already a meaningful reality, let us just think about the educational vouchers, the freedom of choice in healthcare and assistance. These are our plans for the near future.’ (117s_n01).

CL movement teaches the faith as a commitment that involves all the aspects of everyday life, from working hours to school hours. At the same time, at the foundation of the event of faith there is an encounter, that is basically a friendship bond. The ‘adventure of life’ is something that has to be shared with others and the CdO provides a space for an encounter based on the working experience. It also constitutes an important business network, which provides entrepreneurs and professionals services and connections.

\textsuperscript{11} Don Giussani was not very supportive at their birth, since he promoted families and involvement in daily life of communities, while Memores Domini are quite secretive and similar to the Opus Dei numeraries (Pinotti 2010; CL website).
From its beginning, CL insisted on the idea of living the faith not in specific time and places, but in everyday life. Therefore ‘Environmental Communities’ were established: groups of people working or studying in the same places or living in the same hoods join together, overcoming role and age differences. In this way believers could find faith-friends with whom share the responsibility of making the faith something real and concrete in the places of everyday life. In other words, there is a focus on territory and life circles. The movement does not confine itself to a specific place, but permeates every aspects of believers’ life. The proposal of a living, revolutionary faith, involves the total commitment of adherents. Even though there is no explicit membership (except for formal groups), the involvement extends over the whole of life experience; thus it seems very difficult to leave the movement, and especially the inner circles (see Marzano 1997). CL describes itself as an inclusive movement. In the words of Lorenzo Oragnhi (provost of Milano Catholic University since 2002) ‘CL has been able to affect the Italian history starting from the idea of people: in front of the intellectualism of the power elite, the popular dimension becomes an option of inclusion, within a country based on fighting factions and that distrusts every unification attempt.’ (21ps_g05).

The movement is internal to the Catholic Church, and the leader Don Giussani always insisted on the importance of the obedience to Church teachings and hierarchies, and of cooperation with other catholic church-related movements. Italian Catholic Church is indeed composed of several internal currents and organisations, so much so that Diotallevi defines Italy as a Catholic monopoly where internal competition flourishes (2002).

With respect to the relation with the Church, CL underlines the differences between movements and institutions. While the Church has the function of protecting Catholic tradition, the ecclesial movements have the role of giving life and concreteness to faith, as well as to evangelical mission. Tracee meaningfully publishes the speech of Pope John Paul II in occasion of a Vigil for the 2000 Jubilee, in order to show Pope’s approval to the movement.

‘One of the gifts of the Spirit to our time is certainly the flourishing of ecclesial movements which, from the beginning of my Pontificate, I continue to give as a reason for hope for the Church and for men. They "are a sign of the freedom of forms in which the one Church reveals itself, and they surely represent a novelty which has still to be adequately understood in all its positive effects for the Kingdom of God at work in the history" (Teachings, VII/2 [1984], p.696). In the celebrations of the Great Jubilee, especially those of 1998, dedicated in particular to the Holy Spirit and his sanctifying presence within the Community of Christ's disciples (cf. Tertio Millennium Adveniente, n. 44), I rely upon their common witness and collaboration. I trust that they, in communion with the Pastors and in liaison with the diocesan projects, would like to bring their charismatic, and, therefore, educational and missionary experience, in the heart of the Church, as a valuable experience and a model of Christian life.’

In this perspective, ecclesial movements are not in competition with the Church. On the contrary, they work in connection with the clergy in order to support its presence in contemporary societies.

The aim of CL is to educate people to Christian faith as an event, something that continuously occurs and renews itself. In this perspective, CL is strictly connected to Catholic Church activities, but, in a way, it is different. Speaking to Memores Domini, for instance, Don Giussani maintains that ‘The lord enlightened His people. Better, He enlightened His elected; I always think that we are elected. May the Lord enlighten this people, without whom I am not myself” (15r_a06). Thus, CL seems to share with other religious movement the idea to be the elected people, the vanguard of the God’s realm (see Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2006).
The very identity of CL, as we said, revolves around its ‘pedagogic method’, which invites people to re-discover the faith as an event. The strength of the movement, as it appears from its members’ words, is the ability of making religion alive, and using the faith as a challenge and a stimulus to engage with the reality. In that sense, we could define CL as a Catholic charismatic movement (Guolo and Pace 1998; Marzano 1997), with a strong identity and adherents’ internal commitment, a charismatic leader and a reactive attitude towards the secularization process.

3.2 Representation of religion.

CL defines religion as a total commitment. Religion is neither only a tradition, nor something private: it is a movement, a meaningful reality, a ‘total experience, since Christianity deals with everything’ (59pv_f03).

CL proposes a ‘revolutionary faith’: the basic idea is that believing involves embodying religion and religiously living every aspects of life. Religion is a challenge, since it implies a rebellion towards the world. ‘Thus, even the mother in the discretion of her house and the shy boy in his classroom, by the very fact of having met Christ and he repeated in the twilight of their heart the same "Yes" to St Peter’s, carry out a rebellion against slavery the world and set the point of recovery of freedom.’ (editorial_g96). Faith is a rebellion, in CL’s words, since it means to engage the world’s living rules by religion. As an exponent of CL in America Latina explains ‘the values of this worlds are not our values. If we let us to be determined by the values of this world, we will be determined by society expectations, and not by what is true.’ (14pv_a10). Thus, religion is not generated by fear: on the contrary, it is a challenge since it pushes the humankind to question the sense and the meaning of their lives.

To be religious, in CL founder’s opinion, is to really engage with religion, without considering it as a part of daily life that protect people from sorrows and despair. Religious commitment implies a real and full commitment. ‘The encounter with Christ is not a sort of "after work" that stands alongside the daily life of man. Nor it is a kind of "spiritual fulfilment" that prepares the men to better cope with their daily life. On the contrary, it is the event in which all human experience is understood in its whole truth, and made liveable in its complete positivity.’ (26ps_n04).

Religion is not an inherited and stable tradition but a living faith. CL refuses the idea of spirituality and tradition. At the same time, religion is not something distant and belonging to a different set of reality. Religion has to be lived in everyday life, as this editorial clearly states:

‘To the men of our time, God--according to the teaching of centuries of philosophers and religious masters--seems to be reachable only by way of a long and complicated spiritual journey. […] The majority of people remain a bit timorous and perplexed. And in the end, among the pressures of daily life, they stop raising for themselves the problem called God. Or else they tend to listen to the many false masters who lay out for them a more accessible spiritual path, one more comfortable, less demanding. And so, especially in times of insecurity and anxiety, many proposals for the soul are offered, many “ways” to God or to well-being or to balance, in an undifferentiated melting pot. […] man is not made of pure “spirit,” he is not a being who lives from the clouds up. Every day, man has to deal with other men in flesh and blood, with things having to do with problems of survival and growth. If God were something that lies at the end of a difficult and confused spiritual journey, then He would be a sort of disaster and the search for Him would be an action full of obstacles, a heart-breaking contradiction to living--as though being close to God meant, in a certain sense, being less men.’ (editorial_d02).

Since God embodied in a man, the only way to reach God is through the human, in CL’s opinion. Therefore to be religious means to fully live their times and societies.
The intergenerational transmission of the faith has to be made by the example, by the works, and by encouraging the youngsters to ask themselves what is religion. In this perspective, the religious path is not spiritual, but daily and material. Religion makes people free. The pedagogic method encourages people to use religion and faith as a meter of evaluation of everything. Thus, is not science, ideology, nor even religious tradition that teach people the facts of life, but life itself, by experience.

‘He [Don Giussani, N.d.A.] said the students: "I do not want to convince you of my ideas, but I want to give you a method by which you can see whether my ideas, and others’, are right or wrong." The method, that we also learned, is precisely the screening of elementary experience; it is the opposite of clericalism, which wants to convince in the name of a non-verified authority. Clericalism is: "You must believe me because I am a priest, or more frequently because I am a professor, a judge or a scientist," not because I witness something that will be true to you too’ (19ps_d05).

In other words, the experience is what allows everybody to learn and discover the truth. Juan Carron, the current leader of CL after Don Giussani’s death, explains that ‘we should focus on experience, otherwise we will always need the expert, a supplement of truth outside the evidence of experience […] we would take the reasons from outside the experience, but in this way everything would collapse and, even worst, Christianity would prove to be useless’ (11_m11). As a consequence, for CL adherents the ‘School of Community’ and the moments of common prayer are very important.

In this perspective, religion is not a list of values and ideals: ‘The Jesus of intellectuals, reduced to either a prophet of a utopian and never achieved socialism, or a kind of deliver of an obvious goodness, is useless. It may be useful for debates, for journalistic contentions, or to tickle the human desire of a myth or hero’ (editorial_m07). There is a clear criticism to ‘intellectuals’. CL presents itself as anti-intellectual, by valorising first-hand knowledge.

Religion makes itself real through ‘the Works’. In that way, to be a Christian means to do Christianity. Religiously engaged people have the mission to educate by the example, and to help others by the works. Therefore the network of services and support, like housing and job placement services, is very important, since it allows adherents to concretely answer to people needs. Tracce is rich of exemplary stories, such as a young activist who during an electoral campaign helped a homeless to find a job (1pv_g11). Religion is inherently a relation, therefore friendship is a part of religious experience. CL adherents call themselves ‘friends’ and they often tell that the recruitment is based on friendship.

As a consequence, religion is not private. Indeed, the public presence is what characterises CL as a movement, since ‘the separation between faith and life, between the doctrine of faith and the reasons of choices is the worst tragedy that could happen to a Christian’ (26ps_n04). First of all, religion is a friendship, hence the role of community is very important for CL. And, second, religion involves all the aspects of life and has to be witnessed in every gesture. Christianity, in CL vision, is not a private faith.

‘The Christian is not a comfortable observer of someone else’s match, since “in any case he already knows how things stand.” Christians are not persons who think they are already living in Paradise. We get mixed up in things like everybody else, in the approximations and contradictions that touch every human, personal, social, and political situation. Any position of detachment, of not wanting to get involved in facing problems, masks a presumptuousness about the Christian’s mission–as if the judgment that arises from faith coincided with a devaluation of the circumstances of personal, social, and political life. Faith moves a man to realism, not to Utopian flight. In taking a position within the events of the world, those who are touched by the Christian event are more restless in searching for adequate and profound reasons and in keeping in mind all the factors at stake. As they confront social and political questions, they will find themselves next to men who are fighting on the same side for more superficial or partial reasons. But this is no cause for them to leave the field.’ (editorial_n01).
The role of religion in society is that of remembering that everything comes from God, and to bring questions and answers into the public sphere, pushing the politics to pursue the common good. Religion is public, and ‘Those who have long preached a division between personal and church life, between the spiritual and the temporal spheres, between religious practice and political commitment, find themselves today indicating as the sole criterion for choice a table of values as vague as it is abstract, malleable as chewing gum, often useful only for hiding quite other motives.’ (editorial mz00). On the contrary, religion has to be public and to state clearly the ‘right direction’.

CL describes the faith as a challenge that continuously enquires reality. Thus, religion is a choice. In that perspective, the success of CL and its appeal may be also connected to the major changes which affected the Western religious landscape at large, specifically, the way of living religion as a personal choice (see, for instance, Berger 2001 and 1969; Davie 1994; Hervieu-Léger 1999; Roof 1993; Wuthnow 1992). Nevertheless, the contents of faith cannot be described with the categories of ‘religion-à-la-carte’, or ‘patchwork religion’ (Hervieu-Léger 1999; Schlegel 1995; Wuthnow 1998 and 1992). On the contrary, faith contents of CL are clearly stated.

Therefore Catholic religion, as CL describes it, is a challenging faith. CL adherents see themselves as people continuously engaged and committed. Religion is something to fight for, and at the same time the very reason for commitment. The very idea of movement reflects this vision, since the movement is something that is on going.

3.3 How things change: the role of religion in society.

Even though CL presents itself as a revolutionary faith, it does not search for dramatic changes. On the contrary, changes have to be incremental, by works, and by example: in a word, for CL, by education. Speaking of a charity, a columnist explains that ‘In the works, those who work and are assisted are not a victim of an anonymous and impersonal care; they are continuously encouraged to live their freedom: the daily practice of education, intended as an introduction to reality as a whole, supports any initiative.’ (98s n06). Thus, charities and mutual support become evident through businesses and services network, addressed to adherents and beyond. Changes are made ‘one by one, person by person’ (1pv g11).

‘Forces that changes the history are the same forces that change men’s hearts’ said Don Giussani, and his sentence is quoted in several articles (see 1l m11). The roots of a real change are to be found in attitudes changes. In turn, attitudes changes come from education to religion and to religious event.

Starting form this idea of change, the role of religion in society is crucial: churches and religious movements have to take their place into the public sphere, and engage themselves in the whole of the society arenas.

‘Clearly, if the Church would like to obtain the power consensus, it should do something very simple: deal only with issues "above the clouds", having anything to do with history, and consider only the so-called spiritual issues, leaving the temporal ones to others. As if the Spirit was an inert, sterile, ineffective force. […]

Instead, the opposite happens, for two reasons:
- first, the Church judges and will judge the things of history because it is present in the world bringing the experience, and therefore the point of view, of a people, a sociologically detectable part of a reality - "ethnic entity sui generis," as Paul VI passionately repeated in July 75 - characterised by a power from on high, that of the event of Christ crucified and risen;
- secondly, and this is what is most "annoying", the factors that drive the experience, and the judgments it generates, are not ultimately related to the criteria of all the other "parties": there is no calculation of political and social advantage, there is no strategy to achieve hegemony in society, nor there is a concern to be à-la-page, that is the search for consensus. The first factor that moves the action of the Church in the
world is the obedience to Christ present in his mysterious body, the empathy - which is a conversion - with His own "incredible" love for mankind and its history.

One, in fact, is the concern of the Church in its movement within the world’s affairs: that men do not offer their hearts and their reason to false gods, that is to say that the freedom and the value of the person must not be sacrificed on the altar of idols elusive as much as dominant, like fashion and the claim to absolute power of the state. When this conversion is alive in the men of the Church, they are necessarily, without intending to and without having to ask anyone's permission, to judge and spend generously for the good of all.’ (editorial_a98).

CL criticizes the very idea of separation between religion and anything else, because religion has to be the reason for every action and opinion. In this perspective, CL engages the debate over political secularism, by arguing for a strong presence of religion in politics. The very idea of political secularism is Christian, in CL words: Church and State have different tasks. But political secularism has to guarantee the public presence of religion. Not only religion has the right of speaking in the public sphere: indeed, it is its duty and part of its identity.

In CL’s opinion, religion (Catholic religion) is the answer to world’s troubles. Moreover, during the celebrations for the 150° anniversary of Italian State, several articles pointed out the positive role of religion in the construction of democracy, despite the Breach of Porta Pia and the Non expedit encyclical12. Apart from history, to describe the contemporary role of Christianity in multicultural societies Tracce reports the words of an Egyptian Jesuit, professor at Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut and at the Pontificio Istituto Orientale in Rome, expert of Christianity-Islam relations, and director of a book series about Arab-Christian cultural heritage for Jaca Book (the publishing house related to CL).

‘For European Christians this is the moment of a dual challenge that comes from Islam (especially in its radical versions) and from secularization: Islamists shout "faith" as though it were a magical formula and point to modernity as the devil that corrupts religious purity; supporters of a secular state ['laicists', N.d.A.] reply that faith is an obstacle to modernity, a brake on the use of reason to its full capacity. The Christian who lives faith in all its dimensions is both secular and believer at the same time, and can testify that faith and reason go hand in hand, that the believer does not have to give up anything of modernity, except the claim that he can do without God, and that in order to believe, he has no need of a confessional State.’ (32ps_d99).

Thus, in the words of CL exponents Christianity has to teach the real way of democracy. In this perspective, the role of religion in society has to be protected, since it allows to give a meaning to laws and rules. Tracce articles often quote Bockenforde on the limits of the modern State. The debate over the role of religion in public sphere usually emerges in connection to the debates about international politics, specifically the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. CL maintains that both war and pacifism are wrong, since they both ignore the role of God in society: the war is wrong, but even those who endorse self-determination of nations are wrong, because only God can save the world. It is only the recognition of being dependent from another that make people aware of their responsibilities towards society and the common good.

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12 The Italian State foundation included a struggle against the Holy See, who published Non Expedit encyclical (1868) in order to prevent Catholics to take part into Italian politics. The institution of the Italian Kingdom included the conquest of Vatican State (Breach di Porta Pia 1870). As a matter of fact, Italy is often listed among the States where the establishment of political secularism included a struggle with religious institutions.
3.4 More society, less State: the idea of the common good

Societies change by citizens’ education and incremental transformations. CL’s idea of common good is expressed by the statement ‘more society, less state’. Human freedom is the basic value of society, in CL words: therefore it has to be protected and the instrument of protection is the principle of subsidiarity.

The key themes of contemporary societies, their challenges, in CL vision are: ‘the respect for life from the earliest to the last moments, the defence of the family founded on marriage between a man and woman, the development of an economy that takes account of the person and the environment, the principle of subsidiarity, the parents' right to the freedom of education for their children’ (84s_m07).

Following the social doctrine of the Catholic Church introduced by Pope Leo XIII, CL recalls in several articles the relation between Christianity (Church social doctrine) and subsidiarity, which affirms the duty of balancing between the State and the Market, and the necessity of considering individuals the very centre of society. In CL opinion, the principle of subsidiarity means the primacy of society on the State. In other words, the State has to support people’s freedom of choice in education, healthcare and social assistance. It is clear, from what we said so far, that education is one of the key themes, for CL. But subsidiarity has a larger extent. In an interesting article about the criteria of electoral behaviour for CL adherents, Vittadini affirms:

‘The ideal guidelines of public choices are synthetically three. The first is the old statism, that for someone seems to never go down, and for someone else seems to represent the possibility of a new local power. According to this approach, the government should, by itself, meet all the public policy needs, by directly managing every service it is responsible for, while each private action is labelled as a source of distortion of public funds and against the interest of the people, especially the poor. In contrast, the existing state system operating in our country for decades, produced budget deficits no longer sustainable, inefficiency and low quality services, as well as high income and political dominance for politicians who are full of promises, and yet unable to handle their tasks. The second approach is that of wild privatization, which considers the mere dynamics of the market forces as capable of responding to social problems. This approach does not consider the failure of the first privatization processes in our country (bipartisan!), the responsibility for these ideas in the financial crisis of recent years and, especially, that certain social goods can not be managed to maximize profit for shareholders. A third set of criteria with which to manage the "public" is that of subsidiarity based on solidarity, which involves an alliance between the public, private and social realities and stresses the value of the active initiatives of everyone for the common good.’ (3pv_m11).

Therefore subsidiarity is considered as a way of managing the public for the common good, which is the guarantee of individual freedom. It is a modernization of solidarity as a ‘third way’ between capitalism and state-oriented economy. In this perspective subsidiarity is seen as a way of protecting individuals and social initiatives from both the state and the market. It is worth pointing out that the reference to subsidiarity is quite recent in CL discourses. The first wave of the literature, instead, highlights different topics and key themes: education, individual freedom, and political commitment. Only in late 80s subsidiarity became an important element in CL discourse.

3.5 Political involvement as a part of religious commitment.

The representation of politics is clearly expressed in the CL website.

‘In a committed Christian experience the political dimension naturally descends from the cultural dimension. Political action, in the conception of CL, is one of the fields in which a Christian is called with greater responsibility and ideal generosity to verify the unifying criterion that guides his existence in
the face of the problems posed by the life of society and institutions. God gave men power so that they could work in His creation through the commitment of their own talents, family, and society, to the point of that “demanding form of charity” – as Pope Paul VI called it – which is politics. It should thus not be surprising that out of CL have come people engaged on various levels, directly and on their own responsibility, in political action.

In particular, following the line marked out by the Church’s social doctrine, what gives life to Christian commitment in politics is the defence of that highest good which is freedom, a necessary condition so that man can seek adequate answers to what his heart desires and his needs demand. The political action typical of the person educated in the Movement must tend, thus, to create the conditions so that the individual and society, in the whole of its activities of production, culture, and association, are not diminished or penalized by a statist view or by a position of privilege granted only to some for reasons of power.

As this quotation clearly shows, politics and political commitment is a crucial element of the faith experience, since religion involves the whole of a human being. In this perspective, religion is neither a ‘list of values’, nor something ‘private’. On the contrary, the truly religious experience requires to be active in every field of life.

Answering to the allegations of a political-religious movement, eager to conquer political power, the influential member of CL Vittadini, underlines that: ‘Our role is and will be forever that of a movement which educates to a desire, builds works, and enquires politics starting from contents, it will never be that of a political current, nor of a political party’ (41b_s00).

The political commitment leads to identify some key themes: education, subsidiarity, solidarity. We report an interesting debate published on Tracce, about the differences between No Global and CL young adherents.

‘Martino, from Brianza, asks: ‘Like the No Global, we want the peace, we want a better world, we help the poor. So, which is the difference between us and them? Vittadini: Men are the desire of happiness, but we bear the original sin. Matter is: who gives you the peace? Because we lack this capability. This is the difference between us and them: we lack the capability of peace, it does not come from an analysis, from a thought. We have to find someone who gives us the peace, who enables the forgiveness. Think that Jesus gives Pietro, who betrayed him, the Church! Like a friend who smashes up the car you lent him…you will never lend it again…On the contrary, Jesus gave once again the car to Pietro, and the garage too! He left his legacy to a betrayer. How may Hebrews and Palestinians live together after they kill each others’ children? There must be a greater, superhuman strength! What makes us different is our recognition that every man has to be set free. There are no ‘the good ones’ and ‘the bad ones’, the evil West and the good East, the bad bribers, and the good judges, the good pro-Third World and the evil entrepreneur. There is the man, who is a sinner, bearing this fatigue: he wants the good, but he cannot make it. Who will free us from evil?’ (59pv_f03).

As it stands, the choice of supporting a political party does not came by definition. CL maintains that it support ‘friends who share our positions. Between the two political sides there is no doubt that the Polo [right, N.d.A.] has been more engaged in these struggles [subsidiarity, freedom of education]’ (124s_g00). Indeed, at the national level CL strongly supported the right-wing parties. Nevertheless, apart from political support in electoral campaigns, CL cooperated with left-wing politicians, especially at the local level. Even though the political support is directed to right-wing parties, CL cooperates with whom is in charge, whatever their political position. In this perspective, as it is often reported, CL is a pragmatic movement, which is interested in having the possibility of pursue its aims, whatever the political condition.

However, CL exponents engage directly with politics and some of their exponents are elected in local, regional, national and international bodies. The commitment in politics, 13 http://www.clonline.org/storiertext/eng/comlibe/tredimen.htm
which is a way of engaging reality, is connected to the choice of a specific political party. CL presents itself as open, realistic, and ready to support whoever is close to its idea of the common good (as is has been expressed in the previous section). Nevertheless, they engage almost exclusively in PDL.

In a long interview, Formigoni (Memor Domini, according to Pinotti 2010, and president of Lombardia), clearly explains his political choices. At the time of the interview, PDL did not exist, and right-wing coalition (Polo) was composed by Forza Italia (Berlusconi’s party) and Alleanza Nazionale (right).

‘(Q) A year and a half ago you joined Forza Italia and some, especially in the Catholic world, have been annoyed by this choice. Why a Catholic should, or may, engage in Berlusconi’s party?

(A) Because Forza Italia has joined the European People's Party, has been recognized as the heir of Europe's most important folk tradition of Christian inspiration. And it is a party in which a Catholic like me has found other Catholics, but also secular liberals and reformists with whom to fight the same battles in defence of principles in which I have always believed. […]

(Q) Now at stake is the question of the alliance of Polo with the Lega Nord and Lista Bonino. Unions against nature because of the imperfect electoral system or alliances coming from real political affinities?

(A) Lega Nord and Lista Bonino are two different things. With the Lista Bonino I do not think we will arrive at an alliance, because there are too many differences. For the Lega Nord is different: it is a popular and "populate" party that has always voted our bills on the themes of life, family, and educational freedom. It's a party that had to choose, which could not be alone: either go with the left, or with the Pole. It chose the Polo, it has chosen to vote for our candidates in regional elections.’ (122s_mz00).

The justification of alliances on the basis of common ideas and as a mean for achieving political objectives is a specific concern for CL. Especially the alliance with Berlusconi posed some problems, even though CL has always been able to gain advantages from Forza Italia (and then PDL) failures. For instance, when in 2005 regional elections the centre-left coalition obtained success, except for Lombardia and Veneto, CL underlined the role of Formigoni (and therefore CL itself) in ‘saving’ Lombardia. At the same time, through the words of Vittadini, a criticism was expressed to the ‘demagogy of the lonely leading man’ (49pv_a05). Nevertheless, CL always supported their allies. Even in the recent ‘Rubygate’ scandal it underlined the necessity of evaluating a government by its outcomes and not by moral (since every man is a sinner).

3.6 CL as a fundamentalist movement?

CL is indeed a successful movement, in terms of growth and legitimization. Stark’s model for the reasons of success points out the role of local opportunity structure. A religious movement is more likely to be successful if: its religious proposal is strictly connected to a major religious tradition, its relation with society has a medium level of tension, and its members could be seen as a casual sample of the population and not as outliers. Moreover, a movement to be successful has to be able to: trigger an effective mobilization of its members, build and maintain dense and stable network of activists, socialise and educate young members, react to secularisation process. Finally, favourable condition are a non-regulated religious-market, a weak religious tradition, and the possibility of achieving a visible success within a generation (Bainbridge 1997: 411). Even though we do not follow the religious economy perspective, these elements of success could be a useful starting point for the analysis of CL. Even considering the literature on social movements, such as the theory of

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14 Lega Nord is a xenophobic party, allied of the right-wing coalition.
15 Lista Bonino was connected to Radicali Movement, whose political priority are freedom issues quite distant from catholic religion, such as abortion or medically assisted procreation.
resources mobilization (see McCarthy and Zald 1977 for a discussion) and the ‘new social movement theory’ (Melucci 1980), CL is characterised by a strong identity and a powerful network for resources mobilization.

As for the movement characterization, CL has been described, in recent and international literature, by using the category of ‘fundamentalism’ (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2006; Guolo and Pace 1998; Pace 1998). Following the definition of the *Fundamentalist Project* (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2006), we can identify nine fundamentalism basic features. With respect to the ideological features, the project defines as fundamentalist a movement that: (1) has a reactive attitude towards secularization process; (2) has a selective approach towards both the religious tradition they belong to, and the modernity; (3) has a Manichean/binary perspective; (4) has an absolute faith in the infallibility of religious ‘foundational characters’; (5) has a messianic attitude. As for the organisational characters, the project points out: (6) the definition of members as ‘elected’, or ‘chosen’; (7) strict boundaries; (8) authoritarian structure; (9) control over the time and space. CL has, indeed, some characters of fundamentalism: it is a transformative movement with specific boundaries. The aim of CL is to religiously engage with the society, by living religion in the whole of life circles. Indeed, the adhesion to the movement is very inclusive, since the movement provides to all people’s necessities: friendship, job, and housing placement. The transformative attitude could be exemplified by the commitment in healthcare system, that in Lombardy, due to the introduction of subsidiarity (Gori 2005), is a quasi-monopoly of CL-related structures. Nevertheless, the ideological characters of CL seem to be less in a fundamentalist framework. First, it had no problem in leader substitution, because Don Giussani himself appointed Julian Carron as the next leader. Second, the relation with modernity and society at large has reactive features, but the attitude toward society is more missionary than messianic.

Moreover, even though the fundamentalism category could be useful in describing CL as a movement, there is a lack of insights in the specific organisational structure, especially the network of economic and charity activities, and in the specific relations with the Italian political system.

In order to better understand the reasons for the success of CL, we decided to include in the analysis a specific focus on the political opportunity structure. At the beginning of CL story, in the Catholic world the teaching of the philosopher Maritain about political secularism and the separation between religion and society were quite widespread (Centro Operaio 1975). CL engaged this separation frame, by claiming for a religious commitment in the whole of everyday life. Therefore their political and economics presence follows consequently and consistently the willingness of a living faith. And since the base of the human adventure is the relation between individuals, CL built up a Christian network operating in every field of society. The changes in the political system, indeed, really affected the relations between CL and politics, as well as the possibility for CL to effective acting in the political and public spheres.

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16 For a discussion, see also Ozzano (2009 and 2004) and Guolo and Pace (1998).

17 And more: an interesting article on Tracce, for instance, provide secondary school students who have to prepare the final exam with suggestions and clues.

18 With some huge exception, for instance the big hospital San Raffaele, leaded by the priest Don Verzé. The hospital is currently on financial troubles and the Vatican itself is trying to acquire it, even though a society connected to CDO was ready to come by.
4. The contextual reasons of a success

CL political success cannot be understood without looking at how the cultural vision and the organizational features of this movement interacted with the last thirty years political and cultural. The political opportunities approach (Tilly and Tarrow 2007) provide a useful framework to look at how the changing conditions of the Italian and European political landscape affect the relationships between CL and politics.

4.1. Localization and subsidiarization of policies

One of the most important elements in CL successful political action can be detected in the positive interaction between the attention paid by CL members to the local action and the general trend toward the localization and the subsidiarization of public policies (Brenner 2004; Ferrera 2005; Kazepov 2010).

Since in the 80s many European countries’ policy making has been affected by a rescaling process toward the local level. This process occurred in many policy domains, such as welfare, healthcare, education, industrial development, environmental policies. Among the different reasons of this process\textsuperscript{19}, we can mention: the State financial crisis and the consequent need of reducing the public expenditure by rescaling responsibilities to local administrations, the declining importance of a national state politics after the opening of the international markets in the ‘90s, the pressure from the EU institution to reshape the national institution through a subsidiarity principle\textsuperscript{20}.

The localization of policies not only shifted resources to the local administrations, but also gave more powers to local political elites. Being elected as a mayor of a local municipality or as a president of a regional administration became a way to control a higher amount of public budgets, a larger set of important administrative roles and a strongly prestigious position, in terms of media exposition and political consensus.

At the same time, the subsidiarization of public policies, and particularly the externalization of welfare services, has moved a huge part of the public expenditure resources from public driven structures to private firms, both for profit and non-for-profit, often triggering competition phenomena for resources (as it happens also in different systems, see for instance Scheitle 2009; Marwell 2004).

In this European framework, it is interesting to specifically analyze Italy at the beginning of the ‘90s. In this period, Italy faced the strongest crisis of its republican history, when a big corruption scandal destroyed the ruling parties, Christian Democrats and Socialist Party, and produced a high demand for change in the political and institutional system. This crisis of legitimization and the overall pressure to localization and subsidiarization provided the occasion for new actors to present themselves as subjects who could change the old political system. A strong demand for autonomy to local administrations from the central government came mainly from Lega Nord, (the Northern League party) that was becoming very powerful in those years by asking a federalist state reform (Biorcio 2003; Bellucci e Segatti 2011). At the same time an even stronger demand for civil society actors stronger was rising in the public discourse: the most important Italian newspapers, as well as the most popular opinion leaders, framed the civil society actors (non-profit associations, entrepreneurs, non-partisan professors and intellectuals) as those who could save Italian institution from the abusive presence of the old parties.

\textsuperscript{19} The causes of this process can be placed in different factors and the literature on the subject is still controversial.

\textsuperscript{20} Starting from the White Paper of Delors in 1993.
Italy then, was a suitable place for CL. Both the European trend to localize and subsidiarize policies and the old Italian political system crisis provided a great political opportunity to actors who could play as new political leaders and also to economic subjects who could provide service for the public sector. CL played both roles at the same time.

The movement could mobilize its large and disciplined grassroots network to support its leaders in local elections. During the years of the Popular Movement, and even after the birth and growth of CdO in the ‘90s, CL became more and more capable of influencing huge numbers of people in local areas, especially in the middle and little towns of Northern. This ended up being an exceptional instrument of political consensus in the local dimension.

Moreover, the localization of political powers is perfectly complementary to the idea, deeply rooted in CL culture, of building the common good not by pursuing a political project in a large scale and in the long term but by acting ‘here and now’ for local projects. With this straightforward ideology and its efficient political leadership, CL played a strong influence on policies at the local level and shaped some institutional reforms starting from its vision of the relationship between state and society.

4.2. The political space in the Second Republic context

There is another political opportunity that has helped CL becoming such a successful subject in Lombardy. It deals with the transformation of the Italian party system after the 1992-1993 crisis. In April 1993, when the corruption scandal had already destroyed the popularity of the traditional ruling parties, a referendum introduced a new electoral law based on the majority system. After this result, the parliament also changed the cities, provinces and regions electoral laws for cities, introducing the majority system and the direct election for mayors and local presidents. Until then, and for almost 50 years, Italy was a sort of a blocked democracy, with two big parties but no real competition between them (Galli, 1984), based on a proportional electoral system, on centrist coalitions running the national government and on a big Communist Party always on the opposition side. After these reforms, the Italian party system became polarized in two big coalitions both running for the national government: a centre-left coalition was composed mainly by political subjects coming from the traditional parties (former communists and the leftist part of the former Christian democrats) and a centre-right coalition mainly composed by Forza Italia, a brand new party led by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, Alleanza Nazionale (AN), the former neo-fascist party and Lega Nord (Northern League). In 1994 elections, just two months after its foundation, Forza Italia became the largest Italian party and the centre-right coalition won the national elections. The big electoral strength of Berlusconi’s party mainly came from the huge popularity of its leader and its great media power21, but the party itself lacked of a organization and of political leaders at the local level22.

In the first period after the 1993-1994 political revolution, CL political leaders gathered in a little party of former Christian democrats with no alliances and weak electoral strength. But they suddenly changed their mind. In 1995, two months before the regional elections, CL became allied to Forza Italia in order to candidate its leader, Roberto Formigoni as Lombardy President. The centre-right coalition won the regional elections in almost every Northern region and Formigoni became Lombardia’s President. It was his first time.

CL was able to take advantage of a rare political opportunity: Berlusconi’s party was a powerful electoral weapon but an almost empty political room. Joining his coalition, CL could easily fill this room through his well organized activists and skilled local leaders. It also

21 Berlusconi was, and still is, the owner of almost half of the national TV channels.
22 Forza Italia had been built in such a short period only through the organizational system of Berlusconi’s advertising company.
had the possibility of making its key themes a coalition priority. In these years, the movement gained a huge political power at the local level. Not only they conquered the Lombardia presidency, but they also managed to fill almost every top position in the administration and its most important branches, such as public hospitals, social service structures and the public agencies for financing the local industrial development (Pinotti 2010). From these positions, CL members could heavily influence the Region policy making process and promote a radical subsidiarization of many public services. By using a voucher system, they implemented a large program of services liberalization and externalization, mainly in healthcare, education, social services. Most of these subsidiarization processes were exactly crafted on the size of the CdO firms all over the region (Bifulco et al. 2008; De Leonardis 2011).

Moreover CL members could fill other important positions at the local level in Lombardia, both in big cities such as Milan and in middle towns in the most important areas of the region (Giorgi and Polizzi 2011). Through a coordinated action between local and regional CL administrators on one side, and local and supralocal economic networks (Tosi and Vitale 2011; Tajani 2011) on the other side, CL managed to be successful not only in the political action but also in the economic field.

4.3. The role of Catholic Church

If the particular dynamics of the Italian political landscape have a crucial role in explaining the great success of CL in Lombardia, we cannot forget another important factor that promoted CL action at the political level: the Pope and the Italian Catholic Church support.

Starting from the ‘70s, in the last years of the Paul VI pontificate and then under John Paul II’s, the new XX century Catholic movements, have been strongly promoted as a fruitful way to reinvigorate a weak Catholic Church: means to achieve a lay people radical engagement of lay people and a strict loyalty to the Pope and to the hierarchies. Therefore, CL was among the movements who received a strong endorsement from the Vatican. The visit of the Pope to CL annual Rimini Meeting in 1982 is the symbolic icon of this close relationship.

Moreover, at the beginning of the ‘90s, the president of Italian bishops, personally chosen by the Pope, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, started claiming for the need of a new public and visible presence of the Catholic church in the cultural arena. As the strong Catholic party that dominated the Italian politics for many decades (DC) was disappearing, the Catholic church tried to find again a central role in the Italian society, by developing a strategic and systematic use of every instrument in its control, in order to spread the voice of the hierarchy in the public arena and to defend the country Catholic identity. This operation was called the Cultural Project of the Italian Catholic Church.

CL was a perfect candidate to play this task. The idea of strongly pointing out the Catholic identity in every context had always been a remarkable feature of the movement (see section 3). The whole CL experience in the public debates (in universities, newspapers, as well as political debates), was a constant attempt to highlight the differences between Christian and non-Christian visions of reality. The movement great efforts to organize a nation-wide event, the Rimini Meeting, aimed at making the CL presence visible in the Italian society. Following his natural identity mission, CL generously helped the most important Catholic

23 CL members have been heads of the Urban planning in the Milan administration for the last 14 years.
24 We can mention just the most popular movements, such as Communion and Liberation, Focolarini, Neocatechumenal Way, Charismatic Renewal and, even if not officially acknowledged as a movement, Opus Dei (see Garelli 2006 and Pace 1988).
25 Among the instruments used by Card.Ruini, we can mention the bishops national newspaper L’Avvenire, the prestigious Catholic University in Milan, as well as a strong presence of the Bishops Conference in the Italian media.
26 In 2010, more than 800,000 people visited the meeting, according with the CL press office.
Church campaigns in the political arena, such as the pro-life campaign for the abortion referendum in 1981 and a second one against the medically assisted procreation referendum in 2005. At the same time, in the last 15 years the Catholic hierarchies frequently supported CL political leaders in local and national elections.

**Some conclusions**

Our research is at its first stages. Nevertheless we can draw some conclusions, starting from the analysis of the monthly magazine Tracce and the focus on the political opportunity structure.

In the sociological literature, CL has been studied either focusing on its political ideology, or as a religious movement (often defined as fundamentalist, or integrist). We decided to include also another perspective, by analysing the political opportunity structure.

First, we analysed CL self-representation, specifically focusing on political commitment as a part of religious engagement. In this perspective, we pointed out the basic elements of CL identity with respect to the movement itself, the representation of religion, and the representations of social and political changes. Introducing a specific focus on the political system allows the analysis to learn more on the relationships between religion and politics than on CL itself. Therefore, we highlighted the close relationships between the recent changes in the Italian political system and the reasons for CL success in Lombardia. Indeed, it has been a process of mutual adaptation and influence. The introduction of direct elections of regional governors and of subsidiarity principle allowed CL to gain a more important role in Lombardia political sphere. On the other side, these political opportunities pushed CL to stress subsidiarity as one of its basic features. As a matter of fact, the reference to subsidiarity principle is almost absent in the first analysis of CL ideology, which points out, instead, the topic of educational freedom and of political commitment.

The political success of a Catholic movement in a Western democracy is relevant to understand the changing role of religion in the political arena. We could say that the crucial role of religious groups in political life does not affect only the Islamic countries, but it is growing also in Western contexts such as Europe and the US. Christian movements can play a role of substitution of traditional political movement in countries where traditional parties became particularly weak and not capable of involving citizens. As many important authors pointed out in the last few years (Crouch 2004; Skocpol 2003; Putnam 2000; Stoker 2006), the political life of modern democracies is more and more affected by a diminished participation of people to the traditional political parties. Cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1994) live more on public and private funds than on the everyday work of activists. Their programs are less influenced by ideologies than by lobbies interests. In this context, religious groups promote an emotional and practical involvement of their members, giving them deep motivations and a strong sense of mutual solidarity. The organizational resources and the ideological framework of these groups can reinvigorate the grassroots politics that the old forms of solidarity are no longer able to guarantee. The success of CL, then, rely on a mix of ingredients that many traditional actors, such as parties, unions and social movements, are not able to mobilize anymore: a vibrant social life at the local level, a powerful ideology of its religious mission in the world, a disciplined and efficient organization of its political and economic activities and a strong alliances with supralocal religious, political and economic actors.

The analysis of CL in Lombardia, then, suggests us some important elements to research on religious movements in politics. Moreover, the analysis of both movement identity and political system allows a better understanding of the relationship between religious and political actors, and between religious actors and political system.
But the story of CL in Lombardia suggests also that something is changing in the relationship between national and local politics. CL is a locally rooted movement, able to have voice also in the national political sphere. The changes in the political landscape multiplied the territorial arenas of politics, distributing competences at different government level. Cities and larger urban areas are becoming the spaces where private collective actors place their political action in order to promote and defend their interests (Brenner 2004; Bagnasco and Le Galès 2000; Sassen 1991). The ability of playing at different territorial horizon by using local, regional and national political spheres to promote its topics and activities is a huge signal of both a capacity of adaptation to a changing political system and of influencing these changes. CL turned out being effective in its political action when supported by national actors, such as national political leaders (Berlusconi), national and international economic groups (CdO networks) and religious leaders (the Catholic Italian bishops and the Pope himself).

Therefore, in the analysis of a religious movement in politics it is important to consider not only the political system. Indeed, it seems crucial to consider how religious movements play in a multilevel political system. When analysing political secularism, for instance, literature usually takes into account the national level of separation between religion and politics. Nevertheless, the European subsidiarity principle gave room to inedited relations between religion and politics. As the analysis of CL suggests, the strategic attitudes towards politics are different at different political levels. At the national level, CL maintains relations with different political areas, especially through the annual Meeting, and gives its electoral support to the right-wing coalition. At the regional level, in Lombardia, where the movement has deep roots and a dense network, CL has been able to express the region governor and to influence legislation. Moreover, it has been able to locally establish a huge network of business and charity activities. In regions where the movement counts less members and activities, CL also cooperate with governments of other political colours. Thus, political strategy is different in relation to both political conditions and territorial horizon. This is the reason why we argue for a more in-depth analysis of politics-religion relationships at different territorial levels.

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