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Religious Diversity and Pluralism in Italy

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Introduction

Because of the flow of many people coming from various countries – more than 180 -around the world, to what extent the Catholic monopoly in Italy is challenged by an increasing degree of religious diversity? Roughly speaking, the question concerns the relation between religion and migration in Europe, in particular in the Southern countries, focusing on the switch from being countries of emigration to becoming countries of immigration. Secondly this process affects the peculiar religious structures of those countries. Many of them – like Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain¹ – for historical reasons are countries up to now with a dominant religion: Orthodox in Greece, Catholicism in the others.

The monopolistic structure of religious field in any case is now challenged by the increasing religious diversity. It means an increasing of the social complexity that implies a differentiation of the religious field in relation and tension with the dominant system of belief.

From theoretical point of view, it seems to me useful conceptualize the socio-religious change occurring in the Southern part of Europe according to system theory². The point of view of the theory of social systems seems to me particularly useful to analyze what happens in a society when its environment changes, becoming in many ways not easily attributable to the apparatus of social

¹ Vilaça, Helena. Furseth, Inger. Pace, Enzo. Pettersson, Per. *The Changing Soul of Europe*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2014 ; Perez-Agote, Alfonso (ed.). *Portraits du catholicisme en Europe*. Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

² Luhmann, Niklas. *Soziale Systeme*. Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987 (*Social System*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996); Luhmann, Niklas. *Introduction to Systems Theory*. Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 2012; Pace, Enzo. *Religion as Communication*. London, Routledge, 2011.





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cohesion and social control (political, ideological, economic and cultural) that could apply to a society relatively more stable and homogeneous. The risk of the entropy both for the society as a whole and for a Catholic institution is higher when the flow of immigrants coming from a variety of countries around the world is not homogeneous too. There is diversity within the diversity. Not only Islam, but Muslims; not only Orthodox Christians, but Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Moldovans, Greek, Russians Orthodox each with its own specific religious characteristics; not only people coming from Asia, but Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian Tamil and so on; not only Pentecostals, but African, Latin-American and Chinese Pentecostals with belonging to a plurality of different denominations.

Focusing on to the Italian case, the political system is called upon to rethink the way the State has traditionally managed the relations on the one hand with the Catholic Church - the dominant religion of the majority – and on the other with the other denominations considered minorities, *admitted* today to enter the public space legally ruled. It means the Italian way to manage the religious diversity. The peculiar policy of religious pluralism in Italy is another evidence of the relevant conceptual difference introduced by many scholars³.

The article is divided into two parts. In a first, I am intending to specify the contours of the issue of religious diversity. The second part will document with the help of maps of places of worship the spread of major new religions in Italy today.

1. The impact of the migration on the Italian society

I propose to analyze the social changes taking place in Italy from a particular angle, i.e. the passage from a society under a Catholic monopoly to one characterized by an unprecedented and unexpected religious pluralism. The maps illustrating the presence of several different religions from

³ Beckford, James T. Demerath Jay N. (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Sociology of Religion*, 316-348. Los Angeles, Sage, 2007; Doe, Norman. *Law and Religion in Europe*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; Richardson, James T. Bellanger, François (eds.). *New Religious Movements and Minority Faiths*. London, Routledge, 2014; Wuthnow, Robert. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.





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those of a typical Italian's *birth* (Catholicism) show how the country's social and religious geography is changing. Such a change is a major novelty in a country that has always seen itself as Catholic for long-standing historical reasons and also for deeply rooted and still strong cultural motives.

Despite the religious diversity that is beginning to make itself socially obvious, the Catholic Church continues to have a central role in the public arena, but it is beginning to realize that Italian society is *moving* on, not only because other religions are striving to gain visibility and public acknowledgement, but also because they are contributing in some cases to making the religious field more variegated.

The Catholic Church is a system of belief that is still well-organized, with a complex *potestas indirecta*⁴ in the sphere of political decision-making. This is the *religion of Italians' birth*. Albeit with growing difficulty, it has continued to withstand the onslaught of secularization, as an analysis on a representative sample of the population⁵ and an ethnographic study⁶ have recently confirmed. By comparison with other situations in Europe, Italy appears to have become secularized while remaining *faithful* to its image (in collective representational terms) as a Catholic country, thanks to the Church's organizational strength. It is no longer a Catholic country in terms of many Italian people's practices, but the collective myth of the Italians' Catholic identity⁷ still seems to hold. But the socio-religious shift is taking place: from a religious single culture to a novel form of religious diversity. This is a slow process that is going largely unnoticed, generating no particular tension or conflict (except for the case of the Muslim places of worship), but it is ultimately producing a change in the country's socio-religious geography. Italian people are no longer born inherently Catholic.

⁴ Poulat, Émile. L'Église romaine, le savoir et le pouvoir, in *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 1974, 37 : 5-21.

⁵ Garelli, Franco. *Gente di poca fede*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2020; Cipriani, Roberto. *L'incerta fede*. Milano, Franco Angeli, 2020.

⁶ Marzano, Marco. *Quel che resta dei cattolici*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 2012.

⁷ Garelli, Franco. Guizzardi, Gustavo. Pace, Enzo (eds.). *Un singolare pluralismo*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003.





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My aim in the following pages is to illustrate and describe this change with the aid of data collected in a study completed in 2012⁸, which enable us to go beyond mere generic estimates of the presence of other, non-Catholic religions in Italy to map the different places of worship, by region and by religious confession. Although the number of immigrants reached plus than 5 million in 2014 (accounting for 7% of the population), neither the central Italian Statistics Institute (ISTAT) nor the Ministry of the Interior have succeeded in providing a circumstantiated picture of the real presence of the various religions in the country, apart from the case of the Muslim places of worship, which are monitored by the police and the intelligence services on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior for reasons of public security. Indeed, this source provides a good starting point for examining and further analyzing the situation, as was done recently by Allievi⁹ and Bombardieri¹⁰.

Be that as it may, the 189 different nationalities of Italy’s immigrants make it plain that religious diversity is now part of our lives, at the local market, in our hospital wards, prisons and school rooms, at the offices of our local social services, and so on. Estimates may be a starting point, but they no longer suffice to give an accurate picture of Italy’s socio-religious geography, capable of *realistically* illustrating people’s experiences and their ways of belonging to a given religion. In other words, estimates cannot answer the question of what people that we formally classify as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Pentecostals, and so on, actually believe in.

We are beginning to gain an idea of the areas where the immigrants’ different religions tend to become concentrated, but we have only a very incomplete and imprecise map of their places of worship. These places are still not very obvious to the naked eye – to our cursory gaze, at least: though we are accustomed to recognizing a Catholic church at a glance, we are less well equipped to notice buildings that identify the presence of other, non-Catholic religions. Our eyesight has a role in

⁸ Pace, Enzo. *Religious Congregations in Italy: Mapping the New Pluralism*, in C. Monnot & J. Stolz (eds.). *Congregations in Europe*, Springer, Cham, 2018, 139-158.

⁹ Allievi, Stefano. *La guerra delle moschee*. Venezia, Marsilio, 2010.

¹⁰ Bombardieri, Maria. *Moschee d’Italia*. Bologna, EMI, 2012.



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religions. Our eyes reflect and record an orderly outside world, where we see things that are familiar to us.

To begin to really *see* how Italy’s socio-religious geography is changing, we must first go a step further, going beyond mere estimates of the different religious realities that have now become well-established in our country. Some religious communities show a marked degree of homogeneity, while others are differentiated even amongst themselves. It is easy to find information on the former, much more difficult for the latter (as in the case of the Muslim communities that refer to different associations, some of which represent the world of believers as a whole, while others are based on geographical origin). For some religions, despite some degree of differentiation, we can deal with the problem of obtaining a credible picture of their places of worship by relying on a network (that we have patiently constructed) of witnesses, who have provided addresses and other precious details.

Maps are used for travelling, and combined with a compass, they help us to orient ourselves in an effort to interpret the new map of religions in Italy. If somebody were to travel through Italy from north to south, and from west to east, they would certainly not be immediately aware of any Sikh temples or mosques, nor would they know how to recognize an Orthodox church (barring a few exceptions in Trieste or Venice, or in Bari or Reggio Calabria in the south, where there are churches that bear witness to the historical presence of flourishing Greek and Albanian Orthodox communities). They would be even less likely to stumble upon evidence of Hindu mandir or Buddhist temples, and would have virtually no chance of noting any African, South American or Chinese neo-Pentecostal Churches. While the African neo-Pentecostal Churches have been the object of a specific investigation¹¹, their Latin American and Chinese counterparts have remained in the background. A problem with the new Churches, moreover, lies in that it is very difficult to find them because they are often born and survive in very precarious logistic and operating conditions. It is nonetheless common knowledge that some Latin American mega-Churches, and particularly the *Igreja Universal*

¹¹ Pace, Enzo. Buttici, Annalisa. *Le religioni pentecostali*. Roma. Carocci, 2010.





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do Reino de Deus (born in Brazil in 1977) are now widespread in many countries¹². This Church has ten locations in Italy (in Rome, Milan, Turin, Genova, Mantova, Verona, Udine, Naples, Florence and Siracusa). Then again, little or nothing is known about the religious habits of the Chinese, except for two studies conducted in Turin and Prato (Tuscany)¹³.

2. Mapping religious diversity

Taking a quick look at the map of religions in Italy, we see the following situation in as much as concerns the places of worship (Table 1).

Table 1: Places of worship and membership estimates (2018)¹⁴

Religions	Places of worship	Membership (estimates)
Islam	794 (of which 6 mosques)	1,614,000
Orthodox Churches	486 (parishes)	1,528,000
African Neo-Pentecostals	858	150,000
Sikh	42	80,000
Buddhism	136 meditation centres and two pagodas (Rome and Prato)	80,000
Hindu	2 mandirs, Altare (Savona) and Pegognaga (Mantova)	1,500
		3,453,500

¹² Corten, André. Dozon, Jean-Pierre. Oro, Ari Pedro (eds.). *Les nouveaux conquérants de la foi. L'Église du royaume de Dieu*. Paris, Khartala, 2003 ; Garcia-Ruiz, Jesus. Michel, Patrick. *Et Dieu sous-traite le Salut au marché*. Paris, Armand Colin, 2012.

¹³ Berzano, Luigi et al. *Cinesi a Torino*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010; Giordan, Giuseppe; Cao, Nanlai; Pace, Enzo (eds.). *Chinese Religions in China and Italy, Religioni & Società*, 2018, 1, p. 120.

¹⁴ Source: Pace, Enzo (ed.). *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013.





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The Chinese and Latin American evangelical Churches are not on the list: the former are difficult to survey; the latter are beginning to spread, but they are of little importance by comparison with the other denominations included in the above table.

There are Islamic places of worship dotted all over the country, with a greater density where the concentration of small and medium enterprises (in the numerous industrial districts of northern and central Italy) has attracted numerous immigrants from countries with a Muslim majority. This means not only the Maghreb countries (Morocco taking first place, with half a million men and women who have now been residing permanently in Italy for 20-25 years), but also Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The relatively large Iranian and Syrian communities date from further back, having become established at the time of their two countries' political troubles, with the advent of Khomeini's regime in Iran, and Hafez el-Assad's repression of the political opposition in Syria in the 1980s.

The places of worship are mainly prayer halls (*musallayat*), sometimes precariously occupying uncomfortable premises. In fact, the number of mosques, in the proper sense, can be counted on the fingers of one hand: there are only three, the most important being the one opened in Rome in 1995, which can contain 12,000 faithful. These prayer halls are concentrated mainly along the west-east axis, peaking in Lombardy, followed by the Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions. This distribution also reflects the different components of the Muslim world, recognizable in some of the most important national associations - if for no other reason than because almost all the places of worship included in the census refer, from the organizational standpoint, to one of these associations. On the one hand, there is the Union of Islamic Communities of Italy (UCOII), which is historically close to the Muslim brotherhood (though it is currently undergoing internal change): this is one of the best-organized associations, which manages 31% (205) of the prayer halls identified in the census, while another 32% (209) are part of the new Italian Islamic Confederation, (CII), which mainly enrolls Moroccan immigrants (and their families). The other 240 *musallayat* belong to other, smaller associations, at least one of which – called the Islamic Religious Community (COREIS) - was



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founded by an Italian converted to Islam (through the esoteric tradition that goes back to the figure and thinking of René Guénon), so it is easy to imagine that this is, strictly speaking, an Italian Islam. Although this is numerically a small group, it has a public visibility unlike any of the other, above-mentioned associations.

The presence of the Orthodox Christians appears to be much more stable and well-defined than the still precarious position of the various Muslim communities (also in terms of the often poor, derelict urban locations made available to them as places of worship), since the latter are still waiting to see their legal position confirmed on the strength of an understanding between these Muslim communities and the Italian State, in accordance with the Italian constitution. This difference is not only because one of the Orthodox Churches was recently recognized (in December 2012) by the Italian State, but also because their inclusion in the Italian social and religious fabric has been facilitated - for the Romanian, Moldavian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, at least - by the bishops of the Catholic Church. In many dioceses, where there was a visible and pressing demand for places of worship or parishes, the Catholic bishops have authorized Orthodox priests to use small churches left without a priest, or chapels that had remained unused for some time (located on the outskirts of towns). By comparison with the Muslim communities, the Orthodox parishes are more evenly distributed all over Italy.

If we now look at the 42 Sikh temples (*Gurdwara*), their uneven territorial distribution stems from the segments of the job market that immigrants from the Punjab have gradually come to occupy. A sizeable proportion of these workers has filled the space abandoned by the Italians throughout the central portions of the North West and North East of Italy, including parts of Emilia, as breeders of cows serving the large dairy industries and pigs for pork meat products: the historical figure of the Italian *bergamini* (as they were called throughout the Po valley) has been replaced by men with a turban, the Sikh. By contract, these migrants have not only benefited from a good salary, they have also been given a home (usually adjacent to the husbandries so that they could take care of the animals



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round the clock), and this has made it easier from them to bring their families to Italy – something that is much harder for other communities of migrants to do because they are usually unable to demonstrate that they have a stable home. Consequently, a generation of Italian Sikh was soon to develop (either because they arrived at a very young age, or because they were born in Italy).

The Sikh communities now amount to about 80,000, out of the 120,000 immigrants from India. Most of them arrived in Italy around 1984, driven by a combination of factors and severe social problems in the Punjab region because: United Kingdom (the country to which these migrants had historically flocked) refused them entry; there was a crisis in the farming sector; and there was political conflict between the independent's Punjabi movement and the government in New Delhi¹⁵.

First, the map shows a gradual institutionalization of the Sikh communities that have proved capable not only of finding the financial resources needed to renovate old industrial sheds and convert them into places of worship, but also of negotiating with the native communities without encountering any particular administrative difficulties or political obstacles (unlike the Muslim communities when they try to set up a prayer hall or mosque). The map also shows the early signs of a differentiation amongst the Sikh: there are two different associations (the Association of the Sikh Religion in Italy and the Italy Sikh Council), to which the various temples refer. There is also a religious minority that mainstream Sikhism considers heterodox, the Ravidasi, followers of a spiritual master called Ravidas Darbar, who appears to have lived between the 14th and 15th centuries in Punjab; for his wisdom and authority, he was recognized as a new guru and added to the ten that all of the Sikh world venerates.

¹⁵ Bertolani, Barbara. *Gli indiani in Emilia: tra reti di relazioni e specializzazione del mercato del lavoro*, in D. Denti, M. Ferrari, F. Perocco (eds.) *I Sikh, storia e immigrazione*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2003, 163-176; Bertolani, Barbara. Ferraris, Federica. Perocco, Fabio. *Mirror Games: A Fresco of Sikh Settlements among Italian Local Societies*, in Kristina Myrvold and Knut A. Jacobsen (eds.), *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Translocal Practices*, London, Routledge, 2011, 133-161; Bertolani, Barbara. *I Sikh*, in E. Pace (ed.) *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 31-46.





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Although some hymns attributed to Ravidas have been included in the Sikh's sacred text (the *Granth Sahib*), most Sikh deny him the same status as the gurus officially acknowledged by tradition.

We are facing to a slow movement of Italian society towards an unprecedented, unexpected socio-religious configuration that is still, in some aspects, unknown to many Italian people. Just to give an example, in the areas where the Sikh have settled, for a long time they were mistaken for Arabs with a turban, or Orthodox Christians; few people grasped the differences that exist between them in terms of their different national Churches.

To complete the picture which reflect changes underway in Italian society that are not only due to exogenous phenomena (like the immigration of men and women from other countries). The following table shows the presence of other Christian Churches or Congregations which have intertwined their history with Italian history for a long time. This presence constitutes the old stratum of the religious pluralism on which today the new religious diversity is superimposed and grafted.

Table 2: Historical Denominations and Congregations in Italy (membership and agreement with the State) (2013)¹⁶

Denomination and Congregations	Membership	Places of worship	Agreement with the State
Waldensian and Methodist Church (united since 1975)	25,000 /30,000	22	1984
Lutheran Church	8,000	11	1993
American Episcopalian Church	600	2	No agreement
Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches (UCEBI)	25,000	100	1995
Church of Brothers	14,000	216	No agreement
Assemblies of God	150,000	1,181	1986
Federation of Pentecostal Churches	35,000	520	No agreement
Seventh-day Adventist Church	7,000	18	1986
Jehovah's Witnesses	430,000	3,070	Draft Agreements in 2000, 2007 and 2015 never approved by the Italian Parliament
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints (Mormons)	20,000	3 missions, 14 districts Big Temple in Rome (2019)	2012

¹⁶ Sources: Naso, Paolo. *Protestanti, evangelici, Testimoni e Santi*, in E. Pace (ed.) *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 97-130 and Introvigne, Massimo, Zoccatelli Pierluigi (eds.), *Le religioni in Italia*, Torino, Elledici, 2013.



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It is important to stress the growth in the last 10 years of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the various Pentecostal congregations (the most important of which are the Assemblies of God and the Federation of the Pentecostal Churches), both of which have been recruiting new members from among Italian people who were originally Catholics but have opted to adhere to another form of Christianity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses first came on the scene in 1891; since then, they have grown constantly in number. Today, they are widespread all over Italy, with more than 3,000 congregations, 1,500 kingdom halls, 250,000 evangelizers, and a similar number of supporters. They also have a far from negligible number of new conversions drawn from among the Albanian, Romanian and Chinese immigrants, as well as from the French- and Portuguese-speaking Africans.

The diffusion of the Pentecostal Churches is even more significant. Most of them come under the heading Assemblies of God, with 1,181 communities dotted all over Italy, with a greater density in certain southern regions, areas that are generally believed to have strong Catholic traditions. The other group, the Federation of Pentecostal Churches, currently has 400 congregations and approximately 50,000 members.

If we combine the Pentecostal communities and Churches with a Protestant matrix with the African, Latin American and Chinese neo-Pentecostal Churches, and then add the movement that has formed within the Catholic Church called Renewal in the Spirit (which now includes approximately 250,000 people in Italy, with 1,842 communities established in almost every region), we can see that the Church-religion model - that Catholicism has developed over the centuries, with its parish-based civilization, is being challenged by an alternative model where the experience (through community rites) of a charisma counts for more than a set of dogmas.

Above all, the organizational format of these alternative religions no longer preserves the traditional separation between clergy and layman. If the spirit blows where it will, as Pentecostalism (in all its various expressions) becomes more established in Italy's traditionally Catholic society, it could become an element of further differentiation in Italians' choices in the religious sphere.



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If the new type of Pentecostal Christianity challenges Catholicism, Eastern religions represent another alternative that extends the spiritual religious supply in a country of wide and long Catholic tradition.

The Italian society had already met in the 70' and 80' of the last century the new face of westernized Buddhism, through the various spiritual movements from India and Japan respectively. The most famous were, among others, in the first case, the Hare Krishna movement and Osho Rajneesh, while in the second, Soka Gakkai. There is, therefore, a long-Italian Buddhism. Today it is recognized mainly in association approved by the State, the Italian Buddhist Union (about 80,000 members). With the arrival of immigrants from Sri Lanka, India, and China a new layer of followers of various schools of Buddhism has formed. It is in fact an innovation that makes even more plural the presence of Buddhism in Italy¹⁷. The distribution of the various meditation centres, as the map shows, it clearly documents.

Conclusion

Italy's socio-religious geography is changing - slowly, but constantly and irreversibly. The above maps and figures also faithfully record a demographic transition, affecting Italian society as a whole that has been going on for at least 50 years.

The Italian population is continuing to age (nowadays, 20% of the population is over 65 years old). Meanwhile, the size of Italy's population is not diminishing thanks to a higher birth rate per female (from 1.19 in 2002 to 1.25 in 2012), due to the greater propensity of immigrant families to have children, and more of them, by comparison with Italian couples. Set against this background, it is hardly surprising that the Catholic clergy is constantly ageing too: while there were 42,000 priests in Italy in 1972, this figure is expected to drop to 25,000 by 2023; 48% of Italian clergymen are now

¹⁷ Maciotti, Maria Immacolata. *Il Sutra del Loto*. Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2001; Molle, Roberto. *I nuovi movimenti religiosi*, Roma, Carocci, 2009; Molle, Roberto. *L'Oriente italiano*, in E. Pace (ed.), *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 73-84.





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over 65 years old, and the mean age of the clergy as a whole is 62. There is a paucity of vocations and policies to recruit young Asian and African priests seem unable to fill the gap that is already apparent in the ranks of the Italian clergy¹⁸. By comparison, the new popes of the 355 Orthodox parishes are much younger: 60% of them are between 30 and 45 years old, and 6% are under 30; the mean age of the Muslim communities' 600 imam is under 35; and the 300 pastors of the African Pentecostal Churches are usually between 28 and 35 years old.

For the Italian Catholic Church, the changes taking place on the religious scene are an absolute historical novelty. Being used to seeing themselves, quite understandably, as a well-organized salvation organization, with a capillary distribution throughout the country (with 28,000 parishes and a considerable number of monasteries, sanctuaries, centers for spiritual retreats, and so on). Though it is still an authoritative actor on the public stage, the Catholic Church is having to cope with the changes underway. For a good deal of the short history of Italy as a nation, right up to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church had maintained a sort of civil disinterest in the country's religious diversity. Then it changed tack, during the years of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, becoming more open to exchanges with the Hebrew communities and the Churches of a Protestant matrix. It succeeded in considering the other religious presences established in Italy as potential parties to a dialogue between different faiths, promoted by the Catholic Church with a view to appearing tolerant and open-minded, while emphasizing that it was still the *dominant figure* on the *public stage* in the Italian religious sphere, the *primus inter pares* in regulating public communication on matters of religion.

From the religious standpoint, the Italian case is a good example of how, and to what extent, a symbolically monopolistic system can be transformed exogenously. The unprecedented, unexpected religious diversity that has begun to emerge in Italy¹⁹ makes it necessary to update the maps of religiosity and secularization that the country's sociologists of religion study to interpret the changes

¹⁸ Castegnaro, Alessandro. *Nordest. Una società in rapida trasformazione*. Vicenza, Osservatorio Socio-Religioso Triveneto, 2012.

¹⁹ Cartocci, Roberto. *Geografia dell'Italia cattolica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011





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taking place over the years. In the past, these changes often occurred within Catholicism itself, often involving small percentage displacements in a picture of apparent substantial immobility in terms of the Italians' collective representation of themselves. They saw themselves as Catholic in more than 85% of cases, though they revealed marked differences (and diversified levels of secularization) in both their attitude to their belief and their behavior (from their religious practices to their moral choices, which were sometimes highly individualized and by no means consistent with the official doctrine of the Catholic Church).

Now, for the first time after years of research, the maps (some of which are illustrated here) show that we need to use a different compass to interpret a rapidly and radically changing social and religious scenario. With time, Catholicism will also experience some degree of internal change. In the debate on pluralism within the Catholic Church, it will no longer be enough to say “bring in the cavalry” to conceal the fact that 5% of Italy’s immigrant population are Catholics, but they come from worlds that are moving away from the theology and the liturgy of the *Roman Catholic Church*. These African, Latin American, Philippine, Chinese and Korean Catholics will add their own point of view to what being Catholic means, which will not necessarily be consistent with Italian mainstream traditions.

This will give rise to a new area of research that will require new intellectual energies to investigate the real religious experiences of so many people belonging to so many religions, going beyond the ethno-centrism (or Catholic-centrism that has inevitably characterized our research on our predominantly Catholic society). We also have to reflect critically on the concepts and theoretical reference systems needed to deal with the unprecedented religious diversity that has been increasingly characterizing life in Italy.



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