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## THE WORD OF THE GUEST EDITOR

The matter of relationships between politics and religion in Europe is a very complex one which for some years now has aroused considerable debate, beginning, in particular, with the celebrations held to commemorate the centenary of the French law on the secular state (the 9<sup>th</sup>. December 1905<sup>1</sup>). Moreover, the issue of state secularity is of such broad international import that it occasions comparative analyses between Europe and America<sup>2</sup>. But another key problem is that of religious freedom<sup>3</sup>. Not to mention the broader issues of approaches at sociological, philosophical and political-science level.<sup>4</sup>

This issue of the *Politics and Religion Journal* is perfectly in tune with a line of investigation and debate that characterizes, more and more, sociology and the sociology of religion in particular, as well as the political debate in Europe in general and in the single European states, whose peculiarities need to be thoroughly investigated to avoid undue generalization and interpretational agglomerations devoid of adequate empirical bases. This is why the following essays are strongly marked by references to the concrete, in particular the most recent, reality (an example is the case of the United Kingdom, where Michael P. Hornsby-Smith appropriately awaited the outcome of the May 2015 elections in order to take them into consideration in his analysis).

The picture provided here, although partial, ranges from Scandinavia (Lindberg) to the heart of Europe and Poland (Piotr Burgoński), to the UK (Michael P. Hornsby-Smith) and France (Philippe Portier), to then touch on Spain (Alfonso Pérez-Agote) and Italy (Simone Carlo Martino). Some contributors are young scholars, others are social scientists of long standing. This guarantees the relevance of the experience gained, as well as the originality of the approaches proposed.

The opening article by Lindberg highlights once again the impossibility of homologating markedly different situations within a sole hermeneutic meaning that one may not speak generically of "Nordic" countries, when treating the links between politics and the prevalent Lutheran religion in Scandinavia, if Denmark, and to a lesser extent, Norway and Sweden appear to validate the Durkheimian hypothesis of a solidary nexus due to religion, while, in the case of Finland and

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1 Cipriani Roberto, „Religione, politica e laicità“, in: *Religija, politika, pravo*, Institut za uporedno pravo, Mitropolija Crnogorsko-primorska i Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd-Budva, 2015, pp. 805-23.

2 Joppke Christian, *The Secular State under Siege. Religion and Politics in Europe and America*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015. Norris Pippa, Inglehart Ronald, *Sacred and Secular. Religion and politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, 2011.

3 Baldwin Clive, Aux frontières de la liberté de religion, *Projet*, 342, 2014, pp. 45-52.

4 Portier Philippe, Philosophie, politique et religion. Une exploration des paradigmes contemporains, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 169, 2015, pp. 263-283.

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Iceland this is not necessarily so, or is less so.

Hornsby-Smith, after an extensive examination of history with particular reference to the effects of the Protestant Reformation, turns a disenchanted eye upon the dynamics at work at present in the UK, which has seen the links between politics and religion split up into four historically diversified areas (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) with Anglicans supporting the Conservative and Catholics the Labour Party, whereas, in the case of the Liberal Democrats Anglicans and Catholics seem to be pretty evenly deployed. The author refers to a number of empirical studies and expresses the belief that the public role of religion is declining<sup>5</sup> - with the exception of Ireland, where the decline is contained - and relegated to the private sphere. In particular, it appears that religious leadership in the UK does not impact greatly on government policy. Meanwhile the Islamic presence in the United Kingdom is becoming more and more substantial.

In France, the issue of women is at the kernel of the scholarly interest of Philippe Portier who wonders what contribution prevailing secularism may have made towards the processes of gender emancipation and affirmation of rights of equality. The French sociologist is inspired by the thinking of the philosopher Catherine Kintzler. He then highlights the persistence of hierarchical principles that hinder respect of human rights, at least up until the 1960's, and also addresses the issue of difference, which, in the 1960-1990 thirty-year period, reaped a certain degree of favour. In more recent years, however, thanks to pressures brought to bear by the world of Islam, a more universalist outlook has asserted itself.

For Spain, Pérez-Agote's contribution focuses on modernization, which produces significant consequences, favouring a certain degree of religious subjectivism which tends, thus, to minimize the effects of secularization and denote the substantial impact of migratory flows, which reproduce a considerable degree of identification between religion (as an added value) and culture. Meanwhile, however, there is a clear decline in religious affiliation to Catholicism, which in 1965 recorded a self-definition rate of 83% for the Spanish population, by 2008 this figure had fallen to 27.7%. This process marks a transition from religious practice to non-practice, with a rise from 15% to 45% for non-practicing Catholics, in just over 40 years. Nonetheless, the Church maintains its place within the public arena, although a growing cultural and religious pluralism, not much liked by the Catholic hierarchy, is emerging.

In Italy, as Simon Carlo Martino sustains, the relationship between Catholicism and politics is of long and established standing. Not surprisingly, the Catholic ideological perspective is fundamental when explaining the country's overall political situation. This is confirmed by the historical presence of parties of Christian inspiration, the action of a kind of "civil religion", continuous reference to

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5 Cited by Hornsby-Smith: Bruce Steve, *We Don't Do God. The Long Divorce of Religion and National Identity in Britain 1832-2008*, *Journal for the Study of British Culture*, 16 (2), 2009, pp. 117-130.

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Catholic teaching when dealing with matters of public interest. But the scenario is changing: it is necessary to come to terms with Islamic immigration. Catholicism is becoming more and more internationalized and the succession of continuous socio-economic crises forces the Catholic Church too to adjust, in order to stay afloat.

More interrelated with a European Community framework is Piotr Burgoński's attempt to explain current events in his own country, Poland, in relation to the attitude of Poles towards the adoption of a text prepared by a working group called CAHVIO i.e. "Ad Hoc Committee for Preventing and Combating violence against women and domestic violence". The Church itself is involved in the debate about whether or not to adhere to a European policy of equality and non-discrimination. Its orientation, favourable as far as respect of the moral obligations of the citizens of a Christian nation is concerned, is being evaluated by those involved in the public discussion.

Then we have a study (Del Re) closely connected with the present-day contingency and the relative novelty of a significant religious minority like the Yazidi, a Kurdish community from the Nineveh area of Iraq, strongly affected by the recent war which is creating an almost continuous territorial war line between Iraq and Syria, passing through the Lebanon and Turkey, and urging people to run the risk of crossing the Mediterranean to Italy and Greece, thus bringing throngs of asylum seekers there who then move on into Austria and Germany or, by means of some other no easier corridor, into Macedonia and Serbia, Croatia and Hungary.

Of this cluster of events and population upheavals, we find traceable references in the journal's two reviews, the one by an international guru of sociology such as José Casanova who examines the work of a young scholar (Massimo Rosati, prematurely deceased), on the Turkish reality and the construction of a secular society there, the other by Massimiliano Ruzzeddu, dedicated to another international guru, Brian S. Turner, known specialist in comparative sociology applied to politics and religion.

In short, the stimuli required to induce reading this number's essays are not wanting. It is really worth one's while to devote more than a mere glance to the articles published here.

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