

## Article

# 1967/1969: The End, or (Just) a Pause of the Catholic Liberal Dream?

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to explore the strong connections between the topics of this special volume of *Religions*: the current crisis of political Catholicism and religious Catholicism; the new questions posed about the relationship between Catholicism and advanced modernization; the relationship between Catholicism and European institutions; and the importance of the North Atlantic relationships within Catholicism. The paper sheds light on these questions through an analysis of a particular but indicative case study, namely, the “Catholic 68” in Italy. Deconstructing the predominant narrative about the relationship between Vatican II and the events of 1968 (or, better, those of the 2-year period 1967–1969) helps to clarify the connections between the topics of this volume in important ways. In fact, the predominant narrative about the “Catholic 68” still pays undue tribute to both an oversimplified reconstruction of the “parties” who fought one another during the Second Vatican Council and an oversimplified reading of the late 1960s. In this perspective, the Italian case is particularly relevant and yields important sociological insight. The starting point of the paper is the abundant literature on the “long 60s”. This scholarship has clarified the presence of an important religious dimension to the social and cultural processes of this period as well as a (generally accepted) link between the Council-issued renewal and “1968”. At the same time that literature has also clarified that the “long 60s” paved the way for a deep social transition which has also marked the first two decades of the 21st century. The nature of this religious renewal and social change has often been described as the triumph of liberal parties over conservative parties. This paper instead proposes a “three parties scheme” (conservative, progressive and liberal) to better understand the confrontation that occurred at the Council and that at the end of the same decade and its consequences for Catholicism and European politics today.

**Keywords:** Catholicism; political Catholicism; Europe; Vatican II Council; modernization; religion/politics relationship

## 1. Introduction

Catholicism is in crisis today, and not only in Central-Western Europe. Italy—which this paper will focus on—does not represent an exception (Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi 2015).

Italian Catholicism is in crisis from the point of view of *both* its religious system and political system<sup>1</sup>. Such a double crisis represents the deep difficulties faced by the current Catholic orientation

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<sup>1</sup> In order to consider Catholicism as a phenomenon which is not limited to the religious dimension alone see Diotallevi 2017. From an historic point of view it is easy to understand how general, serious and deep the crisis of Catholicism is, especially when keeping in mind the close links between Italian political Catholicism and Italian religious Catholicism during the entire 20th century (De Rosa 1976a, 1976b; Scoppola 1966). From an analytical perspective, it is not helpful to confuse these two crises (that of the political Catholicism and that of the religious Catholicism), just as it would be to consider them as isolated from each other.

towards modernity. Moreover, this orientation also includes a certain view of Catholicism's *relationship with itself*.

This *double* (religious and political) and *twofold* (objective and reflexive) crisis of contemporary Catholicism describes the deep crisis that the vision and the program of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962–1965) are experiencing today. One example helps to illustrate the depth of this crisis. Could there be anything more divergent from what the Council established with regards to its positive declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*<sup>2</sup>, than the current positions of the French, Italian, Polish or Hungarian “Catholic sovereignists”? *Dignitatis humanae* (nn.6-7, and, more extensively, John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*) declares an idea of the common good as something that a plurality of social institutions (political, religious, economic, scientific, family and so on) must take care of and deal with together, and, in doing so—each in its own way—those institutions limit each other in order to guarantee individual freedom. Contemporary “Catholic sovereignists”, instead, reduce the idea of the common good to an exclusively political affair, and the ‘sovereign state’ as the particular form that politics must consequently take. These “sovereignists” pursue something (‘sovereignty’) that *Dignitatis humanae* firmly condemns, and to this purpose they also make an unscrupulous use of religious symbols and myths (Diotallevi 2020). What is more, these “sovereignists” are also fighting against the same principles of religious freedom that *Dignitatis humanae* presents as something the Church and Catholics have to fight for.

This paper will try to deal with this current crisis of Catholicism by analyzing two elements. (i) First, it revisits the 1967–1969 crisis in Italy and its relationship with Vatican II in order to better understand the contemporary crisis of the relationship between Catholicism and modernity. (ii) In order to understand the relationships between the religious and political forces unleashed by Vatican II and the 1967–1969 crises, the paper then reconsiders the results of Vatican II and the reforms it implemented. In the interpretation of this article, these results and reforms appear as the triumph of a distinct, liberal (Anglo-Saxon-influenced) Catholic understanding of modernity. That understanding positively and critically embraced modernity, and in ways that were fundamentally different from the “conservative” Catholic understanding of modernity. It was also deeply different from the “progressive” understanding of modernity, whose theoretical roots are more often closer to those of conservative as opposed to liberal Catholicism. According to this perspective, the results of Vatican II did not represent a compromise between progressive and conservative Bishops, but an anticonservative alliance led by a liberal minority which included progressive forces as a junior (even if numerically bigger) partner.

As recognized by a large amount of literature, the events of the 2-year period from 1967–1969 represent the first severe crisis of the post-Council phase. Quoting Gerd-Rainer Horn (2015a, p. 51): “the huge involvement of Christians as Christians in the different progressive movements developed between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s is largely undisputed. In this regard, the only serious and important question is whether this wave of contestation was a direct or an indirect consequence of Vatican II” (see also Walsh 2006).

An analysis of the Italian case helps us to shed light on this point, but it also helps us to deal with an anomaly in the scholarship. Despite the privileged role that the Italian case plays in the eyes of researchers studying the relationship between Catholicism and “1968” (the Holy See is in Italy, the Council was held here, the relevance for universal Catholicism of the relationship between the Vatican and its closest political and social context should not be forgotten), the amount of studies and debates about the relationship between “1968” and Catholicism in Italy is not even remotely similar to the amount of work and results available for the United States (a truly endless literature), Québec (e.g., Gavreau 2013; Lemieux 2000), Great Britain (e.g., Field 2014, 2017), Ireland (e.g., Woodcock Tentler 2007), France (e.g., Hervieu-Leger 1989, 2003; Cuchet 2018; Le Goff 2018), Netherlands (e.g., Coleman 1978; Van Dam 2015), Belgium (e.g., Dobbelaere 1987) or Germany

<sup>2</sup> About the paradigmatic value of this document see Ratzinger-Benedict XVI's speech to the Roman Curia of 22 December 2005.

(e.g., Lepp et al. 2016). On the other hand, this does not deprive, but instead increases, the value and interest of works by authors such as Beretta (1998, 2008), G. Formigoni (2012), F. Gentiloni (2018), Santagata (2016), Saresella (2005, 2017), Vecchio and others.

The present paper is divided into five parts: (1) The first part offers a critique of the main interpretations of the relationship between “1968” and Vatican II. This attempt will be developed (2) first by trying to recall the meaning of “1968” according to the more general interpretation of the long 60s and then (3) by doing something similar for Vatican II. On the basis of all this, we will try to demonstrate that, in the 2-year period of 1967–1969, numerous orientations regarding the relationship between Catholicism and society emerged, and that these orientations can be better understood if put in relationship with the events of Vatican II (which ended in 1965). This includes both the first stage of application and reception of the Council’s resolutions but also the Catholic criticism about modernity and modernization that already during the 1950s had both a rightist and a leftist declination. The later was destined to become a protagonist of the “68” and celebrated by its myth. Finally (4) we will highlight some analytical advantages that the revision of the relationships between Vatican II and “1968” brings to those interested in the current crisis of Catholicism and in its connection with the political events of Europe and North Atlantic relationships. Part 5 is devoted to some conclusions.

If “1968” and its story did not express, but rather humiliated and defeated, the reformism inspired by the Council, then the late 1960s crisis of Catholicism in Italy (and not only) appears under another light. The revenge of the antireformists against Vatican II would appear to have begun not only during last decades from the conservative forces of the “right”, but well before and from progressive forces of the “left” as well.

## 2. 1968 and Vatican II: A Relationship Requiring Further Investigation

While there is consensus within the scientific debate about the existence of a relationship between the Italian “1968” and Vatican II, there is no prevalent interpretation about its nature. Briefly, there are three main alternative interpretations (with a qualitative difference between the first two interpretations and the third one).

A first group of authors supports the theory of a direct influence of Vatican II on “1968”<sup>3</sup>. In this interpretation, Vatican II represents one of the main causes of “1968”, and most likely created its ideals and fed its reasons.

A second group of authors, instead, supports an indirect relationship between Vatican II and “1968”<sup>4</sup>. In this interpretation, the identity crisis represented by Vatican II, including its delays and uncertainties, was insufficient to prevent the liveliest part of the Catholic world from joining the protest movements of those years, which ended up acting against the Catholic institutions themselves (both religious and nonreligious).

Finally, a third, theological interpretation influences large sectors of the wider scientific community. As a consequence, some sociologists have followed positions that make a distinction between a “letter” and a “spirit” of the Council and that suggests looking for their meaning in the latter (Faggioli 2012, pp. 10, 20–21, 2016). In this interpretation, half a century is still too short a period to understand the meaning and scope of Vatican II (Komonchak 2018, pp. 275–81).

One element is enough to prevent us from being satisfied with these interpretations. If we more carefully consider *what actually happened around 1968*, we should realize that *it* is well more than what the first two readings are focused on and—at the same time—something more relevant and meaningful

<sup>3</sup> Among these we can identify two main subgroups: authors thinking that this season of protests was prepared by the Council and authors insisting on the disappointment for the failed implementation of the renewal promised by Vatican II (Horn 2008, pp. 291–92; 2015b, p. 253; McLeod 2013, pp. 462–63; Santagata 2016, p. 251; see also Scoppola 1985).

<sup>4</sup> They compare the effect of Vatican II on the Catholic public opinion to that generated on the Anglican world by the book *Honest to God* (by JAT Robinson (2002), first ed. 1963) or on Christian public opinion in general by *The Secular City* (by Cox 1965, in the Italian translation prefaced by E. Balducci). Others instead focus on the delay in celebrating Vatican II (Beretta 2008, p. 65) and also on some of its hesitations during the doctrinal forum.

to justify. In addition, as we are going to see better in §4, among the forgotten or temporarily bracketed events during 1968 (or, better between 1967 and 1969) there were also church reforms. While great attention is paid in the scholarship to a sequence of protests during that period, which, however, did not generate lasting effects<sup>5</sup>, some of these church reforms represented real “revolutions”, with lasting direct effects.

The sociological analysis of the relationships between Vatican II and the late 1960s, therefore, must be analytically freed from a detrimental tribute to the legend of “1968”, a legend which leads us to ignore both the “second half” of the principal events of 1968 and the ways in which the “Catholic 68” (in Italy and elsewhere) fought against the more revolutionary and Vatican II-inspired church reforms.

In this light, a broader register of the events of 1968 appears much richer and more varied than the list of events considered and celebrated by its myth. In Italy, 1968 was the year of great ecclesial protests<sup>6</sup> (Horn 2015b, pp. 205–8; Beretta 1998, 2008). It was also the year of Padre Pio’s funeral (September 26), an occasion of extraordinary participation expressed with reasons and codes very far from Catholic dissent and also from the official church. 1968 was also the year of publication of *Humanae vitae* (Marengo 2018) and of Paul VI’s catecheses about the rights of conscience and its value (among other things, immediately after the publication of the encyclical of which those catecheses were the first and often forgotten explanation). 1968 belongs to the period of the largest ordinations of priests in the 20th century in Italy (Brunetta 1991) and also to the period when the first signs of a widespread abandonment of pastoral services emerged and which would become fully evident soon after (Diotallevi 2005). 1968 is the crucial year of the new “red biennium” (after that of 1919–1920: Albanese 2006) and it is also the year in which *Democrazia Cristiana* (the *Christian Democratic Party*, DC) won around 40% of the votes in the Chamber of Deputies (as much as the PCI (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, *Communist Italian Party*) and PSI (*Partito Socialista Italiano*, *Socialist Italian Party*) combined and—unlike these two parties—the DC achieved a greater consensus not in the Italian Senate, but in the Chamber, i.e., where younger people also voted. 1968 is the year during which demonstrations praised Mao, Che Guevara and other gods of the Communist pantheon, but it is also the year of sorrow for the extreme sacrifice of Jan Palach in Prague, invaded by the Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops. 1968 is the year where the Vietnam War by the United States of America was criticized (Beretta 1998, p. 271; Saresella 2018)<sup>7</sup> and it is also the year where the same people cried for Martin Luther King and Bob Kennedy’s murders.

So, (the myth of) “68” is an accurate but distorting selection of what happened in 1968. As far as we are concerned, “68” is a legend that reveals more about the dreams and anger of a restricted section of the public opinion than about the transformations, reforms or actual revolutions which occurred in those months.

There is also another reason for integrating or overcoming the current interpretations of the relationship between “68” and Vatican II. In fact, among the effects of the oversimplification on which the “1968” myth is based there is also a sort of “fog falling” on the strong contrasts if not evident opposition between the teachings of Vatican II and the objectives or slogans of “1968”. In particular, such contrast becomes even more marked for some of the most innovative and reformist elements of the Council’s teachings. Three examples are particularly telling. First of all we could mention the contrast between the option of Vatican II in favor of the model of religious freedom as opposed to the secularist

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that “68” or the “late 60s” have not “changed our world”. Moreover, this essay explicitly supports the opposite hypothesis. Something different is what we aim at stressing here, that is, in short: while the great mobilizations of the late 1960s were driven by “revolutionary” ideals and projects that were not implemented and that in fact soon ceased to be pursued (in other words, they did not generate the desired effects, so called “direct effects”); on the contrary, the ecclesial (and non-ecclesial) reforms of the late 1960s (generally ignored by the studies about the “68”) consolidated and generated long-lasting effects. Paragraph 4 of the essay provides some examples of such effects.

<sup>6</sup> From the occupation of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan, 17 September 1967), to that of the Cathedral of Parma (14 September 1968), to the event involving the Isolotto parish in Florence.

<sup>7</sup> In this context, the sensational resignation of Bologna archbishop, card. Lercaro (January–February 1968).

(*laïcité*) model (Diotallevi 2010; Fabbretti 1968) and to the secularist trends of “1968”—in the political field, of course, but even more in the fields of school, research, and education (Freathy and Parker 2013, pp. 254–55; Stolk et al. 2016, pp. 195–96). Equally exemplar is the opposition between the reduction of all social reality to the competence of politics, as in the 1968 creed that “everything is politics”<sup>8</sup>, and the teaching of Vatican II, which considered politics as only one of many and different societal institutions, each of which provides a specific and partial contribution to the common good. Finally, the optimism and progressivism of “1968” are very different from the texts of Vatican II, and also from the Council’s Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, so much evoked in those moments (Wood 2015, pp. 233–37; Levering 2017, in part pp. 172–72; Saresella 2016). Namely, this Council Constitution teaches that human history is characterized up to the last day by a struggle (both in the social dimension and in the personal one) and that every conflict of this struggle is not determined necessarily by positive fate<sup>9</sup>.

It is evident, therefore, that there are at least two orders of reasons to doubt the above-mentioned understandings of the relationship between “68” and the Council or vice versa. In brief, (I) an oversimplified reconstruction of late 1960s—among other things—(II) obscures the substantial opposition between a wide range of the “Catholic 68” issues and the Vatican II teachings, even if those were openly and formally presented on behalf of these. Soon after, the failure of the “Catholic 68” offered the conservative opposition to Vatican II the opportunity to exploit a tremendous and unexpected advantage: the (self)identification of the “Catholic 68” movements with the “spirit” of Vatican II.

The first two readings are based on an oversimplified reconstruction of the 1967–1969 period. The third reading, instead, substitutes one of the two poles of the relationship (Vatican II’s facts and texts) with something at least sociologically more inaccessible (“the spirit of the Council”). On the other hand, and with more costs than benefits, it tends to postpone the analytical work on Vatican II and consequently on its relationship with the 1967–1969 biennial.

### 3. Broadening Our View on the “Long 60s”

In order to deal with the weaknesses of the three above-mentioned interpretations, we will try to put the Vatican II/1968 relationship in the frame delivered by the “long 60s” thesis.

Considering more closely H. McLeod’s reading, without deviating too much from other authors (e.g., Gavreau 2013), the “long 60s” identifies the period that runs roughly from the second half or from the end of the 1950s (or 1958) to the early 1970s (or 1974)<sup>10</sup>. During those years the “western societies” succumbed to deep social transformations which implied drastic increases in social differentiation, complexity, contingency, mobility and the speed and spread of communications.

These transformations started to become evident already at the end of the 19th century, while various attempts to limit them were made in the first half of the 20th century with alternating success. In the end, those increases, a true drastic acceleration of modernization, generated a deep crisis in the structure of society, or, more precisely, in the configuration of society (cf. Kjaer 2011; Diotallevi 2014; Febbrajo and Corsi 2016, i.e., of a certain model of social order). In other words, a “world” already in crisis finally ended.

During that abundant decade (the long 60s) the impacts of at least *three different types* of social processes cumulated their effects producing those increases (functional differentiation of society and so on) or, in other words, an acceleration of modernization. At nearly the same moment, several long-term, medium-term<sup>11</sup> and short-term processes reached their peak. This generated a far more disruptive

<sup>8</sup> This position is also linked to the “homemade Keynesianism” of the Italian Catholics which pre-existed Vatican II (Scoppola 1986, e.g., pp. 70–71), an approximate, not rigorous way of following the indications of the English economist.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular GS n.36. about the concept of ‘world’ in *Gaudium et spes*, see Ratzinger (2005) (I’ve tried to talk about this point in Diotallevi 2012).

<sup>10</sup> McLeod follows A. Marwick. See also (Peterson 2018, p. 48; Horn 2015b, p. 253). For links with the 1970s protest movements see e.g., (Hall 2008). See also (Zald and McCarty 1998).

<sup>11</sup> The social transformations that occurred between the end of the Second World War and the end of the 1950s have deeply ambiguous features. Among others, on the one hand it is an unexpected moment of religious revival (Snape 2017, pp. 214–30;



effect than a possible modernization process made up of a single “wave” would. In just over a decade, the results of the consolidated secularization added up to the acceleration of the social modernization of the post-war period and of the early 1950s (e.g., Durand 2012, p. 27; Gavreau 2013, pp. 206–8). At that point an already explosive mixture detonated because of a series of events. The impact of the Vietnam War on public opinion (Saresella 2018) and that of some religious events (certainly including Vatican II) were never absent from the list of the decisive events, even though such a list changes depending on the author.

This process involved the main variants of modernization, the European–continental and the Anglo–Saxon one, but it certainly had a more destructive impact on the European–continental state-centered societies. We will come back to this point in a moment. Before doing so, however, it is important to underline a further aspect of the “long 60s” thesis which is particularly useful for analyzing the relationship between “1968” and Vatican II. The supporters of the “long 60s” thesis require further investigations on the specific atmosphere of the late 1960s (McLeod 2013, p. 463). This subperiod does not represent the whole process, but in many local contexts some discontinuity elements of the “long 60s” reach their highest intensity in this moment.

If we, following the “long 60s” thesis, start assuming a medium-term horizon, we are almost forced to focus our attention on a very useful element. Immediately before the “long 60s”, the Italian Catholicism (like many other Latin Catholicisms) saw the rise and consolidation of the opposition, or at least resistance, to social modernization (first of all to the market economy and in general to the western mainly “NordAtlantic” liberal values). This opposition was animated, if not by reactionary intentions, certainly by the typical “*intransigentismo*”<sup>12</sup>. In Italy (and not only) this opposition to modernization—this is my point—mainly came “from left”, but its roots can be traced back also to the Catholic “*afascismo*” (a movement neither in favor nor against fascism, TN) of the regime period as well as in some types of profascist positions, like that of the head of the Catholic University of Milan “Sacro Cuore”, Agostino Gemelli (Moro 1979, 2020). Exactly such Catholic leftist statism (apparently revolutionary, but contrary to any increase of modernization in terms of individual freedom and spheres differentiation<sup>13</sup>) would then become the protagonists of the late 1960s. The biographies of a number of iconic personalities of the “Catholic 68”, including don Lorenzo Milani, Giorgio La Pira and Fr. Ernesto Balducci are among the best examples we can offer here. These personalities were closer to the French state-centered (and less differentiated) model of modern society than to the North Atlantic stateless (and more differentiated) model of modern society. Not by chance they were more sympathetic to a model of *laïcité* (secularism) than religious freedom. These “progressives” were in many ways the heirs of an older model of Catholic corporatism one which was very different

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Petigny 2009; Herberg 1960—I ed. 1955—); on the other hand, during those same years the first signs of a new heavy wave of mass secularization appeared (Hout and Fischer 2002, pp. 167–83; Ellwood 1997; Gill 2003, p. 147; Stolz and Koenemann 2016, pp. 188–93). About the structural transformations of the religious world, certainly not on local scale: (Wuthnow 1988; Coleman 1978; Gavreau 2013; Horn 2013, pp. 23–35; Ferraresi et al. 1970, pp. 204–5; Quaranta 1982).

<sup>12</sup> In general, the term historiography labels the Catholic opposition to modernity/modernization, in particular developed after and against the French Revolution. The intransigent party was still alive during Vatican II Council, as well as now.

<sup>13</sup> Since modernity is considered as a dramatic “differentiation of the social spheres” or, better, as the primacy of the functional differentiation of society over any other kind of social differentiation, statism is (i) an attempt to control and basically remove such constitutive character of modernity. Since the state is at the same time a product of the modernization process, i.e., one of the various forms that an already specialized and different politics can take, statism is also (ii) a modern reaction to modernization or the core of a “reactionary modernization” project. As regards the state and statism as “modern reaction to modernity” or “reactionary modernization”, see Diotallevi 2014, pp. 83–115. Here we can also find a large cross-reference to sociological as well as the historic literature supporting such thesis, starting from the works of the *Konfessionalisierungsschule*.

Both the Catholic fascists or a-fascists under the Fascist Regime and the left-wing Catholic statists from the 1950s and 1960s onwards had in common a certain preference for the organized primacy of the political powers over the whole society, skepticism about liberal democracy and strong opposition to the market economy. They were not rarely the same people, as it is the case for some professors of the Milan Catholic University (Moro 2020; Scoppola 1985).

from the liberal Catholicism of Sturzo and De Gasperi, but also of a figure such as Luigi Einaudi<sup>14</sup>. The Italian case is no exception in this story (Saresella 2005), even if it gives rise to a particular variant of the process<sup>15</sup>.

Now we have all the ingredients to raise a crucial point of our analytical scheme. Within the preconiliar Catholic landscape, one can already identify the wings which would play the major roles during Vatican II and during the post-Council period. On the one hand, we find a (“liberal”) minority which recognizes the acceleration of modernization (as institutional differentiation) as an opportunity not only for civil life, but also for faith, church and religion. On the other hand, we have two groups, “conservatives” and “progressives”, who resist and oppose this acceleration. Both groups share intransigent roots and socio-political paradigms despite being on the opposite sides of the political spectrum. For example, both “conservatives” and “progressives”, the former from a confessional perspective and the latter from a secularist (*laïque*) perspective (Diotallevi 2010, 2014), converge on a vision of politics that keeps society integrated and that exercises sovereignty. Within the Catholic field (both Italy and elsewhere), by the late 1940s and early 1950s three parties, as opposed to two, were already playing their game and would continue to do so for the decades to come, through to the present.

The utility of a three-parties scheme is reinforced if we move—following the “long 60s” thesis—from a medium-term to a long-term scenario. In fact, we find that also for the question about Vatican II/1968 relationship the horizon one ought to consider is that of the Catholic reactions to the shock of the French Revolution (Scoppola 1975; Kaufmann and Zingerle 1996). Widening the gaze to this broader period, it also becomes clear to sociologists why Vatican II must be studied as the most important moment, from the 16th century onwards, that redefined the relationship between Catholicism and modernity. Therefore, another element becomes clearer: the years 1967–1969 must be analyzed as the first crisis of the solution found by the Vatican II Council to the Catholicism/modernity issue.

From within a long-term perspective we are obliged to wonder *how many* and *which* predominant positions on the church’s attitude towards modernity contested one another within Catholicism. We must also evaluate *whether* this range of positions has been adequately taken into adequate account by current scholarship on the relationship between Vatican II and “1968”.

On this point, the dominant interpretations of the relationship between Vatican II and “1968” continue to consider only *two* ecclesial “parties”: the “conservative” and the “progressive” one. In general, the first label includes those who opposed modernity, with greater or lesser rigidity and sought to restore or safeguard the 16–19th century model of Christianity. By “conservatives” we refer to the more traditional and harsher forms of “*intransigentismo*”. On the contrary, more difficult hermeneutic problems arise when we consider the opposite field. In fact, the category includes two very different groups, both in size and in belief. The Council, and in particular the redaction history of documents such as *Gaudium et spes* (Komonchak 1999) and *Dignitatis humanae*<sup>16</sup> represents very clear examples of this. The alliance that won the first round against the “conservatives” subsequently engaged in an internal, second round: “liberals” vs. “progressives”.

In this reading, two sensitivities, two very different spiritual and theological programs, two very different ecclesiologies fought against the drastic rejection of modernity supported by the “conservatives”. This anticonservative alliance includes the so-called “intransigent moderates” (Moro 1988), those who consider the values of modernity separate from the tools offered by modernity, and the latter likely to bend to a more realistic and wary version of the Christian reconquest of society and culture. The “new Christianity” and the “new historical project” (Pietrobelli 1982), directly inspired

<sup>14</sup> Luigi Einaudi (1874–1961), Catholic and liberal, was an Italian economist, scholar and politician. Among other things he worked as financial correspondent for The Economist. Einaudi was Governor of the Bank of Italy (1945–1948) and Minister of Finances, Treasury and Balance, as well as Vice-Premier, in 1947–48. He was second President of Italy from 1948 to 1955.

<sup>15</sup> See also (Zanatta 2020).

<sup>16</sup> See (Fabbretti 1968; Scatena 2004). The contribution by J.C. Murray was decisive (e.g., Murray 1954).

by Maritain, represent the best-known examples of this wing. However, after a general analysis, it is evident that the greater attention to the social dimension—often to welfare rather than to freedom—is not enough to place these so-called “progressives” out of the “*intransigente*” horizon<sup>17</sup>. In fact, in most cases a certain kind of Scholasticism represents the ideological base shared by both “progressives” and “conservatives”. Both of them shared the antiliberal positions defined by *Rerum novarum*<sup>18</sup> and *Pascendi*<sup>19</sup>, and confirmed by *Quadragesimo anno*<sup>20</sup>, but were divided according to their preferences for an authoritarian and confessional model of social order. The “progressives” left more space between the top and the bottom of a model of subsidiarity which remained statist and hierarchical. “Progressives” and “conservatives” were deeply divided by the very different dimensions of the space given to the ecclesiastic power within the political field, but the primacy of politics over each “social sphere” (rights and judicial system included) is taken for granted by both “conservatives” and “progressives”.

In reality, the “progressives” or “moderate *intransigente*” are not the only party which opposed the “conservatives”. Among the opposition to “conservatives” there was also a wing which adopted a dialectic attitude towards modernity. This attitude was positively interlocutory, not instrumental, and therefore different from any variant of *intransigentismo*, even the “moderate” one. This third party can be aptly described as a ‘liberal’ Catholic party, following the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the term, as opposed to the French one. The liberal Catholic party saw values in modernity that were similar to those of Christianity and even appears as a *kairos* for faith and for the Church. It is not approached with renunciation or captive spirit, but rather with sympathy and without any subordination. The religious freedom of modernity is seen and experienced by “liberal” Catholics (and not by Catholic “progressives”) not as a loss, but as a gain, and not only for society but also for faith and the Church.

Framing Vatican II in the “*long 60s*” obliges us to focus on the last phase (spanning 150 years) of the controversial relationship between Catholicism and modernity. Such a perspective obliges scholars to consider at least the entire period from 1815 to the early 1970s (the end of the “*long 60s*”), and consequently the Council, as an event that undoubtedly represents a decisive point in the modernist crisis (Scoppola 1975). By adopting this analytical perspective, the idea of a Catholic field crossed by the struggle among—at least—“three” parties (*intransigenti* or “conservatives”, moderate *intransigenti* or “progressives” and “liberal” Catholics) instead of “two” is reinforced.

Pietro Scoppola’s work on the modernist crisis probably provides us with the most useful and direct access point to this history. The most important of his works, published on the immediate eve of Vatican II (in 1961), helps to decipher the huge gap between the entire set of requests for religious renewal of the early 20th century from those actually affected from the *Pascendi*<sup>21</sup> by Pius X (1907). The antimodernist repression overcame the limits of the *Pascendi* condemnation and severely challenged almost the entire set of requests for renewal, but did not cancel them. Other extremely useful scholarship on this period includes that of Moro (1979) dedicated to the FUCI<sup>22</sup> of Righetti and Montini between the early 1920s and the early 1930s and then to the spiritual research that survived the sacrifice on Italian Catholicism imposed by the Vatican and by the fascist regime by depriving the FUCI of its national leader: Giovanni Battista Montini (who would become Paul VI)<sup>23</sup>. That spiritual and ecclesial search survived,

<sup>17</sup> About the lack of alternative, or the similarities, between the Maritainian and Pacellian perspectives see (Scoppola 1986, p. 16).

<sup>18</sup> Published by Leo XIII in 1891.

<sup>19</sup> Published by Pious X in 1907.

<sup>20</sup> Published by Pius XI in 1931.

<sup>21</sup> By this encyclical letter Pious X condemned “modernism”. He adopted this term to collect, label and condemn some positions reported on papers and books (published between the late XIX century and the beginning of the XX century) of Catholic biblical scholars, philosophers and theologians who believed that the church could not ignore the new scientific historical research concerning the Bible and ask for a religious and ecclesial renewal.

<sup>22</sup> Together with the *Movimento laureati di Azione Cattolica*, the federation of Catholic college students (Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana, established in 1896) is the main organization of the so-called “intellectual branch” of *Azione Cattolica Italiana*.

<sup>23</sup> Ten years after the Vatican had already sacrificed Sturzo to fascism.



in fact, and remained separated from both the “conservatives” and the “progressives”<sup>24</sup>. In short, thanks to works such as those by Scoppola and Moro, it is possible to understand that the “third party” was far from both types of *intransigentismo*, among which, starting from Murri, many biographies and many organizations (e.g., [Giuntella 1975](#)) repeatedly passed (in both directions) or even commuted. It was the common ideological and theological matrix of the “conservatives” and “progressives” that allowed this passage and this repositioning from one side to the other. Together with the works just mentioned, also other scholars of many different disciplines<sup>25</sup> facilitate a better understanding of the spiritual and cultural differences with the “moderate *intransigente*” (or “progressive”) position of the Catholic wing built on works and witnesses by Newman, Manzoni, Rosmini, Blondel<sup>26</sup>, De Lubac, Sturzo<sup>27</sup>, De Gasperi and Montini<sup>28</sup>. In other words, the fathers and leaders of the “third party”.

In brief, the adoption of the “long 60s” thesis forces us to put Vatican II and its relationship with the late 60s within the century-long, dramatic confrontation between Catholicism and modernization. In such a perspective we can identify (at least) “three parties”: “conservatives”, “progressives” and “liberals”. The same perspective helps us (a) to reconsider similarities and differences among each of these three “parties” and the other two, (b) to clarify who won and who lost at Vatican II, and (c) to understand the limits of current interpretations of the relationship between Vatican II and “68”.

According to a unanimous opinion, the words used by Paul VI at the end of the Council (7 December 1965) provide for a good summary of the orientation prevailing in that synod. For our purposes it is sufficient to analyze just a few of his words:

“We cannot pass over one important consideration in our analysis of the religious meaning of the council: it has been deeply committed to the study of the modern world. Never before perhaps, so much as on this occasion, has the Church felt the need to know, to draw near to, to understand, to penetrate, serve and evangelize the society in which she lives; and to get to grips with it, almost to run after it, in its rapid and continuous change.” Additionally: “Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anticlerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it”. Finally: “A wave of affection and admiration flowed from the council over the modern world of humanity. Errors were condemned, indeed, because charity demanded this no less than did truth, but for the persons themselves there was only warning, respect and love. Instead of depressing diagnoses, encouraging remedies; instead of direful prognostics, messages of trust issued from the council to the present-day world. The modern world’s values were not only respected but honored, its efforts approved, its aspirations purified and blessed”<sup>29</sup>.

In these words, there is evidently no trace of “*intransigentismo*”, neither of its “conservative” variant nor of its moderate and (so called) “progressive” variant.

When he was elected pope (1963), Montini inherited the Council and led it to completion, guaranteeing an extraordinary success to the reformist as opposed to “*intransigente*” current. Since the

<sup>24</sup> [Gentiloni’s](#) (2018, p. 19) insight into the cultural and theological weakness of the latter is enlightening.

<sup>25</sup> For theology see e.g., ([Boersma 2009](#), pp. 209–92).

<sup>26</sup> That of the first edition of the *Action*, published in 1893.

<sup>27</sup> Both H. [De Lubac](#) (1993, p. 58; cf. [Moretto 1993](#)) and L. [Sturzo](#) (1937, pp. 640–47) were among the great readers of the first edition of Blondel’s *Action*.

<sup>28</sup> Sturzo’s popularism was spread in the Montini family, just think about the role that the father of the future Paul VI had in the foundation of the Popular Party. As for the assessment of Paul VI of De Lubac, the quote reported by J. [Guittton](#) (1979, p. 141) is enough: according to Montini was the best: Paul VI would have given him “the palm”.

<sup>29</sup> Speech during the last public session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Tuesday, 7 December 1965.

election of Paul VI, when the Council had already started and therefore on the basis of a broad discussion on crucial issues, and then during the Council, the conservative front was beaten by a coalition where, under the leadership of the liberal and reformist minority (*“Montiniana”*), the second party—that of the *“moderate intransigent”* (*“progressives”*)—had also deployed. The most important results of Vatican II reveal the signs of this *“third party”* victory<sup>30</sup>, i.e., of the *“party”* which has been ignored by the most widespread interpretations of the relationship between Vatican II and *“1968”*.

Therefore, if it is true that the *“conservative”* party lost during the Council, it is also true that the *“progressive”* one did not win. This holds even though the progressives represented a larger share of the winning coalition. We should not confuse *“Catholic liberals”* and *“Catholic progressives”* when we analyze the Catholic *“68”* and its relationship with the Vatican II.

The dogmatic adoption of the *“continental”* right/left opposition (so different from the *“Atlantic”* one), which characterized the narrative and legend of *“1968”*, makes it almost impossible for analysts to identify this *“third party”*. So, in the best case, the third-party program and identity is misunderstood and reduced to a search for compromise as a goal *in itself*. The *“third party”* is difficult to place both on the *“right”* and on the *“left”* (once conceived according to the *“continental way”*). From this too simple analytical scheme came (and come) misunderstandings and reductionisms based on poor and widespread legends, such as that which paints Paul VI first (during the Council) as a *“progressive”* and then (after the Council) as a *“conservative”*. These legends, or similar ones, became the basis of the most widespread interpretations of the relationship between *“1968”* and Vatican II.

If we wanted to remain faithful at any cost to the idea of only two ecclesial parties<sup>31</sup>, it would be more correct to oppose an *“intransigente”* and antimodern party (made up both of *“conservatives”* and *“progressives”*<sup>32</sup>) to a party animated by the request for a deep religious reform, *interested* and *active in* modernity. As Sturzo defined it, liberal *“without preconceptions or prejudices”* made up of people who understand and defend the *deep link between the modern sensitivity and Christian sensitivity* (Paul VI)<sup>33</sup>.

Ultimately, if the right importance is given to the greater complexity of the ecclesial world (*“three parties and not two”*), both the pre-Conciliar (and not Conciliar) genesis and the markedly conservative (i.e. resistant to any acceleration of modernization) character of the leftish Catholic *“1968”* become more evident, as well as its clericalism (e.g., the ecclesiology implied by the *“worker priests”* movement<sup>34</sup>). When it comes to understanding the positions on the issue of peace and war<sup>35</sup> or the attitudes towards freedom both in economics—market—and in politics—representative democracy—(Saresella 2005, p. 246), or on the option of Vatican II for the religious freedom model (anticonfessional and therefore antisecularist) (Diotallevi 2010, 2014), the proposed scheme (with three parties instead of two) shows its greater analytical usefulness. *“Liberal Catholics”* and *“progressive Catholics”* did not share the same position on these issues. The same happens when it comes to

<sup>30</sup> We could say of the *“reformists”*, according to the unsuspected declaration by Ratzinger-Benedict XVI: speech to the Roman Curia of 22 December 2005 devoted to the paradigmatic value of the *Dignitatis humanae*.

<sup>31</sup> It is not Thomas Aquinas's thought to split the two parties, but rather the interpretation given to it. To have an idea, think about the distance between the 'interpretation of Aquinas by Maritain and that by Gilson and De Lubac (Menozzi 1993, p. 157ss). About Maritain's *“duplicité”* see (Horn 2008, pp. 298–99).

<sup>32</sup> See footnote above n.12.

<sup>33</sup> At the general audience of 27 August 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Without questioning at all the sincerity and the extraordinary generosity of those initiatives, it is true that the ecclesiology of the *“worker priests”* experience was rather clerical. About the Catholic *“left-wing”* in general: (Bedeschi 1966, pp. 6–20; Horn 2015b, p. 255; Saresella 2014, 2016, pp. 53–68). Not many in this current rendered their garments for the Soviet repression in Hungary (in 1956) or for the invasion of Czechoslovakia (in 1968). About the influence of the A. Olivetti's *Community Movement* (Casula 2015, pp. 17–21); as for elements of E. Balducci's culture: (Menozzi 2005, pp. 76–77); on his Maritainism (which also leads him to a *“secularist”* interpretation of the *Dignitatis humanae*) (Bocchini Camaiani 2002, p. 191); on his constant apologetic tension (Martini 2005, p. 107); on his *“active spirit”* (Horn 2015b, pp. 43–46, 150–51).

<sup>35</sup> Formigoni (2012, p. 101) on the antiliberal matrix of the Catholic pacifism during the *“Cold War”*.

understand the reasons and the characteristics of the lay apostolate according to Vatican II, which are understandable only by adopting a “non-intransigente” perspective<sup>36</sup>.

In the currently most widespread and most accredited analysis of the relationship between “1968” and Vatican II, there is no awareness that the difference between the third position (“liberal”) and the first two (“progressives” and “conservatives”) is perhaps more radical than that between the “conservatives” and the “progressives”. This defect has numerous and serious consequences. As far as we are more directly concerned, such a defect prevents us from understanding the fate of the alliance between “progressive” Catholics and “liberal” Catholics in the 2-year period 1967–1969 after they had defeated the “conservatives”. This same misinterpretation also prevents us from having a clear idea about who held the leadership of this coalition at the time of Vatican II, i.e., the “liberals” (even though they represented a minority within the successful coalition) and not the “progressives” (even though they represented a majority of the successful coalition).

#### 4. “1968”: The Full Evidence of the “Third Party” Leadership Crisis

An abundant amount of scientific literature<sup>37</sup> dispels all doubts about the large participation of Catholics in the 1968 protests in Italy (too). That said, a decisive second gap in that literature should be highlighted. As highlighted in §2, a number of important religious events linked to the “Catholic 1968” recalibrate the significance of the events celebrated by the myth of “68”. At the same time, there were also important intraecclesial struggles over those events, and the reforms set out in the Council, throughout 1967–1969. These struggles have also been largely ignored or misunderstood in the scholarship. Instead, they deserve attention, because they reveal that between 1967 and 1969 almost all the deepest and most important reforms of Vatican II were completed or made decisive steps forward. *These events—it is important to indicate—are ignored by the most common interpretations and narratives of “1968”<sup>38</sup> or they are often remembered as something opposed to “1968”<sup>39</sup>*. What are the effects of this choice on those interpretations?

In this light we could focus on a dramatic question. Were the “1968” protests the (direct or indirect) expression of the Vatican II or—on the contrary—were they an opposition to it? Were they an antiliberal as well as antireformist protest, even if leftist? If so, how to explain it?

Between 1967 and 1969 the reformist program established by the Council reached a significant number of results. If compared to the conservatives’ program, the revolutionary value of these results can hardly be questioned, their discontinuity can hardly be disputed. In reality, the years after 1968 saw the “conservatives” opposing these reforms no less than the Catholic protagonists of the “bright days of May ‘68’”. The progressives, in fact, began to contest the reforms of Vatican II before the conservatives did. The struggle over the liturgical reforms enacted during that period, for example, represents one of many contests which pit the progressives together with the conservatives against the liberals. The architect of the 1967–1969 reforms was Pope Paul VI.

Between 1965 and 1967 work began on what in 1983 would become the new *Code of Canon Law* that gave juridical relevance to the Council’s resolutions and which overrode the resolutions and the structure of the 1917 Code—as at that time many were seriously discussing about the possibility of a *lex ecclesiae fundamentalis* rather than another *Code*.

On 24 June 1967, Paul VI repeated in *Sacerdotalis coelibatus* the request for the ecclesiastical celibacy of diocesan priests, but in new terms. According to the Council teaching he defined diocesan priest

<sup>36</sup> Horn (2008, p. 110). Other sources of the Catholic “leftist” movement: the specialized apostolate (Horn 2008, p. 291) and the heritage of Pius XI (56–63). Think about the political-cultural evolution of the *Pro Civitate Christiana* of Assisi. For analogies with what happens in the French-speaking Canada: (Gavreau 2013).

<sup>37</sup> See Saresella (2005), which opens a window on the vast world of the Catholic magazines from the Council to the contestation.

<sup>38</sup> For a different interpretation, e.g., (Santagata 2016).

<sup>39</sup> A typical case is represented by the reactions following the release of *Humanae vitae* (Harris 2018; Beretta 1998, p. 122; McLeod 2015, pp. 318–24). We should not underestimate what happened during the previous year, after the publication of *Sacerdotalis coelibatus*.

celibacy, without any uncertainties or reticence, as “particularly suited” (“*multimoda convenientia*”, no.18), without referring anymore to the principle of a presumed evident and acquired coessentiality between celibacy and ordained ministry. Only the publication of *Humane vitae* would catalyze a more radical opposition on the part of “Progressive Catholics”<sup>40</sup>.

On 15 August 1967, with the publication of *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, Paul VI literally overturned, rather than reform, the Vatican governance structure and its ordering principles. Suffice it to say that he reorganized the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* at the level of all other congregations, even though it had dominated the whole ecclesiastical government from 1542 onward. At the same time, Paul VI moved the *Secretariat of State* from the bottom to the top of the curial structure. This choice demonstrates his evident and powerful support to the practical dimension of faith well before “practical theology” became famous all over the world. It is difficult to find a more revealing act among the signs and protests of the “Catholic ‘68”, an act that was authentically revolutionary and radically inspired by Vatican II. While previous popes had proposed new doctrinal definitions and future popes would propose new catechisms and doctrinal compendiums, on 30 June 1968, at the end of his proclaimed “year of faith”, Paul VI proposed a *profession of faith*: the *creed of the people of God*. It brought back the primary expression of faith to a more ancient and convenient form<sup>41</sup>, much more practiced and rooted in the Church tradition. *Humanae vitae* was then released on 25 July 1968. It denounced above all any form of direct and therefore full control of reproduction (HV n.16), mentioning abortion as a typical case<sup>42</sup>. This denunciation—whose implications both in the text and subsequently should certainly be singularly discussed—is placed and exposed from inside the horizon of the conscience and of its dignity and its inviolable freedom. Paul VI would even add some new accents to this topic during his Wednesday catechesis soon after the release of the encyclical. In this document, more than any other, the divorce between Paul VI and the progressive Catholics all over the world is made evident (McLeod 2007, pp. 337–39; 2015, p. 324; Beretta 1998, p. 122; Harris 2018).

On 3 April 1969 the new *Messale Romano* was published and thus the liturgical reform requested and initiated by Vatican II was completed. This reform did not change only or primarily the language of celebrations. Even more than that, it freed the liturgy from its theologically and spiritually negative heavy sediments accumulated over time (Marsili 1996, 2007). From that moment on (until today) this reform has become the main target of the “conservatives” battle (both official and unofficial), without thereby being less indigestible even to the “progressives” who were simultaneously fighting for a less regulated and a more free, spontaneous liturgy which was sometimes deprived of any distinction of the roles between clergy and laity.

On 10 October 1969, Paul VI signed another of those acts that for the last 50 years have relentlessly attracted the arrows of both the external and the internal opposition, once again and obviously both “conservative” and “progressive”. It was the new statute of *Azione Cattolica Italiana*, that of the “religious choice” (“*scelta religiosa*”)<sup>43</sup>. Here, more than spending words to repeat how important *Azione Cattolica Italiana* was for Paul VI (he defined it as “not historically contingent, but theologically necessary”<sup>44</sup>), or to show once again how much its new statute corresponded to the Council’s ecclesial doctrine on the lay apostolate something else was urgent. What matters most here, in fact, is to remember which plan the renewal of *Azione Cattolica* belonged to, and which guide it was entrusted

<sup>40</sup> About criticisms of “Catholic progressives” to Paul VI Sacerdotalis caelibatus see (McLeod 2015, p. 324; Horn 2015b, p. 253; Saresella 2005, p. 246).

<sup>41</sup> The articles are a creed of a liturgically rooted faith profession, rather than a series of sentences drafted for a philosophically and logically designed doctrine.

<sup>42</sup> This, of course, does not put every form of contraception on the same level but, on the contrary, judges every act of contraception (obviously in subjective conditions of full warning and deliberate consent) according to its level of similarity (in terms of likelihood of its effect) with the certain and irreversible pregnancy interruption.

<sup>43</sup> Martini (1982) identified the prophetic character of the “religious choice” as a reference to the discernment practice, now back in fashion (at least in words), but at that time and for decades strongly opposed.

<sup>44</sup> Address to the delegates to the III National Assembly of *Azione Cattolica Italiana* (1977). Expression then mentioned again in *Evangelizzazione e ministeri* (n.79).

to. In this regard, it is better to return to Pietro Scoppola's opinion about the modernist crisis and the subsequent repression, of which one line has been quoted before.

At the end of the 19th century the crisis of positivism and an hour of bewilderment in public life had rekindled the desire for religion in many spirits. At the origins of the reform movement (*internal to Catholicism and above all to the Catholic clergy, A. N.*) there was undoubtedly the purpose of meeting this expectation, of offering the image of a Catholicism close to the needs of the time. The movement crisis and the stiffening of authorities left that expectation unmet. It seems that the Church has missed an opportunity to get closer to the souls in search of faith. The failure of the Catholic cultural renewal has contributed, on the other hand, to deepen the gap between the Church and the culture of the time (p. 362).

As noted, Scoppola wrote these words<sup>45</sup> in 1961, therefore 1 year after the solemn opening of the Council. Vatican II would soon become a response to the need for renewal ostracized by the antimodernist repression, although only a part of the persecuted requests for religious renewal could be called "modernist" according to the *Pascendi's* sense. Soon after the conclusion of Vatican II, it was necessary for Paul VI that the renewal inspired by the Council was experienced and acquired by the majority of the Catholic laity and not only by its intellectual, ecclesial and political leaders. He believed that such a renewal should become "popular". To this aim, Vittorio Bachelet, trained in the *F.U.C.I.* and then president of the "graduates" of *Azione Cattolica* (*Movimento Laureati di Azione Cattolica*), was called—together with a group of other lay people and ecclesiastical assistants of similar spiritual orientation—to the top of this ecclesial association (not community, movement, group or "sect": see Favale 1991): at the top of the renewed *Azione Cattolica Italiana*<sup>46</sup>.

Paul VI, like any leader of a reformist winning elite, needed time not only to let the Council's fruits ripen, but also to ensure that, once ripened, they could take firm roots. The time available, however, always depended on some fortunate combinations of success both in the government action and in the consent acquired (consent, not the simple "audience satisfaction" that religious celebrities are today satisfied with, see Turner 2011; Diotallevi 2019). For Paul VI, the possibility of winning this challenge also depended on the ability to make an orientation become a majority, this time in a much wider, complex and changeable arena—the whole laity—compared to the area composed by the council assembly or by the curial system. Such a mission was that of the renewed *A.C.I.* If the renewed *Catholic Action* would become since the 1970s the main polemic target of Italian Catholic integrist in the late 1960s—also including physical aggressions by *Comunione e liberazione* and personal attacks as in the 1980s against Giuseppe Lazzati, who fought against both Fascism and Nazism, knew the Nazi camps, was rector of the Milan Catholic University and since 2013 has been named "venerable" for the entire Church—, as *A.C.I.* was attacked from the left by *Christians for socialism* and *Base communities* movements.

In sum, during the 2-year period 1967–1969 there was a novelty, that should be adequately considered, which brought to the inevitable review of the relation between Vatican II and "1968" by the currently prevailing interpretations. The alliance between "progressives" and "reformists" that had prevailed over the "conservatives" at the Council was definitively broken between 1967 and 1969. Not less than the "conservatives", the "progressives" also lashed out against Paul VI's reformism.

<sup>45</sup> In the same year of *Eclisse del sacro* by S.S. Acquaviva.

<sup>46</sup> This was the purpose and the prophetic value of the "religious choice" of that new statute, as explained 12 years later by the Archbishop Carlo Maria Martini while celebrating the first anniversary of the assassination of Vittorio Bachelet by the *Brigate Rosse*. The "religious choice" did not invite people to withdraw in the small religious "field", but to remain in the unique secular field in a new way. It invited to remain there in responsible freedom, without which no "choice" is given or, in biblical terms, no discernment is exercised (p. 211), true synonym of the "religious choice". The category of choice or discernment—said Martini in that homily—is fundamental for the spiritual figure of the layman and expresses better than other related categories the positivity and attention to the plan of God in the world; it is not an immediate and definitive judgment on reality, which belongs to God alone, it is a careful and patient discernment of how the work of the Spirit gives life and creates his Church in the world (p. 211).



In other words, Montini's attempt—which had been successful during Vatican II—to transform at least some “conservatives” and quite a few “progressives” into “reformists” underwent a serious and lasting setback (see [Horn 2015a](#), p. 64).

The split that the editorial staff of the theologically top-ranked journal “*Concilium*” ([Horn 2015b](#), p. 256) would soon experience, where at the beginning the most important theologians who had worked as experts during Vatican II were committed, exemplifies well (on a primarily theoretical plan) something that happened also to Italian Catholicism and to other local Catholicisms to an even wider extent.

The hypotheses according to which the Catholic “1968” in Italy was a reaction to the alleged betrayal of the Council openings summarize only part of the split between “progressives” and “reformists” ([Scoppola 1986](#), pp. 119–24). The hermeneutic work on which to focus should start from a more careful consideration of the intransigent component of the “progressives” DNA<sup>47</sup>, which emerges with full evidence—for example—in studies dedicated to a long list of leading characters: from Romolo Murri ([Scoppola 1975](#), e.g., pp. 155–62) to Ernesto Balducci<sup>48</sup>. The same reasons which led the Catholic progressives to oppose the acceleration of modernization in the 1940s and 1950s, also led them to oppose the ecclesial reforms of the late 1960s which had been born of an inspiration which did not see modernity and its acceleration as a curse. Such a point cannot be ignored when it comes to explain the taste of betrayal that Paul VI's liberal and reformist practice had to the “progressives” intransigent palate. In any case, as usual, by opposing the “reformists”, the “progressives” paved the way for the “conservatives” return<sup>49</sup>.

The expectations betrayed by Montini's reformism did not have their roots in the teaching of Vatican II, nor were they inspired by its texts. They were born before the Council and they had driven the most widespread interpretations of it, even if they were not very precise or even partial and instrumental.

To stay within the Italian borders, and therefore in many ways not far from the core of universal Catholicism, well before the Council, the *intransigente* matrix had nurtured the dissatisfaction and misunderstanding of the Italian society of the 1950s (as well documented, for example, by the pages of many Catholic magazines active in that period, first of all “*Testimonianze*”). Even among the fibers of the Italian Catholic world a “leftist” and “activist” wing had already begun ([Sidoti 1975](#), pp. 172–74), and was somehow also integrist. When the knots of the Council reforms began to come to the comb, some distances between “progressives” and “reformists” started to reveal themselves. So, the “progressive” and antiliberal interpretations of texts such as *Pacem in Terris* by John XXIII began to spread even if that document put freedom—including political freedom—among the main pillars of the Catholic Church's social teaching ([Fabbretti 1968](#)). Without any literal and historical reason, the same happened for the main texts of the Council and for *Populorum progressio* by Paul VI. They became the sources of a maximalist and sometime also utopian social Catholicism. Objectively both “conservatives” and “progressives” were essentially antimodern<sup>50</sup>. The premises for all this pre-existed the Council, but their ignorance often influenced its widespread understanding.

In short, the point we argue is the following: the Italian Catholic “1968” expressed the prevalent and deep-rooted misunderstanding of modernity, sometimes expressed as real hostility, which had grown stronger between the 1940s and 1950s, when modernity was accelerating. An old “*intransigent*”

<sup>47</sup> This is why we cannot agree with the hypothesis that 1968 represents a sort of mass modernist crisis. The thesis depends on a very poor idea of modernism, even poorer than *Pascendi's* ([Hunter 1991](#), p. 82). If anything, it could be defined as an “antimodernist” rebellion.

<sup>48</sup> Ernesto Balducci (1922–1992), religious priest, preacher, theologian, journalist. Between the late 1960s and the early 1990s he was an important participant of the Italian Catholic dissent and of the “leftish Catholicism”.

<sup>49</sup> It would be important to deal with a comparative analysis of the process we are referring to and the American ([Hout and Fischer 2002](#), p. 185ss; [Wuthnow 1988](#), p. 147), Dutch ([van Rooden 2010](#), p. 189ss), Québécoise ([Gavreau 2013](#), e.g., p. 196ss) culture wars.

<sup>50</sup> For some even more ancient roots see ([Moro 2020](#)).

gaze on modernity came at that time mainly from the “left” (refused in the social domain of duties, responsibilities and risks, modernity was instead enthusiastically accepted in the individual domain: more rights, more goods, less responsibilities, antiauthoritarianism). The Italian Catholic “1968” expressed the “leftist” attitude of this misunderstanding and hostility. All this was both cause and effect of the loss by the “third party” of its ability to positively drive the requests and energies of the moderate *intransigentismo* or “Catholic progressivism”.

## 5. Some Analytical Advantages of a Different Interpretation

In the period between the First World War and the “long 60s” the structure of the so-called *state centered societies* definitively entered into crisis (Diotallevi 2014). The following period saw *first* the acceleration of the functional differentiation of society (Luhmann 1987, 1997) up to its globalization and *then*, especially in the last three decades, a strong counter-thrust (Kissinger 2014; Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2014; Kupchan 2012; Tooze 2018; Khanna 2019)<sup>51</sup>. The “pro-sovereignty” and “populist” movements, together with the recovery of a hegemonic ambition and the appeal of authoritarian regimes, represent the most visible aspect of that counter-thrust *today*.

At this moment it is impossible to make predictions. Nobody can say for certain whether this wave of sovereignists and populist reaction to globalization represents the last attempt of a defeated regime (the statist one) or a real inversion of trend. Luckily, however, what matters here is something else.

Our purpose is to assess how much the correction of the current prevailing hypotheses about the relationship between Vatican II and “1968” can help to address the issues we have been focusing on: (i) the crisis of political and religious Catholicism, (ii) the relationship between Catholicism and modernization, (iii) the relationship between Catholicism and the ongoing developments of the European Union, (iv) and the status of the North–Atlantic relationships within Catholicism.

Drawing on the analysis above we can make a few preliminary conclusions.

(i) According to a “*third party*” perspective, political and religious Catholicism nourished one another (De Rosa 1976a, 1976b; Scoppola 1966, 1985). Each questioned and destabilized the provisional syntheses of the other and vice versa. Unlike the prevailing *intransigent* Catholic thought, which also included the Maritainism and then Dossettism experience, in the “third party’s” perspective there was no hierarchy between societal institutions (or “social spheres”): the religious sphere was not hierarchically superior to the political and vice versa and no sphere is out of a direct (neither religiously mediated nor deterministic) impact of Revelation. Without leaving the pyramidal and syllogistic view of the pre-Council thought (i.e., that of “see-judge-act”), the full assumption of political responsibility by the Catholic laity would have never been imaginable. We would have remained within the “Gentiloni pact”<sup>52</sup> scheme. Or we would have returned to it, as Tardini continued to hope after the Second World War, in opposition to Montini and De Gasperi’s thought (see Scoppola 1978). The ecclesiastical powers would have exchanged—or boasted of being able to do so<sup>53</sup>—packages of votes with the politicians who could offer them greater advantages.

Without the very different perspective of the “*third party*” we would have had neither Sturzo’s “popularism” nor De Gasperi’s decade. We would not have had any *political Catholicism*, in the strict sense of the word (i.e., “nonconfessional”), but only the use of religion for political purposes or the use of politics for religious purposes. In fact (De Rosa 1976b), one cannot talk of ‘political Catholicism’

<sup>51</sup> Some summaries by “Foreign affairs” are useful, e.g., March 2018, January 2019, April 2019, May 219, January 2020.

<sup>52</sup> At the end of the “*non expedit*” period (when Italian Catholics were requested by the Pope not to take part in the national political life) and before the grounding (in 1919) of the Sturzo’s nonconfessional and nonecclesiastically run Popular Party, “the “Gentiloni Pact” was the most important attempt to negotiate a political exchange between the Vatican powers and the Italian secular political conservative wing: clerical electoral support in return for less anticlerical national policies (De Rosa 1976a, p. 337ss).

<sup>53</sup> As at the time of the Napolitano–Monti operation by the CEI management and the so-called “Cartello di Todi” (October 2011). About the well-established irrelevance of the religion for the electoral behaviour of the Italian Catholics, see the literature mentioned by (Diotallevi 2016a).

when Catholicism plays a role only on the political demand side. Political Catholicism requires a vibrant role for Catholic ideas, experiences, people and organized interests on the political supply side, where politics is run and policies imagined and realized. What is more, a ‘nonconfessional’ characteristic is required of any ‘political Catholicism’—if on this second side no special power is left to the ecclesiastical authority. We would not have had political Catholicism even if the Catholics had broken with and successfully refused the political ambitions of the ecclesiastical authorities. In this last case, in fact, we would have had the simply politically irrelevant Catholicism of the elected Catholics as “independent from” the various political parties (and thus completely dependent on parties—first of all the PCI—who would be the “owner” of the parliamentary seats granted to them). We would not have had a political Catholicism, but a mass political opportunism of Catholics. This happened both with the clerical-fascists and with the Catholic-communists (Scoppola 1971, 1978), and also every time that the Catholics swore to be faithful to the dogmas of *laïcité* (Diotallevi 2016a), something that has now become very usual despite the scripts of both the Italian Constitution and Vatican II<sup>54</sup>.

Not every kind of Catholic religiosity is able to cope with and to support political Catholicism. Surely neither Catholic devotionism nor Catholic fanaticism are able to do so. So, the crisis of Paul VI’s ecclesial leadership in 1967–1969, together with the crisis of the “third party’s” hegemony on the ecclesial coalition in opposition to the “conservatives”, would not have remained and would not remain without heavy effects on the political Catholicism.

(ii) With the crisis of the ecclesial “third party”, the *nonintransigent* perspective and program of Catholicism both on modernity and on itself started to decline. The “third party” crisis was the crisis of the reforms and renewal program of Vatican II (having at their core the four constitutions and *Dignitatis humanae*, Sartori 1994). As is known, that program had been written under the guidance of Paul VI and with the collaboration of some theologians who, in the early 1960s, worked as council experts and who, almost without significant exceptions, in the previous years had been investigated as suspects of modernism by the guardians of the Vatican orthodoxy. The same *nonintransigente* project was proposed by Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam*, in 1964, and confirmed in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, in 1975: two clearly relevant dates to our study. Significant portions of that program were abandoned or even contradicted during the following pontificates, which highlighted alternative slogans such as “identity” and “nonnegotiable values” and gave space to things such as personal prelacies and multiplication of authorized rituals to legitimate a regime of intraecclesial liturgy *à la carte*, which was literally unconceivable in the “third party” perspective.

Not only the current crisis of the political Catholicism, but also that of the relationship between Catholicism and religion (Diotallevi 2017, 2019), can be attributed to the crisis of the “third party” and of its ecclesial leadership. Without this crisis, we would not have such an unchallenged and unprejudiced use of religious symbols by political players who, however, do not recognize any value either to the social teaching of the Church or to the Catholics’ political and social experience (Diotallevi 2020). The background of this unscrupulous use was the failed attempt—an important but not unique feature of the Ruini project<sup>55</sup>—to bring the political action of Catholics under a more direct control of the ecclesiastical authorities and, in particular, of its unprecedented *Italian* national summit. Without political Catholicism and the “third party’s” crises, no space would have been created for the present abuses of the Ruini project.

As repeatedly shown (Diotallevi 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2019), the political abuse of Christian religious symbols is not an isolated fact, but only one aspect of that transformation of Catholicism into a *low intensity religion* (Turner 2011, p. 149) made of massive recourse to the *commodification* and *brandization* of religion. In fact, what we are calling *third party* defeat is nothing but a case of what authors

<sup>54</sup> See (Diotallevi 2016b).

<sup>55</sup> Cardinal Camillo Ruini was president of the Italian Episcopal Conference from 1991 to 2007 and vicar of John Paul II’s Rome dioceses. He was the main player of John Paul II’ pastoral and political line into the Italian theatre (see “ruinismo” in the historical and sociological literature).

like B.S. Turner have termed the *democratization of religion*, i.e., a dramatic shift in power from the religious supply side to the religious demand side, in other words: the decline of religious authority. Ironically, despite the traditionalist mindset of numerous Catholic religious firms that use this strategy (since similar samples of Catholic progressivism are not missing), they are not examples of an (unlikely) opposition to the modern world but, if anything, of subordination. What interests us more is that these strategies and the Catholic religiousness they give rise to are obvious examples of a radical alternative to the real religious modernization imagined by the “third party” conceived—from Newman on—both as an attempt to answer to the religious challenge of modernity and also to the Christian challenge to modernity. Clarifying the characteristics of the latter and understanding the crisis it has experienced since the late 1960s help to correctly frame the more recent phenomenon of “*low intensity Catholicism*”. It represents (in its “right wing” or “conservative” variant as well as in its “left wing” and “progressive” variant, see [Diotalleui 2015, 2019](#)) the defeat of the Catholic religious modernization path taken by Vatican II and Montini, and of the “religious choice” ([Martini 1982](#)), that leaves room to another path inspired by a very different idea of religious modernization, and a less ambitious and more subaltern one.

Nor is it difficult to ascertain that none of the three main popes after Paul VI adopted either the Montini or the “third party’s” programs in their entirety. This was not due to the lack of personal veneration toward Paul VI by Wojtyła, Ratzinger and Bergoglio, and therefore it does not represent a problem. On the contrary, it helps us to understand that this distance arises above all from different cognitive schemes and preferences, as well as from the spiritual and institutional models of reference. From this point of view, as discussed elsewhere ([Diotalleui 2016b, 2019](#)), the split between Bergoglio’s pontificate and those of his two predecessors, while noteworthy, is no greater than that between Paul VI and the three longer pontificates after him.

(iii) The fruitful perspective of the typical Catholic “third party” modernity has abundantly manifested itself in the political arena, both at the national and European level. We cannot ignore the dialogue with this variant of liberal Catholicism (not to be confused with the French-inspired liberal Catholicism—see [Diotalleui 2010](#)) developed by that particular political Catholicism, the “populism” originally designed by Don Luigi Sturzo, who cannot be compared to the various democratic-Christian or Christian-social currents. During the De Gasperi period ([Scoppola 1978](#)), the Sturzo-style “populism” greatly contributed to the achievement of political results such as the Italian Constitution of 1948, the birth of NATO and the foundation of the first elements of what is now the European Union.

Not by chance, therefore, even without representing the only factor, its crisis was to be followed by serious difficulties in the main results ensured by its success. The slow prevalence of the “intergovernmental” and “interstate” interpretation of what we now call the European Union over the federal interpretation (think about Jean Monnet and a federalism of functions before than of segments)<sup>56</sup> is contemporary and proportional to the decline of Sturzo’s “populism” influence on the Christian-Democratic contribution to the European adventure started by Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi. This contribution was characterized by the intention to overcome the form of the modern state exactly in its cradle (that is continental Europe). The intent was so clear that not a few observers considered that project as nothing but a “Catholic conspiracy” ([Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010](#), p. 195ss).

Furthermore, it is difficult to deny that the current supremacy of the intergovernmental and interstate trend versus the federal trend has at least widened the space filled by the “neosovereignists” with the passing of time. There is no sovereignty without state; what the European adventure wanted was in fact to overcome the state. If, however, in Brussels and in its surroundings only cooperation between the national governments or even “European sovereignty” is pursued, it should not come as a surprise that elsewhere someone is dreaming to go back to the old sovereign states. Not by chance,

<sup>56</sup> See ([Elazar 1995](#); [Moravcsik 2002, 2005](#); [Fabbrini 2005](#)).

in October 2000, in Warsaw, Tony Blair clearly asked to consider the EU as a “superpower, but not as a super state”<sup>57</sup>. Federalism (primarily functional rather than segmentary) and not macro-sovereignism remains the alternative to the micro- and meso-sovereignism of the current “neo-sovereignists”.

(iv) Benedict XVI recognized a paradigmatic value of the just mentioned *Dignitatis humanae* and at London’s Westminster Hall (17 September 2010) he dedicated an unprecedented praise to the Anglo-Saxon political tradition. On the other hand, in the *Centesimus annus* (1991) encyclical John Paul II declared the value of the market economy and that of the reciprocal limitation between the economic and political powers as decisive elements of Catholic social teaching, which were well established in the ecclesial doctrine of Vatican II. These two examples allow an understanding that the renewal of the Catholic concept of modernity carried on by Vatican II would not have been imaginable without the great contribution from Anglophone Catholicism in the 20th century, especially from the United States. Here it is also strategic to remind that such a contribution offered by Anglophone Catholicism had been developed thanks to its fruitful dialogue with the nonrationalist and nonsecularist variant of liberalism and with its constitutionalism. Quoting Tocqueville, this liberalism—very different from the French one—brought together for the first time the spirit of freedom and that of religion, without opposing them (De Tocqueville 1971, p. 42; see Douglass and Hollenbach 1994; Noonan 1998; Murray 2005; Mensch 2010; Diotallevi 2010; Gorski 2017). Therefore, ignoring the contribution of the North-Atlantic and Anglophone Catholicism to the renewal that prepared and succeeded Vatican II would be a bit like trying to explain the healthy principles of modernism without referring to John H. Newman’s testimony and works.

As stated, the best Catholic–liberal synthesis (always according to the Anglo–Saxon meaning of the term “liberalism”) of the ecclesial doctrine about the relationships between political and religious powers is represented by the already mentioned *Dignitatis humanae*. As an alternative to both secularism (or *laïcité*) and confessionalism (Diotallevi 2010, 2017), this Council document recognizes full citizenship in the public space to religion (in terms which are equivalent to the U.S. 1 Amendment: “free exercise” and “disestablishment”), and underlines that the creation or reshaping of such public space as an open space is a work—among others—of religion itself. The common good is therefore considered not “only” as a political affair but “also” as a political affair. In line with this theoretical and pastoral option, *DH* (in terms very similar to those of Stepan’s “twin toleration model”<sup>58</sup>) condemns the reduction of religion just to private devotion or to public but merely cultural phenomenon.

*Dignitatis humanae* was inspired by the match and cooperation between the American liberal Catholicism, mainly thanks to J.C. Murray, and a theoretical perspective inspired both by Sturzo and by Pavan’s<sup>59</sup> Thomism (very different from that of the Roman school<sup>60</sup>) (Fabbretti 1968). Almost 20 years before, the battle to include the principle of religious freedom into the Italian Constitution (see art. 8), as an alternative to the twin models of secularism (*laïcité*) and confessionalism, was led by A. De Gasperi, supported by Montini, and had to stand and win not only against the other parties of the Constituent Assembly, but also against the great majority of the DC, the pressures of the Vatican curia and of “*Civiltà Cattolica*” (Scoppola 1978; Sale 2008).

Since the end of the 1990s, however, regarding the *Declaration 11* annexed to the *Treaty of Amsterdam*, now art.17 annexed to the *Treaty about the functioning of the European Union* (2007), the Catholic Bishop Conferences of the EU member countries (COMECE) came back to support the secularist–confessional model (religion as state infrastructure), asking and obtaining that the legal status of the “confessions” remained under the competence of the states (Ventura 2013, p. 124ss, 2014; Lugato 2014). Thus,

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address\\_given\\_by\\_tony\\_blair\\_to\\_the\\_polish\\_stock\\_exchange\\_warsaw\\_6\\_october\\_2000-en-f8c765d9-ad33-4ce3-bf8e-7dd6d01141d7.html](https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_tony_blair_to_the_polish_stock_exchange_warsaw_6_october_2000-en-f8c765d9-ad33-4ce3-bf8e-7dd6d01141d7.html).

<sup>58</sup> See Stepan (2000, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Antonio Pavan (1903–1994) priest, theologian, scholar, dean of the Lateran University, who then became cardinal. He served the staff of John XXIII, as expert at the Vatican II Council, and of Paul VI. Among other things, he worked at the draft of *Pacem in terris* and *Dignitatis humanae*, fighting against the opposition of the Vatican Curia to the religious freedom principle.

<sup>60</sup> Additionally, also from that of Maritain: see here footnotes no.17, 25, 28, 33.



they were following the ecclesiastical illusion of preserving some protection (although paid at very high price, destined to increase). They preferred to remain under the states' protection rather than supporting more firmly a post and antistate EU federal model of governance. The remarkable distance of this ecclesiastical strategy from the path started during the Italian Constituent Assembly and traced by the Council is easily measurable.

Finally, today it is difficult to dispute that the current Pope has not rarely expressed slogans (such as “tierra techo y trabajo”: [Francesco 2017](#)) and more articulated thoughts in line with the idea of the exclusive competence of politics on the common good<sup>61</sup> rather than with the idea of horizontal subsidiarity and free market stated by Vatican II and *Centesimus annus* and by influential speeches by both John Paul II and Benedict XVI<sup>62</sup>. The current Pope does not seem to emphasize anymore the coauthorship of Catholicism or at least its compatibility with the ideal of “open societies”, as on the contrary it had begun to happen with the opening to Anglo-Saxon constitutionalism already present in some radio messages by Pius XII during the Second World War ([Gonella 1942](#)). In Pope Bergoglio's time, the influence of the North-Atlantic bond on the ecclesial doctrine seems to be lost. At least this coincides with the demise and crisis of the “third party” heritage and of its leadership over the ecclesiastical coalition alternative to the “conservatives” which first emerged in the 2-year period 1967/1969.

In summary, from the “three and not just two parties” perspective, the connection between the topics proposed by the publishers of this issue of *Religions* is strong and evident: the crisis of political Catholicism and religious Catholicism, the new questions posed about the relationship between Catholicism and advanced modernization, the relationship between Catholicism and European institutions and the importance and developments of the North Atlantic relationships within Catholicism. Equally strong and evident are the links between these topics with the event and the teachings of Vatican II.

To understand these topics, the events of 1968, or better those of the 2-year period 1967–1969, emerge as particularly important. The now abundant literature about the “long 60s” has greatly clarified the presence of a very relevant religious dimension to the social and cultural processes of that 2-year period, as clarified among other by the deep link generally accepted between the Council issued renewal and “1968”. At the same time that literature clarified that the long 1960s started a deep social transition which also marked the first two decades of the 21st century, which still seems to be on-going, and whose outcomes are not obvious at all.

In conclusion, the analytical advantages of the perspective just presented would not be real if they did not leave open some questions able to inspire new thinking and new research.

For example, does Pope Francis, so keen on the Council and on Montini (despite so culturally and spiritually far from the latter<sup>63</sup>), simply represent a new chapter of the intraecclesial alternation between *intransigentismo* (more or less moderate) and liberal reformism ([Mosse 1986](#), p. 304) or does his papacy represent something else? Additionally, what is his papacy, if not simply a “leftist weak neo-confessionalism”<sup>64</sup>? Has Italian (religious and not only) Catholicism now begun again (from the “right” and from the “left”) to reject modernity or is it just trying to use modernity's tools (starting from communication) thereby becoming a slave to them or simply accommodating to it? Or, at least to

<sup>61</sup> See e.g., *Evangelii gaudium* n.56 or n.240: “The State is responsible for the care and promotion of the society's common good.” For the relationships between J.M. Bergoglio and peronism see [Zanatta 2020](#).

<sup>62</sup> Such as that at Westminster Hall already mentioned or that of 22 May 2010 at the *Centesimus annus* Foundation.

<sup>63</sup> Just think about the abyss separating GB Montini's “popular” (Sturzian) notion of people (it. “popolo”, es. “pueblo”) and the idea of people (it. “popolo”, es. “pueblo”) living in the “people's theology” so loved by Pope Francis (see [Scannone 2016](#); [Diotalle 2019](#), chap. 3; and also, [Zanatta 2020](#)).

<sup>64</sup> Think about the current orientations of the Vatican diplomacy towards the Chinese or Venezuelan regime. According to the *Konfessionalisierung* paradigm schools and also to the Gorski's lesson, here ‘confessionalism/confessionalization’ means reduction of religion to a state infrastructure.

some extents, does Italian Catholicism still challenge modernity by participating in it with firm belief and considering it as a *kairos*, a good time for faith?

Furthermore: if we wanted to come back to the religious “reformism” that emerged from the Council and that inspired Montini’s pontificate, would there be enough strength and resources *today* as there were then despite the defeats of 1924 (Sturzo’s exile, successfully requested by Mussolini to the Vatican), 1933 (Montini’s removal from FUCI’s leadership because of the Fascist’s regime pressure) and 1954 (Montini’s appointment as Archbishop of Milan and his consequent “exile” from his position at the top of the Vatican Curia)? Does *today*’s Italian Catholicism still have enough resources (of any kind) to revamp the model of Vatican II and Montini’s ecclesial reformism and spirituality? Since, if such a reformism and spirituality is fully able to cope with radical modernity, it can also do it only in an alternative and much more costly way than “low intensity Catholicism” could do for the small part visible to social science, in today’s context, is a new and updated season of “third party” leadership a realistic perspective or is it now really mere utopia? Is the spread of *Pentecostalism* and of “low intensity” Catholicism an accident or does it confirm the impossible ecclesial and spiritual change implemented by the Second Vatican Council? Is it wiser to conclude that *today* the search for a deep and popular religious renewal, that survived the antimodernist repression and imposed in Vatican II and in the first post-Council period (above all with the renewal of *Azione Cattolica*), is nothing but an illusion, especially of those who ignore the political theory (Sartori 1987) according which it is impossible, apart from very restricted elites, to sustain beliefs in society which are at the same time “structurally open” and “intensively believed”?

Questions like these can give birth to new research worthy of attention. If so, one benefit of the interpretation proposed by this study is to let these questions emerge with a little more clarity.

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