

Ninety years after the Lateran Pact, many questions remain in Church-State relations. We should not be misled by celebrations of pure image. We must change and follow the new course set by Pope Francis.

We are in the ninetieth year since the signing of the “Patti Lateranensi” (agreement to create the “Stato della Città del Vaticano”) and also at the thirty-fifth anniversary of the “Concordato” (agreement between Church and State). It will again be presenting a mere image [1] with the usual reception at the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See, with the presence of a completely different government from the previous ones but which, if it is a Church-State relationship, will probably have nothing to say but to take part. *Maiora premunt*, it is not on the agenda to talk about these issues today in Italy. Yet it can be done differently as those who sought, on the occasion of the recent one hundredth anniversary of the “*Appello ai liberi e forti*” of Don Sturzo. This Appeal marked the beginning in Italy of Catholics being active on political issues.

Anti-social inspiration in the Church

“Noi Siamo Chiesa” has a different and alternative opinion to the “orthodox” vulgate of the Church-State relations in our country. Our point of view is one of the central questions of the critical position where we differ from the ecclesiastical common sense that has characterized our Church. It comes from far away, from Antonio Rosmini who asked for “*freedom without privileges*”, from Alessandro Manzoni and by those who accepted the fall of the temporal power of the Popes and considered the law “*sulle garantigie*” (about guarantees for the Church) (May 13, 1871) of the new Italian State that granted freedom to the Church and economic resources to the same extent as those previously necessary to maintain the many structures of the Roman Curia [2]. Then the people expressed a secular position of acceptance of democracy (against much resistances) and of lively criticism of the Patti of '29. For many years, Catholics from the pew argued against the acceptance of the situation that had been consolidated with the approval of Article 7 of the Constitution in 1947.

Finally, this critical strand established itself in chapter 76 of the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* which provided for the possibility of the unilateral renunciation of the Church to the privileges “*to give sincerity to her testimony*”. In 1984, at the signing of the new “Concordato”, the whole area which was inspired by “Vatican Council 2”, a text was included which stated: “*These choices of the Vatican, shared by the CEI (Italian Conference of Bishops), seem contrary to the most genuine conciliar inspiration and to the widespread expectations among Christians for a credible and poor Church, supported by faith and free to preach and practice peace based on justice and freedom*”. The position of democratic and conciliar Catholics has manifested itself many times over the past 50 years against a laicity that is called “positive” to support clerical positions (referendum on divorce and voluntary termination of pregnancy, law 40 on the law of end of life and law for civil unions, Welby and Englaro cases...). The resistance of democratic Catholics has also manifested itself against the single political orientations of the hierarchies, wary of the center-left and sympathizers of the center-right.

A historical reflection made on “if the decision were different”

The thinking of our history on this occasion of the ninetieth of the “Patti L.” must be done with this “if”, which seems to emerge from facts that can not easily be contradicted in history and that indicate guilt and errors made by those who led the church. The fury to defend the temporal power, to prolong the

non expedit (prohibition on Catholics to be engaged in political issues before “Patti L.”) for decades, allowed or facilitated a management of the nascent Italy to a much more secular, oligarchic, military caste that, together with modern interventions, led to real national disasters (the colonial wars, the military repression of people insurrection on 1898, until the real coup of May 1915 to begin the first global war). The democratic line of the Popular Party of don Sturzo was definitively set aside with the signature of the Patti L. on 11 February 1929 to close the "*questione Romana*" (the question left open before the end of the Pontifical State of the Church in 1870). If, instead of the agreement with Fascism, which was largely favorable to the ecclesiastical system (with heavy gifts such as the article *ad hominem* against Ernesto Buonaiuti), there had been a real withdrawal from fascism, the latter would have been able to consolidate and would not have obtained the broad consensus that allowed the war of aggression in Ethiopia in 1935 and finally the unfortunate alliance with Nazism and the entry into the war in June of '40. Pius XI realized too late how much it cost the Italian nation with the consolidation of the ecclesiastical system with the acceptance of the agreement of '29. For his part, Pius XII took note of the situation.

The “Resistenza” (organization underground) against Nazism and fascism was very much characterized with the protagonism of Catholics. At the “Constituent Assembly” of 1947 the Patti were accepted as part of the general reconstruction of cohabitation. If they had been rewritten, the relationship between the Catholic Church and society would have taken off on a very different and more clear track. The history of the Catholic party then saw on one side the tenacious faith and its important part in the difficult process of democracy in Italy in an international framework decided by the great balance of the Cold War, and on the other side the constant pressure of the looming clericalism in the fifties. The political unity of Catholics, preached as a value of faith and defended to the bitter end for too many years, was not a positive fact because it contributed to dividing Italians and to isolating from the Church and from religious practice those who referred to the inspirations and ideals of socialism (while everything was tolerated or accepted on the other side, that of clericofascism).

Council on one side, “Concordato” of 1984 on the other

The great missed opportunity was that of not fully accepting the spirit of the Council by those who managed the Church. Relations between the Church and the institutions in our country were missed up from the 70s onwards. The Commitment to political unity remained stable in a framework that was on the move. The clashes that we listed, from the referendums to the laws, began, while the conciliar components in the Church were in difficulty because of the so-called “religious choice” (which meant true secularity to the choice of the weak and the humble and not of the palaces) was viewed with suspicion. The potential advantages of a separate structure, that of the Vatican City State, to freely manage international relations, resources, interventions on the global dimension of the Church [3], turned into serious negative events because they allowed administrations, those of the IOR and similar scandals, which were the source of continuous and serious scandal and compromise of the spiritual authority of the Church. Since then the questions on how much the ‘29 decision to create a separate State has been positive and reflections have started on how to prevent it with legislation, whether already existing or not, agreed or unilaterally, Italian or European, the disorder that even now it is difficult to correct, despite the good will.

Within an unsatisfactory situation there was at the end the signature of the new Concordato in 1984 with the subsequent establishment of the “ottopermille” (fiscal contribution system favourable for the Church) and the discipline of teaching the Catholic religion in schools. This modernization of Church-State relations, which only modified secondary aspects, but still of some importance, consolidated the existing System. It seems to us, however, that the contributions of the Church-State, although they are not now getting the attention of the public, cannot be called solid; periodically there are

disputes of various kinds, from the minor ones on the use of Christian symbols to those on goods and taxes up to the interventions on the laws. Certainly they are unsatisfactory relationships for those who start from a demanding perspective, that of the believer witnessing their beliefs and Christian communities with the problems of the world, always having the Gospel in the right hand and the newspaper in the left. To start the discussion and make proposals it is useful to try to take stock of the situation, as we understand it.

The current situation

Our society is changing, indeed it has changed. Let's see some things in "points", easy to understand, that affect our question and that require that you think about what to do:

- there is no longer ideological rigidity, loyalties of the past in the political or ecclesial field, the opposition, the exclusions are minor, even the differences in tax are less perceived, society is more "fluid";

- the believer / non-believer antithesis seems blurred. Secularization, which affects much of the forms of religious life, is accompanied on the one hand with the crisis of the idea of religion as "*opium of the peoples*", on the other to a new search for a sense of life that goes in the direction of the rediscovery of spirituality;

- there is no longer a real party system. Each of them has a rather uneven line on the relations between the State and the Church and on relations with ecclesiastical hierarchies and religions;

- Italy has become multicultural and multi-religious. The phenomenon is growing;

- the diffused sensitivity to questions of faith has long received the message of Pope Francis, who is seen as different from the previous pope and makes the demand for credibility and coherence for the Church grow;

- the ecclesiastical system is static and the ability to give directives that are heard on ethical or socio-political issues are increasingly limited.

Some proposals

Taking into account the considerations above, the current situation, from our point of view, is not satisfactory, we need more secularism and more credibility, and you cannot ignore it. A "purified" presence of the believer and of the Christian communities is necessary, including all their dimensions (parishes, religious orders, bishops, movements ...) in the relationship with institutions and civil society.

Let's make some concrete proposals. We are aware that, on the one hand, today we speak in the desert, but on the other, we are spreading seeds for an unprecedented future. What we propose is the collection of messages already expressed by us in the past and indirectly implies recognition of the errors of the Church in the past. We hope that these concrete proposals are at least discussed. We are aware that they can slowly be accepted and realized.

- the teaching of the Catholic religion, as currently regulated, is transformed into compulsory education in the history of religions with public management;

- in the State universities there are the faculties of theology and of the Institutes of Religious Sciences;

- instead of hindering it, a law on religious freedom is promoted in coherence with the Constitution which gives dignity and rights to all religious confessions, that is today still subject to the fascist law;

- on the ecclesial side and on the part of the institutions, it is aimed at a modification of the "ottopermille" system that leads to its progressive elimination within ten years;

- any use of public resources, national or local, entrusted in a transparent manner to Church structures, must be aimed at interventions of collective benefit;

- Church income of any kind must be known accurately and be normally taxed. Their management must be shared at various levels in the Church with the overcoming of the current system based on the secret and complete exclusion of those who do not belong to the clerical order. The criteria must be inspired by the "Church for the poor and of poor";

- deepen and better define the bilateral way at the different levels (Italy and the European Union) all the aspects concerning the management of the financial resources of the Holy See in the light of the serious abuses occurred in the past;

- every Church structure must report both to the State tribunals and the ecclesiastical authorities any acts of pedophilia of the clergy or of sexual abuses of any type, regardless of the canonical norms. The institutions of the Italian Republic to cooperate to the fullest.

It is a long-term program that requires internal Church reform, involving minds, sensitivities and behaviors to start a courageous path, but consistent with the Gospel. The appointments with history must be able to grasp them. The Spirit blows unexpectedly and now more than before, outside the stolen structures inherited from the past. Yes, because a new Church is possible.

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NOI SIAMO CHIESA

[1] As an example of the easy triumphalism, which nobody contradicts, we want to quote the editorial of Carlo Cardia from yesterday, Sunday 10 February, on the Avvenire. He argues that with Patti a "new phase" opened up, an "epoch" that led to democratic reconstruction, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, human rights, the defeat of totalitarianism, the unveiling of the dramatic inequalities between peoples and nations, and so this step in describing the virtues of long papacy and S. See. All this would be understood - says Cardia - "with the eyes of history". For us these statements are really surprising, we have other eyes. But to better understand the culture that runs through the Vatican Curia, let's take a full resume of Prof. Matteo Nacci of the Pontifical Lateran University, presenting the Round Table on February 12 in Rome on Patti in the Vatican press room organized by the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences. He said: *"I firmly believe that the 1929 Lateran Pacts - partially modified by the 1984 Villa Madama Agreement - are a valid example of a high 'legal culture': a juridical culture that stands above the gravestone value that they assume as a 'product' of international law, ecclesiastical and concordant because it expresses the highest merit of the Church to be able to scrutinize, always, the 'signs of the times' interpreting them with prudence and wisdom in the light of the Gospel"*. No comment.

[2] Pius IX dismissed the law with very heavy words in a definitive way two days later with the encyclical *"Ubi Nos"* saying that it envisaged *"inconsistent immunity and privileges"*.

[3] Card. Pietro Parolin, secretary of state, in a meeting with the LUMSA on 7 February, recalled these "merits" of the Lateran Pacts without hinting to their many dark sides.