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ENCOUNTER, DIALOGUE, AND KNOWLEDGE: ITALY AS A SPECIAL CASE OF RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT IN FOREIGN POLICY

By Fabio Petito and Scott M. Thomas

The “religious turn” in the study of international relations has started to break through and inform concrete policy discussions. The first part of this article briefly explains that breakthrough and the broader context for Italy’s engagement with religious non-state actors, including similar recent initiatives in the foreign affairs ministries of other countries. The second part examines some of the theoretical underpinnings of the approach we have started to develop in discussions over the last few years with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), and a variety of religious non-state actors from Italy and other countries—an approach emphasizing a new form of knowledge generated through the encounter and dialogue with religious communities and religious non-state actors. In the light of these insights, the final part of this article examines the Italian case and begins to explore how engagement with religious leaders, organizations, and communities could contribute to Italy’s foreign policy objectives and decision-making.

Our argument is that Italy could represent a special case of religious engagement in foreign policy because of its unique geo-religious position: in the context of the current epoch-making changes in the international society, there is a sense in which Rome has become again, religiously speaking, *caput mundi*—the center of

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the world—as a unique hub of a transnational network of religions connections. Retrieving some episodes of its older and its more recent complex history of *ante-litteram* religious engagement in foreign policy, we suggest Italy could develop a model of religious engagement in foreign policy mediated by its “special” relationship with the Catholic Church and with the world. Through this triangulation, Italy could engage religious actors abroad more effectively by engaging religious actors at home. For this model to work, however, some critical conditions should be met and some potential risks mitigated.

Foreign Policy and Religious Engagement

The United States exemplifies the somewhat unexpected trajectory from changes in theory about religion and international relations to changes in the actual practice of foreign policy-making. Johnson and Sampson’s *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (1994) was one of the first books from within the foreign policy establishment to make the case for the need to study the relationship between religion and foreign policy. A decade later a subfield of research on “Religions in International Relations” had been clearly established, and only three years ago a Religion and International Relations Section was founded within the International Studies Association.¹ This trend reflected the exponential increase in the last 15 years of the number of studies, publications, and research projects on religion and international relations.² Also indicative of these developments was the launch of this journal in 2003, an increasingly important forum for research and foreign policy debate on religion in international relations. In its own way it has contributed to the increasing institutionalization of these developments in the academy and policy-making communities.

The policy world took note. In 2006, in her memoir, Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State argued:

When I was secretary of state, I had an entire bureau of economic experts I could turn to, and a cadre of experts on nonproliferation and arms control ... I did

not have similar expertise available for integrating religious principles into our efforts at diplomacy. Given the nature of today’s world, knowledge of this type is essential. (2006, 75)

In 2008 the Chicago Council on Global Affairs convened the Task Force on Religion and the Making of US Foreign Policy co-chaired by Scott Appleby and Richard Cizik which published in 2010 an influential policy report titled *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy* (2010). Critically reflecting on the failures and lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, the report shows how the Western community failed to understand the key role that local mainstream Islamic communities played in providing education, sanitation, and other social services when the state structure no longer existed, as is the case with a so-called failed state. Framing religion exclusively through the counter-terrorist framework prevented bringing religion in constructively as part of the solution to build stability, the central objective of the international community’s new comprehensive approach to security and development. The Chicago report established the basic ideas of the “religious engagement” approach.

The US State Department, following the recommendation of an internal Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group (2011–2012) which expanded on the previous report, created in 2013 the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, whose mission is to implement a new “U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement.” This new US policy emphasized the need to understand the political role of religion in international affairs beyond what we could call the securitization paradigm (i.e. religion as a security problem), and envisaged a foreign policy strategy of constructive engagement with religions abroad to: (1) Promote sustainable development and more effective humanitarian assistance; (2) Advance pluralism and human rights, including the protection of religious freedom; and (3) Prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict and contribute to local and regional stability and security. In March

2015, the State Department renamed this office as the Office of Religion and Global Affairs in a move which seems to suggest an intention to upgrade its relevance and capacity.

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of other European countries, for example, France and the UK, following US developments, have also intensified their engagements with the unexpected global resurgence of religions in world politics in order to “make better policy and to make a bigger difference,” to use the words of a recent conference sponsored by the Foreign Office.³ The EU is starting to develop its own approach to religion and international relations, especially in the framework of promoting “intercultural dialogue” and in relation to religious freedom (Annicchino 2014).

The Italian MFA in co-operation with the ISPI has, since 2009, sponsored a yearly international seminar with the aim to discuss the growing role of religion in international affairs by gathering not only scholars and experts of religions and international relations, but also diplomats, policy-makers, and media actors working in the area of religion, as well as religious representatives, movements, and associations particularly active in inter-religious dialogue. The project has been housed within the Policy Planning Unit of the *Farnesina* (the Italian MFA) at the initiative of its then head Pasquale Ferrara who has briefly referred to its history in the introduction of his recent volume *Global Religions and International Relations: A Diplomatic Perspective* (2014). Over the last five years the seminars, held in the city of Trento, have raised the awareness among the Italian foreign policy-making community of the growing relevance of religion in international affairs. It has explored a number of critical issues related to this agenda (e.g. global governance, the Arab revolutions, freedom of religion and belief). This article is based on our participation in these discussions and on a recent Concept Paper we wrote aimed at helping the Italian foreign ministry engage more practically with religious actors (Petito and Thomas 2014). The question we try to address is how should Italian foreign policy more systematically engage religious actors and integrate religious knowledge

to enhance its foreign policy-making process and produce better foreign policy?

Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge

Any foreign ministry is concerned with specific policy issues, and at least one of the things it wants to know from any proposed dialogue and engagement with religious non-state actors is *how* religious non-state actors can help achieve its foreign policy goals or objectives (or indeed how together they can identify common foreign policy goals that could facilitate engagement and cooperation on the country’s wider objectives). In other words, how can the foreign ministry, religious communities, and religious non-state actors make better connections at home and abroad?

If the foreign ministry and religious non-state actors are to better engage and connect with each other on different aspects of foreign policy, then *both* sides need to see *how* they can make better connections. Both sides also need to see that (1) they require the right kind of tools—physical, conceptual, or analytical—to make the right kind of connections, and they also need to see (2) how they can do so on specific global issues or policy dilemmas. The problem is, as Friedrich Kratochwil has said repeatedly, if all you have is a hammer, then every problem in the world looks like it needs a nail to fix it (Kessler et al. 2010, 7). It is not always possible, either for foreign ministries or religious non-state actors, to see the *new* types of connections they can make, or even how to make them, if all you have are the old tools that are only able to work on the old materials.

The central theoretical starting point of this article is that in some way “religion,” whatever it is about, is also about *power*, a central concept in political science (along with authority, legitimacy, and ethics or justice). This means religion’s importance and relevance is *more* wide ranging than is indicated by limiting its presumed role to the impact of ideas on politics—as one understanding of the concept of political theology would imply (Cavanaugh and Scott 2004). This is also why foreign ministries need to be concerned with religion. Foreign ministries need to take seriously how power, authority, and

legitimacy are constructed by religious actors—institutions, organizations, and communities—since this will affect overall foreign policy effectiveness across a whole range of global issues. Scholars engaged with the religious turn also demonstrate (as do a variety of articles in this journal) that this is not only because religion is often a part of war, civil war, and terrorism. It is also because religion remains a key part of the moral life and social life of most societies around the world.

Religion is the most effective or still one of the most effective cultural practices that constitute persons as particular kinds of beings, and communities as particular kinds of social groups, in specific social worlds. Religion helps establish, enforce, and authorize what is good, what is evil, what is right, and what is wrong. How these social and religious worlds are constructed—what is often termed “lived religion”—is certainly *not* the main concern of any foreign ministry (research in theology, religious studies, and the anthropology and the sociology of religion deal with these issues) (Orsi 2003). However, it is central to religious communities and the religious non-state actors that operate within them, and between them, and which *connect* the concerns of the foreign ministry to religious concerns, social groups, and communities.

Therefore, from this perspective “religious engagement” becomes a critical way of improving the *knowledge* base for foreign policy in an increasingly culturally pluralistic and politically fragmented global international society. Integrating religion into foreign policy is about tackling the existing deficit of knowledge that now often seems to contribute to what has been called “the world adrift” (Crocker et al. 2015), the growing disintegration of international society in terms of its cultural-political arrangements and worldviews along a number of dividing lines such as the West/Non-West and the Global North/Global South.

In other words, we need to come to terms with the fact that today the international society is experiencing an epoch-making process of transformation: the economic shift toward the East, the emerging great powers embedded

mainly in non-Western cultures, religions, and civilizations (BRICs); global urbanization, with the world now more urban than rural—with not only the majority of people, but also the majority of *young* people living in the megacities of the global South (Goldstone 2010);⁴ and the rise of the global middle class, in which the world for the first time in history will move from being mostly poor to *mostly* middle class. Our contention is that the global resurgence of religion is actually significantly related to these structural societal changes—much more significant than many foreign ministries, commentators, and even scholars of international relations would suggest. So, contrary to secularization theory, from Sao Paulo, Chicago, Lagos, and Cairo, to Seoul and Jakarta, megacities, mega-churches, mega-mosques, and being religious, educated, and middle class go together. Moreover, China may be indicative of all these shifts, since by 2050 it could have the largest number of Muslims and Christians in the world (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009; Thomas 2010a).

Therefore, we need the realism to recognize the emergence of a new multipolar world, one that is also a postsecular world of multiple modernities and varieties of secularisms, that is, there are increasingly multiple ways of being religious and being modern in the 21st century (Mavelli and Petito 2014). The merging of “modern” political values and practices with traditional local references and ways of living, often rooted in religious traditions, will in all likelihood be the rule rather than the exception in the 21st century. The fact is that for most of the people in the world, and especially in the world of the global South, all life is lived not only within secular political ideologies and worldviews. Far more importantly, life is lived within theologies and spiritualities (Thomas 2010b). These are the real existing communities that concern, or should concern, any foreign ministry.

However, what is crucial regarding the approach set out here is that it moves beyond the limited perspective of seeing religious non-state actors primarily as “moral cheerleaders”—prophets, advocates, or activists for ideas, ethics, morality, and norms in foreign affairs and in foreign aid or international development

assistance. This limited perspective is what justifies the concern that if you bring religion into foreign policy, foreign policy gets confused with social work (Mandelbaum 1996). Basically, the role of religious non-state actors is reduced to: (1) helping to alleviate suffering and (2) bringing ethics, moral values, human rights, etc. into debates on international affairs. The churches in Britain, for example, are always seen as part of the foreign aid lobby. Not until recently, or perhaps not even now, did the Foreign Office see them as useful for anything else. Moreover this is still often the dominant conception of the role of religion by religious actors *themselves*, even if over the last 15 years the secular script of international affairs and development is being rewritten (Severine and Bano 2009).

Rewriting the secular script means it is increasingly recognized that there is, and even always has been, a role of religious non-state actors in promoting peacemaking, human rights, international cooperation, and development (Barnett 2012).

Indeed, this recognition is crucial to help build bridges today for cooperation between religious and secular groups, communities, and constituencies. *All* these constituencies need to see current efforts by foreign ministries to engage religious non-state actors in a much larger historical timeframe, as part of what has always been there, but often hidden from history. Religion needs to be understood as part of historical progress (not without contradictions, of course), toward human rights, the laws of war, humanitarianism, international law, and international institutions, and not only a response to some immediate conception of threats to international security—Islam, terrorism, or the idea of a clash of civilizations.⁵ Indeed, to some extent this recognition is evident in the new US strategy for religious engagement.

There is another key point, however, that sets out the perspective of this paper: It is that more than ever in our contemporary world the “bottom” and not the “top” of society is (or at

least should be) an important location to construct knowledge about international relations—to understand the functioning of social, political, and economic systems, and for knowledge about the consequences of choices in foreign policy. The idea that the bottom of society, that is, the poor, the marginalized, is the *preferential place for ethics* is not new: it can be found in the Catholic tradition in the notion of “the preferential option for the poor.” What we argue, however, is that the bottom and not the top of society can also be the *preferential place for epistemology*, for discovering what knowledge is, how it is constructed, and in whose interests it is constructed in international relations. If this is the

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case, then religious non-state actors can be an important resource for generating or constructing new knowledge in international relations, knowledge relevant to foreign policy-makers. It is knowledge coming from what Pope Francis has called “the periphery,” a metaphor he uses to describe social

marginality, as part of a religious criticism of liberal conceptions of globalization (Ferrara 2015). This is also why religious non-state actors have more than a humanitarian and a moral cheerleader’s role to offer, as important as this role is. They also have a key role in helping the foreign ministry construct new knowledge of what is going on, in ways that affect its interests and foreign policy goals.

This *new* knowledge is generated on a variety of issues through the encounter and dialogue with religious communities and religious non-state actors. This encounter and dialogue are not in the first instance about religious leaders’ discussion of ideas or doctrines (i.e. what is usually meant by interreligious dialogue), although this does not mean there is no reflection on social practices. The key point to make between religious actors and the foreign ministry is that ideas, beliefs, or practices cannot be separated from (1) the *people* who use them, (2) the particular *places* these people use them, and (3) the definite *social circumstances* of their daily lives. Sacred spaces

cannot be understood as separate from the places where things are done (workplaces, hospitals, laws courts, homes, streets, etc.), from the media or the means used to do these things, or from the relationships constructed around them. This is why it is first the encounters that take place in ordinary, day-to-day interactions and friendships, and secondarily what emerges in the social, political, or economic problems of everyday living—which appear in schools, market places, grocery stores, among carpenters, electricians, nurseries, community centers, youth clubs, etc. This is how religion is lived in daily life (Orsi 2010). It is also here that what can be called the “veiled violence” of the state, local officials, local government—laws, regulations, institutions, bureaucracies, petty government officials, etc.—may be felt, resented, and is revealed. (Think, for example, of Mohamed Bouazizi, the street vender in Tunisia who set himself alight and whose act became the symbolic incipit of the Tunisian revolution and the broader Arab Spring.) And it is here that issues emerge that need to be defused before the occurrence of social eruptions or explosions (Thomas 2014). Therefore, given this perspective, perhaps it should not be so surprising that Pope Francis summarized his first early homilies at Santa Marta thusly: the truth is an encounter (Bergoglio 2014).

Clearly, this is *not* the world of the foreign ministry but it is very much the world of religious non-state actors, which can be local or foreign, or both (as aspects of mission), and which often have long-term commitment to the country. Perhaps this is not even the world of secular Western elites. However, it is the increasingly relevant social fabric of the world. Religious dynamics are contributing to many of the changes and transformations that the predominant Eurocentric social and political frameworks of analysis are struggling to understand. In other words, this new approach to religious engagement relates to what is neither ordinarily the world of foreign policy practitioners nor that of religious actors. But, the insights and perspectives it generates are certainly relevant to foreign policy concerns—problems of political stability, social cohesion, and religious extremism—as well as arguably useful to the religious actors (more than they

might realize). This means for the foreign ministry there may be a closer relationship between knowledge, diplomacy, and interreligious dialogue than what is usually thought to be the case.

The encounter and dialogue that religious non-state actors participate in are also not in the first instance a type of multi-track diplomacy in peace building or peace making. Multi-track diplomacy, conventionally understood, is the dialogue and negotiations on specific political issues that involve states and secular or religious non-state actors in civil society, often engaging with those actors that have been a party to the conflicts (Twiss et al. 2015). However, if the bottom and not the top is the privileged location to construct new knowledge in international relations, then it will be increasingly necessary for both the MFA and religious actors to have an ongoing, that is, an organizationally established, engagement with each other—focused on new knowledge related to specific *issues* or *regions* of the world. The foreign ministry may benefit from new kinds of knowledge religious actors may bring—e.g. nuanced understanding of smoldering situations, tensions, anxieties, and resentments, before they erupt, or erupt violently, and become “events” in international relations. Religious actors also can benefit from the way the MFA engages the political constituencies whose policies and actions influence the life of the people who religious actors deal with every day.

Italy as a Special Case of Foreign Policy and Religious Engagement

The first part of this article briefly indicated the variety of foreign ministry initiatives in various countries regarding engaging with religious non-state actors, including the Italian MFA project. The second part of this article briefly set out some of the aspects of a new conceptual framework and approach to foreign policy and religious engagement emphasizing encounter, dialogue, and knowledge. This final section begins to briefly examine the relevance of this approach to the future of Italian foreign policy by asking how the Italian government might strengthen its foreign policy-making by engaging with religious actors abroad and

integrating religious awareness and engagement in its foreign-policy-making process.

It can be argued that Italy represents a special case of religious engagement in foreign policy because of its unique and complex history of informal religious engagement mediated by its special relationship with the Catholic Church. However, is this specialty or uniqueness likely to result in a comparative advantage or disadvantage? Are there interesting points of convergence and/or divergence between a possible Italian approach to religious engagement and other Western approaches? How can the foreign ministry overcome institutional incapacity for religious engagement, and how can it minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of engagement with religion and religious actors in foreign policy? Can the foreign ministry learn from history and existing best practices to develop an Italian model of religious engagement in the field of foreign policy?

A discussion on the relationship between religion and foreign policy in Italy cannot avoid starting with: *the Pope*, as head of the Catholic Church; *the Curia*, as its central administration; the *Holy See*, as a unique type of international actor (different from all other types of religious non-state actors since it has international legal personality under international law); and *Rome*, as the central location for all these aspects of the Catholic Church. This is the broader background for this section of the article, but one that unfortunately too often facilitates a reading of the influence of the Papacy on Italian foreign policy through two ideologically polarized, rather than historically based, views: on the one hand, the papacy's overwhelming influence and, on the other hand, its irrelevance.

One of the ways to begin answering these questions includes developing a historical perspective: retrieving and reconsidering historical memory for a better understanding of the different aspects and epochs of the history of the relationship between religion and foreign policy in Italy. However, this has to be done in a way that is relevant to Italian foreign policy today, so it can help to build an Italian model of religious engagement in foreign policy.

Arguably, the fascinating and complex history of the interactions between Italian foreign policy and the Vatican, as well as the diplomacy of the Holy See, has not yet received, to the best of our knowledge, a detailed and comprehensive assessment.⁶ It is, however, clear that the story is not only marked by the different historical international contexts and papacies, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the different ways in which this relationship has evolved through the four main eras of Italian foreign policy—namely the liberal period, the fascist era, the “First Republic,” and the “Second Republic.”

The role of the Franciscans in supporting Italian foreign policy, for example, is one aspect of this complexity, which is not ordinarily a part of the story of Italian diplomatic history (see, for example, Mammarella Giuseppe e Paolo Cacace 2006). In the early years of the newly united Kingdom of Italy, at the highest of the Church and State conflict when Catholic religious congregations were legally suppressed and the *non expedit* forbid Catholics to participate in the elections of the new Italian state, some religious missions, especially the Franciscans, were used by the Liberal foreign policy elites as a critical instrument in foreign policy to promote Italy's “moral and material interests in the Levant” (Carmody 2008a). As a number of institutional reports suggested at the time, the missionaries held the key to Italian influence overseas, especially in the Mediterranean region (Ministero degli Affari Esteri 1880). Interestingly in the case of the Franciscans, this patriotic alignment argument was instrumentally used by the Order to get state approval for the opening of the Roman missionary college of St Anthony (or Antonianum) as an institution of higher education, something which finally happened during the fascist era in 1933. For the religious order the aim was to rebuild the Franciscan life in the aftermath of the laws of suppression in many countries. For the Italian government the aim was to establish and protect its interests in the world (see Carmody 2008b, 439–450). At the same time this helped to open up a space for Italy amidst the European nationalisms in the Middle East (Buffon 2008). Therefore, following these lines of reasoning, we could begin to ask how

today a variety of Italian religious non-state actors, ecclesial movements, religious organizations—based in Italy and sometimes founded in the country, but which now operate globally—could be a resource for Italian foreign policy in the early 21st century?

Beyond the Vatican factor, another way in which Italy is a special case from a religious perspective relates to the thick and extensive societal presence of the Catholic Church and world, which presents an array of grassroots structures, religious personnel, social institutions, and lay associations. This reality structures, in a significant way, Italian civil society and is unrivaled in any other European country (Garelli 2007). An interesting example (from the post-1989 second republic era) relevant for our discussion is represented by the new movement (post-Vatican Council II) of the Community of Sant'Egidio, centered in Italy—in particular in Rome where it was founded—but now present in more than 60 countries all around the world. Sant'Egidio's main and original vocation is to work with the poor, the marginalized, the aged, the disabled, the sick; but it has become known for his work of inter-religious dialogue and peace-building and as such gained the nickname of “the U.N. of Trastevere” (from the district in Rome which houses the community's headquarters) (Morozzo della Rocca 2013). Best known is the peace agreement they brokered for Mozambique in 1992 after 15 years of a bloody civil war which killed more than one million people. The critical service of mediation played by Sant'Egidio was possible not only because of the credibility the community had gained with both of the warring factions for its humanitarian work in the midst of the conflict, but also because of the coordination with the Italian MFA and the local Catholic Church in Mozambique.

The Sant'Egidio experience in Mozambique clearly speaks to the approach emphasizing local knowledge, encounter, and dialogue as well as to the potentialities of the triangulation we mentioned as key to a successful model of Italian religious engagement in foreign policy. Other less successful attempts, such as the Sant'Egidio's initiative that facilitated in 1995 the creation of a platform for dialogue among the major

opposition parties (including the Islamic Salvation Front) to put an end to the civil war in Algeria, interestingly point to the difficulties of achieving a policy outcome in the absence of coordination with an MFA—as in this case, the Italian government as well as other European countries were de facto opposing Sant'Egidio's platform.

But perhaps the most relevant way in which Italy may be a special case has to do with the changing demographic nature of Catholicism in what many analysts describe now as global Catholicism, a religion of the Global South (Linden 2012). There is a sense in which in this context Rome has become indeed again a kind of religious *caput mundi*, for it has a unique position, more than Washington, London, Paris, or Brussels, as the hub of a transnational network of religions connections. These transnational connections are not based only on the network of the Catholic Church, which is unique among the great worldwide religious organizations for its vertical universal structure converging to Rome. They are also linking Rome to other religious traditions, communities, and organizations through the mediation of the Catholic world—that is, via the links that the Holy See, local and national Churches, and the many Catholic organizations or non-state actors headquartered in Rome have worldwide with religious communities and leaders abroad. These connections are often based on long-standing relationships of reciprocal knowledge, sometimes of an official nature, but they are also a part of growing friendships in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation for the common good between Catholic actors and other religious actors.

Italian religious non-state actors also often work at the margins of society in Catholic missions around world in communities among poor, marginalized, and vulnerable people. They operate at the bottom, in difficult neighborhoods in developed countries, and they operate in similar communities in the religious world of the global South—which often are also religiously *pluralistic* communities, that is, many communities embedded, often for generations, in one (or more often, more than one) of the main world religious traditions.

A variety of religious orders, some with centuries of experience, are well known for operating at this practical down-to-earth level at home and abroad, beyond or below what the foreign ministry would usually recognize as its concern. Is there a way in which the foreign ministry and these religious non-state actors could better engage and connect with each other on different aspects of foreign policy beyond the humanitarian developmental agenda that would come to mind?

Is it possible there are ways they could help make foreign policy more effective and efficient (in the use of scarce human, material, and financial resources)? Could they even do so in ways that may gain more public support and appreciation for what Italy can do in the world, which could have positive spill-over effects for the government? Insofar as some of Italy's foreign policy goals reflect the common good, could this approach unite people of faith and those without it—unite all people of good will on the common goals for Italian foreign policy? To these rhetorical questions our reply is clearly positive.

The latter question, however, is the most critical one, as it implicitly highlights some important critical pre-conditions for this model of religious engagement in foreign policy to work. On the one hand, the Italian MFA should not interpret the engagement with religious non-state actors instrumentally, as only a form of intelligence gathering. On the other hand, the domestic religious non-state actors—primarily the Catholic organizations—should not interpret religious engagement as a lobbying activity vis-à-vis Italian foreign policy. The “common good”—as a general principle articulated by the Catholic social doctrine and operationalized by experts' contextual judgment (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, para 165)—should be the political-religious frame of reference for a meaningful and successful Italian model of religious engagement in foreign policy mediated by its special relationship with the Catholic world. Moreover, this is arguably a particularly strategic time to consider such an endeavor with Pope Francis—who has captured the world's popular imagination and has initiated some novel

forms of “diplomatic engagements” such as using prayer and reflection as a starting point for hosting the Israeli and Palestinian presidents in Rome. On immigration, human trafficking, and the global economy, he has used the papacy's moral role, which is arguably the most important bully pulpit in the world. In each of these areas politicians and policy-makers have started to recognize his contribution to promoting more substantial changes in global policy (MacIntyre 2015). Before this time it would be unthinkable that leading economists (Jeffrey Sacks) or even the director of the IMF would be in dialogue with a pope about the global economy (Sacks 2014). This new papacy, which has been further intensifying the process of de-Italianization of the *Curia* already started by his two predecessors, would also make more difficult any nostalgic translation of religious engagement in Italian foreign policy into some outdated and dangerous Catholic Power Italy model, that is, an Italian foreign policy which would be ostensibly Catholic-oriented and supporting Catholic interests and values. This is a risk that would require a degree of vigilance and a constant reference to the already-mentioned counterweight of the (Catholic) logic of the common good.

The next practical fundamental question is: how to develop a system capable of filtering and transforming the wealth of this under-utilized religiously based societal information and knowledge into analysis and input for better foreign policy-making? And how to do it with specific reference to the unique case of Italy? This requires more thinking on the tools and instruments that could help strengthen Italian's religious engagement capacity, full discussion of which exceeds the space limitations of this article.⁷ However, it is important to underscore here two challenges that need to be taken into account: first, the need for new tools that are realistically conceived and in line with the significant budgetary pressures the diplomatic service is facing; and second, the need for a bipartisan consensual acceptance of the model, which avoids the politicization of the idea along ideological (Left/Right) or religious (believers/non-believers) cleavages.

In a globalized world with an increasing number of great powers, middle powers, and emerging powers, Italy should play to its uniqueness and comparative advantages—one of which, we have argued, is the potential regarding religious engagement in foreign policy. Rome has a unique position, more than other major cities around the world, as the headquarters of a transnational network of religious connections. Central to this network is the Holy See, as a unique type of international actor (different from the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the World Council of Churches, and other types of religious non-state actors). Moreover, from the point of view of Italy's national interest, this religious perspective relates to the thick and extensive societal presence of the Catholic Church in the world. It presents an array of structures and organizations, which *link in a unique way those that are top-down, centralized, and hierarchical with those that are bottom-up and grassroots*. Religious personnel, social institutions, and lay associations also structure in significant ways Italian civil society. This organizational setup is unrivaled in any other European country, and the Italian MFA can use to its advantage what is often considered to be a disadvantage in the management literature: hierarchy and centralization. Rome is the ideal

location to coordinate the kinds of local knowledge beneficial to the global knowledge relevant to the MFA. And on specific policy initiatives Catholic non-state actors can benefit from the foreign ministry's engagement with other governments and international organizations.

The discussion of the Italian case reminds us of the great multiplicity and diversity of geo-religious locations and histories, as well as of the wide spectrum of state-religion arrangements that can be found even within the Western world. The model of religious engagement that we have proposed here, for example, clearly diverges conceptually from the model that is currently predominant in the USA to the extent that it envisages religious engagement abroad through religious engagement at home, something that seems contrary to the American state–church separation model. In some way, our conceptual discussion *a fortiori* confirms that the search for the *one single* best model of religious engagement in foreign policy should be resisted. The new knowledge of international relations that today's foreign policy-makers are looking for is surely marked by the plural, the local, the societal, the culturally specific—and, perhaps most importantly we have argued, the religiously specific. ❖

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1. Johnston received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the Religion and IR Section of the International Studies Association annual convention in New Orleans in 2015.
 2. We have contributed to this burgeoning field from what *ex-post* can be described as an interpretivist and critical European approach to international theory. See the pioneering Special Issue on "Religion in International Relations" of *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (2000); Petito and Hatzopoulos (2003); Thomas (2005); Special Issue "The Postsecular in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* (2012); and Mavelli and Petito (2014).
 3. For two recent initiatives, see the FCO-sponsored conference "Religion, Foreign Policy and Development: Making Better Policy to Make a Bigger Difference," Wilton Park, February 5, 2014, <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/conference/wp1311/>, and the Quay D'Orsay-sponsored conference on "Religions et politique étrangère." Sciences Po, Paris, 5–6 November 2013, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-et-son-reseau/evenements-et-actualites-du/actualites-du-mae/article/intervention-de-laurent-fabius-au-108962>.
 4. This is an important reason behind the increasing demand for security specialists regarding the process of religious militancy, radicalism, or extremism.
 5. See, for example, on the case of the EU Diez and Barbato (2008) and Leustean (2009).
 6. For an initial attempt, see Pollard (1990).
 7. We are currently working on a policy brief on this subject for the Italian minister of foreign affairs.

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