

RiMe

Rivista dell'Istituto
di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea

ISBN 9788897317470

ISSN 2035-794X

numero 5/I n. s., dicembre 2019

Lost Christianities in textbooks. A case study of the grammar high schools in Rome

Federica Candido - Vito Loré - Carla Noce

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7410/1389>

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Special Issue

Religious culture and education in 20th and 21st century Europe

Maria Giuseppina Meloni and Anna Maria Oliva (eds.)

RiMe 5/I n.s. (December 2019)

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Lost Christianities in textbooks. A case study of the grammar high schools in Rome

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Date of receipt: 18th July 2019

Date of acceptance: 25th October 2019

Abstract

Religion today represents a field of interest that is extensively analysed in line with a variety of different approaches and methodologies. The teaching and educational sectors covering religion and the history of religions have also been invested by this renewed climate of interest, although they still today represent an object of peripheral inquiry. The spread of stereotypes and the distortion and partial interpretation of sources, erroneous knowledge and interpretations extraneous to the historical data, are topics on the agenda not only in the debate in civil society itself but also in university lecture halls. This presentation is the result of an investigation concerning the history of Christianity and conducted on the history textbooks most commonly used in the twenty-five grammar schools in Rome. It is the intention of the working group to extend the analysis to other secondary schools. The contribution intends to launch a reflection on the way in which secondary school textbooks present Christianity, starting from three key themes, which are for various reasons significant:

- 1) the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins;
- 2) the existence of various forms of

Riassunto

La religione rappresenta oggi un campo di interesse ampiamente scandagliato secondo approcci e metodologie diversificati. Anche i settori dell'insegnamento e della didattica correlati alle religioni e alla storia delle religioni sono stati investiti da questo rinnovato clima di interesse, sebbene, com'è stato già adeguatamente messo in luce, essi ancora oggi rappresentino un oggetto di indagine periferico e, in larga parte, inesplorato.

La diffusione di stereotipi, la pervasività di facili e grossolane generalizzazioni, la distorsione e la parziale interpretazione delle fonti, per non parlare della diffusione di conoscenze erranee ed estranee al dato storico, rappresentano uno dei temi all'ordine del giorno non solo nel dibattito della società civile ma anche tra i banchi delle aule universitarie.

Il presente contributo è frutto di un'indagine inerente la storia del cristianesimo e condotta sui libri di testo di storia più adottati nei 25 licei classici statali di Roma, benché sia intenzione del gruppo di lavoro estendere l'analisi anche ad altre scuole secondarie.

L'articolo intende avviare una riflessione sul modo in cui i manuali scolastici delle scuole superiori presentano il fenomeno

Christianity since ancient times;
3) the structuring of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and, in particular, the constitution of the papacy.

della religione cristiana a partire da tre temi-chiave, considerati per varie ragioni significativi: 1) L'emergere del cristianesimo dalla sua matrice giudaica 2) L'esistenza di più cristianesimi fin dall'epoca antica 3) Lo strutturarsi di una gerarchia ecclesiastica e, in particolare, il costituirsi del papato.

Keywords

Religions; Stereotypes; School Textbooks; Christianity.

Parole chiave

Religioni; stereotipi; libri di testo; Cristianità.

Methodological preface. - 1. The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins. - 2. Christianities. - 3. Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodization. - 4. Analysed Textbooks. - 5. Bibliography. - 6. Curriculum vitae.

Methodological preface¹

In view of the unprecedented situations resulting from the multiculturalism and religious pluralism that have swept Europe in recent decades and which, more and more often, fill the front pages of our newspapers – thanks in part to a determined and steered propaganda echoed by the mainstream media and social networks – religion today represents a field of interest that is extensively analysed in line with a variety of different approaches and methodologies.

The teaching and educational sectors covering religion and the history of religions have also been invested by this renewed climate of interest, although, as has already been clearly pointed out (Giorda, 2014, pp. 209–230)², they still

* The authors decided to translate into English the quotations of the studies and the school textbooks. The reasons are twofold: ensure that the text has a substantial homogeneity and make it easier to read for non-Italian-speaking users.

¹ This paper is divided into the following paragraphs: *Methodological preface* (Candido - Loré - Noce); *The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins* (Noce); *Christianities* (Candido); *Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodisation* (Loré); *The questionnaires* (Candido - Loré - Noce).

² Giorda refers to a series of specific studies dedicated to the analysis of educational courses related to religions and to the treatment of religious subjects in schoolbooks: some conferences of the 1970s promoted by the Volkswagen Stiftung and supported by the Council of Europe (Bendiscioli, 1975; Conseil de l'Europe, 1974); a research project dedicated to the stereotypes of Islam in textbooks promoted by the Georg Eckert Institut of

today represent an object of peripheral inquiry and in large part remain unexplored³.

The spread of stereotypes, the pervasiveness of facile and rough-and-ready generalisations, and the distortion and partial interpretation of sources, not to mention the dissemination of erroneous knowledge and interpretations extraneous to the historical data, are topics on the agenda not only in the debate in civil society itself but also in university lecture halls.

As Brusa suggests, “stereotypes should be studied not so much with the stern frown of the teacher inveighing against newspapers, television documentaries, films and manuals, offended by the ignorance of the crowd (educated badly – and this is another stereotype – by television and by a malfunctioning educational system) but rather with the seriousness and patience of the researcher, who senses, beneath the skin of a mass phenomenon, a crisis or deep malfunctions of the relationship between the community of historians and society, between university and school, and who discerns unresolved problems within the same academic context” (Brusa, 2004). It is

Braunschweig (*No Chance of Belonging? Islam and Modern Europe Remain Segregated in European Textbooks*) and, on the same topic, Otterbeck 2005, a study conducted on eight textbooks. Even though the literature dedicated to the link between “education–textbooks–religions” is still not very abundant, however, there is clearly a need for teachers and school staff to have reliable tools and materials to deal adequately with issues relating to religion. See, in this regard, *SORAPS*, the interesting project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, coordinated by the Department of Studies on Asia and Mediterranean Africa of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, coordinated by Massimo Raveri and Giovanni Lapis. *SORAPS* (Study of Religions Against Prejudices & Stereotypes), a continuation of *IERS* (Intercultural Education through Religious Studies), is a project that encompasses European universities and three schools, and the aim is to make information and scientific and professional training materials available to secondary school teachers in order to combat prejudices and intolerance through the study of religions. <<https://soraps.unive.it>>. The need to provide teachers with tools is also tackled in *PARS* <<https://www.pars-edu.it>>, a training and information portal for the fight against religious illiteracy, a project promoted by *FSCIRE* (Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII).

³ The urgency of providing adequate answers has given rise to countless resolutions from the Council of Europe (for example, to the *Conference of European Education Ministers on Intercultural Education: Managing Diversity, Strengthening Democracy*, Athens 2003) and other international bodies. Indeed, in Toledo (Spain) in March 2007 (to cite one of the most important examples for us), the panel of experts of the *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*, which focus on the freedom of religion and belief stressed that “Knowledge about religions and beliefs is an essential part of a quality education. It is required to understand much of history, literature, and art, and can be helpful in broadening one’s cultural horizons and in deepening one’s insight into the complexities of past and present.” (*Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154>>.

with this spirit that we have tried to undertake our investigation, fully aware, on the other hand, that the interaction between academy and school, as well as the dialogue between teachers constitutes an essential prerequisite.

This presentation is the result of an investigation – that is still in its initial phase – concerning the history of Christianity and conducted on the history textbooks most commonly used in the twenty-five secondary schools in Rome⁴ specialising in classical studies. It is the intention of the working group to extend the analysis to other secondary schools: in this context, therefore, we offer only our first reflections resulting from the examination of a limited sample (the first six in the ranking)⁵.

We have chosen to start with the books most widely used in secondary schools specialising in the classics because it is from these schools in Rome that the highest number of students enrolled in our degree courses in Literature and History comes from: as a starting point, therefore, this study provides a sort of check conducted on the main texts with which our students were schooled, despite the awareness that, nowadays, school is no longer the only place disseminating complex superior knowledge. Indeed, there is no doubt that it “competes with a wide range of means and channels of formation and information endowed with greater flexibility and often greater appeal in the eyes of young people. If this were not enough, the pervasiveness of the mass media and the general phenomenon of globalisation have accentuated the degree of uniformity in mentalities and cultures. We live, that is, in a universe of shared knowledge that conforms to a single model; in a word, one that is standardised” (Panciera - Zannini, 2009, p. 110). Having said that, however, we are of the opinion that in order to probe the origins of this “religious illiteracy”, to discover the state of health of history teaching in Italian secondary schools and to deepen the relationship between historiography and widespread knowledge, between science and a “shared historical sense⁶, it is difficult to leave out a careful and precise analysis of the schoolbooks⁷.

⁴ This is the list of secondary schools examined: Visconti, Anco Marzio, Augusto, Benedetto da Norcia, Lucio Anneo Seneca, Copernico, Amaldi, Dante Alighieri, Vivona, Giulio Cesare, Manara, Orazio. Albertelli, Socrate, Tasso, Convitto nazionale Vittorio Emanuele I, Aristofane, Plauto, Tacito, Mamiani, Virgilio, Montale, Lucrezio Caro, Pirandello, Russel.

⁵ The texts investigated so far in our study are as follows: Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015a, 1–2, (28) 10.52%; Marisaldi, 2014, 1–2, (22) 8.27%; Amerini and Zanette, Tincati, 2017, (20) 7.51%; Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, 1-2, (19) 7.14%; Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015b, (15) 5.6%; Bettini, Lentano, Puliga, 2013, (13) 4.9%.

⁶ “Historical common sense” is the subject dealt with by Grendi, 1979 and in the replies in the following issues of the journal *Quaderni storici* up to issue 46 in 1981.

⁷ On the textbook definition cf. Guarracino, 2011, p. 11. The criticalities concerning the use of textbooks as tools in the teaching of history – and of any other subject, we might add – have

Our limited contribution, referred to a specific segment of the Italian school system, intends to launch a reflection on the way in which secondary school textbooks present Christianity, starting from three key themes, which are for various reasons significant: 1) the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins; 2) the existence of various forms of Christianity since ancient times; 3) the structuring of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and, in particular, the constitution of the papacy.

From a methodological point of view, the cataloguing of each textbook was carried out on the basis of the following grid⁸:

1. Textbook, author, and publisher.
2. Quantitative analysis of the pages and paragraphs dedicated to the selected topics; position within the layout of the volume; arrangement and scanning of contents.
3. Key words highlighted.
4. Analysis of any iconographic references or maps.
5. Analysis of any documents, anthologies, and sources included.
6. Content analysis: correctness of information, degree of updating with respect to current research, and identification of ideological orientations.

1. *The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins*

Defining the date of birth of Christianity in relation to Judaism is the first problem that historians of Christianity have posed themselves. When did the two religions constitute two autonomous groups, two different religious systems, endowed with specific beliefs, rites, and practices? This is an important theme, and it has been deeply investigated by scholars in recent decades⁹. The traditional representation, which traced the birth of Christianity and the foundation of the Christian religion back to Jesus, has been radically questioned and with good reason in studies undertaken over the past few decades. Even if the *Book of Acts* tells us that “the disciples [of Jesus] were called Christians first in Antioch.” (Acts 11, 26; see also 26, 28) this does not mean that

been addressed by many studies: here it is enough to quote Brusa, 1985 and 1991; Guarracino and Ragazzini, 1980, then republished, with some modifications, in two volumes (1990 and 1991); Mattozzi, 1978.

⁸ In the elaboration of the grid and in the determination of the criteria we have been guided by: Giorda, 2014; Giorda, 2012; Gualtierio - Melandri- Monducci - Morando *et al.*, 2010, pp. 48–50; 95 and 101; Ragazzini, 1978.

⁹ See. the monographic issue of ASE 21/2 (2004), on the theme *How Christianity Was Born*, one part of which is dedicated to an analytical examination of the main publications on the topic between the 1990s and the early 2000s; Mimouni - Maraval, 2006; Brent, 2009; Aguirre, 2010; Simonetti, 2010; Penna, 2011; Pesce, 2011; Norelli, 2014; Destro - Pesce, 2017.

the followers of Jesus in early times did not continue to consider themselves Jewish. In short, although it cannot disregard the historical figure of Jesus, Christianity as a complete and autonomous religious system does not begin with Jesus nor with the first men and women who adhered to his movement: the very term 'Christianity' does not exist before the second century, being documented for the first time in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch¹⁰. The most recent historiography has proposed various dates for this act of birth, indicating variously as topical moments the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70CE, or the revolt of Bar Kochba of 132-135¹¹, or indeed suggesting the fourth century as the era in which the separation process was finally concluded, when the Christianisation of the Empire was effected by the intervention of the imperial authority in favour of Christianity.¹² Whether we want to adopt this last hypothesis or the generally more widely accepted hypothesis – which in my opinion more correctly identifies important aspects of the distinction between the two religious worlds in the second century – historiography agrees that “the birth of Christianity” was not the rapid exit into the light of a more or less already formed body, but an intricate and long complex series of developments, experiments, meetings, clashes, cultural negotiations, synergies, ideological operations, and affirmations of power.” (Norelli, 2014, p. 11). Boyarin in particular has suggested we rethink the traditional image, also used in the field of linguistics, of a common genealogical tree (*Stammbaum*) at the origin of the differentiation between the two religions, in favour instead of another model in vogue among the linguists, that of the wave theory, according to which innovations generated at one point can be propagated just as waves are created when a stone is thrown into a pond, intersecting with others formed elsewhere. The new dialect and, therefore, the new religion, could have originated from the aggregation of elements generated in different but contiguous environments, all within the galaxy of the Judaisms of the Second Temple¹³.

¹⁰ Cf. Ign. *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10,1 and 10,3; *Epistle to the Romans* 3,3; *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6,1: in some of these passages Christianity is contrasted with Judaism. On the theme of the definition and classifications of the religions of the Roman world in the Christian authors of the II-IV century see Massa, 2017.

¹¹ The indication of the period between the two Jewish wars as marking the era of separation between the two developments was promoted above all by Dunn, 1991. For a discussion on this concept of division and the influence exerted on contemporary criticism, cf. Guijarro Oporto and Miquel Pericás 2004, above all p. 475.

¹² Regarding the latter suggested date see Radford Ruether, 1972; Lieu, 2003 and 2004; Boyarin 2004.

¹³ Cf. Boyarin, 2004, pp. 18-19. The two theories are emblematic of two ways of conceiving the genesis of differences, including in the historical-religious context: “The older theory, the *Stammbaum* model, presumed that all similarity between languages and dialects is the

Elsewhere, studies have also highlighted how the very concept of religion that is indiscriminately applied to very different realities such as paganism, Judaism, and Christianity, is actually the product of a cultural and ideological construct within Christianity, the evolution of which is traceable in the Christian literature of the early centuries¹⁴. The classification of the religions of the Empire into three radically distinct and separate groups responded, according to some recent interpretative proposals, to the rhetorical strategy put in place by the Christian authors of the second and third century to carve out a space within the Roman religious system (Massa, 2017). These are fundamental acquisitions that historical and religious university textbooks and various books¹⁵ aimed at the general public have tried to spread in recent years and which can provide significant critical insights for the observation of contemporary religious phenomena, as they deal with the themes of religious identity, as well as with pluralism and the perception of the other, helping us to think of religions as realities that are diverse and dynamic, complex and not easily circumscribed.

product of a shared origin, while differentiation is produced after the languages no longer have contact with each other. It will be seen that the older model corresponds with descriptions of the history of Judaism and Christianity that talk of a "parting of the ways" and assume that all that is shared between the two is a product of their common origins, while the wave theory model leads us to think of much more fluid and not strictly defined borders on the ground, with partitioning taking place well above the ground." On this question cf. also Mimouni and Pouderon, 2012. Regarding the suggestion of D. Boyarin, see Lanfranchi, 2015.

¹⁴ On this regard, see, at least Sachot, 1999 and 2016; Filoramo, 2004, especially pp. 75-88.

¹⁵ By way of example, see: Filoramo and Menozzi, 1997: the contributions in the first part, by Edmondo Lupieri and Giovanni Filoramo, deal extensively with the question of the process of distinction between Christians and Jews, identifying in the period between the two great Jewish revolts of 70 and 132–135 the formation phase of two autonomous religious entities; Corbin, 2007 (pp. 18–31) summarily deals with the emergence of Christianity in the second century; Prinzivalli, 2015: Gianotto's contribution, on the passage from Jewish followers of Jesus to antagonism between Christians and Jews (pp. 69–96), explains the two different conceptions of the origin of Judaism: 1) one that sees in the revolt of Bar Kochba the moment from which the "parting of the ways" between the two religions occurs; and 2) the other promoted by Boyarin, who sees the conclusion of the separation process only in the fourth century; he opts for the wave theory model, according to which the identification of a single moment for the separation should not be considered as useful. Boyarin maintains that Christianity originated from precise choices of identity-forming elements, operated by different groups, and from their consequent aggregation and diffusion, until forming a new 'dialectal' agglomeration within that vast range of spoken word with blurred contours that constituted the Judaism of the time and also included the followers of Jesus (p. 70). Among the recent general interest books on the subject, see Augias - Cacitti, 2008 and Norelli, 2014, who addresses an audience of non-specialists.

Starting, therefore, from an observation of the enormous potential that lies in adopting a perspective such as this, both in terms of the development of historical and critical skills and educational values in general, we have sought to probe how many of these acquisitions have landed in school history books, since in the university classrooms we have perceived that little has percolated through to the students.

Our analysis shows that a non-dynamic and non-plural concept of the birth of Christianity still continues, and the fundamental results of historical and religious research are not taken into account.

A varying number of pages (from four to seventeen) is dedicated to the topic, usually coinciding with a chapter in the second volume of the first two-year educational programme¹⁶. Jesus of Nazareth and early Christianity are, as is obvious, inserted into the contemporary Jewish world; indeed, the affirmation is often repeated that Christianity was originally one of several Jewish sects that had spread through Palestine. At times, an attempt is made to distinguish between a historical framework, able at this chronological level to identify a substantial closeness between Judaism and Christianity, and a religious one, which already provides a clear distinction between the two religions, or presupposes self-awareness on the part of Christians, of being of a religion distinct from the Jewish one. In line with the portrait provided by the Gospels, Jesus is sometimes unhesitatingly presented as he who proclaimed himself the Son of God and the Messiah¹⁷ awaited by the Jewish religion, and at other times

¹⁶ See, for example: Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, (ch. 19, "Le origini del cristianesimo e della Chiesa", pp. 72-88); Marisaldi, 2014 (par. 3.2. "Gli inizi della predicazione cristiana", pp. 41-44); Amerini -Zanette - Tincati, 2017 (Lesson 7, "La rivoluzione cristiana", pp. 116-123); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016 (ch. 18, "Il cristianesimo e le origini della Chiesa", pp. 54-67); Bettini -, Lentano - Puliga, 2013 (Unit 17, ch. 3, "L'infanzia del cristianesimo", pp. 527-531).

¹⁷ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 42: "He preached love for one's neighbour and the importance of forgiveness, proclaiming that the value of the weak and the suffering was great in the eyes of God; he declared that his followers belonged to a celestial kingdom beyond time, where those who had lived justly would rejoin the creator. He claimed to be the son of God, sent by him to earth to stipulate a new covenant (the New Testament), as announced by the prophets, and to redeem, with his own death on the cross, humanity from original sin (...)" Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 74, after having affirmed that the figure of Jesus is in many ways part of the tradition of the unjustly persecuted Old Testament prophets while in the eyes of many might appear as a political guide, adds: "Jesus, for his part, while rejecting the political role that many wanted to attribute to him, gave his preaching a radical religious content: he claimed to be not a simple prophet, but the Messiah always awaited by the Jewish people, the Son of God whose coming meant the advent of the Father's kingdom. From the historical and non-religious point of view, however, it is certain that originally Christianity was only one of several Jewish sects that appeared in Palestine"; Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016(pp. 58-59), instead, more correctly, attribute to the followers of Jesus – not to him – the belief that he was the Messiah, the Christ sent by God.

as one of the many prophets who predicted the advent of the kingdom of God (Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 528). However, the textbooks do not make the slightest reference to the fact that, for example, the title of 'Son of God' and 'Messiah' – just two of the divine titles borrowed from the biblical context – are most probably definitions elaborated by the early communities of believers to describe Jesus, rather than words used by Jesus himself. What is generally missing is any indication of the historical process that led from the oral nature of Jesus's preaching to the establishment of a written memory, or better, of several memories corresponding to different traditions and recorded in various texts¹⁸. What is missing above all is the indication that the texts that present us with the history, or story, of Jesus – be they canonical, apocryphal, or other early Christian works – should, when considered as historical sources or literary works, be investigated like any other text, regardless of the fact that the Church regards them as inspired books. The application of a historical-critical method in the study of these texts, evaluated for the purpose as historical sources and examined according to the criteria brought to play by any textual analysis, has led scholars to formulate various hypotheses about the steps that led believers to recognise a more than human figure in Christ. Today, therefore, there exists a certain consensus about the fact that all the events in Jesus's life have been reread by later traditions in the light of the resurrection: according to many testimonies, the first followers of Jesus experienced this through a series of apparitions. These experiences, which are difficult to comprehend for a modern man, are generally identified by critics as the turning point, the one that led to the identification of Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord, the Son of God as well as the Son of man, understood clearly as a messianic figure who has already obtained glory and kingdom through the resurrection¹⁹.

As for the explanation of the separation between Judaism and Christianity, this is often left to the aforementioned passage in *Acts 11.26 ff.*²⁰, although in

¹⁸ Marisaldi, 2014, p. 42, illustrating (in the text and in a separate detailed box in the margin) what the Gospels are, underlines how they were written on the basis of collections of facts and sayings and oral traditions partly dating back to the early followers of Jesus, maintaining a trace of the cultural environment of the time; on the other hand, the presentation of the contents of the preaching of Jesus is uncritical: see note 18 above.

¹⁹ For a concise introduction to the consolidated issues and perspectives of different studies, see Iossa, 2000.

²⁰ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 43 (document); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, p. 60 (document): then, further on ("Anti-Judaism" section, p. 65) it is stated that "initially the followers of Jesus preached in the temple of Jerusalem, and on his travels Paul carried out his missionary activity starting from the synagogues; the contrast with the Jews was not felt so radically and intolerably. But, after the Jewish revolt of 66CE and the destruction of the Temple of 70CE, the need arose to distinguish themselves from the Jews, considered dangerous rebels and

almost all the textbooks examined the shift from movement to religion is attributed to Paul, who supposedly was the first to implement the break with Judaism (Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 530) and create a religion of a universalistic nature; only in one case is reference made to the mid-second century as being the moment from which we may speak of two diversified entities²¹. To strengthen the idea of a very early separation between the two religious systems there is an iconographic framework that resorts to symbols that can only be found as of the latter half of the second century and in some cases only in the fourth, to mark the distinct identity even more, leaving the reader to suppose that the new-born religion had its own complex and mature symbolic universe from the very outset. Archaeological studies have instead shown how the material Christian culture does not become visible and recognisable before the latter half of the second century, a period to which is also attributed an architectural shift as regards Christian housing and rooms used for worship²². The notion that derives from this is, overall, that of a Christianity as an entity detached from the historical, cultural, and social context from which it takes its start, a crystallised phenomenon eternally equal to itself and ultimately ahistorical. The formation of the scriptural canon, the development of a hierarchical structure, and the debate that underlies the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy are moments of crucial importance to understand the vitality of the Christian religious phenomenon of the origins, but they are often treated only marginally.

Contrary to what we might have initially expected, the problem with the textbooks examined does not lie in the limited number of pages given to the subjects, but in the way these are treated and, in the vast majority of cases, in the absence of a scientific approach to the argument: the respect for what is sacred, indeed, often seems to lead the authors to limit themselves to a confessional presentation. What is missing in these illustrations of Jesus and the

enemies of Rome. Theological opposition increased: the Christians accused the Jews of not having been able to decipher the divine plan, refusing to see in Jesus the Messiah announced by the prophets (it was therefore the Christians who were the “true Israel”, not the Jewish people), and of “deicide” (for having condemned the Son of God to death). The situation worsened in the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. From the fifth century onwards the Jews were subjected to heavy discrimination sanctioned by law: they were excluded from public, military, political, and administrative offices; they could not practise as lawyers, buy Christian slaves, or build new synagogues”.

²¹ See Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, p. 120, in which reference is also made to the use of the term ‘Christianity’, which took place for the first time in the second century [ed. note: this was Ignatius of Antioch].

²² Concerning which, see Guijarro Oporto - Miquel Pericás, 2004, p. 477, note 23 and 24, with reference to the works of Snyder, 1985, and White, 1990.

early Christian communities is a historical sense and a historical-religious perspective²³. There seems to be almost no trace of the application of a historical-critical method with regard to the sources concerning Jesus, and to the centuries-old debate about the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith: the great clamour – and the defensive reactions by some sectors of the Catholic world – caused by the publication in 2006 of *Inchiesta su Gesù*, a book by Corrado Augias and Mauro Pesce that did nothing but make accessible a series of details accrued by historians concerning the figure and message of Jesus to the general public²⁴, says much about the embarrassment that a part of the Italian ecclesiastical and Catholic world feels with regard to the application of historical methods to the figure of Jesus, and it is evidently still influencing the surrounding cultural world. Such is not the case in other cultural contexts²⁵.

2. Christianities

For the purposes of a correct understanding of the historical development of phenomena relating to Christianity, it will be useful to start with the premise that the initially wholly Jewish movement born following the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, then developed into a variety of divergent interpretations that the progressive institutionalisation of the Great Church attempted to reduce to unity²⁶.

To account for this heterogeneity – that is, to underline how the complexity of not only modern but also ancient Christianity is more than simply the history of the Roman Catholic Church, but includes a variety of expressions in the field of doctrines, practices, and rites – the use of the plural ‘Christianities’ instead of the singular ‘Christianity’ is now widespread among scholars of the history of

²³ Regarding the distinction between ‘history’ and ‘memory’ concerning the study of the figure of Jesus, see Norelli, 2008 with reference to Halbwachs, 1997 (critical edition); Assmann, 1997, with critical observations with regard to Dunn, 2006.

²⁴ To gain an idea of the debate, see the article by Enrico Norelli in *La Repubblica*, 2 January 2007, diffused in a more extensive form in Mauro Pesce’s blog: <<http://www.mauropesce.net/IT/index.php/inchiesta-su-gesu/27-articoli-inchiesta-su-gesu/27-enrico-norelli-su-repubblica.html>>.

²⁵ The literature on the historical Jesus is seemingly endless: for an initial introduction, see Bertalotto, 2010.

²⁶ I wish to thank Professor Enrico Norelli for having suggested the work of Alkier, 1993, to me, in which a history is presented of the concept of “primitive Christianity” as a historiographic category that, in the course of history, has been manipulated and bent to the demands of ecclesial polemics or of cultural politics on the basis of different cultural periods and contexts.

Christianity and religions²⁷. This term is not a mere affectation, but rather a clear choice, made in the historiographical context, not to exclude, on the one hand, people, individuals, or groups from the historical narrative who, on the basis of judgements expressed by contemporaries or posterity, have been considered heretical or schismatic and, on the other, sources, texts, and documents that have been considered doctrinally heterodox or have been expelled from the canon, being defined as apocryphal.

In opposition to a history of Christianity written in the past with apologetic intent, especially in the context of the confessional debate between Catholics and Protestants, modern criticism endeavours to study Christianity in its jagged articulation, made up of very different beliefs and practices held by men and women who recognise their saviour in Jesus. It is thus easy to note that from the very beginning different conceptions of Christ, the world, and the Scriptures have coexisted and that the process of homogenisation and formation of the scriptural canon, the definition of orthodoxy/heresy and a hierarchical structuring only developed over time and never completely anyway, given that persistent cultural and sometimes deep divisions continue to survive between one Church and the next.

A careful reading of the textbooks examined overwhelmingly reveals an approach that visibly comes into conflict with the attitude of prudence referred to above. Indeed, our textbooks tend to present the history of Christianity in like manner to all stories about the victorious, as a “history of domination”: of Christianity over rabbinic Judaism, of Christianity over pagan religions, of the Christianity of the “Great Church” over the Christianities which were absorbed by it or were expelled from the orthodoxy²⁸. However, there can be little doubt that the expulsion of many movements founded in the first three centuries and the merciless struggle against their founders and their followers is a historical fact that cannot be circumvented (not even by the school history books from

²⁷ The use of the plural is now also in vogue for other religious phenomena (for Judaism, for example, cf. Boccaccini, 2008). By way of example, see some studies pertinent to the history of Christianity: Rinaldi, 2008; Prinzivalli, 2012; Dell’Osso, 2012; Riedweg, 2012.

²⁸ Usually the textbooks dedicate one or two special chapters to the emergence and development of Christianity with titles that are eloquent in identifying the key to the interpretation of the proposed historical outline, that is to say, one in which Christianity, presented as a monolithic phenomenon uniform over the centuries, after an initial phase of persecution under the Empire, underwent no change and, having remained unchanged since the dawn of its existence, emerged in the fourth century as a state religion. From this point of view, for example, there is a range to choose from: Marisaldi, 2014, “Gli inizi della predicazione cristiana” (p. 41), “L’impero cristiano del IV secolo” (p. 160); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, “Il cristianesimo e le origini della Chiesa” (p. 54), “La cristianizzazione dell’Impero romano. (IV secolo)” (p. 148).

which we cannot expect this issue to be dealt with in detail, but we would ought to be able to expect at least a hint of its complexity).

Interesting critical aspects about very topical issues such as power relations between different groups, the emergence of a single authority, the manipulation of information for propaganda purposes are offered us, in our opinion, by the way the orthodoxy–heresy dialectic is presented in the textbooks.

Indeed, while during the fourth century the concepts of heresy and schism became progressively clearer and heretics were the recipients of a legislative corpus dedicated to them, in the early centuries the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy did not appear so clear-cut. Contrasting with a traditional presentation, which saw heresy as a deviation from orthodoxy, which came chronologically later, a capital study of 1934 by Walter Bauer (Bauer, 1934) provocatively suggested reformulating the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, in particular with regard to Christian origins. He pointed out how in reality, in some areas, heresy preceded orthodoxy, but even though Bauer's theory – which I do not set out here in detail – caused some violent reactions, it laid the groundwork for a new vision of the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy. After the pioneering study of Bauer, in 1985 Alain Le Boulluec (Le Boulluec, 1985) re-analysed the topic in a systematic way with regard to the documents of the first three centuries, proposing a revision of the terminology in use. It was he who introduced the expression 'heresiological representations' with the aim of underlining how, far from representing stable categories, *heresy* and *orthodoxy* are instead contingent constructions and products of the "historical process". In most cases, the news we have about heretical groups are far from objective, as they are actually the representation of those groups given us by their adversaries, be these representatives of the hierarchy or heresiologists. For example, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, as pointed out by Le Boulluec (Le Boulluec, 2000), use the term *hairesis* as a rhetorical strategy in order to decree the exclusion of certain types of beliefs and practices on the basis of presumed genealogies of masters and disciples.

Heresiological literature, indeed, aims above all at the denigration of the adversary and, in doing so, often resorts to sophisticated rhetorical strategies and the use of platitudes: these are therefore sources that must be considered critically by the historian and not taken as gospel truth.

The theme of heresy (and its consequent relationship with orthodoxy) is usually dealt with in school textbooks exclusively when discussing Constantine's religious policy and the condemnation of Arius by the Council of Nicaea: the heresy–orthodoxy issue is usually dismissed in a few lines, very often in the form of a lexical marginal note to the text. In the textbooks analysed, the term 'heresy' – which it is worth recalling was originally a neutral term in

Greek – corresponds to a meaning of deviance from the truth of the faith taught by the Church. In this regard, we should note the definition by which Marisaldi bridles Gnosticism, understood as a “philosophical doctrine” whose doctrines “which questioned one of the foundations of the Christian religion, namely that of being a religion that was considered to be revealed by God”, proved a “hard test” for Christian thinkers²⁹.

Our work, although limited to a sample of texts that needs to be expanded, leads us to conclude for now that in principle a form of interpretation prevails that does not take into account the existence of a process, the outcome of which was the result of clashes and debates: the most trite heresiological representation is used, on the basis of which at the beginning there was a single unanimously shared doctrine, from which the rotten branch of heresy subsequently split³⁰. Only in one case, in no more than one or two lines of text, is it stated that in the early centuries the Christian communities were in a state of flux as regards beliefs and practices³¹.

²⁹ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 155. This is the only textbook that mentions the Gnostic doctrines and Montanism, albeit in an unclear and at times misleading way.

³⁰ Cf. the explanation of ‘heresy’ in the following glossaries: 1) Marisaldi, 2014, p. 163, “Doctrine in contrast with a truth of the faith as taught by the Church. The rise of heresies in the early period of Christianity prompted the Church to clarify precisely its own truth of faith, often through the comparison of different positions in a council. In the second and third centuries some heresies arose from contact with pagan philosophy or other religions, such as Zoroastrianism. In the fourth and fifth centuries, heresies such as Arianism formed around the interpretation of the figure of Christ and the relationship between God and the world”: the derivation of the heresies from Greek philosophy is a *topos* of heresiological literature; 2) Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 120: “The term heresy (which in Greek means “choice” indicates a different opinion to the official one. It is mainly used in reference to religious matters and contrasts with orthodoxy (the “right opinion”), i.e. the total acceptance of the doctrine of the Church”; 3) Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, p. 152: “The Greek *hairesis* originally had a neutral meaning (“choice”) and was used to indicate the different philosophical “schools”. With the advent of Christianity it was used to designate the religious currents within Judaism and then Christianity, and finally to define in a negative sense those that were ‘deviant’ with respect to the official doctrine of the Church”.

³¹ Cf. Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, p. 186, who on the subject of religious controversies state: “We must understand, in fact, that in those first centuries, Christian doctrine was not yet defined and stabilised as we know it today. The Christian world was marked by different interpretations of fundamental aspects of conduct and faith, which fed sometimes harsh contrasts within the Church and caused great disputes among the bishops of the various communities”; Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, pp. 536–538: “In the fourth century the Christian doctrine was still in a fluid state and many clashing and sometimes irreconcilable positions existed within the Church. An orthodoxy (from the Greek *orthós* ‘right’ and *doxa* ‘opinion’) had not yet been defined; that is, an official doctrine of the Church, with its dogmas”.

Marisaldi's textbook is the only one to refer to Montanism³², a charismatic Christian movement established between 151 and 171 in Phrygia, by Montanus, Prisca (or Priscilla), and Maximilla. Through ecstatic visions, these three figures claimed that the Paraclete spoke through them, as prophesied in *John* 14. Although Montanus's approach was extremely different from the contemporary Gnosticism, Montanism embodied a real conflict of authority, causing a crisis in the nascent organisational structure of the Church and thus accelerating the process of formation of the canon and that of the creation of the mono-episcopate. In our text, instead, Montanism is labelled as a "fundamentalist and fanatical movement" that "forbade the participation of Christians in public life and in the service of the army". It is difficult to understand then why the author contrasts the Montanists with the martyrs, almost suggesting a distinction between good Christians and bad Christians.

The textbooks we investigated devote too little space altogether to the existence of different facets and variants (historical, geographical, doctrinal, theological, and others) of early Christianity, thus sweeping away the possibility of appreciating the idea of a process that included clashes, debates, compromises between groups in power, a skilled use of the means of communication of the time, and manipulation of reality for propaganda purpose; themes, in other words, that if adequately addressed, could provide elements for reflection and tools for the observation of contemporary realities.

Similar considerations also concern the establishment of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; the books reviewed, in fact, omit the existence of different structures of ministries and authorities in the various churches in the early centuries (Cattaneo, 1997; Schöllgen, 1998), but in the paragraphs immediately following those dedicated to Jesus's preaching and the very early missions of the apostles (in most cases the reference is exclusively to Paul³³) they simply speak of "bishops" and "presbyters" and nothing else.

³² Marisaldi, 2014, p. 100, states that following the persecutions (parallel to the emergence of the figure of the martyrs) "fundamentalist and fanatical movements such as Montanism spread, which prohibited the participation of Christians in public life and in the army".

³³ Cf. for example: Marisaldi, 2014, p. 100: "The churches had already begun to organise themselves in precise hierarchies: the presbyters ('elders', in Greek, from which 'priests') were ministers of the worship and the bishop ('episcopos', 'overseer' in Greek) was the head of the local community and often enjoyed high prestige in the city"; Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 76: "The Christian Church (from the Greek 'ekklesia', assembly) was at its origins numerically significant and in continuous expansion: it was an institution that had no comparisons in antiquity [...]. The Christian communities were under the direction of people esteemed for their faith called 'presbyters' (from the Greek, 'older') and the local communities were placed under the authority of a bishop (from the Greek for 'overseer') elected by the faithful who controlled a territory comprising the diocese".

The idea that the episcopal role was an apostolic institution began to dominate only from the second century, when there was a move from a collegial structure (in which the bishop was a *primus inter pares*), to the mono-episcopate: at the end of the second century Irenaeus of Lyon affirmed that the Twelve and the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel and founded the churches to entrust them subsequently to the bishops, successors and depositaries of their own teaching³⁴. In reality, the transition from the collegial structure to the mono-episcopate did not take place at the same time in all the churches: it was only during the third century (and not without difficulty) that the mono-episcopate acquired universal recognition.

All this complex process, in which every community constitutes a case in itself, finds almost no coverage in our textbooks. With the exception of *Ambiente storia* by Bettini - Lentano - Puliga (2013, p. 536)³⁵, in the other texts analysed, the notion proffered seems to be that of a rather undefined ecclesiastical hierarchy (at the top of which there is the bishop) having always been operative in the early Christian communities³⁶.

A similar invisible hand also seems to have directed the pen of the authors of our textbooks when they should have addressed (or at least mentioned) the issue of the primacy of some Churches over others in the context of the governance of the Christian world: Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and, from the second half of the fourth century, Constantinople.

³⁴ According to Irenaeus, the truth of the Catholic Church is guaranteed by the uninterrupted succession of the apostolic teaching through the bishops (*Against Heresies* 3,3,1-4) and, for this reason, according to the Christian heresiologist and writer, it becomes necessary to note the list of bishops. It is worth recalling that Irenaeus refers to the list of the bishops of Rome, although there the mono-episcopate was not established before the second half of the second century. It is presumed, therefore, that in this list, drawn up not before the first half of the second century, the presbyters of the College of the Church of Rome were designated as bishops.

³⁵ The textbook distinguishes between the hierarchical organisation before and after the "Constantinian milestone": while from the third century onwards there is the formation of "an increasingly complex hierarchy in which the key figure was represented by the bishop (overseer) to whom was entrusted the evangelisation and the administration of the Christian community in a given territory, the diocese", in the "Church of the origins" there was a substantial "equal relationship" between the faithful and the ministers of the cult".

³⁶ Cf. for example Marisaldi, 2014, p. 157: "At the time of Marcus Aurelius the structure of the Church was already well established and corresponded generally to that of the provinces of the Empire. The territory was divided into dioceses, each led by a bishop (...). The dioceses referred to the local churches, which were under the responsibility of a priest (or 'presbyter', adopting a word derived from the Greek), assisted by collaborators called deacons".

In our textbooks, instead, the only Apostolic See able to boast a supremacy over all of Christendom is Rome³⁷. Once again, the decision to simplify, the need for synthesis, the editorial requirements established in accordance with ministerial directives and, probably, an interpretation vitiated by cultural biases which it is difficult to resist because of *force majeure*, provide our students with a mere outline in which the complexity and myriad historical vicissitudes are substituted by a pre-packaged collection of definitions and superficial knowledge that adhere little (and sometimes not at all) to historical truth.

3. *Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodization*

The framework of the secondary schools educational programmes provides a – rather infelicitous, in our opinion – partition between the early Middle Ages, studied in the second year, and the later Middle Ages, explored in the first part of the third year, and *de facto* as a premise to the modern age. The theme of the civil power of the bishops of Rome over the Lazio area is done with by the end of the two-year period and liquidated – in the schoolbooks we looked at – within a timeframe that is no longer acceptable: a single episode (the donation of the castle of Sutri by King Liutprand to Pope Gregory II) continues to be identified, in two of our three textbooks, as a turning point, as the origin of the

³⁷ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 157: “The bishop of Rome was considered the most important because the church there was founded by the apostle Peter, who had been chosen first by Jesus at the beginning of his preaching and who died in Rome. From the fourth century onwards, the bishop of Rome had the title of pope (father, from the Greek)”; Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 76: “The various Christian communities dispersed in the world were in contact with each other; among the various bishops, the Christian community of Rome, the capital of the Empire, assumed particular authority, as it was here that the two major apostles, Peter and Paul, had suffered martyrdom. The origin of the papacy must also be associated with the importance of this city”; Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, pp. 229-236: “While the bishops were rooted in the territory, the Church was transformed into a unitary and centralised organism thanks to the authority of the bishop of Rome over the ecclesiastical hierarchy. (...) At the time of the Council of Nicaea only an ‘honorific’ primacy was accorded the bishop of Rome; it was the bishop Siricius (384–399) who was the first officially to bear the title of pope, to emphasise his superiority over the other bishops. (...) The primacy of the bishop of Rome was strengthened with the pontificate of Leo I, the pope who according to legend had stopped Attila at Mantua. Leo inherited the title of supreme pontiff from the Roman tradition and affirmed the principle of the primacy of Peter, according to which the bishop of Rome had full power over the Church as the successor of Peter, the apostle to whom Jesus had entrusted his community of the faithful. Peter was by tradition considered the first bishop of Rome; here he had preached and suffered martyrdom”; Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 536: “The seat of Rome in the West enjoyed great prestige, of course, and it was here that the bishop acquired the particular significance that would make him the head of Christian West, the pope, in the fifth century”.

“temporal power” of the popes; or that origin is identified with the control – which was undoubtedly powerful – of a pope like Gregory the Great³⁸. This simplistic and entrenched need for sharply divided periods is a common trait of many Italian schoolbooks³⁹; in our opinion, it paints a radical, often undue simplification of the picture, as we have already seen in part regarding the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. In this specific case, the promotion of the Sutri Donation to milestone event makes it possible, in fact, to exclude a much more complex and blurred scenario from the visual field of the students: the transformation of the properties of the bishops of Rome, to a political domination on a vast area surrounding the city. It was only from the late twelfth century that their slow evolution in a jurisdictional sense led to the establishment of a coherent government structure, in line with the general evolution of the royal powers in Western Europe⁴⁰. On the other hand, the books for the third class in secondary schools retain a distinct and more important question, on which we will focus our attention: the way in which the papacy rebuilt, or rather built, its authority over the Western bishops.

Beyond substantially different views of a complex phenomenon such as the Reform of the Church, scholars have long been in general agreement on two points. 1. It was only between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the conflict that opposed the Germanic empire and the bishops of Rome, that the foundations were laid for an effective distinction between the royal power and the episcopal institution. Indeed, the involvement of bishops in the exercise of power at a local level, especially in the areas of Frankish tradition, dates back to the early centuries of the Middle Ages and, in some respects, to late antiquity; and it was a structural fact, not perceived as ‘corruption’, or as decadence by the society of the time. The bishops often had government prerogatives, which integrated or supplemented those of the royal representatives. 2. It was precisely in the context of that conflict between the bishops of Rome and the Empire that the conditions were created for a factual hegemony of the papacy over the bishops of Western Christianity. Until the beginning of the eleventh

³⁸ Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, pp. 24-25; Amerini -Zanette - Tincati, 2016, pp. 354-355, in a more nuanced way (on p. 254, regarding the *Patrimonium Sancti Petri* at the time of Gregory the Great, an evolution over centuries is suggested, which led to “a real territorial and political entity submitted to the authority of the pontiff, the embryo of the future Church State”). Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, pp. 172-173, instead attribute the birth of the “temporal power” of the Roman Church to Gregory the Great. See the effective remarks on the establishment of a papal government in the late Middle Ages in Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, pp. 30-32.

³⁹ On this point, cf. Loré - Rao, 2017, pp. 309-312.

⁴⁰ Recent analyses and summary with bibliography in Marazzi, 2012; Carocci, 2014. Concerning the early medieval phase, Arnaldi, 1987, remains fundamental.

century, the episcopal institutions, and the ecclesiastical ones in general, operated within regional frameworks, coordinated – often weakly – by bishops of particularly prestigious seats; thus the definition of ‘Christianities’ in the plural is wholly suited to defining the early medieval situation also as regards the ecclesiastical institutions⁴¹.

In this area, the periodisation that is deeply rooted in the schoolbooks therefore finds fertile ground; and instead, paradoxically, the scope of the Reform is diminished, for different but converging motivations. The schoolbooks systematically evoke examples of the Roman reformers, pauperisms like the Milanese *pataria* and, finally, the new monasticism, putting them all in the same basket, with particular emphasis given to the case of Cluny (Desideri - Codovini, 2015, pp. 14-19; Gentile, Ronga, Rossi, 2016, pp. 44-48; Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, pp. 17-22). The relationship between these phenomena was complex and is in reality interpreted in a very diversified way by historiography⁴²; after all, Cluny did not expand in contrast but in symbiosis with the royal, princely, or noble powers of the time. The fact is, however, that the ‘amalgamation’ of the new monasticism, paupers’ movements, and the Reform of the Church suggests the idea of a linear process, from the beginning of the tenth century to the Concordat of Worms, with the gradual overcoming of a situation characterised by an “*église au pouvoir des laïques*”⁴³, enslaved to the needs of princes and local powers, which proliferated with the collapse of the Carolingian empire. It should be said that the way the issue is tackled by Giardina, Sabbatucci, and Vidotto is much richer in nuances than the others, and the origin of the conflict between the papacy and the Empire in the eleventh century is presented in a coherent manner (on the basis of Capitani’s studies), as the result of a reform instigated by Henry III, and by the ecclesiastical circles close to him, then rooted in Rome and left to get out of hand by the emperor⁴⁴, Desideri and Codovini, on the other hand, give a rather nuanced overview of the early medieval papacy as a “universal power”, but it is the overall construction of the story that ensures that wherever the Reform is mentioned, explicitly or not, as a reaction to a robust period of loss of

⁴¹ Recent synthesis with bibliography in Artifoni, 2007. Among the textbooks we have examined, Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2016, p. 230, explicitly proposes that papal primacy was already clear and defined in late antiquity.

⁴² See different readings of the question in the following classic studies: Miccoli, 1974, pp. 464-608; Violante, 1975; Capitani, 1992³, pp. 237-360. Effective summary in Cantarella, 1998.

⁴³ This is the title of the celebrated volume by Amann and Dumas, 2007.

⁴⁴ Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, p. 20: “But his initiative [of Henry III] turned out to be a mixed blessing: the new pope [Clement II] and even more his successor Leo IX, deeply committed themselves to the reform and raised the prestige of the papacy, bringing back the theme of the supremacy of the pontiff over all the exponents of temporal power.”

ecclesiastical autonomy⁴⁵, it is presented as relatively brief. The civil powers of the bishops are always presented as an effect of the Ottonian policy, in the short period between the tenth and eleventh centuries (the so-called bishop-counts⁴⁶), and in connection with Imperial control, which the Ottonians reaffirmed and formalised on the election of the bishop of Rome.

These distorted perspectives weigh not so much on the narration of the conflict between papacy and Empire, nor on the description of late-medieval ecclesiastical structures, which overall are presented correctly albeit in an inevitably summary fashion, but in the evaluation of the modalities of that shift and above all retrospectively, on the characterisation of Christianity and of ecclesiastical institutions in the centuries before the year 1000. The building up of the papal primacy is the dramatic outcome, and not the only possible one, resulting from the dissolution of a long-term ambiguity: the bishops as shepherds of souls and, at the same time, as an essential part of the network of royal powers. The paradoxical reduction in scope of this change expresses the attachment that is widespread in the textbooks for the idea of a late-medieval and early medieval Christianity that unrealistically is too hierarchical and homogeneous, both in the practice of social relations and in the consciousness of the players themselves of the time.

The questionnaires:

We accompanied the analysis of the textbooks with a questionnaire, prepared in collaboration with our colleague Mariachiara Giorda, addressed to university students, to try to understand if and how they dealt with historical-religious subjects during their secondary school years.

The students were asked the following simple questions:

1. What school did you attend?

⁴⁵ Desideri - Codovini, 2015, pp. 14–15; see in particular on p. 15 the reference to the tenth century as the “papacy’s iron age”.

⁴⁶ Desideri - Codovini, 2015, p. 6: “The control of the high clergy through the granting of benefits and offices to the bishops and abbots who, in exchange, had to swear loyalty to the sovereign”, with reference to Otto I; Gentile - Ronga - Rossi, 2016, p. 44: “With regard instead to the lower grades of the Church, the creation of bishop-counts had increased corruption. To obtain this title – but also, more simply, that of a priest – there was no hesitation in resorting to simony: the investment would then be recovered by imposing rates on religious celebrations or on the sacraments”; Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, p. 11: “Otto gave rise to a network of powerful feudal lordships entrusted not to the secular aristocracy but to bishops (the so-called bishop-counts). It was he himself who invested these with both temporal and spiritual powers”. For a concise explanation of the temporal powers of the bishops and the inappropriateness of the expression ‘bishop-counts’, see Sergi, 2001.

2. Do you remember if time was made for the study of the history of religion? Do you remember anything in particular in this regard?
3. In which subject did you deal with these issues?
4. Are there any historical-religious topics that you would have liked to study or explore further?
5. What history books did you study in secondary school? Do you remember if there were parts dedicated to the history of religion?
6. Is your perception of these topics studied in the history classes as being important or secondary themes?

Fifty-two completed questionnaires have arrived so far: it is only a small sample, which does not allow us to elaborate a general consideration, but it does nevertheless provide us with some interesting data that deserve to be considered at a later date.

There was an almost wholly unanimous perception of historical-religious themes in the textbooks used in secondary school and, more generally, in school history programmes as being accorded minor importance, and the question as to whether there were any historical-religious topics that the students would have liked to study or explore further in this period of school education saw a high number of positive responses (41 for, 11 against). Among the requests cited most insistently was that of a great focus on the historical aspect of religions, highlighting their influence on politics in the ancient as in the contemporary world. It is, after all, to history as a subject that this type of teaching is fundamentally entrusted in secondary schools. To the question “In which subject did you deal with these issues?”, history appears 38 times, followed some way behind by religious education (also abbreviated as IRC, in Italian *insegnamento della religione cattolica*) with 13, Italian literature (11), philosophy (11), and foreign literature (6). The crucial role of the history textbooks in the transmission of historical-religious knowledge emerges clearly and it is from here that we must surely begin to work patiently to construct texts that are more up-to-date and more attuned to the requirements emerging from a multicultural and multireligious society.

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6. Curriculum vitae

Vito Loré teaches Medieval History at Roma Tre University. He is a member of the editorial staff of "Reti Medievali", of the executive board of the Inter-University Centre for the History and Archaeology of the Early Middle Ages and of the Centre of Studies for the History of the Countryside and Farming Work. His research interests are focused on the social and institutional history of the High Middle Ages, particularly in southern Lombard Italy. He recently edited with François Bougard the volume *Biens publics, biens du roi. Les bases économiques des pouvoirs royaux dans le haut Moyen Âge*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019.

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