



ISLAM IN EUROPE: *TAFAHOM* (MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING) AND MUTUAL HOSTILITY

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When the first Muslims arrived in Europe during the last century in search of a livelihood, the Europeans never imagined that, as their circumstances changed over the years, those immigrants would start demanding to be treated as full citizens, or that their somewhat half-hearted attachment to their religion would eventually turn into the nucleus of a European Muslim identity. To begin with, not many of those millions of Muslims performed their prayers in the mosque or showed other outward signs of religiosity. However, since the 1980s there have been developments that no-one could have predicted, with the result that today attendance at regular prayers and collective celebrations of the Islamic identity are the norm, along with other visible signs of Muslim piety. Perhaps the most far-reaching of these are to be seen in the realm of culture, the media and the arts.

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European Islam and secularism

It is worth noting that, while the Muslim presence in European countries today does not pose a challenge to their secular-based social philosophy, it is a challenge to the exclusivist right-wing and narrow-minded religious ethos – whether Catholic or of another hue – which claims to be the sole representative of those countries’ national identities and maintains that the national churches are the custodians of their peoples’ collective memories.¹

The yardstick for defining secularism in the West varies from country to country and there is no standard model. Although some countries see themselves as representing the “original” secular model against which all other secular models should be compared, a close examination of the situations and legislation of the different Western states will reveal that secularism exists in several different forms, as do the relationships between religion and the state. These range from the head of state being regarded as the supreme representative of the Faith (as in the Scandinavian countries and Britain, where the Lutheran and Anglican churches are part of the state structure and their relationship to the respective monarchies is enshrined in law, which states that the monarchs are the guardians of the Faith and responsible for appointing the bishops and archbishops) to a total separation between the “religious and temporal councils” (as in France; this is specifically stipulated in the French Constitution, which states: “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic”).

However, in addition to these two Western extremes there is the unique example of an essentially religious state (the Vatican) within what is basically a civil state (i.e. Italy). Modern Italy is founded on a secular identity – both social and political – derived from the statesman Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882); Garibaldi was never hostile to religion, but he was often at odds with the clergy. In a letter he wrote in 1867 he stated: “We are in favour of religion which is right and proper, and that is what we wish to see replacing the religion of the bogus clergyman.”

¹ Enzo Pace: *Islam in Europe*, translated by Ezzeddine ‘Anayah, Kalimah, Abu Dhabi, 2010, p. 26.



Despite the legal and institutional distinction between the two states (Italy and the Vatican), there is a rare type of interaction between the forms of authority they wield within the social sphere, particularly in the fields of education, the media, science and health. Essentially, this interaction consists of what may best be described as a kind of “flexible intermingling” of the structures of the secular state and the State of the Holy Church.

Under this system of “intermingling” the Church has not only sought a legal monopoly over moral issues. It also uses the pretext of trying to exercise its authority over this legal prerogative to justify its attempts to dictate how the political, cultural, scientific and educational sectors should be run - or, to put it briefly, how society should be run. It does this not by interfering directly in politics, but through what is known as “the Church’s social code,” which means that the Church plays a crucial and wide-ranging strategic role.

So despite occupying an area of not more than 44 hectares, the Vatican’s influence extends across the entire secular state of Italy.

Since the Lateran Treaty of 1929, known as the *Concordato*, between Fascist Italy and the Vatican, the relationship between religion and politics – or rather, between Catholicism and the Italian state – has been a unique one, of a type summed up by Count Cavour (1810-1861) as: “A free Church in a free state.” This, essentially, describes the relationship between the Vatican and the Italian state.

Italy’s special situation has given rise to an ongoing dialogue between secularism and the majority religion. This has had a negative impact on other faiths, which are treated as intruders, or outsiders, and not as part of the original social fabric.

Muslims and the “remodelling” of the European identity

Today, while it is true that many European states continue to retain their largely Christian character, the European identity has been “remodelled” following the demographic changes produced as a result of the numerous migrations that have taken place. Muslims have played a



major role in this process, while the prevailing Catholic religious mentality has shown itself unable to adapt to it and accept it.

It was American sociologists who were the first to coin the expression “religious market” – a reflection of the view that the social space occupied by religious activity is a kind of market-place subject to the laws of supply and demand, commodities and competition, as well as monopolies where activities are concerned¹; in this respect they have turned a critical eye towards Europe, since in most European countries the religious market is dominated by one single Catholic or Protestant tradition; Italy is probably the European country where the market is most clearly dominated by a single religious establishment.

With the arrival of a large Muslim element, efforts have been made to break the Church’s monopoly hold on Europe’s religious space. In response, Catholic religious activists have resorted to every possible means in order to maintain the *status quo ante*, including attempts to arouse feelings of apprehension and suspicion about this new competitor. The Church has pursued this course unrelentingly and in doing so it has tried to awaken the Europeans’ hitherto dormant religious feelings and plant doubts and fears in their subconscious. However, they do not appear to have been very successful, because “lukewarmness” is an ingrained European character trait where religion is concerned and cannot be activated through inspiring terror of the “different other” – particularly when much of that “different other” enjoys the same citizenship rights and claims as the original population. While it may be possible to exploit fears about national security, allegations of threats to the citizen’s identity (based on his or her Church affiliation) have no impact at all, particularly since a person’s sense of identity comes from within himself rather than from outside influences.²

1 Robert B. Ekelund-Robert, F. Hebert-Robert, D. Tollison: *Il Mercato del Cristianesimo*, Universita Bocconi Editore, Milano, 2008.

2 Many nominal Catholics today say: “I am not a Catholic, but I am a believer” or “My son has not been baptised; he will decide if he wants to be when he is older”. Another common phenomenon is “religious tinkering” in which a person develops his or her belief system without belonging to an established church. This all indicates that the Church has lost its control of the social space.

Now that Italy has over a million Muslims, where does this “new phenomenon” stand within the Catholic/secular reality in which there are undefined virtual boundaries? The textual definition of Italy’s secular identity dates from the reign of the Christian Democratic Party (founded in 1942 and an active force till around 1994), which formally adopted the authoritative text on the subject with the approval of the Communist Party (led by Palmiro Togliatti). Consequently, Chapter 7 of the Constitution states: “The State and the Catholic Church are each independent and fully sovereign.” Then the second paragraph of the same chapter adds that “the relationship between them shall be in accordance with the Lateran Pacts” – that is, based on the Treaty of 1929 between the Vatican and the Italian government headed by Benito Mussolini, whom the then Pope described as a “man under the care of Divine Providence”.

On the basis of these arrangements the Church in the West usually claims that it is fundamentally committed to a separation between the religious and temporal realms, and that the only threat to that separation comes from outside – from Islam. This has given rise to a widely held view in the West that religions other than Islam in the Arab and Islamic countries are persecuted because those countries do not separate religion from politics and civil life.

One of the numerous changes that have taken place in Europe over recent decades has been the “awakening” of millions of Muslims as they have emerged from their long years of hibernation and marginalisation and sought to gain respect for their religion and culture. In response, the Church has tried to project an image of itself as the protector of Western values and the European identity from the challenges of Islam.

Following the unification of Italy in 1861¹ (which the Church opposed), the Church lost much of its power and authority over the Italian kingdoms and statelets. However, after the Second World War its fortunes were revived by the Christian Democratic Party.

¹ Following what became known as the “Breach of Porta Pia” on 20th September 1870 – when the Italian unification forces sought to seize control of Rome – a law was promulgated on 13th May 1871 delineating the borders of the Vatican (and thus the temporal space occupied by the Papal authority).



As well as making a significant contribution to Italy's reconstruction after the fall of Fascism (both by helping establish the foundations of the state and by shaping its liberal character through the Christian Democratic Party), the Church also played an active part in preventing the country from joining the Socialist bloc. With these achievements to its credit, it saw itself as entitled to dominate the Italian social space.

However, with the Church assuming a dominant role after the fall of Fascism, the state found itself deprived of an opportunity to develop a clear policy towards other minorities. This caused the religious groups – particularly the Islamic ones – to feel deeply uncertain about how to present their demands. Should they apply to the Italian civil state, which publicly declares itself to be secular, or the Vatican statelet, which rules on the religious status of the groups that have emerged out of the social changes of the past three decades?

In reality, we find that the Islamic community needs to satisfy the demands of both sides – the secular Italian state as well as the Vatican. One example of this is the fact that its application to build a mosque in Rome was only recognized legally when the Vatican had approved it after exhaustive negotiations, despite the building's location being outside the Vatican and within the Italian state's geographical area.¹

Today, any discussion on secularism in Italy is subject to daily social pressures from the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Apostolic See. The Church does not merely speak for its adherents when it exerts that pressure, but in the name of the community as a whole regardless of differences of race or creed. In other words, it continues to be the all-powerful dominant force despite the changes that have taken place in the social fabric.

Therefore, most aspects of Islamic religious affairs in Italy are determined by the Vatican, which continues to put pressure on the

¹ For further details on this subject see Stefano Allievi: *Islam in Italy: a Journey through the Realities of the Second Religion*, translated by Ezzeddine 'Inayah and Adnan Ali, Kalimah, Abu Dhabi, 2010, p. 90.

secular state in order to restrict the Muslims' freedom of movement. If this is not the case, why is it that followers of the second religion are still refused licences to build their prayer facilities out in the open and are only allowed to perform their religious rites underground in cave-like converted storerooms or car-parks beneath the basements of high-rise buildings? This is the case with Rome's second mosque which, like the country's other Muslim prayer facilities, is not legally recognized. In fact, only two actual mosques have been legally recognized in the whole of Italy – the main mosque in Rome and the Milan Mosque. Other Muslim places of worship have the status of community associations.

Muslims are not only denied the right to build visible places of worship. They also find that attempts are made to exclude them from the media, which is totally dominated by the Catholic Church. Some 98% of religious programmes on Italian state TV are the preserve of Catholicism, while other faiths enjoy virtually no presence at all. (And this is despite the fact that Islam is Italy's second religion, followed by the Jehovah's Witnesses and other Protestant sects, then, finally, the Jews.) Islam is occasionally given a slot in which its traditions, practices and legal system are discussed superficially and highly critically in the sort of terms summed up in the Italian myth of "the Mahometan Miracle"¹.

The Church and its monopolisation of the religious space

There are no challengers – whether ideological or political – to the Church's dominant position in Italian society. Following the Second Vatican Council the Church opened its doors wide to those whom it described as "lay believers" – that is to say, individuals or groups who had strong links to the Church but were not members of the priesthood. This new open-door policy was inspired by a sense that there was an urgent need to control those "unattached" members of the wider community who were not directly subject to the Vatican's authority or jurisdiction, and

¹ According to the proverb, one day a crowd of people pressed Muhammad (PBUH) to produce a miracle, as Allah had promised him that he would move a mountain. He sat before the mountain and began to pray, but the mountain did not move, so Muhammad stood up and, facing the mountain, said: "If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, Muhammad will go to the mountain."



the lay believer was one of the Church's tools for dominating the secular component of that community. The old idea of society consisting either of "men of religion" or secularists now seemed inappropriate in the new social circumstances since - among other things - it did not enable the Church to enjoy a pervasive enough presence.

In this connection, the late Pope Karol Wojtyła's support for Catholic community work was designed to restrict society's freedom of action and bring it under control (politically and legislatively) in order to reinforce the influence of the Church. While his popular image was that of a broad-minded Pope who was open to ideas from the outside world because of his calls for dialogue and ecumenicalism, he was basically a traditionalist conservative committed to the reestablishment of Rome's (i.e. the Vatican's) authority.

It was against this background that the Community of Sant'Egidio rose to prominence. Because of its Vatican connection the Community – the Vatican's "secular arm" established by the Rome University professor Andrea Riccardi (nominated last year for the Nobel Prize) and described by *The Times* newspaper as one of the most powerful global institutions, with branches across Italy and beyond the country's borders – is a highly effective instrument for exerting pressure on Italian domestic politics and influencing the policies of the countries in which it has a presence. Within the Arab context it extended a warm welcome to the Algerian opposition conference in November 1994.

As well as seeking to exercise control over society, the Church also aims to exert its influence over the younger generation. The *Ora di Religione* – or "Religion Hour" – in Italy's government schools is designed specifically to promote Catholic teachings to the exclusion of all others; all the teachers involved in it are members of the clergy appointed by a Christian Church body, though they receive their salaries from the Italian state, not from the Church. Despite the growing numbers of Muslim pupils in the government schools, the authorities still refuse to allow "Religion Hour" to be changed to a "Religions Hour" in which other, non-Catholic, religions can be taught, and administrative obstacles are put in place to



prevent the appointment of teachers from other faiths for that purpose. The Church is determined to be the sole custodian of the religious sphere, even when non-Catholics are involved.

So this educational policy continues to deny (or virtually deny) other faiths. Non-Catholic Christian sects such as the Protestants and the Orthodox – or Judaism – may not be radically affected by it, but it has a major impact on Muslims, who represent the country’s second largest religion after the Catholics.

With regard to the question of the crucifix being displayed in classrooms, in 2003 an Italian judge ruled that it would be legal to remove it at the request of the pupils’ parents. This aroused the ire of the Church, which claimed that it was a violation of the Lateran Pacts and their stipulation that Catholicism is the state religion. However, these days the expression “state religion” is an anachronism since the state’s subjects now include Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Confucians.

Within Italian society the Church dominates every aspect of the “religious realm” and only recognizes the legitimacy of the Jews, while Muslims are treated as dubious characters and intruders. Despite this, however, the Church is making every effort to establish closer ties with Islam and Muslims in the Arab states as well as the Islamic world in general. Here its aim is to serve its own interests by penetrating the social fabric of those countries while concealing its practices back in its own homeland.

Spain and Islam

Unlike other European Catholic states – where the Church continues to influence their social policies and educational programmes – Spain’s recognition of Islam is unique within Europe. Historical factors may help us to understand why this should be so.

Islam’s present public image may be traced – to some extent anyway – to the tensions and “historical residues” stored in the collective memory of a world that seems to us far removed from the centralised Europe of



today. In this section we should start by considering two things: firstly, the provisions of Spain's new post-Franco constitution of 1978 and, secondly, the Law of Religious Freedom promulgated in 1980.

The Constitution affirms the secular character of the state and guarantees religious freedoms. The state upholds the citizen's freedom to choose his or her religious affiliation and from time to time it signs agreements with religions that have an established presence in Spanish society. The new 1980 Law of Religious Freedom approved the creation of a special body within the Ministry of Justice with responsibility for implementing the principles of the Constitution and establishing the conditions for recognizing the different faiths and, uniquely, we find that this body includes representatives of Spanish Islamic associations.

It took the body more than ten years to draft a co-operation agreement between the state and Spain's resident Muslim community. This was followed by the ratification of the Law of 1992 after a series of meetings between government representatives and a coalition of Spanish Muslim associations entitled the *Comision Islamica de Espana* – the Spanish Islamic Commission.

There is more than one pivotal element here. Most paragraphs of the text refer to “the Spanish Muslims” – an indication of a desire (on the part of both the government and the Islamic representatives) not to regard followers of the Islamic Faith as being foreigners, but rather as citizens with the same status as anybody else, who are members of a religion recognized by the state in view of the role it plays in Spain's history. A second factor is that, in recognizing the Islamic Faith, the state sees it as a belief system rooted in the Spanish historical identity. Paragraph 39 of the agreement states: “The State and the *Comision Islamica de Espana* will co-operate in protecting and developing the Islamic historical, artistic and cultural heritage in Spain; this provides fertile ground for contemplation and study for the benefit of every member of Spanish society.”

With this recognition the agreement enabled all outstanding issues concerning the free practice of the Islamic Faith to be resolved.¹

¹ Enzo Pace: *Islam in Europe*, translated by Ezzeddine 'Anayah, Kalimah, Abu Dhabi, 2010, pp. 141-142.

The latent identity conflict

The West's preoccupation with Islam is essentially about the demographic impact of Europe's rising Muslim population over the coming decades, which has crucial implications for the future of the European identity. On the other hand, European politicians' current concerns about the Muslim presence are the result of an obsession with security issues, despite the fact that, generally speaking, their fears are essentially based on a perception of a threat rather than any actual danger.¹

Despite the fact that – in the worlds of an Italian sociologist when speaking of the West's current situation – “today we cannot speak about Islam and the West [as two different and separate phenomena], since Islam now exists right here in our own house and Islam has emerged in the West as a result of this new infusion. Indeed, is this not a common type of historical development? The fluidity of today's change is – ultimately – liable to become an established reality, even if it is still at the early stages. We do not really know what it will ultimately lead to. What usually happens is that the further away something is in time, the more clearly it can be seen. We see what is actually happening around us in our immediate vicinity through a sort of mist, because it is too near to allow us to define our surroundings precisely.”²

The strongest pressure faced by Muslims usually arises when they want to practise their religious rites. Religious freedom in a secular society is relative and we can put it to the test by seeing the extent to which Muslims feel the need to hide their identities at work, in the home, or

¹ The secular state sometimes tries to interfere and lay down its own rules for what is or is not acceptable as far as the Muslim community is concerned. When an imam of the Rome Grand Mosque (Imam Abdel Sami' Mahmoud, a graduate of al Azhar) declared marriage to Jewesses to be prohibited (although this is actually permitted under the Shariah, since a Jewess would be one of the People of the Book), the Italian state intervened by exerting pressure until the imam was removed from his post and expelled. And when a Muslim – Abdel Karim al Jaza'iri – called for prayers to be said for the soul of Sheikh Ahmed Yasin after his assassination, the security authorities intervened and expelled him from Italian soil on the grounds that his conduct posed a threat to Italian security.

² Stefano Allievi: *Islam in Italy: a Journey through the Realities of the Second Religion*, p. 17.



even in the street for fear of being snubbed or harassed.¹ When a Muslim Arab is asked about his religious affiliation, he usually describes himself as a “moderate Muslim” or “secular”. And when he is asked if he is a “conservative” in the practice of his religious rites, he usually denies that he prays or fasts regularly. This kind of camouflage has a strong impact on a person’s personality; it is probable that the popularity of the name “Sarah” among Muslim newborns in the West is one symptom of this “disguise,” since it is unlikely to mean that expatriate Muslim parents are disproportionately fond of Sarah, the wife of the Prophet Abraham (PBUH); rather, it is designed to enable the girl to hide her identity when she goes to school.

We also come across many Arabs who give their sons Arabic names on their birth certificates but call them Francesco, Giovanni or some similar Italian name in the street. This kind of social evasiveness has been devised by the outcast to enable him to fit into the community. Where jobs are concerned – particularly in restaurants, cafes and other establishments owned by people of Arab origin – it is rare to find people prepared to use their Arabic names; usually it is the proprietor who orders them to adopt Italian names to avoid (or so he will claim) driving the customers away.

It is hard for Muslim girls who wear the *hijab* to find employment in government posts or private companies or establishments, even if they are Italian-born. Because of negative media attitudes, people tend to shy away from a woman who wears a headscarf. Some Muslim girl students in Italian universities cover their heads or wear Islamic dress, though the freedom they find within their university compounds (which allows a girl to dress as she pleases) quickly evaporates as soon as they come face to face with the realities of life outside or try to find jobs; “unconventional” dress is a major obstacle to finding employment, so they have to either remove it or be content to stay at home and look after the children.

It may be less of a problem for a religious man who allows his beard

1 Not only Muslims are subjected to these pressures. Several Copts and Syrian Christians have changed their Arabic names in favour of Italian ones to help them integrate better into Catholic society, which is highly sensitive to anything with an Arabic flavour.



to grow, because there are also plenty of bearded, non-Muslim Italians. However, he will probably receive a hostile reaction from the public if he shows any outward signs of Muslim piety or declares openly that he follows the rules of his faith.

The impact of this politically-driven public hostility has affected sections of the Muslim community who had previously felt more or less immune from it and it has influenced attitudes to immigrants from the Islamic world, who tend only to be considered for employment in non-sensitive or junior positions – whether in universities, the media, educational institutions in general or other organisations – except when circumstances dictate otherwise. Students at European universities are discriminated against and treated differently from their native European colleagues; this is just as true of citizens whose parents or grandparents are from Arab and Islamic countries as it is of overseas students who are themselves from that part of the world.

So life in a Catholic/secular country is not easy if a person openly declares that he (or she) is a Muslim, and the fact that a society is secular is no guarantee that an individual will be able to practise his or her faith without being harassed in some way. Hence most Arabs conceal their religious identity.

Although this unfortunate situation – in which members of different religions and sects had to pretend to be something that they were not – reminds one of the Middle Ages, it can still be seen today in advanced countries which claim to uphold human rights and freedom of conscience.

This state of affairs has caused overt manifestations of Islam to be regarded with suspicion in the West, whether they concern the Muslim style of dress, the visible presence of Muslim houses of worship, or the five daily prayers or other Islamic rites. In the midst of this highly charged atmosphere, in January 2000 the Italian Episcopal Conference demonstrated its opposition to all forms of integration and called for Muslims to be deprived of the opportunity to perform any acts of worship on parish property. It also warned the clergy and lay members of the Church against the dangers of mixed marriages with Muslims.



Summing up the Church's position, Cardinal Biffi, the Archbishop of the Italian city of Bologna, has stated that Islam poses a threat. In the year 2000 he declared on several occasions that the main question at issue was the defence of the Italian state's Christian identity. He added that Catholicism was the religion of the vast majority of Italians and the secular state could not ignore this historical fact under the pretext of protecting the rights of minorities. Moreover, anyone who opposed the Catholic Church (here he was referring to the secular nature of the modern state) was unconsciously undermining the foundations of Western civilization.

The equation "Catholicism=the Italian national identity=the values of Western civilization" has led to the emergence of an ideological position that has been widespread in Italy for years and dates originally from the political conflicts of the Cold War and the period between 1948 and 1979.¹ Theoretically, and according to the common Abrahamic legacy, Catholicism and Islam should coexist happily in Italian society; in fact, however, there is a mutual aversion which could almost be described as open hostility.

European Islam and the "difficult birth"

Europeans are afraid of Islamic religious movements, most of which they regard as being indistinguishable from each other (i.e. "they are all radical and extremist"). Generally speaking, they use their fears to justify their rejection of the Muslim communities living in the West and their objections to allowing them to exercise their rights – particularly their right to express their cultural identity. (The issue of Halal meat is one instance of this.) Consequently, it is not the Muslims who refuse to become integrated into European society; rather, it is the Europeans' politico-religious attitudes and their vision of a single all-dominating belief-system that prevents Muslims from integrating.

As well as these obstacles, there is one other overriding stumbling block where Muslims are concerned – the fact that Muslims have failed to produce an independent, European Islam. The reason for this is that there

¹ Enzo Pace: *Islam in Europe*, translated by Ezzeddine 'Anayah, Kalimah, Abu Dhabi, 2010, pp. 164-165.

is a shortage of Europe-based thinkers and religious leaders, with the result that European Islam looks to the Arab countries or the wider Islamic world for its inspiration and doctrinal guidance.

What Dr. Abdul Majid Najjar refers to as the European Muslims' "cultural partnership" is not much in evidence, because there is a serious dearth of Muslim cultural activity in the West; moreover, any religious or cultural activities that do exist are directed at local Muslim communities rather than Western society as a whole, with the result that it is not possible to speak of a "cultural partnership" in this context.¹

In the capital city of world Catholicism we find that the main Islamic institution – the Rome Mosque, which may well be the biggest mosque in the Western world – still imports its imams and scholars from the Arab countries. Moreover, while it aims to represent the Muslims who live in Italy, it is controlled to a large extent by the official diplomatic establishment and its Council is comprised of embassy representatives from the Islamic countries (which Muslim expatriates find highly off-putting for a number of reasons – political and religious to name two). Consequently, at the popular level Islam in Rome is better represented by the city's smaller prayer facilities and Muslim associations, particularly *UCOII (Unione delle Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia)*, the main Muslim umbrella organization.²

Today, as Italy's new generation of Muslim immigrants acquires a more stable legal residential status, Islam in that country is beginning to adopt a similar organizational approach to the one found in other European countries, though at a more rapid pace.³

Conclusion

While Muslims recognize that the religions of Jesus and Muhammad are one and the same, Catholic Christianity in Europe still refuses to accept

¹ *Fiqh al Muwatanah li'l Muslimin fi Uruba*, Al Majlis al Urubi li'l Ifta' wa'l Buhuth, p. 24.

² Stefano Allievi: *Islam in Italy: a Journey through the Realities of the Second Religion*, p. 46.

³ *Ibid.*



that this is so. Despite the fact that theologians in Catholic universities are coming up with some bold ideas about the need to adopt a new attitude to dealing with the “different other,” they have failed to have any impact on the Church establishment. Although the Church recognizes Christianity and Judaism as being Abrahamic religions, it excludes Islam - the third member of the Abrahamic family.

Since the relationship between Islam and Catholicism is so limited in Italy, Muslims have to rely on the state’s secular laws to safeguard the Islamic identity within the social fabric. While the Church seeks to prevent Muslims from playing their part as full members of Italian society, it is unable to exclude them from civil society altogether, because this would be incompatible with the socio-political philosophy upon which European social values are based.