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The Relationship between Religion and Left-wing Organizations. The British Labour Party and the Italian PD: a Comparative Study

This paper proposes a comparative study of the role played by the religious factor within two European left-wing organizations, the British Labour Party and the Italian Democratic Party, between the early Nineties and today. By thus analyzing the two cases at issue, it also aims at presenting and comparing them in a wider perspective, namely the importance of religion in shaping and transforming political institutions (such as political parties) .

These research questions are anchored in and hope to contribute to the body of literature which examines religion as a key variable in ex-

plaining political outcomes. Treasuring the pre-existing bibliography, this work aspires nevertheless to provide innovative insights and to broaden this field of inquiry towards a rather unexplored direction.

On the one hand, indeed, most of the existing studies concern themselves with religiously based political action, in terms of voting behavior and political mobilization as well as specific phenomena such as religious fundamentalism or conflicts (Inglehart and Norris 2004, Knutson 2004, Smith 1996, Juergensmeyer 2000, Fox and Sandler 2006). On the other hand, the literature that investigates the causal connections between religion and institutions mainly focus on organizations such as churches or confessional parties and on their interaction with the respective political sys-

tems (Kalyvas 1996, Gould 1999, Gill 2000, Warner 2000).

The present inquiry, instead, intends to explore the way religion comes to influence institutions not traditionally perceived as religious, such as left-wing parties.

The choice of the two specific case studies is based on the Most Different Systems Design comparative methodology (Landman 2000), which, in order to explain a certain outcome (in this specific case, the significance of religion within left-wing organizations) takes into account the most diverse circumstances in which it has appeared. Building on this, both the sharp systemic differences (above all in terms of historical relevance and evolution of the religious cleavage within the party system; Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Daalder, 1967) and the interesting analogies developed by the so-called New Labour and by the Italian PD will be scrupulously illustrated.

With this in mind, the phenomenon under consideration will be regarded as a complex and multifaceted one, to be studied with respect to various dimensions, even though all indissolubly linked to each other.

First and foremost, this work will inquire about the relationship between religion and partisan political culture, by scrutinizing the two parties' traditional ideological framework as well as their contemporary cultural references.

Secondly, it will consider the part that religion has played in the two parties' electoral strategies and policy-making, through an accurate examination of the respective political manifestos, electoral campaigns, positions over relevant government policies and specific issues.

Last but not least, the attitudes towards religion of the two parties' leaders, members and cadres throughout the last two decades will be also carefully compared, via an in-depth analysis of the available primary and secondary sources (interviews, party official publications, statistical evidence).