The Radical Right and Religious Discourse

The Golden Dawn, the Lega Nord and the Sweden Democrats Compared*

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Abstract

The paper investigates whether there is a link between the main radical right-wing parties in Greece, Italy and Sweden and the pre-dominant church institutions within these countries. The focus lies on the interaction between the party's ideology and the church's political discourse. We distinguish between the 'internal supply side' (the party's discourse on the religious agenda), the 'external supply side' (the Church's current discourse), and the 'demand side' (the Church's traditional discourse). The research aim is to determine whether religious voters (who are formal church members, who believe and who practice regularly) might constitute a potential electorate for radical right-wing parties. This assumption builds on the 'pathological normalcy' thesis that radical right-wing parties promote an extreme version of the mainstream values in society (Mudde 2010). The method for elaborating the official church and party documents is based on the theorization of the so-called Essex school of discourse analysis. The findings of the paper are that the religious electorate is a potential pool for the radical right party family to the extent that the internal supply side and the external supply side overlap. This applies to the largest extent in Greece, to a medium extent in Italy and to a low extent in Sweden.

Keywords: radical right; Golden Dawn; Lega Nord; Sweden Democrats; Church; discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The proposed research seeks to document and evaluate theoretically the positive or negative link between the Radical Right (hereafter, RR) parties of Greece, Italy and Sweden (the

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Golden Dawn, the Lega Nord and the Sweden Democrats) with the established religious tradition of each country. The research focuses on the party family interaction with religion in terms of ideology. Although there are central as well as secondary differences between these parties, the reasons for selecting these specific case studies are a) the existence of a common set of core ideological features between the RR parties, and b) the diverse background of the respective electorates (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox).

The research aim is to understand why the 'people of the church' might constitute a potential or a hostile electorate of the RR parties. Our definition of 'people of the church' is derived from Kellstedt et al. (1996: 175ff.): formal church members (affiliation) who practise more or less regularly (involvement) and believe in the core doctrine of their Church (religious tradition). Our understanding of the term 'radical right' (RR) follows Minkenberg (1998; 2011). He defines right-wing extremism as an ideology aimed at abolishing constitutional democracy (1998: 34), and right-wing radicalism as scepticism against liberal democracy and its values of freedom, equality, individualism and universalism. The RR parties under examination often express this criticism directly or indirectly, sharpening ethnic or religious criteria for exclusion (nativism) and linking them to hierarchical and authoritarian models in politics (Minkenberg 2011: 113). The paper builds on the 'pathological normalcy' thesis (Mudde 2010). According to this analytical frame, RR success is founded to a certain degree on the dominant ideological setting within the political culture; that is, the party's ideological core should not be viewed as alien to the mainstream, but as a radical interpretation of the hegemonic ideas in society.

2. Methodology, central concepts and structure

The topics under examination are a) the position of the core religious social and ethical values within the ideological structure of the RR, and b) the religious political tradition and public discourse as an actor in favor of or against the growth of the RR movement. In particular, the research questions to be addressed are: How do the RR parties interact with religion at an ideological level? What is the possible impact of religion on the articulation of the core features of RR ideology? What is the place of religion as an ideological element of the RR normative base and its influence and representation in the articulation of the public discourse?

Each case study is divided into a) the 'internal supply side' (the party's discourse on the religious agenda), b) the 'external supply side' (cultural opportunity structures/the Church's current and late public discourse with regard to the RR activity, policy-setting and ideology), and c) the 'demand side' (the Church's traditional discourse that has strong roots within and has influenced the domestic political culture, i.e. nationalism, authoritarianism).

We distinguish between current church discourse on the 'external supply' side, and church value framework and dominant social perceptions and beliefs on the 'demand' side. It should be noted that the criterion for defining an ideological element of the religious discourse as part of the 'demand' or alternatively of the 'external supply' side is historicity. The former relates to the religious value framework at a macro-historical level,

i.e. concepts that have had an 'enduring effect' in the social operation of a given country (R. Inglehart and W.E. Baker); the latter relates to the stance of the religious subculture at a micro level. For instance, the instrumental identification between the national and the religious identity has been a longstanding ideological feature shared by many Protestant and Orthodox state churches since the first steps of the respective nation-building process. Given its normativized status as a hegemonic perception, this link is related to the demand side, not to the external supply side, though the local Church might still be a cultural structure fueling its social legitimacy. On the other hand, the religious discourse with regard to relatively newly developed concepts, such as euro-skepticism, should be examined within the external supply side, because of their circumstantial and temporal character. Given that they do not form part of the collective conscience, but are contemporarily highly disputed issues between antagonistic ideological platforms, the corresponding religious discourse might serve either as the fertile ground for their adoption or as a factor for their rejection.

The method of elaborating the material is the Essex School paradigm of discourse analysis (Laclau, Mouffe 1985), i.e. the qualitative examination of discourse as a network of meaning, in which a privileged signifier (such as 'nation', 'religion', 'environment' etc.), functions as the 'nodal point', the center, of the discursive structure and, thus, determines its core meaning. Because of the relational character of the discursive chain, the meaning of the other signifiers is fixed exactly by their relation with the nodal point. In short, the meaning and content of a signifier changes in accordance to the nodal point on the basis of which it is articulated. For instance, the signifier 'justice' acquires variant meanings when used by different party families, because it is structured in relation to different nodal points. For the communist party family, 'justice' has the creation of a classless society as its signified; for a separatist party its meaning is transformed into the right of self-determination, and the political freedom from an existing state entity; for a fundamentalist party, it is identified with the rule of the religious bureaucracy, perceived as the authentic representative of God's will, etc. Thus, the meaning of a discursive signifier is actually contingent, subject to diverse interpretations depending on the context. At the same time, this means that the discourse of a social agent might be almost identical, have an elective affinity, or be hostile, to the discourse of another actor, depending on the conceptualization of the signifiers and nodal points of each part's discourse. Within this analytical framework, the paper endeavors to examine what kind of relationship exists between the predominant religious groups and the RR parties of three different countries with diverse social contexts and cultural backgrounds. In short, we explore whether the religious discourse has been a factor, among others, for the party's growth or not.

The sources to be used as data for analyzing the internal supply side are: a) RR party documents, and b) the political discourse of party officials on religious policy. For the demand side, we examine a) the political theology of the Churches under investigation, and/or b) ground-breaking historical church documents, e.g. the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra aetate*. For the external supply side, we focus mainly on a) the public discourse of the religious establishment in contemporary times (statements, interviews, etc.), and b) the official church documents within the contemporary period (Council or synodal decisions etc.).

The paper is divided in three parts, one for each country. In conclusion, the paper endeavors to compare the relevant results. The results are presented in the form of two tables. The first one shows the position of the core religious social and ethical values within the ideological structure of the RR, while the second one shows the religious political tradition and public discourse as an actor in favor or against the growth of the RR movement.

3. Greece

3.1 Internal supply side

The GD has instrumentally employed the Orthodox value system as a marker of national identity (Camus 2007), or as the pool of the traditional value setting (Zaslove 2004). It has exploited the political opportunity structures (Dinas et al. 2013; Georgiadou 2013) and endeavored to extend its influence over the religious electorate via establishing Orthodoxy as a 'criterion of exclusion' (Minkenberg 2013: 11). In particular, Islam is demonized as representing, stereotypically, 'terrorism' and 'jihadism' (Golden Dawn 2012), and treated as a corrupting element for imagined social homogeneity and cultural purity (Psarras 2012). For the GD, religion is one of the four criteria for national belonging (Golden Dawn 2013a), while the opposition to the construction of a mosque in Athens has been a 'signature' issue of its agenda. It is important to note that the Church has impeded this for decades.

The GD does not often address the question of state-church relations. This is not because these issues are out of its agenda, but because they are not put on the table for public debate. The Church's social and political status is hegemonic and its privileges are considered more or less 'common sense' for a large part of society. In short, there is no political space for the GD to politicize religious influence, because the mainstream parties are pro-religious themselves. This is why the GD interventions were triggered in relation to claims of 'rigorist'[1] groups, which the other parties hesitate to support because of the risk of alienating the more secular segments of their electorate. Overall, the GD's position is that any change in the current confessional monopoly is out of question. The role of religion in education should be strengthened and acquire a confessional character. The prevailing preferential legal status of the Orthodox Church of Greece (OCG) should be maintained. The right of religious freedom should be limited. A strict legal framework regarding moral policy and respect for religious symbols should be applied (Golden Dawn, Political Theses). As regards moral politics and the traditional value setting, the GD considers the family to be the nucleus of society and civilization. The state should adopt a strict legal framework against abortion (Golden Dawn 2013b), while homosexuality is not acceptable and a stigma (see table 2).

The position of the religious 'signature' themes within the structure of the GD political program does not mean either that they form core features of GD ideology, or that they should be treated separately as autonomous premises of the party's ideological frame. However, they should be elaborated within the context of nativism, namely that their actual meaning is derived from their relation with the nodal point of the party's discourse

(table 1). Consequently, questions such as state-church separation or abortion are advocated or opposed not on the basis of their supposed intrinsic moral or social significance, or for being a first order condition for the proper political function or acts in line with the Orthodox value system, but according to their instrumentality for alleged national progress (Papastathis 2015).

3.2 External supply side

The OCG has been reluctant to actively oppose Golden Dawn and to take part in the created *cordon sanitaire* (Sakellariou 2013a). The Synod has not made any clear statements against the party. The voices openly hostile to the party were relatively few. On the other hand, a great majority of the bishops have not taken a clear position. In conclusion, the OCG has not declared a war against GD practices, ideology, or active propaganda within the social body in order to counteract the party's influence. This is because the Church cannot effectively oppose a political group whose ideology has core elements of its recent discourse as one of its central features, i.e., after 1974, ethnic nationalism, mono-culturalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and populism (table 2) (Papastathis forthcoming). On the other hand, it should be made clear that currently the new archbishop and as well as some high ranking officials have raised their voices against anti-immigrant discourse. Moreover, the OCG's social work (i.e. soup kitchens) does not exclude immigrants (see table 1).

Overall, the OCG discourse (until the election of archbishop Hieronymus in 2008) has served as the breeding ground for the GD party's social penetration, by advocating and thus de-stigmatizing ultra-nationalist and exclusionist ideas (Stavrakakis 2003; Zoumboulakis 2013; Karyotis, Stratos 2010). In other words, the OCG contributed to making the RR party's political frame part of the mainstream. Moreover, the current neutral stance of the OCG towards the GD has two practical consequences. First, it has a legitimizing effect for party propaganda, and second, because the relative convergence between the mainstream parties not to align (at least officially) with rigorist measures. This leaves the door open for GD to cover the respective political space, via participating in or even establishing 'ownership' over salient issues for the religious collective conscience (Papastathis 2015).

3.3 Demand side

The OCG has worked as the 'cultural factor' behind RR social legitimization at a macro level, via mediating ethno-phyletist and authoritarian value systems, which constitute primary elements of the party ideology (Minkenberg 2008). First, OCG dominance is founded on the idea of *Helleno-Orthodoxia*, according to which an institutional relation and a complete identification between Greek ethnic identity and Orthodoxy exist. For someone to be considered a member of the national body, he/she should by definition belong to the Orthodox Church (Matalas 2002). In effect, the Church was represented as the cohesive element par excellence of national entity, forming the 'trustee' of the nation's values and rights. Helleno-Orthodoxia is represented as part of 'common sense' within Greek society.

Other central concepts for Orthodox political theology and Canon Law are Caesaropapism and the absolute rule of the Bishops within their jurisdiction (despotocracy). The fact that these features were embraced by the Church in the past centuries does not mean that the OCG is currently advocating an authoritative regime. What it is actually implied is that its thinking and internal operation have created a certain political mind-set for the social acceptance of authoritarianism. Clergy are accustomed to exclusionist or law-and-order attitudes because they perceive them as part of the traditional order of things. Moreover, anti-communism has been central to the Church's political program. Throughout the 20th century, the OCG sided unequivocally with the right-wing ruling establishment, acting as its ideological pillar against the Left: it supported the Right against the Communists in the Civil War and legitimized the dictatorship's undemocratic politics of expelling Communists and banning the Communist Party (Karayannis 1997; Sakellariou 2013b) (see table 1).

4. Italy

4.1 Internal supply side

From the mid-1990s on, and even more after September 11th 2001, the Lega Nord changed its previous anti-clerical position to explicit support for Catholicism, the Church and Catholic morality and values (Passalacqua 2009; Piombo 2010; Bacciottini 2010; Baricchi 2010; Zaslove 2011: 102ff.). Public Enemy No. 1 is no longer the Southern Italian, but the illegal and Muslim immigrant who threatens Italy's ethnic-cultural and religious homogeneity and Europe's Christian character (see table 2; Del Medico 2004: 131; Hoppe 2007: 133; Mingozzi 2011; Bulli, Tronconi 2012: 83ff.; Galli 2012). Religion is also used for legitimizing its protectionist economic policy: the Lega emphasizes the elite-friendly aspect of economic globalization at the expense of small producers, local culture and Christian identity (Piombo 2010; Zaslove 2011: 143; Lega Nord 2014). Since the early 2000s, the Lega has regularly organized protests against the building of mosques together with extremist and traditionalist Catholic groups (Passalacqua 2009; Bonasera, Romano 2010).[2]

The so-called religious policy agenda, i.e. state-church relations, has no central place in the party's program (Lega Nord 2014). However, the Lega supports the Church in such questions when needed, such as in the Lautsi case on banning the crucifix from classrooms, and thus highlighting the party's ties with social Conservatism and Catholicism (table 2; Passalacqua 2009; Zaslove 2011: 100ff.).

In the early 1990s, the Lega tried to differentiate itself from the Democrazia cristiana concerning family and morality policies in order to attract younger and secular voters (Bonasera, Romano 2010; Zaslove 2011: 100ff.). They also advocated liberal frames concerning abortion, assisted procreation, or civil rights for homosexual couples. Since the mid-1990s, it has shifted to more conservative policies and now defines the nuclear family as the fundament of society, a position which overlaps with traditional Catholicism (figure 3; Scaliati 2007: 56; Mingozzi 2011).

4.2 External supply side

Concerning the official clergy's discourse, there have been some nationalist/populist state-ments in the last years, but they form the minority (table 1; Traniello 2007; Pertici 2009). On the other hand, traditionalist Catholic groups, which maintain strong links with the church hierarchy, have as their core positions the rejection of immigrant integration and the defense of soil and race. Overall, there is an overlap between traditionalist Catholic groups and the Lega Nord's discourse on anti-immigration and Islamophobic positions (Scaliati 2007; Provenzano 2010). However, Islamophobic positions are far less frequent on these movements' homepages than positions in favor of traditional Catholic morals (table 1; Del Medico 2004; Copertino 2008; Centro Culturale Lepanto 2014; Messa in latino 2015; Movi-mento Politico Cattolico Militia Christi 2015; Comitato Principe Eugenio 2015).

This allows for the conclusion that the Lega Nord's references to traditional Catholic morals are made for strategic reasons, that is, for attracting Conservative and rural voters especially in Northern Italy and to establish itself as the successor party to the Democrazia cristiana – as the Conservative catch-all party (figure 3; Provenzano 2010; Taletti 2010). Islamophobic statements are probably also made for strategic reasons, but they are directed towards another target group: towards a somewhat more secular constituency, which does not follow the Church's teaching to the letter, but uses Catholic identity for drawing its boundaries from other religious and ethnic groups. The Lega's alliance with traditionalist Catholic groups and the celebrations of the Tridentine mass may both be the result of strat-egy and of the substantial overlap of their theological convictions.

4.3 Demand side

The shift of the Holy See's policy, as reflected in lifting the 'non expedit' in 1919, enabled the gradual equation between Italian national and Catholic identity (Prandi 1984; Moro 2003: 316; Boaglio 2008). The fascist regime, following a populist strategy, based its propa-ganda to a certain extent on the appeal to religious sentiment (De Felice 1988). The Church's teaching during this period was mostly pro-fascist: it asked Italians to obey the authorities and condemned liberalism and socialism (Tripodi 1959: 25; Moro 2003: 325). The first time the Church took a position for democracy was in the 1944 Christmas sermon given by Pius XII. In this sermon, he designed democracy as an ideal system of values which corre-spond to natural law and to the spirit of the Gospel (The Holy See 1944). In 1948, the Holy Office excommunicated all members and supporters of the Communist party (Pci) and the Socialist party (Psi; Lariccia 1981: 16). The Second Vatican Council's *Nostra aetate* dec-laration brought a definitive change in the Church's political position, since it recognized the right to religious freedom, condemned all discrimination and violence against people because of their race or religion, and banned Catholic anti-semitism by acknowledging the Jewish people as God's first-born people (table 1; The Holy See 1964; 1965a; 1965b).

5. Sweden

5.1 Internal supply side

In their early history, the SD had no specific Christian profile (table 2; Rinderheim 2008: 96). Some of them were neo-Pagans, while the majority did not exhibit any religious orientation. It was only when the SD first participated in church elections in 2001 (Bäckström et al. 2004; Hagevi 2005) that they had to come up with a church program. Since then, they have increasingly underscored their Christian heritage (Hamrud, Qvarford 2010: 200), and encouraged their members to become involved with the Church, although the SD voters' rates with regard to religious belief and church attendance are very low in comparison to other parties (Johansson Heinö 2013).

The SD leadership articulates a discourse in which Lutheran identity has a central place, being equated with the social body and symbolizing the unity of the nation. Lutheranism is seen as something genuinely Nordic and Swedish, because of its close link to the development of the Swedish nation-state. This unity, however, is considered to be threatened by the spread of Islam (table 2; Lipponen 2004: 73).

For the SD, the separation between Church and state is perceived as a further sign of decline, while current church leadership is criticized as being too liberal and left-wing (Lipponen 2004: 73). The current SD manifesto does not contain any statements on religion or religious education, but only reservations against private schools, which also include Muslim schools (Sverigedemokraterna 2014: 12). However, according to various interviews and statements of SD officials, religious education classes at school should have a more confessional character rather promoting multicultural values. The SD demand more financial support for the protection of the Christian heritage (Sverigedemokraterna 2014; SD TV 2014).

Concerning the traditional value framework, the SD underscore the importance of marriage and nuclear family in society. They encourage the Church to oppose homosexual marriage (Lodenius, Wingborg 2009: 158), and promote traditional gender roles. The SD are in favor of restricting the allowed period for abortion from 18 to 12 weeks, while adoption from non-European countries is viewed skeptically (Sverigedemokraterna 2014).

In conclusion, Lutheranism has an instrumental value for the SD as a marker of national identity (table 2). However, the signifier of Lutheranism being represented as the contrasting 'other' of Islam forms a criterion for defining the 'outgroup'. Hence, it takes its meaning from its relation to Islamophobia and skepticism against immigration as parts of the party ideology.

5.2 External supply side

The Synod's and the Bishops' Council's minutes from 1995 to 2014 might be indicative of whether the Church has created the fertile ground for SD party growth (Kyrkomötet 2002–2011; table 1). Both corpora made almost no reference to the 'Swedish nation'. Ethnic nationalism and any exclusionist framework are officially rejected. The Church understands

itself as a part of the worldwide church (the concept of 'Evangelical Catholicity' which can be traced back to archbishop Söderblom), it does not define itself by ethnicity and states that this criterion has no meaning for its identity. It calls itself 'the people's church', striving to get in contact with all people regardless of their origins (Kyrkomötet 2009c; 2009d; for the historical development and the current meaning of this idea, see Thidevall 2000; Eckerdal 2010). In this regard, it should be noted that the Church is highly involved in aiding refugees and in the promotion of the rights of incoming immigrants.

Concerning moral politics, liberal and progressive positions prevail. The Church celebrates benedictions of homosexual partnerships, commits itself to work against discrimination of homosexuals and allows them to become priests (Kyrkomötet 2005; 2010c). It defends gender equality and inner-church democracy, and has fully accepted abortion (table 1).

5.3 Demand side

The Church of Sweden showed the highest degree of nationalism at the end of the 19th century with the ungkyrkorörelsen (Young Church Movement), a Christian nationalist movement (Söderblom 1908; Eklund 1915; Björkquist 1916; Blückert 2000; Ekstrand 2002: 74). After the First World War, the nationalist message was toned down. The Young Church Movement also began missionary activity among the working class, which led to Social Democratic priests who interpreted the idea of the 'people's church' within the folkhem (people's home; Tergel 1969; 1974; Bohlin 2014: 4).

The idea of the 'people's church' has progressively been extended and melded with Social Democracy (Thidevall 2000; Ekström 2003: 56; Brohed 2005). From 1958 to 1976, when the Social Democratic party governed alone, it was able to exercise the largest influence on the Church's political orientation. Because the government feared that the Church might develop into a Conservative veto player to its own progressive policies, it made sure to only choose progressive bishops which would support these policies (Tergel 1995; Martino 2014: 393). Because of this development and its consequential intensified development aid and ecumenical cooperation, the Church of Sweden became politicized to the left-wing. This culminated in the Uppsala meeting in 1968 and its consequent Church Movement which perceived God as a Social Democrat and Jesus as a revolutionary (Lundberg 1975; Tergel 1995).

The Church has thus evolved from a supporter of the ruling classes and society elites to a critical voice and a challenge to the upper and middle classes (Ekström 2003: 196). So, if one 'digs' in Swedish church history, nationalism and nativism (the Young Church Movement), law-and-order thinking (the traditional understanding of the state church system) and, to a smaller extent, even anti-parliamentarism and anti-communism can be found. However, within the last 60 years, this has not been the Church's prevalent theology (Rasmusson 2007: 125ff.).

Of course, we have to distinguish between the Church leadership's theology and the religious orientations of the laypeople. A minority of laypeople do not keep up with the Church's reforms concerning liturgy and political statements and have become alienated

from it. Here, the committed Christians within the SD offer a theological alternative which matches their more traditional way of believing, so that they may also become an electorate for the SD in parliamentary elections. But, given the high degree of secularization in Swedish society, it is more likely that the SD's restrictive immigration policy is the ideological element attracting most votes. In relation to this element, it is of secondary importance if the Swedish identity is constructed as 'Lutheran/Christian' or as 'secular', as long as 'the immigrant' and 'the Muslim' are kept out.

6. Analysis

As developed in the empirical part, the relationships between each Church and the RR party in their respective country show large differences: closeness in the Greek case, a neutral distance in the Italian case and total opposition in the Swedish case. The variant political relationship between each predominant Church and the domestic RR party is defined by analyzing the discourse of the religious actors towards the RR parties, on the one hand, and the discourse made by the RR parties with respect to religion, on the other hand.

Table 1 shows the Churches' positions towards the RR political framework. Several elements and substantial positions of the RR ideology are identified (privileged RR discourse signifiers, e.g. 'Fascist Past'). The next column shows both the RR party's and the Church's stances towards these signifiers ('Y' stands for 'yes', 'N' for 'no' and 'NP' for 'no position'). This table answers the question about the position of the core religious social and ethical values within the ideological structure of the RR. It also enables a comparison between the political positioning of the three Churches, as well as how the RR ideological elements are conceptualized by each Church in accordance to the nodal point of their discourse. For the OCG, the nodal point is *Helleno-Orthodoxia*, for the Catholic Church in Italy, it is *traditional morals*, and for the Church of Sweden, it is *the people's church*.

Table 2 does the same for the Church's privileged religious discourse signifiers in order to show the RR parties' position towards the Churches' religious discourse. Several elements and substantial positions of the Church's privileged religious discourse are identified (e.g. 'Conservatism'). Most of them belong to the demand side, but some of them to the external supply side as well. Because of the Church's institutional conservatism, most of these values can be traced back to earlier periods, while some newer positions are received if they fit in with the overall value framework (as it could be the case for euro-skepticism, for instance). The next column shows the RR party's and the Church's stances towards these signifiers. By this, table 2 answers the question about the religious political tradition and public discourse as an actor in favor or against the growth of the RR movement. Again, we can identify overlapping discursive elements between the RR parties and the local religious organizations. However, the question is how the same features are actually conceptualized by the political agents. As aforementioned, the nodal point of the respective discourse fixes their exact meaning. For the Golden Dawn, the nodal point is *nativism*, for the Lega Nord, *immigration skepticism/Islamophobia*, and for the SD, *nativism*.

Table 1: The Churches' positioning towards the Radical Right ideology										
n/n	Privilege d Radical Right Discourse Signifiers	GREECE			ITALY			SWEDEN		
		GD	OCG	**OCG Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of:** *Religious Nationalism (Helleno-Orthodoxia)*	LN	CC	**CC Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of:** *Catholic traditional morals*	SD	SC	**SC Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of:** *the people's church (populism)*
1	Fascist Past	Y	Y	Repudiation after 1974 (Church collaboration as a mistaken act, imposed by the then historical context).	NP	Y	Church distances itself from the Fascist past from the Second Vatican Council on.	Y	N	No fascist dictatorship in Sweden; Church distances itself from all nationalist tendencies in the past.
2	Ethnic Nationalism	Y	Y	Religion as the criterion for national belonging. Identification of Orthodoxy with Greek identity and *vice versa*.	Y	Y	The Catholic Church's rootedness in (North) Italian society; existence of a Catholic national culture.	Y	N	Explicit intention by the Church to reach out to all people living in Sweden, independent of their ethnic origin.
3	Nativism	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
4	Exclusionism	Y	Y	Mono-culturalism; No acceptance of minority groups (e.g. Muslims) as part of the political body.	Y	NP	No position expressed about minorities.	Y	N	Church often states explicitly its intention to include ethnic minorities, immigrants and homosexuals.
5	Xenophobia	Y	Y	National homogeneity; Stigmatization of the cultural other. However, the Orthodox Christians should have a place in Greece. (E.g. distinction between the Orthodox emigrants from Albania vis a vis their Muslim compatriots).	Y	N	Some bishops favor immigration of Catholics, but official Church statements condemn discrimination on the basis of race or religion.	Y	N	Church is very involved in favor of a liberal asylum and refugee policy.
6	Immigration skepticism	Y	Y	Cultural demonization of non-Orthodox Christians (especially Muslims). Essentialist stereotypes of the religious 'other' as a possible threat for religious purity.	Y	N	In parts of the Church, cultural demonization of non-Catholics, especially Muslims. Essentialist stereotypes of the religious 'other' as a possible threat for religious purity.	Y	N	
7	Racism	Y	N		Y	N		N	N	
8	Law and Order	Y	Y	Law and Order as God given for the national 'good'. Rejection of the idea of social disobedience.	Y	Y	Law and Order as God given for the national 'good'. Rejection of the idea of social disobedience.	Y	NP	
9	Authoritarianism	Y	Y	Legitimation of the established political structures (The 'Divine Right' of the King).	NP	NP	Despite a hierarchical church organization, no statements about state or party organization are made.	Y	N	Church values its democratic decision-making structure highly.
10	Strong Leadership	Y	Y	Conceptualization of the religious body as the 'flock'.	Y	Y	Conceptualization of the religious body as the 'flock'.	Y	N	The archbishop has only a formal function; see above.

n/n	Privilege d Radical Right Discourse Signifiers	GREECE			ITALY			SWEDEN		
11	Militarism	Y	N		Y	NP		Y	N	
12	Totalitarianism	Y	N		N	N	Rejection of totalitarianism and support of democracy since 1944.	N	N	Involvement in favor of human rights worldwide is part of Church's self-understanding.
13	Jingoism	Y	Y	Reconstitution of the authentic Christian empire (Byzantium)/ the Greeks as the new 'Chosen People'.	Y	Y	Only among traditionalist groups, desire to reconstruct an integrist Catholic society.	Y	N	Total acceptance of modern society as it was built during the folkhem era.
14	Populism	Y	Y	The 'people' as the religious body per se. The Church portrayed as the authentic representative of the national body, having the mission to protect it against the modernized 'elites'.	Y	Y	The 'people' as the religious body per se. The Church portrayed as the authentic representative of the national body, having the mission to protect it against the modernized 'elites'.	Y	Y	Claim to represent and to reach out to all Swedish people, to create inclusion and cohesion.
15	Anti-Systemic Politics	Y	N		Y	Y	Only among traditionalist groups; otherwise, the Church supports the existing party system and constitutional order	Y	N	Support for the existing party system and constitutional order.
16	Anti-Establishment	Y	N		Y	Y		Y	N	
17	Anti-Human Rights Thinking	Y	Y	The Church as the ultimate judge of the normative regulatory framework for the protection of the collective body vis a vis the modernization process that leads to national decadence.	Y	N	Today, the Church equates human rights with natural law.	N	N	See above.
18	Anti-intellectualism	Y	Y	Intellectuals perceived as secularists, modernists and innovators threatening religious purity.	Y	Y	The Church mainly wants to appeal to 'the simple people' with little formal education.	N	NP	Education and a developed theology is fundamental for Protestantism; on the other hand, the SD are progressively appealing to educated classes.
19	Anti-Parliamentarianism	Y	N		N	N		N	N	
20	Direct Democracy (Referendum)	Y	Y	The Church, as the authentic representative of the collective body, is obliged to call for a referendum when it consider it suitable (e.g. when its status or issues of religious interest are questioned).	NP	NP		NP	NP	
21	Anti-Communism	Y	Y	Atheism/ Secularism.	Y	Y	Atheism/Secularism	Y	Y	Atheism/Secularism

n/n	Privilege d Radical Right Discourse Signifiers	GREECE			ITALY			SWEDEN		
22	State Regulation Economy	Y	NP		NP	NP	The Church does not completely back the Lega's protectionism, but warns against too extreme capitalism.	Y	NP	
23	Family/Traditional Ethics	Y	Y	Christian morality.	Y	Y	The traditional family, opposition of 'gender ideology' and rights for homosexuals.	Y	N	The Church rejects the SD's involvement in favor of the traditional family; instead, it strives for inclusion of sexual minorities.
24	Welfare Chauvinism	Y	N		Y	NP		Y	N	
25	Euroscepticism	Y	N		Y	N	Catholic universalism was one of the bases for EU integration.	Y	N	The Church supports the EU.
26	Anti-Globalization	Y	Y	Secularism. A threat for religious purity and ethnic homogeneity.	Y	NP		Y	NP	
27	Anti-Semitism	Y	Y	Essentialist representation of Jews as evil. Conspiracy theories.	NP	N	Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has distanced itself from Anti-Semitism.	N	N	Church distances itself from Christian anti-Semitism.
28	Islamophobia	Y	Y	Islam conceptualized as the nation's 'hostile other' threatening the Christian value frame and corrupting the national homogeneity. Identified to a large extent with Anti-Turkism, which is in turn viewed as the old national enemy persecuting Byzantine Orthodoxy for its ancient birthplace. Constantinople (Istanbul) as the symbolic center of the national group. Against Turkey's EU membership.	Y	Y	Islam conceptualized as the nation's 'hostile other' threatening the Christian value frame and corrupting the national homogeneity.	Y	N	Church frequently holds Christian-Muslim services.
29	Regionalism	N	N		Y	NP		N	N	

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Table 2: The Radical Right Party's positioning towards the Church's religious discourse									
n/n	Privileged Religious Discourse Signifiers	**GREECE**				**ITALY**		**SWEDEN**	
		OCG	GD	GD Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of: *Nativism*	CC	LN	LN Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of: *Immigration Skepticism/ Islamophobia*	SC SD	SD Conceptualization via the Nodal Point of: *Nativism*
1	Conservatism	Y	Y		Y	Y	Lega: traditional morals and nativism	N Y	SD: promotes a social conservatism
2	Nationalism	Y	Y	Exclusionism; Jingoism; Militarism	N	Y	Lega nativism	N Y	SD: embrace it
3	Anti-communism	Y	Y	Anti-communism	Y	Y	No detailed statements; communism is no longer an issue	N Y	SD: strongly anti-Communist
4	Xenophobia	Y	Y	Exclusionism; Racism	N	Y	Skepticism towards religious minorities	N N	SD: acceptance of immigrants as long as they adapt to Swedish values and work hard
5	Immigration skepticism	Y	Y	Exclusionism; Racism	N	Y	Skepticism towards immigration of Muslims over Catholics	N Y	SD: acceptance of immigrants as long as they adapt to Swedish values and work hard
6	Law and Order	Y	Y	Totalitarianism	Y	Y	No detailed statements	NP Y	SD: favour harsher judgments for criminals
7	Authoritarianism	Y	Y	Absolute authority of the Leader.	Y	Y	No detailed statements.	N Y	SD: authoritarian structure with arbitrary exclusions of party members.
9	Populism	Y	Y	Anti-political; Anti-establishment; Exclusionism.	Y	Y	Lega: nativism legitimized by supposed Padanian ethnic identity, but also by the Church's rootedness in the Padanian people.	Y Y	SD: appeal to the Church's rootedness in the Swedish people.
10	Anti-Globalization	Y	Y	Anti-Cosmopolitanism; Anti-Semitism; threat to cultural purity.	NP	Y	Globalization depicted as a threat favoring elites and damaging local culture and production.	NP Y	Globalization depicted as a threat damaging local culture.
11	Anti-Establishment	N	Y	The only authentic political alternative to the corrupted elites. Populism.	N	Y	Lega presents itself as alternative to established parties.	N Partly	SD presents itself as alternative, but also as the heir of the Social Democrats and of several Conservative parties.
12	Anti-Human Rights Thinking	Y	Y	Anti-Human Rights Thinking; Euroscepticism; Anti-Cosmopolitanism	N	Y	Lega restricts human rights to co-ethnics.	N N	SD defend human rights.
13	Human Rights Thinking	N	N		Y	N		Y Y	

n/n	Privileged Religious Discourse Signifiers	GREECE			ITALY			SWEDEN		
14	Anti-intellectualism	Y	Y	Anti-Cosmopolitanism; appeal to the 'simple people'.	Y	Y	Both Church and Lega appeal to the 'simple people'.	N	N	SD appeals to higher and lower educated classes (e.g. by differentiated events, activities and newspapers).
17	Direct Democracy (Referendum)	Y	Y	The 'people', i.e. the ethnic body, against the corrupted cosmopolitan elites.	NP	NP		NP	NP	
18	Secularism	N	Y	However, maintenance of the Church's privileged status as distinguishing the native from the foreign.	N	N		N	N	SD: prefer a conservative theology and morals.
20	Family Values (anti-abortion)	Y	Y	A condition for the national good.	Y	Y	Lega against it for the sake of the survival of the Padanian people.	N	Y	SD against it for the sake of the survival of the Swedish people.
21	Family Values (homophobia)	Y	Y	A condition for the national good. Homosexuality as a threat for national morals.	Y	Y	Lega against it for the sake of the survival of the Padanian people.	N	Y	SD against it for the sake of the survival of the Swedish people.
22	Social Work	Y	Y	Welfare Chauvinism.	Y	NP		Y	NP	
23	Gender Equality	N	N	Gender ideology as a danger for traditional families as the fundament of society.	N	N	Gender ideology as a danger for traditional families as the fundament of society.	Y	N	Gender ideology as a danger for traditional families as the fundament of society.
24	Religious Education	Y	Y	A condition for the national good. Morality; tradition; link with the glorious past of the nation; criterion for distinguishing the natives from the foreigners.	Y	Y		N	Y	SD: want to restore denominational religious education for preserving the Swedish people's identity and because it belonged to the former status quo.
25	Welfare Equality	Y	N	All men are not equal. A Greek cannot have the same welfare rights as a foreigner. Welfare Chauvinism.	Y	N P		Y	N	SD: slightly oriented towards market economy, want to reward prestation.
26	Universalism	Y	N	A threat to national purity; anti-globalization; anti-cosmopolitanism.	Y	N	Lega would understand it as globalism; Catholic identity used for affirming Padanian particularist identity.	Y	N	SD: Lutheran identity as ethnic marker of Swedishness.
28	Close Church-State Relationship	Y	Y	A condition for the national good. The one presupposes the other.	Y	Y		N	Y	SD: want to restore state church system for preserving the Swedish people's identity and because it belonged to the former status quo.

n/n	Privileged Religious Discourse Signifiers	GREECE					ITALY			SWEDEN
29	Anti-Semitism	Y	Y	Anti-Semitism; anti-cosmopolitanism; threat to the national culture; the primordial national enemy.	N	N		N	N	SD: involved in campaigns and activities against anti-Semitism.
30	Islamophobia	Y	Y	Anti-immigrant prejudice; xenophobia; Anti-Turkish.	Partly	Y	Lega supports Islamophobic bishops.	N	Y	SD: want to introduce more restrictions against Muslims.
31	Anti-Paganism	Y	N	Paganism as the religion of the ancient Greeks is accepted.	NP	NP		NP	NP	
Source: Authors' own compilation.										

Overlapping between the internal supply side (the party's discourse on the religious agenda), the external supply side (cultural opportunity structures/the church current and recent public discourse with regard to RR activity, policy-setting and ideology), and the demand side (the church traditional discourse that has strong roots and has influenced the domestic political culture, i.e. nationalism, authoritarianism) is highest in Greece. In Italy, the internal supply side partly overlaps with the external supply side and partly with the demand side. In Sweden, the internal supply side practically coincides with the demand side but shows no overlapping with the external supply side.

7. Results and concluding remarks

This result partly confirms Mudde's 'pathological normalcy' thesis and its application to our case of to what extent 'people of the church' constitute a possible electorate for RR parties: this is the case as far as the internal supply side and the external supply side overlap. Under this condition, the values transmitted by the Church and by the party reinforce each other and are perceived as 'common sense'. By contrast, if the internal supply side and the external supply side diverge, practicing church members have to choose between conflicting loyalties. This means that they either are prevented by the Church's influence from voting for a RR party, or they stand with an RR party and progressively become alienated from the Church. Since most mainstream (i.e., non-Evangelical) Protestant churches became politicized to the left-wing in the 1960s and 1970s (Martino 2015), this is more likely to happen in mainstream Protestantism than in other denominations. That the Church of Greece is closer to RR ideology and the Church of Sweden is totally against it, and that the rather 'neutral' relation of the Lega with the Catholic Church, might be indicative of the influence of both the 'confessional' and the 'secularization' cleavages in respect to the dynamic articulation of the political discourses of the actors involved.

Footnotes:

1. Rigorism is broadly defined as the adoption of the religious practices, canons, and ethical codes to the strictest possible way. Within the Greek context, the core political features of these groups are: protection of the Christian value-frame, conservatism, anti-westernism, anti-Semitism, anti-modernism, and anti-human rights thinking.

2. *Traditionalist* Catholic groups are defined as Catholic associations for laypeople who are involved in reversing at least one of the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council. For most of them, this applies to the liturgy reform which substituted the Tridentine Mass with its current form. In contrast to this, *traditional* Catholic moral positions are shared by traditionalist groups and by the Holy See and the Italian Bishops' Conference.

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