

**‘Voting for God
at the European Parliament and in the House of Representatives.
A comparative analysis of the place of religion in legislative arenas’**

François Foret (ULB)
[fforet@ulb.ac.be]

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Abstract

Sociologists of religion oppose secular Europe to religious America. The US is offered as an example of a mature democracy able to integrate religion within political deliberation. The EU is invited to enter a post-secular era, making room for believers in the definition of collective preferences. Beyond normative visions, however, little data is available on the role of religion in the recruitment of European elites, the formation of coalitions and decision-making in Brussels. The European Parliament, as the assembly representative of social and cultural diversity in Europe, is a good field for study. The first results of an ongoing survey on Religion at the European Parliament (<http://www.releur.eu>) concerning what MEPs believe and what they do with these beliefs offer a state of the art. Based on this, the contribution discusses the European specificity in matter of relationships between religion and politics in parliamentary politics and the relevance of the comparison with the American model.

In the present re-emergence of religion on the political and intellectual agenda, the transatlantic comparison is recurrent. The exceptionality of European secularization is contrasted with the resilience of American religiosity to emphasize that secularization does not necessarily go hand in hand with modernity. The US is offered as an example of a mature democracy able to integrate religion within in social life and political deliberation. The EU is invited to enter a post-secular era, making room for believers in the public space and in the definition of collective preferences.

The US does indeed offer a stimulating ‘Constitutive Other’ for the understanding of the EU, both because of its similarities and its differences with the latter. It is multi-level governance, a multi-cultural polity and a mature democracy. The stronger social relevance of religion in the US has the advantage of highlighting the logics at work with more clarity than the subdued spiritual phenomena which underly politics in Europe. The American example may thus be used as a reference case study, especially since there is a huge literature on religion and politics, contrasting with the relative thinness of European scholarship.

The purpose here is to analyse the findings of an ongoing survey on religion at the European Parliament (EP) by confronting it with the main features of religion in American legislative politics. This is not to say that the EU, as a quasi-federation, should be equated with the American State. Restrictions stemming from the nature and limits of the European political community and the range of its competences as regards the regulation of spiritual affairs are bound to be numerous. However, this analytical perspective does recognize the EU as a full political system likely to produce effects in all policy sectors and to reframe identities and allegiances well beyond the decision-making circles in Brussels. Our analysis stands close to the emergent hypothesis of a normalization of the EU, which justifies its comparison with classic polities. This approach is all the more opportune that interactions between religion and

politics played a major role in nation- and state-building. Looking back at national history and elsewhere provides a way to discuss the specificity and relevance of religion in the process of European integration.

As the arena where cultural diversity and conflicting interests or worldviews are expressed, the European Parliament is a privileged field in which to observe the political effects of religion. The House of Representatives is the most comparable legislating body due to its mode of election and its size. Differences however should be kept constantly in mind. A Congressman (the name commonly designates a member of the House, even if technically speaking a Senator also belongs to the Congress) represents about 650, 000 citizens but with great discrepancies between for example Alaska and California. He or she bears comparison with an MEP from a big member state who represents more than 875, 000, with significant variations between countries¹. The districts where the Representatives are elected, may lead them to be sensitive to local concerns². The literature also suggests that there are regional factions (more prevalent among Republicans than Democrats), a factor which induces a territorial fragmentation of the party-based logic of representation but presumably one far weaker than the national subdivisions operating at the EP.

Analysis of religion at the House of Representatives highlights several variables which may be tested at the European Parliament. Religion indeed matters in American parliamentary politics, admittedly with less strength than partisanship and ideology but still in a significant way. It gives purposes and incentives to political actors. It creates cleavages, but evolving cleavages. Religiously-based positions shift according to contexts and circumstances. A single event may be sufficient to alter the salience and the form of religion as a political factor. Before September 11 2001, President Bush's defining moment was his decision on stem cell research. After September 11, his cornerstone was the war against terror and the way to come to terms with Islam. Some cleavages organized around strongly discriminatory issues are likely to divide politicians in a durable way. For example, 'progressive' sexuality is bound to remain a contentious issue for some time³, even if its intensity is declining.

In order to assess similarities and divergences between American and European configurations, the influence of social, political and institutional contexts has to be clarified. The *social context* is the general background against which to understand representativeness, how a politician represents his or her electors, and the role that religion can play in this symbolic relationship. Social context refers to the individual religiosity of political actors in their relation to the religious beliefs of the electorate; to the implications of belonging to a specific denomination; to the way politics may encompass religious and cultural diversities; to the role of religion in the political socialization of a decision-maker, inside the legislative body, in the capital, in his or her constituency and in the national or international political spaces.

Political and institutional contexts are constituted by opportunities and constraints offered by the general political system and the legislative body within which a parliamentary representative operates and by the general climate of opinion about religious or religiously-related issues. A first question is that of knowing how to identify religion as a political factor in parliamentary politics (for example, according to denominational affiliation, or to level of

¹ Costa O., Saint Martin F., *Le Parlement européen*, Paris, La Documentation Française, 2009.

² Oldmixon Elizabeth Anne, *Uncompromising Positions. God, Sex and the US House of Representatives*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005, p. xii.

³ Oldmixon (2005), p. 191.

religiosity) and to measure its effects (by analysing votes or other activities). A second question concerns religion as a policy issue, with a variable salience across policy sectors, and religion as material for “cultural politics”, a transversal political style which goes beyond the search for compromise in order to enforce non-negotiable values. The purpose is to find whether religion is ‘business as usual’ in parliamentary politics or creates specific conflicts, cleavages and strategies. A third and last question investigates the way the parliamentary institution is able to frame the religious preferences of politicians on the one hand, and religious issues on the other hand. The framing of individual preferences can be assessed by observing the effect of the longevity of legislators in the assembly on how they handle religion. As regards religious issues, the socializing effect of the institution is seen if the amount of time which a controversy involving moral choices related to religious beliefs has been active can be shown to correlate with a kind of ‘agreeing how to disagree’. Either the need for compromise prevails in order to protect the functioning of the assembly, and politicians develop ways to comply with this constraint while making symbolic uses of religion; or religion prevails as an absolute doxa, showing the limits of the parliamentary institution’s capacity for regulating conflicts.

I. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT: RELIGION AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

The American model

To believe, whatever the content, but not too much

Like American Presidents, Representatives are expected to display their religious credentials, but without exaggeration. Presenting oneself as a religious person is a matter of patriotism and public decency, the content and the extent of faith being of less importance. However, excessive ardour may be unwise as it may endanger the religious freedom of fellow citizens who have a faith of lesser intensity or belong to another denomination. Therefore, a Congressman will comply with the obligations linked to his or her role and exhibit the religiosity required by public virtue, but to go beyond these minimal requirements may be counter-productive: it may hurt the feelings of fellow representatives, lobbies or electors. The best strategy is thus to display religious feelings at appropriate moments and to be silent otherwise. This is confirmed by an expert on Congressional life: ‘You do not see religion mentioned that much in the debates that take place in the House. You do not see members of the House appealing directly to specific verses of the Bible to support their argument. They speak in more general terms about the moral stature of the country, where we are going. There are too many different denominations to be efficient when appealing to a specific tradition to gain the argument. (...)’⁴

In interviews, legislators and staff insist on the importance of *personal values* – explicitly and prominently religious values – in decision-making. The singularity of the incentive and the political risk involved is reduced by the fact that there is a supposed correspondence between the legislator's attitudes and modal preferences of his constituency. The legislator's values are thought to reflect those of the electors. Thus, the political danger of any discrepancy is low. This general safety rule may leave room for provisos and exceptions. Constituency preferences evolve, either by demographic change (although this is unlikely in a single term) or above all because the context changes and alter the relevance of moral issues. The congruence between the personal religious preferences of the decision-maker and those whom

⁴ Interview with Dan Wolfensberger, Director, The Congress Project, Wilson Center, Washington, 29/11/2010.

he or she represents thus needs to be constantly reassessed⁵. The political context may have changed since the election and altered the views of the electorate if not those of the legislator.

It is a general rule that legislators declare that their personal beliefs are of more importance than any pressure from their constituencies. It cannot be reasonably expected from a politician to present himself or herself as a servile follower of opinion permanently begging for re-election. Nevertheless, some representatives justify voting against their conscience on the grounds that they feel they have to comply with the mandate given to them. In some even more complex cases, they can vote in opposition to their personal preferences and the moral orientations of their constituents because they consider that religion should not interact with politics or that policy matters require them to do so.

More generally, as most Americans favour a moderate line, holding an extreme position and accepting the risk of making compromise impossible and of blocking the work of the legislature is a huge responsibility⁶. A refusal in the name of absolute values to cooperate in order to reach a solution acceptable to all is a behaviour which is probably negative in any cost/benefit calculus for the majority of legislators. Exceptions may be extreme fighters for God who are entrenched in very homogeneously conservative constituencies, meaning that the phenomenon will be quantitatively limited given the heterogeneity of the US electoral map.

Representation as a slightly distorted reproduction of American social realities

Representatives who want to make a point on religious issues for personal reasons or who have to do so in order to satisfy their constituencies will find plenty of opportunities for this. It is not necessary to build a profile in courage by taking a stand on risky issues with a controversial religious dimension. Skilled politicians will take positions on symbolic but petty bills, especially those which enjoy a wide consensus (for example to secure family values, a sound-bite of American politics, rather than to oppose abortion), to show their religious zeal back home without breaking either with party discipline or mainstream moderation. But even if representatives are not obliged to take up such symbolic postures, they would prefer not to openly distance themselves from religion. On Capitol Hill as well as in most US constituencies, it is better not to declare oneself a non-religious person unless one wants to make a statement of it, and one is ready to pay the political cost. The day the first Congressman comes out of the closet as an outspoken atheist will be a notable date in American parliamentary history. In 2007, the Californian Democrat Pete Stark, affiliated as a Unitarian and an incumbent since 1973, became the first member of Congress to declare that he does not believe in a Supreme Being, a somewhat tardy piece of audacity after more than thirty years of compliance. Others prefer not to be specific on their beliefs but do not express an absence of beliefs⁷.

This combination of mandatory if symbolic religious exhibition and strategic moderation may explain why American legislators declare a higher level of religiosity than average Americans⁸. As representatives, they have to embody American political culture and

⁵ Oldmixon (2005), p. 187.

⁶ Oldmixon (2005), p. 188.

⁷ Lin Joanna, "111th Congress reflects greater religious diversity in the U.S.", Los Angeles Times, 5/1/2009.

⁸ According to a study by the Pew Forum in 2008, about 1% of Congressmen did not declare a religion affiliation versus 16.1% of the adult American population. Cf. Pew Forum *on Religion & Public Life, Faith on the Hill. The Religious Affiliations of Members of Congress*, 19/12/2008, <http://pewforum.org/Government/Faith-on-the-Hill-The-Religious-Affiliations-of-Members-of-Congress.aspx>, accessed 18/12/2010.

showing at least a minimal religiosity is part of this function. This qualifies the hypothesis of a socio-cultural gap between secularized elites in Washington and religious masses in the backwoods. The sincerity of the faith displayed by political elites is another story.

The religious composition of the House of Representatives reflects the denominational diversity of the US population, even if statistical balances are not reproduced exactly. The Pew Forum provides data⁹ on Congress that is still not available for the European Parliament. Taking as an example the 111th Congress, there is a Protestant majority throughout the history of the institution. But the first affiliation is Roman Catholicism, followed, almost equally by Baptists and Methodists. The Legislative body also includes several other minority Protestant affiliations, an oversized sample of Jews, Orthodox, two Muslims, two Buddhists and a member of Soka Gakkai. Some Congressmen declined to specify their faith but do not declare its absence.

Religious diversification has for long been the pattern and this continues. Variations between denominations reflect societal trends at work in the US more than political circumstances. Victories of Republicans or Democrats cause adjustments but no major shifts from one term to another. This was even true in 1994 when the Republicans won their first majority in the House of Representatives since 1954 and remained so during their lasting control of the House until 2006¹⁰. Influence is not always measured strictly by numbers. The geographical distribution and historical and socio-economic backgrounds of each community are also crucial parameters, as well as the organizational efficiency of each religious community both as regards party apparatus and at grassroots level. Catholics are often considered as a model for mobilization and lobbying. Jews are a very secularized and discrete group but are well represented. Mormons enjoy strong positions due to their territorial concentration. Muslims¹¹, Buddhists and Hindus do not have the same resources and are rather under-represented.

Another way to assess the place of religious minorities in parliamentary politics is to look at their access to top positions. Protestants still keep a firm hand on posts of authority. Nevertheless, Catholics can rely on their organizational skills and their relative number to secure positions such as Speaker of the House with the Democrat Nancy Pelosi or minority leader with the Republican John Boehner in a recent past. Jews may be said to be more present in the higher ranks of presidential administrations than in parliamentary hierarchies. The occasional Mormon is able to achieve high office, such as Harry Reid as majority leader in the Senate but this remains relatively rare. The twin logics of representativeness and pure demography still operate at this level.

Religious identity may also have an influence on other social identities claimed by legislators. Being openly gay is infrequent but not unheard of. The announcement of his homosexuality by the first member of the House dates back to 1982. A few others followed this example and this did not prevent them from being re-elected. Nevertheless, the first candidate to be elected for the first time as a gay person achieved this only in 1998. Some Representatives preferred to keep silent even if they were known as homosexuals in their districts. Others encountered problems when their sexual preferences were disclosed. It is worth noticing that there is no known gay member of the Senate. This has to do with the

⁹ Pew Forum, *Faith on the Hill*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Oldmixon (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹¹ The first Muslim, Keith Ellison, was elected only in 2007. He caused minor uproar by taking his oath of office on the Koran rather than the Bible, but the Congress institutional ritual was perfectly able to accommodate this innovation.

smaller size of the upper house, and probably also with its mode of election which may be more challenging for sexual minorities as constituencies encompass a greater variety of population, including possibly more conservative parts.

Religion in social circles

Representatives are likely to keep a low profile about religion. Whatever their private beliefs, they will frequently speak of religion in ad-hoc fashion with like-minded people and limit their expressions on this subject in the public arena. 'There is no constitutional stricture about not talking about religion but members realize that religious references are not going to win any votes by appealing to particular religious beliefs. You have to make a larger argument. Politics is about additions. You try to build coalitions and to make it bigger'¹². References to religion are mostly part of the ritual of civil religion which is a dramatization of national identity borrowing religious vocabulary. The reality of religious observance is to be kept for appropriate circles. 'People are not afraid to discuss their religion with people they want to talk about it, but they are not wearing it on their sleeves, they may be wearing the American flag but mostly not the Christian Cross. They manifest mostly their faith in the way they talk and relate to people'¹³.

Religion may also matter as a social universe offering opportunities for networking and feedback at four levels: inside Congress, in the small world of Washington, in constituencies and in the national and international spaces.

Firstly, religion works as a socializing network through prayer meetings at the House. Small spiritual gatherings enable meetings with other legislators, staffers and officials. Such events may provide bipartisan contacts, inspiration and even collective initiatives. There are also meetings between denominations testifying to a mutual curiosity, especially between Catholics and Evangelicals. Religion is also part of the official institutional drama of the House. The opening prayer of each plenary session is performed by the Chaplain of the House, a Catholic priest¹⁴, belonging to the biggest organized denomination in the country but far from representative of a nation composed of a majority of Protestants distributed in multiple affiliations. The ecumenical character of the act is thus strikingly underlined. Not all persons present in the room show concern and respect for the prayer which is very quickly executed. In contrast, the pledge to the flag which follows commands general attention and almost everybody participates, including staffers and visitors in the galleries¹⁵. Again, religion is clearly subordinated to civil religion for the greater national glory.

Secondly, attendance at ceremonies in local Washington churches is a way for the politician who spends a few days per week in the capital to find a home from home, local networks and soul-mates.

Thirdly and most importantly, participation in religious events held in the constituency is a political imperative for all members of the House, including events held by traditions other than their own affiliation. Churches still play a very significant role in the social life of many communities, and the Representative has to attend at least a few times a year. This signals that

¹² Interview with Dan Wolfensberger, Director, The Congress Project, Wilson Center, Washington, 29/11/2010.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ This chaplain was nominated by the Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is Roman Catholic. The preceding Speaker Dennis Hastert was listed as Protestant. Before him, speaker Newt Gingrich was Baptist but converted recently to Roman Catholicism, the religion of his wife.

¹⁵ Observation at the House of Representatives, Washington, 18/11/2010.

he is concerned by local problems and an opportunity to receive feedback from electors. American parties do not have the same regular structures as their European counterparts to coordinate activists and to reach sympathizers or indifferent masses. This makes the assistance provided by religious structures all the more important. This is the very practical reason why, according to an expert observer of American political elites 'many representatives call themselves religious, but do not really care. The religiosity of American politicians and the influence of religious lobbies are often overestimated, especially in Europe'.¹⁶

A fourth form of socialization through religion is a belonging to a specific denomination. This is transversal as it can produce effects at the local level, in the House with fellow believers, on a national scale or trans-nationally by identification with spiritual authorities (such as the Vatican or Catholics) or minorities worldwide (such as Christians in China). The effects of socialization may vary according to the denomination. For example, when a Representative is identified as a Catholic, as well as when the constituency has a strong Catholic presence, he or she is more likely to show a high level of support for religious traditionalism. This effect is stronger for Catholicism than for other denominations¹⁷. A hypothesis is that the hierarchical organization of the Catholic Church and the efficiency of its lobbying ensure more disciplined respect for its teaching. However, the views of Catholic representatives and of the American episcopate frequently differ. American Catholic Congressmen are notably conservative on abortion or gay rights, but not on prayer at school¹⁸. In social policy, they are far more conservative than the progressive teachings of the Catholic Church and the American episcopacy¹⁹.

The European model

To disbelieve, but not too much

Whereas complying with civil religion by displaying a moderate level of faith is the required norm for American legislators, a peaceful absence of religion appears the norm for an MEP. Levels of religiosity, observance, feeling of belonging and the importance given to religion all converge to underline that religion matters far more in the US than in Europe. To give a factual illustration of the differences in the social expectations towards rulers that frame American and European society, it is possible to use an indicator regularly mobilized by international values surveys and which has also been applied in the research on MEPs. To the statement 'politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office', 32.1% of Americans agree or agree strongly, compared with 11.1% of Germans, 9.3% of French and only 1.2% in our sample of MEPs.²⁰ This means that both in society and in European political circles, the espousal of religious beliefs is far from coterminous with the job of European

¹⁶ Interview with Clyde Wilcox, Georgetown University, 2/12/2010.

¹⁷ Oldmixon, 2005, p. 187.

¹⁸ This stronger social conservatism of political actors compared with the religious hierarchy is a frequently observed phenomenon. George Weigel, a well-known Catholic political thinker active in a think tank in Washington, keeps at arms' length the discourse of the episcopate. "The bishops are not the only voice of American Catholicism. Their views are only one interpretation of the social teaching of the Church. This is an attempt to turn the Catholic doctrine into a kind of German Christian democracy, it is not persuasive, it can lead in that direction but there are other directions also." (Interview with George Weigel, Washington, 21/1/2011). The stronger conservatism of political and civil society compared to organizational hierarchies – rather the inverse picture of what happens in Europe – illustrates the width of American pluralism.

¹⁹ Oldmixon Elizabeth, Hudson William, "Catholic Republicans and Conflicting Impulses in the 109th Congress", *Politics and Religion* 1(1): 113-116, 2008.

²⁰ Data dates from 2005 for the US and Germany, from 1999 for France, from 2010 for MEPs. See <http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/index.asp>, accessed 21/7/2011.

representative. This does not prevent 40.9 % of our respondents from defining themselves as religious persons (a proportion which is probably overestimated as those politicians with the greatest proximity to religion were more willing to take the questionnaire). Being an MEP does not mean being hostile towards religion. The Parliament of course includes a proportion of frequent churchgoers who are very outspoken but largely outnumbered by colleagues indifferent to religion. Looking at the broader picture and risking a typology, the standard profile of an MEP would be a non-believer acknowledging a religious heritage as a 'cultural Christian' while not attaching much importance or political meaning to this. This identikit MEP strongly supports the separation between politics and religion but may be open to arrangements in order to accommodate the religious preferences of individuals. For example, a majority agree that if a nurse were asked to help perform a legal abortion, she should be allowed to refuse on religious grounds. The dominant view is best expressed in the word of a British Liberal: '[The EU] should have a policy respecting all, discriminating against none and insisting on separation between religion and politics'. This is congruent with the global mission of the EU. The EU respects national systems which are all marked by a clear demarcation between political and religious affairs under diverse institutional forms, while acting for the protection and progression of fundamental individual rights. But MEPs are far more divided on acknowledging religion as identity and memory. 46.1% consider that the Lisbon Treaty should have made reference to Europe's Christian heritage, while 53.9% hold the contrary view.

In short, American legislators use religion as a consensual, permissive and self-restricted repertoire to discuss the public good and national identity. MEPs use an open and tolerant secularism instead of religion to do the same thing. This offers rhetoric material less suited to celebrating a vibrant European identity than to emphasizing a common set of principles rooted in human rights. The same mechanism of representation as an exacerbation of social realities may be at work at the House of Representatives and at the European Parliament: in Washington, religiosity is accentuated by the lip service of politicians though qualified in its actual influence; in Brussels, secularism is celebrated though implemented in a very flexible manner.

Neither God nor accountability, but Nation: the EP mirrors European societies

Considering this general background, any homology between the religious preferences of MEPs with those of their constituents has very little relevance. Here, several broad structural factors combine their effects. European societies are highly secularized. MEPs are almost invisible political elites. Citizens most frequently do not know their European representatives and care even less about their personal characteristics. This means that the religiosity of MEPs is a non-question for the electorate. Besides, the mode of election by party lists and the way the Parliament works blur any possible scheme of accountability. Recent moves towards a territorialization of European elections by the design of regional constituencies seem unlikely to change anything.

Largely emancipated from electoral pressures, religious MEPs may indulge themselves by following their conscience, especially on issues involving moral judgments. Some of them actually say they do so, even if religion intervenes for most MEPs more as a social and political reality to tackle willy-nilly than as a personal inspiration. The range of competences of the EP does not provide for the exercise of everyday moral choices. However, a few political entrepreneurs may use their relative freedom to develop a 'kennel strategy' by standing on firm religious or anti-religious grounds. Inside the Parliament, this is a way of attracting like-minded colleagues and lobbies. Here an assumption could be made. In the US,

the general salience of religion tends to push religiously-minded political actors towards the centre by moderating their discourse in order to integrate religious arguments within advocacy coalitions. In Europe, the general indifference towards religion can encourage religiously-minded actors without much hope of recognition to develop extreme views and controversial tactics in order to gain public attention. This hypothesis ought to be tested further, including in national Parliaments.

A total lack of data on the religious affiliations of MEPs prevents assessment of the impact of social change in the population on the denominational composition of the legislative body. The reluctance of European representatives to answer does not make it easy to fill this gap. What makes the EU specific is that the frontiers of the polity are constantly enlarging to include new populations, thus modifying the demographic balance between denominations. MEPs of new post-2004 member states are perceived by their Western counterparts to be more religious and outspoken about their beliefs. However, this distinction merits re-examination. National, political and religious affiliations are intertwined. MEPs from new member states are more on the right of the political spectrum than their Western counterparts, and thus more likely to have a greater proximity to religion and a greater conservatism on issues related to religion. This does not mean that Eastern MEPs feel less European – rather the contrary – or are less supportive of European integration.²¹ Thus, it is very difficult to isolate the effect of denominational affiliations.

Overall, 70.9% of MEPs agree that religion does not create differences between MEPs who are Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or from other denominations (29.1% have the opposite opinion), but they almost unanimously (93.3% against 6.7%) state that religion has variable importance depending on the nationality of the politician. The EP has to deal with less denominational diversity than the House of Representatives but a deeper cultural and political diversity. National affiliation prevails totally over religious affiliation and, furthermore, directs it. Depending on their experience of a specific configuration of relationships between Church and State and their positioning within a domestic political context, representatives experience their denominational identity in diverse ways. A German Catholic keeping an eye on the fiscal status of German Churches is more interested in economic issues related to religion, while an Italian Catholic concerned by the controversy on religious signs in classrooms is more active in the debates about the regulation of religious pluralism in the public space.

Religious affiliation is no longer in itself an autonomous variable in the allocation of top positions in the EP. The Presidency has frequently been held by leaders known to be pious and observant Catholics, but in the main this reflects the domination of Christian democrats and demographic balances more than a denominational coalition. What matters is more a compliance with the moderate secularism understood as the common ground for all Europeans than the content of the personal faith. A good illustration was offered by the contest between Jerzy Buzek and Mario Mauro as candidates for the Presidency of the Parliament in 2009²². Far from being a confrontation between Protestants supporting Buzek and Catholics supporting Mauro, the debate inside the EP was polarized by the opposition of some nationalities (especially French and Belgians, but also Italians) who considered that

²¹ Simon Hix, Roger Scully and David Farrell (2011) 'National or European Parliamentarians? Evidence from a New Survey of the Members of the European Parliament'. p. 12, <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/EPRG/MEPsurveyData.aspx>, accessed on the 25th of June, 2011

²² Simon Taylor, 'Mauro withdraws candidacy for Parliament president', *The European Voice*, 6/7/2009

Mauro was unacceptable due to his proximity to the Holy See and its conservatism. There were also concerns that his appointment would be perceived all across the legislative body as a provocation and could endanger the agreement with the PSE about the EPP/PSE rotation in the Presidency. In the end, Mauro was asked to withdraw. Again, political sensitivities framed by national cultures, together with institutional pressure for compromise prevailed over denominational affiliation.

Compared with the US where the religious imperative may influence the public display of other social identities such as sexual orientation, religiosity is a far less salient issue for MEPs who are under less scrutiny. Again, the low religiosity of European societies coupled with public indifference towards MEPs leave their private preferences largely unquestioned. However, the gay issue is a basis for mobilization. There is an intergroup on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Rights – LGBT. It is defined as an ‘informal forum for Members of the European Parliament who are interested in issues that impact the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people—as well as their families and employers. Members of the Intergroup would usually take a positive stance on LGBT issues when they draft reports or amendments, when they vote in the Parliament, or when they deal with constituency affairs.’²³ It seems relatively successful as it is the second largest of the twenty-seven intergroups of the EP with one hundred and eighteen members. It includes MEPs from five political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE/GNL) with a leaning towards the left, and from twenty-two different Member States. Three things may be worthy of remark. Firstly, nine MEPs are registered as private supporters of the Intergroup, without making their identity public. This suggests that ‘progressive sexuality’ (or simply support for it) is not as neutral a question as it may seem and that some persons prefer to remain silent about it. Secondly, some group organizers are well-known activists in favour of respecting the separation between religion and politics (notably the Dutch liberal Sophie in’t Veld). Connections with groups active on religious issues are thus obvious. Thirdly, there is no politician from a new member state among the six presidents and vice-presidents. National contexts may make it too difficult to champion such a cause; at the same time, it may be that representative from these countries has yet achieved sufficient leadership on these issues to hold a position of command. Actually, difficulties occur in some conservative new member states (not to speak of neighbouring countries such as Ukraine or Russia). The EP had to take firm positions against Lithuania which was discussing restrictive measures discriminating against homosexuals, and the pressure from the supranational parliament did in fact succeed in inducing Lithuanian MEPs to revise their positions²⁴. This shows that a proactive stance on these questions may be productive, but does not mean that such an involvement will allow a MEP to build a high profile and to access media recognition.

*Religion and socialization in Brussels and beyond*²⁵

Given the far lesser salience of religion in Europe than in the US, it is no surprise that it offers fewer opportunities for socialization. Inside the Parliament, religion is not integrated within institutional rituals as is the case in the House of Representatives with the opening prayer. Actually, signs of religious presence are the subject of ongoing controversies, from rooms dedicated to spiritual or philosophical meditation to meetings of the President of the EP with religious leaders. Concerning political socialization to meet like-minded MEPs, staff and

²³ <http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/about/members/>, accessed 21/7/2011.

²⁴ <http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/press-releases/meps-welcome-lithuania-new-progressive-law-advertising>, accessed 21/7/2011.

²⁵ This topic will be developed further in another article, as well as the role of religion in European elections (campaigning and vote).

activists, activities have multiplied in recent years. On the one hand, the EPP has launched several initiatives to activate networks and events, revitalizing to a certain extent its Christian-Democratic roots. On the other hand, secular forces have tried to counterbalance what they perceive as a religious reawakening by organizing platforms and conferences²⁶.

In Brussels understood as a social universe, the quest for religious sociability is limited to MEPs who have a high level of religious observation and who spend long periods in the European capital, two important restrictive factors. Besides this, mobility between Brussels and Strasbourg is a further obstacle for the constitution of dense religious networks. The growing strength of religious lobbying is nonetheless rapid and may contribute towards increasing the salience of religious topics in the Brussels 'microcosm'. Overall, most of our interviewees said they have contact with religious lobbies a few times over a year or a term (58.4%), one-fifth more frequently (18% at least once a month) and 15.7% never. Religious lobbying follows predominantly denominational and national patterns, is dependent on the already existing religiosity of the MEPs and does not seem to have a transformative influence on political choices.

The role of religion in the relationship between an MEP and his or her constituency is similarly constrained by the fact that few people care very much about either religion or Europe in most member states. Religion is not likely to be a very important element in the weak scheme of accountability to which a European representative is subjected. However, religious networks may surface in the public relations strategy an MEP will develop to nurture his or her links with organized civil society. Several MEPs said they were struck by the number of priests in cassocks or nuns in cowls or cornettes in the corridors of the EP at the invitation of their counterparts from new member states. These contacts, which oscillate between political communication with the general public and political dialog with private interests, are to be considered a non-formal form of feedback for MEPs. Similarly, grassroots initiatives are developing, such as the 'prayers for the European Union'²⁷ in several religious communities in Brussels and all over Europe. This may be a kind of 'Europeanization from below' initiated generally by private individuals but which contribute towards defining the social background within which religious MEPs move.

Finally, denominational solidarity is not very perceptible in the life of the institution and in European internal politics, but may emerge in external politics. 70.9% of MEPs interviewed in our survey consider that religion does not create any differences between MEPs who are Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or from other religions. Protestants and Orthodox may simply find sometimes that, in identity politics, the reference to the 'Christian heritage of Europe' is too much associated with 'Catholic heritage'. The overwhelming demographic domination of Christianity in the Parliament does not really allow the smallest denominations (Muslims, Jews) to exist as proper forces. Cultural differences between denominations probably exist, but they are so mixed with and overpowered by national differences that they are impossible to observe. A Polish Catholic is still seen as more Polish than Catholic (to the dismay of some victims of national stereotypes caricaturing their religious preferences). Finally, the most significant gap is said to be between religious and non-religious MEPs rather than between denominations. Things are slightly different when international relations are on the agenda. The pattern of a 'clash of civilizations' subtended by religious oppositions is frequently

²⁶ See the The European Parliament Platform for Secularism in PoliticsKey to Secularism in Europe, <http://politicsreligion.eu/>, accessed 24/7/2011)

²⁷ For an example, see <http://liege2010.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/journee-de-priere-pour-leurope/>, accessed 24/7/2011.

evoked in the discourse of European representatives. It may happen that promotion of the role of the EU as the defender of human rights and oppressed minorities all over the world includes a specific concern to look after Christians.

Having examined the general socio-cultural background in which to situate the place of religion and the extent and channels taken by its influence on legislators in the US and in Europe, the challenge is to be sure that we are indeed discussing religion, and if so which religion; and under what form religion may be an active force in parliamentary politics in Washington and Brussels. This leads us to consider the constraints and resources offered by the specific political and institutional contexts of American and European legislatures.

II. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS: RELIGION IN THE WORK OF LEGISLATURES

How to measure religion and where to find it

Reducing the complexity of religious affiliation

To conceptualize religion is all the more difficult that religious diversity is high. In the US, it may be a nightmare for the researcher confronted by the multiplicity of Protestant sects. A rough indicator such as *broad religious affiliation* (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish...) without greater precision (Lutheran, Baptist...) gives reliable general guidelines but is likely to miss many theological nuances and historical circumstances which are explanatory of various divergent political choices. Such an indicator may capture differences between Christians and Jews, but not between black Pentecostals and white Southern Baptists²⁸. Many American approaches break down Protestants into different groups (far fewer have the same concern for other denominations). The danger is one of delving ever deeper in precision in order to encompass all spiritual peculiarities, which may bring accuracy but also more difficulty in managing data. This is the reason why broad denominations are still widely considered to be useful proxies. In Europe, religious diversity likely to be represented at the EP is smaller.. The standardized religious categories used in international values survey do the job. One French Muslim MEP regretted that the questionnaire offered different Christian denominational affiliations but only one for Islam, despite the existence of Sunni, Shiite or Sufi traditions. The remark is well made, but considering the small number of Muslim MEPs, to break them down into smaller categories would have the effect of further diluting their visibility in the data. Interviewees have the possibility of further specifying their denomination in order to complement the predefined options. Overall, the decision to offer multiple choices for majority religious groups and more restrictive options for minority groups is congruent with dominant practice in American literature. So far, it is not possible to map accurately the religious composition of the EP considering the size of our sample. Nevertheless, the survey confirms the overwhelming domination of Catholicism as the majority religion in Europe and the relative weakness of Protestants and Orthodox. There are a few Muslims. The fact that European elections are second-order elections and that one votes for lists may favour candidates representing 'diversity' more than traditional national elections which favour the established positions of traditional elites. This point calls for further investigation by comparing different countries.

²⁸ Oldmixon Elizabeth A., "Religion and Legislative Politics" in Smidt Corwin E., Kellstedt Lynn A., Guth James L., *Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2010, p. 499-500.

Beyond denominational differences, another question is to distinguish between levels of religiosity. Some attempts have been made to develop indicators enabling to create *cross-cut denominations religious types*. For example, Benson and Williams²⁹ measured 'orthodoxy' across denominations by opposing, on the one hand, 'legalistic religionists' conceiving a strict, judging God and valuing self-restraint while embracing a conservative political orientation, and on the other hand, 'people-concerned religionists' with a conception of a liberating God and tending towards more liberal voting records. This was a reminder that conservatives are not the only ones to be motivated by religion. Such methods require extended elite interviews and categories may be too complex to generalize to larger debates³⁰, especially for comparison with average citizens. It is certainly pertinent for surveys focussed on the religiosity of decision-makers, but less relevant for researchers aiming at dealing with the actual effects of religion when it exists. Concerning MEPs, their level of religiosity is too low to justify typologies which are too discriminatory. The decision was made to use, firstly, indicators of self-definition of beliefs as well as observance in order to measure MEPs' level of integration into a religious system; secondly, statements indicating levels of cultural liberalism on key issues like the place of religion in public life or the right to opt-out for a nurse required to perform an abortion. On both points, questions have been borrowed from international values surveys in order to enable comparison with the mass of electors as well as with other political elites.

Limits of roll-call analyses

Besides defining what forms of religion are to be searched for, it is necessary to know where to search. A consensus exists which emphasizes the interest of not limiting analysis to final votes but also of including all related activities. Bill co-sponsorship, committee action or floor speeches show the potential room for framing decisions during the earlier stages of the process with more independence from party leaders and constituents. Still further, communication and campaigning material is a great source of information on how the politician handles religion in interactions with lobbies and citizens³¹. As regards voting itself, for the US where religion is a very significant social influence, there was a temptation to postulate its potential influence in all policy fields and to create transversal quantitative indicators. This required for example the creation of indices of the religious conservatism of elites and constituencies examination of correlations with political conservatism in legislators' voting patterns. But the assessment of the nature and range of religious conservatism was extremely controversial and the final deliverable could only be a mere correlation. There was no reliable way to establish a causal link between religious influence and decision-making. The main deliverable frequently ended up showing that Republicans voted in a more conservative way than Democrats, something which represents a limited cognitive gain. Such general quantitative frameworks have tended to be abandoned³².

At the European Parliament, considering the nature of the agenda issues which most frequently have no discernable religious relevance, the way MEPs are elected which blurs schemes of accountability involving potential judgements on their moral and religiously-loaded choices (even if some ratings exist) and the elusiveness of religious influence, this method based on roll call analysis has very little relevance. Alternatively, data on other parliamentary activities are illuminating. For example, an analysis of the salience of religion

²⁹ Benson Peter, Williams Dorothy, *Religion on Capitol Hill: Myths and Realities*, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1982

³⁰ Oldmixon (2010), p. 501.

³¹ Oldmixon (2010), p. 502.

³² Oldmixon (2010), p. 508.

in oral and written questions of MEPs during a decade (1999-2010) underlines the very secondary dimension of the topic. Of roughly 60, 000 questions analyzed, only 385 (0.64%) deal explicitly with religion. There is nevertheless a clear trend towards a rise in the salience of the topic over several parliamentary terms of office. Besides, this rating says little either about the underlying influence of religion on wider subjects or about the political intensity of religiously-related political choice.

Religion in policy choices and religion in ‘cultural politics’ as political style

The variable salience of religion according to policy sector

In US legislative politics, depending on the issue at stake, religion is not credited with the same degree of legitimacy and influence. American legislators make clear distinctions between issues involving a moral choice related to religion and those which do not. They mention in decreasing order of importance abortion (almost unanimously), family planning, stem-cell research, school prayers, impeachment, and hate crimes. On these topics, legislators are willing to vote according either to what their religious tradition says and/or according to their conscience. A moral choice is not always a substantially religious one, but religion is definitely at the core of the most intense and controversial moral choices³³.

Apart from providing justification for legislators following their personal fundamental beliefs on key questions, some issues are more likely than others to be deciphered in religious terms. Religion may become a key dimension on moral and/or cultural issues, when a decision is turned into a matter of fundamental principles rather than a technical judgement. ‘Cultural politics’ refers to a kind of argumentation which builds a case as a conflict of values. Framing a debate in terms of ‘cultural politics’ is more likely on some issues which are heavily loaded with traditions and values, but this may also occur for more surprising objects (see for example the debate on halal or kosher dishes in fast food restaurants in several European countries). Due to the distribution of competences, between territorial levels, cultural politics is frequently managed at State level in the US and at the national level in Europe. A shift is however always possible and sometimes happens unexpectedly through legal recourse to a higher court or through the indirect effect of federal/supranational norms in domains such as social law, labour law or taxes.

In European politics, when MEPs are asked to identify policy sectors where religion is most important, the picture reflects the competences of the EU. Religion is said to matter in fields related to fundamental rights, EU founding norms and the legitimating motto of the European political project. Combating discrimination and favouring freedom of expression are to be included in this category of fundamental rights. Social policy can also be included under this label as it frequently refers to issues such as human dignity or gender equality. It also encompasses assistance to the economically disadvantaged or various forms of solidarity and welfare which are not explicitly labelled in terms of human rights but refer to a discourse on the religious duty of helping fellow human beings. Culture and education is another important domain. This may overlap with freedom of expression as it deals with religion in the arts or sciences, liberty of conscience, and the balance to be struck between the unfettered creativity of artists and respect for all sensitivities. More broadly, it concerns the place of religion in society and the definition and transmission of collective identities. The last significant category is international relations. Here, incentives are the influence of religion on Europe’s relationships with the rest of the world, solidarity with Christian minorities

³³ Oldmixon (2005), pp. 23-49

worldwide and above all risks associated with religious extremism, principally Muslim extremism.

- Q: Which are the issues on which religion is most important at the European Parliament? (please rank the three first responses in order of importance)

<u>Issues</u>	<u>external relations</u>	<u>freedom of expression</u>	<u>fight against discrimination</u>	<u>social policy</u>	<u>economic policy</u>	<u>culture/ education</u>	<u>other</u>	<u>not any</u>	<u>total</u>
1.	11 12,6%	16 18,4%	21 24,1%	23 26,4%	1 1,1%	9 10,3%	6 6,9%	0 0,0%	87 100%
2.	5 6,6%	14 18,4%	20 26,3%	17 22,4%	1 1,3%	17 22,4%	1 1,3%	1 1,3%	76 100%
3.	10 16,7%	9 15,0%	8 13,3%	8 13,3%	2 3,3%	18 30,0%	5 8,3%	0 0,0%	60 100%
<u>total number</u>	26 11,7%	39 17,5%	49 22%	48 21,5%	4 1,8%	44 19,7%	12 5,4%	1 0,4%	223 100%

Number of interviewees: 99

Independently of the competences of the EP, the salience of religion could be explained in some cases by its potential for ‘scandalization’. Since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1979, the institution has met its limits by its inability to offer an attractive political drama able to catch the headlines. Political action at the EP is considered too complicated, not bipolarized enough (majority/opposition; left/right) in order to create a gladiatorial-style of debate with winners and losers, not animated by notorious spokespersons with a real ‘human interest’. Besides, where Europe is concerned the EP is the victim of the structure of national public opinion: where there is a clear consensus on European integration, one does not speak of Europe as there is nothing to say; where there is no consensus on European integration, one does not speak of Europe as it would be counter-productive to create divides on what is a secondary issue³⁴. Religion may serve as a way to raise interest and to polarize both political actors and media by offering radical and simplifying messages capable of making sense of the institutional complexity of the EP. Religious topics may thus be a symbolic resource to fuel controversies. The Buttiglione affair in 2004 is a good example of this kind of instrumental function for religion. What was mainly an inter-institutional arm-wrestling bout between the Parliament and the Council with the Commission as an unfortunate casualty was narrated as the story of the martyrdom of an inexperienced Catholic (which Buttiglione by no means was) by the soulless politics played out in Brussels³⁵. This utilization of religion may occur predominantly in the context of fundamental rights, which are the backbone of EU legitimacy, but may also take place in the areas of external relations (protection of a Christian minority for example) or education (the threat of creationism). In

³⁴ Morgan D., *The European Parliament, Mass Media and the Search for Power and Influence*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, p. 91.

³⁵ « Une question d'ordres? Discours religieux et intégration européenne à la lumière de l'affaire Buttiglione », *Les Cahiers du CEVIPOL*, n°3, 2007, <http://dev.ulb.ac.be/cevipol>.

short, religion may suddenly become relevant in any policy sector provided that it has a potential for ‘scandalization’, to the extent of the restricted publicity of European politics.

Such ‘scandalization’ strategies may be developed by extremists or lobbies active in the Parliament but achieve a limited audience and entail significant political costs. They are thus bound to remain infrequent. However, the EP does increasingly work as an arena where issues are repoliticized. A good example is the controversy on European funding for research on embryonic cells³⁶. On such a topic, arguments go well beyond scientific and economic considerations to deal with a global conception of the human being and the legitimacy of human agency on its evolution and reproduction. This involves philosophical and religious references which are so strong and so deeply embedded in culture that they are not easily subjected to the rules of European deliberation and compromise. The approaches adopted in the European Commission and in the European Parliament to deal with research on stem cells are strikingly different. The Commission has multiplied efforts since 2002 to drive forward convergence and to avoid the framing of the debate as a clash of values by developing expert networks (*Eurostemcell*, *Neuroget*), offering incentives through funding, organizing conferences of citizens, and so on. In contrast, the EP was an arena of re-politicization in 2001 and in 2006, especially around the Fiori and Hassi reports, with long processes of compromises and amendments in commissions which were subsequently brought to nothing by a hardening of ideological positions. Religion was only an incentive in the opposition between conflicting normative worldviews and interests, and finally gave way to economic considerations (even countries and nationalities supporting a restrictive policy concerning research on embryonic cells do not openly oppose funding within European programme committees³⁷). But this showed how religion may operate without any clear correlation to nationality, party membership or denominational affiliation. Rather, it is a very personal element which conditions optimism about science and progress and becomes all the more important when there is neither consensual expertise nor political agreement.

The same impossibility of ‘cultural wars’ in the House of Representatives and at the EP?

A cultural war is a pattern which is first constructed by political elites by framing some issues as non-negotiable in the public space, and then deconstructed by the same or other political elites in the parliamentary space in order to reach a compromise.³⁸ The American political system is a highly pluralist one which provides minority rights and includes a number of mechanisms providing checks and balances. In such an environment, having a majority is not enough. A super-majority is required, and it is also often necessary to achieve congruent agreements in the House of Representatives, in the Senate and at the White House³⁹, to say nothing of the judiciary. It is all the more unlikely to meet these conditions that subjects which bring about cultural wars (abortion, same-sex marriages, etc.) generally create divides not only between parties but also inside parties, and increasingly so as both Republicans and Democrats become more and more heterogeneous. Politicians claim the right to vote ‘in conscience’ on such topics, and the cost of enforcing party discipline would be tremendous. Pyrrhic victories, numerous casualties, and painful aftermaths: there are several reasons why party hierarchies are unwilling to push controversial issues too hard. Even in the Reagan years, marked as they were by ideological assertiveness, Republicans were very careful. They secured notable achievements but under the form of mixed bags which left

³⁶ Pauwels Eléonore, "L'Union européenne face aux biotechnologies médicales: Quels enjeux pour le processus d'intégration?", Master's Thesis, Collège d'Europe, Bruges, 2006, p. 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40-43; 45-55; 66-68.

³⁸ Oldmixon (2005), p. 187.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

progressives and traditionalists neither totally defeated nor happy. They also made symbolic gestures. For example, Republicans draw a conservative line on international family planning in order to use American influence to discourage abortion and contraception in developing countries⁴⁰. Very few people really cared about this in the US, but it was a cheap way to pay tribute to the core values of the party. Later, the aggressive tactics of the Christian Coalition and the Christian Right in the 1990s did enable a containment of progressive politics. They forced Bill Clinton, the most pro-gay rights President in American history, to concede the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) enabling a State to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages established in another state by shifting the debate from a matter of discrimination to the protection of marriage as the keystone of Western civilization. But this success constantly faces pressure from the growing social acceptance of homosexuality. Republican moral views were considered to have repelled a moderate electorate without significant gain⁴¹.

Considering the limited gains available from cultural wars, American political parties frequently prefer to avoid them and are happy to leave to the judiciary the responsibility for solving the most difficult questions. The Supreme Court has made history on ethical decisions more often than Congress has. The American example thus suggests that cultural wars are unlikely at the EP. The degree of ideological heterogeneity is greater, not necessarily between the two main political groups (EPP and PSE), but between extremes and inside political families. National cleavages add to the complexity. The requisite inter-institutional congruence is also very difficult to achieve. It is not plausible that a very Conservative Christian president of the Commission could lead his or her college according to with his or her preferences, secure a majority to support those views at the EP and be able to rely on a consensus in the Council, while complying with the obligations fixed by the legal context of the EU in matter of fundamental rights. In short, European political parties have no incentive, no willingness and no means to launch major conflicts. When MEPs are asked whether the EU should have a religious policy, 76.4% say 'no'. On the one hand, they stick to the principle of subsidiarity leaving nation-states deal with religious or religiously-loaded issues. On the other hand, like their American colleagues, MEPs largely abandon the difficult decisions to national and European arenas, even if they vigorously criticize the results, as did Italian representatives in the Lautsi affair.

The effects of political socialization on religion

Old hands do not rock the boat: the effects of the longevity of political office on politicians

In US legislative politics, the individual experience of a Representative is important for the way they deal with religion. A freshman in the Capitol does not handle his or her religious penchants in the same way as a veteran. Seasoned legislators are considered more likely to compromise on moral issues than newcomers. This does not mean that a Congressman who has several terms under his or her belt is more secularized. In fact, the House of Representatives does not seem to have the capacity to alter personal religious preferences. But the more deals you have cut, the more likely you are to cut some more by going beyond cultural conflicts. One socializing effect of the institution can be acknowledged in the legislator's concern to make the institutional machine work, and his or her increasing knowledge of how to do so. And this knowledge involves the awareness that coalitions are not build by quoting the Bible.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83 sq.

The experience of the legislator may have other influences. The more mature a politician is, the more likely he or she is to have strong enough positions and resources to secure re-election. This means that on moral issues, the legislator will vote more according to his or her personal preferences and less according to the preferences of his or her constituency or party. Conversely, the electoral longevity of a representative is positively correlated with his or her propensity to work with denominational lobbies. Indeed, religious interest groups tend to have fewer resources and different methods from economic lobbies. They do not ‘wine and dine’ legislators, but rather establish personal contacts based on common moral views through long-term exchanges. Any significant turn-over among legislators is bad news for public interest organizations like religious lobbies⁴².

This importance of stability in political personnel does not augur well for the ability of religious interest groups to socialize with MEPs considering the very significant level of turnover after each European election. Representatives of peripheral forces may build themselves a niche as advocates for religion and achieve re-election if they are able to secure constant electoral support, however small. But for candidates running in major parties, to be the spokesperson of a denominational faction in Brussels is not much of an insurance (and maybe rather a handicap) against the risk of being bypassed by national party leaders when it is time to constitute party lists.

Still less than the House of Representatives, the EP does not alter the personal preferences of MEPs regarding religion. Almost half of our respondents consider that the place of religion in the European Parliament is different from their experiences in national politics, but 83% declare that notwithstanding this, their experience in Brussels and Strasbourg failed to change their views on the relationships between religion and politics. The 17% whose views have changed tend more to be struck by what they perceived as excessively strong religious lobbying, they tend more to be non-religious and atheists, and their evolution is rather towards a greater vigilance about or promotion of secularism or simply a new concern about how to tackle the religious issue. Following an inverse logic, some – pretty rare – MEPs testify that their confrontation with European post-national materialism and with the moral relativism of counterparts of other nationalities has given them fresh energy to renew their fight for their beliefs. Finally, in the same way again as in the US, committed believers may learn how to disagree according to Brussels rules: they take up symbolic postures (for example about the reference to the Christian heritage of Europe) while playing the game of compromise to make Parliament work.

Old stories leave less blood: effects of the longevity of the issues

Apart from the electoral longevity of politicians, the longevity of issues also needs to be taken into account. A fresh battle involving moral choices and possibly affronting religious beliefs will provoke more turmoil than a recurrent controversy where the arguments, stakes and actors are already known, and maybe eroded by time. At the House of Representatives, debates on abortion are frequently bypassed in order to avoid open confrontations and turned into technical discussions on funding mechanisms. This means that legislators do not discuss the legality of and justification for abortion or the balance between the good and bad effects of the contraceptive pill, trusting the experts to establish the ends of reproductive policy. They limit themselves to celebrations of consensual family values with lyrical variations and to negotiating ways and means. This makes it easier to take political responsibility for an

⁴² Den Dulk Kevin R., Hertzke Allen D., “Conclusion: Themes in Religious Advocacy” in Cleary Edward L., Hertzke Allen D., *Representing God at the Statehouse. Religion and Politics in the American States*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006, p. 229.

abstention which does not as appear as a moral betrayal. Besides, the duration of the controversy suggests that there is probably a robust correspondence between the attitudes of legislators and constituencies as opinions have become stabilized. Traditionalists may be frustrated at not being able to reopen the case but they have to be content with the *status quo* as a lesser evil. This practice of routinization is however only possible when the *status quo* does exist and/or when a decision is reached by another authority, generally the Supreme Court. More recent problems on the agenda such as progressive sexuality have been less routinized⁴³. Codification routines are developing in Washington in order to prevent fierce parliamentary guerrilla actions, but isolated acts of bravado cannot be excluded. The gradual appeasement of the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* controversy about how to deal with homosexuality in the army may be an example of how the legislature is coming to term with the issue.

The emergence of ethical and religious questions on the EP's agenda is relatively recent and its new salience following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements and polarization on the subject of the Turkish candidature still newer. Routinization may not have had the time to develop. Already, the dealings with issues such as research on stem cells show evidence of a learning curve. In its history, the European Parliament (like the European political system as a whole) has shown a considerable capacity to adapt and to accommodate cultural and ideological diversity while preserving its delicate mechanisms of compromise-building. A bet would be that the EP will manage to find a way to regulate disagreements on ethical issues to the reduced extent that it is obliged to given the competences of the EU. Conversely, the resilient differences between nationalities in levels of cultural liberalism and above all in the ways in which debates are framed do not suggest that trans-European cleavages are likely to emerge to structure party re-alignments within a unified European political field. In other words, controversies on abortion or homosexuality do not offer immediate structures providing opportunities to Europeanize political and public spaces.

⁴³ Oldmixon (2005), p. 28.