



D+ReSoM

Diritto Religione Società Multiculturali
Law Religion Multicultural Societies

Право Религия Мультикультурные Общества

انون والدين في المجتمعات متعددة الثقافات
多元化社会中的法与宗教

LAW, RELIGION AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY

EDITED BY
PIERLUIGI CONSORTI

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DiReSoM Papers

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Pierluigi Consorti

DiReSoM (Diritto e Religione nelle Società Multiculturali – Law and Religion in Multicultural Societies) is a research group created in 2017 by Italian Scholars in Law and Religion.
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HYGIENE OF THE BODY AND OF THE SPIRIT*

Luigi Mariano Guzzo

The Covid-19 epidemic also changes our manner of being in church. Besides the need to respect the safety distance of at least one meter during religious services, in line with the government provisions, Calabrian bishops (and not only they) adopt further measures, ranging from the presence of a hydroalcoholic solution at the entrance of the places of worship to the warning requiring to wash one's hands well, especially directed at priests, deacons, and ministers of the Eucharist. Within a religious community, these hygienic-sanitary indications, acquire a spiritual significance, which can be traced back to the ancient practices of personal purification, associated with the element of water. In general, as a religious act, purification marks the passage from the profane to the sacred, but also from a life of sin, of flesh, to a new life, of spirit; from what is impure to what is pure... Water has an expiatory meaning that underlies the idea of a moral and at the same time spiritual regeneration. Jewish wisdom, through Psalm 26, makes one sing: "I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar." In the Christian revelation, water is itself a symbol of salvation: as John writes (19:34), blood and water flow out from the pierced side of

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Jesus after his death on the cross. Before the passion, during the last supper, it is Jesus again who indicates a new style, a ministry of service, by washing the feet of the apostles with water (Jn 13: 1-15).

It is interesting to observe that over the centuries the different practices of purification have also taken on health-related functions. In the sixth century, for example, Cassiodorus founds a monastic institution, the "Vivarium," on some coastal inlets washed by the Ionian Sea, and also uses these natural pools for therapeutic purposes. Even today, as it is well known, ablutions are performed by Muslims in preparation for prayer, according to the indications of the Koran: "O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah, then purify yourselves" (Sura, 6). One may also think of the immersion in the sacred river Ganges prescribed to the Hindus.

Certainly, in Christianity, as health issues were progressively absorbed (and resolved) by the competences of the public authorities, ablutions became increasingly symbolic - starting with baptism, which is not, moreover, a baptism "with water" (as was that of John the Baptist) but in "Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3:20). In the Catholic liturgy there are other forms of purification - of people (the sprinkling of the faithful, or the washing of the priest's hands both after the prayer for the offerings and after the communion) and sacred objects (the purification of chalice and paten). These rites manifest the desire for a purification that is primarily interior. On the other hand, the Christian message goes beyond the simple ritualism of the gestures: the Pharisees and scribes marvel that Jesus' disciples "take food with impure hands, that is, unwashed"

hands (Mk 7: 2). But the large baggage of information that is preserved in religious traditions teaches that the hygiene of the body is closely connected to the hygiene of the spirit, and vice versa. In the time of the Covid-19 epidemic, this is a lesson to be kept in mind.

As scholars engaged in the study of the legal regulation of the religious phenomenon, we decided to create a web space to collect documents, comments and other useful materials related to the Covid-19 emergency, in order to assess the outcomes of the normative decisions made by state and religious authorities. So, on March 8th we have created www.diresom.net. By the end of April, we had already published more than 500 documents and comments related to this issue, and more than 20.000 unique visitors had surfed our website. Therefore, we decide to edit an open source book to share in a more orderly way the comments that we have already published online, thus giving the possibility to consult these first guidelines to all those who want to study or analyze the legal reaction, both state and religious, to this pandemic.

Pierluigi Consorti, Full Professor of Law and Religion at the University of Pisa (Italy), is the Chairman of the Association of Academics of the Legal Regulation of the Religious Phenomenon in the Italian Universities (Adec) and the Coordinator of Research Group DiReSoM.

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