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“Die Regierung der Universalkirche  
nach dem Konzil von Trient“  
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### **Seminar of the MPForschungsgruppe III with Prof. Simon Ditchfield (York University)**

The Research group had the opportunity to meet for a colloquium with Professor Simon Ditchfield, from the University of York. Ditchfield’s research interests are linked to ecclesiastical erudition and the making of Roman Catholicism as a world religion in the period c. 1500-1700.

The seminar started with the presentation of the personal research projects of the members of the group, as well as those of other participants of the colloquium.

Dr. Laura Mazzoni, from the University of Buenos Aires (Current Guest at the Max Planck History for Legal History) shared with the group her PhD thesis topic, which concerns the study of the Bishops of Cordoba between the end of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. This research sheds light on the government of local churches at a diocesan level, which is one of the topics of interest to the Research Group.

Subsequently, Dr. Benedetta Albani presented some aspects about how the Research group III of the Max-Planck Institute for European Legal History will function. For example, she explained that the members of the group started their investigations simultaneously. Although each doctoral student has his/her own specific research topic, the study of the history of the Roman Curia and specifically of the Congregation of the Council is a common study field between them. This makes it possible for the group to study the governance of the Church in the Tridentine era as a *long durée* phenomenon, and in a Global perspective, integrating local outlooks as well.

The PhD students taking part in the group gave a brief description of their research projects, which are:

Brendan Röder: The functioning of the Congregation of the Council. Cases of petitions made to the Holy See about internal clerical issues in the eighteenth century.

Alfonso Alibrandi: The theory of the interpretation of the Law in the relationship between the Congregation of the Council and the French law during the reign of King Louis XVI, since the promulgation of the *Ordonnance civil*.

Constanza López Lamerain: The relationship of the Congregation of the Council and the dioceses of Chile during the colonial period in the context of the *Patronato Real*.

Claudia Curcuruto: The relations between Apostolic nuncios and the Congregation of the Council and the way the decrees of the Council of Trent were received and interpreted in the second half of the seventeenth century in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, presenting a congruence between bishops in the administration of justice in the territories of nuncios' administration.

Finally, Otto Danwert, Researcher at the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History presented his research interests and current investigations, which correspond to the development of Canon law in the Andean region, especially as adumbrated by the provincial councils of Lima, studying the conceptions and dealings with the afterlife in ecclesiastical documents. Currently he is interested in the comparison between the Third provincial council of Lima and the Third provincial council of Mexico, and in the interrelation between the norms generated in them, and also their mutual influence.

The colloquium continued with Professor Ditchfield's presentation of his research topics and the book chapter written by him, which was chosen to guide the discussion: **"Tridentine Catholicism", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, Edited by Alexandra Bamji, University of Leeds, UK, Geert H. Janssen, University of Oxford, UK and Mary Laven, University of Cambridge, UK.**

He proposed the question, How can we write History of communication and reception?

As in his previous article, "Trent revisited" -in Adriano Prosperi, *La fede degli italiani*, Edizione della Normale, 2011-, he tried to situate Trent as a local event. In the context of the discussion of the relationship between periphery and centre, the Council of Trent could be seen as a centre but in a different way, not taken as a symbol, as it has commonly been. So, he proposes to look at Trent as an authentic local event, establishing how many people were there at the time of its celebration, how it impacted in its own time, etc.

This is certainly not an easy work, as at that time there was a conscious effort by the Papacy to keep the diaries and papers of the Council of Trent under lock and key. However, this was a counter-productive enterprise since it left the field clear to Paolo Sarpi's brilliantly polemical account of the Council's dealings.

This is part of a larger argument in the way to study this topic: to question ourselves how relevant was the Council of Trent in the building of episcopal models and in the development of provincial councils, for example. As a provisional conclusion, Professor Ditchfield proposes that this was only true to a certain extent. Indeed, outside Europe, the Council of Trent was most relevant in Latin America, but it was not so in other geographical areas.

In this sense, the work of John O' Mailey has been of assistance, as it intends to demystify the Councils of Trent and then of Vatican II. His main aim is to "restore the Counter-reformation to Humanism", looking specifically at the humanist roots of Jesuits and their influence in the Counter-reformation process.

So, Trent might be characterized as a legal construct (of Canon law), whereas the Vatican II was a rhetorical one.

The historiographical generation after Hubert Jedin's work on the Council of Trent had a polemic against the Council, treating it as a dry thing and blaming Trent for all the mistakes of the church until the contemporary era. This was linked to an ideology that was very strong and persistent at the time, related to political issues in Italy.

**After this brief introduction, there was a time for questions and discussion of the following topics:**

- ❖ The variety of sources for the study of the Council of Trent: at what level can we situate the discussion? What is the relationship between theory and practice?

The Council of Trent itself was about negotiation. This is evidenced by the fact that people all over the world managed to send petitions to Rome even in those cases where it wasn't meant to happen. For example, interesting documents that can be studied in this way are Confessional guides, which are doctrinal Principles, worked out in questions, showing the way canon law impacted on parish life.

It is also important to realize that Trent was reported in real time. The canons and the decrees that were published in 1564 were just the end of a long process. For example, one of the most strongly debated issues was the canon concerning marriage. The decrees from these sessions were printed as the discussion happened, as pamphlets. There were even editions of *supplica* at a local level, from the bishopric of Trent.

This explains that after Trent there was an explosion of petitions to Rome on marriage, which was related to problems of inheritance and others, so marriage was "the" relevant topic after Trent.

- ❖ Historiographical perspectives.

Importance of the "history writing process". There is a problem in the writing of "Religious history", as it shouldn't be studied as a separated discipline, but as history of humanity in action with its multiple complexities. Under this perspective it is possible to say that the Church interferes highly in human relations. Under the perspective of legal history, it is possible to look at normativity and normative orders, not only law. This is why Religion must be treated as a verb –i.e. as behaviour or practice and not only as a noun (doctrine).

On the issue of combining theory and practice, the main purpose is to open a dialogue that can build a common ground. The idea of the Council as a symbol has been alive for centuries and it has constantly been used as a point of reference, but not precisely to understand how the people of this period tried to combine the theoretical and the practical level. This is why is important to pay attention to the discussions that were held, conversations as daily activities at the time, and to see in which different ways the canons were interpreted, and how the experience of the different actors influenced the process.

From the perspective of the Roman Curia, it is interesting to notice the horizontal dialogue that took place between the different dicasteries, considering that they had overlapping personnel at the congregations, creating a dynamic system of administration within the Roman Curia. In the case of the Congregation of the Council it will be useful to consider it as a committee or coalition of various interests rather than as a monolith.

#### ❖ Work at the archives

Regarding the work at the archives, it is important to acknowledge that the Vatican archives have evolved considerably throughout the different periods. Also, we need to consider them not only historical archives, but archives in movement that were organized the way they were for a particular reason. Why are the documents configured in this way? What questions did they want to answer? How does their design reveal particular kinds of questions that wanted to be asked? This point of view may explain how the archives are organized in this particular way. In the case of the Archive of the Congregation of the Council, at the beginning the documents were ordered by session of the council and canon, and in the seventeenth century this way of organization changed to a chronological order (date of the petitions' arrival). There is not index for the first period of the new way of registration.

The way in which the congregation proceeded was by the analysis of particular cases: they used past decisions where they could be relevant to specific topics. Although they used to make reference to their own decisions, this way of proceeding was not systematic. This means that when they tried to find a solution for a practical topic they didn't always find the correspondence with past decisions.

Ultimately, the task of the Congregation of the Council was to interpret the canons and answers to doubts whilst acknowledging the reality on the ground in local bishoprics.

#### ❖ Information coming to Rome

There was an enormous amount of information coming to Rome, as questions for the Congregation of the Council to resolve. Even so, many times the Congregation would delegate the final decision to the bishop from the diocese the request came from. It is also interesting to observe that Rome's objective was not to obtain the information for its own sake –since anyway it didn't have the instruments to do so-, but to gain enough information to take good decisions and thereby dispense justice to local communities. The interpretation of the information which reached Rome was, in the final analysis, a juridical decision.

#### ❖ Universal governance of the Church

One of the questions discussed was, by what means does the Holy See claim universal governance? In this, the nuncios were very important as they had the right to make visitations throughout the archbishoprics of the Catholic world and to bring back information to Rome. It was common practice that, in the Roman Catholic Church, tasks and specific attributions were delegated. That is why a specific curial language was developed in terms of diplomacy.

#### ❖ Relation between Centre and periphery: methodological approaches.

The benefits of the collaboration between research into the centre and periphery and linking ideas coming from both fields was discussed, as well as the necessity of paying attention to labels, as they are never self-imposed. The idea of a two-way traffic of information in a pairing or reciprocal system would be more useful in this sense, meaning that the particular and the universal can happen at the same time and coexist. This leads to a change in the focus of the traditional way of looking at the problem: not what Tridentine Catholicism is, but how does it work under specific circumstances.

Other topics proposed for further discussion were:

- ❖ Canon law and distance.
- ❖ Relation between Canon law and civil law.
- ❖ The use of the Council of Trent in local level-cases.
- ❖ Application of the Council of Trent by bishops.
- ❖ The Council of Trent and missionary activity. Can we think of Roman Catholicism outside Europe besides “missionary Catholicism”?
- ❖ Texts and translations of the decrees of the Council.
- ❖ Catholicism as a global religion.
- ❖ Geographical limits of Tridentine Catholicism.

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