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REFORMATION AND RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN ITALY AND EASTERN EUROPE. OPEN QUESTIONS AND NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The four essays in this section revise the contributions made during the seminar cycle *Riforma e crisi religiosa nell'Europa del Cinquecento. Contesti e letture*, which took place in April-May 2017 at the Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori of Padua University¹. Here, the authors tackle the sixteenth-century political-religious disruption from the perspective of peripheral contexts with regard to the lengthy establishment of the Reformation: on the one hand, the Italian peninsula and on the other, the vast territories going from Moravia, Transylvania, Poland and Lithuania, with ramifications reaching as far away as the Russian world.

A connection between Italy and central-eastern Europe was certainly nothing new. It can already be found in historiography on the Reformation ever since Cantimori focused his research on the Italian “heretics” of the sixteenth century, following them over the Alps in the diaspora towards remote regions of the continent and identifying in their clearly humanistic radical and minority religious ideas the characteristic developments of modernity, in the direction of religious rationalism and the freedom of conscience².

Today, by contrast, in the face of a radically changed panorama of studies and new reference frames, the questions that arise from such a connection have changed. As has recently been observed, having gone in different directions, the *religionis causa* migrations that occurred during the sixteenth century have been studied as an essential channel of religious and cultural interaction, as an exchange of knowledge, as a dialogue between political-social and economic practices, in other words, as aspects of a constituent

¹ More specifically, the first two, by Elena Bonora and Guido Mongini, and the last by Laura Ronchi De Michelis, were presented as lessons; the third, by Dainora Pociūtė, was the result of discussions that took place during the conferences. Amongst the initiatives in Padua in 2017, of note is the opening speech by Massimo Firpo for the academic year of the Centro per la Storia dell'Università di Padova (16 March 2017), published with the title *La Riforma protestante e le origini della tolleranza religiosa*, in «Quaderni per la Storia dell'Università di Padova» L (2017), pp. 3-20.

² Here I shall only refer to the introduction by Adriano Prosperi, in Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento e altri scritti*, Einaudi, Turin 1992, and the recent work by Neil Tarrant, *On the Origins of Enlightenment: the Fruits of Migration in the Italian Liberal Historiographical Tradition*, in Cornel Zwierlein - Vincenzo Lavenia (eds.), *Fruits of Migration. Heterodox Italian Migrants and Central European Culture 1550-1620*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2018, pp. 362-381.

mobility of the European horizon³. The Italian exiles that were so close to Cantimori's heart, who rebelled against any form of organised church, are no longer considered the main precursors of the modern values of religious tolerance and freedom⁴. Instead, these figures are regarded more as the protagonists of experiences in which religious choice was combined with the search for personal and professional success. In addition, their settlement in the East of Europe has been studied in relation to the varying ability they had to grasp the opportunities that these contexts offered, being characterised by specific political dynamics and an extraordinary ethnic and confessional variety, in which the Reformation had introduced profound changes and new relations with the western countries⁵.

Historiography has also made considerable progress on this side of the Alps. Decades of research have shed light on events, actors, and the diffusion networks of religious attitudes that are often difficult to contextualise within the Protestant doctrines as they are linked "more here than elsewhere [...] to the crisis of the Roman church and the reformist efforts of the ecclesiastical élites"⁶. Furthermore, we also know that, contrary to what was commonly believed for years, the Italian wars did not cease in 1530 with the Treaty of Bologna. Throughout the fifteen forties the Italian political situation remained open and suspended owing to an on-going irreconcilable conflict between Charles V and Pope Paul III⁷. It was against this backdrop that the decisive game for the affirmation of Roman centralism played out, with the rise of the Inquisition and its simultaneous assertion as an instrument to repress heresy and allow the Church to govern⁸. The political revival of the papacy would, in turn, result in projects to ensure Rome's control over the central-eastern area of the continent, which was a worrying part of Europe, characterised by religious co-existence and confessional pluralism⁹.

This is the context of the articles, despite the heterogeneous nature of their approaches and themes.

In the first, *L'«Italia dell'imperatore» e la crisi cinquecentesca* ("Imperial Italy" and the sixteenth-century crisis), Elena Bonora goes back to the

³ «An important part, even a formative part, of Europe in its modern form» (Cornel Zwi-erlein - Vincenzo Lavenia [eds.], *Introduction: Heterodox Italian Migrants and Central European Culture 1550-1620*, ibi, p. 17).

⁴ Ibi, pp. 3-6.

⁵ Cf., for a general overview and succinct, updated bibliography of the fields, Lucia Felici, *La Riforma protestante nell'Europa del Cinquecento*, Carocci, Roma 2016, pp. 203-208; pp. 287-288.

⁶ Massimo Firpo, *Juan de Valdés e la Riforma nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2016, p. x.

⁷ Elena Bonora, *Aspettando l'imperatore. Principi italiani tra il papa e Carlo V*, Einaudi, Torino 2014.

⁸ Massimo Firpo, *La presa di potere dell'Inquisizione romana 1550-1553*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2014.

⁹ An effective outline on these subjects is now to be found in Elena Bonora, «Come s'egli non fusse al mondo». Paolo IV e l'Europa, in «Tiempos modernos» xxxvii, 2 (2018), pp. 360-386.

theme of her book, published in 2014, *Aspettando l'imperatore* (*Awaiting the emperor*), focussing on the course of the pro-imperial party that, in the fifteen thirties and forties, united Italian princes and cardinals with its common aim: deprived of its political powers, the papacy would once again fall under the control of the peninsular states, and firmly in the hegemonic sphere of Charles V. This plan was anything but unrealistic, as the author shows with a careful parallel study of published letters and accounts, and the extraordinary secret correspondence between the cardinals Benedetto Accolti and Ercole Gonzaga, the existence of which was ignored for years. "Imperial Italy" could count on a ramified network of family and feudal allegiance, which was not only reinforced by patrimonial and territorial interests, career and status ambitions, but also by an implacable aversion towards Paul III. In letters, the latter was described as the "tyrant" pontiff who offended Christianity as a whole, violated the prerogatives of cardinals and the authority of princes, and usurped a state in Italy. Over a fifteen-year period, this powerful formation acted astutely, making their moves amidst the highs and lows of the armed confrontation between the emperor and king of France, relying on the support of imperial representatives and emissaries: from the governor of Milan, Ferrante Gonzaga, and the ambassador Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, to Juan de Valdés, considered in this article not in the role of a spiritual guide but as an imperial courtier and champion of the Spanish culture and language in the Naples of Charles V.

The project – in which politics and religion were closely intertwined – was destined to fail and did not survive the 1549 conclave, which marked the Roman Inquisition's seizure of power. Nevertheless, Bonora points out that its existence allows us to look at key issues in the interpretation of the sixteenth century crisis from a new perspective: in particular, at the actual birth of the Roman Inquisition. This was generally believed to be the fruit of a compromise between Paul III and the Carafa faction. However, in the light of the action of Charles V's cardinal "servants", this could rightly be led back to the conscious decision of the Pope to take up a formidable weapon against his enemies in the College of Cardinals, issuing a clear warning to the governors and élites in the peninsula, who were no longer exempt from papal power. Secondly, the question of the political foundation of Italian religious dissent is reopened. Recent historiography has identified Reginald Pole and Giovanni Morone as members belonging to the imperial side of the College of Cardinals. They have also been attributed with the role of acting as the points of reference for the group of the "spirituali" who, following Valdés' death in 1541, were committed to carrying out intense propaganda with the aim of influencing the plans of the papacy and directing the initial indications of the Council of Trent¹⁰. The description that we are offered here, however, presents us with a much more detailed front of imperial prelates, divided in the understanding of their loyalty to Charles V, opposition to the pope, and

¹⁰ M. Firpo, *Juan de Valdés*, pp. 193-204.

the conflicting choice of the Council. And there is more: various cues in Cardinal Accolti's correspondence suggest deploying the real political support of heretics and dissidents, with its network of alliances and protection extending beyond the Alps, towards "imperial Italy".

This therefore means a redefinition of the concrete background and problematic notion of the Italian Reformation. Whilst today the latter has become a current expression, it represents the final destination of a tormented historiographic itinerary that is still open. In the second article in the section, *Dalla Riforma in Italia alla Riforma italiana. Mutamenti di paradigmi storiografici (From the "Reformation in Italy" to the "Italian Reformation". Changing Historiographical models)* Guido Mongini describes the stages in detail, starting with Cantimori's *Eretici italiani* and Chabod's studies on the State of Milan, which played a decisive role in placing heterodoxy at the centre of the political and religious history of Italy. The influence of these two historians was also to orient a research line that was particularly active from the nineteen seventies on, in which studies on heretical thought were coupled with the reconstruction of religious dissent, using archive sources and those of the Inquisition trials in particular. As we well know, focussing more closely on the universe of prosecution was a fundamental step: the trial documents regarding individuals and groups of different social and cultural standing will mostly not reveal Lutherans or Calvinists, but converts of religious leanings that were difficult to classify on the basis of dogmatic categories, being entrenched in the humanistic controversy against scholastic theology, imbued with echoes of Erasmus and the influence of ancient and new spiritualisms. At that point, the author remarks, it was no longer a case of cataloguing the expressions of the "Reformation in Italy" but of defining another research object, a particular Italian variant in the European religious crisis. Thanks above all to Massimo Firpo's studies, the religious proposal of Valdés' emerged in all its great importance, based as it was on the subjective experience of the divine and indifferent to doctrine, and therefore alien to the open rift with the Church. Concentrating on this "pernicious heresy" that had been left to the "spirituals", and reconstructing its broad diffusion in the clerical world and even the College of Cardinals, it became possible to understand the extent of an internal conflict within the ecclesiastic institution that would result in the identification of the line of the papacy with that of the Inquisition at the end of the forties. The Italian Reformation was geographically close and had penetrated the Church highest levels; it spread; in Italy thanks to political support we now know more about and as such, had become a much more fearful enemy than the distant Reformation on the other side of the Alps that could no longer be controlled¹¹. This forced the

¹¹ A recent development of these aspects, at the heart of research by Cantimori and Antonio Rotondò, in Guido Mongini, *Gli eretici italiani e la critica della Riforma protestante (1530-1550)*, in Antonella Barzazi - Michela Catto - Dainora Pociūtė (eds.), *Eretici e dissidenti tra Europa occidentale e orientale (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, Padova University Press, Padova 2018, pp. 13-34.

papacy to take the path of a Counter Reformation that, by the middle of the century, would be able to count on the Italian princes leading back to order in the name of the fight against heretics, within the new power relationships that were widespread in “Papal Italy”.

Highly controversial in Rome, the Italian Reformation was met with equal discordance by the Protestant confessions. Not only Calvin, but also Italians who adhered to Calvinism such as Pietro Paolo Vergerio and Giulio Della Rovere stigmatised its characteristic traits, identifying them as a powerful obstacle rather than a stimulus to spread Protestant doctrines: the rebuttal of dogmatic formulations, exercising doubt, emphasis on the ethical nucleus of Christianity, and tendential nicodemism. This patrimony of ideas and attitudes was destined to develop in radical forms and to become embodied in the stories of exile in central-eastern Europe. One such example is in the antitrinitarian physicians presented by Dainora Pociūtė, in the third article, *Eterodossia e medicina nella prima età moderna. I «medici ariani» alla corte di Stefano Báthory (Heterodoxy and medicine in the early Modern Age. “Arian physicians” at the court of Stefano Báthory)*.

From the end of the fifties onwards, a network of heterodox physicians was established in Transylvania, Poland and Lithuania, most of whom were Italian; over a fifteen-year period it expanded as a result of new arrivals owing to Inquisition trials in the peninsula and people coming from cities in Germany and Switzerland. When the Catholic Stefano Báthory was made head of the Polish-Lithuanian Confederation in 1576 the line of tolerance practised by the Jagellone dynasty remained unchanged and the presence of this group of professionals grew further in the palaces of a sovereign who travelled from Transylvania to his other dominions, in the homes of nobility, and in an army that was fighting in military campaigns against the Russian Czar. The author takes a closer look at the paths of the professional activities, social integration and religious commitment of the leading figures: Giorgio Biandrata from Piedmont, together with Fausto and Lelio Sozzini, one of the creators of the Lithuanian Unitarian Reformed Church promoted by Duke Nicola Radziwiłł; Nicolò Buccella from Padua, the personal physician of Báthory, who also carried out the autopsy on his body and who for years represented a reference point for Italian heretics who migrated to the lands of the Grand Duchy. The analysis carried out in this essay of events, works and scientific disputes is a source of new elements regarding the controversial relationship between medicine and religious heterodoxy, the conceptual premises of which laid in Serveto and which greatly influenced the origins of Socinianism¹². As Pociūtė points out, Zurich’s cultural circles were alarmed by the fact that “Arianism” had penetrated medical studies; Conrad Gesner, the city archiater, became the spokesman for this complaint in 1563. Never-

¹² For a general survey on the subject, cf. Alessandra Quaranta, *Exile Experiences “Religionis causa” and the Transmission of Medical Knowledge between Italy and German-Speaking Territories in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*, in C. Zwierlein - V. Lavenia (eds.), *Fruits of Migration*, p. 95.

theless, firmly established in the East of the continent, “Arian physicians” remained active protagonists of a varied *respublica medicorum* from a confessional point of view, with authoritative figures of reference in members of the composite Hapsburg cultural milieu such as Andreas Dudith and Johannes Crato¹³.

It was towards this socially prestigious group that the Jesuits were to direct their conversion projects when they arrived in the area in the fifteen sixties and seventies. However, without any support from the sovereign they had to adapt to a longer-term project of targeted, capillary propaganda. Together with those of the papal nuncios, their interventions gradually helped make the existence of an aged professional community shaken by the growing bitterness of internal controversy, increasingly precarious.

The experience of the heterodox physicians, which was a significant element in the Italian heretics’ diaspora, represented a chapter in itself in the intense flow of interactions between the Reformation and the Slavic world. Laura Ronchi De Michelis deals with this in the last article in the section, *La Riforma e la Slavia ortodossa tra XVI e XVII secolo (The Reform and Slavic Orthodoxy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries)*. In this detailed overview, the author looks at the stages of the diffusion of the various Reformation currents between the kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where the dominant confessions, Catholicism and the Orthodox faith respectively, already co-existed with Hussite, Armenian, Muslim and Hebrew minorities. Lutheranism, Swiss confessions and Calvinism became integrated in a composite whole in the middle of the sixteenth century, but following different paths. In each case it was a pacific phenomenon, favoured by the tolerance of the last Jagiellonian dynasty and the fact that the nobility was just as distant from the Catholic Church as it was from the Orthodox one, and was defending its own political and religious freedom. A further contribution came from the fact the Orthodox were open towards certain doctrinal and ritual aspects of the Reformation, and their desire to resist Catholic pressure regarding the union with Rome. This resulted in what the author calls a “cultural and religious revolution”. The adhesion to the reformed ideas of Nicola Radziwiłł, the chancellor of the Grand Duchy and prince of the Holy Roman Empire, fostered the Lithuanian nobility to abandon their original religious confessions and encouraged contacts with German universities, liberating the ruling élite from the dominant relationship with the Polish cultural world. Furthermore, it led to the foundation of printing houses and schools. This therefore also weakened the Orthodox religion, which became clear at the end of the sixteenth century when the Union of Brest (1596) sanctioned the Orthodox hierarchy entering into communion with the Roman Church, and Constantinople’s refusal led to the failure of the agreement with the evangelical reformed Churches (1599). At that moment in time the combined

¹³ Cf. the rich and well-documented overview by Gábor Almási, *The Uses of Humanism. Johannes Sambucus (1531-1584), Andreas Dudith (1533-1589), and the Republic of Letters in East Central Europe*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2009.

effects of the dynastic issues and the actions of Jesuits and papal legates were making the Reformation lose ground. This opened the path towards re-Catholicization and adaptation to the western models of intolerance; in Lithuania this was to take on the form of a progressive “Polandisation”.

The relationships between the Reformation and the Russian Orthodoxy were completely different. It was far-removed from the melting-pot of Polish-Lithuanian freedom: the Orthodox faith acted as the bond between the state and society, like an insurmountable barrier to the Latin West. Contacts with the Protestant world – through merchants and foreign technicians – therefore became part of the dynamics represented by Ivan IV; these were characterised by the exclusive loyalty to Orthodoxy and curiosity about religious faiths that were adverse to Catholicism, and were encouraged by the growing strength of the Russian church and the plans of dynastic alliances with the Danish monarchy.

However, as the author shows, the traces of this intense season of involvement in the religious novelties from the West endured. Both in Poland and the Lithuanian Grand Duchy the religious production of a previously unknown educational nature was established, consisting in catechisms in the local languages with passages by Luther, Melancton, Calvin and Swiss reformers. These instruments were to be revived in limited variations, both in the Catholic and Orthodox field, until the late seventeenth century. Parallel to this, the Protestant image of the Antichrist pope was incorporated in the controversial arsenal of the Slavic orthodoxy in contrast to the new Gregorian calendar, the work of the pope who was changing the times and destroying the Christian church. The topos of the Antichrist pope was also to reach Russia: Ivan IV opposed it when the Jesuit Antonio Possevino, a zealous interpreter of the Eastern politics of Gregory XIII, tried to champion the Czar’s submission to the primacy of Rome.

More than thirty years have now gone by since Silvana Seidel Menchi recommended abandoning the use of rigid dogmatic parameters in the approach to the dynamics of the Reformation and showed, in her *Erasmus in Italia*, the potential of expanding the interpretative grids to contexts¹⁴. These articles are the unequivocal testimony that theological-doctrinal interpretations of the sixteenth-century religious crisis have now become obsolete. They also appear, however, equally distant from today’s historiographic directions that – in the tracks of “cultural history” and anthropological studies – regard the definition of the confessional identities in Europe in the early modern age as a multi-directional process that only took place in the field of religious life, far-removed from both the theological sphere and that of ecclesiastical and civil institutions. These are perspectives in which, as has recently been pointed out, the Counter Reformation itself loses its value as a turning point in the history of the Catholic church; instead it is simply reduced to a set

¹⁴ Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia (1520-1580)*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1987, pp. 21-22.

of devotional practices that were shared from the bottom up, and gradually watered down in an “Early modern Catholicism” that lasted four centuries – with the Council of Trent at the centre – and was able to successfully put itself forward as a global religion¹⁵.

On the other hand, the essays in this section all concentrate on the importance attributed to the political-institutional dimension in the analysis of the transformations resulting from Luther’s protests. Whether we are talking about an Italian Reformation that emerged from a confused combination of hopes for renewal and material interests or radical currents that developed in the spaces defined by the constitution of the Polish-Lithuanian “Noble Republic”, the examples offer an account of dialogue and confrontation between powers and organised confessions, the establishment and dissolution of communities and minority churches in specific social spaces, the transition from legally guaranteed practices of co-existence to coercion. They recall the contested affirmation of new orthodoxies, with a revival of the Roman church that was the product of intense, multiform unrest. It was from the conflicts and political decisions taken during the heart of the processes started by the Reformation that structural elements emerged that would allow Roman Catholicism not only to oppose “heretics”, but also to formulate projects of hegemony on other Christianities and to pursue expansion on a global scale.

¹⁵ For more about these tendencies, which developed in particular in Anglo-Saxon historiography, and their implications, see Elena Bonora, *Il ritorno della Controriforma (e la Vergine del Rosario di Guápulo)*, in «Studi storici» LVIII, 2(2016), pp. 267-295; M. Firpo, *La presa di potere*, pp. V-VII.