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## A Global Perspective on De Propaganda Fide

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## A Global Perspective on *De Propaganda Fide*\*

Giovanni Pizzorusso's monograph takes a clear position in the historiographical debate regarding the significant differences that separate studies on the papacy, church history, and the history of Catholicism. His focus lies on deepening our understanding of a Roman dicastery strongly desired by the pope. This work can be counted among the studies dedicated to the papacy's policy for expanding Catholicism in the world. The author pursues his objective by maintaining a Curial centre of gravity and relying mainly on purely Roman archival sources, above all the historical archive of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide. Pizzorusso immediately clarifies a decisive question that has divided scholarship on this Congregation. Discussing the main reasons for the foundation of Propaganda Fide, the author sides with the view that it was predominantly the result of a concern with the fight against the heretics of northern Europe and rejects the struggle against the *patronato regio* as the principal reason for its creation. This position, stated clearly at the beginning of the book, on the one hand allows the author to clarify the true relationship between Propaganda Fide and the *patronato regio*, revising the received scholarly opinion on this institution. On the other hand, it facilitates a clearer understanding of the early years of the life of the Congregation, revealing its role and function.

What makes the work of Pizzorusso particularly relevant is his approach to the analysis of Propaganda Fide. His is a general and global perspective. The nature and the prerogatives of this Curial office, which by purpose and function was exposed to various populations and cultures of the world, has tended to produce a historiography strongly focused on specific places of mission. It was natural that historical research should primarily focus on particular and geographical interests, and that

these should prevail over a global view; these territorial perspectives have certainly provided detailed analyses of how Propaganda Fide related to and acted in a given location. However, these separate points of observation could not generate a general understanding of the phenomenon. Pizzorusso's study develops a synthesis of the insights generated by previous archival and historiographic research. His narrative aims to outline a historical-institutional profile of the Congregation with particular attention paid to what he calls the *governance* of the missions. The result is therefore a comprehensive picture of this institution – if limited to the 17<sup>th</sup> century – and above all the filling of a scholarly lacuna, thanks to the completeness provided by Pizzorusso's general vision of Propaganda Fide.

The first part of the work focuses on the Congregation's more properly jurisdictional and administrative aspects. Pizzorusso explores the historical reasons that led to the birth of the Roman department, describing specifically the pontifical need to create a central agency that had supreme jurisdiction over all mission lands and that therefore acted as nexus between the central power and the periphery. He thus provides a full account of the political plan that aimed at the Roman and papal centralisation of the missions. Particularly interesting and accurate is his description of the internal functioning of this imposing Curial office also from the bureaucratic point of view. The author goes into the details of the Propaganda Fide machine, outlining the protagonists and their tasks. The administrative apparatus counted not only those who worked in the Curia but also various figures who worked directly in the field of the missions, such as the apostolic vicars – created *ad hoc* by Propaganda Fide – apostolic prefects, nuncios and agents of the Congregation.

\* GIOVANNI PIZZORUSSO, Governare le missioni, conoscere il mondo nel XVII secolo. La Congregazione pontificia De Propaganda Fide (Studi di storia delle istituzioni ecclesiastiche), Viterbo: Edizioni Sette città 2018, 224 p., ISBN 978-88-7853-779-8

This massive system represented the eyes and will of the pope in the mission lands.

In outlining this institutional framework, Pizzorusso does not fail to mention the jurisprudential character of Propaganda Fide. As time went on, the huge influx of correspondence from all over the world – material evidence of the universality of papal *governance* – increasingly overburdened the Roman offices, which had the task of finding the doctrinal and juridical answers to the most varied questions. It was precisely Propaganda Fide's responses to the requests of local institutions, orders, and distant dioceses that led to a gradual accretion of the measures issued by the congregation and thus to the natural creation of a missionary law, which was also the result of the desire to make the resolutions consistent and uniform.

This missionary jurisprudence was also increasing due to the dispositions of a department that had predated the foundation of Propaganda Fide and already had jurisdiction over the missions, namely the Holy Office. It is precisely by analysing the various prerogatives of Propaganda Fide that Pizzorusso is able to capture the delicate relationship between the Congregation and the Holy Office. These dicasteries were both involved in the expansion of Catholicism, albeit with different authority and methods. The coexistence of complementarity and diversity forms the basis of the author's analysis, who emphasises both the methodological differences in the two departments' approaches to conversion but also the collaborative relationship that developed between them over time. Their juridical competences remained distinct, but at the same time, questions of doubt or concurrent matters were regulated and disciplined by an assiduous juridical and dogmatic debate. Pizzorusso's discussion therefore shows clearly that the two institutions were faces of the same coin, that is, both were cogs within the same project of Roman centralisation.

The second part of the monograph consists of thematic chapters. This allows the author to collect the countless questions of a political, cultural and linguistic nature that arose from the contact between the Church and the mission territories. In fact, after describing the institution from within its structures, the author now turns to its external activities, though he always keeps his Roman and Curial perspective in mind. Dealing with territories, *nationes* and rites of a different nature raised questions regarding policy direction and required

changes in the processes of evangelisation that were far from straightforward. The Congregation had to face such complications while trying to adhere to doctrine and at the same time maintain the necessary flexibility, for example, for harmonising the Latin Roman rite with Eastern traditions.

The systems of evangelisation had to be adapted to the places of mission, and this could give rise to contradictions and discontinuities, as Pizzorusso shows. These inconsistencies, which risked distancing the new territories from orthodoxy, could be one of the natural effects of missionary action. Implanting a permanent structure and a religious confession in a culture very far from a Western European – and above all the Roman – one meant that missionaries faced evident difficulties. In fact, the Tridentine innovations were not merely to be implanted, but rather more intelligently recreated; both the institutional structures and the rites were to be settled in gradually. The translation of the Tridentine model into local contexts required adaptations that were regularly evaluated by Propaganda Fide. Out of these processes, the Congregation developed a specific and exceptional approach, a testimony to the rapprochement of the missionaries to the local cultures.

The author's survey of The Congregation's training of missionaries is particularly interesting, down to the type of staff chosen for its work or with whom Propaganda necessarily had to collaborate. The description of this significant prerogative of the department is very useful for understanding how the Roman Curia tried to shape those who were to represent the papacy in distant lands. Constantly making the necessary temporal and geographical distinctions with regard to the choice of workers employed, the author draws a picture of the missionaries, who held a great responsibility as the representatives of the Church in dioceses a long way from Rome. On the one hand, Pizzorusso examines the relations between the Congregation and the regular orders; on the other, he describes the constant concern regarding the increasing numbers of secular clergy involved in the missions, resulting from the formation of an indigenous clergy who could more easily culturally interact with the societies to be evangelised. All the components of the missionary Church – the missionary monks, the secular indigenous clergy, and the missionary personnel of Italian origin – remained constantly under the magnifying glass of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, which tried

to control, as far as possible, the work of these men, overseeing both their doctrinal and their linguistic formation.

In conclusion, Pizzorusso's book, which neither claims nor is intended to be a history of the institution, is certainly suitable for all those who want to understand what strategies and objectives were hidden behind the administration and government of Propaganda Fide. The deep historiographic knowledge and the absolute familiarity

with the subject on the part of the author allow readers to find their way around the work, which is accessible and detailed at the same time. The well-chosen apparatus of notes and the bibliography, the result of years of in-depth research on the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, will enrich and broaden the historiographic context of the many studies that this Roman department continues to inspire. ■

**Manuela Bragagnolo**

## Probabilmente moralmente legittime\*

Con questo lavoro Stefania Tutino propone un'interessante e ben documentata lettura storica del probabilismo della prima età moderna, collocato nel più ampio contesto della storia religiosa, intellettuale, culturale e politica dell'Europa della prima modernità.

Sviluppatosi nella seconda metà del XVI secolo il probabilismo rappresentò una significativa e controversa novità nella teologia morale cattolica. Come rendere moralmente legittime le decisioni quando non era possibile individuare con assoluta certezza la soluzione corretta? Secondo i teologi probabilisti si poteva legittimamente seguire una specifica linea di condotta se supportata da un'opinione probabile, anche se l'opinione contraria era fondata su argomenti più cogenti o su autorità più numerose e più forti. Legatosi intrinsecamente, dalla seconda metà del Seicento, alla Compagnia di Gesù e a un sistema morale lassista, il probabilismo fu al centro di una violenta propaganda. Tale battaglia polemica ne offuscò a lungo l'importanza dottrinale che il presente lavoro, sulla base dell'analisi di un vasto materiale a stampa e manoscritto, cerca di recuperare.

Lo spettro d'indagine è limitato alla prima fase, finora meno studiata, e copre un arco cronologico

teso tra la metà Cinquecento e il decreto di condanna di Papa Innocenzo XI (1679). Secondo l'autrice il probabilismo non costituì meramente un giustificativo per una condotta morale eccessivamente permissiva. Si trattò piuttosto di uno strumento al quale i teologi ricorsero per far fronte ai cambiamenti e alle novità che attraversarono il mondo cattolico della prima età moderna, inglobandoli all'interno del sistema teologico e intellettuale cattolico. Se, da un lato tali novità avevano intaccato nel profondo il sistema epistemologico e teologico tradizionale, provocando una crescita esponenziale di vacillamenti e dubbi, il probabilismo rappresentò una via possibile per gestire l'incertezza come componente fondamentale del sapere e della condizione umana.

Il volume si compone di undici capitoli che seguono puntualmente, attraverso le fonti, l'itinerario del probabilismo dai primi sviluppi, legati alla straordinaria produzione intellettuale della Scuola di Salamanca, fino alla piena elaborazione ad opera dei Gesuiti del Collegio Romano. Originato nell'ambito dei dibattiti sulla confessione post tridentina, il probabilismo uscì presto dal confessionale, rivelandosi uno strumento intellettuale particolarmente plastico e utile negli ambiti più

\* STEFANIA TUTINO, *Uncertainty in Post-Reformation Catholicism. A History of Probabilism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018, 563 p., ISBN 978-0-19-069409-8