

CALL FOR PAPERS

SCIENCE, RELIGION AND POLITICS DURING THE «MODERNIST CRISIS»

Rome, June 3-5, 2010

Belgian Historical Institute in Rome / Academia Belgica

Scientific Board

Corinne BONNET (Toulouse), Patrick CABANEL (Toulouse), Jan DE MAEYER (Leuven), Michel DUMOULIN (Louvain-la-Neuve), Daniele MENOZZI (Normale Pisa), Danny PRAET (Gent), Philippe RAXHON (Liège), Vincent VIAENE (Leuven)

Organizing Committee

Corinne BONNET, Michel DUMOULIN
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Format of the Colloquium

- Workshop with approximately 20 participants, 12 of which will be selected through a « Call for papers »
- Contributions to be distributed in advance (10/05/2010) among the participants
- Languages : *French, English and Italian*
- Publication of *Acts* intended

Procedure

Scholars interested in submitting a **proposal** for a lecture should do so **by September 30, 2009 at the latest**, and should send their proposal to Annelies LANNOY at the following address: annelies.lannoy@ugent.be

Abstracts should be accompanied by a short CV, and should be presented in French or English: the proposal should be approximately 30 lines, outlining the subject and indicating the original character of its subject and/or approach; also, the abstract should indicate which of the four sessions (1-4: *infra*) the contribution is intended for.

The proposals will be evaluated by the scientific committee in light of the available places and the structure of the Colloquium. A positive or negative response will be communicated to each candidate at the latest by **October 31, 2009**.

Conference proposal

In 1910-11, the « case Cumont » caused intellectual and political uproar in Belgium. The Cumont case transcends the anecdotal level of an individual career and will be our starting point for a general reflection on the interactions between science, religion and politics at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Franz Cumont had been professor of Roman Institutional History at the University of Ghent, since 1892. He was already a scholar of world-wide renown when, a few years later, he was unanimously proposed by his Faculty as the new full professor for the chair of Roman History. He was barred from this promotion by the Catholic Minister of Sciences and the Arts, baron Descamps. After several months of controversy, mobilization and even negotiations at the highest political level, Cumont permanently resigned from his academic positions and, a short while later, he altogether left his native Belgium, bewildered by the whole experience. A political and confessional imbroglio had prevailed over the scientific interests of the Belgian academic world.

The modernist context seems to have been a major factor in the academic ostracism Cumont fell victim to. Cumont was befriended with Loisy, and he corresponded with Buonaiuti and Turchi. In 1906, he published the « best-seller » entitled « Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain » (English translation: 1911), in which the spread of Christianity was placed in a historical perspective. In this book, Cumont put forward the thesis that the so-called oriental religions had paved the way for the « triumph of Christianity » by promoting a new spirituality and a new relation between religion and morality. Attacked by some, praised to the skies by others, Cumont became the target of Catholic apologetics, which served as a point of reference for the conservative government. At the time, the Belgian government had full control over academic appointments at state universities. This « affair » reveals what was at stake in the intellectual, cultural and political world, not only in Belgium, because this case largely transcends the Belgian context and is relevant to the entire scientific world during this period marked by modernism and anti-modernism. What became of the free choice of teachers and teaching material in this time of intellectual “witch hunt”? What positions did the different representatives of political and religious power take up? How did they relate to the academic world, towards specific developments in research? What challenges for Christian theology were implied in the new discipline of history of religions? Through which instruments, in which socio-cultural spaces and with which results was this challenge pursued?

The major objective of this Colloquium is to explore, in four thematic sessions, the complex and evolving dynamics between political power, religious authority, and the scientific community, in the period of the modernist versus anti-modernist debate, that is to say from the last quarter of the 19th to the first quarter of the 20th centuries, when a positivist « science of religion » developed. The *tableau* we would like to sketch will take

into account both the Catholic and the Protestant world, Belgium as well as Europe and the United States. The approach will be resolutely interdisciplinary and comparative.

The four thematic sessions are conceived along broadly chronological lines:

SESSION 1

In this introductory session, we will explore the field of tension existing between science, religion and politics in the last quarter of the 19th century, symbolized, on the Catholic side, by the encyclical *Pascendi*, but present also in the Protestant world. We will evaluate the position of the emerging “science of religions” in this context, and the possible cross-influences connecting it to the political world.

SESSION 2

The second session will focus on the « Cumont case»: we will discuss its Belgian and European context, and evaluate both its unique characteristics and its general significance as a case in point for the conflicts between the academic world, the political realm and the religious authorities.

SESSION 3

In the third session, we will turn our attention to the development of intellectual machinery and institutional academic environment for the history of religion: themes, concepts, problems, methods, but also the creation of university chairs, academic networks, conferences, journals, publications, etc. We will study the way political and religious authorities tried to gain control over these new developments.

SESSION 4

The final session will be dedicated to the impact of the scientific « globalization ». For the “science of religions” this globalization occurred mainly around the First World War: the interaction with anthropology and ethnology, the importance of missionary reports and the discovery of other religious cultures, the development of archeological expeditions, in a political context marked by imperialism, including cultural imperialism.