

THE

Volume XLIX, No.4

Winter 2018

# SIXTEENTH CENTURY JOURNAL

*The Journal of Early Modern Studies*



0361-0160(201824)49:4;1-L



**The Indissolubility of Marriage & the Council of Trent.** E. Christian Brugger.  
Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017. xvi + 295 pp.  
\$69.96. ISBN 978-0-8132-2952-2.

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In this book, E. Christian Brugger settles a question that might at first seem pertinent only to a narrow group of scholars, but which, in fact, has far-reaching significance: did canon 7 of the Council of Trent intend to teach that divorcees could licitly remarry if their first marriage ended because of adultery? Or rather, is the Catholic teaching that consummated marriages are indissoluble an immutable dogma of faith, or a matter of discipline that could be changed?

Though promulgated in 1563, the canons of Trent are still the Catholic Church's most authoritative pronouncement on the indissolubility of marriage, a doctrine that sets Catholicism apart from all other world religions. Nonetheless,

the meaning of canon 7 has been debated since Paolo Sarpi published his *Istoria del Concilio di Tridentino* in 1619. Whilst some hold that canon 7 confirms the impossibility of licit second marriages, the canon has also been deployed by Catholic theologians who argue that the church should accommodate the remarriage of Catholic divorcees. Brugger's book does not address the thorny question of whether the Catholic Church should change its teaching on indissolubility, but rather resolves doubts about the meaning of canon 7 to tell us whether it even could change the doctrine.

Doubts about the meaning of canon 7 stem from its indirect wording. Unlike the other canons of Trent, canon 7 did not directly condemn those who taught something other than Catholic doctrine, in this case those who argued that divorcees could licitly remarry in cases of adultery. Instead canon 7 anathematized those who claimed that the Catholic Church erred when it taught that marriage is absolutely indissoluble. In addition to criticizing Catholic belief, however, the Protestant Reformers whom the Council sought to refute openly advocated a contrary teaching, that marriage could be dissolved not only in cases of adultery but in other circumstances as well. Despite this clear contrast between the Protestant and Catholic teachings, the words of canon 7 avoided directly condemning those who taught that second marriages were licit in cases of adultery.

Seeking to explain this anomaly, scholars have claimed that:

1. The Council sought to condemn Luther's argument that the pope had no authority over marriage, not the substance of the Reformers' views on marriage.
2. The Council delegates did not agree that the indissolubility of marriage was an unchangeable doctrine of the faith.
3. Because some church fathers taught that remarriage in cases of adultery was not a mortal sin, delegates feared that anathematizing all those who permitted remarriage would have condemned doctors of the church.
4. The Council modified Catholic teaching to accommodate Greek Christians who allowed divorce and remarriage in cases of adultery.

Brugger contests each one of these theses. Instead he argues that canon 7 reasserted traditional Catholic teaching on indissolubility, but did so indirectly to avoid anathematizing Greek Christians who permitted second marriages in cases of adultery. Brugger argues that this solution satisfied the Venetian delegation at the Council, who claimed that a direct condemnation of the Greeks could disturb the partial but precious communion between the Catholic Church and the Greek Christians who populated Venice's Mediterranean territories. In the Venetian Republic, Greek archpriests were given limited power over Greek clergy and liturgy but acknowledged papal authority and ultimately submitted

to archbishops appointed in Rome. Brugger's argument echoes the view of the nineteenth-century Jesuit theologian Giovanni Perrone, but is bolstered using the documents of the Council held in the Vatican Archives, unavailable in Perrone's day but now widely accessible in thirteen edited volumes.

After taking two separate chapters to establish the views of the Reformers and the Greeks, Brugger undertakes a thorough analysis of the Council's discussions and votes, first at Bologna and then at Trent, before offering a close analysis of the Council's three final texts on marriage: canon 7 on adultery and remarriage, canon 5 anathematizing other Protestant teachings on second marriages, and a *Doctrina* spelling out the traditional Catholic teaching on indissolubility. Brugger demonstrates that a significant majority of the Council fathers believed that the indissolubility of marriage was an immutable dogma of faith. Moreover, he shows that canon 7 states that indissolubility was the truth "according to the scriptures" and "Apostolic authority" in order to assert this fact. Brugger details the views of prominent prelates who did not toe the line on indissolubility. Nonetheless, his close examination of discussions and voting at the Council shows that only inaccurate interpretation of the sources could lead one to claim that such delegates represented a majority. The fastidiousness of Brugger's own analysis is further demonstrated in his meticulous appendices, which provide the authorities cited by delegates, voting records, and drafts of the key documents in both the original Latin and English translation.

Brugger focuses on the importance of the indissolubility controversy for ecumenicism; the accommodation of Greek marriage practices, however, also reflects a broader pragmatism in the early modern church, noted increasingly by historians of sixteenth-century Catholicism. In the period of the Council, the church acknowledged that many Christians failed to live up to Catholic ideals. This included non-Catholic Christians such as Greeks and the converts of the New World mentioned in Brugger's introduction, but also supposedly practicing Roman Catholics in Europe. Often the church did not directly condemn these people. It even granted papal privileges that exonerated them from canonical penalties attached to common misdemeanors such as irregular marriages. Like the decision not to anathematize the Greeks, such measures acknowledged the reality of laypeople's lives and the church's limited ability to change them, without indicating for one moment that the church intended to change its teachings.

With this book, Brugger fulfils his narrow yet significant aim with clarity and rigor, providing an explanation of Trent's teaching on indissolubility that will be valuable to all those interested in Catholic social teaching, in the sixteenth century and today. Like his first work, *Capital Punishment and the Roman Catholic Moral Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), the present volume demonstrates Brugger's ability to provide lucid histories of now-contentious Catholic social teachings. Brugger admits that he approaches his subject as a theologian and not as an historian. Nonetheless, his work will interest all those who study the Council of Trent and the church that convened

it. Indeed, the book reflects an important turn in historical writing on Trent in the last decade. Explicitly and implicitly throughout the text, Brugger insists that councils can only be known from the documents that they produced. In his conclusion he decries the notion of a “Spirit of the Council,” an essence of the proceedings that reveals intentions that were somehow hidden from the promulgated edicts. These statements and the methodology that they mirror bolster not only the case for indissolubility as a *de fide* dogma, but also the efforts of historians who have rejected the uncritical use of the adjective “Tridentine” and focused increasingly on explaining “What [actually] Happened at the Council.”

