

External Examiner's Report on the dissertation of Mgr. Jiri Sucharda  
"Alfonso de Valdes and the universal empire of Charles V"  
submitted in 2022 to  
the Faculty of Arts (Centre for Ibero-American Studies) of Charles University

Mgr Jiri Sucharda has devoted his thesis to a Renaissance figure that may have wielded more influence than he is usually given credit for, Alfonso de Valdes. In his dissection of Valdes writings Sucharda brings several elements to our attention that are usually overlooked. Maybe foremost among them rank his reports from Augsburg in 1530 and the subsequent conflict between the inquisition – after all a state institution – and the high-ranking secretary of the Spanish monarch. As an aside, it is also fascinating to note that Valdes actually echoed Leo X's comment on Luther's campaign against the sale of indulgences as primarily a feud among monks, Dominicans and Augustinians in particular. The major work scrutinized by Sucharda is Valdes' defence of Charles V in connection with the Sacco di Roma in 1527. For obvious reasons it includes a polemic against the Pope who had joined Charles' enemies. It is surprising, though, that Valdes does not take the easy way out by simply blaming the mutineers. Instead, he comes close to regarding the excesses of the soldiers – or even Luther's work - as a form of deserved divine punishment.

The author is to be commended on his command of Latin and Spanish. His English includes a few recurrent, slight grammatical mistakes, especially in connection with definite and indefinite articles, or indirect speech, but they do not compromise the readability of the work. What is a bit more debatable is Sucharda's approach to Valdes' writings as an expression of "ideology", an infamously complex and misleading term. In his conclusion, Sucharda himself poses the question whether Valdes actually saw eye to eye on these issues with his boss Gattinara, or whether his writings do not simply reflect his top boss's agenda, Charles V. Valdes was in favour of imperial hegemony, but what else would a member of the emperor's entourage be supposed to advocate? His difficulties after 1530 clearly are a result of changed circumstances: Obviously, what fitted the context of 1527 when Charles was actually fighting the Pope (and there was still hope for reconciliation with the as yet unnamed Protestants), may no longer have been fashionable a few years later, when Charles had made his peace with the Pope. After all, few politicians like to have their sound-bites quoted against them years after.

Again, when discussing universalism, a bit more attention might have been paid to the context, i.e. the combination of motive and opportunity that characterized the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century. For almost the first time since the Luxemburgs in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century Emperor and Pope were once again locked in combat, while the rise of the Ottoman Empire put a premium on Christian unity. Still, what was universalism supposed to represent: A programme that called for further efforts or a convenient justification for a *fait accompli*? Sucharda is right to point to Charles' release of Francis I as a crucial decision – however, it's not necessarily a decision dictated by ideology. Moreover, even with Francis I in captivity, France would have lived on, as it did under all sorts of queen mothers in generations to come. Maybe the obvious solution how to fit France into a universalist concept Habsburg style was by dynastic links, as Charles V tried to do later on: "Tu, felix Austria, nube...?"

The Reformation certainly provided an obstacle to all efforts to turn the Holy Roman Empire into a mechanism capable of concerted action. Even more so, the catch 22 was that the German dynasties who embraced the reformation, tended to be exactly those who had usually counted as allies of the Habsburgs, whereas their Wittelsbach rivals set themselves up as Catholic defenders of the faith. In the discussion of the Spanish turn towards hard-core

Catholicism, one might have mentioned that the status quo in Spain was quite different from the German one, not necessarily in terms of theological dispute about the proper way to salvation but certainly in terms of church government and cash-flow. To a large extent, Church wealth was already at the disposal of the reconquista and need not be requisitioned in a bid for secular empowerment. Thus, there was no powerful land-grabbing lobby agitating for an Iberian version of reform.

With such a big topic in front of him, and all sorts of ramifications, Sucharda sometimes gives in to the temptation to get side-tracked and pursue certain aspects about e.g. the teachings of Luther or Dante that cannot easily be summed up in a few pages. Charles V himself, of course, is a figure that has spawned whole libraries of secondary literature. It would be unfair to expect Sucharda to read and quote all of it. Every now and then, however, a few extra references might have helped (e.g. Tracy's book on Imperial finances or Hook's classic on the sacco di Roma).

In conclusion, I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as passed.

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