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Michele Dillon, Professor of Sociology, COLA travels to Italy

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UNH Global

Michele Dillon

Professor of Sociology ~ Italy



Prof. Dillon at the Roman Forum in Italy

While on sabbatical this semester, I spent close to six weeks in Italy (Oct. 4-Nov. 11), partially funded by grants from the Faculty Development Committee and CIEGE. I had a highly productive and stimulating trip. Italy is a marvelous place and especially for a scholar of Catholicism, Rome, The Vatican, and almost any place in Italy is a treasure trove of historical and contemporary data. I gathered rich interview, observation and textual data for my new book project on institutional change in Catholicism

as well as data I will use in other ongoing scholarly projects. Prior to my trip I reached out to scholars in Italy, some of whom I did know previously, and this resulted in new connections with faculty and students at the American University of Rome, a potential destination for UNH semester-abroad students.

I spent the first week in Rome, coinciding with the opening of the Vatican's Synod on family life. I met with senior Vatican officials (Oct. 5) and ascertained their views about the prospects for change in church practices regarding marriage and divorce, as well as discussing the more general theme of change and continuity in Catholic doctrine and practices. I also met (Oct. 8) with two Italian sociologists of religion, both of whom are close observers of Vatican affairs (Professor Roberto

Cipriani, University of Roma III and Professor Federico D'Agostino, University of Naples) and I found their assessments of current issues and controversies in Catholicism highly insightful. Apart from my own data gathering efforts, I gave a public lecture on "Religious and Cultural Change in American Society" at the American University of Rome (Oct. 7), and I was also a guest speaker in the university's MA seminar on religion, where I discussed secularization and post-secularity with the students and their professor (Dr. Davor Dzalto). My conversations with AUR faculty and students were very engaging and I hope to maintain this connection.

Subsequently, I spent a month based in Verona. While there, I gathered ethnographic data on the public presence of the Catholic Church and the persistence of large-scale religious rituals. I plan to draw on these data in my ongoing scholarly writings on the unevenness of secularization.

While in Verona, I made a series of side-trips:

I met with a sociologist of religion at Padua University (Dr. Enzo Pace) who discussed his assessment of the institutional challenges impeding changes in Vatican culture and in the Church more generally.

I went to Venice where I explored the Biennale Art Exhibitions. I specifically visited the neighborhood which was the site of a controversy earlier this year due to municipal opposition to the artistic redecoration/reimagining of a closed Catholic church as a Muslim worship space. I will be using data from the Biennale in a paper I plan to present on the tensions between Islam and Western culture as part of a thematic panel at the American Sociological Association meetings in August 2017 (currently under review).


I went to Milan to get a sense of Expo 2015 and how it publicly framed the Expo theme, food and sustainability. I propose to include a new section on the sociology of sustainability in the revised/3rd edition of my theory textbook and I plan to use visual and other data from the Expo event to illustrate the tension between sustainability and consumerism.





Prof. Dillon with American University of Rome in background

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