

*Venice, homeland of freedom, where everybody can live in his own way*

*(“Venezia libera patria di poter vivere ciascuno a suo modo”)*

*Introduction*

My lecture today will deal with the history of Renaissance Venice from a particular angle: the fascinating time, between the 1520s and 1580s, in which the city became the centre of religious dissent in sixteenth-century Catholic Italy. In this period, the city looked, to many of the people who lived or travelled there, “*a homeland of freedom, where everybody could live in his own way*” – as a Frenchman maintained in 1579 in order to explain why he had moved to Venice.

In this lecture, we will try to understand why, how and to what extent Venice was indeed a *homeland of freedom*; what were the origins and what was the epilogue of this moment in the city's life; and who were the main characters of a story that has to do with non-conformism, hope for a different religious (and even social) order, secret underground meetings, struggle, repression, violence and the rise of the first blossoms of freedom of thought.