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# Negotiating the Sacred: Spirituality and Reform in the Age of Enlightenment in the Republic of Venice

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

NEGOTIATING THE SACRED: SPIRITUALITY AND REFORM IN THE AGE OF  
ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

By

Simonetta Marin

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2014

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ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

Simonetta Marin

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Negotiating the Sacred: Spirituality and Reform in  
the Age of Enlightenment in the Republic of Venice

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The continuing resilience, significance, and variety of religious culture in the age of the Enlightenment in the Republic of Venice are the overarching themes of this dissertation, which consists of a series of case-studies. Though the stories examined here are diverse and cover several aspects of devotions, practices, and beliefs, they all grew out of negotiations that took place at all levels. Each chapter showcases negotiations of the sacred among secular authorities, the clergy and their flocks, bishops and inquisitors, higher office holders in the Roman Church and in local branches of the Inquisition, and various members of ecclesiastic institutions. Together, these represent a more complicated religious Enlightenment than usually envisioned. Negotiations of the sacred unfold against the background of unapologetic quests for the miraculous and divine manifestations. Hence, the pursuit of modernity, which is still seen as the hallmark of the Age of Reason, actually never was very far removed from the sphere of religion and consciousness of the spiritual world. The examination of so many varied aspects of devotion, practices, beliefs, and the numerous uncertain attempts to constrain them within more rigorous boundaries (or to remove them from popular control) during the eighteenth century ultimately confirms that we – “moderns” – are the children of the Enlightenment in more complex ways than we might imagine.

Dedicated to my parents, Egle and Adelmo

## Acknowledgments

This dissertation has taken me on a personal and intellectual journey. At times, I must admit, it has seemed more difficult than rewarding. Having reached the conclusion, I wish to thank and acknowledge my indebtedness to those who have helped me along the way. As my friend, Carmelo Romanello, reminded me, my achievement in this journey is no longer mine alone, but belongs also to all the people who have believed in me and supported me. Few words could be more truthful: this thought has pushed me through the final stage of the process. Pursuing a PhD can be a very solipsistic and often unforgiving endeavor, especially the research and writing aspects. However, for those souls who are willing to dwell “in doubtful joy” when immersed in a challenging task, the faith of those who have – in different ways and times – stood by them is the most invaluable of gifts.

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I wish to thank Mary Lindemann for her consistent support and for helping me to conceptualize this project in its early stages. My work has benefitted from her pointed

comments, sharp questions, and bright mind. Her pragmatism, her discipline, and her work ethic have been deeply inspiring and formative.

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## Notes on Citations and Abbreviations

### Archives and libraries

ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Città del Vaticano
APSo	Archivio Parrocchiale di Sorisole, Bergamo
ASV	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
BCAM	Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, Bergamo
BMC	Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Venezia
BNM	Bioblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia
BSP	Biblioteca del Seminario Patriarcale, Venezia

### Printed publications

DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1960–)
DSI	Adriano Prosperi (ed.), <i>Dizionario Storico dell'Inquisizione</i> (5 vols, Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010)

### Other abbreviations

b./bb.	<i>busta/e</i>
c./cc.	leaf/leaves
n.n.	unnumbered leaf/leaves
ff.	following
fz.	<i>filza</i>
ms./mss	manuscript/s
n./nn.	note/s
r.	<i>recto</i>
reg.	<i>registro</i>
v.	<i>verso</i>
vol./vols	volume/s



## INTRODUCTION

### **From the Purging of the Saints to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Spirituality and Reform in Early Modern Venice and the Veneto**

When eighteenth-century Protestant travelers, young or old, made their grand tours through Italy, they never failed to show surprise in discovering a religious culture that was radically different from their own. Pilgrimages, colorful processions, and the exhibition of relics accompanied the numerous Catholic feast days, which exemplified a material and festival culture that Protestants did not typically experience in their native lands, nor understand. Their reactions displayed a mixture of bewilderment interwoven with disdain.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the traditional criticisms of the superstitions of Catholics and of the popish errors which supported those beliefs, what struck Protestant observers even more poignantly was how complicit the Catholic clergy were in maintaining and even promoting this order of things, and how they were more concerned about outward ceremonials than true religion. These travelers may have exaggerated their reactions for the sake of spicing up their accounts, but still, there seemed to be something in those luxuriant manifestations of religious expression that evidently surpassed their already biased expectations concerning Catholic devotion and beliefs. Ludovico Antonio Muratori – a religious man, an historian, and the father of the Italian Catholic Enlightenment – felt deeply ill-at-ease when he was confronted with these sometimes moralistic, sometimes amusedly dismissive foreign reports about Italian customs. The fact that people from other countries not only frowned upon Italian devotional practices

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<sup>1</sup> Willem Frijhoff, “Popular religion,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 7, *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 196.

but also scornfully judged them caused the erudite Muratori, who was not in the least inclined toward effusive displays of religiosity or Baroque manifestations of piety, to feel at best embarrassed, or even occasionally outraged.

In the eighteenth century, travelling throughout Europe and especially Italy became the ultimate educational rite of passage for British elites. This pursuit provided wealthy and mostly young male gentlemen exposure to the masterpieces of Western art, to the fashionable society of the Continent and, last but not least, to the specific Italian character that entertained as well as amazed. The British were not alone in considering this valuable experience something that needed to be recorded for the good of future readers. Goethe, among many others, also wrote about his “Italian Journey,” using the diaries that he kept during his travels to Italy from 1786-1788. Along with the foreign enthusiasm for Italian art and amenities, a new genre of writing appeared – possibly in response to the unflattering portrayals of Italians in matters of religion. This new and increasingly popular genre was travel guides. Some visitors were not merely travelers; they could also be pilgrims. Beside the worldly attractions and history that drew so many travelers to Italy, many eighteenth-century travel guides also offered information concerning Italian religious history. These descriptive texts unabashedly provided details about saints’ bodies and relics, which were often obsessively listed. Stories about the most wonderful miracles were spun into the travel guides as well and were interwoven with stories about relics.

To provide one example, the Venetian nobleman and senator Flaminio Cornaro (1693-1778) published some important historical and religious guides for pious

travelers.<sup>2</sup> He was an avid and well-known relic hunter who collected, purchased, and donated hundreds of saints' relics. He also obtained official sanction and acknowledgement when Pope Benedict XIV wrote a preface for one of his books about all the churches and monasteries existing both in Venice and the surrounding islands in the Venetian lagoon. The Pope praised Flaminio's works as well as other, similar books that circulated in the peninsula on the same topics.<sup>3</sup> They contained more than mere information of historical interest; they also advertised the continuing celebration of foundational elements in Christian devotion. These works served as a reminder of what brought the faithful together, to recognize and venerate important sacred places, churches, and precious relics.

Aside from his devout and deep interest in church antiquities, Cornaro was also one of the first supporters of the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, first established in the church of Saint Canziano in 1732, and further endorsed between 1742 and 1745 with the introduction of paintings and eulogies. He founded and promoted the erection of the altar dedicated to the Heart, provided the most precious furnishings for it in that location, and also wrote the annual panegyric in praise of the Heart to be recited during the service. In sum, he actively took part in launching the devotion.<sup>4</sup> The devotion of the Sacred Heart, which first appeared in public during those years, became highly controversial and would be harshly criticized for its disturbing iconography (the Heart was represented as a material organ). Theologically, it was labeled superfluous by critics because there was

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<sup>2</sup> See Flaminio Cornaro, *Notizie storiche delle chiese e monasteri di Venezia, e di Torcello, tratte dalle chiese veneziane e torcellane* (Padua: Giovanni Manfrè, 1758); and also Flaminio Cornaro, *Venezia favorita da Maria. Relazione delle immagini miracolose di Maria conservate in Venezia* (Padua: Giovanni Manfrè, 1758).

<sup>3</sup> Benedictus XIV, *Lettera Del Santissimo Signor Nostro Benedetto Papa XIV. Al Nobile Uomo Flaminio Cornaro* (Venice: Guglielmo Zerletti, 1754).

<sup>4</sup> Anselmo Costadoni, *Memorie della vita di Flaminio Cornaro* (Bassano: Remondini, 1780), xciv.

already a feast and an accepted devotion of the Blessed Sacrament which was performed to worship Christ. To those critics, Cornaro replied that there was no such thing as a superfluous devotion, especially when it involved the Holy Sacrament. No act of devotion should be considered useless, observed Cornaro, when bad Christians and the ungodly perpetrated offences against God every day and all day long. God, he argued, tolerates our weaknesses and our constant searches for novelty, so that the faithful might be inspired with religious enthusiasm, which would act to counter apathy in their hearts. Moreover, he added, “it is easier to introduce and expand some new devotion than to revive the older ones.”<sup>5</sup> Cornaro’s enthusiasm for this new devotion that focused the devout on the Son of God displayed another of the many facets of his faith.

This dissertation analyzes how in the Republic of Venice both secular and religious authorities tackled the problem of allegedly “unregulated” devotion, and in so doing, shed some light on the multifaceted world of people’s religious practices in “the long eighteenth century” of the *Serenissima*. These practices combined, at times almost indistinguishably, magic with religion, spiritual with mundane concerns, and prescriptive literature with forbidden books. While analyzing why those Venetian attempts were destined to fail – at least in part, and also why they sometimes seemed to be only half-hearted attempts, this study will investigate several examples of conflicting ideologies within the Church as well as among the local elites, which together help to explain the persistence of a variety of religious manifestations of devotion during the so-called Italian Catholic *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment).

The term Christian Enlightenment does not raise eyebrows anymore, yet it is still a relatively recent description. The expression is an oxymoron and stands at odds with

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xciv.

what the Enlightenment has been perceived and described to be for a long time, namely as something at war with Christianity.<sup>6</sup> One might even argue that, at its core the Enlightenment was anti-Christian, anti-Church, and anti-religious. Certainly, the interpretation that the Enlightenment conflicted with religious faith cannot be dispelled in all instances. Over the century, several Enlightenment writers' critiques of traditional Christianity were deep and wide-ranging. The more radical critics rejected

the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of the Creation, the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, the existence of a divinely ordained social hierarchy, the divine origin and authority of the bible, the Christian supernatural framework of the virgin Birth, the resurrection and miracles, the idea of reward and punishment in an afterlife (especially the existence of hell), the reality of Satan, demons and spirits, the authority of a priestly caste and the notion that there was a divinely revealed morality which humans were expected to live by.<sup>7</sup>

This list could be extended, but it conveys quite accurately the underlying spirit of the theoretical Enlightenment: the movement encompassed a sustained attack on both revealed religion and ecclesiastical authority. Some scholars have argued that the very nature of Enlightenment was a complete rejection; Jonathan Israel would be the best example of this view. However, most current historians of the eighteenth-century acknowledge that there were many "Enlightenments" in this period, and that most of them involved changes or challenges to religious ideologies.<sup>8</sup> The eighteenth-century

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<sup>6</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Enlightenment, Revolution and Reawakening 1660-1815*, vol. 7 eds. Timothy Tackett and Stewart Brown, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 283.

<sup>7</sup> David Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 109-10.

<sup>8</sup> Israel is the most ardent advocate that the Enlightenment was supra-national in scope. He argued that the European Enlightenment was indeed a "single, highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement, displaying differences in timing, no doubt, but for the most part preoccupied not only with the same intellectual problems but often even the very same books and insights everywhere from Portugal to Russia and from Ireland to Sicily." Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), v.; and see also Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1650-1752* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Enlightenment was not strictly a movement of French *philosophes*. Instead, one could say that it comprised several local “Enlightenments,” which took place in different parts of Europe, and that these were often characterized by reform agendas which were driven by religious concerns and promoted by members of both religious and secular institutions. The major religions of Europe encountered movements for renewal and reform, in which such hallmark Enlightenment ideas as reasonableness and natural religion, toleration and natural law were championed by those who challenged tradition.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Enlightenment was focused upon traditional structures and institutions. As a reform movement within the Church, the Catholic Enlightenment was linked “with the Enlightenment reform movement and with interventions by reforming sovereigns who were inclined to welcome the collaboration of religious forces with the state in a more general process of cultural and social transformations.”<sup>10</sup> The reform of society as a whole therefore encompassed religious as well as economic changes and required a joint effort by secular and religious authorities. However, what has been called a “discordant harmony” characterized their dialectic relationships during their mutual endeavors.<sup>11</sup>

The Enlightenment could not be a uniform phenomenon because it was shaped by a dynamic set of interactions among thinkers and also reformers. Moderates and radicals fought with one another, and also with conservatives who defended Christianity against this aggressive assault on orthodoxy. The results were diverse, due to local dynamics, the specific timeframe of the debates, and the personalities involved. One aspect of this set of processes that historians have not sufficiently emphasized was that a significant portion

<sup>9</sup> See on this topic David Jan Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Ulrich L. Lehner, “The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment,” in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, eds. U.L. Lehner and M. Printy (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 1-55.

<sup>11</sup> Lehner, *The Many Faces*, 3.

of the “new ideas” voiced in this period about religious reforms were not really new at all. For example, one aspect of the Catholic Enlightenment was a long delayed attempt to apply the Tridentine reforms. Thus, what had not been accomplished after Trent now became the subject of new debates. But these proposals did require a new kind of negotiation among those who were involved in the making or unmaking of reforms.<sup>12</sup> Historians of the Italian Enlightenment arguably have been too insistent about emphasizing what the Enlightenment *was not* to fully consider the polyphony (or a better word might be cacophony) of differing voices during this period. Most scholars also have portrayed the Italian Enlightenment as an ultimately ineffectual endeavor in terms of many of the reformers’ envisioned economic and social goals, and thus have failed to notice that it also fell short in regard to reforming a large number of religious and devotional practices. This myopic interpretation of the issues at stake appears to have been caused by a general disinterest among modern scholars in any religious topic within the field of Enlightenment studies.

The term *Aufklärung*, which is used to characterize a certain kind of Enlightenment, was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century by the German historian Sebastian Merkle to underline the non-reactionary feature of Catholicism in the century of the Enlightenment. This was in response to Protestant studies which dominated the Enlightenment field up to that time.<sup>13</sup> However, *Aufklärung* is not an exact translation of the Enlightenment. *Aufklärung* means the active process of *enlightening* rather than the period. For lack of a better term, it came to be used in Italian historiography to describe the varied, and in many respects composite and contradictory,

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>13</sup> Mario Rosa, “The Catholic *Aufklärung* in Italy,” in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, eds. U.L. Lehner and M. Printy (Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2010), 215; Lehner, *The Many Faces*, 8.

strands of the Enlightenment. As Mario Rosa argues, the expression is a more neutral term, and for this reason can also be applied to the Italian context and its multifarious nation-state manifestations.<sup>14</sup> If Muratori symbolizes in an intellectual sense the first period of the Italian Enlightenment (and to vast degree also the second half of the century as well, as nearly every discussion in that later period somehow stood either against or in favor of his ideas), Pope Benedict XIV (pontificate 1740-1758) represents a period of significant change in the Church. Though he was labeled the Protestant pope by enthusiastic French philosophers for his openness to modernity, Benedict XIV set his goals somewhere between tradition and innovation. With his fundamental work on canonization, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (1734-1738) – written when he was still Cardinal Lambertini, Benedict synthesized a century of tradition while at the same time focusing deeply and consistently on new scientific and medical literature.

Throughout his life, Benedict tried to maintain good relations with people who looked on the Church unfavorably. His personality, charisma, and inclinations made it possible for him to collaborate in a friendly manner with Muratori, who proposed a more regulated or reasonable form of devotion. Similarly, while censuring and denouncing the pervasiveness of the most mystical religious experiences that had permeated devotion (especially during the Baroque period), Benedict recognized the validity of the deep mystical experience of Caterina de' Ricci, who was beatified in 1732 (when, still cardinal Lambertini, he was Promoter of the Faith) and canonized in 1746 by him (when he was pope). He also validated the religious experience of levitation exhibited by Giuseppe da

<sup>14</sup> Rosa, *The Catholic Aufklärung*, 215-250; and Mario Rosa, "Roman Catholicism," in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Alan Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3:468-472.



Copertino, who was beatified during his papacy in 1753. After Benedict's death, all attempts to balance between favoring certain forms of "illuminated" Catholicism while trying not to stray too far from tradition came to an end. During the papacy of his successor Clement XIII (1758-1769), Rome's condemnation of the *Encyclopédie* left no doubts that all dialogues with enlightened authors were over.<sup>15</sup> Expressions of enlightened conservatism and reform did not vanish, but historians have found them almost exclusively in the debates on economic reforms and the pursuit of Christian happiness. The debate about proper forms of devotion moved to the periphery of the Enlightenment. A eudemonistic conception of religion as the civilizing function of Catholicism – which was also a theme in Muratori's work – emerged as the main subject of conversation among intellectuals and reformers, and consequently among later historians too.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, historians of the Enlightenment have also relegated the long-running controversy between the Jansenists and the Jesuits to the political domain, as this has been categorized as a battle over issues that had less to do with *religion per se* than with the internal organization of the Catholic hierarchy, the relationship between the Pope and the bishops, and that between the Pope and monarchs. But that controversy actually involved arguments over the meaning, the extent, and the necessity of the reform of pious practices in Catholicism. Their heated discussions about forms of devotion also extended beyond the Jansenists and the Jesuits themselves, to eventually involve numerous other secular and clerical parties who promoted opposing views at different times and in different circumstances. These arguments would cover the full spectrum of the religious

<sup>15</sup> Rosa, *The Catholic Aufklärung*, 224-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-37.

culture at the time. Thus, disputes about devotion have been obscured and neglected in modern historical studies, which focus instead on louder debates like those concerning economics and institutional reforms.

While scholars have defined the catholic Aufklärung as a Tridentine revival, that older reform effort was not so much the actual goal; rather it was the background against which many opinionated writers engaged with eighteenth-century issues of tradition versus modernity. Of course, “tradition” already embodied many ambiguities and contradictions. The Church was not uniform in its represented views on many topics. It is too simplistic to think that divergences occurred only along vertical lines, which would be a result of applying the never fully abandoned theory of popular *versus* learned to reform debates. Although many historians long ago rejected this theory of two poles fighting against each other, in Enlightenment studies the two-tier theory is still considered a valuable tool. As justification, Enlightenment scholars argue that superstition was a key word for eighteenth-century reformers, a term that illustrated the sharp division of society into two distinctive groups. This stereotype was very popular among enlightened elites, and it appeared both widely and regularly in their discourses.

To what extent does the stereotype correspond to reality? The image of “the superstitious other” was a construct – a negative opposite of Enlightenment goals and ideals. As Linda Oja argues, the stereotype was meant to function as a spur to encourage self-education or even self-discipline. Its message was intended mostly for the elites, to encourage them to perfect themselves. It was not a message that offered anything useful

for instructing the populace.<sup>17</sup> Many scholars have uncritically accepted this old propagandistic vision that oversimplifies reality in an overly dichotomous fashion. Thus, they believe that if ever there was a time when a gap between *popular* and *elite* certainly existed, and moreover was notably wide, that time was during the Enlightenment. However, in the eighteenth century, the accentuation of that distance was a rhetorical tool which was used to propel reforms and support their *raison d'être*. Elites themselves often subscribed to beliefs and practices that were labeled superstitious by reformers or the defenders of orthodoxy.

We could argue that when applied to a local level, the model of popular versus learned might appear to fit observed realities, with the lower clergy aligned more often than not on the same side as their parishioners. But this too would be a simplification and a misconception. Many bishops as well as high secular authorities supported rather than impeded that priest-flock alliance. Incorporating various pre-existing and new agendas that existed across Europe, Enlightenment writers dredged up and amplified several recurring and unresolved issues. In this process (or processes) previously uncertain categories such as orthodox versus unorthodox became even more vague and intermixed, as did such designations as local versus universal, prescriptive literature versus practices, clergy versus populace, urban settings versus rural ones – and the one that seemed to encompass them all, learned versus unlearned. Indeed, while considering the religious Enlightenment, we should now use a model that features multiple poles and very complex relationships. The expression Catholic Aufklärung is problematic because it is associated with scholarly transformations of religious debates into political phenomena. It also

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Oja, “The superstitious Other,” in *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 76.

flattens the intricate textures of religious thought that were displayed, and leads one to overlook numerous clashing parties who clearly argued about religion and different forms of devotion.

Due to its association with new philosophies and advances in science and medicine, the Enlightenment has often been depicted as a period during which most Europeans cast off old beliefs concerning witchcraft and magic. This study also addresses these topics, which emerged within a wider reform movement that was intended to regulate piety and eradicate unorthodox practices. Witchcraft and magic are analyzed both from an institutional and a cultural point of view. In the Republic of Venice during the eighteenth century, a clash occurred between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities over the jurisdiction over witchcraft. This resulted in the most powerful secular tribunal of the Republic (The Council of Ten) assuming partial control over these areas at the expense of the Inquisition. The long battle between the secular and religious parties in the Republic over this issue provides a fascinating glimpse of the roles that both groups played in tackling the problem of witchcraft. The observable role of the *consultori* (the Republic's official legal consultants) and the members of the Venetian patriciate in particular raises questions about the extent to which their approach to secularizing this sphere of concern involved religious principles as opposed to primarily the use of pragmatic arguments. Their methods were rather less secularly founded than we might expect. When the Council of Ten took over the right to adjudicate certain crimes, which had earlier been classified as under the jurisdiction of religious authorities (in the process re-conceptualizing them by applying the definition of *crimen leasae majestatis*), they notably did not secularize or decriminalize these activities. Instead, though they labeled

them differently, the Council believed that in prosecuting these behaviors, they were still disciplining malefactors in accordance with the strongly held religious values of their society. In a rural area of the Republic, in the Veneto Dolomites near Belluno, where accusations of witchcraft were presented before the secular tribunal, an unexpected collaboration between the local governor and the local exorcist created a useful bridge between the legal system and the sacramental domain from which the problem of witchcraft could be successfully addressed to the satisfaction of the secular court, the parish priest and, likely, the community itself.

Venetian authorities attempted to handle issues that were related to the sacred sometimes in conjunction with, and sometimes in opposition to the agendas of religious institutions. This process developed as the Roman Inquisition's power began to weaken, which allowed more room for the secular authorities as well as local clergy to deal with witchcraft. A decline in religious belief and differentiation of the secular sphere from religious institutions and norms are both core components of classical theories about secularization. However, the alleged, gradual process that emancipated the Western world (and the modern world) from the control of religious dogmas and practices no longer seems so obvious or straightforward. Religious and secular sensibilities were (and remain) inextricably bound together. Moreover, they mutually condition each other.

Religion was, as much as the other components of the Enlightenment, an essential element in the secularizing process. As Jonathan Sheehan argues, religion has been continually remade, and has been given new forms and meanings over time.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, perhaps we should look more closely at what role religion played during the

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2003): 1061-1080.

eighteenth century in the story of the origin of modernity. But to bring religion back into the equation is not enough. We must consider the secular powers as equally important because of the ways in which secular and religious concerns were interrelated. A deeper study of this relationship in the period of the Enlightenment is still needed.

If religion was an essential part of the Enlightenment because “the media of the enlightenment were fundamental structures through which new religious cultures and practices were created,” the opposite is also true.<sup>19</sup> Those existing structures could have been venues for changes as well as continuities. Secularization, even in the eighteenth century, was not an inevitable or linear historical process.<sup>20</sup> Beyond the usual avenues of research, in which the focus is typically on Inquisition documentation, different archival source material can also provide glimpses of institutions and practices whose relationship with religion was both complicated and diverse. An examination of that archival source evidence reveals that the Enlightenment should not be simply interpreted as the period when a distinctive form of religion was born (which continues to shape the present). Rather this was a period in which secular forces encroached upon the religious sphere, and vice versa, in a deliberate but hitherto unforeseen manner. These mutual encroachments confounded the boundaries between the sacred and the secular sphere in ways that have been little explored in modern scholarship.

In the eighteenth century, several attempts were made to reform popular piety in the Republic of Venice. In the second half of the century, in joint efforts, the State and the Church launched a last “crusade” against saints’ feasts. The abolition of saints’ feasts was, however, only part of wider discussions about religious practices and beliefs, the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1076.

<sup>20</sup> See on this topic, Jose Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *Hedgehog Review* 8 Spring/Summer (2006): 7-22.

goal of which was to re-define the confines of the spiritual world and limit access to the sacred, especially in local cults of the saints. Catholic reformers, influenced by Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Jansenist ideas, tried to reduce outward manifestations of devotion and spiritual enthusiasm. But the forms that popular devotions might take were contested territory. Jansenism, along with ascetic theology, played an important role in shaping the Catholic Enlightenment. The former movement was strongly and aggressively opposed to Baroque forms of Catholicism that were still prominent in European Catholic religious life. The latter served as foundations for the promotion of a personal relationship with Christ, and of abandonment to God's providence.<sup>21</sup> But sharp definitions cannot be so easily applied to indistinct situations. The roots of the changes are actually not as clear-cut as modern studies would have us believe. Tracing the origins of this new theology is complex. For example, while Giovanni Scaramelli, who belonged to the new course of theology and mysticism, could find inspiration in the Jesuit tradition, Muratori cannot be so easily characterized. Although Rosa places him within the new course of theology, Muratori was as much if not more deeply affected by Jansenist ideology.

While eighteenth-century Catholic practices are generally a neglected topic, for Italy and the Venetian Republic this is even more the case. Yet, Venice and the extensive territory that the city ruled in the northeast of Italy was an important area in Catholic Europe, where religious issues were hotly debated. This situation generated a wide range of documentation, from official views of the Church and governmental authorities, to the publications of reformers and intellectuals, and to the recorded perspectives of local clergymen and everyday people who were engaged in the religious enthusiasm and controversies of the time. This vast documentation constitutes the body of sources upon

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<sup>21</sup> Lehner, *The Many Faces*, 20-26.

which this dissertation is based. This study, then, attempt to fill a gap in the academic literature by focusing on topics which are usually investigated only by local historians or amateurs who are interested in folklore – and whose studies, though valuable, tend to be anecdotal in nature and limited in scope. My research has been conducted in state, parish, and diocesan archives in the Veneto, Friuli, and Lombardy, as well as in the Vatican archives. I use multiple sources from both religious and secular institutions, and contemporary published materials to analyze a range of discourses which occurred during the eighteenth century. Together, these sources provide much deeper insights into the religious culture of the eighteenth century than have been previously described. I also examine how the reform of popular forms of piety proceeded through negotiations, adjustments, and acts of dissent.

The first chapter, *Reform Begins: Enthusiasts and Opponents*, analyses the abolition of saints' feasts in the Republic of Venice and the intense debates revolving around this issue for a period of almost forty years. The second chapter, *A Venetian Anomaly: The Tied Hands of the Inquisition and the Negotiation of the Sacred*, examines the antagonism between the Venetian Inquisition and the secular tribunal of the Council of Ten over witchcraft and magic. Slowly but irreversibly, the Council of Ten took over from the religious tribunal the most important cases related to "abuse of the sacraments." This "technical" chapter lays the foundation for my discussion of witchcraft and magic prosecution at the institutional level and questions simplified narrative of secularization. The third chapter, *The Autumn of Magic*, examines forms of magical practices that were neglected in studies of the Early Modern period even when witchcraft and witch-hunting topics dominated the historiography. This chapter shows how deeply involved Venetians



of all social levels, clergy included, were in pursuing various goals through magic. Magic was so widespread that its pervasiveness in Venetian society made it difficult, and at times almost impossible, for the Inquisition to trace its numerous strands which threatened the city like a giant spider web.

In the fourth chapter, *Engaging with Demons: the Eight Sacrament*, I argue that exorcism was used as an alternative way to deal with accusations of witchcraft. In spite of the fact that the Church was trying to strictly regulate the practice, prohibiting the use of manuals published in previous centuries, and discouraging the use of exorcism by priests, the practice did not abate nor did the employment of prohibited handbooks of exorcism. The fifth chapter, *Don Antonio Rubbi: A Living Saint versus the Enlightenment*, focuses on the “living saint” Antonio Rubbi, who was a priest with the power to work miracles, a healer, and an exorcist. While reformers were claiming that the age of miracles was over – as (allegedly) was the practice of the faithful to appeal to saints as intermediaries for miracles, Rubbi was attracting thousands of pilgrims from all over Europe to the mountainous area north of Bergamo. The sixth and last chapter, *A New Image for a New Devotion: The Fleishy Heart of Jesus*, examines the rise of the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the debates that this devotion stirred within Catholicism. The heated controversy revolved around its iconographical representations. While images of the fleshy, anatomical heart of Jesus were perceived by the Jansenists as obscene and an ultimate Disrobing of Christ, the devotion, progressively sanitized in its representations, brought Christ to the center of Catholic devotional life again, and helped to move the much criticized cult of the saints to the margins. While examining how the ultimate

defining image of Christianity was so fiercely opposed and debated, I explore the thorny issue of the role of images in Catholicism.

This development of highly varied forms of devotional practices, some of which stupefied or even horrified European travelers when they encountered them, is also what led to several Christian practices that are still thriving in the world today. The Enlightenment was therefore a bridge between the religious cultures of the Early Modern period and our own time. Yet, when between 1962 and 1965 the Council Vatican II took place in Rome, the Church's goal was to respond to modern religious trends. Thus, part of what had remained unaccomplished in the Age of Reason became a focus once again. Presently, almost fifty years after the Council, the Church is still discussing what appears to have been a failed reform, or a reform that continues to be a work in progress. And while accommodations with certain modern desires still seem to be a distant but necessary goal for some, others today cry out for a return to the old liturgy which, they claim, conveys a sense of the sacred more powerfully. Again and again, the Church appears to curb the extremes of the spectrum and engages in conversations with advocates of both sides. And more importantly, the Church also continues to engage in ongoing conversations, more or less publicly, with many institutions of civic society, from political parties (of all ideologies) to Catholic and lay associations. If anything, the Enlightenment provided to people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries not a strategic plan for secularizing society, but models which reflect and perhaps may help us to shape the new and equally complex negotiations and intersections between the sacred and profane.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Reform Begins: Enthusiasts and Opponents

The years from 1758 to 1774 were the springtime of the Italian Enlightenment. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment ideas contributed to the sweeping secularization of Italian society. Elite intellectuals, as part of their laicization of education, urged the dissolution of the Jesuits, and endorsed a series of limitations and controls upon the other religious orders. The elites perceived an increasing gap between their own beliefs and those of the superstitious populace, and undertook a campaign to advocate reform in order to dismantle the ancient regime of the past. This period also witnessed moments of great tension involving matters of reform in the Catholic Church and the Italian states. Civil and religious societies were often opposed. Reforms and reform initiatives included the expulsion of the Jesuits; the transformation of schools; and debates about mortmain, the regular orders, papal power, the Inquisition, and censorship. During the 1760s, economists, geographers, historians, and politicians began to pay more attention to the problems of poverty, injustice, and inefficiency in Italian society. Although more moved by considerations of the wealth and power of the state than ideas of social justice or welfare, reformers denounced the backwardness of the dominant economic mentality and the “prejudices” which guided the conduct of the peasants, merchants, and tenants.<sup>22</sup> They called for learned men, who would propose scientific solutions designed to improve the material conditions of the peasants, to direct the reform of agriculture. They envisioned government as the instrument of change in the

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<sup>22</sup> Franco Venturi, “Church and Reform in Enlightenment Italy: The Sixties of the Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 2 (Jun., 1976): 215-32; and by the same author, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 5, *L’Italia dei lumi. La Repubblica di Venezia (1761-1797)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 94-120.

transformation from subsistence agriculture to production for the market. Newly-organized academies were to provide both the teachers and the ideas that would replace the current religious culture with one based on work and thrift.<sup>23</sup> As at the end of the sixteenth century, comparisons with Protestant regions were a constant refrain emphasizing the backwardness of Catholics. For the reformers, one of the reasons that Protestants had advanced economically was because they worked far more than the Catholics, which improved material conditions for both individuals and society.

The excessive number of feast days was regarded as a primary cause of economic decay. In the second half of the century, Italian state governments and the Church launched a joint attack against saints' feasts. Their attempted abolition of popular saints' feasts formed part of a wider discussion about religious practices and beliefs that was aimed at re-defining the boundaries of the spiritual world. In the eighteenth century, many aspects of Christian life were far from being clerically-dominated. This was especially the case with local cults of the saints, wherein devotees typically expressed their personal piety and accessed the sacred without direct clerical intervention. Villages, cities, and communities made independent choices in regard to which saints they celebrated, and why they were celebrated. Local saint's days and their feasts were annual reminders and renewals of the very particular relationships between saints and their communities. The Church began to call the cult of the saints a form of religious enthusiasm that diverted direct devotion away from God. But their main objection was

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<sup>23</sup> However, all those initiatives did not turn into programs of rational political and economic reform. For example, in the Republic of Venice, enlightened reformers discussed issues and developed an awareness of inadequacies in Italian society, but these intellectual pursuits were not translated into pragmatic action. The debates were like a kaleidoscope from which no well-defined initiative could emerge. The reformers created an atmosphere favorable for change but not a group capable of providing coherent, continuous, and consistent guidance for any practical programs. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 5: 132-90.

less about genuine affection shown for saints than certain decidedly non-religious behaviors that occurred during these celebrations. Thus, for differing reasons (reform of the economy for the secular elites and efforts to discipline religious behavior for the Church), authorities in the Church and in several Italian states worked together in the later eighteenth century to attempt a reform of old-fashioned, popular devotional practices involving the celebration of saints' feast days. Influenced by Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Jansenist ideas, these reformers tried to reduce outward manifestations of devotional practices. Despite those efforts, however, demonstrations of popular piety doggedly continued. The joint effort of religious and secular authorities to curb such practices did not result in quick and easy successes, and their long-term efforts did not last long beyond the end of the eighteenth century.

In the Republic of Venice – the area within Italy that will be the main focus of this dissertation, the attempted reform of saints' feasts ran an especially long and exhausting course. A virtual civil war raged among Catholics and within the patriciate over this issue. This conflict proved more disruptive and debilitating than certain, more obvious clashes between the Church and secular groups.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A valuable study about the reorganization of doctrine and the Church, political and religious interactions in Europe, and social and cultural forms and expressions during the Catholic Reformation is Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). By the same author, and also important, is *Society and Religion in Münster, 1535-1618* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), in which he analyzed the linkages between the Catholic upsurge and the larger transformation taking place within the estates of the empire; and *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550-1759* (London: Routledge, 1989), in which Hsia's focus is the promotion of confessional policy by the rulers of cities and territories to impose religious conformity upon their citizen and subjects. The book stresses coercion and persuasion in the formation of early modern confession. A good study about the making of a Catholic society through Marian congregations established by Jesuits is Louis Châtellier's, *The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). In *The Religion of the Poor: Rural Missions in Europe and the Formation of Modern Catholicism, c. 1500-c.1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Châtellier shifts his focus from urban Catholic elites to rural missions. In this latter book, the author highlights the increasing routine of pastoral and parish work in the countryside. For a challenge to and a criticism of the confessionalization thesis, in which the author describes the origins of Catholic

## The Cult of the Saints and Popular Devotion

Although secular and ecclesiastical authorities agreed that popular festivals needed to be drastically curtailed, uncertainties and doubts about how to handle this delicate matter plagued the Venetian authorities. The clergy openly disagreed among themselves about how to best deal with popular devotion. Bishops often supported popular saints despite papal bulls which condemned their feasts. Political and ecclesiastical authorities developed different ways of perceiving and dealing with popular religiosity. This disjunction between initiatives in the secular and religious spheres hindered an effective response to what in the eighteenth century came to be seen as a serious problem: unregulated popular religious beliefs and practices revolving around the cult of the saints.

Over the centuries, since the Renaissance period and then increasingly after the Council of Trent, the number of local saints had grown dramatically. In particular, healing saints became an important feature of village life. Unlike the official calendar, which with some variations remained virtually the same everywhere in Christendom, the liturgical calendar often varied from place to place. Saints' days were scattered mostly in the second half of the year, yet only a few of these were part of the official calendar. The majority were local, geographically delimited phenomenon. These religious rites helped to form community identities. Feasts and processions for local patron saints expressed the

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identity as essentially political in nature, see Marc Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of Baroque: Religious Identities in Southwest Germany, 1550-1750* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Forster's argument that culture is the result of an ongoing dialectic process between competing forces, groups, and different world views can easily be applied to Italian rural and urban contexts. However, in this chapter I analyze the last and more dramatic part of the reform, which occurred at the very end of the eighteenth century. The negotiations between competing groups about the nature of religious practices and the role of intermediaries, particularly the parish clergy, in the development of Catholicism within the Republic of Venice will be the subject of the next chapters.

inner fabric of a society – its hierarchy, its tensions, and its ongoing negotiations between social groups, both in urban and rural areas. While religious official feasts adhered to strict universal precepts that all Catholics had to respect, local devotional feasts did not simply commemorate the anniversary of the saints' deaths. They also celebrated particular and local vows that villagers and city people had made in the past, when the invoked saints had fulfilled the requests of their communities and worked miracles on their behalf. Feasts were therefore very numerous across the land precisely because they were local phenomena with precise functions for each community – they commemorated responses to particular pacts between a saint and his/her people, and particular miraculous events. Feasts were thus deeply intertwined with the history of villages and their inhabitants. But, the existence of so many local calendars with highly varied interruptions in work schedules and the peculiar devotions which occurred in many celebrations did not fit very well in the post-Reformation agenda of the Church and of many Venetian elites.

One of the first concerns of the early Protestant reformers had been to eliminate saints' days; this was an initial step toward the abolition of Roman Catholic practices entirely.<sup>25</sup> Their reform of the calendar was “an aspect of social discipline, an attempt to reduce drunkenness and idleness, the perverse by-products of the Church of Rome.”<sup>26</sup> More than two centuries later, in Catholic states, the termination of religious customs that interrupted the work routine lay at the core of the secular and ecclesiastical discourses about reform. According to the reformers on the Venetian mainland, the people tended to turn holy days into holidays; they transformed religious devotions into mundane and base

<sup>25</sup> Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62-87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

activities that jeopardized the soul. Drunkenness and idleness were the regrettable result, and these activities practically defined peasants, rustics, and workers in the minds of the reformers. This class, they claimed, under the pretext of religious devotion actually degraded religion and wasted their time in contemptible inactivity.

Ever since the fifteenth century, secular scholars and theologians had complained about the multiplication of feasts and holy days, claiming that they were detrimental to the poor and occasions for excesses. From the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Holy Days and Sundays in some dioceses amounted to more than one hundred days every year, not including the feasts which particular monasteries and churches celebrated. On 13 September 1642, Pope Urban VIII had issued the Bull *Universa per orbem*, which mandated a long-desired reduction of obligatory holy days, better known in Catholic Europe as *feasts of precept*.<sup>27</sup> Still, there remained 36 feasts and 85 labor-free days to be celebrated in the official calendar. Urban VIII had also turned the so-called movable feasts into obligatory feasts and limited the right of bishops to establish new Holy Days. However, despite his efforts, local feasts were added and kept accumulating beside the holidays already listed on the official universal calendar. The added holidays grew in number, and religious and secular authorities made no further, significant attempts to regulate their proliferation until the eighteenth century.

### **Muratori and Querini: The Intellectual and the Cardinal**

At the outset of the Italian Enlightenment, with the support and alliance of Pope Benedict XIV, Ludovico Antonio Muratori finally attempted to tackle this problematic

<sup>27</sup> The *festa fori*, or feasts of precept, were celebrated with double obligations, namely, to rest from work and to hear Mass. Frederick Holweck, "Ecclesiastical Feasts," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).



issue. Along with other enlightened Catholics and intellectuals, Muratori and Benedict XIV worked to bring about a long-desired reform of the saints' feasts. Though their effort served as a beginning to this process of reform, it also led to heated debates among ecclesiastical and lay intellectuals.

Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Angelo Maria Querini were the chief opponents in this dispute over the festivities. Muratori was an intellectual and director of the Modena Ducal Library.<sup>28</sup> His systematic style of research would make him one of the founders of modern medieval studies in Italy. Muratori became an accomplished and well-known scholar and a famous, although a prudent polemicist.<sup>29</sup> He was important not only as a historian, but also as the most influential and effective Italian intellectual of the early eighteenth century – a man who prepared the ground for the Italian Enlightenment (called the Catholic *Aufklärung*).<sup>30</sup> The civil and religious aspects of his thought deeply

<sup>28</sup> Muratori took minor orders in 1688 and was doctor of Roman and canon law by 1694. Right after his ordination in 1695, Muratori was appointed to a post at the Ambrosian library in Milan. As a young man, his interest in philological studies and antiquarian scholarship had been awakened by the Director of the Library of the Dukes of Modena, Father Benedetto Bacchini. In Milan, he completed the first volumes of his first major work, the *Anecdota* (Milan, 1697-1698; Padua, 1713), a collection of documents drawn from the Ambrosian collections. In 1700, on Bacchini's retirement, he returned to Modena to take over the directorship. From this point on, his life story is the story of his publications. See the introduction and the *nota bibliografica* in L. A. Muratori, *Opere*, eds. G. Falco and F. Forti (Napoli, 1966), xiii-xlv.

<sup>29</sup> Accused in his own time both of Gallicanism and Jansenism, Muratori never challenged Catholic dogmas and always considered himself a strict Catholic. Nevertheless some of his works regarding religion and piety were not published for many years, because they did not pass Vatican censure. To get published, Muratori had to modify, cut, and soften his extreme and boldest statements; see Muratori *Opere*, XXVI, 366, 929. Although overlap between Gallicanism and Jansenism was often quite strong, the two were not coterminous. Gallicanism is more specifically focused on the independence of the French Church from the authority of the papacy. In an extended sense, Gallicanism advocated the subordination of the Church to the State. Jansenism, although linked theologically and politically to both of these concepts, included them within much broader theological and spiritual matters. See Dale K. Van Kley, "Jansenism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, vol. 7, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–28; and Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 50-56.

<sup>30</sup> The expression defines the moderate approach to the Enlightenment which was pursued in countries like Germany and Italy, in their attempts to combine the principles of the new era with institutions that were still deeply religious and conservative. Mario Rosa, "The Catholic *Aufklärung* in Italy," in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, eds. Ulrich L. Lehner and Michael O'Neill Printy (Leiden,

inspired the reformers of the eighteenth century. Muratori was most famous for his polemics against tradition and scholasticism, his attacks on the failures of contemporary Italian society, and for his attempts to revive Italian culture.

Querini was a powerful cardinal, the Bishop of Brescia (one of the most important cities on the Venetian mainland), and a member of a principal Venetian noble house.<sup>31</sup> In 1723, he was elected Archbishop of Corfù. Pope Benedict XIII created him Cardinal *in pectore* in 1726, and he was installed as Cardinal and Archbishop of Brescia a year later. In 1730, Querini became the head librarian of the Vatican Library. He was also an influential political figure with strong connections both in the Veneto and at the Vatican.

In 1740, Muratori launched a campaign to reduce the number of religious festivals. He urged the bishops of Italian dioceses to join his efforts to reform popular devotion and to convince the Pope to regulate these practices more strictly.<sup>32</sup> For Muratori, concern for religion and welfare were inseparable; “the laws of religion,” he argued, “are in accord with” the laws of good government. He wished to turn a Machiavellian “reason of the state” to “the public good.” Before the topic became a

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Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 215-250; Peter Hanns Reill and Ellen Judy Wilson, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 28.

<sup>31</sup> Querini was born in Venice. He entered the Benedictine Order in Florence in 1695 and was ordained in 1702. From 1710 to 1714, he undertook extended educational journeys through England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. He corresponded and sometimes met with eminent scholars of his time, such as Bernard de Montfaucon, Isaac Newton, and Voltaire. Upon his return to Italy, he was made abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Rome and was charged with compiling the annals of the order. In 1747 and 1748, he again went on a journey through Switzerland and Bavaria. In these years, he also became a member of the Academies of Sciences of Berlin, Vienna, and Russia. His increasing differences with Pope Benedict XIV ultimately led to him being sent back to his diocese in Brescia, where he died in 1755. See Gino Benzoni and Maurizio Pegrari, eds., *Cultura religione e politica nell'età di Angelo Maria Querini. Atti del convegno di studi promosso dal comune di Brescia in collaborazione con la Fondazione Giorgio Cini di Venezia Venezia - Brescia, 2- 5 dicembre 1980* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1982); and Volker Hunecke, *Il patriato veneziano alla fine della Repubblica 1646-1797. Demografia, famiglia, ménage* (Rome: Jouvence, 1997); and also Giorgio Busetto and Matilde Gambier, eds., *I Querini Stampalia un ritratto di famiglia nel Settecento veneziano* (Venice: Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Muratori's works inspired Archduke Leopold II in Tuscany, who implemented some of the most effective and innovative Italian reforms at the end of the eighteenth century. Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 1, *Da Muratori a Beccaria* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 136-61. Venturi offers a lively discussion of the question.

widespread theme in the European Enlightenment, Muratori devoted an entire treatise to the concept of “Public Happiness” in 1749.<sup>33</sup> He argued that desire for the common good was more than just an extension of private interest because self-interest can be transformed into public happiness only by applying the laws and the institutions of civic life. Thus, by fostering economic and agricultural improvement, a better standard of living, and education, governments could eliminate poverty, abolish ignorance, and consequently eradicate superstition. For him, the dreadful conditions in which people lived, especially peasants, had to be a principal concern of both the State and the Church.

As early as 1712, in a letter written to his Jesuit friend Padre Paolo Segneri, Muratori presented his case regarding popular piety. He referred back to the Council of Trent to reassess the principles that had been established at that time: the “veneration of images or statues should not be veneration of the objects *per se* but of what they represent.” He continued, “If abuses should occur in worship, the Holy See was to abolish these once and for all.”<sup>34</sup> Muratori expanded this idea, declaring that devotion to images, relics, or even to saints and the Virgin were all a type of material devotion. He found that simple folk who were not educated in matters of dogma were easily moved to a kind of piety that he termed “Muscovite” (that is pertaining to the Orthodox Church). In other words, Muratori likened the forms of devotion to the saints as they were being practiced in Italy to the veneration of icons, as was done in Orthodox Christianity.<sup>35</sup> Hence, Protestants might fairly accuse the Catholics of idolatry. To counter this, he called for “a regulated piety.” Muratori felt that people wrongly attributed to the cult of the

<sup>33</sup> Luigino Bruni, *Civil Happiness. Economics and Human Flourishing in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 42-45. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della pubblica felicità. Trattato Economico Politico* (Venice: Antonio Zatta & Figli, 1789).

<sup>34</sup> In the Letter to Segneri, June, 20 1712. In Muratori, *Opere*, 346.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

saints and the cult of the Virgin those virtues and qualities that properly belonged only to God and Christ. The saints, their relics, and their miracles relied on the thaumaturgic and apotropaic powers that people wrongly believed saints' images and relics intrinsically possessed. The faithful addressed saints – lamented Muratori – with an excess of devotion that too easily shifted into error. They talked to paintings, images, and statues, thinking they were the *actual* saint: the faithful confused the representations and the simulacra with the real focus of piety, God. Saints were only intercessors, but people worshipped them as if they were God:

It would be useful to explain to the faithful the difference in the manner of invocations. In fact, we do not implore God as we implore saints. We pray to God because He gives us grace and delivers us from evil. We pray to saints [only] because they are in God's grace, and we ask them to intercede with God on our behalf and plead for what we need. These are two distinct formulae of prayers: to God, we properly say, 'Lord, have mercy on us, listen to us'; to the saints, we say, 'Pray for us.'<sup>36</sup>

His invective against what he considered to be Catholic idolatry shows quite clearly how Muratori more than sympathized with Jansenist ideas and harshly condemned superstitious faith, which he believed was concerned only with external devotion.<sup>37</sup> "External devotion" was indeed a loaded (and a contested) expression since it reflects an intellectual perception of devotional practices. It implies that the peasants' ignorant misunderstanding was the cause of their external devotion because they had forgotten about (or did not understand) that God supplied the saints' power to enact miracles and provide aid. Worse still, they were performing mechanical rituals without having or thinking about real belief in the deity.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Muratori, *dalle lettere al Segneri*, 349. All translations are my own.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 345-48. See more on this topic in the last chapter about the Sacred Heart.

<sup>38</sup> This topic will be analyzed/explored in the last chapter about the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

In early 1742, Muratori wrote a letter to Cardinal Querini in Rome, asking him to approach the Pope on this subject. Querini apparently agreed, but then changed his mind, and a bitter fight over the question ensued.<sup>39</sup> Querini was a learned and famous scholar in his own terms, and was in contact with personalities of the French Enlightenment such as Voltaire. However, in spite of these friendships, Querini was also a traditional and conservative cleric who did not favor advocating changes in popular devotion. Querini is interesting and somehow emblematic because he represents the ambivalences, the complexities, and the contradictions within the Church and its members in his time, regarding this debate about practices of devotion.

In the meantime, Italian and other European bishops were also appealing to the Pope, requesting his direct intervention in this matter. This further fueled the quarrel between Querini and Muratori. Charles III, the King of Spain, Naples, and Sicily, also petitioned the Pope.<sup>40</sup> These officials of Church and State were convinced that a simple change in the liturgical calendar could with one blow defeat the three problems of endemic poverty, disease, and starvation by increasing the number of work days. Backwardness was the word Italians used when comparing Catholic with Protestant countries. Thus, well before Max Weber lauded the Protestant work ethic as the spirit of capitalism and the key to its development, eighteenth century Catholic reformers had identified that very same work attitude which was thought to increase productivity in the

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<sup>39</sup> The heated discussion came to an end in 1749 when the Cardinal proposed reconciliation through a third person. These events are narrated in the letters exchanged between Muratori and his Tuscan friends between 1695 and 1749. *Lettere inedite*, Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Florence, 1854); see in particular 488, 510-516. For a portrait of Querini and his volatile personality, see Daniele Menozzi, *Il papa e il concilio ai tempi di Angelo Maria Querini*, in *Cultura religione e politica*, 477-94. See also Antonio Niero's essay in the same collection.

<sup>40</sup> A copy of this letter and the Pope's response can be found in the archives of Venice, along with other documentation about the festivals. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 3 January 1749.

Protestant world, and which Catholics seemed to lack. However, many bishops openly disagreed. Querini soon became the most active and vociferous opponent of reform. Their positions and motivations did not simply reflect their different personalities. This was a result of opposite approaches toward religious concerns and religious policies. The ensuing polarization of views exemplifies the complexity that the Church and secular authorities faced while attempting to guide popular piety and devotional practices.

For Muratori, the suppression of religious feasts was a way to eradicate folk customs and an efficacious way to relieve poverty. In his view, people who did not work during holy feasts squandered what little they had and ruined their families. This was especially disastrous for the poor. Outraged, Muratori thought the clergy both instilled and tolerated wrong forms of devotion for their own benefit, rather than trying to teach proper forms of pious expression. Clerics certainly did stimulate the imaginations and sentimentalism of people out of fear that they would otherwise abandon Catholicism. Muratori's sensitivity as a religious man and his rational stance made him indignant about clergy who almost deliberately deceived people in matters of faith. "Whoever acclaims miracles without proposing saints as models," he wrote, "thinks about his own profit and the profit of his church, rather than about the spiritual wellbeing of his flock."<sup>41</sup> Insisting that the clergy were exhibiting irresponsible and detrimental behavior, Muratori also underlined how convenience rather than orthodoxy was the underlying rationale for current forms of popular devotion: "Now, not only in some places, people are not instructed about the doctrine of the Trinity." There was a certain amount of fear to teach the basic Catholic tenets, he denounced, because that "would diminish the devotion towards Mary and the saints." Then, he rhetorically asked why it was so hard to try "to

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<sup>41</sup> Muratori, *Opere*, 934-40.

explain or correct certain *opinions that are not of the Church but rather within the Church* (the Italics are my own).<sup>42</sup> Here Muratori pointed out what he believed was the main problem troubling the Church: the difficulty lay not in the institution but rather in the fact that the institution contained members who might twist or erroneously interpret correct Catholic doctrine and practice. Muratori's perspective shows his inability to see what the nature of the problem really was: the plurality of opinions was not simply the result of a mistaken understanding about right versus wrong principles. Those who opposed his views within the Church were merely promoters with differing emphases in their methods of teaching and supporting faith. The Church was not monolithic, and change would not be unidirectional.

For Muratori, the popular craving for miracles was another symptom of misguided devotion. Churches were being turned into reliquaries that "performed" miracles. But such fierce polemics against the cult of the saints and the Virgin drew strong criticism, especially from Jesuits. Bishops and ecclesiastics in general regarded his ideas as a threat to the entire edifice of devotion. His proposal to celebrate the Mass in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, evoked particularly strong episcopal opposition. The clergy was not particularly interested in combating popular ignorance. Yet, Muratori argued that ignorance in matters of religious dogma could not be overcome if people did not understand the liturgy. In addition, he continued, current forms of devotion to saints were not modeled on the Council of Trent's pattern of *imitatio*; the saints were not upheld as exemplars of virtue, but rather were invoked for a variety of reasons, often including a search for material gains. Muratori claimed that, "People invoked saints for temporal benefits, to rid themselves of illnesses, to avoid storms, floods, fires, to pursue good

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<sup>42</sup> Muratori, *Dalle Lettere*, 349.

harvests, to win a quarrel, to have children, to have a nice trip, to be safe at sea, and so on.”<sup>43</sup> Specific saints, he said, specialized in healing people for different ailments. Each were considered to possess peculiar qualities and virtues. According to Muratori, the saints had come to look like a group of pagan divinities whose only aim was to garner human praise and honors. If angered or insulted, he explained, saints were believed to change from benevolent to vindictive creatures, who might withdraw their protection. Indeed, heavenly patronage seemed hardly distinguishable from the human version in the popular perspective. Saints had been humanized, and “people used them to get followers and friends, exalting their own saints over the others.”<sup>44</sup> For Muratori, this was worse than idolatry; it was paganism. Muratori sought to foster his own vision of true spiritual devotion and considered spurious and idle the phantasms of devotion, the paraphernalia of popular liturgical devotion, the religious symbols, and particularly the images of saints used by the common people.

Muratori religious concerns were coupled with his social and moral concerns. The man of religion was never separate from the reasoning intellectual reformer. He never stopped fighting his crusade for the poor. His battle against the popular feasts was meant to be a battle in favor of abolishing obligatory labor and against what he considered “superstition.” In *Della carità cristiana*, Muratori encouraged solidarity, since charity was a distinctive trait of Christian society. For him, to neglect living people’s needs in favor of the memory of the dead was merciless and uncharitable behavior. He saw in many devotional practices the absurd antagonism of care for the dead *versus* care

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 935.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 938



for the living.<sup>45</sup> However, his attachment to the learned Catholic entourage shaped and to some extent distorted his perception of popular religion. When he compared heavenly patronage to worldly patronage he made an important point, but he failed to see how deeply religious practices were linked with local political and social concerns.<sup>46</sup> That creative religious life, rather than being an empty and profitless shadow of popular piety, was an aspect of both urban and rural dynamism and dynamics: a distinctive trait that partially collapsed with the end of the *ancient régime*.

Muratori was not alone in denouncing the backward superstitions that competed with official faith. Yet, even though members of the aristocracy, intellectuals, and some clergy agreed with his views, they were still a minority. A significant sector of the elite and the people, including the majority of priests, still believed in miracles and favored local forms of devotion. For them, the risk was great that uprooting the old practices, beliefs, and customs would undermine faith but fail to uproot superstition. Without popular piety, without the cult of the saints, and without relics, processions, pilgrimages, and miracles, Catholicism would perhaps succumb to popular disaffection or indifference, or worse, yield to Protestantism. Querini and the others who opposed reform believed that the Catholic Church should never have become involved in these issues because, as Querini said, “God and the saints, as they always did, would look to protect the people in difficult times.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Muratori, *Opere*, 368-417.

<sup>46</sup> This is a concept that historians developed more than two centuries later. See Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> See Querini's letter to the Archbishop of Fermo, Alessandro Borgia, who was one of the first bishops to ask for the papal indult. *Lettera seconda del medesimo sig. cardinale al suddetto mons. arcivescovo*, January 1747, in *Raccolta di scritture concernenti la diminuzione delle feste di precetto* (Lucca: Nella Stamperia di Filippo Maria Benedini, 1752), 64.

But appeals to Providence as the only solution to economic problems were no longer practical, replied Muratori.<sup>48</sup> In the following years, debates about agriculture and economic crises surged in the context of the famine of 1763-67. This would be the last famine of such severity and scope in Italian history. The event left a deep mark on Italian life. Contemporary analyses of the disaster were published by scientists and political writers. For the first time, elites and intellectuals realistically considered the problem of how to overcome the age-old rhythms that led to insufficient harvests, famine, and death. Economic problems provided the biggest push for the reformers of the 1760s. Groups of reformers were eager to collaborate with the governing classes and sovereigns in order to enlighten them, so that the elites would enact the reforms they had proposed. The Republic of Venice was a center of discussion of these problems from the beginning of the 1760s, and issues concerning the Church and religion were a main focus for reform. In Venice, certain active Senate politicians such as Andrea Tron and Andrea Querini facilitated a debate between the partisans and the enemies of the Jesuits, and between the defenders of the privileges of the clergy and those who protested against those privileges.

Agricultural reform was the necessary complement to devotional reform, but economic reasons alone would not guarantee an official reform of piety. Some elite observers and clergy decried how people worshipped or practiced religion, and wanted to restrain and channel their ability to access and manipulate the sacred. In the fight against “popular errors,” attacks on superstitions and on worldly pursuits as profanations were at the forefront. This was an old *vexata questio*. Since the Council of Trent, the Church had tried to constrain popular piety and to limit its ability to flourish independently, outside ecclesiastical control. According to the less conservative members of the Venetian

<sup>48</sup> Venturi, *Church and Reform*, 215-32; and *Settecento riformatore*, 2:101-62.

aristocracy (who discussed whether and how to regulate local saints' festivals), devotional and liturgical changes had to go hand-in-hand with simultaneous political, social, and economic transformations. But a consensus was not easy to reach regarding the most important issues at stake: the reform of popular devotion, development of the economy, the relationship between the state and the Church, and finally, the revival of Sarpi's jurisdictionalism, which underlay most of these matters.<sup>49</sup> For example, regarding popular devotion and the economy, feasts, festivals, and fasts were closely entwined. A feast day was often at the center of prolonged festivities. In such cases, religious rituals such as attending church and perhaps fasting, formed components of larger festive events that frequently included gluttonous eating or excessive drinking. The economic damage both to the state and to families caused by the great number of feasts formed a recurrent, obsessive theme found in virtually all intellectual circles, journals, and essays.

In the mid to late eighteenth century, Venetian elites participated actively in the diffusion of Enlightenment thought and its modernizing programs, at least in the form of debates. The Venetian government founded and supported journals and academies that promoted and disseminated new ideas. Those gazettes reinterpreted economic ideologies in order to combat what reformers perceived as a stagnant economy in general and languishing agricultural production in particular. Physiocratic theories played a major role in journals such as *Giornale d'Italia* and in agrarian academies and political bodies. Agriculture came to be hailed as the most noble and useful of arts and inspired a new generation of reformers. Proposed reforms included introducing innovative systems of land rotation, addressing the desperate situation of the peasants, overcoming the inertia of

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<sup>49</sup> Sarpi and Venice's jurisdictionalism will be the topic of the next chapter.

the owners, and remedying the inadequate education of the masses.<sup>50</sup> One of the simplest ways to improve the economy was to ensure more work days to peasants and urban workers: by working more, they could better provide for the sustenance of their own families and contribute to the improvement of the state. This was the argument Muratori promoted, which was further developed by his followers.

But Querini doubted that people needed more time to work. His experience told him that artisans needed more business opportunities, rather than simply more time.<sup>51</sup> He attacked the bishops who called for indults to permit work during the holy days (an indult is a special and often temporary papal dispensation that allows a special exception to a Roman Catholic Church law), and accused them of working against Catholic dogma. He also urged them to disregard Urban VIII's Bull on the subject.<sup>52</sup> Thus, he launched a clear, if indirect, polemic against the Pope himself. In 1740, Benedict XIV had convened a plenary council to consult with Italian bishops about the regulation of feasts across Christendom (he continued to consult with the bishops about this issue after this council as well). In 1742, Querini wrote his first work on the subject, in which he proposed four different solutions to the problem. The first was simply to suppress some feast days; the second was to transfer the weekly feasts to Sundays; the third was to allow people to work after having attended Mass; and the fourth was to combine several feasts into one. Speaking of those who wanted to suppress some feast days entirely (and sparing not even the Pope), Querini branded them heretics in the service of Protestantism. He carried

<sup>50</sup> Venturi in *Settecento riformatore* has extensively addressed this topic. Academies and agriculture in the Republic of Venice are the main subject of a recent and detailed book by Michele Simonetto, *I lumi nelle campagne, accademie e agricoltura nella Repubblica di Venezia, 1768-1797* (Treviso, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Querini, *Raccolta di scritture*, 62.

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed explanation of Pontifical Indult, see Andrew Meehan in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

things so far that Benedict XIV mandated an end to the discussion in November 1748.<sup>53</sup>

Pope Benedict XIV was remembered in the chronicles after his death as the “Protestant Pope” because he was the one who started the process of reform.<sup>54</sup>

This debate concerning the reduction of holy days also revealed the broader ideological positions of the combatants. Muratori’s plea for the intervention of bishops revealed his episcopalism and his kinship with Jansenism. Querini, who did not want bishops to ask for such a reduction, strenuously supported papal centralism in this issue. He was referring of course not to the actual Pope, Benedict XIV – who promoted and was urging a change, but to those popes of the past who had honored and celebrated the feasts, and had condemned their transgressors. He openly opposed Benedict XIV, who turned out to be incapable of making a decision amid the variety of different and irreconcilable opinions among the bishops, and therefore left the matter completely in the hands of the bishops. For their part, the bishops each asked for specific indulgences for fewer saints’ days in their own dioceses *only if and when they wanted to limit the number of feasts*. Querini attacked Muratori and whoever defended reducing feast days, and accused them of conniving against papal dogma. Muratori replied that feasts were a matter of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and thus could be categorized as *changeable* discipline, not *unchangeable* dogma.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 1:160.

<sup>54</sup> See Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 1:161.

<sup>55</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, “Risposta di Lamindo Pritanio alla nuova scrittura dell’eminentissimo cardinale Angiolo Maria Querini intitolata La molteplicità de’ giorni festivi, 1748,” in *Scritti inediti* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1872), 277, 282. This work remained unpublished until 1872. Muratori revealed that Querini tried to bring the matter to the attention of the Holy Roman Inquisition, but nothing happened. This was reported in a letter sent to Muratori from Tamburini, a cardinal friend of his in Rome. He also added: “The Pope lamented the fact that Querini persisted in annoying humankind with this issue of the feasts.” It was after this episode that Benedict XIV imposed silence on the parties involved. *Ibid.*, 268-69. Lamindo Pritanio was the pseudonym Muratori adopted to hide his identity. As was noted above in n. 30, Muratori’s rational stance against popular forms of devotion, and his dismissal of popular practices

In a very interesting letter to the Archbishop and Prince of Fermo, Alessandro Borgia, dated January 1747 (Borgia had undertaken a reform in his own diocese), Querini disclosed a personal and hardly religious concern:

In all honesty, tell me please, if you really think that we bishops should like to ask for indults, owing to which we will be deprived of half of our profits, which constitute our income and essentially our table? I do not think so. You would hear our cries up to the stars, and all the bishops would demand the benefits that they had enjoyed for centuries, the offerings that believers have made to the Church, the practice of the universal church, and the decrees of the Holy See: all this to counteract such an unfortunate proposal.<sup>56</sup>

This rather undisguised, naked self-interest indicates that his objection was primarily financial since individual churches relied to some extent on these sources of revenue to function. However, Querini's reactionary stand additionally betrayed another enduring fear: that believers might lose their faith in Catholicism. Muratori replied to Querini's stolid optimism about how to solve economic and social crises by saying that Querini had no idea how people worked or what people did. It was one thing, continued Muratori, to work for a daily wage, something else to be paid for actual production. Most peasants labored day by day and desperately needed more days of labor. But Querini, "who was born, nurtured, and lived in grandeur could know nothing of our low atmosphere," he said.<sup>57</sup> He contended that those who sit too high cannot hear the people's voices.<sup>58</sup>

The *consultore in jure* Fra' Paolo Celotti in 1745 produced one of the earliest official Venetian government documents on the issues involved. This consisted of a

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related to the cult of the saints and their relics often put him in a difficult position so that he had to change and moderate his positions in order to avoid censure.

<sup>56</sup> Muratori, *Raccolta di scritture*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> "Difesa di quanto ha scritto Lamindo Pritanio in favor della diminuzione delle troppe feste," in *Raccolta di scritture concernenti la diminuzione delle feste di precetto* (Lucca: Nella Stamperia di Filippo Maria Benedini, 1752), 167.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

concise commentary on feasts. In perfect agreement with Querini, he declared that “to abolish saint feasts of devotion is impossible” because they “agree too much with the character of the people.”<sup>59</sup> He claimed that “people [were] particularly attached to their festivals, that abolishing them would certainly [provoke] rumors and scandals, and it would not [be] easy to convince them, even with papal authority, that discontinuing their communal vows to their protector saints would not [cause] misfortunes to the negligent communities.”<sup>60</sup> This was an important argument, which bishops who opposed the reform had also made. In tune with the people’s beliefs about what saintly protection was and what it entailed, these anti-reformers were afraid that those who worked on one of the abolished saint days would be visited with divine punishments: crops sown on that day would perish, and cattle might sicken as a result of men working and thereby offending a saint. According to Celotti, even the Pope’s resolution would have been considered arbitrary because it went against the Scriptures. The non-observance of the feasts, he argued, would make the believers afraid “of incurring calamities even greater than those they had escaped through their acts of devotion.” Even if some people did not honor holy days, the majority did. Celotti did not condemn popular piety. He contended that most of the devout made good use of their saint days: they celebrated them with earnest confessions, attended Communion, visited the churches to obtain indulgencies, and they were eager to hear sermons. In sum, they gathered in the churches to listen to the word of God and to the instructions of the catechism. Overall, the saints’ feasts were an institution

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<sup>59</sup> The *consultori* were both clerics and men of the law. They had the knowledge and the subtlety of theologians and the astuteness of politicians. They were well-trained in Roman as well as canonical law and were required to be experienced secretaries, notaries, or judges for the Venetian patricians who ruled the mainland. They were appointed by two of the most important political bodies of the Republic of Venice, the Senate and the Council of Ten.

<sup>60</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 216, February 9, 1746 more Veneto.

that benefitted and enhanced the spiritual life of the people. He therefore argued that the Republic should not interfere in the matter. At the end of his commentary, he quoted Querini and referred specifically to his ideas. Celotti concluded by saying that to abolish or lessen saint days would cause an undesired collateral effect, worse than any longed for positive outcome: the disaffection of the faithful toward saints and also toward religion.<sup>61</sup>

### **Montegnacco: An Advocate of Choice**

The question did not surface again for over a decade. In the interim, the issue of the feast days remained unsolved. There was a sort of unspoken truce between the religious and secular authorities – a truce in which those on both sides must have taken some care not to upset the delicate balance of forces. Celotti was by then an old man exhausted by his long career as *consultore* and his age. His last opinions, issued between 1746 and 1748, sounded more conventional and less aggressive than those made during his strenuous defense of Venetian prerogatives in the previous years.<sup>62</sup> But from 1746 on, the Senate had occasionally relied on the abilities of a young but capable theologian who gained full-fledged experience in the most troublesome area of the *Terraferma* (mainland): *La Patria del Friuli*. His name was Antonio Montegnacco. When the Venetian Senate decided to reopen the matter of the saints' days in 1756, he had been for

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<sup>61</sup> With Paolo Celotti and the other *consultori* who were appointed after him, tradition seemed to be renewed. Their contributions to Venetian policy with regard to jurisdictionalism, relations with Rome, and defense of state prerogatives were certainly influenced by Jansenism and Gallicanism. See Antonella Barzani, "I consultori," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 5, *Dalla Controriforma alla fine della Repubblica: il Settecento*, eds. Arnaldi e M. Pastore Stocchi (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1986), 192-99. In this particular matter, Fra' Paolo de' Servi (as Celotti liked to identify himself in honor of the other great and famous Servite, Paolo Sarpi), was particularly cautious and prudent. He did not consider popular devotion an affair in which the state should interfere.

<sup>62</sup> Aidée Scala, "Antonio di Montegnacco e i consultori in iure friulani del Settecento tra istanze sociali e questioni ecclesiastiche," in *Annali di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea* 12 (2006): 269-70.



six years the official *consultore* of the Republic. He proved to be a wise choice on the part of the state.

Montegnacco was a member, as was Celotti, of the glorious *consultori* who had been born, raised, and trained in *La Patria del Friuli*. The majority of the eighteenth century *consultori* were in fact from there (*friulani*), and the reason the Venetian Senate appointed them (it became a tradition) lies in the peculiar political and religious situation of the region. *La Patria del Friuli* was an enclave of feudal nobles who aggressively maintained many of their prerogatives within the Republic. In addition, Friuli was a land in between the Republic and the Austrian Empire: tensions and disputes over jurisdictional matters exploded frequently, and required expertise and dexterity in foreign (as well as domestic) law and canon law. A frequent thorn in the flesh was the Patriarchate of Aquileia, whose jurisdiction had extended over some Austrian dioceses since 1497, when Austrian Friuli was added to its territory. The ongoing conflicts between the Republic and the Austrian Empire ended in 1751 when the Patriarchate was suppressed by Pope Benedict XIV. Montegnacco had been appointed the official *consultore* of the Republic in 1750. His legal opinions and perspective on this matter contributed to a final solution of the complex issues involved.<sup>63</sup> The patriarchate was replaced by the two archbishoprics of Udine and Gorizia (both in the territory of the

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<sup>63</sup> Montegnacco's proposal to deal only with the Empress of Austria, Maria Teresa, and to dismiss or work around papal intervention (he refused to accept the appointment of an apostolic vicar in the Austrian territories) brought the Republic to a breaking point in the diplomatic relationship with the Holy See in June 1750. The powerful and well-connected Cardinal Querini was therefore sent to Rome to intercede with the Pope. The relationship between Rome and Venice then restarted with more direct papal intervention on the matter than Montegnacco desired. Nonetheless, he was the one who urged the translation of the patriarchate to the Venetian territories, and his strong positions on the Venetian prerogatives re-fueled Venetian jurisdictionalism. Saints' days aside (in this matter, as we have seen, the old *consultore* Celotti had decided on a policy of non-intervention), Celotti had preceded Montegnacco and had re-launched the revival of Venetian jurisdictionalism, which is the topic of the next chapter. See Scala, 274-74 and Barzazi, 195-96.

Republic of Venice). Thus, when the issue of the saints' days reappeared again in the agenda of Venetian policy, Montegnacco was well prepared to deal with such extraordinarily thorny issues.

Montegnacco analyzed all the documentation then existing on the subject: writings from the *Inquisitore alle Arti*; dispatches from Venetian ambassadors in Vienna, Rome, and Naples; reports of what foreign princes had requested and obtained; and the opinions of bishops.<sup>64</sup> Finally, he sketched out the anticipated result if such measures were applied.<sup>65</sup> After dismissing the plan of shifting the saints' feast days to Sundays, and arguing that the memory at least of the feasts had to be retained, Montegnacco recommended that the Church should not require people to work on those days. The clergy still had to celebrate the suppressed feasts in the same way on Sundays and as more solemn festivals were observed. He went further, adding:

The priests, those who used to communicate with their parishioners every week, in order to honor Sundays and other important festivals, will announce the new course of things when the people are released from the obligation to work. It seems to us that public mercy should allow people to decide whether or not they want to honor those days in the manner that suits the personal devotion of each one, which can be more or less intense, whether they work or do not work, and keep shops and workshops open or not. In fact, there would then be a reduction of feasts that are no longer obligatory holy days.<sup>66</sup>

For Montegnacco then, popular celebrations would become a matter of choice on semi-holy days. Openly disagreeing with the Counter-Reformation tendency to regulate all forms of popular piety, he asserted that "the less pious and less religious should not feel guilty if they got some rest or amusement, while the poorest artisans and peasants on

<sup>64</sup> Venetian magistrates responsible for the proper government of Arts, Guilds, and provision of food.

<sup>65</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, f. 560, c. 647.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 655. I thank Fabiana Veronese for having brought this *consulto* to my attention.

the other hand should not complain that they have less time to work.”<sup>67</sup> He concluded by saying that it was one thing to appeal to the power of the state to force people to celebrate holy days in proper and orthodox ways, but something else entirely to force them to work.<sup>68</sup>

Montegnacco held a more complex view about popular devotion than the *consultori* both before and after him. His training as a fine theologian and a scholar complemented his pastoral ministry. After completing his studies in Udine, Montegnacco was entrusted with some important tasks by the patriarch Dionisio Dolfin. He became part of the prestigious Academy of Science in Udine and took part in the important synod of Aquileia in 1740.<sup>69</sup> From a simple consultant, Montegnacco became one of the main contributors in the synod. But what really made the difference was that Montegnacco had been the head of the important parish church in Tarcento from 1730. His experience therefore combined a variety of different offices. He was not only an erudite who could deal with diplomatic as well as political issues, but also a parish priest who was taking care of his flock. He knew what the celebration of feast days meant for the faithful and foresaw their reactions. Although his early years remain to some extent unknown (and he expressly wanted to keep that time a secret since, as he allegedly reported, “there was really nothing worthy to be mentioned in it”), it is clear that despite his humble origins Montegnacco climbed the ladder in his ecclesiastical career by expanding his capabilities

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> This may seem quite unusual for Montegnacco, who was one of the most aggressive *consultori* of the last Repubblica and a strenuous defender of Venetian jurisdiction versus Church interference. In fact, this was a moment of exquisite subtlety in his activities, as I will later emphasize. For a short but efficacious analysis of the *consultori*, see Antonella Barzani, *I consultori*, 179-99. For a more recent and detailed study, see Scala, *Antonio di Montegnacco*, 255-89.

<sup>69</sup> Scala, *Antonio di Montegnacco*, 272-73. Giuseppe Trebbi, “Antonio Montegnacco,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (here after DBI), Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 76 (2012), *ad vocem*.

with experiences beyond the intellectual and political arenas. That gave him a wider perspective and the ability to analyze the would-be reform of saints' days.

On the particular issue of how to coerce people to work, a gap had opened between the state and ecclesiastical arguments and positions. Theologically, bishops and popes could not be as harsh, as sharp, or as clear-cut in maintaining that people had to work on the days of the suppressed feasts. That position would suggest the transformation of a religious precept into a worldly one. The Pope and bishops could forbid or ban markets, open taverns, and profane activities during holy days, as they had done many times before (albeit without success), but they could not oblige people to work or not work, nor could they call for the state to do so. Here, Montegnacco was clearly referring to an edict of Benedict XIV, stating that on non-obligatory holy days, “everyone must attend Mass and the other liturgical ceremonies, but each is free to decide about tending to family affairs or work.”<sup>70</sup> Even during feasts of patron saints, the Pope guaranteed a certain freedom of action by suggesting that people “participate in Mass and by asking them *to try* to abstain from servile work.” It was to be a matter of free will, not of obligation.<sup>71</sup>

Montegnacco, a clever and far-sighted counselor with the valuable experience of a parish priest, knew that Benedict's project to delegate the question to the bishop of each diocese was not going to work. He strongly recommended to the Venetian Senate that “patron-saint celebrations aside, which differ in each diocese, the Prince should intervene

<sup>70</sup> “In reliquis festis [...] per vos commutari volumus praeceptis praescriptisque sacro sancto Missae sacrificio intersint; ceterum negotii familiaribus servilioribusque suis operibus sine ullo prorsus conscientiae scrupolo incumbere integrum cuique esto.” ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 12 December 1748.

<sup>71</sup> [...] volumus et praecipimus die tum Missae sacrificio adesse, tum a servilibus operis sibi temptare, (Italics mine.) Ibid.

to get a uniform indult so as to avoid liturgical differences in the same region.”<sup>72</sup> State authorities could therefore embark on a critically important initiative, which would result in a new religious configuration: local liturgies would give way to a universal liturgy. This encroachment of state power on religious matters would significantly reduce the local power that bishops had exercised in the past in the provinces. We might speculate about how much of that power they actually exercised in this particular matter, given the diversity of temperaments, different ideas about expressions of popular devotion, simple devotion itself among potential participants, and also geographical disparities. It was one thing to be the head of a diocese in the city, another to deal with the more or less far away countryside. The mountain areas were yet another cultural sphere altogether.

Montegnacco discussed at length the pros and cons of state involvement in religious issues. Official rhetorical strategies were a common tool for theologians in the service of the Republic. Their specific task was to disentangle delicate issues of *mixti-fori* while analyzing facts and making decisions, namely those matters which involved state and Church alike.<sup>73</sup> These matters fell squarely between the religious and the secular. *Consultori* typically defended the Republic from what might be perceived as the illegitimate interference of ecclesiastical authorities in matters of state sovereignty.

In this situation, Montegnacco composed an unusually long historical narrative in order to justify state intervention in a supposedly “religious realm.” He went back as far as Plato’s *Republic*, naming all the kings, emperors, and princes who in the past had intervened to regulate popular piety. He quoted Grotius, the Dutch jurist, who wrote about natural law, and finally Botero, who theorized about *raison d’État*. With this

<sup>72</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 560, cc. 657-658.

<sup>73</sup> The *mixti fori* will be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapter.

historical preamble, he was building a solid theoretical background to support his argument to counteract the long period of acquiescence of the Venetian authorities on the issue. As we have seen, the *consultore* Celotti did not bother to examine in legal terms state intervention since he strongly urged the state to avoid it. The Republic of Venice had a longstanding tradition of aggressiveness in its relations with Rome that had cooled during the second half of the seventeenth century but was revived after 1750.<sup>74</sup>

Montegnacco's plea of legitimacy signaled that bolder new stance and pointed out that:

The majority of the faithful do not respect the holy days. In cities and villages alike, only a handful attends Mass. Even fewer attend religious services, and a great many abuse those days by spending them in whatever ways they please. Worldly distractions abound everywhere; casinos and taverns are open all day long; and people work even more on feast days, not to mention the fact that most business revolves less around necessity than luxury. While the evening Office is sung in church, outside the church, in the square, spectacles are performed, and taverns distract people from going to catechism and to religious services as they should. In the villages, then, abuse is usual; people mill, drive their hay-wagons, and set public markets in front of the church on Sundays, just when Mass and the offices are being celebrated in church. People get drunk, and it is not surprising on those days that they commit more crimes and murders than they usually do.<sup>75</sup>

This short excerpt contains the principal arguments that the reformers used to legitimate and justify the abolition of feasts. Profanation and desecration of the Catholic religion were the rationale that reformers used to propel reform. The argument that

<sup>74</sup> For the story of the Venetian Interdict in 1606 and the events surrounding Paolo Sarpi's life, see Sarpi's *Historia del Concilio Tridentino*. The illuminating studies on Sarpi by Gaetano Cozzi are still among the most valuable contributions to this question. See also on the subject William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter-Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), and by Erich Cochrane, *Italy, 1530-1630* (New York: Longman, 1988). See also Eric W. Cochrane, "Counter Reformation or Tridentine Reformation? Italy in the Age of Carlo Borromeo," in *San Carlo Borromeo: Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second half of the Sixteenth Century*, eds. J.M. Headly and J.B. Tomaro (Washington D.C.: Folger Books, 1988), 31-46. The Republic was not only firm in maintaining state neutrality; until the first half of the eighteenth century, the state also kept a low-profile politically. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 1:272-354; and by the same author, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 2, *La chiesa e la repubblica entro i loro limiti (1758-1774)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976).

<sup>75</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 560, cc. 649-650.

Muratori had raised about the cult of the saints as a form of idolatry – a form worship that had expanded at the expense of devotion to Christ and God – was toned down. It was too close to Jansenist ideas and incompatible with people’s beliefs and practices. In order to attack the cult of the saints, the better way to go without entering theoretical debates and encountering fierce opposition or misunderstanding was not to argue that the cult of the saints was *inherently wrong* (since devotion to them was of a different nature than devotion to God) but that it was *accidentally wrong* because of people’s intemperance.<sup>76</sup> To bypass this theological conundrum, the Church was already using a different strategy: the marginalization of saints was taking place as the controversial devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was growing. But to pursue the abolition of the feast days was still premature – and despite this shift in the *consultore*’s stance (and in the political milieu of his time), the debate stalled again in another lethargic impasse.

### **Pesaro and Foscari: State Intervention**

For more than ten years after Montegnacco’s initial intervention, the push for reform of popular devotion to the saints languished. For a decade, from 1758 to 1769, Clement XIII sat on Saint Peter’s throne; he was, quoting Franco Venturi, “the last dried-up and miserable incarnation of the Counter-Reformation popes,” a man “ruled by a

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<sup>76</sup> Among the many texts written in opposition to Muratori’s arguments, the *Difesa dell’illibata divozione de’ fedeli* (published in Venice in 1759) is particularly interesting in this discussion because a vast section of the work was devoted to the cult of the saints. The author, Constantino Gaudio, inserted the part dedicated to saints into a sort of “hierarchy of devotion,” designed so that the faithful could not mistakenly attribute to saints what pertained to God. To compare idolatry to the cult of the saints (which is instead *dulia*) was a mischievous and utterly improper (and unorthodox) action on Muratori’s side, argued Gaudio. That comparison contradicted Catholic dogma. Gaudio possessed, beyond religious zeal, also familiarity with the Scriptures and an interest in theological subtleties that Muratori did not share. Although the devotion to particular saints can be considered a voluntary matter, emphasized Gaudio, the devotion toward saints in general was necessary. Hence, devotion to the saints was part and parcel of Catholicism and not just a complementary aspect that could be dismissed or undermined. Constantino Gaudio, *Difesa dell’illibata divozione de’ fedeli, assunta contro di Lamindo Pritanio* (Venice: Pietro Savioni, 1759), 47-227; 57.

narrow family mentality.” He was a pope who was completely “unaware of what was beginning to emerge in the world, closed within those religious forms and traditions which for some time had found their clearest expression in the Society of Jesus.”<sup>77</sup> The election to the papacy of Clement XIV coincides with a renewed interest which the Venetian authorities expressed in the feasts. Then, in 1768, Francesco Pesaro and Sebastian Foscarini, two remarkable young magistrates who took a leading role in promoting Venetian reform, raised the argument of the abolition of the feasts yet again.<sup>78</sup> These ambitious and audacious young members of the Venetian patriciate thoroughly prepared the ground for their uniquely Venetian approach to the subject: a combination of secular initiative and ecclesiastical cooperation. They paved the path that state intervention would eventually take. They dismissed as confusing Benedict XIV’s plan to maintain half holy days. Instead, they proposed shifting holidays to the following Sundays as the only feasible way to address the question. For Pesaro and Foscarini, a true feast *must* possess a double obligation: to rest from worldly labor and to hear Mass. They felt that the half holy days idea was an ambiguous definition which would have conveyed a misleading message. Many agreed. People were accustomed to rest during holidays. Since the Middle Ages, bishops’ edicts were issued before any feasts to remind Catholics that no work was permitted during holy days. The transgression of this religious rule

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<sup>77</sup> Because of the different Venetian calendar, 1768 corresponds to 1769. Venetian dating was called *more veneto* and postponed by two months the end of the year, which was therefore celebrated in February. Venturi, *Church and Reform*, 222.

<sup>78</sup> ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalistis*, fz. 105, 29 January 1768. In their political plan, they did not hide their admiration for French Gallicanism and the way French bishops handled “the issue of religious feasts,” independently from any papal intervention. Sebastiano Foscarini had been *Riformatore dello studio di Padova*, a position in which he secularized schools and education; he was the nephew of Doge Marco Foscarini, a great reformer himself. Francesco Morosini distinguished himself in the battle to reform the artisanal guilds and the asphyxiated Venetian economy. In 1769, they were appointed respectively as *Savio Grande* and *Savio di Terra*, offices that allowed them to participate actively in the process of reform. Later on, they would occupy important diplomatic offices in Rome and Vienna. Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 5: 31, 137, 138, 190.



involved punishment and the payment of fines.<sup>79</sup> With the introduction of the half holy day, people would be confused and would too readily miss Mass to work the entire day, or on the contrary, would amuse themselves after services. The suppression or the shifting of holidays would instead offer the easiest solution, if also the most drastic one. While most of the bishops preferred a middle way solution that would give people the freedom to attend or not without lessening the number of feasts, the Venetian secular authorities were now opting for moving the feast days to Sundays: in this manner, devotion would also be focused more on Christ than on the saints.<sup>80</sup> The *consultori* analyzed in detail how the various types of reform had been implemented in other states, both in Italy and beyond, in order to use those examples as a way to convince the Holy See to accept the translation of the feasts within Venice's territories. In the meantime, the ambassadors of the Republic were conducting ongoing negotiations with the Holy See to reach an agreement on the feast days.

Up to 1768, the magistrates and *consultori* had discussed all feasts, including those that were not obligatory but were celebrated as if they were obligatory. These latter feasts were the popular saints' feasts. This was not an insignificant distinction. Feasts of precept (obligatory holy days) and popular feasts (so called feasts of vow, feasts of devotion, and feasts of consuetude) belonged to two different categories. While the secular authorities could arrange and change feasts of devotion with the collaboration of the bishops, any alterations in feasts of precept required the direct intervention of the Holy See.<sup>81</sup> What was really at stake was the excessive number of the popular feasts

<sup>79</sup> ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalisticis*, fz. 105, 29 January 1768.

<sup>80</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure, Scritture sopra varie importanti materie*, fz. 265. *Consulti* by Dalle Laste.

<sup>81</sup> The *consultori* appointed at that time were Giovanni Battista Bilesimo and Antonio Ricci. ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514.

which had originated outside the official liturgical calendar. Thus in 1772, the Venetian Senate decided to carry out a controversial survey designed to enumerate the number of local saints' feasts celebrated in the Republic.<sup>82</sup> It was the first step toward the reform, and since the clear agenda was to curb most of them, the clergy (who were in charge of gathering the information about all the saints' feasts celebrated in their parishes and surrounding territories) initially boycotted the enterprise.<sup>83</sup> Most of them in fact wanted to maintain the feast days as much the people did. When they finally agreed to collaborate, several hundreds of letters from every corner of the Dominion arrived in Venice. These provided evidence of the inflated number of feast days celebrated in the entire Republic. Since the Senate was working on holy days of obligation as well as on popular saints' feasts, which was a dangerous as well as an ambitious task, the *consultori* felt compelled only later (in August 1784) to define the nature of both for the first time. This was the recognition of two distinct spheres, and it came curiously at the end of the most difficult phase of the negotiations for the reduction of the feasts of precept. Foscari and Pesaro expressed the conviction that all feasts had to be abolished, especially the popular feasts, and that the state had to take the initiative to do so. Nonetheless, they recognized that state intervention would not suffice.

To effect change in this delicate realm of popular piety, the secular authorities required episcopal collaboration. While the state could set up the framework and decide the content of reform, bishops had to provide the modalities: the ways of proceeding and

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<sup>82</sup> When in 1771-1772 the Venetian Senate had commissioned the survey of customary religious holidays, the clergy found themselves in an awkward position: they were mediators between their communities and more remote powers. The result of this investigation has been published. See Simonetta Marin, ed., *Il culto dei santi e le feste popolari nella Terraferma veneta. L'inchiesta del Senato veneziano 1771-1772* (Vicenza: Angelo Colla Editore, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> At first, they simply did not comply, and it took a second command of the Senate to secure their unwilling collaboration, see Simonetta Marin, "Santi e uomini: destini oltremondani e terrestri," in *Il culto dei santi*, lxxv-lxxix.

applying reforms, and decisions about when and where to apply the reforms. According to Foscarini and Pesaro, people would never accept such intrusions on the part of state authorities into religious affairs. Thus, bishops had to play a key role in convincing and educating the people to accept novel forms of devotion. In the end it must be, “a matter of ecclesiastical discipline.”<sup>84</sup> Pesaro and Foscarini also suggested that in order to achieve a greater consensus among the bishops, it made sense to ask the Archbishop of Udine and the Patriarch of Venice to speak to the other bishops of the Dominion and to urge a common solution.

### **Natale Dalle Laste**

At this moment, a new *consultore in jure* attempted to implement their combative stand: he was the right man at the right time. In 1769, Natale Dalle Laste succeeded Antonio Montegnacco. He was in charge of examining the result of the investigation in 1773. Dalle Laste was a theologian and a Latinist. His talent for composing prose and verse both in Italian and Latin made him famous both in Veneto and in Italy. He taught in Padua but tired of being at what he saw as the center of envy, intellectual rivalry, and resentment. Thus, he left to teach literature, logic, metaphysics, and natural, civil, and political law in a private school in Ceneda. He also composed pedagogical treatises and continued his literary endeavors. Before undertaking the tasks of a historiographer for the University of Padua and then of *consultore* for the Republic, he had pursued an academic career.<sup>85</sup> Dalle Laste was an “all-round” intellectual. His perspective on the saints’ feasts clearly exemplified the distance between the erudite and

<sup>84</sup> ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalisticis*, fz. 105.

<sup>85</sup> Paolo Preto, “Natale Dalle Laste,” in *DBI*, vol. 32 (1986), *ad vocem*.

the popular stances that the reformers were explicitly underlining. In a word, his selection was wholly appropriate for their purposes.

He found that the situation was worse than he imagined. The results of the state survey of holy days abundantly demonstrated that every community celebrated numerous “extra” holidays of devotion. Most were local festivals conducted by communities, cities, groups, confraternities, and families in keeping with ancient (*ab immemorabili*, as documents call them) vows or devotions. They had been celebrated for years, for decades, for centuries. Since Urban VIII’s Bull in 1642, they should have been considered illicit festivals, as none had been approved by bishops or popes. Yet they continued to be practiced, as responses to popular needs.

In this particular matter, bishops did not need a pope’s authorization to intervene, reduce, eradicate, or suppress. Theoretically, they could independently decide on how to deal with popular piety. A few bishops had already suppressed some feasts. But the majority desired to preserve the *status quo*. Both ecclesiastical and secular authorities played for time, because no one wanted to take the first step. Muratori had recognized and addressed both the economic and religious issues at stake. Reluctantly, and later in comparison to other European and Italian states, the Venetian Republic finally decided to intervene, as they had been pressed into action by the most enlightened members of the patriciate – men who were actively involved in the process of reform. As soon as the process of reform began, the Venetian Republic had to seriously refer to and relate their proposal to the Bull of Urban VIII. The Bull not only *indirectly* allowed Venice to abolish popular feasts since these were not *true* holy days of obligation, but also permitted the authorities to suppress all feasts of precept that did not appear on Urban

VIII's list, as well as those that were not properly celebrated. Now Natale Dalle Laste could provide the Republic with the legal and theological arguments to launch this ambitious operation, which deliberately initiated reform without the approval of the Pope.

The various positions held by the Venetian aristocracy and the clergy were highly complex. What emerges is a complex picture of a variety of situations affected and the difficulty of forging an agreement among the bishops. The Papacy was not well placed to take charge of the affair. The heated polemics had convinced Benedict XIV in the previous three decades not to make a decision for the universal Church. If it was impossible to reconcile the different opinions among the bishops of the same state, how was it possible to envision uniformity throughout Catholic Europe? By offering the bishops the right to ask for indulgences and to decide which model they considered best for their dioceses, Benedict had left the question unresolved. His indecisiveness led to quibbles, strenuous quarrels, and litigations among religious and secular authorities and within the member of the patriciate itself.

Dalle Laste's strong opposition to popular forms of devotion did not facilitate matters either. When Montegnacco wrote of his opinions, he never used the term *superstition* because in doing so he would have stepped onto rather dangerous ground. Nor did he venture any judgments or assessments about popular piety. Natale Dalle Laste chose a different strategy. When he analyzed the results of the survey, he employed all of his skills with satire against popular devotion to the saints. The bizarre names of many of the religious feasts aroused his contempt. About the records, he said, "one can get the sense of the infinite distraction of the subjects." Then he reported the reasons for the existence of the feasts in the popular devotional landscape: contagions, epidemics, both

of human beings and animals, storms, fires, floods, falling mountains, fights between communities and villages, liberation from rats, from locusts, from ants. All of this was based in “vulgar traditions;” all of it demonstrated “the profane interest in worldly things;” and all of it proved that saints were invoked “for protection from physical pain” and for seeking “prosperity.” Popular attitudes about saints’ feasts revealed the grossness of the humble people, the simple reality being that popular devotion was nothing more than “opportunistic, insincere piety.”<sup>86</sup> As *consultore*, Dalle Laste had read the thousands of letters collected by the clergy, and he based his evaluation on these. But in the end, his strong and open condemnation of popular piety and his oppositional stance throughout (that combined pity and mockery) alienated potential political allies and ecclesiasts who might have supported his religious reform. Consequently, he wound up casting additional obstacles into the path of those who attempted to use diplomatic efforts to find a solution for the obligatory holy feasts.<sup>87</sup> Though this was ultimately a matter for papal decision, in its effort to settle Church and state differences, the Republic’s public attitude toward saints’ feasts was extremely important. If the Holy See felt that the Venetian Senate policy about popular devotion and popular feasts was too aggressive, this would have generally undermined negotiations about the days of obligation.

The violent, iconoclastic invective of Dalle Laste echoed centuries of theological discourse – and intellectual snobbery – by calling for a form of devotion that was based upon internal religious experience rather than something external. Ever since the late Middle Ages, intellectuals and clergy had attacked miracles, images, relics, paintings, and

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<sup>86</sup> ASV, *Consultori in iure*, Scritture sopra varie importanti materie, fz. 265.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

reverence for the representation of the sacred.<sup>88</sup> This was one of the most debated theological issues in the long history of the Church.<sup>89</sup> Although they did not go so far as to express full-fledged skepticism or total rejection of the possibility of miracles, Scholastic theologians had attempted to provide a more rational basis for the faith through a systematic analysis of miracles, while also voicing doubts concerning the nature of it. Their attempt to limit recognition of miraculous phenomena reflected a “growing discomfort with alleged supernatural intervention.”<sup>90</sup> Theologians – worried that relics, reliquaries, altarpieces, or statues might become idols – continued to warn that God was best approached without images and material objects. Intellectuals of the Middle Ages, like those who came after them, continuously drew attention to unsubstantiated beliefs and irrational practices of the people.<sup>91</sup> Thus, heretics and non-believers were not alone in regarding with some skepticism or even some disdain such excessive devotion to the material manifestations of the sacred.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> We may recall here Boccaccio’s tales and how he brilliantly exploited fake miracles for comic effect, as well as people’s gullibility and ingenuity. In doing this, he offered a full portrait of popular devotion, which was more accurate, perhaps, than the contemporary chronicles. Humanists and reformers such as Erasmus and Calvin exhibited a critical attitude toward contemporary superstition, especially identified in the cult of the saints. See Muir, *Ritual*, 125-200.

<sup>89</sup> This subject will be more extensively treated in the chapter dedicated to the living saint and the Sacred Heart.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Goodich, *Miracle and Wonders. The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1550-1350* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 27.

<sup>91</sup> See Peter Dendle, “The Middle Ages Were a Superstitious Time,” in *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*, eds. Stephen Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby (New York: Routledge, 2008), 118-20; Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century. Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 152-55; Daniel E. Bornstein, “Relics, Ascetics, Living Saints,” in *Medieval Christianity. A People’s History of Christianity*, vol. 4, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress 2010) 97 75-108; Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 2, 26-31, 46-54; and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>92</sup> However, skepticism and mockery were the other side of the coin, and the Church was as concerned about such expressions of religious irreverence as they were about religious enthusiasm or superstitious practices. Chaucer’s narrative poetry and Boccaccio’s novellas, for example, tell stories about people’s credulity, mordant or salacious, and perfectly represent the complexity and the layers of medieval religiosity. It is not coincidental that, as Michael Goodich pointed out, many miracle stories were intended to warn those who would show disdain for the saints or those whose faith had grown cold. Contemptuous

Dalle Laste embraced rational religion and linked it to the *ragion di stato* (Machiavelli and Botero's *Reason of State*). He wanted to eradicate all reminders of the hopefully soon-to-be abolished saints' feasts. Dalle Laste's words call to mind the Protestant iconoclastic intolerance toward saints and their representation:

In order to break the idiotic and materialistic people of their habits – people who are enchanted by material objects, it is necessary to take away from every church and from every district any sign, any mark, any invitation, and any enticement to the abolished festivities. The saints will be celebrated on week days with the normal services. This worship of the cult of the saints was established long ago by the Apostolic Roman Church. Let this be sufficient for people in observing all their wished-for acts of piety. Hence, altars will be adorned only with the decency required by the sacred rites and mysteries. The ringing of bells will be prohibited, as well as music, processions, the display of relics, solemn masses and vespers; and even more importantly, fairs, markets, and taverns with tables outside. In this fashion, when all the allurements are taken away, the devout curiosity of people, along with their affection for popular practices, will cool.<sup>93</sup>

To strip away what made the saints' feasts special to the people was radical surgery in a Catholic society which traditionally reserved a special place for the cult of the saints. Devotion to the saints was expressed everywhere: in the parish churches where saints' relics were venerated, where their statues were displayed, and where their paintings were hung. Parish churches, as well as individuals, were named for them. Medals, images, cheap popular books, objects of devotion, and common practices all spoke of an enduring devotion.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, despite arousing some antagonism, Dalle Laste's efforts seem to have been successful. In 1775, the Venetian Senate decreed that “feasts of devotion” and “feasts of

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words against saints or lack of belief in them could provoke God's (or the saint's) wrath, resulting in a punishment striking the non-believer. Skepticism was not only a matter that pertained to the learned.

<sup>93</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 265.

<sup>94</sup> This will be extensively treated in the chapter dedicated to the forms of eighteenth century pious (as well magical) expression.



vows” were all to be shifted to the following Sundays. This reform extended to all parts of the Dominion: Istria and the Greek Ionian Islands were included. These areas would therefore gain more work days. The goal was to improve the agricultural and artisanal sectors in other underdeveloped provinces.<sup>95</sup> However, the concrete implementation of the decree proved very difficult to achieve, especially in those same territories.

The decree also mandated that bishops had to address pastoral letters to the clergy and the laity alike. Pastorals usually contained admonitions, instructions, consolations, or directions for behavior. In this particular circumstance, bishops were to communicate the order for the suppression of the feasts and provide the reasons for it. They had to explain the secular and religious justifications, in order to assure people that their vows of religious devotion to saints were no longer binding and that those vows could indeed be annulled by the bishops without negative consequences for the souls of the faithful, or threat to their spiritual salvation or material well-being. Bishops had the hard task of persuading Catholics to respect the law and not sanctify those feasts that for centuries had been sanctified and promoted by the Church itself. The Senate “urged Monsignor Patriarch of Venice and all the bishops of the Republic to follow the laudable example of the Bishop of Udine and to suppress with their spiritual authority all the popular feasts and to abolish them from the diocesan calendars.”<sup>96</sup>

The Archbishop of Udine, Giangirolamo Gradenigo, was born in Venice in 1708. He was a member of an illustrious noble family of the capital.<sup>97</sup> Gradenigo had been destined for an ecclesiastical career from childhood, when he was sent for his initial

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. And also in ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 285: the last legal opinion on the subject, by Piero Franceschi, 27 October 1790.

<sup>96</sup> ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalistis*, fz. 105, 29 January 1768.

<sup>97</sup> Michela Dal Borgo, “Giangirolamo Gradenigo,” in *DBI*, vol. 58 (2002), *ad vocem*.

education to the Theatines in Brescia. He completed his studies there and soon entered the order. He ascended the ecclesiastical ladder rapidly, becoming a member of the diocesan council, then a lecturer in theology and, in 1755, procurator general of his order. His intellectual and religious vocation caused him to undertake various disciplines: he wrote about theology, history, philology, and linguistics. His scholarship attracted the attention of the powerful bishop, Angelo Maria Querini, who befriended him and wanted him to become a professor at the prestigious seminary in Brescia. When the Patriarchate of Aquileia was suppressed, Gradenigo was the perfect candidate to hold and handle the delicate new role of Archbishop of Udine, after the new position was instituted. In 1765, the Venetian Senate appointed him archbishop, and Gradenigo began the last and most important part of his ecclesiastical career. The Senate's faith in Gradenigo was well founded since he, along with the Patriarch of Venice, were ably suited to launch the reform on the mainland. Unlike his old mentor and friend Querini, Gradenigo was a supporter of the reform of the saints' feasts. In 1775, immediately after another series of negotiations with the Holy See began, Gradenigo wrote an important pastoral to support the Venetian method of lessening the number of the feast days and moving the saints' days (with their mundane aspects, such as markets and fairs) to Sundays.<sup>98</sup> Later, when in 1787 the reform was granted the official sanction of the Holy See, his pastoral and his activities became the model for other bishops in the Dominion to follow.

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<sup>98</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 267, *Consulta* by Dalle Laste, August 1776.

### Suspicion and Mistrust: The Clergy and the Republic

Apparently, the bishops cooperated. They wrote pastoral letters and state edicts, which were promulgated and affixed everywhere in all the territories of the Republic. Nevertheless, as the new *consultori* Giovan Battista Bilesimo and Antonio Bricci lamented, most of the subjects did not obey the Republic's order. In 1784, almost ten years after the promulgation of the decree, the situation remained virtually unchanged.<sup>99</sup>

They analyzed the problem this way:

Old prejudices are disguised under the fake appearance of religion. During feasts, the bad habits of people become even worse because human beings naturally incline toward idleness, entertainment, and merrymaking. The material interests of clerics are one additional reason for the failure, for they are the ones who mostly benefit from holidays rather than from ordinary weekdays, admittedly a thing perhaps necessary for the maintenance of the Church and for other needs. Moreover, in some places, the local government *still* imposes pecuniary penalties on people who work during feast days.<sup>100</sup>

The *consultori* revealed in this rough report how much they distrusted the clergy. They believed the clergy's support for the reform was insincere and therefore ineffective. They speculated about whether state supervision of priests was practical and debated about how to force priests to preach reforms from the pulpit. But this measure was clearly not a successful way to face the clergy's opposition to reform. No one could in fact ensure, the *consultori* stated, that priests "would not partly destroy, especially in the

<sup>99</sup> In the Provinces, both governors and the clergy had brought proceedings against some rebellious communities that wanted to celebrate their popular feasts "by force." ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 8 August 1784.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. (The italics are my own.) Evidently, local officials were not only reluctant to apply the Venetian decree about the abolition of feasts; they also remained deeply attached to the old Catholic precept which established that people who transgressed holy days of obligation by working on those days had to pay a fee to the communal institution.

confessional, the effects of their own sermons.”<sup>101</sup> While confidence in the assistance of the bishops had not yet completely vanished, distrust of the clergy was evident.

The clergy were, of course, crucial to the success of reform. They were now the ones who would need to educate the people about proper religious behaviors, and who would need to support the reform in the parishes. In addition, since the intellectuals had started to discuss solutions for the agricultural crisis, the magazines and newspapers had promoted the idea that the clergy also ought to be involved in the campaign to improve agriculture. The role of the priest was becoming more and more the role of a mediator between the people and the state’s institutions. Thus, the more active and enlightened members of the clergy were called upon to be the peasants’ allies. While the State was incapable of implementing agricultural reform in the countryside and the landowners hesitated to make changes, the reformers sought to delegate to the clergy the task of preaching agricultural productivity.<sup>102</sup> From the pulpit and through their everyday contacts with their parishioners, priests were charged with instilling the people with the new principles of agronomic science.

While the clergy were deciding what to do in response to this call from the state, facing what was apparently becoming a clear failure of the recently issued law to regulate saints’ feasts, the *consultori* decided to abandon the idea of reducing the number of popular feasts by decree. Instead, they proposed that communities, cities, corporations, and territories pay a fine until they decided to refrain from celebrating the feasts. They

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> This was a project that the reformers borrowed, again, from Muratori’s works, in particular *Della pubblica felicità* (Venice: Antonio Zatta & Figli, 1789). Muratori collaborated with and was a close friend of some of the most famous directors of the Italian journals, such as Giovanni Lami. *Novelle Letterarie* was the model for the Venetian periodicals, which in 1760s began spreading the same initiatives. Thus, the clergy were involved in both the spiritual and material improvement of simple people and peasants.

conceived this as “compensation” to the state for the damage suffered to the national economy. This rather naïve proposal was not enacted, and was not brought up again in the extant documents from the archive. The Venetian State simply lacked the bureaucracy and the police structure necessary to implement it.<sup>103</sup>

### **Tiepolo and Pius VI: Reaching a Solution**

The drive to reduce the feasts of precept also had remained blocked.<sup>104</sup> To resume negotiations with Rome, the Venetian ambassador Alvise Tiepolo proposed to introduce some modifications to the original Venetian plan proposed in 1773, now reducing the number of feast days that were to be moved or shifted. Nevertheless, all attempts proved fruitless.<sup>105</sup> The difficulty of reaching an agreement was due to the stubborn Roman commitment to Tarracona’s method, namely the half holy days, which was the only solution the Pope would accept.<sup>106</sup> Further negotiations were suspended. Talks between Lazzaro Opizio Pallavicini, Pius VI’s Secretary of State, and the Venetian ambassador ended in a deadlock that was not resolved until a more political and malleable man, Pius VI, ascended the pontifical throne in 1775.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, things seemed to change with Pius VI. Tiepolo informed the Venetian Senate that the new Pope had issued a brief in favor of Poland, conceding the suppression of some feasts.<sup>108</sup> When the ambassador tried to make sure that Austria was going to

<sup>103</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 8 August 1784.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. The initial plan called for the translation to Sundays of more than thirty feasts of precept.

<sup>105</sup> Although frustrated by earlier failures, Venice had advanced a new plan in 1773, proposing to shift twenty five feasts to Sundays and to suppress entirely a few others.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. So called since it was applied in Tarracona in 1727. ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalisticis*, fz. 105, 29 January 1768.

<sup>107</sup> This was when Venice decided to come to terms with popular devotion and promulgated its decree.

<sup>108</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 8 August 1784. The event was reported by Bilesimo and Bricci and was dated back to 1775.

apply the same model in its Italian provinces, he hoped to take advantage of Venice's proximity to the Austrian provinces so that he could propose the same solution. But Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, one of the leading figures of the Enlightenment in Austria, made it clear that he believed "each prince had to deal with the Pope separately."<sup>109</sup> Obviously, Kaunitz did not want to link Venetian attempts with Austrian policy regarding the problem of obligatory holy days. He was afraid to endanger his own position with Rome, a result he feared if Austria joined its efforts to those of Venice. The popes who had been more willing to allow other states to simply abolish many saints' feasts were not so eager to do the same on Italian soil. In the land of the Counter-Reformation, even a modest attempt by reform-minded statesmen to change political and judicial institutions, whether to stimulate economic growth or to improve the training of the country's future leaders, resulted in sharp confrontations between Church and the Italian states. The reformers' attempt to define "boundaries," that is, to create separate spheres for the exercise of religious and of secular authority, was more bitterly contested in Italy than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>110</sup>

In the following years, negotiations lurched between impending failure and predictions of imminent success. In 1784, after a protracted process of planning, the

<sup>109</sup> Kaunitz was perhaps the most important diplomat of his era. He was a capable state chancellor and an extremely influential chief minister of Maria Theresa, and after her death, he also served her sons, Joseph II and Leopold II. To increase the central state authority, to limit the authority of the nobility, and to subject the Church entirely to the State were his main aims and his greatest achievements. See Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 1 and 2, and also the most recent article by Carlo Capra, "Habsburg Italy in the Age of Reform," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10 (June 2005): 218-33. The paper surveys the main reforms carried out by the Habsburg governments in Lombardy and Tuscany from the 1730s to around 1790, in light of recent historical studies. Venturi's biographical approach to the theme is discussed in the first part of the study, which then compares reforming activities in the two states in the fields of the administration of justice, ecclesiastical policy, and public finance.

<sup>110</sup> Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 2. Rome persisted in being more liberal and indulgent toward European countries. When Naples, Tuscany, Parma, Milan, Genoa, Turin, and some dioceses in the Papal State had appealed for the reduction of the number of feasts, none obtained the dispensation for missing Mass. Experience proved how inadequate Tarracona's method was for preventing abuses on feast days. ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514, 8 August 1784.

Venetian Senate decided to bar bishops from the negotiations, “to avoid the embarrassment of reconciling so many different opinions,”<sup>111</sup> and to leave the matter entirely to the Venetian ambassador and the Pope. Increasing diffidence in the unofficial notes suggested that it was better not to solicit the opinions of the bishops, not only because there were so many, but also and above all because their obedience and loyalty to the Republic remained uncertain.<sup>112</sup> The Venetian ambassador was considered a more reliable mediator than the bishops.<sup>113</sup> Elsewhere we find that the Archbishop of Milan, on behalf of all the Milanese cardinals and urged by his sovereign, made a plea to the Pope; in Sardinia, everything went through the minister in Rome; and in Reggio and Carpi, the cardinals proceeded without even asking for papal permission. The fact that in some places cardinals helped to expedite the process did not make the Venetian Senate change its mind about not including their own bishops.<sup>114</sup> Indeed some bishops had completely ignored the Senate’s appeal in 1775 that they write pastorals about the abolition of popular saints’ feasts.<sup>115</sup> At this point, for the *consultori*, the best way seemed to avoid recommending any new plan. Rather, on the basis of these examples they would ask for the suppression of a limited number of feasts, leaving the Holy See free to choose the method. Yet they always persisted in rejecting Tarragona’s suggestion to retain most of the holidays and allow the people to work after Church services.<sup>116</sup> The problem with this plan was that while the Bishop of Tarragona (and the other Spanish bishops who adopted it in 1727) saw no problem in allowing people to decide whether or not to work after

<sup>111</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514.

<sup>112</sup> These comments were expunged from the official documentation.

<sup>113</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514.

<sup>114</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 283.

<sup>115</sup> The bishops’ negligence in executing secular commands does not appear in the same source, but in later documentation. ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 285.

<sup>116</sup> *Raccolta di Scritture*, 10.

Mass, the secular reformers who were urging the pope to resolve this issue at the end of the eighteenth century did not want to leave such an option to the faithful. Since it would have been far too easy for people to take the entire day off rather than going back to work, secular authorities did not wish to endorse this plan which was still the favorite in the Roman court.

In March 1787, after Sardinia and Modena had obtained papal authorization to reduce their feasts of precept, the Senate – taking advantage of a more propitious moment in diplomatic relations and acting through the Venetian ambassador – requested the same arrangement and some concessions for the feasts of patron saints. The following May, Venice obtained from Pius VI the much expected brief: *Paternae Caritati*. The brief was converted into a secular decree and from this point onward, calendars and almanacs had to be adjusted so that no sign, mark, or symbol made reference to the suppressed feasts.<sup>117</sup> Weekly saints' feasts were entirely eliminated. In Venice, the popular feasts should have been expunged from calendars as of 1775, when the Venetian Senate had issued their executive decree which abolished most of the saints' feasts; however, it was necessary to renew the order.

The new decree established punishments for those who transgressed the proclamation. In the rough copy of the decree, an interesting remark – and one expunged from the published text – said:

Whomever tries to commemorate the abrogated feasts in any way will also be punished. This includes those who decorate altars, lamps, and candle

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<sup>117</sup> That was the ordinary procedure: every time a brief was issued by the Pope, the state had to accept and transform it into a secular rule. This did not always happen. In fact, as far as saints' feasts were concerned, France never accepted Urban VIII's Bull. The French cardinals were therefore more independent from the Holy See in regulating religious feasts, as the noblemen Foscarini and Pesaro stated in their letter to the Senate in 1769. They did not hide their personal conviction that the French way was wiser than Venice's acceptance of the Bull. ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Roma Expulsis papalisticis*, fz. 105.



lights, or set them up more solemnly than on the ordinary days, as well as anyone who brings special decorations into the church and arranges for music and the ringing of bells on the abolished feast days.<sup>118</sup>

Although these words did not appear in the official decree, they accurately reveal the issues that lingered in the background.

Finally in 1787, all the bishops of the *Terraferma* (mainland) complied by issuing pastorals to endorse the reform of the saints' feasts promoted by the Republic and sanctioned by the Pope. They also all emphasized how lessening the number of feast days would provide an opportunity to the faithful to better celebrate the existing feasts, and to devote their time and energy to praise God.<sup>119</sup> The pastorals, however, also underlined how devotion to the saints should *still be cherished* as an important facet of Catholic piety. The people were not prohibited from attending Mass; they were simply released from their obligation to so and allowed to work. Indeed, they were strongly urged to do so. The mundane aspects of the festivals were prohibited altogether. No market, no stalls, no charlatans, no music, and no performances were permitted in the public squares (nor could these be moved to Sundays) – as they were presumably considered to be a dangerous reminder of the abolished feasts. The secular arm, emphasized the bishops, would punish any transgressors. In the Senate's desperate attempts to enforce what bishops could not really enforce (that is, *work*), they had to make the religious feast days purely spiritual. Anything that could distract people from work was to be eliminated. The people were not the only ones who were warned: the clergy and parish priests were also admonished not to commemorate from their pulpit the abolished feasts, nor to remind the

<sup>118</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514.

<sup>119</sup> BSP, *Decreti e Pastoralis del Patriarca di Venezia Federico Maria Giovanelli*, Misc. 630; and BMC, *Decreti e Pastoralis, Correr 1131/305 (=Misc. Correr II 305)*.

people about them, or worse, continue to celebrate them – which would be acting against secular and episcopal mandates.

Even at this point, not all of the bishops were ready to comply. Cardinal Giovanni Cornaro, the abbot of the Abbey of Vangadizza, which was an independent (from the Venetian state) religious enclave between the dioceses of Verona and Adria, aggressively wrote that he was not going to give up the feast of Saint Teobaldo for the feast of Saint Bellino (who was part of the Venetian official list of saints who were not swept away with the abolition).<sup>120</sup> The people of his territory did not even know who this saint Bellino was, and as far as he was concerned, “one saint is not the same as another.” Thus he restated in these words the principle underlying the age-old reasons for devotion to the saints, that is, the deep, strong, personal, and communal pacts that villagers and people in the territories had established with *their own* heavenly patrons. Dalle Laste replied to Cardinal Cornaro’s letter, telling him that if his flock was not ready to change by this time, that was because “he did not, as the other bishops did, prepare gradually the faithful for the change; he did not slowly introduce the upcoming reform from the podium; and he did not persuade, convince, or lead his people into it as he should have.”<sup>121</sup> Although the *consultore* spent a fair amount of time refuting point by point of the cardinal’s remonstrance, in the end, Cornaro won the contest and the people of Vangadizza continued to celebrate their patron, Saint Teobaldo. “*In cauda venenum*” (literally “the poison (is) in the tail,” meaning “the worst is yet to come” or “save the worst for last”) was the sardonic comment of Dalle Laste. The cardinal and abbot Cornaro had played his

<sup>120</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, b. 514 (*Feste di precetto* letter from Cardinal Giovanni Cornaro, dated December 3 1787).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Letter from Dalle Laste undated. The document was signed *revisor*, “reviser,” not *consultore* – because Dalle Laste was also entrusted with the task of revising the papal briefs.

cards very well, claiming that legitimacy within his monastery and territory had been granted by both the Prince and the Pope. This left the secular authorities no choice but to surrender.<sup>122</sup>

### The Aftermath

It took almost forty years to reach an agreement on methods and a solution that worked. Control of the affair had been shifted slowly but inexorably away from the bishops to the secular authorities and into the purview of the Republican oligarchy. The task had been immense, and negotiation-fatigue pervaded political as well intellectual writings on the topic. A certain sense of discouragement ran through the last *consultori*'s legal opinions, which were not as aggressively composed as the earlier ones. The failure of a diplomatic agreement in the early stages of the negotiation process deeply affected the *consultori*, and their well-known tenacity faltered. They became more and more uncertain about how to handle the situation, even wondering if the Pope would dismiss any Venetian claim in order not to establish an unpalatable precedent.

Even knowing that the suppression of popular saints' feasts would almost certainly provoke great resistance, the Republic – not without dissent – embarked on the reform and undertook their detailed survey of popular feasts. As the Senate expected, it was an arduous task. As negotiations with the Holy See were ending, the *consultori* bitterly claimed that “no sooner would the feasts of precept be reduced, thanks to the

<sup>122</sup> The monastery and territory of Vangadizza was *de facto* under the Papacy and had no obligation to honor the Republic's policies and decrees. Furthermore, Cornaro argued, the Pope *merely* sanctioned the official calendar of the feasts which was the result of the strenuous negotiations between the Republic of Venice and Rome. He was therefore even more exempted from secular jurisdiction and command.

Papal brief, than the popular feasts would all at once spring up again.”<sup>123</sup> Feasts would rise up from their ashes, like the Arabian Phoenix. The *consultori*'s recognition of the resilience of popular feasts sounded like resignation or even defeatism.

According to Venetian elites, whether people celebrated feasts or not, they *always* desecrated holy days. In the first place, they tarnished saints' feasts with worldly pursuits; in the second place, they engaged in work and therefore violated religious obligations. How to untangle this Gordian knot? The first act of the reform had been an attempt to turn the holy days into half holy days. Did that suffice? No, because the hearing of Mass on suppressed feast days or half holy days still persisted. Unlike Benedict, Pius VI realized that patron saints' days had at least to be treated in the same fashion as feasts of precept.<sup>124</sup> The other feasts had been abolished; yet to the extent that Masses were celebrated, Divine Offices sung, and the catechism preached, they still existed. In fact, according to the decree of Pius VI:

On the other feasts (namely those of no obligation), people may work, but they need not fast nor do low manual labor. However, devotion to the saints and the sacramental penance of the faithful should not be eliminated. Furthermore, during the suppressed feasts as well as during their vigils, let attendance at Mass and other services be observed in each church and fasting must be transferred from vigils to the fourth and sixth *feria*.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> ASV, *Consultori in iure*, b. 514, 11 May 1787: [...] eius scilicet pro universa quamvis Diocesis, qui principaliter est Patronus Civitatis, in qua sede est Episcopalis. His igitur omnibus festis diebus pro veteri Ecclesiae Catholicae Instituto Christi fideles Sacris adesse, a servilibus operibus se abstinere et ieiunium in eorundem vigiliis, quibus adnexum sit, observare debeant ac teneantur.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. (The translation is my own.) In reliquis vero festis non solo laboriosas artium exercitationes et servilia opera permittimus sed insuper per eosdem Christi fideles a quacumque vigiliae seu ieiunii diebus praecedentibus, dummodo aliunde vel ratione quadragesimae vel ratione quattuor temporum non praecipitur, et audiendi Missam in praedictis festis obligatione absolvimus et liberamus. Sed quoniam dum populorum conscientiae consulimus et eorum qui in sudore vultus sui panem comedunt, indigentiae providemus, Sanctorum venerationem et salutarem Christi fidelium paenitentiam minuere non intendimus Sanctorum ac Solemnitatum officia et Missas tam in iisdem abrogatis festis quam in eorum vigiliis retineri et sicut prius in quacumque Ecclesia celebrari mandamus sacrum vero ieiunium, quod in praedictis vigiliis habebatur, ad quartas et sextas ferias adventus transferendum, ibique servandum edicimus et constituimus.

The ambiguity remained in the “half day” of obligation, which was a true oxymoron, because a holy day was intrinsically a *day* of obligation.<sup>126</sup> How could the faithful believe that they were not violating religious precepts and above all their vows to the saints, when those saints were still commemorated in church through services and liturgies? Obligation was in fact annulled for the laity but not for the clergy, who kept on celebrating saint’s days. When the *consultori* had decided to eradicate feasts so that “no memory would remain,” they added, “except in the individual recitation of the Divine Office, as well as in missals, books of hours, and calendars for ecclesiastical use.”<sup>127</sup> Their ultimate goal was to transform a popular, communally shared liturgy into the private practice of individual clergy and individual members of the community. Dalle Laste had already anticipated this modification when he wrote, “If the Holy See did not appreciate the suppression of some feasts in Italy ... we can argue that it will not condemn the simple transference of people’s days of worship as long as they are practiced within *the clergy’s discipline*.”<sup>128</sup> For him, hearing Mass should not even be an option. His ideal scenario envisioned not only internal devotion over exterior practices but also clerical devotion over popular piety.

As one of the final acts of the reform, the Senate ordered the adjustment of almanacs, calendars, and newspapers, and established new rules for courts, magistrates’ activities, and for other public necessities. However, this also met with strong resistance.

Regarding calendars, almanacs, and journals, let no indication remain of the suppressed holidays, either with red characters, or crosses, or little

<sup>126</sup> Pope Clement XIV (1769-1774) did away with the half holy days, which however continued to be observed in rural districts. Frederick Holweck, “Ecclesiastical Feasts,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). On the Venetian mainland, as we will see, the persistence of half holy days as well of popular feasts lasted longer than that, some enduring well beyond the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century.

<sup>127</sup> ASV, *Consultori in iure*, b. 514, 8 August 1784.

<sup>128</sup> ASV, *Consultori in iure*, fz. 265, 14 August 1773.

stars, or whatever other mark or sign. [...] Even though both the prince and the bishops regulated and reduced the number of festivals in recent years, the feasts of popular saints are still in the almanacs, and simple people think that the new rule has not been made public, or that it has been repealed, or that they can freely transgress it. The feasts, thirty-four of them in the past, are still in almost every current almanac of the state, and we can even count forty-eight feasts for 1787 in one calendar of Padua and Bassano.<sup>129</sup>

As the *consultori* had feared, the number of feasts – in a supreme irony – even increased.

Italian historians chose the term *Aufklärung* to identify that peculiar kind of Catholic Enlightenment which took place not only in German territories but also in Italy from 1770 to 1830.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, they defined the form of absolute monarchy called enlightened despotism as one in which rulers embraced the principles of Enlightenment. Rulers tended to allow a certain degree of religious toleration, as well freedom of speech and of the press. It was a period of cultural dynamism; monarchs fostered the arts, sciences, and education; and reformers of the new era believed in their ability to effect deep transformations in society. But the extent of these transformations depended upon many variables. Tradition and superstition both stood in the way of reform. But while reformers recognized these obstacles as distinctively characteristic of the ignorant populace, they seemed not to notice – or to notice only to a degree – that those same religious and secular institutions that promoted changes were also beset with ambivalences and contradictions. It was not merely that the rural parochial clergy belonged to the same class of people they were watching over and by virtue of physical

<sup>129</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 283, 12 January 1786 (by Piero Franceschi, the last *consultore* of the Venetian Republic).

<sup>130</sup> For more on the reform in Austria, Bavaria, Portugal, Tuscany, and other territories in Eastern Europe, see Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso, Politica della ragione e religione del cuore* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999), 149-223.

proximity with their flocks (and perhaps due to personal interests) were opposing reform. High ranking members of the Church – bishops, cardinals, and the secretary of the Roman curia – also did not always share the same views concerning whether and how to regulate piety.

“Regulated piety” was the dream of the reformers, but already at the beginning of nineteenth century, the old forms of devotion which were thought to have been eradicated were reestablished and even reinforced. The cult of saints, images, relics, *ex-voto* miracles, and processions were all somehow revived. Rather than being purged or eliminated, theatrical baroque aspects of Catholic piety were instead regularized in accord with standardized models and approved by the Church. Bishops in their dioceses and clergy in their parishes were to become the unchallenged guides in this new phase of Catholic religious practice.<sup>131</sup>

The pattern of regulated piety was never simple nor linear. In the diocese of Treviso, for example, Bishop Giuseppe Grasser, after his visitation in 1826-1827, issued a pastoral in which he prohibited the celebration of the saints’ feasts even on Sundays, as had been established by the reform. His reason was that during these holidays, “the exuberant clamor, excesses, and laughter” occurring in the festivals had overshadowed the holy days, nearly burying them under a landslide of anything but religious behaviors.<sup>132</sup> While he had succeeded in implementing the reform when he was in Padua, thanks to the collaboration of the priests there, in the Treviso area the clergy proved to be more willful about the ex-feast-days and less obliging in regard to pastoral instructions.

<sup>131</sup> Ottavia Niccoli, *La vita religiosa nell’Italia moderna, Secoli XV-XVIII* (Rome: Carrocci, 1999), 163-94, 195-218; Rosa, *Settecento*, 225-266.

<sup>132</sup> Luigi Pesce, ed., *La Visita Pastorale di Giuseppe Grasser nella Diocesi di Treviso 1826-1827* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), xviii-xx.

His successor, Bishop Sebastiano Soldati, had to face the same resistance to his reiterated attempts to carry out the change. In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, an even more serious reaction against the abolition of the saints' feasts occurred. From the pages of a famous Catholic journal published in Bologna (part of the Papal States), distress and disappointment about "the poor state" of the feast days was voiced.<sup>133</sup> Revivalist Catholics denounced the so called enlightened intellectuals and reformers who spread slanderous rumors about the reform of the feast days and encouraged people not to worship saints. These libelers felt compelled to explain that Pius VI *did not* erase saints' feasts from popular religious practice as the only aim of the papal decree was to allow the people to work without the obligation to attend Mass. The truth was, these Catholic writers argued, that the religious services must be celebrated, and the priests also had a moral duty to remind their flocks about those days. This was because it was "certainly a godly behavior to do *now* in the spirit of devotion what was *in the past* was done purely due to obligation."<sup>134</sup> These new promoters of the feast days further lamented that the profanation of the holy days had reached the point that it was no longer considered shameful to urge people to work during any holy day.

This nineteenth century revival of popular piety corresponded not only to wider European revivals or to the Romantic era sensibilities of the period. What was driving this backlash was, from one side, the perceived failures of the Enlightenment after the end of the Napoleonic period, and, on the other side, the fear that those ideals of the French revolution were still lingering in Italian society. In the aftermath of the Austrian control of the Lombardo-Veneto, the process of secularization was further hindered by

<sup>133</sup> *Il Vero amico. Foglio settimanale*. vols. 4-6 (1852), 86, 96, 188-89.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.



the reestablishment of the previous status-quo. However, Catholics still perceived that a mortal wound had been inflicted upon Catholicism, before, during, and even after the French troops left the Italian states. In the name of work, productivity, and alleged progress, they said, violations of religious tradition had been extended to all feast days. The warnings of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Esdra stated that during the holy days everybody was admonished not to work: not the servants, not the handmaids, not even the animals. They were sure the time of God's wrath was coming soon. Thus, after thirty years of negotiations between the Republic and Rome, and repeated truces, not even a final secular edict coupled with a papal decree could put an end to the popular desire for devotions associated with saints' feasts. The debate was still acrimonious and open.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **A Venetian Anomaly: The Tied Hands of the Inquisition and the Negotiation of the Sacred**

Reforms aimed at popular devotion in the eighteenth century called for more than just regulating the most obvious, attention-grabbing transgressions of Catholic orthodoxy like the cult of saints. In the eighteenth century, reforms were directed at a wider range of issues including more mundane, everyday practices and widespread popular beliefs about superstition and magic. Notoriously, the institution responsible for rooting out heresy and superstition was the Inquisition. However, the Inquisition was not the only court or religious tribunal claiming to have jurisdiction over heresy, sacrilege, witchcraft, and the like. These matters were also a concern to the secular authorities because they were considered a threat to the general social order.

In the Venetian Republic during the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical authority, namely the Inquisition (otherwise called the Holy Office) was greatly reduced as secular courts began to prosecute religious offences more aggressively. The *consultori in jure* mediated the struggle between the ecclesiastical court and the most feared tribunal of the Republic, the Council of Ten, shaping their legal opinions with expertise, knowledge, and a combative attitude. They felt that they could revive a much more glorious past when the *Serenissima* claimed her independence and refused to acknowledge the Holy See's spiritual superiority over her own temporal autonomy. In order to erode the Inquisition's power, the *consultori* exploited the juridical concept at the core of the *delicta fori mixti* (that is, crimes punishable by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities) to extend the jurisdiction of the Council of Ten over a wide range of concerns. This chapter will focus on the clash between these institutions in the eighteenth century over the issue of who

should try cases for religious transgressions. A hypothesis is also presented concerning why the Council of Ten was so anxious to claim further jurisdiction at the expense of the Inquisition. This battle involved a conflict about the disciplining of the sacred between the two institutions that symbolized the contest of power between the Church and the State. Aside from defining and re-defining the scope of heresy and the various subsets of heretical crimes, the jurisdictional battle between the Inquisition and the Ten also revealed two developments which were taking place simultaneously: secularization and its apparent opposite, sacralization. While the former, sparked by Enlightenment thought, entailed “the dissociation of religious beliefs from the social mechanisms of world structuring,” the latter ostensibly invested secular activities or institutions with religious significance.<sup>135</sup> How these two processes are mutually interrelated is still an open empirical question.<sup>136</sup>

The Venetian Inquisition is well studied for the period up to the seventeenth century, although historians have largely ignored its activities in the eighteenth century. There are two explanations for why there has been little intellectual interest in the Inquisition of eighteenth-century Venice to date. The first explanation is structural. Eighteenth-century Inquisition documents are rare compared to the abundance of records available for the Renaissance period. Moreover, in the eighteenth century, prosecutions occurred more formulaically (meaning prosecutions were quite standardized in the way they proceeded and not particularly thorough) and sometimes charges were dropped altogether with little extra elaboration as to why the charges were dismissed. Moreover,

<sup>135</sup> Christopher B. Kaiser, “From Biblical Secularity to Modern Secularism,” in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, eds. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 83.

<sup>136</sup> See on this topic, Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Inquisition efforts to investigate instances of heresy and witchcraft almost disappeared in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>137</sup> Compared to previous periods, eighteenth-century Inquisition sources seem formulaic and redundant.

The second reason scholars shied away from an analysis of the Inquisition in the eighteenth century is historiographical. Interest in religious practices in the eighteenth century history of the Republic is only recent.<sup>138</sup> Previously, scholars basically ignored irreligious practices and relegated popular piety to the margins of more official discourses on religion. Studies of the Enlightenment period have focused on economic and political matters that seem more theoretically sophisticated and relevant to historical developments today. Until recently scholars focused on discussions about economic developments, laws abolishing religious orders and the decline of ecclesiastical privileges. Studies of the eighteenth century were more interested in the secularization of the state. The works that explore the Italian Enlightenment view it largely as a failed attempt to reform Catholic states (mostly from an economic and institutional point of view), especially in comparison with the more successful reforms that took place in other European states.<sup>139</sup> First published beginning in the late 1960s, Franco Venturi's volumes provide a well-documented, rich, and insightful history of Italian and European Enlightenment but also a very traditional perspective on the role of religion.<sup>140</sup> Other historians have largely

<sup>137</sup> The next chapter will explore this topic in more detail.

<sup>138</sup> See Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop. Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), and Fabiana Veronese, "Terra di nessuno. Misto foro e conflitti tra Inquisizione e magistrature secolari nella Repubblica di Venezia (XVIII sec.)" (PhD diss., Università Ca' Foscari Venice, 2010), and Fabiana Veronese, "L'orrore del sacrilegio. Abusi di sacramenti, pratiche magiche e condanne a morte a Venezia nel primo ventennio del Settecento," *Studi veneziani* 52 (2006): 565-342.

<sup>139</sup> Mario Rosa, *Settecento Religioso. Politica della ragione e religione del cuore* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999); and the most recent *La contrastata religione. Riforme e religione nell'Italia del Settecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2009).

<sup>140</sup> Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 1-5 (Turin: Einaudi, 1969-1990).

avoided larger questions of the Enlightenment's role in the interrelationship between the Italian city states and have focused more specifically on the local aspects of the Enlightenment. Historians of eighteenth century Italy have eschewed larger questions about such reforms, possibly because they were intimidated by the depth of Venturi's investigation.

When addressed, the religious sphere in the eighteenth century has been studied mainly in relation to the development of religious education, and the expansion of seminaries. These studies emphasize the official and public face of the Catholic enterprise in a supposedly anti-Catholic age. For many historians it seemed more important to highlight the (sometimes futile) attempts on the part of the Catholic Church to stay abreast of the other confessional churches in Europe. Historians thus emphasized official doctrine and the public image of the Church, at the expense of more fluid interpretations and the kinds of exceptions and challenges that were occurring alongside and in opposition to mainstream discourses. Hence, the focus on the Church in the Enlightenment period has concentrated on pastoral care, interventions made on the part of prominent bishops, and efforts to modernize the seminaries.<sup>141</sup> Aspects of devotion at the level of popular practices have been largely ignored.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>141</sup> The studies in question were often written by authors who were very close to Catholic environment, if not openly confessional. Although it might be difficult to talk of a history of the church written from within, the authors of such studies were certainly not completely out of it. See the volumes dedicated to the various dioceses in Veneto, *Storia religiosa del Veneto*, Giunta Regionale del Veneto, Gregoriana; a series started in 1991 with *Il Patriarcato di Venezia*, ed. Bruno Bertoli and completed in 2004 with the volume 10, *Diocesi di Concordia*, ed. Antonio Scottà.

<sup>142</sup> The historiography of the South also had a strong confessional dimension, for example the studies inspired by the pioneering work of Giovanni de Luca, followed by those of his pupil Gabriele de Rosa. Both scholars were focused on religious practices and *the* people, thus starting a new fruitful trend. However, in more recent years, those studying the social and cultural history of religious practices, as fundamental to understanding the ancient regime more deeply, claimed some distance from the more ecumenical approach to the past. This produced valuable studies on popular religious culture in the South. See, for instance, Giuseppe Maria Viscardi, *Tra Europa e Indie di quaggiù, Chiesa, religiosità e cultura popolare nel Mezzogiorno, secoli XV-XIX* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2005). And also David

As historians have long viewed the Inquisition as the main means used to prosecute heresy and other religious crimes, including witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, and divination, they have looked to the records kept by the Holy Office as their primary source for uncovering practices and beliefs not in conformity with Tridentine tenets, religious prescriptive literature, and priestly sermons.<sup>143</sup> It is only recently that a few important works have finally appeared on the eighteenth century that challenge some of the historiographical biases that have long accompanied works on the Enlightenment. This new research explores topics like the diffusion of atheism in Venice and the circulation of books about magic, labeled grimoires. Also included in this group are works that examine discord between religious and secular authorities over questions of jurisdiction. These recent studies fill a historiographical vacuum that previously only showed the official side of the Church and contained a relatively unchallenged view of religious authority.<sup>144</sup>

With the above premises in mind, this chapter analyzes how the Inquisition's claims that it had exclusive jurisdiction over religious crimes, such as sacrilege (specifically, abuses of the sacraments which involved the Host), clashed with attempts by the Council of Ten to expand its influence during the eighteenth century. Details about

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Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch. The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>143</sup> This assumption has been questioned now in the work by Fabiana Veronese on the application of the *mixti fori* in the Republic of Venice during the eighteenth century. Veronese's main focus has been to investigate the complex interrelationships between the secular and the ecclesiastical courts in order to uncover the institutional structure of the Venetian Inquisition. See Veronese, *Terra di nessuno*.

<sup>144</sup> Federico Barbierato mined the eighteenth century Venetian Inquisition archive thoroughly in order to explore the vast, variegated and virtually unknown world of the Venetian publishing industry. The *grimoires* were books of magic. In a second work he analyzed "the spread of irreligious ideas (and more generally deviant) statements, attitudes, and behavior" in the cities of the Republic. Fabiana Veronese's analysis focused instead on the dynamics between the Inquisition and the secular authorities. Although her studies did mention religious practices, her interest is primarily institutional.

the jurisdictional battle also provide insight into practices the Church had long tried to eradicate in pursuing its control of the sacred.

The Council of Ten was the most prestigious but also the most notorious tribunal of the *Serenissima*; the *consultori* were the famous legal consultants of the Republic discussed in Chapter I. The influential Council of Ten was able to take jurisdiction over certain crimes that belonged in the ecclesiastic court. In this appropriation they were supported by the legal opinions of the *consultori in jure*. Not surprisingly, the attempts to extend the scope of the Council of Ten's jurisdiction created tension with the Inquisition. Some crimes initially fell under the umbrella of the Inquisition but belonged to the *mixti fori* (that is, a crime within the jurisdiction of either secular or religious courts), constituting an area where the juridical competency of secular and religious tribunals overlapped. This triggered a long-lasting dispute that saw the Council of Ten progressively gaining power as the Inquisition lost power. Together, the interplay between the three institutions (the Inquisition, the Council of Ten, and the *consultori*) constituted the framework used for the prosecution of magic in the eighteenth century.

One such matter that established the primacy of the Council of Ten was the prosecution of sacrilege which involved the theft of sacred objects and in particular the theft of the consecrated host. The custom of protecting sacred items belonging to a church went back to the Middle Ages, when hosts, patens other items needed for celebrating the Eucharist were concealed from the gaze of the faithful and locked into the wall close to the altar. These precautions were taken because people believed that the host was inherently miraculous and therefore could be used to work nefarious magic, not

just for sacred purposes.<sup>145</sup> During the eighteenth century, prosecutions for the theft of sacred wafers and of the patens where they were kept increased dramatically. It was an ominous crime. Such thefts constituted a sacrilege against the body of Christ.

Although sacrilege might appear to be a purely religious offence, it also was a clear demonstration of extreme disrespect for secular power. This was because the Eucharist also symbolized the sacredness of the Republic. In Venice, the feast of the Corpus Christ was a major civic and religious celebration. Every Good Friday, the Republic regularly staged a vast public funeral for Christ, during which an image of the crucified Jesus or simply a crucifix was placed in a sepulcher and guarded until Easter morning. The whole city mourned; churches were draped with black cloth; and the people wore black. The body of Christ in the form of the consecrated host was carried in a coffin by one of the city confraternities and then buried in a tabernacle in the Basilica of St. Mark. This little, symbolic tomb was officially sealed by the Doge. Thus, whenever the *consultori* stretched the concept of *laesae majestatis* to include sacrilege, they were drawing sacrilege from the ecclesiastical domain into the secular sphere to serve their political agenda. The intent was not to subvert or change the meaning of sacrilege, but to exploit its dual nature as a crime against the sanctity of both the State and the Church. Both the Inquisition and the secular authorities were therefore determined to deter such crimes by punishing them harshly.

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<sup>145</sup> In 1215, the fourth Lateran Council prescribed that the Eucharist be kept under lock and key. The European medieval Church enforced this measure, insisting that every parish church had a tabernaculum in which the pyx containing the Eucharist might be kept. However, these early measures failed to exclude the use of the Eucharist for magical purposes, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33-35; Adriano Prosperi, *Tra evangelismo e controriforma: G.M. Giberti (1495-1543)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1969); Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1982), 186; Godefridus J. C. Snoek, *Medieval piety from relics to the Eucharist. A process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1995), 363. I will expand on the role played by the consecrated host within magical practices in the next chapter.



### **The Inquisition: A Short Introduction and Some Jurisdictional Issues**

The Church regarded magic, witchcraft, apostasy and religious dissension as heretical.<sup>146</sup> In countries where the Inquisition existed, the prosecution of heresy technically fell under the domain of the Holy Office.<sup>147</sup> As early as the thirteen century, the Church had created a specialized institution to pursue its campaign against heresy, the papal Inquisition.<sup>148</sup> From the brutal repression of the Cathars in the thirteenth century to the witch-hunting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Inquisition underwent several transformations. In the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, during a very critical period for the papacy, Paul III, Alessandro Farnese, reformed the Inquisition establishin in 1542 the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. In the same year the Pope took the decisive step of calling for a general council for Christendom to resolve the religious differences created by the Protestant Reform. It was not until March 1545, however, that a group of cardinals, archbishops, bishops, abbots, and theologians met in Trent. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) made the repression heresy a major objective of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The reorganization of the Inquisition led to the creation of a strongly centralized institution that could hopefully eradicate the new and highly menacing heresy of Protestantism. This was a massive enterprise that changed also the configuration of episcopal authority and its competency on religious misdoings and

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<sup>146</sup> Between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries, authorities increasingly linked magic with heresy, see Michael David Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 112, and, by the same author, *Battling Demons. Witchcraft, Heresy and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); also Franco Cardini and Marina Montesano, *La lunga storia dell'Inquisizione. Luci e ombre della "leggenda nera"* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2007), 99-110.

<sup>147</sup> The most well-known Inquisitions were established in three countries, France, Italy, and Spain. Germany successfully resisted a permanent Inquisition, and it was never allowed to force its presence in the British Isles. See Cardini and Montesano, *La lunga storia*.

<sup>148</sup> James Buchanan Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society. Power, Resistance, and Discipline in Languedoc* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-22.

behaviors. While the local Inquisitions were under the control of the Roman Inquisition, the bishops had to surrender to the local as well as Roman Inquisitors' preeminent role in the defense of Catholicism.<sup>149</sup>

In practice, however, things were consistently more complicated. Even in Italy, where the Inquisition gained a solid foothold, the papal tribunal of the thirteenth century had to find its place within already constituted legal systems. The jurisdiction of the already existing legal systems extended over many (if not all) of those activities the Inquisition had now acquired the power to prosecute.<sup>150</sup>

Hence, both secular and sacred powers jointly prosecuted heresy, but the jurisdictional overlap often caused tensions. While the Church tried to subsume a host of offences under crimes against divine majesty, secular powers acted in a similar fashion, incorporating the very same crimes within their own sphere and calling them "crimes against majesty." The seeds for long-lasting juridical conflicts between religious and secular powers were already sown in the thirteenth century, the beginning of the golden age of juridical pluralism.<sup>151</sup>

As civil law and religious canons continued to develop, there were many crimes that multiple tribunals could prosecute in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The

<sup>149</sup> It was Pope Paul III who established the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition to defend the Catholic faith and to proscribe errors and false doctrines, see Andrea Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia. Dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009); Giovanni Romeo, *L'Inquisizione nell'Italia moderna* (Rome-Bari: Edizioni Laterza, 2006), 3. The Inquisition was a flexible institution able to adapt to the new challenges the Roman Church faced. Initially the Inquisitors shared the control of the faith with local bishops, yet they also eroded the prerogatives of the bishops in the suppression of heresies; see Del Col, *L'Inquisizione*, 118-141.

<sup>150</sup> In the thirteenth century, for example, Frederick II established heresy as a crime to be persecuted in the secular courts. At that point, the clergy only assisted in this secular prosecution, see Vincenzo Lavenia, "Tribunali secolari," in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, vol. 3, eds., Adriano Prosperi and John Tedeschi (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), *ad vocem*, 1599; and Vincenzo Lavenia, "'Anticamente di misto foro': Inquisizione, stati e delitti di stregoneria nella prima età moderna," in *Inquisizioni: Percorsi di ricerca*, ed. Giovanna Paolin (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2001), 35-79.

<sup>151</sup> Lavenia, *Tribunali secolari*, 1599-60.

tribunals could also act in a cumulative way. That is, crimes might be tried in more than one court sequentially including the ordinary Episcopal courts, papal Inquisition tribunals, as well as civil courts of several types (imperial, royal, feudal, and urban). The crimes that fell into this arena of jurisdictional juxtaposition were known as *mixti fori*, as noted earlier, and could therefore be judged by either secular or ecclesiastical authorities. The jurisdictional problems that this system created were legion. Even establishing which tribunal should take precedence, in the sense of having the right to “go first,” created tensions. The Roman Law tradition of the *praeventio* favored the court that initiated the prosecution, and the matter often came down to who was able to try a case first. In turn, two parallel trials could occur: one for the crime of heresy and the other for secular aspects of the crime. In cases of witchcraft, for example, the ecclesiastical tribunals were to pass judgment and punish heretical aspects of sorcery, the abuse of sacred objects and any diabolical pacts. On the other hand, the civil tribunal was responsible for investigating scandals and exacting punishments caused by the *maleficium*. Other crimes such as bigamy, polygamy, sodomy, blasphemy, sacrilege, abortion and usury also fell under *mixti fori*.

After the Reformation, *mixti fori* changed as juridical pluralism underwent a process of simplification. Protestant areas abolished ecclesiastical tribunals along with canon law. In Catholic countries, although there was more collaboration between ecclesiastical tribunals and civil authorities, there continued to be antagonism between the religious and civil court systems. Ideology called for the suppression of heresy and the law also proscribed against it. However, depending on whether the crime had a theological emphasis (that emphasized the religious and heretical nature of the crime) or

a social emphasis (the act of heresy was damaging to society or the sacred body embodied by the king, the prince or the republic), usually one of the courts took precedence over the other.<sup>152</sup>

In Italy, the Inquisition maintained its stronghold on most religious crimes. Yet the legal situation varied from one region to another, and witchcraft was one contentious issue that brought many of the overlapping jurisdictional problems to the surface.<sup>153</sup> Up until the 1630s there were a number of controversial cases in north and central Italy that strained relations between the Church and the Italian states. Nonetheless, it was not until the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century that northern Italian states tried to limit the Inquisitor's sphere of intervention.<sup>154</sup>

### The Venetian Inquisition

Venice played a leading role in trying to limit the influence of the Inquisition. The Republic had never accepted the Inquisition's authority to address *mixti fori* crimes. The first step, therefore, was to remove some crimes from the Inquisition's jurisdiction. On 20 December 1537, the Council of Ten created the magistracy of the *Esecutori contra la Bestemmia* (Executors against Blasphemy) to prosecute blasphemers. The Council's

<sup>152</sup> Lavenia, *Tribunali secolari*, 1600.

<sup>153</sup> Secular powers in different European countries developed their own ways of dealing with religious matters. The manner in which different countries handled religious matters also developed at different times. In France for instance, the process of the "secularization of heresy" began as early as the fourteenth century.<sup>153</sup> After Trent however, the Church administered the majority of its prosecution. The Inquisition gradually acquired jurisdiction which had belonged to the local Episcopal tribunals over matters such as the suppression of astrology, learned magic, and necromancy. Progressively, prosecutions for these offenses were handled exclusively by the Inquisition. The Church also abolished the distinction between simple sorcery and heresy, categorizing simple sorcery as a form of heresy and a serious offence against Christian dogmas. Finally, the papal Bull *Coeli et Terra* promulgated by Sixtus V in January 1586 declared that sorcery, magic, and witchcraft were not *mixti fori* matters; they were to be considered forms of heresy as well.

<sup>154</sup> Lavenia, *Anticamente*, 35-79.

reach expanded over time to include other areas, such as censorship.<sup>155</sup> However, in order to understand the tensions that arose over jurisdictional supremacy between secular and religious authorities in the eighteenth century, a brief excursus on the early Venetian Inquisition would be useful.

In Venice the reorganization of the Inquisition (along with the suppression of heresy) began quite early. Long before the establishment of the Roman Congregation of the Holy Office in 1542, the Venetian government took an active role in the suppression of heresy.<sup>156</sup> In 1249, doge Marino Morosini had established a Ducal Inquisition that was characterized by its mixed composition of lay and ecclesiastical members. Three “honest and discreet” nobles were charged with ferreting out heretics and denouncing them to the Signoria. The Signoria would then turn the heretics over to the authority of the Patriarch

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<sup>155</sup> The Council of Ten was the most feared tribunal of the *Serenissima* established in 1310. It was first established in order to address the conspiracy of Baiamonte Tiepolo. From a supposedly temporary/extraordinary institution, the Council became the most prominent, powerful, and well-known tribunal in Europe. It was inquisitorial (in the legal sense), rapid, efficacious, and), preserved the Ten’s reputation for summary and inexorable justice until the very end of the Republic. Its procedure, called “The Secret Rite of the Ten,” was theoretically reserved for capital crimes, but over time, the Ten expanded the concept of capital crime to deal with an increasing number of issues. Moreover, they extended their procedure to local governors to address the increasing demand for secular prosecution and to avoid having too many cases concentrated in the Venetian court. Too many cases would have jeopardized the principle of the celerity of the process the tribunal was based upon. The secrecy and the lack of any guarantee for the defendant made the Council of Ten’s procedures notorious throughout Europe and, especially in the eighteenth century, the tribunal aroused fierce criticism from within and without the Dominion. Secrecy meant that the defendants were not informed of the charges and the defendants had to prepare their defense without the help of a lawyer. Secrecy also surrounded all the actions of the tribunal, from beginning to end. Strangulation in prison rather than public execution distinguished many of the Ten’s punishments. During the eighteenth century, however, the system became more lax and the defendants were allowed legal consultations for their defenses, see Gaetano Cozzi, “Autodifesa o difesa? Imputati e avvocati davanti al consiglio dei Dieci,” in *La società veneta e il suo diritto. Saggi su questioni matrimoniali, giustizia, penale, politica del diritto, sopravvivenza dle diritto Veneto nell’Ottocento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), 149-229; and “Ordo est ordinem non servare.” Considerazioni sulla procedura penale di un detenuto dal Consiglio dei X, *Studi Storici* 29, no. 2 (1988): 309-320. Paolo Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia. Spionaggio e controspionaggio ai tempi della Serenissima* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2010), 51-59.

<sup>156</sup> Andrea Del Col, “Organizzazione, composizione e giurisdizione dei tribunali dell’Inquisizione romana nella repubblica di Venezia (1500-1550),” *Critica Storica* 25 (1988): 244-294, as well as “L’inquisizione romana e il potere politico nella repubblica di Venezia (1540-1560),” *Critica Storica* 28 (1991): 189-250.

for a joint investigation.<sup>157</sup> Since its very beginning, the Ducal Inquisition repeatedly clashed with the ecclesiastical Inquisition in the Veneto, which was staffed by Franciscans. Determined to keep the city out of the grips of this Franciscan run Inquisition that insisted on extending its powers in Venice, the Venetian government came to an agreement with Pope Nicholas IV in August 1289. It took years of bitter negotiations under the constant threat of an interdict, but the Papacy agreed to appoint an inquisitor whose salary was to be paid by the government.<sup>158</sup> This Papal “new” Inquisitor did not replace the one already in existence. The new Inquisitor was set up as a parallel institution. The division of competencies between the two entities remained unclear.<sup>159</sup>

The Senate was always effective in limiting the activities of this new inquisitorial office by gradually limiting its prerogatives. In 1385, for instance, the Senate reduced the salary of the Inquisitor and, finally in 1423 succeeded in eliminating the position entirely. Yet that victory was not permanent. By 1540 an Inquisition had been put in place that was made up of the papal nuncio, the Patriarch and the Inquisitor. There was no oversight from lay institutions. Despite the lack of oversight, the Inquisition did not have unlimited power. In order to arrest a suspect or launch an investigation, they needed the cooperation of the Council of Ten.

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<sup>157</sup> Since 1451 the bishop of Venice has carried the title of Patriarch, inheriting the title along with the territories from the old Patriarchate of Grado. The bishop is one of the few Patriarchs in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. Currently five Latin sees, including the Diocese of Rome itself, are accorded the title of Patriarchate, together with Lisbon, the East Indies and Jerusalem. See Giuseppe Cappelletti, *Storia della chiesa di Venezia dalla sua fondazione sino ai nostri giorni*, vol. 2 (Venice: Coi Tipi del Monastero Armeno di San Lazzaro, 1851), 123; and William J. Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 332.

<sup>158</sup> Robert C. Davis and Benjamin C. I. Ravid, *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 97-98; Federico Barbierato, “Venezia,” in *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, vol. 3, ed. Adriano Prosperi (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), *ad vocem*, 1657.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 1657-60.

In this ambiguous situation, dealing with the problem of heresy became a problematic process. For example, a serious religious crisis ensued when the Bishop of Capodistria, Pier Paolo Vergerio (who was a humanist), was convicted of heresy for his attempts to promote a reform in the Italian territories. Vergerio's trial (1545-1549) caused the most important magistracies to undertake stronger actions against Protestant heretics. In 1549, the Council of Ten permitted Vergerio's arrest, and he was extradited to Rome and executed.<sup>160</sup> This episode constituted a watershed. Venice soon fashioned her local version of the Inquisition, which took the form of a mixed institution. That authoritative body would survive until the last days of the Venetian state. In 1547, the Venetian government appointed three members of the aristocracy to assist the Inquisition; the so-called *I Tre Savi* (three wise men). Initially the three Savi acted as judges. They were frequently responsible for preparing cases and making decisions about matters like the circulation of prohibited books.<sup>161</sup> Gradually, however, the Savi took on a more politically important role; they became responsible for supervising the activities of the Inquisition. On the other hand, from 1560 onward, the appointment of the Inquisitor became an exclusive papal prerogative. The Franciscans who had been appointed by their own order were replaced by Dominicans. The Dominicans were chosen directly by the Congregation of the Holy Office. In sum, the Venetian Holy Office was an Inquisitional tribunal that mixed secular and religious authority in a way that theoretically guaranteed Venetian authority, but that in practice was never so simple or straightforward.

<sup>160</sup> Robert A. Pierce, *Pier Paolo Vergerio the Propagandist* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 125.

<sup>161</sup> Barbierato, *Venezia*, 1658.

### Reclaiming Mixti-Fori

Venice was the strongest and the most autonomous state on the Italian peninsula, and although the Republic supported the activity of the new Inquisition against heresy, it did not always endorse all decisions and instructions coming from Rome. From the very beginning of the Inquisition's activity, the Council of Ten claimed control over certain crimes involving both religious and secular concerns. The establishment of corollary magistracies such as the Esecutori and the Three Savi demonstrates this tendency.<sup>162</sup> With the decision in 1547 to appoint these two committees, Venice established a lay magistracy to aid the Church in the suppression of heresy. At the same time, this measure created a way to supervise the activity of the Inquisition from within. It also centralized and controlled all the Inquisition tribunals in the Dominion.

An uncontested monopoly of the Inquisition over heresy was thus chimerical. Significantly, part of the myth of *Serenissima* emphasizes the relatively large degree of independence the Venetian Republic was able to assert against Roman "interference." Still, historians have pointed out that Venice was hardly unique in this respect. Other Italian states administered religious affairs in their territories as vigorously as Venice. However, a recent study examining the interplay between the Venetian Inquisition, the Congregation of the Faith in Rome and other urban tribunals, demonstrates that Venetian

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<sup>162</sup> For this first stage of Inquisition activity and the importance of the papal nuncio as the real judge in Venetian trials, see Andrea Del Col, *L'Inquisizione*, 342-356 and John Jeffries Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 53-57. The analysis of Giovanni Della Casa on this issue is particularly interesting; Della Casa was the leading head of this stage. During his nunciature, the repression of religious dissension was mostly handled by authorities of the state. The Venetian *rettori* started prosecutions autonomously. This constant interference in Inquisition activity under the pretext of assistance – even when the number of trials grew enormously – provoked papal grievances and a threat to excommunicate the civil authorities in 1551. However, the quarrel was settled by the Council of Ten when it established the presence of *rettori*, ecclesiastical judges, and doctors of law to guarantee the correctness of procedure; the *rettori* however had the obligation to send the most important cases to Venice.



autonomy was of a different character. Venetian autonomy was stronger than in other Italian city-states.<sup>163</sup> Although intervening in religious issues was a long-established tradition in Venice, it was only at the beginning of the seventeenth century -- when Paolo Sarpi came to lead the jurisdictional offensive -- that such intervention was more precisely defined in legal terms.

### Paolo Sarpi

The defense of Venetian secular prerogatives was inspired and shaped by the works and ideas of Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623), a Servite friar and state theologian during the period of Venice's struggle with Pope Paul V. Between 1610 and 1618, Sarpi wrote a work that soon became known throughout Europe. His famous *History of the Council of Trent* was a manifesto which denounced papal absolutism. This was the only one of Sarpi's writings to be printed in his lifetime, and appeared in London in 1619, under the pseudonym Pietro Soave Polano. Although put immediately on Rome's *Index* of prohibited books, it went through several editions and five translations in 10 years. Among Italian scholars and thinkers, Sarpi was an early advocate of the separation of Church and State.

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<sup>163</sup> Among others, Paolo Prodi has challenged the alleged Venetian uniqueness in regard to its religious and political system, see Paolo Prodi, "La Chiesa di Venezia nell'età delle riforme," in *La chiesa di Venezia tra riforma protestante e riforma cattolica*, ed. Giuseppe Gullino (Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1990), 36-75. Indeed, probably with the only exception of Andrea Del Col whose studies on the Inquisition covered the eighteenth century as well, all major scholars on the matter have challenged the supposed diversity of the Venetian Inquisition, Adriano Prosperi, *L'Inquisizione romana: Letture e ricerche* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003); *Ibid.*, "Riforma cattolica, Controriforma, disciplinamento sociale," in *Storia dell'Italia religiosa, 2. L'età moderna*, ed. Gabriele De Rosa, et al. (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1994), 3-48; Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997); Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); John Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition on Early Modern Italy* (Binghamton, NY.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991). Fabiana Veronese is the author of the recent study on the complex relationships among the Venetian powers, the local Inquisitions, and Rome; see Veronese, *Terra di nessuno*.

Sarpi is a legendary figure in Venetian history and the most famous of the *consultori*. His appointment and his oeuvre (the latter comprised of hundreds of legal opinions and his controversial theological and political works) completely changed the role of the *consultori* within the institutional setting of Venice. Indeed, Sarpi shaped the *consultori*'s role in the decision-making processes of the Republic. The Venetian Interdict of 1606-1607 “pushed into prominence ... the keen, subtle, and controversial monk, Fra Paolo Sarpi.”<sup>164</sup> In 1606 the Pope had imposed an interdict on all territories of the Republic after the Republic refused to revoke several laws that the Church considered infringements on ecclesiastical rights. Appointed as *consultore in jure*, Sarpi intervened and defended the autonomy of Venice. Sarpi's *Historia dell'Interdetto* and his *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* present his account of the events. They also mount a historical and ideological defense of the political autonomy of Venice.

Sarpi's name is indissolubly linked to the republican ideals of Venice. In this role as publicist and *consultore*, Sarpi was a pivotal figure in shaping Venetian jurisdictionalism – that is, the vigorous supervision of religious authority by the secular powers. Jurisdictionalism entails an all-encompassing notion of state authority and sovereignty. Sarpi provided a solid theoretical and legal basis on which Venice could repeatedly assert its independence from the Church. It also allowed Venice to push its prerogatives as a sovereign state in the face of Roman interference.<sup>165</sup> The highly unorthodox and non-conformist nature of Sarpi's religiosity, as well as his ideas on the

<sup>164</sup> William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 340.

<sup>165</sup> Aldo Stella, *Chiesa e Stato nelle relazioni dei nunzi pontifici a Venezia, Ricerche sul giurisdizionalismo veneziano dal XVI al XVIII secolo* (Città del Vaticano: Studi e Testi: 239, 1964); Giorgio Zordan, *Repertorio di storiografia veneziana: testi e studi* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1998); Filiberto Agostini, *Istituzioni ecclesiastiche e potere politico in area veneta: 1754-1866* (Padua: Marsilio, 2002). See also the recent article on the role of the *consultore* Montegnacco in the last phase of Venetian jurisdictionalism, in *Annali di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea* 12 (2006): 267-69, 363.

relationship between state and church, made him a perfect target for the Inquisition. Sarpi also had numerous contacts and longstanding correspondence with Protestants, especially Calvinists. Not surprisingly then, more than once, Sarpi was accused of heresy. He was also attacked on one occasion by three assassins who stabbed him several times.<sup>166</sup> The source of the attack was never established, but it was commonly assumed the Roman Church was behind the attack. Sarpi survived, and his popularity grew.<sup>167</sup>

Sarpi argued that the Inquisition had usurped powers that had to be restored to the state as secular concerns. He took the issue a step further by claiming it was the State's obligation to control heresy. In a more moderate way, Sarpi argued that the secular government, which was in charge of maintaining public order, had to be involved in the Holy Office because of the threat to public order posed by heresy. Behind the apparent conciliatory tone of this statement was a very aggressive stance in support of Venetian jurisdictionalism.<sup>168</sup> But what was jurisdictionalism?

The term jurisdictionalism was forged in the twentieth century and applied retrospectively to all struggles for jurisdiction between secular and religious spheres. Although some scholars have maintained it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that jurisdictionalism became a true juridical program and more than just an idea, the roots of this "orientation" trace back to the second half of the fifteenth century

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<sup>166</sup> During the Venetian *Interdetto* (1606-1607), Sarpi wrote numerous pamphlets to endorse the Republic's jurisdictional prerogatives against papal claims. Those writings were widely circulated throughout Europe and were included in the Index of the prohibited books. Despite his personal relationship with Sarpi, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine launched a counter-campaign that accused Sarpi of heresy and apostasy. It was not the first time Sarpi was labeled as a heretic. When at age 20 he became court theologian of the duke Guglielmo Gonzaga of Mantua he had to face similar accusations, see Luisa and Gaetano Cozzi, "Introduzione," in *Paolo Sarpi. Opere*, eds. Luisa and Gaetano Cozzi (Milan: Ricciardi, 1969); and Gaetano Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979).

<sup>167</sup> For Sarpi and his significance within Venetian historiography and other historiography see David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). He also produced other fundamental work on the *servita*, Paolo Sarpi, *Opere*.

<sup>168</sup> Pullan, *The Jews*, 24.

at least contrasting Papal pretensions to power on the Italian peninsula. However, it was only after the Council of Trent that the growing influence of the Papacy and the Church became a major issue in the relationship between the secular and religious spheres.<sup>169</sup> As far as secular and religious spheres of influence are concerned, early modern jurisdictionalism was less an attempt to redefine than defend secular prerogatives in areas upon which the Inquisition and the Church had infringed. Indeed, another term often used to describe jurisdictionalism is regalism. Regalism was the doctrine of a sovereign's supremacy in ecclesiastical matters that appeared as early as the rise of the monarchies during the Renaissance.<sup>170</sup> Such prerogatives in the ecclesiastical sphere originate in the notion of absolute monarchy of divine right developed throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>171</sup> Jurisdictionalism, as an attack on ecclesiastical interferences, is therefore linked to the making of absolute European states and became one of the main tenets in the political agenda of the monarchs who ruled during the Enlightenment.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>169</sup> In the second half of the sixteenth century, almost all the Italian states created multiple magistratures with the purpose of defending what were called the traditional rights of the secular powers; see, *The Papacy. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philippe Levillain, vol. 2, (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), 888.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas James Dandele and John A. Marino, eds., *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); and also Mark Goldie, "Absolutism" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 282-295; and in the same volume Richard Whatmore, "Enlightenment Political Philosophy," 296-318.

<sup>171</sup> Josephism is another way to define jurisdictionalism in German, Italian and Iberian territories, after the name of the ruler who enforced the jurisdictionalism in the eighteenth century, namely Joseph II, heir of the Habsburg monarchy who was the Roman emperor from 1765 to 1790. Josephism might be considered a Catholic transplant (and a re-adaptation) of French Gallicanism, in turn. The theory advocates restriction of papal power, see *The Oxford handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko, in particular the chapter by Mark Goldie, "Absolutism," 282-295. Needless to say, the development of jurisdictionalism urged the so called modern state to assume functions which had been exercised for centuries by the Church, such as poor relief, registration of births and deaths.

<sup>172</sup> They were called "Enlightened monarchs" or less flatteringly but more realistically "Enlightened despots," an oxymoron that conveys the contradictions as well as the limitations of their social and institutional reforms and programs, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), in particular the chapter "Enlightened Despotism," 270-301.

Also for this topic, Peter H. Wilson, ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); in particular Gregory Hanlon, "The Italian States," 304-321. Regalism and Enlightenment did not always go hand in hand. In the State of Naples for instance while

### Sarpi's Jurisdictionalism

Although it was not until the eighteenth century that theoretical reflections on the relationship between Church and State began to be published and discussed in Enlightenment milieus, Paolo Sarpi is rightly considered to be the father of Italian jurisdictionalism.<sup>173</sup> The year 1613 was the turning point in the struggle between the Inquisition and secular powers over jurisdiction in Venice. In that year the Senate issued an ordinance to regulate the Inquisition in its territories. The purpose was essentially to reorganize existing laws particularly in regard to a decree about witchcraft by the Major Council of 1410. In this instance, Venice claimed the doctrine of *mixti fori* and of *praeventio*. The official *consultore* since the time of the Interdetto was Sarpi. In a speech on the Inquisition, Sarpi went beyond the concept of *mixti fori*. He focused on the notion of non-heretical witchcraft and accused the Inquisition of having usurped secular prerogatives. Then in a work published anonymously in 1639 entitled *Historia della Sacra Inquisizione* (or *Sopra l'Officio dell'Inquisizione*) he justified the way in which the Venetian government limited the Inquisition.<sup>174</sup> Besides explaining the way the

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jurists were claiming the separation of church and state, they also lacked interest in Enlightenment reform, see Girolamo Imbruglia, "Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Naples", in *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72-74. See also Barbara Ann Naddeo, *Vico and Naples. The Urban Origins of Modern Social Theory* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2011), 240.

<sup>173</sup> Arturo Carlo Jemolo, *Stato e Chiesa negli scrittori politici italiani del Seicento e del Settecento*, ed. Francesco Margiotta Broglio (Naples: Morano, 1972). Naples was the patria of the eighteenth century Italian jurisdictionalism and Pietro Giannone his major exponent, see Dino Carpanetto, *L'Italia del Settecento. Illuminismo e movimento riformatore* (Turin: Loescher, 1980); Agostino Lauro, *Il giurisdizionalismo pregiannoneiano nel Regno di Napoli* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1974).

<sup>174</sup> Del Col, *L'Inquisizione*; in particular the chapter "L'Inquisizione nella Repubblica di Venezia (1542-1600)," 342-394. The *Historia* was translated into English and Latin and republished numerous times both in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Like almost all other of Sarpi's works, the work was published throughout Europe. Copies dated 1639 without a place of edition (in order to avoid censorship) were most likely Venetian and were designed as tools for the *rettori* in *Terraferma*; Mario Infelise, "Ricerche sulla fortuna editoriale di Paolo Sarpi (1619-1799)," in *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi: atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi. Nel 450° anniversario della nascita di Paolo Sarpi*, ed. Corrado Pin (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2006), 519-21, 525, 527-528. According to David Wootton, the Sarpi of the

Inquisition in Venice worked, Sarpi offered a history of the office in the Republic in this handbook.<sup>175</sup> According to Sarpi, the office in Venice was independent from the Roman court, since it was constituted by the Republic through contracts and concordats with popes. The Inquisition in Venice was not created by papal bulls but by decree of the Major Council. Most importantly, as Sarpi reiterated, the office of the Inquisition was “mixed secular and ecclesiastical” in Venice.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, Sarpi’s attack on the Church was clear and clearly uncompromising: “For many centuries ecclesiastics have had no other purpose than to pursue secular jurisdiction: a fact that never occurred without causing upheaval in the political order.”<sup>177</sup>

Because heresy corrupts true doctrine, Sarpi admitted, heresy pertained to the ecclesiastical court. However, since heresy “disturbed the peace as well, it was also secular.”<sup>178</sup> Therefore, the *consultore* developed a more precise legal definition of religious crimes that engaged the secular sphere, such as scandals, *maleficium*, crimes against public order, and the *crimen lesae majestatis*.<sup>179</sup> Sarpi tackled the problematic distinctions between religious crimes and the secular sphere: sorcery, witchcraft,

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*Historia* made a shift from the Sarpi of the *Pensieri*, his more religious and philosophical text written around 1588, before the Interdict. In Wootton’s view, the Interdict marked a critical juncture in the development of Sarpi’s ideas, now so deeply informed by a sort of Machiavellian reasoning about the opportunity to use religion for political purposes rather than a philosophical take on matters of purely spiritual religion. This is not the place to discuss this position, however by stating a sharp division before and after the Interdict, we may lose sight of the complexity of the man, who certainly distinguished the private sphere of inner spirituality from the political sphere of religion as *instrumentum regni*, David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124-131. See also the very compelling and more recent article on Sarpi historiography that tackles this issue, in particular Luisa Cozzi’s take on Sarpi’s alleged agnosticism, if not atheism, and the still important contribution of her and Gaetano Cozzi’s research for a deep understanding of Sarpi, Giuseppe Trebbi, “Paolo Sarpi in alcune recenti interpretazioni,” in *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi*, 651-688.

<sup>175</sup> Paolo Sarpi, “Sopra l’Officio dell’Inquisizione,” in *Scritti giurisdizionalistici*, ed. Giovanni Gambarin (Bari: Laterza, 1958), in particular, Scrittura Seconda, 130-212.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-41

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Vittorio Frajese, *Sarpi scettico. Stato e chiesa a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 307; Lavenia, *Anticamente di misto foro*, 61.

*maleficium*, chanting, use of spells and magic, and identified the discriminating factor as heresy. Where no heresy was involved, the crime fell to the jurisdiction of the secular authorities. If heresy was present, the Inquisition took precedence.<sup>180</sup>

Several chapters of Sarpi's *capitulare* discussed competency and procedure. According to Sarpi's work, nothing could be done or even initiated without the assistance of the *rettore*, namely the local governor.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, the Inquisition should not be allowed to proceed if there are no manifest examples of heresy in cases of "conjunction and divinations."<sup>182</sup> For example, in cases of "herbal healing, witchcraft, sorcery and *maleficium*," the Inquisition could not proceed if there was no suspicion of heresy or evidence of abusing the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>183</sup>

In cases of witchcraft, even in those countries where there was no Inquisition, the way secular and ecclesiastical authorities managed to exert their own claims followed a specific pattern. Extensive witch-hunting occurred in areas where the secular power was weak or decentralized and unable to oppose the escalation of the crisis with its own tribunals and institutions.<sup>184</sup> Interestingly enough, in Italy, the Inquisition limited prosecution of witchcraft urging caution while overseeing the activity of the local

<sup>180</sup> Sarpi, *Sopra l'Officio*.

<sup>181</sup> *Opere di Fra Paolo Servita. Teologo e consultore della serenissima repubblica di Venezia* Tomo Quarto (Helmstat: Mulleri, 1763), 10. This book was published under the name of a fake publisher in a fake city as it was common to do to avoid the censure. The book was in fact published in Verona by Marco Moroni, see Paolo Sarpi, *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* (Florence: Barbera, Bianchi & Comp., 1858), xxiii. For this specific issue of the fake dates in publishing see Mario Infelise, *L'editoria veneziana nel Settecento* (Milan: Angeli, 1989). Also Mario Infelise, *I libri proibiti: da Gutenberg all'Enciclopédie* (Rome: Laterza, 2002); and the recent Patrizia Bravetti and Orfea Granzotto, eds., *False date: repertorio delle licenze di stampa veneziane con falso luogo di edizione*, (Florence: Florence University Press, 2009). It is worth mentioning that a significant part of the books published in the eighteenth century were published with a fake date and a fake publisher but *with* the authorization of the same institutions that were in charge of the censure, *Ibid.*, Mario Infelise, *Falsificazioni di stato*, 7-28.

<sup>182</sup> *Opere di F. Paolo*.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Romeo, *Inquisitori*; Edward Watts Morton Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning Folk in English History* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007).

Inquisitors. However, the “checks and balances” operated in both directions, and at times the secular authorities intervened to limit the scope of religious prosecutions of witchcraft, and vice versa.<sup>185</sup> In the *capitulare* as well as the legal opinions he advocated, Sarpi appealed to Venetian legal tradition that addressed heresy as early as the fourteenth century. As in other Italian city states, heresy was, however, also a *publicum crimen* and as such was prosecuted using standard criminal procedures.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, Sarpi decriminalized witchcraft on the grounds of its delusional or illusory foundations. Indeed despite the establishment of the demonological treatises and the development of the concept of witchcraft, some thinkers within Christian theology were deeply skeptical about the power of witches, their connections with the devil, and the devil’s ability to interfere with the world. Drawing upon such traditions, Sarpi insisted that the secular interest in witchcraft should not resort to brutal persecutions because “those who are charged with this crime would be very likely women or mentally ill people, who require education or instruction more than punishment.”<sup>187</sup>

Sarpi’s work anticipated Ludovico Antonio Muratori’s position on similar matters. Sarpi’s defense of secular jurisdiction went hand-in-hand with a wish to protect the mad or delusional women who were in need of rehabilitation rather than punishment. This was not a minor issue; the Senate had in fact decided to assert its jurisdiction over witchcraft, advocating more rigorous penalties on the grounds that the Inquisition was too forgiving about such matters.<sup>188</sup> Sarpi therefore was claiming secular prerogative on

<sup>185</sup> See above, p. 84 and n. 153.

<sup>186</sup> Barbierato, *Venezia*, 1657.

<sup>187</sup> Sarpi, *Sopra l’Officio*.

<sup>188</sup> Giovanni Gambarin, ed., *Paolo Sarpi, Scritti giurisdizionalistici* (Bari: Laterza, 1958), 124-25, 167-70. The same ideas are further developed in a consult conserved at the Marciana Library regarding a case about alleged female witches submitted to the *consultore*’s attention, BNM, Cod. Ital. VII, 1205 (9429), fols. n. nn., Paolo Sarpi, *Consulto sulle Malie e Malefici*.



witchcraft while at the same time pleading clemency and leniency for the alleged witches who were just women who were victims of their own ignorance. In his *consulto* on sorcery and witchcraft Sarpi explains: “The laws of this Serenissimo dominio established that the Inquisition has no jurisdiction over crimes of herbal magic, witchcraft, sorcery, and *maleficium*; these will be judged and punished by secular magistracies.” According to Sarpi, in cases where no suspicion of manifest heresy existed, the secular tribunal was not even required to report the case to the Inquisitor.

Moreover, Sarpi argued that the decision regarding whether or not heresy was involved was a matter for a secular magistracy to decide.<sup>189</sup> In respect to the bull of Pope Sixtus, Sarpi argued that not all Catholic states had accepted the bull. Therefore the Inquisition’s claims that all states had to comply were nothing more than unjust pretensions. In the Republic of Venice, in fact, he claimed that canon law enforced by Venetian tradition established that blasphemy, usury, sorcery, witchcraft, herbal magic, and *maleficium* fell within secular jurisdiction. Manifest heresy (as opposed to occult heresy, which is also formal heresy but practiced internally) was therefore restricted to cases involving the worship of the devil and apostasy.<sup>190</sup> As mentioned above, Sarpi embraced a tradition within that Catholic doctrine which had long regarded witchcraft and its demonic facets with skepticism.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, contrary to what Ruth Martin in her

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Sarpi referred also to the *Directorium Inquisitorum* to suggest prudence in discerning heresy from other forms of unorthodox behavior. The *Directorium* was written by Nicolas Eymeric in 1376 and has been considered one of the most influential books of instructions for Inquisitors. Ruth Martin considered it the text used by the Inquisition in Venice between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but John Tedeschi disclosed the importance of Eliseo Masini’s *Sacro Arsenale* in Venetian Inquisition prosecutions; see Martin, 56-59; and Tedeschi.

<sup>191</sup> Although witchcraft beliefs maintained a strong hold in Christendom until the eighteenth century, theologians, jurists and physicians expressed many shades and gradations of skepticism on the subject. They arose as early as the fifteenth century, exactly when witchcraft ideas started being formulated. One of the most influential works against the persecution of witches was also one of the first to be published, in

text on Venetian Inquisition has claimed, Sarpi also relied on Venetian legal tradition, which he applied in a particularly forceful way.<sup>192</sup> The Senate's decision to appoint Sarpi as *consultore* worked to their advantage; and he devoted himself to the task. It was indeed a perfect match. Sarpi's convictions, his cleverness, and his strength came to the aid of that portion of the Venetian nobility who wanted to pursue a resolute policy toward Rome. Sarpi, whose theological and historical erudition became a valuable asset of the Venetian Senate, substantiated the Venetian tradition using judicial doctrine and his deep knowledge of canon law. In this way, he constructed his theory of Venetian sovereignty, or more precisely of jurisdictionalism. In doing so, Sarpi was ahead of his time and more in tune with the theories about the state and absolutism being developed in other countries during those years.<sup>193</sup>

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1563. The work is called *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Veneficiis* by the Dutch physician Johann Weyer. Weyer was not at all skeptical about demons and demonism, but he denied the existence of female witchcraft. Witches were nothing more than deluded old women criminalized by Catholic priests and theologians, See Walter Stephens, "The Sceptical Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101-121; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145-46 and the chapter "Believers and Sceptics," 195-213.

<sup>192</sup> In her book on the Venetian Inquisition, Ruth Martin has a different take on the matter. Her study focuses on the Venetian Inquisition between 1550 and 1650, a time when the Inquisition activity on magic, superstition, witchcraft, and collateral crimes was at its height. Martin did not support her conclusions with any documentation other than Inquisition trials, and reached the conclusion that the typical Inquisition's crimes in Venice were completely under the jurisdiction of the Church rather than the secular authority. As she herself admitted, the crime of witchcraft was not persecuted per se in Venice, while denunciations for magic, necromancy, superstition, and even *maleficium* certainly formed the bulk of the accusations. However, Martin regarded Sarpi's work as unimportant, and dismissed what he wrote as a "distorted half-truth." Interestingly enough, she considered Sarpi "particularly biased in his choice of material for writing the history of the Inquisition in Venice and for establishing the basis for its authority" and based her assumption on what cardinal Francesco degli Albizzi had written. But Albizzi, who responded to Sarpi to refute his theory, was certainly no less biased than Sarpi himself. Indeed, while Sarpi was trying to protect the secular government from any encroachment on its jurisdiction by the ecclesiastical authority, the existence of *mixti-fori*, the early establishment of an inquisition in Venice, the ongoing negotiations upon a range of criminal matters with Rome, and the difficulty in combining a double jurisdiction with both secular and religious prerogatives, (namely the core of Sarpi's polemical stance toward the Inquisition), are now well documented; Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Venice 1550-1650* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1989), in particular pages 38, 72-73.

<sup>193</sup> See Patricia Springborg, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), 4; Paul Anthony Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and*

Sarpi's bold attitude toward the Church was supported by a portion of the patriciate but was opposed by more conservative aristocrats who did not wish to increase the tension between Rome and the Republic.<sup>194</sup> For many years following his death, Sarpi became a forgotten figure. His name quickly became taboo among Venetian political leaders; his *consulti* were hidden in the *Secreta*; and his work apparently had little effect on later everyday political life.<sup>195</sup> His works were read but not quoted. Sarpi's unpublished work was saved by some trusted friends and was passed down from one patrician household to the next until being rediscovered in its entirety in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, Sarpi's banished books, which were listed in

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*Political Theory Under the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3; Jaska Kainulainen, *Paolo Sarpi between Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes: A Case Study on the "Political Animal" in Early Modern Europe* (PhD diss., European University Institute of Florence, 2009).

<sup>194</sup> After the Interdict (1606-1607), the official historiography tried to reduce his significance. In the official reconstruction of those events, the name of Antonio Querini was used as the real demiurge of the affair. Sarpi was removed and mentioned as a mere legal consultant, one of the many theologians and canonists in the Republic's service, whose identities at times were not even necessary to give. See *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*, ed., Corrado Pin (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2006), in particular Barzazi, *Immagini, memoria, mito: l'ordine dei serviti e Sarpi nel Seicento*, 489-517; Mario Infelise, *Ricerche sulla fortuna editoriale di Paolo Sarpi (1619-1799)*, 519-46; and Dorit Raines, *Dopo Sarpi: il patriziato veneziano e l'eredità del servita*, 546-649. Throughout the history of the Republic there was never anyone who was not a patrician who was as influential and well known as Sarpi. Sarpi occupied the international scene on behalf of Venice. Dorit Raines states that Sarpi's influence bespoke the lack of political foresight on the part of the Venetian elite. For this reason, Sarpi constituted a problem for the aristocracy: both in life and in death Sarpi was not an easy presence to deal with. Sarpi was certainly a difficult presence, so much so that some historians, and Raines is one of them, took the statement of the nuncio at face value and claimed that in 1621 (the year of the decline of Sarpi's power) everybody hated him because he was seen as responsible for Venice's difficult political situation. Part of the elite regarded him as too audacious toward the papacy, putting him at odds with the usual prudence which characterized Venetian politics. This ambiguous attitude toward Sarpi was therefore the result of conflicting ideas that animated Venetian political life, along with the extraordinary fame and prestige Sarpi had acquired in Europe while still alive. This influence, Raines claims, overshadowed the image of the Venetian aristocracy as the only class in charge of political power. This was a problem in Venetian historiography: written from within and by Venetian nobles who had been building the myth of Venice. The history of the Republic had to revolve around its protagonists, who by definition belonged to the nobility. The fact that Sarpi could dominate the European political scene revealed a weakness of the Venetian nobility. See Raines, *Dopo Sarpi*, 548-551.

<sup>195</sup> While the public state papers of various kinds were preserved in the Ducal Chancery, the documents of the most important and delicate business matters of the state were kept in the so-called Secret Chancery (*Secreta*), an addition of the fifteenth century. Rawdon Brown and Agostino Sagredo, *L'archivio di Venezia con riguardo speciale alla Storia Inglese* (Venice and Turin: G. Antonelli and L. Basadonna Edit., 1865), 92-93.

<sup>196</sup> Raines, *Dopo Sarpi*, *ibid.*

the Index, were read by everybody, both his followers and his enemies, and both inside and outside of Venice.<sup>197</sup> Officially, his ideas reemerged at the turn of the eighteenth century and came to form the backbone of Venetian policy toward the Church, Rome, and the Inquisition.

Between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the interest in Sarpi extended to a large part of the nobility that saw in his ideas the institutional grounds on which to battle the interference of the Roman Church in secular matters. For those nobles who were not afraid to enter into open conflict with the papacy (*I giovani* as they were called), Sarpi became the symbol of Venetian independence and autonomy, the most powerful, enduring myth of the *Serenissima*.<sup>198</sup> Slowly but steadily there was a revival of Sarpi's work, reestablishing his fame and influence in the Venetian state as well as other Italian states.<sup>199</sup> In such a changed political context Sarpi's little booklet on the Inquisition found a new audience. The *Sopra l'Officio dell'Inquisizione* was never intended for publication, but it had deep and lasting consequences. Its impact was delayed, but nonetheless influential. In the first half of the

<sup>197</sup> Paolo Sarpi's fame was never received in Venice as well as it was abroad; his works were always in the shadow of any *consultore* who was in charge after him. After his death and until the end of the sixteenth century, Sarpi's name was rarely quoted even if we can incontestably see his words and his thoughts were behind the *consultori's* legal opinions. His works filled the patriciate's bookshelves, but Sarpi's name was hardly ever mentioned in public arenas. See *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi*, ed. Corrado Pin, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2006), in particular the essays by Barzazi, *Immagini, memoria, mito*, 519-546; Infelise, *Ricerche sulla fortuna*, 519-546; and Raines, *Dopo Sarpi*, 546-649.

<sup>198</sup> *I giovani* were a group within the Venetian political entourage that stressed the need for Venice to regain political independence from the Church, Spain and also the Austrian Hapsburgs. They were opposed by *I vecchi*, whose conservative politics aimed to keep good relationships with the papacy at all costs, see Gaetano Cozzi, "Galileo Galilei, Paolo Sarpi e la società veneziana," in *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1979), 135-234; and *Il doge Nicolò Contarini; ricerche sul patriziato veneziano agli inizi del Seicento* (Venice: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1958), 1-147.

<sup>199</sup> When in 1760 Francesco Grisellini published Sarpi's memoirs, his role in the *Interdetto* was finally restored. Grisellini's *Memorie anedote spettanti alla vita e agli studi del sommo filosofo e giureconsulto F. Paolo Servita* were published in Losanna, Raines, *Dopo Sarpi*, 564-71. See also Giacomo Diedo, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia dalla sua fondazione sino all'anno 1748*, published in 1751 and the conspicuous, Vettor Sandi, *Principij di storia civile* published in 1755.

eighteenth century, Sarpi's advice became the standard for the *rettori* of *Terraferma*, teaching officials how they should cope with the local Inquisition. A copy of *Il capitulare dell'Inquisitione* was provided to every single local governor at the time of his appointment.<sup>200</sup> *Il capitulare* endorsed the idea there was a uniquely Venetian way of approaching the Inquisition in the Republic.<sup>201</sup> The handbook the *Rettori* received cautioned them not to let the Inquisitors work in the Republic as they did elsewhere with a relatively free hand elsewhere.

After 1733, it was required that Inquisitors appointed to Venice become subjects of the Venetian Dominion. Furthermore, the Inquisitors had to be born and educated within the boundaries of the Dominion as Venice did not allow the Congregation in Rome to appoint inquisitors from other Italian states.<sup>202</sup> Thus, according to the Venetian way of looking at the matter, the Inquisitor of Venice had to be first and foremost a subject of the Republic and *then* an ecclesiastical official. The underlying assumption was that the Inquisitor would be subject to Venetian sovereignty and accustomed to Venetian politics and its way of handling religious affairs.<sup>203</sup> The Inquisitor in Venice also had the responsibility of controlling local Inquisition activities in the rest of the dominion, and was responsible for deciding if a local issue was important enough to

<sup>200</sup> This regulation was repeatedly renewed in the eighteenth century also through decrees from the Senate. In 1740 the Senate delegated the three *Savi* to this matter. They had to send a copy of the *capitulare* to every city in which there was a tribunal of the Inquisition, and make sure that every *rettore* had a copy in his hands before leaving for the city in *terraferma*, see Veronese, *Terra di Nessuno*, 112-13.

<sup>201</sup> Sarpi's works reappeared, not coincidentally, just when the Council of Ten was allowing the *rettori* to prosecute a wider range of cases either according to the procedures of the Ten, or under the conditions of *servatis servandis*. *Servatis servandis* offered a middle ground between ordinary justice and the secretive, extraordinary procedures of the Ten.

<sup>202</sup> Veronese, *Terra di Nessuno*, 194-99.

<sup>203</sup> In his handbook, Sarpi lamented how the Inquisitors in the Republic at that time were foreigners, while in Spain it was not an issue to have Spanish Inquisitors and urged a change (supported by the Senate). This was made possible through the intervention of the ambassador in Rome. The office of the Republic had to be given to the natives of the Republic. Sarpi claimed: "They are in fact more informed of what happens, of the custom and the conditions of the place, and they have more affection, they are moved to fulfill their duty with more justice and love, with more discretion and charity;" Sarpi, *Sopra l'Officio*, 155-56.

warrant transfer to Venice or Rome.<sup>204</sup> Whether or not a case warranted being forwarded to Rome was a delicate matter that Venice chose not to leave in foreign hands.<sup>205</sup> They also did not want officials who were not from the Republic deciding what should be communicated about difficult and delicate matters.

Every time a new Inquisitor was appointed, his confirmation came with an edict affixed to the doors of the main churches. It was an official act marking the change of office holder.<sup>206</sup> Ideally, the only distinction between the different edicts should have been the name of the new Inquisitor. However, this was also an excellent opportunity for the Church and its priests to remind the faithful that the Inquisition had jurisdiction over orthodoxy and was empowered to punish heresy. In order to persecute heresy, the Inquisition needed people to collaborate and report the individuals who were committing such acts.

Although the edicts were *generally* identical to the previous edicts the Inquisitors had issued, *at times*, Inquisitors made changes. Needless to say, the Republic did not appreciate it when Church officials tried to make modifications to the edicts. Well before the establishment of the Inquisition in the sixteenth century, various concordats had

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. According to Sarpi, the correspondence between the Venetian Inquisition and Rome should be limited only to important issues. Otherwise, every report coming from Venice would turn into a pretext to spread dangerous rumors and foolish nonsense as, for instance, the claim of a new example of heresy that “the Holy Spirit has hair and body.”

<sup>206</sup> Perhaps it is no surprise that the control of the edict at the entrance of each new inquisitor was suggested by the twenty-third chapter of Sarpi’s *capitulare*. The latter ruled that the edict could not contain more than six elements: first, against those who were heretics or knew heretics or suspect of heresy and did not denounce them; a second against those who organized meetings to talk about false religions; a third against those that were not ordained but celebrated mass or heard confessions; a fourth against those who uttered heretical blasphemy; a fifth against those who tried to prevent the office of the inquisition from operating by threatening or offending its ministries, informers or witnesses; and a sixth against those who kept, printed or made someone else print heretical books about religion; Sarpi, *Sopra l’Officio*, 128. No other category was allowed or included in Sarpi’s instructions. Any references to witchcraft, necromancy and magic were significantly missing; and yet, as striking as it seems, this absence in his text has gone unnoticed by historians.

established boundaries and regulated the relations between Venice and Rome and spelled out their respective competencies on issues concerning the *mixti fori*. Indeed, while the Roman Inquisition claimed certain crimes to be its exclusive domain, the Venetian government also claimed its own exclusive domains. This ongoing dispute over authority was never fully resolved. Even the smallest change made by an Inquisitor who was either more zealous or less familiar with Venetian mores could cause a diplomatic incident between Rome and Venice.

The Venetian officials never lowered their guard, and they oversaw the Inquisitor's activities and their in certain instances more resolute interpretation of their roles. According to Jonathan Seitz "Inquisitors stepped up their pursuit of witchcraft and other magical misconduct in the final decades of the sixteenth century" and the Republic "made no efforts to rein them in."<sup>207</sup> Perhaps such an argument could apply earlier but such a categorical statement is less valid for the eighteenth century. Moreover, Seitz's clear-cut assessment is based on an inaccurate understanding of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authorities. In the absence of rigorous archival study of a rich cadre of sources on the correspondence between the *consultori* and the highest magistracies, this conclusion about the relationship between the Republic and the Inquisitors is not well supported by the historical record. In fact, in the eighteenth century, the *consultori in jure* frequently redrew the boundaries of competence for the Inquisition, each time significantly reducing its reach. In the hands of the *consultori in jure*, the *mixti fori* became a measure used to advocate initially a *joint power* that would soon transform into a more *absolute power* exerted by the secular courts. Calling upon

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<sup>207</sup> Jonathan Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 7.

*mixti fori* was therefore used as a strategic device by the *consultori* to break through the Inquisition's control.

### The Bertollis

While immediately after Sarpi's death the *consultori* played a lesser role, by the beginning of the eighteenth-century the situation had changed and the *consultori* were decisive once more. Empowered by Sarpi's works, they forged a secular legal system that challenged the ecclesiastical claim over the *mixti fori* as well as its control of matters such as the printing press and the book trade in the Dominion. In a word, the *consultori* sought to limit ecclesiastical interventions into matters regarded as inherently secular. Sarpi had focused on the Inquisition overstepping its bounds, maintaining that under the cover of heresy, Rome was pursuing secular rather than religious aims.<sup>208</sup> Historically, heresy had been an elastic, flexible concept, but not only for the ecclesiastical authorities. The *consultori* of the eighteenth century turned that flexibility on its head narrowing the meaning of heresy and stretching the idea of *mixti fori* to serve their own ends.

The following case illustrates well how at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Venetian *consultore* Giovanni Maria Bertolli took the first steps toward redefining categories of heresy, and in so doing widened secular prerogatives.

Bertolli (1631-1707) was born in Vicenza. In spite of his humble origins (his father was a carpenter), his rapid social ascent was extraordinary. As a lawyer trained in Roman law, Bertolli changed the course of his life when he decided to move with his family to the city. In Vicenza to enter the powerful Lawyer's guild was near to impossible, but once in Venice Bertolli managed to make his fortune as a lawyer and

<sup>208</sup> Sarpi, *Sopra l'Officio*, 146.



fulfilled his ambition to climb the social ladder. He became friends with Venetian noblemen and learned Venetian law. With the support of his new and important connections and his familiarity with the Venetian way of dealing with justice, he became a candidate for the office of *consultore*.<sup>209</sup> Bertolli had also entered the Venetian scene at a very opportune time, when Venice was opening up the rigidly closed boundaries of the patriciate to a few new families from the mainland. He was appointed *consultore* in 1684 and remained in the office until his death.

During his time in office, Venice was trying to revive the state's jurisdictional past and allure. Bertolli became an interpreter of that agenda. He wrote the *consulto* with which Venice defended the prerogatives of the Doge and his appointment of a *primicerio* (principal priest for Saint Mark's Cathedral) against Rome's claims. The Basilica of Saint Mark was an independent oddity, free from any Roman control. The basilica was considered the personal religious chapel of the Doge, who appointed the *primicerio*. The patriarch actually resided and officiated from the cathedral in Santa Maria di Castello, located in a *sestiere* (district) far from the hustle and bustle of Venetian political life. We will return to this rather unusual arrangement later in the chapter. Bertolli as *consultore* defended the Doge and the *primicerio*'s prerogatives but suggested a careful drafting of the letter to the ambassador, so as not to cause too much of a stir in Rome. He did not want to write anything that might trap Venice in an official, unwanted, and new reformulation of the antique but ambiguous accommodation that presently existed between the Holy See and the Venetian basilica. He was a man of subtle and diplomatic maneuvering rather than forceful change.

<sup>209</sup> Venetians in fact had never accepted Roman law. Instead, they developed their own legal system based on the principles of *equitas* and *traditio* (the use of the precedent was similar to some degree to that practice in English common law). But Bertolli's ability to navigate in both legal systems was an advantage.

Cautious attitude notwithstanding, Bertolli drew heavily upon Sarpi's ideas. Bertolli enforced *mixti fori* in cases of sacrilegious thefts, sorcery and witchcraft.<sup>210</sup> In 1701 the Bishop of Lesina reported a *galeotto* (a galley oarsman) to the *Savi all'Eresia*. The *galeotto* was seen taking the Host out of his mouth during communion. The Captain who witnessed the act found the host in the *galeotto*'s pocket and reported him. The Savi asked Bertolli for his opinion. According to Bertolli there were two different elements to the crime, one extrinsic and the other intrinsic. The extrinsic element was the mere act of physically handling the Eucharist. The intrinsic element required an examination of religious convictions (which may or may not imply heresy.) Bertolli's judgment was circumspect; he not only avoided the loaded term of heresy but also *mixti fori*. Thus the crime represented either a desecration of the body of Christ or signaled that the offending party practiced magic. Upon examining the case, Bertolli decided that the Council of Ten had jurisdiction over the extrinsic part, and the Inquisition had jurisdiction over the intrinsic one. It was in other words a way to claim *mixti fori* without openly saying so. Perhaps the fact that Bertolli was not well versed in canon law or theology made him particularly prudent. He clearly did not wish to jeopardize the strained relationship with Rome. A *parvenue* (as he had been defined), Bertolli was aware that the position he reached was out of his league. And circumspection was the mark of his gratitude to the city that had allowed him to completely re-fashion himself. It is noteworthy, perhaps, that as soon as he was appointed *consultore*, the city of Vicenza – which had offered him

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<sup>210</sup> Gianfranco Torcellan, "Giovanni Maria Bertolli (Bertolo)," *DBI*, vol. 9 (1967), *ad vocem*. For a recent biography of this *consultore* see, Claudio Povolo, "Giovan Maria Bertolli: l'ascesa di un giurista nella Venezia della seconda metà del Seicento," in *300 anni di Bertoliana. Dal passato un progetto per il futuro, I (Iohannes Maria Bertolius Serenissimae Reipublicae Venetae Iuris Consultor)* (Vicenza: Istituzione Biblioteca civica Bertoliana), 19-51.

no opportunities earlier for his social aspirations – invested Bertolli with the title of count.

The same resolution was reached in the case of a host that was used to induce abortion. The *rettore* of Chioggia brought the case to the Venetian authorities. A woman had dissolved a consecrated host in a soup prepared for her unmarried daughter; but there was confusion and a married daughter mistakenly ate the soup and “consequently” lost her baby. Bertolli again split the case into two parts and decided that it had both secular and religious dimensions. This time Bertolli quoted Sarpi’s *capitulare* directly in reaching his conclusion.<sup>211</sup>

There was another case that illustrates how such matters were resolved that occurred on November 8, 1708. The event in question occurred under the jurisdiction of the Inquisitor in Rovigo, but the *rettore* of the city was uncertain of which authority had the power to preside and brought the case to the Senate’s attention. Antonio Padersani, a cleric and teacher of rhetoric, was accused of sorcery and abuse of sacraments because he had reputedly used consecrated hosts in a ritual to renounce the Trinity and had given some of the consecrated wafers to his dog to eat. Moreover, Padersani’s use of magic was reportedly multifaceted and diverse. He was accused, for instance, of swallowing a piece of paper on which he had written charms, circles, and conjurations in his own blood; performing a ritual with the head of a dead man and some candles, and engaging in other bizarre unspecified ceremonies “in order not to fall off a horse.” Padersani also supposedly tried to render himself invisible. In addition to owning a copy of *Clavicula Salomonis*, a classic handbook of Renaissance magic, Padersani also developed his magical activities using several different sources. He drew from a *pot-pourri* of

<sup>211</sup> Veronese, *Terra di Nessuno*, 135-36.

*grimoires*, that is, books of magic, books of secrets, and personal expertise. Moreover, it was reported that Padersani doubted Mary's virginity, believed "wet dreams" were not a sin, and argued that youthful vices need not be confessed. Padersani also believed that the sacrament of penance was meaningless.<sup>212</sup> In sum, Father Padersani's case exhibited a collection of different offenses: misconduct, magic, and unorthodox ideas as well as unsanctioned practices. This case provides a typical portrait of the kind of person who ended up before the Inquisition, even if some of the charges were false. It also reflects an understanding of what the accusers believed the Inquisition wanted to hear.

The inquisitor of Rovigo argued that witchcraft, possession of prohibited books, and heretical speech fell under the authority of the Inquisition. The two *consultori* disagreed and divided the crime into "opinions" and "deeds." The former was the Holy Office's responsibility, namely to proceed against violations of Catholic dogma, according to rules established for centuries from "concilia, holy fathers, and supreme pontiffs." The deeds, specifically sorcery, divination, magic, and witchcraft, "some committed with abuse of sacraments," others "to exercise hideous abominations," were all "operations intrinsically dangerous for society and detestable to princes."<sup>213</sup> Here the *consultori* subtly but efficaciously shifted their ways of seeing things: abuse of sacrament was slowly gravitating toward the category of crime against the majesty of the Republic.<sup>214</sup> The *consultori* insisted the Republic had always enacted severe laws and

<sup>212</sup> ASV, *Senato Deliberazioni Roma expulsi papalistas*, fz. 20, letter from the *podestà* in Rovigo to the Senate, November 17 1708. The episode is also in Fabiana Veronese, *Terra di Nessuno*, 136-38.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> The abuse of the body and blood of Christ was the "the sacrilege of all sacrileges," the worse crime belonging to the category of *crimen laesae majestatis*. According to Lorenzo Priori, the seventeenth-century jurist and author of the *Prattica criminale*, the most famous manual of legal praxis in the Venetian mainland territories, the crime was so nefarious that both courts, secular and religious, must resort to capital punishment. Lorenzo Priori, *Prattica criminale secondo il ritto delle leggi della Serenissima Repubblica di Venetia. Con nota delle parti, e deliberationi pubbliche statuite sopra ciascun delitto* (Venice: Girolamo

meted out exemplary punishments against such crimes. Then they seemed to slip back into the trap of the old and less flexible definition when they determined that the Inquisition had to proceed against “qualified” sorcery, which included some form of sacramental abuse, while simple sorcery was instead a secular matter.<sup>215</sup> Were the *consultori* contradicting themselves and switching from the old ways to a new, more aggressive approach? Or were they simply showing how it was possible to work within the old definition of *sortilegia* (magical activities) while at the same time expanding it? It appears clear, however, that in stressing the *crimine lesae majestatis* over faith and religious aspects of the crime, the *consultori* were paving the way to allowing the secular to dominate in matters of *mixti fori*. The focus was moving from the religious to the secular. Crimes that threatened society called for secular jurisdiction and expanded the significance and the role of secular intervention.

In this case, and in other cases like it, the Inquisition had to first complete any prosecutions that had been started; only then could the *rettore* proceed with his court. As far as the Council of Ten was concerned, it take over a trial in two different ways: directly from Venice or indirectly through a delegation to local governments. Although the whole procedure could be transferred to Venice, it was more likely that the *rettore*

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Albrizzi, 1695), 126. For the Venetian law public crimes of *laesae majestatis* included four categories: those against God (scandalous impiety, heresy, schism, apostasy, and blasphemy), those against religion (disregard of public cult, injurious deeds against God and sacred objects), those against religious people (injuries, murder, and incest), and those against sacred things (sacrilegious theft, simony, and squandering of sacred objects), ASV, *Consultori in iure*, fz. 476, schema «Delitti pubblici», n.n., sine die. According to Paolo Prodi, between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, every crime became to some degree *crimen laesae majestatis*, that is, an attack on the monopoly of the king or the state. This also mirrored a change in the notion of guilt so that nonconformity with the law was at once an act against God and society. Paolo Prodi, *Una storia della giustizia. Dal pluralismo dei fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 173-74. See also Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53-56.

<sup>215</sup> ASV, *Senato Deliberazioni*; Veronese, *Terra di nessuno*.

would proceed on his own.<sup>216</sup> *Mixti fori* was, therefore, applied to all forms of witchcraft in all its various modes whether sorcery, conjuration, herbal healings, or magic, and even the abuse of sacraments which had been traditionally considered a form of heresy, and therefore under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. This led the *rettori* to increasingly question under whose authority a particular case should be prosecuted. Indeed, requests to untangle the different legal competencies mostly came from the *Terraferma*. Similarly, the three *Savi* who oversaw Inquisition practices in Venice could and did unofficially ask for the *consultori*'s opinions.

With the appointment of the second Bertolli as consultore – Giovanni Maria Bertolli the Younger – in the 1720s, Venice moved in a different direction, momentarily seeming to abandon jurisdictionalism.<sup>217</sup> Bertolli the Younger was born in Venice (1678-1737) to a Jewish family. He was adopted and then baptized as a Christian, however, by the older Bertolli who gave him his own name, raised him, and provided him with a solid education. Bertolli the Younger then entered the order of the Servite friars. Curiously enough, Giovanni Maria Bertolli the Younger was an isolated anti-Sarpian Servite. He fiercely opposed the large reprinting of Sarpi's works by the publisher Lovisa, proposing instead a more limited copy run. He also attacked the well-respected *consultori* Paolo Celotti and Odoardo Maria Valsecchi, who were defending “the miracles of Paolo Sarpi.”<sup>218</sup> His career within the political Venetian arena was the result of his father's

<sup>216</sup> For an explanation of the infamous Secret Rite of the Council of Ten (the Rito Segreto), which extended widely the ordinary competence and jurisdiction of the local rettore, see above, p. 85, n. 155.

<sup>217</sup> Torcellan, *Giovanni Maria Bertolli*.

<sup>218</sup> In the city placed under Interdict by the pope, Sarpi (who was excommunicated as well), was turning into a saint; after his death the miracles attributed to him multiplied. In 1722, in the apse of the monastery of S. Maria dei Servi, an almost intact corpse was discovered, which was immediately identified as that of Paolo Sarpi. The legend of Sarpi performing miracles had already spread in the city in the aftermath of his death, so the finding of his body reinforced a devotion that already existed; Barzazi, 515. For a reconstruction of this intriguing story see Antonio Niero, “Miracoli post-mortem di Fra Paolo Sarpi,” *Studi*

influence, but he ended up being more related to and in tune with the interests of the curia than the Republic. His dislike of Sarpi was so deep that he bought, paying with his own money, five hundred of the new published works of Sarpi to eliminate them from the market. His schemes did not stop there. In order to remove the corpse of Sarpi, which was increasingly becoming a focal point of enthusiastic devotion, and have him buried in a mass grave, he falsified official documents – which he signed with the names of Venetian patricians. For this, he was condemned to five years in prison. Even dead, Sarpi was still stirring up the political as well as the religious scene in Venice.

### **Paolo Celotti, Sarpi's Revival, and the Encroachment of the Council of Ten**

Another kind of man – but one who also had civic passion, and a desire to take up the challenge of the task and to restore the myth of the Servite – was needed if Sarpi's ideas were to be revived. This was Paolo Celotti, the *consultore* who followed the Bertollis, who was the most determined and the most skillful of the *consultori* of the eighteenth century. He was indeed the true heir to Sarpi. Celotti (1676-1745) belonged to the group of *consultori in iure* who came from *La Patria del Friuli* (a province in the Republic of Venice).<sup>219</sup> He attended the local Jesuit school in Udine before attending the school of the Servite Order in Udine and then in Venice. Celotti completed his studies in philosophy and theology under the direction of Odoardo Maria Valsecchi, an old *consultore in iure*. His career as *consultore* began immediately after he became a

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*Veneziani*, 10 (1968): 599-620. However, Bertolli was not alone in showing negative feelings towards Sarpi. Ambiguities and ambivalences characterized the positions of the members of the same order, the Servites. Devoted to him but also caught in the difficult situation that Sarpi's excommunication had caused, members of his orders professed both devotion and rejection of his memory and legacy in Venice. Both in life and in death, Sarpi evoked contradictory feelings; Barzazi, *Immagini*.

<sup>219</sup> Antonella Barzazi, "I *consultori in iure*," in *Storia della cultura veneta dalla controriforma alla fine della Repubblica. Il Settecento*, vol. 5/2, eds. Girolamo Arnaldi and Mario Pastore Stocchi (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1986), 179-199.

theologian and was only interrupted when he became an assistant to Venetian ambassadors. He therefore had broad experience in legal and political settings and developed close friendships with some of the most influential patricians. In 1723, the Senate assigned him the role of reviewer (*revisore*) of papal bulls, a position that allowed him to act as *consultore* with absolute freedom and with the complete trust of the Venetian government. As a *consultore* Celotti vigorously defended secular jurisdiction over crimes of bigamy, sacrilegious theft, and witchcraft.<sup>220</sup>

Not only was he seen by others as the one who could continue Paolo Sarpi's jurisdictionalism, but he clearly saw himself in that role. His unconditional veneration for Sarpi brought him to sign all his legal opinions with the name of "Fra Paolo de' Servi:" thus enunciating both a tribute to the person he considered as his virtual mentor and demonstrating a clear expression of his admiration.<sup>221</sup> Just as Sarpi had been deeply influenced in his ideas by his friendships with Protestants, Celotti found new arguments and new inspiration from Gallican and Jansenist authors. Celotti's library was as rich as Sarpi's and provided him with the most recent and provocative books on theology, politics, and philosophy. When it came to challenging the Holy Office, Celotti made clear, almost word for word, references to Sarpi. In his attack on the Inquisition and his refutation of its demands to discipline society, Celotti used a very narrow notion of heresy and expanded on Sarpi's claims regarding the limited range of Inquisition's prerogatives. Celotti relentlessly defended Venetian sovereignty, arguing that there was nothing that did not fall under secular jurisdiction. In one of his *consulti*, Celotti went so

<sup>220</sup> Antonella Barzazi, *I consultori in iure*. For a short but detailed biography on Celotti, see Paolo Preto, *Celotti, fra Paolo*, in *DBI*, vol. 23 (1979), *ad vocem*.

<sup>221</sup> Barzazi, *I consultori in iure*.



far as to call the doge a “king,” a title he possessed *de facto* despite the fact that Venice was a proud Republic.

When it came to the specific subject of censorship, Celotti was particularly resolute in his determination to reduce the power of the Inquisition. He went so far as to suggest that one of the theologians at the University of Padua should oversee the publication of books that supported secular authority, thus removing the power of censorship from the control of the Inquisition.<sup>222</sup> On the overall matter of printing and censorship, Celotti suggested limiting the right of the Roman Inquisition and the Congregation of the Index to proscribe books published or distributed in Venice.<sup>223</sup> Celotti also proposed removing the Inquisition’s jurisdiction over Catholics from other European countries “because they have different rituals than ours.”<sup>224</sup>

Expanding on Sarpi’s teaching, Celotti further narrowed the notion of heresy to mean “an error of intellect.” Celotti argued that as long as people kept their “erroneous

<sup>222</sup> Barzazi, *I consultori in jure*, 192-94. Sarpi also had much to say about censorship. The control of information and ideas within post-Tridentine society was continuously updated with new editions of the Index of prohibited books. According to Sarpi, heresy had to be the only criterion for Inquisition intervention to oversee and discipline society. Sarpi attacked the Inquisition’s pretense to censor matters that had nothing to do with faith and heresy. Even though there were books whose content might offend someone or contain silly pranks or sharp mottos, or offend public morality, none of those excesses pertained to the Inquisition. The inquisitor, argued Sarpi, “is made judge of the faith, not censor of customs,” and continuing, “he does not have to use his scythe on someone else’s crops;” see Sarpi, *Sopra l’Officio*, 195. In several legal opinions, Sarpi repeated and maintained this principle. The Inquisitors wanted to censure more than just books that were religious. The Inquisitors wanted to step outside their own domain and supervise taverns, and all the social gathering places in the city.

<sup>223</sup> Preto, *Celotti*. This statement was an expansion of the twenty-fifth chapter in Sarpi’s *capitulare*; see Sarpi, *Sopra l’Officio*, 127. If in the fifteenth century Venice was the printing capital of Europe, Venice managed to keep her thriving publishing industry despite the Congregation of the Index’s control in the sixteenth century. This situation had changed – but not irreversibly – when, after the Interdict, the relationship between the Republic and Rome soured. For an interesting debate on how the Interdict constituted a watershed in the publishing industry and the freedom to publish in Venice, see Filippo de Vivo’s book that effectively summarized the different opinion of Paul Grendler and Gaetano Cozzi on the matter; Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249-257. Although immediately after the Interdict the government favored silence on many contentious issues, the publishing industry was not completely affected by restrictive measures. Along with the official censorship there was in fact a parallel and counteracting strategy that allowed the publishing industry to elude the restrictive policy through shrewd expedients such as false dates and places of publication, see above, p. 95, n. 181.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

beliefs to themselves,” they presented no social threat. They would be considered formal heretics and rebellious against God and the faith but *only* before the inner tribunal (*foro interno*), that is, the tribunal of one’s own consciousness, and not before a Church tribunal, that is the outer tribunal (*foro esterno*).<sup>225</sup> Therefore, heretics that posed no social threat would not fall under the competence of the Holy Office.<sup>226</sup> Hence, Celotti urged a religious tolerance that seemed much like a form of nicodemism.<sup>227</sup>

### **The Contested Nature of the Abuse of the Sacrament: Defying the Mixti Fori**

During his term of office, one case in particular demonstrates how Celotti counseled the Ten to deny the Inquisition’s jurisdiction. On May 9, 1724, the Council of Ten condemned the goldsmith Antonio Sciutta to death. The sentence was harsh. Sciutta was to be beheaded and quartered between the two columns in front of the lagoon. His legs and arms were to be gibbeted and put on public display in four different places around the city. Sciutta had been in prison since his arrest by the Ten in April, because he stole two *ciboria* (Eucharist containers) and almost two hundred consecrated hosts from the church of Saint Nicolò in Venice. Immediately after Sciutta’s imprisonment, the Venetian Inquisition had asserted its rights in the case, and in response the Ten literally

<sup>225</sup> Confession was at the centre of Inquisitorial methods where great emphasis was placed on its role. For the conception of confession as a judicial procedure and its long history within Christianity, see Elena Brambilla, *Alle origini del Sant’Uffizio. Penitenza, confessione e giustizia spirituale dal medioevo al XVI secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000) and the most recent, *La giustizia intollerante. Inquisizioni e tribunali confessionali in Europa (secoli IV-XVIII)* (Rome: Carocci, 2007).

<sup>226</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 187, c. 19.

<sup>227</sup> For the various developments over time of the concept of Nicodemism, which means outward conformity within the norms of orthodoxy, see Eric W. Cochrane, *The late Italian Renaissance, 1525-1630* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 244-260; Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe, 110-1350* (New York: Welcome Rain, 1998), 77, 304; Jeffries Martin, *Venice’s Hidden Enemies*, 136, 263-64.

had the defendant removed from the religious tribunal.<sup>228</sup> The *consultori in jure* used all their political and theological skills to insist on turning this case over to the secular court, winning the jurisdictional and political battle with the Roman Inquisition.

In the meantime, while Sciutta was waiting in prison for his sentence to be carried out, the Ten and the *consulturi* were dealing with another similar case. In March 1722, the friars of the convent of Isola della Scala, a town near Verona, found their tabernacle had been broken into and the *ciborium* missing along with an unspecified number of hosts. This was considered a serious violation, and the local Inquisition interrogated a number of people who were suspected of sacrilege. They had difficulty locating Antonio Fontana, also known as Rambaldo, whom the local Inquisition believed was responsible for the sacrilegious theft.<sup>229</sup> Rambaldo successfully eluded the Inquisition for almost two years, vanishing without a trace. In June 1724, Rambaldo returned to his village under the assumption he was finally safe. His own neighbors, however, denounced him to the local Inquisition. Given the importance of the case, Rambaldo was immediately transferred from Verona to Venice, landing not in the cells of the Inquisition but in the Council of Ten's prison.<sup>230</sup> Rambaldo confessed that he had taken the ciborium, broken the sacred vessel in two, sold half of it to a Jewish merchant in Verona, and left the other half in front of the door of the convent, probably hoping thereby to stop the investigations. Then he buried the hosts in a garden. It was impossible to establish the truth of this statement (the burial of consecrated hosts in non-sacred ground had occurred more than two years

<sup>228</sup> On the grounds the Inquisition had already started the proceedings but had acted without a formal denunciation and therefore had committed a procedural mistake; see Veronese, *L'orrore del sacrilegio*, and *Terra di Nessuno*, 248-52.

<sup>229</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139.

<sup>230</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 192, c. 98, May 29, 1724.

before), but one thing was certain: the Ten and the *consultori* were eager to implement a new juridical strategy and justify secular control in this and similar matters. They thus took the matter very seriously.

Citing Thomas Aquinas, the *consultore* Celotti argued for secular jurisdiction in this case because once the host was corrupted, it was no longer the body of Christ. Accordingly, if the host was thrown on the ground it changed its substance and turned into bread again. However, to steal, trade, use, and bury hosts remained sacrilegious acts that were to be punished as harshly as any other heresy. Corrupted by blasphemous hands and taken away from their rightful place, hosts reversed their transubstantiation but not their sacredness. The ashes of the host, if found, had to be placed in a church or in consecrated soil. Consequently, the desecrated hosts were both hosts and not hosts. Was Celotti contradicting himself? Was he on shaky ground when he tried to disentangle theological issues in the service of secular authorities? Celotti was a fine theologian. The theological disquisition on the “essence” of a host removed from a church and used for non-liturgical purposes shifted the issues at stake. Here Celotti emphasized the theft rather than the desecration and abuse of sacraments. Hence, the sacrilege became a secular crime, subject to secular jurisdiction according to Celotti.

If Rambaldo did indeed bury the hosts, he also kept at least one for himself. The man had a mysterious wound on his arm, a wound he kept covered with a piece of white bandage that was continuously spotted with blood. What he was hiding beneath the bandage, however, was not merely a wound. Rambaldo had what was called in Venice an “*ingermatura*.” He had inserted a consecrated host under his skin.<sup>231</sup> This magical

<sup>231</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 139. In a previous trial, carried out by the Inquisition, a different technique was used for the *ingermatura*. In his confession Carlo Alberti declared that a physician had taught him to draw

practice was commonly used to protect a person in battle. It was a practice used frequently by soldiers, but also by people who traveled to the East and had to cross the sea where piracy was frequent.

The trials of Sciutta and Rambaldo proved to be a critical moment for Venetian jurisprudence. The appeal by Celotti to *mixti fori* was a shrewd maneuver. From April to August 1724, the Republic applied the juridical concept of *mixti fori* to cases involving the desecration of hosts. Soon after, however, the Ten encroached fully on what once had been the Inquisition's prerogatives. On 19 August, 1724, the Senate passed a decree designating all sacrilegious thefts matters of secular competence, including those of consecrated hosts. The Inquisition could, of course, always claim there was heresy involved in such crimes, but the decree in fact removed a whole range of crimes related to the abuse of sacraments from the Inquisition's authority. The Inquisition protested the change and the *consultore* Celotti was soon entangled in a major controversy between Venice and Rome.

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the letter H on his arm pronouncing the names "Abraam, Moses, Isaac" while putting a needle on the letter between the skin and the flesh. The ritual would have lasted as long as the needle was left there; ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, c. 22r, June 6 1705. The magical ritual of *ingermatura* was practiced also in other Italian territories, but, to my knowledge, performed as it was with the aid of hosts, it seems to be a peculiar Venetian kind of magic, used especially by soldiers, *galeotti*, and whoever felt his life was easily imperiled. Usually, *ingermatura* was achieved through written charms, or written prayers. Religious briefs and religious items, like scapulars, were also used for the purpose of protection, from violent death, accidents, wounds, and general danger. Another peculiar thing about the Venetian *ingermatura* is the way it was carried out, namely inserting the wafer under the skin. This dramatic solution also seems foreign to places other than Venice, where it was enough to wear the charms and the briefs to receive protection; see Girolamo Tartarotti, *Del Congresso Notturmo delle Lammie: libri tre* (Rovereto: Giambattista Pasquali, 1749), 347; Scipione Maffei, *Opere*, vol. 2 (Venice: Antonio Curti, Q. Giacomo, 1790), 19; Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Annali d'Italia dal principio dell'era volgare sino all'anno 1749* (Milan: Giovambattista Pasquali, 1753), 223. The word *ingermare* was simply translated in the dictionaries of the time as "to bewitch, to charm," see for example, Gasparo Patriarchi, *Vocabolario veneziano e padovano co' termini e modi corrispondenti toscani* (Padua: Stamperia Conzatti, 1775), 178; the same meaning also appeared in a nineteenth century vocabulary about Roman vernacular words, see Filippo Chiappini, Bruno Migliorini and Ulderico Rolandi, *Vocabolario romanesco* (Rome: Chiappini Editore, 1967), *ad vocem*.

The Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome asked the nuncio in Venice to intercede in the matter. Nonetheless, the nuncio failed to halt what the Congregation considered a real attempt to undermine the prerogatives of the Roman Inquisition.<sup>232</sup> The rule remained that in *mixti fori* whichever tribunal (secular or religious) had initiated the prosecution had to finish it. Following Sarpi's *capitulare*, the second tribunal would then have to initiate a separate persecution on its own. Precedence was thus largely a matter of timing; the tribunal first involved in the case was granted the right to proceed.<sup>233</sup> However, the Ten repeatedly violated this rule, citing procedural errors, and as in both the cases of Sciutta and Rambaldo, assumed responsibility.<sup>234</sup> Two days after the Senate promulgated its decree, on 21 August 1724, Rambaldo was executed. On September 20, Sciutta was executed as well. The Ten had deliberately waited to sentence Sciutta until the jurisdictional issue was resolved.

The Inquisition still believed it had a say in Rambaldo's case because it had actually reached the same verdict as the secular tribunal and would have preferred to handle the death sentence in secrecy. At times executions took place concealed from public eyes: emissaries of the Ten used to strangle culprits in the silence of their cells. In these two cases, however, the Ten decided to exploit the symbolic ritual of the capital punishment and turned the execution into a ceremony of the state's power. And in the

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<sup>232</sup> For a reconstruction of the Venice-Rome correspondence about this controversy, see Veronese, cit., 253 and following. This aggressive stance was not shared by the other *consultore* in charge. Indeed, Piero Marini, the second *consultore* in charge at the time (the *consultori in jure* were always two) had a more diplomatic and prudent take on the matter but his position was not heard. Celotti had already taken over and Marini, who did not sign individual *consulti* except in the case of this sporadic opinion, was no match for Celotti; ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 192, cc. 98r-149v; Marini's opinion on July 26, 1749, cc. 149r-149v.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

years following the Ten continued with public executions. Rambaldo was beheaded like Sciutta, between the two famous columns in Saint Mark's square in front of the lagoon.<sup>235</sup>

In these cases, what was in theory a *mixti fori* had actually become a Council of Ten affair. Because a determination of heresy would decide which tribunal had jurisdiction, the Ten took advantage of ambiguous definitions and equally flexible procedure in order to circumvent the *mixti fori*. On the whole then, the Ten used two different strategies to cut the Inquisition out of the business of adjudicating cases where there was abuse of sacraments. First, the Council of Ten was able to begin the trial before the religious authority became involved. Interestingly enough, in almost every case, the Ten was the first tribunal to assume jurisdiction; according to the principle of *preventio*, the Ten then had to proceed with their persecution of the crime. The crime could then pass on to the Inquisition only after the Ten had concluded its case. In practice, however, the case never ended up in the Inquisition's court because the death sentence pronounced by the Ten was considered definitive. Thus, "the preeminently secular participation in these proceedings," as Sarpi had shrewdly defined it, became the only participation and a second trial became unnecessary.<sup>236</sup>

Second, because the abuse of sacraments was often the result of the desecration of churches, the charges usually focused on this aspect rather than on any possibility of heresy. Therefore, breaking into a church, stealing sacred objects, and scattering hosts about the floor constituted serious crimes that did not need to be considered heresy to be prosecuted by Venetian secular authorities. Circumstances differed, however, when there

<sup>235</sup> From 1727 to 1749, the Council of Ten executed all those who were accused and found guilty of this crime in the same gruesome manner, with only some slight differences see Veronese, *L'orrore del sacrilegio*, n. 174.

<sup>236</sup> Sarpi, *Sopra l'Officio*.

was a challenge to orthodoxy, such as the removal of hosts for the alleged purpose of performing magic. In this case, the Inquisition had the authority determine whether or not heresy was involved.

### Controlling the Sacred

In 1735, another case provoked a heated controversy between the Republic and the Inquisition. Nicolò Farra, a priest, was accused of having stolen consecrated hosts “to use them for the *ingermatura* as well as for other superstitious practices.”<sup>237</sup> Farra was also accused of having sold or given away the hosts he stole. This sacrilege happened in Muggia, a village near Capodistria. The *consultore* took the case out of the Inquisition’s hands by arguing the secular court had the right to proceed. Farra’s crime was ignominious, a true abuse committed against God. It was not so much about the theft of the container of the hosts and the ostensory; it was more about selling the consecrated hosts, that is, selling the body of Christ, “a crime that [was] similar to that of Judas who sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver.”<sup>238</sup> According to the laws of the Republic, secular authorities must punish offenses against divine majesty, and the ecclesiastical powers were in charge of any “suspicion about wrong beliefs and errors of the mind.”<sup>239</sup> However, the former crimes were *certain* to have occurred, while the latter were only *presumed* to have occurred. In outlining such a distinction between the two courts, Celotti also implied that the offenses against divine majesty were more certain crimes and should

<sup>237</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 205, cc. 25-28; and cc. 137-143.

<sup>238</sup> ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 205, c. 140v.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 137v.



take precedence over the uncertain.<sup>240</sup> Thus, Celotti was challenging the *mixti fori* principle that guaranteed the right to proceed to the first court that started the prosecution.

Farra was not condemned to death, but unfortunately that is all that is known about the outcome of this case. The Ten's documentation does not include a verdict, and we may only speculate that the *rettore* exercised some leniency. Capital sentence aside, Farra might still have received a harsh form of punishment. However, since the prosecution occurred in Capodistria as *a processo delegato* under the supervision of the local governor, the priest's social connections in the city might have influenced the outcome. This element always mattered in the administration of justice.<sup>241</sup>

During the eighteenth-century, Sarpi's writings were republished numerous times, and as a result, the Republic exerted its jurisdictionalism vigorously. The secular magistracies constantly monitored the activities of the Holy Office in Venice and in the Terraferma. In the city, the three *Savi* oversaw all Inquisition proceedings; in the Dominion, the *rettore* (or his legal assistant, the judge of the *corte Pretoria*) appointed in each satellite city played the same role.<sup>242</sup> The absence of secular authorities at any stage of the trial invalidated the proceedings. Indeed, procedural breach was the grounds commonly used by secular authorities to annul many Inquisition trials. The application of

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. The *consultore* also referred to the Senate's laws dated 1595 and 1599 decreeing that in cases of blasphemy, wounds to sacred images, sacrilegious litanies and public derision of religion, the secular magistracies would proceed, leaving suspicions of wrong belief to the Inquisition.

<sup>241</sup> Gaetano Cozzi, *Ambiente veneziano, ambiente Veneto. Saggi su politica, società e cultura nella Repubblica di Venezia in età moderna* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997); and also, by the same author, "*Giustizia contaminata.*" *Vicende giudiziarie di nobili ed ebrei nella Venezia del Seicento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996).

<sup>242</sup> For the legal and political administration of the mainland see Claudio Povolo, "Aspetti e problemi dell'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica di Venezia. Secoli XVI-XVII," in *Stato Società e Giustizia nella Repubblica di Venezia (sec. XV-XVIII)*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Rome: Jouvence, 1982), 155-258; and the more recent *L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica di Venezia (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, in Giovanni Chiodi and Claudio Povolo, ed. (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2004); for the particular figure of the *cancelliere pretorio* who was the *rettore*'s right hand in the local juridical system, see Simonetta Marin, "L'anima del giudice. Il cancelliere pretorio e l'amministrazione della giustizia nello Stato di Terraferma (secoli XVI-XVIII)," in *L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica di Venezia: (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, eds. Giovanni Chiodi and Claudio Povolo (Verona: Cierre, 2004), 171-257.

*mixti fori* was a delicate matter. Each time a Venetian magistracy asked the *consultori* for their opinion, it was possible to redraw the boundaries of the different competencies between the tribunals. If political circumstances allowed, the *consultori* sought to expand secular prerogatives beyond those already established allowing numerous attempts to expand the secular sphere in dealing with cases of witchcraft and abuse of sacraments in the eighteenth century.

The enforcement of *mixti-fori* in cases of magic and witchcraft changed not only the ways authorities looked at and understood magic and witchcraft, but also (and perhaps more significantly) the way people perceived magic and witchcraft. In a recent study, Jonathan Seitz argued that despite famous instructions on the matter and the guidance of the Roman Inquisition in the seventeenth century, the Inquisition in Venice developed its own way to deal with accusations of witchcraft. The fact that *maleficium* was difficult to prove by Church standards, led the Venetian inquisition to rely heavily upon physicians and their expertise. Although chosen by the Holy Office as the favored specialists to establish whether a natural or unnatural cause determined mysterious ailments, physicians preferred to stay out of it and did not address the matter. For this reason, Seitz argues, the tribunal dismissed the majority of the cases brought before it. Physicians were willing to say that a particular ailment had no natural cause, but physicians were not willing to say whether any supernatural intervention had occurred. Seitz concludes that defendants were thus convicted of less serious offenses because the prosecutions for witchcraft were regularly dismissed. In the end, it no longer made sense to raise the charges of witchcraft. The charges simply disappeared from Inquisition's records.

However, what vanished from the sources did not necessarily vanish from everyday life. The Inquisition's archive is not the only source that can be used to explore practices and beliefs at the time. A far more complex picture emerges if we read the information on the Inquisition trials in conjunction with other sources. In the eighteenth century, the Inquisition had an often difficult relationship with the other magistracies. As discussed earlier, the *consultori in jure* mediated the relationship between the religious tribunal and the secular courts. They analyzed the issues at stake, proposed solutions, and pushed for secular Venetian intervention into religious matters. The *consultori* claimed that such cases were not *just* religious matters, grounding their opinion on Sarpi's writings, Venetian legal precedents, and Venetian law. They also (at times more forcefully, at times more warily) expanded legal categories and redefined legal terms to root out practices related to the abuse of sacrament by means of secular intervention, in particular through the much feared tribunal of the Council of Ten.

By looking at the records of the *consultori* and the Ten, we can see that such practices showed an ability to survive until the end of the century. Although the rituals used to perform magic with hosts were slowly giving way to less unorthodox practices, the special significance of the consecrated host did not fade in popular devotion. Indeed, the host was still considered a very sacred object and was useful as a form of protection. It was a relic that could be stuck in a prayer book, for instance, along with holy cards representing different saints. On August 1757, in fact, the *consultore* Enrico Fanzio intervened in the case of a cattlegirl who was reported to the Inquisition.<sup>243</sup> She had admitted openly to keeping a consecrated host in her breviary. Fanzio did not consider her use of the host as evidence of being involved with magic. Rather, he viewed her as a

<sup>243</sup>ASV, *Consultori in jure*, fz. 227, cc. 45r-46r, legal opinion by Enrico Fanzio, 19 August 1757.

simpleminded woman from the countryside “whose malicious bluntness,” suggested that “she did this more out of ignorance and some sort of fanaticism rather than false devotion or corrupted habits in her will or false credence in her beliefs.”<sup>244</sup> The *consultore* argued that the woman should have been prosecuted in both tribunals: the secular and the religious.<sup>245</sup> However, offering his own interpretation of the religious aspects of the crime (he essentially dismissed any religious aspects), he curtailed any recourse to the ecclesiastical court de facto, implying that education was needed over punishment.<sup>246</sup>

Summing up, while the struggle concerning *mixti fori* continued, it often came down to who was able to try a case first. However, as soon as officials began to more openly quote Sarpi as *the* authority on questions of jurisdiction, secular officials like the *consultori* and the Council of Ten began to take a bolder stance. Yet, a question remains to be answered or at least addressed: why was the Council of Ten interested in abrogating the jurisdiction of Inquisition? The Council, established only as a temporary solution in periods of crisis, had clearly greatly expanded its jurisdiction over time. In its role as a special tribunal with wide-ranging powers, the Ten gradually created satellite institutions and also, according to the circumstances, authorized other magistrates (such as the local

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> The prosecutions by the Venetian Inquisition took on a more didactic character in the eighteenth century. Some crimes were absorbed under the jurisdiction of other tribunals (it happened with the Esecutori Contro la Bestemmia and again with the Council of Ten) but other crimes slowly switched into the category of errors (or fraud), and finally became mere matters of clerical concern to be addressed in the secret of the confessional. Inquisitors therefore functioned as public confessors who handled improper practices mostly with admonitions, penitentiary exercises, and prayers. This almost idyllic scenario however needs to be (at least partially) reassessed. As far as Venice is concerned, the Inquisition’s policy regarding abuse of sacrament (before the secular tribunal took over) was no different than the Council of Ten’s. We will turn to this shortly. The belief the Inquisition administered mild or relatively mild penalties during the Enlightenment also has to be reconsidered. During the eighteenth century, the Roman Inquisition as well as local inquisitions tended to treat abuses of the sacrament as harshly as the Ten in Venice. Recent studies have indeed challenged the myth of a seemingly moderate and innocuous eighteenth century Inquisition. The numbers of cases involving capital punishment were more than previously recognized, but few of those cases were for abuse of sacrament (for stealing consecrated hosts and for celebrating Mass without being a priest).

governors) to use their terrible, secretive rite. In the end then it encroached on everything that was directly or indirectly connected with the safety of the state. Was the Ten's predisposition to engulf the prerogatives of other tribunals almost structural? Since its establishment, the Council of Ten had expanded its powers and would continue to do so for the remainder of the life of the Republic. This was because the tribunal considered all possible threats to the good order and well-being of Venice to be within its purview.

*Mixti fori* was a contentious terrain in which state and church repeatedly assessed their respective power. In the end, to reestablish *mixti fori* and implement it was a step toward the progressive marginalization of the antagonistic authority represented by the Inquisition. By stretching the concept of *crimen laesae maiestatis* to include sacrilege, the Council of Ten in Venice circumvented the potential jurisdictional issues that lay at the core of *mixti fori*. The crime of injured majesty exceeded all other crimes as far as punishment was concerned and involved the heaviest penalty. Most of the crimes under the rubric of *lesa maestà* were, however, treasonous through analogy. Adhesion to heretical views was, for instance, a serious crime on par with high treason. In Venice, the Ten absorbed *sacrilege* within *lesa maestà* (which was a notion Sarpi had previously developed in his writing about witchcraft), and they not only subsumed sacrilege to *lesa maestà*, but also made the Inquisition's prosecutions virtually unnecessary.

Some Italian historians have noted that during the eighteenth century, the sentences the Inquisition handed down for certain crimes were particularly harsh, sometimes inexplicably so. The holy tribunal extended the notion of heresy to crimes that would not have customarily fallen under that umbrella. Moreover, the gravity of their

punishments was inconsistent with the moderate attitude of the seventeenth century Inquisition.

*Mixti fori* was not the only circumstance in which secular and religious authorities were both involved in the prosecution of the same crime. The Inquisition was responsible for instances of heresy, yet the execution itself was exclusively the responsibility of the secular power. The state stepped in once the ecclesiastical tribunal had pronounced its verdict, lending its secular arm to the Church in support of the sentence exacted. This was the rule in Venice as elsewhere in Christendom.<sup>247</sup> However, the Venetian secular power was not always willing to support the Church's decisions. In 1705, two of the sentences handed down by the Venetian Inquisition caused grave tensions between the Holy Office and the secular authorities.<sup>248</sup> The Inquisition had condemned four convict oarsmen to death for the abuse of consecrated hosts, apostasy to the worship of demons, and sorcery. The hosts were thought to help the accused to become invisible and therefore protect their owners against death in battle, but the hosts were also used in a way that desecrated Christ because the accused stepped on the wafers while worshipping the devil.<sup>249</sup> When the Venetian Inquisition remitted the convicts to the secular arm, the State was reluctant to comply with the sentences. To apply the death penalty for this kind of crime was an

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<sup>247</sup> According to canon law, the Church could not actually shed blood. When the Inquisition condemned someone to death, it "relaxed" the victim into the "secular arm" so that the state, not the Church, would be responsible for the execution. Elena Brambilla, "La polizia dei tribunali ecclesiastici e le riforme della giustizia penale," in *Corpi armati e ordine pubblico in Italia (XVI-XIX sec.)*, eds. Livio Antonielli and Claudio Donati (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2003), 73-110. In fact, "without shedding blood" was the misleading phrase used to confirm how in theory, punishment (especially the death sentence) should be decided by the courts and not the Church.

<sup>248</sup> Andrea Del Col and Marisa Milani, "'Senza effusione di sangue e senza pericolo di morte.' Intorno ad alcune condanne capitali delle Inquisizioni di Venezia e di Verona nel Settecento e a quelle veneziane del Cinquecento," in *Eretici Esuli e Indemoniati nell'Età Moderna*," ed. Mario Rosa (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1998), 141-196.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-45.

extreme measure, both for the Venetian Inquisition and the Inquisition in general.<sup>250</sup> The secular authorities claimed that there were no precedents and that they had to decide on the mode of execution in order to execute the sentence. However, there were underlying theoretical implications since they felt that assisting the Inquisition in such cases diminished the authority of the Doge, making the secular courts “the mere executor of someone else’s sentences.”<sup>251</sup> In light of the conflicts that would follow, this phrase sounds quite prophetic, if not a declaration of war at least a declaration of intentions. Moreover, the sentences handed down seemed excessive since they far surpassed the traditionally moderate approach to heresy in Venice. Misuse of the host, however, was a sacrilegious attack against both the authority of God and the Prince and had implications with regard to the sacredness of the two powers, as was discussed earlier.

After negotiations between the ecclesiastical authority and the secular magistracies, the Venetian secular power decided to comply and opted for a solution that was in tune with the Venetian *modus operandi*: first a public reading of the sentence from the space between the two columns in piazzetta San Marco which would be crowded with people; then the execution to follow would be a private execution by strangulation.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> The bull of Alexander VIII promulgated in January 1691 was used to validate the Inquisition’s decision. According to the bull, abuse of sacrament involving consecrated hosts was considered a form of demonic witchcraft to be prosecuted by the Inquisition and punished with the death penalty. *Ibid.*, 147-48.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 154. This was certainly not a new principle but both the *consultori* in charge, Giovan Maria Bertolli and Odoardo Valsecchi, as the Inquisitor in charge quoted sixteenth century documents to make their case. This quotation in particular referred to the concordat with Pope Julius III in 1551. The concordat decreed that three senators were to attend all the proceedings and judgments of the Inquisition in the city of Venice. By the same token, in the mainland territory the *rettori*, that is, the local governors, were to attend the proceedings of the local Inquisition. Paolo Sarpi, *Opere*, tomo I (Helmstat: Per Jacopo Mulleri, 1750), 348.

<sup>252</sup> The Savi were undecided about the kind of execution. The nuncio and the Inquisitor referred to the Papal proclamation – the *consultori* quoted Sarpi, but it was Sarpi who pointed out that lay assistants could not pretend to know the Inquisition’s motivations nor interfere with the Inquisition’s sentences. *Ibid.*, 150-51.

Afterwards, the dead bodies would be thrown into the sea, in the depths of the lagoon.<sup>253</sup>

Although the incident did not apparently create any major crisis since a delayed execution did take place, the incident provides a glimpse into the complex relationships between secular and religious authorities, especially considering the conflict that would explode in the years that followed. *Mixti fori* was not invoked this time; it was not even mentioned, and yet this incident foreshadows the crisis to come.

A contradiction characterized this first crisis and differentiated it from the main jurisdictional battle. When the Inquisition adopted the use of capital punishment in 1705, the secular authorities argued that harsh punishment in such matters was not in conformity with the Venetian tradition. The secular authorities discussed the issue and tried to find precedents. They called for the input of the *consultori*, and more importantly, made a point about how secular power might become the political and symbolic handmaid of religious power. This seems to be the key for understanding the relationship between the Inquisition and secular powers before and after the death of Rambaldo. Inquisitors' claims and controversial decisions were considered contrary to the idea of fair justice the Republic wanted to project. However, as soon as the Ten took over, the council lost all their reservations about capital punishment and fairer justice.

Indeed, the objections raised about the harshness of sentences for heresy did not apply to *crimine lesae majestatis*. Was the concern of protecting their populace from the Inquisition simply a rhetorical tactic used by the Council? Were they trying to advance their own prerogatives, wanting to have the ability to prosecute such crimes and exercise sentences like execution? Becoming the most prevalent judicial authority in Venetian

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 162. The murdering of the heretics occurred in the Republic in two distinct ways: in public in the cities of the mainland, and in secret in Venice, according to the principle that in the capital the death of heretics should not be a ceremony or a ritual. Ibid., 165-66.



territory and circumscribing ecclesiastical authority was only part of the matter.<sup>254</sup> In pursuing such a strategy, the Ten redefined crime and expanded the full potential of its meaning. By exploiting ambiguities in the overlapping meanings of heresy, abuses of the sacraments, *crimine lesa majestatis*, and crimes against God, they ensured that the state would be the sole authority to prosecute such offences.

If the Doge could bury the Eucharist to protect it in the heart of the basilica, which was the symbol of his secular and religious powers, why could the Ten not prosecute any outrageous abuse, offence, or desecration perpetrated against that very same body of Christ? This happened, as was discussed above, while a dispute was erupting between the Holy See and the Republic concerning the alleged autonomous status of the basilica. Bertolli painstakingly tried to protect the prerogatives of Venice without putting too much on the table. Did an old papal concession exist, or was the position of the basilica the result of a self-proclaimed act of independence, as in many other instances in which Venice fashioned herself and the state's own traditions? Bertolli did not think it was a good idea to dig into this too much. He simply wanted to maintain

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<sup>254</sup> That there was a sincere preoccupation with the symbolic centrality of the death penalty (as a representation of sovereign power and its prerogatives) emerges repeatedly from the documentation. The well-established principle that a person convicted would be delivered to the secular arm for execution was seriously challenged in a few instances during the sixteenth century, when the Inquisition prosecuted and also physically executed the convicted without recurring to the secular authorities. The fact that those occurrences went back to the sixteenth century did not make them less significant given they were expressly reported among the documents gathered in 1705. According to Milani and Del Col, these sentences were not shown to the Collegio “perhaps to avoid the risk that secular authority might think their officials did not always execute heretics.” (the translation is my own), *Ibid.*, 172. However, this does not mean that this material was ignored or was going to be ignored by the *consultori*, by the Savi (the three nobles who were part of the Venetian Inquisition) or by other members of the Venetian patriciate who might have access to it in an unofficial way for that matter. The Collegio was the cabinet of Venetian politics and consisted of the doge, six ducal councilors, three heads of the judiciary, and sixteen Savi. The Collegio presided over the Senate and decided the agenda to be discussed. Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 375.

the status quo, established *ab immeorabili tempore*, without uncovering a can of worms. As bizarre and preposterous as this affair might sound, it brings to light the complexities of such discourses, wherein no sharp line could be drawn between secular and religious bounds. Moreover, historically the feast of the Corpus Christi was in Venice “one of the most important occasions to connect governmental authority to the supernatural power of the Eucharist.”<sup>255</sup> This blurring of the sacred-secular boundary, embodied in the idea of Jesus as both humane and divine, had been a defining feature of most forms of Christianity since Late Antiquity. It continued to resonate in the Age of Enlightenment in celebrations focused on the Eucharist, which remained popular in the religious and civic life of the city.

Wherever possible, the Council of Ten worked to take the spiritual out of life. They focused on discipline as a non-spiritual matter whenever they could. This process began during the Renaissance and was prompted, as Guido Ruggiero emphasized, by the Inquisition itself. In this disciplining process, both the secular and the religious domains competed to redraw the boundaries of spiritual life in ways that still need to be explored, and with implications that go well beyond the period of the Enlightenment. In their mutual (but not always coinciding) interest to define the sacred, the religious authorities played an equally important role in shaping, re-shaping, and negotiating the place of religion and devotion in eighteenth century everyday life. Both the Inquisition and then Ten seemed to enforce and even compete in the secularization of society, but they each

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<sup>255</sup> Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75; and Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 224-28. Throughout Europe, the Corpus Christi procession of the Blessed Sacrament – whose members moved beneath a golden canopy, were preceded by clergy, and were followed by rulers and magistrates – had become a public celebration of the corporate identities of the main social groups within the Christian community, who held up the body of Christ as their triumphant king. The celebration resembled a royal entry into the city, as all orders of society appeared and paraded through the streets.

shared a desire to monopolize the sacred. The excising of the spiritual from popular control proceeded alongside a simultaneous process to either maintain that control within the religious domain or to restore control over the sacred to the political body. In fact, the efforts of the Ten can be described as an attempt to re-sacralize the Republic. Thus, the mutual efforts of both the religious and secular authorities to either regulate or eliminate devotional practices were intertwined with their struggle to wield power over the sacred sphere.

Here again the road to disenchantment was anything but straightforward. There were full stops, changes in direction, and sudden reversals back to the old paths throughout the journey. The mutual encroachments of the secular and religious spheres created detours and numerous side-passages along a road that was perhaps never destined to reach its intended destination (for either group of travelers). The defense of the Republic's status as an independent state against papal intrusion became interwoven with the matter of jurisdiction for the prosecution of misuses of the Host. Concerning sacrilege, the religious and secular authorities confronted and competed against each other, and fought their ultimate battle in the field of popular magic. The resulting, and almost inevitable, secular reading of the sacred was a way of embedding (or re-embedding) the sacred in the profane. This was to be the last chapter in Venice's long endeavor to meld religion and public life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Long Autumn of Magic: The Entanglement of Magic and Religion**

This chapter analyzes the ways in which magic was still deeply rooted not only in popular belief but also among representatives of the Church in the Veneto in the eighteenth century. Magic and religion had always overlapped across the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and little apparently changed as far as their close relationship is concerned during the Age of Enlightenment. The complexities of this overlap made it difficult for anyone – reformers, Inquisition judges, secular authorities, or commentators – to disentangle one from the other, even as they argued the necessity of doing so. But not everyone saw this as desirable. The last chapter examined the role played by the Inquisition and Council of Ten in prosecuting magic; this chapter focuses more closely on the popular practices and in so doing suggests the deep relationship between magic and religion in the eighteenth century, a period in which magic was still ubiquitous and existed in a multiplicity of forms.

Until recently, magic and witchcraft during the age of the Enlightenment were fairly neglected topics of historical investigation. Even Renaissance studies have often relegated magic and witchcraft to the margins, although episodes of witch-craze have garnered significant attention for that earlier period. Magic and witchcraft, however, shed a light on culture and society not necessarily only when witch-hunts or witch-crazes are involved.<sup>256</sup> As Guido Ruggiero emphasizes, while “scholars have dismissed *maleficia* as simple, unsophisticated spells and half-understood magical formulas that

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<sup>256</sup> If the pact with the devil was a response to and a mirror of religious treatises of the time, the existence of malevolent magic was indeed an inherent communal phenomenon within European society, a way to deal and cope with misfortune and otherwise unexplainable adversities.

deluded only the poor and ignorant,” a more sympathetic approach and a renewed interest in the ordinary has found significance in magical practices that resonated *both* in high *and* everyday culture.<sup>257</sup> This is even more the case in works on the eighteenth century, in which scholars have often dismissed magic as a trivial residue of past witchcraft practices that are of little or no interest to social history.<sup>258</sup> Owen Davies, has noted that “until fairly recently the history of witchcraft and magic beyond the period of the witch-trials (generally 1600-1700s) was not seen as having any significant social importance, and was seen as a subject for folklorists, not historians.”<sup>259</sup> More recent publications, however, set out how to rescue it, in E. P. Thompson’s famous words, “from the enormous condescension of posterity.” As Owen demonstrates, at a time in which magic was supposed to have declined, occult knowledge underwent a process of significant democratization as is proven for instance by the flourishing of manuals of hermetic lore during the Enlightenment.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>257</sup> Guido Ruggiero, “Witchcraft and Magic,” in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. G. Ruggiero (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 476; and *Binding Passions, Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>258</sup> A typical example is Oscar di Simplicio, *Inquisizione, stregoneria, medicina. Siena e il suo stato (1580-1721)*, (Siena: Il Leccio, 2000); and *Autunno della stregoneria. Maleficio e magia nell’Italia moderna*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005). For a discussion of the eighteenth century see *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The period of the Witch Trials*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (London: Athlone Press, 2002).

<sup>259</sup> Dave Evans, “Interview with Historian Dr. Owen Davies,” Occult ebooks, accessed November 20, 2011, [http://www.occultebooks.com/interviews/Interview\\_OwenDavies.htm](http://www.occultebooks.com/interviews/Interview_OwenDavies.htm). See also Owen Davies’ two important studies on magic and witchcraft in England, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Culture 1736-1951* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2003). Not only does Davies bring to the fore the resilience of magic and magical beliefs during the Enlightenment, but he, along with other historians, goes well beyond this time period up to the present. Davies has recently edited two books on the subject with Willem de Blécourt, the first focused on the period of the Enlightenment, the second on the nineteenth and twentieth century. Both “show that the history of witchcraft in the modern era is as much a story of continuation as of a decline.” Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies, eds., *Beyond the Witch Trials. Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) and *Witchcraft Continued. Popular Magic in Modern Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>260</sup> Printing had a huge role in this circulation in Britain as well as in the northern American colonies; in Italy, however, manuscripts continued to be a major source of transmission because they more could easily escape censorship. See Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford:

The terms magic and witchcraft are used at times indistinguishably in studies about unorthodox practices and beliefs in religion. Historians have long recognized that witchcraft is a difficult concept that defies easy definition.<sup>261</sup> In choosing the vocabulary for my chapter, the Venetian approach to witchcraft is central. The Venice Inquisition was uninterested in that particular aspect of magical practices that relied on making a pact with the devil and tended to not search for it in the course of its investigations.<sup>262</sup> Thus, the Inquisitors did not “create” or “instill” that sort of witchcraft in the popular imaginary. In Venice, then “witchcraft” tended to refer to *maleficium*, that is when intent to harm was involved. When malevolent intent was at play, “sorcery” rather than

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Clarendon Press, 1993); Henry R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); François Moureau, ed., *De bonne main. La communication manuscrite au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris and Oxford: Universitas-Voltaire Foundation, 1993); David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David D. Hall, *Ways of Writing. The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the situation in Venice, see Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, 237-303; and Filippo de Vivo, *Information and communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>261</sup> Despite the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* no consensus among theologians and Christian writers was ever reached about witchcraft; as far as the clergy was concerned, as we will see in this chapter, in the eighteenth century the reform of priesthood promoted by the council of Trent had not occurred yet; when it comes to popular practices, historians know how difficult it is to grasp them through biased documents. To what extent, for instance, learned culture and popular culture responded to each other creating a whole and completely local set of practices is still a matter of debate; a famous example of this “conflation” is the relation between Inquisitors’ culture with the Friulian local culture in Carlo Ginzburg’s study; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York: Penguin Books, 1982); see on this latter topic Brian P. Levack, *Demonology, Religion, and Witchcraft* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 151. The same can be said for the word superstition, “an elusive and slippery term,” and its various definitions across time and in different authors (Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe. Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4. In Cameron’s study, the notion and the treatment of superstition exclude demonology as well as witchcraft. Indeed, because the distinction often relied on differences in *degree* rather than in *kind*, superstition could both include and exclude witchcraft and demonology, depending on what it was that authors of the past were taking into account. That is to say, superstition turned into witchcraft if the author focused on misbeliefs and practices which were considered serious religious transgression (and led therefore to charges of heresy) rather than on practices that required clerical involvement to be reformed; see also Stuart Clark, “The Rational Witch-finder: Conscience, Demonological Naturalism, and Popular Superstition,” in *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases*, vol. 5, ed. Brian Levack (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 126-152; in particular 134-138. For an exhaustive review of this historiographical as well as theoretical issue, see Stuart Clark, “Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Culture,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Period of Witch Trials*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 122-146.

<sup>262</sup> Ruggiero, *Binding passions*.

“witchcraft” is the most accurate term. Moreover, in the eighteenth century Inquisition trials, “*maleficium*” instead of “*stregaria*” or “*stregarie*” (the Italian words that more closely translate as “witchcraft”) was the Inquisitors’ preferred term. Thus *maleficium*, *fattucchieria*, and *magia* were the words that most often appeared in eighteenth century Inquisition documents. For these reasons, I use “magic” as an umbrella form for practices that, although variously defined by the eighteenth-century Inquisition, had at least one thing in common; they were techniques designed to assist people in time of need to heal, and, at times, to harm. Very often, of course the goals of magic are more mundane, helping one win at gambling, uncover a treasure, or find a lover.

### **The Books of Commands, Grimoires, Secreti, and Popular Lore**

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the circulation of books of magic, called grimoires (in Venice people often referred to them as “the books of commands”), was a widespread phenomenon.<sup>263</sup> A grimoire was a compilation of “conjurations and charms, providing instructions on how to make magical objects such as protective amulets and talismans.”<sup>264</sup> According to the historian of early modern English magic Owen Davies, contrary to what is often assumed, books of magic and grimoires were not always the same; “grimoires are books of magic, but not all books of magic are

<sup>263</sup> Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. Clavicola Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milano: Edizioni Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002). The same phenomenon, probably in much bigger proportions, took place in England, continental Europe, and America. In his book about the books of magic, Davies stresses that far from “disenchanted” Europe, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment actually saw a steady increase in magical texts. Widespread distribution of *grimoires* began in the eighteenth century and continued with great success for well over a hundred years. Printed in relatively cheap formats, such as the French *Bibliothèque bleue*, such books were sold in Europe and flooded Europe’s New World colonies, where they circulated not only among colonists but also among native and African-American populations. See Owen Davies, *Grimoires. A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: University Press, 2009).

<sup>264</sup> Davis, *Grimoires*, 1.

grimoires.”<sup>265</sup> Davies excludes esoteric texts that purported to deal with occult forces in the natural world, such as works of alchemy and astrology, from the domain of grimoires.<sup>266</sup> However, the distinction is not absolute and his definition seems too clear cut. Books of astral magical rites and conjurations, like the famous medieval *Picatrix*, fit the category of grimoire, as did occult books of secrets containing elements that contributed to the grimoire tradition.

In Venetian Inquisition trials people used the word “secrets” as a general word encompassing all popular magical spells, formulae, and rituals from books of magic, that is, grimoire and books of secrets. In the twelfth century the so-called secrets of nature entered Western culture via Arab civilization. European scholars eagerly embraced the new learning, the product of older Syrian, Persian, and Greek cultures, translated and assimilated by Islamic scholars. The results of this cultural process were books that professed to disclose the “secrets” as well as the “experiments” of famous men of science. They drew from an impressive corpus of treatises on astrology, alchemy, magic, and divination.<sup>267</sup> Their underlying principle was that “the world was a network of hidden correspondences and a reservoir of powerful occult forces.”<sup>268</sup>

Despite the fact that Arab scholars mixed philosophy with the work of artisans and instrument-makers, and mathematics with pharmaceutical and public health concerns, these works remained throughout the middle ages almost exclusively the

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38-40.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 40.



preserve of intellectuals.<sup>269</sup> The knowledge they transmitted was elitist and esoteric. As printed books became more widely available in the sixteenth century, however, the literature of secrets were transformed; it was no longer esoteric or elitist but increasingly popular.<sup>270</sup> Books of secrets contained “recipes, formulas, and ‘experiments’ associated with one of the crafts or with medicine” and were used as “all-purpose household books.”<sup>271</sup> They, however, mixed the marvelous with the natural, and did not distinguish between magical and technical recipes.<sup>272</sup> Although to the modern reader, as William Eamon argues, books of secrets “more closely resemble how-to-do books than magic books,” they also often explained how to use incantations to summon demons, disclosed magical formulas or suggested experiments to produce marvels.<sup>273</sup> As a result in the everyday world of early modern Venice and the Veneto books of secrets and grimoires were often used together with their magical techniques and secrets overlapping and blending.<sup>274</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 47-90. The term “book of the secret of secrets” reached extraordinary popularity in the middle of the twelfth century when the homonym Islamic pseudo-Aristotelian text (*Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār*) provided a model for Latin and vernacular manuscripts of the work, 45.

<sup>270</sup> Although the Scientific Revolution seemed to explain nature’s secrets and by the eighteenth century those secrets were mere techniques, in the sixteenth century the term was still loaded with its ancient and medieval connotations, an aura of esoteric wisdom, occult knowledge, artisan’s cunning, and the injunction not to divulge secrets to the *vulgus*.

<sup>271</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>272</sup> Davies, *Grimoires*, 259

<sup>273</sup> Eamon, *Science and the Secrets*.

<sup>274</sup> According to Eamon, the advent of printing did not eliminate the boundaries between learned and popular culture, rather, it gave voice to both and mediated between the two. The Books of Secrets were not only or not simply vulgarization or popularization of prevalently Latin theoretical academic knowledge but they also drew on vernacular sources. Empiricism was the key word of those texts, which were read by barbers, bone-benders, patres familias, as well as merchants and doctors. The books of secrets were the product of “a meditation between natural philosophy and the people’s immediate, concrete, and empirical experience of nature,” see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets*, 94, 105. See also Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550–1600*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Kavey argues that “books of secrets did, in fact, make the manipulation of nature more accessible to a broad variety of people.” Readers were “powerful agents in, rather than victims of, the natural world,” Kavey, 8. Books of magic circulated widely because of their affordable prices and Kavey examines the role of readers in constructing authority and the strategies printers employed to attract the readers. In eighteenth century

Among the many available grimoires, the most famous was probably the *Clavicula Salomonis*, the Key of Solomon.<sup>275</sup> According to myth, an angel had revealed to King Solomon “the secret of secrets,” that is, the power of summoning but also dominating spirits and demons. Hence, in Venice as elsewhere, behind the title of *Clavicula Salomonis* lay often other books of magic: it became a catch-all term for grimoires. Venice, however, had its own special texts that were locally prized. There, texts of ceremonial magic were often called “Books of Command,” and were at times identified with the *Clavicula*, but also at times with the writings of the local author, Pietro d’Abano.<sup>276</sup>

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Venice, leaflets about *secrets* circulated as pharmacological recipes and the *Provveditori alla Sanità*, the Venetian health magistracy, regulated their diffusion to protect the apothecary’s guild from uncontrolled competition. See Carnelos, *Libri da grida*, 145, 150, 273-76.

<sup>275</sup> Already in the sixteenth century *The Clavicule of Solomon* was “the most ubiquitous and widely circulated grimoire.” Early modern Venice versions were available in many languages. See Davies, *Grimoires*, 54, and Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*.

<sup>276</sup> For Venetians Pietro’s name evoked a magic that was rooted in their own history of magic and esotericism. Pietro d’Abano (1257-1316) was a philosopher, astrologer and professor of medicine in Padua. The *Heptameron* and *Almadel* were books of magic attributed to Piero D’Abano; the latter was the one that most caught people’s imagination. According to legend, Pietro had acquired the knowledge of the seven liberal arts thanks to the seven domestic spirits he kept locked up in a crystal jar. As a sorcerer he could make money he had just spent go back in his purse, and he could move his neighbors’ wells onto his garden and use them whenever he wanted. When he was accused of magic arts by the Inquisition, the people of Padua tried to lynch him. He transformed into a donkey and escaped the crowd. Legend aside, the Inquisition accused him of magic in 1306 but his powerful friends interceded and the charge was dismissed. He kept on performing his activities as sorcerer, astrologer, and physician until 1315 when he was accused again, this time of heresy. He died soon afterwards, but the Inquisition condemned him at the stake even though he was already buried in Saint Antony church in Padua. Before the Inquisition dug out his body to burn it in the public square as heretical, his friends took it and the Inquisition had to burn just an image of the heretic. See Giammaria Mazzuchelli, “Notizie storiche e critiche intorno alla vita di Pietro d’Abano,” in Giovanni Battista Chiaramonti, ed., *Dissertazioni storiche, scientifiche, erudite recitate da diversi autori* (Brescia: Giammaria Rizzardi, 1765), 65-101; and Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy* (Amsterdam - New York, NY: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008).

Pietro’s myth still reverberated in the nineteenth century, not only in his own birth region (Veneto) and in Northern Italy, but also in other areas of Europe, as the eponymous melodrama in three acts, published by Ludwick Tieck in 1825, shows. This work was a re-elaboration of Pietro’s story in romantic-gothic style in tune with the taste of the time. See L. Tieck, *Pietro di Abano*, ed. Antonella Gargano, (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 2003). Folklore studies show that in the area around Feltre (a small town north of Padua) magical practices were executed in the name of Pietro d’Abano at the end of the nineteenth century, further evidence of the persistence of those techniques well beyond the Enlightenment, G. Pitre and S. Salomone Marino, *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari*, vol.15 (1896):289; *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, vol 2 (Rome: Coi Tipi del Salviucci, 1878), 526-50.

Thanks to printing and popular interest, grimoires were not rare or particularly expensive. And as was the case with many early modern texts, the *Clavicula*, or at least parts of it, passed into oral traditions.<sup>277</sup> Fragments were transmitted by words of mouth. Thus it became a text *in fieri*, a work in progress, that is, not a finished book but rather a collection of parts reformulated and adapted to people's needs. Significantly these books and their users usually professed to be true Christians: prayers and blessings formed integral parts of the magic contained in them.<sup>278</sup> Moreover Christ, Mary and the saints were all appealed to for protection from harm and these figures along with sacramentals attempted to prevent inadvertent conjuring-up of demons.<sup>279</sup> This religious or liturgical aspect of the *ars magica* would have significant consequences for the resilience of magical techniques across the early modern period, even as the Counter-Reformation placed the *Clavicula* securely on the first Index of Prohibited Books in 1559.<sup>280</sup>

<sup>277</sup> As Davies points out, large areas of magical practice existed entirely in oral culture: "Grimoires never represented the totality of people's experience and knowledge in the past. There are numerous charms, spells, and ritual that were passed down orally through many generations, and were only recorded in writing by folklorists and antiquarians in the nineteenth century," 1, 45.

<sup>278</sup> Their roots, however, lie even further back in the religions of the ancient civilizations of the Near and Middle East. During the medieval era there occurred an extraordinary and intense scholarly collaboration between the religious traditions of paganism, Judaism, Christianity, and, later, Islam and each of these traditions affected each another. The pagan writings of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Egyptians were translated and examined. Churchmen travelled across Europe to study the Arabic science and Jewish mysticism taught in Spain and France. As a result of this confluence, magic came to be treated both as a religious matter and an aspect of science. Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: University Press, 2009).

<sup>279</sup> Davies, *Grimoires*.

<sup>280</sup> Mario Infelise, *I libri proibiti da Gutenberg all'Encyclopédie* (Rome: Laterza, 2002); Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*.

### A Priest/Magus: Don Pietro Longaretti

It was not only books and oral culture that promoted and maintained a rich world of magic in the early modern Veneto. Don Pietro Longaretti provides a good example, as an eighteenth-century necromancer working in the grey area between “white” and “black” magic. He had received a humanistic education in Bergamo, where he was born. After studying Latin under the guide of a religious preceptor, Longaretti moved on to philosophy, also under the direction of a religious tutor. He became a wandering cleric, traveling from Bergamo to Padua and other cities, from parish to parish until finally he ended up in Venice.<sup>281</sup> As many people did in Venice, he spent his time in cafés, where he could meet and talk to others enjoying the social life of the metropolis and finding potential customers for his magic.<sup>282</sup>

In eighteenth-century Venice cafés had replaced pharmacies and barber shops as places of socialization: here people met and talked, unafraid at times of saying imprudent things. Don Longaretti in a café told Pietro Floravansi, an attorney who had become intrigued by the priest’s personality, that he knew “how to make demons bring him money.”<sup>283</sup> He then revealed his magical expertise and, taking him to his house, showed him the rich apparatus of ceremonial magic he kept hidden there, which included a manuscript grimoire, consecrated hosts, reliquaries, and “a circle inside which the book [the grimoire] had to be read.”<sup>284</sup> In December 1752, after being urged by his confessor, Floravansi denounced Longaretti to the Inquisition, claiming to have doubts about the magical activities in which he participated. It is not clear whether his skepticism stemmed

<sup>281</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 145.

<sup>282</sup> Socialization and the exchange of ideas in coffee-houses is discussed in greater detail further on in this chapter.

<sup>283</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 145.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

from his religious beliefs, his conviction that magic did not work, or his disappointment at the failure of the *ars*. Of course, none of these reasons excludes the others.

Extensive records exist on Father Longaretti, because he had to defend himself from several charges: he was accused of practicing sorcery, hunting treasure, being a magician and an expert in occult knowledge, as well as a priest who did not hesitate to change his name multiple times to escape ecclesiastical control.<sup>285</sup> He is the archetype of the cleric-magician and, perhaps also a libertine. As witnesses attested, Longaretti had two passions in his life: theatre and magic.<sup>286</sup> Among all the magical paraphernalia found in his home, the Inquisition found twenty pentacles and various *carte di voler bene*, that is, love charms for performing love magic. In 1755 after a long investigation of his checkered career in several Veneto towns, the Inquisition condemned him to five years in prison and eternal banishment from Venice and its territories. Longaretti escaped, however, and his adventurous flight was briefly noted by the Inquisition notary including his burning down of the prison door, his stops at a few taverns while fleeing, and his eventual disappearance in lay attire in the direction of Bergamo, his native city. There the Venetian police informants gave up tracking him and the trail goes cold.<sup>287</sup> Ten years

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<sup>285</sup> He was charged with sacrilege, abuse of sacred objects, conjuring the devil to bring money, corrupting people to do the same things, having celebrated mass twice a day, celebrating mass after having eaten and having sex with women.

<sup>286</sup> The theatrical aspect of magic was often noted in literature. To name the most famous, Prospero and Doctor Faustus are two stage magicians who possessed magic books. In particular, Prospero's book was crucial to his rule over islands, enabling him to control spirits and keep them obedient. Barbara Mowat argues that Prospero's grimoire departed "in significant ways from extant grimoires" since Prospero's relationship with the spirit-world had "an insouciance and arrogance that would have baffled the master of a typical grimoire;" this to say, once again, that even in literature as well as in reality what practitioners did with the books of magic eluded easy categorization. See Barbara A. Mowat, "Prospero's Book," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001): 10. As far as the humorous and deceitful side of magic is concerned, see for example the comedies by Anton Francesco Grazzini, called *Il Lasca*, *Le Cene di Antonfrancesco Grazzini*, (Milan: G. Silvestri, 1815), 55-76; the evocative mago's name in the novella (Novella IV, Seconda Cena) is Zoroaster.

<sup>287</sup> Casanova was arrested for magic and atheism in 1755 and in 1756 made his rocambolesque escape from the "Piombi." See Giacomo Casanova, *Fuga dai Piombi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2002).

after the end of the trial Longaretti made a plea for mercy to the Venetian authorities: the Roman Congregation of the Holy Office had dismissed his charges and he wanted to return to Venice. We do not know how this ended. In the end Longaretti's story remains as elusive as the magic he used.<sup>288</sup>

The presence of such a character was not that unusual in sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries Inquisition documents, but it might seem unlikely in the eighteenth-century. The claim that people still inhabited an enchanted world is hardly revolutionary, yet it is quite surprising that clergymen should still figure prominently there. According to the historiographical tradition, especially in regard to the northern Italian states, the days of the magician-priest were long past. This misconception goes hand in hand with the relative indifference of many scholars to the religious practices of the Enlightenment in Italy. Thus, the fact that members of secular clergy and regular orders were so deeply entrenched in magic is an important untold chapter of eighteenth-century history.<sup>289</sup>

### Sacramentals, Prayers, and Priests

Clergy in the eighteenth century actually were frequent practitioners of learned magic, even as the Church continued to place increasing restrictions on their use of quasi-

<sup>288</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 145.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. An exception is Erik Midelfort's study on Joseph Gassner. Gassner was a German Catholic priest who had extraordinary powers of exorcism. He healed thousands of men and women, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestants. His personal, unique method, which combined exorcism with psychology, triggered religious enthusiasm as well as vitriolic skepticism. To heal his patients, Gassner developed a method that combined traditional belief in demonic possession with a more rationalistic (and innovative) approach toward mental illness. Indeed Gassner, ostracized both by the enlightened *intelligentsia* and by the religious authorities for his extensive use of exorcism in curing ailments and possessions, embodies the contradictions of his time. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

magical rituals to aid their parishioners.<sup>290</sup> Indeed, some priests' magical beliefs and practices differed little from those of their parishioners.<sup>291</sup> At times, clerics played the role of cunning men, eager to use a claimed clerical monopoly on the spiritual to empower their magic and sustain their status and authority.<sup>292</sup> In his writings, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, the renowned eighteenth century historian, antiquarian, and ecclesiastic, repeatedly condemned priests who, instead of discouraging superstitious practices, exploited them to their advantage.<sup>293</sup> Thus, priests themselves were not disciplined enough to be able in turn to discipline their flocks. Moreover, priests were often central participants in magic that involved both prayers and sacramentals, as they possessed the expertise to handle the sacred tools for such rituals.

Prayers and sacramentals remained key elements of magic. One of the greatest challenges for the church after Trent was to eradicate prohibited prayers, especially those used for magic. The Tridentine Church resolutely and systematically sought to ban devotional deviations by defining doctrine, tightening up discipline, and encouraging

<sup>290</sup> Gentilcore argues that magic was the biggest threat the Catholic Church had to face after the Council of Trent “despite – or because of – the number of ecclesiastics involved in it.” See David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch. The System of the Sacred* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>291</sup> For earlier examples of this see the fascinating story of father Aurelio of Siena in the city of Venice, whose adventurous life displays the deep and tangled dealings of a priest offering magic to members of all social strata as well as institutional figures, see Guido Ruggiero, “The Fortune-telling Frail”: Fra Aurelio di Siena and the Wages of Sin,” in Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 175-222; see also Luciano Allegra, “Il parroco: un mediatore tra alta e bassa cultura,” in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 4. Intellettuali e potere*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 897-947; and, in the same series, Piero Camporesi, “Cultura popolare e cultura d'élite tra Medioevo ed età Moderna,” 79-157. For a study of the dynamics between the “cunning priest” and its community, see Mary R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote Ovvero Strione’: Ecclesiastical and Superstitious Remedies in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” ed. Steven L. Kaplan, in *Understanding Popular Culture* (Berlin and New York: Mouton, 1984), 53-83.

<sup>292</sup> Cunning folk is the English term for practitioners of magic and it has been in use since the fifteenth century in England (Davies, *Popular Magic*, 1-28). However, considering the similarities rather than the differences, this specific usage of the word does not prevent historians from applying and extending the term to other geographical and historical contexts, as I freely do with respect to various eighteenth century Venetian settings, both urban and rural, in reference to women and men, clergy and lay people, engaged in magical techniques.

<sup>293</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata devozione de' cristiani* (Trento: Giambattista Parone, 1748).

proper devotion. The list of prohibited prayers was lengthy. Periodically, the Church printed and circulated books that listed prohibited devotional texts. These prayers were usually addressed to specific saints and identified by the name and by the first line of the supplication.<sup>294</sup> The variations, however, were endless and thus virtually impossible to pin down. Making the task more difficult yet was the fact that these prayers were also part of an oral tradition and the written records of them are merely the tip of a much larger area of cooperation between priests and general public. Even written prayers, however, were hard to control. They were a huge business. Publishers constantly printed new editions of prohibited devotional texts. A recent study reveals how the interplay of ingenious printers with the well-known relative freedom Venice enjoyed, created an illegal market of books, flyers, healing recipes, and holy cards that flourished alongside legal ones.<sup>295</sup>

One way to prevent or limit the proliferation of prohibited prayers was to publish and encourage the permitted ones. Ejaculatory prayers were brief prayers that constituted a mainstay of popular devotion. It was believed that their repetition at established hours of the days would help keep the faithful in a Christian frame of mind. Traditionally the prayers of ejaculation were immediate and “sharp” (*jaculum* means dart in Latin); they had to reach God instantly and their brevity did not strain the memory. In the devotional

<sup>294</sup> F. Antonio Leoni, *Breve raccolta d'alcune particolari operette spirituali proibite* (1709). Leoni was Inquisitor in Bologna and wrote this handbook for “the convenience” of his vicars *foranei* (local delegates of the Inquisition; see next chapter for a more detailed explanations of such figures) and ministers. This little book was meant to help the Inquisitors to sort out quickly the most common prohibited prayers as well as “indecorous and illicit” devotional images. It is a long list of texts, prayers, indulgencies “apocryphal, of no value, and indecent that still are printed;” 1-5. Prohibited prayers were even more difficult to track than other kinds of texts: the majority of them circulated in manuscripts and fragments, passing from hand to hand, copied, and interpolated into other texts. References to these lists of prohibited orations appear also in Cesare Cantù, *Storia degli italiani* (Turin: Unione Tipografico Editrice, 1856) 850; Pietro Tamburini, *Storia generale dell'Inquisizione* (Milan and Naples: Fratelli Borroni and Giustino Merolla, 1866), 422; Filippo Anfossi, *Difesa della bolla Auctorem fidei* (Rome: Carlo Zordacchini, 1816), 179.

<sup>295</sup> Laura Carnelos, *Libri da grida, da banco e da bottega. Editoria di consumo a Venezia tra norma e contraffazione (XVII-XVIII)* (Ph.D diss., Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, 2010).



books they were recommended for people who could not meditate because of lack of time or education.<sup>296</sup> Often written in rhyme, ejaculatory prayers did not allow (too much) imaginative manipulation. The daily missal contained many of these prayers; they were mostly spiritual and edifying, and encouraged imitation of the saints' moral virtues. The thaumaturgical aspect of saints' devotion was left aside. However, it was *that* aspect that was mostly valued in the prayers outside the church. There, people's needs, combined with their fecund imagination, bent the ejaculations to all sorts of goals, many less licit and some quite magical.

Long prayers called *orazione* were published as well. Most were used during liturgical celebrations, since preachers used to publish their famous sermons as well their favorite prayers. The *Orazioni* were collections of prayers usually "in praise of" a particular saint: they were therefore in tune with the hagiographical genre endorsed after the Council of Trent.<sup>297</sup> Nonetheless, no matter how widespread these books of *orazioni* might be, when people called for saints' help outside of mass or official liturgical places, they used the prayers that most suited their needs. Thus, the improper use of Catholic liturgical prayers as well as modified versions of prayers were part and parcel of magic rituals. The *carte di voler bene*, cards used in love magic, belonged as well to this category of prohibited prayers. Some were apocryphal, some were prayers that the Church had prohibited, and some were prayers that had not been recognized by the Church. They usually involved psalms, prayers, or invocations often enriched with mysterious iconographic motifs. The saints who were most invoked were St. Daniel, St.

<sup>296</sup> In Pietro Francesco Orta, *Orazioni giaculatorie di molti santi e servi di Dio*, (Rome: Gaetano Zenobi, 1704) the short ejaculatory prayers were followed by little explanatory notes, moralizing stories with historical protagonists.

<sup>297</sup> Serafino da Vicenza, *Orazioni sacre*, vol. 1 (Venice: Giambattista Regozza, 1735).

Marta, St. Ursula, and St. Brigit. But in Venice and its territories St. Anthony was a favorite and he remains to this day one of the most famous saints in Italian Catholic piety.<sup>298</sup>

*Santini*, images of saints reproducing their most iconic characteristics, were as popular as prayers for the pious and for those interested in magic as well. Indeed, the handy pocket-sized holy cards were complementary to the prayers that people addressed to special saints, who many saw in a way as artisans of the sacred and called upon to help with their personal problems, healing illness or aid with love. Each saint tended in fact to specialize in healing one or more ailments or dealing with specific problems.<sup>299</sup> In order to work these cards often required rituals to empower them: usually a certain number of masses or blessings. In Venice suggestively at times transporting such images a certain number of times in a boat was required. And here we may apply what Ruggiero calls “a locally constructed discourse,” referring to the many “christianities” existing during the Renaissance.<sup>300</sup> Despite the attempts after Trent to impose upon the believers standardized and sanitized versions of devotional practices, communities, villages, and

<sup>298</sup> For the clandestine circulation of the oration of St. Martha and issues revolving around this topic see Maria Mia Fantini, “La circolazione clandestina dell’orazione a santa Marta,” in *Donna, disciplina, creanza cristiana dal XV al XVII secolo* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996), 45-65. Orations to St. Cipriano were also very common and people used to carry them for protection, a fact recorded also in the literature of the Italian Renaissance, see Grazzini, *Le Cene*, vol. II, 292-93, in the last tale of the “terza cena.” A list of the prohibited orations that printers should not expose in their shops nor sell appears in Pietro Tamburini, *Storia generale dell’Inquisizione*, vol. I (Milan & Naples. Fratelli Borroni and Giustino Merolla, 1866).

<sup>299</sup> Gennaro Angiolino, *Santi e santini: iconografia popolare sacra europea dal sedicesimo al ventesimo secolo* (Napoli: Guida editori, Istituto francese di Napoli, 1985), 3-20.

<sup>300</sup> It was a difficult task for the Catholic Church to impose its vision of Christianity on society, both in urban centers and especially in the countryside: a fact, indeed, that applies not only to Catholicism but to Protestant cultures too, where the official Reformed view of society did coexist with multiple local interpretations and adjustments. See Guido Ruggiero, “Witchcraft and Magic,” 478; and for the German Protestant world, see Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987) and *The Reformation in National Context*, eds. Robert Scribner, Ray Porter, and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Also, for an interesting study on the dialectic relationship between central and local authorities in relation to particular cults and traditions in Italy, see Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, sanctity and history in tridentine Italy. Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

cities kept their own particular liturgies, which persisted up to and beyond the eighteenth century.<sup>301</sup> Venice with her peculiar watery landscape and her unique political system provided its unique ways of fashioning imaginative magical-religious practices.

The layered and syncretic aspect of magical prayers is nicely revealed in an invocation to St. Anthony the Abbot, also called “The Saint of the Fire,” since he was appealed to cure herpes zoster, known in Italy as St. Anthony’s fire.<sup>302</sup>

*Missier* Saint Anthony of the burning fire, rich, noble, and powerful, you came from the East to the West as the day darkened and the night blackened, you ruled the water as you ruled the burning fire, you ruled ferocious Nero’s heart and you ruled Tobias’ swine eyes. Saint Anthony, give me the help I’m asking for, as you made the good thief lose his sense, I strongly pray, compel, and conjure that you humiliate [name] heart so you can make him lose all his senses and feelings of body, mind, and imagination. So, *Missier* Saint Anthony of the fire, I want to strongly pray, compel, and conjure you in name of the favor you did to that old woman when Noel stole her chickens, to make N.N. lose all his senses and feelings of body mind and imagination. [...] So, *Missier* saint Anthony in name of the bells you rung, and the mass you said, and the chalice you lifted, and the book you read, and the robe you wore, and the rope you tied around your waist, I strongly pray, compel and conjure you for the flames of your burning powerful fire that you vigorously stir up the unruly passion in his hearth that he cannot rest, that he won’t be able to rest or find peace, that he won’t be able to find a place where to repose, and that he will feel burned and devoured, that he won’t be able to rest or stay in bed or go to church or walk down the street, that he won’t be able to spend, buy, and trade with men or women, that he won’t be able to talk to girls so he will hate all of them [...] that he will not be able to stay in any

<sup>301</sup> For a thorough investigation of the significance of local liturgical practices in preserving as well as building religious identity in Catholic Germany see Marc R. Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque: Religious Identity in Southwest Germany, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>302</sup> Saint Anthony the Abbot, also known as the Hermit or the Great (ca. 251-356) was one of the first saints and is most famous for his thaumaturgical virtues. The saint’s healing power covered a broad pathology of painful exanthems. Besides the herpes zoster, his specialty, he was believed to be able to cure ergotism and erysipelas. All of these conditions, albeit different in etiology, are referred to in one country or another as St. Anthony’s fire. Accounts of his endurance of demonic temptations in the Libyan Desert contributed to spread his fame and made him into the saint that fought the devil. His biography, written by Athanasius of Alexandria, bishop of Alexandria, Father of the Church, and a contemporary, spread the ascetic ideal of St. Anthony in Eastern and Western Christianity. Saint Anthony’s fame was constant in the first centuries of Christianity and experienced a resurgence during the crusades, when the search for his relics boosted his popularity anew, see Carlo Gelmetti, *Il fuoco di sant’Antonio. Storia, tradizioni e medicina* (Milan: Springler-Verlag, 2007), 1-7, 53-116.

place without me, he could not breathe or find consolation but in coming to or calling for me, loving me, longing for me, and consoling me for whatever I can say and ask. [...] Hallelujah. Hallelujah.<sup>303</sup>

This prayer was found among the many magical things found in the priest Don Longaretti's house discussed earlier. It is interesting to note that the analogies typical of conjurations and spells come from the Scripture, from legends, and from oral narratives, all mixed freely together. What is important is not scriptural accuracy or even the likelihood of the events recalled, but their wondrous resonances. It is likely that the value of the juxtaposition of the biblical stories mentioned in the prayer (Nero, Tobias, and the swine) lay in the demonic presence and the capacity of St. Anthony to defeat the devil, one of the feats for which he was most venerated.<sup>304</sup>

That St. Anthony was the saint one would turn to for the cure of skin diseases and to fight the devil had a deeper logic. The fire of the hell that the saint fought against in his

<sup>303</sup> All translations are mine. Punctuation has been changed to conform to modern usage. ASV, Sant' Uffizio, b. 145.

<sup>304</sup> According to Christian tradition, the emperor Nero was not only responsible for the persecutions of Christians but also for setting Rome on fire and then blaming it on the Christians. Furthermore, under his reign the apostles Paul and Peter were both condemned to death. Depicted as one of the cruelest Roman emperors, one of the ultimate human embodiments of evil, Nero represented a diabolical power associated with the Antichrist, a legend that saw a revival in the nineteenth century. See Harry W. Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul: Historical and Judicial Context, Traditions, and Legends* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994), 191-193; Shushma Malik "Ultimate Corruption Manifest: Nero as the Antichrist in Late Antiquity," *Acta Classica Supplementary Volume*, forthcoming 2012; and, by the same author, "Nero's Rome as a Model for *fin-de siècle* Decadence" (paper presented at the Conference *Proceedings of Sexual Knowledge: Uses of the Past*, University of Exeter, 27-29 July 2009). Although Nero is never mentioned in the Book of Revelation, Richard Bauckham contends that John used the historical Nero to describe the beast, which would therefore explain why works of late antiquity and early Christianity constantly referred to him, Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London and New York: Continuum, 1998), 384-451. The Book of Tobias, or Book of Tobit, from which the second reference in the prayer is taken, is an apocryphal book of the Bible, the earliest Hebrew version of which dates to the fifth century B.C. The book was mostly known because of Tobias' struggle against a demon during his wedding night. Tobias married Sarah knowing that her previous seven husbands had been killed by a demon before she could consummate the marriages. This biblical story portrays the sanctity of marriage, the intercession of the angels, and the reward of good works. Swine do not appear in the Book of Tobias but in Luke 8:33, where demons came out of a possessed man and entered a herd of pigs which subsequently rushed down a steep bank into a lake and drowned, see "Tobit," in *Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn, John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003) 736-47; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, ed. Craig A. Bubeck (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2003), 185.

hagiographical tradition became in the popular imagination the fire of the skin rashes that afflicted his petitioners. That same fire carried over to matters of love. In magical prayers it was metaphorically transformed into the fire of lovers' passion. In this creative transposition of meanings the lover who was the object of the prayer was "molested" and tormented with the help of saint Anthony, who was appealed to not "to heal from the fire" but to create another form of it to force one's victim to accept a binding love. Curiously enough, all the events mentioned in the prayer as if they had been Saint Anthony's doings are instead biblical stories that, while unrelated, as far as I know, to the hagiographic tradition of this particular saint, were certainly related to people's perception of a miraculous activity that worked consistently across time. Love magic prayers in St. Anthony's name figure prominently in the Venetian Inquisition's archives from the sixteenth century. Longaretti's case demonstrates how both censorship and Inquisition surveillance could not defeat the circulation as well as the ongoing creative process of performative magic practiced in his name.

St. Anthony and saints in general were not the only ones to be called upon to force love on reticent lovers. In the following prayer addressed to Jesus the absence of biblical references is striking, especially in comparison with the complex intertextual references of the St. Anthony oration:

Oh Jesus, grant me your help in everything I do and good luck in my business, in your holy name  
 Oh Jesus, grant me that N. N. may feel and endure a strong passion in his heart, in your holy name  
 Oh Jesus, grant me that in a short time N.N. may come to find me completely humbled, in your holy name  
 Oh Jesus, grant me that he may come to beg me that I give him peace, in your holy name  
 Oh Jesus, wring N.N. heart to make him love me above everything else, in your holy name

Oh Jesus, torment N.N. heart so that he will come and he won't help but  
 come to me humbled, in your holy name  
 Oh Jesus, true angel of God, grant me what I am asking you, in your holy  
 name  
 Oh Jesus, answer my prayer, in your holy name <sup>305</sup>

In its brevity and simplicity, this plea to Jesus was also a lucky charm, a kind of multi-purpose spell: before addressing love, the first line sets a more general request for success and well-being.<sup>306</sup> The simple, anaphoric structure of the prayer as well as the epistrophe at the end of each line creates a model that easily allowed people to substitute different words and requests for the ones listed here, thereby creating a theoretically infinite variety of orations.

The line between religion and magic could become blurred not only through the use or misuse of prayers. Sacramentals, outwardly visible signs of the sacred, were a virtually inexhaustible source of religious enthusiasm and magic as well. They included rosaries, crucifixes, holy water, holy oil, blessed palms, medals, crosses, pilgrimages, prayers, processions, blessings, exorcism, as well as relics used both to bless and exorcise. They were part of those “ecclesiastical remedies” that certain strains in Catholicism, and later Protestantism accused of being superstitious objects or practices enticing a superficial form of devotion that could easily slide into spiritual error and ultimately magic.<sup>307</sup>

<sup>305</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134. In this process 30 people were charged with heretical propositions and alike and the prosecution lasted from 1707 to 1710.

<sup>306</sup> Prayers addressed to Jesus were by no means exclusively an eighteenth century occurrence. Ruggiero's analysis indeed proves how Christ was a favorite object of people's invocations, Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*.

<sup>307</sup> See Muratori's well-known position about many forms of outward religiosity and the even more pronounced opinions of Enlightenment reformers in the eighteenth century. For an analysis of how sacramentals were at the center of theological and ecclesiastical concern and debate in the Middle Ages, see Godefridus I. Snoeck *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist. A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden and Köln: Brill, 1995).

Predictably, sacramentals were widely used in popular magic.<sup>308</sup> Provided by the priests who were involved in the rituals, or taken from the church by the people who performed magic, sacramentals could seem to offer powers similar to those of sacraments for they appeared to have a sacred power which people could use to manipulate both the natural and the spiritual world.<sup>309</sup> Yet, there was a fundamental theological difference between sacraments and sacramentals: the former worked *ex opere operato*, that is, by virtue of the action itself independently of the merits of the minister or the recipient; the latter worked *ex opere operantis*, namely by virtue of the agent. That meant that a range of requirements had to be met for them to work.<sup>310</sup>

In spite of the fact that there was an attempt to clarify this scholastic distinction at the Council of Trent, the issue remained unclear.<sup>311</sup> Variations in local practices as well as the “uncertainty of theologians and churchmen” made it virtually impossible to draw sharp lines between what was officially approved and what was deemed incorrect.<sup>312</sup> It is not surprising therefore that in popular perception sacramentals and sacraments were charged with a similar religio-magical potential to engage with and manipulate the spiritual world.<sup>313</sup>

It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that both secular and religious authorities drew stricter boundaries and emphasized not only the substantial distinction between the two but also the monopoly of the clergy in administering both sacramentals

<sup>308</sup> In his analysis of religious practices in Puglia, Gentilcore treated extensively of these remedies in popular beliefs, see *From Bishop to Witch*, in particular 100-05.

<sup>309</sup> Robert Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*

<sup>310</sup> Michael Kunzler, *La liturgia della chiesa* ( Milan: Jaca Book, 2003), 434.

<sup>311</sup> Charles Elliott, *Delineation of Roman Catholicism* (New York: G. Lane, 1842), 192-93

<sup>312</sup> Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 43.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

and sacraments.<sup>314</sup> When around 1790 the Dominican Faustino Scarpazza, professor of theology in Venice, wrote a major review of moral theology in Italian, he devoted three pages of his voluminous book to the sacramentals.<sup>315</sup> Scarpazza admits almost reluctantly and in a rather convoluted way that sacramentals are ceremonies created by the church “to instill respect and reverence for the sacraments,” namely, sacramentals symbolize and ignite faith but they do not confer grace the way sacraments do.<sup>316</sup> However, he continues, sacramentals have been instituted to obtain “certain established effects” that the church “explains in detail” and that are linked to the blessings and prayers of its own ministers.<sup>317</sup> That is to say, sacramentals are “those things that in virtue of a religious ritual that is performed [in special places and under special conditions] aim to worship God and especially to obtain certain specific benefits.”<sup>318</sup> He mentions as examples the well-known virtues of exorcisms, Sunday sermons, the holy bread, public confessions during Holy Thursday, and the bishops’, abbots’, and the priests’ blessings, “which often have brought about manifest miracles.”<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> This was part of the broader undertaking of “enlightening” the people and teaching the basics of the Catechism to the faithful more systematically and extensively than the Church had been able to do before. This was one of the most ambitious (and ambivalent, given the inherent incapacity of ordinary, uneducated people to truly understand them: I will return to this issue in later chapter) among Trent’s propositions about fighting people’s superstition with education. Obviously it could never be completely successful and even in the eighteenth century there was no agreement about *in what* and *to what degree* people had to be instructed. The teaching of Catholic tenets involving theological issues was a contentious matter that saw clergy, bishops, and Inquisitors debating and confronting each other to find practical solutions for their parishioners.

<sup>315</sup> Faustino Scarpazza, *Teologia morale, ossia compendio d’etica cristiana*, tomo 6 (Venice: Gio. Battista Missiaglia, 1826), 88-89. The exact date of publication is unknown, but according to the Venetian Gazette the book was already in its third edition in that year and its popularity was well established, *Gazzetta: o sieno notizie istoriche, politiche, di scienze, arti, agricoltura*, vol. 23 (1796), 144; also, Cesare Cantù, *Grande illustrazione del Lombardo-Veneto*, vol. 5 (Milan: Corona e Caimi Editori, 1859), 760.

<sup>316</sup> Scarpazza, *Teologia*, 88. Translation mine.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.



But crucially he stresses that sacramentals were not objects of spiritual power that popular devotion could manipulate for their own use without priestly mediation. They were not wild cards that could be used indiscriminately to secure virtually any goal. Rather the holy objects were to be employed in the limited number of rituals he carefully enumerated.<sup>320</sup> The laity's exclusion from handling sacramentals could not have been expressed in a more straightforward manner.

Other authors were as clear about this issue, briefly mentioning the sacramentals as something that occupied a minor and perhaps not so significant place in Catholicism, quite differently from the sacraments instituted by Christ as ways to accede, enhance, and maintain grace. According to one commentator, "according to theologians [sacramentals] consist in certain things, acts, or remedies prescribed by the Church to benefit the faithful."<sup>321</sup> Another author, the ecclesiastical writer Battista Bovio, was even more restrained in his description of sacramentals: he did not give many details, mentioning them in passing as "sacred ceremonies instituted for the cult of the sacraments and the sacrifice," reducing them simply to handmaids of the latter.<sup>322</sup>

However, it would be misleading to suggest that this was the last words on the matter. In the mid-nineteenth century Gaetano Moroni wrote:

"Besides the sacraments that exist within the Catholic Church, other rituals, other sacred practices - although inferior and not as valuable and precious as the Sacraments themselves - are worthy of being held in high consideration. These are the Sacramentals, and it is an offense to the Church and to all Catholics to define these sacred actions as *superstition*,

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Giovambattista Guidi, *Duplicato annuale di parrochiali discorsi per tutte le domeniche e solennità del Signore. Ad uso massime delle persone di campagna* (Venice: Giambattista Novelli, 1761), 267.

<sup>322</sup> Giovanni Battista Bovio, *Teatro morale dogmatico-istorico* (Rome: Giorgio Blacho, 1791), 534.

as they originated from the Scripture and the gospel, and they were all practiced from the first centuries [of the Church.]”<sup>323</sup>

Clearly, the use of the sacramentals by lay people was still a matter of debate more than half a century after Scarpazza’s clarification, but while eighteenth-century authors tried to downplay the place sacramental had in the domain of devotion, Moroni rejected that interpretation and the biases it carried and re-dignified them, emphasizing their significance and their role in Catholic liturgy. According to Moroni, the long lasting Christian tradition of sacramentals (rooted in the Bible) indicated that showing contempt or disdain toward them was wrong.

Moroni too provides a list of sacramentals; it includes “the consecration of churches and altars, altar vases, the blessings of robes for the veneration of the Eucharist, the consecration of virgins, the blessing of weddings, holy images, the relics of saints, the *Agnus Dei*, the blessed grains of the rosary, the sound of the blessed bells, exorcisms, funerals, and other sacred ceremonies.”<sup>324</sup> Sacramentals provoked mockery and criticism in those who wanted to get rid of practices that were associated with popular superstition Moroni admitted, but he was not ready to condemn them because of “the malicious and dishonest purposes sacramentals had, at times, been used for.”<sup>325</sup> He argued that the Church received the sacramentals as holy and as such she maintained them. Those who desecrated them should be condemned. But their beneficial effects in preserving health, in setting people free from their sins, and in defending them from the devil made them

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<sup>323</sup> Moroni wrote an immense encyclopedic work about Catholicism, a sort of catechism for erudite. He was a scholar close both to pope Pius VIII and pope Gregory XVI and his monumental endeavor would not have been conceivable without being supported or even commissioned by the Church. Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di eruditione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni*, vol. 59 (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1852), 139-40.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

necessary and highly valued.<sup>326</sup> Although sacramentals were not supposed to work as sacraments, *ex opera operato*, namely bestowing grace by themselves, Moroni granted them more power and more importance than other Catholic writers. Sacramentals were blessed by the Church and sometimes “may obtain the same effect as sacraments.”<sup>327</sup> And it was precisely in this ambiguity about their effect rather than their finer theological niceties that ordinary people used them: sacramentals could be used to draw grace, perform miracles, and to perform magic as well.

### **The Use of Relics and the Host in Magic**

Among sacramentals, the relics of the saints were particularly valued for magical purposes.<sup>328</sup> Clerics used relics not only to bless people during processions and festivals but also to bless and purify the streets of cities and villages, their borders, the countryside, the crops, and the animals. Relics were most favored as objects of veneration as they were part of the holy bodies of the saints and therefore were believed to possess miraculous healing powers. The church founded and preached the cult of relics on the theological assumption that relics partook of a certain degree of the saints’ power. The inherent miraculous functions of relics were thus an established part of Christian ceremonies. The foundation of churches lay on the presence of one or more relics within their walls. Relics made a space sacred and delimited it: through public exhibition as well as processions, relics released their apotropaic powers into the community.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>328</sup> About the blurred line between the liturgical and para-liturgical devotion in present day devotion see A. Vecchi, *Il culto delle immagini nelle stampe popolari* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1968).

In fact, according to the church relics could be anything that had been in direct or indirect contact with the body of a saint. The latter are called contact relics, for example, oil sanctified by contact with the empty receptacles in which saintly bodies had formerly lain. Referring to objects that had touched the tomb of Christ, Gregory of Tours wrote “Fides retineat, omne quod sacrosanctum corpus attigit esse sacratum,” namely: “Faith believes that anything that has been touched by the sacred Body is holy.” This concept was also extended to the saints: “For if someone wants to take away a blessed relic, he leaves a little cloth, previously weighed on a balance, inside [the shrine]. Then, keeping vigil and fasting, he earnestly prays that the apostolic virtue may assist his piety. Wondrous to relate! If the faith of the man is strong, when the cloth is raised from the tomb it is so soaked by divine power that it weighs much more than it previously did, and then the man who raises it knows that by its grace he has received what he requested.”<sup>329</sup>

Thus contact relics were not only objects which the saint had physically touched, but also things that had come into contact with those objects. As a result their multiplication and the transmission of the sacred that derived from them was virtually unlimited. It was almost inevitable then that this vision would be extended by people to all objects that were related to the sacred domain, and that they would attribute inherent thaumaturgical, miraculous, and divine properties to them. In popular devotion relics easily morphed into amulets, namely superstitious (in Church’s terms) items whose powerful effects could be mechanically deployed. This, however, could easily become a two-way-process. From people’s perception, amulets, as well as sacramentals, could turn into relics too, namely

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<sup>329</sup> Contact relics were also established by pouring oil or water onto sacred places and shrines, such as the Stone of Unction: a custom that can be seen to this day in Jerusalem. Once the liquid has been poured, pilgrims mop it up with their handkerchiefs, squeeze it back into plastic bottles and distribute it to loved ones back home. See John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of Saints in the Early Christian West, c. 300-c. 1200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25-30.

sacred (spiritual) objects used as a protection against various maladies and misfortune.<sup>330</sup>

This wider range of quasi-relics created a gray area of objects with relic-like status at least that regularly appeared in cases heard by the Inquisition and played an important role in the religious nature of much magic.

Sacraments, in turn, were at the core of parish life: they constituted the pillars of Christian liturgy and were signs of divine grace and thus very tempting for those who wished to adapt their evident power to magical ends. The Eucharist, in particular, was and still is the central element of the Christian liturgy. According to Catholic theology, once consecrated by a priest, the host becomes literally the body and blood of Jesus: a precious relic indeed. The importance of the Eucharist increased throughout the high and late Middle Ages and culminated in the creation of the feast of the Corpus Christi (body of Christ). In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the wafer of the Eucharist became the most powerful holy item in Christianity.<sup>331</sup> During Corpus Christi processions the consecrated host was carried through local villages to ensure fertility and protect from harm. Lay people started to use the host outside of church to protect fields, cure diseases, ensure fertility, protect themselves against wounding or drowning, prevent

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<sup>330</sup> As it has been effectively put, “the relationship of the amulets to the contagious power of special places or people was crystallized in early Christianity in the phenomenon of the relics.” See Glenn Warren Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar eds., *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000), 296. In addition, all sacred objects including sacramentals benefitted from this extended aura of sanctity. Although theoretically sacramentals such as holy water and oils were more potent than relics because they derived their power from sacraments, in practice all relics and most liturgical paraphernalia that were blessed before use held an undistinguished potency. Because of the proximity to altars, for example, liturgical books acquired “numinous power” too. See Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 86. The overlapping characteristics of all these visible symbols of invisible power date back to the Middle Ages, where boundaries between textual amulets, sacred books, and holy relics could be quite fluid. See Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Univeristy Park: Penn State University Press, 2006), 55.

<sup>331</sup> For the most complete, exhaustive and insightful research on the Eucharist see Snoeck, *Medieval Piety*.

storms, and gain wealth -- with or without the mediation of priests.<sup>332</sup> The power of the host could be enhanced by writing Bible verses, prayers, or magical charms written on it.<sup>333</sup>

It seems that the host achieved such an important status in the religious practices of medieval Christianity that it virtually “displaced the relics of the saints at the centre of liturgical and popular religious practice.”<sup>334</sup> From the thirteenth century on, hosts were also used in love magic: kissing a man with a host in her mouth would guarantee a woman his true love; prostitutes used the host to seduce and keep their clients; and, ground into a powder, the Eucharist was an essential ingredient of love potions, a practice

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<sup>332</sup> This escalation of Eucharistic devotion occurred while the theological doctrine of transubstantiation was being refined (the first official formulation of the doctrine of transubstantiation took place at the Council of Trent). Beginning at the end of the twelfth century, according to the doctrine, each time the priest pronounces the words of consecration the substance of the bread and wine is miraculously replaced with that of body and blood of Christ. The power of the host was such that often the Elevation of the Host degenerated into commotion. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 9; see also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Janine Larmon Peterson, *Contested Sanctity: Disputed Saints, Inquisitors, and Communal identity in Northern Italy, 1250-1400* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2006), 263.

<sup>333</sup> Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth*, 86. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79-80.

<sup>334</sup> Charles Zika, “Host, Procession and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany,” *Past & Present* 118 (1988): 25-64. Also, Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics*, 31-64. Around the thirteenth century the reverence paid to the altar and directed to the saints and their relics turned into reverence paid to the tabernacle and the sacred host. The elevation and the sight of the host were credited with spiritual benefits, physical good and miracles. This phenomenon went hand in hand with the clericalization of the celebration of the Eucharist: priests celebrated and received it in the name of the people. The people therefore did not participate but only assisted in what had become “a *mysterium depopulatum*, and the Eucharist itself a *mysterium tremendo*,” namely a mystery without the people and an awe-inspiring or frightening mystery. Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, 54. Interestingly enough, Gerard Lukken identified in the *mysterium depopulatum* a degeneration in Catholic liturgy that at the beginning of the twentieth century originated a movement that eventually led to the Second Vatican Council. The *mysterium depopulatum* was according to Lukken “a ritual [in Catholic liturgy] in which people hardly participate,” an exclusive interaction between the priest and God/Jesus. In his paper Lukken emphasizes this as the key point of Vatican II, held in Rome between 1962 and 1965, whose main issue was the revision of the liturgy. More specifically, the Council discussed the need for greater lay participation in the mass. The Council allowed the introduction of the vernacular, greater verbal interaction between the priests and the congregation, and, meaningfully, prescribed that the priest celebrate the mass facing the participants instead of facing away from them, see Gerard Lukken, “The Field of Tension Between Liturgical Restoration and Reform,” *Symposium Worship Wars: Contested Ritual Practices*, Instituut Voor Liturgische en Rituele Studies, Tilburg (November 26, 2010); William J. Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism*, 363.

that would flourish in the Renaissance and continue up to the eighteenth century.<sup>335</sup>

Hosts could also be used to hurt others and in black magic. The host was often used to cause abortions, and witches were believed to use the host in their diabolical potions and rites. In the second half of the fifteenth century (therefore before witch trials reached their peak in Italy) in demonological treatises as well as in prosecutions, the profanation of the host was the most heinous crime a witch could be accused of.<sup>336</sup>

The emphasis on the elevation of the host during the celebration of the mass, its veneration through processions and local pilgrimages, the blessings priests performed with the host and the decision to hide the host from the gaze of the faithful and to keep it in a locked place increased both the orthodox devotion to the Eucharist and its private, unorthodox, magical allure.<sup>337</sup> As noted earlier stealing a host was an abuse of the

<sup>335</sup> Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual*, 10. Hosts were a recurrent ingredient in Venetian love magic, where they were dissolved in soup to bind one's lover and were inscribed with words of secrets written on them. Indeed, as Ruggiero maintains, the meaning of the Eucharist in love magical rituals completely transvalued the sacrament itself; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 91-94, 96, 125-27.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. 131, 222-29. See also for the various uses of the host in magic and witchcraft the very recent study by Michael Ostling, *Between the Devil and the Host. Imagining Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Brian P. Levack, *Demonology*, 312.

<sup>337</sup> The Fourth Council of Lateran in 1215 prescribed that the Eucharist be encased in an iron tabernacle, behind iron doors. The pix, the Bible and the sacred vases were put away in a niche on the *secretarium* or the *presbiterium*. During the thirteenth century locking the host behind the altar, a practice that was initially more in use in Rome's churches became widespread. See Cecilia Pisoni, "Tabernacolo," in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000). In the synod held in the Vatican in 2007, the bishops reinstated the importance of locking the consecrated host to protect it from thefts for magical purposes. "L'Eucaristia: Fonte e apice della vita e della missione della Chiesa." *Rivista Araldi del Vangelo* 18 (July 8, 2009), <http://it.arautos.org/view/show/7000-l-eucaristia-fonte-e-apice-della-vita-e-della-missione-della-chiesa>. Before the Council of Trent urged the faithful to make communion more often and by the eighteenth century the general practice especially for the ordinary people was to take communion monthly, as a confraternity in Venice suggested to its members. See Pier Giuseppe Gillio and Alessandra Bonomo, *L'attività musicale negli ospedali di Venezia nel Settecento* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2006). Local variations aside, the partaking of Communion was a process that gained momentum in the eighteenth century. See also for the region of Puglia, Carmelo Turrisi, *La diocesi di Oria nell'Ottocento* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1978). Also Vittore Branca ed., *Sensibilità e razionalità nel Settecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), and Alberto Vecchi, *Correnti religiose nel sei-settecento Veneto* (Venice: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1962). See Andrea Migliavacca, *La "confessione frequente di devozione."* *Studio teologico-giuridico sul periodo fra i Codici del 1917 e del 1983* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997), 66-72. In the instructions for the faithful and in the catechisms of the eighteenth century, while the redemptive value of the Eucharist was stressed, the frequency of partaking of the sacrament was left to the discretion of confessors. Those who desired to take

sacrament and a sacrilege, a crime that in the Republic of Venice in the eighteenth century was aggressively prosecuted by the most feared local tribunal, the Council of Ten.<sup>338</sup> The host, however, was often provided by priests themselves. After all, who was in a better position to obtain it? Moreover, as we have seen in the eighteenth century, popular magic still relied on the ceremonial and liturgical expertise of ecclesiastics, so their contribution to magic was far from passive or merely supportive.

### The Training and Role of Clergy

Once again the goal of separating priests from the world of popular magic seemed a necessity for the Church in the eighteenth century. Obviously this was not a new goal and it can be traced back at least as far as the reforms of Trent. Although the establishment of seminaries (schools for aspiring priests) to develop and assure the training of priests was a main concern of Trent, this was an undertaking that was not consistently carried out even two centuries after the council. At the end of the eighteenth centuries, the lack of education of Venetian priests was still widely recognized.<sup>339</sup> Most remained largely uneducated and ignorant even about the basic catechism they were supposed to teach their flock.<sup>340</sup> They were also too close to their parishioners, not only

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communion daily had to undergo spiritual exercises and excessive frequency was considered unnecessary, even though even in this case the direction of the confessor was required. *Direttorio ascetico. Opera del P. Giovanni Batista Scaramelli della compagnia di Gesù*, (Naples: Presso Giuseppe Raimondi, 1759), 164-82.

<sup>338</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>339</sup> Bruno Bertoli and Silvio Tramontin, eds., *La visita pastorale di Giovanni Ladislao Pyrker nella diocesi di Venezia (1821)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: 1971).

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.; the topic of ignorant clergy is a classic motif in Venetian historiography, see *Giornali veneziani del Settecento*, ed. Marino Berengo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962); also, for a very recent and thorough overview of these issues (not specifically about Venice and the Venetian area) see Gaetano Greco, "Le forme del ministero cristiano alle soglie della secolarizzazione," *Cristiani d'Italia, Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2011, *ad vocem*; I refer to the article also for its rich bibliography.



in terms of cultural and religious practices, but also in their personal involvement in the village and its communal life.<sup>341</sup>

In the countryside of the Veneto and Friuli regions in particular, priests were in various ways entangled in village affairs, as land owners, leaders of factions, active participants in local feuds, and members of patronage systems. Their role as priests was therefore influenced and warped by the deep connections they had within the communities to which they belonged or of which they had become part.<sup>342</sup> Education might help to set the clergy apart and above their parishioners, but things were far from simple on that score, as these social and economic involvements created serious obstacles. Without a strong, supportive hierarchical structure providing training, adequate financial support, and regular appointments to posts (appointments were often the monopoly of groups within the communities and the source of ongoing conflict) priests could not be independent and above their parishioners.

In fact, often deeply involved in their communities as protagonists, the role of clergy in keeping magic alive is frequently noted in Inquisition documents from the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>343</sup> The entanglement of ecclesiastics in popular magic in

<sup>341</sup> This is an unexplored topic that cannot be investigated in this study but it is still worth noting.

<sup>342</sup> Prosecutions by the Council of Ten in the eighteenth century are a rich source for the specific topic of priests involved in all sorts of communal issues. I would like to thank Alfredo Viggiano for the interesting and fruitful conversation we had at the Venetian archive on such matters and for pointing my attention to this not-yet-explored aspect in the historiography. A special thank you goes also to Michelangelo Marcarelli who shared with me on many convivial occasions his findings in the Udine archives on the relationships between priests and villages in the Patria of Friuli.

<sup>343</sup> Regular clergy, that is, clergy belonging to a religious order rather than directly trained and ordained by the diocese, were a notable presence in Venice. The city hosted more than thirty monasteries, all well furnished with magic and astrological texts that friars spread into the community in a capillary way. The books of magic of monastic libraries crowded the cells of the friars, who, besides keeping prohibited texts in their rooms, transcribed them and carried them out into the city, exchanging the grimoires with other books and lending them to practitioners and amateurs outside the monastery. About the specific topic of libraries in monasteries and friars cells, see Federico Barbierato, "La letteratura magica di fronte all'Inquisizione veneziana fra '500 e '700," in *Magia, alchimia, scienza dal '400 al '700: l'influsso di Ermete Trismegisto*, vol. 1, ed. Carlos Gilly, (Florence: Centro Di, 2002), 136-38; also, Antonelela Barzazi,

all its forms is particularly evident in the so-called Trial of the Fifth of March. The trial lasted several years (1705-1711), during which time the Inquisition examined more than fifty people, women and men belonging to all orders and social strata. The case was extremely complicated and involved numerous people with intricate intertwining stories. In fact, at one point the Inquisitor became so disoriented that he drew a chart to sort out what was what and the numerous sheets of paper attached to one another were almost a meter long each. Most of those involved confessed that they had practiced or known people who had practiced magic in virtually all its possible variations. Prostitutes and procuresses, a count, a secretary of state, many clerics, and a writer were involved in a magic affair that kept the city and authorities abuzz for several years. More generally, both noblemen and commoners were involved in one way or another in the prosecution. The case revealed a true culture of magic, that is, a wide and rich array of magical techniques which people at all levels of society were more than ready to seek, learn, and use.<sup>344</sup>

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*Gli affanni dell'erudizione. Studi e organizzazione culturale degli ordini religiosi a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004). Barbierato devotes an entire chapter of his recent text about the Venetian Inquisition to the involvement of clergy in quietism (a mystical doctrine condemned by the Church in 1687) and other irreligious ideas, significantly calling them “the danger from within.” We could apply and extend this concept to the magical activities in which both priests and friars were involved during the same period and beyond. Federico Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop. Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 189-264. This is a topic that the same author brought up also in his book about grimoires in Venice, *Nella stanza dei circoli*.

<sup>344</sup> They recovered patens, containers for wafers, and hosts; they baptized magnets and shrouds. In spite of having abused the sacraments and invoked and made pacts with the devil, none of the people involved was condemned to death. They all presented themselves voluntarily to the tribunal, denounced as wrong what they had done, and rejected what they had believed. This was enough for the Inquisition to stop it from going too far in its sentencing. In reference to their having turned themselves in, one of the convicted said: “I went to warn the other accomplices, but then we decided to come all together [...] in the month of May. We agreed not to name each other names but to go and confess all together, so none of us would fall in disgrace.” ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, c. 1r.; c. 69 confession of Francesco Passarin, November 17, 1705; and *passim*. The process was brought to scholarly attention by Federico Barbierato in his study on the circulation of magic books between seventeenth and eighteenth-century in Venice, see *Nella stanza dei circoli*; it was also examined by Fabiana Veronese in her article on the death penalty in Venice for abuse of sacraments, see “L’orrore del sacrilegio. Abusi di sacramenti, pratiche magiche e condanne a morte a

Friar Bartolomeo of the monastery of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice and his fellow friar Giovanni Paolo Molin played a significant role in the events that unfolded in the Trial of the Fifth of March, and represented well the clergy's central involvement in magic and its dissemination in Venice. Well-known as an expert at "baptizing" magnets (lucky charms used for "love's purposes and treasure hunting"), friar Bartolomeo also provided books of magic from the library of the monastery to help others with their quest for magical power.<sup>345</sup> He was well acquainted with Francesco Passarin, a *mago* who organized frequent magical excursions to search for treasure and arranged frequent trips from the hills of Montello to the beaches of the Lido of Venice, seeking the right place to work magic most effectively. Despite his knowledge, however,

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Venezia nel primo ventennio del Settecento," *Studi veneziani* 52 (2006): 265-342. I am enormously indebted to both of them for their generosity as scholars and as friends. A particular thank you goes to Federico Barbierato, who gave me the backbone of his notes from a trial that amounts to more than six hundred pages, certainly one of the biggest conserved in the Inquisition Office.

<sup>345</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, n.n., sentence against frate Bartolomeo Vitturi, July 9, 1709. Baptizing magnets was a completely different ritual from simply blessing them. The terminology here is important: no matter how unorthodox or bizarre the ceremony might sound, the choice of the term implied that it was meant to work as a sacrament and not simply as a sacramental, which would be mere blessing. We have previously said that in magic as well as in religion the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals was fuzzy; nonetheless the clergy (who performed both) were keenly aware that sacraments were efficacious signs of grace. A baptized magnet conveyed the marks of rebirth and salvation very powerfully as it was a potent Christian amulet indeed. Magnets used for love magic or for good luck were common already in Renaissance Venice. Father Aurelio of Siena used white magnets to bind lovers, to win someone's good graces, and, wrapped up with red and white silk, as amulets to be worn by sailors: the power of attraction of the magnet could work for love, good will, and fortune, see Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 197-99; Ruth Martin includes magnets in the category of charms and incantations, defining them as symbolic objects meant to "produce a supernatural effect," see Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice 1550-1560* (Oxford-New York: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 5. Baptized magnets were used also in other areas of Italy, see Mary O'Neil, "Sacerdote ovvero strione: Ecclesiastical and Superstitious Remedies in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Understanding Popular Culture*, ed. Steven Kaplan, (Berlin-New York-Amsterdam: Mouton 1984), 53-83; and O'Neil, "Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-Century Modena," in *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephen Haliczer, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 88-114. Magnets were almost always mentioned in books of magic as examples of occult sympathies in action. Complex philosophical elaboration of the principle of magnetism can be found in Giordano Bruno's and William Gilbert's works. When Giordano Bruno defended his animistic version of heliocentrism he applied magnetic philosophy to argue in favor of the earth's movement, Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* (Cornell: Cornell Paperbacks, 2002), 88.

Passarin could do nothing without the aid of his clerical allies both friars and priests, who provided sacramental power to make his magic work.

The friar Giovanni Paolo Molin was as involved in that magic as Bartolomeo, but his contribution appears to have been more erudite. He was in fact the lecturer of theology at the monastery and thus in a position to read prohibited books. His access to rare manuscripts at the library of the monastery as well as other important libraries (like the renowned monastic library of San Giorgio) was something he broadcast widely.<sup>346</sup> But he was even more aggressive in promising, exchanging, and sharing questionable texts from monastic libraries with lay members of the community. Inevitably, San Francesco della Vigna came to be perceived by the Inquisition as virtually a workshop of magic. While Bartolomeo was prosecuted by the Inquisition, Molin found an original escape, albeit a rather too permanent one if accounts can be believed. After only a short period of detention, the father abbot of the monastery decided to grant friar Molin permission to leave the monastery to undertake a journey to the Holy Land. The agreement was that after his trip he would return and be imprisoned again. He supposedly died shortly thereafter poetically in Nazareth where Christianity was born.<sup>347</sup> The stories of Bartolomeo and Giovanni Paolo show the crucial role friars played as intermediaries between learned and popular magic in Venice in the eighteenth century as well as their active participation in both. The extent to which they maintained and even

<sup>346</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, n.n., deposition by Count Cristoforo Mamuca della Torre, June 16, 1705; and c. 6v, deposition by Agostino Fabris, June 30, 1705. The monastery at the island of San Giorgio Maggiore was among the most famous in the city, the favorite destination of the sons of the Venetian aristocracy who pursued ecclesiastical careers; Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, 56.

<sup>347</sup> A letter from friar Molin was addressed to the Inquisitor saying that his departure might look like an escape, but it really was not: he was in such a rush to leave only because he was afraid his parents would stop him with their tears and their demands. He asked forgiveness for his sins and for having caused his nation so much scandal, ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, c. 176r. His death was recorded by the monastery on December 27, 1707, *Ibid.*, c. 279r.

encouraged the existence of culture of magic was a crucial element of the magical world that continued in Italy across the Enlightenment.

### Ceremonial Magic and Popular Techniques

In the late Middle Ages priest and monks were often involved in spiritual or demonic magic that attempted to control the spiritual world and the powerful entities that inhabited it.<sup>348</sup> Because that magic frequently required a wide variety of long, elaborate, and complex rituals it often was closely associated with ceremonial magic.<sup>349</sup> The numinous qualities of books of magic were similar to those of liturgical and devotional books, for at the same time that they summoned spirits, they appealed to God for aid in doing so.<sup>350</sup> In grimoires, in fact, the conjuration of spirits was invariably juxtaposed with prayers to God and the saints.<sup>351</sup> Not all contemporary theologians condemned such magical texts: some believed that the practices they explained were not only valuable but compatible with Christianity.<sup>352</sup> But problems and differences arose when magicians faced the fact that their magic could attract not only positive spirits but also dangerous and negative ones, even demons.

Points of contact between the earthly world and the celestial as well as infernal realms bestowed magic with a Janus-like quality, that is, an ambivalence that rested on

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<sup>348</sup> Michael D. Bailey, "The Meaning of Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1-24. For a suggestive introduction to the diverse form of magic practiced in the Middle Ages, the representations of magician and ritual procedures, see Sophie Page, *Magic in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

<sup>349</sup> Graziella Federici-Vescovini, *Medioevo magico: La magia tra religione e scienza nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Turin: Utet, 2008).

<sup>350</sup> Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 7.

<sup>351</sup> Prayers and litanies were essential elements throughout the consecration as well as rituals. When hearing the mass, for example, the priest (who was also the conjurer) had to carry the book of magic with him and place it on the altar during the service. After the mass the book had to be put in a secret place and sprinkled with holy water. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>352</sup> Page, *Magic in Medieval*, 18-28.

the ability of magicians to engage both with the celestial and the demonic. Nonetheless accepting magic as something that had a strong Christian dimension not something necessarily alien or contradictory to it reinforced strong parallels between magic ceremonies and religious rituals. And it often meant that in order for magic to work, both the performer and the magic text had to be correctly prepared in Christian and moral terms. Thus before performing magic, the magus had to purify himself through fasting, good behavior, and with appropriate attire.<sup>353</sup> The rituals themselves had to evoke and mimic regular Christian ones, rather than appearing to be subversive or heretical.

The instructions generally used for performing ceremonial magic are exemplified in the eighteenth-century manuscript of magic found among Don Longaretti's belongings.<sup>354</sup> *The True Experimented Secret*, one of his grimoires, was a fourteen-page manuscript with, according to the text itself, "a long and authoritative tradition."<sup>355</sup> The manuscript claimed that "an obedient spirit" had dictated the "secret" or the book to the Jesuits, who had used it "to seek treasures hiding in mines, lands, lakes, the sea, and everywhere it was possible to find gold, silver, pearls and other precious things." The book required that the calling of powerful spirits be done without offending God or endangering one's life or soul. The goal was to use spirits to gain the wealth necessary to alleviate misery, not to satisfy greed, pride or hatred. "A good reason" – something the conjurers felt in their heart was good – should prompt the ritual described in the book.

<sup>353</sup> The anonymous late medieval manuscript *Liber consecrationum* (*Books of Consecrations*) makes this point clearly, see 8-10.

<sup>354</sup> We can easily recognize in Longaretti's magic motifs that we find scattered throughout the tradition, including details belonging to medieval magic such as the *Liber Consecrationum*. How practitioners composed and recombined their own magic is difficult to reconstruct, and it is even more difficult to know what they actually *did* with a text. The use of the text is as important as its manufacture. On the issue of the complex relationships between texts and readers and the creative process of reading see Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>355</sup> ASV, *Sant' Uffizio*, b. 145.

This was the golden rule of much ceremonial magic: internal purity was as important as the actual deeds involved. The success of the ceremony was contingent upon good intentions and proper demeanor. Longaretti's grimoire makes this perfectly clear:

“Let's conjure with all possible care, without impertinence or curiosity, without summoning spirits with arrogance and vanity, otherwise things you will not like will come to you, as happened to people who were ignorant about these things. I warn you, [for this ritual to be successful] it is necessary that [the person who performs it] be a man of good heart, even better if he is a religious man, but above all a kind-hearted, respectable man, because to conjure and summon the spirits is no small matter. However, you should not be afraid if you do it with a good reason and not to lead a dishonest life. Those who carry this secret will be protected from any sort of misfortune, as well as witchcraft; they will not suffer any danger from fire or water in a rough sea.”<sup>356</sup>

After completing the preparatory phase of the ritual with good intentions and the correct frame of mind, the conjurer had to draw a magic circle with blessed branches from olive and palm trees or with blessed clay, with the name of the three Magi on it. The participants, in the number of one or three (“like the Trinity”) had to carry an image of the Archangel Michael. At this point the conjurer would recite the *Te deum laudamus* (a hymn of praise) and the *De profundis* (a penitential psalm) for the souls of the Purgatory in an attempt to ensure that good rather than evil spirits would be called and be the result of the magical ceremony. Whoever participated in the ritual needed to be free from mortal sin and to have taken confession and communion. In addition nine masses had to be celebrated for the souls of the dead and the living beforehand to make it work.<sup>357</sup> Once those involved entered and the circle was closed, candles were to be

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid. Translation mine.

<sup>357</sup> This detail is not better specified in the conjuration. It is possible that the masses were to happen right before the ritual took place, but more in keeping with the already mentioned *Ars Notoria*, we might also think that the conjurer would have decided that the established number of masses be performed on given sets of days. The observance of specific days or periods of time in which to undertake any business was a typical requirement of books of magic. For the *Ars Notoria* ritual cycles see Klaassen, “The Subjective Experience,” in *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7, no. 1 (2012):28.

placed at its boundaries and the conjurer held a cross with a relic inside, possibly a relic of Saint Ignatius (founder of the Jesuits). In the circle, everyone would entrust themselves/open themselves up to the Trinity, say the penitential prayer of the *Confiteor*, and start the blessing of the circle.<sup>358</sup>

The circle, it was made clear served to protect both the magician and accomplices from demonic deceptions.<sup>359</sup> Prayers addressed to God, Jesus, the Trinity, the Virgin, Saint Anthony of Padua, and the guardian angel St. Michael followed. After all these precautions were taken, the spirits called could be commanded. Seven esoteric conjurations were addressed to the good spirit *Arathron* (the name of the spirit summoned) with the formula “I command” alternating the conjurations with invocations to God, the saints, the Virgin, and Christ.<sup>360</sup> Tellingly in all the essential elements (the declaration, the address, the series of invocations, and the instructions), such conjurations were analogous to exorcisms. Indeed, in medieval usage the two terms were interchangeable, regardless of whether the intent was to summon or to dispel the evil spirits.<sup>361</sup> In the case of Longaretti’s manual only by proceeding in such a fashion could

<sup>358</sup> The *Confiteor* is the liturgical form in which confession of sins is made and is recited near the beginning of the Catholic mass.

<sup>359</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 145. For the significance of the circle in magic see Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 175-176.

<sup>360</sup> Arathron was one of the seven Olympian spirits governing the planet Saturn. He taught alchemy, magic, philosophy, and medicine, was able to turn anything into stone and treasure into coal, and could make a person invisible and barren women fertile. Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Angels* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 48; Gustav Davidson, *Dictionary of Angels* (New York: Free Press Paperback, 1994), 50; Filippo Bianco, *Lessicomanzia. Ovvero Dizionario divinatorio-magico-profetico* (Naples: Stamperia del Genio Tipografico, 1831), 358.

<sup>361</sup> See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 3. From the Incarnation to the Nativity, from his Circumcision to his Flagellation, from his Passion and Death and to his Resurrection, all Christ’s major life events were listed to urge the spirit to appear and obey. The logic of “sympathetic magic” or magic by analogy worked also in Longaretti’s “experimented secret,” in which the evoked spirit had to obey the conjurer as Christ obeyed God. Moreover, the spirit was invoked on behalf of Jesus. The theory of sympathetic magic was first introduced by James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study on Magic and Religion* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 12-55. For a more recent take on the matter, see Stuart Clark, “Witchcraft and Magic in



the conjurer ask the spirit for the amount of money he needed and specify if he wanted it in gold, silver, or another way; he could even ask the spirit that the money be found in the sea, in lakes, or in the ground.

The text also offered a short prayer to assure Christ's protection when the magician came into contact with the spirit, to ward off a bad outcome:

“Whenever the spirit will come with its trickeries of the spirit, to frighten my body, soul, and mind, Jesus Christ won't allow it, since he [died] innocently on the cross; and as the son of God recommended his mother to St. John, in the same way I recommend my soul to Christ in this time. Amen.”<sup>362</sup>

All the other invocations to God, the angels and the saints were also meant to ensure the safety of the conjurer. Behind this lies the inherent ambiguity of these apparently religious practices, because in attempting to attract and control spirits who could be evil as well as good, the magician was skating on thin ice where good intentions could quickly be overcome by powerful evil spirits and demons. And, of course, those seeking power once the ice was broken could easily be seduced by the power that evil spirits could offer to lead them astray and thus use their powers and magic to evil ends.

The web of relationships that supported Longaretti's endeavors and protected him from the authorities' discipline (both inside and outside Venice) strongly suggests that his methods were more than anomalous echoes from a more magical past. Perhaps the most important reason why it was so difficult to eradicate magical practices from the cultural mindset of women and men of the post-Reformation world lay in the faithful's perception that these practices did not appear to be endangering Christians' souls – despite the

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Early Modern Culture,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Period of the Witch Trials*, vol. 4, eds. Bengt Ankerloo, William Monter, and Stuart Clark (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 99-121.

<sup>362</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 145.

church's admonitions to the contrary.<sup>363</sup> If, as Frank Klaassen argues, "a society that ascribes a high degree of power to ritual and its users will invite the development of unofficial and transgressive ritual," that same society "will deploy/display those rituals in a more ambiguous way, less subversive than it might appear."<sup>364</sup> What Klaassen means is that subversion is a two-sided coin and at times rather than challenging the status quo, it confirms it. Such seems to be the case with ritual magic which involves both celestial and demonic influences and according to the will of the conjurers (and perhaps the spirits involved) can slide quickly from one to the other. In other words, the ambivalence of ritual magic could be easily used both to subvert and to reinforce the perceived correct order of things.

Longaretti claimed that his interpretation of magic was quite legitimate and Christian: following carefully the good instructions of his grimoire would keep the participants safe from demonic intrusions and danger. While, according to trial records, his erstwhile acolyte and accuser, Floravansi, had found the details of the ritual worrisome, Longaretti had laughed at his fears and finally gaining his trust by saying that those who performed the ritual "had to be under divine grace." Perhaps Floravansi was embellishing his story or perhaps don Longaretti was making a point about the fact that he, as a priest, was a key element in the success of the *ars magica* and in keeping it on the right side. Undeniably, there were demonic elements in the rituals, as well as the *possibility* of being overwhelmed by them. It seems also plausible that in explaining his virtues as a magician, Longaretti took advantage of the ambiguities of such a role to

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<sup>363</sup> See also Owen Davies.

<sup>364</sup> See Frank Klaassen, "The Middleness of Ritual Magic," in *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 131-65.

convince his interlocutors-would-be-assistants.<sup>365</sup> It was against just such ambivalence that during the Renaissance Ficino and others tried to disentangle their magical practices from demonic interventions. Indeed, natural magic with no invocations to demons claimed to be a higher and purer form of magic.<sup>366</sup> This was a claim that the learned practitioners as well as the later followers of the *ars* would never stop making, and something that could never be entirely achieved.<sup>367</sup> Don Longaretti played it successfully in his career as a priest magician at least until the Inquisition stepped in to clarify the matter with their stricter vision of the distinction between orthodox practices and the misuse of the spiritual.

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<sup>365</sup> To ascertain the sincerity of conjurers in terms of holiness or un-holiness as well as of their personal convictions about the *ars* is an almost impossible task. If sincerity, as an historian pointed out, is difficult to discern in our contemporaries, it becomes most elusive in historical contexts. Richard Kieckhefer, "The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft and Magic," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24, (1994), 355-85. Even the young and reckless Casanova experienced a breakdown when he decided to invoke the devil to deceive a nobleman, for some fun and possibly for some money, and, upon entering the circle, saw a thunderstorm with lightening unleashed, Giacomo Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), 9-12, 776-83. He wrote in his diaries that he lost his nerve, something that, he claims, he thought could never happen to him. He identified the thunderstorm as God's wrath, and, his body shaking with fear, his blood froze in his veins. Casanova's sincerity is far from undisputable; however, the episode remains interesting as an example of magical practices in eighteenth century literature.

<sup>366</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century, in part thanks to the Neoplatonic and Hermetic theories of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the meaning of "natural magic" underwent a significant change. Ficino, Pico, and their followers denied that natural magic involved demons. Their magical theories and practices were based on manipulation of symbols and the natural affinities or sympathies among things of all realms: animal, vegetable, mineral, planetary, and intellectual. Therefore, they maintained, the power of magic was independent of the invocation of spirits. However, Renaissance magi often undermined their own distinctions between natural and demonic magic. They admitted the existence of spiritual beings to whom it was possible to address prayers, hymns, and innocent spells and claimed that their influence was beneficial. In her book, Paola Zambelli emphasizes the ambiguous, contested boundary between the two varieties of Renaissance magic: "black," necromantic or demonic, and "white," natural or (as often called) proto-scientific. Demons are discussed as well as invoked in the Neoplatonic's writings and Zambelli argues that their ambiguities were caused by the contemporary Church's condemnation of all ceremonial magic as witchcraft. This ambivalence in the nature of magic made dissimulation quite common: magical works were circulated in manuscript rather than in print as a precaution against censure or worse; see Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), in particular 1-10.

<sup>367</sup> The connection between natural magic and the development of science turned in part on the aggressive attempt to dissociate white magic from demonic implications. For this see the eighteenth-century debate about magic and witchcraft later in the chapter.

### The Charms of Paolina Brusatti

Magic was, of course, infinitely protean and took many forms; consequently, the individual element was as important as the common ground that nurtured it. Liturgy or para-liturgical activities informed ceremonial magic, but popular magic has its own liturgy too. Engagement with the supernatural was shaped by tradition but also subjected to a wide range of individual innovations. Often apparently similar stories of magic and witchcraft reveal quite disparate traditions and innovations. Yet, within this Babel of forms, some themes and actions recurred frequently enough to make historical analysis possible without grinding out individual character. In eighteenth century Venice, magic elements of high and low society and culture mixed together in original and idiosyncratic ways. When the prostitute Paolina Brusatti decided to speak in front of the Holy Office, she too revealed a scenario in which people at all cultural and social levels mixed to practice magic.

Paolina was in search of efficacious spells *ad amorem* (love charms) and Giovan Battista Alfieri, “a young handsome man wearing a wig,” was ready to sell her what she needed. She brought a number of objects before the tribunal, but one was crucial: a page of parchment with crosses, spells and prayers, a form of a *carta di voler bene*, made from the hide of an unborn lamb that had been cleaned, tanned, perfumed and blessed.<sup>368</sup> A dove, perhaps as a Christ symbol, played a role as well in the ritual that empowered the *carta*. It had to be left on a table for the night and the following morning Paolina was assured that she would find one of its feather that had fallen thanks to “divine virtue.” With that feather she and her tutor were to write a special spell on the parchment; then it

<sup>368</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 130, March 1st 1700.

had to be consecrated three times by being put on the altar under the Eucharist three times. Alfieri promised originally that he would take care of this as he knew a cooperative priest at the church of Spinea (a village in the Venetian *terraferma*, not far from the city). But Alfieri came back from that village after a few days with news that the priest there had said that “there were impediments” to doing the ritual in his church and that they had to go to the private chapel of a nobleman who lived in the countryside nearby. In order for the parchment to work, Paolina also “had not to commit sin using it,” thus she had to remain chaste, otherwise the card would lose its virtues.

Paolina, who was after all a prostitute, did commit sin and confessed this to Alfieri. Alfieri decided to go to his priest friend in Spinea to ask that he fix the ruined spell for an additional price. All the crosses on the card had to be scented and the priest had to say a psalm over every cross. When the mass actually occurred in a private noble chapel the priest also cut off three corners from the card. During the ceremony the priest reportedly ate the three corners of the card, and then lifted it up when he elevated the Eucharist as required by the ceremony.<sup>369</sup> In theory then the card was empowered to ensure Paolina’s success in love.

Alfieri did not offer his knowledge and service for free. He asked Paolina for 30 ducats for two magic sessions. When Alfieri was finally questioned by the Inquisition, he denied all allegations and claimed that personal issues (he and Paolina had a pending trial at the Avogaria, a civil tribunal) and hatred had moved Paolina to denounce him to the Inquisition.<sup>370</sup> He disclaimed any involvement with magic, magicians and heretical practices, arguing that he had merely told Paolina that he had some prayers that helped

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., January 24, 1702; March 14, 1702.

one “to be well.” Later he said that these *carte* helped one “stay out of danger.”<sup>371</sup> Since Paolina, he said, had begged him to copy them, he agreed. From the trial it seems clear that Alfieri’s main and most profitable activity was to copy such magic cards. He claimed that they contained primarily “holy words” along with others words that he could not understand. The Inquisition decided to let him go, but not before requiring an abjuration and imposing salutary penances. Those almost symbolic penances suggest that these sorts of accusations were becoming less significant in the eyes of inquisitors and on their way to disappearing from Inquisition documents to leave room for what seemed like more compelling issues facing Catholic society in the eighteenth century.<sup>372</sup>

### Turning to the Devil?

Most of this magic at least claimed to be benign, at least in its intentions if not in its practice. There was present in Venice, however, a streak of magic that was openly demonic. In a strange but perhaps ultimately logical progression some people did not use prayers merely to subjugate demons or spirits to their will as recommended in grimoires, but rather called on the devil for his aid, often deriding spitefully God’s failure to fulfill their prayers. The rituals used to call upon saints and demons were often similar or even identical, and the problems they were meant to solve were also similar. In short, both good spirits and evil ones were denizens of the same spiritual world and required similar handling making the distinction between good and evil unclear to some. Indeed, it is

<sup>371</sup> Ibid. These *carte* may well have been forms of *carte di voler bene*.

<sup>372</sup> Note how the role of the Inquisitors wasn’t dissimilar from the role of the confessor. In reality, the complex and ambiguous relationship between inquisitors and confessors, which at the beginning of the Inquisition activity in the sixteenth century saw the inquisitors share and subsume part of the confessors’ responsibilities, was undergoing a reverse process: during the eighteenth century confessors increasingly regained control of their parishioners’ lives and souls.

possible that magic continued to exist because of a basic confusion about the ultimate spiritual power that ruled the world (both spiritual and material), especially given the extraordinary powers often attributed to evil spirits and the devil by the Catholic Church itself.

The Counter-Reformation Church had expressed considerable concern about people who gave saints the respect properly due to God. The tendency of the cult of the saints to turn into idolatry was one of the reasons why the Church's hierarchy had launched what was virtually an eighteenth-century "crusade" against the inappropriate veneration of the saints.<sup>373</sup> In the same way that the reverence due to God could be misdirected and given to the saints, so, too, it could be misdirected and given to demons. One popular practice involved calling on the devil for assistance. In the economy of the sacred, engaging the aid of the devil promised a quick return and, though the ultimate price was high, the immediate pay-off was enticing. The soldier Domenico Caenazzo was willing, it seems, to sacrifice his ultimate salvation for short-term gains and made a pact with the devil for specified terms.<sup>374</sup> As he recounted his story before the Inquisition, he explained that he had been made prisoner and become a slave of the king of Algeria. After five years, he along with other prisoners managed to escape. Good luck and favorable circumstances helped, but he feared that demonic support played a role as well. Domenico and his friends had decided to call on the devil for help. They carved a circle in the ground with a knife that had been buried for twenty-four hours

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<sup>373</sup> See the first chapter.

<sup>374</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 138, Deposition of Domenico Caenazzo, March 15, 1703.

under the latrine of their work camp and invoked the devil from inside this magic circle.<sup>375</sup>

But as soon as Domenico pronounced the devil's name he claimed that he became frightened, jumped out of the circle, and called on God, all the saints, and the Virgin to save him. In any case, Domenico and his companions escaped: they walked for days until they reached a river where they found a boat that took them to the coast of Spain. Freed from the Muslim yoke, Domenico kept traveling until he came to Venice. Years passed. But he was afraid that he owed his freedom to the devil and that "there was no hope for him" because he had promised his soul to him for his freedom.<sup>376</sup> Convinced that his last-minute attempt to turn to God and the saints was not enough and haunted by doubts about his salvation, Domenico went to confession. In turn urged by his confessor, he turned himself in to the Inquisition. And in the end despite his voluntary admissions of his contract with the devil, his fear of losing his soul, his sense of guilt, and his will to repent, Domenico Caenazzo was still condemned to eighteen months in the Inquisition prison.<sup>377</sup>

Not all were inclined to give the devil so much credit. Antonio Partenio, for example, *stregone* and self-proclaimed impostor, claimed a different vision of the diabolic. At the time the Inquisition laid its hands on him he had already been

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<sup>375</sup> This ritual seems almost an inverted ceremony or a sinister parody of the highly ritualized demonic magic. The magic circle in ceremonial magic was the sacred space created by the circular perimeter which functioned as a physical barrier that protected the environment where the ritual was performed. The circle was usually drawn with a consecrated knife; it protected the conjurer from demons and evil spirits, Christa Tuczay, "Magic Circle," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, 3:698-699. Interestingly enough, in this episode in which the devil was actually called upon rather than being kept outside of the circle, he is drawn into what may be clearly identified as a desecrated ground; this twist in the ritual, though somewhat logical in the specific economy of ritual magic, also strikes one as involuntarily burlesque.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.



condemned by the Inquisitors of State to finish his days in prison.<sup>378</sup> Since he did not have anything to lose, he spontaneously offered his deposition to help advance the complex trial of the Fifth of March discussed earlier. His account also recalls many aspects of Venetian magic touched in this chapter. As a young man Partenio had devoted himself to magic and to the devil because he wanted to marry a certain girl. As he put it, he conjured “the devil in the name of God.”<sup>379</sup> The illogic of that move notwithstanding, he did finally marry the girl but was not satisfied because the dowry was not as large as he had expected. At that point he began to practice magic in earnest. He got hold of a copy of the *Clavicula Salomonis* but found that it did not contain what he was looking for. So he consulted other grimoires: Pietro Bailardo’s, Cecco d’Ascoli’s, Pietro d’Abano’s. None of those had what he wanted. The occult philosophy of Cornelius Agrippa was his last hope, but this proved a disappointment too. Then Partenio decided to give up on books and turn to those who could teach him what he wanted. That failed as well and to make a long story short, Partenio explored all the possibilities that magic could offer, to no avail. Exasperated, he promised one of his sons to the devil, promising that he would teach him to do evil; he also promised that he would give his wife over to sin. In his conjurations he had prayed God ardently that He allow the devil to appear to him, as he knew “from *devotional books*” that he had appeared to many others.<sup>380</sup> Asking God’s help *to see* and *talk* to the devil may sound like a blasphemous and nonsensical plea, but it was in reality an inference, however wrong, coming from theological works

<sup>378</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, n.n., April 8, 1705.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Emphasis added.

and prescriptive literature itself. To explain the existence of the devil in human life theologians had long maintained that he could operate “only with God’s permission.”<sup>381</sup>

While still using as the backbone of his magic the teachings of books, Partenio used more popular forms of magic, often performed by women: these involved boiling kettles, slaughtered chickens, black cats, and burning candles. As he realized that none of these worked, he decided to turn his lore and the fame he had acquired to profit. He became a swindler who purposely deceived people to make money. In this way, magic became quite lucrative for him. But even as a fraudulent *mago* Partenio took many in with his claimed talents; after all he was well trained and had spells, charms and conjurations for any occasion. If someone wanted to conquer a woman’s love he would take her by the hand and say: “*Ego te ligo sicut ligatus fuit Christus in horto*” (I bind you as Christ was bound in the garden), a simile meant to compare the victim of love to Jesus in the moment in which he was made prisoner;<sup>382</sup> this recalls conjurations as well as other exemplars of popular magic like those taking place in the sixteenth century and analyzed by Guido Ruggiero.<sup>383</sup> The same result could be reached by taking the hair of the would-be-lover to a mass on a Friday. Three knots had to be tied in the hair, one at the beginning of the ceremony, one at the time of the reading of the Gospel, and the third

<sup>381</sup> This principle had been established by Church fathers like Isidore of Seville and Athanasius of Alexandria. See Francesco Trisoglio, *Il Vangelo di Marco alla luce dei Padri della Chiesa* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2006), 180. In his famous treatise the sixteenth-century Dominican friar and physician Scipione Mercuri repeatedly insisted that the devil could do nothing without the permission of God. Scipione Mercurio, *Degli errori popolari d’Italia* (Verona: Stamperia Francesco Rosi, 1645), a statement that would appear constantly in eighteenth century prescriptive literature: see Giovanni Croiset, *Le Vite de’ Santi per tutti i giorni dell’anno*, trans. Selvaggio Canturiani (Venice: Stamperia Baglioni, 1727), viii, 43, 265, 458; Giovanni Battista Scaramelli, *Il direttorio mistico. Indirizzato a’ direttori di quelle anime che Iddio conduce per la via della contemplazione* (Venice: Simone Occhi, 1760), 368.

<sup>382</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, c. 2v. Italics mine.

<sup>383</sup> Ruggiero calls these verbal structures “metaphors of power” and claims that they reflected in the microcosm the power of the macrocosm. In cases in which the references to biblical events were more than one, Ruggiero calls them “transfer of accrued power” and suggests that the power of many holy stories would increase simply by listing them and would then be transferred (by virtue of the charm) to whatever goals were pursued by the invocant, Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 104-106.

during the distribution of the Eucharist.<sup>384</sup> Each phase was to be accompanied by specific Latin phrases. Partenio called this ritual “the mass of the passion,” a phrase that through unlikely analogy and perhaps an involuntary sense of humor alluded to Christ’s sufferings.<sup>385</sup> Burying an egg with the names of the couple on it was another way in which Partenio worked magic for love. He also claimed that he knew how to make one invisible and how to make someone immune to wounds. The former involved the head of someone who had died violently: a gruesome detail for a practice that had innumerable variants, both in historical and literary documents.<sup>386</sup> The latter required a consecrated host and the ritual consisted in “making a pocket in the arm, inserting the host, and leaving it to grow [into the arm].” This was the Venetian version of *ingermatura*, a practice that the Inquisition prosecuted until the 1720s, when the Council of Ten assumed control of such crimes and began inflicting capital punishment to the culprits.<sup>387</sup> After a long confession, Partenio, the multipurpose *magico*, abjured. And finally in 1720 Inquisitors of State decided that a now sick Partenio had paid enough and granted him freedom under the condition that he leave the city.<sup>388</sup> After sixteen years spent in prison,

<sup>384</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, cc. 1r-1v; to knot hair or make a cord with it was a common practice *ad amorem*. In describing magic practices in Southern Italy De Martino defines it as “the technique of the knot” and “symbol of binding,” see Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002), 22, 131. See also Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*.

<sup>385</sup> Here, again, we encounter what Ruggiero identified as a powerful motif in Venice Renaissance magic, namely the sufferings of Christ, which deeply resounded within “a poetics of divine power and human.” Emphasizing the various stages of Jesus’ Passion, “magicians had incorporated into their magic one of the central mysteries of the faith.” Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 105-06. Analogies that involved the person of Christ could work at various levels: Christ could be identified as the object of love, conquered by the suitor, or with the suitor who had to bear and undergo the pain of intense love.

<sup>386</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, c. 4v and ff. A similar practice is also referred to in another Venetian case heard by the Holy Office in the sixteenth century involving Fra Marc’Antonio Gandolfo and Constantino da Pesaro, who were accused among other things of burying the heads of dead friars with beans planted in them, which when eaten were supposed to make them invisible. Likely, that magic too was one of those things to be found in books of secrets. I thank Guido Ruggiero for telling me about this episode, ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 54.

<sup>387</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, cc. 1v. See Chapter 2 for the wide use of *ingermatura* in Venice and its importance in fomenting the jurisdictional battle between the Inquisition and the secular authorities.

<sup>388</sup> Veronese, *L’orrore del sacrilegio*, 54.

Partenio had one last chance to reinvent himself and perhaps was again able to use his expertise, far from the eyes and ears of Venetian Inquisitors.

Even though witchcraft as a contract with the devil, namely the Sabbath, did not play a significant role in Venetian prosecutions, the devil did keep cropping up in Inquisition documents. People called upon him in opposition to God, as a response to God's failure to give them what they requested in prayer or in ceremonial magic. Therefore the devil was evoked from time to time *along with* and *in combination with* God's intervention, assistance, and help, as well as *a substitute for Him*. Nonetheless such conjurations seldom really impeded the faithful from going back and forth between realms of the spiritual world seeking the power most likely to be of use whether that was from God, the saints, or the devil and his minions.

### **The Gray Area of Skepticism and the Apparent Death of the Devil**

Some went a step further, however, seeing the failure of appeals to the devil as the last proof that God, the devil and the world of spirits were a chimera.<sup>389</sup> In 1709, Giovanni Bresciani, an ex-novice in the Augustinian monastery in Treviso, spontaneously denounced himself to the Inquisition and revealed that, during a conversation he had

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<sup>389</sup> That diabolism was a form of protest is not a new idea. Witchcraft historiography underlines how diabolism can be interpreted as a protest against medieval society, against male domination or against the established church. See Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials. Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 3. Moving from people's practices to the elites' perceptions of them, witchcraft was in terms of its cultural and intellectual construction a necessary product of Western (and Christian) binary logic. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). As far as the link between libertinism and diabolism is concerned, the connection was already established in the seventeenth century because libertine beliefs in black magic, cabala, and demonology were quite common. However, beliefs in demonic powers were still *inside* a Christian universe. Indeed, Blaise Pascal, while adopting some libertine tenets himself, felt compelled to develop his theory about this topic in the *Pensées*. He urged that libertines should abandon their excessive faith in demonic powers and emphasize instead the superiority of Christ's miracles. John F. Boitano, *The Polemics of Libertine Conversion in Pascal's Pensées. A Dialectics of Rational and Occult Libertine Beliefs* (Tübingen: Narr, 2002), 63, 88-92.

mentioned that he did not believe he had a soul. He went on to say that he also had doubts about divine justice, specifically about how God could foresee that Judas was going to betray Him, and about whether God was to be considered responsible for Adam's sin. He said that at first he did not share such thoughts with anybody, but then was moved by the desire to discuss them with "the wisest men" he knew. It turned out that Giovanni had also been openly questioning the mystery of the Incarnation, the practice of indulgences, the venality of the Church, hell, heaven, purgatory, the pope, the sacraments, the Virgin, and God himself.

At some point in his confession before the Inquisition, he recalled that as a child he had heard people say that "the devil gives money to whoever sells his soul to him."<sup>390</sup> In spite of the fact that he did not believe either in the devil or in hell, one day he decided to invoke him. He went to campo San Francesco della Vigna (no circle was drawn here to conjure the devil – perhaps because the circular shape of the Venetian *campo* was enough for him, or maybe he was skeptical enough not to care), took off all the sacred objects he was wearing, and called upon the devil with a low voice – all without being heard or seen by anybody. If the devil had appeared, he would have made a deal with him; but the experiment failed. In his abjuration, Bresciani claimed to have summoned the devil, "led by greed and his own eccentricity."<sup>391</sup>

After repeated failures, Partenio seems to have adopted a more skeptical attitude. He then offered a story that combined skepticism with imposture: the magus was someone ready to take advantage of people's gullibility. Many others followed a similar path. In many ways in the eighteenth century, as unlikely as it might seem, belief in the

<sup>390</sup> ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136. Deposition on December 13, 1717. Bresciani was charged with heretical sorcery.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

devil seemed to lead down a path to religious skepticism and even atheism for some. This was a new phenomenon, perhaps due to the spread of atheism in the seventeenth century, the diffusion of printed works, and a general increase in literacy. Whereas in the seventeenth century this “atheism” took the form of libertinism, in the eighteenth it became more substantial, more ideological, and a more direct and conscious negation of the existence of God.<sup>392</sup>

Of course, that was a position based upon the most radical ideas of the Enlightenment, which Christian authorities could not accept. The development of experimental science and the dawning of the Enlightenment also significantly challenged faith in magical practices. Reliance on supernatural assistance was no longer thought to be necessary nor, for that matter, possible. In the Age of Reason, increasing skepticism regarding the supernatural encompassed both magical and religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, one of the main goals of European Enlightenment writers was to rule out the possibility of bewitchment and of pacts with the devil. Jonathan Israel significantly entitled one of his chapters “The Death of the Devil” and argued that one of the intentions of the radical Enlightenment was to prove conclusively that pacts with the devil were impossible. However, to gain a better understanding of the eighteenth century and of what was at stake for the Church, we need to examine not only Enlightenment discourse committed to tearing down the demonological foundation which supported the elite paradigm of witchcraft, but also conversations that were taking place among devout Catholics on the same topic.

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<sup>392</sup> Federico Barbierato deals with this thoroughly in his book *Politici e ateisti. Percorsi della miscredenza a Venezia tra Seicento e Settecento* (Milan: Unicopli, 2006), translated into English as *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop. Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

With the publication in 1749 of Abbot Girolamo Tartarotti's book, *Del Congresso notturno delle lammie*, the last European debate about magic and witchcraft started and quickly spread. According to Tartarotti, witchcraft was a mental construction, a projection, an invention of minds numbed by ignorance, but not an actual deed.<sup>393</sup> His attack on traditional demonology was, however, ambiguous as well as contradictory. He intended to excise witches from the sphere of popular beliefs, and more importantly, from the dockets of law courts, but wished to defend their existence and significance within the scope of Catholic demonological literature.<sup>394</sup> Rather than being inherently or actively evil, a witch was, according to Tartarotti, someone who *was made* evil by being perverted. The *maghi* or sorcerers, however, were another story entirely: they were learned men whose relationship with evil was active rather than passive. While rejecting the reality of the Sabbat and denying that female witches possessed real power, Tartarotti – in order not to challenge the doctrinal definition of evil – maintained his belief in magic.

His double-standard definition naturally opened the door for major criticism from enlightened authors. Tartarotti's book provoked quick and heated responses. The most famous and immediate was Scipione Maffei's book, *L'arte magica dileguata*, or *Dissipated Magical Art*, published in the same year. After the publication of Tartarotti and Maffei's books (and of their own replies back and forth to each other), a number of further publications appeared, which either supported or opposed their theories. None of these publications deserves much attention due to their lack of original insights; but on the whole, they comprise our historical record of the controversy. The most important

<sup>393</sup> Girolamo Tartarotti, *Del congresso notturno delle lammie* (Rovereto: Giambatista Pasquali, 1749).

<sup>394</sup> For some further observations on this subject, see below, n. 500.

issue was something that constituted a raw nerve for Christian theologians: the existence of the devil and his malevolent interferences in human affairs. Those who launched the counter-attack wrote in defense of the existence of witches, as well of the devil and his powers, and denounced the skeptics for playing the devil's game. To cause people not to believe in the devil's powers was, as exorcists knew, one of the favorite tricks that the devil liked to play. Thus, denouncing magic as superstition was both dangerous and stupid. Magic might be a demonic illusion; however, that illusion served to confirm and justify the devil's place in Catholic theology. Later scholars have focused on and praised Tartarotti's book and the debate that followed as catalysts for altering elite beliefs in witchcraft and magic in eighteenth century Italy. But something that must also be emphasized concerning the debate is the aggressive tone of certain authors who took part, when they argued for the existence of witches – and more importantly, about the extent of devil's powers. Indeed, the most critical argument in this debate (which involved endless redefinitions of what witches could do or not do, and also what the devil could do or not do) involved the attempt to erode the devil's powers to the point of almost eradicating them. Opponents of this initiative forcefully proclaimed that this debate was jeopardizing the theological tenets about the devil and his place in Christendom. In their view, the devil's existence needed to be strongly reinstated.

As can be seen in the Venetian Inquisition trial records, to invoke the devil was considered to be a last resort in attempting to access the supernatural: after having appealed to God and the saints without success, as many of those who were convicted by the Inquisition confessed, they had decided to turn to the devil. Once this avenue was explored without attaining any useful result, the religious relativism that had urged them



to try any alternative in the spectrum of the supernatural then led them to slide into skepticism. However, the road to intellectual skepticism was also being paved by the widespread Enlightenment literature, which provided hot topics for conversationalists in the cafes of Venice. Thus, while on one side the Inquisition was attempting to downplay the role of the devil in people's beliefs and were dismissing witchcraft prosecutions (thereby hoping perhaps to undercut belief in magical practices that revolved around the devil) – and the clergy were stating more insistently that the devout do not have the ability to gain access to the supernatural, on the other side, the devil – with his very real powers – clearly continued to play an undiminished role in the minds of many eighteenth-century Christians.

After being frustrated and disappointed, aspiring magi realized that the devil might not appear when summoned by magical rituals – perhaps because he was not as willing or eager, or even powerful enough to satisfy people's demands concerning mundane goals. But many continued to believe that he certainly could sneak into people's lives to work terrible mischief. He could enter people's bodies, and manifest himself in the most disturbing and frightening ways as an evil presence lurking within one's very skin. The devil not only was still the biggest challenge to people's salvation, in these believers' view – he was also considered an active disturber of their earthly wellbeing. As we shall see in the next two chapters, people in the eighteenth century did continue to believe that ailments and diseases were often directly caused by the devil. Thus, exorcism practices in the eighteenth century acquired a different and deeper meaning. Those clergymen who engaged directly in battle with demons exemplified both the power that they could wield because of their office and also the ultimate power of the Church to

oppose and defeat the chief antagonist of God and Christianity. Exorcism thereby came to serve two purposes at once – to keep the devil at bay, and to keep him at the center of people’s beliefs. This was ultimately the best answer that the faithful, along with priests, could offer against the dismissive and pragmatic approach that the Inquisition used throughout that century. The hitherto largely neglected writings of those who wished to bring the devil back into Christian discourses are very interesting because they disclose contemporary fears of the great danger of any texts which were intended to undermine the devil and his minions. They also reveal many ambiguities and ambivalences in regard to demonology, witches, and exorcism within the eighteenth-century Catholic Church.

The long autumn of magic deeply colored the cultural and social world of the eighteenth century, playing an often unrecognized role in its religious and social life. Magic was directly compatible with the spiritual world of Christianity. Its practitioners acknowledged Christian spiritual powers and called upon them to seek high-minded goals, such as healing and the attainment of the basic means to survive. Other practices included seeking illicit power to incite love, and to dominate or destroy enemies. Only an extremely small number left Christianity completely to align themselves with the devil, or finally rejected both the devil and God.

We find in the literature of the grimoires and in characters like Don Pietro Longaretti a rich and complex world that gives depth and nuance to our understanding of spiritual life in Italy during the Enlightenment. Priests like Longaretti served as important intermediaries between the spiritual world of magic and a general populace that still believed in the efficacy of magic, as well as in the spiritual components of everyday life. Indeed, the populace believed the spiritual was at their disposal, even as some within

the Church were attempting to deny access to such power to everyday people. Elite attempts to restrict the cult of the saints (and other religious practices, which seemed to offer everyday people the power to manipulate the spiritual world via their relationships with saints) were resisted by the general populace and by some inside the Church. Similarly, in the realm of magic we can see everyday people (and often their priests) also resisted such discipline and continued to seek more general access to power from the spiritual world. It was the autumn of magic perhaps, but many believed magic still offered a rich harvest. While the involvement of clergymen in magic was becoming increasingly problematic (and was therefore to be chastised), priests did possess a legitimate and powerful tool that demonstrated their privileged access to the enemy of Christianity. Through the sacramental power that they held as ministers, priests could talk to, summon, deride, scorn, and even cast out the devil. This topic and its particular place in eighteenth-century religious culture is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Engaging with Demons: The Eighth Sacrament

“Experience shows that where there are no exorcists, there are no possessed. Exorcists certainly do have the power from God to heal real demoniacs; unfortunately, they also have the power to create fake ones. Such are the pranks the feeble female imagination can play. In Saint Mark’s in Venice, as in the Cathedral of Milan, as soon as some precious relics are shown, immediately one can hear shouts, screams, and squalls. They all come from women, rustic women, who believe they are possessed. Their bodies are contorted, their eyes are glazed over. Once the relics are covered again, that commotion ends, and there are no demoniacs any longer.”<sup>395</sup>

Ludovico Antonio Muratori

Damn, damn you, obstinate sinners, if you do not repent! I was condemned to Hell just for one sin – and you? It has been a long time since God has been calling you, and He is waiting for you. And you? Are you playing deaf? If you confess your sins, you can obtain grace again; for me, there is no such remedy anymore! Damned, damned by God! He is trying to tell you! On the Day of Judgment you will have to tell that you have been warned even by the devil, since God wants you safe at any cost! ... Yes, make fun of the priests and go saying everywhere that all this is their invention, false scruples, fear of women. ... the time will come ... you will see. And I say this not just for this village but the whole world, full of sinners, and of people who take communion as if they eat a piece of bread or a bowl of soup; they have the same conscience as their shoes. Damned, damned you will be by God. Make fun of the priests, play deaf, desecrate the sign of the cross – many do it, as if they are getting rid of mosquitoes, and then they dare to take the holy water. Only a drop of it, if it falls in Hell, would turn it into Heaven.<sup>396</sup>  
Speech of the demon inside Maria Piva, called Gardita

As was discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the Inquisition in Venice did not persecute witches for attending a Sabbat. The Venetian Inquisitors were not seeking evidence of pacts with the Devil, orgies, witches as the Devil’s attendants, or demonic adoration in exchange for the supernatural power to harm people. However, images, engravings, and

<sup>395</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della forza della fantasia umana* (Venice: Giovanni Gatti, 1783), 111. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>396</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142. From the letter of don Limana, priest-exorcist of Nicoló of Zoldo, July 24, 1740.

ecclesiastical writings that described in lurid detail the nightmares of a Christian community besieged by the Devil and by witches did reach the lagoon and Venice's mainland territories. And that was not all. More aggressively and directly, the Devil entered people's beliefs, imaginations, and popular imagery through the words of priests and preachers. Their fiery sermons dwelt upon the terrors of Hell and on daily temptations. The Devil and his minions appeared not only in the Inquisition's documents but also in other archival sources. These records all indicate that both demonological descriptions and weekly sermons about the Devil reached both the rural and urban populations to be blended with local lore.

This chapter discusses the Devil as a constant presence in eighteenth-century people's lives and the rite used by the Church to cast demons out, exorcism. Exorcism in this period was neither marginalized nor discontinued. To the contrary, the practice was extremely important to the priests' ministry. Indeed, it was one of the most powerful sacraments performed by the clergy. But even more importantly, this chapter brings to the fore and analyzes the connection between the parish priest and the exorcist, as well as the connection between exorcism and witchcraft. In the eighteenth century, the roles of the parish priest and the exorcist were conflated into one, and handling *maleficium* increasingly entered the purview of local priests. In their capacity to act as exorcists, they drove out demons, healed maleficent acts, and challenged witches who had allegedly caused harm.

To begin, the reputations and roles of exorcists at the outset of the eighteenth century are examined to establish a revisionary perspective of their role in local society of the time. Then two case studies are presented and analyzed to show how local priest-

exorcists dealt with two occurrences of large-scale spiritual turmoil in rural areas in Northern Italy, using exorcist rites as a healing and stabilizing tool. Far from being castigated by the Church for their actions, they were generally supported, despite contemporary efforts of the Church to “tame” exorcist practices.

### **The Exorcist: An Initially Unflattering Portrait**

Fulgenzio Micanzio, *consultore in jure*, was a pupil, friend, and biographer of Paolo Sarpi. He wrote a (perhaps inadvertently) humorous story that illustrated the downsides of exorcism.<sup>397</sup> Despite the amusing aspects of the narrative, this story sheds some light on the controversial practices conducted by exorcists and on the distrust that was associated with them within the Church.

In the story, Giovanni Battista Perugino was a Servite friar and an exorcist. He was also called Lagrimino (“Little Tears” or “Maudlin”) because he knew how to make good use of tears when the necessity arose. However, Perugino’s orthodoxy was very questionable. After he committed some unspecified crimes, he left his convent to escape the Father General’s discipline. He then came to Venice “where to hide was easy, and that’s why a lot of fugitives ended up there,” as Micanzio pointed out.<sup>398</sup> But Lagrimino did not need to hide, because the very fact that he was on the run from the Father General made him well-liked by the local Provincial Father, Maestro Gabriello. Lagrimino, in order to make some money, started performing exorcisms and even obtained a license from the papal nuncio in Venice. What Micanzio thought about exorcists was clear in his story: most of them were foreign and “a fugitive race which could not live under the vow

<sup>397</sup> Fulgenzio Micanzio, *Opere del Padre Paolo dell’Ordine dei Servi e Theologo della Serenissima Repubblica di Venetia* (Venice: Roberto Meietti, 1677), 57-61.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

of obedience, [but instead] pursued pleasures and sought to get rich.”<sup>399</sup> Friar Lagrimino had, among his many patients, the wife of a merchant. As often happened, the exorcism took a long time, and his sessions with the merchant’s wife were conducted both in the local church and in her house. At the time, the merchant’s business was failing. He realized that a considerable quantity of satin, muslin, and other varieties of precious cloth was missing from his emporium. After confronting his apprentice at the shop, the merchant sorted out the mystery: his wife was paying for Lagrimino’s exorcisms with the luxurious fabric of his store. Not surprisingly, noted Micanzio, part of these payments ended up in the Provinciale’s and the Nuncio’s convent rooms.

Micanzio argued that “God sometimes allows demons to harass human beings; it is also true that, according to the logic and harmony underlying our faith, this rarely happens – but when it does, it happens for a reason.”<sup>400</sup> What constituted a reason in the view of the Catholic Church was not necessarily the same for exorcists, however. For the latter, it was convenient that public squares be constantly full of women possessed by evil spirits. So lamented the *consultore* Micanzio, who displayed his skepticism in much the same way as his tutor Sarpi. Women’s uterine ailments, melancholic humors, and diseases that their husbands transmitted to them were all attributed by the exorcist, Micanzio noted with some sarcasm, to sorcery and spells.

Micanzio insisted that like illusionists, exorcists were able to pull things out of women’s stomachs that could not possibly be there.<sup>401</sup> He was referring to pieces of iron, nails, small files, pins, needles, feathers, stones, cloth, shards of glass, hair, seaweed, and foam that could be vomited up by the bewitched or found in the proximity of the victim,

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

either in their bedding or in their bedclothes.<sup>402</sup> These were seen as the visible proofs of someone's malicious intentions – evidence of *maleficium* or witchcraft. Such harm was inflicted through occult means that many Christian demonologists linked to the practice of demon worship.<sup>403</sup> Micanzio, however, did not believe in the demonic basis of these “discoveries,” and he shared his skepticism with other Christian theologians and writers. Roman Inquisitors in the seventeenth century also had expressed a fair amount of skepticism about these forms of “evidence.” The Congregation the Holy Office in Rome, concerned that local tribunals might not be sufficiently meticulous in their prosecutions of witchcraft, had urged the establishment of a *corpus delicti* at the beginning of all of their trials. As Jonathan Seitz has recently argued, the *corpus delicti*, or evidence required for a successful prosecution of witchcraft, was difficult to verify. In the phrasing of the Venetians: “the root [was] hidden and the material uncertain.”<sup>404</sup> For this reason, both officially (through instructions sent regularly) and unofficially (through new manuals that were produced for Inquisitors), the Congregation discouraged Church prosecutions for witchcraft.<sup>405</sup>

But according to Seitz, the challenges of prosecuting witchcraft in Early Modern Venice were due less to the Congregation's cautious approach to the matter than to the unwillingness of local physicians to recognize supernatural illnesses, and to their

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<sup>402</sup> These are the objects that Girolamo Menghi described in his *Compendio*, but there were some variations in his list. Menghi, 273. In the sixteenth century case of Margherita examined by Guido Ruggiero, the hidden signs of *maleficium* were revealed by the priest who was called by the husband of the alleged victim. The husband was a physician who was unable to cure his wife with natural cures. Guido Ruggiero, “The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: Male, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre-Modern Medicine,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 1141-1158.

<sup>403</sup> Jonathan Durrant and Michael D. Bailey, *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 131.

<sup>404</sup> Jonathan Seitz, “‘The Root is Hidden and the Material Uncertain:’ The Challenges of Prosecuting Witchcraft in Early Modern Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2009): 102-133.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*



tendency to deny their competence to speak of supernatural interventions in the body that were allegedly caused by witchcraft.<sup>406</sup> Though tribunals also sought the expertise of exorcists to discern the signs of *maleficium* in the case of a suspected supernatural illness, physicians were considered to possess more credibility with Inquisitors.<sup>407</sup>

Although *maleficium* was seldom prosecuted in Venetian Inquisition courts in the eighteenth century, it did not vanish from the tribunal's archives.<sup>408</sup> In fact, the topic was prevalent enough that in these same years the jurist Bartolomeo Melchiori raised a discussion of the issue at the juridical level and pushed for a re-definition of magic and witchcraft. He argued that these were superstitions and harmless activities that should not be included under criminal law offenses. Bartolomeo Melchiori was a jurist in one of the most important cities on the Venetian mainland, having been appointed *assessore* for Senator Girolamo Renier when the latter was governor in Brescia. The *assessore* was the local criminal judge, and Melchiori was a jurist who knew both Roman and Venetian law.<sup>409</sup> In 1741, Melchiori edited an important criminal law collection, in which he tackled the issue of magic and witchcraft in legal terms. A few years later, he wrote an additional work in which he expanded what he had previously written as a response to Girolamo Tartarotti's book that had engendered an eighteenth-century debate about witchcraft and the alleged ominous power of witches.<sup>410</sup> Melchiori did not wish to enter

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Charges of *maleficium* were switched to other, lesser crimes. See also Jonathan Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30-58.

<sup>408</sup> Although charges of *maleficia* were routinely dismissed by the Inquisition, witchcraft accusations were still brought before that institution. On the Venetian mainland, this matter was primarily handled by the secular court of the local governor. Witchcraft fell under the umbrella of *mixti fori*. Both religious and secular courts had jurisdiction over it in Venice. This was a matter that Venetian authorities handled in their own way. See Chapters 2 and 3 above.

<sup>409</sup> This was during the years 1746 and 1747; see Luciano Parinetto, *Magia e ragione. Una polemica sulle streghe in Italia intorno al 1750* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1974), 60.

<sup>410</sup> This is discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

into theological or philosophical speculations about witches, demons, and their powers. As a jurist, he wanted to examine how to establish such a crime, that is, a crime committed with sorcery or witchcraft.<sup>411</sup> He was concerned with juridical proof, not with establishing religious or philosophical truths.

Without denying the existence of witches, demons, and *maghi*, Melchiori stated that he had never encountered the effects of their arts. Since the law recognized both witchcraft and magic, he had to accept those two categories. However, despite the evidence required by the law, no witchcraft prosecutions could actually provide that evidence.<sup>412</sup> Attempted prosecutions of such acts thereby confirmed Melchiori's assertion concerning the burden of proof: witchcraft materials *could not be* considered *corpus delicti*, that is, a set of facts that showed a crime had occurred. Melchiori focused his polemic on what was important for the legal system: the proof of *maleficium*.<sup>413</sup> On a very practical and empirical level, the *maleficium* needed to be proved, as with any other crime, with witnesses, clues, confessions, and tangible signs. All of the paraphernalia of the magic that was involved, namely prohibited books, secret cards, evidence of a pact with a demon, hair, needles, cruxes, seeds, images, concoctions, and so on, did not fall into any plausible legal category.<sup>414</sup> He argued that the contention that something might be "possible" or "likely" should not be a legal issue. How could a judge seriously

<sup>411</sup> Bartolomeo Melchiori, *Miscellanea di materie criminali, volgari e latine, composta secondo le leggi civili e venete* (Venice: Gasparo Storti, 1776). See also *Dissertazione epistolare di Bartolommeo Melchiori assessore inviata ad un professore di legge in confermazione del capitolo XIII della sua Miscellanea di materie criminali. Degli omicidi commessi con sortilegio* (Venice: Pietro Basaglia, 1750).

<sup>412</sup> While the eighteenth century legal system still identified witchcraft and magic as the most heinous of crimes, historians need to look at the actual prosecutions to see to what extent the law was applied.

<sup>413</sup> Parinetto, *Magia e ragione*, 64-71.

<sup>414</sup> Seitz, along with other Venetian historians, held that witchcraft was absolutely within the jurisdiction of the Inquisition; Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 204. However, as was discussed in chapter 2 (and as will be elaborated on further in this chapter), the correspondence between the *consultori in jure*, the Council of Ten, and the local *podestà* discloses a much more complex situation; Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 204.

consider that someone had been harmed “through songs, magic chants, whispered secret words as curses, conjurations, execration, and the like”? Melchiori argued that whatever might come from a confession, crimes committed via *maleficium* were not provable in the legal system and were impossible in nature. In such cases, “the wise judge had nothing to do but consider the confession wrong and caused by ignorance.”<sup>415</sup>

But Melchiori’s attempt to decriminalize witchcraft should not be considered proof that his opinions were widely shared. Despite the Venetian Inquisition’s leniency and attitude toward witchcraft, legally speaking the door was still open for tribunals to proceed against accused witches. As *consultori* had constantly argued, it was a secular matter and this always left room for prosecution. And if in the main cities witchcraft might have become a different affair, in rural areas acts of *maleficium* were still perceived as such and pursued in courts.<sup>416</sup>

Returning to Micanzio, he personally did not believe in the reality of *maleficium* and suggested that exorcists simply sought personal profits by planting those ideas in women’s minds. Indeed, exorcists were blamed by some skeptics for instilling, nurturing, and spreading those beliefs. But such criticisms did not influence the way sudden misfortune, strange illnesses, and mysterious deaths were perceived by the faithful and even by some authority figures. The fact that the Venetian Inquisition refused to persecute witchcraft because of the physicians’ claims that they were unable to

<sup>415</sup> Parinetto, *Magia e ragione*, 65.

<sup>416</sup> In her work on Venice, Ruth Martin emphasized the absence of traditional *maleficium* as an element of witchcraft that was focused on money and love as opposed to witchcraft that was related to agriculture. In a word, urbanization influenced the structure of magical beliefs and practices. See Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice. 1550-1650* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989). For more on this topic, see Owen Davies, “Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft: an Examination of London,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (1997): 597-617; and Oscar di Simplicio, “On the Neuropsychological Origins of Witchcraft Cognition: The Geographic and Economic Variable,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Bryan P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 507-27.

adequately assess supernatural occurrences did not mean that all Inquisitors and physicians rejected the possibility that *maleficia* was real. Some did believe, just as the common people did.

Yet, abuses relating to exorcist practices did occur, and these caused the Inquisition great concern. Unconventional and improper exorcist methods were often investigated by the eighteenth-century Inquisition. Several cases exist in the Venetian archive. The introduction of the *Rituale Romanum* in 1614 by Pope Paul V, promulgated to establish uniformity of worship throughout the Church, did not discourage exorcists from using techniques that were both questionable (not in agreement with the *Rituale*) and often bordering on *sollicitatio ad turpia*.<sup>417</sup>

Most of the exorcists in the Early Modern period were Dominicans, Franciscans, or Capuchins who, as preachers, wandered from place to place in the service of their religious communities. Since the requirement to be examined and licensed by bishops in order to practice exorcism had never been applied to those belonging to regular orders, these exorcists were appointed by their own abbot ordinaries and practiced without Episcopal confirmation or supervision. They were the most blatant abusers of the *ars exorcistica*. Secular clergy were not immune from this sort of accusation, but the ability

<sup>417</sup> To examine this specific kind of accusation is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is worth noting that bizarre techniques to cast out demons had been employed (and also chastised by the Inquisition) in the sixteenth century. Giovanni Romeo's study on exorcists engaging in sexual acts with the possessed did not imply that their actions suggested inappropriate clerical behavior. What appeared to be *sollicitatio* were at times unorthodox methods, but were not designed for the exorcist to pursue personal pleasure. For example, according to Romeo, Inquisitors who blew demons away from the intimate parts of their female parishioners might have stretched the boundaries and the meanings of their mission – but not maliciously. Ottavia Niccoli, however, emphasized how this sort of peculiar exorcism was actually not so peculiar, nor as localized as Romeo suggested. The practice was instead quite widespread. As far as the eighteenth-century Venetian Inquisition was concerned, such unorthodox methods of exorcism were common. This constitutes further proof of the resilient attitudes attached to a practice that, despite repeated attempts by the Church to regulate exorcism, was stubbornly resistant to regimentation. See Giovanni Romeo, *Esorcisti, confessori e sessualità femminile nell'Italia della Controriforma: a proposito di due casi modenese del primo Seicento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998); Ottavia Niccoli, "Esorcismi ed Esorcisti tra Cinque e Seicento," *Società e Storia* 32 (1986): 409-18.

of the bishop to control and revoke their licenses made them (a little bit) more susceptible to hierarchical supervision. Between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the number of parish priests who practiced exorcism increased; apparently as part of a deliberate strategy of the Church intended to place the practice of exorcism under tighter control.

Beyond the threat of revocation for misuse or gross irregularity of practice, the episcopal licensing process effectually limited the ability of a priest to conduct exorcisms to a limited period of time. However, this form of internal control of the secular clergy was far from perfect. Because the basics of exorcism, along with all of the other aspects of liturgy, were contained in the *Rituale Romanum*, virtually every priest could learn to exorcise. More importantly, they felt they had the right to do it. In their view, the combination of confessor-exorcist in one person made the practice both different in character and stronger in value. While a community could always call for a professional, outside exorcist when there was a need, it was more convenient and likely more comforting to have the confessor of the community village act as the exorcist. That way, someone who was already in charge of the souls of his parishioners would also be the one to save them from terrifying demonic incursions. This situation also could dramatically change the dynamic of the exorcism. The act of confession could be used as the first step in the process of discovering spirits and then exorcising them. This will be explored further below.

### Devilish Rhetoric

The fact that exorcism was at least theoretically understood to be an additional sacrament leads to the following question: Why did so many people believe that the Devil was physically present in their lives during the eighteenth century? An obsession with the Devil's misdeeds pervaded the prescriptive literature in this period. The Devil was said to be omnipresent in catechisms and in other devotional and religious publications. This was a point made repeatedly in handbooks for the clergy and in the *Rituale Romanum*, especially during the eighteenth century, when exorcism was also defined as a "rare occurrence" in ministry activities.<sup>418</sup> Father Daniele Concina's works are a prime example. Born in Clauzetto, a village near Udine in La Patria del Friuli, Concina was an energetic, indefatigable Dominican polemicist and a rigorous moralist who became engaged in many contemporary disputes.<sup>419</sup> His education started in Gorizia at a Jesuit college. However, in 1707, he left the Jesuits and entered the Order of Preachers (the principal part of the Order of St. Dominic). This was a choice that revealed both his vocation and his personality: he abandoned the luxury of the Jesuits for what he defined "the poverty of the Dominicans." Venice was the place dearest to his heart. There he found a congenial intellectual environment where he studied theology and sharpened his rhetorical skills. An examination of Concina's career can help us to understand the multiple levels of eighteenth-century religious discourse and how they could intertwine.

<sup>418</sup> *Rituale Romano Illustrato* (Venice: Tommaso Bettinelli, 1749), 105-06.

<sup>419</sup> Danile Concina (1687-1756). Regarding his "ridiculous" polemic against Maffei's *L'arte magica dileguata*, a text that denied the reality of witchcraft and witches, Paolo Preto showed that Concina could blend the thinking of a bright mind with rigid and obtuse ideas. His command of rhetoric led him to be repeatedly invited to Rome. Protected by Benedict XIV and many influential friends, he conducted a tireless crusade against Jesuit moral laxity. Concina's opposition to Maffei's book concerned the conviction that witches had sexual intercourse with the Devil. But what seemed to Preto to be almost an irreconcilable contradiction of personality traits in Concina's character was more likely an ambivalence that was commonly expressed by many ecclesiastics of his own time. See Paolo Preto, "Daniele Concina," in *DBI* 27 (1982), *ad vocem*.

Early in his career as a preacher, Concina delivered scorching sermons from the pulpit. When he went back to Friuli as a lecturer in theology, he addressed his students with the more sophisticated arguments of an academic. In both cases, we might argue, he was driven by the same religious fervor. In his works, Concina condemned making loans for usury, opposed Jesuit probabilism (or laxism), and fiercely opposed the theatre, which was a very popular Venetian form of entertainment.<sup>420</sup> He held that the latter provided the perfect stage from which the Devil could corrupt men and, above all, women.<sup>421</sup>

Elsewhere, he saw many venues from which the Devil could sneak into Christians' lives: in particular, cafès, casinos, brothels, and taverns.<sup>422</sup> In fact, all public spaces, except for those devoted to religious activities, were united and associated by "the world, the Devil, the flesh," to use his words.<sup>423</sup> This was clearly the language of the preachers. In cities and villages, wandering preachers emphasized the role that the Devil played in leading people astray. Evidence from the Venetian and Friulian archives proves that parish priests with a fascination for fiery, vehement sermons, and with an evident desire to grab their parishioners' attention, stir their emotions, and keep them under control, also became

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<sup>420</sup> Probabilism is a doctrine developed by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century to determine what one should do when different authorities are found to disagree. The theory claims that if one is willing to perform an action, and that action has some probability of being granted official sanction, one has reason to perform that action without being condemned. Here, probable means likely to be supported by authority rather than supported by evidence. It does not matter how much weight the authority has. For many, probabilism suggested a sense of loss of the certainty that characterized the Renaissance. In another sense, probabilism is any position that requires one to be content with probability because certainty does not obtain or because it is difficult to know whether certainty could obtain. Jansenists strongly attacked probabilism, but they were not the only ones; non-Jesuits, generally speaking, were not prone to accept what was deemed as a reduction of ethics in moral laxism. Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, eds., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 562.

<sup>421</sup> Preto, *Daniele Concina*. For Concina's invective against the theatre and women's susceptibility to devil's lures, see Daniele Concina, *De' teatri moderni contrari alla professione cristiana* (Rome: Eredi Barbiellini, 1755), 87.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 268-69.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 328. He did not spare the *spiriti forti* from his condemnation. To him, they were the worst contemporary product of the Devil, and so he dedicated an entire treatise to them. Daniele Concina, *Della religione rivelata contra gli atesisti, deisti, materialisti*. Tomo secondo (Venice: Simone Occhi, 1754), 129-30.

accustomed to employing this kind of rhetoric.<sup>424</sup> Magic, witchcraft, and *maleficium* might have faded from juridical discourse, but these topics continued to play a dominant role in sermons and works of religious devotion.

Magic was the *ars* taught by the Devil, as Pietro Maria Ferreri wrote in his catechism. This was one of the most famous handbooks for Catholic education during the eighteenth century.<sup>425</sup> Ferreri described in detail how the Devil could interfere in human affairs. For him, magic was the main door through which the Devil could enter a person's life. By himself, the Devil was thought capable of turning the elements of nature upside-down, predicting natural phenomena, and enticing the faithful. Together with his followers, the Devil could cause other sorts of evil. According to Ferreri's description, *maghi* (magicians) did things that might look like miracles but were not; *fattucchiere* (sorcerers) did things that endangered people's souls, especially through love magic; and *streghe e stregoni* (male and female witches) performed *maleficia* to damage crops and harm bodies. Against *maleficia* (and implicitly also against those who were in league with the Devil), the faithful had only one hope – to resort to Church remedies. Ferreri conceded that some women could counteract *maleficia* with superstitious remedies, but

<sup>424</sup> Two of the best-known devotional books of the eighteenth century that warned against the Devil's relentless interventions in the lives of the faithful are Domenico Serio, *Esercizi di missione. Opera utilissima a missionari, predicatori, parrochi* (Bassano: Remondini, 1781), and Geminiano da San Mansueto, *Prediche quaresimali* (Bassano: Remondini, 1774).

<sup>425</sup> Paolo Maria Ferreri, *Istruzioni in forma di catechismo per la pratica della dottrina cristiana* (Bassano: Remondini, 1768), 129. The first edition was written in the 1730s, but the Remondinis repeatedly reprinted this famous manual for priests until the end of the century. The sixteenth-century catechism by Robert Bellarmine was still the model for priests' manuals, as it was hard to publish new works without encountering censorship. However, parish priests needed practical yet complete handbooks to teach doctrine to their flocks and to refresh their own information. The French were less afraid of being censored and so published new catechisms during the eighteenth century, which were often translated into Italian. Turlot was one of the authors translated at the beginning of the century (his work was often quoted and paraphrased by Ferro). Later, Fleury, and Mesengù became the favorites, although their works were heavily censored. For a comprehensive examination of Catholic catechisms, see Michela Catto, *Un panopticon catechistico. L'arciconfraternita della dottrina cristiana a Roma in età moderna* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 61-92, 246-77.



he affirmed that these also allowed the Devil in, rather than driving him away. These methods included small actions in the house, such as putting the broom behind the door, sprinkling salt all over, hiding needles, pins, and the like. But for Ferreri, the only remedies which could fully undo bewitchment were those offered by the Holy Church. These included participating in the sacraments, doing penance, taking Communion, invoking the names of Jesus, Mary, the guardian angels, and/or the saints, and then praying, fasting, and making the simple gesture of the sign of the cross.<sup>426</sup> Prescriptive literature left no doubt that the most powerful *remedia adversus maleficia* could only be deployed by the Church and its ministers. These included the uses of holy water and other blessed objects such as the relics of saints, the *Agnus Dei*, sacred candles, and above all, exorcisms.<sup>427</sup>

The insistence within the prescriptive literature that holy and priestly remedies should be used to dispel the Devil is crucial to understanding witchcraft up to the eighteenth century. Historians have established how the Devil *of the books* did not necessarily match or trickle down into common people's beliefs.<sup>428</sup> Although at the village level witchcraft practices and motivations were largely devoid of demonstrable connections to the Devil, preachers' sermons about the Devil's influences did play a role in the way parishioners dealt with some adversities and afflictions. Because the Devil was so prominent in sermons, catechisms, and handbooks for clergy, he was internalized (and then externalized) as a disturbing voice from within – as a real entity that subverted the

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<sup>426</sup> Ferreri, *Istruzioni*, 129.

<sup>427</sup> Nicolas Turlot, *Il Tesoro della Dottrina Cristiana, opera esimia latina, tradotta in francese, poscia in italiano, utilissima non solamente ai parrochi ed altri ecclesiastici, ma anche a qualunque persona che desidera di apprendere con chiarezza tutto ciò ch'è necessario per credere e vivere cristianamente. Undecima edizione veneta. Tomo secondo* (Venice: Gio. Battista Recurti, 1751), 452-54. The original book was published in 1635.

<sup>428</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and E. William Monter, *The Period of the Witch Trials* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

Catholic tenets which parish priests attempted to instill within their communities. And the Devil within could be expelled only with the help of the same priest that had long warned his parishioners against the fiend's mischievous evildoings. This is why priests believed that the best exorcist for a community was the local parish priest. And a parish priest is the protagonist of the story examined below. But before turning to these compelling cases, we must first examine the *ars and exercitium exorcizandi*.<sup>429</sup>

### Exorcism versus Witchcraft

In Italy, the development of exorcism was a consequence of “the anomaly of witchcraft” throughout the peninsula.<sup>430</sup> As Giovanni Romeo has explained, the practice of exorcism in Italy was associated with and linked to witchcraft prosecutions.<sup>431</sup> Since acts of *maleficium* were thought to cause death, sickness, or even demonic possession, to counteract these manifestations the exorcist had to find and destroy the *corpus delicti*, those signs which revealed that a bewitchment had occurred. However, demonologists asserted that although it was important to eradicate the manifestations of *maleficium*, it was equally important to permanently destroy the malefic presence, the source of the evil doings. Theoretically, a witch-hunt was a viable possibility and an ultimate solution.

Confronted by this grim and potentially socially destructive solution, the sixteenth-

<sup>429</sup> Girolamo Menghi, *Fuga Demonum Adiurationes Potentissimas et Exorcismos Formidabiles ...* (Venice: Eredi di Giovanni Varischi, 1596), 16.

<sup>430</sup> See for this topic Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, Esorcisti e Streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Florence: Sansoni, 1990); and Gian Paolo Gri, “Spiritâz a Clausiet,” *Sot la Nape XLIV*, 4 (1992): 5-15. As Gri pointed out, studies in Friuli confirm this pattern. Throughout the eighteenth century, the practice of exorcism grew exponentially in the region, rather than diminishing in importance. Exorcisms took place mostly in special sanctuaries located throughout the territory. See also Donatella Cozzi and Elena Zannier, “Gli spirtâz di Clauzetto,” *Âs. Int e Cjere. Il territorio dell'antica Pieve d'Asio*, ed. Manlio Michelutti, 69° Congresso della Società Filologica Friulana (Udine: Società Filologica Friulana, 1992), 459-498. This is further discussed below.

<sup>431</sup> Romeo, *Inquisitori*.

century Holy Office opted to insist upon the fact that the Sabbat was only an illusion caused by demons. Thus, they expressed skepticism concerning witches' alleged powers. At the same time, the Inquisition was leaning toward a less literal interpretation (and a milder prosecution) of witchcraft. But exorcists challenged these premises, contending that they could identify the signs of *maleficia* and also the people who were responsible for them. They argued that through exorcism, both the victim of a *maleficium* and the possessed would reveal the names of those who had bewitched them.<sup>432</sup> In a few sixteenth-century instances studied by Guido dall'Olio, collaboration between Inquisitors and exorcists was attempted but not pursued. It was the Inquisitors who decided not to put any trust in this alliance.<sup>433</sup> The Inquisitors believed that reliance on the "revelations" of people who were under the Devil's spell and spoke names during exorcism might create "a sinister mechanism very difficult to control."<sup>434</sup> Their fear was that cooperation between exorcists and tribunals might trigger an interminable chain of accusations and counter-accusations. This might have paralyzed the system rather than making it work.<sup>435</sup> Exorcists' techniques to sort out the culprits were therefore kept out of the tribunal court, but remained in high demand beyond that context.

According to the Italian historian Elena Brambilla, during the eighteenth century exorcism was discontinued due to changes in the judicial system, which incorporated the new developments and implications of the Scientific Revolution. Science dismissed the supernatural significance of the signs of *maleficia*. In an article titled "La fine dell'esorcismo" ("The end of exorcism"), Brambilla argued that in the first half of the

<sup>432</sup> Dall'Olio, *Alle origini*, 90-91.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.* This had been the system during the earlier witch prosecutions and was also the standard procedure in prosecutions for heresy.

eighteenth century a shift occurred in the relationship between traditional theology and medicine.<sup>436</sup> While until the seventeenth century medicine was subordinated to theology, in the eighteenth century ecclesiastical authorities progressively moved away from their traditional position and focused more on natural rather than supernatural causes to explain emotional and physical ailments. This shift in turn fomented a change in the way diabolic as well as divine possessions were understood. According to Brambilla, the development of Cartesian philosophy, with its sharp differentiation between matter and spirit, caused a rejection of old theories concerning the spontaneous generation of extraneous matter in human bodies. Thus, extraneous matter – such as the strange objects found surrounding the bewitched (usually found in their beds) or which emerged from their bodies – could no longer constitute the ominous and meaningful signs of *maleficium* and demonic possession. As Fulgenzio Micanzio had already argued more than a century before, those objects could not possibly be found or generated in human bodies.<sup>437</sup>

A contentious debate arose concerning scientific versus religious beliefs in the middle of the century. Medicine was undergoing secularization between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, becoming progressively separated from theological concerns. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, exorcism as a means to cure both bodies and souls

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<sup>436</sup> Elena Brambilla, “La fine dell’esorcismo,” *Quaderni storici* 112 (2003): 117-47.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-125. This represented a shift toward a scientific frame of mind that was later developed by the English physician and anatomist Thomas Willis and the Italian medical scientist and physician Antonio Vallisneri. Antonio Vallisneri (1661-1730) held the chairs of Practical Medicine (first) and Theoretical Medicine (later) at the University of Padua from 1700 until his death. As did many erudite and learned men of his time, Vallisneri overestimated the influence of new scientific discoveries within elite circles. This was a common trait among reformers during the Enlightenment or pre-Enlightenment period: these intellectual elites could no longer believe in superstitions. A cultural gap between learned and unlearned people was growing. But to contend that all elites agreed on this position is a misperception that arose from the false myth (endorsed by the same reformers) that all elites shared a rational intellectual culture and were equally enthusiastic about the progress of the new sciences. For a detailed reconstruction of Vallisneri’s statements suggesting the wide influence of science, see Dario Generali, *Antonio Vallisneri. Gli anni della formazione e le prime ricerche* (Florence: Olschki, 2007); and Maria Teresa Monti, *Antonio Vallisneri. L’edizione del testo scientifico nell’età moderna* (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

might have been declining, but it remained a powerful tool in priests' hands throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>438</sup> Moreover, redefining the boundaries of the natural did not mean excluding the supernatural altogether, namely demonic interferences in human affairs. The fact that exorcism was banned as a method to prove the *corpus delicti* in juridical courts and was dismissed in scientific discourses does not mean that it also disappeared from everyday religious practices. In many rural communities, exorcists – and even secular authorities – continued utilizing exorcism techniques to make sense of sicknesses, death, and misfortune and to alleviate communal and individual tensions.<sup>439</sup>

Exorcism played too great a role in the social and religious lives of villagers for its significance to fade away during the eighteenth century. At the same time, exorcism was an increasingly controversial practice within Catholicism. Abuses were monitored and punished, but the Church had allowed exorcists to act quite independently in their approaches to demoniacs up to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Although some attempts to regulate these practices began with the publication of the *Rituale Romanum* in 1614, individual techniques to cast out the Devil continuously developed in practice and in literature until the first decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>440</sup> The failure to closely

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<sup>438</sup> In a recent study, Brambilla developed her analysis of seventeenth-century theology and eighteenth century medicine by tracing the transition from possession to hysteria, and thence to mental disease. She appears to have softened her previous argument for a straightforward trend toward rationality. Cultural ambivalences were not the focus of her analysis, but rather the transition which occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from supernatural to natural causations. Yet, Brambilla admitted that contradictions and incongruities underlay condemnations of devotional excesses. On the very last page of her book, quoting Behringer, she conceded that possession and *maleficium* continued in the eighteenth century “to supply explanations for ailments even after ‘rational’ medicine *should* have substituted it” (the italics are my own). This assertion curiously contradicts the title of her final section, “The last demoniacs and their Enlightened cure.” See, Elena Brambilla, *Corpi invasi e viaggi dell’anima. Santità, possessione, esorcismo dalla teologia barocca alla medicina illuminista* (Rome: Viella, 2012), 182, 242.

<sup>439</sup> The cases discussed below demonstrate these uses of exorcism.

<sup>440</sup> For an English translation of the traditional *Rituale*, which was officially replaced in 1998 but is still in use today, see Philip T. Weller, trans. and ed., *The Roman Ritual*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1952). The brevity of the instructions contrasts with the longer parts containing the actual prayer of exorcism. Compared with the richness of the exorcists' accounts, the vagueness of the described *Rituale*

supervise exorcists and to implement more firmly-supported reforms begs the question, why did criticism of the practice remain a dead letter? What was truly at stake, and more important than controlling the practice of exorcism, was the issue of belief in the existence of the Devil and his powers. Furthermore, what stemmed from that was also an issue of power – the power of the Church, as an institution, to fight and overcome the Devil, and the power of the individual exorcist to exert his own sacramental means to cast the Devil out. To better understand the activities of Early Modern exorcists, a brief historiographical examination of demon-fighting is required.

### **Forbidden Manuals**

Although the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 was a turning point in the way the Church handled exorcism, its publication did not constitute a significant change in the way exorcisms were performed. The *Rituale* was an attempt to find a solution for “unruly” practices. Yet, its brevity is striking, not only in comparison to medieval liturgical sources but also in comparison to contemporary ones. While suggesting that exorcists adhere to its regulations, the authors of the *Rituale* did not explicitly prohibit other, potentially contradictory, manuals. They simply exhorted patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, and clergy to observe the *Rituale*. While some historians have argued that the *Rituale* marked the end of abuses and of highly personalized techniques in combating spirits, this was not the case. True, the Church’s regulation of exorcism did become more intense at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when many of the materials that had

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becomes apparent. Beyond generic recommendations and the prayers, the *Rituale* does not address the actual modes of confrontation between the priest and the Devil *through* the body of the possessed. Ibid., 160-229. The gap left by the manual’s scanty instructions is filled with the individual practitioner’s field experience. The unwritten, golden rule of the rite is to learn it from a practicing exorcist.

been used and permitted until that point ended up on the Index of the Prohibited Books. But to reiterate, what the *Rituale* offered was merely a structure. After its publication, the exorcists still wanted *exempla*. Thus, the works of “exorcism” authors such as Girolamo Menghi, Francesco Maria Guazzo, and Candido Brugnolo continued to be taken as models.<sup>441</sup>

Girolamo Menghi (1529-1609) wrote the most famous manual for exorcists in the seventeenth century. He emphasized that exorcism was an important tool in the ongoing repression of witches.<sup>442</sup> Menghi was born in Viadana, in the territory of Mantova. He was a friar minor of the Franciscan order, and his whole career and life were devoted to developing, expanding and divulging the art of exorcism. Menghi attempted to portray exorcism as a credible practice (something often denied because of the many scandals and abuses that were associated with the activity and its practitioners). In his *Compendio dell'arte essorcistica et possibilità delle mirabili et stupende operationi delli demoni et de' malefici ...* published in 1576, he intertwined demonology with witchhunting.<sup>443</sup> During the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many exorcists, when accused of illicit practices before religious tribunals, defended themselves by referring to him as an authority, although at times his views were considered controversial. Despite the Church's skepticism concerning many aspects of exorcist practices and of Menghi's

<sup>441</sup> Antonio Rotondò, “Candido Brugnolo,” in *DBI*, vol. 14 (1972), *ad vocem*.

<sup>442</sup> Guido Dall'Olio, “Girolamo Menghi,” in *DBI*, vol. 73 (2009), *ad vocem*.

<sup>443</sup> Menghi made extensive use of the *Malleus Maleficarum* but only briefly addressed exorcism in the third part of this book, where he offered only a few theoretical explanations and almost no practical advice. It was in his second work, *Flagellum daemonum, seu exorcismos terribiles, potentissimos, et efficaces ... accessit postremo pars secunda, quae fustis daemonum inscribitur* that Menghi treated the matter more extensively. Published one year later, in 1577, this second work soon became very popular, and it remained so long after.

works, Menghi continued to publish texts on the subject throughout his life.<sup>444</sup> To counteract any accusations and to defend his own practice, he provided a theory along with exempla, as his writings contained more and more of his personal experiences.

When attacked, Menghi replied by maintaining that his instructions were correct but had been distorted by many exorcists. Despite continued criticism and the ongoing skepticism surrounding manuals of exorcism, Menghi's books were not censored during the seventeenth century, even after 1614 when the *Rituale Romanorum* was published. Only in 1704 was the *Flagellum* prohibited, along with the treatise *Fustis daemonum, adiurationes formidabiles, potentissimas et efficaces in malignos spiritus fugandos de oppressis corporibus humanis...complectens*. The *Compendio* was completely forbidden in 1707.

A similar story of influence, controversy, and then final censorship also describes the works of Francesco Maria Guazzo (c.1570-?). Guazzo was born in Milan and although his life remains for the most part a mystery, his work became immediately a must-read for exorcists and priests who engaged directly with the Devil. He was a doctor of theology and probably an Inquisitor. He also gained fame throughout Europe for his voluminous *Compendium maleficarum*, a treatise on demonology published in 1608 in Milan, and republished in a much expanded edition in 1626.<sup>445</sup> This *Compendium* was a massive compilation of previous texts rather than an original work. Among the 322

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<sup>444</sup> In 1599, a strong attack against the practice was launched by Scipione Mercuri, who in his *Gli errori popolari d'Italia* denounced exorcists and particularly Menghi as the most famous (or rather notorious) among them, due to his abusive uses of medicine while performing exorcisms. Nonetheless, he justified and even further promoted the use of herbs and other natural substances to cure the possessed (he had offered many recipes in his treatises).

<sup>445</sup> Thanks to Federico Borromeo's approval, Guazzo's *Compendium* also became an essential tool to prosecute the *untori* (it was widely thought that *untori*, "anointers," went about the city deliberately spreading disease with various ointments that they smeared on houses, city walls, and church pews).



authorities cited in the text, Nicholas Remy and Martin Antonio del Rio emerged as his favorite authors. He drew heavily on Menghi's works too; but much more than the Franciscan, he made witches and witchcraft the heart of his own interests and treatises. The *Compendium* became a front-line weapon in the war against witchcraft. It described in detail the Sabbat, the *pactum diabolicum*, and *remedia divina* and *naturalia* to heal the effects of bewitchments. The exorcism on exorcism was significantly expanded in the second edition, which contained a practical section that succeeding generations of exorcists benefitted from immensely. It included descriptions of the use of exorcisms against storms and blessings against infestations of parasites.

Exorcists wrote their manuals building upon each other's work, borrowing, expanding, inserting, and then producing their own books. These handbooks were a compelling potpourri. They combined the most sophisticated summaries of demonological literature with the most practical recipes to protect not only people from sicknesses caused by the Devil and his minions but also their crops. This is the reason those handbooks were a precious aid for parish priests. They were multipurpose handbooks to help the priests' flocks to keep the Devil at bay in their everyday lives, and if necessary, to defeat Him. This process of accretion of knowledge from one exorcist to the other went hand in hand with the tendency to offer more and more examples – more stories that could provide a framework from which the exorcist could benefit. These examples were not mere bony stereotypes but detailed and nuanced cases which clearly demonstrated the many ways in which the Devil do harm. Guazzo's *Compendium* was exactly that sort of work.

Candido Brugnoli (1607-?) was born in Sarnico, in the territory of Bergamo. He was a Franciscan of the minor order, who combined his teaching of philosophy and theology with preaching and a variety of positions in several monasteries. His *Manuale exorcistarum* was published in 1650 in Bergamo, and immediately it was widely used, until it was prohibited by the Congregation of the Index in 1727. The work has the structure of a handbook, offering records of all the symptoms and marks that reveal or suggest a demonic presence.<sup>446</sup> Brugnoli left a wide margin for interpretation: numerous cases gave way to conjectures and possibilities. But if the book lacked theoretically neat distinctions, it offered an abundance of examples. And exorcists were particularly eager for these. In Venice in 1668, Brugnoli published his most elaborate theoretical work, the *Alexicacon*. Here, he identified four different types of *maleficium* according to the causal factors of each (God, the Devil, witches, and natural objects). He also described in detail how to heal the possessed with regard to the type of *maleficium*. Brugnoli recommended that a distinction be made between when it was advisable to use medicine or exorcism. But, he repeatedly asserted that medicine was highly limited in its ability to cure diabolical maladies. His overall argument was that to separate natural from supernatural causes was often not only impossible but moreover useless, as the Devil's hand was virtually always present. Brugnoli's books were grounded in rich references to previous literature on theology as well as on demonology. He also profited extensively from his own experience as an exorcist, repeatedly referring to his experiences with detailed and explicit descriptions.

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<sup>446</sup> These are ordered and classified under the categories of intellectual powers and sensory powers. The external sensory powers referred to the senses (the faculties of hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste, and also speaking), while the internal sensory powers involved emotions (love, desire, joy, hatred, sadness, hope, fortitude, fear, and despair). The first duty of every exorcist was to identify the powers, marks, or signs which were apparent in the victim's case.

These were the three authors who most influenced and inspired the exorcists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though other writers' works were also known, used, and quoted. In addition, exorcists continually summarized, re-edited, and added their own experiences to an already long body of knowledge and personal accounts in the texts. But the principle of accumulation was not the only one at work. Alongside old techniques, there were always observations and comments about the nature of the *ars*, plus additional stories of actual exorcisms which enriched the texts with models and patterns to follow. If both the *Rituale Romanum* and Menghi's publications constituted a turning point in the history of exorcism because they embodied a series of rules for exorcists, the practice still largely remained as variable and elusive as the personalities of the priests who engaged in it. While regulation of exorcism was attempted by the Church from the beginning of the seventeenth century, in practice most exorcists evaded this institutional control. Bizarre and personal forms of exorcism were denounced and sometimes even severely punished throughout the seventeenth century, but this did not eliminate or even seriously discourage the use of such peculiar practices.

Furthermore, the *Rituale Romanorum* did leave room for interpretation. Rather than being explicative, it simply called for prudence. Many of the techniques that were deployed in actual exorcisms were ignored in the text. Concerning the interrogation of the Devil, the *Rituale* suggested caution. The Devil was the trickster *par excellence*, and exorcists—just like the Devil's victims, might not escape his deceptions. But such warnings did not resolve practical issues. Despite the fact that conversing with the Devil was a dangerous activity and could undermine the outcome of an exorcism, to cast him out many exorcists believed they had to first understand demonic rationale. For their part,

the exorcists wanted clear guidelines and so they kept offering a variety of approaches to their colleagues. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century new manuals were constantly published, and although the majority were mostly copies of past authors' texts, including some which had already been officially censored, this does not diminish the vitality of the enterprise.

At the same time that the Congregation of Rites attempted to discipline the practice and provide a prominent place for the *Rituale*, exorcists were “militantly” aggressive in promoting their own manuals, methods, and preferred authors, even if those traditional texts at times openly dismissed or criticized the official *Rituale*. Most importantly, the *Rituale* did not contain any references to witches and witchcraft. Witches as culprits and witchcraft as crime began to disappear from some European courts and legal procedures as early as the seventeenth century; but as we have seen, in the brief examination of Menghi, Guazzo, and Brugnoli, witches and witchcraft continued to be great concerns. The link between witchcraft and exorcism, so strongly stressed in those manuals, became very problematic in the eighteenth century when the ongoing debates were ruling out the real presence of witches.

From 1704 to 1710, a series of famous exorcising manuals were formally prohibited: Menghi's and Guazzo's works were among them. This censorship focused on the pharmacopeia, obscure blessings, names of the devils, conversations with the Devil, and disrespect for the *Rituale*.<sup>447</sup> All the proscribed texts had been in print for more than a century and had been used with proper ecclesiastical approval. But in 1725, a decree

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<sup>447</sup> Vincenzo Lavenia, “Tenere i malefici per cosa vera. Esorcismo e censura nell'Italia moderna,” in *Dal torchio alle fiamme. Inquisizione censura. Nuovi contributi della più antica biblioteca provinciale d'Italia. Atti del convegno nazionale studi, Salerno, 5-6 novembre*, eds. Giuseppe Gianluca Cicco and Anna Maria Vitale (Salerno: Biblioteca Provinciale, 2005), 160-161.

established that all descriptions of rituals printed after the Reformation, and without the specific authorization and approval of the Congregation of Rites, were forbidden.<sup>448</sup> Yet the quest for how-to exorcism texts did not diminish after this ban. Despite the continuing prohibition of certain manuals, handbooks for exorcists continued to be published, and a dazzling potpourri of techniques were advertised all over Europe throughout the century. Attempts to reintroduce some of the prohibited books also occurred, as when in 1732 a friar named Girolamo da Cornedo tried to republish Brugnoli's *Manuale exorcistarum* by removing some parts of the text. Notwithstanding the omissions, the Congregation of the Index refused to allow the publication. The *Alexicacon*, however, was never censored despite its inclusion of the same rituals and assumptions concerning the nature of exorcism and the role of the exorcist that the Congregation was now so strongly rejecting. Perhaps the fact that this work was more a treatise (with a misleading title) than a practical guide made it appear less likely to become a handy manual for exorcists. In any case, all Church efforts to eliminate or contain prohibited books, or fragments of them, would fail, at least in the short term. For example, a text edited in 1746 by Stefano Coleti, which openly reintroduced Brugnoli's ideas, was finally prohibited only in 1763.<sup>449</sup>

Banned manuals continued to enter the market in violation of the Index and raise the legitimate suspicion that the Church perhaps turned a blind eye. An example of this is the publication of Bernhard Sannig's *Collecetio sive apparatus. Absolutionum, Benedictionum, Conjuratum, Exorcismorum*. Throughout the eighteenth century, the

<sup>448</sup> George Haven Putnam, *Censorship of the Church of Rome and Its Influence upon the Production and Distribution of Literature, Part 2* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 134.

<sup>449</sup> Lavenia, *Tenere i Malefici*.

Remondinis of Bassano published this text numerous times.<sup>450</sup> Sannig had published his European collection of exorcisms at the end of the seventeenth century. Although this voluminous book contained all forms of exorcisms and benedictions (which had not been granted official approval), it was still in use in the nineteenth century.<sup>451</sup>

In 1757, when Pope Benedict XIV released a new edition of the *Rituale*, this was accompanied by an ambiguous commentary written by the theologian Giuseppe Catalano.<sup>452</sup> The commentary defended the episcopal authority to grant licenses for exorcism, and it attacked Menghi and his search for *maleficia* – including fake possessions, the vomiting of objects, and spectacular and public exorcisms.<sup>453</sup> Catalano also re-launched the doctrine of the exorcism as a sacrament, by which he did homage to the partially censored work of Brugnoli. Again and again, the endeavors of the Church to proscribe extraneous material in the practice of exorcism were in vain. Also, their permitted exceptions seemed to fuel the continuation of the practices that they were

<sup>450</sup> Sannig was a Franciscan from Bohemia who published his work in 1685. Putnam, *The Censorship*, 135. The latest Remondinis publication is dated 1789: Bernhard Sannig, *Collecetio sive apparatus. Absolutionum, Benedictionum, Conjuratum, Exorcismorum, Rituum ...* (Bassano – Venice: 1789). An earlier copy of Sannig's book was published by the Remondinis in 1764; see Giuseppe Remondini, *Catalogus novissimus et copiosissimus librorum omnium qui impressi sunt, ...* (Venice: Remondini, 1772), 258. Manuals could still be reprinted, although only partially and with different titles and listed authors. They might also be reproduced as manuscripts. No prohibition prevented the priest-exorcists from promoting and circulating of the old handbooks. Furthermore, while these older manuals were increasingly falling under the ban, the demonological literature that constituted the backbone of their *raison d'être* was not censored.

<sup>451</sup> In 1832, the Congregation of Rites was finally asked to examine it. Even this initiative apparently did not produce any further action because Sannig's name never appeared in any of the Indexes, and his unofficial and uncontrolled anthology of exorcisms went apparently undetected and uncensored. Putnam, *The Censorship*, 135.

<sup>452</sup> Although re-edited with very few additions in 1757 by Pope Benedict XIV, the *Rituale* of the 1604 remained substantially unchanged until the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it was only with the Catholic reform urged by the Vatican Council II that a new *Rituale* was produced. However, to change the *Rituale* proved to be no easy undertaking. As far as exorcism was concerned, this endeavor took quite a long time to accomplish; the relevant section was not finally approved until 1998. Moreover, the old *Rituale Romanorum* has not been fully discontinued. In fact, it turns out that the most experienced exorcists have preferred to use the previous version over the new one. See Putnam, *The Censorship*, 170-171; and Gabriele Amorth and Paolo Rodari, *L'ultimo esorcista. La mia battaglia contro Satana* (Milan: Edizioni Piemme 2012), 215.

<sup>453</sup> Luigi Accattatis, *Le biografie degli uomini illustri delle Calabrie* (Cosenza: Tipografia Municipale, 1870), 357-60.

ostensibly attempting to regulate.<sup>454</sup> All of this indicates that the golden age of exorcism was *not* over. Perhaps it was yet to come.

### **A Village Besieged: A Story of Witchcraft**

In the year 1739, a pandemic of possessions was spreading in Zoldo, a valley situated in the northern area of the Bellunese Dolomites, and throughout its neighboring territory. The whole region appeared infested with demonic presences. Women and children were the favorite victims in these evil incursions, which proved to be particularly persistent. The relatives of the victims of possession started a pilgrimage to Venice, hoping that their afflicted ones could be cured by the city's exorcists. But, despite the fame of the Venetian exorcists, they did not stop the Devil's incursions. Instead, the Devil displayed a certain pleasure in deluding them and only a few of the demoniacs were successfully exorcised in Venice. Once back home, however, these exorcised victims manifested the same symptoms of demonic oppression as before. These possessions, and the mysterious and incurable diseases that had afflicted many of the villagers, were thought to be not just the works of the Devil but also the result of *maleficia*.

As an official response, in 1739 the local governor Lorenzo Bon (he was also *podestà* and Captain of Belluno) and Giorgio Premarin (the local judge for criminal justice) had been authorized by the Council of Ten to investigate what was happening in Zoldo.<sup>455</sup> In August 1740, now tasked with the problem of a frightened population and

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<sup>454</sup> Putnam, *Ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142. Belluno is one of the most important cities in the Dolomite region. It is a major hub on the route between the Republic and northern Europe. Bon and Premarin were allowed to proceed with the Rite, as part of their charge by the Council of Ten; this

having found no workable solution for the outbreak of strange afflictions, Bon decided to do something to calm the people. He started a wider investigation. To begin the process, he and Premarin reported their current suspicions to the Venetian authorities. They sent a long and detailed dispatch to the Council of Ten about “the bewitched of Zoldo.” In this letter, they confirmed that the entire valley seemed to be besieged by the Devil. They reported that an accusation of witchcraft had been leveled against eight women, who had been “invaded” and constituted the apparent reason for the local outbreak. But they also said that this was only small part of a much bigger demonic scheme which was afflicting the region. Indeed, more than ninety villagers of all ages, both genders, and all conditions were possessed. Along with this massive demonic invasion, mysterious ailments had also been plaguing the territory. Some of the illnesses went back twenty years, others had suddenly appeared. All of the bewitched had suffered from headaches, eye and tooth pains, and strong stomach pains since their childhood. What these ailments had in common was that they were resistant to medical cures, and they caused the death of many of the afflicted. Blessings proved to be efficacious in the recovery of the few who survived, or at least the practice alleviated their suffering. This fact, argued Bon, proved clearly that the Devil’s malice was behind all of this.

The physician Luca from Alleghe was a pivotal witness of the long-lasting pandemic. During this time, he often sent the afflicted to be cared for by the religious caretakers of the region, as his craft was ineffective against that kind of illness. Even when natural causes appeared to be the reason for their suffering, the cases were so

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procedure was usually reserved for capital crimes, which meant that the defendants were not informed of the charges and had to prepare their defense without the aid of a lawyer. It was much faster than the ordinary procedure, and so was suitable for dealing with emergencies of public order. I am deeply indebted to Fabiana Veronese and Federico Barbierato for having provided me with the transcription of this trial. To both of them my gratitude is immense. Their kindness, as friends and scholars, has been invaluable to me.



extraordinary that Luca recognized diabolical operations behind those afflictions. Bone deformities and monstrous tumors were, according to the local physicians, beyond natural explanations. The officer of Public Health came to the same conclusion after examining those that were ill and the bodies of those who died. Suspicious objects had also been found in the bedclothes of the victims. Upon inspection, the beds of some of the “little creatures” (the children) struck by the inexplicable disease revealed some interesting findings: feathers ingeniously woven into the fabric, a millet plant so fresh that one could squeeze the juice out of it, a sheep’s foot, and a piece of pork that seemed freshly butchered.<sup>456</sup>

In this dramatic context, as soon as the governor and his court had been allowed to investigate the occurrences with the *rito secreto* authorized by the Ten, six women of Zoldo “who were universally considered witches” were found to be responsible for the *maleficia* that had made these people and their herds fall sick and die. Identified as witches by the villagers, these six women had been seen gathering together, going out at nighttime, and walking along deserted paths with their heads covered by little white scarves like those the local women wore during Mass and religious ceremonies. They wandered around without wanting to be seen and warned whoever recognized them to immediately forget that they had. Furthermore, these women had threatened their victims in the past, even years before, mostly because of perceived injuries. The victims or their relatives either had failed to be good neighbors, or they had reproached these women with negative remarks or indifference, or they had allowed their animals to trespass on the women’s property damaging their land.

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<sup>456</sup> Such a collection of bizarre objects would be familiar to scholars of European witchcraft; see below.

Notwithstanding what was happening in Venice or other cities of the mainland, in Zoldo – a village up in the Dolomites, accusations of witchcraft were brought to court.<sup>457</sup> Crucially, the governor (a Venetian nobleman himself) who presided over the trials apparently believed that *maleficia* had caused harm or death to humans, animals or crops. To substantiate his claim, in his report he referred to the testimony of the physician Luca and the officials of the local health board. He knew that was the legal requirement to proceed in a case of witchcraft allegations. Lorenzo Bon therefore presented a grim depiction of the bewitched territory that was under his jurisdiction, and he listed all of the details of this chain of unfortunate events. The perpetrators had names and, more important, reasons for their actions. The summary of the trial did not leave any doubts; according to the depositions of the witnesses, a series of misfortunes was easily reconstructed. Instances of harshness aimed at the alleged witches had provoked their reprisals. Their threats, which occurred because of “the denial of charity,” were followed by the sickness or death of those (or their loved ones) who somehow had upset, disappointed, mistreated, or challenged the alleged witches.

In Bon’s narrative, the cause-and-effect pattern was self-explanatory. But he did not simply leave the narrative to speak for itself. He also directly addressed the issue of anticipated skepticism by answering those who might believe that *maleficium* was a fiction and existed solely in people’s imaginations. What was happening almost in front of his eyes persuaded the governor that this phenomenon was no illusion and no delusion. People fell mysteriously sick and passed away, crops got damaged, and the animals

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<sup>457</sup> As we have seen, the Venetian Inquisition took a cautious approach to accusations of witchcraft. However, it would be inaccurate to state that *maleficium* vanished as a crime from eighteenth-century Venetian courts.

suddenly stopped working and then died. The successful performances of certain exorcists were confirmation that the Devil and *maleficia* existed. Then there was the authority, Bon continued, of the Scripture, of high-rank ecclesiastics, of the canons, and of the respected works of other important theologians: all of them supported a belief in witchcraft. Last but not least, Bon continued, numerous investigated experiences had provided evidence that *maleficia* did exist and that people truly could be bewitched. The religious culture and the forbidden manuals had shaped the cultural mindset of the local clergy and many exorcists, and now even echoed in the podestà's dispatch.

Thus, the podestà described the story of the witches of Zoldo and the background that explained the reasons behind their wicked acts. The women who were universally thought to be witches were Maria, the wife of Batta Tazier (who was called la Vecchia Faiona from Pianaz); Menega Mareta, the wife of Andrea Colussi; Maria, called la Cechia Zotta Bottera from Mavason; Maria, the wife of Valentin de Marc from Brusadai; Giustina, the wife of Batta Cadenella from Pecol; and Maria, the wife of Antonio Bonfardini, who was also from Brusadai. All the witnesses dated the origin of their reported *maleficia* to events that had occurred between themselves and one of these women in the past. David Colussi, for instance, testified that he once threw a stone at Vecchia Faiona's goat, whereupon she threatened him, saying that "he would pay for that." The day after, a mare died for no apparent reason. The people's perception of la Vecchia Faiona's attitude and this account led to mistrust and fear. She had often been seen near the altar of the church, and departed suspiciously as soon as people saw her. She was also seen strolling around desolate places with her hair hanging loose; then she would stop, put her hands on her lap, close her eyes, and remain like that, absorbed in her

thoughts. When possessed women were brought to the church, her accusers corroborated, she used to lash out and scream at those who brought them there. After she threatened Antonio Faina a second time, one of his oxen fell ill and died within fifteen days. Every time she met Maria Balestra, who was notoriously possessed, she sat in front of her, maintained a steady gaze, and Maria would laugh uncontrollably. Every time the possessed women of the village met each other, they used to laugh at each other, an ominous sign, which suggested to the governor that they belonged to the same wicked community.<sup>458</sup> The demon itself, interrogated by the Venetian friar who exorcised Mara Balestra, had revealed that la Faiona was responsible for her bewitchment and that the demon entered her body through nuts, pears, and an egg, attested Bon. Here, the link between bewitchment and possession was clearly established. Exorcist manuals described cases of possession by the direct will of demons, who could enter the victim's bodies through food or beverages.<sup>459</sup> To what extent that demonological literature actually influenced or resembled the people beliefs is hard to estimate. We will return to this aspect of the case shortly.

Going back to la Faiona and her wanderings around the most sacred as well as the most deserted places with her witch-friends from the villages, they had been seen walking on Carnival Thursday during the nighttime, wearing white scarves on their heads. When informed about this, the priest had said that they must have been witches because that

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<sup>458</sup> Bon did not mention any pact with the Devil or orgies at a Sabbat. But in emphasizing that witches recognized each other, he hinted at an implicit, if not explicit, pact with the Devil. The essence of witchcraft was making a pact with the Devil, which was sealed often by sexual intercourse. Stuart Clark, "The Causes of Witchcraft," in *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179-94.

<sup>459</sup> And this was somehow more difficult to detect, because when a demon directly entered a victim's body there were signs of disturbance, agitation, and nightmares that could indicate a possession had taken place. Girolamo Menghi, *Compendio dell'arte esorcistica* (Venice: Appresso Georgio Varisco, 1610), 270.

was no time, place, nor hour for women to go around with scarves used only to go to church or to accompany the dead.

Several witnesses also testified the bad reputation of Menega Mareta. On one occasion, the physician Luca had been unable to cure Maria Pancera, so he took her to the priest Antonio Colussi. Menega joined them too. Once in the church, the women knelt and were ready to be blessed. When don Colussi arrived, he addressed Menega like this: “Even you, witch, now pray to God for her health, after causing her harm!” The priest greeted her as a witch and with such strong words that the *podestà* felt compelled to report them directly. This is one example among many in which a priest played a role in the recognition of a woman as a witch. For example, another witness swore, Menega was heard at one point to say from the confessional booth that she was a witch and knew others like her.<sup>460</sup>

In another instance, when Zotta Bottera asked for some water from a villager who was walking with some mules along the lane and he refused to give it to her, she threatened him. Immediately after this, one of his female mules balked until he removed its load and pushed the animal hard to make it move. Then, to keep it moving, he was forced to bless the animal numerous times. The first remedies against bewitchment were in fact spiritual remedies that any priest could employ: holy water, holy oil, salt, wine, and prayers. Exorcism was conducted as a last resort; after all other means had been attempted. And in exorcism, those other remedies continued as part of the practice, to

<sup>460</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142. In this respect, the relationship between possession and confession is due to the conflation of the two supposedly distinct roles of the priest and the exorcist. In Foucault’s study, possession was a result of confession – a response of the person’s body to a relentless investigation of his/her soul. This topic is further discussed in the fifth chapter, on the living saint.

establish a continuity of rituals. Hence, blessings and exorcism were often juxtaposed activities.<sup>461</sup>

Despite the priests' claims that they were the sole authorities who could wield sacramental power to combat witchcraft, some believed that a witch who could cast a spell and bewitch a person could also be a cunning person specialized in un-bewitchment. Maria, the wife of Valentin de Marc, was called to heal Zuanne Barbon, who seemed to feel better afterwards. However, after a year, when the two casually met Maria looked at him in a way that "froze his blood." At that point, the stomach pain that was afflicting Barbon a year before suddenly returned. Maria then spread word around that "she gave him the look to make him pay." What happened between the two of them can only be guessed, but a witness testified that she was bitter because Zuanne had accused her of being a witch, and had said to Maria, "You won't get away with it." Was this because she was unable to cure him (or un-bewitch him), and therefore he talked badly of her behind her back? This appears to be a case similar to the situation of female supernatural (witch) healers. Perhaps Maria could both heal and cause harm. But as soon as she was not able to perform what she had been asked to do, this often-noted dual capacity emerged.<sup>462</sup> Shortly after, Barbon died and two of his daughters became possessed. Hence, Maria's bad reputation led to an accusation of witchcraft.

The refusal of charity was identified as the major motive for revenge in witchcraft cases by Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane. This was the basis of a classic pattern. However, beside this very rigid model more complex relationships among neighbors and

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<sup>461</sup> Menghi, 660, 664.

<sup>462</sup> Stuart Clark, "Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Europe," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Period of the Witch Trials*, vol. 4, eds. Bengt Ankerloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter, 112-18 (London: Athlone Press, 2002).

villagers could also exist. As the second case below demonstrates, even when the stories were shaped like “denial narratives,” they might also include a variety of other reasons for revenge-motivated *maleficia*. Giustina, the wife of Batta Cadenela, was the main protagonist in another example of bitterness turning deadly. She admonished Antonio Piva because he had thrown her flour on the ground. A few days after the incident, his children died. His wife also became ill because of the *maleficium* allegedly caused by Giustina. Another Maria, the daughter of Zuane Cocon, became possessed after giving Giustina some fabric to sew a shirt. The fabric was found in her bedclothes with other suspicious objects, as Maria’s mother and the priest Serafini attested. Another witness testified that Giustina bewitched Iseppo Simon Colussi’s baby and that she died. Simon confirmed this and recounted his family’s sufferings. Giustina went to his house under the pretext of borrowing some barley, and his little baby became ill afterwards. She looked at her and even kissed the baby girl, who all of a sudden started having leg pain. Then the pain moved to her stomach, and after assuming a contorted position, the little girl died. Her little corpse did not become hard but could be folded as if it was made of dough. Thus, the unusual state of the body reflected a supernatural illness. Eight years before, another child had died in the same way, and the winter before, three mares, three sucking calves, and three sheep also died without anyone knowing what illness had caused these events. After the incident, Giustina had been in Simon’s house again to borrow some flour. On that occasion, he had taken the opportunity to speak against witches. Giustina felt so offended and resentful that she started telling the people of the village that he treated her as a witch. This was in a subtle and indirect way another warning: in treating her as a witch, Simon made her into a witch.

Maria, the wife of Antonio Bonfardini, was also deemed responsible for a demonic attack. During the exorcism of Lucia from Plan de Gral, the demon that had possessed her accused Maria. It seems that the demon had entered through some sour bread that Maria gave to Lucia when she was walking through the woods beyond the village. This Maria was also considered a wandering witch, like the others. People used to see them, alone or in company with each other, in the middle of the street – though nobody had been seen there a moment before. It seemed as if they all of a sudden had appeared from nowhere. Maria was a poor woman, but people borrowed money from her and everybody wondered how she could lend money that she did not have. Here, money has a double connotation. It was one of the main reasons that the Devil could entice women and convert them into witches. The money which Maria possessed sounds like a payment for her making a pact with the Devil.<sup>463</sup> But characterizations from demonological treatises aside, on a local community level the fact that Maria was a woman who lent money might have opened a can of worms. Female money-lenders in fact could lay themselves open to the charge of witchcraft from their defaulting debtors. In addition, the wife of Antonio Costa testified that her husband also fell sick, became an invalid, and finally died after Maria had threatened him because his animals had.

Thus, strange deaths and sudden illnesses were blamed on these women. One was accused of having become mysteriously become wealthy. A couple of them were also accused (in the governor's report to the Ten) of having made a pact with the Devil and with having caused the possession of some villagers. But here, we must pause for some reflection. Did the common inhabitants of Zoldo really believe their local witches had the

<sup>463</sup> Soili-Maria Olli, "The Devil's Pact: A Male Strategy," in *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Owen Davies and Willem De Blécourt, 100-116 (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).



power to send demons to possess other people? Did the witnesses, for example, say that the demons had entered the victims via their food ? Or was this a rather far-fetched interpretation of what the people had said – perhaps a product of the way that questions and answers had been formulated and then written down during the official investigation?

It is hard to establish to what extent the common people’s perceptions of this outbreak of misfortunes and possessions matched (or was shaped by) those of the exorcist-parish priest, the other confessors in the territory, the physician who repeatedly declared that supernatural events were at work, and/or the members of the investigating court. We must bear in mind that historians established long ago that insistence of the Devil’s participation in seemingly “evil” occurrences was likely a result of reliance on the prevalent prescriptive literature of the period. That erudite interpretation did not necessarily match the common people’s beliefs. At the village level, witchcraft may well have been devoid of any speculation about the role of the Devil. In these accusations, due to the nature of the available record we cannot really know what the villagers thought concerning the magical methods which the alleged witches had employed.

But one thing that is clear is that an alliance existed between the podestà Bon and the parish priest and exorcist, don Limana. The podestà already seemed to believe that the wondrous and terrible things which were happening were supernatural in their causation because of the testimony of the learned men in his company. As we shall see, Bon then apparently confirmed this attitude based upon his trust in and reliance on the priest-exorcist of the village. He became so convinced in fact that he told the Council of Ten only the activity of the priest-exorcist don Limana could break the Devil's grip on the poor people of this suffering community.

### Don Limana and the Demons: A Story of Possession

In their manuals, Menghi and Guazzo had described (and provided examples for the reader) how witches could use *maleficia* to do harm, causing illness and death to humans as well as animals.<sup>464</sup> These authors also said that with the Devil's help, witches could kill children.<sup>465</sup> The alleged *streghe* of Zoldo seem to neatly fit the model described in the demonology texts and exorcist writings. Whether or not the governor of Zoldo, Lorenzo Bon, had read those texts (and despite his status as an educated eighteenth-century Venetian noble), he seemed to believe in a construct of witches that matched the descriptions in those works. In his narrative of events in the region of Zoldo, the governor explained the alleged witches' evil-doings by recounting a sequence of events that followed a logical progression, which – when examined in terms of causes and effects, defined a classic example of rural witchcraft. Their acts (these were surmised from the misfortunes that the witnesses described, and the cases of illness and possession that were observed) were the results of various local personal conflicts. Each misfortune suffered by a villager had followed such a conflict with one of the accused, suggesting a motivation of revenge on the parts of the witches. And their methods, according to the evidence, could be nothing else but supernatural. Thus, the podestà linked the literary concept of witchcraft with the local context and evidence, which had been gathered for the trial. To further support his conviction that this was a clear set of examples which demonstrated the reality of *maleficia*, Bon also mentioned the names of the exorcist authorities noted above. Finally, we may additionally note that the governor relied

<sup>464</sup> *Maleficia* could cause “any sort of harm, sickness, and damage.” Menghi, 689-90. It was commonly argued that most of the time; demons brought the malicious instruments of *maleficium* into the victim's homes to harm them, hiding these instruments in the victim's bed or other places. Menghi, *Compendio*, 366.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.

heavily on don Limana, the local priest-exorcist, who was also very familiar with these exorcist texts. In fact, as Bon admitted in his official report, he could not have conducted the witchcraft investigation or the trial, nor handled the popular frenzy that the pandemic of possessions had caused in the community without the help of don Limana.

Indeed, don Limana's help had been invaluable to the podestà. What did Bon mean by that? Don Limana had performed endless and exhausting exorcisms for more than a year to discover the demons afflicting his flock and then to cast them out. Taking care of people's souls was his duty as a priest and as an exorcist. But don Limana was given extra duties and a much larger role during this case. Early on, Lorenzo Bon had found himself in need of a replacement for his chancellor, when the current officer's "health was seriously compromised." Bon had decided to select don Limana for that office.

The priest replaced the chancellor and assisted the governor during the trial. Even assuming that this was only a temporary solution, the governor's choice went against the grain of Venetian policy. In order to better manage justice in the mainland territories and to avoid conflicts of interest both with and within the community, Venice tried very hard (without always succeeding) never to assign important offices to local people. Moreover, don Limana was a cleric, while the office of the chancellor was, by definition, bureaucratic, legal, and secular.<sup>466</sup> Thus, don Limana found himself in the very unusual

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<sup>466</sup> Once elected, every podestà of Terraferma had to appoint a chancellor, who was an intriguing and complex figure within the bureaucratic and juridical system of the Republic. The chancellor's role was to be the podestà's right-hand man. His functions were expanded as much as the podestà allowed, because the chancellor was his private secretary and also the closest collaborator with the judge in court. The chancellor's most important official responsibility was to assist the *giudice del maleficio* (the judge of the criminal court) during trials. For this duty, the chancellor had to possess vast juridical knowledge. His duties required the combination of legal expertise and dexterity in handling a variety of bureaucratic and political issues. Personality as well as patronage played a major role in his appointment. Simonetta Marin, "L'anima del giudice. Il cancelliere pretorio e l'amministrazione della giustizia nello Stato di Terraferma

situation of being required to help Lorenzo Bon to disentangle the witchcraft allegations in the trial while at the same time he was exercising his ministry as an exorcist, to free his community from its demons.

We also do not know the outcome of this specific prosecution, which took place in the court of the governor. What we do know is that the governor sent to the Council of Ten, along with his summary of the trial, a detailed letter written by don Limana. In that letter, Limana offered his comments, observations, and insights about the possessed and the exorcisms he had performed. It was don Limana who described witchcraft and possession as two separate components in the Devil's plot in Zoldo. He also emphasized the threat that the local witches were posing to the community. Additionally, while emphasizing the seriousness of this attack by the Devil, Limana also highlighted the responsibility of the community. He claimed they had provoked God's wrath. As we will see, in his account the demons were conveying a warning and an admonition to this community, as well as to the world, to take the right spiritual path.

The trial, which began exactly when don Limana started to perform his numerous exorcisms, took on the appearance of a public exorcism. This was in effect a way to humiliate but also reintegrate those who were responsible for the acts of *maleficia* and the possessions. Don Limana became the driving force behind both the trial and the exorcisms. As the Venetian eighteenth-century Inquisition assigned mild penances and left them to the care of confessors, in the same vein the local court appears to have resorted to the parish priest, confessor, and exorcist to deal with the witches in Zoldo. The local officials could assign them penances without inflicting punishment, or rather,

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(XVI-XVII secolo),” in *L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica di Venezia (XVI-XVIII)*, ed. Claudio Povolo (Vicenza: Cierre Edizioni, 2005), 171-258.

as substitutes for punishment. In the end, don Limana proved capable in his role as an exorcist – or at least this is what he related at length in his gripping account of this affair.<sup>467</sup>

The document that don Limana provided covered various elements: a review of his parishioners' symptoms, their responses to his efforts, an analysis of the possessed according to his categorization of the different degrees of possession, and the success (or lack thereof) of his exorcism attempts. From the very beginning, his narrative was meant to display his masterly knowledge of all the instruments and tools of the *ritus exorcizandi*. Don Limana used (and at times quoted) the *Rituale*, but what mainly shaped his craft, gave him a strong sense of mission, and constituted the foundation of how he detected and mastered demons were the manuals on exorcism that had been banned by the Church. These continued to form the core of his exorcist *ars*.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, using these texts, don Limana was able to master the rhetoric of exorcism as well as its practice.

He divided the female parishioners who were possessed into three categories. First, he distinguished those who displayed evident and certain signs of “possession or *maleficium*” from those who displayed only mild symptoms.<sup>469</sup> Second, he distinguished

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<sup>467</sup> The link between witchcraft and the alleged possessions comes from don Limana's continuous references to Menghi's *Compendio dell'arte esorcistica* and Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum*. Throughout his account, these two handbooks were repeatedly used as major sources of inspiration and as how-to manuals. He drew from them both his understanding of witchcraft and possession, and further knowledge of how to handle the very risky business of dealing with demons. Since Guazzo had compiled his manual from the works of others (and Menghi's work is very recognizable), for practical reasons and in this particular context, I refer mostly to Menghi in the notes. I will, however, point out when Guazzo's text provides different insights and/or complements Menghi's book.

<sup>468</sup> While Menghi and Guazzo described a Christian community that was relentlessly assailed by the Devil – a community in which evil was considered a necessity to test human beings (demons constantly sought to use illusions and deceptions to confound the faithful), Brugnoli conveyed more a sense of pride in casting out demons. For him, exorcism truly was the eighth Sacrament, and the exorcist was fully consecrated and invested by his sacred call. This is discussed further below.

<sup>469</sup> Here, don Limana followed almost literally Menghi's categorization. Menghi divided his *Compendio* into three parts. In the first, he discussed the Devil and his minions; in the second, he discussed *maleficia*; and in the third, he discussed how to actually perform an exorcism. His book showed “the amazing things

between victims who did not manifest clear signs of invasion but were discovered to be possessed (by means of his preliminary exorcisms) from victims who manifested their possession in a very dramatic way, either within their homes or in public spaces. Some were carried to him while screaming, laughing, or manifesting other bizarre behaviors typical of demonic possession. And thirdly, he identified those who did not need to be properly exorcised but should be tested using some *precetti probativi* – basic questions designed to make the demons reveal themselves. The last category of women would be treated with blessings and minor exorcisms to admonish the demons not to continue tormenting the victims.

In addition to Menghi and Guazzo's influences, Brugnoli's text, which was very popular, especially in north-eastern Italy, also had a profound impact on don Limana. According to Brugnoli, rituals of exorcism had both personal and social consequences. The possessed had to be officially forgiven (and the success of the exorcism needed to be documented by confessors and exorcists), and then s/he had to be fully re-integrated into society. As a rite, exorcism was self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and self-justifying. It did not require the involvement of witches, a physician, or Inquisitors. But in order to be successful, the exorcist had to gain the demoniac's trust. The close relationship that the exorcist established with the possessed was crucial. Who – other than the confessor (the local parish priest) – could better fit this role? Yet, he could not be just an ordinary priest.

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that demons and witches can do," how they enter into human bodies, the signs that reveal possession, and how to determine whether or not the victims are "bewitched or possessed." Menghi, *Compendio*, 269.

To cast away the Devil was beyond a human's ability. The exorcist had to be more similar to an angel than a man; he should be almost divine.<sup>470</sup>

Based on these convictions and a sense of self-confidence that came from his spiritual commitment, don Limana performed his exorcisms. Like the accounts found in any manual for exorcists, don Limana's was a self-advertising declaration of his success. He applied all the means he had available in his exorcisms. Physical violence was one method. Chasing the Devil could be a very brutal experience for the people (in this case, all women) who had to undergo the exorcism. In more than one instance, don Limana described how he aggressively pulled their hair, stuck his finger in their mouths, and resisted their frantic behavior with physical force. However, he did not limit his methods to physical contact with the bodies of the possessed. He also engaged the Devil in conversation. Don Limana urged the demons to talk to him in order to reveal who they were and why they were molesting his flock. He claimed that, challenged by his clerical status and his obstinate perseverance, the demons spoke out. Focusing on these elements, don Limana shifted the emphasis in his account of this epidemic of evil from the victims (the demoniacs) to himself – the priest who played the leading role in saving them.

As don Limana related, it was during the previous winter and “because of divine will” that the Devil's malice was disclosed. Using his deceits, the Devil was plotting the spiritual and physical ruin of don Limana's poor flock. Many, even some the most distinguished members of the community, believed the afflictions were a strange result of natural causes. But don Limana, who presided over the care of their souls (always, as he said, “because of divine will”) and observed carefully how matters had unfolded, formed

<sup>470</sup> Albano Biondi, "Tra corpo ed anima: medicina ed esorcistica nel Seicento (l' Alexicacon di Candido Brugnoti), " in *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo ed età moderna*, eds. Paolo Prodi and Carla Penuti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 408-09.

a different interpretation while underscoring the fact that he “did not have a complete grasp of what he was doing.” This latter statement was not to portray his humble position. Instead, don Limana was highlighting for his readers that, even without knowing the exact extent of the pandemic, he instinctually had gained an immediate sense of the nature and scope of the Devil’s grip on his community. Don Limana employed all of his rhetorical skills to eliminate any doubts that his territory was under the Devil’s spell. He also repeatedly reiterated that he was the only one who could successfully chase out the demons, whose purpose was to destroy the reign of God, and more specifically, his ministry, his parish, and his people. The conflict between don Limana and the demons which troubled the women of his parish could not be settled in one battle. What would unfold between don Limana and the demons would be a strenuous war for the souls of his parishioners. Despite the intense and ongoing struggle, don Limana expressed certainty that he would win. In this spirit, don Limana recounted his experiences.

According to don Limana, the village and the whole territory were under the Devil’s spell much more extensively and deeply than it seemed, especially the female population. He argued it was not possible that the ailments were caused by natural causes. These illnesses were too similar among all the afflicted victims. According to Guazzo, clear indications of the possession of a victim included uncanny strength, knowledge of theology, speaking in languages unknown to the sufferer, the appearance of strange bodily distortions and, for the female possessed, talking in a manly voice, blaspheming or singing drinking songs and, in general, showing fondness for male patterns of misbehavior.<sup>471</sup> In don Limana’s account, children were not spared from the disquieting

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<sup>471</sup> Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, ed. Montague Summers, trans. E. A. Ashwin (London: John Rodker, 1929), 168.



signs of possession. The infant daughter of Evangelista Zacagni died at the age of four months while barking in her cradle like a dog and burping as though she was thirty years old. Overall though, women were the victims who manifested the most ominous signs of beastly metamorphosis. Caterina, the daughter of Sir Zamaria Monego, burst into fits of laughter, sounding like a wicked barking dog. Giacomina Piva, the servant of Batta del Monesgo, laughed in the most bizarre way, sounding like a donkey. She was also tormented by diabolic hiccups. Susanna, the wife of Batat Sarchi, howled like a dog. Margarita, the wife of Nicoló Soramae, suffered from a canine hunger. This was similar to an image from Scripture, in which the damned were condemned to suffer a canine hunger eternally: “*Famem patientur ut canes*” (Psal. 58. 15).<sup>472</sup> It was a diabolic circus on display.

The inverted world of demonic possessions had even more to exhibit. Women turning into animals were as grotesque as women turning into men. The internal voice that molested them was the same hoarse male voice that was emitted when don Limana began to search for demons. The victims would answer with arrogance and contempt, employing the familiar form (rather than the courtesy form) of speech, and would speak in the third person. When the afflicted met each other, they would laugh eerily when they heard curses and bad words; they also greeted each other cheerfully, using male names and addressing each other as “*compare*.”<sup>473</sup> From animals to men to furies: the possessed displayed a dreadful combination of strange and aberrant behaviors.

<sup>472</sup> Reported by Afonso de Liguori; see Oreste Gregorio, ed. *Opere Ascetiche. Apparecchio alla morte e opuscoli affini di Alfonso Maria de' Liguori* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1965), 251, 392.

<sup>473</sup> This was the friendly way that men used to greet or refer to each other, which was sometimes followed by the first name. Literally, the word *compare* means “godfather.” More generally, it expresses a form of camaraderie with respect. It also could be (quite approximately and imprecisely) translated with the term “sir,” although this has an overly formal tone attached to it. Words such as fellow, brother, or buddy convey more closely the sense of conviviality and fraternity that the term *compare* carried. Interestingly,

During her exorcism, Maria displayed so much strength that a few robust men had a hard time keeping her still. She was also grinding her teeth in a terrifying way. Her servants attested that she cursed all day long, screamed in a ghastly way, and uttered dirty words. Apollonia, the wife of Antonio Piva, also screamed and vented her hellish rage. Maria, the wife of Bortolo Piva, was summoned because of some “inhuman utterings that she made to her husband,” despite her love for him.<sup>474</sup> In the rectory of the church, don Limana asked this Maria about demons using the *precetto tacito probativo*. She leapt up with so much rage and anger that don Limana stated that someone weak in spirit would have been frightened to death. Her eyes flared, she raged in fury, and she threatened don Limana in a ghastly voice, saying that she wanted “to burn him.” This episode lasted for an hour, with all the signs of “a truly diabolic poison” spilling out. Two men of the parish witnessed the terrible racket. At another time, Maria, the wife of Piero Piva, inquired about who had asked don Limana to bless her child (whom she was carrying in her arms) when, “marvelously,” at the first sign of the cross before her son, the demon inside of her revealed itself. The woman raged in a fury. Her face became contorted into a hideous grimace, and she spoke in an awful voice, twisting her body in such a way that bystanders were stupefied and shocked. In still another occasion, Caterina, the daughter of Antonio Bonfardini, yelled and shouted even in the church, to the amazement of everybody.<sup>475</sup>

Aggressive, impudent, and shameless behaviors, as well as manifestations of repulsion in the face of Christian symbols were usually considered evidence that demons were the source of the person’s condition. Susanna, the wife of Antonio Moro, ran away

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here don Limana completely conflated the possessed with the witches. In his letter to the governor, he referred to their gregarious and unabashed attitude anytime they met with each other.

<sup>474</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142. A display of emotion similar to the Devil’s joy at destroying family bonds was also a sign of possession. Menghi, *Compendium*, 355-56.

<sup>475</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142.

as soon as she saw priests. Andreana, the wife of Nicolo, spit in the priest's face. Margarita spit upon the Crucifix. Menghi and other exorcists stressed this aspect of possession – that is, the diabolical repugnance shown toward anything sacred.<sup>476</sup> Don Limana emphasized this aspect too, especially because many of the women accused had once been the most pious among his flock. Their sudden change in behavior was first and foremost shocking for themselves, as well as for the entire community. The swift transitions of those victims from calm to fury, from respect to insolence, from loving sacred things to hating them, and from using the first person to using the third person when the demon was addressed were the source of bewilderment for everybody who witnessed them. But the exorcist was not surprised.

Some of the victims' changes of personality could be even more dramatic. Madness and despair were two sides of the same coin, and were considered to be both the evidence and the effects of possession. Maria, the wife of Simon Balestra, felt such great despair at one point that without any apparent reason she wanted to drown herself or throw herself off a cliff. This behavior was explained by Guazzo when he wrote: "When some inner power seems to urge the possessed to hurl himself from a precipice, or hang or strangle himself, or the like" the person was clearly showing signs of bewitchment.<sup>477</sup> Different demons caused different illnesses and different patterns of behavior, as Menghi had noted; melancholy was certainly among the most common and insidious manifestations that he identified. Madness, on the other hand, was a common explanation

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<sup>476</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 271. This aspect is not discussed in Guazzo's works. According to Guazzo, some exorcists believed that the possessed were unable to attend divine worship, and if compelled, they were tormented more violently. But he did not mention those displays of revulsion by the possessed in the presence of sacred objects and personae, which other exorcists emphasized.

<sup>477</sup> Guazzo, *Compendium*, 168.

for possession. All exorcists knew this. Menghi had devoted many pages to the topic and constantly returned to it.<sup>478</sup> Likewise, don Limana obsessively discussed the same issue.

The possessed women of Zoldo were reputed to be either mad or feigning madness. But don Limana argued that no one could switch from a devotional Christian life to the opposite simply by their own choosing. Don Limana did not doubt that the terrible pains and sufferings experienced by the “poor women” of his parish were real. And he was certain about the sincerity of their previous religious feelings and behaviors. Those women had observed fast days, listened to Mass, visited churches, practiced the sacraments, and prayed for long hours in front of the altar of the Virgin to implore her help to overcome their tribulations. Don Limana was convinced that a battle of two different wills and personalities was at play in their tormented bodies. These women were considered the most devout in the parish and were terrified at the prospect of succumbing to the demons within. Yet, as soon as they approached the Eucharist, the “evil spirit” would say, “I do not want her to have communion today, because that will burn me.”<sup>479</sup>

Skeptics maintained that these demoniacs were simply mad, ill, or deluded, or that they were carrying out deliberate deceptions. To consider them mad was what the world wanted, countered don Limana, and unfortunately it was also what the Devil wanted. To make them believe, like those who surrounded them, that they were mad was exactly the Devil’s intention. The demon inside Tomasina Monega manifested himself saying, “I thought of driving them mad, and you with them, but I guess I could not do that – so it’s better if I shut up.” This view was stressed by Menghi, who offered many examples of

<sup>478</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 585.

<sup>479</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142.

misdiagnosed possessions; the physicians who misdiagnosed those cases did not understand spiritual matters, or the demons that created these delusions.<sup>480</sup>

If they were abandoned by the priests and treated as mad by those around them, they might surrender to despair, emphasized don Limana. If they were mad, they wouldn't even have that little peace of mind and gaiety that God still allowed them to enjoy, even in their miserable condition. Further evidence that they were possessed and not mad was that only *the priest* was able to make them return to their senses, by using holy water, prayers, and by exorcising the demons, all without resorting to any natural remedies. Furthermore, argued don Limana, if they were mad, then they should constantly exhibit those behaviors, and not only at certain times when they were supposed to pray, go to church, or engage in religious activities like fasting, taking communion, worshipping relics, seeing priests, or hearing or talking about sacred things. Also, how could it be, he continued, that if they were mad they should all manifest the same symptoms despite their differences in age, complexion, and status? "Even ten drunk people," he added, "are all different in their state of inebriation, although they got drunk from the same wine."<sup>481</sup>

They all often experienced a "burdened heart" and felt as though "a vapor was circulating in their bodies and extremities, like a rat or an army of ants."<sup>482</sup> Demons entered the bodies of possessed, as Menghi had argued, through the mouth, the nostrils, or the ears in the shape of a rat.<sup>483</sup> They then passed "between the skin and flesh, like a

<sup>480</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 569, 663-64, 667.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 270. In Guazzo's work, rats are not mentioned; but ants, worms, and frogs are mentioned. Guazzo, *Compendium*, 169.

rat, and walked into the head.”<sup>484</sup> Rats and ants were both symbolically used to describe possession. In other passages, demons appeared in some part of the body, “palpitating like a darting fish, or a colony of ants.”<sup>485</sup> At times, they were perceived to be like a wind that ran through the body, causing people to feel that their heart was being oppressed.<sup>486</sup> Again and again, while explaining his methodology and the signs of the maladies and while praising the value of his own craft, don Limana proved how profoundly he was indebted to prohibited exorcism manuals.

If the village was being besieged by the devil, it was don Limana who held the reins of spiritual control over the community. By hearing confessions, he asserted tight supervision over his parishioners’ religious lives, ensuring the most minute scrutiny of the condition of their souls. Confession was the first and most important step to probe his parishioners’ feelings. It was used to sound them out concerning their thoughts about their personal lives, their attitudes, and their deeds. Through these confessions, the priest-exorcist of Zoldo also was performing a kind of “preventive exorcism.” He tested for the presence of demons, even when there were no clear signs of possession. In some cases, the parishioners’ reluctance to go to confession was seen as enough reason for don Limana to proceed. He additionally used confession as a way to detect the first signs of an onslaught by witches, as well as to uncover networks of witches. A system of compulsory and meticulous confession was designed to unveil to the priest the spiritual flaws of his flock; from there to becoming the exorcist was a short step.

Even without seeing manifestations of demonic activities, don Limana always assumed that the Devil was continuously at work and ready to take over as soon as he

<sup>484</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 273.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.; Guazzo, *Compendium*, 169.

<sup>486</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 272.

became distracted. His attitude was therefore not to wait until it was too late, but to foresee, to anticipate, and to corner the Devil by maintaining relentless control. In a word, don Limana never lowered his guard and not surprisingly he regularly discovered what he feared – the devil. One example involved Susanna, the wife of Zamaria Balestrar, who was summoned to come to don Limana to confess because she was very lazy, as everybody knew. Before the *precetti probativi*, she revealed some hints that she might have been possessed. She made fun of his *capellano*. During confession, her demon admitted to having been within her for thirty years – “if we are to believe this,” added don Limana. His suspicion about the demons’ credibility was constantly repeated as a proof of his mastery of the art, since a major problem for exorcists was that they could be deceived by the forces of evil. Although the demons of Zoldo answered and obeyed the *precetti*, understood Latin, and revealed names, don Limana specified that “we shall not (always) believe demons.” This was a refrain in Menghi’s *Compendio*, in which he repeatedly warned would-be exorcists to be on guard against the tricks of the Devil, who maliciously and continuously tried to fool the exorcist.<sup>487</sup>

None of the demoniacs, don Limana proudly declared, departed from the confessional booth before being released by him, no matter how intense their rage, and no matter how much they protested and lashed out. The Devil, mortified by the power of the priest (*at sacerdotii imperium*), surrendered and withdrew. Although the demons produced fury, rage, and madness in their victims, the demons could not turn the possessed against themselves or against the priest. The demons could not go that far, ensured don Limana. No threat toward the minister could turn into real violence. At any

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<sup>487</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 246-47.

time, he was able to grab the demoniacs' hair, to respond aggressively to their furies or to challenge their stubborn and resistant silence.

To provoke the demons was a controversial technique. However, since the body of the possessed was also, according to Menghi, the body of the demon, it was defensible to harass the demons both verbally and physically. Pulling the victims' hair and ears, and slapping them hard were challenges to the demons to emerge.<sup>488</sup> The hair in particular was *the* place where demons liked to hide themselves: an inexperienced exorcist might even believe an exorcism to be over without realizing that the demon had found refuge in the hair of the possessed.<sup>489</sup> In addition to physical acts, Menghi had said that the exorcist should annoy the demons “with opprobrium, insults, and injuries, and with any other appropriate method with which he can honestly do that.” Indeed, “to offend the filthy spirits” was crucial and the duty of the exorcist.<sup>490</sup>

Insults aside, conversations with demons were highly controversial and strongly discouraged by the *Rituale Romanum*.<sup>491</sup> Nevertheless, they constituted the most significant aspect of don Limana's exorcisms. Through them, those demons that had been hiding from other, less effective exorcists, finally manifested themselves. In asserting this, don Limana thus clearly resisted the Church's attempt to curb the more spectacular methods of exorcists. Here was proof that the sometimes banned manuals offered useful and even essential instruction. Menghi explained that no serious exorcist would ever engage in meaningless talk with demons, listening to their diabolic utterings out of

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 307-08.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>491</sup> Philip T. Weller, *The Roman Ritual, Christian Burial, Exorcism, Reserved Blessings, etc.*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1952).



“curiosity” or “vanity.”<sup>492</sup> Exorcists had to be careful not to succumb to the deceptions of demons. However, when they were commanded by the divine spirit, they would have to talk to these evil spirits. In this case, the implication was that don Limana’s conversations were “licit” because God was forcing the demon to talk and the exorcist to listen.<sup>493</sup> And don Limana certainly let the demons of Zoldo talk.

### **Warnings from Hell: A Religious Awakening**

As was mentioned above, exorcism was a sacramental that at times worked as, and could become, a sacrament. Moreover, the exorcist was believed by many to be an instrument of God’s will. As much as he was capable of making demons tell the truth, that truth was thought to be part of a divine plan. Demons sometimes spoke the truth explicitly to castigate sinners. Thus, the messages passed along via exorcism might well be truths which God wanted people to hear.

The demons – using the bodies of their victims – screamed their dreadful messages, speaking mostly during don Limana’s confessions or during the church services. Don Limana claimed that those were warnings for the villagers. He was not the only one who heard them. The inhabitants of San Nicoló, when in church or at Mass, could all hear these messages. It would have been hard not to hear them, even if the parishioners were outside the church, since the possessed not only yelled in their rage but, in the frenzy of their forced revelations, furiously punched the confessional booth’s walls.

According to don Limana, the epidemic of possessions in Zoldo and its valley was not simply allowed by God but desired by Him. The demons’ hoarse voices, all the

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<sup>492</sup> Menghi, *Compendio*, 334.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 334-37, 345.

unfortunate occurrences, the diseases plaguing the village, the deaths, and the possessions were all part of a Divine scheme of redemption. The unsuccessful exorcisms performed in Venice also were considered part of The Almighty's plan. As the demon inside Maria Panciera pronounced, "God did not want the possessed who went to Venice to be liberated, because their liberation would not have moved the populace to do anything to drive the demons out of the territory."<sup>494</sup>

Timing was also an important aspect of God's plan. There was something that the people of Zoldo and the surrounding area needed to understand. A realization and a subsequent awareness that could lead people to the path of salvation was still ahead. The wake-up call that don Limana was expecting and suggesting from his pulpit had not yet been grasped in Zoldo. He related that the demon inside the very pious Susanna Balestra, for instance, started to scream during one of his sermons, admonishing the people to "be patient in their tribulation." The demon further exhorted them to accept anything God sent to them, and to remember that from that disgrace each of them needed "to learn how to know Him [meaning God] and fear Him a bit more." What the demon shouted out was reported to have frightened the priest as much as his congregation. The demon revealed that it had been in Susanna's body for forty years, and that it was about time for him to speak up. "With God's permission," it added, "I am manifesting myself."<sup>495</sup>

A strange paradox was also unfolding before the parishioners: the suffering of the demon which brought on the suffering of their victims. Some demons were not so eager to talk; they just wanted to depart from the bodies of the possessed. They called themselves prisoners against their will. "Damn those who do not believe, damn them

<sup>494</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

because it is their fault I have to stay in this damn body rather than being in Hell, where I'd rather be," had said the demon inside Maria del Vettor Panciera. He and the other evil spirits could not depart from those bodies until the people believed that these possessions were indeed a "great thing" sent by God. The demon inside Giacoma, the servant of Batta dal Monego, confirmed that its time to leave had not yet come. "No, no, no," it screamed, the world had yet "to learn to know Him a little."<sup>496</sup> The demons who were in the most troubled were those who were tormented and aggravated by the strong spiritual life of their victims. In spite of everything the victims were going through, many still struggled to maintain their devotions, to pray more, and to fast more. In the case of Giacoma, the demon cursed her, yelling and screaming because she had "the courage to take a vow of perpetual chastity, to the great outrage of the infernal enemy." Nothing could be worse for the Devil than to see his efforts impeded by those who refused to surrender. But these cases were relatively rare, as there were not many who could fight off demons. As the demon inside Apollonia Panciera put it, "a beautiful soul is worth more than all the treasures of this world." However "If it was up to [the demons]," pointed out the one who was molesting Apollonia "[they] would have rather stayed "in the darkest caverns of the earth." The agony of the demons was therefore due to their unfulfilled wishes. The more they wanted to molest beautiful souls, the more they were disappointed by their lack of success in spoiling them. "If you knew," said another demon addressing don Limana, "how many damn themselves and how many I deceive!" None of them were aware of the extent of the evil in their own lives, not even how much the Devil was responsible for that. This was a world gone adrift, or rather, a world on the edge of a precipice. That's why the Devil had to come and show, as the demon inside Giacoma Piva uttered, "the

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

open Hell in this world” – so people “won’t go into Hell in the other world.” This statement is a terrific example of how the Devil could speak the Truth and reveal through prophetic words why the possession epidemic was afflicting the village. “Everybody should go to Zoldo,” the demon proclaimed. The demon inside Luca de Luca insisted on this point because in that mountainous valley there was the “greatest of shows” to see, “a corner of Hell” that would do more for people than going to processions, visiting churches, or travelling as pilgrims in places far away.

Lashed by don Limana (and advertised by him through his letter), the demons spoke to all humanity – not just to the village. The vast outbreak of possessions in Zoldo became emblematic of the condition of mankind on the eve of Apocalypse. Apocalyptic indeed was the language of the demons of Zoldo. And all this had occurred, as don Limana had repeatedly predicted, because his flock was not listening to him as they should. The clergyman’s sermons went unheard, and people made fun of priests, as the demon inside Maria Pica (called Gardita) liked to emphasize. “The Faith is dead in two thirds of the world, and many have received communion as if it is a slice of bread,” said the demon inside Apollonia to several bystanders. And what did people think when they saw lightning in the sky? They were all afraid it would burn their houses. But what about their own souls? “Nobody cared, nobody thought about these.” Many warnings to keep on the path to God had been delivered thus far. Yet, most of the people seemed not to have received the message. Whoever “does penance, does penance, and for those who do not want to repent,” the time of chastisement was coming: a last warning for those who had the temerity to continue to close their ears.

According to don Limana, the sacraments were not being honored and celebrated, and the Devil and Hell were considered fables for women. However, there was also something more to it. In the village, there was a group of unrepentant sinners who, more than anybody else, had to listen to what the demons had to say and do something about it. These were the witches of Zoldo, those against whom the villagers had brought witchcraft allegations and who were now being prosecuted by the podestà Bon for *maleficia*. They presently found themselves in another court, the sacred community of the church where the entire community was gathered. Here they were summoned by don Limana, publicly blamed, and openly called upon to do what the priest-exorcist had been waiting for them to do: confess and repent. The demon inside Maria Piva had said, “Come you, come – you damn witches! You have placed me here! Let you be damned by God if you will not repent. God has been waiting for you for eighteen months, calling you to confess and repent. Damn you! Come, come and liberate me from this body, and we will go together to Hell! God has had enough of you.” Then, bitterly, the demon added that the witches would finally confess, take communion, and receive God, “a God so big in a body so dirty.”

Almost at the very end of the long letter in which don Limana had collected all the speeches addressed to him, he finally disclosed the main characters who were now mainly responsible for prolonging the outbreak of evil that was plaguing Zoldo, its inhabitants, and himself. For one-and-a-half years, he had been performing strenuous and exhausting exorcisms that had worn him out. In his most dramatic writing, don Limana revealed that the Devil’s grip could only be released when the witches came and

surrendered to him. Exorcism had been don Limana's best tool to control his community, to dispel the acts of *maleficia*, and finally, to punish the witches of Zoldo.

That don Limana was behind the outburst of possessions, was the creator of the epidemic, and was the origin of that collective frenzy was suspected by others in his own time. To this, don Limana answered:

If there is someone who may think that, with my preaching or with some eccentric behavior of mine or in whatever way... I terrified these creatures and filled their heads with fear and concerns, particularly the women's heads, why did men, even the weakest among them, not display the same reactions? Furthermore, if that accusation is true, why do my people not complain about it? Instead, they all unanimously (as far as I know and except for some notorious backbiters) pray for me, so that I overcame this ordeal. And even those who are afflicted, who are devout poor women when they are in control of themselves, they also pray for me.<sup>497</sup>

Nobody at this point of the story would have had any doubts about the fact that the Devil was indeed an integral part of don Liman's sermons, confessions, and pastoral care. But exorcism was a Janus-faced activity. The eighth sacrament expelled demons that, to skeptics, were symbols of the clergy's unrelenting preaching and superstitious minds. On the other hand, for pious believers, exorcism was the best proof of the Devil's existence. When the debate about witchcraft occurred in the 1750s, following Girolamo Tartarotti's publication of *Del Congresso notturno delle lammie*, those who denied the existence of witches and their powers were called "demon lovers" by those who supported the reality of witchcraft.<sup>498</sup> This was because they argued that to undermine

<sup>497</sup> ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 142.

<sup>498</sup> Tartarotti dismissed witchcraft as a fantasy and therefore a superstition. In his refutation of witchcraft, Tartarotti combined theological, although marginal, skepticism with a new urgency to limit the ominous consequences of witch-craze episodes. At the time that Tartarotti was taking an interest in this matter, the periodic waves of witchcraft outbreaks that had occurred throughout Europe had already ended. Nonetheless, some episodic witch mania could easily revive again, like it did in the very same year in which his book was published, in the German city of Würzburg. There, Maria Renata Singer was condemned to death for witchcraft. Tartarotti's theories about the non-existence of witchcraft were not completely convincing, but they were intended to put an end, theoretically and conclusively, to potential

belief in the power of witches would also undermine belief in the power of the Devil and ultimately belief in the omnipotence of God. One of Devil's biggest victories would be to convince people that he does not exist. Against those who wished to argue this, the clergy responded by defending the prerogatives and purpose of the Devil, his minions, and consequently, of themselves as well. Unlike wandering exorcists, priests were embedded in the social fabric of their parish. Exorcism in their hands was a powerful weapon to settle issues as well as to bring them out, and to pacify disagreeable neighbors or to stir them up. Exorcism could heal people, unlock their demons, and last but not least, prove the Almighty's power in the face of evil. Priest-exorcists fought the Devil – but they also kept him alive. As will be explained in the next chapter, casting out demons was a sacramental practice that priests continued to use well after the Tartarotti debate was over.

Brugnoli's work – although it was published later than the texts of Menghi and Guazzo – did not display a more enlightened perspective on witches. Quite the opposite, in his book witch-hunting was encouraged and promoted. His words were incendiary: “prepare the canes, arrange the quills, set up the gibbet, light the fires, drop boiling oil, spread molten lead.”<sup>499</sup> This ferocity in his exorcist manual and his obsession with witches were components that should be taken into account when historians explain eighteenth-century witchcraft as local cultural lore used to cope with unpredictable and unfortunate events of village life, as opposed to that classic version of witchcraft which is

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witchcraft accusations. The fact that witchcraft was still a viable possibility as well as an explanation for *maleficia*, made Tartarotti's concerns legitimate. Trying to refute witchcraft with scientific arguments, Tartarotti wanted to demonstrate the implausibility of Sabbat flights on the basis of the physical impossibility to move across temporal space in such a short amount of time. Girolamo Tartarotti, *Del Congresso notturno delle lammie* (Rovereto: Giambatista Pasquali, 1749).

<sup>499</sup> Biondi, *Tra corpo ed anima*, 414.

depicted in the literature on the matter. Those handbooks which remained in use far longer than they were supposed to were also, and by no means in a minor way, demonological treatises in their own right. Those witches that had disappeared from the Inquisition's court inhabited the books and the minds of the parish priests who used and performed exorcism as an expanding and essential aspect of their pastoral care.

Before don Limana started his hunt and his own exorcisms, many possessed women went to Venice to be exorcised by priests and friars in the city. However, it appears that all of those exorcisms failed. Don Limana seemed to be the only one who had the power to successfully intervene in Zoldo. This, at least, was what the demon inside Maria had pronounced. How do we explain this situation? Were not all exorcists able to use the rite to combat demons? Was there some further meaning behind the choice of the clergyman who should expel particular demons? The answer is that a pandemic of possessions could be an occasion for a specific Christian community to redeem itself. The power of the Church could force the Father of Lies to speak the truth. God -- using the exorcist as His tool -- was forcing them to do His bidding, which was to speak truth to save the people who were still lax in their piety and belief.

Thus, in addition to obvious functions of exorcism to defeat the Devil and his minions, a more ambitious use of the practice emerged from don Limana's experience and accounts: the Devil and witchcraft became in his depiction of these events manifestations of God's anger and served as "corrective afflictions" to awaken Christianity. Through the bestial language of possessed women (who also howled, barked, and emitted braying laughter), don Limana wrote that a Divine truth meant for human beings was also being expressed. Inspired by his present opportunity and the



influence he had on Bon, he took full advantage of his roles as exorcist and chancellor. In his letter, don Limana disclosed the plan that he had conceived to save the people of Zoldo. In the process, he placed himself in the role of a new Christian champion for the parish and also a heroic representative of the Church.

During the French wars of religion of the seventeenth-century public exorcisms had become a ceremonial and symbolic weapon that Catholics used against the Huguenots. Hellfire preachers could, as Sarah Ferber argued, “induce rage in Catholics or recantation in Huguenots.”<sup>500</sup> The display of public exorcisms that took place during that period was a way for Catholics to show divine approval for their side. Thus, when Catholic priests were asked to heal suffering bodies taken over by demons, that task became their opportunity to use and reaffirm the miraculous rite of exorcism, which included a much wider panoply of Catholic remedies. Catholics used the Host, holy water, saints’ relics, and prayers, to deliver the possessed of their demons. Those demons spoke at length too, in the accounts of their conflicts with exorcists, and wound up publicly supporting the Catholic Church.<sup>501</sup> Thus, from the bodies of the possessed, which symbolized the eternal battleground between the good vs. evil, divine revelations could be heard.

The demons of Zoldo also had their truth to reveal – and don Limana brought this boldly before the public’s eyes. The villagers had failed to comply with what their own parish priests had been preaching: but this seeming lack of success on the part of the parish priest was turned into a success for the expert priest-exorcist – who was that same clergyman. What his flock had not wanted to hear from his pulpit, they had to hear in the

<sup>500</sup> Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004),

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<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-112.

form of voices coming from Hell – voices which spoke to them because of the local priest-exorcist's efforts. Those voices conveyed a message from God that ultimately would allow the afflicted people to spiritually redeem themselves and thereby save their community. This is the moral that don Limana sought to relate in his account.

To conclude this case examination, we should pose and attempt to answer some questions. First, was exorcism a preferable method for dealing with local village conflicts involving witchcraft accusations in Venice that kept traumatic prosecutions and public executions to a minimum?<sup>502</sup> Exorcism was arguably a gentler means of healing a community. And a second question is, if the Church saw exorcism as a useful tool to quiet local witchcraft cases, was that why the higher Church authorities never rigorously defined nor enforced its regulations concerning the practice? Based upon the accounts described above, we may suggest that exorcism indeed was considered a useful way to deal with *maleficia* because the witches were also “exorcised.” Were they really exorcised in a formal sense or more symbolically exorcised? This is something that is hard to answer. However, both options might have happened, one not excluding the other. The public admonition that don Limana issued against them and enacted (or acted out) in the church, when the demons spoke in public spaces where all or most of the villagers were gathered, served the purposes of exposing the witches, making them go to him to confess, and finally submitting themselves to his priestly authority. We can call this a form of symbolic and public if not “orthodox” exorcism, since their demons were cast out through the witches' contrition and public admission of their faults and

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<sup>502</sup>A few Italian historians and anthropologists have suggested that exorcism was one way to handle witchcraft. But precisely how this was done has only been speculated upon using “indirect” evidence. See above, p. 202, n. 430.

wrongdoings. But also – and again this does not dismiss the role of public shaming and contrition – the witches could have been redeemed through an actual exorcism performed upon them. The now willing witches were therefore finally defeated by don Limana’s persistence in pursuing them along with their demons. And all of this was possible without the need for a witch-hunt, an Inquisitional trial, or spectacular executions and witch burnings that could further unsettle the local community or embarrass certain notable aristocrats in Venice.

Regarding the second question, as we have seen, some anthropologists and historians have speculated that exorcism was seen by the Church as a way to handle witchcraft in Italy; and they have argued that witches, the possessed, and the bewitched were increasingly perceived and treated by the authorities as members of the same group rather than members of antagonist groups. According to the anthropologist Gri, for example, this attitude created a new fracture between the governing institutions and the greater population. If the authorities dismissed and chose to ignore witchcraft as a reality, then the people would feel exposed to and at risk for suffering *maleficia*. Thus, the Church’s endorsement of exorcism – even if that meant a concession to be decidedly lenient in regulating the practice – may have been seen as a necessity because that method would again result in (hopefully) a lesser public spectacle and fewer deaths than an extended witch-hunt and consequent public executions. Persistent local village conflicts involving witchcraft accusations could be solved by local parish priests without their resorting to the harsher legal solutions of bygone days (in fact, a resulting “public healing” was likely considered more probable or at least desirable), and the Church

would still be respected for answering the people's needs to find relief from their maladies, adversities, and also their anger.

One final question: What happened to the women in the first case study who were thought to be witches? Were they "cured" through exorcism, or tried and executed? As was stated above, since we unfortunately do not have information on the outcome of this trial (the record was lost or perhaps destroyed), we do not know what happened to the accused witches. But perhaps we can assume that, as their trial was also a form of public exorcism in the sense that the witches were actually exposed more to public blame and shame than to condemnation and corporal punishment for their "crimes," this process may have led to their ultimate redemption. In fact, that may have been why don Limana celebrated the case in his account of his spiritual triumphs.

In the providential scenario, the *mise-en-scène*, that don Limana constructed for his community in order to help his readers and his flock to better understand evil and the Devil, the demonic warfare which he recounted was transformed into spiritual warfare. Like a Russian doll, the Almighty's mercy embraced all: from the little petty daily evils to the main source of evil and the adversary of God, the Devil. The priest-exorcist first used this new scenario to tell a story of old and new quarrels, hostilities, tensions, and feuds among neighbors. Then the Devil and his minions were introduced as antagonists, who faced the priest-exorcist – that agent of God whose task was to protect the people, even if it was ultimately from themselves. By the end, the Devil who was first introduced as a tormentor and would-be corrupter of human beings wound up working completely in God's service. And through the heroic actions of don Limana, the community was both

saved and properly educated in correct pious belief. Adversities here, like in a biblical narrative, were employed within a literary strategy to chastise a wayward community.

Don Limana's employment of exorcism relied heavily on prohibited books that contained descriptions of witchcraft and witches who menaced the faithful and challenged God. This was not only portrayed in his account as successful; he also demonstrated that the Church's attempts to propose a homogenous reform of exorcism were ill-considered and should in fact be revoked. The spectacular forms of exorcisms that were described in the old manuals kept witchcraft and *maleficia* alive in the minds of the people (even in the minds of some of the educated upper classes). In turn, the continued practice of these forms remained a valid tool for priests. They could use it to handle complex litigation matters that troubled their communities and to deal with internal (spiritual or emotional) turmoil which afflicted their parishioners.

Don Limana championed the position of many priests of his time (arguably don Limana might have been a typical – if perhaps a more ambitious, enterprising, energetic, and imaginative – representative of their attitudes) who did not accept the Church's desire to "sanitize" practices and beliefs. Rather, they had their own vision of how to find useful ways to cope with mundane and religious problems in villagers' lives. This dichotomy between practical-minded priests-exorcists and philosophically motivated high-ranking members of the Church reemerged strongly again during the Council Vatican II (1962-1965) and remained an issue of contention well beyond the end of that event. During the Second Vatican Council, there was a push to revise all of the official books of the Catholic Church, including the Roman *Rituale*. This was the last official book to be updated by the Council, and the new version was published in 1998. However,

exorcists – as the most famous of them in modern times still lament – were carefully kept out of the Council’s discussions. Thus, the new *Rituale* was drafted by cardinals and theologians who never practiced the *ars exorcizandi*, and this was done without their even asking the exorcists for their opinions on the matter. The result of this action was a new *Rituale* that does not work for the experienced exorcists. They have consequently been allowed to use the old version, the *Rituale* of 1614 (only slightly modified in mid-eighteenth century) – at their own request. Moreover, the never-abandoned struggle against *maleficia* is still engrained in the current practice of exorcism. Thus, despite the arrival and passing of a long anticipated opportunity for the Church to modernize, exorcists and new-minded theologians continue to converse and disagree about a single best way to address what should be seen as very old issues that still and may always concern the Christian faithful.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Don Antonio Rubbi: A Living Saint versus the Enlightenment

Miracles! What nonsense!  
These things do not exist in Nature!  
The world today is far too enlightened  
To rub the cobwebs from our eyes!<sup>503</sup>  
Those are all frauds, all rogueries  
Of priests and friars who invented them  
To take money thanks to these deceptions!  
The souls, the saints, the Christs, the Marys ...  
Isn't it enough that we believe in that One who is up there?  
And, to tell the truth, we should doubt that, too,  
Because nobody has seen him yet!  
This is, if I'm not wrong, the way of thinking  
Of these enlightened minds, and then ...  
What about those who swear by what they cannot prove:  
They shall go to hell!  
Because they want to preserve  
Their wives' honor, and even their mothers',  
Uncertain as they are about who their sons and fathers are.<sup>504</sup>

This chapter focuses on Don Antonio Rubbi, a “living saint,” who in the summer of 1772 attracted from all over Europe thousands of pilgrims seeking cures through his blessings. The phenomenon immediately led to the development of two opposing parties: those who believed that a holy man was working-miracles, and those who ridiculed these events as manifestations of superstition and fanaticism. In 1772, the Venetian Senate decided to carry out a controversial survey, which was designed to enumerate the number of local saints' feasts celebrated in the Republic. The unhidden agenda was to curb most of them.<sup>505</sup> In this historical and geographical context, the outburst of religious

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<sup>503</sup> To rub cobwebs from one's eyes means to wake up, also metaphorically. To remove dust and cobwebs from old things also means a new beginning, as the enlightenment was a new beginning. Thus, the enlightened world should have already abandoned such superstitious ideas, and there should be no need to remove the cobwebs, as those old fashioned ideas should have been wiped out already.

<sup>504</sup> BMC, *Cicogna 705/VII*, Satire dell' Abate Labia, XXVII, *A sonnet about the archpriest of Sorisole*. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)

<sup>505</sup> The history of this secular and religious effort to reform popular devotion is the topic of Chapter 1.

enthusiasm for a “living saint” in the very same year as this survey appears to have been more than a mere coincidence. It is instead reminiscent of the poetic justice seen in Dante’s *contrappasso* (counterpunishment).<sup>506</sup> The goal of this chapter is to examine each of Rubbi’s roles and activities in order to illuminate different perspectives on saints and their miracles among contemporary devotees, and to show connections between religious practices, beliefs, and healing in this period, in which the Catholic Church was trying to limit the cult of saints while claiming that the age of miracles was over.

When he performed his alleged miracles, Don Antonio Rubbi was almost eighty-years old. He was born in 1693 in Zogno, a little village in the midst of mountain scenery in the Brembana Valley. After he attended seminary in Bergamo, he was ordained in 1718. For five years, he worked in Zogno (his own village), and then he became a vice-parish priest and moved to Monte di Nese. There he remained until 1740, when he was appointed parish priest in Sorisole, following an election by the village community council. He died in Sorisole in 1785, when he was almost ninety-two years old. Thus, Rubbi was in charge of the Sorisole parish for forty-five years. During his career, Rubbi became a *prevosto* or *vicario foraneo*.<sup>507</sup> In his post as either *prevosto* or *vicar*, the power and the influence that Rubbi possessed were greater than those of a simple parish

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<sup>506</sup> I use this term loosely, as a figure of speech without the strict theological or religious implications that Dante intended. *Contrappasso*, literally translated as counter-suffering, was the type of punishment that Dante used in his *Inferno*.

<sup>507</sup> The position of *vicario foraneo* was instituted by the Tridentine Church to create a more formal connection between the center of a diocese and its surrounding areas. The vicar was responsible for coordinating the area under his control: he received information, issued decisions, and functioned as a mediator between the bishop and the various parts of the diocese. See Angelo Turchini, “La nascita del sacerdozio come professione,” in *Disciplina dell’anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Paolo Prodi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 225-256, in particular 228.



priest. But what made him even more influential were his roles as an exorcist and a healer.<sup>508</sup>

On July 25, 1772, Francesco Savorgnan, the *podestà* (local governor) of Bergamo, wrote to the Venetian Senate to report about the exceptional events happening in his territory.<sup>509</sup> An extraordinary concourse of people had assembled in Sorisole to receive the blessings of Don Antonio Rubbi, the octogenarian priest of a little village not far from the city. And more were coming. Stories of Rubbi's thaumaturgical powers extended not only to the surrounding area but also outside the Republic. Pilgrims from Milano, Pavia, Cremona, Lodi, Como, and also from Piedmont described the prodigious healings he had brought about with his blessings or through things he had blessed. The paralyzed were cured, the blind could see, the deaf could hear, the mute could speak, the

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<sup>508</sup> A couple of years later, a similar phenomenon would occur in the German territories. Between 1774 and 1777 Johann Joseph Gassner, a Swiss priest, performed thousands of exorcisms to heal the sick. Although no claim of sanctity was ever made for Gassner (he nonetheless became a sensation), the similarities between Gassner and Rubbi are striking. Both priests attained widespread fame, but the underlying methods (or better the methods used to by others to build their fame) and the reasons for their success seem to be different. Rubbi was proclaimed a living saint and a miracle worker, and Gassner was an avowed exorcist who claimed that most of human diseases were not rooted in natural causes. However, their cases are more complex. Different strategies were used to promote each man to better suit local social and cultural demands, or to circumvent hierarchical religious controls over their activities. H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). In the 1980s, micro-historian Giovanni Levi studied another cleric who became quite of an attraction after curing hundreds using exorcisms. In the seventeenth century, the priest Giovanni Battista Chiesa performed innumerable exorcisms in the villages of Piedmont, as he claimed that all of these sufferers were possessed by demons. He also believed that the devil was responsible for many, if not all, physical illnesses. He became the subject of a religious investigation and ultimately was proscribed from further exorcising; see Giovanni Levi, *L'eredità Immateriale. Carriera di un Esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), 133-43. Levi was more interested in analyzing Chiesa's role in economic and social terms than in exploring the religious and cultural framework which led to such an epidemic of possessions. He interpreted Chiesa's extensive exorcisms as a way to maintain and possibly enhance the position that his family held in the village and the territory. Their position would not be based upon their possession of land, but rather on the prestige and power attributed to Chiesa due to his role as exorcist-healer; 122-47.

<sup>509</sup> ASV, *Senato Terra*, fz. 2555, Agosto 1772 – prima.

lame could walk, and those seized by evil spirits were liberated. The faithful who sought Don Rubbi's blessings, pointed out the Governor, "were of all ranks and conditions."<sup>510</sup>

Some of the notables from the nearby states had already visited Sorisole, continued Savorgnan. Among them were the countesses Belgioioso and Arconati, the marchionesses Pallavacini and Caravaggio, as well as many other members of the aristocratic families of the state of Milan. More than 4,000 people crossed the territory every day, most recently also from Valtellina, the Grisons, and Switzerland. As soon as the pilgrims received their blessings, they would leave Sorisole and go back home. Though many crowded into the region, so far there had been no public disorder. Savorgnan suggested that perhaps vigilance should be increased before the advent of the most important local saints' feasts, as that would attract even more pilgrims. But he did not sound particularly worried.

The *podestà* noted that the elderly priest belonged to the third order of Saint Francis that he was a holy man who was deeply involved in pastoral care, and that he was devoted to curing the sick. He personally took care of these sick people, defying his old age and refusing the aid of his assistants, he provided food and remedies for them. He did not mind the long trips he had to take at every time of the day and night, and he consistently declined the generous gifts that the faithful would offer to thank him for his intercessions.

We might say that the first "hagiographical" account of Don Rubbi is this letter by the Venetian governor. He not only downplayed what could have been a major concern for the Republic (that is, the passage through their territory of thousands of pilgrims), but also offered the first short and descriptive portrait of Rubbi. Unintentionally, in his

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

description, Savorgnan laid the foundation for Rubbi's *vitae*. Moreover, he did not forget to mention the economic boon that the countless numbers of devotees were bringing to Sorisole and its people. Although he noted this only as an aside, the Rubbi affair became a big business opportunity for the community.

What Savorgnan carefully did not mention in his letter to the Venetian Senate were the two words: *saint* and *miracles*. It seems a deliberate omission, intended not only to minimize the controversy that was growing around the priest's activities but also to discourage or postpone the authorities' intervention. Savorgnan, himself a supporter of Rubbi and a believer in his miracles, in addressing the magistrates in Venice did not wish to raise alarm about the pilgrimage nor instil doubts or suspicions regarding the holy character of the priest.

### A Counter-Reformation Saint or a Saint Sui Generis?

Among the people gathered in Sorisole, there are some nobles, a certain count Arconati, and the *maestro di camera* of Archduke Ferdinand. Everybody wants to talk to him. People call him *Il Santo*, kiss his hands, grab him, and they would cut his robe and even his hair if some guards and gentlemen were not protecting him. All the authorities of the nearby territories have already visited him, as well as those from Milan, Genoa, Mantua, Turin, and Florence... All around, there are invalids of every sort: the lame, cripples, and the blind. There is no talk about war these days; people are barely interested in the news. The saint is the only topic of conversation. People laugh, cry, discuss, and tell their stories. The heretics from the nearby Protestant countries come too, to receive a blessing from the saint. The man is more than eighty-years old and looks as old as he is, fragile, sick, and exhausted. The devotees are afraid that they will lose him soon.<sup>511</sup>

<sup>511</sup> APSO, *Raccolta di Lettere Don Antonio Rubbi*, 1772, vol. I, Letter by Giovanni Pietro Verdi Bergamo July 21 7v-8r.

As the above quote illustrates, during his time as a healer, Rubbi came to be called “Il Santo.” Caterina Dolfin, a Venetian noble woman, writer, poet, and lover and eventual wife of Andrea Tron, commented in one of her letters of the period that this term was to be reserved solely for reference to Saint Anthony of Padua.<sup>512</sup> Was Rubbi appropriating the title that the most famous saint in the Christian tradition had held for five centuries? Dolfin laughed aloud at the idea of it, but the pilgrims swarming through the Venetian territories were not laughing. Don Rubbi was alive, and according to the canonization law, he was not supposed to be called nor considered a saint, nor could he be declared one by popular acclamation. To make such a declaration was the prerogative of the Pope alone.<sup>513</sup> Indeed, the process of canonization could not even begin until fifty years had passed after the death of an alleged saint.<sup>514</sup>

“Living saints” had not been unusual in the early Christian centuries and during the Middle Ages. However, the expression is mainly associated with “a typology of female sanctity” in Renaissance Italy.<sup>515</sup>

<sup>512</sup> St. Anthony is one of the most popular saints in the Church, and even today, the basilica in Padua is commonly known as “Il Santo.” Every year on June 13, the Chapel of the Shrine of St. Anthony is still packed with pilgrims. Caterina Dolfin was the core of the most prestigious literary salon held in the second half of eighteenth century in Venice. The daughter of an intellectual and impoverished aristocratic family, she became the wife of the influential Andrea Tron after having been his friend and lover for almost two decades. In their social and political settings, they constituted the driving force for the religious and political reforms in Venice; see also, on Caterina and Andrea Tron below, n. 628 and 629. Enrico Castelnuovo, “Una dama veneziana del XVIII secolo,” in *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti seconda serie* Francesco Protonotari (Rome: Nuova Antologia, 1882), 641; Catherine M. Sama, ed., *Elisabetta Caminer Turra Selected Writings of an Eighteenth-Century Venetian Woman of Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 45, 76-86, 183.

<sup>513</sup> Due to the decrees of Urban VIII in the seventeenth century, crowds were chased away from such would-be saints, although the controlled process for making a saint had begun as early as the thirteenth century when Pope Gregory IX published his *Decretales* in 1234. David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra D'Otranto* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 163.

<sup>514</sup> As of Pope Urban VIII's reform (1634), a candidate for canonization had to be deceased for at least 100 years before the process could start. However, this rule was not always applied, and later the congregation established the minimal time between death and canonization as fifty years.

<sup>515</sup> Gabriella Zarri, “Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century,” in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, trans.

By the 1560s, the model of asceticism that had allowed this short period of female religious prominence had disappeared. The new model of sanctity which emerged during and after the council of Trent (1545-1563) exemplified a renewed suspicion of visions and other mystic activities. In this process of change, the Church transformed the notion of the “living saint” to the image of the “false saint” who would be charged with exhibiting a pretense of holiness – a particular type of unorthodox behavior that was persecuted by the Holy Office.<sup>516</sup>

The way in which saints are created had always been through a process of interaction between clergy and laity, center and periphery, learned culture and popular culture. At times, the balance of these forces shifted more towards the center; and this certainly happened during the Counter Reformation.<sup>517</sup> The veneration of saints came under fire during the Reformation. Even Erasmus, who remained Catholic, had argued that the veneration of saints was often similar to the superstitions of the pagans. Virulent criticism of the saint cults and their ultimate abolishment from the religious landscape was one of the profound changes enacted by opponents of Catholic practices during the Protestant Reform. In the face of this mounting criticism from beyond and sometimes

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Margery J. Schneider (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 219-254; and Gabriella Zarri, “From Prophecy to Discipline, 1450-1650,” trans. Keith Botsford, in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 83-112. See also Paul Antony Hayward and J. D. Howard-Johnston, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>516</sup> Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice (1618-1750)* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>517</sup> Peter Burke, “How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint,” in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 153. Also see Fernando Vidal, “Miracles, Science, and Testimony in Post-Tridentine Saint-Making,” *Science in Context* 20, No. 3 (September 2007): 481-508. For a thorough overview of sainthood during the Renaissance and throughout the Counter Reformation, see Gabriella Zarri, “L'età rinascimentale,” in *Storia della santità nel cristianesimo occidentale*, ed. Anna Benvenuti Papi (Roma: Viella, 2005), 223-260 and Simon Ditchfield, “Il mondo della Riforma e della Controriforma,” in the same volume, 261-329.

within the Roman Catholic Church, the fathers at Trent had to address abuses associated with the veneration of saints. Nonetheless, their decrees reaffirmed that images, relics, pilgrimages, and the cult of saints generally were doctrinally sound. Changes from earlier practices were limited to setting up more elaborate and systematic criteria and procedures for recording the lives of saints and confirming new saints.<sup>518</sup> After an impasse that lasted sixty-five years, during which no more saints were canonized, a new period of saint-canonization began in 1588. St. Didacus was elevated, and the Congregation of Sacred Rites and Ceremonies was instituted. Beatification and the canonization of saints were among the matters assigned to the Congregation. In 1610, the Pope was granted the sole authority to confirm the elevation of saints. The procedure to attain saintly status was further formalized by Pope Urban VIII in 1625 and 1634, and the system reached its final process with the treatise published in the 1730s by Cardinal and canon lawyer Prospero Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV.<sup>519</sup>

In the matter of the recognition of saints, centralized control from Rome was designed to erode the local cults that had spread far from Roman control. However, such regulation from the center toward the periphery was never fully achieved, nor was it ever rigorously enforced. Local cults of popular veneration continued to spring up. Most of these did not extend outside their limited geographical areas, nor did they attain official recognition. The few which grew sizable enough to be formally sanctioned were scrutinized with explicitly defined rules that had been established to require the proof of a heroic degree of virtue.<sup>520</sup>

<sup>518</sup> Burke, *How to become*, 154.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 156. See Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy. Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10. Ditchfield

Although by virtue of the saying *vox populi vox Dei* Rubbi was already a saint, the first step toward an official canonization process was to gather information about the saint's life and miracles. During this process, official hagiographical accounts were usually also developed according to a traditional narrative that aligned the given figure's deeds with those of other saints. Following Rubbi's death, no diocesan investigation promoted Rubbi's canonization. Thus, the story of his accomplishments was constructed in an unofficial way, mainly from letters which reported his healings and from some biographies written immediately after his death.<sup>521</sup> Giovanni Suardi was the first hagiographer who divulged Rubbi's life and miracles in Italian. He extensively used the first biographies written immediately after Rubbi's death, which were by Rubbi's successor, the cleric Tiraboschi, and the canon and theologian of Bergamo cathedral, Mario Lupo. The latter offered an insightful portrait of Rubbi in his famous *Codex Diplomaticus*. Those works were in Latin, however, and thus were inaccessible to the vast majority of believers. Suardi also benefitted from the oral tradition since the memory of the living saint in the territory was at that point very much alive. Acting as an ethnographer, Suardi was able to talk directly with people who had met the priest during their lives. Though he was not as an official collector of Rubbi's miracles, Suardi (who was a priest himself) reshaped the stories he heard about Rubbi's extraordinary healings in order to endorse the canonization process.

Rubbi's *vita* was designed to exemplify a perfect model of heroic virtue, which closely followed the accepted pattern of hagiography.<sup>522</sup> Signs of his holiness were noted,

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argues that the topos of center versus periphery does not fully apply to the Tridentine Church, the efforts of which could be better explained as attempts to "particularize the universal."

<sup>521</sup> Giovanni Suardi, *Memorie Intorno al fu Prevosto di Sorisole d. Gio. Antonio Rubbi* (Bergamo: Dalla Tipografia di Pietro Cattaneo, 1857). Suardi strongly believed that saints were essential to the Catholic faith and that God showed the grace He bestowed upon them through the miracles they could perform. Giovanni Suardi, *Intorno alle nuove officature proposte par la chiesa di Bergamo. Dialoghi* (Padua: Co' Tipi di Angelo Sicca, 1850), 63-64. See also Gianni Fazzini, "Mario Lupo," *DBI*, vol. 66, (2007), *ad vocem*.

<sup>522</sup> I refer for this topic to the seminal studies of Sofia Boesch Gajano, as well as those edited by her, in particular *Aspetti dell'agiografia nell'alto medioevo* (Palermo: Enchiridion, 1983), and "Santità, culti,

as often was the case for other saints, very early in his life. Since childhood, Antonio was said to immerse himself totally in the spiritual world, and obedience and reclusion were features of his education. He never participated in playground activities; eager to please his parents, he remained quietly in his house. Going back home from school or church, he did not let the other children distract him from his secluded and pious lifestyle. The older he grew, the more religious exercises became his only delights. His early vocation and his demeanor earned him support from the local priest and later from the bishop Luigi Ruzzini. As a result he was admitted to the seminary without having to pay for it.<sup>523</sup>

According to the *vita*, Rubbi was clearly predestined for sainthood. Even before embracing his priestly life and working miracles, he was the recipient of a divine gift of grace as a reward for his charity.<sup>524</sup> Suardi tells us that as a priest, ministering to the sick was one of Rubbi's main concerns, and he visited sick people constantly. If these people could not come to him, he would visit them, irrespective of the fatigue of long trips which sometimes took him over difficult mountain tracks.<sup>525</sup> He left such an impression on people that not only his parishioners but the people from the nearby villages "would run to or send for him, imploring his blessings when they were afflicted with any illness."<sup>526</sup>

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agiografia. Temi e prospettive," in Associazione Italiana per lo Studio della Santità, dei Culti e dell'Agiografia. Convegno di Studio (Rome: Viella, 1997); also see the more recent *La santità. Ricerca contemporanea e testimonianze del passato*. Atti del Convegno di Studi Prato, Biblioteca Roncioniana, 24 novembre 2007 (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2011).

<sup>523</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 1-3.

<sup>524</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 64r-66r. Antonio Rota a fervent supporter of Rubbi recounted the story, or better, a wondrous anecdote, about a silver ducat which Rubbi gave to a beggar and which God later returned miraculously to him. Rota was one of the most fervent supporters of Rubbi as well as of the devotion of the Sacred Heart. He was also the target of vicious sonnets and satires which mocked his excessive, baroque, and sentimental devotion (see the next chapter). The letters describing Rubbi's healings were collected mostly by the Capuchins, who worked as Rubbi's assistants during the period in which he attracted thousands of pilgrims. The bulk of the correspondence is kept in the Bergamo diocesan archive. However, I used a copy of a selection of those letters, particularly those written in the period of the maximum intensity of Rubbi's activities. This copy is kept in the archive of Sorisole.

<sup>525</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 11.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



According to Suardi, after he entered the religious life, Rubbi committed himself to “hate his body” as well as to despise mundane things. Mortification, discipline, self-abnegation, and strenuous religious exercises were the ways through which Rubbi pursued his saintly call.<sup>527</sup> His ministry, his chastity, and his irreproachable prompted increasing number of people to call him a saint. In early 1772 his fame spread suddenly and rapidly throughout Italy and then to the rest of Europe. His transformation into a locally venerated “living saint” became a mass phenomenon that prevented his being doomed to fall into oblivion after his death.

During the summer of 1772, people in both simple carts and elegant carriages flocked to see him. The roads to Sorisole were clogged with pilgrims from all walks of life. Many came on foot, and some carried litters to transport the sick. The local taverns and hostels did not have sufficient capacity to serve all these people. Thus, every house became an inn. The streets were too narrow to handle the multitude, so they were enlarged. River trips multiplied, and at one point four-hundred riverboats per day were counted coming and going during the saints’ feast days for St. James and St. Anne. Rubbi’s house was literally besieged having become the most important sanctuary in Christendom, commented Suardi.<sup>528</sup> Both believers and detractors of Rubbi’s miraculous healings agreed on that: the thousands of pilgrims who arrived at Sorisole transformed the little village into an impromptu, famous shrine.

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 50-54.

### The Power over Demons

First and foremost, Rubbi was an exorcist. His superiors repeatedly granted him the special license to bless demoniacs. This was an activity that both in scope and extent opposed the increasing efforts of the Church to place strict limitations on exorcisms and exorcists.<sup>529</sup> However, while Rubbi was recognized as an exorcist in the contemporary sources, his activities as an exorcist seemed to abruptly stop during the time when he dispensed miracles of thaumaturgical healing. These miraculous activities were more suitable for the construction of a narrative for the making of the saint. And herein lay one of the controversies concerning Rubbi's activities in 1772. As long as the Church proved unable to completely regulate their exorcists' *modus operandi*, the practice was contentious and even controversial. Moreover, exorcism was supposed to be employed to save one demoniac, not to cast demons out of the entire community attending a mass exorcism. Yet, during those months when Rubbi was blessing sufferers continuously, his blessings were very likely an extended form of exorcism, which went beyond the ordinary ministry of a parish priest. Because of the problematic nature of exorcism and the fact that public exorcisms of that sort were not part of established liturgy, Rubbi's activities as an exorcist were obscured in the sources. But if we look closely at some his later actions during that year, we can see that exorcism was a basis of his practice.

The Count and Canon Ferrante of Ambivere, who lived in a village within the hills surrounding Bergamo, had been suffering for ten years with convulsions which affected his nervous system and caused chronic pain.<sup>530</sup> He sometimes walked with a

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 7; APSO, vol. II, 1v. Further discussion of this aspect of Rubbi's exorcisms and blessings is offered later in this chapter.

<sup>530</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 1r-4v.

limp, and occasionally he could not stand because his body became twisted and contorted in the oddest ways. Sometimes the convulsions were so violent that he had to stay in his bed for days or weeks. In such a state, he had to suspend his daily duties as a minister. Even when he made a supreme effort, trying to get out of his bed to pray in the morning at church, he was regularly overwhelmed by stomach cramps and terrible pains in his joints and nerves. His many physicians believed his condition was a permanent infirmity that could not be cured, meaning naturally cured. When the canon heard that not very far from his own parish there was a priest called “Il Santo” who worked miracles, he decided to meet this man. On July 10, 1772, he left his village to go to Sorisole. When he met Rubbi, Ferrante of Ambivere described his illness. The living saint calmly but firmly replied to him that he was not going to be healed. Ferrante nonetheless received his blessings and went back home. In the following days, he experienced the most ferocious attacks. After this, rather than diminishing, his faith grew, and he felt he had to go back to Sorisole again. He was determined to wait until he had obtained grace. Those were the exact words he said to Rubbi. While conversing with him a second time about other things, a convulsion suddenly twisted Ferrante’s neck. Seeing this, Rubbi blew his breath into Ferrante’s face once, and the convulsion ceased.<sup>531</sup> The morning after, still agitated by what had happened, Ferrante woke up and went to Mass presided over by Don Antonio Rubbi. As soon as Rubbi had delivered his sermon and was beginning to bless the flock gathered there, Ferrante had a seizure which was even stronger than the one he experienced the night before. After the Mass, Ferrante tried to get up to leave the church with Rubbi, but his knees were so twisted that he could not move.

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 3r.

At that point, Rubbi stared at him and pronounced some words. Immediately, Ferrante's face became ghastly pale, and he fell back to the ground, his body frozen. He was unable to speak. The people around lifted and carried him to the choir while trying to comfort him by saying he had to have faith. Rubbi entered the room, grabbed and pulled his hair, and raised him from the ground. Then he took Ferrante by the hand, and they took a few steps together. As soon as Rubbi left the room, the affliction started again. The Canon lost his voice and could only make himself understood by gestures. Rubbi came back, took Ferrante's hands again, and they walked together. At the top of some stairs, Rubbi left him, and though two men were supporting Ferrante at his side, he could not move as he felt his knees hard as iron and impossible to bend. For three or four minutes they all stayed there, the two men trying to push him to walk down the stairs. Rubbi came back and took him by the hands a third time, and again he was able to walk. Ferrante then went home and lay on his bed. There, the convulsions returned, causing uncontrollable jerking movements in his feet and his arms. Rubbi prescribed some holy water to drink, and Ferrante's convulsions stopped and never returned again.<sup>532</sup>

While this is only one of the numerous accounts of the healings which were recorded in Sorisole during the summer of 1772, it is the only detailed account of an exorcism. Though Rubbi was a well-known exorcist who had cast out demons throughout most of his ministry, there are only a few occurrences of exorcism in his miracle narrative and those are not acknowledged as such. For Ferrante as well as for the author of Rubbi's *vita* (who reported this event), this was one of the many miracles that Rubbi performed and an example of his thaumaturgical powers. However, this was first and foremost an exorcism. The *exsufflation* (the blowing in the face), the contorted body, the canon's

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 4v.

reactions to Rubbi presence and words, the resistance of Ferrante's body and its attempts to undo what Rubbi was doing as soon as he left the scene, the pulling of the hair, and the testing of faith are all recognizable elements of the rite of exorcism.<sup>533</sup> What makes this exorcism different, besides the important fact that it was not defined as such, is that the possessed – Ferrante, rather than uttering disconnected phrases, insulting Rubbi, or speaking in unknown tongues, remained silent throughout the procedure. Though dramatic changes in the sufferer's voice constituted one distinctive proof of possession (and they are missing in this event), Ferrante's silence attests to his complete submission to Rubbi. While this exorcism apparently lacked the most theatrical aspects of the rite, it was still quite a piece of drama enacted by Rubbi, who performed the ritual in front of the entire church. As was discussed in the previous chapter, although this was an aspect of exorcism that was condemned by the church, exorcists often believed that they had to sort out the best way to dispel demons. In pursuing the best method, traditionally, personal innovation did count.<sup>534</sup> To the people who experienced and saw the ritual of exorcism, its effectiveness depended upon the exorcist's personal skills – not on his conformance with the *Rituale Romano*.

<sup>533</sup> The “convulsive flesh” was not simply a sign of possession but also an indication that the exorcism was efficaciously proceeding, and that the techniques employed to battle the devil were reestablishing health. The convulsive flesh, as Foucault called it, was more than just a way to reject confession. Michel Foucault, *Abnormal, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (New York: Picador 2003), 213. Refusing to comply with the perturbing scrutiny of the soul, as suggestive as this sounds, in Foucault interpretation, was only part of a ritual that dealt with culturally embedded beliefs regarding illnesses, the presence of evil, the fear of sin, and the sense of guilt. Exorcism was a physical, an emotional, and a religious response to all the above-mentioned components and their mutual interaction; it was a tool through which people understood and expelled what was troubling both body and soul.

<sup>534</sup> Gassner's take on exorcism was also non-conformist. Most of his patients did not show any of the signs of possession, such as are described by the manuals. As was previously noted, Gassner, like Rubbi, healed all sorts of illnesses through exorcism, but in a very unorthodox way. On the other hand, the twitching, sudden, and violent movements as well as the stiffening of the limbs all characterize the onset of the classic exorcism ritual, which is described in both old demonological texts and the *Rituale*. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession & Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 212; Midelfort, *Exorcism*; Talamonti, *La carne convulsiva*, 150.

The various phases of this exorcism were staged in a symbolic fashion and in a ritualized manner. Before starting the procedure, Rubbi tested Ferrante's faith by sending him back home without doing anything. As Ferrante recollected in his letter, his faith stayed strong and even become stronger. At that point, Rubbi began his exorcism. Although the typical conflict between the exorcist and the demon inhabiting the possessed was not played out, the interactive nature of the ritual remained in place, as an ongoing and somewhat choreographed exchange took place between Rubbi and Ferrante. Ferrante was able to overcome his demons after Rubbi patiently went back to him anytime he was unable to proceed and took him by hand. Then Rubbi would let go of his hand. Three times Rubbi repeated this rite and followed it up with a dose of holy water. Then the demon finally succumbed. Rubbi, acting as a patient father, taught Ferrante how to walk again. Rubbi's composure may not mirror the exertions undergone by the typical exorcist who had to engage with demons, but his behavior was reminiscent of a saint who knew he had already won in the contest.

Another much more subdued example of Rubbi's exorcist activities was his treatment of a possessed woman who was brought into his church. Rubbi was preaching, but once he heard her screaming, without interrupting his sermon, he turned toward her and made the sign of the cross and she calmed down, stayed quiet, listened to the prayers, and went home healed.<sup>535</sup> Rubbi's composed but charismatic behavior in defeating the demons was certainly uncommon. But rather than challenging traditional exorcist practice, his methods validated, confirmed, and pushed them to another level. These were not simply cases of single individuals who needed to be freed from their demons: the entire community needed this as well. The Masses, the sermons, and the blessings all had

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<sup>535</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 90.

this purpose: to eliminate the primary source of any evil, both physically and spiritually. By the same token, Rubbi was also committed to discovering “all the maladies of the soul.”<sup>536</sup> Therefore, he tirelessly listened to the confessions of his parishioners, as he was eager to sort out the extent to which the devil had entered their lives, their thoughts, and their deeds.<sup>537</sup>

### **Ribbons, Handkerchiefs, and the Miracle Narrative**

Each day, the living saint’s routine revolved around both public and private blessings. The sick, whose condition would not allow them to endure the fatigue of either a short or a long trip to Sorisole were not neglected. They received Rubbi’s blessings from objects blessed by him that worked as a contact relic. From the beginning of the pilgrimages, caskets with items to be blessed arrived in Sorisole. These items were blessed and returned, bearing full apotropaic force.<sup>538</sup> Even the Doge sent a case filled, among other things, with many copper engravings of the Virgin Mary.<sup>539</sup> What Rubbi preferably blessed were handkerchiefs and ribbons. In Venice, Father Ignazio wrote that to fulfill people’s needs, he had to tear the handkerchiefs blessed by Rubbi into tiny pieces.<sup>540</sup>

Verona became a theatre of miracles. There the reign of the disbelievers was over, as the Vicar of the Bishop of Bergamo enthusiastically remarked.<sup>541</sup> Contrary to what was

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<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>537</sup> Ivonne Sensi, “Don Antonio Rubbi: Parroco Santo di Sorisole Nato a Zogno,” *Associazione Socio Culturale Friula, Conferenze Anno Accademico 2001-2002*, Quaderno no. 17 (Zogno, 2002), 48.

<sup>538</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 35v. I purposely use the term apotropaic in this context because, as we will see, these items primarily functioned to turn away harm or evil influences, like prayers that request protection from demons.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 61r.

<sup>540</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 82-87, 92.

<sup>541</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 45v.

happening in Bergamo, in Verona the Bishop was validating the miracles with his investigation. Who would have said, wrote one of the physicians who confirmed the miraculous healings, that “the *bergamaschi* (who live in Bergamo), always competing with the *veronesi* (who live in Verona) over relics and saints, would dismiss so blatantly their own living saint, who is held in so much esteem by us?”<sup>542</sup> Indeed, the Episcopal Chancery in Verona was collecting documents and examining witnesses – activities which, as we shall soon see, were not pursued by the bishop in Bergamo.

It was in Verona where Giovanni Verando Zeviani, a physician, and Alessandro Zappi, a surgeon, attested to the miraculous recovery of Donna Rosa Illuminata Svaitzer, a nun in the monastery of the city. The two doctors declared that the remedies they had been trying had repeatedly failed, and therefore they had played no part in her recovery.<sup>543</sup> The nun was twenty-four years old and, as a consequence of having neglected to cure her inguinal and hiatal hernias, had for the last two years suffered unbearable pain. Aside from this condition, she also had a long history of ailments: lack of appetite, bleeding, convulsions, paralysis of the right leg and hip, bad fevers that left her almost blind in the right eye, and other unpleasant maladies that tormented her body.<sup>544</sup> Nicolò Antonio Giustiniani, the Bishop of Verona, read the physicians’ declarations and decided to interrogate the nun. He asked Svaitzer how she had obtained grace, and she said that as soon she had donned the shirt Rubbi had blessed, she started crying and could not understand her emotions. After a while, she felt that her head was lighter, but more aggravated by her pain. Then she experienced shortness of breath, and

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 44v (letter by the physician Zeviani).

<sup>543</sup> “Bad are those fevers that never leave the body, return every day and with violent paroxysms, and show symptoms of debilitating the body, often perniciously during its course.” Aulus Cornelius Celsus, *Medicine in Eight Books* (London: D. Wilson and T. Durham, 1756), 53.

<sup>544</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 110 (dated August 9, 1772).



after that, she experienced a great impulse to get up from her bed.<sup>545</sup> Zeviani declared that what he witnessed was not a miracle but rather a combination of miracles.

Donna Marianna Gioseffa Cartolari, of the same monastery, suffered from near-fatal asthma attacks that left her at death's door so many times that she had received the *viaticum* ten times and the extreme unction three times. Over the previous six years, Marianna also had begun to suffer inguinal pain in the left side of her body. As the pain became more intense and moved to her leg, she became a cripple and the affected leg shrank to become some inches shorter than the other. Her leg, foot, and toes stiffened, and she could not move or bend them. Neither would her leg stop twitching. These spasms caused terrible pain.

All attempted remedies resulted in no relief. But Cartolari also had the inexplicable feelings similar to those of Donna Rosa as soon as she wore a cord that Rubbi had blessed. She thought she was healed, but “she was afraid of herself” and wanted the abbess to be there to assist her when she would attempt to get up from her bed. She did get up, but after two hours when she felt a convulsion coming, Cartolari realized that she did not have the cord around her. As soon as she put the cord around her wrist again, “with sincere faith, she was healed” as the attack ceased. She felt anxious and restless and could not stay in bed anymore. So she got up again and was finally able to walk.<sup>546</sup> Both women had eventually been completely healed, enjoyed subsequent good health, and had a good appetite. After initially looking pale and drawn, they came back to

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>546</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 123.

life.<sup>547</sup> The Bishop of Verona also interrogated this nun. After this, he attested that true miracles had indeed happened in the convent.<sup>548</sup>

When the nun Gioseffa Cartolari heard that Svaizer was miraculously cured by the blessed shirt, she said: “And for me, there is nothing left for me?” So the nuns gave her the only thing left, that is, the ribbon (or the cord) wrapping the box that contained the many objects Rubbi had blessed for the nuns. Although in this case the ribbon appears almost incidentally, the use of blessed ribbons or cords to heal various illnesses appears to have been one of Rubbi’s favorite methods. In the letter describing the miracle, perhaps due to a slip of the pen, the cord was also called *legatura*, which was a magical form of binding that people performed to cast or undo spells.<sup>549</sup> As is discussed in Guido Ruggiero’s *Binding Passions*, signing cords and the clothing of sick people were common healing techniques used both in Venice and in the countryside in the sixteenth century.<sup>550</sup> These objects “seem to be treated like an extension of the body.”<sup>551</sup> The practice dispelled the evil in whatever form it took through witchcraft or the evil eye. Again, though a major effect of Rubbi’s semi-relics was to heal when applied to the bodies of sufferers, at the same time these artifacts served to cast out evil, acting therefore as another form of quasi-exorcism.<sup>552</sup> Thus, Rubbi adopted this quite common magical practice for his own religious healing. His techniques did not simply refer to

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 117-120.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 124 (Verona, August 27, 1772).

<sup>549</sup> I accept the interpretation Cartolari gave of this event, during the interrogation by the bishop; she identified the item as a cord, while the physician wrote that this cord was a ribbon from the blessed shirt used by Svaitzer.

<sup>550</sup> Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 153.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Measuring, binding, and burying an evil symbolically; knotting handkerchiefs and ribbons; and signing with water and holy oil are still parts of popular practices and rituals. Franca Romano, *Laura Malipiero strega: storie di magie e sortilegi nel Seicento* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003), 31. See also by the same author *Guaritrici*, 167-198.

those beliefs which were intended to cope with evil but rather re-enforced them, infusing them with the power over the demons that he possessed as an exorcist. One detail that his miracle narrative does not provide is that Rubbi belonged to a family which had been bestowed with a particular grace that granted them the power “of signing.” People who received the ability to “sign” had the power to heal.<sup>553</sup> Instead of dismissing or opposing practices that the Inquisition had been trying to eradicate since the Council of Trent, Rubbi absorbed those rituals into his own priestly practices of blessing and healing.<sup>554</sup> The belief in the efficacy of magical practices shared by the exorcist and the people he exorcised was a key factor in determining the efficacy of exorcism in the first place.<sup>555</sup>

Rubbi was curing all kinds of illnesses, but those related to mobility impairment seemed to be in the majority. A woman with severe spinal muscular atrophy was carried on a chair to receive his blessing, and was able to stand up and walk again. Another

<sup>553</sup> “The sign” stood for “the sign of the cross” and metonymically came to identify (and still does) the folk healers whose gifts were handed down from generation to generation. See Ruggiero, in particular the chapter “The Women Priests of Latisana: Apollonia Madizza and the Ties That Bind,” 130-174; and Marisa Milani, *Piccole storie di stregoneria nella Venezia del '500* (Verona: Essedue, 1989), 165, and by the same author, *Streghe, morti ed essere fantastici nel Veneto* (Padua: Esedra, 1994), 24; see also Romano, *Laura Malipiero*. In witchcraft studies, these practices may be defined as “healing spells,” but the term “to sign” is used extensively in the Republic. There, it has a sacred meaning. This aspect should be emphasized since those “magical” rituals represented exorcisms performed by lay people.

<sup>554</sup> Until recently, the Rubbis were credited as possessing this same gift, and so were thought to be able to cure people from various illnesses and ailments with it. Rubbi’s descendants still live in Padronecco, where Giovanni Sonzogno (1714-1800), Rubbi’s cousin, was born. He was also a cleric who died “in the odor of sanctity” and a healer who possessed the gift “to sign.” See Luigi Roffia *Don Giovanni Antonio Rubbi Ol Preost Sant (1693-1785)* (Gorle, BG: Editrice Velar, 2010), 10-13.

<sup>555</sup> This is an element that is still very prominent today. The belief that possession is mostly caused by *maleficium* was neither eradicated nor completely censured. This explains what might be regarded as a strange collaboration between women able to recognize the signs of *maleficia* and exorcists. The collaboration between women able to detect *maleficium* and exorcists may seem unusual, as one rather might expect an antagonist relationship. In the sixteenth century case of Margarita, examined by Guido Ruggiero, the hidden signs of *maleficium* were disclosed by the priest, who called to discern them by the husband of the alleged victim. The husband was a physician who was unable to cure his wife with medicine or natural remedies. As we know from the chapter on the Inquisition, in the Venetian urban setting, witches – though present – were not as menacing as elsewhere (no pact with the devil was implied), and there the Holy Office did not charge them as severely either. Here then, a primary concern in the sixteenth century – to recognize and dispel an act of female sorcery – had given way to another priority, to confirm and reassess the exorcist’s ability to drive out the devil. Guido Ruggiero, “The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: Male, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre-Modern Medicine,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 1141-58.

woman developed contractures on her body such that her limbs could no longer straighten. Her condition was so severe that she could neither stand up nor even sit: she was literally a shapeless bundle of flesh on a chair and had been like that for fifteen years.<sup>556</sup> She could not eat by herself and looked like she was already dead. But as soon as she received Rubbi's blessing, she started to move. Rubbi said "stand up," and with difficulty she did. Then he said, take some of that wine on the table. She could not stretch her arm, but Rubbi said, "Just do it."<sup>557</sup> She took the wine, drank it, and was healed completely. The wine in this story turned into the miraculous wine of the Eucharist. Wine was one of Rubbi's remedies which had multifaceted therapeutic benefits and could treat many conditions. This and the following example of another miracle account resembled episodes of the Scriptures in which Jesus or his apostles performed miracles while "commanding" the sick.<sup>558</sup> When a young man was transported to Rubbi on a litter and put on the ground, Rubbi said, "In the name of Jesus stand up."<sup>559</sup> This was a clear re-enactment of Peter's act of healing.<sup>560</sup> A girl suffering from rickets could not walk nor put her feet on the ground. After Rubbi blessed her, he said to those who brought the girl to him, "Put her on the ground and let her walk on her own." "It is impossible," they said, "she cannot even stand." "So," said Rubbi, "you do not have faith, since anything is

<sup>556</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 62v-63r.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 63r.

<sup>558</sup> See Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). The author also distinguishes how the role of faith in the making of miracles is more or less important, according to the apostle's interpretation of the story. Mark linked miracles with faith, while Matthew took another approach. The bestowing of grace upon the sick was not necessarily or explicitly related to their faith in Jesus. In the same vein, Rubbi's miracles followed both patterns. In the examples above for instance, his commands to do things and the resulting healing are not connected with faith; but in other occasions, as we will see, faith would be an important factor in the healing process. The Scriptures therefore offered different models of miracle healing from which to take inspiration. Twelftree, *Jesus*, 97-101, 114-118.

<sup>559</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 63r-63v.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.* See Acts 3:6.

possible for those who have true faith.”<sup>561</sup> And he said this with such an imperious voice that the men, surprised and afraid, put her down. The girl could stand by herself in the end, and she walked home.

Though cases involving the sufferer’s loss of the ability to move (as the result of an illness, of an injury, or other condition) permitted the most remarkable showcases of Rubbi’s thaumaturgical power, he also cured ulcers, tumors, hemorrhages, skin diseases, among a variety and all sorts of maladies. Another nun in the same convent where many of these miracles occurred frequently suffered from fever and coughed up blood continuously. She was so exhausted that she could not speak anymore. An unspecified blessed object was applied to her body, and she was healed and spoke again.<sup>562</sup> In this instance, her voice, or a lack of it, played an important part in the healing process. Many of the sick, whatever their illnesses, “had lost their voice”. If possessed (like demoniacs), they lost their voices in Rubbi’s presence. Only through Rubbi’s blessings and performances were these sufferers able to regain their voices again. Then the sick returned to their original, healthy state thanks to Rubbi’s intercession.

The archduchess Maria Amalia of Austria sent a letter to Rubbi asking his help to conceive a male descendant. She did not want to be recognized, so she wrapped her letter inside a letter from her confessor, a Capuchin. He had both letters delivered to Father Raimondo, Rubbi’s brother. “Unaware of the rules of social etiquette,” as Suardi put it, Raimondo did not seek to identify the sender and simply passed the letter to Rubbi, who also did not care about who wrote it. After having read the letter, Rubbi made someone else write “blessed by the parish priest of Sorisole.” The letter was sent back, but without

<sup>561</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 45r-46v.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 41v (she was likely suffering from tuberculosis).

seeing any signature the duchess suspected that her servant had played a trick on her. She believed that rather than going to Sorisole, her servant letter-carrier had stopped in Milan or in Bergamo to enjoy the festivals there. Yet from her confessor and a number of other intermediary friars, the duchess discovered that her letter had reached Rubbi, who indeed had blessed it.<sup>563</sup> In July 1773, Maria Amalia delivered a son, Don Luigi, and in gratitude sent Rubbi a silver chalice, a silver phial, four golden statues, and a precious chasuble.<sup>564</sup>

In another instance, a child unable to urinate was brought to Rubbi because the *norcino* Fermi was afraid that surgery performed on such a small child could be fatal. Rubbi was awakened and immediately blessed the child, who was immediately able to urinate. They both went to the front of the altar of the Madonna, and Rubbi blessed him again, saying that he who was blessed must have faith. The child then urinated again, and this time expelled a kidney stone.<sup>565</sup>

Invariably, local saints acquired their reputations because of their specialized powers. Although some, like Saint Anthony, might have a range of thaumaturgical powers, most of them cured specific kinds of illness. And living saints were sought to treat a wide spectrum of conditions. His own examples show the variety of Rubbi's healings. Not all of them were strictly speaking miracles because they did not entail the cure of an incurable illness, as the canonization process required. However, they were all perceived as prodigious. The severity of the condition, the risk of death or harm if a

<sup>563</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 103-11.

<sup>564</sup> The chasuble is still in the Sorisole church; the rest of these items were stolen during the nineteenth century. See Roffia, *Don Giovanni*, 4.

<sup>565</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 60v-61r. Norcini were lithotomists, surgeons skilled in the surgical removal of a calculus; they were considered low-level surgeons, doctors "of testicles, who cannot heal a wound without wounding." They were indeed infamous because they often did castrate their patients. See Piero Gambaccini, *Mountenbanks and Medicasters. A history of Italian Charlatans from the Middle to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 61.

normal remedy was administered, or the failure of other types of medical care were for the believers reasons enough to resort to Rubbi and to believe his healings were miraculous. Moreover, in thaumaturgical miracle narratives it did not matter whether the story could stand up to specific criteria. As religious historian Duane Watson explains, Saints' lives "do not so much contain argumentation as they *are* argumentation."<sup>566</sup> For the great masses of the faithful, the miracle narrative, written or oral, sanctioned by authorities or not, constituted *per se* a proof of sanctity. The range of Rubbi's healings helped to turn his parish into a pilgrimage site. As a living saint, Rubbi proved to be a saint for all seasons.

Miracle narratives in a broader sense were not what hagiography was, or was supposed to be, but rather what it ended up being: a layered product, in which many different tales – both oral and written – kept reflecting, mirroring, and expanding on each other. They were a combination of first-hand testimonies that reflected the spread of rumors about miracles and became inextricably interwoven with saintly practices. Rubbi's own miracle narrative encompassed a tangled web of discourses that were taking place at the peak of his fame. The role of the local clergy and the Capuchin fathers in portraying and propagating Rubbi's miracles was pivotal in spreading the phenomenon outside the borders of Bergamo's territory. Friars, priests, and lay people surrounded Rubbi, filtering requests and organizing his appointments for personal consultations. In order to approach *Il Santo*, people had to use intermediaries. Although his hagiographers

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<sup>566</sup> Duane F. Watson, "Introduction," in *Miracle Discourse in the New Testament*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 8. Upon examining the treatment of saints' miracles after the canonization process, carefully identified miracles could become irrelevant even for the ecclesiastical authorities. See Laura Ackerman Smoller, "From authentic Miracles to a Rhetoric of Authenticity: Examples from the canonization and cult of St. Vincent Ferrer," *Church History* 80, no. 4 (2011): 773-97.

pointedly noted Rubbi's uncaring attitude concerning the social standing of those who sought his blessings, the nobility – and especially female nobles – enjoyed preferential treatment thanks to their confessors, who contacted appointments for them directly or indirectly with the Bergamo friars or the priests who were close to Rubbi.<sup>567</sup> There was a chain of correspondence which connected monasteries to convents and secular clergy. In fact, most of the thousands of letters from people pleading for Rubbi's intercession that arrived at Sorisole were written by Capuchin friars, who were the main mediators between Rubbi and the supplicants. The number of exchanged letters between ecclesiastics of all ranks talking about Rubbi and his wonders was endless. This correspondence contributed enormously to Rubbi's rapid rise to fame.

At a local level, Rubbi's fame spread by word of mouth and by the endorsements of clergy. The accounts were expressed in the sermons of priests in the surrounding territories who preached about his miracles and then arranged distance blessings. There was also another important means of communication. Printed devotional items contributed significantly to his reputation and to his notoriety beyond the borders of the Republic. Popular leaflets on the most popular subjects of the time travelled quickly and circulated among numerous believers. Peddlers and charlatans wandered from place to place, telling as well as selling the many tales, the latest news, the oddest curiosities, and wondrous stories which they had collected in their journeys. To make the most of their business without getting in trouble with the local authorities, they requested permission to erect their stalls and sell their wares. Then they sold remedies for the sick, leaflets and cheap devotional books after authorizations were granted by the Inquisition. It was through such a seller that a leaflet ended up in the hands of the Inquisitor of Pesaro and

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<sup>567</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 55.



then was reported to the Roman Congregation. The peddler who requested permission to reprint the story handed the leaflet to the Inquisitor. Likely having heard about Rubbi, the Inquisitor then involved the Congregation in Rome by sending the leaflet to them along with accounts of some of the miracles attributed to the wonder-maker Rubbi.<sup>568</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that this popular narrative of Rubbi's deeds included other affirmations of the veracity of his acts, such as those by physicians who accredited Rubbi's miracles, by civil servants, and by other observers, Rubbi's opponents denounced this narrative as a complete fabrication. Some of his detractors were clerics, some lay writers, and some physicians who denounced their colleagues for fraud or incompetence for affirming the miracles.<sup>569</sup> Of course, all miracle narratives are the product of careful manufacturing. A would-be saint's supporters or acolytes – as some scholars have recently called them – had to shape their case according the pre-established expectations and literary conventions of hagiography to convincingly make a saint.<sup>570</sup> However, a “spurious” miracle narrative that might (or might not) prevent canonization did not affect the reputation of the living saint. This narrative, ridiculed, ostracized, denounced as imposture, was not preventing the faithful from believing in Rubbi's thaumaturgical power, his healing ability, or his holiness.

<sup>568</sup> ACDF, *S.O. Tituli Librorum*, 1759-1783, tomo 2, fasc. 65. The Congregation, of course, prohibited the further printing of pamphlets “advertising” Rubbi's miracles, as if they were advertising the latest medicaments and *segreti* on the market.

<sup>569</sup> BCAM, *Collezione di autografi e notizie*, 65 R 6-10, 65 R 9; BMC, *Cicogna 230, Miscellanea da P. Antonio Ghezzi di S. Giuliano*, Notizie del prevosto D. Antonio Rubbi del 1772, cc. 215-21.

<sup>570</sup> Jacalyn Duffin, *Medical Miracles. Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38-69; Paolo Parigi, *The Rationalization of Miracles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76-106, 126-155.

### Distance Healings

With Rubbi's fame arrived not only pilgrims but also letters. Hundreds of supplication letters were gathered on a daily basis at the living saint's house. As we have seen, he was petitioned to heal any condition that obstructed or prevented mobility or walking, as well as any other health crisis. The miracle narrative described the extraordinary acts performed by Rubbi. However, saints helped with all sorts of needs and desires, and therefore many other and often ordinary requests arrived at Sorisole. Saving a community from danger was among the most common pleas that villagers sent to their local saints, and Il Santo also received such invocations. The villagers of Pomarolo in the diocese of Trento, for example, wrote a letter in which they asked to be rescued from an epidemic that had infected their mulberry trees during the last five or six years. The epidemic had been grievously injurious to the poorest families, who obtained much of their income from mulberry cultivation. The letter continued, affirming that the villagers' sins were the cause of this calamity. Therefore, they implored Rubbi to intercede for them, deliver them from evil, and in particular to save them from the epidemic.<sup>571</sup> In this case, Rubbi did not bless one or more things to send back to the supplicants, but rather conducted a Mass for the community on an established day and time.

To reach out to people from other villagers, cities, and territories, Rubbi extensively used a method that can be called "a distance blessing" or "a distance healing." This was a practice that contributed enormously to the circulation and the growth of his reputation as a living saint. Pasqua was a woman suffering from a

<sup>571</sup> Surdi, *Memorie*, 72-73 (letter dated 17 August 1772).

respiratory disease which was so severe that the weight of the bed linens aggravated her breathing problems.<sup>572</sup> She had to sleep with a support frame that kept the sheets and blanket off her body. The nuns of the convent of St. Joseph and Fidenzio in Verona decided to accept her into their convent and kept her alive, giving her the only food she could tolerate, mainly goat milk. She could no longer speak due to shortness of breath. After the physician of the convent requested permission from the abbess to examine her, he confirmed that nothing could be done with medical science to cure Pasqua. But exactly one day after the physician declared her incurable, she was miraculously healed. Informed of this event by the nuns, the physician went back to see her and found her completely recovered and in full possession of her voice. Around three o'clock in the afternoon during the day before, Pasqua had asked to be carried into the convent courtyard. She had sat there holding a crux blessed by Rubbi, which the nuns of the convent had requested. She knew at that time Rubbi was conducting blessings in Sorisole, and she fervently prayed and then was able to cry out the *Te Deum*. Thereafter, she felt "strong, reinvigorated, and free from her infirmity."<sup>573</sup> Although there was no personal exchange between Rubbi and Pasqua, she could still benefit from the Mass he was celebrating in Sorisole as a distance healing.<sup>574</sup> People in Verona knew not only the

<sup>572</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 20v-25v (Verona Letter by proto-physician Nicola Bongiovanni, August 15, 1772).

<sup>573</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 2; APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 4v.

<sup>574</sup> A distance healing also occurred in the territory of Padua, when the husband of an ailing woman resorted to Rubbi's blessings after he had explored all other possibilities to cure her. The woman had fallen ill after she gave birth. She refused to get out of her bed, did not talk, barely ate, did not recognize her husband and children, and above all did not want to go to Mass and would not suffer to hear about religious things or sacraments. The man had tried everything from blessings to exorcism. He had consulted various physicians, had made her travel with him, had taken her to the Madonna del Monte in Vicenza, and then had stopped in Thiene in the hills for the healthiness of the air. All of this was to no avail – because the woman was so drained after the journey that on their way back, he had to call a priest because he feared for her life. When they were in Padua, he heard about the living saint who was working miracles and sent a shirt along with a devotional book. They were both blessed by Rubbi. The shirt was worn by the woman, and at 2:00 pm all of their family members and friends gathered around her bed to say three Hail Marys.

times of the Sorisole Masses, but also that a special service was performed for them. Every day at 10:00 pm, in fact, Rubbi would bless from Sorisole those who in the Verona diocese prayed to God and told Him of their needs.<sup>575</sup>

The curate of Garda, Giuseppe Bulgarini, also wrote of his experience.<sup>576</sup> He managed to see “*Il Santo*” in person which, as we have seen, was easier for a cleric than for a lay person. After listening to Bulgarini’s account of his afflictions, and hearing of his continuous abstinence from salami and wine, and of his trial of many medical cures prescribed by physicians, Rubbi gave him his advice. He told Bulgarini to drink wine, eat everything, be cheerful, and to get used to eating raw onions. Then he blessed him with holy water. Bulgarini left with faith and was not even aggravated by the journey. His general condition improved, and he soon felt much better. Although his sight was not restored, he kept following Rubbi’s prescription devotedly. During their meeting, Rubbi had also offered a distance blessing to his parishioners. They arranged the day and the time – selecting the Sunday after the Assumption of Mary, between 12 and 1 pm in the afternoon. This allowed Bulgarini the time to tell his flock about this on the prior Saturday. Everything was also written down in detail by his Capuchin brother, who was in charge of the practical arrangements. Bulgarini reminded the people with a ringing of the bells at 12:00 pm, to give them half an hour to gather in the church. At 12:30 pm, he began the service. Five thousand people gathered for the church service that day. The holy water sent from Sorisole by a friend came in handy.

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The woman who had been restless for months fell into a deep sleep and woke up at 3:00 pm during the following day, completely healed. She felt gay and content, and she could not explain where she had been when she was sleeping. APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 46r-49r. The Madonna del Monte Berico is one of the most famous Marian sanctuaries in Italy. The episode is interesting because it is another example of healing and exorcism through a blessed object, a collective prayer, and the distant but essential participation of Rubbi.

<sup>575</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 25v-26r (Don Bertolini, secretary of the bishop in Verona).

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 26v-28r.

However, not all the clergy were sympathetic concerning this *modus operandi*. The priest Mario Moro of Perteole, in the Patria del Friuli, was enraged. In his unpublished memoirs, Moro expressed his view about distance healing and consequently about the Rubbi affair.<sup>577</sup> A friend had asked his opinion concerning the extraordinary events and this odd practice of distance healing. The parish priest of a church more than one-hundred miles from Sorisole had invited his parishioners to genuflect in order to receive Rubbi's blessings. According to Moro, Rubbi had no authority to bless in such a way, and so the people gathered at the church should not have kneeled to receive his blessing. Moro considered this to be an act of idolatry because according to Urban VIII (and later confirmed by Lambertini) no veneration was supposed to be offered to a man who was not a *beato* or a saint. The planning of the time, of the day, and of the method of this blessing were all utterly disturbing to Moro because this was not customary, either in the past or in the present. How could such a thing occur after the decree of Urban VIII, which had even forced the fathers of the Society of Jesus to eliminate from their churches the image of Ignatio Azovedo (although they had been granted permission to display this image by Pope Gregory XV)?<sup>578</sup> How, in the eighteenth century, could such a public cult to a man who was a nobody be permitted? Indeed, the Church clearly forbade invocations to a saint or a *beato* with private litanies, if that saint or *beato* had not been officially acknowledged by the Church. Moreover,

<sup>577</sup> BMC, *Cicogna 1417/VIII, Varie operette critico morali indeite del rev.do sig.r d. Mattio Moro parroco di Perteole ...*, cc.241-251. The manuscript letter was about a church in a place that was identified only with the initial N.

<sup>578</sup> Inácio de Azevedo (1527-1570) was a Portuguese Jesuits missionary who was attacked, captured and finally massacred along with his companions by the French Huguenot corsair Jacques de Sores while sailing near the Canadian Islands.

Benedict XIV had established that a simple priest could not perform any blessings outside the Mass, unless he first obtained papal permission.<sup>579</sup>

This argument against Rubbi's blessing does not appear in any other secular or religious documents, but it probably was the underlying reason for bishop Redetti's decision to suspend these blessings (this decision will be discussed later). They were, from a legal and institutional point of view, quite problematic. Furthermore, the cult of personality that Moro denounced in the specific context of the blessings was another troublesome issue. Outside the church and along the main street, the market stall merchants were selling a great quantity of Rubbi's portraits for high prices. Concerning these portraits, a Benedictine nun from a convent in Mestre had been in bed for twenty years suffering from a severe physical disability; in fact, the bishop had pardoned her from the morning prayers in the chapel due to her illness. She read about the nun named Svaitzer, who had miraculously recovered thanks to Rubbi's shirt. This nun possessed an image of the living saint, which she promptly applied to her body and was healed.<sup>580</sup> Though Rubbi had never posed for a portrait and never allowed anyone to make one, numerous versions of his image were circulating in Sorisole and also in the major cities of the Republic. Suardi could count at least thirty of them.<sup>581</sup> People desperately sought his portraits, or paintings and statuettes of him, which were sold in the streets, in the public square, and in the local stores.

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 245-248.

<sup>580</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 49v-50v.

<sup>581</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 43.

### Pepper, Onion, Wine, and More Bizarre Remedies

Although the healings that were reported in the summer of 1772 were seen as supernatural occurrences, for fifty years Rubbi had been treating his parishioners and the people of the nearby villages. His simple natural remedies, which were ridiculed by doctors, had cured various types of illnesses – even those that local physicians had considered untreatable.<sup>582</sup> Not only the villagers from the countryside but also the people from the city, against the advice of their physicians, had started resorting to Rubbi for help with their most tenacious illnesses. Rubbi’s remedies were, according some physicians, “sometimes helpful, sometimes completely useless, and sometimes they were the opposite of what the illnesses required.”<sup>583</sup> But, as Suardi pointed out, “who had not experienced how different can be the opinions of physicians?”<sup>584</sup> According to the hagiographer, the fact that people kept turning to the living saint was a proof that the remedies worked. To establish their prerogative to cure and to condemn Rubbi’s abuses of the medical practice, the physicians turned to the Venetian Health Office and made a complaint. However, the Venetian government “perhaps fearing some turmoil” did not support their petition.<sup>585</sup> The “unlikely” remedies which Rubbi was prescribing became a matter of legend, or in some cases, the object of heavy sarcasm. Though the physicians’ petition was ignored (not to say rejected), satirical sonnets appeared that vindicated them and heaped ridicule upon what seemed to be the most appalling of Rubbi’s remedies. Wine, pepper, and onions, together or variously combined, constituted the trinity of the medicaments Rubbi prescribed. Although Rubbi’s hagiographers credited him with the

<sup>582</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 28v-29r.

<sup>583</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 132.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. I have searched in the Venetian archive for this alleged complaint, but did not find it.

possession of some medical knowledge, the miracle narrative did not pay much attention to this. Some of the witnesses conceded that his bizarre remedies were able to heal some cold humors, but most interpreted them as smoke and mirrors to divert attention from his miracles.<sup>586</sup> In sum, both his contemporaries as well as his later hagiographers, whether scorning Rubbi's alleged expertise or minimizing it for the sake of his more appealing thaumaturgical virtues, did not dwell upon or scrutinize this aspect of the living saint's activities.

Wine was the most ubiquitous ingredient that Rubbi prescribed and, and it was the most ridiculed. Physicians and satirists were not alone in suspecting and condemning the use of wine in medicaments. The epileptic son of count Scipione Bosello, for instance, was taken to Rubbi by his physician and was instructed to drink wine and not water. Once his mother heard that, the mother changed the remedy, adding some water in the wine. The son was not healed and kept having seizures, so he was taken to Rubbi again. Rubbi questioned him about his exact medication and then responded that it was a shame his mother believed less than her own son.<sup>587</sup>

By accepting the physicians' accusations about the ineffectiveness of Rubbi's natural cures, some of his acolytes dismissed Rubbi's role as an empiric physician and emphasized instead his thaumaturgical power to transform trivial substances into working remedies. Others credited Rubbi with medical knowledge (without explaining what that exactly meant), but still preferred to interpret his treatments within a hagiographical framework. Though he prescribed various remedies, concoctions, and cataplasms, the

<sup>586</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 26r.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 32v- 33r (Letter by Maghini, vice chancellor of Bergamo to the chancellor of Verona, 25 July, 1772).



agent of healing, they explain, was always and only faith. The transformative power of God's grace acted upon everything Rubbi did and said.

According to Suardi, pilgrims seeking Rubbi's blessings travelled to Sorisole until he died. Moreover, the people of the surrounding villages and neighborhoods persistently preferred his remedies to the physicians' cures. He had gained, argued Suardi, the people's trust because he disapproved many of the physicians' methods – in particular, bloodletting.<sup>588</sup> Bloodletting was administered by physicians but also by barber-surgeons. It could be a dangerous treatment if performed with a lack of anatomical knowledge because arteries might be severed by mistake, and cuts could become infected. Furthermore, bloodletting could worsen the patient's condition as it might drain essential blood, making them more ill. The strong opposition that the villagers displayed in regard to bloodletting may be related to their already precarious physical conditions, which were unlikely to improve after heavy bloodletting. Although the Sorisole parochial archive reveals that no physician was present in the village, physicians must have been practicing their craft in the nearby territories. How otherwise can we explain their alleged complaints about Rubbi? Although it is not clear whether those complaints turned into real accusations brought to the Office of Health in Venice, it appears that deep resentment was aggravating the local physicians.

The territory under Rubbi's supervision as *vicario foraneo* comprised a large area, in which people could have readily experienced or been exposed to physicians' cures. That people resorted to folk healers, wise women, or spiritual healers because physicians were beyond their reach both economically and geographically is now a debunked

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<sup>588</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 181

myth.<sup>589</sup> As Mary Lindemann pointed out, the close temporal proximity of a range of healers – physicians, surgeons, wise women, and priests – characterized the medical situation for Early Modern people.<sup>590</sup> However, local differences should not be completely dismissed. In mountain territories, a shortage of physicians might have been more typical than their easy availability, as in urban environments.

Priests might have been proscribed from practicing medicine, but this did not prevent them from exercising some forms of medical care.<sup>591</sup> As Suardi pointed out, parish priests should have some medical and legal knowledge “to save their flocks from the local wolves”— meaning from physicians and legal practitioners who could be as greedy as they could be incompetent.<sup>592</sup> In the eighteenth century, clergy still provided individual assistance for their parishioners; and during the second half of the century, the topic of priest-doctors was discussed as the most feasible option to extend basic medical

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<sup>589</sup> Lindemann, *Medicine*, 140.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>591</sup> The church ban on the study and practice of medicine was due to concern about clergy practicing medicine for monetary reasons. It had been enacted primarily as a matter of discipline, to restrain the religious from leaving their cloisters and practicing among the laity for mundane reasons. There was also a preoccupation about an activity that could threaten human life, which was compromising a cleric’s sacred position. However, even in canon 18 of the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1218, the prohibition for clergy in religious orders from practicing surgery did not apply to those clergy in minor orders (such as porters, acolytes, exorcists, and lectors) or secular clergy. Although, as mentioned before, the prohibition was reiterated later in the sixteenth century, the presence of clerics in the health system never abated and was in fact encouraged by the simple fact that hospitals, *lazaretti*, and all charitable institutions had been religious enterprises since their very foundations. Moreover, throughout the eighteenth century monasteries remained the main apothecary centers, which provided remedies and *segreti* of all kinds. Giustino Farnedi and Giovanni Spinelli, eds., *Settecento monastico italiano. Atti del I Convegno di studi storici sull’Italia Benedettina* (Cesena, 9-12 settembre 1986) (Badia S. Maria del Monte: Centro Storico Benedettino Italiano, 1990); Stuart Anderson, ed., *Making Medicines: A Brief History of Pharmacy and Pharmaceuticals* (London: Pharmaceutical Press, 2005); Raimondo Villano, *Arte e Storia della Farmacia* (Pavia Selecta: Medica, 2006); Cornelius O’Boyle, *The Art of Medicine: Medical Teaching at the University of Paris, 1250-1400* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 48-50; Piers D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, Wounds and the Medieval Surgeon* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14-16; and Lindemann, *Medicine*, 157-92.

<sup>592</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 8.

assistance to rural areas.<sup>593</sup> The outcome of that debate is less important in this specific context than our recognition that a link between the priesthood and healing persisted (although in different forms and under changed circumstances) into the age of Enlightenment. This association was both advocated and denounced. For some who endorsed the idea of a priest as a physician, it was more a practical matter than anything else because some rural areas suffered a shortage of doctors. For those who cried out their indignation about clerics practicing medicine, the issue at stake was the care of the soul and cures for the body. They argued that both were endangered: the former was neglected, the latter was mistreated. A counter-narrative thus emerged to tear down this aspect of Rubbi's activities. His healings, his personality, and his ministry were scrutinized, and according to his opponents, Rubbi failed to pass the exam. Not only he was no saint; he was also not a good priest and not a proficient healer. To his detractors his relentless attempts to heal people were as arrogant as they were ludicrous.

### A Cantankerous Saint

Among the skeptics, the report written by Count Durante Duranti deserves a section of its own.<sup>594</sup> Duranti went to Sorisole as an observer, to be an eye-witness of the

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<sup>593</sup> Robert Heller, "Priest-doctors as a rural health service in the age of Enlightenment," *Medical History* 20, (1973), 365-66. In the Italian gazettes of the time, the same rationale was applied to agriculture. Priests, as many articles argued, were in a position to educate their parishioners in order to improve farm productivity, promote crop rotation, and teach how to identify and manage pests and how to handle livestock, etc.

<sup>594</sup> Count Duranti (1718-1780) was from a noble family in Brescia. He was an ambitious poet as well as a passionate character. He had an adventurous life, leaving Brescia – his own city – because of some contentious affairs with other members of the nobility there. He travelled in the major cities of the Italian states and lived in Venice until he participated in a duel, which caused him to leave the city to avoid the severe laws against dueling in the Republic. Then, thanks to the interventions of his Venetian friends, he was able to go back. But he had to accept to spend two years in prison rather than being a run-away patrician. After that, he was able to pursue his literary career and was highly acclaimed for his poetical verve and oratory skills. Guido Fagioli Vercellone, "Durante Duranti," *DBI*, vol. 42 (1993), *ad vocem*.

blessings and to write his impressions based on first-hand experience.<sup>595</sup> He gave a detailed account of Rubbi's typical day between private orations, a significant number of Masses, public sermons, blessings, and individual healings. Moreover, Duranti saw the enthusiasm of the crowds as well as the business-like attitude of the people surrounding Rubbi.

Rubbi, emphasized the Count, blessed incessantly because wherever he moved, supplicants were waiting for him. That a man of his age could handle such intense activity and fulfill all of his commitments, according to Duranti, was likely the truest miracle of all. He was astonished by the old priest's stamina. When he walked around the village, the crowd was always pressing in on him. For this reason, the sturdiest of his parishioners were defending him with sticks to keep overzealous devotees away. They had already tried to cut his robe and even his hair.

Although Rubbi was universally known as frugal and not interested in money, the alms and the gifts collected by the clergy surrounding him were considerable. Pilgrimage was without doubt a good business for many of the local lay people as well as the religious men around Rubbi. The more the stories of Rubbi's miracles circulated, the more the revenues grew. This miracle phenomenon soon turned into a thriving enterprise, and Sorisole became a gold mine. But money was not the only disconcerting thing about the impromptu shrine. Scandals and disorders had occurred in handling the correspondence, as well as the faithful. The many letters sent to *Il Santo* were carelessly stored in a room, where they were left unattended. Confidentiality easily could be violated. It happened that someone read one letter and made its content public; this had to

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<sup>595</sup> BMC, Mss. PD 77 C, ff. 112- 120; APSO, vol. II, 31r- 45v.

do with a delicate matter regarding a foreign nun. The fact that the private content of the letters, which were almost like confessions, could be so easily divulged due this negligent attitude was indicative of how things were being handled in Sorisole by the acolytes surrounding Rubbi. According to Durante, their poor behavior and their opportunism were obvious. Rubbi was never left alone. He was constantly watched. Durante observed that only invalids were allowed to approach him, because they, unlike the healthy, would not have been able to discern his imposture. And those few who had the privilege to talk to Rubbi could do it only after making substantial donations to the acolytes.

Thus, to see *Il Santo* in person was not that simple. Moreover, before meeting him, the sick and the faithful were given specific instructions. They were admonished about how faith was essential for their healing. After his blessings, they were all convinced to be better or to get better soon, though both Rubbi and his entourage claimed that the healing effects might not be immediate. Indeed, sometimes a precise time – ten, twenty, or thirty days – was given, within which the supplicants would be healed. Durante saw in this procedure a tricky and deceitful way to manipulate the sick. They would be afraid that they might not heal if they did not put all their faith in Rubbi and his power to work miracles. However, there was an underlying rationale at work within the devotional and liturgical domains. While faith was the necessary element in order to heal, the declaration of faith was *per se* a performative locution, a statement that actively *did* something.<sup>596</sup> Thus, if to express aloud one's faith was a key element of the healing

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<sup>596</sup> More precisely, they are *illocutionary* since they do more than convey information (*locutionary*) or produce results among the participants (*perlocutionary*). J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, first edition 1962 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, reprinted (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98, 123-40, 145-50. Austin's theory of performative language provides a fruitful approach to understand the emphasis on the power of ritual words in religious scenarios. See also Frances Hickson Halm, "Performing the Sacred: Prayers and Hymns," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 237-237; Alessandro Duranti, "Agency in Language," in *A*

process, then to assert successful healing, even before it was actually manifested, was part of the same logic. To assert otherwise – that healing might or would probably occur – would have compromised that fundamental nexus between faith and healing.

Durante noted that Rubbi dismissed and made fun of physicians' treatments, and he also argued that Rubbi's remedies were odd and harmful, such as the lye that he prescribed to drink with other substances like pepper. Moreover, according to Durante, two of the most outstanding healings turned out to be complete deceptions. One of the nuns who was said to have been healed was in the same condition as before, while the condition of a certain Count Arconati had worsened. He noted that many supplicants ultimately regretted having gone to Sorisole because their condition did not improve, and they had to endure the inconveniences and the cost of the journey. False stories were also circulating, such as myths about eminent members of the nobility or of the ecclesiastical hierarchy who allegedly had been *miracolati* (healed). According to Durante, there was a false story circulating that the king of Sardegna had sent a case of items to be blessed. Another claimed that the Bishop of Brescia Molino had regained his eyesight after receiving Rubbi's blessings. Notwithstanding its questionable nature, this latter rumor was so deep-seated that it was impossible to stamp this fable out.

Among all of his criticism, for Durante the most appalling thing was Rubbi's personality. The Count viewed him as a man of contradictions. Nobody could deny that he was living an extremely austere life, and that he was chaste and virtuous. But he was also ill-tempered, brusque, stubborn, and opinionated. Moreover, he was a transgressor

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*Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 451-73. For Austin's theory applied to the Bible, see Jay C. Hogewood, "The speech Act of Confession: Priestly Performative Utterance in Leviticus 16 and Ezra 9-10," in *Seeking the favor of God. The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney Alan Werline (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 69-82.

of the ecclesiastical law that prohibited priests from prescribing remedies. Durante also accused Rubbi of allowing the sale of his portraits before his eyes and under his nose, and accepted too easily that ecclesiastics of higher-rank kneel down in front of him and kiss his hands. By the same token, he did not seem perturbed that everywhere he went; people addressed him as a saint. This was a title that, Rubbi had to know all too well he could not accept without transgressing Church law as well as ignoring the virtue of humility. In his preaching, the living saint exhibited ill-tempered behavior. Before starting his sermons, he typically glared at the congregation; his eyes bulged, and he remained in that state for a few minutes. Then he began a rant that was more an invective than a sermon – yelling, screaming, and threatening those present. In the instance when Durante was present, he found what he said was so incoherent and confusing that he could not understand a word. Afterwards, the Count was told that Rubbi’s speech and rage on that occasion was in response to the crowd’s attempt to force open the door of his house. Nonetheless, Durante reported that that sulky and irritable attitude was the most notable feature of his character. At the end of the Mass, in the Count’s eyes his prolonged blessings did not look like what they were supposed to be, namely the bestowing of grace, but rather like empty theatrical gestures.

Durante went on to report that invalids would gather in the sacristy and wait for him. After having blessed them, Rubbi would say, “Go home, have faith, and you will heal.” After these individual blessings, he secretly talked with some priests in the confessional while the crowd waiting outside still sought his blessings. The Count explains that annoyed by the pressure and the unceasing requests, Rubbi yelled, shouted, and cursed at all those who tried to get his attention. He even threatened the assembled

people with the pole of a canopy. His impatience and irritability – observed Durante – greatly contrasted with the Christian virtues *mansuetudo* and *patientia*.

Durante ended up convinced that the miracles were a farce. He credited the rumor that Rubbi's stature as miracle worker originated from an instance in which someone, knowing how the priest was fond of blessing (or aware of his enthusiasm for blessing), had played a trick on him by presenting two fake invalids who were suddenly healed after receiving Rubbi's blessings. Bystanders had witnessed this, and as a result Rubbi convinced himself he could work miracles. Soon people were spreading stories about the miracle.

For Durante, the man was a fool, perhaps a holy fool, manipulated by the greedy interests of those who fabricated the miracles. Rubbi believed he was able to perform what he could not perform, and at the same time he claimed to be a man of miracles without wanting to be, like the physician despite himself from the play of the same name, *Le Médecin malgré lui* by Molière. The Count's pamphlet circulated widely and became the basis for an unmerciful satire about Rubbi and his miracles. Indeed, Durante provided a rich plot outline, from which the Venetian *auteur à la mode* Antonio Piazza wrote his novella.<sup>597</sup> In the end, he concludes that Rubbi's naivety, the credulity of the people, and the profits from this saintly affair lay at the core of the phenomenon.

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<sup>597</sup> Aldo Maria Morace, *Un romanziere del Settecento. Antonio Piazza* (Pescia: Giuseppe Pontari Editore, 1999).



### A Saint in Spite of Himself

Those who find their hope in miracles often fabricate castles in the air at such heights that their fall cannot be but ruinous and hasty.<sup>598</sup>

In a sense, Piazza with his parody completed Durante's attempt to dissect and demolish this attempt to make Rubbi a saint. Piazza offered a different approach using satire to elaborate on Durante's journalistic piece which claimed to be a critical analysis of the events. As sagacious and hilarious as they may have been, the sonnets circulating about Rubbi's miracles and the gullibility of those who believed in them could not be used to unmask and dissect people's motivations as effectively as an articulated storyline could. While Rubbi and his devotees were ridiculed, Piazza disclosed the intentions of those who had fabricated the whole miracle narrative. The protagonist of the novel was a dervish, who lived on the top of a hill. He was a man who lived in poverty because he gave all he had to the poor. He had a passion for medicine, which he constantly studied without learning anything. His neighbors as well the inhabitants of the valley often called upon him when they were ill. Without paying any fees, they obtained medicine and the services of a doctor. Thus, physicians and apothecaries, deserted by their patients and customers, were bored to death and did not know how to spend their time. Because of his extreme ignorance and despite his good intentions, the dervish killed many after prescribing remedies worse than the maladies. Hearing about this, Mustafa ordered the dervish not to administer any medicines, simple or composed, else he would have him hanged. Nonetheless, the people continued to believe that the dervish was being unjustly persecuted and, "fuelled by their fanatic zeal, dreamt to see him working miracles." That

<sup>598</sup> BNM, C 112C 150 003, Antonio Piazza, *Castelli in Aria, Ovvero Raccolta Galante di Alcuni Fatti su Tale Argomento* (Venice: Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1798), 1-18.

was enough to drive all the cripples, the blind, and the hunchbacked of the province to form a long procession over the hill, to prostrate themselves before the dervish and ask for his grace. He urged them to ask for God's help, as he was just a simple man. Piazza described his ignorance which made him say the most abstruse things, utter nonsense that people mistook for arcane knowledge. For his part, the dervish kept claiming to be a good man who was helping his neighbors – nothing more than that. Yet, this was to no avail because people kept proclaiming him a saint, and all cried out that he performed miracles. Still, they went back home as ill as they had been, their legs as crippled and crooked as before. When some noticed that there had been no miracles, moral explanations about the higher purposes of divine justice were invoked to justify what was only apparently a lack of grace. Thus, their deaths were a blessing to reward the good; suffering in this life was a sign of the afterlife in heaven. As increasing number of pilgrims arrived from outside the realm of Mustafa, accounts of the dervish miracles multiplied and spread. Tavern keepers, coachmen, and ferrymen told and retold the wonders, adding more and more details because more miracles created more business. Those who could not move from their own beds sent a shirt, a handkerchief, or a sock “to be touched by the miraculous rod” of the dervish. Eventually, in order to satisfy all the requests, the good man was forced to appear at established times before the huge number of his devotees who gathered in front of his windows. After he “badly explained a passage of the Koran, he shook his rod, and cut up the air with mysterious signs,” then letting the people go. Those who had things to be touched or had diseases that could not naturally be cured, or who asked for a private meeting had to wait a long time before being admitted to his presence. For everyone his universal remedies were always the same: pepper, onions, and wine.

The fanaticism grew to the point that people considered themselves blessed simply by touching or kissing the dervish's robe or his turban. Some cut a piece from his robe and even tried to cut his hair. To that he responded saying, "Who am I, a mutton, that you want to shear me?" He was of choleric temper, and this did not improve when he started to be besieged by his devotees. He could not get a breath of fresh air without being surrounded; everybody wanted to see, to kiss, and to touch him. He walked with a rod to push his way through the crowd. Those who were slapped, were given a good hiding, or who got kicked believed that they had received a particular grace. And many wrestled to be beaten more than the others. Because even in Turkey there were possessed demoniacs, his reputation grew larger when he performed a hundred exorcisms a day. This was the ultimate proof of his sanctity. Everybody claimed they had seen people healed and demons cast away. But what did they really see? A bunch of crutches left by those scoundrels who were able to walk without them and could go home on their legs, or "a horde of lunatics" who believed they had been set free from demons that never possessed them in the first place. "Amongst human maladies, there are many created by the imagination, and those can be healed using some wisdom over weakness and ignorance." Piazza argues that many were healed of the illnesses they suffered only in their minds. Others benefitted from the positive effects of travelling, including a change of air. But for Piazza more than anything, it was faith that was working on them. The dervish, after constantly hearing he was a saint, convinced himself that he was. The Turks bestowed on him the honors pertaining to his holiness; and if their culture had permitted portraits and copper engravings, these would have been sold in great quantities and in different fashions. The visionaries called those who did not want "to surrender to the

dreams of their altered imagination infidels.”<sup>599</sup> They confused Mohamed’s miracles with those of the dervish, and it seemed that to deny the latter was a consequence of not believing in the former. Piazza tells of a high priest and a physician who reported the miraculous cure of a woman who had been paralyzed for years and had regained the use of her legs. They became the most fervent supporters of the dervish and promoted the frenzy over his wondrous powers. But they would all suffer a fall. This included the priest, who once had a good reputation, and the physicians, who were from a place where people were known to be both very eccentric and unaccountable. Because the dervish had convinced himself of his own holiness, he was even less able to manage his hot temper. When he spoke from the balcony, he flashed a harsh glare at the gathered devotees, as though he wished to kill them with his gaze. He could not suffer the people’s noisy talking. But there could be no silence where hundreds flocked together, congregating in crowds under a torrid sun in August. They were excited to see the dervish and had become exhausted by the journey, the heat, the waiting, and their own diseases. Yet, the dervish could not tolerate the commotion. He threatened them with words of rage, saying that he would not appear anymore, and until he heard complete silence, he would not speak.

His brusque and abrasive manners became proverbial. A young man blind in one eye was so eager to see him and had so much faith that he almost believed he could see with the blind eye even before meeting the dervish. But when this man finally was admitted into his presence, the dervish mistreated him and screamed at him saying that he should not dare to ask to see with both eyes when he already had one to use! And the dervish sent him away. The young man was devastated by this harsh treatment and

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<sup>599</sup> Piazza, *Castelli*, 10.

publicly declared that the dervish was not a saint but an asinine impostor. Hearing this, an outraged believer tried to hit him with a saber. In his attempt to avoid the blow, the disgruntled petitioner, disillusioned by his expectations, ended up under a carriage and also lost his other eye. It was a deserved, divine punishment for talking badly about the saint.

“One day,” commented Piazza sarcastically, it will be of historical interest to consider how it happened among people who claimed to be strong-minded (*spiriti forti*) and who praised themselves for living in such an enlightened century, that an idiot, a coarse and ill-mannered man, a choleric who prescribed pepper, onions, and wine to heal any disease, who sent many people before their time to the meet their maker, was held in such esteem, was so worshipped that he could have had power over a multitude if he only wanted that.”<sup>600</sup> According to Piazza, who was following Durante’s insights about the rise (and the fall) of the living saint, the dervish became a saint despite himself. Echoing the Moliere comedy about a common man who became a physician because people made him such, the priest Rubbi turned into a saint because that was what people expected.

Drawing a parallel between Rubbi and this character in his comedy, Piazza wittily reworked Durante’s report to reveal a clear sequence of events. The physicians’ complaint to the Venetian authorities had constituted a challenge. Therefore, the healer, who was seen as a threat to the medical corporation, did not interrupt his activity, but rather transformed himself into a different and less menacing operator who utilized varied healing traditions that still coexisted alongside modern medicine. If he could not act as a healer in the natural world, according to Piazza, he would then cure by using the supernatural.

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<sup>600</sup> Piazza, *Castelli*, 18.

Thus, when the world of empiric medicine was denied to Rubbi, people opened up for him a way in which he could perform as a healer without antagonizing the medical professionals. The people placed a halo around his head, and he acted accordingly. While Rubbi's phenomenon represented a good story to base a comedy upon, there were larger implications. Those who did not believe in his miracles, or in miracles at all for that matter, had to explain the priest's abrupt success as a miracle-worker by disclosing what they perceived to be his game. For skeptical observers, the sudden and therefore implausible switch from healer to saint, as soon as Rubbi's cures had been chastised, offered further reason to dismiss the phenomenon altogether.

### Miracles and Imagination

At the beginning of time, God talked frequently through angels who made themselves visible. Frequently, there were the miracles when Faith was promulgated. Now, in order to believe or to know what to do, we do not need them. Be content and humbly accept what the sacred books and the many accounts of our Fathers tell us. Do not try God; do not presume anything. Amen.<sup>601</sup>

Do not seek after miracles but rule yourself with the Law of Faith.<sup>602</sup>

According to the bishop of Crema, Marcantonio Lombardi, the three F's – *Fede*, *Fantasia*, and *Fanatismo* ("Faith, Imagination, and Fanaticism") – characterized what was occurring in Sorisole. Those with faith would be healed; those with strong imaginations would feel better; and those who were simply fanatics would go back home, just as sick as before.<sup>603</sup> "Miracles are events occurring against natural laws," stated a popular eighteenth century handbook about religious cults, "through them God manifests

<sup>601</sup> Cesare Calino, *Opere, Tomo secondo, che contiene le Lezioni Sacre e Morali sopra li Primi cinque Capi del Libro Primo de' Re e le Lezioni sopra il Giuoco* (Venice: Gio. Battista Recurti, 1759), 391.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>603</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. I, 12v.

His omnipotence and His truth.”<sup>604</sup> Although they were thought to have occurred frequently during the first era of Christianity when God had to impress the rustic and uneducated people who were not easily swayed with the power of words, miracles were thought not to occur in the age of the Enlightenment. This had become a refrain within eighteenth century prescriptive literature. It was by no means an original statement. Even before the Reformation, skepticism about miracles had become an integral part of Christian theology. During and after the Reformation, this skepticism turned into rejection by Protestant theologians, while for the Catholics it became an issue that had to be addressed through stricter regulations and official interpretation about sainthood and manifestations of the divine. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the debate about miracles concluded with David Hume’s influential text on the subject, *Of Miracles* in 1748. For Hume, a miracle was a violation of the laws of nature: because the laws of probability are against the occurrence of any particular miracle, it is simply unreasonable to believe any report of a miracle.<sup>605</sup> On the Catholic side, Prospero Lambertini’s treatise *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (“On the Beatification of the Servants of God, and the Canonization of the Blessed,” 1734-1738), provided the most elaborate theory of canonization. Lambertini applied a rigorous forensic methodology to

<sup>604</sup> *Dizionario storico de’ culti religiosi stabiliti sopra la terra dall’origine del mondo ...*, trans. Giuseppe Antonio Proposto Cornaro, vol. 7 (Venice: Gio. Antonio Pezzana, 1786), 114.

<sup>605</sup> "Of Miracles" is the title of Section X of David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1748). For a critique of Hume’s philosophical approach, see John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and, for a re-consideration of Hume’s impact on the subject, see Robert J. Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

dispute claims of sainthood and miracles, and emphasized the need to look for natural causes before concluding that cures were miraculous.<sup>606</sup>

In the aftermath of the outburst of miracles in 1772, authors of devotional literature carefully maintained their distance from the attitudes of the religious populace whom they believed were too eagerly looking for visible signs of divine intervention. In the very same year as the extraordinary pilgrimages, an anonymous author tackled the issue of miracles after having been directly inspired by Rubbi's story.<sup>607</sup> The outburst of miracles and the frenzy surrounding them was, at this time, no doubt a matter of deep concern. Both the eager enthusiasm for and the fierce skepticism toward miracles were attitudes to be avoided because the former inclined to superstitious and unruly beliefs and the latter to Protestantism. A middle ground had to be found that would not endanger the theological tenets concerning the Almighty's intervention in nature and human affairs. While religious fervor had to be contained and miracles had to be subjected to scrutiny, their reality as well as their place within theology could not be denied. The extremes – to believe too much or not to believe at all – were viewed as both pernicious and wrong. It was therefore difficult to find an acceptable balance between fanaticism or unregulated beliefs, and complete skepticism. This issue lay at the core of the Catholic discussion revolving around the miracles.

Epistemological skepticism, when pushed to the extreme would ultimately lead to a complete dismissal of the possibility of the invisible to make itself visible. The war over

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<sup>606</sup> Lambertini became Pope Benedict XIV in 1740. Catrien Santing, "Tirami sù: Pope Benedict XIV and the Beatification of the Flying Saint Giuseppe da Copertino," in *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 79.

<sup>607</sup> BNM, Misc. C 20635, *Lettera di risposta di un sacerdote regolare ad una religiosa sua sorella nella quale si dichiarano le maniere più sicure di ben conoscere e distinguere i veri dai falsi miracoli e presentata a Sua Eccellenza la Signora Contessa D.a Clelia Grillo ne' Borromei* (Milan: Nella stamperia di Giuseppe Marelli, 1772).



miracles, argued an anonymous critic, already caused issues affecting public order in Italy as well as in France. These had been so serious that the authorities had to intervene and, through edicts, prohibit the discussion, publishing, or writing about the discovery of any alleged miracles and miracle workers.<sup>608</sup> Such characterizations, as the Church's investigations proved, were the result of misguided devotion.<sup>609</sup> Alleged miracles usually proved to be fake after being subjected to close scrutiny, but people were eager to believe in them; and, as the anonymous writer significantly added, "when I say people, I do not mean the most uneducated, the illiterate, those who can barely lift themselves out of the most basic animal instincts, no; I actually mean many among the believers, those who should be different and should distinguish themselves from the populace and the rustics, who also fall into the most trivial mistakes."<sup>610</sup>

As was mentioned above, in the eighteenth century the guidelines for discerning miraculous healings were offered by *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*, which was extensively quoted by those who engaged with the topic. Lambertini's precepts were the last in a long tradition that, since the Middle Ages, had increasingly developed well-defined rules to sort out the real miracles from the fakes. This treatise was the result of Lambertini's keen interest in (and deep knowledge of) theology, canon law, and medical science. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Bologna was a leading center of a vibrant medical culture and experimentations, and Lambertini was not only particularly

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<sup>608</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 17.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-21

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Despite the recurrent motif that appeared in religious as well as in secular writing of the learned versus the unlearned, no distinctions in regard to status or education could really be made within the body of the devotees. More realistically, virtually everybody was prone to the same sort of mistakes in matters of faith, practices, and beliefs. see more about this topic the last chapter on the sacred heart.

fond of those studies but also promoted them throughout his life, as a cardinal and later as a pope.<sup>611</sup>

By his criteria, illnesses that were miraculously healed had to be classified by medical examination as very difficult or impossible to cure. Because miracles are rare and portentous occurrences, the disease had to be an exceptional condition. When the condition of the ailing person was so bad that there was no medical or natural cure which could improve the patient's health – meaning that only a supernatural intervention would work, at that point if a healing occurred, this could be attributed to a miracle. But when curable and common illnesses such as rheumatism, abdominal pains, joint pains, light eye inflammations, some fevers, and some hysterical or hypochondriac episodes, or stomach pains disappeared after people invoked a saint or received a blessing from a servant of God, that was not a miraculous occurrence. Here, both Lambertini and the author of the anonymous pamphlet clearly referred to the believers' habit of resorting to divine aid anytime they were in need and then claiming miracles had occurred when no such thing had happened. In such cases, either the illness had followed its natural course or a cure had been attained only in their imaginations.

As Fernando Vidal observed, imagination played a crucial role in assessments of miracles from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century. Lambertini took this idea a step further. In his discussion, imagination became a true pathogenic and healing agent – so much so that miracles could be considered “epistemic things.” Imagination, therefore, being “the primary way of confronting the natural with the supernatural,” became a

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<sup>611</sup> Rebecca Messbarger, “Anna Morandi's Wax Self-Portrait with Brain,” in *The Fine Arts, Neurology, and Neuroscience. Neuro-Historical Dimensions*, eds. Stanley Finger et al. (Amsterdam and Oxford: Elsevier, 2013), 75-94.

crucial element in the Early Modern dynamics of science and religion, knowledge and belief. Lambertini was an active participant in transforming the “sciences of the soul” into “sciences of the mind.”<sup>612</sup> As he pointed out, imagination could actually heal certain conditions, by creating a positive state of mind that was ultimately conducive to recovery. Cheerful positive thinking could warm the humors, allowing patients to digest food better and make curative potions more effective; the result was to help the purging of vicious humors that were unbalancing the body. Physicians were aware of such potent powers of the mind and claimed that imagination was main reason for the success of impostors, quacks, and charlatans who sold *secreti* that were useless and possessed no concrete healing properties.<sup>613</sup>

If imagination played a huge role in people’s perceptions of their wellbeing, the positive benefits of travelling also had some part in it. Pilgrims who felt an overall improvement in their health mistook this for a miracle. The fact that a change of air and physical exercise improved languid states and circulation was not only common lore but also a precept of one of the leading eighteenth-century medical trends, that is, the neo-Hippocratic revival of environmental medicine.<sup>614</sup> According to physicians, travelling

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<sup>612</sup> Fernando Vidal, “The Imagination and Miracles as Epistemic Things,” *Knowledge and Belief Research Projects* (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2006). Available online at <http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/imaginationAndMiracles>; Messbarger, *Anna Morandi*, 77. For the development of the discipline of psychology from its appearance in the late sixteenth century to its redefinition at the end of the seventeenth, and its emergence as an institutionalized field in the eighteenth century, see, Fernando Vidal, *The Sciences of the Soul. The Early Modern Origins of Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Christian theology had long established that Nature itself could exert great influences on human bodies. Saint Thomas argued that imagination could cause infirmities as well as healings; see in particular 86-87.

<sup>613</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 92-93.

<sup>614</sup> Vladimir Janković, *Confronting the Climate. British Airs and the making of the Environmental Medicine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jonathan Andrews, “History of Medicine: Health, Medicine and Disease in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 4 (2011): 503-15.

would have immediately generated color in one's cheeks, tone, and firmness of the muscles, and energy for the mind.<sup>615</sup>

Physicians had been employed in canonization trials throughout the seventeenth century; their testimony had been considered useful, but not indispensable.<sup>616</sup> Lambertini made their opinions a necessary part of the process and also redefined their participation, arguing that more important than the opinions of the physicians who took care of patients were the opinions of those doctors who the Congregation of Rites would appoint to examine the cases in question. The former, in fact, could easily fall into deception and believe that the illness was more serious than it was.<sup>617</sup> Another necessary precondition to properly identify a miracle was that the illness had to have reached its most acute stage, so that it could not get any worse. Moreover, the patient must have undergone all the natural treatments possible before resorting to a divine cure. In regard to this, Lambertini was quite specific and required that all treatments which a patient underwent had to be described in considerable detail and with precision by the attending physicians.

Ambiguous or vague cures were not a valid indication for establishing miracles healings.

Another important aspect to take into account was timing. Lambertini excluded from miracles those healings that occurred after days (usually nine) of continual prayers to God and the saints. Those were mere graces. The importance of a complete recovery

<sup>615</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 100. Also see Giovanni Battista Borsieri, *Instituzioni di medicina pratica*, vol. 3 (Naples: Libreria Tipografica Simoniana, 1841), 147; and James Johnson, *Change of Air, Or the Diary of a Philosopher in Pursuit of Health and Recreation* (London: G. Hayden, 1831), 30.

<sup>616</sup> Gianna Pomata, "Malpighi and the Holy Body: Medical Experts and Miraculous Evidence in Seventeenth-Century Italy," in *Spaces Objects and Identities in Early Modern Italian Medicine*, eds. Sandra Cavallo and David Gentilcore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 102.

<sup>617</sup> This statement suggests (as some historians have already noticed) that physicians sometimes placed themselves in positions of direct antagonism with miracle workers, or denied the miracles that clergy proclaimed. But as often as not, they confirmed the supernatural intervention. When they did, they did not always act according to their personal beliefs or convictions, but instead occasionally delivered what was a convenient response to account for their inability to find a cure for their patients.

from the disease was also crucial. The healing therefore had to be immediate and perfect.<sup>618</sup> The *miracolato* in an instant must leave the sufferer free from any disease and also the collateral consequences of that disease, such lethargy, weakness, lack of appetite, or other debilitating conditions that usually occurred during convalescence.<sup>619</sup> Those who had been granted a miracle had to revert to a sort of pristine state of health; they ought to be vigorous and strong, as before the illness. Miracles do not admit abatement. By the same token, this renewed state of health must continue permanently. If the sick person returned to the same previous condition, this meant that no miracle had occurred in the first place. As the famous physician Paolo Zacchia pointed out, often the sick were healed as soon as relics were applied but experienced a relapse shortly after.<sup>620</sup> This was indeed a major issue because, as it has been seen in Rubbi's miracle narrative, some of his healings were immediate, but most were not. They occurred after the blessed went back home and prayed to the Virgin Mary. Rubbi in fact regularly asked the sick to pray to her for intercession, because he was a fervent devotee of Mary. This fact alone would have excluded most of Rubbi's miracles from fitting the prerequisites that the canonization law required.

The "servant of God" who inspired the pamphlet, remained unnamed in the anonymous text, *Lettera di riposte* – likely, and prudently, to avoid the generation of unwanted further promotion of this cult. However, after reviewing Lambertini's general rules to discern true from fake miracles, the author commented that some more specific

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<sup>618</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 52.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68. Paolo Zacchia (1584-1659) was a *Protomedico* and became a physician for Pope Innocenzo X. He was a celebrity in his own time. Zacchia discussed the case for medical distinctions between different types of mentally deficient people, and in so doing he "laid down new considerations for the courts, and showed the importance of the law's needs to the development of medical interpretation of mental illness." See Katherine D. Watson, *Forensic Medicine in Western Society. A History* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 77.

inquiries about the unnamed “servant of God” at the end of the pamphlet reechoed the attacks against Rubbi’s real holiness. The “living saint’s” life should conform to the long-established model of sanctity before his supporters surrendered to their blind enthusiasm. Was he observing the laws – natural, divine, or human? Was he disobedient to his superiors? Was vanity or self-interest inspiring his actions? Was he engaging with the believers in strange and preposterous ways? Was he impatient? Did he have a quick-temper?<sup>621</sup> These questions, which clearly referred to Rubbi’s methods and personality, had to remain unanswered because to address them, an official investigation after Rubbi’s death would have to be started. Nonetheless, they re-asserted the necessity to closely examine the would-be saint himself and not only his alleged miracles.

This was a practical way to call for prudence. To postpone any judgment until the Church could consider the matter would also quiet the raging controversy over this outburst of popular devotion. The Congregation of Rites had to become very cautious in evaluating alleged miracles to defuse assertions by enemies of the Church. But their concern over becoming the subjects of derision and mockery due to the criticism of enlightened Protestant reformers was not the whole problem.<sup>622</sup> Overly absolute skepticism had its downsides too. To maintain in the eighteenth century that miracles had entirely ceased would immediately trigger a defense of miracles by even such persons as the anonymous author who was unconvinced about Rubbi’s thaumaturgical powers and holiness. Rubbi’s miracles might be under attack, but to attack miracles altogether was indeed another story. Those who pursued a Catholicism that was to be stripped of any exterior paraphernalia of piety or tangible manifestations of the sacred were endangering

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<sup>621</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 97-99.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

people's devotion. These skeptics would shake the pillar of religion to its base, imperil the evidence of revelation, and ultimately move toward deism.<sup>623</sup>

### **Some Other Concerns, the Unspoken License, and a Doubtful Bishop**

During the time of the mass pilgrimages, economic damages deriving from the local villagers' abandonment of their normal activities were also a concern. Trade and agricultural work were dangerously neglected.<sup>624</sup> While the pilgrimage in the short run was profitable for the villagers, who literally transformed their households into taverns and hostels, in the long run it could have turned into a material disaster.<sup>625</sup> While undertaking their reform of saints' feasts, the authorities pointed out the economic losses that the many holidays had caused in the Italian economy. If on the one hand the local festivals did not properly celebrate saints and were moreover from the reformers' point of view an unacceptable "desecration," they were also held responsible for the national economic malaise. In this vein, the underlying argument against the crowds that were swarming around shrines was that any activities which were detrimental to the wellbeing of private people or to the public should be prohibited. In France, this was the case, and pilgrimages had been long prohibited. One commentator suggested that the road to Rubbi's shrine should have been blocked, in order to restrict the passage of that many people.<sup>626</sup> Instead, the road to Sorisole had been enlarged.

<sup>623</sup> See more on this topic below, p. 319.

<sup>624</sup> BMC, Mss. PD 77 C, c. 129. The economic losses were an aspect that was also emphasized by Count Durante.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> *Lettera di risposta*, 102. The fact that the authorities did not intervene to stop the phenomenon was puzzling, according the author of this text.

Since the sixteenth century, pilgrimages had been monitored and were increasingly discouraged by the secular authorities. By the eighteenth century, pilgrimages had seriously declined in popularity. They became a rarer phenomenon which mostly occurred on a local level, where pre-existing shrines continued to attract people from the nearby territories. For reasons of public order as well as for economic concerns, some European rulers went so far as to prohibit pilgrimages altogether. Interestingly, in 1772 – during the heyday of Rubbi’s blessings, the emperor of Austria, Joseph II, forbade any pilgrimage outside the borders of the Empire.<sup>627</sup>

As the Republic of Venice had seen, in the past gatherings of lesser size had generated great alarm. For example, in the middle of the seventeenth century the preaching of Segneri in the territory of the Republic was simply prohibited due to the crowds he attracted. The fact that in 1772 thousands of pilgrims passed through Venetian territory without soliciting a prompt reaction from Venetian authorities left observers perplexed. Moreover, those Venetian patricians who fully embraced the principles of the Enlightenment did not conceal their annoyance or their condescension during such occurrences.<sup>628</sup> However, the extent of this attitude is difficult to determine. How many

<sup>627</sup> See Paola Vismara Chiappa, “Il volto religioso di Milano nel primo Settecento,” in *Politica, vita religiosa, carità: Milano nel primo Settecento*, eds. Marco Bona, Castellotti Edoardo Bressan, and Paola Vismara Chiappa (Milan: Edizioni Universitarie Jaca Book, 1997), 143-149; and Adonella Cedarmas, *Per la cruna del mondo: Carlo Camucio e Moisé Vita Cafsuto, due pellegrini nella Terra Santa del Settecento* (Udine: Franco Angeli, 2009), 155-60.

<sup>628</sup> Caterina was exchanging his views on Rubbi with a friend, the intellectual and writer Gasparo Gozzi, who agreed with her caustic comments about Rubbi and his foolish followers. As an example, she repeatedly mentioned her own confessor, whom she disparagingly called “the exorcist.” It was not a term of endearment. With that word, as her biographer pointed out, she used to refer to those ignorant, greedy, and superstitious priests who were common in the countryside. Gasparo Gozzi (1713-1786), brother of the playwright Carlo Gozzi, was the founder of the *Gazzetta Veneta* and *L'Osservatore Veneto*, which were supposed to be the Venetian equivalents of the much more famous and successful *English Spectator*. He held some important offices in the Republic, as he was a censor and overseer of printing in Venice. Castelnuovo, *Una dama*, 641-42; Gasparo Gozzi, *Opere del conte Gasparo Gozzi. Lettere Familiari* (Bergamo: Presso Tommaso Fantozzi, 1826), 124; and Gasparo Gozzi, “*Col più devoto ossequio*”:



who served in politics shared the ideas of the outspoken Caterina Dolfin and her husband, the powerful Andrea Tron?<sup>629</sup> Dolfin indeed manifested disbelief and mocked Rubbi and his followers. At the same time, he expressed some discomfort about allowing a multitude to cross the Venetian territory undisturbed.<sup>630</sup> Nonetheless, while a recent study has shown that skepticism ran deep among the Venetian aristocracy in the eighteenth century, traditional beliefs were still maintained by many aristocrats.<sup>631</sup> Did the Venetian authorities really permit these critiques of miracles without intervening at all? Actually, the passivity of the institution was only apparent. Venice was monitoring the events, and the authorities were continuously in contact with the governor of Bergamo. On September 1772, the bishop prohibited Rubbi's blessings. By October 1772, as an anonymous pamphlet noted, the Rubbi craze was over. It had been a fad, an outburst of religious fervor which lasted only a few months, a fire that had already consumed itself.<sup>632</sup> This was the way the contemporaries and later local historians saw the event. But the sources also offer a slightly different explanation, which invites a new interpretation. The Republic was not simply ignoring the issue, in the hope that such events would stop as fast as they began. Certainly Rubbi became visibly exhausted by the

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*interventi sull'editoria, 1762-1780*, eds., Mario Infelise and Fabio Soldini (Padua: Marsilio 2013), 115. See also Domenico Proietti, "Gasparo Gozzi," in *DBI*, vol. 58 (2002), *ad vocem*.

<sup>629</sup> Andrea Tron was one of the most aggressive Venetian reformers. For a recent analysis of female participation in eighteenth century Venetian political and cultural life and the role of Caterina Dolfin in shaping that cultural milieu, see "Women and Cultural Institutions," in *Italy's Eighteenth Century. Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, eds. Paula Findlen, Wendy Vassylg, and Catherine Sama (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 101-73; Elisabetta Graziosi, "Revisiting Arcadia: Women and Academies in Eighteenth-Century Italy," 103-24; and Catherine M. Sama, "'On the Canvas and on the Page': Women Shaping Culture in Venice," 125-50.

<sup>630</sup> Castelnuovo, *Una dama*, 641.

<sup>631</sup> Federico Barbierato, *Politici e Ateisti: Percorsi della Miscredenza a Venezia fra Sei e Settecento* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2006); Flaminio Cornaro, *Notizie Storiche delle Chiese e Monasteri di Venezia, e di Torcello...* (Padua Appresso Giovanni Manfrè, 1758); Anselmo Costadoni, *Memorie della Vita di Flaminio Cornaro* (Bassano: Stamperia Remondini, 1780).

<sup>632</sup> BNM, Misc. C 20635, *Saggio di riflessioni* (Como: Ottavio Staurenchi, 1772), 1.

intense activities of the last months, but this did not prevent the secular as religious authorities from intervening.

Economic as well public order issues were certainly at stake. But beyond these matters, Rubbi was also increasingly accused of disobedience toward the bishop. His opponents claimed that he was blessing without the bishop's permission. While the large-scale, extensive, and prolonged blessings that Rubbi was performing were unprecedented and, as the priest Mario Moro argued, were not part of the clergy's duties, the only license that the bishop could actually issue was the license to exorcise. However, as we have seen, exorcism was not the term used for Rubbi's activity. There was therefore a problematical, as well as unsolved, juxtaposition between exorcism and blessings in Rubbi's methods, which contemporaries did not discuss. As was argued earlier, Rubbi's blessings were a form of public exorcism. Thus, strictly speaking, he was operating outside the limits of an episcopal permit. Neither public exorcism nor extensive blessings were prescribed in the liturgy.<sup>633</sup> But regardless of his clerical authority concerning exorcisms, in such exceptional circumstances, the problem of disobedience was a card that his opponents could play simply because of the bishop's ambiguous stance. Did Redetti authorize Rubbi's blessings or not? The answer to this question is not a clear-cut. Rubbi had been previously licensed as an exorcist by Bishop Pietro Priuli. Indeed, he had been exorcising for almost fifty years.<sup>634</sup> Although not formally authorized by Bishop Antonio Redetti, the license was implicitly renewed because, according to Rubbi himself, the Bishop had often requested his services as an exorcist in the past. Thus, on the one

<sup>633</sup> As a matter of fact, after the bishop requested that he not bless anymore, Rubbi restricted his activities to the ordinary blessings performed at the end of the Mass. This was a great limitation on Rubbi's performances, but nonetheless Rubbi could still continue to bless – though not by means of those grand scale blessings that had attracted thousands of pilgrims. APSO, *Lettere*, vol. III, 27r-27v.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, 30v.

hand the Bishop tacitly approved his activities, while on the other hand he avoided taking a stand concerning the more recent mass exorcisms and the healings. The Vicar General Giuseppe Rovetta was Rubbi's strongest supporter, and his enthusiasm was at odds with the Bishop's cold reaction to Rubbi's blessings, miracles, and widespread fame.<sup>635</sup> Yet, he also was undecided about what to do. Caught between the flurry of miracles, the religious enthusiasm, and the growing criticisms, he was temporizing.

Finally, after a meeting with the *podestà* of Bergamo, the Inquisitor, and the Venetian patriarch Giovanni Bragadin, Redetti told his vicar general to dissuade Rubbi from continuing his blessings in order to dispel the criticisms that his performances were generating.<sup>636</sup> Rovetta wrote to Rubbi as a friend, anticipating that the blessings might have to come to an end very soon, because they were causing some disorder. His letter did not surprise Rubbi. There was obvious ambivalence within the Bishop's entourage, and Rubbi knew that the Bishop was not entirely comfortable with the scale of his blessings. He wrote that he had tried to diminish or stop the blessings, but he was always dissuaded from that aim, especially by certain notables. Furthermore, the only excuse he could offer to the people seeking his help was that the fatigue and the inconveniences of his intense daily performances had become too much of a burden for him to bear. That excuse, it seems, was not enough of a reason for Rubbi to stop delivering his blessings from the pulpit. Rubbi thereby simply and craftily maneuvered around an indirect but very clear message. He wrote that he would be delighted to follow the Bishop's instructions, whatever these were. To any observer, his obedience (if that was what was at stake), ought to have been clear. After all, the Bishop had used an intermediary and

<sup>635</sup> The vicar general is the highest official of the diocese after the bishop. He is legitimately deputed to exercise jurisdiction in the name of the bishop.

<sup>636</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. III, 4r, August 4, 1772.

was himself ambivalent in his own opinion. Indeed, the Bishop's reaction was revealing because, according to Rovetta, his words were "*for now*, I do not want to get involved with this matter."<sup>637</sup> Thereafter, Rubbi continued his blessings undisturbed. His reputation and fame had grown, and everyday thousands of pilgrims flocked to Sorisole; they were not going to be easily persuaded to leave without a blessing. However, the opposing murmurs did not fade. Rubbi's alleged disobedience toward the Bishop was too good an opportunity to waste. It was an additional reason to discredit his activities and a weapon his opponents could use against him.

Distraught due to the mounting criticism and lack of the Bishop's explicit support, Rubbi wrote a letter to Redetti.<sup>638</sup> Many, he argued, were those seeking his help to heal their bodies as well as their souls. Blessings and hearing confessions kept him busy day and night. It was a never-ending, strenuous task. In return, he was receiving slanderous accusations about his operating whimsically, without authority, and against the Bishop's will. He had to remind Redetti that the previous Bishop Priuli had asked and almost imposed upon him the work of blessing more frequently (here, again, the ambiguity of the terminology leaps also from Rubbi's letter, in which he employed interchangeably the word *bless* with the word *exorcise*). After Priuli, the Cardinal Leonardo Porzia, all the vicars general, and the canons reiterated this plea. Also, Rubbi argued, his authority as an exorcist of the diocese was without time limit. Redetti himself (the current bishop), had sent him people to exorcise and bless. He had been asked by the vicars to do everything in his capacity as an exorcist without "bothering the Bishop."<sup>639</sup> The current vicar told him it was his calling to bless all those who came to him. When he had asked for advice

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 6r.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., 5v-6v, August 25, 1772.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., 8r.

from the secular and religious authorities in Bergamo, they unanimously told him he should not fail to satisfy the people because of the Bishop's silence. Many went through the inconvenience of a journey to be blessed, said Rubbi. With these assertions, *Il Santo* was indirectly urging the Bishop to take a less ambivalent position in order to dispel the accusations against him.

Finally, the Bishop decided to tackle the issue head-on and asked for a private meeting with Rubbi. Rubbi visited the Bishop, who was on vacation at Gorle, and they met behind closed doors on August 27. The conversation between the two men remained secret, but the outcome was a proscription against blessing. Redetti made his decision reluctantly. He admitted that he did not want to get involved in the affair, but pulled in two directions, he sided with those who wanted the pilgrimages and Rubbi's activities to end.

When the bishop finally decided to forbid Rubbi's blessings, Rovetta, who considered the living saint to be his protégé, resigned.<sup>640</sup> The split between the Bishop and his own vicar could not be more dramatic. The vicar had been his alter ego for sixteenth years. Because of the Bishop's old age and poor health, the affairs of the diocese had been mostly in Rovetta's hands. His abrupt departure left a vacuum difficult to fill and the Patriarch of Venice ultimately intervened, and mediated between the two with the result that Rovetta retook his position.<sup>641</sup> While the pilgrimages did not come to an end, they did slow down but not so much because of the Episcopal prohibition (which was revoked a short time later), but because of the winter season that was making travel conditions harder to manage, especially through the mountains. Nevertheless, chests full

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 10r.

<sup>641</sup> Suardi, *Memorie*, 172.

of things to be blessed were still sent; local painters remained as busy as ever creating Rubbi's portraits for those devotees who did not want to go back home without his image, and people kept gathering in Sorisole to ask for blessings, despite the winter.<sup>642</sup> Everywhere in the Republic and in Venice too, the religious goods stores were selling medals, statues, and sketches representing the living saint. The pilgrimages did not stop – they just slowed down, and this was Rubbi's blessing gradually decreased in scale and did not attract as much attention thereafter as before, they did not completely fade away. Although the massive pilgrimage came to an end, people kept seeking Rubbi's cures as long as he was able to offer them. We should not forget that the flurry of Rubbi's healings coincided with the beginning of his physical decline.

### **Epilogue**

Don Antonio Rubbi emerged on the eighteenth century religious scene as the most unlikely of would-be saints to receive official sanction, and his daily miracles contradicted the already established principle that the age of miracle was over. His activity as a healer went against the prerogatives of the professional physicians, and his exorcisms defied the latest debates about the reduced role of the devil in human life. In sum, Rubbi was completely at odds with the eighteenth century religious and secular attempts to narrow the presence of the sacred in everyday practices. However, for the people he cured and those who sought his blessings, Rubbi had it all. He offered many options which eighteenth century villagers and city dwellers sought in order to address their maladies. If for those in the Church who urged a regulated devotion, Rubbi dramatically and embarrassingly represented a Catholicism that was entwined with magic,

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 174-75.

superstition, and idolatry, for his devotees Rubbi's multiple roles were unproblematic and highly cherished. Moreover, the people's enthusiasm for Rubbi aside, clerics of all orders and ranks often proved to be as fervent as the pilgrims were. Without them, stories of the living saint's performances would not have extended throughout and beyond the Italian borders nor would he have reached such a level of fame. Thus, while the variously enlightened (lay as well as religious) observers used Rubbi's activities as litmus paper to test the inadequacy of the authorities' desired religious reforms, the members of the Church who did not align themselves with such relentless endeavors to eradicate popular devotions saw the living saint as a bastion against some of the most irreligious opponents of all the ages, that is the *spiriti forti* (freethinkers) of the age. Rubbi proved that God was rejecting the Enlightenment in all its disturbing facets. His miracles were the Almighty's grace bestowed upon the world, whose people were progressively denying His presence. Indeed, the prodigious events that marked the summer of 1772 even reconverted some Protestants to Catholicism. As in the periods of the most violent Catholic and Protestant controversies, the miracle accounts were deployed against the disbelievers.<sup>643</sup> During these years, many perceived the spread of a new sort of heretic pestilence, and the so-called *spiriti forti* represented the last frontier of heresy. However, as Rota put it, "miracles were stronger than the *spiriti forti*," and "the horde of materialists, deists, pantheists, naturalists that preceded and followed Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvetius" were going to surrender to what he defined as "a new kind of revelation."<sup>644</sup>

<sup>643</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. III, 36v.

<sup>644</sup> APSO, *Lettere*, vol. II, 4v. Miracles had always served the purpose of reinvigorating Christianity in times of religious turmoil and uncertainty. But during the Enlightenment, Catholicism was faced with a different sort of religious dissension, indifference, and disaffection. Against this real or perceived threat, the Church, despite internal opposing voices, took the opportunity to support devotional enthusiasm in two other instances. The first was the case of Giuseppe da Cupertino (1603-1663), who was beatified in 1753 and canonized in 1763. The second was in the case of Benedetto Giuseppe Labre (1748-1783), who was

According to him, the Catholic religion was manifesting itself through Rubbi's prodigious virtues, and with such a statement he opposed not simply the ungodly *spiriti forti* but also those within the Church who were claiming that the age of miracles was long over.<sup>645</sup> Everybody could touch with their own hands an embodiment of the idea that "nothing happens by chance," which was emphasized by the miracle narrative.<sup>646</sup> The wish that the *spiriti forti* could be discredited and their numbers reduced was a rhetorical device to reassert the necessity of keeping the miraculous alive.

The propaganda used to endorse Rubbi's contemporary veneration and (future) canonization expressed a sincere concern about what was perceived to be the widespread effects of Enlightenment ideas. But as important as it was, this propaganda cannot account for the magnitude of Rubbi's public recognition or the people's frenzied craving for his blessings and his healings. The Venetian Senate in 1772 had launched its own crusade against the saints who were considered capable of distracting people from work and from proper devotion. Yet, through an ironic twist of fate, it was in that very same year that an elderly priest working miracles was publicly acclaimed a saint – a popular act that defied all the premises that lay at the core of the religious reform. While striving to disenchant the world, the reformers had to face the resilience of the devout and also risk creating a depiction of God in which He was no longer visible in the world.

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canonized shortly after his death (therefore violating the standard procedure). Marina Caffiero, "Santità e controrivoluzione: il caso di Benedetto Giuseppe Labre," in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica: rivista del Dipartimento di studi storici dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea dell'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma*, no. 2 (1989): 83-103; and by the same author, *La Politica*, 16-23, 41-45. See also Santing, *Tirami sù*, 97-99.

<sup>645</sup> APSO, vol. II, 5r.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid. The Italian expression echoes a passage from the *Divina Commedia* and refers to Democrito "che 'l mondo a caso pone," meaning that he "ascribes the world to chance." This expresses a condemnation of the anti-teleological Democritean and Epicurean system. Dante poetically and efficaciously condensed what became a famous Catholic *adagio*, but the rejection of this philosophy was formulated by patristic authors. See Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 1999), 379-380; and Peter Lopston, *Reality. Fundamental Topics in Metaphysics* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 37-39.



Indeed tangible manifestations of the divine are the evidence of a revealed religion. As philosopher Richard Swinburne nicely put it, with miracles “God put a signature on things.”<sup>647</sup> Both the devout who sought miraculous healings and the clerics who believed that God was speaking through Rubbi’s miracles placed no limits on supernatural events or further revelations. It does not matter if their understandings of these prodigious events were as diverse as the participants or bystanders. From those who *experienced* miraculous healings through faith to those who *interpreted* them in a prophetic way, to be in the presence of the living saint Rubbi was to be *in the presence* of the sacred. Notwithstanding the prescriptive literature and the secular and religious interventions on matters of devotion, eighteenth century believers were inclined to see the holy in their everyday lives. What a scholar has recently called “the waning of the Enlightenment” started in the midst of the Enlightenment itself.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> This expression was stated in a recent interview with Richard Swinburne, entitled “Arguing God from Miracles & Revelations?” <http://www.closetotruth.com/video-profile/Arguing-God-from-Miracles-Revelations-Richard-Swinburne-/1021>. See also Richard Swinburne, *Revelation. From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-97.

<sup>648</sup> Robert E. Rodes, Jr., “The Waning of the Enlightenment,” *Historically Speaking* 11, no. 2 (April 2010): 30-32. I borrow this expression from the author, although he used it in a completely different context, in which he analyzed the contemporary dysfunctions of institutions and social systems as manifestations of the decay of Enlightenment principles.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A New Image for a New Devotion: The Fleishy Heart of Jesus

We have to consider that the unlearned, who are not educated enough in matters of dogma, may conceive or nurture improper devotion or gross superstition towards them, a sort of muscovite devotion, that is to say, which indulges too much on the materiality of images without elevating, as it should, thoughts and affection to the Original existing in Heaven. And if they can inspire or develop beliefs and practices not very desirable, even more they will give reasons to the enemies of our religion to cry out. They [people from other states] already accuse us of idolatry all day long, compelling wise Catholics to justify the doctrine of the Church on images, to excuse the many abuses, to acknowledge ignorance or little decency. I have seen some French erudites come to Italy and experience pain just looking at our saints' statues, exposed for public veneration on the altars and carried in processions. They were even more baffled when they heard conversations addressed to the figure of the Dead Christ and saw the true care the faithful took towards it, as if that plaster was the true corpse of the Savior.<sup>649</sup>

We cannot deny— because experience teaches this to us – that the unlearned cannot conceive speculative truths. Books are simply not made for them. To be moved, they need material objects. They need to see, they need to hear. Holy images, called by Saint Gregory *The Book of the Ignorant People*, have been in use since the first centuries of the Church and are considered useful. They excite devotion in people, as saints' graves, their holy relics, and other pious and devout things do. Although, as I said, people of better understanding do not need such material aids to elevate their thoughts to God, often even their devotion is moved, or more moved, by these external objects. Assisting in the sacred offices of the Church, for instance, when they are executed with proper gravitas and devotion, or visiting those shrines where the authentic holy bones of the saints are kept, may enhance our worship.<sup>650</sup>

Ludovico Antonio Muratori

This chapter examines the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its contested beginnings. The Sacred Heart cult also provides a focus for the analysis of Catholic uses

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<sup>649</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, "Dalle lettere al Segneri," in *Ludovico Antonio Muratori. Opere*, eds. Giorgio Falco, Fiorenzo Forti (Naples: Liguori, 1996), 356. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)

<sup>650</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata divozione de' cristiani* (Trento: Giambattista Parone, 1748), 299.

of imagery and representations of the sacred during the Enlightenment. The cult, which is one of the most widespread devotions in the modern Church, was the subject of fierce debate in the second half of the eighteenth century. Both in its representations and in its theological significance, the Sacred Heart was highly controversial.<sup>651</sup> As soon as the devotion started to spread and a variety of images of the Sacred Heart circulated, two opposing factions vigorously clashed. On one side, linked to the Jansenists, were those who attacked the devotion, while on the other side were those who sympathized with the Jesuits, and who supported the devotion. The Italian scholars Mario Rosa and Daniele Menozzi analyzed developments in the debate about the devotion of the Sacred Heart from a political perspective.<sup>652</sup> Rosa in particular associated the Sacred Heart with the combined efforts of the papacy and the Jesuits to re-launch a Counter-Reformation in the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>653</sup>

In this chapter, the Sacred Heart will serve as a focus for a discussion of the dynamics of Catholic uses of imagery. An episode that took place in Bergamo reveals what took place during the making (and the attempted unmaking) of this devotion. The image of the incarnate divine heart generated a significant discussion about sacred

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<sup>651</sup> The bibliography on the Sacred Heart is immense; I will refer here to the most comprehensive studies and later to additional works on specific themes. See Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione* (Roma: Viella, 2001); David Morgan, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Visual Evolution of a Devotion* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); and Jon L. Seydl, "The Sacred Heart of Jesus: Art and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Italy" (Ph.D diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

<sup>652</sup> See Menozzi, *Sacro cuore*; Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso, politica della ragione e religione del cuore* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1999).

<sup>653</sup> For France, the topic was investigated in a thorough study by Jonas Raymond, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2000); and also Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 230-36. Jonas argued that the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus played a central role in shaping the deeply conservative vision of the nation that emerged during the religious battles of the French Revolution. The heart became a key symbol for nineteenth-century royalist politics. Catholic elites and French clerics repeatedly invoked the salvation narrative conveyed by the heart and called for a renewed partnership between king and God to recreate the nation.

representations that has been largely overlooked in modern historiography.<sup>654</sup> Both theologians and art historians have failed to fully recognize how the representations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in this period represented a watershed in the way Christ has been depicted since the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>655</sup> The Sacred Heart is in fact the final depiction that Christian artists have produced to date for the faithful to focus upon while worshipping Jesus. Moreover and most importantly, this chapter emphasizes the reasons for this Christological shift in devotional practices and imagery at that particular time.

### **The Unsettling Power of Images: A Shaky Theology?**

The quotes that open this chapter highlight Ludovico Antonio Muratori's ideas and concerns about the use, or rather the abuse, of images in eighteenth-century popular devotion. The first passage comes from a letter to Father Segneri, a well-known missionary with whom Muratori corresponded intensively between 1712 and 1713. The second is from one of Muratori's most famous essays, in which he urged the Church to regulate devotion. The latter was published many years later, in 1747. More than thirty years separate the two works. If we neglect the significant time interval between these writings and the different circumstances that generated them, we might be inclined to

<sup>654</sup> Art historian Jon L. Seydl constitutes an important exception; his contributions revolve around the developments in the devotion of the Sacred Heart. Seydl's study focuses on the development of the devotion in Rome, Emilia Romagna, and Portugal. While investigating the diffusion of popular prints and commissioned paintings, mostly inspired by Batoni's canvases, Seydl also traces the growth of the devotion from the center to the periphery; see Jon L. Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*; and Jon L. Seydl, "Contesting the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Late Eighteenth-Century Rome," in *Roman Bodies: Antiquities in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Hopkins and Maria Wyke (London: The British School in Rome, 2005), 215-27.

<sup>655</sup> See Yvonne Zu Dohna, "Figure di Dio nell'arte del XVII secolo. Il volto artistico della modernità," in *L'uomo moderno e la chiesa: atti del congresso 16-19 novembre 2011*, ed. Paul Gilbert (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2012), 329-48; Gabriele Finlandi, *The Image of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Beth Williamson, *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Helen De Borchgrave, *A Journey into Christian Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

read them in an overly literal way and thereby overlook subtler nuances. Though at first glance, they appear to suggest a change in Muratori's view on this topic, actually this was not the case. Although different in their tone, the passages convey a similar, if not an identical, content. Popular piety was, according to the erudite Muratori, overly inclined toward external and excessive manifestations of religious enthusiasm: it was an emotionally charged piety that easily slid into superstition. Among the multiple ways in which people articulated their beliefs and lived their daily religion, their approaches to representations of the sacred were certainly the most objectionable. The people's reverence for images was unabashedly attacked by Muratori as idolatry and misguided piety rather than representative of true acts of devotion. He and others then called for reform within the Church. Though images were considered necessary for the common people to understand and memorize the basics of Catholicism (this was a long-established principle and a method that had been employed since the first centuries of Christianity), they were also deeply disturbing because they raised the not-so-simple-question of what was actually being worshipped. Was it what the image represented, or the image itself? In other words, the concern was that people often conflated the image with the subject of their devotion.

In the second fragment Muratori seems to tone down his original polemical stance against images, quoting the famous pedagogical and pragmatic view on the matter held by St. Gregory. However, despite this concession, a careful reading of the last paragraph reveals that he had not changed his position. While he maintained that liturgical participation or visits to holy shrines could elevate the spirit of the believers, he omitted any references to images, which again spoke of his distrust of material representations of

the sacred as being the correct means to instruct or encourage proper devotion. Hence, Muratori's second quote should not be read as an acceptance of images as necessary, but as a concession that they should be tolerated for the unlearned. For the educated believer, however, images were entirely unnecessary. According to Muratori, believers could be divided into these two basic groups of people. We will see how this position was in fact an idealistic projection of Muratori the scholar, which did not correspond to the far more complex social and cultural reality.

After the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the positive function of religious art in devotion and, at the same time, warned against misuses of images and idolatry. These issues were at the core of the Reformation. However, the Council of Trent addressed the issue of images with some circumspection and vagueness. There were no specific or detailed instructions about pictorial themes or representations of the sacred, nor was any censorship exerted for existing art works.<sup>656</sup> The appeal to tradition was implemented through local hierarchy, that is, the bishops. They supervised artistic productions in their own dioceses and became the judges of religious art. But guidelines were vague, suggesting only that a general decorum be followed. Thus,

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<sup>656</sup> While the debate over images is as old as Christian art (it began as early as the fourth century), the Iconoclastic Controversy erupted between the eighth and ninth centuries when the Western Church and popes supported the use of images while some of the Byzantine emperors did not. The issue revolved around worshipping images instead of worshipping God. At the Council of Nicaea (787) the place of holy images was reinstated and the honor paid to them was understood to be the honor that passes on to what the images represent. Hence, whoever reveres the images reveres in them what the subject represents. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 144-63; and Anthony Towey, *An Introduction to Christian Theology: Biblical, Classical, Contemporary* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 208-824. The abundant use of images and their veneration was a point of contention for Protestant reformers. Although views about images varied, images were ferociously attacked during the sixteenth-century religious struggles that lead to instances of iconoclasm. This issue was discussed at the Council of Trent, but it was not easy to tackle. The Catholic Church had to counteract accusations of idolatry from the Protestants and at the same time maintain and defend a Catholic identity in the matter of images.

common sense shaped and informed by the past became the main guide in episcopal supervision.<sup>657</sup>

The significant utilization of images and sacred representations in Catholicism continued. The Jesuits, who were the most important and militant order during and after the Catholic Reform, began to use images also. Instilling piety and moving people by means of “affective art” became an important aspect of the Jesuit program.<sup>658</sup> However, scholars have demonstrated that images played a significant role in shaping, inspiring, and transforming Christian spirituality well beyond the activities of the Jesuits. In a recent study, Ottavia Niccoli has shown that, between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries in Italy, domestic icons and holy images became common furnishings, protecting the house and educating children about piety. They were cherished figures that

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<sup>657</sup> Indeed, to deal with this lack of “instructions,” in the aftermath of the Council of Trent a few works were published to fill this theoretical vacuum. Bishop Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), for example, offered some directions and his own interpretation on the matter. However, in his famous *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582), Paleotti mainly identified what a painting should not be, rather than what it should be. Pictures should not be “rash,” “scandalous,” “erroneous,” “suspect,” “heretical,” “superstitious,” or “apocryphal.” Bishops had to examine images with a theological frame of mind, to anchor them within tradition, and be certain that they did not vary from Biblical exegesis. Paleotti translated into practice his theoretical concepts about art when he personally commissioned canvasses and engaged with painters such as Bartolomeo Cesi, Camillo Procaccini, the Carracci, and Lavinia Fontana. As much as Paleotti as others attempted to provide more defined guidelines for artists, knowledge, taste, and personality as well as the development of art during the following centuries deeply influenced the way bishops looked at the images, or did not look at the images. Some images were censored and others were not, depending upon very variable circumstances, the personal relationships between the bishops and the artists themselves, and the bishops’ relationships with private individuals who commissioned art works. See Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. William McCuaig (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust/ Getty Research Institute, 2012), 160-76; Lydia Salviucci Insolera, *L’Imago primi saeculi (1640) e il significato dell’immagine allegorica nella Compagnia di Gesù. Genesi e fortuna del libro* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004), 14; and, on the topic of Paleotti and the artists, the work of Ilaria Bianchi, *La politica delle immagini nell’età della Controriforma: Gabriele Paleotti teorico e committente* (Bologna: Compositori, 2008). See also Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Sensuous Worship. Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 53; and Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology. The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), 685.

<sup>658</sup> Evonne Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jeffrey Chipps Smith, “Sensuous Worship, or a Practical Means to a Spiritual End,” in *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 29-55; Peter Burke, “The Jesuits and the Art of Translation in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, eds. John W. O’Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris, and T. Frank Kennedy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 24-32.

helped shape an imaginative religious mindset, and they conveyed a sense of intimacy and familiarity with the supernatural world. Images were kissed, revered, worshipped; acts of reverence were shown toward them, and a whole liturgy in which the devotee became engaged with the sacred representation was learned from childhood; this then played an important role in people's lives, even in adulthood, in social as well as religious settings.<sup>659</sup> Paper holy cards were the common companions of nuns in the solitude of their cells, and in fact, everybody owned them.<sup>660</sup> Images were worn, attached to walls, mounted behind doors, placed inside blanket chests and in trunks, and set over bed headboards. They were displayed (and stored) in any number of places, and even put on bodies to help them heal.<sup>661</sup> Such was everyday devotion.

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<sup>659</sup> Ottavia Niccoli, *Vedere con gli occhi del cuore. Alle origini del potere delle immagini* (Milan: Laterza, 2011). Moving from the past to the present, the impact of images on the senses (and sensibilities) of children and their use as a pedagogical tool to teach religion is well proved by the syllabus for a class in which the objective is to "Introduce devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." Part of the requirements is to draw, with the help of detailed instructions and images, the sacred heart. See [www.chcweb.com/catalog/files/htdsh.pdf](http://www.chcweb.com/catalog/files/htdsh.pdf). *Regarding children's religious training in a broader sense, current catechisms teach what looks like an updated version of the sixteenth and seventeenth century techniques (which Niccoli very effectively highlights) to shape children's religious behavior, such as the use of images in everyday prayers, the making of little altars, and the introduction of religious figures and themes in playground activities. See* <http://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMESCHL/CRUSADE.HTM>.

<sup>660</sup> The production, distribution, and sale of cheaply made devotional booklets were widespread. Streets sellers, peddlers, charlatans, and preachers diffused this basic library that only recently has become an object of study. See the works of Laura Carnelos, which are tremendously important for further research on the field: Laura Carnelos, *Con libri alla man.* *L'editoria di larga diffusione a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Milano: Unicopli, 2013), and also *I libri da risma. Catalogo delle edizioni Remondini a larga diffusione (1650-1850)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2008). The Remondinis printed thousands of holy images which, from the seventeenth century onward, were widely used in the domestic devotional practices of Catholics of all social strata. The rich Remondini collection still needs specific examination, both of its content and iconography.

<sup>661</sup> At least until Vatican Council II, the images of the Sacred Heart, as well of other holy cards, were easily found in domestic spaces and were disseminated throughout people's houses – in the dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and in drawers; they were also used as bookmarks, kept in wallets, and placed close to the dearest family portraits. They were not mere Christian amulets or lucky charms, but rather, they were everyday relics to keep away misfortune, diseases, and accidents. The faithful could buy such accessible relics nearly everywhere: they were also found in churches – distributed at the end of services or simply left at the main entrance of churches, hanging in the prayer places before entering the confessional, and located close to hassocks. These were viewed by believers during their prayers after their absolution. Their inherent sacred value was enhanced when the images were blessed. As historians of contemporary religion have shown, many Catholics still use images as relics to protect themselves and their beloved: similar to how medieval cities defended themselves against external and internal attacks by placing sacred relics and bodies (securely hidden in the convents and hermitages) along their borders, believers weaved a sort of holy



## A New Image of Christ

Texts dealing with representations of the divine became increasingly rare after Calvin. Among the Protestant reformers, Calvin was the one who theologically fought the war against idols most comprehensively and persistently. According to him, images were always the source of a distorted spiritual worship because they were inseparable from idolatry. Once an image was placed in a sacred space, believers would start to “worship” it. Hence, Calvin railed against this, and his condemnation of images marked a turning point in Christianity.<sup>662</sup> From then on, Catholics faced accusations of being idolaters who fostered superstition. Although in the Baroque period the issue seemed to disappear from religious treatises, theoretical and theological discussions about images in Catholicism did not end after the sixteenth century.<sup>663</sup> While it might have ceased to be a matter of hot debate, the controversy continued “to be at work underground.”<sup>664</sup> The discussion of images receded, but reservations about images of the Trinity still ran deep in Catholic orthodoxy. The issue re-emerged in 1745, when a nun named Crescentia from Augsburg

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fortress around themselves by keeping close to themselves images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. Images and representations of Christ, as David Morgan has argued in his numerous studies, also have played an important role in molding American Christianity in a more comprehensive sense beyond its Catholic component. See David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); and by the same author, “The Look of the Sacred” in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 296-318.

<sup>662</sup> For thorough discussions of this topic, see: Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Sergiusz Michalsk, *Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993); and David J. Davis, *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures: Religious Identity During the English Reformation* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013).

<sup>663</sup> For an exhaustive excursus of the Church’s texts on the regulation of images, see Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa e le immagini. I testi fondamentali sulle arti figurative dalle origini ai nostri giorni* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 1995). The issue of idolatry, which according to Jonathan Sheehan waned in “analytical usefulness” in the seventeenth century, did not vanish but instead kept emerging along with other religious matters throughout the eighteenth century. See Jonathan Sheehan, “Sacred and Profane: idolatry, antiquarianism and the Polemics of distinction in the Seventeenth Century,” *Past and Present* 192 (2006):35-66.

<sup>664</sup> Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 190.

had a vision of the Holy Spirit in the form of a young man. Pope Benedict XIV intervened with a brief called *Sollicitudini nostrae*, in which he admitted the legitimacy of images of the Holy Trinity, but only when depicted in certain ways. Every anthropomorphic depiction of the Holy Spirit was henceforth banned. It was the first time that the modes of representing God were fixed on the basis of the Bible.<sup>665</sup>

Between the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century, limitations and freedoms in the creation of imagery depicting the Son of God suddenly became a point of intense focus. This period is particularly significant because in those years the Church dealt with a broader controversy about images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. That devotion revived the old debate about images in general and about the image of Christ in particular. In early Christianity, Christ was represented mostly symbolically, as a fish or as a lamb, or allegorically as the Good Shepherd. From the first to third century, the lamb – used extensively by St John in the Book of Revelation – became the most recognizable symbol of Christ. The 82nd canon of the council of Trullo in 692 declared that Christ must be represented in his human form and not in the form of the lamb.<sup>666</sup> However, the

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 174-182. The solution for this issue was neither simple nor straightforward. The matter had not been regulated after Trent. Benedict “did not want to indulge popular devotion,” but he also did not want “to endorse the austerity of those theologians who rejected the idea of depicting the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, while the only legitimate images were those representing the Father as an old man, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as a dove, others were tolerated. The tricephalous image of the Trinity belongs to Catholic tradition – and can still be seen, for example, in St. Peter’s in Rome, on the tomb of Pope Sixtus IV (1484; a work by Pollaiuolo). This was not condemned, but was defined as not preferred by the Church. See Jan Hallebeek, “Papal Prohibitions Midway Between Rigor and Laxity: On the Issue of Depicting the Holy Trinity,” in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm. Struggle for Religious Identity*, eds. Willem van Asselt, Paul van Geest, Daniela Müller, and Theo Salemink (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 379; Anne Hunt, *The Trinity. Insights from Mystics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 139; and also Mario Rosa, Benedetto XIV, *Enciclopedia dei Papi, ad vocem*, Treccani, 2000; and Nigel Aston, *Art and Religion in the Eighteenth-century Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 59-60.

<sup>666</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Well (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 596.

lamb continued to be represented in the *Agnus Dei*, and these portable images of Christ were sacramentals widely used in popular religion as well as in magic.<sup>667</sup>

In Christian art, the suffering Christ on the cross was the most common representation of Jesus.<sup>668</sup> However, though in the eighteenth century prayers that described in detail the grislier aspects of the scourging and the crucifixion were still circulating, the Church discouraged such extreme religious expressions. When images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were first printed, distributed, displayed, and venerated, an alternative representation of Christ gained a foothold in religious imagery and popular imagination. While the pierced heart, with blood dripping from it, could still work as a symbolic and vivid representation of the Passion of Christ, a less wounded heart that was still dramatic in its carnal verisimilitude could suggest a mutual exchange of feelings and affection. In domestic settings and as portable images, such representations of the Sacred Heart soon became popular and eventually became a prominent representation of Christ. The Sacred Heart of Jesus reduced the distance between the Son of God and the faithful. It conveyed a more approachable Christ than the dying or dead Christ on the cross. The heart suggested hope rather than a sense of guilt, empathy rather than *imitatio*, and relief

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<sup>667</sup> The prohibition was reiterated in the nineteenth century. See *Monitorio ecclesiastico. Pubblicazione mensile ad uso del clero*, vol. 5, par. 1 (Naples: Tipografia degli Accattoncelli, 1885), which reminds priests that the images of Christ on display in churches have to be in human form and cannot be depicted with the symbol of the lamb; 257-60. Recurrent, and not completely unproblematic, was the use of the omnipresent *Agnus Dei* and of not-quite-orthodox reproductions of Christ's image in popular practices. These revealed a need of the believers to isolate Jesus as an icon and to carry his image for magic/religious purposes. Indeed, the reproduction of "little shrouds" bearing the face of Christ, which were to be carried and worn, was a popular technique used to pursue pure earthly gains such as winning an election or profiting from betting on election results. Examples of such practices are examined in Chapter 3.

<sup>668</sup> The Passion was, in all of its artistic and individual variations, a major theme in religious art. I certainly do not mean to over-simplify the rich and diverse iconographical heritage of Christ's representations throughout the centuries. During the Renaissance and the Baroque period, Christ was a favorite subject of artistic expression, a religious theme that inspired the most important painters to find new representations within the tradition. Nonetheless, aside from a few instances in which Christ was depicted as victorious (as for example in the Sistine Chapel ceiling painted by Michelangelo or when his face crowned with thorns – which represented the Passion), his suffering body was still a favorite topic, and was the most common form of visual language in religious art used to convey Christ's role and significance in devotion.

and joy rather than sorrow. It represented pictorially what has been defined as “the theology of the heart.” During the eighteenth century and as a reaction to the “human enlightenment,” the promoters of this theology spoke of “divine enlightenment.” Religion, they claimed, was beyond rational argument. The faithful were said to experience God through their hearts. This simple theology muted further attempts to explain the existence of God through traditional or innovative metaphysical arguments.<sup>669</sup> Interestingly enough, those same theologians failed to recognize how this ideological change was also manifesting itself as an iconographical “revolution.” But as a legacy of Baroque piety, the heart image still had to undergo certain transformations both in its representation and meaning before it became a widely accepted new symbol of Christ and Christianity.

### **The History of the Heart: From Metaphor to Cult**

The trope of the heart runs deep in Christian tradition.<sup>670</sup> The act of “writing on the heart was a frequent and vivid image in medieval literature and art.”<sup>671</sup> Also in the Middle Ages, the book of the heart was a specific trope in introspective writing. The heart was the literal site of memory, understanding, and imagination, as well as the traditional locus of emotion.<sup>672</sup> St. Paul and St. Augustine each contributed elaborate

<sup>669</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)*, vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 118-46; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>670</sup> Before Christianity, the heart as a locus that combined anatomical functions with spiritual or emotional expressions had been celebrated in other religions and cultures. Among the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks, the Hellenistic and Roman Alexandrians, and the Arabs, representations and texts about the heart existed and were continually studied for intellectual and religious interest. See Louisa Young, *The Book of the Heart* (New York & London: Doubleday, 2003), 3-30.

<sup>671</sup> Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

metaphors for the heart to patristic and medieval culture. St. Paul endowed introspective writing with a haunting corporeality, while St. Augustine made the heart the center of his inner self, a tablet on which God wrote with “words like arrows.”<sup>673</sup> The trope of writing on the heart was taken literally in medieval saints’ legends that described martyrs receiving divine inscriptions on their hearts, which were later read by others. The Dominican Heinrich Seuse, in the fourteenth century, described this sacred activity even further, reporting in gruesome detail the act of self-inscribing God’s commands on one’s own body with a sharp stylus.<sup>674</sup>

In secular literature, a different sort of passion was inscribed onto lovers’ hearts, as twelfth- and thirteenth-century lyrics and romances reveal.<sup>675</sup> The vividness of these works was so realistic and personally meaningful that, by the late fifteenth century, the books of the heart evolved into actual visual images and into real representational objects. Artisans produced heart-shaped manuscripts and books, and embellished these with images representing books of the heart. These constituted self-referential symbols of the literary *topos*.<sup>676</sup> Thus, the trope was taken to a different level, since introspective writing turned into exterior representation that continued to refer to interior expression.<sup>677</sup> Thus the heart, as a metaphor and an image, entered medieval devotional literature during the

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 4-10.

<sup>674</sup> Barbara Newman, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess,” in *Spiritus 2* (2002), 1-14. Ignatius of Antiochia, from the Golden Legend, also had the name of God written in golden letters on his heart, (Ibid., 16). This motif resounded so deeply that female mystics in orders of sanctity were inspected *post mortem* to see if they bore this miraculous inscription on their hearts.

<sup>675</sup> The Italian troubadour Sordello da Goito, and also the poets of *il-dolce-stil-novo*, exploited and expanded the possibilities of the metaphor with erotic imageries of the heart. Jager, *The Book*, 63; Young, *The Book*, 221. For a study of the complex interconnections between philosophy, spirituality, and eroticism in medieval metaphorical language, see Elena Lombardi, *Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

<sup>676</sup> Jager, *The Book*, 137.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., 17-26.

patristic period and then acquired several layers of added cultural meaning during the medieval centuries.<sup>678</sup>

Along with these images, the heart of Jesus as a metaphor for Christ was also developing. This image was meant to be venerated, mostly behind the closed doors of cloisters. The fascination with the heart was linked to a development in the cult concerning Christ's wounds. The wound on Christ's side became the doorway to Christ's heart and to human salvation. The roots of this devotion go back to the thirteenth century, when it was practiced in the convents of Saxon nuns and Flemish holy women.<sup>679</sup> Soon, the cult of the heart became a much cherished and ubiquitous devotion.<sup>680</sup> With its emphasis on hearts – not only the heart of the Savior but also that of the saved, and also the heart of the lover – this Christian tradition was a constant inspirational source for male and female mystics, would-be saints, and actual saints of many orders, places, and times.

Thus the trope of the heart was already long established in European culture when in 1685 the French Visitandine nun Marguerite Mary Alacoque revealed her mystical visions by providing sketches of them. From this, her particular devotional form sprang. She drew on those images to convey both her love for Christ and Christ's affection for her. Marguerite's spirituality was shaped by her adoration of the Eucharist. Her first

<sup>678</sup> Aside from literature, poetry, and mystical writings, the heart was also a powerful symbol in magic. As Guido Ruggiero has shown, animal hearts were used in brews and potions, while wax hearts, when pierced with needles, were intended to punish enemies or reluctant lovers. This ritual emerged as a profane reenactment of Christ's Passion (the pierced heart of Jesus was one of the most dramatic representations of the new devotion). Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions. Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120-24.

<sup>679</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 55-6. Jeffrey F. Hamburger's study on the art of female monasticism shows that the imagery of the sacred heart had a long history. See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists. The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1997).

<sup>680</sup> On this theme, that is to determine the exact origins of the devotion, the advocates and the opponents of the cult found another reason to squabble with each other without getting to the bottom of their contention; see below.

mystical experience occurred when she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament. The strong connection between the Eucharist and the devotion of the heart has its origins in twelfth-century female mysticism.<sup>681</sup> Marguerite followed the mystical tradition also in her self-mortification, which contained a strong component of eroticism. The pain she endured as soon as she committed herself to the heart, which was manifested in instances of physical debasement, was never separated from the pleasure those practices brought to her. Pain and pleasure were the two sides of her vow to Christ. In her encounters with Him, their hearts passed from one to the other, and their relationship was thereby consummated, so to speak. Although this exchange also had its root in older tradition – Saint Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, for example, Marguerite made the heart the center of her new devotion both visually and theologically.<sup>682</sup> Thus, in her visions, Marguerite incorporated the multiple layers of Baroque piety regarding the heart – and merged in her devotion its symbolic meanings of romance, affection, tender intimacy, and eros.<sup>683</sup> Jesus came to her to remind her first, and the world after, how His own sacrifice had been forgotten. Hence, mortification and annihilation were key aspects of “Alacoque’s erotics of pain.”<sup>684</sup>

<sup>681</sup> While this root was largely associated with women, by the thirteenth century, the devotion had spread among many mendicant orders: it was practiced among the Cistercians, the Benedictines, and the Carthusians. By the sixteenth century, Dominicans in the Germanic territories had shaped an entire ascetic practice around the sacred heart. In the same century, the devotion spread to the Jesuit order. Through the works of this latter order, and also through the entire medieval corpus of mysticism, and the artistic tradition, the devotion “flowed into the confluence of streams that found a common streambed in the spirituality” of Francis de Sales and Jane the Chantal. These two then transmitted the devotion to the community of Visitation that they founded. See Wendy M. Wright, “A Wide and Fleshy Love: Images, Imagination and the Study of Christian Spirituality” *Christian spirituality bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* 7:1 (Spring 1999): 1-12; and Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>682</sup> Anna Scattigno, “Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi,” in *DBI*, vol. 70 (2007), *ad vocem*.

<sup>683</sup> David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 117-26.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. While Bynum repeatedly pointed out in her studies how physicality was an important element of medieval religiosity, other scholars, such as Richard Rambuss, stress mainly the erotic aspects of the

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart transformed from a symbolic image to a graphic representation of a fleshy, muscular pump. That image reignited the argument against religious imagery. Marguerite's engravings represented the heart on a throne of flames, encircled with a crown of thorns and surmounted by a cross. This was an emblem that soon was placed on top of altars beside the crucifix; it was also worn by her, and by her convent sisters and other devotees.<sup>685</sup> The heart was still a metaphorical image during her time, but in one of her writings Marguerite referred to it as a "heart of flesh," laying the first stone in the shift from a simple image to an anatomical picture. It was Joseph Gallifet who took this allusion and promoted the materiality of Alacoque's visions.<sup>686</sup> In his *De cultu S. Cordis Jesu* of 1726, the heart no longer appeared stylized but was shown as in an anatomical manual. This was what ignited the virulent attacks on the devotion throughout the remainder of the century.<sup>687</sup>

The harsh polemic against the Sacred Heart focused on its fleshy, carnal, material, and

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spiritual desire in the relationship between Christ and the faithful. While emphasizing the intensity with which the sacrament of the Eucharist was received and celebrated by women during the thirteenth-century, Bynum recognizes the longing for an almost physical contact with Christ, which was also, she argues, a desire for power to handle Christ in a way that only priests could have. According to Rambuss, in religious writings as in poetry, the spiritually contemplative was aligned with erotic descriptions of the body of Jesus. Although in Rambuss's reading the conflation of religion and eroticism reveals a physical response as well as spiritual exertion, the latter appears intrinsically dependent on the former – a correlation that is at odds with a more comprehensive understanding of religious culture, as Bynum portrays. See "Jesus as Mother and Abbot As Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing," *The Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 3/4 (October 1977): 257-84; and also Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>685</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 13-4.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>687</sup> Although discoveries concerning the heart made by William Harvey (1578-1657) and his followers led to a new understanding of the brain as the core of the self, the Aristotelian conception of the physical heart as the seat of the soul remained common. Gallifet rejected the empirical view, and reaffirmed that the heart was the organ of sensible affections. Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*, 32-34. See Scott Manning Stevens, "Sacred Heart and Secular Brain" in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 264-284; and also Jean- Félix-Henri de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino ossia la divozione al S. Cuor di Gesù opera di monsignore Gian Felice Enrico di Fumel tradotta dal francese in italiano e corredata di copiose ed interessanti annotazioni* (Bologna 1782), 82 and *passim*. This work – which is not a simple translation of the French bishop's original title but rather an anonymous commentary on that book – was dedicated to the Queen of Portugal, who a fervent devotee of the Sacred Heart.



graphic representation. The images that were widely circulated in the eighteenth century were not at all like a flat heart pierced with darts, something that might resemble a modern Valentine's card, but a rather bloody, disturbing, anatomical representation of a human heart (indeed it has been suggested that an ox heart may have been used as a model).<sup>688</sup>

The devotion was first celebrated officially in France in 1765.<sup>689</sup> In 1856, Pope Pius IX extended the devotion throughout the Church. The supporters of the devotion did not necessarily associate the origins of the cult with Alacoque, but preferred to trace the deeper roots of the heart in Christian tradition. This not only conferred a different sort of legitimacy to a cult believed to be as old as other devotions to Jesus Christ; it also moved the devotion (at least ideally) away from the luxuriant imagery and descriptions that Marguerite had abundantly lavished on it in her visionary accounts, which had not yet received Church sanction.<sup>690</sup>

### **Controversy over the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Jansenists vs. Jesuits**

The dispute over the Sacred Heart was part of the broader and enduring dissension between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. Though the Jesuits were not the only ones who favored the devotion, they were the first to promote it. Indeed, the cult of the heart was quintessentially Jesuit. The potent imagery and metaphors, which so heavily

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<sup>688</sup> Curiously, while animal hearts used for love magic generically mirrored the human heart, hearts from large and powerful animals such as bulls were associated with masculinity. Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 121.

<sup>689</sup> Aston, *Religion*, 50.

<sup>690</sup> In 1903, Pope Leo XIII identified St. Francis de Sales as the originator of the cult. Michel P. Carroll, *Catholic Cults and Devotions. A Psychological Inquiry* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1989), 134.

relied upon and inspired empathy between the faithful and Christ in His Passion, became enormously influential works in the Jesuits' hands.

Since their foundation by Ignatius of Loyola in 1539, the Jesuits had considered themselves to be the defenders and guardians *par excellence* not only of the Catholic faith but also of the Papacy and its prerogatives. The Jesuits acquired immense power and wealth thanks to their deep connections both with the Papacy and the Spanish crown.<sup>691</sup> Yet in the eighteenth century, their position within the European political landscape became threatened. Their power, wealth, and hold on the religio-cultural system were clearly positioning them to be targets of the newly centralizing monarchies. In the eighteenth-century political agendas of these newly emergent states, problems involving the religious orders and their previously untouchable rights and properties, their privileges, their tax exemptions, and their monopoly on education became a main focus of controversy about the order. The Jesuits made up almost “a state within states” and were the most conspicuous example of the problems represented by the religious orders. Consequently, in 1756 they were expelled from Portugal; in the following years, France, Spain, and some Italian states also expelled them. In 1773, Pope Clement XIV had to yield to requests coming from various kings, and he suppressed the order altogether. His election to the pontificate was, in fact, in part a result of an agreement with the French

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<sup>691</sup> Jesuits pastoral missions were also created within Europe with the aim of Christianizing the most rural areas. These missions were significantly called by the Jesuits “le Indie di quaggiù” (that is, “the Indies down here”) to underline the need for the Church to keep sending missionaries to different parts of Europe. In Europe, the Jesuits established religious institutions such as colleges and lay confraternities. In 1978, “Le Indie di quaggiù” was used as a title for a documentary that was inspired by the work of the anthropologist de Martino. It focused on marginal, yet deeply rooted contemporary beliefs and practices. See Gianluca Sciannameo, *Nelle Indie di quaggiù. Ernesto de Martino e il cinema etnografico* (Bari: Editura Palomar, 2006).

king – the throne of St. Peter in exchange for Jesuits’ heads, so to speak (though not literally).<sup>692</sup>

The Jansenists’ disregard for external manifestations of religious piety was more than an ideological opposition to the Jesuits. Advocates of inner spirituality, rigorous and intellectual, the Jansenists positioned themselves on the other side of the devotional spectrum from the Jesuits. Endorsing stern morality and restrained religious practices, the Jansenists rejected the Jesuits’ methods to inculcate the doctrines and lore of Catholicism. The Jesuits’ uses of theatre, dramas, images, music, and sacramentals to indoctrinate and obtain easy conversions among the populace deeply offended and disturbed the Jansenists’ rigorous sensibilities.<sup>693</sup>

The Jansenists believed that outward practices of devotion were in fact symbols of superstition and evidence of a lack of inner spirituality rather than an expression of spiritual life. As Alain Besançon noted, the Jansenists “were iconoclastic by instinct, by temperament and in practice.”<sup>694</sup> Those who took a Jansenist approach to spirituality opposed the devotion of the heart of Jesus and objected to both its literal and metaphorical imagery. The visual and textual tradition of the sacred heart did not mesh with their rationalized way of understanding and worshipping God. They believed that the mingling of texts and images was a source of errors, sensual thoughts, and emotional

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<sup>692</sup> For a short but efficacious summary, see Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: a History of the Popes* (New Haven, CT: 2006). For an extensive account, see Dale K. Van Kley, “Jansenism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, vol. 7, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–28.

<sup>693</sup> The Jansenists were the followers of Cornelius Jansen. For Jansen, a Flemish theologian (1585-1638) (whose major work, *Augustinus*, was published posthumously in 1640) and his disciples, Jesuit theology was far too optimistic. They accused the Jesuits of reviving the Pelagian heresy that had been thoroughly condemned by Augustine. Jansenism in turn was condemned as heretical in several papal bulls, most notably by Innocent X in 1643 and by Clement XI in his *Unigenitus* in 1713. Aston, *Art and Religion*, 11, 61-4, 244-48.

<sup>694</sup> Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 193.

reactions. At best it was a distraction from the path of real communion with God; at worst it was a sure way to elude grace. They understood the images and imagery to be literal because they rejected the implications of a metaphorical interpretation. As powerful and persuasive as metaphors might be, they were associated with an objectionable, effusive approach to spirituality rather than intellectual one. However, as Wendy Wright argues, the metaphorical aspects embodied “multiple layers of the Christian mystery.”<sup>695</sup> Images, as many scholars have pointed out, have always played a role in transforming and motivating the spiritual life of believers.<sup>696</sup>

When Pope Clement XIV banished and disbanded the Jesuits in 1773, they did not simply and suddenly disappear. Many ex-Jesuits were absorbed into other religious institutions. At the same time, the Church had to deal with growing Jansenist influences.<sup>697</sup> This particular circumstance, in which both Jesuits and Jansenists acted from within the Church, changed the dynamics of the debate over images and the devotion of the Sacred Heart. The Jansenists and Jesuits blamed each other for their marginalization; meanwhile, their ideological opposition by necessity became more

<sup>695</sup> Wright, *A Wide and Fleshy*, 3.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid. Like Wright, Hamburger argues for the importance of “seeing” in spiritual practices and beliefs: in medieval convents, texts as well as images shaped personal and communal spirituality. The level of complexity and sophistication in which textual and visual resonances were employed helped to generate a panoply of representations of the sacred heart. The wounded heart, crucified hearts, and oversized hearts suspended from a cross were the result of visual strategies to translate and engage with the Sacred Scripture, and with the Song of Songs in particular. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 102-19. Bishop Gabriele Paleotti developed concepts that had been articulated in the sixth century by Gregory the Great, concerning not only the great utility of images to teach and instruct the people, but also to move their feelings. Paleotti, *Discourse*, 114-122; Nicholas Cachia, *The Image of the Good Shepherd as a Source for the Spirituality of the Minsiterial Priesthood* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997), 8-22.

<sup>697</sup> See Enrico Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1968); Alberto Vecchi, *Correnti religiose nel sei-settecento veneto* (Venice-Rome, Istituto per la Collaboazione Culturale, 1962); and the most recent study by Pietro Stella, *Il Giansenismo in Italia*, Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007. See also the interesting nineteenth century study by Cesare Cantù, *Gli eretici d'Italia: discorsi storici*, vol. 3 (Torino, 1866), 374-98.

subtle and surreptitious, since both sides had to act mostly in disguise.<sup>698</sup> This was particularly the case in Italy, where for a long time it was argued that Jansenism had a very limited, marginal influence. Italian Jansenists, if any existed, were deemed to be isolated figures who could not seriously affect the dominant panorama of theological and religious discussions.<sup>699</sup>

But the situation was more complex. Even though the Jansenists did not have as much success in Italy or as strong a grip on culture there as they had in France, this did not mean that their influence was of no consequence. Influential Catholics were suspected of exhibiting Jansenist opinions. Even Muratori's writings showed, if not of an open affiliation with the Jansenists, at least some affinities with it. He was not alone. Many were marked as closet Jansenists; some admitted to having adhered to those ideas later in life.<sup>700</sup> But there were also some who openly and blatantly professed to be Jansenists: Giuseppe Maria Pujati (1733-1824) was one of those. Born in the Patria of Friuli, and at first a Somascan Father, then a Benedictine, Pujati was a theologian, a philologist, and an influential and fierce polemicist. In 1772 when he was already in his forties, he began teaching Sacred Scripture at the University of Padua. His arguments against what he perceived to be distorted devotional practices and against the Jesuits who promoted them made him fall out of favor in a city that hosted many Jesuits and embraced their sumptuous and exuberant spirituality.<sup>701</sup> His consequent unpopularity

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<sup>698</sup> Reciprocal accusations were part of both Jesuit and Jansenist approaches to all issues. In this, there was an underlying assumption that each order wanted to ruin or discredit the other. This mutual aim likely influenced their politics and views more than scholars have so far suggested.

<sup>699</sup> I want to note here briefly the complete absence of Jansenism in the otherwise complete and compelling work of Franco Venturi about the Italian Enlightenment.

<sup>700</sup> See Vecchi, *Correnti religiose*.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*

condemned Pujati to a less public role as a scholar and turned him into a wandering Jansenist, in search of more congenial and receptive milieus.

The devotion of the Sacred Heart, with its highly controversial depictions, became the theme around which Pujati articulated and explained his position on representations of the sacred and the specific base from which he launched his wider attack against images. His involvement in the Sacred Heart debate was defended in his *Riflessioni sopra l'origine, la natura e il fine della devozione al Sacro Cuore di Gesù*, published in Naples (and anonymously in Venice) in 1780.<sup>702</sup> Pujati was deeply committed to the reform of popular devotion, which he saw essentially as a matter related to external manifestations of piety. He was the inspiration for the Synod, the most famous, undisguised, and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to assimilate Jansenist ideas into Catholicism. The Synod of Pistoia, held in September 1786, was promoted by Bishop Scipione de' Ricci. Strongly inspired by Jansenist doctrine, it was condemned by Rome in the Bull *Auctorem Fidei* of 1794.<sup>703</sup> The Synod was a fascinating chapter within Italian religious history, showing – despite its (apparent) failure – how Jansenist ideas were deeply held by many high ranking members of the church.<sup>704</sup> Although Pujati travelled widely in the northern and central Italian states, proselytizing, writing books and pamphlets, promoting his ideas,

<sup>702</sup> Rosa, *Settecento religioso*, 43.

<sup>703</sup> See *Il Sinodo di Pistoia del 1786*, ed. Claudio Lamioni (Rome: Herder Editrice Libreria, 1991). Interestingly enough, the liturgical reforms that the synod proposed were not significantly different than those approved by Council Vatican II from 1962-65 and later implemented. See Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship. A Primer in Christian Ritual* (London: Continuum, 2003), 83-5, 109.

<sup>704</sup> See the insightful work by Enrico Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del sec. XVIII* (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1968). Dammig traced the hidden Jansenist inroads into the cardinal palaces in Rome; and Pietro Stella, *Il Giansenismo in Italia*, vol. 3, *Crisi finale e transizioni* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007). However, Catholic elites were not the only supporters of Jansenism: parish clergy were often supporters as well. Don Carlo Pezzagna, the priest of a village in the Venetian mainland, who left a rich memoir about his ministry, was strong defender of the Jansenist creed. See Andreina Rigon, "Un parroco riformista nella campagna veneta del secondo Settecento: don Carlo Pezzagna," *Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa* 41 (1992): 129-43.

advising bishops, counseling governments, and fostering the Jansenist cause, he made his home in the Venetian cities of Padua, Venice, and also Bergamo.<sup>705</sup>

### **Bergamo: A Microcosm of Religious Turmoil The Power of Ridicule**

Bergamo provided fertile soil for the fostering of both Jesuits and Jansenist ideologies.<sup>706</sup> When Pujati moved to this city, after his many “pilgrimages” back and forth from the Republic to other Italian states, he took refuge in the monastery of San Polo. He immediately found supporters of his Jansenist ideas in the Father Inquisitor and the most important clerics of the city. Since he was notorious for his Jansenist leanings (he was a virtual fugitive, protected by powerful patrons and hiding from the public), Pujati had to act behind the scenes. Others, however, were ready to openly fight for the ideas he espoused. General antagonism between his followers and opposing factions boiled over into a local and specific controversy about the devotion of the Sacred Heart.

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<sup>705</sup> See Alberto Vecchi, *Correnti religiose*, 465; and Giovanna Troisi, “Giuseppe Maria Pujati ed il giansenismo veneto,” in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, CXIII, 1987, 101-61. For the extensive range of his interests, see Giuseppe Maria Pujati, *Esame e giudizio di un ecclesiastico sopra un nuovo libretto di Via Crucis* (Bologna, 1782); *Dissertazione sopra l'origine di Subiaco* (Venice: Andrea Santini e figlio, 1816); and also, Charles Louis Richard and Jean Joseph Giraud, *Biblioteca Sacra. Ovvero dizionario universale delle scienze ecclesiastiche*, vol. 16 (Milan: Editore Ranieri Fanfani, 1836), 142-45. Pujati taught in various colleges and universities, both in Padua and in Rome. As an outspoken Jansenist, he made some enemies, especially in the Roman Jesuit enclaves. He returned to the Republic, where he could enjoy protections and hospitality. Pujati spent his last years at the Praglia abbey near Padua and then in Venice in his brother's house, where he died in 1824. See *Nuova Enciclopedia ovvero Dizionario generale di scienze, lettere, industrie, ecc.* vol. 18 (Turin: Unione Tipografica – Editrice Torinese, 1885), 788.

<sup>706</sup> Giovanni Pignatelli, “Giovanni Paolo Dolfin,” *ad vocem DBI*, vol. 40 (1991). The Jesuits' affiliations in the city were as strong as those of the Jansenists. Don Luigi Mozzi was the leader of the Jesuit enclave which exercised a strong influence on the Catholic culture of the city and on Bishop Dolfin himself. Mozzi, Dolfin, and Maria Antonia Grumelli Podrecca, the powerful abbess of the convent of St. Chiara in Bergamo, belonged to the group called the *Oblati* of the Apostolic College. The Oblates was a congregation founded in the early eighteenth century to spread the faith from a Jesuit's perspective. They adapted the *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola, both for their spirituality and their apostolic mission. The Oblates were considered a sort of secret sect since its members took secret vows and were bound to secrecy. Because of this secrecy, they were accused of pursuing interests that conflicted with those of certain secular powers.

While Pujati attacked the Sacred Heart with fairly sophisticated theological arguments, the controversy at the local level unfolded in the form of satire and the involvement of secular authorities. The animosity between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in Bergamo extended beyond the walls of the religious institutions. Humorous and witty pasquinades were disseminated throughout the city, the territory, and the whole of the Republic. Satirical pamphlets and sonnets against the new devotion and its supporters were circulated, some vitriolic in tone.<sup>707</sup> Priests who supported the Sacred Heart were publicly ridiculed.<sup>708</sup> They were labeled the most ignorant of all priests, barely able to speak in the vernacular, let alone Latin. An anonymous sonnet, dedicated to don Antonio Rota, the priest of the side chapel in the Bergamo cathedral, started like this:

What can we say about the priest Giuseppe Rota?  
 He looks like a dead man standing, with the face of a rabbi  
 Instead of a brain, he has a turnip  
 He could not care less about the bishop or the pope  
 He does not understand the vernacular or Latin  
 And the miserable man got into a war,  
 To defend the honor of the divine heart?<sup>709</sup>

The sonnet continues, suggesting that Don Rota should go to Monomotapa (an African territory where Christian missionaries had been trying very hard to convert the pagan population) to fight his battles, and adding that perhaps given that he was just a poor crazy man, he did not even deserve to go that far.<sup>710</sup> Other compositions followed in

<sup>707</sup> *Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquistori di Stato, Lettere dei Rettori di Bergamo*, b. 13.

<sup>708</sup> In the previous chapter, we also saw the use of ridicule: a few years before, those who were now mocking the devotees of the heart were deriding don Rubbi's miracles. Thus, those who wrote sarcastic sonnets (and those who responded to them) during the mass pilgrimage to the living saint were also involved in this second "satire tournament," happening in Bergamo.

<sup>709</sup> Antonio Rota was one of the most fervent believers in the thaumaturgical powers of the living saint Don Antonio Rubbi. See Chapter 5; see also the note above.

<sup>710</sup> Monomotapa is the Portuguese name for the African territory covered now by Rhodesia, the Kalahari, and Mozambique. In the sixteenth century, Portugal colonized this area and started a process of Christianization, although the results were ambiguous at best. While some nineteenth century writers were more prone to see the missions established by the Dominicans as well as the Jesuits as very successful,



much the same vein, and although they were entertaining, they also stirred up acrimony and dissension. Contemporary writers recognized that literary works were supporting both sides of the battle, perhaps with different results.

### **A Parable: Don Antonio Rubbi's Defense of the Devotion**

One of these literary squabbles involved the priest, don Antonio Rubbi, discussed in the last chapter who had been a sensation in the years before and was still an attraction for believers who were in search of miraculous cures. He was considered a living saint who could work miracles and did not mind exposing himself to mockery. He had already been the object of personal attacks concerning his alleged holiness, thaumaturgical powers, and skills as a healer. His message was conveyed in a biblical tone:

A poor old man was very devoted to the Virgin and used to worship her more than once a day. The bishop, during his visitation, came to know about him and his perhaps too vivid imagination. The bishop tried therefore to amend his practices and instructed him in the correct and appropriate way to pray. When the bishop left by sea, the old man went after him, crying out desperately: "My Lord, my Lord, I do not remember, how do I have to say it, how do I have to say it?" And then the bishop with his own eyes saw how sincere was the zeal of the old man, who was coming toward him – walking on the sea without wetting his feet, he said: "Go, my old good saintly man, and say what you wish."<sup>711</sup>

With this little parable, Don Rubbi tried to teach a lesson to the enemies of the Sacred Heart. This story is part of a letter he sent to Benedetto de Passi, a canon of the Bergamo cathedral who fiercely opposed the devotion. Rubbi, who was also an exorcist,

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others were skeptical of the results of those missions and considered them mainly failed attempts to convert the local population. See *Educazione Cristiana, ovvero catechismo universale*, Vol. XXIII (Venice: Eredi Curti Editori, 1823), 52; and Giulio Ferrario, *Il costume antico e moderno o storia del governo*, ... Vol. IV (Florence: Vincenzo Battelli, 1825), 101-09.

<sup>711</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, *Lettere di rettori di Begamo*, B. 13 1765-1782, fasc. 1780-1782 (Letter by Rubbi, dated August 3, 1780).

thought the attempt to obstruct the devotion of the Sacred Heart was the devil's doing.<sup>712</sup> He confronted De Passi aggressively and accused him of surrendering to the devil. De Passi, in turn, used Rubbi's letter against him, making it public and declaring that it was the ultimate act of a senile priest who was talking nonsense.<sup>713</sup> But no matter how confused, fanatical, or enthusiastic for the new cult Don Rubbi was, his fable had a moral. The devotion of the Sacred Heart was, according to him, unfairly opposed "by certain ascetics who were ruling the consciences out of Christ's law with their difficult high notes."<sup>714</sup> To put it differently, their voices were so high pitched when they sang that everyday people could not make out the lyrics. Nonetheless, people like the old man in the parable, pure in their heart, were the proper candidates for holiness. "Those ascetics," he said reproachfully, were doing more harm than good to the faithful, "by raising scruples, fears, and mistrust." They might have been educated and literate, but they were neither in touch with God nor with true devotion.

### **The Two Canons of the Cathedral**

While Don Antonio Rubbi, Don Antonio Rota, and others were the objects of relentless satire, the canons of Bergamo Cathedral, Benedetto de Passi and Francesco Sonzogno, brought the issue to the institutional level. By informing the Inquisitors in Venice, they were calling on secular authorities to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>715</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Ibid. Rubbi used exorcism extensively to cure people from various illnesses.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid. The letter is written in broken vernacular. Rubbi, as we saw in the previous chapter, did not have the gift of eloquence, and his preaching was often obscure. Nonetheless, he managed to deliver effective, powerful, and vehement sermons.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> Inquisitors of State, one of the most powerful Venetian magistratures, were set up to protect the state. Their power was very broad-based because they could participate in any investigation of some interest to the security of the state. They were directly appointed by the Council of Ten and their limited number (three) gave them the ability to be secretive, efficient, and quick in their decisions. Their cognizance was

They also drew the complacent bishop of Bergamo, Giangirolamo Dolfin, into the controversy without directly blaming him. Dolfin, in fact, happened to be not only the head of the diocese and their superior, but also the main supporter of the devotion. The Inquisitors, in turn, ordered the *podestà e capitano in loco*, Girolamo Ascanio Zustiniani, to look into the affair.

De Passi and Sonzogno wrote two letters: a short one addressed to the Inquisitors and a long one addressed to the bishop. The latter was also attached to the report they sent to the Inquisitors. They were well aware that the bishop openly favored the new devotion of the Sacred Heart; therefore, they conceived the letter for him as a theological manifesto against it. With no possibility whatsoever to confront their own bishop successfully regarding the matter, they approached the issue more gingerly and strategically. While in their letter to the Inquisitors they explicitly identified the ex-Jesuits as the behind-the-scenes rabble-rousers and indirectly accused Dolfin of being an accomplice, in their letter to Dolfin they artfully dropped every contingent detail to focus only on the cult. What they ought to bring to Dolfin's attention were theological and devotional issues. When combined with their theoretical manifesto, the shorter missive sent to the Inquisitors was much more efficacious as well as telling. The "worshippers" of the heart, also derisively called *Cordicoli* to emphasize their idolatrous attitude, were

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almost unlimited, and they were feared for the enormous power they wielded. When unanimity could not be reached, matters went back to the Council of Ten for a final decision. William Carew Hazlitt, *The Venetian Republic: Its Rise, Its Growth, and Its Fall* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), 452-55. See also Samuele Romanin, *Gli Inquisitori di Stato di Venezia* (Venice: Pietro Nabatovich, 1858). For a recent study of the Venetian secret services, see Paolo Preto, *Servizi segreti di Venezia. Spionaggio e controspionaggio ai tempi della Serenissima* (Milan: Il Saggiatore Tascabili, 2010), 51-82. For further references on the role of Inquisitors of State, the complex relationships between institutions and magistratures, and their changing competences throughout the centuries, see Gaetano Cozzi's works: *La società veneta e il suo diritto: saggi su questioni matrimoniali, giustizia penale, politica del diritto, sopravvivenza del diritto veneto nell'Ottocento* (Padua: Marsilio, 2000); *Venezia barocca: conflitti di uomini e idee nella crisi del Seicento veneziano* (Venice: Cardo, 1995), *La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna: dal 1517 alla fine della Repubblica* (Turin: UTET, 1992); *Repubblica di Venezia e Stati Italiani: politica e giustizia dal secolo XVI al secolo XVIII* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982).

introducing dangerous innovations in piety, along with “disturbing new images that enticed less devotional than sensual thoughts,” lamented De Passi and Sonzogno in their letter.<sup>716</sup> Controversial paintings lay at the core of their condemnation. The heart hovering in the middle of a canvas alone looked as though it had just been ripped out of Jesus’ chest and was “represented” as well as “described” as an organ. (Fig.1-2) Sometimes the heart, the two canons complained, was included in biblical settings as a real persona; and at other times, it was painted along with Jesus, who was depicted as an emasculated, effeminate man, languorous if not sensuous in giving his heart away.<sup>717</sup> Flaming hearts hanging on church walls were another part of the unsettling story the two canons relayed to the Venetian Inquisitors. Whatever the pictorial narrative, De Passi and Sonzogno argued that these representations had no biblical foundations. The new devotion was an invention, unnecessary and undesirable.

They explained that the new devotion was aggressively penetrating the religious landscape: indulgences were granted, confraternities were formed, and new prayers, orations, and rituals were either added to the old ones or else were completely replacing them.<sup>718</sup> Even the old liturgy was giving way to new and unsettling ceremonies. Leaflets

<sup>716</sup> *Cordicoli* in Italian or *Cordicoles* in French, from the Latin *cordia-latras*, meant literally, “adorers of the heart” and was used in a disparaging way to identify those who supported the devotion. Thomas Williams, *A View of Religions. A Dictionary of All Religions, and Religious Denominations* (London: F. Westley, W. Simpkin and R. Marshall; and W. Baynes and Son, 1823), 89. See also Jonas, *French and the Cult*, 139.

<sup>717</sup> This a reference to Pompeo Batoni’s Sacred Heart, a painting created in 1767 for the altar in the northern side chapel of Il Gesù in Rome. David Morgan, “Rhetoric of the Heart: Figuring the Body in Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, eds. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 98, 105; and Dante Bernini and Claudio Strinati, *Capolavori da salvare* (Florence: Giunti Editore, collana Dossier d’art, 1986), 40. For a recent and thorough overview of Batoni, his works, and his Roman milieu, see Liliana Barroero, ed., *Intorno a Batoni: Convegno internazionale, Roma, 3 e 4 marzo 2009: atti* (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Raghianti Studi sull’arte, 2009).

<sup>718</sup> Indulgences as well as confraternities were a significant source of revenues. All the priests who instituted the devotion in their parish were united in denying the existence of confraternities linked to the devotion, pointing out that there was no payment or money involved with the devotion but only free alms

and devotional books containing images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were being published and distributed within as well as outside new religious groups; convent choruses were adorned with statues devoted to the new cult; and nuns' cells were filled with devotional objects carved in the shape of hearts. These ways of introducing new iconographical motifs into the catalogue of religious imagery were unprecedented and unsettling.<sup>719</sup>

Furthermore, dividing “the indivisible divine body of Christ” had not only iconographical implications but theological ones. The devotion and its representations undermined the unity of Christ's person, the teaching of the Trinity, and the one and indivisible nature of the Christian godhead. The cult of the Sacred Heart, De Passi and Sonzogno feared, was as much a threat to the universal body of the Church as to Christ's body. Indeed, the adorers of the heart set themselves apart as a separate congregation in the midst of the overall religious community. Tracing a parallel between the devotion *to a part* rather than to the whole and the urge the devotees felt to differentiate themselves within the body of believers, the canons linked the obvious risk of idolatry with the

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from the devotees. ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, letters from different parish priests, dated May and June 1781, c. 698 and the following.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid. Despite what the clergy promoting the cult maintained, the Sacred Heart was becoming a new source of revenues. Although no direct statement was ever made about revenues, this was certainly an issue at stake, as can be seen in the collateral documentation collected by the Inquisitors. All the clergy who replied to the inquisitors mentioned the alleged lack of revenues attached to the devotion. Confraternities of the Sacred Heart sprang up, but they were – so reported the priests – associations with no money involved, neither for being part of them nor for the divine offices celebrated. Even alms – insisted the clergy – were given freely with no recommendations or requests. The associates – confirmed the priest Gianfranco Canini of Bergamo – never made any unions among themselves because there were not real confraternities but simple associations attached to the already existing confraternity of Brescia. No minister, no syndics, no deputies, or other people were appointed to run these new affiliations. However, the devotion was inextricably linked to indulgences, which was a secure source of revenues, approved by papal authority and solicited by Episcopal requests. Even the priest Battista Lazari of S. Lazaro in Brescia claimed that he introduced the cult in his church after asking Bishop Dolfin for his authorization. Dolfin went personally to bless the painting of Christ showing his heart, which don Lazari had commissioned (at his expense, he emphasized). However, he continued, there was no such thing as a confraternity since there were no further expenses for the devotion, no meetings, and no ceremonies; there was only a Mass every Friday of the month, celebrated by Lazari, who also reassured the secular authorities that no particular revenues were coming from the cult.

dreadful menace of a fracture within the Church congregations. Thus making themselves in effect a separate part of the greater whole of the Church – and mirroring their exclusive “worship” of an exclusive part of Jesus with their own effective separation. In fact, they repeatedly used the more ominous term “schism,” revealing their fear (or the fear they hoped to evoke) that a religious fissure within the Church was possible, provoked by the virulence of the controversy over the new devotion.

The two canons took up their iconoclastic stance on the grounds of what they saw as an all-out assault on Catholicism. The new devotion, they argued, was like a plague, a form of idolatry that was infecting the believers and jeopardizing the older feasts, which were “most holy and safer”:

Such is the feast of the Most Holy Sacrament, observed every third Sunday in every parish with solemn processions and frequent Communion. Such is also the holy Mass, attracting everybody not only in the city but in the villas. Such is the practice of meditating about the life, the Passion, the death, and the resurrection of the Savior in every parish and every family, by reciting the rosary every night. These and other pious and authorized practices are in danger of being suffocated by the new devotion. The abuses in the devotion should call for the respect of the true rule, as we have seen in the diocese of Brescia, where cardinal Querini replaced the expensive and extravagant processions toward sacred statues, more adorned and pompous than devout, with the more decent devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament, brought to the sick and the dying.<sup>720</sup>

Some of these celebrations, they continued, had taken root only after bishops had strenuously supported and encouraged them amongst the believers for years. Lastly, the Sacred Heart involved a new feast, thus undermining the most recent Venetian policy to

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<sup>720</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Bergamo, June 3, 1780. This statement was also an overt declaration of Jansenism, because Jansenists believed that ornaments of the church were an insult to the poor and an ostentatious display of money used unwisely. Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image. An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 192.

drastically restrict the number of saints' feasts.<sup>721</sup> De Passi and Sonzogno could hardly conceive that the Republic, after years of contentious debates within the Venetian patriciate and within the Church to abolish (or at least curb) religious holidays, was now allowing a new one. The letter asserted that "the devotion to the sacred heart was rotten to the core." They proclaimed their "faith in [Bishop Dolfin's] wisdom and his ability" to eradicate the devotion.<sup>722</sup> Thus they ended their manifesto by antagonizing the bishop who, as they and everybody else knew, was a major advocate of the cult.

### **Bishop Dolfin**

Despite the fact that even in their letter to the Venetian authorities the two canons never explicitly mentioned the Bishop's influence on the increasing importance of the devotion of the Sacred Heart in the religious life of Bergamo, Brescia, and the surrounding villages, it was common knowledge that the Bishop himself was behind this renewed religious enthusiasm.<sup>723</sup> When the devotion of the Sacred Heart was introduced in Bergamo in 1778, Dolfin promoted it in an "almost pontifical Mass."<sup>724</sup> In his pastoral

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<sup>721</sup> See Chapter 1, in which I examine the abolition of saints' feasts in the Republic of Venice in its various stages.

<sup>722</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato.

<sup>723</sup> In Brescia, the nearest city to Bergamo in Lombardy, the devotion of the Sacred Heart had already become a common practice as early as 1746, when Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini obtained indulgences for the confraternities of his diocese. The rise of the Confraternities of the Sacred Heart in Brescia caused a parallel interest in the cult in many churches in Bergamo. Ever since Pius VI had granted plenary indulgences in 1779, sacred hearts were displayed in many urban churches. Interestingly, the confraternities of the Sacred Heart in Bergamo, claimed the priest Gianfrancesco Canini, were not true confraternities, but more like lay associations linked to the confraternities in Brescia. Canini, along with other priests who introduced the devotion, provided a feeble and unconvincing attempt to underplay some side effects of the devotion, such as the sudden rise of confraternities, which within the Venetian domain had to obtain secular licenses and were subjected to secular control. ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Letter of June 30, 1781.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., Letter by Zustiniani, May 16, 1781. A detail provided by the podestà Zustiniani. A Pontifical Mass was a solemn Mass celebrated according the ceremonies prescribed in the "Cæremoniale Episcoporum." The Cæremoniale was revisited in 1984, and now the term "pontifical Mass" is no longer in use. However, in the past as now, the Mass was reserved for special occasions because the celebration is complex and entails the display of Episcopal insignia. The bishop is vested in the *cappa magna*, and the deacons and all the clerics have to minister the book, mitre, crosier, censer, candles, and so forth while

letter dated 1779, the Bishop urged his flock to embrace this devotion which excited believers' hearts, making them feel that Jesus' love was unconditional. In a public edict, he had openly and publicly fostered the devotion of the Sacred Heart, promising indulgences for those who embraced its cult. In a private letter to the nuns of his city's convents (which immediately became public), he urged them to continue undisturbed their devotion of the Sacred Heart by all means, even at the cost of their spiritual isolation. In fact, whenever a confessor called the devotion into question, the nuns were to immediately to leave the room and cut off any relationship with him. Confronted with criticism and harsh reactions by those clerics of the city who opposed the Sacred Heart, the Bishop reinforced his episcopal authority over the convents and invoked his personal connection with the nuns.

As soon as Passi and Sonzogno involved the Venetian authorities, Dolfin felt compelled to respond to the open accusations. He set the tone of his reply by indirectly accusing the enemies of the Sacred Heart of iconoclasm. Not only had books and representations been removed from nuns' cells, but images of the heart had been removed from churches and erased from paintings.<sup>725</sup> The devotion of the Sacred Heart, Dolfin claimed, had already been introduced by his predecessors, practiced by many saints,

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others in turn wash the bishop's hands. *Cerimoniale Episcoporum*, (Venice: Ufficio Liturgico-Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, 1984), 140-142.

<sup>725</sup> The indulgences that Bishop Dolfin had obtained for his diocese entailed a pilgrimage "to the image of the heart displayed on some altars." This statement implied two things: first, once the images were removed or erased, as had occurred in Bergamo, the celebration of the Sacred Heart was at risk and undermined, as the devotion was linked to the exhibition of and visits to the image; second, the representations of the heart were placed on movable altars and were therefore movable images that could be temporarily arranged during the time of orations, indulgences, and novenas, *in sum* celebrations for the devotion, and then taken away. ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Letter by Gianfrancesco Canini, Bergamo, June 30, 1781. A confirmation of this practice comes also from Cardinal Rezzonico's letter, dated August 18, 1779, in which the latter asked the Pope for a plenary indulgence and remission for the dead for those who were repentant and, after confession and communion, "would visit the image of the Divine Heart exhibited for public veneration over some altar in the cathedral, or in some church, or some chapel, or in some oratory" during the Friday after the Octave of the Most Holy Body of Christ, or the Sunday after it – the precise day to be established by the priest of the place.



suggested by many important authors in the past, authorized by the popes, protected and defended by sovereigns in every part of the Catholic world, supported by bishops, and even embraced by many dioceses in the Venetian Republic. He thus claimed that he was following in the steps of many before him. Last but not least, he argued that upon his own request, the Holy See had granted him and his diocese indulgences for the cult. This was his final word on the theological issue.

In addition to being an apologia for the devotion, Dolfin's letter was a *j'accuse* against the high-profile Jansenist Pujati, the instigator of the religious crisis in Bergamo and in the Republic, and it depicted him as a troublemaker trying to undermine the Catholic faith from within. What irritated Bishop Dolfin was the fact that Pujati, "a simple monk" who was clearly a Jansenist and an enemy of Catholic orthodoxy – and who possessed no authority to criticize episcopal resolutions and decisions in matters of faith and devotion, was attempting to undermine his authority. In his counterattack, Dolfin asked the Venetian authorities to support his request that the secular arm expel from his diocese and from the Venetian territories these enemies of the Catholic hierarchy "who were disturbing the tranquility of his people." Pujati was not the only one to be discredited and accused.<sup>726</sup> The two canons and the Inquisitor of Bergamo, Bandiera, were also blamed. Dolfin asked for all of them to be expelled from the Republic.

### ***The Consultore in Jure***

The *podestà* Zustiniani confirmed the involvement of the bishop in promoting the devotion in Bergamo and the surrounding territories; he also pointed out that indulgences

<sup>726</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato.

for those who practiced the devotion of the Sacred Heart were granted by the Pope upon Dolfin's petition. The Inquisitors of State asked the *consultore in jure* his opinion, and he took the matter into his own hands.<sup>727</sup> Before analyzing in detail the issues at play, Giovanni Battista Bilesimo emphasized how "there are always two sides to every story" and since the Bishop had simply neglected to present or consider one of them, he would provide a brief summary of the ongoing dispute. Interestingly, the other side of the story had been offered, in detail, by De Passi and Sonzogno; but the *consultore* wanted to make a point about the Bishop's agenda. In his report, Bilesimo underscored how the whole question had become an issue only when the devotion turned into a public affair. "The numerous confraternities, the solemnity of the devotion, the rituals and specific practices had brought the cult to the attention of some theologians," Bilesimo observed, "who, after having thoroughly and rigidly examined it, at first disapproved, then condemned it." The cult of the heart, continued Bilesimo, was rejected because it "is childish, superstitious, and tends toward Nestorianism."<sup>728</sup> However, this devotion, added Bilesimo almost in passing, had been instituted by the Jesuits some time before. Thus, in a short paragraph so condensed that it leaves no doubt about his attitude towards the issue, the *consultore*

<sup>727</sup> Ibid., The consultore's report is not dated. The *consultori in jure* were in charge of disentangling difficult issues when religious concerns were at stake and, as often happened, intertwined with secular issues. I have examined their complex and crucial role in shaping Venetian religious politics in my previous chapters, especially 1 and 2.

<sup>728</sup> Nestorianism stressed the distinction between the human and the divine in Christ to such a degree that Nestorian teachings spoke of "two persons" of Christ, one human and the other divine. Nestorianism therefore seemed to threaten the unity of the divine and the human in Christ. It was considered a heretical doctrine and was condemned in the fifth century. Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions. A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 25, 43-44. Interestingly, Bilesimo introduced in his summary a very strong and specific term, that was not used by Passi and De Sonzogno but was instead used by Pujati and Bishop Scipione de' Ricci, the most tenacious enemies of the Sacred Heart, in their "invectives" against the superstition that the cult of the heart was fomenting. Scipione de' Ricci, *Lettera pastorale di monsignor vescovo di Pistoia e Prato in occasione di ...* (Genoa: Repetto, 1788), 21-22; and *Memorie di Scipione de' Ricci*, vol. 1 (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1863), 102, 138. For the Synod of Pistoia and Bishop Ricci, see above, p. 342.

summarized the history of the devotion.<sup>729</sup> Since the Jesuits had to be credited for the institution of the devotion, it did not make much sense in his opinion to delve into other details, and therefore he failed to mention Mary Margaret Alacoque, the mystics, and the saints who were the founders of the devotion.<sup>730</sup> Bilesimo did not bother to conceal his condescension for what he considered a frivolous case and a frivolous plea. However, what emerges even more strikingly from the dismissive tone of the *consultore* was that the short paragraph describing the issues emphasized the deep contradictions engrained in the history of devotion; that is, the Sacred Heart was *de facto* a cult, even though it had been considered by theologians to be an essentially futile devotion with heretical undertones.

The *consultore* did not want to examine (and be dragged into) the ongoing – and exhausting – disputes around the Sacred Heart. Therefore, he avoided the topic. His solution was just to let things quiet down by imposing silence on both parties. He recommended removing all the books on the matter and forbidding the circulation of new ones. The devotion of the Sacred Heart could not be condemned, Bilesimo noted, as it had been endorsed with papal approval in the form of indulgences, and fostered through Masses and offices. Nonetheless, what he called “the accessories” around which the polemics swirled, namely associations, offices, prayers, devotional booklets, paintings,

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<sup>729</sup> Bilesimo’s point of view, though couched in diplomacy and prudence, was easy to identify. He was one of the last *consultori* who dealt with the abolition of saints’ feasts; as we saw, he had harsh words for both the bishops and the clergy and he trusted neither, considering both to be responsible for the failure of the reform. See Chapter 1. *Consultori* had to be far-sighted men. Devil’s advocates in the service of the Republic, or rather, of the party that was governing it at that time, would ideally practice an empirical if not cut-and-dry manner of looking at things, especially when the interests of the Republic were at stake because of religious matters.

<sup>730</sup> Although the length and the depth of their opinions might have varied according to the aspects they wanted to emphasize (and the expectations of the magistracy which had sought their advice), the thoroughness of the *consultori*’s reports was a requirement in their role as legal and theological consultants of the Republic. The paucity of this *consulto* in regard to the devotion indicates Bilesimo’s unwillingness to spend time and effort on it.

and images, should all conform to “the rules of *purity, gravity* and *decorum* required by the Catholic religion” (my italics). Bilesimo added that “the bishop *should* be the one in charge of such responsibility, not the Venetian tribunal.” In other words, Dolfin was to regulate piety in his diocese rather than asking the secular authorities to do so.

Bilesimo was unequivocal about the Bishop’s responsibility as the primary guardian of the faith. More precisely, the *consultore* pointed out how the Bishop was not carrying out his role as a pastor. With this he finished his report, leaving the Inquisitors with the feeling that he was not at all sympathetic to what he considered an ecclesiastic trivial matter about a questionable devotion. *Purity, gravity*, and *decorum* were the guidelines Bilesimo emphasized for regulating piety, as per Muratori’s directives. It was a *trinity*, as congenial to the Jansenist’s sensibilities as it was incompatible with the sensuous and emotional religiosity of the disgruntled ex-Jesuits. His reticence in dealing with the issue should not be misunderstood. Bilesimo could barely hide his personal convictions; but the secular institutions had to withdraw before the Church’s authority. The devotees of the heart were pursuing a devotion that was not in tune with the Catholic *Aufklärung*, but the Church had favored it in many instances. However, as it turned out, that support was ambiguous to say the least.

### **Rome: An Ambivalent Church A Process of Enforcements, Resistances, and Compromises**

Bergamo was an exceptional and belated example of the ways the conflict over the devotion was unfolding between proponents and opponents. The city in many ways represented a microcosm of the wider debate that started in the first half of the seventeenth century, as the devotion spread beyond the closed doors of convents and

monasteries. Bergamo represented the controversy at work. De Passi and Sonzogno did not simply echo that controversy; in fact, they revealed how it was playing out in a local context, in which both Jansenists and Jesuits enjoyed strong and powerful affiliations. More importantly, what was happening in Bergamo reverberated outside the city: it re-actualized the broader theoretical controversy and linked the periphery with the center.

At the center, namely Rome, the devotion of the Sacred Heart had attracted an early and favorable consensus from various ecclesiastics and confraternities. But it received a wary reception from the official Church. If friends and enemies of the devotion were outside as well as inside the Roman Church, many nuances existed between these two poles, including a level of true disinterest or a very tepid interest in the cult. In the first half of the century, the devotion was repeatedly rejected, mostly on the grounds of its graphic representations and its insistence on the materiality or carnality of the heart rather than on its metaphorical implications. In the second half of the century, the devotion was still stirring controversies.

The Sacred Heart not only revealed the Church's internal split between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, it also revealed concerns about the ability to regulate worship within the Church through the approval and authorization of emergent devotions. Lack of approval or censure left room for accommodation, and fostered dialogue and negotiation between those who supported the new devotion and those who opposed it within a divided Church. When the people and the historical circumstances involved in this process changed, the dynamics of the interaction changed too. Personal inclinations, beliefs, and connections of the various popes at various times altered the premises underlying the diffidence toward a devotion that was raising theological as well

iconographical issues, despite its obtaining local recognition. Because of the ambivalence that surrounded its concurrent acceptance and outright rejection, the Church sought grounds for compromise.

Among the popes, Benedict XIV (papacy years 1740-1758) was certainly not a supporter of the Sacred Heart. Even before he became pope (while he was a member of the sacred Congregation of Rites as Cardinal Lambertini), he had not given his approval for the devotion.<sup>731</sup> With Clemente XIII (papacy years 1758-1769) the situation changed. He was sympathetically inclined towards the Jesuits. He was part of the Arch-confraternity of Saint Theodore on the Palatine Hill, under the name of Friar Carlo of Saint Ignatius. The goal of the confraternity was to spread the devotion of the Sacred Heart – an activity achieved mostly through the distribution of images. During the pontificate of Clemente XIII in 1767, Pompeo Batoni painted a canvas dedicated to the Sacred Heart. It represents Christ showing (almost offering) his heart to the viewer, who engages in and becomes part of the scene. (Fig. 3) This painting was and still is one of the most reproduced images of the devotion. It has been copied and printed continually since its appearance on the altar in the northern side of Il Gesù in Rome. Although Batoni's image immediately became the model for private as well as public images of the devotion, the Sacred Heart did not obtain universal recognition within Catholic liturgy.

During the pontificate of Clement XIV (1769-1774) the process toward papal approval of the devotion came to an impasse. The Pope had to deal with the growing disfavor and opposition to the Society of Jesus expressed by the European monarchies. Banned by most of the European countries by the 1760s, the Jesuits were repeatedly

<sup>731</sup> Mario Rosa, Benedetto XIV, *DBI*, vol. 8 (1966), *ad vocem*.

Even though Pope Benedict XIV issued some local indulgences that were associated with the devotion, to approve or endorse the devotion was another matter.

accused of shrewd maneuvering to ensure their political as well as economic power and influence at the expense of the secular states. It was more a political than a theological controversy that led to their final suppression in 1773. The history of the Sacred Heart was therefore linked to the mixed fortunes of the religious order that mostly promoted and spread the devotion.

A turning point occurred in 1781 when during the pontificate of Pius VI, and under his wing, Pompeo Batoni painted seven monumental altarpieces for the Basilica of the Estrela in Lisbon, all dedicated to the Sacred Heart.<sup>732</sup> The series was a significant commission ordered by the Queen of Portugal, Maria I Braganza. The Queen figured in the highly allegorical paintings as protector of the devotion as well as of the Catholic Church in the world. It was a statement of political importance and was a visual manifesto of the reconciliation between Rome and Portugal, whose relations had broken off after the suppression of the Jesuits in 1758.<sup>733</sup> Here the political aspect or the political relevance of the devotion clearly emerges because the heart became both cause and result of a new alliance between throne and altar. This was an important step in counteracting the increasing isolation that the Holy See was enduring.

Regardless of the ebb and flow in the devotion's endorsement, the wholesale rejection of the devotion that the Jansenists were calling for was doomed to failure. The

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<sup>732</sup> The papal praise of Batoni's paintings is anecdotal. As soon as Pius VI saw the canvases, he let Batoni kiss his hand rather than his foot – a special honor granted to acknowledge the painter's accomplishment and the fortuitous circumstance. Edgar Peters Bowron and Peter Bjorn Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni. Prince of Painters in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Houston: Yale University Press and the Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 130.

<sup>733</sup> The whole affair happened immediately after the death of Benedict XIV. During the papal *sede vacante*, the Marquis of Pombal took advantage of the temporary vacuum and expelled the Jesuits from Portugal, and he also immediately stripped them of their possessions. Douglas L. Wheeler, and Walter C. Opello, *Historical Dictionary of Portugal* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2010), 216; and Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal. Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71-84.

Sacred Heart had developed strong roots in Catholic devotion as well as in politics. Although the devotion was not yet acknowledged as universal within the Church, it was no longer a private cult celebrated solely in the secrecy of cloisters. Not only had it left the cells, it had spread widely. Numerous indulgences had been issued to nobles and bishops who promoted and celebrated the devotion. In addition to France, where it had risen initially, the devotion of the Sacred Heart spread within Spain, Poland, Hungary, and Italy. In the Venetian Republic, Bishop Dolfin was not alone: the last two Patriarchs of Venice, Giovanni Bragadin and Federico Maria Giovanelli, were also ardent supporters of the devotion.<sup>734</sup> Following Bragadin's plea in 1765, Clement granted the city indulgences for the devotion. The cult of Christ's heart had first made its appearance in 1732, when a *Compagnia del Sacro Cuore* was founded at the Church of San Canciano. There, a specific altar was dedicated to the new devotion. The convent of Santa Caterina was soon run by nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and increasingly, nuns of various convents became devoted to the heart.<sup>735</sup> The devotion was already popular by the mid-eighteenth century in Venice, having been fostered also by the early circulation of texts containing prayers and hymns to the heart. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart of Jesus had entered the religious literary scene in the figurative and expressive language of Francesco Maria Ghirlandi's *Ghirlanda d'affetti poetici al Sacro Cuore*, in which the hearts of both Christ and Mary were the subject of the opening sonnet.<sup>736</sup> In 1742, the major works of Leonardo da Porto Maurizio

<sup>734</sup> de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 44.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>736</sup> Fassl, *Sacred Eloquence*, 192. The story of those two hearts is very much intertwined. It also sheds more light on the feminine quality of this devotion, which would remain a strong and important feature throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Emma Fattorini, "Devozioni e politica," in *Cristiani d'Italia* (Treccani, 2011), and *Il culto mariano tra Ottocento e Novecento: simboli e devozioni. Ipotesi e prospettiva di ricerca* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999).



were published in Venice; he also aggressively promoted the devotion.<sup>737</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart had found a place in devotional literature, prayers, and novenas. Orations to the Heart appeared alongside those for Mary, Christ, and the saints.<sup>738</sup> At about the same time, the Remondinis also published in Venice the entire work of Francesco de' Liguori, who was one of the most strenuous supporters of the devotion of the Sacred Heart – to which he dedicated prayers, novenas, and songs. Artists also soon started to devote their craft to the devotion. This is an intriguing part of the part of the story that is still mysterious because the hearts painted in this early stage of the devotion sooner or later disappeared.

Between 1742 and 1745, Bartolomeo Letterini painted a *pala* representing the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart, with the flaming heart enveloped by the crown of thorns in the upper part of the image.<sup>739</sup> The altarpiece was completely repainted between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century; the heart was discovered during the 1985-86 restoration.<sup>740</sup> (Fig. 4) But it was with Tiepolo's "Martyrdom of Saint Agatha," painted for the Church of the Benedictine nuns around 1755 at Lendinara (Patria del

<sup>737</sup> Leonardo da Porto Maurizio (1676-1751) was a leading figure in Roman devotional life in the first half of the century. He belonged to the order of Friars Minor. Leonardo established "The Way of the Cross" in the form of fourteen stations and thereby aggressively re-inserted Christ into the devotional practices. He was proclaimed a saint by Pope Pius IX in 1867. His work launched the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, and it spread afterward.

<sup>738</sup> *Raccolta Di Panegirici Sopra Tutte Le Festività Di Nostro Signore, di Maria Vergine e de' santi ...* Tomo 6 (Venice: Girolamo Dorigoni, 1762), 62- 71, 98-105, 197-208; *Raccolta di fervorose orazioni per ciascun giorno della settimana per ben preppersi alla morte ...* (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1778), 14. See also Serafino Petrobelli, *Panegirici ed altri sacri ragionamenti*, vol. 1 (Venice: Remondini, 1752): this text is particularly interesting because, although the Sacred Heart does not appear as a specific cult, the heart is an almost obsessively recurrent word, as well as a theme, throughout the book.

<sup>739</sup> Johanna Fassel, *Sacred Eloquence: Giambattista Tiepolo and the Rhetoric of the Altarpiece* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 187-188.

<sup>740</sup> Antonio Niero, "Spiritualità popolare e dotta," in *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Settecento*, ed. Bruno Bertoli (Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1993), 144.

Friuli), that the Sacred Heart of Jesus emerged as a devotion to Christ.<sup>741</sup> The heart, isolated and encircled by a crown of thorns, appeared not “to counterbalance the powerful presence of the female saint” but rather to share the pictorial space with the saint.<sup>742</sup> (Fig. 5) The nuns were devoted to the heart, and that was the object of the painting (along with Saint Agatha). This was a device that allowed Tiepolo to paint the Sacred Heart as a separate organ, yet with a link to an established holy image. The heart was painted at the top of the canvas, on a smaller movable lunette that later mysteriously got lost and has disappeared.

It was not the first time that Tiepolo painted the subject. In 1737, a Martyrdom was also painted for the basilica of Saint Antonio in Padua. On that occasion, Tiepolo had painted Saint Agatha looking up at Saint Peter, whose appearance was followed by the miraculous healing of her wounds. (Fig. 6) That heavenly vision in the upper part of the altarpiece at Lendinara was replaced with the Sacred Heart.<sup>743</sup> However, that heart was not immediately acknowledged as being a representation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and, as a matter of fact, not all art historians today accept this attribution – or the juxtaposition of the two different devotional scenes: the one with Saint Agatha’s martyrdom and the tribute to the growing devotion of the Sacred Heart.<sup>744</sup> In 1766 another sacred heart, painted by Antonio Gabrieli, was displayed on the altar of the SS. Martyrs in the Church of the Jesuits in Belluno. This Sacred Heart too was removed

<sup>741</sup> The canvas is now in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin. Keith Christiansen, *Giambattista Tiepolo, 1696-1770* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 239; Fassl, *Sacred Eloquence*, 166.

<sup>742</sup> Art historian Fassl’s interpretation differs from my own because she sees the heart as almost incidental, while I argue that it is in fact very likely the real protagonist in the painting. *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>743</sup> Christiansen, *Giambattista Tiepolo*, 239.

<sup>744</sup> Filippo Pedrocco, *Tiepolo* (Florence: Art Dossier Giunti, 1996), 48; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Storia di Venezia: Temi. L’arte*, vol. 2 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1995), 363.

during the Napoleonic era.<sup>745</sup> Thus, the devotion to the Heart of Jesus in Venice as well as in the rest of the Dominion had become a feature in popular devotion – fostered by bishops, cherished by new confraternities, celebrated by painters, and honored by future saints such as Leonardo da Porto Maurizio and Alfonso de' Liguori. The heart was increasingly appearing in existing liturgical practices.

### **Inquisitors Seeking Advice**

The proliferation of books that aggressively promoted the devotion and the introduction of new iconographical motifs did not simply raise a heated debate. The argument instead rose to an entirely new level, involving the local Inquisitors who found themselves caught in the middle. They were confronted with texts that seemed to be multiplying despite being forbidden, and with images that they did not recognize as part of the tradition. Inquisitorial pleas for guidelines about what to publish and what to exhibit reveal both their dismay about the devotion, and the Church's ambivalence towards it. In the process of censorship, the individual personalities of the Inquisitors played key roles. On the whole, the Inquisitors were mostly at odds with the novelty of the devotion, which was nevertheless championed by the local bishops and clergy.

This was true in Italy, even beyond the Republic of Venice. During Benedict XIV's pontificate, others Inquisitors asked for guidance regarding books and pictures about the devotion, which some priests had displayed in their churches.<sup>746</sup> The Inquisitor

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<sup>745</sup> Flavio Vizzuto and Antonio Gabrieli, *DBI*, vol. 51 (1998). Gabrieli was born in Belluno (1694-1789), and was a local painter who did not reach the fame of other Venetian artists. But he did achieve some recognition during his career, which was developed almost entirely between Belluno and Treviso. He painted many religious-themed canvases, commissioned both by members of the aristocracy and the clergy. His technique is reminiscent of that of the more gifted Guardi.

<sup>746</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ACDF), *St. St. C 4-p*; in particular, the correspondence with the Inquisitor of Perugia.

of Perugia, for instance, acknowledged the validity of the devotion, since the presence of the heart was a recurrent motif within the mystical tradition. He also noticed that some books that had been published which were in fact prohibited. Nonetheless, he was mostly troubled by images of “a wounded heart that had been arranged over altars.” He at once feared this and wondered if the separation of the heart from Christ’s body was the first step toward other “visual novelties.” The exhibition of the heart might encourage the idea that other parts of Christ’s body could be dissected and represented alone, a sort of dismembering process that he personally found disquieting. Also, the books and images had not received approval from the Sacred Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies, the Roman institution in charge of disentangling this sort of issue.<sup>747</sup> Interestingly, concern about the inherent risk of isolating the heart, which might be a dangerous precedent that could lead to a focus on other bodily parts of Christ, had been an element of the rationale of Benedict XIV’s rejection when he was still a cardinal.

Returning to the rest of the Venetian Dominion, outside Bergamo’s territory books that had been prohibited by the Index were nevertheless printed locally.<sup>748</sup> Especially in the Patria del Friuli, the extreme northeast corner of the Republic, censors must have turned a blind eye. How that happened did not completely remain a covert

<sup>747</sup> This was the committee set up by Pope Sixtus VI in 1588 to regularize local liturgical practices according to the Tridentine vision of the Reformed Catholic Church. The aim was not merely to control the periphery from the center but also to absorb the periphery within the center, according to the new Roman standards. Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy. Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88, 97.

<sup>748</sup> Clandestine book markets flourished in Venice in the eighteenth century; but even as early as the mid-seventeenth century, the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova, charged with overseeing all aspects of the university, lamented that many books were published without the Inquisition’s license. Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. Clavicula Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002), in particular chapter III; and Marino Zorzi, “La produzione e la circolazione del libro,” in *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 7 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997), 921-85, 955. However, this case was different in the sense that the prohibited books were circulating with a regular license that had been irregularly granted.

affair; the Bishop himself had consented to the contested publications. The Inquisitor was puzzled and turned to the Sacred Congregation. His request was for clearer guidance, but in the process he exposed the contradictions that the Church itself was perpetuating about this matter.

The Inquisitor in the Friulian town of Udine, Francesco Benoffi, had been dealing with this issue since 1753, and he was not pleased.<sup>749</sup> In Udine as well as in Concordia, nuns who were fervently devoted to the Sacred Heart were “arbitrarily” spreading the devotion and introducing new hymns that celebrated the Sacred Heart in the liturgy.<sup>750</sup> The devotion had been inaugurated during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the Monastery of S. Vito, in the Diocese of Concordia. Those litanies sung in praise of the heart had not received Church approval. Benoffi wrote to Rome asking for guidelines, and pointed out that to introduce novelties in the liturgy was an abuse. Clement VIII, in 1601, had reaffirmed this principle with a decree establishing that any new litanies needed a canonical authorization. While for private cults (namely those practiced outside the official liturgy in the privacy of ones’ own home, chapel, or cell), the validation of the Inquisitor was enough, for the public the Sacred Congregation of Rites was required. It is worth noting that in both cases the Bishop was not, jurisdictionally speaking, in charge of this matter. Without entering directly into a conflict with the Bishop, the Inquisitor Benoffi was refusing to back down from his position. He therefore sent books as well as manuscripts promoting the cult to Rome, where the content could be examined by the Sacred Congregation.

<sup>749</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1753-1754*, cc. 57-63; *C.L. 1771-1772*, cc. 102-13.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid. C.L. 1753-1754*, c. 56.

Benoffi also stated, “part of the populace [were] bewildered by these orations, which they [did] not recognize as belonging to the Roman tradition.”<sup>751</sup> It is unclear if these were the concerns of parishioners or of a zealot Inquisitor not keen on the new devotion. In any case, he held that even though the Archbishop had already given his imprimatur, “he [Benoffi] wasn’t sure about the cult.”<sup>752</sup> Although those litanies had been approved in the Church of Saint Theodore in Rome, he believed they had to be prohibited in Udine, and in all the churches and convents of the Venetian Dominion.<sup>753</sup> “People praying incessantly all those Latin orations,” argued Benoffi “were reducing the devotion to a pure *material event*” (my italics). By saying “material,” the Inquisitor most likely intended “mechanical,” as he was referring to the fact that people did not understand Latin – therefore, the real meaning of the new prayers was for them completely obscure. The choice of the word was not casual or accidental; *material* alluded to the major criticism that the enemies of the devotion had posed concerning the carnality of the heart, namely its physical, disturbing verisimilitude. This indicates Benoffi’s awareness of the controversy about the “material heart” and made clear which side he was taking.

However, contrary to what he had thought, eliminating the devotion was not an easy task. The cult was already deeply rooted and had gained many devotees. Perhaps the new hymns and prayers, although new and in Latin, were not as disturbing to the devotees’ sensibilities as Benoffi claimed. The Archbishop had allowed the celebration of the cult, especially in the monasteries; however, the Inquisitor wanted to know “also on

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<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid., c. 57.

<sup>753</sup> The arch-confraternity of the Sacred Heart was first established in Italy, and was founded by the famous preacher Leonardo da Porto Maurizio in 1729. Leonardo was an indefatigable promoter of the devotion, see above n. 737. Nicola Barbuti and Giovanni Pinto, eds., *Itinerari di ricerca. Studi in onore di Giovanni Pinto* (Bari: Cacucci, 2002), 52. For an extensive study of the devotion of the Sacred Heart in Rome and the role of Porto Maurizio in spreading both it and the Via Crucis, see Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*.

behalf of the archbishop, which prayers could be substituted for those he had decided to eliminate during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and on the feast of the Sacred Heart.” Thus, it seems that the Bishop, who was the main arbiter in the introduction of devotion and new songs, was in Benoffi’s words, as willing as Benoffi was to remit the matter to the Congregation. Benoffi’s attitude was unapologetic; behind his apparent deference in asking for guidelines, he was already opposed to the Sacred Heart, and intended to curb those songs that had not been approved, and to remove the suspicious books. Moreover, he wanted to know whether he could remove any paintings that represented the Sacred Heart from churches. After all, to disseminate images of the Sacred Heart was proving to be the most effective way to propagate the devotion.<sup>754</sup>

In 1772, Francesco Benoffi was again at the forefront of the Sacred Heart affair; he was Inquisitor in Padua at this time, and was still facing the same issues.<sup>755</sup> In Udine, he had managed to eliminate the representations of the Sacred Heart from churches, following an order of the Congregation. In Padua, he wanted to censure the book *Biglietti confidenziali critici*, which fostered the devotion of the Sacred Heart.<sup>756</sup> The book was a harsh refutation of Camillo Blasi’s *De Festo Cordis Iesu dissertatio commonitoria cum*

<sup>754</sup> Ibid. Seydl’s detailed study focuses on the development of the devotion in Rome, Emilia Romagna, and Portugal. While investigating the diffusion of popular prints and commissioned paintings that were mostly inspired by Batoni’s canvases, Seydl also traced the growth of the devotion from the center to the periphery.

<sup>755</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1771-1772*, cc. 102-10.

<sup>756</sup> This book (*Biglietti confidenziali critici contra il libro del sig. Camillo Blasi avvocato romano stampato in Roma quest’anno 1771*) was the work of the theologian Giambattista Faure (1702-1779). He was a militant Jesuit polemicist, who in 1744 found himself in the middle of a controversy when he defended the work of a Jesuit which had been placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. For this defense, he was summoned for questioning by the Superior General of the Society, who was acting on behalf of Pope Benedict XIV. Throughout his life, Faure was involved in the major theological issues of his time, and he continually wrote texts against the rigorists who accused the Jesuits of moral laxity. Even during Clemente XIV’s pontificate, he continued his work as a polemicist and saw in the attack on the Sacred Heart a manifest attack against the Jesuits. In his *Biglietti confidenziali*, he refuted the Jansenist theology, which he considered an invalid and insincere critique of the devotion. Giuseppe Pignatelli, *Giambattista Faure*, in *DBI*, vol. 45 (1995), *ad vocem*.

*notis, et monumentis selectis*. His “Dissertation about the Sacred Heart,” published in 1772, contained one of the sharpest criticisms of the cult.<sup>757</sup> The anonymous author of the *Biglietti*, who was also promoting the circulation of images of the Sacred Heart, provoked the Inquisitor’s intervention and challenged his patience. In his report to Rome, Benoffi did not hide his exasperation at having to deal again with what he clearly considered a matter that should have been long closed. The prohibited book, complained Benoffi, had been introduced by the young director of the Seminary in the city, a friend of the Jesuits who acted secretly to print texts and pamphlets, and who resorted to the commonly used strategy of creating fake imprints to avoid censorship.<sup>758</sup> The publication of forbidden texts seems to have been permitted by ecclesiastics who hid themselves behind a vow of silence. Astutely, the Inquisitor suspected that the anonymous work had been written by several “pens” in Rome – allegedly cardinals and theologians – who then sent their papers to Padua, where they were copied, printed, and made ready for the market dealing with devotional literature.

In sum, Benoffi made it sound like a conspiracy. Indeed, the highest authorities in Rome were split into two conflicting parties concerning the devotion. Each side played an important role in guiding, keeping contacts, directing, controlling, and influencing their respective adherents in the Venetian Dominion. The Inquisitor claimed that the book he was examining was the private property of one of the most powerful families in Padua,

<sup>757</sup> Camillo Blasi, *De Festo Cordis Iesu dissertatio commonitoria cum notis, et monumentis selectis* (Venice 1772).

<sup>758</sup> This consisted of adding a fictitious printer, date, and place of publication. It was a common strategy in order to avoid censorship; in Venice it was done even by the secular authorities. On this topic, see Mario Infelise, “Falsificazioni di stato,” in *False date: Repertorio delle licenze di stampa veneziane con falso luogo di edizione (1740-1797)*, eds. Patrizia Bravetti and Orfea Granzotto (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2009), 7-27. For other studies on this topic, see by the same author *I libri proibiti. Da Gutenberg all’Encyclopedie* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 108-14; and *L’editoria veneziana nel ‘700* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1989), 71-131.



who threatened to appeal to influential patrons in Venice to have it returned.<sup>759</sup> As discussed earlier, both in the Republic and in Rome, a polarized situation existed, with powerful and influential exponents on both sides, who were able to build up a network of supporting allies to counter the efforts of their opponents. The director of the local Jesuit school disclosed to Benoffi that Camillo Blasi, the target of the anonymous book, was a friend of the Pope, and that rumors were spreading that the real author of the book was in fact Clement XIV himself, who had allegedly written the pamphlet while still a cardinal. Enlarged and revised, the book was then published under Blasi's name, although it was thought that he "would have not been capable of such an enterprise."<sup>760</sup> Most of the copies were sent to France, where the devotion also had many affiliates and enemies. The statement ended with a rather cryptic sentence: "This pope is a real enigma."<sup>761</sup> That the book, which is still attributed to Camillo Blasi, was suspected to be the work of the Pope is rather telling. In those turbulent years preceding and following the suppression of the Jesuits, the level of mutual distrust was reflected in the correspondence between the periphery and the center.

Beyond the ambiguities and contradictions within the Church, there was also another important phenomenon at play. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent, when the Inquisitors moved increasingly into arenas that had been the preserve of the bishops, they entered into multiple jurisdictional conflicts. At the end of the eighteenth century, the opposite occurred: while the institution of the Inquisition Office was breaking down, the bishops were reclaiming their leading role to revitalize the Church.

<sup>759</sup> Congregation, *C.L. 1753-1754*, c. 103.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Sacred Heart, the Eucharist, and the Ultimate Disrobing of Christ

As were other bishops of his time, Dolfin was interested in reviving Christianity by introducing and allowing the devotion of the Sacred Heart, and by adding new prayers for this into the liturgy. These prayers were intimate and personal, and different from prayers to the saints – those helpful advocates who received requests of desired favors and pleas for assistance.

Sacred Heart, I adore you with my most humble feelings, and along with the angels and the saints I love you and I give you my heart. Here it is! Let it enter you through the lance wound and join my heart with yours, so they will never be separated again.<sup>762</sup>

This excerpt, from a prayer said by the nuns in the Bergamo convent, celebrates a powerful, “physical” communion with Christ. It represents a sensuous mysticism, an emotional as well as physical connection between Christ and the faithful. This troubled the adversaries of the devotion, whose austere religious sensibilities were gravely offended by such extreme effusions. In order to understand the relation between the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist, and the ways in which the similarities between the two caused anxiety to the Jansenists, I return here to the words and actions of the Jansenist theologian Pujati, who had been active in the Bergamo disputes. While the use of Christ’s body in the devotion to the Sacred Heart was the original matter of contention, Pujati pushed the dispute further, arguing that the new cult violated the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>763</sup> By setting these two practices in opposition, Pujati was suggesting that the cult of the Sacred Heart desecrated the integrity of the Church’s core practices.

<sup>762</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, the letter is undated but is part of a Bishop’s letter to Venice, dated January 31, 1781.

<sup>763</sup> ACDF, *C.L.* 1782, n. 4.

Before analyzing his argument in detail, it should be emphasized that the nexus between the heart and the Eucharist was not an invention of the devotees of the heart. The thirteenth-century devotion of the Sacred Heart was explicitly a Eucharistic devotion; that is to say, the need for direct contact with God was expressed through mystic Eucharistic piety in the form of the cult of the Sacred Heart.<sup>764</sup> Eucharist piety was in fact, as Jeffrey Hamburger put it, “the hallmark of female spirituality during the late Middle Ages.” The disembodied heart of Jesus, which became the main emblem of this spirituality, “stood by synecdoche for the whole of Christ’s body.”<sup>765</sup> In turn, the Eucharist, the actual flesh and body of Christ, was strongly associated with the Passion.<sup>766</sup> The Eucharist represented Christ’s Passion and was the only sacrament that was both offered and received, exemplifying the exchange between God and humankind.<sup>767</sup> During the Middle Ages, fascination with the Passion and Christ’s body produced a rich array of variations on the theme. As Bynum argues, the motif of the humanization of Christ “grew out of twelfth-century concern for imitating the human Christ.”<sup>768</sup> In medieval literature, body depictions and body metaphors were the most common means of communicating the transcendental experience of mysticism. Thus, all Christ’s bodily parts were seen as

<sup>764</sup> Carolyn Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 228-48.

<sup>765</sup> In tracing the development of the luxuriant visual representations of the heart, Hamburger explained the link between the heart and the Eucharist, whose representations overlapped, complemented, and referred to each other. Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists*, 125.

<sup>766</sup> See on this theme, see Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), in which the communion as a way to commemorate the Passion is extensively analyzed throughout the volume. See also Richard Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross. The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129.

<sup>767</sup> Insofar as it was offered, it had the nature of a sacrifice, but here it is important to emphasize the communion with God, and the exchange between Christ and the devotee. Teresa Whalen, *The Authentic Doctrine of the Eucharist* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1993), 19.

<sup>768</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 90.

testimony of his humanization.<sup>769</sup> According to Leo Steinberg, even the depiction of Christ's penis was not a naturalistic aspect but rather a reflection of a contemporary theological trend that focused less on Jesus' divinity than on his humanity.<sup>770</sup> The devotion to the five wounds of Jesus grew out of this fertile devotional terrain as well, becoming more and more intense in the High Middle Ages, when it tended to concentrate on the wound in his side and then on the broken and pierced heart that lay within. As part of such a humanizing process, to expose the wounds of Christ meant to expose his frail humanity too. To see was also to feel *for* and *with*; this meant to have compassion, from the Latin word *compassio*, co-suffering. In Alacoque's first encounter with Christ, before the intimate exchange of hearts, she lay on his wounded chest.<sup>771</sup> That act of compassion turned into an exchange of mutual affection. The new prayer that the nuns of Bergamo were saying was not as new as De Passi and Sonzogno, and the author of the "Dissertation about the Sacred Heart" document seemed to imply. It was part of a long tradition in which a deep and intimate relationship with Christ, his body, and his suffering was visually represented and linguistically expressed.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>770</sup> See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Richard Trexler focused instead on the sexual character of Christ's nudity, arguing that the exposure of intimate parts of his body could have aroused erotic feelings in the viewers. Richard Trexler, "Gendering Jesus Crucified," in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads* (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, 1993), 107-120. See also, Corine Schleif, "Christ Naked: Words and Images, Contexts and Contestations in History and Historiography," in Sherry C. M. Lindquist, ed., *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art* (Farnham, Surrey, UK, England: Ashgate, 2011), 257-78.

<sup>771</sup> This was a biblical reference captured in the picture of the Last Supper when, as from the Gospel of St. John 13:25, the Evangelist laid his head upon the heart of Christ. John Eudes (1601-1680), considered one of the founders of the devotion of the Sacred Heart, was almost a contemporary of Alacoque and also was particularly fond of such sentimental images which conveyed, in his specific case, both the devotion of the hearts of Mary and Christ. Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); and by the same author, *Sacred Heart: Gateway to God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

Pujati's argument was not only a personal opposition to that long Christian tradition but also a rejection of the mystical spirituality that the Enlightenment had identified and condemned as a remnant of Baroque piety. The holy Eucharist, he argued, was the true sacrament of love in the indivisible persona of Jesus Christ, offered in "flesh, blood, soul and divinity."<sup>772</sup> The *Cordicoli*, Pujati contended, cleverly played with words to tailor the devotion to the Congregation's expectations. They had defended themselves from the Decree of 1756, which took issue with the materiality of the heart, by "substituting the word 'charity' for the word 'muscle'."<sup>773</sup> Here again, the issue at stake was deeper than it might seem, since the muscle with such overt physicality was moving away from that spirituality which Pujati as a Jansenist saw as the core of devotional life. He singled out what he perceived to be deceitful rhetoric, meant to circumvent the Congregation's resolution. When Bishop Dolfin had explained the meaning of the heart for the Bergamo faithful, he carefully chose words that echoed the symbolic meaning of the heart: "[Let's pray for] the ardent charity of Jesus Christ, our Savior, whose sacred heart is the throne, the center and the victim, so that we can easily conform to the image of the Son of God through his mortification, suffering, and torments, and the imitation of his sublime virtues, as in the words he pronounced: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart."<sup>774</sup> The Bishop therefore focused on the two aspects of the devotion that were acceptable to the Congregation: charity and redemption.

The artistic obsession with Christ manifesting His wounds at the Passion had its origins in medieval Christianity and never abated thereafter. Paintings and prayers

<sup>772</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; this also contains a pamphlet published anonymously in 1780 in Cesena, Faenza, and Venice (by Simone Occhi), the title of which is "Lettera del Nobile Sig. [...] di Bergamo sopra la devozione del Cuor di Gesù." Pujati has been identified as the author.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>774</sup> ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, Bergamo, January 31, 1781.

dramatically evoked the scenes from Christ's Passion, describing in vivid detail the pain that the crown of thorns inflicted on Jesus, the brutality of the *Calvarium*, the nails piercing his hands, the agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation, and the last, ultimate injury and insult perpetrated by a soldier who stabbed Christ on the right side of His chest with a lance. Water and blood flowed out of that wound, and finally, His corpse was shown with all those offences. All of these stigmas were part of the Passion and had a central place in Christian piety and liturgy. Particular devotions celebrated the Passion and everything this entailed. One example was the devotion to the Five Wounds.

However, when the supporters of the Sacred Heart used the Five Wounds to support and legitimate their cult of the heart, insisted Pujati, they were perpetrating a fraud; they were misrepresenting tradition. That was another of the many subterfuges which they used to get their way. The devotion of the Five Wounds was not about "the fissure or the nails, the hands or the feet, or Christ's chest," but about Christ Himself, pierced and crucified. Moreover, "hands, feet, and chest are not the objects of the devotion," insisted Pujati, but rather "*allow the signs to express and inspire*" (my italics) devotion for the only possible cult, that is, to Jesus Christ.<sup>775</sup> According to Pujati, since the heart was still depicted hovering alone and isolated in paintings, to use such words as charity and love was not an act of surrender to the Church's will, but rather a travesty.

From this perspective, bodily representations of Christ were seen as offensive to His dignity. Pujati insisted that the devotees felt no horror whatsoever in presenting His heart in the most unlikely ways – inside Christ's ripped-open chest, or held "in the hand of a delicate rather than devout Nazarene, or on a luminous globe, or in other whimsical and most indecent shapes." These were clear references to Batoni's painting and to the

<sup>775</sup> Ibid., xiii.

images which were modeled after it.<sup>776</sup> As the prayer of the Bergamo nuns demonstrated, such graphic descriptions of intimacy with the body of Christ were both textual and visual, or could become visualizations through the text of the orations.<sup>777</sup> Pujati wrote, “[the *Cordicoli*] dared to disclose the slaughter of the carnal heart of Jesus.”<sup>778</sup> There was something about this extreme gesture that those who opposed the devotion found both offensive and disturbing. It was perceived as a reenactment of the Disrobing, not for moral edification or with a purpose to educate the faithful, but as a way to lure the masses by means of an indecent show. The devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus took the Disrobing of Christ to its ultimate end, literally stripping the skin and the flesh from his body to reveal and offer the organ inside. For the devotion’s opponents, this was the ultimate violation of the respect due to Christ, and an act of blasphemy.

### **From the Monastery Santa Maria Sopra Minerva: A Rebuttal**

The rebuttal to Pujati’s attack came from Bernardino Membrive, a friar of the Dominican Monastery at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome.<sup>779</sup> First, Membrive cleared the devotion from the accusation of being fostered by a nest of Protestant dissenters – an accusation made by Pujati himself.<sup>780</sup> Second and most importantly, Membrive created a genealogy of the Sacred Heart, (leaving out Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose visions were still contested), in which he traced the devotion back to the

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>777</sup> About the relationship between text and image, see Wendy M. Wright, “Transformed Seeing: Visual Devotional Imagery and the Shape of the Imagination. The Case of the Sacred Heart,” *Studia mystica* (2001): 97-109; and Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists*, 80, 136, 164, 180, 214.

<sup>778</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; Ibid., xx.

<sup>779</sup> The monastery became the seat of the Congregation of the Holy Office in 1628.

<sup>780</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; Ibid. cc. 227-233. The rebuttal seems to be an adaptation of a previous document written by Membrive on February 26, 1776, although it did refer to Pujati’s book, dated 1780, and to an edict of the Congregation, dated 1778.

official saints of Christianity. Saint Gertrud was the saint who first introduced the devotion, which she foresaw in a prophetic way. This can be seen in her memoirs, where she writes: “The sweetness of Jesus Christ is going to be known later in history, when the world, tepid and languishing in its love for God, will need to ignite the devotion again.”<sup>781</sup> By using those words of Saint Gertrud, the Dominican emphasized how her prophecy had come true: the devotion was demonstrating its redeeming quality. Membrive also excised the Jesuits’ contribution to the devotion altogether. The Jesuits were not even mentioned by the Dominican, who very skillfully argued that the devotion became public in the second half of the seventeenth century – “but *not* through the individual effort of a particular religious order.”<sup>782</sup>

This was a bold statement which was meant to dissociate the devotion from the Jesuits, whose presence attracted dissension and controversy that was detrimental to the devotion.<sup>783</sup> Instead, he explained that a significant number of confraternities were devoted to the heart, which comprised “thousands of devotees; among those, illustrious figures, erudite clergy, more than zealous bishops, and cardinals; people of all statuses and conditions, from all nations, and all religious and secular orders.”<sup>784</sup> The devotion had therefore won a much wider and stronger level of support than its opponents wanted

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid., c. 228v.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., c. 229v.

<sup>783</sup> Although it may seem disingenuous, the Dominican was not completely wrong about the contribution of other religious orders in endorsing the Sacred Heart. The Redentorists, along with their founder Alfonso de’ Liguori (1696-1787), were also committed supporters of the devotion. In the Republic of Venice, the Remondinis published extensively de Liguori’s devotional texts which spread the devotion outside the habitual Jesuit paths. Alfonso de Liguori, “Novena del Cuore di Gesù. Notizia della divozione verso il cuore adorabile di Gesù,” in *Novena del santo natale colle meditazioni per tutti i giorni dell’avvento fino all’ottava dell’epifania* (Bassano, Remondini, 1766), 245-27. See also Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori, *Selected writings*, ed. Frederick M. Jones (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), in particular the “Novena to the Sacred Heart,” 219-45; and Théodule Rey-Mermet, *Il santo del secolo dei lumi: Alfonso de’ Liguori (1696-1787)* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1983), 583-84, 621, 628, 644, 744, 752, 779-85, which illuminates the intense correspondence between Giuseppe Remondini and de Liguori.

<sup>784</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; Ibid., cc. 229v-230r.



to acknowledge. Moreover, Membrive added, the feast had been singled out by the Church, which had bestowed indulgences on it, and the Pope had lately granted a new office and Mass to the crown of Portugal, which was associated with the devotion. This was the event that won Pompeo Batoni's paintings international attention. Religion and politics were impossible to disentangle here. This also highlights an important development of the devotion: not only bishops, but many members of the European aristocracy were actively engaged in promoting the cult.<sup>785</sup>

After asserting the past and present legitimacy of the devotion, Membrive examined the meaning of the heart and showed how its place within Catholicism should not be questioned any longer. Membrive argued that the wound in the pierced heart, the crown of thorns encircling it, and the flames surrounding it show that, focusing upon the heart, the faithful were worshiping the love of God. Even the most unlearned, coarse, and ignorant people – such as the inhabitants of the Alps and the barbarians of the East, among whom the devotion had also spread – could not look at the heart so depicted without remembering the love of Christ; nor could venerate one without worshipping the other. Membrive also rejected the claim that the Congregation of Rites had limited the devotion to the spiritual heart, excluding the carnal heart. To exclude the heart as a symbol is absurd, maintained Membrive. If the Congregation wanted only to honor the spiritual love of Jesus without worshipping the carnal wounded heart as a symbol of it, it should have said “straightforwardly that this feast renewed the memory of Jesus as love.”<sup>786</sup> Instead, argued Membrive, the Congregation had stated that the devotion renews

<sup>785</sup> See also de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 32, 48-50. The bishop of Lodève's book seems both to mirror and expand Membrive's arguments about the devotion.

<sup>786</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; *Ibid.*, cc. 229v-230r.

symbolically the love of Jesus, “*symbolice renovari memoriam divini amoris.*”<sup>787</sup> And he continued, “If we exclude the symbol, how can we renew symbolically the love of Christ? ... Where is the symbol if we exclude the heart? Love cannot be the symbol of itself.”<sup>788</sup>

At the end of his defense for the devotion, Membrive launched into an apologia for the cult and argued for the importance of images in religiosity. He wrote that since men are made of reason and senses, they are easily moved by the spiritual. However, to make them love the sublime and the invisible, sensory things are needed. Religion nurtures the faithful with external rites, hymns, solemn celebrations, and sensible objects of devotion. Hence, not only does the Church show the Savior or the child in the nativity in order for them to be adored, or Christ dying on the cross in his own blood, but it encourages us to worship his name, his wounds, the nativity itself, the thorns, the lance, and above all, the cross. Thus, it is unnecessary to exclude Christ’s material heart from the devotion and the feast of the heart.

As Benedict XIV had argued, the Church never celebrated the divine attributes of God, or the interior virtues and abstract perfection of Christ with a Mass and office except by using some material object that could clearly represent them, or with events that could more vividly imprint these concepts on the minds of the faithful. Benedict had never conceded that the feast of the Passion of Jesus was celebrated without any symbols or mysteries, such as the wounds, the Passion itself, or the cross. “Not only can we not exclude any material object from the feast of the Sacred Heart,” maintained Membrive,

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<sup>787</sup> Ibid., c. 231r.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid., c. 231v.

“but we should not.”<sup>789</sup> Moreover, he asked whether the Church could “find a more appropriate symbol for the love of Christ than his wounded heart?”<sup>790</sup> He concluded that the heart itself was the most appropriate symbol.

### **The Word was Made Heart: Integrating the Devotion**

The Venetian authorities and the Congregation of Rites prohibited both any further discussion of the devotion and the publication of any new book on the subject (no matter whether it fostered or censured the cult), but that was not enough to close the issue. Tomaso Volpi, a parish priest in the Bergamo territory and a fine theologian, released a new book on the subject in 1781.<sup>791</sup> Volpi had been more an observer than a direct participant in Bergamo, as he pointed out, and from the stance of this avowed objectivity he claimed his right to set forth his critical contribution to the controversy. He had lived in Bergamo during the years of contention, and now offered a thorough examination of the events that had unfolded around him.

Volpi condemned the Sacred Heart along with the epiphenomena that seemed to be essential aspects of the devotion: the visual representations, the array of new books propagandizing the devotion, and the aggressiveness and the arrogance of the devotees in replacing the existing liturgical practices. However, since the devotion was already part of liturgical practices given Church acceptance, it was now necessary to contain the

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid., c. 233r.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid., c. 261v, 29 May, 1782. Interestingly, Silva – the member of the Congregation who was in charge of resolving the controversy – after examining Pujati’s text, dismissed it as “a worthless, trivial little book” that did not deserve the attention of the tribunal or real censorship. Silva had to admit that Pujati’s little book did not contain any errors against the faith, so he could not proscribe it. His decision was therefore to forbid the publication of all books “sive pro, sive contra devotione cordis Jesu.”

<sup>791</sup> Antonio Tommaso Volpi, *Della divozione al Sagro Cuore di Gesu Sentimento di Anton-Tommaso Volpi. Sentimento di Anton Tommaso Volpi, curato di Osio Superiore* (Bergamo: Stamperia di Vincenzo Antoine, 1782).

damages that the devotion could entail. More than a sacrilege perpetuated against the Son of God, dismembering the body of Christ was, in Volpi's view, an imposture. The images of the sacred heart were a theologically absurd fraud because "That heart that was never seen [was] made visible, splitting Christ's chest open."<sup>792</sup> Depicting Christ alive, with his wounded chest open, showing the heart, was an error and as such should not be portrayed. This contention condemned all those paintings that represented "many hearts held by lovely little angels, as picturesque as [it was a] profane theme." (Fig. 7) He argued that products of the capricious imagination of artists were not well suited to proper devotion, even if they suited believers' penchants for holy images. Hearts in different fashions were portrayed, medals bearing the effigies of hearts were distributed and could be found on every street corner, and confraternities of the heart arose everywhere, as well as chapels and altars. More and more parishes asked to celebrate Masses and offices in honor of the heart. It was a religious frenzy. People addressed their prayers to the heart, asserted Volpi; they envisioned it, and before it they knelt. The heart, as he bitterly stressed, was the object of devotion, not Christ.<sup>793</sup>

The Congregation of Rites had approved the devotion but, according to Volpi, very reluctantly. More accurately, the Church was trying to channel the cult into acceptable and orthodox terms while being dragged into the affair by the relentless attitude of the devotees of the heart. The *Cordicoli*, not discouraged by the earlier rejections, repeatedly pleaded for the devotion. While the Congregation had called for a symbolic use of the heart, they insisted on treating the heart as a real organ of Christ. While the Congregation emphasized charity as the real significance of the devotion, the

<sup>792</sup> Volpi, *Della divozione*, 16.

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

devotees focused on the physical uniqueness of the heart. Even as the most recent scientific studies were acknowledging the brain as the center of human, intellectual, and emotional activities, the devotees kept clinging to the idea that the heart was the locus of affection and love. What could the Catholic Church do, wondered Volpi? Eliminate the cult or ignore petitions to celebrate the devotion and requests to be granted indulgences for it from the many devotees around the Christian world? The only option Volpi saw was to accept the devotion, while trying to trim and prune the most extravagant branches. But this was an undertaking that was deliberately boycotted by those who fostered the cult.

Volpi also saw the heart as a feminization of the devotion, an acceptance of those mystical female experiences of which the Church was highly suspicious. The Church, in Volpi's analysis, had been literally besieged by the belligerent attitude of the *Cordicoli* who, far from accepting the teachings of the old Fathers, wanted to rely on whimsical female visions.<sup>794</sup> Volpi was avowedly skeptical of mystical experiences, seeing them as the product of women's propensity for flights of imagination.<sup>795</sup> The role that female imagination in particular played in keeping alive religious practices which were labeled as superstitious, had been repeatedly outlined by reformers.<sup>796</sup> Volpi's concession to the

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<sup>794</sup> Here, Volpi not only referred to Marguerite Alacoque's apparitions, which had not been approved by the Church, but to a marginal and mostly unknown episode of "fake revelations" and "false sanctity" that had occurred in Lebanon in those very years. There a Maronite nun named Endie founded a confraternity for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and started to foster the devotion. Her mystical visions were believed to be the product of divine communication by her spiritual father, the bishop, and the patriarch. However, when her revelations and prophecies were brought to the attention of the Holy See, the Congregation of Rites looked into the matter and, after an investigation, in 1779 declared the visions feigned and invented, and ordered the destruction of all her publications, closed the institution, and moved the nun to another convent. The patriarch, who initially did not want to submit to the papal authority, had to recognize his errors to be reinstated to his office. Volpi, *Della divozione*, 131-33; also see Nicolas Sylvestre Bergier, *Dizionario enciclopedico della teologia, della storia della chiesa, degli ...* Vol. VI (Milan: Carlo Turati, 1845), 347.

<sup>795</sup> Volpi, *Della divozione*, 134.

<sup>796</sup> In his treatise about the power of imagination, Ludovico Antonio Muratori insisted on the female inclination to surrender to their fancies. Emotionally and physically fickle-minded, women were explicitly

use of images as pedagogical tools to instruct the unlearned was strictly limited. Precisely because the images were for ignorant people, the risk of them conveying messages that the ordinary folk were not able to decipher was not worth taking. Although clerics were able to discern the nuances and disentangle the symbolism, and could unveil the real meaning beyond obscure wordings and allegoric representations, the people certainly could not do that. Moreover, those who promoted the heart were ready to jeopardize the real understanding of Christian tenets to favor a devotion that had no theological foundations. That situation was beyond Volpi's comprehension. In referring to an anonymous satire or sonnet that was circulating in Bergamo, Volpi highlighted the absurdity of thinking that material heresy was somehow acceptable in return for devotion. It was almost as if that price for religious fervor was a fair price to pay, even when it brought with it a dose of unorthodoxy.<sup>797</sup>

Ultimately, Volpi foresaw more bad than good coming from the devotion. He believed that the enthusiasm of the supporters was as misleading as it was contagious. For many priests, the heart and its virtues had become the primary object of their homilies. More than a mere figure of speech, the heart became truly anthropomorphized, a detail that entailed some serious repercussions. This perception of the heart as a real and separate persona was reinforcing the idea that the heart was much more than a symbol.

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defined as "hysterics." Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Della forza della fantasia umana* (Venice: Giovanni Gatti, 1783), 90, 109. See also Gennaro Mattioli and Franco Scalzone, eds., *Attualità dell'isteria. Malattia desueta o posizione originaria?* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 31. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to state that Muratori and some other scholars in his time laid the foundation for the intellectual climate, if not the theories, developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century about the medical diagnosis of hysteria. They were based, in turn, on Renaissance interpretations of classical Greek medical and philosophical theories. For a recent study exploring the roots of psychology as a discipline before the age of the Enlightenment, see Fernando Vidal, *The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>797</sup> Here, Volpi most likely was referring to don Antonio Rubbi's *apologia* of the Sacred Heart through the story of the old holy man whose apparent lack of proper devotion did not prevent him from embodying Christ's sanctity. See above, pp. 345-46.

Here Volpi was referring to some instances of devotion that had become notorious. In Bergamo for example, a heart had been carried at a procession and then placed on the cross on behalf of Christ.<sup>798</sup> In devotional books, entire episodes of the Passions and the gospel had been interpreted iconographically in the same fashion, with a heart replacing the body of Christ.<sup>799</sup> (Fig. 8) The liturgical endorsement of the devotion displayed a thorough integration of words, images, and shapes; in sum, a new visual language was developed. It was no wonder, Volpi observed, that people were now twisting the traditional vocabulary of piety, preferring “the Word was made of heart” instead “of flesh.” This replacement was quite alarming, given that “flesh” was seen as the only theologically correct way of expressing the mystery and the dogma of the Incarnation, and the use of the word “heart” “was introducing a language completely unknown” to tradition and “contrary to the truth.”<sup>800</sup> In such a manner, warned Volpi, the concept of the Incarnation was being limited to the heart.<sup>801</sup>

Hence, in promoting the cult of the heart, images and words worked together. Not only was the devotion endorsed in sermons, but manuscripts were circulating in the convents and among the devotees, and could easily escape control. A manuscript “full of nonsense,” commented Volpi, was announcing in a millenarian tone that the advent of the heart would bring a new era of bliss.<sup>802</sup> Thus, the Incarnation as well as revelations were being reinterpreted through the paradigm of the heart. Once the devotion was introduced

<sup>798</sup> De Passi and Sonzogno considered this sort of impersonation to be a desecration of Scripture; in their letter to the bishop, the nuns also raised doubts about the heart carried in procession. See ASV, Inquisitori di Stato. Also see above p. 348.

<sup>799</sup> However, by no means was such creative liberty in the representation of the heart new. Images like these had been drawn by the nuns of Halfta. Hamburger, *Nuns As Artist*, 126-27.

<sup>800</sup> Volpi, *Della divozione*, 50.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Volpi reported that the text was later censored. However, his point was that he could foresee no end to such nonsensical publications, but could foresee the Church being forced to control printing and practices endlessly.

in liturgy, nothing remained the same. The celebration of the Eucharist was also undergoing changes, and it seemed to become the handmaid of the Heart. This link between the heart and the Eucharist clearly emerged as soon as the devotion had begun in the cloisters. While spreading outside the convents, the devotion of the heart kept overlapping with the Sacrament of the Eucharist. When the two ceremonies, the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart, were combined, paintings of the heart were placed on the tabernacle, implying that the heart was the Eucharist and the Eucharist was the heart.<sup>803</sup>

Volpi's publication revealed that the silence imposed on both parties was not applied to his work. The secular authorities did not veto the work, and that revealed with whom they sided. As far as the religious authorities were concerned, there was no reason to prohibit the work. Volpi's take on the affair did not undermine Church authority nor condemn the endorsement that the Congregation of Rites and the Pope granted to the cult. Rather, the issues highlighted by the cult were a matter of serious theological concern. The heart was intruding into the traditional liturgy and overshadowing established rites. Moreover, the role of images in the making of the devotion and in popular piety had grown into an issue that now had to be faced. If the Sacred Heart had to exist, then the attention of devotees must be focused iconographically, linguistically, and theologically on Christ. The heart had to become the means for finding Christ again, rather than an end in itself.

**The Sacred Heart: Revamping Catholicism  
From Theory to Practice: Chioggia and Zealot Priests: A Story-In-Context**

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<sup>803</sup> Ibid., 137. This juxtaposition was far from being a mere speculation. Hosts with the image of the heart impressed upon them were made and later prohibited. See below, p. 400, n. 817 and 818.



That the growing popularity of the Sacred Heart was linked to the widespread circulation of its images was not only Volpi's perception. The history of the development of the devotion of the Sacred Heart reveals this clearly. Images of the heart were a major vehicle to propagate the new cult. The Sacred Heart aside, images were also a major vehicle for communal worship and popular devotion. While during the second half of the eighteenth century the Sacred Heart had become a main concern from the perspective of Jansenist religiosity, the use and understanding of images in people's everyday practices was always part of their agenda. Inspired by the new debate concerning the Sacred Heart, the Jansenists and their sympathizers tried to address the issue of the cult of images more broadly. The Jansenist approach to sacred representations did not remain purely theoretical: confessions, weekly sermons, and catechism lessons provided a good opportunity for clergy who embraced Jansenist ideas to apply theory to practice.<sup>804</sup> However, this could be a risky business. These images and their cult were an important aspect of Catholic devotional piety. In the eighteenth century, local feasts still revolved around them; they were exhibited and carried in processions; offerings were made to them; candles were lit for them; and altars were arranged for them. When priests asserted teachings against the use of images, they had to face the reality that there could well be a negative reaction to their pedagogical efforts. To introduce novelty in the cult of images would not create the results that the clergy sought. In other words, to attempt to regulate how people treated images could result in the complete rejection of the use of images in worship.

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<sup>804</sup> That ordinary clergy, and not only those ecclesiastics who were engaged in the theological debate, embraced the Jansenist creed and tried to translate it into their daily ministry is an aspect of Italian Jansenism still to be explored.

In 1787, Giovanni Benedetto Maria Civran, the Bishop of Chioggia, a city on the southern side of the Venetian lagoon, wrote to the Inquisition in Venice to inform the tribunal about events happening in his diocese.<sup>805</sup> In a few villages, some “overly zealous” priests, who wanted to educate people about the proper veneration due to sacred images, had provoked unwanted results and had stirred virulent debates in their parishes. During the feast of the Rosary, for example, some female parishioners publicly refused to partake in the local celebration on the grounds that the images, the paintings, and the statues “were simply pieces of wood, canvas or stone.” Pandemonium ensued in the public square in front of the church. The women allegedly took the teaching too far and rejected the images altogether. The priests’ lessons were completely turned upside down, the bishop pointed out. Rather than engaging in proper veneration, no veneration was offered by the female followers of these “zealous” priests.

The Bishop himself, along with his vicar and his chancellor, went to the villages and offered another lesson on the cult of images to teach their role and their importance within devotion. This re-established the status quo; the people then paid special tribute to the local images as before. However, the Bishop was disconcerted about the previous unsettling outcome of instructing the populace. He did not blame the priests, who acted “in good faith” and “held good principles,” but clearly he had to address a misguided attempt to introduce complex theological issues to uneducated people.<sup>806</sup> He felt that the Church should consider whether teaching delicate and intricate matters to the wrong audience could cause more harm than good. The Bishop did not need to explain what that harm was; questioning and ultimately rejecting religious images was a serious problem in

<sup>805</sup> ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 150, January 24, 1787.

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid.*

Catholicism that could lead to religious dissent or atheism – two major concerns of the eighteenth-century Venetian Inquisition.<sup>807</sup>

Although the Bishop underplayed both the responsibilities of the priests and their Jansenist attitude, he stressed the importance of images in devotion, de-emphasized the role of theological texts in pastoral duty, and implicitly raised important questions about how to provide effective religious education. The call for reform, and attempts to change or abandon practices that had informed village religious life since its inhabitants could recall, was thus difficult to achieve even at the end of the eighteenth century, as repeated attempts to abolish saints' feasts had proved.

If Jansenist teachings about images could lead to questioning and rejecting images altogether, that could potentially cause strong resistance from those parishioners who cherished their traditional practices and did not wish to abandon them. Such was the case in Chioggia, where those who took the Jansenist teachings literally challenged those who clung to their traditional practices. Some teachings about images were arguably subversive, both because they could be misinterpreted and because they could cause social turmoil. Fear of such instances was a good enough reason to desist from pursuing a more "regulated piety." Attempts to educate the people about images could go wrong, even if the people were receptive to that instruction. No matter how good and noble the intention to regulate piety might be, clergy could not go so far that the people would be rendered unable to comprehend their teachings. The case that the Bishop of Chioggia brought to the attention of Venetian Inquisition proved that there was no such thing as seemingly innocuous lessons inspired by Jansenism. According to the Church, and in

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<sup>807</sup> Federico Barbierato, *Politici e ateisti. Percorsi della miscredenza a Venezia fra Sei e Settecento* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2006).

spite of its internal contradictions, that was not a viable path for Catholic devotion to take.

### The Many Grades of Devotion

Many erudite members of the Church realized that people needed images, as representations and as symbols, but they were concerned that the people could not grasp the theological truth behind these images. However, the issue was more complicated than they wanted to admit, and dissension was not only a matter of popular versus elite understanding and expression of devotion. The dispute around the Sacred Heart represented a larger contention about the use of images in religious art as well in religious education and acculturation; that is, instead of accepting the image simply as an object, the believer responds to the signifier as if it were the signified. This forces consideration of both the image represented as well as the materials from which the image is composed. Images, in this sort of discussion, are art in terms of aesthetics, but they are also part of a cognitive process that blurs the difference between sign and signified.<sup>808</sup>

Images are infused with the power to “aid memory and recognition, inspire awe, arouse piety, and make the absent present and the dead living.”<sup>809</sup> The relationship

<sup>808</sup> For a sociological approach to contemporary religious practices and the physical response to religious art, see Michael P. Carroll, *Madonnas that Maim. Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>809</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44. For further development of these themes, see also by the same author, “Holy images and other images,” in *The Art of Interpreting*, ed. Susan C. Scott (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 1995): 68-87; and David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese “Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Aesthetic Experience,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (2007): 197-203. Moving from theory to practice, a survey on religious paint-by-number productions shows how, for both the producers and owners, these paintings assume almost a sacramental status; they also become “valuable catalysts for material spirituality.” Thomas Ryan and Lawrence Rubin, “By the Numbers: Material Spirituality and the Last Supper,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 2, no. 2 (2002):155, 162. The lack of artistic or aesthetic value of this mass production does not therefore necessarily invalidate nor diminish the meaning it provides, nor the effect it has. See also David Freedberg, preface to the Polish

between religious images and their beholders is the subject of several studies by art historian David Freedberg. As he argues, there is an element of verisimilitude that binds signifier and signified because “we still seek to reconstitute the reality of the signified in the sign.”<sup>810</sup> In his work on psychological responses to art, he intends “to establish what is specific in the psychological effect of images.” Though Freedberg’s “specific” is ahistorical, art historians as well as historians could still benefit from his theory. Freedberg suggests that in the believers’ responses to images, the realism of the representation is essential to the efficacy that the images may have. In this respect, “effective images strive towards an illusion in much the same way drama does.”<sup>811</sup> The lifelike images of the *sacri monti* in northern Italy – chapels containing scenes from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the saints, mostly in the form of sculptures – are a case in point; in these depictions, actual fabric, objects, and figures are incorporated in the representations.<sup>812</sup> By the same token, iconographically, the association between the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart was actually taken a step further, and the two became

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edition of "The Power of Images", in *Potęga wizerunków: studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania*, trans. Ewa Klekot (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007).

<sup>810</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 245. Some historians have also pointed out the power of religious images to elicit responses as well as participation from the faithful. However, Freedberg considers study of the behavioral and emotional manifestations “of the exchange between images and their beholders” to be a thoroughly theoretical approach. With regard to Freedberg’s theories, see the review by Ernst Gombrich, “The Edge of Delusion,” Review of *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, by David Freedberg, *The New York Review of Books* 37, no. 2 (February 15, 1990): 6-9. In his following studies, Freedberg dealt with and developed his study of the neurophilosophical aspects of the relationship between images and looking. See the preface to the French edition of “The Power of Images” in *Le pouvoir des images* (Paris: Montfort, 1998); “The Failure of Colour,” in *Sight & Insight: Essays On Art and Culture In Honour of E.H. Gombrich At 85*, ed. John Onians (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 245-62; and “Composition and Emotion,” in *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, ed. Mark Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 73-89.

<sup>811</sup> Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye. Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>812</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 245. Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584) was a supporter of the Sacri Monti at Varallo and elsewhere, as part of the campaign against the Waldensian Swiss. Tom Devonshire Jones, Linda Murray, and Peter Murray, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 66-67; and Luigi Zanzi, *Sacri monti e dintorni* (Milan: Jaca Book Spa, 2005).

conflated when the image of the heart was impressed upon the hosts.<sup>813</sup> In the same vein, *monstrances* (*ostensoria*) made in the shape of a heart to contain consecrated hosts were replacing the ordinary *ostensoria*. Some were made of crystal, which suggests an attempt to intensify the connection between the container and the contained.<sup>814</sup>

As Carol Bynum has demonstrated, in Christianity, matter *matters*. She claims in fact that the essentially visual and visionary character of late-medieval piety was not *merely* visual: the material of which those presentations were composed was as important as the scene or the image represented. Representations of holy figures or events were not just references to what was beyond them; they were imbued with the divine. “Visionary experience,” writes Bynum, “tended to result in holy matter that itself animated or transformed, both authenticating and reproducing the original eruption of the sacred.”<sup>815</sup> Bynum’s claims about the function of art in the Middle Ages seem equally relevant to the eighteenth-century conflict over the Sacred Heart. In fact, her argument provides a way of thinking about the conflict as a traditional, historically-based way of accepting and revering historical images and artifacts, which was in conflict with the Jansenists’ more modern and cerebral view that images displaced the true worship of the spirit.<sup>816</sup>

<sup>813</sup> Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *Schola cordis. Amore sacro e profano, devozioni, pellegrinaggi, preghiera, attraverso il simbolismo del cuore in immagini e oggetti europei (secoli XVII-XX)* (Ravenna: Essegi, 2000), 20.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid., 33; Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *Carte intagliate ritagliate e punzecchiate. Immaginetto devozionali e decorazioni profane manufatte in paesi europei nel Settecento e nell'Ottocento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1998), 73.

<sup>815</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 110.

<sup>816</sup> Episodes of manifestations of the sacred may occur less frequently than in the past, yet they still, in the twenty-first century, involve the sighting of the divine as the *locus* of the divine. The growing phenomenon of Marian visions, shrines, and miracles have occurred both in Europe and the U.S. in the twentieth century has been a rich venue to explore for journalists, anthropologists, and sociologists. See Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary. An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the U.S.* (New York: New York Plume Books, 1998); Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Marco Marzano, *Cattolicesimo Magico. Un'indagine etnografica* (Milan: Bompiani, 2009). Also of interest are the events involving Padre Pio, from his stigmata to his strong support and devotion of the Sacred Heart; his final

It's hard to think of a better image to represent the *locus* of the divine than the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is figuratively and literally the conflation of the human and the divine, and the embodiment of both. What could possibly be more evocative than the image of divine love conveyed in a fleshy heart, as Father Membrive had poignantly observed? The matter, in this case, was merely representational and not metaphorical. But the logic of Membrive's reasoning does not change, because to the believers, the truth of the painted flesh *was* the flesh as it was perceived. Even though virtually nobody expected images of the Sacred Heart (or any other image for that matter) to bleed, sweat, speak, or move, those images retained a power that *moved* those who believed in it. For a time, the religious life in Bergamo was disrupted by an outbreak of iconoclasm. Because of their power, images were erased, books were banned, and devotional objects were removed by the Church. Bishop Dolfin sought the assistance of the secular arm to stop instances of iconoclasm that targeted the images of the Sacred Heart, which he had so vigorously promoted. "Love and hatred of images," writes Freedberg, "are often two sides of the same coin."<sup>817</sup> If the detractors of the Sacred Heart were so viscerally opposed to the sensuous representations in the images, it was because they too felt the power of those images.

Pujati himself wrote that the Christ's wounds were meant to *express* and *inspire*. Jansenist practices were not lacking in emotional responses, but emotion had no place in what was, especially compared to Catholic religious practices, a highly intellectualized spirituality. It was precisely that strong emotional response which the Sacred Heart

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controversial canonization in 2002 by Pope John Paul II is additionally noteworthy. For these topics, see the compelling work of historian Sergio Luzzato, *Padre Pio. Miracoli e politica nell'Italia del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

<sup>817</sup> David Freedberg "Iconoclasm and Idolatry," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Copper (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 141.

evoked that Pujati despised and intellectually rejected. His personality, which combined passion, severe moral rigorism, and self-denial, suggests perhaps a more complex reading of Jansenist ideas. They too felt and feared what their theology rejected – that is, the life and power inherent in images. Those who opposed the Sacred Heart understood the power of images. In fact, they believed that the appeal of these images was dangerous for everyone, learned or unlearned, noble or common man. They saw the Church’s willingness to use imagery to attract the unlearned as a gross oversimplification of the distinction between classes. In a very insightful passage, one of the wittiest opponents of the Sacred Heart undermined one of the most common assumptions about elite versus popular:

There are people of average literacy, people who think they are erudite yet they are not, and those who are learned in certain things and very ignorant in others. After all, well-educated people make mistakes. The truth is that between the learned and the un-learned, there are infinite variations.<sup>818</sup>

Images of the Sacred Heart were in patrician as well as peasant houses. It would have been a naïve mistake to dismiss the circulation of this devotion as an affair pertaining only to the lower strata. The point Camillo Blasi, author of the passage above, was making was that if anybody could learn from “the book of images,” and if this source was not conveying theological truths, then anybody also could learn the wrong lesson. Thus, those endangered by the novelty of the devotion were not only the unlearned but literally everyone. It was a risk that, according to him, was not worth taking.

If as Blasi argued, “between the learned and the un-learned there are infinite variations” between the Church’s versions of truth and error, then there were also many

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<sup>818</sup> Camillo Blasi, *Lettere italiane aggiunte all’antirretico in difesa delle Dissertazione commonitoria dell’avvocato Camillo Blasi* (Rome: Per Benedetto Francesi, 1772), 17-18. This was a rebuttal, published anonymously, that Blasi wrote in response to the criticism that his previous works against the devotion had provoked.



grades of devotion. This was by no means a new principle. In the two centuries after Trent, the grey area of acceptable devotional practices had grown almost constantly and without effective control by the Church. As long as individual private devotion remained private, individual error did not necessarily entail an ecclesiastical intervention, even if these practices strayed to the verge of unorthodoxy. However, once erroneous practices left the private domain to enter the public space of devotion, the matter could become more of an issue, as the history of the Sacred Heart consistently proves.

### **The Relentless Materiality of the Heart**

Although the ascetic reform that Jansenists were promoting in their attack on the Sacred Heart would not succeed, their fierce aversion to the fleshy heart did not go unnoticed. The depiction of the heart, disembodied and hovering as a bloody organ, held clear theological implications. The heart could become a depiction of a relic that did not and could not exist because the doctrine of Resurrection implies that Christ rose from the dead in the very same physical body in which he died. Batoni's 1765 painting, "The Sacred Heart," provided an influential model for the representations of the devotion by including images of both Christ and the heart. However, Batoni's canvas, representing a rather feminine Jesus graciously offering his heart to the faithful, was not free from criticism. Moreover, Batoni's representation of Jesus' heart was still a carnal heart, and representations of the heart alone did not completely give way to images of Jesus *with* his heart. As can be seen from the Bergamo case, images of the heart alone still appeared two decades after Batoni displayed his canvas in Rome. Although it was a successful artifice, meant to avert a major criticism of the cult, namely that it was a devotion to the

dismembered organ of Christ's body, the addition of Christ to the images was not quite enough. The heart needed to become less and less fleshy to overcome criticism, to subdue the harsh tone of the debate, and finally to permit a compromise.

The Sacred Heart was by no means a fixed or fossilized image; indeed, it proved to be a flexible motif that was susceptible to iconographical changes over time. The attempt to sanitize the image of the heart started as early as the devotion itself but was rejected by the *Cordicoli*, who believed that its materiality was essential to the image. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the heart in paintings became more symbolic and less real; in a word, the *matter*, so utterly disturbing, was stripped away. The process of making the heart less and less fleshy eventually got to the point that a new devotion arose, that of the Divine Mercy, which depicted the heart as ethereal, and dissolved entirely in pure light.<sup>819</sup> Interestingly, while the process of distancing the form (the heart) from its matter (the flesh) – which is paradoxically the opposite of what the heart was (thus, the *incarnate* had to be made *un-incarnate*) – was developing, *ex-votos* in the shape of hearts replaced earlier types of *ex-votos*.<sup>820</sup> (Fig. 9) *Ex-votos* in the shape of hearts had existed previously, but it was in the eighteenth century that they began to flourish, replacing ones that encompassed a wide variety of forms.<sup>821</sup> Hundreds of

<sup>819</sup> The devotion was (is) based on visions of Jesus reported by the Polish nun Maria Faustina Kowalska in 1930s. Richard Torretto *A Divine Mercy Resource: How to Understand the Devotion to Divine Mercy* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010). In the first decade of the twentieth century, the symbolist Odilon Redon explored in a few paintings the theme of the Sacred Heart, representing it as a glow of light radiating from Jesus' chest. Compared to Redon's images, Divine Mercy's images are much less evoking, with their unnatural rays of light coming from Jesus' heart. In this respect, Redon's depictions of the heart interpreted the Jansenist's creed for a symbolic interpretation of the heart almost literally.

<sup>820</sup> *Ex-votos* are votive offerings given to a saint when a prayer for a miracle is answered. Before the heart-shape *ex-votos* replaced older forms, they usually represented the healed part of the body. Less common *ex-votos* were also small paintings illustrating the basic elements of the miracle story.

<sup>821</sup> In her studies, Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni has emphasized the growing number of heart-shaped votive offerings between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See "Ex-voto e simbologia del cuore," *Il Santo*, XVI, no. 2-3 (1976): 291-300, and "Simbologia e cultura tipologica dell'ex-voto a forma di cuore," *Il Santo*, XXIII, no. 3 (1983): 555-72.

eighteenth century silver, heart-shaped *ex-votos* are still extant and are on display in many Catholic churches, arranged on red velvet panels hanging on the walls. These unapologetically remind the viewer of the devotion as it was in its early, contentious iconographical form.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, as its eighteenth-century opponents had feared, invasively and aggressively made a place for itself. Not only did it become the iconic image of Catholicism in the world, but by virtue of its evocative representations, it shaped and articulated religious identity.<sup>822</sup> Did the Sacred Heart reach its final form in the twentieth century, having slowly but progressively left its bodily shape behind, as some historians claim? While majestic statues of Christ adorn the most recent cathedrals dedicated to the devotion of the Sacred Heart, and the heart is no more than a symbol expressed in gesture, in Italy as well as in other Catholic countries, religious enthusiasm for *ex-votos*, emblems, and devotional objects in the shape of hearts has not abated.<sup>823</sup>

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<sup>822</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, and by the same author, "Religion and Visuality in America: Material Economies of the Sacred," *Cambridge History of Religions in America*, ed. Stephen Stein. 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 748-780. In his studies, Morgan focused on Irish and American Catholics, both confronted with other religious denominations and challenged to maintain a distinct identity. As far as Italy is concerned, where no such a problem exists, the Sacred Heart had to compete in a way with the cherished panoply of saints, who had been venerated as part of Italian civic and urban life for centuries. Each of these saints acquired areas of "specialty," often but not always connected with the details of their lives or martyrdoms. It is in the domain of healing that the devotion of the Sacred Heart took an interesting turn in Italian practices. As far as I know, the subject has not been studied yet, but the devotion of the Sacred Heart seems to have been associated with the support of religious groups who tend the sick. This is a topic that deserves to be explored. As a place to begin, see Luigi Novarese, "Inchiesta sul culto del Sacro Cuore," *L'Ancora*, no. 8-9 (agosto-settembre 1974): 1-20, <http://www.luiginovarese.it/scritti/scrittiediti/anc1974/8.htm>. Accessed February 28, 2014.

<sup>823</sup> Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni showed that the heart became iconographically the most favored symbol on both religious and mundane objects throughout the twentieth century. Its allure still has not faded. For example, Mexican Sacred Hearts, inspired by the intensely emotional Frida Kahlo painting "The two Fridas," in which the two hearts exposed are the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a heart ripped from a chest in an Aztec sacrifice, are inflaming devotees' faith well outside the borders of Latin America. See Hayden Herrera, *Frida. A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 190; Hayden Herrera, "Why Frida Kahlo Speaks to the 90's," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1990, 41; and "Frida Kahlo Sacred Heart: earrings, pendants, and ornaments."

(Fig. 10) In the realm of private devotion, the Sacred Heart still assertively displays its original bodily matter.

The fleshy heart still resonates with current spirituality. Moreover, in Italy the heart still appears in public exhibitions. In Cividale del Friuli in April 2006, the local religious and secular institutions brought the Sacred Heart to the fore again, launching an art contest. Needless to say, the artists' approach to the devotion was varied but mainly focused on the heart. Significantly, the exhibition explored multiple possibilities for depicting the heart, and included images in which the heart both revealed and transcended its materiality.<sup>824</sup> Hence, the battle over the iconographical depiction of the heart remains unfinished because the heart keeps fluctuating between the fleshy muscle that *is* and the spiritual that it *is pointing to*. Given the impossibility to “freeze” the Sacred Heart, we may speculate that the needs which characterized late medieval theology, that is “the paradoxical need to restrain (sometimes to the point of denying) and yet utilize (sometimes to the point of exaggerating) the transformative power of the material,” are still present in modern society.<sup>825</sup>

Deep resistance and ambivalence toward the devotion has not completely dissipated, as the ongoing dichotomy between “popular devotion” and official devotion

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[http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html?\\_sacat=0&\\_from=R40&\\_nkw=frida+kahlo+sacred+hearts&\\_nkwusc=frida+khalo+sacred+hearts&\\_rdc=1](http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html?_sacat=0&_from=R40&_nkw=frida+kahlo+sacred+hearts&_nkwusc=frida+khalo+sacred+hearts&_rdc=1). Accessed February 28, 2014.

Devotional jewelry inspired by the Sacred Heart appears in the form of necklaces with heart pendants. This usage can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when in the convents of the diocese of Lodève, nuns wore emblems like those depicted in Marguerite's engravings; the fashion then spread outside of France. De Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 73.

<sup>824</sup> Thirty-three artists were asked to interpret the devotion of the Sacred Heart from a modern perspective. I cannot see a better example than this to contradict theories about the allegedly concluded discourse concerning the best or the most proper ways to depict and represent the heart. As the paintings show, these artists' views ranged from the more traditional to the most rarified and poetic, yet unconventional exploration of *matter*. Tradition therefore met with innovation, and spiritual with material to re-propose once again the apparent contradictions of the heart. The collection of works is still visible online at [http://www.mondocrea.it/it/iriflessioni/story\\$data=riflessioni&num=687&sec=20](http://www.mondocrea.it/it/iriflessioni/story$data=riflessioni&num=687&sec=20). Accessed February 28, 2014.

<sup>825</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 131.

reveals. A passage from a document of The Congregation of the Faith issued in April, 2002 about the Sacred Heart is enlightening:

Popular piety tends to associate devotion with its iconographic expression. This is a normal and positive phenomenon. Inconveniences can sometimes arise: iconographic expressions that no longer respond to the artistic taste of the people can sometimes lead to a diminished appreciation of the devotion's object, independently of its theological basis and its historico-salvific content. This can sometimes arise with devotion to the Sacred Heart: perhaps certain over sentimental images are incapable of giving expression to the devotion's robust theological content or do not encourage the faithful to approach the mystery of the Sacred Heart of our Saviour.<sup>826</sup>

In a very cautious yet resilient fashion, the Catholic Church re-stated its functional and to some degree ambivalent take on images and popular culture, echoing the ancient idea that images *are* the book for simple folk. “Popular” and “iconographic” are still two seemingly indissoluble concepts and terms. Visual arts as well as devotional items are “relegated” to a questionable but useful and valuable means to express devotion. Yet, as such, these images express devotion *in a minor key*. The idea that the exposed heart of Jesus was “indecent” has come a long way, from the debates about a contentious devotion to expressions of a symbol of Catholicism. The underlying reasons for the eighteenth-century controversy have not faded away, and the heart still represents the inner contradiction of a doctrine that needs and therefore uses images as well as material objects, and yet is still troubled by them. On the other hand, during John Paul II’s papacy, the number of canonizations enormously increased, as well as the tendency to promote rather than curb all visible manifestations of the sacred. Clearly, the

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<sup>826</sup> “The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,” Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy Principles and Guidelines* Vatican City December 2001 (166-73), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20020513\\_vers-direttorio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html)

miraculous and the emotional still have an important part to play within Catholicism.<sup>827</sup> In a famous speech at the Basilica of Montmartre in 1980, Pope John Paul II declared his personal devotion to the Sacred Heart, recommitting the Church and Catholics everywhere to it. Although some may contend that this enforcement is the official view rather than the lived religion, it would be legitimate to ask why the Church would keep promoting a devotion that seems to bear such inherently deep ambivalences. Clearly, those ambivalences are an intrinsic feature of contemporary Catholicism as much as they were before.

### **The Christocentric Shift**

One major result of the devotion of the Sacred Heart was that it created a shift in Catholic devotional practices, bringing Christ back to the center of Catholic devotional life by encouraging a sentimental identification between Christ and the faithful, which was elicited by the heart. In this respect, the devotion was working against the cult of the saints in an attempt to restore Christ's predominant role in piety.

The rise and fall of the cult of the saints and the cult of the Sacred Heart represent differing points of emphasis for the Catholic Church. When the Church was attempting to define itself in relation to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent allowed veneration of the cult of the saints to expand. Once that sense of urgency to re-shape and redefine the Church had faded, Catholics were left with some apparently unresolved problems in regard to the cult of the saints. The devotion to them had grown uncontrollably, to the point of obscuring the devotion to Christ and God. Muratori, in his letters to Segneri, as well as in his major work about popular devotion (entitled *Della*

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<sup>827</sup> See above, n. 820.

*regolata divozion de'cristiani*), not only called for an immediate regulation of the cult of the saints; he also urged a shift in piety away from the saints and toward the real object of Catholic devotion – God and Christ. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, Muratori had promoted a return to Christology, affirming the centrality of Christ as a way to overcome the abuses especially seen in the excessive, disproportionate, and unregulated devotion to the saints and even to the Virgin Mary.<sup>828</sup>

With its focus on the empathy between Christ and the faithful, the Sacred Heart reversed the allegedly mundane character of the devotion to the saints. By emphasizing Jesus' love, the cult of the Sacred Heart exposed the contractual nature of the cult of the saints and moved it to the margins. The contractual relationship between saints and believers was perceived as devotion in exchange for or as thanks for a miracle. For reformers, appeals to saints to cure and prevent any ailments, illnesses, or dangers was reason for scorn and condemnation. Reformers saw these contracts as a venial feature of popular piety, as a reason to curb the number of the saints' feasts, and as a reason to undermine the cult altogether. This argument was old rhetoric, but during the eighteenth century, it did prompt the actual abolition of saints' feasts.<sup>829</sup>

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<sup>828</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata divozion de'cristiani* (Trento: Giambattista Parone, 1748), in particular the chapters “Della Divozione verso il Signore Gesù Cristo,” 23-33 and “Della Divozione ai Santi,” 235-55. Muratori disdained the pomp and ostentation of Baroque Catholicism, prescribing instead a simple rational devotion. As was examined in Chapter 1, he was the inspiration for the abolition of saints' feasts, an endeavor that became a long-lasting battle involving, among others, Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini, who was in complete disagreement with Muratori about reducing the number of the much cherished celebrations of saints. Querini's rejection and passionate involvement in the matter, which found much support within the Venetian aristocracy, caused the Republic to delay for decades their tackling of the issue when compared to other Italian states. While Muratori's approach toward representations, theatrical processions, and external acts of piety echoed Jansenist perspectives, Querini exemplified a more pragmatic or even political stance on popular devotion. He feared that altering part of the devotional structure might cause its entire architecture to collapse.

<sup>829</sup> For the cult of the saints before and during the English Reformation, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580*, in which the author addresses the reasons underlying their devotion as well as their opposition. Christian humanist reformers expressed their critical views of the superstitious practices linked to the cult of the saints. The most famous of all, Erasmus of

Despite or perhaps because of the criticism the saints underwent during the Reformation, after the Council of Trent, their place within Catholicism was confirmed and even reinforced.<sup>830</sup> Strong manifestations of devotion to Christ were central in the Protestant churches, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were seen with some suspicion and discouraged by the Catholic Church, where much more emphasis was placed on devotion to the saints.<sup>831</sup> In the same vein, during the first decades immediately after the Reformation, the Catholic Church underwent internal theological turmoil in order to sort out the best way to deliver the Lord's Prayer because of the strong connection that the prayer had with the Reformed world and the beginning of the Lutheran movement.<sup>832</sup> The Lord's Prayer had to remain important, yet it went through considerable textual changes to satisfy Catholic sensibilities, and to prevent it from leaning dangerously close to Protestantism.<sup>833</sup> When it came to channeling and regulating devotion to the saints, the problem became thornier as the Church found itself incapable of controlling the various local practices that stood at the core of village life.

Furthermore, the Church could not deny that the intercession of saints was efficacious as well as proper without undermining a central tenet of Catholic faith and without coming too close to the Protestant position. With their local profusion and

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Rotterdam, mocked the cult of the saints in his *In the Praise of Folly*. Like the majority of Christian reformers, he attacked the abuse of the cult. However, at times it is difficult to discern where the mockery ends and the skepticism begins. See Christine Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 61-78.

<sup>830</sup> For a recent interpretation of the critical importance of saints in the post-Reformation Catholic Church, see Massimo Leone, *Saints and Signs: A Semiotic Reading of Conversion in Early Modern Catholicism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); also, Mauro Regazzoni, "L'azione pastorale della Chiesa dopo Trento," in *Storia della spiritualità italiana*, ed. Pietro Zovatto (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2002), 309-56; and Dino Carpanetto, *Santi e patroni* (Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2006), 35-46.

<sup>831</sup> Giorgio Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011). According to eighteenth-century Venetian Inquisition documents, people were still brought before the tribunal for the destruction of saints' paintings, for preaching Lutheran ideas against the saints, and for claiming the centrality of Christ in devotional practices.

<sup>832</sup> Caravale, *Forbidden*, 3-24.

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



celebrations, saints therefore became a catalyst of popular devotion. Saints served as markers of the cyclical life of the Italian countryside, which revolved around the seasons and the feasts. Saints fulfilled a variety of functions and took on a variety of roles. They were protectors, patrons, symbols of communal unity, and also of familial standing. The array of saints honored in a village reflected and shaped, in the deepest sense, that village's society and culture. Social harmony and political order depended on their cult. In sum, perhaps it is not too far-fetched to state that devotion to the saints, reaffirmed and to some degree regulated by Trent, helped the Catholic faith and the faithful not to go astray. Their presence balanced the new and singular emphasis on Christ that Reformers asserted and that some Catholics advocated and practiced.

When eighteenth-century reformers launched their attack on the saint cults, people evaded the restrictions which the authorities imposed on their devotional practices as a final attempt to cling to their beliefs and not give up their lived religion. The attempted reform of piety was met with popular resistance. The heavenly patronage that so suitably mirrored the earthly one, namely the cooperative social structure that survived until the Industrial Revolution, was not going to disappear. Saints remained indispensable interlocutors for believers in times of spiritual and material need, and their space in devotion was not yet completely replaced by the heart. Saints' feasts were still celebrated, yet their very essence – built upon communal life – was undermined by changes occurring within the social, political, and economic systems. In the aftermath of the reform of saints' feasts, the Sacred Heart devotion came less to fill an immediate or an imminent void than to fulfill a different quest for the sacred.

It is not that difficult to sort out why the Jansenist polemical barrage missed the mark. The austere, severe, and elitist Jansenist interpretation of atonement and salvation was not a viable way for the majority of Catholics. Likewise, the Jansenist's inclination for unadorned churches, plain liturgy, and gloomy spirituality could not suit a religiosity that had become accustomed to Baroque exuberance and a profusion of rituals, sacramentals, processions, devotional objects, and sensuous art. The Jansenist attempt to reform the worship of the Sacred Heart ultimately revealed just how deeply these practices and beliefs were entwined in the daily lives of the villagers. This was more complex and spiritual than Muratori and the Jansenists had been willing to admit. These devotions were not merely ways of *expressing* belief. As the bishops who supported the cult of the saints and promoted the devotion of the Sacred Heart acknowledged, venerating the saints and celebrating the heart *constituted* belief. In parish life, the liturgical year did not simply mirror the annual cycles of nature; it provided a structure in which all events, religious as well as social, intertwined with each other. Masses, offices, processions, expositions and veneration of images, relics, and sacramentals formed a nexus in which life, work, and religion shaped a sacred communal space.<sup>834</sup> Intellectual, refined minds might look upon these activities disparagingly; however, the faithful were not simply practicing their faith with the aids of material objects or images – rather, they *were making beliefs* in the very act of their devotion.

This chapter has provided a glimpse of the religious turmoil which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. Examining the events that happened in Bergamo allows us

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<sup>834</sup> Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, "Introduction: the dimension of sacred space in Reformation Europe," in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-16; see also Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

to study historical examples of the application of both Jansenist and Jesuit ideas. That case study exemplifies issues and controversies which were much broader in scope than a contest of words within one feisty urban environment might suggest. The Sacred Heart was a contested devotion that brought to the surface opposing and clashing voices within Catholicism. On one side stood those who desired visible manifestations of the divine, used images, and felt the need for external practices; on the other side stood those who claimed that the Word should be enough to inspire devotion. Caught in between these extremes – and exemplifying many degrees of middle ground, the Church was eager to regain control over the majority of believers who unwillingly had to give up most of their cherished saints' feasts and in addition were increasingly being exposed to the most unsettling "enlightened" ideas. Deism, with its insistence upon a distant God, seemed not too different from the ideas of those Catholics who professed that the age of miracles was over. If there was no need for miracles, if there was no need for saints, if there was no need for priests to drive out the devil because there was no devil, perhaps there was also no need for God.

At the turn of the century, the Church, faced with internal and external challenges, pursued prudent but unrelenting accommodation. By allowing the devotion to flourish while maintaining a sort of theological truce, the Church displayed foresight. Sonzogno, De Passi, Pujati, and Bishop Dolfin were all ordered to be quiet. They were not to engage in verbal fights through pamphlets, books, manifestos, or public conversations that would stir up vicious satire or mordant sonnets, and last but not least, confuse the believers. Hearts were not carried in processions any more, but as Volpi argued, the heart had already found its place within liturgical practices. At that point, there was no way back.

While the saints were ostracized, their numbers curbed, and the abolition of their feasts was implemented, the Sacred Heart offered the faithful a reinvented alternative to practice their sense of the sacred. And this alternative was increasingly promoted by the Church. A more contemplative and Christ-centered piety was growing out of the cult of the Sacred Heart. The rhetoric and the images of the Sacred Heart of Christ, with their emphases on empathy, tenderness, and sentiment, would become the religious language of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The heart of Jesus was welcomed precisely because it gave the faithful a very different sort of image than the Man of Sorrow(s), and a way to worship Jesus without dwelling on his Passion and death. (Fig. 11) Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the saints' reform and this Christological revolution, communities, villages, and cities still celebrated their own saints while adding to their feast days a new one dedicated to the Sacred Heart. In their pastoral Visitations of the dioceses of Venice, Padua, and Treviso, bishops consistently reported how the devotion of the Sacred Heart became an established part of festivities and festivals, alongside those of the remaining saints; and the confraternities of the heart became a predominant facet of almost every parish.<sup>835</sup>

However, more than a process of exclusion, this was a process of accumulation.

People retained their saints, or at least some of them, and at the same time they

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<sup>835</sup> Bruno Bertoli and Silvio Tramontin, eds., *La visita pastorale di Ludovico Flangini nella diocesi di Venezia, 1803* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), lvi, 39, 87-90; Luigi Pesce, ed., *La visita pastorale di Giuseppe Grasser nella diocesi di Treviso, 1826-1827* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 33; Bruno Bertoli and Silvio Tramontin, eds., *Le visite pastorali di Iacopo Monico nella diocesi di Venezia, 1829-1845* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1976), cxxii, 45, 63, 111; and Margherita Piva, ed., *La visita pastorale di Federico Manfredini nella Diocesi di Padova, 1859-1865*, vol. 1 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), xlii.

incorporated the devotion of the heart. The heart was therefore not merely replacing the saints; rather it enriched the panoply of people' choices, addressed another dimension of human spiritual life, and fulfilled a different category of needs. The increasing presence of the heart of Jesus did not push away or marginalize the cherished saints, but it did very successfully re-emphasize a Christocentric focus in Catholic piety.

## Children of the Enlightenment: A Conclusion

Throughout the eighteenth century, the word reform seemed to capture the *Zeitgeist*, the true spirit of the age. Yet reform was not a word that authorities used in regard to piety, or religious beliefs and practices. Instead, they used a less problematic and less ambitious term, “plan.” A plan for lessening the number of saint’s feasts was repeatedly promoted during the century. All other efforts to alter popular devotion and practices were centered on that plan. Reform was indeed the intention of Muratori’s plan to regulate devotion. That same initiative propelled virtually all of the discussions and debates which took place during the eighteenth century. Together with the state, the Church hierarchy targeted popular Catholic forms of piety for reform. Church and state leaders tried to impose a new, modern Catholicism upon the Venetian Dominions.

Muratori and his followers felt that certain, objectionable religious practices wasted spiritual and material resources. In their subsequent efforts to eliminate those popular practices, they drew into their conversations participants both from local politics and local religion. The would-be reformers wished to undermine long held claims of religious control and autonomy, and tried to eliminate some key aspects of devotion from the common people’s forms of practice. They also attempted to reduce or eradicate what we have defined as extra-liturgical activities. These activities were expansions of liturgical practices, but they occurred mostly outside the Church and were conducted privately. Such activities were more and more considered/regarded as illicit manipulations of the sacred. But the militant, reforming attitude among religious and secular authorities, which is the starting point of this dissertation, is only one aspect of a much larger story. Beside those loud and self-serving calls for reform, a large number of

opposing voices also made themselves heard. This dissertation focuses on those other voices and tells their stories, to tear apart the myth of the Catholic Enlightenment as the final result of eighteenth-century Church and secular authorities' attempts to homogenize religious practices according to changing notions of spiritual and economic efficiency.

The ongoing struggle within Christianity to define its relationship to modernity was both a paradox and a chimera. It was a paradox because modernity was understood as something which was at odds with religious practices. It was a chimera because the more that Christianity and modernity were paired as concepts, the more that all attempts to achieve a regulated devotion lost their spiritual and religious focus. As we have seen, those who sought modernity emphasized the backward and centrifugal aspects of piety, they also diminished those voices that kept bringing back into the conversation essential elements of Catholic liturgy, practices, and beliefs. In the end, however, as this dissertation shows, all attempts to sanitize devotion on the grounds of old and new economic rationales were challenged by diametrically opposed parties.

Paradox and contradictions were not new in Christendom, many could in fact be dated back to the first important Church council that answered the Reformation, the Council of Trent or earlier. Muratori's envisioned reform was in itself an attempt to implement what that council had failed to accomplish. As had become clear by the eighteenth century if not earlier, neither the control of devotion nor the religious education of the people in the local parishes could be achieved by means of episcopal visitations, which occurred only periodically, as conceived by Trent. These occasional visitations could not really affect everyday life. Reform was therefore the local clergy's responsibility, but even their seminar education – a key goal of the Tridentine decrees –

failed to produce the well-educated or sufficiently-educated clergy. Another institution that was seen as capable of bringing about change was the Inquisition. It had the power to curb popular devotions that lead the faithful astray, though Muratori, under the eyes of the Inquisitors himself, definitely did not wish to emphasize this.

While, as we have seen, many promoters and opponents of the eighteenth-century would-be reform contended with one another, the process unfolded *in fieri* – in such a manner that virtually everyone participated: secular and ecclesiastical institutions, lay and religious members of society, and the clergy with their flocks. Reform efforts did result from numerous “negotiations of the sacred,” or – put another way, during the course of the politics that revolved around religious practices in the Republic of Venice. As this study shows, the locally-rooted and objectionable elements of religious practices that were the targets of reformers were too deeply entwined in universal Catholicism to be swept away by one-sided rationalistic and intellectualist notions of proper religious devotion.

The continuing resilience, significance, and variety of religious culture in the age of the Enlightenment are the overarching themes of this dissertation, which consists of a series of case-studies. Though the stories examined here are diverse and cover several aspects of devotions, practices, and beliefs, they all grew out of negotiations that took place at multiple levels. Each chapter showcases negotiations of the sacred among secular authorities, the clergy and their flocks, bishops and inquisitors, higher office holders in the Roman Church and in local branches of the Inquisition, and various members of ecclesiastic institutions. The first chapter demonstrated, for instance, how both bishops and the clergy stood in the way of secular and religious attempts to lessen the number of



saints' feasts. Chapter six revealed how Inquisitors and bishops interpreted the growing circulation of images and prayers to the Sacred Heart from two clashing mindsets: one side embraced the new cult as a powerful method to revive devotion, while the other saw it as an aggressive and transgressive movement that opposed the regulation of sacred representations established by Church tradition. Chapter four shows how exorcism, despite the Church's attempt to regulate and homogenize the practice, was still flourishing in the eighteenth century. And in turn using the books that exorcists in this period relied on to learn how to summon and cast out the Devil even though they were listed in the Index of the prohibited books, exorcism was deployed by local priests and fostered by the Venetian governor to address a community's maladies, internal conflicts, and spiritual turmoil. Together, these negotiations represent a very complicated religious Enlightenment. The clergy appear throughout this study as significant protagonists in these negotiations who tended to maintain local religious culture rather than reforming it, and adapted to local contexts and popular practices rather than opposing them.

Negotiations of the sacred unfold against the background of unapologetic quests for the miraculous. Divine manifestations were claimed and celebrated less as ways to revive Catholicism than as unequivocal signs that transcendence as well as immanence are the key notions in describing the relationship between man and the world, and man and God.

Throughout these chapters, both common people and the upper echelons of secular and religious society celebrated and cherished the materiality of religious practices. In their view, transcendence was not opposed to, but grounded in immanence. During the century, the persistent allure of magic reveals precisely the need to sense, touch, approach, and manipulate the sacred. The crusade against the saints was also a

fierce attack upon the miraculous. But the more the boundaries of divine manifestations were narrowed and restricted, the more people at all social levels pressed to experience such manifestations. The making of the new living saint don Antonio Rubbi at the end of the century reflects well how these deep-seated religious feelings played out in the case of one “living saint.” The exorcisms performed by don Limana in chapter four, by which he made demons speak the truth and warn the faithful, were also highly dramatic epiphanies that reflect the yearning for instances of God’s revelation. The pursuit of divine manifestations could not be better demonstrated than by the fascination that emerged for the carnality of the Sacred Heart. Despite the Church’s efforts to sanitize its iconographical verisimilitude, the devout still cling to this image today.

In his pioneering book, Peter Burke suggested that cultural influences travelled in two directions: from the social echelons above to those below; and from the levels below to those above. The *modi* in which these ongoing conversations among the various components of society were forged are, however, much more complicated than this. The first half of this equation cannot be taken for granted – since it was modified by the dynamics of the second half. More importantly, the upper echelon was not a monolithic group. As we have seen, the term Catholic Aufklärung fails to express the richness of this religious Enlightenment. That term directs attention to some aspects and away from others. It highlights the links with the *lumi*, but casts others into the shadows. And it admits evidence from some discourses, but also filters out much more that should be considered. As John W. O’Malley insightfully observed in referring to the Council of Trent, “historians see things one way when they wear the hermeneutical spectacles, for instance of ‘Counter-Reformation Rome,’ and very differently when they wear those of

‘early modern Rome’.” Choosing definitions and assigning names are very delicate matters, as Alfred North Whitehead argued: “The whole subject depends on such a choice.”<sup>836</sup> This seems to be the case for the Enlightenment too. When historians reintroduced religion into their discourses about the eighteenth century, this was already a loaded term. Throughout this dissertation, the definition of Catholic Aufklärung has been shown to be inapplicable to the cases discussed and examined. The term reflects a disregard for those “other voices” at the center of this study, which opposed the premise of more rational and less outward forms of devotion. These opposing voices were important components in shaping and reshaping religion and practices in the age of the Enlightenment.

The symphonic and at times cacophonous quality of the divergent voices of this dissertation is central to its rethinking of the period. Historians have long used Inquisition records to reconstruct early modern Catholic societies, because they shed considerable light on the contested boundaries of religious heterodoxy. In this study, I extensively used other records of religious “policing” which provide much additional information about religious norms, both heterodox and orthodox. Since in the Republic religious practices were also monitored by secular authorities, and were linked to secular issues of power and prestige, those venues of research added a significant broader perspective. Moreover, Beyond varied archival sources, other documentation, such as prescriptive literature, manuals, catechisms, exorcism handbooks, travel guides, and memoirs, multiple stated

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<sup>836</sup> John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 5; and also John W. O'Malley, “The Council of Trent, 450 Years Later,” *Huffington Post. Religion*, April 29, 2013. Accessed April 15, 2014 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-omalley/the-council-of-trent-450-years-later\\_b\\_3180148.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-omalley/the-council-of-trent-450-years-later_b_3180148.html). For a critical take on historiographical categorization see also the most recent *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/ Harvard University Press, 2013), in which a careful study of the long and exhausting sessions of the Council of Trent discloses far more controversies and ambiguities among the participants than their apparently cohesive decrees reveal.

opinions have formed the core of this study. All those “voices” have offered a more complex and multi-layered picture of Venetian religion during the eighteenth century.

It may seem odd that in a dissertation which starts by examining saints, demons and even the Devil himself appear to frequently upstage the saints. In fact, people often appealed to the Devil, demons, and also witches in their search to manipulate the sacred to fit their own desires and needs, whether malevolent or mundane. Magical rituals were intertwined with religious practices and beliefs throughout the eighteenth century. Saints and the Devil could therefore comprise two parts of the same religio-magical frame of mind. As this study demonstrates repeatedly, priests upheld this interpretation and participated in this sort of manipulation of the sacred. At least until the first half of the eighteenth century, priests were invariably present in scenarios of magical activities. The priest/magus don Pietro Longaretti, whose adventures and escapades are narrated in chapter three, is a typical example of a contemporary who mixed magic and religion. If and when magic ceased to be actively practiced (more likely, the practice of magic simply disappeared from the Inquisition trial records), priests who once had been practitioners of magic became the sole interlocutors with the Devil. Thus, the practice of exorcism, rather than vanishing, had a heyday in Venice during the eighteenth century. It was at this intersection between magic and religion that priest-exorcists found a new role (or revived their old role) as protagonists in handling the sacred. The supernatural aspects of popular piety that reformers so desperately wished to eradicate dramatically reemerged in the practice of exorcism, as well as in the production/outburst of miracles – notably in the case of don Rubbi, a priest who was considered by many to be a living saint. And in chapter four that revolves around the pandemic of possessions in Zoldo, I examined a

paradoxical situation in which miracles of divine revelation appear in the utterances of demons who preach to an exorcist and his parishioners.

By including and examining religious episodes such as these, this study has therefore revisited and redefined the traditional linkage between modernity and the Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century Venetian documents are like the images provided by a kaleidoscope: the same material examined from a different angle often presents new and wondrous forms. In these sources, religious negotiations concerning the sacred appear continuously. Thus, the pursuit of modernity, which is traditionally seen as the hallmark of the Age of Reason, actually never became very far removed from the sphere of religion and consciousness of the spiritual world. In chapter one, for example, the plan to regulate piety and to restrain popular festivals and the cult of the saints was resisted and ultimately delayed by members of the state and the church who felt uneasy about undermining such resilient and meaningful forms of devotion. Chapter two examines a long battle which occurred between the Council of Ten and the Inquisition concerning jurisdiction over religious crimes, and consequently the regulation of spiritual life. While both the Inquisition and the Ten seemed to promote (and even to compete in) the secularization of society, the negotiations between these authorities reveal not so much an attempt to desacralize the world as a shared desire to monopolize the sacred. For example, in the matter of the abuse of the consecrated host, the Ten and the Inquisition struggled against each other to wield power over the sacred sphere. Finally, this examination of so many varied aspects of devotion, practices, beliefs, and the numerous uncertain attempts to constrain them within more rigorous boundaries (or to remove them from popular control) during the eighteenth century ultimately confirms that we –

“moderns” – are the children of the Enlightenment in more complex ways than we might imagine.

The reformers, despite their primary goal of limiting and disciplining devotional practices that focused on the supernatural, had to leave the door open regarding miracles and other sorts of epiphanies (divine disclosures). The spiritual and the material remained thoroughly intermixed in the Catholic world of the Venetian Republic: relics and sacred representations are examples which bridged the two domains. Moreover, the reformers’ failure to “sanitize” devotions or to promote a more “reasonable” manner of participating in religion was coupled with their realization that Christianity as a practiced religion could not be devoid of feelings and esthetic sensibilities. When the Sacred Heart of Jesus became popular, that image was not designed to fill a vacuum in devotional practices; rather, it added yet another facet to the multiple representations of the sacred that had never ceased to be venerated, and which had never lost their perceived function to help the invisible become visible.

Belief in God and in divine manifestations has not ceased to matter, nor have these beliefs faded away, as secularists expected would happen. In fact, we are so far from the notion that religion is an irrelevant aspect of modern society and culture that we are now actually reviving some of the impassioned debates of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. A measured reflection on the relationship between secularism and religion can be found in the record of an arguably unlikely encounter in 2004 between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (prior to his election as Pope). This was published as *The Dialectics of Secularization: On reason and religion*. Both men insisted that proponents of secular reason and of religious conviction should learn from each

other, as they differed over the particular ways that mutual learning should occur. In more ecumenical and Catholic terms, the Enlightenment can be considered the bridge to the twentieth century, even if (and arguably because) it was not a period of successful religious reform. The age of reason was a period of “incubation,” in which controversial issues about Catholicism and devotion were debated. These debates re-emerged almost two centuries later and formed the core of a seminal event in the history of the Church, the Second Vatican Council.<sup>837</sup> Decades later, there are still heated disputes over what that council intended, as well as uncertainties about what it all means for us today. But that’s another story.

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<sup>837</sup> For a recent and insightful work stressing the multifaceted event with viewpoints, personalities, and interests in frequently tumultuous conflict, see John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

## Figures

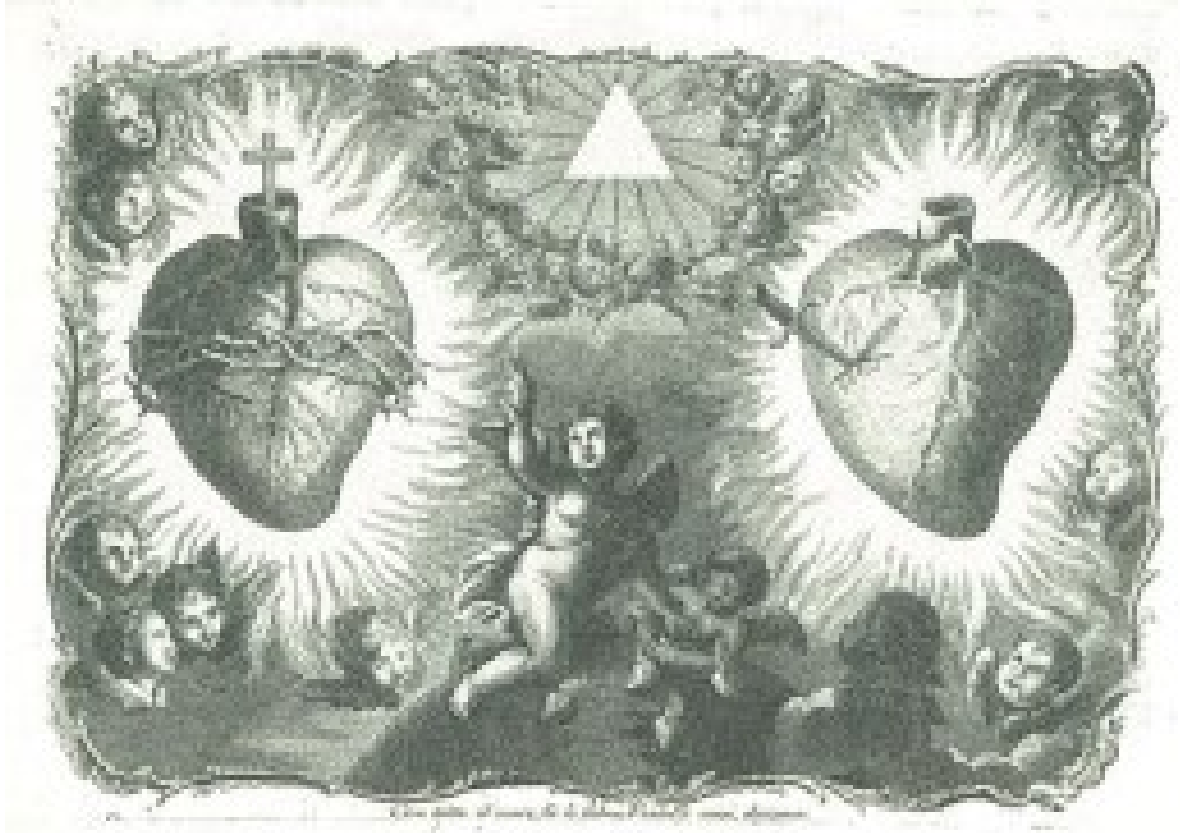


Fig. 1

(Devotional Engraving in copper representing the hearts of Jesus and Mary, 18th century, Italy). Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *I cuori della Madonna: il simbolo del cuore in oggetti e immagini della devozione mariana dal Seicento alla prima metà del Novecento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1997), 37.

The devotion to the heart of Mary developed alongside the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Although this practice did not reach the same significance, popularity, and place in Catholic devotion, it enhanced the feminine aspect of the devotion to heart of Jesus, namely the motherly and embracing quality of it. These images (Fig 1 and 2) show their two hearts together. They were depicted in their most impressive naturalistic form, as human organs, with the veins and arteries portrayed as visibly and with as much detail as in an anatomical study.





Fig. 2

(Devotional Brass medal representing the hearts of Jesus and Mary, 18th century. Italy)  
Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *I cuori della Madonna: il simbolo del cuore in oggetti e immagini della devozione mariana dal Seicento alla prima metà del Novecento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1997), 39.



Fig. 3

(Pompeo Batoni, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, oil on copper, 1767, Church of Il Gesù, Rome)



Fig. 4

(Bartolomeo Letterini, *Madonna Addolorata con il sacro cuore di Gesù*, painting on canvas, 1730, Church of San Canciano, Venice)



Fig. 5

(Giambattista Tiepolo, *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, oil on canvas, 1756, Altarpiece from Saint Agata, Lendinara, Staatliche Museen, Berlin)

This scene of the martyrdom of Saint Agatha is more blurred, more evocative, and more dramatic than the first one that Tiepolo depicted. Saint Agatha looks in awe at the heart (now missing from the upper part of the scene), with an amorous expression, as she is experiencing visionary ecstasy



Fig. 6

(Giambattista Tiepolo, *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, oil on canvas, 1736, Altarpiece at Basilica di Sant'Antonio, Padua)



Fig. 7

(José de Páez, *Sacred Heart of Jesus Surrounded by Angels*, c.1775, oil on canvas, Museo Soumaya, Mexico City, Mexico)

This painting is by an artist from the Spanish colonies in Mexico. The physical, European representation of the heart was blended in Mexico with Aztec cultural elements that identified hearts (seats of the victims' immortal soul and potency) as a part of the body to be sacrificed to the gods. The falling angels surrounding the Heart were not only a product of American religious syncretism; they also appeared in Italian devotional texts and church paintings. This image perfectly represents what Volpi described in his text as a ludicrous scene.



Fig. 8

(Sacred Heart with Crown of Thorns, painting, Radio Spada iconographic gallery dedicated to the cult of the Sacred Heart)



Fig. 9

(Heart shaped ex-voto in gold, 18th century, Italy.)

Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *I cuori della Madonna: il simbolo del cuore in oggetti e immagini della devozione mariana dal Seicento alla prima metà del Novecento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1997), 29.





Fig. 10

(Domestic Holy Water Stoup with the Sacred Heart, late 19th century, ceramic, Museo Etnografico, Udine)

Ex-votos were not the only objects which the devout could employ to venerate the heart. Religion items in the shape of a heart were widely produced in the eighteenth century and after. Reliquaries, medals, pendants, scapulars, stoups, and all sorts of religious paraphernalia in the shape of heart became highly popular in churches and in domestic settings, as well as in private usage



Fig. 11

(Christ Crucified with instruments of the Passion and the souls in Purgatory, 18th century Remondini, Bulino engraving, Museo Etnografico, Udine)

This busy and crowded scene seems to be an iconographical attempt to depict the Sacred Heart as almost disguised by other, more established and recognizable symbols of devotion. The Remondinis merged in one image instruments of the Passion, emerging bodies of penitents from a sea of flames, and the heart of Jesus. The heart sits at the feet of the crucified Christ; it is depicted in a funnel shape and seems to draw into itself not only Christ, but also the rest of the scene. All of the traditional signs of the Man of Sorrow(s) ultimately dissolve into the heart. Thus, the prior emphasis on an act of Atonement for sin switches to a tribute to the heart that encompasses all.

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