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Vernacular Books and Religious Dissent in Early Modern Italy: A Study of the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA

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Article abstract

The sixteenth century was a period of tumultuous religious change in Europe as a whole. Italian Cinquecento culture was profoundly shaped by currents for reform and counter-reform; printed vernacular literature soon came to represent an excellent vehicle for spreading philo-Protestant religious propaganda, but it became a powerful weapon of the Roman counterpart as well. In this article, I will outline a survey of textual materials preserved in the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA, focusing on Italian vernacular works printed between the 1540s and the 1580s. I will consider three aspects of the history of Italian print as related to the Cinquecento religious turmoil: the use of Nicodemite strategies and their effectiveness; the role of Petrarchist poetry as a privileged conduit for evangelizing dissenting doctrinal content; and the development of (para)textual apparatuses intended for instruction and guidance to the reader.

Vernacular Books and Religious Dissent in Early Modern Italy: A Study of the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA

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The sixteenth century was a period of tumultuous religious change in Europe as a whole. Italian Cinquecento culture was profoundly shaped by currents for reform and counter-reform; printed vernacular literature soon came to represent an excellent vehicle for spreading philo-Protestant religious propaganda, but it became a powerful weapon of the Roman counterpart as well. In this article, I will outline a survey of textual materials preserved in the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA, focusing on Italian vernacular works printed between the 1540s and the 1580s. I will consider three aspects of the history of Italian print as related to the Cinquecento religious turmoil: the use of Nicodemite strategies and their effectiveness; the role of Petrarchist poetry as a privileged conduit for evangelizing dissenting doctrinal content; and the development of (para)textual apparatuses intended for instruction and guidance to the reader.

Le XVI^e siècle correspond à une période de bouleversements religieux à travers l'ensemble de l'Europe. La culture italienne du Cinquecento a été façonnée en profondeur par la Réforme et la Contre-Réforme, et leurs nombreux mouvements : à cette époque, la littérature vernaculaire imprimée est rapidement devenue un excellent véhicule pour la diffusion de la propagande religieuse favorable au protestantisme, mais elle constituait également une arme puissante pour l'Église catholique. Dans cet article, je propose un tour d'horizon des matériaux textuels conservés dans la collection aldine Ahmanson-Murphy de UCLA, en me concentrant sur les œuvres vernaculaires italiennes imprimées dans les années 1540–1580. J'examinerai trois aspects de l'histoire de l'imprimerie italienne liés aux troubles religieux du Cinquecento : le recours aux stratégies nicodémistes et leur efficacité ; le rôle de la poésie pétrarquiste comme vecteur privilégié de l'évangélisation de contenus doctrinaux dissidents ; et le développement d'appareils (para)textuels destinés à instruire et à guider le lecteur.

The sixteenth century was a period of tumultuous religious change in Italy and in Europe as a whole, a period when movements for reform and counter-reform reflected and affected shifting religious sensibilities. Italian Cinquecento culture was profoundly shaped by these changes. In particular, the fruitful line of inquiry set in motion by Carlo Dionisotti has been able to establish a close connection, throughout the 1540s, between the rapid growth of the new literature in the *volgare*, pouring from the presses all over the peninsula, and the spread of what is commonly referred to as Italian *spiritualismo*, that is, a reform-flavoured spirituality, built around the doctrine of justification by

faith alone on the basis of Augustinian and humanistic premises.¹ The Italian movement for reform can thus be described as a decidedly vernacular one, and one that “seeks to harness the power of the new printing presses and the reach and appeal of vernacular literature in order to spread its message to the largest possible audience.”² The most famous text to emerge from the circles of Italian Spirituali is the *Beneficio di Cristo*, authored by the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova and revised by the humanist Marcantonio Flaminio, who provided the final redaction of the work.³ This short treatise, centred on the aforementioned doctrine of justification by faith alone and aimed at showing how people were justified and how they can be certain that they were, was by far the most widely circulating work of spiritual devotion; the dissemination of the *Beneficio* started as early as 1541, in manuscript form, only to increase after the *editio princeps* was issued in Venice in 1543, and continued at least until the book was recorded in the Venetian Index of 1549.

In early Cinquecento Italy, print quickly came to represent the most effective vehicle for spreading dissenting religious content to the largest possible audience, as well as, on a broader level, for meeting the widespread need for spiritual renewal. Following up on Dionisotti’s research, a more recent body of studies concerned with printed vernacular works has shown not only that the experience of reform in Italy continues beyond the fourth decade of the century, a decade that witnessed the founding of the Inquisition in 1542 and the beginning of the Council of Trent (1545–63), but also that the Roman

1. On the debated question about the preference for either *evangelismo* or *spiritualismo* (which is preferred) with reference to the Italian movement for reform, see Fragnito, “Gli ‘spirituali’ e la fuga di Bernardino Ochino,” xxi. The term *evangelismo* was first used in this sense in Cantimori, 565–604. On the Italian movement for reform, see Gleason; Simoncelli, *Evangelismo italiano*; Seidel Menchi, “Italy”; Firpo, *Tra alumbrados e ‘spirituali’*; and the more recent Firpo, *Juan de Valdés*. Among the studies that focus on the connection between *spiritualismo* and *lingua volgare*, see especially Firpo, “Riforma religiosa e *lingua volgare*.”

2. Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics*, 3.

3. A modern edition of the *Beneficio* as well as of its early French, Croatian, and English translations is available in da Mantova, *Il Beneficio di Cristo*, from which I quote; a modern English translation is provided in Prelowski, 110–16. The most important critical work on the *Beneficio* is Ginzburg and Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza*—recently revised and updated in Iacovella, “Dall’Alfabeto cristiano al *Beneficio di Cristo*”; very useful reviews of the large (and sometimes polemical) literature on this text are given by Simoncelli, “Nuove ipotesi e studi sul *Beneficio di Cristo*”; Rosa; and Gonnet.

counteroffensive did not fail to appropriate vernacular print as both a polemical weapon against the heretics and the preferred means to lead the lay population back within the safe boundaries of orthodoxy.⁴

The propulsive centre of the print publishing industry in early modern Italy was Venice, where the humanist Aldo Manuzio (the Elder, 1449/1450–1515) started publishing in 1494, putting out a large number of Greek, Latin, and vernacular classics, including the renowned edition of Petrarch's vernacular poetry, *Le cose volgari di messer Francesco Petrarca* of 1501, as well as an array of verse and prose works in the *volgare*. The value and variety of the vernacular output of the Aldine press are well represented in the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection, held at the Charles E. Young Research Library at UCLA.⁵ Amounting to approximately 1,500 titles, the collection includes the imprints not only of Aldo's press but also of his successors, namely his son Paolo Manuzio (1512–74) and his grandson Aldo Manuzio (the Younger, 1547–97). Furthermore, it contains imprints of Aldo's Florentine associates, the Giunti, and of the Venetian printer Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari (1508–78). The Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection thus provides us with a privileged viewpoint on some of the most striking and significant tendencies of the Italian print publishing industry in a period of intensified religious experimentation and spiritual development, while at the same time allowing for an expansion of the research focus well beyond the experience of the Council.⁶

In this article, I will outline a survey of a selected group of materials from the collection, focusing on Italian vernacular works printed between the 1540s and the 1580s, which are therefore very much receptive to the dissemination of heretical messages as well as to the Roman doctrinal counteroffensive. I shall consider such materials based on three aspects of the history of Italian print as related to the Cinquecento religious turmoil: the habit of resorting to Nicodemite strategies and their effectiveness; the role of Petrarchist poetry as a privileged conduit for evangelizing dissenting doctrinal content; and the

4. See Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*; Ardisino and Selmi, eds., *Poesia e retorica*; and Barbieri and Zardin.

5. The main point of reference for the study of the collection is the catalogue: see Barker; on the story of the larger Ahmanson-Murphy Collection of Early Italian Printing (1465–1600), see Nuovo. In this article, the title of the collection may also be shortened: e.g., Ahmanson Aldine Collection.

6. For a thorough consideration of the historical fracture represented by the Council, see Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press*, and Caravale, *Preaching and Inquisition*.

development of paratextual apparatuses intended for instruction and guidance to the reader, which testifies to an increasingly widespread practice of private and domestic devotion that relied on vernacular religious books.

1.

“Nicodemism can be generally defined as the practice of religious (dis)simulation in contexts of more or less open persecution.”⁷ More precisely, in mid-sixteenth-century Europe this was a conduct typically adopted by milieus or individuals pursuing heterodox forms of religious spirituality that were likely to make them unwelcome to the established churches on both sides. Even more specifically, in early Cinquecento Italy, Nicodemism was the dissembling religious behaviour proper to the leading Spirituali milieus, threatened by their close association with reform-inflected doctrinal stances. “In their effort to achieve the broadest possible consensus on irenical positions conducive to compromise,”⁸ the Spirituali are known to have resorted to strategies of disguise and validation as early as the mid-1540s, that is, immediately after the reorganization of the Inquisition in 1542. The pursuit of dissembling stratagems by Italian reformist thinkers and supporters, then, increased notably at the turn of the decade, as the Inquisition began an actual repressive campaign against the Spirituali, starting between 1551 and 1553.⁹ As far as written texts are concerned, Nicodemite strategies mainly consisted of ingenious rhetorical techniques such as reticence, innuendo, partial concealment of crucial phrases by subtly shifting from content explanation to more fragmentary linguistic analysis, and the repetition of highly evocative words such as “grace” or “justification”;¹⁰ but they could also be brought about at the editorial level, for instance by concealing dissenting texts within orthodox volumes or under neutral titles.

7. Miglietti, 1. On Italian Nicodemism, an important contribution is made by Ginzburg (*Il nicodemismo*); on the Italian experience of reform as a model for Tudor England, see the more recent Overell, *Nicodemites*, especially 33–51.

8. Seidel Menchi, *Italy*, 187.

9. On this turning point, see Firpo, *La presa*; more broadly, on the Roman Inquisition, see also Caravale, *Beyond the Inquisition*.

10. For instance, on the *Beneficio di Cristo* as a Nicodemite text, see Overell, 121–26.

In order to gain better understanding of the pervasiveness, complexity, and effectiveness of Nicodemite practices, one can look at the editorial history of four texts commonly deemed to be among the most representative of the dissenting doctrine propounded by the Spirituali: the *Pianto della marchesa di Pescara sopra la Passione di Cristo* and the *Orazione fatta il Venerdì Santo sopra la Passione di Cristo* by Vittoria Colonna (1492–1547); the *Meditatione d'un divotissimo uomo sopra la passione di Cristo*, persuasively attributed to Marcantonio Flaminio (1498–1550) by Paolo Simoncelli; and the *Sermone recitato alla Croce il Venerdì Santo* by Benedetto Varchi (1503–65). All four texts appear in print together only once, in the 1557 edition issued in Bologna by Antonio Manuzio (1511–59), a copy of which is to be found in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection: PIANTO / DELLA MARCHESA DI PESCARA / SOPRA LA PASSIONE DI CRISTO. / ORATIONE DELLA MEDESIMA / sopra l'aue Maria. / SERMONE DI M. BENEDETTO VARCHI / recitato alla Croce il uenerdi santo. / MEDITATIONE D'VN DIVOTISS. HUOMO / sopra la passione di Christo. / CAPITOLO DELLA DETTA S. MARCHESA / DEL TRIONFO DI CHRISTO. / In Bologna per Antonio Manutio. 1557 (call number Z233.A4 C7192 1557).¹¹ As is already clear from the titles, what comes to the fore in these texts is the account of Christ's Passion. This is an episode crucial to the doctrine conveyed by the *Beneficio*: according to the treatise, salvation is a gratuitous gift imparted to humans by virtue of Christ's death on the Cross (and not a reward for good deeds, which *per se* are not meritorious), a gift that people are called upon to enjoy by means of a firm faith, grounded in God's promise of predestination and election to eternal life. As a matter of fact, all four texts are to some extent indebted to the *Beneficio*, especially Flaminio's *Meditatione* and Varchi's *Sermone*. The *Meditatione*—originally conceived as a lay sermon to be delivered before the so-called *Ecclesia Viterbiensis*, the reform-minded group gathered around Flaminio himself and Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500–58) and mainly concerned with the study and propaganda of the writings of the Spanish humanist Juan de Valdés (ca. 1505–41)¹²—has been shown to bear a striking resemblance to the

11. See Barker, no. 531. The volume also includes a *Capitolo* by Vittoria Colonna on the triumph of Christ. For a detailed description of this edition and subsequent reprints, see Jung–Inglessis, 115–28.

12. On Cardinal Pole and the *Ecclesia Viterbiensis*, see Mayer, especially 103–42, and Overell, 33–51; on Valdés, see Crews.

Beneficio (which Flaminio, in fact, revised) in terms of lyricism and images.¹³ For its part, Varchi's *Sermone*—delivered before the reformist “Compagnia del Bechello” in Florence—can be described as a paraphrase of the *Beneficio*, which it follows in its main lines, especially emphasizing the unmerited nature of God's gift of grace, the centrality of Christ crucified to the conception of faith, and the importance of solidarity and brotherhood among Christians.¹⁴ In addition to this, one can observe that Varchi reuses the specific wording of the *Beneficio* in two highly charged passages. First, right at the beginning of the *Sermone*, when describing the benefit of Christ's death on the Cross as “il più stupendo” (the most splendid) among the benefits imparted to men by God, he draws the adjective from the conclusion of the devotional work: “il beneficio stupendo che ha ricevuto il cristiano da Iesù Cristo crocifisso” (the most splendid benefit the Christians have received from Christ crucified).¹⁵ Second, when describing the Passion, he takes the detail of Christ enduring crucifixion “senza aprir mai quella santissima bocca ed eloquentissima” (without ever opening that most holy, eloquent mouth) from the account of Isaiah's words on the Passion recorded in the *Beneficio*: “egli è stato oppresso e ingiuriato, e nondimeno non ha aperto la bocca sua” (he was persecuted and insulted, and yet he did not open his mouth).¹⁶

Contrary to Flaminio's and Varchi's texts, the *Pianto* and the *Orazione* by Vittoria Colonna revolve around the figure of the Virgin Mary: the first is a meditation on the Virgin's reaction as she holds the body of her dead son

13. See Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*, 56–63. On Flaminio's experience in Viterbo, see Pastore, 117–33.

14. See Simoncelli, *Evangelismo italiano*, 331–40; and Firpo, *Gli affreschi di Pontormo a San Lorenzo*, 220–26.

15. See Colonna, *Pianto della Marchesa di Pescara* (1557), 38, and da Mantova, 83 (ch. 6, lines 611–12), respectively. Here and henceforward, quotes from sixteenth-century editions are given in a lightly modernized version, as is customary in Italian editions of pre-modern and modern texts, and appropriate when presenting texts that are drawn from a variety of printed sources following different editorial criteria. The editorial changes that have been made are as follows: *u* and *v* have been distinguished according to modern usage; (pseudo-)etymological *h* has been removed; the ampersand symbol & has been converted to *ed* when preceding a vowel, to *e* in all other cases; capitalization, punctuation, and accents have been changed to follow modern usage; pronouns and adjectives referring to God and Christ have only been capitalized where this assists comprehension. All passages quoted are accompanied by working translations which, if not otherwise specified, are the author's own.

16. See Colonna, *Pianto della Marchesa di Pescara* (1557), 45, and da Mantova, 22 (ch. 3, lines 99–100), respectively.

at the foot of the Cross; the second is a line-by-line commentary of the *Ave Maria*.¹⁷ Absent from the core of the Christocentric reformed doctrines, the Virgin is, conversely, at the forefront of the Catholic doctrine of salvation, acting as the advocate of sinners before God. In this respect, it is telling that the title of the *Pianto* originally bore the Virgin's name (*Sermone sopra la Vergine addolorata*) and was probably changed by the editor so as to be in tune with the Christocentric tenor of the 1557 volume.¹⁸ In light of this, one could conclude that Colonna's prose works pursue a decidedly Nicodemite strategy: expressly placed at the opening of the volume, they are bestowed with the task of concealing the explicitly reform-flavoured drift of the following works by Flaminio and Varchi, lulling the reader (and especially the commissioners of the Inquisition) into recognizing the safe features of orthodoxy. The editorial history of Varchi's *Sermone* seems to support the interpretation of Colonna's works as a "shield" against censorship:¹⁹ namely, its first issue, dating back to 1549—that is, to the same year of its oral delivery at the "Bechello"—also effected a Nicodemite strategy, by placing the *Sermone* behind Varchi's obituary oration for Maria Salviati de' Medici (1499–1543), so that the orthodox tone of the oration would conveniently rub off on it.²⁰ Furthermore, over a decade later, in 1561, this stratagem will allow Francesco Sansovino (1521–86) to include the *Sermone* in the second part of his anthology of *Diverse orationi volgarmente scritte* (an exemplar of which is also to be found in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection: call number PQ4258.S32d 1569): that is, by attaching the *Sermone* to the obituary oration for Maria Salviati, Sansovino could avoid exposing it in so prominent a position as the table of contents.²¹

17. On these texts, see lastly Carinci.

18. See Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*, 137.

19. On censorship practices on literary texts in Cinquecento Italy, see Helm.

20. It must be kept in mind that 1549 was also the year when the *Beneficio di Cristo* was recorded in the Venetian Index, which made it all the more necessary for the Florentine publisher Lorenzo Torrentino (1499–1563), who issued the print, to resort to dissembling stratagems (see da Mantova, 440–42).

21. See DIVERSE / ORATIONI / VOLGARMENTE / SCRITTE / da molti huomini illustri de' tempi nostri. / RACCOLTE, RIVEDVTE, AMPLIATE / & corrette per M. Francesco Sansouino. / CON UN TRATTATO DELL'ARTE ORATORIA / della Lingua Volgare del medesimo Sansouino, utile non pure a gli / Oratori ma a' Poeti ancora che desiderano con eloquenza & artificio/samente scriuere gli loro concetti. / Con la Tauola dell'Orationi, & de gli Autori, & delle materie che / in esse si contengono per ordine d'Alfabeto. / IN UENETIA / Appresso Iac. Sansouino Veneto. / MDLXIX. Varchi's

I shall now turn back to Vittoria Colonna's prose works. As is well known, Colonna's religiosity is deeply imbued with the reformed doctrines put forward by the Spirituali circles,²² among whose members she was also included; more precisely, she is known to have taken part, together with Flaminio, in the meetings of the *Ecclesia Viterbiensis*.²³ On closer inspection, in fact, both the *Pianto*—which is now known to have been originally written as a letter to the famous reformed preacher Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564)—and the *Orazione* appear to address the Christocentric doctrine of justification by faith alone.²⁴ Mary's *pianto* expresses not only grief for the loss of her son, but also joy for the satisfactory value of His sacrifice, and the emphasis is placed exactly on her rejoicement. Accordingly, the Virgin is ultimately presented not, in keeping with the Catholic teaching on salvation, as the advocate of humankind but rather as the one “showing the way” to Christ by providing a concrete model of faith and positive action to follow.²⁵ Therefore, the strength of Mary's faith represents her “legacy to mankind (and a quality which those who choose her as a role model must strive to emulate), and the reason why all Christians are eternally indebted to her.”²⁶

Per tanto, nascendo quanto tesoro può avere il Cristiano dalla vera fede e avendolo [sic] ricevuta dalla vergine Maria, che senza lei sarebbe stata estinta, è da pensare quanto sia l'obbligo che noi le abbiamo, che certamente così grande il troveremo, che questa vita mortale non bastarebbe per sodisfare alla millesima parte.²⁷

Orazione and *Sermone* appear in the second part (numbered autonomously): DELL'ORATIONI / DI DIVERSI HUONINI [sic] / ILLVSTRI. / PARTE SECONDA, 53–56 and 57–61, respectively.

22. On Colonna's spiritual attitude, see Fragnito, “Per lungo e dubbioso sentero,” 177–213; but also Forcellino.

23. On Vittoria Colonna in relation to the Viterbese milieu, see Pagano and Ranieri.

24. On the *Pianto*, see Simoncelli, *Evangelismo italiano*, 211. The *Pianto* must have been written around 1540–41, at the same time as other letters by Vittoria Colonna to the Capuchin preacher; the *Orazione* was probably composed after the *Pianto* (see Jung–Inglessis, 144). On Bernardino Ochino, see Camaioni, “Capuchin Reform,” and Camaioni, *Il Vangelo e l'anticristo*.

25. See Carinci, 420.

26. Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*, 141.

27. Colonna, *Pianto della Marchesa di Pescara* (1557), 11.

(For, since all the treasure that the Christian may obtain is born of a true faith, and since we have received that faith from the Virgin, for without her it would have been extinguished, then we must remember how great is our obligation to her, so huge, in fact, that this mortal life would never be sufficient to repay even the tiniest fraction of it.)

In this sense, Colonna's depiction of the Virgin appears to be in tune with the heterodox one provided by Giovan Battista Gelli, that is, one of the most prominent Florentine intellectuals known to have embraced the *spirituale* doctrine of *sola fide* in the 1540s. In December 1547, Gelli delivered a public lecture at the Accademia Fiorentina on Petrarch's *canzone alla Vergine* (Rvf 366). Right at the beginning of the *lezione*, when commenting on lines 1–3 of the *canzone* ("Vergine bella, che, di sol vestita, / coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole / piacesti sì che 'n te Sua luce ascose"), Gelli dwells on the mystery of Incarnation, explaining that God took human form as Mary's child for the sole purpose of saving humankind—namely, by means of Christ's Passion on the Cross; and he pursues a more general attempt at dampening the Catholic cult of Mary, by presenting her not as the advocate of sinners before God but as a means towards the benefit of Christ crucified:²⁸

la cagione, la quale mosse Iddio a prender carne e diventare uomo fu solamente la salute nostra [...] che essendo stato ab eterno ordinato e deliberato nel consiglio della santissima Trinità che la persona media di quella, cioè il Verbo e il figliuolo d'Iddio, venissi a prender carne umana per essere mediatore infra Dio e l'uomo, Maria fu quella sola la quale infra tutte l'altre donne piacque a Dio, sì ch'egli la elesse per albergo e per madre di esso suo figliuolo; e stante, come si è detto prima, questa divina determinazione, venne Maria essere a cagione senza la qual non poteva farsi questa incarnazione, ma non già cagion

28. On the Accademia Fiorentina and the practice of public lectures on poetry, see the foundational book by Plaisance, *L'Accademia e il suo principe*. On public lectures on Dante's *Commedia* as a conduit for expressing and evangelizing dissenting religious content throughout the 1540s, see the important work by Dalmas, *Dante nella crisi religiosa del Cinquecento italiano*. Partly building on Dalmas's acquisitions, I have analyzed the corpus of public lectures on Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, including Gelli's *lezione* on Rvf 366, in the light of the spread of the doctrine of the *Beneficio di Cristo*: see Vatteroni, "Lettture 'spirituali' di Petrarca."

propria e principale di quella, perché questa, come noi abbiamo detto, fu solamente la salute dell'uomo.²⁹

(the reason why God took human flesh and became a man was to save humankind [...] as, since eternity, it had been ordained and deliberated in the council of the Holy Trinity that the medial person of that, that is the Word and the son of God, should take human flesh to be mediator between God and humankind, Mary was the only one who among all other women pleased God, so that he chose her as the shelter and the mother of His son; and given this divine determination, as has been said before, Mary came to be the reason without which this incarnation could not have taken place, yet not the proper and principal cause of that, because this, as we have said, was only the salvation of humankind.)

It becomes clearer, then, that Colonna's prose works fully conform to the Nicodemite conduct widely embraced by the reformed Italian milieu, displaying a stylistically sophisticated dissimulation of heterodox messages that did not fail to be recognized within that same milieu. In proof of this, one could mention the 1563 edition of Colonna's prose works, along with Flaminio's *Meditatione* but not Varchi's *Sermone*, published in Venice by Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, an exemplar of which is contained in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection: PIANTO / DELLA MARCHESA / DI PESCARA, SOPRA LA PASSIONE DI / CHRISTO, con una Oratione / della medesima, sopra / l'aue Maria. / ORATIONE FATTA IL VENERDI / santo, sopra la passione di Christo. / In Vinegia appresso Gabriel / Giolito de' Ferrari. / MDLXIII (call number Z233.G4 C65pi 1563).³⁰ Although issued at the same time as the end of the Council—that is, in times of growing doctrinal control and intensified repression—this edition seems to fearlessly elaborate on the reform-flavoured slant to Colonna's texts. On the one hand, the volume closes with a small collection of four sonnets, three by Colonna herself (*Le nostre colpe han mosso il Tuo furore*, *Pende l'alto Signor nel duro legno*, and *Felice giorno, a noi festo e giocondo*) and one by the Venetian diplomat and humanist

29. Gelli, 205–06.

30. On the editorial fortune of Colonna's spiritual prose works, see Carinci, 426–28.

Ottaviano Maggi (first half of the sixteenth century)³¹ (*Alma, è ben tempo omai che de' tuoi errori*), which can be regarded as summarizing and epitomizing the main lines of the doctrine subtly conveyed by the prose texts: the abundance of God's mercy (*Alma, è ben tempo* 12–14: “E digli: Alto Signor, ti chieggo umile / perdon del mio fallir: non mi si neghi / soccorso di Tue gratie alme e divine” [“Lord, I humbly ask for forgiveness for my sins: do not deny me the help of your holy, divine Grace”]); the satisfactory value of the sacrifice on the Cross (*Pende l'alto Signor* 1–2: “Pende l'alto Signor nel duro legno / per l'empie nostre colpe” [“The Holy Lord is hanging from the cruel wood of the Cross because of our sins/in order to pay for our sins”]); and the Eucharist as Christ's gift of Himself to humankind, as described in chapter 5 of the *Beneficio* (*Felice giorno* 1–4: “Felice giorno, a noi festo e giocondo, / quando offerse il Signor del sacro e puro / corpo nudrirne, e render l'uom sicuro / di star sempre con lui nel cieco mondo” [“Happy day, joyful and wondrous for us, on which God offered up his sacred and pure body as nourishment and made man sure of his eternal presence in this blind world”³²]). On the other hand, the issue is prefaced with a very interesting letter from the humanist Tommaso Porcacchi (1530–85) to the publisher, Giolito, with whom he undertook a long-lasting collaboration. Here Porcacchi calls upon Giolito to reissue Colonna's *Pianto* and *Orazione* so as to match his previous edition of her *rime*, claiming that such an editorial enterprise would benefit every pious soul:³³

mi son mosso a pregar V. S. ch'avendo ella ne' tempi andati fatto stampare in forma piccola le devotissime e singolarmente commendate *Rime* dell'illustriss. sig. Vittoria Colonna Marchesa di Pescara, la qual fu non pure esempio di virtù e di nobiltà, ma ancora d'integrità di vita e di santità al mondo, voglia in quel medesimo sesto fare stampare il *Pianto* ch'ella fece sopra la Passione del N. S. Giesù Cristo benedetto e l'*Oratione sopra l'Ave Maria*, acciò che possano accompagnarsi con le bellissime rime di lei [...] per commodità dell'anime devote.³⁴

31. On Maggi, see Mattingly, 212–36.

32. Translation available in Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo*, 101.

33. Abigail Brundin stresses the devotional framework in which the reading of Colonna's poetry was intended to take place (see Brundin, “Poesia come devozione,” 165).

34. Colonna, *Pianto della Marchesa di Pescara* (1563), A2r–A3r.

(In the past you printed in small size the devout, worthy *Rime* by the illustrious Marchioness of Pescara, Vittoria Colonna, who is not only a paragon of virtue and nobility, but of integrity and holiness as well. Therefore, I now ask you to print in that same size her *Pianto* on Christ's Passion along with her *Oratione sopra l'Ave Maria*, so that they can accompany her poems [...] to the benefit of every pious soul.)

The volume of *rime* most probably refers to the one edited by Lodovico Dolce (1508 or 1510–68) and first published by Giolito in 1552, then again in 1559 and 1560; exemplars of the first and last issues are to be found in the Ahmanson Collection.³⁵ This volume draws together Colonna's love and spiritual poems, which were known to be written in a reformed vein. In fact, the prefatory letter of the first edition of her *Rime spirituali*, issued by the Venetian print publisher Vincenzo Valgrisi in 1546, provides early evidence of the reformed reading of Colonna's verses.³⁶ In light of this, the fact that Porcacchi explicitly links Colonna's prose works to her *rime* leads us to interpret his choice for the word "commodità" (benefit) as hinting at the complete title of the *Beneficio*, namely *Trattato utilissimo del beneficio di Gesù Cristo crocifisso verso i cristiani*, where the synonymical adjective "beneficial" (in the superlative form "utilissimo") is featured.³⁷ In doing so, Porcacchi would therefore be suggesting a reading of Colonna's literary output in an explicitly *spirituale* vein. Moreover, this same passage from Porcacchi's letter can help shed light on what might have been the original form of the Ahmanson exemplar of Aldo Manuzio's edition of Colonna's *Pianto* of 1556: PIANTO / della Marchesa di Pescara sopra / la passione di Christo. / ORATIONE / della medesima, sopra l'Aue Maria. / ORATIONE / fatta il Venerdi santo, sopra la / passione di Christo. / In Venetia, 1556. Col Priuilegio (call number Z233.A4 C7192).³⁸ The Ahmanson-Murphy item's gaufered edges suggest that it was bound with

35. Call numbers Z233.G4 C65r 1552 and Z233.G4 C65r 1560, respectively.

36. It must be kept in mind that Colonna's poems, both love and spiritual, are "characterized by a remarkable uniformity of tone and purpose, and the transition from *amorose* to *spirituali*, imposed by early modern editors, is so smooth as to constitute no obvious shift or break in the poetic register" (Brundin, "Vittoria Colonna and the Poetry of Reform," 62–63).

37. For the semantic proximity between *comodità* and *beneficio*, see *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, s.v. "comodità," § 3, 3:380.

38. See Barker, no. 500.

something else, something that at this point one could deem likely to have been a copy of Colonna's love and spiritual *rime*. If this were the case, the Ahmanson exemplar would pair up with the one held at the Biblioteca Corsiniana in Rome, in which Colonna's *rime* are bound with her devotional prose works.³⁹

In spite of Porcacchi's request, Giolito never reissued Colonna's *Pianto* and *Orazione*. In fact, in 1567, two years after being tried by the Inquisition for possession of heretical books,⁴⁰ he published the Siense Carmelitan Niccolò Aurifico de' Bonfigli's *Discorso* in defense of Colonna's *Pianto*, a copy of which is held in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection: DISCORSO / DEL R. PADRE / FRA NICOLO / AVRIFICO SENESE / CARMELITANO. / NEL QVALE SI MOSTRA CON / ragioni, & autorità, sì delle Scritture Sa/cre, sì anco di molti Dottori Santi / Greci, & Latini, / QVANTO SIA CONVENIENTE / anzi necessario piangere, meditando l'acerbis/sima Passione del Salvator nostro / GIESV CHRISTO. / VI SI MOSTRA ANCORA / qual sia il uero modo di contemplar / piamente un tanto misterio. / CON PRIVILEGIO. / In Vinegia appresso Gabriel / Giolito de' Ferrari. / MDLXVII (call number Min Z233.I8 A947di 1567). In the dedicatory letter to "madonna suor Raffaella pisana," Aurifico presents his work as an argument in favour of the orthodoxy of Colonna's *Pianto* on account of its focus on the feeling of grief for Christ's death, therefore contrasting with the joy of the "modern heretics":

M'è venuto alle mani un discorso qual quest'inverno da me nacque quasi alla sprovvista per occasion d'una molto divota operetta della illustre signora Marchesana di Pescara intitolato [*sic*] il *Pianto* sopra la Passion del nostro Signore, ove io provo per confirmation di quel bel libretto, con ragioni e con autorità, esser molto lecito, anzi necessario, pianger cristianamente la morte e passione del Signore, quantunque molti a' dì nostri si sieno sforzati con molta impietà persuader il contrario.⁴¹

(I found a speech I wrote this past winter almost by improvisation, inspired by a very devout work by the illustrious Marchioness of Pescara, her *Pianto* on our Lord's Passion. In that speech I show, by force of rational arguments and

39. See Brundin, *Spiritual Poetics*, 133n1.

40. See Simoncelli, *Evangelismo italiano*, 217.

41. de' Bonfigli, A3r.

with the allegation of *auctoritates*, that it is legitimate, and indeed necessary, to mourn our Lord's death and Passion, although nowadays impious people try to convince us of the opposite.)

At first glance, the *Discorso* seems to conform to the post-Tridentine climate of cultural complacency, attempting to fit Colonna's reform-flavoured works into an orthodox model, thereby preserving the poet's mainstream status.⁴² Yet, at the end of the volume, a letter from Giolito to the readers is included that suggests a different interpretation of this editorial enterprise as a whole. Here, Giolito claims to have published the *Discorso* precisely in place of Colonna's *Pianto*, which he was prevented from reissuing, and, in so doing, he also posits a reform-inflected slant to Aurifico's work:

Era l'intention mia, gratiosi lettori, che questa divota operetta uscisse fuori insieme con quel libretto della illustre Marchesana, ma poi che giusti impedimenti fanno sì che per adesso non si può ristampar tal operetta, abbiamo stampato questa, con animo e speranza di darvi presto di nuovo in stampa quella della marchesana.⁴³

(My intention, dear readers, was that this devout work be printed along with the illustrious marchioness' book. Yet, for legitimate obstacles prevent me from reissuing said book, I printed this one instead, with the intention and hope to provide you soon with the marchioness' book as well.)

In light of these words, the dedicatory letter comes to lend itself to a *spirituale* reading as well. For instance, one notices that Aurifico describes Christ's Passion as "utile," resorting to the very same adjective we have already seen in the complete title of the *Beneficio*, that is, the *Trattato utilissimo del beneficio di Gesù Cristo crocifisso verso i cristiani*. It becomes clear, then, that the adjective "utile" used by Aurifico bears not just the general meaning of "useful" but, more precisely, the *spirituale* meaning of "beneficial." One notices that Aurifico moves on to praise the beneficial value of the recollection of Crucifixion, thereby pointing towards chapter 6 of the *Beneficio*, which is precisely centred upon the recollection of predestination: "E che cosa poteva io lasciarvi [...]"

42. See Carinci, 427, whose interpretation, nevertheless, "stops" here.

43. de' Bonfigli, [108].

la qual vi potesse esser più cara, più utile e più salutifera che la pia e dolce memoria di Gesù Cristo crocifisso, e il vero modo di contemplarlo in croce?” (What could I ever give you that be dearer to you, more useful/beneficial and restoring, than the pious, sweet recollection of Christ crucified and the righteous contemplation of the Cross?).⁴⁴ Finally, Aurifico draws upon the authority of St. Paul, an *auctoritas* which is central to the development of the reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone: “Udite quel che disse San Paolo, quel gran predicatore: io mi ho persuaso di non voler saper altro né predicar altro se non Cristo crocifisso” (Listen to the words of the illustrious preacher St. Paul: I decided to know nothing, to preach nothing besides Christ crucified).⁴⁵ In other words, then, Giolito’s edition of the *Discorso* provides us with concrete evidence of the potential *spirituale* reading of Colonna’s devotional prose works despite their being published in the aftermath of the Council, while at the same time testifying to the persistence of elaborate dissembling techniques across the post-Tridentine decades.

2.

On the one hand, scholarly works to date have highlighted the high level of erudition and literary awareness informing the movement of Spirituali in early modern Italy.⁴⁶ More precisely, the Italian movement for reform has a decidedly poetic nature, as one can observe by looking at the uplifting lyricism of the language of its key text, the *Beneficio di Cristo*, progressing by means of a rhythmic, rousing repetition of key words and phrases such as “grace,” “faith,” “justification,” or “mercy.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, the literary genre of Petrarchan poetry as defined by Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) at the outset of the century soon came to play a key role in shaping the evolution of the *spirituale* milieu, as it quickly established itself as the bestseller of the new printing industry. It was therefore regarded as the most effective means of disseminating dissenting religious content up and down the peninsula and across different social groups. Such a close marriage of poetry and reformed piety in and around the circles of the Italian Spirituali is best illustrated by the

44. de’ Bonfigli, A4r.

45. de’ Bonfigli, A4r.

46. On the bookish devotion of the Spirituali, see Overell, 57–60.

47. On this aspect, see Seidel Menchi, “Italy,” 188.

development of a subgenre of Petrarchan poetry that is commonly referred to under the name of *petrarchismo spirituale* (spiritual Petrarchism), initiated and primarily represented by Vittoria Colonna. Her spiritual poems, deeply imbued with reformed content, set the precedent for a wealth of like-minded, individually authored collections and anthologies to be published throughout the first half of the sixteenth century.⁴⁸

The eight exemplars of Colonna's *rime* which are to be found in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection cover a significant span of the editorial history of this work, with a range between 1538 and 1586. Colonna's spiritual poems were included in printed issues of her *rime* from the very first editions of 1538, but only began to be announced on the title page for the 1539 edition.⁴⁹ Her poetic output, which came to fruition prior to the Council and therefore in a period of particular freedom for religious experimentation, quickly made it into the growing vernacular canon of the *moderni*: it is probably on account of such an accomplishment that printed editions of her *rime* started to wane after the 1560s, for a reissuing of her reform-inflected verses in the much changed post-Tridentine environment could have been ruinous for the poet's fame.⁵⁰ In this respect, it is interesting that the issue by Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari of 1560: RIME / DELLA S. VITTO/RIA COLONNA, / MARCHESANA ILLVST. / DI PESCARA. / CON L'AGGIVNTA DELLE / RIME SPIRITVALI. / DI NVOVO RICORRETTE, PER / M. LODOVICO DOLCE. / In Vinegia appresso Gabriel / Giolito de' Ferrari. / MDLX (call number Z233.G4 C65r 1560) presents the poet's *rime spirituali* as a mere supplement (*aggiunta*) to the volume, as this appears to testify to the surfacing of a concern for Colonna's reputation; in other words, by belittling the poet's

48. A detailed overview of the tradition and transformations of Petrarchan spiritual poetry throughout the Cinquecento is provided by Quondam, "Note sulla tradizione della poesia spirituale e religiosa," now to be integrated with Geri and Pietrobon, *Lirica e sacro tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*. Among the growing body of critical studies on *petrarchismo spirituale*, see Föcking; Carrai; and Franco Tomasi's introduction to the anthology of texts pertaining to this subgenre, in Anselmi, 609–12. See also the essays gathered in Doglio and Delcorno, *Rime sacre dal Petrarca al Tasso*; and Doglio and Delcorno, *Rime sacre tra Cinque e Seicento*. More specifically, on Colonna's *rime spirituali* see Brundin, "Poesia come devozione," which focuses on the devotional reception of this text by the contemporaries, as well as Copello, "Per un commento alle *rime spirituali* di Vittoria Colonna," and Copello, "Vorrei mi mostrassi il volto e i gesti."

49. For the publication history of the sonnets, see Colonna, *Rime*, 258–70.

50. See Brundin, "Poetry of Reform," 67n23.

production in this way, the editor Lodovico Dolce was pursuing a Nicodemite strategy.⁵¹

The first editions of Colonna's *Rime spirituali* as an independent corpus appear in 1546 and 1548 at the Venetian print publisher Vincenzo Valgrisi's: LE RIME SPIRITVALI / DELLA ILLVSTRISSIMA / SIGNORA VITTORIA / COLONNA MARCHE/SANA DI PESCARA. / NON PIV STAMPATE DA POCHISSIME / INFVORI, LE QVALI ALTROVE COR/ROTTE, ET QVI CORRETTE / SI LEGGONO. / Con gratia, & priuilegio, / in Vinegia; / appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi: / MDXLVI (call number Z233.I8 C686r 1546)⁵² and LE RIME / SPIRITVALI DELLA / ILLVSTRISSIMA SIGNORA / VITTORIA COLONNA / Marchesana di Pescara. / Alle quali di nuouo sono stati aggiunti, oltre quelli non pur dell'altrui / stampe, ma ancho della nostra medesima, piu di trenta, o trentatre / Sonetti, non mai piu altrove stampati; un capitolo; et in non pochi luoghi / ricorrette, & piu chiaramente distinte. / Con gratia, & priuilegio. / IN VINEGIA, / ALLA BOTTEGA D'ERASMO; APPRESSO / VINCENZO VALGRISI: / M.D.XLVIII (call number Z233.I8 C686r 1548). If one pays attention to the paratextual apparatus of each volume, one finds that the highly charged spiritual character of the poems is further underlined here. According to the dedicatory letter prefacing the 1546 edition, for instance, Colonna's *rime* are a paragon of divinity—the poet herself is compared to celestial rather than terrestrial bodies—and ultimately provide no less than guidance to salvation, as “true immortality” corresponds not just to poetic glory, but to the glory of the soul:

tratta le cose spirituali con una poesia tanto leggiadra, nobile, e divina, che non essendo ella inferiore a gli altri poeti né d'ingegno né di eloquenza, ed essendo tanto superiore nella qualità della materia e del soggetto quanto sono più alte le cose celesti delle terrene, si può dir senza iperbole che la sua poesia

51. The Nicodemite hypothesis might find confirmation in the fact that in the body of the volume—that is, in a “shielded” context—the section of spiritual poems is introduced, and thereby enhanced, by its own title page. Moreover, the same goes for the following text, which bears as reform-flavoured a title as *Capitolo del trionfo di Cristo*, as well as for the *Stanze*. All these texts are also included in the 1544 edition.

52. The copy bears what seems to be two owners' notes on the title page (“Francisci de Cassonibus”; the second name has been crossed out), as well as pen tries by contemporary hands on the last leaf.

fra queste altre non altrimenti risplende che si faccia la luna fra le minori stelle. [...] però gli pubblico, pregando tutti i pellegrini ingegni i quali si diletano della poesia che ad imitazione di questa nobilissima signora consacrino la loro lingua e stile a Dio, se vogliono scrivendo conseguire la vera immortalità.⁵³

(Her poetry deals with spiritual issues in a way so elegant, noble, and divine that one could say without exaggeration that it shines among the other's poetry as the moon shines among the stars: for not only is she not inferior to the other poets in intellectual capacity and eloquence, but she is superior to them as for the quality of her poetic subjects in the same way that celestial bodies are superior to terrestrial ones. [...] Therefore I publish her *rime*, and I ask all the distinguished minds that enjoy poetry to imitate this noblewoman in devoting their poetic language and style to God, if they want to accomplish true immortality by means of their poetry.)

Just as interesting for us is the dedicatory letter of the 1548 edition, authored by the humanist Giovanni Antonio Clario (1510/20–post 1590)⁵⁴ and addressed to Isabella Villamarino (1503–59), wife of Ferrante Sanseverino, prince of Salerno, for it provides us with further evidence of the early reformed reading of Colonna's poetry. In a passage of the letter that is crucial to our understanding of Valgrisi's editorial enterprise, Clario forges a multifaceted parallel between the dedicatee Isabella and the poet Colonna—as both women and noblewomen—in order to ultimately place emphasis upon their consonance of spiritual views, as they have both placed themselves under the religious guidance of the same figure:

Ecco, se allo stato e conditione dell'auttore si pon mente, ella nobile e marchesana, e voi nobile e principessa; se al sesso, ella donna, e voi donna; se alla materia, qual materia è più alta, più degna, più onesta, più santa e più conveniente a donne, che questa, che cristianamente parla di Cristo? Oltre che, secondo io odo, da un medesimo organo ed istromento avete appresa sì cristiana, sì santa, sì onesta, sì degna e sì alta dottrina. Questa opera dunque per ogni cagione vi dée esser cara, ma tanto maggiormente, quanto v'interviene questo particolare di più, oltre tanti altri, che è della conformità della dottrina.⁵⁵

53. Colonna, *Le rime spirituali* (1546), 2v–3r.

54. On Clario, see Ricciardi.

55. Colonna, *Le rime spirituali* (1548), 4.

(Look, if one considers the author's social status, she is a noblewoman and a marchioness, you are a noblewoman and a princess. If gender, you are a woman, she is a woman. As for topic, which one is nobler, holier, and more suitable for women than this one, which speaks of Christ in a Christian way? Moreover, you both learned such Christian, holy, noble doctrine from the same organ and instrument. Therefore, this work should be dear to you, even more so, because of the consonance of doctrinal views.)

There can be little doubt that the figure alluded to under the phrasing “organo ed istromento” (organ and instrument) is Bernardino Ochino: both women are known to have attended his Neapolitan sermons in the late 1530s as well as the meetings held at the d'Avalos court in Ischia and at the Sanseverino court in Naples, meetings which in fact were deeply influenced by Ochino's and Juan de Valdés's religious thought—that is, what is referred to here as “Christian” and “holy” doctrine *par excellence*.⁵⁶ By means of this accurately crafted allusion, Clario manages not only to inform the readers of the reform-inflected tenor of the *rime* they are about to enjoy, but also provides them with the coordinates of the cultural milieu in which the poet's (and the dedicatee's) religious sensibility is rooted and took shape, thereby revealing a broader cultural scope.

It is worth mentioning that the Ahmanson exemplar of the 1548 Valgrisi edition bears a short note written in pen under the prefatory letter, on page 5: “dev[otissimo] umill[issimo] obblig[atissimo] se[r]v[itore] Apollonio Campano. Vedi Apostolo Zeno nell'annotazioni alla Biblioteca dell'eloq[uenza] ital[iana] del Fontanini Tom. II pag. 95 stamp. In Venez. 1753.” As suggested by the bibliographical reference to Apostolo Zeno's *Annotazioni* to the *Biblioteca dell'eloquenza italiana di monsignore Giusto Fontanini*, first published in Venice in 1753, the note is due to a much later owner of the volume. Apollonio Campano is one of the pseudonyms Clario was used to resorting to,⁵⁷ one that the unidentified owner seemingly found in the volume he refers to. Here, on page 95 of the second volume, one finds that Clario would collaborate with Valgrisi again one year later, in 1549, when he would author a commentary on

56. On this point, see Ranieri. On the influence of Ochino's teaching on Colonna's poetry, see Bardazzi.

57. See Trovato, 273n38. This pseudonym hints at Clario's hometown, Eboli, a small town in the southern region of Campania.

Petrarch's vernacular poems based on Bembo's Aldine edition of 1501, signing it with the same pseudonym of Apollonio Campano.

3.

Recent studies have started to show how printed vernacular devotional texts soon began to function as a means of support for private and domestic religious practices, guiding the household through their daily praying routines and helping individuals develop and nourish their spiritual inner life.⁵⁸ Due to its intrinsic memorability, poetry played a major role in this process: in a copy of the collection of *Rime spirituali* published by the Neapolitan printer Orazio Salviani in 1574, now housed at the Newberry Library in Chicago, for instance, one finds marginal annotations aimed at guiding the reader back to particular poems by subject matter, thus suggesting "a reader at work on their book of *Rime spirituali* to make it more useful and profitable as a devotional tool (because the themes can form the basis for prayer and meditation)."⁵⁹ The 1546 exemplar of Colonna's *Rime spirituali* in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection could be taken as an example of an earlier stage of this process of private appropriation of spiritual poetry. At the end of the volume, two paper sheets are bound that contain a manuscript index of the poems continuing on the *recto* of the last leaf. The index is most likely to be ascribed to a sixteenth-century hand, probably the same one that added a brief note on the *verso* of the last leaf: "Non so se sia apresso l'indice, onde se non è, trovandosi errore si possono aggiugnere i sonetti che non si sono posti" (I don't know whether it is to be found in the table of contents: should it not be, it would be a mistake and one could add the sonnets that are not listed). The annotator remains unidentified, for the writing differs from that of the owner's note recorded on the first leaf ("Comprato da Clino Ropelli l'anno 1557 in Liria" [bought by Clino Ropelli in the year 1557 in Liria (probably the Spanish town of Llíria)]). The scant amount of information notwithstanding, the manuscript supplement suggests a close usage of the book motivated by an active interest in its contents—something which is not far off from developing into employing poetic anthologies, and more generally literary works, as devotional tools, as shown by the Chicago exemplar.

58. See especially Brundin, *The Sacred Home*, and Corry.

59. Brundin, *The Sacred Home*, 247.

If we revert to the 1563 edition of Colonna's *Pianto*, we can look at this phenomenon from a different angle, that of production rather than consumption. As we have seen, the edition features four sonnets by Vittoria Colonna and Ottaviano Maggi that summarize the main lines of the evangelical message conveyed by the prose works, while at the same time making them more memorable by virtue of the formal traits of lyric poetry. At this point, my speculation is that Giolito and Porcacchi were highly aware of the widespread phenomenon of personal appropriation of poetry for private spiritual purposes and utilized this for both editorial and doctrinal purposes. By providing readers with an integrated, simplified, and more enjoyable access to the prose works, they would not only encourage them to purchase their volume but also succeed in evangelizing the dissenting content informing it.

Of course, one cannot rule out that the print market provided Giolito and Porcacchi with models they could draw upon in devising their edition of the *Pianto*: for instance, when one considers a text such as the *Trattato delle trenta stoltizie* by the Dominican friar Domenico Cavalca (1270–1342), issued in Venice by Francesco Marcolini (1500–59) in 1537 under the title of *Battaglie spirituali*: BATTAGLIE SPIRITVALI, / SACRE, A LO ECCELLENTIS/ SIMO ET OTTIMO Signore, / IL S. CONTE GVIDO RAN/GONE GENERAL CAPI/TANO DE LA MAESTA / CHRISTIANISSIMA, / IN ITALIA. / Di maggio nel MDXXXVII. / Con gratia, e privilegio. [*colophon*] Impresso in Venetia per Francesco Marcolini da / forlì appresso la chiesa de la Trinità ne / glianni del S. MDXXXVII. / il mese di Maggio con gra/tia, e Priuilegio. The prose text is accompanied by sonnets, also authored by the Dominican friar, that recapitulate its main lines.⁶⁰ It is worth lingering for a moment on the copy preserved in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection (call number Z233.I8 C314b 1537), for it bears a short note on the title, on page A3r: “Comincia il Trattato delle trenta stoltitie che si commettono nelle battaglie spirituali. Compilato per Frate Domenico Cavalca da Vico Pisano, de l'ordine de' Predicatori” (Here begins the treatise of the thirty follies that one commits in spiritual battles, written by Friar Domenico Cavalca from Vicopisano, member of the Order of Preachers). A sixteenth-century hand, probably the owner's, crosses out “de' Predicatori” and adds the following in pen: “di San

60. The same happens in another work by Cavalca, the *Specchio di croce*, also complemented by twelve sonnets.

Benedetto. Fu monaco di San Benedetto, è presso alla patria mia a 20 miglia” (from San Benedetto. He was monk of San Benedetto, which is around twenty miles from my hometown). The interest here lies in the monastery to which the unidentified annotator wishes to tie Cavalca’s figure. In fact, the monastery could be identified with San Benedetto in Polirone, one of the main centres of irradiation of religious dissent in early Cinquecento Italy. Benedetto da Mantova, the author of the first version of the *Beneficio*, belonged to its community. A manuscript copy of the *Trenta stoltizie* and other works by the Dominican friar could actually be found in the monastery’s library,⁶¹ which attests to the interest aroused by this text in the same cultural milieu as that from which the 1563 edition of the *Pianto* was later to stem.

For its part, the Roman Church was neither deaf to the evangelizing potential of vernacular literature circulating in print nor slow to appropriate editorial strategies, such as furnishing devotional works with a paratextual apparatus that would guide the readers through the text and enable them to employ it as a reference for their daily rituals of devotion.⁶² In order to show examples of this process, I will focus on the tradition of vernacular commentaries to the Psalms—in the different forms of *esposizioni*, *ragionamenti*, etc.—which flourished especially in the 1560s and is quite well represented in the Ahmanson Aldine Collection.⁶³

In 1567, Giolito published the *Discorsi spirituali [...] nella esposizione de’ sette Salmi penitentiali* by the Florentine Dominican Teofilo Fedini (d. 1581), a work precociously aligned with the new religious climate of the post-Tridentine era: DISCORSI / SPIRITVALI / SOPRA IL GIARDINO / DE PECCATORI: / NELLA ESPOSIZIONE DE SETTE SALMI / Penitentiali, composti dal R. P. Fra TEOFILO FEDINI / FIORENTINO dell’ordine de Predicatori. / DOVE SI TRATTA DELLA VERA PENITENZA CHRISTIA/na, e del modo del conuertirsi a Dio, Con due Tauole, una de’ Capi principali, / l’altra delle cose piu notabili contenute nella presente Opera. / CON PRIVILEGIO. / IN VINEGIA, APRESSO

61. This is ms. 89 of the Biblioteca Civica in Verona, which an owner’s note allows us to trace back to the Polirone community (see Troiano, 593–94).

62. In the 1560s, the Roman counterpart regained the concept of the *beneficio di Cristo*, as shown by Simoncelli, “Noterelle.”

63. On this tradition, see Morace, “I Salmi tra Riforma e Controriforma,” and Pietrobon, *La penna interprete della cetra*.

GABRIEL / GIOLITO DE' FERRARI, / MDLXVII (call number Z233. G4 F34di 1567).⁶⁴ The volume, consisting of a collection of devotional prose texts, opens with a dedicatory letter to “cardinale Alessandrino”—that is, Pope Pious V, a former cardinal inquisitor and a champion of the counter-reformed Roman orthodoxy—in which Fedini maintains that his work is aimed at benefiting Christians, especially the unlearned and imperfect. In so doing, the Florentine Dominican significantly hints at the title of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, but only to debunk its message, as his *Discorsi spirituali* will shield the readers from the dangers of heresy and provide them with the guidelines on the correct—that is, orthodox—spiritual conduct:

[...] giovare a tutti quanto più sempre si può, e particolarmente dove i pericoli son grandi e ' bisogni maggiori. Per il che, parendomene avere occasione per li grandi disturbi e calamitosi tempi di questa nostra misera ed infelice età, mi disposi farlo ad ogni modo, e tanto più volentieri [...] quando io mi studiassi giovare a molti miei cari e divoti amici, amatori di buona e santa vita.⁶⁵

([I intended] to benefit everyone as much as possible, and particularly where the perils are larger and the needs greater. For this reason, since it seemed appropriate to me, because of the big troubles and calamitous times of our miserable and unhappy age, I have decided to do so, and even more willingly since I knew I would benefit my dear, devout friends, who lead a pious and holy life.)

As implied by the title, the volume features a “tavola delle cose più notabili” (table of the most notable things) which is clearly aimed at orienting the reader’s use of the book as a tool for domestic religious edification in keeping with the counter-reformed Roman doctrine. Under letter “L,” for instance, the reader would find a handy outline of anti-Lutheran content with the corresponding page numbers:

Lutero non puote mai introdurre nella chiesa di Dio se non cose per la sua rovina. Lutero co' suo' seguaci sprezza i voti e suscita tutte l'eresie ed errori che sono stati nella chiesa: 256, 257. Luterani tolgono le cirimonie, la penitenza,

64. On Fedini, see Cargnoni, 280–81.

65. Fedini, *3r–v.

l'oration de' santi, i sacramenti, ed introducono nella chiesa, come nimici di Cristo, ogni cosa brutta e scelerata per che la rovinino: 258.⁶⁶

(Luther cannot introduce in God's church but ruinous things. Luther and his followers despise the vows and provoke every heresy the church has ever experienced. Lutherans dismiss ceremonies, penitence, orations to the Saints and sacraments; in turn, as enemies of Christ they bring into the church every wicked, evil thing, so as to destroy it.)

Under letter "F," the statement "Fede senza opere non basta: 39" (Faith without good deeds is not enough) would refer them to the passage, on page 39, in which a doctrine so central to the reformed thought as that of justification by faith alone is debunked by virtue of the same *auctoritas* the reformers are used to drawing upon, that of St. Paul—as made explicit by the printed *marginalia* supplying the biblical sources quoted or referred to in the text:

Ahimé, quanto bene sarebb'egli che ognuno mostrasse il suo valore e fosse tutto pieno di buone e sante opere? Aborrisse il peccato e lo manifestasse a Dio? Che la fede sola, non è quella, lei, che basti: ma è bene il fondamento dello edificio nostro spirituale, e non è già tutto. Però ben disse il Santo Apostolo, che bisogna edificarvi su oro, argento e gemme preziose, ed ogni vero amatore di cristiana disciplina dé far sempre opre di vera giustitia. [*marg.*] Cor. 3.⁶⁷

(Should not everybody show their value and perform good deeds? Reject sin and show God that they do? For faith alone is not enough: indeed, it is the foundation of our spiritual building, yet it is not the whole building. For which reason the Apostle said that one must build on this foundation using gold, silver, and precious jewels, and that anyone who is fond of Christian discipline must perform good works of true justice.)

66. Fedini, [***v].

67. Fedini, 39. See I Cor. 3, 10–13: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light [...]"

The model exemplified by Fedini's *Discorsi spirituali* proves successful. Over two decades later, in 1589, another Venetian printer, Aldo Manuzio the Younger, published the *Discorsi della penitenza sopra i sette Salmi penitentiali di David* by the polymath Nikola Vitov Gučetić (1549–1610), from Drubrovnik: DISCORSI / DELLA PENITENZA, / SOPRA / I Sette Salmi Penitentiali di / David. / di m. NicolO Vito di Gozze, / gentil'hVomo ragVseo. / Ne' quali, oltre a la piena cognitione della salutifera Penitenza, / si confutano alcune opinioni de gli heretici; & particolarmente / in materia della Predestinatione. / Con la Tauola delle cose notabili. / Alla Santità di N. S. Papa Sisto V. / In Venetia, presso Aldo. MDXXCIX. / con privilegio. (call number Z233.A4 G74d).⁶⁸ Once again, the reader is supplied with a “tavola delle cose notabili” (table of notable things) highlighting the book's anti-Lutheran content. Not surprisingly, particular emphasis is placed on the doctrine of predestination and justification, first under letter “E” (“Error de gli eretici intorno alla perseveranza: 20. Error di Lutero intorno all'opere: 45. [...] Errore intorno alla predestinatione: 225” [Mistake by the heretics about perseverance. Mistake by Luther about deeds. Mistake about predestination]); then again under “F” (“Fede necessaria: 423. Fede ci salva in compagnia della penitenza: 428. Fede sola non basta: 429” [Faith is necessary. Faith saves us along with penitence. Faith alone is not enough]); and, finally, under letter “L” (“Lutero si [sic] contamina con la vita licentiosa: 46. Lutero disonesto e traditore: 72” [Luther is tainted by a licentious life. Luther is dishonest and a traitor]).⁶⁹ The controversial character of Gučetić's work is overtly announced right in the title, stating that the *Discorsi*—once again dedicated to a former cardinal inquisitor, Pope Sixtus V—intends to refute some heretical opinions, especially as far as predestination is concerned (“si confutano alcune opinioni de gli eretici, e particolarmente in materia della predestinazione”).

The third and last exemplar I would like to draw attention to is that of the *Ragionamenti* by the Franciscan friar Bonaventura Gonzaga (d. 1586), issued by Giolito in 1566 (and again in 1567, in the same year as Fedini's *Discorsi*): RAGIONAMENTI / DEL REVERENDO PADRE / FRATE

68. On Gučetić, see Harris, 135; and, more broadly, Favaro and Griggio, 97–107. On the frontispiece of the Ahmanson exemplar of his *Discorsi della penitenza*, the “M” and the “D” of the year are made using capital “c” and “i” letters: the M is made out of a C and I and a capital “c” facing the opposing way; the D is made out of an I and another capital “c” facing the opposite way. See Barker, no. 987.

69. See Gučetić, Hh3r, Gučetić, Hh3r, and Gučetić, Hh4v, respectively.

BONAVENTURA / GONZAGHI DA REGGIO / CONVENT. DI S. FRANCESCO / SOPRA I SETTE PECCATI MORTALI, / & sopra i Sette Salmi Penitentiali del Re David / ridotti in sette Canzoni, & Parafrasticati dal medesimo. / CON PRIVILEGI. / IN VINEGIA APPRESSO GABRIEL / GIOLITO DE' FERRARI / MDLXVI (call number Z233.G4 G66ra 1566).⁷⁰ Like the *Discorsi*, the *Ragionamenti* advertises itself as beneficial to Christians: in the prefatory letter to readers, Gonzaga presents it as “così necessaria e fruttuosa lettione” (such a necessary and useful lesson), his young age notwithstanding; and like the *Discorsi*, the *Ragionamenti* is furnished with a “tavola delle cose più notabili” (table of the most notable things), which however seems to serve more as an actual table of contents than as a guide specifically intended for the doctrinal edification of the reader. As a matter of fact, Gonzaga charges his work with a much less fervently controversial tenor than Fedini’s (and later Gučetić’s)—so much so that, in the preface to the last section of the volume, containing the *Parafrasi [...] ne’ sette Salmi penitentiali*, he praises Flaminio’s paraphrase of the Psalms.⁷¹ Instead, he focuses on providing the reader with simplified access to a subject matter so difficult (*ardua e difficile*) as that conveyed by the Davidic texts. Not only does he embellish the prose text of the *Ragionamenti* with a paratextual apparatus of *marginalia* pointing out the most relevant themes—thereby balancing the more traditional function of the *tavola*—but he also supplements it with a vernacular poetical rendition of the Psalms in the form of *canzoni*, thus exploiting poetry’s intrinsic memorability, as well as with a prose paraphrase intended to interpret and expound (*interpretare e dilucidare*) the Davidic texts. Furthermore, seven engravings accompanying each paraphrase enrich this remarkable apparatus.⁷²

A further paratextual element stands out in the context of our analysis. This is the sonnet by Tommaso Porcacchi, *Conforme al cuor di Dio profeta santo*, addressed to the prophet David, a sonnet which, along with other poems, accompanies and prefaces the work:

70. The Ahmanson Aldine Collection includes a copy of the second issue as well (call number Z233.G4 G66ra 1567). A brief biographical profile of Bonaventura Gonzaga is offered by Pietrobon, 240 (see also the index, *ad indicem*).

71. On which see Pietrobon, *ad indicem*.

72. On the interaction of word and image in religious literature, see Ardisino and Selmi, *Visibile teologia*.

Conforme al cuor di Dio profeta santo,
 non ad altri che a te spirito simile,
 qual la tua gloria, alteramente umile,
 mentre sì giusto sei, merta gran vanto?
 Poi, quando al dolce plettro il sacro canto
 unisci in suono, al mondo, a Dio non vile,
 qual diadema sacro o qual monile
 fora premio al tuo dir condegno tanto?
 In cielo è 'l merto tuo, dov'ora il godi,
 e in terra sono in molte menti impresse
 e in molte penne e lingue le tue lodi.
 Scorgile or tutte in pure carte espresse,
 e mentre tu dal buon Gonzaga l'odi,
 dille conformi a le tue note stesse.⁷³

(Holy Prophet, whose spirit conforms to God's heart, which honour could ever fit your humble glory and justice? Which prize, albeit precious, could ever be appropriate for your holy poetry, dear not only to humans but to God as well? Your reward is in Heaven, when you now enjoy it. Here on earth, many remember and praise you in their writings. Watch their pure papers and let the good Gonzaga read them for you, so that you can find them in keeping with your own poetry.)

One might be surprised at the fact that Porcacchi, who three years earlier edited so heterodox a collection of texts as Colonna's *Pianto* and *Orazione* and Flaminio's *Meditatione*, provides a prefatory sonnet for a work that conforms to the post-Tridentine climate by announcing, right in the prefatory *Argomento de' ragionamenti*, that it will support evidence of the existence of Purgatory: "e con certa occasione si entra a ragionar del Purgatorio, mostrando che egli vi è, il che si prova con l'autorità della Sacra Scrittura e de gli altri autori ecclesiastici" (we will be talking about Purgatory and showing that it exists, as is proven by the authority of the Holy Scriptures as well as of ecclesiastical authors).⁷⁴ Likewise, it might come as a surprise that it was Gabriele Giolito who issued Fedini's *Discorsi* and Gonzaga's *Ragionamenti*: that same Giolito, in fact, who at around

73. Gonzaga, [***4v].

74. Gonzaga, ***2v.

the same time was trying—albeit, as we have seen, without succeeding—to reissue Colonna's prose works.

Editorial enterprises such as Fedini's, Gučetić's, and Gonzaga's provide us with a valuable insight into what happened in the immediate aftermath of the Council of Trent. While the Roman Church became aware of "the need to define and clarify the guidelines of belief among Italian Catholics,"⁷⁵ Italian print publishers and intellectuals started to comply—as they had to—with a profoundly changed (and changing) cultural environment; yet at the same time they tried to resist the pull of the mental stagnation of the Counter Reformation. The Ahmanson Aldine Collection preserves a copy of another work that best illustrates this post-Tridentine trend, which I shall touch upon in conclusion. This is the *Historia monastica* by the Tuscan Benedictine Pietro Calzolari Ricordati (ca. 1500–80), first published in Florence by Lorenzo Torrentino in 1561: HISTORIA / MONASTICA, / DI D. PIETRO CALZOLAI. / da Buggiano di Toscana, Monaco della / Badia di Firenze, / della congregazione di Monte / Casino, / DISTINTA IN CINQUE / GIORNATE, / NELLA QVALE, BREUEMENTE / si raccontano tutti i Sommi Pontefici, e quelli, che / hanno predicata la fede Christiana a i Gentili. / Gl'Imperadori, i Re, Duchì, Principi, / e Conti. L'Imperatrici e Reine, / & altre Donne Illustri, / e Sante. / Huomini dotti, che hanno scritto qualche / opera. E Santi, I quali sono stati / dell'ordine Monastico. / IN FIRENZE, / Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino, / MDLXI (call number Z233.I8 C139h 1561).⁷⁶ The issue is prefaced with a sonnet by Benedetto Varchi addressed to Calzolari, *Padre, quella che voi tessete oggi opra*:

Padre, quella che voi tessete oggi opra,
di tutti i padri benedetti storia,
proffitto al mondo, a voi darà tal gloria,
ch'andrete a tutti i narrator' di sopra.
Per voi mai non sarà che 'l tempo cuopra
spirti sì chiari, e fia sempre memoria
di loro: onde a ragion vostro si gloria
Chiuso, il cui gregge operò tanto, ed opra.

75. Fenlon, 88.

76. An extended issue of the *Historia* was then published in Rome by Vincenzo Accolti (d. 1596) in 1575.

Chi avrebbe pensato che Buggiano,
 sì picciol borgo e scuro, al mondo dato
 lume avesse sì grande e sì sovrano?
 E se troppo oso, il vostro buon Silvano
 esser deve, e non io, da voi colpito,
 che 'l mio vòto ruscel rende oceano.⁷⁷

(Father, your story of the men of the church, that you are now working on, will profit the world and bestow such glory on you, that you will be superior to every other writer. Thanks to you the memory of these men will survive forever, for which reason the Benedictine order is proud of you. Who could have imagined that the small, little-known town of Buggiano would provide the world with such a famed man? If my praise is so high, it is because of your dear Silvano, who contributes to turn my poetic stream into an ocean.)

After authoring a text so explicitly dissenting as the *Sermone* in 1549, Varchi must have quickly acknowledged the general shrinking of cultural horizons that had already begun with the opening of the Council. In 1554, he refused to provide Torrentino with an accompanying sonnet for his issue of Antonio Alati's translation of Erasmus's *Sermone della grandissima misericordia di Dio*; seven years later, he provided him with a sonnet for a work so precociously integrated into the counter-reformed climate as the *Historia monastica*.⁷⁸ Not long after this, the former Nicodemite completed his post-Tridentine parabola by being ordained a priest. He died within the safe boundaries of Roman orthodoxy in 1565.

Conclusion

A survey of the Ahmanson Aldine Collection proves extremely rewarding for the study of the Italian movement for reform. Italian Cinquecento culture and society appear to have been very much alive to reform-inflected instances of

77. Ricordati, A3v. A further sonnet, *Silvan, che la più degna e miglior parte*, displayed on the same page, is authored by Laura Battiferri and addressed to Silvano Razzi (the "buon Silvano" of Varchi's sonnet, l. 12). Girolamo Razzi (1527–1611), who took the religious name Silvano when becoming a Camaldolite monk in 1559, was one of Varchi's closest friends and the author of his first biography.

78. See Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia*, 166–67, and Zaggia, 2:619–22, respectively.

spiritual renewal even beyond the setback of the Council of Trent. A close reading of Vittoria Colonna's prose works in the 1557 Bolognese edition, as well as a survey of the editorial history of her *Rime spirituali*, along with a material analysis of the Ahmanson exemplars, all point in this direction. While the Italian readership was receptive to heterodox content and interested in promoting such by relying on the success of the printing industry up until the last quarter of the century, the Roman Church was not late in exploiting the evangelizing potential of the new vernacular literature, especially after the end of the Council. This can best be appreciated by looking at the development of paratextual apparatuses of devotional books, intended to guide the reader within the safe boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy.

The holdings of the Ahmanson Collection allow researchers to follow and illuminate this twofold tendency in the Italian experience of reform over the central decades of the sixteenth century, thereby contributing to the reshaping of Delio Cantimori's historical paradigm—according to which the Italian *spirituale* movement did not survive the opening of the Council—as carried out by the most recent scholarship on reform and counter-reform.

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