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CHURCH AND CENSORSHIP IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

GOVERNING READING IN THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Patrizia Delpiano

ROUTLEDGE

Church and Censorship in Eighteenth-Century Italy

Dealing with the issue of ecclesiastical censorship and control over reading and readers, this study challenges the traditional view that during the eighteenth century the Catholic Church in Italy underwent an inexorable decline. It reconstructs the strategies used by the ecclesiastical leadership to regulate the press and culture during a century characterised by important changes, from the spread of the Enlightenment to the creation of a state censorship apparatus. Based on the archival records of the Roman Inquisition and the Congregation of the *Index of Prohibited Books* preserved in the Vatican, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic Church's endeavour to keep literature and reading in check by means of censorship and the promotion of a "good" press.

The crisis of the Inquisition system did not imply a general diminution of the Church's involvement in controlling the press. Rather than being effective instruments of repression, the Inquisition and the *Index* combined to create an ideological apparatus to resist new ideas and to direct public opinion. This was a network mainly inspired by anti-Enlightenment principles, which would go on to influence the Church's action well beyond the eighteenth century.

This book is an English translation of *Il governo della lettura. Chiesa e libri nell'Italia del Settecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

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Abbreviations

Archival Sources

ACDF—Archivio della Congregazione per la dottrina della fede, Rome (Index: Archivio della Congregazione dell'Indice; S.O.: Archivio della Congregazione del Sant'Ufficio; *C.L.*: *Censura librorum*; *St. St.*: *Stanza Storica*)
ASMo—Archivio di Stato, Modena
ASR—Archivio di Stato, Rome
ASVe—Archivio di Stato, Venice
BABG—Biblioteca Archivio Bassano del Grappa, Vicenza
BCAB—Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna
BPT—Biblioteca della Provincia di Torino
chap.—chapter
col., cols—column, columns
ed., eds—editor, editors
edn—edition
et seq. *et sequentes*—and the following
f., ff. *folio, folios*—sheets in manuscripts
fasc.—fascicle
ibid. *ibidem*—in the same place
id. *idem*—the same
inf. *infra*—below
MS, MSS *manuscriptum, manuscripta*—manuscript, manuscripts
n.d.—no date
no., nos.—number
n.p.—no page
or.—original
r *recto*—right (front of manuscript sheet)
s.a. *sine anno*—without year
s.l. *sine loco*—without place (of publication)
s.n. *sine nomine*—without name (of publisher)
sup. *supra*—above
t., tt. *tome*—tomes
v *verso*— verse (reverse of manuscript sheet)
vol., vols—volume, volumes

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Note to the English Edition

This is the English language and revised edition of my Italian book (*Il governo della lettura. Chiesa e libri nell'Italia del Settecento*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), and it includes translations of Italian, French and Latin quotations. Some examples included in the Italian edition have been removed, while the notes have been considerably shortened and in some cases eliminated. On the other hand, the bibliography has been updated, and every effort has been made to refer to English versions of the works listed in references to secondary literature. Primary sources, both in the notes and the bibliography, are mentioned and listed in the language of the versions consulted, with the date of the original edition (in French, English and Latin) placed in brackets.

The bibliography has been divided between primary sources and secondary literature, and it contains a full list of the works referred to in the main text and in the notes. The page references given in the notes are to the editions listed first in the bibliography, unless otherwise stated. In any case, the first editions of the works are always included in brackets.

Archival sources are mentioned only in the notes (see the list of abbreviations for the location of archives). Books reviewed in eighteenth-century periodicals have been indicated by complete editorial references only in the notes, and therefore, they do not appear in the bibliographical references at the end of each chapter.

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Introduction

This book addresses the issue of ecclesiastic control of reading in eighteenth-century Italy. Its aim is to bring to light the strategies developed by the Catholic Church to govern the printing press and broader culture in a century of profound intellectual and political change that included the spread of the Enlightenment and the translation of jurisdictionalist ideas into practice, beginning from the 1760s.

There have been many studies of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and books in the early modern period, and these have in fact multiplied following the opening of the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1998. Being interested in moments of rupture, many historians have focused their attention on the religious crisis of the sixteenth century to show how the post-Tridentine era provided the Italian context for a veritable crackdown on the circulation and consumption of the written word, realised through the creation of a robust structure of norms and prohibitions and the practice of book burnings and expurgations.[1]

The eighteenth century has been investigated much less, being the focus of limited studies of specific aspects, but never of comprehensive interpretations. The interest of scholars in this period has concentrated on the changes that occurred following the birth of state censorship, aimed at breaking, in a jurisdictionalist context, the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the clergy on the world of the printed word and oriented in certain cases towards promoting the trade of works listed in the *Index librorum prohibitorum*.[2]

Yet history does not unfold only through moments of rupture, so the story told in this book is also one of continuity. In practice, studying a century seen even by its contemporaries as being divided between "a love of religion and the spirit of libertinage"[3] (a characterisation often used to stigmatise the secular morality of the Enlightenment) inevitably means taking account of the aforementioned turning points, while not forgetting the continuity between them. First among these was the stalwart resistance of the Catholic hierarchy which, despite the Church being rent internally by the threats to religious unity posed by Jansenism and the polemics against the Jesuits that culminated in the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, on the whole remained deployed in safeguarding the *patrimonium*

fidei of the Tridentine Council and continued to rely, through the censorship imposed by the Congregations of the *Index* and the Inquisition, on methods that were by no means novel.

Thus, despite these events being rooted in the period of the Catholic reconquest and the fact that it is difficult to distinguish signs of innovation in long-term processes, the basic hypothesis of this book is that in the eighteenth century, in parallel with the decline of inquisitorial procedures established during the Counter-Reformation and while secularising forces were active in Italian society,[4] the Church steadily shifted the centre of gravity from repressive to persuasive techniques. Combatting its enemies on equal terms on the field of the written word, it accepted confrontation in the public sphere. This brought about the transition from secret to public censorship, which took the positions adopted by the hierarchy in matters of religion, ethics, politics, justice and education away from the offices of the *Index* and the Inquisition and turned them into official norms to which the good Catholic was obliged to adhere. The shift was a significant one, and it is possible to detect within it the origins of mechanisms for the control of public opinion that would go on to have a profound effect on the Italian path to modernity. Because of this, the word "governance"—as the subtitle suggests—seems even more appropriate than "censorship" to describe a complex programme which, while never abandoning the effort to halt the spread of prohibited texts, tended rather to guide the burgeoning reading public by means of a skilled application of communication methods able to reach both clergy and laity.

Precisely in order to follow the continuity and changes, this analysis, although focused on the eighteenth century, also looks back to the Counter-Reformation and forwards to the Restoration. As for geography, Italy is the centre of the picture, but the work does not ignore Catholic Europe and in particular France, a choice that seems natural considering the close relations between the elites of the two countries and the fact that across the Alps, there was a varied literary production in French that quickly entered the publishing networks of the peninsula.[5]

The work has drawn on many sources: the minutes and reports of the meetings of the Congregations of the *Index* and the Inquisition, and the censorship judgments on proscribed books preserved in the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and records of certain trials held by the Holy Office found in other inquisitorial archives. Encyclicals, pastoral instructions, catechisms and also sermons, conduct manuals, journals, letters, autobiographies and warnings to the youth were all consulted. Thus the sources accessed were not only those unearthed from the so-called archives of suppression.

Nevertheless, a warning must be made before outlining the structure of this book. To study the Church's control of reading means to approach institutions and men who were in different ways responsible for surveillance: popes, censors, inquisitors, bishops, priests and preachers. While there is no

doubt that there were profound differences on many issues of internal and external policy between the various occupants the Throne of Saint Peter during the eighteenth century, and that there was no lack of disagreements between the censors on the fate of investigated books,[6] it is also true that, if one follows the common thread of the control of books and reading, the actions of the Church are seen to have been consistent and uniform. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Church was composed of many individuals, each with different opinions: it is enough to underline that the works of the exponents of enlightened Catholicism and of the reformist clergy were themselves placed under scrutiny by the censors, nor did they avoid being placed on the *Index*. The issue of conflict within the Church and the role of censorship as a tool at the service of the various doctrinal movements and religious orders is certainly fundamental. However, this is a problem that this book addressed only marginally since it focuses on secular literature—and, so to speak, on the Catholic Church's external enemies—rather than on religious books. There is hardly any need to remind the reader that the history of the Church in the eighteenth century is not fully reflected in that of the control of reading: a control—to provide another detail about this study—that is tackled here by analysing highly coherent attempts and endeavours made by many members of the clergy (the short- and long-term outcomes of which will be discussed in the conclusions), leaving in the background the issues more strictly related to the vicissitudes of the readers and affairs of the publishers.

The nucleus of the first chapter is the consolidation of the Enlightenment movement, which can be traced back to cultural categories that went well beyond the Protestant heresy that arose as a result of the sixteenth-century crisis of religion. Propounding a secular morality entirely alien from Tridentine dogmatic faith and based on forms of religiosity that sidelined revelation, or on the principles of a virtuous atheism, the Enlightenment as a whole appeared to overturn the established order and to attack, in the name of a cosmopolitan universalism, the Catholic and Christian identity of the peninsula. An important role was played by the development of the literature of entertainment, of which the novel was the most original product. Initially spread through translations of European works before becoming an indigenous literary genre, this was regarded with suspicion since it was capable of reaching a wider public than that of the traditional elite of readers. From the 1750s, these two phenomena, which in fact were closely connected in the ecclesiastical worldview, raised new concerns for the clergy and the Catholic hierarchy regarding the spread of books. They also inspired reflections on the damage wreaked by reading, which in that decade emerged as one of the great dangers to which the people that the Church had previously sought to protect, particularly from the poisons of Protestantism, were exposed.

Driven by these two fears, the Holy See invested considerable energy and manpower in the defence of its intellectual hegemony. The censorship

apparatus is recreated in the second chapter through the activities of the *Index* and Inquisition and by bringing to light the array of different censors called to pass judgment on individual texts. A key moment was the reorganisation of the *Index*, carried out by Benedict XIV in the 1750s, which brought an end to the lively debate that arose in early-eighteenth-century Catholicism between conservatives and *novatores*. Prospero Lambertini, who many scholars consider the tolerant pope,[7] in fact succeeded in updating the *Index* of Prohibited Books and using it to combat the unorthodoxies of his time. He also proposed strategies to encourage men of letters[8] to adopt the practice of self-correction and therefore of self-censorship. In the course of the century—thanks to the diligent denunciations of the papal nuncios, who acted as intermediaries between the censorship institutions of the various states in which they operated—all the classics of the Italian and European Enlightenment were condemned, especially those in their original language not yet translated.

As shown by the clandestine circulation of books on the *Index* throughout the peninsula, including in the Papal States,[9] reading courts undoubtedly experienced a profound crisis during the eighteenth century, which can only be explained by examining changes external to the Church. Censorship measures seemed incapable of keeping pace with the accelerating publishing market, especially considering the spectacular delays that sometimes occurred. As for the deterioration of the system of the Inquisition (third chapter), this was not caused by the Roman Holy Office abdicating its role. Indeed, the 1760s saw the start of a strict suppression in the Papal States that involved book burnings and the exemplary punishment of unrepentant readers.

Elsewhere, however, inquisitorial courts had to come to terms with the establishment of state censorship, against which the various anti-jurisdictionalist edicts and regulations issued by the Holy Office in Rome could do little. Nevertheless, the crisis of the Inquisition should be interpreted not so much as a total and definitive decline, but rather as the institution's gradual adaptation to ongoing changes.[10] In response to the depletion of its powers of suppression, the Roman Holy Office focused on methods of persuasion and, in order to tackle the growth of texts deemed to be impious, rallied the bishops of the Papal States. The mobilisation of all the clergy of the peninsula was carried out by the popes through the use of encyclicals—a method of communication not just internal, but which reached beyond the Church—giving instructions related to books. The chronological and thematic correlation between the rules of the Inquisition and papal encyclicals on the one hand, and sermons and pastoral instructions to local clergy on the other, indicates a certain common intent between the centre of Catholicism and the periphery of the various dioceses in their support for what appears to have been a well-orchestrated campaign against books and reading. And this happened despite the different positions expressed by the Jansenists on the question of who held the

authority to prohibit (the bishops, and not the pope) and regarding licences to read prohibited texts, denounced as absurd privileges compared to bans that applied to all the faithful.

The 1770s and 1780s were a turning point with regard to the mechanisms used by the Catholic Church in view of the orientation of the nascent public opinion (fourth chapter).[11] Essentially, suppressive approaches appeared to be failing in a context in which calls for renewal were being translated into jurisdictionalist practice through the suppression of local inquisitorial courts (in Tuscany, 1781, and Lombardy, 1782). The relaunch of the war against books was therefore crucial and, being closely associated to the fight against the spread of the Enlightenment, was fought through the publication of rebuttals of the books on the *Index*, the translation of *antiphilosophique* literature and the publication, in periodicals linked to the Holy See, of reviews denigrating prohibited volumes.

The protagonists of this war, it is worth noting, were often members of the Congregations of the *Index* and of the Holy Office, and men of the clergy. Not that this task was carried out exclusively by individuals in some way close to the leaders in Rome, but the intertwined relationships of patronage with the authors reveal the closeness of the link between the books on the *Index* and the publishing production promoted by the Roman and peripheral Church hierarchy that targeted prohibited works. The use of editorial resources entailed a transformation of the literary genres used as critical tools against the *ancien régime* (dictionaries and novels, for example) and also involved the development of a pedagogy for good books that took account of the new tastes of the public. A wealth of conduct manuals taught readers to look at the world of books with suspicion so as to encourage them to internalise the norms of the *Index* and then to practice forms of self-censorship. This was an approach with the potential to solve the problem of obedience to the Church at a time when its policy of repression was in decline.

The "other" eighteenth century[12]—that hostile to the Enlightenment, of which this research reconstructs one aspect—does not appear, therefore, a world facing the new in a state of inertia. On the contrary, it was able to counter the changes relating to the spread of secularisation by promoting a "preventive counter-encyclopaedia"[13] and organising, through the use of the written word, an "active counter-revolution"[14] based on a solid theoretical structure that would act as a guide to the actions of the Holy See well beyond the end of the century. In this sense, it is undeniable that the Church had employed the communication tools of modernity, however true it is that it knew how to bend these to the end of maintaining the status quo. This was an operation which can aptly be described with terms like "conservative innovation" or "anti-modern modernisation,"[15] where the oxymorons effectively convey a plan of intellectual hegemony carried out through the strengthening, and at the same time the control, of the press as the fundamental institution of learning.

Notes

1. See in particular Fragnito, *La Bibbia*; Fragnito, *Proibito*. For an overview of studies, see Rozzo, "Sulla censura." On the attempt made by the Inquisition and the *Index* during the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth to purify devotional works written in vernacular Italian, see Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer*. See also, among others, Ricci, *Inquisitori*; Caravale, *Preaching*.
2. On the Republic of Venice and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, see respectively Infelise, *L'editoria*, especially 99 et seq.; Landi, *Il governo*, 75 et seq. The outcome was different in the Savoyard State, where state and ecclesiastical censorship intertwined, resulting in an alliance between throne and altar. On this topic, see Braida, *Il commercio*, 73–140. For an analysis of different censorship apparatuses in the eighteenth-century Italian states, see Braida, "Censure." For a comparative perspective at European level, see Sabato, "Comparing Book Censorship."
3. These are the words used in the 1780s by the former Spanish Jesuit Andrés, *Dell'origine*, 452.
4. This frame is outlined by Venturi, *Settecento*, vol. II, *La Chiesa*, who pays close attention to the jurisdictionalist reforms undertaken by Italian states in the second half of the eighteenth century.
5. On the vast circulation of French books in the Italian Peninsula, see Waquet, "La lumière" and, with regards to the prohibited texts, see Valeri, *Libri nuovi*.
6. On the contrasts between the two congregations over the ages, see Rebellato, *La fabbrica*.
7. Rosa, "Benedetto XIV," 401. See also Rosa, "Pope Benedict XIV."
8. On the use of the term *man of letter* (*letterato*) in the *ancien régime*, see Chartier, "The Man of Letters."
9. On the important role played by the Société typographique de Neuchâtel in disseminating prohibited books in Italy, see Braida, *Il commercio*, 255 et seq.; Pasta, *Editoria*, 225 et seq.; Valeri, *Libri nuovi*, 74–81 (particularly for works by d'Holbach). On the Rome area, see Tarzia, *Libri e rivoluzioni*. See the database *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe* (hosted at http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/ accessed 8 April 2017) and Burrows, Curran, Hiribarren, Kattau, Merivale, *The French Book*. See also the pioneering work by Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers*.
10. The actual decline of the Inquisition is the topic tackled by Brambilla, *La giustizia*, 228 et seq.; Del Col, *L'Inquisizione*, 700 et seq.
11. Regarding the conceptualization of public opinion during the *ancien régime*—an opinion which was not disentangled from the influences of censorship—see, among studies on the Italian Peninsula, Landi, *Naissance* (with reference to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and provinding a long-term perspective); Landi, "Censure et formation."
12. Guerci, *La discussione*, 11.
13. This expression was used by the antifascist intellectual Piero Gobetti (1901–1926), in *Risorgimento*, 13–64. The reference was to the *antiphilosophique* culture which was widespread in the eighteenth-century Savoyard State.
14. See Chiosi, *Lo spirito*, 263 (for the Kingdom of Naples).
15. See Caffiero, *Religione*, *Premessa*, 11–24, 15, who—quoting Reinhard, *Papauté*, 163—rightly highlights how the Church has been "able to adapt the processes of the early modern world to its own ends" (12). For a general introduction to this topic, widely debated in Italy, see Ferrone, "Chiesa cattolica e modernità"; Ferrone, *Lo strano Illuminismo*; Ferrone, *The Enlightenment*. A different perspective can be found in Menozzi, *Chiesa*; Menozzi, "La Chiesa"; Rosa, "The Catholic Aufklärung," who in particular underlines the relationship between Catholicism, Catholic Church and Enlightenment.

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1 From the Spoken to the Written Word

Although marked over the years by a general attitude of suspicion, the relationship of the Church to reading has a history characterised by moments of weakness and of strength: a history, that is, profoundly conditioned by what existed and what was changing around the Church, in the wider culture, in society and in the realm of politics.

If we look at the early modern age, we see that there is no doubt that, after the introduction of the printing press—a watershed in a fundamental sense[1]—the second half of the sixteenth century was one of the strongest moments. The control over reading set in course by the Roman Church hierarchy during the Counter-Reformation—over both religious and secular texts—constituted a turning point from the previous Renaissance period with respect to the access to books in the Catholic world. Intensified by the unfolding of the Protestant Reform movements, which preached that every believer should read the Holy Scriptures for themselves, the Church's traditional distrust then took form in the creation of a formalised censorship apparatus with a list of banned texts—the *Index of Prohibited Books* (1559)—and with a congregation specifically appointed to enforce it (1571).

For its part, the Inquisition carried out a veritable hunt for books, which were perceived as the vehicle par excellence of heterodoxy, while confessors diligently exhorted the faithful to report disobedient readers.[2] After lengthy internal discussions, the Church arrived at a definitive ban on translating the Bible into the vernacular, in other words, a ban on Catholics having direct knowledge of the founding text of their own religion.[3] In reality, this was not simply a matter of suppressing and punishing, but also one of preventing and curing. Such was the purpose of the Counter-Reformation educational handbooks which dispensed healthy doses of "defensive and preservative medicine,"[4] helping to prescribe specific reading guidelines in relation to contents and readership.

The question of the actual effectiveness of ecclesiastical prohibitions in the early modern age needs further analysis, bearing in mind the fact that every rule, however rigid, had its exception through a system of privileges: after standards were set they were inevitably transgressed.[5] It should especially be noted that the adoption of repressive strategies had different

outcomes within different social groups. Indeed, it is known that there existed a double censorship regime, which at the time effectively permitted an "aristocracy of free readers" the use of banned texts.[6]

However, these were nothing but exceptions to the rule, which, starting from the Counter-Reformation, formally outlawed the freedom of Italian inhabitants to read. Reading was forcefully discouraged, and similar attitudes, in matters of faith, promoted not the birth of an informed religion, but rather that of a "passive reception of elementary indoctrination."[7] This favoured the survival of an oral transmission of knowledge among the lower classes on the one hand,[8] and the clandestine circulation of prohibited texts among cultured people on the other.[9] This split, which in theory made books the exclusive objects of the elite, eventually became the most significant outcome of the religious crisis of the sixteenth century. The long-term effects of this process and the changes that took place in the Church's stance on reading during the eighteenth century are the subject of this chapter.

1. Paper Threats

Once it had deployed, between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, its frontal attack on the Protestant heresy, which involved every area of knowledge, from science to literature, the Church passed through a phase in which it appears the fight against books was not an absolute priority. Certainly, in 1645, the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli, outlining the image of the good Catholic man of letters, drew attention to the "ignoble profession" of the "lustful" poets and stressed the terrible damage caused by their works.[10] Likewise, another Jesuit, Giuseppe Agnelli, when instructing urban priests on the containment of sexual desire, referred to the deadly effects of "lustful books, or those that deal with love," which seemed to him "like poison in milk, which quickly spreads through the veins and takes away life."[11] But for all this, it seems that the habit of reading was not widespread given that Paolo Segneri, in his *Cristiano istruito*, did not offer a single item of advice on it.[12] In his Lenten sermons, he urged the faithful to read good books, but showed no particular concern about bad ones because "evil companions" were much worse. Indeed, Segneri did not believe that reading was in itself a natural and immediate cause of sin:

> The hearing, or not hearing of a sermon, the reading, or not reading of a book . . . can lead [the believer] to heaven or to hell. I said *can* lead, you see, because our wellbeing does not immediately depend on our actions but it depends on them only remotely.[13]

If we then try to discover what were the main causes of concern for the Italian clergy at the end of the seventeenth century, we find that for them, the danger lay elsewhere. In 1690, the pastoral letters of Gregorio Barbarigo, Bishop of Padua—who was also the founder of the local seminary's printing

works and keenly interested in the role of good printed matter in spreading the faith—considered taking action against dancing and bad language and threatened believers who went to church bearing weapons. But not even when addressing educational issues did he suggest that the fathers be diligent in overseeing the reading of their sons.[14]

Similar impressions are suggested by the history of repression. From the mid-seventeenth century, in fact, inquisitorial trials for possessing or reading books on the *Index* were reduced considerably in both Italy and Spain.[15] And eventually there were changes in the perception of violating the rules: the production of heretical texts being wiped out, the reading of prohibited books was deemed not so much a crime as a misdemeanour. At the end of the century, the inquisitor for Aquileia, Antonio Dall'Occhio, in recommending a vicar to pardon a penitent reader, suggested "some salutary penance, that is that for fifteen or twenty days . . . he recite on his knees the five holy wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Credo once." He also invited him to make the accused reflect "most deeply on the article '*Credo sanctam. Ecclesiam catholicam*', which by means of a papal summa his representative on earth prohibited the reading of such books." This suggestion contrasted sharply with that given in 1532, at the time of the heretical plague, by the Franciscan Giovanni da Fano, according to whom "heretics must be burned. . . . This should also be done to those who own the books of the lost Luther."[16]

In the eighteenth century, the *Index*, as we shall see in the next chapter, naturally continued to dictate what books were banned to good Catholics, seeking thereby to curb the circulation of forbidden knowledge. Up to the 1740s, however, the remedies of the clergy do not seem to have oriented on this objective. If we view the habits of the people through the eyes of the many bishops, priests, confessors and moralists tasked with educating them, we see a population immersed in orality and the dangers of orality. Apparently, the repressive strategies against reading in the second half of the sixteenth century had prevailed, and their goals were reached. Had the control been so effective that the clergy no longer considered reading a danger and therefore not worth talking about? Or was the Church showing an unprecedented tolerance towards prohibited texts?

Let's take a trip through the peninsula and listen to a few sermons, which give an insight into the fears of the day, as well as general behaviour. They tackled many different subjects, from the deceitfulness of the world to the evil of lechery, but in the early decades of the century scant attention was given directly to reading. No concern about it can be found in sermons on subjects that might implicitly refer to reading, that is, those on lust, children's education, opportunities for sin, and the misuse of time—all themes which, from the mid-century onwards instead gave reason to dwell at length on the issue.

Pantaleone Dolera, a regular cleric, when speaking of lasciviousness, did not once mention the existence of books and when identifying, on the topic

of education, bad examples given by parents to their children, he instanced conversation and dance.[17] For his part, the Capuchin father Gabriello Maria da Brescia, when referring to sinful situations, counselled the faithful as follows: "If you do not wish to contaminate yourself, stop ogling that face, burn that book, tear up that titillating painting." Yet for him the real "lusts" were games and conversations.[18] The indexes of works examined bear out this hypothesis: the alphabetical lists of illustrations to be used in specific sermons referred mainly to sins connected to the oral sphere. The index of Carlo Maria Gabrielli's *Sermoni*, for example, included such words as "dances," "shows" and "carnival," but made no mention at all of the world of books.[19]

The non-existence of discussions spotlighting the damage caused by books is confirmed by the analysis of instructions given to the clergy. Teodoro Gennari, Bishop of Veglia, when reflecting on the use of time in a book for confessors and preachers (1722), railed against the hours lost by men combing their hair or shaving or "chattering with women." As for women, it seemed to him that they spent their days on "dressing up, tittle-tattling, dancing, and playing."[20] And, although in the second printing in 1723 of a pastoral letter by Bishop Barbarigo, the duty of regularly attending the sacraments was restated,[21] in general it was the theatre that emerged as the greatest peril to the believer during the first half of the century. Many in fact were the moral objections made in that direction by various Italian bishops in their pastoral letters.[22] And neither was there a lack of equivalent warnings to confessors, such as those penned by the Domenican Daniello Concina in a work that circulated widely in eighteenth-century Italy.[23]

Nonetheless, it was one thing to preach in the countryside, and another in the city; one thing to address illiterates, another the intellectual upper classes. The sporadic allusions to books and reading that were made applied to the elite. Gaetano Zuanelli, Bishop of Belluno, for example, when preaching about education, decried the terrible examples given to children by parents immersed "in games, debauchery, and dissolute pleasures" and, preaching on "lost opportunities," he placed bad companions alongside "immodest" books, "love stories" and texts of "bitter criticism"; but the public he was addressing—"noblemen" and "greats"—was defined quite specifically.[24]

Having said all that, it must be emphasised that the reflections came from different voices expressing different religious and pastoral sensibilities, linked moreover to the functions of the order to which the speakers belonged and the dress they wore. It is this crucial point that allows us to understand the special diligence with which the Society of Jesus, traditionally responsible for the education of the nobles during the early modern age, took care of—then and later—the reading of young people. Suffice it to recall the sermons of the Jesuit Giovanni Granelli, who from the 1730s underscored how books could be an "*arma daemonum*":[25] an observation which recurred in particular in educational textbooks aimed the scions of the nobility. Another Jesuit, Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, at the beginning of