

Religious Restlessness in Sixteenth-century Italy

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In this paper I would like to explore the religious turmoil of sixteenth-century Italy on a social level below that of popes, princes, and cardinals – the level of the concerned middle-class merchant, the courtier, and the literate artisan. The characters who will enable me to delve into the religious consciousness of middle and lower class Italy are the adventurers of the pen, the low-born followers of Pietro Aretino who wrote popular books, the paperbacks of the day. They wrote in order to earn money to keep body and soul together. In some cases their writing was little above twentieth-century newstand trash, but other parts of the corpus was of a higher order. In any case these men and their writings provide the avenue through which I will examine some aspects of religious restlessness in *Cinquecento* Italy.

In 1527 Pietro Aretino settled in Venice and supported himself by his wonderfully prolific pen. Plays, letters, tales, pornography, devotional treatises, and even a translation of the Psalms poured from his pen to the Venetian vernacular presses. Attracted by the example of Aretino, other penurious *poligrafi* came to Venice with the same desire to write freely away from the suffocating courts.

These authors both reflected Italian opinion and helped to mold it. In their restless lives they visited most Italian courts and cities and were alert to new ideas in the air. Indeed, their livelihood depended upon giving the reading public what it wanted to read. At the same time, since financial rewards were still quite limited, they had to write continuously – three to four books a year – to support themselves. This meant that they often filled their pages with ideas, gossip, and stories that were making the rounds of the city or court. For this reason, their books are a useful index to a primitive kind of public opinion in Italy. Although the number of their readers was limited by literacy, they included nobility, courtiers, merchants, professional men, perhaps literate artisans, and the academies were *letterato*, merchant, and noble met together. Their books were small in size, about four by six inches on the average, inexpensively printed, and sometimes profusely illustrated. They fitted easily into pockets or saddle bags, and were avidly read in the long hours spent idling in courts, shops, or on sea and land journeys. These “pocket books” of the Cinquecento contained tales, poetry, plays, moral fables, travel literature, satires, letters and burlesques. From Aretino’s arrival in Venice in 1527 until about 1560, the adventurers of the pen enjoyed their greatest fame and popularity.

Having introduced the adventurers of the pen, I would like to make some general remarks about the religious situation of *Cinquecento* Italy. In the early years of the sixteenth century, Italians in secular unconcern ignored religious revival, while northern Europe sought to understand, the central paradox of grace and sin. Only after the penetration of the, new ideas from the north and the hideous shock of the sack of Rome did latent Italian religious unrest find a focus. Then the anti-clericals saw the sack of Rome as a warning from God to correct abuses, while religious visionaries looked to Luther, although they did not always realize that his ideas were different from their native faith.¹ Throughout the 1530's and 1540's Italian churchmen and laymen wrote Scriptural commentaries, while vernacular translations of the Bible were printed by Venetian Dominicans in 1536 and 1538. Preachers devoted their Lenten exhortations toward inspiring an inner renewal along the lines of faith and Scripture. The interest in Scripture and faith was allied with the mounting desire to correct ecclesiastical abuses. When the Papacy seemed unresponsive, laymen and clergy sought new means. In November 1545, for example, an anonymous writer addressed an appeal to the new *doge* of Venice, begging him to use his power to effect reform in the Church.² New religious orders stressing worldly engagement rather than monastic isolation sought to meet the spiritual needs of the people through charitable activity in cities and towns. After their earlier lethargy, Italians took up religious concerns in the reign of Paul III (1534-1549), amid the desire for reform and reunion in the expectancy of the coming general council.

The study of the religious history of *Cinquecento* Italy leaves much undone. On one hand the Papacy, Council of Trent, and those movements called Catholic Reformation and Counter-Reformation have been studied extensively. Italians who opted decisively for the Protestant Reformation have had their lives minutely examined. It is an old cliché that there is a biographer for each sixteenth-century Italian Protestant – all six of them. A more recent tendency in scholarship is to find Italian Protestants under every rock of the Apennines, behind every workbench in Tuscany, and to speak of a vigorous plant cut down in full flower by the Counter-Reformation. But many of these Italian “Protestants” protested vigorously that they were “loyal sons of the Roman Church” and considered Luther some kind of mad dog. They had no intention of breaking away from the Papacy. They did not flee to Protestant Switzerland.

Much of the religious activity of Italy in the first half of the *Cinquecento* does not fit neatly into older categories often derived from the study of Northern European religious history. The most useful term for the religious concern of Italians in the first half of the century is “Evangelism,” an admittedly imprecise

¹ Delio Cantimori, *Eretici Italiani del Cinquecento: Ricerche Storiche* (Firenze, 1939), 3-25.

² Aldo Stella, “Utopie e velleità insurrezionali dei filo-protestanti italiani (1545-1547),” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, XXVII (1965), 133-182.

term for a phenomenon that was more an attitude than a movement. Evangelism included a desire to reform abuses, emphasis on Scripture, and the primacy of justification through faith without the omission of good works. Erasmus' concern for individual moral reform, the understanding of Scripture rather than commentaries, and the hope for union between all Christians influenced it. Delio Cantimori notes that in the period of Evangelism one cannot always distinguish between Catholic Reform, philo-Protestantism, or sympathy for Protestant ideas. Such diverse persons as the aristocratic ladies Vittoria Colonna and Giulia Gonzaga, the Spaniard Juan Valdes, cardinals Gasparo Contarini, Pietro Bembo, Reginald Pole, Giovanni Morone, Jacopo Sadoletto, and Girolamo Seripando could be termed Evangelicals at least part of the time. Some who fled Italy for Protestant Europe, as Bernardino Ochino, Pier Martire Vermigli, and Piero Paolo Vergerio, and others like Pietro Carneseccchi and Aonio Paleario, who remained and were executed in the 1560's as heretics, could be termed Italian Evangelicals.³

Only later were some men, books, and passages from the period of Evangelism judged heretical or close to heresy, and even after the decrees of Trent, distinctions were often difficult to make. To cite an example, the small but extremely influential *Beneficio di Cristo* was published anonymously in Venice in 1543. An *Index* of 1549 condemned it, although various cardinals praised the work. Despite the fact that entire heretical passages were copied or paraphrased from Luther, Calvin, and Melancthon, modern scholars have found it difficult to detect open heresy in the work.⁴ Drawing the line between Catholic and heretic involved definition and investigation. Only after the Council of Trent and general acceptance of its decrees could this be done with consistency.

Evangelism flourished without difficulty until about 1542 when a series of reversals revealed that a chasm existed between Catholic and Protestant. Ochino, the brilliant preacher and general of the Capuchin order, fled Italy for Calvinist Switzerland. The shock to Italian public opinion was enormous. Contarini died,

³ On Italian Evangelism, see Delio Cantimori, *Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento* (Bari, 1960), 28, 32-34; Hubert Jedin, *Papal Legate at the Council of Trent: Cardinal Seripando*, trans. F. C. Eckhoff (St. Louis and London, 1947), 104-107; Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Dom Ernest Graf O.S.B. (London, 1957), I, 363-367; and Eva-Maria Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism in 16th-Century Italy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XIV (1953), 511-527, who limits it to aristocratic circles. Jedin makes a distinction between the "Erasmian programme of reunion" and "Evangelism" but states that "both were due to a tendency to seek an understanding with the Protestants on the basis of what both parties retained of the substance of Christianity." *History of the Council of Trent*, I, 370.

⁴ See Ruth Prelowski's introduction and edition of the *Beneficio di Cristo* in John Tedeschi, ed., *Italian Reformation Studies in Honor of Laelius Socinus*, Università di Siena, Facoltà di Giurisprudenza, Collana di Studi "Pietro Rossi," Nuova Serie, vol. IV (Firenze, 1965); 21102.

broken by the failure of the Ratisbon colloquy to come to an agreement with the Northern Protestants. The establishment of the Roman Inquisition, the constitution of the Jesuits, and the more militant stance of the German Lutheran princes all pointed to the coming strife. A second, crisis phase of Italian Evangelism occurred from 1542 to about 1560.⁵ By the 1560's the cleric, gentleman, or commoner had to decide whether his religious conscience was fundamentally Catholic, or whether he should make the long journey over the Valtellina pass into Protestant Europe.

With these brief remarks about the religious situation of *Cinquecento* Italy, I would like to examine in the main body of the paper some of the religious views of the adventurers of the pen, and through them, those of middle and lower-class Italy.

The starting point for much of the religious concern of the adventurers of the pen was the desire for a simple religion of belief and good customs lacking a rational theology or elaborate ceremony. Aretino expressed this desire in both his devotional and secular writings. He saw religion as a matter of infused belief in the chief tenets of Catholicism, such as the Virgin birth. When he went to church, Aretino expected to hear a straightforward sermon on virtue and vice, not a "strident dispute." Such brazen arguments were "a reproach to the silence of Christ, who simply gave men a sign, in order not, to take away the premium which He places on faith." These disputes had "nothing whatever to do with the gospels or with our sins."⁶ Religion should be a personal benefit to man as well as a bond to a remote time of a better life. The characters in his stories looked back to a life of simple virtue and purity in the past. The simple devotion that he described in his saints' life typified his religious ideas. Although he practiced most of the sensual vices, Aretino propounded a religious ideal of simple faith and feeling.⁷

Another free-lance author who was much more deeply involved in Italian religious concerns, Ortensio Lando, was born about 1512 in Milan.⁸ Although he once claimed that his mother was a noblewoman, it is unlikely that he enjoyed the advantages of noble birth. He became an Augustinian monk as a youth, but left the monastery about 1530 because he found theology "too vague." He also studied medicine briefly at Bologna, but soon found his true vocation with the

⁵ Cantimori, *Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana*, 28.

⁶ *Primo libro delle lettere di Pietro Aretino*, a cura di Fausto Nicolini (Bari, 1913), I, 268; letter to Antonio Brucioli, 7 November 1537, Venice.

⁷ See Giorgio Petrocchi, *Pietro Aretino tra Rinascimento e Controriforma* (Milan, 1948), 72-81.

⁸ For Lando's life, see Ireneo Sanesi, *Il Cinquecentista Ortensio Lando* (Pistoia, 1893); Giovanni Sforza, "Ortensio Lando e gli usi i costumi d'Italia nella prima metà del Cinquecento," *Memorie della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, Serie II, LXIV, no. 4 (1914), 1-68; and Conor Fahy, "Per la vita di Ortensio Lando," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 142 (1965), 243-258.

vernacular presses as copyist, editor, and finally, as a free-lance author writing for money. From 1533 through 1553, Lando published fifteen original works (usually anonymously), did two translations, and edited six other works. By 1650 his works had appeared in about 100 editions, including French and English translations.

Lando wandered constantly, rarely spending more than a few months in one place. He was to be found all over Italy from Sicily to Trent, in Lyons, at the court of Francis I of France, in Basel and eastern Switzerland, and in Germany. After 1545 he lived in or near Venice and its presses until his death c. 1554 or 1555. From time to time he was patronized by Italian princes or merchants, but never for long. By his own admission Lando found courtly sycophancy difficult, and more than once he lost the friendship of a prince with an ill-chosen word.

In his wanderings, Lando had ample opportunity for contacts with Protestants. He knew and approved the Protestants of the Tuscan city of Lucca and their concern for Scripture. He exhibited a good knowledge of Swiss Protestant leaders, especially those of Basel. In 1535 he may have been used as a messenger to carry letters back and forth from Martin Bucer to Lando's employer, a printer in Lyons. But despite occasional praise of Protestants for using Scripture rather than Scholastic commentaries, he did not become a Protestant and had little love for them.

Rather, Lando credited Erasmus as a formative influence on his religious thought. Writing in a dialogue published in Basel, 1540, he ecstatically described the impact of Erasmus and his message. Erasmus had struggled to bring people and nations to Christ-through Scripture; he had brought men into light from the dark cloud which overshadowed them. Men were astonished and provoked, but they turned aside from prolix tomes (i.e., Scholastic commentaries) to examine the forgotten books of Scripture. Joyful letters spread the message of Erasmus to Italy, and many men opened the Gospel and moved forward to the glory of Christ. And Lando (speaking autobiographically through one of the characters of the dialogue) explained that he himself had been persuaded to believe by Erasmus' message.

This dialogue also revealed Lando's lack of enthusiasm for the Protestant Reformation, and his dislike for the intense theological activity of Germany. Once emitting light, Germany was now a sordid and dark area of bawling theologians who ignored Erasmus. One man had thrown all into misery, and that man was Luther. At the same time, Lando faced the problem of whether Erasmus had been the fountain from which Luther issued. Thoroughly airing the problem, he concluded that Erasmus had not been a heretic. Lando did concede that Erasmus had had a sharp pen, and pointed out how it had provoked the illtempered Luther and Bucer. On the other hand, Erasmus often had overcome

heretical men with his books.⁹ In short, Lando admired Erasmus for teaching men to follow Scripture, but disliked Luther, Bucer, and German theologians. He absolved Erasmus from any taint of heresy, while admitting that his critical pen may have played a role in bringing on the Reformation. In the rest of the dialogue Lando amused his readers by chiding the Basel Reformers for their estrangement from Erasmus in the last seven years of his life. The Basel Reformed Church did not appreciate Lando's raillery and furiously denounced his book in the following year, 1541.¹⁰

The starting point of Lando's Evangelism was anti-clericalism. He flayed *Ginquecento* prelates for the abuses for which they were notorious: nepotism, non-residence, neglect of their dioceses, avarice, and politicking. On the other hand, he was willing to grant credit where credit was due. Lando praised the reforming bishop of Verona, the saintly Gian Matteo Giberti, whose reforms were codified in the Council of Trent.¹¹

As might be expected, Lando sharply condemned the monastic life that he had left behind. His fundamental objection was that monastic orders had degenerated since their inception. In the early Church, monks had lived simple, holy lives in the wilderness but, as the world had declined, so little by little, had the lives of the monks. They had moved to the cities where they dressed well, made female friends, and mixed in worldly affairs. He urged monks to return to their holier ways as in the primitive Church.¹² Unlike Protestants, he did not advocate the abolition of monasticism.

Another element in Lando's Evangelism was a dislike of theology because it represented the attempt to apply reason to religion. Science (*scienza*) was an invention of the devil; Christ told men to forget the wisdom of this world and to know Him by ignorance. Scripture taught the word of God which was incomprehensible to reason. Theologians used all the trapping of reason – and ended by accusing one another of heresy. God came to simple, ignorant men who

⁹ *In Des. Erasmi Rotherodami Funus, Dialogus lepidissimus, nunc primum in lucem editus*. Basileae, MDXL, foll. 12v, 14r-15v, 1v, 2v, 4r-6r, 14v, 16v, 17r-17v, 6v-10v.

¹⁰ *Paradosi cioe, sententie Juori del comun Parere: Novellamente venute in luce. Opera non men dotta Che piacevole: & in due parti separata*. In Venetia. MDXLV, 24.

¹¹ *Paradosi cioe, sententie Juori del comun Parere: Novellamente venute in luce. Opera non men dotta Che piacevole: & in due parti separata*. In Venetia. MDXLV, 24.

¹² *Commentario de le piu notabili, & mostruose cose d'Italia, & altri luoghi, di lingua Aramea in Italia tradotto, nel quale s'impara, & prendesi estremo piacere ... da Messer Anonymo di Utopia composto*. In Venetia, Al Segno del Pozzo. MDL, 33-34v; *Ragionamenti familiari di diversi Autori...* In Vinegia al segno del Pozzo. MDL, 18-23v; *Erastus tones*, foll. 19r-20v.

lived a good life in lowly places.¹³

In 1550 Lando linked justification by faith to belief in Scripture as an antidote for the ills of the Church. At the conclusion of a violent anti-clerical tract, he tendered advice to bishops. Above all, they should implant the Bible in the hearts of the faithful. In order to accomplish this, they had first to teach the force and true use of faith. Faith was a pure gift from God given to men to mortify the flesh, and for man's justification in Jesus Christ. Faith made good works spring up (*fa pullular le buone opere*). By faith one came to works, and through works man was affirmed in faith. Teach the people, Lando admonished bishops, that works were signs of faith, faith a sign of grace, grace a sign of justification, salvation, and divine good will.¹⁴ Lando's imprecise and untheological combination of justification by faith without omitting good works approximated the position of Italian Evangelism of Gaspare Contarini and Reginald Pole.¹⁵

Lando brought to fruition his belief in Scripture and faith in his *Dialogo delta Sacra Scrittura* of April 1552 and repeated it in condensed form in another work published later in the year. Writing under his own name, Lando in the *Sacra Scrittura*, instructed Lucrezia Gonzaga of Gazzuolo, a minor Gonzaga princess and his current patroness, on the consolation and usefulness of Scripture by discussing its message book by book.

In his works of 1552 Lando strengthened his position of 1550 on justification by faith rather than works. Citing St. Paul's epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, he stated that men were born subject to sin, and only by the grace of Christ, and not through works or man's merits, were the believers justified. The epistle of St. James showed that true religion consisted not in words, nor in "easy boasts of faith," but only in piety, the soil of good works.¹⁶

Those who could hear the word of God were the elect. From the beginning of the world they had been "elected and predestined." Created to know and to serve God with perfect hearts, they were taught by God Himself because they

¹³ *Paradossi*, 12v, 14-14v; *La sfera de scrittori antichi et moderni di M. Anonimo di utopia ...* In Vinegia, MDL, 19-19v; *Quattro libri de dubbi con le solution a ciascun dubbio accomodate...* Vinegia, Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, et Fratelli. MDLII, 309.

¹⁴ *Ragionamenti familiari*, 47v.

¹⁵ Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism in 16th-Century Italy," 517, 521.

¹⁶ "Quivi [in Paul to the Romans] sopra ogni altra cosa egli disputa del peccato, & convince esser tutti gli. uomini nati al peccato soggetti. Poscia egli disputa della giustitia; et dimostra the solo per la gratia di Christo, & non per l'opre, o per li meriti sono giustificati i credenti: non indugia molto, ch'egli esplica l'effetto della Gratia, & della fede, insegnando, che i Giustificati vivono una vita piena di penitenza guardandosi dalle mondane malvagità." *Dialogo di M. Hortensio Lando, net quale si ragiona delta consolation, et utilita, the si gusta leggendo la Sacra Scrittura...* In Vinegia, MDL, al Scono del Pozzo. 51 (quote), 23, 53v.

had been given the power to hear the Gospel. In answer to the objection that God wanted all men to be saved, Lando answered, citing St. Augustine, that God meant some men of all states and conditions, but not all men would be saved. Lando assured Lucrezia that her ability to listen avidly to him speaking on the glory of God was a sign that she was of the number of the predestined.¹⁷

Lando spoke of the Church in two senses: (1) a completely spiritual, invisible congregation of the good, and (2) a visible external union with a ministry and outward signs, a structure like the existing Catholic Church. Posing the question of what was the true Church, he answered that it was the “congregation of the good.” It could not err, was without stain, and “completely spiritual” (*tutta spirituale*). The Church was Christian, holy, anointed, with Christ as bishop, Pope, and mediator, at its head.¹⁸ But the Church was also an external body with clear signs. In response to a question on the signs of the true Church of Christ, Lando answered: the preaching of the Word of God, confession of faith, baptism of water, correction of the errant, the Lord’s Supper, and excommunication of the obstinate. Lando approved of infant baptism, and thought that the Church should include the “infirm” in faith. The Church had a ministry with priests (*sacerdoti*) who were to study, teach, and preach the word of God, dispense the sacraments, and minister to the poor. Lando affirmed that all the faithful were priests of an internal priesthood, but added that they were not the ministers of the sacraments.¹⁹ Christ was the head of the spiritual Church, but Lando implied a hierarchy for the visible Church when he advised that correction of the vices of the heads of the Church was sometimes necessary. Excommunication was justified from St. Paul; those who were persuaded by another belief, or a salvation outside of Christ’s, were to be excommunicated.²⁰

Lando strayed from orthodoxy in his discussion of sacraments. Sacraments were “signs and testimonies” (*segnacoli e testimoni*) of divine benevolence and man’s redemption. Their purpose was to restore and aid man’s infirmity.²¹ In his discussion of sacraments, Lando recurrently used the verb “signify.” He posed the question, “What does the Lord’s Supper signify? It signifies that all those who eat and drink together take part in the body and blood of Christ; in such a

¹⁷ “Hor poi the si avidamente m'udite favellare dells gloria d'Iddio; ben è segno, the siete del numero de predestinati...” *Sacra Scrittura*, 9v (quote); *Dubbi*, 236, 273, 248, 259.

¹⁸ Lando used the same words to describe the Church: “la congregation de tutti i buoni” in *Dubbi*, 292; and “la congregatione dei buoni” in *Sacra Scrittura*, 7v; “tutta spirituale” was used in *Sacra Scrittura*, 7v, and *Dubbi*, 292. Also see *Sacra Scrittura*, 65v, and *Dubbi*, 241, 292.

¹⁹ “Tutti i fedeli sono sacerdoti? Così è ... ma non propriamente ministri di sacramenti.” *Dubbi*, 293; “Che tutti i fedeli sono sacerdoti del sacerdotio interno: & non dell'esterno.” *Sacra Scrittura*, 7v.

²⁰ *Dubbi*, 276; *Sacra Scrittura*, 22, 15v, 41v, 66.

²¹ “furono ordinati gli sacramenti, segnacoli, & testimoni dells divina benivoglienza, & della nostra redentione...” *Sacra Scrittura*, 66; also *Dubbi*, 298.

way they are united together with Christ through faith and charity like a body to the head in the same spirit.” He went on to explain that whoever was not united to Christ in faith and to his neighbor in love, and yet participated in the Eucharist, was a hypocrite and simulator “showing himself to be what he was not.”²²

Lando strengthened this interpretation in his explanation of the “true use” of the Lord’s Supper. It proved to the communicant himself that he had true faith and contribution for his sins, had charity toward his neighbor, and was not contaminated by vice.²³ In a strict sense, Lando implied that the sacraments were not necessary for salvation. But he added a strong plea for participation in the sacraments on the grounds that no one was perfect in faith.²⁴

In his discussion of the Eucharist, Lando strayed furthest from Catholic orthodoxy. His discussion of the Lord’s Supper was very close to Zwingli, who argued that the sacraments were signs and seals, not originating or conferring grace, but presupposing the grace of the elect. But at the same time, Zwingli acknowledged that the sacraments were necessary to strengthen man’s faith.²⁵ Lando’s words were close to the Zwinglians, but he did not deny that sacraments were channels of sanctifying grace, nor did he deny Transubstantiation; Lando made no mention of these.

Passing to other sacraments, Lando spoke of two kinds of confession, private and public. In response to Lucrezia’s question, he defined private confession by the example of David who had confessed his injustice directly to God, who then loosed him from the impiety of his sins. Thus, Lando concluded, if we will confess our sins, God will faithfully remit them. Then he asked Lucrezia if she wanted to hear of public confession. She demurred and they went on to another topic.²⁶

Ceremonies and religious practices were of little importance to Lando, but he did not eliminate them. He posed the question: if God wished to be adored only in spirit and truth, why did the Old Testament mention ceremonies? He answered: the Fathers of the Old Testament, who say that the Jewish people were childlike, instituted ceremonies to manifest God’s glory and to provoke the

²² “Che cosa significa, la cena? Significa, the tutti coloro, the mangiono, & beveno [sic] insieme, hanno parte nel corpo & sangue di Christo, di maniera, the sono insieme uniti a Christo per fede, & charità come un corpo al capo in un medesimo spirito, & sono insieme uniti l’uno all’altro per carità, come un membro all’altro membro in un medesimo corpo. Talmente, the chiunque non è unito a Christo per fede, & carità, & al compagno per carità non puo degnamente convenire alla partecipazione della cena, anzi è hippocrita & simulatore mostrando essere quello ch’egli non è.” *Dubbi*, 277.

²³ *Paradossi*, 79v.

²⁴ *Dubbi*, 301, 298.

²⁵ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (NY and London, 1905), I, 372-375; III, 223.

²⁶ *Dubbi*, 298-299, 252; *Sacra Scrittura*, 14v-15.

Jews to remember the benefits received from God. Hence ceremonies remained in order to rouse the love of God and virtue in the hearts of men. Again Lando asked, why were so many devotional cults (*culti*) instituted in the Church, and answered that human reason always sought to justify itself through its own works. He did not attack any specific Catholic practices or ceremonies, but minimized the importance of fasts and abstinence from meat.²⁷

But Lando spent little time discussing sacraments and ceremonies. The primary purpose of the *Sacra Scrittura* dialogue was to guide the reader to a better life through the reading of Scripture. The major part of the book was an explanation of the spiritual message of the Bible couched in terms of moral exhortation derived from biblical examples. Lando argued that the Bible was superior to all other models of conduct and learning. Scripture was better than Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, and the early Renaissance educator, Pier Paolo Vergerio (d. 1414), for teaching virtue, including “civil faith” (*civil fede*). The Bible was superior to any of the perfect types that inspired men: Cicero, the perfect orator; Thomas More’s perfect reign of Utopia; Castiglione’s perfect courtier; and Erasmus’ perfect Christian knight of the *Enchiridion militis Christiani*.²⁸ Anti-clericalism was omitted from *the Sacra Scrittura* and the other work of 1552, as Lando proposed a positive religious program.

With the definition by the first session of the Council of Trent (1545-1547) Lando’s position was heretical – more by omission than by assertion – on the sacraments, Eucharist, justification by faith, and predestination. But the Council was not completed, and the decrees were far from official promulgation, implementation, or widespread acceptance. Although some of the ideas of Lando’s religious thought in 1552 were more heretical than orthodox, Lando, who was uninterested in theology, did not develop a complete heretical position. It is doubtful that he considered himself outside the Church. The circumstances of the publication of his religious ideas in 1552 argue that he did not consider himself a heretic. If Lando had thought of his *Sacra Scrittura* as heretical, or if he had foreseen difficulties with the Inquisition, he would not have published it under his own name. Two years later, when Lando ran into difficulty with the Inquisition because of the book, he protested that he was “a loyal son of the Roman Church.”²⁹

A great deal of Lando’s religious thought would have been acceptable to Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Zwinglian. The only group whose doctrines he rejected by name were the Anabaptists.³⁰ Lando did not attack Catholic practices and beliefs, as purgatory, veneration of saints, the Virgin birth, the mass, tradition as a supplement to Scripture, indulgences, sacramentals, or holy

²⁷ *Dubbi*, 244, 315, 288, 259.260.

²⁸ *Sacra Scrittura*, 26, 28, 31v-32.

²⁹ Fahy, “Per la vita di Ortensio Lando,” 255.

³⁰ *Sacra Scrittura*, 16-17v.

orders. In most instances he made no mention of them. Lando did not work out the implications of his religious ideas but, instead, propounded a simple, positive program based on Scripture and faith characteristic of Italian Evangelism.

Another vernacular author who exhibited a similar kind of religious belief was Anton Francesco Doni of Florence. Born in 1513, within a year of Lando, Doni was the son of an artisan, a scissors-maker. Like Lando, he became a monk, and priest of the Servants of Mary. Then at the age of 27 he left the order to embark upon the same rootless life of the literary adventurer. Like Lando, he settled in Venice from c. 1544 through 1556, and wrote prolifically for the popular presses. Then he resumed his fruitless travels, finally retiring to semi-isolation in rural Venetia until his death in 1574.³¹

By birth Doni was related to artisan circles and in his life maintained connections with the artisan classes, working as a printer himself. In a letter of November 1546, subsequently published in one of his books, he demonstrated that Italian Evangelism reached the level of Florentine artisans.

The letter recounted the confession of faith of a dying man, an anonymous unlearned weaver of Florence. Doni indicated that he was present at the man's death, and that he was happy to pass on the news, to communicate it to the other brothers (*fratelli*).³² The gist of the confession of the ignorant weaver was similar to Lando's thought. It affirmed faith in God as the foundation of salvation for the elect. Faith was a gift of God through which man had "certain experience" of the promise of God. Man was saved by God's grace through faith, not through his own efforts.³³

The weaver implied a distinction between visible and invisible church. He confessed a church which was the gathering of all the elect "through divine predestination" and whose head was Christ.³⁴ Then he described a simplified

³¹ On Doni's life, see my unpubl. diss. (Wisconsin, 1964), "Anton Francesco Doni: Cinquecento Critic," 91-143; and *I Marmi di Anton-francesco Doni* ripubblicati per cura di Pietro Fanfani con la vita dell'autore scritta da Salvatore Bongi. 2 vols. (Firenze, 1863). For a complete bibliography of Doni's works, see Cecilia Ricottini Marsili-Libelli, *Anton Francesco Doni scrittore e stampatore*, Biblioteca Bibliografica Italica, Vol. 21 (Firenze, 1960).

³² "A M. Basilio Guerrieri. Non sono quindici giorni passati, the venne a morte un fedel christiano Et quests fu la confessions & ragione che fece & rese di sua fede in propria persona di tal tenore ...la quale ellegrezza ho voluto partecipate con esso voi, come frutto della nostra novella amicitia: & voi sarete contento comuioarla a gli altri fratelli. State sano. Alli xxviiij di Novembre. MDXLVI. Di Fiorenza." *Lettere del Doni Libro Secondo*. In Fiorenza MDXLVII, 50v, 52.

³³ "Io confesso the la fede è dono d'Iddio, per to quale sentiamo per prova, & habbiamo vera & certa esperienza della bonta & della promessa d'Iddio. Et certo not siamo salvati per gratia per la fede, & non per nostro operare percioche questo è dono d'Iddio non dato per opere; accioche nessuno habbia di potersi laudate." *Lettere*, 51.

³⁴ "Io confesso una sola chiesa, laquale è la ragunanza di tutti gli eletti per predestination divina; i quali sono stati dal principio del mondo & saranno insino alla fine; della quai chiesa è capo GIESU CHRISTO." *Lettere*, 51

external church with bishops and priests who had to be irreproachable in conduct and doctrine. On the sacraments, he affirmed a Zwinglian definition of the Lord's Supper. It was "a holy memory and thanksgiving of the death and passion of Jesus Christ, which we do together in faith and charity."³⁵ He expressed a general distaste for oral prayer, days of fast and abstinence, and holy days. Doni's dying weaver mentioned Scripture little, but its importance was taken for granted throughout the confession.

The confession read like the thought of a layman attempting to understand for himself the mysteries of faith and salvation, exactly as Doni described the anonymous weaver. From the viewpoint of existing theological positions, it was eclectic, containing strands which might be identified as Catholic, Zwinglian, Lutheran, Calvinist, or even a trace of Anabaptism. If Doni's statement about communicating the message to the *fratelli* can be taken at face value, Doni may at this time have been part of a conventicle, i.e., a group of laymen who met to discuss religious issues, read from Scripture, or to listen to reports from Protestant Europe.

What religious paths did the vernacular authors follow after mid-century? Lando did not live long enough to be faced with making a decision on his religious beliefs. Only his books suffered. They were put on the *Index* in 1559 but continued to be reprinted and sold despite the prohibitions. One or more copies of the *Sacra Scrittura* appeared in a Neapolitan book shop in 1565.³⁶

The spirit of renewal and reform of post-Trent Italy caught up some of the vernacular authors. Luigi Tansillo wrote devotional works in reparation for earlier lascivious works. Others who had deserted the monastery returned to the religious life. Devotional writings became a mainstay of the publications of some of the Venetian printers who earlier had specialized in Aretino's racy stories. The *poligrafo* Girolamo Muzio became a dedicated but intemperate heretic hunter. Renewed, re-invigorated Catholicism claimed some of the vernacular authors by conviction – and compelled others through the *Index* and Inquisition to change their ways and thought.

Tridentine Catholicism did not satisfy all the vernacular authors after 1550, but still they did not opt for Protestantism. Doni continued to dream of a reformed Catholicism and expressed his dreams in the form of utopias. In 1552 he described a "New World," a primitive utopian city-state inspired by More's

³⁵ "Io confesso the la cena del Signore è una santa memoria & ringratiamento della morte & della passione di GIESU CHRISTO, la quale not facciamo insieme in fede et in chanta; della quale si debbono mandar via tutti quegli the sono infedeli." *Lettere*, 51-51v.

³⁶ Salvatore Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari da Trino di Monferrato, stampatore in Venezia* (Roma, 1890), I, lxxxv-ci.

Utopia.³⁷ All the citizens of the “New World” lived peaceable lives without private property or social institutions. It was an attempt by Doni to criticize the social abuses and moral vices of *Cinquecento* Italy by portraying a primitive, natural, good society. His New World utopia contained an undefined, vague religion presided over by priests. The citizens worshipped every seventh day in a great temple, as well as every morning and evening. Religion played a role in his natural utopian community but Doni did not elaborate on its features. The whole tone of the utopia implied a rational, naturalistic religion more typical of the seventeenth century.

Then in 1564 Doni constructed a utopian religious order to reform the Church in Italy. In each of thirteen Italian cities a large circular temple worthy to be a cathedral should be built. All should be constructed on the same design, with a high altar in the center with a depiction of the Calvary scene, and twelve side chapels, one for each apostle, placed around the circumference of the church. The church in Rome was the most important of the thirteen. To each temple were attached a bishop, twelve canons (one for each chapel), and thirteen priests to assist bishop and canons in reading daily mass and the office at the high altar and chapels. In Rome a cardinal protector assisted by twelve bishops presided. By Doni’s count, the Order consisted of a cardinal, twenty-four bishops, and 313 canons and priests, “all learned and admirable.”

Doni decreed strict rules of conduct and dress for the members of the order. Before admission, every character stain had to be eliminated. After entry, upon the commission of a notable crime or sin, a member was placed in penance and, at the second offence, expelled. The canons were to dress in a clear purple habit, and the priests in “honorable” black. But the members of the order were not to be restricted by monastic rules or forced to live in poverty. All were free to come and go as they pleased, to study, to ride, and to do anything characteristic of gentlemen. Learning was the path of advancement. When death depleted the ranks, the vacant places were to be filled by the most learned friars and priests. After reading and disputing before the Holy See, the Pope and bishops would select the new members. The entire order would be at the disposal of the Church, prepared to defend the Church and the papacy in disputes or in any other way.³⁸

More’s *Utopia* possibly suggested the setting of the thirteen temples and uniform clothing, or perhaps the Jesuits suggested the idea of a reformed religious order. In any case, Doni’s reformed religious order was an extension of his belief in a Church led by a reformed monasticism.

One would like to believe that Doni finally found religious peace in old age, but the evidence indicates that he did not. Doni may have begun to doubt that an

³⁷ See Paul F. Grendler, “Utopia in Renaissance Italy: Doni’s ‘New World’”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXVI, n. 4 (1965), 479-494. The utopia is in Doni’s *I Mondi del Doni*, Libro Primo. In Vinegia per Francesco Marcolini, MDLII, 90-99.

³⁸ *La Zucca del Doni Fiorentino ...* In Venetia Appresso Fran. Rampazetto, ad instantia di Gio. Battista, & Marchio Sessa fratelli, MDXLV, 270-273v.

afterlife existed.³⁹ In a poem of 1567 on man's fate, Doni repeated the conventional words of comfort, that man should throw himself on God's mercy, but it seemed a solution of form rather than belief. The last two lines expressed his pessimism

And cry, at the end life is a sorrow,
A fatal use, a living loss.⁴⁰

I would like to summarize briefly the religious views of these free-lance authors. Initially they were caught up in the spirit of renewal along the lines of Scripture and faith, the movement which scholars usually call Evangelism. This lasted until the mid-1550's. At this point they began to lose their identity, going in different directions – to a sincere Tridentine Catholicism in some cases. Interestingly, in very few cases that have come to my attention did they opt for Protestantism. Some of them retained their vague, unrealized hope in a form of utopian religion. In this way Doni is a precursor. Giordano Bruno, and Tommaso Campanella are the only Italian successors to Doni. In his utopian *City of the Sun* (1602) Campanella included a syncretic religion composed of elements of Christianity, Eastern religions, sun-worship, and his own peculiar kind of naturalism.

The religious history of Baroque Italy is another story, very little studied. I have simply tried to describe some of the religious turmoil, restlessness, and excitement of *Cinquecento* Italy in crisis, through the world of the free-lance authors, Aretino and his followers.

³⁹ *La Zucca*, 296v.

⁴⁰ “Et grida, al fin la Vita è un'affanno,
Un utile mortale, un “vivo danno.”

Fredi Chiappelli, “Un poema inedito e sconosciuto di Anton Francesco Doni,” *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 58, Serie VII, n. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1954), 567.