

## The Observance and the Confrontation with Early Protestantism

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### Introduction: Persistent Images of the Early Sixteenth Century

Be not angry, my good sirs; I mean well. I have to tell you this bitter and sweet truth: Let no more mendicant monasteries be built! God help us! There are too many as it is. Would to God they were all abolished, or at least made over to two or three orders! It has never done good, it will never do good, to go wandering about over the country. Therefore my advice is that ten, or as many as may be required, be put together and made into one, which one, sufficiently provided for, need not beg. (...) For their preaching and confession has led to naught but mere hatred and envy between priests and monks, to the great offence and hindrance of the people, so that it well deserves to be stopped.<sup>1</sup>

Luther's outright disavowal of the value of mendicant preaching, and of the mendicant orders in general, epitomizes the problem faced by modern historians who want to make sense of the aftermath of the fifteenth-century Observant reforms. Over the last five decades, following the publication of Heiko Oberman's *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (1963) and a wealth of studies on Bernardino of Siena and other luminaries of the fifteenth-century Observant movement, many scholars and interested outsiders have become convinced of the dynamic nature of and fascinating developments in the late

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1 Ludwig Fischer (ed.), *Martin Luthers Schrift an den christlichen Adel Deutscher Nation von des Christlichen Standes Besserung* (Leipzig: 1839), 45–46: 'Zuernet nicht, lieben Herren, ich meine es wahrlich gut, es ist die bitere und suesse Wahrheit, und ist, dassz man je nicht mehr Bettelkloester bauen lasse. Hilf Got, ihr ist schon viel zu viel; ja wollte Gott, sie waeren alle ab, oder je auf zween oder dren Orten gehaufet! Es hat nichts Guts gethan, es thut auch nimmermehr gut, irre laufen auf dem Lande. Darum ist mein Rath, man schlage zehen, oder wie viel ihr noth ist, auf einem Haufen, und mache eines daraus, das genugsam verforget, nicht betteln duerfe. (...) Ist doch aus solchem Predigen und Beichten nicht mehr denn eitel Hasz und Neid zwischen Pfaffen und Moenchen, grosz Aergernisz und Hindernisz des gemeinen Volks erwachsen, damit es wuerdig wuerde, und wohl verdient ufzuhoeren (...).'

medieval Catholic world. The depiction of Catholicism during the first half of the sixteenth century, in contrast, has remained problematic. Many of the arguments once used to disqualify the late medieval world as a period of decline, decadence, and crisis, continue to hover over the world of sixteenth century Catholicism prior to the Council of Trent.

During this period, Catholic Europe was faced by Lutheran, Anabaptist, Anglican, Zwinglian, and Calvinist religious dissent. It saw the escalation of large military conflicts, and a relative marginalization of papal prestige, symbolized by the traumatic sack of Rome in May 1527. It was also confronted with the seemingly unstoppable expansion of Ottoman power, which led for instance to the conquest of Rhodes (1522), the defeat of the Hungarians at Mohács (1526), the first siege of Vienna (1529), and the conquest of Buda and Pest (1541).<sup>2</sup>

Historical scholarship, heavily influenced by the verdicts of humanist spokesmen and early Protestant reformers alike, has passed severe judgment on the Catholic Church and on Europe's religious orders for their apparent powerlessness and their failure to provide proper answers to the needs of the time. Except for a few nineteenth-century German scholars, most have accepted the claims of early sixteenth-century humanists such as Erasmus, and of Lutheran spokesmen, that early sixteenth-century Catholicism was hollow to the core, and that it did not have the preachers to stem the Protestant tide.<sup>3</sup> Luther's assertion that mendicant preaching only contributed to hatred and envy between priests and monks, and that it did nothing to further the pastoral needs of the laity, seemed to confirm this.

Following this line of thought, it has been easy to postulate that effective Catholic preaching oriented towards pastoral care and additional forms of catechetical instruction was absent. Instead, the populace was kept enslaved to a superstitious religious culture characterized by inane 'external' devotions, with

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2 Recently this time period, or rather the period between the Fifth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent, has been the focus of an international workshop co-organized by the history departments of the University of Bologna and Radboud University Nijmegen. See: B. Roest, K. Bosch, A. More, A. Huijbers & P. Delcorno, "Strategies of Catholic Identity Formation (Chronicle)," *Franciscan Studies* 70 (2012): 323–36.

3 In the end, the position of Erasmus was more complex than that of the Lutherans. Whereas Erasmus made exaggerated claims about the novelty of his own catechistic teachings and approach to homiletics, and never obtained much appreciation for medieval scholasticism, he eventually found fault with the Lutheran claim that they were the first to demonstrate religious truth after centuries of concealment and deception by the 'papist' Church. See: István P. Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The Historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 106 (Leiden: 2001).

access to proper biblical teachings virtually non-existent. Until very recently, for many scholars of Luther and Calvin, this powerlessness explained the successes of early Protestantism, which as a religion of the word would have provided the general populace with sound religious teachings based on biblical scholarship alone 'for the first time' since the patristic age.<sup>4</sup>

No wonder, then, that historians working within the Protestant traditions have been very reluctant to part with this distorted depiction of events. After all, this emplotment made the rise of Protestantism almost inevitable and above all desirable. Even though recent historians working within this tradition have moved away from its most extreme positions, it is still popular to maintain that Catholicism did not have a proper answer to Protestant evangelical preaching.<sup>5</sup> It is also understandable that a large number of more secular modern historians, many of whom had and continue to have an ingrained aversion to colorful displays of devotion and 'superstition', could subscribe at least in part to the same depiction of events, if only to discern in the rise of Protestantism the vestiges of a Weberian *innerweltliche Askese* that, alongside humanistic reforms, cleared the path towards modern rational and capitalist development. In countries where 'Catholic backwardness' was held at bay, the seeds of modernity had a chance to take hold: in England, the Low Countries, Northern Germany, and Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting that the same idea of powerlessness and decadence also took hold among nineteenth and twentieth-century Catholic historians, notably to defend the necessity and the triumph of the Tridentine reforms. Faced by Protestant challenges, the Catholic Church would have restructured itself doctrinally and morally, casting away the remnants of medieval doctrinal and

4 Sigurjón Arni Eyjólfsson, "Überblick über die Bewertung von Luthers Predigten in der Forschung," in *Luther Between Present and Past: Studies on Luther and Lutheranism*, ed. Ulrik Nissen (Helsinki: 2004), 17–39.

5 See for such representations of events, for instance, J. Pollmann, "Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560–1585," *Past and Present* 190 (2006): 83–120; J. Bosman, "Preaching in the Low Countries, 1450–1650," in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. L. Taylor (Leiden-Boston-Cologne: 2001), 327–55. According to Bosman, ("Preaching in the Low Countries," 353) there were no effective Catholic preachers active in the Low Countries after Brugman (d. 1473): "The mendicant Brugman was in a way a unique phenomenon with only a short, temporary effect on the religious practice of his times'.

6 For a modern evaluation of this representation within several types of German historical scholarship, see Peter Blickle, "Reformation und kommunaler Geist: Die Antwort der Theologen auf den Verfassungswandel im Spätmittelalter," *Historische Zeitschrift* 261:2 (1995): 365–402.

pastoral confusion. The pre-Tridentine period was in this view a period of religious uncertainty that triumphant counter-reformatory Catholicism had left behind.<sup>7</sup>

Given the striking religious enthusiasm of Catholic lay people during the fifteenth century, as well as the Observants' impressive pastoral revolution – with its reform of religious houses, intensive preaching campaigns, and massive output of sermons and all kinds of literature of religious instruction (which was in huge demand) – this vision of early sixteenth-century powerlessness and lack of action is puzzling. For one, it assumes that all those religious orders that had been so active in fifteenth-century reforms and in preaching and catechism campaigns had suddenly lost heart, and had somehow stopped reforming, preaching, and teaching by the time Luther supposedly hammered his theses on the church doors in Wittenberg. It also assumes that members of these orders were incapable (as has even been maintained in relatively recent historical studies) of formulating answers in reply to Lutheran and early Calvinist challenges.

This essay will of course not attempt to address all of our misconceptions with regard to the world of early sixteenth-century Catholicism. However, it will try to make the case for the continuing relevance of Observant religious programs of reform and the role of Observant religious orders as educators of the wider population. Furthermore, it hopes to offer a different evaluation of the engagement of Observant preachers and theologians with the issue of Protestant religious dissent.

### Continuation of Observant Reforms

The dissemination of Observant reforms did not come to an abrupt end at the end of the fifteenth century. In fact, several of the largest religious orders (the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, the Benedictines, the Poor Clares, and the female Dominicans) saw an acceleration of Observant reforms on a European scale between the closing decades of the fifteenth century and

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7 For a criticism of this lingering Catholic representation of events, which was re-emphasized in several works of Delumeau (with their postulation of a late medieval era of *Angst*), see Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'Au-Delà: les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Âge (vers 1320 – vers 1480)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 47 (Rome: 1980), x, as well as Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (Oxford: 1992), 9–11, and John M. Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 147 (Leiden-Boston: 2010), 42–44.

the 1530s. The history of these ongoing Observant reforms is complex and volatile. Moreover, because in many cases it involved strife and competition between vying factions, as well as the production of vitriolic polemical treatises that denounced slackening standards and lack of rule observance, it has been quite easy for sixteenth-century critics and modern historians alike to interpret all this mayhem very negatively, as yet another sign of religious decline. One could argue instead, however, that the very belligerence of Observant stakeholders and their opponents was an indication of the importance of proper rule observance for many religious people, and of the willingness to go to great lengths to implement reform.

By and large, the pursuit of Observant reforms continued to receive the backing from the higher ecclesiastical authorities. Looking at the decrees of the Fifth Lateran Council and the so-called *Libellus ad Leonem x* from 1513, issued as a programmatic blueprint for Church reform by the Camaldolese monks Paolo (Tommaso) Giustiniani and Pietro (Vincenzo) Quirini, many ideas formulated by fifteenth-century Observant leaders from within the religious orders were still considered the best remedy for a fundamental reform of the Catholic Church *in capite et in membris*.<sup>8</sup> It explains, for instance, the willingness of Pope Leo x to invest heavily in the solution to the conflicts between different factions in the Franciscan order, enforcing unity along specific Observant lines with the famous bull *Ite vos* of 1517.<sup>9</sup>

It proved to be very difficult to unify all Observant initiatives within the Franciscan order – witness the sudden appearance after 1517 of new and more radical Observant Franciscan offshoots such as the Franciscan Riformati, the Alcantarines, and of course the Capuchin reform, which soon after evolved into a nearly independent order. These were by no means the only ‘new’ orders and congregations that emerged or developed within the larger Franciscan family during the sixteenth century. Among the women, for example, we can also point to the Annonciade and the Spanish Conceptionists.<sup>10</sup>

The Franciscan order was not alone in launching new observantist congregations after 1500. Rather, the first half of the sixteenth century saw the creation

8 Eugenio Massa, *Una cristianità nell'alba del Rinascimento. Paolo Giustiniani e il 'Libellus ad Leonem x' (1513)* (Genova-Milano: 2005); Ludovic Viallet, “Social Control, Regular Observance and Identity of a Religious Order: A Franciscan Interpretation of the *Libellus ad Leonem*”, *Franciscan Studies* 71 (2013): 33–52.

9 Pacifico Sella, *Leone x e la definitiva divisione dell'Ordine dei Minori (OMin.): La bolla 'Ite vos' (29 maggio 1517)*, *Analecta Franciscana*, 14 (Grottaferrata: 2001).

10 Bert Roest, *Order and Disorder. The Poor Clares between Foundation and Reform, The Medieval Franciscans*, 8 (Leiden-Boston: 2013), 199–201, 208–09.

of a significant number of completely new religious orders and congregations of regular clerics with distinctly observantist profiles, frequently created with direct support of Observant mendicant groups, or at least inspired by Observant spiritual classics from the fifteenth century. These included the Italian Theatines and the Somascan Fathers (*Ordo Clericorum Regularium a Somascha*), the Barnabite regular clerics and their female branch (the 'Angeliche'), Filippo Neri's Congregation of the Oratory, and, of course, the Jesuits of Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>11</sup>

Many of these new sixteenth-century orders and congregations, notably the Capuchins, the Jesuits, and the Theatines, would become very important in counter reformatory Catholic mission and ministry, alongside the older mendicant orders. As such, they are frequently studied from the perspective of the post-Tridentine Catholic Church. Still, many of these new orders and congregations, the Jesuits included, had their origin and obtained their early spiritual profile in the world of Observant reforms. Their earliest pastoral engagement – preaching, catechetical instruction, redemption of prostitutes, spiritual support of condemned criminals, hospital and orphanage management – built directly on the examples of the existing Observant apostolate and its ambitions of transforming Christian society as a whole. Only the hardening of confessional boundaries and the transformation of Catholic orthodoxy turned these orders and congregations into the well-known taskforces of the Counter-Reformation.

### Religious Orders and the Transformations before the Council of Trent

The pre-Tridentine history of these old and new orders and congregations was part of a dynamic, albeit chaotic period of reform and experimentation. Developments differed significantly between regions and nations, as did the role of the orders. England, Sweden, and Denmark were possibly the countries in which the impact of religious orders was nullified most abruptly and more or less completely. In the Scandinavian countries, this was due to a complete, state-driven acceptance of Lutheranism, while in England it was due to Henry VIII's break with Rome, which after 1536 led to the dissolution of all religious houses.<sup>12</sup>

11 The most accessible overview of these and other 'new' orders can be found in Michael A. Mullett, *The Catholic Reformation* (London-New York: 2001), 69–110.

12 On Scandinavia, see: Jørgen Nybo, *Die Franziskaner in den nordischen Ländern im Mittelalter*, Franziskanische Forschungen, 43 (Kevelaer: 2002), 97–120. For England, the most manageable overview is still provided in David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge: 1976).

In Spain, the Observant reform project of Cardinal Cisneros (1436–1517) and the royal dynasty always had strong connections with concerns over doctrinal purity, due to the inheritance of the *reconquista* and ongoing fears about contamination by morisco and marano influences. During Cisneros's lifetime, the pursuit of Observant reforms became to an extent allied with Erasmian humanist educational ideals, which became epitomized in the teaching program of the newly erected schools at Alcalá, and in the Complutensian Polyglot Bible project. After Cisneros's death, increasing concern about the influx of Lutheranism and heterodox 'alumbrado' spirituality severely curtailed the more open-minded forms of Catholic religious reform. What remained of the Observant program was heavily geared towards religious discipline and the safeguarding of Catholic orthodoxy. Within these more narrow and punitive parameters, Observant reforms of religious houses and Observant involvement with pastoral care would continue on a remarkably large scale.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the impact of Lutheranism, and the way it became a strategic instrument in the struggle between German territorial lords and Emperor Charles v, organized Catholic religious life in the German Empire suffered many setbacks from around 1520 onwards. In cities and regions that opted for Lutheranism, religious houses normally were forced to close down (or they were forbidden to accept new novices, which in the end had the same result). Yet in regions within the German Empire where Lutheranism for one reason or another did not take hold, or where religious allegiances remained contested for a very long time, Observant reforms initiated in previous decades frequently continued. Due to the scholarly emphasis on Lutheranism and its impact, this continuation of the Observant project in numerous regions within the German Empire during the first half of the sixteenth century has escaped attention. Insofar as sixteenth-century German Observant religious movements do make an appearance in the works of modern scholarship, it is frequently in the context of religious polemics with Lutheran opponents. The other activities by Observant religious houses and the concomitant production of pastoral texts do not figure prominently.<sup>14</sup>

13 J. García Oro, *Cisneros y la reforma del clero español en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: 1971); Idem, "Conventualismo y observancia. La reforma de las órdenes religiosas en los siglos xv y xvi," in *Historia de la Iglesia en España* III, 1: *La Iglesia en la España de los siglos xv y xvi* (Madrid: 1980), 211–349; Idem, *Cisneros. Un cardenal reformista en el trono de España (1436–1517)* (Madrid: 2005).

14 For the Franciscans, note the introductory work of Walter Ziegler, "Die deutschen Franziskanerobservanten zwischen Reformation und Gegenreformation," in *I francescani in Europa tra riforma e controriforma, Atti del XIII convegno internazionale, Assisi, 17–19 ottobre 1985* (Perugia: 1987), 51–91. For the literary production of Franciscan Observants in the

Especially in Italy, and to an extent also in France, it seemed for a while possible to realize forms of evangelical renewal that would accommodate many of the demands of proto-Protestants, precisely because they tied in with already existing Catholic reform programs, and at times received support from high placed secular and religious authority figures. In France, many 'evangelical' reformers, both those that in due course would become devoted Lutherans or Calvinists and those who eventually stayed within the Catholic fold, received support from Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549), the sister of King Francis I of France. Throughout the 1520s and the early 1530s, these reformers made significant headway, notwithstanding significant opposition from the Parisian theology faculty, local lords, and crown officials inimical to Marguerite.<sup>15</sup> Although the majority of Observant religious figures, including many of their leading theologians (such as Pierre de Cornes (Petrus de Cornibus) and Jean Gacy), came down from nearly the beginning on the side of Catholic repression,<sup>16</sup> a significant number of them took up the cause of evangelical reform, and sometimes suffered persecutions that eventually drove them completely into the Protestant fold. Cases in point are the Dominican theologian and preacher Aimé Meigret, and the Franciscans Pierre de Sébiville and Jean Prévost.<sup>17</sup>

In Italy in particular, the boundaries between ongoing projects of religious observance, 'evangelical' and 'spiritual' Catholic reform initiatives, and forms of proto-Protestantism were highly complex. This complexity was fueled by the fragmented political situation, with rivaling city-states, many of which resisted papal interference and supported religious reform initiatives of questionable orthodoxy as long as it seemed strategically or politically expedient to do so. Complexity was also fuelled by the mixed messages sent out by the Catholic hierarchy itself, and especially by dissent among leading cardinals. Some of these, such as Reginald Pole and Gasparo Contarini, maintained

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Low Countries until the 1560s, see Bert Roest, "Franciscans Between Observance and Reformation: The Low Countries (ca. 1400–1600)," *Franciscan Studies* 63 (2005): 409–42.

15 Jonathan A. Reid, *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and her Evangelical Network*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 139, 2 Vols. (Leiden: 2009).

16 Cf. James K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France, The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500–1543*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 32 (Leiden: 1985), 124, 237–38.

17 Henry Guy, "Le sermon d'Aimé Maigret," *Annales de l'Université de Grenoble*, n.s., Lettres-Droits 5 (1928): 181–222; J.J. Hémarquinier, "À propos du procès d'hérésie contre Aimé Meigret (Grenoble, 1524)," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 19 (1957): 480–01; Auguste Prudhomme, *Simple notes sur Pierre de Sébiville: 1er prédicateur de la réforme à Grenoble, 1514–1524* (Bourgoin: 1884); Reid, *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent*, 264–65, 296–98, 341.



conciliatory positions during the 1530s and the early 1540s. Others, however, such as Gian Pietro Carafa and Girolamo Aleandro, quite early displayed a staunch willingness to come down on the side of Catholic orthodoxy. This caused conflicts within the College of Cardinals itself, and increased the confusion on the ground. In some areas (the autonomous state of Venice, the republic of Lucca, parts of the state of Milan, Florence under Cosimo I, and the court at Ferrara under Duchess Renée of France), several types of 'evangelical' reform were allowed to develop, at least temporarily or intermittently. Elsewhere, reformers suffered outright persecution. The positioning of the religious orders in all this is very difficult to chart and is only revealed by in-depth local and regional studies.<sup>18</sup>

Following the breakdown of negotiations between representatives of the Catholic Church and Protestant leaders in the context of the Diet of Regensburg in 1541, on 21 July 1542 (with the bull *Licet ab initio*) Pope Paul III instituted the supreme tribunal of the Sant'Uffizio (the Roman inquisition), which had the competence to proceed against lay and clerical people alike without regard for privilege or immunity. This tribunal came into the hands of Cardinal Carafa, who started to direct the activities of the tribunal to initiate repression of internal and external dissent.<sup>19</sup> The same year, Bernardino Ochino, the general of the young Capuchin order, the most famous Italian preacher of the 1530s and friend of both Cardinal Pole and the high noble supporter of evangelical reforms Vittoria Colonna, was accused of heresy and more or less forced to flee to Calvinist Geneva.<sup>20</sup>

The increasing influence of the Roman inquisition and the Carafa party did not immediately end all 'evangelical' reform attempts within the Catholic fold. 1542 was also the year in which the reformist cleric Morrone was made cardinal. Around him, and at the court of Cardinal Pole in Viterbo, reform-minded Observant clerics and a wide range of other 'evangelical' reformers still found protection. These included many clerics influenced by so-called Valdensian currents inspired by the Spanish reformer Juan de Valdés (d. 1541), who had

18 Elena Bonora, *La Controriforma*, Biblioteca Essenziale Laterza, 35 (Bari: 2001), esp. 4–31. Still valuable is Paolo Prodi, *La crisi religiosa del XVI secolo: riforma cattolica e controriforma* (Bologna: 1964).

19 Bonora, *La Controriforma*, 14–16.

20 B. Nicolini, "Bernardino Ochino. Saggio biografico," *Biblion. Rivista di filologia, storia e bibliografia* 1 (1959): 5–25; Ph. Mc. Nair & J. Tedeschi, "New Light on Ochino," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 35 (1973): 289–301; Ugo Rozzo, "Nuovi contributi su Bernardino Ochino," *Bullettino della Società di studi Valdesi* 146 (1979): 51–83; Michele Camaioni, "Note su due episodi del periodo italiano di Bernardino Ochino," *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria* 116 (2009): 120–48.

fled from Spain to Naples in the 1530s. Valdensianism emphasized interior illumination and subjective experience along *alumbrado* lines, and downplayed doctrinal issues. This opened up the possibility to further religious reforms without doctrinal confrontation and in principle kept alive possibilities of mediation between different confessions. The final clampdown on and destruction of such currents only took place in the course of the 1550s. By then, all major religious orders, including the Capuchins (who had suffered a severe crisis following the defection of Ochino) and the Barnabites (whose leaders had been subjected to inquisitorial persecution in 1552 for their acquiescence to illuminist positions and unwarranted female initiatives), had been properly cleansed of any lingering 'evangelical' tendencies.<sup>21</sup>

### Observant Preaching before ca. 1520

The Observant apostolate of the early sixteenth century is one of the most underestimated and neglected aspects of the Observant legacy. The claims of Christian humanists (such as Erasmus) and of early Lutherans that they were the first to offer proper catechistic instruction to the laity, as well as preaching based on Scripture, have had an incredible impact. Many historians accepted (and continue to accept) such partisan statements at face value, and refuse to investigate properly the available source material.<sup>22</sup>

A number of surveys now provide a sense of the impressive production of catechisms and more ambitious works of religious instruction between the second half of the fifteenth century and the start of the Council of Trent.<sup>23</sup>

21 Antonio Fregona, *I frati cappuccini nel primo secolo di vita, 1525–1619: approccio critico alle fonti storiche, giuridiche e letterarie più importanti*, Studi francescani, 8 (Padua: 2006); Rita Bacchiddu, *Una donna carismatica e i suoi critici: Paola Antonia Negri (1508–1555) e i primi Barnabiti*, PhD. Thesis Scuola Internazionale di Alti Studi-Fondazione Collegio S. Carlo (Modena: 2003).

22 The *locus classicus* of these exaggerated claims can be found in the introduction to the 1518 edition of Erasmus's *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*. See: Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, LXVI (Toronto-Buffalo-London: 1988), 9.

23 Paul Bahlmann, *Deutschlands katholische Katechismen bis zum Ende des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Münster: 1894); R. Rusconi, "Dal pulpito alla confessione. Modelli di comportamento religioso in Italia tra 1470 circa e 1520 circa," in *Strutture ecclesiastiche in Italia e in Germania prima della Riforma*, eds. Paolo Prodi & Peter Johanek (Bologna: 1984), 259–315; M. Turrini, "Riformare il mondo a vera vita cristiana: le scuole di catechismo nell'Italia del Cinquecento," *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-germanico in Trento* 8 (1982): 407–89; L. Guglielmini, *Il sacramento della Penitenza nei catechismi dei fanciulli del secolo*

These works clearly show that basic and more advanced forms of Catholic religious instruction (beyond works meant to stimulate devotion in the more spiritual sense) was by no means just a reaction to early Protestant challenges, but was very much an intrinsic part of the Observant attempt at securing the moral and doctrinal 'health' of ordinary believers. Building on fifteenth-century initiatives, early sixteenth-century Observants and members of newly created orders and congregations not only continued to write catechisms and provided catechistic instruction in the context of preaching campaigns. They also helped to set up catechetical schools for the young (*scuole della dottrina*) and increased their production of vernacular texts of religious instruction for the laity. The latter in particular seems to have happened in nearly all regions in Europe, and apparently catered to a genuine lay interest.<sup>24</sup> In this context, ordinary believers were given a much higher level of access to theological, biblical, and para-biblical materials than would be common in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. This had repercussions for the form and content of works of religious instruction in ways that have not always been properly understood by modern scholars.<sup>25</sup>

Most impressive is the ongoing homiletic output. Local and regional studies indicate that around and after 1500, in cities all over Europe, urban authorities continued to appoint urban preachers with an Observant background, whether for 'extraordinary' preaching campaigns during the Lent and Advent seasons, or for 'ordinary' preaching on Sundays and feast days throughout the liturgical year. Many of the preachers mentioned in the sources are known only by name,

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*xvi*, *Ricerca storico-teologica*, Corona Lateranensia, 32 (Rome: 1983); Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent*, Studies in the history of Christian traditions, 117 (Leiden-Boston: 2004), 250–75, 366–73, 417–44. For additional non-Franciscan works, see also Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books, 1465–1550: A Finding List* (Geneva: 1983).

24 On the *scuole*, see: P.F. Grendler, "Le scuole della dottrina cristiana nell'Italia del Cinquecento," in *Città italiane del '500 tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Lucca: 1988), 299–312; M. Turrini, "Le scuole di catechismo nell'Italia settentrionale del '500,'" *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico di Trento* 8 (1982): 373–406.

25 This holds true in particular for lay 'access' to biblical and parabiblical materials, which changed significantly in the course of the sixteenth century. Whereas authors of the *Libellus ad Leonem* asked for lay access to vernacular biblical texts, confirming and strengthening existing tendencies (and recognizing the existence and widespread dissemination of vernacular biblical texts since the later medieval period), after the Council of Trent, lay access to the Bible became highly problematical. See also the results of the ERC research project of Sabrina Corbellini in Groningen ('Holy Writ and Lay Readers. A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Late Middle Ages').

and have not left written traces behind. Nevertheless, manuscript archives and catalogues of incunabula and early sixteenth-century imprints contain a massive number of Catholic sermon collections: a large variety of *de tempore* and *de sanctis* collections, including ‘postils’ for Sundays and feast days that provided simple moral and doctrinal exegetical explanations of the liturgical pericopes read in church during the year, quadragesimal collections (with sermons held predominantly on penitential issues during the forty days before Easter), and sermons for specific occasions (crusade sermons, burial sermons, sermons on pressing social and moral topics, etc.).<sup>26</sup>

Among the Franciscan Observants alone – to stay within the boundaries of my own scholarly expertise – the generation active in the two decades before Luther’s breach with the Church contained an impressive number of homiletic practitioners, whose works circulated widely in both manuscript and print. Good examples from among the most famous of these are Olivier Maillard (d. 1502), Étienne Pillet (Stephan Brulefer, d. ca. 1505), Pelbartus Ladislaus of Temesvár (d. 1504), Nicolas Denisse (d. 1509), Bernardino Busti (d. 1513), Dietrich Colde (d. 1515), Johann Meder (d. 1518), Michel Menot (d. 1518), Jean Vitrier (d. 1519), and Heinrich Kastner (d. 1530).<sup>27</sup> In some cases the model sermon collections and complementary *praedicabilia* of these preachers had a long-term impact on Catholic religious teachings within specific regions.<sup>28</sup>

Counter to what one would expect on the basis of Lutheran accusations, more recent scholarly evaluations of both the Savonarolan movement in Florence and of mendicant itinerant preachers in Italy show that many master preachers

26 Different scholarly assumptions sometimes have led to completely opposite evaluations concerning the dissemination and impact of such collections. See for instance the different approach to sermon imprints in the works of Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ*, 5ff and Emily Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* (Cambridge, MA: 2013), 28–31.

27 For a first introduction to many of these and other preachers, see Roest, *Franciscan Literature*, 77–100; Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ*, 235ff.

28 Hence the *Pomerium sermonum de tempore* (at least twelve editions before 1520), the *Pomerium sermonum de sanctis* (11 editions between 1501 and 1520), and the *Pomerium sermonum quadragesimalium* (9 or 10 editions between 1499 and 1520) of Pelbartus Ladislaus of Temesvár became standard collections in many religious libraries in Eastern Europe, and as such could have a huge impact on preaching practice, complementing and partly replacing older Observant homiletic classics such as the *Biga salutis*. Roest, *Franciscan Literature*, 99; Z.J. Kosztołnyk, “Pelbartus of Temesvár: a Franciscan Preacher and Writer of the Late Middle Ages in Hungary,” *Vivarium* 5 (1967): 100–10; Ildikó Bárczi, “La diversité thématique dans les prédications de Pelbart de Temesvár,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 100 (2007): 251–310.

active before and after 1500 did not embrace apocalyptic imagery.<sup>29</sup> Nor did they limit themselves to instilling fear of the tribulations of hell and purgatory.<sup>30</sup> Instead, an analysis of their sermons shows in many cases a secure biblical basis (albeit not according to the *sola scriptura* criteria of the later Protestant movement), and also a willingness to deal squarely with a wide variety of doctrinal issues, alongside the comprehensive moral and societal teachings that we have come to associate with the Observant preaching of fifteenth-century luminaries such as Bernardino of Siena and Giacomo della Marca.<sup>31</sup>

Although most Observant preachers subscribed to comparable, exhaustive programs of religious instruction, their homiletic style could differ significantly. Michel Menot (nicknamed *lingua aurea*) was famous for his use of narrative examples and his simple, even 'grotesque' style of preaching in accordance with a late medieval *sermo modernus* format that sought to connect with the popular culture of his urban audiences. This meant that his sermons were highly structured, following a proper division of the sermon's theme, and contained a sufficient number of mnemotecnic devices and appropriate exempla and anecdotes to keep the attention of the audience.<sup>32</sup>

Other preachers, such as Jean Vitrier, had a much more learned stylistic approach that combined patristic and new humanist homiletic models. Their strategy reflected a new accentuation of classical rhetorical guidelines and the example of patristic preaching (espoused by Traversagni, Erasmus, and others), which emphasized the three aims of classical rhetoric (to move, to teach, to delight: *movere, docere, delectare*). Vitrier's sermons did not rely as much on clear divisions and enumerations as the late medieval *sermo modernus* (which

29 Apocalyptic preaching was certainly a significant phenomenon, especially, it would seem, in Italy. See. O. Niccoli, *Profeti e popolo nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (Bari: 1987).

30 This is for instance thematized in Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident: 14<sup>e</sup>-18<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: 1978).

31 Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ*, 84–119; Bert Roest, "Wat salmen met sulck volck maken?" Franciscaanse stadspredikers en de verdediging van het katholicisme in de Nederlanden, circa 1520–1568," in *Stedelijk verleden in veelvoud. Opstellen over laatmiddeleeuwse stadsgeschiedenis in de Nederlanden voor Dick de Boer*, eds. Hanno Brand, Jeroen Benders & René Nip (Hilversum: 2011), 245–58.

32 For an introduction to his preaching style, see: J. Nève (ed.), *Sermons choisis de Michel Menot (1508–1518)* (Paris: 1924); Ch.Labitte, "Prédicateurs grotesques du 16<sup>e</sup> siècle. Michel Menot," *Revue de Paris* 8 (1838): 120–41; É. Gilson, "Michel Menot et la technique du sermon médiéval," *Revue d'histoire franciscaine* 2 (1925): 301–50; Hervé Martin, "Les prédicateurs franciscains dans les provinces septentrionales de la France au XVe siècle," in *I frati minori tra '400 e '500, Atti del XII Convegno Internazionale Assisi, 18-19-20 ottobre 1984* (Assisi-Perugia: 1986), 254–55.

in that sense had been a deliberate departure from the less-structured patristic and monastic exegetical homilies, to provide the necessary structure for audiences less-imbued with biblical culture), and shied away from colorful anecdotes and exempla. Instead, he would provide a more intellectual exegetical exposition of biblical passages, with recourse to patristic authorities, and with a stylistic register that through a careful choice of words and rhetorical coloring would arouse in the audience the desire to move beyond an initial understanding and acceptance of the principles of Christian faith, towards an interiorization of the spiritual meaning of Scripture.<sup>33</sup>

The wide variety in preaching styles found in surviving sermon collections from this period makes it very difficult to discern a general transformation of preaching away from the late medieval *sermo modernus* in favor of humanist homiletic models of learned oratory, as scholarship on contemporaneous preaching manuals would suggest. Likewise, it is not entirely accurate to say that highly trained mendicant preachers opted *en masse* for an elite form of refined oratory, in contrast with frequently lesser-educated secular priests.<sup>34</sup> It certainly makes sense to investigate the normative changes in the manuals of homiletic rhetoric, but it is necessary to compare these with homiletic practice. It would seem that preachers were quite capable of using different stylistic registers, and of mixing different structural models (that of the late medieval *sermo modernus*, the 'patristic' homily, and the humanistic *concio*) in light of audience and occasion.<sup>35</sup> Vitrier's homilies, for example, hailed by its editor as

33 Vitrier would have had a pronounced influence on Erasmus's concept of Christian learning, due to his own studies of Origen and his patristic preaching style. Vitrier would also have been instrumental in enticing Erasmus to finish his *Enchiridion militis christiani*. See André Godin, "De Vitrier à Origène. Recherches sur la patristique érasmiennne," in *Colloquium Erasmianum* (Mons: 1968), 47–57; Idem, *Spiritualité franciscaine en Flandre au XVI siècle: l'homélaire de Jean Vitrier* (Geneva: 1971); Idem, "Érasme et le modèle origénien de la prédication," in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia*, ed. J.-C. Margolin, 2 Vols. (Paris: 1972), 2: 807–20. Lorenzo Traversagni's *Epitoma margarite castigate eloquentie* was published in 1479. More influential was Erasmus's *Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi*, which was published in 1535.

34 Hence, I cannot agree with Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press*, 22–27, who opposes mendicant 'oratorical' or 'elite' preaching with pedagogical and simple episcopal preaching. Her verdict is colored by turning the sermons of the conventual Franciscan Cornelio Musso into the embodiment of the mendicant style of the sixteenth century.

35 The starting points for such discussion remain John O'Malley, "Form, Content, and Influence of Works about Preaching before Trent: The Franciscan Contribution," in *I frati minori tra '400 e '500, Atti del XII convegno internazionale Assisi, 18-19-20 ottobre 1984* (Perugia-Assisi: 1986), 25–50; Idem, "Content and Rhetorical Forms in Sixteenth-Century Treatises on Preaching," in *Renaissance Eloquence*, ed. J.J. Murphy (Berkeley: 1983),

a departure from the structured 'medieval' scholastic sermons of his contemporaries, might partly look the way they do because they catered to a rather elite audience of female religious practitioners and engaged lay people. It remains to be seen whether they were really exceptional if compared with other collections aimed at a comparable audience or reading public.

Diversity in homiletic styles was in part a legacy of the fifteenth-century Observance. Bernardino of Siena and a number of his Italian disciples in particular, while retaining many elements of the thematic divisions of the *sermo modernus*, had opted to move away from selecting their biblical themes and preaching topics uniquely from the biblical pericopes read through the liturgical year. Many of their sermons were almost moral-theological popularizing treatises on the 'ills' of the time (sodomy, usury, the lack of urban peace, etc.), on specific Christian virtues that were in need of cultivation (parental love, spousal fidelity), or on basic catechistic and penitential issues. To anchor their sermons to the biblical text, they looked strategically at which biblical verses worked for a chosen topic, rather than limiting themselves to the biblical passages suggested by the readings of the liturgy.<sup>36</sup>

By freeing themselves from the constraint of the liturgical pericopes, these preachers and their immediate successors had more freedom to address what they considered to be pressing issues. The homiletic style that later fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Italian Observant preachers brought to bear on this was not uniform. Some preachers were attacked by contemporary humanists for their adherence to an 'uncultured' and overly structured *sermo modernus* and their lack of humanist rhetorical skill. Others were hailed as exemplars of proper humanist preaching. In some cases criticism and praise were directed at the very same preacher, which shows that humanist positions on such matters were not always the same.<sup>37</sup>

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238–352. Very insightful for the Italian situation is Carlo Delcorno, "Dal «sermo modernus» alla retorica «borromea»," *Lettere Italiane* 39:4 (1987): 465–83. What is needed is an in-depth analysis of contemporary sermon collections to see the real impact of humanist preaching theory.

36 Carlo Delcorno, "L'ars a praedicandi di Bernardino da Siena," in *Atti del Simposio internazionale cateriniano-bernardiniano*, eds. D. Maffei & P. Nardi (Siena: 1982): 419–49.

37 Hence Bernardino and other Franciscans received praise from humanists like Guarino and Vespasiano da Bisticci, whereas they were attacked by Poggio Bracciolini, Coluccio Salutati, Valla, and Erasmus. Delcorno, "Dal «sermo modernus» alla retorica «borromea»," 474–78. Delcorno suggests that many such preachers only used humanist learning as adornment, but that the underlying homiletic method was slow to change, to the chagrin of humanist purists.

Alongside thematic sermons disconnected from the liturgical pericopes (which were apparently quite popular in North and Central Italy) many Observant preachers continued to preach more properly in alignment with the themes suggested by the liturgical readings, either in a more 'traditional' late medieval *sermo modernus* format (such as Menot) – which had proved to be very effective to bring doctrinal and moral arguments across with recourse to basic logical procedures, divisions, mnemotechnic enumerations, strategic references to acknowledged theological authorities, and vivid *exempla* – or in a more 'humanist' rhetorical fashion (such as Vitrier), with less emphasis on logical inferences, distinctions, and non-biblical *exempla*.

### Observant Friars in Confrontation with Early Protestantism after 1520

In line with scholarly assumptions concerning the 'lack' of Observant pastoral engagement during the early decades of the sixteenth century (which would have left the field wide open for early Protestant intervention), many scholars have also passed harsh verdicts on the response of Catholic Observant preachers and theologians to the challenges of Lutheranism and early Calvinism.

In general, it has been argued that Observant preachers and theologians were unable to formulate a proper response, or were at least unable to provide a viable homiletic alternative to the early Protestant pastorate of the word. Observants, it is said, either failed to preach the Gospel in the face of the early Protestant homiletic onslaught (spending their energy instead on pointless polemics) or their homiletic response was wholly inadequate, due to their failure to address doctrinal concerns around justification, free will, and the sacraments. The former position is favored by many scholars of Lutheranism (with Heiko Oberman as a major exception), who have argued that Luther and his early colleagues more or less invented biblical preaching according to the so-called 'postil' format.<sup>38</sup> The latter position has been espoused by scholars such as Alasdair Duke and Judith Polmann, who thus have tried to 'explain' the attractiveness of Calvinism in the Low Countries and parts of France. None of these verdicts withstand scrutiny.<sup>39</sup>

Thanks to the magisterial study by John Frymire, however, we now know that Catholic Observant preachers in Germany (alongside secular Catholic

38 Cf. the discussion of this tradition and its problems in view of the evidence in Frymire, *The Primacy of The Postils*, 13ff.

39 Roest, "Wat salmen met sulck volk maken," *passim*.



colleagues, such as Eck and Nausea) did not limit themselves to futile polemical refutations of Lutheranism.<sup>40</sup> Instead, they addressed the Lutheran homiletic challenge head-on. And they could do this easily: especially in Germany and France, the fifteenth-century Italian innovations of Bernardino of Siena and his followers to free the sermon from the liturgical pericopes had never become very popular. Therefore, there was an unbroken tradition of preaching based closely on the biblical text as it was read in the course of the liturgical year. This tradition comprised both designated ‘postils’ that provided a down-to-earth, sometimes line-by-line moral and doctrinal exegesis of the Bible pericopes read in church on a particular day, and other types of *de tempore* and quadragesimal sermons, which likewise took their theme from the liturgical readings of the day, but focused in a more independent fashion on moral or doctrinal issues. As shown in Frymire’s partial survey, the Catholic production of these texts in Germany was massive, and the preachers in question, including the Observant Franciscans Anton Broickwy of Koenigstein (d. 1541), Johann Wild (1554), and the Leipzig Dominican Hermann Rab (d. 1534), were highly capable biblical ‘postilators’ in their own right.<sup>41</sup>

The idea that Catholic preachers, if they preached at all, failed to address the doctrinal concerns of the laity is likewise flawed. This depiction of events has long dominated scholarly discussions on the beginnings of the Reformation in the Low Countries, with recourse to anecdotal evidence and with reference to the devotional content of a relatively small number of vernacular sermons that were published for lay readers, and probably were specifically geared to address devotional concerns. Scholars also have projected post-Tridentine regulations, which limited in-depth doctrinal teachings in sermons to lay people, back onto the much more flexible and less-regulated preaching

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40 Such polemical literature did exist and fulfilled a specific function. Yet it was not the only answer ‘available’ to Catholic spokesmen. On the polemics as such, see W. Klaiber, *Katholische Kontrovers-theologen und Reformer des 16. Jahrhunderts. Ein Werkverzeichnis*, Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, 115 (Münster: 1978); H. Smolinsky, *Augustin von Abveldt und Hieronymus Emser. Eine Untersuchung zur Kontrovers-theologie der frühen Reformationszeit im Herzogtum Sachsen*, Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, 122 (Münster: 1983); Erica Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: 1995).

41 Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils*, 139–45, 606–69; Rolf Decot, “Der Einfluss der Reformation auf die Predigt im Mainzer Dom von Wolfgang Capito bis Johannes Wild,” in *Zwischen Konflikt und Kooperation. Religiöse Gemeinschaften in Stadt und Erzstift Mainz in Spätmittelalter und Neuzeit*, eds. Irene Dingel & Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte, 70 (Mainz: 2006), 87–102.

environment of the pre-Tridentine period.<sup>42</sup> What scholars often fail to do, however, is to reflect on the structure and actual content of Latin model sermon collections published for preachers by Observant mendicants in the Low Countries, Germany, and France – figures like the previously mentioned Anton Broickwy of Koenigstein, as well as Matthias Weynsen (d. 1547) and Jan Royaert (d. 1547).

Looking at these source materials, which probably are indicative of the themes addressed by preachers in real-life preaching situations, a completely different picture arises. For one, these sixteenth-century Catholic preachers included much more doctrinal teaching in their sermons than modern scholars have realized. As Larissa Taylor had already observed for French Dominican and Observant preachers active in France, Franciscan Observants active in the Low Countries and the German Rhineland covered a substantial amount of doctrinal teachings on the efficacy of sacraments, justification and grace, issues of intercession, scriptural authority, and the *magisterium* of the Church.<sup>43</sup>

Alongside sermon collections, Dutch and Belgian Observants, like many of their colleagues elsewhere, also continued to write more thematic booklets and treatises of religious instruction that did much more than simply arouse devotion among lay believers. In that sense, the fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Observant tradition of catechetical instruction was maintained, and resulted in a substantial production of catechisms, sacrament and Mass explanations, including texts that provided lay readers with a plethora of biblical and patristic references in the margins, so that Catholic believers were given access to the sources that would help them to ‘prove’ the Catholic position over against Protestant attacks.<sup>44</sup> These Catholic catechistic texts published prior to the Catholic catechism of Canisius are frequently ignored, but can provide a sense of the different strategies used to secure lay commitment to the tenets of Catholic faith between the 1520s and the mid-1550s.

The persistent denial of the existence of Catholic preaching and religious instruction in the wake of Protestant agitation, and the denial of its efficacy and doctrinal content, are thus puzzling. It seems clear that many historians

42 On such post-Tridentine preaching regulations and their prevalence of *movere* over *docere*, see Delcorno, “Dal «sermo modernus» alla retorica «borromea»,” 468–70.

43 A case in point is Anton’s summer postil collection published in 1549, which contains interesting discussions of the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. Cf. Anton Broickwy of Koenigstein, *Postillae sive enarrationes in epistolas et evangelia*, Pars aestivalis (Cologne: 1549), ff. 86–106.

44 An interesting example is the *Boek van den heylighen sacramenten* of Franciscus Vervoort from Malines (Mechelen), which was published in 1552, and was reprinted in 1556. B. De Troeyer, “Vervoort (François),” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire* 16 Vols. (Paris: 1932–1995), 16: 506–09.

have somehow failed to take seriously the many references to mendicant preachers in the sources (chronicles and archival documents) – evidence that shows how often European towns and urban authorities continued the late medieval practice of recruiting mendicant preachers for ‘extraordinary’ or ‘ordinary’ preaching assignments. Apparently such preachers were very popular, and precisely for that reason they came under severe attack by Protestant spokesmen, who rightly saw them as dangerous adversaries.<sup>45</sup>

These denials also indicate that many scholars have refused to acquaint themselves properly with the massive homiletic output of Catholic preachers during and after the 1520s, and that of Observant preachers in particular. This is even more puzzling when we reflect on the fact that a large number of prominent Lutheran and early Calvinist preachers had been Observant Catholic friars before their ‘conversion’, and hence had received their education and homiletic training in the schools and friaries of Observant religious orders. This was true for Luther himself (who had been an Augustinian friar) and for many other Lutheran and Calvinist preachers with an Observant mendicant background.

Apparently, the dividing line between early Protestants and Catholic Observants was at times very thin. As we have seen above in the discussion of reform initiatives in France and Italy, for instance, there was significant overlap between the Observant calls for religious reform and its emphasis on living in accordance with the commands of the Bible, and the evangelical message of early Lutheranism and early Calvinism. Soon the doctrinal boundaries would harden, especially within the polemic exchanges and accusations following the first official condemnations of Luther. Yet several Observant friars who eventually ended up in one of the Protestant camps took their time in crossing the dividing line once and for all. Alongside the *Werdegang* of preachers such as Aimé Meigret OP, and the Franciscans Pierre de Sébiville and Jean Prévost mentioned earlier, the trajectory of the Observant Franciscan François Lambert

45 On such preaching assignments of Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and Carmelites in Aix-en-Provence, see Claire Dolan, *Entre tours et clochers: Les gens d’église à Aix-en-Provence au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: 1981), 97–98. For Utrecht in the Low Countries, see R.H. Pegel, “Prediking voor de leken in de stad Utrecht, 1500–1580,” in *Utrechters entredoux. Stad en Sticht in de eeuw van de reformatie, 1520–1620*, eds. H. ten Boom, E. Geudeke, H.L.Ph. Leeuwenberg & P.H.A.M. Abels (Delft: 1992), 112–46. For the appointment of secular clerics to such positions and the wider context of mendicant and secular urban preaching assignments before and after 1500, see also Bernhard Neidiger, “Wortgottesdienst vor der Reformation: Die Stiftung eigener Predigtprüfungen für Weltkleriker im späten Mittelalter,” *Rheinische Vierjahrsblätter* 66 (2002): 142–89; Michael Menzel, “Predigt und Predigtorganisation im Mittelalter,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 111 (1991): 337–84.

is very revealing in this regard. As Pietro Delcorno has shown, the transition of François Lambert of Avignon from Franciscan to Lutheran preacher between 1520 and the winter of 1522 was gradual, and for a while it seemed possible – not only for him but also according to remarks of early Lutheran and Zwinglian correspondents – to combine the Observant Franciscan lifestyle with teaching evangelical Christian truth.<sup>46</sup>

In the case of the learned Hebraist Conrad Pellican from Rufach and Basel, the transition from Observant Franciscan to Protestant between 1519 and 1526 was even more prolonged, and was beset with hopes of arriving at a compromise that would combine the best of both worlds, based on a shared commitment to a life of evangelical perfection. Pellican already began to tilt towards Lutheran positions around 1519, but remained guardian of the Basel friary until 1524. By then, his Protestant sympathies were well known among his fellow friars. Still, he remained in the Basel friary for another two years, teaching Hebrew and theology at the local university. Throughout this period, Pellican apparently continued to believe that it could be possible to combine Protestant teachings with being faithful to the Franciscan rule. Around Easter 1525, he addressed a letter to the Observant provincial chapter, which was held at Kreuznach, and in this letter he defended himself against those who accused him of being a Lutheran heretic. He avowed his Protestant leanings but indicated that he still loved the Franciscan order, and even went as far as to suggest that the order's provincial leaders should send to his friary in Basel other friars from the province with Lutheran tendencies, in order to let them live and work in correspondence with evangelical truth. He wrote that the progress of Protestantism was inevitable. Curiously enough, his sincerity and reputation within the order was such that the new guardian present at the provincial chapter was told to leave Pellican in peace and allow him to continue his studies and his teaching of Hebrew in Basel. Not long afterwards, Zwingli invited him to Zürich to become professor in Greek and Hebrew there. Pellican finally accepted in February 1526 and left the friary and the order.<sup>47</sup>

To claim that early Protestants were preachers of the word, while their Catholic opponents either did not know how to preach or were incapable of doing so in an adequate fashion, is thus to ignore the fact that there were many

46 Pietro Delcorno, "Between Pulpit and Reformation: The "Confessions" of François Lambert," *Franciscan Studies* (2013): 113–33.

47 Erich Wenneker, "Pellikan, Konrad," in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, 14 Vols. (Herzberg: 1990–1998), 7: 180–83; G.G. Merlo, *Nel nome di san Francesco. Storia dei frati Minori e del francescanesimo sino agli inizi del XVI secolo* (Padua: 2003), 422–28; Frédéric Bresch, *Esquisse biographique sur Conrad Pellican* (Strasbourg: 1870), 31–34.

skilled homiletic practitioners in both camps, each with the same or a highly comparable training – sometimes received in one and the same Observant house of study. Hence the Observant Franciscan *studium* in Leipzig produced preachers and teachers such as Augustinus of Alvelde and Friedrich Myconius. The latter would convert to Lutheranism, whereas the former would become one of its most vocal antagonists. These were opponents who knew each other very well, who had previously worked together and who shared much common ground as preachers and pastoral workers.<sup>48</sup>

With the progressive emancipation of Lutheran and Calvinist theologies, the creation of distinct Lutheran and Calvinist training grounds in Wittenberg, Basel, Zürich, and elsewhere, and the rise of Catholic censorship, the divisions in form and content between Protestant and Catholic preaching would increase over time. But it remains to be seen whether many lay people in the 1530s and 1540s would have been able to discern marked differences between the postils of the Catholic Observant Franciscan Johann Wild, the Augustinian Johannes Hoffmeister, the Dominican Johannes Dietenberger, or the Carthusian Johannes Justus Lansperger, and those of their contemporary Lutheran opponents.<sup>49</sup> When the Margrave Albrecht Alcibiades of Brandenburg and his armies occupied the city of Mainz temporarily in 1552, Johann Wild had been the single Catholic male cleric to remain. His reputation as an evangelical preacher was such that Albrecht refrained from plundering the Franciscan friary and asked Wild (in vain) to become a chaplain in his army.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout this period – between ca. 1520 and the end of the Council of Trent – Catholic Observant preaching apparently retained much of its earlier variety. As with earlier periods, we have to guard against sweeping statements about the main direction of the development of Catholic homiletic style towards a type of learned oratory, as current and later theoretical preaching handbooks seem to suggest, and as has been repeated by modern scholarship, most of which focuses on a small number of famous (court) preachers, or extrapolates from the preaching guidelines of post-Tridentine reform bishops such as Carlo Borromeo.<sup>51</sup> A proper verdict can only be given after a diligent

48 See on these and other former colleagues and later adversaries J. Schlageter, “Humanistische Polemik gegen den Franziskaner Augustin von Alvelde zu Beginn der Reformation,” *Wissenschaft & Weisheit* 69 (2006): 230–64.

49 See on these preachers for instance Frymire, *The Primacy*, 101–33. See also Jon Derek Halvorson, *Religio and Reformation: Johannes Justus Lansperger, O.Cart. (1489/90–1539), and the Sixteenth-Century Religious Question* (Chicago: 2008).

50 Frymire, *The Primacy*, 146.

51 Aside from the work of Emily Michelson mentioned previously, see also Christian Mouchel, *Rome franciscaine: essai sur l'histoire de l'éloquence dans l'Ordre des Frères*

analysis of the sermons of many preachers, and not only the most learned and famous ones, those that became well-known for their homilies at the Council of Trent or the papal curia and were hailed by learned contemporaries.

A general change took place with regard to the use of theological authorities in the face of the challenges of early Protestantism. This frequently meant a relative decline in the use of medieval scholastic authorities in favor of biblical and patristic references. Catholic preachers were well aware that they had to provide a convincing answer to the Lutheran doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Hence Catholic postilators and authors of other sermon collections became more concerned with presenting ample biblical proof for their doctrinal statements.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, there was a tendency to draw examples and analogies more consistently from the biblical text, to the detriment of examples and stories derived from non-biblical sources. This was certainly the case in the postils properly speaking, which from the start had a more basic exegetical character than some of the other model sermon collections. Still, analogies and emblemata taken from the book of nature remained popular (and this also happened within the Protestant world). Under the impact of humanist and Protestant criticism, popular Catholic preaching might have lost some of its entertainment character in favor of more sober and earnest forms of exposition.<sup>53</sup> Beyond that, popular books with moral stories and edificatory jests that previously had functioned as *praedicabilia* to provide preachers with suitable and lively illustrative examples continued to have a life in the Catholic (and Protestant) republic of letters independent from their original homiletic context.<sup>54</sup>

The re-orientation towards a more careful biblical anchoring of the homiletic message would also explain why many Catholic model sermon bestsellers

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*Mineurs au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance, Série 3 (Paris: 2001). The most insightful analysis of Borromeo's guidelines and their relation with prior guidelines and preaching handbooks still is Delcorno, "Dal «sermo modernus» alla retorica «borromea»" mentioned previously.

52 Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ*, 74–77.

53 Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ*, 195–98.

54 The most famous example in this regard concerns *Schimpf und Ernst*, the 1521 masterpiece of the (Conventual but observantist) Franciscan friar Johannes Pauli, which also received a reading public among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestants. Yumiko Takahashi, *Die Komik der Schimpf-Exempel von Johannes Pauli: eine textpragmatische Analyse frühneuhochochdeutscher Predigerzählungen* (Freiburg: 1994); Albrecht Classen, "Die deutsche Predigtliteratur des Spätmittelalters und der Frühneuzeit im Kontext der europäischen Erzähltradition: Johannes Paulis *Schimpf und Ernst* (1521) als Rezeptionsmedium," *Fabula* 44:3–4 (2003): 209–36.

from earlier periods (the *Dormi secure*, the *Biga salutis*, and other collections from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century) gradually fell out of favor. It is unclear, however, whether this held true for Europe as a whole. As with many other matters, impressions like these, taken from regional surveys of imprints and library collections, need further corroboration.

Due to a relative lack of in-depth analyses of Catholic sermons across the board, it remains difficult to come up with a satisfactory typology of preaching styles during this period. This would require comparisons between surviving collections from different Observant homiletic practitioners and their Theatine, early Jesuit, and Capuchin contemporaries. The last-mentioned of these had an early homiletic luminary in the previously mentioned Bernardino Ochino, who was celebrated as a new Bernardino of Siena before his disastrous fall from grace and flight towards Calvinist Geneva in 1542, which for a while threatened to discredit the young Capuchin order as a whole. During his years as celebrated Capuchin preacher, Ochino might have been somewhat of an anomaly among his down-to-earth and anti-intellectual early Capuchin confreres. However, any verdict on these matters calls for much additional research.<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion

Much of what has been said in this essay is of a tentative nature, due to a relative neglect of the available sources, and due to ingrained narratives that have hampered proper scholarly engagement with Observant Catholic preaching during the first half of the sixteenth century. Thanks to the accelerating digitization of early modern imprints, however, many Catholic sermon collections and works of religious instruction are now accessible in ways undreamt of before, and there is no longer any excuse for passing over the available evidence. If we can begin to see that much of the humanist and early Protestant invective against the failures or the absence of Catholic preaching and religious

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55 The most widely available studies on early Capuchin preaching are still standing in older traditions of order historiography, and have to be handled with care: B. von Mehr, "De historia praedicationis, praesertim in Ordine fratrum minorum Capuccinorum, scientifica pervestigatio," *Collectanea franciscana* 11 (1941): 373–422 & 12 (1942): 5–40; Arsenio da Ascoli, *La predicazione dei cappuccini nel Cinquecento in Italia* (Loreto: 1956), esp. 132. The 1536 Capuchin constitutions urged the friars to limit themselves "al nudo e humil crucifixo terse, phallerate et fucate parole, ma nude, pure, semplice humile et basse, niente di meno divine, infocate et piene d'amore."

instruction was a product of polemic and self-positioning, a broad new field of research will open up.

Research in that field will change our image of the nature of Catholic indoctrination of the faithful, and will probably also change our ideas about the religious and theological literacy of the Catholic laity in general. This research will also allow us to move beyond the statements about ideal types of sixteenth-century preaching found in the humanist preaching manuals of Erasmus and others. In addition, it will facilitate a more careful evaluation of the legacy of Observant preaching and the project of Observant reforms during the long fifteenth century. Finally, it will allow us to judge more properly, and in a comparative fashion, the changes within Catholic teaching and approaches towards it before and after the Council of Trent.