INTRODUCTION

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The theme of this volume is the promotion of the sensuous as a part of religious experience in the Roman Catholic Church of the early modern period. Here "sensuous" refers to the dictionary definition of the term: of, related to, or derived from the senses, usually the senses involved in aesthetic enjoyment. "Sensual" usually applies to the physical senses or appetites, particularly those associated with sexual pleasure. We have not excluded the sensual – indeed, Bette Talvacchia's essay deals explicitly with this area and others refer to it – but it is not our primary focus.

The origin of this book is two sessions at the 2007 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, entitled "The Counter-Reformation Re-encountered."[1] By design, the sessions offered a range of perspectives: the presenters included historians and art historians, and the commentator, John O'Malley, is the leading historian today working on religion in the Renaissance. We all noted that the papers had, as a common thread, the role of the senses. It was apparent that classic formulations were being questioned by each of the authors, and this indicated that the time is right for a reassessment of the Counter-Reformation.[2]

Erasmus initiated the debate that developed between Protestants and Catholics over the role of the senses at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when he called for reform from within the Church. He described, and roundly condemned, the material cult of the veneration of relics and images that he saw all around him: lavish ceremonies displaying the wealth of the Church and superstitious practices, such as prostrating oneself before the statues of saints. Erasmus influenced Martin Luther in his formulation of *sola scriptura* and his rejection of good works as a means of salvation, including the patronage of churches, chapels, and monasteries. Reformed churches were whitewashed, stripped of images and of ornament. Although Luther eventually permitted didactic altarpieces, Calvin sternly prohibited them and eliminated all pomp and ceremony from the

liturgy, with the intent that worshippers would have nothing to distract them from receiving the Word of God and pondering it with their mental faculties. Appeal to the senses was to be avoided because it created an emotional dependency on the Church, which Protestants regarded as an illegitimate hold over the faithful.

The definitive response from the Catholic side came from Alberto Pio, who bundled Erasmus together with the Protestant Reformers and proclaimed that joy must accompany every form of the divine cult.[3] The senses are necessary, according to Pio, to ascend to sublime things, and they derive from the Holy Spirit. The lines were drawn. In the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551) the doctrine of Transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements, rejected by most Protestants, was reaffirmed, together with the practice of carrying the Host in procession. When the Council finally pronounced the Church's position on sacred images (1563), it endorsed them, saying that "great benefits flowed from all sacred images" and that by them "the faithful should be aroused to adore and love God and to practice devotion."[4]

The role of the senses had always been recognized in the writings of the Church, and that written tradition played an important part in the arguments put forward against the Protestant Reformers.[5] The apologists for images in fact argued for the superiority of the senses over reason in promoting devotion. Alberto Pio, responding to Erasmus, had declared that all spiritual reality is transmitted to the mind by the senses, and Ambrogio Caterino echoed him.[6] Catholics recognized that emotion was a tool that Protestants had renounced and that it could therefore be used effectively to woo the lapsed back to the Catholic fold.[7] Images were an important part of the whole arsenal that included relics, liturgy, processions, music, and theater. Protestants held that reason, not emotion, should be the basis of religious experience. Both sides recognized the unconscious power images wield over thought and behavior, but for Catholics this was an indispensable bond that strengthened believers' relationship to God and tied them to the Church. The reassertion of this tradition of honoring the appeal to the emotions vitalized the reform after Trent, as the essays in this volume will show. In this introduction, some of the revisions and trends in current scholarship of both historians and art historians of the post-Tridentine era will be discussed, in particular with regard to the role of the senses.

The view of the Counter-Reformation held by historians until the past quarter-century has been summarized powerfully by John O'Malley:

> Serious historians of Christianity of the early modern period had until recently little interest in Catholicism as a subject of research. The Renaissance, they believed, was theologically vacuous, only superficially Christian, and the so-called Counter-Reformation was a restoration of the worst aspects of the Middle Ages, interesting only insofar as it threw light on the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was modern, the

> Catholic Church remained medieval. To such historians even religious art of the latter period reflected the monolithic uniformity of Catholicism at large. It adhered slavishly to the dictates of ecclesiastical authority, which acted on the well known lines on sacred art from the Council of Trent, and it was programmed as a reaction to Protestantism.[8]

O'Malley goes on to point out, however, that since about 1985–90 Catholicism has held a new allure: the stepsister, though not yet Cinderella, has attracted the unbiased attention of a young generation of scholars, particularly in North America, who often do not have a Catholic background.[9]

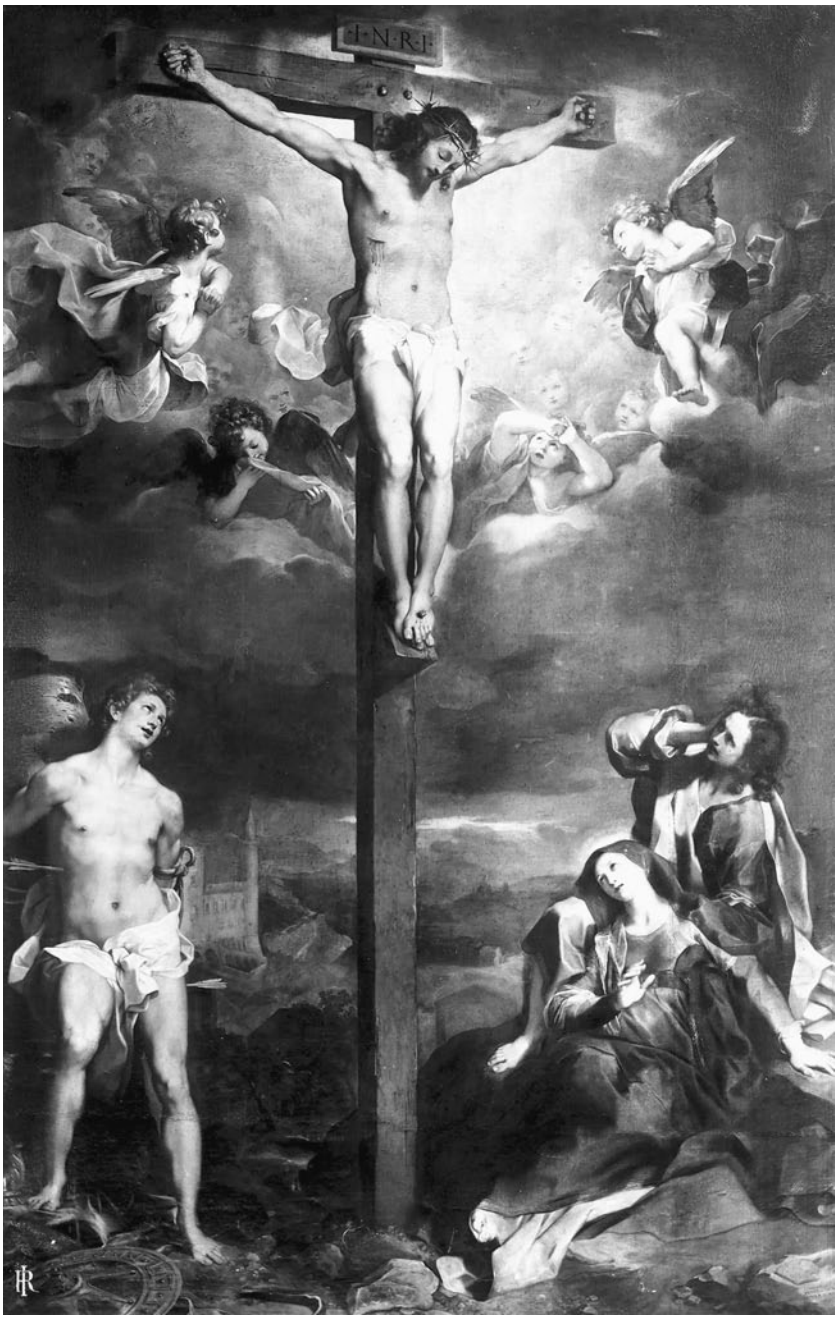
What I see as the single most important revision in this recent scholarship is the recognition that reform after Trent was not simply mandated by ecclesiastical authorities, then obediently and mindlessly implemented. Certainly there were efforts to impose conformity, but they collapsed, as for example in Carlo Borromeo's Archbishopric of Milan[10] – where they met with resistance from the civic authorities and barely survived beyond his death – or in the early days of the Jesuits. In 1558 the first General Congregation of the Order issued a ruling regarding the erection of houses (residences),[11] which was confirmed and enlarged on at the next meeting in 1565: "Jesuit structures should be neither lavish nor overly decorated, but should awaken the contemplation of poverty and built in the form and manner of our buildings." This is an unambiguous reference to an accepted Jesuit standard. All projects had to be examined by the Jesuit general and approved by him, after which no changes were permitted.[12] In the event, as the Society of Jesus spread geographically, it became impossible to exercise tight control and latitude was permitted.[13] It should be noted that the prohibition on decoration was not applied to churches. Jeffrey Chipps Smith shows in his essay just how lavish a Jesuit church might become by the seventeenth century.

In contrast to these efforts by Church authorities to dictate, a more typical procedure was exemplified by the project to renovate the churches in Florence.[14] In 1564, the year following the close of the Council of Trent, Duke Cosimo, on his own initiative, instituted reforms that transformed the Dominican and Franciscan churches, S. Maria Novella and S. Croce, into structures that privileged the laity as never before. The duke ordered that the rood screens, which blocked the view of the high altar from the laity's space, be removed and the friars' choirs be transferred from their elite position immediately in front of the high altar to the chancel behind it. Altars were constructed in each of the bays of the nave, and in S. Croce the subjects of the altarpieces were designed to follow a sequence of Christ's Passion, providing the laity with the opportunity to meditate on the narrative. The churches were thereby transformed: virtually all traces of the medieval hierarchical arrangement were eradicated,[15] and in accordance with the spirit of Trent, the churches were reoriented to the laywomen

and laymen. What is noteworthy is that there is no evidence that the ecclesiastical authorities were even consulted, to say nothing of their having dictated or directed the project, and that the artists enthusiastically endorsed it. This is in sharp contrast with the way Carlo Borromeo proceeded with church-building reform in Milan,[16] but the contrast highlights the error of regarding post-Tridentine reform as a monolithic, top-down movement imposed by the Church on arts and architecture.

Scholars are recognizing increasingly, then, that the process of reform after Trent was not in the main one of enforcement or of issuing directives from above; rather it was catalyzed by the initiative of patrons and artists who sought new solutions addressing concerns that had been raised. Of particular interest is the development in recent Counter-Reformation scholarship of the concept of "negotiation." It is a kind of "counter-category," as O'Malley has dubbed it, to "social discipline," by which historians meant the imposition of standards of social behavior from above.[17] "Negotiation" points to responses of resistance and compromise to those efforts to impose standards. Such negotiating has been shown to take place at all levels: "between bishops and Rome, between pastors and bishops on the one hand and their flocks on the other, and between accused and inquisitors."[18] From the vantage point of art history, negotiation is proving to be an important key to interpretation. In fact, it can enable us to see through to what was really going on behind the official documents. A case in point is the infamous encounter between Paolo Veronese and the Venetian Inquisition over his decoration for the refectory of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. The study of it has normally been interpreted to fall in the category of social disciplining rather than negotiation: it is traditionally cited as the most egregious instance of the ecclesiastical authorities intervening between the artist and his church patrons. The case has been useful to scholars trying to understand the new norms for painting in the post-Tridentine period, because the court records of Veronese's interrogation have survived and show specifically what the concerns of the Inquisition were.[19] However, the compromise that concluded the case is not documented and is therefore generally overlooked by scholars. The painting was not destroyed; the painter was not punished. We can deduce from the present state of the painting, to which an inscription identifying the scriptural passage on which it is based was added, that all parties reached an agreement simply to change the subject from the Last Supper to the sacramentally neutral Feast in the House of Levi. The alternative view of this notorious case, informed by the new interpretive tool, is that when the Inquisition flexed its muscle to demonstrate that it could and would exercise oversight, both the patrons and the painter were able to negotiate a compromise. It is significant that this is the only recorded case of such intervention by the Venetian Inquisition that we know of.

Another example of negotiation was the system that evolved in the 1580s whereby the painter was required to present a drawing to the church



1. Federico Barocci, *Crucifixion with the Madonna and St. John and St. Sebastian*, 1596. Genoa, cathedral. Photo: Alinari / Art Resource, NY.

before executing an altarpiece. A documented early instance is that of the Oratorians requiring Scipione Pulzone to send a *cartone* of his *Crucifixion* to allow the fathers to assess it in situ.[20] This became required practice in 1593 when Cardinal Vicario Girolamo Rusticucci issued an edict that artists should submit a *bozzetto* for prior approval by ecclesiastical authorities.[21] Although an undeniable aspect of social disciplining is implied, the

mechanism set up a situation in which negotiation between artist and patron could take place in advance to avoid any need for censure or rejection of the finished altarpiece.

In fact, enforcement of the decree was local, sporadic, and underfunded. Studies show that concern in the parishes centered more on the leaking roof than on the questionable decorum of the pictures.[22] Opher Mansour's essay on Clement VIII's visitation of the churches in his Diocese of Rome shows that although the pope had the power to effect reform, his efforts were often ineffective. Both patrons and artists sought new solutions for the sacred image, recognizing that the *maniera* paintings of the pre-Trent period did not provide satisfactory images to stir the worshipper's devotion.[23] The appeal to the emotions of the new sacred images that artists like Federico Barocci were striving for clearly struck a chord with patrons, if one can judge from the letter from Doge Senarega praising the *Crucifixion with the Madonna and St. John and St. Sebastian* that Barocci had executed for the Genoa cathedral (1596, Illustration 1).[24] He calls it "something divine," "beyond the reach of human praise." Senarega makes clear that it evoked in him deep emotions. "The Virgin arouses pity and consoles, and it seems precisely that her divine spirit, penetrating the wounds of Christ, enter into them to discover whether she is to be transfixed by the death of her beloved son or rather regenerated by the redemption of humankind." In attempting to describe its affect, he says that "it enraptures, tears asunder, and gently transforms us." Though the rhetoric may seem over the top to us, and therefore suspect, it signals a level of emotional involvement with the image that was desired and that would not have been possible with pre-Trent *maniera* sacred images.

LITERATURE ON ART OF THE POST-TRIDENTINE ERA

The literature on art of the post-Tridentine era has its own history. There is a noticeable lack of attention to the effects of the Tridentine decree in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, although the controversy surrounding the Jesuits had an impact on the way art was regarded, as we shall see. A few treatises continued to appear after the flurry culminating in Gabrielle Paleotti's *Discorso* in 1582,[25] most notably that of Giovan Domenico Ottonelli and Pietro da Cortona,[26] examined here in Maria H. Loh's essay, but writers about art, like Baldinucci, Malvasia, Bellori, and less well known local historians, followed the model of Vasari's biographies. Even Luigi Lanzi, who was trained as a Jesuit priest, wrote his *Storia Pittorica dell'Italia* without giving special attention to the genre of sacred images (1792–96). Although Lanzi depended heavily on Raffaello Borghini (1584)[27] in describing the altarpieces in Florentine churches, he largely ignored Borghini's critique from the point of view of Trent, mildly

objecting in passing to Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* (see Illustration 18) because the naked figure was better suited to an academy of design than to a church, a paraphrase of Borghini.[28] Stuart Lingo's essay in our volume examines Borghini's treatise in the light of the Florentine context.

The term "Counter-Reformation," which originated in 1776 in the plural usage of Johann Stephan Pütter (*Gegenreformations*), had been used by the historian Leopold von Ranke (1843), but he did not discuss art. The subject did not reenter the literature until Charles Dejob published *De l'influence du Concile de Trente sur la littérature et les beaux-arts chez les peuples catholiques: essai d'introductionà l'histoire littéraire du siècle de Louis XIV* in 1884.[29] Even after its publication, post-Tridentine sacred art was not separated out in the literature and would be discussed under the rubric of mannerism or late Renaissance art, that is, categorized by style rather than subject.

Certainly the appearance of Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux après le Concile de Trente, étude sur l'iconographie de la fin du XVI^e^, du XVII^e^ et du XVIII^e^ siècles en Italie, en France, en Espagne et en Flandre* (1932), drew attention to new iconography, although most of Mâle's examples were drawn from the seventeenth century.[30] His choices were no doubt circumscribed by the scarcity of photographs of works from the late sixteenth century – a situation that has not been fully remedied to this day – so that he did not adequately discuss the last third of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Mâle opened up the topic of Catholic ideology, showing how Trent's endorsement of the didactic function of sacred images came to be interpreted as a mandate to defend doctrines attacked by Protestants. Thus, we find, for example, the Virgin Mary the subject of increased devotion, and the cult of saints, especially martyrdoms, represented with a new fervor. Iconography that promoted the position of the Church is territory that continues to be mined to great effect in scholarship, for example, the colossal exhibition on art at the time of Sixtus V[31] and recent studies of iconographical programs of the Church. Not only iconographical innovation in individual images or programs, but entire genres, such as landscape and still life, emerged as new objects for devotional consideration after Trent and have received recent study by scholars such as Pamela M. Jones, whose *Federico Borromeo and the Ambrosiana: Art Patronage and Reform in Seventeenth-Century Milan* has provided a firm foundation for contextualizing preferences in patronage and collecting.[32]

The first book to focus on the *style* of Counter-Reformation painting in Italy was Federico Zeri's *Pittura e Controriforma. "L'arte senza tempo" di Scipione da Gaeta* (1957).[33] He characterized Scipione Pulzone as the quintessential painter of post-Tridentine sacred art, finding in his work a manner that removed the image from the immediacy of setting or moment, creating what Zeri called a timeless quality. For Zeri, the period was the beginning of the drying up of religious art that has continued to our own time. Although he showed insight in recognizing that Trent inaugurated a

new era, he had no sympathy for it; the painters he selected to epitomize it gave Counter-Reformation art a bad name among connoisseurs. In fact, contrary to Zeri's premise, it is difficult to pick out any artist who is exemplary of this period. Gauvin Bailey has pointed out that "[i]n the decades before 1600 a greater variety of styles was being used than ever before in the history of Central Italian painting, as each artist went in his own direction to reformulate the rules of *arte sacra*."[34] In the English-speaking world, Zeri's first impact was on Sydney Freedberg, who applied his term "Counter-Maniera" to painting in relevant cases across the Italian peninsula.[35] In the 1980s, perhaps inspired by the reprinting of Paolo Prodi's important essay from 1962, "Ricerca sulla teorica delle arti figurative nella Riforma Cattolica,"[36] Italian scholars Alessandro Zuccaro and Claudio Strinati, among others, began turning their attention to the problem of style in post-Tridentine painters.[37]

A different approach proved more fertile. In 1940 Rensselaer Lee turned attention to the contemporary sources and the ways they addressed style in "*Ut pictura poesis*: The Humanistic Theory of Painting."[38] His study, particularly of Gilio, would sire a series of investigations of the application of the classical rhetorical principle of decorum in post-Tridentine art. Following Lee, Charles Dempsey recognized that decorum was a key to understanding how artists translated the decree into art and, conversely, how their art would be judged.[39] Robert W. Gaston's essay in our volume shows that the interpretation of decorum was as varied as the artists themselves, and thus contributes to our understanding of the diversity of the period.

Around 1960, publications of the sources began to appear, most notably that by Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma*. The translation and analysis of *Charles Borromeo's "Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiaticae," 1577*, by Evelyn Carole Voelker, added significantly to our understanding of the social-disciplining side of the reform.[40] Especially valuable are Giuseppe Scavizzi's analyses of sources in his various publications, first in Italian and culminating in *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius* (1992).[41]

Two decades previously, Anthony Blunt's influential summary of sources, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1660* (1940), first appeared, but it is misleading in its characterization of the spirit of the reform after Trent. Blunt's book has been a principal source disseminating the view of the Counter-Reformation as a top-down organization. He characterized the Counter-Reformers as diametrically opposed to the humanists: "It was their aim to undo all that the Renaissance had achieved, and to get back to a feudal and medieval state of affairs.... One of the first objects of the Counter-Reformers was to abolish the right of the individual to settle all the problems of thought or conscience according to the judgement of his own personal reason. They wished instead to set up the acceptance of authority, which was exactly the principle the Humanists had succeeded in destroying."[42]

Francis Haskell laid the broad foundation for studying systems of patronage in his book *Patrons and Painters* (1963), which was revised and enlarged in 1980, indicating its ongoing impact. It has spawned a large number of useful studies of papal and cardinalate patronage, including those on collections and collectors, and programs of architectural renovation and decoration.[43] Christian Adolf Isermeyer did some early work in this latter area, followed by Hall's study of the Florentine Mendicant Church renovations already mentioned.[44] Enlarging the field of Mâle's original investigation of persuasive imagery was the influential work of Joseph Connors, *Borromini and the Roman Oratory: Style and Society*.[45] Beginning in the 1990s, students of Connors and Irving Lavin began the systematic study of iconographical programs of the late Renaissance and baroque – for example, Jack Freiberg, *The Lateran in 1600: Christian Concord in Counter-Reformation Rome* (1995). The Cambridge series Monuments of Papal Rome, edited by Connors and Lavin, included Steven Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (1996); Louise Rice, *The Altars and Altarpieces of New St. Peter's: Outfitting the Basilica, 1621–1666* (1997); and Nicola Courtright, *The Papacy and the Art of Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Gregory XIII's Tower of the Winds* (2004). In each case the author has shown how the subject matter of the decorative program and architectural decisions were shaped by the concerns of the Church. Taking the opposite viewpoint, that of the laity, Pamela Jones, who has authored several important studies of Counter-Reformation art and culture, offered in 2008 a study of the reception of altarpieces in Rome by contemporaries, providing us with a multivalent perspective on the outcome of such programs.[46]

THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

The association of Counter-Reformation art with "propaganda," that is, missionizing, however, reinforced a mistrust of it born of suspicion of the Jesuits.[47] The historiography of the Society of Jesus is an important chapter in the story of how the art of the post-Tridentine era has been regarded and deserves closer attention here. Because the Jesuits, unlike the other Orders, vowed to go on missions when ordered by the pope, which has been interpreted as an oath of loyalty to the pope, and because they grew rapidly and spread their mission not only across Europe but also around the world, their power made them increasingly an object of hostility. When the Jesuits fell into disfavor, culminating in the suppression of the Society in 1773, two aspects of their method came under suspicion. The first was their centralized and uniform approach, which suggested that all orders came from the top down. To the extent that the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation were regarded as synonymous, the perception grew that the ecclesiastical authorities dictated initiatives

for reform after Trent, which we have seen is a view only now receding. The second aspect was the Society's endorsement of the appeal to the senses as an especially effective way to stimulate devotion in the faithful; this fostered the suspicion that the Jesuits intended to subvert reason, to conquer the mind and the spirit "through visual intoxication" (phrase borrowed from Galassi Paluzzi).[48] In the age of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, this was a deeply sinister threat. It is in this context that one of the tasks of scholars interpreting the Counter-Reformation today is to reconstruct accurately and without prejudice the role of the senses and the emotions.

From the very start, the Society promoted the use of sacred images in devotion and encouraged an appeal to the senses. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* provided a model for the way the senses can be invoked to draw the participant into meditation.[49] Ignatius instructs the exercitant to concentrate all his senses and focus his imagination on the subject selected for the day's meditation, for example, hell. He is then instructed to see in his mind's eye the "composition," the place; then to feel it – the heat of hell's fire; then to hear it – the shrieks of the tortured damned, and so on through the senses.[50] A similar direct appeal to the senses characterized the worship experience in a Jesuit church.

It is useful to take a look at the Jesuits' adaptation of theater in order to gain insight into their methods because theater works the way liturgy does, appealing to the emotions through the senses. Professional theater was developing simultaneously with the founding and early years of the Society in the mid-Cinquecento. Recognizing the power of theater to change people, the Jesuits recognized as well the competition professional theater offered in the education and care of souls.[51] Theater educates, either for bad or for good, so they developed their own theater, making use of all the devices and techniques of professionals, but instead of educating their audiences in the vices – teaching how to lust after potential lovers, how to cuckold husbands, how to undermine the authority of masters, how to indulge the basest longings of the flesh – they taught them how to live virtuously in a world created and ordered by God.[52] The reason they were successful is that they in no way avoided sensuousness. Their spectacle competed with, and even surpassed, anything secular professionals had to offer.[53] "Jesuit dramaturgy operates in a thoroughly incarnational way: transcendence is achieved through the physical, through the word-made-flesh," in Michael Zampelli's words.[54]

Contrast this with Carlo Borromeo, who with puritanical zeal forbade comedy and dance in his Diocese of Milan. He objected to performances that competed with liturgical celebrations, disrupted holy days, indulged the imagination to no useful – that is, religious – purpose, and literally wasted time.[55] Although he temporarily persuaded Gregory XIII to his position, his victory was short-lived. Immediately following both their deaths, Gregory's successor, Sixtus V, permitted theatrical performances,