

SCIENTIAE STUDIES



Edited by Andreea Badea, Bruno Boute,  
Marco Cavarzere and Steven Vanden Broecke

# Making Truth in Early Modern Catholicism

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# Scientiae Studies

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*Edited by*  
*Andreea Badea,*  
*Bruno Boute,*  
*Marco Cavarzere, and*  
*Steven Vanden Broecke*

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# Table of Contents

A Product's Glamour. Credibility, or the Manufacture and Administration of Truth in Early Modern Catholicism	7
<i>Bruno Boute, Andreea Badea, Marco Cavarzere, and Steven Vanden Broecke</i>	

## Part I Accommodating

1. Scholastic Approaches to Reasonable Disagreement	41
<i>Rudolf Schuessler</i>	
2. Regulating the Credibility of Non-Christians: Oaths on False Gods and Seventeenth-Century Casuistry	63
<i>Marco Cavarzere</i>	
3. How to Be a Catholic Copernican in the Spanish Netherlands	85
<i>Steven Vanden Broecke</i>	
4. Appearance and Essence: Speaking the Truth about the Body in the Early Modern Catholic Church	111
<i>Brendan Röder</i>	

## Part II Performing

5. Saving Truth: Roman Censorship and Catholic Pluralization in the Confessionals of the Habsburg Netherlands, 1682–1686	135
<i>Bruno Boute</i>	
6. The Production of Truth in the Manufacture of Saints. Procedures, Credibility and Patronage in Early Modern Processes of Canonization	165
<i>Birgit Emich</i>	



7. Credibility of the Past: Writing and Censoring History within  
Seventeenth-Century Catholicism 191  
*Andreea Badea*
8. Heresy and Error in the Assessment of Modern Philosophical  
Psychology 211  
*Leen Spruit*
9. Modern Philosophy and Ancient Heresies: New Wine in Old  
Bottles? 237  
*Maria Pia Donato*

### Part III Embedding

10. “Experiences Are Not Successful Accompaniments to  
Knowledge of the Truth”: The Trial of the Atheists in Late  
Seventeenth-Century Naples 263  
*Vittoria Fiorelli*
11. Choosing Information, Selecting Truth: The Roman  
Congregations, the Benedictine Declaration, and the  
Establishment of Religious Plurality 279  
*Cecilia Cristellon*
12. Disciplining the Sciences in Conflict Zones: Pre-Classical  
Mechanics between the Sovereign State and the Reformed  
Catholic Religion 305  
*Rivka Feldhay*
- Index 331



# A Product's Glamour. Credibility, or the Manufacture and Administration of Truth in Early Modern Catholicism

*Bruno Boute, Andreea Badea, Marco Cavarzere, and Steven Vanden Broecke*

## Abstract

This chapter furnishes the reader with a vademecum to the volume. It places uncertainty in the limelight as a key element for understanding confessional cultures and belief systems, and shows how early modern Catholicism struggled to find practical strategies for marrying deep-seated uncertainties with its aim of operationalizing an absolute and revealed truth. Inspired by Michel de Certeau and Bruno Latour, among others, this introduction argues that a methodological transfer between science studies, history of knowledge, and religious history offers a toolkit to reconstruct the credibility of past beliefs. It introduces the volume's focus on the myriad of connected laboratories and work floors of early modern Catholicism, and on the untainted emergence of a universal truth from such a multifarious activity. This praxeological approach is illustrated in the subsequent survey of this volume's sections and chapters.

**Keywords:** science studies, praxeology, history of uncertainty, early modern Catholicism, Michel de Certeau, Bruno Latour

Is truth 'out there'? The proposition has lost much of its evidence. The premise that 'facts are sacred' is under pressure from fake news, alternative facts, and scepticism about official science. Conversely, fingers are wagged at a postmodern relativism that is allegedly seeping into scientific research, particularly in the humanities, before intoxicating public debate

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in general.<sup>1</sup> Historians, too, are eminently vulnerable to these accusations: the fluid, tangled realities and truths from the past often fail to meet the test of objectivity or ‘out-thereness’.<sup>2</sup> And yet, history of science and science studies have also argued that both this eminently Western approach to the ‘out-thereness of truth’, and the alternative notion that ‘anything goes’, are rooted in a misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge-making and, more broadly, in a ‘Euro-American’ ontology that is as local as anything.<sup>3</sup> It is only inside this ontology, the argument goes, that the sacrality of facts and the ‘out-thereness’ of truth appear to be in jeopardy as soon one observes that, following the Latin etymology of the word, *facta* are fabricated.

It may be more productive to approach the simultaneously sacral and manufactured nature of facts as a paradox rather than an unsolvable postmodern contradiction: a treasure trove to penetrate the *arcana* of truth and the way in which it functions within precarious interpretive communities. ‘We live in a world where—as Marx forcefully argued—a product’s glamour relies on the invisibility of its unglamorous (but often clamorous) production.’<sup>4</sup> So where does this approach leave truth? Inspired by this re-interpretation of Marx and by Bruno Latour, we would suggest that truth is the glamorous concept which Western communities have typically used to sign off and black box the enormous amount of costly and unglamorous work that goes into their epistemic practices. In order to take a salutary distance from this glamorous closing of the ranks and open up the ‘invisibility of its unglamorous production’, we have chosen to focus on ‘credibility’ instead. Within the ongoing process of circulation and appropriation of knowledge that actors of different sort incessantly carry out, ‘credibility’ stands for the (ascribed) ability of a knowledge proposition

1 Cf. the iconic counter-attack launched by Sokal and Bricmont, *Impostures intellectuelles*.

2 It is generally assumed that reality (1) does not only exist out there beyond ourselves but, *in addition*, in order to be objective, has to be: (2) independent of our actions and manipulations; (3) “given”, i.e. anterior to our discoveries or other actions; (4) definite, i.e., more or less specific, clear, certain, and definable, provided that the proper methods are used; (5) singular and homogeneous (instead of multiple and heterogeneous); and (6) stable, in the sense that it remains constant if not disturbed, rather than precarious and dependent on continuous maintenance. Cf. Law, *After Method*, 8–9.

3 The concept ‘Euro-American’ should therefore not be confused with ‘English-language’, ‘Northern European’, or ‘Protestant-centred’. In this volume, it merely denotes the above-mentioned set of assumed and functionalizing implications for the objectivity of truth/reality. Cf. Law, *After Method*, pp. 24–25. On the seeming incommensurability between ‘universal (scientific) knowledge’ and ‘local belief’ or the *pensée sauvage* vs. scientific rationality, see Vinck, *Sociologie des sciences*, pp. 99–102.

4 Highmore, *Michel de Certeau*, p. 3.



or a claimant to knowledge to act at a distance on others.<sup>5</sup> We use this concept precisely because it lacks the glamour, and hence much of the capacity for confusion, that epistemic tools like 'truth' have. It is far better suited to convey the social qualities of stability and reliability that slip into epistemic claims as the hard human work of epistemic standardizing and homogenizing has been carried out.

Obviously, one could always choose to further analyse credibility into its social, material, and cognitive functions, and much recent work in social epistemology has done exactly that.<sup>6</sup> Credibility involves trust, funding, career patterns, hermeneutical, and epistemological qualities like representativity, coherence, accuracy, methodological solidity, raw 'data', etc. In historical reality, however, these are difficult to disentangle. Data are social (as the need for representativity suggests) and trust is also generated by footnotes.<sup>7</sup> Anthropologists of modern 'big science', for instance, explain the accumulative entanglement of financing, data, rewards, and careers via the concept of a 'cycle of credibility' that blurs the lines between cognitive and social functions.<sup>8</sup>

Compared to big science, institutionalized religion lends itself more easily to such an approach: from a secular point of view, it involves deeply unglamorous, indeed incredible, 'beliefs' and 'doctrines'.<sup>9</sup> But there are also more solid reasons for transferring this approach to the historical study of religion. The apparent dilemma between the 'out-there-ness' of truth and the notion that 'anything goes', which has only begun to haunt students of science in the past 30 years or so, has been familiar to religious historians for a much longer time. Their field has long been populated, after all, by practitioners who either operated within the religious schemes they investigated, or else rejected these schemes altogether in favour of a secularist and culturalist understanding of religion from without.

This volume aims to contribute to the process of this broader methodological transfer between science studies and the history of religion. It, too,

5 On 'circulation' in the history of knowledge and the equivalent of 'transfer' and 'appropriation' in religious history, compare Brilkman, 'Confessional Knowledge' and Ditchfield, 'In Search of Local Knowledge'.

6 Cf. *The Routledge Handbook of Social Epistemology*; see also Rheinberger, *On Historicizing Epistemology*.

7 Cf. the inspiring insights in Callon, 'Some Elements'.

8 For a brief introduction see Latour and Woolgar, 'The Cycle of Credibility'; an inspiring application in Van Reybrouck, 'Boule's Error'.

9 From an anthropological point of view, see the chapter 'L'objet impossible' in Piette, *La religion de près*. Equally relevant are the historiographical debates in Clossey et al. and Clark et al., 'The Unbelieved and Historians'.



sets out from the assumption that the credibility of religious truth can be captured by reconstructing the unglamorous work floor where it was manufactured and administered by a multitude of historical actors. Seen from this historicist perspective, the glamour of the product *is* its credibility. More specifically, we do this by focusing on early modern Catholicism, and especially on the learned Catholicism of elites, which has an innumerable number of Pandora's boxes sitting on its archival shelves.

A number of immediate historical factors would seem to encourage our enterprise, even though these are not necessarily unique to early modern Catholicism. First, Catholicism took the principled existence of absolute truths as a regulative ideal for the authenticity and credibility of institutions. Conversely, the Church of Rome had no qualms to identify itself as the sole depository and guardian, in a millenary apostolic succession, of a revealed truth untainted by human politicking and manipulation. Second, Catholic engagement with absolute truth was a high-stakes issue because that truth was transformative. Teachers were shepherds who did not merely transmit pure truth, but also sought to effect purification to attain the salvation of their flock. Merging orthopraxy with orthodoxy, early modern Catholicism offers ample opportunities to study how *theoria* and personal *paideia*, knowledge/power and care of the self, epistemic techniques and anthropotechniques, intersected and connected.<sup>10</sup> An 'orthodoxic religion' in the anthropological sense,<sup>11</sup> this projected unity of the faith trickled down in the uniformity of religious practice and ultimately vented the unity of a monolithic Church Militant or, in scholarly terms, of Catholic confessional culture as such.<sup>12</sup> Third, it is hard to underestimate early modern Catholicism's success in projecting, even achieving, at least a workable semblance of transcendental order, to the extent that modern historians still privilege internal coherence and general trends as the markers of Catholic confessional culture and religious change. While the inertial force of scholarly traditions played an essential role in enhancing this forceful narrative in modern scholarship, it also taps inadvertently into the hard, daily work of zealous inquisitors, Church officials, and elites to keep internal plurality and fractures invisible, shady, or marginal.

Needless to say, our enterprise is not without precedent. First, the last two decades saw the emergence of studies focusing on the striking plurality

10 Despite our references to the later work of Michel Foucault, his own engagement with early modern Catholicism was rare. For an exception, see Foucault, *Les anormaux*, pp. 155–216. On anthropotechnique, see Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*.

11 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

12 See now Emich, 'Konfession und Kultur', and Maurer, *Konfessionskulturen*.



of early modern Catholicism(s) across the globe. This new orientation is somewhat related to, but should not be confused with, earlier claims for a *catholicisme au pluriel* that were rooted in a surreptitious privileging of ideology as the true engine of religious change. This privilege, for instance, explains the ongoing vitality of an older historiography focusing on the history of -isms (Baianism, Molinism, Jansenism, Gallicanism, etc.) where expressions of plurality are held to reflect local (but doctrinally coherent or 'pure') sub-catholicisms, national churches, or even 'counter-churches'. These were often staged as proverbial Davids struggling with a Roman Goliath on axes that distinguish pure or 'real' religion from *Realpolitik*, and sometimes even truth from error. But these are not the only available options for creating a salutary distance from Tridentine self-images. A precociously original alternative was contained in Michel de Certeau's essay on the formality of practice (1972). While discussing the same themes cherished by traditional historiography of church and theology, de Certeau offered a much more fractured vision of early modern religious change.<sup>13</sup> However, it is the turn of the twenty-first century that marked an increasingly sustained assault on the mainstream emphasis on doctrinal and institutional, or cultural and evolutionary, coherence in the study of early modern Catholicism.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the fractured nature of collectives (and their truths or beliefs) has become a central focus of research in the humanities in general. This focus draws, *inter alia*, on the post-Durkheimian anthropological insight that communities presenting themselves as solid, monolithic blocks prove no less heterogeneous, plural, or conflictual than avowedly pluralist collectives.<sup>15</sup> Early modern Catholicism, too, can be viewed as a precarious community of (somewhat regulated) conflict. The endless wrangling over what is true, and therefore worthy of defending, offers an opportunity to understand *how* communities of belief (including early modern global Catholicism) are held together through everyday practice. This volume seeks to demonstrate that this question should be privileged over the more mainstream question of *what* (structure or culture) holds collectives together *in principle*.<sup>16</sup> Such opportunities are not limited to the well-known confessional fractures dividing the Old Continent, or even to less familiar phenomena such as indifference and confessional ambiguity, or to the challenges springing

13 De Certeau, 'La formalité des pratiques'. For an (all too rare) attempt to engage de Certeau's approach, see the various essays in *Lire Michel de Certeau*.

14 Ditchfield, 'In Search of Local Knowledge'; Frijhoff, 'Foucault Reformed by Certeau'.

15 For an interesting take on Durkheim and post-Durkheimian reorientations of anthropology, see Arnaut, 'Making Space for Performativity'.

16 On this issue, see Latour, *Science en action*.



from intensified contacts with cultures overseas.<sup>17</sup> It is not just at the anomalous fringes that early modern actors can be caught displaying a seemingly *postmodern* awareness of deep-seated cognitive uncertainties, of the situational validity of moral, ceremonial, or liturgical codes, and of the fragility of political, social, and religious configurations. It is at the very core of their world that they built their cohesion through performative acts and instable negotiations.

In the past two decades, scholars have come to value uncertainty as an important key to seventeenth-century Catholicism.<sup>18</sup> Much research has demonstrated the rifts within the ‘streamlined machinery’ of the Society of Jesus, and has focused on the performativity of managerial practices moulding this ‘Jesuit cacophony’ into a single actor on a global stage.<sup>19</sup> In more traditional academic quarters the performativity of bureaucratic practices functionalized the elusive orthodoxy of a loose conglomerate of scholars into the hallmark of corporatist identity.<sup>20</sup> The transregional—transcontinental, even—governance of other religious orders in their (g)local entanglements also offers many clues. The field of missionary studies has benefitted from an emphasis on actors’ perspectives, combined with a focus on practices designed to generate trust and credibility. The resulting ‘local’ histories were then judiciously plugged into the global transfers shaping early modern Catholicism.<sup>21</sup>

This wealth of new scholarship has yielded at least three essential elements for the project of this book. First, historians of early modern Catholicism no longer merely indulge in deconstructing master narratives of past and present. Rather, they seek to understand how early modern Catholics could turn *their* truth-driven master narratives into a forceful and mobilizing referent for action, knowledge, and belief. This volume’s short answer is: through hard work by chains of actors addressing problems on the ground. To revisit the previous paragraph’s question of how to investigate inevitably fractured collectives: while epistemological, moral, or cognitive uncertainties prove(d) hard to tackle *in principle*, it is rewarding to follow early modern

17 On confessional ambiguity, see Ossa-Richardson, *A History of Ambiguity*, and the essays in *Konfessionelle Ambiguität*.

18 Tutino, *Uncertainty*; Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?*

19 Gay, *Jesuit Civil Wars*.

20 Quattrone, ‘Accounting for God’; Friedrich, *Der lange Arm Roms?*; Boute, *Academic Interests*.

21 On the incessantly growing literature about mission, see at least *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*; Amsler, *Jesuits and Matriarchs*; *Catholic Missionaries in Early Modern Asia*; Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*; Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*; Molnár, *Le Saint-Siège, Raguse et les missions catholiques*; Windler, *Missionare in Persien*; Županov, *Missionary Tropics*.



actors overcoming them, albeit with difficulty and at considerable cost, *in practice*. Practices and the credibility of their outcome, not ethereal ideas or concepts, constitute the central focus and the structure of this volume.<sup>22</sup> This connects back to de Certeau's aforementioned seminal essay on the formality of religious practices, which also advocated a deeply praxeological approach to credibility.

Second, it is clear that such a praxeological line of approach is profoundly interdisciplinary. Literary studies have highlighted the precarious yet effectively mobilizing authority of texts in interpretive communities which encompass social collectives as much as the reading strategies and hermeneutical practices that support this authority.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, historians of philosophy and of science have made it incontestably clear that practices of knowledge production, validation, and accreditation were tangled with the concomitant manufacture of a scholarly *persona*.<sup>24</sup> Sociology of science has emphasized the role of everyday practices of in- and exclusion for delineating and stabilizing fluid, competing, and/or coexisting communities and networks, following Gieryn's trailblazing article on boundary-work and Bourdieu's theory of practice.<sup>25</sup> A series of culturalist 'turns' have enabled scholars to show how spatial, ceremonial, and material arrangements—both at premodern and modern universities—are constitutive of academic authority and charisma.<sup>26</sup> It is in this context that bureaucratic or managerial practices (as in the aforementioned managerial practices of the Society of Jesus, or in the wielding of academic privilege) emerge no longer as mere footnotes to the so-called 'structures of science' supporting knowledge production. Latour's work on laboratory life, or Becker and Clark's on the bureaucratic 'little tools of knowledge', among others, has instead illuminated cognition and knowledge production from its material base. They show how the manufacturing of experts and data involved the agency of machines and cyborgs; the transformative operations of questionnaires, visitation reports, catalogues, charts, (wooden and paper) tables; and the spatial arrangements of laboratories, libraries, and lecture- and disputation-halls.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the

22 The study of practices regarding the early modern period has been greatly intensified in recent years; see *Die Praktiken der Gelehrsamkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit* and *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit*.

23 Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?*

24 Shapin, *Never Pure*; Paul, 'What Is a Scholarly Persona?'; Hunter, 'The History of Philosophy'.

25 Gieryn, 'Boundary-Work'; Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie*; see also *Was als wissenschaftlich gelten darf*.

26 Clark, *Academic Charisma*.

27 Latour, *Science en action*; *Little Tools of Knowledge*.



eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this learned culture was deeply tangled with the juridico-ecclesial regimes of knowledge production nurtured by medieval Christianity and early modern confessions.

Third, it is now clear that these realities, including fractures and cognitive uncertainties, were not restricted to the fringes of early modern Catholicism, but were equally present at its (self-declared) core. In the Eternal City, practices of institutional, religious, or geographical differentiation were often balanced—or unwound—by administrative, censorial, or executive practices which aimed at homologating, neutralizing, occluding, or deleting a limitless variety. Iconic protagonists of Catholic orthodoxy such as the Inquisition and the Congregation of the Index often enter the stage as censorial mediators and pacificators.<sup>28</sup> The striking pragmatism and ambiguity of Roman doctrinal, administrative, and legal governance in reaction to the supplications, reports, or denunciations from across the globe has also become a common thread in new studies on the Roman congregations of cardinals. Surprisingly, perhaps, heated conflicts involving existential doubts seldom resulted in strong Roman definitions. Curial institutions sought to navigate competing and mutually exclusive claims to tradition, truth, or pastoral relevance by managing, shelving, or bluntly ignoring them; by silencing litigants on the periphery; by ‘privatizing’ historiographical traditions or doctrinal controversies; and by catering to—or modifying—the honour codes that grounded the dynamics of learned polemics.<sup>29</sup>

All this reduces something of the surprise that Rome, the self-declared headquarter of Tridentine Catholicism, should paradoxically become a starting point for research into the plurality and the polycentric organization—cognitive and otherwise—of early modern Catholicism.<sup>30</sup> The latter features balance out the drive towards doctrinal and liturgical homogenization which historians have often emphasized as a mark of religious change. It should be remembered that the Church defined its canon negatively (i.e. by the exclusion of deviation). This left ample room for a dynamic pluralization, although within a highly authoritative, generalizing, and often punitive register, and in turn allowed Catholicism to ‘go global’, and Catholics worldwide to inhabit a timeless set of rules and institutions. The combination of Roman brinkmanship and the reactive style of early modern

28 Cavarzere, *La prassi della censura*.

29 Gierl, ‘The Triumph of Truth and Innocence’; Badea, ‘(Heiligen-)Geschichte als Streitfall’.

30 Emich, ‘Localizing Catholic Missions’. Together with Prof. Dr. D. Weltecke (Frankfurt), Birgit Emich directs a *Kollegforschergruppe* (2020–2024) funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft on the policentric and plural nature of premodern Christianities at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a.M., Germany.

governance grounded a post-Tridentine plurality, informed by attempts to appropriate and transfer the Council of Trent's image of an apostolic tradition to new circumstances, to different localities across the globe, by a multitude of actors servicing a wide range of programmes. Most notably, at least from a Roman point of view, all this had to happen without provoking a much-feared crisis about the infallibility of the papacy.<sup>31</sup> Pluralization, in the sense of a dynamic rather than a residual plurality, is the proverbial worm in the apple of the homogenization drive across confessional divides that historians have observed at the end of the previous century.

In the last few decades, this fluid understanding of plural cognitive systems and ditto interpretive communities has also substantially altered our comprehension of the coexistence or competition between (above all, Catholic) religion and science. Catholic confessional culture has proven more absorbing of the new epistemic ambitions of early modern science, as exemplified in the trajectory of Copernican cosmology, than is suggested by Galileo Galilei's iconic brushes with Roman censorship.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, scholars have reached a better understanding of the methodical engagement with uncertainty and duplicity that, via the epistemic innovations of probabilism (cf. below), early modern theologians increasingly showed in order to solve moral doubts and avoid *perplexitas*, or the inability to act.<sup>33</sup> Scholarship contains many similar approaches to the history of science that must equally deal with the problem of plurality and the coexistence of diverging assertions on the natural world. This furnishes additional arguments both for ditching the habitual Whig narrative of the relation between science and religion in terms of competition, conflict, and science's eventual victory, and for withdrawing an anti-modernist defence of religion, on three accounts. First, both science and religion were dependent on a previously generated, more or less easily transferable, institutional or charismatic credibility of spokesmen. Secondly, science and religion remained committed to the regulative principle of an absolute truth loaded with the above-mentioned Euro-American set of implications, and disposed of multiple practices to functionalize this principle. Finally, the contents or consequences of such absolute truths remained strikingly elusive, controversial, and disputed throughout much of the early modern period. These assessments warrant an emphatically *symmetrical* approach to the history of early modern expert communities, defying the modern gap between science and religion. What

31 *Das Konzil von Trient*.

32 Vanden Broecke, 'Copernicanism as a Religious Challenge'.

33 Tutino, *Uncertainty*, and lately Schuessler, *The Debate on Probable Opinions*.

is more, they also call for a symmetrical analysis of how practices created, stabilized, and articulated the credibility of both actors *and* contents, succeeding in establishing across ages and continents a Euro-American ontology with its requirements of purity.<sup>34</sup>

In order to further operationalize our praxeological approach, the different contributions to this volume have been assigned to three sections, respectively entitled ‘Accommodating’, ‘Performing’, and ‘Embedding’. Each of these sections illuminates one of three key ways in which early modern Catholics functionalized their notions of absolute truth (as well as their corresponding truth-driven master narratives). Theologians as well as historians, scientists, and other scholars managed to overcome the problems stemming from an elusive orthodoxy, an unsettling uncertainty, and blatant disagreements about the meaning of the faith’s central tenets by transforming truth into a mobilizing referent for (collective and individual) action and belief on the ground. We hope to demonstrate that the credibility of these narratives was largely constituted by such practices, which then often ‘went without saying’ as credibility itself gained an aura of self-evidence, in order to keep the work floor tidy and the ‘product’ both pure and purifying. Needless to say, these practices occasionally overlap, and our list could easily be expanded with other items, including equivocation, deletion, dissimulation, and modes of conflict, among others. The reader is invited to take this overall structure as a means of connecting the wide range of questions, themes, and methods in the following chapters to the general programme of this volume.

## 1. Accommodating

Our first section takes its title from one of the most notorious cultural practices of post-Tridentine Catholicism: the Jesuit policy of accommodating local and individual circumstances, as a matter of missionary method, with the translation of Catholic teachings and rituals into local philosophical and religious frameworks as one of the more spectacular examples.<sup>35</sup> The credibility (or, considering the thoroughly legal reflexes of the institutional Church, legitimacy) of accommodation was often premised on the assumption of an underlying ‘common humanity’ rooted in natural law, and hence

34 A plea for a symmetrical anthropology in Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

35 Regarding the divisions between ‘religious’ and ‘civic’ customs cf. Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*.



guaranteed by universalizing anthropologies. The chapters in the first section develop two main points about post-Tridentine accommodation practices. First, they illustrate that accommodation practices, and their foundations in humanist rhetoric and scholastic reasoning, were neither exclusive to the Jesuit order nor to a missionary context. Second, they raise questions about the connections between Roman doctrinal and ritual authority and the local beliefs and practices that it accommodated. As we saw it, the credibility of accommodation hinged on the assumption that a unified set of Roman teachings and rituals could be successfully translated and incarnated in a wide range of local beliefs and practices: in Europe and overseas; among ecclesiastical elites as well as among the *rustici, idiotae*, 'simple folks' and 'infirm'. Everywhere, the Church sought to protect its flock (with a firm hand, if necessary) from spiritual harm. This situation does not differ greatly from what we can see in the domain of early modern knowledge practices, which (in Bruno Latour's classic interpretation) also prioritized the task of mobilizing, translating, and accommodating local information into newly instituted master maps and centres of accumulation.

RUDOLF SCHUESSLER's introductory chapter on scholastic approaches to reasonable disagreement examines the backdrop to one of the most publicized and divisive controversies in the seventeenth century, raging both in Europe and overseas. As Schuessler convincingly argues, these resulted in the most sophisticated enterprise to regulate and accommodate reasonable disagreement prior to the recent return of the subject in modern analytical philosophy. Early modern Catholic scholars developed a conceptual and methodological toolkit to establish the tenability and assertability of conflicting, perhaps incompatible, yet 'probable' opinions among epistemic peers: opinions supported by reason and by expert authority that did not attain the epistemic quality of certainty or the status of official Church teachings. By maintaining less probable opinions in the fold of assertible opinions, early modern 'probabilists' broke with the 'probabiliorism' of medieval scholastics and expanded the number and scope of probable opinions in truth-searching procedures. This resulted in a reshuffling of the boundaries between the certain, the tenable, and the untenable. It should be noted that the Jesuits were iconic but hardly sole protagonists in this story, while missionary encounters offered but one among many triggers for the rise of probabilism. One of its main fields of application, casuistry, found practitioners in an expanding judicial system, but was also closely related to Catholic disciplining efforts through the confessional's tribunal of conscience. The latter happened in Europe (where anti-probabilism and

attacks on the ‘laxist’ effects of casuistry merged with anti-Jesuitism in the wake of Pascal’s *Provinciales*)<sup>36</sup> and overseas (where missionaries worked to translate local rituals of shame into Christian penance practices).

Casuistry, which acquired the trappings of a full-blown theological subdiscipline with separate chairs in many diocesan seminaries and in Jesuit colleges, among others, offered a recognized method of reasoning that, at the crossroads of law and theology, could forge a normative order in uncharted territories. Casuistic practical ethics ‘thought by cases’, in the sense that it organized everyday decision-making through piecemeal accommodation to codifications of specific circumstances of action, not to formalized abstractions of context-less normative behaviour.<sup>37</sup> MARCO CAVARZERE’S case study on the validity of oaths on false gods in transcultural commercial relations offers a penetrating view on this dimension of casuistry. The vast colonial trade empires were not solely built on coercion, but also on contractual agreements with non-Christian communities and rulers. These contracts continued to require mutual oaths for confirmation that, however, could no longer be legitimized by Aquinas’s concept of *fides*, a merger of ‘trust’ in contractual parties bound by ‘faith’ in the same God. In the newly globalizing world of commerce and Christendom—ranging from Dutch trading posts in Malaysia, over the Moluccan Islands and Portuguese factories in India, to Danish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Prussian outposts on the African Gold Coast—a stunning variety of practices existed, including Christian merchants and representatives of European trade companies choosing to participate in pagan rituals of oath-taking. Cavarzere shows that similar forms of accommodation should not be mistaken for an early form of modern toleration or an emerging religious relativism. That the age-old practice of commercial oath-taking did not collapse in similar transcultural encounters testifies to the fact that practical agreements continued to be premised on a single, yet elusive religious referent that committed contractual parties with bewilderingly different cosmologies to a readjusted ‘network of trust’. This connection was validated and functionalized in the casuistic treatment of local ‘cases’ by Jesuit authors such as Lessius and Suárez at the beginning and by Protestant authors at the end of the seventeenth century. Although Protestant concerns differed somewhat from their Catholic counterparts, this chapter illustrates how

36 Gay, *Morales en conflict*.

37 Compare with the use of aphorisms in early modern astrology, or the use of medical cases in early modern medicine. On the former, see Vanden Broecke, ‘Evidence and Conjecture’, on the latter, see Pomata, ‘Sharing Cases’.



casuistry emerged as a transconfessional normative toolkit to navigate the deep blue ocean, making a forceful case for comparative research across confessional boundaries.

Accommodation thus shaped a wide range of institutional and disciplinary practices capable of handling even hard cases of doctrinal incommensurability. The conflict between Scripture's literal meaning and the teachings of heliocentric cosmology offers an intriguing example. STEVEN VANDEN BROECKE's work on the Catholic astronomer Wendelinus (Govaert Wendelen, 1580–1667), based in the Habsburg Netherlands, fleshes out the apparent anomaly of ongoing Catholic engagement with Copernicanism after Galilei's condemnation by the Roman Congregations of the Index and the Holy Office in 1616–1633. Drawing on the empirical evidence that Wendelinus's scholarly networks included ecclesiastics and scholars (Fromondus and Caramuel, among others) involved in the local implementation of the Roman ban *against* heliocentrism, this chapter offers a nuanced view of how public Copernicanism remained a reality in Rome's North-Western bastion on the Catholic frontier. In line with this book's stated claims, Vanden Broecke shows how ecclesiastical dignitaries, university professors, and local astronomer-priests like Wendelinus all privileged the question of *how* (rather than *whether*) to be a public Copernican. Wendelinus's hermeneutical practices, around which his public *persona* was constructed, involved careful triangulation of astronomical demonstrations with consideration of the social and spiritual consequences of philosophical and astronomical assertions, and a carefully calibrated use of Scripture as a source of assertions on the natural world. These criteria inspired both trust and credibility about the 'legitimacy' of Wendelinus's Copernicanism. These premises support Vanden Broecke's conclusion that cosmological knowledge was not a top-down, non-negotiable product after the Galilei affair in the Habsburg Netherlands, and that the legitimacy of Copernican ideas did not solely depend on the protection of friends in high places, but rather on the Catholic Copernican's sharing of his audience's concerns and standards of epistemic decorum.

In these chapters, the social and spiritual consequences of assertions emerge as important considerations in the assessment by religious authorities of their validity, testifying to the efforts of learned and ecclesiastical elites to transmit truths that were both pure and purifying. In his magisterial *L'Erreur et son juge*, Bruno Neveu distinguished several categories ('perilous', 'scandalous', 'offensive towards pious ears', 'pernicious', etc.) within a long list of theological qualifications that Roman censors and theologians used in order to weigh the distance of propositions from Revelation and

Church-sanctioned matters of faith.<sup>38</sup> Through this careful taxonomy, Roman authorities outlined undesirable spiritual or social consequences as legitimate grounds for condemnation. BRENDAN RÖDER's work shows how this line of argumentation could be activated as the looming danger of scandal and social rift threatened the Church community. Röder ventures into the realm of bureaucratic decision-making by the Roman Congregation of the Council, focusing on the issue of possible canonical impediments to the sacerdotal status of clergymen who incurred bodily defects through disease or mutilation. This issue is documented in hundreds of petitions, submitted by clergymen wishing to be cleared of (accusations of) irregularity, and sheds intriguing light on the double truth regimes under scrutiny: on the one hand, that of the medical reports by surgeons and physicians penetrating visible signs (symptoms) of invisible essences (diseases) inaccessible to non-expert observers; on the other hand, the directly visible, non-medical, *prima facie* evidence of the clerical body, which often sparked scandal when seen by the wider community during the performance of sacerdotal functions. Scholarly attitudes towards non-expert views were largely shared by cardinals and their advisors (see below); medical experts' authority was seldom questioned; and medical reports continued to appear in great numbers in these files. Still, in case of dissonance, it is interesting to note that Roman decision-makers favoured disregarding medical opinions for the 'wisdom of crowds'. Expanding the analysis to other domains such as demonic possession and criminal offences committed by public officials, Röder discerns two modes of truth-finding, through uncovering hidden truths (the medical expert approach) and covering up visible evidence (the curial approach) respectively. However, he argues against privileging one truth regime as more 'modern' than its 'premodern' alternative, as both modes continue to underpin cognitive and governance practices in the present.

While illuminating how truth-driven master narratives could thrive not in spite of, but because of, accommodation, the chapters in this section raise some new problems. It is essential to ask to what extent the notion of a centralized master narrative that effectively accommodates local variety functioned as a regulative ideal authorizing practices, not as an actual object constructed and informed by such practices. In his recent *A History of Ambiguity*, Anthony Ossa-Richardson unearthed the long history of attempts to isolate the notion of an original and single authorial meaning that local interpretive practices seek to access. Interestingly, Ossa-Richardson also shows how post-Tridentine Catholic exegesis defended the view of scriptural

38 Neveu, *L'Erreur et son juge*.

passages having *multiple* literal meanings.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, this theoretical gesture problematizes—and potentially opposes—the very notion of a homogeneous master text that accommodates and integrates local variety. Several chapters in this section urge us to question the precise status and function of the Catholic ideal of an absolute truth accommodating the variety of the world. It would go too far to claim that these were entirely novel phenomena. At the very least, however, their proliferation in post-Tridentine Catholicism raises questions about our understanding of ‘accommodation’ as the translation and inscription of practices in pre-existing, separate truths. Instead, they point towards an alternative understanding of accommodation as the inscription of practices in a web of social relations of power: a web of relations between social actors that is *authorized* by the fiction of an absolute truth or literal meaning, and instantiated in the form of disciplined practices.<sup>40</sup> As de Certeau observed in his classic *La fable mystique* (1982), the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the sudden proliferation of such authorizing fictions, allowing the social practice of interpretation to continue in a world where the readability of divine will had become far less self-evident.<sup>41</sup>

Another way to look at the problem of whether or not master narratives are either singular or fictitious is offered by the Dutch physician and philosopher Annemarie Mol’s ‘praxiographic’ research into ontologies as they take form on a daily basis in late twentieth-century hospitals. Mol’s research reveals how, staying with Brendan Röder’s terminology, the essences accessed through a variety of practices (conversations with patients; different diagnostical tools applied in different departments of the same hospital; and a wide range of different treatments) multiplied, could contradict each other, and were occasionally coordinated between different departments while not (necessarily) aggregating into a *single* object to be inscribed in a single master narrative.<sup>42</sup> This opens up the possibility of a situational, practical, and multiple objectivity at the core of Euro-American knowledge cultures that otherwise tend to emphasize singularity and exclusivity as conditions

39 Ossa-Richardson, *A History of Ambiguity*, pp. 162–181.

40 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, pp. 248–249.

41 See De Certeau, *La fable mystique*, pp. 127–137. Likewise, the recent literature on the theme of secrecy in early modern science has called for a shift in attention from secrets to secrecy, from a strict focus on what is being circulated in knowledge societies to the way in which dynamic social relations are forged around secrets in the first place. Since ‘secrets are a social phenomenon’, the traditional focus on knowledge as the proper object of the history of science may thus be embedded in a broader study of social practices of belief and credibility, whose foundations resist an easy reduction in terms of economic value. See Vermeir and Margócsy, ‘States of Secrecy’, and, above all, Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy*, and Snyder, *Dissimulation*.

42 Mol, *The Body Multiple*.



for truthfulness. The chapters in the next section about performing, which equally has a situational ring to it, provide additional material for this discussion.

## 2. Performing

If the concept of an absolute truth functioned as a promissory note facilitating translation and accommodation across local claims, the second section focuses on the performances that visualized, confirmed, accredited, and situationally achieved the coveted unity or coherence of doctrine and practice, to the extent that this unity could indeed become a given fact. As suggested before, the performance of transcendental order and unity, doctrinal and otherwise, may well have been one of the post-Tridentine Church's most striking achievements. This assessment raises a number of issues. Performance can be understood as an improvising act, which plays on the *double entendre* of acting as doing or pretending to do something, and/or as an *enactment* of (this being Catholicism) an obliging and authoritative 'out there'. In line with Röder's findings in the previous section, staging Catholic unity and coherence of doctrine implied also that Catholic hierarchies and their expert advisors were actively involved in covering up disagreement and criticism on the public scene, through the proscription of books and/or the imposition of silence on warring scholars and scholarly or religious communities. Similar practices of dissimulation under the guise of authority underscore the performative dimension to censorship and (other) bureaucratic practices. The bulk of scholarship in the humanities accepts understanding performance in such a dramaturgical way, embracing the concept of theatre state enhanced by Clifford Geertz and other pathbreaking studies.<sup>43</sup> Still, given the fact that truth, in early modern Catholicism, was not only to be pure but also purifying, the possible meanings of performance should be expanded to include the possibility of (salutary) transformation of individuals and collectives. This entails that performance should also be considered in terms of real effects and achievements, the meaning generally attached to the concept in economics, accounting, engineering sciences, and to those tedious bibliometric evaluations modern universities force their scholars to undertake.

Rome loomed large in the previous section, but takes the centre stage here. The chapters in this section focus on curial approaches to themes

43 We refer first of all to the pioneering work by Geertz, *Negara*, and to the discussions stirred by this volume.

that range between the liturgical enactment and functionalization of Catholic orthodoxy in the sacrament of Penance; the double liturgical and scriptural registers in canonization procedures; hagiographical and historiographical debates in the context of inter-religious competition; and the challenges posed by 'novelties'—always a suspect category in theological speech—introduced by seventeenth-century natural philosophers. 'Saving Truth' by BRUNO BOUTE, focusing on the administration of the sacrament of penance, engages directly with the double connotation of truth with purity and purification. The analysis builds on a case study of Roman censorship procedures in the early 1680s that sought to manage a heated conflict in the Habsburg Low Countries over seemingly innocuous didactic prints. Common to these prints, some of which would be proscribed by the Holy Office, was a summary of Catholic doctrine in seven articles, cognition of which was deemed necessary for salvation. Venturing into the polarized religious (elite) culture of the Spanish Netherlands, Roman censorship documents as well as polemical writings reveal that didactic disputes were deeply entrenched in the acrimonious conflicts over the correct method of penance. As a pivotal tool in the sacramental offensive of early modern Catholicism, and as a central platform for the enactment of sacerdotal authority and hierarchy, confession was a privileged battleground in the 'rigorist' reaction against established pastoral practices. From the 1640s–1660s onwards, this reaction encompassed anti-Jesuitism, a rejection of probabilism, and a fierce counter-attack against 'laxist' casuistry. Faced with the question of whether penitents should know the tenets of the faith in the so-called 'seven articles' explicitly, Roman censors proved once more preoccupied with scandal and the souls lost to pastoral civil wars over sacramental methodology. To counter these, they effected a practical formalization of (sacramental) practice into a tangible sign and the substitute of an elusive orthodoxy, as observed by de Certeau. In other words, censorial practices saved truth from partisan recuperation in the confessional by banning controversial contents from public liturgical acts. As consequence, censorship functionalized saving truth as an obliging, yet speechless, referent, a mediator for the justified communion of the faithful in the Eucharist. In this way, censorship paradoxically operated a pluralization of practices and beliefs in subliminal spheres that were to be kept off the public stage.

BIRGIT EMICH investigates another liturgical black box with similar features: beatifications of the blessed and canonizations of saints, another phenomenon valued by historians as a central tool of early modern Catholic renewal. The performative speech act of beatification or canonization appears in a whole new light if one draws on Latour's image for the paradoxes



of scientific ontology.<sup>44</sup> It in fact proved a Janus-faced event: on the one hand, it discovered, proclaimed, and acted on an anterior, sacred fact, i.e. the blessed or saint's eternal life in God's presence after death in an odour of sanctity; on the other hand, this sacred fact was afterwards manufactured in a highly uncertain process of trial and error. In other words, canonization was the outcome and culmination of two elaborate modes of truth-finding and decision-making that enhanced each other's legitimacy, and that shed interesting light on curial governance in general. Initially, the (legalistic) mode of the bureaucrats prevailed, which involved expert investigation, consultation, and verification of evidence, reporting and navigating loopholes in the Congregation of Rites. Subsequently, fact-finding transitioned to the spiritual mode in a sequence of scripted sessions in the consistory of cardinals. From then on, the supreme pontiff, an absentee landlord in the mode of the bureaucrats, gradually took on a lead role in the limelight, culminating in the liturgical drama of the celebratory canonization mass at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Here, prayers and the Holy Spirit's guidance eclipsed the legal world of postulants, experts, and lawyers, of *dubia* and authenticated seals. The analysis, drawing on, among other cases, that of Jacek of Krakow (Saint Hyacinth, canonized in 1594), is followed by a survey of Roman decrees issued during the quintessential pontificate of Urban VIII (1623–1644), highlighting the deep-seated Roman concern about legitimacy. Alongside the anteriority of sacred facts, legitimacy and universality surface as tangled connotations of truth in the beatifications and canonizations conducted by one of Urban's predecessors, Pope Paul V (Isidro Labrador in 1619; Francesca Romana in 1608; and Carlo Borromeo in 1610). This is revealed in the subsequent analysis of the dynamic relationship between centre and periphery, and of the pervasive influence of patronage and papal nepotism. This analysis recalls some findings in the previous chapters in this book. Emich carefully distinguishes between the factors and agencies openly displayed in Roman narratives through prints, public liturgy, and monuments and those that were contrarywise concealed, kept informal, or faded-out. Her findings support the argument that such cover-ups aimed to functionalize the universal truth of Roman canonizations across the globe; to establish its singularity amidst the plurality of early modern Catholicism; and to rescue its purity from the omnipresent particular, local, or clientelist interests crossing the boundaries between heaven and earth.

44 Cf. the gap between 'Science' and 'science in action' in Latour, *Science en action*, p. 28, which we consider here first and foremost as a chronological gap.



ANDREEA BADEA offers a different vantage point on similar phenomena by revisiting a well-known conundrum: why was the Curia the only European court that did not appoint official historiographers, despite the crucial function of history in confessional polities? She does this by juxtaposing two episodes at opposite ends of the seventeenth century: the Roman reactions to Sarpi and De Dominis, and the debates over the possible condemnation of the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum* and Mabillon's *Epistola de cultu sanctorum ignotorum*. Under the heading of 'ignoring, overwriting, and deleting the opponent', Badea points out that curial restraint in producing official, Rome-sanctioned refutations of Sarpi and De Dominis was matched with the discreet commissioning and coordination of a protracted war of words that was to be fought by authors (Bzovius, Alciati, and eventually Sforza Pallavicin) and universities (Paris, Louvain, Cologne) of repute. These efforts were intended to override inconvenient histories with an unofficial, yet semi-canonical version. Roman reluctance to enter the fray was about more than just decorum. The dealings with Papebroch and Mabillon also involved considerations about the religious and social consequences of critical hagiographies for the veneration of saints on behalf of the flock. Above all, while history and hagiography offered a legitimation of both the present and the future, the emerging source critique and the continuous unearthing of new sources by continental networks of scholars made this promise particularly slippery and provisional. Any authoritative intervention was liable to be jeopardized by new discoveries and to trigger a crisis of apostolic authority or to bind curial institutions to untenable positions. In this episode, expert practices of uncovering (new sources or flawed readings) met a Curia that again was rather inclined to cover up sources (of disruption) and therefore presented the past through a solemn speechlessness from the apostolic heights of Peter's chair.

Several themes and practices discussed in the previous chapters resurface in the contributions of MARIA PIA DONATO, on new approaches to sacramental physics in the Eucharist, and LEEN SPRUIT, on Roman attitudes towards philosophical psychology. Both deal with the challenges of alternative natural philosophies (Cartesianism, atomism, corpuscularism) to the merger of confessional orthodoxy, an almost dogmatized Aristotelianism, and related scholastic practices that revamped the apostolic Church of Rome as a doctrinal and sacramental community in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While both chapters take a long-term approach, Donato points out that a sustained attack against established Eucharistic physics culminated in the second half of the seventeenth century, and that it often coincided with attacks on behalf of the so-called *novatores* of Rigorism and Jansenism



against scholasticism, casuistry, and allegedly laxist penitential practices. Conversely, authors frequently used the sacraments of confession and of the Eucharist as benchmarks for challenging the aforementioned post-Tridentine merger.

Various key points emerge from this. First, both chapters confirm the preoccupation with the salvation of the flock and highlight the efforts to nip scandal in the bud—in other words, the double preoccupation with both pure and purifying truth that manifestly informed Roman assessments of philosophical statements' assertability. This tended to result in rather weak condemnations (temerarious at best, Spruit) instead of hard qualifications such as *haeresim sapiens*, *haeretica*, *haeresi proxima*, or the corresponding degrees of error. This opens up perspectives for the practical and hermeneutical accommodation of doctrinal incommensurability observed by Vanden Broecke, resonating, for instance, in the apparent oxymoron of 'Catholic atomists' in censorial reports.<sup>45</sup> Second, these weaker condemnations may reflect a generalized awareness of the porous boundary between theology and philosophy, and between orthodoxy and novelty. Taken together, these proscriptions highlight the pluralizing effects of censorship through the mutual objectification of canon and -isms (Spruit). Third, they reveal the precarious existence of a plural 'community of censorial intelligence' within an unstable Curia (Donato) and a wider scholarly community, where censors figured as authors, disputants, and polemicists. The representation of different theological schools and religious orders, not a distant neutrality, informed the Holy Office's and the Index's recruitment of its experts.<sup>46</sup> In fourth place, the creation of ad hoc lists of statements from the past, a sort of 'historical doxography', proved a quintessential resource for truth-finding among authors and censors alike. Authors used history to connect their alternative physics with (pre- or a-scholastic) Catholic traditions, in a way that recalls the primitivist leanings of Jansenist and rigorist *novatores*. Censors' practices, on the other hand, aligned propositions with past heresies to determine their degree of deviation from orthodoxy. At least in the case of psychology, the sources deployed were often the same among authors and their censors (Spruit).

In both chapters, the precariousness of the censorial community and of disciplinary and epistemic boundaries join with another issue central to this volume's programme: the performative dimension of censorial practice, which Donato and Spruit seek to capture in the highly rhetorical quality of censorial discourse. Crafting both the censor and his audience (cardinals

45 ACDF, S.O., Stanza Storica O 3 f, fols. 472r–475v.

46 Quantin, 'Le Saint-Office et le probabilisme'.

of the congregations, other experts), it devised both Rome's otherwise ill-defined censorial community and its *raison d'être*: suspect, condemned, or tolerable -isms. This recalls the silent and stabilizing operations of bureaucratic (but equally highly rhetoric) 'little tools of knowledge' in the manufacture of the scholarly *persona* and his field of expertise.

The work in this section raises questions complementary to the discussion on the implications and credibility of situational accommodations being grounded in a single master narrative. Some tension lingers between the dramaturgical understanding of performative practice—the most common approach in the humanities—on one hand, and its transformative dimension as much as its connotation with achievement in other disciplines—the performativity *of* practice, so to speak—on the other hand. In a narrow dramaturgical option, the student of truth and credibility needs eventually to confront *what* lurks behind the stage, *what* principle or force regulates the drama and posturing coming with the production of solid knowledge or the authority of spokesmen. This raises the question of whether a narrow dramaturgical option can be reconciled with the praxeological leanings of this volume and its corresponding choice to privilege the question of 'how' communities of belief aggregate in practice over the question of 'what' keeps them together in principle. Peter Burke's quest, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, for the (*non*-performative) regulative principles of performance is highly illustrative in this respect.<sup>47</sup> Having briefly mentioned and then shelved the option of performance in terms of achievement, the argument needs to recur to the functionalization of an elusive yet pervasive *habitus* to establish the credibility of situational performances. In this approach, the researcher working with a narrow dramaturgical option eventually risks being overwhelmed again by the *arcana s/he* investigates. Seen from this perspective, the concept of a credibility being grounded in hard work including a wide range of epistemic and social practices offers a different approach. Related problems will re-emerge from the interpretative grid we propose in the next section.

### 3. Embedding

The contributions to the third and last section of this volume engage with another practice that illuminates the ongoing functionalization of

<sup>47</sup> Burke, *Performing History*. A discussion of Bourdieu's theory of practice in De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, pp. 82–90.

truth. Generally, embedding carries several connotations ranging from raw materialism as the prime mover of ideologies over entanglement and acculturation to the full-blown hybridization of ‘text’ and ‘context’, to name just a few. For our purposes, we wish to draw the attention to the networked or tangled nature of truth in early modern Catholicism. Further qualifications are needed, however. Conceptually, ‘networks’ can be understood as social networks of position holders, including brokers and middlemen, as a pivotal resource for politics, the pursuit of religious programmes, or the circulation of knowledge. At face value, this option, which was systematized in the last decades of the twentieth century and in the early 2000s in the micropolitical paradigm accounting for the dynamics of early modern state-building and international diplomacy,<sup>48</sup> complements the actor’s perspective that most contributors to this volume prefer. Some difficulties remain, however. In a world dominated by social networks, the uncertainty or precariousness of doctrinal contents, sacramental programmes, ecclesiological set-ups, etc., and their credibility seem rather unproblematic: networks or homologous fabrics kept these going; and the social, cultural, or symbolical capital acquired in a process of (seemingly unproblematic) accumulation by institutional or informal position holders accounts for their success. Within such a hierarchical and synoptic discourse, painstaking negotiations, appropriations, and multiple agencies however remain partly hidden from view.

The other option lies in keeping similar embeddings more fluid, the social positions and the resources involved unstable, uncertainty paramount, and appropriation central to religious transfers and change. With this option, the question of credibility and the functionalization of truth-driven master narratives again becomes relevant to explore *how* a multitude of agents and agencies, in an ongoing process of problematization, mutual enrolment, and mobilization, practically bundled and stabilized resources, built and nurtured more durable alliances, and managed to act as one entity in the pursuit of common objectives.<sup>49</sup> The chapters in this section illuminate two related aspects of this phenomenon.

The first involves issues of enrolment and mobilization of various agencies. CECILIA CRISTELLON’s chapter explores the background of the papal declaration of Benedict XIV in 1741. With this official document, the Holy See confirmed the validity (a legal equivalent of truthfulness) of mixed

48 Reinhard, ‘Einleitung’.

49 On the concepts of ‘problematization’, ‘mutual enrolment’, and ‘mobilization’ see: Callon, ‘Some Elements’.

marriages involving a Catholic spouse or marriages between two heretics, contracted in the Low Countries without the Tridentine requirement of sacerdotal attendance. The United Provinces hosted a sizable Catholic minority that, despite the prohibition on public worship, continued to thrive in the shadows of the 'dominant' Reformed Church. In the Habsburg and militantly Catholic South, tiny crypto-Protestant communities were joined by substantial numbers of Protestant soldiers, following various barrier treaties with the maritime powers against French expansionism. Long after prosecution of Catholics in the North subsided, the situation remained unclear. This unclarity put in jeopardy the salutary operations of other sacraments and trickled down south of the border with the Habsburg state. For Roman congregations—Propaganda, Council, and Holy Office—repeatedly petitioned by missionaries, apostolic vicars, and Belgian bishops, it proved nearly impossible to establish the existence of individual marriages in the face of prohibitive and/or competing state legislation. Add to these a feeble clerical presence; the absence of an established Catholic hierarchy enforcing rulings on the ground; and a striking variety of nuptial practices; with Roman *gremia* of decision-making reverting to ad hoc solutions or to strategic silence (*non respondeatur*). All this resulted in the Benedictine declaration of 1741 that, in the following years, would gradually be extended to other regions with large heretic populations.

These are the premises of Cristellon's thorough analysis of the Roman workshop. She delves deeply into the intelligence-gathering on cases spanning more than 150 years, the sorting of information, its interpretation by experts, and strategic or habitual omissions. Bringing to light its 'unglamorous' production, the author stresses the performative, indeed transformative, dimension of the Benedictine declaration, in legal terms a non-doctrinal document that contained neither novelty nor a normative approval of mixed marriages. It therefore did not untangle itself from the Tridentine norm, but meanwhile normalized exceptions to that norm without trapping the papacy in the slippery business of dispensations. It modified access to salvation in the past, the present, and the future; and thus re-embedded vast numbers of dubious spouses in the folds of the Church. In Cristellon's work, these modifications join with interesting reality politics, in which papal inertia was activated and papal agency was conversely mooted in a declaratory register. In this way, it became possible to reassemble and mobilize the transcendental order of the apostolic Church of Rome as an obligatory passage point to salvation for a public that otherwise might have lost interest. Based on these findings, it is relatively safe to conclude that curial bureaucracies and committees mastered the art of making oneself



indispensable by framing contexts, diagnosing difficulties, and mobilizing interested parties. This practice does not merely permeate diplomatic correspondence of the nunciatures or the ‘curialesse’ of Roman bureaucrats. It also proves central to the practice of embedding and mobilization that modern scientists use in order to issue statements on nature, society, or the universe on the thin line between activity and passivity; between mere discovery of pre-existing realities and their messy production.<sup>50</sup>

A second aspect comes here to the fore: in Rome too, defining the problem was often an obligatory passage point to its solution. More specifically, it is the endless intertwining of unstable matters of concern popping up in this book that interests us and that moves to the centre of analysis in VITTORIA FIORELLI’s essay on the trial, condemnation, and abjuration of the Neapolitan ‘atheist’ Giacinto De Cristofaro and his fellows in 1688–1697. This episode furnishes ample material to explore the tangled nature of atheism (eliciting comparison with the fluid existence of other -isms discussed in this volume). De Cristofaro’s atheism remained elusive, to the extent that many scholars preferred to list him among atomists in the wider attack on established Aristotelianism discussed in previous chapters. Paraphrasing Vanden Broecke, the question is not *whether*, but *how* to be an atheist. The shift from active to passive mode—eventually, the story is about how to be *condemned as* an atheist—is not unimportant, for De Cristofaro’s agency on the Neapolitan scene was gradually narrowed down to his public act of abjuration. On closer inspection, De Cristofaro had been nudged into the abjuration (rather firmly) by other agencies and actors that were (and/or claimed to be) in turn nudged into action by other tangible or transcendental entities. On the one hand, Fiorelli’s narrative displays the performative production of heresy in inquisitorial technique, moving from the periphery—the multitudes of auto-denunciators that, after the Roman condemnation of Quietism in 1687, exposed themselves to the pre-scripted interrogation forms procured by the Holy Office—to the clear and definable centre of a heretical movement. On the other hand, it is clear that De Cristofaro’s atheism bundled various intersecting and conflicting concerns about the religious and political polity of Naples and its ancient kingdom, both within Roman Catholicism and within a global *Monarquía*. The atheism trials at the end of the seventeenth century emerge as placeholders for the intensified collusion and negotiation of various programmes detained by the Inquisition in Rome, the Spanish *Suprema*, diocesan tribunals, orthodox Aristotelians, the kingdom’s power elites, the

50 See: Callon, ‘Some Elements’, and Latour, *Science en action*.



Spanish Crown, and the general public. Some of these sought to establish themselves as obligatory passage points to the public good, while others may well have been more confused, failed to get a grip on events, or eventually ended up recanting 'their' atheism. De Cristofaro did not share the fate of the more or less contemporaneous Roman 'libertines', who faced capital punishment. Nevertheless, Fiorelli's story recalls the parish priest Urbain Grandier in de Certeau's *La possession de Loudun*, the hapless actor who was burned at the stake in a French provincial town fifty years earlier in an ever-widening, uncertain drama that involved nuns, demons, and the crushing authority of the state; restless rural dwellers and a divided town; cooperation and antagonism between physicians, exorcists, and theologians; as well as the scars left by religious strife and by the plague.<sup>51</sup>

Two conclusions can be drawn from the contributions to this section, each of which is somehow related to entangling and disentangling. First, De Cristofaro's atheism remains something of an enigma. A tangible reality during the shameful act of abjuration, it evaporates in other places, among others in scholarly assessments carefully untangling his atheism from its context and re-embedding whatever is left of it in neat ideological or disciplinary categories. Yet, while pure atheism proved nebulous in Naples at the end of the seventeenth century, it gained reality (or credibility) as it was embedded in a wide range of other concerns and aspirations, culminating in its objectivation during salutary rituals of reconciliation with the Church. Agency furnishes another fascinating issue, in Cristellon's analysis, with Rome walking the tightrope between activity and passivity: between pushing botched marriages in the past, the present, and the future into an equally botched form of existence. At the very end, the papal document brought the converted or Catholic spouses of these mixed marriages back into the communion of the justified while merely ascertaining their validity. In a chronological twist, the state of affairs generated by the Benedictine declaration came to precede it, with the arduous, centennial context of trial and error between Rome and the Low Countries to get a grip on things disappearing quietly from sight.

In the concluding essay, RIVKA FELDHAY asks what kind of grand narrative of early modernity would fit the historiographical accents and emphases explored in the previous three sections. Taking her cue from Mary Louise Pratt's fruitful metaphor of the 'contact zone', Feldhay proposes that we, instead of approaching early modernity as a site of increasing autonomy for politics, religion, and science, take their ongoing interdependence as a

51 De Certeau, *La possession de Loudun*. Cf. Weymans, 'Michel de Certeau'.

given, focusing our efforts on the specific discursive points through which this interdependence is incessantly articulated, and around which the boundaries between the partners of this *ménage à trois* are constantly re-drawn. Feldhay's essay offers an exercise in this approach through its focus on discussions of state sovereignty, religious authority, and mathematical discipline as three such contact zones.

The first section, accommodating, raises a spectrum ranging from fragmented regulative fictions over single but elusive referents and Latourian centres of accumulation to the possibility of Mol's multiple, full-blown, but nonetheless localized and situational truths as both the object and the product of accommodation. The second section on performative practice shows, on the one hand, how the liturgical, administrative, and censorial performance created a salutary order which represented itself as the guardian, and depository, of truth over individual and communal transformation and justification; on the other hand, it points out that the full-blown performativity of practice succeeded at least in achieving a workable semblance of that transcendental order. The third section raises the possibility that, from a historicist point of view, embedding actually makes uncertain and impure realities and beliefs more real(istic) than pure ones, while the much-coveted anteriority of truth proves to be a product of careful discursive or plain practical manipulations and deletions. This is of course an open list. Within the different chapters here, a wide range of other, often related practices appear that allow truth to navigate Peter's bark through thick fogs of doubt. The connotations of independence, anteriority, universality, singularity, etc. that we seek to untangle from objectivity for the sake of praxeological analysis should likely not be considered mere fictions—quite to the contrary, in light of the considerable efforts invested in their maintenance in the following chapters. The vast majority of the contributions to this volume even suggest that, as far as early modern knowledge cultures are concerned, the list of implications for truthful realities in modern Euro-American metaphysics may actually be expanded, with (the absence of obstacles to) purification as another assumed quality of absolute truth. Instead, it may be more productive to investigate these implicit or explicit understandings as matters of concern to be addressed practically, or as more or less obligatory passage points on the production line of religious truth, so to speak. This volume visits administrative, liturgical, scholarly, censorial, and legal laboratories for glimpses of pure and purifying truth as they surface from a disorderly, unglamorous work floor to be sorted, crafted, fine-tuned, stabilized, polished, and put to work—i.e. those moments in which truth gained credibility for historians, and an aura of



self-evidence for historical actors. Whatever Marx said about unglamorous production processes, the editors of and contributors to this volume remain fully intrigued by the glamour of the product.

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