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# ANABAPTISM IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT. While relatively unknown to Anglophone circles, there was a thriving Anabaptist community in Italy during the reformation. It is the scope of this article to help retrace the origins of the Anabaptist movement in Italy (a movement which lasted at best for sixty years, from the 1520s-1530s to the 1570s, and did not leave us with the theological writings such as those produced by Hubmaier, Marpeck, or Simons) and to set straight some misconceptions unintentionally (or intentionally) perpetuated by some who have attempted this journey in the past. This is done in the hopes of raising appreciation for the movement and of enticing future research interest in this forgotten branch of the Radical Reformation.

KEY WORDS: Italian Anabaptism, Italian reformation, antitrinitarianism, Camillo Renato, George Huntston Williams

## Introduction

I remember sitting in a church history class, during my seminary days, and asking the professor if there had been a reformation in my native Italy as there had been in other European countries. His response was that there had been one, but due to the geographic proximity to Rome, the Italian reformation was short lived. While simplistic, his answer was on point. In fact, many different religious and philosophical currents converged in Italy and its surrounding territories in the 16th century. Among these were the reform movement within the Roman church, magisterial movements outside the Roman church, and various radical movements. As a matter of fact, many have suggested that the Italian reformation movement was separate from and predated the reform movement initiated by Luther and have underscored the impact of humanism on paving the way for reform inside and outside of the Roman Catholic church (Prosperi 2005: 602ff).

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During these turbulent times, transition in theological thought was very common. Take for example the journey of Giovanni Laureto di Buongiorno, who changed from the Roman Church, to Lutheranism, to Anabaptism, to antitrinitarianism, to Judaism, and finally back to Roman Catholicism. (Pommier 1954: 294-322). This fluidity has led Italian historian Antonio Rotondò to argue against rigid doctrinal definitions of movements, not because they are unnecessary, but because, according to him, the historian cannot forget the culture and society in which doctrinal lines are born and the frequent interactions between men and movements, before and after they separated from each other and accused each other. This, he claims, is evidenced by those figures who eluded a strict theological-doctrinal characterization and instead reflect 'the complexity of the crisis [that existed] in the decades in which they lived' (Rotondò 2008: 15). Delio Cantimori, an early leading authority on the Italian reformation, was likewise uninterested in theological distinctions, for as he explains:

> the distinctions between spiritualists, libertines, anabaptists in the proper sense, and so on, and the distinctions between Mennonites, Melchiorites, Jorists, etc. only have strictly theological-doctrinal importance, and are not useful for the historical evaluation of their movements, which acquire a historical value only in their totality (Cantimori 2009: 44, n. 6).

Yet, theological distinctions can be very useful in historical theology, and it behooves us to try to understand the nuances in this underground world of Anabaptists, of spiritualists, and of other religious sects (as Cantimori would describe this movement). Especially given that due to Italy's geographical proximity to Rome, Zurich, and Geneva, any movement that was out of harmony with the Roman Church or the newly established reformed churches eventually had to go underground or emigrate to survive. It is therefore the scope of this article to help retrace the Anabaptist movement in Italy (a movement which lasted at best for sixty years, from the 1520s-1530s to the 1570s, but did not produce the theological writings that a Hubmaier, a Marpeck, or a Simons did) and set straight some misconception unintentionally (or intentionally) perpetuated by some who have attempted this journey in the past. For the sake of clarity, Anabaptism proper will here be defined as a movement of believers who, on the authority of the New Testament, made believer's baptism central to the concepts of discipleship and the restitution of the church.

## So Italy Had a Reformation?

While I disagree with Rotondò when he argued against doctrinal distinctives, I would agree with him concerning the influence culture and society has on the formation of doctrinal lines and the fact that the fluctuations and unrest of the sixteenth century could only be understood historically if one considers the various aspects of the social and religious life in the midst of which they manifested themselves. Therefore, to understand the Italian Anabaptist movement, one must first understand the Italian reformation.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, the advent of humanism was central to the Italian reformation. With the return to the study of patristic writings, due to the humanists' *ad fontes* battle cry, theological discussion in Italy was propelled out of the domain of the clergy alone and into the domain of the intellectual circles. Cantimori retraces the roots of this impetus in Italy at least back to the early fifteenth-century, in the thoughts of the Roman humanist, Lorenzo Valla. With his frequent polemicizing, Valla introduced into the Italian culture a taste for hermeneutical philology, which produced a desire for a precise understanding of words and terminologies. In some circles, this resulted in the renewal of ideas through the restoration of precision in the language and a tendency not to compromise with tradition. Among other things, Valla had begun a criticism of the Vulgate, as Erasmus later would do more thoroughly. As people continued in the tradition of Valla, the result was 'an explicit tendency to fideism together with a return to Scripture' (Cantimori 2009: 22). Eventually, by the time Girolamo Savonarola had passed away, the laymen's interest was not only philosophical, but also theological and ethico-political (Cantimori 2009: 15). Yet, humanism did not isolate itself to the intellectual circles. Amongst the clergy, humanism developed with a decisively Christian bent pointing back to the writings of Paul, through the writings of Augustine. This pre-Lutheran Paulism was the focal interest of the early reformers who opted to work within the Roman church (Gonnet 1982: 39).

No matter what one's theories are about the roads to the reformation, as one approaches the period of the reformation proper, the impact of the propagation of ideas coming directly or indirectly from Germany and Switzerland has to be considered. While Church fittingly claims that 'the Italian Reformation is not properly the history of the penetration of Lutheran or Calvinist or Zwinglian ideas' into Italy, but 'the contribution of Italy to the spirit and program and achievements of the reform of the church' (Church 1932: 1). However, the penetration of Lutheran ideas on Italian soil cannot be underestimated as a driving force in the Italian reformation proper. Firpo remarks that it did not take long for the writings of Luther to arrive in Italy, and on their arrival, they quickly reacted with the cultural and religious tensions already existing in the peninsula. These tensions included

> an intense anticlerical tradition, ancient prophetic and millennial uneasiness, humanistic thought and the Platonism of the renaissance, the lure (philological, theological, and ethical) to a Christianity brought back to its evangelical origins

> and purified from undue scholastic incrustations, and the multiple reforming motions largely present among the clergy and the laity (Firpo 2004: 3).

While these testified to a religious sensitivity permeating all social milieus, all of them were motivated by a crisis in the roman ecclesiastical institution. This crisis had produced an ignorant and corrupt clergy, simony and concubinage, and had been compounded by the absenteeism of bishops, the abuse of the beneficiary system, conflicts between bishops and religious orders, and the political (versus spiritual) preoccupations of the papacy (Firpo 2004: 3; Gonnet 1982: 38).

The paths of the propagation of ideas and the personalities that influenced Italy at this time varied by region. The political division in the peninsula resulted in the north's being influenced by Luther, Zwingli, and eventually Calvin, and the south's being influenced by the Spaniard Juan de Valdéz. As will be seen below (when looking at the Anabaptist movement in Italy), these influences did not stay isolated, and during the initial period of the Italian reformation, ideas flowed throughout the peninsula. In addition, texts like the Beneficio di Cristo (centered on justification by faith alone) underscored, by the presence of both reformed catholic elements and Lutheran elements, that in this period of time it was difficult to distinguish between reforming catholic movements and pro-Lutheran or pro-Zwinglian movements (Gonnet 1982: 41). Cantimori names this initial period of the Italian reformation as 'the evangelistic' period, and gives it a *termine ad quem* of 1542 with the creation of the Italian inquisition (Cantimori 2009: 434).

This initial period was followed by what Cantimori calls 'the crisis of evangelism', which resulted in a variety of reactions (Cantimori 2009: 434). Being persecuted by the Sant'Uffizio, some abjured, some were martyred, and others chose to go into exile or were forced to flee from their native land. Gonnet calls this latter group the *ecclesia peregrinorum*, for Italians established themselves in the Grisons, Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Strasburg, England, Germany, Moravia, Transylvania, and Poland. During this period, the advent of or propagation of a variety of doctrinal positions such as Anabaptism, antitrinitarianism, and Nicodemism occurred (Gonnet 1982: 46-56). Cantimori identifies the end of this period as circa 1560, and follows it with a twenty year period that he names 'the second generation'. Here the overt movements in Italy came to an end or turned into movements that lived in clandestinity, many of which, Cantimori claims, were somewhat Anabaptist. Some of these movements would lay the ground work for what eventually would became known as Socinianism and later on organized itself *oltr'alpe* (on the other side of the Alps) as Unitarianism. There is also in this period the perfecting of Nicodemism, which, as Cantimori observed, 'becomes so perfect that it does not leave any traces of itself'. After 1580, the final period of the reformation, as identified by Cantimori, is dominated not by movements, but by a few individuals such as Fausto Sozzini (Cantimori 2009: 435-36). The repression done at the hands of the inquisition was an important factor in the quenching of the reform impetus in Italy, whether it was native or imported. Yet, the Italian political situation also played a role in the shaping, and eventually the quenching, of this reform. It was impossible to establish new churches, whether Lutheran, Zwinglian, or Calvinist, in Italy, without the support of the local political authority, and while the nobility might not have been able officially to establish non-roman catholic churches, the support of nobles facilitated the propagation of ideas and kept many reformers alive. Their assistance allowed the fires of the Italian reformation to burn as long as they did.

## The Origins of Italian Anabaptism

The origins of the Italian Anabaptists are complex and heterogeneous. Yet, one can identify at least three distinct sources. The influx of refugees from the Tyrol-Trentino region in 1525 into the tolerant Venetian Republic was one source of radical ideas. Lutheran and Zwinglian writings affected the popular malcontent in the Alpine valleys, leading the people to 'demand a radical reform on the basis of an intransigent Biblicism and according to what they considered to be a genuine evangelical spirit, therefore condemning the debauchery and the temporal powers of the clergy and, at times, rising against feudal oppression' (Stella 1967: 12). This ethos, imported by the refugees, prepared the ground for more radical ideas, for it resonated with the 'growing frustration and increased disillusionment' of the evangelicals in the Veneto region who had hoped that the 'Venetian government might offer its support to a reform of the Church' (Martin 1993: 102). In addition to refugees, the Brennero way also brought a constant flux of artisans, sellers, and students, along with their radical ideas. This 'facilitated a constant influx and exchange path for the small clandestine communities that were created in many cities of the mainland (and in a few rare cases, even in the countryside)' (Firpo 2004: 143-44). It is probably due to these connections that, in a letter sent from a knight of Malta in Rome to a friend back in France, we find the statement that the Anabaptists were called *tramontans* and therefore had probably come 'from Switzerland, from the Val de Rancure region, from Angroigne, and from Savoy' (Chevalier de Malte 1589: 5).

A second source was Venice itself. Firpo identifies Venice as the door of the reformation in Italy, what he calls 'a node of the heterodox propaganda in Italy'. The Venetians, known traders, interacted with all sorts, making it easy, for example, to slip a few Lutheran books in-between two bags of pepper from Germany. The books would eventually make their way to the printers and booksellers, who were always looking for something new to sell. There, they were sold, with the appropriate warnings, for an appropriate profit (Firpo 2004: 11). In addition, Venice found itself in close proximity to Trieste, a town that had changed hands several times between the Venetian Republic and Austria. Here, refugees seeking to escape Austria, from as far away as Moravia, sought entry into the tolerant Republic (Stella 1973: 5-12).

A third source, which in some ways is more concrete, is the mysterious Tiziano. Not much is known about his background, only his forename; yet, he is not to be confused with Lorenzo Tizzano, alias Benedetto Florio (Stella 1969: 81). There are two main sources of information on Tiziano. The first is in the correspondence from reformed pastors like Agostino Mainardi (in Chiavenna) and Philipp Gallicius von Salis (at Chur) to Heinrich Bullinger. The second is the frequent mention of his name in the transcriptions of numerous trials during the Venetian inquisition (of special note are the delations of Pietro Manelfi discussed below). Each historian who has tackled trying to understand the history of the Italian Anabaptist movement has portrayed Tiziano in a slightly different light, so that one reads such different accounts of Tiziano as to puzzle one exceedingly. Nevertheless, I will try here to present a summary of the facts about Tiziano.

Menelfi tells the inquisition that after having served a cardinal in Rome, Tiziano converted to Lutheranism and moved to Geneva (Manelfi 1970: 18). Martin assumes that Tiziano, in search of religious liberty, eventually fled to the Grisons (also known as the Rhaetian League or Graubünden) after the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in 1542 (Martin 1993: 103). The Grisons were tolerant to protestant ideas, but were not officially tolerant to the Anabaptists. Yet, Williams claims that they 'played an important role as a refuge for German-speaking Anabaptists', and places George Blaurock, Andrew Castelberger, and Felix Mantz there around 1525 (Williams 1992: 215-16, 220-21; Martin 1993: 103). It would seem plausible, therefore, that Tiziano, while not having come into direct contact with Blaurock, Castelberger, or Mantz, probably came into contact with their Anabaptist ideas while in the Grisons and adopted them there. This understanding of Tiziano's teachings could be reinforced by several testimonies that claim that Tiziano brought his ideas from Germany: Alvis de' Colti tells the inquisition that 'Tiziano was the first that brought this thing from Germany' (Manelfi 1970: 20); Bruno Busale, who had been baptized by Tiziano, analogously states that 'he said that he was given authority from Germany' (Gastaldi 1981: 566, n. 66); and Paolo Beltramini tells them that 'God had sent an angel from Germany' (Stella 1969: 47).

Also supporting the assumption of Tiziano's Anabaptism are comments in a letter dated August 1549 in which Mainardi tells Bullinger of the tie between the *Anabaptist* Tiziano and Camillo Renato, before Tiziano's expulsion from the Grisons by the secular authorities (Renato 1968: 229). Reflecting on this DeWind cautions jumping to Anabaptist conclusions about Tiziano and claims that all that can be asserted safely 'is that he probably came under Renato's influence' (DeWind 1952: 29), however it would seem that the intent of the letter is not to taint Tiziano with Anabaptism because of his relation with Renato, but to taint Renato with Anabaptism because of his relationship with Tiziano.

Upon his expulsion from the Grisons, Tiziano returned to Italy and established a vibrant Anabaptist community in Asolo, which immediately became the center of intense missionary activity. By the winter of 1549, the epicenter of this missionary group probably moved to Ferrara from where Tiziano and his disciples undertook missionary voyages to Romagna and Tuscany (Gastaldi 1972: 568). There is even some evidence that at some point Tiziano might have gone to witness to the pope, Giulio III Del Monte. Ginzburg presents some textual discussion on the variants in the various copies of the delations of Manelfi; specifically, that the sentence that Tiziano had gone to persuade 'Nostro Signore' was only found in one copy. Given that this was a title used for the pope and that the transcribers of the time felt the need to redact this note, it is very possible that this was done to protect the pope's reputation (Manelfi 1970: 16-18, 62). The pope notwithstanding, these missionary journeys encountered fertile soil, according to Ugo Gastaldi, for it had already been permeated with Lutheran, Zwinglian, Calvinist, and Anabaptist ideas. It is during this time that Tiziano met Manelfi in Florence, and eventually baptized him in Ferrara (Gastaldi 1972: 568). According to Manelfi, the Anabaptist teachings divulgated by Tiziano at the time of his conversion were the 'ancient opinions of the Anabaptists' (Manelfi 1970: 63).

In the account given by Manelfi on October 17, 1551, to Leandro de Albertis, the delegate of Rome in Bologna, Manelfi states that Tiziano had taught him:

> … about the anabaptist doctrine, which is this:
> It is not licit according to the gospel to baptize young people if they have not first believed.
> The magistrates cannot be christians.
> The sacraments do not confer any grace, but are external signs.
> They do not believe in the church anything other than holy scripture.
> They do not believe any of the opinions of the doctors.
> They believe that the Roman Church is diabolic and antichristian.
> Those who have been baptized are not christians, but need to be re-baptized (Manelfi 1970: 33-34).

In his account given November 12, 1551, in Rome, he further states:

> Similarly Tiziano started to preach to me the anabaptist doctrine and rebaptism, saying that I was not baptized because I did not have faith when I was baptized, and the other ancient opinions of the anabaptists, that is that christians cannot exercise magistrates and lordships, dominions and kingships, first by the authority of Christ 'The kings of the gentiles rule, but not so with you', and also because of the law that says 'Do not murder', and because the apostle says that the sword is given to the Gentiles 'to punish those who do evil' and not to the christians, commanding that no christian can rule as king, duke, prince, nor exercise any magistracy, and this is one of the first principles of the anabaptists, and other opinions; there was not yet among these anabaptists the conclusions againt the divinity of Christ and the other new articles determined and concluded in the council that was held in Venice as I said above (Manelfi 1970: 63).

The reason Manefli designated Tiziano's aforementioned teachings as the 'ancient opinions' was to contrast them with the new antitrinitarian opinions that eventually developed in Italian Anabaptist circles and were subsequently ratified, according to him, during a Venetian synod in 1550. It cannot be denied that the antitrinitarian movement that developed in Italy during this period is very important to the history of the Italian radical reformation, for its ideas might well be, as Gastaldi claims, 'the only original contribution that came from the Italians to the religious unrest of the sixteenth century' (Gastaldi 1981: 577). Yet, as will be argued, to try to classify all Italian Anabaptists as antitrinitarians is erroneous.

## Where Did the Antitrinitarian Teachings Come From?

Retracing the roots of antitrinitarianism is hindered by the fact that the protagonists of this movement 'often changed names and at times even used multiple pseudonyms at one time as they moved from place to place' (Stella 1969: 39). This, compounded by the numerous variations in the spelling of individuals' names in the records, due to dialects and analphabetism (for example Tiziano is referred to as Ticiano or Titiano in several documents), make the individuals involved hard to trace.

Some point to Michael Servetus as the obvious source, but Martin sees the origin of the antitrinitarian belief as being more obscure than that. While he admits that Michael Servetus' writings circulated in Italy in the 1530s and 1540s, he sees the development of these ideas as 'a complex phenomenon that could in no way be traced to one individual' (Martin 1993: 107). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that 'the environment of philosophical thought in Italy was eminently favorable to Servetus' theories' (Comba 1897: 486), or theories like his. In Anabaptist circles, at a minimum, what can be noticed is the confluence of at least two currents, a clearly antitrinitarian current from the south and the Anabaptist current from the North (Pommier 1954: 308).

Stella identifies the southern currents to be due to Girolamo Busale from Naples. The Neapolitan abbot, in a desire to understand the message of the gospel and to live by it, gathered in Naples with many radicals from the Valdesian circle (Stella 1969: 15-37). Here he would have come in contact with the 'philo-Judaic, universalistic, and prophetic impulses' of Juan de Valdéz, 'a Marrano, a humanist Illuminist, [who] was an anti-Nicene Nicodemite, and Evangelical Spiritualist with a strong sense of the imminent Second Advent'. After the death of Valdéz, Busale moved to Padua to study philosophy. Here, according to Williams,

> he appropriated two views closely associated with Paduan intellectual and popular religious circles: (1) that saints and sinners sleep until the day of the resurrection and Last Judgment and accordingly that there is neither a heaven nor a purgatory and (2) that Jesus was born of the seed of Joseph, a characteristic affirmation of an Ebionitic Christology (Williams 1992: 819, 829, 860).

Busale's path crossed the path of the Anabaptist movement when some of their missionaries, including Benedetto del Borgo and Nicolò d'Alessandria, arrived in Padua. Here they convinced him to be re-baptized and to become part of their movement, but themselves succumbed to the radical ideas of the former abbot. Gastaldi notes that among these radical ideas were the denial of the divinity of Christ, the nature of the soul with its associated consequences, and the application of critical rationalism to Scripture (Gastaldi 1981: 569). These new teachings produced an immediate reaction from the other Anabaptists. The first to react was Agostino Tealdo, the minister of the Anabaptist church of Cittadella, who immediately proposed to excommunicate Benedetto del Borgo (Stella 1969: 41-42).

Given the potential that this controversy had to destroy the unity of the by now well connected Anabaptist community, a synod was called. Yet, before reviewing the Venetian synod, a few words should be said about other currents that came into play in this Anabaptist / antitrinitarian merging. For example, Marc'Antonio Villamarina confessed that between 1542 and 1546 he had been part of a group of heretics in Naples, who were first Lutherans, then Anabaptists, and whose leader was Juan de Villafranca. According to him, all of them 'believed against the divinity of Christ' (Stella 1967: 101). While this is evidence of antitrinitarian Anabaptists before the confluence of the two streams mentioned above, given Busale's interaction with the Neapolitan groups, but his lack of Anabaptist thoughts until his time in Padua, one might postulate that the Anabaptist teachings did not survive the perpetual flux of ideas present during this time period in Naples. A northern current from the Grisons came in the late 1540s through Giambattista da

Voltolina, a student of Camillo Renato, who brought much of Renato's thoughts and mixed them with Valdesian spiritualism. While the influence of Renato is uncertain, Stella believes that there was an interdependence between what he deems to be'the radical spiritualism' of Renato and the antitrinitarian transformation of Anabaptist thought (Stella 1969: 57-64). It must also be said that not all the influences were necessarily external. Manelfi testifies that division came about in Venice due to an argument over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 18: 18; some saying that Christ was God and some that Christ was man (Manelfi 1970: 34).

## The 1550 Venetian Synod

Regardless of where the antitrinitarian ideas came from, though, division was in the camp, and an Anabaptist synod was called to try to come to a unified position. Most of the information we have on the Venetian synod comes from the delations of Manelfi, the priest from the Marche who turned Lutheran and then Anabaptist after having met Tiziano. In the autumn of 1551, wanting to rejoin the Roman faith, he presented himself to the inquisition in Bologna, which, having found his story very interesting, sent him to Rome. In his five depositions, Manelfi did not just narrate his story; he also gave very detailed lists of individuals, in a plurality of towns, who were Lutherans or Anabaptists, for, as he claimed, he was a very influential person in both movements. Specifically, he was in charge of procuring the funds for the Venetian synod, he was the first one to speak at the synod, and he was named an 'apostolic bishop' in the Anabaptist movement with the responsibility of propagating the new doctrines decided in Venice and of facilitating contact between various Anabaptist churches. While many early researchers on the Italian radicals put a lot of weight on Manelfi's delations, Stella, after having done likewise for his 1967 volume, came to change his perspective in his 1969 volume. Other cohesive testimonies had come to light that did not agree with Manelfi's. Nevertheless, Manelfi's testimony is still central in this research, even if one should not trust it wholeheartedly.

In his account given October 17, 1551, Manelfi tells Leandro de Albertis, the delegate of Rome in Bologna that 'in the year 1550, in the month of September, there met sixty, between Anabaptist ministers and bishops, in Venice, for a council, where, for forty days fasting, praising and studying the sacred scriptures, we determined the following articles' (Manelfi 1970: 34). Manelfi knew this because he played an important role, according to him, in the preparation of the synod and in the synod itself. Yet, there is doubt that Manelfi was even present at the synod. Marcantonio Del Bon d'Asolo, whom Manelfi had identified as one of the most important ministers and his companion as an 'apostolic bishop', claims that Manelfi 'had not entered in this sect if not many months after the said meeting in this land [vis. the synod in Venice]' (Stella 1969: 65). It is possible that Manelfi did join the group when he claims to have and that Del Bon d'Asolo did not know of it, for Manelfi's testimony is corroborated by Giuseppe Sartori. However, this does underscore the fact that they could not have been together as 'apostolic bishops' sent to communicate the decision of the synod to the churches as Manelfi claimed. In addition, the facts presented by Manelfi about the synod are also in question. Manelfi claims that the synod lasted forty days and included sixty people, while others claim that it lasted four days and included fifteen people. The location within Venice of the synod itself is also different in Manelfi's testimony (Stella 1969: 64-69).

The articles the synod accepted, according to Manelfi, were as follows:

1. Christ was not God, but man, conceived by the seed of Joseph and Mary, but filled with all the virtues of God.
2. Mary had other sons and daughters after Christ, proven by the fact that in several scripture passages Christ had brothers and sisters.
3. No angelic beings were created by God, and where scripture speaks of angels, it speaks of ministers, that is of humans sent by God so that they could establish scripture.
4. There is no other devil than the wisdom of man, and therefore that serpent of which Moses speaks of having seduced Eve, is nothing other than human wisdom, because we do not find in scripture anything created by God which is an enemy of God, if not the wisdom of man, as states Paul to the Romans.
5. The impure will not resurrect in the day of judgment, but only the elect, of which Christ is chief.
6. There is no other hell than the grave.
7. When the elect die, they are asleep in the Lord, and their souls do not benefit anything until the day of judgment, when they will be resurrected; the souls of the impure perish with their body, as do the souls of all other animals.
8. The human seed has, from God, the power to produce flesh and spirit.
9. The elect are justified by the eternal mercy and kindness of God, without any visible work, we mean without the death, the blood and merit of Christ.
10. Christ died as a demonstration of the justice of God, and by justice we mean the cumulus of all the goodness and mercy of God and of all his promises (Manelfi 1970: 34-35).

Again, according to Manelfi, these new doctrines came to be added to the 'ancient opinions of the Anabaptists' which were already held by the members of the synod, and 'especially those [opinions] about magistrates' (Manelfi 1970: 66). This is another place where the testimony of Manelfi is shaky, for in reality some of these ancient opinions would have had to be modified since to hold to the belief that Christ was not God, according to Manelfi himself, the synod ended up rejecting 'the first and second chapter of the gospel of saint Matthew and the first, second, and part of the third chapter of saint Luke'. This was because 'in these chapters it is said that our Lord Christ is born of the holy Spirit, and we wanted him to be born of the seed of Joseph', because 'only what conforms to the prophets is the gospel, and those chapters according to our doctrine do not conform with the prophets', and finally because 'in the epistle from saint Jerome to pope Damasus we find that said pontiff tells saint Jerome to add, subtract, correct the gospels, and we say that these chapters were added by saint Jerome' (Manelfi 1970: 64).

Also according to Manelfi, the only group to reject these new teachings during the synod was the delegation from Cittadella. Yet, it seems that the Anabaptist community of Cittadella was not present at the synod, for Tealdo had not wanted to come. Not only that, but it also seems that the articles of faith given by Manelfi had indeed been agreed upon by some, not in Venice, but at a successive meeting in Ferrara. It is only at that meeting that some ultimately decided against the divinity of Christ. Yet, unlike what Manelfi implied, there were several who did not agree with this position. Not the least of whom was Tiziano, who had 'contested greatly… for he alleged that if you destroy a part [of Scripture] you eventually destroy the whole' (Stella, 1969: 64-69). Therefore, as Gastaldi claims, 'there is no doubt that the "new articles" are not another invention of the priest from the Marche' (Gastaldi 1981: 556), but they were not as universally accepted as one might think from reading Manelfi's delations.

After the synod, several 'apostolic bishops' were sent throughout the Anabaptist network of churches to inform the churches of the doctrinal decisions taken in Venice. The ones who refused to accept the new antitrinitarian doctrines would be dismissed from the network of churches. Stella notes that not all the communities accepted the new teachings. There were even some 'turbulent protests' like the one that happened in Verona at a Sunday morning gathering in September of 1551, when the local community there refused to accept these new teachings (Stella 1967: 79). As Manelfi would himself report in his November 14, 1551, delation: 'all accepted rebaptism, but when they heard that Christ was only human and from the seed of man, they did not want to hear about it and there was a controversy and each one returned to his house' (Manelfi 1970: 72).

The question then remains as to why Manelfi would have lied to the inquisition, especially since he had gone there of his own accord. Gastaldi offers what seems to be the most plausible explanation: Manelfi was working with the *Sant'Uffizio* (the Venetian inquisition) and the Roman Curia. Rome had been trying to pressure Venice, for some time, not to be so lenient on religious heterodoxy. When they became aware of the presence of Anabaptists in the Republic, they knew that they now had some leverage. Anabaptist thought was seen as radical and subversive due to their challenge of the concept of Christendom, their views on the magistrate (this was a major theme in Manelfi's delations), and the Münster debacle. Antitrinitarian thought was even worse, for by denying the divinity of Jesus there was an even more direct challenge to the foundation of Christendom. The Curia knew that had the Venetians known of these radicals, they would not have tolerated them. In addition, Venice had been tolerant concerning protestant sympathizers probably due to business interests. They benefited from the sale of heterodox books, but more importantly, they benefited from trading with 'protestant' governments. Since there were no Anabaptist governments and both the Roman church and the Reformed churches persecuted the Anabaptists, protecting these radicals had no pecuniary benefit for these merchants to make the presence of their radical ideas tolerable. The *Sant'Uffizio* knew it had what it needed to push Venice into action. Yet, to make sure that Venice took the bait, Manelfi's testimonies needed to be considered important. By claiming to be at the heart and head of the movement, Manelfi sealed the validity of his testimony, therefore helping the Roman cause (Gastaldi 1981: 557-58). In the letter to the Venetian authorities, the Roman Curia highlighted precisely these things, warning them that 'throughout all of Italy was discovered, by the great goodness of our lord God, a multitude of anabaptists, who have conjured against the magistrates, against our faith and against Christ our redeemer' (Manelfi 1970: 83). The plan worked; after having been contacted by the *Sant'Uffizio*, the Council of the Ten itself took action to exterminate the radicals in the Republic.

## Some Other Testimonies of Anabaptism in Italy

There are, in addition to what has been presented above, many other testimonies of Anabaptism in Italy depicting a varied population, as can be seen in Firpo's summary of Manelfi's catalog of individuals:

> Out of his declaration emerges a thick and varied world spreading from Padua to Istria, from Verona to Rovigo, from the Cittadella to Friuli, comprised of tailors, hatters, perfumers, shoemakers, innkeepers, weavers, apothecaries, rag merchants, tooth-drawers, barbers, dyers, furriers, blacksmiths, metal workers, peddlers (among whom were a 'handicapped without feet' and a 'hunchbacked

> who sold bread in the square' at Vicenza), often with all their families. In addition, there were painters and sword smiths who were often forced to leave their professions ('Anabaptists do not want any who make weapons or paintings'). There were also doctors, notaries, rectors and canonries of the Pola cathedral, ex-priests and friars married with children (whom had become artisans), teachers, farmers, a student, a doctor in law and even a commendatory abbot from Naples such as Girolamo Busale (Firpo 2004: 144-45).

Anabaptists were found throughout the land of Italy. There are some testimonies of a large group of Anabaptists as far south as Sicily. A knight of Malta in Rome claimed that he witnessed the execution of thirty or forty Anabaptists in Sicily while 'an infinite number of others fled' only to be recaptured later. 'Some were quartered, and others were broken, and others tortured and hanged, and for most of them the quarters were put at the doors of the cities where said Anabaptists had been found, the number of which exceeded about a hundred.' He also claimed that a recently burned Anabaptist bishop was known to have himself 're-baptized more than three thousand' (Chevalier de Malte 1589: 3-6). Others populated the Alpine region.

Their doctrine generally aligned itself with Anabaptist doctrine. For example, a follower of Nicolò d'Alessandria, Biagio the shoemaker, told the court that d'Alessandria had told him:

> that if I wanted to live as a christian I needed to leave the roman church because her ceremonies were all sophistries and that the pope was the antichrist and that confession of all one's sins given to a priest is not necessary, because all one needs to do is confess to God because the priests were not real priests and ministers of the word and that one needed to preach and explain the mass… and that one should only pray to one saint, that is Jesus Christ… and that the sacrament of extreme unction was something made by man and that the real extreme unction was to ask God for his mercy… that this world was the Purgatory and that one did not need to do good deeds for the dead and that the good deeds that one wanted to do should be done to praise God… and that one cannot be baptized if one did not first believe (Stella 1969: 41, n. 80).

Or again, in a compilation of several testimonies pieced by Stella, we see the beliefs of Girolamo Allegretti, the new pastor of the Anabaptist community of Gardone, and of his aid Stefano de' Giusti, a doctor from Cremona:

> First: they deny that Christ is really in the Host, and they say that if he were really there one would be able to hear his bones breaking while chewing; second, they deny that baptism is necessary and they do not baptize anybody; third, they deny that the sacrament of penitence is necessary; fourth, they say that it is crazy to say a mass for the living or the dead; fifth, they say that there are no true feasts during the year, but that every day is equal and they work indiffer-

> ently of what day it is; sixth, they say that the pontiff is the antichrist; seventh, they say that there are no leaders, just Christ; eighth, they say that the ones we call leaders do not have any authority, but only the [authority] of the congregation; nineth, they have broken the figures of the saints and said that they were masks and deformities; tenth, they deny that the church is that of the faithful; eleventh, they deny free will; twelveth, they deny purgatory (Stella 1969: 45).

Italian Anabaptists also included misunderstood individuals like Camillo Renato, as the Sicilian Paolo Ricci eventually renamed himself (Casadei 1939; Church 1932: 39, n. 39). According to Williams, Renato 'was genetically and morphologically an important nodal point connecting three branches of the Radical Reformation: Spiritualism, Evangelical Rationalism, and Anabaptism' (Williams 1965: 109). Given Renato's role, he is often depicted as he is seen in the eyes of the historian writing about him. Specifically, Williams repeatedly tries to depict Renato as a spiritualist by arbitrarily adding the term spiritualist on two separate occasions in translations, mistranslating terms so as to be able to strengthen parallels between Renato and Schwenckfeld, and poorly representing the writings of the eighteenth century Rhaetian historian Petro Dominico Rosio de Porta (Disseau 2014: 70, n. 137; 90, n. 20; 134, n. 30; 145, n. 76). Similarly, Rotondò and Casadei like to depict Renato as a rationalist by often establishing a false dichotomy between reason and faith, and ignoring Renato's own attestation about the centrality of Scripture in the life of a Christian (Disseau 2014: 201-2). Yet, there is a substantial difference between connecting and embodying; while Renato had connections, albeit important, with the Sozzini family and ties with Tiziano, the lack of cohesive information in the coeval narratives suggests that a better understanding of Renato has to come from the study of his doctrines, as compared to the doctrines of his contemporaries. A study of his doctrines of baptism and the Lord's supper, in addition to his views on Scripture more clearly labels him an Anabaptist than a spiritualist or an evangelical rationalist (Disseau 2014: 210).

The last mention of Anabaptism in Italy coincides with the end of the Italian reformation. Due to the great persecution that was unleashed by the plethora of names given by Manelfi, many Anabaptists who were able to escape left, often not knowing where they were going. They often tried to end up in Germany or Turkey, 'not to become a Turk', one would share, 'but to live in freedom with their faith' (Stella 1969: 8). During this exodus, many also went to Moravia and there connected (or possibly re-connected) with the Hutterite communities. It was there that the newly arrived antitrinitarians were confronted again with the 'ancient opinions' and had to make a choice: keep their beliefs and find another place to settle, or reject their antitrinitarianism and become part of the brotherhood. We know the story of four of them, Giulio Gherlandi, Francesco della Sega, Antonio Rizzetto, and Gian Giorgio Patrizi, all four citizens of the Republic of Venice. All four eventually wrote to and undertook missionary journeys to Venice to beg their brothers and sisters there to abandon their antitrinitarianism and move to Moravia where they could live in freedom. All four were eventually arrested and executed. After the death of Gian Giorgio Patrizi, there is no more news about missionaries from Moravia and no news of the Anabaptists in Italy (Galstaldi 1981: 577-90; DeWind 1954: 163-85; Stella 1969: 228-307).

## What Shall We Make of All of This?

First of all, there must be a recognition that there were genuine Anabaptists in Italy. As I have argued elsewhere (Disseau 2013: 235-260), DeWind was mistaken when he claimed that 'it is high time for historians to set the movement in a clearer light and to bring about a cessation of the practice of speaking of the radical Italians as "Anabaptists"' (DeWind 1952: 28). Granted that his comment was primarily a response to his study of the radicals who had fled from Italy to the Leagues, the sentiment of the entirety of his article is that there was no such thing as Italian Anabaptism, or to use his terminology, there were no true *Täufer* in Italy. DeWind does moderate his view some in a 1954 article where he admits that there were 'those (very few in number) who sought for and found their idea of a true church' (DeWind 1954: 163), but he still underrepresents the thousands of Anabaptists who did exist in Italy. In connection with this, there must be a correction to the impression that all Italian Anabaptists were antitrinitarians. Clearly, some did turn to this heterodox position, but not all, and probably less than the literature at times seems to indicate.

Next there must be a call to the academia to renew the study of Italian Anabaptism. There is much that needs to be analyzed and much that has yet to be unearthed. Along with this call, also comes a plea for people to be careful in their studies. While running the risk of appearing to be unfairly targeting Williams (which I am not), I need to point out that while he is to be commended for all the research that he has done on the Italians and on Camillo Renato (one of the few Anglophones to do so), I have found him to be sloppy on at least two other occasions, in addition to the comments already mentioned above: quoting sources that he obviously was not familiar with (Disseau 2014: 42, n. 34) or directly citing manuscripts while clearly having only referred to second hand citations of them (Disseau 2014: 60, n. 96).

Finally, there must be an appreciation for those who propagated the gospel at very high personal risk on the southern side of the Alps as their brothers did on the Northern side. These heroes of the faith should be remembered, for in their desire to *viver in libertà con la nostra fede* (live in freedom with our own faith) they help lay the foundation central to the religious freedom that so many of us enjoy today. May we seek to be as obedient to Scripture and our Lord as they were.

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