Introduction

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This volume sets out to explore the world of domestic devotions in early modern Italy. Religious life in this time and place has long been the subject of scholarly study; so too have the household, family and domestic sphere.¹ Yet it is only relatively recently that academic attention has been paid to the overlap between these – to the myriad, complex and diverse ways in which people in this era engaged with religious beliefs, practices, rituals and objects in their homes.²

- 1 On the household and family see Palumbo-Fossati I., “L'interno della casa dell'artigiano e dell'artista nella Venezia del Cinquecento”, *Studi Veneziani* 8 (1984) 109–153; Herlihy D. – Klapisch-Zuber C., *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven & London: 1985); Sarti R., *Vita di casa: abitare, mangiare, vestire nell'Europa moderna* (Rome-Bari: 1999); Balestracci D., *The Renaissance in the Fields: Family Memoirs of a Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Peasant* (University Park, PA: 1999); Fortini Brown P., *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture and the Family* (New Haven and London: 2004); Grubb J.S., “House and Household: Evidence from Family Memoirs”, in Lanaro P. – Marini P. – Varanini G.M. (eds.), *Edilizia privata nella Verona rinascimentale* (Milan: 2000) 118–133; Howe N. (ed.), *Home and Homelessness in the Medieval and Renaissance World* (Notre Dame, IN: 2004). A seminal work that elucidated links between institutions, doctrine and lay piety is Niccoli O., *La vita religiosa nell'Italia moderna: Secoli XV–XVIII* (Rome: 1998).
- 2 An early example is Zemon Davis N., “Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France”, *Daedalus* 106.2 (1977) 87–114. Scholarship on Protestant households was swift to take up this theme, and much recent research owes a debt to works such as Ozment S., *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: 1983) and Roper L., *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: 1989). Recent publications on Protestant Britain have continued this trend: Hamling T., *Decorating the Godly Household. Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven and London: 2010); Rylie A., *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (Burlington, VT: 2012); Doran J. – Methuen C. – Walsham A. (eds.), *Religion and the Household, Studies in Church History* 50 (2014). Work on Catholic contexts includes Bornstein D., “Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions”, in Brown J.C. – Davis R.C. (eds.), *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London: 1998) 173–192; select essays in Forster M.R. – Kaplan B.J. (eds.), *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Steven Ozment* (Aldershot: 2005); Cooper D., “Devotion”, in Ajmar-Wollheim M. – Dennis F. (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: 2006) 190–203; De Sandre Gasparini G. – Grado Merlo G. – Rigon A. (eds.), *Religione domestica: medioevo, età moderna, Quaderni di storia religiosa* 8 (2001); Mattox P., “Domestic Sacral Space in the Florentine Renaissance Palace”, *Renaissance Studies* 20/5 (2006) 658–673; Morse M., “Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian Casa”, *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007) 151–84; Corry M. – Howard D. – Laven M. (eds.), *Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: 2017).

Scholars who seek to illuminate the interface between religion and domestic life have benefited from gains made by earlier work on the home and family. The seminal work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas has been crucial in this regard. For her, the home is both a space and a community: it is a repository of memory, a place where each individual is expected to invest in the collective good, somewhere with an aesthetic and moral dimension.³ The boundaries of the home are not fixed, and it can be a fragile entity that is easily disrupted. This fluidity is central to our definition of domesticity. The early modern *casa* housed not just the nuclear family but a shifting network of kin, friends, business associates, servants and apprentices. Households were not stable units: babies were put out to wet-nurse, children lived with employers, elite girls were raised in convents, widowed women returned to their natal homes, men left for seasonal work, relatives came and went. Defining 'domestic space' is also not straightforward.⁴ Many Italians would not have recognised any clear delineation between spaces for living, working and socialising, as extant architecture makes clear. Numerous individuals spent parts of their lives in institutional settings, and the poorest in society, lacking defined spaces that they could call 'home', nonetheless experienced what can be classed as 'domestic' devotions.

Notwithstanding these realities, our aim is to affirm the importance of the domestic environment to spiritual life in this period.⁵ If we acknowledge that behaviours and rituals shape human experience to a greater degree than doctrines, then it becomes clear that the home is as deserving of the attention of scholars interested in religiosity as the church. Within the *casa* daily prayers were said, candles were lit in front of images, and divine grace was received. Births, deaths and marriages all took place at home and were marked by religious rituals and observances. Times of crisis as well as key moments of the

3 Douglas M., "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space", in Mack A. (ed.), "Home: A Place in the World" *Social Research* 58, 1 (1991) 287–307.

4 A strong body of scholarship on Catholic spaces has emerged in recent years (the scope of which cannot be fully indicated here), see for example Boesch Gajano S. – Scaraffia L. (eds.), *Luoghi sacri e spazi della santità* (Turin: 1990), in particular the essays by Signorotto G.V., Zarri G., Rosa M.; Verdon T. (ed.), *Lo spazio del sacro: luoghi e spostamenti – The Space of the Sacred: Place and Displacement* (Bologna: 1997); Spicer A. – Hamilton S. (eds.), *Defining the Holy Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: 2005), in particular essays by Webb D., Banner L.A., and Pestell T.

5 We are here primarily interested in lay homes, rather than those headed by ecclesiastics, or institutional domesticities. However, we recognise that such distinctions are not so easily drawn: clerics and laypeople were members of the same families and often shared domestic spaces.

day – waking, eating, sleeping – were punctuated with prayer that could be individual or communal, spoken, read or sung. This was an era of increasing focus on the importance of the household and family (in general, civic and moral terms), and although the practice of domestic devotion was by no means an early modern invention, its significance was amplified in the period's discourse.⁶ The definition of a space as domestic in no way precluded its conceptualisation in explicitly spiritual terms. In recognition of this fact, advice literature urged laypeople to make space for moments of quiet reflection and meditation (both literally within their homes and figuratively within their hearts and souls); a wealth of material evidence confirms that many did so.

Essays in this volume draw attention to these realities, and shine light on their significance to life in this period. They highlight that domestic devotions were often simultaneously personal, familial and communal. Although the home could be an intimate space of quiet contemplation, religious life within its walls was shaped by the participatory activities of church, confraternity, shrine, parish, pilgrimage and procession in profound ways.⁷ Equally, rituals that took place in the church, confraternal hall or street had domestic aspects and meanings, and the language and imagery of home and family appeared frequently in Catholic discourse. The home was a site of pious sociability, where religious festivities, weddings, and in general all those activities traditionally associated with collective and public gatherings were celebrated.⁸ Domestic devotions were enmeshed with institutional forms of piety, and many essays explore the ways in which practices, sounds, gestures and objects which originated in churches, monasteries and confraternal

6 On the earlier roots of some early modern practices see Webb D., "Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages", in Spicer A. – Hamilton S. (eds.), *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: 2005) 27–47, and the essay by Bacci in this volume.

7 See essays in this volume by Chiu, Dall'Aglia, Fenlon, Garnett and Rosser and Viola. Here our approach is in harmony with a large body of scholarship from across disciplines which rejects neat divisions between public/private and clerical/lay. Studies that achieve this with a focus on early modern Catholicism include Cohn S.K., *Death and Property in Siena, 1205–1800: Strategies for the Afterlife* (Baltimore: 1988); Poska A.M., *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Leiden – Boston: 1998); and Garnett G. – Rosser J., *Spectacular Miracles. Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: 2013). Work on confraternities is often characterised by the same concern; see for instance Terpstra N., *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: 1995).

8 See essay in this volume by Kostylo. This was as true of Muslim and Jewish homes in the early modern era as of Christian ones. See essays by Wollina, Katz, Kaplan, Arad in the companion volume to this one, Faini M. – Meneghin A. (eds.), *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*, *Intersections* 59/2 (Leiden – Boston: 2019).

houses migrated into dwellings.⁹ Others make fresh contributions to historical debates surrounding the validity of the public/private distinction, indicating the need to pay careful attention to early modern language and attitudes.¹⁰ In recognition of these elisions, essays in this volume probe the intricate web of connections that bound early modern believers to one another, and examine how they negotiated different forms and spaces of piety and expressions of faith.

In the light of these observations, the question arises of whether any aspect of spiritual practice was primarily domestic in nature. Prayer, for instance, could be conducted anywhere. However, preachers and the authors of moralising treatises identified certain aspects of devotion as being especially suited to the home. Daily reading was encouraged for those who were literate, as was meditation on an image.¹¹ Believers were urged to find time and space in their lives for quiet, regular contemplation of the holy mysteries. (Such advice was clearly modelled on monastic ideals of behaviour, with treatises on the household urging their readers to think of their homes as analogous to houses of God.) It is perhaps in the quotidian repetition of behaviours that we can locate something that was particular to domestic devotion, rather than in any single act or ritual.

Another aspect that is characteristic of this period is the significance afforded to objects and artworks. Demand for religious texts and wares exploded in these years, with the greater availability, affordability and diversity of material goods meaning that more people than ever before aspired to own such items.¹² Laypeople from across the social scale used objects to create areas within their homes that were suited to daily acts of piety. Works of art were repositories

9 See essays in this volume by Ardissino, Bacci, Morse and Sarnecka.

10 See essays in this volume by Caravale and Dall'Aglio.

11 On religious reading see essays in this volume by Corbellini and Ardissino.

12 Here too the work of anthropologists has been a catalyst for developments in other disciplines, see Douglas M. – Isherwood B., *The World of Goods. Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: 1979). The literature on early modern material culture and consumption is large and ever-growing. Significant works on the domestic sphere include Thornton P., *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600* (London: 1991); Ajmar-Wollheim M. – Dennis F. (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy*; Campbell E.J. – Miller S.R. – Carroll Consavari E. (eds.), *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400–1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities* (Burlington VT: 2013). Evelyn Welch's *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumers Cultures in Italy, 1400–1600* (New Haven and London: 2005) concludes with consideration of religious goods 'Buying Heaven' 295–301. See also Corry et al., *Madonnas and Miracles*.

of stories, hopes and prayers, as essays in this collection demonstrate.¹³ They were treasured for their beauty, their rich materials, and sometimes their artistic worth. Primarily though, religious items were valued for their ability to move the soul, provide protection and bring believers closer to the divine. In the home, beholders entered into particularly intimate relationships with depicted figures: speaking to them, touching and kissing them, imaginatively interacting with them on a daily basis. Small objects worn close to the body, such as pieces of jewellery, *agnus dei* pendants or little scraps of prayer in pouches, were often especially cherished.¹⁴ The extraordinary range of items with religious significance of some sort that were incorporated into domestic life (including furniture, crockery, inkstands, candlesticks, holy water stoups, combs and cutlery) indicates how vibrantly artists and makers responded to the requirements of different believers: rich and poor, educated and uneducated, men, women and children.¹⁵

Among other things, this diversity highlights the need for historical sensitivity towards distinctions in devotional experiences. A wealth of scholarship has made clear that religion offered one of the most significant vehicles for the formation and expression of female subjectivity and agency in the early modern era. How did that dynamic operate within the home? Moralists taught that an explicitly patriarchal structure ought to govern family life: it was the assumed male head of the household who was to lead communal prayers and enforce religious discipline. Women were relied upon to behave in a pious manner and help ensure the sanctity of the home, teaching children the basics of devotion, for example, but they were expected to do so under male guidance and supervision. Spirituality itself could be deeply gendered, with contemporaries regularly associating practices and beliefs that were condemned as superstitious and silly with femininity, regardless of whether they were adhered to by men or women. The reality, although it was profoundly informed by these discourses, was of course more complicated. While any simplistic association of domesticity with femininity must be vigorously resisted, it is nonetheless true that women were able to carve out agency from within the intersecting frameworks of the domestic and the devotional. Sometimes this crystallised around explicitly female events that were more likely to happen at home than anywhere else, such as childbirth.¹⁶ On other occasions, reputations for piety

13 See essays in this volume by Bacci, Brody, Corry, Morse and Sarnecka.

14 See essays in this volume by Galandra Cooper and Tycz.

15 See essay in this volume by Bacci, Brody, Corry and Sarnecka. See also Corry – Howard – Laven (eds.), *Madonnas and Miracles*.

16 See essay in this volume by Tycz.

allowed laywomen to situate themselves at the centre of networks of power and exchange.¹⁷ While valuable studies have shed light on the links between female religiosity and the household more work is needed on the spiritual experiences of laymen, and the ways in which concepts of masculinity, as well as femininity, shaped religious life within the home.¹⁸

Disparity in social status offers another analytical framework through which our topic can be viewed. Those who were poor and spent their days in the fields or moving around the city might have found it difficult to attend to admonitions to create quiet spaces of contemplation in their daily routines. Those who could not afford the full paraphernalia of domestic devotion (or who shared their living space with many others) were less able to create areas demarcated for prayer within their homes. Many of the essays in this volume explore practices that were commonplace across the social scale, or pay attention to objects and works of art that were available to those without great means.¹⁹ Yet the disparities between the experiences of rich and poor is an area where more work is to be done.²⁰

As with all historical enquiries covering a span of several hundred years, our topic prompts consideration of changes and continuities in domestic devotion. Italian spirituality in this era was shaped by forces that crystallised in two major events: the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation, and the Council of Trent. The spread of Reformed ideas in Italy in the first decades of the sixteenth century – partly thanks to the diffusion of cheap print – prompted questioning of some of the most widespread devotional practices.²¹

17 See essay in this volume by Novi Chavarria.

18 One recent essay that does so is Willis J., "The Decalogue, Patriarchy, and Domestic Religious Education in Reformation England", in Doran et al. *Religion and the Household* 199–209. Another that takes account of both male and female spectatorship of domestic works of art that had moral and religious connotations is Randolph A., "Renaissance Household Goddesses: Fertility, Politics, and the Gendering of the Spectatorship" in McClanan A.L. – Rosoff Encarnación K. (eds.), *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation, and Marriage in Premodern Europe* (New York: 2001) 163–189. A forthcoming study that engages with the religiosity of laymen is: Corry M., *Beautiful Bodies: Sexuality, Spirituality and Gender in Leonardo's Milan* (Oxford: forthcoming).

19 See essays in this volume by Ardissino, Chiu, Corry, Fenlon, Galandra Cooper, Garnett and Rosser, Sarnecka and Tycz.

20 On the ability of sources such as the *registri dei pegni* in the series of the *Monti di Pietà* to shine light on the religious lives of those of lower status see Meneghin A., "Fonti per la storia della devozione popolare nella Marca pontificia (XV–XVI secc.). I registri dei pegni nelle serie dei Monti di Pietà", *Ricerche Storiche*, 47:3 (settembre–dicembre 2017) 5–24.

21 On print see Salzberg R., *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester: 2016) 117.

The Reformation manifested itself in Italy in manifold ways: Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, anti-Trinitarian and even more radical ideas coexisted and mingled with one other, and need to be considered alongside attempts at reform that were rooted in Catholic orthodoxy.

It was not just beliefs that were shaped by the influence of Reformed doctrines but also practices. Clandestine conventicles were held in semi-public spaces such as shops, taverns and workshops, as well as in homes. Such places provided ideal environments for discussion, and for the performance of deviant rituals. Adherents to these new creeds often adopted a double standard of behaviour in their everyday lives: the practice of Nicodemism made it possible to draw a distinction between one's public persona, and one's inner self.²² Individuals who adhered to this approach seemed outwardly to abide by Catholic orthodoxy, but in private followed their true beliefs.²³ Despite many reformers, such as Calvin, arguing that martyrdom was preferable to dissimulation, the majority of heterodox believers in Italy chose the latter path.

As is well known, Protestants placed significant emphasis on domestic aspects of religiosity.²⁴ While the Reformation called for a more personal brand of spirituality, based on the reading of the Gospels rather than the authority of priest and Church, it also entailed a whole range of beliefs that had a powerful influence on everyday life. Reformed spirituality involved activities such as chanting the Psalms, celebrating the Lord's Supper and reading and discussing the Bible that all took place within the home; it could even shape dietary regimes.²⁵ The influx of new ideas that penetrated Italy also had an impact on visual cultures of devotion. Examples include Lorenzo Lotto's portraits of Luther and his wife, painted in 1540 for his nephew Mario D'Armano, or the famous *Crucifixion* drawn by Michelangelo for Vittoria Colonna, with its emphasis on ideas expressed in the *Beneficio di Cristo* (1543).²⁶

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- 22 On Nicodemism see Ginzburg C., *Il Nicodemismo* (Turin: 1970); more recently, and for further bibliography, Valente M., "Un sondaggio sulla pratica cattolica del nicodemismo. «Che li scolari tedeschi si debbano tollerare a vivere luteranamente, in segreto però»", in Peyronel S. (ed.), *Cinquant'anni di storiografia italiana sulla Riforma e i movimenti ereticali in Italia 1950–2000* (Turin: 2002) 157–216. On dissimulation see Snyder J.R., *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: 2009).
- 23 As previously mentioned, study of these aspects of early modern spirituality can fruitfully illuminate public/private distinctions in this era. See essays in this volume by Caravale and Kostylo.
- 24 See works cited in note 2.
- 25 See Kostylo's essay in this volume.
- 26 On Lotto see Firpo M., *Artisti gioiellieri eretici. Il mondo di Lorenzo Lotto tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Rome – Bari: 2001). On Michelangelo see Alberti A. – Rovetta A. – Salsi C.

One area where reformers in the post-Tridentine Church were in partial agreement with Protestants was on the need to eradicate 'superstition'. For Protestants, the term referred to the use of most religious paraphernalia, belief in miracles and many other aspects of Catholic devotion.²⁷ For the post-Tridentine reformers, superstition designated what could now be defined as traditional, or folkloric forms of practice. Belief in a whole world of magical and supernatural powers had long shaped attitudes to ritual, prayer, enchantments and images in Italian religiosity. Many 'superstitious' practices were intrinsically domestic, and revolved around everyday hopes and fears: conception; recovery from illness; warding off accidents; protection against bad weather and thieves; safeguarding mothers and babies during childbirth; defence against evil spirits, and so on.²⁸ The intertwining of magic and religion was commonplace and was widespread amongst believers of all levels of society, including members of the Church.²⁹ In the aftermath of Trent, the repressive apparatus of the Counter Reformation targeted these practices in an attempt to eradicate them. The dual measures of censorship and inquisitorial activity were wielded in the effort to stamp out deviancy. As a result, little survives of the wealth of cheap prints, flysheets and texts that transmitted many of these ideas. There are a few extant printed or manuscript copies of prayers, orations and legends with rubrics that insist on the talismanic and amuletic powers of the text, but most of what we know of their use derives from indirect sources such as trials, letters, *Acta synodalia* and later accounts.³⁰ These sources tell us that despite its best efforts, the Counter Reformation Church failed to eliminate these beliefs.³¹ Essays in this volume point to a position

(eds.), *D'après Michelangelo. La fortuna dei disegni per gli amici nelle arti del Cinquecento* (Venice: 2015), esp. the section 'Crocifisso'.

- 27 Although the Reformation did not entirely undermine belief in miraculous events: see Soergel P.M., *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany* (Oxford: 2012).
- 28 See Faini M., "Every-Day Miracles and Supernatural Agency in Sixteenth-Century Italy. The Case of the Marche", in Cardarelli S. – Fenelli L. (eds.), *Saints, Miracles and the Image: Healing Saints and Miraculous Images in the Renaissance* (Turnhout: forthcoming); in the same volume see also Meneghin A., "The Miracles of the *Madonna del Soccorso* of Rovigo: Popular Piety, Natural Disasters and the Environment of Polesine in the Sixteenth Century".
- 29 See for example the case of the priest Guglielmo Campana explored in Duni M., *Tra religione e magia. Storia del prete modenese Guglielmo Campana (1460?–1541)* (Florence: 1999).
- 30 See Tycz's essay in this volume.
- 31 Rozzo U., *La strage ignorata. I fogli volanti a stampa nell'Italia dei secoli XV e XVI* (Udine: 2008); Caravale G., *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Farnham: 2011).

of reluctant compromise that was adopted by some reformers: traditional forms of devotion could be tolerated within the domestic sphere, if in public believers conformed to the newly codified orthodoxy.³²

There had always been a divergence between how the Church thought spirituality ought to manifest itself in the home and how it did so in reality. This rift between the prescriptive tenets of domestic devotion and its actual features deepened over the sixteenth century. Historians have long mined the substantial advice literature of this era, but those who are interested in the experience of lay piety also have to attend closely to the scraps of evidence that have come down to us in trial records, legislation, songs, material and visual remains, written accounts and architecture. In many cases, those interested in domestic devotion find themselves caught between prescriptive sources and accounts of 'deviant' practices. Widespread, everyday devotions were not often recorded (not all are as lucky as historians of Tuscany who have recourse to *libri di famiglia* which often contain pertinent material); the essays in this volume therefore represent a precious effort in the reconstruction of the kinds of customs, rituals and beliefs that powerfully shaped both religious and home life in early modern Italy.³³

1 The Unbounded Nature of Domestic Space

It has been noted that many of the essays in this volume testify to the impossibility of drawing any clear distinction between individual and collective devotions, instead highlighting the myriad ways in which these were linked. Spiritual ties expanded outwards from the domestic sphere, enmeshing the whole community in a network of social relationships that had a religious dimension. Iain Fenlon's contribution explores devotional music, demonstrating that it was common for the chanted litany to be sung in the home as well as in churches, monasteries, and convents. By a careful study of extant evidence Fenlon is able to reconstruct some of the pious sounds that echoed through early modern homes. Study of Florentine *laudi* demonstrates that a 'rich variety of interlocking musical practices', both public and private, were audible in this urban context. In Venice, too, *madrigali spirituali* and litanies, *laudi* and hymns such as the 'Salve Regina' were commonly heard *in casa*. In the intimacy

32 See essays in this volume by Caravale and Dall'Aglio.

33 For an example of the use of this kind of Tuscan evidence see Corbellini's essay in this volume.

of the home, in front of images of the Virgin, prayers were said and devotional songs sung, just as in church.

Remi Chiu's essay similarly illustrates how sound linked domestic and communal spaces. Chiu focuses on a series of processions held in Milan in 1576–78 during an outbreak of plague. These were organised by the Archbishop Carlo Borromeo as a response to the problem of collective sin. Whether sung in the streets during one of these processions, or from behind doors and windows due to the imposition of quarantine, religious music brought the populace together in the fight against the communal scourge. Moreover, singing at home could activate a form of imaginative devotion: by retracing the steps of Christ on his long suffering *Via Crucis* one could remain safely indoors during the plague and yet attend a procession 'in spirit'. If the procession must be seen as a physical expression of civic and social organisation and hierarchy, it can also be read as an event during which liturgy and music allowed individuals to participate in a shared devotion that encompassed domestic space within its boundaries. The home thus became the site of religious experience that was simultaneously individual, familial, household, civic and communal.

Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser discuss the *ex voto* as a particular point of reference, a witness to this special relationship between individual religiosity and that which was communal. Focusing on Liguria, the authors argue that while the *ex voto* evidently functioned as a direct witness of the receipt of personal grace, it simultaneously held powerful collective significance. Those who left *ex votos* at shrines declared themselves to be part of a local community of believers. By doing so, they participated in the formation of public memory and affirmed the miraculous powers of a particular holy figure. The *ex voto* thus represents a perfect example of the ways in which personal religious experiences found natural expression and obvious significance in the context of a social community.

At times, the impetus for the convergence of domestic and communal aspects of religious life came more from one side than the other. If Chiu deals with the appropriation of communal customs by laypeople in domestic contexts, Valeria Viola considers the opposite occurrence: when spaces that were ostensibly reserved for the devotions of a household took on more expansive and collective significance. Viola's essay presents case-studies of the architecture of noble residences in Palermo during the age of Counter Reformation. She demonstrates that apparently 'private' familial *oratori* and chapels were used for church functions that included the wider community, either regularly or when the necessity arose. A careful comparison of rural and urban examples reveals that this was especially true in the countryside, where in some cases

the communal role of a 'private' space concluded with its final transformation into a parish church. Viola also highlights the importance of paying attention to regional variations in responses to the restrictions that Rome sought to impose on the use of domestic chapels after Trent, exploring how they shaped the particular spiritual landscape of Palermo.

2 Domesticating the Divine

Contemporaries recognised that domestic space was defined as much by its myriad links to other spheres and networks as by any sense of enclosure. At the same time, the richly interactive relationship between domesticity and religiosity meant that beliefs about the household and family themselves shaped piety. Domestic metaphors and imagery featured in prayers and songs, *vite* of recent saints described their origins in ordinary lay households, and images of the births of holy babies in contemporary settings affirmed that everyday events could have intense religious significance. This was also a period characterised by a real appetite for images, objects and stories that illuminated the home lives of holy individuals, whether near contemporaries or Biblical figures. Popular texts told of how the little boy Jesus helped his mother around the house, laying the table and making the beds, and increasing prominence was given to the iconography of the nuclear Holy Family, with their loving bond held up as an ideal for ordinary people to emulate.³⁴ In addition, from earliest childhood early modern Italians were encouraged to develop close, even familial, relationships with the holy figures who inhabited their homes – appearing in prints and paintings, decorating crockery and other day-to-day objects, evoked in literature, prayer and song.

This impulse towards the domestication of the divine is unsurprising: this was a period during which the home increasingly took centre stage in moral and civic discourse. Discussions of marriage, household management and childrearing; interest in etiquette, manners and bodily deportment; the attempted regulation of household goods – all emphasised the moral significance of the home. Margaret Morse examines this overlap in her essay on portraiture. She

34 Texts that explored the home lives of holy figures include the widely read thirteenth-century *Meditationes vitae Christi* which was attributed by contemporaries to Bonaventure, and the early-fourteenth-century *Vita di San Giovanni Battista*. On these texts and their relationship to contemporary devotional practices see Corry's essay in this volume. On the cult and iconography of the Holy Family see Wilson C., *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art* (Philadelphia: 2001).

asserts that neat art historical divisions of Renaissance paintings into 'secular' and 'religious' did not reflect the contemporary reality. Piety could be signalled in portraits via clothing, poses, jewellery and books. But even paintings that lacked these overt markers of religiosity could take on spiritual significance when they were hung alongside devotional images and placed in close proximity to domestic altars. Morse argues that this kind of arrangement communicated that a depicted figure was a devout member of the Christian community. If the sitter was deceased the image called forth prayers for his or her soul, and exerted continuous pressure on the living to dutifully maintain the family's honour and good standing. We are thus encouraged to think in more flexible terms about how we classify certain aspects of early modern culture.

Zuzanna Sarnecka's investigation of the taste for domestic *presepi* (Nativity scenes) encapsulates many of the trends outlined here. In the later thirteenth century Pope Nicholas IV commissioned a *presepio* for Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, in commemoration of St Francis' particular devotion to Christ's birth and the miracle at Greccio. Similar sculptural representations subsequently filled churches and convents, before migrating into homes in miniature. Paying particular attention to questions of materiality and gender, Sarnecka provides a case-study of these little terracotta objects. Many of them were functional as well as decorative, taking the form of inkstands. They asserted a charming connection between writing and the moment when 'the Word was made flesh' at Christ's birth. Thus a very everyday activity could be imbued with mystical meaning by an object that brought the holy narrative into the home.

By contrast, Elisa Novi Chavarria's study considers a cult that had its genesis in domestic circumstances, before emanating outwards into society. In Naples in the later sixteenth century Isabella della Rovere, Princess of Bisignano, was renowned for her great piety. In her chamber hung a painting depicting a Marian vision that had been experienced by her spiritual advisor, the Capuchin monk and 'living saint' Geremia da Valacchia. Geremia had the work of art made for her, and it testifies to the intimate relationship that bound the two together. But, as Novi Chavarria attests, neither Isabella nor Geremia was an isolated figure. The Princess was at the heart of a network of aristocratic sociability that was based on cultural connections and the exchange of religious relics, scientific instruments, and artistic artefacts. The holy man became the subject of widespread devotion and as his fame spread, so too did the image he had made for Isabella, disseminated in prints and sculptures. Thus the intimate, personal religious encounter of these two figures lay at the heart of a cult that traversed social boundaries and spread beyond Italy.

3 The Materiality of Devotion

As has already been noted, the centrality of material and visual culture to early modern Catholicism is inescapable. The essays in the previous sections, although grouped under different headings, encompass discussion of maiolica inkstands, musical instruments, *ex votos*, architectural structures, paintings, domestic altars, relics and prints. Catholicism was undoubtedly a religion of things: the liturgy came to employ a vast array of objects (chalices and patens of precious metals, candles and candleholders, bells, sacred vestments, crosses and so on) and churches were lavishly furnished. This period also saw a remarkable proliferation of objects intended for private devotion: rosaries, crucifixes, *agnus dei*, medals and pilgrim badges, domestic altars, holy water stoups, prints, plaquettes, sculptures and paintings. Objects and their uses sparked debate and attracted criticism, most obviously during the Protestant Reformation. Although the Catholic Church affirmed the value of the visual and material culture of religion, increasingly after Trent it sought to control the use of such objects through sanction and censure.

Historians of Catholicism have long paid attention to objects, images and the evidence of sources such as *post mortem* inventories, but the essays in this section confirm that there is still much that can be illuminated by a focused approach to material culture.³⁵ Michael Brody's study provides an overview of sixteenth-century *piatti da pompa*, objects that were often painted with religious scenes and which call into question modern definitions of a devotional image. Brody conducts a survey of the iconographies of these maiolica wares, which were found in homes across Italy. He perceives them as operating in an analogous way to paintings, and considers to what degree their cheaper production distinguished them and increased their appeal.

Brody's essay illustrates the advantages of directing new attention towards a specific category of objects, and the same is true of the contributions of Irene Galandra Cooper and Katherine Tycz. Galandra Cooper concentrates on the *agnus dei*. Her analysis attends to their physical and material characteristics, and commences with fundamental questions such as: What were *agnus dei*? Who made them and for what purposes? To what kinds of beliefs and practices do they attest? These little pieces of wax were initially an entirely licit sacramental distributed by the Church. Individuals treasured them, keeping

35 It is not possible to give a full overview of the literature on Catholic material culture here. For a recent publication of direct relevance see Corry – Howard – Laven (eds.), *Madonnas and Miracles* and bibliography.

them at home or on their persons, pinned to their clothes or hanging from their necks. However, these were multivalent objects that could slip into the realm of the illicit and become points of tension – both between the Church and laypeople, and between individuals within a single household. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent ecclesiastical authorities attempted to impose a rigidly orthodox discipline over the use of such items, and Galandra Cooper fruitfully turns to inquisitorial records to unpick these complexities.

Katherine Tycz's essay considers the material resources which women had recourse to when they faced hardship or significant life events. Focusing on items such as girdles, amulets and holy words, prayer sheets, and phrases written on *brevi*, and on attitudes to these objects that are revealed in contemporary sources, Tycz illuminates both actual practices and gendered understandings of religiosity. She demonstrates that fierce belief in the power of such aids during pregnancy and childbirth was enduring and widespread. From consideration of the apotropaic virtues of the *brevi*, Tycz moves outward to the histories of child bearing, pregnancy and infancy in early modern Italy. Her essay demonstrates that although the study of material culture prioritises research on artefacts, it is also enriched through analyses of representations of materiality, both textual and visual.

The use of objects in private devotion was nothing new, of course. Michele Bacci's essay reminds us that Christians had prayed in front of images since the earliest days of the religion. By the twelfth century, Byzantine believers had adapted rituals of the Mass and transposed them into their homes, along with religious icons. Although this domestication of church practices was suspect in the eyes of some Westerners, the production and domestic use of icons quickly spread in Italy and the Venetian empire. By the fifteenth century, the *maniera greca* was perceived as distinct from the Western style: the latter was considered more aesthetically appealing, but icons were thought by many to retain a particular value in private devotion. Bacci illustrates how artists freely mixed Italianate features with Byzantine ones to create works that made visible a trans-confessional concern with the efficacy of images for personal piety.

4 Prayer and Meditation

Throughout the early modern era, reading devotional texts and contemplating sacred images were privileged ways to gain access to the divine. A large portion of the print industry's output consisted of religious literature. Notwithstanding the prohibition issued in the aftermath of Trent on reading the Bible, Italian devotees had access to a large and manifold choice of spiritual works, mainly

in the vernacular.³⁶ Many of these books were cheap, affordable, and readily available on book-stalls, from street vendors, and in bookshops. As scholars are beginning to recognise, both the birth of new spiritual genres and the spiritualisation of pre-existing ones contributed to a rejuvenation of Italian literature in this period.³⁷ However, one should bear in mind that words and images were not mutually exclusive: many devotional books were illustrated (or contained at least one woodcut), and they shaped forms of piety that also found expression in the visual arts. Essays in this section reflect on devotional literature, on how it affected prayer and meditation, as well as on its interactions with imagery.

As Sabrina Corbellini confirms in her essay, reading provided a ‘mystical itinerary’ to God, performed in accordance with rules that were handed down to laypeople by spiritual advisors. In turn, literate laypeople taught the art of religious reading to fellow devotees. This was true of Bartolomea degli Obizzi, whose spiritual father was the Dominican Giovanni Dominici, and who herself provided guidance to other women with whom she corresponded. As Corbellini notes, there was a substantial – and still partially unexplored – outpouring of devotional books, many of which recommended regular religious reading. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, members of the mendicant orders came to comprehend the demand from laypeople for instructions on how to practice their devotions, and were swift to use the printing press to disseminate manuals that soon became best-sellers (examples include Cherubino da Spoleto’s *Regola della vita matrimoniale* (ca. 1464) and *Regola della vita spirituale* (ca. 1485)). Spiritual teachings learned while attending sermons or church were often written down, and subsequently read, meditated on, and discussed at home.

36 Fragnito G., *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471–1605)* (Bologna: 1997); ead., *Proibito capire. La Chiesa e il volgare nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: 2005).

37 Baldacchini L., *Bibliografia delle stampe popolari religiose del XVI–XVII secolo. Biblioteche Vaticana, Alessandrina, Estense* (Florence: 1980); Jacobson Schutte A., *Printed Italian Vernacular Books 1465–1550: A Finding List* (Geneva: 1983); Baldacchini L., “Il libro popolare italiano d’argomento religioso durante la Controriforma”, in Aquilon P. – Martin H.J. – Dupuigrenet Desrousilles F. (eds.), *Le Livre dans l’Europe de la Renaissance*, Actes du XXVIII^e Colloque international d’Études humanistes de Tours (Paris: 1988) 434–445; Quondam A., “Note sulla tradizione della poesia spirituale e religiosa (parte prima)”, *Studi (e testi) italiani* 16 (2005); Quondam A. (ed.), *Paradigmi e tradizioni* 127–211 and 213–282; Ferretti F., *Le Muse del Calvario. Angelo Grillo e la poesia dei benedettini cassinesi* (Bologna: 2012); Samarini F., *Poemi sacri nel Ducato di Milano* (Bologna: 2017).

While some of the devotional works that were printed for a growing audience of devout readers achieved remarkable success and longevity, many of them are nowadays largely forgotten. The same is true of paintings. Maya Corry turns her attention to the production of numerous relatively cheap, small-scale religious paintings of generally Leonardesque inspiration, which depict episodes from the infancy of Christ and St John the Baptist. Devotional literature was deeply concerned with infancy, often recommending that a child's religious education begin in their earliest years when their soul was especially malleable. Medical beliefs taught that children were naturally inclined towards sensual pleasure, and pedagogues advised that their moral instruction ought to be enjoyable. Visual images were thought to be particularly appealing, and in combination with the idea that works of art could access the soul with greater immediacy than the written word, these discourses can be seen to have driven the market in certain iconographies that were pleasing to children. Works representing the encounter between Christ and his cousin in a joyful and 'childish' way provided a focus for the youngest members of the household, stimulating pleasure, recognition and positive spiritual development. Such images were generally small-scale and widely available, and Corry's study thus provides new insight into the religious concerns of those lower down the social scale.

If the needs and desires of laypeople drove the production of devotional works of art, the same was equally true of texts. Nor was there any clear distinction between these, for contiguity between the written word and images was a defining feature of religious culture. Erminia Ardisino analyses the production of books on the rosary, exploring the interplay between words and pictures in this sub-genre. As is well known, the rosary was one of the most widespread forms of devotion in Europe. Spoken individually or collectively it could be practised anywhere, inside the home or within one of the many confraternities of the rosary. The first Italian book on the subject was Alberto da Castello's 1522 best-seller, the *Rosario della gloriosa Vergine Maria*, which was reprinted forty times. Rosary books were often illustrated so that the illiterate could take spiritual advantage from them, while more literate readers could fruitfully consider the images alongside the written text. Later in the century books of *imprese* and emblems specifically centred on the rosary were published, and it became the subject of narrative poems (some intended for a learned audience, others for a more popular readership). This dense and rich literature also encompassed texts by female authors, such as Francesca Turini Bufalini's *Rime spirituali sopra i misterii del santissimo Rosario* (1595). Ardisino's essay illustrates how a single religious practice could stimulate a wealth of cultural responses, traversing all levels of society.

5 Conflict and Control

In a time of confessional divisions, personal religiosity became an increasingly delicate matter. Homes were privileged spaces where heterodox ideas could be discussed and deviant devotional practices could be performed, as has been noted. Although we tend to think of reformed devotion as generally not relying on materiality, this is only partially true. Books, paintings and woodcuts were all central in non-orthodox devotions, and a variety of rituals and practices were associated with them.³⁸ Later in the sixteenth century the Inquisition's attention shifted towards the resistance of 'superstitious' practices, which the post-Tridentine Church struggled to eradicate. A number of essays in this volume deal with these issues, highlighting the ambiguities and the shortcomings of the strategies of the Roman Church.

Giorgio Caravale reasserts the value of the analytical categories of public and private in the specific context of the Counter Reformation, when contemporary observers became wary of forms of devotion that were practised 'away from an audience'.³⁹ The space in which heterodox believers sought shelter from prying eyes was not necessarily a physical place, a secluded room of one's house, but could be the inner part of one's soul. Yet religious authorities were suspicious of the domestic diffusion of heterodox practices and sought to encourage public displays of orthodoxy. In the second half of the sixteenth century the Inquisition tribunal increasingly turned its attention towards mysticism and superstition. Caravale defines these deviations from orthodoxy respectively as an 'excessive focus on the inner life' and an 'excessive misuse of outward signs'. Given the practical impossibility of exerting control over the personal religiosity of all Catholics (and also because of the many jurisdictional conflicts within the Counter Reformation Church), Rome resorted to a compromise. Certain forms of devotion, such as cults dedicated to un-canonised holy people, were prohibited in their public manifestations but tolerated in private. Possession of suspect books might be permitted as long as they were not read. This led to an ambivalence, a grey area in official attitudes to personal devotion that Caravale links to longer-term historical trends.

The question of how contemporaries understood the concept of 'private' devotion is taken up by Stefano Dall'Aglia in his study of a phenomenon that lay in the grey area identified by Caravale: the cult of Girolamo Savonarola.

38 See, for example, Al-Kalak M., *L'eresia dei fratelli. Una comunità eterodossa nella Modena del Cinquecento* (Rome: 2011).

39 On the use of these controversial categories, see Bonora E., "Il ritorno della Controriforma (e la Vergine del Rosario di Guápulo)", *Studi storici* 57 (2016) 267–295.

As late as the 1580s, secret conventicles were held during which devotion was paid to relics and images of the friar, and stories of his miracles were told (these also circulated in the anonymous *Trattato dei miracoli*). The cult, which was not limited to Tuscany and which involved members of all levels of society, was eminently domestic. This, Dall'Aglio suggests, was not only because it was prohibited, but was also due to Savonarola's own promotion of intimate and domestic forms of piety. Towards the end of the sixteenth century Dominican voices suggested that worship of Savonarola be allowed to continue, so long as it was conducted in 'private'. Here, Dall'Aglio argues, privacy was understood to mean within the home, rather than in one's inner soul.

This is not to suggest, however, that authorities simply ceded control over the domestic sphere. Those who advocated compromise did so in acknowledgment of the disruptive potential of religious beliefs that found expression behind closed doors. In a city such as Venice, with its proximity to German-speaking regions, these issues were particularly acute. Here, as Joanna Kostylo affirms, different confessions coexisted, and the extraordinary output of the printing press as well as the feverish circulation of manuscripts meant that it was easy to access heretical ideas.⁴⁰ Kostylo's analysis of apothecaries' households – spaces that were simultaneously familial and professional, meeting places where news was exchanged and people gathered – reconstructs the ways in which heterodox beliefs spread and took root. Multiple, conflicting religious identities could exist within a single family, and theological discussions that took place in the home could eventually lead to forms of radical unbelief. Kostylo reveals how complex networks of sociability shaped heterodoxy in early modern Venice. Lutheran – but also Calvinist and, to some extent, Anabaptist – believers read books aloud, discussed theological issues, prayed and sung together, performed music, and celebrated the Lord's Supper.

While confessional conflicts or the attempted suppression of traditional, local or folkloric cults are certainly not unique to the Italian peninsula, the extent of the interaction between these components of early modern spirituality in Italy was profound. In some respects the home was a laboratory in which reading and discussion, the comparison of confessions and faiths, and a constant dialogue took place. It is unsurprising, then, that ideas were shaped there that informed some of the major strands in European thought.

40 de Vivo F., *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: 2007).

6 Conclusion

Inevitably, a collection of case-studies such as ours cannot provide an entirely comprehensive overview of our topic. The domestic devotions of Italian Jews are not considered here, for example.⁴¹ Certain aspects of Catholic spirituality which undoubtedly had domestic manifestation are not addressed.⁴² New models of sanctity introduced in the Counter Reformation period are only touched upon, despite their relevance to our theme.⁴³ (The biographies of the Oratorians, for example, exemplary first followers of St Filippo Neri, reflect an innovative, domestic pattern of sanctity that was expressed through continuous prayer, virtue and visions, and which often included women and children.)⁴⁴ Differences based on location and region are hinted at, and a number of essays focus on areas that are understudied in Anglophone scholarship: Naples, Palermo, Liguria, Lombardy. But a more systematic study of regional variation is outside the scope of our volume.⁴⁵

What we hope to have demonstrated beyond doubt is that a tight bond existed between the domestic and the devotional. Household rituals and beliefs that were largely beyond the reach of external authority cannot be adequately traced in any one type of source, or by means of a single approach. For this reason, our volume draws on expertise across several disciplines in order to bring to light the pivotal place of piety in the early modern Italian home. Essays encompass the histories of art and architecture, material culture, musicology, literature, and social and cultural history. They address how spiritual concerns shaped definitions of 'home' and 'privacy', the role of images and

41 The partner volume to this one, *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*, does address the topic of domestic devotions from the perspective of different faiths.

42 Examples include acute fears of apocalypse, on which see Niccoli O., *Profeti e popolo nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (Rome – Bari: 1987), and belief in the ability of spirits, devils and angels to interact with humans, on which see Christian W.A., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton, NJ: 1981) and Levi G., *L'eredità immateriale: carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento* (Turin: 1985).

43 See Dall'Aglia's essay on the cult of Savonarola. See also Zarri G., *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione tra '400 e '500* (Turin: 1990); Jacobson Schutte A., *Aspiring Saints. Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750* (Baltimore and London: 2001); Gotor M., *I beati del papa. Santità, inquisizione e obbedienza in età moderna* (Florence: 2002).

44 The lives of the followers of Filippo Neri are found in Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, ms. 2068 (*olim* XX.VI.25). On the spirituality of the Filippini and its domestic dimension see Verstegen I., *Federico Barocci and the Oratorians: Corporate Patronage and Style in the Counter-Reformation* (Kirkville, MO: 2015).

45 For this see Brundin A. – Howard D. – Laven M., *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: 2018).

objects in devotion, the ability of domestic religious practices to shape wider social, cultural and economic life (and vice versa), and the complex relationships that existed between official orthodoxy and beliefs that were suspect or unsanctioned.

This volume poses a challenge to the enduring notion that Catholic religiosity in the early modern era was governed primarily by institutions. It asserts in unambiguous terms that spiritual life was not characterised by the endless repetition of empty ritual. Practices of domestic devotion did not fade away after Trent, nor did Catholic authorities cease to provide advice on how, when and where these should be conducted (the Jesuits are an obvious example). Throughout our period, for ordinary Catholics the home was a place for religious instruction and reading, prayer and meditation, communal worship, miracles, multi-sensory devotions, the contemplation of religious images and the performance of rituals. It was within this context that intimate relationships with the divine were forged and maintained; the study of domestic devotions can open up the history of the emotions and subjectivity in fascinating and important ways. Spiritual experience within the home was familial and communal, so our topic has ramifications for the study of religious institutions, and society and culture more broadly. Overall, what emerges most forcefully from these collected studies is a clear sense of the vibrancy, flexibility and importance of domestic devotions in early modern Italy.

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