PART II: THE TEXTUAL RECORD
The Catholic Press and the Strategic Uses of the Marian Cult

The great crusade of modern times is the press, and we all should be involved with it

Priest Angel Clavero

In 1899 Pope Leo XIII gathered, for the first time, a Plenary Council with Latin American Bishops with the aim of reinforcing the role of the Church in a liberal and secular world. Gathered in Rome, the Council sought to initiate an overarching process of reform of the Latin American Church under Roman supremacy, a direction that the Vatican had already secured in Europe during the Catholic resurgence of the end of the nineteenth century. As the guardian of authority and moral order, the Church, the pontiff insisted, should promote welfare and pacify social conflicts, while combating the dangers that threatened the Latin American faith: ‘superstition, ignorance, Socialism, masonry and the bad press’. Practical rules to prevent the advance of such evils soon followed suit, set up by the bishops attending the meeting for whom the expansion of religious education, a wide and strategic mobilisation of the laity, and the promotion of the Catholic press became a priority. Indeed, the latter was one of the themes in the agenda to be discussed at the Episcopal Conference in Argentina in 1902, where bishops especially called upon lay Catholics to publish and disseminate Catholic newspapers, at the time that they alerted the flock about the pernicious involvement (whether in writing or consuming) with the ‘bad press’, that is, publications contrary to the Church. Similarly, in 1906, the bishop of Córdoba called a Synod to draw out a plan of religious education, involving the clergy and lay organisations, while declaring liberalism the main enemy of the Church. The special condemnation of the ‘pornographic novels, magazines, and the liberal newspapers’ that the Synod declared reflected the Bishop’s main and enduring concern with the secularising forces that permeated society, which he perceived as threatening the Church’s legitimate social role. As he expressed with alarm, ‘in this hour of such an active propaganda against