Until recently systematic research into Catholic censorship was blocked by the enduring closure of the archives of the Roman Index and Inquisition. Only the opening in 1998 of the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, which includes the historical records of the Holy Office (or Inquisition, founded in 1542) and the Index (founded in 1572), removed the barrier to detailed study of censorship and made it possible to assess the structure and inner mechanics of Roman censorship in the early modern era. What was revealed by the first studies was an extremely complex picture of the activities of the two Congregations. In this essay I discuss some issues regarding early modern Catholic censorship of medieval works and authors, with particular attention to theological and philosophical works. Some preliminary remarks and caveats are due.

First, in view of the well-known thorny problems of periodization a neat distinction between medieval and early modern authors and works is problematic. As far as ecclesiastical censorship is concerned, however, the rise of the printing press and of the Protestant Reform seems a more sensible caesura than any watershed in epochs. Thus, for present purposes, I

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1 Now held in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (from now on: ACDF) in Rome.

2 It must be noted that, unlike the archives of the Holy Office, the records of the Index are relatively intact. The Inquisition holdings suffered many and serious losses. For example, the burning of the Inquisition palace in 1559 on the death of pope Paul IV; then the removal of the archival records by Napoleon after his occupation of Rome. For discussion of the latter, see R. Ritzler, "Die Verschleppung der päpstlichen Archive nach Paris unter Napoleon I. und deren Rückführung nach Rom in den Jahren 1815 bis 1817," Römische Historische Mitteilungen 6-7 (1962-1964): 144-90.


intend by the term medieval authors those active, *grosso modo*, till the end of the fifteenth century.

Second, Roman censorship, as organized in the Congregations of the Holy Office and the Index, concentrated on living persons and recently published books. Thus, in addition to older prohibitions and condemnations of notorious heretical or suspect authors (among whom Abelard, Joachim of Fiore, Michael of Cesena, William Ockham, John Wycliffe, and Marsilius of Padua), most medieval authors were examined only when their works appeared in print. Now, several distinct cases can be distinguished. Often, works of orthodox Fathers and medieval doctors were examined and/or prohibited simply because they appeared in editions published by Protestants or suspect authors and printers, active for the most part in Switzerland and Germany. By contrast, many suspect or heretical authors were never placed on the Index, because their works had already been condemned by ancient or medieval councils. Origen is a case in point. Many authors, among whom Ockham and Michael of Cesena, probably appeared for the same reason on early indexes, and were tacitly removed in the later sixteenth-century indexes. Other suspect medieval authors were examined in the sixteenth century by the Congregation for the Index when their works appeared in print. They were condemned on some local list or prohibited in one of the Roman Indexes, but they were tacitly removed at the end of the century. Cusanus is a case in point. Many works on astrology and divination by Arab authors (Avenaris, Albubather, Albumasar, Alchibitius), who

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6 Examples are Augustine, Epiphanius, Eusebius, Gaudentius, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Bede, Hilary. See ILI, 10, under the respective entries. The same holds for editions of Aristotle, Ovid, Stobaeus, Trentius, Apuleius, Lucian, Epictetus, Dioscorides, Hermes Trismegistus, Flavius Josephus, Macrobius, and Pliny.

7 For the general prohibition of works condemned before 1515, see Rule I of the Tridentine Index, also adopted in the Clementine Index; cf. ILI, 9: 920.

8 From 1574 it was not permitted to sell the works of Nicolaus Cusanus (Nikolaus von Kues, 1401-1464) in the Ecclesiastical State without explicit permission from the authorities; see the “Aviso alli libri” of the Master of the Sacred Palace (22 May 1574), published in ILI, 9: 746-7, 757. Since 1577, *De concordia catholica* (reprint: Basel 1565) was prohibited in Rome; ILI, 9: 750, 755, 766; cf. ACDF, Index, *Diari*, 1, f. 8r. Later, Cusanus’ works were mentioned in a list of works “extra Indicem prohibiti” (ILI, 9: 770, 776), and were placed in the so-called Index of Parma (1580); ILI, 9: 159. They came again under examination of the Congregation for the Index from 26 November 1587; see ACDF, Index, *Diari*, 1, fols. 28v-29r. Cusanus was placed in the Sixtine Index (ILI, 9: 390, 835), but not in later Roman Indexes (1593, 1596). On 7 August 1594, the correction of his works was commissioned to the second class of Consultors, but ACDF does not hold these corrections; cf. *Diari*, 1, f. 80v.