In early modern Europe politics and religion are insoluble parts of a binary system, and so are political and religious iconography. The two categories were simply not conceived as two distinguished or even distinguishable ones. The fusion between political and religious iconography is nowhere more evident than with the Spanish Hapsburgs. Key issues of Counter-Reformation theology and pillars of Catholic orthodoxy—such as the Eucharist, the Trinity or the Immaculate Conception—were adopted and indeed incorporated into the dynastic imagery of the Catholic Kings, representing their piety and devotion, and, therefore, undisputed role as foremost defenders of the Catholic faith and legitimate rulers of the world. It might be sufficient here to recall such emblematic images as Charles V and his wife Isabella adoring the Trinity in Titian’s monumental Gloria for the emperor’s private oratory in Yuste, Rubens’ spectacular series of Eucharist-Tapestries commissioned by Isabella Clara Eugenia d’Austria for the Monastery of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid or Claudio Coello’s scenographic Sagrada Forma for the sacristy of the Escorial, showing Charles II kneeling in front of the miraculous host (Figure 19.1).¹

¹ The present contribution retains the format of the initial paper presented at the American Academy in Rome, with the addition of endnotes restricted nonetheless to basic and most recent bibliography. I would like to thank Thomas Dandelet, John Marino, and Ingrid Rowland for their kind invitation to the conference, as well as their encouragement and help throughout the preparation of this paper.

The iconography of the Catholic Kings was indeed dominated by religious imagery and widely diffused through painted copies and a myriad of printed images. Some of the most explicit representations were in fact printed images, such as Rubens’ monumental thesis illustration of *St. Francis Seraphicus Atlas*, supporting the Immaculate Conception (Figure 19.2). The highly elaborate iconography presents St. Francis, the Franciscan Order and the Spanish Hapsburgs as the main supporters of the cause of the Immaculate Conception, including images of the reigning king Philip IV and his family, as well as those of his ancestors Charles V, Philip II and Philip III. In Pedro Villafranca’s 1672 engraving of Charles II and his mother Mariana d’Austria, the transfer of the regency occurs under the guidance and protection of the Immaculate Conception, *Patrona Hispaniae*, and the Eucharist, *Patrocinium Austriacum* (Figure 19.3).

The following considerations address questions that have been mostly avoided in art historical literature: whether and how the politics of Counter-Reformation iconography in Hapsburg Spain had an impact on Naples and the Spanish dominions in Southern Italy, and also how far the production and consumption of art was, directly or indirectly, shaped by these politics. Considering the range and complexity of the problems encompassed, it is the intention here to define the field of investigation and provide a methodological framework rather than to come to any definite conclusions.

Naples has been described as the “real capital of the Counter-Reformation.” The core of the city was dominated by an ever-growing number of churches, convents, and confraternities and a vast num-

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