IDENTIFYING AND CENSORING IMPROPER ARTWORKS IN CARLO BORROMEO'S DIOCESE. THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY *INDEX OF PROFANE PAINTINGS* IN THE MILAN DIOCESAN ARCHIVES*

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Abstract

Due to the elusive nature of the surviving documentation, it is often difficult to assess in what areas and to what extent the Tridentine prescriptions on sacred images led to acts of censorship directed at works of art. The Milanese diocese at the time of Archbishop Carlo Borromeo (1564–84) stands out as a rare case for which policies concerning the control of sacred art and their practical implementation are relatively well documented. This article examines Borromeo's legislation on religious artworks and how it was translated into practice, highlighting the role played by the administrative system of his diocese in the effort to identify and censor inappropriate works of art. I bring to light these dynamics through an in-depth analysis of the so-called *Index of Profane Paintings*, a document recording the results of a systematic enquiry into artworks that did not comply with Tridentine standards, carried out in the Milanese diocese under Borromeo. Despite being the only known evidence of an investigation of this kind made in the sixteenth century, this document has been largely ignored by art historians. I discuss the date and circumstances in which the *Index* was compiled, as well as the methods and targets of the enquiry it records. I then examine the problems raised by the artworks denounced and the solutions envisaged for them, exploring their relationship with contemporary religious and visual culture. A revised transcription and an English translation of the document are given in the Appendices.

In the abundant literature on the Counter-Reformation and the arts, the archbishop of Milan Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584) emerges as a key figure for the development of Catholic policies on sacred artworks in the decades immediately

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after the Council of Trent.[1] His endeavour to reshape the Milanese diocese in accordance with the standards set by the council encompassed all aspects of ecclesiastical administration and moral and religious life, including the production and use of works of art, which he tried to bring under episcopal control by sponsoring the creation of an exceptionally detailed corpus of directives.[2] While Borromeo's legislation on this matter is generally well known, the main historical testimony concerning the way in which his directives were implemented has received very marginal attention. This is the so-called *Index picturarum prophanarum* or *Index of Profane Paintings*, a list of fourteen artworks in the diocese of Milan that were considered problematic on moral or doctrinal grounds (Fig. 1). The list, preserved in the Milan Diocesan Archives, is part of a larger collection of documents regarding infringements of Church regulations.[3] Its entries record the results of a systematic inquiry, carried out over the entire diocesan territory, into works of art that did not comply with Counter-Reformation standards—the only large-scale investigation of this kind undertaken in the sixteenth century.

Two transcriptions of the document have been published to date. The first appeared in 1970 in an article by the ethnographer and linguist Ottavio Lurati,[4] while the second was printed in 1985 as a note to an essay by the historian Carlo Marcora.[5] Scholars have mainly referred to these editions,[6] which, however, contain notable errors[7] and are not accompanied by a historical commentary. I publish here a revised transcription (Appendix I) and an English translation (Appendix II) of the document. In order better to understand its origin and scope, in the first two parts of the article I examine the *Index* in the light of the approaches to art censorship advocated by the Council of Trent and put into practice by Borromeo. Analysed against this background, the document offers a unique insight into the strategies employed

1. What follows is a selection of studies on Carlo Borromeo's life, reforming activity and legacy: G. Alberigo, 'Carlo Borromeo come modello di vescovo nella Chiesa post-tridentina', *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXIX.4, 1967, pp. 1031–52; *San Carlo e il suo tempo* (Atti del convegno, Milan, 1984), 2 vols, Rome, 1986; *San Carlo Borromeo. Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. J. M. Headley and J. B. Tomaro, Washington and London, 1988; *Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della grande Riforma. Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento*, ed. F. Buzzi and D. Zardin, Cinisello Balsamo, 1997; W. De Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul. Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan*, Leiden etc., 2001; D. Zardin, *Carlo Borromeo. Cultura, santità, governo*, Milan, 2010.

2. See below, section 1.

3. See below, section 2.

4. O. Lurati, 'Pene ai bestemmiatori, indulgenze, reliquie e "immagini profane" nella Diocesi Milanese (e nelle Tre Valli) ai tempi di San Carlo', *Folklore svizzero / Folklore suisse*, LX, 1970, pp. 41–52 (47–48).

5. C. Marcora, 'Trattati d'arte sacra all'epoca del Baronio', in *Baronio e l'arte* (Atti del convegno, Sora, 1984), ed. R. De Maio et al., Sora, 1985, pp. 189–244 (208 n. 34).

6. See G. F. Piccaluga, 'Tra liturgia e teatralità. Consuetudini sociali ed immagini dal medioevo alla controriforma', in *Rappresentazioni arcaiche della tradizione popolare* (Atti del convegno, Viterbo, 1981), Viterbo, 1982, pp. 145–95 (146 n. 4); A. Turchini, 'Il governo della festa nella Milano spagnola di Carlo Borromeo', in *La scena della gloria. Drammaturgia e spettacolo a Milano in età spagnola*, ed. A. Cascetta and R. Carpani, Milan, 1995, pp. 509–44 (524–25); D. Rigaux, *Le Christ du dimanche. Histoire d'une image médiévale*, Paris etc., 2005, p. 220; De Boer (as in n. 1), p. 106 n. 61; C. Franceschini, 'Arti figurative. Il controllo', in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, ed. A. Prosperi, 4 vols, Pisa, 2010, I, pp. 102–05 (103).

7. As already remarked by Wietse De Boer concerning Lurati's article: De Boer (as in n. 1), p. 223 n. 28.

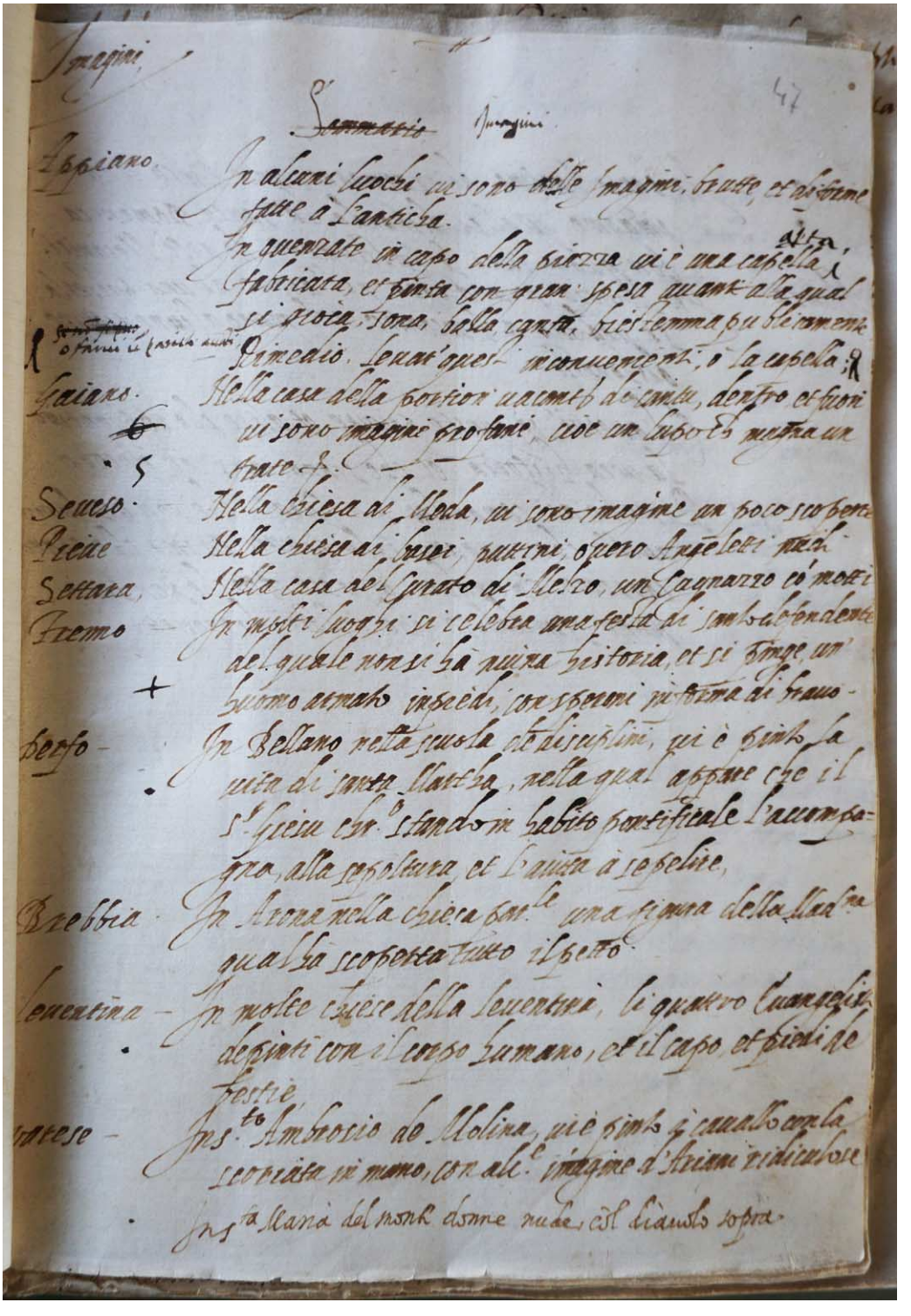

FIGURE 1. Milan, Archivio Storico Diocesano, MS Section XIV, vol. 67, fol. 35r (*Index of Profane Paintings*).

by the Borromean administration to implement regulations and gather information on their infringement. In the third part of the article, I delve deeper into the individual entries of the *Index* to uncover the reasons that led to the denunciation of particular artworks. As I show in the conclusion, the remedies envisaged in the document to deal with these artworks provide a first-hand example of the pragmatic approach adopted by the Milanese episcopal authorities in their effort to regiment sacred art, but also of the difficulties and, ultimately, of the limits that such effort was bound to encounter.

1. CONTROLLING SACRED ARTWORKS: THE TRIDENTINE DECREE AND BORROMEO'S LEGISLATION

The impact of the Counter-Reformation on the contemporary production of sacred art has long been a topic of scholarly discussion. If the search for a distinctive 'Counter-Reformation style', which was supposed to have emerged in the decades after the Council of Trent, has proved largely inconclusive,[8] historians of art and religion have more fruitfully investigated the ways in which the official stance on sacred images taken by the council intersected with contemporary artistic and theological debates,[9] as well as its connection with new opinions and practices concerning religious art and architecture.[10]

The effects that Counter-Reformation policies had on pre-existing artworks, however, remain more elusive. The decree on sacred images approved during the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, in 1563, is mainly concerned with preventing idolatry while still allowing, and even encouraging, the veneration of images. On the matter of physical works of art, its laconic instructions look forwards rather than backwards, suggesting that the focus of the council was principally turned on contemporary artistic production. Even if the condensed wording of the decree leaves a margin for interpretation and ambiguity, the expressions that appear in its text describe predominantly the creation (or the introduction into a sacred space) of new works of art, rather than discussing the persistent use of those that were already in place. This is evident, for instance, in the sections that forbid displaying images that contain doctrinal errors or may be misinterpreted by the beholder, as well as creating artworks that are lascivious, indecorous or unusual.[11] Only one sentence,

8. For a discussion of this problem, see S. Kummer, 'Doceant Episcopi. Auswirkungen des Trienter Bilderdekrets im römischen Kirchenraum', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LVI, 1993, pp. 508–33 (511–12); and J. M. Locker, 'Introduction. Rethinking Art after the Council of Trent', in *Art and the Reform in the Late Renaissance. After Trent*, ed. J. M. Locker, New York and London, 2018, pp. 1–18.

9. For a recent assessment of this topic, see W. De Boer, *Art in Dispute. Catholic Debates at the Time of Trent*, Leiden and Boston, 2022.

10. See, e.g., A. Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, Chicago, 2011; *The Council of Trent. Reform and Controversy in Europe and Beyond (1545–1700)*, ed. W. François and V. Soen, 3 vols, Göttingen, 2018, III; *Art and the Reform in the Late Renaissance. After Trent*, ed. J. M. Locker, New York and London, 2018.

11. See the edition of the decree in *Conciliorum Oecomenicorum Decreta* [hereafter: *COD*], ed. G. Alberigo et al., Bologna, 1973 (1st ed. 1961), pp. 774–76: 'nullae ... imagines ... statuantur' (p. 775, ll. 37–39); 'imagines non

limited as it is to referencing the types of images that should not be present in a church, implicitly embraces both newly made and older artworks.[12] The result is a set of prescriptions that are generally vague and allow ample leeway in the matter of execution. They principally stress the importance of controlling any new addition to sacred art, yet they also draw attention to what kinds of images are already to be found in churches, thus potentially encouraging the censorship of artworks inherited from the past, whether ancient or recent.

Examples of the correction or removal of pre-existing works of art when they conflicted with the new standards of decency or with the needs arising from liturgical reform are indeed well known, although they remain sporadic. As regards the problem of decency, the notorious order to cover the naked figures in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, which followed hot on the heels of the closure of the council, has attained almost topical status in art historical studies.[13] As regards liturgical reform, particular attention has been given to the removal of rood screens from church naves in Italy and other Catholic countries.[14] It is clear, however, that no coordinated, large-scale effort to correct or eradicate older artworks was effectively carried out as part of the Catholic reform. Significantly, for instance, the very order to censor the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel also expressed the intention to efface any other 'obscene or false' images that were to be found thereafter, but as far as we know no practical measure was then taken to look actively for such images or intervene on them.[15]

When seen against this general lack of action in censoring already-existing artworks, the position taken by Carlo Borromeo in his diocese during the second half of the sixteenth century proves a notable, if local, exception. Borromeo arrived in Milan as its recently appointed archbishop in 1565, after spending the previous years in Rome as secretary to Pope Pius IV. The careful attention he devoted to sacred art was certainly fuelled by his experiences in Rome, where he had been directly involved in organising the last sessions of the Council of Trent and in mediating the discussions on whether to include religious images in its agenda.[16] Moreover, in the short period between the closure of the council and his relocation to Milan, Borromeo had taken part in the first important move to implement the Tridentine decree by presiding over the commission that ordered the covering of the nudes in the Sistine

pingantur nec ornentur' (p. 776, l. 1); 'ponere vel ponenda curare imaginem' (p. 776, ll. 9–10).

12. Ibid., p. 776, ll. 4–7: 'Postremo tanta circa haec diligentia et cura ab episcopis adhibeatur, ut nihil inordinatum, aut praepostere et tumultuarie accomodatum, nihil profanum nihilque inhonestum appareat, cum domum Dei deceat sanctitudo'.

13. On this episode, see esp. M. Schlitt, 'Painting, Criticism, and Michelangelo's Last Judgement in the Age of the Counter-Reformation', in *Michelangelo's Last Judgement*, ed. M. B. Hall, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 113–49; J. O'Malley, 'Art, Trent, and Michelangelo's "Last Judgement"', *Religions*, III.2, 2012, pp. 344–56; and T. Depasquale, 'Epilogue Two. Michelangelo's "Last Judgement" and the Reception of the Nude in Counter-Reformation Italy', in *The Renaissance Nude*, ed. T. Kren et al., Los Angeles, 2018, pp. 365–73. For an overview of the reactions to the *Last Judgement* in 16th-century Italian culture, see R. De Maio, *Michelangelo e la controriforma*, Rome, 1978, pp. 17–108; and B. A. Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgment. The Renaissance Response*, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 71–101.

14. Most recently by J. Allen, *Transforming the Church Interior in Renaissance Florence. Screens and Choir Spaces, from the Middle Ages to the Tridentine Reform*, Cambridge, 2022.

15. Franceschini (as in n. 6), p. 103.

16. De Boer (as in n. 9), pp. 107, 119.

Chapel.[17] This engagement with both the production of regulations on sacred art and their practical application continued throughout all of Borromeo's years as archbishop of Milan. The regulations issued under his rule aimed, on the one hand, to steer contemporary artistic production towards the standards advocated by the Council of Trent; on the other, they also provided Church officials with effective guidelines to identify pre-existing artworks that should now be considered problematic or unacceptable.

The archbishop first addressed the matter of sacred art during the First Provincial Council he held in 1565, shortly after his arrival in Milan.[18] One of the decrees published on this occasion established ground rules on how the clergy should deal with religious artworks, offering a summary of the directives issued at Trent and introducing practical measures to implement them.[19] As part of these measures, bishops under the jurisdiction of the Milanese archdiocese were given the unprecedented order to summon all painters and sculptors of their districts and to instruct them personally on the errors to be avoided in image making. If, despite this, any inappropriate artworks were produced, the decree established that both the artists and the patrons involved in creating them should be punished. Moreover, the council made bishops responsible for the censorship of already-existing works of art, urging them to supervise the correction or destruction of those that deviated from Tridentine prescriptions. Additional recommendations on these topics were issued a couple of decades later, during the Fourth Provincial Council of 1576.[20] These new directives went into further detail concerning what types of representation should be avoided. In particular, they introduced some caveats that had not been mentioned by either the Council of Trent or Borromeo's First Provincial Council, such as a prohibition against displaying images of animals in sacred spaces. The punishments to be meted out to artists and clergy in case of infringement were also specified in further detail, stating that they could range, at the discretion of the bishops, from financial penalties to excommunication. The problem of religious images that were too old and damaged to be kept in use was also tackled for the first time, with directives explaining how to dispose of such artworks.[21]

17. Franceschini (as in n. 6), p. 103; Schlitt (as in n. 13), p. 118 n. 10; O'Malley (as in n. 13), p. 353.

18. Provincial councils were periodical assemblies organised every three years by archbishops in order to discuss directives with the high clergy of the ecclesiastical provinces under their jurisdictions. They became mandatory after the Council of Trent. The decrees issued at the provincial councils summoned by Borromeo are published in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* [hereafter: *AEM*], ed. A. Ratti, II.1, Milan, 1890. On their relevance for Borromeo's policies on sacred art and on their relationship with later Counter-Reformation writings on images, see P. Prodi, 'Ricerche sulla teorica delle arti figurative nella riforma cattolica' (1st ed. 1962), in *Arte e pietà nella Chiesa tridentina*, Bologna, 2014, pp. 53–189 (73–74); A. Buratti Mazzotta, 'L'arte sacra e la sua normativa nei documenti dei concili provinciali milanesi', *Studia Borromaica*, VII, 1993, pp. 117–59; F. Repishti, '"Delectare est suavitatis, docere necessitatis, flectere victoriae". Le pitture "perfette in questo proposito" nel *Discorso* di Gabriele Paleotti', in Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane (1582)*, ed. S. Della Torre, Vatican City, 2002, pp. xxv–xxxviii; and G. Harpster, 'Sacred Images in Carlo Borromeo's *Instructiones*. Between Liturgy and the Antique', in *Renaissance Religions. Modes and Meanings in History*, ed. P. Howard et al., Turnhout, 2021, pp. 155–74.

19. *AEM*, II.1, cols 36–37.

20. Ibid., cols 307–08.

21. On animals, punishments and old images, see also sections 3 and 4.

2. IMPLEMENTING COUNCIL DECREES IN THE DIOCESE OF MILAN: A SYNERGY BETWEEN THE EPISCOPAL SEAT AND THE RURAL CLERGY

Three years prior to issuing these instructions, during the Third Provincial Council of 1573, more general matters concerning church architecture and furnishing had also been examined briefly.[22] On that occasion, the archbishop had announced that he was preparing a specific collection of directives on these topics, which was finally published in book form in 1577, under the title *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* ('Instructions on Ecclesiastical Buildings and Furnishing').[23] Books of *instructiones* ('instructions'), *regulae* ('rules') and *advertenze* ('prescriptions') on various matters pertaining to ecclesiastical ministry were produced repeatedly during Carlo Borromeo's time, and were principally meant to provide clergymen with guidance on how to implement the decisions taken at provincial councils.[24] As a compendium of Borromeo's opinions on sacred buildings, the *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* have received ample attention from modern scholars.[25] While their reception in sixteenth-century architectural theory and practice has been examined at length, the consequences that the rest of the regulations produced under Borromeo had on the artistic heritage of the Milanese archdiocese remain largely to be assessed.

In particular, the practical efforts taken to implement prescriptions that tackled already-existing artworks are yet to be investigated in depth. Surviving documents prove that they did not remain on paper, and that at least some attempts were made to track down old works of art that needed to be destroyed or amended. This endeavour was made possible thanks to the elaborate administrative system on which the control of the Milanese diocese had come to rely. Upon assuming his position in Milan, Borromeo had overhauled the administrative structure of the diocese so that

22. *AEM*, II.1, cols 265–67.

23. I refer to the following edition: Carlo Borromeo, 'Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae', in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma*, ed. P. Barocchi, 3 vols, Bari, 1960–62, III, pp. 1–113. For translations into English and Italian, see respectively E. C. Voelker, 'Charles Borromeo's "Instructiones Fabricae et Suppellectilis Ecclesiasticae", 1577. A Translation with Commentary and Analysis', PhD thesis, Syracuse University, 1977; and Carlo Borromeo, *Instructionum fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae. Istruzioni intorno alla fabbrica e alla suppellettile ecclesiastica*, ed. S. Della Torre and M. Marinelli, Vatican City, 2000.

24. See A. Turchini, 'I "questionari" di visita pastorale di Carlo Borromeo per il governo della diocesi milanese', *Studia borromaica*, X, 1996, pp. 71–120 (84–85); and D. Zardin, '"E subito esseguirò quanto mi ordini". Clero di parrocchia e vicari foranei tra centro e periferia sul finire del Cinquecento', in D. Zardin, *Carlo Borromeo. Cultura, santità, governo*, Milan, 2010, pp. 171–221 (213).

25. See, e.g., L. Grassi, 'Prassi, socialità e simbolo dell'architettura delle "Instructiones" di San Carlo', *Arte cristiana*, LXXIII, 1985, pp. 3–16; the essays collected in *San Carlo e il suo tempo* (as in n. 1), I, pp. 573–688; E. C. Voelker, 'Borromeo's Influence on Sacred Art and Architecture', in *San Carlo Borromeo. Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. J. M. Headley and J. B. Tomaro, Washington and London, 1988, pp. 172–87; M. L. Gatti Perer, 'Incidenza della legislazione borromaica sull'edilizia religiosa nel territorio dell'antica diocesi di Milano', *Studia Borromaica*, VIII, 1994, pp. 251–89; S. Della Torre, 'Le architetture monumentali. Disciplina normativa e pluralismo delle opere', in *Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della grande Riforma. Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento*, ed. F. Buzzi and D. Zardin, Cinisello Balsamo, 1997, pp. 217–26; R. Sénécal, 'Carlo Borromeo's *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae* and Its Origins in the Rome of His Time', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, LXVIII, 2000, pp. 241–67; R. Schofield, 'Architettura, dottrina e magnificenza nell'architettura ecclesiastica dell'età di Carlo e Federico Borromeo', in F. Repishti and R. Schofield, *Architettura e Controriforma. I dibattiti per la facciata del Duomo di Milano, 1582–1682*, Milan, 2004, pp. 125–49; Harpster (as in n. 18).

it became an effective tool to implement council directives. In order to monitor and guide the activities carried out by the clergy all over the territory—from the city of Milan down to the country parishes—a refined system of information was established. The Milanese archdiocese was traditionally divided into administrative districts called *pievi*, the territory of which comprised several parishes.[26] Borromeo put the *pievi* under the supervision of rural vicars (*vicari foranei*), senior clergy tasked with organising monthly meetings of the parish priests, collecting their reports and requests and forwarding this information to the episcopal seat in Milan. Conversely, the directives coming from Milan were passed on through rural vicars to the priests appointed to the various parishes.[27] An additional means of controlling the diocesan territory was provided by pastoral visits, whether performed by the archbishop himself or delegated to appointed officials known as regional visitors (*visitatori regionari*).[28] These events entailed the production of large quantities of documents detailing the state of the *pievi*, some of which would go as far as to reproduce the plans of local church buildings or list the books in the possession of each parish priest.[29] Regional visitors also had the task of periodically soliciting reports from rural vicars, a task which they often accomplished by giving them lists of questions to which they had to furnish a written reply.[30]

The documents produced in this fashion were then transmitted to the episcopal seat in Milan. There secretaries catalogued and systematised the information gathered from the countryside in ways that facilitated both Borromeo's perusal of this material and its use for the preparation of the directives that were to be discussed at provincial councils. While the nuances of the work performed by these secretaries are mostly beyond our grasp, typical results of their activity are summaries and lists that outline the contents of the reports coming from the countryside. These summaries are sometimes jotted down on the back of the original documents, sometimes written on separate sheets.[31] The materials collected in this way by Borromeo's administrative system formed the original nucleus of the Milan Diocesan Archives, where they are still preserved.[32] As their production mirrored the reformation agenda pushed forward by the provincial councils, they stand out as our main source of information on the attempts to implement the rules on sacred

26. On the connection between geography and administration in Borromeo's diocese, see esp. W. Goralski, *I primi sinodi di San Carlo Borromeo. La riforma tridentina nella provincia ecclesiastica milanese*, Milan, 1989; *Itinerari di san Carlo Borromeo nella cartografia delle visite pastorali*, ed. E. Brivio et al., Milan, 1985; A. Turchini, *Monumenta Borromaica*, II. *Milano inquisita. Inchieste di Carlo Borromeo sulla città e diocesi, 1574–1584*, Cesena, 2010, pp. 15–34.

27. For an overview of this system, see Zardin (as in n. 24); and Turchini (as in n. 26), pp. 23–27.

28. Turchini (as in n. 26), pp. 21–23.

29. On architectural plans, see the examples mentioned in *Visite pastorali di Milano (1423–1859)*, ed. A. Palestra, Rome, 1971, pp. 602–03; and *Visite pastorali alle pievi milanesi (1423–1856)*, ed. A. Palestra, Florence, 1977 (listed in the index). Photographs of some of these plans are reproduced in Buratti Mazzotta (as in n. 18); and *Itinerari* (as in n. 26). On library catalogues, see Zardin (as in n. 24), pp. 212–14.

30. See Turchini (as in n. 24); and Turchini (as in n. 26), p. 24.

31. Zardin (as in n. 24), pp. 180–81; Turchini (as in n. 26), pp. 40–41.

32. On the origin of the Milan Diocesan Archives, see *Guida degli Archivi diocesani d'Italia*, ed. V. Monachino et al., 2 vols, Rome, 1990, I, pp. 17–21, 197–99.

art dictated on the occasion of the councils. The abundance of records dating from the time of Borromeo contained in the archives, however, and the fact that mentions of sacred art are for the most part sparsely scattered throughout them, have effectively hampered our understanding of how Borromeo's legislation was translated into practice.[33] It is unclear, for instance, if any of the bishops subject to the Milanese archdiocese ever actually organised the teaching sessions for artists recommended by the First Provincial Council. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that during Borromeo's life some steps were taken to ensure that ecclesiastical authorities were in a position to personally reach the artists active in the diocesan territory. This is shown by the fact that local clergy could be required to provide lists of the painters and sculptors working in their *pievi* as part of the documents assembled to prepare pastoral visits.[34] Moreover, the final records of such visits testify that already-existing works of art (as well as contemporary artistic production) could easily become the target of censorship. Both Borromeo and his regional visitors gave orders to destroy or amend any works of art encountered on their visits whose contents clashed with Tridentine prescriptions. The orders still preserved concern traditional iconographies that were beginning to be seen as inappropriate for church decor, either because their subject was not strictly religious or because they contained elements that were perceived as indecorous, apocryphal or misleading.[35] Giovanni Francesco Bonomi, Borromeo's nuncio to the Swiss sector of the diocese, gave the command to efface calendar paintings in three centres of the Canton of Ticino, Chiasso, Cerentino and Lodano.[36] Similarly, in 1569, a regional visitor to the town of Germanedo, on the lake of Lecco, ordered that an allegorical representation of the Holy Sunday found in the local parish church should be destroyed, and put on record that an order to do so had already been given by Borromeo himself on a previous occasion, but was yet to be carried out.[37] A painting in the cathedral of Biella with a similar iconography—that of the Sunday Christ—was also ordered to be effaced after a pastoral visit in 1571.[38] Other irregularities had been denounced the previous year in San Bovio near Peschiera (Milan), where Borromeo's visitor Leonetto Chiavone lamented that the local saint Bobo, the patron of cattle, was indecorously represented 'in the company of oxen and horses'.[39]

33. The document presented in this article will hopefully provide a starting point for a future, more comprehensive exploration of the archives in search of factual evidence on the control of sacred art. As shown below, the *Index* lists artworks according to their geographical location. A thorough examination of the acts and decrees produced on the occasion of pastoral visits carried out in these locations may open the path to finding further materials dispersed in the archives.

34. Examples of such lists are given in *Visite pastorali di Milano* (as in n. 29), p. 261; and *Itinerari* (as in n. 26), p. 13. A letter of instructions concerning the preparation of these documents is mentioned in Turchini (as in n. 24), p. 94.

35. On these categories, see below, section 3.

36. Rigaux (as in n. 6), p. 217.

37. C. Marcora, *La pieve di Lecco ai tempi di Federigo Borromeo dagli atti della visita pastorale del 1608*, Lecco, 1979, p. 603 n. 1. On this particular image, see below, section 3.

38. Rigaux (as in n. 6), p. 216. The painting, which was covered by a layer of plaster, became visible again following restoration in the 1950s.

39. B. M. Bosatra, 'Mezzate', in *Dizionario della Chiesa ambrosiana*, ed. A. Majo, 6 vols, Milan, 1987–93, IV, pp. 2206–11 (2207).

Even if the documents in the Milan Diocesan Archives have not been thoroughly searched in order to identify instances of this kind, the examples mentioned above suggest that in Carlo Borromeo's diocese already-existing artworks were being subjected to corrective actions with a frequency that is unmatched, to present knowledge, in any other Catholic region of the time.[40] The *Index of Profane Paintings* confirms this impression, providing, as mentioned, the only known evidence of a sixteenth-century systematic inquiry into extant works of art that did not comply with Counter-Reformation standards. The document is written on the thirty-fifth folio of the volume catalogued as Archivio Storico Diocesano [hereafter: ASD], Section XIV, volume 67, a miscellaneous manuscript comprising leaves and quires of different size.[41] Although the materials contained in the book date from the time of Carlo Borromeo, they were bound together only in the seventeenth century, when the Diocesan Archives were reorganised and many loose documents were collected in volumes.[42] A summary written on the flyleaf at the beginning of the book—also dating from the seventeenth century—identifies the contents as a series of indexes regarding specific matters:

> Various indexes compiled during the life of saint Charles.
> Index of the consecrations of the churches of the city of Milan, i.e. of parishes.
> Index of various superstitions.
> Of profane paintings.
> Of indulgences.
> Of blasphemers.
> Of holy relics.
> Of lives of saints, and of archbishops' deeds.
> Of the confraternities of Corpus Domini.
> Of council decrees that are not observed.
> Of the needs of parish churches.[43]

Despite all parts of the manuscript being defined here as 'indexes', only some of them are in fact structured as lists of short entries. This is the case, for instance, of

40. Later on, starting from the last years of the 16th century, a similar attention towards the censorship of works of art already installed in ecclesiastical buildings emerges from the documents recording Pope Clement VIII's pastoral visits to the churches of Rome. See O. Mansour, 'Censure and Censorship in Rome, c. 1600. The Visitation of Clement VIII and the Visual Arts', in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, ed. M. B. Hall and T. E. Cooper, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 136–60.

41. While most folios of the manuscript are not numbered, some quires are marked with distinct sets of digits that correspond to partial attempts at foliation. The resulting page count is not always reliable: the folio occupied by the *Index of Profane Paintings*, for instance, is marked as fol. 47 when it actually corresponds to fol. 35.

42. This rearrangement was the work of Giovan Battista Corno, the archivist between 1644 and 1690: *Visite pastorali di Milano* (as in n. 29), pp. xi–xiv; M. Colombo, 'Giovanni Battista Corno (1607–1690) archivista della Curia arcivescovile di Milano', *Ricerche storiche sulla Chiesa ambrosiana*, XXVIII, 2010, pp. 135–63.

43. Milan, ASD, Section XIV, vol. 67, first flyleaf: 'Indices varii facti Sancto Carolo vivente. / Index Consecrationum Ecclesiarum Urbi Mediolani, scilicet Parochialium. / Index variarium supertitionum. / Picturarum prophanarum. / Indulgentiarum. / Blasphematorum. / Reliquiarum Sanctarum. / Vitarum Sanctorum, et Actionum Archiepiscoporum. / Confraternitatum Sanctissimi Corporis Domini. / Decretorum Conciliorum Executioni non mandatorum. / Necessitatum Ecclesiarum Parochialium'. In addition to the *Index of Profane Paintings*, the sections on superstitions, blasphemers, indulgences and relics (the last one only in excerpts) have been published by Ottavio Lurati: see O. Lurati, 'Superstizioni lombarde (e leventinesi) del tempo di San Carlo Borromeo', *Vox Romanica*, XXVII, 1968, pp. 229–49; and Lurati (as in n. 4).

the *Index of Profane Paintings*, while other sections of the volume consist instead of original reports written by the rural clergy.[44] Both the lists and the collections of original reports are organised geographically, following a series of toponyms that correspond for the most part to the names of the *pievi*. The documents record information on all rural areas of the archdiocese of Milan, including the Swiss valleys of Leventina, Blenio and Riviera, in present-day Canton of Ticino (Fig. 2).

The purpose of these materials, whether presented as summaries or kept in the original form, is evidently that of systematising information about problematic issues that the diocesan authorities were trying to solve. Ottavio Lurati, the first scholar who published excerpts from the manuscript, remarked that five of the topics covered in the indexes correspond to matters that Borromeo brought to the forefront of his reformation plans during the Fourth Provincial Council of 1576.[45] On that occasion the diocesan clergy received instructions on how to identify true relics, preserve written accounts concerning the lives of the saints venerated in each parish, distinguish between authorised indulgences and unauthorised ones and eradicate superstitious beliefs in rural areas.[46] Religious images, as we have seen, were also discussed in greater detail than during the previous councils.[47] On the matters of relics, the lives of saints, indulgences and superstitions—albeit not on that of sacred artworks—the decrees of the Fourth Provincial Council solicited the production of registers and reports to be sent to the episcopal authorities. Regarding the issue of superstitions, in particular, this request was accompanied by a deadline: parish priests should make inquiries into the superstitious beliefs of the people under their pastoral care and produce written reports about them before the next provincial council was held in 1579.[48] On account of this recommendation, Lurati came to the conclusion that the *Index of Superstitions* presents the results of the inquiry ordered on this occasion.[49] He also suggested that the other indexes were probably put together around the same time, and that they collect information sent to the episcopal seat by parish priests.[50] While it remains unclear whether all indexes have indeed the same origin, the hypothesis that those concerning topics examined at the Fourth Provincial Council were prepared in the wake of this event is plausible.[51] Lurati's conjecture that the information presented in them comes directly from parish priests, however, needs to be revised. As already noted by Wietse De Boer, the *Index of Blasphemers* appears to collect information

44. Original reports make up the first section and the last four.

45. Lurati (as in n. 43), pp. 229–30.

46. *AEM*, II.1, cols 300–10.

47. See above, section 1.

48. *AEM*, II.1, col. 309.

49. Lurati (as in n. 43), p. 230.

50. Lurati (as in n. 4), pp. 41–43.

51. Contrary to this opinion, Wietse De Boer remarks that the *Index of Blasphemers* contains internal evidence that may point towards a slightly earlier date. Specifically, the index reports that some men guilty of blasphemy were sent to Milan to be examined by Vicar General Giovanni Battista Castelli, who left his office in 1574, two years before the Fourth Provincial Council of 1576 (De Boer [as in n. 1], p. 223 n. 28). The passage quoted by De Boer, however, explicitly states that these events had occurred in the past (see the transcription in Lurati [as in n. 4], p. 46). Their mention, therefore, does not invalidate the hypothesis of a date after 1576.

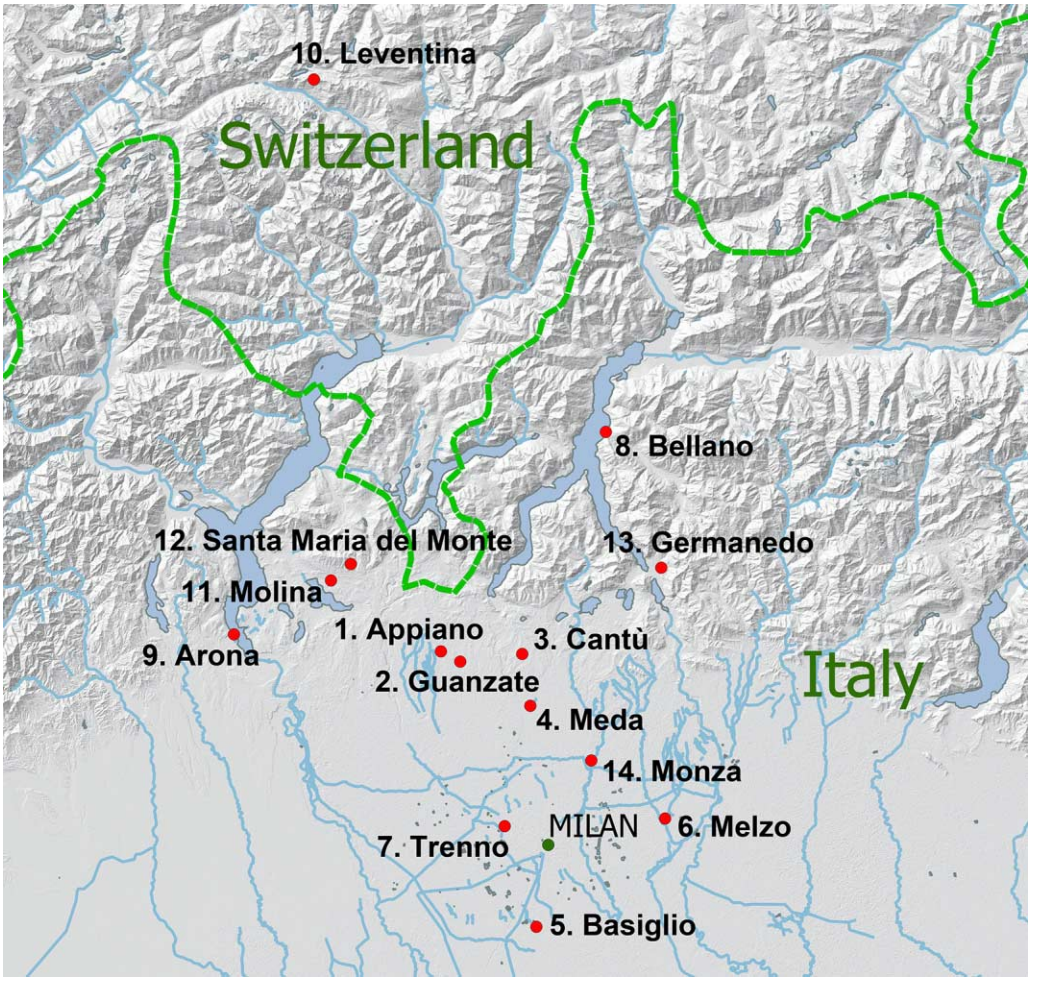

FIGURE 2. Distribution of the artworks mentioned in the *Index of Profane Paintings*, shown on a modern map.

culled from reports sent by rural vicars, not by parish priests.[52] This is evidenced by repeated third-person allusions to rural vicars interspersed throughout its text, some of which imply that the vicars were answering specific questions concerning the occurrence of blasphemy in their territories.[53] De Boer's hypothesis that the document itself was compiled by rural vicars, however, is not equally persuasive.[54] Since the entries of this index consist in a rephrasing of excerpts selected from the vicars' first-hand reports, it is more likely that the document was produced by episcopal secretaries. Traces of the same process emerge from the indexes on superstitions and indulgences.[55] Moreover, the use of lists of questions sent from the episcopal seat to solicit reports on the matters

52. De Boer (as in n. 1), p. 223 n. 28.

53. Cf. the text published in Lurati (as in n. 4), pp. 43–47.

54. De Boer (as in n. 1), p. 223 n. 28.

55. Several passages from these texts ostensibly relate what rural vicars had reported by letter; see, e.g., Lurati (as in n. 43), p. 238: 'Remedio che pensa di usar è ... quelli che ricadono in queste superstizioni nel suo vicariato che li curati li mandino a lui' ('The remedy that he is considering is ... that those that relapse into these superstitions in his vicariate be sent to him by his curates'); ibid., p. 239: 'Ha dato ordine per

covered in the indexes is proved by the presence of two such questionnaires (one regarding indulgences, the other relics) that are bound inside the volume.[56]

The *Index of Profane Paintings* does not offer any equally specific clue on the source of the data it summarises, nor on the means by which these data were gathered. The text closes, however, with the instruction 'to order parish priests not to give absolution' to people who refused to destroy or amend the works of art listed in the document.[57] This remark was most likely directed to rural vicars, since it fell to them to supervise parish priests. We can therefore be reasonably certain that the *Index of Profane Paintings* originated as part of an effort made during the 1570s to regiment irregular practices in the countryside through the involvement of rural vicars, summoned to investigate on these matters with the guide of specifically designed questionnaires. As intermediate authorities between the archbishop and the parish priests, rural vicars appear therefore to have acted as the central link in a two-way system of communication. In transmitting news from the countryside to Milan, they worked as informants tasked with reporting to the episcopal seat the infractions taking place in the parishes; at the same time, in relaying orders from Milan to the countryside, they functioned as officials charged with enforcing in the parishes the remedies decreed by the episcopal seat.

3. PROBLEMATIC ARTWORKS IN MS ASD, SECTION XIV, VOL. 67

The entries of the indexes contained in the manuscript reveal the different ways in which works of art could be caught up in infractions against the standards of piety that Borromeo was striving to enforce. Some of the artworks denounced—such as those, for example, displaying lascivious, apocryphal or potentially misleading images—were intrinsically problematic. Others, however, showed perfectly acceptable representations, but had come to be used for purposes that Church authorities considered inappropriate. In both instances a corrective action was required; but whether this action should be targeted towards the objects themselves or towards the people interacting with them varied on a case-by-case basis. The *Index of Superstitions*, for instance, reports that in Butinono (a now-lost toponym mentioned in several documents of the Diocesan Archives) a representation of St Sebastian pierced by arrows was used by local women to perform a healing ritual:

> To cure fever, the women are in the habit of counting the arrows that appear in a painting of Saint Sebastian in the church, and of saying on the first day as many *paternosters* as [the number of] the arrows, and of reciting one less each day until they come to the last.[58]

il suo vicariato alli curati' ('He has given the order in his vicariate to the curates'); Lurati (as in n. 4), p. 49: 'Fra le indulgenze che ha nel suo vicariato' ('Among the indulgences that he has in his vicariate').

56. The questionnaire on indulgences, in two copies, appears right after the *Index of Blasphemers*; the other one after the index concerning relics.

57. See Appendix I; and Appendix II. For the injunction to refuse absolution, see below, section 4.

58. Lurati (as in n. 43), p. 244: 'Per la febre le donne usono di numerar le saette che sono in qualche pittura in chiesa di Santo Sebastiano e dir il primo giorno tanti pater nostri quante sono le frizze, e andar calando uno ogni giorno sino che sono finiti'.

In this case it was not the artwork itself which was a cause of concern, but the fact that popular belief had attributed quasi-magical powers to it, taking its cue from the traditional symbolic association between the outbreak of illnesses and arrows shot from a bow.[59] It seems, therefore, that the episcopal authorities recognised the crux of the problem in the people's attitude rather than in the painting. The issue was filed among instances of superstition instead of unlawful images, which implies that any action taken to solve the problem would likely focus on forbidding local people from performing the ritual, rather than on modifying the representation.[60]

The *Index of Profane Paintings*, on the other hand, contains a census of cases for which a direct intervention on artworks was envisaged. As can be gathered from the text published in Appendix I and Appendix II, the document closes with the instruction to either correct or destroy the fourteen works of art mentioned in the list.[61] Interestingly, these are not all paintings, as the seventeenth-century title seems to imply. A caption written at the beginning of the list by the person who compiled it (and therefore dating from the time of Borromeo) describes them with the more general term 'Images',[62] a word that may well correspond to the definition originally used by the episcopal authorities when soliciting reports on sacred art.[63] As a matter of fact, the actual contents of the document are heterogenous. The text describes most artworks as paintings, but some of them are listed as unspecified 'images' (which could mean either paintings or sculptures), and a building is also included. The offences for which these different artworks were reported are equally varied. While the sixteenth-century title defines them as 'profane', the list does not exclusively mention artworks that may be considered profane in the sense of secular and/or licentious.[64] Rather, it also provides examples of other issues addressed by the Tridentine decree and Borromeo's provincial councils, such as the presence of apocryphal, misleading or undignified representations.

The one building included in the list—a chapel in the town of Guanzate, now in the Italian province of Como (Fig. 2, no. 2)—had given rise to a problem which

59. For the history of this association and its use in Christian iconography, see P. Berger, 'Mice, Arrows, and Tumors. Medieval Plague Iconography North of the Alps', in *Piety and Plague from Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. F. Mormando and T. Worcester, Kirksville MO, 2007, pp. 23–63. For the Italian area, see also C. Frugoni, *Paure medievali. Epidemie, prodigi, fine del tempo*, Bologna, 2020, pp. 316–23. St Sebastian was often invoked as a protector against illnesses: S. Barker, 'The Making of a Plague Saint. Saint Sebastian's Imagery and Cult before the Counter-Reformation', in *Piety and Plague from Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. F. Mormando and T. Worcester, Kirksville MO, 2007, pp. 90–131.

60. As several passages of the *Index of Superstitions* show, the solutions envisaged to deter people from further engaging in superstitious practices were either excommunication or various forms of public penitence: see Lurati (as in n. 43).

61. See below, section 4.

62. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

63. The Latin word *imagines*, here rendered in Italian as 'Imagini', is a recurring umbrella term used to define artworks in the decrees of the provincial councils and in Borromeo's writings.

64. Both meanings of the term were current in Counter-Reformation writings on sacred art: cf. Gabriele Paleotti, 'Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane', in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma*, ed. P. Barocchi, 3 vols, Bari, 1960–62, II, pp. 117–517 (173–75) (English translation: Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, tr. W. McCuaig, Los Angeles, 2010, pp. 84–85).

occupies a middle ground between the issue mentioned in the *Index of Superstitions* and those denounced in the other entries of the *Index of Profane Paintings*. The document refers to 'an open chapel, built and painted at great expense' and located on the main square of the town, in front of which people gathered to 'play games and make music, dance, sing and swear in public'.[65] The building can be identified as the lost oratory of San Rocco, which stood in the proximity of the parish church of Santa Maria.[66] As was the case with the image of St Sebastian employed for healing rituals in Butinono, the issue with the chapel in Guanzate lay in the inappropriate use that local people were making of it. Unlike the painting of Butinono, however, the chapel had the additional shortcoming of not being in line with the standards for sacred art advocated by Borromeo. The archbishop is known to have ordered the destruction or the modification of several open chapels comparable to the one described in this passage, especially in rural areas.[67] This was done with the double aim of preventing any inappropriate intermingling between laymen and clergy during celebrations, and of ensuring that altars and other sacred furniture were not exposed to inclement weather or soiled by animals.[68] The chapel of Guanzate was a cause of concern precisely for the latter problem, aggravated by the fact that the building had become a hub for immoral activities. A report written by a parish priest around 1566 already complains of people dancing in front of the chapel, while documents produced on the occasion of pastoral visits carried out in 1574 and 1583 remark on the need to close the entrance to the building and to remove the altar inside, so that it would no longer be fouled by wandering animals.[69] The solution put forward in the *Index of Profane Paintings* is even more radical, since the entry recommends either curbing the unruly behaviour of the local parishioners or destroying the chapel. As a further alternative (and preceded by an erased note clarifying: 'if this proves impossible') the building could be transformed from an open to a closed structure through the addition of a wall. In the event it was this solution that was ultimately adopted, although not before almost three decades had elapsed. It is only in 1605, in fact, that a description of the state of the chapel testifies that the opening at the front of the building had been walled up and provided with a door.[70]

The other cases included in the *Index*—all concerning paintings or sculptures—are not accompanied by similar remarks suggesting specifically tailored remedies. Their solution is collectively addressed in the instruction written at the end of the document, which orders the correction or destruction of any artwork mentioned

65. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

66. For the history of this chapel, whose date of construction is unknown, see O. Zastrow, *Guanzate. La comunità civile e religiosa nei secoli*, Guanzate, 2005, pp. 132–33.

67. M. L. Gatti Perer, 'Per la definizione dell'iconografia della Vergine del Rosario. L'istituzione della compagnia del S. Rosario eretta da san Carlo e l'edizione italiana figurata del 1583 delle "Rosarie preces" di Bartolomeo Scalvo', in *Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della grande Riforma. Cultura, religione e arti del governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento*, ed. F. Buzzi and D. Zardin, Cinisello Balsamo, 1997, pp. 185–208 (185–86).

68. Ibid. See also De Boer (as in n. 1), pp. 106–07; and Harpster (as in n. 18), pp. 163, 165–66.

69. Zastrow (as in n. 66), pp. 133, 166–67.

70. Ibid., p. 133.

in the list.[71] Among the problems raised by these images, the most straightforward are the presence of nudity and the depiction of sexual acts, which occur in five out of the fourteen cases denounced. Lascivious images had been explicitly forbidden by the Council of Trent[72] and by Borromeo's legislation,[73] and were a common target of Counter-Reformation censorship.[74] The clergymen asked to ferret out inappropriate images in the Milanese diocese appear to have been keenly aware of this prohibition, as they were moved to denounce even mild examples of nudity. 'Partly naked figures' were thus reported in the parish church of Meda (Monza e Brianza; Fig. 2, no. 4), and 'little putti, that is naked angels' in that of Basiglio (Milan; Fig. 2, no. 5).[75] While none of these artworks can be identified today, the putti denounced in Basiglio must have been created only some decades before the *Index* was compiled, since they appeared in a church built in 1545.[76] The same is probably true for a depiction of Mary Magdalene 'whose whole bosom is uncovered' that was found in the church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Arona (Novara; Fig. 2, no. 9),[77] given that representations of the penitent Magdalene with a naked torso spread especially from the sixteenth century.[78]

The remaining two examples of lascivious images mentioned in the *Index* are more peculiar. A representation showing 'naked women, with the devil over them' was reported in the church of Santa Maria del Monte near Varese (Fig. 2, no. 12), a notable pilgrimage site that would later develop into the main shrine of the local Sacro Monte.[79] Documentary evidence attests that the church had been lavishly decorated during the fifteenth century, although almost no traces predating the baroque renovation of the building survive today.[80] Naked figures interacting with devils feature commonly in depictions of infernal punishments, which became especially frequent in north Italian art during the late medieval period. The episcopal informant who denounced the painting in Santa Maria del Monte was probably referring to a

71. See below, section 4.

72. *COD*, p. 775, l. 44.

73. *AEM*, II.1, cols 36–37; Borromeo, 'Instructiones' (as in n. 23), p. 42.

74. For the well-known example of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, see section 1. Paleotti had planned to devote an entire book of his unfinished continuation of the *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* to lascivious pictures: Paleotti, *Discourse* (as in n. 64), pp. 332–33.

75. See Appendix I; and Appendix II. Orders to cover up naked figures of angels are recorded in the decrees of Clement VIII's pastoral visits in Rome: Mansour (as in n. 40), pp. 141–42, 146.

76. On the history of the parish church of Sant'Agata in Basiglio, see *Basiglio*, ed. S. Freddo, Riva presso Chieri, 2002, pp. 28–29.

77. See Appendix I; and Appendix II. For similar instances of censorship against images of Mary Magdalene, cf. Mansour (as in n. 40), pp. 142, 146–47.

78. See M. Ingenhoff-Danhäuser, *Maria Magdalena. Heilige und Sünderin in der italienischen Renaissance*, Tübingen, 1984; and *La Maddalena tra Sacro e Profano* [exhib. cat.], ed. M. Mosco, Milan and Florence, 1986. On the opinions of Counter-Reformation writers regarding the appropriate way to represent Mary Magdalene, see O. Delenda, 'Modifications des représentations de Marie-Madeleine après le concile de Trente', in *Marie-Madeleine figure mythique dans la littérature et les arts*, ed. A. Montandon, Clermont-Ferrand, 1999, pp. 117–27.

79. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

80. On the scant remains of the original decoration (none of which matches the description in the *Index*), see A. Bertoni, 'La basilica di Santa Maria del Monte sopra Varese. Religiosità, arte e committenza tra quindicesimo e sedicesimo secolo', in *Sacri monti. Devozione, arte e cultura della Controriforma*, ed. L. Vaccaro and F. Ricardi, Milan, 1992, pp. 335–51; and G. Arricobene et al., *La cripta romanica del santuario di Santa Maria del Monte*, Busto Arsizio, 2015.

representation of this kind, given its collocation in a church building. In northern Italy, however, images of infernal punishments predominantly show sinners as either men or sexless figures, with relatively few characters identifiable as female. The fact that the naked figures of Santa Maria del Monte were clearly recognisable as women probably contributed to inspire reprobation in the clergyman who denounced them, prompting the idea that their dealings with the devil(s) were suggestive of sexual acts, as the expression 'col diavolo sopra' intimates in the original text.[81] In the eye of a Church official of the 1570s, this impression could have been strengthened by an association with witchcraft lore, possibly even with the visual depictions of demons embracing witches that circulated in contemporary prints and books.[82]

Sexual themes were undoubtedly present in the only representation of the *Index* found in a building with no apparent ecclesiastical ties: a private house in Monza, in which, according to the document, 'immoral paintings' could be seen on a wall through the opening of a postern.[83] Erotic scenes and humorous subjects with obscene connotations had been an accepted part of the medieval repertoire of secular decoration in northern Italy, where they could be displayed in highly visible places, such as building façades or the painted ceilings of reception halls.[84] The paintings reported by the episcopal informant for Monza might have pertained to these genres. Interestingly, their denunciation exceeded the scope of the inquiries performed by the other clergymen who contributed materials for the *Index*, all of whom focused on the decoration of Church-owned buildings, leaving artworks in the possession of the laity aside. The 'immoral paintings' in Monza, however, were visible from the outside of the house—a fact that evidently stood out as a public offence and a hindrance to the reforming activity pursued by the clergy in the area, and therefore prompted their official denunciation.

Equally, if not potentially more pernicious than erotic paintings, were sacred images containing erroneous or apocryphal elements. Just as lascivious representations, erroneous iconographies had been singled out in the Tridentine decree as a threat to the spiritual advancement of the faithful.[85] Borromeo had repeated this warning in both the decrees of the First Provincial Council[86] and his *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*, where he states that the first thing Church authorities have to be wary of in sacred images is precisely that they should contain

81. See Appendix I.

82. For some examples of these, see C. Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, London and New York, 2007, pp. 22, 226–28.

83. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

84. Images of this kind are still visible, for instance, on the façade of the Palazzo dell'Arengo in Novara (a fresco depicting sexual intercourse, 13th century) and on the 15th-century painted ceilings of the Castle of Lagnasco, Cuneo (women fishing phalluses from a pond; women picking phalluses from a tree; sodomy scene). For an overview of this topic, see V. Pace, 'Immagini della sessualità nel medioevo italiano', in *Medioevo. Immagini e ideologie* (Atti del convegno, Parma, 2002), ed. A. C. Quintavalle, Milan, 2005, pp. 630–43.

85. *COD*, p. 775, ll. 36–39: 'In has autem sanctas et salutares observationes si qui abusus irrepserint: eos prorsus aboleri sancta synodus vehementer cupit, ita ut nullae falsi dogmatis imagines et rudibus periculosi erroris occasionem praebentes statuantur'.

86. *AEM*, II.1, cols 36–37.

no error and be based on approved ecclesiastical sources.[87] Several representations listed in the *Index* raised concern because of these reasons.[88] For instance, in the oratory of Santa Marta in Bellano (Lecco; Fig. 2, no. 8) a fresco cycle depicting the life of the titular saint contained a scene that struck diocesan informants as erroneous: according to the document, Jesus Christ, dressed as a pope, was represented in the act of burying the dead body of St Martha.[89] The series of paintings to which this depiction belonged decorated the main chapel of the oratory and was destroyed around the beginning of the eighteenth century,[90] so that no evidence of the exact appearance of the fresco remains today. The description suggests, however, that its iconography followed a passage of the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, according to which Christ and the French bishop St Fronto attended the funeral of St Martha and helped place her body in the grave.[91] Faithful depictions of this episode appear in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian art, both in frescoes and panel paintings (Fig. 3).[92] The iconography of the fresco in Bellano was probably similar, if not identical, to that of these artworks, although the mention of Christ in papal garments remains puzzling. The detail, which is singled out in the description as the main incongruity in the image, probably derives from a misattribution of St Fronto's episcopal garb to the figure of Jesus. It is impossible, however, to say whether this mistake actually featured in the painting or whether the figures were misidentified by the informant who denounced the fresco. The same informant (or the secretary reworking his report) may even have considered the whole scene as apocryphal, since the wording of the *Index* seems to imply that the very presence of Christ in this episode was considered disconcerting.[93]

Problems with apocryphal iconographies were also occurring in the *pieve* of Trenno, near the city of Milan (Fig. 2, no. 7). The local informant reported that 'in many places' of the area people used to 'celebrate a festival dedicated to Saint Defendens, of whom we have no historical account', and that on the occasion of this festival they painted 'a standing man in armour, wearing spurs, in the guise of a *bravo*'.[94] Unlike the biblical Martha, Defendens is a saint whose cult is entirely the fruit of popular devotion. Despite being venerated in the Alps as one of the martyr soldiers of the Theban Legion, he is not mentioned in any official ecclesiastical source.[95] In denouncing

87. Borromeo, 'Instructiones' (as in n. 23), pp. 42–45.

88. For similar instances occurring during Clement VIII's pastoral visits, cf. Mansour (as in n. 40), pp. 149–51.

89. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

90. V. Mezzera, 'Gli oratori minori e le confraternite della Parrocchia di Bellano. Notizie storiche', *Archivi di Lecco e della provincia*, XIV.3, 1991, pp. 322–58 (332).

91. Jacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. G. P. Maggioni, 2 vols, Florence, 1998, II, pp. 686–87.

92. E. Gaillard, 'The *Burial of St. Martha* by Sano di Pietro', *Burlington Magazine*, XL, 1922, pp. 237–39; G. Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, Florence, 1952, pp. 681–83; M. Corsi, *Gli affreschi medievali in Santa Marta a Siena. Studio iconografico*, Siena, 2005, pp. 31–35.

93. The focus of the entry is not exclusively on the inappropriate garb of Christ, but also on the role that Jesus is given in the burial: see Appendix I; and Appendix II.

94. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

95. The very name Defendens points towards an origin in folk devotion, as it clearly evokes the role of 'protectors of the faith' that Alpine traditions attribute to the Theban martyrs. On the cult of the Theban Legion, see M. Centini, *Martiri tebei. Storia e antropologia di un mito alpino*, Scarmagno, 2010; and *Mauritius und die thebäische Legion. Saint Maurice et la Légion Thébaine*

FIGURE 3. Sano di Pietro, *Funeral of St Martha*, 1460–70. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 65.181.7. Image in the public domain.

a festival celebrated in his honour and the images produced on this occasion (which were probably processional paintings or banners such as those commonly used in other areas where the cult of St Defendens was spread [Fig. 4]),[96] the informant for the *pieve* of Trenno was contributing in more than one way to the reforming effort promoted by Borromeo. On the one hand, his report complied with the decrees of the First Provincial Council, which prohibited the representation of subjects based exclusively on the 'inane opinions of the populace'.[97] On the other hand, it was also instrumental in establishing the authenticity of the saints and relics venerated in the diocese, a problem that the Fourth Provincial Council had tackled together with that of sacred art.[98] Finally, the denunciation of the depictions of St Defendens was also in line with an additional point that Borromeo had repeatedly stressed in his prescriptions: that is, that it was essential that sacred figures, especially saints, should be represented in an attire that was appropriate and decorous.[99] Concern with this issue emerges clearly in the description of the paintings made by the people of Trenno, which are reproached for representing St Defendens sporting the trademarks of a contemporary hired soldier.

(Actes du colloque, Fribourg, Saint-Maurice, Martigny, 2003), ed. O. Wermelinger et al., Fribourg, 2005.

96. See, e.g., R. Cardani Vergani, 'Dal culto di santi locali, quali San Feriolo e San Defendente, a quello più conosciuto per San Pellegrino. Alcune testimonianze nell'area lombarda', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, XLIX, 1992, pp. 55–65.

97. *AEM*, II.1, col. 37: 'Historiae quoque, quibus neque Ecclesia, neque probati scriptores auctoritatem ullam dederunt, sed sola vulgi vana opinione commendantur; effingi prohibeantur'.

98. The decree of the Fourth Provincial Council in which sacred art is discussed (*De sacris reliquis, miraculis et imaginibus*) is part of the section *Quae ad sanctorum cultum, sacrorumque temporum celebritatem pertinent* (*AEM*, II.1, col. 300). Matters concerning saints, relics and sacred images had also been grouped together in the Tridentine decree (*De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum, et de sacris imaginibus*; *COD*, p. 774). During the 1570s the authenticity of St Defendens was also being questioned in the diocese of Verona: see M. Corso, 'Places, Rites, Society. Religious Practice in the Early Modern Venetian Mainland', PhD thesis, Università di Padova, 2020, pp. 118–19.

99. *AEM*, II.1, col. 37; Borromeo, 'Instructiones' (as in n. 23), p. 43.

FIGURE 4. Processional banner with St Defendens, 17th-century. Berzona (Canton of Ticino), San Defendente. From R. Cardani Vergani, 'Dal culto di santi locali, quali San Feriolo e San Defendente, a quello più conosciuto per San Pellegrino. Alcune testimonianze nell'area lombarda', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, XLIX, 1992, fig. 4.

This preoccupation with decorum was crucial in determining whether a sacred image should be considered suitable or not. As a matter of fact, all remaining artworks listed in the *Index* appear to have been denounced because they were perceived, to some degree or another, as undignified. The case of an image of St Ambrose, the patron saint of Milan, painted in the rural church of Molina (Varese; Fig. 2, no. 11), perfectly exemplifies this concern. The bishop saint appeared 'on horseback, with a scourge in his hand', and was surrounded by 'many ridiculous images of Arians'.[100] The painting was evidently a representation of St Ambrose driving the Arian heretics

100. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

FIGURE 5. Cristoforo de' Predis, *St Ambrose on Horseback*, 1476. Varese, Museo Baroffio, MS inv. 1000, front page. Courtesy of Sacro Monte – Varese Musei.

from Milan, an iconography inspired by the doctrinal and political struggle of the historical Ambrose against the spread of Arianism. Starting from the fourteenth century, Lombard artists began to render this subject as a dramatic fight, representing the saint on horseback in the act of charging against the opponents of orthodoxy. This development was fuelled by a legend according to which St Ambrose, mounted on a steed, had appeared in aid of the Milanese army at the battle of Parabiago, fought in 1339 against rebel citizens (Fig. 5).[101] The entry of the *Index* suggests that

101. See M. L. Gatti Perer, *La chiesa e il convento di S. Ambrogio della Vittoria a Parabiago*, Milan, 1966, pp. 4–5; A. Rovetta, 'Ambrogio in Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Attestazioni iconografiche di età borromaica', *Studia Ambrosiana*, IV, 2010, pp. 155–86 (162–66); G. Cariboni, 'L'iconografia ambrosiana in rapporto al sorgere e al primo svilupparsi della signoria viscontea', in *La mémoire d'Ambrose de Milan. Usages politiques et sociaux*

the painting found in Molina was considered objectionable for reasons quite similar to those that prompted the condemnation of the images of St Defendens: the presence of elements recalling martial violence, coupled, in this case, with the 'ridiculous' attitudes of the Arians fleeing before St Ambrose. The painting is no longer preserved, although it is unknown whether it was destroyed as a direct consequence of the orders contained in the *Index* or at a later time. It is worthy of notice, at any rate, that some years after the *Index* was compiled the question of whether to censor inappropriate representations of St Ambrose was still much debated. As bishop of Milan, Church Father, and successful mediator in the clashes of secular power and ecclesiastical authority, St Ambrose was the model on which the Milanese episcopal identity had fashioned itself along the centuries. Borromeo regarded Ambrose as an especially apt symbol for his own political and pastoral goals, and amply referenced Ambrose's legacy in his writings and visual choices. He adopted, for instance, a portrait of the saint as the new image for the Milanese episcopal seal.[102] Preventing the spread of potentially damaging representations of St Ambrose was therefore a pressing concern for Borromeo. In 1580 he solicited an opinion on this matter from the erudite Pietro Galesini.[103] In his answer, Galesini criticised the habit of representing St Ambrose on horseback as unbefitting a bishop, remarking that the battle of Parabiago had been the result of internecine fights between the people of Milan and was therefore not a conflict that a patron saint could have endorsed. He recommended banning the production of further images of St Ambrose on horseback, but he recognised that it would be impossible to effectively wipe out already-existing representations, contenting himself with the knowledge that these would be inevitably destroyed by time.[104]

Another reason for reporting artworks as indecorous was the depiction of animals, which, as mentioned, had been already pointed out as problematic in the records of a pastoral visit to San Bovio made in 1570.[105] In 1576 the Fourth Provincial Council explicitly condemned the representation of animals as being 'indecent and profane', and thereby contravening Tridentine prescriptions.[106] While animal figures should be tolerated when they were an essential part of well-established religious iconographies, any superfluous inclusion of animals in church decor was to be

d'une autorité patristique en Italie (V^e–XVIII^e siècle), ed. P. Boucheron and S. Gioanni, Paris, 2015, pp. 129–53; and A. Albuzzi, 'La barba di Ambrogio. Iconografia, erudizione agiografica e propaganda nella Milano dei due Borromeo', ibid., pp. 155–207 (nn. 38–39).

102. See, in particular, C. Geddo and S. Paoli, 'I santi Ambrogio e Carlo', in *La città e la sua memoria. Milano e la tradizione di sant'Ambrogio* [exhib. cat.], ed. M. Rizzi, Milan, 1997, pp. 298–307.

103. On his biography and collaboration with Borromeo, see M. Navoni, 'Galesini, Pietro (1520 c.–1590 c.)', in *Dizionario della Chiesa ambrosiana*, ed. A. Majo, 6 vols, Milan, 1987–93, III, pp. 1359–61.

104. Transcribed in F. Meda, 'Il centenario di una battaglia e la leggenda dello staffile di S. Ambrogio', *La scuola cattolica*, LXVII.2, 1939, pp. 150–66 (162): 'Quanto a me pare che le pitture già fatte si lascino che il tempo le levarà: ma per l'avvenire non permetterei che si faccino, perché un'effigie tale è molto disconveniente a un vescovo'. On Borromeo's disapproval of this iconography, see also Geddo and Paoli (as in n. 102), p. 300.

105. See above, section 2.

106. *AEM*, II.1, col. 307: 'Effigies iumentorum, canum, aliorumve brutorum animalium in ecclesia ne fiant: cum aliquid inhonestum, aut profanum in ea apparere nefas sit, ex Tridentini Concilii sanctione'.

avoided.[107] Evidently alerted by these instructions, the informants whose reports are summarised in the *Index* denounced the representation of 'a fearsome dog with inscriptions' (possibly a heraldic badge or some other emblematic image) that appeared in the parish house of Melzo (Milan; Fig. 2, no. 6).[108] They also reported a series of 'profane images' painted on both the interior and the exterior of a Church property in Cantù (Como; Fig. 2, no. 3), which included a scene showing 'a wolf eating a friar'.[109] The latter entry is the only one in which the adjective 'profane' is used by the sixteenth-century compilers of the *Index*, although its exact implications remain unclear. No additional evidence regarding the appearance of these paintings is known today. It is therefore impossible to establish whether the word simply echoes the conciliar decree condemning animal images as 'profane'; whether it amounts to a remark on the offensive nature of the scene, perceived as profaning the dignity of Church members by representing one of them at the mercy of a hungry animal; or whether it means that all the paintings in the building showed profane (secular) themes instead of more appropriate sacred ones. Any one of these meanings does not necessarily exclude the others. It is evident, in fact, that the artworks reported in the *Index* often aroused suspicion for more than one reason—as we have seen, for instance, in the case of St Defendens.

A similarly intricate tangle of issues was ostensibly raised by the representations of the evangelists with human bodies 'and the head and feet of animals' that were found in several churches of the Valley of Leventina in Switzerland (Fig. 2, no. 10), where some of these paintings are still visible today (Fig. 6).[110] The *Index* does not specify why these images were considered problematic. It is clear, however, that in mingling the human shape of the evangelists with that of their symbolic animals they radically infringed Borromeo's prescriptions on both the decorous representation of saints and the avoidance of beasts in sacred art. Moreover, the anthropo-zoomorphic iconography of the evangelists, although occurring in medieval artworks from the Alpine area, is conspicuously absent from most Italian territories.[111] From the perspective of a sixteenth-century clergymen educated in Milan or another major Italian city, this iconography would have seemed outlandish, and may therefore have been considered to be a violation of the proscription against unusual images contained in the Tridentine decree.[112] It is true that the text formulated at Trent does not clarify

107. Ibid. Similar concerns were raised in 1573 by the Venetian Inquisition regarding the depiction of a dog in Veronese's *Last Supper* (renamed *Feast in the House of Levi*), which the artist was asked to replace with a figure of Mary Magdalene: see the transcript of the trial in M. E. Massimi, *La Cena in casa di Levi di Paolo Veronese. Il processo riaperto*, Venice, 2011, pp. 179–82.

108. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

109. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

110. See Appendix I; and Appendix II. For Lombard and Swiss examples of this iconography, see V. Segre, 'La chiesa di S. Ambrogio a Chironico in Val Leventina. Recenti restauri e nuove interpretazioni', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, XVII, 2010, pp. 173–92 (186 n. 44); and V. Segre, *Die Kirche S. Ambrogio in Chironico, Kanton Tessin*, Bern, 2007.

111. On this iconography, which visually embodies the exegetical association between the evangelists and the Four Living Creatures described in the Book of Ezekiel 1.5–14 and in Revelation 4.6–8, see U. Nilgen, 'Evangelistensymbole', in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, VI, Stuttgart, 1973, cols 517–72 (online edition: *RDK Labor*, www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=89207 [accessed 12 December 2022]).

112. *COD*, p. 776, ll. 8–10: 'Statuit sancta synodus, nemini licere, ullo in loco vel ecclesia … , ullam insolitam ponere vel ponendam curare imaginem, nisi ab episcopo approbata fuerit'.

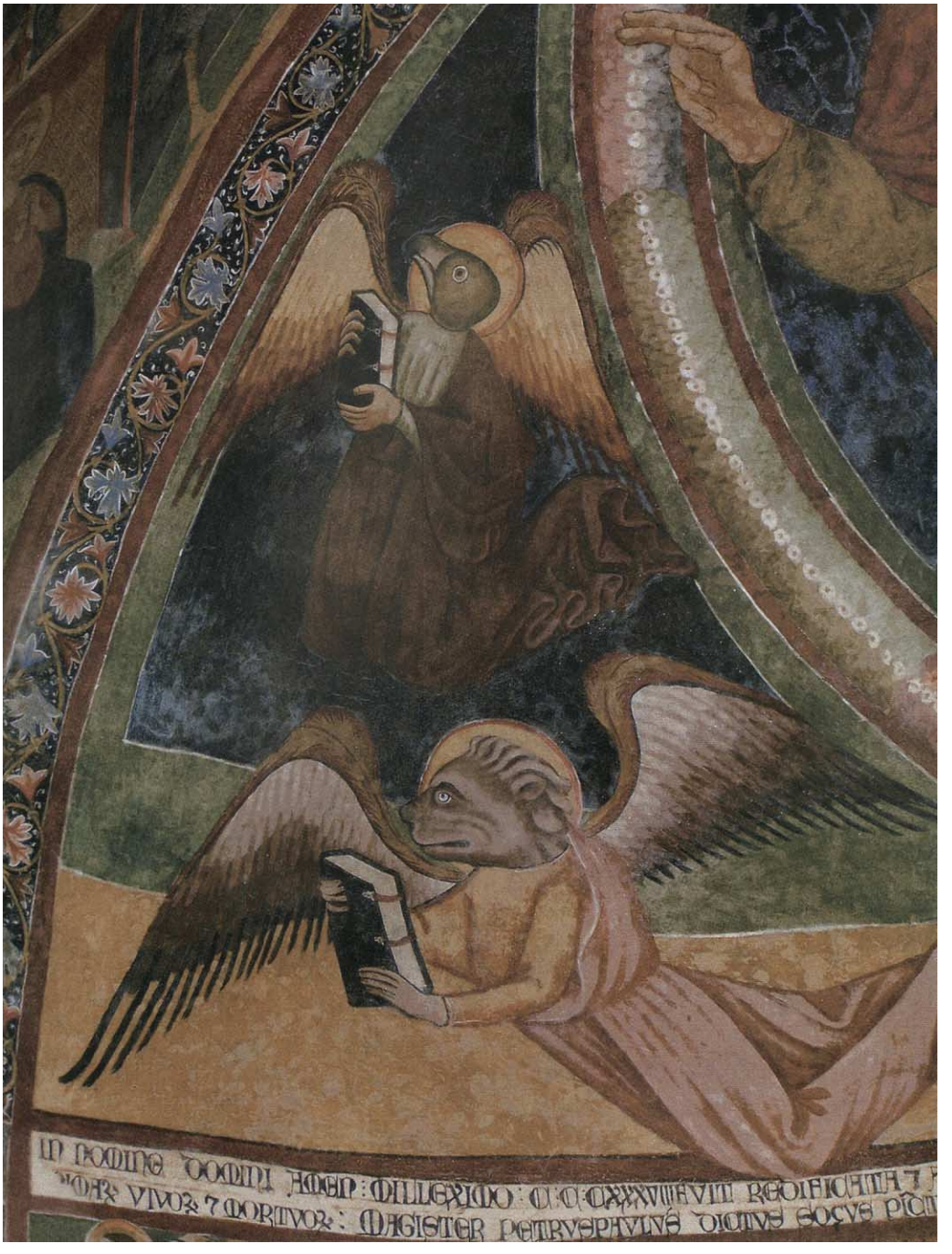

FIGURE 6. Magister Petruspaulus, *The Evangelists John and Mark*, c. 1340. Chironico (Valley of Leventina), Sant'Ambrogio. From V. Segre, *Die Kirche S. Ambrogio in Chironico, Kanton Tessin*, Bern, 2007, back flap illustration.

what renders an image 'unusual'—whether its rarity, or novelty, or abnormality. Later episodes of censorship, however, prove that iconographies that altered the human shape in unnatural ways could fall under this category. Seventeenth-century inquiries into the depiction of the Trinity as a three-faced man, for instance, testify that these representations could be decried as both unusual and bizarre to the point of being perceived as monstrous.[113] Diffidence and distaste towards such images were probably exacerbated by the fact that the old symbolic solutions on which they relied were markedly different from those most commonly used in contemporary Renaissance art, as sixteenth-century visual allegory had largely moved away from the proliferation of sundry attributes and composite figures typical of late medieval symbolism.[114]

Unusualness, lack of decorum and wariness of obsolete forms of allegory also underlie the censure of the 'image called the Holy Sunday, with almost every tool related to the mechanical arts' that the *Index* records in the church of Santa Giustina in Germanedo (Lecco; Fig. 2, no. 13).[115] The painting, now lost, appeared on the wall of a cemetery adjacent to the church, where it was still visible at the beginning of the seventeenth century.[116] The iconography of the Holy Sunday is attested in a small number of late medieval frescoes from the Alpine region, including Lombardy and the Canton of Ticino. It consists in an allegory similar to that of the Sunday Christ: the female personification of Sunday is surrounded by an array of working tools that inflict injuries to her body, thus representing the offence caused by working on holy days (Fig. 7).[117] As mentioned above, the acts of a pastoral visit to Germanedo made in 1569 had already stressed the need to destroy this image, describing it as 'a figure of a certain [female] saint with some inappropriate symbols of several arts'.[118] These expressions are close to those that we find in the *Index*. In both cases, the description reveals a marked degree of unfamiliarity with the iconography of the Holy Sunday, and conveys a sense that the prominent depiction of trade tools was considered unbecoming to a sacred effigy.

In all the instances examined so far, the issues that led to the denunciation of an artwork lay either in its contents or in its use. Interestingly, however, one additional entry of the *Index* reveals that the widespread preoccupation with decorum could also prompt informants to denounce paintings or sculptures for aesthetic reasons. Concerning the *pieve* of Appiano (Como; Fig. 2, no. 1), the document states that 'in some places' there were 'ugly and misshapen images, done in the old style' ('fatte

113. See C. Franceschini's analysis, 'Volti santi e Trinità triformi. Ricerche in corso sullo statuto delle immagini nei procedimenti del Sant'Uffizio', in *L'Inquisizione romana e i suoi archivi. A vent'anni dall'apertura dell'ACDF* (Atti del convegno, Rome, 2018), ed. A. Cifres, Rome, 2019, pp. 279–301.

114. On this topic, see the remarks of E. H. Gombrich, '*Icones Symbolicae*. Philosophies of Symbolism and Their Bearing on Art', in *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1972, pp. 123–95 (138–39).

115. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

116. Rigaux (as in n. 6), p. 75.

117. On this iconography and its distribution, see Rigaux (as in n. 6), ch. 3; R. A. Lorenzi et al., *La Madonna dei Mestieri*, Pisogne, 2004; and A. Zaina, 'Il precetto festivo tra ammonizione e devozione. Il "Cristo della domenica" negli affreschi bresciani', *Brixia sacra*, XII.3–4, 2008, pp. 33–63 (41–51).

118. Rigaux (as in n. 6), p. 76 n. 9: 'Figura cuiusdam sanctae cum certis signis diversarum artium non condecentibus'.

FIGURE 7. Graphic reconstruction of the *Allegory of the Holy Sunday*, c. 1465. Pisogne (Brescia), Santa Maria della Neve. Drawing by M. T. Corghi, reproduced with permission.

à l'anticha').[119] As is well known, the expression *all'antica* is commonly used in sixteenth-century literature on the visual arts as technical jargon designating ancient style, with regard to artifacts made during antiquity or imitating Greek and Roman art. Nevertheless, under the pen of writers who were neither artists nor art theorists, the same expression was often employed in the more generic sense of 'old', and could therefore be applied to the description of medieval objects and customs.[120] Here 'à l'anticha' describes in all probability Romanesque or Gothic artworks, since these

119. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

120. See, e.g., the examples mentioned in C. Maritano, '"A l'antica. Non de' Greci o Romani, ma di que' tempi". Immagini del Medioevo nell'età di Emanuele Filiberto e di Carlo Emanuele I', in *Giuseppe Vernazza e la fortuna dei primitivi* (Atti del convegno, Alba, 2004), Alba, 2007, pp. 17–41.

were the types of 'old' Christian images that an episcopal informant was more likely to encounter in the area of Appiano. In criticising these artworks as unpleasant and deformed, the entry offers a rare glimpse into the way artistic style was perceived by sixteenth-century educated observers who did not have a technical background in the visual arts and were not antiquarians, collectors or patrons. In the eyes of the informant reporting on the *pieve* of Appiano, a sacred image could evidently be considered undignified if it did not adhere to contemporary Renaissance standards, even if its contents were otherwise irreproachable. Similar opinions often dictated the behaviour of early modern clergy towards the artworks displayed in churches. The destruction and replacement of medieval works of art that no longer met stylistic standards, as well as their removal to less prestigious locations (whether by displacing them from a main altar to the sacristy, or from urban sanctuaries to minor churches in the countryside), are both amply attested. Yet despite these trends, stylistic concerns were rarely, if ever, explicitly voiced in Counter-Reformation writings on sacred art. Neither the decrees of Borromeo's provincial councils nor the *Instructiones*, for instance, ever mention the matter of style, although they otherwise offer extremely detailed prescriptions compared to other sources.[121] In these texts, old religious images raise concern only inasmuch as they may be in a bad state of preservation, and may therefore need to be restored or, if damaged beyond repair, be disposed of in a manner respectful of their sacred status.[122] No mention is made, however, of old images that are still pristine but no longer correspond to what were now deemed the appropriate aesthetic standards.

4. CONCLUSION. DENOUNCING AND CENSORING: TWO DIFFERENT MATTERS

The *Index* closes with a general remark on the need to be vigilant regarding the truthfulness and decorum of images.[123] This recommendation is followed by a more specific prescription concerning the artworks mentioned in the list: Church officials (probably the rural vicars, as we have seen)[124] would need to instruct the parish priests under their supervision to deny absolution to those who did not correct or destroy these artworks.[125] This course of action differs from the remedies envisaged

121. On the lack of attention to style in the *Instructiones*, see G. T. Harpster, 'Carlo Borromeo's Itineraries. The Sacred Image in Post-Tridentine Italy', PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018, pp. 8–9. For the same issue in Paleotti's *Discourse*, cf. K. F. Morrison, 'Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's Call for Reform of Christian Art', in *Knowledge and Profanation. Transgressing the Boundaries of Religion in Premodern Scholarship*, ed. M. Mulsow and A. Ben-Tov, Leiden and Boston, 2019, pp. 95–132 (103).

122. *AEM*, II.1, col. 308. Paleotti had planned to discuss the same problems in the continuation of his treatise; see Paleotti, 'Discorso' (as in n. 64), p. 509. For some examples of artwork restoration carried out under Borromeo's aegis, see G. T. Harpster, 'Decorum and Display. Conserving and Restoring Miraculous Images in Post-Tridentine Milan', in *Madonne. Reframing, Coronation and Re-Installation of Marian Images in Early Modern Spaces*, ed. C. Franceschini, Turnhout, forthcoming.

123. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

124. See above, section 2.

125. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

by the Fourth Provincial Council, which had recommended that any artists that made unlawful images as well as any clergymen that allowed them to be installed in churches be fined or excommunicated.[126] The corrective measure mentioned in the *Index* shifts the target from the creators of new images to the people responsible for the preservation of older ones—an adjustment that reflects the specific needs of the inquiry at hand, in its distinctive attempt to perform a large-scale purge of already-existing artworks instead of monitoring the creation of new ones.

Despite this pragmatic approach, it is apparent that the threat of withholding absolution did not always have the desired effect of compelling parishioners to modify or efface the images that the inquiry had brought to light. As we have seen, already-existing artworks were on the whole largely unaffected by Counter-Reformation attempts to regulate the contents and use of sacred art. In this domain, efforts to convert legislation into practice remained exceptional even if they could theoretically find a model in other types of censorship, such as that directed against books. The final words of the *Index* attest that the writers of the document were well aware of this similarity: as they state, the images mentioned in the list should be censored precisely because they are 'no less scandalous than immoral books'.[127] After the Council of Trent, authors concerned with the control of sacred art had repurposed to their ends Pope Gregory the Great's famous analogy of images as the book of the illiterate. Both Johannes Molanus and Gabriele Paleotti, for instance, dedicated a chapter of their treatises to drawing parallels between images and books, asserting the need to censor their contents after a similar fashion.[128] Even before these treatises were published, the same idea had already appeared in the decrees of Borromeo's First Provincial Council, which state that what is forbidden in books, should be also forbidden in images.[129] This belief in the need to act in a similar manner towards texts and images, however, did not lead to the creation of an official system of art censorship such as that already in place for books. Towards the end of his life, Paleotti began advocating the creation of an official 'Index of forbidden pictures' to be compiled by the same commission that was tasked with the Index of forbidden books.[130] Had it been realised according to

126. *AEM*, II.1, cols 307–08.

127. See Appendix I; and Appendix II.

128. Johannes Molanus, *De picturis et imaginibus sacris*, Leuven, 1570, Book II, ch. 2, 'Quod in libris prohibetur, prohibendum etiam esse in picturis, quae sunt idiotarum libri' (modern edition: Johannes Molanus, *Traité des saintes images*, ed. F. Boespflug and O. Christin, 2 vols, Paris, 1996, I, pp. 125–27); Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, Bologna, 1582, Book I, ch. 5, 'Se la introduzzione delle imagini sia stata anteriore ai libri, e che convenienza abbia con essi' (Paleotti, 'Discorso' [as in n. 64], pp. 142–49).

129. *AEM*, II.1, col. 37: 'illud in primis caveant Episcopi, ne quid pingatur, aut sculpatur, quod veritati Scripturarum, Traditionum, aut ecclesiasticarum historiarum adversetur: ne cuius lectio prohibetur, eius imago populo proponatur'.

130. See Prodi (as in n. 18), pp. 138–58; I. Bianchi, *La politica delle immagini nell'età della Controriforma. Gabriele Paleotti teorico e committente*, Bologna, 2008, pp. 214–15; and Mansour (as in n. 40), pp. 153–54. On the relationship between this project and the *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, see also G. Fusari, 'Introduzione al *Discorso sulle Immagini*', in Paleotti, *Discorso* (as in n. 18), pp. xi–xxiv (xvi–xvii); and Morrison (as in n. 121), p. 120.

Paleotti's intentions, this index would have unequivocally established what iconographies and types of images should be censored. The project, however, was abandoned after Paleotti's death. The inquiry ordered by Borromeo remains therefore the only large-scale effort ever made to discover infringements of the Tridentine decree and eradicate them, notwithstanding the fact that it was directed at specific artworks instead of general categories.

Even with this narrower scope, at all events, its goals proved difficult to achieve. The people in the diocese of Milan—as indeed the inhabitants of most Catholic areas—were loath to relinquish long-standing practices that were no longer seen as acceptable by Counter-Reformation standards.[131] Perhaps unsurprisingly, they proved equally reluctant to destroy or modify artworks that formed part of the religious and visual landscape in which they had been living, often for generations. For several of the cases mentioned in the *Index*, the step from denouncing to censoring appears to have been hindered by local resistance. It is certain, for instance, that the order to destroy or amend the representations of the evangelists with animal heads in the Valley of Leventina was not thoroughly carried out, since some of these images can still be found today. In other cases, it is clear that it took decades, and several reports from Church authorities, before any corrective measure was implemented. The chapel in Guanzate, for example, had been the cause of complaints since at least 1566, but it was only at one point between 1585 and 1605 that the modifications prescribed in the *Index* were finally made. The image of the Holy Sunday in Germanedo had also been denounced at least three times during the sixteenth century, and yet at the beginning of the following century it was still in place. It disappeared some time after, but it is uncertain whether it was destroyed as a consequence of these repeated reports or in the course of ordinary renovations. The same is true for the rest of the artworks mentioned in the document, none of which survive to this day. While some of them may well have been destroyed in compliance with the orders contained in the *Index*, others are likely to have encountered the fate that Pietro Galesini foretold for the images of St Ambrose on horseback in his reply to Borromeo: if reforming zeal was not able to take care of them, the passage of time would certainly do so.

131. See, e.g., De Boer (as in n. 1), ch. 6.

APPENDIX I

MILAN, ASD, MS SECTION XIV, VOL. 67, FOL. 35R–V, *INDEX PICTURARUM PROPHANARUM*

Note: I have reproduced the punctuation, capitalisation and crossings-out that appear in the original, while modernising *u*/*v* usage to facilitate reading. Round brackets contain letters that in the original are abbreviated. Foliation is indicated within square brackets.

[fol. 35r, marked as fol. 47r]

Imagini

~~Sommario~~ Imagini[132]

Appiano[133]

In alcuni luochi vi sono delle imagini, brutte, et diforme fatte à l'anticha.

In guenzate[134] in capo della piazza vi è una capella ap(er)ta, fabricata, et pinta con gran spesa avanti alla qual si gioca, sona, balla, canta, biestemma publicamente.

Rimedio, levati questi inconvenienti, ò la capella; ~~se no(n) si può~~ o farvi u(na) pariete ava(n)ti.

Gaiano[135]

Nella casa della portion' vacantorum[136] di cantu,[137] dentro, et fuori vi sono imagini profane, cioe un lupo che magna un frate etc.

Seveso[138]

Nella chiesa di Meda,[139] vi sono imagine un poco scoperte.

Pieve[140]

Nella chiesa di basei,[141] puttini, overo Angeletti nudi

Settara[142]

Nella casa del curato di Melzo,[143] un cagnazzo co' motti

Trenno[144]

In molti luoghi si celebra una festa di santo defendente del quale non si ha niuna historia, et si pinge un huomo armato in piedi, con speroni in forma di bravo.

132. Written in a different hand.

133. Appiano Gentile (Como, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 1.

134. Guanzate (Como, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 2.

135. Galliano (Como, Italy).

136. This expression appears to describe a building which formed part of one of the so-called *benefici vacanti*, i.e., ecclesiastical properties whose revenues were temporarily unassigned.

137. Cantù (Como, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 3.

138. Seveso (Monza e Brianza, Italy).

139. Probably the parish church of Santa Maria in Meda (Monza e Brianza, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 4.

140. Pieve di Locate, a district that comprised what are now the towns of Pieve Emanuele and Locate di Triulzi (Milan, Italy).

141. The church of Sant'Agata in Basiglio (Milan, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 5.

142. Settala (Milan, Italy).

143. Melzo (Milan, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 6. The building mentioned here is probably the house at no. 9, Via Sant'Alessandro, which is documented to have been used as a parish house at the beginning of the 17th century: see the entry 'Ex Casa Parrocchiale, Melzo' on the online database Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali, catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/ArchitecturalOrLandscapeHeritage/0303269394 (accessed 3 February 2022).

144. Trenno, now a neighbourhood of Milan (Italy): Fig. 2, no. 7.

Derfo[145]

In Bellano nella scuola de' disciplini,[146] vi è pinto la vita di santa Martha, nella qual appare che il s. Giesu Chr(ist)o stando in habito pontificale l'accompagna, alla sepoltura, et l'aiuta à sepelire.

Brebbia[147]

In Arona nella chiesa par(rocchia)le[148] una figura della Mad(dale)na[149] qual ha scoperta tutto il petto.

Leventina[150]

In molte chiese della Leventina, li quattro Evangelisti depinti con il corpo humano, et il capo, et piedi de bestie.

Varese[151]

In santo Ambrosio de Molina,[152] vi è pinto à cavallo con la scoriata in mano, con ali(quant)e imagine d'Ariani ridiculose

In s(an)ta Maria del monte[153] donne nude, col diavolo sopra

[fol. 35v, marked as fol. 47v]

Lecco

In santa Iustina di zarmagne,[154] vi è pinta una imagine, qual si dimanda la santa Dominica con quasi tutti li instrumenti de arti mecanici.

Monza[155]

In Monza, in una casa nel'aprire di una pusterla si vedono à l'incontro nel muro alcune pitture dishoneste.

E d'avertir in queste pitture, et altre che rep(re)sentino la vera historia, et che siano fatte con decoro.

+++ Rimedio di comandar ai curati che non assolvono quelli che tengano tale pitture prima che siano corrette, emendate, ò casse, per che non sono meno scandalose che i libri dishonesti.

145. Dervio (Lecco, Italy).

146. The church of Santa Marta in Bellano (Lecco, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 8.

147. Brebbia (Varese, Italy).

148. The church of the Nativity of the Virgin (Collegiata della Natività di Maria Vergine) in Arona (Novara, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 9.

149. The abbreviation 'Mad.na' could also be read as 'Madonna', possibly referring to an image of the *Madonna lactans* or the Double Intercession. Contrary to the description of the *Index*, representations of these iconographies in the Alpine area usually show the Virgin entirely clothed, with only one breast visible. However, a Tuscan fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli in the church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (*The Intercession of St. Sebastian*, 1464), brought to my notice by Paul Taylor, represents Mary baring both her breasts, suggesting that a reference to an image of this kind cannot be entirely ruled out.

150. The Valley of Leventina (Canton of Ticino, Switzerland): Fig. 2, no. 10.

151. Varese, Italy.

152. The church of Sant'Ambrogio in the hamlet of Molina, near the town of Barasso (Varese, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 11.

153. The shrine of Santa Maria del Monte near Varese (Italy), now the main church of the Sacro Monte di Varese: Fig. 2, no. 12.

154. Church of San Cipriano e Santa Giustina in Germanedo, now a neighbourhood of Lecco (Italy): Fig. 2, no. 13.

155. Monza (Monza e Brianza, Italy): Fig. 2, no. 14.

APPENDIX II

MILAN, ASD, MS SECTION XIV, VOL. 67, FOL. 35R–V, *INDEX OF PROFANE PAINTINGS*

Note: Crossings-out correspond to those found in the original; foliation and editorial expansions are indicated within square brackets.

[fol. 35r, marked as 47r]

Images

~~Summary~~ Images

Appiano

In some places there are ugly and misshapen images, done in the old style.

In Guanzate, at the top end of the square there is an open chapel, built and painted at great expense, in front of which people play games and make music, dance, sing and swear in public.

Remedy: [either] remove these nuisances, or the chapel; ~~if this proves impossible~~ or build a wall in front of it.

Galliano

In the house of the 'portion' vacantorum' in Cantù, both inside and out, there are profane images, that is to say a wolf eating a friar, etc.

Seveso

In the church of Meda, there are some partly naked figures.

Pieve

In the church of Basiglio, little putti, that is naked angels.

Settala

In the house of the parish priest of Melzo, a fearsome dog with inscriptions.

Trenno

In many places they celebrate a festival dedicated to Saint Defendens, of whom we have no historical account, and they paint a standing man in armour, wearing spurs, in the guise of a *bravo*.

Dervio

In Bellano, in the oratory of the Confraternity of Penitents, is painted the life of Saint Martha, in which it appears that the Lord Jesus Christ, dressed in papal garments, accompanies her [body] to the burial place and helps bury her.

Brebbia

In Arona, in the parish church, a figure of Mary Magdalene whose whole bosom is uncovered.

Valley of Leventina

In many churches of the Valley of Leventina, the four evangelists painted with a human body and the head and feet of animals.

Varese

In Saint Ambrose of Molina, [the titular saint] is painted on horseback, with a scourge in his hand, and many ridiculous images of Arians.

In Santa Maria del Monte, naked women, with the devil over them.

[fol. 35v, marked as fol. 47v]

Lecco

In Saint Justina in Germanedo is painted an image called the Holy Sunday, with almost every tool related to the mechanical arts.

Monza

In Monza, in a house, when opening a postern, some immoral paintings can be seen on a wall in front.

Heed must be taken, concerning these paintings, and others, that [they should] depict historical truth, and be made in a dignified way.

+++ The remedy [shall be] to order parish priests not to give absolution to those who keep these paintings until they are corrected, amended, or effaced, since they are no less scandalous than immoral books.

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