

# Political Information and Religious Skepticism in Early Modern Italy

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The seventeenth century saw the unexpected revival of the classical debate concerning the theory of the political imposture of religion. The rapid reception of this intellectual conceit facilitated the subsequent introduction of a number of heterodox doctrines that came to typify religious dissent in that period. At the same time, traditional religious worship remained customary and firmly embedded within the social fabric. But by the end of the seventeenth century, its image had been radically transformed. Religion came to be considered, above all else, as the premier instrument of social control, whose vast collection of dogma, norms and prescriptions lay at the antipodes of belief in its pastoral responsibilities and its ultimately spiritual oversight of matters regarding the afterlife.<sup>1</sup>

The reformulation of religion as an instrument of political control, however, was little more than a small step on a well-worn path. The intertwining of politics and irreligion had a lengthy literary history, notoriously so since the work of Machiavelli early in the previous century. However, the particular connection which 17<sup>th</sup>-century writings stressed was between the implicit reciprocal meaning of the terms *politician* and *atheist*. Both limited themselves to questions regarding human matters, and no longer interpreted reality through God. Both viewed reality as the creation of human thought. Within this perspective, God was simply another human invention. If humans had thus been the authors of this idea, his function had been accounted for in its efficacy as a device for social control and seizing ruling power.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, contemporary usage of

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1 For a preliminary survey see BARBIERATO, 2012.

2 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, busta 65, *Del Pasquino esiliato. Parlata prima. Pasquino et il Gobbo di Rialto*. The pasquinade can be dated to the 1650s.

*politician* was in fact not limited to public office-holders or official leaders who ruled according to a predefined ideology. Indeed, the term *politician* commonly defined a broad swath of the general public irrespective of social class who cultivated a fervent interest in world events and state secrets. This pursuit served no functional purpose beyond the concerted effort to interpret every aspect of daily life, including religion, in strictly political terms. The proliferation of *avvisos* of current events and state secrets reinforced belief that *ragione di stato* was the dominant operative principle of all societies past and present.<sup>3</sup>

The polemics and discussion of Reason of State reached its peak in popularity between 1600 and 1650.<sup>4</sup> The diffuse practice of such public speculation was not necessarily located in particularly large urban contexts, but nevertheless was more prevalent in places such as Venice, a city characterized by the uniqueness of its infrastructure and boasting a seemingly preternatural ability to obtain important information. In these respects, Venice was most likely the leading city in Italy, rivaled only by Rome. Both were among the most political, i.e., surveillance-ridden cities in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Material from newspapers, gazettes, *mercuri* and oral or written accounts created a sweeping vision of *politics* that was more open and more critical, at least in its initial stages.<sup>6</sup> Such material created a decisive change in the relationship between politics – or depictions of politics – and marginal sectors of the population, namely, an expanded and more varied section of the population, which, though excluded from power, remained interested in politics and was adept at discussing it. Yet, the type of political analysis they practiced often took the form of rudimentary and simplified contextualization of sudden outbreaks

3 The term *politichisti* was often used to define the group of people who read gazettes or heard them being read out and then discussed them, sometimes heatedly, cf. ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 567, report on 8 September 1681.

4 VILLARI, 1987, p. 27.

5 HAFEMAYER, 1999, p. 21-31.

6 Daniel Woolf claims that the spread of political information led to an affirmation of the sense of simultaneous events, the awareness of being part of a world in which other people were living at the same time in distant or unknown places. The consequence was a marked change in the perception of the present as a period of time rather than an instant. “News had not, of course, displaced history as a subject of discussion. But it had definitively established the present as a zone of activity, as narratable as the past, but distinguishable from it, and thereby constructed a public space within which events could enjoy their ephemeral life before slipping into the maw of history”, in: WOOLF, 2001, p. 98. See also DOOLEY, 2010.

of wars and conflicts. While their discussions sometimes broached a broader array of topics, discussions were often circumscribed by questions of military strategy, such as competing notions on the optimal means of mobilizing troops. Yet, rather than exercises in military strategy, these speculative analyses intended to constitute lessons in diplomacy when particularly eloquent or minimum rationales for the Reason of State. At times they also represented opportunities for pure social self-promotion.

In this light, the historian's task is not merely establishing how many people were effectively aware of the facts, or even comparing how accurately the various news sources reflected them. The real question is: what did these people think they knew? What kind of knowledge did they believe was being conveyed to them through news sources, and what kind of knowledge was conveyed from them to the next receiver?

Unfortunately, the answer to questions such as these can only be found in our recognition of the inevitable, indefinable gap between a text and its direct, concurrent comprehension. In 1666, Gregorio Leti observed that what readers found in gazettes and what they wanted to find were two different things, for while "people read them as they are written," nevertheless they "interpret them as they like".<sup>7</sup> Gazettes and journals, moreover, were hardly the only material paths for spreading news. A somewhat demotic education could be had on the affairs of state through the plethora of satirical works in prose or verse, whose vast diffusion could often be traced back to the inventories of gazetteers, who often produced them in their *botteghe*.<sup>8</sup>

Oral communication was also common practice in Venice where, in order to keep current, one merely had to stroll into a square or *bottega* and listen. Along with speeches, stories and songs, gazettes were read aloud and discussed in places frequented by people from every social sector.<sup>9</sup>

7 LETI, 1666, p. 255.

8 INFELISE, 2002, p. 157. See ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 650, report by an informer at the Nunciature on 9 November 1692. Texts in rhyme were popular: after being put up on walls and circulated in handwritten form, a 1695 defamatory composition against a rector from Verona had "become [...] public entertainment for youngsters in song". There were references to other similar songs at the same time, in: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, busta 122, 15 December 1695.

9 As an eighteenth-century text said, "songs, stories, gazettes, reports, speeches" were part of "those [...] little publications of not even three sheets and which circulate among the common people and the minority of insurgents, which are sung, talked about and sold in the street and in St Mark's Square", in: ASV, *Riformatori dello*

Such oral communication of news increased the likelihood that a single copy of a journal or gazette would reach a very large number of listeners, including some who could not read.<sup>10</sup> This posed potential dangers to orthodoxy, dangers which although neither immediate nor immediately perceived, nevertheless seemed to fuel dark fears. Such fears were fanned not merely because subversive print and oral news brought certain events to the attention of a huge audience, but also because they could easily encourage subversive attitudes. Gazettes, described as “delectable entertainment to delight gentlemen”,<sup>11</sup> were fragments of text which seemed too many to be fragments of the world. Unlike historical works and religious revelations – each presenting an unchangeable past and a future free of speculation – gazettes described an evolving world, one updated with each new edition. Clarity meant the author simply had to proffer ambiguities: “today’s news has pulled up something cold and tomorrow’s will be something hot”, making it seem normal to chance upon news which “when left in isolation for a while is discovered to be contaminated”, or has turned into “rancid news”.<sup>12</sup> Because the depreciation value inherent in the most current information, owed to the fact that the “latest” news was under temporal constraints as it vied to attract public notice, people found themselves constantly having to redefine their view of the facts, as well as their assumptions and conclusions that were based on their prior analysis of the events. The need to revise

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*Studio di Padova*, busta 361, anonymous undated written document. Gazetteers themselves sometimes told the news orally in advance: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 640, anonymous report on 26 December 1704.

- 10 Children often shouted stories and affairs around St Mark’s. In general sales took place both from stands and by going around ‘crying them out in Saint Mark’s and at the Rialto’. If news turned out to be ‘rancid’, i.e., overtaken by events or publicly denied, the value of the publications diminished. In such case the seller did not stop his work but fixed the price in order to cover costs and unsold copies were usually distributed among *putelli* (children), who sold them around the city ‘crying them out’, cf. ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, busta 366, trial against Giovanni Batti, deposition by Giovanni on 11 September 1684.
- 11 *Pallade veneta da sabato 29 agosto a sabato 5 settembre 1716*, in: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 713.
- 12 MURATORI, 1901-1922, vol. 3, p. 1020, letter 906, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Milan, dated Modena, 3 January 1709; also vol. 2, p. 580, letter 529, to Francesco Arisi in Cremona, dated Modena, 22 May 1702. For the ‘rancid news’, in: ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, busta 366, trial against Giovanni Batti, deposition by Giovanni on 11 September 1684.

and recast one's predictions caused by the fleeting validity of news, as one very astute commentator called it, has allowed "political astrologers to dominate the field of prediction".<sup>13</sup> The consequences and repercussions were of more than a little importance. First, once the most recent news had enhanced expectations of more, people demanded to know what happened next and to check the validity of their analysis. Hence, they waited for news to arrive – at times a spasmodic development. Secondly, people grew accustomed to the idea that the truth was something momentary and elusive, although this was not necessarily a conscious awareness. Multiple sources of news often kept awareness of subjectivity to a minimum. The newspapers arriving daily often reported the same events in significantly different ways. Sometimes even the gazetteers themselves drew attention to discrepancies by referring to varying versions "so that readers stick to whichever one they like."<sup>14</sup> As one keen observer noted in 1676: "the freedom of Venice, which allows the writers of news reports to plan them as they wish in their newsletters [...] has made them so venal that they are no longer expected

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- 13 ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 603, report by Giuseppe Antonio Gasparini on 22 May 1700. 'Everybody speaks about this turbulence of Mars, and they say that it's about to blow over, given that it can be seen that the planets involved are preparing for calmness', wrote an informer, Ranuccio de Baschi, from Rome in 1642, in: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 550, report on 5 March 1642. The vocabulary of politics was often quite esoteric and referred to secret or reserved political knowledge, see BURKE, 2010, p. ix–xx. The Marquis d'Argens preferred the term 'cabalists' to 'astrologers': 'Comme ils n'ont pas l'air assez riche pour qu'on croie qu'ils dépensent beaucoup en Couriers, on le figurerait presque, si l'on ajoutoit foi à leurs discours, qu'ils ont des Esprits aériens à leurs gages, et qu'il y a une étroite liaison entr'eux et les Cabalistes', in: D'ARGENS, 1737, p. 97f. Rumours and premonitions were combined in a letter sent by Lorenzo Tiepolo, the ambassador in Paris, to the Consiglio di Dieci in 1707: 'Everybody predicts misfortune coming from France, misfortune that could even affect the King's life. It is talk based on horoscopes drawn up in these times and on the planets. In this way the most rigorous surveys are conducted, but these are banks which cannot contain the flood of words uttered: it is true that credence must not be given to this type of forecast, but it is also true that such a widespread rumor cannot be ignored', in: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti segrete*, busta 54, letter of 1 April 1707.
- 14 The matter in question here was the outcome of armed conflict between the French and the Spanish in Valenza in 1656. The episode is reported in INFELISE, 2002, p. 93.

to write the truth, but to satisfy other people's tastes with regard to their interests."<sup>15</sup>

No longer focused on a single truth, readers and partisans had to shape their opinions based on the principle of pleasure. Besides, the world of the *novellista* was undoubtedly complex. In addition to its heterogeneous nature and problematic credibility of sources, this world was also connected to a multi-faceted situation. For example, the *novellista*'s world was forced to consider the new political perspective and concomitant new levels of reality. With regard to wars, this meant recognizing all nuances, so that simple alternatives such as neutrality or siding with one party or another succumbed to a broad range of intermediate options. A state could rush into war or else show its disapproval, yet secretly support one or both sides. A state might just as easily support only certain members of a side and so on. Enthusiasts found themselves tasked with completing the puzzle in order to show off the plausibility of their critical finesse.<sup>16</sup>

The ease with which people soon dealt with notoriously false partial accounts led them to doubt the truth in general. This phenomenon led to the broad context of Pyrrhonism and the skeptical crisis that persisted throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> The concept of historical truth experienced a particularly profound crisis in the second half of the century, continuing through the early decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> In the end, the fields of historiography and information were not so far removed, given that the work of historiographers and gazetteers often coincided. Works of historiography were often based on the recent acquisition or interpretation of work by gazettes.<sup>19</sup> In any case, political information, now widespread at every level, undoubtedly played a vital role in spreading the skeptical crisis of the historiographical sector into the lowest manifestations of cultural life.<sup>20</sup> With conflicting newspapers and various oral versions of current

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15 ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 566, report by Fra' Costantino on 19 December 1676.

16 On the aspect of the new opportunities introduced by concealment as a technique influenced by new scientific methodology, see VILLARI, 1987, p. 20f.

17 On this matter, see DOOLEY, 1999.

18 On the issue of Pyrrhonism and scepticism in general, in addition to HAZARD, 1964, see POPKIN, 2003; BORGHERO, 1983; the essays collected in PAGANINI, 2003 and PAGANINI/MAIA NETO, 2009.

19 On this aspect, see INFELISE, 2002, p. 65-78.

20 The rise of the news-sheet in the seventeenth century made the unreliability of reports of the "facts" more obvious to a much greater number of people than ever before, since rival and discrepant accounts of the same events – battles for example

events, individuals were not presented with objective or definitive situations, but rather with reports of events which had a rapid depreciation rate. These depictions of reality were subject to constant change and never assumed a definitive shape. Hence, the reality interpreted and then offered by gazetteers was very much a work in progress. Because reality, or at least the portrayal of it, was constantly changing, readers got used to redefining their definitions of what was real on a frequent basis.

With time, readers of news publications throughout Europe began to apply fresh analytical tools to the traditional assessment methods used for political and financial matters. This process contributed to the crisis of conscience which ultimately laid the foundations for the Enlightenment.<sup>21</sup> Readers and other consumers of news came to accept, perhaps unwittingly, that the truth had an expiration date, one ostensibly defined by gazettes or subsequent reports.<sup>22</sup> When the latter became available, it forced yet another re-ordering of events to adapt an overview that included the latest news. These changes also let people prognosticate in order to fill gaps left by uncertainty, thereby posing the question of whether some future event might or might not occur.<sup>23</sup> In addition to affirming, at least implicitly, new notions that truth might be just the sum of probabilities, such prognostication changed the focus of interest from the event itself to the interpretation of thoughts and principles. However, as Cardinal Sforza Pallavicino warned in 1644, these forecasting skills were inherently dangerous to the power structure because they inevitably fostered attempts to predict rulers' actions as reckless as predicting God's will.<sup>24</sup> It was like "wanting to enter the cabinet of Providence", as Ludovico Antonio Muratori wrote a few decades

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– arrived in major cities on the same day and could therefore easily be compared and superimposed, BURKE, 2000, p. 202.

21 DOOLEY, 2001, p. 277. See also DOOLEY, 1999.

22 A true *novellista* was always attentive to dates, and the tension stirred up by current events was one of the most common elements in satirical works: 'si quelqu'un devant lui s'avisait de tirer de sa poche une lettre, dans laquelle il fut fait mention d'une victoire, par exemple, remportée en Hongrie sur les turcs, il s'écrioit aussitôt à pleine tête: la date? Et si on lui répondoit, du quatorze de ce mois, il ne manquoit de repliquer: cela est vieux; nous avons des nouvelles du vingt qui assurent le contraire', in: LE SAGE, 1821, p. 211. The text was written in around 1740.

23 See HACKING, 1975 and WOOTTON, 1992, p. 50-53.

24 PALLAVICINO, 1644, p. 346f.

later.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, because the Catholic Church found itself unable to control the distribution of information, the best it could do was to limit the spread of subversive materials to marginal groups, for example by only using handwritten rather than printed forms.

The results must have been extremely marginal. It is clear, however, that religious dissent and political information found many means of collaboration and many forms of *disorder* which may well have been generated by this widespread passion for the current interpretation of events. *Novellisti* and *politichisti* made the most of the latest political news even though they were not directly involved in it and had no ambitions to foster change. Rather, politics became something to observe, reflect on and discuss, but not to take part in.<sup>26</sup> Events, upheaval and politics were all mere phenomena and were treated as such. Religion was also a part, becoming an aspect of political life as people started to investigate it using the same critical tools and applying the same skeptical spirit. Information and religious dissent were two stages along a path marked by discontinuity, yet the trends and consequences they spawned – the idea of religion as a political

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25 MURATORI, 1901-1922, vol. 3, p. 925, letter 800, to Carlo Borromeo Arese on the Borromean Islands, dated Modena, 2 June 1707. It was pointless to try to be ‘astrologers’ because providence had ‘secret mechanisms and master strokes, which can easily stun and mock those great minds, who think they have the upper hand over future times’, in: *IBID.*, p. 965, letter 850, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Milan, dated Modena, 12 April 1708 and vol. 4, p. 1450-1451, letter 1252, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Naples, dated Modena, 18 March 1712.

26 Seventeenth-century Venice ‘had become a city in which consciences could consume experiences (even if set against each other) although they did not pass, in the full sense of the term, “through” them. Consumption was possible through representation: wars, conflicts, changes in states and religions all over the world and progress were read about, pondered over and discussed, sometimes with great verve, but the quiescence of destinies in which the Venetian state had become locked, the relativization caused in insight and reasoning by a city which was already at the time both one of the most stably unchanging cities and one of the cities most affected by foreign patronage, mainly exempted people from staking their lives on any item of news. When almost everything had been consumed through representation rather than experience, it tended to take on a new dimension and be recognized for the specific importance it could have in the Venetian context. Without hazarding too much, it was a climate after all in which one could find measures for concealment, compromises and a small amount of practical tolerance’, in: SCARABELLO, 1982, p. 373.



invention – were already evident to people at the time. The primary influence of the information market on religious matters was therefore to change how reality was interpreted, increasing skepticism which also started to affect religion. The danger of switching from historical to religious skepticism was concrete, of which people were highly aware.

It has been said that the information market turned writers into philosophers, information into opinions and readers into critics, thus creating a skeptical trend that led to extraordinary consequences. In combination with other seventeenth-century intellectual developments, it generated widespread skepticism about the availability and reliability of all forms of historical knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, thanks to information's ability to penetrate the urban fabric and establish an extensive network of followers, this systematic skepticism inevitably impacted areas of experience beyond historical knowledge. The phenomenon was therefore not limited to the educated classes. As I have noted, anybody could either read or ask others to read second-hand reports and thus form their own opinions. Such ingestion of current information led to discussions, the creation of "a political language",<sup>28</sup> and often arguments about alternative readings of the event in question. In this way, discussions about politics and the *news of the world* created ideal conditions for new forms of religious dissent, spreading them to increasingly broad social circles. Meeting to discuss a variety of issues considering dissimilar opinions, and digesting contrasting reports inevitably fostered an embryonic form of critical consciousness, which was soon directed against religion in general.

The steady shift from state secrets to religion, fluctuating between political and religious matters, was the end result of political and religious spheres being perceived as "different aspects of reality [...] different, but intertwined – or, to put it in a more precise way, mutually reinforcing by the means of analogy".<sup>29</sup> This pooled perception made religion and politics appear equally distant from people's everyday comprehension. Together with the mysteries of nature, religion and politics came to be perceived as knowledge that could not be investigated.

Throughout the seventeenth century, these changes led to a marked increase in the effort of learning about nature through experimental means. As the revolution in the information sector opened the door to the discovery of political

27 DOOLEY, 1999, p. 2.

28 ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 21 December 1687.

29 GINZBURG, 1976, p. 32.

secrets, it led to state secrets being revealed in discussions, groups and cliques. In *botteghe*, whether gazettes were read silently or aloud, they suggested the possibility of penetrating sovereigns' cabinets and standing apart from others through the skillful analysis of political events. Conceptual instruments such as Machiavellianism and more sophisticated theories of political science spread and became visible in political practice. Such ideas were therefore available for theoretical and critical use and were learnt not only in the academy, but by reading gazettes and discussing them at home and in public. The 'separate sphere' of lofty, unattainable knowledge was now within reach, bereft of the sacred nature that had set it apart. In the same way, religion was dragged to the ground, reaching the level of the common man and even coming to be considered man-made.<sup>30</sup>

The process that led political news to be circulated widely operated in parallel, although perhaps slightly out of synch, with the process that led skepticism to penetrate broad strata of Venice's population. The language of religious dissent certainly overlapped with political discussions even if the ideas did not; people at all levels of society started viewing reality with a more skeptical attitude, placing religion within the political sphere. In other words, they started to consider religion as an aspect of reality, enabling it to be approached in a new light. Religion and politics had always been entwined, but were now also linked in discussion, meaning that skepticism about one manifested itself in skepticism towards the other. A relentless link was created between political and religious skepticism in both attitude and content. The former somehow opened the door to the latter. Revealing the secrets of politics meant that many could question all historical structures and institutions. Once the most secret structure, the political use of religion, was also revealed, the process had come full circle.

In the 1650s Girolamo Flech, a Dominican from the monastery of San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, ably summarized this disposition for widespread incredulity. His words clearly and gracefully explain the connections between the opportunities for thought offered by multiple channels of information, and

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30 It is difficult, if not impossible to establish which of these areas was attacked first and caused repercussions on the others. Traditionally, the definitive fracture between man and God was identified in the birth and development of modern science. I think that this explanation is highly plausible, but I think it should be underlined how the expansion of a feeling which widely discredited the case for religion as fact found a place in areas of experience which were perhaps closer to everyday matters and developed an extremely close link to the opportunities opened up by information and political discussion.

the growing tendency to question revealed truths. “The four Evangelists,” Flech wrote, “were four poor notaries, who wrote what they heard people saying, and that they were like these news writers, in the sense that they contradict each other [...] so much so that in order to make them coincide, the holy fathers needed to write a book *De concordantii evangelistarum*.”<sup>31</sup> The need to reconcile conflicting Biblical texts by citing the *Concordantia evangelistarum* became evidence for the limited credibility of the Holy Scripture. But Flech’s was a particularly vivid portrayal of a widespread idea, namely that it was possible to subject the Gospels and the Bible in general to the same critical devices used for gazettes, newspapers and reports of far-off events. Once the Evangelists were compared to common gazetteers, it became possible to find ample contradictions in scripture. Seen as the work of man, the Bible was basically desacralized. In 1693, Giorgio Cottoni charged that the Gospels “were written on tree bark and [...] must not be believed.”<sup>32</sup> Some seventy years later, Don Cristoforo Venier publicly claimed that the Bible was “a fable.”<sup>33</sup>

Just as skepticism of the Bible’s divine origins spread, traditions and opinions of ecclesiastical imposture tended to overlap or even merge. Don Carlo Filiotti was sure of this in 1651, when he explained that the dogmas “of the Church [...] were opinions of men like him, and he did not take them into consideration, just as others would have done if he had had his personal opinions printed”.<sup>34</sup> Less than 30 years later Carlo Cima, a priest, echoed Filiotti, writing of books penned by the Fathers of the Church: “anyone can write similar books in his own way, and say whatever he likes [...] and he could still make books in his own

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- 31 ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, busta 108, trial against Fra’ Griolamo Flech, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Santo Ponticolfo from Venice on 15 May 1657. Contrastingly, a few years later *reportista* Giovanni Quorli reminded that ‘newspapers are reports and not gospels’, in: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, busta 714, undated letter (but later than 21 December 1669) from Giovanni Quorli to the Inquisitors of State. The implicit juxtaposition of gazetteers and evangelists is also found in LETI, 1685, p. 29.
  - 32 ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, busta 127, Cavalieri Domenico file, trial against Giorgio Cottoni, spontaneous appearance by Michele Mezario on 17 February 1693.
  - 33 ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, busta 148, trial against Don Cristoforo Venier, spontaneous appearance by Don Daniele Molin on 1 March 1763.
  - 34 ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, busta 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Giovan Battista Balduino on 26 November 1652, cc. 8v-9r.

way, and say whatever he liked.”<sup>35</sup> And in the early eighteenth century, Paduan Tommaso Zattoni concluded that Scripture was founded on “abstract analogies” and was no more than a “holy novel”.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the body of church dogma eventually came to be considered as just one option among many, a mere opinion which could be believed or not. To nurture their own skepticism, people merely had to choose their ‘favorite’ alternative. In any case, dogma that had once been widely accepted, at least in public, became a matter for discussion, rather like news of a battle or the political games of the Duke of Mantua with the King of France, or even the maneuvers of the conclaves. Religion was thus seen in the same light as royal and human affairs, just another evidence of everyday secrecy relating to men and power.

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35 ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, busta 122, trial against Don Carlo Cima, deposition by Carlo Mancini on 12 December 1679. After all, as Menocchio had stated decades before, Scripture could really have been dictated by God, but all the additions had been made by men, who had increased the size of text for which ‘only four words’ would have sufficed and made it become ‘like the books about battles that grew and grew’, in: DEL COL, 1990, p. 65, declaration on 27 April 1584; GINZBURG, 1980, p. 11.

36 ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalisticis*, f. 22, letter by Captain of Padua Federico Venier on 5 December 1710.

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