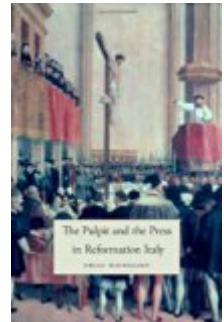


**Emily Michelson.** *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 262 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-07297-8.



**Reviewed by** Anne J. Schutte

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**Commissioned by** Matt Vester (West Virginia University)

Emily Michelson's first book, preceded by several published articles, grew out of her doctoral dissertation (Yale, 2006). *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* focuses on preachers famous in their own time (most of them mendicant friars), secular priests who preached at the behest of their bishops, and some other writers who addressed the laity about biblical exegesis. Their sermons and other writings appeared frequently in print in the vernacular. The author aims to show that these representatives of Catholic orthodoxy, particularly those operating in mid-century, "found themselves on the front lines of a more desperate war than anything they had ever imagined" (p. 1). Somehow they had to meet the challenge posed by Protestants, above all their insistence on *sola scriptura*, by teaching the Catholic version of what Holy Writ meant. The corollary of *sola scriptura*, "every man/woman his/her own priest," was not a proposition prominent Catholic religious, priests, and lay intellectuals were willing to consider. They looked down paternalistically on and in some instances openly despised ordi-

nary laypeople, whom they considered ignorant, prone to error, and completely incapable of understanding the Bible unaided by highly educated experts in theology--namely themselves.

Given the impossibility of experiencing a sixteenth-century sermon as its original audience did, with the preacher's "carefully honed gestures, intonation, and speech patterns" (p. 24), Michelson turns to four varieties of printed sources in the vernacular. These genres were by no means new on the scene. Editions of sermons take pride of place. *Predicabili*, model sermons for the use of preachers ill equipped to compose their own, and expositions of the pericopes (Epistle and Gospel readings for feast days and Sundays during the liturgical year) contained in vernacular lectionaries continued to be produced. Homilies, lectures devoted to scriptural exegesis, achieved increased prominence after having been mandated by the Council of Trent. The crucial novelty was that they now became available to the reading public in vernacular print.

Jacket blurbs to the contrary, Michelson's book is neither coherent nor convincing. Making her case in a mere 181 pages of text (followed by more than a third as many containing often discursive endnotes) would have been difficult but not impossible had she paid closer attention to constructing and supporting her arguments. The chronological contours of Michelson's "Reformation Italy" remain uncertain. From the introduction, readers will gather that it began when the Protestant challenge presented itself. The three figures (pp. 29-31) and the appendix, "Key Preachers in Italy" (pp. 183-184), on the contrary, suggest that it commenced in 1500. Inclusion in the appendix of the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98) seems questionable. Although he, not Martin Luther, was the first religious leader to realize the potential of print, he obviously was not responding to the Protestant threat. Just as dubious for chronological and other reasons is the presence of the humanist and poet Ludovico Bigi, known as Pittorio (1454-1525), author of homilies on the Epistle and Gospel pericopes. For one thing, at the time of his death Protestant ideas were just beginning to make their way into Italy; for another, as a layman, he never mounted the pulpit. Yet another of the six "key preachers in Italy" whose publications are charted in the appendix does not belong there either. Italian translations of works by the Spanish Dominican Luis de Granada (1505-88) proliferated, but their author never set foot in Italy. More appropriate candidates for the appellation "key preacher" would have been figures treated in some detail in the text: the Observant Franciscan Evangelista Marcellino (1530-93), the Dominican Serafino Razzi (1531-1611), and the Canons Regular Gabriele Fiamma (1533-82) and Onofrio Zarrabini (b. 1535). Relegated to a single unspecific paragraph (pp. 141-142), publishing preachers belonging to such "new orders" as the Capuchins and the Society of Jesus are conspicuous by their virtual absence. Her concluding claim that Catholic clergymen were paranoid—"fearing Protestants, fearing

changes in their own leadership, fearing their own laity, and fearing above all the end of the world as they knew it"—amounts to facile, unsupported armchair psychologizing.

On her *terminus ad quem*, Michelson is consistent: the end of the sixteenth century. She does not justify this choice. Clearly, both it and her *terminus a quo* were dictated by the online resources she consulted. Edit16, produced by the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico (ICCU) in Rome, and the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC), produced at the University of St Andrews (where Michelson now teaches), start in 1501 and stop at the end of 1600. These dates conform to bibliographical tradition, but for historical inquiry they are artificial, arbitrary, and wrong-headed. Had she consulted the larger ICCU catalog, <http://www.sbn.it/opacsbn/opac/iccu/antico.jsp>, she would have learned that some of her protagonists' works continued to be issued in print well after 1600. Her treatment of quantitative evidence leaves much to be desired. With the partial exception of figure 2 (p. 30), she does not cull her data so as to focus exclusively on works in Italian related to explanation of the Bible. Rather, she includes all publications of a given writer, whatever the genre and language.

Once upon a time in a golden age, or so readers of my generation choose to believe, prestigious scholarly publishers produced impeccable books. At least in the Anglophone word, such is no longer the case. *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* is marred by numerous technical errors and unwise authorial and editorial decisions. Neither Michelson nor her copy editor—if indeed she had one, a privilege no longer to be taken for granted—paid sufficient attention to achieving consistency in the spelling of proper names and correcting flagrantly wrong words: "preachers" instead of "printers" (p. 34), "linear" where "literal" is almost certainly meant (p. 99). No one caught and remedied the elementary mistake of referring to friars as "monks" (pp. 15, 20, 22, 109).

Blame for the minimal index and the absence of a bibliography no doubt lies exclusively with Harvard University Press. Michelson bears prime if not sole responsibility for several other shortcomings. Her title gives a misleading impression of the book's content. Not all the published works she considered originated in "the pulpit." "The press" plays a minor role: she mentions in passing only a handful of publishers, whose role in this sector of the book market she does not systematically examine. "Reformation Italy" inevitably connotes the philo-Protestant movement; a single paragraph in the introduction explaining that she is using the term differently (pp. 11-12) does not suffice to dispel that initial impression.

The role of print in early modern Italian Catholicism richly deserves sustained, sophisticated scholarly attention. Michelson's *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy*, sad to say, does very little to advance understanding of this important topic.

Response by Emily Michelson:

Luca Baglioni, a preacher who sought, in 1562, to redraft the rules of sacred oratory, composed a chapter on how to preach against the "moderni eretici": "È debito del Catholico Predicatore con la forza della verità arditamente difenderla [la santa Chiesa] in ogni loco, & occorrente bisogno." To this end, he wrote, "bisogna che'l Predicatore ... sudi, peni, & si affatichi con prieghi a Christo, e con mille altri pij merti [sic] di ritrovar forma tale accommodata al predicare contra gli heretici." Despite the urgency of his tone, Baglioni advocated the high road: instead of refuting the heretics point by point, preachers should simply reaffirm Catholic doctrines, and avoid ugly disputes with the misguided. Baglioni boasted that his skill and training as a preacher let him counter false doctrines without ever naming them, and had brought many heretics to penitence. In his treatise he also insisted that without such skills a sermon would bear no fruit among the pious and might even create schismatics.[1]

Baglioni argued for the importance of the sermon in the new context of a confessionalizing Europe, and helped to convince me of the same.

Baglioni's treatise was published just a year before the Council of Trent ended. It typified--but did not conclude--more than a decade of intense discussion among Catholic clergymen over how best to refute heterodox ideas and affirm Catholic ones, in print and in preaching. As *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* makes clear, the middle of the sixteenth century was a time of great uncertainty for teaching doctrine to laypeople. Lay demands for scripture and instruction were increasing, the triumph of the "modern heretics" was easily imagined, and the final decrees of Trent were bitterly debated and slow in coming. Yet this was precisely the period of increasing pressure for more frequent and more varied preaching, inspired in part by new exemplars of resident bishops, such as Gian Matteo Giberti in Verona. This period was the focus of my research. *The Pulpit and the Press* primarily tells the story of the first generation of Catholic preachers to confront Protestant and Catholic reform on a broad institutional scale--the men whose task it was to address early fears about the new doctrine, and to bolster Catholic attachment, yet hindered by an unprecedented lack of guidance.

Because these preachers clearly saw the printing press as an innovative and invaluable way to give their sermons wider reach, and because their sermons grew out of their reading and other writing, I considered the preached sermon from two broader perspectives. I included sermons that were from the outset intended for reading, and I analyzed works by preachers that were not sermons but that sought to address the same concerns or otherwise support preaching. My trove of sources included preaching manuals such as Baglioni's, pedagogical treatises for laypeople, and volumes of printed *predicabili*, among others. A sermon is not fully extricable from any of these

genres. Indeed, *predicabili*--collections of sample sermons for preachers to exploit--best exemplify the cyclical nature of oral and written culture. Preachers themselves described their increasing reliance on printing. For this reason, both the pulpit and the press were necessary to my title. My overall purpose was to describe the contexts in which this sermon literature had effect, both as printed works to read and as oral works to hear, and to argue for the genre's importance in constructing early modern Catholicism. The preachers who received the most attention in the book were the Italians best represented in print over the second half of the century. This feature determined the emphasis given to some denominations over others. Their reception in the seventeenth century is a promising, but wholly separate, area of future study.

One of the driving questions in my research, as Schutte's review rightly notes, was the dilemma of how a Catholic cleric might satisfy increasing lay demands for scripture, when scripture itself had taken on Protestant connotations. This question derived from the sermons themselves. Where I had expected to find scorn for Protestant behavior and itemized refutations of their doctrines, I found instead a concentrated concern with the Protestant distortion (as preachers saw it) of scripture. The dilemma was greatest in mid-century, when the recent memory of Savonarola and Ochino--two supposedly orthodox preachers whose exegesis proved deeply destructive--forced preachers to take very cautious stances. Yet even in this period, the preachers in my study turned out not to approach "the scripture problem" in lockstep, but to offer a variety of more or less restrictive approaches to lay reading.

A generation later, as the book explains, these concerns had largely dissipated. Preachers still found heterodoxy a convenient rallying cry, but they began to apply their concerns about scripture to other areas. By the close of Trent, the rise of the resident bishop as the flag-bearer of reform

had become inevitable. Many preachers spent their energies working out the details of this "episcopal turn." Some Franciscans and Dominicans, seeing their long-standing primacy in the pulpit challenged, increasingly used the press to defend their role as keepers of preaching tradition. In so doing they also found new ways to make scripture available to interested laypeople, despite the more constricted religious culture of the early post-Tridentine period. Preachers may have started from fear of the laity, even paranoia, and they said as much. But contrary to Schutte's assessment, fear was not their final response. My book shows throughout how preachers ended by accommodating, more or less grudgingly, a variously changed religious landscape, and how they ultimately helped to shape it.

*The Pulpit and the Press* thus not only traces the transition from more plastic to more rigid boundaries of orthodoxy, but also continues to find areas of flexibility and variation where other scholars have seen uniformity. Indeed, some of my findings are intended to contribute to enduring debates about the ultimate nature of religious reform in Italy. On this subject, as indeed on the other aspects of my argument, I would have welcomed the comments of Anne Schutte, one of our most valuable scholars on Italian religious history and historiography. I am happy to incorporate some of Schutte's suggestions on methodology, such as the recommendation that scholars use the ICCU catalogue for seventeenth-century printed books. Indeed my newer research requires it. But for this work, I would have wished for a review that attended more to the book itself than to its production values, and that took issue primarily with its arguments.

#### Note

[1]. *L'arte del Predicare contenuta in tre libri, secondo i precetti rhetorici, composta dal Reverendo Padre fra Luca Baglione de l'ordine de' Frati Minori osservanti* (Venice, 1562), 35r-38v, 17r.

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