

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Praying in the Renaissance. A Plurality of Theories, Texts, and Practices in a Changing Europe

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ABSTRACT

The European Renaissance saw a deep renewal of the form and content of prayer. Even before the Reformation (whether Protestant or Catholic), the growing role played by lay people, women and men, in the religious sphere created new forms of worship, developing new practices and new texts. The renewal became even more intense during the 16th and 17th centuries, two centuries defined and devastated by changing confessional identities, but also vitalized by the printing press and confraternal activities. The project intended to study, from a multidisciplinary perspective, the changes which took place in this everyday and universal practice in the early modern period. The results offer an important contribution to knowledge on the topic for two reasons: first, it goes beyond existing studies on prayer, which do not go later than the 15th century and are focused on monastic prayer and books of hours; second, because it took into account under-studied aspects, such as domestic practices, the contributions of women, devotional images, books of prayer, catechisms, and parodies, offering a truly new picture that may suggest much further research. Moreover, having involved scholars who specialise in the fields being studied, the results offer an unparalleled academic contribution on the various topics considered.

1- Introduction

The project intended to study a period which still promises new discoveries for research from a fresh perspective. The subject of prayer is in fact a good illustration of the many aspects of European history which have not yet been sufficiently explored. Prayer was a daily practice for everyone, both individuals and communities, like all forms of devotion, but has only recently begun to arouse genuine academic interest. The approach we proposed to this subject was intended to use a plurality of theories, practices, and experiences, as it involved theologies, exegesis, pastorals, ethics, education, writings, gender questions, family life, printing, art, music, and objects of worship. As existing studies on prayer do not

go later than the 15th century, focusing on monastic prayer and books of hours, we decided to explore the 16th century, which was rich in new issues due to the different reforms. Moreover, the political and religious fragmentation of Christian Europe meant people had very different, interesting experiences. We wanted to stress plurality, which derives not only from confessional divides: that which makes prayer 'plural' at this time is mainly the now massive, active participation of the laity. Lay people entered into the management of religious affairs and invested in what had been the privileged domain of the monastic and ecclesiastical world. Moreover, the new means of dissemination offered by printing spread

knowledge and tools that had previously been restricted to clerics throughout Europe.

2- Experimental details

[As the project had to cover many fields of investigation, from theology to liturgy, from oral cultures to publishing, from literature to music, from architecture to art, and so on, we created a team of specialists, including experts in the various fields and disciplines covered by the subject in order to give an expert result for each of the dimensions explored. In order to reach our aim within the year, we decided not to look at certain aspects, such as the architecture of devotional spaces, sacred art, and pilgrimages, because they are better studied and known.

Erminia Ardisino, working closely with Elise Boillet, selected the most experienced scholars in each of the fields involved. They were chosen from around the world for their renowned expertise. With the exception of just one scholar, who was replaced by an equally qualified colleague, everyone invited accepted our invitation. The scholars involved are: Barral-Baron Daussy Marie (Université France-Comté, FR), Barbieri Edoardo (Università Cattolica, Milan, IT), Boillet Elise (CESR-Tours, CNRS, FR), Carinci Eleonora (University of Oslo, NO), Dekoninck Ralph (Université de Louvaine, BE), Fabre Pierre-Antoine (Ehess, Paris, FR), Falque Ingrid (Université de Louvaine, BE), Fisher Alexander J. (University of British Columbia, CA), Grosse Christian (Université de Lausanne, CH), Haemig Mary Jane (Luther Seminary, MN-USA), Lastraioli Chiara (CESR, Université de Tours, FR), Mckim Donald K. (Theologian, Independent Scholar, USA), Michon Hélène (CESR, Université de Tours, FR), Ó Hannracháin Tadhg (University College Dublin, IE), Reif Stefan C. (Cambridge University, UK), Restif Bruno (Université de Reims, FR), Villani Stefano (University of Maryland, MD-USA), Wodianka Stephanie (Universität Rostock, DE), Zardin Danilo (Università Cattolica, Milan, IT), Zarri Gabriella (Università di Firenze, IT), and Ardisino Erminia (Università di Torino, IT CESR-Tours).

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Each scholar was tasked with drawing up a plan to consider their area of expertise in the theory and practice of 16th century prayer, if possible highlighting the plurality of perspectives and experiences. During the months of work from November when the call closed, we exchanged abstracts around the group and we kept in touch via email, exchanging problems, ideas, and issues. Certainly, working at the CESR on this subject in this period was a privilege, not just because of the richness of the library, but above all for the constant engagement with other scholars of the Renaissance. Moreover, this project became part of the *axe de recherche* of the CESR *Cultures de la pluralité religieuse et politique: conflits et concorde*, directed by Élise Boillet, Stéphan Geonget, and Hélène Michon. In fact, this project shares a common goal with the *axe*, which is to reconstruct a European history that revisits and goes beyond traditional national and confessional narratives.

On the 30th of May 2024, I participated in the annual research seminar of this research group, giving a paper on *Autour du livre Repertorio di letteratura biblica in italiano a stampa (ca 1462-1650)*. It was an opportunity to discuss this project with the members of the *axe*, and they gave some important suggestions. At the end of May 2024 I collected the essays, and I completed the introduction I had been writing during the year. Moreover, I worked to edit and complete the volume. The table of contents is as follows:

PRAYING IN THE RENAISSANCE. A PLURALITY OF THEORIES, TEXTS, AND PRACTICES IN A CHANGING EUROPE

E. ARDISSINO, *Introduction*

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- 1) S.C. REIF, *Jewish Prayer in Sixteenth-Century Europe*
- 2) M. BARRAL-BARON DAUSSY, *Erasmus and Devotion*
- 3) M.J. HAEMIG, *God's Command and Promise: Luther and his Followers on Prayer*
- 4) D.K. MCKIM, *John Calvin on Believing in Prayer and Praying*
- 5) FABRE P. A. *Novelties in Catholic World: Ignatius of Loyola*

- 6) C. GROSSE, *The Social Appropriation of the Liturgy. Prayer and Daily Life in Calvinist and Zwinglian Societies in French-Speaking Switzerland (16th-18th Centuries)*
- 7) T. Ó HANNRACHÁIN, *Confessional Migration and Devotional Changes in European World*
- 8) S. VILLANI, *The Book of Common Prayer and its Migration*

II. *Texts between Innovation and Tradition*

- 9) BARBIERI E., *Books of Prayers*
- 10) E. BOILLET, *Psalms*
- 11) E. BOILLET, *The Lord's Prayer*
- 12) E. CARINCI, *Marian Prayers*
- 13) DEKONINCK R. -INGRID FALQUE, *Images for Praying*
- 14) S. WODIANKA, *In Search of the 'Inner Voice': Spiritual Sonority and Polyphonies of Silence in Mental Prayer in Post-Tridentine France and Italy*
- 15) H. MICHON, *La prière mentale et les étapes de la vie spirituelle*

III. *Practices*

- 16) D. ZARDIN, *La preghiera delle confraternite*
- 17) FISHER, *Music and Prayer in the Renaissance*
- 18) M. FAINI, *Prayer and Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*
- 19) G. ZARRI, *Women's Voices*
- 20) L.P. WANDEL, *Teaching Prayer: Reformation Catechisms*
- 21) B. RESTIF, *Corporeality and Materiality of Prayer in Western Europe (late 15th and 16th Centuries)*
- 22) C. LASTRAIOLI, *Parodies*
- 23) E. ARDISSINO, *Praying at the Roman Oratorio. Filippo Neri's Innovations and Heritage*

3- Results and discussion

[The volume which resulted opens with an introduction by Erminia Ardisino that touches on the most significant aspects of the phenomenon. (These included: innovations introduced by the mendicant orders and their third orders, and by the *Devotio Moderna*; The confraternities, the laity in the life of the

Church and in the organisation of devotion; The influence of Humanism, the importance of the printing press and the availability of circulating books and single sheet texts suggesting new forms of devotion; The new theories coming from the newly created orders; The change in individual and community prayer, the experience in families, the objects and images for devotion, new role models and the education of children, and the relationship of the body and mind in prayer, especially for women).

The first part of the volume deals with the fundamental building blocks, largely theology and spiritual trends, with their differences and transmigrations; the second part deals with texts, in particular the importance of biblical prayers and their reconfiguration in new media; and the third deals with practices, in their variety and materiality.

The research results of these specialists are extremely interesting, and highlight how the foundations of prayer based on the Bible were not subject to significant shifts as might have been expected, corresponding to the division and fractures within Christianity that took place following the Reformation. With the sole exception of prayers for the Virgin Mary and for the saints, rejected by the Reformed church, all groups basically make the teaching of Jesus and the Psalms the foundations of prayer, even if this leads to different pastoral and liturgical outcomes. This trend is confirmed by the European circulation of texts and practices which crossed confessional lines. The most significant changes and sources of plurality were due to the laity becoming involved in how devotional practices were managed. The confraternities and the press hugely altered habits of worship. New prayers, new songs, new forms of devotion and public events, a stress on self-reflexivity and spiritual introspection, and the domestic setting for domestic practices, were all important factors for changing devotional activities. The European laity in the early modern period was closely involved in reading, interpreting and translating the Bible, creating prayers (with or without music and images), organizing

religious events, inventing new ways of sharing religious culture, and adapting the rules of poetic or literary creativity to sacred themes. Women and men even created completely new literary genres such as spiritual poetry, sacred dramas, and oratorios, which were often performed in churches, confraternities and town squares. These innovations spread around the world with the missionary activity.]

4- Conclusion

[Better understanding of this revolution in prayer will underline the profound similarities between different European communities. It may bear witness to the creation of a European identity based on religious unity in texts and practices which ran deeper than confessional or political divisions. The results of the project will not only show how prayer evolved, but also reveal the dynamic development of religious attitudes, especially among women, at the forefront of the transformation of prayer.]

5- Prospects of future collaboration with the host institution

[I started my collaboration with the CESR in 2014, with my participation in the project *The Laity and the Bible. Religious Reading in Early Modern Europe*, directed by Elise Boillet. It led to long-lasting and extremely fruitful collaboration, as we published several volumes: *Lay Readings of the Bible in Early Modern Europe*, eds E. Ardissino-E. Boillet, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2020; *Gli Italiani e la Bibbia nella prima età moderna. Leggere, interpretare, riscrivere*, eds E. Ardissino-E. Boillet, Turnhout, Brepols, 2019; *Repertorio di letteratura biblica in italiano a stampa (1462 ca-1650)*, eds E. Ardissino-E. Boillet, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023. I also published essays with Chiara Lastraioli and Maria Teresa Ricci (all Univ. of Tours), and I started an exchange of research interests with Concetta Pennuto, Elena Pierazzo and Alessandro Turbil. I hope to continue my collaboration with CESR scholars. In fact, I am planning a volume on *Women and Biblical Exegesis in Early Modern Europe* which will involve some of them. The first step will be a panel at the

Renaissance Society of America convention to be held in Boston in March 2025.]

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

[During the period of the fellowship three multiauthor volumes, edited by me with other colleagues, came out: *Rivelazioni. Scrittura di donne e per donne nell'Italia della prima età moderna* (with Elisabetta Selmi, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2023); *La preghiera nella cultura letteraria italiana: Ribaltare, ri-mediare, oltrepassare i modelli* (with Magdalena Kubas and Alessandro Vettori, monograph issue of *Italian Quarterly*, LX/235-236, 2023), *Dante nel Rinascimento europeo. Religione e politica* (with Giovanna Cordibella, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2024). Moreover I published several essays related to the topic: *Tasso e il sacro*, in *Tasso*, eds Emilio Russo - Franco Tomasi, Roma, Carocci, 2023, pp. 251-270 ; *I geroglifici morali di Maria Alberghetti. Dalla predicazione alla poesia*, in *Fontes*, IV, 2023, pp. 185-205 ; *Il pensiero poetante e visionario di Chiara Matraini*, in *La pensée des femmes en Europe dans la première modernité*, ed. Maria Teresa Ricci, forthcoming; *I salmi penitenziali interpretati dalle donne*, in *Il potere della parola. Scritture femminili italiane (XIV-XVI secolo)*, eds L. Michelacci and H. Sanson, Paris, Librairie Classiques Garnier, in print; *Strutture liturgiche del «Purgatorio»*, in *Atti degli Incontri sulle Opere di Dante. VI. Commedia, Purgatorio - Paradiso*, eds M. Ciccutto, G. Ledda, Firenze, SISMEL - Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2024, pp. 33-58; *Il Pater Noster: Riscritture e Parodie (Da Dante Al Nuovo Millennio)*, in *Italian Quarterly*, LX/235-236, 2023, pp. 1-23; *From Sacred Truths to Human Doubts. Arcangela Tarabotti Decrying Men's Privileges in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, in *Women and Doubt*, ed. M. Faini, Amsterdam, Amsterdam Un. Press, forthcoming; *Mary's Motherhood and Domestic life in Francesca Turini Bufalini's Poems on the Rosary*, in *Rethinking Mary in Early Modern Europe: Women's Voices and the Virgin Mary*, ed. E. Carinci, in print; *Isabella Coreglia e la scrittura pastorale femminile: un genere per la difesa della donna*, in *Convegno internazionale "Andrò fra mille donne elette e sole". Donne a Lucca nella prima età moderna*

/ *Women in Early-Modern Lucca*, 22-24 novembre, 2023, ed. I. Caiazza, E. Carinci, in print.]

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