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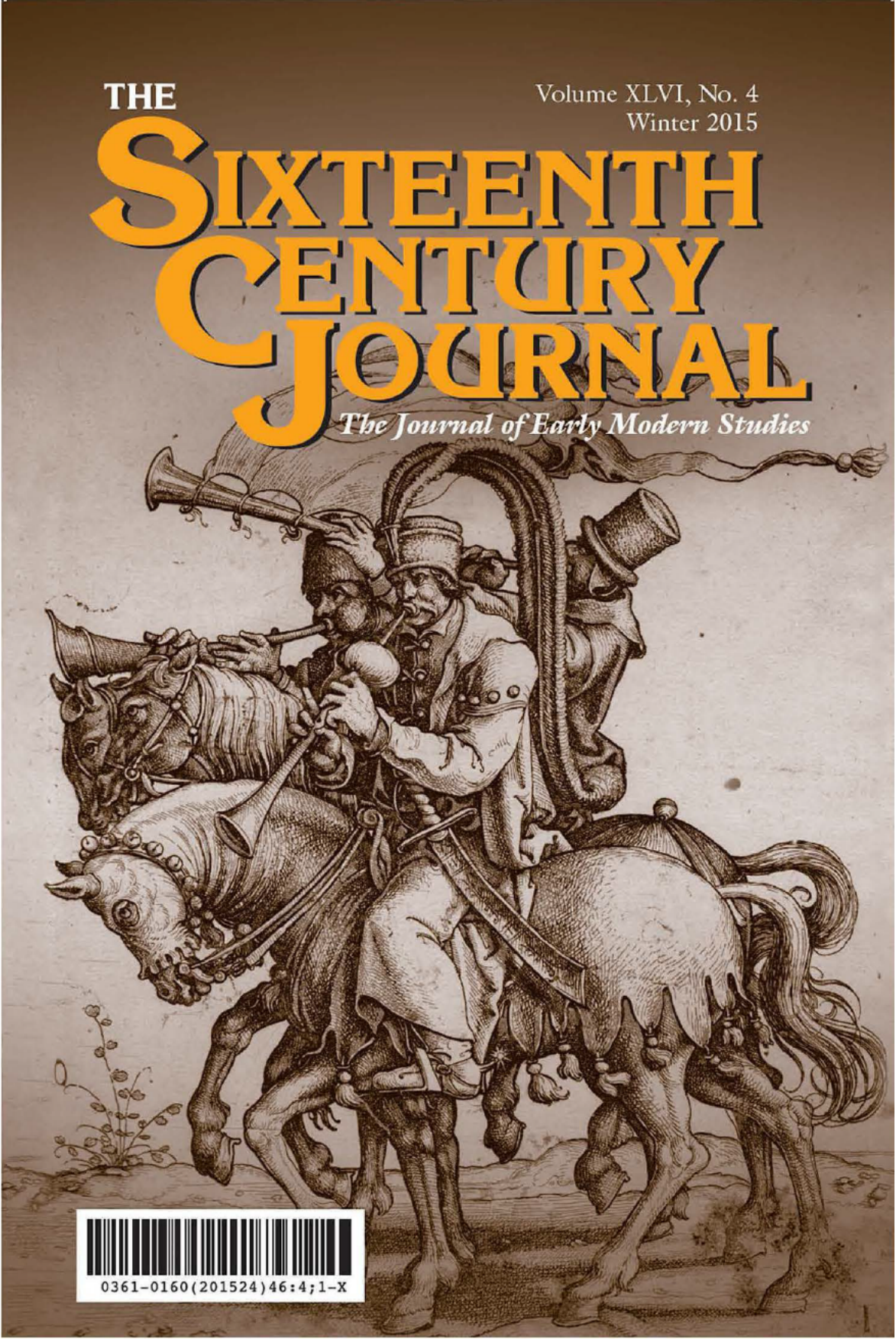

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Concord and Toleration in the Thought of Francesco Pucci, 1578–81

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Francesco Pucci was a Florentine heretic who was executed by the Catholic Church in 1597. Since the 1930s, he has been considered by Italian historians to be an important contributor to the development of theories of religious toleration. A close analysis of two texts written by Pucci reveals that his thought was more complex than previously supposed. In a letter to Niccolò Balbani, a Calvinist minister in Geneva, Pucci described his heterodox theology. These views led him to develop a deeply intolerant vision of concord. These theological commitments structured Pucci's thinking in this period, and they are reflected in his *Forma di una republica catholica*. The text describes a secret society, which would allow those who followed Pucci's heterodox beliefs to live freely. The society was conceived as a temporary expedient. Although it contains some tolerant elements, it was designed as a means to secure Pucci's intolerant vision of concord.

The son of a Florentine merchant, Francesco Pucci (1543–97) spent much of his adult life travelling across Europe developing and espousing idiosyncratic theological beliefs, best—albeit broadly—categorized as "Pelagian."[1] Little known during his lifetime, Pucci remains a relatively obscure figure today. Had it not captured the attention of two significant historians of the Italian Reformation, Delio Cantimori and Luigi Firpo, his work might never have been explored.[2] Both historians recognized Pucci as an important figure in the development of Italian religious, intellectual, and political history. Their evaluation of his significance was framed by what I have elsewhere termed the "Italian liberal

[1]For a concise overview of Pucci's life and work, see Peter Holmes, "Pucci, Francesco (1543–1597)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 24 September 2013, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22859.

[2]See Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1939; repr., *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento e Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento*, ed. Adriano Prosperi [Turin: Einaudi, 1992 and 2002]); Luigi Firpo, "Processo e morte di Francesco Pucci," *Rivista di filosofia* 40 (1949): 371–405; Firpo, "Francesco Pucci in Inghilterra," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 5 (1951): 158–73; and Firpo, "Nouve ricerche su Francesco Pucci," *Rivista storica italiana* 79 (1967): 1053–74. For more recent discussions of Pucci see Antonio Rotondò, "Il primo soggiorno in Inghilterra e i primi scritti teologici di Francesco Pucci," in Rotondò, *Studi e ricerche di storia ereticale* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1974), 225–71; Élie Barnavi and Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Le périple de Francesco Pucci: Utopie, hérésie et vérité religieuse dans la renaissance tardive* (Paris: Hachette, 1988); Mario Biagione, "Prospettive di ricerche su Francesco Pucci," *Rivista storica italiana* 107 (1995): 133–52; and Biagione, "Incontri italo-svizzeri nell'Europa del tardo Cinquecento: Francesco Pucci e Samule Huber," *Rivista storica italiana* 111 (1999): 364–422. See also Giorgio Caravale, *Il profeta disarmato: L'eresia di Francesco Pucci nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 14–22, for Caravale's summary and critique of the historiography on Pucci.

historiographical tradition." According to this interpretation of history, individuals such as Pucci drew upon the distinctive intellectual and spiritual inheritance of the Italian Renaissance to produce rational ideas that would form the basis of an indigenous movement for religious reform. In turn, this movement allowed for the development of doctrines such as religious toleration that would characterize the Enlightenment.[3]

The Italian liberal tradition is frequently overlooked in Anglophone reviews of the literature on toleration, marginalizing some of its most important insights. For instance, it is rarely acknowledged that by focusing on Renaissance Italians' contribution to the development of ideas such as toleration, proponents of the liberal tradition challenged the centrality assigned to Protestantism in existing narratives of Enlightenment before Joseph Lecler's *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (1955). Nevertheless, this approach encouraged historians of the liberal tradition to reconstruct—sometimes in misleading ways—the thought of the individuals they studied in order to fit them into their predetermined narrative.[4] For their part, Italian historians have not tended to engage with English language historiographical developments. From as early as the 1930s, Anglophone historians have questioned narratives of an inexorable development of liberalism and attendant growth of modern concepts of toleration. These critiques have gathered in number, and over the last twenty years historians have revealed a rich repertoire of contemporary ideas associated with toleration and reconstructed the manner in which toleration was practiced in medieval and early modern Europe. Failure to engage fully with these insights has meant that a number of the key assumptions of the earlier Italian liberal tradition are still present in modern Italian language studies.[5]

In a recent work charting the origins of Pucci's thought, Giorgio Caravale explicitly reaffirmed the Tuscan heretic's importance as a theorist of toleration, and thus as someone who contributed to the development of European

[3]Neil Tarrant, "Censoring Science in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Recent (and Not-So-Recent) Research," *History of Science* 52, no. 1 (2014): 1–27, esp. 4–9.

[4]For a discussion of the historiographical issues involved, see the still relevant article by Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53.

[5]For critiques of Enlightenment narratives and reviews of recent developments in the historiography of the idea of toleration, see, for example, Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen, eds., *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1996), 1–17; John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman, eds., *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 1–10; Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1–39, esp. 1–13; Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–12; and Jeffery R. Collins, "Redeeming the Enlightenment: New Histories of Religious Toleration," *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 3 (2009): 607–36.

civilization.[6] He also rejected Mario Turchetti's highly influential thesis that few early moderns argued for toleration conceived in a modern sense, but simply for temporally and geographically limited forms of toleration that would function in the absence of religious concord.[7] For Caravale, Pucci's ideas of toleration instead took two forms. First, in accordance with the ideas of Guillaume Posthumus Meyjes, he argued that Pucci could be categorized as a "utopian irenicist." Secondly, he suggested that Pucci's heterodox soteriology contained a seed that subsequently grew into a doctrine of toleration conceived in the modern sense.[8]

An analysis of two documents written by Pucci between 1578 and 1581, a letter written to the Calvinist minister Niccolò Balbani, and the *Forma di una republica catholica*, suggests that Caravale's analysis may be challenged on two grounds.[9] First, although it is possible, broadly speaking, to categorize Pucci as an irenicist, Meyjes's category does not capture fully the complexity of his thought.[10] Some of his ideas are closer to those of the irenicists that Meyjes termed "confessional" and neither category accommodates the intolerance that structured Pucci's thinking. Secondly, it may be true that later thinkers drew upon Pucci's soteriological ideas to develop doctrines of modern toleration, but such a reading of Pucci's theology seriously misrepresents its intolerant implications. In any case, it is misleading to use later interpretations of his work to make inferences about his original intentions.

The foregoing discussion suggests that Pucci's thought cannot be readily classified according to existing historiographical and/or philosophical categories deployed by intellectual historians. It is therefore helpful to approach his ideas from a different perspective. Over the last ten years, historians such as Benjamin Kaplan and Alexandra Walsham have shifted the focus of research on early modern toleration away from theories and their application and toward studies of examples of practical coexistence within European society.[11] They have pro-

[6]Caravale, *Profeta*, 24–29.

[7]Mario Turchetti, "Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, no. 1 (1991): 15–25. For Caravale's critique of Turchetti's thesis, see Caravale, *Profeta*, 191–93.

[8]Caravale, *Profeta*, 193.

[9]This letter, "A Niccolò Balbani in Ginevra (Basilea, autunno 1578)," is published in Francesco Pucci, *Lettere documenti e testimonianze*, ed. Luigi Firpo and Renato Piattoli (Florence: Olschki, 1955), 1:23–54. Cantimori discovered the *Forma* and suspected it was written by Pucci; see Cantimori, *Eretici*, 378–92. His contention was confirmed by Firpo; see Firpo, "Gli scritti di Francesco Pucci," *Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, ser. 3, vol. 4, pt. 2, 30–32. Cantimori subsequently published a transcription of the *Forma*, which I have used in this article. See Delio Cantimori and Elisabeth Feist, eds., *Per la storia degli eretici italiani del secolo XVI in Europa* (Rome: Reale Academia d'Italia, 1937), 171–209.

[10]See Guillaume Posthumus Meyjes, "Tolérance et irénisme," in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, ed. Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, Jonathan Israel, and Guillaume Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 63–73; for his definition of the term "irenicism," see 63–65; for a definition of "utopian irenicism," see 66.

[11]Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*.

vided a new insight into the practical ways in which contemporaries sought to maintain social peace within religiously divided communities. Pucci used his writings on toleration to develop a framework to address precisely these problems, while also ensuring salvation for as many as possible. His task was complicated by his heterodox convictions, which engendered an unusually intolerant stance toward other Christians. To achieve his ends, he drew upon, but did not slavishly follow, parts of the contemporary repertoire of ideas about toleration.

Pucci was horrified by the violence and disruption of sixteenth-century Europe. Like many of his direct contemporaries, he desired concord—a single unified faith, but the soteriological beliefs that he developed in his letter to Balbani led him to advocate a profoundly intolerant rendering of this concept. For Pucci, salvation solely depended upon individuals making a rational choice to believe in God. Although he maintained that no religious practices or rites were fundamental to salvation, he also held that correct religious practice was a manifestation of true belief. The corollary of this position was that incorrect practices made manifest misplaced belief. He therefore argued that God condemned all who engaged in corrupted practices. A single, clearly defined faith was essential in order to assure salvation for all.[12]

These central insights laid the ground for Pucci's subsequent reflections on religious toleration, which were contained in the *Forma*. This text contained a template for a secret society that would nestle within confessional states. It would, Pucci hoped, allow like-minded Christians to band together to lay the foundations for a council that would establish the true faith. While waiting for this to occur, its members would outwardly observe the religion of their host community, but privately practice a theology of reduction. They would restrict their religious practice to the observance of certain key beliefs—the essential points such as acceptance of the Ten Commandments—on which all Christians could agree. Superficially, this proposal resembled the forms of irenicism advocated by humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus and subsequently developed by influential authors such as Sebastian Castellio. These authors distinguished between fundamenta—beliefs essential to the faith—and adiaphora—things indifferent to the faith. By reducing the number of fundamenta, they suggested that Christians could maintain the unity of their faith while accommodating often significant differences.[13]

[12]I follow here Turchetti's concept of concord; see Turchetti, "Religious concord," 15–19.

[13]For an overview of the issue of irenicism in theory and practice, see Kaplan, "The Gold Coin," in *Divided by Faith*, 127–43. On Erasmus's "theology of reduction" and its influence on Castellio, see Hans R. Guggisberg, "The Defence of Religious Toleration and Religious Liberty in Early Modern Europe: Arguments, Pressures and Some Consequences," *History of European Ideas* 4, no. 1 (1983): 37–39; Mario Turchetti, "Une question mal posée: Erasme et la tolérance, L'idée de sygkatabasis," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 53, no. 2 (1991): 379–95, cf. his rejection of Erasmus's influence on Castellio, Turchetti, "Religious Concord," 20–21. See also Gary Remer, "Humanism, Liberalism, and the Skeptical Case for Religious Toleration," *Polity* 25, no. 1 (1992): 21–43, who makes the important point that humanist toleration was not "full toleration" as individuals

In the *Forma*, Pucci advocated the practice of a theology of reduction, but his heterodox soteriology led him to render this idea in a manner that differed in two key respects from that of the humanist irenicists. First, since Pucci maintained that God condemned all who engaged in erroneous practices, there could be no adiaphora about which Christians could agree to differ. Consequently, it was essential that the members of his society refrained from all actions and practices that were uncertain. Secondly, the humanist irenicists argued that by reducing the faith to its most basic elements, they could create a durable form of concord that was rooted in the acceptance—or indeed toleration—of religious difference. Pucci's proposed theology of reduction was, by contrast, a short-term expedient. It would be used only within his society, and it would be abandoned once the true fundamenta of the faith had been established by a council. This new definition of Christianity, rather than his theology of reduction, would provide the basis for concord.

These insights provide a means to answer a question left hanging by Miriam Eliav-Feldon, an earlier historian of the *Forma*, namely: what was the society's purpose? She argued that Pucci's intentions remained unclear. He was in fact offering a genuine proposal for a society, albeit one never implemented. Practicing their pared-down version of Christianity, the society's members would live and worship together without fear of engaging in the corrupted practices that endangered their salvation. This society would continue to exist until such times as a council could define the true parameters of the faith. Once this had been achieved, the society could be dissolved. The fundamenta having been established, the former citizens of Pucci's society, like all who considered themselves Christian, would be expected—and if necessary compelled—to respect these truths.[14]

The Lettera a Balbani

In 1563, Francesco Pucci left his native Italy, beginning a long exile in northern Europe. By 1572, he lived in Paris where he witnessed the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, and converted to Calvinism in its wake.[15] That winter, seeking to escape the chaos that followed the killing, he moved to England. After matriculating in the faculty of arts at the University of Oxford, he dedicated himself to the study of philosophy and theology. In 1574, he graduated with the degree of Master of Arts and upon returning to London, he established contact with the

remained accountable for the fundamenta, 28. For a further discussion of the limits of Erasmus's conception of tolerance, see Nathan Ron, "The Christian Peace of Erasmus," *The European Legacy* 19, no. 1 (2014): 27–42.

[14]Miriam Eliav-Feldon, "Secret Societies, Utopias, and Peace Plans: The Case of Francesco Pucci," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984): 139–58, 49.

[15]For an account of Pucci's life to this time, see Caravale, *Profeta*, chaps. 1–2; for his conversion, 79–80.

city's French Calvinist church.[16] He fell into dispute with the Church authorities after demanding the right to speak on religious matters and indicating that he believed that he was a prophet.[17] Having left England in 1576, he returned to Paris, and after spending the winter there, he continued to Basel where he met fellow Italian exile Fausto Sozzini. By 1578, the two men had begun to dispute several theological questions, including the issue of the mortality of Adam.[18] In the autumn of that year, at the height of his dispute with Sozzini, Pucci also wrote a lengthy letter to the Lucchese nobleman Niccolò Balbani (henceforth *Lettera*), then minister for the Italian church in Geneva, in which he detailed his views on issues such as original sin, justification, and salvation.[19]

The *Lettera* contains a detailed exposition of the theological beliefs that Pucci held in the late 1570s. He rarely expressed his ideas directly or systematically. More often than not, his positive views on theological matters were advanced through a critique of the positions held by others. In order to reconstruct his ideas, it is necessary to follow his often circuitous argument as it develops, drawing connections between the various positions that he advanced and identifying the features that gave his theology an underlying cohesion. This approach has the advantage of preserving the characteristically digressive nature of his prose, while exposing the foundations of his thought.

Pucci opened the *Lettera* with a plea to be given a fair hearing. Too often, he lamented, men were inclined to hate someone who contradicted their views before listening to what they actually had to say. He then rapidly moved on to discuss what he took to be the central problem that needed to be addressed. Interpreters of scripture had long tied themselves up in numerous errors. Among the most important was maintaining an unduly negative view of human nature. As a consequence of this error, they were unable to recognize "the state of innocence in which all men are born and in which they remain until the use of reason and of judgment, when they are not yet steeped in the malice of the way of the world." Having failed to comprehend this fundamental insight, "they commonly ignore the divine truth and turn their back on the Creator, following human and false instruction and teachings."[20] This statement introduced many of the themes that Pucci would elaborate in his letter, namely the errors of the exegetes, and their responsibility for imposing false doctrines on their fellow Christians.

This passage from the *Lettera* also points to the content of his theological beliefs. His comments on man's innocence raised the issue of the nature of original sin, a concept that lay at the heart of orthodox soteriology. Pucci set out his intention to grapple with this issue, by declaring almost immediately that all

[16]Firpo, "Pucci in Inghilterra," 160.

[17]Firpo, "Pucci in Inghilterra," 161–62.

[18]For an account of Pucci's time in Basel, see Caravale, *Profeta*, 85; on the dispute with Sozzini, see Cantimori, *Eretici*, chap. 32.

[19]Pucci, "A Balbani," 23–54.

[20]Pucci, "A Balbani," 24–25. All translations are the author's.

mortals were born in a state of salvation. He continued that he would demonstrate "that the anger of God and damnation hangs over only those who acquire it for themselves, by faith turned elsewhere than to the Creator and by the wayward manner in which they act contrary to the divine Spirit and sentiment."[21] Pucci's position was clear, albeit highly controversial. Since all humans are born in a state of salvation, they are damned only as a result of their own free actions. Assuming such a position involved the denial of multiple positions held and elaborated by generations of theologians.

At the heart of Pucci's rebellion against orthodoxy lay a denial of the proposition that all men are born in a state of damnation. Forms of this idea dated back to the earliest Church Fathers, but it received its most significant articulation in the writings that Augustine produced during the course of his polemics against the Pelagians. He argued that following the fall of man, each individual inherited the original sin of Adam, and so it was transmitted by propagation and not by imitation.[22] Not only had original sin rendered man unable to perform unaided any actions pleasing in the eyes of God, but it also damned each individual. According to the position that Augustine advanced in *De civitate dei*, in order to be released from this merited and justified punishment, it was necessary to be baptized. For Augustine, this sacrament remitted the original sin. Yet even in this new condition, man retained concupiscence, a constant inclination towards sin. From the point at which man became able to obey the law, he assumed responsibility for ensuring that he did not act upon that inclination. He would only be successful in his endeavors, however, if God granted him prevenient grace, which would allow him to have the faith that would make it possible to resist his innate tendency to sin. A gratuitous and totally unmerited gift of God, grace was only granted to those whom he chose. They alone would be one of the elect. Those whom God overlooked would be numbered amongst the reprobate.[23]

Aspects of Augustine's thought remained hugely influential throughout the medieval period, but his theological views came to be held in especially high regard from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries.[24] It would obviously be wrong to suggest that during this period, every Christian accepted each of his views in their entirety, or that they necessarily agreed as to how to interpret his corpus.[25] Yet while the soteriologies of the main confessions of the later six-

[21]Pucci, "A Balbani," 25.

[22]See William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 47–48.

[23]Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 21.16.

[24]Anthony D. Wright, characterizes this period in western Christian history as the "Augustinian Moment"; see Wright, *The Counter Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World*, 2nd ed. (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), esp. "Introduction: The Counter-Reformation and Augustinian Europe," 1–33.

[25]For a discussion of these issues, see Arnoud Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1520–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

teenth century contained significant differences of emphasis, each continued to subscribe to key Augustinian doctrines. These included belief in the inheritance of original sin and man's subsequent corruption, and the idea that both baptism and faith were necessary for salvation.[26] Moreover, they also all agreed that faith was impossible without the gratuitous gift of grace. As we shall see, Pucci not only rejected these core ideas, but he also differed from the theologians of the main confessions in his apparent outright rejection of the authority of the Church Fathers. He only mentions them when he is seeking to rebut their positions, and he appears to view them as being responsible for establishing the views that he sought to contest. Pucci thus set his face against mainstream theological opinion, and aimed to prove his case solely by invoking the authority of scripture.[27]

Using these means Pucci was able to conclude that original sin undoubtedly existed. "It is certainly true," he wrote, "that there is a great defect in the nature of all we mortals by reason of the corruption which entered us from the sin of our first parents, with respect to this defect God says that the inclination of the human heart turns towards wickedness from its youth."[28] Although this statement was broadly in accordance with received theological opinion, he rapidly departed from it with his further assertion that "one will never find that this original defect has imputed eternal damnation to anyone."[29] According to Pucci, God did not hold individual humans personally accountable for the sin of Adam. No one would be damned as a result of his actions, and as a consequence, there was no need for God's grace in order to secure salvation. Nevertheless, original sin had implanted in each individual a tendency towards sinful behavior. God remained, however, merciful not only toward original sin, but also towards sins committed. Consequently, he had sent Christ, through whom all would be excused of their sins provided that they did not incur God's wrath. His creatures could provoke his ire either by displays of diffidence towards him or by living a wicked life.

Continuing his assault on orthodox theology, Pucci demonstrated how Christianity had come to be dominated by false doctrines. To understand the

[26]For a statement of the position established by Catholic Church on these issues by the mid-sixteenth century, see decrees of the fifth and sixth sessions of the Council of Trent in J. Waterworth, trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), 21–29, 30–53. For Luther, see, for example, J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trans., *Martin Luther On the Bondage of the Will, A New Translation of De servo arbitrio (1525): Martin Luther's Reply to Erasmus of Rotterdam* (London: James Clarke, 1957). For Calvin, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–46), on his soteriology: bk. 2, 1:279–542; on baptism: bk. 4, chap. 15, 3:327–48.

[27]See for example Manfred Schulze, "Martin Luther and the Church Fathers," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2:537–626; Johannes Van Oort, "John Calvin and the Church Fathers," in *Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, 2:661–700.

[28]Pucci, "A Balbani," 25.

[29]Pucci, "A Balbani," 25.

origin of this error, he argued, it was necessary to consider the language "used not only by the prophets, but by other good authors, and very frequently used in the common tongue, that is, to call the disciples children and the masters father of whatever thing it is." For Pucci, this was an apt metaphor because as "fathers generate children similar to themselves in body, so masters, by teaching, make something similar to themselves in that faculty that they teach." Examples of regeneration through training were readily observable in the society around him; through a process of instruction and education philosophers made new philosophers, and theologians made new theologians. According to this manner of speaking, each master "calls himself the father of those in his school."[30]

The false belief that every individual inherited original sin stemmed from biblical exegetes' failure to recognize that this metaphor was also deployed in scripture. Seemingly referring to the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, Pucci noted that when God sent masters to preach to badly instructed men "often they recognized them as ill-born and badly created, that is badly taught and instructed." Thus when the prophets talked of individuals being "ill-born," they referred not to a literal, but to a figurative birth. They recognized that an individual was shaped by the society in which he grew up, and by the teachers by whom he was instructed. When the prophets referred to the Jews as "ill-born," they did not do so because they regarded them to be innately sinful. Instead they condemned them for practicing a false version of the faith that had been inculcated in them by the society in which they lived. Pucci observed that "The interpreters have often (and especially in the Gospel of St. John and in the letters of St. Paul) taken that which was said against this birth of the false sects, as if it were said of human nature and of the common birth of the body from the mother." Interpreters of scripture had therefore made a catastrophic error; they had confused man's figurative birth with his literal one.[31]

This is a pivotal stage in Pucci's argument. Not only did he once more reject the idea that man was born incapable of acting in a manner pleasing to God, but he also expanded his discussion in a surprising direction. He suggested that sinful behavior was, in many instances, collective learned behavior. Misguided instruction had not only failed to show individuals how to overcome their innate tendency to sin, but had actually taught them to behave in a sinful manner. There are significant implications to Pucci's argument. If one happened to be born and raised in a society that indulged in debased or corrupted practices, these would appear normal to the members of that society. Sin would permeate that society. Yet this sin would not be the product of individual deviance, but the result of collective malpractice that was erroneously considered not only acceptable, but in fact also pleasing to God.

[30]Pucci, "A Balbani," 34.
[31]Pucci, "A Balbani," 35.

It was hard to dislodge such values and practices from a given society. The masters would routinely teach them to that society's children, who would in turn teach them to their children. Generation after generation of sinners would be figuratively born. By engaging in and teaching these corrupted activities, these societies would be securing not only their own damnation, but also preparing future generations to condemn themselves. Pucci's insight also carries the implication that this corruption begins with the teachers, and in particular with the priesthood. Not only were the priests actively engaged in preaching their falsehoods, but they also compelled their flocks to accept them; in so doing, they rotted Christian society from within. By dutifully rendering obedience to the priestly caste, whole swathes of Christian society allowed themselves to become sinners.

Pucci then turned to anticipate some objections to his opinion, which required him to engage with the scriptural foundations of orthodox theology. He began by considering the grounds for asserting that God would punish individuals for sins that they had not personally committed. First he discussed Deuteronomy 5:9, which describes the punishment with which God threatened the Jews should they fail to respect the second commandment enjoining them to refrain from worshipping idols. The passage in question reads, "I the Lord am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation that hates me."[32] These words could be taken to imply that individuals are punished on account of the actions of their forebears, and irrespective of their own behavior. According to Pucci, it would be misguided to understand this passage in this manner. God does not say that he will punish all physical descendants of sinners, but instead, "one sees that he treats of the imitators of the wicked fathers." In other words, God only threatened to punish the figurative "children," those who continued to perpetuate the iniquities of their "parents." Nevertheless, Pucci added, "I readily concede that to the wayward evil-living all sins are taken into account." Pucci's point was clear; scripture shows that while God may justly punish an individual, it will only be for the sins that he has committed.[33]

It may appear from reading the foregoing discussion that Pucci tended toward a works-based understanding of the economy of salvation. While this may be a reasonable assumption based on the arguments thus far presented, he continued his letter by introducing some new elements that radically recast his beliefs. The most important development in his argument took place during a discussion of baptism. Most understandings of this rite were, he argued, based on a false assumption that the need to remit original sin had made baptism necessary. This error, he argued, stemmed from a misinterpretation of a passage in the Gospel of Mark. Pucci cited the passage of scripture in Italian as follows: "Chi

[32]All translations are from the King James Version (KJV).
[33]Pucci, "A Balbani," 37.

crederà e sarà battezato, sarà salvo." In full, the verse reads, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Pucci remarked that "having heard it said that the believers and the baptized will be saved, it has been concluded with little reason that one will not be saved if one is not baptized." For Pucci this was a clear error. The passage did not imply that the unbaptized would not be saved, but only those who did not believe.[34] He bolstered this point by making the more general observation that the failure to perform rituals pleasing to God, even highly important ones, was not sufficient to debar an individual from salvation. The Jews, he noted, did not circumcise the babies who were born during their forty years in the wilderness.[35]

In this passage, Pucci had not only developed his views on the soteriological significance of religious practice, but also affirmed the centrality of belief. Elaborating his position, he continued that "the blame for non-belief does not fall upon children, or on those who do not have the use of reason or judgment, as Zwingli, Pighio, and others opposed to Augustine have seen. Thus, when one treats of faith or misbelief, all discussion pertains to adults, who are either believers or unbelievers, not to children."[36] This being the case, only those who were of sufficient age and possessed of the requisite mental faculties would be judged on account of their belief or lack thereof. With these words, Pucci took a further step by suggesting that faith was the product of a rational choice. Since this free choice was sufficient to ensure salvation, there was no need for either the remission of sin or prevenient grace.

Pucci then proceeded to discuss a number of Paul's epistles. These were foundational texts in the history of Christianity. Generations of exegetes had drawn upon them to formulate many of the key doctrines that Pucci wished to contest. He began with the Apostle's famous declaration that we "were by nature children of wrath, even as the others" (Eph. 2:3). This passage had often been taken as a proof of the idea that man had inherited original sin. For Pucci, such an interpretation was simply mistaken. Once again, exegetes had failed to understand the language of scripture. In this passage, Paul did not speak of human nature in its original state, but of human nature once it had been corrupted by wicked customs. Reprising his earlier suggestion that habits and manners are formed by the society in which individuals live, he wrote that we are "commonly carried along by the flow of the world and of the errors of the sects, that are held in high regard in those countries where we live." When the Apostle made use of the word "nature," he did so in order to criticize those behaviors and habits that were so deeply established within human societies that they had become almost natural. Pucci concluded that "With regard to that manner of speaking 'children

[34]Pucci, "A Balbani," 38.
[35]Pucci, "A Balbani," 39–40; the story to which Pucci referred is in Josh. 5:1–8.
[36]Pucci, "A Balbani," 38.

of wrath,' it is certain that to him it is an *ebraismo*, which means 'culpable for anger and for contempt by reason of sins committed.'"[37]

Pucci gathered the various threads of his argument in the course of a discussion of Paul's epistle to the Romans. He began by considering the contents of chapter 9 in which the Apostle discussed the story of Esau and Jacob. This passage, Pucci rightly noted, had been used as a "secure foundation to prove this hatred of God *ab aeterno*."[38] In other words, it had been used to gainsay the belief that from the beginning of time God had nursed a hatred for Esau, which is to say from before he was born and before he could personally sin. In turn, this contention had been taken to imply that God had predestined the fate of each individual. Pucci noted that "it is certain that this place is a little obscure, as St. Peter said speaking of the writings of St. Paul." This was a reference to 2 Peter 3:16 in which Peter noted that Paul's letters contained "things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Pucci thus exploited a biblical precedent for acknowledging the complexity and indeed the ambiguity of Paul's writings, which he took to imply that the misinterpretation of his words was not only possible, but in fact likely. This set the tone for his discussion; he would criticize the interpreters of Paul, while seeking to rediscover his "true" message.[39]

The error of maintaining that God harbored an eternal contempt for Esau came, Pucci argued, from misunderstandings of the manner in which Paul had cited scripture. First, he noted that the Apostle had drawn on the following passage of Genesis: "the elder shall serve the younger" (Rom. 9:12). Pucci recontextualized this extract. First he quoted it in full. In this passage God directly addressed Rebecca—then pregnant with the twins—saying: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). Glossing this text, Pucci noted, "Here there is no doubt that the prophecy spoke of two nations, because the Edomites descended from Esau and the Israelites descended from Jacob, and the Israelites in the end triumphed over the Edomites." Pucci then turned to address a second passage of scripture cited by Paul, this time from Malachi, which read, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13). Again he cited the original passage in full, "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness" (Mal. 1:2–3). Expounding the text's meaning, he argued that once again it did not refer to individual brothers, but "without doubt it speaks of the two nations."[40]

[37]Pucci, "A Balbani," 40–41.

[38]Pucci, "A Balbani," 41. For an account of the gradual development of Augustine's interpretation of Rom. 9, see James Wetzel, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and foreknowledge," in Stump and Kretzman, *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 52–53.

[39]Pucci, "A Balbani," 41.

[40]Pucci, "A Balbani," 41–42.

According to Pucci, previous exegetes made two errors while explaining the meaning of Romans 9. First, they confused the individual brothers with the tribes that they had respectively founded. "You see therefore that in both these prophecies the difference between one nation and the other is spoken of, and the first spoke of that which had to occur, and the other of that which had occurred, and that both spoke of the current state of the people." Secondly, they read the earlier passage of scripture in light of the later one. God certainly spoke of his hatred for Esau in Malachi, but exegetes had mistakenly projected this statement onto the passage from Genesis, and assumed that God had always hated Esau. On this basis, they had concluded that Esau was *ab aeterno* reprobate and excluded from salvation.[41]

Those who maintained this position were, according to Pucci, "deceiving themselves." On the one hand, exegetes had simply extrapolated too much from scripture, for neither passage made any explicit mention of Esau's personal eternal damnation. On the other, the word "hate" was only used in reference to Esau in Malachi. This text was written, Pucci noted, after the Jews had returned from Babylon, that is, more than a thousand years after the children's birth. The use of the word "hate" in the later text therefore denoted a change in God's attitude towards Esau, one that had occurred at some point between the completion of the two texts. God's hatred was therefore not eternal, but had started at a particular point in time.[42] Returning to his first criticism of earlier interpretations of Romans, Pucci continued, "we have seen that the first [passage] like the second did not speak of the persons of these two individuals, but of the nations that descended from them; and in one and in the other there were some believers and some unbelievers, and as a consequence some elect and some reprobate." According to his interpretation of Romans, God neither hated the person Esau, nor did he automatically confer this hatred onto his descendants. All of Abraham and Isaac's descendants had the potential to be saved or to be damned.

For Pucci, this failure to discern the true meaning of Paul's discussion of the divergent stories of the Israelites and the Edomites was underlain by a wider misunderstanding of his purpose in this letter. In the Apostle's own age, a division had opened within his people, the Jews, among whom there were "some who denied the Messiah, who were the party unfavourable to the Apostle, others embraced him, who were the Christians." The fact that the majority of the Jews rejected Paul's message could have led the Romans to doubt the truth of this promise made to the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. Paul's task was to maintain the credibility of the promise of salvation, while explaining his fellow Jews' rejection of Christ. The differing fates of Jacob and Esau and their respective tribes offered a means to explain why only some among the chosen people would

[41]Pucci, "A Balbani," 42–43.
[42]Pucci, "A Balbani," 42–43.

be given eternal happiness, although all were descended from Abraham and Isaac.[43]

Pucci went on to expound his interpretation of Paul's argument in more detail. In the course of his discussion, he began to set out his ideas on the proper relationship between faith and works in the economy of salvation. Following Paul's arguments, he asserted that there could be no good works without faith. The prophecy made in Genesis was not concerned primarily with the actions that the twins would eventually perform, but with the root cause of those actions. If Esau acted in ways displeasing to God, it was because he lacked true faith. Similarly, the Israelites and Edomites were equally called by God and each individual member of the tribes possessed the capacity to respond to his calls. The Edomites certainly brought God's wrath upon themselves by performing actions that were displeasing to him, but for Pucci these perverse actions were signs of a more significant affront. The Edomites had not truly believed. If they had done so, then they would have been capable of behaving in a manner pleasing to God. They too could have been saved. Since they did not believe, they had acted in a manner displeasing to God and so justly earned his punishment.[44]

The damnation of the Edomites was not inevitable, however. They had neither lacked, nor ever lost, the capacity to believe. As we have seen, according to Pucci, faith is the product of a free and rational choice. Recall, however, that Pucci maintained that human behaviors and habits, including an individual's choice to embrace correct belief, are shaped and formed by the society in which he or she lives. The observation of societal norms could encourage the majority, if not the entirety, of a given society—for example the Edomites—to hold misplaced beliefs, and thus to act in ways that merited God's hatred. Yet the influence of social factors was no excuse, for the decision to embrace faith was made by individuals. Pucci's discussion led his reader to the conclusion that God's hatred towards the Edomites was not predestined. Instead, God had foreseen that Jacob and Esau and the tribes that they respectively founded would make differing choices with respect to their internal faith.

By refusing to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah and failing to have faith in him, the majority of the Jews likewise incurred God's wrath. As a consequence, the Jews living after the revelation of Christ were not capable of fulfilling the law truly, but were instead engaging in corrupted practices. The Jews made this choice not because they were badly created, and certainly not because God had predestined them to be among the reprobate. For Pucci, this was not Paul's opinion; "rather, a little later he said that they were loved by God by reason of their fathers, but he had a bad opinion of those who were contradicting the call of the Messiah, by their distrust and waywardness."[45] Although the Jews had dis-

[43]Pucci, "A Balbani," 43–44.
[44]Pucci, "A Balbani," 44.
[45]Pucci, "A Balbani," 44.

graced themselves in God's eyes, their disgrace would only last for so long as they persisted in maintaining a false version of their faith. Should they choose to believe truly, they too could be, in Paul's words, grafted back into the olive tree. Although the Jews could have been saved, the habits and traditions that they maintained and taught as a society more often than not prevented them from making the rational choice to embrace Christ as savior.

Pucci's soteriological commitments held significant implications for any attempt to establish peace within Christendom. His radical decision to place salvation in man's hands elevated the significance of human free will and indeed reason. Yet since he also maintained that belief could be shaped by society, he placed a new emphasis on the social control of behavior and action. The practice of corrupted rites or ceremonies invited God's anger and retribution, so individual Christians needed to be protected not only from their own errors, but also from the perverted teachings of their societies. This could only be achieved by establishing a form of concord that excluded beliefs defined as false. Pucci did not explicitly develop these themes in the *Lettera*, but began to tease out their implications in more detail in the *Forma*.

The Forma di una republica catholica

Pucci completed the text of the *Forma* following his return to England from Switzerland in 1581. It sets out his ideas for a secret society, described in often surprising detail. The most basic level of organization would be a college, a small cell of like-minded believers. Outwardly the members of the colleges would render full obedience to the religious and civic authorities of the communities in which they resided. Behind closed doors, they would practice their own forms of religion. Pucci described these beliefs and practices in some detail, and they will be discussed more fully below. The various colleges would be established wherever there were enough sympathetic individuals, and linked so as to form a network. Pucci described the officials who would organize and administer the various levels of the society, and even how the dispersed colleges would communicate and the manner in which decisions affecting the whole Republic could be made via a general diet. Pucci's text concluded with a supplementary section, the *Disciplina domestica*, which described how the members should organize various practical aspects of their community.[46]

From the start of the *Forma*, Pucci signaled his intention to address the broader issue of establishing peace within Christendom. It opens with the following words: "If it is possible by the limited understanding of man to find some remedy for the confusion that one sees today in religion and the Christian republic, the means cannot be anything other than a free and holy council, to which

[46]Pucci, *Forma*. For a further description of the organization of the society, see Cantimori, *Eretici*, 380–92; and Eliav-Feldon, "Secret Societies," 144–48.

one sees all good men of all the provinces are inclined." Despite the violence that he had personally witnessed, and regardless of the self-evident failure of the Council of Trent to resolve Europe's religious divisions, Pucci still believed that a final settlement to the religious crisis of his age could be reached by means of discussion. His optimism originated partly in a strong belief in the power of the laity, or at least those good men, who shared the opinion that "the source of this disorder comes from the doctrine and the uncorrected lives of the ecclesiastics." Nevertheless, the fact that the clergy lay at the root of the problem presented a significant challenge for any would-be reformer, not least because "one knows well that the powerful prelates, who foresee that this [a council] would be the ruin of their great temporal power, impede it in any way that they can." So for Pucci, although a council could be the means to resolve the sixteenth-century religious crisis, it remained an aspiration rather than an imminent possibility.[47]

In the absence of any helpful leadership from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it seemed to Pucci that the burden of resolving the religious crisis lay on the shoulders of the laity. It was borne by men such as him. There remained, he observed, many ordinary Christians who were alienated by the present state of affairs. So many, in fact, that it would be possible to fashion them into a new republic. "Therefore one sees that he who could unite, in some reasonable manner, [those] well-disposed towards the public good who are divided one from the other by distance of place and by differences of customs and ceremonies, could prepare a fitting residence for the future council."[48] At the most basic level, Pucci's ambition was precisely this; to unite disaffected yet faithful members of the laity, in order that they might create a suitable environment for the convocation of a council.

Pucci did not directly comment on the type of Christian peace that he expected a council to establish, but it is possible to reconstruct his ideas from comments he made regarding the form that his society should take. Pucci believed that before his society could be called into existence, he would need to establish the beliefs to which its members should adhere. "It being most certain," he wrote, "that one cannot order a community with a durable and good government without religious accord, it is first necessary that our citizens are resolved as to how they should govern themselves with regard to matters divine, and that they know well which belief is accepted by their senate and people." Although these remarks were specifically directed at future society members, the principle behind them presumably applied to Christendom more widely. Good and stable government required clear definitions of the faith.[49]

Following this principle, Pucci laid down a series of requirements for members of his society. Of these, the most fundamental was the requirement that all

[47]Pucci, *Forma*, 171. It remains unclear what Pucci regarded as the source of a council's authority. It is likely to have differed markedly from Erasmus's concept of the consensus omnium; on this idea, see Remer, "Skeptical Case," 24–28.

[48]Pucci, *Forma*, 172.

[49]Pucci, *Forma*, 174.

should be Christians. His definition of a Christian amounted to the acceptance of a number of specific propositions: that God was the creator of the universe, that Christ had taken human form, that Christians should love just one God, and that Jesus had been sent for their salvation. Although Christians could readily accept these ideas, Pucci went on to express views that were more controversial. He added that members of his society should confess that "by means of [Christ's] death and resurrection we are washed of our sins and human defects and we have most certain hope of resurrection, and they are persuaded by this most certain thing that God takes count of the good and of the bad, and reserves a reward for the good, and punishment for the bad."[50] With these words, he seemed to imply that being a "Christian" entailed the acceptance of the idea that God punishes or rewards individuals according to their behavior. Implicitly, it required accepting his heterodox opinion that no one was excluded from the possibility of salvation.

Although eager to establish clear parameters for belief, Pucci was aware that defining a "Christian" was complicated by the existence of many churches, each with its own particular ceremonies and interpretations of scripture. Obviously some, if not all, of them were propagating ideas contrary to the faith. No one could be sure which, if any, of these ideas and practices the members of his community should accept. Pucci noted this situation arose because Christianity had lacked a "supreme judge, or a council acceptable to all nations, which might declare point by point how things should be understood, and with divine authority restrain the contumacious and disobedient—the disputes and debates between the churches are without end." With these comments, Pucci suggested that he did not believe that it was possible at that time to define the truth of Christianity, but that it may be possible for an authority such as a council to establish Christian truth "point by point." In other words, for Pucci, each aspect of Christian belief could and should be defined as being either true or false. Moreover, he suggested that if and when these truths were established, anyone who chose to dissent—the "contumacious and disobedient"—could be restrained on God's authority.[51]

Pucci thus envisaged a council establishing a form of concord quite distinct from that which the humanist irenicists such as Erasmus had proposed. Not only had the Dutch humanist advocated the punishment of Christians only in strictly limited circumstances, but more importantly, he had called for a form of concord that allowed for tolerance in relation to adiaphoral issues. Pucci rejected any such idea. His intolerance towards religious difference was consistent with the theological beliefs expressed in the *Lettera*, which had led him to the conclusion that the performance of corrupted rites and practices angered God and endangered each individual's salvation. Should a reformed Christianity grant any tolerance to erroneous belief it would imperil the souls not simply of those who propagated those beliefs but also of any other Christians who might listen to them.

[50]Pucci, *Forma*, 175.
[51]Pucci, *Forma*, 176.

Although Pucci's long-term aim for his society was establishing the basis for a council that could implement an intolerant version of concord, he faced a more immediate problem. As he wrote, Christians were practicing false versions of the faith taught to them by the priests. He therefore needed to establish how to prevent Christians condemning themselves to damnation while they waited for a council to determine the true faith. Despite his zeal, Pucci was a pragmatist. Having acknowledged that a council was, at best, a distant prospect, he designed his society to perform a second purpose—providing a framework that would allow the laity to live and worship until such times as the truth of Christianity were determined.

To achieve this particular end, Pucci began to articulate his own version of a theology of reduction. In the absence of any clear definition of orthodoxy, Pucci suggested that the citizens of his republic should retain only what he referred to as "catholic resolutions, that is universal resolutions of Christian doctrine and ceremony, and in the others they are free until the time of the future council." These were those doctrines and ceremonies that were acceptable to all Christians, whether Greek or Latin, Catholic or Protestant, Armenian, Syrian, Ethiopian, or Indian and "of all the other types of Christian of whom one has some knowledge." They were "those things which have been made known to the world by the Prophets and by the Apostles the divine history and laws of our creator and savior." The most important of these principles were presented in the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Paternoster. He also recommended the performance of works of charity "which by the consensus of all the nations and laws are pleasing to God." Since these practices and ideas were universally accepted as being good, and for the most part used and observed in similar ways, Pucci's followers could be assured that they were pleasing to God.[52]

Pucci also adopted this approach when treating the ceremonies and sacraments of the Church. Only two sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, were universally acknowledged throughout Christendom. Although acknowledging that both sacraments had been interpreted in various different ways, Pucci suggested that the points of underlying agreement could once more be exposed. With regard to baptism, he suggested that it was a sign by which Christians professed themselves to be dead to sin. He continued that the external washing led to an internal renovation that consecrated man to God. In an echo of the position advanced in the *Lettera*, he argued that it obliged man to live no longer as an ill-formed creature shaped by the customs and manners of the world, but as a well-born creature made by God. His attitude towards the Eucharist was more straightforward. He suggested that it was universally recognized that man should consume bread and wine, and that they represented the body and blood of Christ. It seems that until the true doctrine of the Eucharist could be established, Pucci simply wanted his

[52]Pucci, *Forma*, 176.

followers to consume the bread and wine, without speculating on what was (or was not) taking place within.[53]

Finally Pucci noted that "It is also commonly taught, throughout all Christianity without any contradiction, that it is appropriate to dedicate every seventh day, that is Sunday, to sacred assemblies." Respectful of this common teaching, Pucci proposed that his followers observe a simple albeit tightly controlled service. When the members of the society gathered for worship, the oldest and most knowledgeable in scripture would, without any "ambition or vain ceremony," take up a position in the assembly room where they could be heard by all. One of the elders would read some chapters of scripture to the assembled company. Pucci placed strict limits on what should be read publicly, advising that it was wise to avoid discussing any difficult passages in front of such a wide audience. The discussion of complex parts of the Bible, such as the prophetic works, should be restricted to those with the most experience of interpreting scripture. The elder who had read the passage aloud would then pray for divine inspiration before explaining its meaning. Ordinary members of the society would then be invited to discuss what had been said according to their consciences.[54]

Although Pucci had set out what he considered to be acceptable beliefs and practices, he remained aware that many others existed. He was also conscious of the fact that some of them were undoubtedly false and instituted by man. To avoid his citizens from jeopardizing their salvation, Pucci advised them to refrain from any uncertain practices. Conscious that some might continue to exercise a hold over his followers, he advocated a limited form of tolerance. Until a council could determine definitively which practices were true and which false, he judged that all of "our citizens are free to govern themselves according to their conscience." He also urged restraint on future members of his republic, by stating "that they should not condemn nor denounce one another for similar differences, if in the rest they are devout and good men."[55]

This passage certainly appears to suggest that Pucci advocated freedom of conscience in certain matters religious for the members of his society, but his ideas again differed from those of the humanist irenicists. None of the practices that Pucci suggested could be tolerated were strictly adiaphoral, for God either approved of them or he did not. With his ideas of freedom of conscience, Pucci sought only to protect the stability of his community, aiming to prevent it being disrupted by unnecessary internal doctrinal dispute. This he achieved by advocating a temporally limited doctrine of toleration, one that would allow his followers to engage in practices of which he did not necessarily approve. He arrived at his position partly through his skepticism. Pucci certainly did not approve of ideas and practices that he considered ungodly, but prior to a council, he considered it

[53]Pucci, *Forma*, 176–77; he discussed the sacraments and particularly baptism further (206–8).
[54]Pucci, *Forma*, 177–78.
[55]Pucci, *Forma*, 179.

impossible to determine those that were categorically wrong. He was also led to this position by his theological conviction. The "tolerant" views that he expressed here were consistent with the ideas contained in his *Lettera*. Recall his argument that true belief will manifest itself in good works and correct behaviors. If an individual truly believed, it would follow that the decisions that he or she made in good conscience would be pleasing to God. Pucci accepted that some of his followers might not truly believe, and that such misbelief would manifest itself in the performance of corrupted practices. Though man could not know if any individual had offended God, He would punish them if they had. Pucci was not withholding judgment on those of his followers who held wrong beliefs, but was instead deferring it to a higher authority.

It is also notable that although Pucci was prepared to grant a limited degree of freedom of conscience to members of his community, he did not extend it to the adherents of other confessions. In the third chapter of the *Forma*, he described how his citizens ought to conduct themselves in relation to the civil authorities. In this section, he described how the bishop of Rome and other similarly high-ranking ecclesiastics had usurped the place of God on earth, erecting what he termed "a superstitious sovereignty" in many Christian states. Having arrogated to themselves the power to interpret and dispense divine law, they acted to prevent any free council or reformation that might challenge their power. They had also forced many Christians to accept "non-catholic and superstitious things."[56] Whereas maintaining a deep sympathy for the members of the laity inculcated with false beliefs, Pucci clearly regarded those beliefs to be abhorrent.

In this passage, Pucci also returned to one of his most important themes—the detrimental impact of the clerical order on Christian society. His anger at the fact that they taught "non-catholic" beliefs can be explained by returning once more to his comments concerning the significance of false instruction contained in the *Lettera*. By teaching the faithful erroneous doctrines, the priests were acting as false parents who beget ill-bred children. Growing up within communities in which these traditions were observed, individuals who might otherwise choose to live as good Christians were figuratively born as sinners. Placing their trust in their priests, they freely chose to give themselves over to false belief, and ultimately to damnation. Far from tolerating the teachings of other Christians with whom he disagreed, Pucci believed that it was imperative that they were shown to be false.

We are now in a position to understand Pucci's final ambition for his republic. He offered Christians a means to escape the superstitions imposed by a corrupt and self-serving clergy. Within his republic, like-minded Christians could live without fear that they might incur God's wrath by practicing corrupted versions of the faith instituted by the clergy. Together they could break the cycle of parents begetting ill-born children. Observing their strictly limited faith, they

[56]Pucci, *Forma*, 181.

could await, and perhaps contribute to, the formation of the council that would establish Christian truth. Yet, although Pucci may have presented his republic as a haven from doctrinal dispute, it is notable that in order to derive any benefit from his society, it was necessary to subscribe to his theological principles. One needed to accept his assertion that simply having faith in God, and refraining from engaging in corrupted practices was enough to ensure salvation.

Conclusion

Pucci's thought—whether on matters of soteriology or tolerance—was highly idiosyncratic, and consequently it is difficult to define according to established historiographical categories. This does not mean that none are relevant. To the contrary, aspects of his thought readily could be classified according to a number of existing categories. The problem is that none would fully capture the complexity of his thought. A new category could be developed to describe his ideas, but it would likely only be useful to describe this specific case. It may be more productive to conceptualize Pucci as someone who borrowed freely from a repertoire of contemporary ideas on toleration in order to develop solutions to the practical problem of Christian coexistence. An alternative approach to the intellectual history of toleration therefore may be to consider how individuals such as Pucci appropriated ideas and set them to use in the pursuit of specific ends, rather than to consider how they contributed to an abstract debate over the nature of toleration.