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An Army of the Devil in the *Indie Romane*: The Jesuits' Struggle against Religious Ignorance in the Early Seventeenth Century

Author: Jacopo Bertol, Università degli Studi "La Sapienza" di Roma

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An Army of the Devil in the *Indie Romane*: The Jesuits' Struggle against Religious Ignorance in the Early Seventeenth Century

JACOPO BERTOL

> It is not possible to explain by words the ignorance of things pertaining to the Christian faith that we found in the peasants and the shepherds around the countryside of the bishopric of Albano, which we call the "Indie romane." It was truly a thing worthy of great compassion to find near Rome, which is the head of the world, teacher of truth, people who were Christians, but without knowledge of our Savior Christ.[1]

From Rome, Catholicism sought to spread itself throughout the early modern world.[2] But, at a more local level, how did Catholic missionaries operate in the rural areas near the papal city? In the archival sources preserved at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), the countryside around seventeenth-century Rome emerges as a site of widespread religious ignorance, superstition, and magic. Its proximity to the center of Catholicism highlights the problem of religious education in rural areas. The rural missions are a key tool to access the everyday life of farmers and shepherds, and among the many religious orders involved, including the Capuchins, Theatines, and Barnabites, the Jesuits' missions are by far the best documented. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, there was an explosion of studies that investigated the internal missions in different national contexts as a fundamental device for spreading knowledge of the Tridentine decrees and promoting the teaching of faith.[3] Scholars have also underlined the permeability between internal and external missions, researching the Jes-

1. Rome, ARSI, *Rom.* 128/I, fols. 35r–42v, 35r.

2. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal (1540–1770)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation: Papacy and Peoples in the Early Modern World," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101 (2010): 186–208; Alison Forrestal and Seán Alexander Smith, eds., *The Frontiers of Mission: Perspectives on Early Modern Missionary Catholicism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Franco Motta, "Sguardo globale e storiografia sul cristianesimo di età moderna," *Rivista storica italiana* 132 (2020): 517–41.

3. Adriano Prosperi, "Otras Indias: Missionari della Controriforma tra contadini e selvaggi," in *Scienze, credenze occulte, livelli di cultura* (Florence: Olschki, 1982), 205–34; Louis Châtellier, *La religion des pauvres: Les missions rurales en Europe et la formation du catholicisme moderne, XVI–XIX siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1993); Bernadette Majorana, "Missionarius/concionator: Note sulla predicazione dei gesuiti nelle campagne (XVII–XVIII secolo)," *Aevum* 73, no. 3 (1999): 807–29; Federico Palomo Del Barrio, *Fazer dos campos escolas excelentes: Los jesuitas de Évora, la misión de interior y el disciplinamiento social en la época confesional (1551–1630)* (Florence: European University Institute, 2000); Francisco L. R. Callado, *Misiones populares en Espana entre el barroco y la Ilustración* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 2006); Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent, eds., *Missions religieuses modernes: "Notre lieu est le monde"* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007).

uit apostolate's essential and common traits from a global perspective, as can be seen in the works of Adriano Prosperi, Dominique Deslandres, Paolo Broggio, and Luke Clossey. However, interest has waned in more recent years.[4]

Why should we revisit a neglected topic like that of the internal missions? In 2010, in the face of the growth of studies on the Society, Emanuele Colombo traced a series of parallel tendencies of return toward familiar themes: toward Europe and Rome, toward the church's institutions, toward the medium of print, toward theology and spirituality, toward the Society's origins.[5] Returning to the internal missions aligns with the latest historiographical trends in Jesuit studies. Recent studies have focused on ideas of autonomy, flexibility, and negotiation, underlining the Society's ability to adapt to different contexts through the principle of accommodation.[6] The actions of the Jesuit fathers in the Roman countryside provoke considerations on the gap between the normative expectations and behavioral practices that have characterized the history of the Society since its foundation.[7]

The topics of witchcraft, magic, and superstition have thus far been little investigated in the field of Jesuit studies.[8] Even though the mission reports contain a treasure trove of valuable material and throw fresh light on the Jesuits' interactions with these practices in the field, existing works have mainly focused on the production of demonology manuals.[9]

The Jesuits regarded every act that deviated from the Tridentine decrees as a product of diabolic forces: for this reason, they directly targeted behaviors, speeches, and beliefs they judged as superstitious or blasphemous. In this way, every rural mission was a battle against Satan,[10] who actively propagated religious ignorance among farm-

4. Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 551–99; Dominique Deslandres, "Les missions françaises intérieures et lointaines, 1600–1650: Esquisse géo-historique," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 109 (1997): 505–38; Paolo Broggio, *Evangelizzare il mondo: Le missioni della Compagnia di Gesù tra Europa e America (secoli XVI–XVII)* (Rome: Carocci, 2004); Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

5. Emanuele Colombo, "Gesuitomania: Studi recenti sulle missioni gesuitiche (1540–1773)," in *Evangelizzazione e globalizzazione: Le missioni gesuitiche nell'età moderna tra storia e storiografia*, ed. Michela Catto, Guido Mongini, and Silvia Mostaccio (Roma: Dante Alighieri, 2010), 31–59.

6, Silvia Mostaccio, *Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014); Guido Mongini, *Maschere dell'identità: Alle origini della Compagnia di Gesù* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2018); Jessica Dalton, *Between Popes, Inquisitors, and Princes: How the First Jesuits Negotiated Religious Crisis in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Camilla Russell, *Being a Jesuit in Renaissance Italy: Biographical Writing in the Early Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

7. Silvia Mostaccio, "'Perinde ac si cadaver essent': Les jésuites dans une perspective comparative; La tension constitutive entre l'obéissance et le 'representar' dans les sources normatives des réguliers," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 105 (2010): 44–73; Fernanda Alfieri and Claudio Ferlan, "Storie di obbedienza negoziata," in *Avventure dell'obbedienza nella Compagnia di Gesù: Teorie e prassi tra XVI e XIX secolo*, ed. Fernanda Alfieri and Claudio Ferlan, 7–17 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 7–17.

8. Franco Motta, "Demoni, streghe, gesuiti: Contributo a una contestualizzazione storica," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 132, no. 1 (2020): 155–70.

9. Jan Machielsen, *Martin Delrìo: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

10. Bernard Dompnier, "Le diable des missionnaires des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," in *Les missions intérieures en France et en Italie du XVIe au XXe siècle*, ed. Christian Sorrel and Frédéric Meyer (Chambéry: Université de Savoie, 2001), 233–46, here 233–34.

ers and shepherds. In a bid to shed more light on this subject, this paper will therefore analyze the Jesuits' approach to unorthodox beliefs during the missions and their efforts to represent these deviant practices through the metaphor of the devil.

The Jesuits' reports of the missions reveal a series of different perspectives that bring out the vital importance of local contexts and offer new glimpses into rural inhabitants' beliefs. The main obstacle in researching this subject involves overcoming the rhetorical lens interposed by the Jesuits that was derived from their interpretation of apostolic tasks. The interaction between Jesuit rhetoric, focused on a narrative of martyrdom and sacrifice, and the reality of the desolate countryside near Rome is summarized by the idea of *Indie romane*, which is a geographical variation of a broader idea, *Indie di quaggiù*. The application of the term "Indie" to the Christian lands in Jesuit literature is a fascinating object of study and has been interpreted in different ways.[11] If this term, according to Prosperi, was proposed as a consolatory tool aimed at directing novices' aspirations of martyrdom toward the European countryside,[12] Luigi Fiorani has interpreted it as an instrument to break the illusion of a totally Christianized Europe and to propose a new goal for the Jesuits' apostolic efforts.[13] These two historians have studied the Roman countryside through a broader focus, analyzing the rural missions' general dynamics and developments. The current paper instead aims to overcome the fixed rhetorical schemes of the Jesuits' reports and identify the variety of unorthodox practices widespread in the countryside, the lenses adopted by the missionaries to understand them, and the methods the Jesuits used to interact with farmers and shepherds in the context of *Indie romane*.

In the Jesuit interpretation of the apostolate in the Roman countryside, missionaries were engaged in a continuous struggle against the advance of the devil, as repeated several times by Superior General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615, in office 1581–1615).[14] The Jesuit general expressed his ideas in a letter addressed to the Society's provincials, dated April 15, 1590, where he used the metaphor of a military battle to summarize the conflict between Jesuits and Satan in the countryside:

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11. Bernard Dompnier, "La France du premier XVIIe siècle et les frontières de la mission," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée* 109, no. 2 (1997): 621–52; Alessandro Guerra, "Per un'archeologia della strategia missionaria dei gesuiti: Le Indipetae e il sacrificio nella 'vigna del Signore,'" *Archivio italiano per la storia della Pietà* 13 (2000): 109–91; Elisa Novi Chavarria, *Il governo delle anime: Azione pastorale, predicazione e missioni nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica, 2001); Giuseppe Maria Viscardi, *Tra Europa e "Indie di quaggiù": Chiesa, religiosità e cultura popolare nel Mezzogiorno (secoli XV–XIX)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2005).

12. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 597.

13. Luigi Fiorani, "Cercando l'anime per la campagna: Missioni e predicazione dei gesuiti nell'agro romano nel secolo XVII," in *La predicazione in Italia dopo il Concilio di Trento: Tra Cinquecento e Settecento; Atti del X Convegno di studio dell'Associazione italiana dei professori di storia della Chiesa, Napoli, 6–9 settembre 1994*, ed. Giacomo Martina and Ugo Dovere (Rome: Edizioni dehoniane, 1996), 421–56.

14. Alessandro Guerra, *Un generale fra le milizie del papa: La vita di Claudio Acquaviva scritta da Francesco Sacchini della Compagnia di Gesù* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001); Francesca Cantù, "Il generalato di Claudio Acquaviva e l'identità missionaria della Compagnia di Gesù: Note e prospettive sulle missioni americane," in *A Companhia de Jesus na Península Ibérica nos sécs. XVI e XVII: Espiritualidade e cultura*, ed. José Freitas Carvalho (Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2004), 151–70; Paolo Broggio et al., eds., *I gesuiti ai tempi di Claudio Acquaviva: Strategie politiche, religiose e culturali tra Cinque e Seicento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2007); Flavio Rurale and Pierre-Antoine Fabre, eds., *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva's Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017).

> And it seems to me that since Satan has placed his army in the countryside [...], we who are part of his ordinary militia must no longer be content with a few light skirmishes, but having placed the squadrons in order, go to meet what I hope in Divine Goodness will be concurred with such abundance of graces, that a happy outcome will follow.[15]

This metaphor was not new to the Society, since it derived from the text of *Spiritual Exercises*: its model was the Meditation on the Two Standards, which created a strong connection between the moment of vocation and the apostolic mission.[16] It described the world as a place of conflict where two captains, Christ and Lucifer, were gathering their armies under the two opposite standards. As interpreted by Jerónimo Nadal, choosing the standard of Christ implied an obligation to imitate the model of Jesus's life.[17] Acquaviva therefore evoked this image to stress the importance of apostolic activities in rural areas.

Acquaviva's leadership was a pivotal period in the development of the Jesuit model of mission:[18] on several occasions, he sought to promote missionary practice and make it a systematic activity of the Society. Among the general directives he issued from 1590 to 1599, the *De jubilee et missionibus* (On the jubilee and the missions) in 1590 aimed to compensate for insufficient efforts in the countryside through wider coordination.[19] This text was followed by *De fervore missionum* (On the fervor of the missions) in 1594 and *De modo missionum* (On the manner of the missions) in 1599, where the general proposed the institution of temporary residences for missionaries, distinct from the colleges,[20] and ordered that each province should assign between six and twelve priests to the missions. These provisions did not mark an immediate turning point in overcoming the chronic problems of infrequent and limited missions, but they nevertheless initiated a process from the center that would realize its full potential later in the seventeenth century.

In addition to these general directives, complementary instructions were exclusively aimed at the Jesuits undertaking a mission in the Roman countryside,[21] underlining the importance of this terrain for the Society. A comparison between the model suggested by the instructions and the narration in the reports of the missions reveals sharp caesura—there were some exceptional circumstances that the instructions could not foresee, especially where the supernatural was concerned: encounters with the

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15. ARSI, *Instit.* 122, fols. 30v–32r, *Lettera di N.P. Generale il P. Claudio Acquaviva ai provinciali della Compagnia delli 15 d'aprile 1590*, 32r.
16. Federico Palomo Del Barrio, "De algunas cosas que sucedieron estando en misión: Espiritualidad jesuita y escritura misionera en la península Ibérica (siglos XVI–XVII)," in Carvalho, *A Companhia de Jesus na Península Ibérica nos sécs. XVI e XVII*, 119–50; Adriano Prosperi, "The Two Standards: The Origins and Development of a Celebrated Ignatian Meditation," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2, no. 3 (2015): 361–86.
17. Jerónimo Nadal, "Exhortationes complutenses" [1561], in *Epistolae et monumenta P. Hieronymi Nadal*, vol. 5, *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu* (Rome: De Miguel Nicolau, 1962), 206–448.
18. Sabina Pavone, *I gesuiti: Dalle origini alla soppressione, 1540–1773* (Rome: Laterza, 2018), 62–71.
19. Bernadette Majorana, "Tra carità e cultura," in Broggio et al., *I gesuiti ai tempi di Claudio Acquaviva*, 219–60.
20. Majorana, "Tra carità e cultura," 225–26.
21. ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* 720/A, fols. 37r–39v, *Istruzione per li padri della missione delle campagne di Roma*, fol. 37r.

devil, apparitions, and local superstitious practices. After describing their itinerary and engagement with the rural inhabitants, missionaries tended to use the following formula: "Now we will propose some things worthy of some consideration."[22] In this way, a rupture was introduced that shifts away from the story of success described up to that point. What can be found in this break? A series of stories and practices that turned away from the triumphalist logic of Jesuit rhetoric and underlined the devil's advance. In the reports of missions in the *Indie romane*, the devil operated through different agents and practices, which the Jesuits had to devise new strategies against every time they encountered them.[23] This evil figure acted as a metaphor to understand the ignorance prevalent among farmers and shepherds in the countryside.[24]

The most common form by which the devil manifested himself was blasphemy, which the Jesuits viewed as widespread among the lowest strata of society. Indeed, the confrontation with unrepentant blasphemers is an ever-present *topos* in Jesuit reports. A representative example can be offered for the small town of Cori in the southern part of Lazio, as related in an anonymous report of 1613. There, the Jesuits encountered a man whom they described in the following terms:

> A horrible blasphemer had repeatedly denied Christ, his blood, and his passion, and his death, violating his divine goodness even more with unworthy words. Once taking an image of him crucified, he put it under his feet and trampled on it, then taking it in his hand he spat it all out, denying him and in spite of him adoring the devil, then taking a dagger he tore it all apart with such rage that it seemed like a demon.[25]

In this example, the fathers found themselves facing a convinced apostate who denied the dogmas of the Christian faith and despised the crucifix. His rejection of the truth of Christianity was connected to the set of practices underlying the ritual gestures of the sabbath,[26] including trampling and spitting on the image of Christ. This blind rage effaced the human aspect and caused the apostate to assume—in the words of the Jesuit—the guise of a demon. Nevertheless, the Jesuits were able to reintegrate this apostate into the social and religious community through the spiritual weapons of confession and forgiveness. His sin had been forgiven by the decision to confess his life. For this reason, the Jesuits' success became even more relevant.

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22. ARSI, *Rom.* 128/2, fols. 599r–602r, Pascasio Romualdo and Tommaso Abrecundio, *Relatione della missione fatta alle Diocesi Tuscolane et Albanese*, fol. 599r.

23. For similar episodes in the Jesuit missions in the New World, see Serge Gruzinski, "Délires et visions chez les indiens du Mexique," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen-Âge, temps modernes* 86, no. 2 (1974): 445–80; Dominique Deslandres, "Le diable en mission: Le rôle du diable dans les missions en France et en Nouvelle-France," in Sorrel and Meyer, *Les missions intérieures en France et en Italie*, 247–62; Fábio Eduardo Cressoni, "Na boca do inferno: A América diabólica projetada pela Companhia de Jesus," *Diálogos* 18, no. 2 (2014): 571–605.

24. Dompnier, "Le diable des missionnaires des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," 233–46.

25. ARSI, *Rom.* 130/2, fols. 401r–410v, Anon., *Relatione della missione fatta in Velletri et sua diocesi nel 1613*, fol. 402v.

26. For the meaning and the history of sabbaths, see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1976); Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Longmans, 1987); Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del sabba* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989); Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

The greater problem here was not just ignorance but apostasy. Apostates were present in most communities. In their mission in the diocese of Albano between March and April 1614, two priests, Giulio Sini and Michele Severo, recounted having confessed a man "so bad that he no longer believed in God or the saints,"[27] even though he had never given any sign of this conviction during his life: even after he confessed, he continued to hide the truth. In front of the missionaries, however, he declared that he had made multiple pacts with the devil to have his enemies killed.

In both cases, these were not mere superstitions or the products of ignorance but forms of apostasy. The outcome in the reports was always the same: the confession of sins and the sinner's reinstatement in the eyes of God. However, the devil not only manifested himself through the words of a blasphemer but could also take on the appearance of a wolf who terrorized the shepherds' livestock.[28] The wolf was an ever-present threat in the reality and culture of the *Indie Romane*,[29] a beast that competed directly with men in the struggle for survival. The appearance of a wolf during a mission was a distraction for the shepherds that prevented them from taking part in the Jesuits' activities and celebrations.

The devil could also be complicit in murder. In a letter about a mission in Albano, sent to the provincial father Decio Striverio on May 5, 1612, the priest Andrea Porcari focused on a tragic event that had upset the life of the community, reporting that "three little girls of nine or ten years went to the vineyard, and a man chased them away and took one who was nine years and choked her with a rope and cut her ear."[30] In the face of this murder, villagers suggested that it had been carried out by a sorcerer, with the ear being used for a curse. The attention the Jesuits gave to the murder testifies to the extent to which they were able to share the lifestyle and fears of a community during their missions. Like the inhabitants of *Indie romane*, the Jesuits wanted to understand what was behind this crime, and, in their eyes, witchcraft was the only possible explanation.

This episode raises a question: How did the Jesuit priests behave in the face of a curse? During a mission in Cisterna in 1613, a priest and some women saw two candles burning behind a closed window with a ball of wire and some nails in the middle of them. When one of the local priest's elderly uncle caught sight of these candles, he immediately fell to the ground and was left blind:

> Therefore, since everyone was in great fear, and confusion, the priest took those images, and having made everyone kneel down, he pronounced little by little, followed by all the others, the words of those prayers. Marvelous thing in a moment those lights, and diabolical things disappeared, and the old man recovered his sight, and the priest

27. ARSI, *Rom.* 131/1, fols. 73r–74v, Julius Sini and Michael Severus, *Relatione della missione fatta alle capanne et altri luochi della Diocesi di Albano, l'anno 1614, nel mese di marzo e aprile*, fol. 73v.
28. ARSI, *Rom.* 128/1, fols. 35r–42v, 35v.
29. Mario Scaduto, "La strada e i primi gesuiti," *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 40 (1971): 323–90.
30. ARSI, *Rom.* 130/1, fols. 139r–139v, Andrea Porcari, Albano, letter to Decio Striverio, May 5, 1612, fol. 139r.

> came full of wonder to tell us the fact, so that we could help him to thank the Lord.[31]

This story can be read as a direct confrontation between the tools of the Jesuits and the devil. The hands of the fathers came into action through the images and devotions, which they bestowed on the priest and the women, using them to defeat the curse. Faced with a magical threat, a member of the secular clergy decided to rely on sacred objects to drive away evil and restore the elderly man's sight. Here, it is possible to observe the main danger inherent in the images: the possibility of using them for apotropaic and therapeutic purposes.[32] The object's material nature could become more important than the model it was supposed to convey. This dynamic was favored by the fact that the priest himself, who should have supervised their correct use, had assumed that ambivalent appearance. He became a fluid figure between the curate and the sorcerer, which was typical of the pre-Tridentine clergy and persisted even during the Counter-Reformation.[33] The story's outcome naturally celebrated the work of the missionaries, who had played an important, albeit indirect, role in overcoming the curse. The sudden disappearance of the diabolical objects and the elderly man's parallel recovery of his sight amplified the story's exceptional nature, which fell within the sphere of the supernatural. This tendency toward a miraculous transposition of episodes was a characteristic trait of the Jesuits' mentality in their quest to construct a self-congratulatory history and memory.[34] The sphere of the supernatural helped to increase the Society's successes beyond reality.

Among the magical tools widespread in the Roman countryside, the *breve*, a small sheet of paper, was exceptionally popular during the seventeenth century. In the rural areas, the written word possessed a magical power that went beyond its meaning: it was not something to be understood but to be used.[35] For the same practical reason, the effectiveness of a magical ritual could depend more on an object's material than its meaning.[36] These texts were used, therefore, as talismans or amulets to be placed at the core of magical rites. Through their ability to access domestic environments and observe daily practices, the Jesuits had a better chance of identifying these objects and their owners than ecclesiastical courts. The Jesuits' objective was to acquire or confiscate as many of these *brevi* as possible in order to burn them, without however investigating their meaning or seeking the reasons for their use. In the report for the mission in the diocese of Albano in 1601, some missionaries had compiled a list of all the "silly superstitions" believed by the farmers. Among these, one stood out—it was based on the idea that a sheet of sheepskin parchment had the power to defend the wearer from wounds or injuries: "We found someone who was completely convinced that by carrying around a certain sheet of parchment on which were written very intri-

31. ARSI, *Rom*. 130/2, fols. 401r–410v, 409v.
32. Paolo Cozzo, *Andate in pace: Parroci e parrocchie in Italia dal Concili di Trento a papa Francesco* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 76.
33. Cozzo, *Andate in pace*, 67.
34. Adriano Prosperi, *La vocazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), 29.
35. Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli: "Clavicula Salomonis" e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: Bonnard, 2001), 103–6.
36. Owen Davies, *Magic: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

cate characters and holy words mixed with others from an unknown language, he was absolutely sure he could not be hurt or disliked."[37]

A simple sheet of written words without a meaning became a powerful tool of self-defense not only from physical offenses but social ones too. A sheet of parchment played a major role in another episode in the nearby diocese of Tuscolo, as written in Pascasio Romualdo and Tommaso Abrecumbio's report from June 1604. After listing the estates through which the missionaries had passed, the fathers wrote that "many superstitions have been removed, together with invocations of demons and rags written that taught how to cast spells."[38] One of these was a healing ritual around a *breve*, practiced by a peasant family, which was based on the belief that physical discomfort could be transferred from man to animal through a series of symbolic steps around the *breve*. The outcome of the story confirms the hard line the missionaries adopted toward these practices:

> Since the curate was never able to get his hands on this document, he arranged for a relative of the master to take it and show it to us, and with this invention he had it torn up and burned, knowing that the master made little noise when he understood that we had been sent by His Holiness.[39]

Another superstition was thus eliminated through a ploy, which involved a female member of the owner's family. This type of informal resolution imposed a ban on the transgressor without incurring the scandal of a trial. This was a very different strategy from the procedural methods of the Holy Office's tribunals, which manifested a desire for knowledge of these objects to establish the specifics of the crime in order to come to the appropriate judgment. Two opposing strategies are therefore apparent: on the one hand, verifying and decoding the *brevi* through sight to discern their meaning, and physically appropriating and destroying them to erase their existence on the other.

Here, it is possible to identify an aspect of the Society's autonomy: when the priests faced unorthodox religious practices, at least during the period in question, they hardly ever asked for the intervention of the Holy Office or the bishops. The reason for this can best be illustrated using an example from a mission carried out in Sermoneta in May 1606,[40] when the Jesuits had to work to eliminate the "bad opinion" the community had developed about the Society after some missionaries had broken confessional secrecy in a previous mission, leading an inquisitorial process to be opened against a woman. Collaboration with ecclesiastical tribunals entailed the risk of breaking the atmosphere of trust, which was the basis of a mission's success. The Society's relationship with secular and ecclesiastical institutions and with other religious orders is key to understanding the reports and discovering the Jesuits' rhetorical strategy: on the one

37. ARSI, *Rom.* 128/I, fols. 35r–42v, 37r.
38. ARSI, *Rom.* 128/2, fols. 475v–476v, Pascasio Romualdo and Tommaso Abrecumbio, *Relatione della missione fatta per il Vescovato di Tuscolano, 1604*, fol. 476v.
39. ARSI, *Rom.* 128/2, fols. 475v–476v, Pascasio Romualdo and Tommaso Abrecumbio, *Relatione della missione fatta per il Vescovato di Tuscolano, 1604*, fol. 476v.
40. ARSI, *Rom.* 129/1, fols. 184r–184v, Filippo Nappi and Giovanni Battista Palmucci, *Breve relazione della missione di Sermoneta, et Bassiano*, fol. 184r.

hand, there was a constant attempt to build and maintain good relations with the bishops and the local clergy; yet, on the other, missionaries expressed strong disapproval toward any institution that placed obstacles in their path. Nonetheless, the rhetorical scheme dictated that each episode should end in success.

Within the rhetorical framework of the Jesuit apostolate, the devil's deceptions were his primary weapon to affect the villagers' everyday life. In the Jesuits' eyes, the devil was the principal force behind refusals to confess and seek absolution. Sometimes, the relationship between the apostate and the diabolical forces could be told as a real experience, with the encounter with the devil even taking place in human form. The *L'informatione del Collegio di Sezza* for the annual letters of the year 1613 summarizes the successes of the students during the year.[41] In this document, two similar stories attribute the same function to the devil: obstructing confession. The first concerned a young man who had encountered Satan in the form of a pilgrim:

> The above-mentioned young man, going elsewhere on business, met a hermit, who fixed his eyes on him, and said several times, "Oh poor young man"; when the young man asked the reason why, the hermit added, "Your soul is in a miserable state; if you promise me with an oath never to confess your sins, you will find yourself faithfully exposing yourself as your soul is." The young man, out of curiosity to know if he was telling the truth, swore.[42]

The refusal to confess in this episode was described as the result of a real event in the life of the young man, who had trusted the words of this mysterious figure, mistaking him for an angelic creature. Only after many years did the sermon of a Jesuit enlighten the man's mind on the nature of the devil's deception. The figures of the devil and the pilgrim were so strongly intertwined as to generate confusion in the writing process: as evidence of this, on one occasion the author of the *Informatione* felt compelled to cancel the word devil and replace it with peregrine.

The second story is of a more tragic nature: the protagonist was not only the victim of a deception but claimed to have been raped several times by the devil himself.[43] The woman's story revolved around violent encounters with the devil. In this case, the turning point in her life was also marked by the encounter with the missionaries, who managed to make the woman confess. The Jesuits thus achieved another important victory through confession.

The last form of the devil's appearance allowed a direct contact between the dark forces and the army of the Lord: during the missions, episodes of demonic possession could occur, and exorcism became a necessary tool. An example is reported in an anonymous report of the mission carried out in Velletri in 1612. The night after the Jesuits' sermon in the town square, which had touched the soul of a woman,

41. ARSI, *Rom.* 130/2, fols. 470r–472r, *L'informatione del Collegio di Sezza per le lettere annue.*
42. ARSI, *Rom.* 130/2, fols. 470r–472r, *L'informatione del Collegio di Sezza per le lettere annue,* fol. 471v.
43. ARSI, *Rom.* 130/2, fols. 470r–472r, *L'informatione del Collegio di Sezza per le lettere annue,* fol. 472r.

> a demon appeared to her and occupied her in such a way that she could not move; she tried as hard as she could to say Jesus, but she could not move her lips or utter a voice; after thinking internally and trying again, she finally managed to say Jesus, at which voice the demon, mocking, disappeared, and she came to make a good confession.[44]

No exorcism was practiced in person, but the woman with her strength alone was able to free herself from a state of demonic possession, pronouncing the word "Jesus." This nocturnal event and the subsequent decision to confess lead this experience back to the previous story of the woman raped by the devil. This kind of event may have been the product of a previous indoctrination,[45] derived from the arguments expressed by the Jesuits' sermons. These arguments could accentuate in the farmers the fear of the threat of the devil, which, in their eyes, assumed a real shape. The sense of guilt experienced by those who refused to confess their sins activated a series of psychological mechanisms that could cause the impression of an encounter with the figure of the devil.[46] The heroic tale of the woman's possession and liberation from the devil can thus be seen as the projection of internal and unconscious tensions.

The Jesuit priests, on the other hand, took note of all these stories and used them as evidence of the success of their actions. The battle against ignorance carried out in the missions was outlined more concretely in these episodes, which described the devil as part of everyday reality and as an active enemy, complicating the wider struggle against unbelief and superstition. In this way, the Jesuit reports highlight the sense of urgency, described in the earlier-mentioned letter of Superior General Acquaviva,[47] which invited the fathers to multiply their efforts to protect Rome in the face of the advance of Satan's army in the countryside. Gathering successful examples in the reports of missions was also a tool to elaborate new procedural rules in the instructions, promoting the circulation of knowledge within the Society. These stories testified that the devil was not only penetrating the rural world in a capillary way but that he was in fact close to reaching the gates of Rome. Through their work in the rural missions, the Jesuits had been able to achieve a series of important victories, each time driving the devil out from the *Indie romane*.

Through these stories in the reports of the Jesuit fathers, this paper has explored the variety of unorthodox practices and beliefs that were widespread in the *Indie romane* and were condemned by missionaries as superstitious and blasphemous. In the rhetorical scheme of Jesuit narrative, every deviation from orthodoxy was represented through the metaphor of the devil, who was actively committed to corrupting the souls of farmers and shepherds. If some repetitions of *topoi* and similar episodes in the reports from different missions suggest the need to question the picture of success outlined by the Jesuits, these sources nonetheless allow us to reconstruct the condi-

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44. ARSI, *Rom*. 130/2, fols. 293r–294v, 293v.
45. Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609–1614* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 306.
46. Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 76–77.
47. ARSI, *Instit*. 122, fols. 30v–32r.

tions of religious ignorance and disbelief that were typical in the rural areas of the Italian peninsula during the first decades of seventeenth century. For these reasons, examining the missions in close proximity to the Catholic center further challenges our understanding of the impact of the Counter-Reformation: the Jesuits described the inhabitants of the *Indie romane* as "people who were Christians, but without knowledge of our Savior Christ,"[48] once again calling into question the progress of religious education in the early seventeenth century.

48. ARSI, *Rom*. 128/I, fols. 35r–42v, 35r.