Challenges to Episcopal Authority in Seventeenth-Century Padua

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Abstract:

The Decrees of the Council of Trent expanded episcopal authority to ensure bishops would have sufficient power to enact and enforce reforms. Bishops with large dioceses, however, found it difficult to maintain consistent control over all their parishes, which significantly hindered the progress of reform. Like many of his contemporaries, Cardinal-Bishop Gregorio Barbarigo of Padua (bp. 1664-1697) attempted to overcome this challenge through a combination of bureaucratic organization and pastoral visitations, which proved insufficient. Although episcopal authority was theoretically extended over the diocese through his network of *vicari foranei*, in reality many vicars were inefficient administrators and the lower clergy and laity tended to respect episcopal authority only as embodied in the bishop himself. Barbarigo maintained control when physically present in a parish, but found his authority subverted when he was away, thwarting the progress of reform in Padua. Some of his vicars were simply negligent administrators, but even those who assiduously performed their duties found that Barbarigo's flock understood episcopal power as personal power, rendering it impossible for him to extend his authority through an abstract bureaucracy.

As the reformers at the Council of Trent (1545-63) contemplated the future of the Catholic Church, they knew that bishops would be on the front lines during the reform process and ensured that their authority was strengthened and clearly stated in the decrees. Ideally, the bishop's flock would be willing participants who would follow his program once they received the Tridentine Decrees and the necessary resources, but the reformers were not naïve enough to believe this would be the only reaction to reform. They realized that bishops were likely to face significant resistance from both lower clergy and laity. If the opponents to reform were in the minority, their neighbors might overrule them: parish clergy had some authority over laity and laypeople were at minimum capable of protesting clerical transgressions. However, when the acts of defiance or disobedience grew into serious disturbances or the majority of a parish wanted to resist the bishop's efforts to reform, only he had the authority to levy more serious

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disciplinary penalties such as excommunication, suspension, and deprivation of benefice. In its most troubled moments, the fate of Tridentine reform in a particular diocese rested in the hands of an individual bishop. Although many dioceses covered small territories and contained few parishes outside the urban center, some bishops had jurisdiction over several hundred parishes, which complicated their task. Many historians have explored the challenges presented by disinterested bishops, poverty, secular political obstruction, or other obstacles that effectively prevented reforms from commencing. This work, in contrast, will explore an issue faced by those reform-minded bishops fortunate enough to have wealthy, but large, dioceses in which a reform plan could be implemented. The challenge these bishops faced was to devise a method of reform that allowed them to make their authority felt across the diocese and to supervise quotidian religious life in all their parishes, even when their physical presence was not feasible. Without this sort of governance, clergy and laity uninterested in the reform process would find it relatively facile to defy the bishop's mandates, creating disturbances in parishes across the diocese. When the volume of these disruptions grew, the bishop would find himself hard pressed to regain control, and his reform plans would suffer.

This scenario is what San Gregorio Barbarigo, Cardinal-Bishop of Padua from 1664-1697, faced as he devoted the last three decades of his life to an attempt to revitalize the Church in his diocese. Constant challenges from many of his 327 parishes tested the limits of his authority and forced him to spend much of his time correcting blatant abuses, rather than developing and nurturing the religious culture of Padua. His inability to maintain control consistently over the entire diocese helps to explain why reform made little progress under his tenure, in spite of his extraordinary efforts and Padua's privileged position as one of the

wealthiest dioceses in Italy.[1] This paper will examine some of the ways in which clergy and laity challenged episcopal authority through analysis of events in two of Barbarigo's more troublesome parishes. In each, members of his flock attempted to subvert Tridentine reforms and obtain personal gains that conflicted with Barbarigo's image of the post-Tridentine Church.

By all accounts, Gregorio Barbarigo was an ideal Tridentine bishop. As the eldest son of Gianfrancesco Barbarigo, a prominent Venetian patrician who served on the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia* for much of his son's episcopal career, Gregorio had powerful political allies in Venice.[2] In addition to the connections provided by his father and his family name, he had started his own career in politics, attending the treaty talks at Westphalia at the age of eighteen. There he met and befriended Fabio Chigi, who would later become Pope Alexander VII. Chigi's friendship and guidance inspired Barbarigo to alter his path, and when he returned from Westphalia he enrolled at the University of Padua to study law *in utroque* and took clerical orders. His devotion, intelligence, and connections in both Rome and Venice led to a rapid rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He held a papal appointment in Rome for a few years, and then was named Bishop of Bergamo in 1657, cardinal in 1660, and Bishop of Padua in 1664.[3] Venice and Padua were strong supporters of both his promotion to the cardinalate and his move to Padua. His political power was undeniable, and while in Bergamo he had gained a reputation as a model bishop and dedicated reformer. Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, who would later become Pope Alexander VIII, remarked in the early 1660s that Padua "need[ed] an Apostle more than a bishop," and evidently the papacy and the secular government in the Veneto considered

[1] Stella, "L'età postridentina," 237.
[2] The *Esecutori contro la bestemmia* were responsible for punishing blasphemers and other moral offenders in Venice, often working alongside the Inquisition.
[3] On Barbarigo's career before his entrance into Padua, see Montanari, *Gregorio Barbarigo a Bergamo.*

Barbarigo to have the ideal combination of political and spiritual authority to be successful in Padua.[4]

Although many bishops were unable to enact some of the Tridentine decrees because of financial difficulties, Barbarigo was fortunate in Padua. The extensive financial resources at his disposal allowed him to reinvigorate the then-failing seminary and turn it into one of the premier centers for clerical education in Europe.[5] Once the seminary was well established, he installed a printing press there, allowing him to publish everything from textbooks for seminarians to catechism books and decrees that he sent to his parishes. He believed firmly that the greatest obstacle to reform was ignorance, and education was an important segment of his reform plan, so it was crucial that his flock have access to the appropriate didactic materials.[6]

Padua's assets also helped him to develop his supervisory plans. In 1572, Bishop Nicolò Ormaneto had instituted a network of *vicari foranei*, parish clergy who were charged with monitoring ecclesiastics in surrounding parishes, but the system had fallen into disuse.[7] Barbarigo revitalized the program, expanding it to 46 vicarages of between 1 and 13 parishes each.[8] Most bishops who utilized the *vicari foranei* system chose vicars in one of two ways. They either appointed trusted priests, as Carlo Borromeo had done, or had the position automatically go to the parish priest of *chiese matrice* of the area.[9] Barbarigo chose a middle ground: he appointed his vicars, but only chose priests already within the vicarage. When he had no specific information to help him choose, he appointed the parish priests of the *chiese matrice*, but reserved the right to transfer the seat of the vicarage if the chosen priests proved irresponsible

[4] Ippolito, *Politica e carriere ecclesiastiche*, 83-84.
[5] Serena, *S. Gregorio Barbarigo e la vita spirituale e culturale*, 1-2.
[6] Billanovich, "Le 'Relationes ad limina' di Gregorio Barbarigo," 221.
[7] Billanovich, *Fra centro e periferia*, 1-4.
[8] Vicarages that only included one parish were fairly large cities with cathedral chapters, which meant the city might have upwards of twenty priests. The average number of priests per vicarage was about 17 at the time of Barbarigo's death. This data is taken from Bertazzi, *Stato della diocesi*, BSP.
[9] Prodi, "Tra centro e periferia," 220.

or incapable. In many cases, it seems that Barbarigo's selection method led to vicars who were ill prepared for their new supervisory role.[10]

In order to make his authority felt even in his absence, the vicars were required to make bi-annual visitations of each church in their jurisdiction and hold monthly meetings with all the clergy in the vicarage. During these congregations, the clerics would discuss *casi di coscienza*, providing them with a form of continuing education as they contemplated the bishop's hypothetical spiritual quandaries. To ensure that Barbarigo was kept informed of the state of his diocese, vicars were required to write quarterly reports and attend annual meetings in Padua, and were instructed to contact the bishop more frequently if necessary.[11] When they encountered minor offenses or examples of ignorance, such as occasional drunkenness and other indecorous behaviors or an inability to properly explain church doctrine, vicars were supposed to "fraternally admonish" the clergy under their jurisdiction to change their ways.[12] More serious offenses, such as obstinate concubinage, refusal to attend to the *cura animarum*, or consistent absence without excuse from monthly congregations, were to be reported to the bishop. On rare occasions, Barbarigo granted a vicar judiciary powers to prosecute an errant cleric, but normally vicars were restricted to delivering warnings and alerting the bishop.[13]

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[10] For example, the vicar of Torre seems to have had a particularly difficult time establishing his authority. It came to Barbarigo's attention in 1676 that the priests from two of his ten parishes refused to attend monthly congregations. A short while later, Barbarigo wrote to the same vicar admonishing him for his own failure to remain in his parish, telling him he was not to go "to Padua without a license from one of your fellow parish priests, otherwise we will yell very loudly." ("Non venite a Padova senza licenza in scritto di uno de v[ost]ri Comparochi vicini, altrimenti grideremo forte assai.") Finally, in 1679, the vicar was having problems with the priest of a third parish, and Barbarigo learned from a layman that this priest refused to attend the monthly congregations because he felt "the vicar of Torre is too young with respect to the others, and he is very imperious, and ambitious." ("Il vicario di Torre é troppo giovene respetive a gl'altri, et habbia molto imperio, et ambitione.") The letters are found in *Miscellanea Barbarigo II,* n.p., BSP. The layman's testimony is found in *Inquisitiones* 87, n.p., ACVP.

[11] Billanovich, *Fra centro e periferia,* 25.

[12] Ibid., 27.

[13] At one point, Barbarigo granted the vicar of Piove di Sacco the right to preside over a case against one of his parish priests because Barbarigo was unable to personally appear within a reasonable period of time. Ibid., 27-45.

The Tridentine Decrees required that visitations be conducted at least once every two years (preferably annually), and Barbarigo, like many other bishops in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, envisioned the vicars as a way to make this feasible.[14] Visiting 327 parishes was an exhausting project: in 33 years, Barbarigo completed three full visitations, visiting any given parish roughly once a decade. Ideally, the vicars would serve as Barbarigo's bureaucrats, acting in his name and under his authority on the periphery of the diocese while transmitting information back to the center, allowing him to make the most of his periodic visits and fulfill his Tridentine duty of annual visitations in each parish.[15]

In spite of Barbarigo's tireless efforts (which led to his beatification in 1761 and his eventual canonization in 1960), it is difficult to discern any significant progress in the copious reports from his diocesan visitations. The records comprise over twenty thousand folios in 42 *buste* recording the bishop's actions, conversations, and inquisitorial proceedings, and they are rife with incidences of clerical and lay disobedience, ignorance, and defiance.[16] Though the offenders and their locations sometimes change, Barbarigo was constantly bombarded with situations that tested his authority and hindered his reform efforts. The size and geographic distribution of the diocese certainly contributed to his challenge: Padua's 327 parishes were split into two distinct areas. About half of the diocese was around Padua, while the other half was up in the Dolomite Mountains, with a section of the diocese of Vicenza running between them. While weather made traveling to the mountainous parishes perilous in winter, heat kept the

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[14] For example, the dioceses of Bologna, Vicenza, Milan, Aquileia, Rimini, and Bergamo all had *vicari foranei*. Prodi, "Lineamenti dell'organizzazione"; Mantese, "L'origine dei vicariati foranei"; Maselli, "L'organizzazione della diocesi"; Gervaso, "L'istituzione dei vicariati foranei"; Turchini, *Clero e fedeli a Rimini*; Montanari, *Gregorio Barbarigo a Bergamo*.

[15] The Tridentine Decrees required at least a complete visitation every two years, which could be delegated to another official if necessary. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 193.

[16] In comparison to Barbarigo's 42 *buste*, there are 4 *buste* from the episcopate of Federico Cornaro (bp. 1577-1590), 6 from Marco Corner (bp. 1594-1625), 8 from Giorgio Corner (bp. 1643-1663), and 6 from another Giorgio Corner (bp. 1697-1722). All are part of the series *Visitationes*, ACVP.

bishop from traveling much in summer, and the requirements of the cardinalate forced him to spend more time in Rome than he wished.[17] His bureaucratic network of vicars helped, but for it to function as intended, every vicar had to be trustworthy, diligent, and competent, which was not always the case. Barbarigo found some of his vicars to be negligent and others willfully defiant, which often meant that he arrived on a visitation with no advance notice of the disorder he would soon discover. Some of his vicars may have been competent officials, but those who were not contributed to a situation in which roughly a quarter to a third of parish clergy in the extra-urban regions of the diocese of Padua were deficient in some way throughout Barbarigo's tenure.[18] In the end, episcopal authority was inconsistently applied, creating conditions under which the clergy and laity were able to ignore or challenge the reforms they disliked.

Disobedient priests caused Barbarigo a great deal of distress. He lived his own life as a model cleric as was his responsibility, greatly valuing his own frugality, asceticism, and chastity, and he expected the same of his clergy.[19] Unfortunately, many of them lacked his discipline and commitment to their vows; for some, the priesthood was not a calling, but an occupation. Barbarigo worked ceaselessly both to reform errant clerics and to ensure that the new priests ordained under him were devoted to their choice, but was not always successful in either endeavor. One of his most vexatious priests was Don Pietro Zanone, who became parish priest of the village of Alano in 1670. During Barbarigo's first visit to Alano in 1666, he had found no

[17] Barbarigo participated in five papal conclaves during his tenure in Padua. Evidence of his consistent desire to return home to Padua whenever he was called to Rome can be found throughout his correspondence. For some examples, see Pampaloni, *Gregorio Barbarigo alla corte di Roma,* 223, 249, 269, 296.

[18] It is difficult to judge how many of his vicars were diligent, as most of the vicarial reports are now lost. Barbarigo should have received 92 visitation reports, 552 casuistry reports, and 46 *status animarum* reports per year in addition to *ad hoc* correspondence sent as issues arose. However, only two visitation reports, one from the vicarage of Teolo in 1672, and another from the vicarage of Monselice in 1693 were preserved among the bishop's visitation records. The visitation of Teolo is bound into ACVP, *Visitationes* 41, fols. 383r-386v. The visitation of Monselice is tucked into the back of *Inquisitiones* 86 and is not paginated.

[19] Not content with merely maintaining his vow of celibacy, he even refused to allow any women access to the episcopal palace and refused to lodge with noblewomen while on visitation if their husbands were away or they were widowed. Schutte, "Gregorio Barbarigo e le donne," 851.

significant troubles, but by his second visit there in 1674, Zanone had taken over the parish and problems manifested themselves.[20] Alano was in the vicarage of Quero, near the northern edge of the diocese at the foot of a mountain, about 80 kilometers from Padua. The weather in this area made visitations difficult, but Barbarigo still managed five visits in total, four of them during the last two decades of his episcopate. To keep an eye on Zanone, he went to Alano roughly twice as often as he visited most parishes. During their first encounter in 1674, Barbarigo was not yet aware of the grief Zanone would cause him. He found it difficult to decide if Zanone was simply a naïve country cleric who lacked the proper diligence or if he was defiant and manipulative.[21] When he arrived in Alano, he found that the church, like the others in the vicarage, needed a number of minor improvements and new furnishings.[22] This was often the case in poorer parishes, which had insufficient funds to keep up with the building's needs, but it could also indicate a careless cleric. More importantly, Barbarigo discovered that the people of Alano and some surrounding villages considered one of their roadside shrines to be miraculous.

After the Council of Trent, bishops were instructed to be cautious about supposedly miraculous occurrences in their dioceses. Although the Church's official position remained that religious images could be the vehicle for saintly intercession, the decrees urged prudence about them. In the twenty-fifth session, the canons stated that "no new miracles [will] be accepted and no relics recognized unless they have been investigated and approved by the…bishop."[23] Barbarigo was very serious about following the Tridentine decrees and was also a thoroughly practical theologian who was often drawn to scientific explanations for supposed miracles.[24] He

[20] Billanovich, "Esperienze religiose negate," 44.
[21] Ibid., 56.
[22] *Visitationes* 43, fols. 345r-347v, ACVP.
[23] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 216-217.
[24] Billanovich, "Esperienze religiose negate," 54.

was thus predisposed to doubt the image of Alano from both a Tridentine and a personal standpoint.

When Barbarigo began to investigate the image, Zanone presented him with a description of the painting and recorded testimonies of various witnesses to the supposed miracles. The image was an oil painting of the Madonna and Child on a country road. According to Zanone's notes, certain laypeople said the image sweated in summer, changed colors, emitted odors and "rays of splendor," and opened and closed its eyes.[25] Some also heard the litany sung by a choir of angels as they gazed at the painting. The image was reported to have cured many cripples and sick people, though most of them were from other towns and many of their names were unknown; often the only evidence of a cure was an abandoned pair of crutches or a rumor. Finally, Zanone asserted that the image had resurrected a stillborn baby long enough for him to baptize it.[26]

Some of the witnesses and beneficiaries of the miracles reported were from Quero, the seat of the *vicario foraneo*, so it is probable that he was aware of the events in Alano. Yet he obviously had not reported the miracles out of either excitement or suspicion to Barbarigo, who arrived in Alano unaware of what lay ahead. The vicar's negligence can perhaps be explained by the problems Barbarigo found in all five parishes in this vicarage, including Quero. In his own church, the vicar was admonished for the condition in which his parish was found: his parishioners were "poorly instructed in the matters of the Holy Feast, the Laws of God, and Christian doctrine" because the priest "so little applied himself to the spiritual governance of

[25] "Raggi di splendori visti da Zuan Toppo." *Visitationes* 43, fols. 365r-367r, ACVP.
[26] As a man with scientific leanings and skepticism about miracles, the story of the baby was particularly suspicious to Barbarigo. The seventeenth century saw a surge of these miracles, which were officially condemned and fought by the church only in the eighteenth century. Cavazza, "Double Death," 1-31.

their souls."[27] In the other parishes, the priests were found to be similarly remiss in their duties, demonstrating that the vicar was not neglecting his own parish in favor of his responsibilities as vicar. As he was clearly not a model cleric, it is not surprising that he did not want to draw Barbarigo's attention to his vicarage.

Without the potential advantage of foreknowledge, Barbarigo and his auditor spent the following day interviewing laypeople about the shrine. They found that the witnesses were generally unsure of the image's powers: while they believed it was miraculous, much of what they knew was rumor. Their uncertainty contrasts with the priest's recorded testimonies, suggesting that he may have coached his witnesses or revised their statements for them in his register. According to the bishop's records, he interviewed many men (the exact number is not stated) but he only recorded the testimonies of three. Two of these three were not among those named as witnesses by the priest, while the third was present at the resurrection miracle.

The first witness told the bishop that he had seen little himself – he had observed some humidity on the image which some called sweat, and he had seen a bird circle the image which he was told was a dove, though he was not sure what a dove looked like. He said that the priest told them the image was miraculous and that Zanone was collecting alms in a locked box at the shrine, to which he had the only key.[28] In the end, the witness admitted that what he had seen personally was not necessarily miraculous, but he remained convinced by the stories he had heard.

The second witness had some information about the baby. He had seen the infant in a box on the altar after the miraculous baptism, and the body had seemed to sweat. He had not

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[27] "Ritrovato il suo popolo così mal'istrutto nelle cose della Santa festa, della legge del Sig. Dio, e della Dottrina Christiana, e che egli sia si poco applicato al governo spirituale dell'anime." *Visitationes* 43, fol. 322r, ACVP.
[28] *Visitationes* 43, fol. 369, ACVP. Usually any box containing money for the church was to have at least two different keys, one held by the priest and one held by the custodian of a local confraternity, to prevent fraud and theft.

witnessed the baptism but he testified that "the priest said he had resuscitated and baptized him, and then he returned to dead."[29] Like many others, he had also seen the image sweat. The bishop had obviously considered the more logical reason for this circumstance, because he asked the man about the weather, day, and year. The witness could only remember that it was summer, presumably confirming the bishop's suspicions that humidity caused the image to sweat.

The third man called before the bishop was Matteo Caberlon, who often helped Zanone and who was present for the baptism. Before he was privy to this amazing event, he had seen the image sweat in August and had also seen the Madonna's skin change from pink to white.[30] Some time later he was summoned at midnight to join two midwives, one of their husbands, and the priest at the shrine. They had brought a premature stillborn baby and hoped the Madonna would act to save his soul. Matteo reported that he saw the infant's right eyelid open and bleed a bit and his index finger extend to point at the Madonna while a midwife held him. The priest baptized the boy, at which point his eye closed, his finger dropped, and he appeared dead again. The bishop evidently found these signs of life insufficient, because he interrogated Matteo about whether the baby had actually moved his eye, if he whimpered or made any noises, if his mouth moved when the priest put the salt in it, and if the infant moved after the baptism or was seen to die. The answer to all of these questions was no, though Matteo added that the body sweated for two or three days before burial.[31] Matteo also confirmed that a significant sum of money was being collected from the alms box in both coins and trinkets, many made of precious metals. Zanone removed these items and recorded them in a book that was entrusted to Matteo. Unfortunately, as Matteo was unable to sign his name to his testimony, he was probably

[29] "Io viddi quell putto in una scatola che sudava; essendo stato prima due giorni il capitello come era nato, e disse il Prete che era suscitato e lo haveva battezato, e poi era tornessi a morire." Ibid., fol. 369v.
[30] Ibid., fol. 370.
[31] Ibid., fols. 370v-371r.

incapable of reading the priest's ledger, so he could not tell the bishop how the money was being spent. He thought perhaps it was going towards church maintenance, but since Barbarigo had found the church to be insufficiently supplied, this answer was unsatisfactory.[32]

Apparently the statements of the other witnesses shed no more light on the situation, as Matteo's testimony is followed by this note:

> The eminent and reverend lord Cardinal interrogated many other selected men of this community about the contents above in the explanation of the parish priest, and found nothing relevant, nothing to conclude certainty of miracles, but only rumors, and he judged the tumult to be rather on account of the simplicity of the people and the credulity of the same priest, who seems to be of a good life.[33]

Although Barbarigo denied the legitimacy of the miracles, he was willing to attribute this episode to the naïveté of both Zanone and his parishioners. He was interested, however, in where the money was going. Though Zanone had not asked for the bishop's or the Venetian government's permission as required, he had improved the structure around the image and had started purchasing supplies to build the image a more permanent home attached to the parish church.[34] This would have increased the image's reputation and brought many pilgrims to Alano. It also would have made overseeing the shrine easier for Zanone, as his house was attached to the other side of the church. Thus far, he claimed to have spent more on the construction projects than the alms boxes had yielded in coins, suggesting that he sold some of the trinkets or was using money from the church fabric fund or his benefice. Barbarigo issued a decree ordering the priest to halt construction and dismantle what he had built at the shrine, returning it to its original

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[32] Ibid., fol. 371v.

[33] "Em[inentissi]mus et R[everendissi]mus D. Cardinalis plures alios homines huius communis oretenus diligent interrogavit super contentis in expositione di Parochi, et nihil relevans invenit, nihil concludens ad certitudine miraculorum, sed rumorem, et concursum iudicavit esse potius ad deferendum populi simplicitati, et eiusdem Parochi credulitati, qui cum sit bone vite." Ibid.

[34] He did ask permission to build the new choir (though made no mention of its intended purpose), but there is no evidence that he received it. Barbarigo asked the vicar of Pove to go to Alano and send back advice to the bishop about the intended project. His choice of the vicar of Pove rather than the vicar of Quero, under whose jurisdiction Alano fell, suggests that Barbarigo was aware of the negligence of the vicar of Quero before his visit in 1674. *Diversorum* 9, fol. 310, ACVP.

condition. Zanone was also to hand over the key to the alms box to the custodians of Alano's confraternities, who were instructed to use the money for charitable purposes. Finally, Zanone was forbidden to exhort the people to gather at the shrine under penalty of suspension if he disobeyed. As for the laity, Barbarigo "paternally exhort[ed] them to give profitable devotion to the omnipotent God, the mother of God always a Virgin, and the other saints in the parish church and make their alms there, and beware of the errors and frauds that are always in new things."[35] Believing the situation resolved, he continued on his way.

As Barbarigo would later discover, he had not witnessed the errors of a simple country cleric, but rather the work of a very cunning one. By 1678 Zanone had shown his true colors and the bishop was frustrated and appalled by his behavior. Although the particular incident is not explained, Barbarigo wrote to his vicar general about Zanone and the priest of a nearby town, "I would never have believed [they could be] so impertinent and malicious."[36] Barbarigo did not make it back to Alano until 1686, and upon his return, found the situation so overwhelming that he was unable to address it in the time he had allotted for Alano in his visitation schedule. Rather than complying with the bishop's orders, Zanone had continued to build an addition to the church using alms, the church fabric fund, and part of his benefice to pay for it.[37] As the image of the Madonna was no longer an attraction, Zanone had decided to create a convent instead. The visitation records describe an "unconsecrated structure" in which "women without order, rule, or permission spend their time, making loud noises in the Church and disturbing the parish

[35] "Emin[enz]a sua antequam discederet a Visitatione Ecclesie Alani protulit sequens decretum, ed deliberatione circa imagine Deipare pictam in Capitello del Masil vulgari sermone, ut intelligeret a populo ibi presente in magno numero, quem fuit paterne hortatus profitens devotionem omnipotenti Dei, Deipare Sempre Virgini, et aliis Sanctis in ecclesia Parochali, et in ea eleemosynas facere, et ab erronibus, et fraudibus que in novitatibus sempre esse solent, cavere." *Visitationes* 43, fols. 399r-400r.
[36] Pampaloni, *Gregorio Barbarigo alla corte di Roma*, 215.
[37] Laity testified that Zanone destroyed a grove of chestnut trees that provided one quarter of his benefice's yearly income. *Inquisitiones* 87, n.p, ACVP.

functions."[38] As these women had not taken orders and their living space was completely unsuitable for a convent, reforming it was not an option. To further aggravate the situation, Zanone had written to the Venetian government to declare his "convent" as a lay space that, under Venetian law, the bishop had no right to enter uninvited. Barbarigo was forced to suspend his visit to Alano and return a year later, once he had the opportunity to sort out the jurisdictional confusion and gain permission to enter the structure.[39]

Obviously the vicar, who was a different priest by now, was no more diligent than his predecessor.[40] He had not reported the false convent, and Barbarigo found that the vicarage had not improved since his last visit. The priest was admonished for his negligence in his parish and his mismanagement of the vicarage, while the other priests were castigated for their obvious (and perhaps justified) lack of respect for the vicar and for their own shortcomings. They often refused to attend monthly congregations and other obligations that required them to travel to Quero, while also neglecting important parochial functions. Though Zanone was the worst offender in the area, he was clearly not alone.[41] The vicar's negligence had, among other things, allowed the corruption in Alano to go unchecked for years, though Barbarigo was able to end it once he became aware of it. He contacted the Venetian authorities after his 1687 visit, and Zanone received a government order to disband the convent.[42] Zanone was threatened with suspension should he have any private contact with the women, and once more Barbarigo considered the matter settled.

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[38] "In quibus laicalibus fabricis degunt quedam mulieribus nullo ordine, et regula, nulla permissione, obstrepentes in Ecclesia, paroles funtiones perturbantes." To make this situation even more scandalous, with the exception of a widow whose age is not stated and two women in their mid-thirties, the women were in their teens and twenties. *Visitationes* 54, fol. 465v, ACVP.
[39] *Processo Barbarigo* 9, fol. 1058r, ACVP.
[40] The records contain no indication that the former archpriest/vicar of Quero was deprived of his benefice, so it is likely that he simply retired or died and a new priest was chosen for Quero.
[41] Ibid., fol. 165.
[42] *Visitationes* 55, fol. 386r, ACVP.

Unfortunately for Barbarigo, Zanone was not as contrite as he claimed, and the spiritual direction of the town had not improved when Barbarigo visited for the last time in 1694. Although the convent, now referred to by locals as "the priest's harem," had been disbanded, Barbarigo discovered that four of the women, now in their thirties, had not adopted the appropriate secular female role of wife.[43] One spent every night at the priest's house, while another slept there occasionally and all four gathered there frequently in the afternoons. Zanone was suspended for disobeying the bishop's previous order and under suspicion of improper relationships with women and possibly heresy.[44] Just like his predecessors, the new archpriest and vicar of Quero had not alerted Barbarigo to the highly unusual circumstances in Alano, effectively allowing abuses to go unchecked. Nor did the suspension end Barbarigo's struggles with Zanone; after begging the local Augustinian hermit to plead with Barbarigo on his behalf, Zanone considered traveling to Padua to ask for forgiveness but instead chose to appeal his suspension in the Venetian courts, again unnecessarily involving the secular government. He finally went to Padua and spent several months there before Barbarigo ultimately lifted his suspension and sent him back to Alano.[45]

Though Barbarigo had no way to predict in 1674 that Zanone would be such an unfit cleric, in hindsight it is clear that Zanone was not a naïve, well-meaning priest. He had little to no interest in the spiritual guidance of his parish and was willing to take risks in order to achieve his temporal goals, which seem to have been the company of women and wealth. Perhaps the convent had been his plan all along and the chapel for the image was a way to fund that project,

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[43] "Al giorno vi hanno pratticato e prattica publicamente una tal Giulia una Cattarina che gia erano state per Avanti nel seraglio di detto Parocho." *Visitationes* 60, fols. 283r, 287v-294r, ACVP.
[44] In addition to the problematic sleeping arrangements, Barbarigo was interested in the daytime activities of this group, which included reading, meditation, and prayer. Liliana Billanovich believes that he suspected them of quietism in addition to their other sins. Billanovich, "Esperienze religiose negate," 110.
[45] *Processo Barbarigo* 9, fol. 1075r, ACVP.

or perhaps he would have been content to live a relatively luxurious life off the fame and proceeds the chapel would have brought had Barbarigo not invalidated the image. Either way, it is probable that Zanone was the source of the rumors about the image's miraculous powers or at the very least that he capitalized on stories initially spread by others, as many of the stories seem to trace back to him. Based on the seeming sincerity of lay testimony during Barbarigo's visitations, he was probably right about the "simplicity" of the laity, but Zanone was neither credulous nor benign.

Barbarigo eventually saw through each of Zanone's machinations, but only after decades of abuse had occurred in Alano. Though Zanone was unable to convince the bishop that the image was truly miraculous, he was able to hide his role and intentions in the rise of the shrine's reputation. Under lax supervision, as he was fortunate enough to find himself in a vicarage plagued by delinquent vicars and far enough away from Padua to keep the bishop at a distance, he was then able to create a false convent that he maintained for years. It is hard to imagine that any attempts at Tridentine reform could be successful under a priest with constant access to a group of nubile women living away from parental supervision. Conveniently for Zanone and to the detriment of Barbarigo's reform plans, the laity were relatively unconcerned with the extracurricular activities of their parish priest; they made no demands upon their vicar (or if they did he ignored them) or bishop to correct the problem until 1694, and even then only some of them were scandalized by the events they described. Many historians have noted that the laity was generally untroubled by concubinage, but certainly this was no ordinary case![46] The villagers of Alano, like many of their contemporaries, had not internalized the concept that the clergy should be held as a class apart from the laity, subject to a different moral code. In the absence of any strong reforming desires on the part of either clergy or laity or an effective local

[46] For example, see Greco, "Fra disciplina e sacerdozio," 57.

administrator, the bishop's programs and occasional personal presence were insufficient to ensure change in Alano or any other parish with a similar attitude towards reform.[47]

For several reasons, the visitation records show many more conflicts between the bishop and his priests than with the laity. Barbarigo's strategy of reform, as befitted a post-Tridentine bishop, was a straightforward, top-down progression. If he and his vicars could create a well-educated, devoted, and honest priesthood, then the clergy would be able to reform the laity under their spiritual guidance. Not only does this make sense from a structural perspective, it was also made necessary by Venetian law. Barbarigo, like every other bishop in the Veneto at this time, was forbidden to interrogate laypeople without the written permission of the local podestà and was limited to questions about clerical comportment. This law was part of a series of policies designed to limit the Church's influence in the Veneto, which had resulted in the Interdict of 1606-1607, and had remained in place after the papacy acknowledged defeat.[48] In some cases, this hampered Barbarigo's abilities to correct problems as they arose. When he uncovered flagrant abuses by laypeople, he had three options: he could advise the parish clergy, who could intervene from a position of spiritual authority; he could alert Venice, if the offense involved a legal issue; or he could notify the Holy Office of Padua.[49] In order to interact more with the laity, Barbarigo tried to set aside time for an open audience during each visitation, allowing anyone to bring forward his or her concerns personally. Though he could not intervene directly when information came to him through inquisitions, it seems that he found a loophole in the law and could involve himself when the issue was presented to him voluntarily. In an early visit to the

[47] Alano is certainly an extreme example; no other priest in the diocese proved as troublesome as Zanone. But Barbarigo faced a similar sort of disinterest in reform in many of his parishes, and was often equally unable to overcome less sensational problems if the laity and clergy were unwilling to cooperate.
[48] This particular law was justified by Venice as a way to prevent jurisdictional overlap between bishops and the Roman Inquisition. Billanovich, "Esperienze religiose negate," 105. For more information on limitations to ecclesiastical powers in the Veneto during this period, see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*.
[49] Unfortunately, the records of the Holy Office of Padua are no longer extant, so it is impossible to know how often Barbarigo may have used this strategy to bolster his reform efforts.

town of Marostica, a parish with about 3500 residents, Barbarigo's open audience with the laity led to a four-day investigation of a marriage. As a woman and her father petitioned for an annulment and her husband fought to reclaim his wife, it became obvious that the supplicants in this case were attempting to manipulate the bishop using their knowledge of the Tridentine reform of matrimony.

As they interfered directly with an important part of secular life, new doctrines regarding the sacrament of marriage were particularly prone to manipulation by the laity. Although the bishops at the Council of Trent had attempted to create stricter regulations for Catholic marriage, they could not agree on certain issues and in the end produced a confusing decree. The definition of a proper marriage was stated clearly: banns must be announced three times on three successive feast days before the wedding in order to find any impediments, and the marriage must take place in public, be conducted by the couple's or bride's parish priest, and be witnessed by at least two people. The names of the bride and groom were then to be inscribed in the marriage register.[50] Discrepancies arose when couples chose not to follow this format in its entirety. The decrees were unclear about clandestine marriage, which had been a matter of great debate at the Council. Reformers at Trent wanted to stop clandestine marriages meant to conceal impediments, but could not fully ban the practice because of their insistence that the couple freely consent to the union. While some bishops were influenced by powerful nobles who wanted to maintain absolute paternal authority in the arrangement of marriages, others felt it was imperative that couples not be forced to marry to serve family politics. In the end, free will triumphed over political marriage strategies, and clandestine marriages were grudgingly accepted if the justification was an overbearing parent's objection to the match. As long as the marriage

[50] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 183-4.

was still performed by a priest with two witnesses and recorded in the register, it was valid, though certainly seen as less desirable by the Church.[51]

Evidently clandestine marriages had not been sufficiently discouraged in the Veneto by the Tridentine decrees, as the Venetian Senate had issued a proclamation against them in 1662 and would issue another in 1676, which Barbarigo would complement with an episcopal edict and instructions to his parish clergy to read both aloud to their parishioners.[52] When Barbarigo visited Marostica for the second time in September 1668, he was forced to confront this issue directly. He set aside the afternoon of his arrival to meet with laypeople and was visited by Augustin Righetto and his daughter Angela, who wished to petition for the annulment of her marriage to Antonio Frigho.

Augustin began by explaining the circumstances of his daughter's wedding, hoping to convince the bishop that it had been performed improperly and was therefore eligible for annulment. According to Augustin, his daughter had been abducted (*rapita*) from his house in the middle of the night. Antonio took her without parental consent to the house of the archpriest (who was also the *vicario foraneo*), where he told her to agree with him that they were already married, and wanted the marriage to be legitimized and recorded in the parish register.[53] Although unlikely, this story describes a potentially annullable union. While the Tridentine decrees on matrimony were ambiguous in places, neither marriage-by-kidnapping nor an earlier secular marriage to be legitimized by the priest was acceptable.[54] The lack of banns and parental consent, on the other hand, made the marriage less sacramentally sound but not invalid.

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[51] Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 39.
[52] The documents of 1676 are printed in Barbarigo, *Lettere pastorali, editti, e decreti.*
[53] *Visitationes* 36, fol. 177r, ACVP.
[54] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 187-8.

Augustin continued his tale, explaining to the bishop that although he had not approved of the match, he eventually agreed to give a dowry "conforming to [his] status," which might suggest that his disapproval was not severe enough to justify a clandestine marriage.[55] Finally, he arrived at the real reason Angela wanted an annulment: she had recently fled Antonio's house and taken refuge in her sister and brother-in-law's home to escape Antonio's habit of savagely beating her and threatening to kill her. Augustin asserted that this was a pattern in Antonio's life: he had been married once before, had also taken that wife without her parents' consent, and had similarly mistreated her. Some in town even blamed her early death on his domestic violence. The level of spousal abuse described by Augustin and later Angela, particularly by a man with Antonio's history, was unequivocally cause for a separation of bed and board, but not annulment – an abusive marriage was still a marriage, if the nuptials had been legitimate.[56]

The bishop next summoned Antonio, and not surprisingly, his account of the wedding night was a bit different. He told the bishop that the witnesses called before him would attest that "Angela his daughter is my legitimate consort conforming to the disposition of the Holy Doctors and the Holy Council of Trent," appealing to the bishop's commitment to Tridentine reform.[57] According to him, he and Angela had wanted to marry, but could not because of her father's opposition. So with the help of the Righetto family maidservant, Angela escaped from "paternal power" and they went immediately to the archpriest's house, where they were married in the presence of two witnesses and the union was recorded in the parish register.[58] His comment that Angela was escaping her father's overbearing will provided justification for the manner in which

[55] "Conforme al mio stato." *Visitationes* 36, fol. 177r, ACVP.
[56] Only an invalid marriage could be annulled, but a separation of bed and board could be granted under circumstances of female infidelity or male violence or failure to provide. A separated couple was still married until one spouse's death, and when the case was found in favor of the wife, her husband had to provide for her for life. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 29-30.
[57] "Angela sua figliola é mia legitima consorte conforme [al]la dispositione de[i] sacri Dottori et Sacro Concilio di Trento." *Visitationes* 36, fol. 179r, ACVP.
[58] "Mia consorte… stava sotto la potestà paterna." Ibid.

the marriage was carried out; he was suggesting that Augustin had attempted to restrict his daughter's freedom to choose her spouse.

Beyond his account of the wedding night, Antonio's testimony is a thin denial of the abuse of which he was accused. Never denying outright that he beat his wife, he repudiated Angela's accusation that he withheld food from her, and also asserted that she had not fled for the reasons she gave, but rather because she had been led astray by her brother-in-law.[59] He finished his testimony asking the bishop to return his wife to him, as she had no grounds to request an annulment. Although technically true, the bishop continued the investigation.

Angela was called next, and gave an account of her wedding night that aligned mostly with Antonio's, though she left open the question of her true consent to the marriage. She claimed Antonio coached her to tell the priest that Antonio was her chosen spouse, but it appears that she never attempted to defy him that night, nor did she tell the bishop that she was forced to speak those words. She then described the abuse she suffered at Antonio's hand. He beat her frequently and left her without food, taking his own meals at the local tavern.[60] He also viciously threatened her, saying that "he wanted to wash his hands in [her] blood."[61] The bishop and his assistants questioned why she had not left earlier. She told them she had been afraid her father would not take her back, a response that only seems logical if she had run away and contracted a parentally-disapproved match. But if she lacked the resolve to leave Antonio earlier, she had certainly found sufficient strength to declare defiantly that she would not return to her husband again, regardless of the bishop's legal decision.[62]

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[59] Ibid., fol. 179r.
[60] Ibid., fol. 184r.
[61] "Si voleva lavar le mani nel mio sangue." Ibid., fol. 183v.
[62] Ibid., fol. 184r.

In the course of this testimony, another crucial fact emerged: the marriage had taken place in 1662, six years earlier. Had Angela truly been abducted, it would have been possible for Augustin and Angela to go to Padua immediately. Marostica is about fifty kilometers from Padua – no insignificant distance in the seventeenth century, but certainly not insurmountable under dire circumstances. Perhaps they had not felt they could approach the vicar, as he had officiated at the wedding ceremony, but they also had another option: the bishop had visited Marostica in 1666, and they could have advanced their request then. Furthermore, the notarial register that contained the record of Angela's dowry, paid in 1665, suggests that Augustin was opposed to the marriage and in no hurry to pay his unwanted son-in-law, but also that he had plenty of time to contest the marriage had it been illicit. Most likely, Antonio's story of the marriage was closest to the truth: he and Angela had eloped under justifiable circumstances and the archpriest had been within regulations in performing the marriage.

After interviewing ten neighbors, all of whom supported Augustin and Angela's claims of abuse, the bishop made his decision. In the end, Augustin's attempt to have the marriage annulled was unsuccessful. It seemed clear to Barbarigo that the marriage had been clandestine but legitimate, and therefore was still sacramental and inviolable. However, the evidence of abuse was strong enough for him to grant Angela a separation of bed and board, which would keep her safe from Antonio's violence and require him to support her financially. Neither would be allowed to remarry, however, until the other died. For a young woman with no children, this was a definite improvement, but by no means ideal. Under canon law and Tridentine regulations, however, this was all Angela was entitled to as an abused wife. Augustin must have known this, so he chose to make the case more about the nature of the marriage ceremony than the abuse she suffered. Nor was this outcome favorable to Antonio, as he had to support Angela but had no

control over her. His strategy had been to confine his case to demonstrating that the marriage had been legitimate because he hoped the bishop would summarily dismiss the annulment request, rather than investigating the allegations of abuse. Antonio's knowledge of the reforms, which had served him well to this point, worked against him in the end. Although the outcome in this case was not what either party had desired, Augustin and Antonio's strategies demonstrate how savvy laypeople could attempt to use knowledge of church reform to undermine, rather than adhere to new rules.

In this case, laity chose to ignore the Church's regulations, the vicar-archpriest was complicit by performing a suspect marriage in the middle of the night and failing to report the separation to the bishop, and Barbarigo could only appear personally on occasion and certainly could not examine the conditions of every marriage in town.[63] Because of this series of failures, Barbarigo spent four days on what should have been a simple request for a separation that could have been granted at least two years earlier during his first visit. While Barbarigo was certainly not directly responsible for this situation, his program for supervising the diocese was structurally weak and left gaps in which these sorts of issues could arise.

In the end, Barbarigo's system of *vicari foranei* and pastoral visitation was insufficient to extend his authority across his diocese. In these cases and many others, the vicarages were of little use; major problems required the personal presence of the bishop even when the vicar was diligent, and a negligent vicar could make matters worse.[64] Many of the vicars did not perform

[63] In the course of his visitations, Barbarigo discovered a series of problems with the vicar and the rest of the parish clergy of Marostica, so his agreement to perform a slightly suspect marriage and failure to report any of the occurrences in Marostica to the bishop might have stemmed from a combination of his own lack of devotion and a fear of having the bishop investigating his parish. In 1666 he was involved in a conflict with a chaplain who refused to respect his authority and was attempting to usurp some of his jurisdictional power, and in 1668 he and other clergy were accused of dishonest practices with women, gambling, and drunkenness by some laypeople. *Visitationes* 33, fol. 461r, and *Inquisitiones* 85, fols. 316r-321v, ACVP.

[64] Due to the jurisdictional complexity of the Veneto, Barbarigo seems to have only interfered in lay problems revolving around marriage disputes and enmity between families. Billanovich, *Fra centro e periferia,* 150.

their duties well; at the 1687 congregation of vicars in Padua, Barbarigo lamented the "malum regimen vicarium" which he perceived across the diocese.[65] Even in cases where vicars were diligent, their correspondence with Barbarigo and clerical visitations demonstrate that many people in the parishes under their jurisdiction, particularly other parish clergy, had little respect for their supposed authority.[66] Though Barbarigo had invested the vicars with some of his power, ultimately his flock considered episcopal authority to be embodied solely in the bishop himself, regardless of the assiduity of their vicar. Barbarigo was generally capable of correcting abuses when he confronted them personally, but once he moved on to the next parish, he left in his wake a high rate of recidivism. For a bureaucratic structure like his *vicari foranei* to stand in for him when he could not appear personally, the cooperation of those under its jurisdiction and a nearly unbroken line of discipline emanating from the bishop through every branch of the system were required. If their authority was respected and they performed their duties diligently, vicars could handle the smaller problems in their regions and refer more complicated issues to the bishop.[67] With this information, the bishop could adjust his travel schedule or offer advice to vicars and

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[65] Ibid., 104-5. In addition to this complaint, at least twelve of the forty-six vicarages had their vicarial seat transferred between 1664-1697. The changing names of vicarages in Barbarigo's visitation records provide evidence for ten transfers, while his correspondence discusses two more. There is no indication that Barbarigo considered this a failure of the vicarial system in general or of his methods of choosing vicars. On the contrary, he continued to believe in the reliability of this system and did not always choose to remove vicars who proved unreliable. Specific documentation is available for the transfer of the vicarage of Fossò to Paluello and of the vicarage of Abano to S. Pietro Montagnon. *Visitationes* 53, fol. 29v, ACVP, and *Diversorum* 9, fol. 284v, ACVP.

[66] Not much of his correspondence with vicars survived, but most of what remains is preserved in *Miscellanea Barbarigo I-II*, BSP. In particular, vicars had problems with priests who refused to attend monthly congregations. In one visitation, Barbarigo discovered that personal enmity was at the root of one parish priest's refusal to make the journey, while all the priests in the vicarage of Quero (though Don Zanone of Alano and the parish priest of Vas were the worst offenders) consistently refused to appear on Holy Saturday or at congregations. Barbarigo had to order these obstinate clerics, who made little effort to veil their contempt, to obey their vicars. *Inquisitiones* 87 (folios not numbered) and *Visitationes* 54, fols. 175r-177v, ACVP.

[67] In the *Miscellanea Barbarigo I-II*, BSP, there are four letters from Barbarigo to vicars instructing them to address specific small problems in their territories, ranging from priests wearing short vestments to priests refusing to visit the sick. During the next visitations (which were sometimes years later), Barbarigo found no evidence of the former problem in one of the vicarages, while the problems in the other three had not been eradicated, but were not particularly widespread or flagrant. The visitations in question are of the vicarages of Torre, Calvene, Paluello, and Abano, found in *Visitationes* 46, 56, 63, and 65, ACVP.

write admonitions to the offending parties if he could not appear personally. But when the vicars either were not diligent or were not uniformly respected and resistance spread like a contagion, the system broke down. Even if the diligence and loyalty of the vicars could be ensured, the simple fact that so many lower clergy and laity only responded to episcopal authority when the bishop was physically present made it nearly impossible for post-Tridentine bishops to maintain control over large dioceses, significantly hindering the rate of change within the Catholic Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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