

*Celestino Galiani e la Sacra Scrittura: Alle radici del pensiero napoletano del Settecento.* Gustavo Costa.

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When the archives of the congregations of the Holy Office and the Index were finally opened to scholars in the later 1990s, the late Gustavo Costa (1930–2012) was among the first to recognize their potential value in revealing how the Roman Catholic Church responded to intellectual change. In a series of pioneering studies of individual cases, he explored how particular authors and works came to the attention of the two congregations, the reports that assessed whether or not they merited condemnation,

and the process by which the cardinals of the respective congregations reached their decisions. The archive, he understood, was not simply a record of decisions: it could illuminate the wider intellectual universe of the Church, particularly in his chosen period of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, immediately preceding the Enlightenment. Within this period, Costa could also build on his earlier interest in the thought of Giambattista Vico to explore the implications of the decisions taken in Rome for intellectual life in Naples, the setting not only for Vico, but for Pietro Giannone and many other thinkers of interest.

The present book is a study of the referral to the Index of a number of *Theses* proposed for debate in Rome in 1708 and again in 1710 by Celestino Galiani, a young Neapolitan member of the Benedictine order of the Celestini, who had been sent to Rome to complete his education. Quickly making a name for himself, Galiani was appointed by his superiors to lecture on the Bible at the Convent of S. Eusebio; he was also taken up by the “Tamburo circle” of theologians and scholars who were pursuing new approaches to biblical sacred history and the history of the early Church, under the patronage of Cardinal Imperiali. Formally debated by Galiani’s students before an invited audience of cardinals and theologians, the *Theses* were carefully worded; but they were clearly intended to raise some of the issues at the heart of contemporary biblical criticism. The dangers to orthodoxy in discussions of these issues had been demonstrated by Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and Richard Simon’s *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*, both condemned by the congregations in the 1680s, and Galiani’s *Theses* were in turn denounced to the Index. Three successive reports on them were commissioned, the first in its favor, the next two decisively against. In addition (and unusually — or at least contrary to the secrecy supposed to obtain in the congregation’s proceedings), Galiani was able to prepare a defense of five of his most controversial theses, which were then subjected to a lengthy *risposta* by a theologian employed by one of the cardinals hostile to Galiani. Together these manuscript documents provide ample evidence of the arguments deployed against Galiani, and of the authorities — patristic, Scholastic, and contemporary — that he and his critics cited in their support.

Beginning with the “reply,” Costa provides lengthy summaries of these documents, not only setting out the issues at stake, but identifying the authorities cited and summarizing the points derived from them. An appendix includes transcriptions of all the relevant documents from the archives of the Index (but not of the *risposta*, too long to include). Although Costa’s mode of exposition does not always make it easy for the reader to distinguish between summaries of Galiani, his critics, and their authorities, the result is a wealth of information about the debate over the Bible’s interpretation within the Church. The intuition that the archive of the Index has much to offer intellectual historians is borne out. In fulfillment of the book’s subtitle, Costa also notes where Vico and Giannone engaged with the same issues, and invoked or criticized the same sources. Given the uses the Neapolitan thinkers were to make of the material, Costa suggests, Galiani’s enemies were right to think that there was more danger in his *Theses* than he would have them believe.

Valuable as this study is, qualifications may also be entered. Costa's default perspective is black and white: the Index and Holy Office were instruments of repression, retarding intellectual life in Italy and obstructing thinkers' access to innovative trends north of the Alps. Had Costa made more of the narrative of the case, its ambiguities would have been more apparent. He does note that Galiani almost certainly brought the process upon himself by referring a member of a rival circle to the Holy Office — playing the same game of denunciation. As the case proceeds through the Index, it becomes clear that its outcome depended on rivalry among the cardinals and, when the cardinals divided evenly after hearing the third report, on the pope himself, who first decided to prohibit, and then, under pressure from Imperiali, to order that the *Theses* be omitted from the next supplement to the Index. In other words, the decisions of the Index were not so much an objective embodiment of orthodoxy as a barometer of factional advantage within the curia, and of the relative standing of the circles or academies associated with individual cardinals.

A final qualification concerns the implications of this study for understanding of the wider Catholic intellectual world, and of the thought of the Neapolitans Vico and Giannone. Here Costa may have undersold the potential fruit of his inquiry by limiting it to the occasions when Vico and Giannone specifically referred to the arguments and authorities at issue in Galiani's case. For despite Rome's suspicions of the new scholarship, the two Neapolitans were still able to make extraordinarily imaginative use of the materials of sacred history and biblical criticism in framing their philosophies of history and accounts of the formation of civil society. Working in the shadow of Rome almost certainly made a difference: Vico's *Scienza nuova* and Giannone's *Triregno* were unlike anything from Northern Europe on their subjects. But what that difference was will not be understood if Vico and Giannone are interpreted simply as bending to Roman censorship.

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