

Jacob Acontius: From Trent to *Satan's Stratagems* (1565)

1 A JOURNEY OF FAITH BETWEEN THE PAPACY AND THE EMPIRE

Little is known about the life of Jacob Acontius, not even his exact date of birth. He was born in Trent or Ossana, probably in around 1520, studied law and was admitted to the College of Notaries in Trent in February 1546, after having practised the profession since at least 1540.¹ A couple of years later, in June 1548, the course of his life changed when he met Archduke Maximilian, son of Emperor Ferdinand I, who stayed at Trent on his way to Spain.² Although the meagre documentary sources—a legal act signed by the young notary in the presence of the future Emperor—suggest that this was probably a fleeting encounter, it had significant repercussions. When the then King of Bohemia returned from Spain, exactly 3 years later, he stopped in Trent once again. It is highly likely that he met Acontius for the second time on this occasion and persuaded him to travel to Vienna, an invitation to the court that soon turned into a permanent stay lasting over 4 years. Acontius was probably referring to this stay in Vienna when he mentioned ‘many years of my life spent at court’³ in a letter to a friend some time later. Although we cannot put an exact date on the time he spent in Vienna, it is probable that he was there from 1551 to 1556, when he decided to return to Trent to serve in the secretariat of Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo, who had just been appointed Governor of Milan.

Fig. 1 Jacobus Acontius, unknown artist (possibly late seventeenth century)



It was during this period—between 1548 and 1556—that he nurtured the decision to leave the Catholic fold for the Reformed camp. However, it is difficult to establish the times and stages of this transition without more certain documentation (Fig. 1). For example, it is not clear whether Acontius made his choice during his time in Trent—in which case his decision to follow Maximilian to Vienna would be seen as a result of this early conversion—or subsequently, during his long spell at the Archduke's court in Vienna. It is possible—even probable—that the heated religious turmoil that characterized life in Trent from the early 1540s onwards made an impression on the inquisitive young notary. In her 1988 study of the fortunes of Erasmus of Rotterdam in Italy, Silvana Seidel Menchi partly focused her attention on notaries and their natural exposure to 'Lutheran contagion'. Indeed, Roman Inquisition courtrooms witnessed a constant procession of notaries who had been fatally attracted by the sirens of religious dissent. It all started when a humble shoemaker was questioned about the presence of Lutherans in Asolo—less than a 100 kilometers from Trent—during a 1547 enquiry. His naively immediate reply was 'yes, there are lots of notaries who speak around here', and that the heretical groups met to read the epistles of St Paul at the 'chancery of notaries'.⁴ In many cases, this religious restlessness had been triggered by reading religious texts by Erasmus of Rotterdam; he was an author with whom notaries were already familiar through his grammatical and rhetorical works.⁵ It is easy to imagine that

Acontius's role as a notary led to his familiarity with Erasmus's works; a familiarity he would put to use many years later as a religious exile far from the peninsula. Acontius's friend Leonardo Colombini was also a notary—they finished their studies together and both joined the College of Notaries in Trent—and was first put on trial for heresy in 1564, a few years after Acontius left the country (he was tried again in 1579). While Acontius was still in Trent, Colombini's friend and correspondent Giovanni Antonio Zurletta was also tried for heresy.⁶

In any case, it is not essential to establish whether it was a question of Acontius's pro-Lutheran propensities guiding him towards the court of a prince who was clearly favourably inclined towards Protestants (for obvious political reasons), although he had never officially sided with them,⁷ or, conversely, the milieu of the court inspiring him to leave the Catholic faith once and for all. Acontius's move to the Reformed faith was probably the result of a gradual process made possible by his rising impatience with Catholic intransigence and ultimately triggered by the irenic and conciliatory atmosphere at the Viennese court. After all, the 1540s—Acontius's last decade on the Italian peninsula apart from a short spell in Milan and Trent in 1557–1558 before he left the country definitively, to which we shall return later—featured a significant increase in Roman repressive measures against the spread of heretical dissent. These formed part of the project to redefine the dogma of the Catholic doctrinal patrimony, which was threatened by the inroads made by the Reformation on the peninsula. Although Trent provided a distinctive vantage point, Acontius must have been an informed and attentive observer of the profound transformation of Roman power over the course of that decade. However, after leaving the city, he experienced a completely different climate at Maximilian's court that was certainly more favourably disposed towards religious conciliation; he encountered an early form of Lutheranism tinged with irenic tension that must have nurtured his sympathies for Reformed ideals, in stark contrast to the uncompromising Swiss Protestantism that he later encountered after leaving the peninsula definitively. Acontius was in Vienna in the years following the Battle of Mühlberg and, significantly, the failure of the 1548 Augsburg Interim—the statement through which Charles V responded to the perceived affront of Rome's unilateral decision to transfer the Council from Trent to Bologna. These were years in which the Emperor chose to give fresh impetus to the peace-making spirit that had driven the failed series of religious colloquies in the 1540s, although this time he focused

exclusively on the Empire and its difficult political balance instead of Rome. The new rules introduced by the Interim, particularly the marriage of priests and lay reception of the Communion cup, continued to fuel the hopes of those in the German-speaking world who supported religious reconciliation between Catholic and Reformed princes over the following decades.⁸ In the immediate future, however, it proved impossible to achieve Charles V's long-cherished aim of repairing the political fracture that had divided the Empire since the second decade of the sixteenth century. In the early 1550s, the Emperor was forced to gradually become aware of the failure of his irenic dream of a reunified Empire under imperial protection, reluctantly accepting the religious and political division in his territories, which was finally formalized by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Although there must have been a climate of resignation in Brussels following Charles V's decision to abdicate the imperial title, share his territories between his brother Ferdinand I and his son Philip II, and retire to the monastery of Yuste, political hopes and visions at Maximilian's Viennese court continued to be driven by ideals of peace and reconciliation for several decades. Acontius gradually embraced Lutheranism in this climate, which was pervaded by Maximilian's irenic optimism, and his conciliatory and tolerant approach to religion was influenced by this model for years to come.

2 THE *DIALOGO DI GIACOPO RICCAMATI*: SEEKING A METHOD AND MAKING NICODEMITE PLANS

The *Dialogo di Giacopo Riccamati* *Dialogo di Giacopo Riccamati* provides an interesting outline of Acontius's personal anguish and journey of faith in the early 1550s.⁹ It was published in Basle in 1558, but, as the author testifies, it was written in Vienna under the auspices of the Archduke.¹⁰ As its title suggests, the work is a dialogue between two imaginary characters, Muzio and Giacomo Riccamati, with two opposing—or at least extremely diverse—states of mind, which can both be partly attributed to the author at different moments on his journey of faith. Muzio embodied the unwavering faith of a lifelong Catholic who had always lived on the Italian peninsula and seemingly had no doubts about the religious doctrines inherited from his forefathers. He was a God-fearing man who had been taught not to explore 'things that are too challenging and too high-minded' ('cose troppo ardue [...] et troppo alte'),¹¹ convinced that 'his judgement' would not 'be sufficient to distinguish the sincere

expositions of the Gospel from petty and sophistic ones',¹² and equally sure that his duty as a Catholic was to follow the decrees of Rome without asking too many questions about the imposed doctrines, being particularly careful to avoid contact with the 'contagious' Lutherans. Despite these unshakable certainties of faith, Muzio was aware of the ailments afflicting the Church of Rome at the time. However, he genuinely hoped that a Council in the near future would miraculously heal them. His hopes reflected the weight of expectations that this 'assembly of all Christendom' had generated in the period immediately before the Council was convened and for a few more years after 1545, leading the most sensitive souls—which probably included Jacob Acontius at some point—to think about the renewal of the Roman Curia and doctrinal reconciliation with Protestants.

Giacomo Riccamati sat on the other side of the imaginary debating table in the *Dialogo*: a man of faith dedicated to defending the quest for truth. He did not offer ready-made recipes for salvation and tended to undermine the certainties used by Muzio to defend his apparent inner serenity by revealing the errors committed by the papacy, above all the obtuseness of its response to Lutheranism. In other words, the author assigned him the task of planting the seed of doubt in the soul of a devoted Catholic, persuading him that if questioning his certainties meant executing a divine commandment, then measuring his doctrines against someone with different ideas meant making a fundamental contribution to the quest for divine truth. It is easy to see the figure of Riccamati as the profile of a man beset by doubts, who nevertheless manages to transform his state of disquiet and uncertainty (and consequent apparent weakness) into a symbol of great strength of spirit over time. When rereading the *Dialogo* over five centuries after it was written, the clear impression is that Acontius used the work to depict the religious anguish he had experienced in the years before deciding to move to the Archduke's court or before definitively abandoning the Catholic faith, creating a dialogue featuring agonizing inner conflict between the reason (and certainty) of his Catholic origins and Italian past, and the emergence of doubts that first tormented him at length and then led him to move away from his roots. The point of arrival of Riccamati's journey of faith in the *Dialogo* was identified by the Lutheran flag. However, it was not a definitive destination by any means, not just because it would be replaced by new adventures in far-off and unknown places, but because the author's focus and reasoning did not concern

the final outcome or the relative suitability of the destination, but rather the method required to reach it, wherever it may have been.

Riccamati seemed to express the many questions that the religious crisis in the early sixteenth century had generated in the mind of Acontius and many other like-minded restless souls. With the proliferation of religious confessions on the Italian peninsula, he asked himself why nobody seemed willing to question their certainties; the many sects generated more or less directly by the Lutheran rift should have been enough to sow the seed of doubt in the minds of Catholics that they were in the wrong and had previously been deceived. Riccamati felt that the basic observation that only one of the many religions was true should have immediately led them to observe that ‘an infinite multitude of people were mistaken in the past’. They only had to look beyond the limited horizons of their home turf and be driven by the desire to check ‘what certainty there is’ that their ‘religion is good’, taking ‘those who criticise it’ seriously, even if just to ‘know what reasons and evidence they bring along’, so that they can imagine ‘what answers could be given in response’, thereby ‘making a diligent comparison’ and striving to understand how much they could ‘really be sure of the truth’.¹³

It is clear from a perusal of the *Dialogo* that the main target of the polemical attack was the Church of Rome. Luther’s paean to the ‘freedom of the Christian’ had sensationally opened the floodgates—despite his subsequent partial rethink—on a river that had been flowing more or less sedately for centuries, giving rise to an uncontrolled torrent of currents of varying sizes: it was no longer possible to behave as if nothing had happened and the unity of Christianity had never been questioned. People could no longer uncritically assimilate the religion of their fathers—the faith in which they had been brought up—without first asking searching questions about the quality of their chosen path or reformulating the reasons for their choice after thorough analysis. Riccamati thus asked Muzio the rhetorical question: ‘If someone embraces the doctrine that he has been taught and stubbornly persists with it, without wanting to attest whether it is genuine or false, does it not seem like a random path?’¹⁴ Those who only embraced the ‘doctrine of the Roman Church’ because ‘it had been taught to them first’, and because it had been ‘embedded in the soul’ with ‘the example of their fathers and many others that educated them in childhood’ were effectively admitting to themselves and God that if they had been born to fathers who were

‘Turkish or Jewish, or from another sect of infidels’, and if their religion ‘had been taught to them first’, they would calmly have ‘followed the Turkish, Jewish or indeed any other religion’. The implications of religious relativism—the equality of the three monotheistic religions—were used here as a bugbear to persuade Muzio to abandon his unshakable certainties. The only remedy for those who did not wish to embark on a ‘random path’ and who wanted to be sure that their chosen religion was ‘good and holy’ was to verify that ‘it was such’ through ‘the word of God’.¹⁵ Those who refused to measure themselves against others or, even worse, took refuge by choosing to blindly persecute difference soon lapsed into ignorance and superstition. By closing the door in the face of divine truth, the intolerance of those who ‘object as soon as the Gospel appears, without even wanting to understand what it was, using bans, imprisonment, stakes and all sorts of supplications, persecution and cruelty [...] to prevent it from developing and to oppress it’ would only lead to further separation from God.¹⁶

Riccamati was therefore trying to sow the seed of doubt in Muzio’s mind (for him it was a certainty) that Rome’s reaction to the spread of Lutheranism, characterized by total closure and repression, was a sign of the obtuseness, weakness and—ultimately—the bad faith of the Church: ‘their biggest mistake’ was their ‘perverse stubbornness in wanting to class something as an abomination without first understanding what it was’. The rejection of any kind of dialogue was so all-encompassing, added Riccamati, that when a representative of the Roman Church had finally decided to listen to Protestants, he had done so ‘with such rotten and corrupt judgement’ that even ‘the bright light of the sun’ had appeared to him as ‘darkness’.¹⁷ In the light of attacks by Lutherans, instead of ‘using due diligence to learn the truth or falsity of one’s faith’ or taking advantage of the opportunity to question one’s certainties and renew the reasons for belonging to one’s faith through a frank and transparent debate, checking that it corresponds to the dictates of the Gospel, the Roman hierarchy had quite unscrupulously ‘avoided them [Lutherans], accused them and persecuted them as great heretics’.¹⁸ In this way, they ‘foolishly’ spurned every opportunity for ‘discussion of the faith’, showing their fear of ‘lapsing into heresy’, as if ‘changing views’ was the gravest danger for a man of faith.¹⁹

In response to Riccamati’s persistent reasoning, Muzio showed all the fragility of the faithful Catholic whose atavistic certainties have been snatched away. He felt that opening his heart and mind to the Lutherans

would be tantamount to the risk of being fatally attracted to their innovative message. As a resident of a Catholic country, the prospect of dialogue seemed to be full of uncertainties. Indeed, he saw four equally impracticable options: ‘keeping it secret’—the Nicodemite choice—appeared increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of greater inquisitorial oppression; publically retracting heresy guaranteed a lifelong stigma of ‘infamy’; fleeing involved the painful abandonment of ‘fatherland, family and friends [...] and everything’; and martyrdom—the choice to make a pertinacious stand and ‘go to the stake ignominiously’—was not for him. It was better to postpone the inevitably dramatic choice and wait for a ‘free and holy Council’ to be convened, in the hope of being ‘enlightened by the truth’ and, furthermore, ‘without any danger’.²⁰ This late appeal for a Council (the *Dialogo* was published in 1558, although it had been written a few years previously) probably reflected the aforementioned weight of expectations that those who, like Acontius, were sensitive to religious change must have placed in the forthcoming opening of the Council of Trent in the early 1540s. Until it was actually convened and issued its first doctrinal decrees in 1546–1547, and even afterwards (think of Giorgio Siculo’s prophetic *Epistola* of 1550), the Council was responsible for the projection of numerous appeals, hopes and utopian dreams into the collective consciousness of the time, all aimed at the future prospect of healing the fracture in Christianity. After the early 1550s, however, all this inevitably became part of a past overtaken by events and Riccamati was forced to bring Muzio sharply back to reality: hoping that Lutherans and Catholics would come to an agreement on the ‘controversies of religion’ was tantamount to hoping that ‘God and the devil’ would reach a joint understanding. His attack ended with a rhetorical question—‘Can’t you see how long this practice has been in place?’²¹—that betrayed all the disenchantment of those—none more than Acontius—who had been forced to painfully accept the failure of the prospect of reconciliation following the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547 and Charles V’s last attempts to seek religious and political unity in his Empire, adapting to a new equilibrium that soon found its first legal expression in the Peace of Augsburg (1555).²²

However, the final outcome of the process of disillusionment experienced by Acontius through Riccamati was not explicit adhesion to Lutheranism, although various textual allusions suggest that it was the religious confession that the author of the *Dialogo* leant towards. Instead, Acontius’s central message was an invitation to place the search

for religious truth at the centre of one's life path by 'scrutinising the truth with great diligence [...] regarding things related to the pious worship of God and our salvation', without deviating from the teachings of the Gospel. While careful and meticulous study of the holy texts was to be encouraged ('read and contemplate the Scriptures assiduously'), it was also essential to favour constant debate with different positions of faith about the truth and the most fruitful way to reach it: 'let us ask everyone what the right way is' was the explicit invitation formulated by Acontius–Riccamati in the *Dialogo*.²³ The Council was certainly required, but not in the traditional way; it needed to be 'in many pieces', an ideal meeting of all Christians consisting of many short sessions offering daily opportunities for exchanging and discussing views on matters of faith among friends and experts: 'You and I will do our part today, two or three other friends will do theirs tomorrow.' The best recipe for the ultimate triumph of the divine truth was to 'stimulate each other to study the Scriptures' ('accend[ersi] l'un l'altro allo studio delle Scritture'), listen to 'everyone's opinions' and compare them to assess 'which ones are most in keeping with the Holy Scriptures' ('quali sieno alle Scritture sacre più conformi'). The main lesson that emerged from the *Dialogo* therefore concerned the method adopted in the search for divine truth rather than the content of faith.²⁴ With regard to the latter, as we shall see, Acontius referred his readers to another text that was subsequently enclosed with the *Dialogo*: the *Somma della dottrina cristiana*. The original concept behind the *Dialogo* was different; when it was drafted (in around 1554–1555), he did not intend to abandon his country, but return to his place of birth—as he duly did in 1556—to make his contribution to the search for truth. After having been away from the Italian peninsula for more than 5 years, except for short work trips,²⁵ and still (partially) aware of the power relations in play at the time, Acontius wanted to mark his return by launching a covert propaganda campaign aimed at sowing the seed of doubt within the fortress of solid certainties which supported Rome's temporal and spiritual power. He intended to use the text completed at the Viennese court as a weapon; as it was written in Italian, it was designed for an Italian audience. The terms of this Nicodemite propaganda campaign were revealed at the end of the *Dialogo* by the Catholic Muzio, now ashamed about the 'serious and reckless errors' committed thus far and having been persuaded to leave the 'darkness in which he was living' in order to clarify, most of all to himself, 'whether he was walking along the path of truth or that of error'.²⁶ This was after asking

for more information about the Lutheran doctrine and getting Riccamati to promise to give him ‘a little book to read’ that would help him to ‘separate the wheat from the chaff’—the reference is to the *Somma della dottrina cristiana*.²⁷ Indeed, Muzio encouraged him to ‘summarise all this reasoning that you’ve done with me in writing’, recommending, however, that he should publish it under a title ‘that would not frighten off scrupulous men, but exhort them to read it’.²⁸ The idea was to distribute the volume around ‘streets and inns’ (‘contrade e hosterie’) by implementing a Nicodemite plan of dissemination in which the apparent randomness of the material distribution of the text would conceal its precise proselytizing objective:

Copies could be thrown down at night around the quarters of the city, giving the impression that someone had randomly lost them, and some could be placed in taverns as if they had been left behind by travellers; in short, it could be disseminated everywhere in a thousand different ways.²⁹

A title ‘that would not frighten off scrupulous men, but exhort them to read it’ was an essential condition for the success of the plan and its aim to convince even the most reluctant Catholic believers, while at the same time avoiding the increasingly tightening grip of censorship. The final title chosen by Acontius—at Muzio’s behest—was *Dialogo [...] nel qual si scuoprono le astutie con che i lutherani si sforzano di ‘ngannare le persone semplici et tirarle alla loro setta: e si mostra la via, che harebbero da tenere i prencipi e magistrati per istirpare de gli Stati loro le pesti delle heresie*, which astutely presented the theme of the work under a reassuring controversialist guise while disclosing its content to those who wanted and were able to read between the lines. In this way, by being passed around in cities and gaining widespread exposure, this manual of persuasion would become an instrument for spreading the method to ‘seek the truth’. Muzio concluded

on seeing the ways and the sequence of points that you have used with me, some could also use them with their friends (if the opportunity arose), while others could give the book directly to their friends, adopting an appropriate argumentative nuance,

adding the final comment that ‘it really is disgraceful that the world has to remain so blind and in such gloomy darkness’.³⁰

The propaganda project outlined in Muzio’s concluding remarks never came to fruition. After returning to the Italian peninsula in the second half

of the 1550s, Acontius might have realized that the substantial strengthening of the inquisitorial and censorship network—now much more far-reaching under the Carafa papacy than the situation he had encountered just a few years before—made it too risky to publish his *Dialogo*. Alternatively, he might have abandoned the idea of printing the book—it was only published a few years later in Basle after he had become a religious exile—and used his stay on the peninsula to experiment with the discreet and reserved channels of manuscript circulation. Although there is no documentary evidence to demonstrate that the text was distributed, the existence of a manuscript version of the *Dialogo* with some significant differences compared to the printed edition makes such an eventuality plausible.

The manuscript copy, which might predate the final printed version published by Pietro Perna in 1558,³¹ also provides insight beneath the murky veil that often enshrouds the problematic drafting phase of a work only known in its final printed version. It is a first and more moderate draft that probably coincides with a less advanced stage in Acontius's religious journey. It stands out from the printed edition for the notable absence and clear sweetening of some of the most markedly anti-Roman passages in the final text. Indeed, the manuscript version bears no trace of the explicit allusions to persecution, 'bans', 'imprisonment', 'stakes' and 'to all kinds of torture' by the executors of papal will, the explicit identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Antichrist,³² or the polemical attacks on princes and magistrates persecuting heretics to appease the religious powers. Its tone is much more subdued, reflecting the profile of an author besieged by doubt, a man still hesitating before taking the decisive step. The printed text, by comparison, is much more clearly defined, taking shape both as a paean to the method of perennial truth-seeking and the work of a man who had left his doubts behind and joined the Reformed camp by bluntly rejecting papal authority and its religious arsenal.³³

Which form of Protestant faith did Acontius finally decide to endorse? By attempting to answer this question, we can cast light on his religious torment, which is otherwise difficult to grasp in its most hidden aspects, and above all reach a better understanding of successive developments in his religious thinking. As mentioned, the form of Lutheranism that Acontius encountered and embraced in Vienna was fully focused on a call for the religious freedom of Christians and direct personal readings of the Bible, firmly grounded in the spirit of liberty before authority and

tradition. This is certainly the image of Luther's followers conveyed in the *Dialogo*, where—using Riccamati as a mouthpiece—they are compared to ‘all of the prophets, Christ and the apostles’ who had been subjected to savage ‘calumny’ in the past.³⁴

3 THE *SOMMA BREVISSIMA DELLA DOTTRINA CRISTIANA*: THE ‘BENEFIT OF CHRIST’ AND ANTI-ROMAN POLEMICS

The image of Lutherans as prophets, apostles and so on is substantially confirmed in the *Somma brevissima della dottrina cristiana*, the short work written by Acontius to accompany the printed version of the *Dialogo* and illustrate basic Reformed doctrine.³⁵ As it was also in Italian, it was probably conceived to be part of his thwarted Nicodemite propaganda project. It reads as a small tribute composed in honour of the Bible as the only source of knowledge. Acontius uses presumed adherence to the holy text as his yardstick, either embracing a given doctrine or launching polemical attacks accordingly. The faith that he espoused was ‘grounded in extremely clear, candid and resolute testimonies of Scripture’, all aimed at ‘exalting the mercy, grace, goodness and glory of God’, while at the same time ‘deflating and lowering the pride of men’.³⁶ The harshness of predestination had been expunged from this faith to make room for the central role played by the ‘benefit of Christ’s death’; as it was ‘impossible for someone to be saved’ because of ‘the nature and the condition of man’, God had

sent his only-begotten son Jesus Christ, moved by an unfathomable love and goodness, so that, as a man, he could come to the aid of our folly. The aid was such that he took all of our sins and iniquities onto himself and was severely punished on the cross, as if he had committed all of our sins.³⁷

The salvific effects of this sacrifice guaranteed man total restoration of his perfect state of grace before the original sin.³⁸ However, the benefit of Christ’s death ‘does not yet belong to all men’, meaning that ‘not everyone is saved’. Indeed, ‘this grace and favour’ are exclusively reserved for those who have faith, those

who believe [...] not the history of events surrounding Christ [like the Jews], but firmly believe that they are some of those that Christ died for, and believe that their sins were forgiven by Christ through pure grace.³⁹

On the other hand, according to 'Catholics' the 'benefit of Christ's death was imperfect' because by mounting the cross the Son of God had only erased our sins (and Adam's original sin) 'with regard to guilt, but not yet with regard to punishment'. For Acontius, this was why they maintained that in order to 'fulfil the punishment' the soul of man needs a post-mortem trip through purgatory or the 'intercession (as they say) of those who do good for the dead', or that it is necessary to satisfy by works while still alive.⁴⁰ Therefore, Catholics placed 'the justice of man in works more than anything else'. However, as the Scriptures clearly stated the opposite, namely that 'the Son of God fully erased all the sins of those who are saved', it followed that man is not obliged to do good works to 'recompense for his sins or erase them', as Catholics maintain, but only 'to be obedient to God as a good son, so that his name is glorified and so that he can be as similar as possible to his master Jesus Christ'.⁴¹

Therefore, the Scriptures teach us 'that the only road to salvation is the remission of sins and the justice promised to us in Christ and through Christ, which is received through faith'.⁴² With regard to those who indicate a different path to reach salvation, 'there is no doubt that they want to teach a different Gospel from the one taught by the apostles'.⁴³ Acontius's form of Lutheranism—which he probably chose to embrace while at the Viennese court—was therefore strongly influenced by the doctrine of the *Benefit of Christ*, an anonymous text published in Venice in 1543. Given that the book circulated widely around the Italian peninsula in the mid-1540s, it is easy to imagine that he enjoyed the opportunity to read it before he left Trent at the end of the decade. The *Somma* contains a lot from the *Benefit of Christ* and little in terms of predestination; there are clear traces of Luther's ideas on the freedom of Christians and reading the holy text directly, and few signs of the increasing dogmatic and doctrinal rigidity adopted by Protestant Churches in the mid-sixteenth century. It has already been mentioned how much Acontius's version of Lutheranism was inspired by the irenic environment of the Viennese court where he spent 'a long time'.⁴⁴ This must be borne in mind in order to understand the tolerant elements of his masterwork, *Satan's Stratagems* (*Stratagemmi di Satana*).⁴⁵ Equally, in order to grasp the secret of the latter work's success in the Protestant world, above all in England, we need to take into account the aggressive anti-Roman nature of the *Somma*, which, by anticipating many parts of *Satan's Stratagems*, once again illustrates to what extent Acontius's

impatience with Catholic intolerance and the obtuseness of Rome's reaction to the challenge of Lutheranism was at the root of his choice of faith.

The *Somma brevissima della dottrina cristiana* mirrored the dialogue-based structure of its companion work (the *Dialogo di Riccamati*), continuing the imaginary debate with the arguments and objections put forward by the Catholic camp. The synthesis of its savage anti-Roman attacks was the accusation that Catholics had deviated dangerously from the route outlined by the principles in the holy text. Acontius wrote that after it had been established that Catholics could not prove any of their doctrines on the basis of Scripture, they had striven to sustain a number of points: 'the authority of the Church, that is of the Pope, the cardinals and the bishops, and also of the Pope by himself (who wants to be above the Church), is greater than that of Scripture'; 'that the Church can judge what should be admitted or not admitted as authentic'; 'that Scripture does not contain everything that is part of the Christian doctrine, but that the apostles taught many things exclusively by word of mouth'; 'that the Pope and the Church have the authority to make new laws and oblige men to obey them under pain of mortal sin'⁴⁶; 'that they can create new articles of faith and those who do not believe in them are heretics who cannot be saved'; 'that the Pope, who claims to be the Vicar of Christ, and the Church are governed by the Holy Ghost, and cannot err'; 'that therefore interpretation of the Scriptures is exclusively their responsibility and not that of others'.⁴⁷ Naturally, justification by works and faith was not the only point on which the Catholic doctrine deviated from the Holy Scriptures. Acontius consistently adopted Lutheran reasoning to stress that the only sacraments ('visible signs' that represent the 'good news of our redemption through Christ') mentioned in the Scriptures were baptism and the Eucharist: the popes had therefore wrongfully increased them to seven.⁴⁸ He also targeted the Catholic habit of worshipping saints and auricular confession—a highly useful instrument through which priests were able to 'imprint their swindles and fallacies firmly in the souls of simple men'.⁴⁹ He ended by reviewing the arguments of apologists for the Holy Roman Church and demolishing their theories one by one. Some had attempted to 'make excuses for the popes by saying that what they did with their traditions and institutions was not a question of adding to the precepts of God', but instead 'was only a way of providing guidance and showing the right path to be able to observe these precepts flawlessly'. Acontius cut such reasoning

short—‘this is tittle-tattle’—with the view that ‘it is clear to see that they value their traditions much more than the precepts of God’.⁵⁰ To those who claimed that removing the central role of works for purposes of salvation paved the way for immorality—‘the exclusion of works stops men from learning how to do good and cheapens them, smoothing the path for the license of the flesh’⁵¹—he answered provocatively that although not everybody in Reformed countries was a saint by any means, he was sure that ‘you will not find all the whoredom, adultery, hatred, animosity, envy, murder, cheating, blasphemy and other nasty vices I could name that are frequently found in the Papacy’, but rather ‘a way of life with great innocence and simplicity’.⁵² Others had objected that ‘the doctrine and religion of the Roman Church had been considered good and holy for so long and by so many and by such great countries’ that it was impossible to believe ‘that our fathers must have been blind and let themselves be deceived’, or that ‘a certain Martin Luther only started to open his eyes after many centuries and see what many learned and able men before him had not seen’.⁵³ Acontius responded by saying that ‘the same considerations’ could be made by Turks or Gentiles ‘to affirm their faith’, as ‘their religion had lasted much longer and been embraced by more countries and peoples than that of the Roman Church’. And yet there was no doubt—especially in the minds of Catholics—that ‘the Gentiles were mistaken’ and ‘the Turks are seriously mistaken’.⁵⁴ As in the final printed version of the *Dialogo*, the climax of the anti-Roman attack led the reader to associate Rome with the Antichrist:

We say that although the Pope professes to be a Christian and the shepherd of all Christians, he teaches and has others teach a doctrine that is essentially anything but Christian.⁵⁵

These aggressive anti-Roman polemics also featured in Acontius’s masterwork, *Satan’s Stratagems*, alongside harsh attacks on the dogmatic rigidity of the Protestant Churches, forming a (seemingly) ambiguous and contradictory blend. We shall return to both aspects in Chap. 3 to analyse the success of the work in seventeenth-century Europe.

4 TOWARDS ENGLAND: RETURN AND ESCAPE FROM THE ITALIAN PENINSULA

In mid-1556, Acontius decided to return to Italy, an idea that he had probably never abandoned. He had always seen his stay in Vienna as an opportunity for a long break—somewhat significantly, it was punctuated by several short Italian trips—rather than definitive exile.⁵⁶ The drafting of the *Dialogo* in Vienna and the associated Nicodemite propaganda plan prove that he had not renounced his ambition to promote a work revealing the nefarious influence of the papacy on religious life on the peninsula and, more generally, Rome's intolerant attitude. Returning to the area he had left 5 or 6 years previously, Acontius chose—perhaps at the suggestion of an eminent advisor⁵⁷—the protection of Cristoforo Madruzzo, also known as the Cardinal of Trent, a man of the Church who was able to offer him sufficient reassurances on matters of faith due to his open and tolerant attitude. Acontius had probably known him since his time in Trent and had appreciated his broad-mindedness as a student of law in Padua, when he was already a member of the Accademia degli Infiammati (Academy of the Burning Ones). Madruzzo became a bishop in 1539 and a cardinal in 1545. In 1541, he had offered protection to Ortensio Lando, a scholar and polygraph from Milan who fled to Switzerland in the late 1540s, and thanked him by dedicating to him a manuscript collection of writings by Luther and Bucer with extremely radical connotations;⁵⁸ in subsequent years, he also welcomed figures suspected of heresy such as Nicolò of Verona, the Augustinian editor of *Nova doctrina* by Urbano Regio, and Andrea Ghetti from Volterra, an Eremite friar employed by Madruzzo *in officio praedicandi*.⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards, in 1548, the Bishop of Trent conferred the title of Podestà of the City on Filippo Valentini, a humanist from Modena previously suspected of heresy by Paul III and a future exile in Valtellina in 1557. During the first sessions in Trent, the stance Madruzzo took in favour of translating the Bible into the vernacular and giving the Eucharist to laymen led to accusations of heresy from Bishop Dionigi Zanettini.⁶⁰ As a great admirer of the *Benefit of Christ*, he also took steps to help the Sicilian Bartolomeo Spadafora in 1555, when Cardinal Reginald Pole asked him to intervene with the Emperor on his behalf to prevent the involvement of the Sicilian Inquisition, which already had 'some malevolent information' about Spadafora frequenting the circle centred around Pole and Vittoria Colonna in Rome.⁶¹ These

are sufficient elements to outline the profile of a man of the Church who, also thanks to the protective shield of the imperial jurisdiction of the Principality of Trent, was able to allow himself significant room for manoeuvre away from the direct control of Rome. When Acontius returned to Italy, Madruzzo had just been appointed Governor of Milan in place of the Duke of Alba. Therefore, after a long period of imperial service, he moved to the Spanish branch of the Habsburgs, whose relations with the German-Imperial branch were not at their best. However, the Cardinal of Trent always enjoyed the favour of Charles V, and even after appointed as the Governor of Milan was very careful to keep the channel for dialogue with the German branch open, thereby encouraging constant interaction between the German world and the Roman Curia, even at the cost of displeasing the King of Spain, Philip II, who decided to replace him shortly afterwards.⁶² In this way, on 26 November 1556 Acontius arrived in Milan to be Madruzzo's secretary and remained in this role until June 1557.⁶³ There are no surviving documentary traces regarding his stay or his actions in Milan.⁶⁴ The temptation to interpret this as implicit confirmation of the implementation of his long-planned Nicodemite propaganda plan is indirectly strengthened by the fact that his time in Milan coincided with the exacerbation of Paul IV's repressive campaign, whose effects were only partially cushioned by Madruzzo's influential protection. The Governor of Milan made an effort to stem pressure from Carafa by collaborating with Ercole Gonzaga, Cosimo I and a network of agents in Rome and Venice to exonerate Pietro Carnesecchi, who was first summoned to appear before the Roman Holy Office in 1557 and given a sentence in absentia on 2 April 1558.⁶⁵ Madruzzo hosted him regularly from 1559 onwards and even expressed open disapproval of the appointment of cardinals favoured by the Pope in March 1557 by supporting the Theatines Scotti and Consiglieri, along with Dominican and Franciscan friars such as Ghislieri, Petow and Dolera, and strict canonists like Rebiba and Reumano.⁶⁶ Indeed, his troublesome stances earned explicit reproaches from the Pope on more than one occasion; he was even urged to be more vigilant in his area to prevent the occurrence of unpleasant episodes such as a prison break by two dangerous heretics.⁶⁷

The papal measures were not without political implications that were sometimes clear, for example in the harsh propaganda against the imperial court that reached its climax in February 1557: while Aconcio was in Madruzzo's service, the Pope gave orders to collect evidence that could

be used to accuse Ferdinand and his son Maximilian of heresy, continuing his refusal to recognize the former's imperial title.⁶⁸ This initiative, with its hurriedly collected evidence, was destined to remain a dead letter, overtaken by the final events in the war, but it is easy to imagine its effect on those like Acontius who were inextricably associated with the imperial court and the young Hapsburg Archduke in particular. If we believe those who said after the event that Acontius had been contemplating his escape to Switzerland for a long time,⁶⁹ it is quite legitimate to suggest that Carafa's intimidation campaign against the Ferdinand and Maximilian set off alarm bells in his head. The event which then finally persuaded him to head for the Alps was probably the sensational arrest of Cardinal Morone during the night of 31 May 1557; when news of this spread throughout the peninsula, the different European powers reacted with shock and worry.⁷⁰

A few days after this, on 19 June 1557, a letter sent from Milan informed the Duke of Mantua that

Acontius, secretary to my lord the Cardinal, who dealt with dispatches for the Court, departed without saying exactly where he was going, having left all of his writings in his room.⁷¹

Acontius's hasty departure seems to have left Madruzzo 'extremely angry about this escape'⁷² and it is easy to understand why. A message sent a few days later by the Venetian agent in Milan announced that 'messer Jacob Acontius, secretary to the illustrious Monsignor of Trent, who was responsible for his figures, has fled to go and live in Zurich as a Lutheran'.⁷³ Acontius himself returned to the religious reasons for his escape in the dedication in *De Methodo* (Basle 1558) addressed to his partner in flight Francesco Betti, recalling

the difficulties and worries that we both shouldered for so long, our common studies, wanting and not wanting the same thing and, what counts more than anything else, the same religious belief and the decision, taken jointly, to abandon our homeland for it, which created the closest possible bond between us.⁷⁴

Betti also gave an account of their planned but seemingly sudden escape in a passionate and engaging *Lettera all'Illustrissimo Marchese di Pescara*, in which he explained to his protector Francesco Ferdinando d'Avalos 'the reason why he resigned from his service'. The Roman gentleman

recounted that he had 'stayed in Basle for more than two months waiting for Acontius', before 'coming to stay in this city [Zurich]', from where he sent his long letter.⁷⁵ It is not known why the two friends separated after leaving Milan together and met up again later. Nevertheless, they probably travelled together along much of the route that took them to Chiavenna, passing through Caspano, in Valtellina. From Chiavenna, they might have reached Basle via Locarno, before moving on to Zurich.⁷⁶

The letters of recommendation that the two fugitives took to Zurich, addressed to the city's Italian community, bore the signs of their stay in Valtellina,⁷⁷ while the stopover in Basle was used to collect a letter from their friend Celio Secondo Curione addressed to the Antistes Heinrich Bullinger, a further guarantee of receiving a favourable welcome.⁷⁸ It was undoubtedly because of these influential introductions that Acontius and Betti were favourably received by the main city authorities. The 'two poor Christians, one from Rome and the other from Trent' were immediately granted financial help from the Locarnese community in Zurich,⁷⁹ and were probably offered accommodation at the house of Bernardino Ochino, a pastor in the same community.⁸⁰ This was the start of the close friendship between Acontius and the former General of the Capuchins, who had escaped from the Italian peninsula in 1542. Ochino finally settled in Zurich after a long spell in England under King Edward VI. He crossed the Channel with Peter Martyr Vermigli in 1547 at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and stayed in England as a priest in the first Italian evangelical community in London until the Catholic Mary Tudor came to the throne (1553): Ochino was probably the first to sing the praises of the Anglican Reformation to Acontius, instilling in the latter the desire to discover the country for himself.

Acontius stayed in Zurich until the autumn of 1558, travelling to Basle at least once to supervise the publication of his three works (the *Dialogo*, the *Somma* and the *De Methodo*) by Pietro Perna, a native of Lucca. He then moved on to Strasbourg, thereby following, perhaps unintentionally, the path trodden a decade before by Peter Martyr Vermigli after his escape from Lucca, where he had been the long-term Prior of the Augustinian Canons at the monastery of San Frediano; after brief stop-offs in Zurich and Basle, he was called to Strasbourg by Martin Bucer to fill the post of Professor of the Old Testament, which had been vacant for almost a year following the death of Wolfgang Capito.⁸¹ Thus, in November 1558, Acontius found himself in Strasbourg, the place of refuge of many Marian exiles who had fled Catholic England in 1553,

together with Bernardino Ochino. It is plausible to suggest that the latter introduced Acontius to the group of English gentlemen waiting in the imperial city for better times so that they could return to their homeland. They included John Jewel, the future Bishop of Salisbury and a good friend of Ochino's, who played a leading role in Acontius's decision to move to England a year later,⁸² Robert Dudley, the future Earl of Leicester, and, above all, Francis Russell, the second Earl of Bedford, who became one of Acontius's noble English protectors and at the time employed an Italian, Pietro Bizzarri, as his secretary.⁸³

Strasbourg was probably also the place where Acontius met his future adversary Edmund Grindal, the Anglican Bishop of London, another Marian exile with an aggressive side to his character; some years later, the two clashed violently regarding the expulsion of the Dutchman van Haemstede from the foreign community in London. He also met Sir Anthony Cooke, Cecil's father-in-law, and Sir Thomas Wroth, a former favourite of King Edward VI and the son-in-law of Sir Richard Rich, who famously profited from the dissolution of the monasteries.⁸⁴ Acontius shared his enthusiasm with them about the death of the Catholic Queen Mary and subsequent rise to the throne of Elizabeth Tudor in November 1558. In this way, while his English friends were planning their return, Acontius allowed himself to be persuaded to cross the English Channel by the Ambassador Sir Nicholas Throckmorton. William Cecil, the Queen's secretary, was looking for engineers who were experts in fortification to contribute to the strengthening of the country's maritime defences, as he was worried by international developments that exposed England to French and Scottish attacks—particularly the prospect of a French attack launched from Scotland. Shortly before, for the same reason, he had asked another Italian expert, the Florentine Giovanni Portinari, to return to England, where he had previously worked in the service of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Somebody—perhaps his father-in-law, Sir Anthony Cooke—must have spoken to him about the learned Italian he had met some months before in Strasbourg, a man driven by religious feelings favourable to Elizabethan England with significant experience of fortification work, whose texts included a treatise on the art of fortifying cities⁸⁵; Cecil wasted no time in asking Throckmorton, the English Ambassador in Paris, to contact Acontius and soon afterwards, on 25 August 1559, advance notice was given of his arrival in England.

Waiting for him in London, along with the Secretary of State's men, was an annual pension of 60 pounds granted by the Queen for future services rendered in the fortification project.⁸⁶ Almost as soon as he arrived, Acontius entered the service of the Earl of Bedford, whom he had met in Strasbourg. As mentioned, the Earl also employed another Italian religious exile, Pietro Bizzarri, a historian from Perugia. Both Bizzarri and Acontius were friendly with Bernardino Ochino.⁸⁷ In 1564, shortly after Russell had been appointed Warden of the Eastern Marches and Governor of Berwick, Acontius was called to work on the castle in the latter town, where he was soon joined by Bizzarri. His name thus became associated with a project that is still remembered in English history textbooks.⁸⁸ During the months they spent together, Bizzarri drafted a short treatise dedicated to *De bello et pace*, whose irenic nature was clearly inspired by Acontius's work and thinking.⁸⁹ Bizzarri's collection of poems indirectly confirms the interpretation offered by the editors of a previously unpublished short treatise by Acontius on fortification that was recently rediscovered in a later English translation in an English nobleman's private archive⁹⁰: the issue of peace was constantly at the heart of their musings during their brief stay in Berwick. While Acontius dedicated his *Booke of fortefyinge* 'to he who loves peace and quiet',⁹¹ Bizzarri praised military engineers like Lee and Acontius in his poem *Ad Ricardum Leum Anglium*, regarding their work as noble and glorious inasmuch as they helped to keep the peace, hold invaders at bay and allow civic life to proceed smoothly.⁹²

The financial security guaranteed by the annual royal pension meant that Acontius could continue to nurture the religious aspect of his exile. Since the reign of Edward VI (1547–1553), Thomas Cranmer had supported the inception of a number of Churches of foreign exiles—providing the exiles with a place of welcome and a collective platform for making their voices heard more distinctly formed part of a clever strategy deployed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to rescue England from the state of doctrinal uncertainty bequeathed by Henry VIII. He was convinced that if this group of foreigners were given free rein to express their faith, they would provide some useful models for the construction of the fully Reformed status to which the Anglican Church aspired.⁹³ At the same time, Cranmer hoped that London's new role as a place of welcome for exiles from all over Europe would make the city the capital of the Protestant awakening.⁹⁴ It became natural for newly arrived foreign exiles in England to seek a suitable place in one of the various

national Churches that were revitalizing religious life in the capital. Somewhat predictably, however, as the years passed, the spontaneity that had driven the first steps taken by the foreign communities gradually gave way to a series of rigid rules that tended to regulate as many aspects of their religious practices as possible. First of all, in 1550, Jan Laski, an energetic Polish Reformed bishop whose time in London included a spell in Lambeth Palace (the Archbishop of Canterbury's residence), published his *Forma ac ratio tota ecclesiastici ministerii in peregrinorum ... Ecclesia instituta Londini in Anglia*, a sort of guideline that provided detailed indications of the rights and duties of members of the foreign Churches, the election and role of ministers and elders, ritual and sacramental rules, checks on orthodoxy and the morality of each member of the congregation. Laski's text, which was fully endorsed by Cranmer, balanced Presbyterian concessions with a system featuring Episcopal leanings; it was undoubtedly a step forward in the stabilization process for Churches that had started as spontaneous gatherings but later followed precise rules in terms of organization and control.⁹⁵ It was probably no coincidence that Bernardino Ochino was replaced that year as head of the Italian Church by the more inflexible Protestant Michelangelo Florio, with Cranmer's blessing.⁹⁶ Regardless of who was at the helm, life was hard for the Italian Church of London from the start because of the relative scarceness of Italians and the tendency of Italian merchants, bankers, artisans and mercenaries in London to resist affiliation with any Church due to their instinctive intolerance of rules and the cautious attitude of those planning to return to their homeland at some point rather than end their days in prison.⁹⁷ It thus disbanded almost immediately in 1553, when Mary Tudor came to the throne, and was unable to reform until 1565. However, its survival over the following decades (until after 1600) was not due to the presence of Italians, but the adhesion of a large group of Flemish exiles, who had broken away from their national Church at the end of 1567, and the participation of a significant number of Englishmen in the ecclesiastical life of the community.⁹⁸

The initial situation mapped out by Thomas Cranmer in the late 1540s soon changed significantly. After the Catholic chapter of Mary Tudor, the Anglican Church recouped all the reforms introduced by Edward VI in enhanced form by anchoring them in a more systematic framework. Foreigners living in London were no longer asked to provide inspiration for a theological and doctrinal model; instead, their presence

was used to confirm the goodness of the choices made by the English Church. In terms of policy, the impetus from the government in London was to strengthen the doctrinal orthodoxy of these Churches. Laski's *Forma*, which was still the reference text for the internal organization of such Churches, safeguarded egalitarian and radical statements through censorship entrusted to influential laymen and applicable to all confrères (including ministers), and the institution of prophecy, which allowed even the most humble member to rise from his pew and provide his interpretation of the Bible as long as he could prove that he had received direct and unquestionable divine inspiration. However, in the new political framework in the second half of the 1550s, there was a drop in such utterances aimed at defending the original evangelical and egalitarian spirit of the foreign Churches.

Therefore, when Acontius arrived in England, over 10 years after Cranmer had established the foreign Churches in London, the religious outlook of these institutes had changed radically. As the Italian Church had been disbanded a few years previously, at some point Acontius joined a small group of Spaniards who had created a small community centred around Casiodoro de Reina in 1559. This Morisco had fled from the Hieronymite monastery of San Isidoro del Campo in 1557,⁹⁹ and started to preach to members of a Spanish community in London that had formed at the time of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon's wedding. Acontius received a warm welcome and became one of the most influential members of the Consistory by 1562; he was even described in some testimonies as the 'head of our Consistory'.¹⁰⁰ However, the only ecclesiastical bodies officially approved by the Bishop of London, Edmund Grindal, were the French and Flemish Churches. The former was dominated by the assertive character of Nicolas des Gallars, one of the most distinguished ministers in Geneva, who was chosen as its leader directly by the Geneva Consistory in April 1560 and made it a sturdy defensive stronghold of Protestant orthodoxy. The latter had been reorganized by Adriaan van Haemstede, a liberal and conciliatory spirit who later fell afoul of harsh censorship by members of his Church in the mid-1560s in the wake of the growing rigorism in London. Jacob Acontius became directly involved as a result of the presence of a group of Anabaptists of Dutch origin, disciples of Menno Simons, who had settled in England during the reign of Henry VIII. Under Queen Elizabeth, they fell victim to the government's increasing intolerance towards 'irregular' religious groups on English soil and were given 20 days to leave the Kingdom in

October 1560. Elizabeth stated that other refugees would receive the full support of the government as long as they took an uncompromising stance towards the redoubtable ‘sect’. After being invited to a meeting with the Anabaptists, Adriaan van Haemstede promised to champion their cause with Edmund Grindal, recognizing them as disciples and granting them his protection. However, the Consistory of the Flemish Church—above all Pierre Delenus—refused to back van Haemstede’s stance and he was excommunicated on 14 November 1560 after a series of turbulent meetings. He was thus forced to leave the country on 15 December.¹⁰¹

The Dutch minister’s view, which caused such a sensation in his Consistory, was that the Anabaptists—‘infirm members of the body of Christ’—could receive grace as long as they accepted ‘the remission of sins and salvation thanks to the sacrifice of the only mediator and *grand-petre* Jesus Christ, striving for justification through the Holy Ghost’.¹⁰² This was a battle that Jacob Acontius wanted to embrace. He made his first statements on 2 September 1560 to the elders and ministers of the French and Flemish Churches and 2 days later in a letter to Nicolas des Gallars. He focused on an extremely subtle doctrinal question related to the reality of incarnation—or the human nature of Christ—put forward by van Haemstede to establish the thin dividing line that would make the Anabaptist proposition acceptable or not.¹⁰³ According to Des Gallars, Acontius’s standpoint was even more extreme than the Dutch minister’s stance, opening the way to denial of the human nature of Christ, or denial of the incarnation.¹⁰⁴ This dispute went on for several months. In November 1560, Edmund Grindal became involved when Acontius sent him a long letter in which he tried to use all the influence of the prestige and distinguished references he had accumulated as a Queen’s pensioner and engineer in charge of coastal fortifications to help his friend.¹⁰⁵ However, he only managed to delay the Dutchman’s sentence of excommunication by 3 days; after a few weeks, the latter was forced to set sail for Enden, while his supporters in the Flemish Church were called to sign a profession of orthodox faith. Acontius continued to defend him even after the ruling, sending a letter to the Church of Geneva,¹⁰⁶ and personally striving to persuade him to return to England in their frequent correspondence.¹⁰⁷ Finally, in July 1562, Acontius sided with van Haemstede when he refused to sign a formal retraction suggested by Grindal, unconcerned about compromising his position in the eyes of the top echelons of the Anglican Church. In any case, beyond the specific details of the episode, which developed inside the Flemish

Church but extended much further with the involvement of the most influential religious authorities in extremely subtle doctrinal debates on the nature of the divine seed, what was really at stake was the question of exercising authority in doctrinal matters. The expulsion of van Haemstede was not the only explosive case in Elizabethan England in the early 1560s: there were two controversial episodes in 1563 centred around Cassiodoro de Reina, a minister of the Spanish Church accused of anti-Trinitarianism and moral perversion,¹⁰⁸ who was forced to flee and was tried in absentia in London, and Justus Velsius, an enlightened thinker inspired by Schwenkfeld who was expelled from England.¹⁰⁹ It has been noted that these frequent cases of intolerance showed the triumph of the Presbyterian model favoured by the Anglican episcopal polity—a rigidly hierarchical constitution supported by ministers appointed by external and isolated religious authorities rather than the community of believers, an orientation that tended to suffocate the autonomism and democratic radicalism of the Congregationalists.¹¹⁰ Acontius was fully immersed in this growing climate of intolerance and personally bore the consequences of the dogmatic and disciplinary rigidity of the national Churches in London. After Reina's escape, together with members of the Spanish community who lacked a leader, he asked to take Communion with the French Congregation, but the Consistory invited him to first purge himself of the suspicion of heresy, as they did not want their consent to sound like implicit approval of van Haemstede's ideas. Acontius appealed to Grindal for the umpteenth time, but his defence was judged to be unsatisfactory by members of the Consistory of the French Church.¹¹¹ He fared no better a few months later with the reconstituted Italian Church, now led by Girolamo Ferlito, an exile from Palermo who had fled to Geneva to escape the rigours of the Inquisition and was appointed by the Geneva Consistory to breathe fresh life into the Italian congregation in London¹¹²: on this occasion too, Acontius's application seems to have been rejected.

5 *SATAN'S STRATAGEMS*: A RESPONSE TO REFORMED INTOLERANCE, A RECIPE FOR PEACEFUL CHRISTIANITY

It was in the midst of these events that Acontius drafted his masterwork, *Satan's Stratagems* (Basle, 1565; Fig. 2), a work that fully reflects his impatience with the growing climate of intolerance to which he himself had fallen victim to on a number of occasions. Indeed, the book is full of (sometimes savage) criticisms, harsh reproaches and passionate

Fig. 2 Frontispiece of the 1565 Basle edition of Acontius's *Satanæ Stratagemata*

S A T A N A E
S T R A T A G E M A T A L I
B R I O C T O ,

I A C O B O A C O N T I O
Auctore.

- Accessit eruditissima Epistola de ratione edendorum librorum, ad Iohannem Vuolfium Tiguripum eodem auctore.



B A S I L E A E
A P V D P E T R V M P E R N A M
M. D. L X V.

exhortations regarding the direction taken by his Reformed companions. At the same time, his target audience was the Protestant world, which he now felt part of¹¹³: it is no coincidence that his attacks are full of references to ‘our’ Reformed Christians, whom he always set in contrast to the ‘papist enemy’ in his prose. His continuing polemic against the increasing doctrinal rigidity of the Reformed Churches and their progressive move away from Luther’s original message of evangelical liberty at the beginning of the century was therefore carried out from within that world. He displayed the wounded sensibility of someone directly involved who was especially annoyed by the betrayal of the very spirit and ideals that had attracted him in the first place. Although he never makes explicit references to events and people, it is clear that many passages in his eight books are directly inspired by his personal experience, above all the expulsion of the Dutch minister van Haemstede, which was the episode that had affected him most the most.¹¹⁴ Despite the numerous attempts made by van Haemstede and Acontius to explain how the former’s words had been misunderstood, the accusation of heresy had been blindly repeated until the achievement of the final persecutory objective of expulsion from England. In Acontius’s eyes, the arrogance and pride displayed by many

Reformed ministers in dealing with matters of faith was irrefutable proof that they were falling prey to Satan's tricks just like the 'Papist enemy', betraying the original values of the Gospel that they used to fight for, even to the point of renouncing personal property and comforts:

It is surprising at what pitch of sanctity they think they have arrived, and how they despise and esteem as nothing those who do not imitate them—and this is the more grievous, because they are of those, who have not hesitated to become exiles for the Gospel's sake, and forfeit possessions, honours, comfort, kinsmen and friends, and because in the beginning they made so fair a show. I know what I am saying. I am acquainted with many; they are not of one place or one nation, but all alike were exiles for Christ's sake. Alas, my brother! The path you have entered upon is not the right one! You did enter upon the right path once, but have turned aside from it. But verily that which now you tread will lead you to destruction! Come back to the right path, while you may, while yet daylight continues!¹¹⁵

Acontius had met these Marian exiles in Strasbourg and Frankfurt in the second half of the 1550s. They had fled England several years before the frenzy of Mary Tudor's anti-Protestant repression, aimed at restoring Catholicism, persuaded him to embrace the cause of the 'Gospel'; he then followed them back to their homeland when Mary Tudor was on her deathbed. Now at a distance of some years after these events, he could not bear to see the Marian exiles transformed into 'stern and harsh censors',¹¹⁶ accusing them of 'having your eyes fixed only on your dignity, reputation and the public opinion of you, that you may be accounted as gods among men' and wanting to 'afflict and oppress your brothers, and take to yourselves a kind of dominion over their consciences, and thus surround Satan's kingdom with a wall and build up its bulwarks!' In this way, Acontius reiterated, they would only succeed in building 'the walls of the Devil's kingdom, thereby constructing its defensive stronghold'. He warned that 'it was not at Rome that the papacy first came into being; it derives its origins from our first parents. There is none of us, who does not cherish his own papacy in his heart',¹¹⁷ attacking them with the extreme insult of a comparison with the much-despised 'Papism'. The path to follow was one dedicated to love and charity for one's neighbour, 'to gentleness, to the duties of charity and to that which is true, not to a counterfeit kind of saintliness',¹¹⁸ rather than hatred and domination of consciences: 'verily charity has not the eyes of the lynx to see another's blemishes; it has no eyes at all; it is altogether blind, it covers its neighbour's sins and suffers them

not to be seen'.¹¹⁹ True love does not involve interrogating people and scrutinizing their every move in order to catch them out:

to turn a blind eye to the sins of our neighbour, to put the best construction on all things, to think naught but what is good of another, all these things are so closely allied to charity, that, where they are not, charity cannot be—any more that there can be fire, where there is no heat.¹²⁰

Acontius depicted his former companions as indulgent with themselves and inflexible and unmerciful with others.¹²¹ Before looking at your neighbour, 'there is still more than enough for you to do at home, and that the words *Physician, heal thyself!* (Luke 4: 23) may still be justly said to you'.¹²² While Acontius underlined that it was pointless—and moreover anti-Christian—to denounce other people's sins in public,¹²³ he also felt that the practice of public penance adopted by most Reformed Churches was profoundly wrong and counterproductive. He compared the practice to auricular confession and the 'no common disgrace' that Catholics were subjected to through this unrighteous instrument of power.¹²⁴ He asked himself: 'do not the Papists try to persuade us by that same reason that their auricular confession is necessary? Why do we reject it here?', before answering, 'for this reason of course, that we do not think room ought to be left for human inventions or calculations of convenience and inconvenience'.¹²⁵ In the same way, with regard to the imposition of public penance, he felt that 'it was not ordained from on high and is not necessary for the keeping of any divine ordinance, [there is sufficient harm in it, inasmuch] as men claim authority to impose any yoke on men, for that belongs to God alone'.¹²⁶ It was not wrong to expect a sign of regret from those who, after 'disregarding not only two or three brothers, but the Church itself', did not want to 'abstain from something unbecoming to a Christian'.¹²⁷ The way to heal tension in a Christian community was, however, not to expect those who committed errors to carry out an act of public penance before the whole Church.¹²⁸ The main path for re-admittance to the community, thereby repairing the fracture caused by the estrangement, was *correctio fraterna*¹²⁹: what should triumph among the faithful of any Church was 'to be most ready to forgive and do anything rather than nurse feelings of triumph'.¹³⁰ 'If neighbours and those who consort with the outcast testify that he is showing his repentance in no doubtful way and reproaching himself for his act',¹³¹ in other words 'if he afterwards shows any signs of penitence

and men worthy of credit testify that it is so, when this has been signified to the church, he should be restored to the place he held before, and this too should be done with as little verbal display as possible'.¹³²

Acontius's critique of the increasing disciplinary and doctrinal rigidity of the Reformed Churches went beyond the specific question of the expulsion and desirable reintegration of the 'infected member'. His polemic went straight to the heart of the issue, openly arguing against extensive use of the confession of faith, a defensive stronghold behind which almost all Protestant Churches had taken shelter, ready to open fire on anyone that betrayed their oath:

What objective is pursued through this meticulous demand for confessions of faith? It is desired that he who errs is in some way forced to betray himself – and when you have acknowledged this, what use will it be? A lot (you will say), as it will be possible to admonish him; and if he repents, I will have acquired a brother, while if he persists, he will be excluded from the Church, where he will not corrupt others. But because those who err learn, there will be no need for this institution. Since if there is no tyranny in the Church and if pastors combine true charity and erudition with great gentleness and humanity, those who dissent from the Church on certain points will reveal themselves of their own accord; they will approach, inquire and call the matter into question. They will present their reasoning or pieces of evidence by drawing them from the Holy Scriptures. They will not refuse to hear solutions that are the joint product of charity and sound erudition, and if matters are treated cleverly, humanely and carefully, the truth will always prevail. If instead there is tyranny, nothing can be more suitable for the practice of tyranny than these institutions; they are nothing but slaughterhouses of consciences.¹³³

Acontius felt that these 'slaughterhouses of consciences' were instruments of power that were ends in themselves, means of controlling consciences whose only effect was to favour the practice of dissimulation by members of the Churches.¹³⁴ The very existence of the growing number of confessions of faith in the Reformed world had given rise to an uncontrolled number of religious sects that were often in conflict with each other, offering the papist enemy the opportunity to denounce the Protestant rift. This could only be explained as work engineered by Satan:

Whereas Satan fervently desires that those who have declared war on that his mighty kingdom of the Roman Church should appear to be divided

into as many parts as possible we exceedingly further his desires. I admit that I cannot regard this with, approval. [...] I, for my part, should not disapprove, if certain churches agreed about those articles of religion, which it is necessary to salvation to know, and also had one common confession of that faith, that just as in truth they belong to one body, so they might also be seen to belong to it. But since that is not done, I would rather there was no confession than so many.¹³⁵

He emphasized that although the ideal objective was for all Churches to share a single confession of faith, this was not a feasible prospect in the religious framework of the time, so the best auspice was not to have any. Only in this way would it be possible to escape from the infernal machine fuelled by Satan, consisting of indignation, pride, arrogance, animosity and endless disputes about insignificant doctrinal details:

[T]hey defame one another [...] when some controversy arises among them (as we have said), while they are discoursing they light upon those things, which we said before occur in disputations; and their minds being stirred and disordered they are not careful what they do, following the impulse of their indignation; and this happens the more easily, the more importance both parties or at any rate one thinks is involved in the matter in controversy.¹³⁶

This was the result:

Our dear ones are foully slain before our very eyes; neither age nor sex is spared; even the very unborn babes are doomed to death and their bodies torn in pieces. What are we doing meanwhile? Seemingly all this is nothing to us! Intrepidly we quarrel, strive and brawl. Petulantly we bandy insults, abuse and reproaches. Thus the common cause is daily dishonoured more and more, we daily stir up more bitter hatred against ourselves and sharpen a sword for the common foe, for him some day to draw upon ourselves, and furnish him with the faggots, wherewith to burn our bodies.¹³⁷

This happened because of those in the Reformed world:

[W]hen any people embraces the Gospel there are many of the people, who would as readily have embraced any other doctrine you will as that of the Gospel; seeing they feel no concern for religion at all [...] there are not wanting such among them as, though they really care naught for religion, yet pretend they love it dearly, bestow much labour on Holy

Writ and become learned in things divine and eloquent disputers, and at length attain to the office of teaching and preaching. And since (O horrible!) there is a great gulf betwix heart and tongue, and since they teach far other than they act, it manifestly redounds to the very groat discredit of the Gospel.¹³⁸

With regard to these people, he continued: 'wherefore by their impure life worthy of many scathing rebukes, they are a shame and disgrace to the Gospel, whose praises they magnificently mouth maybe over their cups, not to say in the company of harlots; those men some day will be justly punished by God for their impiety and crimes'.¹³⁹ They therefore needed to cast away their 'ambitions, vain babblings, wrath, enmities, quarrels, discords and all other affections!' and avoid the 'foolish trust and gall' that Satan used to obfuscate our minds.¹⁴⁰ He made it clear 'that a man should never make an end of speaking in abusive terms of the pope of Rome, the cardinals, the monks and the priests, that he should never cease to be angry at their impostures and errors, and should make no distinction of foods for religion's sake, they would all to a man admit that godliness by no means consisted in things of this sort alone' and that it should not be used as a pretext for censoring others' works and actions.¹⁴¹ When 'artything comes to their ears about their neighbour', such men do not 'lovingly admonish him and exhort him to remember his duty', but instead 'discuss him slanderously with any one you will, rather than address a single word to the man himself. They will quickly publish the matter abroad and make no end to their whispering, till some other subject offers itself whereon they may practise that remarkable godliness of theirs.'¹⁴² Christians should instead use 'maximum gentleness and moderation' with their neighbours in order to 'acquire the souls of men for God' rather than 'render to every man according to his merits'.¹⁴³ The best way to apply this Christian pedagogy involved proceeding gradually, starting from a truth 'which meets with readiest assent and is less open to calumny'. For example, he advised teachers or preachers to deal with justification by faith before the impiety of the mass, the worship of saints and images and other things of that kind.¹⁴⁴ In this way, pastors would achieve their objective of imparting the fundamental truths of the faith without triggering any dissent or controversy.

His proposal to stop the cases of abuse of power that he frequently witnessed was closely connected to the heart of the message in *Satan's*

Stratagems, namely reducing the truths of the faith to a few essential shared principles. Acontius felt that the confession of faith was acceptable as long as it did not ‘force one to mention a dogma that is not one of the main points of the Christian religion that must be known in order to be saved’.¹⁴⁵ The Reformed Churches had to ‘settle for a simple confession of faith including only the fundamental points of the religion’, without ‘devising any law or institution which the consciences of men might be bound to one day’.¹⁴⁶ Acontius made a heartfelt appeal to his former companions who had become the inflexible censors of others’ behaviour: ‘let them leave the secrets of hearts to God’, while refraining from commanding souls or founding laws.¹⁴⁷

On this point, Acontius could fall back on a solid humanistic tradition stretching from Erasmus of Rotterdam to reflections by the Savoyard philologist Sebastian Castellio and the former General of the Capuchins Bernardino Ochino. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Erasmus had been one of the first to stress that the theologian’s duty was to instruct rather than repress, recalling old Church practices whereby ‘the heretic was given an attentive hearing’. Erasmus underlined that ‘if he explained himself satisfactorily, he was absolved; if after conviction of heresy he remained obstinate, his supreme penalty was to be excluded from communion with the Church’. The main target of his polemic was the dogmatic attitude that typified the top echelons of the Church hierarchy:

formerly someone was considered a heretic if he deviated from the Gospel, the articles of faith or something of similar authority. Nowadays, if anyone differs however little from St Thomas, he is a heretic. [...] Anything that does not please or is not understood is heresy.¹⁴⁸

Erasmus maintained that it was not right that an error of any kind be punished by burning unless it was linked with sedition or any other crime which the laws punished by death.¹⁴⁹ His attack on the repressive methods adopted once too often by the Church authorities and his tolerant irenic proposal led him to suggest a return to Christian origins, with a simple living faith freed from the trivialities of decadent theology. This faith was limited to an essential core of articles that everyone could identify with. According to Erasmus, ‘some learned and devout men’ should gather ‘to extract from the most pure sources of the Gospel, the apostolic writings and their best commentators a kind of résumé of the whole “philosophy of Christ”’,¹⁵⁰ which he summarized as follows:

The essence of Christian philosophy consists in understanding that all our hope rests in God, who grants us his gifts freely through the mediation of his Son. The death of Jesus redeems us, baptism unites us to his Body; dead to the lusts of this world, we must live in accordance with his lessons and example, do good to all.¹⁵¹

The idea of a core faith limited to essential principles that could garner approval from a wide range of existing religious confessions bore considerable fruit over the following decades, although different elements were stressed at different times.¹⁵² Those who welcomed his proposal included Sebastian Castellio, after the dramatic events surrounding the Spanish anti-Trinitarian Michael Servetus, who was sentenced to burn at the stake by Calvin in Geneva in 1553. In works such as *De haereticis an sint persequendi* (1554) and his subsequent manuscripts *Dialogi IIII*, Castellio developed the idea of the *fundamentalia fidei* necessary for salvation, continuing down the path outlined by Erasmus. Indeed, he invited men to discuss 'the path to follow in order to reach Christ, namely how to put our lives right', criticizing the custom of those who wasted energy by debating 'the state and function of Christ himself, and where Christ is now, what he is doing, in what sense he sits to the right of the Father, in what way he is one with the Father. And then discussing the Trinity, predestination, free will, [...] angels, the state of souls after this life'¹⁵³: all of these issues and questions were seen as superfluous to purposes of attaining the eternal life. Therefore, while developing his proposition based on the ideals of religious tolerance, Castellio strove to indicate an analytical method and procedure for discussion, outlining a path that could lead to a positive outcome by attributing central importance to human reason.¹⁵⁴

Despite clearly distancing itself from Castellio's mystical rationalism to embrace radical spiritualism grounded in inner enlightenment,¹⁵⁵ Bernardino Ochino's *Dialogi triginta*—published in Basle in 1563 and translated into Latin by Castellio—also followed the same path with a clear community of intent and views.¹⁵⁶ Ochino felt that as heretics were merely misguided they should be educated rather than burned at the stake; using violence against them and insulting them in public only revealed the fragility of their reasoning and beliefs.¹⁵⁷ They should never be put to death, as heresy was not one of the offences that God had delegated to civil magistrates.¹⁵⁸ A good Christian should instead admonish and educate heretics with charity and gentleness; punishment was only

legitimate in view of any unlawful behaviour. Only in the event of persistent heresy should they be avoided for a period of time.¹⁵⁹ The question of the legitimacy of the punishment of heretics by civil magistrates was at the heart of a lively theological debate that had developed over the decades (and even centuries), partly thanks to the fundamental contribution by Erasmus of Rotterdam and Sebastian Castellio, about a passage from the Gospel: the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 24–30), which has been described as ‘a fragile shield used as refuge by those who rejected the use of force in matters of faith’.¹⁶⁰ The passage inspired a wide range of different interpretations. On one hand, wheat and tares—good seed and poisonous weeds—provided ‘an exemplary two-track model to distinguish and contrast the chosen people from the others, the deviants and rejects’. On the other hand, however, the text made it impossible for the chosen ones of the kingdom of God to ‘eradicate’ the others, postponing this moment until the final harvest, namely ‘the end of this world’ (Matthew 13: 40): wheat and tares had to remain together.¹⁶¹ From St Augustine onwards, the parable of the seed had attracted opposing interpretations that highlighted either that tolerance of the bad seed was a sign of a good Christian or that it was not necessary to wait for the return of Christ to harvest crops, so the tares should be burned immediately.¹⁶² Erasmus of Rotterdam offered his interpretation, which was in line with Augustine’s thinking, in *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Matthaei*, published in Basle in 1522, earning censure from the Valladolid Council:

The servants who want to cut out the weeds before the time are those who think that the false apostles and heresiarchs should be suppressed by the sword and by corporal punishment. But the Master of the field does not desire their destruction, but rather that they should be tolerated in case they should amend and turn from tares into wheat. If they did not amend, the task of chastising them one day should be left to their judge.¹⁶³

Returning to this reading shortly afterwards to answer critics of his biblical paraphrase, Erasmus further specified the terms of his reflection, maintaining that it was a question of distinguishing between the powers of bishops and the secular authorities. While the former were only supposed to use evangelical clemency in correcting and guiding the faithful, the latter were free to use force against those who had a disruptive impact on the life of the society as a whole.¹⁶⁴ The point was to affirm once and for all that violence was extraneous to Christianity and that

coercion could do nothing regarding matters of conscience and inner convictions. Castellio also adopted this interpretative line, which had reached Erasmus from Augustine, when addressing princes—the holders of temporal and political power—in the introduction to his anthology of passages in defence of religious freedom:

Be happy with the sword that God has entrusted you with: punish thieves, punish traitors, false witnesses and others of the same ilk. As far as religion is concerned, defend the pious against affronts by others. This is your duty. Theological doctrine should not be dealt with by your sword. Otherwise, if the theologians have you handle their doctrine using your arms, a doctor will reasonably be able to ask you to defend him using arms against the opinions of other doctors; and dialecticians, orators and those with other skills will be able to do the same thing.¹⁶⁵

With clear reference to the exegesis of the parable of the seed by Erasmus and Castellio, Ochino used his *Dialogi triginta* to inveigh against pastors who forgot their duty and claimed the right to separate outcasts from saints, thereby substituting Christ, who was the only one that could carry out such a task at the end of time.¹⁶⁶

Acontius picked up the thread of these reflections by providing his version of the ‘variously interpreted passage’, saying that ‘when the servants asked whether they should go and gather up the tares, the householder is said to have replied that they should not go, lest haply while they gathered up the tares, they rooted up also the wheat with them’.¹⁶⁷ For him, this was a definite ‘testimony to Christ’s fondness for tolerance’.¹⁶⁸ He rejected ‘the explanation given by some, that Christ does not here do away with any kind of rigour, but warns us that evil must be tolerated, which cannot be amended without destruction’, stressing that it ‘does not seem to be consistent with the householder’s words’.¹⁶⁹ He had no more sympathy for the exegesis of those ‘who would have it that the whole cleansing of the church is here referred to, which the Lord bids be put off till the last day, but that he does not on that account forbid particular cleansings of churches’.¹⁷⁰ He felt that it was clear that

the wheat represents the godly, the tares the ungodly persons [...]. The field is the world. Therefore to gather up the tares from the field is to kill the ungodly and remove them from among the living in this world. But the Lord forbids that to be done and would have them grow together with the wheat and not be separated until the time of harvest.¹⁷¹

Naturally, this rule did not apply to ‘certain heinous offences’ that ‘must be held in check by the avenging sword’: for cases of adultery, murder and similar crimes, it was the magistrate’s duty to punish the guilty party or parties appropriately by separating them from the rest of the community.¹⁷² However, magistrates were not supposed to deal with matters of faith—there was total agreement with Castellio and Ochino and their joint intellectual point of reference, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Acontius took this reflection even further by adding an element to defend the religious sphere against interference from civil powers; he found an extra reason in his fallible conception of man to prevent magistrates from dealing with the hidden mysteries of the conscience. He felt that in a magistrate’s mind

a man who is not in errore may seem to him to be in error, or one who is not so grievously in error to be very grievously in error, may easily happen, is most surely proved by all the many controversies between very learned men, by which the church is at all time vexed.

For this reason, they could never be allowed to ‘judge controversies of dogma between believers.’¹⁷³

Moving beyond the absorbing but limited discussion of the exegesis of a single biblical passage, using words that Acontius faithfully reproduced in *Satan’s Stratagems*, Ochino focused on the origin of heresies, created at the instigation of Satan due to the corrupt habits of ministers, the hatred and envy that divided them, the pride and enthusiasm for pointless innovation that assailed them, or more simply their ignorance and vanity, even the excessive faith that led men to worship them as gods.¹⁷⁴ The Roman Antichrist bore a huge responsibility—Ochino accused him of gradually corrupting the original evangelical message by inventing arbitrarily imposed rules and doctrines, which introduced the germ of error and heresy into Christianity.¹⁷⁵ Acontius fully supported this sentiment and reiterated it in his masterpiece, just as he picked up and developed the attacks launched by Ochino against the Reformed Churches, which were becoming increasingly similar to the Roman Catholic Church in their execrable habit of replacing the evangelical word with their magisterium.¹⁷⁶ The harsh polemic against the dogmatic impositions of the dominant orthodoxies inspired by Castellio found a natural outlet in Ochino’s work with a heartfelt appeal for a radical reduction in the number of *fundamentalia fidei* necessary for salvation, diluted to simply faith in Christ as the Messiah and saviour of humanity

without any consideration of the dogmatic arsenal (Trinity, sacraments, Holy Communion and baptism) used as a shield by the main religious confessions.¹⁷⁷ Although there are some obvious differences between the two texts—such as Ochino's focus on a non-speculative faith consisting of inner certainties and charitable work that Acontius would not have endorsed with his insistence on the scriptural basis of faith—the continuity of themes and reflections between the *Dialogi triginta* and *Satan's Stratagems* is wholly evident, from an apology for religious tolerance and Christian freedom to a defence of doctrinal pluralism and a rejection of all coercion in theological matters. Bolstered by reading Ochino's work, which shared the same publisher as *Satan's Stratagems*—Pietro Perna from Lucca—Acontius persevered with determination down the well-trodden path and developed his version of the arguments in question. His starting point was clear and irrefutable: 'it cannot be hoped that the happy day when all men think equally about all matters will ever arise for the Church of God'. Unanimity of opinion was simply an ideal that would never be created in the earthly world. The only way to achieve the common goal of religious harmony was to identify a few truths necessary for salvation, with everyone agreeing to accept them and tolerate each other, discussing 'their controversies in a friendly and courteous way, like brothers'. Each religious confession had to renounce part of its identity so that they could all converge around a single symbol of faith. The beneficial effects of such an agreement between the Churches would be visible to all Christians immediately: 'assuredly such an accord of the Churches would allay much talk among men, and remove many great stumbling-blocks, which retard the progress of the Gospel to a remarkable extent'. Acontius had no doubt over the content of this 'very old and short confession, which is ascribed to the apostles and is called a watch-word, and which every one accepts'¹⁷⁸: it had to be formulated so that:

it so included all things which are necessary to be known for the attainment of salvation, that nothing whatever is left out; and on the other hand, if any things are of such a kind, that even if a man departs from the truth therein and persists in his error to the end, nevertheless hope of his salvation ought not to be abandoned, of those things the confessions contains nothing.¹⁷⁹

The form in which these few essential truths for salvation were conceived was also vitally important for Acontius; 'they had to be presented in such

a way, that it can neither appear to admit him who does not admit them, nor appear not to admit him who does'.¹⁸⁰

Acontius maintained the same line of reasoning with regard to establishing which divine truths would unite the largest number of existing Christian sects and confessions. He felt that the essential truths were those that no one could misunderstand, those that emerged from a simple reading of the holy text with its clear language and evident meaning.¹⁸¹ On the contrary, the propositions that had to be condemned or rejected included 'only those things that contradict the truths of the faith so much that it is necessary to know that one cannot believe both in what needs to be believed and what is condemned'.¹⁸² In other words, the only doctrines that needed to be censured were those that clearly contradicted the few essential truths of the common confession of faith. The first example he put forward inevitably concerned the doctrine at the top of his ideal list of fundamental principles, the 'benefit of Christ's death': 'one cannot ascribe justification to Christ alone and also to the law at the same time; [...] as it is necessary that it is only ascribed to Christ and those who ascribe it to the law are rightly condemned'.¹⁸³ Christ had saved humanity by sacrificing himself on the cross for all Christians and only those who believed in this benefit could aspire to eternal salvation, while those who denied this fundamental principle placed themselves outside the harmonious religious community outlined by Acontius in *Satan's Stratagems*. What followed—a detailed six-point list of the fundamental doctrines on which to base the common 'symbol of faith'—was a clear and methodical compendium of his religious anthropology. Acontius affirmed that there is only one God, and with him 'the one who he sent, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost'; it could not be justified in any way to 'deny that the father is one thing and that the son is something else, as Christ is really the son of God'. His seventeenth-century detractors used this slightly ambiguous statement as proof of his supposed anti-Trinitarianism.¹⁸⁴ For Acontius, man was deeply corrupted by the original sin and could do nothing to save himself without divine assistance¹⁸⁵; the second point in his list said that 'man is subject to the wrath and judgment of God'.¹⁸⁶ The only opportunity for salvation was through the intervention of 'his son Jesus Christ, who, on becoming a man, died for our sins and rose from the dead for our justification'. It was enough to believe in the benefit of Christ's death to attain eternal life.¹⁸⁷ Finally, Acontius used these doctrinal assumptions to make a first draft of his confession of faith to preserve

religious peace and harmony, an extract which is worth reproducing in full:

I know one true God and the one that he sent, Jesus Christ, his son, and the Holy Ghost. I know that this is God's law: '*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord* etc. *Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them*' [Deut. 6:4, 27:26]. I believe in the resurrection of the dead and that the living and the dead will be judged; those who have behaved righteously will attain the eternal life, while those who have behaved unjustly will be tormented. And as I, conceived in sin and by nature a child of rage I have seriously erred against the law of God, I recognize that I am a subject of God and guilty of eternal death. However, since, at the established time, God sent his son Jesus Christ into the world, who on becoming man *died for our sins and rose for our salvation*, and released us from our sins with his blood, for which sinners are forgiven, and *neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*, I trust that I will obtain life in his name and through his grace. I know of only one baptism, in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Ghost. If anyone wishes, they may also add the condemnation of errors that contradict the aforementioned faith, in this way: I reject the verdict of those who deny that the son is one thing and the father is something else. I therefore recognize that Jesus Christ is truly the son of God. I do not place justification in the law, or in the commandments, or in the inventions of men, but only in Christ. And I do not hope to be saved through the Blessed Virgin, or any saint, or through any other name, but only through Christ.¹⁸⁸

A similar confession of faith would certainly be the best way to 'reach an understanding between Christians'.¹⁸⁹ Otherwise, 'as long as everyone wants his judgement to be a rule and a law for all others in every belief', the consequence will inevitably be 'that everyone is seen as a heretic by everyone else' and that 'there will be no limit to the number of sects, fights, turmoil and hostility'.¹⁹⁰ Only if 'men were persuaded that all those who accept this symbol [...] should be accepted [...] as Christians and brothers and must be admitted [...] to ceremonies of worship', then the same religious controversies would be 'treated with much greater equanimity'. Indeed, after eliminating the animosity and hatred that exasperate the minds of theologians and men of faith, 'adversaries would be deprived of every opportunity to defame'.¹⁹¹ After being established, Acontius specified that the limited set of common truths would not be

treated as an untouchable simulacrum, as someone might well receive ‘a new revelation’ from God. This person would not necessarily be a theologian or leading pastor.¹⁹² ‘An opportunity of speaking ought to be given oven to the most unlearned’¹⁹³ and nobody should have the gall to maintain that he who ‘rises in order to contradict [...] acts recklessly’, as God might well have chosen such a man to make ‘this truth clear in the Church through him’.¹⁹⁴ The reason for this was fairly simple: ‘God would have himself recognised as the author of his gifts; he would not have his glory ascribed to our studios or intellects, but to himself. If you hear a wise word from the mouth of some unlearned man, you must [...] recognise God as the author.’¹⁹⁵ This defence of common prophecy, which attracted the attention and favour of the English supporters of the Congregationalist model in the following century,¹⁹⁶ was rooted in ancient customs and traditions.¹⁹⁷

Naturally this power of prophecy granted to individuals within the community could not enjoy unlimited freedom. Acontius perceptively noted that there was a thin boundary separating the community’s need to ‘abide by the decision of those who sit with him’ from the likelihood that the bearer of doctrinal innovation would be seen as ‘a disturber of the Church’.¹⁹⁸ In order not to cross this boundary, a divine prophet—whether educated or ignorant—had to submit to the judgement of the members of the community after expressing his ideas and if his suggested innovations were not approved, he had to abandon them.¹⁹⁹ If he persisted in obstinately maintaining his point of view against the opinion of the other community members, he would be rightfully accused of being a ‘disturber of the Church’, just like the community members that insisted on him retracting his ideas.²⁰⁰ If the Church wrongfully decided to condemn him and ‘remove him so as not to acknowledge him as one their own’, it would certainly not achieve the objective of ‘separating him from Christ’. On the contrary, the Church rejects someone only ‘because he does not accept the doctrine delivered from on high, and that which is necessary to be known for the attainment of salvation’.²⁰¹ In other words, for Acontius, consistency with the dogma of a specific Church could not be used as a parameter for assessing the opportuneness of doctrinal innovation; the best variable was how far removed it was from the set of essential truths for salvation and, more generally, ‘the ears should be accustomed to recognise nothing as worthy of credence save only the oracles of God contained in Holy Writ’.²⁰² In his conciliatory irenic vision, anyone could have his say and contribute to the truth

if inspired to do so by God: 'there will be no reason why any man should be excluded, who is seen to be at all endowed with godliness and God's Spirit'.²⁰³ For this reason, his idea of councils was very different from the view that materialized at other times in Church history: he took a harsh line on the presumed universal validity—imposed by the Roman Catholic authorities in an authoritarian way—of decrees issued by councils:

but that councils can err we doubt not; nay, nothing is more certain than that they very often have erred. But if we obey some wicked decision of a council, we are not assured by any testimony in the word of God that we shall be excused.²⁰⁴

The only way to make councils a useful instrument of divine truth was to see them as forums for open discussion that were not binding for anyone.²⁰⁵ These pages showcased one of the central points in Acontius's thinking, which had already been clearly expressed in *Dialogo di Riccamati*, namely the central role played by method and the importance of an ongoing laborious search for truth with no preconceived certainties or blind dogmatism.²⁰⁶ He felt that councils had to meet

after the controversies that upset the Church have been expressed and everyone has been given the power to speak freely, in order to allow those who the Lord has chosen to reveal something useful about the question to speak and say what they hear.

After all those who feel inspired to contribute to the debate have spoken, 'the others then judge', but not in such a way that 'the majority make a law which imposes acceptance of what someone says', but rather 'in a way that everyone considers what has been said' and, 'when it seems to have been proved by suitable evidence from the divine letters', it is adopted by the council, 'striving to persuade the others, not through the authority of the council, but through the testaments of the Word of God heard at the council'.²⁰⁷ Only in this way, with a joint 'symbol of faith' for all Churches and a constantly open-minded attitude towards the search for divine truth, would it be possible to create a situation whereby 'he who does not think the same, at any rate as far as the chief heads of doctrine are concerned, knows that he does not belong to that congregation' and leaves of his own accord.²⁰⁸ Only by focusing on doctrine and the divine oracles that support it—and not men who defend it through the supposed integrity of their lives and 'often unstable men's piety'—would it be possible to avoid

the ‘controversies full of strife and quarrelling’ that estrange Christians from the truth and instead maintain a stable level of faith in God.²⁰⁹

6 THE ANTI-CATHOLIC POLEMIC

It should be clear by now that Acontius did not shy away from claiming affinity with the Reformed front.²¹⁰ This helped to characterize his harsh and radical polemic as part of a critique within the Protestant universe. In a certain sense, it was a contribution aimed at stimulating a return to the original spirit of Lutheranism through compliance with the dictates of the Gospel and the freedom of Christians, which the Reformed Churches had progressively abandoned over the course of the sixteenth century in favour of rigid dogmatism that helped to stabilize a fragmented religious framework but inevitably led to an intolerant disposition that was anathema to a free and conciliatory spirit like Acontius. Despite the violent attacks against Protestant pastors and theologians, and the radical nature of the doctrinal proposal in *Satan’s Stratagems*, the work escaped censorship in Elizabethan England. This can be explained by its use of Latin, the decision to publish it in far-off Basle and, above all, its heartfelt dedication to Queen Elizabeth and the close ties that Acontius managed to forge with the English court in the years leading up to publication.²¹¹ In addition to these factors, his eight books were also guaranteed a positive reception in Anglican–Reformed circles by the virulent anti-Roman polemic with which *Satan’s Stratagems* was imbued; it featured even more venomous content than his previous *Somma brevissima della dottrina christiana*.²¹² Apart from the vitriolic anti-dogmatic critique aimed at the Protestant world, Rome was Acontius’s main polemical target; the gradual corruption of the evangelical doctrine, aided by the constant obfuscation implemented by bishops, cardinals and popes to the detriment of the original evangelical truths, had started there. Acontius supported his case with a wide range of examples. A good starting point was the weak interpretative foundations on which Rome had constructed its temporal and spiritual power:

Lastly there is another reason, when from some true proposition a false one is wrongly deduced, and men then use the consequences in place of that proposition, whence it was drawn. Thus when the famous words: ‘Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ (Mat, 16:19),

the pope of Rome has wrongly inferred that proposition, whereby he affirms that he can enact new laws and set up new heads of doctrine (they call them articles of faith) and compel men both to keep the former and believe the latter, he is making use of that consequence as a proposition delivered him from on high.²¹³

Corruption and obfuscation were the best ways to describe the procedure that Rome had implemented with regard to the sacraments:

After some time there were men who thought that any sacred or holy rite was called by the name of sacrament, and so began to transfer that name also to the laying on of hands, to matrimony, penance, confirmation and extreme unction. And the result was that, since baptism and the supper had acquired a name they shared in common with things quite different, their fashion was obscured. [...] Thence too it resulted that, as it was agreed that baptism and the supper were instituted by our Lord, so it was commonly believed that all those which were called sacraments were instituted by him.²¹⁴

This short step had opened the gates to the depths of the blindest popular superstition. With regard to the sacrament of confession, there had been genuine scriptural obfuscation: 'if, though the meaning which the words express is the same, they are nevertheless expounded as if they meant something else. This is the case with the words: "Go and show thyself to the priest" (Luke 5: 14), from which has been derived the proposition, whereby every man is bidden to tell his sins to a priest.'²¹⁵ This was a 'most cunning invention to magnify and establish that papal domination' because 'that practice of confiding sins each year to the priest's ear, on which occasion these papist spies search out aught they think to their advantage' allowed them to use the collected information as an instrument of blackmail and power.²¹⁶

The 'innovation' of Mass was also a case of a 'mistake' and a 'specious pretext'. The 'first Christians' had used it as a formula to 'preserve accepted institutions from laxer observation [...] nothing else than a precaution to prevent the Lord's very salutary institution from falling into disuse and being done away with'. They thus 'celebrated the memory of the death of the Lord', replacing 'primitive worship' where all onlookers 'flocked in great numbers to break the bread' with a priest who took it together with the wine in the presence of many. However, its value had been completely distorted by those like the popes who arbitrarily

decided to ‘change the name of the signified thing to the signifier, calling the act a sacrifice rather than a commemoration of sacrifice’. In this way, almost without anyone realizing, ‘the Lord’s very simple institution of the breaking of bread was turned into that very august and elaborate ceremony of the mass by a strange kind of metamorphosis’.²¹⁷ This ‘lavish and intricate act’ had acquired such ‘honour’ in the Catholic world that it was hard to believe ‘that there is greater devotion than participating in it daily’ and ‘nothing is as normal to anyone as attending Mass’. Adopting the same perspicacity and irony that runs through much of his work, Acontius concluded his attack with a highly realistic social portrait:

And so we find that, when friend meets friend, at the time it is celebrated, he asks him as of a thing, which no one is supposed to pass by, whether he has heard mass, or where he has heard it, or whether he will go and hear it with him in this church or that.²¹⁸

The power system built up over the centuries by the popes was based on both an absurd claim of infallibility and the state of ignorance and fear in which the faithful were left²¹⁹: the latter was a basic requirement for the achievement of the former. Left in the dark about religious truths, ‘the naïve population’ became increasingly convinced that they would not be able to understand divine words, even those that appeared to be clear.²²⁰ By propagating the ignorance of their believers, the popes managed to impose ‘one change in doctrine for the worse’ after another in such a way that they were not even ‘noticed’ by the people, thereby giving rise to a systematic and irreversible process of ‘corruption of doctrine’, which in turn, in a vicious circle with no way out, ‘surrounded men with great darkness’ and made them ‘fall into terrible error’²²¹:

Therefore if any religion has been set up and established among the people, and that a false one, since they imbibe it as children with their mother’s milk—at a time when there is no judgment whatever—and afterwards hear parents, domestics and neighbours all speaking about it with one voice, and when the idea is impressed upon their tender minds that, if any one believe otherwise, he is most assuredly to be tormented in the everlasting fires of hell, such delusions do not allow the judgment to grow, but stunt it and altogether destroy it, so that it can see no light, And so it can neither find out the truth by its own efforts, nor can it bear it, if any would fain reveal the truth to it.²²²

Acontius painted a gloomy picture that seemed to offer no escape to Catholic believers: 'wherefore the man who was born in the midst of errors, since he holds them to be truth, cannot fail to love them and to hate the truth, which is repugnant to them'.²²³ Therefore, 'it was by no means surprising that 'men are so unwilling to be removed from the darkness of popery'. The diabolical control mechanism built up over the centuries by 'papists'²²⁴ became even more effective as it managed to numb the consciences of believers with a clever system of punishments and simple tools for expiation of guilt:

For although the papists require certain things, which a man is unwilling to do, and forbid others, which he would like to have permitted him [...] nevertheless, if a man transgresses, they offer him very easy ways of atoning for his transgression, such as the frequent hearing of masses and the buying of them, the saying of certain number of prayers, the purchase of papal diplomas, whereby sins are remitted at a very small cost, and other trifles of that kind.²²⁵

The believer was therefore imprisoned by a fiendish blend of repressive elements and productive moments:

And so those who make it their business to oppress the truth partly inspire fear by exile, confiscation of goods, dishonour and most cruel punishments, and partly allure men to ungodliness by dangling splendid rewards before them and catch them as a man catches fishes.²²⁶

Not even the spread of the 'Evangelical truth' by Luther and his followers had managed to lift the obfuscation that enveloped Catholic believers, as the 'Romans' used 'the arts of calumny' so that 'the people may not inquire too curiously how just a cause there is for punishing men of this kind with death, nay, that they may applaud their execution'. All they had needed to do was 'invent the name of a heresy or sect or make use of some old one and condemn it', maintaining 'at first that Luther was reviving the errors of John Huss and Wiclef', accusing his 'sect, as they call it' of the 'foulest disrepute' to the extent 'that men cannot mention its mere name without displeasure'.²²⁷

7 THE UNIVERSALISM OF HUMAN PASSIONS

Acontius's biting anti-Roman polemic and explicit claim of affiliation with the Reformed front, expressed several times,²²⁸ meant that *Satan's Stratagems* did not fall foul of Elizabethan censorship even though it also contained a radical and even aggressive critique of the process of dogmatic inflexibility employed by the Reformed Churches, above all the foreign ones in London. However, although the success of the work was certainly connected to the author's royal protection and, more generally, the adaptable and open-minded stances taken by Elizabeth I and her entourage, it was not limited to the Anglican world: in the century following the publication of the first edition in Basle, 21 editions were printed in five languages in six countries. We shall return in Chap. 3 to the reasons why the work was so well loved in seventeenth-century England, but to understand its general success we need to focus on its constituent universalistic elements featuring broad-ranging reflections about the nature of man, the author's ability to shed light on the most hidden and fleeting aspects of the human soul and the most obscure mechanisms of theological disputes. All of these factors made *Satan's Stratagems* a valuable text for deciphering the complex code of religious controversy and doctrinal conflict wherever it arose, irrespective of the essentially geographical context that the vast majority of religious polemical writings in circulation at the time inevitably referred to.

The starting point for his reflection was strongly influenced by the pessimistic Reformed anthropological concept of the corruption of human nature following the original sin.²²⁹ Almost immediately, however, from the first of his eight books onwards, Acontius's analysis abandoned the path of theological discourse to enter the more universal sphere of human passions, taking the form of a shrewd psychological examination of the sins that this corruption of the spirit was sure to foster: 'And hence it is in the first place that he loves himself beyond measure, but with a blind and extravagant love, seduced whereby he abhors his own true good; but he pursues that which is bad for him.' Pride and arrogance are the 'corrupt' feelings that take over the human soul with consequences that become increasingly redoubtable as the level of power of those that nurture them increases:

For as soon as he is exalted to some rank or greater fortune, he thinks that any man you will owes him all things, to minister to his advantages even to his own disadvantage, to revere him and honour him, and that he has the best of rights to make use of any man and all that he has at his good will and pleasure.

Each of these men sees himself almost as a God and 'if he acquires a little learning, straightway he thinks that he knows everything, and is the only one who knows, so that the whole world ought to be governed by his wisdom'.²³⁰ Obfuscated by the haze of his own arrogance, the man of power 'is uncommonly fond of enjoying bodily pleasures to the full and he displays the greatest lack of restraint in regard to these matters. He loves this present life and bestows all his thoughts upon it; of the life to come he thinks not at all. He fondly imagines that this life will last for ever.' This insatiable yearning makes him blind to knowledge of God and his will; he is so full of himself that he thinks God wants to be worshipped with the same gifts that he appreciates: 'gold, silver, stones of great price, and great gems and costly buildings'.²³¹ However, Acontius's harsh analysis was not limited to men of power²³²: Man is by his very nature beyond measure 'arrogant, high-minded, intemperate, greedy, insatiable, covetous, a supplanter, deceitful, quarrelsome, envious, revengeful, murderous, blind, headlong, harsh, wicked and born with a disposition to every evil deed.' For this reason,

he readily puts the worst construction on things which concern his neighbour and is exceedingly suspicious [...] Wherefore if his neighbour has gained aught of advantage or of glory, he envies him and, if he can, prevents him from gaining it; he belittles the reputation of his neighbour, magnifies his faults and brings false charges against him; if any one opposes him somewhat in any matter, he is extremely prone to anger and hatred and cannot easily lay aside his displeasure, nay rather, whets him more and more till he ends in bloodshed, destruction and the most horrible kinds of vengeance.²³³

By applying these emotional mechanisms to the field of doctrinal and theological polemics, it was easy to understand why the number of controversies increased on a daily basis with seemingly no chance of curbing them. After ascertaining that it was difficult for anyone 'to bear contradiction with equanimity', it was also easy to observe that every difference increased the level of hatred between individuals. Furthermore, 'if to all

this are added insults and calumnies on the part of the adversary, it must needs be that the feelings are much more powerfully affected still'.²³⁴ The adversary's doctrine is often confuted before being properly understood and is not listened to 'attentively and with patience'. There is no attempt to 'suspend judgment until the very last'. Blinded by hatred and rage, either adversary can make this mistake:

When at the very first word he imagines he can guess what the other means, and anticipates his words with his own judgment, the result will be that, since the latter means one thing and the former understands him to mean another, he will not confute the adversary's arguments, but those things which through his own hastiness and false interpretation he has conceived in his own mind.²³⁵

The 'bitter, insolent and insulting words and, maybe, threats'²³⁶ naturally aggravate the situation, as the person concerned 'firmly persuades himself that his adversaries, since they cannot defend their cause by reasoning, have put all their confidence in mere violence and insolence'.²³⁷ At this point, it becomes difficult to bring the religious polemic back into the realm of proper judgement:

Since a mind discomposed can neither understand nor judge aright, if the mind of the man who is led astray by error, besides that the error is in other respects also by no means aptly confuted, is further discomposed by abusive words [...], he can much less easily recognize his error.²³⁸

The experience accumulated by Acontius in his years at the law courts allowed him to observe these dynamics with the clinical eye of an impartial observer. If man indulges his self-satisfied and proud nature by appearing 'to surpass others, if possible, in all things', he is 'unwilling' to 'give way to any one or admit his own mistakes':

As a proof of this, take those who go to law about some matter; how hard it is to persuade those who are seeking or denying aught unjustly, that they are acting unjustly! And moreover the more their passions are kindled by contention, the more disagreeable and grievous it appears to give way.²³⁹

By following these psychological mechanisms, the division in matters of faith was fostered and doctrinal errors were consolidated:

Thus peoples are split up into sects, which pursue one another with a more than Vatinian enmity, sparing no kind of insult. Men indulge the more therein, because they do not suppose they are obeying the impulses of their own passions, but doing something highly pleasing to God, though really they are daily incurring God's greater wrath and becoming involved in thicker darkness.

The perverse dynamic triggered by this behaviour, which Acontius had already illustrated, meant that disputes between different sects spread like wildfire: 'These discussions spread errors abroad, because clamour that is heard at them, and the brawls to which they give rise, give men much to talk about.'²⁴⁰ It was an endless spiral in which feelings ran high and each adversary resorted to arguments that he would never have dreamed of using, simply because he was caught up in the heat of the moment and rage, thereby significantly increasing the distance that separated him from the truth and his opponent:

[E]ach party is wont to bring forward many arguments in favour of its own view, if contention somewhat whets and inflames men's minds, it is easy to see that no few things are both affirmed and denied on either side, which they would never have either affirmed or denied had their minds been composed.²⁴¹

Therefore,

when any one seems to be straying a foot's breadth from the right path, think there is nothing else to be done but forthwith to sound the trumpet and fill the air with reviling, abuse and clamour; whatever comes uppermost, though often nothing could be more inept, seems the aptest retort to make, and we imagine that in this way we are doing our duty finely and that great praise is due to us on that account—wise men indeed, seeing we are bringing oil to quench a fire!²⁴²

The proliferation of subsequent controversies resulted in an exponential increase in the 'number of dogmas, the so-called articles of faith' and therefore the number of religious sects, with each one embracing one of these (new) articles of faith.²⁴³

Acontius provided a simple solution to stop the perverse destructive spiral of Christianity, an antidote to the snares engineered by Satan: 'sweetness, gentleness, patience, modesty, love of peace'.²⁴⁴ Indeed,

if those who walk in error were so disposed as to be willing patiently and with quiet and undisturbed minds to listen to those who disagree with them and carefully weigh the value of their reasonings, as if there were really some possibility (in spite of all appearances) of their being in error, very many would be converted from their errors,

without fuelling the high rate of conflict and discord that was troubling Christianity.²⁴⁵ Listening and patience were the two antidotes suggested by Acontius to escape Satan's traps, naturally accompanied by a drastic reduction in the truths of the faith needed to obtain salvation; he felt that reducing the number of essential articles to a minimum would instantly remove the enormous pressure and strong emotional investment that each religious sect or confession created regarding single articles of faith, which were often—he underlined—completely unnecessary for attaining the eternal life. Even if the doctrine encountered were clearly false, 'nevertheless before you decide on stirring up any strife, you have still to consider what the importance of the matter is'. Acontius suggested focusing on the aim

to divert men's minds from curious and valueless questions of that kind, not because the things said are false, but much more that there may be no sad waste of precious time: and moreover it often chances that, while a trivial matter is being dealt with, on one side or the other propositions are rashly put forward by men whose minds are disordered by the heat of contention, which, since they are of greater moment, no little corrupt the purity of doctrine.²⁴⁶

The acute psychological analysis developed by Acontius regarding the sins of man and the perverse interpersonal dynamics triggered by them cast new light on the characteristic mechanisms of religious disputes. No one before him had been able to reveal the evil workings that powered doctrinal controversies so clearly, providing some fundamental indications for escaping from the perverse spiral of personal clashes and confessional conflict that entire societies were caught up in at the time. The success and greatness of this work dedicated to the *Satan's Stratagems* lay chiefly in the extraordinary ability that Acontius demonstrated in this respect.

NOTES

1. For the document in the Ossana parish archive that shows Acontius in his role as a notary in 1540, see G. Radetti, *Introduzione*, in J. Aconcio, *De methodo e opuscoli religiosi e filosofici*, ed. G. Radetti, Florence 1944, 4. Between 18 and 22 January 1546, Jacob Acontius and Leonardo Colombini (about whom, cf. also p. 10) appeared before the College of Notaries in Trent, which assembled in the lower hall of the Bishop's Palace next to the cathedral, asking to be formally admitted (which happened respectively on 21 and 22 January); both were judged 'sufficiently learned and brilliant in the rhetorical arts' ('satis docti et luculenti orationibus'), but did not yet have the fundamental requisite of being enrolled in the city register of *cives*. The Episcopal Court took steps to grant them citizenship and on 22 February 1546 both were considered suitable and were unanimously admitted to the College of Notaries. Nothing is known about Acontius's studies, but it is possible that he did not have any university qualifications, as they were not necessary to practise as a notary; cf. BCTn (Biblioteca Comunale di Trento), ACT1, 4272, anno 1546, cc. 163r–164r, 166r–168v; edition of the Colombini trial in L. Masé, *La 'peste luterana' contagia un notaio. I processi per eresia a carico di Leonardo Colombini (1564–1579)*, Università degli Studi di Trento, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Corso di Laurea in Lettere, rel. prof.ssa S. Seidel Menchi, a. a. 1995/1996, 21–25; cited by R. Giacomelli, *Jacopo Aconcio. La vita*, in P. Giacomoni and L. Dappiano (eds.), *Jacopo Aconcio: il pensiero scientifico e l'idea di tolleranza*, Trent 2005, 203–232, esp. 206–208 and 208–210 for Acontius's few surviving acts. For an up-to-date bibliography regarding Acontius, see the entry by J. Tedeschi, in John Tedeschi (comp.) with James M. Lattis, *The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture: A Bibliography of the Secondary Literature, ca. 1750–1997*, with a historiographical introduction by Massimo Firpo, Modena and Ferrara 2000, 107–115, in addition to the various recent essays cited in this book.
2. On 29 June 1548, in the presence of Archduke Maximilian, the reconciliation between two members of the aristocracy took place in Ala, near Trent: Acontius signed the relative document in his legal capacity. The two men presumably first met on that occasion (cf. C.D. O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, trans. Delio Cantimori, Rome 1955). On 13 September, in the same year, Madruzzo married Maria of Habsburg, his uncle Charles V's daughter, in Valladolid (cf. S. Fichtner, *Emperor Maximilian II*, New Haven, CT, 2001, 19).

3. 'Molti anni di vita trascorsi a corte'; letter from Aconcio to John Wolf, 20 November 1562, in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 325–356, quotation on 349.
4. The names of numerous notaries appear in the Inquisition registries, especially at the beginning of the second half of the century (1555–1580); cf. S. Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia 1520–1580*, Turin 1988, 322ff.
5. The reference is to works such as *Dulce bellum inexpertis*, *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Ioannis* and *Novum Testamentum* in the Venetian edition of 1526, which were often found in notaries' houses together with works by Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon, Bullinger, Vermigli, Ochino and Vergerio (Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia 1520–1580*).
6. The year 1548 marked the start of the first inquisitorial trial (the second one was in 1552) against the merchant Giovanni Antonio Zurletta, a sign of the rampant religious dissent in places such as the German quarter of San Pietro, which was home to both Acontius and Ascanio Schrattenperger, a dogged supporter of the mortality of the soul and the heresy of the three imposters. The latter was tried in 1568, 4 years after the first trial of the notary Leonardo Colombini, Acontius's friend (K. Pischedda and S. Seidel Menchi, *La politica del dissenso. Cristoforo Madruzzo e gli eterodossi*, in Giacomoni and Dappiano (eds.), *Jacopo Aconcio*, 155–169, esp. 167–168).
7. The Apostolic Nuncio in Vienna, the Bishop of Alife, did not hesitate to label him a heretic (O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 12, note 40). It is significant that Vergerio had dedicated his *Agli inquisitori* to him in 1559 (cf. P.P. Vergerio, *A gl'inquisitori che sono per l'Italia. Del catalogo di libri eretici*, n.p. 1559). Moreover, there were Protestants in the prince's service, even after his Spanish marriage, and he had contact with evangelical ministers such as Giovanni Sebastiano Pfäuser (Vergerio, *A gl'inquisitori che sono per l'Italia*). On Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg, future Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and the milieu of his Viennese court, see Fichtner, *Emperor Maximilian II*, 32–49, who even suggests that Acontius played a role in Maximilian's spiritual development (39–40).
8. On this issue, besides the essential G. Constant, *Concession à l'Allemagne de la comunione sous les deux espèces. Etude sur le débuts de la réforme catholique en Allemagne (1548–1621)*, 2 vols, Paris, 1923, cf. E. Bonora, *Roma 1564. La congiura contro il papa*, Rome and Bari 2011; and G. Caravale, *Preaching and Inquisition in Renaissance Italy: Words on Trial*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016, 129–161.
9. The complete title of the work is *Dialogo di Giacomo Riccamati ossanese nel qual si scuoprono le astutie con che i lutherani si sforzano di 'ngannare*

le persone semplici et tirarle alla loro setta: e si mostra la via, che harebbero da tenere i prencipi e magistrati per istirpare de gli stati loro le pesti delle heresie. Cosa in questi tempi ad ogni qualità di persone non solo utile, ma grandemente necessaria da intendere. Interlocutori il Riccamati e Mutio D (hereinafter referred to as *Dialogo*); cf. the modern edition edited by G. Radetti in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 183–210.

10. 'A dialogue that I wrote in Vienna in the Italian language, the first few pages of which I showed Your Highness' ('Un Dialogo que yo escrevi en Viena en lengua Italiana, del quel mostré el principio a V. Alt.a'), he wrote to Maximilian, sending him a printed copy of the booklet (cf. letter from Argentina [Strasbourg] of 27 November 1558, in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 319–320, quotation on 320). The presence of a manuscript in the National Library in Vienna supports the hypothesis that Aconcio sent or gave a copy to Maximilian (cf. O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 77).
11. *Dialogo*, 183.
12. 'Esser bastante a discernere le spositioni sincere della Scrittura dalle cavillose et sofistiche'; *ibid.*, 196.
13. *Ibid.*, 188–189.
14. 'Se alcuno abbraccia quella dottrina che prima gli viene insegnata et in quella ostinatamente persevera, senza volersi certificar mai s'ella è sincera o falsa, non vi pare egli che sia un camminare a caso?'; *ibid.*, 203–204.
15. *Ibid.*, 204.
16. 'Al primo spuntar dell'evangelio, senza punto voler intender che cosa si fusse, subito con bandi, con prigionie, con fuochi et con ogni sorte di supplici, persecutioni e crudeltà s'oppose [...] per impedire il corso suo, et per opprimerlo' (*ibid.*).
17. *Ibid.*, 192.
18. 'Usare alcuna diligenza per conoscer la verità o la falsità della [propria] fede'; 'di fugirl[i], d'accusarl[i] et di perseguital[i] come [...] grand'heretic[i]'; *ibid.*, 191.
19. *Ibid.*, 198.
20. *Ibid.*, 200.
21. 'Non vedete quanto tempo ha che si sta in su questa prattica?'; *ibid.*, 201.
22. See the considerations made above on p. 11.
23. 'Investigar diligentissimamente il vero [...] circa le cose che al pio culto d'Iddio et alla salute nostra s'appartengono'; 'si leg[g]ano e si considerino diligentemente le Scritture'; 'Dimand[iamo] a tutti qual sia la via buona'; *Dialogo*, 194–195.
24. 'Get hold of a Bible and wherever you find Scripture passages cited, check whether they are faithfully quoted or not. Then, for the parts before and after the cited words, try to understand how they should be

- interpreted. If you do all this, I assure you that you will obtain great knowledge of divine matters in a few hours and that it will seem like you have left gloomy and wretched darkness for brilliant and smiling light. You will also understand the enormity and detrimental nature of the deception of those who, by suggesting that one can only become knowledgeable about these subjects after extremely long and laborious studies, ensure that very few people dedicate themselves to them; in particular, they frighten off those like magistrates and princes who should instead devote themselves to these topics and try to understand their meaning'; *ibid.*, 208–209.
25. This can be indirectly deduced, for example, from the opinion expressed by Acontius in 1564 when he was involved in fortification work in the seaside town of Berwick, which also provides information about his past as a military engineer: he had been trained by leading experts in the military art, such as Count Francesco of Landriano and Giovanni Maria Olgiati, Charles V's chief engineer, whom Acontius mentions with special affection and gratitude and who had worked on, among other things, the 'rampart' ('bastionate') fortification of the stronghold in Alessandria in 1554; cf. V. Gabrieli, 'Aconcio in Inghilterra (1559–1566). I baluardi di Berwick e gli "Stratagemmi di Satana"', *La Cultura*, 21, 1983, 309–340; 323.
 26. *Dialogo*, 202.
 27. Regarding which, cf. here below.
 28. 'Tale che non pure non ispaventasse gli huomini scrupolosi, ma gl'inuitasse a leggerle'; *Dialogo*, 209.
 29. 'Potrebbonsene di notte gittar per le contrade alcune copie sì fattamente che potessero parere a caso perdute, potrebbonsene lasciar da' viandanti per le hosterie come dimenticate: in somma si potrebbero in mille modi seminar per tutto'; *ibid.*
 30. 'Altri [...] vedendo i modi et l'ordine che voi havete usati con meco, gli potrebbero poi usare anch'essi (offendosi l'occasione) con i loro amici; altri potrebbero, quando con un colore et quando con un altro, porre in mano a' loro amici il libretto stesso' (*ibid.*).
 31. For an edition of this manuscript version, see Aconcio, *De methodo*, 387–397.
 32. Acontius was referring to the Antichrist and the deceptive forms in which he would appear according to the Scriptures, introducing a 'doctrine that appears to be Christian but is actually quite the opposite of Christian', in such a way that those who proceed with his doctrine 'will believe that they are definitely good and true'; *ibid.*, 189. A few pages further on, after leaving Muzio on tenterhooks for some time, Riccamati started to put his cards on the table (up to a point). He said that there

were already men 'in our time' who claim to be able to demonstrate that 'the Antichrist is already in the world and has already been reigning for many years' and further maintain that the Antichrist is none other than 'the Pope with his Roman Church': these people are none other than 'the Lutherans'; *ibid.*, 192.

33. Cf. O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 95.
34. *Dialogo*, 208.
35. Acontius makes no reference to it in the manuscript version of the *Dialogo*; cf. O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 94.
36. *Somma*, quotation on 228.
37. *Somma*, 219–220.
38. 'And we came out of it clean and pristine, as if neither Adam nor we, who are descended from him, had ever sinned, but had always observed the divine law perfectly; and in this way the damnation of the law was annulled and removed, along with all of its power to condemn us' ('Et noi ne sia restati scarichi, netti et mondi, come né Adamo né noi che da lui siam discesi, havessimo mai peccato, ma sempre perfettissimamente osservata la divina legge; et in tal modo fu scancellata et levata via la maledittione della legge, et tutta la forza ch'avea di condannarci'); *ibid.*, 220.
39. 'Che credono, [...] non la historia dei fatti di Christo [come gli ebrei], ma credono fermamente d'esser del numero di quelli per li quali Christo è morto, et che credono per Christo essergli per pura gratia perdonati i loro peccati'; *ibid.*
40. 'Beneficio di Christo [era] imperfetto'; 'quanto alla colpa, et non anchora quanto alla pena'; 'sodisfare alla pena'; 'suffragi (come essi dicono) di coloro che fanno bene per li morti'; *ibid.*, 244.
41. *Ibid.*, 248.
42. *Ibid.*, 235.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Cf. above, pp. 10–11, 19–20.
45. Regarding which, see below.
46. 'L'autorità della Chiesa, cioè del papa, de' cardinali et de' vescovi, et ancho del papa solo (il qual vuol esser sopra la Chiesa) è maggior di quella della Scrittura'; 'che a lei sta di giudicar qual sia da esser ammessa o non ammessa per authentica'; 'che la Scrittura non contiene tutto ciò che alla dottrina christiana s'appertiene, ma che gli apostoli molte cose insegnarono solamente in viva voce'; 'che 'l papa et la Chiesa ha autorità di far nuove leggi et di ubligare gli huomini ad osservarle sotto pena di peccato mortale'; *Somma*, 229.
47. 'Che posson formar nuovi articoli di fede, a i quali chi non crede sia heretico, né possa esser salvo'; 'che 'l papa, qual pretende esser vicario di

- Christo, et la Chiesa sono governati dallo spirito santo, et non possono errare'; 'che perciò a loro solamente s'aspetta lo interpretare le Scritture, et non ad altri'; *ibid.*, 230.
48. *Ibid.*, 223.
49. 'Imprimer ben negli animi de' semplici le loro barrerie et inganni'; *ibid.*, 253.
50. 'Scusare i papi con dir che non è stato aggiunger a i precetti d'Iddio quel che essi hanno fatto con le lor traditioni et istituti'; 'è stato solamente un dar alcuni indirizzi, et un mostrar la strada per poter perfettamente osservare essi precetti'; 'si vede molto bene che in assai maggior rispetto tengon essi le sue traditioni che non fanno i precetti d'Iddio'; *ibid.*, 242.
51. 'Lo escluder le opere è un levare a gli huomini lo studio di bene operare, un fargli diventar da poco, et un aprir la strada alla licenza della carne'; *ibid.*, 272.
52. 'Non vi troverai quei tanti puttanissimi, adulteri, odi, nemicitie, invidie, homicidi, barrerie, bestemmie, et altri vitii brutti da nominare, che si trovano frequentissimi nel papato'; *ibid.*, 273.
53. 'Sì lungamente et da tanti e sì grandi paesi la dottrina e religione di quella [romana Chiesa] [era] stata riputata et buona et santa'; 'che i nostri padri debbian essere stati ciechi e s'habbian lasciati ingannar'; 'un Martin Luther solo dopo tante età harà cominciato ad aprire gli occhi et vedere egli quello che non han veduto tanti dotti e valent'huomini che sono stati avanti lui'; *ibid.*, 275.
54. 'La religione dei quali molto più in lungo era durata et da più paesi e popoli era stata per buona abbracciata, che quella della romana Chiesa'; *ibid.*, 276.
55. 'Noi diciamo che benché il papa faccia professione d'esser christiano, et d'esser pastore di tutti i christiani, nondimeno insegna e fa insegnare una dottrina in sustanza alla christiana in tutto contraria'; *ibid.*
56. Cf. above.
57. It does not seem implausible that Acontius reached Milan through the favour of Cardinal Otto von Truchsess, the future Cardinal of Augsburg, who provided a link to the territories of the Empire and was very close to Madruzzo. The relationship between Maximilian and Madruzzo seems to have broken down in 1552, when the former suspected the latter of having tried to poison him to favour the succession of Philip of Spain to the imperial throne (cf. Fichtner, *Emperor Maximilian II*, 27).
58. Pischedda and Seidel Menchi, *La politica del dissenso*, 160.
59. *Ibid.*
60. G. Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471-1606)*, Bologna 1997, 75 and 78.

61. Pischedda and Seidel Menchi, *La politica del dissenso*, 163.
62. In line with imperial policy, his irenic profile was coherent until the end, so much so that in 1571 in the Consistory he suggested inviting Protestant princes to join the alliance against the Turks, meeting with strong opposition from Pius V (*ibid.*, 169).
63. A letter from Madruzzo to his delegate Trajano, who was with the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole II, is dated 23 November 1556; it was written by Acontius in his capacity as secretary (L.N. Cittadella, 'L'ultimo decennio di Ercole II', *Archivio storico italiano*, 1877, 209–210; 'Nuovi documenti di Jacopo Aconcio', *Studi trentini*, 3, 1925, 234–238, esp. 238; O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 14; Radetti, *Introduzione*, 6).
64. As it was written recently, 'neither the documentation in the General Archive in Simancas nor that in the State Archive in Milan that refer to Madruzzo's governorship in Milan conserve any trace' of Acontius (Pischedda and Seidel Menchi, *La politica del dissenso*, 155).
65. M. Firpo and D. Marcatto, *I processi inquisitoriali di Pietro Carneseccchi, 1557–1567*, critical edn, 2 vols, Vatican City 1998–2000, II/2, 519–521, 524–526, 550.
66. Writing confidentially to his friend Gonzaga on 1 April 1558 regarding a Conclave that seemed imminent due to the Pope's precarious health ('a pear that is about to fall as it is already extremely ripe'), he defined the new cardinals, with his typical aristocratic disdain, as men of little importance, simple 'Theatines and friars' ('chietini et frati'); PM, v. III, 223 note 356; M. Firpo, *Filippo II, Paolo IV e il processo inquisitoriale del cardinal Giovanni Morone*, in M. Firpo, *Inquisizione romana e Controriforma. Studi sul cardinal Giovanni Morone (1509–1580) e il suo processo d'eresia*, new edn, Brescia 2005, 361; Pischedda and Seidel Menchi, *La politica del dissenso*, 171–172.
67. L. Fumi, 'L'inquisizione romana e lo stato di Milano', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 37, 1910, 438; O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 14–15.
68. A. Paris, '"Trento è tedesco ed ha la lingua sciolta". Cristoforo Madruzzo e Giovanni Morone tra Impero e Inquisizione', in M. Firpo and O. Niccoli (eds.), *Il cardinale Giovanni Morone e l'ultima fase del concilio di Trento*, Bologna 2010, 159–186, 171–172. A message from Ludovico Tridapolo to the Duke of Ferrara, of 19 June 1557, different from the one referred to in note 34, validates this hypothesis: 'The cause of Aconcio's departure might have been the severity of Paul IV, who sent Madruzzo a brief in Milan, ordering him to proceed against those who supported the escape of Claudio Pralbino, an Augustinian priest with the name Angelo Maria, a staunch heretic' ('Causa forse del dipartirsi dell'Aconcio fu il rigore di Paolo IV il quale aveva mandato un breve al Madruzzo a Milano con ordine di procedere contro quelli che

- favorirono la fuga di Claudio Pralbino prete eremitano di S. Agostino col nome di Angelo Maria eretico convinto'); 'Nuovi documenti', 237; Radetti, *Introduzione*, 9.
69. Celio Secondo Curione revealed this in his letter presenting Aconcio and Betti to Bullinger in Zurich, writing that the pair had promised to leave the peninsula and take refuge with the Protestants the year before (letter from Curione to Bullinger, in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 398).
 70. This reanimated the by-now ragged group of cardinals protecting the interests of the double-headed eagle on the peninsula, above all Ercole Gonzaga. A few days after Morone's arrest, the Cardinal of Trent also ordered his representative in Brussels 'to make sure that the King takes Morone into account during the negotiations to make peace with the Pope'; PM, v. III, 156 note 104. The lack of comments about the arrest of the influential cardinal illustrates the circumspection with which Madruzzo operated, along with his tendency to adapt to the course of events without hesitation. In their Introduction to *Il cardinal Giovanni Morone e l'ultima fase del concilio di Trento*, Massimo Firpo and Ottavia Niccoli define him as 'intellectually and politically modest, bound—with great naivety—to a vague and by now old-fashioned Erasmian ideal, certainly accommodating but incapable of the discretion instead attributed to Morone's character in the common perception'; 16–7. For an up-to-date bibliography on Madruzzo, cf. PM, v. III, 431–432, note 117.
 71. 'Il Concio, segretario di monsignor cardinale, il quale haveva carico de' disacci per la Corte, se ne è andato senza che si sappia di certo dove, havendo lasciate nella sua camera tutte le scritture'; letter from Ludovico Tridapolo to the Duke of Mantua, 19 June 1557, Milan, in 'Nuovi documenti', 237–238; O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 14; Radetti, *Introduzione*, 8. Tridapolo was convinced that Acontius had gone to the court in Vienna to deal with a matter on behalf of the Count of Landriano.
 72. Letter from Ludovico Tridapolo to the Duke of Mantua, 19 June 1557, Milan.
 73. 'Messer Giacomo Concio, segretario di monsignor illustrissimo di Trento, che aveva la cura delle cifre, si è fuggito per andare ad abitare a Zurigo come lutterano'; letter of 27 June 1557, Milan, in 'Nuovi documenti', 238; O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 15; Radetti, *Introduzione*, 9.
 74. 'Le fatiche e le preoccupazioni che quasi in comune abbiamo a lungo sostenute, i comuni studi, il volere e non volere la stessa cosa, e, ciò che conta più di tutto, la stessa credenza religiosa e la decisione, parimenti presa, di abbandonare per essa la patria [che] ci hanno uniti con un vincolo stretto più di qualsiasi altro'; *Giacomo Aconcio tridentino a Francesco Betti romano*, in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 77.

75. 'Dimorato in Basilea per più di due mesi per aspettarvi il Contio'; 'ven[ire] e ferma[rsi] in questa città [Zurigo]'; F. Betti, *Lettera di Francesco Betti romano all'illustrissimo et eccellentissimo marchese di Pescara suo padrone, ne la quale da conto a sua eccellenza de la cagione perche licenziato si sia dal suo seruigio*, Basle, 1557.
76. Betti's letter to the Marquis of Pescara was written in Zurich.
77. This is what transpires from a document in the family archive of Francesco Orelli, a member of the Locarnese community in Zurich, quoted by Taplin, *The Italian Reformers*, 98.
78. Curione's letter to Bullinger is dated 1 July 1557; cf. the text in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 398.
79. 'Due poveri cristiani, uno di Roma l'altro di Trento'; Taplin, *The Italian Reformers*, 98 note 153.
80. On the Locarnese community in Zurich, in addition to the cited work by Mark Taplin, cf. also F. Meyer, *La comunità riformata di Locarno e il suo esilio a Zurigo nel XVI secolo*, trans. Brigitte Schwarz; preface by Adriano Prosperi, Rome 2005.
81. On Vermigli, see the bibliographical entry in Tedeschi, *The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 536–553, as well as G.O. Bravi, "Non voler predicare il falso né ingannare il populo". Pier Martire Vermigli a Lucca', in R.A. Lorenzi (ed.), *Riformatori bresciani del '500. Indagini*, Brescia 2006, 33–60, esp. 56–60 on his teaching work in Strasbourg. In 1549, the Swiss Zwinglian Churches approved the *Consensus Tigurinus* as a result of the rapprochement between the Churches of Geneva and Zurich carried out by Heinrich Bullinger. A few years later in 1566, 2 years after Calvin's death, the rift between the two Protestant Churches became permanent, given the refusal of the Calvinists and Zwinglians to accept the Lutheran formula of the Eucharist, while Swiss unity was preserved by the *Confessio Helvetica*.
82. Writing to Vermigli from London on 22 May 1560, Jewel said that 7 months previously he had given Acontius—'an Italian now with the Duke of Bedford'—some money to send to Zurich for Ochino. John Jewel (1522–1571) studied at Merton College and then at Corpus Christi College in Oxford. He taught rhetoric until 1547, the year of the arrival of Peter Martyr Vermigli, who had such a profound influence on him that he decided to abandon the religious life. At the beginning of the Catholic Restoration, despite some attempts to find a compromise, he was forced to leave England and joined Vermigli in Zurich. When Elizabeth came to the throne, he was able to return home in March 1559 and embark on a brilliant ecclesiastical career: he was appointed Archbishop of Salisbury on 1 January 1560. His best known work is the *Apologia pro Ecclesia Anglicana* (1562), thanks to which he

- became the champion and official theologian of Anglicanism; see the entry by J. Craig in ODNB, and M. Firpo, *Pietro Bizzarri esule italiano del Cinquecento*, Turin 1971, 217 note 2.
83. Gabrieli, 'Aconcio in Inghilterra', 312.
 84. *Ibid.*, 311.
 85. Acontius himself revealed that he had written the treatise, which he had translated into Latin in around 1562 (letter from Acontius to John Wolf, 20 November 1562, in Aconcio, *De methodo*, 325–356. Quotation in this case is from p. 349).
 86. To be precise, starting on 27 February 1560. On 8 October 1561, he received his letters of naturalization and obtained English citizenship (P. Denis, 'Un combat aux frontières de l'orthodoxie: la controverse entre Acontius et Des Gallars sur la question du fondement et des circonstances de l'église', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 38, 1976, 55–72, 58; see also O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 28).
 87. Bizzarri might have met Ochino for the first time in 1539, when he was just 14 years old (Firpo, *Pietro Bizzarri*, 21), and probably met him again in Strasbourg in 1547 before leaving for England (*ibid.*, 24). They stayed in contact from 1549, when Bizzarri was appointed as a professor at St John's College (at the beginning of 1550, Bizzarri met John Bradford, a professor at Pembroke Hall and a close friend and disciple of Bucer, at Ochino's house; cf. *ibid.*, 29). Bizzarri then made contact with Francis Russell through Ochino (*ibid.*, 30).
 88. Acontius's role was to act as a consultant to the English engineers already working there, rather than a specialist called into manage the fortification work (Gabrieli, 'Aconcio in Inghilterra', 318): on 26 May 1564, the Queen herself ordered Sir William Pelham to travel to Berwick to 'consult Portinari [another Italian in Elizabeth's service] and Acontius and Lee about the fortifications there' ('consultarsi con Portinari e Aconcio e Lee circa le fortificazioni sul posto'); *ibid.*
 89. Firpo, *Pietro Bizzarri*, 42 and 107.
 90. J. Aconcio, *Trattato sulle fortificazioni* (Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Studi e testi, 48), ed. Paola Giacomoni, with Giovanni Maria Fara and Renato Giacomelli, edn and trans. Omar Khalaf, Florence 2011.
 91. In a world dominated by a permanent aspect of conflict, Acontius felt that man was obliged to fortify his spirit just like the cities in which he lived, to defend himself against the tricks of enemy armies and the equally fearsome traps of Satan, the master of irreconcilable religious discord and interminable doctrinal controversies (*ibid.*).
 92. Firpo, *Pietro Bizzarri*, 108.

93. A. Overell, *Italian Reform and English Reformations, c.1535–c.1585*, Aldershot 2008, 45.
94. Ibid., 59.
95. Regarding the *Forma*, cf. L. Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra nel Cinquecento e i suoi rapporti con Ginevra*, now in L. Firpo, *Studi sulla Riforma in Italia*, Naples 1996, 117–194, esp. 120–121.
96. Overell, *Italian Reform*, 53.
97. Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra*, 122.
98. Ibid., 123. On the Italian Church of London in the seventeenth century, see the article by S. Villani, 'The Italian Protestant Church of London in the 17th Century', in B. Schaff (ed.), *Exiles, Emigrés and Intermediaries Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* (Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 139), Amsterdam and New York 2010, 217–236.
99. After sampling Calvin's doctrinal rigorism in Geneva, where he led a small Spanish congregation, and a spell in Frankfurt, where he became a member of the French Church, he joined a group of English exiles who were about to return home.
100. Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra*, 131. The testimony is by Baldassarre Sanchez at the trial of Casiodoro de Reina in London in October 1563 (cf. E. Boehmer, *Spanish Reformers of Two Centuries from 1520: Their Lives and Writings, according to the late Benjamin B. Wiffen's Plan and with the Use of his Materials*, III, Strasburg 1904, 11; O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 36).
101. Ten other supporters of van Haemstede were excommunicated a few months later on 4 May 1561, following enquiries conducted by the Dutch Consistory (Denis, 'Un combat', 56).
102. 'La remissione dei peccati e la salvezza grazie al sacrificio dell'unico mediatore e *grand-pretre* Gesù Cristo, aspirando alla giustificazione attraverso lo spirito santo'; *ibid.*, 57.
103. Ibid., 61.
104. Ibid., 60–62.
105. Ibid., 62; Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra*, 130; this lost apologia is known thanks to a letter that Acontius wrote to Grindal in 1565, summarizing its content.
106. At this point, Jean Utenhove also wrote to Calvin and Bullinger to defend the conduct of the Consistory of the Flemish Church; cf. Denis, 'Un combat', 62.
107. Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra*, 131.
108. Casiodoro de Reina was also accused of being a follower of the Spanish doctor Michael Servetus. Both charges were later proved to be unfounded; according to Firpo, the Spanish exile's misadventure seems

- to have been due more to theological rivalry than proven guilt; cf. *ibid.*, 133.
109. Denis, 'Un combat', 65.
 110. Firpo, *La Chiesa italiana di Londra*, 138.
 111. *Ibid.*, 133–134.
 112. *Ibid.*, 136; Firpo writes that the Italian colony was still divided and more intent on seeking earthly gains than the true faith (137).
 113. For example, while speaking about the issue of the Council, Acontius explained that 'since I have not now to do with the Papist, but with those, who would have the gospel truth restored, there is no need to prove in many words that no council has the right either of laying down now laws or of setting up new forms of worship'; *Satan's Stratagems*, 94. On *Satan's Stratagems*, as well as the studies included by John Tedeschi in his aforementioned bibliographical entry (cf. note 1), see also A. De Groot, *Acontius's Plea for Tolerance*, in R. Vigne and C. Littleton (eds.), *From Strangers to Citizens: The Integration of Immigrant communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550–1750*, Brighton 2001, 48–54.
 114. There is a clear reference to this episode when he writes about 'such spectacles', when someone who has been misunderstood is accused of heresy, notwithstanding the fact that he explained that 'he did not mean that which offended others, and held no new option' (*Satan's Stratagems*, 163–164). Cf. also where Acontius reiterates that he will not name names or confront anyone personally because he does not want his work to be seen as a personal attack, but a general reflection about religious conflict and ways of dealing with it (*ibid.*, 47).
 115. *Ibid.*, 102.
 116. *Ibid.*, 103.
 117. *Ibid.*, 195.
 118. *Ibid.*, 103.
 119. *Ibid.*, 102.
 120. *Ibid.*, 103.
 121. *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 333.
 122. *Satan's Stratagems*, 104. The first step was therefore to put right one's own life (*Stratagemmi di Satana*, 339).
 123. To this end, Acontius used the example of Joseph, who did not denounce Mary in public after discovering that someone else had made her pregnant, but was minded to repudiate her in private (*Stratagemmi di Satana*, 337).
 124. 'But some one perhaps may add that it would nevertheless be profitable and indeed necessary, because it is clear that it involves no common disgrace, so that men find it a stronger check restraining them from licence

in sinning. But here nothing is heard but human counsel; the voice of God, which alone cannot deceive, is not heard' (*Satan's Stratagems*, 128).

125. Ibid., 128–129.

126. Ibid., 129.

127. 'Disprezzat[o] le ammonizioni non soltanto di due o tre fratelli ma della stessa Chiesa'; 'astenersi da una cosa indegna di un cristiano'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 395. This passage is not included in the English edition.

128. *Satan's Stratagems*, 128.

129. Ibid., 129.

130. Ibid., 128.

131. Ibid., 127.

132. Ibid., 129. He felt that censure only needed to be imposed in one case: 'But for what reasons will there be occasion for censure? Assuredly is reproved in a man on the plain evidence of the word of God, if he does not when admonished consent to abstain from it' (ibid., 129).

133. 'Che cosa si cerca con questa diligente richiesta di confessioni? Si vuole che chi erra in qualche modo sia costretto a tradirsi—e quando l'avrai riconosciuto, che utilità ci sarà in ciò? Molta (dirai), in quanto sarà possibile ammonirlo; e, se si pentirà, avrà acquistato un fratello, se si ostinerà, sarà escluso dalla chiesa, onde non corrompa gli altri. Ma perchè coloro che errano imparino, non ci sarà bisogno di questa istituzione. Poichè se nella chiesa non ci sarà tirannia e se nei pastori la vera carità ed erudizione sarà congiunta con una grande mansuetudine e umanità, coloro che dissenteranno in qualche punto dalla chiesa si riveleranno spontaneamente; si accosteranno, interrogheranno, metteranno la cosa in questione, presenteranno i loro argomenti o le loro testimonianze dalle divine lettere; non ricuseranno di sentire le soluzioni provenienti insieme dalla carità e dalla solida erudizione. E se le cose saranno trattate abilmente, umanamente e prudentemente, la verità vincerà sempre. Se invece la tirannide c'è, niente può essere più adatto all'esercizio della tirannide di tali istituzioni; non sono che meri macelli di coscienze'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 457. This passage is not included in the English edition.

134. Acontius wrote as follows: 'It is probable that if those who dissent from the Church on any matter are threatened by a danger or a dishonour, many will certainly hide their feelings' ('È verosimile che, se coloro che dissentonno dalla chiesa in qualsivoglia cosa sono minacciati da un pericolo o da una vergogna, molti nasconderanno volentieri il loro sentimento'); *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 459. This passage is not included in the English edition.

135. *Satan's Stratagems*, 168; cf. also *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 495.
136. *Satan's Stratagems*, 162–163.
137. *Ibid.*, 190–191.
138. *Ibid.*, 163.
139. *Ibid.*, 162–163.
140. *Ibid.*, 195.
141. *Ibid.*, 100.
142. *Ibid.*, 102.
143. 'Somma dolcezza e moderazione'; 'acquistare a Dio gli animi degli uomini'; 'rendere ad ognuno secondo i meriti'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 327. This passage is not included in the English version.
144. *Satan's Stratagems*, 164.
145. 'Da costringere uno a far menzione di un dogma che non sia dei punti principali della religione cristiana che si debbono necessariamente conoscere per salvarsi'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 455. This passage is not included in the English edition.
146. 'Accontentarsi di una semplice confessione di fede che comprend[esse] solo i punti fondamentali della religione'; 'escogitare nessuna legge o istituzione, dalla quale un giorno le coscienze degli uomini possano essere legate'; *ibid.*, 461; cf. O'Malley, *Jacopo Aconcio*, 149. This passage is not included in the English edition.
147. *Satan's Stratagems*, 149. With regard to 'the other dogmas', Acontius's recipe was for the community to undertake to 'twist the errors which will emerge spontaneously and be revealed using useful and beneficial demonstrations' ('convellere con utili e acconce dimostrazioni gli errori che spontaneamente emergeranno e si riveleranno'); *Stratagemmi*, 455. Only in this way would it be possible to prevent 'any controversy arising, especially for a short time, if no one rejects the sentence disapproved of by those who command, it will not be accepted into the bosom of the Church' ('qualunque controversia sorga, specialmente da poco tempo, se qualcuno non respinge la sentenza riprovata da coloro che comandano, non viene accettato nel grembo della chiesa'); *ibid.*, 455. This passage is not included in the English edition.
148. Letter to Albert of Brandenburg, Archbishop of Mainz, 19 October 1519; *Erasmus, Opus Epistolarum*, ed. P.S. Allen, 11 vols., Oxford, 1906–1947, t. IV, 101, 102 and 106; J. Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, New York 1960, 117.
149. Letter to George, Duke of Saxony, 12 December 1524; O. E., t. V, 604–606; Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 118.
150. Letter 858, 14 August 1518; O. E., t. III, 365; Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 125; cf. the letter he sent to his friend Paul Volz, which he included as a preface to the new edition of the *Enchiridion*

- militis christiani* in 1518; J. Lecler, *Storia della tolleranza nel secolo della Riforma*, 1967; Brescia 2004, 149.
151. Letter 1039, 1 November 1519; Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum*, t. IV, 118; Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 126; cf. the letter he sent to his friend Johannes Slechta, November 1519; Lecler, *Storia della tolleranza*, 150. His idea was to limit the faith to a small number of articles and leave the rest to free discussion; in his treatise the *Spongia* (1523) against the reformer Ulrich von Hutten, he wrote 'on those questions which are the usual subjects of Scholastic debates I would not dare deprive a man of his life if I were the judge, nor would I risk my own' (*Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni*; Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, Lugduni Batavorum, Curâ & impensis Petri Vander Aa, 1703–1706, t. X, c.1663; Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 127).
 152. Erasmus saw tolerance of religious sects as a necessary but temporary expedient in view of the reconstruction of unity and, in this respect, his irenic conciliatory proposal was superseded by the course of events over the following decades.
 153. 'Della strada per la quale si possa arrivare al Cristo, ossia della correzione della nostra vita'; 'dello stato e della funzione di Cristo stesso, e di dove lo stesso Cristo sia adesso, cosa faccia, in qual modo sieda alla destra del padre, in qual modo sia uno col padre. E poi della trinità, della predestinazione, del libero arbitrio, [...] degli angeli, dello stato delle anime dopo questa vita'; Preface to his anthology *An hereticis sint persequendi*, addressed to Cristoph of Württemberg, quoted in M. Firpo, *Il problema della tolleranza religiosa nell'età moderna*, Turin 1978, 111–112.
 154. Castellio's reason was, however, still 'Dei filia', far removed from Spinoza's *ratio*. In other words, it was a mystical reason—as it has recently been defined—that did not substitute faith (which is still driven by will rather than intellect), but was used by faith to define its contents. He felt that obscure and controversial passages of Scripture should be subjected to the judgement of reason ('rectum atque sanum'). It also had the task of ascertaining limits and deferring for further analysis and debate those matters that did not seem clear enough to be shared and accepted by others; M. Firpo, "'Boni christiani merito vocantur haeretici". Bernardino Ochino e la tolleranza', in *La formazione storica dell'alterità. Studi di storia della tolleranza nell'età moderna offerti a Antonio Rotondò*, promoted by H. Méchoulan, R.H. Popkin, G. Ricuperati and L. Simonutti, 3 vols, Florence 2001, I, 161–244, esp. 188. On the issue of tolerance and reason in Castellio's thinking, there are also useful points to consider in the recent works by M. Bracali, *Il filologo ispirato. Ratio e spiritus in Sebastiano Castellione*, Milan 2001,

- and S. Salvadori, *Sebastiano Castellione e la ragione della tolleranza. L'ars dubitandi fra conoscenza umana e veritas divina*, Milan 2009.
155. Indeed, Ochino reaffirmed a clear distinction between reason and faith. With no objective criteria of truth and even the authority of the Bible swept away, the only thing left for him was the certainty of one's faith, trust in the spirit of God that addresses the spirit of man directly, the inner testimony of his word (Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 190–192). Acontius also distanced himself from Castellio's rationalism, for example when he wrote that 'nothing is surer than this, that (as far as the doctrine of religion is concerned) we can have nothing that is sure save on the testimony of the voice of God' (*Satan's Stratagems*, 21).
 156. On the personal friendship between Jacob Acontius and Bernardino Ochino and their many common friends, cf. above, pp. 27–28. The two had numerous opportunities to meet in the immediately preceding years, especially in Zurich, where Ochino welcomed Acontius to his private home, and Strasbourg, where they had joint friendships with many Marian exiles whom Ochino had met during his time in England under Edward VI and introduced to Acontius, thereby creating the conditions for the latter to join them on their trip across the English Channel after the death of Mary Tudor.
 157. Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 163.
 158. Ibid., 164. In his *Dialoghi triginta*, Ochino established 12 conditions that he deemed necessary for a heretic to be punished by death, through a dialogue with his alter ego, Cardinal Morone (ibid., 165).
 159. Ibid., 166–167.
 160. A. Prosperi, 'Il grano e la zizzania: l'eresia nella cittadella cristiana', in Pier Cesare Bori (ed.), *L'intolleranza. Uguali e diversi nella storia*, Bologna 1986, 51–86 (now also in Adriano Prosperi, *America e Apocalisse e altri saggi*, Pisa and Rome 1999, 211–237), esp. 54.
 161. Prosperi, 'Il grano e la zizzania', 54–55.
 162. Adriano Prosperi dwells at length on the two opposing interpretations in ibid.
 163. R.H. Bainton, 'The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century', *Church History*, 1, 1932, 82–85; Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 122. On Matthew 13:24–30, besides Prosperi, 'Il grano e la zizzania', cf. also Lecler, *Storia della tolleranza*, 146, and S. Pastore, *Il Vangelo e la spada. L'Inquisizione di Castiglia e i suoi critici*, Rome 2003, 199–204, which, among other things, reconstructs the context of the 1527 censure against Erasmus by the Valladolid Council.
 164. Prosperi, 'Il grano e la zizzania', 74.

165. S. Castellione, *Fede, dubbio e tolleranza, pagine scelte e tradotte*, ed. G. Radetti, Florence 1960, 61; Prosperi, 'Il grano e la zizzania', 74.
166. B. Ochino, *Dialogi triginta*, 2 vols, Basileae, per Pietrum Pernam, 1563, II, 439; Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 171.
167. *Satan's Stratagems*, 65.
168. 'Testimonanza della simpatia di Cristo per la tolleranza'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 146. This passage is not included in the English edition.
169. *Satan's Stratagems*, 66. He continued, referring to the passage from Matthew: 'for he does not say: "Yes, go, but see to it carefully that you do not root up the wheat also along with the tares!" but he altogether forbids them to go and would have tares and wheat alike grow together until the harvest. From this it is clear that great violence is done to the words by such an interpretation' (66).
170. Ibid.
171. Ibid.
172. 'Certi mostruosi delitti'; 'debbono essere tenuti a freno dalla spada vendicatrice'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 229. This passage is not included in the English edition. Cf. *Satan's Stratagems*, 67.
173. *Satan's Stratagems*, 70. Instead, civil magistrates were allowed 'to punish irreverent words against God, to chastise those who have ventured to abandon the whole Christian religion and who have ventured to induce any one else to abandon it. If any strange forms of worship have been set on feet or any images put up, he should remove them; he should shield the necks of the godly from the violence and injury of the ungodly, keep the public peace, and other things of that kind' (73).
174. Ochino, *Dialogi triginta*, II, 417–418; Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 166.
175. Ochino, *Dialogi triginta*, I, 11; Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 169.
176. Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 169.
177. Ochino, *Dialogi triginta*, II, 162, 166; Firpo, 'Boni christiani', 174–175.
178. *Satan's Stratagems*, 169.
179. Ibid., 170.
180. Ibid.
181. Ibid., 170. Cf. also *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 521.
182. 'Soltanto quelle cose che contraddicono talmente alla fede delle verità che è necessario conoscere che uno non può insieme credere in ciò che bisogna credere e in ciò che si condanna'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 523. This passage is not included in the English edition.
183. 'Uno non può porre la giustificazione nel solo Cristo e insieme anche nella legge; [...] poiché è necessario che essa sia riposta nel solo Cristo, giustamente sono condannati coloro che la ripongono nella legge'; ibid., 523. This passage is not included in the English edition.

184. 'Colui che egli mandò, Gesù Cristo, e lo spirito santo'; 'negare che altro sia il padre, altro sia il figlio, poiché Gesù è veramente figlio di Dio'; ibid. Cf. below, Ch. 3. This passage is not included in the English edition.
185. *Satan's Stratagems*, 21.
186. 'L'uomo è soggetto all'ira e al giudizio di Dio'; 'suo figliuolo Gesù Cristo, il quale, fatto uomo, per i nostri peccati è morto e per la nostra giustificazione è stato risuscitato dai morti'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 523. This passage is not included in the English edition.
187. 'Se crederemo nel figlio di Dio, nel nome suo conquisteremo la vita eterna'; 'in nessun altro c'è la salvezza; non nella beata Vergine, o in Pietro, o in Paolo, o in qualsiasi altro santo, o in nome di che altro sia'; 'la giustificazione non sta nella legge, né nei comandamenti e nelle invenzioni degli uomini'; ibid., 525. This passage is not included in the English edition. Concluding his synthetic note, he specified that this was because 'justification cannot be found in any other; not in the Blessed Virgin, or in St Peter, or in St Paul or any other saint, or in the name of anyone else', just as 'justification is not in the law or the commandments or the inventions of men'.
188. 'Conosco un solo vero Dio e colui che egli mandò, Gesù Cristo, suo figlio, e lo spirito santo. Conosco che è legge di Dio quella: "*Ascolta Israele, il Signore Iddio tuo Dio è unico* etc. È *maledetto chi non avrà eseguito tutte le cose che sono scritte nella legge*." Credo che avverrà la resurrezione dei morti e che saranno giudicati i vivi e i morti; coloro che avranno agito giustamente, andranno verso la vita eterna, quelli che avranno agito ingiustamente verso il supplizio. E poichè io, concepito nel peccato e per natura figlio dell'ira ho gravemente mancato contro la legge di Dio, riconosco di essere soggetto al giudizio di Dio e reo di eterna morte. Ma poichè, nel tempo stabilito, Dio ha mandato nel mondo il figliuolo suo Gesù Cristo, che, fatto uomo *per i nostri peccati è morto, e per la nostra giustificazione è risorto*, e che ci liberò dai nostri peccati col suo sangue, per il quale si annunzia il perdono ai peccatori, *e in nessun altro c'è salvezza, e non vi è, sotto il cielo, alcun altro nome dato agli uomini, per il quale noi abbiamo ad essere salvati*, confido che in suo nome e per grazia sua otterrò la vita. Conosco un solo battesimo, in nome del padre e del figlio e dello spirito santo. Se a qualcuno piaccia, potrà aggiungersi anche la condanna di quegli errori che contraddicono alla fede sopra esposta, in questo modo: respingo la sentenza di coloro i quali negano che altro sia il figlio e altro sia il padre. Riconosco quindi che Gesù Cristo è veramente figlio di Dio. Non pongo la giustificazione nella legge nè nei comandamenti nè nelle invenzioni degli uomini, ma soltanto in Cristo. E non spero di salvarmi per mezzo della beata

- vergine o di qualsiasi santo o per mezzo di qualsiasi altro nome, ma per il solo Cristo'; *ibid.*, 526–527.
189. 'Redigere una simile confessione di fede che soddisfacesse tutti coloro che appartengono alla universale chiesa di Dio, così da farli ritenere che essa debba adoperarsi come simbolo e che tutti debbano accontentarsi di essa e non esigere la confessione di più cose ancora'; 'raggiungere una concordia fra i cristiani'; *ibid.*, 528.
 190. 'Fino a quando ognuno vorrà che il suo giudizio sia norma e legge per tutti gli altri nel credere ogni cosa, e che non sia lecito non obbedirgli'; 'che tutti siano da tutti considerati eretici'; 'non ci sarà un limite alle sette, alle risse, ai clamori, alle ostilità'; *ibid.*, 528–529.
 191. 'Gli uomini si persuadessero che tutti coloro che accettano questo simbolo [...] vanno accettati [...] come cristiani e fratelli e debbono essere ammessi [...] alle cerimonie del culto'; 'trattate con molto maggiore equanimità'; 'sarebbe tolta agli avversari ogni occasione di calunniare'; *ibid.*, 529.
 192. 'Qualche nuova rivelazione'; 'La scienza delle cose divine non deve essere considerata come frutto delle nostre vigilie, dei nostri studi, dei nostri ingegni'; 'viene da Dio e dal suo spirito'; 'sul momento [di] donarla ad uno'; 'al più sciocco'; *ibid.*, 299.
 193. *Satan's Stratagems*, 91.
 194. 'Se si leva per contraddire'; 'agisca temerariamente'; 'quella verità sia palese per mezzo suo nella Chiesa'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 298. This passage is not included in the English edition.
 195. *Satan's Stratagems*, 91.
 196. Cf. below, Ch. 3.
 197. Acontius explicitly referred to the 'old Church of the Jews' but also added that this practise had lasted in Christian Churches until at least the time of Constantine (*Satan's Stratagems*, 91–92).
 198. *Ibid.*, 93.
 199. Cf. *ibid.*, 93. Acontius also offered some useful advice to those who wanted to introduce new features into the credo of the community, suggesting a series of precautions to help them: 'They only must be admonished, to whom after the pioneers God has revealed aught, to make use of great tact in publishing such things, and not to assail others insolently, as if making it a reproach to them that they have not seen all things; not to suppose that they have for any private reasons maliciously tried to cover or corrupt aught. A suspicious mind becomes not a Christian man, nor indeed one that is ungrateful towards those, through whom God has bestowed some great benefit upon his church. And let them not at the very first word boast that they have something quite new to reveal, which no one has marked before, or in which great

men have been grievously deluded, or use other silly words of that kind. In this respect methinks the prudence of some is greatly to seek; for although on some occasions their opinion had very little novelty about it, they have wished to impress men's minds by presenting it in a new form and so getting a reputation for novelty. By doing this they have brought divers tragedies on themselves and have sorely vexed the Church of God—which ills might perchance have been avoided, if only some little tact had been used' (ibid., 173).

200. Ibid., 93.
201. Ibid., 96.
202. Ibid., 139.
203. Ibid., 97. Later, Acontius also reflected on how to recognize a real follower of truth (*Stratagemmi di Satana*, 469–471).
204. *Satan's Stratagems*, 94–95.
205. Ibid., 96.
206. Ibid., 136, for the invitation to seek one's own path to truth alone.
207. 'In modo da permettere che, espone le controversie che turbano la Chiesa, e data facoltà ad ognuno di parlare liberamente, coloro cui sarà piaciuto al Signore di rivelare qualcosa di utile alla questione parlino e dicano ciò che sentono'; 'gli altri poi giudichino'; 'il maggior numero faccia una legge la quale imponga di accettare ciò che dice qualcuno'; 'in modo che ognuno consideri ciò che è stato detto'; 'quando sembri comprovato da adatte testimonianze delle lettere divine'; 'sforza[ndosi] di persuaderlo agli altri, non per l'autorità del concilio ma per quelle testimonianze del verbo di Dio che ha imparate nel concilio'; *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 313. This passage is not included in the English edition.
208. *Satan's Stratagems*, 96.
209. Ibid., 176.
210. Cf. above.
211. On the system of censorship in Elizabethan England, see C.S. Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, Cambridge and New York 1997.
212. On the anti-Roman element of the *Somma brevissima della dottrina cristiana*, cf. above pp. 22–23.
213. *Satan's Stratagems*, 81–82. Acontius's critical reflection continued thus: 'But there is one kind of false consequences that is remarkably hard to detect, because they are partly deduced from assumptions, which either are not expressed or perchance not contained in the thought, but are thus accepted without any controversy, as if they proceeded from things quite certain and plain. That is the case with the consequence, which has just been mentioned. For in order to make out that the power of enacting laws was granted to Peter, the word binding must mean the

- same as enacting laws. For in that way you argue quite rightly: to bind is to enact laws; the power of binding was granted to Peter; therefore the power of enacting laws was also' (ibid.).
214. Ibid., 83. 'At length even bells (as men call them) began to be baptised—and what else was this than to give occasion to the ignorant commons to think that there was just as much in the baptism of man as they know there was in that of a bell, and thus the memory of the washing away of sins in baptism, which the baptism made with water signifies was made by the blood of Christ, disappeared?' (ibid.).
 215. Ibid., 81. Cf. also *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 271.
 216. *Satan's Stratagems*, 146.
 217. Ibid., 84.
 218. Ibid., 146.
 219. Ibid., 87. Cf. also the controversy about ecclesiastical offices as a source of corruption (*Stratagemmi di Satana*, 283).
 220. *Satan's Stratagems*, 86.
 221. Ibid., 87.
 222. Ibid., 140.
 223. Ibid., 141.
 224. Acontius stressed the 'trade in souls' ('commercio delle anime') implemented by Rome: 'The Roman Pope, cardinals, bishops, monks and other men of the same kind are driven against the evangelical truth by their high status, wealth and the advantages they usually receive from trade in souls, and as magistrates, princes and kings they become oppressors and rage against us' ('Il romano pontefice, i cardinali, i vescovi, i monaci e gli altri uomini della stessa risma, [sono] spinti contro la verità evangelica dalle loro grandi dignità, dalle ricchezze, dai vantaggi che erano soliti ricevere dal commercio delle anime, e come magistrati, principi e re, divenuti loro carnefici, inferociscano contro di noi'); *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 451. This passage is not included in the English edition.
 225. *Satan's Stratagems*, 141–142.
 226. Ibid., 158; for the harsh anti-Roman Catholic polemic, cf. also *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 491 and 493.
 227. *Satan's Stratagems*, 153.
 228. *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 479; cf. also ibid., 493, on the anti-Roman Catholic propaganda that defames Protestants and propagates their terrible reputation, making people move away from them.
 229. *Satan's Stratagems*, 5.
 230. Ibid., 6.
 231. Ibid.

232. On this issue, see also Acontius's considerations regarding the avidity and malice, simulation and dissimulation that always surround power: 'For simple men, enemies of all guile and all evil arts, since they suppose they should take greater pains to be good than to seem so, will very easily be outdone in acquiring a reputation for saintliness by skilful men greedy of office; for they will be less careful in hiding their blemishes. They will labour rather to get rid of their faults than to disguise them, they employ no devices to win the favour of men. He who has set his heart on office will be most careful to hide all his faults; he will most carefully fall in with those things, which he sees are most approved by those, who can give him promotion, and will leave nothing undone in the way of pretending, dissembling and flattery, if only he can make himself acceptable to them in every possible way; and by this covert kind of soliciting, which requires much more art and toil, the ungodly sometimes no less gain their ends than they would, if they were allowed to make use of the open method' (ibid., 86).
233. Ibid., 7.
234. Ibid., 11–12.
235. Ibid., 12.
236. Ibid., 14.
237. Ibid., 15.
238. Ibid., 13.
239. Ibid., 13–14.
240. Ibid., 15. Acontius returned to the issue of the proliferation of religious sects and confessions later in the work, recalling the pointlessness of multiple doctrinal positions: 'If there is one God, one Christ, one baptism, one faith (Eph. 4:5), what is the meaning (they say) of all these names of confessions? If there is agreement of opinion among you, if there is one faith, how comes it that there is not one confession of faith common to you all?' (ibid., 167).
241. Ibid., 16.
242. Ibid., 17–18.
243. *Stratagemmi di Satana*, 463. This passage is not included in the English edition. Cf. also ibid., 577–579.
244. Ibid., 463.
245. *Satan's Stratagems*, 19.
246. Ibid., 25.

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