Emblemen van lijdzaamheid
Touber, Jetze Jacob

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This book analyses the hagiographical works of Antonio Gallonio (1556-1605) and their relation to the professionalising disciplines of law, medicine and engineering in sixteenth century Western Europe. Particular aspects of these disciplines present in Gallonio's writings are interpreted as the attempt of a Counter-Reformation priest to offer his public a viable Christian alternative to the worldly ambitions engendered by these secular professions. Being continuously confronted with groups in society that claimed authority with regard to social relations, to the human body or to the forces of nature, Gallonio tried to steer away the attention of his readers from these subject-matters, in the direction of faith, devotion and ultimately deference to the only legitimate representative of God in this transient world, the Catholic church. All references to legal issues, medical issues or technical issues in Gallonio’s oeuvre constitute signs pointing at the vanity of worldly affairs and the superiority of matters divine. In conclusion, Gallonio offered a spiritual alternative to secular ambitions, representing the Catholic clergy as a profession that surpassed all other professions in importance. This dissertation is inspired by the microhistorical method characterised by a continuous alternation between microscopic close-ups and macroscopic historiography.

In chapter 1 of this book I describe the Roman Oratory as a historical phenomenon, I summarise the historiography regarding Antonio Gallonio and I introduce the conceptual and methodological considerations underlying my work. Furthermore, Gallonio’s biography is briefly sketched. Gallonio was a member of the Roman Oratory, an order of secular priests founded in the second half of the sixteenth century by the Florentine cleric Filippo Neri. The order developed out of a popular religious movement and was very much the product of the Counter-Reformation, intended as it was to reform the ways of the Roman population, the clergy as well as the laity. The Oratory organised public meetings in which its member-priests commented on passages from the gospel, on moral examples gleaned from saints’ lives and on issues concerning the Christian way of life. The oratorian priests furthermore acted as confessors and spiritual directors to leading figures of the ecclesiastical and secular elites of Rome. At the same time they studied intensively and produced a whole range of devotional, historical and polemical works of erudition, the most famous of which is the Annales Ecclesiastici of Cesare Baronio. Gallonio was a typical member of the Oratory, as he lectured on the lives of the saints, gave spiritual guidance to pious young women belonging to the Roman aristocracy and wrote and published hagiographical texts himself, based on an extensive and diverse collection of sources.

Though a typical oratorian, Gallonio has always been regarded as an enigmatic member of his order as well, as he had an impetuous character and was very dependent on his spiritual father, Neri. In 1593 Gallonio clashed with Baronio, the author of the much admired Annales Ecclesiastici, a conflict
willingly fuelled by their mutual spiritual father Neri. This has cast a shadow on Gallonio’s legacy and explains partly why he has never received the historians’ attention he deserves. After Neri’s death Gallonio fell out of grace with some of his fellow oratorians, who preferred a more strict regulation of the institution than he did. Yet he had influential supporters, the most eminent among whom was cardinal Federico Borromeo. By the end of his life he was held in some regard for his thorough knowledge of all things pertaining to saints’ cults and he acted as advisor to the Congregatio de Sacris Ritibus, the curial organisation that formally regulated acts of devotion and worship.

The particular structure and lay-out of Gallonio’s hagiographical works suggest his concern to guarantee the validity of the hagiographical tradition. They are meticulously documented, uncannily systematic, irritatingly repetitive and illustrated with technically refined yet sterile engravings. Devotion to the saints was a vital element in both catholic liturgy and social life. The catholic clergy stimulated their flock to continue praying to the saints and performing public acts of devotion such as processions and pilgrimage. At the same time the veneration of saints, relics and sacred images was denounced as idolatry by the reforming movements in Northern Europe. These two opposing tendencies resulted in various projects, initiated in the catholic half of Europe, meant to purge the devotion to the saints of historically and logically dubious elements, in order to retain a sound and legitimate core of devotion. Such attempts at regulating the veneration of saints is generally regarded as an element of ‘social discipline’, a term referring to the active concern of European clerics and rulers with the lives and souls of their subjects in order to mould them into subservient believers and citizens. The oeuvre of Gallonio fits in with this development, being the product of laborious scholarship, containing obvious polemical elements and having didactic intentions aimed at a wide readership.

The sixteenth century not only witnessed the fragmentation of Latin christianity into various denominations, it also saw an acceleration in the production and disclosure of knowledge about the world. The operation of the printing press, the correction and editing of classical texts, the rise of socially heterogeneous learned societies and the accessibility of new continents all contributed to the rapid diversification of ways of generating and publicising knowledge. In this regard a unifying theme of importance is the relationship between textual authority and (new) empirical observations. The unquestioned authority of textual tradition gave way to the juxtaposition of received truth and personal observation. As Gallonio sought to bolster the trustworthiness of his texts about saints, the question imposes itself whether his sources of information and modes of argumentation also included empirical observations.

One of the effects of the multiplication of available knowledge and intellectual strategies was specialisation. Necessarily, scholars limited themselves to circumscribed areas of inquiry. Gallonio was no exception to this, nor were his fellow oratorians. Just as other scholars, for instance lawyers, physicians and engineers, were delineating their respective areas of competence, a
hagiographer such as Gallonio had to do the same thing. In the process certain areas of study or competence could come under the attention of different interest groups, the resulting overlaps occasioning either cooperation or rivalry. Thus Gallonio came to share issues of social order, physical and spiritual health and technical development with members of other expert groups. When one traces the points where Gallonio met with other disciplines, either harmoniously or polemically, a pattern emerges that shows the fairly consistent strategy of a priest coping with the increasing complexity of lay culture.

My method is inspired by the microhistorical approach usually associated with the name of Carlo Ginzburg and elaborated and commented upon by Jacques Revel, Edward Muir, Gianna Pomata, Florike Egmond and Peter Mason. Specifically, this comprises the identification of points of contact and interaction between several loosely defined social and intellectual disciplines, in casu hagiography, law, medicine and engineering, as these points manifest themselves in the life and works of the individual Gallonio. Concentrating on one author enables me to do justice to the multilateral character of the interaction between these forerunners of the modern professions. This gives insight into the complexity of the reactions of the clergy to contenders in the arena of social and intellectual authority.¹

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the hagiographical production of Gallonio. The most obvious characteristic of his hagiographical writings is that they are historical texts. An essential feature of the pre-modern conception of history was its continued relevance for the present. Therefore, historical writing was not just a rumination upon a more or less distant past, but constituted a source of signs, examples, even a blueprint for the present. Especially the history of all things sacred, evangelical history, ecclesiastical history and saints’ lives, was supposed to contain repetitive elements that contemporaries should try to emulate. The precarious situation of catholicism in Europe by the middle of the sixteenth century made it especially important to reconstruct a certified history that left no doubt as to the permanent excellence of the universal catholic church. Such a history required an abundance of trustworthy source material. Like Baronio, who had recourse to a staggering variety of sources for his historical studies, Gallonio also built his hagiographical works on a wide range of sources, ecclesiastical and secular, narrative and documentary, published and unpublished. Peculiar to the work of Gallonio is his use of material sources, especially generic, interchangeable archaeological objects from everyday life, very different from the unique works of art and the readable coins and inscriptions usually employed in antiquarian studies.

The sacred history that Gallonio thus assisted in reconstructing was strongly biased towards the Roman empire. With their celebration of the translation of the relics of Flavia Domitilla and her servants Nereus and Achil-

¹ I do not share Ginzburg’s interest in a folkloristic undercurrent in the dominant cultures of Europe, as well as his emphasis on the permanent bipolar conflict between the social elite and the masses.
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leus, the oratorians highlighted one of the earliest documented instances of a member of the Roman imperial family that converted to Christianity. That this woman was a relative of the warlike Flavian emperors, considered ancestors of Constantine the Great, and that she rejected marriage with a nobleman at the insistence of her eunuch-servants, in favour of virginity and martyrdom, only increased her relevance for the oratorian pastoral programme. The oratorians could present her as a model for the violent and promiscuous aristocracy of their own age to follow, and her eunuch-servants as forerunners of themselves, preferring sacred celibacy over worldly fame and procreation. Gallonio participated in shaping a specific past that suited the oratorian image of the clergy, humble and gentle but insistent in guiding the laity towards spiritual advancement, away from the daily effort for worldly advancement, be it of a juridical, scientific or military kind.

In chapter 3 Gallonio’s ambivalent relationship with law and juridical regulation becomes apparent. In the course of the late Middle Ages saint making had become very much regulated by means of detailed legal procedures, which the church in the Counter Reformation retained and reinforced. At the same time there were clerics who preferred a more flexible attitude, condoning spontaneous local devotions to recently deceased persons as long as there was no clear danger to orthodoxy. Gallonio belonged to the latter group, along with Baronio and for instance the Jesuit Roberto Bellarmino. Gallonio, who fervently promoted the canonisation of the deceased Neri and participated in curial discussions on the legitimacy of specific devotional issues, collided with Francisco Peña, a typical representative of the former group of churchmen that frowned upon irregular acts of devotion. Whereas the likes of Peña regarded any unwarranted devotion as a potential heresy, requiring immediate action of the central curial tribunals, Gallonio and those who shared his views were convinced that divine providence would in the end separate the wheat from the chaff, as long as the clergy made sure the layfolk were supervised in their actions and gently corrected by them if need be. The conflict arose from different models of Christian society, Peña representing a hierarchical model that criminalised all religious initiatives originating in the lower levels of Catholic society, and Gallonio representing an egalitarian model in which the clergy should be the guides accompanying the laity rather than the administrators judging them.

Most people eligible for canonisation in the Early Modern period were confessors, exceptional religious persons that died relatively peacefully. Since the procedure for formalising the veneration of confessors was roughly in operation and continued to be developed, Gallonio had to engage himself with this procedure in order to further the cause of the canonisation of Neri. This entailed the gathering of evidence, mostly empirical evidence in the form of oral testimonies. From these testimonies it should appear that the candidate had been an extraordinarily virtuous Christian and, above all, that he had wrought miracles. In the case of Neri, not only a great number of miracles had been witnessed that involved his healing powers, but his own body was a
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miraculous phenomenon. His heart had grown to such enormous proportions that some ribs had even broken, interpreted as God’s remedy against the tremendous heat Neri had built up inside, being continuously engaged in prayer and contemplation of God. The need for juridically certified testimonies occasioned the dissection of Neri’s body after his death, attended by expert witnesses. Gallonio diligently gathered all legitimate testimonies related to the physical manifestations of Neri’s holiness. A system of legally binding rules dictating how to formally recognise holy confessors was in operation, and Gallonio not only acquiesced in these rules but showed himself capable of using them to his advantage, as well.

Holy martyrs were a different story altogether. The edifying significance of martyrdom was difficult to ascertain since there was often little hard evidence as to the exact motives of either the martyr or his prosecutor. Since much religious violence, readily interpreted as martyrdom, was inflicted by secular authorities that claimed to combat rebellion and subversion, canonisation of new martyrs was a precarious affair. Accordingly, little jurisprudence was developed in the Early Modern period relating to martyrs. Not surprisingly then, Gallonio’s work on martyrdom was hardly informed by canonisation procedure, though his martyrological work was cited in the important codification of canonisation procedure by pope Benedict XIV in the eighteenth century. Gallonio’s martyrological work had a more distinct relationship with penal law. His description of torture as a rational, systematic cycle of phases is analogous with how contemporary writers on the interrogation of criminals and heretics approached the subject, among whom Francisco Peña. Gallonio cited the works of well known legal scholars, he entered into discussions regarding corporeal punishments and he referred to the contemporary practice of legal torture. He constantly represents martyrdom as the result of a conscious preference for God’s law over the law of mankind, denying the efficacy of the legal instruments of torture and corporeal punishment in the face of God’s providence. In conclusion, his dealings with law are highly ambivalent. He rejects the juridical straitjacket that professional lawyers and judges would cast upon society, since faith, humility and charity should prevail over rules and regulations. At the same time, he shows himself very well aware of the importance of the profession of law and capable of dealing with it.

Chapter 4 shows the intense and often strenuous relationship between the cleric Gallonio and practitioners of medicine. As an oratorian Gallonio was deeply immersed in the doctrine of the salutary effect of suffering, physical as well as emotional. Therefore the art of medicine was regarded in essence as a vain endeavour, actually hindering Christians in their spiritual growth. At the same time people continuously sought relief from their ailments, turning to individuals with a reputation for holiness such as Neri just as easily as they turned to doctors of medicine, surgeons or plain quacks. Medicine was thus not just counterproductive from a spiritual point of view, it also meant an opportunity to show off the superior qualities of the spiritual healer. Gallonio knew how to profit from this effect in his Vita of Neri, as he spelt out miraculous
healing after miraculous healing. Every time the patient regained his health after the physicians had given up all hope, when Neri or his relics subsequently entered the scene. Gallonio manipulates the testimonies on which these medical histories were based in order to maximise the effect of the miraculous cures, in the process showing a rather sophisticated acquaintance with technical medical language and argumentations. Again, Gallonio shows himself to be proficient in a profession, a proficiency which he utilises to disqualify that same profession as a vain distraction from what really mattered, in this case spiritual health.

Medical practitioners were not an anonymous professional group in Gallonio’s *Vita* of Neri. Physicians, surgeons and pharmacists had such frequent and intimate dealings with the oratorians, as spiritual pupils and as medical custodians, that many of them personally make their appearance in Gallonio’s account of Neri’s life story. Some of these medical practitioners, such as Michele Mercati and Andrea Cesalpino, in their own writings show themselves actively concerned with the question as to which group of professionals should take priority when patients’ spiritual as well as their physical health was in danger. For Gallonio the answer to this question was obvious: spiritual health was vital, therefore the clergy should always be favoured over the medical arts. In his rendering of episodes from the lives of Mercati and of Giovanni Battista Modio, another physician figuring in the *Vita* of Neri, Gallonio clearly advocates the conversion of medical scholars to devotion and passivity.

The death and subsequent autopsy of Neri was a special situation, in which Gallonio allowed for an unusually active role for the medical arts. Since Neri’s own anatomy was supposedly miraculous, which required medical expertise to be proven, Gallonio described the operation which led to the discovery of his enlarged heart with much attention to medical detail. In this instance, medical expertise was conducive to a juridically certified anatomical miracle. This happened in the years leading up to 1600, when the enthusiastic lobbying for new saints such as Ignatius of Loyola and Carlo Borromeo came to a temporary climax. Shortly afterwards pope Clemens VIII put a halt to all juridical proceedings regarding canonisation and the procedure was tightened by repressive currents in the papal curia. In the decades after 1600, the spontaneity with which the oratorians and their befriended practitioners of the medical arts cooperated in practice on behalf of the canonisation of their deceased spiritual leader would succumb to the full weight of new regulations imposed by the papacy.

In chapter 5 attention to the profession of engineering takes centre stage, though in a less straightforward manner than law and medicine in the previous chapters. This is a consequence of the more recent and less distinct manifestation of engineers as a selfconscious professional group in Western European societies in the sixteenth century. The aspects of engineering echoed in the work of Gallonio are the attempts of aggressive male aristocrats to subject the forces of nature to their own violent ambitions through inventions
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such as firearms, innovative fortifications and siege equipment. Gallonio’s martyrological studies explicitly present martyrs, preferably female, as glorious examples of christian passivity, superior to their male counterparts with their vain enterprises. The instruments of torture with which martyrs were maltreated, which served to identify these martyrs in the manner of heraldic emblems, form a martyrological alternative to the weapons borne by the proud aristocracy as part of their coats of arms. By focusing on the mechanics of the martyrs’ instruments, Gallonio emphasises the vanity of these inventions. This is in stark contrast to the pride which transpires from the so-called machine theatres, lavishly illustrated books depicting mechanical contraptions that are ingenious but often impossible to realise, a genre popular among the social elite that Gallonio in his works addressed.

Whereas Gallonio sought to discourage his readers from letting themselves be carried away by the glorious machinery of their age, he himself was forced now and then to contemplate in a more than cursory manner the mechanics that underlay certain torture instruments. A special case is his elaborate discussion of the equuleus, the wooden horse, a kind of rack mentioned in martyrological sources and pagan literature alike. According to Gallonio the wooden horse was a horizontal beam mounted on four legs with a simple mechanism that enabled executioners to stretch out the victims lying on the beam to the point of dislocating their joints, without applying much force. The discussion on what seems an obscure and macabre antiquarian subject actually had a clear topical significance. This becomes apparent from the catholic account of the trial and execution of Balthasar Gerards, the assassin of William of Orange, governor of the Calvinist Netherlands. Of the different versions of this account that circulated in Rome, the version in the possession of Gallonio is the only one known to have the word eculeus in it. The mechanical reconstructions in the works of Gallonio served to create a proper vocabulary for describing the instruments used for contemporary religious violence.

The illustrations of Gallonio’s works reinforce the impression of mechanical finesse. At a closer glance however they actually confirm the ultimate indifference of Gallonio towards technical innovation. The engravings in his published works, designed by Giovanni Guerra and executed partly by Antonio Tempesta, partly by Leonardo and Girolama Parasole, are refined and closely related to the texts. They actually contribute to an understanding of the reconstructions and reinforce certain arguments. However, even though Guerra was well acquainted with the techniques and conventions of mechanical illustrations, these engravings lack in technical sophistication. A detailed inspection of the illustrations of the martyrrological publications of Gallonio show numerous details that are inaccurate or disfunctional. These engravings successfully suggest mechanical prowess, but were in fact inadequate as technical illustrations. Gallonio played with the profession of engineering, warning against too much enthusiasm and at the same time engaging in discussions on the mechanical details of martyrrological instruments, but in the end he refrained from penetrating this profession properly.
Chapter 6 takes a broader view of Gallonio’s work as a product of collecting and processing knowledge. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century the collecting of texts and objects was facilitated by networks of communication that were ever expanding, socially as well as geographically. In the wake of the medieval princely and ecclesiastical collections of codices, curiosities and works of art there was a proliferation among administrators, bankers, merchants, physicians and scholars of collections of books, antiquities and natural objects. At the same time collectors were more than before inclined to specialise, in the actual content of their collections as well as in the descriptions and inventories they compiled. The huge amount of documents related to saints’ lives, cults and relics that Gallonio collected can be seen as a symptom of this very same flowering of specialised collections among the urban elites. Gallonio collected predominantly texts, hagiographical documents and lists of relics. He was also interested in empirical observations, such as the material quality of documents and objects, especially in relation to relics. However, such observations were usually verbal testimonies of empirical observations performed by others. Gallonio’s collection was thus of a more textual kind than the collections of antiquities and natural phenomena of his contemporaries and it had a more functional character as it served the specific purpose of verifying the historicity of hagiographical traditions. Still, the intensive correspondence with a widely ramified network of assistants, many among whom were lay people engaged in different, partly overlapping networks as well, functioned in a similar way.

As Gallonio drew on his hagiographical collection while composing his own works, he categorised the elements it consisted of, thus participating in the enormous effort of classifying the world undertaken by collectors of all kinds of objects, artificial as well as natural. Gallonio pictured himself as a very sober author that sacrificed stylistic decoration for the sake of clarity and logic. He carefully identified common characteristics of torture instruments and holy virgins and structured his publications accordingly. The logical, technical and physical criteria he employed for classifying the elements of his hagiographical collection, could have served to classify ancient artifacts or natural phenomena as well. Gallonio shared the aspiration to construct a complete taxonomy of the phenomena under scrutiny with scholars like Mercati and Girolamo Mercuriale. The antiquarian objects, especially the interchangeable utensils from everyday life that Gallonio introduced in his work on torture instruments, contributed to his taxonomy of martyrological instruments. However, upon close inspection he hardly seems to have observed the antiquarian objects himself, delegating to unnamed experts the task of judging their worth as historical sources.

In general, Gallonio excelled at adapting the form of his works to the public he had in mind. He used his hagiographical collection as a box of building blocks, combining and recombining citations, passages and images as he saw fit, casting the material in the mould that fitted his purpose. Every single one of his works is a totality, structured according to distinct criteria, constructed out of more or less the same elements as his other works. These
elements are snippets of hagiographical representations, pieces of testimony, accounts of miracles and martyrdoms, liturgical formulae, and of course images and objects either seen personally or heard about. Gallonio employed these hagiographical elements in his works as emblems, combinations of visual and textual information that conveyed well defined units of Christian morals and truth.

Chapter 7 draws together the strands running through this book, offering conclusions as to the nature of Gallonio’s hagiographical work, his place among the other oratorians and what his work tells us about the clergy of the Counter Reformation vis-à-vis the expanding role of the legal, medical and technical professions in Early Modern societies. Gallonio’s oeuvre is very diverse, especially given its modest size compared to those of some of his contemporaries. It shows particularly well how a priest in the Counter Reformation would collect all hagiographical testimonies he could get his hands on, and produce completely different works out of the same core of hagiographical sources. Rather than as a failed epigone of Baronio, Gallonio is better appreciated as one of several oratorian writers that experimented with the patrimony of ecclesiastical erudition in order to buttress the edifice of the universal Catholic Church.

In Gallonio’s case, these experiments led him into the ‘workfields’ of law, medicine and engineering, although his encounter with each of these ‘workfields’ was different. In the case of law, which had been a fully operative discipline in lay society as well as within the church since the twelfth century, Gallonio was forced to work within the juridical framework of rules already firmly in operation with regard to canonisation procedure. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent from more than one aspect of his works that he was not a great proponent of the legal profession that aimed at structuring society according to fixed rules, products of the human intellect. In the case of medicine, his position was more advantageous, as the authority of the medical arts with respect to society was all but agreed upon. He could use his cursory knowledge of medical jargon and ideas to depict the medical arts as a pitiful exercise in vanity, inferior in all respects to pastoral care aimed at spiritual health. At the same time, he happily adopted the medical contribution to the canonisation of Filippo Neri, copying the medical language used to describe the saint’s miraculous anatomy. The case of engineering is less clear-cut, since this was a relative newcomer on the stage of the established professions. Gallonio presented the instruments with which martyrs were tortured as diabolic inventions, suggesting that contriving, improving and applying mechanics were vain enterprises. Christian humility and passivity were preferable at all times to the active ambition of engineers. Christian passivity is the theme that underlies all Gallonio’s works, a theme he manifested by presenting the vanity of the professions in repetitive, well defined combinations of images and texts. Gallonio’s oeuvre thus is a collection of emblems of passivity.