

Educating the Catholic People.
Religious Orders and Their Schools in Early Modern Italy
(1500–1800)

David Salomoni
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Written by David Salomoni for Brill's series devoted to the History of Early Modern Educational Thought, *Educating the Catholic People* pursues an ambitious and brave aim, as brave and ambitious should be whoever enters the forest of the Catholic religious orders as a historian of early modern culture. Whereas the adjective 'Catholic' recalls the alleged universal reach of the Roman Church, the origin and development of its many institutes reveal the spiritual unrest of its flock, a structural issue that soared in the sixteenth century in the wake of Protestant Reformation and combined with the inherent particularism of Italian states and cities. Salomoni confidently navigates the complexity of this scenario while attempting to trace and highlight the educational landscape that several of these orders helped to build and, so far, needed a comprehensive treatise.

The volume can be seen as a logical and successful continuation of the author's debut monograph in the field of history of education (*Scuole, maestri e scolari nelle comunità degli Stati gonzagheschi e estensi: tra tardo Medioevo e prima modernità*, Rome: Anicia, 2017), which stemmed from his doctoral dissertation and dealt extensively with school systems in the regions ruled by Gonzaga and Este seignories, through a wealthy and meticulous archival research. In a broader sense, as far as methodology and the design of the treatise are concerned, *Educating the Catholic People* gratefully declares its debt to the strand of studies inaugurated by Paul Grendler, still the fundamental achievement on the history of educational institutions in Italy during the Renaissance. Consistent with the model of Grendler's research on Italian universities, Salomoni maps the geographic distribution of religious orders and their scholastic endeavours through three levels of sources: unpublished archival documents, including notarial papers, contracts and letters; coeval printed sources, which include regulations and constitutions but also historical, religious and hagiographic texts; the reorganisation of a vast selection of post-1830 secondary literature, often with a local history or case study character, is also valuable. This aspect ensures the multiplicity of

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perspectives indispensable in studying educational institutions, where politics, economic and social history, and the history of ideas and culture, including material culture, of a community intersect.

The author's historiographical thesis consists of two main statements. First, schools on the Italian peninsula in the modern age were not a monopoly of the Jesuits. Although the system of Jesuit colleges represents for Salomoni 'a benchmark in the background' (13) and also a parameter for non-denominational research, as it used to be studied by Jesuit and non-Jesuit scholars as well, the educational vocation emerged in many other religious orders and gave rise to long-lasting institutes and institutions, aimed at users of different ages, gender and social backgrounds, deeply linked to the territory: Barnabites, Somascan, Piarists, Theatines and Servites (only the latter were born before the Reformation, namely in the Medieval period) and then the Ursulines and the Angelic Sisters. Second, the density of educational experiences in the Po valley of Piedmont, Lombardy and especially Emilia-Romagna (Barnabites, Theatines and Piarists, Ursulines and the Angelic Sisters) contributes to further downplaying the 'black legend' of a North-Central Italy that after Cateau-Cambrésis declines irreparably as for economics and culture. On the contrary, schools proliferated where instances of religious renewal and concrete educational needs coexisted. For this reason, in the long centuries of the modern age, the areas of the Po valley were a second propulsive spiritual centre alongside that of the Roman area, which produced, however, more literacy for the ordinary people and more choice of schools for the ruling class. This way, the dissolution of the religious orders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries left on the field many ruins but also a ground well prepared to welcome the post-1815 moral, civil, and productive redemption and its limits.

In chapter 1 ('Educating the Modern Catholics?'), Salomoni outlines the prominent features of the Italian educational mosaic between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They set the passage from the communal era to the early modern period by modifying the relation between governments' aims and power representation. The path to the predominance of religious teaching is described through the dissemination of the Schools of Christiane Doctrine, which were first based in Milan and 'laid the groundwork for the arrival on the educational market of the new religious orders' (39). Grouped in male and female, for each order, Salomoni provides a careful survey on their genesis and, particularly, he recounts and investigates how each of them came to realise and put into effect its peculiar pedagogical vocation (chapter 2, 'Historical Paths'). It also highlights how the schools were involved in a threefold dynamic of tension, thus the conflict between orders and the Church (i.e., inconsistencies and dissent toward the Tridentine decrees), between orders and the secular power, and eventually internal conflicts within the orders themselves.

The 'Processes of Settlement' of schools and colleges (chapter 3) offer the most outstanding amount of quantitative data to understand the geographical key of

the work, thus the importance of the northern Italy urban net in the diffusion of religious schools throughout the Italian peninsula and abroad—as it was the case of the Somascan institutes. Its maps, numbers, and lists also provide tools for prospective comparative studies on the same subjects. Chapter 4 returns to the narrative style that is the author’s signature and, under the title ‘Different Types of Schools Operated by Religious Orders,’ reconstructs a collection of cases exemplary of the primary forms the orders gave to their educational facilities. Extremely well-documented is what happened in the Duchy of Modena, where Jesuits and Piarists competed for the school population and the support of the local authorities. The same happens with the paragraph devoted to the little city of Guastalla, which proves the remarkable ease of Salomoni with local archives and microhistory sources. Nor the other paragraphs are less well finished, and the political reading of every single educational event (Somascons and the Diocesan Seminaries) and the cultural deepening of the female contexts (St. Charles’ ‘educandato’) stand out.

The fifth and last chapter (“The End of an Educational Season”) returns to tune the myth of the obscurantism of Catholic culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the Enlightenment, as it deals with the intersection of science, education, and religious politics. Salomoni delves into some case studies that are relevant and fascinating at the same time. On the one side, the vicissitudes of religious scientists, mostly Piarists and Barnabites working during the age of ‘scientific heresy’ revolving around Galileo’s and Newton’s theories prove one more time how blurred the seventeenth-century Catholic culture was, shaped in any case by schools and teaching. On the other hand, through the history of religious schooling in the Republic of Venice, the author recalls some cornerstones in the general history of religious orders and tells the progressive fade of the dogmatic and cultural rivalry between the Catholic Church and the Protestant world. Finally, he collects the threads of some eighteenth-century cultural issues towards ‘the end of an educational season’ to eventually state that the Catholic schools of the religious orders did not finish either because clergymen were ignorant, or their methods were old-fashioned. They failed because the educational system provided by the religious orders had become too mixed, complex, and weak to face the needs of an all-embracing historical turn like the one set off by the French revolution and Napoleon.

Salomoni’s work brings to the history of education the most rigorous methods of archival research and painstaking attention to details necessary to give solidity to the reconstruction of such a fluid institution that were schools before the era of the national school systems. In doing so, he also puts forward some historical judgements which can, of course, be questioned and hopefully will enliven the scholarly debate on this challenging subject, as good contributions can do.