

# Epilogue

The sermons of Johann Wild brought us to the threshold of a new historical era dominated both by the solidification of confessional differences and by a fundamental shift in the political landscape. Three events symbolically mark this epochal transformation; namely, the Tridentine decrees on justification in 1547 as well as the 1555 Peace of Augsburg and the concomitant election of the inquisitor Gian Pietro Carafa as Pope Paul IV.<sup>1</sup> The utter recomposition of Western European Christianity had been attempted either by means of religious dialogue or military enterprise; yet such approaches – embodied most importantly by Charles V – had proven untenable. The positions of the spokesmen of the *via media*, who had sought to attain a compromise among the different theological positions, were therefore considered with increasing suspicion – or no longer suited the demands of a time that prioritized clear-cut distinctions.

The ultimate destiny of Wild's works perfectly epitomizes the gradual transformation of the religious panorama. After his death in 1554, Wild's sermons continued to be published with considerable success over the course of three decades, and yet a new generation of Catholic leaders looked at his works with growing diffidence. The attitude of the early German Jesuits clearly shows such a change. One of the earliest Jesuits in Ingolstadt was proud to recall that in 1556 the library of their college, recently founded by Peter Canisius (d. 1597), was able to acquire “three German volumes of Wild” – thanks to a generous donation from the Duke of Bavaria, Albrecht V (d. 1579) –, which would be used to train future Jesuit preachers.<sup>2</sup> Still in 1566 and 1569, the sermons of Wild – as well as those of other *via media* proponents such as Georg Witzel – were among those recommended for an “*integra bibliotheca catholica*” in the indexes of

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1 As a general introduction see MacCulloch, *Reformation*. On the 1547 decrees as key point of the Council, see Adriano Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: Una introduzione storica* (Turin, 2001), pp. 65-67. On the early 1550s as a decisive turning point in the Catholic Church, see the recent work of Massimo Firpo, *La presa di potere dell'Inquisizione romana 1550-1553* (Rome-Bari, 2014).

2 “Deinde opera D. Doctoris Hondij concessit optimus Princeps [Albert V], pro sua liberali voluntate, ut Bibliopola emerentur libri qui defuerunt in humanitate 40. Florenis. Mox tria Volumina Feri [i.e. Wild] Germanice aedita eiusdem Hondij benevolentia et principis expensis donata fuerunt, quae concionatoribus deservirent”; *Beati Petri Canisii, S.J., Epistulae et acta*, ed. Otto Braunsberger, 8 vols (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1896-1923), 2, pp. 902-03 (Thomas Lentulus; 7 July 1556). This episode is recalled – with some inaccuracy – in Frymire, *The Primacy*, p. 337.

Bavaria. This resulted from the work of a commission led by Canisius himself within the region that was at the forefront of the counter-reformation movement in the German lands.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the repeated condemnations of Wild's books in other countries and the fierce attack that the Spanish Dominican Domingo de Soto launched against him in 1554, Wild's sermons were still highly esteemed in the Catholic German territories of the 1560s.<sup>4</sup> This esteem would not last, however. Just over a decade later, in 1580, when the counter-reformation movement had gained particular momentum, Canisius wrote a detailed letter dedicated to the issues of censorship and its repercussions for existing sermon collections to the new Duke of Bavaria, Wilhelm v. In his letter, the Jesuit explicitly criticized the works of Wild and Witzel. Canisius included them in a list of authors who were formerly considered Catholic and yet, "in the complete sense of the term they are not Catholic", as their doctrinal exposition was not sufficiently clear or "in many places deviates from the approved Catholic faith", i.e. from Tridentine theology ("Sacri Concilii Tridentini normam") and its early reception.<sup>5</sup> A sign of the changing times, while the previous Duke had supported the Jesuits by financing the purchase of Wild's sermon collections for their libraries, his son was now asked to halt the dissemination and use of those same books. In the new confessional era, the works of these authors were neither useful nor acceptable. They had to be replaced with more doctrinally sound sermon collections and pastoral tools, among which was Canisius' own catechism – one of the new Catholic

3 Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils*, pp. 339-40. An excellent summary of the Counter-Reformation is provided by Elena Bonora, *La Controriforma* (Rome-Bari, 2001).

4 On the attack of Domingo de Soto against Wild, see Gérard Morisse, "Johann Wild et l'Inquisition espagnole," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 70 (1995), 159-74.

5 "Ubi nec tacere possum nec debeo, scriptores quosdam huius temporis Catholicos nominari, eorumque libros in precio haberi, et Catholico nomine vulgo celebrari, sed qui revera et integre Catholici non sunt. Loquor de Georgio Wicelio, Conrado Cligio, Joanne Fero, Jacobo Schöppero, Georgio Cassandro, ut alios id genus plures praetermittam. Et enim si horum scripta quae extant, legitime ponderentur, ac praesertim ad Sacri Concilii Tridentini normam, vereque solidam Theologiae regulam excutiantur, etiamsi maiore quidem ex parte doctrinam Catholicam tradant atque tueantur, tamen, si verum fatendum est, nonnunquam in fide sana et catholica religione claudicant, ac lima et praecisione quadam indigent, ut sine offensione tuto legantur et lectoribus pariant aedificationem"; Letter of Canisius to Wilhelm v (8 August 1580) in *Beati Canisii epistulae*, 7, pp. 549-55: 553. On this letter, see Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils*, p. 342. On Canisius, see Patrizio Foresta, *Wie ein Apostel Deutschlands': Apostolat, Obrigkeit und jesuitisches Selbstverständnis am Beispiel des Petrus Canisius (1543-1570)*, (Göttingen, 2016). Already in 1569, the Jesuit Alfonso Pisano, who was at the time professor of theology at Dillingen, expressed to Canisius some misgivings about the works of Wild and Witzel; see *Beati Canisii epistulae*, 6, p. 272.

bestsellers.<sup>6</sup> Due to a rather curious twist of events, Wild's bodily remains suffered a similar fate at this time, traversing the path from glory to forced oblivion. After his death, he had been buried in the Franciscan church of Mainz close to the main altar; notably, in a position of prestige.<sup>7</sup> Yet in 1574 the church passed over to the Jesuits – who had established themselves in the city in 1561 – and soon after they removed the headstone of the Franciscan preacher. The memorial of Wild was no longer a priority for the new inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

I have opted to dwell on the destiny of Wild's legacy, precisely because it reflects the broader transformation that was taking place. On the one hand, it refers to the gradual implementation of the new "Tridentine paradigm" and to the role of political powers in the age of the confessional Churches.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it shows the increasing relevance of new protagonists within the Catholic milieu, such as the Jesuits. Parallel to these phenomena, among the Protestants, the prominent role Jean Calvin (d. 1564) and the Reformed churches achieved represented a radical novelty that further enriched and complicated the religious and political scene. The situation became even more complex with the "Protestants in arms" in France and the Low Countries from 1562 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Within this socio-religious and political context, the growing role of censorship and political control over religious discourse pertained not only to the production and circulation of books such as those of Wild, but also to other forms of religious instruction, such as the production and staging of religious plays. The freedom to stage the story of the prodigal son now had its limits. Dramatic productions could need prior ecclesiastical approval. This was at least the case in Italy, where in 1579 an edict of the Inquisition in Pisa

6 On the origin of this text see Patrizio Foresta, *Ad Dei gloriam et Germaniae utilitatem: San Pietro Canisio e gli inizi della compagnia di Gesù nei territori dell'impero tedesco (1543-1555)* (Soveria Mannelli, 2006).

7 "Tumulatus ante summam aram aedis Ordinis sui" – as refers Paulus, *Johann Wild*, p. 67.

8 See Decot, "La prédication à Mayence," p. 277.

9 See Paolo Prodi, *Il paradigma tridentino. Un'epoca della storia della Chiesa* (Brescia, 2010), who underlines the innovative dynamism of the initial phase of this historical phenomenon. On the interlocked phenomena of the confessionalisation and the *Sozialdisziplinierung* as a process involving different competitive powers, see *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Paolo Prodi (Bologna, 1994), esp. Wolfgang Reinhard, "Disciplinamento sociale, confessionalizzazione, modernizzazione. Un discorso storiografico," *ivi*, pp. 101-23.

10 See a synthesis in MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 237-53 (Calvin) and 306-13 (wars of religion in the 1560s). As introduction and for further bibliographical references, see also Sabina Pavone, *I gesuiti dalle origini alla soppressione* (Rome-Bari, 2004) and Corrado Vivanti, *Le guerre di religione nel Cinquecento* (Rome-Bari, 2007).

forbade “comic actors” to stage anything “inherent to the Old and New Testament or sacred themes or ecclesiastical and religious topics [...] and anything that represents necromancy or depicts it in comedy”.<sup>11</sup> The prohibition was the severe outcome of an inquisitorial trial against a company of actors who had planned to stage a series of plays in the city and instead were forced to defend themselves before the inquisitors. Among the plays that they had planned to perform was *Il figliol prodigo*.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, the archbishop of Florence forbade the staging of secular and religious plays in the oratories of Florentine confraternities. These plays could be performed, but not in sacred spaces and not without previous permission from the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>13</sup> Despite growing regulations, the fortune of the prodigal son on the stage would not diminish. As we have seen in Chapter 6, the parable became a standard topic for dramas in schools and Jesuit colleges.<sup>14</sup> However, playwrights and actors had to carefully consider the confessional context in which they were living.

In this changing religious and cultural context, the parable of the prodigal son continued to play a prominent role in the production, dissemination, and appropriation of the religious message. Though tracing the parable’s varied pastoral uses within the different confessions goes beyond the scope of this study, the results of this investigation on the late medieval and early

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- 11 “Divieto a tutti quanti li comici [...] di rappresentare cosa alcuna né scrittura di testamento vecchio o nuovo, né di scrittura sacra o santa, né cosa ecclesiastica o religiosa [...] né meno representare o comediare negromantia”; quoted in Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, p. 349.
- 12 On this episode, see also Carlo Ginzburg, “Folklore, magia, religione,” in *Storia d’Italia. I: I caratteri originali*, eds. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti (Turin, 1972), pp. 601-76: 654-55.
- 13 Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, p. 347. Analogous restrictions were promoted by Carlo Borromeo in Milan. On the censorship of biblical plays as unauthorized biblical translations, see Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo*, pp. 48, 132-33, and 199-216.
- 14 Beside the plays mentioned in Chapter 6, see the entry *Sohn, Der verlorene*, in Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte*, 10th ed. (Stuttgart, 2005). Within the Italian context, together with the already mentioned play of Giovanni Maria Cecchi (on which, see Eisenbichler, “From *Sacra Rappresentazione to Commedia Spirituale*”), one has to consider texts such as Maurizio Moro, *Rappresentazione del figliuolo prodigo* (Venice: Carlo Pipini, 1585) and Giuliano Francini, *La rappresentazione del figliuol prodigo* (Orvieto: Antonio Colaldi, after 1587). On seventeenth-century *canovacci* of the *commedia dell’arte* based on a rather free re-invention of the prodigal son’s story, see Neri, “Studi sul teatro,” pp. 36-44 and Giuseppe Billanovich, “Diavolo e vangelo nella commedia dell’arte [1938],” in Giuseppe Billanovich, *Itinera: vicende di libri e di testi*, ed. Mariarosà Cortesi (Rome, 2004), pp. 7-20.

sixteenth-century period offer a basis for just such an enquiry. Before recapitulating the main findings of the research proposed in this book and formulating my final remarks, it may be useful to indicate – in the form of an epilogue – a few possible directions for additional research concerning the ‘modern’ prodigal son, drawing mainly upon the scholarship available to date on the topic.

For an evaluation of the production of new exegetical texts among Protestants, one may begin by considering Jean Calvin’s commentary on the prodigal son in his *Harmonia ex tribus evangelistis composita* (1553). In this text, the reformer continued to adopt the parable as a narrative tool to shape a (Protestant) religious identity, using the consolidated rhetorical scheme: “just as the prodigal son [...] in the same way we ...”.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, he clearly proposed his interpretation of the prodigal son’s confession as an alternative to “the confession that the pope constructed”, thereby adapting the story to the ongoing confessional conflict.<sup>16</sup> Within Lutheranism, which faced the challenge to redefine itself after the death of Luther, one may consider the *Glossa compendiaria* (1570) of Matthias Flacius Illyricus (d. 1575), which was a commentary on the bilingual New Testament of Erasmus.<sup>17</sup> Flacius Illyricus was a leader of the so-called ‘gnesio-Lutherans’, who presented themselves as defenders of the authentic Luther over and against the more nuanced positions on free will and predestination expressed by Melancthon and those labelled

15 “Ergo quemadmodum hic iuvenis paternae clementiae fiducia ad quaerendam reconciliationem erigitur, ita nobis poenitentiae initium sit oportet Divinae misericordiae agnitio, quae nos ad bene sperandum excitet”; Jean Calvin, *Harmonia ex tribus evangelistis composita, Matthaeo, Marco et Luca, adiuncto seorsum Iohanne* (Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1560), p. 276. See on this passage Delville, “La parabole de Fils prodigue au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle,” pp. 101-04.

16 “Sequitur etiam confessio, non qualem fabricavit Papa, sed qua filius offensum patrem sibi placat: nam haec humilitas redimendis offensis omnino necessaria est”; Calvin, *Harmonia*, p. 276.

17 *ΤΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΥΙΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΚΑΙΝΗΣ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗΣ ΑΠΑΝΤΑ. Novum testamentum Jesu Christi filii dei ex versione Erasmi [...]. Glossa compendiaria Matthiae Flacii Illyrici albonensis in Novum Testamentum* (Basel: Pietro Perna and Theobald Dietrich, 1570), pp. 279-80. On this work and his author, see Luka Ilić, “What has Flacius to do with Erasmus? The Biblical Humanism of Matthias Flacius Illyricus,” *Colloquia Maruliana* 24 (2015), 207-20. It is relevant to mention also the publisher of this edition: Pietro Perna was a former Dominican friar, who had fled from Italy in 1542 (just like Bernardino Ochino (a former Capuchin) and Pietro Martire Vermigli (a former Augustinian Canon), at the moment of the foundation of Carafa’s inquisition) and who became a promoter of the Italian heterodox movement in Basel; see Leandro Perini, *La vita e i tempi di Pietro Perna* (Rome, 2002).

as Philippists, positions that entered into the 1577 Formula of Concord.<sup>18</sup> The parable of the prodigal son allowed Flacius to insist on several points that were under discussion in the intra-Lutheran debate. The scene of the father running towards his son (defined here as “*pictura ingentis misericordie patris coelestis*”) serves Flacius to point out that “*verissimum autem est quod etiam antequam peccator sese moveat ex sua peccatorum sentina, pater coelestis eum ad se trahat*”, without mentioning – as Melanchthon had emphasized – the necessary reply of the sinner.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it does not seem to be a coincidence that almost half of the commentary is devoted to the elder brother, criticizing any form of good works or disciplined regime (“*aliquam speciem externorum operum ac discipline*”) – whereas Melanchthon had recovered the term *disciplina* in a positive sense as a means of responding to the challenges raised by antinomian positions as well as radical religious and political movements.

Among the texts of religious instruction on the prodigal son written by Catholic authors, I dwell upon the works of Ottaviano Preconio (d. 1568), Jerónimo Nadal (d. 1580), and Diego de Estella (d. 1578), as they offer differentiated entry points to the pastoral use of the prodigal son after the Council of Trent. All three were highly productive pastoral and exegetical authors, and it was no coincidence that they were exponents of religious orders (both old and new) that were prominent players in the confessional projects of counter-reformation Catholicism.<sup>20</sup>

The Franciscan Ottaviano Preconio was ordained bishop of Monopoli in 1546 and then, in 1562, archbishop of Palermo.<sup>21</sup> He played an active role in the Council of Trent, and his pastoral writings can be viewed as an initial attempt to implement the conciliar pastoral strategy in his diocese, as their focus on the sacraments demonstrates. In 1567, Preconio published his *Meditatione del peccatore ridotto a guisa del figliol prodigo* (“Meditation of a Sinner in the guise of

18 See MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 347-53 and, for an in-depth analysis, Luka Ilić, *Theological of Sin and Grace: The Process of Radicalization in the Theology of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Göttingen, 2014).

19 It is interesting to note that Flacius Illyricus reshaped the medieval allegorical interpretation of the gesture of the father, adapting it to the needs of Lutheran theology: “*Qui volunt ociosius applicare omnes partes huius parabolae, dicunt illam amplexationem et exosculationem significare iustificationem, annulum significare Spiritussancti donum, vestem bonam conscientiam, calceos opera vocationis, convivium denique perpetuam laetitiam et celebrationem Dei in hac vita aeterna*”; Flacius Illyricus, *Glossa compendiariorum*, pp. 279-80.

20 See Bonora, *La Controriforma*, pp. 44 and 68-82.

21 See Michele Granà, “L’attività politica di Ottaviano Preconio O.F.M.Conv., padre conciliare a Trento e arcivescovo di Palermo (1502-1568),” in *I francescani e la politica*, ed. Alessandro Musco (Palermo, 2007), pp. 561-77.

the Prodigal Son”). In it, he wrote in the first-person singular, identifying himself with the prodigal son: “Deh, meschino me, figliol prodigo in tutto stolto [...] L’ufficio mio fu solo de pascer porci [...] Io, figlio prodigo ...”.<sup>22</sup> After a section on his own sin, the author presented a devout meditation on the Passion of Christ, which is depicted as the ideal means to achieve true contrition. Preconio adopted an emotionally intense register, in which he – in the guise of the sinner, that is, the prodigal son – addressed Christ directly, while meditating on the pains of his Passion: “Tu dunque Signore hai pianto e lacrimato tante volte per cagion mia ...”.<sup>23</sup> A closer analysis of this text would show how the prodigal son was – once again – considered the prototype for the sinner, and how his story was framed as a narrative of self-understanding. Furthermore, the connection between the prodigal son and the meditation on the Passion of Christ offers an interesting possibility of comparison with Johann Meder’s earlier work.

While the text of Preconio had a moderate dissemination (with only one edition in Naples), the work of Jerónimo Nadal – one of the most prominent Jesuits of the time – can be deemed a monument of the Tridentine pastoral strategy.<sup>24</sup> From 1568 onwards, Nadal planned and carried out the complex production of the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* and the *Adnotationes et meditationes*. These were two complementary parts of a refined visual-textual commentary on the Gospel readings for all Sundays of the liturgical year and for the Lenten period. The text and the preparatory sketches were complete by 1576, but the final product was only published in 1593-94, following Nadal’s death.<sup>25</sup> The result was a magnificently illustrated commentary on the liturgical pericopes, in which the images could also be printed separately as visual catechetical support. Thanks to a system of cross-references between *imagines* and *meditationes*, the reader/viewer was guided to meditate on and visually capture the main theological points of each Gospel text. Usually, one engraving – with its rich details – was enough to illustrate a Gospel passage. Some pericopes did, however, receive special treatment, and the parable of the prodigal son was a prominent instance. Four different engravings give an extraordinary,

22 Ottaviano Preconio, *Meditatione del peccatore ridotto a guisa del figliol prodigo a misero e calamitoso stato il quale ricerca contritione per vigore della passione di Christo afflitto et morto per gli peccati suoi* (Naples: Giovanni De Boy, 1567), fols. 5v, 7r, and 10v.

23 Preconio, *Meditatione*, fol. 59r.

24 See William V. Bangert, *Jerome Nadal, S.J., 1507-1580: Tracking the First Generation of Jesuits*, ed. Thomas M. McCoog (Chicago, 1992).

25 See Danilo Zardin, “Le *Adnotationes et meditationes* illustrate di Nadal sui Vangeli del ciclo liturgico: il modello e il riuso,” in *Visibile teologia: Il libro sacro figurato in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, eds. Erminia Ardissino and Elisabetta Selmi (Rome, 2012), pp. 3-23.

detailed visual commentary on the parable (fig. 40-43).<sup>26</sup> Only the sections on the Passion and Resurrection of Christ display a larger number of images. Clearly, Nadal considered the story of sin and conversion of the prodigal son as a key text in his project of “visible theology”.<sup>27</sup> A more in-depth scrutiny of the illustrated commentary on the parable – which was soon also available in vernacular adaptations<sup>28</sup> – would open the door to a study of the religious discourses on this parable developed by the Jesuits, and in general, the catechetical use of images of the prodigal son in the confessional age. The latter theme more evidently merits a specific investigation. Such a project would expand and complement the work done by art historians of the early modern period, who have already pointed to the enormous success of the prodigal son – also as a “profane” subject – in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visual arts across the confessional spectrum. One only need recall the names of Maarten van Heemskerck, Guercino, Rubens, and Rembrandt.<sup>29</sup>

The Franciscan Diego de Estella – the third writer I mention here – was a renowned preacher and spiritual author, who had been appointed preacher at the court of King Philip II in the 1560s. Among his writings, several of which are mainly focused on the love of God, there is a vast commentary on the Gospel of Luke. This work, which Estella conceived explicitly for the use of preachers, was first printed in 1574-75.<sup>30</sup> In its introduction, Estella stated the reasons for choosing this specific Gospel. Therein, he underlined the central theme of

26 See Jerónimo Nadal, *Evangelicae historiae imagines: ex ordine Evangeliorum, quae toto anno in missae sacrificio recitantur* (Antwerp: Martin Nutius, 1593), fig. 66-69. The commentary on this pericope is in Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia: quae in sacrosancto missae sacrificio toto anno leguntur* (Antwerp: Martin Nutius, 1594), pp. 125-30.

27 I borrow the expression from Ardissino and Selmi, eds., *Visibile teologia*.

28 On the 1599 Italian version edited by Agostino Vivaldi, see Zardin, “Le ‘Adnotationes,’” pp. 7 and 21-23.

29 See for instance: Barbara Haeger, “The Prodigal Son in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art: Depictions of the Parable and the Evolution of a Catholic Image,” *Simiolus* 16 (1986), 128-38; Cornelia Diekamp Moiso, “Il tema del figliol prodigo nella pittura neerlandese,” in Galli, ed., *Interpretazione e invenzione*, pp. 205-44; the chapter “The prodigal son by Guercino” in Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Illuminating Luke. 2: The Public Ministry of Christ in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting* (New York, 2005), pp. 135-64; Stéphanie Fardel-Dewaël, “Le Fils Prodigue, miroir mondain des Pays-Bas méridionaux (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles),” *Graphè* 18 (2009), 105-23; Anita Boyd Morris, “Pictures of Debauchery: Profane Images of the Prodigal Son’s Revels in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings,” *Dutch Crossing* 35 (2011), 213-28.

30 A brief introduction to the work of Estella and an English translation of his commentary on the prodigal son is provided by Robert Karris, “Diego de Estella on Luke 15:11-32,” *Fran-*



mercy, and specifically mentioned the prodigal son: “[Luke] alone wrote that very beautiful and graphic parable about the prodigal son. That parable is so filled with love’s sweet consolation that it could melt like wax the hard hearts of the most obstinate people, once they had heard it, and cause them to be seized and elevated into the love of God”.<sup>31</sup> We recognize here the familiar topos regarding the special power of this story to move its listeners to penitence. In his rich and detailed commentary, Estella interpreted the parable “through the lenses of the Council of Trent”, most particularly when he considered the themes of justification and sacramental penitence.<sup>32</sup> Estella inserted, for instance, an explicit polemic against the “impissimi Lutherani”, underlining that a person does not lose his free will once he or she sins.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the servants of the father are identified as “the ministers of the Church, who administer the sacraments, especially the priest who absolves from sins”, because grace “is conferred through the ministry of priests and preachers”.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Estella drew on long-standing exegetical strategies to address main theological points while discussing the parable, such as presenting the

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*ciscan Studies* 61 (2003), 97-234. See also Jesús Martínez de Bujanda, *Fray Diego de Estella (1524-1578). Estudio doctrinal de sus obras espirituales* (Madrid, 1970).

- 31 “Praeterea sanctus hic Evangelista dulcior et suavior est, dum Christi misericordiam et pietatem magnificat et commendat. Hic est qui maioribus criminibus gravatos et afflictos dulci consolatur eloquio. [...] Solus parabolam illam filii prodigi amoris dulcedine et suavitate plenam scribit ita graphice et artificiose, ut dura hominum obstinatorum corda, ea audita, tanquam cera liquescant, et in divini numinis dilectionem rapiantur et eleventur”; Diego de Estella, *In sanctum Jesu Christi evangelium secundum Lucam, doctissima pariter et piissima commentaria*, 2 vols (Lyon: Jeanne Giunta, 1583), 1, fol. 1v. (Here and below, I follow the English translation provided by Karris, “Diego de Estella”). In his *Modus concionandi*, Estella advocated for a literal interpretation of the parable, criticizing some traditional allegorical readings (such as the fatted calf as symbol of the Passion); see Diego de Estella, *Modo de predicar y Modus concionandi*, ed. Pio Sagüés Azcona (Madrid, 1951), pp. 21-23 and 217-18 (in the Spanish version, Estella explicitly mentioned Wild’s commentary). In his commentary on Luke can be found a long and interesting section in which Estella criticized large parts of the previous exegetical traditions (refusing for instance the allegory of the two sons as the Jews and the Gentiles). This section was removed from later editions after the intervention of the Inquisition (for instance, it is missing in the 1583 Antwerp edition that I have consulted); see on this Karris, “Diego de Estella,” p. 117.
- 32 Karris, “Diego de Estella,” p. 109.
- 33 “Docemur [...] quod per peccatum non perditur liberum hominis arbitrium, ut impissimi Lutherani ausi sunt asserere”; Diego de Estella, *In sanctum Jesu Christi evangelium secundum Lucam enarrationes*, 2 vols (Antwerp: Peter Beller, 1583), 2, p. 246.
- 34 “Servi isti ministri sunt ecclesiae qui sacramenta ministrant, et maxime sacerdotes absolventes a peccatis. [...] nunc ministerio sacerdotum et praedicatorum confert illam [gratiam]”; *Ibid.*, 2, p. 251.

different types of grace in the scene of the encounter between the father and his son. While dealing with one of the most sensitive theological topics of his age, Estella simply copied word-for-word the thirteenth-century *Postilla* authored by Hugh of Saint-Cher, including its description of *gratia preveniens*, *coadiuvans*, *conservans*, and *consummans* – a fact overlooked by the modern editor.<sup>35</sup> Still, Estella's explanation is more sophisticated on the point of the *gratia preveniens*, wherein the process of justification is carefully discussed. Then, in the section that comments on the three gifts given by the father to his returned son, the text reiterates the three types of grace (*gratia preveniens*, *cooperans*, *consummationem prestans*) granted to the sinner.<sup>36</sup> The commentary's close dependence on medieval sources is further confirmed by the use of the simile of the vulture, which we have encountered not only in Hugh of Saint-Cher's text, but also in Iacopo da Varazze's model sermon on the prodigal son.<sup>37</sup> By silently borrowing these elements from the medieval scholastic exegetical tradition and adapting them to the theological and pastoral needs of his time (for instance, by introducing a list of ten reasons on the importance of sacramental confession), Estella's commentary constitutes a bridge between the late medieval pastoral uses of the prodigal son parable and its subsequent fortune in the modern period. In fact, notwithstanding the initial troubles that this commentary encountered with the Spanish Inquisition, which requested that

35 “*Accurrens*, notatur gratia coadiuvans sive cooperans, quae non patitur moram vel dilationem. Sicut enim nutrix videns puerum invalidum conantem ad ambulandum, statim occurrit ne cadat, ita Deus cum aliquis nititur per liberum arbitrium ambulare ad eum, statim Deus accurrit per gratiam. [...] Secundo dicitur hic quod *Cecidit super collum eius*, in quo notatur gratia conservans, quae fovet et amplectitur poenitentem duobus brachiis charitatis: leva est dimissio culpe et dextera promissio gloriae. [...] Amplexus cum osculo, ipsa gratia reconcilians est hic signis descripta [...]. Praeterea in osculo notatur gratia consummans seu perficiens, quia osculum est signum perfectae reconciliationis et pacis et dilectionis. Et ideo ultimo ponitur, quia non habebitur nisi post tres gratias predictas”; *Ibid.*, 2, p. 250. On Hugh's text, see above p. 65.

36 “*Observa autem quod triplici gratia adiutus fuit hic: gratia videlicet praeveniente, cooperante sive subsequente, et gratia consummationem praestante*”; *Ibid.*, 2, p. 252; each type of grace is then elucidated through key quotations taken from the letters of St Paul (“*De hic tribus gratiis loquitur Paulus ...*”), as an indirect reply to the Lutheran positions.

37 “*Cum autem adhuc longe esset, vidit illum pater ipsius et misericordia motus est. Hic notatur ordo quo Deus venit ad peccatorem, secundum proprietatem et similitudinem vulturis, qui primo vidit cadaver a longe, deinde advolat, et postea insidet, et tandem incorporat*”; *Ibid.*, 2, p. 249. See above p. 65 (Hugh of Saint-Cher) and p. 125 (Iacopo da Varazze).

changes be made, Estella's work was an enduring international bestseller.<sup>38</sup> Over a period of nearly a century, it was printed seventeen times in several Catholic countries, with editions in Salamanca (1574–75; 1582), Alcalá (1577–78), Lyon (1580; 1583; 1584; 1592), Venice (1582–83; 1586), Antwerp (1583–84; 1593; 1599–1600; 1606–08; 1612; 1622; 1653–55), and Mainz (1680).<sup>39</sup> Thus, it became one of the standard reference commentaries on the prodigal son.

The same dynamic of continuity and change can also be seen in another exceptional document, which finally brings us quite close to the domain of parochial pastoral care beyond the urban context; namely, the sermon on the prodigal son written by Domenico Sala, a priest in the small Santa Maria Assunta of Rancio parish in the archdiocese of Milan, near Lecco. Sala composed his text in the 1570s for one of the monthly meetings among the clergy of the area. At these gatherings, the attending priests were asked to practice preaching and to submit copies of their sermons to the religious authorities of the diocese, "who would evaluate them in order to ensure that the ministry of the word was being fulfilled properly in the parishes".<sup>40</sup> The very existence of this type of document enables us to investigate a level of pastoral interaction that was almost inaccessible in the previous historical period, and it also attests to the initiatives that were implemented in Carlo Borromeo's Milanese diocese to both promote and control preaching in the parishes. The content and structure of Sala's sermon are rather simple. The sermon presents a translation of the parable into the vernacular, provides a brief interpretation in accordance with a penitential reading of the story, and closes with an exhortation to the audience. The pastoral visitations of that period depict Domenico Sala as a secular priest with a notably modest theological background, such that we can reasonably assume that his sermon represents the minimal threshold of understanding regarding the parable among the rank and file clergy of that area.<sup>41</sup> The content of Sala's homily makes clear that key concepts forged over the

38 A brief discussion of the troubles of this work with the Inquisition is given in Karris, "Diego de Estella," pp. 98-103.

39 See Pio Sagüéz Azcona, "Fray Diego de Estella. Nuevos datos biobibliográficos sobre todas sus obras," *Revista Española de Teología* 44 (1984), 195-215; 202-05.

40 See Benjamin W. Westervelt, "The Prodigal Son at Santa Justina: The Homily in the Borromeo Reform of Pastoral Preaching," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 32 (2001), 109-26. This text – as well as other texts from this precious collection kept in the Archivio storico diocesano of Milan – has been edited in Angelo Turchini, *Monumenta Borromaica 3: Parole di Dio, parroci e popolo. Prove di predicazione del clero lombardo* (Cesena, 2011), pp. 364-66.

41 A few years later, in 1583, Gasparo Cristofori, who was a parish priest in Valtellina – not far from Lecco – identified himself with the prodigal son ('Non vi dimando già la stola prima, ma solum mi facciate uno de mercenari vostri'), when he wrote to Cardinal Carlo Borro-

course of centuries of interpretation and pastoral use of this parable also had reached the basic level of parochial pastoral care. Instances of this include: the interpretation of the two sons as personifications of the good and the bad Christian; the sharing of property depicted as a symbol of free will; the itinerary of the prodigal son as a means to elucidate the process of sin, contrition, and confession; the interpretation of the father's servants as the priests hearing the confession of sinners, and so forth. It is, however, difficult to pinpoint the exact sources of this sermon. The inventories of books of other parishes in the area list many of the standard exegetical authorities, such as Thomas of Aquinas' *Catena aurea* and Nicholas de Lyra's *Postilla* (in the form of a partial edition that offered a commentary on the liturgical readings). They also show the abundant presence of old and new model sermon collections, including those of Iacopo da Varazze, Vicent Ferrer, Johann Herold, Roberto Caracciolo, Cornelio Musso, Luis de Granada, as well as the vernacular Lenten sermon cycle of Ludovico Pittorio (d. 1525).<sup>42</sup> With 25 sixteenth-century editions, Pittorio's work was one of the prominent bestsellers on the Italian book market. His sermons would have been easily accessible, even for a priest with a modest theological education like the parish priest of Rancio, who may well have derived from Pittorio an unusual interpretation of the shoes given to the son by his father.<sup>43</sup> In any event, it is difficult to ascertain exactly which books

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meo to ask for forgiveness for several crimes he committed as a priest; see Pastore, *Nella Valtellina del tardo Cinquecento*, pp. 47-48 and 151.

- 42 On this list of sermon collections, see Turchini, *Parole di Dio*, pp. 90-94. Some of the priests of the area had a more solid theological culture than Domenico Sala, as is proven by a sermon of Girolamo Di Basti, curate of Malgrate, near Lecco, who drew on a model sermon of Vicent Ferrer; see Wietse de Boer, "The Curate of Malgrate or the Problem of Clerical Competence in Counter-Reformation Milan," in *The Power of Imagery: Essays on Rome, Italy and Imagination*, ed. Peter van Kessel (Rome, 1992), pp. 188-200. On the religious culture of the regular clergy, see the results of the important ongoing research project "Libri e biblioteche degli Ordini religiosi in Italia alla fine del secolo XVI", led by Roberto Rusconi; see Roberto Rusconi, "Le biblioteche degli ordini religiosi in Italia intorno all'anno 1600 attraverso l'inchiesta della Congregazione dell'Indice. Problemi e prospettive di una ricerca," in *Libri, biblioteche e cultura nell'Italia del Cinque e Seicento*, eds. Edoardo Barbieri and Danilo Zardin (Milan, 2002), pp. 63-84 and *Libri, biblioteche e cultura degli Ordini regolari nell'Italia moderna attraverso la documentazione della Congregazione dell'Indice*, eds. Rosa Marisa Borraccini and Roberto Rusconi (Rome, 2006).
- 43 Sala: "La scarpa è serrata di soto e aperta di sopra, a significare che il peccator, qual ritorna ala via bona di Cristo, de' lasar le cose terene e risguardar sempre le cose celeste"; Turchini, *Parole di Dio*, p. 366. "Mettetegli etiam in piedi gli calciamenti, che sono di sotto serrati, e di sopra aperti, per dimostrarci che 'l si tenga il core serrato alle cose terrene e aperto alle celesti"; Ludovico Pittorio, *Homilario quadragesimale* (Venice: Johann Criegher, 1568), fol.

Domenico Sala had at hand's reach – and it is possible that he had assimilated some of the contents used for his own sermon through channels of oral communication. What remains relevant is that by repeating and adapting numerous medieval elements, the priest of Rancio provided his parishioners with a sermon that exhorted them to “imitate” the penitential itinerary of the prodigal son (“se imitareti questo fiolo giovine”). However, in a convenient shift in interpretation that reflected the priorities of the post-Tridentine age, the father of the parable became “the spiritual father, i.e. your confessor”.<sup>44</sup>

The grandiose commentary of Diego de Estella and the simple sermon of Domenico Sala show the different ways in which the changing religious culture and the pastoral practices of the late sixteenth century were still influenced by medieval interpretations and pastoral uses of the parable of the prodigal son. This offers a vantage point from which to look back and to summarize the major findings of this study.

This book has traced and analysed the gradual construction, wide dissemination, and multiple transformations of a paradigmatic interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son in the medieval period, as well as the crisis and the renewal of this paradigm in the early sixteenth century. The guiding methodological assumption has been that the study of the numerous interpretations and uses of a specific biblical narrative allows for an investigation of the forms and the media through which religious discourse was concretely shaped within a context of pastoral activities. The main argument of this study has been that this parable increasingly became a reference point in late medieval discourses concerning religious instruction. In the skilful hands of those who mastered religious communication, this story became highly functional in the shaping and reshaping of a narrative of self-understanding. It served to propose and impose a powerful discourse. With the many re-presentations of this parable, the faithful were asked to recognize their own sinful lives in the story of the prodigal son, and they were urged to imitate his exemplary conversion.

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45r (Saturday after *Reminiscere*). On the dissemination of this sermon collection, first published in 1506, see Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press*, pp. 26-27. On Pittorio, a humanist who later became a Servite, see Giancarlo Andenna, “Pittorio, Ludovico,” in *DBI* 84 (2015), pp. 320-22.

44 “E così voi peccatori se imitareti questo fiolo giovine, ogni volta che sareti im peccato mortale vi ricoreti dal vostro patre spirituale, cioè dal vostro confesore, sareti abrazato dal nostro signor Iesu Cristo e, così facendo, voi tuti il signor Idio vi darà sanità in questo mondo, ne l'altro il riposo e gaudio dil paradiso”; Turchini, *Parole di Dio*, p. 366. On the role of catechesis in the growing sixteenth-century patriarchal ideology, see Bast, *Honor Your Fathers* and – on Milan – Angelo Turchini, *Sotto l'occhio del padre. Società confessionale e istruzione primaria nello Stato di Milano* (Bologna, 1996).

The more than one hundred texts written by approximately eighty authors examined in this book have highlighted the wide, ingenious, and multifaceted use of this biblical narrative within late medieval and early modern pastoral activities. The analysis has emphasized in particular the role of preaching as a pervasive medium of religious instruction within (at least) the urban context, where the voices of popular preachers – especially those coming from the ranks of the mendicant orders – were increasingly able to reach large sectors of society. The parable of the prodigal son was employed to present its audience with a convincing model of sin and conversion, and to invite them to internalize and reproduce the example of the prodigal son. The listeners were urged to undertake a homologous penitential itinerary in order to return – by means of contrition, confession, and satisfaction – to the house of the father, i.e. the Church. Within this type of religious discourse, the sinful condition of the human being and his or her need for conversion were constantly reasserted and exposed in manifold ways.

Nevertheless, another message was asserted by such religious discourses with (almost) equal energy; namely, that of the unlimited mercy of God, who was ready to forgive sinners and was likewise reluctant to punish their faults. Sermons on the prodigal son also presented a discourse on the intense relationship between God and the soul, developing either the passionate appeal of God who addressed the human soul as his beloved, or the prodigal son's affective contemplation of Christ's Passion and his overabundant mercy. In this type of text, the prodigal son first embodied the ideal penitent, who recognized his sin and undertook a penitential itinerary; then he was transformed into the beloved soul, the *sponsa Christi*, who longed for spiritual union with Christ. This bears witness to the versatility of many late medieval preachers, who were able to adopt clearly distinct registers, passing from harsh critique of customs to devout meditation on the love of Christ. Thereby, contrary to stereotypical presentations of medieval preaching as an instrument in a fear-based pastoral model, the sources analysed here contribute to uncovering a much more nuanced medieval religious discourse that presented lay people with a message in which fear and hope, sin and mercy were deeply intertwined.

This study has also demonstrated the predominance of the penitential interpretation in late medieval readings of the story of the prodigal son. Between the thirteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, normative discourses on this parable repeated almost invariably the main features of this interpretation. The seemingly endless reposition of these basic concepts guaranteed that both preachers and listeners gradually became familiar with the penitential explanation, which at the end of the medieval period was considered a given. The parable served as a powerful master narrative with which to frame the lives

of the listeners in a story of sin and (need for) mercy, and allowed for the presentation of an anatomy of the penitential process. This could be accomplished in comparatively simple forms or by means of a pocket-size but attentive discussion of topics such as God's foreknowledge and human freedom, divine grace and human merits, interior contrition and sacramental confession. Model sermons on the prodigal son offered preachers a functional scheme to familiarize their congregations with these strategic topics in a simplified and yet not overly simplistic form. Sermons thus enhanced and popularized an automatic connection between these theological and pastoral issues and the parable of the prodigal son. The penitential interpretation of this story provided key elements for the dissemination of a basic theological culture and contributed to the gradual construction of a shared religious landscape. As part of a ritual form of communication, the repetition of these contents contributed to structuring and preserving a symbolic order of society.

The analysis of a large number of these texts also revealed the freedom and talent of individual exegetes, preachers, and playwrights who – within a shared penitential domain – developed multiple aspects, variations, and nuances. This book has therefore highlighted not only the pervasive presence of a pastoral paradigm, but also the creative experimentations present in the elaboration of this biblical narrative, which was used to shape and control sophisticated religious messages and effective pastoral instruments. The homiletic discourse had the potential to move far beyond the basic penitential elements and involve themes such as a passionate Christocentric devotion. Such a phenomenon clearly emerges in the sermon cycle of Johann Meder, who brought the topos regarding the exceptionality of this parable to its extreme consequences when he transformed the story of the prodigal son into a narrative framework covering the entire Lenten period. In these sermons, the journey of the prodigal son did not end with the merciful reception of his father, but instead evolved into the description of the emotionally intense relationship between Christ and the human soul.

In the context of the dominant penitential interpretation of this parable, the present study has explored the strategic role of preaching in shaping, reshaping, and disseminating the story of the prodigal son in addition to the ways in which it mediated theological concepts elaborated by scholastic exegesis. In seeking effective forms of communication, late medieval sermons increasingly dramatized the parable. In particular, it was possible to trace the transformation of the few words uttered by the prodigal son in the Gospel into a long and poignant monologue, in which he asked for mercy and pronounced an exemplary confession. From this perspective, sermons on the prodigal son also served as a school of penitential prayer. They were a *vade-mecum* for a good

and sincere confession, even providing the proper words for it. In a telling instance, fifteenth-century *reportationes* allowed us to see a variety of schemes adopted to dramatize and tailor the message to specific audiences, going as far as transforming the prodigal son into a Paduan adolescent who went to Ferrara in search of adventure, as stated by Bernardino da Siena. The strategy of these semi-dramatic sermons was developed – once again – in a radical manner by Meder, who introduced lively descriptions of the main scenes of the parable and colourful dialogues between its protagonists. These dialogues were not so distant from those of the contemporary religious plays inspired by the parable, and we can argue that Meder and other preachers transformed the pulpit into a kind of virtual stage.

This study has considered sermons within a broader spectrum of sources, uncovering – at least in some cases – the mechanisms of a complex multimedia system of communication and persuasion. The interaction between biblical commentaries, sermons, religious plays, devotional texts, and a wide range of images contributed significantly to the making and popularizing of the late medieval profile of the prodigal son. Following a specific biblical narrative has allowed us to see, in concrete forms, the multiple channels through which the Bible reached a large audience and became part of everyday life. Moreover, it has been possible to trace – in specific cases within this communication system – the concomitant agency of men and women as well as members of the laity and the clergy in the reception, transformation, and appropriation of this parable and in the elaboration of a public religious discourse. This became evident in a number of religious plays on the prodigal son written and repeatedly staged in the vibrant context of fifteenth-century Florence. The prominent place of this parable within Florentine religious theatre confirmed the exceptional attention granted to the biblical story within the realm of educational activities. Once visualized and actualized on the stage in an entertaining way, this parable proved an ideal means of proposing to the audience (and to the young actors of the confraternities) a clear-cut religious model that, on the one hand, invited the renunciation of the rebellious and dissolute life led by the prodigal son and, on the other hand, called for an imitation of his repentance and adhesion to paternal authority – in the family, the state, and the Church.

The destiny of the elder brother of the biblical parable has emerged in the study as another element of particular interest. In the various medieval presentations, the story of the two brothers was generally transformed into the story of the prodigal son alone, marginalizing or erasing in full the presence – and particularly the function – of the elder brother. The latter was often barely mentioned or used only to introduce a discussion about the relationship



between mercy and merit. However, this study also has uncovered a surprising way in which a sermon could be developed on the basis of the phrase that the father says to his elder son: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours". Due to the versatility of the *sermo modernus*, this biblical sentence could be taken out of its original context and transformed into a dialogue between the Virgin and Christ. Thus, from the thirteenth century onwards, preachers were able to deliver a sermon in honour of the Virgin Mary on the foundation of the parable. This unpredictable result did not derive from previous exegetical commentaries. Rather, it was codified by Iacopo da Varazze in his highly influential Lenten sermon collection. Preaching not only reformulated previous exegetical interpretations, but also opened the way to innovative readings of the biblical text.

The dominant tendency, therefore, was to separate the two brothers. The prodigal son served to build a penitential sermon, while the figure of the elder brother allowed for the construction of a Marian sermon. Nevertheless, the presence of the two brothers also made it possible to employ this biblical narrative to frame a contrast or a radical opposition. Biblical commentaries continued to refer to the patristic allegorical interpretations of the parable, and although this type of interpretation became less common in late medieval pastoral writings, it was still an available option that provided preachers with the possibility to develop a discourse on the mercy of God while simultaneously involving anti-Jewish stereotypes that depicted Jews (symbolized by the elder brother) as hard-hearted and blind, and sometimes even as sons of the devil. Furthermore, in particular historical contexts and in conflict situations, exegetes, preachers, and playwrights created highly different discourses based on the contrast between the two brothers. In a twelfth-century sermon written in the Benedictine monastery of Admont, the two brothers represented the soul and the body. In the thirteenth century, the contrast between the two brothers gave Hugh of Saint-Cher the means to develop a discourse on the active and the contemplative life as well as on the clergy and the laity, in which he defended the pastoral commitment of the new mendicant orders. In late fifteenth-century Florence, Savonarola associated the elder brother with lukewarm, that is, false Christians, who were prisoners of their self-confidence and pride. What in the earlier years of his ministry had been a spiritual theme gradually assumed also a political meaning, given that he labelled all his adversaries as lukewarm (*tiepidi*). Finally, in the sixteenth century the opposition between the two brothers served to stage the conflict between Catholics and Lutherans. In times of harsh contrast, the parable became a useful polemical tool, as when Burkhard Waldis transformed the figure of the elder brother into a grim Catholic monk, who mistakenly trusted in the merit of his own good works.

The early sixteenth-century religious disputes broke the previous general consensus on the theological interpretation and pastoral use of this parable. The penitential paradigm came under severe strain, as is evidenced already by the 1519 dispute between Martin Luther and Johannes Eck. The divergent and conflicting interpretations of this parable originated from its intense use in previous centuries, which entrenched an automatic connection between this biblical narrative and theological themes such as sin and free will, grace and conversion, mercy and merit. The crisis of the previous paradigm was undoubtedly a significant break with the past. The interpretation of the penitential itinerary of the prodigal son was profoundly rediscussed and reframed. However, a complex dynamic of continuity and change was at play within this general framework of transformation. Without acknowledging it, prior medieval schemes were employed by both Catholic and Protestant authors on a constant basis. In various ways, the paradigm of the excellence of this biblical narrative as the ideal pastoral tool with which to convey to lay people a discourse about sin, penitence, mercy, and salvation was reconfirmed and transmitted to modern times. The prominent role attributed to the parable of the prodigal son in pastoral and educational activities arose from a conviction shared by parties on each side of the confessional divide, namely that – as Johann Wild stated to his audience – “in the prodigal son we learn to recognize ourselves”, as “the parable of the prodigal son is nothing but a mirror, in which it is possible to look at both the sinner’s misery and the mercy of God, and to see how one passes from one to the other”. The parable was a mirror that mediated and constructed self-knowledge, as well as a map that helped the faithful to embark upon a spiritual journey. The story of the prodigal son was used in a pragmatic way to achieve this result. This book has traced how the ideal image reflected by this mirror and the paths of the penitential itinerary were shaped and changed during the late medieval period and the complex transition to the early modern era. By means of this multifaceted and engaging history, the parable of the prodigal son became *the* parable par excellence and a landmark in discourses of religious instruction, in which it was presented as the paradigmatic biography of any believer.