



Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 21
Issue 2 October 2017

Article 16

9-30-2017

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Recommended Citation

Angeli, Silvia (2017) "Still Banned After All These Years- Retracing the Journey of Cavani's 'Revolutionary' Galileo (1968).," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 , Article 16.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol21/iss2/16>

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Still Banned After All These Years- Retracing the Journey of Cavani's 'Revolutionary' Galileo (1968).

Abstract

"Revolutionary" and "scandalous" are adjectives the late Ettore Bernabei, General Director of Italian State Television (RAI) from 1961 to 1974, used to describe Liliana Cavani's *Galileo* (1968) in a 2005 interview for *Corriere della Sera*. Such harsh judgment reflects the undiminished hostility of a significant branch of Italian Catholicism toward the film. The fact that almost 50 years after its release *Galileo* has yet to be broadcast on public television despite being commissioned by it unequivocally confirms this hostility. Based on primary sources such as press articles and archival sources, this article chronicles *Galileo's* incredible journey through the labyrinth of censorship and Catholic reception, revealing the complexities and mechanisms that regulate religious, political, and cultural life in Italy as well as the splintered nature of Italian Catholicism.

Keywords

Italian Cinema, Catholicism, Galileo Galilei, Giordano Bruno, Censorship, RAI

Author Notes

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Introduction

Liliana Cavani's *Galileo* follows the life of Italian scientist Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) through his discoveries and conflicts with the Catholic Church until he abjured his beliefs under the threat of receiving a death sentence. With a straightforward storyline and sober style, *Galileo* powerfully illustrates the obtuse prejudices and fear of progress that characterized the 17th-century Church and Italian society and establishes similarities with the post-conciliar Church of the late 1960s. The film suffered an especially unhappy fate, notably enduring censorship and a ban from public television, a poignant example of the strength of the censorial forces, both religious and secular, at work in Italy.

September 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of *Galileo*'s release. Italian State Television (Radio Televisione Italiana, RAI) commissioned the film but has never broadcast it, a question that has inexplicably received little attention. In a 2005 interview with Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, RAI general-director Ettore Bernabei (1961–1974) initially denied responsibility for the film's fate but later admitted that he considered Cavani's work to be "more scandalous than Brecht's" and argued that not broadcasting it "was just a matter of common sense. Think what would have happened if we had aired it."¹ Such harsh judgment reflects the undiminished hostility towards the film from a significant branch of Italian Catholicism.² At first glance, though, Cavani's interpretation of the story of the Pisan scientist presents nothing

especially provocative, from its rather institutional inception and the historical consultation services from Professor Boris Ulianich, a renowned expert on Christian history³ to the portrayal of Galileo as a profoundly Catholic man.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that *Galileo* was conceived, shot, and released during one of the most significant junctures in Italian religious history. At that time, Italian Catholicism was undergoing redefinition as the Catholic world came to terms with the legacy of epoch-making events such as the papacy of John XXIII (1958–1963) and, especially, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The Church had emerged from the Council destabilized by internal division and dissent, which peaked during the late 1960s under the more conservative papacy of Paul VI (1963–1978).⁴ It was within this period, characterized by a decrease in religious participation and practice as well as a questioning of the teachings and traditional models of the behaviors enforced by the Catholic Church,⁵ that Catholicism's inherently fragmented underlying quality emerged at its clearest.⁶

Against this backdrop, a number of factors posed particular threats to more traditional Italian Catholicism, leading to the film's continued ban: Cavani's inclusion in the film of excommunicated Nolan philosopher Giordano Bruno, the portrayal of Galileo as a deeply Catholic man, and Cavani's irreducibility to a specific ideological position. Indeed, Bruno was—and still is—an extremely controversial figure for the Catholic Church; sentenced to death for his heretical beliefs, he was never rehabilitated. Similarly, the filmmaker's insistence on portraying Galileo as a genuinely

religious man, whose respect for Catholic precepts and values is surpassed only by his love for the truth, accentuates the ferocity of his persecution by the Baroque Church. The fact that Paul VI had still not rehabilitated the scientist and displayed a rather conservative attitude towards scientific progress prompted both the director and *Galileo's* critics to draw parallels with the contemporary post-conciliar Church, making the film's criticism of the Catholic hierarchy extremely relevant and timely. Finally, Cavani's own positioning outside of any specific ideology, paired with her unconventional, nonconformist approach to Catholicism, made it difficult for the Catholic press to form a coherent and unanimous response to the film. This is reflected not only in the range of Catholic responses to *Galileo*, but also by RAI's treatment of the film. Indeed, after commissioning from the director, RAI sold it to film company Cineriz and allegedly destroyed every copy left in its possession.

Overall, *Galileo* serves as an interesting analysis of the mechanisms regulating the existence and working of the ecclesiastical body as well as a critique of repressive power and its consequences on cultural progress. Ironically, the same mechanisms are replicated by the film itself in the context of late 1960s Italy, making the already existing connection between the reality portrayed in the film and the one in which the film was released even more apparent.

Venice and Beyond

The 29th Venice Film Festival in 1968 was notoriously controversial. Five days before its opening, filmmakers belonging to the Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici (National Association of Cinematographic Authors, ANAC) withdrew their films from the competition in a protest immediately endorsed by left-wing political associations and organizations. Reasons for the ANAC filmmakers' disgruntlement ranged from the regulation of the festival by a fascist statute to a diffuse dislike of festival president Luigi Chiarini to more generic but ideological motives such as the condemnation of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁷ Cavani, however, openly declared her intention to participate in the festival, flying in the face of the ANAC's position.⁸ This decision alienated Cavani from the more extreme left wing, cementing her reputation as an independent director.⁹

Although *Galileo* received favorable reviews from many film critics, winning the Cineforum prize,¹⁰ the film's release marked the beginning of a convoluted series of events rivaling fiction. Notably, *Galileo* was ruled VM18, or unsuitable for children.¹¹ The censor board requested that the director "shorten the stake scene, horrific given the macabre details, the insistence of the sequences, and the agonizing screams of the victim."¹² Despite many protests from Cavani and the Italian press,¹³ Bruno's execution scene was cut considerably, and the age restriction was eventually lifted on October 11, 1968.¹⁴ Cavani¹⁵ and numerous reviewers heavily criticized the board's

decision. For instance, Italian writer Alberto Moravia's article was entitled "On [Their] Knees in Front of the Censors," comparing Galileo's inquisitors to the film's censors.¹⁶ Left-wing newspaper *Paese Sera* made the same reference in its headline "Three Centuries after the Inquisition. Censorship against Galileo,"¹⁷ while Italian film critic Lino Micciché commented on the censors' decision: "You cannot help but feel like you are in the Dark Middle Ages."¹⁸

Among Catholics, vociferous criticism appeared in *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche* (*Cinematic Information*) issued by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico (Catholic Centre for Cinema). It classified the film as "Am," meaning it should be seen only by mature adults, and declared that Cavani's "biased and malicious attitude, confirmed by the distortion of some historical facts, leads to the exaggeration of the behavior of the Church, which is portrayed as a vessel for obscurantism and conservatism."¹⁹ Cavani's "distortion of some historical facts" refers to her manipulation of the story's timeline to include Bruno's encounter with Galileo, setting the film's beginning as 1592 instead of 1608–1609, as the latter were the years when the historical Galileo dedicated himself to astronomy and perfected the telescope.²⁰ *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, however, made no mention of the consultation provided by Ulianich, which ensured that the film was otherwise extremely accurate and faithful to the historical characters.²¹

The Catholic press reacted positively in other aspects, however. For example, Don Francesco Angelicchio, ecclesiastical advisor for the Ente

Nazionale dello Spettacolo (National Entertainment Office), showed appreciation towards *Galileo*, even referring to Cavani as a Catholic director.²² Claudio Sorgi, a Venice correspondent for the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano* (*The Roman Observer*), displayed a similar attitude. Acknowledging *Galileo*'s divisiveness, he nevertheless applauded it, asserting that "only a Christian could handle such an issue without distorting it, [...] with love, I would say, defending personal freedom, to defend the very mission of the Church."²³ Finally, Catholic reviewer Gian Luigi Rondi criticized what he felt were parodic portrayals of the religious figures in the film but did not perceive any criticism of religious power, instead seeing the Soviet Union as the only referent from current events.²⁴ These views align with a strategy often employed by Italian Catholics, which director Marco Bellocchio, discussing his film *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1971), brilliantly described as the Church's "extraordinary capacity for taking over and adapting everything to its own ends."²⁵ Indeed, the Catholic press focused only on the aspects of *Galileo* it could use to its own benefit, such as Galileo's faith, while ignoring the film's more radical accusations, implicit and explicit.

Religious Fragmentation and Church Authority in Post-Conciliar Italy

To understand the reception of *Galileo* within the Catholic world, it is useful to address the religious conditions of Italy at the time of the film's release. Cavani, not unlike Galileo, operated in a post-conciliar atmosphere and, more

generally, at a crucial juncture for Italian Catholicism characterized by strong religious fragmentation. In particular, the Second Vatican Council had an undeniably enormous impact on the Italian Church, “creating turbulence and dissent on an unprecedented scale.”²⁶ Increased emphasis was placed on individual consciousness, religious and political tolerance, and greater participation by the laity, ultimately leading to challenges to the Church’s spiritual and political authority.²⁷ Moreover, patterns of power and relations within the Catholic Church itself were shifting, encouraging religious and spiritual fragmentation and pluralization and often resulting in irreconcilable divisions among the Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, “by the end of the 1960s, such had been the weakening of internal discipline that a number of groups of both clergy and laity were in dispute with their bishops.”²⁸ In particular, a growing number of groups from the Catholic hierarchy openly dissented. These *Cattolici del dissenso* (dissident Catholics) organized in *Comunità di base* (grassroots communities) stressed their reliance on the gospel message and its commitment to the poor and underprivileged.²⁹ Their positions clashed with the more traditional branches of the Church, still entrenched in defensive postures on the pressing issues of the time such as clerical celibacy, birth control, and women’s emancipation.³⁰

This never-quite reconciled division has had far-reaching effects, as demonstrated by Paul VI’s 1968 controversial encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (*Human Life*). The document, which reconfirmed the Church’s intransigent position on birth control, took the world by surprise for a number of reasons.

First, its firm stance contrasted sharply with the liberalizing efforts promoted by the various protest movements and with the open, progressive attitude more recently displayed by the Church, especially under John XXIII.³¹ Second, through *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI effectively overruled the findings of a birth control commission, whose majority had voted in favor of contraception use.³² The document was criticized by some members of the public and numerous theologians and clerics such as Leo Joseph Suenens, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, and Charles Curran. Cardinal Suenens even questioned “whether moral theology took sufficient account of scientific progress.” He begged his brothers to “let us avoid a new ‘Galileo affair.’ One is enough for the Church.”³³

This disagreement had significant consequences. Not only did Paul VI refuse to publish another encyclical during his 15-year reign, but his rigid, conservative position also undermined the openings that emerged during the papacy of John XXIII and the first phase of the Council. Paul VI’s encyclical “reclaimed the supremacy of the church hierarchy’s authority over personal conscience, the exercise of religious freedom, and lay interpretive autonomy.”³⁴ Once again, a clear ideological division within the Catholic world separated those who advocated an open, pluralist, democratic stance and those, like the Pope, who ultimately saw scientific progress and contemporary cultural and social changes as threats to Church authority.

Suenens certainly did not make the only mention of “the Galileo affair” during the Council; indeed, the scientist’s name recurred throughout those

three years.³⁵ At this Council born out of John XXIII's desire for an *aggiornamento* (updating) of the Church,³⁶ the complex question of the relationship between science and faith—and, therefore, the Church's treatment of the scientist—could no longer be ignored. Fragmentation and disagreement within the Catholic hierarchy came to a head in the drafting of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Role of the Church in the Modern World. While a number of bishops wanted to mention Galileo by name in the body of the text, others strongly opposed doing so, believing that the Church should not be forced to admit its mistake.³⁷ Eventually, Pietro Parente, assessor of the Holy Office, suggested including a general statement on the autonomy of science in the text and relegating the specific mention of the Pisan scientist to a footnote.³⁸ The Church's reluctance to rehabilitate Galileo aligns with its persistently conservative view of scientific progress. This view is further demonstrated by the Council's emphasis on the importance of the Scriptures and "supreme rule of faith"³⁹ as well as by Paul VI's closing remarks in his address to "Men of Thought and Science," reaffirming science's subordination to faith.⁴⁰

The Catholic Church's attitude towards scientific progress held extreme interest for Cavani, as attested to by the number of newspaper, journal, and magazine articles she used in her research for *Galileo*, now conserved in the Carpi, Italy, archive dedicated to her work.⁴¹ Cavani took issue with the climate of inflexibility and repression characterizing the post-conciliar Church, especially its lack of allowance for discussion. This attitude

is evident in her correspondence and interviews from the time. In response to a November 1967 letter from Italian film critic Morando Morandini, Cavani commented on the bigotry and fanaticism experienced by the historical Galileo and established parallels with the contemporary disapproval of discussion. She expressed her concerns about the relationship between power and culture, reflecting on her own predicament and difficulties with censorship: “To what extent does a man of culture have to submit to the orders of authority?”⁴²

Similarly, in an open letter to the director of the magazine *Civis*, Cavani harshly criticized Antonio Bruni’s article asking Italian Catholics to refrain from joining student protests. By contrast, she contended that Catholics have the moral duty to fight injustices, especially when perpetrated by those in power.⁴³ The following statement most clearly expresses Cavani’s view on the contemporary Church:

The Church has [always] been suspicious of science, and mostly still is. ... We still witness infightings and open struggles between the so-called defenders of authority and all those Christians who [dare to] “contest.” This is because, today like yesterday, what [the Church] tries to uphold is not the Gospel but Church authority.⁴⁴

For Cavani, Galileo’s story was a metaphor for progress, for freedom of speech and thought, and for a “cultural revolution”—to use the director’s words once again—that still needed to be carried out.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, impossible to fail to see an explicit reference to Paul VI’s post-conciliar Church in the film’s bleak portrayal of the 17th-century Catholic Church. The

Baroque Catholic hierarchy blindly denied any change or criticism, barricading itself behind what it considered to be unassailable truths. Likewise, the post-conciliar Church refused to accept or value cultural and scientific progress or to enter into a positive, constructive dialog with the contemporary world, preferring to remain entrenched in millennia-old dogma.

Bruno and Galileo

Cavani's inclusion of Bruno is crucial to explain why *Galileo* provoked such strong reactions among the most traditional branches of Italian Catholicism. Indeed, at the film's release, this aspect was regarded as an unprecedented feature⁴⁶ and attested to the director's audacity in addressing sensitive issues. The historical Bruno was a controversial figure in the Catholic Church. A strong defender of Copernican heliocentrism, Bruno believed that the universe was infinite and contained innumerable worlds. Accused of denying core Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation, eternal damnation, the Trinity, and the virginity of Mary, he was condemned for "obstinate and pertinacious heresy."⁴⁷ Unlike Galileo, however, Bruno has never been rehabilitated by the Church; in fact, throughout the centuries, the Vatican has rarely made official comment on the case. Certain actions, however, speak louder than words, in particular the canonization of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino, a key figure in the trials of Bruno and Galileo.⁴⁸ Even when the Church finally broke its silence on the 400th anniversary of Bruno's execution, it simply reaffirmed its

condemnation of his doctrine. On February 18, 2000, while expressing his regret for Bruno's death, Pope John Paul II maintained that the philosopher's theories could not be rehabilitated because they were "incompatible with the Christian doctrine."⁴⁹

In *Galileo*, Cavani opposes Italian Catholics' generally negative perception of Bruno and portrays him as a man of absolute moral and intellectual integrity, willing to die to defend his beliefs. In this sense, he is ultimately braver than Galileo. The line—historically accurate according to sources—he delivers during his trial is certainly a testament to his courage: "I think your fear in pronouncing the sentence against me will be greater than mine in hearing it."⁵⁰ Cavani's flattering portrayal of Bruno, as well as the Church's callousness, becomes particularly evident in the scene of his execution. Against the backdrop of a sinister musical score combining violins, church bells, and a choir, the philosopher is first tied to a wooden cross by black-hooded figures and then lifted and placed on the stake. A large crowd gathers in the square, among them a surprisingly high number of children. The camera focuses on a nun holding a young child in her arms. The boy, easily impressionable, turns his head away from the scene. The nun grabs his face and turns it back, forcing him to watch the execution. "Look!" she urges him. Evidently, there is a lesson to be learnt here: the boy will benefit from watching a man burnt alive. Meanwhile, on the cross—the cruciform posture clearly alludes to Christ—Bruno looks out over the crowd. He does not seem afraid or even worried but determined and almost serene. Soon, the flames and

smoke engulf him and he begins to moan. The crowd watches undisturbed, the red light of the fire reflected on their faces producing a sinister effect. Eventually, Bruno lets out a long, chilling scream, while the hooded figures work relentlessly, adding bundles of wood to the already large pile. In this respect, both *Galileo*'s critics and Cavani herself⁵¹ acknowledged the thematic and stylistic similarities to Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928). The fact that the Church recognized Joan as a saint in 1920⁵² adds to Cavani's treatment of Bruno as a martyr.

Nevertheless, more controversial than Bruno's positive portrayal was Cavani's characterization of Galileo as a profoundly Catholic man. Indeed, her depiction differs from previous representations of Galileo, particularly Bertolt Brecht's second version, also known as the "Californian version," of the drama portraying the scientist as a cunning individual who did not hesitate to manipulate the truth in his favor.⁵³ By contrast, Cavani's Galileo is a naïve man enamored with both science and God who believes until the very last minute that the Church will acknowledge its errors. To Galileo, speaking about his discoveries is not an act of defiance but an inescapable moral duty that in no way denies God. If anything, the scientist has a rather profound and personal relationship with God. For example, in one scene as Galileo gives a lecture advocating geocentrism, a friar objects, "But this way you kick God out of the sky! Where do you put God in your system?" Galileo returns a reply as insightful as it is modern: "Where He's always been: in ourselves. Inside us."⁵⁴ However, such a view could not but be perceived as a threat to the

Church's authority at a time when religious fragmentation was already so strong and the historical Galileo had yet to be rehabilitated.⁵⁵

Resistance to Labelling

Another factor worth considering in *Galileo's* reception is Cavani's inability to fit neatly into pre-formed, established artistic and political categories. As Marrone puts it: "Because of her choice of controversial themes, her graphic use of sexuality, and her forceful (a)political stance, Cavani has rarely been understood."⁵⁶ Unlike Marco Bellocchio, Bernardo Bertolucci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and so many more of her colleagues, Cavani never joined a political party yet was considered to be radical and highly politicized, and her works controversial and provocative. The director eloquently addressed this question of labels:

Communists considered me a left-wing Catholic because in 1966 I made *Francesco d'Assisi*. Social Democrats thought I was a Communist. Some Christian Democrats regarded me as the devil, and the ultra-left a crook because I presented *Galileo* at the much contested 1968 Venice Film Festival.⁵⁷

To those unfamiliar with the Italian socio-political context, such a statement might appear exaggerated, as if Cavani suffered from a persecution complex. However, in Italy, the figure of the artist and more generally the intellectual has been extremely politicized in a tradition that dates to Dante and finds illustrious representatives in Benedetto Croce and Antonio Gramsci. As Ward explains, "Italian intellectuals are courted by political parties of all

persuasions to add lustre to their slates at election time, and wooed by the media as influential opinion makers.”⁵⁸ This trend was even more prominent during the heavily politicized 1960s, particularly 1968, a year of unprecedented social and political upheaval in recent Italian history.

Cavani’s nonconformist, independent stance further emerged in her approach to Catholicism. Often described as a dissident Catholic by film scholars and critics,⁵⁹ Cavani made constant references to Catholic figures, themes, and symbolism throughout her career. As early as 1964, religion became prominent in her work when she shot the television documentary *Gesù mio fratello* (*Jesus, My Brother*) on the life of French priest Charles de Foucauld, founder of the congregation of the Little Brothers of Jesus. Furthermore, Cavani exhibited an undying interest in St. Francesco, returning to narrate his life three times in her 60-year career, in 1966, 1989, and 2014. These three works differ considerably but are all original, unconventional interpretations of the saint’s story. Moreover, Cavani twice considered making a film about the life of Jesus, only two years apart, in 1964 and 1966.⁶⁰

Cavani truly saw Catholicism as an expression of Italian social values, aligning with the anthropological reading of religion advanced by Émile Durkheim and Clifford Geertz. Wary of theories denying religion any value, Cavani once stated, “I find the Marxist who flaunts disinterest and gratuitous contempt for religion simply boorish; religion is, at least, an analytical tool for many ancient or primitive cultures.”⁶¹ Indeed, Cavani’s greatest concern was not the belief system of Catholicism but the institution of the Catholic Church,

which often exercised power in oppressive, unjust, and even cruel ways, limiting personal freedom in both thought and action and hindering cultural progress. This mentality allows Cavani to condemn the ruthless, repressive nature of religious power without denying or devaluing the social and cultural importance of Catholicism.

RAI's Banishment

Another key piece in this mosaic of reactions to *Galileo* is the film's treatment by RAI. As a state-owned broadcasting company, RAI fell under the political influence of the Christian Democracy (DC) party, which then held a plurality. During the early 1960s, the DC, which held traditionally conservative positions, established an alliance with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) under the guidance of DC party secretary Amintore Fanfani. The aim of the alliance was to create a strong center-left coalition, improve political stability, and counter the growing popularity of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).⁶² The extremely delicate task of opening Fanfani's political plan to the moderate left without diminishing the DC's influence on RAI fell on the shoulders of Ettore Bernabei.⁶³ A DC member and Fanfani's most trusted aid,⁶⁴ RAI general-director Bernabei also had very close ties with Pope Paul VI, whom he praised as "a political genius."⁶⁵

The significance of Bernabei's directorship is demonstrated by the labeling of 1961–1974 as "The Bernabei Era."⁶⁶ Bernabei believed that RAI

had a moral obligation to inform, educate, and unify its audience. Accordingly, he formulated a program of “pedagogical enlightenment.”⁶⁷ Indeed, “Bernabei’s leadership was animated by a powerful, almost religious commitment to the educational role of public broadcasting. [...] For him, hiring people of proven ‘faith’ was a way to ensure that the mission [...] would be fulfilled.”⁶⁸ His frequent censorial cuts even earned him the nickname “Supercensor”—an assessment whose validity Bernabei has acknowledged.⁶⁹

In this political and cultural context, Angelo Guglielmi, head of the Special Broadcasts Unit, commissioned *Galileo*. In Guglielmi’s accounts of the film’s inception, trouble started in the early stages of production as the RAI general-director hesitated to green-light the production and allowed it to be completed only due to the intercession of an important prelate.⁷⁰ While Guglielmi did not offer the prelate’s name, it is safe to assume it was don Angelicchio, who was known for his ability to accommodate and mediate between conflicting forces and positions within the Catholic world⁷¹ and who had interceded on Cavani’s behalf in the case of *Francesco d’Assisi* (1966).⁷²

Additional reports stated that RAI executives conducted an unofficial showing of *Galileo* without inviting the director or the producer, and shortly after—possibly even one day later, according to Guglielmi⁷³—sold it to the film company Cineriz, owned by businessman Angelo Rizzoli. The film was distributed in cinemas in February 1969, after being cut from 105 to 92 minutes.⁷⁴ Cavani claimed that Rizzoli quickly withdrew it from cinemas at

the request of DC Giulio Andreotti, then Minister of Industry and Trade.⁷⁵ Andreotti was certainly not new to interventions in cinema; as undersecretary of the presidency of the Council of Ministers, he played a pivotal role in promoting cinema-related legislation, most notably reintroducing the “tax on dubbing” in 1949.⁷⁶ In 1952, he joined a dispute over Vittorio de Sica’s *Umberto D*, harshly condemning its unflattering portrayal of Italian society.⁷⁷

After selling *Galileo*, RAI swiftly destroyed every copy in its possession, breaching its contract with Cavani. In interviews, Cavani explained that when Mimmo Scarano succeeded Bernabei as RAI general-director in 1975, he sought to finally broadcast *Galileo*, only to find that every copy had been destroyed.⁷⁸ Ironically and rather inexplicably, the film circulated only due to its distribution in schools by the Catholic company San Paolo Film,⁷⁹ whose mission is “to bring the Gospel to the contemporary man through the quickest and most effective ways.”⁸⁰ This decision once more attests to the incredibly diverse, splintered nature of Italian Catholicism.

This was not the first controversy surrounding Cavani’s films commissioned by RAI. *La casa in Italia* (*House in Italy*, 1964), a documentary on housing issues in Italy, caused some debate. RAI executives cut the second episode’s denunciation of property speculation by 18 minutes.⁸¹ Similarly, *Francesco d’Assisi*, while appealing to the progressive strain of Catholicism, became the subject of a parliamentary intervention by the right-wing Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement). According to Cavani, the film was labeled “heretical, blasphemous, and offensive [to] the faith of

the Italian people.”⁸² Cavani was criticized for her casting choices and radical portrayal of the saint. Indeed, Francesco was played by Lou Castel, mostly recognizable to Italian audiences for his role in Bellocchio’s provocative *I pugni in tasca* (*Fists in the Pocket*, 1965). Moreover, Cavani characterized Francesco as a young, conscientious rebel, deviating from the hagiographic, devout representation of the saint.⁸³ These criticisms do not seem to have had affected the film’s circulation or Cavani’s opportunities to work with RAI, but they certainly increased her reputation as a politicized director.⁸⁴

Over the years, *Galileo*’s circulation has improved. Restored in 2007,⁸⁵ it was re-presented in Venice in 2009 in a section called “These Ghosts 2. Italian Cinema Rediscovered,” alongside a number of restored films not widely circulated.⁸⁶ That same year, the first DVD version of the film was released. The extras featured an interview in which Cavani and Monsignor Dario Edoardo Viganò discussed the film’s reception at length. Such an open discussion with a clergy member is easy to read as an attempt at reconciliation.⁸⁷

In addition, Cavani has intensified her collaboration with RAI. In 1996, she joined RAI’s board of directors, a role she held for two years.⁸⁸ She cemented the bond by producing three television movies commissioned by RAI: *De Gasperi, l’uomo della speranza* (*De Gasperi, Man of Hope*) in 2005, *Einstein* in 2008, and *Francesco* in 2014—a partnership that seemed to indicate that Italian state television had finally buried the hatchet.

Such developments make the film's continued ban—and the lack of commentary on it—even more difficult to understand. It has been suggested that the present obstacles might be of a more practical nature:⁸⁹ indeed, as mentioned, RAI attempted to destroy every copy of the film and relinquished its copyright. This, however, does not explain nor excuse RAI's still-standing ban. The film has not only been restored but also screened in cinemas and circulated on DVD. Instead, RAI's concerns with the film appear to have a very different nature: by opening space for reflection and discussion on extremely delicate topics such as freedom of speech and thought, *Galileo* fed into the religious fragmentation at the time of its making, challenging the Church's weakened authority and deviating from RAI's program of pedagogical enlightenment and social cohesion. While these topics might no longer be sensitive, traditional branches of Italian Catholicism are still unwilling to acknowledge the poor treatment of the film and its director—an attitude unsurprising considering how long it took to rehabilitate Galileo.

Conclusion

This article aimed to unravel the complex history of *Galileo*'s reception and distribution by situating it in the delicate religious context of post-conciliar Italy. This study identified three elements of the film that disturbed more traditional branches of Catholicism: Cavani's inclusion of Bruno, her

characterization of Galileo as a Catholic, and the difficulty assigning the director an ideological position.

Ironically, the post-release fate befalling *Galileo* echoes many of its themes: the importance of freedom of thought and speech, the dialectics of personal conscience and obedience to authority, and the implications of institutionalized power and its cultural effects. Indeed, Cavani's interpretation of the scientist's story could not but feel especially relevant and timely in the context of late 1960s Italy. As Italian Catholicism redefined its identity, traditional Catholics could perceive only threats from Cavani's *Galileo*, with its appeal to freedom of speech and thought voiced by a deeply, genuinely religious man. The film not only revisited a bleak moment in the history of the modern Catholic Church and its ferocious conduct; Cavani's clear ideological positioning of Galileo within Catholicism also highlighted the Church's callousness. The director's own ideological position—left leaning but critical of communism, interested in religion but never religious—only enhanced the confusion.

Consequently, the Catholic world faltered in formulating a consistent, unanimous response to the film and instead reacted with benevolent curiosity, ideological appropriation, and unprecedented ostracism. Ultimately, the institutional Church's efforts to create a monolithic, unequivocal, and coherent system through its appeals and guidelines became fruitless when confronting the reality of the myriad of Catholic sensitivities and tendencies in Italy. While this religious fragmentation was hardly novel, as Gramsci famously remarked

in his *Prison Notebooks*,⁹⁰ it certainly reached a moment of great clarity in the case of Cavani's *Galileo*.

Finally, although it is easy to see religious identity at stake in the late 1960s, RAI's continued refusal to broadcast *Galileo* is nothing short of bewildering. One point is certain: the film's upcoming 50th anniversary presents yet another opportunity for critics to discuss the results of the Catholic world's propensity for self-reflection and Italian state television's ideological independence.

¹ Stefano Bucci, "Bernabei: 'La cattiva tv fa cadere i governi,'" *Corriere della Sera*, June 28, 2005, 39. All translations in this article are the author's, unless otherwise specified.

² Throughout this article, the terms *Catholicism*, *Catholic*, and *Catholic Church* are used instead of the more comprehensive *Roman Catholicism*, *Roman Catholic*, and *Roman Catholic Church*. Although not all Catholics are Roman Catholic, and indeed, there are seven non-Latin, non-Roman ecclesial traditions, the distinction is hardly relevant in Italy, an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country. For the same reason, *religion in Italy* refers to Catholicism, unless otherwise specified.

³ Cristina Olivotto and Antonella Testa, "Galileo and the Movies," *Physics in Perspective* 12, no. 4 (2010): 382.

⁴ Percy Allum, "Catholicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109.

⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 245.

⁶ Percy Allum, "Uniformity Undone: Aspects of Catholic Culture in Postwar Italy," in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley (New York: St. Martin, 1990), 94.

⁷ Italo Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso* (Milan: Saggiatore, 1995), 101–132.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹ Lietta Tornabuoni, “Cavani. Only History Will Save Us,” *La Stampa*, July 2, 1994, 13.

¹⁰ “Il Premio ‘Cineforum 1968,’” *Cineforum* 8 (1968), 592.

¹¹ At the time of *Galileo*’s release, Italian censorship was regulated by Law n. 161 on the “Revisione dei film e dei lavori teatrali,” which was introduced on April 21, 1962 and is still valid today, albeit with a few changes. The first article of this law explained that the public screening of films and their export abroad are subject to the “nulla osta,” that is, the authorization of the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo. The Ministry issues such authorization after eight special commissions, whose composition includes relevant figures (magistrates and university professors) in the fields of law, pedagogy, and psychology as well as representatives of the film industry, have examined the films. These commissions are tasked with deciding whether a film should be given the “nulla osta” for public screening. For more information, see Domenico Liggeri, *Mani di forbice: la censura cinematografica in Italia* (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 1997), 21–22.

¹² “Galileo,” Italia Taglia, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.italiataglia.it/>.

¹³ For the purpose of this article, newspapers and magazines representing different ideological positions were selected, ranging from national (e.g., *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Messaggero*) to regional (e.g., *Il Piccolo Trieste*) publications and from left-wing (e.g., *L’Unità*, *Paese Sera*, *Avanti!*), to Catholic publications (e.g., *L’Osservatore Romano*, *Avvenire*, *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*). This selection does not exhaust the variety of voices in the Italian press at the time but constitutes a comprehensive, reliable sample.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “La Cavani su ‘Galileo’ proibito ai minori,” *Il Piccolo Trieste*, September 9, 1968, 7.

¹⁶ Alberto Moravia, “In ginocchio davanti ai censori,” *L’Espresso*, September 22, 1968, 23.

¹⁷ “Tre secoli dopo l’Inquisizione. La censura contro *Galileo*,” *Paese Sera Roma*, September 6, 1968, 3.

¹⁸ Lino Micciché, “Un salto nella verità,” *Avanti!*, 29 September 1968, 8.

¹⁹ Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, vol. LXIV (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1968), 203.

²⁰ Olivotto and Testa, “Galileo and the Movies,” 384–385.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 384.

²² Francesco Angelicchio, “Rapporto sulla XXIX Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica,” September 16, 1968 (ACEI7), 3, <http://users.unimi.it/cattoliciecinema/home/>.

²³ Claudio Soggi, “Accolto il ‘Galileo’ con una buona dose di consensi e polemiche,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, September 4, 1968, 5. Soggi likely uses *Christian* as a synonym of *Catholic*. *Christian* commonly is employed rather loosely in Italian, at least partially, because it traditionally is a synonym for *man*, or *civilized man*, as Gramsci points out in *Prison*

Notebooks. For more information, see Antonio Gramsci, *Note sul Machiavelli: Sulla politica e sullo stato moderno*, ed. Valentino Gerrattana (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977), 323.

²⁴ Gian Luigi Rondi, “Un suggestivo ‘Galileo’ sullo schermo della Mostra,” *Il Tempo*, September 3, 1968, 7.

²⁵ Nicoletta Zalaffi, “Interview with Marco Bellocchio,” *Sight and Sound* 42, no. 4 (1973): 199.

²⁶ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 139.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

³⁰ Linda Woodhead, “Christianity,” in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, eds. Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami, and David Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 185.

³¹ John XXIII displayed openness toward other religions and ideologies, as demonstrated in his social encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963). The latter clearly reflected the Church’s more tolerant spirit: it was addressed to not only the clergy and the faithful but also “all men of good will” and invited the faithful to collaborate with nonbelievers and adherents of other faiths.

³² John O’Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 309.

³³ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 394.

³⁴ Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 78.

³⁵ For an exhaustive overview, see Maurice Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo. 1633–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 328–29.

³⁶ Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 130.

³⁷ Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo*, p. 329.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The exact wording of the footnote is “Cf. Pio Paschini, *Vita e opere di Galileo Galilei*, 2 vols., Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 1964.” In 1941, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences commissioned Paschini, an Italian bishop and historian, to write a biography of Galileo. His work, however, was deemed to be too critical of the Church and was rejected. A heavily edited version was eventually published in 1964.

³⁹ Paul VI, “*Dei Verbum* Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” November 18, 1965, accessed March 27, 2017,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, sec. 21.

⁴⁰ Paul VI, “Address to Men of Thought and Science,” December 8, 1965, accessed May 19, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651208_epilogo-concilio-intellettuali.html.

⁴¹ Among the thirteen articles in the archive are analyses of freedom of thought within the Church, as well as birth control and scientific discoveries. See Liliana Cavani, “Articoli,” ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura B, doc. N. 22-34, Fondo Liliana Cavani, Carpi.

⁴² Liliana Cavani, “Letter to Morandini,” ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 6, Fondo Liliana Cavani, Carpi.

⁴³ Liliana Cavani, “Letter to the Director of Civis,” ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 5, Fondo Liliana Cavani, Carpi.

⁴⁴ Liliana Cavani, *Galileo e Francesco. Due Film* (Turin: Gribaudi, 1970), 187.

⁴⁵ Caterina Gasparini, “Dentro Galileo: Ricostruzione storiografica di un film,” in *Liliana Cavani*, eds. Giacomo Martini, Piera Raimondi Cominesi, and Davide Zanza (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2008), 70.

⁴⁶ Giuliano Montaldo’s film on the philosopher, titled *Giordano Bruno*, was released in 1973.

⁴⁷ Ingrid Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008), 5.

⁴⁸ Michael White, *The Pope and the Heretic: The True Story of Giordano Bruno, the Man Who Dared to Defy the Roman Inquisition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), E-book, 2–3.

⁴⁹ Luigi Accattoli, “Giordano Bruno, ecco il Mea Culpa del Papa,” *Corriere della Sera*, February 18, 2000, 35.

⁵⁰ White, *The Pope and the Heretic*, 6.

⁵¹ Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini, “I film,” in *Lo Sguardo libero: Il Cinema di Liliana Cavani*, eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990), 52.

⁵² Benedict XVI, “General Audience,” January 26, 2011, accessed 18 June 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110126.html.

⁵³ Brecht wrote three different versions of the drama. Interestingly, the portrayal of the scientist differs considerably between these versions. In the first, Galileo is a modern anti-hero who, much like Brecht himself, victimised by a ruthless authoritarian regime, chooses to recant his thesis in order to survive. The second version, however, presents Galileo as a Machiavellian character who abjures out of fear and cowardice and, as such, needs to be condemned by the reader and the audience. This version was also the base for the final version of the piece, which was translated back into German and represented in Berlin in 1956. For

more information, see Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*. London: Methuen Drama, pp. xx–xxiii.

⁵⁴ *Galileo*, directed by Liliana Cavani (1968; Italy and Bulgaria: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

⁵⁵ Galileo's rehabilitation was Pope John Paul II's pet project. On July 3, 1981, he created a special commission, which worked for more than 10 years. On October 31, 1992, almost 360 years after the scientist's condemnation, John Paul II officially rehabilitated Galileo, calling him a "sincere believer" and praising his foresight in applying the scientific method to all matters and his ability to separate the Sacred Scriptures from their sometimes-erroneous interpretations. See Giovanni Paolo II, "Discorso ai partecipanti alla Sessione Plenaria della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze," October 31, 1992, accessed March 21, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1992/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19921031_accademia-scienze.html, sec. 4.

⁵⁶ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, xiii.

⁵⁷ Tornabuoni, "Cavani. Only History Will Save Us," 13.

⁵⁸ David Ward, "Intellectuals, Culture and Power in Modern Italy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81.

⁵⁹ This expression is used by numerous critics, including Francesca Brignoli, Cristina Olivotto, and Antonella Testa. See Francesca Brignoli, *Liliana Cavani: Ogni possibile viaggio* (Genova: Le Mani), 3; Olivotto and Testa, "Galileo and the Movies," 376.

⁶⁰ First, *Jesus* was modeled on the Gospel of John, and second, *Black Jesus* was an original interpretation featuring a black Jesus as the protagonist. With Italian journalist Ludovica Alessandrini, Cavani wrote a musical in which Jesus was a black man from Alabama. However, for unknown reasons, neither film left the embryonic state. See Liliana Cavani, "Proposta per a un film. Dal Vangelo secondo S. Giovanni e deall'Apocalisse," ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura "Gesù Negro 1966. Il progetto—documentazione," doc. 10, Fondo Liliana Cavani, Carpi. Liliana Cavani, "Soggetto per Black Jesus," ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura "Gesù Negro 1966. Il progetto—documentazione," doc. N. 3, Fondo Liliana Cavani, Carpi.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Ilaria Favretto, "The 'Opening to the Left,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, eds. Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Kindle edition, 412.

⁶³ Franco Chiarenza, *Il cavallo morente. Storia della RAI*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 102.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁵ Salvatore Merlo, "La RAI sono stato io," *Il Foglio*, March 17, 2015, accessed June 17, 2017, <http://www.ilfoglio.it/cultura/2015/03/17/news/la-rai-sono-stato-io-81921/>

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- ⁶⁶ Riccardo Ventrella, "Ettore Bernabei," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. Gino Moliterno (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.
- ⁶⁷ Gianfranco Bettetini, "L'Italia televisiva chiama davvero l'Europa?" in *Le televisioni in Europa Vol. I*, ed. C.D. Rath, (Turin: Fondazione Agnelli, 1990), 238.
- ⁶⁸ Cinzia Padovani, *A Fatal Attraction: Public Television and Politics in Italy*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 79.
- ⁶⁹ Menico Caroli, *Proibitissimo! Censori e censurati della Radiotelevisione Italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2003), p. 68
- ⁷⁰ Angelo Guglielmi, "Dalla TV al Cinema," in *Lo Sguardo libero: Il Cinema di Liliana Cavani*, eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990), 128.
- ⁷¹ Paolo Fossati, "L'associazionismo Cattolico (associazioni, esercenti, cineforum)," in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura Cattolica in Italia*, vol. II, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2006), 326.
- ⁷² Giacomo Martini, "Interview with Liliana Cavani," in *Liliana Cavani*, eds. Giacomo Martini, Piera Raimondi Cominesi, and Davide Zanza (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2008), 246.
- ⁷³ Guglielmi, "Dalla TV al Cinema," 129.
- ⁷⁴ Gasparini, "Dentro Galileo," 75.
- ⁷⁵ Caterina Gasparini, "Il Galileo di Liliana Cavani. Analisi dei Materiali del "Fondo Liliana Cavani" (PhD diss. University of Parma, 2004), 138–139.
- ⁷⁶ Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (London: Routledge, 2009), 49.
- ⁷⁷ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1896–1996* (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.
- ⁷⁸ Gasparini, *Il Galileo di Liliana Cavani*, 138–39.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ "Codice Etico," San Paolo Store, accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.sanpaolostore.it/codice-etico.aspx>.
- ⁸¹ Buscemi, *Invito al Cinema di Liliana Cavani*, 30.
- ⁸² Tallarigo and Gasparini, "I film," 42.
- ⁸³ Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*, (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 254.
- ⁸⁴ "Cavani e San Francesco: Affascinata per ben tre volte da una figura immensa," *San Francesco Patrono d'Italia*, accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.sanfrancescopatronoditalia.it/notizie/societa/cavani-e-san-francesco-affascinata-per-ben-tre-volte-da-una-figura-immensa-39944>

⁸⁵ “Galileo,” *Cinematografo*, accessed May 27, 2017,
<http://www.cinematografo.it/cinedatabase/film/galileo/20268/>.

⁸⁶ “Questi fantasmi 2,” *La Biennale*, accessed March 21, 2017,
http://www.labiennale.org/it/cinema/archivio/mostra/film/selezione_ufficiale/questi_fantasmi.

⁸⁷ “Dario E. Viganò e la regista Liliana Cavani su ‘Galileo,’” *Galileo*, directed by Liliana Cavani (1968; Italy and Bulgaria: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

⁸⁸ Brignoli, *Liliana Cavani*, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Tornabuoni, “Cavani. Only History Will Save Us,” 13.

⁹⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 420.

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