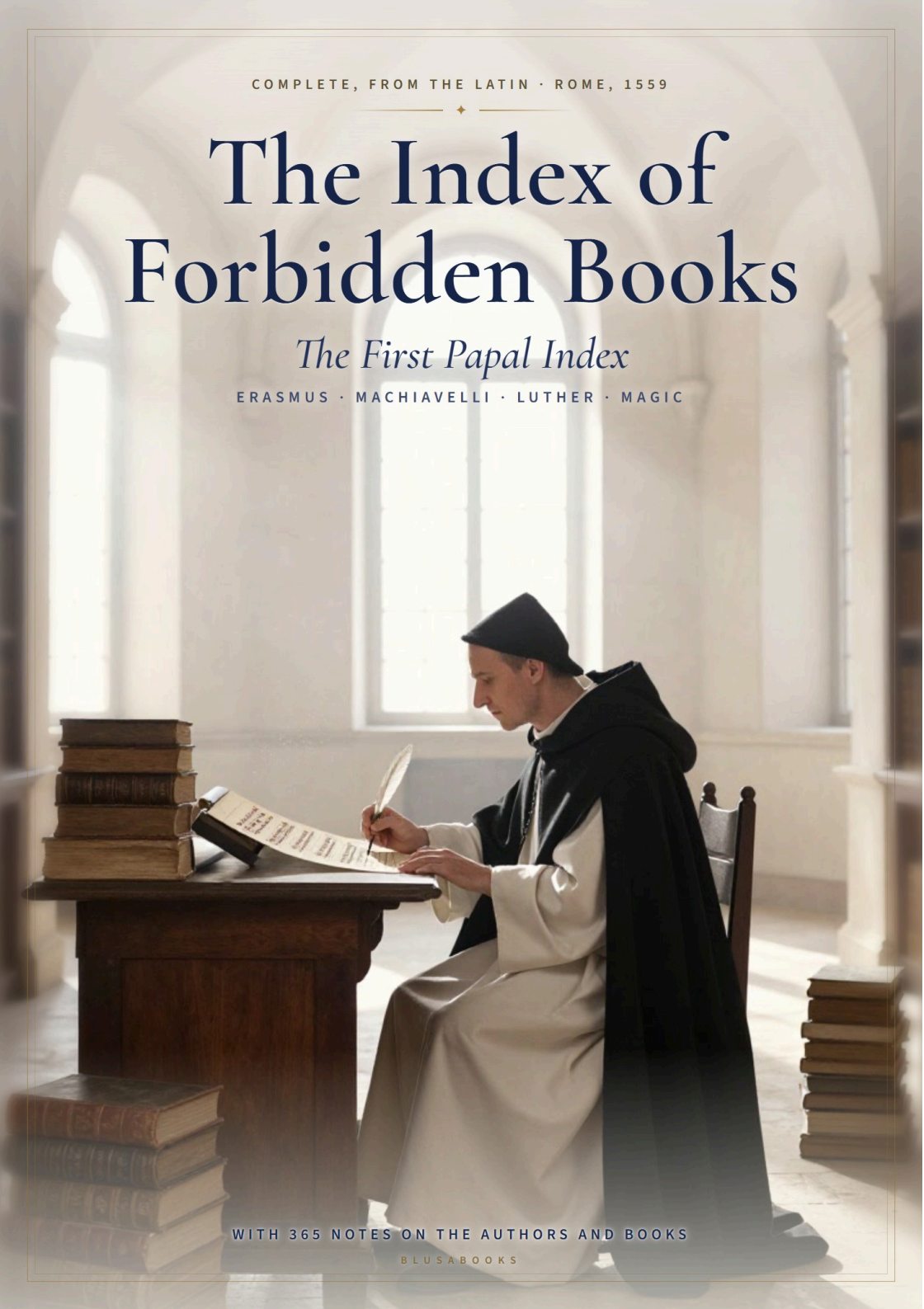
COMPLETE, FROM THE LATIN · ROME, 1559

# The Index of Forbidden Books

## *The First Papal Index*

ERASMUS · MACHIAVELLI · LUTHER · MAGIC



WITH 365 NOTES ON THE AUTHORS AND BOOKS

BLUSABOOKS

BOOKS OF WISDOM

# The Index of Forbidden Books

*The First Papal Index · Rome, 1559*

The *Index auctorum et librorum* — the list of the Roman Inquisition with which the Church banned Erasmus, Machiavelli, the *Decameron*, the whole of Luther, 61 printers and all magic and divination. Complete in modern English from the Latin, with notes

BlusaBooks · MMXXVI

Modern English text, notes, foreword and commentary © 2026 SIA "Blusa Entertainment".

Source: *Index auctorum et librorum, qui ab Officio Sanctae Rom. et universalis Inquisitionis caveri... mandantur*, the list of forbidden books of the Office of the Roman and Universal Inquisition, printed in Rome in 1559 (copy in the University of Pennsylvania Libraries). Rendered into modern English from the Latin, from images of the pages of the edition. Original pages from the same edition; the colour illustrations are modern.

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# FOREWORD

**A list that tried to stop books.** This book is only a list — names, titles, cities and years in alphabetical order. Yet few lists have ever been so dangerous. It was issued in Rome at the beginning of 1559 by the Office of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, and it was the first list of forbidden books published by a pope and binding on the whole Catholic Church. Anyone who kept one of the books named here, or sold, lent or gave it away, was excommunicated automatically — without a trial and without a warning. The list includes Erasmus and Machiavelli, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Dante's *Monarchy*, the whole of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, every book of divination and magic, the Talmud, dozens of editions of the Bible, and 61 printers whose entire output — including whatever they might print in the future — was banned whatever its content.

**The explosion of books and the Reformation.** A hundred years before this list, printing had arrived in Europe. A book that once took months to copy by hand could now appear in hundreds or thousands of copies and be bought at a fair. When Martin Luther began his fight with Rome in 1517, his writings spread through all the German lands within weeks. Basel, Strasbourg, Zurich, Wittenberg, Nuremberg and later Geneva became great printing centres, where the writings of the Reformers, Bibles in the vernacular languages, satires and pamphlets came off the presses one after another. The Church tried to stem the flood with local bans. The theologians of Paris (the Sorbonne) published a list of forbidden books in 1544, the University of Louvain in 1546. But these were local lists, and they did not bind the whole Church.

**Paul IV and the Roman Inquisition.** The Roman Inquisition, or Holy Office, was founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III to fight heresy in Italy. One of its leaders was the Neapolitan cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa — a stern, unbending man

who believed that heresy had to be torn out by the roots. In 1555 he became pope as Paul IV, and under him the Holy Office prepared this list. The decree that proclaimed it is dated "30 December 1559". In Rome at that time the new year was counted from Christmas, so by our reckoning the date is 30 December 1558. The decree was posted on the doors of the Basilica of St Peter, at the Palace of the Inquisition and in the Campo de' Fiori, and the Index itself appeared at the beginning of 1559.

**How the list is built.** After the decree the list is arranged alphabetically, and each letter has three classes. The first class holds authors all of whose works are prohibited, "even if they said nothing against religion or about religion". The second holds particular books by particular authors. The third holds books by unknown authors. The list was ordered by first name, not surname, and it was compiled in haste from different sources. So the same person can appear in several places: Luther is under both L and M, Erasmus under both D and E, and Luther's colleague Justus Jonas is named four times on a single page under different names. At the end of the list come the forbidden Bibles and New Testaments, and last of all the list of printers.

**How severe it was.** The Index did not stop at heretical theology. If an author was in the first class, everything he had written was forbidden — herbals, medicine, geography and even Latin primers for children. Every anonymous book printed in the previous forty years was forbidden, and so was every book printed without the licence of a bishop and an inquisitor. Every book of divination and magic was forbidden; only "natural observations" useful for navigation, farming and medicine were allowed. No Bible or New Testament in German, French, Spanish, Italian, English or Flemish could be printed, read or kept without the written licence of the Inquisition. And 61 printers from Basel, Strasbourg, Zurich, Geneva, Wittenberg and other cities had their entire output banned. As a result, books that are not on the list at all were automatically forbidden too — Vesalius' great anatomy (Oporinus, 1543), Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (Petreius, 1543) and Fuchs' herbal (Isengrin, 1542).

**How it was received.** The Index did not strike only Protestants. It names Catholic bishops and cardinals, humanists who stayed loyal to Rome all their lives, and even the cardinals' report of 1537 on the reform of the Church, which Carafa himself had once signed. Booksellers had to hand over forbidden books, and the books were destroyed. Many, Catholics among them, thought the list went too far, because at one stroke it outlawed a large part of the science and literature of the age. Paul IV died on 18 August 1559. In 1564, under Pope Pius IV, a new Index — the Tridentine Index — appeared with ten general rules. It was milder; part of the works of Erasmus, for example, became permitted.



*A square in Rome in 1559: in the distance a heap of forbidden books is burning (illustration)*

**What the Index meant later.** The list of 1559 opened a history that lasted four centuries. In 1571 Pope Pius V created a special Congregation of the Index; in 1917 its work passed to the Holy Office; the last edition of the Index appeared in 1948. Only in 1966 did the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith announce that the Index was no longer binding church law. In the Campo de' Fiori, where

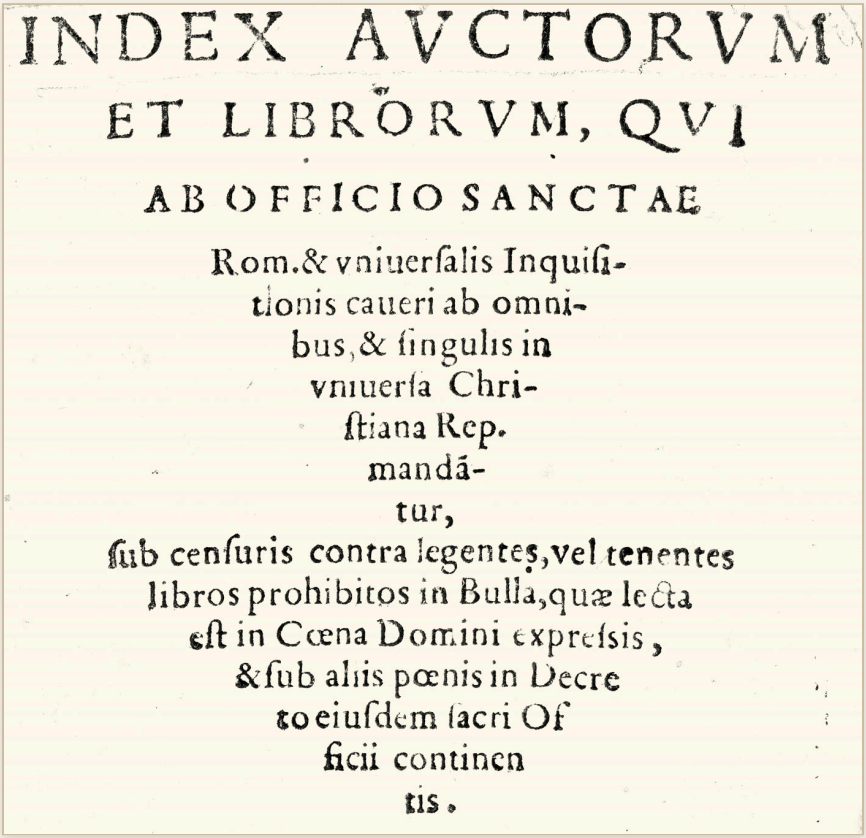
this decree was posted in 1559, Giordano Bruno was burned in 1600 (see our No. 84).

**How to read this book.** We have translated the whole edition — the title page, the decree, every entry from A to Z, the Bibles, the New Testaments and the printers — leaving nothing out. In the list, the names of people and printers keep the Latin form in which they were printed in 1559 (for example "Erasmus Roterodamus", "Henricus Cornelius Agrippa"), because that is how the inquisitors looked for them and found them. Book titles are translated, with the original title in italics in brackets. Cities are translated; years are kept as in the edition. The real value of the list lies in the footnotes at the foot of the page: they say briefly who each well-known author or book was and, where it is known, why they were feared. The edition's misprints and duplicates are left as printed and, where it matters, explained in a note. In a few places a printed line has faded or is hidden in the binding; where it could not be restored with confidence, there is an ellipsis "...". At the end of the book a commentary explains in plain words why these particular books ended up on the list and what we know about it today.

This is a historical document. It shows what one of the most powerful institutions of its age was afraid of — and for that very reason it tells us a great deal about the books that went on to change Europe.

# THE TITLE PAGE AND THE DECREE

*The title page of the Index, the decree of the Holy Office forbidding every book named in the list, and an explanation of how the list is arranged.*



INDEX AVCTORVM
ET LIBRORVM, QVI
AB OFFICIO SANCTAE
Rom.& vniuerſalis Inquiſi-
tionis caueri ab omni-
bus,& ſingulis in
vniuerſa Chri-
ſtiana Rep.
mandá-
tur,
ſub cenſuris contra legentes,vel tenentes
libros prohibitos in Bulla,quæ lecta
eſt in Cœna Domini expreſsis,
&ſub aliis pœnis in Decre
to eiuſdem ſacri Of
ficii continen
tis.

*The title page of the Index: "Index auctorum et librorum, qui ab Officio Sanctae Rom. et universalis Inquisitionis caveri ab omnibus et singulis in universa Christiana Rep. mandantur..." (Rome, 1559)*

# INDEX OF AUTHORS AND BOOKS AGAINST WHICH THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY

**Roman and Universal Inquisition[1] commands each and every person throughout the whole Christian commonwealth to be on guard, under the censures against those who read or keep prohibited books that are set out in the Bull read on the day of the Lord's Supper,[2] and under the other penalties contained in the Decree of the same Holy Office.**

## The Text of the Prohibition from the Decree of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition

To all the faithful of Christ, of whatever state, rank, order, condition or dignity they may be, and wherever in the world they may live: under the censures and penalties set out in the Bull of the Lord's Supper and in the Decrees of the Most Holy Lateran Council,[3] and also under pain of suspicion of heresy, of deprivation of all degrees, offices and benefices whatsoever they may hold, of perpetual disqualification from holding these and all other offices and benefices, of perpetual infamy, and of other penalties to be imposed at Our discretion, We strictly order and command that henceforth no one shall dare to write, publish, print or cause to be printed, sell, buy, lend, give as a gift or on any other pretext hand over, receive, keep with him openly or secretly, or in any other way whatever preserve or cause to be preserved, any book or writing of those marked in this Index of the Holy Office, or any other writings whatsoever that shall be found to be stained with the taint of any heresy or to have come from heretics. Whoever neglects to obey, or, having such books and writings of any kind, does not — once he has in any way learned of the present Decree — faithfully and in fact hand

1 The Roman Inquisition (the Holy Office) was founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III; Paul IV (Gian Pietro Carafa, pope 1555–1559), under whom this Index appeared, had earlier been its hard-line head.
2 *Bulla in Coena Domini* — a papal bull solemnly read in Rome every year on Maundy Thursday; it excommunicated heretics and anyone who read, kept or printed their books.
3 The Fifth Lateran Council, by the decree *Inter sollicitudines* (1515), forbade the printing of any book without prior approval by a bishop or inquisitor — the beginning of pre-publication censorship.