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Introduction

The uses of history in religious controversies from Erasmus to Baronio

STEFAN BAUER

Change and diversity in history have always been fundamental challenges for all Christian confessions. Since the early Christian period, error and heresy have been systematically weeded out. With the advent of the Reformation from 1517, each of the confessions argued that it possessed and carried forward the true heritage of the early Church: Catholics, by claiming a continuous line through the entire Middle Ages during which the Church remained ‘always the same’ (*semper eadem*); and Protestants, by claiming to return to the primitive, pure state of affairs which had been preserved by only a few ‘witnesses of truth’ even as the majority of the Church became ever more corrupt. From the Reformation, therefore, church history presented both an opportunity and a problem to each confession. Protestants were compelled to invent particularly resourceful answers because, as Euan Cameron has noted, ‘the core message of the Reformation called for a shift in perceptions of the Christian past’.¹ This

My warm thanks to Simon Ditchfield, Jill Kraye, Kevin Killeen, David Bagchi, Neil Tarrant, Elisabetta Li Destri Nicosia and the anonymous readers of this journal for comments on earlier drafts of this Introduction. Three of the papers in this special issue were first presented at a workshop entitled ‘The Uses of History in Early Modern Religious Controversies’ (York, 2017); I am grateful to all workshop participants for fruitful discussion.

¹ Euan Cameron, ‘Primitivism, Patristics, and Polemic in Protestant Visions of Early Christianity’, in Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield and Howard Louthan (eds.), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27–51, at p. 29. For an overview of the topic of history and theology see also Stefan Bauer, ‘Theology and History’, in Kenneth G. Appold and Nelson H. Minnich (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Reformation Era Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

meant that Protestants, who aimed to revert to the pristine early state of the Church, found themselves confronted with the key issue of explaining why error had entered the Church after apostolic times. Since the prevailing models for church history did not suit their view of the degeneration of the medieval Church, Protestant historians had to re-invent the discipline. Catholics, on the other hand, aimed to prove that church institutions and doctrine displayed a fundamental continuity in practice and beliefs from apostolic times. In the decades when the Catholic Church faced the most important religious crisis of the early modern age, and when Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican Churches sought to establish themselves, as well as to create their own identities, much of this process was achieved through reflection on, and debate over, the past.

This special issue of *Renaissance Studies, The Uses of History in Religious Controversies from Erasmus to Baronio*, extends previous studies but also explores the subject from a variety of innovative angles. To appreciate these innovations, it is first necessary to consider the past literature. The only systematic comparative study, by Pontianus Polman, dates back to almost ninety years ago.² More recently, Irena Backus studied the attitudes of Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran scholars towards the Church Fathers.³ She concluded her account by stating that historical scholarship in the sixteenth century had two main components: 'One of these was a genuine interest in the past; the other was the concern to affirm confessional identity by privileging a particular historical method.'⁴ As I argue, however, in my opening essay to this issue, it is difficult to establish a clear dichotomy between a 'genuine' and a 'confessional' interest in history. Jean-Louis Quantin has examined the role of the Church Fathers in the self-definition of Anglican theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and

² Pontianus Polman, *L'élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI^e siècle* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1932).

³ Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378–1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). On Calvin and church history see also Euan Cameron, 'Calvin the Historian: Biblical Antiquity and Scriptural Exegesis in the Quest for a Meaningful Past', in Karen E. Spierling (ed.), *Calvin and the Book: The Evolution of the Printed Word in Reformed Protestantism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 77–94.

⁴ Backus, *Historical Method*, 394.

has convincingly pointed out that ‘many seventeenth-century controversies revolved around the reality, and indeed the very possibility, of theological change in the past’.⁵ The collective volume *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World*, edited by Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield and Howard Louthan, shows that the need for sacred history was strongly felt among all confessions.⁶ This special issue builds on such insights. It analyses key figures, ranging from Erasmus, Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon to Cesare Baronio. It posits that, since the Reformation, the intermingling of religion and historical arguments was profound, complex and shifting. Above all, it provides a novel analysis of the ways in which theologians and historians faced up to the concepts of change and diversity. Rather than treating sacred history as a finished product, this issue explores how it was created and shaped through controversies and polemical interactions.⁷

⁵ Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 403.

⁶ Van Liere et al. (eds.), *Sacred History*. See also the two digital book exhibitions ‘The Art of Disagreeing Badly: Religious Dispute in Early Modern Europe (I–II)’, curated by Stefan Bauer and Bethany Hume (<http://social.shorthand.com/DisagreeBadly>).

⁷ Polemic as an argumentative practice has already been studied from a variety of different angles. On the language of polemic during the Reformation see Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). On controversial theology see Heribert Smolinsky, ‘La vicenda della teologia controversistica’, in *Storia della teologia*, 4 vols. (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1993–2003), vol. 4, 67–124. On the wider topic of learned polemic see also Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (eds.), *Comment on se dispute: les formes de la controverse*, special issue of *Mil neuf cent*, 25 (2007), no. 1; Uwe Baumann (ed.), *Streitkultur: okzidentale Traditionen des Streitens in Literatur, Geschichte und Kunst* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Marc Laureys and Roswitha Simons (eds.), *Die Kunst des Streitens: Inszenierung, Formen und Funktionen öffentlichen Streits in historischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Kai Bremer and Carlos Spoerhase (eds.), *Gelehrte Polemik: intellektuelle Konfliktverschärfungen um 1700*, special issue of *Zeitsprünge*, 15 (2011), nos. 2–3; Marc Laureys and Roswitha Simons (eds.), *The Art of Arguing in the World of Renaissance Humanism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013); Almut Suerbaum, George Southcombe and Benjamin Thompson (eds.), *Polemic: Language as Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Discourse* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). A research centre at the Technische Universität Dresden (‘Invectivity: Constellations and Dynamics of Disparagement’) deals with the ‘brutalization of discourse’ from the perspectives of history, literature, art, sociology and law.

A recurrent theme in the essays presented here is the study of reading practices and of historical method. In ‘Students of history, masters of tradition: Josse Clichtove, Noël Beda and the limits of historical criticism’, Sam Kennerley underlines how the advances in methodology made by fifteenth-century humanists created tensions between criticism and tradition. Humanist scholars of the Renaissance had developed a historical mindset that marked a departure from medieval thinking about the past. In many ways, humanists made the Reformation possible by developing a sense of anachronism, a critical attitude towards sources and an interest in causation.⁸ This new historical perspective caused some humanists to rewrite history. Not only was medieval Latin superseded by a more elegant style modelled on classical authors, but humanists also introduced the idea of the Middle Ages as a separate period, lasting from c. 400 to c. 1400. Historical writers such as Leonardo Bruni (d. 1444) and Flavio Biondo (d. 1463) emphasized human agency in their story of the fortunes of medieval states after the end of the Roman Empire.⁹ The ‘darkness’ which humanists thought had enveloped the Middle Ages concerned not so much religious beliefs but the lack of cultural achievements in this period. In a dramatic departure in Western thinking, humanist historical thought introduced the ideas of cultural decadence and of a hiatus between the present and the classical past that had to be bridged.¹⁰ Following the ideas of humanists, it was not a huge conceptual leap for Protestants, at the outset of the Reformation, to arrive at their central historical paradigm. They saw the medieval heritage as corrupt and gave preference instead to the early Christian era, which was, in part, contemporary to classical antiquity. As is shown in several of the essays here, however, humanism did not lead to a single conclusion, privileging either Protestant or

⁸ Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Arnold, 1969), 1; *idem*, ‘History, Myth and Fiction: Doubts and Debates’, in José Rabasa et al. (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 261–81.

⁹ William J. Connell, ‘Italian Renaissance Historical Narrative’, in Rabasa et al. (eds.), *Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 3, 347–63.

¹⁰ Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 75. For the relationship between humanist and sacred history see Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 445–78.

Catholic views about history. Both confessions adopted humanist techniques to underscore their ideological viewpoints in different ways. Certainly, the appeal to history and tradition seemed to favour the Catholic standpoint.¹¹ On the whole, Catholic authors held that if a tradition could be traced back to apostolic times, it must have been sanctioned by Christ even if no explicit written proof existed. Protestants used the same argument to dismantle Catholic claims to tradition. As I illustrate in my essay 'Pontianus Polman re-imagined: how (not) to write a history of religious polemics', these principles could be applied very flexibly. The Protestant authors of the seminal church history known as the *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559–74), for example, argued that the female Pope Joan must have existed in the ninth century because a long tradition of chronicles transmitted her story, even though sources contemporary to her papacy were missing. The Centuriators argued that, in fact, all proof dating from the ninth century had been destroyed by the Catholic authorities in Rome. In another context, however, the Centuriators turned this argument on its head, maintaining that the *Donation of Constantine* (which purported to give dominion over the West to the papacy) must have been a forgery precisely because no contemporary documents referred to it.

From the beginning of the polemics between Catholics and Protestants, history was used to provoke, disparage and condemn the other side. Catholic polemicists such as Johann Eck (1486–1543) recognized very early on that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, which postulated that the foundations of the Christian Church could be reconstructed solely from God's own word in Holy Scripture, was so explosive that it could destroy the very institutional foundations of the Catholic Church.¹² To counter this powerful claim, Catholics insisted that the Bible itself was not sufficient. Scripture needed a trustworthy interpretation and, what is more, there were truths concerning

¹¹ Felicity Heal, 'Appropriating History: Catholic and Protestant Polemics and the National Past', in Paulina Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History in Early Modern England* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2006) (also published as special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 [2005], nos. 1–2), 105–28, at p. 107.

¹² On doctrines of Scripture in the Reformation see Euan Cameron, *The Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163–71.

faith which could not be found in the Bible. As Eck stated: ‘Scripture is not authentic without the authority of the Church.’¹³ Very soon, Catholics sought the opportunity to show the limits and impracticality of the principle of *sola scriptura*. First, they repeatedly confronted Luther with the question of whether ‘he alone was wise’ and why he believed that he was justified in disregarding scholarly opinions built up through the centuries. As Marie Barral-Baron observes in this issue, Luther himself admitted that this was the sharpest and most pertinent argument put forward against him.¹⁴ In addition to this epistemological challenge, Catholics hoped to demonstrate that Protestants needed history to prove their own points, as it seemed that not all doctrines and rituals maintained by Protestants derived their authentication from the Bible alone.¹⁵

In all confessions, a providential world view – that is, the idea that God’s will was revealed through history – remained pervasive. The concept of divine purpose in history did not receive a decisive blow until the eighteenth century, when the forces of chance, natural causation and technological progress were more fully taken into account by some Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁶ In the sixteenth century, world history was still largely seen as a sequence of epochs which were ordered by divine providence.

¹³ Johann Eck, *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutherum et alios hostes ecclesiae* (first publ. 1525), ed. Pierre Fraenkel (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979), 27.

¹⁴ See her essay ‘A Church without History? Luther and Historical Argument in the Context of Humanist Polemics’. See also Susan E. Schreiner, *Are you Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ For a bibliography of the writings of Catholic controversialists of the sixteenth century see Wilbirgis Klaiber, *Katholische Kontroverstheologen und Reformer des 16. Jahrhunderts: ein Werkverzeichnis* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978). For the earlier period up to the 1550s in particular, see also Mark U. Edwards, Jr, ‘Catholic Controversial Literature, 1518–1555: Some Statistics’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History*, 79 (1988), 189–205; David Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518–1525*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Euan Cameron, ‘The Bible and the Early Modern Sense of History’, in *idem* (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 657–85, at p. 657. For what follows see also Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele, ‘Theologie und Historie: zur Interferenz zweier Wissensgebiete in Reformationszeit und konfessionellem Zeitalter’, in Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele and Irene Dingel (eds.), *Kommunikation und Transfer im Christentum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2007), 129–56.

Chief among the biblical prophecies that lay at the heart of this view of history were those from the Book of Daniel, according to which history unfolded in a succession of four monarchies. The consensus of Reformers such as Philipp Melanchthon and Heinrich Bullinger was that these monarchies could be identified with the Assyrian/Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek and the Roman Empires. In his work on the *Four Empires* (1556), the Protestant historian Johann Sleidan popularized this view and provided material for instruction in schools. Sleidan saw history as a constant process of decline, leading to the end of time.¹⁷ Apocalyptic thought thus served both to explain the past and to predict the future. As the essay by Barral-Baron shows, the Reformation was seen as God's reform which anticipated the end of the world.¹⁸ Such arguments lent greater urgency to reform activities.

Catholic historical thought, on the other hand, placed considerably less stress on the Apocalypse. Cesare Baronio, for example, underlined the continuity of the visible Church through the ages. In the preface to the *Annales ecclesiastici* (*Ecclesiastical Annals*, 1588–1607), he singled out continuity as his main theme:

We shall demonstrate for every age that the visible monarchy of the Catholic Church was instituted by Christ our Lord, founded upon Peter and preserved inviolate by his legitimate and true successors, the Roman pontiffs, guarded religiously and never broken or suspended but continued forever; and that he has always been recognized and accepted in each age as the one visible head of the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church, to which the other members are obedient.¹⁹

¹⁷ Alexandra Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 84.

¹⁸ See also Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, 12 vols. (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 1588–1607), *Praefatio*, vol. 1, 5. My translation is adapted from Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 283, and from Cameron, 'The Bible', 676. On Baronio see also Giuseppe A. Guazzelli, 'Cesare Baronio and the Roman Catholic Vision of the Early Church', in Van Liere et al. (eds.), *Sacred History*, 52–71; Giuseppe Antonio Guazzelli, Raimondo Michetti and Francesco Scorza Barcellona (eds.), *Cesare Baronio tra santità e scrittura storica* (Rome: Viella, 2012).

The trans-historical relationship between the visible Church and the divinely ordered progress of history circumvented many of the problems posed by apocalyptic thought. It enabled authors such as Baronio to spend less time and effort than Protestant scholars on trying to make their research into the chronology of historical events coincide with the precise years of the unfolding of the Apocalypse as ordained by God. This does not mean that Baronio's historiography was any less dogmatic. The Catholic Church's normative system after the Council of Trent (1545–63) included a confessionalized view of history; and Baronio's *Annals* represented the official Roman version of church history from the birth of Christ to 1198.²⁰ Baronio's desire to show that the visible Church had never changed led him to judge the validity of historical sources by standards of assessment based on doctrinal foundations. For him, theological and historical truth could not diverge.

Not all church history, however, was dominated by dogmatic considerations. A notable example, on the Catholic side, are the writings of the Italian scholar Onofrio Panvinio (1530–68). Panvinio resisted pressures from the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and pushed forward with his own research agenda, investigating previously unexplored themes in church history based on new sources.²¹ In his works, Renaissance historiographical ideas intersected with ideas of the Catholic Reformation.

²⁰ Confessionalization is understood here as a process by which confession-building shaped and contributed to historiography. For a general discussion of this term see U. Lotz-Heumann, 'Confessionalization', in Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen and Mary Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 33–53. See also Nicholas Hardy and Dmitri Levitin (eds.), *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: An Episode in the History of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

²¹ Stefan Bauer, *The Invention of Papal History: Onofrio Panvinio between Renaissance and Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). On the creative potential of church history in the early modern period see also Anthony Grafton, 'Church History in Early Modern Europe: Tradition and Innovation', in Van Liere et al. (eds.), *Sacred History*, 3–26; *idem*, 'Past Belief: The Fall and Rise of Ecclesiastical History in Early Modern Europe', in Philip Nord, Katja Guenther and Max Weiss (eds.), *Formations of Belief: Historical Approaches to Religion and the Secular* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 13–40.

Panvinio approached historiography with a candour which – according to the currently accepted view of religious history in this period – was not considered possible in 1560s Rome. While acknowledging the Protestant threat, Panvinio impartially made use of a wide range of historical sources and, crucially, described error and diversity in church history. In his work *On the Various Ways of Electing the Roman Pope (De varia creatione Romani pontificis)*, in which the idea of variety appears even in the title, not only was Panvinio the first scholar to write a history of this topic from St Peter to the 1560s but he also described how the rules for these elections were modified throughout the centuries to adapt to varying historical necessities (fig. 1).

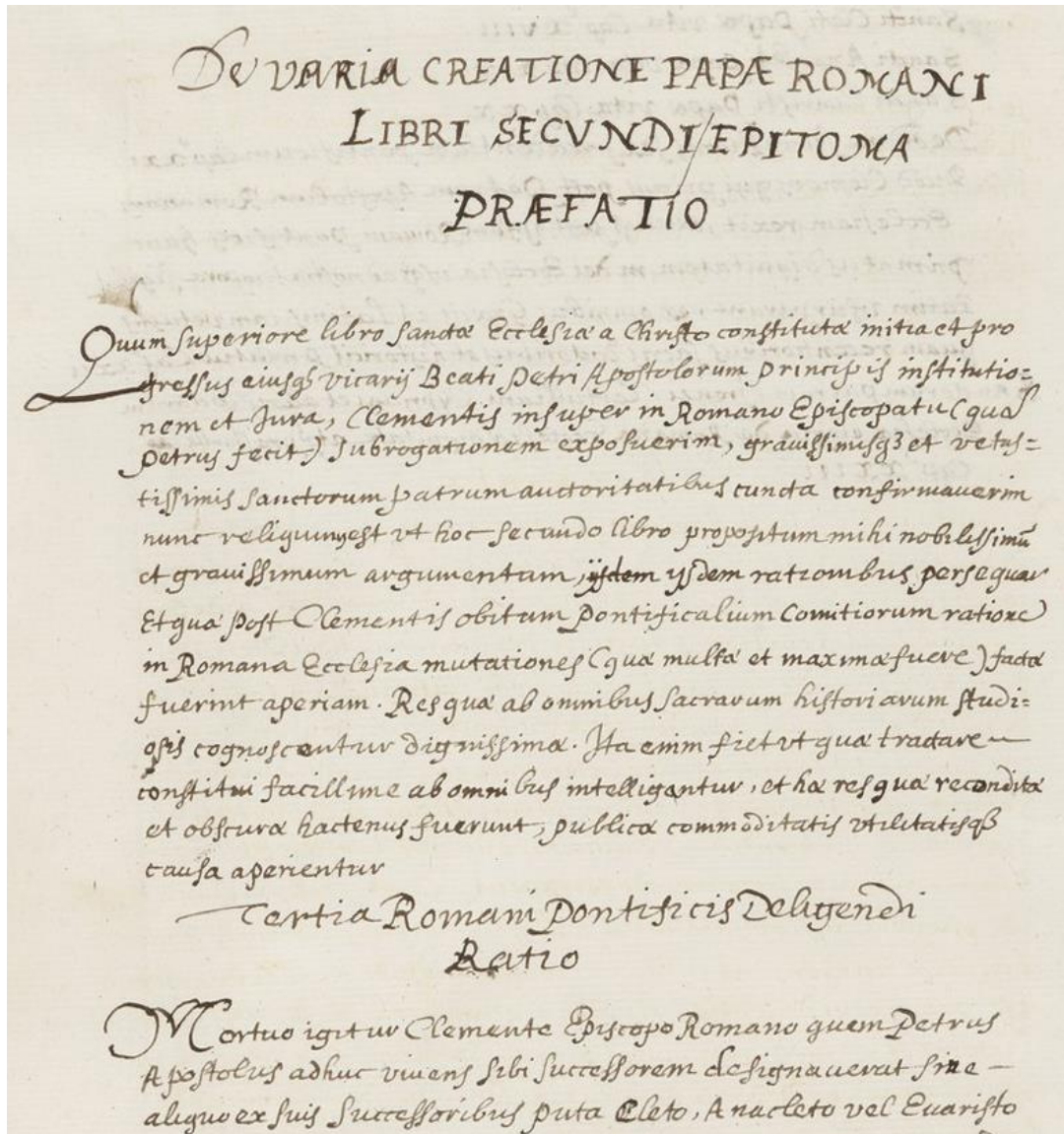


Fig. 1: Onofrio Panvinio, *De varia creatione Romani pontificis* (epitome). Reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (lat. 4244B, fol. 16v).

Writing the history of the papacy through the history of the papal elections gave Panvinio the opportunity to trace changes in the distribution of power inside the Church over the course of the centuries. Yet, by describing variations, he opened a Pandora's box, which could conceivably play into the hands of both Protestants and Catholic reformers who denied the papacy the privilege of self-reform. Furthermore, Panvinio proved – much to the displeasure of some members of Rome's ruling elite – that in the late antique and early medieval periods, the German emperors had played a role in designating the popes. Lastly, he did not hesitate to portray the past schisms,

factions and quarrels within the College of Cardinals. Shocking as this must have been to the Roman authorities, Panvinio was able to operate undisturbed and to enjoy the patronage of cardinals and kings. Panvinio's works were censored only after his death, in the 1580s and 1590s, when a more thoroughly dogmatic control of historiography had been established within the Roman Church.

On the Protestant side, key historiographical texts were Matthias Flacius' *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Catalogue of Witnesses to the Truth, 1556) and the *Magdeburg Centuries*. A revisionist interpretation of the dominant scholarly narrative regarding Flacius and the Centuriators is now underway. While they have been seen as authors who completely subordinated their evidence to dogmatic, theological and apocalyptic goals, their pioneering use of historical sources has recently been examined in more detail.²² Flacius was also a significant model for English church historiography. John Foxe, in his *Acts and Monuments* (1563–83), not only transposed the model of the catalogue of witnesses into a fully-fledged national history of the Church in England but also inserted a new element into the story by claiming that the Book of Revelation had foretold the rise and fall of the Christian Churches.²³ England was fertile ground for experiments in church history, as is evident from the wide range of ecclesiastical histories produced during Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558–1603).²⁴ Historians such as

²² Irene Dingel, Johannes Hund and Luka Ilić (eds.), *Matthias Flacius Illyricus: biographische Kontexte, theologische Wirkungen, historische Rezeption* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019). On the use of print made by Protestants in general, see Miriam Usher Chrisman, 'From Polemic to Propaganda: The Development of Mass Persuasion in the Late Sixteenth Century', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History*, 73 (1982), 175–96; Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

²³ Euan Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History: The Challenge of the Churches' Past* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 135. On Foxe see also Thomas S. Freeman, 'The Power of Polemic: Catholic Responses to the Calendar in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61 (2010), 475–95; *idem* and Elizabeth Evenden, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and the essay by Freeman in this issue.

²⁴ Rosamund Oates, "'For the lacke of true history": Polemic, Conversion and Church History in Elizabethan England', in Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton (eds.), *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 133–52.

Foxe, Bale, Matthew Parker and John Jewel, and, for the seventeenth century, Caroline divines such as James Ussher, adroitly navigated between apocalyptic concerns and a humanist-inspired search for philological accuracy and appreciation of diversity in their corpus of sources.²⁵

Today, in dealing with both the sacred and the profane historiography of the Reformation period, scholars face a different set of problems. Chief among them is the problem of teleology. To what extent did writers in the sixteenth century foreshadow the development of modern, critical historiography? As David Womersley has pointed out, it is a fallacy to believe that the growth of philology and source criticism inevitably led to objectivity and secularization.²⁶ To begin with, as we have seen, providentialism remained strong. Second, as this special issue shows, the role that religious beliefs played in the works of many historical writers during the sixteenth century became stronger rather than weaker. In some ways, the dogmatization of church history could indicate the opposite of a process of secularization. For example, in his essay here on Foxe, Thomas Freeman demonstrates that technical refinement did not preclude a fiery engagement with anti-Catholic polemic.

This collection of essays has several self-imposed limits. Of necessity, a special issue cannot perform the tasks of a handbook or even those of a larger edited collection. Geographically, the focus is entirely on Western Europe, thus covering many, but not all, of the most significant battlegrounds between Catholics and Protestants. Since the theme is polemics that were closely linked to the Reformation and its consequences, it

²⁵ See Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History*; Peter D. Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (eds.), *The Church on its Past* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2013); Angela Ranson, André A. Gazal and Sarah Bastow (eds.), *Defending the Faith: John Jewel and the Elizabethan Church* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018). For sources see Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (London: Scolar Press, 1977); *idem*, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (London: Scolar Press, 1978); Ethan H. Shagan and Debora Shuger (eds.), *Religion in Tudor England: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

²⁶ David Womersley, 'Against the Teleology of Technique', in Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History*, 91–104. See also Paulina Kewes, 'History and Its Uses', *ibid.*, 1–30, at pp. 1–3.

was decided to deal with Catholics and mainstream Protestants, leaving aside Greek Orthodox Christians and Protestant Radicals, as well as inter-faith relations such as those between Christians and Jews and between Christians and Muslims.²⁷ Finally, the emphasis is more on producers of polemical texts than on their contemporary consumers.²⁸ Nevertheless, most of the contributors engage with the ‘consumption’ of the earlier – that is, medieval – sources which were deployed in sixteenth-century polemical exchanges.

This issue mainly investigates two types of historical writing. The first is historiography in a narrower sense, such as the *Magdeburg Centuries*, the *Ecclesiastical Annals* of Baronio, the papal biographies of Platina, and catalogues of famous figures from history such as those by Bale and Flacius. Many of such historical works, especially Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, were heavily infused with theological polemic. The second type is the polemical use of history made by theologians such as Josse Clichtove, Martin Luther and Johann Eck.²⁹ Their theological writings could range from short works, akin to pamphlets, to extensive statements of doctrine such as Eck’s *On the Primacy of Peter*. Several of the essays in this issue (Bagchi, Barral-Baron and Bauer) deal with theological disputations, especially the Leipzig Disputation of 1519 involving Luther, Karlstadt and Eck, which is analysed both as an oral event and with

²⁷ For the radical Reformers see Geoffrey Dipple, *‘Just as in the Time of the Apostles’: Uses of History in the Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005).

²⁸ Further studies of the uses of history in religious polemic might benefit from use of the Universal Short Title Catalogue to collect information about the formats, print runs and translations of many of the polemical texts discussed in this issue. For a case study on the reception of, and reactions to, a key text for the history of the papacy see Stefan Bauer, *The Censorship and Fortuna of Platina’s Lives of the Popes in the Sixteenth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). On the readership of Reformation pamphlets see Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994); David Bagchi, ‘Printing, Propaganda, and Public Opinion in the Age of Martin Luther’ (2016), in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.269>.

²⁹ ‘Historians’ and theological ‘polemicists’ could not always be clearly distinguished from each other in the sixteenth century; see Heal, ‘Appropriating History’.

regard to the written texts that accompanied and followed it.³⁰ Theological works also came in the form of manuals, Scripture commentaries and confessions of faith. Not all polemical exchanges were between confessions: Kennerley's essay, for example, concerns a lively debate among the Catholic theologians of Paris on the lives of saints such as Mary Magdalene.

David Bagchi ('The historical argument in early Reformation controversy revisited: the Council of Constance in the writings of Eck and Cochlaeus') touches briefly on the genre of dramatic comedy, discussing how Johannes Cochlaeus offered a satire on the tensions within Lutheran 'high command' in Wittenberg.³¹ As this episode makes clear, Reformation polemics took place on many public and private stages and in a variety of media.³² What is more, historical writing often had a hybrid status. Not only did a wide spectrum of texts deal with the past but readers and writers also made comparisons across genres. References to history could be made by libellers, imaginative writers or political actors, and between diverse forms and genres such as martyrologies, sermons, plays and poems. Historical plays, for instance, could influence narrative historiography. Poetry, drama and prose historiography were sometimes composed by the same authors and could share the same objectives.³³ John Bale, author of a catalogue of writers who had represented the true Church through all ages, also wrote

³⁰ On disputations see also Joshua Rodda, *Public Religious Disputation in England, 1558–1626* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

³¹ On satire see Barbara Könniker, *Satire im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 1991); Antoinina Bevan Zlatar, *Reformation Fictions: Polemical Protestant Dialogues in Elizabethan England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anne Lake Prescott, 'Satire and Polemic', in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 223–42.

³² Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Pettegree, *Brand Luther*; Helmut Puff, 'The Word', in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 390–408.

³³ Paulina Kewes, 'History and Its Uses', 5; Blair Worden, 'Historians and Poets', in Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History*, 69–90. On the relations between literature and history see also Allan Megill, 'Literature and History', in Kelly Boyd (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, 2 vols. (London; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), vol. 1, 725–28.

the quasi-historical play *King Johan* to promote the cause of reform.³⁴ Some historical writings consciously employed the vernacular to reach a different type of readership from that sought by authors who wrote for an educated public in Latin.³⁵ In a 2006 volume, the functions of historical writing in Early Modern England were examined by an interdisciplinary team of historians and scholars of English literature, prompting reflection on how the uses of history changed from the beginning of the Reformation until the eighteenth century.³⁶ Although our special issue puts less emphasis on the relations between history and literature, readers will encounter literary forms such as the ‘private’ letter (which in the sixteenth century was, more often than not, intended to circulate among a larger audience), the satirical dialogue and the diatribe (of which Erasmus was a master), as well as both secular and sacred biography.³⁷

My opening essay (‘Pontianus Polman re-imagined’) begins by reviewing and assessing several examples of how religious polemics have been studied with regard to their use of history. Only one book has ever treated the subject in a systematic way: Pontianus Polman’s *L’élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI^e siècle* (1932). Applying a rigid scheme, Polman dealt first with Protestants and then with Catholics. For each side, he presented two sections: the first entitled ‘The accumulation of material’ (subdivided into ‘history of dogma’ and ‘church history’) and the second ‘The synthesis of material’. Polman’s general conclusion was that religious polemics stimulated historical research but that theological ideas were often considered of greater importance than evidence derived from historical documents and sources. Contemporary reviewers of his book outlined their own visions of how

³⁴ See John Bale, *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytanniae ... catalogus*, 2 vols. (Basel: Oporinus, 1557–59); Philip Schwyzer, ‘Paranoid History: John Bale’s *King Johan*’, in Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 499–513.

³⁵ On the growing popular fascination with the past in England see Daniel R. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Matthew Neufeld (ed.), *Uses of the Past in Early Modern England*, special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 76 (2013), no. 4.

³⁶ Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History*.

³⁷ On polemical dialogues and their popularizing functions see also Zlatar, *Reformation Fictions*.

the subject should be treated. For example, the Catholic historian Hubert Jedin (1900–80) maintained that particular problems (for instance, disputes about papal primacy or church councils) should be dealt with separately, which would make their treatment more coherent. Moreover, he thought that church history and the history of dogma should not be split up. The French historian Lucien Febvre (1878–1956), on the other hand, envisaged a book about two different ages, each dealing with both Protestants and Catholics. The first would consider ‘the age of opportunism and disorganized combat’ and the second ‘the age of synthesis and pitched battles’. After discussing Irena Backus’ book *Historical Method and Confessional Identity* (2003), I argue that a new history of religious controversies should build on an ‘anatomy of polemics’, that is, on the study of scholarly conventions, their modification and rupture in Reformation polemics, with particular attention given to the criteria of religious knowledge as exemplified by debates about forgeries.

What complicates the task of the contributors to this issue is that the uses of history did not always reflect the underlying convictions of those who used it. As Marie Barral-Baron explains in her essay ‘A Church without history? Luther and historical argument in the context of humanist polemics’, there was a disjuncture between the use which Luther, the Reformer, made of history, and his reservations about the discipline. Luther did not hesitate to grant historical arguments an important place in justifying the division of Christendom that the Reformation had provoked.³⁸ In Luther’s eyes, however, historical arguments were part and parcel of his polemical armoury. He often deployed them, and encouraged his followers to do likewise, but he did not regard them as having much intrinsic interest. Luther’s highly original attitude towards historical argument no doubt helps explain why dialogue between Catholics and

³⁸ On Luther’s view of history see also Wieland Kastning, *Morgenröte künftigen Lebens: das reformatorische Evangelium als Neubestimmung der Geschichte* (Göttigen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Mark Thompson, ‘Luther on God and History’, in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and L’ubomír Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 127–42; Volker Leppin, ‘Luthers Blick auf das Mittelalter’, in Günter Frank and Volker Leppin (eds.), *Die Reformation und ihr Mittelalter* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2016), 113–33.

Lutherans reached an impasse and why an entente between Erasmus and Luther proved impossible to achieve.

Looking more specifically at France during the earliest years of the Reformation, Sam Kennerley (in 'Students of history, masters of tradition') investigates the relationship between tradition and historical criticism. His key sources are two polemics between Josse Clichtove (1472–1543) and Noël Beda (c. 1470–1537) over the cult of Mary Magdalene and the *Exultet* hymn. A student of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Clichtove articulated modern-sounding criticisms of received traditions. His opponent Beda is instead famous for his scholastic defences of inherited doctrine against humanists like Clichtove and Erasmus. Drawing on an in-depth reading of Clichtove and Beda's tracts, Kennerley contextualizes the clashes between these two scholars and analyses their respective methods and conclusions. While demonstrating the sophistication of Clichtove's historical thought and Beda's own surprising skill as a historian, Kennerley's essay contends that the central issue of these polemics was not history, but, rather, whether tradition was a legitimate subject for historical criticism.³⁹ The piece concludes by considering the implications of these polemics for the study of sacred history in the Reformation, as seen in the changes Clichtove made to his method after his conflict with Beda.

David Bagchi's essay ('The historical argument in early Reformation controversy') takes us into the eye of the storm in the controversy between proponents and opponents of the Reformation: the memory of the Council of Constance (1414–18). This council came to be seen by Protestants as the epitome of the papal tyranny which ordered the murder of the godly reformer Jan Hus. Bagchi re-evaluates the work of Catholic champions of the council. He points out that Polman, in his *L'élément historique*, was critical of the historical abilities of the earliest Catholic opponents of the Reformation and regarded the efforts of authors such as Eck and Johann Cochlaeus as mediocre and superficial. Polman's verdict – that the use of history in religious controversy achieved maturity only much later in the sixteenth century – has proved

³⁹ See also Jean-Marie Le Gall, 'The Lives of the Saints in the French Renaissance, c. 1500–c. 1650', in Van Liere et al. (eds.), *Sacred History*, 209–29.

influential. A review of Reformation-era treatments of the Council of Constance, however, indicates that Polman underestimated the work of the early Catholic controversialists in this regard. Writing against Luther after the Leipzig Disputation of 1519, Eck emphasized the importance of using primary sources when discussing the decrees of church councils. Cochlaeus, in a series of writings on Constance and the execution of Jan Hus, displayed a similar concern for the importance of consulting original documents, of citing them correctly and of quoting them accurately. Bagchi argues that while one looks in vain to the early controversialists for a recognizably modern, critical approach to history-writing, there was a nascent interest in the importance of primary sources and accurate citation, as well as a relative openness to new interpretations – the building blocks of history as a critical discipline.

Turning to Lutheran Germany, Harald Bollbuck (in ‘Searching for the true religion: the Church History of the *Magdeburg Centuries* between critical methods and confessional polemics’) demonstrates that the *Magdeburg Centuries* constituted the first attempt at a comprehensive Lutheran church history. Written as a collaborative project and starting its account in the apostolic age, the *Magdeburg Centuries* also aimed to describe the theological changes which had taken place in their own times, although the printed version extended only to the thirteenth century.⁴⁰ In its development, the project was closely connected to the so-called Chancery of God, a propaganda office of strict Lutheran theologians in Magdeburg which worked against the emperor, the Catholic Church and confessional opponents in Wittenberg. Written during a period of political threats, the work was driven by apocalyptic thinking and a certain scepticism about both lay and ecclesiastical authorities. The authors of the *Magdeburg Centuries* adopted a variety of techniques – searching for historical testimonies of religious truth, applying the critical methods of a humanist education, deconstructing myths or (if necessary) their tradition, and writing for specific

⁴⁰ See also Harald Bollbuck, ‘Testimony of True Faith and the Ruler’s Mission: The Middle Ages in the *Magdeburg Centuries* and the Melanchthon School’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History*, 101 (2010), 238–62.

confessional goals – which were intermingled with the compilation of excerpts from historical sources.

Two essays deal with the Protestant and Catholic reception of a pivotal medieval figure, Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073–85), who asserted the papacy's right to depose all princes – a position which brought him into dramatic conflict with the Holy Roman Empire.⁴¹ In the first essay, '1077 and all that: Gregory VII in Reformation historical writing', Thomas Freeman shows that from the late Middle Ages onwards, Gregory VII's reputation was hotly debated. While lionized during the Catholic Reformation (the period during which Gregory's cult at Salerno was recognized by Rome), the controversial pope was also the target of strident polemics from conciliarists, German humanists and then, most intensely, Protestants. This essay focuses on the development of the polemic against Gregory by Lutherans and English Protestants. Important contemporary sources attacking Gregory were unearthed by humanist and conciliarist scholars such as Johannes Aventinus and Ortwin Gratius, and then published by Protestants including Melanchthon and Kaspar Hedio. Thomas Swinnerton, Robert Barnes and other English writers with strong connections to the Lutherans presented the polemical history of Gregory's pontificate to their countrymen. It was then extended by Matthias Flacius, John Bale and John Foxe. Yet, while all Protestant accounts of Gregory agreed that he plumbed the depths of papal depravity, they varied as to which of his qualities should be considered to be truly Antichristian. For some writers, it was his imposition of clerical celibacy; for others, it was his excommunication and deposition of an emperor; for still others, it was his activities as a sorcerer. Freeman's essay discusses these variations and evaluates the reasons for them; it also demonstrates how Gregory VII became a keystone of Protestant interpretations of ecclesiastical and papal history.

⁴¹ On Gregory VII see also I. S. Robinson, 'Reform and the Church, 1073–1122', in David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (eds.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 268–334; Mareike Menne, 'Zur Canossa-Rezeption im konfessionellen Zeitalter', in Christoph Stiegemann and Matthias Wemhoff (eds.), *Canossa 1077: Erschütterung der Welt*, 2 vols. (Munich: Hirmer, 2006), vol. 1, 603–12; Ernst-Dieter Hehl, *Gregor VII. und Heinrich IV. in Canossa: paenitentia, absolutio, honor* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019).

By contrast, the second essay on Gregory, by Gianmarco Giuliani (*'Reformatio or restauratio? The rehabilitation of Pope Gregory VII in Catholic historiography after Trent'*), looks at the Catholic reception of this pope and shows that the eleventh volume of Baronio's *Ecclesiastical Annals* (1605) was a major attempt to rehabilitate Gregory's reputation. By relying on a much wider range contemporary sources, Baronio succeeded in creating a new critical account of Gregory, portraying him not as the symbol of the end of the millennium, as in the Protestant interpretation, but instead as the protector of the Church's apostolic purity. Baronio became a spokesman for the *Doctrina Hildebrandina*, which was sanctioned by the decrees of the Council of Trent and reinforced by subsequent Catholic theologians.⁴² Giuliani's essay concludes with some reflections on the uniformity of the historical method emerging in all confessions.

After considering the essays presented in this special issue, readers are encouraged to draw their own parallels between Protestant and Catholic uses of history. As techniques of historical source criticism became increasingly refined towards the end of the sixteenth century, the elements of the confessionalized interpretation of history stood out more clearly. Readers might, especially, want to reflect on the apparent paradox that the dogmatization of historical interpretation, over the course the period under investigation, increased simultaneously with advances in scholarship. This contradiction challenges the notion of linear, progressive developments in the study of the past. It also makes the case for further detailed case studies about how historical writers continuously redefined not only the bonds that unite history and theology but also the boundaries that separate them.

⁴² On the Council of Trent see now Wim François and Violet Soen (eds.), *The Council of Trent: Reform and Controversy in Europe and Beyond (1545–1700)*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).