

Inventing the “Early Modern” Papacy: Four Paradigms

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“Invention” has become a buzzword in papal historiography of late, with two major publications recently invoking it as a theme.¹ And yet, as A.D. Wright observed twenty years ago, the papacy’s historians have almost always framed the period from Trent to Napoleon through narratives not of invention but of decline.² Older, confessionally-motivated historians saw Catholicism as retrograde and backward, and the German and English Reformations as thus modernizing forces. Many twentieth-century Italian historians, from Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) on, agreed. For them, papal expansion into the temporal sphere was akin to a cancer that had choked off *la forza del destino* and/or Italy’s proper development towards becoming a unified and democratic nation-state. Paolo Prodi (1932–2016), who advanced the most sophisticated variant of this view, argued that the papacy’s expansion into temporal government led to an absurd contradiction between its structures and the ideology which legitimated them—a contradiction that only a violent reset in the nineteenth century could resolve.³ Wright’s original point—worth revisiting—is that such accounts of papal moribundity are incomplete at best. Their focus on what we might now define as facets of the papacy’s ‘hard power’ obscured a very real growth in papal ‘soft power’ and the pope’s cultural influence. This ought to be seen to have prefigured key nineteenth-century developments. The pope’s pastoral mission, Catholic social policy, diplomatic networks, a papal cult of personality all had origins in this period which were worth acknowledging and exploring. The slow gestation of those features to the papacy might even explain why later popes, from Pius IX (r. 1846-78) on, were able to apply them so efficiently when the need to do so was urgent. The successes of the nineteenth-century papacy’s self-reinvention, *the invention of the modern papacy*, in other words, had Tridentine roots.

Stefan Bauer’s new book on the ‘invention’ of papal history treats one part of this story from this period: the creation of a unifying narrative around what the papacy is, was, and should be. However, this essay contextualizes the nineteenth-century papacy more holistically by looking not at Bauer’s work but at Wright’s thesis afresh—and also, by extension, at several earlier paradigms the influence of which Wright sought his critique to displace. The global turn in early modern historiography, which has occurred since Wright wrote, would appear, if anything, to have vindicated his approach. It has certainly greatly increased interest in the Catholic Church’s global reach, in turn stimulating fresh inquiry into Rome’s place within it. Simon Ditchfield, who is writing a history of early modern Catholicism “Papacy and Peoples”, now explicitly seeks not merely to move past Prodi but to anchor analysis of the papacy in

¹ Stefan Bauer, *The Invention of Papal History: Onofrio Panvinio between Renaissance and Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Rosamond McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber Pontificalis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

² A.D. Wright, *The Early Modern Papacy: From the Council of Trent to the French Revolution: 1564-1789* (London: Longman, 2000), 1–2.

³ Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince, One Body and Two Souls: the Papal Monarchy in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Haskins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Italian original: *Il Sovrano Pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982).

discussion of what connected Rome to the Church's global localities.⁴ Other scholars working on the Catholic periphery, such as Tadhg Ó'hAnnracháin, Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, and Christian Windler do the same.⁵ And yet there are aspects to Wright and Ditchfield's new narrative of Catholic cultural hegemony that we might still want to problematize when discussing the papacy's long-term development. Hard power still counts for something in the propagation and projection of soft power; the papacy was an enabler of intellectual repression as much as it was of intellectual enrichment. And early modern papal government was often sclerotic and dysfunctional even compared to the governance of other contemporary states.

The following pages constitute my attempt at presenting the different views that have shaped debate on the papacy and its contributions to histories of early modern Italy and Europe. In the essay, I try to reconcile Wright's paradigm with those of the historians he critiqued to produce a richer picture of the texture of change. My argument is that much has been gained from religious, cultural, and global perspectives but we must continue to integrate their findings with established points of view and, in particular, to engage with the most innovative aspects to had come before. The papacy is a complicated and ever-shifting institution. Understanding that it is always going through processes of invention and re-invention is key to grasping its longevity and success.

Inventing the Tridentine Paradigm

In spite of the global turn, let us begin where historiography about the Counter-Reformation invariably still does: with Trent. Older accounts achieved a remarkable consensus about the Council's importance to both pope and Church, holding it substantially responsible both for shaping the forms early modern Catholicism took and the papacy's role within them. Pius IV (r. 1559–63), the pope who masterminded the Council's resumption in 1561, certainly coaxed the delegates into accepting a remarkable series of statements about papal authority within the Church at its conclusion in 1563. Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623), the Servite friar who was the Council's first historian, argued that the Council's affirmations of papal supremacy hijacked the legitimate cause of Conciliarism to suppress genuine initiatives for reform.⁶ There may have been some truth in this, but Ludwig Pastor (1854–1928) and other Catholic apologists saw it

⁴ Simon Ditchfield, "Tridentine Catholicism," in Alexandra Bamji, Geert Janssen, and Mary Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 15–32, especially 24–28. Idem, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation: Papacy and Peoples in the Early Modern World," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101 (2010): 186–208. Idem, "Papal Prince or Papal Pastor? Beyond the Prodi Paradigm," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 51 (2013): 117–32.

⁵ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Tadhg Ó'hAnnracháin, *Catholic Europe, 1592–1648: Centre and Peripheries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Christian Windler, *Missionaire im Persien. Kulturelle Diversität und Normenkonkurrenz im frühneuzeitlichen Katholizismus (17.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Cologne-Vienna-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2018).

⁶ Paolo Sarpi, *Istoria del concilio di Trento*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 2011). David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104–17.

differently: Trent's decrees included a necessary acknowledgment that popes would need to take a leading role in orchestrating the great flowering of Catholic renewal of the following decades.⁷ Hubert Jedin (1900–80) and Jean Delumeau (1923–2020), the two greatest mid twentieth-century historians of early modern Catholicism, argued that the decrees in fact made it possible for popes to standardize Catholic worship and thus to bring Roman Catholicism into being as a distinct confession within Christianity.⁸ Certainly, Pius IV moved to annex implementation of the decrees to the papal prerogative in the months after the Council's conclusion. Subsequent popes then used them to justify major revisions to the catechism, liturgy, breviary, missal, and Vulgate. *Benedictus Deus* (26th January 1564) set out terms on which Pius graciously ratified the Council's decrees. Christian kings, republics and princes, and all the pope's subordinates in the ecclesiastical hierarchy were to accept his decision and interpretation of the decrees under threat of interdict and in perpetuity.

Historians have long since noted the alacrity with which the popes of the later sixteenth century also set about constructing an infrastructure in Rome for interpreting the Conciliar decrees, and thus for consolidating the authority which they had confirmed in them. Pius IV's Apostolic Constitution *Alias Nos* (2nd August 1564) established the *Sacra Congregatio Cardinalium super executione et observantia sacri concilii Tridentini et alium reformationum huius Pontificis*.⁹ His original Congregation, which had seven cardinals as members, seems to have been intended only to 'implement' the decrees, not to 'interpret' them.¹⁰ Yet subsequent popes expanded the Congregation's functions and altered its operation. Sixtus V's *Aeterni Dei* (1588) entrusted it not only with the decrees' proper interpretation but also with resolving controversial questions relating to them, and monitoring the activities of provincial councils which sought to implement them locally.¹¹ Gregory XIV's *Ut securitati conscientiae* (1591) gave the Congregation the right to issue its resolutions in the name of the pontiff (*nomine Papae*).¹² The jurist Prospero Fagnani (1588–1678), who served as the Congregation's Secretary in the 1620s and 1630s, presented the Congregation's activities as a simple bureaucratic process of clarification: those who wished to have the law interpreted submitted a request; the Congregation took evidence, conferred, and adjudicated. Appeals against the Congregation's decision were possible in theory—because the pope personally had the final say—but the Congregation's decisions were revised only rarely, typically in the event of a material change in circumstances.¹³

⁷ Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, trans. Ralph Francis Kerr (40 volumes, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891-1953). See 15:366–78 for Pastor's assessment of Trent's significance, in particular 370–71 on its view of the papacy.

⁸ Hubert Jedin, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, various translators (4th edition, 4 vols., Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009-10). Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (London: Burns & Oates, 1977).

⁹ Pius IV, "Alias nos" (2nd August 1564), in Luigi Tomassetti et al. (eds.), *Bullarium Romanum: Bullarum diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum: taurinensis editio* (24 vols., Turin: Franco & Dalmazzo, 1857–72), 7: 300–01.

¹⁰ Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni* (103 vols., Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1840–61), 16:170.

¹¹ Sixtus V, "Aeterni Dei" (22nd January 1588), in Tomassetti, *Bullarium Romanum*, 8:991.

¹² Gregory XIV, "Ut securitati conscientiae" (22nd February 1591), in Tomassetti, *Bullarium Romanum*, 9:391–92.

Importantly, the Congregation conveyed its ruling only to the original litigants and with minimal commentary: they were neither published nor promulgated and were not to be reproduced.

Paolo Prodi advanced an important argument about the effects of these developments, which was also to be the foundation of his wider critique of the papacy's early modern structures. Rulings of the Congregation bound the whole Church and were retroactive, meaning that they potentially affected all existing practices. Those who wished to know how a ruling from the Congregation would affect them had to apply to the Congregation to seek their own clarification. At the same time, rulings were not subject to any particular form of legal reasoning: the papal plenitude of authority allowed the pope or his delegates within the Congregation to decide on any basis. *Benedictus Deus* banned reporting of decisions and glossing of them precisely to avoid scrutiny of this papal prerogative—but it therefore also effectively consigned Canon Law, the great jurisprudential framework by which medieval popes had regulated the known world, to the status of arbitrary diktat: the law was simply what the pope or his representative said he wanted it to be. In one sense, this simply brought the philosophy of Canon Law into line with the law codes of secular monarchies. Like the pope, many secular princes claimed a power to legislate *de legibus absolutus* and thus not to be bound by wider conventions or traditions. And we can overstate the extent to which canonists abandoned jurisprudence: they still used earlier legal reasoning and decisions in their arguments; such reasoning and decisions just carried less force.¹⁴ Thus, in another sense, Trent transformed Canon Law from an inheritance accumulated from the whole Church into a more explicit system of (nominally personal) papal fiat.¹⁵ This had serious implications, not least for the study of Canon Law, which could now be accomplished only by rote learning of rules and therefore declined precipitously everywhere except Rome.¹⁶ The fact that such a large proportion of papal legislation in this period regulated the pope's own temporal domains only exacerbated the situation further. Many of the canonists after Trent simply ignored this reality. For Domenico Toschi (1535–1620), for instance, the pope enjoyed his plenitude just as he had always done. Toschi only referenced the *de facto* local administrative purpose of much papal legislation in an addendum that “certain goods are in the care of the Church and the pope deals with them in his role of public person”.¹⁷ In Toschi's defence, popes and their supporters faced a paradox which could not be easily reconciled: the pope's law was only valid in Rome because it was valid universally. Neither pope nor canonist could ever admit that it was not universal without also suggesting that it was not valid.

¹³ Propsero Fagnani, *Commentaria in Quinque libros Decretalium* (Cologne: Casonus, 1661), chapter “Quoniam de Constitutionibus”, n.58, vol. 1, part 1: 184–85.

¹⁴ For further remarks on this see Willibald Plöchl, *Geschichte des Kirchenrechts, Das katholische Kirchenrecht der Neuzeit*, (5 vols., Vienna: Herold, 1953–69), 3:61–102. On the development of the specific canons in this period, see Plöchl, *Geschichte des Kirchenrechts*, vol. 5.

¹⁵ On this point, see also Gerard Fransen, “L'application des décrets du Concile de Trent. Les débuts d'un nominalisme canonique,” *L'année canonique* 27 (1983): 5–16.

¹⁶ Paul Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 443–73.

¹⁷ “Quia quaedam bona sunt patrimonii Ecclesiae, et in istis Papa contrahit tanquam publica persona.” Domenico Toschi, *Practicarum conclusionum iuris in omni foro frequentiorum* (8 vols., Rome: Aloysio Zannetti, 1606), conclusio 46, “Papa habet duplicem administrationem in Ecclesia & quam,” 6:47.

While popes had to grapple with this paradox, Catholic princes did not: the changes to Canon Law which Trent precipitated gave them fresh grounds to assert the primacy of their law over Canon Law within their own kingdoms. The processes by which such princes effectively began to subordinate Church to state long pre-dated 1563, but they also accelerated after that date. One key measure was in the recognition of the Tridentine decrees themselves, which was everywhere accomplished only after royal prerogatives had been reserved; implementation was also slow and took an idiosyncratic form determined by each crown. Royal control over senior Church appointments, already well advanced in some kingdoms, now led to wholesale ‘nationalization’ of episcopates.¹⁸ Likewise, royal access to ecclesiastical revenues (in particular the fruits of vacant office) grew substantially. Popes had limited tools to resist this incursion into areas of what they still regarded as their own prerogative. Spiritual sanction was one, but the infamous Venetian Interdict of 1606–07 showed that up as completely ineffective.¹⁹ Coercion might have been another, but no Catholic princes were willing to wage war against their neighbours in support of papal rights which they also disputed within their own territories. Negotiation was the third—and here popes recognized royal rights over national churches in return for certain specific forms of support (for instance, the Spanish gifts and loans which contributed so much to the building of St Peter’s).²⁰ Popes drew the line only in a small number of high-profile cases in which senior clerics with connections to Rome were subjected to royal justice without a right of exemption. The heresy trial of Bartolomé Carranza (1503–76) from 1558–68 was one; the tribulations of Melchior Khlesl (1562–1630) between 1618 and 1628, and of Giulio Alberoni (1664–1752) in 1720–21, were others.²¹ Yet in each of these cases it cost the

¹⁸ The literature on this subject is substantial. See, in particular, Joseph Bergin, “The Counter-Reformation Church and its Bishops,” *Past & Present* 165 (1999): 30–73. Idem, *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589-1661* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Change and Continuity in the French Episcopate: The Bishops and the Wars of Religion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986). Helen Rawlings, “The Secularisation of Castilian Episcopal Office under the Habsburgs, c. 1516–1700,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987): 53–70. José Pedro Paiva, “The Appointment of Bishops in Early Modern Portugal, 1495–1777,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 97 (2011): 461–83. Claudio Donati, “Vescovi e diocesi d’Italia dall’età post-tridentina alla caduta dell’antico regime,” in Mario Rosa (ed.), *Clero e società nell’Italia moderna* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 321–89. Wieslaw Müller, “L’Episcopat polonais à l’époque posttridentine,” *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 8 (1987): 373–82. Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Politica e carriera ecclesiastiche nel secolo xvii: i vescovi veneti fra Roma e Venezia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993).

¹⁹ A.D. Wright, “Why the Venetian Interdict?,” *The English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 534–50. Idem, “The Venetian view of Church and State: Catholic Erastianism?,” *Studi Seicenteschi* 19 (1978): 75–106. For a narrative account, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 25:111–83.

²⁰ Thomas J. Dandele, “Paying for the New St. Peter’s: Contributions to the Construction of the New Basilica from Spanish Lands, 1506-1620,” in Thomas J. Dandele and John A. Marino (eds.), *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion, 1500-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 181–96.

²¹ José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras, “Sondeo en el proceso romano del arzobispo Carranza,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 3 (1965): 193–238. Idem, *El proceso romano del Arzobispo Carranza (1567–1576)* (Rome: Iglesia Nacional Española, 1988). Johann Rainer, “Der Prozess gegen Kardinal Khlesl,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 5 (1963): 35–163. Antonino Arata, *Il processo del cardinale Alberoni* (Piacenza: Collegio Alberoni, 1923). More generally, see Joseph Bergin, “Cardinals as National Politicians,” in Mary Hollingsworth, Miles

secular prince little to acquiesce to papal demands for custody of the cleric in question (and perhaps even rather suited them to do so). In other respects, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a tightening of the royal grip and a decline in papal capacity to intervene, even before the most substantial reforms of Joseph II of Austria (r. 1780–90) and the other ‘Enlightened despots.’

Paolo Prodi’s Paradigm

Paolo Prodi’s thesis about the early modern papacy engaged this wider European picture. However, its primary concern was political and administrative developments within Italy: Prodi argued that what occurred in Rome from the second half of the sixteenth century on was neither a result of the Reformation specifically, nor of religious factors in general, but rather reflected an inherent contradiction between the pope’s two roles as spiritual pastor and also as temporal prince. As spiritual pastor, the pope claimed a universal mandate over Christendom but as temporal prince he needed to construct an apparatus for governing a specific set of territories, all of which came with their own very idiosyncratic problems and issues. Medieval popes had ruled their temporal state in an essentially ad hoc fashion, but the popes after the Western Schism sought to consolidate it as a buffer against the twin threats of Conciliarism and secular interference. This meant rolling-out a more substantial and institutionalized apparatus of government; it also meant developing deeper relationships with the Italian elites on whose support papal rule would ultimately depend.²² In Prodi’s view, the grand bargain popes struck with Italian elites proved to be something of a Faustian pact: developments taken to govern the pope’s temporal state simultaneously undermined the papal claims to universal leadership on which the legitimacy of their local government rested. For Prodi, the years around 1650 brought the fork in the road: popes had to decide which identity to commit to, and their pursuit of temporal government had concomitant negative effects on their ability to project pastoral authority beyond their realm after this date.

Prodi’s arguments have had important consequences. First, they have largely removed religion from the explanation of early modern papal reinvention: papal developments (especially failures) were not in the religious field per se but rather in the ability to control that field at the same time as the political field. Secondly, Prodi’s arguments allowed him to champion the papacy as a pioneer of developments in state-building and state finance later taken up elsewhere. Indeed, two of Prodi’s best-known phrases from *Il Sovrano Pontefice*—both appearing multiple times—refer to the “clericalization of the state” and the “Italianization of the Church.” By “clericalization of the state” he meant the process by which roles which had hitherto been almost exclusively fulfilled by laymen were now assigned to ecclesiastics. The temporal governance of

Pattenden, and Arnold Witte (eds.), *A Companion to the Early Modern Cardinal* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 211–27.

²² The English scholar Peter Partner also, independently, developed a similar and influential thesis which drew on his training in Oxford under the medievalist K. Bruce McFarlane, *The Papal State under Martin V: The Administration and Government of the Temporal Power in the Early Fifteenth Century* (London: British School at Rome, 1958).

the Papal States was his case in point: a complex web of papal governorships (and, in senior cases, legateships) evolved to enforce papal rule. But this nexus of new appointments did not rationalize the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Rather, it extended it in new directions and created additional entanglements. Prodi explored the conflicts generated between the Archbishop of Bologna Gabriele Paleotti (1522–97) and the city’s papal legates at length in a series of publications.²³ Some have questioned the true nature of Paleotti’s struggles and also how widely they were really replicated elsewhere.²⁴ Nevertheless, many have accepted the premise of Prodi’s position that different branches of the pope’s church-state were simply superimposed on each other without much effort to clarify their respective competences or jurisdictions. Prodi believed this was a deliberate papal policy designed to ensure that the pope himself could always claim the final say. However, even if true, it had unintended effects: for one thing, it made it hard for the pope, or those close to him, to know what was being done in his name. For another, it created a large number of offices and committees in Rome, the most important of which were the Congregations of Cardinals, that the politically ambitious or upwardly mobile were incentivized to fill.²⁵

The system of Congregations undoubtedly assisted popes in developing the broad portfolio of activities discussed below. But it also unquestionably embedded Italian political elites in the papacy’s institutional structures to an unprecedented degree—hence Prodi’s second aphorism “Italianization of the Church”. Many medieval popes had been drawn from central Italy’s local nobility in the period before the curia’s move to Avignon in 1309. However, the papal bureaucracy was still small at that stage and was never to this point fully Italianized. Now, however, the papal bureaucracy had grown large enough to support hundreds of scions from families drawn across all Italian regions. The process by which these families ‘colonized’ the papacy began almost immediately after the papacy’s return to Rome in 1420 and expanded significantly after Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84) began to sell offices venally on a substantial scale. Thomas Frenz, in a detailed study of the period 1471–1527, has calculated that Italians obtained a majority of all appointments at that time by a ratio of 6:4 but the effects were most marked at the highest levels.²⁶ Italians constituted a majority of all promotions to the College of Cardinals in every pontificate after 1455 except that of Alexander VI; from 1559 until the Risorgimento they never comprised less than a full two-thirds of the entire College.²⁷ In conclaves, Italian voters rarely dropped below 80% after 1500, which explains why there were no non-Italian popes after Adrian VI (r. 1522–23). The choice of only Italian popes was probably not a product

²³ See, most importantly, Paolo Prodi, *Il Cardinale Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597)* (2 vols., Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1959–67).

²⁴ Dermot Fenlon, “The Papal Prince. One body two souls: the papal monarchy in early modern Europe by Paolo Prodi,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 120–27.

²⁵ On the congregations, see, besides Prodi, Niccolò del Re, *La Curia Romana: lineamenti storico-giuridici* (4th edition, Vatican City: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 1998). Christoph Weber, *Die ältesten päpstlichen Staats-Handbücher. Elenchus congregationem Tribunalium et collegiorum Urbis 1629–1714* (Rome: Herder, 1991). Miles Pattenden, “The Roman Curia,” in Pamela Jones, Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield (eds.), *A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 44–59.

²⁶ Thomas Frenz, *Die Kanzlei der Päpste der Hochrenaissance (1471–1527)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), 240–41.

²⁷ John Broderick, “The Sacred College of Cardinals: Size and Geographical Composition (1099–1986),” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 25 (1987): 7–71, at 43–44, 46–47.

of xenophobia but rather reflected the shared background and cultural formation of many Italian *porporati* and their suspicion of those who had won promotion to the College via other routes. So dense was the nexus of political and social connections amongst Italian cardinals by the eighteenth century that forty out of the fifty-six cardinals who took part in the conclave of 1721 were related to former popes.²⁸ A focus on the cardinal nephew diminished after Innocent XII (r. 1691–1700) formally ‘abolished’ nepotism in 1692. However, what replaced it was not a policy of meritocracy but rather a more general form of kinship preference of the kind which was rife in almost every sphere of early modern life.²⁹

Italianization may in fact also explain both the rise and fall of that well-known phenomenon of the ‘cardinal nephew’ in this period.³⁰ That institution began because the pope was often elderly and needed a minister of unimpeachable loyalty to deputize for him across the many assorted tasks of papal business. Having a cardinal nephew solved that problem efficiently because—except in exceptional circumstances—everyone could work within the fiction that orders from him really came from his uncle. A cardinal nephew’s authority was necessarily time-limited: it could not survive beyond his uncle’s pontificate so there was little point in him expending political influence to try to maintain it in the same form over a longer term (as royal favourites were wont to do in other European monarchies). However, nepotism also brought with it fabulous costs—a point the German scholar Wolfgang Reinhard has made.³¹ Each cardinal nephew typically needed to acquire more resources than his predecessor had done so that he could be sure to build the robust networks of patronage needed to dominate curial politics.³² Eventually, nepotism may have ended because the wider oligarchy which held papal office was simply no longer willing or able to bear the costs of this approach, especially as the wider social bonds binding its members together were growing ever stronger. Tellingly, the rise of the

²⁸ Broderick, “The Sacred College of Cardinals,” 124.

²⁹ For a fuller discussion of this point, and the literature on the decline of nepotism, see Miles Pattenden, *Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 244–54. Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della Curia nepotistica: Papi, nipoti e burocrazia curiale tra XVIIe XVII secolo* (Rome: Viella, 1999) remains the most important Italian contribution to debate.

³⁰ The literature on ‘cardinal nephews’ is very substantial. See, in particular, Wolfgang Reinhard, “Nepotismus: Der Funktionswandel einer papstgeschichtlichen Konstanten,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 86 (1975): 145–85. Birgit Emich, “The Cardinal Nephew,” in Mary Hollingsworth, Miles Pattenden, and Arnold Witte (eds.), *A Companion to the Early Modern Cardinal* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 71–87. Miles Pattenden, *Pius IV and the Fall of the Carafa: Nepotism and Papal Authority in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³¹ Wolfgang Reinhard, *Papstfinanz und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621)*, (2 vols., Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1974). Volker Reinhardt, *Kardinal Scipione Borghese (1605–1633): Vermögen, Finanzen und sozialer Aufstieg eines Papstnepoten* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984).

³² On the patronage system surrounding the cardinal nephew, see Wolfgang Reinhard, “Papal Power and Family Strategy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Ronald Asch and Adolf Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age* (London and Oxford: German Historical Institute and Oxford University Press, 1991), 329–56. Idem, *Paul V. Borghese (1605–1621). Mikropolitische Papstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2009). Birgit Emich, *Bürokratie und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621). Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Mikropolitik in Rom* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2001).

Secretariate of State, a key feature of papal ‘modernity’ which accompanied this development, did not lead to a more ‘modern’ system of government immediately but rather to a modified distribution of responsibilities and spoils.³³ *Ancien Régime* Rome, as it aged, thus began to look rather more like pre-Medicean Florence or early modern Venice in its politics than its own earlier self—and this would have profound implications for how its major political actors responded to the challenges that followed.

Adriano Prospero’s Paradigm

Before presenting Wright’s critique of Prodi it is worth delving into a second paradigm within the Italian historiography which perhaps pre-dated, but later developed in uneasy symbiosis with, Prodi’s views. This paradigm is best represented historiographically by Delio Cantimori (1904–66) and Luigi Firpo (1915–89) in the post-War generation and, above all, by Adriano Prospero and Massimo Firpo in the later twentieth century. The paradigm posited the papacy to have been an agent of oppression within Italy, both directly on its own account and as an enabler of the machinations of the Holy Office.³⁴ Benedetto Croce, who had previously observed how the Church had stifled Italian cultural and intellectual life in the two centuries after 1600, could be said to have been a formative figure in the paradigm’s development.³⁵ However, these anticlerical historians who followed him set their stall to explain far more fully both the motivations behind that process and the mechanics by which it was accomplished. Prospero, who focused on the role of the Holy Office in instigating regimes of social disciplining around the peninsula, showed how Italian minds were controlled by a variety of tools including, and above all, the confessional (the Church’s ‘tribunal of conscience’, in his pithy turn of phrase).³⁶ Firpo, more aggressively, has argued for a general take-over of power within the Italian Church by hard-line zealots who sought to eradicate dissent by branding it ‘heresy’; he has also stressed the importance of avoiding too clean a distinction amongst sixteenth-century clerics between *zelanti* (the hard-liners) and the better-known *spirituali* (apparently more open-minded clerics who were willing to engage with the Protestants at a theological and liturgical level).³⁷ In Firpo’s view, the

³³ Antonio Menniti Ippolito, “The Secretariat of State as the pope’s special ministry,” in Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (eds.), *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492–1700* (2002, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 132–57.

³⁴ On this historiography, see Neil Tarrant, “On the Origins of Enlightenment: The Fruits of Migration in the Italian Liberal Historiographical Tradition,” in Cornel Zwierlein and Vincenzo Lavenia (eds.), *Fruits of Migration: Heterodox Italian Migrants and Central European Culture, 1550–1620* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 362–81.

³⁵ Benedetto Croce, *Storia dell’età barocca in Italia: pensiero—poesia et letteratura—vita morale*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1993). On Croce’s anticlericalism, see S. William Halperin, “Italian Anticlericalism, 1871–1914,” *The Journal of Modern History* 19 (1947): 18–34. Neil Tarrant, “Science, Religion, and Italy’s Seventeenth-Century Decline: From Francesco de Sanctis to Benedetto Croce,” *Zygon* 54 (2019): 1125–44.

³⁶ Adriano Prospero, *Tribunali della coscienza: Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (2nd edition, Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

³⁷ Massimo Firpo, *La presa di potere dell’inquisizione romana, 1550–1553* (Rome: Laterza, 2014).

urge to shape and control could be found amongst all groups within the Roman curia's upper echelons, with concomitant effects on both papal policy and its implementation. The cases against Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), and Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) were the most notorious outputs of this inquisitorial agenda but they only reflected a wider pattern which eased only gradually—and then largely because inquisitorial methods, including censorship of texts and ideas, were increasingly ineffective in the face of societal developments and technological change.

For Prosperi, the confessional became one of the main outward manifestations of this new-found ecclesiastical agenda in favour of social control. Carlo Borromeo (1538–84) famously pioneered it during his stewardship of the archdiocese of Milan from the late 1560s to the mid 1580s, and his work in that respect has been the subject of an important study by Wietse de Boer.³⁸ Borromeo's pastoral interventions as archbishop focused on intense policing of immoral (and thus prohibited) acts of all kinds: fornication, merriments such as dancing, excesses of consumption, gambling and games of chance. Borromeo sought to enforce his confessional regime through a variety of coercive measures, including (but not limited to) indicting serious offenders in the episcopal court, reviving public penance, reserving absolution to his personal judgment, and limiting the availability of times and spaces where sin could occur. Later archbishops of Milan modified the severity of some of Borromeo's strictures, but they retained the essence of his model. Moreover, that model of social discipline (*Sozialdisziplinierung*, in the jargon of the German scholars whose work on "Confessionalization" inspired it),³⁹ soon spread across the rest of Italy. Ecclesiastical censors, who attended to the urgent tasks of purging error from written texts and preventing the circulation of erroneous ones, like catechistic missionaries, who travelled the country to educate the populace in true religion, complemented episcopal efforts. In Prosperi's judgment, and that of his collaborators and intellectual heirs, these developments, in effect, precipitated an untimely defeat for the Italian people at the hands of an over-austere clergy. And, like Prodi, Prosperi was inclined to emphasize the paradoxical 'modernity' of the clerical campaign: the Holy Office, the Confessional, the Index, and the mission were all, in a sense, innovative ideas that looked forward to further developments in European History.

The crux of Prosperi's argument was thus that clerical control led to the creation of a generally supine laity that had lost important elements of its vitality and intellectual expression. But the papacy fitted into this story because it provided its initial point of departure. Borromeo, like other key figures in the generation that unleashed the clergy's confessional regime, spent his formative years at the papal court in Rome—in his case as Pius IV's 'cardinal nephew', and thus a major actor in the organization and management of the Council in its final phase. The popes who immediately preceded and followed Pius, Paul IV (r. 1555–59) and Pius V (r. 1566–72), were both also significant figures in this story. Paul IV had been a member of Paul III's reform commission (*de Ecclesia Emendanda*) in the 1530s and was a key agitator in favour of the Holy Office's instigation in 1542. Pius V was Paul IV's trusted lieutenant, the man who streamlined inquisitorial processes in the later 1550s and who then, as pope, gave the Holy Office full license

³⁸ Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

³⁹ For a summary of the debates and models around Confessionalization and Social Disciplining, see Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Confessionalization," in Alexandra Bamji, Geert Janssen, and Mary Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 33–53.

in the later 1560s. Reform-minded cardinals at the papal court, most notably Giovanni Morone (1509–72), were victims of their inquisitorial intrigues.⁴⁰ But, of course, the intersections between the papacy and Holy Office did not end with Pius V. Two further popes, Sixtus V (r. 1585–90) and Innocent IX (r. 1591) emerged from the next generation of Italian inquisitors and, like Pius V, they proved instrumental in advancing the cause of social disciplining throughout the papal territories and in Rome itself. Gigliola Fragnito, Paolo Broggio, and Saverio Ricci have all seen the Holy Office as having reached the zenith of its power and influence within the Curia during the 1590s. Fragnito, in particular, has produced an arresting account of how inquisitors influenced Clement VIII (r. 1592–1605) to insert a clause in the 1596 Index of Prohibited Books that overruled key rights of bishops to decide on the permissibility of Bible translations.⁴¹ Broggio has discussed the tensions between Clement and the inquisitor Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) over the pope’s right to adjudicate theological controversies over the heads of inquisitors.⁴² Various scholars have also chronicled the bitter struggle fought by inquisitorial opponents to prevent the inquisitor Giulio Antonio Santori (1532–1602) being elected pope in any of the four conclaves from September 1590 to January 1592.⁴³

A big part of the Prosperi paradigm concerned the long-term effects of this revolution in papal government, as it played out over a long period. Indeed, in Prosperi’s own words “Italy has paid the price for religious unity in terms of an intolerance that is as deep as it is subconscious.”⁴⁴ But how far was the papacy specifically responsible for that? The very presence of forces who wished to resist Santori’s election in the conclaves of the 1590s underlines the difficulties that the Holy Office faced in any efforts to attain true dominance in Rome. And the lack of inquisitor-popes through the seventeenth century might also be said to support a thesis about eventual limits to its power and influence. Antonio Gramsci, critiquing Benedetto Croce, also made a further point which offers a valuable riposte to the top-down paradigm of censorship and control: the Church’s efforts to maintain a gap between intellectuals and the masses in Italy were often based on a popular grounding.⁴⁵ Other recent work on leading seventeenth-century bishops, notably in English—Thomas Deutscher on Carlo Bascapé and Celeste McNamara on Gregorio Barbarigo—has raised a possible third objection: neither pope nor reforming bishops really had the resources to impose much of a programme, any programme, systematically.⁴⁶ Maria Teresa

⁴⁰ Massimo Firpo and Dario Marcato (eds.), *Il processo inquisitoriale del cardinal Giovanni Morone: edizione critica* (6 vols., Rome, Istituto storico italiano per l’età moderna, 1981–1995).

⁴¹ Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al Rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura, 1471–1605* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

⁴² Paolo Broggio, *La teologia e la politica: controversie dottrinali, Curia romana e monarchia spagnola tra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Olschki, 2009), 94–123.

⁴³ Miles Pattenden, “The Conclaves of 1590 to 1592: An Electoral Crisis of the Early Modern Papacy?,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44 (2013): 391–410. Agostino Borromeo, “España y el problema de la elección papal de 1592,” *Cuadernos de investigación histórica* 2 (1978): 75–200.

⁴⁴ “[Italia è]... un Paese che ha pagato la sua unità religiosa con un’intolleranza tanto più profonda, quanto meno consapevole,” Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 184.

⁴⁵ See Takahiro Chino, “Religion, Common Sense, and Good Sense in Gramsci,” in Francesca Antonini, Aaron Bernstein, Lorenzo Fusaro, and Robert Jackson (eds.), *Revisiting Gramsci’s Notebooks* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 285–96.

⁴⁶ Thomas Deutscher, *Punishment and Penance Two Phases in the History of the Bishop’s Tribunal of Novara* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). Celeste McNamara, *The Bishop’s Burden: Reforming the Catholic Church in Early Modern Italy* (Washington, DC:

Fattori has written of Benedict XIV's 'relaunch' of the 'Tridentine' reform programme only in the 1740s, when resources were more plentiful and conditions apparently more propitious.⁴⁷ That in itself seems telling. And all of this comes before consideration of the tensions between bishops, and their agenda, and the multiple competing agendas which arose within the papal court. Partly for that reason, the Prosperi paradigm needs to be applied with caution. Nevertheless, it remains notable for its willingness to tackle difficult and unpleasant subjects that sometimes confront Catholic scholarship with harsh truths.

Anthony Wright's Paradigm

Wright's stated aim in writing was to correct what he perceived as the one-sided natures of both the Prodi account and its concurrent anticlerical variants and successors. Yes, the papacy had fared poorly in some respects in the centuries after 1563, but this needed to be set in the context of real and substantial achievements. The papacy's Italianization, and the concomitant "clericalization of the state," had allowed for an unprecedented flowering of the visual arts in Rome and elsewhere; they had made a substantial source of resources available to popes and thus also facilitated the development of a distinct Roman aesthetic within Catholicism. Who now could look at the beauty of the Roman baroque—at the works of Bernini and Borromini; or at the paintings of Carracci or Caravaggio—and not marvel? Rome herself remained (or, rather, became) a hugely important cosmopolitan metropolis which punched significantly above her weight in economic terms on account of her status as a destination for pilgrims and because of her cultural production. More than this the 'Prodi paradigm' of Papal Pastor versus Papal Prince obscured a still greater complexity to the pope's identity and nature. The pope had some six separate roles in this period: Bishop of Rome, Metropolitan of the Roman province, Primate of Italy, Patriarch of the West, Supreme Pontiff, and Papal Prince. For Wright, it generalized too far to claim that popes failed in their duties to discharge their roles with respect to all these offices; indeed, the interplay and conflict between their duties in roles other than as papal prince was perhaps as significant in driving papal history forward as anything inherent in Prodi's simple binary.⁴⁸ Popes' extraordinary contributions to the growth of charity and welfare provision needed to be acknowledged in particular, Wright contended. However, the bottom line was also that popes managed to keep the Roman Catholic confession together after 1563, with only the minor loss of the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht in 1701; they also oversaw the process by which Roman Catholicism not Protestantism became the world's first truly global religion. Both these things needed explaining and that could not be done purely with reference to the intersection of universal ideals and local Italian politics. Rather, it required a more generous and holistic survey of papal activities which placed popes' local concerns in Italy in broader context.

Like Prodi's book, Wright's focused on administration and processes: the methods by which popes consolidated, or sought to consolidate, their power. But where Prodi located sources of sclerosis Wright emphasized what went right: those fields in which popes did indeed extend their influence and set new trajectories in motion. Moreover, though both Wright and Prodi

Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

⁴⁷ Maria Teresa Fattori, *Benedetto XIV e Trento. Tradurre il concilio nel Settecento* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2015).

⁴⁸ Wright states his case, summarized here, in *The Early Modern Papacy*, 14–24.

acknowledged the variability with which the pope was able to exercise his power between pontificates, and even within pontificates, Wright saw this in a rather more positive light than Prodi: achievements should not be measured simply against claims but rather against capacity to achieve. Universal leadership was an unrealizable goal—and, in that sense, popes with limited resources did well to realize even part of their ambitions when the default state of affairs was *not to achieve*. And yet popes built up credible processes for auditing their diocese and province, for exercising leadership within the Italian church (for instance, in the appointment of other bishops), and for sustaining dialogues with third parties who contested their power (i.e. Catholic princes and Orthodox bishops). The administration they developed to do this was effective and substantial. Nunciatures (i.e. permanent delegations at Catholic courts) were perhaps its most visible part: these grew substantially from the second half of the sixteenth century and often involved Italian bishops seconded from their dioceses (the breach of residency rules notwithstanding). But the ties created by cardinals, who served as ‘protectors’ of different orders or groups within the Church, and by the curial congregations – some of which, like the Propaganda Fide, developed interests and networks of clerics who reported to them across the globe – were just as important.⁴⁹ Popes and cardinals could use these networks to transmit and procure both goods and information, which enhanced their knowledge of local affairs across the Catholic world and increased Rome’s cosmopolitan allure. Even the Jesuits, with their vow of loyalty to the pope, could be viewed as representing an achievement in this category, for they too reported to Rome and spread papal priorities to the Catholic frontier. All this was possible because many of the senior clerics in Rome, though Italian and intimately enmeshed with local dynastic concerns, were also deeply pious and interested in evangelization: they thus encouraged all activities they believed would help bring new societies closer to their Christian God.

Simon Ditchfield has recently taken this rehabilitation of the early modern papacy to even greater lengths: he argues that the papacy’s real genius lay not in its ability to impose uniformity in the manner that Hubert Jedin described (or even that Wright implies) but rather in papal willingness to recognize and enable local variety.⁵⁰ Popes achieved cultural hegemony by licensing and regulating religious expression across a wide spectrum, shaping its spontaneity, and creating ties that bound it into an overall structure. For Ditchfield, this allowed for ‘the particular’ to be preserved but also for it to be incorporated into the universal. Popes, but, in particular, the cardinals who worked for them on the curial Congregations, were kept busy by endless demand for decisions to legitimize home-grown practices and beliefs, rites, relics, and even saints. The ‘Prodi paradigm’ has proved deficient because it overlooks this key development. We might think of it another way too: medieval popes acquired their power and prestige through their production and distribution of judicial decisions concerning a vast array of cases over which they claimed jurisdiction in Canon Law. But early modern popes, with that option no longer open to them, did not abandon this model of business; rather, they deepened it within a perhaps narrower, but certainly more expressly religious and cultural, field. Popes thus continued to extend their influence, but in ways that were less prone to being perceived as a

⁴⁹ On this, see (most recently) Giovanni Pizzorusso, *Propaganda Fide. La congregazione pontificia e la giurisdizione sulle missioni* (Rome: Edizioni Storia e Letteratura, 2022) and also the essays in Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Missions* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

⁵⁰ Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Idem, “Tridentine Catholicism,” 15–31.

direct challenge to a prince's claims to sovereignty or a violation of a state's internal jurisdiction. Few serious controversies were generated in which local churches either refused to seek papal recognition (when pressed) or refused to accept papal verdicts. The infamous Malabar and Chinese Rites disputes are the best known episodes where contention arose, but they occurred in the periphery of the Catholic world where a complex mix of politics as well as theological concerns intersected problems of distance and communication.⁵¹ Elsewhere what remains remarkable is how far many local churches did indeed submit to Rome and how much variety Rome generally tolerated in return—two things which perhaps go a long way to explaining how Catholicism came to be embedded so successfully in the cultural systems of so many diverse global societies.

Wright's further point, which perhaps also anticipates Ditchfield, is that this transformation and recognition of local Catholicisms was not a one-way process. Wright writes about what we might term the "loyalty of the people," by which he seems to mean how the papacy inserted itself into local religious contexts even as it regulated and licensed them. John O'Malley has observed independently that "papalization"—that is, the huge increase in the papacy's centrality to Catholic experience—has in fact been the *most important* trend in Catholic History over the past millennium.⁵² For O'Malley, the roots of this trend may have first been set down by Protestants in anti-Catholic tropes (the pope as 'Anti-Christ', etc), but the association of Catholicism with fealty to the pope still long pre-dated its nineteenth-century formalization in doctrines of Ultramontanism. Papal leadership of the Church did not survive simply because of popes' own actions nor because of those of their subordinates: it depended on the values and opinions of Catholics in local communities. Nevertheless, devotion to the pope, of the kind we might detect in the martyr cults of Pius VI, VII, or IX, was not a particular feature of early modern Catholicism, even as late as the mid eighteenth century. Early modern popes, although they often presented themselves as saintly figures, found it difficult to get themselves canonized. Of the early modern popes, only Pius V achieved sainthood in the period (he was beatified in 1672 and canonized in 1712). Innocent XI (r. 1676–89) and Benedict XIII (r. 1721–24) came close, but the processes in their favour stalled. A few medieval popes (Leo III, Gregory VII, Gregory X, and Benedict XI) were also canonized or beatified between 1584 and 1736. Stefan Bauer perhaps supplies an answer to this paradox of a lack of papal sanctity: as he and others have noted, it was all too easy for a former pope's candidacy to fail simply because it conflicted with the reigning pope's priorities or otherwise appeared implicitly critical of him.⁵³ We might argue that the large number of books about popes—including lives of individual popes and compendia of papal lives, or of lives of popes and cardinals—also attests to a broad audience receptive to seeing the pope as a witness to the authenticity of Church tradition.⁵⁴ But, equally, it

⁵¹ On the Rites controversies, see the essays in Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Ines G. Županov (eds.), *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

⁵² John O'Malley, *Catholic History for Today's Church: How our Past illuminates our Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 8.

⁵³ Bauer, *The Invention of Papal History*, 150–57. See also, Simon Ditchfield, "How Not to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint: The Attempted Canonization of Pope Gregory X, 1622–45," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992): 379–422. Miles Pattenden, "Antonio de Fuenmayor's Life of Pius V: a pope in early modern Spanish Historiography," *Renaissance Studies* 32 (2018): 183–200.

⁵⁴ Bauer, *The Invention of Papal History*. Miles Pattenden and Arnold Witte, "The Early Modern Historiography of Early Modern Cardinals," in Mary Hollingsworth, Miles Pattenden, and

might be that only Pius VI's journey to Vienna in 1782—the first by a pope outside his own state for nearly two-hundred-and-fifty years—awakened popes to the possibilities of exploiting their spiritual reputation. Certainly, huge crowds turned out to see Pius and support him in his negotiations with the Austrian emperor, much to the latter's embarrassment and annoyance.⁵⁵

Towards a Possible Synthesis of Paradigms

My purpose in writing this chapter was to propose a synthesis of views that could provide a backbone for new interpretations of papal history in a later period. So what is it? Because we have gained so considerably from the insights of historians setting the papacy in global perspective, we must also acknowledge the on-going value of Prodi, Prosperi, and Firpo's contributions. Prodi, in particular, made the papacy more Italian but also more readily comparable to other state actors across the Alps, and this has greatly advanced our ability to integrate it into a wider history of the state in Europe. Prosperi and Firpo, on the other hand, have fostered a further generation of scholarship which has interrogated more specific mechanics of ecclesiastical regimes of censorship, its place within the broader history of ideas, and its impacts in particular areas of Italian cultural and scientific life. The results of these inquiries have been remarkably varied, which attests to the flexibility of the paradigm within which they have worked. Some scholars like Maurice Finocchiaro, Giorgio Caravale, and Gigliola Fragnito emphasize the heavy-handedness and also the ineffectiveness of the inquisitors' efforts (which nevertheless still had damaging effects).⁵⁶ Others, like Thomas Mayer and Christopher Black have been concerned much more with understanding and recording the rules by which the Holy Office operated and how it created new bureaucratic procedures which showed a sophisticated and subtle appreciation of how to apply law.⁵⁷ Neither view is complete of itself, in the end. Berating the behaviour or values of men who lived four hundred years ago is not especially productive of itself. However, merely explaining the reasonableness of papal inquisitors risks credible accusations of moral cowardice.⁵⁸ If there is a middle ground in these debates it ought to incorporate greater recognition of popes' genuine reluctance to shut down debate—for example, by ruling on theological questions—a policy which was consistent from the late sixteenth century into the eighteenth. The tribulations of Clement VIII and Paul V over the *De Auxiliis* controversy (which concerned the theology of divine grace), and the slow ponderous process

Arnold Witte (eds.), *A Companion to the Early Modern Cardinal* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 435–52.

⁵⁵ Elisabeth Kovács, *Der Papst in Teutschland. Die Reise Pius VI. Im Jahre 1782* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1983); Idem, “Der Besuch Papst Pius' VI. in Wien im Spiegel Josephinischer Broschüren,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 20 (1982): 163–217.

⁵⁶ Maurice Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo, 1633–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Idem, *On Trial for Reason: Science, Religion, and Culture in the Galileo Affair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Giorgio Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Fragnito, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Thomas Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition* (3 vols., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013–15). Christopher Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ See Diarmaid MacCulloch's review of Black's *The Italian Inquisition*, “Evil Just Is,” *The London Review of Books* 32/9 (13th May 2010).

against Jansenism, which took seventy-five years to progress from Cornelius Jansen's own death to the condemnation of his theology in the bull *Unigenitus* (1713), suggest an innate caution in such matters. This caution could even be said to stand in stark contrast with Pius IX's later approach in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864).

A second focus of synthesis ought to be the papacy's geopolitical status in these centuries, which Maria Antonietta Visceglia has explored at length in an important essay.⁵⁹ Simply viewing papal achievements in this sphere as a net positive, because popes' resources were so limited, risks obscuring real and quantifiable declines in papal influence over third parties compared to medieval popes. Where Urban II had rallied the Frankish knights to march on the Holy Land in 1095, Innocent XI was told in 1682 in no uncertain terms by Louis XIV's ambassador that the age of holy war was over.⁶⁰ Clement XI invoked a crusader spirit as late as 1715 to persuade the king of Spain not to attack the emperor while he waged war on the Turks, but his words had no effect. Papal military interventionism of any kind was in fact exceptionally limited after the Battle of Lepanto (1570): Clement VIII's annexation of Ferrara in 1598 and Urban VIII and Innocent X's Wars of Castro (1641–44, 1646–49) saw the only papal campaigns of note in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Innocent X's exclusion by the negotiators of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, like subsequent snubs to Clement XI's diplomatic efforts in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) and to Benedict XIV in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48), was thus based on a very realistic assessment of the pope's potential to contribute to the emergent fiscal-military system of the great powers. Rome was neither a great power of itself, nor was it a hub for the production or distribution of monies, weapons, or other kinds of resources of use to great powers. All this in fact had a considerable concomitant impact on the pope's theological standing, making it harder for anyone to assert his universal primacy against mounting empirical evidence that secular princes did not accept it. Partly in anticipation of this, Clement VIII had tried to insert himself into diplomacy on the basis of his moral authority of a *paterfamilias* (father-figure) to all of Christendom, and he did enjoy some success in that role in the 1590s.⁶¹ Yet the treatment of Innocent X and his successors shows that an age of popes being able to insert themselves into diplomacy on the basis of their moral standing, as attempted by Benedict XV (r. 1914–22) and various popes since him, was still a long way off.

One reason for the pope's lack of diplomatic clout in these years was also surely the precarious state of the papal finances. Prodi took some interest in this subject and so too did Wright, though neither seems to have appreciated just how complex the financial flows to and from the papacy were at this time, nor how gravely they threatened short-term action or affected long-term solvency. Popes had increasingly come to rely on sale of office (venality) to raise capital since the 1470s, but this practice came with long term obligations which they struggled to control and were, in any case, not in practice quantifiable. Felice Litva has shown the difficulty

⁵⁹ Maria Antonietta Visceglia, "The International Policy of the Papacy: Critical Approaches to the Concepts of Universalism and Italianità, Peace and War," in Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2013), 17–62.

⁶⁰ Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 32:124–25, 186, 222–23.

⁶¹ Alain Tallon, "Conflits et médiations dans la politique internationale de la papauté," in Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2013), 117–29. Christian Schneider, "Types of Peacemakers: Exploring the Authority and Self-Perception of the Early Modern Papacy," in Stephen Cummins and Laura Kounine (eds.), *Cultures of Conflict Resolution in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 77–103.

of keeping track of all the transactions in this market.⁶² Worse, no new pope was ever really incentivized to get on top of the state of the finances – because his family *had* to aspire to acquire more wealth than its predecessor if its members were to impose themselves over them. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popes thus created ever more venal offices and other forms of debt, including the so-called *monti*, which were unsecured loan schemes, until the system could no longer take the strain. The Apostolic Treasury avoided outright default by raising taxes, debasement, manipulating interest rates, and manipulating arbitrage (e.g. demanding payment in gold but paying out in silver at an artificial exchange rate). Thus, papal revenues rose hugely in the period 1500–1650, even though popes lost most ‘spiritual’ revenues from outside Italy, but multiple seventeenth-century popes were forced to default on the *monti* by unilaterally re-issuing shares in them under new names at lower interest rates.⁶³ Innocent XII’s 1692 abolition of nepotism and his termination of venal office in 1694 led to temporary respite. However, the papal finances spiralled out of control once again under Pius VI, whose budget deficit by 1796 was a staggering 1.1 million *scudi* (i.e. 50% of the papacy’s average annual revenue over the course of the previous century).⁶⁴ As would happen again in the nineteenth century, papal rule collapsed because popes lacked the resources to defend it. And who lost out from the end of this debt financing regime is still not entirely clear, though a majority were probably small investors from across the Papal States who held partial shares in the papal debt.⁶⁵

Lastly, a final area in which any revisionist narrative of papal history has to be qualified concerns popes’ failure to reunite, or even acquire cordial relations, with other Christian leaderships. Helmut Koenigsberger, in a short but influential essay from the early 1970s, argued that the supposed ‘unity’ of medieval Christendom was not a meaningful standard against which historians should measure the post-Reformation world: it could only ever have been a mirage born of the value a narrow medieval elite placed on a “transnational literate class” who served them.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the fragmentation of unity, in the East from 1054, and in the West from 1517, was real and diminished papal influence and prestige. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popes never came as close again to achieving the long-cherished reunion with the Eastern Orthodox as Eugene IV (r. 1431–47) had done at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438. Indeed, relations between the papacy and Eastern leaderships were characterized by mutual hostility and recrimination throughout much of this period.⁶⁷ Eastern bishops often preferred the

⁶² Felice Litva, “L’attività finanziaria della Dataria durante il periodo Tridentino,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 5 (1967): 79–174.

⁶³ Georg Lutz, “Zur Papstfinanz von Klemens IX bis Alexander VIII. (1667–1691),” *Römische Quartalschrift* 74 (1979): 32–90, at 78, 81–86.

⁶⁴ On the papal finances in the eighteenth century, see Hanns Gross, *Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment: The Post-Tridentine Syndrome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), which contains a useful series of tables, 120–25, 132–33, 140.

⁶⁵ Fausto Piola Caselli, “Public Debt in the Papal States: Financial Market and Government Strategies in the Long Run (Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries),” in Fausto Piola Caselli (ed.), *Government Debts and Financial Markets in Europe* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 105–19. Donatella Strangio, “Public Debt in the Papal States, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43 (2013): 511–37.

⁶⁶ H.G. Koenigsberger, “The Unity of the Church and the Reformation,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1 (1971): 407–17.

⁶⁷ Laura Ronchi De Michelis, “La diplomazia pontificia alla conquista della slavia ortodossa: dall’Unione di Firenze ai ‘falsi Demetri’,” in Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Papato e politica*

freedoms of Ottoman rule to the prospect of incorporation into the Latin hierarchy (with all the revisions to custom and liturgy that would have entailed). In the seventeenth century they even opened lines of communication with Protestants in an anti-papal theological alliance. For their part, papal efforts towards reclaiming the East soon focused more on establishing rival churches through converts than in persuading established leaderships. Yet this also left popes open to manipulation by Eastern Christians who could draw Rome into their own factional struggles.⁶⁸ In the West, popes gradually found they had to accommodate the existence of Protestants—first Lutherans, then Anglicans, then Calvinists—if not *de jure* then *de facto*. Tadhg Ó’hAnnracháin locates the origins of this process in the 1560s and thinks it well advanced by the 1590s.⁶⁹ By the eighteenth century, popes and cardinals were willing to receive Grand Tourists but ecumenism was not yet a relevant feature of papal policy at this date and the improvement in relations with Protestant states was still in its infancy. Pius VI did however permit Henry Cardinal Stuart (1725–1807) to accept a British government pension.⁷⁰

The Problem of the Eighteenth-Century Papacy

This is a book about the nineteenth century and my essay has thus far concentrated on interpretations of earlier papal history grounded predominantly in the sixteenth and seventeenth. These final remarks try to bridge the gap, but they are necessarily brief because the eighteenth century has thus far all too often proved fallow ground for papal historians. Hanns Gross, in the major study of eighteenth-century Rome in English, dubbed this the era of the ‘post-Tridentine’ syndrome, a time of “subtle malaise” brought on by the loss of overall integrative vision and direction.⁷¹ That may be going too far, for recent scholarship has emphasized the city’s on-going cultural vitality in the decades before the French Revolution.⁷² Nevertheless, the lack of direct engagement with the eighteenth century in the major paradigms regarding the early modern papacy has had implications for what has been studied with respect to it. It also has implications for how we read the relationship between that history and the papacy’s nineteenth-century transformations. Was this a time of retreat or of intensification of existing trends? Or of both, one

internazionale nella prima età moderna (Rome: Viella, 2013), 345–61. Edward Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 327–50.

⁶⁸ John-Paul Ghobrial, “The secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,” *Past & Present* 222 (2014): 51–93.

⁶⁹ Ó’hAnnracháin, *Catholic Europe, 1592–1648*. See also, Stefano Villani, “Britain and the Papacy: Diplomacy and Conflict in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century,” in Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2013), 301–22.

⁷⁰ Rosalind Marshall, “Henry Benedict [Henry Benedict Stuart; styled Henry; known as Cardinal York] (1725–1807),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online (27th May 2010): <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12964>

⁷¹ Gross, *Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ix.

⁷² Christopher Johns, “The Entrepôt of Europe: Rome in the Eighteenth Century,” in Joseph J. Rishel and Edgar Peters Bowron (eds.), *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia and London: Merrell Holberton, 2000), 17–46.

in some areas but the other in others? Above all, the eighteenth century has come to be seen as a time of crisis: an era of grave challenges to the pope's authority, spiritual as well as temporal, which may or may not have punctuated the trends in the short term but which fatally undermined them over a longer period. One of these crises could be said to have been occasioned by the turbulent papacy of Benedict XIII, which saw the swirling arguments of the Concilio Romano (the pope's provincial council as bishops of Rome) in 1725.⁷³ The controversy over Febronius was, however, a greater crisis, as were the Jesuit Suppression and the sequence of events which led from the French Revolution in 1789 to the collapse of Pius VI's regime in 1798–99. These three crises were sources of enormous trouble for the papacy which arguably necessitated the process of papal reinvention described in the rest of this volume. Above all, these crises could also be said to have created conditions for matters to move forward beyond the Prodi, Prosperi, and Wright paradigms—specifically, by allowing for the emergence of new narratives centred on secular aggression and on papal (and Jesuit) martyrdom, building on public sympathy for the pope, which had consolidated over the course of several decades.

The Febronian controversy, the earliest of the papacy's three serious eighteenth-century challenges, was, in the short term, perhaps the least visible to those who manned papal office in Rome (and who would have thus had cause to reinvent it). Its impact on how the papacy was seen in Italy and elsewhere in Catholic Europe was nevertheless substantial. Indeed, the idea that Febronius was an unwitting midwife of political Ultramontanism is a well-established one in the historiography of that latter subject. 'Justinus Febronius', the pseudonym which the canonist, theologian, and suffragan bishop of Trier Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701–90) used when publishing his 1763 work *De statu Ecclesia et de potestate legitima Romani Pontificis liber singularis ad reunidos dissidentes in religione christiana compositus* (On the State of the Church and the Lawful Power of the Pope, written to Reunite Christians who Differ in Religion), contended that the pope's claims to supremacy and infallibility lacked any sound theological basis and could be shown to be historical developments which had not existed in the era of the Early Church.⁷⁴ Clement XIII (r. 1758–69) placed Febronius' work on the Index on 27th February 1764 but this gesture was largely ineffective. Within Germany, sympathy for Febronius' arguments led to the Punctuation of Ems in 1786, when the four Imperial prince-archbishops protested the appointment of a new papal nuncio. But elsewhere Febronius' text more than any other work galvanized and/or polarized opinions amongst a generation of educated Catholics, becoming symbolic of much broader debates than the narrow point about the historical legitimacy of papal authority Hontheim had originally raised.⁷⁵ Pro-papal texts such as the *De potestate ecclesiastica Summorum Pontificum et Conciliorum generalium* (1765) and the *De vi ac ratione Primatus Romanorum Pontificum* (1766) by Pietro Ballerini (1698–1769) and the massive *Anti-Febronius* (1767) by the Jesuit Francesco Antonio Zaccaria (1714–95) developed arguments that would later attain greater currency in a nineteenth-century context. Indeed, the

⁷³ See Luigi Fiorani, *Il Concilio Romano del 1725* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977) and, more generally, his useful summary essay on the Roman clergy at this time, "Identità e crisi del prete romano tra Sei e Settecento", *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma* 7 (1988): 135–212.

⁷⁴ Ulrich Lehner, "Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim's Febronius: A Censored Bishop and his ecclesiology," *Church History and Religious Culture* 2 (2008): 93–121. Michael Printy, *Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25–54.

⁷⁵ Printy, *Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism*, 160.

fifty years between these works and de Maistre's *Du Pape* saw a consolidation and refinement of the basic points which would go on to form the backbone of the Ultramontanist ideologies that followed.

The Jesuit suppression, which occurred almost contemporaneously with the Febronian controversy, was of a very different character and had a very different impact on the papacy and its paradigms. The Febronian crisis was primarily an intellectual affair, but the Jesuit suppression was played out in the real social and economic world, and on a global scale. Arguably, it was a long time in gestating, born of the Jesuit-Jansenist conflicts of the seventeenth century: Jansenists successfully portrayed their Jesuit opponents as excessively, even problematically, loyal to the pope at the expense of the crown. Several of Europe's Catholic monarchs, strongly motivated to assert their prerogatives over local churches, then moved to liquidate the Society within their kingdoms and to seize its assets. Portugal was first, in 1759; then France, in 1764; then Spain, in 1767. By the time Clement XIV (r. 1769–74) was persuaded to sign the bull "Dominus ac Redemptor" in 1773 he was already, in effect, legitimizing a *fait accompli*. The suppression ultimately underlined the pope's pitiful weakness with respect to the governance of the universal Church. And, to add to the humiliation, the Russian Empress Catherine the Great and the Prussian King Frederick II refused to accept his authority to suppress it in their kingdoms (both had inherited a number of Jesuit houses in areas previously in Poland). Pius VI found himself in the unenviable position of not being able to admit that the Society had in fact continued. Yet in making such a grab for ecclesiastical assets, the Catholic states which did so set the stage not only for a reaction but also for a shift in paradigm: they had fundamentally changed the balance of power between Church and state if they really could just seize assets and shut parts of the Church down, and with this it also changed calculations in Rome. The sight of dispossessed Jesuit fathers evicted from their homes and lives, won sympathy for both pope and former fathers.⁷⁶ Moreover, it also coincided with an unfreezing of relations between the papacy and non-Catholic states, most significantly Great Britain and the incipient United States.⁷⁷ After all, if Catholic states were attacking the Church and Protestant ones were negotiating greater tolerance for Catholic minorities, who were really the more reliable partners? This was to become a question of ever-greater consequence as the nineteenth century progressed.

The final episode which shattered the old paradigms of the early modern papacy was, of course, the French Revolution. The Revolution eventually reached Rome when General Louis Berthier, on Napoleon's instruction, marched on Rome and proclaimed a Republic on 18th February 1798. Pius VI, who had condemned the revolutionaries as early as 1791, was escorted away to his death in prison at Valence (29th August 1799). Pius became a hero in the process: he had stood up to the French Republic's militant secularism but he also paid the ultimate price. Building on the reputation his earlier journey to Vienna had brought him, Pius' 'martyr cult' was born within a wider project to 'resacralize' Rome and restore legitimacy to the papal majesty.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See, for example, D. Gillian Thompson, "French Jesuits 1756–1814," in Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright (eds.), *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 181–200.

⁷⁷ Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 39:416–18.

⁷⁸ Marina Caffiero, "La maestà del papa: trasformazioni dei rituali del potere a Roma tra XVIII e XIX secolo," in Catherine Brice and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (eds.), *Cérémoniel et rituel à Rome (XVIe-XIXe siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1997). 281–316. Miles Pattenden, "Ringing in the Papal Restoration: Francesco Cancellieri's Treatise on the Capitoline Bells (1806)," *Modern Italy* 27 (2022): 207–23.

Pius VII (r. 1800–23), who found himself embroiled in his own conflict with Napoleon, burnished his office’s valiant credentials still further when he eventually outlasted Napoleon’s military machine after his own five-year imprisonment at Savona and Fontainebleau.⁷⁹ Thomas Albert Howard has written persuasively of the ‘cultural trauma’ that Pius VI and Pius VII’s combined sufferings inflicted on those invested in papal authority, especially in Rome.⁸⁰ In the short term, Pius VII’s restoration led to the extreme reactionary policies implemented during the second half of his pontificate and during those of Leo XII, Pius VIII, and Gregory XVI. However, over the longer term, they gave popes a story they had not previously been able to tell: one of courage, resistance, and moral leadership. Pius IX was not able to harness this ‘martyr cult’ effectively to maintain the Papal States during the bitter struggles of the Italian Risorgimento, but both he and later popes, from Leo XIII onwards, exploited it successfully to cultivate personal devotion far beyond even that showed to Pius VI and VII. The papacy of Wright’s paradigm was clearly superseded by this development and a new and, arguably, very different institution based around a cult of personality was born.

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⁷⁹ Ambrogio Caiani, *To Kidnap a Pope: Napoleon and Pius VII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁸⁰ Thomas Albert Howard, *The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger and the Quandary of the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17–18.

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