

Conclusions

Stefania Tutino

Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA; tutino@history.ucla.edu

Generalizations are always difficult to make, often imprecise, and sometimes misleading. Yet, generalizations are also useful and can even be enlightening when writing a complex, rich, and multifaceted volume such as this one. In this spirit, let me begin these concluding reflections with a generalization: Traditional scholarship on the religious history of early modern Europe, by which I mean the scholarship that has come out in the second half of the twentieth century and especially after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, is based on two elements.

The first element is a tendency to rely on stark oppositions and fixed boundaries to describe and explain the effects of the Reformation on the history of Europe. The most obvious of these oppositions is the contrast between Catholics and Protestants, which the Reformation birthed and which, we are told, became increasingly more pronounced starting with the end of the sixteenth century. This is when the dramatic phase of open religious conflicts ended, and a kind of iron curtain descended upon Europe, paving the way for a (religious) cold war that resulted in a relatively long-lived confessional equilibrium.

Even paradigms based on units of analysis that transcend the Protestant vs. Catholic opposition, such as the confessionalization thesis and the category of social discipline, relied on their own set of fixed boundaries. In these cases, the boundaries in question were those between political and ecclesiastical elites on the one hand and the lower classes on the other. The religious and secular rulers were responsible for consolidating and indeed attempting to increase their respective authority. The lower classes, both Protestant and Catholic, found themselves completely subjugated by the resulting double grip: the political sovereigns strengthened their hold on the bodies of their subjects; the Church leaders strengthened their hold on the consciences of the faithful.

In this traditional account, the history of the Roman Church in early modern Europe was itself divided into two distinct and opposite phases, usually indicated by the terms “Catholic Reform” and “Counter-Reformation”. Until a few decades ago, the common view was that these two phases ran more or less consecutively, and the 1540s was the decade in which the former phase ended and the latter began. Events such as the Council of Trent, the foundation of the Society of Jesus, and the creation of the Roman Inquisition were taken as a sort of watershed moment, after which the Catholic Church lost most of its impetus toward spiritual reform and abandoned any Conciliarist tendencies, to assume instead a strong Papalist ecclesiological position, a firm stand in opposition to the growing authority of the political sovereigns, and an uncompromising attitude of control and repression over any kind of deviation from orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

In addition to relying on binary oppositions such as Catholic vs. Protestant, top vs. bottom, and Catholic Reform vs. Counter-Reformation, traditional scholarship was characterized by specific methodological approaches. Studies on the religious history of early modern Europe tended to employ the method of “classic” political and diplomatic history and of a specific kind of ecclesiastical history that privileged the study of institutions and leaders. In the realm of intellectual history, scholars mostly focused on theology and jurisprudence, perceived as the areas in which the effects of the Reformation were both more evident and more momentous. Furthermore, special attention was devoted to exploring the link between those post-Reformation intellectual and theological changes and print



Citation: Tutino, Stefania. 2023. Conclusions. *Religions* 14: 624. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050624>

Received: 22 March 2023

Accepted: 24 March 2023

Published: 6 May 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

culture, which was seen as the main mode of dissemination and as a veritable revolution concerning the past, dominated by oral tradition and manuscripts.

There is more than a kernel of truth in these views, and we should not make the mistake of underestimating the contributions provided to the study of early modern religious history by the kind of traditional scholarship crudely described above. To begin with, these traditional scholars brought the study of early modern religion outside of the strict purview of confessional history and apologetics and into the realm of history proper. They alerted us to the importance of the Reformation (*lato sensu*) for the political and social history of Europe, demonstrating that the institutions, mechanisms, and theoretical insights that came out as a reaction to the new political and religious landscape created by the Reformation greatly contributed to the birth and evolution of Western modernity. They shed light on the centrality of theology for the development of early modern and modern political thought and enabled us to appreciate the importance of the political dimensions of theology and ecclesiology. By focusing on ecclesiastical institutions and leaders, they have shown us the complexity of early modern Catholicism as a multilayered, trans-national, and politically and financially sophisticated organization, and the extent to which it was in step with important intellectual and political currents of its time. However, for all its advantages, traditional scholarship has held firm in its commitment to fixed boundaries and a narrative of conflict and opposition. This commitment is precisely something that, in recent decades, a new trend in studies on the history of early modern religion is trying to revise.

The history of the Catholic Church in general, and the religious history of the early modern Italian peninsula within it, have seen profound innovations lately. A new generation of scholars has emerged, and they are less interested in formulating rigid categories than in identifying points of contact, less invested in setting up precise boundaries than in investigating the porosity of those boundaries, less keen on reconstructing what was fixed than on highlighting fluidity. We are seeing an abundance of new studies that focus on grey areas rather than the black-and-white; on what is in flux rather than still; on the moments in which the complex systems of control and repression created by both states and churches malfunctioned or broke down, rather than on the dynamics and mechanisms that made those systems work; on what slipped through the cracks and on the cracks themselves, rather than on the whole. This new scholarship is even leaving a tangible trace of its innovations in the very terms that we use to describe these phenomena. As an example, I will only refer to the expressions “Catholic Reform” and “Counter-Reformation”, which nowadays often tend to be substituted by more capacious terms such as “early modern Catholicism” and “post-Reformation Catholicism”. This shift points precisely to this tendency of avoiding sharp dichotomies, privileging instead complexities, nuances, crevices, and overlaps.

In keeping up with these new scholarly interests, the methodologies and approaches that scholars have been recently using are changing. To recover and recenter the complexities and nuances of early modern Italian religion, scholars are being inspired by approaches coming from other disciplines, such as gender studies and the study of material culture. Current scholars on early modern Italian religion are applying the lessons of the new model of cultural history, and, conversely, they are showing how the history of early modern religion could add an important dimension to broader methodological questions. They are taking seriously the insights provided by fields such as the history of emotions and the history of knowledge. They see print culture in all its complexity in tension and in dialogue with manuscript culture and orality. They see liturgy and in general outside behaviors and rituals not just as the expression of confessional allegiance but also more broadly as cultural phenomena that can tell us much about the complex and multifaceted nature of religious identity in the period.

This volume is in many ways both an ideal example of and a wonderful introduction to this novel way of studying the religious history of early modern Italy. Each of the essays examines a different topic using a different methodological approach and with different

disciplinary concerns. Yet, all of them share this new sensibility: they all see the world of early modern Italian religion as dynamic rather than fixed, porous rather than solid, complex and messy rather than stark and neat. In a subtle yet radical and novel way, this volume paints the picture of early modern religious culture in Italy as one full of many nuances and chiaroscuro.

Each author in this collection makes their own scholarly intervention in their respective fields, shedding new light on a specific historical question or cultural phenomena. Yet, if we take this volume as a whole, a few common themes and arguments emerge.

To begin with, we are seeing a newfound place of prominence in the category of space, both physical and metaphorical. Space can be secluded, such as the houses in Modena that Katherine Aron-Beller has studied, which served as points of encounters between the Christians and Jews who defied in the privacy of their homes the local inquisitors' orders to keep those religious groups separate. Space can also be urban and public, such as the city of Venice, where Alessandra Celati has reconstructed a topography and geography not simply of heretical groups but also, once again, clusters of meeting points, places of contact and exchange both within the Protestant or Protestant-sympathizer community and between Protestants and Catholics. Emily Michelson's essay takes us to another city, this time the city of Rome, seen through the eyes (and the legs) of Protestant visitors who observed and, in some cases, accompanied Catholic devotees while they marched through their devotional obligations.

Sometimes this space extends beyond the confines of a city or a state and even those of a continent, to embrace a truly global horizon, as Paul Nelles has argued when following the movement of the copies of the image of the Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore and the cult to the Jesuit martyr Ignácio de Azevedo. This space is not only increasingly global, but also confessionally and politically complex, as Bruno Pomara Saverino shows by putting the individual case of the young Algerian convert Fatima in the context of the multifaced political, institutional, cultural, and religious pressures faced by those who sought or were forced to abandon their religion and convert. Focusing on space also allows us to gain a better purchase on time; as Talia Di Manno writes, early modern Catholic intellectuals were sensitive to, and fully aware of, the needs and pressures to provide historical evidence of the truth of their doctrine, and so they used not only texts but also spaces to validate their past.

The space that emerges from this collection, furthermore, is never fixed but always dynamic and porous. Against a traditional view that still considered the early modern world and its inhabitants mostly static (save for a few exceptions such as soldiers or merchants or missionaries), the people and objects we see in this volume are always in motion. People move—they walk, meet, visit each other's homes, and travel abroad. Objects move too, as we saw in the case of the image of the Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore. Sometimes the intertwined movement of people and images opens up a new perspective from which we can appreciate, as Grace Harpster does, how clergymen in charge of visiting parishes and inspecting the images situated in churches dealt with the complexity of artistic categories and censorship rules. Such dynamism and mobility further complicate the already intricate question of assessing early modern people's religious identity. After decades of thinking about religious identity mostly in terms of confessional allegiance, we are now recognizing that things are not that simple, and there are significant geographical, cultural, and political factors that made early modern people's religious identity fractured and multifaceted. Even the early modern censors and inquisitors in charge of establishing orthodoxy were finding their task more and more challenging as the rate of mobility increased, to the point that, as Eric Dursteler shows, inquisitors were forced to look into people's plates to establish people's orthodoxy (or lack thereof), because looking into their hearts and seeing with certainty what they believed had become difficult.

Turning our attention to those dynamic and porous spaces and away from rigid categorizations enables us to see complexities that before remained under the surface. It also allows us to shine a spotlight on liminal figures and liminal questions, which would

otherwise be impossible to appreciate because they sit at the margins, out of the focus of traditional scholarship. Excellent examples of just how much we gain by looking at the margins abound in this collection. We might start with Flaminio Fabrizi, a young Roman layman who was condemned and put to death by the Inquisition at the end of the sixteenth century. As Vincenzo Lavenia explains, Fabrizi was not learned and yet he had an insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge, he was not a nobleman but had many aristocratic friends and patrons, and his ideas were in many ways farfetched but also in tune with the positions of more learned and better-known atheists and heretics of the time.

Thanks to this newfound appreciation for complexity, we can better understand the ecclesiological position of somebody such as Pietro Camaiani, Bishop of Fiesole, who, as J. G. Amato shows, negotiated in interesting and complex ways his episcopal status, his loyalty to the Pope, and his allegiance to his political patrons without ever completely committing either to the Conciliarist or to the Papalist camp. Because of the same approach, we can finally revisit our understanding of the significance of Antonio Castelvetro's proposal to reform Catholic censorship and establish a new Catholic press. Rather than a collection of self-serving and implausible ideas, Hannah Marcus shows that Castelvetro's treatise was a manifestation of an important debate in early modern Catholicism on how best to meet the challenges that print culture and print market brought to the Catholic project of censoring and controlling the dissemination of ideas.

With few but notable exceptions, mostly concerning female religious orders and female religiosity and spirituality, women have also been traditionally neglected as an object of study among scholars of early modern religion. This volume seeks to rectify this imbalance not simply by focusing on women, but also by seeking to show that the category of gender is important to understand all aspects of the religious culture of early modern Italy. In her overview of the scholarship on witchcraft in the last sixty years, Michaela Valente has identified a few historical and historiographical turning points in the scholarship on witches, showing that the future of the field lies in a sustained and intellectually honest and open dialogue between social and religious history and other disciplines such as gender studies, digital humanities, and the history of emotion. Women are also at the center of Sarah Rolfe Prodan's essay, which examines early modern Italian women poets. Steeped in a specific post-Reformation lay affective piety, these women experimented with the tropes of sensual lyricism and Petrarchism to create a specific poetic idiom and aesthetic vision that merged the spiritual and the sensual. Women are also the protagonists of Tamar Herzig's essay, which recovers the history of dozens of Jewish female slaves who had been raped and violated by Bernadetto Buonromei, whom today is still largely considered as a skilled medical doctor and foundational figure in the history of the city of Livorno. In addition to bringing back to light a forgotten chapter of history, Herzig's essay reminds all of us that the dialectic between memory and oblivion, permanence and loss, and preservation and erasure lies at the core not only of the religious history of early modern Italy but also of our profession and vocation.

For all these reasons, this volume is a wonderful addition to our knowledge of early modern religion. Each essay is enlightening and insightful in its own right; taken together, the volume gives a clear picture of how lively and vibrant the study of early modern Italian religion currently is thanks to a new wave of scholars who have taken to heart the lessons of their predecessors and are moving the field forward. This volume does not only show us where we are now, but it also points the way to numerous exciting roads that the next generation of scholars might take in the future.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.