

INTRODUCTION

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Modern historiography, both idealistic and post-idealistic, is characterized by the awareness that “explored” events or occurrences of human action in their uniqueness and multiplicity only acquire meaning through philosophical consideration.¹ It is irrelevant whether this meaning is inherent in the events or projected onto them, as long as the (moral-) philosophical concept and the historical facts mutually illuminate each other, i.e., the concept can be verified “empirically” or the facts can generate “historical experiential knowledge.” The science of history (in the broad sense) thus becomes the medium of a meaningful explanation of one’s own present for the sake of the future. Without such an appropriative approach, which paradoxically also guides contextualist or deconstructivist conceptions, it would remain a simple (narrative) enumeration of histories (polyhistory).

As is well known, such a modern historiography of the Reformation as a universally accepted historical epoch of immense impact does not begin until Leopold von Ranke’s six-volume *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (1839–1847). Since then, there have been quite different approaches to this church historical phenomenon and “global historical” epoch, which, however, is not what is at issue here.² Rather, we are concerned with the question of how the Reformation, as a process of internal church reform, renewal, or upheaval, shaped the way contemporary actors and their successors dealt with history in the pre-modern era.

Due to the Reformation’s orientation on the source of Christianity in the double sense of the temporal origin and the untainted foundation of faith and piety, the Reformation generation strove to trace a historical line back to the beginnings of

1 It is well known that the Greek verb forming the root of the word “historic” means “to explore,” originally in respect to artefacts of natural history.

2 For approaches of international Reformation research since the second half of the twentieth century, see the essays in: *Archive for Reformation History* 100 (2009), and in: *Politics and Reformations: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr. Vol. 1: Histories and Reformations*. Leiden et al. 2007; furthermore, Thomas Kaufmann: “Evangelische Reformationsgeschichtsforschung nach 1945: Gottfried Seebaß zum 70. Geburtstag”, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 104 (2007), pp. 404–454; Wim Janse: “La Réforme protestante aux Pays-Bas: Tournants dans l’historiographie du XX siècle”, in: *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 80 (2004), pp. 76–92 (see *Reformation & Renaissance Review*, 6 [2004], pp. 179–202); *Cinquant’ anni di storiografia italiana sulla riforma e i movimenti ereticali in Italia 1950–2000: XL convegno di studi sulla riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia*, 2002. For modern research controversies or paradigm, see Stefan Ehrenpreis, Ute Lotz-Heumann (eds.): *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter*. Darmstadt 2002. On older approaches, see *Archive for Reformation History* 101 (2010) and *Bulletin de la Societe de l’ Histoire du Protestantisme Francais* 155 (2009).

Christianity, also under the premise of the article of faith upholding the *unity*, *catholicity*, and *holiness* of the Church. Because of their apocalyptic expectations that made the end of history appear to approach nearer with every sign of the times revealed (drawing on images of the Apocalypse of John), the reformers could not ascribe any separate “epochal” significance to their own time, especially not in respect to general political (universal) history.³ From a historical and humanistic viewpoint, it was foremost a matter of critically examining the present state of affairs in relation to early Christianity, first in respect to biblical canon, then to orthodox dogma, and finally to the scholarly theology of the church fathers. The latter, the science of patrology, would flourish in the seventeenth century (Johann Gerhard, Johann Gottfried Olearius, and the Bollandists and Maurinists).

Consequently, it was also necessary to cope with the problem of postulating a historical continuity from early Christianity to one’s own time. Thus, “modern church historiography [...] is a child of the Lutheran Reformation.”⁴ It begins⁵ with Matthias Flacius, that is with the *Magdeburg Centuries*⁶ and his *Catalogus testium veritatis*.⁷ Incorporating ecclesiastical doctrine (*doctrina*) into the historical account of the *Centuries* was of great significance because it considerably expanded the previous concept of history with intellectually, spiritually, and culturally defined

- 3 Matthias Pohlig: Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung, lutherische Kirchen- und Universalgeschichtsschreibung 1546–1617. Tübingen 2007, p. 499.
- 4 Eduard Fueter: Geschichte der neueren Historiographie. Oldenburg 1911 (Zurich 1985 = repr. of third edition from 1936), p. 246; see also p. 250. Fueter errs, however, when claiming that it did not arise through the novelty of the subject, but rather exclusively through the needs of confessional polemics. For one cannot ignore that the historical problem to be solved was new and by no means simply the realization of one of Luther’s suggestions (Martin Luther: Werke: Kritische Ausgabe. Vol. 50. Weimar 1914, pp. 3–5).
- 5 In other respects, namely with regard to the relationship between world history and church history, Philipp Melanchthon was programmatic and his editing of Carion’s *Chronica* could be regarded as the first example of Protestant historiography. On Carion, see Mark A. Lotito: The Reformation of Historical Thought. Leiden et al. 2019; Malte von Spankeren: “Das Mittelalter im Dienst der Reformation: Die Chronica Carions und Melanchthons von 1532: Zur Vermittlung mittelalterlicher Geschichtskonzeptionen in die protestantische Historiographie”, in: Theologische Literaturzeitung 142 (2017), cols. 639–643. Cf. Pohlig: Gelehrsamkeit, pp. 157–269, esp. 175–189.
- 6 *Ecclesiastica historia integram ecclesiae Christi ideam quantum ad locum, propagationem, persecutionem, tranquillit[at]em, doctrin[as], haereses, ceremonias, guberationem, schismata, synodos, personas, miracula, martyria, religiones extra ecclesiam. Singularem diligentiam et fide ex vetustissimis et optimis historicis, patribus et aliis scriptoribus congesta per aliquot studiosos et pios viros in urbe Magdeburgica. 13 vols. Basel 1559–1574 (the second edition, printed in Basel in 1624, was revised from a Reformed perspective). The most recent comprehensive study on this work: Harald Bollbuck: Wahrheitszeugnis, Gottes Auftrag und Zeitkritik: Die Kirchengeschichte der Magdeburger Zenturien und ihre Arbeitstechniken. Wiesbaden 2014.*
- 7 *Catalogus testium veritatis, qui ante nostram aetatem reclamarunt Papae. Opus uaria rerum [...] scitu dignissimarum, cognitione refertum, ac [...] necessarium. Cum Praefatione Mathiae Flacii Illyrici. Basel 1556. Cf. Pohlig: Gelehrsamkeit, pp. 294–341 and Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele’s contribution in this volume.*

topoi.⁸ On the other hand, the *Centuries* may have fallen rather short of humanistic aspirations in respect to its historical-critical achievement and its annalistic and so-teriological mode of presenting history.⁹

This early Protestant ecclesiastical historiography written for apologetic purposes is quite well researched, including the works of its confessional opponents (e.g., Caesar Baronius, *Annales ecclesiastici a Christo nato ad annum 1198*, 12 vols., 1588–1607; later continued by other authors).¹⁰ From the beginning, authors tended to draw out their historical depictions into the present (for the *Centuries*, an unprinted draft for the fourteenth to sixteenth century exists in the Duke August Library of Wolfenbüttel), without, however, seeing themselves temporally distanced from the Reformation.¹¹ Comparable phenomena can also be found in political historiography.¹²

Only later generations had to develop a “historical” relationship to the Reformation as an epochal prehistory of their own confessional standpoint. This raised the question of how the events of the early sixteenth century were to be perceived, selected, and narrated as a completed process and then as a past age of church history.¹³

In general, one may say that the first historians of the “bygone” Reformation still had a view of history characterized to a certain degree by Christian salvation history, but not necessarily by Augustinian dualism, and that they used historiography for safeguarding dogma, for legally and apologetically protecting vested rights, for promoting confessional identity, or for teaching pragmatic precepts for life.

8 Fueter: *Geschichte*, p. 250: “Die Zenturiatoren behandelten nicht nur sozusagen die kirchlichen Haupt- und Staatsaktionen, sondern auch die in der politischen Historiographie bisher ganz vernachlässigte innere Geschichte, die Veränderungen in Lehre, Kultur usw. Ihre allerdings dürftigen Notizen über die außerchristlichen Religionen legten sogar gewissermaßen den Grund zur Religionsgeschichte.”

9 Fueter: *Geschichte*, pp. 251–253 (opposed, for example, to Ferdinand Christian Baur: *Die Epochen der kirchlichen Geschichtsschreibung*. Tübingen 1852 [repr. Hildesheim 1962], pp. 39–71). See the overview of the following works influenced by the *Centuries* that Fueter did not highly praise: Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* on the English Church (pp. 253–257), Knox and Calderwood on the Scottish Church (pp. 257–259), Bullinger and Beza on the Swiss Church (pp. 259–263), and Salat on the Catholic Church (pp. 263–267). Cf. Christian Moser: *Die Dignität des Ereignisses: Studien zu Heinrich Bullingers Reformationsgeschichtsschreibung*. Vols. 1–2. Leiden et al. 2012.

10 Fueter: *Geschichte*, p. 263 (early writings against the *Centuries*), 263–265 (Baronius). Cf. Katrina Beth Olds: “The ‘False chronicles’, Cardinal Baronio, and sacred history in Counter-Reformation Spain”, in: *The Catholic historical review* 100 (2014), pp. 1–26.

11 Cf. Lucas Osiander: *Epitome historiae ecclesiasticae, Centuria*. 16 vols. Tübingen 1607.

12 Johannes Sleidan: *De statu religionis et reipublicae Carolo Quinto Caesare Commentarii*. Strasbourg 1555ff.

13 In 2017, a conference entitled “Die frühe Historisierung der Reformation: Reformation und Reformatoren in Biographien, Enzyklopädien und Geschichtsschreibung des späten 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts” was held in Bad Homburg. No anthology of the contributions was produced, but some papers were published individually. See the conference report by Ellinor Schweighöfer, online under: www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7203 (last accessed: 28 June 2022).

Matthias Pohligh has presented a quite differentiated picture of this second period of Reformation historiography, which is admittedly limited to German-speaking Lutheranism.¹⁴ He has not only examined actual works of church history, but also other forms of memorial practice (calendars, sermons, etc.) in his study and has shown that Lutheran historiography could be composed kaleidoscopically from diverse contexts of argumentation. Comparable studies for other denominations and for the later, pre-modern period¹⁵ have been few and far between in the last twenty years.¹⁶

When the confessional plurality of Christianity was politically guaranteed “forever,”¹⁷ the problem of how to hold on to the presupposition of the unity and uniqueness of the Church through the upheavals of the Reformation intensified. Historical thinking, because of its own plausibility, played a major role in the sciences and in the society of the post-Reformation era, even detached from the questions of church politics and theology. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the Reformation raised many questions, the treatment of which also shaped historical inquiry.

Indicative of a change in attitude towards the science of history as a result of the Reformation, the first chair of church history was installed in Helmstedt in 1650, shortly after the Peace of Westphalia. At the same time (1651), Johann Heinrich

- 14 Matthias Pohligh: *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung, lutherische Kirchen- und Universalgeschichtsschreibung 1546–1617*. Tübingen 2007.
- 15 See the overview of historical thought in the Reformation and Early Modern Period (with secondary literature) in: Gustav Adolf Benrath: Art. “Geschichte/ Geschichtsschreibung/ Geschichtsphilosophie VII.1 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert“, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 12 (1984), pp. 630–643 (Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, martyr chronicles, Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Sebastian Franck, Gottfried Arnold; followed by those detached from the Christian Augustinian worldview: Jean Bodin, Isaac de La Peyrère, Georg Horn, Pierre Bayle, Lord Bolingbroke, Voltaire, eighteenth-century historical philosophy).
- 16 Reference can be made here to several studies on individual figures: Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele: “Caspar Sagittarius (1643–1694) als Historiograph der Reformation“, in: Kathrin Paasch, Christopher Spehr, Siegrid Westphal (eds.): *Reformatio et memoria: Protestantische Erinnerungsräume und Erinnerungsstrategien in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Göttingen 2020, pp. 69–83; Amy Graves-Monroe: *Post tenebras lex: Preuves et propagande dans l’historiographie engagée de Simon Goulart (1543–1628)*. Geneva 2012; John Vidmar: “John Lingard’s history of the English reformation: History or apologetics?“, in: *The Catholic Historical Review* 85 (1999), pp. 383–419; Alexandra Kess: *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant vision of history*. Ashgate 2008. – Among the comprehensive studies and anthologies worth mentioning here: John Vidmar: *English Catholic Historians and the English Reformation, 1585–1954*. Brighton et al. 2019; Carina L. Johnson, David M. Luebke, Marjorie E. Plummer, Jesse Spohnholz (eds.): *Archaeologies of Confession: Writing the German Reformation 1517–2017*. New York, Oxford 2017; Stefania Biagetti: *Il mito della riforma italiana nella storiografia dal XVI al XIX secolo*. Milan 2007; Stefan Benz: *Zwischen Tradition und Kritik: Katholische Geschichtsschreibung im barocken Heiligen Römischen Reich*. Husum 2003; Frieder Ludwig: “Kirchengeschichte als Ketzergeschichte: Die Hinrichtung Michael Servets in Genf vor 450 Jahren und die Anfänge der neueren kirchlichen Historiographie im 18. Jahrhundert“, in: *Theologische Zeitschrift* 59 (2003), pp. 113–136.
- 17 See the clause used when establishing the date of restitution for the ecclesiastical dominions under the empire in article V § 14 IPO: “Si vero, quod Deus prohibeat, de religionis dissidiis amicabiliter convenire non possit, nihilominus haec conventio perpetua sit & pax semper duratura.”

Hottinger's *Historia ecclesiastica*, a Christian church history embedded in a general history of religion, appeared. The historical-apologetic or scholarly interest flourished especially in theology in the second half of the seventeenth century, producing a whole series of collections of historical information until the mid-eighteenth century (*Epitome, Compendium, Summarium, Nucleus Historiae Ecclesiasticae, Historia ecclesiastica*).

As temporal distance increased, not only did a theory of the Reformation gradually develop in the last quarter of the seventeenth century,¹⁸ but the inner-church actions or events of the early sixteenth century were combined into an overarching unity, for example, as a history of the Lutheran Reformation (Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff) or as the beginning of an epoch (Christoph Cellarius¹⁹).²⁰ At the same time, the apocalyptic worldview lost ground, and in Pietism²¹ the Reformation was seen as the beginning of a task that was never completed in one's own time, primarily in respect to (church) life, less clearly in respect to theological doctrine. In respect to its programmatic view of history, this also included the *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie* by the radical Pietist Gottfried Arnold (1699–1700).

Historiographical research, as a product of modern historical thinking, has paid little attention to post-Reformation historiography precisely because it has been interested in the precursors of its own historical thinking. In the classic history of modern historiography by Eduard Fueter,²² only a few works from the Reformation or post-Reformation periods are discussed. The anthology *Geschichtsdiskurs* published by Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, and Ernst Schulin²³ also hardly addresses historiography before the eighteenth century.

18 Theodor Mahlmann: Art. "Reformation", in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 8 (1992), pp. 416–427, here: 419.

19 Christoph Cellarius: *Historia vniuersalis breuiter ac perspicue exposita, in antiqvam, et medii aevi ac novam diuisa, cum notis perpetuis*. Jena 1702; see there (pp. 13f.) the division into three epochs, namely the pagan antiquity (until Constantine the Great), the Middle Ages (until the conquest of Constantinople [1456]), and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the modern times.

20 See the overview in: Luise Schorn-Schütte: "Kleine Historiographieggeschichte der Reformation", in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 2016; online under: <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/auspuz/239243/kleine-historiographieggeschichte-der-reformation/> (last accessed: 28 June 2022).

21 In their interpretation of the Apocalypse of John (1696 and 1730, respectively), Johanna Eleonora Petersen and David Israel Dimpel view the Reformation as the dawn of the Philadelphian Church Age (Rev 3:7–13) and of a millennial kingdom yet to come (Rev 20). See Markus Matthias: "Der Geist auf den Mägden: Zum Zusammenhang von Enthusiasmus und Geschichtsauffassung im mitteldeutschen Pietismus", in: *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 43 (2018), pp. 69–99, here: 94f.

22 Fueter: *Geschichte*, pp. 246–271. On historiography in the Early Modern Period, see Franz von Wegele: *Geschichte der Deutschen Historiographie seit dem Auftreten des Humanismus*. Munich 1885 [reprint 1965, online edition 2020], pp. 178–338 (Die deutsche Geschichtsschreibung unter der Einwirkung der Reformation) and 733–744 (Die alte, die Kirchen- und Literaturgeschichte [des polyhistorischen Zeitalters]).

23 Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulin (eds.): *Geschichtsdiskurs*. 5 vols. Frankfurt am Main 1993–1999; most noteworthy for our context is the article by Ursula Goldenbaum in vol. 2 (Anfänge modernen historischen Denkens, 1994): "Die philosophische Methodendiskus-

With the contributions to the present volume, we want to draw attention to what we consider insufficiently researched historiographical works on the Reformation from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. The aim is to take stock of those questions with which the historians of the Reformation were confronted, and thus of the influence of the Reformation on historical inquiry itself. Alongside the writings themselves, historical conditions of their origins and methodological aspects come into view. Whether the history of historiography can or must be revised on the basis of the results cannot yet be answered.

The first two papers of this volume present early examples of emerging narratives of the Reformation that differed significantly from each other. *Kenneth Appold* examines the first work of Johannes Cochlaeus on the history of the Reformation. This anti-Lutheran writing set standards in terms of content and method in the spirit of humanism and could thus also become the starting point for interconfessional discussion. *Martin Rothkegel* offers a bibliographically oriented account of the special conditions of the emergence of a Reformation historiography from a victim perspective among the Hutterites of the sixteenth century.

In the second section, the authors investigate various examples of how Protestant perspectives of the Reformations were cultivated in the seventeenth century. *Daniel Bohnert's* contribution shows, by example of the major work on church history by Eusebius Bohemus, how in early seventeenth-century Wittenberg one is completely in the historiographical tradition constituted by Matthias Flacius, both with regard to history as a humanistic-critical method for revealing the original truth and with regard to the ecclesiological-apologetic objective and the usefulness of history as a teacher of a virtuous or pious and blessed life. *Bruce Gordon* uses the development of the Reformed Swiss Bible translation to show the perceived, temporal, and internal distance of contemporaries in Zurich at the beginning of the eighteenth century from Zwingli's Reformation. Accordingly, the past did not have to be reconstructed as much as it had to be emulated "in spirit." The present was to be reshaped against the background of history. It is not by chance that the beginning of a scientifically reflected history of theology as opposed to a history of the church or dogma can be found in seventeenth century Protestantism. *Aza Goudriaan* examines concepts of this kind developed by two Reformed theologians. While Heinrich Altting presented the preservation of and fall from true doctrine under a dualistic understanding of history, thus providing dogmatics with historical material for individual *loci*, John Forbes was concerned with the legitimacy of the doctrine he represented through an exposition of Catholic, i.e., early church doctrine. For *Markus Matthias*, Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff's *Historia Lutheranismi* (1688/92) is a work born of the need to legitimize historically one's own confessional and

sion des 17. Jahrhunderts in ihrer Bedeutung für den Modernisierungsschub in der Historiographie" (pp. 148–161), according to which the „Hochschätzung der demonstrativen Erkenntnis [sc. des Rationalismus] [...] ja den neuen Raum einer *methodisch und theoretisch geleiteten Erfahrungswissenschaft*, die der Gewißheit der demonstrativen Erkenntnis so nahe wie möglich kommt, erst auf[spannt]" (p. 157).

intellectual position. By striving to juxtapose an objective history of the Reformation against an ideological narrative, Seckendorff precludes the modern understanding of history. As *Steffie Schmidt* shows, the particular challenge of Swedish historiography since the Reformation period lay in the need to combine the royal or national (Gothic) narrative tradition with the existing Lutheran tradition. This was especially successful in the figure of Gustav Vasa, although the question remained how royal political action could be synchronized with Luther's Reformation activity without impairing the intrinsic meaning of national (royal) history.

The studies in the third section underscore the historiographic contentions between representatives of various denominations. *Andreea Badea* shows how the Gallican author Louis Maimbourg used the history of Protestantism to criminalize it, thereby furthering the political and absolutist interests of the Sun King. *Sascha Salatowsky* differentiates between a rather static view of a *historia sacra* by Roman authors, in which heretical developments repeatedly storm the church represented by the papacy, and a Protestant understanding of history as a dynamic process of decay and reform (*historia ecclesiastica*). This difference in understanding also affected the patrology of each confession. *Pablo Toribio*'s contribution brings another unorthodox view of the Reformation to the fore. The Unitarians, Antitrinitarians (Stanisław Lubieniecki, Benedykt Wiszowaty) or modern "Arians" (Christoph Sand, Daniel Zwicker) partly represented a progressive Reformation history that only found its theological conclusion with Unitarian theology, while their historical point of reference was before the orthodox fourth century.

The final section of this volume provides three examples of changing approaches to Reformation history in the eighteenth century. *Daniel Gehrt* introduces Ernst Salomon Cyprian's work on the history of the Reformation and points to his reception of Christian natural law thought, allowing him to claim seemingly modern moral philosophical values such as freedom of conscience, the abolition of superstition, and the political independence of the state from the papacy as (necessary) achievements of the Reformation. *Wolf-Friedrich Schäufole* shows the vitality of the argument of truth witnesses in the Reformation histories written by Jacques Basnage and Christoph Matthäus Pfaff in the early eighteenth century. This is accompanied by a relativization of an apocalyptic and, in this sense, epochal understanding of the Reformation. *Markus Friedrich* takes a material approach by describing the conditions of production under which Barthold Nikolaus Krohn conceived and published his *Geschichte der Wiedertäufer* outside the University in Hamburg.

Many milestones of Reformation historiography have been left undone and still await closer examination. In addition to the works mentioned by Fueter, one might think of Lucas Osiander, Johann Heinrich Boeckler, Adam Rechenberg, Johann Andreas Schmidt, Johann Friedrich Hottinger, Georg Horn, Friedrich Spanheim, Sébastien le Nain de Tillemont, Robert Bellarmine, Caesar Baronius, Alexander Natalis, Claude Fleury, Johann Paul Reinhard, or Johann Lorenz von Mosheim.

1. EMERGING NARRATIVES

REFORMATION HISTORY IN THE EYES OF EARLY MODERN CATHOLICS

Kenneth G. Appold

Abstract: While Reformation historiography is typically viewed as a Protestant endeavor, Roman Catholic authors have developed a tradition of their own, and began doing so during the Reformation itself. This essay examines the contributions of one of the first Catholic writers of “Reformation history”, Johannes Cochläus, shedding light on his methods, priorities, and on his debt to Humanism, particularly as evidenced in his *Luther Commentaries*.

Zusammenfassung: Während die Reformationsgeschichtsschreibung in der Regel als protestantisches Unterfangen betrachtet wird, haben römisch-katholische Autoren eine eigene Tradition entwickelt, und zwar bereits während der Reformation selbst. Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Beiträge eines der ersten katholischen Autoren der „Reformationsgeschichte“, Johannes Cochläus, und beleuchtet seine Methoden, Prioritäten und seine Verpflichtung zum Humanismus, welche sich insbesondere in seinen „Luther-Kommentaren“ niederschlagen.

Johann Sleidanus has often been called the “father of Reformation history.”¹ Sleidanus’ *Commentaries*, appearing in 1555, represent a monumental effort to tell the story of the Reformation from a putatively objective standpoint. That aim was itself remarkable: during an age riven by religious strife and characterized by the desire of each party to discredit or even anathematize all others, Sleidanus strove to present history in a way that would be persuasive to more than just his own partisan co-religionists. To do this, he relied heavily on his scholarly method: he based his account on a thorough and exhaustive reading of primary sources. Unfortunately, as we know, that striving towards non-partisan credibility fell flat. Sleidanus was immediately attacked by Roman Catholic scholars who saw him not as the first Reformation historian, but as the first *Protestant* Reformation historian.

One of the first to publish a work against Sleidanus was the Parisian Franciscan Simon Fontaine, whose *Histoire catholique de nostre temps, touchant l’estat de la religion Chrestienne* appeared in 1558.² A closer look at Fontaine’s book, however, reveals that most of it was plagiarized almost verbatim from an early work – namely

1 Cf. Alexandra Kess: *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History*. Aldershot 2008, p. 109.

2 Cf. Adolf Herte: *Das katholische Lutherbild im Bann der Lutherkommentare des Cochläus*. Vol. I: Von der Mitte des 16. bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts. Inland und Ausland. Münster 1943, p. 8.

the *Luther Commentaries* of Johannes Cochläus.³ Though the plagiarism may be surprising, the dependence on Cochläus was not. After all, Sleidanus himself had Cochläus in his sights when he composed his work and perhaps even when he chose its title: both are called “Commentaries.” Moving on through the list of early Catholic works that engage Sleidanus directly or indirectly, the dependence on Cochläus remains obvious, and, according to Adolf Herte, central. It may seem odd that authors sought to refute Sleidanus by appealing to a text that had appeared *before* that of Sleidanus, but at the very least it testifies to the enormous influence and durable quality of Cochläus’ work. Would it be more accurate to name Cochläus, and not Sleidanus, the “father of Reformation history”? Herte, in any case, has traced Cochläus’ influence through Catholic Reformation historiography all the way into the twentieth century. Reformation histories written by Protestants, on the other hand, are less conspicuously indebted to Cochläus. In fact, many of them don’t mention him at all. When they do, they typically dismiss him simply as a Catholic polemicist and opponent of Luther.⁴ In other words, not only Reformation historiography itself, but even its meta-history – which includes the reception and canonization of particular authors – has long reflected confessional biases and preferences. That taking of sides, the lining up behind Cochläus or Sleidanus, to name but two early figures, began during the Reformation itself and is both a product of the times as well as a symptom of the event. The Reformation was marked by a breakdown in communication, an inability and perhaps even an unwillingness to communicate effectively. Before turning to a closer examination of Cochläus himself, I would like to spend a moment underscoring this point because it forms the context out of which Cochläus emerged.

Arguably, the breakdown in communication between Luther and his interlocutors in Rome began in the aftermath of the “95 Theses.” One can trace the development nicely in the exchanges between Luther and Silvester Prierias over the spring and summer of 1518. It is obvious even at the level of their topic: Luther submitted theses on indulgences, and Prierias responded with a defense of papal authority. In terms of content, too, there was little chance of genuine dialogue. Prierias’ defense of the papacy was extremely ideological even by Roman standards of the day, and Luther found little to say in return. Their style was very different, as well. Prierias sounds very much like a bureaucrat or functionary, laying out his case in declarative and slightly condescending terms, while Luther remains true to his academic’s open-ended pursuit of truth. This was not a recipe for productive dialogue. As frustration grew and their material conversation ground to a standstill, they moved from discussing theology to attacking each other personally. Sides were drawn, and they now included not merely their respective theological positions, but also their persons. In Prierias’ view, Luther was not simply mistaken, he was a heretic. And for

3 Ibid., p. 9.

4 A slightly more balanced, albeit extremely brief assessment of Cochläus appears in Thomas Kaufmann: *Geschichte der Reformation in Deutschland*. Berlin 2009, pp. 476–480. Some biographers of Luther make more mention of Cochläus. E.g. Lyndal Roper: *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*. New York 2017.

Luther, Prierias was no longer a credible or even competent conversation partner. It was in that unfortunate exchange that confessional polemic was born.

It is perhaps too easy to describe the failed communication between Prierias and Luther in personal terms – as if it were the result of their individual limitations. That may have been true, as well, but there were also structural and cultural factors that need to be kept in mind. Luther had launched a theological critique of church practices, and his call to reform during the first years of the Reformation was based heavily in theology. Rome, while accustomed to hearing cries for church reform, especially at the councils up to and including Lateran V, typically focused on practical reform measures, such as correcting absenteeism, or prohibiting simony and concubinage. The curia was not well equipped to deal with initiatives articulated in a theological idiom – and this may well have contributed to Prierias' disorientation. In his view, doctrinal questions were not subject to debate, they came to Rome so that people like Prierias could determine if they were heretical.

These factors are significant when assessing Cochläus' polemical writings. Polemical discourse seems to be the product of breakdowns in communication, and because of their partisan nature, are viewed with distaste by most academics today. We tend to overlook, however, that polemic, at least as practiced during much of the confessional age, is not an abandonment of reasoned discourse – though that may have been the case between Prierias and Luther. Nor does it signal a surrender to emotion and partisan passion. Polemics have rules of their own. And that is especially the case with Cochläus. Some of those rules are rhetorical, and early-modern polemicists, especially those with humanistic training, had an impressive arsenal of rhetorical devices, allusions and conventions at their disposal. I will not be focusing on those, however. In the following study, I would instead like to draw our attention to the way in which Cochläus uses historical method in his polemics, and what that tells us about his historiography in general.

Cochläus was born in 1479, which makes him just a few years older than Luther; the two belong to roughly the same generation, Cochläus Franconian, Luther a Saxon. Unlike Luther, whose father rose from peasant stock into the mercantile bourgeoisie, Cochläus had clergymen in his extended family and after the death of his father was schooled in Latin by his uncle, a priest.⁵ University studies followed in Cologne, earning him a *Magister artium* in 1507, and qualifying him for studies in theology. Two years later he was named professor by that same faculty. Again, the dates line up roughly with those of Luther, except for the conspicuous difference that Luther, unlike Cochläus, entered a religious order, the Augustinian Hermits.

In 1510, Cochläus left Cologne to become rector of the Saint Lawrence School in Nuremberg, near where he was born. He spent the next five years there as a teacher, significant not only for the pedagogical experience it afforded him but also

5 Cf. Remigius Bäumer: *Johannes Cochläus (1479–1552). Leben und Werk im Dienst der katholischen Reform*. Münster 1980, p. 14. Cf. also Monique Samuel Scheyder: *Johannes Cochläus. Humaniste et adversaire de Luther*. Nancy 1993.

because it ensconced him firmly within the highest circles of Nuremberg's exceptionally fertile humanists. He lived in the home of Anton Kress,⁶ provost of Saint Lawrence, and became close friends with Willibald Pirckheimer. It was Pirckheimer's famous library he used, and it was Pirckheimer's two nephews he accompanied on what would become a pivotal experience in his life: a trip to Rome in 1515. When he left for Italy that year, he had all the appearances of an up-and-coming humanist: reform-minded, progressive, literate and intellectually broad.⁷ His record of publications to that point showed as much promise and interest for music as for theology. And he was traveling to the heartland of the Renaissance. When he returned to Germany in 1520, he was a Catholic priest. These two things – humanist and priest – would not need to be contradictory. In Cochläus' case, many scholars have seen his move towards ordination in Rome as coinciding with a renewed commitment to the church, and to the papal hierarchy in particular. Evidence for such a "turn" in Cochläus' life comes from his changing attitude towards Martin Luther. As late as 1519, he wrote positively of Luther to Willibald Pirckheimer.⁸ By 1520, those feelings had changed 180 degrees; he was now Luther's critic.

Had Cochläus turned into a papal loyalist in Rome? His most comprehensive biographer, Martin Spahn, writing in 1898,⁹ conjectured that Cochläus had been introduced to the Oratory of Divine Love by Jerome Aleander, and that this influence exposed him to the compelling charisma of moderate reformers loyal to Rome. Hubert Jedin examined these claims further in his dissertation on Cochläus' treatise on free will, and rebutted them persuasively: there is no evidence Cochläus had any contact at all with either the Oratory or with Aleander while in Rome. He did meet Aleander later, and even spent time with him at the Diet of Worms in 1521, but that was after Cochläus' turn against Luther. Jedin concludes that the reasons for Cochläus' apparent change of heart will likely remain a mystery, but he offers one very suggestive observation: it is very plausible that Cochläus had always been loyal to Rome, but that this commitment had not found full expression previously. The overall atmosphere in the Eternal City may, according to Jedin, have had a stimulating influence on Cochläus' intellectual and spiritual development, so that embracing ordination and papal authority did not seem to him as regressive, conservative steps but rather as moments of growth and spiritual expansion.¹⁰

This is an important point because it tells us something about Cochläus' mentality as he turned his critical attention to Luther. Cochläus did not abandon his humanist conditioning and methods, and he did not see himself as a conservative

6 On Kress, cf. Antonia Landois: *Gelehrtentum und Patrizierstand. Wirkungskreise des Nürnberger Humanisten Sixtus Tucher (1459–1507)*. Tübingen 2014, pp. 60ff.

7 For more on Cochläus' humanist education and leanings, cf. Hubert Jedin: *Des Johannes Cochlaeus Streitschrift de libero arbitrio hominis (1525)*. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der vortridentinischen katholischen Theologie. Breslau 1927, pp. 97–113.

8 Cf. Bäumer: *Cochläus*, p. 20.

9 Martin Spahn: *Johannes Cochläus. Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der Kirchenspaltung*. Berlin 1898.

10 Jedin: *Cochlaeus*, pp. 118–121.

rejecting reform. His criticism of Luther arose not so much from a preceding change of heart as it did from his engagement with Luther's writings – most notably two of the Reformer's seminal publications of 1520: the address to the *Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. These works struck one chord that appalled Cochläus particularly: the apparent collapse of a distinction between clergy and laity, which thereby opened the door to an entirely destructive ecclesiology.¹¹ This would become a dominant theme in Cochläus' criticism of Luther. Whereas Cajetan, after meeting Luther in Augsburg in 1518, concluded that Luther wanted to "create a new church," Cochläus fears that Luther, if left unhindered, would leave the world with no church at all.

The turn against Luther did not mean that Cochläus had given up all hope of bringing the Reformer, whom he suspected of egotism and vanity, back into obedience to Rome. At Worms, Cochläus met with Luther and, perhaps naively, discussed practical steps to that effect. The encounter went badly for Cochläus, who soon found himself on the receiving end of Luther's growing taste for ridiculing his opponents publicly.¹²

Cochläus began writing against Luther; more specifically, he began writing against Luther's own writings.¹³ At first, he concentrated on countering the Reformer's sacramentology. Soon, though, the titles began to indicate where Cochläus' deeper interests lay. So, for example, reads the title of a work of 1523: *Glos und Comment auff den XIII. Artikel von rechtem Messhalten widr Lutherische zwispaltung*. Not only does Cochläus signal his opposition to Luther's reform of the mass, but he also indicates why this is so important to him: with these reforms, Lutherans are dividing the church. Cochläus' decision to publish the work in German rather than the Latin he had favored for most of his other writings, also indicates his aim for a broader audience – in Germany, of course. In fact, Cochläus' concern for preventing the disunity of the church goes hand in hand with another aim: that of German unity. This, too, is a consistent theme in the writings themselves, and occasionally makes its way into his titles, such as *Ein Christliche vermanung der heyiligen Statt Rom an das Teütschland, yr Tochter im Christlichen Glauben*, published the following year, in 1524. Interestingly, Cochläus accuses Luther not only of dividing the church in two, but of fomenting multiple divisions upon division. From *Zwiespalt* Cochläus moves on to the *Seven Heads of Martin Luther*.¹⁴ And there we have one of the most enduring of all polemical tropes issued

11 This point is made by Bäumer: Cochläus, p. 21; but is widely established in the literature on Cochläus and readily evident in Cochläus' own writings.

12 Bäumer: Cochläus, pp. 23f.

13 For a comprehensive list of Cochläus' publications, cf. Scheyder: Cochläus, pp. 717–731.

14 Johannes Cochläus: Sieben Köpffe Martini Luthers Vom Hochwirdigen Sacrament des Altars. Leipzig 1529.

against Protestantism: its so-called “fissiparousness.”¹⁵ In Cochläus’ mind, however, that splitting of the church has equally negative implications for society as a whole, in this case for the German nation.

Cochläus continued writing ad hoc theological responses to Luther throughout the 1520’s and 1530’s, long after he moved from the court of Albrecht of Mainz to that of George of Saxony, in Dresden (1528/29), to the cathedral of Meissen (1535), and finally to Breslau (1539). There he remained for the rest of his life, punctuating his repose with frequent trips to other destinations. One trip, however, would be denied him: despite his great hopes for a council and his persistent agitation on its behalf among both Catholics and Protestants, he would never make it to the Council of Trent. Trent, though relying heavily on Cochläus’ groundbreaking assessments of Luther, took place without his personal participation.

The prospect of that council inspired Cochläus to the greatest of all his works: his *Commentaries on the Deeds and Writings of Martin Luther* (1549).¹⁶ Cochläus had begun the work during the 1530s, probably in 1532. Its original plan revolved around drawing parallels between Luther and Jan Hus, thereby linking these two reform movements, the one current, the other already condemned, and using that proximity to expose the dangers inherent to Luther’s project.¹⁷ That plan fell apart, and Cochläus tossed the Hussite pieces into print on their own while suspending his work on Luther. After moving to Breslau, he resumed his research and finally brought it to a close after Luther’s death in 1546, publishing the results three years later. His aim was to provide a tool for the deliberations in Trent.

Several things are noteworthy about style and approach of the *Luther Commentaries*. First, and most conspicuous, is Cochläus’ astonishing thoroughness. Though confining himself largely to printed works – unlike Sleidanus, who drew heavily on manuscripts and unpublished documents – Cochläus collected and digested almost every major and minor work of Luther one could expect him to find. These were supported by other documents, such as official pronouncements from various princely courts, imperial edicts, and correspondence involving Luther and concerning Luther.¹⁸ Much like Sleidanus after him, Cochläus builds his reliability upon a foundation of academic rigor. And in classic humanistic spirit, that means turning to primary sources.

15 This trope was reheated recently by Brad Gregory: *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. Cambridge 2012, passim. Significantly, Cochläus’ writings against other groups, such as the Anabaptists, follow his familiar pattern of laying primary blame on Luther: the Anabaptists may be seditious and heretical, but without Luther, they would not be at all.

16 Johannes Cochläus: *Commentaria Ioannis Cochlaei, de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri Saxonis, Chronographice, Ex ordine ab Anno Domini M.D.XVII. usque ad Annum M.D.XLVI. Inclusiue, fideliter conscripta*. Mainz 1549.

17 Cf. Adolf Herte: *Die Lutherkommentare des Johannes Cochläus. Kritische Studie zur Geschichtsschreibung im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung*. Münster 1935, pp. 2ff.

18 A comprehensive listing of Cochläus’ sources is provided by Herte: *Lutherkommentare*, pp. 28–226.