

## General Introduction

THE EDITORS

The papacy is commonly referred to as the world's oldest surviving institution. Historians have long been fascinated, even perplexed, by what A. D. Wright has called its "capacity for survival" and its "residual strength" across centuries, punctuated by waves of epochal transformations.<sup>1</sup> How and why the papacy has survived across the centuries as an instrument of authority, governance, and influence when so many other powerful institutions – empires and states – have disappeared or been reduced to largely ceremonial functions is surely one of the great unsettled questions of history. Yet there is something imprecise about this commonplace characterization of the papacy as a "surviving" institution if by surviving we mean simply to imply unbroken continuity over time in the basic meaning and form. The claim of an unbroken line of succession from the apostle Peter to the current pope, which is really a claim about the primal *source* of papal authority, needs to be set aside for a moment. The historical record tells a story not so much of institutional survival but of constant invention and reinvention: of makings, un-makings, and re-makings. There has not been one papacy which survives across the centuries, but rather many different institutional forms of the *idea* – and *ideal* – of the papacy as an instrument of power and influence over the lives of believers and non-believers alike. To be sure, many continuities can be discerned across the vast expanse of more than two millennia of papal history, involving self-understanding and organizational structures. Yet in some respects differences in the content and form of the papacy as an institution have been so substantial, even radically different, from one historical epoch to another that they would be virtually unrecognizable to contemporaries from each of them.

*The Cambridge History of the Papacy* is organized to provide readers with a critical-historical survey of the structural development of the papacy as an

I extend my gratitude to Paul Smith for his superb editing, and to Liz Davey, who guided this project forward despite the bumpy road. Joëlle Rollo-Koster.

<sup>1</sup> A. D. Wright, *The Early Modern Papacy: From the Council of Trent to the French Revolution, 1564–1789* (Harlow, 2000), 1.

## General Introduction

institution, and as an actor in Church history and world history. It is hard to imagine a sphere of human activity over the past two millennia that has not been influenced by, and, in turn, influenced, papal action – be it in the domains of religious belief and practice; social, cultural, and political thought; art, science, medicine, ethics, diplomacy, or international relations. In effect, from its uncertain and contested foundations in the first centuries of Christianity to the present, the papacy has remained, as Eamon Duffy has said, “at the heart of the most urgent, the most profound and the most exuberant of human concerns.”<sup>2</sup> Duffy also observes that its history is the story of “one of the most momentous and extraordinary institutions in the history of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Little wonder, then, that academic and popular interest in the papacy persists, despite the vastly changed circumstances in which papal authority and influence are exercised within the Catholic Church, and projected more widely in civil society today. Consider, for instance, the critical reception and popularity of television series and films concerning the papacy – most notably Paolo Sorrentino’s *The Young Pope* and *The New Pope*, or Fernando Meirelles’s *The Two Popes* – among a broad range of recent efforts. The popularity of these imaginative, if fantastical, treatments of the papacy has prompted papal scholars to take notice. Sorrentino’s work, for instance, was the subject of an animated round table discussion at the *Imago papae* conference in Liège, in 2018, for the many “medievalisms” the series produced. These included the young pope’s striking, almost fetishistic, penchant for dressing like Innocent III or Boniface VIII.<sup>4</sup> The sustained ability of successive recent popes to cultivate a global mass audience by means of far-reaching travels and a burgeoning presence on social media has helped to fuel popular interest in the structures and culture surrounding St. Peter’s next putative successor – an interest which now arguably exceeds academic interest by a good margin. In addition to its influence over centuries in matters of religious belief and practice for hundreds of millions of Catholics around the world, the papacy also has projected a moral vision of the social, economic, and political order that has been simultaneously embraced and rejected by millions of people over vast expanses of space and time. In its institutional dimensions, the papacy has evolved over time in response to epoch-making processes and events. Yet the papal institution has always struggled to defend a basic self-understanding

2 Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT, 2014), xii.

3 *Ibid.*, xi–xii.

4 The conference produced a volume, *Imago papae: Le pape en image du Moyen Âge à l’époque contemporaine*, ed. Claudia d’Alberto (Rome, 2020).

## General Introduction

of itself grounded in a theo-political vision of the origin and nature of the papal office and of its eschatological and sociological purpose.

Four questions – each addressed within the three volumes of the present work – have framed that vision across vast chronological and geographical expanses: the pope’s *centrality* within the Catholic Church, the *primacy* of papal power as an instrument of governance, the papacy’s *cultural* influence in society and culture, and the implications of *secularity* for its place in the lives of believers and non-believers alike. Each question – and the search for answers – converges around the fundamental question of papal *authority*: its original claims; the ebbs and flows of its effective reach; and the myriad ways in which claims and expressions of papal authority and supremacy have been contested within the Catholic tradition, and from without.

### Papal Historiography: From the *Liber pontificalis* to Pius XII

Writing about papal history is almost as old as the papacy itself. What we know – and what we think we know – about the papacy’s long and complex history is based on an eclectic mix of sources and sometimes constructed imagination. The sources for papal history are so eclectic in fact as to make it difficult to speak of a singular papal historiography.<sup>5</sup> Related historical materials range from fundamental texts compiled in the early Christian centuries, including New Testament accounts and later hagiographic writings by ecclesiastical sources, notably the *Liber pontificalis* (Book of the Popes), to an eclectic collection of papal biographies whose authorship has been the subject of scholarly curiosity and scrutiny for centuries.<sup>6</sup> Various popular histories and numerous iterations of “black legends” about St. Peter’s throne and the men (or woman) who occupied it can be found across the centuries. Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach the Elder’s 1521 *Passional Christi und Antichristi* is emblematic of one such black legend, rife with antipapal propaganda.<sup>7</sup> The woodcuts

5 For a survey of papal historiography, see Horst Fuhrmann, “Papstgeschichtsschreibung: Grundlinien und Etappen,” in Arnold Esch and Jens Petersen (eds.), *Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft in der Kultur Italiens und Deutschlands* (Tübingen, 1989), 141–83.

6 Stefan Bauer, “The *Liber pontificalis* in the Renaissance,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 82 (2020): 143–58; Stefan Bauer, “Who Wrote the Lives of the Popes? Permutations of a Renaissance Myth,” *Catholic Historical Review* 107 (2021): 28–49; Rosamond McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber pontificalis* (Cambridge, 2020).

7 A digital copy is available at [www.bl.uk/collection-items/luthers-anti-papist-pamphlet-passional-christi-und-antichristi-1521](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/luthers-anti-papist-pamphlet-passional-christi-und-antichristi-1521).

## General Introduction

illustrate a virulent text which compares the pope's actions to those of the Antichrist: a pope who lost control over his bodily appetites, a pope destined to Hell, the antithesis of the Vicar of Christ. In a similar vein, even if not nearly so sensual, is Voltaire's *Candide*, which reiterated earlier attacks on the pope as Antichrist, even as its author petitioned Benedict XIV to keep his censured tragedy *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète* afloat.<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, competing narratives with a tinge of myth and legend have surrounded Pius XII, the controversial pope who reigned during the Second World War and the Cold War, and whose responses to Nazism and the Holocaust have elicited polarized, often sensationalized debate. The debate has played out in public memory more than in scholarly venues, although the lines between the two are easily blurred.<sup>9</sup> Termed the "Pius War," the debate has been dominated by competing accounts – veritable legends, one might argue – of Pius XII as *Hitler's Pope* or a *Righteous Gentile*.<sup>10</sup> In one version, Pius XII is cast as a morally timorous and politically ineffective religious leader, whose strict adherence to the norms and traditions of papal impartiality were sorely ill-suited for the ferocity of fascist exclusionary violence. By contrast, the many would-be Pius defenders cast the besieged wartime pope as a fundamentally good, even saintly figure, who used the papal office to defend human life and work for peace against intractable countervailing forces. Neither version, of course, is historically complete – and nor is it particularly useful for understanding seriously the papacy's Holocaust-era policies.<sup>11</sup>

In March 2019, Pope Francis I announced the opening – by March 2020 – of the Pius XII archives, spanning the years of one of the longest pontificates in modern history – from 1939 to 1958.<sup>12</sup> Until recently, historical study of the

<sup>8</sup> See Voltaire, *Candide*, introduction by Philip Littell (New York, 1918), 22 and Voltaire, *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète* (Amsterdam, 1743). Christopher M. S. Johns, "Introduction. The Scholars' Pope: Benedict XIV and the Catholic Enlightenment," in Rebecca Messbarger, Christopher M. S. Johns, and Philip Gavitt (eds.), *Benedict XIV and the Enlightenment: Art, Science, and Spirituality* (Toronto, 2016), 5–6.

<sup>9</sup> See, most recently, David I. Kertzer, *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler* (New York, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> It seems that the phrase "Pius War" was coined in Joseph Bottum and David G. Dalin's *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII* (Lanham, MD, 2004). For a recent review of the state of the question, see Robert A. Ventresca, "Catholics, the Holocaust, and the Burden of History," in *Advancing Holocaust Studies*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (New York, 2021), 114–27.

<sup>11</sup> The definitive accounts of these respective versions are John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York, 1999) and Ronald J. Rychlak, *Righteous Gentile: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis* (Dallas, TX, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Officials of the Vatican Secret Archive, March 4, 2019. [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190304\\_archivio-segretovaticano.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/march/documents/papa-francesco_20190304_archivio-segretovaticano.html).

## General Introduction

papacy's role in the era of the two world wars and the Holocaust has relied almost exclusively on select archival material from the former Vatican's "Secret Archives," published between 1965 and 1981, titled the *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*.

The Vatican has long pointed to the published portions of its wartime archives to defend itself from claims that it was slow-walking full access to the archives because it was trying to protect the reputation of a pope many Catholics believe should be made a saint. In response to charges of secrecy and lack of transparency, in fact, the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, in tandem with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, established in 1999 the International Catholic Historical Commission. It was comprised of six reputable scholars in the field – three Catholic and three Jewish – whose mandate was to review the eleven volumes of published documents and then to "raise relevant questions and issues that," in the opinion of the team of scholars, "have not adequately or satisfactorily been resolved by available documentation."<sup>13</sup>

The fundamental historical problem the Commission confronted – and it is the question that confronts us still – was "to understand the actions of Pius XII and the Vatican during World War Two, how they decided upon the policies they followed, and why." As insightful as the published sources are, it is hard to disagree with the Commission's conclusion that publication of select papers, however revealing some of them may be, cannot "put to rest significant questions" about the Vatican's role during the Holocaust. As the Commission's report aptly put it in its October 2000 report, "no serious historian could accept that the published, edited volumes could put us at the end of the story."<sup>14</sup>

In short, then, we are not at the end of the story despite all that has been written and said about the pope and the Vatican during the Second World War and the Holocaust. As with other dimensions of papal history, the opening of the Vatican's Holocaust-era archives offers the promise of new, source-based historical interpretations of the papacy at a time of global war and genocide. Major interpretive frameworks, correctives even, are needed if we are to understand and evaluate fully the papacy's role in the Second World War and the Holocaust. For example, historians will need to adopt new evaluative frameworks to study the development and deployment of papal humanitarian diplomacy to respond to war, genocide, and post-conflict reconstruction.

<sup>13</sup> International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, "The Vatican and the Holocaust: A Preliminary Report," October 2000. <https://web.archive.org/web/20060217091102/http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=759>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## General Introduction

Ultimately, the papacy's responses to the Holocaust cannot be understood fully if studied in a vacuum; that is, isolated, and disconnected from a critical examination of the humanitarian discourse and structures of papal diplomacy in the era of the two world wars. It is important for future research to consider the extent to which the transnational vectors of papal humanitarian diplomacy, developed on the eve of the Second World War, augmented processes that started with substantive structural transformations under both Benedict XV and Pius XI. At the same time, we need to evaluate critically the political and ideological premises underlying those structures. If we wish to move beyond the inhibiting strictures of the "Pius War," scholars will need to lay bare how theology, politics, and diplomacy intersected and interacted to determine the course of papal policy in times of severe humanitarian crises.

## The Invention of Papal History

Writing the history of the papacy has played a formative role in the making, unmaking, and remaking of the papacy as an institution. Stefan Bauer has written recently about papal history's "invention" in the sixteenth century at the desk of Onofrio Panvinio, an Augustinian friar, no less. Panvinio was arguably the first historian to rely on modern historical methods as he chronicled the origins and development of the papal office.<sup>15</sup> In some respects, however, Panvinio was more the exception than the rule in adopting a critical-historical approach to writing about papal history before the modern period. In fact, before the opening of the Vatican's archives in the late nineteenth century, writing about the papacy was largely the purview of antiquarians and aficionados who were taken with one or another dimension of the history of specific papal eras. We think here, for example, of the work of Étienne Baluze (1630–1718), Jean-Baptiste Colbert's librarian, who drafted a history of the Avignon popes which still resonates in today's historiography; or of Francesco Cancellieri, whose voluminous output included works on the papal *possesso* and the Vatican antiquities; or of Gaetano Moroni, author of a 103-volume *Dizionario de erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, and Gregory XVI's major-domo – to name but the most prominent practitioners of this trade.<sup>16</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, writing about the history of the papacy has been transformed – revolutionized even – by two concurrent and related

15 Stefan Bauer, *The Invention of Papal History: Onofrio Panvinio between Renaissance and Catholic Reform* (Oxford, 2019).

16 Étienne Baluze, *Vitae paparum Avenionensium, hoc est, Historia pontificum romanorum qui in Gallia sederunt ab anno Christi MCCC. usque ad annum MCCCXCIV.*, ed. Guillaume

## General Introduction

developments. The first is the modernization and professionalization of critical history study as a scientific discipline. The second is the incremental opening of the Vatican's archives since 1881, most notably to scholars working outside of ecclesiastically run or approved universities and research institutes. The opening of the papal archives marked the beginning of the serious business of studying papal history grounded on diplomatic, paleographical, and textual research. European "Schools" or "Academies" founded in Rome have facilitated not only the research but also the dissemination of findings in various national publications. These include, most notably, the German *Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* and the publications of the *Historischen Institut* of the *Görres-Gesellschaft*, the *Institut historique belge de Rome*, and the *École française de Rome*. The fruits of archival research mediated through the lens of modern historical methods were borne in the landmark publication of Ludwig von Pastor's *Geschichte der Päpste seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters* (History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages), which spans the period from Clement V (1305) to Pius VI (1799). Pastor's was a wide-ranging multi-volume history, published in English translation between 1891 and 1953, which was grounded in textual analysis and source criticism. Yet it was also limited by an apologetical bent that narrowed the chronological scope and simultaneously constrained a properly critical evaluation of the papacy as a historical actor.<sup>17</sup> Whenever a pope did something of which Pastor disapproved, it was interpreted as a personal failing of the reigning pontiff and did not, in Pastor's evaluation, reflect on the institution he idealized as a whole. This failure to reconcile, or better yet integrate, the biographical and the personal with the structural and the institutional resulted in one-dimensional and fragmented interpretations of the popes and the papacy as actors in history.

## Sources and Methods

The writing of papal history has demanded sustained analysis of clusters of primary and secondary source material by scholars, and the most important repository of such material for papal history has surely proved to be the

Mollat, 4 vols. (Paris, 1914–22). The edition by Mollat has recently been digitalized; see [http://baluze.univavignon.fr/v1/read\\_index.html](http://baluze.univavignon.fr/v1/read_index.html). Francisci [Francesco] Cancellieri, *De secretariis basilicae Vaticanae veteris*, 4 vols. (Rome, 1786); Francesco Cancellieri, *Storia de' solenni possessi de' sommi pontefici detti anticamente processi o processioni dopo la loro coronazione dalla Basilica Vaticana alla Lateranense dedicata alla Santità di N.S. Pio VII* (Rome, 1802); Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, 103 vols. (Venice, 1840–61).

<sup>17</sup> The English translations, in some forty volumes, are available at the Internet Archives, starting with volume 1 at <https://archive.org/details/historyofthepopeorpastuoft>.



## General Introduction

archives of the Roman Curia. Archival policies and practices reflect the values and priorities of the institution that generates them. And scholars know well that archives tell us a great deal about the nature of the institution that organizes and controls them.<sup>18</sup> Equally, archives play a critical role in the complex and contested process of producing and reproducing knowledge. The papal archives hold the key to understanding how the foremost spiritual authority of the world's largest religious institution formulated its internal and external policies. It took centuries to organize and centralize the Vatican Apostolic Archive (known until very recently as the Vatican Secret Archive). The stabilization and centralization of this archive under exclusive papal authority has represented the will of an institution that has understood its identity and also understands the archive's power to defend and project that identity to the Church and to the world. Pope Francis I's decision on October 28, 2019, to change its name could be seen to demonstrate a willingness to accept scrutiny and an openness rarely seen in ancient institutions.<sup>19</sup>

To redress a singular focus on the narrow bureaucratic structure centered around the papacy and the ecclesial hierarchy, scholars have also increasingly triangulated the research they develop from within the Vatican collections with a diverse array of sources, published and unpublished, from beyond them. Such triangulated research in different kinds and modes of material is vital to properly account for the relationship between the central governing bodies of the Church, namely the pope and the curia, and the diffused capillary network of religious orders and voluntary associations that operate in civil society, often at the margins of, and sometimes in tension with, the nerve-center of institutional power.

Despite the unmistakable decline in the quantity and scope of critical-historical research in the field in recent decades – especially for the modern and contemporary period – we do not want for ambitious histories of the papacy. These exist mainly in the form of wide-ranging if episodic historical dictionaries and encyclopedias. Notable publications include the three-volume series, *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, which was first published in French with Philippe Levillain as general editor, followed by an English version, edited by the late John W. O'Malley.<sup>20</sup> In addition to historical dictionaries and encyclopedias,

18 Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi, and Alessandro Silvestri, "Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History," *European History Quarterly* 46(3) (2016): 421–34.

19 See [www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-03/papal-archives-vatican-open-world-sergio-pagano.html](http://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-03/papal-archives-vatican-open-world-sergio-pagano.html).

20 *Dictionnaire historique de la papauté*, published by Fayard, in 1994, and *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, published by Routledge, in 2002. Other notable publications in the genre



## General Introduction

there are several publications that aim to provide sweeping chronological or biographical surveys of the individual popes.<sup>21</sup> These useful and often accessible accounts focus mainly on the lives of specific popes, rather than on the papacy itself as a formative institution in the life and governance of the Catholic Church and in world history; that is, as a major catalyst of social, political, and cultural change.

The chapters in *The Cambridge History of the Papacy* underscore how profound for the history of the Church and for world history itself have been the consequences that flowed from the ecclesial authority and power of the papacy. Taken together, these chapters lay bare the papacy's complex and contested role within a multi-level, intricate institution made up of distinctive and diverse communities diffused around the world. To advance new understandings of the papacy as an actor in world history demands ongoing work dissecting and analyzing, even interrogating, where appropriate, the contested nature of the papacy's role within the Catholic Church, and in society and politics writ large.

There is a practical challenge for various disciplines and methodologies in studying an institutionalized religious tradition led by an institution such as the papacy, which is “unto itself” (so to speak) – one comprised of so many distinctive but related parts all at the same time. The papacy claims to govern and lead the Church with supreme authority. The pope – the head of body of the Church, to borrow from early modern language – governs an institution with local, regional, and national expressions, which at the same time has also come to constitute a unified, global, and transnational entity. Various chapters across our three volumes explain how the papacy comprises within itself delineated lines of authority, laws, and even its own judicial system for regulating ecclesiastical affairs, and for exercising control and influence over the beliefs, practices, and social lives of adherents. The pope is both spiritual head of a global community of faith, and sovereign head of a territorial state, only limited to the Vatican City comparatively recently. The pope is also sovereign authority of the Holy See, a duly recognized entity that enjoys standing in international law.

of the historical dictionary include Matthew E. Bunson, *The Pope Encyclopedia: A to Z of the Holy See* (New York, 1995); P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Chronicle of the Popes* (London, 1997); Frank J. Coppa, *Encyclopedia of the Vatican and Papacy* (Westport, CT, 1999); Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* (San Francisco, 1997).

- <sup>21</sup> These include, most recently, Eamon Duffy's *Saints and Sinners*; Roger Collins, *Keepers of the Keys of Heaven: A History of the Papacy* (London, 2009); John W. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham, MD, 2010); John Julius Norwich, *Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy* (New York, 2011).

## General Introduction

At the same time, the papacy oversees an institutional system that is comprised of a network of semi-autonomous institutions and loci of decision-making: bishops and dioceses; parishes, religious orders, and congregations; voluntary Catholic lay associations. Crucially, as numerous scholars featured in these three volumes observe, the center-periphery relationships in institutional Catholicism are not static across time and place. Rather, they are highly dynamic such that each part of this complex system of institutionalized religion relates to the other in a range of historically and socially contingent ways. There may be inflection points of convergence or divergence between various levels of the Church system. Consequently, as the chapters that follow emphasize, we need to study the center-periphery dynamic in a diachronic as well as geographic manner to arrive at a more nuanced and historically specific understanding of the papacy as an agent of governance and cultural power within the Catholic Church, in political and diplomatic affairs, and in civil society.<sup>22</sup>

## Structure of the Present Work

Our approach is framed by two distinctive but intersecting categories that are essential to understanding papal history. The first category reflects what we might call the papacy's theo-political imagination – that is, the theological presuppositions of the popes and their vision of the papacy and its place in the Church, and in the world. The second category pertains to the praxis of what might best be understood as various forms of papal politics; that is, the expression in domestic politics, civil society, and international relations of the overarching theo-political vision. Several of the chapters that follow evaluate the stated principles and ideals of the theo-political imagination against the practical outcomes of various forms of religious politics informed, inspired, or constrained by it.<sup>23</sup>

22 Troy Jodok, "'The Pope's Own Hand Outstretched': Holy See Diplomacy as a Hybrid Mode of Diplomatic Agency," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20 (2018): 521–39; Troy Jodok, "The Catholic Church and International Relations," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, April 2016, available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2627477>; and Ivan Vallier, "The Roman Catholic Church: A Transnational Actor," *International Organization* 25 (1971): 479–502.

23 For further discussion of the conceptual framework of the theo-political imagination see, among other works, Emmanuel M. Katongole, *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton, PA, 2005). On the political expressions of theo-political visions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, see Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (Cambridge, 2009) and his "Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31(2) (2001): 163–86. See also Thomas F. X. Noble's review of Roger Collins's *Keepers of the Keys of Heaven: A History of the Papacy*, in *Theological Studies* 71(1) (2010): 222–23.