

# A history of early modern Catholicism in a single object

## John Hay's manuscript *Apologia* (c.1598)

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Throughout most of his life the Jesuit John Hay (1546–1607) strenuously opposed ‘the actions of the ministers of Calvin, the sole cause of every disaster and misfortune of our poor country’ – Scotland.<sup>1</sup> He fought heresy not only at home but also abroad. Like many other northern Catholic scholars, confronted with heresy in or near their homeland, Hay would have identified with the character in Figure 1. His itinerant existence had taken him on dangerous journeys back to Scotland as well as to Belgium, Italy, and France. Looking for a fight, Hay had translated his attack on the Scottish Kirk from low Scots (‘Escossois’) into French. This little work was, in effect, a self-help book. The Jesuit confidently predicted to the French Catholic reader that, with it, ‘you could defend yourself against the impudence of the heretics, whose mouth you will very frequently shut up using a few of [the] questions and demands’ listed in this book.<sup>2</sup> This forecast proved to be wrong where Hay himself was concerned. The French Protestant Jean des Serres (1540–1598) entered into the fray against him.<sup>3</sup> In response, the Scotsman composed an *Apologia*, an apology in the classical sense of the

word: that is, a defence against criticism. Hay was not sorry about anything at all. Getting the *Apologia* printed, however, showed that Calvinist ministers were not in the end Hay’s greatest opponents. His fellow Jesuits were.

Hay’s *Apologia* rests, still unpublished, in the central Jesuit archives in Rome. Folded inside the manuscript is a personal plea by the author, dated 26 March 1600, to the head of Hay’s religious order, the Jesuit general Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615): ‘I send to Your Reverence my *Apologia* against the minister Des Serres, which I have with great effort transcribed in large letters so that it may be more easily read by the printers. I pray and beseech Your Reverence that my errors are diligently corrected by the censors.’<sup>4</sup> Hay reported that in Belgium, where he was then based, he met with nothing but resistance. He pleaded with Acquaviva to have the work printed, and he was certain that the General ‘will do what equity demands’.<sup>5</sup> ‘There is no doubt’, he continued, ‘that the King of Scotland [James VI] and the Lords of that kingdom know that I have composed a reply. If it is not printed, I will be forced to ask Your Reverence to allow me to go away to unknown lands, where I may hide as if completely knocked over by a heretic.’<sup>6</sup>

Even before he saw Hay’s 1,086 page manuscript, Acquaviva had heard the project described in very different terms. Two years earlier a report filed by two Belgian Jesuits had been forwarded to Rome. One argued that the whole effort was fundamentally flawed:

*Whether you consider the material or the method, it would appear that no utility can flow out of reading [Hay’s] book. The material is unplanned, and the things he discusses in it on the subject of Scripture, the pope, the*

1. John Hay, *Demandes faictes aux ministres d’Escosse* (Lyon, 1583), sig. A2r: ‘les deportemens des Ministres de Calvin, cause seule de tout le desastre, et malheur de nostre pauvre pays’. On Hay, see the entry in Willem Audenaert, *Prosopographia Iesuitica Belgica Antiqua: A Biographical Dictionary of the Jesuits in the Low Countries* 4 vols (Leuven, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 430–1.

2. Hay, *Demande*, sig. A5r-v: ‘tu te puisses defendre contre l’impudence des Heretiques, ausquels tu fermeras bien-souvent la bouche, avec une couple de ces Interrogations ou Demandes’.

3. Jean de Serres, *Pro vera ecclesiae catholicae autoritate defensio* (Geneva, 1594).

4. Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [ARSI], Opp. NN. 300.

The letter in question is enclosed in an envelope attached to the inside of the cover of the manuscript: ‘Mitto ... ad R.P.V. meam contra Ministrum Des-Serres Apologiam, quam magno labore descripsi magno charactere quo facilius a typographis legeretur: Oro et obsecro R.P.V. ut errata mea a censoribus diligenter corrigantur.’

5. Ibid.: ‘faciet quod aequitas postulat.’

6. Ibid.: ‘Non dubium est quin Rex Scotiae et magnates illius Regni sciant me responsionem composuisse, quae si non edatur, cogar a R.P.Va. petere ut mihi liceat ad incognitas abire terras, ubi, tanquam ab haeretico plane prostratus, delitescam.’





Figure 1

From the title page of Carolus Scribani, *Amphitheatrum honoris* (Antwerp, 1606). The image shows the Catholic polemicist dressed as a gladiator, illuminated by 'veritas' (truth). An angel crowns him with the laurel wreath of victory. The background shows, as the title suggests, an amphitheatre. Left of the gladiator are a number of demonic figures in classical guise, including a winged sphinx, King Midas (complete with ears), and Medusa. They look subdued, but unlike the scholars (carrying books) to the right, they are still alive. One scholar lost a head, another an arm. All were struck down by the gladiator's sword. Reproduced by permission of the Master and Fellows of Balliol College, Oxford.

*Church, and the other dogmas of the Catholic religion have been so copiously, so solidly, so clearly and gravely written about by others in books already published that it appears redundant, indeed almost reckless to touch on them again, especially in the sort of style and way of writing that Father Hay uses, which to me seems similar to the actions of the two harlots in front of [King] Solomon.<sup>7</sup>*

As far as his colleagues was concerned, Hay's intemperate language risked splitting the baby.

### The Counter-Reformation

Even if John Hay would never leave Europe for one of the many Jesuit missions in the New World or the Far East, the history of his manuscript which, unread, has

7. ARSI, Germ. 178, fols 203r–v. Johannes Goudanus and Johannes Oranus to Olivier Manare, 18 August 1598: 'nulla utilitas ex eius libri lectione permanere posse videatur, sive rem consideres, sive modum. Res tumultuaria est, & quae de scriptura, de pontifice, de ecclesia, aliisque Catholicae religionis dogmatibus ibi tractant, ab aliis tam copiose, tam solide, tam perspicue graviterque scriptis libris iam sunt evulgata, ut supervacaneum, imo fere temerarium videatur ea iterum attingere, praesertim tali modo scribendi et stylo, quali P. Haiius utitur; qui mihi similis esse videtur modo agendi illarum duarum meretricum, coram Salomone.'



gathered dust in the archives for more than 400 years offers a prism through which to view the history and historiography of early modern Catholicism, a period traditionally known as the Counter-Reformation. There existed for centuries a surprising consensus among early modern Protestants and Catholics *and* the historians who studied them that the Catholic Church was above all an institutional church, identified with its episcopal hierarchy and headed by the papacy. That this shared understanding was interpreted differently by Protestants and Catholics will come as no surprise. For Protestants from Martin Luther onwards the papacy was the Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17), a sign that the end of days was near.<sup>8</sup> For Catholics the popes were the uninterrupted successors to the Apostle Peter, on whose rock Christ had built his Church (Matthew 16:18). In both these views, the Jesuits, of which Hay was one, were the proverbial stormtroopers of the Counter-Reformation Church. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, as the Jesuit order is officially called, likened the individual Jesuit to 'a lifeless body'.<sup>9</sup> Its founder, Ignatius of Loyola, advised his followers to judge what appeared white to be black, if the Church so stipulated.<sup>10</sup> No wonder, then, that Jesuits were seemingly everywhere, 'especially', as one historian observed, 'under the beds of zealous Calvinists and skeptical philosophers'.<sup>11</sup> Protestants credited the Jesuits with a wide range of sinister plots and Machiavellian conspiracies, the 1605 Gunpowder Plot being only the most famous.<sup>12</sup>

There is perhaps no greater compliment than an enemy implicitly acknowledging one's superhuman efficiency – yet, it does not make it true. The Society of Jesus, we now know, was from the late 16th century onwards riven by internal conflict.<sup>13</sup> John Hay, as we have seen, was a living human being, not part of the living dead. Historians of early modern Catholicism have moved well past the traditional understanding of the Counter-Reformation church as a 'heavily authoritarian' institution.<sup>14</sup> Simon Ditchfield has taught us to focus not on what early modern Catholicism 'was' (what label it deserved) but on what it 'did'.<sup>15</sup> And what early modern Catholics did, among many other things besides, was to

argue and fight with each other. This, as Mary Laven recently argued regarding the laity, was not necessarily a bad thing: 'resistance and opposition ... were the source of creativity that contributed to the reshaping of Catholicism during the period of our study.'<sup>16</sup> The study of the role and agency of the laity and the recovery of a plurality of Catholic views and perspectives have enriched our understanding of the early modern Catholic world. Yet it has also hollowed out our conceptual toolkit. The changes Catholicism underwent – and their origins – have become too diverse and manifold to be described.

The Counter-Reformation, in short, has become an empty shell. I would like to suggest that we have discarded it too quickly – not because its framework still possesses any validity, but because its origins are worth reflecting on. It is true that the label 'Counter-Reformation' was of Protestant coinage. It was first used in the preface to a 1776 edition of the Lutheran Confession of Augsburg.<sup>17</sup> It is also true that Protestants from the outset valued the image of a reactionary, hierarchical Church led by the Antichrist. The word 'papist' entered the English language in 1533, the year before the Act of Supremacy made Henry VIII the supreme head of the Church of England.<sup>18</sup> It very usefully defined Catholics by their allegiance to the papacy, a foreign monarch. At the same time, many Catholics, if anything, embraced this image of an institutional Church. One of the leading Catholic scholars of the period, the cardinal and papal confessor Cesare Baronio (1538–1607; Figure 2), devoted 12 volumes and, by his own counting, some 50 years of his life to a history of the Catholic Church which proved that its

*visible monarchy [had been] instituted by Christ our Lord, founded upon Peter, and preserved inviolately, guarded religiously, never broken or interrupted but perpetually continued through his true and legitimate successors, indisputably the Roman popes, always known and observed to be the one visible head of this mystical body of Christ, the Church, to which other members give obedience.*<sup>19</sup>

Yet, as Ruth Noyes has shown, even Baronio, a man so close to pope Clement VIII he heard his confessions, had repeated run-ins with the papal curia.<sup>20</sup>

8. Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg (Oxford, 2000).

9. George E. Ganss, ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis MO, 1970), para. 547 (p. 249).

10. Ignatius of Loyola, 'The Spiritual Exercises', in Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, trans., *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of the Spiritual Exercises* (London, 2004), pp. 279–358, at 358.

11. Anthony Grafton, cited by Mordechai Feingold, 'Jesuits: Savants', in Mordechai Feingold, ed., *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge MA, 2003), pp. 1–46, at 1.

12. Peter Burke, 'The Black Legend of the Jesuits: An Essay in the History of Social Stereotypes', in Simon Ditchfield, ed., *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 165–82.

13. Jean-Pascal Gay, *Jesuit Civil Wars: Theology, Politics, and Government under Tirso González (1687–1705)* (Farnham, 2012); Silvia Mostaccio, *Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during the Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615)* (Farnham, 2014).

14. For this label, see Michael Mullett, *The Catholic Reformation* (London, 1999), p. x.

15. Simon Ditchfield, 'Of Dancing Cardinals and Mestizo Madonnas: Reconfiguring the History of Roman Catholicism in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 8:3–4 (2004), 386–408 at 408.

16. Mary Laven, introduction to Alexandra Bamji et al., eds, *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 1–11 at 7.

17. John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge MA, 2002), p. 20.

18. Peter Marshall, 'Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism', in Ethan Shagan, ed., *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 22–48 at 34.

19. Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, 12 vols (Rome, 1588–1607), vol. 1, p. 5: 'catholicae Ecclesiae visibilem Monarchiam a Christo Domino institutam, super Petrum fundatam, ac per eius legitimos, verosque successores, Romanos nimirum Pontifices, inviolate conservatam, religiose custoditam, neque umquam interruptam, vel intermissam, sed perpetuo continuatam, semperque huius mystici corporis Christi, quod est Ecclesia, unum caput visibile, cui pareant membra cetera, esse cognitum et observatum.' Cited in Jan Machielsen, 'Counter-Reformation' in Philip Ford et al., eds, *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 759–774 at 766–67.

20. Ruth Noyes, 'On the Fringes of Center: Disputed Hagiographic Imagery and the Crisis over the Beati moderni in Rome ca. 1600', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 64:3 (2011), 800–46 esp. 817.

## Reform as a personal enterprise?

Hay's manuscript, therefore, reveals some of the fundamental contradictions inherent in early modern Catholicism, in particular the profound contrast between its outward claims and inward reality. Hay's manuscript was at once a personal enterprise – one of his Belgian colleagues wrote that he had been warned off before he started<sup>21</sup> – and a defence of the institutional Church in general, and the papacy in particular. His aim was to show that the Church was unchanging since its foundation by Christ, and that Calvinism was no more than a combination of heresies which the Church had long since defeated. In his letter of dedication to James VI of Scotland he promised that 'if it were not a nuisance for you, Most Serene King, to read my response to the Calvinist minister, I do not doubt that through your singular acumen and the erudition in which you excel you would easily perceive that the doctrine of the Calvinists is the most hideous monster formed for a large part out of the most pernicious heresies of the ancient heretics.'<sup>22</sup> The manuscript's excessive length and its careful copying into 'large letters' for the benefit of the printer, Hay's private pleading with Acquaviva and his hopeful public appeal to James all show the Catholic exile's personal investment in this image of the Counter-Reformation Church as at once institutional and unchanging. Yet, they also belie it. Censorship, as the fate of Hay's manuscript shows, may be a collaborative process; authorship generally is not.

Hay and his fellow early modern Catholic intellectuals offer the historian something unusual: a chance to study the ambitions, feelings, and desires of individuals who for their expression are utterly reliant on the idea of an institutional hierarchy that negates all of these as expressions of the self. By arrogating for themselves the position of spokesperson of unchanging tradition, they elide their personal motivations. One effect, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, has been for Catholic scholars to locate the origins of their work outside of themselves; by identifying the beginnings with the command of a superior they transformed a personal project into an act of obedience.<sup>23</sup> Yet personal ambitions and frustrations that were so carefully effaced frequently surfaced when projects crashed into the real world. The English Catholic exile Thomas Stapleton threatened his reluctant printer with 'great chaos' after he had been informed that anti-Protestant polemics of the sort he had composed 'in some way hardly sell'.<sup>24</sup> Hay's problem was with his colleagues



**Figure 2** Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, 12 vols (Antwerp, 1604), vol. 10, fol. \*6verso. An engraving showing Cesare Baronio at the age of 64, hard at work on the next instalment of his project. Note the religious icon and crucifix on his desk. The open window shows Baronio's titular church of Santi Nereo ed Achilleo, near the Baths of Caracalla, then on the outskirts of Rome. Reproduced by permission of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford.

and censors, but he took care to inform Acquaviva that 'my book could have been printed here [in Belgium] without any cost to the Society.'<sup>25</sup>

The traditional image of the Counter-Reformation, therefore, might be an empty shell, but it was on the part of Hay and his colleagues also a utopian fantasy which they wished into reality. Their individual projects – cast, of course as their precise opposite – pushed the Counter-Reformation into directions which others might not want to follow. When the Spanish Dominican friar Thomas Malvenda claimed that Martin Delrio's *Disquisitiones magicæ* (1599-1600), a voluminous encyclopaedia on witchcraft and magic, might give readers ideas, he insinuated, in effect, that the Flemish-Spanish Jesuit encouraged his readers to try witchcraft at home. The Jesuit retaliated by denouncing the Dominican friar

21. ARSI, Ep. Germ. 178, fol. 204r. Olivier Manare to Claudio Acquaviva, 22 August 1598, enclosing the report by Goudanus and Oranus, cited in n. 7.

22. ARSI, Opp. NN. 300, unnumbered folio page: 'si Rex Serenissime tibi molestum non fuerit, ea legere quae Calvinii ministro respondi, non dubito quin pro singulari tuo acumine, et eruditione qua polles, Calvinistarum doctrinam esse foedissimum monstrum ex antiquorum haereticorum perniciosissimis erroribus magna ex parte conflatum, sis facile percepturus.' Hay's letter of dedication is dated 1 January 1598.

23. Jan Machielsens, 'Heretical Saints and Textual Discernment: The Polemical Origins of the *Acta Sanctorum*', in Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsens, eds, *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 103–41.

24. Jan Machielsens, 'How (not) to Get Published: The Plantin Press in the Early 1590s', *Dutch Crossing* 34:2 (2010), 99–114 at 103.

25. Letter inserted in ARSI, Opp. NN. 300: 'Liber meus fuisset hic excusus sine omni sumptu Societatis'.



in a public letter to the Inquisition.<sup>26</sup> Clashes such as these were central to Counter-Reformation intellectual culture, and as Laven suggested in a very different context, conflicts were by no means always detrimental. Yet, equally important is the fact that these conflicts have been whitewashed and can only be recovered in the archives – as Hay’s manuscript has been. Focusing on the role played by intellectuals in fostering and forging an intellectual culture brings both the individual and the whole they wish to be part of firmly into view. The result is a richer understanding of a church that was rapidly changing, even though its guiding principle was that it did not.

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There is a bigger lesson to be learnt from this story of the Catholic ‘self’ as well. Even if early modern Catholic intellectuals with their grand aims and petty fights are of interest in and of themselves, they also show how reliant we human beings are on religious or philosophical beliefs much larger than ourselves to give our lives meaning and the difficulties this inevitably brings. Their struggles set into relief the tension between the need to negate the individual ambitions, feelings, and desires that make up the self *and* the impossibility of that feat. Many of us find religious belief increasingly incomprehensible, yet we live in an age of renewed religious violence. At a time when some seem again willing to commit that ultimate and most dreaded act of self negation – killing and dying for their faith – these early modern Catholic intellectuals could help us understand a religious problem, the connection of the individual to their community, that belongs to all ages. Hay wished and risked his life to be part of a larger whole and to represent, even fight for, that whole, but he also wished that whole to be like himself, if only it would let him.

26. Jan Machielsen, *Martin Delrio: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 11.

### MARTIN DELRIO Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation



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