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# Introduction

—David Bagchi



## READING THE "OTHER SIDE" OF THE REFORMATION

> Our knowledge of the Reformation suffers from a one-sidedness, a degree of uncertainty, while we are incomparably better acquainted with the reformers and their colleagues than with their opponents.[1]

These words were written in 1889 by a German Protestant historian, welcoming the appearance of a 500-page biography of one of Luther's Catholic opponents. One hundred and thirty years later, it can safely be said that this proviso no longer applies.[2] A succession of studies has both broadened and deepened our appreciation of the so-called "Catholic controversialists," the collective name given to theologians who wrote against Luther and the other reformers. It is now widely acknowledged that their role was not purely

1. Wilhelm Walther in his review of Hermann Wedewer, *Johannes Dietenberger, 1475–1537: Sein Leben und Wirken* in *Historische Zeitschrift* 63 (1889) 311.

2. An indication that studies of Luther's Catholic opponents are no longer considered marginal to the study of Luther himself can be seen from the inclusion of the late Heribert Smolinsky's essay, "Luther's Roman Catholic Critics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, edited by Robert Kolb, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 502–10; and also from the inclusion of Jared Wicks's essay, "Martin Luther in the Eyes of His Roman Catholic Opponents," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, edited by Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

a reactive one of negating the claims of Luther and other reformers with polemic, but that it embraced more positive strategies as well. For instance, it is clear that some Catholic writers used the printing press to reach and to teach the public, in order both to buttress their faith and to provide them with ready-made arguments against the blandishments of whatever wolf in sheep's clothing they might encounter.[3] Others tried to show that Luther's teachings could be disproved on his own terms, on the basis of scripture alone, and did not merely confront him with reams of canon law and scholastic theology.[4] In addition, we are now much more knowledgeable than before of the differences within the ranks of the Catholic controversialists, who did not present a unified or uniform front against their opponent in their understanding of the papacy, for example.[5]

In short, the Catholic controversialists can no longer be dismissed as knee-jerk reactionaries and supporters of the *status quo*, or as undifferentiated representatives of a moribund late-medieval scholasticism. Rather, they appear to us now as writers who were as thoughtful and committed as their Protestant counterparts. Of course, they do sometimes seem deficient both in reasoning and in reasonableness, to say nothing of Christian charity; but their pig-headedness in this respect is no worse than their opponents.' Each



3. Augustin von Alveldt made this intention very clear in his German-language *Eyn gar fruchtbar und nutzbarlich buchleyn von dem Babstlichen stul [A Very Fruitful and Useful Little Book Concerning the Papal See]* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter the Elder, 1520). From its pastorally-minded preface one might not easily recognize this as an anti-Lutheran work at all. He wrote, "But so that everyone might follow safely the way to God, I have made a small booklet (*ein kleines buchlen*) for all people, which is no less fruitful than it is useful, concerning the right flock, which [alone] possesses the right way, means, and method to reach God, and by which it will undoubtedly reach him" (sig. Aiv).

4. This was especially true of Dietenberger and Schatzgeyer. See Ulrich Horst, "Das Verhältnis von Schrift und Kirche nach Johannes Dietenberger," *TP* 46 (1971) 223–47.

5. For example, Alveldt, Thomas Murner, Thomas Illyricus, and Schatzgeyer all expressed in their defences of papal primacy against Luther a more or less muted conciliarism. They were all Franciscans, and Franciscans at this time were still wary of attributing too much power to the papacy. Schatzgeyer in particular expressly subordinated papal power to that of the church as embodied in a council. See *Ainn wahrhafftige Erklerung wie sich Sathanas Inn diesen hernach geschriben vieren materyenn vergwentet unnd erzaygt unnder der gestalt eynes Enngels des Liechts* (Munich: n.p., 1526), sig. Giv. The humanists Sir Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus held to an understanding of ecclesiastical consensus that tended towards a species of conciliarism. See Eduard H. L. Baumann, *Thomas More und der Konsens. Eine theologiegeschichtliche Analyse der 'Responsio ad Lutherum' von 1523* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993), 46; Michael Becht, *Pium consensum tueri. Studien zum Begriff consensus im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon und Johannes Calvin*, RGST 144 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000).

saw in the other a threat to Christ's church equal to or greater than the threat posed by the Ottoman Empire. No wonder they fought dirty.

There is of course much work still to be done to understand the Catholic controversialists fully, both as individuals and as a cohort. But at least they are now understood in their own terms and judged by their own criteria, as an important part of the full picture of the Reformation. The time when they were valued by Protestant historians merely as foils to enable Luther's theological brilliance to shine more brightly, or by Roman Catholic historians for the degree of their loyalty to Tridentine orthodoxy, is long gone.

There is one respect, however, in which Walther's words of 130 years ago still hold good, at least for monolingual anglophones. While the writings of sixteenth-century Protestants are readily available in English, in print and online, it is still difficult for those who lack a working knowledge of sixteenth-century Latin and German to access the writings of the Catholic controversialists, despite the availability of some superb translations.[6] The present volume, using examples of Catholic controversial writing from the extensive Kessler Reformation Collection, therefore, meets a pressing need. Each translation, by an experienced translator, is prefaced by a detailed introduction, which sets both the writer and the writing in context. The purpose of this general introduction is to provide a wider perspective designed to contextualize and to characterize both the personalities involved and the nature of their literary response to Luther.



## THE AUTHORS

In contrast with the evangelical pamphleteering of the day, publishing against the Reformation was no free-for-all, and Catholic writers generally did not take up the pen unless commanded to do so by their secular or ecclesiastical superiors. Evangelical propagandists saw in the need to challenge abuses and in their duty as baptized Christians to proclaim the

6. Erika Rummel, ed., *Scheming Papists and Lutheran Fools: Five Reformation Satires* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993) includes selections from Murner's brilliant verse satire, *The Great Lutheran Fool*. Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Frazel, eds., *Luther's Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) offers a translation of Cochlaeus's life of Luther. Particular mention should also be made of Johann Tetzel's *Rebuttal against Luther's Sermon on Indulgences and Grace*, translated with an introduction by Dewey Weiss Kramer (Atlanta: Pitts Theology Library, 2012), which makes a contemporaneous Catholic response to Luther's critique of indulgence available for the first time and is included in the present volume.

gospel in season and out, sufficient reasons to publish a pamphlet or even a series of them. The only constraint was finding a printer prepared to handle the work. A famous example is that of Argula von Grumbach, who in her pamphlets called the authorities of the University of Ingolstadt out on the grounds that no one else was doing so. The requirement to defend God's word and the demands of natural justice (the authorities had imprisoned and kept incommunicado a Lutheran student), she explained, overrode even the biblical injunction on women to keep silent.[7]

On the other hand, with few exceptions, Catholics published only if they had direct authorization to do so. Even the indulgence preacher Johann Tetzel, who had the most personal score of all to settle with Luther, wrote his *Rebuttal* not in a private capacity but as "inquisitor of heretical depravity" for Saxony and ultimately as part of the legal process against Luther.[8] Duke George of Albertine Saxony used his authority as a prince, entrusted by God with the care of the souls of his duchy, to mobilize his bishops, his household, and the printing shops of Dresden and Leipzig to ban Luther's works and to publish refutations of them. The success of his scheme can be seen from the fact that the presses in his lands were responsible for nearly half of all vernacular Catholic controversial theology in German-speaking lands between 1518 and 1555, a still more impressive statistic when one considers that the campaign ended in 1539, with George's death.[9] Many of the writings represented in this selection (by Alveldt, Bachmann, Cochlaeus, Emser, and Wulffer) were commissioned by Duke George, either directly or through his bishop, Adolf II (of Merseberg). While George was the most determined of the German princes to oppose the Reformation, he was not alone. The agency of Joachim, Margrave of Brandenburg, in commissioning

7. Peter Matheson points out that this was von Grumbach's initial position. She developed a more positive justification for women speaking out against false teaching in her later works. See Peter Matheson, ed., *Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's Voice in the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 43.

8. See Kramer, *Johann Tetzel's Rebuttal*.

9. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 36. Duke George's propaganda campaign is discussed in Mark U. Edwards, Jr., "Catholic Controversial Literature, 1518–1555: Some Statistics," *ARG* 79 (1988) 189–204; Christoph Volkmar, *Die Heiligenerhebung Bennos von Meissen (1523–1524)*, RGST 146 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002); Volkmar, *Catholic Reform in the Age of Luther: Duke George of Saxony and the Church, 1488–1525*, SMRT 209 (Leiden: Brill, 2018); David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518–1525*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 230–36. For Duke George's own literary activity, see Hans Becker, "Herzog Georg von Sachsen als kirchlicher und theologischer Schriftsteller," *ARG* 24 (1927) 161–269; Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46* (Leiden: Brill, for Cornell University Press, 1983), 20–67.

Konrad Wimpina's controversial works is made clear in the introduction to the document *Against Martin Luther's Confession at Augsburg*, which is included in this collection.

There were important exceptions to this rule. Johann Eck first entered the lists against Luther in a private capacity when he circulated a manuscript of annotations on the *Ninety-Five Theses* among friends. Johannes Cochlaeus, who was to become a more prolific opponent of Luther than even Eck, and a far more influential one in the long term,[10] wrote his early works independently. But both these exceptions serve to establish the rule: on the strength of his performance against Luther at the Leipzig Disputation, Eck was conscripted as an expert adviser to Pope Leo X over the official condemnation and was instrumental in first drafting and then promulgating the bull *Exsurge Domine*;[11] Cochlaeus, having established a reputation as an energetic and effective freelance controversialist, was eventually appointed as Duke George's court-chaplain in order to concentrate on his writing and so contribute more effectively to the duke's campaign.[12]

This constraint goes some way to explaining who became controversialists and why. Those entrusted by the authorities with the responsible task of defending the church's faith and practice had to be theologically competent and able to communicate effectively in writing. It is, therefore, not surprising that their backgrounds were predominantly clerical and/or monastic. The so-called "pamphlet war" in Germany, which ran from 1518 to 1525, involved over fifty writers on the Catholic side. Of those whose status can be determined, almost half (48 percent) were secular clergy. Of these, about two-thirds were lower clergy and included men such as Emser, Cochlaeus, and Wulffer who held court chaplaincies, and those, like Eck whose principal employment was as an academic. The rest were of episcopal rank or above, and these tended to be non-German. 41 percent of these writers were members of religious orders, and by far most of these were Dominicans (like Wimpina and Tetzel) or Franciscans (like Alveldt). The eleven Dominican friars outnumbered the five Franciscans active during the pamphlet war, but the Franciscans managed to publish more anti-Luther titles than the Dominicans. Only three writers can be assigned with confidence to other orders, among them the Cistercian Bachmann.

What is more surprising is the involvement in this campaign of Catholic laymen, who accounted for nearly 11 percent of identifiable writers

10. See below in Ralph Keen's introduction to the *Seven Heads of Martin Luther*.

11. See Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 107.

12. See Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 36.

between 1518 and 1525, and of women, both religious and in the world. At first sight this might seem to undermine the point we have already made about the need for authorization, as neither group was generally accorded any competence to discuss theological matters. But those laymen who entered the lists were either themselves personages of considerable authority whose role entailed the defence of the church (King Henry VIII of England and Duke George of Saxony, for example), or, as in the case of Sir Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, they were acting at the behest of such personages. In contrast, lay people who wrote in support of the Reformation "represented the full spectrum of sixteenth-century urban society."[13]

Assessing the volume of literary activity by Catholic women against the Reformation is more complicated. In 1523, a pamphlet was published consisting of the letters of the sibling-nuns Katharina and Veronika Rem to their brother, Bernhard, defending their decision to remain in their cloister in Augsburg.[14] This contribution to the traditionalist cause was, however, an unconscious one: Bernhard had had the sisters' letters printed without their knowledge.[15] A more famous supporter of convent life in the midst of a Lutheran city was Caritas Pirckheimer, abbess of the Poor Clares in Nuremberg.[16] In 1523 she wrote a letter of support to Hieronymus Emser, which was intercepted and published, with barbed comments, by unfriendly hands.[17] But since this was done against her knowledge, in the service of the evangelical cause, it can hardly be considered part of the Catholic campaign in print. Only two women can be positively identified as Catholic polemicists. The first, Anna Bijns, was a Dutch poet who published scathing verses against Luther and the reformers, beginning in 1528. Because she also inveighed against married life, she is normally assumed to have been a nun or to have led a quasi-monastic life, though there is no other evidence for this assumption.[18] Although Bijns was clearly a woman not overly concerned

13. Miriam Usher Chrisman, "Lay Response to the Protestant Reformation in Germany, 1520–1528," in *Reformation Principle and Practice. Essays in Honour of A. G. Dickens*, edited by Peter Newman Brooks (London: Scolar, 1980), 51.

14. *Antwurt Zwayer Closter frauwen im Kathariner Closter zu Augspurg an Bernhart Rem* (Augsburg: Ulhart, 1523).

15. See Merry Wiesner-Hanks, ed., *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996).

16. See P. S. D. Barker, "Caritas Pirckheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation," *SCJ* 26 (1995) 259–72; Charlotte Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–105.

17. *Eyn missive oder sendbrieff so die Ebtissin von Nüremberg an den hochberümbten Bock Empser geschriben hat, fast künstlich und geistlich auch güt Nünnisch getichtet* (Nuremberg: Höltzel, 1523).

18. See Hermann Pleij, *Anna Bijns, van Antwerpen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus,

about offending conventional opinion, it is perhaps significant that her verses avoided the detailed discussion of theological matters, which she was not authorized to tackle. Instead, they addressed the baleful moral consequences of Lutheranism, in particular the slaughter of the Peasants' War. The other author was Elizabeth Gottgabs, abbess of a convent in Oberwesel, who published a polemical tract late on in the campaign, in 1550.[19] As an abbess, Gottgabs would fall into our category of "higher clergy," of episcopal rank or above, and like others in that category would have assumed that her status gave her authority enough to publish.

## THE WRITINGS

The selection contained in this volume gives the reader new to the study of the Catholic controversialists a good idea of the range of literary styles and genres adopted by them. Almost half their publications in the period to 1525 were written in the form of scholarly treatises or disputations.[20] This was a natural choice for the academics in their ranks, as the disputation was a routine means of both teaching and research at universities. Most famously, it was the form that Luther used to promulgate and then to defend his *Ninety-Five Theses*, and many of the contributions to the indulgence debate followed Luther's lead. (We see examples of the genre here in Tetzel's *Rebuttal* and in *Against Martin Luther's Confession* by Wimpina et al., in which the Schwabach Articles are refuted in turn.) The disadvantages of the point-by-point approach were that the resulting refutations were often lengthy and repetitive (they had to be at least as long again as the original and often vastly exceeded this ratio) and that the debate inevitably remained within a framework set by one's opponent. But for the controversialists, these disadvantages were outweighed by the importance of ensuring that every statement made by one's opponent could be refuted in detail, and here the disputation genre had no equal.

The next commonest literary form adopted by the controversialists during the pamphlet war, though far behind the disputation, was the open letter, ostensibly addressed to an individual but meant of course to be read as widely as possible.[21] The form is represented in this collection by Eck's

2011).

19. *Ein christlicher Bericht, Christum Jesum im Geyst zuerkennen, all altgleubigen und catholischen Christen zu nutz, trost unnd wolfart verfast* (Mainz: F. Behem, 1550).

20. See Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 195.

21. There is evidence that, over the longer term, after 1525, the open letter overtook the disputation as the literary genre most favored by Catholic controversial writers.

*Response on Behalf of Hieronymus Emser*, and by Bachmann's *Response to Luther's Open Letter Addressed to the Cardinal Archbishop of Mainz*. This was among the most flexible and adaptable of genres. It allowed a writer to address the issues raised by an opponent without being confined to a framework set by the foe and without the need for *ad hominem* attacks. In practice, however, personal vituperation in the second person remained a feature of these open letters.

Only 7 percent of Catholic controversial publications during the pamphlet war took the form of printed sermons. One reason for this was that not all these writers had parish responsibilities: Cochlaeus, who held a series of chaplaincies and canonries, could declare at the age of sixty-two that he had never preached in his life.[22] The idea of adopting the sermon genre was, therefore, not one that sprang readily to all members of the cohort. But for some it was a vital weapon in their armory. Alveldt, who as a Franciscan friar belonged to a preaching order, published several sermons besides the one in this anthology. The sermon allowed the preacher/writer to address the reader directly, often appealing to the emotions as well as to reason, and to stress the importance of right belief, not as an abstract good but as an urgent matter of salvation. Printed sermons also lent themselves readily to being read aloud in the hearing of others. After the pamphlet war, prompted by the success of Luther's postil collections, Catholic controversialists such as Eck began to publish their sermons in collections keyed to the liturgical year. These became important resources for parish priests and others looking for an arsenal of arguments with which to protect their flock from the influence of Protestantism and, as John Frymire has pointed out, they give us the clearest indication we have of the sort of ideas that would have been disseminated from Catholic pulpits in this period.[23]

Other literary genres were used by the Catholic controversialists, but not in large numbers. The dialogue, in which two or more fictitious figures present their worldviews, often in a semi-dramatized form, was used by a handful of Catholic polemicists before the Peasants' War. Johann Dietenberger and Sebastian Felbaum were notable for writing dialogues in



See Thomas Brockmann, *Die Konzilsfrage in den Flug- und Streitschriften des deutschen Sprachraumes, 1518–1563* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 690.

22. Gotthelf Wiedermann, "Cochlaeus as a Polemicist" in *Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary, 1483–1983*, edited by Peter Newman Brooks, 196–205 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 200.

23. John M. Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils. Catholics, Protestants and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*, SMRT 147 (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Despite the title, Frymire's emphasis is on the role of Catholic preaching.

German.[24] An inventive development of the dialogue was Johannes Cochlaeus's series of books issued under the brand "Seven-Headed Luther," in which Luther was made to conduct a dialogue with himself, based on contradictions drawn from his writings. Finally, the "oration" was a short-lived form used by a number of Italian writers. Such *orationes* consisted of formal addresses to the Emperor Charles V and were designed to counter Luther's own address *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. (Johann Eck's *Oratio* at Regensburg, included in this collection, was not an oration of this sort but a sermon addressed to the Imperial court.)

The choice of literary genre in many cases determined the language in which a controversialist chose to write. Disputation-style writings and letters were far more likely to be written in Latin, while sermons were more likely to be in German.[25] As the debate developed, Catholic writers in the Holy Roman Empire adopted the vernacular in increasing numbers. Nonetheless, as Mark U. Edwards, Jr. points out, between 1518 and 1544 fewer than half the Catholic anti-Reformation works published in the empire were in German, compared with more than 80 percent of Luther's own writings over the same period.[26]

This imbalance might help to explain why Catholic controversial writings sold more poorly than those of their opponents. Of the ten titles translated in this collection, six were never printed again and two were reprinted only once. Only Wimpina's *Against Martin Luther's Confession*, with four reprints, and Eck's *Address*, with three (two in Antwerp, one in Paris), can be considered popular. This contrasts with Luther's works, each of which was reprinted four or five times on average.[27] The number of reprintings is a key indicator of demand because of the nature of sixteenth-century printing. Print runs were low by modern standards (most scholars guess that a handpress could make about 800–1,000 impressions before the soft metal type and/or any engraved woodblocks would begin to deteriorate beyond acceptable limits). Because the presses would run again only if an initial print run sold out, the number of reprints gives us a fair notion of the number of sales. The exception to this rule was where a publisher expected strong demand in other regions and so might commission an initial print run there: it was often cheaper to print locally than to haul such heavy items

24. See Ulman Weiß, "Sich 'der zeit vnd dem marckt vergleichen': altgläubige Dialoge der frühen Reformation," in *Flugschriften der Reformationszeit: Colloquium im Erfurter Augustinerkloster 1999*, edited by Ulman Weiß (Tübingen: Bibliotheca academica Verlag, 2001), 97–124.

25. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 195.

26. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 40.

27. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 18.

as books many miles. This might explain why Eck's work was reprinted in Antwerp and Paris.

It is possible of course that our impression that Catholic controversial writings sold poorly is due to the accidents of survival. Sixteenth-century pamphlets, which were sold unbound, were ephemeral publications not designed to last. Those that have, and so can be found in major libraries and research collections today, have been acquired and preserved. Past book collectors may well have had a bias in favor of collecting books by well-known authors, which might explain why the works of Luther and his lieutenants survive in large numbers, while those of Bachmann or Wulffer do not. This is a possibility, but even contemporaries were aware of the fact that writings critical of the church sold, while those which defended it did not. Catholic writers often had to subsidize the printing of their works: Cochlaeus could not afford to publish until the relatively late date of 1522 for this reason, and Alveldt's *Against the Wittenberg Idol* seems to have seen the light of day only because it was published by his fellow controversialist Emser. Even those Catholic printers who handled these publications out of conviction were obliged to print Evangelical works as well to make ends meet and suffered financially, when they were prevented from doing so.[28] Pope Adrian VI assumed that printers refused to handle Catholic authors, because they had been bribed not to, but the real reason was their poor sales.[29]

Several explanations have been offered to explain why Catholic controversial writings, on average, enjoyed lower sales than their Reformation rivals. We are aware from our own media culture that challenges to the establishment—be they satire or conspiracy theories—always make a bigger splash than defences of the *status quo*, no matter how reasonable or compelling. This phenomenon was recognized by the Catholic controversialists and their supporters and indeed had been noted long before. The highest-ranking of the early clerical literary opponents of the Reformation, Johann Fabri, the vicar-general of Constance, recalled biblical and patristic warnings that the people's ears will always itch after novelties and that the simple folk are always easily misled.[30] Another alleged factor is anticlericalism, a rather imprecise phenomenon that has been held to include anti-monasticism and anti-curialism. Although a consensus on the nature or degree of anticlerical sentiment in the early years of the Reformation is lacking, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that catalogues of clerical failings were

28. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 200, 231.

29. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 22.

30. Johann Fabri, *Opus adversus nova quaedam et a christiana religione prorsus aliena dogmata Martini Lutheri* (Rome: Silber, 1522), sig. Vivr.

more popular than defences of the priestly order.[31] A further factor working against the sale of Catholic propaganda in the Holy Roman Empire was that while the Edict of Worms was zealously enforced in Catholic areas, inhibiting heterodox and orthodox publications alike, it was only selectively applied by Evangelical authorities, to the detriment of Catholic books.[32]

## THE STRATEGY OF LUTHER'S CATHOLIC OPPONENTS

It might seem surprising to attribute a "strategy" to the Catholic controversialists, whose very name suggests that their effort was predominantly reactive rather than pro-active. But the term helps us to characterize the response and the three distinct approaches it adopted before the death of Luther and the convoking of the Council of Trent.

### Polemics (1518–c. 1530)

The earliest phase began with the initial, desultory reactions to Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1518 and came to an end with the submission of the *Confutatio* of the Ausgburg Confession to the emperor in 1530.[33] This was both a summary and a summation of Catholic controversial activity to that point and represented the first and last occasion on which the controversialists cooperated on a common project. The intervening years witnessed the height of the pamphlet war and the aftermath of the Peasants' War. The subject matter of this phase was largely determined by Luther himself: first, of course, the question of indulgences; then the question of papal primacy; and then issues debated at Leipzig in 1519. These exchanges were followed

31. See Peter Dykema and Heiko Oberman, eds., *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, SMRT 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Geoffrey Dipple, *Antifraternalism and Anticlericalism in the German Reformation: Johann Eberlin von Günzburg and the Campaign against the Friars*, SASRH (Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1996). There have also been important discussions of the Catholic controversialists' defences of the clerical estate. See David Bagchi, "'Eyn mercklich underscheyd': Catholic Reactions to Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, 1520–25," in *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay*, edited by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, SCH 26 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 155–65; Geoffrey L. Dipple, "Luther, Emser, and the Development of Reformation Anticlericalism," *ARG* 87 (1996) 39–56; Benedikt Peter, *Der Streit um das kirchliche Amt: die theologischen Positionen der Gegner Martin Luthers* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1997).

32. John L. Flood, "Le livre dans le monde germanique à l'époque de la Réforme," in *La Réforme et le livre. L'Europe de l'imprimé (1517–v.1570)*, edited by Jean-François Gilmont (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 100.

33. See Herbert Immenkötter, ed., *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana vom 3. August 1530*, *CCath* 33, 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1981).

by those prompted by Luther's great treatises of 1520, especially the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, with its demand that the new emperor Charles V undertake the thorough reform of the church, and the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, with its radical attack on the sacramental system and especially on the sacrifice of the mass.

It would, however, be a mistake to portray the Catholic side during this phase as entirely reactive. At crucial moments, they took the initiative. For instance, they were able to force Luther to address the question of papal power in the course of the indulgences debate, and therefore to shift the controversy from an area that had been only vaguely defined hitherto to one that was far more secure dogmatically from their point of view.[34] Similarly, they took full advantage of the bloodshed of the Peasants' War to attribute the armed rebellion to the influence of Luther's seditious doctrines. A series of Catholic pamphlets from the pens of Cochlaeus, Emser, Fabri, Sylvius, and others drove home essentially the same message: "we warned that this would happen."[35]

## Politics (c. 1530–1541)

The Diets of Augsburg in 1530 and of Nuremberg in 1532 marked a new phase in Catholic-Lutheran relations in the Holy Roman Empire and entailed a new—or at least a considerably modified—role for the Catholic controversialists. They had to accept the fact that at least for the time being a significant proportion of their compatriots lived under a heretical government. This did not at all lessen the need for polemic, but it set that polemic in a new context of *Realpolitik*. Old-fashioned, controversial polemic remained part of their armory, but at the same time their writings take on a more overtly "political" flavor than before, with the recognition that only the secular authorities could restore the *status quo*.

An instructive example is provided by the prolific controversialist Johannes Cochlaeus. His literary output over this period hardly flagged: according to the standard catalogue of his writings, Cochlaeus was responsible

34. Johann Eck latched on to Luther's passing comment, in his *Explanations* of the *Ninety-Five Theses* of 1518, that the Roman Church had not always been superior to the Greek Church and turned it into a thesis to be debated with Karlstadt and Luther at the Leipzig Disputation in 1519. Luther naturally responded with a counter-thesis, which asserted that papal primacy was unknown either to scripture or to the early church councils. See Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy. Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 78–85.

35. See Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 149–62.

for over seventy publications between the years 1530 and 1541.[36] Some of these are simply forewords to the works of others, while others are humanistic editions of earlier authors, and others still are simply Latin renderings of his own German works or vice versa. But most are substantial writings that amply repaid Duke George of Saxony's decision to employ him as a propagandist. About half of his output during this time can be described as "routine" theological refutations of doctrinal error: these include treatises on the priesthood, the sacrifice of the mass, and the invocation of the saints. The remainder can be described as having some political dimension.

One must of course be careful about using such a term anachronistically: Catholic controversial writings had been strongly "political" from the outset, inasmuch as they portrayed Luther's teachings as tending to sedition. I mean that these works of Cochlaeus were either addressed to crowned heads with the express intention of affecting policy, or else that they were designed to support a specific initiative by a secular leader. A cluster of works in the earlier part of this phase focuses on the Diet of Augsburg and its ramifications, defending the emperor from Evangelical attacks. They were followed by reactions to Luther's 1531 *A Warning to his Dear German People*, in which the Wittenberger promoted for the first time the right of resistance against the emperor. Cochlaeus was conscripted into this debate by his employer, Duke George. In a series of writings Cochlaeus developed the duke's contention that Luther was a dangerous rabble-rouser, whose influence could be seen not least in relation to the beliefs of the Anabaptists of Münster. This task preoccupied Cochlaeus until about 1534, a date that coincided with the first of his "Philippics" against Melanchthon (1534–1549), all of which emphasized the competence and the responsibility of the secular rulers to suppress heresy.[37] Of a piece with this belief were Cochlaeus's overtures to rulers outside the empire. Despite Henry VIII of England's early promise as an anti-Lutheran campaigner, he had proved to be a broken reed, especially after the executions of Cochlaeus's friends Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher. From 1535, therefore, Cochlaeus looked to the north, to the kingdom of Scotland. Cochlaeus's attention in the late 1530s, as that of many controversialists, was drawn to the promised general council "in German lands" for which the emperor had been agitating. Cochlaeus supported the idea of a council but was determined to disabuse anyone of the notion that it might lead to the toleration, still less the vindication, of the Protestant cause. In booklets published in 1537 and 1538, he cited the

36. Martin Spahn, *Johannes Cochläus: Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der Kirchenspaltung* (1898. Reprint, Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1964), 352–62.

37. Ralph Keen, ed., *Johannes Cochlaeus: Philippicae I–VII*, BHR 54, 2 vols. (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1995).

example of Jan Hus, who had been justly condemned by a German council, that of Constance, with the full support of a German emperor. As the new decade dawned, Cochlaeus's attention turned to another imperial initiative, the religious colloquies, which as much as anything underlined the fact that heresy was now politically recognized in the Holy Roman Empire.

Cochlaeus's literary activity gives us a flavor of the heavily political output of the Catholic controversialists during this phase of operations. While his prolificity made him atypical, he himself nonetheless sat comfortably in the middle vis-à-vis the other literary supporters of Rome. He could not be counted a hardliner in the mould of an Eck or a Pighius, as he was too ready to make concessions when circumstances required them. But he was certainly not a moderate, like Witzel or Gropper, either. To that extent, he and his literary output at this time can be taken to typify this phase.

## Propaganda (1541–1545)

When the colloquy of Regensburg ended in failure in 1541, thanks not least to the recalcitrance of hardliners like Eck, the search for accommodation between the Catholic and Protestant territories within the empire came to an end. At about the same time, policy at Rome began to shift from one of reform and reconciliation to one of confrontation and repression. In these circumstances, little could be achieved either by polemic hurled at the other side or by appeals to secular authorities to extirpate heresy, and so we see a turning inwards of the Catholic literary response, which became geared to the demands of propaganda. This involved teaching the faithful the basics of their faith, portraying alternatives in the worst possible light, and equipping teachers with basic counter-arguments. Attention largely but not entirely turned away from the production of intricate refutations of the latest heterodox publication towards the need for catechisms for the laity and postils for the clergy.

Again, Cochlaeus's publications during his later years can be used to illustrate this shift. He continued to engage in detailed rebuttals of reformers' writings, though his attention now turned from Luther to other names both large and small: Melanchthon, Calvin, Bucer, Bullinger, Osiander, Wolfgang Musculus, and Ambrose Moibanus. But in other respects it is clear that the readership he intends is not so much his religious opponents as those on his own side. To this later period belonged the eventual publication of his infamous *Commentary on the Deeds and Writings of Martin Luther* (1549). Just as significant for our purposes, however, was his role in the publication of a series of eight legal treatises by the jurist Konrad Braun (or Conradus

Brunus) between 1548 and 1550. These were mostly substantial folio volumes, which set out the legal basis, among other things, for detecting and prosecuting heresy and sedition. Cochlaeus's motive was unmistakable: the refutation of heresy by theologians such as he was essential for preserving the true faith; but it had to go hand-in-glove with the legal prosecution of heresy by those with the appropriate authority.

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LUTHER'S CATHOLIC OPPONENTS

Each of the authors we have mentioned in this survey was committed to stopping Luther's Reformation in its tracks. By that criterion, they failed. But this did not mean that their efforts were all in vain. The experience and expertise they built up by their generally careful refutations of Luther and other reformers qualified them to contribute to the church's official actions. Johann Eck's detailed knowledge of Luther's writings up to 1520 helped determine the shape and tenor of *Exsurge Domine*, the bull that set out the grounds for the Wittenberger's excommunication.[38] Eck and others also contributed to the official imperial rebuttal of the Augsburg Confession and represented the emperor's side at the various colloquies of the 1530s and 1540s.[39] Controversialists' writings were even consulted during the proceedings at Trent—though for obvious reasons the substantial theological treatises of the likes of John Fisher were of more value to the council than the brief pamphlets represented in this edition.[40]

Undoubtedly, both the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope could have done more to support their work, ideally by facilitating a central office of communication, through which intelligence could have been shared and a co-ordinated response essayed. We can see something like this—a virtual, epistolary network of controversialists—beginning to take shape at the behest of Pope Adrian VI in 1523, but his death the same year brought this initiative to a close.[41] At a lower level of commitment, the papacy might have provided sinecures to enable the controversialists to pursue their writing single-mindedly, or at least have subsidized the higher cost of publishing Catholic works commercially. The Vatican archives contain numerous

38. Volker Reinhardt, *Luther der Ketzer. Rom und die Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2017), 118.

39. See Immenkötter, ed., *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana*.

40. For the reception of Fisher's work by the fathers at Trent, see Richard Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

41. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 222–27.

heartfelt appeals for support of this kind, made by the likes of Cochlaeus to high-ranking curial officials. They generally went unheeded. Rome's unsympathetic attitude towards her literary champions was summed up by Cardinal Aleander, who declared that "explanations [*rationes*] and disputations achieve nothing." He went further, blaming the success of the Reformation on the Catholic theologians themselves: without their disputing, which gave publicity to the very heresies they meant to suppress, Luther would never have received the support he did.[42]

The Catholic controversialists received much stouter support from some lay Catholics of high standing. Especially noteworthy were the efforts of Duke George of Albertine Saxony, who turned decisively against Luther and all he stood for after hearing him defend aspects of Hussitism in Leipzig in 1519. Duke George then launched a concerted campaign of Catholic, anti-Lutheran propaganda from his twin capitals of Leipzig and Dresden, conscripting churchmen under his influence to take up the pen and offering chaplaincies to established writers, as we have seen. Also, as we have seen, he forced the print shops, on pain of closure, to publish only Catholic books. Duke George's efforts were mirrored on the other side of the North Sea by those of King Henry VIII of England. Henry personally headed an impressive team of theologians who between them refuted almost all Luther's Latin publications in the early 1520s. It included, in addition to Bishop John Fisher, the Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More, the court preacher Edward Powell, and Catherine of Aragon's confessor Alfonso de Villa Sancta.[43] The fact that three of these writers ended their lives at the hands of a fourth illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of royal patronage: it could be very effective while it lasted, but a change of mind (as in King Henry's case) or a change of regime (as in Ducal Saxony) could bring it to an immediate end.

It can safely be said that the achievements of the Catholic controversialists were hard-won. The life and work of a controversialist without the benefit of patronage, or of some other support network such as a religious community, could be difficult, and it says much for their personal commitment to the cause that they battled on. Perhaps the most outstanding example in this respect was Georg Witzel, who had defected to the Lutheran side early on but had become disillusioned on discovering that the lives of Lutherans were no better than those of Catholics. He therefore returned to

42. See the letter of Aleander to Cochlaeus, Oct. 1521, in W. Friedensburg, "Beiträge zum Briefwechsel der katholischen Gelehrten Deutschlands im Reformationszeitalter (aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken)," *ZKG* 18 (1898) 129.

43. Richard Rex, "The English Campaign against Luther in the 1520s," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5.39 (1989) 85–106.

the Catholic fold, on the grounds of its antiquity, and was able to write informed critiques of evangelicalism, while urging the church to reform itself and so diminish the appeal of its critics.[44] But he—and the family he had acquired as a Lutheran pastor and had never abandoned—was hounded by the likes of Eck who always suspected him of being a fifth columnist.

An example like Witzel's inspires respect even today, but we owe it to Luther's Catholic opponents to avoid hagiography and censure alike. Only by learning more about them can we hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of them and their place in Reformation history. This collection is offered as a means to make the controversialists better known and to inspire further investigation.



44. See Barbara Henze, *Aus Liebe zur Kirche Reform: die Bemühungen Georg Witzels (1501–1573) um die Kircheinheit*, RGST 133 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1995).