Early modern Catholicism and its historiography:

innovation, revitalization, and integration[*]

Tellingly, the editors of a recent volume on early modern English Catholicism remark on how this 'historiographical subfield' has been revitalized and transformed into a 'lively arena of scholarly enquiry'.[1] Similar developments can be discerned in other countries where Catholicism became a minority faith during the early modern period, such as the Netherlands, too. To be sure, in the Catholic heartlands of Europe the scholarly investigation of early modern Catholicism is dynamic and forward moving as well, in some cases due to the (greater) accessibility of store-houses of historical treasures such as the rich archives of the Congregation of the Council.[2] In general the subfield of early modern Catholicism has been transformed by several long-term developments.[3] First, whereas the study of Catholicism used to be largely the domain of Catholics lay and religious, after the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) an increasing number of scholars from various religious and non-religious backgrounds freely started to subject early modern Catholicism to academic scrutiny, thereby making use of an ever-expanding toolbox of sources, concepts, and methodologies. Secondly, the study of early modern Catholicism has been expanded through the inclusion of a larger number of topics due to the influence of adjacent fields of scholarly inquiry, such as women's and gender history, leading to the interest in, for example, female Catholic religious, a topic that still is studied intensively to this day.[4] Lastly, because of the global turn Catholicism is increasingly examined from a mondial and comparative perspective, highlighting the vibrancy and diversity of this world religion.[5] This essay outlines several larger historiographical transformations and assesses two concepts (identity and

[1] James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds), *Early modern English Catholicism. Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), 1 [hereafter: *Early modern English Catholicism*].

[2] E.g., Cecilia Cristellon, "Does the priest have to be there? Contested marriages before Roman tribunals," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 3 (2009), 10–30.

[3] Such transformations are never complete; traditional views and approaches are persistent. See, e.g. Massimo Firpo, "Rethinking 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter-Reformation': what happened in early modern Catholicism – a view from Italy", *Journal of Early Modern History* 20:3 (2016), 293–312.

[4] Olwen Hufton, "Faith, hope and gender. Women's religious experiences in the early modern period," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 128:2 (2016) [http://mefrim.revues.org/2673]. For a recent example, see: Caroline Bowden, "Patronage and practice: assessing the significance of the English convents as cultural centres in Flanders in the seventeenth century", *English studies* 92:5 (2011), 483–95. Female Catholic laypeople have received ample attention, too. E.g. Marit Monteiro, *Geestelijke maagden: leven tussen klooster en wereld in Noord-Nederland gedurende de zeventiende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1996). Joke Spaans, *De levens der maechden* (Hilversum, 2012).

[5] See, e.g., Karen Melvin, "The globalization of reform," in Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen and Mary Laven (eds), *The Ashgate research companion to the Counter-Reformation* [hereafter: *Ashgate companion*] (Farnham, 2014), 435–50. Karin Vélez, "Catholic missions to the Americas," in *Ashgate companion*, 147–62. Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation. Papacy and people in the early modern world," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101:1 (2010), 186–208. John O'Malley partly coined the term 'early modern Catholicism' in order to fully encompass Catholicism as a global religion. John O'Malley, *Trent and all that. Renaming Catholicism in the early modern era* (Cambridge, MA; 2000), 9.

memory) which are currently in vogue and are likely to have resonance among future work on early modern Catholicism. Due to its limited length, the scope of this essay is mainly, but not completely, limited to those parts of Europe where Catholicism became a minority faith during the early modern era, with a particular focus on two officially Protestant and neighbouring countries, the Dutch Republic and Britain.

From church history to religious history

Most of the recent trends within the scholarship on early modern Catholicism are in one way or another indebted to and the product of a larger transformation, namely that from church history to religious history.[6] This transformation, which is neatly captured in the title of this journal, got off the ground in the late 1960s and early 1970s and consists of a movement away from the top-down perspective and focus on the institution(s) of the Church, its staff and its theology, to the study of religion which is more interdisciplinary in nature and more attuned to lay religiosity. Religious history is nested within the larger field of cultural history and is enriched by varied approaches to the study of cultures in the historical past, including the interest in material culture as well as the multifarious aspects of human experience.[7] Indeed, major religious upheavals such as the Reformation are no longer primarily understood within an ecclesiastical framework, but instead are related to wider (shifting) cultural patterns.[8]

While the practical outcomes of this historiographical shift are manifold, the greater attention for the laity, lay religiosity, and the interaction between laypeople and the clergy, is one of the more significant consequences. Over the last couple of decades, the image of the Counter-Reformation as a programme imposed by its 'agents', the (missionary) priests, upon a largely intransigent population has been challenged by scholarship that stresses the agency of laypeople and their active participation in processes of Catholic renewal.[9] As a result, concepts such as acculturation have been replaced by terms which more accurately describe the dynamic interaction between the laity and the clergy, including accommodation, appropriation, cooperation, and negotiation. These terms express the understanding that Counter-Reformation had to be 'translated' as to fit in with the actual circumstances on the ground,

---

[6] Willem Frijhoff, "Van 'histoire de l'Eglise' naar 'histoire religieuse' […]," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 61 (1981), 113–53.

[7] On cultural history, see: Peter Burke, *What is cultural history?*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2004). For good examples of this 'cultural turn', see the two recent volumes on the Catholic and the Protestant Reformations: Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen and Mary Laven (eds), *Ashgate companion*; Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford, 2016) [hereafter: *Oxford handbook*]. Also: Ronald Corthell et al. (eds), *Catholic culture in early modern England* (Notre Dame, 2007).

[8] Craig Koslofsky, "Explaining change," in *Oxford handbook*, 585–600.

[9] Marc R. Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the villages: religion and reform in the Bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720* (Ithaca, 1992). Judith Pollmann, *Catholic identity and the revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635* (Oxford, 2011).

in particular in those areas in which Christianity was introduced for the first time.[10] Using such terms to grasp the interaction between clergy and laity and its outcomes has another advantage in that they problematize the distinction between popular and elite religion; instead, scholars have shown that Catholicism after Trent was, to echo Alexandra Walsham, a 'fruitful synthesis of Tridentine and traditional, confessional and customary religion'.[11]

The study of lay religiosity has gained increased importance and is aided by a greater interest in the material and physical aspects of devotional practices. Devoted to unearthing new aspects of the 'religious material culture' of early modern Catholics, scholars study a wide variety of topics including lay ownership of religious objects, their location within domestic settings, and the way in which these objects were used for acts of piety.[12] This neatly ties in with the notion of appropriation mentioned above: the actual use of these objects is investigated, rather than the prescribed use as advocated by the Church and its clergy. In missionary areas such as the Dutch Republic and Britain, the actual distribution of these objects which, in particular in these case of the latter country, had to happen undercover, and the networks through which this was realised add other dimensions to the study of lay Catholic religious material culture.[13] In general, the increased focus on the laity has not rendered the older, institutional history of the church redundant. On the contrary, religious history tends to be holistic in that it aims to study religion in relation to other, wider contexts in which it existed and to which it gave form. Hence the interests in topics including the relation between Catholicism and literary and oral cultures as well as the many studies on religious coexistence.[14] Seen from a wider perspective, recent scholarship on Dutch and British Catholicism has done much to (re)integrate it with 'mainstream' culture, assessing the extent to which early modern Catholicism was influenced by and contributed to this larger cultural framework it was fundamentally part of.[15]

---

[10] Charles H. Parker, *Faith on the margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age* (London, 2008). Alexandra Walsham, "Translating Trent? English Catholicism and the Counter Reformation," *Historical Research* 78:201 (2005), 288–310. Melvin, "The globalization of reform".

[11] Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the landscape: religion, identity, and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), 162.

[12] See, e.g. the project 'Domestic devotions': http://domesticdevotions.lib.cam.ac.uk/ Emilie K. M. Murphy, "*Adoramus te Christe*: Music and post-Reformation English Catholic domestic piety," in *Religion and the household*, ed. John Doran et al., (Woodbridge, 2014), 240–53. Molly Harrington, Picturing devotion in four Dutch Golden Age *huiskerken* (Ph.D., diss., University of Maryland, forthcoming).

[13] E.g., Earle Havens and Elisabeth Patton, "Underground networks, prisons and the circulation of Counter-Reformation books in Elizabethan England," in *Early modern English Catholicism*, 165–88.

[14] E.g., Alison Shell, *Oral culture and Catholicism in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2007) & *Catholicism, controversy, and the English literary imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge, 1999). Els Stronks, *Negotiating differences: word, image, and religion in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden, 2011). Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by faith: religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe* (London, 2007).

[15] E.g., Ethan H. Shagan (ed.), *Catholics and the 'Protestant nation'. Religious politics and identity in early modern England* (Manchester, 2005).

Identities

Two concepts which permeate recent cultural historical studies and are used to examine early modern Catholicism are identity and memory. The interest in identities owes much to the influence of the confessionalisation thesis, which regards the emergence of confessional identities as the culmination of the combined efforts of Church and state to create obedient and pious citizens through a programme of education and social discipline.[16] Although most historians have criticized and discarded the grander claim of this paradigm, which sought to explain the rise of modern states, confessional identity is still regarded as a fruitful concept to investigate how the emergence of distinct confessions changed the sense of self of early modern believers and how this, in turn, influenced their behaviour, too. In line with the movement away from notions of acculturation and the top-down perspective of the confessionalisation paradigm, historians have stressed the extent to which the laity themselves were actively involved in the construction of confessional identities through their participation in particular acts of devotion.[17] Although the emergence of confessional identities cannot be separated from the attempts of Church and (occasionally) state to prescribe and police the thought and behaviour of lay Catholics, the actual Catholic identity that emerged was murky and, in some cases, even ambiguous.[18]

One of the newer directions in which research on Catholic identities is moving, is how they were expressed and perceived in everyday life. Ongoing doctoral research on early modern Dutch Catholics, for example, investigates what made someone a Catholic by analysing the beliefs to which Catholics adhered, how their confessional affiliation was reflected in the (religious) material culture in their houses, and the way it was expressed in the public sphere.[19] Behind such questions lurks a larger one: what did it mean to be Catholic?[20] This question, deceptively straight-forward in its formulation yet frustratingly difficult to answer, will undoubtedly guide future research on early modern Catholicism: it aims to reveal how the meaning of confessional affiliation and the way this was communicated varied within and among societies, thereby further underscoring the heterogeneity of early modern Catholicism. Moreover, in tune with the heightened awareness of the limitations of processes of confessionalization and the fact that confessional identities did not necessarily trump other identities, historians have started to analyse the relationships between the various identities people

---

[16] For a recent overview, see: Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Confessionalization,", in *Ashgate companion*, 33–54.

[17] Marc R. Forster, *Catholic revival in the age of the baroque: religious identity in Southwest Germany, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 2001). In order to stress lay agency in this process, other terms such as 'religious self-definition' have been coined. Dagmar Freist, *Glaube – liebe – zwietracht. Relgiös-konfessionell gemischte Ehen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2017).

[18] Geert H. Janssen, "Quo vadis? Catholic perceptions of flight and the revolt of the Low Countries, 1566–1609," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64:2 (2011), 472–99.

[19] Carolina Lenarduzzi, Katholiek in de Republiek. De katholieke subcultuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, 1580–1750 (Ph.D., diss., Leiden University, forthcoming).

[20] Judith Pollmann, "Being Catholic in early modern Europe," in *Ashgate companion*, 165–82.

had.[21] This raises questions about the extent to which the meaning of confessional affiliation was influenced by other affiliations and identities, and the degree to which this shaped the actual human behaviour. Such a line of inquiry has possible ramifications for related fields of study, including the history of religious toleration, as scholars have pointed at the influence of confessional identities on the interaction between Catholics and Protestants.[22]

To be sure, the concept of identities is not only applied to the Catholic laity, but to male and female religious as well. Research on English convents and monasteries abroad has made clear, for example, how the clergymen and –women in these institutions tried to create and maintain a distinct English Catholic identity, in particular through the trafficking of relics of English saints.[23] As such, the application of this concept enables scholars to gain new insights about topics that have traditionally been part of the study of early modern Catholicism (male religious) or that have been included more recently (female religious). Yet while identity has spurred some exciting new research, this concept has its drawbacks as well: it is a broad term and difficult to define, while the proliferation and even inflation of its use of in scholarly and everyday discourse runs the risk of reducing its hermeneutic power.[24] It is therefore to be hoped that forthcoming research will lead to greater methodological clarification in terms of the definition and meaning of this concept as well as its application.

Memory

The scholarly interest in memory has a long trajectory, but this concept gained traction by the famous work of Pierre Nora in the 1980s and since a decade or so this concept appears more frequently in cultural-historical and religious studies.[25] Although memory has become part of everyday scholarly

[21] Bertrand Forclaz, *Catholiques au défi de la Réforme. La coexistence confessionelle à Utrecht au XVIIᵉ siècle* (Paris, 2014). David M. Luebke, *Hometown religion. Regimes of coexistence in early modern Westphalia* (Charlottesville & London, 2016). Jaap Geraerts, *Patrons of the Old Faith: the Catholic nobility in Utrecht and Guelders, c. 1580–1702* (Leiden, forthcoming).

[22] E.g., Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Integrations vs segregation: religiously mixed marriage and the "verzuiling" model of Dutch society," in *Catholic communities in Protestant states: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570–1720*, ed. Id. et al., (Manchester, 2009), 48–66. Bertrand Forclaz, "The emergence of confessional identities: family relationships and religious coexistence in seventeenth-century Utrecht", in *Living with religious diversity in early modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon et al., (Farnham, 2009), 249–66. See also the PhD research undertaken by Genji Yashura, Functions of toleration and delimitation of the "public": Catholics' tactics for survival in Utrecht, 1620s–1670s (Ph.D. diss., Tilburg University, forthcoming).

[23] Liesbeth Corens, "Saints beyond borders: relics and the expatriate English Catholic community," in *Exile and the formation of religious identities in the early modern world*, ed. Jesse Spohnholz and Gary Waite (London, 2014), 25–38. James E. Kelly, "Creating an English Catholic identity: relics, martyrs and English women religious in Counter-Reformation Europe," in *Early modern English Catholicism*, 41–59.

[24] To give just one example, the contributions in a recent volume on the Counter-Reformation speak about 'devotional identities', 'corporate identities', 'missionary identities', 'Catholic identities', and so on. *Ashgate companion*, 134, 144, passim. Curiously, identity is not listed as a separate entry in the volume's index.

[25] Judith Pollmann, *Memory in early modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 2017), 3–4. Piera Nora et al. (eds), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1984–92).

parlance, its exact meaning yet has to be ironed out[26] – at its most basic level memory denotes the act of remembering through an active engagement with the past. Recent studies on memory practices and politics have made clear that the ways in which past events were remembered and commemorated were consciously influenced by individuals and groups in society and therefore were often heavily contested.[27] The Dutch Revolt, for example, was remembered differently in the Dutch Republic and the Southern or Spanish Netherlands as conflicting narratives of this event were propagated, partly due to differences in political structures and varying aims of the propagandists involved.[28] To offer another example: the Reformation did not only trigger a battle about the Christian past to which all the emerging confessions appealed in order to legitimise their claims, but itself was a monumental historical event that was remembered and evoked in different ways and through a wide array of objects.[29]

The concept of memory has already enriched the field of early modern Catholicism. Historians have shown, for example, how the Dutch Revolt and the French Wars of Religion were remembered differently by various groups and how the evocation of historical events could downplay or exacerbate religious antagonism.[30] As memory was often closely connected to material objects and their spatial locations, these aspects of memory cultures are being investigated too, which neatly ties in with the material aspects of early modern Catholicism (and Protestantism as well).[31] Furthermore, scholars in this field make clear that acts of memorization contributed to the formation of confessional identities, thus enhancing our understanding of this process.

A particular engagement with the Catholic past consisted of the formation and compilation of the collections and archives through which we now perceive early modern Catholicism. Over the last couple of years, scholars have started to study the genesis of the source collections we are so accustomed to work with, realizing that archives have a history of their own and are not neutral and unmediated.[32] Indeed, acts of compilation, preservation, and reorganization shaped archives and influence the

---

[26] The relationship and differences between history and memory are not always clear. John Bossy, "Afterword," in *Early modern English Catholicism*, 253–4.

[27] Jasper van der Steen, *Memory wars in the Low Countries, 1566–1700* (Leiden, 2015), 25 and passim. Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers (eds), *Memory before modernity. Practices of memory in early modern* Europe (Leiden, 2013).

[28] Van der Steen, *Memory wars*, 291.

[29] See the research project 'Remembering the Reformation': http://rememberingthereformation.org.uk/ Alexandra Walsham has two doctoral candidates working on early modern memory: Harriet Lyon, 'The Memory of the dissolution of the monasteries' and Simone Hanebaum, 'History, memory and identity in England 1500–1700'.

[30] Judith Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden van de Gouden Eeuw* (Leiden, 2008). Van der Steen, *Memory wars*. David van der Linden, "Memorializing the Wars of Religion in early seventeenth-century French picture galleries: Protestants and Catholics painting the contested past," *Renaissance Quarterly* 70 (2017), 132–78. Tom Hamilton, "Recording the Wars of Religion: the 'Drolleries of the League' from ephemeral print to scrapbook history', in *The social history of the archive: record-keeping early modern Europe*, ed. Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham [Past and Present 230 Supplement 11] [hereafter: *Social history of the archive*] (Oxford, 2016), 288–310.

[31] Ibid. Marianne Eekhout, "Celebrating a Trojan horse. Memories of the Dutch Revolt in Breda, 1590–1650," in *Memory before modernity*, 127–47. Walsham, *The Reformation of the landscape*.

[32] Alexandra Walsham, "The social history of the archive: record-keeping early modern Europe," in *Social history of the archive*, 9–48.

knowledge of the past we derive from them, too. As Liesbeth Corens has argued, the various 'record-collection projects' which resulted in the source collections on which historians of early modern English Catholicism frequently rely, were not impartial undertakings. Rather, these projects were shaped by the convictions, preoccupations, and aims of the people behind these efforts, engaged as they were in the 'creation of memory' and the establishment of 'counter-archives'.[33] In other words, the past was recorded differently so that it might be remembered differently, something which occurred among and within confessions (traces of which we encounter, for example, among the different histories of the Catholic Mission in the Dutch Republic).[34] As such, memory and archival studies encourage further comparative and cross-confessional research.

The implications of such studies are profound and force us to think about the archives we use and the way these archives and their underlying assumptions and structures influence our vision of the past. Many archives and collections bear the traces of intra-clerical rivalries and should be treated with a degree of caution. Investigations into the formation of archives and source collections (e.g. what has been included and, perhaps more importantly, what has been left out), will enhance our understanding of the ideological impetuses behind the establishment of these bodies of sources as well as the particular historical contexts they are a product of. As such the 'archival turn' has the potential not only to enhance our understanding of early modern Catholicism, but also raise awareness about the extent to which our vision of this historical phenomenon is coloured by the formation and curation of the very collections and archives we derive our knowledge from.

Minority Catholicism

In spite of the increasing number of studies which examine early modern Catholicism from a transnational and even global perspective, comparative studies of Catholicism in various European countries in the early modern era still are rare.[35] Arguably this is the result of the persistent tendency to carry out historical studies within national boundaries, a trend which might be abetted by recent political developments in Europe. Scholars have taken some initial steps to further comparative research, though. Overcoming the negative connotations and the national context in which the term 'minority Catholicism' originated, Christine Kooi used it to denote the form of Catholicism which emerged after

---

[33] Liesbeth Corens, "Dislocation and record-keeping: the counter-archives of the Catholic diaspora," in *Social history of the archive*, 269–87. Also see Michael Questier's current research project titled 'Challoner unbound: treason, politics, religion and martyrdom c.1570–c.1745'.

[34] The secular priest and Jansenist Hugo van Heussen, for example, was conspicuously silent about the involvement of regular priests in the Holland Mission. Hugo van Heussen, *Batavia sacra [...]*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 1726). See, e.g., Parker, *Faith*, 187.

[35] Tadgh Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Europe 1592–1648. Centre and peripheries* (Oxford, 2015).

the Reformation in those areas of Europe where Catholicism was not the majority faith.[36] Often Rome deemed these areas to be mission territories, and studying Catholicism in these Protestant territories can unearth much information about the impact of anti-Catholic state policies on the organisation of mission, the structure of Catholic communities, the relationships between the laity and the clergy, and Catholic religious life. In time, the outcomes of research on minority Catholicism can be contrasted with the findings of studies on Catholicism in the Catholic heartlands and studied against the backdrop of global Catholicism as well. Arguably, variations within early modern Catholicism, both within and outside of Europe, were all local adaptations.[37] Hitherto, however, even though Catholic minorities in various European territories beg to be the subject of robust comparative research, this still is a desideratum.[38]

In spite of this near-absence of comparative work on minority Catholicism in Europe, studies on Catholicism within the confines of national boundaries have shed off the rather insular character of older historiography and firmly (re)connected Catholicism in Britain and the Republic to the international programme of Catholic renewal.[39] Historians also have started to study early modern Catholicism in relation to the larger backdrops it was fundamentally part of and this, in combination with the utilization of cross-confessional and transnational perspectives, further moves the field away from its older rather internalist and inward-looking perspective. To offer one example, recent studies on Dutch and British Catholic refugees, exiles, and travellers, trace the dynamic movement of Catholics across political and geographical boundaries and chart the international networks Catholics were part of, thus breaking out of a nationalistic mould while also relating their findings to earlier works on Protestant exiles, offering a cross-confessional perspective on this phenomenon.[40] But just as religious history did not completely discard the older outcomes, concepts and methodologies of church history, new research on early modern Catholicism should be seen as complementary to its older historiography. Ultimately, it is the creative combination of perspectives, methods, and concepts which will further the research undertaken in this field and which will enable us to get a fuller grasp of early modern Catholicism.

---

[36] Christine Kooi, "Sub jugo haereticorum: minority Catholicism in early modern Europe," in *Early modern Catholicism. Essays in honour of John W. O'Malley, S.J.*, ed. Kathleen M. Comerford and Hilmar M. Pabel, (Toronto, 2001), 147–62.

[37] Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation", 201, 207.

[38] A first step towards such a comparison is provided by the volume: Benjamin J. Kaplan et al. (eds), *Catholic communities in Protestant states. Britain and the Netherlands, c. 1570–1720* (Manchester, 2009).

[39] Parker, *Faith on the margins*. Alexandra Walsham, *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (Farnham, 2014).

[40] Geert H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2014). Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford, forthcoming). The many connections between England and mainland Europe also have been made visible in studies on English convents abroad. Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds), *The English convents in exile, 1600–1800: communities, culture and identity* (Farnham, 2013). For an example of an important thematic and cross-confessional comparison, see: Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at stake. Christian martyrdom in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA; 1999).

Conclusion

The study of early modern Catholicism has been enriched by the conceptual and methodological tools of cultural history which have broadened the scope of the research undertaken in this field, enhancing our understanding of this complex subject. At the same time, due the wider lens through which early modern Catholicism is viewed, it is to be expected that the findings of studies on early modern Catholicism will reverberate more widely and have more resonance in adjourning fields of scholarly inquiry it used to be rather separated from. Innovation and revitalization will thus provide the impetus for further integration.

Abstract

This article analyses several key developments within the recent historiography on early modern Catholicism. It charts the transformation from church history to religious history, the use of important concepts such as identity and memory, and the focus on transnational and minority Catholicism, showing that over the last couple of decades the field of early modern Catholicism has been enriched and revitalized by cultural historical methods and concepts. This change of perspective and approach caused that the study of early modern Catholicism has become less isolated and more embedded in the wider study of the early modern period in general.