

INTRODUCTION

Anniversaries represent occasions for reflection, retrospectively on the past but also towards possible futures. In 2011 the Ecclesiastical History Society celebrated its fiftieth year by publishing a history of its activities since its creation in 1961 written by the society's current honorary secretary,¹ and devoting the subject of its Summer and Winter Meetings to reflections on the church and its past. Members of the society were encouraged to think about the various ways in which churches have constructed and reinvented versions of their pasts in different periods, and also to contemplate how ecclesiastical history has evolved as a discipline over the past half-century. Plenary speakers at the Summer Meeting addressed specific areas of the writing of ecclesiastical history in the fifty years since the society's foundation, setting the debates and issues that have preoccupied church historians in the wider context of developments in history (and to some extent also theology) over the same period. Communications to the Summer Meeting were invited under two heads: historiographical reflections on particular areas of churches' histories; and discussion of specific eras in church history when churches have looked to the past to explain the present or to legitimate visions for the future. At the Winter Meeting, all three papers considered the shifts that have occurred in historical perceptions of the relations between church and state over the last fifty years.

The organization of this volume, which collects the proceedings of both Summer and Winter Meetings, reflects those three strands. It opens with my own presidential address, in which I asked – with deliberate provocation – whether church historians were in danger of losing their distinctive sense of mission and purpose. That ecclesiastical history no longer occupies the place that once it did within in the academy in Britain is undeniable; in university departments of history and theology (and in theological colleges and semi-

¹ Stella Fletcher, *'A Very Agreeable Society': The Ecclesiastical History Society 1961–2011* (Southampton, 2011).

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naries) numbers of church historians have declined significantly during the lifetime of this society. My lecture questions whether ecclesiastical historians have done enough to resist that decline and to respond to various shifts within the wider discipline of history that have occurred over the same period. It considers the effects on church history of the incorporation into historical enquiry of methods derived from other disciplines – including sociology, anthropology, literary theory, and cultural and gender studies – and the significant ways in which they have affected historians' approaches to the past. Coupled with the growing secularization of contemporary society (and the rise of the new atheism), these methodological shifts present serious challenges to the future of ecclesiastical history as conventionally understood and practised by this society. One possible way forward may lie in the adoption of the 'religious turn' manifest in some branches of historical and literary study and also in the history of science, where scholars have begun to take much more seriously the importance of religious belief in understanding and explaining cultures of earlier eras. Ecclesiastical historians could profitably do more to further this trend. I hope my polemical call to church historians to hold on to the fundamental plot that underpins and defines our branch of the discipline will serve as an inspiration to the society's members and help to reinvigorate church history in this country, inside and outside the academy. John Wolffe's essay (on the contribution that church history can make to the contemporary Church of England), which concludes part I of this volume, demonstrates to good effect how the ecclesiastical history of the last two centuries can be made to speak directly to contemporary parishes, priests and people in the diocese of London.

Several of those who offered communications to the Summer Meeting chose to explore specific instances when churches (or individual ecclesiastics) turned to the past in search of evidence to support a particular (often tendentious) reading of their own present, or to inspire or justify movements for restoration or reform of contemporary ecclesiastical institutions. Those essays, collected in part I, range chronologically from Luke Gardiner's analysis of Socrates Scholasticus's retelling of the events of the reign of Theodosius I (379–95) in the 440s, to John Wolffe's essay, already mentioned, on modern religious history and the contemporary church. Although the communications are spread fairly

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evenly across the two millennia of Christian history, a few cluster around particular periods. Given how contested an area the history of the Reformation has always proved, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many, in addition to Diarmaid MacCulloch's survey of fifty years of Reformation studies in part II, touch on aspects of early modern religious reform. But there are also groups of essays addressing European crusades to the Holy Land and different aspects of eighteenth-century church history.

Despite the existence of a separate International Conference on Patristic Studies, established ten years before the Ecclesiastical History Society in 1951 and convened every four years thereafter, the era of the early church has always been well represented among members – and indeed presidents – of the society and among published communications, and it also finds a secure place in this volume. Gardiner's consideration of Socrates' historical method considers how the fifth-century historian's tendentious decision to omit any mention of the massacre at Thessalonica in 391 in his account of the reign of Theodosius could equate with his self-professed ambition to write objective history. Andrew Louth looks at writings dating from the sixth century but attributed to the Dionysius who judged the court of the Areopagus and was converted by Paul. Louth considers how the pseudonymous author attempted to construct the apostolic or sub-apostolic church to which he purported to belong, what use he made of existing church histories (including Eusebius), and how far he may have tried to stand aloof from the doctrinal controversies which so disturbed the church of his own day. In her consideration of how seventh-century Christian writers tried to fit the rise of Islam into pre-existing methods of historical writing, Jessica Ehinger demonstrates how Muslims (identified with the demons and monsters prophesied in the Bible) came to be fitted into an overarching narrative of God's plan for humanity.

Long temporal perspectives also colour the essays on early medieval topics by Conor O'Brien and Renie Choy. O'Brien explores Bede's view of the 'Jewish church', showing how the eighth-century Northumbrian writer understood the roots of his own church to lie deep in the pre-Incarnation past, having developed out of the Jewish tabernacle and the temple. Attempting to define the essence of Carolingian monasticism, Renie Choy demonstrates that the monastic ideal promoted via reforming councils

in the Frankish church early in the ninth century depended on a historical understanding of the nature of lives transformed by the search for God, which quest lay at the heart of their own spiritual endeavour. John Doran's essay encompasses a narrower time frame in assessing how Cardinal Boso, writing in the 1160s and 1170s, reappraised the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073–85) in order both to present him as an ideal model for Pope Alexander III (1159–81) and also thereby to vindicate the cardinal's own reforming strategies.²

Three communications, presented together at the conference, address aspects of the writing and rewriting of the history of the crusades. Thomas Smith asks how far the popes' decision-making was influenced by the memory of the actions of their predecessors, with specific reference to the policy of Honorius III (1216–27) over crusading in the Holy Land. He concludes that although Honorius knew of the involvement of the papacy in crusading in the twelfth century, he did not deem this relevant either to the planning of the Fifth Crusade or to that of Frederick II, in both of which he played a part. Andrew Jotischky explores how central were crusading and the Holy Land in the construction of fourteenth-century histories of the Carmelite Order and thus in the shaping of the Carmelites' identity. How the English Reformation altered understanding of the crusade movement from that held in the Middle Ages is the subject of Bernard Hamilton's essay, which looks at the *Historie of the Holy Warre* written in 1639 by the Anglican Thomas Fuller. He illustrates Fuller's close location of his account within a Christian historical framework, heavily influenced by the historical books of the Old Testament.

A cluster of essays on the Reformation period starts with Charlotte Methuen's analysis of the way in which Luther used church history to define and inform his critique of the papacy. As she argues, although Luther was not a church historian, he sought to explore the past as a means of vindicating his evangelical position, believing that his research into earlier eras illustrated the extent of the papacy's descent into corruption. Polydore Vergil, whose five books on the origins of Christian institutions (1521) are considered by Jonathan Arnold, was (amongst other things) an ecclesiastical

² Sadly, John Doran died as this volume was going to press. A tribute to him will appear in SCH 50, which he co-edited.

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historian, who saw the recounting of the past as an act of faith; he hoped to discover the truth about the origins of church practices in order to strengthen the institution of the church in his own day. John Bale, England's first Protestant church historian, sought to reclaim England's true historical narrative, retrieving that truth from the false accounts related by medieval chroniclers. Susan Royal's assessment of Bale's work shows how Bale saw himself as a prophet as well as a historian; she argues for the prevalence of prophecy as a polemical tool during the Reformation.

After the Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, the story of the Reformation looked rather different. A Catholic perspective comes in Salvador Ryan's analysis of the ecclesiastical history written by John Lynch (a priest-scholar from County Galway) in refutation of Gerald of Wales's twelfth-century condemnation of the Irish. Lynch's *Cambrensis Eversus* (1662) presented a new and confident narrative of Irish Catholicism to a continental audience, one in which loyalty to the papacy did not preclude loyalty to a legitimate monarch. Tony Claydon shows how the pro-Williamite ecclesiastical historian Gilbert Burnet devised a new periodization of the past, creating the Restoration era (1660–89) as a discrete period in British history. In Burnet's view, the events of 1689 did more than bring an end to the ills of James II's reign; they also served to save the Protestant Reformation. Yet, as Robert Ingram's essay illustrates, the nightmare of the Civil War was not forgotten in the eighteenth century but continued to be rewritten from different confessional perspectives. While Dissenters could rally around a shared history of persecution, Anglicans remembered the abuses they suffered at the hands of puritans, and so eighteenth-century polemicists continued to fight England's long Reformation. Chris Wilson's analysis of the use made of the Middle Ages by authors of early Methodist and anti-Methodist polemic widens the temporal lens, yet his communication also shows how the turbulence of England's recent past, and particularly its religious disputes, found reflection in the writing of histories designed to shape and define religious identities.

Similar considerations continued to affect attitudes towards the histories of the English churches in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Andrew Spicer's essay reveals, accounts of the events of the Reformation era played a significant role in Archbishop Tait's defence of the French church in Canterbury in the

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1860s, a defence he mounted in part on the historical ground that the Huguenot church provided an important symbol of the past tolerance of the Church of England. The Great Ejection of 1662 remained a formative moment in the history of Congregational churches; so in 1912, the 250th anniversary of that event became, as Rosalind Johnson and Roger Ottewill explain, a rallying call for the faithful and an opportunity to witness effectively to faith against a contemporary background of religious indifference. In the essays found in the first part of this volume, we see how successfully the churches have used their pasts in all historical eras to defend arguments about contemporary ecclesiastical practice; to suppress alternative, conflicting narratives; and to position their subjects and writers firmly within the Almighty's overarching plan for humanity.

The second part of the volume reflects the growth of interest in historiography among historians working in all aspects and periods of the discipline over the past half-century. From its former status as a marginal branch of history pursued only by a few, historiography has become a growing area of historical enquiry, taking a central place in undergraduate curricula in history and forming an essential part of postgraduate training programmes. Historians' increased reflexivity on their own discipline has arisen, in part, out of the substantial changes that history has experienced methodologically and conceptually over the second half of the twentieth century, as it has adopted the practices of other disciplines, especially from the social sciences. These essays explore the extent to which those same shifts are visible in ecclesiastical history.

Judith Lieu's plenary address moves away from the question that has dominated so much of her previous work – what did the early church do for women? – to ask what women did for the early church, exploring the trends that have affected writing in this field in recent years. She locates her analysis in the context of developments in biblical studies and theology as much as in history, and shows how changing attitudes to women, gender and sexuality proved important influences on scholarly perceptions of women in the past. While realistic about the problems of rescuing women from the obscurity and erasure of early texts (almost exclusively written by men), and sensitive to the challenges to reconstructing a 'true' past posed by postmodernism, Lieu affirms confidently that women belong to the inner logic or deep grammar of the church's self-understanding. For her, contemporary debates about women's

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roles in the church have important implications for historians, whose challenge it is to recognize female agency and the multiple ways in which – often despite the expectations of their own societies – women have contributed to, and frequently transformed, the church.

Diarmaid MacCulloch uses his plenary address to challenge the Anglican, high church hegemonic narrative of the Reformation in England and present a picture of pluralized reformations. Also in part an autobiographical account, MacCulloch's essay traces developments in early modern church history from his own undergraduate days in Cambridge and his experiences as a research student. He locates a significant shift in historical representation of the Reformation around 1970, which he attributes to the ecumenical movement and the relaxation of denominational boundaries that followed the Second Vatican Council. New theological insights and the availability of a wider range of sources, including those of material culture, offered fresh perspectives on events in local and national contexts and led to more pluralized understandings of a Reformation whose history other historians have also come to take more seriously. MacCulloch's essay is complemented by two shorter communications: Stephen Mark Holmes's account of how Scottish Catholics fought back in the second half of the twentieth century against the dominant, Protestant, partisan history of the Reformation in Scotland; and Liam Chambers's exploration of the Irish colleges in early modern Catholic Europe and their contribution to maintaining the vitality of the Irish Catholic community, despite the persecutions.

For Evangelical history, as shown by David Bebbington in his plenary lecture, the past half-century has proved transformative. When the Ecclesiastical History Society was founded, Evangelicals had little time for history, which they perceived as a distraction from the imperative to preach the gospel. But from the early 1960s onwards, there has been an upsurge of interest in recording the history of Evangelical churches, at first from a denominational perspective, and with an emphasis on biographies of central figures, but latterly in a more scholarly fashion. Bebbington explores the evolution of this historical consciousness in Britain and in the United States, illustrating the relationship between theology and historical writing, the significance of the introduction of social scientific methods, and the ways in which a deeper historical

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consciousness has enabled Evangelicals to contribute more fully to national life. As he argues, this was an era in which Evangelicals made a discovery of their history.

Rosemary Moore looks at the history of the origins of the Quaker movement, and examines the different versions given of Quaker beginnings, and the tensions between the interpretations articulated by those who belong to the movement and those who write as outsiders. She argues for more diverse origins than many have accepted, and for the validity of plural understandings of the multiple facets of Quakerism. The discovery of the archives of the Panacea Society (a once thriving community of followers of the prophet Joanna Southcott) leads Philip Lockley to reflect on the ways in which church historians approach heterodoxy, arguing for the importance of tracing the full texture of the Christian experience of the past, encompassing unorthodox expressions such as those of the Southcottians.

Taking a longer chronological perspective than the other plenary speakers, Kenneth Parker examines tensions between Roman Catholic scholars and the Catholic church authorities over different historiographical understandings of the past between the first and second Vatican Councils. He takes four metanarratives of Catholic history and two case studies (birth control, and the place of women in the church) to illustrate his argument, showing how sharply drawn are the lines of these disputes and how entrenched the view that faith has something to fear from historical research. Different light on Catholic historiography is shed by Alec Corio's survey of G. G. Coulton's polemical historical writing directed against Cardinal Gasquet. This, he shows, was more than a debate about method, or about what could be known of the churches' pasts, but exposed contemporary social anxieties about the decline of the Anglican confessional state and a newly assertive spirit in Roman Catholicism. A final essay in part II by Sarah Flew offers a new perspective, demonstrating the neglect by church historians of the subject of religion and finance and showing, through an evaluation of the income of voluntary religious organizations in Britain, how significant a sphere of investigation money can prove to be, if only we can overcome our reticence in talking about it.

Proceedings of previous Summer and Winter Meetings of the society have conventionally integrated the plenary addresses given at the Winter Meeting into the general run of essays, but on this

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occasion we have determined to keep them separate. For the speakers at the Winter Meeting were asked to adopt a metahistorical view and discuss scholarship on church and state over the half-century of the society's existence. Claudia Rapp's lecture on church and state (or, as some medievalists prefer to say, 'religion' and 'power') in Late Antique and Byzantine scholarship, explores changing perceptions of the place of religion in society and politics in this period in a wide context. She traces the various social, cultural and historical shifts that affected approaches towards the writing of history since the 1960s and looks forward to likely future trends. In an increasingly globalized context, Byzantium is likely in the future to be explored in comparative perspective not with the Christian West but with its regional neighbours: Islam and even Asia. Anthony Milton's discussion of the same question in an early modern context reveals a similar sensitivity to questions of language and terminology, but also addresses related questions about modernity and the effect of modernization on the decoupling of church and state. His central focus is on the confessionalization paradigm, the relationship between religion and state formation and national identities. Although Milton expresses some confidence about scholarly recognition of the importance of religion in past cultures, he argues for the need for sensitivity to the changing meaning and significance of the religious discourses and symbols of earlier eras. Changes in the conception and role of both the church and the state in Britain over the past fifty years colour Matthew Grimley's assessment of religious history, politics and the state since 1961. Against a subtly drawn background of political, social and cultural change, declining church attendance and growing multiculturalism, Grimley shows how between the 1950s and 1980s the social history of religion in Britain became divorced from its political and intellectual history, bringing a temporary (and peculiarly British) eclipse of church and state as a subject for historical study. World political events in the 1980s and an increasing use of religious language in moralized political discourse helped in part to restore a historiographical connection between religion and politics and to revitalize the history of church-state relations from the 1990s onwards. Grimley's essay offers a sophisticated critique of simplistic readings of secularization theory and presents a narrative that does not always sit comfortably with some of the earlier essays in this volume.

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The theme of the society's fiftieth anniversary conference sparked considerable interest among members and led to a well-attended and lively meeting in Oxford, which opened with a round-table, ecumenical discussion in Christ Church Cathedral on the question, 'What has Church history ever done for the Church?' Essays published in this volume show resoundingly how significantly ecclesiastical history has contributed to the churches' understandings of their own pasts since the time of the first apostles in Jerusalem. Yet they also illustrate the importance of a historical consciousness, not just to the formation and perpetuation of ecclesial identities, but to the understanding of relations between members of different Christian denominations and between Christians and representatives of other faiths, and of the place of the churches within political power-structures across time. In its second half-century, the Ecclesiastical History Society will need to demonstrate that it can respond sufficiently both to social, cultural and religious changes and to innovations within the wider historical profession, to enable it to contribute to contemporary debates and not merely comment on them retrospectively.

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