

# The Politics of Leo XIII's Opening of the Vatican Archives: The Ownership of the Past

Nicholas J. Tussing

## Abstract

In 1881, Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) opened to scholarly research the Vatican Archives, a repository of documents recording papal history from the Middle Ages. Two years later, his letter *Saepe numero considerantes*, confirmed the opening and his *motu proprio* of May 1884 gave further instructions.<sup>1</sup> The opening was entwined with both the broader world of Italian politics and the smaller political sphere of the archives itself. The “macropolitical” context was the ecclesiastical controversy about the papacy’s role in Italian history, which informed Leo XIII’s decision to expand access to the archives. The micropolitical context concerns the management of the archives and the politics of access inside the Vatican. In his memoirs published posthumously in 1947, Protestant scholar Theodor Sickel<sup>2</sup> shows how bureaucratic power struggles and disagreements on extending access affected a scholar interested in historical research for its own sake. Despite Leo XIII’s appreciation for Sickel’s work, some of the pope’s subordinates tried to hinder access to the documents, a disjunction between papal policy and its implementation. In part, these obstructions reflected the difficulty of translating a general policy into concrete terms; but they also revealed a clash within the Curia. This conflict informs both Leo XIII’s letter and Sickel’s memoirs. Leo XIII’s letter equates truth with apologetics, or the defense of the Catholic Church:<sup>3</sup> for Leo XIII, the archives embodied the Church’s memory and therefore its identity. Sickel’s memoirs, on the other hand, illustrate the politics of archives management.

<sup>1</sup> *Saepe numero considerantes* may be translated “Often considering.” Papal documents are named after the first few words of the document, which may have little to do with its actual subject matter. A *motu proprio* (“of his own accord”) is a papal rescript whose provisions are decided by the pope personally, without taking the advice of cardinals or others. See Andrew A. MacErlean, “Motu proprio,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* 10 (New York: Appleton, 1911), transcribed by W. S. French, Jr., available at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10602a.htm>, accessed 9 August 2007, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007. A rescript is a papal response to an individual query or petition; Andrew B. Meehan, “Papal Rescripts,” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* 12, transcribed by Douglas J. Potter, available at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12783b.htm>, accessed 9 August 2007, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Leo XIII, *Saepe numero considerantes*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1906), vol. 16 (1883–84): 49–57. See also Claudia Carlen, *Papal Pronouncements: A Guide, 1740–1978* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Peirian Press, 1990) 1: 46; and Theodor Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen; nebst ergänzenden Briefen und Aktenstücken*, ed. Leo Santifaller (Vienna: Universum, 1947), 470–77. Owen Chadwick summarizes the letter in *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 100–103. All translations in this article are mine.

## Literature

Although the literature on the Vatican Archives in general is extensive, the literature on the opening of the archives is meager. In 1981, the Vatican Archives published a volume commemorating the centenary of the opening, which says little about the actual opening of the archives and is celebration rather than analysis.<sup>4</sup> For example, Miguel Batllori describes the career of a future prefect of the archives, Franz Ehrle, during the years after the opening. Wipertus Collenberg advocates studying the archives for the human aspect of history, not just national history because the archives touches on the lives of millions of believers. Antonio Luciani echoes this view, arguing that the archives serves the study of microhistory as well as macrohistory. Francesco Turvasi narrates his pleasant experiences at the archives while studying Genocchi, a priestly advocate for the Peruvian Indians. None of this tells us much about the historical context of the opening.<sup>5</sup>

Recent articles on the Vatican Archives do not discuss Leo XIII's decision to open the archives to researchers.<sup>6</sup> Most articles concern the controversy over Pius XII's attitude toward the Holocaust, and the Vatican's perceived reluctance to grant access to his papers; and they are news reports rather than studies.<sup>7</sup>

John P. Boyle uses the archives to study the centralization of ecclesiastical authority.<sup>8</sup> William R. Franklin's "The Opening of the Vatican Archives and the ARCIC Process"<sup>9</sup> does not concern Leo XIII's opening of the archives, but uses

<sup>3</sup> Martino Giusti, prefect of the Vatican Archives, Letter to Marquis Don Giulio Sacchetti, Delegato Speciale della Pontificia Commissione per lo Stato della Città del Vaticano, 30 May 1980, in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario: L'Archivio segreto vaticano a un secolo dalla sua apertura, 1880/8–1980/81* (Vatican City: Archivio Vaticano, 1981), 122.

<sup>4</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Batllori, "Tras la apertura del Archivo Secreto Vaticano," in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 31–54; Count Wipertus H. Rudt de Collenberg, "Pour une nouvelle approche prosopographique des fonds de l'Archivio Segreto Vaticano," in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 93–103; Antonio Luciani, "L'Archivio Segreto Vaticano e la cultura contemporanea" (*Osservatore Romano*, 15 November 1980), in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 147–50; Francesco Turvasi, "Vatican Archives: Wealth Untold," in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 105–109.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, Boolean searches in ProQuest on "Leo XIII and archives" and on a number of variations on that theme came up empty.

<sup>7</sup> For example., "Vatican Will Not Open Archives to Scholars," *Academe* 87, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 2001):11; Gill Donovan, "Some WWII Vatican Archives To Be Released," *National Catholic Reporter* 38, no. 17 1 (March 2002): 12.

<sup>8</sup> John P. Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority: Historical and Theological Studies* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, n.d.); reviewed by Marianne Sheahan, "Vatican Archives Yield Secrets for Study of Church Authority," *National Catholic Reporter* 32, no. 28 (10 May 1996): 10.

<sup>9</sup> William R. Franklin, "The Opening of the Vatican Archives and the ARCIC Process," *Anglican Theological Review* 78 (Winter 1996): 8–29. ARCIC is the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Committee, which was established after World War II as a forum for dialogue between Catholics and Anglicans.

material from the archives to illuminate the debates that preceded Leo XIII's decision that Anglican orders were invalid. Thomas Shelley, commenting on a much earlier article by John Tracy Ellis, agrees with Ellis's praise for Leo's confidence in historical truth, as shown in his opening of the archives and his letter *Saepe numero considerantes*,<sup>10</sup> but neither Shelley nor Ellis examines the letter in detail.

Other literature consists of practical guides to the archives rather than considerations of their political role.<sup>11</sup> In a discussion of Francis Blouin's inventory of the Vatican Archives, Jay Jackson<sup>12</sup> describes how Blouin and his assistants collated many indexes into a single volume and created an electronic database employing the MARC cataloging format. Jackson touches on Leo XIII's opening of the archives, but does not study it in depth.

The only secondary source on the opening of the archives is a brief but complete account by Owen Chadwick, who relates the archives to contemporary political, religious, and historical debates such as the controversy on papal infallibility.<sup>13</sup> However, this narration of events does not study specific documents or examine their political content.<sup>14</sup> Such a study needs to place the documents in the context of the history of the Vatican Archives.

### History of Access to the Archives<sup>15</sup>

According to the Vatican Archives website, popes kept letters from the beginning of Church history and carried their records with them on their travels. At the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries, a reference is made to placing documents "*in arcivo dominae nostrae sanctae Romanae ecclesiae*"

<sup>10</sup> Thomas J. Shelley, "God Does Not Need Our Lies," *Commonweal* 122 (7 April 1995): 31. Ellis's article, "Another Anniversary," appeared in *Commonweal* on 2 February 1934.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Francis X. Blouin, *Vatican Archives: An Inventory and Guide to Historical Documents of the Holy See* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Leonard E. Boyle, *A Survey of the Vatican Archives and Its Mediaeval Holdings* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Jay Jackson, "Inventoried Treasures: The Vatican Archives Revealed," *American Libraries* 30, no. 11 (December 1999): 70–73.

<sup>13</sup> According to the First Vatican Council's decree, *Pastor Aeternus* (8 July 1870), the pope exercises infallibility when he defines (i.e., affirms) a doctrine regarding faith and morals in the capacity of representative of the Universal Church (which is very rare). The Second Vatican Council specifies that papal definitions must be in accord with and contained in revelation. See F. X. Lawlor, J. T. Ford, and L. Heft, "Infallibility," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), 448. For a brief overview of debates contemporary with the First Vatican Council, see J. J. Hennessey, "Vatican Council I," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 14, 403–07.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed bibliographies on the Vatican Archives, see <http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/bibl.htm>, accessed 18 August 2007 and Infography: Archivio Vaticano – History – Sources <http://www.infography.com/content/759680507127.html>, accessed 10 August 2007.

<sup>15</sup> In this section, everything without a specific reference comes from the Vatican Archives website: [http://www.vatican.va/phome\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm), accessed 10 August 2007. No author is given. Pontifical dates are from *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 11: 502–506.

("in the archives of Our Lady the Holy Roman Church").<sup>16</sup> Most material pre-dating Innocent III (1198–1216) was lost because of the fragility of papyrus as well as wars and other vicissitudes.<sup>17</sup> Documents moved around and were kept in a variety of places such as the chancery, the Camera Apostolica (Apostolic Chamber),<sup>18</sup> the Wardrobe, and the Bibliotheca Secreta (Private Library). During the Western Schism (1378–1417),<sup>19</sup> the archives was in extreme disorder.

After the restoration of unity at the Council of Constance, Pope Martin V (1417–31) began reassembling archival material. From the sixteenth century, the number of documents in the archives, such as nuncio reports, increased exponentially.<sup>20</sup> They also acquired greater importance as a focus of historical research, although, according to the archives' website, they were considered private, and therefore could be restricted at will:

Yet, whether public or private, they were considered private goods [as they had been in antiquity], reserved to the possessors of the "ius archivi" or "archivale": physical persons, or public bodies, including even the State.

Archives, including the pope's, were called *segreto*.<sup>21</sup> The Italian word is misleading, and in this context simply means "private, guarded," rather than "occult" or "underhanded." From 1475 to 1612, access to both the archives and the Vatican Library became more and more restricted.<sup>22</sup> Sixtus V (1585–90) had a notice inscribed over the door to the archives, threatening with excommunication any who dared to enter without permission.

In addition to restricting access, the popes moved to centralize their archival collections. Pius IV (1559–65) tried to found a central ecclesiastical archives to improve documentation; but this design was not carried out.<sup>23</sup> Paul V (1605–21) established the Archivio del Vaticano,<sup>24</sup> combining materials formerly separated.

<sup>16</sup> *Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Misc. Arm. [Wardrobe] XI*, 19; quoted in A. Samoré's preface to *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Giulio Battelli, "Vaticano: VII. Archivio Vaticano," *Enciclopedia cattolica* (Vatican City: Ente per l'Enciclopedia cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico), 12, columns 1131–35.

<sup>18</sup> The Camera Apostolica was the central board of finance in the papal administration, and it played an important role in the government of the Papal States. See J. P. Kirsch, "Apostolic Camera," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1, transcribed Douglas J. Potter, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01633b.htm>, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007, accessed 10 August 2007.

<sup>19</sup> During the period of the schism, there were two popes, or sometimes even three; W. Ullmann, "Western Schism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 14: 691–94.

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv: Ein internationales Zentrum historischer Forschung," in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Battelli, "Vaticano," col. 1131; Samoré, in *Archivio Vaticano, Il libro del centenario*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 58.

<sup>23</sup> Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 39, 98, 241; Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 106.

<sup>24</sup> Battelli, "Vaticano," column 1132.

The founding of the archives had a political aspect, as Vatican officials hoped to use it as a weapon in the defense of the Holy See's property.<sup>25</sup> Materials began to be cataloged, and in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi created the *Schedario Garampi*, which remains the only general index for documents in the archives at that time.<sup>26</sup> Only the pope, the secretary of state, the prefect of the archives, and collaborators had access; researchers could request copies, but not originals or indexes.<sup>27</sup>

Napoleon created the first unified papal archives, albeit outside papal control, when he had the papal archives brought to Paris between 1810 and 1813.<sup>28</sup> In 1814, the Bourbons ordered the archives' return; unfortunately a third of the documents were lost or destroyed on the way back to Rome.<sup>29</sup> Papal officials guarded the archives even more strictly after its return from France, and, with very few exceptions, denied access to researchers on pain of excommunication.<sup>30</sup> Scholars had to pay for copies, and because they could not examine the catalogs to see what the Vatican possessed, getting copies was even more complicated.<sup>31</sup> Rome limited access further after the 1848–49 revolution.<sup>32</sup> Lack of access led to complaints, as well as to rumors that Rome was withholding secret records of its evil deeds.<sup>33</sup>

In 1869, the British government obtained Vatican permission for Catholic convert Joseph Stevenson to examine and transcribe documents pertaining to English history.<sup>34</sup> Aided by the archivist's assistant Pietro Wenzel, who knew more of the archives' contents than anyone else, Stevenson had more freedom than any other researcher before him.<sup>35</sup> It is not clear, however, why Stevenson was granted freedom of access denied to others.

<sup>25</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> See <http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/bibl.htm>, accessed 18 August 2007. See also Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 58; and "Giuseppe Garampi," in "The Archives: The Past and the Present," <http://asv.vatican.va/en/arch/garampi.htm>, accessed 10 August 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 59. The secretary of state is the chief assistant to the pope, entrusted with important ecclesiastical affairs and dealings with secular rulers; see Benedetto Ojetti, "Roman Curia," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 13, transcribed Jeffrey L. Anderson, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13147a.htm>, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007, accessed 10 August 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Blouin, *Vatican Archives*, xx–xxi.

<sup>29</sup> Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 60.

<sup>30</sup> Gian Maria Vian, "Nel centenario dell'apertura: l'Archivio Segreto Vaticano e le ricerche storiche," in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 235–36; originally in *Osservatore Romano*, 6 June 1981.

<sup>31</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 40–41.

<sup>32</sup> Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 61.

<sup>33</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 91.

<sup>34</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 77–79. The complete account is on pp. 78–87.

<sup>35</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 83, 85.

### Leo XIII'S Letter on the Use of the Archives for History

Such was the situation when Leo XIII became pope in 1878. As archbishop of Perugia, he had argued that the Church must engage modern civilization.<sup>36</sup> Leo XIII hoped to broaden the range of Catholic thought and improve relations with the non-Catholic world outside Italy.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Hergenröther (1824–1890), a Catholic theologian and historian, recommended opening the Vatican Archives, and Leo began discussions with the Curia, the officials who assist the pope in governing the Church, as to the advisability of doing so.<sup>38</sup> After the death of Francesco Rosi-Bernardini, the prefect of the archives, in 1879, Hergenröther took his place as the first prefect to hold the rank of cardinal.<sup>39</sup> The pope charged Hergenröther with making the archives more accessible through better reference and organization,<sup>40</sup> and he further aided access by centralizing the archives.<sup>41</sup> No known documentation exists for the decision to open the archives. A memorial tablet gives the date as 1880, while the actual admission of scholars took place sometime in 1881.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Protestant scholar Theodor Sickel used archival sources as the basis for a monograph that argued that the tenth-century document (the *Privilegium Ottonis*), whereby German emperor Otto I had given wealth to the Church, was genuine.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary scholars were convinced by his argument—even Lord Acton who was not particularly friendly toward the papacy. The fact that a Protestant found evidence in the archives to support the Church in a historical debate both enhanced the Church's historical standing and, concomitantly, weakened Catholic opposition to increased access.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>36</sup> J. M. Mayeur, "Leo XIII," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 8, 490–93; U. Benigni, "Leo XIII," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 9, trans. W. G. Kofron, online edition Kevin Knight, 2003, [www.newadvent.org/cathen/09169a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09169a.htm), accessed 18 September 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Hergenröther received a degree in theology from the Collegium Germanicum in Rome in 1844 and was ordained four years later. In 1859, he completed a doctorate in theology at Munich. He taught theology, canon law, and ecclesiastical history at Würzburg. In addition to studying the conflict between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, he was involved in such controversies as the defense of the temporal power of the papacy and of the definition of papal infallibility. Leo XIII raised him to the cardinalate and to the rank of archbishop, and charged him with the task of establishing archival studies in the Vatican on a scientific basis. He also edited the correspondence of Pope Leo X (1513–21) and worked on the history of Ecumenical Councils. See J. P. Kirsch, "Joseph Hergenröther," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 7, trans. W. G. Kofron, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07262a.htm>, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007, accessed 10 July 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 92–93. See also Kirsch's article on Hergenröther.

<sup>40</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 93; Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 66–67.

<sup>41</sup> Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 64.

<sup>42</sup> Cardinal A. Samoré, letter to Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, 14 May 1980, in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> *Das Privilegium Otto I für die Römische Kirche vom Jahre 962* (Innsbruck, 1883); cited by Santifeller in Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, and by Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 97–99.

On 18 August 1883, two years after opening the archives, Leo XIII issued *Saepe numero considerantes*, which confirmed the opening of the archives<sup>45</sup> in the context of the debate on the papacy's role in Italian history. Indeed, the pope's letter arose from the context of the unification of Italy and the abolition of the papacy's temporal power (1859–70); thus, the letter formed part of an ongoing political struggle.

The conflict between the Piedmontese dynasty and the papacy predated the unification of Italy by several years, going back to disagreements between Piedmont, which was to unify Italy, and the Catholic Church<sup>46</sup> on such matters as the legal status of clergy. Piedmont's policy under the premier Count Camillo Cavour aimed at unifying Italy under the rule of Piedmont through a combination of diplomacy, force, and the exploitation of internal divisions in the other Italian states. The French emperor Napoleon III supported Piedmont, while the other states were under the influence of the Austrian Empire.<sup>47</sup> Situated in the center of the peninsula and ruled by the head of the Catholic Church, the Papal States were the single greatest barrier to Italian unification.

War broke out between France and Austria in 1859; Piedmont profited from Austria's distraction. With the aid of Giuseppe Garibaldi,<sup>48</sup> Cavour in the next two years annexed the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and most of the Papal States, along with several smaller states. The conquest of the Papal States took place by degrees, starting with Romagna in the north. After seizing Romagna, King Vittorio Emanuele of Piedmont wrote to the Vatican to demand the cession of Umbria and the Marches; but Pope Pius IX (1846–78) refused. Cavour subsequently entered the Papal States and demanded the disbanding of the papal armed forces; but the pope again refused. The papacy remained intransigent, even though it was powerless to prevent Piedmont from annexing most of its territory. Napoleon III vetoed the occupation of Rome and the surrounding territory to conciliate the Catholic party. But after his fall and the establishment in France of the Third Republic in 1870, the French ceased to protect Rome, and the Italian army was free to occupy the city and bring an end to the temporal power of the pope.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Battlori, "Tras la apertura del Archivo Secreto Vaticano," 31.

<sup>46</sup> G. Mollat, *La question romaine de Pie VI à Pie XI* (Paris: Librairie Lecoivre, 1932), 282 ff. This work is biased, but fairly well documented.

<sup>47</sup> Mollat, *La question romaine de Pie VI à Pie XI*, 309–13.

<sup>48</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–82), after a checkered career fighting in various South American wars, returned to Italy in 1848 to lead a volunteer unit against Austria, but was defeated and went into exile. After his return to Italy in 1858, Cavour entrusted him with a corps of volunteers. Two years later, he invaded the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and handed it over to Piedmont; in 1866, he did the same to Venice, which had been under Austrian rule. Denis Mack Smith, *Garibaldi* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 9–11. Despite his fame as an Italian nationalist, Garibaldi believed that the nation-state was only a stage on the way to creating an international community; Smith, *Garibaldi*, 2–3.

<sup>49</sup> Mollat, *La question romaine de Pie VI à Pie XI*, 314–22, 326, 346–61.

The Italian government did guarantee the immunity of the pope, to whom it accorded sovereign honors and assured an annual income. But it also required royal approval for ecclesiastical appointments outside Rome and dissolved religious orders. The loss of temporal power, in particular, was deeply resented.<sup>50</sup> Rome, like Jerusalem today, was a battleground between two historical memories that claimed the same city: that of the Church and that of the new Kingdom of Italy.

At stake was control of the overarching narrative of Italian history. In 1882, Garibaldi denounced the papacy as inimical to Italian liberty. In response, Leo XIII argued that the Church was the chief creator of Italian nationality.<sup>51</sup> Leo XIII's view of history presumed that the archives, by embodying the memory of the Church, also defined its identity.

Institutional memory is inseparable from ethics and politics; so it is natural that contemporaries of Leo XIII, such as Lord Acton, saw archives as possessing a political and ethical aspect.<sup>52</sup> The structure of *Saepenumero considerantes* demonstrates that the archives was the locus for apologetics (the defense of the Church): Leo viewed the archives not as neutral, but as buttressing the Church's side in the ongoing debate about the Church's role in Italian history. Or, rather, he viewed the archives itself as neutral, but not the information it transmitted. Leo XIII's clerical allies had similar ideas. For example, Cardinal Jean-Baptiste-François Pitra (1812–89) cited German Protestant historian G. H. Pertz (1795–1876) to the effect that the study of the archives would bring about “the most beautiful defense of the papacy.”<sup>53</sup> The Italian occupation of the Papal States informed Leo's letter as the principal motive behind the opening of the archives. The letter indeed began by referring, not to the archives, but to the debate regarding the Church in Italian history:

We know well that their efforts with great force and heat have been turned to the history of the Christian name, and especially to that part which concerns the deeds of the Roman pontiffs that are bound and connected to Italian matters.<sup>54</sup>

The pope accused the Church's antagonists of fabricating a new memory, implying that memory can either be true or counterfeited to serve partisan ends: “Indeed, they act at once unjustly and perilously who devote more to hatred of the

<sup>50</sup> F. M. Underwood, *United Italy* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1912, reissue 1970), 243–44, 245, 246, 255.

<sup>51</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 100.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Man on His Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 80.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Baptiste-François Pitra, *Lettres des Papes*, 244 quoted in Fernand Cabrol, *Histoire du Cardinal Pitra* (Paris: Retaux, 1893), 305. For more on Pertz, see Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 22–25; Chadwick refers to a travel diary by Pertz entitled *Italienische Reise* (Hanover, 1824), 146. See also Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 19 (note by Santifeller), 23–24, 26, 28–29, 37.

<sup>54</sup> “*Satis cognoveramus, ipsorum conatus multa cum vi et calliditate in historiam christiani nominis esse conversos, maximeque in eam partem, quae res gestas complectitur Pontificum romanorum cum ipsis italicis rebus colligatas atque connexas*,” 49.



Roman papacy than to the truth of things, clearly striving to form a counterfeited memory of earlier times in a deceptive color, to serve the new facts in Italy.”<sup>55</sup>

Leo XIII aimed to set forth an alternative to nationalist historiography that portrayed the popes as obstacles to Italian unity: “we wish that the truth should at some time prevail, and Italians recognize whence they formerly received and in the future may hope to obtain the greatest benefits. . . .”<sup>56</sup> Drawing on the archives to support the papacy’s temporal power was not, for Leo, merely presenting one side; it was giving the Italians a correct understanding of their own history.

Surveying the use of history by opponents of the Church from the Magdeburg Chronicles<sup>57</sup> to his own time, the pope protested that even some Catholics, that is, for example, Italian nationalists, abused history in the same way as did Protestant propagandists; and he insisted that the archives disprove the antipapal construction of history:

Therefore, with the purpose we have stated, the least vestiges of antiquity have been investigated; each singly has attempted the recesses of the archives; futile fables have been brought to light; comments, a hundred times refuted, a hundred times repeated.<sup>58</sup>

The phrase “*fabulae futes*” expresses the factitious and fabricated character Leo ascribed to antipapal historiography, whose falsifications were partly made up out of whole cloth, but partly constructed through the selective relation of facts, ignoring whatever good the Church had done and only reporting the bad.

The letter contains very little about whether, and to what extent, any opposition to the papacy’s temporal power may be justified. Rather, the pope took a binary approach to historical debate. On the one hand, Leo XIII suggested that history could be a conspiracy to suppress the truth for political reasons.<sup>59</sup> To this partial historiography, on the other hand, he opposed the ideal of history as impartial truth, to which he appealed as a witness for the Church. The archives, then, contained not dead documents, but weapons for controlling the memory

<sup>55</sup> “*Etenim iniuste simul et periculose faciunt qui plus odio romani Pontificatus quam rerum veritati tribuunt, illuc non obscure spectantes, ut superiorum temporum memoriam mendaci colore fucatam novis in Italia rebus servire cogant*,” 49.

<sup>56</sup> “*velimus ut vincat aliquando veritas, et italici homines agnoscant unde sibi vis beneficiorum maxima antea percepta et in posterum speranda sit*,” 49.

<sup>57</sup> The authors of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, a Lutheran history of the Church, partly by the Croatian Protestant Matthias Vlacich. Published in 1559, the history aimed to show that the early Church held true “evangelical” beliefs, not “popish anti-Christian doctrine,” and it reportedly claimed, among other things, that Pope Alexander III (1159–81) approved of “Baalism”; see Edward Myers, “Centuriators of Magdeburg,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* 3, online copyright Kevin Knight, 1999; [www.newadvent.org/cathen/03534b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03534b.htm), quoted in [www.istriians.com/istria/illustri/vlacic/magdeburg1.htm](http://www.istriians.com/istria/illustri/vlacic/magdeburg1.htm), both accessed 30 November 2004.

<sup>58</sup> “*Illo igitur, quod diximus, proposito pervestigata sunt vel minima antiquitatis vestigia: singuli prope tabulariorum tentati recessus: evocatae in lucem fabulae futes: commenta, refutata centies, centies iterata*,” 50.

<sup>59</sup> “. . . dici possit, artem historicam coniurationem hominum adversus veritatem,” 50.

of Italy, the Church, and Europe. It derived this value precisely from its perceived neutrality. Because the papal interpretation was true, and the nationalist view false, the archives must by its very nature as impartial records support the former: "The uncorrupted records of events, if one direct a tranquil mind devoid of prejudice, by themselves unaided and magnificently defend the Church and the Papacy."<sup>60</sup> It is worth remembering that the pope, though he wrote polemically, did not cynically pass off biased documents as impartial; rather, he assumed that this one-sided view is objectively true, and the other false.

Leo's supporters echoed this idea; for example, Cardinal Pitra's biographer Fernand Cabrol asserted: "The impartial history of the popes is itself a defense, it shows the services rendered by the papacy, it must lead every good Italian patriot to desire the re-establishment of this power."<sup>61</sup> And this view is still expressed today: Francesco Turvasi has cited Leo's comment about history ("The first law of history is not to venture to say anything false, then secondly not to obscure anything true")<sup>62</sup> as proof that "[t]he Church was not inspired by an apologetic motive, but simply by that of truth."<sup>63</sup> In fact, the letter shows very clearly that Leo did have an apologetic motive, though not one he saw as contradicting the truth. In contrast, the prefect of the archives, Martino Giusti, wrote that Leo, in opening the archives at a time of impassioned anticlericalism, was conscious that the truth is always apologetic.<sup>64</sup> The implication is that the documents are on the one hand neutral witnesses to the truth, while on the other they show certain historical narratives to be true and others false.

These narratives, even today, affect the very identity of the Church. This is why, in marking the centenary of the opening, Pope John Paul II emphasized that the archives has a dynamic character and that the vast increase in documents would benefit the world as sources of law, government, history, knowledge, humanity, and culture. Further, he cited Paul VI's statement that reverence for the archives is reverence for Christ's activity in the world through the Church.<sup>65</sup> This veneration doubtless reflects the view of archives as repositories of memory and

<sup>60</sup> "Incorrupta rerum gestarum monumenta siqui tranquillum et praeiudicatae opinionis expertem intendat animum, per se ipsa Ecclesiam et Pontificatum sponte magnificeque defendunt," 49.

<sup>61</sup> "L'histoire impartiale des papes est donc à elle seule une apologie, elle montre les services rendus par le pouvoir temporel des Papes, elle doit amener tout bon patriote italien à souhaiter le rétablissement de ce pouvoir," Cabrol, *Histoire du Cardinal Pitra*, 307.

<sup>62</sup> "... primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat, deinde ne quid veri abscondere audeat," 54.

<sup>63</sup> Turvasi, "Vatican Archives: Wealth Untold," 108–109; see also the history of the archives at the Vatican Archives website, Part 6, now archived at [http://web.archive.org/web/20040925163623/www.vatican.va/library\\_archives/vat\\_secret\\_archives/docs/documents/vsa\\_doc\\_storia6\\_it.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20040925163623/www.vatican.va/library_archives/vat_secret_archives/docs/documents/vsa_doc_storia6_it.html), accessed 18 August 2007.

<sup>64</sup> "... conscio che la verità è sempre apologetica," in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 122.

<sup>65</sup> See footnote 19, above; Paul VI's remarks were made on 26 September 1963 and are in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, I, 1963, 614 ff, in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 132.

identity; it is identity that gives the archives much of its power. Embodying a perception of historical memory, the archives may also present an image of what the Church is.

Leo was keenly aware of the ways in which Italian nationalists had both molded and physically embodied the public perception of history, as in monuments to the Sicilian Vespers (a revolt against a thirteenth-century French king allied to the papacy) or to “the man from Brescia.”<sup>66</sup> Both monuments embodied memory for Leo: the Sicilian Vespers was an event “of bloody memory” (*cruentae memoriae*), and the Italian nationalist propaganda made Arnold of Brescia “glorious to posterity” (*insignem posteris*). For Leo XIII, these monuments gave outward substance to a false memory that manipulated public opinion for political ends.

Schools are vital in transmitting memory, so it is not surprising that they formed one of Leo XIII’s principal concerns. The pope feared that teachers would inculcate anticlericalism in their pupils, who “easily imbibe disgust for venerable antiquity, and an irreverent contempt for the holiest things and persons.”<sup>67</sup> What the pupils learned was, for Leo, counterfeited history that, instead of deducing causes from the observation of events, started with assumptions hostile to the Church and distorted history to fit these assumptions:

They do not proceed in contemplation of the greater disciplines from the narration of events to the causes of things; from causes, rather, they seek to build up of laws that appeal to judgements rashly trumped up, which often openly dissent from doctrine handed down from heaven, and of which the entire ground is to dissimulate and conceal how and to what extent Christian institutions could bring about a salutary outcome in the course of human events.<sup>68</sup>

The word *ficta*, which I have translated “trumped up,” is related to *fiction* and denotes the manipulated and constructed character Leo attributed to

<sup>66</sup> [H]omini Brixienti, 51. Arnold of Brescia was a twelfth-century dissident who favored confiscating ecclesiastical wealth and giving it to the laity, thus both restoring evangelical poverty and satisfying the demands of the state. The clergy looked askance at this, and eventually Pope Innocent II had him condemned. Arnold had been a follower of Abelard and involved in the latter’s downfall: Bernard of Clairvaux had him exiled from France. Returning to Italy, he apparently repented and went on pilgrimage to Rome, where he got caught up in a movement to abolish the temporal power of the popes. Eugenius III was driven out of Rome. But the papacy made an alliance with Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, and Arnold was overthrown and put to death. His followers rejected the Catholic hierarchy and sacraments altogether. See J. A. Brundage, “Arnold of Brescia,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1, 844; and E. Vacandard, “Arnold of Brescia,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 1, trans. John Fobian, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2003, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01747b.htm>, accessed 30 November 2004.

<sup>67</sup> “. . . facile imbibunt venerandae antiquitatis fastidium, rerumque et personarum sanctissimarum inverecundam contemptum,” 51.

<sup>68</sup> “Non in maiorum disciplinarum meditationibus ab eventuum narratione ad rerum proceditur causas: a causis vero exaedificatio legum petitur ad iudicia temere ficta, quae saepius cum doctrina divinitus tradita aperte dissentiunt, et quorum ea omnis est ratio, dissimulare ac tegere quid et quantum instituta Christiana in rerum humanarum cursu eventorumque consequentia ad salutem potuerint,” 51.

nationalist historiography, as well as its doctrinal errors. (Compare the expression "*fabulae fuitiles*" cited above.) By depicting the popes as enemies of Italian nationality, the nationalists created a memory that contradicted the reality contained in the archives.<sup>69</sup>

The purpose, then, of opening the archives was to show the alleged falsity of the secular nationalist view of history, which the pope assumed to be a *parti pris*, a position taken without evidence, and that account of the Church a strait-jacket into which the facts of history must be stretched or compressed to fit. Leo believed that he himself possessed the true vision of an Italy that benefited from the presence of the Roman See and that the documents would vindicate this papal memory. It bears remembering, however, that archives in the Kingdom of Italy had been available since 1860;<sup>70</sup> so if nationalists did falsify history, it was presumably not for want of documents.

To counter the nationalist view of the Church, the pope offered a narrative of benefits arising from the papal role in Italian history. According to Leo, the Church's preponderance in Italy prevented religious strife (such as the French and German Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century), ensuring prosperity; further, in earlier centuries, the Church resisted the barbarian invasions. The papacy, he argued, aided the Byzantine emperors against the Turks, advanced studies, and benefited civil government: "it provided the liberty of civil government and opportunities necessary to accomplishing such great things."<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the papacy protected Italy from foreign rule (by which Leo presumably meant the Holy Roman Emperors, and possibly also the French), provided laws for popular republics (popular commonwealths borrowed laws from the wisdom of the popes),<sup>72</sup> and patronized the arts and scholarship.

The pope contrasted this view with secular nationalist historiography, protesting that Italians attacked the Church when even Protestants admitted its benefits. Returning then to education, he accused nationalist historiography of obscuring truth in the interests of party and corrupting students' minds by instilling impressions that would later harden into prejudices. He particularly condemned the partisan aspect of nationalist history:

Nevertheless, it is hardly believable what a capital evil is that of the student of history who serves the enthusiasms of faction and the divers cupidities of men. For history will be not then a teacher of life nor a light of truth, as the ancients

<sup>69</sup> Cardinal Pitra, a recipient of the pope's letter, likewise accused the Italian government, "worthy heir of the revolutionaries," of falsifying history in its schools. Letter to the Abbess of Sainte-Cécile, 15 August 1883, quoted in Cabrol, *Histoire du Cardinal Pitra*, 307.

<sup>70</sup> Butterfield, *Man on His Past*, 79.

<sup>71</sup> "[C]ivilis principatus libertatem opportunitatesque praebeat tantis peragendis rebus necessarias," 52.

<sup>72</sup> "[L]eges [. . .] res publicae populares a sapientia Pontificum mutuatae sunt," 53.

said she should be of right, but the approver of vices and the maidservant of corruption—this especially for youths.<sup>73</sup>

In contradistinction to this rash and prejudiced school of historiography, the pope appealed to an informed and impartial history based upon careful investigation. The “enthusiasms of faction” referred of course to the nationalists, whom the pope depicted throughout as a narrow party rather than the broad national movement they professed to be. Further, he attributed a moral character to each side in the debate: the opponents of the papacy not only erred, but tended to vice and corruption. In short, he imbued the historical memories embodied in the archives with an ethical value: sources served to refute “all falsehoods and lies” (*omnia ementita et falsa*). Instead of viewing facts contained in documents as neutral, Leo expected them to vindicate a specific historical interpretation.

In addition to its overt antinationalist polemic, *Saepe numero considerantes* also engages in a covert polemic against the policy of withholding access to the archives. Leo was fighting on two fronts: in openly attacking the Italian nationalist school, whose followers had occupied Rome and ended the popes’ temporal power, he also opposed the party in the Curia that opposed opening the archives (presumably on the grounds that its contents would serve the antipapal narrative). To rebut both adversaries, the pope surveyed a long pedigree of ecclesiastical historians, beginning with the early Church (Eusebius, St. Augustine) and continuing into the nineteenth century. This narrative portrayed the Church as the patroness of historical studies. Thus, the pope both opposed the anti-Catholic stereotype of an obscurantist Church and presented a model for the Church to follow, one that would foster historical research in the service of apologetics.

Leo made it clear that the archives was to play a leading role in this approach to history. For the only direct reference to the archives in the letter is precisely in connection with the Church’s need for weapons in the battle over memory. This passage is worth quoting at length since it shows Leo XIII’s thought concerning the role of archives in shaping historical memory. The pope begins by referring to the debt in gratitude that the Church earned by cultivating history; then he urges the use of history as a weapon, in a turn of phrase that is only partly metaphorical, given the political stakes involved. He then explicitly states that this conflict over memory had induced him to open the archives:

Therefore if the Church merited every most grateful memory in historical disciplines in the past, let her continue to do so in the present—especially since the needs of the times impel her to earn this praise. For as hostile weapons, as We said, are wont to be sought from history, it behooves the Church to do

<sup>73</sup> “Interim tamen vix credibile est quam sit capitale malum historiae famulatus servientis partium studiis et variis hominum cupiditatibus. Futura quippe et non magistra vitae neque lux veritatis, qualem esse oportere veteres iure dixerunt, sed vitiorum assentatrix et ministra corruptelae: idque praesertim hominibus adolescentibus, . . .” 53.

battle with equal arms, and wherever she is assaulted most bitterly, there let her furnish herself the more, to repel the onslaught. With this counsel in mind, We decreed at another time that Our archives be made available, as far as possible, for the advancement of religion and of beneficial arts; today likewise We ordain that a fitting ornament from Our Vatican Library come to light, by preparing the historical works We mentioned.<sup>74</sup>

Following this manifesto, the pope expressed the hope that qualified and sober scholars (*"viri probi, in hoc disciplinarum genere versati"*) would use the archives for research, and he propounded a vision of history as the triumph of truth over arbitrary opinion: "For arbitrary opinion must necessarily yield to firm and conclusive arguments; truth itself will at length overcome and break efforts long undertaken against the truth, which may be obscured, but never extinguished."<sup>75</sup> He concluded by assuring his readers that the Church had always prevailed over its enemies and that the conflict with the Apostolic See had damaged the Italian government. Thus he came full circle, from enunciating high principles of historical inquiry to the application of these principles in the struggle against the Italian state.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues that personal identity "can only be activated in the temporal dimension of human existence."<sup>76</sup> This dimension employs memory, since the subject defines himself or herself through narrative;<sup>77</sup> memory is the means whereby the subject constructs this narrative. Admittedly, an institutional identity differs from an individual identity, but the latter furnishes a useful analogy for Leo's letter, where the overriding aim was to ensure that the Italian national memory honor the role of the Church.

Moreover, Mary Carruthers shows that, in the Middle Ages, memory was adjudged constitutive of identity, inasmuch as memory constructed character out of fragments of the past—an idea applicable beyond the medieval period.<sup>78</sup> Abby Smith applies similar ideas to historical artifacts and rare books when she refers to "the ability of a cultural object to carry within it memories that, taken

<sup>74</sup> "Igitur si de disciplinis historicis optime omni memoria Ecclesia meruit, mereat et in presens: praesertim quod ad hanc laudem ipsa ratione impellitur temporum. Etenim cum hostilia tela, uti diximus, potissimum ab historia peti soleant, oportet ut aequis armis congregiatur Ecclesia, et qua parte oppugnatur acrius, in ea sese ad refutandos impetus maiore opere muniat. Hoc consilio alias ediximus, ut tabularia Nostra praesto essent, quantum potest, religioni et bonis artibus provehendis: hodieque similiter decernimus, ut adornandis operibus historicis, quae diximus, opportuna ex Bibliotheca Nostra Vaticana pateat suppellex," 55.

<sup>75</sup> "Nam firmis ad probandum argumentis cedat necesse est opinionis arbitrium: conatusque adversus veritatem diu susceptos ipsa tandem per se superabit et franget veritas, quae obscurari potest, extingui non potest," 55.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press; original *Soi-même comme un autre*, Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 114.

<sup>77</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* and "Narrative Identity," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Its Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 188, 195.

<sup>78</sup> Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 180.

together, constitute an identity.”<sup>79</sup> Tom Nesmith cites Gary Taylor’s definition of knowledge and culture as what is remembered; this memory is mediated through “editors.”<sup>80</sup> Not all memory or culture is necessarily determined in this way, but the memory embodied in documents is not neutral. For Nesmith, archives are more “a dynamic process of recording” than static documents;<sup>81</sup> it follows that they are also a dynamic process of remembering.

Applying these ideas to the Vatican Archives, it is noteworthy that, according to Ambrogio Piazzoni, the creation of the secret archives in 1612 served to guarantee a tradition that would not be merely oral<sup>82</sup>—in other words, to guarantee memory. Similarly, Pope John Paul II describes the archives as forming an entire book (connoting a meaning that can be read and interpreted) that contains the memory of the Church: “We can with good reason consider the Vatican Archives as an extraordinary book, that preserves and reveals in its pages . . . the memories of a long, age-old human event, whereof the Church and our civilization are heirs and continuators.”<sup>83</sup>

Thus, archives embody historical memory, which in turn constitutes national or institutional identity; that is, archives are among the building blocks for the construction of memory and identity. As such, their content is politically and ethically charged. Even while maintaining the objectivity of the archives, Leo XIII also perceived this ethical character. He saw, however, no conflict between affirming the neutrality of the archives and its polemical use. Therefore, he could at once assert a one-sided view of history and insist on the principle of historical objectivity, for he held the archives to be a repository of truth, but truth itself to favor a particular interpretation of Italian history in a contemporary political debate.

### Theodor Sickel and the Politics of Access

While Leo XIII viewed the archives in the context of a larger historical narrative, Sickel simply wanted to obtain access to the documents for research. Born in Aken an der Elbe in Prussia in 1826, Theodor Sickel studied theology and

<sup>79</sup> Abby Smith, “Authenticity and Affect: When Is a Watch not a Watch?” *Library Trends* 52 (Summer 2003): 172–82, 177.

<sup>80</sup> Gary Taylor, *Cultural Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 6, 122–25; quoted in Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2002): 34, n. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 35.

<sup>82</sup> Ambrogio Piazzoni, “Archivio Segreto Vaticano: cento anni dall’apertura/1. La mostra documentaria,” in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 196; originally in *Osservatore Romano*, 26 April 1981.

<sup>83</sup> Speech of Pope John Paul II, reported in *Osservatore Romano*, 19 October 1980 (cited in Archivio Vaticano, *Il libro del centenario*, 131): “Possiamo . . . considerare, a buon dritto, l’Archivio Vaticano come un libro straordinario, che custodisce e rivela nelle sue pagine [. . .] le memorie di una lunga, secolare vicenda umana, quella di cui la Chiesa e la nostra civiltà sono eredi e continuatrici.”



These poplar cabinets were built around 1610 and contain records from the Council of Trent, 1545–1563, which responded to the challenges of the Reformation. In 1881, the archives were limited to the *Armaria* fonds, which included the archives of the Council of Trent, some series of the *Archivum Arcis* and some political-diplomatic miscellaneous of the Secretariat of State, including some important Nunciatures, as well as other modest fonds, also of families, from the 15th through 18th centuries. Copyright © Archivio Segreto Vaticano. See [http://asv.vatican.va/en/arch/access\\_1881.htm](http://asv.vatican.va/en/arch/access_1881.htm), accessed 7 July 2007.



history, completing a dissertation on French history in 1850. He was especially interested in original documents and taught courses on palaeography and diplomatics in France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland before being invited to teach at the Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung (Austrian Institute for Historical Research) in Vienna.<sup>84</sup> Sickel wrote brief notes on Rome, the papal archives, and related matters during the 1890s. In his last years (1906–1907), he drafted, wrote, and dictated memoirs based on these notes; he intended to edit them and put them in order, but never did so. They are a rich source for the history of science and learning in nineteenth-century Austria, Germany, and Italy. The originals were kept at the Institut für Geschichtsforschung until 1923, when they were moved to the Österreichisches Historisches Institut. Wilhelm Erben published a copy in the same year. Leo Santifeller's 1947 edition includes related materials from the Vienna Archives.<sup>85</sup>

Though Protestant, Sickel had no particular axe to grind, and indeed was seen as vindicating the Church by showing the *Privilegium Ottonis* to be genuine; thereby, he also vindicated the liberal party within the Vatican Archives.<sup>86</sup> Sickel only seemed to address the polemical issues of Catholic and Protestant historiography when invited to do so by the pope: when Leo expressed doubts about how German Protestant critics would react to Sickel's findings, Sickel "enter[ed] the lists" ("*eine Lanze einzulegen*") on behalf of Protestants, saying that they "would not deny the Catholic Church the honor and recognition that were her due."<sup>87</sup> The scholar later noted, possibly with amusement, that the pope counted him among the good Protestants, not the malicious ones ("he counted me decidedly among the good Protestants, not the malicious like Gregorovius").<sup>88</sup> This vignette suggests that Protestant as well as Italian nationalist polemic was on Leo's mind when he opened the archives.

Sickel observed politics on a smaller scale than Leo, in the machinations of bureaucracy. He was concerned most with gaining access to the documents. Politics continued to plague the archives. The Curia in general opposed the opening and distrusted Germans, especially the archivist Hergenröther, and therefore contrived to appoint as his subarchivist an Italian, Pietro Balan, an ardent papalist whose interest in the archives was frankly polemic.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Santifeller, introduction to Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 1–2. See also Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 115–16.

<sup>85</sup> Santifeller, in Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 7–9.

<sup>86</sup> See Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 97, and the end of my historical survey above.

<sup>87</sup> "[...] der katholischen Kirche die Ehre und Anerkennung, die ihr gebühren, nicht versagen werde," Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 58.

<sup>88</sup> "[E]r rechnete mich entschieden zu den guten Protestanten, nicht zu den böswilligen wie Gregorovius," Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 191.

<sup>89</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 94; Paolo Dalla Torre, "Balan, Pietro," *Enciclopedia cattolica*, 2, columns 720–21; P. Scoppola, "Balan, Pietro," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 5 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana) 5:308–11.

Hergenröther sought to expand access, but had little influence, while Balan tried to maintain restrictions. But, in spite of Balan, the archives slowly became more open, though several inconveniences remained, such as lack of heat and inability to consult the catalogs.<sup>90</sup> Some thought that the physical discomfort in the archives was deliberately intended to discourage users.<sup>91</sup>

Access clearly had a political aspect, mostly involving Balan, the assistant archivist. After a brief character sketch of the latter (learned, clever, a little too eloquent and facile, reserved), Sickel described the assistant archivist's preponderant role and the need to obtain his good graces in order to navigate the archives. However, Balan was often (strategically?) absent, thus passively impeding access. According to Sickel, Balan's simulated interest in the visitors' research masked a fundamental obstructionism: "On the other hand, Balan always seemed pleasant and took a lively interest in furthering all research—for show. Actual success depended only on whether one knew how to get the better of the *sottoarchivista* in one way or another."<sup>92</sup> Balan was apparently also both capricious and touchy: at one point he publicly expelled a researcher for speaking poor Italian. Though recognizing the benefits that had accrued to researchers, Sickel doubted whether this is the proper way to manage an archives:

In short, very much that visitors have obtained in the last few years, are due to the employee's direction and generous good will. But is this correct archives management?<sup>93</sup>

This passage is ambiguous. Did Sickel mean that researchers owed the official a debt of gratitude, or that they were dependent on his caprice? And, while the context suggests that "*der Beamte*" is Balan, this is not clear. It could refer to Hergenröther or to the employees of the archives in general. The dominant idea, however, was that the archives should not be run arbitrarily, since this impeded access and therefore the use of archives for research.

Sickel also related an incident showing how the power struggle between Balan and Hergenröther directly affected his own access. As Cardinal Hergenröther led him into the archives, Balan jumped out and pointed to the bronze tablet over the door (presumably the one containing the warning of excommunication); Hergenröther immediately led Sickel out of the room and showed the scholar a document from the pope granting access. To avoid conflict with Balan in front

<sup>90</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 95.

<sup>91</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 96–97.

<sup>92</sup> "Im Gegentheile erschien Balan stets gefällig und trug ein lebhaftes Interesse, jede Forschung nach Thunlichkeit zu fördern, zur Schau. Der eigentliche Erfolg hing nur davon ab, ob man dem *Sottoarchivista* auf die eine oder andere Weise beizukommen wußte," *Müncher Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 1883, cited by Santifaller in Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen* 38–39, n. 3.

<sup>93</sup> "Kurz: sehr vieles, was in den letzten Jahren von den Besuchern des Vatikanisches Archiv erreicht, verdankt man der Person des leitenden und mit seiner Gunst nicht kargenden Beamten. Doch ist das wohl rechte Archivordnung?" *Müncher Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 1883, cited by Santifaller in Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen* 38–39, n. 3.

of the visitors, Hergenröther had recourse to the prefect of the library, Peter Bollig—who was startled, because so far as he knew, the archives was closed. These incidents took place in 1881 and suggest either that the archives was still closed, or that its opening was not widely known among those who, by virtue of their office, ought to have known. Sickel concluded that the pope and his representatives did indeed want to open the archives, but were proceeding slowly and without fanfare: “Every case indicated to me that the pope and his representatives in these circumstances would have preferred to remove all obstacles, but with caution, and so held it wise to proceed in great secrecy.”<sup>94</sup> Not all employees even knew that the door had been opened, and Sickel himself was enjoined to secrecy. Consequently, access remained very limited in practice, for a researcher can hardly have effective access if he does not even know that he has access.

Sickel suggested, however, that Balan was not so much opposed to access, as amusing himself in intrigues against Hergenröther, which implies that either anti-German bias or love of power was Balan’s dominant motive.<sup>95</sup> Hergenröther could not, in the short term, prevail against Balan, though he did manage to obtain permission for Sickel to use the indexes. However, the fee system remained in force and access to the documents was expensive.

The feud between Balan and Hergenröther eventually ended in September 1883 with Balan’s removal from the archives.<sup>96</sup> He was replaced by the Benedictine historian Luigi Tosti (1811–97) and by the Austrian historian Heinrich Seuse Denifle (1844–1905),<sup>97</sup> and access was extended to documents older than 1815. Officials retained the right to determine if research was contrary to religious or social interests—which seems a fairly broad category. But this right was seldom exercised, and scholars in practice often received access to catalogs that officially were withheld.<sup>98</sup> Disorder was probably the principal barrier to access, though it also had the salutary effect of making systematic concealment difficult; indeed, sometimes researchers knew more about the contents than did the staff.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> “*Schon jener Fall von 1881 bewies mir, daß der Pabst und seine Vertreter in diesen Angelegenheiten am liebsten alle hergebrachten Hindernisse beseitigt hätten, aber vorsichtig, also auch in großer Heimlichkeit vorzugehen für gerathen hielten*,” Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 40.

<sup>95</sup> Before the official opening of the archives, it was reported that Italian prelates were not happy with the presence of a German prefect. See, for example, Count Paar’s letter to Count Andrassy, 13 June 1879, cited by Santifaller in Sickel *Römische Erinnerungen*, 466–67. (Count Paar was Austro-Hungarian ambassador to the Holy See; Count Andrassy was minister of the Exterior.)

<sup>96</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 106; see also Dalla Torre, “Balan, Pietro.”

<sup>97</sup> For Tosti, see Giuseppe Gallavresi, “Luigi Tosti,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* 14, trans. Thomas M. Barrett, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14788c.htm>, online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007, accessed 10 July 2007. For Denifle, best known for editing documents from the medieval University of Paris and for an attack on Martin Luther, see Reginald Walsh, “Heinrich Suese Denfle,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* 4, trans. Albert Judy, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04719a.htm>; online copyright Kevin Knight, 2007, accessed 10 July 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 107–108.

<sup>99</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 109; see also Blouin, *Vatican Archives*, xxii.

In the regulation of the archives, or lack thereof, the power struggles between the liberal and conservative factions were quite evident. These struggles made themselves felt in the pope's *motu proprio* of May 1884, which were intended to bring order to the archives, but failed to do so. The conflicts were swept under the rug, and it was even forbidden to publish the regulations in their entirety. Researchers, however, were happy with them: Vilmos Fraknói, vice president of the Hungarian Academy of Scientists, was pleased that the archives were now definitely under Hergenröther and that fees were fixed at a very reasonable level. Access, however, remained restricted: "But unfortunately, we also have further no access in the rooms of the archives." The chief advantage for researchers was that they need no longer make "private arrangements" ("*private Vereinbarungen*," quotation marks in original German).<sup>100</sup>

Owing to disagreements within the Curia, only part of the *motu proprio* was published (as a poster)—that pertaining to researchers—but even that was so inconspicuous that few visitors noticed it. Sickel agreed with this partial publication, since the full document revealed the inner organization of the archives. One might think such transparency a good thing, since it makes accountability possible, but Sickel apparently thought otherwise, possibly because of fear of scandal, or deference to bureaucratic authority. And yet, he himself stated that he derived benefit from knowing the competencies of the various employees.

The regulations marked a compromise and, according to Sickel, were only intelligible as such:

"We want," so the opponents of the opening must have said, "not to let this or that determination go by the wayside," and so, in order to have at any rate some regulation to maintain, they must have dredged [literally, "warmed up"] these rules up, although they have not been administered at all in recent years.<sup>101</sup>

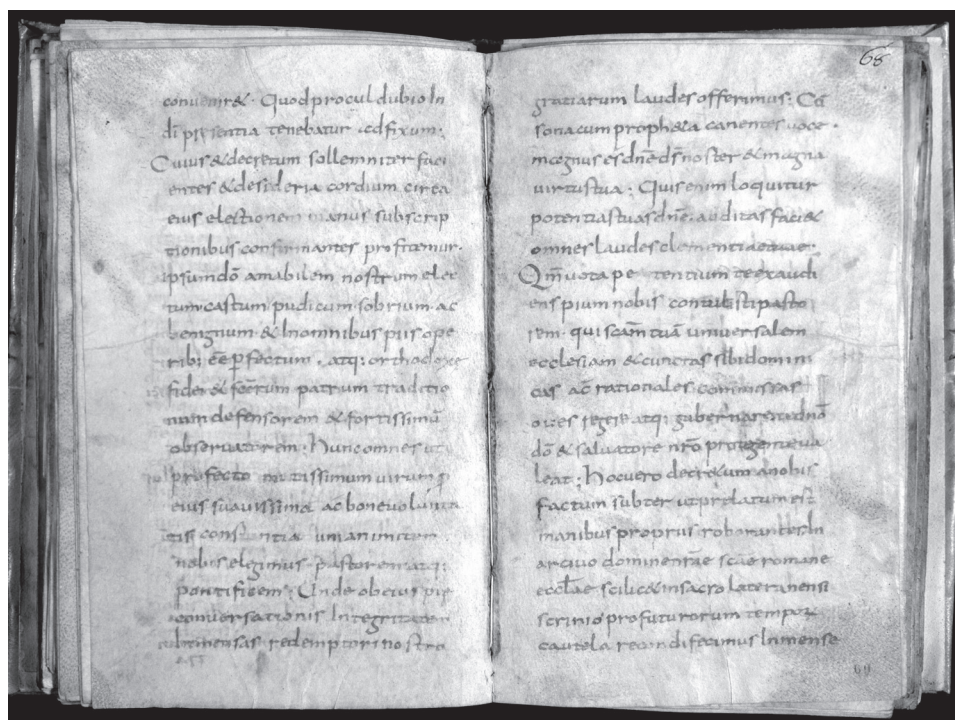
Thus, Sickel placed the regulation of the archives in the context of curial politics.<sup>102</sup> Regarding other matters of archival management, Sickel praised the pope's decision to have the Lateran Archives brought to the Vatican, against the wishes of the Lateran Archivist, because it improved archival organization ("it opened the way for the future, to regulate the archival system");<sup>103</sup> but he

<sup>100</sup> Fraknói, letter to Theodor Sickel, 29 May 1884, quoted in Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 66–67, n. 3.

<sup>101</sup> "Wir wollen, so werden die Gegner der Erschließung gesagt haben, diese und jene Bestimmung nicht fallen lassen und so hat man, um doch ein Reglement zu erhalten, dieselben noch einmal aufgewärmt, obwohl sie in den letzten Jahren gar nicht mehr gehandhabt worden sind," Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 68.

<sup>102</sup> Chadwick, *Catholicism and History*, 116, describes three groups opposed to increasing access to the archives: those who feared that the Vatican would lose control over the documents; Italians who thought that foreigners should not have access; and those who sought to avoid physical loss of or damage to documents.

<sup>103</sup> "[W]eil sie für alle Zukunft den Weg bahnte, das Archivwesen zu regeln," Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 106.



The Vatican *Liber Diurnus* codex, a collection of formularies, was discovered by Luca Holste among the manuscripts of the Roman library of the monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in 1646 and became part of the Vatican Secret Archives in the 18th century. Theodor von Sickel edited the 1889 edition in Vienna. Copyright © Archivio Segreto Vaticano. See [http://asv.vatican.va/immagini/doc/secVIII\\_IX\\_a.jpg](http://asv.vatican.va/immagini/doc/secVIII_IX_a.jpg), accessed 7 July 2007.

remained concerned about the poor care of materials: “In short, the conditions in the archives are very faulty and give scope and grounds for complaints against the current management.”<sup>104</sup> These complaints emboldened those who thought the archives should never have been opened in the first place. Yet the pope continued to support Sickel’s research, probably because it validated both the papal narrative of history and the liberal policy toward the archives. Leo XIII’s policy did, in the end, percolate to the lower level of archival administration.

## Conclusion

Today, records are made available according to pontificate (that is, at the beginning of each pontificate the documents of the next pope in line become

<sup>104</sup> “Kurz die Zustände im Archive sind sehr mißlich und geben gegründeten Anlaß zu Angriffen gegen die jetzige Verwaltung,” Sickel, *Römische Erinnerungen*, 240.

available).<sup>105</sup> Documents are available up to the end of Pius XI's pontificate (1939), along with the collection on prisoners of war (Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano [Prigionieri di Guerra 1939–47]). Sergio Pagano, the prefect of the Vatican Archives, posted a notice online dated 15 July 2003 requiring—on pain of suspension of access—that a copy of every publication citing an archival document be sent to the Vatican Archives, so that the triennial *Vatican Secret Archives Bibliography* can be kept current.<sup>106</sup>

Access, then, has been an important issue throughout the history of the Vatican Archives. Further, it always had a political aspect, as is evident in Leo XIII's use of the archives in the service of a politics of memory. The opening of the Vatican Archives illustrates several different aspects whose relative importance depends on the perspective of the observer. These aspects include the accessibility of the documents, their condition, and their political and ethical content and implications. Leo XIII's letter surveys events from above, at a distance, as elements in a larger political, religious, and historical debate over the Church's role in Europe, especially in Italy. Sickel perceives the same events from below, at a closer proximity to the documents, and in a world where political struggles take place on a smaller scale. In both cases, the archives stand at the center of a conflict over who will control the memory of the Church and of Italy. This is evident in Leo XIII's letter, but the same issues inform the struggle between Balan and Hergenröther, however petty this struggle may seem. For, ultimately, Balan aimed to use the archives to advance a papalist polemic, and he seems to have been suspicious of the uses others might make of the documents. He also enjoyed using the archives to enhance his own power within the Curia. Hergenröther, on the other hand, seems to have shared Sickel's attitude, valuing the documents as sources of knowledge for its own sake rather than of power.

This conflict reflects the divisions in the Curia as to the advisability of granting access to the archives; possibly even Leo XIII was of two minds about it. These divisions diluted the effectiveness of Leo's liberal policy. Nevertheless, the opening remains a milestone in both archival scholarship and the Church's relation to scholarship.

Much work remains to be done in this field. One desideratum is to track down Balan's *Gli archivi della Santa Sede in relazione alla storia d'Italia* (*The Archives of the Holy See in relation to the History of Italy*),<sup>107</sup> which might illuminate the

<sup>105</sup> "Storia dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano (parte 6)," see footnote 63. See also "Rules for Scholars," <http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/amm.htm>, accessed 10 July 2007. See also Blouin, *Vatican Archives*, xvii and xxii; C. Kosanke, "Vatican Archives," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 14:397–99; Diener, "Das Vatikanische Archiv," 66.

<sup>106</sup> "Rules for Scholars," <http://asv.vatican.va/en/fond/anim.htm>, accessed 18 August 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Pietro Balan, *Gli archivi della S. Sede in relazione alla storia d'Italia. Discorso recitato nella Pontificia accademia di religione cattolica di Roma nel giorno 5 maggio 1881* (Rome: Fratelli Monaldi, 1881).

connections between Balan's politics and his management of the Vatican Archives. A wider range of viewpoints on the opening is desirable. For example, more non-Catholic perspectives on the archives, both modern and contemporary with the opening, would be interesting. One would also like to know more about the motives of opponents of the opening. The archives itself may possess materials to shed light upon its opening. Studies of this sort would bring further insight to the role of archives in the development of historical memory.