



Jesuit Restoration – Part One

The Jesuits in Europe before 1769

Thomas M. McCoog SJ

On 7 August, Jesuits worldwide commemorate the 200th anniversary of the restoration of the Society of Jesus after a 40-year suppression. *Thinking Faith* asked Jesuit historian Thomas M. McCoog to tell us the fascinating story of the Jesuits' downfall and re-establishment... and everything in between! In the first of a four-part series, we read about how the thriving Society found itself on the losing side of an argument with the great ruling houses of Europe.

An Irish Jesuit, Charles Aylmer, who had entered the Society of Jesus at Stonyhurst on 21 May 1808 and had just completed his D.D. in Palermo, arrived at Civita Vecchia from Sicily on 20 July 1814. At that time all passengers were quarantined for 21 days before they were allowed to continue to Rome. For some reason, Aylmer received permission to continue his journey on the 27th and he arrived in Rome on the 29th, in time to celebrate the feast of St.

Ignatius Loyola with a pomp and ceremony unknown for the past forty years. Rumours that Pope Pius VII would announce the long-awaited and long-anticipated universal restoration of the Society of the Jesus on that feast day circulated widely. But the papal bull was not quite ready; instead it was published on 7 August, the octave of the feast. Aylmer provides a rare eye-witness account of the service:

At about 8 o'clock in the morning his Holiness [Pope Pius VII] came in state to the Gesù, where he celebrated Mass at the altar of St. Ignatius, attended by almost all his Cardinals, Prelates, and by about 70 or 80 of the Society. After his Mass and thanksgiving, we all proceeded to the Sodality, which I dare say you remember. None were



admitted except Cardinals, and those Prelates who are immediately about his Holiness, and the 70 or 80 of the Society. Here the Bull which reestablished the Society all over the world was read. I cannot pretend to comment on it as I heard it but imperfectly. I know that it extends the Society already established in Russia. Naples and Sicily, to the whole world. . . . All of the Society present then went up in order and kissed the Pope's feet. He spoke to several as they came to him and expressed particular joy and satisfaction in his

Countenance during the whole ceremony. He continually smiled at the number of old men, who came hobbling up to the throne, almost all with tears of joy in their eyes. . . . In fine yesterday was truly a day of jubilee and triumph for the Society. The people exulted with joy, and loaded us on every side with Congratulations. I could not refrain from tears: little did I expect or hope to be present at so consoling a ceremony in the Capital of the World, and attended by such circumstances. Never was any order established in this manner; never such marked attention paid by any Pope; never so great a triumph. O truly how sweet is victory after a long fought battle!!!!

A long battle indeed.

THE SUPPRESSION

From its foundation in 1540 the Society of Jesus had vocal critics, controversial opponents, and ferocious enemies. Protestant preachers and divines denounced them as janissaries of the Anti-Christ or palace guard of the pope, an image many Jesuits themselves cultivated. Protestant rulers especially feared their teaching on regicide, tyrannicide and papal power to depose rulers. But even within the Roman Catholic Church, complaints and criticisms were commonplace: Dominicans denounced Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* as unorthodox and, later, Jesuit teaching on grace and freedom as heretical; Franciscans questioned perceived Jesuit syncretism in the Chinese Rites controversy; Jansenists condemned Jesuit moral teaching for its laxity; Gallicans, eager to preserve (and increase) the traditional prerogatives of the Church in France, resisted Jesuit papalism, a position advocated so strongly by members of the Society that some bishops feared that it undermined their ordinary power. But the Society also had many influential friends, among whom were the pope (some more than others), and the ruling houses of Portugal, Spain, France and the Holy Roman Empire. By the mid-18th century there were more than 20,000 Jesuits with approximately 700 colleges, universities and seminaries under their direction.

During the 18th century, 'enlightened despotism' may have been the preferred mode of governance among certain royals, but the *philosophes* such as Voltaire extolled Great Britain as reason's model monarchy, especially preferable to France. Some, tired of continuous battles with the papacy, deemed Britain's greatest achievement its domestication of the Church. Curtailing the power and influence of the Roman Church required hobbling the Society of Jesus. A strident Anglophile, former favourite of the Society of Jesus, and sometime Portuguese ambassador to the Court of St. James (1738), Sebastião José de Carvalho, later Marquis of Pombal (1770), set the scenario for the Society's downfall.

Portugal

Pombal, as he is commonly called, was appointed the equivalent of prime minister by the new monarch Joseph I in August 1750. Portugal, the proud owner of the first early modern empire, had fallen in status, wealth and reputation, a decline Pombal sought to remedy through the careful use of English economic and ecclesiastical models. Jesuit resistance to the redefinition of the

Portuguese-Spanish imperial boundaries in South America because of deleterious effects on the famous *reductions*, and the subsequent War of the Reductions in which native Americans fought Spanish and Portuguese soldiers (made famous in the 1980s film, *The Mission*) sparked Pombal's offensive against the Society. The Italian Jesuit Gabriel Malagrida's claim that the terrible Lisbon earthquake of 1 November 1755 demonstrated divine wrath against the Portuguese government, antagonised Pombal even more. Seizing upon the popular association of Jesuits, political assassinations and regicide, Pombal accused Jesuits of scandalous business practices and, more important, of complicity in a bizarre attempt on the life of King Joseph I. A proclamation of 19 January declared the Society guilty of involvement in the plot. On 20 April 1759 King Joseph I expelled nearly 2000 Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies. Malagrida was executed for heresy on 12 January 1761.

Portugal had been the first province of the Society of Jesus, long a centre of Jesuit activity; now it initiated the Society's destruction. Pombal broke diplomatic relations with Rome in 1760 and *de facto* ruled the Roman Church in Portugal according to the English model. (Relations were not restored until 1770 and the threat of a complete schism was used to cajole the pope.)

France

With the strong support of the Bourbon monarchy, Jesuits had emerged the superior force in France with Pope Clement XI's condemnation of Jansenism in *Unigenitus* (1713). Jansenists may have been defeated but they were not vanquished. Like Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jesuit procurator of Martinique, Antoine Lavalette, depended on the successful arrival of his ships for the payment of massive debts. Through his commercial activity, Lavalette financed the Jesuit mission in the West Indies. In 1755 British ships confiscated thirteen French vessels including those conveying Lavalette's goods. With creditors demanding repayment Lavalette declared bankruptcy. Two banking houses, fearing their own bankruptcy as a result of Lavalette's failure, sued the Society of Jesus in court with the argument that the Society as a single body was responsible for the debts of its members. The court decided in favour of the banks on 30 January 1760. The advice of the Society's lawyers to appeal to the *parlement* of Paris was ill thought-out because of the *parlement's* traditional hostility to the Society, its Jansenist membership and its defence of Gallican liberties.

To no one's surprise – except perhaps the Society's lawyers – the *parlement* upheld the court's decision on 8 May 1761 and gave the Society one year to pay the debts. *Parlement* also initiated a thorough investigation of the Society of Jesus as a foreign body, outside the control of the French crown and the Gallican Church, whose subversive teachings recently threatened the life of the king of Portugal and had earlier influenced Robert Damiens's attempted assassination of King Louis XV on 5 January 1757. The king did all he could to protect the Jesuits, as did the French episcopacy. Even Jesuits themselves, to the shock and anger of the recently elected Father General Lorenzo Ricci, proposed reforms to eliminate foreign and introduce Gallican items into their way of life. Nonetheless, *parlement* ordered the gradual closure of Jesuit colleges. Throughout 1762 and 1763, *parlement* suppressed the Society throughout most of the kingdom. In November of 1764, Louis accepted the advice of his principal minister Étienne François, Duke de Choiseul, and suppressed the Society throughout the realm. At the time there were nearly 3,000 Jesuits in France. Some went into exile; others remained as secular priests under the jurisdiction of the bishop. The English Jesuits moved their college from St. Omers to Bruges, and their novitiate from Watten to Ghent because of the expulsion.

Spain

There were approximately 4,500 Jesuits in Spain and its empire. As king of Naples, Charles had entrusted his sons and heirs to the Jesuits for their education. In 1759 Charles succeeded his half-brother Ferdinand VI on the Spanish throne as Charles III. His Jesuit-educated son Ferdinand succeeded him as king of Naples. Charles, his family and his inner circle were pro-Jesuit, and as king of Spain he welcomed Jesuits exiled from France.

Attempts by the Italian Leopoldo de Gregorio, Marquis of Esquilache, to introduce fiscal reforms resulted in popular demonstrations and bread riots. The introduction of a law against traditional Spanish attire caused such large riots in March of 1766 that the king fled Madrid. The king eventually conceded the repeal of the unpopular law against attire, the reduction of price of food and the exile of Esquilache to quell the disturbance. Some members of court whispered in Charles's ear that Jesuits were actually responsible for the demonstrations. In April of 1766 a secret extraordinary tribunal investigated the causes of the uprisings: on 29 Janu-

ary 1767 it recommended the expulsion of the Society. But the Jesuits were confident they would weather this storm. Unfortunately they underestimated the influence and power of Pedro Pablo Abarca y Bolea, Count of Aranda and friend of Pombal. At midnight on 2 April, magistrates and police raided each Jesuit house within Spain, gathered the community together, and dispatched them to a convenient port for transport to the Papal States. The English vicars apostolic convinced the Spanish crown that the two English colleges in Valladolid and Seville were administered and not owned by the Society of Jesus and thus prevented their confiscation. Henceforth English secular clergy governed them.

Pope Clement XIII reprimanded Charles for his decision despite the king's promise to provide a pension for each Spanish Jesuit. Papal pleas for a reconsideration were dismissed on the grounds that such a reversal would render Spain ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Why not rather ask what God would say, Clement replied. As pope and king contested the fate of the Society, Jesuits, overcrowded in Spanish ships, were on their way to the Papal States. But in May, Clement denied them access to papal ports; in so doing he perhaps hoped to force Charles to backtrack. Genoa allowed the Jesuits to disembark in Corsica, a colony then in revolt. In January of 1768 the Jesuits evicted from the Spanish colonies arrived, but in May, Genoa ceded Corsica to Spain so the Jesuits were again evicted. From northern Italy, where they were deposited, they began their long trek to Rome. It is estimated that approximately 700 Jesuits abandoned the Society during this ordeal.

Italy

Bound by blood to the kings of France and Spain – and by a secret treaty, the so-called 'Family Pact' – King Ferdinand IV of Naples and Duke Ferdinand of Parma expelled the Jesuits. The Society was ordered out of Naples on 3 November 1767 and from Parma on 5 February 1768. Malta, a fief of Naples, expelled the Society on 22 April 1768. Immediately the Bourbon powers and Portugal applied diplomatic pressure on and threatened military action against Clement XIII if he did not suppress the Society universally. The Bourbons submitted their formal request in January of 1769. On 2 February, the night before a scheduled discussion, Clement died.

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