

Jesuit Suppression and Restoration 1773-1814

On July 21, 1773 with great reluctance, Pope Clement XIV signed the brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* which dissolved the Society of Jesus throughout the world.

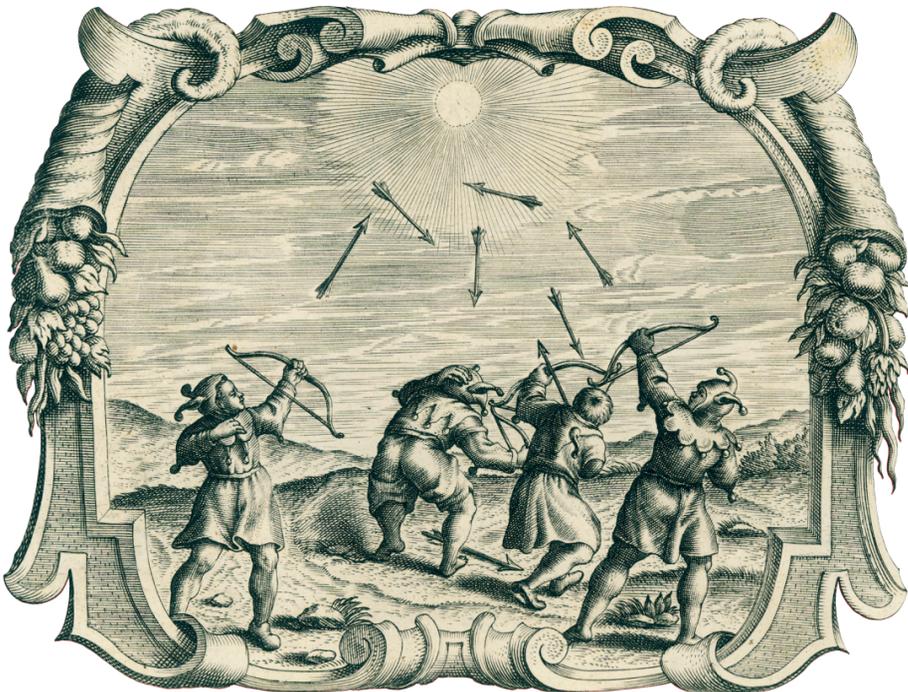


Figure 1. Emblem 565. *Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu* Motto: "No arrow strikes the sun. The Society is attacked in vain by the envious." (Antwerp: Plantin Press, 1640) Special Collections, Saint Joseph's University

The only way to explain the suppression of such a large, successful, and well established religious order as the Society of Jesus is to consider it the result of a perfect storm—the result of a highly unlikely convergence of forces antagonistic to one another but united in opposition to the Jesuits. The Jansenists in their theological and ethical rigor never let up in their accusations that the Jesuits undermined public morality with their moral teachings and betrayed the Catholic faith in their attempts to accommodate the Chinese and other cultures in Asia. The Gallicans, Febronians, and others with their theology of national churches virtually independent of the papacy, saw the Jesuits as papal agents, representatives of a foreign power. The anti-clerical, anti-Christian philosophers of the continental Enlightenment hated and feared the Jesuits, who were among their most able intellectual opponents. Ministers of the

crown in Portugal, Spain, France, and elsewhere saw political gain in bringing down such an important institution and being able to confiscate its schools and other properties.

This coalition was able to convince, hoodwink, or intimidate the monarchs of Portugal, Spain, Naples, France, and finally Austria into pressuring the papacy to rid the church of the Jesuit pestilence. The conclave for a new pope in 1769 took 185 voting sessions to elect Clement XIV. The Jesuits were the issue that dominated the conclave. The new pope did his best to resist the pressure and threats, but finally on June 8, 1773, he signed the brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* ordering the Society disbanded and its properties confiscated: "We divest them of their houses, schools, colleges, hospitals, farms, and any other property in any province or dominion where they may exist." The members of the order

were expelled from their residences, sometimes brutally, and left to fend for themselves as best they could.

Civil authorities had to promulgate the papal brief for it to be effective, a provision that meant that in certain places, such as England and its colonies in Maryland and Canada, as well as Prussia and White Russia, it was never officially in force. In a pattern of remnants, therefore, the Society survived. The French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath radically changed the political and ecclesiastical climate. By 1814, therefore, after a series of local restorations, the new climate allowed Pope Pius VII to restore the Society worldwide. Although in the beginning small in numbers and almost destitute of resources, the Society thereafter began to recruit new members and renew its ministries. In this regard it was particularly successful in the United States.

—John W. O'Malley, S.J.

Anti-Jesuit Propaganda

Many factors led to the Suppression of the Jesuits, but certainly among them was the diffusion and long life of a work published a century and a half before 1773, the *Monita secreta Societatis Iesu*. This book, the magna carta of anti-Jesuit propaganda, purported to be secret instructions from the superior general of the Society informing Jesuits how they were to fleece widows, and work their way into the secret counsels of princes in order to advance the nefarious purposes of the Jesuits, and do other crafty deeds.

In 1614, in Krakow, a small pamphlet was published that was destined to have a profound impact on the Jesuits in succeeding years. Its actual title was *Monita privata Societatis Iesu* but it came to be known as the *Monita secreta* and its anonymous editor claimed that it contained the true instructions of the Society of Jesus, kept secret by superiors for fear that the good

name of the order would be besmirched. The editor claimed that he had come into possession of the text of a stroke of luck, and rushed to publish it so that everyone would know the true face of the Society, hidden until then beneath a veil of piety and self-abnegation.

Not long after its publication, the *Monita secreta* was officially recognized as nothing more than a crude forgery, and the Society of Jesus, with the support of ecclesiastical authorities, took every measure possible to see that the libel was publicly denounced as such—but the damage had been done and the way was paved for publication of a mass of other anti-Jesuit pamphlets in the 17th and 18th centuries.

—Sabina Pavone in *The Jesuits II: Culture, Science, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (University of Toronto Press, 2006)

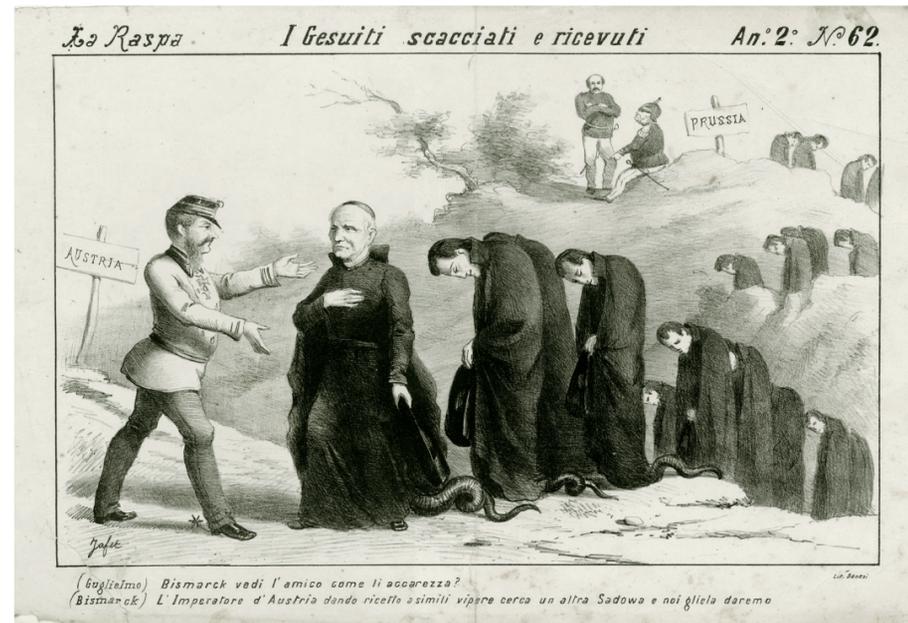


Figure 2. Illustration courtesy of Special Collections, Santa Clara University. *The Jesuits' flight from Italy was part of a general dispersal that pushed half of the order's global membership into exile within the course of a year. This 1872 cartoon, entitled "Jesuits Tossed Out and Taken In," appeared in La Raspa, a journal published in Rome after the fall of the Papal States. It depicts the Jesuit superior general, Pieter Beckx, and seminarians who found temporary refuge in Austria after their expulsion from Prussia. The Jesuits appear benign but they bear serpent tails.*



Figure 3. Pamphlet. *The Popish Royal Favourite*. William Prynne, London, 1643. Saint Joseph's University, Jesuitica Collection.

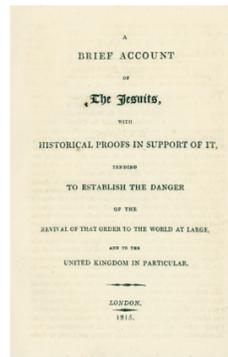


Figure 4. Pamphlet. *A brief account of Jesuits with Historical Proofs in Support of it, Tending to Establish the Danger of the Revival of that Order to the World at Large, and to the United Kingdom in Particular*. Anonymous, London, 1815. Saint Joseph's University, Jesuitica Collection.

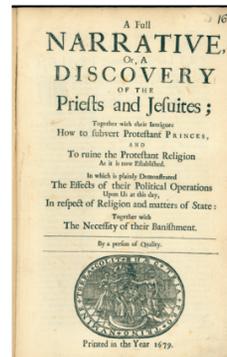


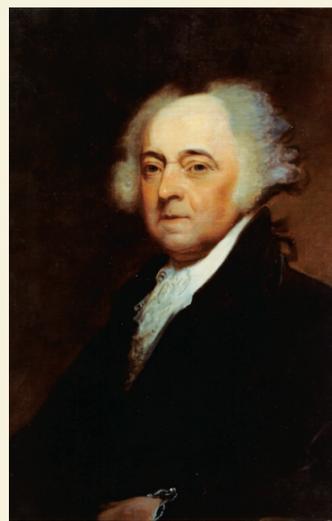
Figure 5. Pamphlet. *A Full Narrative of a Discovery of the Priests and Jesuits: Together with their Intrigues How to subvert Protestant Princes, and to Ruine the Protestant Religion As it is now Established*. Anonymous, London, 1679. Saint Joseph's University, Jesuitica Collection.

Pope Pius VII completely restored the Society of Jesus throughout the world in August 1814. That news was still deeply disturbing to John Adams nearly two years later.

"I do not like the late resurrection of the Jesuits. They have a general now in Russia, in correspondence with the Jesuits in the United States, who are more numerous than everybody know. Shall we not have swarms of them here, in as many shapes and disguises as ever a king of the gypsies...himself assumed? In the shape of printers, editors, writers, schoolmasters? I have lately read Pascal's letters over again, and four volumes of the History of the Jesuits.

If ever any congregation of men could merit eternal perdition on earth and in hell, according to these historians...it is this company of Loyola. Our system, however, of religious liberty must afford them an asylum; but if they do not put the purity of our elections to a severe trial, it will be a wonder."

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson from Quincy to Monticello, 6 May 1816



John Adams (1735-1826)

—Robert Emmett Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University*, Vol. I (Georgetown University Press, 1913)

On August 7, 1814, the Society was restored by Pope Pius VII's bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*. That act would almost certainly not have been possible if the Society had not vestigially survived in two highly unlikely places—Russia and the United States.

The Society of Jesus in White Russia

Jesuits, once so powerful and feared, fell victim to a deadly combination of greed, envy and political intrigue. The Reductions and the colleges where Jesuits once taught by word and deed either reverted to jungle or were converted to secular purposes, their original use memorialized only in a ruined pediment or a street name. As Jesuits suffered suppression and exile in Western Europe, and as Bourbon rulers brought pressure to bear on a reluctant Pope Clement XIV to abolish the Society universally, events in Eastern Europe provided the basis for Jesuit survival.

In the summer of 1772, Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, King Frederick the Great of Prussia, and Empress Catherine the Great of Russia divided among themselves a substantial part of the Kingdom of Poland. Prussia absorbed thirteen Jesuit colleges and seven residences. More important for subsequent Jesuit history were the 92,000 square kilometers and 1,300,000 inhabitants of White Russia that passed to Russia. Among them were 201 Jesuits from two provinces: 97 priests, 55 brothers, and 49 scholastics. Neither the Lutheran Frederick nor the Orthodox Catherine wished to disrupt educational policies of the Catholic institutions now under their control. Thus, neither monarch allowed the papal brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* (21 July 1773) suppressing the Society universally to be implemented in their realms. Besides the important educational apostolate—the principal reason why Catherine insisted on the Society's preservation—Jesuits continued their non-educational pastoral work among the thousands of Roman Catholics living under Orthodox rule. Thus Jesuits continued to live and work in White Russia for 41 years before their universal restoration. Indeed, they worked there until their eventual expulsion in 1820 by Czar Alexander I.

From the autumn of 1780, many ex-Jesuits throughout Europe sought to affiliate themselves with the remnant in Russia. They provided the foundations for the Society's restoration in other lands. In 1793 the Duke of Parma asked Catherine if she could spare a few Jesuits for his duchy. Those sent led to the establishment of the Neapolitan province in 1804. A year earlier the English province was re-established. The ex-Jesuits in the United States associated themselves with the Jesuits in Russia in 1805 and opened a novitiate in Georgetown in 1806. The Society's universal restoration followed on 7 August 1814 with Pius VII's bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*.

The Jesuits in Prussia could not count on the same level of support from Frederick the Great that they received from Catherine in Russia. Initially, Frederick and the Vatican faced each other with intransigence on the issue of the Suppression, but by 1775, Pius VI and Frederick agreed that the Jesuits could continue their work in the churches and the schools, and even accept new recruits, on the condition that they function not as members of a religious order but as individuals under the jurisdiction of the bishops.

On January 3, 1776, Frederick issued orders that the Society of Jesus be dissolved in his realms. Six months later, to this new, somewhat anomalous corporate unit, he gave the title: Priests of the Royal Schools Institute. This Institute lasted for the next twenty-four years.

—Thomas M. McCoig, S.J.



Figure 6. Frederick the Great, King of Prussia after the Battle of Kolin, 18 June 1757. J. Schroder, copyright Bettmann/Corbis



Figure 7. Portrait of Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. J. Schroder, copyright The Art Archive/Corbis