

## RESTORATION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

**Events so far:** The conspiracy of the Bourbons forced the hands of Pope Clement XIV, who, under tremendous duress signed the Brief *Dominus ac Redemptor*, thus abolishing the existence of the Society of Jesus worldwide. More than 22,000 Jesuits were affected. It was explicitly stipulated that the Brief's content would come into effect when the bishop of the diocese read it out in each and every Jesuit house. Many were released of their religious vows; others carried on as secular clergy or formed some holy associations. It was a time of complicated political machinations. In 1774, when the Brief was promulgated, the Society's members were expelled, buffeted, and some were rescued by foreign autocrats. The Society was not rooted out fully. The Orthodox Catherine II (née Sophia Frederica Amalia von Anhalt Zerbst), the Empress of Russia, ignored the papal authority and refused to promulgate it. Grapevine even has it that Pope Clement XIV had sent a secret note to the Empress that the Society could continue in White Russia! She allowed opening a novitiate there, in 1779. The Jesuit Headquarters were in Polotsk. The Society survived in the cold.

**Process of Restoration of the Society of Jesus:** Imagine the Society of Jesus emerging from the rubble of the French Revolution's teeth and the disintegrating Bourbon Empire! The Society of Jesus was fully restored by Pope Pius VII (Giorgio Barnaba Luigi Chiaramonti), on August 7, 1814. In this short but pithy description, we say something about the Jesuits climbing out of their graves.

It is said that from the first moment of the Society's suppression there were voices demanding its restoration. Cardinal Ercole Consalvi, for example, one of the most preceptive, clear-minded' and practical churchmen, who appreciated what the Jesuit role could be in those times said, "If I were master, I would re-establish them tomorrow." Fr. B.V. Bangert mentions three important factors that hastened Society's restoration: collapse of the Bourbon united front; gradual and prudent shift of Pope Pius VI from the stringent sanction to a clearly enunciated desire to Society's restoration; and clear determination of Pope Pius VII to realize his immediate predecessor's desire.

The Bourbon wall first chipped away in France by abolition of monarchy and Louis XVI went to the guillotine. The duke of Parma cleverly deserted other Bourbons and asked Catherine of Russia for a handful of Jesuits. Then he appealed to Pope Pius VI who, still threatened by Spain and Naples, nevertheless complied with the request and three Jesuits arrived in Parma from Polotsk (Russia). José Pignatelli joined the new arrivals, renewed his vows and took care of his fellow Jesuits. Two years later a novitiate with five novices was opened under Pignatelli, who now became a link between the old and the new Society. The duke of Parma requested Pius VI for more Jesuits. The pope on his part asked him to turn to his relatives (i.e., all Bourbons) and change their attitudes towards the Jesuits. King Charles IV was especially unyielding and wrote to Pius VI that the Jesuits were the cause of the French Revolution's atrocities. In 1798, the French troops arrested the pope and set him on the road to exile. During the journey his ambassador extraordinary at St. Petersburg came to him with several reasons asking him to pronounce papal recognition of the Society of Jesus in Russia. The pope responded by saying that the Jesuits themselves must first make a formal petition for it. Pius VI died on August 29, 1799.

In the conclave that followed, Cardinal Barnaba Chiramonti, a Benedictine, was elected Pope Pius VII, on May 8, 1800. He was determined to restore the Society of Jesus in any place from where requests came. The very first thing he did was laying to rest the latent fears of canonical correctness of the Jesuits in Russia in his Brief *Catholicae Fidei* (March 7, 1801). As soon as this became public survivors of the suppressed Society and many young men attracted by St. Ignatius' ideals headed for Russia. Jesuits were invited to Naples but they were asked to exclude any superior outside Naples. Pignatelli, who was provincial then of the Italian Province, denied this overture. In late 1805, Joseph Bonaparte of Spain expelled Pignatelli with his men. They went to Rome and settled near the Colosseum, opened a novitiate at Orvieto and a quasi-college at Tivoli. José Pignatelli died, on Nov. 15, 1811, before the full restoration of the Society. Meanwhile the Catholic world in the West faced a major convulsion just in those confused times and the Society of Jesus was caught in the crossfire:

Napoleon Bonaparte became the Master of Europe. And so we need to say here something about those fateful years.

**The Napoleonic Episode:** Napoleon Bonaparte was basically a despot in the 18<sup>th</sup> –c. style. His philosophical principles came from Voltaire, Rousseau and Robespierre. His religious practice was external, official, and limited to attendance at Sunday Mass. He pursued policies that permitted him to restrict papal interventions. After laborious negotiations he signed the Concordat of 1801 with Pope Pius VII: all cults were to enjoy liberty; and Catholicism was not to be the state religion. In Napoleon's vision liberty accorded Catholic public cult was to be submitted to police regulations! His First Consul seems to have secretly altered and incorporated other matters in the Concordat.

Fissures appeared between Napoleon and the Pontiff very soon regarding application of the Concordat. Conciliating though he was, Pope Pius VII would not compromise his principles. Nevertheless at Napoleon's earnest invitation, the Holy Father consented to go to the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris for Napoleon's coronation as Emperor (Dec. 2, 1804). There the pope insisted that the irregular situation of Napoleon's living with widow Josephine de Beauharnais be rectified immediately if he were to participate in the ceremony the next day. Napoleon's conditions were to be undisclosed – something similar to confessional secrecy – but unacceptable to the pope. After some four months in Paris, the Pontiff returned to Rome.

From here the events began to move faster than the Indian "Duronto" Express trains. The Italian Concordat (1803) recognized Catholicism as state religion. But very soon Napoleon started disregarding it, and speedily introduced into northern Italy laws and institutions motivated by the French Revolution. French Empire began to expand and by 1810, the situation became very acute. By 1806, he had integrated Naples, Venice and other duchies, and comprehensively disregarded the Italian Concordat. When Pope Pius VII did not comply with Napoleon's certain demands, he ordered his General François de Miollis to occupy Rome (Feb. 21, 1808), and annexed the Papal States to the French Empire (May 16, 1809). The Pontiff retaliated by excommunicating the perpetrators. But it had disastrous consequences. On the night of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1809, Napoleon's General Radet with his troops was at the papal palace door asking the pope to rescind the bull of excommunication and his temporal powers. When the pope sternly refused the demands, he was taken prisoner and taken to Savona (N. Italy).

Napoleon wanted to bring the pope to Paris to make him the Supreme Pontiff of his great Empire. Then he also wanted that the pope sanction episcopal nomination to men proposed by Napoleon. The pope rebuffed both demands resolutely. The vacant sees multiplied. Napoleon then nominated to the Parisian See Jean Maury and asked the diocesan bishops to confer on him powers of the Vicar Capitular. Pius VII came to know of it and secretly sent a Brief to Paris declaring Maury's power null. – It is said that Napoleon discovered this secret correspondence. Immediately he deprived the Pontiff of paper, and ink and any book he found in his room. This was a rude shock for the pope that nearly broke him down. He even suffered from insomnia. In despair and helplessness he yielded the power of institution of the bishops Napoleon had demanded earlier.

Napoleon had the pope transferred to Fontainebleau, near Paris (June 1812). Then after his Russian expedition he entered into negotiation with the Holy Father to extract a new Concordat. Pius VII signed it; but the text was intended only as a preliminary one to serve as a basis for a later definitive agreement provided all was kept secret. Instead, Napoleon published it! The infuriated pope withdrew his commitment in it. Finally, as the allied military defeat overwhelmed him, Napoleon freed Pope Pius VII (Jan. 21, 1814).

Pope Pius VII returned to Rome amidst great rejoicing. Discussions began in the papal curia about restoring the Society of Jesus; and the curia haggled for months over the text itself. The first plan was to declare it on the feast of St. Ignatius – probably because of the importance of close relation between the Holy See and the Ignatian order – and the declaration was eventually formulated to repeal the unfortunate Brief of 1773. However, another Cardinal, who had supported the Society's suppression,

disagreed with the text and proposed another text. His text displeased other cardinals: it was mean in recalling Society's merits in the past. The pope intervened and a compromise was arrived at on the form of the bull.

On August 7, 1814 Pope Pius VII went with much pomp to the Gesù, seat of the Jesuits in Rome, offered Mass at the altar of St. Ignatius, and read out to the public assembled there the bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*. The bull began like this:

With once voice the Catholic world demands the reestablishment of the Company of Jesus. We would believe ourselves guilty before God of great error if, among these great dangers to the Christian Republic, we neglected the help granted us by God's special providence, and if, placed in Peter's boat, rocked and assailed by continual storms, we refused to make use of vigorous and tested branches which offer themselves spontaneously to break the force of a sea that threatens us at every moment with shipwreck and death. Resolved by so many and such powerful motives, we have decided to do today what we would have wished to do at the beginning of our Pontificate. . . .

With this formal proclamation the Society of Jesus was no more ostracised, but restored to its rights and privileges. The Jesuits have celebrated several triumphs. But in extent and importance, few have matched this one. The resurrection of the Company was hailed everywhere. On the part of Pius VII, it was a bold stand that he took against his predecessor Clement XIV. On the sidelines, Fr. Echaniz mentions, "A few days later, almost incognito, Charles IV [of Spain, whose father had been the one who relentlessly stood by the abolition and vetoed the Society's restoration], visited the Gesù and the Spanish Jesuits resident in Rome gathered to greet him. He saw himself face to face with the men he had persecuted. He found that the feared and hated Jesuits were harmless over-grown children who kept no grudge. Tears came to his eyes several times."

After the restoration of the Society of Jesus, the Church has seen some of the great names, e.g., the sturdy peacemaker of the Rockies P.J. de Smet; two pillars of courage and light Gaston Fessard and the tireless Pierre Chaillet; Henri de Lubac (theologian on the firing line!); Karl Rahner (theologian of reconciliation); Pierre de Chardin (the paleontologist); Cardinal Augustin Bea (biblical scholar and ecumenist), and perhaps M. Martini and P. Arrupe. The Society has also given to the Church several martyrs, who went through horrendous bloodbath in our brutal, unjust world.

**To conclude:** When the *Minima Societas Iesu* celebrates the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its restoration, the times are considerably different from August 7, 1814. We are living now in the post-modern, globalized, and consumerist world. Politics, economics and information technology have transformed the very lifestyle and ideology of the people the Society seeks to serve. The major consequence of these agents is the 'birth' of wholly new kind of persons. The Creator God has been replaced by idols that seem to be more dominant: pleasure, power, wealth, and prestige with their offshoots. In his allocution to the members of GC 35, Pope Benedict XVI has clearly spelt out the typical features of the present context in various spheres of human life. At the same time, we must not forget that the three Divine Persons are looking down with love on the surface and circuit of the globe so full of people. To conclude then, the Society of Jesus cannot ignore zillions of challenges facing the world and the human family in multiple ways, today. The Father places the *Minima Societas* with Christ carrying his cross at the heart of *this* world. The Spirit of the Risen Lord will guide the Society as he has done thus far for the AMDG.

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**Sources consulted:** *A History of the Society of Jesus* (1986); *Jesuits: A Multibiography* (1995); *Passion and Glory* (vol. III, 1999); *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (vol. X, 1981); *The Return of the Jesuits* (1972).