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Gian Paolo Oliva (1676)

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Religious Orders and Roman Curia: Jesuits and Papal Nepotism in the Seventeenth Century; The Opinion of General Superior Gian Paolo Oliva (1676)

FLAVIO RURALE

Historiographical Debate

It is not easy to propose a synthesis of the developments and turning points in the historical research of recent decades on religious orders and on the Jesuits in particular. Doing so requires grappling with an endless production of essays and monographs and is closely intertwined with the historiographical outcomes of a changed vision, more generally, of the history of the church of Rome. However, it is useful to try to fix some of these turning points and reflect on a historiography enriched by profitable exchanges, making it possible to look at these themes from new perspectives, with new sensitivities, after the innovative research in particular of the Italian area by Mario Rosa, Paolo Prodi, and Adriano Prospero. I am thinking of the “Europa delle corti,”¹ of scholars such as Cesare Mozzarelli and Amedeo Quondam and their encounter with Spanish historiography and the work of José Martínez Millán and Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, of the contributions by John W. O’Malley and Paul Grendler and those of French historiography, for example the works of Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Antonella Romano.² Streams of research by as many other authors have drawn from their achievements.

The debate of the last forty years has indeed made it possible to overcome some interpretations that are often the result of preconceived positions, some simplistic and prejudicial vulgates of the complexity that has marked both the history of the church and, above all, the history of the relations between religious orders and the papacy. This will be the theme at the center of this paper, aimed in particular at clarifying the position of the Jesuits—specifically that of General Superior Gian Paolo Oliva (in office 1661–81)—in the debate on papal nepotism that ran throughout the seventeenth century. In this regard, it is essential to refer to the research of Antonio Menniti Ippolito,

1. An Italian study centre focusing on early modern society that has published over 150 volumes in the Biblioteca del Cinquecento series of the Bulzoni publishing house in Rome.

2. See for example Antonella Romano and Pierre-Antoine Fabre, eds., *Les jésuites dans le monde moderne: Nouvelles approches; Revue de synthèse* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999). Some of the best syntheses include José Martínez Millán, Henar Pizarro Llorrente, and Esther Jiménez Pablo, eds., *Los jesuitas: Religión, política y educación (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2012); and José Martínez Millán, Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, and Gijs Versteegen, eds., *La corte en Europa: política y religión (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2012).

an illustrious scholar who died prematurely in 2016 and has never been sufficiently mourned.³

By now, the opposition in the historiographical debate between a vision of the history of the regular orders that can be defined as apologetic—written a few decades ago by scholars belonging to those same orders—and a secular one, sometimes openly atheist and anti-curial, and in extreme cases supporting a frankly negative vision of the history of the sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Roman church, has been definitively overcome. The so-called “black legend” about the early modern Roman church—to be framed, more generally, within a negative vision of Spanish Italy⁴—has particularly concerned Italian historiography, and only in recent decades has it been possible to overcome these anti-Roman prejudices, also due to the so-called crisis of ideologies and the consequent political change in Europe at the end of the second millennium.

Nevertheless, in recent years there have also been episodes of incredible historiographic conflict on these issues, even violent and vulgar in language. Accounts of our domestic academic historiography tell us of scholars divided between opposing parties, protagonists of confrontations where they rarely find points of contact but merely mutual respect. Take the exchange of insults between the so-called “virtuous atheist historians” and the “enlightened Catholic ones,” participants of a seminar held in Turin in 2004.⁵ Giuseppe Ricuperati defined the meeting as “a lacerating communicative opportunity [...] where provocation dominated”; Paolo Grossi (enlightened Catholic) is simply a historian “nostalgic of medieval legal civilization” in the words of Vincenzo Ferrone (virtuous atheist). To which Grossi, referring to Ferrone’s introductory speech, retorted: “His tone is fiercely angry, his writing heavily ideological, it is uncivilized when he separates single statements from a wider context, he also reads what is not written: the heat plays these jokes.” And so on.

I would like to make another point in these introductory lines: when historians deal with certain research, they often refer only to the more recent literature and forget the

3. Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista: Papi, nipoti e burocrazia curiale tra XVI e XVII secolo* (Rome: Viella, 1999); Menniti Ippolito, “Innocenzo XI,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2004), vol. 62, *ad vocem*; see also Sandro Carocci, *Il nepotismo nel medioevo: Papi, cardinali e famiglie nobili* (Rome: Viella, 1999). On these topics, reference is also mandatory to Ludwig von Pastor, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del medio evo* (Rome: Desclée & C. Editori Pontifici, 1919–34). The complexity of the theme in the early modern age appears not to have been fully understood in the most significant volume recently published in Italy, *I gesuiti e i papi*, ed. Michela Catto and Claudio Ferlan (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2016): the seventeenth century itself—some considerations can be found in the essay by Guido Mongini, relating to the sixteenth century, 48–50—deserves adequate reflection. For historiographical developments in the political diplomatic field, see Silvano Giordano, “I papi e l’Europa nella prima età moderna: Le istruzioni generali ai nunzi,” *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 48 (2010): 55–80; see also Maria A. Visceglia, *La Roma dei papi: La corte e la politica internazionale (secoli XV–XVII)* (Rome: Viella, 2017).

4. Gianvittorio Signorotto, “Controriforma, età spagnola ‘crisi della coscienza europea’: Una nuova prospettiva,” in *Revisioni e revisionismi: Storia e dibattiti sulla modernità in Italia*, ed. Inge Botteri (Brescia: Grafo, 2004), 21–34.

5. Franco Bolgiani, Vincenzo Ferrone, and Francesco Margiotta Broglio, eds., *Chiesa e modernità: Atti della Convegno della Fondazione Michele Pellegrino* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 41, 305. See also Carlo Fantappiè, “Seminari vescovili e storia del clero in Italia: Alcune riflessioni storico-canonistiche,” in *Incorrupta monumenta ecclesiam defendant: Studi offerti a mons Sergio Pagano, prefetto dell’Archivio Segreto Vaticano* (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2018), 1:563–74, here 564.

contributions of authors from decades ago. Therefore, “recent” or “new” interpretative developments of certain historic events are in fact neither so recent nor so new because they have their roots in authors who are not mentioned in the footnotes. So sometimes it is important and useful to go back to the writings of those “forgotten” authors. This is particularly useful when we deal with the issue of relations between the Jesuits and the Roman church (that is to say, between the Jesuits on the one hand and the papacy, cardinals, and the secular and regular clergy on the other).

Historiographical Certainties

Today, we have a few historiographical certainties about the history of the Jesuits and religious orders, in particular about their relations of (alleged) loyalty to the papal see. We owe this to the works of such authors as Robert Bireley and A. Lynn Martin (I am referring to their research from the 1970s and '80s).⁶ What are these certainties?

In the early modern age, all European Catholic powers, both lay and ecclesiastical, recognized themselves as existing in the same space, within the same religious perimeter, the Christian Catholic one. “The state was [...] in the church”: though this is an explicit reference to the Catholic monarchy of Philip II (r.1556–98), it can also be transferred from the Iberian situation to the other European Catholic monarchies.⁷

In this religious and cultural context, largely shared—kind of a “free federation, a Commonwealth, of Catholic Churches”⁸—members of the regular clergy, that is to say, the religious, were intellectuals in the service of the princes and courts at which they were employed: they were loyal to Catholic kings (and not necessarily only to the pope). This is also true of the Jesuits. On the one hand, this gives a certain sense of compactness to Catholic Europe, yet on the other it favors divisions and lacerations, and, above all, it places clear limits on the supremacy of Rome: the fragmented framework of theology prevents a Roman “compact cultural hegemony,” and even less does it favor the affirmation of “a monolithic Catholic thought” in politics.⁹ Starting from the end of the French Wars of Religion (1562–98), upon the conversion of Henry IV (r.1589–1610) and his absolution by Pope Clement VIII (r.1592–1605)—also wanted by the Spanish Jesuit cardinal Francisco Toledo and the general superior of the Society of Jesus Claudio Acquaviva (in office 1581–1615), who had recovered from the dramatic

6. A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973); Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); but we must not forget some pioneering works of French historiography, see Pierre Blet, “Jésuites gallicans au XVIIe siècle? À propos de l'ouvrage du P. Gutton sur le P. de la Chaize,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 29 (1960): 55–84. See also Ronald Cueto, “Crisis, conciencia y confesores en la Guerra de Treinta Años,” *Guadernos de investigación histórica* 16 (1995): 249–65; Cueto, *Quimeras y sueños: Los profetas y la monarquía católica de Felipe IV* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1994).

7. “El Estado estuviera (quedara) en la Iglesia”: on these issues, see the reflections of Robert Descimon and J. Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, “Introducción: La liga católica francesa,” in *Los franceses de Felipe II: El exilio católico después de 1594*, ed. Robert Descimon and J. Javier Ruiz Ibáñez (Madrid: FCE, 2013; the volume is an expanded form of a French text published in Seyssel in 2005), 23–74, here 59, 61. See also below, note 9.

8. Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *1664: Un anno della Chiesa universale; Saggi sull'italianità del papato in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2011), 214.

9. Paolo Broggio, “Roma, la produzione teologica e la vocazione universale del papato: Note critiche,” *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 18 (2010): 7–24, here 8.

conflict with the Spanish sovereign and the Supreme Inquisition—the identification of the Society with both the Catholic monarchy and the papacy was definitively lost, and Spanish Catholicism lost its centrality in the papal curia. In short, it was the end of the Spanish religious, political, and military monopoly that had made this Catholic monarchy the only true European superpower of the second half of the sixteenth century.

Upon the Jesuits' return to Paris (1603), new balances were specified in the field of Catholic universalism, in terms that may appear paradoxical. The missions aimed at converting heretics and pagans both in the East and in the West had to coexist with multiple loyalties, those declared and manifested by the members of religious orders and, above all, by the Jesuits toward the single crowns. In the context of national churches, of the confessional age, and of increasingly tighter control “over Church matters,”¹⁰ Catholic universalism was increasingly fragmented into factions and power groups united “only” by the common Christian-Catholic faith (just as today, in a democratically elected parliament the common adherence to the values and rules of democracy coexists with the partisan interests of individual political formations). Not only that, following the metaphor, internal currents crossed these single parties, favoring clashes and divisions in the same single religious order: again the French facts of the Wars of Religion tell us of Jesuits militarily aligned with the most extreme part of the Liga Católica, while others, as early as the 1590s, were aware of the need to arrive at a compromise (in the same way, the Jesuit royal confessors of the Habsburg front during the Thirty Years' War [1618–48] would be divided among themselves).¹¹

The relations between the sovereigns of Catholic Europe and the pontiff (the commonly recognized spiritual authority) were defined—amid changing balances and sometimes conflicting circumstances—through policies aimed at “nationalizing” not only the secular but also the regular clergy. Continuing the practice of control and intervention of the Renaissance princes, protagonists of the reform of old religious orders and the establishment of new ones, during the seventeenth century the secular powers—equally driven by an authentic religious zeal—subjugated the regulars to controls and censures because of their national belonging. The Spanish case is emblematic: in fact, the claim of the Catholic kings for a vicarial regime (i.e., under direct royal control) would be constant both for the Jesuits and for other religious communities of their domains, aimed at consolidating their organizational autonomy with respect to the Roman curiae of the various orders' generalates. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, similar claims were made in a general context that increasingly tended to safeguard the belonging of individual religious—and in particular of those who held the most important positions in convents, houses, and colleges—to the community

10. Menniti Ippolito, 1664, 190, 192; thus writes the author about the Tuscan church, quoting the opinion of Gaetano Greco: “A sort of national Etruscan church had in fact formed, which even though it could not boast of the juridical traditions of the Gallican church or of the Hispanic churches, or of the Anglican one, was subjected to a continuous and careful control by the central ministers and officials chosen by the grand dukes' [...] Caesaropapism of minors and majors, therefore.”

11. Cf. the essays in *Los franceses de Felipe II*; Vittorio Frajese, *Sarpi scettico: Stato e chiesa a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), chapter 5, 179–246; Robert Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

of “natural subjects” to the prince: this occurred on a national scale in Europe and on a regional scale in Italy, where the aspiration of princes was also to establish regular religious provinces within the borders of their domain.¹² The need of sovereigns to safeguard “national” interests sometimes imposed drastic interventions on regular communities: the prince denies managerial roles or spaces and opportunities for political communication such as church pulpits to non-natural religious, he proceeds with expulsions, imprisonments.¹³ The suspected religious in the eyes of the prince, who frighten him, in these cases are not only the pro-Roman regulars but the religious politically subject to the enemy prince, subject of the neighboring state, to a foreign king.¹⁴ On closer inspection, this was also the Venetian position, which had always framed the action of papal authority above all within interests, strategies, and objectives of a temporal nature, which essentially looked to the pope—along with General Superior Acquaviva and his adherents (the accusation against the superior of the Jesuits came from some Spanish fathers at the beginning of the 1600s)—as a “political prince.”¹⁵ As we shall see, the problems posed by the institution of Propaganda Fide (1622) would become clear when a proposal was made in Rome to remove the missionaries from royal control.¹⁶ The oppositions would then also come from the orders, jealous of the autonomy hitherto enjoyed with their king.

Regulars, Royal Courts, and the Papacy

The seventeenth-century memoirs of Sister Angelique d’Arnauld, reported in Sainte-Beuve’s wonderful work *Port-Royal*, recall Francis de Sales’s judgment on the Jesuits

12. In Archivio di Stato di Milano, *Culto parte antica* 1237, numerous documents from the seventeenth century forbid “admitting to the houses and convents of this City and State superiors to govern them who are not natural to it,” followed by “lists” that specify the “nationality” of the members of the various religious communities. For more on this issue at a global scale, see Matteo Giuli, *L’opulenza del Brasile coloniale: Storia di un trattato di economia e del gesuita Antonil* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 17, 239, 246.

13. Massimo Carlo Giannini, “Note sul problema del controllo politico degli ordini religiosi nell’Italia della prima metà del Seicento,” in *Roma y España: Un crisol de la cultura europea en la edad moderna*, ed. C. Hernando Sánchez (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la acción cultural exterior, 2007), 1:551–75, here 554; cf. Flavio Rurale, “La Compagnia di Gesù tra riforme, controriforme e riconferma dell’Istituto (1540–inizio XVII secolo),” *Cheiron* 22 (2005): 25–52; Rurale, “Male Religious Orders in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” in *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500–1700*, ed. Thomas J. Dandele and John A. Marino (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 481–515.

14. On this topic, cf. the defense of the Jesuit fathers (1610) by Marie le Giers de Gournay, in Alice Boeri and Flavio Rurale, *Marie, Maria, Mariana* (Brindisi: Calamospecchia Editore, 2021).

15. The judgment on the pope in a memorial sent by the nuncio in Madrid to the cardinal-nephew Cinzio Passeri Aldrobandini in March 1601, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Spagna* 54, fol. 78; also *Spagna* 55, fol. 284v; in ARSI, *Fondo gesuitico* 470, *Loirano*, fol. 337; in a Jesuit summary of the jurisdictional dispute between the Milanese Jesuits and Archbishop Federico Borromeo, we read: “And God knows what pope we will have, that if we had one like Clement the Past, we would be completely annulled.” In turn, Clement VIII did not fail to place men he trusted, such as Father Vincenzo Cicala, prefect of studies in the Roman College, to increase the opposition against General Superior Acquaviva. On the theme of the Jesuits at court, in addition to the numerous papers by José Martínez Millán, see also Julián J. Lozano Navarro, *La Compañía de Jesús y el poder en la España de los Austrias* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), and Lozano Navarro, “Los jesuitas, paradigmas del orden, la obediencia y la dependencia,” *Historia social* 65 (2009): 113–24.

16. Giovanni Pizzorurro, “La Compagnia di Gesù, gli ordini regolari e il processo di affermazione della giurisdizione pontificia sulle missioni tra fine XVI e inizio XVII secolo,” in *I gesuiti ai tempi di Claudio Acquaviva: Strategie politiche, religiose e culturali tra Cinque e Seicento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2007), 55–85.

and the regulars in general: “He did not hide from me any of his recondite and important thoughts on the state of the church and on the conduct of some religious orders of which he knew some details and did not approve the general spirit, finding it too refined, too courtly and too political.”¹⁷

The adjectives used by de Sales—refined, courtly, political—do not need further clarification, so explicit in defining the lifestyle and skills with which the members of the religious elite were able to shape their behavior in the daily experience of courtly society and literary and scientific conversation, codified as known by Baldassare Castiglione and Stefano Guazzo. Also from Sainte-Beuve comes the testimony of the fidelity that a Jesuit confessor, Father Pierre Coton, would have been capable of toward his sovereign, Henry IV of France. *Perinde ac cadaver* (in the same manner as a corpse), which defines the theoretically unreserved obedience to the pope, to the general father, and to the superiors proper to every Ignatian follower, became a true and proper propensity for self-sacrifice, readiness to one’s own material annihilation, an extreme sign of loyalty, yes, but to one’s king, not to the pontiff. In fact, our Jesuit is ready to justify the heterodox youthful text of the future abbot of Saint-Cyran, in which suicide itself finds legitimacy in exceptional cases: an extreme act in which the faithful servant gives himself, his body (as food), to his needy and hungry sovereign. The Jesuit Coton went so far as to proclaim that the author of that text, which hypothesized a good thirty-four cases in which a man should be allowed to kill himself without guilt, deserved to become a bishop!¹⁸

The presence of the regulars at court, as mentioned, goes beyond the confines of religious and ecclesiastical interests. The involvement of royal confessors in matters of state is well known (in addition to dealing with the appointments and collations of the most important benefices, they held important positions in finance, foreign, and military policy and were protagonists of matrimonial strategies: in Spain, for example, they attended, sometimes as chairmen, the *juntas*, *ad hoc* councils through which the central administration of the monarchy was organized); moreover, the confessors (of kings and queens, of favorites and ministers) were often leaders of the factional political dialectics typical of the courtly space.

In recent years, part of the literature on political treatises has also favored a more correct understanding of these themes, emancipated from a certain “secularist” interpretation of Nicolò Machiavelli’s thought, careful to recover the role of thinkers of the (Christian) *raison d’état*, like Giovanni Botero, and to reaffirm the profound interpenetration between the politics and ethics of political thought in the early modern age. Corrado Vivanti has specified:

I must confess that the more I go on over the years, the more I realize that the distinction between ethics and politics doesn’t hold up in light of the things that are happening. After all, Machiavelli uses it almost exclusively in *The Prince*, which I consider an exceptional work, written at a particular moment in Italian

17. Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*, ed. Mario Richter (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 152.

18. Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*, 1:195.

political life. The truth is that we must guard against certain trivializations of his thought.¹⁹

Similar considerations also emerge from a paper by Carlo Ginzburg. Some of his questions sound interesting, starting with some reflections on the casuist Friar Timothy, a character among the protagonists of the *Mandragola*: “What elements of scholastic philosophy could attract the young Machiavelli? And what could he draw from such a reading? For a long time, such questions would have been unpronounceable, or rather unthinkable.”²⁰ His interest in the Scholastic syllogism, his debt to St. Thomas’s commentary to Aristotle’s *Politics* and even toward crude (and Machiavellian, one might say) casuistic reasoning return Machiavelli’s reflection to his time, confirming his figure as the original theorist of political thought, no longer however on the margins of the (theological) culture of his time. Recovering this dimension of the Florentine secretary means looking at the different paths of political writing on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reason of state in less conflicting and antithetical terms.

Attention to some aspects of this debate can also be found in Rosario Villari. For example, he identifies in the anti-Machiavellian treatise on the Christian reason of state at least two different currents within the Catholic front: alongside the offensive current “rigidly subordinated to moral and religious canons, and therefore to the Church” of the Possevinos, the Bozios, and the Spontones, he poses the reflection of the “conservative” Botero, and of Scipione Ammirato, able to “at least partially overcome that approach and to carry out more independent research and analysis on the needs, mechanisms, and problems of the state [...]. The difference is fundamental, even though it is to some extent masked by the common ethical-religious inspiration.”²¹

In fact, Botero’s *raison d’état* is still Christian. It was precisely within this vein that baroque politics expressed its originality, inevitably taking up some aspects of Machiavelli’s thought, among them the condemnation of rebellion and the exaltation of absolutism (with religion acting as a glue and bulwark against any popular resistance, “as a guarantee and foundation of the solidity of the state and of social harmony”),²² even though we should not forget the line of thought ready to justify the revolt against the tyrant-king in particular circumstances (with the Spanish Jesuit Juan de Mariana), destined to lead, after the review and refinement operated by seventeenth-century thinkers, into concrete revolutionary yearnings. It is no coincidence that the symbol of the French Revolution, Marianne, owes its name to the jesuit Juan de Mariana.

Therefore, in summary: the historiographical interpretation that sees pontiff and regular clergy—of absolute Roman obedience, it has long been argued—against state and secular clergy—the latter in many respects, however, always under royal control—

19. From an interview with the historian in *La Repubblica*, January 16, 2009; cf. Rosario Villari, *Politica barocca: Inquietudini, mutamento e prudenza* (Rome: Laterza, 2010); Carlo Ginzburg, “Machiavelli, l’eccezione e la regola. Linee di una ricerca in corso,” *Quaderni storici* 38 (2003): 195–213; and, by the same author, *Nondimanco: Machiavelli, Pascal* (Milan: Adelphi, 2018).

20. Ginzburg, “Machiavelli, l’eccezione,” 203.

21. Villari, *Politica*, 14–15.

22. Villari, *Politica*, 18; Boeri and Rurale, *Marie*, 54.

no longer holds.²³ I do not want to deny here how in certain circumstances and historical phases, think of the pontificate of Clement VIII (r.1592–1605) or that of Paul V (r.1605–21), the defense of papal universalism and the authority of the pontiff leans on the work of the most prominent exponents of the ecclesiastical world, including regulars (alongside the Oratorian Cesare Baronio, the Jesuits with Roberto Bellarmino and Francisco Suárez and the Franciscans with Bonaventura Secusio were the protagonists of the papal mediation policy of the late sixteenth century and of the jurisdictional clashes of the early seventeenth century, starting from the Paris of the last Valois, to the London of James I [r.1603–25], to the Venice of Paolo Sarpi).²⁴ But on this background, power relations, political microcosms, let's say, actions and intervention strategies get vivified, concrete behaviors that include, together with the sovereigns and their ministers, exponents of the same orders *de facto* armed against each other, divided among themselves even in the face of the different interests of state and church, opposed to each other in the jurisdictional clash, despite the pressing invitation, in fact, of personalities such as Baronio to defend papal interests, or Bellarmino's call for princes' obedience to the pope *in spiritualibus*—in various circumstances, Jesuits of various nationalities wrote texts and manifested ideas hostile to Rome, “they clung too much to lay potentates and often against the pope.”²⁵

The action of the regulars in the Catholic area actually responded to the (educational, cultural, political) needs coming from some crucial sectors of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society: the king, his family, the court, the old and new nobility, patrician citizens, ecclesiastical authorities, and local communities; for some of them, it was a mere question of pursuing the petty interests of the noble houses they belonged to by birth. Therefore, even for the Jesuits, it should be emphasized, the paradigm of obedience to Rome, of dependence on the pontiff, had by now lost its meaning. Loyalty, sometimes real oaths, bound the Jesuits to their patrons and paved the way for understandings, behaviors, and actions that by force of circumstances could not always be consistent with papal interests. In today's historiography, categories such as anti-Roman and pro-Jesuit and pro-papal and anti-Jesuit coexist, are coherent, and complementary to each other; indeed, they become useful picklocks for understanding not only the history of the Jesuits or the regular world of Spanish Italy

23. Cf. Gigliola Fragnito, “Gli ordini religiosi tra Riforma e Controriforma,” in *Clero e società nell'Italia moderna*, ed. Mario Rosa (Rome: Laterza, 1992), 115–205.

24. On Secusio, see Stefano Andretta, “La monarchia spagnola e la mediazione pontificia nella pace di Vervins,” in *Roma y España*, 1:441–43. On how these years, at the end of the sixteenth century, were a turning point with reference to the Italian problems, see the considerations by Gianvittorio Signorotto, “Milán: Política exterior,” in *La monarquía de Felipe III*, ed. José Martínez Millán and Maria A. Visceglia, 4 vols. (Madrid: MAPPRE, 2008), 4:1032–75, here 1035.

25. ARSI, *Epistolae externorum* 35, fol. 320v, a letter from the duke (and Lutheran cardinal) Ernest Augustus of Brunswick to the Jesuit Eusebio Truches, datable to the years of Oliva's generalate, in which the superior is described as “too good [...] and he would like to please everyone.” A testimony from the early 1600s, in AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Spagna* 54, fol. 78v: “It is not bad in this realm of this matter [attacks on papal interests] that it did not proceed from these religious” (March 1601). Regarding the internal conflict within individual religious orders, the title of Jean-Pascal Gay's volume is very significant: *Jesuit Civil Wars: Theology, Politics and Government under Tirso González 1687–1705* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

but also certain phases of European history.²⁶

We are therefore faced with a regular clergy that was by no means monolithic. The process of differentiation within it followed the developments of society and satisfied the demands and urgencies of the classes, sometimes of the sovereign promoters of reform interventions. This process of fragmentation—think of the history of the Franciscans, divided in a few decades between Conventuals, Observants, and Capuchins—certainly also had other causes: it was, for example, the outcome of internal conflict processes within the orders themselves, of the needs from time to time expressed by their members, individuals, small groups of confrères dissatisfied with their community experience, determined to experiment with new lifestyles and new spiritual adventures. As is well known, this coincided with a particularly turbulent climate, still in the early sixteenth century, not only due to the results of the fracture of Christianity. We often forget, in our reconstructions, that we are dealing with individuals of flesh and blood, with strong personalities, with women and men filled with strong passions, expectations, hopes, projects, the exuberance of youth, and erroneously reduce them to the institutions of which they were part, which were also changeable and perhaps ultimately distant from the spirit that had favored their affirmation and then their growth.²⁷

The Claims of Kings

So, we must not forget the claims of kings, courts, states: they concern the formation of local regular communities, the fathers to be sent on mission, those to be called to court as royal confessors. As pointed out earlier, in the seventeenth century the demand for “natural” Jesuits, for Jesuits who were born in and hence native to the places where they were called to work, became more widespread and pressing. Local Jesuit communities were to be established according to this principle of nationality; the main duties were to be assigned according to this rule, even the office of Father Visitor. The order of kings and princes was that none of them could be “foreigners.” This order was even more imperative in the co-optation of missionary fathers. They had to belong to the same nationality of the monarchies engaged in the colonization of newly discovered or conquered countries.

As for confessors and theologians, the problem was their management: this task was not easy and was in many ways contradictory. This role (of court theologian and court confessor) should be considered as both an office of court and government (as Bireley and Ronald Cueto have made clear).²⁸

26. A clear example thereof are the recent chapters by Emanuele Colombo and Sabina Pavone in *Los jesuitas*, 2:943–94.

27. Querciolo Mazzonis, *Riforme di vita cristiana nel Cinquecento italiano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2020).

28. Cueto, “Crisis, conciencia y confesores,” 264: “El confesor real era *ex officio* consejero de la Suprema de la Inquisición y miembro de la poderosa Cámara de Castilla, era figura clave de todas las juntas teológicas nombradas para aconsejar sobre los problemas éticos y morales, que iban surgiendo en el curso normal de la vida política española” (The royal confessor was an *ex officio* advisor to the Supreme Court of the Inquisition and a member of the powerful Chamber of Castile, a key figure in all the theological boards appointed to advise on ethical and moral problems that arose in the normal course of Spanish political life). Cf. Boeri and Rurale, *Marie*, 65.

It is particularly under Acquaviva's leadership that the political significance of the post of confessor to the king becomes clear: the Society, Acquaviva writes in a letter of April 1610, has no obligation to confess the enemies of its protectors (this is what happened in the case of Henry IV, Jesuits' protector, and the prince of Condé, the French king's enemy, in Milan, April 1610).²⁹ The general superior had to know how to move between the requests of princes and princesses, manage the mobility of the confessors following them, and meet their recommendations.³⁰

If this was the frame of reference, it is clear that the pope also needed the regular clergy for the defense of the Catholic faith and his own political interests; that it is to say, the pope needed his own religious (experts in law and theology) like any other temporal rulers. Therefore, like any other sovereign, the pope had to have the means, especially economic means (university *stipendia*/stipends, well-paid positions, episcopal benefices, ecclesiastical pensions, that is, a real strategy of winning their consensus), to have the theologians of the religious orders on his side. As long as the Catholic religious paradigm remained central to political action, this sort of pluralism implied on the part of those exercising power—sovereigns (including the pope), local, secular, and ecclesiastical government authorities, queens, princesses, and gentlewomen: figures not at all extraneous to the interests of theology and its debates, and who easily translate the controversy on grace, the immaculate conception, or probabilism into political and therefore factional language³¹—that the representatives of the powers develop suitable tools to win over the most prominent exponents of the regular structure to their interests. And even the sovereign pontiff, like the king of Spain, like the most Christian king, like the Italian princes, had to know how to win over the religious to his own designs and strategies, to make them intellectuals, politicians, diplomats, when necessary, to his own service.

Here is what an anonymous author wrote to cardinal-nephew Antonio Barberini in 1642:

There is no doubt that the responsibility of confuting the writings against the Catholic faith and against papal authority belongs to the regulars. However, this was once true. Today, in fact, the opposite is true: today the regulars some-

29. In Flavio Rurale, "Il confessore e il governatore: Teologi e moralisti tra casi di coscienza e questioni politiche nella Milano del primo Seicento," in *La Lombardia spagnola: Nuovi indirizzi di ricerca*, ed. Elena Brambilla and Giovanni Muto (Milan: Unicopli, 1997), 343–70.

30. On the "Instruction" for royal confessors written in 1602 by General Superior Acquaviva, see Rurale, "Il confessore e il governatore," 362, and Robert Bireley, "Acquaviva's 'Instruction for Confessors of Princes' (1602–08): A Document and Its Interpretation," in *Los jesuitas*, 1:45–68.

31. See for example the dispute over the Immaculate Conception in Seville in 1615: "En Sevilla se mezclaban de igual manera posiciones doctrinales, devoción popular e intereses locales, hasta el punto que la controversia asumió tonos de amenaza al orden público. Por otra parte los intereses y la devoción por la Inmaculada habían trascendido incluso a la familia real" (In Seville, doctrinal positions, popular devotion, and local interests were equally mixed, to the point that the controversy assumed tones of a threat to public order. On the other hand, the interests and devotion to the immaculate conception had even transcended the royal family), Giordano Silvano, "La embajada de España en Roma," in *La monarquía de Felipe III*, 4:1011–32, here 1022; see also in the same volume Signorotto, "Milán: política exterior," 1032–75; and Maria A. Visceglia, "La corte de Roma," 947–1011; and Paolo Broggio, *La teología e la política: Controversie dottrinali, curia romana e monarchia spagnola tra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009).

times write to fight ecclesiastical jurisdiction and to defend the temporal jurisdiction of kings. They do this for money and to receive favors. So—he concludes—the evil that now affects the church comes precisely from religious orders themselves.³²

Conflicts between Religious Orders

This was the situation of the Roman church and the regulars in the seventeenth century: a church that was not monolithic but fragmented, a “whole,” as Menniti Ippolito wrote, “composed of many parts, coexisting, concurrent, minimally controllable by the papacy, by the curia,” a church in which the “pontifical congregations [...] operate primarily, if not exclusively, on the peninsula, while its universal, Catholic power can essentially be defined at that time as a virtual jurisdiction [...] on a network of national or autonomous churches.”³³ There is one more fact to emphasize: the permanent conflict between religious orders on theological issues (*de auxiliis*, immaculate conception, probabilism, probabiliorism, Jansenism, quietism, and so on), political issues (the indirect power of the pope, the so-called *ius patronatus*, the right of patronage), and economic ones (let me remind you that in 1610, Juan de Mariana—just when in Paris he, as a Spanish Jesuit, was considered the moral instigator of Henry IV’s murderer—was put into prison in Madrid for criticizing the financial policy of the duke of Lerma; and that the Spanish king’s Dominican confessor took care of the finances of the state).³⁴

So, religious orders were often at odds with each other; in this sense, they were similar to the European political parties of the last century.³⁵ There is an interesting Neapolitan historic event I would like to emphasize—we are in the aftermath of Masaniello’s revolt (1647):

The rioting crowd accepts the political mediation of the Theatines: crowd and Theatines parade together in procession through the streets of Naples. The Jesuits would also like to join them. But the crowd opposes and screams against the Jesuits: “Go pray in your church, and do not come to disturb us. When they unjustly imposed undue taxes on us, you did not come in procession with us to take them away.”³⁶

The foundation of religious orders, their fragmentation, and the birth of new communities should not therefore be read as the result of a strategy studied at one’s table, of

32. Flavio Rurale, “Modo suggerito al signor Cardinale Barberino per avere uomini dotti da valersene per rispondere alle scritture et alle stampe che ogni giorno si divulgano contro i dogmi della fede e contro l’autorità del pontefice: Note a margine,” *Cheiron* 14 (1997): 235–54. Bireley, *Religion and Politics*, 274: “Nuncio Mattei at Regensburg remarked in 1640 that the Jesuits were solid religious but that they tended to favor the interests of princes over the Holy See.”

33. Menniti Ippolito, 1664, 8–9, 12–13.

34. Flavio Rurale, *Juan de Mariana: Un intellettuale contro* (Milan: Il Sole 24 Ore, 2014).

35. Cf. the enlightening preface by Marc Fumaroli, *L’École du silence: Le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

36. Francesco Andreu, “I teatini e la rivoluzione nel Regno di Napoli (1647–1648),” *Regnum Dei* 30 (1974): 221–396. Masaniello was an Italian fisherman who became the leader of the 1647 revolt against the rule of Habsburg Spain in the Kingdom of Naples.

the will of affirmation and control of the church of Rome over society or within the courts: the papal curia would have gladly done without the quantitative (as well as dialectical) exuberance of the regulars in certain periods, such as in the early modern age. The inflation of the orders and entries into the orders, with the consequences it entailed before and after Trent, was a phenomenon that, in fact, Rome managed to regulate only in part (entering an order, after all, was attractive: it could be a means of social ascent, enabling individuals to engage in literary and scientific work, or to change their profession, perhaps leaving behind disreputable conduct, often bringing with it jealousies, ruses, interests, even violence, provided conditions of immunity and privilege within the walls of the convent).³⁷

The lengthy theological discussions of the late seventeenth century, in particular the controversy over Chinese rites, exacerbated relations between Jesuits and mendicant orders, especially between the Jesuits on one side and Dominicans, Franciscans, and Capuchins on the other. Literary and theological discussions—in schools, in bookshops and libraries, in theological circles, in aristocratic palaces—were sometimes the occasion for furious quarrelling. We are in Bologna, in 1687. As usual, the Dominicans mock the Jesuits ... one Jesuit can't take it any more ... so he addresses a Dominican father whose name is Barsani and angrily screams against him: "You, friar pig!"³⁸

The Attack on the Society of Jesus

At the end of the century, the games are over. Papal decisions, critics from other religious orders, and the provisions of the cardinal's congregations (with their accusations and decrees) had laid the foundation for the future suppression of the Society. There were many occasions of conflict that opposed Jesuits not only to other religious orders but above all to authoritative members of the papal curia. I recall here, among others, the conflict with the congregation of the Holy Office on the *Acta sanctorum* (Acts of the saints) of the Bollandist fathers of Antwerp. In 1691 comes the complaint against the work of the Jesuits, particularly critical of the hagiographic tradition of the Carmelite order; then the censorship provision by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition (1695–96); and finally the prohibition decree by the Roman Inquisition of December 1700 only against the *Conatus chronico-historicus ad catalogum Romanorum Pontificum* (*Propylaem Acta sanctorum* [...]) (A chrono-historical catalog of Roman pontiffs (Introduction to the *Acts of the Saints* [...]) by Daniel Papebroch. The *Acta* therefore emerged safe, despite the criticisms of Benedictines, Barnabites, and Dominicans (the one by the secretary of the Congregation of the Index, the Dominican Giulio Maria Bianchi, was particularly harsh) of a work "which sins enormously" and is a "very pernicious doctrine."³⁹ An account thereof is given, from Mantua in 1709, by the Jesuit father, archivist, and librarian of the college, Giuseppe Gorzoni:

37. See Remo L. Guidi, *Dibattito sull'uomo nel Quattrocento* (Rome: Tielle Media, 1998), in particular chapter 6, 799–968.

38. ARSI, *Provincia veneta* 35 II, *Soli*, 1678–1773, fol. 48r, letter of general superior to the provincial father Paolo Casati (March 17, 1687).

39. Margherita Palumbo, "I bollandisti e la censura di Roma: Cinque memoriali del 1696 nell'Archivio della Congregazione per la dottrina della fede," *Analecta bollandiana* 127 (2009): 364–81.

On April 28th, around 6 *post meridiem*, the king of Denmark entered the city [...]. He lodged in the court, where he dined, and at 8 p.m. on the same day he left, greeted again with another triple gun salute. For more months this sovereign had already been living in Italy, since he had stayed in Venice for the Carnival; his idea was then to move to Rome, and in fact he had passed to Florence, but due to the fact, as it was said, that the ceremonies of the pope and the king were not agreed, the latter returned, and went to his palace. This lord had at the same time granted the Society the possibility to have missions and missionaries in his states, with the great benefit of the Catholic religion and the decorum of our own Society, which was then overthrown in Rome by that curia, by the congregation of the Inquisition and by the pope himself [...].⁴⁰

Adding a fourth enemy (delegates and vicars of Propaganda Fide) to this final list (Roman curia, Holy Office, pontiff)—significantly included by the Jesuit Gorzoni within a narrative frame in which a Protestant prince makes a good impression!—contributes to further clarify the intricate picture of interests and conflicts that characterized the church of Rome in those decades. The strong contrast with Propaganda Fide is well known from its origins and throughout the seventeenth century.⁴¹ Giovanni Pizzorusso (with Malcolm Hay, *Failure in the Far East*) recalls the political role of William Lesley, fiercely anti-Jesuit: his influence in the Propaganda Congregation—he writes—lasted for over half a century (since 1659).⁴² With Ines G. Županov,⁴³ we can therefore say: “Even papal Rome, to which the Jesuits pledged their adherence, initiated, with Jesuit *placet* in the beginning, a downward spiral for the Society of Jesus with the establishment of the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith (or Propaganda Fide) in 1622.”

The Mantuan Jesuit Gorzoni most likely referred with evident concern and opposition to the decree approved by Pope Clement XI (r.1700–21) in 1704. It had been prepared by a commission of cardinals and dealt with the best way to continue the apostolic work in China adopted by the fathers of the Society. The dispute, which put the religious order so seriously into question in the Roman curia, took the name, as is well known, of the “controversy of Chinese rites.”⁴⁴

In fact, two opposing images come to us from the contradictory events that mark the history of the Jesuits in that early eighteenth century: on the one hand, in Saint Ig-

40. Angelo Piccini, ed., *Istoria del Collegio di Mantova della Compagnia di Gesù scritta dal padre Giuseppe Gorzoni. Parte seconda* (Mantua: Biblioteca Teresiana, 2019), 132, 224. Cf. Giovanni Pizzorusso, *Propaganda Fide*, vol. 1, *La congregazione pontificia e la giurisdizione sulle missioni* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2022), part 4.

41. Pizzorusso, *Propaganda fide*, 1:378–83.

42. Pizzorusso, *Propaganda fide*, 1:379–84.

43. “Introduction: Is One World Enough for the Jesuits?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), xi–xxxvi, here xii.

44. Stefano Andretta, “Clemente XI,” in *Enciclopedia dei papi* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), vol. 3, *ad vocem*; Gino Benzoni, “Innocenzo XIII,” in *Enciclopedia dei papi*, vol. 3, *ad vocem*. For a summary of the controversy, see Claudia von Collani, “The Jesuit Rites Controversy,” in Županov, *Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, 891–917; in addition cf. Michela Catto, “La controversia sul culto a Confucio ai tempi di Benedetto XIV e la ‘scomparsa’ dell’ateismo,” in *I gesuiti e i papi*, 53–76. Fundamental on this issue are the numerous contributions of Nicolas Standaert.

natus's church, Andrea Pozzo's exaltation of the missionary work of his own order; on the other, in many members of the Society, the awareness of the current serious crisis and of the attacks they were facing from authoritative members of the church, attacks that foretell the charges that would enable the Society's suppression a few decades later. These are the words of Gino Benzoni, author of the entry "Innocenzo XIII" in the *Italian Biographic Dictionary*:

The orders issued to General Tamburini on April 12, 1717 by Cardinal Pier Luigi Carafa of Propaganda Fide are a kind of foretaste of what was to become the brief of suppression promulgated, on June 7, 1773, by Clement XIV. Carafa's text declares the obstinate Jesuit disobedience in China intolerable: "If ever the Jesuits were the right hand of the church, well even your hand—if it causes damage, if it is infected—must be cut. Hence derive [...] the *Orders* intimated to the general superior of the Society Michele Tamburini by the pope. Kind of a forecast of what will be the Brief of Suppression promulgated, on June 7, 1773, by Clement XIV—and in fact it is rumored that Innocent XIII wants exactly this: the suppression of the Society."⁴⁵

The hostilities of other religious orders are placed at different levels, as Gorzoni noted: in the farthest latitudes of the global space (the opposition of Franciscans and Dominicans in China to the so-called Jesuit "accommodation," the same criticisms and competition the Barnabites will also face as protagonists a few years later on this same front);⁴⁶ in the Roman milieu (the clash takes place on other grounds, too: think of the conflicts arising around quietism and more generally on moral and casuistic theology); and, eventually, at the local level. The Dominicans of Mantua, for instance, do not tolerate the privilege of theological teaching recognized by the duke to the Jesuits alone, an example among many of the widespread jealousies and competition between the orders in the city's management of teaching courses.

The Generalate of Father Oliva: Against "Nationalism" ...

The generalate of Father Oliva—the main subject of this paper—ought to be placed within this framework.⁴⁷ First of all, it should be noted that Oliva was not unaware of the customs of court life: he was in fact aware of the bonds of loyalty, the mutual favors that characterized courtly relations.

His correspondence is full of requests for recommendations from princes and princesses in favor of their Jesuit confessors. Oliva himself sometimes referred to the affairs of his relatives and friends (though he also emphasized that they must remain secret), as in 1662, when the governor of Milan, through the Marquis Isimbardi, asked him for a Spanish father "for the accommodation of his house and for some outlet

45. Benzoni, "Innocenzo XIII."

46. Filippo M. Lovison, *La missione dei chierici regolari di S. Paolo (Barnabiti) nei regni di Ava e Pegù (1722–1832)* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000), 9n22; Antonio M. Gentili, "Barnabiti alla corte imperiale di Cina, 1720," *Eco dei Barnabiti* 1 (1983): 57–61.

47. Flavio Rurale, "Oliva, Giovanni Paolo," *DBI* 79 (2013), *ad vocem*.

of his feelings,” as well as confessor of his mother-in-law and wife. Oliva replies with words that once again testify to the political spirit of the religious elite engaged in the European courts. Yes, he has the right father for that job, an expert “in every political affair as much as he is a devotee.” A predecessor, Governor Caracena, had already enjoyed his services, wanting him “with him on his travels and with whose advice he managed the very important affairs of his government and his embassies.” It is not for nothing that Oliva asks the marquis for prudence and secrecy: should the solution he proposes prove to be unwelcome, should the sent father prove incapable or unacceptable, should he not be able to satisfy “in the propriety of the idiom and in the prudence of the stroke,” well, then nothing would be done about it, so the business would remain “buried sooner than being known.”⁴⁸

Of much greater concern is the affair that Oliva had to manage with the Madrid court, when he could do nothing to limit the political centrality of his Austrian father Everardo Nithard: confessor, prime minister, and inquisitor of the regent Mariana of Austria after the death of her husband Philip IV (r.1621–65) in 1665 and therefore an effective member of the main councils of the Catholic court.

In those decades, Nithard’s political involvement even worked as a reminder and a model: in the same way, Laura Martinozzi in Modena, widow of the duke of Este, wanted her father confessor, Andrea Garimberti, as her counselor and member of the State Council. In alliance with the pope and the king of France, Oliva also promoted the marriage union of the prince and future king of England James Stuart with Princess Maria of Este, daughter of Martinozzi (hence the harsh attack launched against Oliva by the English Protestants in 1679, in a “process printed in London”—in the precinct of the supposed popish plot against Charles II [r.1660–85]—then publicly spread and an object of controversy also in Paris; the author of Oliva’s biography, Giuseppe Agnelli, later felt compelled to point out that “the Jesuits are very faithful to their kings”).⁴⁹

Even more significant is Oliva’s epistolary relationship with a Calvinist duchess. It is interesting that Oliva even received a request for a recommendation from Sophia of Osna-bruck in 1676. The Calvinist princess asks him to speak to the Austrian cardinal Nithard to obtain a benefice for one of her protégés, the Catholic bishop of Morocco Valerio Maccioni, who was already apostolic vicar in the West German territories. Names and practices that recur in different contexts, a mobility of ideas and people that sets the tone for the political relations of an entire era ...

But let us return to the most important issue. Oliva’s difficult relations with certain sovereigns made him increasingly aware of the dangers deriving from the prevalence of the principle of nationality applied to the organization of the Society’s activities. Similarly, events and practices at the Roman court led him to condemn the prevalence of family and blood interests in the governance of the church in general. Hence his two important writings of 1666 and 1676.

48. Rurale, “Oliva”; ARSI, *Epistolae nostrorum* 15, *Epistolae Olivae* 1627–62, letters dated August 1662, fols. 75v–76, 87.

49. Rurale, “Oliva”; ARSI, *Vitae* 99, Giuseppe Agnelli, *Il ritratto celeste del padre Gio. Paolo Oliva preposito generale della Compagnia di Gesù* (1682), 29v–30.

In December 1663, Oliva came into conflict with the viceroy of Naples. The viceroy wanted to ban an Italian Jesuit from visiting the Neapolitan province: Oliva emphasizes that because of this the province “will go from bad to worse.”⁵⁰ Applying the principle of national identity is the way to the Society’s dissolution. This is the reason for Oliva’s letter to the Society of 1666: in order to promote to grades and nominate to positions of greater responsibility, it was necessary for the general superior to receive accurate and correct information from provincial fathers, consultants, rectors of the colleges and novitiates, and deans of professed houses. On the contrary, information often reached Rome as a result of “monstrous endorsements,” whose origin, he explained bluntly, was “disordered affection toward homelands and kinship.”⁵¹

... and against Papal Nepotism

According to the traditional perspective, the peace treaties of Westphalia (1648) and the Pyrenees (1659) marked the definitive demise of the Apostolic See as a protagonist on the international political scene. This is not quite true. In fact, as Gianvittorio Signorotto wrote:

It should be pointed out that the organization of the global policies of the European powers, beginning exactly at the end of the wars which characterized the first half of the century, reinstated the “central” role of Rome by other means such as missions, and relations with the churches and societies of the colonies.⁵²

The conclave and the election of the pope remained important events for European monarchies. Cardinals were always important reference figures for Catholic monarchies. The election of the pope was still an event to place under control. Winning cardinals over to the interests of their sovereigns, even with money, continued to be a common practice of European Catholic diplomacy in Rome.

In addition to this, after the diplomatic crises of the 1660s (e.g., the quarrel in 1662 between Louis XIV [r.1643–1715] and Alexander VII [r.1655–67]), the church turned toward a more directly religious engagement, toward a moral renewal: it showed new faith in reforming and moralizing, as was eventually evident in Innocent XI’s (r.1676–89) draft bull against nepotism. The irrecoverable disadvantage in terms of strength therefore calls for a moral reform and a re-launch of the universal mission proper to the papacy. These historical conditions themselves make the abolition of nepotism an issue on the agenda, a widely shared cultural fact. Finally, this reform coincided with

50. ARSI, *Epistolae nostrorum* 18, letters of general superior to Father Michele Elizalde (December 15, 1663) and to the viceroy of Naples Gaspare di Baiamonte, count of Peñaranda (January 5, 1664).

51. *Lettera del nostro padre generale Gio. Paolo Oliva: A’ padri e fratelli della Compagnia, 8 settembre 1666* (Rome: Presso il Varese, 1666); ARSI, *Bibliotheca scriptorum*, 21 B 49. A similar concern for the Cistercian religious order in Massimo Carlo Giannini, “Rancati, Bartolomeo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2016), vol. 86, *ad vocem*.

52. Gianvittorio Signorotto, “The *Squadron volante*: ‘Independent’ Cardinals and European Politics in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century,” in *Court and Politics in Papal Rome 1492–1700*, ed. Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria A. Visceglia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 177–211, here 178.

“a period in which the economic conditions of the papal state appeared to be irredeemable.” Besides that, this reform should be considered within the pontifical effort to reorganize Roman institutions.⁵³

The consultations on the question of nepotism promoted during the 1600s are examined in depth, as already said, in the aforementioned volume by Menniti Ippolito.⁵⁴ As mentioned, the centrality of Innocentian pontificates is known:

The advantage that Pope Innocent XI ensured to the Apostolic Chamber by suppressing—albeit in fact temporarily, because his successor Alexander VIII would later restore them—the offices that were usually conferred on the relatives of the sovereign, or which were conferred by them on others in their own arbitrariness, was estimated at 100,000 scudi and more [...]. Innocent XII, after the neo-nepotist parenthesis of Alexander VIII, followed in Odescalchi’s footsteps and it was he who put a decisive brake on the practice of favoring the relatives of the popes.⁵⁵

It is interesting to follow, in the pages of Menniti Ippolito, the positions expressed from time to time in this regard by the Jesuits: theirs is not a constant critical position against nepotism—since there were also considerations aimed at justifying this practice—but certainly a reflection, by the Jesuits involved, among the most careful and circumspect in assessing the negative consequences of a custom that ended up diminishing the universal authority of the pope, encouraging criticism from Protestants, reducing the financial resources of the papal state coffers. Alongside members of other orders, the Jesuit theologians consulted on various occasions—from Bellarmino to Oliva, through Torquato De Cupis, Juan de Lugo, Muzio Vitelleschi, and above all Pietro Sforza Pallavicino—show depth of analysis, inclination to prudent reflections, among the most critical in fact, despite some contradictions, against papal nepotism:

The nepotist practice [...] for almost a century and a half after the end of the Council [Tridentine, chapter 8, session 25], where it was, albeit generically, condemned, enjoyed good and sometimes excellent health: it aroused widespread perplexity, if not real scandal, but it too was strengthened by new political and institutional motivations.⁵⁶

Among the first to try his hand was Bellarmino in 1612: in addition to recommending to the cardinals a life of frugality, he hoped “that the goods of the Church would not be used to assist relatives,” thus arousing in that circumstance the “harsh and angry”

53. “During the 1650s, the first germs of austerity and moral renewal had begun to spread,” but, as we see later, it was the pontificate of Innocent XI that marked the crisis of nepotism, see Signorotto, “*Squadrone volante*,” 205.

54. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*.

55. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 127–28, 167.

56. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 72; the Tridentine resolutions provided for help to relatives only if they were in conditions of poverty, 92; moreover, Trent had not foreseen sanctions, and therefore those resolutions did not appear binding, 102.

response by Paul V. After the failure of Bellarmino's courageous attempt, "moved by a moral rather than a political or juridical impulse," the matter was again dealt with "on not many occasions, never spontaneously, but always at the request of the pontiffs [...]. With Popes Urban VIII and Alexander VII, the occasions for debate had a fundamental justificationist motivation," as is evident from the premise of the answer formulated in 1638, among others, by the Jesuit de Cupis: the pope was in fact appointed "dominus bonorum ecclesiasticorum" (owner of church property).⁵⁷ *Congrua* of the pope (what was necessary for the food, the dignity of the pope, the majesty and needs of his family, his ministers, his homes, villas—an incalculable budget, underlines Menniti Ippolito), investment banks, Dataria cash, pensions on benefits, ecclesiastical income, "spoils" (what the deceased clergyman had left as "stuff collected from ecclesiastical revenues" therefore destined for pious uses and theoretically available to the pontiff for this sole purpose), "in short, everything that the pope deemed appropriate" could provide the resources to be distributed to relatives, without any limit: a discordant voice, with respect to the consultors, was on that same occasion that of another Jesuit, Lugo, who precisely with regard to the "spoils" had confirmed that the pope could not consider them as "lay goods for private and profane use" (subsequently, on the occasion of the 1658 consultation, Lugo became the protagonist of a "strict writing on the matter"); after all, a few years earlier, Vitelleschi, general superior of the order (in office 1615–45), had already affirmed that the pope could not donate resources drawn from investments in city banks, taxes owed to the chamber by religious orders, spoils and dispensations, which constituted ecclesiastical income and therefore were not alienable.⁵⁸

A second consultation by Urban VIII (r.1623–44) in 1642 involved a third Jesuit, alongside de Cupis and de Lugo, Valentino Mangioni. Nothing new: the experts concluded that the pope could do whatever he wanted. After all, his was "princely grace," and like the grace of any other secular prince he could draw on practically every income from the state coffers.⁵⁹

Two opinions were also requested by Pope Alexander VII (1656 and 1658); the protagonist in this case—"it is difficult to find the same awareness of the issue of nepotism in other sources"⁶⁰—was the Jesuit Sforza Pallavicino. Although contradictory in some passages, he did not fail to recommend some corrective measures, such as reducing the damage associated with summoning relatives to court. Oaths, binding indications such as the amount of money to be allocated to blood relatives, cardinal appointments to be granted after only a few years of experience of ecclesiastical life, obedience to none other than Christ on the part of one's relatives, especially in future conclaves, were indicated by the Jesuit as useful interventions aimed at moderating and controlling the phenomenon. In fact, the Jesuit also confirmed this moderation in 1658: Pallavicini "had no doubts" the pope's power to dispose of the income of the church "was to be considered restricted and should be understood as limited to the

57. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 75, 76.

58. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 118–19nn26, 27.

59. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 78.

60. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 85ff.

good of the Church, the condition of the ecclesiastics and the subsidy of the poor,” and above all “it was only from his own *congrua* that the pope could get what he wanted to distribute also to blood relatives.”⁶¹

Even the draft bull desired by Pope Innocent XI in 1679 against nepotism was preceded by the request for the opinions of some theologians, and the opinion of General Superior Oliva (1676) is, as we shall see, of great interest. As a young man in Rome, writes Menniti Ippolito, “Odescalchi tried [...] to procure offices, benefits and pensions for himself and his family. He did it discreetly, but he did. Then he tried, when he could, to correct the system.”⁶² Although doomed to failure, the pope’s awareness that the church’s authority was only “of a moral nature” found support in the reflection of the Jesuit general superior Oliva:

I daresay that it is only sufficient, even in mediocrity of intelligence, of literature, [...] to humiliate the great lords of this land to the throne of the popes, to make them unspeakably feared with the undoubted courtesy of being able to do everything with everyone, if such mercenary passions and completely unworthy of a supreme ecclesiastic are unleashed from his heart.⁶³

Oliva’s relationship with the papal curia and especially with Pope Innocent XI was contradictory, above all for the well-known theological-moral problems, since he takes anti-probabiliorist positions in the milieu of the strong theological rigor of the pope’s main collaborators, Agostino Favoriti and Matteo Petrucci. Well versed in curial life, a rector of the main Jesuit institutes in Rome, a preacher for a long time, even at the papal court between 1655 and 1661, Oliva did not fail to underline the sometimes hostile mechanisms of the curia: “Since speaking in the palace—he confided to Genoese friend Gian Luca Chiavari—was to me as much splendid as painful for the extreme attention that it is advisable to have for every syllable uttered in that assembly.” In fact, there was no lack of objections, some not appreciating the tone of his speeches and passing him off as “a tongue impotent to moderate itself in the exposition of the disorders.” An ironic outburst was inevitable after his friend’s compliments on the important roles he had held: “It is very true—he wrote in October 1654—that many measure my power by the honors I have received, without remembering that we are in Rome, where many things end in stings.”⁶⁴ But, finally, the Jesuit Gian Paolo Oliva and Innocent XI found common ground on the subject of condemning nepotism.

In 1676, Cardinal Secretary of State Alderano Cybo asked Oliva for an opinion on this

61. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 90–91. On the opinion that the future general of the Jesuits Oliva would also have expressed on this occasion, see below, note 63.

62. A. Menniti Ippolito, “Innocenzo XI,” in *Enciclopedia dei papi* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), 3:368–79, here 371, 378.

63. Gian B. Scapinelli, “Il memoriale del p. Oliva S.I. al cardinal Cybo sul nepotismo (1676),” *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 2 (1948): 262–73; cf. Silvano Giordano, “Uomini e dinamiche di curia durante il pontificato di Innocenzo XI,” in *Innocenzo XI Odescalchi: Papa, politico, committente* (Rome: Viella, 2014), 41–56.

64. ARSI, *Epistolae nostrorum* 15, fol. 49, letter dated March 9, 1652, fol. 51, letter dated July 6, 1652, fol. 56, letter dated October 23, 1654.

question. What the latter writes on this occasion is of exemplary clarity and force. His attack on the popes is furious. He objected to their practices and private use of the church treasury. Oliva's words recall those of Lorenzo Valla in his writing on the false donation of Constantine ("their mercenary passions, the thought of magnifying their relatives prevents them from financing the conquest 'of the infidel countries'"). These times, writes Oliva, "are offended and scandalized by many pontiffs who are excessively immersed in their blood. Almost all the ruins of the church are caused by the fact that the popes took actions more as secular princes than as churchmen."⁶⁵ The attack on the popes for their nepotistic practices and for the use of the church's treasure, as can be seen, was ferocious—"their mercenary passions, the thought of enlarging their relatives" prevent them from financing the work of converting "alienated provinces" or the conquest of "infidel countries." There was also a reference to the Turkish model of the sultan who "wickedly slaughters all his relatives."

Hence, then, also the suggestion to the pope to share the most important choices with the college of cardinals through more stringent electoral pacts, to govern with the sacred college, to proceed with the appointment of cardinals by applying the same procedures and norms for the election of bishops (with secret papers of two-thirds of the college), to provide them with equal economic means (an annuity of at least eight thousand scudi: thus releasing them from economic subjection to the princes), to share the distribution of offices more equally within them. There is also no shortage of criticism toward the nuncios: "These should not investigate the political trends of the rulers with so much curiosity" but "observe the spiritual needs of the dioceses," briefing the popes on these issues, "so that one sees what difference passes between the apostolic letters of the ministers of the Church" and those "of the temporal sons of the ambassadors of the potentates." And hence, eventually, the advantage also for the subjects, finally freed from taxes "which with so much opprobrium in the ecclesiastical name oppress the vassals of Peter."⁶⁶

As is known, Pope Innocent XI's initiative failed and was resumed with some success years later by Innocent XII:

However, the problem of nepotism had also, if not above all, a cultural foundation in recent times. There was a *de facto* acquiescence [...] which allowed for the continued acceptance of practices which could not survive unless they were generally tolerated [...]. It would be the injuries suffered in the revolutionary and Napoleonic period [...] that really eliminated the possibility that the nepotistic praxis [...] could renew itself in terms similar to the experiences of the past.⁶⁷

65. Scapinelli, "Il memoriale," 270; previously, in 1657, according to Otto von Ranke, Oliva had expressed a completely different opinion on the matter, von Pastor, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del medio evo*, 14:part 1, 326. Cf. Giovanni M. Vian, *La donazione di Costantino* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).

66. Scapinelli, "Il memoriale," 271.

67. Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista*, 167.