Antonio Possevino and Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry

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I. POSSEVINO'S PROBABLE JEWISH ANCESTRY

Contrary to the attitudes of many Spaniards, indeed of many Christians of his time, Ignatius of Loyola was entirely without racial anti-Semitism. His desire to be conformed to Christ in the tiniest details even led him to regret he was not born of Jewish blood. During its formative era, unlike many religious orders of the sixteenth century, the Society of Jesus welcomed Christians of Jewish descent into its ranks. As is well known, some of Loyola’s closest collaborators were of Jewish descent, for instance, Diego Lainez and Juan Polanco. Many other Jesuits of Jewish descent made notable contributions, particularly in the foreign missions.

It has not been noticed by scholars that Antonio Possevino (1533-1611), a famous figure in the second generation of Jesuit history, was probably born of Jewish Christian ancestry. His probable Jewish descent seems to have affected his later Jesuit career at various stages. His autobiography, which was written for publication but remains in manuscript, says nothing about any Jewish background. He relates that his grandfather and his father migrated from Piedmont to Milan, then after its capture by the Spaniards.

* The author wishes to thank Marquette University and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation for grants that made the archival research on this article possible.
3 The secondary literature on Possevino is very large. I am presently working on a biography. Among the most valuable contributions are Liisi KARTTUNEN, Antonio Possevino: un diplomate pontifical au xvi siècle (Lausanne 1988); Stanislas POLCIN, Une tentative d’union au xvi siècle: La mission religieuse du Père Antoine Possevin S.J. en Moscovie (Rome 1957, = Orientalia Christiana Analecta 150); Oskar GARBSTEIN, Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia I and II (Oslo 1963 1980).
(1526?), to Mantua. Possevino's father was a goldsmith by trade, as was one of his brothers.

Mantua had a large and very prosperous Jewish community. The status of the Jews at Mantua was the envy of Jewish communities elsewhere in Italy—indeed perhaps nowhere else in Europe did Jews enjoy as much prestige and freedom. One major occupation of the Jews at Mantua was goldsmith work, a common occupation among Italian Jews. In 1527 the ducal Gonzaga family granted permission for the importation of forty Jewish goldsmiths, a very large number that caused friction with the Christian guild.

Two other bits of circumstantial evidence may be noted. Antonio Possevino's elder brother, Giovanni Battista, who had acquired a reputation as a rising humanist before his early death, knew Hebrew in addition to the usual Greek and Latin. Not many Christian lay humanists knew Hebrew. Possevino himself seems never to have learned it. Furthermore the family changed its name from Caliani or Cagliani to Possevino. This change of name has never been explained. Could it be connected with a change of faith?

At least three times Antonio Possevino was accused of being Jewish. The charges are made at widely separate stages of his life. The first charge came in 1557, before his entrance into the Society of Jesus. Possevino had been attacked by a certain Giannotti (probably the political writer Donato Giannotti, 1492-1573) and wrote a long letter defending himself to his friend Alfonso Bonaccioli. Among the charges were plagiarism and being a Jew. The second charge dates from 1585 when Possevino was serving as papal legate. The Austrian Jesuit provincial was warned that among the gossip about Possevino at Prague, «It's thrown about that Father Possevino ... is the son of some Jew».

Little is known about Possevino's family. He describes its migration from Asti to Milan to Mantua in his autobiography ARSI Opp. NN. 336 and in a letter to Baccio Valori in 1600, Florence, BNC Ms. Rimuccini 27 (M-S). The fullest treatment of the family is in KARTTUNEN 1-5 who suggests an earlier arrival of the Possevinos in Mantua but does not document her sources for this.


See the letter of 1545 from Paolo Giovio to Bernardino Maffei which describes Giovanni Battista Possevino as learned «secondo il titolo di Christo in croce» — a humanist conceit for Latin, Greek and Hebrew; the letter is printed in Girolamo Tiraboschi, Storia della letteratura italiana VII-II (Rome 1774) 512.

KARTTUNEN 1.


«Ha detto di voler far una lunga scrittura, dove dice che e informato di casa mia, di mio padre che fusse o hebreo o samaritano per dire così, di mio fratello che è [in] prigione, et mille altre favole indegne di lui, di me et lontanisime dal vero ...», apograph manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ambrosiana D 191 inferior 24v. Perhaps the thousand other fables were far from the truth, but it is certain that Possevino's brother Giorgio was imprisoned at Milan for ten years for reasons unknown: KARTTUNEN 4 and ARSI Ital. 67 242, a letter of Francisco Borgia to the Rector at Milan.

«Spargi etiam de P. Possevino ... esse eum cuiusdam iudaei filium». This letter (February, 1585) by Marcus Pitač onat, the Austrian Provincial, Heinrich Blyssem, at Graz is
The third accusation came in 1607 in a pamphlet against Possevino, who was deeply engaged at the time in the pamphlet war over the Venetian Interdict\textsuperscript{12}. One would expect some fire behind so much smoke. There is a fourth case that came toward the end of Possevino’s life when the charge of Jewish ancestry may have been made orally by a fellow Jesuit; the charge is not entirely clear, but Possevino’s letter relating the matter includes a long list of what people of Jewish descent have contributed to the Church and the Society; Possevino then adds his own accomplishments to the list. The logic of the letter seems to me not merely a belated admission of Jewish descent but a proud assertion of it\textsuperscript{13}. This letter is taken up again at the end of this article and is printed as Document 2.

II. POSSEVINO AND THE JEWISH APOSTOLATE

Most of Possevino’s first twelve years as a Jesuit were spent in Piedmont and in France\textsuperscript{14}. In 1571 he attended the Third General Congregation which elected Everard Mercurian general. Like most of the delegates he was shocked when the leader of the Portuguese Jesuits at the Congregation, Leão Henriques, presented a demand from King Sebastian that no New Christian be elected. The exclusion was mainly aimed at Juan de Polanco\textsuperscript{15}. Mercurian appointed Possevino Secretary of the Society. In an unsuccessful effort to persuade the General to write a letter to the whole Society which would attack national and racial prejudices Possevino in 1576 gave Mercurian a long memorial which pointed out how dangerous for fraternal charity were national pride or prejudices based on noble origin or purity of blood\textsuperscript{16}. Later Possevino repeatedly related the events of the Third General Congregation to the exclusion of men of Jewish ancestry which the Fifth General Congregation enacted in 1593.

To provide a break from his desk job as Secretary of the Society, Possevino became involved in the conversion of the Roman Jews. Under Pius V a special casa dei neofiti was set up for women, supplementing that of St. Ignatius for Jewish male converts. Two of Possevino’s friends, Cardinals Sirleto and Santori, secured additional funds for the casa from Gregory XIII. In

\textsuperscript{12} G.B. Gambabella, \textit{Anatomia d'un nuovo mostro uscito dalla stamparia arcivescovile di Bologna intitolato Risposta di Theodoro Eugenio di Famagosta}... (Padua 1607) 3-4.
\textsuperscript{13} opp. NN. 333 305-306. Autograph.
\textsuperscript{15} W. Bangert, \textit{A History of the Society of Jesus} (St. Louis 1972) 52-54.
\textsuperscript{16} ARSI Cong. 20 B 206-212. The document is attributed to Possevino on 213v and has a short addition in his autograph on 209r. According to A. Astrain III 8, the memorial was written in 1576 and was directed against Benedetto Palmio, the Italian Assistant.
1577 Possevino replaced St. Robert Bellarmine as preacher at the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity where the Roman Jews were forced to attend sermons. During Possevino's first six months of preaching there were fourteen converts. He also discussed with Sirleto and Santori plans for a collegio dei neofiti, a seminary to train preachers for the Jewish apostolate. In presenting these plans to Gregory XIII, Possevino argued the need to help Jewish converts materially since their conversion cut them off from previous business contacts and friends. He also put before the Pope, always a strong supporter of missionary work, a project to use preachers trained at the collegio dei neofiti to convert the Jews of the Levant. The Pope agreed to double Pius V's subsidy and to provide a place for the collegio.

Possevino's later career as papal legate in Scandinavia and eastern Europe is well known. In 1587, however, he was relegated to the Jesuit college at Padua. There he wrote his greatest book, the Bibliotheca Selecta which the Vatican Press published in 1593 with a warm prefatory letter from Clement VIII. The first five chapters of Book Nine deal with the conversion of the Jews.

Possevino begins by recalling how most Jews opposed the primitive Church and passed their hostility down to their posterity. The Jews have so distorted the meaning of Scripture that even now Jewish ideas provide ammunition for Christian heretics such as the Antitrinitarians and for various superstitions. It is Christ himself who gave Christians the right and duty to preach the Gospel not only to pagans but also to Jews. That duty applies to every age, and there have been distinguished and saintly converts from Judaism in nearly every age of the Church, as Possevino illustrated with a long list of examples. The apostolate among Jews, however, has special difficulties and needs special training.

A major purpose of the Bibliotheca Selecta, as its title implies, was to supply bibliographical guidance; accordingly Possevino lists eighteen patristic and early medieval authors who had written against the Jews plus twenty-nine more recent writers. The Jewish apostolate demands a mastery of the Old Testament in both the Hebrew and Septuagint versions. Some of the old rabbinic authors can also be quarried for arguments. The Christian apostle must have an up-to-date knowledge of Judaica; hence while most of what St. John Chrysostom wrote about the Jews is excellent, some of his statements about Jewish rites no longer apply and should not be used.

The Renaissance popes had not pressed conversion, allowing the Jews in Papal territory considerable freedom and status. These popes were content to

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17 Possevino wrote two virtually identical accounts of his Jewish apostolate at Rome, Opp. NN. 336 89-90 and Opp. NN. 313 18; the first is in Latin, the second in Italian. In 1604 Possevino compiled a list of the books and manuscripts in his room at Venice at the request of the General. Among the manuscripts Conciones habitae ad Judaeos Romae ann. 1577 are listed. This manuscript together with almost all his other sermons has perished. Opp. NN. 313 7.

18 POSSEVINO, Bibliotheca 565-570.
rely on the biblical prophecy (Romans 11: 25-29) that the Jews would be converted in the end times. Starting with Paul III the attitude of the Counter-Reformation popes changed sharply. Active proselytism among the Jews became official policy and increasingly harsh regulations were fastened on the Jews in papal territory to pressure them into conversion. Other Italian states often followed or even anticipated papal legislation regarding their Jewish communities. In part the renewed effort to convert the Jews of Italy was stimulated by the success of missionary efforts in Asia and the New World; in part it was the result of the greater vigor of Catholic renewal and the closer scrutiny of heterodoxy of all kinds which resulted from the rise of Protestantism.

Possevino was deeply committed to this new effort to convert Israel, and his Bibliotheca Selecta summarizes with relish the legislation of Paul III, Julius III, Paul IV, Pius IV and Gregory XIII. Even a mention of new legislation by Clement VIII in 1593 was crammed in after the type for the Bibliotheca Selecta has already been set up. Possevino describes at some length the institutions to foster conversion set up by Gregory XIII and with which he himself had been associated, although he makes no mention of his role. Characteristically he calls for similar institutions to be set up throughout Europe, particularly in Poland and the Holy Roman Empire, where there are large Jewish communities. Possevino closed this section of the Bibliotheca Selecta by asking whether Jewish children should be taken from their parents and baptized. He represents the reasons given by those who urge this drastic action, then rejects their arguments in favor of the older and better view of Aquinas, Scotus, Domingo de Soto and others.

III. THE EXCLUSION OF JEWISH CHRISTIANS FROM THE SOCIETY

I. The Fifth General Congregation.

While Possevino was in Rome supervising the publication of the Bibliotheca Selecta, he came into contact with José de Acosta, S.J. Possevino borrowed freely from Acosta's De procuranda indorum salute (Salamanca 1588) when discussing missionary work among the American Indians, and Acosta's title is probably reflected in the full title of the Bibliotheca Selecta.


Acosta is famous in Jesuit history for quite another reason. He tried to enlist the support of Philip II and the Spanish Inquisition to secure more autonomy for the Jesuits in Spain. The result was a crisis of authority within the Society and the convocation of the Fifth General Congregation, the first not called to elect a new general. A severe power struggle ensued both in Spain and Rome. Suffice it to say here that the forces behind Aquaviva were victorious in most of the provincial congregations and in the subsequent General Congregation held in Rome from Nov. 3, 1593 to Jan. 18, 1594. Rather different judgments have been made on this Congregation, but the subject has not had the monograph that it deserves.

Possevino was not sympathetic to Acosta’s plans for Spanish autonomy. Indeed there is evidence that he worked against Acosta even though he valued and used his books. On the other hand Possevino was not a warm supporter of Aquaviva. Possevino did not attend the Fifth General Congregation. There was a fair chance that he might have been elected a delegate had he attended the provincial congregation of his home province. He was surely the most prominent member of the Venetian Province, but he was not invited to the Venetian Provincial Congregation — later this was called an accidental oversight. Perhaps, since Possevino was in Rome he was allowed to attend the congregation of the Roman Province. Later Possevino claimed that he was deliberately maneuvered out of his right to participate in the Venetian Provincial Congregation. Had Possevino attended the General Congregation he certainly could have been, and probably would have been, a dangerous opponent of the General. Certainly he would have waged a strenuous campaign against the proposal to exclude Jewish Christians from the Society of Jesus.

There is an unsigned day-by-day account of the Fifth General Congregation written in Possevino’s autograph. For Thursday, December 23, 1593, perhaps the most shameful day in Jesuit history, Possevino records simply:

«A decree was proposed against the descendents of Jews and Moslems, and it was approved by common consent except for Father Acosta who opposed it sharply and Father Aria who said that he had grave doubts.

It was then asked whether the impediment should be non-dispensable and whether it should be also an essential

22 Congr. 26 45v 48v.
23 The Venetian Province elected Benedetto Palmio and Ludovico Gagliardi to the General Congregation. The Roman Province elected Robert Bellarmine and Fabio de Fabiis: Congr. 20 B 294r.
24 Ibid. 308-310. There is also an apograph copy, Ibid. 304-306. Years later Possevino sent his copy of the account of the Fifth General Congregation’s action de origine to Bernardo de Angelis, the Secretary of the Society: see his letter of 16 March, 1600: Congr. 26 259.
impediment. The decision was that the impediment should be indeed a non-dispensable impediment, but not an essential one25.

Possevino claims that Aquaviva himself cut into the arguments of Acosta and Aria and asked that the impediment be made an essential impediment. Possevino labored for the rest of his life to undo the work of that day, but the last vestige of the Jewish exclusion was not abolished until the Twenty-ninth General Congregation in 1946.

The decision to exclude men of Jewish and Moslem descent needs further study. Throughout the sixteenth century pride in limpieza de sangre grew in Spain and Portugal26. Since most of the other orders in these countries excluded New Christians, it was natural for them to gravitate to the Society so that the Jesuits might seem the converso order27, thus deterring the upper classes from entering – an eventuality that might hurt the reputation and apostolic effectiveness of the Society28. Traditionally the supporters of Acosta have gone down in Jesuit history as the perturbatores; it has been claimed, rather weakly, that twenty-five of the twenty-seven perturbatores were of Jewish or Moorish ancestry.

After the Fifth General Congregation many of them were expelled from the Society, but to attribute the Jewish and Moslem exclusion to the perturbatores is too facile29. Doubtless stress on their converso background could be used to weaken their program for decentralizing the Society in the eyes of the Spanish court and Inquisition, but the decree struck far beyond the perturbatores and in effect surrendered to a prejudice that Loyola had faced and overcome. Concern for limpieza de sangre was unimportant outside Spain and Portugal. Had the impediment been made dispensable, the Society could have dealt with Iberian prejudice one way while retaining flexibility elsewhere. Possevino’s attack on the Jewish exclusion was rightly based on Christian principles, but he did not entirely ignore practical considerations30.

His attack moved on three fronts. First he urged Aquaviva to reconsider the legislation of the Fifth General Congregation. If the General could be

25 «Propositum est Decretum contra descendentes a Iudeis et Saracenis: et communi consensu approbatum est, excepto P. Acosta qui acuter obsistit et Patre Aria qui graviter dixit se esse dubium. Tum questum est an deberet esse indispensabilem, an et impedimentum essentiale. Et visum est faciendum quidem indispensabilem, non tum impedimentum essentiale». Congr. 20 B. 309r. Also see Astrain III 606-611. The text of the decree is printed in Institutum S.I. II 278-279.

26 A. Sicoff (note I) and Reites (note I) 19-21.

27 Ibid. 20. In theory the exclusion worked against men of Moslem descent as much as against those of Jewish ancestry but in practice the descendents of the Moors, largely small farmers and sharecroppers, seldom tried to enter the Society.

28 Astrain III 608.

29 It seems to me that Reites 31-32 and Rey 198-199 are right in criticizing Astrain’s stress on the perturbatores, and that the attribution of Jewish descent to many of them rests on shaky ground.

30 It is worth stressing that in speaking of Jesuit anti-Semitism I am not arguing that the Jesuits of the sixteenth century caused or contributed to its growth in a significant way. Such a charge has been leveled against the medieval friars by J. Cohen, The Friars and the Jews (Ithaca and London 1982). The Jesuits’ fault lay in not resisting the anti-Semitism found in their ambience to the degree that their religious ideals and the example of St. Ignatius directed them.
persuaded, the battle was half won. Concurrently Possevino tried to enlist support for his views in local provincial congregations and with the procurator elected to attend the procurators’ congregation at Rome. Finally he went outside the Society and used his contacts with Pope Clement VIII to bring pressure on the Society to reconsider the Jewish exclusion.  

2. Possevino’s Correspondence with Aquaviva.

Possevino’s first move against the exclusion came in a long memorial addressed to Aquaviva and dated 13 October, 1598. In it he presents the best single statement of his case against excluding Jews from the Society. The arguments and phrases used in this memorial, sometimes with elaboration, sometimes in condensation, reappear again and again in Possevino’s later letters and memorials on the question. His long memorial to Aquaviva can be summarized as follows:

Since the last general congregation there has been a rise in the spiteful remarks made by Jesuits about Jewish and other converts and even about Jesuits of Jewish ancestry. Such remarks were in sharp contrast to Scripture and the example of Ignatius. Christ founded the Church to make Jew and Greek into one flock, and all the Apostles and many other early Christians were Jews. Possevino then added a list of distinguished medieval converts in Spain and Portugal. In contrast to these there admittedly were insincere converts who were forced to accept baptism to save their lives or their goods; many of these returned later to Judaism. But the danger of recidivism was equally present in efforts at conversion among Protestants in Europe and among pagans in Africa and Asia.

New Christians such as Lainez and Polanco played a key role in the early days of the Society, and other New Christians continued to do distinguished work as Jesuits. One of them was Pedro Ramone, who had recently suffered martyrdom along with

31 In 1588 Cardinal Aldobrandini, later Clement VIII, tried to get Possevino as his assistant and advisor for his critical nunciature in Poland. Aquaviva refused to let Possevino go. After the death of the king of Poland, S. Báthory (1586), and especially during the election campaign for his successor, Possevino was attacked not only in the imperial court of Prague but also in Poland. He himself had asked to be recalled, not knowing that six days earlier – on 6 April 1587 – the cardinal secretary of state Montalto had recalled him. Thus, only a year later, it was not advisable to allow him to go to Poland. See L. Lukács, Die nordischen päpstlichen Seminarien und P. Possevino (1577–1587). AHSt 24 (1955) 64 and note 100. Possevino was able to write a long memorial of advice which Aldobrandini used with considerable success: Karttunen 227–234.

32 There are three copies of this document in the Jesuit archives: Inst. 184 II 348-352; Congr. 26 28-32 and 288-292. The last copy is in Possevino’s autograph. The other two copies are in scribal hands but Congr. 26 28-32 has corrections and additions in Possevino’s autograph. I wish to thank James Reites for letting me use a transcription of this document. On the back of the first copy mentioned above (f. 187v) there is a note that two copies of the document were sent to Aquaviva on October 13, 1598. There is also a covering letter from Possevino to the General dated October 14, 1598, which discussed the reformability of the decrees of a general congregation and urges Aquaviva to find a way to remedy in a future congregation what was done in the last one to strike down trouble-makers rather than conserve the Institute of Loyola: Opp. NN. 333 85.

33 Possevino gives the same list of distinguished Jewish Christians in his Bibliotheca Selecta 566.
the general's nephew Rudolph Aquaviva\textsuperscript{34}. Not only was anti-Semitism contrary to the spirit of Ignatius, it was also the root of factionalism and hatred within the Society. The Jesuit \textit{Constitutions} rightly rejected men who cultivate such an attitude. The exclusion of Jewish Christians has opened the door to subsequent exclusions on other grounds and could foster nationalistic bitterness. It has also alienated the New Christians of Spain and Portugal who have been generous benefactors of the Society and its colleges. Possevino concluded by contrasting the ongoing attitude with the words of Everard Mercurian to the Third General Congregation shortly after it had elected him general: \textit{«Omnes enim eiusdem vocationis, et fratres, et filii estis. Itaque nulla sit Sarmatia, nulla Hispania, Germania nulla, nulla Gallia sed una societas, unus in omnibus Deus, omnes in uno Domino Iesu Christo, cuius membra estis»}. Jesus promised all of us without exception that he would be with us until the end of the world if we really wish to be his companions as those first members were.

Aquaviva's reply to this long memorial is dated November 7, 1598\textsuperscript{35}. The General admitted quite frankly that a major consideration in passing the decree excluding those of Jewish and Moslem ancestry was pressure from Spain: important people had warned him that «we will never have peace with the King, with his principal ministers and with the Inquisition nor would the Society ever have the status it deserved unless the decree was passed».

The General insisted that the fathers of the Congregation had passed the decree with general consensus. He denied that he had had reports that after the decree racial slurs were cropping up and harming religious charity, and he claimed that there should not be any discrimination nor was he practicing any discrimination on racial origins among those already in the Society either in the appointment of rectors and provincials or in the elevation of men to the profession. The General's reply then turned to two other matters that Possevino had much at heart, the Fifth General Congregation's decree against Jesuits becoming involved in matters of state and the question of Jesuit lay brothers wearing birettas. Aquaviva warned Possevino that Jesuits who became involved in politics could incur excommunication. The matter of the birettas would be handled, he promised, in a letter from Giacomo Dominici, the Secretary of the Society\textsuperscript{36}.

Possevino was not to be put off so easily. He wrote again to Aquaviva on November 21\textsuperscript{37}. After a long discussion of the problem of biretta and distinctive garb for the brothers, Possevino returned to the Jewish exclusion.

He boldly stated that he had reason to believe that the Jewish exclusion was not something that sprang up spontaneously from the Congregation but was pre-

\textsuperscript{34} Possevino is mistaken. Pedro Ramón (c. 1548-1611) was not a companion of Rodolfo Aquaviva, but died at Nagasaki, Japan. WICKI, \textit{Documenta Indica} 9 (Roma 1966) 28* (= MHSI 94).

\textsuperscript{35} Congr. 26 38.

\textsuperscript{36} Dominici's letter, dated December 7, 1598, is found in Congr. 26 39.

\textsuperscript{37} The autograph copy of this letter is Opp. NN. 333 89-94. There are additional copies in Rom. 127 II 343-348 and Congr. 26 43-48. Here I cite from Congr. 26 43-48 which has autograph additions. There are preliminary drafts of the letter in Congr. 26 33-37 and 222-225 and a partial draft on 253.
meditated long before. To back his claim Possevino described a conversation prior to the Congregation that he had at the professed house in Rome with Father Giovanni Bruno\textsuperscript{38}, who claimed to be privy to Aquaviva’s designs. When the possible exclusion of those of Jewish origins came up, Possevino told Bruno, who was his confessor, that such an exclusion would lead to disunion within the Society and open the door to other sorts of discrimination. Bruno simply replied that despite everything the decree would go through\textsuperscript{39}. Bruno also tried to sound out Possevino about a scheme to make Lorenzo Maggio\textsuperscript{40} (then the Italian Assistant) general. Possevino claimed that he disavowed all such schemes and thereafter found another confessor\textsuperscript{41}.

Possevino then advanced another reason for believing that Aquaviva had pre-planned the exclusion of Jewish Christians by bringing up a conversation that he had in Rome with Aquaviva about Acosta shortly before the Congregation — a time in which «with the consent of Your Reverence I went around lining up support with various personages at Rome... against the devices of Father Acosta»\textsuperscript{42}.

Possevino then recounted at some length the story of the attempt of the Portuguese to block the election of a Spanish general at the Third General Congregation and the successful later effort of Mercurian to «pull up the roots of so much bitterness». He added, rather implausibly, that Philip II’s take-over of Portugal in 1580 was God’s punishment on the Portuguese Jesuits for their actions at the Third General Congregation in 1573. Possevino also returned to his old complaint about jokes and slurs at the expense of Jesuits of Jewish descent, quoting a long story involving St. Dorotheo to illustrate how contempt for one group can easily grow into general irreverence. «May it please Christ our Lord that there may not sneak up on us not only a lack of respect for those many good fathers but also for the Apostles and even the Blessed Virgin»\textsuperscript{43}.

Possevino warned Aquaviva against setting much store on claims of hostility toward the Society at various courts. He noted that Gregory XIII did not hesitate to send Cardinal Lancelotto\textsuperscript{44} (who was of Jewish descent) to the Spanish court. He mentioned other prominent churchmen of Jewish descent to whom the Society owed gratitude, for instance, the Archbishop of Leopoli in Poland\textsuperscript{45}. The reigning pontiff

\textsuperscript{39} It is worth noting that in 1592, prior to the General Congregation, Aquaviva wrote the Spanish provincials and ordered them not to accept New Christians as candidates: Congr. 26 46 and Retes 30.
\textsuperscript{40} Lorenzo Maggio (1530-1605): L. LUKÁCS, \textit{Catalogi personarum et officiorum provinciae Austriae I} (Roma 1978) 724 (= MHSI 117).
\textsuperscript{41} Possevino’s accusation against Giovanni Bruno stirred Aquaviva to action. There is a sworn statement by Bruno, Congr. 26 254, obviously requested by the General, that he had never told Possevino that the General intended to make a decree excluding Jewish Christians. The statement curiously does not refer to the scheme to make Maggio general. Perhaps Aquaviva decided to keep that part of Possevino’s accusation against Bruno to himself. In 1603 Possevino wrote another account of his conversation with Bruno, Congr. 26 124v, and argued that Bruno was a close confidant of Aquaviva.
\textsuperscript{42} Congr. 26 45v.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. 46v, 47r.
\textsuperscript{44} Scipio Lancelotto: GULIK-EIBEL, \textit{Hierarchia catholica mediæ ævi III} (Münster 1910) 52.
\textsuperscript{45} Jan Dymitr Solikowski was archbishop of Lwow from 1584 to 1603 and enjoyed a reputation for theological learning. Possevino wrote to Aquaviva (21 Nov. 1598) that Jan Zamoiski, the Polish Grand Chancellor, had told him that the archbishop was «nato di madre nuova Christiana». \textit{Opp. NN.} 333 93v. See also \textit{Hierarchia catholica III} 240.
Clement VIII also had not discriminated against New Christians — witness his elevation of the Jesuit Francisco de Toledo to cardinal and his appointment of a man of Jewish descent to the see of Forli. Possevino maintained that a new general congregation could set right anything done badly at the last one. «For the love of Jesus Christ, repair the damage as far as possible» so that God can give you a crown worthy of such a long and distinguished generalate. Possevino then mentioned in an abstract manner a point that five years later became a personal obsession: Some people could consider the Fifth General Congregation null and void because of certain irregularities — for instance certain persons (later documents make it clear that here Possevino had himself in mind) were in effect deprived of their right to be elected to and participate in the Fifth General Congregation. Possevino closed his long letter to Aquaviva by pointing out that the Society was urging the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola while at the same time decanonizing his Constitutions: «a noi convenga quel detto di Tertulliano contra Marcione: 'Tu quidem Deum fateris, sed substantiam Dei negas': cioè nos volumus canoni­zare Ignatium, sed partes integrantes eius Instituti destruimus».

Aquaviva can hardly have been pleased with Possevino’s letter and made no reply, as Possevino later pointed out in a memorial to Bernardo de Angelis, the new Secretary of the Society. In effect Possevino had failed to win over the Jesuit leadership in Rome. He now turned to local sources of remedy.

3. The Provincial Congregation at Brescia in 1599

From September 14 to 27 of 1599 the Venetian Province held a provincial congregation at Brescia to elect a procurator and draw up postulata for the forthcoming procurators’ congregation of 1600. Possevino felt that the procurators’ congregation would lead to a new general congregation that could rescind or moderate the Jewish exclusion as well as bring in other reforms that he supported. He was confident that the Pope favored holding a general congregation. There is a long account (the narratio plenior) of what happened at Brescia written by Possevino. He was not the official secretary of the congregation, but he claimed that the official secretary, Lorenzo Terzio, was negligent and used the occasion of the provincial congregation to visit with old friends at Brescia. The narratio plenior is certainly a tendentious document that must be used with caution.

46 Alessandro Franceschi, OP, a Roman, was nominated bishop in 1594, and resigned the see in 1599: Ibid. III 214; was known as l’Ebreino («the Little Jew»): TACCHI VENTURI, II/2 154.
47 Ibid. 48v.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid. 276v.
50 Rom. 127 II 372.
51 There are two copies of Possevino’s narratio plenior. The better copy is Ibid. 372-381. The other is Congr. 26 7-19.
52 Congr. 26 227v.
According to Possevino’s account there was an initial vote to choose a procurator which chose Achille Gagliardi, an old friend of Possevino’s since their student days together at Padua. Possevino himself was elected alternate\textsuperscript{53}.

At Brescia Possevino and twenty-three other delegates voted for holding a general congregation; only five fathers voted against the Provincial against holding a general congregation. Most of Possevino’s \textit{narratio plenior} is a discussion of the reasons for holding a general congregation; much of it is a recapitulation of arguments that Possevino developed elsewhere, often with identical wording\textsuperscript{54}. This is partly because he seems to have dominated the discussion. Not only was he passionately concerned with the issues under consideration, but he had also studied the questions closely and had arguments, precedents, and examples on the tip of his tongue. Moreover as the senior professed father of the province he was in a position to speak first and direct the course of discussion.

There is no need to rehearse here all the arguments for holding a general congregation that fill four crowded pages of the \textit{narratio plenior} since they are largely the ones that Possevino had used the previous year with Aquaviva: the examples of Loyola and Mercurian, the early bishops of Jerusalem, and the list of distinguished churchmen of Jewish descent, including Lainez, were repeated, as was the danger that other groups could also be proscribed and the ingratitude shown to Jewish-Christian benefactors. Such an exclusion was against Scripture, against charity and against the brotherhood of all in Christ. It puts the wishes of worldly princes ahead of God’s glory and hinders the apostolate among Jews. A bald summary hardly does justice to Possevino’s presentation, which is full of fire and eloquence\textsuperscript{55}.

During the provincial congregation Possevino was not feeling well; indeed during the last twenty years of his life he was plagued by ill health. A number of the leading priests of the province — Achille and Ludovico Gagliardi, Giuseppe Fabricio, Lorenzo Terzio and Antonio Lisio — gathered in his sickroom to discuss what had happened at the Fifth General Congregation. Possevino became involved in an argument with Lisio, the Provincial, over the Jewish exclusion. Lisio urged him to write to Cardinal Bellarmine to find out more about what actually happened at the Congregation\textsuperscript{56}.

Possevino did write Bellarmine on September 28, the day after the provincial congregation at Brescia\textsuperscript{57}. He mentioned that he had already written the General and the Assistants on the matter but was unsatisfied with their answers. He related that the vote at Brescia was strongly for calling a general congregation and that Gagliardi had been elected procurator. In general terms he suggested sending Bellarmine further material on the question. His letter then went on to other matters. Bellarmine’s response expressed interest, and Possevino sent him a second letter and a copy of the \textit{narratio plenior}\textsuperscript{58}. It was Possevino’s hope that Bellarmine would take the material to

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Rom.} 127 II 372-373.
\textsuperscript{54} The reasons for holding a general congregation are given. Ibid. 374-387; for the reasons against a general congregation. Ibid. 370-371.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 377-379.
\textsuperscript{56} Congr. 26 276.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{58} Neither Bellarmine’s response nor Possevino’s second letter seems to exist; Possevino describes their exchange in a letter to Giorgio Duras, Italian Assistant, dated March 3, 1600: Congr. 26 229v-230v.
Clement VIII. Instead Bellarmine showed the *narratio plenior* to the general. Bellarmine's giving the *narratio* to Aquaviva may have been unwelcome to Possevino, but later he claimed that he had told Bellarmine that he was free to show the *narratio plenior* to Aquaviva.

Bellarmine was not the only avenue by which the *narratio plenior* came to the General's attention. Possevino showed it to a dozen fathers who he felt were sympathetic to his position. Achille Gagliardi in turn showed a copy to Lisio, who informed the General. Aquaviva then launched a full investigation of what was happening. The investigation took three months and has left dozens of letters in the Jesuit archives. It would be outside the scope of this article to trace the details of the affair, whose most important result was to compromise Possevino's standing still further in the eyes of the General and local superiors.

Meanwhile Possevino continued to gather evidence against the Jewish exclusions. He combed the works of Bellarmine for evidence. Shortly after the Brescia congregation Father Pietro Maduro, Possevino's confessor, called his attention to a passage in the canonist Navarrus (Martin de Azpilcueta, 1493-1586), whose *Manuale sive enchiridion confessariorum et poenitentium* could be used to build his case. Another friend, Father Antonio Folcaro, showed him a passage in Navarrus which condemns a decree similar to the Jesuit one against the entry of Jews that the Minims had passed. Navarrus argued that it was contrary to common law, canon law, and almost divine law. Gregory XIII had abrogated the decree; Pius V had done the same for a similar decree among the Franciscans. These arguments crop up repeatedly in Possevino's later writings.

This article has been following Possevino's struggle against the Jewish exclusions, but he was by no means alone in the struggle. There are a good number of other memorials on the subject in *Instit. 184 I* and *II* at the Jesuit Archives in Rome. Among the notable Spanish Jesuits who argued against the exclusion were García de Alarcón, visitor to the provinces of Castile and

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59 Ibid. 115r.
60 Ibid. 230r Possevino's letter to Duras.
61 Nearly a third of the 642 pages in *Congr. 26* deals with Aquaviva's investigation.
62 *Congr. 26* 279 contains undated notes in Possevino's autograph of material borrowed from Bellarmine, partly on the relationship of SS. Peter and Paul, partly on the success of St. Vincent Ferrer's preaching to the Jews.
63 Possevino brings this material up in a letter to Lisio, 19 January, 1600: *Ibid. 111-112*. He also mentions Navarrus and the documents of Pius V and Gregory XIII in a letter to A. Gagliardi. The letter is undated but is sometime after Christmas 1599: *Ibid. 298*. A short note that seems to have been in Possevino's possession relates the same material about Navarrus and Gregory XIII and traces the source of the information to a conversation between Paul Hofflaus (recently discharged as German Assistant) and «pater quidem ordinis Minimorum»: *Instit. 184 I* 279. Possevino also seems to have gone hunting in various papal documents for statements to buttress his case against excluding those of Jewish blood. Several pages of extracts exist in his autograph from the Constitutions of Gregory XIII and Sixtus V, but their value was marginal since they dealt with the exclusion of illegitimate children rather than those of Jewish descent: *Congr. 26* 57-58.
Toledo\textsuperscript{64}, and Pedro de Ribadeneyra\textsuperscript{65}. Ribadeneyra had to resist pressure from some Spanish Jesuits who wanted him to suppress mention of Lainez’s Jewish ancestry in his biography of the second general. Possevino wrote Ribadeneyra and encouraged him to stand firm\textsuperscript{66}. The Jesuit historian Francesco Sacchini had to write to a long memorial against a resolution adopted by a congregation of the Province of Toledo designed to suppress the same fact\textsuperscript{67}. He cites in support Possevino’s forthright assertion of Lainez’s ancestry\textsuperscript{68}.

4. The Provincial Congregation at Piacenza in 1603

Possevino’s first effort to use a provincial congregation as a springboard toward rescinding the Jewish exclusion ended in failure. The procurators refused to call a general congregation in 1600. The next provincial congregation was held at Piacenza in September of 1603. Possevino tried again.

There are two very different accounts of what happened at Piacenza. The first account, hostile to Possevino, was written by the Provincial, Bernardino Rossignoli, and dated September 29, 1603\textsuperscript{69}.

According to Rossignoli, Possevino opened the meeting by claiming that sentiment for calling a general congregation was increasing remarkably and that this congregation will be his last will and testament. He then launched into a discourse which started with the intervention of the Portuguese King in 1573 to block the possible election of a New Christian. He continued that there had always been some Jesuits who aimed «at exterminating the New Christians» but they had achieved nothing until the Fifth General Congregation. He then argued that the Fifth General Congregation was legitimate as regards the role played by the pope, but not as regards the role played by the Society. The Congregation was rigged, he claimed, noting the role of Acosta and other arguments. Such was the Congregation that excluded New Christians.

The provincial then spoke against the need for a general congregation to renew the Constitutions, which were sound. Possevino replied that a congregation was needed to heal the severe blow caused by the Jewish exclusion. He then brought up, Rossignoli continued, all the old reasons that the General was already familiar with from

\textsuperscript{64} Inst. 184 I 297-312.
\textsuperscript{66} ARSI Vita 162 59-60. Possevino dwells on how Ignatius knew very well the Jewish ancestry of both Lainez and Juan de Polanco; yet gave them high responsibilities in the Society. Lainez and Borgia, both Spaniards, also did not think that the Society should pay any attention to Jewish ancestry. Possevino’s letter develops many of his standard arguments.
\textsuperscript{67} Inst. 184 II 387-400.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. 388r. See also Dei progenitori del P. Giacomo Lainez. Note storiche e critiche del P. Antonio Possevino in TACCHI VENTURI II/1 380-384.
\textsuperscript{69} This account is printed in F. CHIOVARO, Bernardino Rossignoli S.I. (1547-1603): Orientamenti della Spiritualità post-tridentina (Rome 1967) 328-335 (= Analect Gregoriana 163). Besides being an important spiritual writer, Rossignoli was something of a trouble-shooter for Aquaviva: provincial of Milan 1592-1596 and 1606-1611; provincial of Rome 1597-1600; provincial of Venice 1601-1604.
his dealings with Possevino. Possevino then went into a frenzy, adding all sorts of
inept and false statements, for instance that the pope was angry with the Jesuits, quoting
as proof a remark of Clement VIII to Ludovico Gagliardi, «Go tell the General
that he is disobedient». Possevino finished by saying that the Society needed a general
congregation to help its head (capo); indeed he said much more, but according to Ros­
signoli it was rambling and confused.

Most of the priests who spoke after Possevino had their own points to make and
ignored Possevino, although a few spoke to his charges. After four hours they voted.
Everybody was against convoking a general congregation except Possevino, who then
out of shame changed his vote and went along with the rest. When a later session re­
viewed the arguments for not convoking a general congregation, Possevino again
spoke up and denied that he had revoked his vote and again asserted that the Fifth
General Congregation was illegitimate because he had not been properly invited to
the previous Venetian provincial congregation. Admittedly he was allowed to attend
the Roman provincial congregation, but there he was effectively denied passive voice
— the right to be elected delegate to the General Congregation. He claimed that, had
he attended, he could have blocked the exclusion of New Christians because of his
knowledge of the question and its background.

Rossignoli then rose and refuted this argument: Possevino had not been passed
over out of contempt but only through forgetfulness, and he had lost any further
rights by attending the Roman provincial congregation; moreover the General Con­
geration had supreme authority to supply for such defects as Possevino alleged. Ros­
signoli then proceeded to defend the decree excluding Jewish Christians: new circum­
cstances had arisen that did not apply in the time of Father Ignatius. Furthermore
there was nothing unconstitutional about the decree. When the Provincial had fin­
ished Possevino could find no answer and lapsed into silence.

The picture that the Rossignoli account paints is not a pretty one: an old
man (Possevino was seventy and in ill health) who was fighting desperately
and somewhat incoherently for the right as he saw it, but whose fervor made
him advance arguments that others could not take seriously — that the Fifth
General Congregation was null and void because Possevino had not had a
real chance to be elected a delegate

70 Possevino’s deeply emotional involvement is also revealed by another incident at the con­
gregation. He got into a heated argument on the floor of the congregation with Ludovico Ga­
gliardi, who like Achille Gagliardi had been his friend of more than forty years and with whom
he had entered the Society. After the meeting Gagliardi went to Possevino’s room to make
amends: «Father... for the love of God forget everything that passed between
us.» Possevino replied, «I don’t ever want to forget it, for the love of God». CHIOVARO 332.

71 Both Rossignoli and Possevino speak of themselves in the third person. Rossignoli’s
account is in Italian, while Possevino’s (Congr. 26 123-131) is in Latin. In three instances (125r,
126v and 129r) Possevino adds marginal notes that indicate short passages that were not actually
spoken at the congregation. On October 18, 1603 Possevino wrote Aquaviva a covering letter
which he sent with his account of what happened at Piacenza: he claims that the document will
be perhaps his last service to the Society in view of his approaching death. He criticizes Rossig­
noli for giving his opinion about calling a congregation before the floor was opened for discussion.
The result was, Possevino argues, that several Jesuits at the congregation changed their
view once the Provincial had spoken. When Possevino asked them why, they admitted that they
had done so out of fear of superiors. Opp. NN. 333 206r.
According to Possevino's account Rossignoli began the meeting by citing five reasons against convening a general congregation. Possevino as senior professed father spoke next and rebutted the Provincial's arguments, especially the claim that Loyola wanted general congregations to be called rarely. In Possevino's view a general congregation was needed whenever the Society was suffering from serious sickness since a general congregation was the proper way to prescribe a remedy. The present sickness was the lack of unity in the Society and the wound inflicted by the exclusion of Jewish Christians. At this point Possevino's account abruptly switches to a dialogue form with Rossignoli, the Gagliardi brothers, and Fathers Cepari, Giovanni Gente and Bernardino Merenda posing objections and Possevino responding. The figure of Possevino in the dialogue is very different from the rambling, furious old man of Rossignoli's account. He is almost Socrates in the opening book of the Republic.

Neither Rossignoli's nor Possevino's account is an objective picture, and we have no neutral third account of the meeting. Possevino's dialogue probably reflects his feelings on the course the discussion should have taken. It would be repetitious to summarize the whole dialogue here. It largely repeats Possevino's earlier statements on the Jewish exclusion although at points it breaks new ground. It contains his most complete treatment of the decree of the Fifth General Congregation and reveals more fully his attitude toward many of the leading Jesuits at the Congregation. Possevino claims that Aquaviva had told him that he did not want to yield to the pressure from Spain and Portugal to pass such a decree, but he and others swung around in order to punish Acosta and his supporters («ut ad P. Acostae praesertim et aliorum humiliationem ne dicam ultionem Decretum illud conderetur»). According to Possevino, the deliberation on this step antedated the arrival of the delegates from the provinces.

In Rossignoli's account Possevino could find nothing to say after Rossignoli had pointed out that Possevino had forfeited his rights in the Venetian provincial congregation by taking part in the Roman provincial congregation. In his own account Possevino had a great deal to say, arguing rather bluntly that Prospero Malavolta, the Provincial in 1599, had deliberately tried to exclude him from the Venetian congregation.

At this point in Possevino's dialogue Ludovico Gagliardi broke in and argued that the exclusion of men of Jewish or Moorish origin is an essential impediment to entry into the Society. In response Possevino weaves a complex net of canonical-scholastic argument; If it is an essential impediment and Ignatius allowed it, then his own election was invalid (since Lainez was a

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72 Congr. 26 124r-131r.
73 Ibid. 124v.
74 Ibid. 126r: «Certum igitur ac certe valde probable videi potest, eum [Malavolta] non sine aut desiderio aut artificio elusisse Societatis formulam ut ei congregationi non interessem. Ac sive ab Urbe, sive alunde hunc modum agendi accepit, id si iuratus dixisset, forsan astum aliquem ne dicam fraudem aperisset». The ab Urbe is a clear slap at Aquaviva. Possevino goes on to argue that he could not have been merely overlooked—the Provincial had a list with all the names on it.
voter) and all subsequent Jesuit appointments and faculties for confessors were invalid. Moreover the popes and the Council of Trent had erred in approving the Society. The Second (sic) General Congregation that elected Lainez and all its decrees were invalid, and so on75.

5. Possevino and Clement VIII.

Possevino’s efforts to use the provincial congregation at Piacenza in 1603 were even less successful than his efforts at Brescia four years earlier. He therefore pursued his last option, to go over the head of the General and the Society to the Pope. As has been shown, Possevino had cordial relations with Clement VIII going back fifteen years. On November 11, 1603, Possevino wrote a long and solemn letter to the Pope76.

He begins by saying that he has made a general confession beforehand and his only intention in writing the Pope is the honor of God. The occasion of his letter is the forthcoming Jesuit procurators’ congregation in Rome. He protests that he has tried to work quietly within channels. He has written privately to the General and has tried to bring his case before two provincial congregations. The only other time he has sent a memorial to the Pope was when at the General’s behest he wrote to dissuade the Pope from appointing Jesuits to the cardinalate77. He also notes that three years earlier he had sent his narratio plenior to Cardinal Bellarmine in the hope that the Cardinal would bring it to his attention, but Bellarmine seems not to have done so78.

Possevino’s memorial to Clement VIII is entitled «The Things Which Are Considered to be Necessary Now in the Society of Jesus». In it he develops at length eight reforms that he feels are needed. The longest, four closely written pages, is the seventh which deals with the exclusion of those of Jewish or Moslem descent from entering79. It begins by observing that the purpose of the Society of Jesus is the salvation of all nations and that the Holy Spirit has used men of various nations as the foundation stones of the order. The Holy Spirit does not want human respect to block anyone who has the necessary talent and a legitimate vocation. The Jesuit Constitutions say nothing about the genealogy of candidates or whether their parents are heretics, Moslems or Jews, provided that the candidate is a good Catholic. Possevino then repeats his usual list of distinguished churchmen of Jewish descent: «Quod Deus sanctificavit, ut immundum ne dixeris» (Acts, 10: 15). The Pope is reminded that he had issued a brief revoking certain exclusions introduced by religious orders in Spain. Also Aquaviva himself had obtained a Motu proprio from Sixtus V that exempted the Jesuits from the order of Gregory XIII that bastards were not to be ordained or have a vote in religious orders. But now the Jesuits have introduced this indispensable decree of exclusion. Benefactors in Spain who have founded or helped our colleges can feel that they have been treated unjustly since their sons cannot enter the Jesuits or even be

75 Ibid. 127r. Toward its end the dialogue also touches Possevino’s arguments against allowing the brothers to wear birettas: 130r.

76 There are two copies of Possevino’s letter to Clement VIII in ARSI Congr. 26 106-110a and 115-122. The first is in Possevino’s autograph; the second is an apograph but contains an autograph correction.

77 There is a fragment of this letter in Congr. 20 B 301-302.

78 Congr. 26 115.

79 Ibid. 119v-121v.
dispensed from the impediment. The Word of God converted them, but now they find themselves unconverted. Here Possevino invokes the authority of Navarrus and the example of Paul of Burgos. The exclusion clause comes from those who are thinking of themselves and of church dignities, not of the conversion of the nations. Men really guided by faith do not want to bind the hand of God, who calls the lowly to confound the strong.

Possevino goes on to relate the story of the Third General Congregation when the Portuguese presented their letter from King Sebastian; some of the Portuguese Jesuits asked publicly for forgiveness from the Congregation for their attack on Jewish Christians, but some of them pursued the same design in the Fifth General Congregation. What is needed to remedy the division within the order and to block attempts to exclude other groups such as the sons of heretics or usurers is a papal brief which commands an integral return to the Constitutions, which are of divine origin.

It seems unjust that those who have become Christians in Spain, either long ago or recently, should now be thought to have received grace in vain or that their Baptistism was no Baptism or that their divine vocation has been revoked, or that those who have been constant in faith, who have suffered the prisons of heretics, who have fearlessly defended the faith before kings and the world, whose books attest to the path they have trod (a later document suggests that here Possevino probably had himself in mind) should be compared with those who were forced into Baptism in Portugal or elsewhere and have by their malice become marranos. Even the Portuguese admit that among the Jesuit martyrs in India there were descendants of those who were forced to accept Baptism. Their virtù is greater than anything done by those who pretend to be zealous but are only covering their real descent. Possevino reminds the Pope of his own earlier brief which put a stop to blasphemies against Christian converts, whom Christ himself had inserted as members of His mystical body. He concludes by quoting again Mercurian's words at the end of the Third General Congregation, that all be one in Christ.

The eighth and last numbered recommendation in Possevino's letter to Clement VIII deals with the conversion of the Jews. It recalls that Mercurian had Possevino and others write circular letters to the provincials to keep alive the Jewish apostolate. Possevino reasserts that the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that there are hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and in Africa, as well as recently discovered Jewish communities in India. Possevino feels that these Jews in India are particularly ripe for conversion, after which some of them can become apostles to other Jews. Extracts from Possevino's letter to Clement VIII are printed as Document I at the end of this article.

Possevino's letter to Clement VIII had a quick and dramatic effect. When the procurators' congregation met one month later it received a communication from the Pope entitled: «Things which have been proposed for reformation and which have need of remedy in the Society of Jesus»²². The Pope's message, dated November 16, 1603, lists twelve reforms. The first se-

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²⁰ In this last sentence Possevino rather clearly has himself in mind: compare this sentence (Ibid. 121r) with Opp. NN. 333 306r. Both these letters are printed at the end of this article.
²¹ Congr. 26 121v.
²² There are two copies of Clement VIII's letter: the first is Congr. 26 177 and 180; the second (ff. 178-179) is inserted into the first. The date (16 Nov. 1603) and the attribution to Clement VIII are on 181v.
ven are identical in order and substance with the first seven reforms advocated in Possevino's memorial to the Pope; indeed, many of the Pope's recommendations are taken word for word from Possevino, although they drop his long accompanying argument for each reform. The other five papal recommendations come from other sources. The Pope's seventh recommendation reads: «Abolish the decree on the unsuitability for the Society against the descendants of Jews and heretics and rehabilitate them so that there be no difference between them and the others».

The procurators drew up a draft reply to Clement VIII the next day. It is surprisingly independent. The reply states that the reforms suggested by the Pope were worthy of consideration but with few exceptions had not been discussed in the previous provincial congregations. Some points had been discussed, but they were not important enough to require the convocation of a general congregation. Therefore the procurators felt it best to defer the whole matter to the next general congregation since calling a general congregation immediately would be too expensive. Indeed the draft reply enters into what approaches a point by point rebuttal of the reforms proposed by the papal memorial. With regard to the seventh point the procurators' draft responded: «Regarding the decree of descent, there is no need for much discussion since His Holiness knows what he ordered (ordinò) to Father General a year ago and how he commissioned the observance of this decree, seeking a more careful examination. We will only say that perhaps from what has been seen from some letters and memorials from certain persons, this is the proposal which weighs more heavily than handkerchiefs (fazzoletti) and birettas for the brothers».

Points four and five of Possevino's letter to Clement VIII had dealt with these last two matters, as had his letters to the General and the narratio plenior. Rather clearly the Jesuit curia and the procurators saw the hand of Possevino behind the Pope's memorial.

IV. POSSEVINO'S LAST YEARS

There seem to be no records of what, if anything, Possevino did in the next provincial congregation held at Piacenza in 1607. While returning from it he fell dangerously ill at Parma from fever and dysentery. The doctors despaired of his life, and he received the last sacraments. During the same year he seems to have instructed a Jewish young man of great talent at Bo-

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93 Ibid. 177v.
94 Ibid. 187r-192v. On f. 192v the following is written: «Memoriale delli Padri Procuratori della provincia di Europa dato dal P. Bernardo De Angelis segretario a N. S.° Clemente VIII die 17 novembre 1603. In risposta di certi capi datili dalla Sua».
95 Ibid. 189rv. Points four and five of Possevino's letter to Clement dealt with handkerchiefs and birettas, as had his letter to the General and his narratio plenior.
96 Opp. NN. 333 303.
logna, who was then baptized by the Cardinal Legate in an impressive ceremony on March 25. Shortly afterwards the young convert entered the Capuchins.

The decision of the 1607 procurators’ congregation must have given Possevino great joy. For the first and only time in Jesuit history a general congregation was called as a result of a procurator’s congregation. Late in 1608 the Sixth General Congregation met at Rome and passed a great deal of legislation. Two of its decrees take up points found in Possevino’s letter to Clement VIII and the subsequent papal memorial. Clement VIII died March 5, 1605, so his recommendations no longer carried authority. The Congregation’s thirtieth decree recommended to the general the observance of the rule regarding a shorter cassock for the lay brothers so that they could be easily distinguished from priests, just as had Possevino’s letter to Clement VIII, but the Congregation decided not to make any recommendation about the use of birettas by the brothers.

The Congregation wrestled with the Jewish exclusion for three sessions and came up with a slight mitigation of the decree of the Fifth General Congregation: those of Jewish or Moslem descent whose ancestors had been good Christians for four previous generations could be admitted if their families had a good reputation. Inquiries regarding descent were to be made quietly and mere rumours about Jewish descent were to be disregarded. Those whose Christian roots do not go back so far are not to be admitted if their admission could give rise to offense. This part of the decree clearly reflected Iberian conditions. With regard to Poland and elsewhere the general could dispense with regard to the impedimentum originis. The Congregation deprecated any loose talk about ancestry that could harm unity and charity among Jesuits.

Certainly Possevino must have regarded the decree as grudging and inadequate. The decree put more stress on conciliating Iberian prejudice than on upholding the union of Jew and gentile in Christ that the New Testament and Possevino’s letters had insisted on. At least it was a step in the right direction.

When the Congregation’s decrees were published in March, 1608, Possevino had less than three years to live. Sometime during those years an incident occurred that seems to have led to Possevino’s admission of his Jewish ancestry after more than sixty years of silence. The incident is described

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87 Ibid. 311. The account of the conversion is written in Possevino’s autograph, but is uses the third person and does not mention Possevino’s name. I attribute the conversion to Possevino because the account then describes the arrival at Bologna, also on March 25, of Marcantonio Cappello, one of the seven main theologians who had been defending Venice during the controversy over the Interdict with Paul V. Cappello came to seek absolution and reconciliation with Rome. The account attributes the reconciliation simply to «un Sacerdote suo amico», but the amico is certainly Possevino. Cappello later wrote a letter of thanks to Possevino from Rome, 14 July, 1607: Ibid. 315. On Cappello, see G. BENZONI in Dizionario biografico degli Italiani 18 (Roma 1975) 800.

88 The text is printed in Institutum S.I. II 303.

89 Ibid., 302.
by Possevino in a letter whose date and recipient are unclear. A certain Giovanni Andrea threatened to hurl into Possevino’s teeth the charge that he had caused the length of the brothers’ cassocks to be shortened. The addresser of the letter had come to console Possevino about the incident, and Possevino thanks him in the letter. But other insults of another sort may arise which the recipient can answer with the following considerations; Possevino then lists fourteen numbered considerations about the role and contribution of Jews to the Christian Church and to the Society of Jesus. Possevino’s list of distinguished Jewish Christians starts with Jesus and Mary and includes generally the same entries as the other documents that have been studied in this article. At the end of the letter, however, he adds a personal note: he has been born of Christian father and mother and can claim to be more Christian than those who have never preached nor suffered imprisonment nor made known Catholic doctrine through their books. For fifty years God in his infinite mercy has used him «coram Pontificibus, Regibus, et Gentibus, Deo sit omnis gloria, Amen»⁹⁰. Possevino’s phrases repeat those of his letter to Clement VIII but there the statements were about unnamed Jewish Christians⁹¹. Here Possevino uses them to describe his own career. He had been imprisoned by Calvinists at Lyons, he had published some forty books, he had dealt with many popes and represented the faith before kings such as John III of Sweden and Ivan the Terrible and had preached from Dieppe to Moscow.

⁹⁰ Opp. NN. 333 305-306. The letter is in Possevino’s autograph.
⁹¹ Compare Ibid. 306r with Congr. 26 121r. Both of these documents are printed at the end of this article.
1. Letter of Antonio Possevino to Clement VIII
Venice, October 11, 1603
AHSI Congr. 26 115r-122r

Doppo una confessione generale da me fatta, prima che di mandar questa lettera a V. B. ne, vengo humilissimamente a supplicarla di credere, che nessuna altra cosa mi muove a scriverla, salvo l'onore di Dio S. re nostro; la certa fiducia, che di essa ha il christianesimo per ravinare le famiglie religiose; et l'occasione della Congregatione de nostri Procuratori, che dalle Province eletti convengono hora in Roma.

Ho io il lungo di parecchi anni passati rimosso segretemente et con rivenza al P. Generale mio, et poi in queste due ultime congregationi provinciali proposto sinceramente ciò che mi dettava la conscienza, non pensando di farlo terenariamente poichè senza strepito può rimediarsi a varij incommodi, et poiché io, essendo stato il secondo Segretario Generale della Compagnia nostra, et havendo indegnamente havuto il maneggio di varie cose di lei, et veduto varie nostre Province, ho sentito ch'io ero debitore di dire opportunamente ciò che o gli altri Generali mi haveano commesso, o so che non tutt'io sapeano; come che giamai io non habbia presentato alla S. Vostra memoriale alcuno delle cose nostre, salvo quello con cui, con consenso del mio Generale, la supplicai di non introdurre il cardinalato fra nostri.

Et tre anni sono, che havendo la Provincia nostra determinato che si facesse la Congregazione Generale (poichè quella che era stata intimata per l'anno del 1600 non si fece), io mandai una piena narratione al S. Cardinale Bellarmino, con speranza, che da lui comunicata a V. B. ne onde poteva derivarci più sicuro influsso, et parimente mostrata al General nostro, si rimediasse alle cose necessarie senza che fuori ne seguisse alteratione, gia che il detto Cardinale era immediatamente sottoposto a V. S. et come religioso della Compagnia nostra poteva disporre il P. Generale nostro a compire l'opre dell'altre fatiche, fatte indefessamente in tanti anni nel suo Generalato.

Or non parve al sudetto Cardinale di comunicare quella mia scrittura a V. S. Ne io poi promossi altro, salvo che dal P. Commissario del S. Ufficio sendomi due volte scritto, che V. B. ne mi udirebbe l'anno del Giubileo in Roma, mi rimisì a quel tempo, se fosse stato opportuno: et nondimeno avedendomi, che ad alcuni forse no-

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92 There is a rough draft of Possevino's letter to Clement VIII in Congr. 26 106-110a. This transcription is made from the fair copy, Ibid. 115-122, which is in the hand of Eugenio Petrelli, who served as Possevino's amanuensis from 1601 to 1606. Possevino wrote a letter of recommendation for Petrelli and described his services: Opp. NN. 333 294.

93 Possevino was secretary of the Society from 1573 to 1578. In describing himself as the second Secretary he is obviously counting Juan de Polanco, who served under Loyola, Lainez and Borgia, as the first and disregarding those such as St. Francis Xavier who served Loyola briefly before the office was fully developed after Polanco took over.

94 Possevino discusses this memorial in a letter to Aquaviva dated January 21, 1600 (Congr. 26 234r); there is a fragment of the memorial in Congr. 20 B 301-302.

95 For Possevino's letter to Bellarmine, September 28, 1599, see Congr. 26 49-50; Possevino included a copy of his narratio plenior of the provincial congregation at Piacenza with his letter to Bellarmine.

96 The Jubilee was in 1600.
stri non sarebbe grato il mio accesso a lei\textsuperscript{97}, me ne partij con aspettare da Dio altra occasione (se Dio benedetto a me l’avesse mandata) di farlo per solo discarico della mia coscienza, si come hora con ogni humilissima riverenza lo ponga inanti i suoi santissimi piedi.

Le cose, le quali si stimano esser necessarie adesso nella Compagnia di GIESU\textsuperscript{25} [there follow numbered points, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 on folios 115v to 119v].

7. La Compagnia nostra fu per misericordia divina instituita, acciochè secondo i talenti, i quali da Dio le fossero comunicati, aiutasse per la sua parte omnem gentem, quae sub caelo est\textsuperscript{98}. Però anco lo Spirito Santo prima che fossero fatte le Constituzioni elesse di varie nazioni coloro, i quali, et mostrassero in fatti di quali pietre voleva che questo edificio si fabricasse, et onde potessero tirare oltre questa impresa, si come per gratia di Christo fecero et fanno colla parola di Dio, colle scuole, et coi martiri.

Nè lo Spirito Santo volle che per humani rispetti o honoroi si escludesse veruno, il quale ricevendo legittima vocatione et qualità proporzionate a tale Instituto, potesse promuovere si necessaria impresa, in si necessarij tempi del vicino fine del mondo.

[120r] Laonde anco nelle nostre Constitutioni non volle che nissuna genealogia di predecessori o parenti heretici, nissuna di persone illegitime, nissuna di discendenti da Pagani, da Saraceni, da Hebrei (pure che fossero et Christiani, et veri catolici) rendesse i suoi posteri indispensabili: non più di quel che in ogni secolo la Divina Provvidenza ha mostrato coi fatti cominciando da gli Apostoli, et continuando co i quindici primi Arcivescovi, che di hebrei fatti cristiani ressero Gierusalemme, et illuminarono l’Oriente, sin che quindici altri si facessero che chiamati haveria dalla gentilità\textsuperscript{99}, ut IESUS contiungeret omnes in unum parietem, factus caput anguli\textsuperscript{100}. Or se a i primi si aggiungono altri Vescovi fatti da gli Apostoli, tanti santi Padri, et alcuni Pontefici, et ne i vicini secoli in Ispagna S. Giuliano Arcivescovo di Tolet\textsuperscript{101}, et altri, et nel presente in Roma stessa ove la B.ne Vostra, sendo successore di S. Pietro, ode tuttavia quella voce di Christo Quod Deus sanctificavit, tu immundum ne dixeris\textsuperscript{102}, si vede che nelle più sublimi dignità, et nello stato più perfetto, ch’è quel de Vescovi, simil genealogie non cagionano indispensabilita, quando ex causa possonno alcuni servire a S.ta Chiesa. Nè Gregorio XIIJ di santa memoria si astenne di far Cardinali o Arcivescovi ch’erano discesi o da heretici o da hebrei: rivocando anco con Brevi la scissura, che per conto di questo volevano alcuni, più in specie, che in re religiosi, introdurre in altre sue religioni in Ispagna\textsuperscript{103}.

E’il Padre nostro Generale Claudio Acquaviva, vedendo che la S.ta di Sisto Quinto haveria per l’avenire escluso dalle religioni in quanto a gli ordini sacri, et alla voce attiva et passiva, ognuno che fosse nato illegitimo, fece ogni sforzo con pruden-

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\textsuperscript{97} Possevino included his request to attend the Jubilee in Rome in a letter to Bernardo de Angelis, the Secretary of the Society, March 16, 1600, and asked that it be referred to the General and the Assistants: \textit{Congr. 26 260}.

\textsuperscript{98} Acts 2:5.

\textsuperscript{99} Eusebius in his \textit{Ecclesiastical History} states that the first fifteen bishop of Jerusalem were of Jewish descent (IV ch. 5) and that the next fifteen were of gentile origin (V ch. 12).

\textsuperscript{100} The Latin phrase is a loose paraphrase of Eph. 2:20.

\textsuperscript{101} Giuliano was elected archbishop of Toledo in 680; his parents were Christians but of Jewish descent: \textit{Bibliotheca Sanctorum} VI (Rome 1965) 1216.

\textsuperscript{102} Acts 10:15.

\textsuperscript{103} This seems to be a reference to Gregory XIII’s \textit{Nuper ad Nos} (1573) which permitted the ordination of men of mixed ancestry and dispensed with illegitimacy.
za paterna per ottenere gratia (si come ottenne) da Gregorio XIII di santa memoria, che quel Moto proprio non havesse luogo ne’ nostri: poiché sarebbe stato un seminario di dissensione, et la cosa sarebbe anco in certo modo caduta in nota di alcuno Generale nostro.

Però havendosi poi lasciato indurre a permettere che si facesse un Decreto che de cetero [120v] fosse indispensabile ciò che per conto di genealogie era dispensabile, la scissura è ita facendosi tale, che come molti tali in Ispagna si trovano havere o fondati collegii nostri, o aiutata la Compagnia a fundarli [n.s.: fundarla] il lungo di molti anni con fatiche inesaurite, si come fece il P. Polanco che fu segretario di tre primi Generali, possono tenere per grande ingiuria per non dire ingiustitia cotesta indispensabilità: massime che molti discesi da quei, che per mezo della parola di Dio furono convertiti, non si trova, che si sieno mai sovertiti, si come attesta il Navarro di quei di Burgos et di quel Tratto, i quali furono convertiti da Paolo Vescovo Burgense, di cui, ch’era hebreo sendo stato chiamato alla fede, Iddio Sig. nostro si servì grandemente.

Sapevano poi i detti Generali della Compagnia et massime il P. nostro Ignatio ciò che alcune religioni, che vivono più a se stesse che all’acquisto delle nationi, et ciò che alcune catedrali et collegii, per potere aspirare a gradi et dignità haveano statuito per non admettere tali, ma esso, che si guidava per via di fede, et ricordevole del detto di S. Paolo, che unum omnes sumus in Christo, non volle legare le mani a Dio Signor nostro, si che, se col tempo volesse scegliere di questi tali per maggiore sua gloria, come che vocat vilia ut confundat fortia, l’honore tutto ne risultasse totalmente a sua M. Divina: et omnis prudentia carnis in semetipsa confunderetur.

Il Padre nostro Generale Everardo provò parimente con fatti, insieme con tutta la terza Congregatione generale, che simile scissura hebbe origine da Portughesi, i quali per una antipatia naturale non volendo Generali Castigliani, si opposero loro sotto questa specie d’elezioni et procurarono per mezo di lettere de Re di Portogallo et catolico impedire la libertà della Compagnia. Ma Dio Signor nostro, non havendo essi voluto essere nella Compagnia soggetti a Castigliani, gli assuggetti loro poco da poi anco nel temporale, se bene me presente chiesero in pubblico nella istessa Congregatione perdono di quel che haveno attentato, non poterono però desiderare dell’istesso fatto.

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104 Aquaviva obtained from Gregory XIV Exponi Nobis (August 30, 1591) which exempted the Society from Sixtus V’s Constitution Cum de omnibus regarding illegitimate novices: Synopsis Actorum S. Sedis in causa Societatis Jesu 1540-1605 (Florence 1887) 160. There are passages from these documents copied in Possevino’s autograph: Congr. 26 57-58.

105 Navarro is Martín de Azpilcueta, 1493-1586, a prominent canonist. A note in Possevino’s autograph, Congr. 26 58r, seems to refer to Navarro’s De Regularibus Commentarii tres (Rome 1576). Paul of Burgos, c. 1351-1435 (original name Solomon La-Levi) was a converted rabbi who became bishop of Burgos in 1415. He was a prominent exegete whom Possevino recommends in the Bibliotheca Selecta, p. 567. The 1591 edition of his works contained a biography by C. Sanctotissius, O.P.

106 Reites (see note 1 in the body of this article) 20 for a list of religious orders in Spain which excluded candidates of Jewish descent.

107 The Latin clause is based on Eph. 4:4.

108 [1 Cor. 1:27.

109 The Latin clause is loosely based on 1 Cor. 1:27.

110 Astrain III 6-12.

111 Henry II, the former Cardinal Archbishop of Évora and last direct heir of the Portuguese House of Avis, died in 1580 so that Philip II of Spain was able to make good his claims and take over Portugal against minimal opposition.

112 Astrain III 13.
stere di [121r] propagare i suoi disegni, come alcuno di loro procurò anco finalmente nella Quinta del 1594113.

Per lievare la quale scissura, et insieme per togliere l'occasione ch'altri non procurino che alcuno simile Decreto d'indispensabilità si faccia contro i discendenti da heretici o da illegittimi o da usurai, et da altri - il che sarebbe un disfar finalmente ogni congregazione, et tenere aperta la porta a mille mormorationi - inchini la B. n. e Vostra per la misericordia di Dio il pensiero, come Padre universale, al remedio. El remedio non sarà difficile, se (così giudicando la Beatitudine Vostra) con un Breve commandi che ritornino nel suo essere le nostre Constitutions, oltre che questa (si come di sopra io dissi) non è tanto humana, quando divina Constitutione, et fu strada tenuta da Dio nella fondazione della Compagnia. Al che si aggiunge, che non pare giusto, che coloro i quali già o centinaia di anni o inanti uno secolo si fecero in Ispagna Christiani per virtù della parentò di Dio si stimino di non aver conseguita efficace gratia, o ch'il battesimo in tali sia meno che battesimo, o la divina vocatione approbata sia divenuta reproba, o che coloro i quali sono stati constantissimi in fede nelle stesse prigioni di heretici, et per tutto l'hanno intrepidamente difesa in faccia de i Re et del Mondo, e i libri de quali attestano di qual piede hanno caminato, debbano pareggiarsi con quei che per essere già stati violentemente costretti in Portogallo o altrove a battezzarsi, sono per la loro malitia divine marani. Anchor che di questi, qui compulsi sunt intrare114, (dico de Portoghedi stessi) no abbiamo havuti fra nostri, chi sono stati martiri nell'Indie, et hanno colla virtù superato ogni atto di quegli altri, i quali per honore del mondo et per non parere che discendano da tali, forse si mostrano fintamente zelanti115.

Sa poi il Christianesimo, che la S. l. Vostra stessa in cotesto Pontificato, veggendone che alcuni fatti Christiani erano per tal fatto rimproverati, fece subito un Breve che cessassero le bestemmie degli empi, et restassero favorite da Christiani quelle membra, le quali da Christo stesso erano inserite nel suo corpo mistico.


8. Né però il detto Padre restò di avertire per lettere, le quali a me stesso et ad altri miei subordinati faceva scrivere, che i Provinciali andassero circospetti in admettere chi poteva porgere nota, o sia in questo, o sia in ogni altro caso, la quale circospettione non è levata a gli altri Generali, si che il medesimo non faccino, ma che nondimeno non pensino, che la mano di Dio sia abbreviata, la quale o non voglia o non possa vocare ea quae non sunt, ut sint tamquam ea, quae sunt117. Oltre che sendo a centinaia di migliaia di Hebrei sparsi pe'l paese del Turco, altri in Africa, et hora sendosi scoperto in alcuni Regno dell'Indie un grandissimo numero di Christiani, i quali si chiamano

113 See note 25.
115 On example was Afonso de Castro, who was born in Lisbon of rich new-Christian parents. After a distinguished career as missionary and superior, he was martyred at Ternate in January of 1557: JACOBS, Documenta Malucensia I (Roma 1974) 24*-25* (= MHSI 109).
116 Possevino attended the Third General Congregation and served as Secretary of the Society under Mercurian. He also wrote a short life of Mercurian: Vita 1429-14. The Latin biblical reference is a combination of Eph. 4:4 and Col. 3:11.
117 The Latin clauses are based on 1 Cor. 1: 26-29.
lesuaiti, cioè come Jesuiti da GIESU; et parimente multissimi Giudei, che si nominano Mosaiti, non può dubitarsi che chi volle fare utraque unum, et che reliquiae salvae fierent, non habbia sospeso il suo influsso in alcuni, i quali possano essere atti instrumenti per tanta conversione.

Che se il P. nostro Ignatius, il quale da tutti i nostri meritamente è stimato che subito andasse al cielo, operò che a sse succedesse il P. Lainez, il quale, disceso da Hebrei, fu però giovovissimo alla Compagnia, et fino alla morte a S. Chiesa et contra gli heretic et, et nel Santo Concilio di Trento servì pienamente, segue che non deve essere fra nostri, qui plus sapiat quam oporteat sapere, ma captivando l'intelletto in obsequium fidei, adori le sante strade della Divina Providenza lontanissime da quelle del Mondo, poiché quando finalmente si facesse altramente, potrebbe dubitarsi che si cominciasse anco a disprezzi il Filguolo di Dio, il quale non senza altissima disposizione volle che nell'istessa sua genealogia secundum carnum fussero perpetuamente recitate anco quelle donne di malvagia vita onde alcuni de suoi erano discesi.

Or Beatissimo Padre gittatomi a piede della S. Vostra V. dimando humilissimamente la sua S.ta benedizione; et come ringrato con tutto l' animo la Divina bontà, che in questa mia vicinanza di sepoltura, io habbia potuto fare questo (come forse ultime), servigio alla Compagnia nostra, così con ogni rivenza le chieggio abundissimae gratia et lunghissima vita, acciochè in ogni sorte di perfectione promovendoci, habbia sempre maggiore occasione di proteggersi. Di Venetia il di XI di ottobre 1603.

2. Letter of Antonio Possevino [to Antonio Barisone Ferrara, after March, 1608]

AHSI Opp. NN. 333 305r-306r

† M R in Christo P.

Poiché hieri sera V.R. venne a parlarmi con mostra di molta carità, et che mi disse ciò che Gio. Andrea, che sia in gloria, haveva minacciato di dirmi in faccia, sappia ch’il suo motivo era nato da falsa rilatione (se per questa disse), cioè perché io havessi procurato che le sottane de’coadiutori scurtassero: il che non procurai mai,

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119 See note 68.

120 Rom. 12:3.

121 Several women are listed in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ (Mt. 1: 1-16): Tamar who committed incest with Judah (Gen. 38: 15-19); Rahab the harlot of Jericho (Joshua 2: 1); and Bathseba who committed adultery with David (II Sam. 11: 2-5).

122 This letter, a signed autograph, is in Opp. NN. 333 305-306. It is undated, but the reference in the letter to a decree of the Sixth General Congregation indicates that it was written after March, 1608. Aside from the title there is no explicit indication of the recipient, but the title and content suggest the rector of Possevino’s community at Ferrara, Antonio Barisone, as the most likely recipient.

123 Gio. Andrea is almost certainly Giovanni Andrea Arigoni of Verona, a Jesuit brother who entered the Society in 1590 and was assigned to the Ferrara community in 1606 (ARS Ven. 38 96) where he served as tailor, infirmarian and porter.

124 The Sixth General Congregation’s thirtieth decree ordered lay brothers to wear shorter cassocks but deliberately avoided making a decision about their use of birettas; see note 84 in the body of this article. Possevino’s agitation for such legislation would seem to have been common knowledge among local Jesuits.
ma altri forse qui se ne servirono per scaricarsi sopra me, di quel che a se stesse dubitavano che sarebbe rimproverato del disgusto de' fratelli. Dico il vero. *Deus testis.*
Ma perché quel che minacciava, penso che non sarà stato detto a lei sola, laonde può anche seguire in altri concetto che gravi la loro coscienza et sia offesa di Dio et della Compagnia, però credo che V.R. farà cosa grata a S.D. M. 13 se in simili occorrenze secondo la sua ingenuità risponderà nel modo che segue.

Prima, se credono che Christo nostro S.ma sia Dio, poiché fu Giudeo, et poi battezzato.

2. Se la B.ma Vergine et gli Apostoli hanno credito presso tali, poiché furono Giudei, et poi battezzati.

3. Se i 72 discepoli, et trentatre Arcivescovi di Gierusalemme alla fila, che dal Giudaismo al Christianesimo vennero, piantarono secondo il volere di Dio la fede nell'Oriente123.

4. Se Evaristo fu legittimo Pontefice, et martire, et se la Chiesa fa bene a farne ogni anno commemorazione, poiché nacque di padre, o madre Giudea126.

5. Se S.10 Epifanio dee riconoscersi per Santo Padre, il quale non ostante la sua conversazione è celebrato per catolicissimo Dottore della Chiesa, et santo del Cielo127.


7. Se pensano che il B.P. Ignatio facesse secondo il volere di Dio a procurare in Roma case de' Neofiti, et a persuadere che un neofito entrato nella Compagnia non se ne partisse129.

8. Se si crede che facesse bene in eleggere per segretario generale della Compagnia il P. Polanco disceo da Giudei, et il quale ritennero nel medesimo ufficio due altri Generali seguenti ch'erano Spagnoli, Lainez et Borgia130.

9. Se si crede ch'il B.P. nostro Ignatio havesse lo spirito di Dio prima a servirsi nei principali carichi della Compagnia del P. Lainez; poi in dire che la Compagnia gli era più obligata che a qualsivoglia della Compagnia ne excepto quidem Xaverto; finalmente in non impedirlo in cielo, si che fosse eletto unanimemente in Generale dalla Compagnia con tutto che fosse notorio ch'egli fosse nato in Almazan da padre, et madre Giudei.

123 The claim that thirty-three archbishops of Jerusalem in a row were of Jewish descent confuses the statements of Eusebius, which Possevino had cited accurately in his letter to Clement VIII: see note 99.
126 Evaristus was pope from 99 to 1077; the *Liber Pontificalis* describes him as the son of a Bethlehem Jew. His feast day was October 26.
127 St. Epiphanius (315-402) was born of Jewish parents in Palestine near Eleutheropolis and founded a monastery there. His *Panarion* attacked eighty heresies.
128 See note 101 and 105.
130 Juan de Polancos' Jewish descent was well known.

XI. Se si crede che tanti, i quali hanno patito anche martirij, debbono per questo [non] essere inrollati ne catalogo dei martiri.

XII. Se si crede che anche quei che di eretici si sono fatti cattolici, non nati di eretici padre et madre, o hanno havuto prossimi consanguinei eretici, debbono essere stimati in minore conto, con tutto che sieno utilissimi instrumenti della Compagnia et di S.ta Chiesa.


14. Se finalmente si pensa che l’ultima Congregatione Generale habbia errato in temperare il Decreto della passata in questa materia, potendo anco averne, che col tempo si riduca affatto a quel che nelle Constitutioni ordinato haveva il B. Padre Ignatio.

Tutto questo sia detto non perché si pubblichi, se non dove convenisse reprimere le lingue di qualche malignante, et per chiudere la porta alla scissura, la quale fino nei fratelli coadiutori, con poco aiuto dell’anime loro, è penetrata.

Io poi son nato di padre et madre christiani, et per gratia di Dio potrei forse dire con verità di essere più Christiano di quei che né per la fede di Christo Signore nostro hanno mai predicato, né patito prigione, né manifestato al mondo cort libri ciò che pertiene alla catolica religione et alla salute de’ prossimi, si come per 50 anni si è degnato per infinita misericordia l’Iddio di adoperarmi coram Pontificibus, Regibus et Gentibus. Deo sit omnis gloria. Amen. Di V.R. Servo in Christo

Antonio Possevino

At the beginning in another hand: Scripta Poss. an. 1607.

Non esse notandam originem ex Hebreis.

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131 Francisco de Toledo’s Jewish ancestry was well known. He was a distinguished theologian and exegete, the first Jesuit cardinal and the trusted advisor of Clement VIII. With regard to Maldonatus, P. Schmitt, La réforme catholique. Le combat de Maldonat (1534-1583) (Paris 1985) 30-31 (= Théologie historique 74) affirms explicitly that he was not of Jewish origin.

132 See note 115.

133 See note 44.

134 See note 131.

135 Jerzy Radziwill, bishop of Vilnius, was named cardinal on December 12, 1583: Hierarchia catholica III 52 196 355. Possevino had many dealings with him. Other members of the famous Lithuanian family of Radziwill, especially the renowned Nicholas (1515-1565), were ardent Calvinists.

136 See note 45.

137 See note 46. Also R. De Maio, Alessandro Franceschi e il Cardinale Pierre Gondi nella riconciliazione di Enrico IV. Mélanges Eugène Tisserant (Vatican City 1964) VI 313-356, especially 313.

138 See note 89.

139 Most of these details about Possevino’s life are well known. Less known is his imprisonment by the Huguenots at Lyons: Opp. NN. 336 31-36.
La Compagnia di Gesù agli inizi ammise senza difficoltà membri discendenti da ebrei. Forse vi fu tra questi anche Antonio Possevino (1533-1611). Suo padre, orefice, si era trasferito a Mantova proprio nel tempo in cui i Gonzaga vi fecero affluire quaranta orefici giudei. Accuse di ascendenza ebraica furono elevate contro di lui, l’una indipendentemente dall’altra, nel 1557, 1585 e 1607. A sua volta egli si interessò a fondo della conversione dei giudei, predicando loro a Roma nel 1577, correndo a fondare il «Collegio dei neofiti» e incoraggiando l’apostolato con i giudei nella Bibliotheca Selecta (1593).

Dopo che la quinta Congregazione Generale ebbe reso impedimento indispensabile per l’ammissione all’Ordine il discendere da ebrei, Possevino s’ingaggiò in una lotta durata tutta la vita per far annullare questa preclusione. Nel 1598 mandò al generale Acquaviva un lungo memoriale contro tale esclusione, e il generale ammise che il decreto della Congregazione era stato motivato in parte dal sentimento contro i conversi nutrito dai più alti circoli spagnoli. Non persuaso, Possevino proseguì la sua protesta, sostenendo che il decreto non era stato spontaneo, bensi premeditato da Acquaviva. Le sue lettere al generale insistono sui servizi resi alla Chiesa e alla Compagnia in passato e al presente da giudeo-cristiani.

Non avendo potuto spuntarla col generale, Possevino tentò di persuadere le congregazioni provinciali della sua provincia di Venezia del 1599 e 1603 a votare il raduno di una nuova congregazione generale che abolisse l’esclusione dei giudei. I suoi sforzi lo coinvolsero in un’amarà controversia coi provinciali veneti e spinsero Roma a indagare sulla sua attività.

Possevino ebbe insuccesso anche nel tentativo di ottenere l’appoggio del card. Bellarmino. Fallito ogni altro mezzo, egli si rivolse direttamente a Clemente VIII, suo amico di antica data, perorando per una serie di riforme nella Compagnia, in particolare per l’abolizione del decreto antigiudaico. Il Papa accolse le sue istanze e le fece pervenire alla congregazione dei Procuratori del 1603, ma questi sorvolarono sulla richiesta pontificia. Però nel 1608 la sesta Congregazione Generale temperò l’esclusione dei giudei. I decreti di questa congregazione spinsero a Ferrara un gesuita ad attaccare a voce Possevino; il quale in una lettera che descrive l’incidente si dilunga a elencare i meriti dei giudei cristiani e di lui stesso verso la Chiesa e la Compagnia. Essa viene riportata in Appendice, insieme con i passi pertinenti della lettera a Clemente VIII.