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Antonio Possevino: From Secretary to Papal Legate in Sweden

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ANTONIO POSSEVINO

From Secretary to Papal Legate in Sweden

by John Patrick Donnelly, S.J.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Few Jesuits knew Everard Mercurian or respected him as much as did Antonio Possevino, who served first as the former’s secretary in France and later, for five years, as secretary of the Society in Rome during his generalate. Possevino wrote a short laudatory biography of Mercurian that remains in manuscript along with other documents describing Mercurian’s way of governing the Society.¹

Possevino was born at Mantua in 1533 and entered the Society on September 30, 1559. Already an established scholar, Possevino had served as tutor to two young Gonzaga princes, Francesco and Gianvincenzo, who later became cardinals. Two months after Possevino had begun his novitiate in Rome, Father General Diego Laínez cut short his period of training and, taking advantage of his previous contacts with Duke Emanuele Filiberto, sent him to negotiate with the duke regarding Jesuit apostolates in Piedmont-Savoy. Two years later, Possevino went to France, where he lived for a decade, became a skilled preacher, and served as rector at Avignon and Lyons.

In May 1569 Jesuit General Francis Borja appointed the Belgian Everard Mercurian visitor of France. Mercurian selected Possevino as his companion. Because Possevino was more knowledgeable

I wish to thank James Grummer, S.J., for suggestions that have improved this essay. All translations in the essay are my own.

¹ Vita Everardi Mercuriani, praepositi generalis Societatis Iesu, ARSI, Vita 142, ff. 9-14 (with a second copy in ARSI, Vita 26). Also see ARSI, Congr. 20B, ff. 185'–187', Vita 142, ff. 15-24, 54; Opp. NN. 336, ff. 90-91.
about Jesuit affairs in France, Mercurian allowed him to draw up their itinerary. Their task was to foster internal harmony and uniform discipline throughout France.² In 1570 Mercurian, given a free hand by Borja, appointed Possevino rector at Lyon and continued the visitation until Borja recalled Mercurian to Rome.³

POSSEVINO AS SECRETARY

Both Mercurian and Possevino were delegates to the Third General Congregation (April 12–June 16, 1573), convened to elect Borja's successor. The congregation was the most tumultuous in Jesuit history because of three outside interventions in the election of the new general.⁴ The most obvious choice was the widely respected Juan de Polanco, who had served the Society as secretary under Ignatius of Loyola, Lañeiz, and Borja. As is well known, however, Pope Gregory XIII initially made known his desire that the next general not be a Spaniard, but then retracted his injunction. Later Leão Henriques, a Portuguese delegate, spoke in the name of King Sebastian against the election of a “New Christian,” meaning anyone of Jewish or Moslem ancestry. This intervention was seen as an attack on Polanco, who rightly or wrongly was generally regarded as a “New Christian.” On April 22, in the middle of a speech given by Possevino as a prelude to the next day's election, Tolomeo Galli, the cardinal secretary, entered the congregation and reasserted the Pope's wish that the new general not be a Spaniard.⁵ The next day the congregation elected Mercurian general on the first ballot. Shortly thereafter, Mercurian selected Possevino as secretary of the Society, a post he held from April 1573

² Tony Severin, S.J., Un grand Belge, Mercurian, 1514–1580: Curé Ardennais, général des Jésuites (Liège: H. Dessain, 1946), 192–94. Also ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 60v; Vita 142, f. 12v. For more information about Mercurian's visitation of France, see Lynn Martin's article, “The Jesuit Mission to France,” in this volume. Because Possevino's name does not appear on any of the correspondence, Dr. Martin does not think that he served as Mercurian's secretary, despite the former's assertions to the contrary in his autobiographical writings.

³ Possevino gives an account of his work with Mercurian in his autobiography, Annales (ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 60v–61v), stressing the future general's gentle, prudent approach: “minime præcipitem sed mitem, maturum, patientem” (f. 87v).

⁴ This congregation plays an important role in many articles in this volume. See the contributions to this volume prepared by John W. Padberg, S.J., Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, S.J., and Mario Fois, S.J.

⁵ Possevino's speech is found in ARSI, Vita 142, ff. 132v–36v.
to December 15, 1577. The secretary was basically the general’s chief of staff.

Possevino’s five years as secretary have never been studied. Indeed, Possevino himself seems equally uninterested in this period of his life: his autobiography devotes only 14 pages to these years compared to 288 pages on his next three years as papal legate to the Swedish king. Yet those years were very busy and productive.

Ardent and active by nature, Possevino was reluctant to assume his new desk job. Immense piles of letters (“moles immense”) built up since Borja’s death and a large backlog of appointments to be made awaited him. He speaks of wading into a sea. The correspondence was in Latin, Italian, Spanish, and French; moreover, at first Possevino found his assistants to be incompetent, so he replaced them. Even a brief sample of the work accomplished during that period is astonishing. He worked out ciphers for correspondence with the Spanish provinces and with Alessandro Valignano, Jesuit visitor to the Far East. He maintained extensive correspondence with Peter Canisius, Polanco, Alfonso Salmerón, Jerónimo Nadal, and Valignano. He

6 Possevino wrote an account of the Third General Congregation (ARSI, Congr. 20B, ff. 206-212). Astrain’s account of the congregation in his history of the Spanish Jesuits (Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la Asistencia de España, 7 vols. [Madrid: Razón y Fe, 1925], 3:5 ff.) draws on Possevino’s account, which Astrain, on p. 7, sees as directed against the Italian assistant Benedetto Palmio. It is more evident that Possevino in his account attacks both the anti-Semitism and the nationalism of the Iberian delegates. On Possevino’s long war against anti-Semitism in the Society, see my article, “Antonio Possevino and Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry,” AHSI 55 (1986): 3-31.

7 For the secretary’s duties see Ignatius of Loyola, Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, edited and translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), nos. 800-803 (p. 327 f.).

8 See AHSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 86-93, for Possevino’s years as secretary; ff. 97-241, for his work as nuncio to Sweden.

9 AHSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 86, 87.


prepared the annual newsletters (Annuae romane) for 1576 and 1577. Moreover, he wrote instructions for various Jesuit activities. Finally, in Mercurian’s name, Possevino carried on correspondence on many small issues from around the world. One deed will fill historians with dismay: while organizing the papers of the secretary, he burned “all the writings that could have been seeds or memories of old dissensions.”

Mercurian delegated to Possevino much of the Society’s dealings with Pope Gregory XIII and with curial cardinals. Mercurian was not a native Italian speaker; moreover, in Possevino’s phrase, he was noted for his “verborum parcitas.” Possevino, in contrast, author of more than forty books, was rarely at a loss for words. Moreover, Gregory XIII seems to have taken a liking to Possevino, who often went to the Pope to ask for funds for various enterprises, such as the Roman College, the German College in Rome, the English College at Douai, and Scottish Catholics. In 1577 Gregory XIII directed Possevino to redraft a proposal originally made by the Belgian layman Jean de Vendeville. This document, which remained unpublished until 1613, contributed to the founding of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei in 1622.

Possevino’s activities were not restricted to the secretary’s office and to the corridors of papal power. He may have been of Jewish descent. At any rate, he channeled his preaching during these years towards converting Roman Jews. Gregory XIII compelled Jews to attend Saturday evening “conferences” at the church of the Congregation of the Holy Trinity. There they listened to sermons aimed at their conversion. At the urging of Giulio Antonio Cardinal Santoro (better known as Cardinal Sancta Severina), Possevino preached these to the Far East (48–51).

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12 ARSI, Rom. 126b/1, ff. 82v–84r (1576) and 125v–28r (1577).
13 See the following codices in ARSI: Instit. 188, Instit. 186C, Instit. 211.
14 Letter to Claudio Acquaviva soli, January 21, 1600, in ARSI, Congr. 26, ff. 300–3.
15 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 87v, 88r, 89v.
16 ARSI, Vita 142, f. 9v.
17 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 89v. Unfortunately he does not specify the Scottish Catholic beneficiaries. On the Roman and German Colleges, see Francesco C. Cesareo’s “The Jesuit Colleges in Rome under Everard Mercurian,” in this collection.
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sermons for six months during 1577. Fourteen Jews were converted in the course of his exhortations. At the behest of Cardinal Sancta Severina, and Guglielmo Cardinal Sirleto, Possevino approached Gregory XIII and persuaded him to establish a seminary for Jewish neophytes at Rome. There young Jews could be trained for the priesthood. After ordination, they could be sent as missionaries to Jewish communities within the Papal States, for example, in Rome, Ancona, and Avignon, as well as in the Levant. Gregory earmarked two hundred gold scudi annually for the seminary.

In addition to his sermons to Jews in Rome, Possevino was authorized by Mercurian to give Saturday talks on Jesuit religious life to lay brothers at the Gesù. He based these lectures on notes he had taken of Mercurian’s own talks on the same subject during his visitation of France.

The Catholic Reformation probably produced no more ardent advocate of small popular books of devotion and doctrine in the vernacular than Antonio Possevino, who was responsible for distributing three such works while secretary. Nicolo Sfrondrato, bishop of Cremona and later Gregory XIV, was given a manuscript entitled Pratica spirituale d’una serva di Dio during a pilgrimage to Rome in the Jubilee Year 1575. Sfrondrato oversaw its publication: there were editions at Cremona in 1575, at Macerata in 1576 and 1578, at Venice in 1598; there were French translations at Paris in 1599 and Lyon in 1601. The author, a nun who had written the book at the request of her confessor, wanted to remain unknown. Sfrondrato’s preface (p. 6) says only that a devout priest had given him the manuscript. We know Possevino was the priest in question, because his secretary, William Good, later claimed that Possevino had the work published through an Italian bishop.

In Rome Possevino encountered several friends from his earlier stay there. One was Julius Fulcus, treasurer for Alessandro Cardinal Farnese. Possevino directed Fulcus in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Fulcus later wrote a number of devotional works, most notably a work

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20 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 89v-90r. A list of Possevino’s sermons survives, but not the sermons themselves (ARSI, Opp. NN. 312, f. 7r).
21 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 90. A much longer account with corrections in Possevino’s autograph, Origine, progresso, mezzo per la continuazione et modi propagare il frutto de’ seminari instituti dalla Sta. Sede Apostolica sotto la cura della Compagnia di Gesù, can be found in ARSI, Opp. NN. 313, ff. 14-49.
22 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 90v.
23 Good to Mercurian, Braniewo, September 8, 1580, in ARSI, Opp. NN. 328, f. 270.
on almsgiving, later printed in several languages.\textsuperscript{24} At Possevino's request, he subsidized the printing of seventeen hundred copies of a catechism in Greek for Jesuits to distribute in Crete.

Possevino speaks of another old friend, a nobleman about his own age who held a post in the curia, whom he helped through a religious conversion. Although Possevino does not name him, he was almost certainly Camillo Capilupi (1531–1603). He and Possevino were schoolmates and boyhood friends back in Mantua, and both were in Rome in the early 1550s. During the 1570s Possevino furnished him with materials for his massive \textit{Origini e cause della eresie}, which remains unfinished and in manuscript.\textsuperscript{25}

During the Jubilee of 1575, Possevino persuaded Gregory XIII to underwrite the free distribution to pilgrims of a "fairly good-sized book in which Christian doctrine is explained and methods of fostering piety are indicated." Possevino does not give the name of the book, but it was probably a copy of a Canisius catechism, whose distribution Possevino had frequently supported.\textsuperscript{26}

Possevino himself wrote and published two small books while secretary, but neither bore his name on the title page. The first was \textit{Tractatio de perfecta poesis racione} (Rome: Francisus Zanettus, 1576; second edition at Venice: Apud Jolitos, 1588). It was published under the name of the famous poet Lorenzo Gambara for reasons Possevino explained in his autobiography. Lorenzo Gambara (1506–96) of Brescia had known Possevino at Rome in the early 1550s; he was a priest and, like Fulcus, he belonged to the \textit{familia} of Cardinal Farnese.\textsuperscript{27} He had recently completed what would be his longest work, some ten thousand lines in Latin modeled on Ovid's \textit{Metamorphoses}, largely the love stories of the classical gods and goddesses. Just before having it printed, he showed the manuscript to some friends, including Possevino. Possevino, who had a strong puritanical streak, was horrified by it and urged Gambara to burn the manuscript. But Gambara asked, "What am I to do? I already have permission to publish. . . . Rome is already waiting for it." Possevino retorted: "You ask what

\textsuperscript{24} Julius Fulcus, \textit{Eorum quorum eleemosynas ergaverunt admirables fructus, vel de eleemosyna scripserunt insignes sententiae numquam ante in unum ita collectae} (Rome: Apud Victorium Elianum, 1574).

\textsuperscript{25} ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 91'. See under "Capilupi, Camillo" in the \textit{Dizionario biografico degli Italiani}.

\textsuperscript{26} ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 88".

\textsuperscript{27} Farnese's contributions to culture are traced by Clare Robertson, \textit{Il gran Cardinale: Alessandro Farnese, Patron of the Arts} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
you should do? Make it a holocaust to God and you will live, lest you burn forever." He gave Possevino the manuscript to destroy, but Gambara still needed something to offer his patron, Cardinal Farnese. Possevino sat down and dashed off the *Tractatio*. This tract, written in Gambara's name to Farnese, draws on an imposing array of Christian and classical authorities to show why Christians should shun pagan love stories. Possevino argued that even Virgil, Dante's guide, did not teach Christian morality: did not pious Aeneas fornicate with Dido, kill Turnus after he had surrendered, and immolate human victims to the dead? Gambara's conversion was lasting: his later poetry was religious, and when people asked when his promised *Metamorphoses* was coming out, he would hand them a copy of the *Tractatio* with the words, "Read this."  

Possevino's other book from this period was composed by order of Marco Gonzaga, bishop of Mantua, who wrote an introductory letter to it. The book, bearing no indication that Possevino was the author, was written in response to the worst plague to strike northern Italy in the sixteenth century—some 18,000 died at Milan, 20,000 at Brescia, and 47,000 at Venice in 1576–77. For Possevino, the main cause and remedy is God, whose providence guides the course of events; but death enters the world through human sin. God's goodness would not have allowed the plague unless it had a very special usefulness. Possevino listed some of the causes of plague: pride, heresy, theft, lust, and unworthy use of the sacraments. After recounting the role of plague through history, he detailed prayers and devotions to be used and vices to be shunned. He then turned to the clergy and their duty to minister to the stricken. Only at the end of the treatise did he suggest this-worldly remedies and precautions: preparing food, living separately, making a will, and setting aside legal papers for the use of posterity. Clergy should store up food, drink, and clothing both for themselves and for the poor. In religious communities, the novices, the sick, and the elderly should be sent away to a safe place; most of the other religious should seek out plague victims and visit outlying districts to bring the consolations of religion.

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28 It was crucial that Farnese be placated not only for Gambara's sake but also for the sake of the Society, since Farnese was the main patron of the Gesù.
Finally during his years as secretary, Possevino began planning his greatest work, *Bibliotheca selecta* (Rome, 1593).  

**PROMOVEATUR UT AMOVEATUR?**

Possevino preferred an active ministry to desk work at Rome. Twice during his tenure as secretary, he volunteered to go to Greece and to Transylvania as a missionary, but Mercurian did not acquiesce. Leopold von Ranke noted that rivalry among Mercurian’s advisors resulted in their rapid turnover. Thus, Possevino’s appointment as legate to the King of Sweden in September of 1577 may have been a case of “promoveatur ut amoveatur.” There is evidence of friction between Possevino and Benedetto Palmio, the Italian assistant; but the appointment was made by Gregory XIII, whose confidence Possevino enjoyed.

**THE JESUIT MISSION TO SWEDEN**

Many historians have examined Possevino’s next three years as special legate to Sweden. Some have been sympathetic to Possevino, others critical of his work. Gregory XIII sent Possevino to Sweden to

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32 ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, f. 77v.
deal with a complex situation whose roots went back several decades and involved three key players: King John III of Sweden, his wife Queen Catharine, and the Jesuit Laurentius Nicolai (usually called Norvegus for his homeland).

John III, who reigned from 1569 to 1592, was the second son of King Gustav Vasa, who had made Lutheranism the official religion of Sweden. When Gustav died in 1560, his eldest son, Erik XIV, succeeded to the throne; but his increasingly psychopathic behavior resulted in a rebellion led by his half-brother John, who became king in 1569. John kept Erik in prison until his death in 1577, almost certainly due to arsenic administered by royal command.38 A skilled linguist, John has been called by the historian Michael Roberts “the most learned theologian ever to sit upon the throne of Sweden.”39 He remained a Lutheran, but his theology was influenced by the Erasmian Catholic Georg Cassander, who stressed the need to look to the patristic Church for patterns of Church reform. The King favored episcopacy, the use of religious art, and a fairly elaborate liturgy. His eclecticism made him hopeful for Church reunion, for he did not harbor the hostility toward Rome shared by most Protestants of his day. He was behind the Church Ordinances of 1571, whose vague doctrinal statements he imposed on the Lutheran clergy. In 1572 these were supplemented by the Nova Ordinantia, which encouraged retaining monasteries and convents, and attributed a larger role to good works in the process of salvation than Martin Luther could have tolerated. More controversial still was his attempt to overhaul the liturgy in 1577 by issuing what is known as the Red Book, which blended phrases and practices borrowed from the Roman liturgy with those traditional in Swedish Lutheranism.40

Many Lutherans rightly saw these innovations as influenced by John’s Catholic wife, Catharine, daughter of the last Jagellon king of Poland, Sigismund II Augustus. Their marriage contract allowed Catharine to remain Catholic and to have a Catholic chaplain and

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38 Roberts, Early Vasas, 246–49; Theiner, La Suède et le Saint-Siège, 3:104.
39 Roberts, Early Vasas, 277. Biaudet, in contrast, claims that John III knew little theology and was unclear in his own mind (Le Saint-Siège et la Suède, 1:93, 111).
40 Roberts, Early Vasas, 278–82.
confessors at court. The most important of these was the Polish Jesuit Stanislas Warszewicki, who first arrived unofficially in Sweden in 1574 on orders from the Roman Curia to strengthen the Queen's adherence to Catholicism. After returning to Poland at some unspecified date, he and two other Polish Jesuits were appointed the Queen's official confessors. They arrived in Sweden in early 1578, and from then on they, along with Queen Catharine, were responsible for the Catholic upbringing of Prince Sigismund, later king of Sweden (1593-98) and of Poland (1588-1632). Jesuit hopes for returning Sweden to the Roman Church increasingly centered on the young prince.\textsuperscript{41}

The founder of the Jesuit mission in Sweden was Laurentius Norvegus. Born in Norway in 1538, he was educated in Norway and Denmark, where he seems to have come into contact with Jesuits. In 1559 he transferred to Louvain, where he studied theology and converted to Catholicism. In 1564 he entered the Jesuit novitiate and was ordained the next year. He then gathered around him university students to whom he gave the Spiritual Exercises. Several were Danes and Norwegians who later entered the Jesuits. In 1570 he began a clandestine mission in Norway. In 1575 Gregory XIII chose him to head a new Jesuit mission in Sweden, not only because of his charismatic influence over students but also because he was the only Jesuit who could speak Swedish.\textsuperscript{42} Initially Norvegus wanted his superiors to admit some twenty of his Louvain students into the Society as a special unit dedicated to the Swedish mission, but he could persuade them to accept only some of his disciples. Without informing his Jesuit superiors, he arranged for six of his students to join him in Stockholm and took one of them, Florentius Feyt, along with him. In April 1576 Norvegus and Feyt reached Stockholm amid rumors about sinister Jesuits invading the country. John III, however, was delighted to learn that they had landed; once they had first got into contact with the Queen's chaplain, Warszewicki, they set up a secret meeting with the King. He ordered Norvegus to hide his identity as a priest and a Jesuit. John's main motive in welcomeing the Jesuit was to build up his reputation with the Pope and Philip II, whose help he needed for political and economic reasons to be discussed later; but he also had to keep Norvegus's identity secret from his people or run the risk of inflaming their resistance to his liturgical reforms.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:151.


\textsuperscript{43} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:90-93; Roberts, \textit{Early Vasas,
John III put Norvegus in charge of a small college for training ministers at the former Franciscan cloister in Stockholm—the Collegium Regium Stockholmense. Norvegus got the nickname by which he is remembered in Sweden, Klosterlasse, from his work at the former cloister. He followed the King's orders and restricted his teaching to doctrines shared by Catholics and Lutherans, to the classic creeds, and to the teaching of the Church Fathers, but he also defended the King's Red Book in debates over liturgy. The students were enthusiastic about his lectures. The college, funded by the King, soon housed thirty students. Gradually Norvegus separated out from the rest a smaller circle of sympathetic students and introduced them to Roman Catholic teaching in small discussion groups. He won them over at least to the extent that he secretly celebrated a Mass for them on Christmas Eve, 1577, and gave them Communion. Several sermons, notably one on the saints that Norvegus preached on All Saints Day, aroused opposition among the Lutheran clergy; but they also prompted some thirty people to convert to Catholicism. Six of his most gifted young converts Norvegus sent off to the German College in Rome to study for the priesthood, again partly at the expense of the King. Of these, five later became Jesuits. Norvegus also wrote letters to his superiors insisting that they send more Jesuits for the Swedish mission. Superiors earmarked three Jesuits at Louvain for the task. Not having heard from either Rome or Louvain, Norvegus sent his assistant, Florentius Feyt, to Louvain to recruit among his previous disciples. Hearing of this, the Belgian provincial sent two additional Jesuits to teach at Stockholm. Norvegus's demands and his lack of experience in dealing with delicate political issues help explain why Possevino was sent to Sweden in 1577.

**POSSEVINO AS PAPAL LEGATE**

Some historians, such as Ludwig von Pastor, have seen John III's interest in reconciliation with Rome as a mere trick to gain political and economic ends. Twice, in 1572 and 1575, John III tried to be


46 Ibid., 104–9.

elected King of Poland, but on both occasions he failed. Clearly, Roman approval would have helped his cause. Moreover, he was intent on expanding the Swedish foothold in Livonia (mostly modern Estonia), a move that resulted in the Livonian War (1557–82) against the Danes, who held Courland, and Ivan the Terrible. Here Sweden needed Poland as an ally. Denmark and Lübeck regarded John as an enemy and opposed Swedish expansion in Livonia. Elsewhere, King Philip II of Spain needed naval assistance against the Dutch Sea Beggars, and John III was willing to put the considerable Swedish fleet at his service, but only if the price was right. John’s most important motive for seeking favor in Rome and Madrid was the vast lands and rents Bona Sforza had bequeathed her daughters, notably Queen Catharine of Sweden. Most of the property was in Naples: John had little hope of making good these claims if he did not enjoy the support of the papacy and of Philip II.

Late in 1576 John III sent his best general, Pontus de La Gardie, on a secret mission: first he sought support from Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II on the Sforza inheritance, then, he traveled on to Rome, where early in May 1577 he made a secret pledge of obedientia to Gregory XIII in the King’s name. On May 26, Gregory XIII granted an audience with Mercurian and Possevino at his Frascati villa. The Pope asked Possevino to undertake a mission to Sweden. Its main purpose was to foster the Catholic faith in the heart of the King and his subjects by building on the foundations laid by Laurentius Norvegus, and also to encourage a Spanish-Swedish alliance. Philip II was concurrently sending an ambassador, Francisco de Eraso, to Stockholm for discussions. Meanwhile La Gardie traveled to Naples, but failed to secure the Sforza inheritance. He returned to Rome in September. Shortly after the Pope granted Possevino sweeping faculties on September 5, he and two Jesuit companions, the Englishman William Good and the Frenchman Jean Fournier, set out for Sweden.


49 Bona Sforza, second wife of King Sigismund the Elder of Poland and mother of Sigismund (II) Augustus, Catherine, and Anne, returned to her native duchies in southern Italy in 1556 with some 430,000 ducats in cash and jewelry. See Norman Davies, God’s Playground, 2 vols. (New York and Cambridge: Columbia University Press and Clarendon Press, 1982), 1:145.

50 Roberts, Early Vasas, 259–61; Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:57, 67, 170. The Sforza inheritance would have been worth three times the royal annual income!

51 Pastor, History of the Popes, 423 f.
together. They accompanied La Gardie for part of the journey. Possevino stopped in Prague, where Emperor Rudolf II and his mother, Maria, widow of Maximilian II, commissioned him as an envoy to bear a message to King John. This role of imperial envoy was largely a cover story, but useful since John III insisted that the three Jesuits travel in disguise, dressed as courtiers with swords at their sides.

On December 19, 1577, Possevino arrived in Stockholm, where he was warmly received by Laurentius Norvegus and King John. Norvegus, in his optimism, felt that bringing Sweden back to Catholicism would be a fairly easy task and had encouraged the King to think that most of the royal conditions for reunion would be granted. The most important conditions were married clergy, Communion under both species, a vernacular liturgy, and permission for Catholics to attend Lutheran services. Possevino entered into long discussions with the King almost every day for five months, trying to present Catholic teaching.

Possevino kept notes on the conversations and sent them to Rome. The discussions ranged widely and covered, for instance, salvation outside the Catholic Church, the sacraments, and the apostolic succession of bishops. He assured the King that Gregory XIII had appointed a special congregation of cardinals and theological experts to explore his requests. Gradually the King had convinced himself that Rome would accede to his demands, so much so that he told Possevino that he was ready to enter the Catholic Church and wanted to make a general confession. Possevino put him off, telling him to examine first a copy of Pius IV's *Professio fidei tridentine* for several

52 Ibid., 425. For the instructions given Possevino and his companions, probably by Mercurian, as they set out for Sweden, see ARSI, Instit. 117/II, ff. 427–28. These directives insist that the three Jesuits avoid meddling in politics, administration, and “everything alien to our vocation.” No easy task, given their assignment.

53 Possevino and the other Jesuits assumed the disguises reluctantly, but recognized that they were necessary to preserve secrecy (Theiner, *La Suede et le Saint-Siege*, 2:153; Garstein, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation*, 1:133; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 426; Karttunen, *Antonio Possevino*, 121.


days. On May 16, 1578, the King, a very emotional man, threw his arms around Possevino and cried out, "I embrace you and the Catholic Church forever." Possevino then heard his confession and the next day gave him Communion at Mass.\textsuperscript{57} John III wrote Mercuriano a letter praising Possevino.\textsuperscript{58} The King's seeming conversion marked the high point of the Jesuit mission to Sweden.\textsuperscript{59} Thereafter things began to unravel.

Four days later, on May 20, Possevino began the long journey to Rome, with several young Swedes and Finns to be trained for the priesthood. He hoped that he could plead the King's cause for the naval alliance with Spain; but his more important task was to urge Rome to grant the King's request for religious and liturgical concessions, so that Sweden might gradually return to Catholicism. Technically Possevino traveled south as a Swedish ambassador in a warship the King assigned to take him to Poland. He carried confidential letters to King Stephan Báthory of Poland, to Emperor Rudolf II, to the Dowager Empress, and to Pope Gregory XIII. He was also commissioned to press the question of the Sforza inheritance.\textsuperscript{60}

Shortly before Possevino's departure, Norvegus fell into disfavor with the King and Laurentius Petri, archbishop of Uppsala.\textsuperscript{61} Fortunately, Queen Catherine was able to replace her confessors with three Polish Jesuits, including the able Stanislas Warszewicki, who became the leader of the Jesuits in Sweden. A ship from the same squadron that carried Possevino to Poland, returned with Warszewicki and two other Jesuits.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{57} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:136, 315; Karttunen, \textit{Antonio Possevino}, 129. For the text of Possevino's account to Gregory XIII written shortly after the King's conversion, see Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:287.

\textsuperscript{58} Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:274 f., prints the letter dated May 15, 1578.

\textsuperscript{59} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:136–44, discusses at length whether the King's conversion was sincere, impulsive, or the result of political calculation. The King was certainly generous in financially supporting the work of the Jesuits. He even offered Possevino ten or twenty thousand scudi for the Jesuit order. Possevino declined the offer, urging that the funds be used instead for training priests for work in Sweden (Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:150; Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:288).

\textsuperscript{60} Pastor, \textit{History of the Popes}, 427; Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:288 f.

\textsuperscript{61} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:144–49; Karttunen, \textit{Antonio Possevino}, 131.

\textsuperscript{62} Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:151; Karttunen, \textit{Antonio Possevino}, 134 f.
En route, Possevino wrote two long memorials to Gregory XIII. He observed that the Pope had asked for two reports: the first on the intention and disposition of King John and his kingdoms of Sweden and Finland, the second on the state, its powers, its people, and its customs. As an appendix to the first memorial, Possevino described how the King planned to reintroduce Catholicism into his kingdoms. The memorials were probably written in June and sent from Warsaw to Tolomeo Galli, the Cardinal Secretary, to pass on to the Pope. Possevino had a gift for describing geography, history, and the political, military, and religious situations in distant countries, linking his accounts with specific plans for fostering Catholicism.

While Possevino was heading toward Rome, opposition towards the King’s liturgical reforms hardened precisely because they struck many Swedes as a Catholic Trojan horse. In 1578 Norvegus had published a pamphlet supporting the King’s Red Book. The dying archbishop of Uppsala replied in a small pamphlet that circulated widely in manuscript form. Its title is revealing: “Contra novas papistarum machinationes intra limites patriae excitatas.” Norvegus wrote a reply, but it had little impact. Still another pamphlet by Norvegus, the famous Letter from Satan, was counterproductive and provoked several rejoinders.

Possevino meanwhile tried to persuade King Stephan Báthory of Poland to support John III’s quest for the Sforza inheritance, since Báthory’s wife, Anne, had similar claims. At Prague, Rudolf II agreed to Possevino’s suggestion that he send congratulations to John III on his conversion to Catholicism. This, Possevino believed, would make it harder for the King to revert to Lutheranism. Possevino held discussions with Don Juan de Borja, Spanish ambassador at Prague and son...

63 Printed in Theiner, La Suède et le Saint-Siège, 2:275–89, 309–323. Another copy, it seems, found in ARSI, Opp. NN. 328, ff. 134–42, was sent to Mercurian. A somewhat different version of the second memorial was sent to Philip II. Biaudet discusses it in his “Une Nouvelle Version de la seconde relation de Antonio Possevino sur la Suède et la Finlande,” in Études postumées (Helsinki: Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 1931), 31–49.

64 Theiner, La Suède et le Saint-Siège, 2:292–309. Garstein (Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:156f.) summarizes the King’s plan. Possevino by no means agreed with all aspects of the royal plan, which was to encounter strong opposition in Rome (157).

65 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:152 f.; Norvegus’s Litterae Satane ad episcopos et clericos Sueciae (Stockholm, 1578) is reprinted in Duin and Garstein, Epistolarium commercium, 247–58.
of the late Father General Francis Borja, on the royal conversion and employment of the Swedish fleet.\footnote{66}{Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:159.}

Meanwhile, Gregory XIII established a congregation of cardinals in Rome to evaluate John III’s request for concessions. Two leading theologians, the Franciscan Cesare Montalcini and the Jesuit Francisco de Toledo, drafted replies.\footnote{67}{See James F. Keenan, S.J., “The Birth of Jesuit Casuistry: \textit{Summa casuum conscientiae sive de instructione sacerdotum libri septem} by Francisco de Toledo (1532–1596),” in this volume, for more information about Toledo.} Gregory XIII forwarded Montalcini’s response—and most likely Toledo’s unsigned reply—to Possevino. Both evaluations differed very little in content; both rejected the King’s main demands (married clergy, vernacular liturgy, Communion \textit{sub utraque}) since these questions had been decided at the Council of Trent. To grant concessions to Sweden would now open a veritable Pandora's box.\footnote{68}{Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:160 f.; Karttunen, \textit{Antonio Possevino}, 137. The relevant Tridentine decrees can be found in Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., \textit{Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils}, 2 vols. (London/Washington: Sheed and Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:726 (Communion under one species); 735 (vernacular liturgy); 755 (clerical marriage).} Montalcini’s replies to the King’s minor requests were mixed: most were rejected, some accepted outright. The acceptance of still others depended on circumstances and additional clarification.\footnote{69}{For Montalcini’s response see Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:328–56. Possevino’s autobiography includes several documents dealing with the congregation’s decisions (\textit{ARS I}, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 134'–174'\textsuperscript{v}), including Toledo’s response (136'–39' and 157'–62'). Among Possevino’s papers is a folder entitled \textit{Acta suectica}, Opp. NN. 323, containing documents pertaining to the King’s requests and their rejection (ff. 8–18, 47–57).} The cardinals accepted the theologians’ recommendations, and Cardinal Galli drew up the official response. Unaware that Possevino was already on his way to Rome, Galli sent the reply to him in Sweden. When Galli found out that Possevino had left Sweden, he ordered Johan Herbst (one of the Queen’s chaplains) and William Good to convey the congregation’s decisions to the King as discretely as possible.\footnote{70}{Roberts, \textit{Early Vasas}, 286; Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:161–63. Galli’s letter to Herbst and Good is in Theiner, \textit{La Suède et le Saint-Siège}, 2:356 f. Disgraced in 1574, Herbst tried again and again to leave Sweden. He did not receive the required permission until after the arrival of Warszewski in 1578 (Garstein, \textit{Rome and the Counter-Reformation}, 1:151).}

On reaching Rome, Possevino delivered various messages to the Pope from the Swedish royal family, and was informed of the negative response to the King’s requests. Possevino was ordered to return to
Sweden to defend the decisions. Since the cardinals feared that the mercurial monarch might react by suppressing the Jesuit mission, they questioned Possevino closely about the religious and political situation there. He replied that even with royal support Catholicism was unlikely to supplant Lutheranism, that the King’s support was unsteady, and that the Swedish mission had two weaknesses. The first was Laurentius Norvegus, who, despite his charismatic gifts in dealing with people, was politically naive and chronically optimistic. The second reason was the mission’s dependence on secrecy, which, nonetheless, did not prevent many Lutherans from becoming suspicious. 71

Oskar Garstein has argued that Possevino presented to both the Roman Curia and his Jesuit superiors an alternative plan for the conversion of Sweden not dependent on the fragile goodwill of John III and the secrecy of the Jesuit mission to Sweden. His plan centered on the eventual succession of Prince Sigismund. Possevino also considered the Bridgettine convent at Vadstena as a Catholic stronghold and greatly admired the nuns there. The real key to Possevino’s plan was a string of colleges and seminaries designed to recruit students from non-Catholic countries in northern and eastern Europe, providing them with free education. Possevino hoped that many of the students would become priests eager to return to their homelands and work for the conversion of their peoples. 72 The students that Norvegus had already recruited were to be the vanguard. 73 Possevino himself was instrumental in setting up five seminaries for such students, largely financed by Gregory XIII. Run by the Jesuits and located at Vilnius in Lithuania, Tartu (Dorpat) in Estonia, Braniewo (Bransberg) in Poland, Olomouc (Olmütz) in Moravia, and Cluj (Klausenburg/Kolozsvár) in Transylvania, the seminaries were Possevino’s greatest accomplishment and have been studied in considerable detail. 74

While at Rome, Possevino arranged for Swedish students to translate one of his favorite books, Canisius’s small catechism. He carried the translation on his return journey and had it published in

71 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, I:164 f.; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 130.
72 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, I:165–68; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 149.
73 Cardinal Galli shared Possevino’s interest in the Swedish students and wrote him on November 7, 1579, to report on their progress at the German College in Rome (BAV, Barb. Lat. 5742, f. 169).
Stockholm, probably late in 1579. In October Possevino went to Naples to pursue negotiations with the Spanish viceroy, Don Inigo Lopes Hurtado de Mendoza, regarding the Sforza inheritance. But neither the viceroy nor Philip II was eager to wager much-needed funds on the chance of winning the goodwill of the Swedish king. Gregory XIII, with Mercurian’s consent, now appointed Possevino vicar apostolic for all of Scandinavia, the Baltic lands, Russia, and Hungary, wherever there were no Catholic bishops.

In December 1578 Possevino again headed north toward Sweden with letters to John III and several other monarchs. He discussed the Swedish situation with Albrecht V, duke of Bavaria, Emperor Rudolf II, and Stephan Báthory and Queen Anne; he also took preliminary steps toward founding the future seminaries. His route included stops at Bologna, Innsbruck, Munich, Olomouc, Cracow, Warsaw, Gdansk, Braniewo, and Vilnius, and finally terminated in Stockholm on July 24, 1579. While he was passing through the Palatinate, Possevino’s journey almost came to an abrupt end when masked men tried to kidnap him. Fortunately, he was traveling in lay clothes; in his entourage was a bishop whom the kidnappers mistook for him and captured, while Possevino scrambled away. The attempted kidnapping was probably ordered by Charles, duke of Södermanland, a brother of John III and later king of Sweden (1604–11). Charles was a Lutheran with crypto-Calvinist leanings, a bitter enemy of Catholicism.

An unhappy king awaited Possevino. Rome’s refusal to grant what John III regarded as reasonable concessions reached him at the end of October 1578. Without these concessions, royal efforts gradually to reintroduce Catholicism might spark a rebellion that would cost John his throne. Even before Possevino’s return, the King tried by several avenues to reopen the case at Rome. Cardinal Galli had replied

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77 For copies of Gregory XIII’s letters to John III, Queen Catherine, and Prince Sigismund, see ARSI, Opp. NN. 336, ff. 179r–181v. He also added eighteen questions about the Swedish mission that he had proposed to Mercurian, along with Mercurian’s responses (181r–86v).
with another firm denial, and told the King that Possevino would explain the reasons for the Roman decision. Meanwhile Spanish military setbacks and Possevino's failure to secure the Sforza inheritance made the prospects of a Swedish alliance with Spain less attractive. In July John III took communion at a Lutheran service. His religious-political flirtation with Catholicism was not yet dead but palpably dying. 80

John III refused to see Possevino for a month after his return to Sweden, but he later granted him a public audience so that he could present his letters of credence and the letters from various monarchs. Then Possevino and the King retreated to a private room. Somehow the King had persuaded himself that Possevino might be carrying a secret, favorable answer to his requests. Possevino handed him several documents; the King read them, then flew into a rage. Suddenly a storm outside smashed a window, and Possevino fainted. Doctors were brought in to revive him. Later in a private four-hour audience, the King allowed him to explain Rome's reasons for refusing his request for concessions. The arguments did not convince him, but the royal rage had passed. The King even seemed to have returned to a favorable attitude toward the Jesuits in Sweden, perhaps in part because Possevino suggested that it might be better if the Jesuits left Sweden for fields promising a more bountiful harvest. Possevino also promised to try to reopen the case at Rome. 81

Shortly after Possevino's discussion with the King, plague broke out in Stockholm, and in October the royal family fled the city. The Jesuits were quarantined on the island of Lindö near Stockholm with their students, and the college was closed. Three Jesuits, including Possevino and Good, were infected. One Jesuit and two students died. Meanwhile, Norvegus ministered to the sick in Stockholm and made several converts. 82

The key to Possevino's long-range plans for the Swedish mission was recruiting young Scandinavians for the priesthood. Here progress was excellent. In the fall of 1579, seven students were sent to the seminary at Braniewo in Poland, and ten to Olomouc. Most of the students were converts recruited by Norvegus. In the next seven

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80 Ibid., 176–78; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 150.
81 Roberts, Early Vasas, 286; Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:179–84; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 153; ARSI, Opp. NN. 328, ff. 133–36; Archivo Segreto Vaticano, Nunz. Germ. 92, ff. 24–27. On October 9, 1579, Possevino wrote Gregory XIII (BAV, Vat. Lat. 6210, ff. 188–89), pointing out that there was no way to introduce Catholicism in Sweden without concessions.
82 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:186–88; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 155.
months, fifteen students were sent to Braniewo; and when Norwegus and Possevino left Sweden in 1580, they took with them sixteen more, making a total of forty-eight students.\(^8^3\)

The second pillar of Possevino’s plan was raising Prince Stanislas a Catholic, something John III had promised when negotiating his marriage with Catherine Jagellon.\(^8^4\) The Queen’s Jesuit chaplains frustrated the King’s efforts to have his son take part in Lutheran worship and persuaded Stanislas to swear never to desert the Catholic Church or to receive the Eucharist from a Protestant minister. Warzewicki, at Possevino’s urging, translated the Jesuit Peter Skarga’s lives of the saints from Polish into Latin and added an appendix on Swedish saints.\(^8^5\)

Before the plague, the King was hostile to Possevino and unsuccessfully tried to turn Norwegus and Good against him. After the plague, however, the King’s attitude toward the Jesuits softened, and Possevino was allowed to take up residence at the Queen’s palace at Torvesund near Stockholm. Possevino had Warzewicki present the King with a refutation of Lutheranism drawn up years earlier at Rome for a Swedish bishop. More important for the direction of royal policy was Philip II’s successful occupation of Portugal. Shortly after this news reached Sweden, the King provided Jesuits with money and invited Possevino to the wedding of his illegitimate daughter in the Bridgettine convent chapel at Vadstena. After the wedding, the King and Possevino had several conversations at the Vadstena palace, during which Possevino explained Catholic teachings. The King gave his assent to them, but would not advance Catholicism openly for fear of unrest.\(^8^6\)

The political climate and his recent successes in dealing with the King convinced Possevino that a bold move might force the King to take a public stance for or against the Roman Church. The Jesuits working in Sweden would openly proclaim that they were Catholic priests (although not that they were Jesuits, because that would be even more alarming for Protestants). Instructions were given to all Jesuits. Early in February 1580, it seems, they began wearing cassocks in public. Norwegus gave a dramatic sermon in a Lutheran church at Grämunkeholmen, announcing that he was a Catholic priest and had

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83 Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 161; Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:191 f., 215. Garstein gives the names and origins of the students.

84 Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 161; Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:194.

85 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:193, 195 f.

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come to Sweden to reestablish the Catholic Church. Henceforth, daily Catholic Mass was celebrated there, including Masses for the dead. Some elderly people brought out rosaries they had hidden for years and carried them about in public.  

The revelation that Catholic priests were working in Lutheran Sweden obviously provoked reactions. Denunciations of Norvegus in particular were sent to the King, who prevaricated, requesting that Norvegus’s writings be submitted for examination. But the King still had to explain his frequent dealings with Possevino, now revealed as leader of a Catholic underground rather than merely an ambassador from Rudolf II. On February 19, 1580, parliament gathered at Vastena and voted that the King should sever relations with priests, appoint loyal Lutherans to the royal college, and raise Prince Stanislas Lutheran. The King merely told the Jesuits to keep their heads low. More ominous were rumors—in fact, well founded—that a revolt was brewing under the leadership of the King’s brother, Duke Charles of Södermanland. Swedes opposed to the Red Book also discussed a possible invasion of Sweden by Danes and some German Lutheran princes to preserve their Lutheran heritage. Rioters in Stockholm tried to burn down the royal college buildings. Finally a Swede who had gone to the German College in Rome, returned, again professed himself a Lutheran, and published a pamphlet filled with inflammatory accusations against the Jesuits. A second attack on Norvegus’s royal college set it on fire after a bitter battle between students and rioters. Some Catholics at the college escaped, but others were jailed.  

In the aftermath, the King ordered the Catholics to be set free and those known to have attacked the college to be punished. The King tried to use the uproar for his own ends, seeking to impose the Red Book on the nation’s clergy. Most churchmen complied, but some staunch Lutherans fled to the estates of Duke Charles in Finland. The King also ordered Norvegus’s arrest, confiscation of his writings, and perpetual banishment. Other leading faculty members of the college were exiled. But the King did not want to destroy all options: Possevino remained his guest at the palace. While the crisis raged, other Jesuits tried to keep their converts from apostasy, with mixed results. Soon the King reduced Norvegus’s exile to a year, probably at Possevino’s urging. The King best encapsulated his own position in his famous statement to the Lutheran bishops and pastors gathered at a

87 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:201ff. See also Norvegus’s “Instructio,” in Duin and Garstein, Epistolarium commercium, 316ff.

88 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:203–7; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 158ff.; Roberts, Early Vasas, 287.
synod in 1580: “You should not regard the Holy Spirit as tied down to Wittenberg or Geneva or Leipzig or Rome or to any place.”

Toward the end of June, the King granted Possevino’s request to return to Italy. On July 2, the King wrote to Mercurian saying that Norvegus had been sent into exile; two days later, he thanked Pope Gregory XIII for Possevino’s services. Shortly before leaving, Possevino appointed Johannes Billius superior of the remaining Jesuits, and wrote two letters to John III (August 4 and 9) urging him to ally himself politically and religiously with Catholicism, and trying to calm royal fears over internal revolt or invasion by the Danish king Frederick II or Ivan the Terrible. Possevino sailed from Stockholm on August 10, 1580, and arrived at Gdansk seven days later. There he learned of Mercurian’s death on August 1; there too he received furs from King John III to present to Pope Gregory XIII and to Cardinal Galli as a sign of the King’s goodwill. Clearly, the King wanted to keep his options open.

Possevino did not leave Sweden alone. He assigned Norvegus and William Good to the college at Braniewo. Possevino also brought with him sixteen young Scandinavians bound for the Catholic seminaries: ten went to Braniewo and six to Olomouc. He also called upon King Stephan Báthory of Poland and Emperor Rudolf II and discussed with them the Swedish situation and hopes for Catholicism in northern Europe. Five Jesuits priests remained behind in Sweden, three of them chaplains to the Queen, tasked with ensuring Prince Stanislas’s commitment to Catholicism. In late October Possevino reached Rome and reported in person to Pope Gregory XIII.

POSSEVINO’S PAPAL LEGATION: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Possevino repeatedly won the esteem of rulers during his diplomatic career, notably that of Gregory XIII, John III, and Stephan Báthory; but his highhandedness often alienated many fellow Jesuits and other

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89 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:208–10; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 159f.
90 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:211–16; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 161.
91 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:212–16; Karttunen, Antonio Possevino, 161. Possevino wrote Cardinal Galli a long report on his mission (September of 1580) while in Warsaw; extracts are in Theiner, La Suède et le Saint-Siège, 3:376–90.
fervent Catholics. The respected historian Michael Roberts claims that Possevino’s tactics in going public “defeated their purpose: they were a self-indulgence from which he might better have abstained,” and that “Possevino’s bravado completed [the Swedish mission’s] ruin.” The whole affair engendered in John III a dislike for Jesuits and for Rome, alarmed Swedish Protestants, and increased their fear and hatred of Catholicism.

Possevino’s best-informed contemporary critic was Norvegus, who, on leaving Sweden, wrote a letter to John III justifying his conduct and blaming the failure of the mission on Possevino. In September 1580 Norvegus addressed a long evaluation of the mission to Mercurian, who had, in fact died in August. He claimed that “[f]rom Reverend Father Possevino’s first arrival the state of my affairs began to become more difficult, especially regarding the King, with whom I had earlier had excellent relations.” Toward the end, he summed up his view:

Before [Possevino’s] arrival, God gave us the King’s favor, gave us a building for the seminary, gave us an opportunity to teach and later even to preach on Sundays and feast days, and added a fairly good number of young men devoted to me, although still unformed. . . . With his arrival, we lost the King’s favor, the structure of the college crumbled, the young men fell away, and the public lectures came to a halt for lack of listeners. The school came into the hands of the heretics.

Norvegus, of course, overstated his case. The existence of the royal college depended on secrecy and the King’s favor: it always hung by a thread. The number of Catholics in Sweden remained very small: only 237 by Possevino’s estimate, and many of them were foreigners. Possevino did not give up hope for Catholicism in Sweden, which now depended on the young seminarians and Prince Sigismund. Early in 1581, while at Rome, Norvegus wrote a brief history

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92 Canisius to Mercurian, Augsburg, January 24, 1578, Braunsberger, Epistulae, 7:432 f.
93 Roberts, Early Vasas, 287.
94 Ibid., 289.
95 Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:217–19.
96 Duin and Garstein, Epistolarium commercium, 72–84.
97 Ibid., 73.
98 Ibid., 81 f. Also Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:219.
99 Roberts, Early Vasas, 288; Garstein, Rome and the Counter-Reformation, 1:226–34.
of the mission, *Instructio de regno Suecia*. Its milder tone suggests that Possevino and Norvegus met again at Rome and ironed out many of their differences. Pope Gregory XIII does not seem to have regarded Possevino’s mission a failure, for he soon sent him north to negotiate an end to the long Livonian War between Poland and Ivan the Terrible.

**Resumen**

Antonio Possevino ejerció el cargo de Secretario de la Compañía de Jesús bajo el General Mercuriano, desde 1573 hasta 1577. Su tarea principal consistió en despachar la correspondencia epistolar de cada día, pero Mercuriano lo utilizó con frecuencia para tratar asuntos con Gregorio XIII y con la Curia Romana. Possevino predicaba con frecuencia a los Hermanos Jesuitas y a los Judíos de Roma, y fomentó la publicación de libros religiosos de tipo popular. Escribió también dos libros breves: uno en que atacaba las historias paganas de amor y el otro para ayudar a la gente que tenía que hacer frente a la gran epidemia de 1576-1577.

En 1577, Gregorio XIII lo nombró legado pontificio en Suecia, donde los Jesuitas ya se habían establecido en la corte de Juan III, que se sentía inclinado hacia el Catolicismo y tenía motivos políticos y económicos para estar bien con el Papado y los príncipes católicos. Confesores católicos colaboraban con la Reina Catalina en la educación del Príncipe Estanislao en la fe católica. Laurentius Norvegus, S.J. había establecido un Seminario aparentemente luterano, pero sin hacer ruido iba convirtiendo a los seminaristas al catolicismo. Juan III parecía dispuesto a devolver gradualmente Suecia a la fe católica, si Roma le concedía a él privilegios disciplinares de gran alcance. En 1578, Possevino volvió a Roma llevando las peticiones del rey, pero fueron rechazadas. A su vuelta a Roma en julio de 1579, Possevino explicó la denegación a un Rey encolerizado.

A inicios de 1580, Possevino intentó forzar al Rey a ordenar a los jesuitas revelar que eran sacerdotes católicos, pero fracasó en su intento. Empujado por las protestas y alborotos que se siguieron, Juan III desterró a algunos jesuitas. Possevino, otros jesuitas y diciséis seminaristas escandinavos salieron voluntariamente, pero el confesor de la Reina se quedó. La misión sueca no fue un fracaso total: el Príncipe Estanislao y los seminaristas ofrecían la garantía de una esperanza para el futuro.

Translated by Antonio Maldonado, S.J.

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