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Early Modern Variations on the Theme of Complicity: How Jesuits Came to Be Linked with Regicide

Andrew McKenzie-McHarg

Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry,
Australian Catholic University, Rome, Italy
Andrew.McKenzie-McHarg@acu.edu.au

Abstract

In the long history of anti-Jesuitism, the accusation that the Society of Jesus endorsed assassination and used it as a means to pursue its goals hardened into one of the recurring *topoi* that were repeatedly invoked to malign the order. However, the Society was clearly not born with this stigma. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how in the late sixteen and early seventeenth centuries an interplay of political events and doctrinal statements arose whose cumulative effect was to brand the Society with a reputation for approving the principle and abetting the practice of killing kings.

Keywords

tyrannicide – assassination – conspiracy theory – anti-Jesuitism – deposing power – early modern religious history

How was the link between the Society of Jesus and regicide forged? In the course of time, the charge condemning the order for its alleged involvement in what was in the minds of many early modern Europeans the gravest of political crimes became so compounded by polemical repetition that it took on the quality of an unquestioned given—a recurring defamation that, regardless of its relationship to historical truth, hardened into a commonplace so widespread and thoroughly familiar that few ever thought to inquire about its origins. Yet clearly the link was not some kind of original sin that the Society carried with it from the moment it officially entered the world in 1540 when

Pope Paul III (r.1534–49) issued the papal bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae* and thereby recognized the initiative launched by the former Basque courtier Íñigo López de Loyola (c.1491–1556). Instead, it emerged as a result of a complex interplay of political events and doctrinal statements that this article seeks to reconstruct. In doing so, the analysis will jump back and forth between the English and French contexts, which, so the base-line contention, represent the two major sites where the link was forged.¹

As we will see, different strategies were employed in implicating the Jesuits in attempted acts of regicide. In fact, these strategies corresponded to different personae of the Jesuit. Of course, the crime itself would suggest that pinning it on the Jesuits would inevitably conjure up the persona of the Jesuit as assassin. Yet curiously enough, this figure has only a peripheral presence in the material reviewed here, even if this observation needs to be qualified by an acknowledgment of the tendency of this figure to appear in the more luridly fictionalized accounts. In fact, instead of unmediated perpetration, anti-Jesuits of all stripes experimented with hypotheses of mediated instigation in which the Jesuit featured as preacher, as confessor or as teacher.

However, the persona that left the deepest imprint upon this aspect of anti-Jesuitism was the Jesuit as theologian and political theorist. Under its influence, the tradition of tarring the Jesuits with a habit of aiding and abetting the murder of princes became structured by the distinction between “doctrine and action, theory and practice,” as formulated by a mid-eighteenth-century work that stands in many ways as the culmination of this tradition.² These works have been denoted as “black chronicles” but “chronicle” only describes half of what they are; more than simply listing the attacks on kings, queens, and princes attributed to the Jesuits, they also posit—and, to some degree, construct—a Jesuit doctrine as the ultimate source from which these attacks emanate.³ Readers of these works were first invited to stand aghast at the

1 One could ask about the role played in this story by accounts of the assassination attempts targeting Prince William of Orange (r.1544–84), the last of which claimed his life in 1584, yet although some of the narratives are ornamented by occasional allusions to Jesuit complicity, I am yet to see evidence that these events contributed significantly to the evolution of the explanatory models of interest in this article. For an indication that the association between Jesuits and assassination had become established in the Venetian context by the first decade of the seventeenth century, see the article by Sabina Pavone in this special issue.

2 *Les Jesuites criminels de leze majesté dans la théorie et dans la pratique* (The Hague: Les frères Vaillant, 1758), i.

3 See Christine Vogel, *Der Untergang der Gesellschaft Jesu als europäisches Medienereignis (1758–1773): Publizistische Debatten im Spannungsfeld von Aufklärung und Gegenklärung* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006), 166–73.

impieties of the subversive theory before being served detailed accounts of specific cases in which this theory had allegedly been put into practice.

Of course, the rancor and indignation conveyed by these “black chronicles” obscured the presence of a genuine, age-old problem: how to deal with rulers who abuse their power and oppress their subjects? The legal, political, and theological traditions supplied categories and stipulations that were helpful in addressing this question even if they failed to cohere into a fully consistent, foolproof answer. In the fourteenth century, the jurist Bartolus de Saxoferrato (1313–57) had distinguished between the tyrant by usurpation and the tyrant by oppression—the former had no legitimate claim to power while the latter (the far trickier case) did but was arguably in danger of forfeiting it through the abuse of this power—while in the early fifteenth century the Council of Constance (1414–18) had condemned the notion that private individuals were entitled to up arms against a tyrant on their own initiative.⁴ However, the guidelines offered by such declarations began to creak under the strain of pressures generated subsequently by the Protestant Reformation and the long period of religious conflict it triggered, particularly because these events conjured up a new scenario in which a prince by dint of heresy not only oppressed his subjects in this world but endangered their salvation in the next.

To speak of a distinctively Jesuit position in this debate is misleading. For the most part, the contributions made by Jesuit theologians hewed closely to the orthodoxy formulated before their order was created, even if one might discern a specific Jesuit inflection in the conviction that that spiritual power was distinct *sui generis* from the temporal power of the prince. Admittedly, the work of one figure, namely the Spanish Jesuit Juan de Mariana (1536–1624), strayed outside the bounds of orthodoxy and was therefore like a heaven-sent gift to the legions of anti-Jesuits who kept seventeenth- and eighteenth-century printing presses so busy. Yet even without Mariana, there was no shortage of material in which Jesuit theologians acceded a right to kill the tyrant. In doing this, they were, of course, at pains to attach this right to stringent conditions, yet this stringency could not change the fact that in principle they recognized such a right. Consequently, the order’s opponents were able to characterize the Society as an organization that, by endorsing tyrannicide, encouraged regicide. Here was in many ways the crux of the issue: by conforming to a solidly respectable tradition that distinguished between the king and the tyrant, the Jesuits had become dangerously out of step with a new European order whose

4 For a superb overview of this theme as treated through the centuries by theologians and political thinkers, see Mario Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'antiquité de nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).

emerging states saw in the sanctification of the lives of their sovereigns an indispensable precondition for the preservation of peace and stability.

1 The Jesuit Mission to England (1580–81): The Pastoral and the Political

In 1580, the Jesuits embarked on their mission to England. Heading this first foray across the Channel were the English Jesuits Robert Persons (1546–1610) and Edmund Campion (1540–81). Even if their primary goal was to attend to the spiritual needs of England's beleaguered Catholic community, in undertaking this clandestine expedition to their home country they were stepping onto a political terrain that over the course of the previous decade had been the scene of escalating tensions and deteriorating relations between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority. With the papal bull *Regnans in excelsis* Pius V (r.1566–72) had in 1570 stoked the flames from afar by officially excommunicating Elizabeth I (r.1558–1603) and releasing Catholic subjects from their duty to obey her. He had thereby supplied Europe with what many would long see as a memorable and particularly egregious example of papal overreach.

In actual fact, an abstention from involvement in politics was prescribed by the order's *Constitutions*, yet both the qualifications appended to this rule along with other articles such as one encouraging Jesuits to curry favor with the powerful and high-placed implicitly acknowledged how intermeshed religion and politics were in the early modern world.⁵ Jesuits thus ranged across a spectrum made up of different degrees of attention to political affairs, and this spectrum extended to the extreme marked by Jesuits such as Persons, who not only desired to sustain the oppressed English Catholic community but also devised schemes for bringing England as a whole back into the Catholic fold. It need hardly be said that these schemes envisaged more than just peaceful persuasion. If it took a foreign invasion to re-install Catholicism, then Persons and others of his persuasion were hardly likely to spurn the opportunity, should it present itself. Thus, supporting the Spanish Armada and its planned invasion

5 Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 263–64 (§591–92) and 337 (§823). See also A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), 21.

of England in 1588 might not have been official Jesuit policy, but a group of Jesuits espied in such an invasion the means of achieving the goals that defined their life's mission.⁶

The parliament under Elizabeth had for its part broadened the range of acts that incurred the charge of treason. In response to the Jesuit incursions into the realm, the reach of the laws was further extended to criminalize even those activities that Catholic priests performed in observing their pastoral duties and ministering to their co-religionists. Treason was not a charge that parliament viewed as being set in stone. Instead, it was treated as a ductile and dilat-able concept.⁷ Thus, a priest who held Mass and attempted to strengthen the resolve of the congregants to abide by the old religion committed an act that could now incur the charge of treason.⁸ In 1581, Campion was apprehended and, after being tried for treason, executed at the beginning of December in that year.⁹

The reasons for executing Campion would remain contested. Did he die as a traitor or as a martyr? Already before his arrest, his companion Persons had reproached the English government for invoking the crimes of “conspiracy, rebellion, or the crime of high treason” to obscure the fact “these men are punished [...] for their religion and for conscience sake.”¹⁰ William Cecil, Baron Burghley (1520–98), who served as chief advisor to the queen, was, however, adamant that Campion and the other Catholic priests “justly suffered death not by force or forme of any newe lawes established, either for religion or against the Popes supremacie, as the slanderous libellers would have it seem to be, but by the ancient temporal lawes of the realme.”¹¹

Of course, there is no obligation resting upon later historians to vindicate either side in this dispute. Nevertheless, it is revealing that the government might have prosecuted Campion on the basis of the recent legislation that equated his activities as a priest with treason. Yet as Cecil intimated with his

6 Michael Carrafiello has argued for a viewpoint that takes the full measure of the militancy informing the schemes of men such as Persons. See his “English Catholicism and the Jesuit Mission,” and “Robert Parsons’ Climate of Resistance and the Gunpowder Plot,” *Seventeenth Century* 3, no. 2 (1988): 115–34.

7 For an overview, see John G. Bellamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason* (London: Routledge, 1979).

8 Frederic A. Youngs, Jr., *The Proclamations of the Tudor Queens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 228–29.

9 See Gerard Kilroy, *Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 299–330.

10 Quoted in Michael L. Carrafiello, “English Catholicism and the Jesuit Mission of 1580–1581,” *Historical Journal* 37, no. 4 (1994): 761–74, here 766.

11 William Cecil, *The Execution of Justice in England* [1583] and William Allen, *A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics* [1584], ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 8.

reference to the “ancient temporal lawes of the realme,” the privy council opted to pursue another course, quite possibly because the gloss of legality bestowed by the recent legislation was not sufficient to dispel the suspicion that it was being used as a cover for religious persecution. Instead of being charged with transgressions of a religious nature that were now on the books as forms of treason, Campion and fourteen other arrested Catholic priests were accused of having “conspired the death of the Queenes Majestie, the overthrowe of the Religion nowe professed in England, the subvertion of the state, and that for the attempt therof, they had stirred up straungers to invade this Realme.”¹²

There was nothing inherently preposterous about the notion of a plot aiming to kill Elizabeth. In embarking on their covert English mission, the Society was operating on a field shared with other actors who, mixing religious zeal, political calculations, and personal ambitions in varying dosages, did indeed plot against Elizabeth’s life. Her reign was witness to a series of such conspiracies, which all reached various stages of fruition and which have been named after their respective instigators or chief protagonists; the Ridolfi plot of 1571, the Throckmorton plot of 1583, and the Babington plot of 1586 all attest to the genuine danger in which the queen’s life stood at a number of junctures in the course of her reign. However, one does not speak of a “Campion plot,” and this fact goes some ways to vindicating the remarks made by William Allen (1532–94), the English cardinal who, by overseeing Catholic seminaries on the Continent, had dedicated himself to the project of restoring England to an observance of the Catholic faith. According to Allen, Campion had been framed by “subtle machinations and figments of conspiracies [...] invented by the ingenious counsellors.”¹³ These “ingenious counsellors” would seem to have failed in their attempt to portray Campion as, if not an aspiring assassin, then certainly a committed conspirator. Other, more indirect means of tying Jesuits to regicidal operations were therefore in order.

Thus, while the evidence indicates that the accusation alleging regicidal plans hatched by Campion were fabricated, the historical status of the accusations leveled at Dr. William Parry (d.1585), an obscure Welshman whose allegiances to either the Elizabethan government or the Catholic cause were marked by an inconstancy reflected in his own movements on the European continent, is more ambiguous. In his statement in court, Parry spoke of meeting a Jesuit priest in Venice and another in Paris. These meetings were not critical to the narrative he related in which he committed himself to a plan to kill

12 Quoted from the indictment, Kilroy, *Campion*, 300.

13 Quoted in Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), 275.

the queen. But they point in the direction in which subsequent indictments of the Society of Jesus developed: retreating from an advanced frontline position as direct perpetrators and frontline conspirators, the Jesuits took up a position one step removed from the scene of action in a shadowy background from where they masterminded violent assaults upon the lives of sovereigns.¹⁴

2 The French Wars of Religion: The Society as an Alien Body within French Society

At this stage, there was, however, no suggestion that Jesuits were acting in accordance with a doctrine derived from their own theology. We start to see such an insinuation coalescing when we cross the Channel and enter the volatile mix of religious fervor and political feuds created by the French Wars of Religion (1562–98). In 1594, the French counselor of state, Antoine Arnauld (1560–1619) issued a *Plaidoyé* (i.e., address or plea) opposing the Jesuits. The immediate issue was a long-simmering dispute about the right of the Jesuits to teach in Paris, yet Arnauld's protest at the failure of the Jesuits to respect the limits imposed upon their activities in this regard shrunk to a minor quibble upon considering the other weighty accusations Arnauld leveled at the Society. As historian Eric Nelson has demonstrated in his work *The Jesuits and the Monarchy*, the scope of Arnauld's ambitions extended much further. In formulating his *Plaidoyé*, he "took the opportunity to define French law, to provide a means for French supporters of the Catholic League to reintegrate into French society and to present the most fully articulated attack on the Jesuits to date."¹⁵ Arnauld also inaugurated a tradition of anti-Jesuitism within his own family, which would come to represent one of the most active centers of opposition to the Society throughout the seventeenth century.

Arnauld's *Plaidoyé* served as a vehicle for a robust defense of Gallican independence and was dismissive of any papal pretenses of a right to infringe upon French sovereignty. Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) was cited as the Jesuit who championed this notion of a papacy invested with the power to depose kings and princes on the alleged grounds that their rule had taken on a tyrannical

14 For details about Parry, see David Jardine, *Criminal Trials*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Knight, 1847), 1:246–76.

15 Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590–1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 30.

character.¹⁶ But was Arnauld able to achieve the same linkage to doctrine when it came to the question of tyrannicide? His account of Jesuit political positions strongly hinted at a readiness on the part of the Society to accept tyrannicide as a logical extension of deposition. Yet aside from what might seem argumentatively logical and theoretically plausible on its own merits, it needs to be remembered that in denouncing the Jesuits Arnauld's critique benefited from the tailwind whipped up by the indignation over an actual attempt at regicide. In August of 1593, Pierre Barrière (d.1593), a former soldier in the armies of the Catholic League, was arrested for allegedly planning to kill Henry IV (r.1589–1610). Whereas with Campion the English authorities had their Jesuit and needed to fabricate the corresponding plan to assassinate the monarch, in the French case the attempt to assassinate the monarch had already been provided by Barrière. What was needed was the link to the Jesuits.

Barrière had allegedly received the encouragement of the Parisian Jesuits in whom he had confided his intentions. Thus, in this case, we find the Jesuits playing the supporting role of confessor and sanctifier of a criminal deed.¹⁷ However, this collusion was, according to Arnauld, not an isolated incident or a chance circumstance. Instead, it was consonant with a deeply ingrained pattern of Jesuit behavior. Arnauld speaks of the order as the “shop of Satan, wherein are hammered and forged all the murders that have bin [i.e. been] executed or attempted in Europe, within these forty years.”¹⁸ But this “hammering” and “forging” occurs on the basis of actual plots involving, as Arnauld goes on to assure the reader, more than one “murdering Jesuit” (“Jesuite Assassin” in the original)—an example of how in allegorical contexts authors could indulge flights of fancy in which this figure makes an appearance. But in addition to buttressing his denunciations with the insinuation of a pattern of Jesuit criminality that lends plausibility to the otherwise implausible claims linking Jesuits to a specific assassination, Arnauld is adamant that regicide is “their pure doctrine.”¹⁹

16 Antoine Arnauld, *Plaidoyé de M. Antoine Arnauld Advocat en Parlement... Contre les Jesuites defendeurs, des 12 & 13. Juillet 1594* (Lyon, 1594), 12^v–13^r; for the English translation published in the same year, see *The Arrainment of the Whole Society of Jesuits in France* (London: Charles Yetsweirt Esq, 1594), 8^r.

17 See for further details the reprint of “Bref Discours Du Procès Criminel Fait à Pierre Barrière, dit La Barre, Natif d’Orléans, accusé de l’horrible et exécration parricide et assassinat par lui entrepris et attenté contre la personne du Roy,” in *Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu’à Louis XVIII*, ed. M. L. Cimber, 1st series, 15 vols. (Paris : Beauvais, 1837), 13:359–70, here 368.

18 Arnauld, *Arrainment*, 12^r; *Plaidoyé*, 19^v–20^r.

19 Arnauld, *Arrainment*, 12^v; *Plaidoyé*, 20^v.

The evidence cited to substantiate this claim is flimsy and there is no reference to Jesuit theologians who conceded that under a specific set of circumstances the murder of an originally legitimate king fell within the scope of legitimate actions. Admittedly, the most daring and—in the eyes of Gallican nationalists—egregious articulations of this doctrine had at this time not yet been formulated. But even if sixteenth-century Jesuits did not skirt these issues in their teachings and writings, Arnauld is only able to point to a work by William Allen to support his contention that the Jesuits espouse a doctrine of tyrannicide; and, of course, Allen was not a Jesuit, even if he was closely affiliated with the Society.²⁰

Arnauld sought, therefore, recourse to other means to undergird the bridge he builds between the Jesuits and tyrannicide. Thus, he turns to the figure of the Jesuit as preacher and seizes upon the words the Jesuit Jacques Commolet (c.1548–1621), moved to desperation by the impending prospect of a heretic, Protestant king, had declaimed from the pulpit of Saint Bartholomew's Church in February 1593: "We need a second Ehud, no matter whether he's a monk, a shepherd, a lout or even a Huguenot."²¹ Commolet's words represent one of the closest approaches made by a Jesuit to the violent passions characteristic of the League, the party of French Catholics devoted to a kind of holy war in its determination to purge France of heresy. Even though there was an intermittent convergence of goals and sentiments between Jesuits and partisans of the League during the French Wars of Religion (1562–98), Jesuits were for the most part guided by the primacy of their loyalties to the papacy. By contrast, the political action and ideology of the League were informed by a fervent nationalism. Skeptical of the potential of any confession to unite France, the party of the *politiques* proposed an alternative in the form of unconditional devotion to the monarch. As Nelson has persuasively argued, it fell to the Jesuits to assume the role of scapegoat in this situation. The shameful record of occasions on which the king's dignity had been traduced and denigrated could be lifted from

20 Although no title is given by Arnauld, the book to which he implicitly refers is most likely Allen's *A True, Sincere and Modest Defence, of English Catholics* (n.p., 1584). There is no indication that Arnauld actually read this book; most likely, he learnt that such a book existed because Parry had claimed in his statement that reading it had strengthened him in his resolve to kill the queen. Arnauld relates the story of Parry, noting in particular his contact with the Jesuit confessors.

21 I take the translation from Roland Mousnier's *Assassination of Henry IV: The Tyrannicide Problem and the Consolidation of the French Absolute Monarchy in the Early Seventeenth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1973), 215. The original source is provided by the famous journal of Pierre de l'Estoile (1546–1611), *Mémoires-Journaux de Pierre de l'Estoile*, ed. Gustave Brunet et al., 12 vols. (Paris: Tallandier, 1888–96), 5:214.

the shoulders of the French people and transferred to the Jesuits as the foreign body who, according to Arnauld, deserved the most obloquy for perverting the people's originally unalloyed and unconditional allegiance to their king.

In laying the regicidal utterances circulating within the ranks of the League at the door of the Jesuits, Commolet's sermon proved extremely useful. It is therefore not surprising that in the pamphlet Arnauld continually calls upon him as a witness to the inimical relationship entertained by the Jesuits towards the French monarchy.²² When Arnauld talks of the contention supported by Commolet that this monarchy was elective, his reference point is, however, more in line with the League than with the Jesuits.²³ This conforms to a general pattern inhering to the attacks mounted by Gallican *politiques* against the Society of Jesuits; repeated efforts were made to conflate Jesuit doctrine with the ideology of the League.

In sum, Arnauld's assertion that the Jesuits were adherents to a doctrine of regicide was not based on an intimate knowledge of their political thought; his pamphlet formed rather part of an attempt to expurgate the regicidal doctrines cultivated by Leaguers by suggesting that the Jesuits had been the source through which these doctrines had seeped into the lifeblood of the French body politic. To achieve this goal, he relied upon the emphatic force imparted by purely associative precedents from the past and otherwise the usual appeals to highly circumstantial indications of Jesuit collusion. But even if there was a certain conceit inherent to Arnauld's attempt to pin on the Jesuits the blame for blasphemous doctrines that in truth were more the intellectual property of the League, his general contention of a Jesuit assent to tyrannicide anticipated and was vindicated by subsequent articulations of Jesuit political thought. The Jesuits refused to exclude categorically the legitimacy of tyrannicide, and such a position was, therefore, anathema to the Gallican *parlementaires* to which Arnauld numbered.

It would take a further attempt upon the life of Henry, this time carried out in late December 1594 by a former student from the Jesuit college, Jean Chastel (1575–94), before enough momentum was generated to achieve the goal doggedly pursued by Arnauld, namely the expulsion of the Jesuits from France.²⁴

22 See Arnauld, *Arrainment*, 12^r–12^v, 18^r–18^v; *Plaidoyé*, 20^r–20^v, 30^v–31^v.

23 For indications that the Society in general opposed a concept of popular sovereignty that sees in the king a mere delegate of the people who have not alienated their popular sovereignty in entrusting it to him, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:182–84. For notions of elective kingship circulating in France in the sixteenth century, see Richard A. Jackson, "Elective Kingship and *Consensus Populi* in Sixteenth-Century France," *Journal of Modern History* 44, no. 2 (1972): 155–71.

Chastel's revelation that he had been educated by Jesuits was like a red rag to the order's many enemies, and the pamphleteers among them condemned the Jesuits as corrupters of the nation's youth. A pro-Jesuit pamphlet defending the Society against such charges also testifies to the way the dispute was drawn in the direction of doctrinal questions. Admitting guarded approval of a traditional doctrine that countenances tyrannicide under a highly restrictive set of conditions, the author concedes that Chastel was possibly familiar with this teaching:

It is to be believed that he wanted to say and support that which the approved doctors teach regarding the subject, i.e., that it is allowed to kill not all sorts of kings but only those who are invaders and tyrants, whom one can legitimately murder, not only through the authority of the republic but by every private person principally when there is no possibility of recourse to superior authority.²⁵

To demonstrate the irreproachable orthodoxy of this opinion, a list of Scholastic authorities was appended; those who doubted Jesuit conformity to orthodox doctrine were referred to the relevant passages in the works of Dominican theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534), and Domingo de Soto (1494–1560). In this manner, readers were reminded that in professing these opinions the Jesuits were merely adhering to doctrines consecrated by long tradition: “Note, dear reader, that this doctrine cannot be traced back to the Jesuits, given that the majority of the cited doctors wrote many years before God placed this Company into the world.”²⁶

Thus, the Jesuits in their support for inherited church doctrine provide an example of how an attachment to tradition and to orthodox doctrine can lead to seemingly radical (or reactionary) positions when times change and circumstances vary. Remarkably, Jesuits in places such as Spain and the German-speaking lands would continue to elaborate upon the finer points of tyrannicide at a stage when French members of the Society already found

24 In actual fact, the parlements of Bordeaux, Aix, and Toulouse did not register the *arrêt* and thereby made it possible for the Jesuits to maintain a reduced presence on French soil. See Nelson, *Jesuits and the Monarchy*, 53.

25 “Avertissement aux Catholiques, Sur l'Arrêt de Parlement de Paris, en la cause da Jean Chastel, qualifié Ecolier étudiant au Collège des Jésuites,” in [Simon Goulart, ed.], *Mémoires de la Ligue contenant les événements les plus remarquables depuis 1576, jusqu'à la Paix accordée entre le Roi de France & le Roi d'Espagne, en 1598*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam [i.e., Paris]: Arkstée & Merkus [i.e., Jean-Luc II Nyon], 1758), 6:261–65, here 262.

26 “Avertissement aux Catholiques,” 263.

themselves on the back-foot. In effect, non-French Jesuits furnished French anti-Jesuits with compelling material to bolster their assertion that the Jesuit order was permeated by an unholy disregard for the lives of princes.

However, an awareness of this potential supply of material seems to have only slowly filtered through the various channels to the opponents of the order. Thus, in 1602, the anti-Jesuit workshops in France sprung back into life as the signs began pointing to a potential recall and rehabilitation of the order. The most notorious Jesuit articulation of the doctrine of regicide, namely that made by Mariana, had been printed a number of years earlier in 1599 in his *De rege et regis institutione*. But Arnauld was clearly unaware of this work because in his own contribution to the protest at the prospective return of the Society, titled *Le franc et véritable discours au roi Henri IV sur le rétablissement des Jésuites* (1602), Mariana is not cited—and one can hardly imagine that Arnauld would have allowed such an opportunity to pass if he had known of the Spanish Jesuit's idiosyncratic and anomalous views. Arnauld does, however, refer to a passage contained in the *Aphorismi confessoriorum* (Confessor's aphorisms), written by the Portuguese Jesuit Manuel Sà (1530–96) and published in 1595.²⁷ In the passage in question, Sà states that a legitimate ruler who has abused power by governing tyrannically must be judged by a public authority. Once this authority has issued its judgment, the removal of the tyrant can be effected by anyone (though, of course, the private individual is effectively acting on public authority). It is interesting that in 1603—the year after Arnauld drew attention to this passage—Sà's work found its way onto the Roman Index of Prohibited Books.²⁸

An older associate of Arnauld, the lawyer Étienne Pasquier (1529–1615), treats the theme of a Jesuit proclivity for regicide in a highly congruent manner in his famous *Jesuits' Catechism*, whose new annotated critical edition has recently been published in Brill's "Anti-Jesuit Literature" series. Like Arnauld, Pasquier similarly cites Sà while remaining oblivious to Mariana's more extreme position.²⁹ Yet in measuring the evolution of anti-Jesuitism on this score, the glance backwards is in Pasquier's case even more revealing than the comparison to Arnauld's earlier *Plaidoyé* as already in 1564 Pasquier was laying

27 Antoine Arnauld, "Le franc et véritable discours au roi Henry IV sur le rétablissement des Jésuites, 1602," in *Annales de la société des soi-disans Jésuites ou recueil historique-chronologique*, ed. Jean Anotine Gazonnes, 5 vols. (Paris: n.p., 1764), 1:665–95, here 671.

28 Harro Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c.1540–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 315.

29 Étienne Pasquier, *The Jesuits' Catechism or Their Doctrine Examined (1602)*, transl. Patricia M. Ranum and ed. Robert A. Maryks and Jotham Parsons (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 291.

the foundations of the anti-Jesuit rhetorical tradition with his own *Plaidoyer* against the Jesuit teaching institution in Paris, the College of Clermont.³⁰ Even if at this early date he had developed arguments that would become part of the standard repertoire of anti-Jesuitism—objections to the name “Jesuit,” gripes about the ambiguity associated with their ecclesiastical status, allegations of a tendency to engender schism and thus to mimic Protestant heresies—the *Plaidoyer* contains at most only a highly elliptical reference to the issue of regicide.³¹ Published close to four decades later, the *Catechism* offered readers a far more developed account of the alleged Jesuit proclivity for regicide. Thus, chapter nine of the third book is titled: “It Is a Heresy to Approve of the Assassins of Princes, Even Though the Princes Were Tyrants.”³² He sums up his indictment with the following words:

I'm ashamed at having to prove that no subject should attack his prince, no matter what character he is playing. But having undertaken to combat the Jesuits' heresy, which they've indeed practiced, and which they now want to turn into a verbal excuse, I'll give them so much that they'll vomit it up. Oh, Jesuit: Learn, therefore, this lesson from me. For I owe that charity to every Christian. We should obey our kings, regardless of who they are, I mean whether they are good or bad [...]. Just as God gives us kings, we must receive them without knowing, as you do, whether they are kings or tyrants.³³

Reflected in this passage is a further stage in the gestation of the libel linking Jesuits to regicide, though it is worth noting how at this stage the more specific link to Jesuit doctrine is supplied *post factum*; what the Jesuits have “indeed practiced,” they now seek to justify retrospectively with “a verbal excuse.” Indeed, this ordering is reflected by the fact that the intimation of a Jesuit doctrine follows on the heels of earlier chapters that take stock of the various attempts undertaken by the Jesuits to have Elizabeth I in England and Henry IV in France killed. Such allegations failed, however, to convince the king, and in 1603 the Jesuits were readmitted to France. But it was only necessary to shift the focus once more to the further side of the English Channel to find a new

30 See “Plaidoyer de Me. Etienne Pasquier pour l'Université,” *Annales*, ed. Gazignes (Paris, 1764), 1:42–63.

31 See Pasquier, “Plaidoyer,” 55.

32 Pasquier, *Jesuits' Catechism*, 148. For the French original, see *Le Catéchisme des Jésuites*, 228.

33 Pasquier, *Jesuits' Catechism*, 291.

set of events that reinforced the link between the Society and regicide in the minds of early modern Europeans.

3 The Gunpowder Plot and the Debate over the Oath of Allegiance

Two days after a group of English Catholics failed in their desperate attempt to kill James I (r.1603–25) by blowing up the House of Lords in a genuine, albeit unsuccessful conspiracy known to posterity as the Gunpowder Plot, the Catholic Archbishop of England, George Blackwell (c.1545–1613), issued a statement condemning their actions to his Catholic charges and reminding them that “our divines do say that it is not lawful for private subjects, by private authority, to take arms against their lawful king, albeit he become a tyrant.”³⁴ There is little evidence that either Robert Catesby (c.1572–1605) as the leader of the plot or any of his accomplices felt that they were justified in resorting to the extremes of a terrorist conspiracy because they judged James to be a tyrant or that they had been influenced by doctrines of tyrannicide that deviated from the principle articulated by Blackwell.³⁵ And there is even less evidence to support the contention of the famed jurist Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634) that the Jesuits were the masterminds of the plot. Instead, the episode demonstrated how Jesuits could become ensnared in political intrigues through information conveyed to them under the seal of confession. Such was the fate of Henry Garnet (1555–1606), the Jesuit superior in England. Far from goading Catesby on, Garnet and other Jesuits had attempted to dissuade him and his fellow plotters from implementing their plan, yet in the version of events related at the trial in London’s Guildhall Garnet assumed the role of a driving force behind the plot. It is, however, telling that Coke also sought to underpin his insinuations of Jesuit instigation with references to a supposed Jesuit doctrine of deposing princes. He drew attention to the claims that deposition is

34 For a reprint of Blackwell’s statement, see Charles Dodd (i.e., Hugh Tootell [c.1671–1743]), *Dodd’s Church History of England*, ed. Mark Aloysius, 5 vols. (London: Charles Dolman, 1839–43), 4:cxi–cxii.

35 In Antonia Fraser’s popular account of this dramatic episode, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Phoenix, 1995), she makes the claim that the “notorious passage” from Mariana’s *De rege* “was the basis of accusations about ‘Queen-killing’ and ‘King-killing’ Jesuit policy in the English state trial of 1606” (126). Whether the state attorneys were genuinely familiar with Mariana is in my mind doubtful; I am yet to see explicit references to Mariana. A Jesuit association with such practices could have been derived from the diatribes of Gallican *politiques* such as Pasquier and Arnauld that were circulating in English translations.

the natural consequence of heresy—a claim he finds asserted in the works of the Spanish theologian Diego Simancas (1513–83), who was not a Jesuit, and “Philopater,” the pseudonym adopted by Persons for one of his works.³⁶ No explicit mention was made of a doctrine of tyrannicide.

Of course, deposition need not imply tyrannicide but in view of the likelihood that force might be necessary to remove a king who had been formally deposed but persisted in clinging to power, it is also not surprising to find the conflation of both doctrines. Such a conflation was undertaken by James in justifying the oath of allegiance that he sought to impose upon Catholic subjects after the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. Countering the objections as formulated by Bellarmine and thereby entering the fray of politico-theological controversy, James himself penned an “Apologie” of the oath in which he asked

wherefore doeth he [i.e., Bellarmine] here wilfully, and of purpose omit the rest of the points mentioned in that Oath, for deposing, degrading, stirring vp of arms or rebelling against them, which are as well mentioned in the Oath, as the killing of them [i.e. princes or kings] as beeing all of no consequence against a King, no Subiect beeing so scrupulous, as that hee will attempt the one, and leaue the other vnperformed if hee can.³⁷

The oath of allegiance compelled subjects to forswear any acknowledgment of a papal authority whose word would suffice in dislodging a temporal ruler from power or exposing such a ruler to any kind of “violence or hurt.”³⁸ Furthermore, it imposed upon these subjects the duty “to disclose and make known unto his Maiestie, his heires and successors, all Treasons and traitorous conspiracies” to which a subject, including presumably a Catholic priest, might become privy.

This challenge to the seal of confession was in itself sufficient to provoke a confrontation with the papacy. Pope Paul V (r.1605–21) answered James’s campaign to compel his Catholic subjects to swear the oath with two breves enjoining these same subjects to resist this imposition. A controversy thus arose to which, in addition to Bellarmine, other Jesuit controversialists and theologians

36 Jardine, *Criminal Trials*, 2:264. On Simancas as an opponent of the Society and its policy of admitting *conversos* into its ranks, see Robert A. Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 31. The work published by Persons under the pseudonym “Andreas Philopater” was *Elizabethae Angliae Reginae haeresim Calvinianum propugnantis saevissimum in Catholicos sui regni Edictum cum responsione* (Rome, 1593).

37 King James VI and I, “Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus. Or an Apologie of the Oath of Allegiance,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Johann Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111.

38 James, “Triplici Nodo,” 89.

such as Martin Becanus (1563–1624) and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) added their voices. Jesuits such as Persons were steadfast in their assertion of a deposing power of the pope but stressed that this did not automatically entail tyrannicide, although there were certainly Jesuits such as Suárez who also affirmed the right to tyrannicide once the relevant conditions had been fulfilled and the pope had issued the necessary dispensation from the prohibition against murder. And for one Spanish Jesuit, namely Mariana, it was even possible to imagine scenarios in which tyrannicide might be justified in the absence of any such directive.

4 The King is Killed: Vilification of the Society after the Assassination of Henry IV

Where figures such as Barrière and Chastel had previously failed, the religious enthusiast François Ravaillac (1578–1610) finally succeeded on May 14, 1610. The transcripts recording the interrogations to which he was subjected after having fatally struck at Henry IV on this day hint once more at an act that drew its motives from sources other than Scholastic typologies of tyrants and the Jesuit defense of them.³⁹ Nowhere does Ravaillac denounce Henry as a tyrant. Rather, his major grievance seems to have been the lack of any religious zeal in the policy adopted by Henry towards the Huguenots. Indeed, with Ravaillac the moribund sentiments of the League seemed to stir into life again in one last fanatical convulsion, although the channels through which the assassin might have absorbed the ideas of the League are obscure.⁴⁰

What seems less open to dispute is that Ravaillac acted alone. However, by this stage, the tradition of anti-Jesuit polemic had conditioned the discursive culture in such a manner that any act of regicide automatically triggered suspicions of Jesuit collusion. Ravaillac's case yielded scant evidence that might incriminate the Jesuits, yet very soon after he had committed his crime, word of a particularly unabashed appraisal of tyrannicide penned by a Spanish

39 The transcript is printed in *Mémoires de Condé ou Recueil pour servir à l'histoire de France [...] où l'on trouvera des preuves de l'histoire de M. de Thou*, 6 vols. (The Hague: Pierre DeHondt, 1743), 6:201–44. The preface reports at its conclusion (217) a statement with which Ravaillac described how sermons he had heard had convinced him of the need to kill the king, but the details remain vague. The additional claim that Ravaillac was instructed upon the doctrine of tyrannicide is not substantiated in the transcript of the interrogation as published.

40 Baumgartner, *Radical Reactionaries: The Political Thought of the French Catholic League* (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 240–41.

Jesuit spread through Paris.⁴¹ As we have seen, until this stage the French had taken very little notice of Mariana and his willingness to countenance legitimate tyrannicide in a context noticeably divorced from papal deposition.⁴² In actual fact, the sensitivity to Mariana's comments was largely limited to the French Jesuits themselves. Shortly after the original publication of the work, the French provincial had conveyed to Superior General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615, in office 1581–1615) the sense of unease that incendiary passages aroused in the minds of French Jesuits. A second edition appeared containing some minor modifications, which were, however, hardly up to the task of forestalling a potential outburst of anti-Jesuit indignation.⁴³ Sure enough, in the wake of Ravailac's crime, Mariana's work was censored by the Parlement of Paris and publicly burnt.

The censure and burning of this work seemed to provide the official endorsement of a sentiment propagated through the medium of pamphlet literature; namely, that the Jesuits were beholden to a doctrine that countenanced and even counseled the killing of a legitimate king and was, therefore, to blame for the atrocity perpetrated upon Henry IV. Jesuits such as Pierre Coton (1564–1626) with his *Lettre déclaratoire de la doctrine des Pères Jésuites* tried to head off such attacks by emphasizing the overwhelming rejection of any doctrinal sanction for murdering a king and by dissociating the order from Mariana as the black sheep in the family of Jesuit theologians.⁴⁴ Coton sought to dilute the effect of Mariana's provocation by citing numerous passages in which other Jesuits had affirmed the decree issued at the Council of Constance. Yet it is

41 Once more, L'Estoile's journal provides several observations which attest to the notoriety Mariana's work quickly attained after the assassination of Henry IV. See Mousnier, *Assassination of Henry IV*, 53.

42 Frédéric Gabriel, "An *Tyrannum opprimere fas sit?*: Construction d'un lieu commun; La réception française du *De Rege et regis institutione* de Juan de Mariana (Tolède, 1599)," in *Les Antijésuites: Discours, figures et lieux de l'antijésuitisme à l'époque moderne*, ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre et Catherine Maire (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 241–64, esp. 251–52.

43 Robert Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years' War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

44 Pierre Coton, *Lettre Déclaratoire de la Doctrine des Pères Iesuites, conforme aux Decrets du Concile de Constance, adressée à la Roynne, Mere du Roy, Regente en France* (Lyon: Claude Chappelet, 1610). With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see in some of Coton's statements signs of a Jesuit rapprochement with the tenets of absolutism; see Thomas Worcester, "Jesuit Dependence on the French Monarchy," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed. Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107. For further information on the polemical exchange between Jesuits and anti-Jesuits in the wake of Henry's death, see Nelson, *Jesuits and the Monarchy*, 168–70, and Turchetti, *Tyrannie*, 538–39.

telling how even opponents of the Jesuit order were beginning to recognize the council's interdiction of individual initiative in dispatching alleged tyrants as wanting. Thus, replying to Coton's *Lettre déclaratoire* in the anonymously published *Anti-Coton* (1610), the reformed theologian Pierre du Moulin (1568–1658) betrayed an awareness that this interdiction allowed for some flexibility in its interpretation that—so the charge—was then abused by the Jesuits,

for the Jesuites have their evasions ready, *and which is a truth*, namely, that the Councill of Constance speakth of such Tyrants as are lawfull Kings, and that they speake not of Tyrants deposed by publike judgement, and whose Subjects are discharged and absolved of their oath of allegiance by the Pope, nor of Kings who are judged enemies unto the Church. For if the Jesuits shall undertake to make away a King, they will easily finde (out) some reason (or other) to prove that he is no King at all, and by consequence that (herein) they do nothing against the Councill of Constance, not against those places which Father Cotton alleged out of the writings of the Jesuites.⁴⁵

Mariana's solution, which foresaw circumstances under which the private individual could attempt to kill the king because the king prevented the public assemblies from meeting, clearly strayed outside the bounds prescribed by the conciliar decree, regardless of whatever ambiguities it had left open, and Mariana himself implicitly betrayed an awareness of this by attempting to diminish the authority of the council's pronouncements.⁴⁶ But du Moulin took issue even with the Jesuits who conformed to the decree by invoking the right of a public authority to pass judgment on a king and thereby render him into a tyrant. Such a procedure was obviously anathema to the very premise of an absolutist king who derived his power from a divine mandate. Du Moulin was, therefore, able to find passages in the works of a Jesuit such as Francisco de Toledo (1532–96) who might have professed adherence to the conciliar decree (as Coton had asserted) but nevertheless whose approval of the killing

45 The quotation is taken from the English translation *Anti-Coton or a Refutation of Cottons Letter Declaratorie* (London: T[homas] S[nodham], 1611), 52 (my italics). For the corresponding passage in the original *Anticoton ou Refutation de la lettre declaratoire du Pere Cotton* (n.p.: n.p., 1610), see p. 58. On the attribution to du Moulin, see Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and Confession: The Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84.

46 For Mariana's attempt to erode the authority of Constance, see Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 320, also Harald E. Braun, *Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 85–86.

of Henry III still offended the sensibilities of those who had come to ascribe to the life and well-being of the sovereign an inviolable sanctity.⁴⁷

Du Moulin's pamphlet is noteworthy for another aspect. In it, we find a clear distillation of two charges. One charge is levelled at the doctrinal perversion that enables Jesuit theologians to endorse tyrannicide; this is dealt with in the first chapter that has the title: "That the doctrine of the Jesuits approves and maintains the Parricides of Kings and the Rebellion of Subjects."⁴⁸ The other charge, to which the second chapter is devoted, takes aim at "the horrible effects of [this] detestable Doctrine."⁴⁹ A broad survey is then taken of these "horrible effects" as they played out in acts of subversion orchestrated by Jesuits in France but also in places as far-flung as Scotland or Transylvania. Thus, in allowing the doctrine to precede the action, or the theory to dictate the practice, the *Anti-Coton* observes the ordering principle of causation that advanced to become a major structural feature characterizing the genre of "black chronicles" and that posited a Jesuit culpability extending well beyond any one particular "crime scene." In place of a situation in which the doctrine is something of an afterthought (as had been the case with Pasquier), du Moulin's pamphlet anticipates the ritual of incrimination that would be standardized throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a strand of the anti-Jesuit literature: passages documenting a sacrilegious doctrine are first compiled and presented in a manner which prefaces a recitation of violent attacks in which this doctrine was ostensibly translated into action.

5 Conclusion

Christine Vogel's contribution to this special issue presents us with arresting eighteenth-century images illustrating Jesuits wielding daggers as they assault monarchs. However, denouncing the Jesuits as actual assassins was in the realm of text for the most part an act of hyperbole that, as most anti-Jesuits would have admitted, did not reproduce reality but instead melodramatically allegorized it by visualizing a link forged in the late sixteen and early seventeenth centuries on the basis of other characterizations of the Jesuit. As tumultuous as the times might have been, the anti-Jesuits were not blessed with a

47 [Du Moulin], *Anti-Coton*, 5–6. In fact, du Moulin argues on the false grounds that Henry had been excommunicated. Instead, the pope had threatened him with excommunication following his murder of the Guises.

48 De Plaix, *Anti-Coton*, 1.

49 De Plaix, *Anti-Coton*, 31.

real Jesuit figure equivalent to Jacques Clement, the Dominican friar who had killed Henry III (r.1574–1589) in 1589. Instead, those hostile to the Society were forced to resort to other personae—the Jesuit as confessor, preacher, teacher, and, above all, theoretician—in insinuating the link to regicide. Of course, these personae were interlinked and their activities were overlapping. Thus, it was not a stretch to imagine that the Jesuit teacher instructed his pupils in Jesuit theories that eroded the reverence with which the pupils would otherwise regard the life of the prince. But in the end, the most potent means of branding the Jesuits with an alleged proclivity to regicide was provided by characterizing the Society as a workshop for the fabrication of these doctrines that allegedly sanctioned and encouraged assassination.

The preference for assigning the Jesuits this role had an important consequence. While the facts tying Jesuits as confessors or teachers to assassinations remained incidental and anecdotal, the identification of a body of dangerous doctrines cultivated by the order suggested something far more enduring that transcended the localized conflicts that could so easily arise when particular rulers attempted to enhance their power by bringing church administration and religious practice into alignment with the interests of state. In elaborating upon an alternative conception that admitted the distinction between spiritual and temporal power but that insisted upon an ultimate subordination of the latter to the former, the Society of Jesus began to assume the character of a standing or permanent conspiracy—a conspiracy whose conspirators were playing the “long game” and whose interventions in politics were not merely tactical but strategic and in keeping with some sinister masterplan. Such aspersions anticipated the grand conspiracy theories with which later (proto-)conservative authors—including (ex-)Jesuits such as the Abbé Augustin Barruel (1741–1820) with his famous *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme* (Memoirs illustrating the history of Jacobinism, 1797–98)—sought to unveil the hidden causes of the French Revolution. Viewed against this backdrop, we can therefore recognize early modern anti-Jesuitism not only as a site that incessantly churned out conspiracy theories but also as a site where the phenomenon of conspiracy theory itself evolved in highly significant ways.