

Jews in the Society of Jesus: Claudio Acquaviva and his critics



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The Spanish origins of the Society of Jesus entailed a sensitivity about the Jewish ancestry of many of its members. This article examines the decision taken by the Fifth General Congregation of the Society (1593–1594) to exclude persons of Jewish descent (*conversos*), in light of strong criticism voiced by three leading Jesuits: Robert Persons (1546–1610), superior of the English mission, Diego de Guzmán (c.1522–1606), a noted Spanish preacher and catechist, and Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), an Italian Jesuit involved in high-level diplomacy. This article analyses selected correspondence in which they confronted the superior general, Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615, in office 1580–1615), questioning the argument that *conversos* inhibited the work of the Society. The writers' rhetorical strategies include logical argument and practical demonstration as well as appeals to ethos and pathos through personal experience and dramatised precedent, hoping to shame the general into moderating the policy. Acquaviva's resistance to their persuasion is explained by his need to retain the support of the Spanish royal court in asserting his authority over dissident Jesuits in Spain as well as to sustain his project to increase the effectiveness of the Society through internal coherence and tight organisation.

Contribution: The article illustrates the use of rhetorical strategies to reinforce the biblical principle of racial equality within the Society of Jesus in the Reformation era.

Keywords: Jesuits; *conversos*; Claudio Acquaviva; Robert Persons; Diego de Guzmán; Antonio Possevino; rhetoric.

Introduction

Jewish ancestry was a sensitive issue in early modern Spain – a legacy of official attempts to coerce Muslim and Jewish subjects to convert to Catholicism. Suspicion of and discrimination against *conversos* was entrenched in certain strata of Spanish society. The early Society of Jesus, largely dominated by men of Spanish origins, was not exempt from tension over the place of New Christians or *conversos*, that is, Catholics of Jewish descent. Many senior Jesuits were of *converso* lineage, and St Ignatius himself had pronounced pro-Jewish feelings, but anti-*converso* sentiment also ran strong.¹ An attempt to introduce purity-of blood restrictions was narrowly defeated at the Third General Congregation of the Society in 1573, and the matter was raised again in the Fifth, held in Rome from 03 November 1593 to 18 January 1594. This time, a decree was passed, which excluded Catholics of Jewish descent from entering the Society.²

Several prominent members of the Society were moved to compose letters and memorials in an attempt to persuade the fifth superior general of the Society, Claudio Acquaviva,³ to reverse or moderate the decision, which seemed to have been made under pressure from the Spanish royal court. The three Jesuits, whose correspondence is considered below, were closely connected, either personally or through common associates. The leader of the English Jesuits, Robert Persons, had been sent to Spain by Acquaviva in 1588 to deal with the *memorialista* controversy in the Society of Jesus – which played a significant part in the passing of the 1593 decree. Persons remained there until 1596, directing the Jesuit mission to England and founding English seminaries in Valladolid and Seville. When he received news of the decree, he expressed his disquiet in a letter to Acquaviva, written from the palace of the duke of Arcos in Marchena (about 60 km east of Seville) in May 1594.⁴

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1. For an analysis of the 16th-century controversy about the place of New Christians or *conversos*, that is, Catholics of Jewish descent, in the Society of Jesus, see Reites (1977); on Ignatius and his dealings with Muslims and Jews, see Rastoin (2007); in a collection on Jesuits and contemporary Judaism, see Maryks (2010) and Bernauer and Maryks (2013) (*The tragic couple*, on Jews and Jesuits).

2. The text can be found in Padberg, O'Keefe and McCarthy (1994:204–205).

3. For authoritative biographical information on leading Jesuits, see O'Neill and Domínguez (eds. 2001).

4. On Persons's career, see Edwards (1995), McCoog (2017) and T.H. Clancy in O'Neill and Domínguez (eds. 2001, 3:3103–3104).

Diego de Guzmán (c.1522–1606) was the uncle of Persons's host. He was admitted to the Society of Jesus in 1552 after performing the Spiritual Exercises under Francisco de Borja, later superior general.⁵ Soon afterwards, he and his fellow Jesuit, Gaspar de Loarte (1498–1578), came under suspicion of the Inquisition. Antonio de Araoz (1515–1573), provincial superior for Castile, argued that both should be dismissed. In the event, Ignatius allowed them to stay, calling them to Rome given that they were unwelcome in Spain. Loarte and Guzmán suspected that Loarte's *converso* ancestry was the reason for Araoz's attitude. It is thus not surprising that Guzmán, who had criticised Araoz for a lack of evangelical spirit, was strongly opposed to the 1593 decree. He composed a 2300-word pro-*converso* memorial addressed to the like-minded Pedro de Ribadeneyra (1526–1611),⁶ but most likely intended this to be developed into a formal appeal or memorial to Acquaviva, calling for the abrogation of the 1593 decree.⁷

It is likely that Persons met Guzmán, who was active at the College of St Hermenegild in Seville, at the same time as Persons was establishing the English college there. Moreover, he was associated with both Loarte and Ribadeneyra: Loarte's *Essercitio della vita Christiana* (1562) gave the initial inspiration for Persons's *First booke of the Christian exercise* (1582), which in its various forms became a phenomenal best-seller in Elizabethan England (Pearsons 1998). Ribadeneyra's influential Spanish history of the English reformation was composed at Persons's urging and based on his expanded edition of Nicholas Sander's *De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani* [The Origin and Growth of the English Schism] (Weinreich 2017). Persons and Ribadeneyra met several times in Spain in 1593–1594.⁸

Antonio Possevino met Persons in Rome in about 1575 when he was secretary of the Society.⁹ In 1577, he was sent to Sweden as an undercover papal agent, taking with him Persons's friend and mentor, William Good.¹⁰ Later, Possevino was engaged in diplomatic missions to Poland and Russia. As an Italian Jesuit, probably of *converso* descent himself, he wrote powerful pro-*converso* memorials in 1576 and 1598.

The criticism of the new legislation expressed by Persons, Guzmán and Possevino is testimony to an important strain in Jesuit thinking in the late 16th century. This article analyses

5. For his career, see F.B. Medina in O'Neill and Domínguez (2001, 2:1857–1859).

6. On Ribadeneyra's opposition to the anti-*converso* legislation, see Maryks (2010:187–189); for his career, see O'Neill and Domínguez (2001, 4:3345–3346) *sub* Ribadeneyra.

7. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome (henceforth ARSI), *Instit.* 186e, fols 353–358, analysed by Maryks (2010:182–187). The date of this letter is uncertain. Grateful thanks to Fr Brian Mac Cuarta SJ (former director), for permission to consult and quote from manuscript sources held at ARSI.

8. Persons to Acquaviva, 04 and 16 June 1594, ARSI, *Hisp.* 136, fols 362–363, among several other letters during this period; see also Persons to Ribadeneyra, 10–12 September 1584 (Houlston et al. 2017:495–513; cf. Ribadeneyra 1588).

9. On Possevino, see Colombo (2013:25), Donnelly (1986; 2000), and M. Scaduto in O'Neill and Domínguez (2001, 3:201–203).

10. See Persons's letters (1579) to Possevino and Good (Houlston et al. 2017:40–68).

extracts from their commentary, focusing on the varying rhetorical styles and considering the implications of the conflicting attitudes for our understanding of Acquaviva's *generalate*.

The 1593 Decree

Decree 52 of the Fifth General Congregation, promulgated on Thursday 23 December 1593, argues, on the principle of serving the greater glory of God above all else, that:

The ministries of our Society are exercised with greater fruit in the general quest for the salvation of souls in proportion to the distance Ours are from those human situations that can prove offensive to others. Those, however, who are descended from parents who are recent Christians have routinely been in the habit of inflicting a great deal of hindrance and harm on the Society (as has become clear from our daily experience) ... [whereas] it is more suited to the greater glory of God and the more perfect pursuit of the end it [the Society of Jesus] proposes to itself that it possess workers who are very acceptable to other nations throughout the world.

Even though some participants appealed for reconsideration, the congregation confirmed the decree (Rastoin 2007:8–9). When we consider the circumstances behind the decision, it seems clear that the wording disguises a strategic manoeuvre, using a dubious argument about *conversos*' lack of credibility that Guzmán, Possevino and others could counter with weighty evidence.

Robert Maryks (2010:xxviii) has no doubt that Acquaviva played a decisive role in the promulgation of the law banning *conversos* from the society. What lies behind his support for the decree? He may have been influenced by Manuel Rodrigues (1534–1596) (Weber 2022:546), and Paul Hoffaeus (1530–1608) (Maryks 2010:144), assistants to the general for Portugal and Germany respectively, to question the character of *conversos*. Acquaviva's main motive was, however, to gather support for his campaign to maintain the independence of the Society in Spain from the authority of the Inquisition and the king. Phillip II, 'who seemed unimpressed with the new religious order' (Manning 2021:26), had planned to subject it to external visitation, largely due to the influence of the Inquisition. Moreover, a significant party of Jesuits in Spain, known as the *memorialistas*, were agitating for greater autonomy from the Jesuit curia in Rome.

To assert his authority and maintain the unity of the Society, Acquaviva sent José de Acosta (1540–1600) and Robert Persons on a diplomatic mission to Madrid to secure his right as superior general of the Society to appoint his own Visitors to the Spanish provinces.¹¹ The *memorialistas* fought back, and Acosta himself supported their demand to be heard at a General Congregation.¹² At the Congregation, Acquaviva, prevailing over the Spanish revolt, as we may call it, was

11. The superior general commonly appointed Visitors to provinces of the Society of Jesus to work closely with the Provincial for a specified period of time (O'Neill & Domínguez (2001, 2:1748–1749; cf. Acosta 1590).

12. On the *memorialista* controversy and the negotiations with the king, see Edwards (1995:130–135) and Burgaleta (1999:60–63).

willing to promote a decree which not only satisfied Iberian national feelings and prejudices, especially at court, but would also suit the king's constitutional vision (Rastoin 2007:19). Significantly, both Acosta and Persons were opposed to discrimination against *conversos*: Acosta was one of only two delegates to vote against the decree,¹³ and Persons, as we shall see, was embarrassed by its passing.

Robert Persons

Robert Persons joined the Society of Jesus in Rome in 1575. He returned to England on a mission with Edmund Campion (1540–1581) in 1580, but after Edmund Campion's arrest he crossed to France and remained in exile for the rest of his life. He directed the English Jesuit mission from abroad: first in France, then in Rome and Spain, and was finally appointed as rector of the English college, Rome. He worked tirelessly for the reconversion of England and took upon himself the role of apologist of English Catholicism, writing over 30 printed books (Houlston 2018). The decree reached him in May of 1594, when, *en route* to Madrid, he stopped at Marchena at the invitation of the third duke of Arcos, Rodrigo Ponce de León (1534–1630).

Persons found himself in a difficult position, as he had earlier tried to dissuade Philip's court from pursuing discrimination against *conversos*. On 12 May 1594, he wrote a long letter to Acquaviva, reserving his comments on the decrees of the General Congregation to the very end. Presumably conscious that what he had to say would be less than welcome, he began by enthusing about the state of the college in Seville, and then went on to discuss how he proposed to handle the tension in Flanders between two Jesuits: the Englishman, William Holt, and the Scotsman, William Crichton. This was just the kind of leadership question which Persons and Acquaviva discussed confidentially in their letters – it was safe ground (Houlston 2018). Then Persons (1998) introduced his discussion of the troublesome decree:

Los decretos de la Congregacion han llegado aqui, y otros escriviéron a Vuestra Paternidad lo que sientan y ablan dellos, todos parecen muy bien, en quanto yo veo y oyo de fuera si no es el 3, de genere Haebreorum, porque contra esto ablan muchos, tanto de la Compañia como de fuera. Y los unos lo llevan por via de espirito diciendo que parece poca piedad escluyr alguna generacion de hombres Christianos (quantum in nobis situm est) de los medios dexados de Dios para salvarse que es la religion, si en el siglo curren peligro, y si todas las demas religiones al exemplo de la Compañia, hicieren lo mismo, esta generacion de hombres no tendrian medios seguros de su salvacion. Otros lo llevan por via de buen gobierno, diciendo que será este decreto causa de mucha disunion en la misma Compañia en España, y de agenacion de mucha gente principal de fuera &c. Veremos lo que diran en la corte donde entiendo que será mejor recebido este decreto, que en otra parte, por ser conforme al humor dellos, y al modo de proceder del regno, y algunos ministros del Rey me an ablado algunas vezes significando que sería bien que se

hiciese tal decreto, e yo por entonces allegava muchas razones in contrarium, pero agora bolveremos la hoja, y buscaremos las mejores razones que podremos para defender lo que nuestra madre ha determinado, pues esto será lo más acertado y los hijos an de sugetar sus entendimientos. (pp. 1588–1597)¹⁴

The decrees of the congregation have arrived here, and others will be writing to Your Paternity what is thought and said about them; they all make a very good impression, as far as I can see and hear as an outsider, except no. 3, 'concerning the Hebrew race'. There are many, both in the Society and outside it, who have something to say against this one. Some treat it on the spiritual plane and say that it scarcely seems a pious proceeding to exclude one race of Christians (as far as in us lies) from the means which our Lord left for their salvation, that is the religious life, if they are incurring danger in the world. If all the other religious orders were to follow the example of the Society and do the same, this race of men would be deprived of the sure means of their salvation. Others treat it from the point of view of good government, and say that this decree will be the cause of a great deal of discord within the Society itself in Spain and will tend to alienate many notable men outside it. We shall see what they say at court; I believe that this decree will be better received there than elsewhere, as it agrees with their humour and with the method of procedure in this country. Some of the king's ministers have spoken to me at times and intimated that it would be a good thing for a decree of this sort to be made, and at the time I brought forward many reasons against it; but now we will turn over a new leaf and seek the best arguments we can to defend what our mother has decided; for that will be the most proper thing to do: sons must submit their judgements to hers. From Marchena, 12 May 1594, Your Paternity's unworthy son and servant, Robert Persons. (pp. 318–319) (ARSL, *Hisp.* 136, fols 318–319 [text and translation forthcoming in Houlston et al. 2017:1588–1597]).¹⁴

He treads lightly: at first making use of the 'third person perspective' or 'point of view' to create the effect of an impersonal observer, presenting the reaction to the decree as not coming from himself: 'There are many' who have something to say about the decree, 'some' say that the decree is unjust on a religious level, while 'others' see it as a cause of disagreement within the Society and alienation of influential men outside the Society. Persons does not take responsibility for these opinions but reports them indirectly.

When turning to the reception of the decree at the court, Persons leaves behind the logical objections to the decree and switches to the first person, appealing or with reference to his own experience: he himself has gauged the temperament and knows the procedures at the court. Based on his personal observations, he predicts that the nobility of Spain and, more importantly, the court of Philip will welcome the decree, referring to his own conversations with ministers as evidence. He uses the first person and allows his conscience and his own convictions to shine through when he admits that, while discussing the issue with the ministers, he had brought up many arguments against the exclusion of Jews from the Society. Having laid his true feelings on the line, his overriding submissiveness and obedience to the Society prevail. As a true Jesuit, he will put his personal feelings

13. Acosta (1590), formerly Jesuit provincial in Peru, was the author of a significant early ethnographic work, *Natural and moral history of the Indies* (1588/1589), in which he commented on similarities between Jews and indigenous people in South America. See Hodgen (2011 [1964]:295–349, *passim*), and O'Neill and Domínguez (eds. 2001, 1:10–12) for Acosta's career. Grateful thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this context.

14. Persons also wrote to Acquaviva in Latin and Italian but was by now fluent in Spanish.

aside, make a 180-degree about-turn and argue in favour of the decree. This is what is expected of him as a member of the Society of Jesus and Acquaviva's deputy in Spain.

In this letter, Persons negotiates between two personae: the Jesuit who weighs up principles and submits to the authority of the general and congregation, and the friend and ally who has to deal with difficult situations on the ground. Although the emotional appeal is balanced and muted, it carries weight because of the place of emotion, consolation and desolation in the Ignatian economy of discernment (cf. De Guibert 1986; O'Malley 1993).

Persons had every reason to expect that his account would give Acquaviva pause for thought, but when the general replied on 4th July, he responded only to the news about the college and the problems with Holt and Crichton. In an addendum dated 7th July, he addressed the tricky question of the congregation's decree on involvement in matters of state, which Persons had raised at the end of his letter, following his comments on the decree about *conversos*.¹⁵ Clearly Acquaviva was unwilling to enter into any discussion on the matter, even with a Jesuit on whom he relied so much in his dealings with the Society in Spain.¹⁶

Diego de Guzmán

Diego de Guzmán was the son of the first count of Bailén, Rodrigo Ponce de León, grandfather of the duke of Arcos whom Persons was visiting when he wrote the letter as discussed above. His own, undated letter is concerned to show that the spirit of the new decree was not consonant either with the Society's 'way of proceeding' or its *Constitutions*, which stress the importance of harmony among Jesuits and the qualities expected of an effective Jesuit. Brushing aside the wording of the decree, which argues that Jewish lineage is likely to cause offence and compromise the Society's work in the world, Guzmán noted not only how this purity-of-blood emphasis has already alienated many gifted members of the Society, fuelling tensions and disagreements, but also how it has opened the door for those of lesser credentials but with the 'right' lineage, while excluding those whose qualities otherwise exactly match the requirements.

These compelling arguments about the destructive effect of the decree on the Society were, nevertheless, open to contradiction. Acquaviva himself had challenged claims that the decree was highly unpopular (Maryks 2010:182 n51). Arguably, what distinguishes Guzmán's letter and makes it especially persuasive, is the emotional appeal of a fully realised episode from the life of St Ignatius. Guzmán himself had experienced Ignatius' welcoming attitude to men of Jewish descent, and this personal testimony energises his relation of a meeting between the founder of the Society and a Jew in the service of Pope Paul III:

15. Acquaviva to Persons, 04 and 07 July 1594, ARSI, *Tolet.* 5/II, fol. 347v–348r.

16. For example, he was anxious for Persons to deal with the fallout of Acosta's return from the Congregation; Acquaviva to Persons, 02 February 1594, ARSI, *Hisp.* 76, fol. 10r–v. (McCoog 1999)

Habiéndose catequizado en nuestra casa profesa (según entiendo), donde estaba nuestro padre, quedó con grande amistad y agradecimiento con nuestro padre y, hablando un día con el le dijo, 'Yo, padre mío Ignacio, no quisiera, si Dios fuera servido, haber nacido de este linaje por haber esta gente perseguido y crucificado a Jesús Cristo nuestro Señor.' Y le respondió nuestro padre, '¿Queréis que os diga ... lo que yo siento en esto? Yo os digo ... y de verdad que, si nuestro Señor quisiera darme a escoger este linaje yo quisiera nacer, no escogería otro sino este vuestro; y la razón es por haber querido el mismo Señor escogerlo para si y ser Hijo de Abraham y de David y de los otros patriarcas y reyes; y de ellos nació su santísima Madre la Virgen María con su esposo el Santo José al cual llamaba 'el Padre mío': y también la gloriosa Virgen, su madre, le dijo cuando lo halló en el templo, 'Tu padre y yo os buscábamos con dolor.' Y oyendo esta respuesta de nuestro bendito padre Ignacio, el nuevo cristiano quedó muy maravillado y con gran consolación.

Chatting with him one day, he (the Jew) told him: 'I, my father Ignatius, would prefer, if God were served, not to be born of this lineage, for these people persecuted and crucified Jesus Christ our Lord'.

And our father answered him, 'Do you want me to say what I feel about this? To tell you the truth, if our Lord would like me to choose this lineage to be born of, I would not choose other than yours. And the reason for this is that the Lord himself wanted to choose this lineage for him and to be son of Abraham and David and other patriarchs and kings; and of them was his most holy Mother, Virgin Mary, with her husband Saint Joseph, whom he used to call "My Father." And also the glorious Virgin, his mother, told him when they found him in the temple, "Your father and I were looking for you with pain"'.

And hearing this response from our blessed father Ignatius, the New Christian remained very surprised and greatly consoled. (ARSI, *Instit.* 186e, f. 355r–v [text and translation adapted from Maryks 2010:46]).

It is most unlikely that someone recorded the words of the Jew or of Ignatius but the use of direct speech is an effective literary ploy to create the illusion of authenticity. The Jew, who occupied an important post in the service of Pope Paul III, feels ashamed of his lineage, repeating the standard anti-Semitic charge against his race, which he seems to have internalised. The phrase 'if God were served' is telling, because it moderates even his desire to be free of his Jewish burden, scrupulously exercising the Ignatian principle of indifference or detachment. This is a man of rank and dignity, yet he is all submission. Ignatius matches his humility by modestly offering his opinion, carefully expressed. Both he and his companion can identify with Jesus' humble birth, but in so doing can also claim the honour of descent from the Old Testament patriarchs and the two primary saints of the gospel: the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph.

Through the simple device of a friendly interchange, Guzmán replaces institutional humiliation with the glory of the patriarchs and saints. Ignatius is beatified in anticipation,¹⁷ and the Jew is consoled, a recognisably Ignatian term for a movement of feeling that signals God's favour. In contrast with the logical and practical arguments set out elsewhere in

17. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1566) was formally beatified only in 1609 and canonised in 1622.

the letter, this anecdote speaks to the heart and sensibilities of the reader and to the Ignatian conscience. The uncomplicated style of the direct speech quoted in the letter echoes the simplicity of the message that underlies the most important and fundamental argument against the purity-of-blood decree: Our Lord Jesus Christ and his entire family were of Jewish stock.¹⁸ In the event, neither Guzmán's analysis of consequences, nor his emotional staging of an event from Loyola's life-story, could sway Acquaviva, for whom other considerations were paramount.

Antonio Possevino

In a long memorial, addressed to Acquaviva and dated 13 October 1598,¹⁹ Possevino laments the way in which Jesuits were treating those of Jewish descent who had been called by God to the Society of Jesus – many of whom had played such a pivotal role as teachers, authors and founders of colleges. In addition, he calls attention to the way it contradicts the spirit of the gospel and of Ignatius of Loyola.

For our purposes, the most remarkable aspect of Possevino's memorial is the concluding appeal to the example of Acquaviva's predecessor as superior general, Everard Mercurian (1514–1580; in office 1573–1580). Possevino quotes Mercurian's call for unity among Jesuits:

Omnes enim eiusdem vocationis, et fratres, et filii estis. Itaque nulla sit Sarmatia, nulla Hispania, Germania nulla, nulla Gallia sed una societas, unus in omnibus Deus, omnes in uno Domino Iesu Christo, cuius membra estis.

For you are all brothers and sons of the same calling. Let there therefore be no society of Sarmatians, Spaniards, Germans or Gauls but one Society, one God amongst everyone, everyone in one Lord Jesus Christ, of whom you are the limbs.

Maryks treats this as an attempt to make Acquaviva feel guilty, noting that it is 'unfair' or, at least misleading, because Mercurian, who was elected as a compromise candidate at the third general congregation in 1573, had himself purged the Jesuit curia of *conversos* and removed the volubly pro-*converso* Possevino from his position as secretary of the Society, sending him to the mission in Sweden (Maryks (2010:162–63, 174–175). It might be more helpful to treat the quotation from Mercurian as a diplomatic manoeuvre, especially in view of the implication of the *converso* question in the *memorialista* campaign. Possevino strongly supported both Mercurian and Acquaviva in their resistance to the separatist movement in Spain and here he seems to be urging that if unity is paramount, then all anti-*converso* sentiment should be eradicated in the spirit of the gospel, even if some concession to that sentiment had to be made strategically in 1593–1594.

18. See also Maryks (2010:45), quoting from materials gathered by Pedro de Ribadeneyra for his *Life of St Ignatius*, first published in Latin in 1572.

19. ARSI, *Opp.* NN 333, 89–94 (autograph), *Congr.* 26, 43–48 (copy, with autograph additions), and *Romans* 127 II, 343–348; summarised by Donnelly (1986:10–11), using *Congr.* 26; analysed by Maryks (2010:174–182), quoting from ARSI, *Inst.* 184 II, fols 349–352. Maryks (2010:160–174) analyses Possevino's previous memorial, addressed to Mercurian in 1576.

In his reply to Possevino,²⁰ Acquaviva openly admits that the major consideration for passing the decree was to preserve the goodwill of the king and his principal ministers. The Society would never have the status it deserved unless the decree was passed. He insists that there had been consensus among the fathers concerning the decree. He denies the allegation that racial slurs followed in the wake of the decree or that he himself practised discrimination on racial origins among those already members of the society. When Possevino wrote again, stressing that the anti-*converso* decision at the Fifth General Congregation was the result of the need to consolidate support to defeat the *memorialistas*, Acquaviva seems not to have replied (Donnelly 1986:11–13).

Conclusion

All three appeals to Acquaviva invoke biblical principle and the Jesuit 'way of proceeding' as the basis of their argument. The rhetorical challenge the writers face is how to overcome the general's contrary attachment to the practical demands of expediency. Both Guzmán and Possevino demonstrate the vacuity of the utilitarian argument against the *conversos*, and Persons implies that he has already started to counter anti-Semitism in the Spanish court. But something more is needed: a change of heart. Persons brings his personal dilemma to bear, Guzmán dramatises Ignatius' sympathy for the plight of the Jew at the papal court, and Possevino moulds the example of Mercurian in an attempt to shame his successor.

Acquaviva's resistance can only be adequately explained in the context of the project of his 35-year *generalate*, which, it is commonly agreed, played a critical role in establishing the character of the Society (Fabre & Rurale 2017). Malachi Martin (1987) claims that he was 'in a certain sense the second founder of Jesuitism', arguing that this was largely due to his 'tight rule and administrative strictness', which proved the truth of Ignatius' original perception:

If you succeeded in truly coagulating thousands of men in their hearts and wills, if you provided them with discipline and training and perceptive directives for the place and type of their work, then there were few limits on what you could achieve. (pp. 202–203; cf. Houliston 2017)

Given Acquaviva's interest in this intricate combination of men, one can begin to understand why he stood behind the position taken in the decree: that *conversos* would be a hindrance to the greater work of the Society.

In contrast, Persons, Guzmán and Possevino seem to have kept their distance from Acquaviva's overriding concern with organisation. At the very end of 1595, Persons wrote a letter to the general expressing mild irritation with the provincial perspective of many of the Jesuits he encountered in Spain:

Dios quiere que aya de todos para el exercicio de todos ... por mi particular puedo decir con verdad que en mi vida no he hallado ni más amor ni más amistad que en estos reynos, pero veo alguna falta para las

20. ARSI, *Congr.* 26, 38, summarised by Donnelly (1986:11).

cosas universales ... para todas las cosas universales, y para mayor union con Vuestra Paternidad y con las cosas de Roma ...

It is God's will that there should be men of all sorts for all kinds of calling ... For my own part I can truthfully say that I have never in my life found greater love and friendship than in these realms, yet I see that there is some failure to see things in a broader perspective ... in furtherance of all our interests throughout the world, and with a view to bringing about greater union with Your Paternity and with our interests in Rome. (Persons to Acquaviva, 02 and 09 December 1595, ARSI, *Hisp.139*, fols 122r–125v [text and translation forthcoming from Houliston et al. 2017])

The letter echoes the main thrust of the pro-*converso* arguments proposed by Guzmán and Possevino in their memorials: the need for universality and diversity, a generous outlook arising from wide international experience. As general, Acquaviva could be expected to share this outlook – and indeed it is clear that Persons expects that he does – but he would simply not budge. The structural integrity of the Society, as he saw it, was all important.

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Authors' contributions

M.R.D. conceptualised the project, established fundamental sources and wrote the first draft. V.H. edited the content and gathered additional sources and references, specifically hard copy sources.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human participants.

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The data (sources and documents) supporting this article are available from the corresponding author, V.H., on request.

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