

## **The Politics of Conversion: Antonio Possevino SJ, Rome and the Conversion of the Family of the French Ambassador to Venice (1601–1607)**

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A folder of manuscript correspondence at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) reveals a previously untold chapter in a remarkable story of religious conversion and ecclesiastical and political conflict in early seventeenth-century Europe.<sup>1</sup> The cast of protagonists is striking: Antonio Possevino SJ (1533–1611), Pope Clement VIII (1536–1605), cardinal-inquisitor Giulio Antonio Santori (1532–1602), Cardinal Camillo Borghese (1550–1621)—as both cardinal and Pope Paul V—and, at the centre of the narrative, Philippe de Canaye (1551–1610), ambassador to Venice for Henri IV of France (1553–1610).<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the cache comprises letters and documents written by Possevino and Cardinals Santori and Borghese concerning the conversion of Protestant members of Canaye’s family and household between 1601 and 1606. These documents reveal how Canaye used these conversions and his own recent return to Catholicism to forge a relationship with Possevino and, through him, with eminent Catholic authorities, including two popes. The documents also help to explain why these relationships were ruptured so dramatically when Paul V imposed an interdict on Venice in 1606, showing us why Canaye’s views on the interdict crisis came as a complete surprise to Possevino and the pope. When the interdict crisis provoked a stormy debate about the nature and extent of papal authority, Possevino and Paul V discovered

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1 Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter, ARSI), *Opp. NN.* 324-III. Aside from the ARSI sources analysed here, this essay draws on Canaye’s edited letters: Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, 3 vols, which includes a biography in vol. 1, 1–14.

2 Antonio Possevino, \* 12.VII.1533 Mantua (Italy), SJ 29.IX.1559 Rome (Italy), † 26.II.1611 Ferrara (Italy) (*DHCJ* IV, 3201).

that Canaye completely disagreed with them on the question. Consequently, they also disagreed about how far Canaye owed the pope support during this political crisis. By completing this remarkable tale of friendship and fall out, the ARSI documents show us that, in this period, views on the political significance of Catholic conversion varied radically according to circumstance and that this variation could shock even prominent and relatively worldly churchmen, from Antonio Possevino to the pope himself.<sup>3</sup>

Conversion to Catholicism was the foundation of Canaye's relationship with Possevino and with Rome. In the very first months of his friendship with Canaye, Possevino offered to absolve the ambassador's family of their Protestantism extra-judicially, in the privacy of their own palazzo and without involving the local inquisition. This was a great favour from Possevino but also a significant gesture from the pope. Whilst Jesuits had enjoyed a privilege that allowed them to absolve heretics extra-judicially from 1551, the revocation of this power in 1587 meant that, from then on, private absolutions for heresy were principally in the gift of the Holy See.<sup>4</sup> In the Canaye case, gifts of private absolution from Pope Clement VIII were the starting point for a relationship of obligation between the French ambassador and the papal court. Rome saw foreign converts, particularly prominent foreign converts, as great assets for the Church; Canaye enhanced his value by pledging his dedication to Rome in return for the favours granted to his family.<sup>5</sup> Once established, this relationship of mutual obligation was nourished with favours exchanged between the ambassador and

3 In the last decade there has been much scholarly interest in the social and political significance of conversion in the early modern period, represented and partially driven by two major research projects: the Conversion Narratives project at the University of York and the Early Modern Conversions Project led by McGill University. On the political significance of religious conversion, see Fosi, *Convertire lo straniero*; Luebke, *Conversion and the Politics of Religion*, particularly chapter five by Riches on "Conversion and Diplomacy in Absolutist Northern Europe"; Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism*, particularly chapter 2 and the contributions to the special edition of the *Journal of Early Modern History* edited by Mazur and Shinn, "Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern World", particularly those of Colombo, Dimmock and Mansour.

4 A full history of this privilege by the author of this article is currently under review. The use and significance of the privilege are discussed in Firpo, *La presa di potere dell'Inquisizione romana*, 65–6; O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 148; Pastore, *Il vangelo e la spada*, 338–40; Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 236–37 and 492 and Romeo, *Ricerche su confessione dei peccati e inquisizione*, 63–75.

5 See Fosi, *Convertire lo straniero* and Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism*.

the papal court throughout Clement's pontificate, as well as during the papacy of his successor Pope Paul V.

The breakdown of this relationship in 1606 came as a shock to Possevino. When Paul V accused Venice of infringing on his ecclesiastical authority Possevino assumed that Canaye would be Rome's most valuable ally. But Canaye sided enthusiastically with the Venetians. So far, historians have seen Canaye's stance in the interdict crisis as proof that he was at best ambivalent and at worst a deceptive turncoat. Describing the clash between Canaye and Possevino in the fiery debate that surrounded the interdict crisis, historians such as Gaetano Cozzi and Pietro Pirri SJ have echoed Possevino's disappointment, painting Canaye as an opportunist who had deliberately duped the naïve Possevino in his formerly friendly relations with Rome.<sup>6</sup> By this measure, Canaye was false when he made pledges of obligation to the pope following the conversion of his family. However, the ARSI documents disturb this narrative, showing us that the favours that Canaye had exchanged with Rome were purely religious and in no way inconsistent with his position during the interdict crisis. Crucially, none of his gestures of support for the papacy begged the question at the heart of the interdict crisis: the authority of the pope over temporal matters.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is for this reason that the stark contrast between Canaye's views on papal authority and those of Paul V and Possevino remained hidden. They only emerged during the interdict crisis, which divided numerous diplomats, politicians and churchmen over the thorny question of the relationship between Church and state.<sup>8</sup> Canaye did not think that Rome had jurisdiction over the temporal affairs of Catholics. He thus saw his duty to Rome in religious terms. Possevino and Paul V had a completely

6 Pietro Pirri, \* 11.I.1881 Cerreto di Spoleto (Italy), SJ 31.X.1919 Gozzano (Italy), † 5.V.1969 Rome (Italy) (*DHCJ* IV, 3146). Balsamo, *Antonio Possevino S.I., bibliografo della Controriforma*, 45; Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, 52–3 and Pirri, *L'Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 29, n. 16 and 33–4.

7 On various views on this question during the early modern period see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defence of Republican Liberty*, chapters 1 and 7; De Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri*, part one. The volume also has an index of pamphlets published during the interdict at 369–403; Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 345–57; Tutino, *Empire of Souls*, chapter 3 and Wright, "Why the Venetian Interdict?" On the reasons for the increasing clashes between state and Church in the period after the Reformation, see Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation and the Early Modern State", 398–402.

8 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defence of Republican Liberty*, chapter 7.

different view, seeing Rome's spiritual sovereignty over Latin Christendom as constituting a superior entity to the state and with some authority over temporal affairs. For this reason, Possevino and the pope assumed that Canaye's declaration of obligation to Rome meant that he would support the papacy against Venice's claims of ecclesiastical independence. They were stunned when Canaye saw absolutely no contradiction between his declared loyalty to Rome and his defence of Venice's sovereignty.

The Venetian interdict crisis was not the first time that Canaye faced misunderstanding about his religious and political motives. Back in France, the political significance of Canaye's own conversion to Catholicism had been subject to some controversy. Raised Catholic, Canaye had rejected his ancestral religion to become a Calvinist at the age of fifteen.<sup>9</sup> In 1601 he had reverted to the Catholic faith. By that time, Canaye, aged fifty, was established as a Huguenot gentleman, prominent statesman and trusted counsellor of King Henri IV of France.<sup>10</sup> Just as Henri IV had on his conversion to Catholicism in 1593, Canaye faced accusations of political opportunism when he became Catholic.<sup>11</sup> Suspicions about Canaye's motives were exacerbated by the fact that his conversion occurred after he had acted as a commissioner at the Conference at Fontainebleau.<sup>12</sup> This theological debate was presided over by Henri IV and saw Cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron trounce the Protestant theologian Philippe Duplessis-Mornay. The Conference has been described as a "celebrated and thoroughly contrived" means of publicly undermining Protestant theology.<sup>13</sup> For some, Canaye's conversion was merely the *dénouement* in this stage play of Catholic triumphalism.<sup>14</sup> It has even been claimed that the embassy to Venice was Canaye's reward for his part in the

9 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol.1, book 1, 2. Aside from the ARSI sources, this text provides edited copies of Canaye's letters from his arrival in Italy in 1601 to the end of his embassy in 1607. It also includes a short biography by the editor.

10 Wolfe, "Exegesis as Public Performance", 73.

11 Greengrass, "The public context of the abjuration of Henri IV"; Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV*.

12 Migne, *Nouvelle Encyclopédie Théologique*, 660.

13 Wolfe, "Exegesis as Public Performance", 65.

14 Trevor-Roper, *Europe's Physician*, 123.

whole affair.<sup>15</sup> Others have been less cynical about Canaye's motives but stated that his conversion undoubtedly helped him to fulfil the king's desire to redress France's heretical reputation and diminished political status in Italy.<sup>16</sup> Canaye's actions and correspondence certainly demonstrate an acute awareness of the political importance of religious affinity. Nonetheless, they also betray the characteristics of religious conviction concerning the tenets of Catholicism.<sup>17</sup> Canaye himself flatly rejected accusations that political "ambition had driven [him] to change sides".<sup>18</sup> It seems most likely that, like so many other converts, Canaye's motives were mixed, perhaps indistinguishably, and even to Canaye himself.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is impossible for us to discern Canaye's precise motives for converting, we can learn much from the ways that he and those around him perceived and instrumentalised his conversion and the conversion of his family and household. As recent research on conversion in the early modern period has demonstrated, the narratives constructed by converts and those involved in their conversion were multifarious and unstable.<sup>20</sup> These conversion

15 Hardy, *Criticism and Confession: The Bible in the Seventeenth Century Republic of Letters*, 64 and Trevor-Roper, *Europe's Physician*, 123.

16 Regnault's biography of Canaye, for example, discusses his conversion, move to court, transferral to Venice and need to rehabilitate France's image in swift succession. Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 10. On Henri's strategy, see Tallon, "Henri IV and the Papacy after the League", 21–41.

17 This is particularly evident in Canaye's efforts to convert others, which are ardent and give detailed and carefully reasoned arguments for the superiority of Catholicism. See, for example, "Lettera tradotta di francese in italiano del Sig. Ambasciator di Francia in Venetia ad un altro Amb[asciato]re del Re...", ARSI, *Opp. NN. 324-III*, ff. 366–69.

18 "Ma io desidero parimenti che questo resti in voi. Et che per una volta, per assicurarvi, che coloro molto male giudicano di me, i quali giudicano, che l'ambitione me transversum egerit." ARSI, *Opp. NN. 324-III*, f. 367v.

19 The motives cited by converts are often quite different to those suggested by the context in which they converted, see Katznelson and Rubin, eds, *Religious Conversion: History, Experience and Meaning*, particularly chapter ten, Heyd's "'Double Conversions' in the Early Modern Period". For the multiple motives cited by converted soldiers see Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism*, 101. Discerning motives is also complicated by the process of conversion. Abigail Shinn has stressed that converts "turn" multiple times during the process. For this view see, Shinn, *Conversion Narratives in Early Modern England*, particularly 1–2.

20 Ditchfield and Smith, *Conversions*, 5; Fosi, "Conversion and Autobiography"; Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism*, 98–115; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 97–9 and Mazur and Shinn, "Introduction: Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern

narratives also expose the aims and beliefs of those who constructed them, often taking on “implications or symbolism that stretched far beyond the person involved and their immediate circle”.<sup>21</sup> In our case, Canaye, Possevino and the Roman authorities with whom they corresponded were well-versed in the potential implications of religious conversion and these implications were crucial when they negotiated a relationship of mutual obligation between Canaye and Rome. Both the dynamic and the resulting relationship mimicked the understanding between Henri IV and Clement VIII, which both Canaye and Possevino had witnessed first hand. Henri had sought absolution from Rome to consolidate his power as monarch in France.<sup>22</sup> In exchange Henri offered Rome the assurance of a Catholic kingdom and, as a consequence, an important political ally to counter-balance an increasingly powerful Catholic Spain.<sup>23</sup> Like the monarch, Canaye sought full acceptance into the Catholic Church and all of the religious, political and social advantages that this could bring. In return Canaye offered to use his status to grant the pope and the Jesuits favours. Whilst the relationship was harmonious at first, the clash between Canaye and Rome during the Venetian Interdict crisis revealed that the assumed implications of the Canaye family conversion had been very different for each side. The documents and letters held at the ARSI certainly illuminate the otherwise surprising disagreement between Canaye and Possevino. More

World”, 427–36. Various motives can be seen in the conversions of those at the lower ends of society as they negotiated dangers and opportunities across the globe. On this, see, for example, Siebenhüner, “Conversion, Mobility and the Roman Inquisition in Italy around 1600”, 5–35. It is also evident in the propagandistic and political use of high-profile conversions by both the converted and their new co-religionists. See, for example, the role of Johannes Faber at the papal court or the cases of Henri of Navarre and Queen Christina of Sweden. Åkerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and her Circle*; Fosi, “Johannes Faber: prudente mediatore o ‘estremo persecutore dei protestanti?’” and Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV*.

21 Mazur and Shinn, “Introduction: Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern World”, 428.

22 For extended explanations see Sutherland, *Henry IV of France* and Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV*, particularly 172–76.

23 Domineering Spanish influence at the papal court had, in fact, been a key reason for the delay in Henri receiving a papal absolution. Davidson, “Hispanophobia in the Venetian Republic”, 31; Ricci, *Il sommo inquisitore*, 318 and 323–31; Wright, *The Divisions of French Catholicism*, 9–10.

importantly, they illustrate that views on the political significance of Catholic conversion were extremely varied and particularly potent in a Europe where ideas about the nature of Church and state were in radical flux.

### **Forging Friendship through Favours: Possevino and the Canaye Family in Venice**

Antonio Possevino SJ was a crucial conduit between Philippe de Canaye and Rome, during the conversion of Canaye's family and afterwards. Possevino deliberately sought Canaye's friendship as soon as the ambassador arrived in Venice. To Possevino's satisfaction, Canaye reciprocated his overtures almost as quickly. Possevino's experience working as a missionary in France, his academic endeavours and his work as a papal diplomat provided a starting point for their correspondence.<sup>24</sup> Canaye was not only a statesman, but an intellectual and lawyer who had published works on travel and analysis and dialectic.<sup>25</sup> Even in their earliest interactions, Possevino and Canaye offered to help one another. Indeed, in his very first letter, it seems that Possevino gave Canaye the opportunity to educate his sons at the Jesuits' college in Bologna, the nearest of the Society's schools to Venice. Canaye said that he was deeply grateful for this gesture, which only enlarged his existing debt to Possevino. For, Canaye claimed, he was already obliged to the Jesuit for his support of Henri IV's efforts to secure an absolution from Clement VIII. And Possevino continued to give the ambassador reasons to be grateful. Shortly after meeting Canaye in person, Possevino went to the highest echelons of the Catholic Church to negotiate the private absolution of the ambassador's wife and daughter who had remained Protestant at Canaye's conversion. Possevino was keen to secure converts who could help to improve the fortunes of the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus across Europe, whilst Canaye was eager to increase France's influence and prestige in Italy. As we shall see, the friendship between Possevino and Canaye quickly became a relationship of

24 On Possevino's extraordinary literary output and its influence, see Balsamo, *Antonio Possevino S.I., bibliografo della Controriforma*. On his diplomatic career, see *ibid.*, 24–39; Donnelly, "Antonio Possevino, S.J. as Papal Mediator between Emperor Rudolf II and King Stephan Báthory"; Mund, "La mission diplomatique du père Antonio Possevino (S.J.) chez Ivan le Terrible".

25 Canaye's publications comprise: *L'Organe, c'est-à-dire l'instrument du discours...*; *Le Voyage du Levant de Venise à Constantinople* and *Remonstrances et discours faits et prononcez en la Cour et Chambre de l'édit établie à Castres Albigeois...*



mutual obligation with implications that went far beyond the limits of the ambassador's family and household in Venice.

Possevino solicited Canaye's friendship as soon as the ambassador came to Venice. Within a month of arriving in the city in October 1601, Canaye had already received letters and presents from the Jesuit. Whilst the packet of letters at the centre of this study does not contain the correspondence that Possevino wrote to Canaye, Canaye's initial reply is edited in a collection of his letters.<sup>26</sup> From this document we learn that Possevino wrote to Canaye before the ambassador had even taken up his official residence; the Jesuit clearly meant to secure Canaye's friendship as soon as was possible. Possevino would not be disappointed by the ambassador's response. In his first letter to the Jesuit, Canaye spoke of the "honour" that he had held for Possevino "for such a long time". It was an admiration that stemmed from Canaye's knowledge of Possevino's "learned writings, long voyages" and his "great negotiations" as a papal diplomat. Responding to Possevino's advances, Canaye made it clear that he wished to know and befriend Possevino, whom he had regretted not meeting earlier, "neither in Lyon, nor elsewhere", during Possevino's sojourns in France.

Canaye immediately approached Possevino as an ally of France, writing that his desire to befriend Possevino was based on the Jesuit's role in relations between Henri IV and Rome. In his first letter to Possevino, Canaye thanked him for the "ardent affection and singular attention with which [he] had taken on the affairs of the king...at the most uncertain times for his fortune". Here Canaye referred to Possevino's involvement in the events leading up to Clement VIII's absolution of Henri IV. Extant sources do not reveal exactly how Possevino contributed to the resolution. His most concrete recorded role in events came in October 1593, when Clement VIII sent him to intercept and stop the king's ambassador, the Duc de Nevers, who was en route to Rome to convince the pope of the sincerity of Henri's conversion.<sup>27</sup> As Henri was a relapsed heretic and, technically, excommunicate, the pope could neither recognise him as king nor, consequently, receive his ambassador. We do not know precisely what transpired between Possevino and Nevers when they met at the Italian border in the Grisons. However, the fact that the duke went on to Rome and that he and

26 For this letter and the following quotations from it, see Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 33–4.

27 Sutherland, *Henri IV of France*, vol. 2, 515.



Possevino remained on good terms suggests that the Jesuit did not make a particularly robust attempt to thwart the king's efforts to communicate with the pope.<sup>28</sup> Possevino certainly expressed his support for the king elsewhere. In April 1595, in a letter to Henri IV himself, Possevino expressed his gratitude for the honour that the king had shown to him through Nevers on that very occasion.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Possevino stated that he was most eager to talk about the question of the reconciliation with the king in person, so that he could "say that which it would be possible to commit to writing only poorly".<sup>30</sup> Possevino then reiterated his support for Henri IV as ruler of France, suggesting that the Jesuits could help the king to re-establish his power directly, working to "reduce" rebellious cities like Toulouse and Dijon "to obedience" through their colleges.<sup>31</sup> This offer of help was, in large part, an attempt to secure the Jesuits' return to France, whence they had been expelled in 1594.<sup>32</sup> Though Henri did not take Possevino up on his proposals, the Jesuit's support was clearly known and appreciated by the king's men, including Philippe de Canaye. A few years later, in a letter to the French ambassador to Rome, d'Alincourt, Canaye claimed that Possevino "was employed in the re-benediction of His Majesty with such affection, that all of France is in debt to him".<sup>33</sup>

In Venice, Possevino quickly gave Canaye more personal reasons to feel grateful to him, by helping the ambassador to establish himself and his family in Italian Catholic society. One way that Possevino did this was to offer Canaye's sons places at the Jesuits' nearest college in Bologna. Although we do not have Possevino's letter to Canaye proffering this favour, the proposal is evident in the first lines of Canaye's response. In this letter, Canaye spoke of his ardent desire that his eight and ten-year old sons would soon

28 Indeed, it seems that Possevino had very good relations with the Duc de Nevers, who was also a great supporter of the Society in France. Boltanski, *Les Ducs de Nevers et l'état royal*, 339, n. 24. On Nevers, see also, Wolfe, "Piety and Political Allegiance".

29 The letter is located at Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Franc. 3992, ff. 88–9 and is published in Fouquieray, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jesus en France*, vol. 2, 437–38.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy*, chapter 1.

33 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 20–1.

receive their “first instruction in piety and letters under the teaching of [Possevino’s] Society”.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Canaye wrote that he had been crushed with disappointment to find that the Jesuit house in Venice did not instruct lay youth. Expressing his gratitude to Possevino, Canaye claimed that he had received Possevino’s letters just as he was complaining about this fact; Canaye was, he wrote, well-aware of the “great need that [he] had of the assistance that [Possevino] [was] pleased to offer”. In return for this favour, Canaye said that he was ready to “serve, obey and honour” Possevino for his entire life and “by all means that he could”.<sup>35</sup>

The letters held at the ARSI reveal that, soon after this, Possevino offered Canaye an even greater personal favour: the private absolution of his wife, daughter and members of his household from Calvinist and Lutheran heresy.<sup>36</sup> Through these absolutions Canaye’s family would be fully received into the Catholic Church and Italian society; they would no longer cause scandal because of their religion and, of course, they were not divided in confession from Canaye himself. Moreover, they would attain all of this without the discomfort of undergoing an inquisitorial process. Possevino wrote to the Roman Inquisition to solicit special faculties of absolution for the Canaye family at the end of 1601. In February 1602, Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santori gave Possevino permission to act, writing that “His Holiness [Clement VIII] is happy to concede the faculty to Your Reverence to absolve from heresy in both *fora* the Lord Ambassador of France resident in that Supreme Republic [of Venice], his lady consort and all of his family”.<sup>37</sup> That Santori also gave Possevino permission to absolve Canaye is particularly interesting. Canaye had renounced his Protestantism in France and another letter by Possevino in the ARSI collection indicates that he abjured his heresy to the Bishop of Paris.<sup>38</sup> Canaye’s request of an

34 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 33.

35 Ibid.

36 Whilst Canaye’s official biography states that Renée Canaye converted in France, the letters between Possevino and Cardinals Borghese and Santori in ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III reveal that it was Possevino who heard Renée Canaye’s abjuration of Calvinism and that of her daughter, also named Renée, in Venice in 1602.

37 “...la S[anti]tà Sua si è contentata di concedere facultà a V[ostra] R[everen]tia di poter’ assolvere in utroq[ue] Foro dall’heresie il S[ign]ore Ambasciatore di Francia residente appresso cotesta Ser[enissi]ma Republica, la S[igno]ra sua consorte, e tutti della sua famiglia...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 289r.

38 “Havevo io prima di tutta questa attione trattato separatam[en]te col S[igno]r

additional absolution from Possevino through the pope underlines his desire to seek the approval and favour at the highest levels of the Catholic Church. Santori died a few months after sending Possevino his letter and it was Cardinal Camillo Borghese who would confirm Possevino's faculties of absolution and negotiate further favours for Canaye in Rome. The favours did not stop with the absolution of Canaye's wife and daughter. In November and December 1605 and January 1606, Possevino secured further faculties from Borghese, by that point, Pope Paul V, to abjure and absolve Anne de Colignon, George Krilgauser and Erhard Perolt, all members of Canaye's household in Venice and former adherents to the teachings of Calvin and Luther.<sup>39</sup>

By securing faculties to absolve the Canaye family and household privately, Possevino granted Canaye a significant favour, sparing him and his kin the exposure and potential discomfort that came with an inquisitorial process. It is true that, by the early seventeenth century, inquisitorial trials for those who were repentant, particularly foreigners, were relatively light processes.<sup>40</sup> Those who were willing to convert were given a summary procedure at a tribunal to renounce their heresy and receive an absolution.<sup>41</sup>

Amb[asciato]re circa il far, che la S[igno]ra Ambasciatrice sottoscrivesse; di sua mano ha scritta Abiuratione, ma dicendomi il S[igno]re Amb[asciato]re ch'esso avendola fatta in mano del suo Ves[cov]o di Parigi non l'aveva punto sottoscritta, et che in Francia non si usava..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 352v.

39 The abjurations of Colignon, Krilgauser and Perholt can be found in the same cache of letters referenced above: "Nous Antoine Possevin & en vertu, et auctorité de la faculté à nous donnée par n[ost]re S[ain]t Pere Clement VIII ayant ouy v[ost]r re presente confession libre, et volontaire, et ayants este devement informez de vostre vraye et S[ain]te conversion...declarons, que vous George Krilgauser avez esté heretique formel...de la secte de Luter...À cause de quoy vous estes tenu les abiurer, et renoncer à toute doctrine contraire, ou different de celle, que reçoit et enseigne la sainte Eglise catholique Romaine..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 377r. "Nous Antoine Possevin & en vertu, et auctorité de la faculté à nous donee par n[ost]re S[ain]t Pere Clement VIII...declarons, que Erhard Perolt de Norimberg aves esté hérétique formel...de la secte de Luter...À cause dequoy vous estes tenu les abiurer, et renoncer à toute doctrine contraire, ou differente, de celle, que reçoit, etenseigne la sainte Eglise Catholique, Romaine comme nous vous enjoignons le faire: et moiennant la dite abiuration..." *Ibid.*, 379v.

40 Fosi, *Convertire lo straniero* and Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism*, chapter 2.

41 Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 215–18 and 492. On this system of "spontaneous appearances" see also Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 61–2; Brambilla, "Il 'foro della coscienza'" and Fosi, "Conversion and Autobiography". On conversion in Venice, see Rothman, "Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation".

However, for the Canaye family this minor discomfort would have been exacerbated by the structure of the Venetian Inquisition. For, in Venice, the Holy Office was run by lay figures who dominated even the pope's representatives on the tribunal.<sup>42</sup> The Venetian state would have been unlikely to do anything to alienate or aggravate the ambassador of France. France was a major power which could provide a valuable ally against the threat of Spanish supremacy in Italy with which the Venetian Republic had allied in the past.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Protestantism was not a problem *per se* for a diplomatic family in Venice where Protestant ambassadors such as the Englishman Henry Wootton were not necessarily disadvantaged because of their religion.<sup>44</sup> All that said, shrewd diplomatic residents in the Republic were keen to present themselves as "good Venetians".<sup>45</sup> As the newly arrived French ambassador, keen to promote a strong Catholic France, Canaye would not have wanted one of his first engagements with the Venetian state to have been the inquisitorial process of his wife and child, no matter how painless the procedure may have been. Possevino himself stated that Canaye was ashamed of his wife's religion and had desired "to get rid of the scandal of that which is known of his lady wife's heresy".<sup>46</sup> Moreover, as Possevino suggested in his account of Renée's conversion, a private absolution would limit this scandal as "not everybody knew that the lady, his wife, had been a heretic".<sup>47</sup> Thanks to Rome, Possevino could grant private absolutions in the secrecy of the ambassadorial residence, saving Canaye and his family from any unfavourable exposure whilst alerting Rome to the ambassador's devotion to Catholicism.

This favour to Canaye required significant effort on Possevino's part: in order to secure the necessary powers, Possevino had to

42 Thomas Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy*, 64–5.

43 Venice and France had formed an alliance against Milan in the Italian Wars. Mallet and Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State*, 61.

44 On Wotton, see Ord, "Venice and Rome in the addresses and dispatches of Henry Wotton"; Smith, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 2 vols and Soranzo, "Il P. Antonio Possevino e l'ambasciatore inglese a Venezia (1604–1605)".

45 Ord, "Venice and Rome in the addresses and dispatches of Henry Wotton", 7.

46 "...per lievar[e] lo scandalo di quel che si sapeva dell'heresia della S[igno]ra sua moglie." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 361v.

47 "...non tuti sapevano che la S[igno]ra Sua moglie fosse stata heretica." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 351v.

convince the pope that the Canaye family deserved the privilege. By the turn of the seventeenth century, private extra-judicial absolutions were restricted to those whom the pope thought deserving. This contrasted starkly to the situation in the late sixteenth century when, between 1551 and 1587, many Jesuits, including Possevino, had enjoyed a privilege that allowed them to absolve heretics independently and to reconcile them to the Catholic Church.<sup>48</sup> Bishops too had enjoyed a similar power until its restriction by Pope Pius V (1505–1572).<sup>49</sup> From the late sixteenth century, after Sixtus V had revoked the Jesuits' privilege, almost all confessors had to go to the Roman Inquisition to request the necessary faculties to absolve converts privately.<sup>50</sup> All of these faculties were granted at the discretion of the pope; technically, they were in his gift alone. To absolve the Canaye family and household, Possevino went straight to the top of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, to Santori, Clement VIII and then Borghese (in the last case, as both a cardinal and then pope).

Ultimately, this channel of communication with Rome was one of Possevino's greatest gifts to Canaye. For relations between France and the papal court were key to Canaye's diplomatic mission in Venice. In the previous decades, Spanish dominance in Italy, bloody religious war in France and the French succession crisis had left France with few supporters in Rome and diminished influence in Italy.<sup>51</sup> Canaye firmly believed that to restore what had been lost France needed to establish a strong relationship with Rome. As Canaye advised Henri IV from Venice, the most permanent and important powers in Italy were "Rome; and this State [of Venice] and

48 Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 236–37 and 492.

49 Brambilla, *Alle origini del Sant'Uffizio*, 546–48. For an example of faculties given to individual bishops, see the case of Egidio Foscarari of Modena in Al Kalak, *Il riformatore dimenticato*, 104.

50 "...Sisto V sotto li 19 di febrari 1587 riuoco alli Padri della Compagnia la facultà di assolvere in foro conscienti[a]e gl'heretici manifesti, et più N[ostro] Sig[no]re nella bolla in Coena D[omi]ni ha riuocato assolutamente la facolta di assolvere gl'heretici in foro conscienti[a]e. Et che però detti Padri p[er] l'avenire avertano di no[n] servisse di tal facultà, ma havendone bisogno, la dimandino dalla Sacra Cong[regatio]ne del S[an]to Officio, che se gli concederà con patenti particolari, come spesso la concede a diversi Vescovi, e persone regolari." Rome, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, *Stanza Storica D-4-a*, 6r.

51 Tallon, "Henri IV and the Papacy after the League", 32.

the grand Duke [of Tuscany]".<sup>52</sup> Of these, Canaye believed that Rome would be the most effective and receptive ally, telling the French secretary of state for foreign affairs, Villeroy, that "if we must spend, this should be in Rome, it is there by my judgement that it would not be scorned".<sup>53</sup> To ensure the growth of French influence, the French ambassador to Rome would push for the nomination of cardinals favourable to Henri IV and seek to ingratiate other influential churchmen.<sup>54</sup> Whilst these were the key routes for pursuing a Franco-Roman alliance, Canaye's correspondence reveals that he saw another opportunity for diplomacy with Rome in the channel of communication set up by Possevino. Canaye certainly saw Venice as a field for international diplomacy in other cases, attempting to use his proximity to the English ambassador, Henry Wotton, as a means of negotiating an alliance between Henri IV and James VI of England.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Canaye used his growing friendship with Possevino to gain access to the Jesuit's network at the papal court. Moreover, as we shall see, it was not long before Canaye sought to contact the pope directly to confirm his desire for a relationship of mutual appreciation and obligation between Rome and France.

Possevino too acted as a diplomat, seeking to further the interests of the papacy and, tied to these, the interests of the Society of Jesus. Possevino's experience as a papal diplomat had inextricably tied conversion, diplomacy and politics in his approach to eminent foreigners. This is evident in Possevino's interactions with other ambassadors to Venice. With the same speed and energy as he had pursued Canaye, Possevino also tried to cultivate a relationship with the English ambassador, Henry Wotton. Wotton's comments about Possevino's efforts to befriend him certainly make it clear that this was not to be a simple friendship but a relationship of political and religious alliance. Compared to Possevino's dealings with Canaye, interactions between him and Wotton took longer to get off the ground. The two men were put in touch by Canaye. However, as a Protestant, Wotton could not publicly welcome Possevino at the English embassy.<sup>56</sup> Eager to satisfy his curiosity

52 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 178.

53 *Ibid.*, 203.

54 Barbiche, "L'influence française à la cour pontificale sous le règne de Henri IV" and Tallon, "Henri IV and the Papacy after the League", 32.

55 Smith, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, vol. 1, 382–3.

56 Soranzo, "Il P. Antonio Possevino e l'Ambasciatore inglese a Venezia", 390.

about the famous Jesuit, Wotton agreed to meet Possevino in the shadowy cloister of the Basilica di Santi Giovanni e Paolo, a church that Wotton visited frequently to study the pictures.<sup>57</sup> Speaking to the doge some years later, Wotton claimed that Possevino had attempted to convert him in the hope of making him “one of his lambs”.<sup>58</sup> This statement reveals that Wotton saw Possevino’s desire to befriend him as a desire to win his support for the Catholic cause. Moreover, Possevino’s alleged comments to Wotton indicate that his ambitions for religio-political diplomacy went far beyond the borders of the Venetian Republic. For, according to Wotton, Possevino had been ordered to pursue him by Pope Paul V himself who wanted him to know “how much His Holiness admired and esteemed His Majesty [James VI]” and how he “would prove it on every occasion *salva la religione Cattolica*”.<sup>59</sup> To Possevino’s disappointment, Wotton would not convert. On the contrary, he harboured hopes of making Venice a Protestant state.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, Possevino’s efforts and Wotton’s reaction to them, indicate that, although retired, Possevino had not fully relinquished his role as a papal diplomat. Moreover, although he was not won over by Possevino’s flattery, Wotton certainly saw him as a significant political negotiator. He even intercepted Possevino’s correspondence with other Jesuits, claiming “to have a special appetite for the packets that pass to and from those holy fathers”.<sup>61</sup>

In Venice, Possevino passed numerous packets between Canaye and Rome, acting as a channel between the French ambassador and the papal court, offering favours on both sides and forging a friendship on behalf of Rome. Whilst he may not have succeeded with Henry Wotton, Possevino found ambassador Canaye receptive to his advances. As well as securing private absolutions for Canaye’s family and household, Possevino offered Canaye a means of communicating his good will and obligation to the pope himself. In doing this, Possevino convinced Rome that he had won a valuable ally for the Catholic Church.

57 Ibid., 390–91.

58 Smith, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, vol. 1, 345, n.1.

59 Ibid., 443 and 444.

60 Ord, “Venice and Rome in the Addresses and Dispatches of Henry Wotton”, 3.

61 Smith, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, vol. 1, 345.



### **The Politics of Conversion Between Venice, Rome and France**

Possevino and Canaye certainly convinced Popes Clement VIII and Paul V that Canaye was a worthwhile ally. From the start, Possevino peppered his requests for faculties for the Canaye household with promises of the ambassador's deep loyalty to Rome. Canaye himself cultivated his image as an obedient servant for the Catholic cause. He even wrote directly to Clement VIII and Borghese to pledge his obligation to the pope. Rome provided a receptive audience for these overtures. The Canaye family's conversion and Canaye's declarations of obligation spoke directly to the papacy's strategy to re-conquer Europe for Catholicism through the conversion of prominent foreigners. Moreover, the papacy had a special interest in the preservation of a strong and loyal Catholic France, a reality that was by no means secure at this point. Both Clement VIII and Paul V revealed their favour for the influential French statesman, granting numerous religious privileges to his household whilst flatly refusing to give Possevino faculties to absolve Canaye's low born compatriots in Venice. In return for this extraordinary benevolence, Clement and Borghese made it clear that they expected Canaye to convert others and to support Catholicism in France. Whilst Roman authorities had a broad desire to save souls, their exceptional favours to the Canaye family were strongly motivated by the fact that Canaye's nationality, social status and political power made him an attractive ally for the Church.

Possevino's letters to the Roman Inquisition indicate that he considered the private absolution of the Canaye family and household as a means of benefitting the Catholic Church. Possevino was deeply familiar with the use of conversion as a means of diplomacy from his work as a papal diplomat. During nearly a decade's service, Possevino had sought to restore Catholicism across Europe through the conversion of prominent statesmen and rulers in Sweden, Poland, Russia, Transylvania and Germany.<sup>62</sup> Now in Venice, Possevino wrote to Rome promising that religious favours to Canaye would make the ambassador significantly obliged to the pope. Possevino claimed that Canaye and his wife would make their debt to Rome known to other prominent Frenchmen. They had, Possevino claimed, a "singular joy and obligation" that "did not permit them to hide the help [that they had] received from

<sup>62</sup> On Possevino's diplomatic missions see, for example, Donnelly, "Antonio Possevino, S.J. as Papal Mediator between Emperor Rudolf II and King Stephan Báthory"; Mund, "La mission diplomatique du père Antonio Possevino (S.J.) chez Ivan le Terrible".

His Blessedness".<sup>63</sup> Possevino used this same promise during the pontificate of Paul V, when he explicitly assured the pope that granting further private absolutions to the Canaye household would inspire the ambassador to tell all those at the French embassy of his loyalty to Rome, "expressing it incessantly and on every occasion with most grateful memory to whatsoever French lord and others who pass through there".<sup>64</sup>

As his allusion to the embassy suggests, Possevino linked Canaye's value as a convert directly to his status as an eminent French diplomat. Status was not only key to Canaye's value as a convert but also his role as a potential convertor. If the pope granted absolutions and other favours to Canaye, Possevino claimed that the ambassador would not only speak of his obligation to Rome but convert other prominent men and work to secure Catholicism as the sole confession in France. In a letter to Cardinal Borghese after the conversion of Canaye's wife and daughter, Possevino linked the absolutions to Canaye's obligation to convert more souls, saying that the pope's benevolence had "animated [Canaye] to help others towards conversion".<sup>65</sup> According to Possevino, Canaye had "conceived great hope from the eternal affection shown to him" by Clement VIII and so hoped "to be able to use himself for the help of souls".<sup>66</sup> Possevino even went as far as to provide proof of Canaye's newly-found evangelical zeal. He sent to Rome a letter that Canaye

63 "...con singolare loro gaudio et oblig[at]ione...Et perciò che il vigore della D[ivina] gratia non gli permette di tener[e] celato il benef[ic]io ricevuto da sua B[eatu]dine..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 361rv.

64 "Però supplico humilmente V[ostra] S[igno]r[ia] Ill[ustrissi]ma che si contenti di proporre à S[ua] B[eatu]dine se vorrà colla Sua S[an]ta Benedittione confirmare la conversione della detta Damigella, et concederle tanto a lei, quanto a chi la confesserà per una volta Indulgenza plenaria in forma di Giubileo...non dubito, ch'essa co'l S[igno]r Amb[asciato]re ne resterebbono obligatissimi a S[ua] S[anti]tà poiche incessantemente in ogni occasione mostrano con gratissima memoria a qualunq[ue] Sig[no]re francese, et altri, i quali passano di qua..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* ff. 324-III, ff. 372v-73r.

65 "Ma perché Sua B[eatu]dine nel Brieve diretto al S[igno]re Amb[asciato]re l'animava ad aiutar[e] altri alla co[n]vers[i]on[e] poichè costà io avevo mandato una sua, ch'egli scriveva al Casabuono huom dottiss[im]o ma heretico..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 361r.

66 "...molta speranza ha co[n]ceputo sua Ecc. dal paterno affetto mostratogli nel sudetto Brieve, di poter[e] adoperarsi per l'aiuto dell'anime, havendo egli la mira à quel ch'egli come cons[igli]e di stato, et del segreto consiglio del Re, et come huom che ha havuto maneggi sì grandi, va con orationi a Dio, et co[n] discorsi maturi facendone qualche orditura." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* ff. 324-III, f. 361v.

had written to his friend, the distinguished Hellenist and scholar Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) whom Possevino described as “very learned but heretical.”<sup>67</sup> Canaye’s attempts to convert Casaubon only resulted in the deterioration of their friendship. But, according to Possevino, this did not deter Canaye who desired that “the roots of heresy be exterminated from the Kingdom of France” and that “a true peace be brokered between that kingdom and other Catholic crowns”.<sup>68</sup> Attempting to secure papal favours for Canaye, Possevino emphasised the ambassador’s status and his ability to use it for the Church. “As a counsellor of state, and of private counsel to the king” and a “man who has dealt with such great affairs”, Canaye would be able to make a significant contribution to the security of Catholicism in France.<sup>69</sup>

Canaye also declared his support of the Church to its highest authorities. Just like Possevino, he wrote to Rome, thanking the cardinal-inquisitors and the pope for their favour and, in return, pledging his obligation to them. Writing to Cardinal Borghese in July 1603, Canaye spoke of his desire to be “often in the service of the Holy Apostolic See” and asked that Borghese “deign to favour him with some of its commandments”.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Canaye gladly allowed his letters to others to be copied, translated and shared. This meant that the pope and cardinals in Rome could read solid evidence of Canaye’s condemnation of the “absurdity and blasphemies” of “a heretic” and learn of his efforts to convert prominent Protestants like Casaubon and his fellow French statesmen.<sup>71</sup> What is more, both Canaye and his wife wrote directly to Clement VIII, passing their letters to Possevino who sent them on to Borghese who then found

67 ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 361r.

68 “Al rimanente di detta Corte, ma molto più a, i fondati propositi, et desiderii, i quali ha il S[igno]re Amb[asciato]re che da radici si sterpi l’heresia del Regno di Francia, et ch’una vera pace si corrobori fra l’altre corone cattoliche con quel Regno...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 361v.

69 ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 361v.

70 “...tutto q[ue]l poco ch’io posso et voglio et qu[an]to piacerà alla M[aes]tà Div[in]a a concedermi di vita in q[ues]to mondo sarà semp[re] prontiss[imamen]te speso in serv[it]io della S[an]ta Sede Ap[osto]lica et in suo part[icola]re. Del che però desiderando farli più tosto fede coi fatti ogni volta che si degnerà favorirmi di qualche suo commandam[en]to...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 370r.

71 See, for example, “Lettera tradotta di francese in italiano del Sig. Ambasciator di Francia in Venetia ad un altro Amb[asciato]re del Re...”, ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, ff. 366–69.

“an opportune moment” to share them with the pope.<sup>72</sup> Possevino does not appear to have retained a copy of Renée Canaye’s letter. We do however have Philippe Canaye’s correspondence with Clement, which he used to tell his conversion story with much detail and drama. As a Protestant, Canaye had been a miserable heretic, but now he had found the truth and, along with it, true joy.<sup>73</sup> Canaye’s narrative emphasised his devotion to his new confession and even implied that he had been persecuted for his faith. According to his letter, the Canaye family had to move to Venice because Philippe de Canaye’s conversion had brought them “resentment” and “hatred” in France.<sup>74</sup> In his letters to Rome, Canaye added vivid colour to Possevino’s portrait of a man who was an unquestionably devoted and obliged servant of the Catholic Church.

At first, it seemed that Canaye would live up to the image painted in this correspondence. For Canaye and Possevino collaborated in two key areas to bolster and expand Catholicism in France. Firstly, Possevino urged Canaye to rehabilitate the Society in France, as they had been expelled in a cloud of suspicion in 1594.<sup>75</sup> Canaye willingly obliged. Attempting to repair the situation on behalf of Possevino and Clement VIII, Canaye wrote to Villeroy, the French secretary of state for foreign affairs. In his letter, Canaye reiterated Possevino’s

72 “Ricevei la l[ette]ra di V[ostra] R[everen]tia con l’avviso della ric[evu]ta de’ Brevi, et con la risposta della S[igno]ra Ambasciatrice di Francia a N[ostro] S[igno]re, et con la poliza ancora scritta a V[ostra] R[everen]tia dal S[ign]or Ambasc[iato] re; et no le ho scritto altro dopo, perché aspettava commodità di parlarne prima alla S[anti]tà Sua, alla quale mandai subito a vedere tutte le dette scritture.” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 302r.

73 “Nam ut de me ipse dicam vitae[ue] ante actae errores breviter, et ingenue quo decet dolore, ac pudore repeta[m], H[er]etica ego pravitate ab ineunte aetate infectus, non solum totos triginta an[n]os et amplius in Calvinismi professione misere perdidit, sed et p[er] id tempus nullis sumptibus, nullis periculis laborib[us] nullis, aut vigiliis peperci, quo mortiferu[m] istud virus q[uae] latiss[im]e propagaretur. Unde et partium illorum favorem in nos eximium, nostram[ue] apud illas auctoritatem non mediocrem coaluisse sciunt o[mn]es, qui me norunt. Sed o immensam, et impervestigabilem Dei misericordiam.” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 357r.

74 “Quod ubi Christianiss[im]o Regi meo Clementiss[im]o innotuisset, qui nostra opera apud h[er]eticos, et domi, et foris in rebus gravissimis s[a]epe usus fuerat, quantus[ue] ex n[ost]ra convers[ion]e dolor eorum, et odium in nos exarsurum esset facile providebat. Ipsius M[ag]istri placuit dum securitati et dig[n]itati n[ost]rae consultu[m] cupit, ut in Italiam statim legatus apud Venetos me conferrem.” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 357r.

75 Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy*, chapter 1.

argument to Henri IV, stating that the king should welcome the Society back as it could be of particular service to the crown.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, a letter of January 1603 suggests that Possevino and Canaye worked together from Venice to repair the Jesuits' damaged reputation in France. Writing again to Villeroy, Canaye refers to a letter that he had forwarded to him from Robert Persons SJ (1546–1610), a Jesuit who was despised in France as a pro-Spanish traitor.<sup>77</sup> In his letter, Canaye attempted to restore Persons' reputation in France, which, in the eyes of many, had tainted that of all Jesuits.<sup>78</sup> It is evident from this letter that Canaye and Possevino were acting together as nodes of communication between France and Rome. Canaye explicitly asked that Villeroy "respond to [him] about this matter, so that [he] could show Father Possevino" who was working so ardently "in the service of His Majesty" and "the good of his State".<sup>79</sup>

Canaye also helped Possevino with the production and censorship of books. As a missionary and diplomat to Protestant Europe, Possevino knew well that printed material could have a decisive influence on the fate of Catholicism.<sup>80</sup> In a letter to Cardinal Borghese about absolving Canaye's family, Possevino stated that the effect of printed controversies was particularly acute in France, claiming that "as soon as the Most Christian King [Henri IV] shows an inclination to either admit the decrees of the Holy Council of Trent, or to readmit our Society in that kingdom, or to begin some other matter in favour of the Catholic religion, such books come out, the kind of which not only tempt those who read them but...divert the hearts of other princes from the obedience that is owed to the Holy See."<sup>81</sup> Fortunately, Possevino had some

76 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 2, 67–8.

77 Houliston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England*, 6. Robert Persons, \* 24.VI.1564 Nether Stowey (England), SJ 4.VII.1575 Rome (Italy), + 15.IV.1610 Rome (Italy) (DHCJ III, 3103).

78 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 2, 28–9.

79 Ibid.

80 Balsamo, *Antonio Possevino S.I., bibliografo della Controriforma*.

81 "Si concorre poi in un pensiero, che subito ch'io Re Chr[istianissi]mo mostra inclinazione o di admetter[e] il S[an]to Conc[ili]o di Trento, o di riadmettere la Comp[agni]a n[ost]ra in quel Regno, o di spuntare oltre in qualche altra parte a favor[e] della religione cat[tol]ica. Subito escano fuori tali libri, i quali non solo si tenta che gli legga chi può far più danno, ma che sta[m]pati in varie lingue, divertiscano i cori di altri Principi dalla dovuta ubidienza a cotesta S[an]ta Sede." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 362v.

help identifying these books so that he could inform the inquisition about them. In this letter to Borghese, Possevino offered details of one such tract. Although Possevino did not name Canaye, he suggested that his information came from somebody acutely aware of the religious and political situation in France, claiming that “one who would know” had assured him that the anonymous author was, in fact, the “First President of Paris”.<sup>82</sup> A note from Borghese suggests that Possevino’s source was, most likely, Canaye, revealing that “that book in French [that has] emerged against the holy Council of Trent” was “consigned [to Possevino] by the Lord Ambassador”.<sup>83</sup> The inclusion of the information on the book in the middle of a discussion about Canaye, as well as the fact that Possevino had recently secured a licence for Canaye to read prohibited books, confirm that the ambassador was the most likely source of Possevino’s intelligence.<sup>84</sup> Canaye’s own letters provide concrete evidence of his willingness to help Possevino to promote Catholicism through the control and production of printed books. In September 1602, Canaye had gone straight to the top of the French government on Possevino’s behalf, writing again to the secretary of state and asking him to supplicate the chancellor for a privilege that would allow Possevino to print his works of Catholic controversy in France.<sup>85</sup> Canaye was not only helping to stem the flow of Protestant books in his homeland but also to support the production and circulation of Catholic tracts.

Clement VIII responded positively to Canaye’s offers of support, expressing his delight at his family’s inclusion in the Catholic fold and urging Canaye to continue his work to convert others. In October 1602, the pope even honoured the ambassador and his wife by writing them each an Apostolic brief. Clement opened his

82 “Non vi è poi nome di Auttore nè il luogo ove sia stampato. Se bene chi può saperlo, mi ha assicurato, che l’Auttore è il p[rim]o Presid[en]te di Parigi, il quale era solito suggerire tali memoriali...” ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 362r.

83 “Parimente si è letto in Congreg[ation]e quel che ella ha mandato notato nel foglio a parte circa quel libro in francese venuto in luce contro il sacro Concilio di Trento consignatole dal d[ett]o S[igno]r Ambasc[ciato]re.” ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 310r.

84 “Et tanto di questa gr[at]ia e quanto della Patente, per cui gli sia lecito legger[e] i libri prohibiti, sua Ecc[ellenza] bacia humiliss[men]te i piedi di Sua B[eatu]di ne pregandole insieme coll’Ill[ustrissi]ma S[igno]ra sua moglie feliciss[im]o non solo questo nuovo anno, ma molti altri per aiuto di S[an]ta Chiesa.” ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 362r.

85 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 414.

brief to Canaye telling him that he had read his humble account of conversion “with singular pleasure” and expressing his joy at Canaye’s return “within the Catholic Church, just as so many lost sheep are returned to the sheepfold.”<sup>86</sup> The pope then praised Canaye for ensuring that his wife and child “were made Catholic”, a fact that Clement says he had learnt from Possevino’s letters. According to the pope, “God, the author of all blessing, is always blessed when an unfaithful wife converts through a faithful husband”.<sup>87</sup> Clement did not want Canaye to limit his good work to his own household. Closing his letter, the pope stated that he “hopes that, by that same grace—the helper of God—[Canaye] converts other valiant men”.<sup>88</sup> After telling the ambassador what he would like him to do Clement turned to what he had already done for Canaye. Implying that this was a relationship of mutual obligation, Clement stated that what “has been done by Apostolic authority in this righteous matter” had been done freely and willingly and that he wished to “make clear [his] inclinations” to the ambassador.<sup>89</sup> Although couched in the benevolent rhetoric typical of Apostolic documents, Clement’s letter clearly communicated his satisfaction at the conversion of the Canaye family, his favour for Canaye and his ardent desire that Canaye serve the Church by converting others.

Clement would soon go even further in his expressions of favour towards Canaye, satisfying Canaye’s requests for numerous privileges and gifts. Indeed, it seems that when Clement declared his inclination to help Canaye, Canaye took him at his word. In

86 “...sed ut a filio nostro in Christo Dilecto scriptas, et multis nominibus nobis pergratas, sic accepimus et legimus, plane singulari cum voluptate... et intra Ecclesiam Catholicam, tamq[uam] dispersae oves, ad ovile reducta sunt...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 358r.

87 “...cumulo amplificasti, dum scribis Dilectam in Christo filiam, nobilem mulierem Renatam uxorem tuam, et filiam etiam vestram Catholicas esse factas, de quo etiam scripsit Dilectus filius Antonius Possevinus vir religiosus, et ad leverandas Christo animas sedulus operarius, et fidelis. Iterum et semper benedictus sit Deus, auctor omnium benedictionu[m], qui per virum fidelem convertit mulierem infidelem...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 358v.

88 “...sic etiam speramus, quod eadem Dei adiutrice gratia, etiam robustiores viros convertes...” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 358v.

89 “Quod attinet ad cetera, quae in hoc pio negotio ex nostra Apostolica auctoritate acta sunt, et quorum nomine nobis gratias agis, ea nos libenter, et propensa inprimis voluntate egimus, atq[ue] indulgimus, et quoties usus venerit, aut tu id a nobis expetiveris, eandem erga te, et tuos propensionem ostendimus.” ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 359r.



December 1602, just two months after Clement had sent the Canayes papal briefs, Cardinal Borghese wrote to Possevino to communicate the pope's consent to two significant requests. Borghese reported that "His Holiness was happy to concede the Most Excellent Lord Ambassador of France a licence to have a chapel in his palace" and "to concede a licence to the said Lord Ambassador to hold and read prohibited books".<sup>90</sup> There were some small restrictions on these favours. Before installing the chapel, the chosen place in the palazzo had to be inspected by the Patriarch of Venice, Matteo Zane, to ensure that it was situated "where it is possible to celebrate Mass decently and with due veneration".<sup>91</sup> Regarding the licence to read prohibited books, Borghese made it clear that if any "difficulties occur to the said Lord Ambassador in reading such books, he must tell [Possevino] and confer with [Possevino], without sharing it with others".<sup>92</sup> Whilst at first these restrictions may appear to diminish the favours given to Canaye, their necessity underlines the gravity of the pope's gestures; these were privileges that were not to be given or exercised lightly. Moreover, on top of these favours, Clement granted many lesser requests to Canaye, such as indulgences for holy images in the ambassadorial household.<sup>93</sup> With the concession of these gifts, Clement reiterated his hope that Possevino could encourage the Canayes to increase and spread

90 "...Si è anco S[ua] S[anti]tà contentata di concedere licenza al sud[ett]o S[igno]re ambas[ciato]re di tenere et leggere libri prohibiti..." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 310r.

91 "...la S[anti]tà Sua si é contentata di concedere licenza all'Ecc[ellentissi]mo S[igno]r Ambas[ciato]re di Francia di haver una cappella nel suo palazzo, dove decentem[en]te et con la debita veneratione si possa celebrar Messa et scrive con l'alligata per ordine di N[ostro] S[igno]re a Mons[igno]r Patriarca costì, che visiti il luogo, et vegga, che sia decente remittendo S[ua] S[anti]tà all'arbitrio di Mons[igno]r Patriarca di far mettere nell'Altare la pietra sacrata ferma, opure che si possa usar Altare portatile." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 310r.

92 "...che le difficultà che occorreranno al d[ett]o Sig[no]r Ambas[ciato]re nel leggere tali libri, le comunichi, et conferisca con V[ost]ra R[everen]tia senza dilatarsi con altri, acciochè ella con la sua prudenza et zelo possa ricordare quanto giudicarà espediente et quanto p[rim]a mandarò la Patente in mano di V[ost]ra R[everen]tia." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 310r.

93 "Hà parim[en]te Sua S[anti]tà concesse alle corone, et quadretti d'imagini da essa mandate alla med[esim]a Madama Renata, et sua figliuola, le Indulgenze, che V[ost]ra R[everen]tia vedrà notate nel qui alligato foglio di mano di Mons[igno]r Ill[ustrissi]mo Card[ina]le Antoniano. Et perché in esso si fa mentione ancora delle Indulgenze solite di S[ua] S[anti]tà che sono in stampa, io ne mando pur con questa quattro carte." ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, f. 306r.

their faith. As Borghese communicated in a letter, the favours were “consequences of the kindness of His Blessedness” and Possevino should use them as “a signal to further enliven the Lord and Lady Ambassador to make greater progress in the Holy Catholic Faith.”<sup>94</sup>

Clement VIII’s willingness to favour Canaye is unsurprising, for this pope had a particular interest in converting foreigners in Italy. Clement’s papacy saw the consolidation of strategies that had begun at the end of the sixteenth century, which focused on promoting Catholicism by converting non-Catholics visiting Italy. This approach began in the late 1560s, as the threat of native heresy decreased and popes from Pius V onwards aimed to defend Italian Catholics from heresies purveyed by visitors from non-Catholic countries. Italians were banned from visiting heretical states and bound to ostracise and denounce non-Catholic foreigners when they were discovered on their peninsula.<sup>95</sup> Many foreign visitors to Italy appeared before the Roman Inquisition spontaneously to renounce their heresy and so avoid this persecution.<sup>96</sup> The Holy See also recognised that many foreigners did not convert because of fear and so offered non-Catholic visitors more appealing, extra-judicial means for reconciling with the Catholic Church in Italy.<sup>97</sup> The pontificate of Clement’s predecessor, Sixtus V, saw the transformation of extra-judicial institutions like penitentiaries, churches and colleges into places of Catholic catechesis, conversion and absolution. These papal measures operated alongside similar independent Catholic institutions, such as national churches and hospices. At first Rome sought to neutralise the threat of heresy in Italy with these measures, but pontiffs soon realised that they could also use them to win new supporters who could repair the reputation of Catholicism in places where the Church was threatened or even destroyed. With these aims in mind, it is

94 “Questi effetti della benignità di S[ua] B[eatu]dine possono del paterno affetto suo dar da conderare più di quello ch’io non saprei dire; et V[ost]ra R[everen]tia haverà campo da poter tanto più animar contesti S[igno]ri a far qui maggiori progressi, che tuttavia se ne sperano, nella S[an]ta Fede Cat[olli]ca.” ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 306r.

95 Fosi, “Conversion and Autobiography”, 440. Another relevant source on these themes is, Canepa, “La bolla ‘In Coena Domini’”.

96 On spontaneous appearances, see Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 61–2 and Brambilla, “Il ‘foro della coscienza’”.

97 Fosi, “‘Con cuore sincero e con fede non finta’”, pp. 219–24 and “Conversion and Autobiography”, 439–42.

understandable why Possevino thought that the pope would be pleased to hear Renée Canaye's claim that she had converted to Catholicism because of the wonderful things that she had seen of the Church in Italy, which had thoroughly dispelled the lies that she had been told by Protestants.<sup>98</sup>

In the eyes of the early modern papacy, illustrious converts could do even more than their more lowly compatriots to promote the Catholic cause, whether amongst their own countrymen in Italy or the ruling classes of their native lands. For this reason, Clement VIII, Paul V and their successors showed a particular interest in supporting high-profile Protestant converts. This phenomenon would reach its zenith when Pope Alexander VII (1599–1667) had the formerly Lutheran Queen Christina of Sweden carried through Rome's Porta del Popolo on a sedan chair designed by Gianlorenzo Bernini.<sup>99</sup> Under Clement VIII and Paul V, eminent converts like the Bavarian scientist Johannes Faber acted as crucial mediators and were valued for their ability to advertise the benevolence of the Church to their compatriots in Italy and at home. This approach to Catholic re-conquest was summed up by Marcus Welser, a politician and scientist from Augsburg who corresponded with both Faber, Possevino and Canaye. For Welser, if foreign "gentlemen left satisfied with this province and especially Rome and the lands that are under the authority of the Church" it would be "one of the most lively remedies" for the "poison [that] the cursed Lutheran heresy has spread".<sup>100</sup> More than this, converts like Faber lobbied for more favourable laws for Catholics in their native countries and acted as interlocutors for their countrymen at the papal court.<sup>101</sup> For Clement VIII, Paul V and later popes, prominent foreign converts were a key means of promoting and preserving Catholicism within Italy and of supporting Catholic interests across Europe.

Securing high profile converts from France was of particular

98 ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 324-III, ff. 344–45. Fosi, 'Roma e gli "ultramontani"', 364–65; Fosi, "Johannes Faber: prudente mediatore o 'estremo persecutore dei protestanti'?", 195.

99 On the conversion of Queen Christina of Sweden see, Åkerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden*.

100 Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana, *Fondo Faber*, vol. 414, ff. 273v–274v, quoted in Fosi, "Johannes Faber: prudente mediatore o 'estremo persecutore dei protestanti'?", 194.

101 Fosi, "Johannes Faber: prudente mediatore o 'estremo persecutore dei protestanti'?", 198.

importance at this time. For the papacy, a Catholic government in France meant the assurance of a powerful Catholic state and, consequently, an important ally for Rome. This was key in a Europe in which the religious and political landscape was fluctuating and the pope's religious and political influence was increasingly challenged. It was for precisely this reason that Clement VIII had absolved Henri of Navarre, making him King Henri IV. If Henri was Catholic, he would be recognised as king by all of his subjects and a strong Catholic king in France could go some way to ensuring the triumph of the Church in the bloody confessional disputes that had long ravaged the kingdom. Moreover, as the guarantor of the king's conversion and, therefore, of his political power, the pope hoped to secure France's political allegiance, as well as its religious conformity. This was crucial for the papacy at the turn of the seventeenth century as it sought to liberate itself from dependence on Spain, which was becoming an increasingly domineering influence across Europe and on the Church.<sup>102</sup> French backing could also help papal schemes to keep peace in Europe, to defend Christendom against the Turk and to restore Catholicism to England where Clement VIII was acting as a supra-national mediator in attempts to either create or impose a Catholic monarch.<sup>103</sup> Further eminent French converts were especially valuable as, despite the conversion of the king, neither Clement VIII nor Paul V could be entirely sure of the religious relationship between Rome and France, where prominent Gallican factions successfully blocked the introduction of the decrees of the Council of Trent and even expelled the Jesuits during Henri V's reign.<sup>104</sup> Henri himself sought to secure the Catholicism of France and prove his sincerity to Rome by converting his family and ministers, a task in which he was actively encouraged by Pope Paul V and supported by Jesuits.<sup>105</sup>

That Clement's concessions to the Canaye household were part of his strategy to win political support from France is evident in the clear contrasts between the grave favours that he granted to Canaye's household and his attitude towards ordinary French

102 Sutherland, *Henry IV of France*, 500–03.

103 Schneider, "A Kingdom for a Catholic?"

104 Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy*, chapter 1 and Martin, *Le gallicanisme et le réforme catholique*.

105 Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy*, 114–18; Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV*, 175–76.

converts in Venice. Whilst Clement gave numerous favours to the French ambassador and those around him, he flatly refused Possevino's request for a more general amnesty for French Protestants in Venice. Though we do not have a copy of Possevino's letter to Cardinal Santori asking for this faculty, the cardinal's response makes the nature of Possevino's request clear: "it did not appear [opportune] to His Holiness to concede the faculty that you seek in your [letter] to absolve other French heretics that you refer to in this city daily".<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that Possevino believed that he could secure further converts amongst the French community in Venice, Clement did not want private absolutions to be given out at Possevino's discretion. Instead, Canaye wanted to monitor and control these gifts of mercy, an attitude that he displayed across the board. Even in Rome, broader amnesties to "Ultramontane" English, French, Flemish and German converts were closely monitored by the papal inquisition and penitentiaries, and almost always involved a visit to their courts.<sup>107</sup> The mercy of a truly private absolution, performed entirely extra-judicially, was one that the pope wished to retain in his gift. The exclusivity of the favour to Canaye from Rome is underlined in another letter from Santori which stated that "this authority is conceded only – as it was said – for the Lord Ambassador and those of his family, and not for other Frenchmen or Ultramontanes that can be found there" in Venice.<sup>108</sup> It is likely that Clement's reserve about extending the faculty was influenced by the fact that the Venetian Inquisition could have viewed such absolutions as an infringement of its jurisdiction.<sup>109</sup> That Clement conceded the absolutions to the Canaye family all

106 "Le facultà che ricerca nella sua di assolvere altri Francesi heretici che capitassero in codesta città alla giornata, non è parso a Sua S[anti]tà per hora concederle..." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 292r.

107 On the *ultramontani*, see Fosi, "Roma e gli 'ultramontani'". On early modern Rome as a centre of conversion for foreigners, see Fosi, "'Con cuore sincero e con fede non finta'"; "Conversions de voyageurs protestants dans la Rome baroque" and "Preparare le strade, accogliere, convertire nella Roma barocca". The motivations and methods of this approach are explored extensively by Fosi, *Convertire lo straniero*.

108 "Et questa autorità se le concede solamente come si è detto per il S[igno]re Ambasc[ia]to[re] et quelli della sua famiglia, et non per altri Francesi et Oltramontani che si trovano costì..." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 289r.

109 On the inquisition in Venice, see Calimani, *L'Inquisizione a Venezia: eretici e processi*, and Del Col, "Organizzazione, composizione e giurisdizione dei tribunali dell'Inquisizione romana nella repubblica di Venezia (1500-1550)".

the same underlines the strength of his favour towards the French ambassador.

By 1606, numerous Protestants in Canaye's household had received private absolutions from both Clement VIII and Paul V, the latter providing support as cardinal and then as pope. Moreover, Possevino was in talks with Rome about securing more influential conversions through the ambassador. These absolutions were gifts from the pope, only possible "with the authority given to [Possevino] by Our Most Holy Father...the Pope of the Universal Church".<sup>110</sup> Such great gifts came with great expectations. Indeed, according to Borghese, they were done in the hope that Canaye would work "for the good progress of the Holy Catholic faith in France".<sup>111</sup> As we have seen, this was not a vain hope on Borghese's part, or even a vain promise made by Possevino on Canaye's behalf. It was an understanding that was actively cultivated and, at least partially, fulfilled by Canaye himself. Seeking to secure status for his family in Venice and allies for France in Rome, Canaye appealed to the popes' hopes for a strong, Catholic and loyal France, establishing a diplomatic friendship in which political and religious aims appear to have been inextricably mixed.

### **The Venetian Interdict Crisis**

The analysis above suggests that, at first glance, there was an intrinsic complementarity between the political and religious aims of Canaye and France on the one side, and Possevino and Rome on the other. Nonetheless, both Canaye and Rome would soon learn that their assumptions about the nature and extent of their obligation to one another were startlingly different. Whilst Possevino and Paul V thought that Canaye would support Rome politically, Canaye demonstrated his obligation in religious terms. It took a crisis to expose this fundamental contrast. But when Paul V placed an interdict on Venice in 1606, effectively excommunicating the entire state, Possevino and Canaye would quickly take opposing

110 "Io Ant[oni]o Possevino della Co[m]p[agni]a di Giesù coll'auctorità a noi data dal San[tissi]mo nostro Padre Clemente Ottavo, Papa dell'universale Chiesa..." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 346r.

111 "La l[ette]ra di V[ostra] R[everen]tia de VI si è letta in Cong[regatio]ne avanti N[ostro] S[igno]re agli XI del p[rese]nte; et in risposta per hora non mi occorre dirle altro, se non che sua S[anti]tà col suo singlar zelo, et vigilanza nella cura Pastorale va facendo quelli ufficii, che giudica espedienti, et profittevoli per il buon progresso della S[an]ta fede Cat[oli]ca nel Regno di Francia." ARSI, *Opp.* NN. 324-III, f. 297r.

sides.<sup>112</sup> This split was a shock to Possevino. Assured by the ambassador's previous pledges and acts of support to the Church, he had assumed that Canaye would be Rome's most powerful ally. In the event, the debate sparked by the Venetian interdict crisis revealed that Canaye's understanding of papal power was radically different to that of Possevino and Paul V. Canaye did not split from his Roman allies because he was a traitor. But rather, Canaye and Possevino clashed because they had entirely different views on the loyalties of a Catholic and therefore, the nature of Canaye's obligation to Rome.

The Venetian Interdict crisis revealed that many prominent Catholics held wholly divergent views about the pope's position and power. Though it was, on the surface, a dispute about Venice using civil law to punish or restrict representatives of the Church, the interdict crisis quickly became a debate over the nature and extent of papal authority and, through this, the relationship between Church and state.<sup>113</sup> Whilst the Venetian government claimed that churchmen could no longer be exempt from the jurisdiction of civil magistrates, Pope Paul V argued that, as part of the Church, clergy were to be punished only by the ecclesiastical courts.<sup>114</sup> Venice also refused to observe the pope's demand that the Venetian Patriarch visit Rome for examination before appointment to the office and passed laws to stem the acquisition of Venetian land by religious groups or individuals, particularly those strongly allied to Rome.<sup>115</sup> Again, Paul V contested these points, stating that Venice had no right to revoke this ecclesiastical privilege. In sum, many in the Venetian government believed that all temporal matters were to be dealt with by the state, even if they involved members of the Church hierarchy. Paul V, on the other hand, thought that he had the power to intervene in all Church matters, over and above temporal power. In April 1606, in a radical display of this belief, Paul V placed an

112 On the Venetian Interdict, see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, chapters 7 and 8.

113 On the underlying conflict and the details of the events as they unfolded see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, particularly chapters 7 and 8. Wright, "Why the Venetian Interdict?" argues that these questions were played out elsewhere too. Much of this debate was conducted through pamphlets: see Part I of De Vivo's, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri*, which also has a list of such pamphlets at 369–403.

114 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 342.

115 *Ibid.*, 343–4.



interdict on Venice, effectively excommunicating the entire state and preventing any ecclesiastical activity from taking place in the Republic. From the rupture between Rome and Venice, a bitter war of words emerged with some of the greatest theologians and canon lawyers in the Church debating fundamental principles about the nature of Christendom.

Canaye and Possevino quickly found themselves at the centre of this debate. In fact, Possevino and the Society more broadly were both catalysts and victims in the conflict. The Jesuits were seen by many as the ultimate representative of universalist papal power. Indeed, Venice used some of the laws challenged by Paul V to curb Jesuit expansion in the Republic.<sup>116</sup> The centrality of the Jesuits was evident when Venice decided to single out the Society and expel them from the Republic in retaliation to the interdict. After their departure, Canaye reported on the many calumnies that circulated against the Society in Venice. According to Canaye, people claimed that the Jesuits had “despoiled many houses, sent a huge amount of money to Rome, held records of the confessions of notable persons, and, three or four days before their departure, burnt a great quantity of papers out of fear that they would be seen”.<sup>117</sup> The Society was further embroiled in the debate when some of its most prominent members, including Possevino and Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino, emerged as key voices in a vociferous pamphlet war.<sup>118</sup> In these debates, Possevino was one of the ardent supporters of the papal cause and certainly the most acerbic in his criticism of Venice.<sup>119</sup> Canaye too quickly took his place in the discussions, assuming an even more prominent role than Possevino. With Spain firmly on the side of Paul V, pressing him not to give an inch in compromise, Canaye’s king Henri IV took a very different tack. Recognising an opportunity for France to act as a powerful adjudicator, buoying up its friendships with both Venice and Rome, the king proposed himself a neutral mediator in the conflict.<sup>120</sup> As Henri’s ambassador

116 Pirri, *L’Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 24 and 26.

117 Canaye quoted in Pirri, *L’Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 29, n. 16.

118 De Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri*, part one. For the key points of view in these pamphlets see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 379–81 and Tutino, *Empire of Souls*, chapter 3.

119 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defence of Republican Liberty*, 370.

120 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 405–07; Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l’Europa*, 52–3 and De Franceschi, *Raison d’état et raison d’église*.

to Venice, Canaye would work as a lead negotiator alongside d'Alincourt in Rome and Cardinal du Perron.<sup>121</sup>

For Possevino, Canaye's new position was a great boon for the prospects of the pope and the Society in Venice. Having pledged himself as a loyal servant of Rome, surely Canaye would now prove to be its most valuable ally. Writing to Superior General Acquaviva in May 1606, Possevino told him of his efforts to confirm Canaye's backing for the pope's cause. Firstly, he had lent Canaye the works of Juan Azor SJ (1535–1603) "to make him read the three long chapters of the work in the fifth book where ecclesiastical liberty is fully dealt with".<sup>122</sup> More than this, Possevino claimed to have spent more than three months with Canaye "instructing him, so that, writing to France, he would confirm the mind of the king in working for His Holiness more than the Venetians".<sup>123</sup> In a memorandum to Rome, Possevino explicitly linked Canaye's value as an ally during the interdict crisis to the sense of obligation that Possevino had inspired in him: "As regards the ambassador of the Most Christian King [Henri IV], who has for nearly five whole years been turned towards religion by Possevino, it was undertaken so that he learnt the most justified matters to be [those] of the Pontiff, through which he was persuaded to protect the immunity of the Church against the Venetians."<sup>124</sup> In sum, Possevino claimed that he had made Canaye a faithful servant of the Church and that the ambassador could now be relied upon to fight the pope's corner.

At first, it seemed that Possevino's efforts had paid off. In the initial emergency of the crisis, Canaye provided practical aid to the Society, sending "his gondola with his men to help" the Jesuits and saving Possevino's books before storing them safely in his own palazzo.<sup>125</sup> Possevino wrote that this generosity led him and other Jesuits in the city to believe that Canaye should be put "in first place" as their ally, over and above the Spanish ambassador.<sup>126</sup> For Possevino, Canaye's recent generosity only confirmed his value to the Jesuits, which he had already proven by working in

121 De Franceschi, *Raison d'état et raison d'église*, 235.

122 Juan Azor, \* ? . I.1536 Lorca (Spain), SJ 18.III.1559 Alcalá de Henares (Spain), † 19.II.1603 Rome (Italy) (DHCJ I, 316). Pirri, *L'Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 141–42.

123 Pirri, *L'Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 142.

124 Ibid.

125 Pirri, *L'Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 141–42.

126 Ibid., 141.

“longer service” to them than his Spanish equivalent. Moreover, as a Frenchman Canaye would be a more valuable ally all round. For, according to Possevino, the Jesuits’ reputation in Venice had already been improved by association with the French ambassador, helping to dispel notions that the Society were pernicious Spaniards. Once again, Possevino explicitly linked this service rendered by Canaye to the Canaye family’s conversion, claiming that the Jesuits’ reputation in Venice had improved as Canaye’s “entire household” was “passed through [their] hands in order to be converted”. Because of his recent service and their longer friendship, Possevino believed that the Society could and would benefit more from Canaye’s help than that of the Spanish ambassador.

Possevino would soon be disabused of this notion. For, in the very same months that he was writing to Rome of Canaye’s sure support, Canaye was, in fact, condemning Possevino and the pope to both the king of France and his secretary of state for foreign affairs. Canaye wholly disagreed with Paul V’s actions, stating that “His Holiness has much occasion to suffer, as everybody sees that he has treated a Republic that is so Catholic so brutally and for such ill-founded reasons”.<sup>127</sup> The ambassador wrote a long letter to the king, explaining that the sovereignty that the pope claimed was an innovation and that Venice had acted in no way outside of its civil jurisdiction.<sup>128</sup> Canaye criticised Possevino too. Writing to their mutual friend Marcus Welser, Canaye stated that though he “reveres him on merit of his candid piety” and “recognises that he has great obligations to him” he condemned Possevino’s “acerbity against this Republic” which was based on “wicked information about it [that was] most far from the truth”.<sup>129</sup> Writing to Claudio Acquaviva from Paris, Henri IV’s Jesuit confessor, Pierre Coton SJ (1564–1626), revealed that Canaye had criticised the Jesuits to the king himself, warning Henri IV that neither Possevino nor any other Jesuit should be trusted as negotiators in the conflict between Venice and Rome.<sup>130</sup> Canaye certainly followed his own advice to the king, manifestly refusing to involve the Jesuits in negotiations,

127 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 229.

128 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 5–10. The letter is summarised and discussed in De Franceschi, *Raison d’état et raison d’église*, 228–30.

129 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book, 109.

130 Pirri, *L’Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 33, n.3. Pierre Coton, \* 7.III.1564 Loire (France), SJ 30.IX.1583, Arona (Italy), + 19.III.1626 Paris (France) (*DHCJ* II, 983).

or to support the pope's cause. Considering whether he would help to restore the Society to Venice, Canaye remarked, "I shall leave the honour of their reestablishment to my successor".<sup>131</sup> Canaye was similarly cool when his old friend Possevino sought his help directly, asking him to convey a letter and some of Bellarmine's writings to the doge and to pass on some of Possevino's own texts to Henri IV. Canaye claimed that he could do neither because, as the French ambassador, he had to maintain the neutral mediating position that had been so carefully assumed by his king.<sup>132</sup> Possevino was dismayed at Canaye's unwillingness to help. He would surely have been appalled if he had known that, in his correspondence, Canaye had been anything but neutral regarding the papal cause. As early as the summer of 1606 it looked like Possevino and the Jesuits had given up on Canaye. In July of that year the English ambassador Henry Wotton reported that the Jesuits in Rome had requested that Canaye stop interceding on their behalf.<sup>133</sup> Soon enough complaints about Canaye would arise in the Roman cardinalate, with the legate to France, Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, complaining to Villeroy that Canaye "had not behaved as he ought to and had taken the side of the Venetians too much".<sup>134</sup>

Scholarship has interpreted Canaye's actions towards Possevino as nothing short of treachery. For Jesuit historian Pietro Pirri, they demonstrated that Canaye was not to be trusted; that he was a *persona molto equivoca* whom Possevino had befriended out of "an innate naivety of spirit" and with terrible consequences.<sup>135</sup> For Pirri, Possevino had been duped by Canaye's promises of loyalty and the suspicions and reservations of his Jesuit colleague Father Castorio were a much more accurate judgement of the ambassador's true character.<sup>136</sup> The bibliographer Luigi Balsamo agreed that Possevino's faith in Canaye was *mal posta*, and that, in reality, Canaye should have felt many obligations towards the Jesuit.<sup>137</sup> The

131 Quoted in Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, 52.

132 Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, 52–3. On France's position more generally see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 405–07 and De Franceschi, *Raison d'état et raison d'église*.

133 Smith, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, vol.1, 356–57.

134 Quoted in De Franceschi, *Raison d'état et raison d'église*, 511, fn. 1.

135 Pirri, *L'Interdetto di Venezia del 1606*, 29, fn. 16.

136 *Ibid.*, 33–4.

137 Balsamo, *Antonio Possevino S.I., bibliografo della Controriforma*, 45.

great historian of the interdict Gaetano Cozzi echoed Possevino's own shock at Canaye's position, writing that the ambassador's actions illustrated nothing less than a radical change of attitude towards the Jesuits.<sup>138</sup>

Whilst it is certainly correct to say that Canaye's interactions with the Jesuits and authorities in Rome changed during the interdict crisis, this change did not occur because his previous promises of obligation were made in bad faith. Rather, whilst Canaye was a devoted member of the Catholic Church and a loyal servant of the pope as its head, he did not believe that Rome had jurisdiction over temporal powers when it came to temporal questions. For Canaye, this distinction was long established across Christendom. For him, Possevino's claim that "His Holiness is no less sovereign in temporality than in spirituality" was nothing less than a "new article of faith".<sup>139</sup> Moreover, Canaye saw this new tenet as not only a threat to Venice, but to all Christian states, claiming that if the pope truly believed this "it is not only the condemnation of this Republic that is entirely certain; but it will also be necessary to abolish a good part of the ordinances of our Kings and to teach a new Jurisprudence to our Parlements" in France and, ultimately, to "injure all the Crowns of Christianity".<sup>140</sup> Canaye even argued that it was necessary to clarify the distinction between the realms of Church and state in order to preserve the office of the papacy from allegations of corruption from heretics. In sum, for Canaye it was not he but Paul V and his supporters who were trying to change the authority of the papacy and, therefore, the extent of loyalty and obedience owed to Rome by the state of Venice and by Canaye himself.

If Canaye believed that the pope did not have direct jurisdiction over temporal matters, his pledges of obligation and loyalty to Rome were most likely made with purely religious matters in mind. Indeed, considering Canaye's views on the separation between papal and temporal jurisdiction, it is unsurprising that he saw no contradiction in his claim of obedience to the pope and his support of the Venetian state in a dispute over temporal sovereignty. How could Canaye be disloyal to Rome over a temporal question if Rome had no claim over temporal jurisdiction? In his letter to Welser, Canaye made his views on the proper extent of papal obedience

138 Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, 52–3.

139 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 218.

140 *Ibid.*, 2 & 8.

clear. Attempting to explain what he saw as Possevino's excessive claims for papal jurisdiction, Canaye said that the Jesuit was not acting "according to his own conscience" but rather "according to the necessity of his fourth vow" of obedience to the papacy and "what he believed to be appropriate to his profession".<sup>141</sup> With this comment, we see concrete evidence that Canaye thought that Possevino's interpretation of obligation to the papacy reflected his very particular vocation as a Jesuit and not the loyalty that was due from even the most devoted of lay Catholics.

There are several reasons why Possevino might have assumed that Canaye took a more universalist view of papal jurisdiction than he actually did. In the first instance, Canaye's desire to seek papal absolutions for both himself and his family rather than going through local Venetian authorities indicates a preference for papal power over that of local ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In addition, Canaye's willingness to denounce French books to the Roman Inquisition would only have consolidated the impression that the ambassador believed in a centralised papal authority that could be applied across all of Christendom. That said, the areas in which Canaye had helped Possevino and Rome up to the point of the interdict had been wholly religious. Moreover, his actions were entirely in line with the aims of his own state. Henri IV was keenly aware of the need to use and control print to promote Catholicism in France, he supported the Jesuits and he was particularly keen—though ultimately unsuccessful—in his efforts to promote the decrees of Trent in his kingdom.<sup>142</sup> It is certainly true that, in their papal absolutions and their consequent allegiances with Rome, both Henri and Canaye had benefitted from the pope's claim to possess a religious authority that could be applied across Catholic states. Nonetheless, Canaye's ardent views on the limits of papal jurisdiction meant that he could not support Paul V's attempt to use his power in what Canaye saw as the temporal realm. Enraged, Possevino retaliated. Taking up his own pen to write to the French secretary of state, by then a strong supporter of the Society, Possevino accused Canaye of violating the papal interdict—a claim that painted Canaye as a traitor to both the pope and the neutral mediating strategy of his own French king.<sup>143</sup>

141 Ibid., 109.

142 Tallon, "Henri IV and the Papacy after the League", 25.

143 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 95 and 139.

## Conclusion

As William Bouwsma has underlined, crises are points of rupture that unearth ideas and discontent that are overlooked, hidden or suppressed by pragmatism and exigency.<sup>144</sup> At such moments, clashing ideologies and aims are revealed and protagonists stand at a crossroads. When the Venetian interdict crisis sparked a long overdue and fiery debate about the thorny yet fundamental question of papal authority, Canaye and Possevino stood at a crossroads and took radically divergent paths. Their contrasting positions—on both the interdict crisis and on Canaye’s obligation to Rome—were based on fundamental disagreements about the very nature of papal and temporal authority. In this period, Rome often used the conversion of foreigners as a means of securing both religious and political support. Nonetheless, fluctuating ideas about the authority of the pope, Church and state meant that men and women came to conversion with a range of responses concerning the duty and role of Rome and, therefore, of Catholics. As we have seen in the Canaye case, some of these responses could radically disturb the Church’s aims in securing foreign converts.

The break between Possevino and Canaye during the interdict crisis underlines that, during this period, the significance of conversion to Catholicism was remarkably diverse. Furthermore, that men such as Antonio Possevino and Maffeo Barberini were shocked at Canaye’s position indicates that even prominent representatives of the Church had not yet realised how far views on serving Rome varied. In this period, the Church’s conversion strategies on both an individual and institutional level assumed that conversion was a clear indication of support for the papacy that could be used for both religious and political ends. But this strategy was complicated by the range of motivations and views held by converts. Whilst at first Canaye, Possevino and their allies in Rome appeared to be working in perfect harmony, this was because they collaborated on purely religious matters in which the aims of Rome, France, Possevino and Canaye chimed. It was only in the storm of debate that came with the Venetian interdict crisis that the actual limitations of their agreement were exposed.

Canaye’s position was based on broad political and religious principles that were shaped by his own experience living in France during the late sixteenth century. Having witnessed the French wars of religion first hand, Canaye believed that the only route to

144 Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History*, 98.



political stability was a pragmatic and tolerant approach to religion that avoided the bloody consequences of religious dogmatism. For this reason, Canaye explicitly rejected the possibility of a unified, universal Christian Church directed by the pope, stating that “it’s not the unity but the equality of Churches and opinions that maintains and conserves the state”.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, Canaye believed that if anybody should act as a supra-national protector of Christian states it should be a monarch and not the pope; he even told Henri IV he should aim to assume this role by emulating Charles V’s efforts to create a “universal Monarchy of Christianity”.<sup>146</sup> Canaye had thought that forging an alliance with Rome, along with Venice, would strengthen France’s position as a Christian kingdom and allow Henri IV to take the lead resolving the religious and political crises that had been sparked by the Protestant Reformation. This plan backfired when Paul V attempted to impose papal authority over Venice, which Canaye saw as a threat not only to Venetian sovereignty but to the stability of Christian states like France, and to the papacy itself.

Though borne of his own experience and aims, Canaye’s views were widely shared, chiming with the arguments of the most prominent and vociferous champions of the Venetian cause. Paolo Sarpi, the Servite friar who would become the most famous defender of Venice against the pope and, through the interdict crisis, a friend of Canaye, also argued that Paul V’s actions illicitly infringed on Venetian sovereignty.<sup>147</sup> Papal critic Paolo Sarpi wrote that just as “a natural body could not endure within itself one part not destined to belong to the whole, even less can a civil body endure that has in its midst a man who recognized others than the prince [as his superior] in human and temporal things”.<sup>148</sup> The Venetian patrician Antonio Quirino echoed this view, arguing that “The Republic, as free and independent prince, has, by the nature of its principate,

145 Canaye, *Harangues et actions publiques des plus rares esprits de nostre temps*, 313–15 quoted in De Franceschi, “La diplomatie henricienne et les ambitions française”, 561.

146 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 1, book 1, 276. On Canaye’s idea see, De Franceschi, “La diplomatie henricienne et les ambitions française”.

147 Bouwsma, “The Venetian Interdict Crisis and the Problem of Order”, 103 and Cozzi, “Sarpi tra il cattolico Philippe de Canaye de Fresnes e il calvinista Isaac Casaubon”. On Sarpi see Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi: between Renaissance and Enlightenment*.

148 Sarpi quoted in Bouwsma, “The Venetian Interdict Crisis and the Problem of Order”, 106.

authority over all its subjects indifferently".<sup>149</sup> Whilst a significant number of prominent theologians in Italy supported the pope during the interdict crisis, it is notable that the majority of Venetian citizens agreed with the state.<sup>150</sup> By defying the interdict and Paul V's intervention into civil matters in Venice, these supporters of the Venetian cause, just like Canaye, rejected the idea that the pope had supreme authority over the state.<sup>151</sup>

Canaye knew that he had disappointed Rome by refusing to side with the pope. Nevertheless, he stood by his actions. After Paul V lifted the interdict in April 1607, Canaye wrote a letter to apologise to the pope, reiterating his devotion to Paul V and asking for "his Apostolic absolution" "if he had, in some matter, either through ignorance or through some other human defect, erred".<sup>152</sup> Despite this request for forgiveness, Canaye stated that, even if the pope was unsatisfied with his work, he had satisfied his diplomatic office, claiming that he had "done everything that, in his weakness, was possible".<sup>153</sup> Canaye remained firm in his stance on the interdict crisis even though it had brought him to blows with Possevino, the man to whom he had entrusted the conversion of his family and his own alliance with Rome. For Canaye, his family's conversion and his own devotion to Rome aimed to promote and protect the Catholic religion by bolstering France's position as a Catholic power not the pope's position as a political authority. As if to reiterate this distinction between the temporal realm of Canaye's political work and the pope's role as a religious leader, the ambassador did not deliver his letter to the pope himself but turned, once again, to his family, just as he had when he initially established his relationship with the papal court. Remaining in Venice, Canaye conveyed the letter to Paul V in the hands of his two sons, charging them to visit the pope "to kiss his most holy feet in [Canaye's] name and that of their mother and sister".<sup>154</sup> Canaye had rejected Paul V's aspirations to supra-national authority over Catholic states but in order to fulfil his own personal and political aims it was necessary that he and his

149 Quirino quoted in Bouwsma, *ibid.*

150 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republic Liberty*, 390.

151 Bouwsma, "The Venetian Interdict and the Problem of Order", 97–111.

152 Canaye and Regnault, eds, *Lettres et ambassade*, vol. 3, book 5, 553–4.

153 *Ibid.*

154 *Ibid.*, 554.

family were “known as supporters and most humble sheep of His Holy flock”.<sup>155</sup>

### **Summary**

This article uses a collection of unpublished letters and documents as well as edited correspondence to trace the development of the friendship between Antonio Possevino SJ (1533–1611) and Philippe de Canaye (1551–1610), the French ambassador to Venice and a recent Catholic convert. These documents show that Canaye and Possevino used the conversion of Canaye’s Protestant family to forge a relationship of obligation between the French ambassador and popes Clement VIII and Paul V. These popes granted private absolutions and various other favours to the Canaye household whilst Canaye used his position and network to help to promote the Catholic cause in Venice and France. This friendship was dramatically ruptured when Paul V placed an interdict on the Republic of Venice, sparking a diplomatic crisis and a fiery debate over the nature and extent of papal authority. Possevino and the pope thought that Canaye would prove a valuable ally but in the event the ambassador sided enthusiastically with the Venetians. This has led some historians to suggest that Canaye was false in his friendship with Possevino and Rome. However, this article uses the ARSI documents along with Canaye’s edited letters to argue that Canaye sided with Venice because he did not believe that papal authority could infringe on temporal sovereignty in civil matters and, crucially, that this position was consistent with Canaye’s dealings with Rome from the start. By considering the nature of Canaye’s relationship with Possevino and the papacy from its beginnings, this article illustrates that, at the turn of the seventeenth century, the religious and political significance of conversion to Catholicism varied radically for both converts and their convertors and that this variation could shock even worldly and experienced missionaries such as Possevino and even the pope himself.

### **Sommario**

Questo contributo si basa su una serie di lettere e documenti, in parte inediti, che riguardano il rapporto di amicizia tra il padre Antonio Possevino SJ (1533–1611) e l'ambasciatore di Francia a Venezia, Philippe de Canaye (1551–1610), che si era convertito al cattolicesimo. I documenti rivelano che la conversione dell'intera

155 Ibid.

famiglia di Canaye fu sfruttata sia da Possevino che da Canaye stesso per stabilire un rapporto di reciproco obbligo tra l'ambasciatore francese e i papi Clemente VIII e Paolo V. Questi papi concessero alla famiglia Canaye assoluzioni extragiudiziali e diversi altri favori, mentre a sua volta Canaye approfittò della sua posizione e rete politica per sostenere la causa cattolica a Venezia e in Francia. L'amicizia tra Possevino e Canaye si ruppe drammaticamente quando Paolo V lanciò l'interdetto contro la repubblica di Venezia, scatenando una crisi diplomatica e una accesa disputa sulla natura e i limiti dell'autorità papale. Possevino e il papa avevano creduto che Canaye sarebbe stato un alleato prezioso nel conflitto con Venezia, ma l'ambasciatore francese ben presto prese le parti dei veneziani. Questo fatto portò alcuni storici a ipotizzare che l'amicizia di Canaye non fosse affatto sincera. I documenti dell'ARSI e la corrispondenza pubblicata di Canaye mostrano che l'ambasciatore si schierò a favore di Venezia perché sosteneva strenuamente che l'autorità dei papi non dovesse violare la sovranità temporale. Questa convinzione di Canaye fu da sempre alla base dei suoi rapporti con Roma. Questo articolo mette in luce che, all'inizio del XVII secolo, il significato religioso e politico della conversione al cattolicesimo variava radicalmente sia per i convertiti che per i loro convertitori e che questa variazione poteva risultare sconvolgente anche per i missionari più esperti come Possevino e addirittura per il papa stesso.

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