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The Catholic Order Teaching in the Tsarist state (1772–1802)

Katolicki zakon nauczający
w państwie carów (1772-1802)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present and popularise information regarding the current state of research on the presence and activity of the members of the Society of Jesus in the Tsarist state between 1772 and 1802. A synthetic analysis of the complex issue of official educational activities provided by the Catholic Order in the Orthodox Russian Empire is based on a comparative analysis of the existing subject literature and the author's archival research, the results of which have been published in the papers referred to in the article. The first part explains the circumstances that led to the appearance of the Jesuits in Russia and discusses the reasons that allowed these subjects of the Tsar to maintain relative autonomy in managing their Order, ensure its development, and pursue their own goals. The functioning of Jesuit schools in Russia is also discussed in this context. The second part focuses on close relations between the Jesuits and Tsar Paul I, which had a significant impact on the functioning of the Order. Based on, among others, the fragments of the correspondence found in the Roman Archive, the author describes the Tsar's contacts with Father Gruber and analyses their role, significance and results in the political and diplomatic area connected with the Jesuits' activity in Russia.

KEYWORDS:

Jesuits, Russia,
St. Petersburg,
education, college,
Tsar Paul I

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

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ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest prezentacja i upowszechnienie aktualnego stanu badań na temat obecności i działalności członków Towarzystwa Jezusowego w państwie carów w latach 1772–1802. Na podstawie własnych kwerend archiwalnych, których wyniki stanowiły podstawę źródłową przywoływanych w artykule publikacji, a także wykorzystując analizę porównawczą dotychczasowej literatury przedmiotu, autor dokonał syntetycznego omówienia złożonego problemu dotyczącego oficjalnego prowadzenia działalności wychowawczej przez katolicki zakon na terenie prawosławnego cesarstwa rosyjskiego. W pierwszej części artykułu wyjaśniono okoliczności, które doprowadziły do pojawienia się jezuitów w Rosji oraz omówiono powody, które pozwoliły tym poddanym carów utrzymać względną autonomię w zarządzaniu instytucją (zakonem), w kierowaniu jej rozwojem, a zwłaszcza w realizowaniu jej własnych celów. W tym kontekście umiejscowiono również informacje dotyczące funkcjonowania szkół jezuitów. Druga część tekstu skupia się natomiast na opisanu i ujawnieniu bliskich relacji między jezuitami a carem Pawłem I, które miały istotny wpływ na możliwości działania zakonu. Opierając się m.in. na zamieszczonych fragmentach odnalezionej w Archiwum Rzymskim korespondencji, autor odtwarza przede wszystkim kontakty cara z o. Gruberem, analizując ich rolę i znaczenie w sferze polityczno-dyplomatycznej, jak i praktyczne przełożenie na prace realizowane przez jezuitów.

Introduction

The Jesuits settled in St. Petersburg thanks to an extraordinary favour shown to them by Tsar Paul I (1796–1801). Although their stay there was short—only 15 years—the Jesuits left a permanent mark on the life of not only the capital city of the Empire but also of other places in the Tsarist state. The fruits of their labour can be found in various areas of life, not only in the period when they lived in Russia but also later, which is exemplified by the fact that Russians (e.g. Prince Ivan Gagarin) were allowed to join the Society of Jesus. Moreover, it was thanks to this 15-year presence in this country that the Society of Jesus was able to obtain a formal registration from the Russian Federation in 1992: the law of that time stated that any

religious association or organisation had to document their earlier presence in Russia for such a period in order to obtain a legal status.

The activity and development of the Society of Jesus in the Russian Empire (1772–1820)

The longest uninterrupted presence of the Society of Jesus in the Russian state (Załęski 1875; Inglot 1997; Inglot, Tokareva 2006; Pavone 2008)¹ to date coincides with the exceptional period in the history of the Order founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, namely with the suppression of the Order (breve *Dominus ac Redemptor* issued by Clement XIV on 21 July 1773). Within several months the suppression was executed in most countries worldwide, however, the non-Catholic rulers, the Orthodox Catherine II (1762–1796) and the Protestant Frederick II (1740–1786), did not promulgate the papal decision in their kingdoms.²

The Jesuits had become the subjects of Catherine II only a year earlier as a result of the First Partition of Poland. In the areas annexed by Russia (Belarus and so-called Polish Livonia, with Daugavpils), there were 201 Jesuits who lived in 18 institutions: 97 fathers, 49 clerics and 55 brothers (coadjutors). They ran colleges in Polotsk, Orsha, Vitebsk and Daugavpils, residencies in Mogilev and Mstislav (both were transformed into colleges in 1799), three missionary houses in Belarus (in Faszczów, Łozowice, and Rasna) and nine missionary stations in Livonia (in Aula, Dagda, Indrica, Kaunata, Laukiesa, Prele, Puša, Uzhvald, and Varclany).

Catherine II—as she always emphasised herself—did not allow the Jesuits to disappear from her country, appreciating the importance of their schools and their usefulness in her educational policy. The Tsarina, who at that time was organising the education system in the Empire (she never managed to complete this ambitious plan)

¹ From 1581, when the first Jesuit—Antonio Possevino—entered the country of the tsars, the Jesuits went there five more times. The longest of their short stays before 1772 was the mission in Moscow in the years 1698–1719, which enjoyed the protection of Peter the Great.

² After several years Frederick II acknowledged the suppression: in 1776 the papal breve was promulgated in Silesia, and in 1780 in Prussia.

(Litak 2004: 221–222), included the Jesuits and their schools in her vision. Therefore, defying Clement XIV’s decision, she let the Order of St. Ignatius stay in Russia. The Tsarina and her ministers referred to this decision in all their later declarations concerning the Jesuits. Nevertheless, as is apparent from some of her statements and her overall political attitude towards the papacy, this decision was also motivated by the desire to demonstrate her autonomy from the Roman court and from other rulers. The Jesuits’ motivation to stay in the Empire and to take an oath of allegiance (for which they were heavily criticised) was their need to protect the Catholics who found themselves under the rule of the Orthodox Tsarina.

In the Russian Empire the papal breve was never promulgated in a way determined by the Pope, and thus it never became legally binding. That is why the Jesuits living within the borders of the Empire remained there and continued their mission. The ruler of Russia, who wanted to be seen as an enlightened Empress not dependent on other rulers in her choices and decisions, took the Jesuits under her wing. She declared the papal breve not binding and—acting against the Pope’s decision—allowed the Society of Jesus not only to survive but to thrive in her lands. She did not let the Jesuits implement the suppression for which they had asked several times (assuring them that she would “settle this matter” personally with the Pope), but offered them her special protection. This was reflected in various forms, ranging from tax exemptions to the ban on all attacks against the Order.

At the beginning the Jesuits confined their activities to the territories of Belarus and Livonia and maintained the status quo from before 1773, however, soon after—in the 1780s—they “opened up” to the world. The breakthrough events included: the opening of a novitiate (1780), the First Congregation of Polotsk (1782), which elected the vicar general with the authority of the superior general of the Order (Father Stanislaus Czerniewicz), and the papal approval of their status granted *vivae vocis oraculo* by Pius VI in 1783 (Inglot 1997: 125–136). With the Tsarina’s support, the Jesuits organised their religious life following the rules of their own Institute³: they established

³ The term “Society’s Institute” denotes both the type of life and activities undertaken by the Jesuits and the documents in which it is authentically and

a province (with a novitiate and a full formation cycle) with a provincial and a central authority (a vicar general and his assistants).⁴

The Jesuits owed this organisation to their first superior in Belarus, Father Stanislaus Czerniewicz (O'Neill, Domínguez 2001: 1028–1030),⁵ mentioned above. He proved to be a truly providential man and it was him to whom the Jesuits also owed their survival in Belarus in the first place. Thanks to his wisdom and determination, Father Czerniewicz managed to avoid the spontaneous dispersion of members of the Order upon receiving the news of the suppression, to maintain unity in the Jesuit communities, and to ensure the continuation of their religious life and apostolic work.

Thus organised, the Jesuits embarked on new apostolic challenges. For obvious reasons, they paid special attention to and spared no effort in the area of education, adapting their *Ratio Studiorum* to the specific situation in which they found themselves.

legitimately presented. Some of these documents are legally binding, while others inspire or explain the spirituality of the Order or the conduct of the Jesuits, or transmit the Society's healthy traditions (see *Konstytucje Towarzystwa Jezusowego* 2006: 286–289).

⁴ These events from the early 1780s encouraged many ex-Jesuits from all over Europe to express their willingness to re-enter the Order in Belarus. After 1782 more and more of them began to go to Polotsk from various parts of the continent, and soon afterwards they were joined by new candidates. Their preparation—some of them were eminent Jesuit figures—considerably improved the quality of teaching at schools and significantly contributed to initiating and maintaining ties with ex-Jesuits all over Europe.

⁵ Stanislaus Czerniewicz was born on 15 August 1728 in Lithuania. He joined the Society of Jesus on 16 August 1743 in Vilnius. Between 1759 and 1768 he stayed in Rome as a secretary of Father Karol Korycki, a Polish assistant of the general of the Order; at that time he made many acquaintances, which proved useful during his management of the Order in Belarus. From 1769 he was the rector of the College in Polotsk. On 25 October 1773 he was appointed as the superior of a group of Jesuits remaining under the Russian rule after the Partition of Poland, in 1774 he became the vice-provincial of the Jesuits in Belarus, and on 17 October 1782 he was elected the vicar general (*Vicarium Generale perpetuum cum plena potestate Praepositi Generalis*) by the First General Congregation in Polotsk (*Congregatio Generalis Extraordinaria*). He died on 18 July 1785 in the village of Stajki in Belarus. Biographical notes for all the Jesuits mentioned in the present article can be found in Grzebień (1996). The biographical notes of some of them can also be found in O'Neill and Domínguez (2001).

Their most important scientific and education centre was the College in Polotsk, which enjoyed a period of vigorous development in the 1880s, especially from the beginning of Paul I's reign. Numerous ex-Jesuits who came to Belarus from various parts of the continent became teachers there. In 1796 about 244 young people studied in all the schools in Polotsk, and in 1811—about 441. In January 1812 (the ucas of 12 [24—n.s.] January), Tsar Alexander I (1801–1825) transformed the College in this town into an Academy with the rights of a higher education institution (ARSI, Russia 1005, V-3bis; Giżycki 1905: 58–62).

The new university was officially named the Academy of the Jesuit Order, but was commonly called the Polotsk Academy. It enjoyed the Tsar's personal protection and was directly subordinated to the general of the Order⁶ and, in matters of teaching, to the Ministry of Public Education. The Academy had three faculties: the Faculty of Theology, the Faculty of Philosophy and Artes Liberales, and the Faculty of Languages and Literature. It had the right to confer doctoral degrees in theology and canonical and civil law. The first rector of the Polotsk Academy was Antoni Lustyg, previously the rector of the College since 1805, who held this post until 1 August 1814. He was followed by Alois Landes (1 August 1814 up to 1 August 1817) and Rajmund Brzozowski (1 August 1817 up to 1820). All Jesuit schools in the Russian Empire were subordinated to the Polotsk Academy.

The Academy was officially opened on 15 June (27—n.s.) 1812. However, all schools in Polotsk were soon closed in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Some classes were not opened until 8 January (20—n.s.) 1813, and about 100 students began the academic year on 17 September. The inauguration ceremony, combined with the promotion of five new doctors of theology, took place on 25 November (7 December—n.s.) of the same year on St. Catherine's Day (Giżycki 1905: 64–65). 84 students began the first academic year at the Academy: 25 in the Faculty of Theology, 29 in the Faculty of Philosophy, and 30 in the Faculty of Languages; additionally, 123 students were

⁶ Father Tadeusz Brzozowski was the head of the Jesuits in the Empire at the time of the Academy's activity; he held his office as the provincial and rector of the Academy.

enrolled to schools subordinated to the Academy, and in 1813 the teaching staff consisted of 25 lecturers.⁷ The curriculum—influenced by the government—clearly favoured sciences, i.e. the Faculty of Philosophy and Artes Liberales (surprisingly, although the Jesuits went to great lengths, they never succeeded in obtaining the right to confer doctoral degrees in philosophy).

In the academic year 1814/15, there were 136 students in all three faculties at the Academy, including 50 Jesuits, 11 Basilians, 10 diocesan priests and 65 laymen. This number was reduced by the Tsarist ucas of June 1817, which forbade the admission of Orthodox Catholics to schools in Polotsk. Before the closure of the Academy in 1820, 39 professors taught about 700 students in all schools in Polotsk. In its short history, the Polotsk Academy promoted over 100 doctors.

The Polotsk Academy had well-equipped research laboratories, libraries and printing houses, and it also published—albeit very briefly and irregularly—its own scientific journal: *Miesięcznik Polotski (Polotsk Monthly)*. The number of volumes in the library increased considerably at the beginning of the 1880s when ex-Jesuits from Poland and Western Europe brought or sent their collections to Polotsk. In 1820 the library consisted of over 40,000 volumes and was one of the largest libraries in this part of Europe. The Academy took over the printing house that opened in Polotsk in 1787 thanks to Catherine II, and in the years 1787–1820 it published about 350 books in Polish, Latin, German, French, Italian, Russian and Latvian (Kaczorowski, Sękowski 2001: 219–244). According to the latest research, this printing house, of which relatively little is known so far, was one of the most productive printing houses in the Eastern Borderlands and exerted a significant impact on the Polish communities in Belarus and even in Russia. It also provided textbooks for Jesuit schools in Belarus as well as Polish prayer books: they were sent to the Black Sea area, the Caucasus, Siberia—anywhere where Polish settlements and Jesuit missionary stations needed them.

⁷ The list of professors (and people holding other functions in all religious institutions) was published every year in the catalogues of the Belarusian Province, printed in Polotsk between 1784 and 1820.

The second education centre of the Order was the Jesuit College in St. Petersburg, which will be presented in the second part of the article. In addition to these centres, old and new colleges operated successfully in the Russian Empire. The Society of Jesus had seven other colleges: the old ones in Daugavpils, Orsha, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Mstislav, and the newly established ones in Romanov (open since 1811) and Uzhvald (since 1817). The schools in Daugavpils and Vitebsk offered classes up to philosophy, and the others—up to rhetoric. In Chachersk, Krāslava and in several missions in the areas of the Volga River, Astrakhan, the Caucasus and the Black Sea, the Jesuits ran lower schools, and in 1810 they opened a school for girls at the residence in Riga. The curriculum included a lot of science: mathematics, architecture, physics and chemistry. Foreign languages were taught in all colleges, with French and German heading the list. Classes were conducted in Latin and—from 1802—in Russian. In total, in 1796, all Jesuit schools in the Russian Empire taught 726 students and in 1815—around 2,000 (of which about 400 were educated in all schools in Polotsk—secondary and lower). Almost every college had a boarding house for boys from noble families: in 1805, about 220 students lived in them (Drzymała 1973: 219; Inglot 1997: 95–111).

The second area of the apostolic activity of the Jesuits in the Russian Empire was missions: missionary work was one of the privileged means from which they benefited, and this applies both to parish missions in Belarus and Polish Livonia and to missions in other parts of the Empire and beyond its borders (Inglot 2014: 319–354). Before 1800, missionary work focused on the religiously neglected rural populations of Belarus and Livonia. In 1773 28 Jesuits worked in 12 missionary stations. Due to an insufficient number of the Jesuit priests during the first years after the suppression of the Order, they were forced to hand over four of their institutions to diocesan priests. Having achieved internal stability and no longer afraid of losing its position in the Russian Empire, the Society of Jesus began to develop its missionary activity, which was also possible thanks to the gradual increase in the number of its members. In the period between 1803 and 1815, six important mission centres for Catholics of different nationalities were established in the south and east of the Russian Empire: the Volga mission with its centre

in Saratov (1803), the mission in Odessa by the Black Sea (1804), the mission in Astrakhan by the Caspian Sea (1805), the mission in Mozadok in the North Caucasus (1806) (Inglot 2002: 67–87), and the missions in Irkutsk (1812) and Tomsk (1815) in Siberia.

Moreover, the Jesuits were engaged in traditional pastoral care in each of their churches: they heard confessions, administered the Sacraments, delivered sermons, taught catechism, preached at retreats, offered parish missions and spiritual exercises, and were chaplains in hospitals and prisons. The Jesuit parishes and churches were home to various congregations (including the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and fraternities (of Good Death or Providence) for different states: nobility, townspeople, students. Congregations of Christian Piety (*Confraternitas Pietatis Christianae*), in which catechists for rural children were educated, operated in the villages belonging to the Order. In all their churches the Jesuits promoted devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in a special way (there was a Congregation of the Sacred Heart in each church) (Inglot 1996: 11–114). In 1810 the fathers from all Jesuit institutions heard 161,693 confessions (1,974 of them were general confessions), prepared 2,299 persons for their First Holy Communion, baptised 5,963 people, blessed 423 marriages, preached 6,427 sermons and instructions and gave 4,409 spiritual exercises. In the same year, the Jesuits from the colleges in Polotsk, Orsha, Daugavpils, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Mstislav and St. Petersburg and the residence in Riga (founded in 1804) visited 405 prisoners and 3,267 sick people (ARSI, Russia 1007-I).

The apostolic activity of the Order in the Russian Empire—large-scale and dynamic from the very beginning—would not have been possible without the special favour and support of the Orthodox rulers of Russia.

It can be reasonably claimed that the Jesuits owed their survival and development in the Russian Empire and, consequently, the universal restoration of the Order in 1814 to the particularly favourable disposition of the Russian Empress and her successors, especially Paul I. On the other hand, the Jesuits' activity in the first period and their later expansion resulted from the efforts of the already-mentioned Father Stanislaus Czerniewicz and Father Gabriel

Gruber (Pierling 1999; Inglot 2001: 103–117; Serše, Juričič Čargo, Južnič, Košir 2005; Južnič 2006; Inglot 2012: 256–277).⁸ Father

⁸ Gabriel Gruber (Grueber) was Slovenian. He was born on 4 May 1740 in Vienna into a bourgeois family. He completed his classical studies, including rhetoric, at the Jesuit College in Vienna, and on 18 October 1755 he joined the Society of Jesus there. After completing a one-year course of Latin and Greek in Leoben (1757–1758), he studied philosophy in Graz (1758–1760) and then languages in Vienna (1760–1761) and mathematics in Trnava (1761–1762). Next, he studied theology in Vienna (1762–1763) and Graz (1763–1767), where he was ordained in 1766. In the period 1767–1768 he completed the third probation (a one-year study of spirituality and religious law) in Judenburg, which was the culmination of his religious formation and preparation for the solemn profession. In 1768 he was sent to the Jesuit College in Ljubljana, where he worked as a professor of mechanics and hydraulics. He designed a new church and the Jesuit College there and directed their construction. Intending to go to China as a missionary, he studied medicine and surgery. On 15 August 1773—the day before the suppression of the Order was announced in Rome—he took his solemn vows in Ljubljana. After the suppression he remained in Ljubljana and worked there as a professor of drawing, geometry, mechanics and hydraulics. He also worked on the regulation of the River Sava and, as the court physicist of Emperor Joseph II, was given a responsible position in shipbuilding in Trieste. In the years 1773–1780 he managed the works on the canal, which still bears his name (*Gruberkanal*). In February 1784 he went to Polotsk and joined the Order again. At the College in Polotsk he taught mechanics and architecture (1784–1799), and later experimental physics (1799–1800); he also organised a course in natural sciences and technical sciences. He established and equipped a natural history laboratory, a physics laboratory, and a chemistry laboratory, and exhibited a collection of architectural models. With the help of experts he himself had taught, he built a magnificent physics and mechanics museum, a library, a gallery and a richly decorated theatre hall, whose ornaments he designed; he also decorated the museum hall with frescoes. Thanks to him, the College acquired a valuable collection of medals and precious metals as well as a laboratory with mechanical instruments, in which instruments for the Tsarist Hermitage in St. Petersburg were made. Gruber's biographies emphasise his expertise in civil architecture, perspective painting, mechanics, hydraulics and astronomy, not only in theory but also in practice.

In 1797 he was appointed as an assistant of the vicar general: first Gabriel Lenkiewicz (d. 10 November 1798) and then Franciszek Kareu. Because of Father Kareu's illness, he was his envoy in contacts with the government and the Holy See. On 22 October 1802 he was elected as the general of the Order. He died in an accident (smoke from a fire, together with the anxiety caused by the fire, led to a violent asthma attack, which turned out to be fatal) on the night of 6/7 April 1805 (25/26 March n.s.) in St. Petersburg. Gruber was the most eminent person in the Order at that time, and his generalate was unique in five centuries of the Order's history. It was mostly thanks to his initiatives and efforts that the Order was universally restored in 1814.

Czerniewicz played a considerable role in maintaining and managing the new province, and Father Gruber managed to make it thrive: his role in the development of the Order within and outside the borders of the Russian Empire was unprecedented and his efforts eventually led to the restoration of the Society. From the beginning of his stay in Belarus, Gruber was also the Order's main representative in its contacts with the Russian authorities. His extraordinary abilities allowed the Society of Jesus to expand and undertake new activities during his generalate.

Tsar Paul I and the Jesuits

Tsar Paul I, the son of Catherine II, was even more favourably disposed to the Jesuits than his mother. His attitude was—to a great extent—influenced by Father Gruber, who managed to win the Emperor's extraordinary favour and kindness. From February 1799 Gruber stayed—practically permanently—in St. Petersburg. He was sent to the capital by the Third General Congregation, which was held in Polotsk at the beginning of 1799 (during which a new vicar general was elected: Father Francis Kareu) in response to Archbishop Stanislaus Siestrzeńcewicz's (Brumanis 1968; Inglot 1996)⁹ attempts to interfere in its internal affairs. Its aim was to discuss the strategy connected with defending the interests of the Order, maintaining its autonomy, and regulating its canonical situation. It was no coincidence that Gruber was chosen for this mission: his education and erudition were widely known and had already won him fame among the wealthy in the Empire. Nevertheless, it took the Jesuits four months to overcome numerous obstacles caused by Siestrzeńcewicz's intrigues before he finally managed—in June 1799—to meet the Tsar personally.

⁹ Stanislaus Bohusz Siestrzeńcewicz (1731–1826), the metropolitan of Latin Catholics in the Russian Empire. Consecrated as the auxiliary bishop of Vilnius on 3 October 1773, he administered the part of the diocese which passed under Russian rule after the First Partition of Poland. Catherine II established the Belarusian Archdiocese and appointed him as its bishop (in 1774) and archbishop (in 1782), which was approved by Pius VI in 1784. He was a shepherd of Catholics in Russia for 53 years.

Before this meeting, Paul I had met the Jesuits twice. The first was in October 1781 when he and his wife, Maria Feodorovna, visited the Jesuits in Polotsk during their travels abroad, and it was also the Tsar's first meaningful encounter with the Catholic world. They visited the church and the College, expressed an interest in the lives of the students and professors and their educational methods, and attended a meeting in the collegiate church (ARSI, Russia 1003, VIII-6). Paul's second encounter with the Order took place in May 1797 when he visited the Jesuits in Orsha during his stay in the western provinces of the Empire, which can be seen as proof of the monarch's kindness towards the Order (ARSI, Russia 1002, f. 36).

During their first meeting, the Tsar assured Gruber that the presence of the Order in Russia and the inviolability of its Institute were unthreatened. With time, Gruber managed to earn the ruler's exceptional and unprecedented grace and even his friendship. From July 1800, the Jesuit was a frequent guest at the Tsarist court. One of Father Gruber's confreres, Father Didier Richardot,¹⁰ claimed that he achieved this thanks in part to his knowledge and abilities, but—he added immediately—mainly because of the greatness of his spirit and his wonderful character:

Father Gruber's knowledge and talents had something of an encyclopedia: he was an architect, physicist, doctor, musician, designer and painter of different styles; conversation with him was charming and instructive. However, more than all his talents, it were strength of his spirit and the amenity of his character which had won the favor of the Tsar Paul I, who took particular pleasure in maintaining him at the Tsarist court. He admitted him to enter into his cabinet through a secret door, he even regulated that the Father would follow the court at the castle of Gatchina where he could enjoy similar protection to his home officers. Until then the benevolence of the Tsar towards him was limited to appreciating his individual merits, and had not yet extend to the Company of which he was a member. (ARSI, Russia 1004, IV-13)

¹⁰ Didier Richardot (1769–1849) came to Belarus from France (where he had studied at the seminary in Paris and at Sorbonne University) in 1791; after being ordained (Polotsk 1799), he worked in St. Petersburg as a French preacher from December 1800. He knew Gruber personally, as they lived under the same roof. He left a short written record of this acquaintance (“Brevis relatio de vita et obitu R.P. Gabrieli Gruber scripta a P. Desiderio Richardot, et die 14 II 1844 e domo Staroviesiensi missa ad P. Mauritium Vedastum Nizard [Leopolim],” pp. 1–4).

Załęski (1906) observes that Paul's positive attitude towards the Jesuits was caused by

the book about the Illuminati which revealed (...) their antimonarchic and antisocial tendencies. As an antidote to their rebellious sects and doctrines, the book mentioned the Jesuits, heaping well-deserved praise on their activities in the field of public education. Paul swallowed the sentences and truths of this book.

And the Jesuit historian continues, probably not without some exaggeration:

For the Jesuits, he developed respect and almost religious worship, and although he was immoderate in both his anger and his kindness, he wanted to see Russia filled with schools and Jesuit colleges in the blink of an eye. (Załęski 1906: 245)

Gruber's meetings with the Tsar were a turning point in the monarch's relations with the Jesuits, and influenced their activities and, in general, their presence in the Tsarist Empire and thus affected the future of the entire Order. During this period, Paul I, moving from declaration to action, took practical steps to secure the Order's peaceful existence and to entrust new duties to it. It was then (in the summer of 1800) that the idea was born to make the Jesuits responsible for education in the western territories of the Empire: the Tsar intended to entrust them with the Vilnius Academy and all educational institutes in Lithuania, Volhynia and Podolia. He treated the Order as a powerful weapon in the fight directed at defending the existing order—in Gruber's words, "in order to protect these provinces from revolutionary conspiracies" (*mettere quelle province al riparo delle congiure rivoluzionari*) (ARSI, Hist. Soc. 210, 184–185). On 22 August 1800, the Tsar ordered Gruber to visit the Vilnius Academy and to conduct an inspection of the entire school system in Lithuania. The Jesuit returned to the capital at the beginning of October and the monarch, in the same month, issued a series of decrees entrusting the Jesuits with education in Lithuania and with the administration of St. Catherine's parish church in St. Petersburg with permission to open schools there (*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonow* 1830). On 21 November, the Tsar wrote to the vicar general, Franciszek Kareu:

I am glad that by bringing you to my countries and by providing you with a solid foundation of existence, I have proved myself useful to an



Order as venerable as yours. (...) You can rest assured that I am and will always be ready to give to your Society, and to you, Father, in particular, tangible proofs of my kindness. (ARSI. Russia 1004, IV-1, f. 14)

His support for the Jesuits' efforts to restore the Society can be seen as such proof of his kindness. From the very beginning, they had hoped for the restoration of the Order and by no means did they await it passively. First, when their efforts to implement Clement XIV's breve in the Empire proved unsuccessful, they took steps to obtain formal permission for the continuation of the Society in Russia from Pius VI, the new Pope; they received his informal permission in 1776 and *vivae vocis oraculo* in March 1783. Finally, aware of the favourable attitudes of Pius VI and of his successor Pius VII, the Jesuits, taking advantage of the position achieved by Gabriel Gruber at the Tsarist court, resumed their efforts to obtain a formal approval of the Order in the Russian Empire. This was the first step towards the restoration of the Order (Inglot 1997: 125nn).

In June 1799, during Gruber's first conversation with the Tsar, the latter expressed his consent to the Jesuit's request to send a letter to the Pope asking him to approve the Jesuit operations in Russia. At that time, Pius VI was ready to grant the Jesuits in Russia his formal approval, provided it was requested by the Russian ruler.¹¹ In a special memorandum written for the Tsar, Gruber explained the complicated situation of the Jesuits in Russia and the reasons why they needed papal approval (ARSI, Russia 1027, f. 148r-149r). Unfortunately, the situation in which Pius VI found himself in the last months of his pontificate made it impossible to take further steps in this matter and forced him to postpone it.¹²

The case was reopened a year later. In the summer of 1800, Paul, prompted by Gruber, wrote a letter to the Pope. The Jesuits needed papal approval to be able to admit ex-Jesuits into the Order, and more Jesuits were necessary for the new initiatives that the Tsar had decided to entrust to them. In a personal letter to Pius VII sent in

¹¹ In order to avoid the protests of the still active opponents of the revival of the Order, this policy was adopted by the Holy See regarding the restoration of the Society of Jesus: the rulers had demanded its suppression, so it was up to them to initiate its restoration.

¹² Pius VI died in exile in Valence-sur-Rhône (France), during the night of 28/29 August 1799.

August 1800, the Tsar asked the Pope for official recognition of the existence of the Society of Jesus in the Russian Empire (ARSI, Russia 1004, VI-1; Inglot 1997: 151). Responding to this request, on 7 March 1801, Pius VII issued the breve *Catholicae fidei*, in which he officially “approved and confirmed” the existence of the Jesuit Order in Russia. The breve was sent to the Jesuits in Polotsk a year later, in September 1802, in a private form, because Tsar Alexander I did not see the need for its official promulgation, as the Order had never been suppressed in Russia.

Bearing in mind the universal restoration of the Order, which he was still striving to achieve, Gruber—elected the general of the Order in 1802¹³—intended to restore the Society of Jesus and extend its activity beyond the borders of the Russian Empire. In 1803 he re-established the English Province and the Italian Province. He began the process of re-establishing the mission in the Netherlands and prepared the ground for the establishment of the Province in the United States of America (Inglot 1997: 179, 214–244). General Gruber’s crowning achievement was the formal approval of the Jesuits in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies granted by Pope Pius VII with the breve *Per alias* issued on 30 July 1804 (Inglot 1997: 191–200). From then on, the general’s power extended beyond the borders of the Russian Empire. This was the second step taken by the Pope, after the approval of the Jesuits in Russia in 1801, towards the universal restoration of the Order (throughout the world), which finally happened on 7 August 1814 when the same Pope proclaimed the bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*.

The presence of and the role played by Father Gruber at the court of the Orthodox ruler of Russia is remarkable. As was mentioned above, in the summer of 1800 he managed to win the Tsar’s trust to such an extent that he was granted unlimited access to him. Undoubtedly, he also had some influence on—at least some of—his projects.

Frédéric-César de La Harpe, the tutor and trusted confidant of Alexander I, who did not hide his hostility towards the Jesuits, also acknowledged Gruber’s influence on Tsar Paul and his decisions.

¹³ After the Pope’s approval of the Jesuits’ presence in Russia, the vicar general became the superior general.

He stayed at the court in St. Petersburg between 1783 and 1794 and, during Alexander's reign, between August 1801 and May 1802. In his correspondence with Alexander (Biaudet, Nicod 1978–1980), he also devoted some lines to the Society of Jesus. Although the Jesuits were only mentioned in a relatively small number of his letters, the opinions he expressed were significant. Gabriel Gruber was the only “Russian” Jesuit whom de La Harpe mentioned by name. He learnt about the Jesuit—though he did not know him personally—during his second stay in St. Petersburg and did not harbour any warm feelings for him, although he acknowledged his greatness. Having learned that Gruber had been elected as the general of the Order, on 4 January 1803 he wrote—shaken and concerned—to his pupil Tsar Alexander: “We are concerned about this election of Father Gruber.” At the same time, he emphasised the accuracy of the choice: “This man is truly worthy of the Society’s generalate” (*On est inquiet de cette élection du père Gruber ... Cet homme était digne en effet du généralat de la Société*) (Biaudet, Nicod 1979: 156). De La Harpe explained his understanding of the phrase “being worthy of the Society’s generalate” in a letter to the Tsar dated 19 December 1803:

This Jesuit, worthy of the ambition of the founders of the Order, was sent to St. Petersburg in order to win Paul I’s grace. He had a great influence over him, but he lost it by wanting to make improper use of it. (Biaudet, Nicod 1979: 165)¹⁴

The Pope’s representative at the Tsarist court, the auditor Giovanni Antonio Benvenuti, repeated a general opinion:

Father Gruber, thanks to his skills and knowledge, is a recognised specialist in the fields of fine arts, construction, machinery and equipment for manufacturing, trade, etc. Thanks to this, he has won the grace of the Tsar and the most important dignitaries who have the greatest influence in the government. The respect that he has earned thanks to his abilities and attitude is of great benefit to the whole Order. It is believed that if the Order increases in number and if the Pope approves it, it will be of great benefit to the state thanks to its schools and the education system. (...) Therefore, the Pope would risk a lot by refusing his [the Tsar’s—M.I.] request [for the approval of the Jesuits in Russia—M.I.]. As far

¹⁴ In 1804 he added that Gruber “avait obtenu un grand crédit auprès des grands et à la cour” (Biaudet, Nicod 1979: 179, de La Harpe’s note).

as Russia is concerned, it will certainly be very useful for Catholicism in this country. (Rouët de Journal 1957: 28–30)

And he added in a different place: “Gruber can do anything. This defies imagination: he visits and talks to the Tsar whenever he wants and he always lends him his ear” (*Gruber può tutto. Ciò è al di sopra di ogni espressione, vede e parla col Sovrano quando vuole, ed è pienamente ascoltato*) (Rouët de Journal 1957: 54–57). There is no doubt, then, that Gabriel Gruber enjoyed an exceptional position at the court of Paul I.

In his monograph, the Russian historian Natal Ejdelman also mentions meetings between the Russian Tsar and the Jesuits, the Tsar’s letter to Pius VII with the request to restore the Jesuit Order, and the “famous Jesuit Gruber, who played an outstanding role at court in the last months of Paul’s reign” (Ejdelman 1990: 82). Describing Gruber’s unusual position, Ejdelman quotes the opinion prevailing at that time: “While describing the balance of power at the time of the fall of Rostopchin, the Austrian ambassador Locatelli (25 February 1801) lists Kutajsov, Pahlen and Father Gruber as the most influential figures, and Gagarin, Oboljaninov, Naryshkin and Stroganov as the second most influential figures” (Ejdelman 1990: 242).

In the early morning of 11 (23 n.s.) March 1801, a dozen or so hours before Paul I’s death, Gruber waited (as every day?) for an audience with the Tsar. At the same time, according to Ejdelman,

with each hour Pahlen is increasingly afraid of some obstacle. The Governor-General *is afraid of the Jesuit Gruber, who maintains a close relationship with the Tsar* [italics—M.I.], who is waiting for an audience after Pahlen’s report. It is worth remembering that certain diplomats compared Gruber’s influence with that of Kutajsov before. The Jesuits’ and the Pope’s intention to support Paul, who is favourably disposed to them, is undeniable. Therefore, Pahlen, as if deliberately, prolongs the report, which bores the monarch, who no longer wants to have another conversation. Gruber leaves, and Pahlen continues to watch over the security of the secret project [an attempt to assassinate the Tsar—M.I.]” (Ejdelman 1990: 269)

None of the opponents of the Society of Jesus dared—in this case—accuse the Jesuit of taking part in a plot to kill the monarch, not even de La Harpe!

Father Gabriel Gruber was a providential man not only with regard to the affairs of his Order in the Russian Empire, a matter of the utmost importance for its development and future throughout the world. He also contributed greatly to the development of Catholicism in the Empire and to the establishment of friendly relations between the Holy See and the Russian rulers (Rouët de Journal 1943, 1957, 1922–1927),¹⁵ as the Pope’s envoys in St. Petersburg repeatedly emphasised on various occasions. The Secretary of State, Cardinal Ercole Consalvi, counted on Gruber’s cooperation, abilities, and influence at the court of Paul I, especially in delicate matters: the Jesuit’s role was invaluable in maintaining diplomatic relations threatened by a breakdown in May 1799. It is also worth stressing the role Gruber played in the initiatives undertaken by papal diplomacy aimed at achieving the unity of the Churches. He was a very close—if not the closest—collaborator of the representatives of the Holy See in Russia. Benvenuti once again summarised Gruber’s work:

He has far-reaching plans regarding the development of his Order. If they succeed—wholly or partially—they will be extremely beneficial to our religion. (Rouët de Journal 1957: 447)

It was thanks to Father Gruber and as a result of his influence that Tsar Paul was very close to the Catholic Church (his confession that he is a Catholic in his heart is quoted!) and he was also extremely and authentically congenial with Pius VI. One (and not the only) proof of this was inviting the Pope to his country and offering him hospitality in Russia when he heard the news of the plans to deport him to France. Similarly, in December 1798, when the Tsar wrote to the Pope (who had been outside Rome for almost a year) expressing concern for his fate and offering to come to his aid, the letter ended with an assurance of “sincere friendship and special respect” (Inglot 1997: 134–135; Stegnij 2013: 279–282).

¹⁵ Extensive information on this aspect of Gruber’s activity and his role in the relations between the Holy See and Russia can be found in the correspondence of the Pope’s representatives at the court of the Tsar of Russia: L. Litta, G.A. Benvenuti and T. Arezzo (see Rouët de Journal 1943, 1957, 1922–1927).

The new Tsar, Alexander I, on the whole, continued (at least in the first years of his reign) his father's ecclesiastical policy: he was tolerant of the Catholic Church and favourable towards the Jesuits (Inglot 2006: 266–284). Already on 23 May 1801, he published a ucas confirming the position of the Order in the same form as provided by his predecessors. This was also reflected, among other things, in his visit to the College in Polotsk and a meeting with the ailing general Franciszek Kareu a month before his death (30 July 1802) (ARSI, Russia 1004, VIII-2). Thanks to the Tsar's support, and—in some cases—as a result of his orders, new religious institutions were established during his reign, such as the residence in Riga or the missions in the south and east of the Russian Empire.

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