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"We Are Arming Our Enemies": The Ambiguities of Converting Non-Catholics in Jesuit Schools of the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century

Dmitry Zharov

Central European University, Department of Historical Studies, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

Jesuit schools were key instruments of re-Catholicization in the Habsburg lands of Central Europe, where confessional boundaries remained fluid. Both non-Catholic students and Jesuit educators whose religious allegiances were uncertain challenged the colleges' confessional mission. Jesuits struggled to determine whether Protestant students had genuinely converted, as some concealed their religious loyalties and later became Lutheran priests. At the same time, some Jesuit educators maintained dubious confessional commitments, and others eventually became renegades.This paper examines these parallel challenges through three perspectives. First, it explores the norms governing students' confessional conduct and the expectations placed on educators in Jesuit colleges of the Austrian province during the 1560s–80s. Second, it investigates the difficulties of enforcing these norms in practice. Finally, it traces the agency and subsequent trajectories of both students and educators, focusing particularly on graduates ordained as Lutheran priests in Wittenberg and Jesuit defectors.

Keywords:
Jesuit education; confessional ambiguities; Habsburg monarchy; re-Catholicization

Correspondence:
Dmitry Zharov, Central European University, Department of History,
Vienna, Austria; email: zharov_dmitry@phd.ceu.edu

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In 1552, three brothers—Adam, Alexander, and Michael Höller (or Heller)—entered the Jesuit school in Vienna.[1] They were the very first students to study under the Jesuits in Vienna, at a time when the order had not even received the official right to open the school in 1553. Little is known about their background. What is important is that they were born in Vienna, and Jesuits paid great attention to attracting locals to their school. It was expected that proper Catholic education would strengthen their faith, and after graduation they would serve the needs of the Roman church and the Society of Jesus. Training loyal priests was a key element of the Jesuit educational endeavor in regions like Austria, where Protestantism was particularly strong. Adam and Alexander, the elder brothers, fulfilled all expectations of their Jesuit tutors. They both entered the order and occupied prominent positions in the colleges of the young Austrian province. Adam had a particularly spectacular career. He had already started his novitiate by 1553, and in 1557, as a "promising student," he was sent to Rome to study philosophy.[2] After Adam returned to Vienna in 1560, he was appointed minister and then vice-rector of the college. While performing these administrative duties, he continued deepening his knowledge of theology. In 1563, Adam was entrusted with a mission to Hungary, where he became a preacher in the college of Trnava—the first Jesuit institution in that country. The Jesuit leadership was pleased with his achievements and sent him to the college in Prague, where the order also needed experienced teachers and priests. Adam spent six years in Prague, and in 1569 he was a *regens convictorum*, that is, a supervisor of students living in the Jesuit boarding houses.

However, in 1569 this model career path ended abruptly with Adam's sudden decision to leave the college and the Jesuit order as a whole. This move provoked a harsh reaction from Adam's main peer, Provincial General Lorenzo Maggio. Maggio sent an extremely emotional letter to Höller accusing him of treason.[3] It was not just the secession of a good Jesuit that had made Maggio furious; much more disappointing was Adam's alleged shift to Protestantism. Furthermore, the former Jesuit professor was suspected of "letting internal enemies restore their forces and external ones infiltrate [the college]."[4] As a teacher and administrator, he was accused

1 *Pannonhalmi* Bencés Főapátság *Levéltára* (HU-PBFL) [The Library of the Pannonhalma Benedictine Abbey]. 118. E.5. Historia Collegii Societatis Jesu Viennensis ab anno 1550 usque ad annum 1567, 13.

2 László Lukács, ed., *Catalogi personarum et officiorum provinciae ausitriae SJ*, vol. 1, *(1550–1600)* (Institutum historicum S.I., 1978), 3, 15, 694.

3 A Jesuit perspective on the story of Adam Höller, as well as Magius's letter, is given in the Chronicle of Sacchini. Franceso Sacchini, *Historia Societatis Jesu: Pars secunda* (Antwerp, 1620), 290–92.

4 Sacchini, *Historia Societatis Jesu*, 290.

of tacitly contributing to the spread of unorthodox religious ideas in the school. Shortly after he left the Jesuit order, Adam fell victim to the plague in Vienna. Before his death, he managed to draft a response to his colleague's accusations, which was published in Basel in 1573 thanks to the help of Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio—a Protestant scholar who became acquainted with Adam Höller in Vienna.[5] Adam's response to the Jesuits is quite surprising. Rather than attacking back and engaging in a typical confessional debate, he praised the Jesuits for their achievements: support of education and Christian piety. Yet, Adam claimed that by obeying the pope, Jesuits used their talents to serve an evil power. Although grateful to his teacher for the skills and values he had imbued him with, Adam could not share the idea of dividing Christians into "orthodox" and "heretics" and had chosen to migrate to a more tolerant camp.

The story of Adam Höller seems to run counter to what would normally be expected from a graduate, a teacher, and an administrator of a Jesuit school. After years of a supposedly intense Catholic indoctrination, he ended up in a circle of Protestant humanists criticizing the pope and the Catholic Church.

As this paper will show, Adam's case is not unique. Attracting students from different confessional milieus was a crucial objective of the Jesuits' struggle to bolster Catholicism in the late sixteenth-century Habsburg lands. Whether someone was "hesitant in faith" or originated from a family of "heretics," Jesuit teachers sought to tip the scale in favor of the Catholic Church and recruit well-trained priests and teachers. But this process did not always go smoothly. The paper argues that studying in a Jesuit school was not a guarantee of confessional allegiance. Many students effectively resisted conversion attempts made by their tutors and considered education in purely pragmatic terms. Jesuit masters were also alarmed at a phenomenon that I call "veiled confessional identification." Formally abiding by Catholic rites during school years did not by itself entail continued adherence to Catholicism after graduation. Some graduates not only stayed loyal (or switched) to unorthodox religious ideas but also became prominent Protestant preachers. Even those who were regarded as forefront fighters for the Catholic cause—Jesuit teachers and priests—could act contrary to the expectations of the order's superiors. After many years of studying and then teaching at Jesuit schools

5 It was published under the pseudonym of Paul Albutius: *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas in qua de rebus gravissimis et lectu dignissimks tractatur* (Lutetiae Parisiorum: Per Gotthardum Villardum [cypher meaning Basel: Per Petrum Pernum], 1573); Manfred Edwin Welti, *Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio, Marchese d'Oria im Exil, 1557–1597: Eine Biographie und ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Philippismus* (Librairie Droz, 1976), 143–45.

and actively participating in the life of the Society, they decided to choose the opposite side of the confessional confrontation. Such complex personal agencies underline the ambiguities of confessional identifications in the age of the turbulent formation of confessions. Thus, an inquiry into the fates of Protestants (or at least non-Catholics) among students and teachers of Jesuit schools in the Habsburg lands proves the necessity of a more cautious use of terminology related to confessions and conversions of particular actors or groups in early modern Central Europe.

The paper consists of three parts. It begins by briefly discussing the problem of conversions in multiconfessional regions like the Habsburg monarchy and the role of educational centers in building religious identities. It then looks into the debates around Protestant students attending Jesuit schools and the problem of conversion. I compare how this issue was treated in official Jesuit reports (*Litterae annuae* [Annual letters], *Litterae quadrimestres* [Quarterly letters]), in instructions to colleges, and in the personal correspondence between the Jesuits operating in the Austrian province and the superior general. Special attention will be paid to concerns about the "sincerity" of conversions and the religious practices of students. I closely examine those students from the Jesuit colleges of Vienna, Prague, and Graz in the period between 1553 and 1600 who were either identified as "heretics" by the Jesuits or explicitly demonstrated an attachment to Protestantism after leaving the Jesuit school. In the third part, I turn to the Jesuit teachers who fell away from the Catholic Church.

Confessions, Conversions, and Jesuit Schools in the Habsburg Monarchy

Defining Confessions and Conversions in Early Modern Europe

Recent scholarship has paid much attention to the ambiguities of religious affiliations in the second half of the sixteenth century, a period when the formation of the major confessional groups was still in progress.[6] By promoting a vision of a unified Christianity, irenic intellectuals also brought into question the importance of confessional differences.[7] Syncretic religious practices

6 See overview in Alexander Schunka, "Afterword: Entangled Confessionalizations; A European Perspective," in *Entangled Confessionalizations? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Gorgias Press, 2022), 745–58.

7 Howard Louthan, *The Quest for Compromise: Peacemakers in Counter-Reformation Vienna* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); C. Scott Dixon, "Introduction: Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe," in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon and Dagmar Freist (Routledge, 2009), 1–20; Alexander Schmidt, "Irenic Patriotism in Sixteenth- and Sev-

illustrated the fluidity of the boundaries between Catholicism and various Protestant denominations.[8] Such heterogeneity allowed many believers to make spiritual choices that did not fit the standard confessional division.

The same methodological problems apply when analyzing conversions and changes of confessional balance. Broadly defined, conversion is "an abandoning of one faith in favor of another."[9] Identifying this spiritual transition historically is a highly challenging task. The anthropology of religion has rejected a simplistic vision of conversion as a rupture and tends to regard it as a cultural passage involving sophisticated modes of transformation. Thus conversion can instead be seen as "a process of continual embedding in forms of social practice and belief, in ritual dispositions and somatic experience."[10] Contemporary scholarship distinguishes certain themes underlying the complexity of conversion. The four that are most relevant for a historical study are (1) continuities between the past and the new religious denomination, (2) the agency of converts, (3) the diversity of their motivations, and (4) "conversion careers," that is, a continuous quest for personal religious identification and drifting between various confessions.[11] This nuanced perspective on the problem of conversion has greatly contributed to new approaches to religious history in general and to the confessional history of early modern Europe in particular.[12] Benjamin Kaplan has argued extensively that more emphasis should be placed on the agencies of converts and that the pragmatic aspects of their choices should

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enteenth-Century German Political Discourse," *Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 243–69; Alexander Schunka, "Reformed Irenicism and Pan-Protestantism in Early Modern Europe," *Searching for Compromise? Interreligious Dialogue, Agreements, and Toleration in 16th–18th Century Eastern Europe*, ed. Maciej Ptaszyński Kazimierz Bem (Brill, 2023), 299–330.

8 Martin Christ, "Catholic Cultures of Lutheranism? Confessional Ambiguity and Syncretism in Sixteenth-Century Upper Lusatia," *Past & Present* 234, issue supplement 12 (2017): 165–88; Helmut Puff, "Belief in the Reformation Era: Reflections on the State of Confessionalization," *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 46–52.

9 Peter Mazur and Abigail Shinn, "Introduction: Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Early Modern History* 17 (2013): 427–36, here 428.

10 Diane Austin-Broos, "The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, ed. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1–14.

11 Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–24.

12 Marc David Baer, "History and Religious Conversion," in Rambo and Farhadian, *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 25–48; Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin, eds., *Religious Conversion: History, Experience, and Meaning* (Routledge, 2014).

also be considered alongside the theological ones.[13] Kaplan also emphasizes the limits of control exercised by a certain church over the adherence of its members, including newly converted ones.

Kaplan's perspective is extremely useful for studying post-Reformation confessional dynamics. Scholars should avoid taking confessional terminology for granted and instead explore the deeper meanings behind phrases like "a certain town was Protestant" or "a person converted to Catholicism."

Attracting students from Protestant families was a key aim of the Jesuit schools and universities as potential centers of conversion. Protestant parents often sent their children to Jesuit schools despite supposed confessional antagonism, and this tendency was common in various parts of Europe.[14] Pragmatic reasoning often outweighed confessional prejudices. The primary motivation for choosing a Jesuit school was the high quality of training and the benefits for students from poor backgrounds. Protestant theologians were deeply concerned about students' migration to Jesuit institutions and sought to develop competitive Lutheran and Calvinist schools.[15] In 1597, Georg Mylius, a Lutheran theologian from Wittenberg, addressed those parents opting for a Jesuit education and accused them of committing a grievous mistake.[16] Mylius claimed that "church and school belong together" and described attending a Catholic school as harmful for children's faith, since they risk being tempted to convert to "papacy."[17]

Thus, Protestants explicitly considered Jesuit schools a threat to the spiritual integrity of their young co-religionists. The question then arises: How justified were such worries? To what extent were the Jesuits actually capable of inducing students to convert, and how effective were these attempts? How did the Jesuits themselves address the hesitance of a significant number of their students to fully embrace Catholic dogma? In

13 Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 266–94; Kaplan, "The Context of Conversions in Early Modern Europe: Personal Agency and Choice in the Construction of Religious Identities," in *A Question of Identity: Social, Political, and Historical Aspects of Identity Dynamics in Jewish and Other Contexts*, ed. Dikla Rivlin Katz et al. (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 315–36.

14 Kaplan, "Context of Conversions," 326.

15 Stefan Ehrenpreis, "Reformed Education in Early Modern Europe: A Survey," *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 85 (2005): 39–51.

16 Georg Mylius, *Christlicher Sendbrieffe an die Evangelische Christen in Lijfland, Poln, Preussen, Littaw, Churland unnd andern angrentzen den Provintzen, Dafi sie ihre Kinder in der Jesuiter Schulen, Collegien und Seminanen zuschicken bey höchster ihrer selbsten und ihrer Kinder Wolfahrt und Seligkeit Abschew unnd Gewissen haben sollen* (Leipzig, 1597).

17 Mylius, *Christlicher Sendbrieffe an die Evangelische Christen*, iii.

what follows, I will examine these issues in greater detail, focusing on the Protestant students in the Jesuit schools of the Austrian province.

Protestant Students

"Fictive" Catholics

Private correspondence and instructions regulating domestic affairs in the colleges of the Austrian province offer an insight into the concerns of the Jesuit professors regarding the education of Protestant students. Private letters and local instructions were not intended for broad distribution within the order, nor did they serve any propagandist goals, and they could therefore address certain sensitive issues more openly than the *Litterae* or Chronicles.

In 1567, Henrich Blyssem, the rector of the Jesuit college in Prague, questioned the feasibility of admitting children from Protestant backgrounds. In his letter to the superior general, Blyssen argued that allowing Lutherans access to Jesuit education posed multiple challenges.[18] According to the rector, despite the professors' best efforts, Protestants remained steadfast in their faith. In Blyssem's view, providing Protestants with rigorous training in rhetoric and philosophy risked actively arming the enemies of the Catholic Church (*videmur Ecclesiae hostes nostris armis instruere et munire*). Moreover, he feared that Lutherans could tacitly talk about doctrinal questions with Catholic students and seduce them from the true religious path (*secreto agant de fide, ut eos seducant*).[19] Although such conversations were strictly forbidden, it was impossible for teachers to constantly monitor the "dangerous" students. Thus, the rector feared that Jesuit schools could unexpectedly become recruiting grounds for Protestants.

Blyssem made a telling remark on the possibility of conversions at school. Although Protestants attended Catholic services, they did so half-heartedly and did not believe in the validity of the Catholic dogmas. On the other hand, the rector was conscious of the negative consequences of a mass expulsion of suspected heretics. First, he noted that apart from Lutherans, some devout Catholics could also be mistakenly removed from the school.[20] This ambiguity stemmed from the unclear confessional identifications during that period. Distinguishing between a Lutheran and a Catholic was often challenging, and the rector risked punishing those who were not associated with Protestantism but still struggled to properly articulate the Catholic dogmas. Second, the rector believed that expelling non-Catholics would considerably reduce the school's student body. Many

18 Henrich Blyssem to Francisco de Borja in Monumenta paedagogica Societatis Jesu (hereafter MPSJ), 3:406–9.

19 Blyssem to Francisco de Borja in MPSJ 3:408.

20 Blyssem to Francisco de Borja in MPSJ 3:408.

boys from burgher and noble families in Prague could not easily go against the will of their parents and convert to Catholicism, but they could attend the Jesuit school. Their presence gave Jesuits a chance to induce them to the right creed or at least to sow seeds of doubt in their minds.

Jerónimo Nadal, a famous Jesuit educator, also raised concerns about the practical implementation of conversion policies in Jesuit schools in Central Europe. Nadal inspected the colleges of the Austrian province in 1563 and 1568 and was informed about the situation on the ground. In 1566, he requested advice on the admission of Protestants from the Society's superior general Francisco de Borja (g. 1565–72). Nadal suggested that Protestants could study under Jesuits but only on the condition that they properly performed all the required Catholic rites: attended Masses, confessed in a Catholic manner, recited litanies, and learned the Catholic catechism.[21] Otherwise, they should be expelled from the schools.

Nadal reiterated similar ideas in the instructions to the College of Vienna, which he issued during his visit in the college in 1568.[22] These instructions include a brief but highly significant note revealing the intricacies of confessional self-fashioning among students at Jesuit schools. Nadal emphasized that the only students who should be tolerated under Jesuits were those who conducted all the rituals in a sincere way (*nisi comperiretur omnia illa facere ficta*). This indicates that Nadal, probably along with other Jesuits at the colleges of the Austrian province, was well aware of the danger of teaching a student who merely pretended to be a Catholic while remaining loyal to his original faith. It was a complex task to detect such cases and to unmask crypto-Lutherans. A Protestant student willing to receive good training in the Jesuit school may have concealed his genuine religious beliefs to avoid annoying his teachers. While at school, he could vigorously recite Catholic prayers and the Catechism, but once the classes were over or after graduation, he returned to practicing Lutheran rites.

This preoccupation with "fictious" conversions is central to understanding the peculiar place of non-Catholics within the Jesuit educational system. It aptly reflects some of the aforementioned characteristics of conversion: pragmatic agency (students could "veil" confessional self-identification by pursuing practical goals); continuity with the "past" religious practices (remain persistent in the "unorthodox" faith while attending Catholic services); and the fluidity of "conversion careers" (students could cease positioning themselves as Catholic once their education and the external pressure came to an end).

21 Jerónimo Nadal to Francisco de Borja in *Epistulae P. Nadal. III*, 306.

22 Jerónimo Nadal, "Instructiones datae Viennae 1566," in MPSJ 3:117.

Interestingly, the letters from the Austrian and Czech colleges did not seem to concern the generals of the Society significantly. Instead of addressing the problem of "false" conversions, they stressed the importance of admitting children from Protestant families. In 1557, Superior General Diego Laínez (g. 1558–65) wrote to Joannes de Victoria (a professor and since 1560 the rector at the Viennese college) that heretics should be accepted to Jesuit schools provided they did no harm to others (*purché non faccino danno agli altri*).[23] He did not specify the nature of the harm, but he was likely referring to the unauthorized religious conversations the rector in Prague was worried about. According to Laínez, it would have been especially beneficial to attract Protestants in Central European towns like Prague (or Vienna) where the majority was not Catholic.

Borja shared the views of his predecessor and also pointed to the advantages of having Protestants in schools where they might convert to Catholicism.[24] He acknowledged that children were supposed to follow all the rites (he wrote specifically about confession and communion), but he did not mention any restrictive measures for non-compliance. The general seemed to be more enthusiastic about discussing the benefits of teaching "heretics" than the problems arising from this confessional tolerance. His terminology also reflects a more favorable attitude toward Protestant students. Borja called them "children of heretics" (*figlioli di heretici*), implying that the heresy was actually external to the children and they were amenable to "healing." In a letter sent in 1570 to Joannes de Vittoria, Borja proposed that children should not be deprived of Catholic sacraments even if they were known to have participated in Protestant services.[25] On the contrary, teachers should be more attentive to the needs of such students and provide them with the necessary pastoral care.

Hence, the ambiguous religious conduct of students was to be tolerated, including an overt allegiance to rival confessions outside the school. The generals were certain that the Jesuits' mission was to win back the souls of those who had fallen into heresy and not to repel them. This approach definitely bore fruit but sometimes led to unintended consequences.

From Jesuit Schools to Wittenberg

In 1573, Bartholomaeus Viller, the prefect of a student boarding house in Vienna (*prefectus domus convictorum*), shared with Superior General Everard

23 Diego Laínez to Joannes de Victoria, September 25, 1557 in Monumenta Lainii 2:480.

24 Francisco de Borja to Jerónimo Nadal, December 3, 1566 in *Epist P. Nadal III*, 325.

25 Francisco de Borja to Joannes de Victoria in MPSJ 3:408, annotation 5. Manuscript in ARSI Germ. 108, fol. 113^{r}.

Mercurian (g. 1573–80) his thoughts on sending more students from Austria to Rome for further theological training.[26] Since the 1550s, the best students from the German and Austrian colleges had the privilege of continuing their studies at the Collegium Romanum. With the establishment of the separate Collegium Germanicum in 1573, the number of students benefiting from this opportunity could increase. Given the excellent reputation of the Collegium Romanum and Collegium Germanicum, studying in Rome was typically regarded as highly beneficial for any talented student of philosophy or theology. The general would have expected rectors and other administrators of the local colleges to support such valuable academic exchanges. Yet, Viller sought to prove the contrary. He put forward several arguments in favor of founding a new seminary in Vienna instead of sending students to Rome. Viller claimed such a decision would have been more sensible economically, since the Viennese Jesuits had funding to finance the studies of more future priests than Rome (ten to forty). Even more substantial was another point, namely that many students who had already studied in Rome and returned home had made a terrible impression on Viller. Many of them did not become priests but instead got married and began acting against the Jesuits.[27] This ingratitude to the order that had invested so much in them was what most disappointed Viller. While he did not explicitly call them Protestants, "acting against the Society" might imply that their confessional loyalties were also shaken. Viller gave no explanation of these undesirable transformations but assumed that teaching in a local seminary would allow for stricter control over students' religious behavior. Viller's account offers glimpses into the agency of those students whose confessional identification was at least uncertain. They studied under Jesuits, and their academic performance and probably religious conduct were appreciated, leading to their selection for further training in Rome. Yet, after receiving the best possible education in the Jesuit system, they "ungratefully" joined the adversaries of the Catholic Church.

Graduates of Jesuit schools sometimes not only remained indifferent to the appeals of their Catholic teachers but also pursued careers in the Lutheran Church. The so-called "Book of the Ordained" (*Ordinierterbuch*) of Wittenberg University provides several telling examples of such personal trajectories.[28] The Book of the Ordained contains concise autobiogra-

26 Bartholomaeus Viller to Everard Mercurian, October 9, 1573 in MPSJ 4:493–95.

27 Bartholomaeus Viller to Everard Mercurian, October 9, 1573 in MPSJ 4:494.

28 Georg Buchwald, ed., *Das Wittenberger Ordiniertenbuch Bd.1:1537–1560* (Leipzig, 1894); Buchwald, ed., *Das Wittenberger Ordiniertenbuch Bd.2:1560–1572* (Leipzig, 1895); Buchwald, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der evangelischen Geistlichen und Lehrer Oesterreichs aus den Wittenberger Ordiniertenbüchern seit

phies of all the priests ordained at the University of Wittenberg.[29] These hundreds of testimonies recording the self-representations of future priests hold special value for prosopographical research on the confessional history of Central Europe. I have identified four ordained Lutheran priests who at some point studied in a Jesuit school. Two of them attended schools in the Austrian province (in Olomouc and in Vienna).

Georg Weyer was born in Paderborn, a bishopric city in northwest Germany, presumably into a Catholic family. He received his elementary education at home, and after some time his parents sent him to the Jesuit school in Olomouc. He studied there for one year until about 1591–92, when he suddenly converted to Lutheranism (*postmodum ad dexteritatem sanae Evangelicae doctrinae conversus*). He continued his studies under Protestant teachers in Moravia and eventually ended up in Wittenberg. In the 1590s, Moravia was still one of the strongholds of Protestantism in the Habsburg lands, largely due to the active support of the local aristocracy. The Jesuit university in Olomouc was intended to advance the Catholic agenda, but the case of Weyer proves that the Jesuits' efforts sometimes produced outcomes that were the opposite of their intentions. While the reasons for Weyer's confessional shift are unknown, the sequence of events is noteworthy: a student from a Catholic background became Protestant after just a year of studies at one of the largest centers of Jesuit education in Central Europe. This raises questions about the efficiency of Jesuit schools in achieving their conversion goals.

Georg Kraner from the small town of Leibniz in Styria was sent to Vienna by his presumably Protestant parents. Around 1580 in Vienna, he initially attended classes at the university and later moved to the Jesuit school. In his account, Georg was trying to convey all the misfortunes he faced as a Protestant student in a Catholic environment, thereby providing a remarkable account of his personal attitude toward the Catholic creed during his studies. He claimed to have endured corporal punish-

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dem Jahre 1573," *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für die Geschichte des Protestantismus in Österreich* (hereafter JGPÖ) 16 (1895): 29–34, 176–202; 17 (1896): 25–63, 157–86; 18 (1897): 56–72, 239–58; 19 (1898): 111–26; 21 (1900): 113–28; 23 (1902): 183–203; 24 (1903): 78–96, 236–63.

29 The entries for the period between 1537 and 1600 were published in Georg Buchwald, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der evangelischen Geistlichen und Lehrer Oesterreichs aus den Wittenberger Ordiniertenbüchern seit dem Jahre 1573," JGPÖ 21 (1900): 114; Buchwald, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der evangelischen Geistlichen und Lehrer Oesterreichs aus den Wittenberger Ordiniertenbüchern seit dem Jahre 1573," JGPÖ 24 (1903): 91, 241; Buchwald, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der evangelischen Geistlichen und Lehrer Oesterreichs aus den Wittenberger Ordiniertenbüchern seit dem Jahre 1573," JGPÖ 23 (1902): 184.

ments from a university professor for his unorthodox ideas.[30] Although the University of Vienna was generally more religiously tolerant than the Jesuit school, Georg's professor, Mathias Lubanus, was likely a zealous Catholic.[31] Suffering physical and moral violence, Georg was forced to join the Catholics. At the Jesuit school, Georg was obliged to pray with Catholics and attend their services. On the one hand, he sought to create the impression that he was making progress in appropriating the Catholic dogmas. However, he asserted that he was doing so in such a manner that prevented him from truly abandoning his Protestant beliefs.

After some years of studies under the Jesuits in Vienna, he returned home to Styria. There, he finally got a chance to breathe freely, to enter the famous Protestant school of Graz, and to "purify himself from the filth of heretics [in this case—Catholics]." Self-fashioning in front of the theologians of Wittenberg required a very critical approach to every aspect of one's past life related to Catholicism, especially concerning Jesuits. Georg had to account for his time in a Jesuit school and his participation in Catholic ritual life. Thus, he emphasized the forced nature of his supposed conversion to Catholicism and the insincerity of his loyalty to the Jesuits. It is impossible to reconstruct Kraner's actual spiritual experiences in Vienna and to determine the degree of his sincerity during Catholic services at school. We also do not know what his Jesuit teacher thought of him and whether during his time at school they classified him as a successfully converted "heretic." Still, Kraner's case again exemplifies the fluidity of confessional borders in the late sixteenth century and the power of agency that defies confessional stereotypes. Georg needed a good education, which he could acquire at the University of Vienna and then in the Jesuit school. To achieve this goal, he was ready at some point to adhere to the Catholic rites. However, as soon as the confessional context around Georg changed, he reverted to Protestantism.

The cases examined above highlight the fragility of the conversion policy at Jesuit schools and the ambivalence of confessional self-identification among students. Studying at a Jesuit school did not necessarily entail a genuine embrace of the Catholic faith. On the contrary, students could conceal their confessional allegiance during their studies and, after graduation, switch to the rival camp. Often, it was the pragmatic moti-

30 Bushwald, "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der evangelischen Geistlichen und Lehrer Oesterreichs aus den Wittenberger Ordiniertenbüchern seit dem Jahre 1573," JGPÖ 24 (1903): 241.

31 Ulrike Denk, "Matthias Lubanus," in 650 plus: Geschichte der Universität Wien, https://geschichte.univie.ac.at/de/personen/mathias-lubanus (accessed September 2, 2026).

vation of receiving good training that pushed students to spend several years under the Jesuits. Such strategies could eventually result in a paradoxical outcome: Jesuit schools producing future Lutheran priests, hence Blyssem's fears that by admitting Protestants to the schools Jesuits risked arming their enemies.

Jesuit Renegades

Students with unstable confessional allegiances caused serious concern, but even more troubling were "treasons" within the inner circle of Jesuit educators. The Jesuits had to cope with the problem of defection from the very outset of their missions in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire. In the 1550s and 1560s, there were three known cases of defection among German Jesuits.[32] In 1621, Jacob Reihing, a renowned Jesuit preacher, fled from the college of Neuburg and pursued a career as a Lutheran theologian at the University of Tübingen.[33] The loyalties of the Jesuits from the Austrian province were also sometimes shaken. Between 1556 and 1586, there were at least five Jesuits in the Austrian province who failed to justify the trust of the order, with most starting as Jesuit school students who eventually entered the order and served as teachers or administrators. Some of them were born into Protestant families and were later converted by the Jesuits. Certain "apostates" after several years of hesitation sought to reconcile with the Jesuits, while the others felt at ease in the anti-Catholic camp. All these cases were extraordinary and provoked a strong, well-documented response from Jesuit authorities. Moreover, some of those former Jesuits provided their own explanations for abandoning Catholicism. I will dwell on the three most exceptional personalities: Adam Höller, Christian Francken, and Paul Florenius.

In my view, the classical microhistorical notion of "normal exceptions" aptly applies to the stories of Jesuit renegades. Building upon the original definition by Edoardo Grendi, Thomas V. Cohen offers a lucid explanation of the "normal exceptions":

> Strange things, wrote he [Grendi], despite their oddity, both contain elements of the normal and, by their oddity, illustrate its boundaries. The deviant event, in its strangeness, challenges values, institutions, and principles, and jostles narrative habits of those who perceive it and respond. Moments of slippage

32 John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 54.

33 Richard Kirwan, "The Conversion of Jacob Reihing: Academic Controversy and the Professorial Ideal in Confessional Germany," *German History* 36 (2017): 1–20.

> can free up action, whether social, political, or mental. The odd, testing the normal, shows us something of its contours.[34]

In our case, the "odd" Jesuits who turned to Protestantism challenge the perception of the Jesuit order as a confessionally homogeneous and well-disciplined institution and Jesuit schools as model centers of re-Catholicization. A confessional shift of the most-trusted students and then teachers reveals the limitations of conversions, once again highlighting the fluidity of this phenomenon.

Adam Höller

Adam Höller (Heller) was the first successful defector from the college of Prague. His case gives a rare opportunity to compare the testimonies produced by both sides: Adam himself and his former Jesuit colleagues. In 1569, after years of studying under Jesuits and serving the order in various positions (minister and then vice-rector in Vienna, preacher in Trnava, philosophy teacher in Prague), Adam became a prefect of the boarding school—*regens convictorum*—in Prague. In that year, he decided to leave the college. The *regens convictorum* was responsible for maintaining discipline among the students living in the college.[35] There was a set of strict rules to be observed by the boarders, including those concerning piety and religious conduct. A *regens convictorum* was therefore expected to contribute to strengthening students' faith and, if needed, urge them to convert. It is doubtful that Adam Höller fulfilled this aspect of his duties properly.

In a letter discussing Adam's defection, Provincial General Lorenzo Maggio mentioned that the former *regens convictorum* had "tempted many [students?] to sin."[36] Maggio did not specify the kind of temptation, but it is likely that Adam shared some unorthodox thoughts with other Jesuits or students in the college. Maggio directly accused Adam of "returning to the camp of adversaries," thus damaging his soul and giving the enemies of faith, that is, Protestants, a reason for triumph.[37] Adam's confessional unorthodoxy was, thus, apparent to his fellow Jesuits. At the same time, Maggio did not overly emphasize religious matters, highlighting other possible reasons for Adam's misdeed. According to the provincial, the harsh-

34 Thomas V. Cohen, *The Roman Tales: A Reader's Guide to the Art of Microhistory* (Routledge, 2019), 7.

35 See "Regulae praefectorum in convictu P. Hoffaeo ordinante 1595," in *Monumenta Germaniae paedagogica II*, ed. Georg M. Pachtler (Berlin, 1887), 319–20; "Officium vice-praefecti 1595," in Pachtler, *Monumenta Germaniae paedagogica II*, 320–22; "Ordo domus convictorum 1595," in Pachtler, *Monumenta Germaniae paedagogica II*, 32–34.

36 Franceso Sacchini, *Historia Societatis Jesu: Pars tertia* (Rome, 1649), 291.

37 Sacchini, *Historia Societatis Jesu: Pars tertia*, 290.

ness of the college's domestic discipline was a driving factor in Adam's decision to flee. This claim seems odd, given that by 1569 Adam had been living with the Jesuits for seventeen years and must have been accustomed to all the peculiarities of life in a college. By emphasizing secular, domestic causes of defection, Maggio may have been attempting to distance the incident from confessional debates. The ultimate goal of Maggio's letter was not to condemn Adam for life but to bring him back to the order. Maggio asserted he would pardon Adam if he repented and returned to the college. Breaking domestic rules because of personal moral weakness was a lesser evil than confessional disloyalty.

To Maggio's dismay, religious motives prevailed in Adam Höller's case. According to Francesco Sacchini's *Historia*, after arriving in Vienna Adam started to defame the Catholic Church and the Jesuit order.[38] Fortunately, it is possible to compare the Jesuit accounts with the vision of the "renegade." Before dying of plague in 1570, Adam drafted a letter offering a more nuanced understanding of his attitude toward Catholicism and the Jesuits.[39] The letter was published in 1573 under a pseudonym mediated by Adam's confidant from Vienna—Protestant humanist Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio. Adam Höller wrote his polemic response in a very conciliatory manner. Repeatedly underlining his respect for the Jesuit order, Höller expressed hope that such "learned, honest, just and, most importantly, pious" men as Jesuits would be able to accept his views.[40] Adam sought to defend three key points.

First, he harshly criticized the papacy. The Jesuits' greatest mistake, Höller argued, was their unconditional loyalty to the pope. By revering popes, Jesuits betrayed Christian ideals and transformed from Christians to "papists."[41] Adam advocated for the Lutheran approach to the papacy and to the priesthood in general. He praised Martin Luther's writings and wished they could be studied alongside the classical authors of antiquity. The popes were accused of extreme cruelty to the followers of Luther. Adam argued that brutal repression against "heretics" should not be sanctioned by a leader of Christians, and their behavior resembled that of pagan emperors like Nero and Domitian.[42]

The division of Christians into "orthodox" and "heretics," as well as religious persecutions, was the second major concern of Adam Höller. Pleading for the rejection of confessionally motivated violence as well as for

38 Sacchini, *Historia Societatis Jesu: Pars tertia*, 290.
39 Albutius, *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas*.
40 Albutius, *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas*, 2.
41 Albutius, *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas*, 2.
42 Albutius, *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas*, 9.

Christian reconciliation was consonant with the ideas of many Protestant humanists of the time, such as Sebastian Castellio. It is impossible to trace a direct influence and to define whether Adam had a chance to embrace these ideas during his years under the Jesuits. Yet, the engagement with the Protestant intellectual world is directly inferable from his rhetoric.

The last point raised by Adam had practical implications for him personally. He strictly opposed the concept of celibacy, arguing that prohibiting priests from having families was not justifiable. In this regard, the Lutheran approach was also preferable. To support his argument, Adam even referred to the experience of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which allowed its priests to marry.[43] Adam thereby highlighted that only Catholics practiced celibacy, a policy he thought should be abolished. Unsurprisingly, marriage was the first thing the thirty-year-old Adam did in Vienna.

Adam Höller was a Jesuit who developed his system of beliefs independently from what was taught by his professors and in a similar fashion to the teachings of Protestants. Years spent in the order did not cultivate in him a spirit of absolute obedience, and he directed criticism at the aspects of the Jesuit doctrines he did not agree with. Still, it is revealing that he did not seek confrontation but instead attempted to explain to the Jesuits their "errors," hoping for understanding. He respected his former masters, being convinced that, once the Jesuits rejected the power of the pope, they could use their talents and piety for a better cause. Not all the defectors were as peaceful as Adam Höller.

Two Friends, Two Renegades

Christian Francken and Paul Florenius are arguably the most well-known apostates of the late sixteenth-century Austrian province. Their biographies were first explored in a series of articles in the late nineteenth century and then addressed in a few more recent studies focusing mostly on theological and philosophical issues.[44] I will sketch their careers with a focus on their relationships with the Jesuits and complex "conversion careers."

43 Albutius, *Epistula Paulii Albutii ad Jesuitas*, 19.

44 Andreas Katz, *Die Convertiten seit der Reformation nach ihrem Leben und aus ihren Schriften: Bd. 3; 1590–1601* (Freiburg am Breisgau, 1866), 295–308; Andreas Steinhuber, *Geschichte des Kollegium Germanikum Hungarikum in Rom*, Bd. I. 2. (Aufl. Herder, 1906) 76; Maria Biagioni, "Christian Francken and the Skepticism of the Sixteenth Century," in *The Radical Reformation and the Making of Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 108–34; József Simon, "Philosophical Atheism and Incommensurability of Religions in Christian Francken's Thought," *Hungarian Philosophical Review* 61, no. 2 (2017): 57–67.

Francken and Florenius are often considered together because they taught at the Jesuit college and were close friends.[45] Their friendship began in 1576 when Christian Francken arrived at the Viennese college as a young Jesuit novice, where he met Paul Florenius. Francken originated from a Protestant family in Saxony. After converting to Catholicism and entering the Jesuit order, he was sent to Rome for studies. Due to health issues, he spent some time in Sicily and, after recuperating, moved to Vienna. In 1577, the twenty-five-year-old Francken was studying theology in Vienna and was authorized to teach philosophy.[46]

Francken's friend Florenius was born in Prague. In 1570, he was admitted to the Collegium Germanicum upon the recommendation of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Commendone and became a Jesuit in 1575.[47] Florenius was academically successful. In 1577, at the age of twenty-seven, he had already received doctoral degrees in philosophy and theology and was teaching theology at the Viennese college.[48]

In 1578, the two young and promising Jesuit professors violated the vows of obedience, escaped from the college, and moved together to Prague. Maggio, still the provincial of the Austrian province and the college rector, left a detailed account of this event and of the preceding circumstances.[49] Maggio carefully discussed how Florenius had deceived the Jesuits by "imitating the true religion."[50] The provincial acknowledged that Florenius at first skillfully misled his fellow Jesuits. To make the right impression, he actively devoted himself (*ne mediocriter deditus*) to the spiritual practices exercised by the brethren and read pious literature.[51] However, it was already possible to detect some oddities in his behavior. Florenius was mostly unsociable and unfriendly to other Jesuits, whom he seemed to despise. There was only one college member who enjoyed his full trust.[52] Although Maggio did not give his name, it is reasonable to assume this was Christian Francken. Florenius allegedly once confessed to his friend that he did not especially esteem the order and always tried to remain independent in his judgments.

45 See a detailed examination of this friendship in Clarisse Roche, "Usages et mises en scène de l'amitié entre Paulus Florenius et Christian Francken dans les polémiques religieuses à Vienne (1578–1590)," in *Amitié: Un lien politique et social en Allemagne et en France XIIe–XIX siècles* (2013), https://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/discussions/8-2013/roche_usages (accessed September 2, 2026).

46 Lukács, *Catalogi personarum*, 382.

47 Steinhuber, *Geschichte des Kollegium Germanikum Hungarikum*, 75.

48 Lukács, *Catalogi personarum*, 382.

49 Laurentius Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," in MPSJ 4:723–36.

50 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 724.

51 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 724.

52 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 725.

After two years in Vienna, Florenius requested to be dismissed from the order for the first time, but Maggio persuaded him to stay. Although still a Jesuit professor, Florenius ceased to hide his unconventional ideas. He spoke favorably of heretical teachings and criticized Catholics for their ignorance and inability to apprehend the arguments of their opponents.[53] Additionally, Florenius showed little respect to the prominent Catholic preachers, such as Peter Canisius and Stanislaus Hosius. Most importantly, Florenius openly defended some key Protestant doctrines: original sin, *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*, rejection of the veneration of saints, and criticism of ecclesiastical ceremonies and the Catholic priesthood. According to Maggio's report, in private conversations with his closest confidant (Francken) he even called the pope the Antichrist.[54]

As a professor of theology in Vienna, Florenius had access to classrooms, where he propagated his ideas. Florenius appealed to his expertise and came up with a clever ruse. He claimed that all these doctrines were actually taught in Rome and he had learned them in the Collegium Romanum.[55] However, in private talks he acknowledged that the teachers at the main Jesuit educational center had nothing to do with the concepts he was advocating. Thus, it can be argued that at some point a member of the order actively promulgated explicitly Protestant teachings within the walls of the Jesuit school of Vienna. Maggio attempted to portray other Jesuits as immune to this hostile influence.[56] Yet, even the rector pointed out that there were enough external students and probably Jesuits who expressed an interest in Florenius's theology (*rem novam admirantibus*).[57] According to Maggio, unnecessary references to John Calvin in Florenius's lectures made students suspicious, but he still had a receptive audience. Heated disputes with another theology professor also failed to prompt any changes in his position in the college. After attending his classes, Maggio himself concluded that such lectures could be appreciated by heretics. The rector feared that Florenius was immersing students in Protestant ideas and, most concerning, doing so in the name of the Jesuit order.[58] Astonishingly, despite such apparent defiance, Maggio did not resort to any punishment but instead sought to dissuade him from unorthodox ideas. One possible explanation for this leniency could be Maggio's intention of keeping this unpleasant incident in-house, since it might have damaged the reputation

53 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 727.
54 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 731.
55 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 728.
56 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 727.
57 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 728.
58 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 734.

of the college. Persuading Floren to stop his misconduct, Maggio briefly mentioned his desire to avoid any scandal arising from this story.[59] All Maggio's efforts were in vain. Florenius arrogantly rejected Maggio's requests and ultimately escaped from the college in early February 1578.

During his time at the college, Florenius together with Francken wrote the anti-Jesuit treatise *Colloquium jesuiticum* (The Jesuit Dialogue).[60] The treatise soon gained popularity across Europe, being translated into several languages and bringing fame to Florenius as a Protestant polemist. *Colloquium jesuiticum* was written as a classical Platonic dialogue between a master (Paulus Florenius) and apprentice (Sebastain Franck), both eager to uncover the whole truth about the Jesuits. As the treatise is well known, I will limit myself to summarizing its core argument.[61] The "Jesuit religion" (*religio jesuitica*), that is, Catholicism, is portrayed as essentially a form of paganism based on superstition and hypocrisy. Playing on the early modern interest in stereotypes, different nations varied in terms of vulnerability to the Catholic paganism. Thus, while Spaniards and Italians were by nature more receptive to any kind of superstition, Germans and Czechs tended to reject it and to embrace the reformed ideas. The treatise offers proofs of the pagan nature of Catholicism: many Catholic feasts resembled the ancient ones, with the pope as the principal idol.

More relevant to the present study is the context in which the treatise was conceived. Francken emphasized that it was the outcome of continuous, intense talks both dissenters held in the college. Maggio also confirms this point by referring to the secret conversations of Florenius with his friend. Since these conversations became known to the rector, their "secrecy" was somewhat relative. It is crucial to understand that the inhabitants of the Jesuit college in Vienna did not have a private space in the conventional sense. They lived, studied, prayed, and took meals together. They were not allowed to leave the college and go to the town without permission from the rector or one of the prefects. So, it is hardly possible to imagine a situation when Florenius and Francken were sitting privately and discussing unorthodox issues. There were always other witnesses listening to their conversations.

59 Maggio, "Litterae de funesta Pauli Florenii apostasia," 734.

60 Christian Francken, *Breve colloquium Jesuiticum, Toti orbi Christiano, & urbi potissimum Caesareae Viennensi, a recte cognoscendam, hactenus non satis perspectam, Iesuitarum religionem utilissimum: Habitum a S. Theol. D. Paulo Florenio, cum Christiano Francken philosophiae professore in Caesareo Iesuitarum Gymnasio Viennae, anno 1578 20. Ianuarij* (Leipzig, 1580).

61 For a detailed analysis, see Lech Szczucki, "Philosophie und Autorität: Der Fall Christian Francken," in *Reformation und Frühaufklärung in Polen: Studien über den Sozinianismus und seinen Einfluß auf das westeuropäische Denken im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Paul Wrzecionko (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 168–74.

Given Florenius's provocative behavior at the college, it is plausible that he intended to engage other Jesuits (or externals living in the boarding houses) in the discussions. Consequently, in 1576–77 the Jesuit college in Vienna served as a space where two Jesuits, one of whom was a theology professor, could disseminate anti-Catholic ideas under different circumstances: at the lectures or in private talks with their neighbors throughout the day.

Florenius and Francken both became prominent Protestant preachers, but their fates unfolded differently. Florenius remained a fierce critic of the Jesuits until he died and participated in several disputes with former co-religionists. Francken followed a more sophisticated trajectory. In 1581, he attempted to reunite with the Jesuits. In a letter addressed to the rector of the Viennese college, Francken repented his apostasy and recounted his life after leaving the college.[62] In Prague, he grew disillusioned with his friend Florenius. Allegedly, he had adopted a hedonistic, sinful lifestyle that did not correspond to the Christian ascetic ideals he had previously propagated.[63] Francken moved from Prague and set off on a long journey through the Protestant lands of the Holy Roman Empire (Dresden, Leipzig, Wittenberg, Magdeburg, Braunschweig, Heidelberg, Tubingen, Basel, Geneve, Strasbourg, Basel, Nuremberg, Breslau). In Basel, he prepared a new edition of the *Colloquium jesuiticum* and in Nuremberg was appointed as a teacher in the Protestant town school. Thus, on the one hand, he continued his activities as a Lutheran theologian. On the other hand, Francken faced difficulties with fully integrating into the Protestant community because of his Jesuit past.[64] Other Protestants were often suspicious and did not treat him with respect. These internal controversies might have pushed him to reconcile with the Jesuits. The Jesuits, however, were reluctant to see him back in the college. The Viennese Jesuits took into consideration his misdeeds—defection, the *Colloquium jesuiticum*, active anti-Jesuit polemic—and concluded he was extremely unstable in matters of faith.[65] The attempt at reconciliation failed, and Francken proceeded with Protestant preaching and teaching in Poland, Hungary, and Transylvania. In 1590, he again decided to switch confessional allegiance and (re)converted to Catholicism in Prague. For his religious inconsistency, Sebastian Francken earned the nickname "weathercock."[66]

The cases of Florenius and Francken illuminate the intensity of anti-Catholic endeavors within the Jesuit school. While Andreas Höller also

62 Christian Francken. *Epistula in qua deplorat suum a Societate Jesu et Ecclesia Catholica discessum* (Vienna, 1582).

63 Francken. *Epistula in qua deplorat suum a Societate Jesu*, A 3.

64 Francken. *Epistula in qua deplorat suum a Societate Jesu*, A 4.

65 *Historia collegii Viennensis pars I*, ÖNB, Codex 8367, fol. 29$^{v.}$

66 Katz, *Die Convertiten seit der Reformation*, 308.

allegedly "tempted" students with unorthodox ideas, Paulus Florenius proceeded in a much more systematic manner. Moreover, as a theology professor he had better opportunities for Protestant propagandizing. The counterintuitively moderate response of the rector to Florenius's activities is another surprising aspect. I have discussed how the superior generals recommended that rectors tolerate Protestant students, since they were amenable to conversion. The case of dissenting professors was certainly more serious and complicated. It is difficult to explain why, for almost a year, the rector let Florenius act contrary to the order's interests. Maybe he genuinely held out hope for the spiritual improvement of such a talented Jesuit. In addition, there were certain reputational concerns at play. Francken is notable in terms of his turbulent "conversion career." "My soul was torn between you [Catholics] and Lutherans," as he stated in his letter to the Viennese Jesuits.[67] A Protestant converted to Catholicism who eventually escaped the Jesuit college, returned to his original confession but still carried the Jesuit legacy. Next, the failed attempt to reunite with the Jesuits, the continuation of his career as a Protestant teacher, and finally the conversion to Catholicism. His fate can be regarded as an example of a fluid confessional self-identification that changed according to the circumstances.

Conclusion

"From these [students] there hopefully will be a great use for the Catholic Church." The Jesuit Olivier Mannaerts came to this optimistic conclusion after his visit to the school of Graz in 1583.[68] The present paper has argued that the Jesuit colleges of the Austrian province in the second half of the sixteenth century faced considerable struggles in fulfilling those expectations.

The treatment of students with dubious confessional allegiances was the first crucial issue. While the leadership advocated for admitting children from Protestant families, emphasizing its utility for conversion purposes, the rectors, generally sharing this view, highlighted certain problematic aspects. Many students remained steadfast in their faith, posing the risk of influencing their peers with unorthodox ideas. The Jesuits tended to put the blame on the students' detrimental environment outside the school. Parents and Protestant preachers allegedly prevented students from observing Catholic rites. The only possible solution was to separate students from their families and to keep them in the Jesuit boarding facilities. Yet, this option worked mostly for non-locals who could not afford

67 Francken, *Epistula in qua deplorat*, A4.

68 Olivier Mannaerts, "Acta visitationum assistentiae germaniae de studiis," in MPSJ 7:444.

accommodation in the town. Additionally, the limited capacities of the boarding houses did not allow all applicants to be accepted.

"Fictious" conversions constituted another major problem. The Jesuits repeatedly raised concerns about the sincerity of the students outwardly embracing Catholic doctrine. Merely performing all the symbolic acts identified as indicators of conversion—taking Catholic communion, confessing to a Catholic priest, attending Mass, reading catechism—did not necessarily reflect a genuine shift in confessional allegiance. Driven by pragmatic motives like getting a high-quality education, students could imitate (the Jesuit sources often used the expression *ficta anima*) their loyalty to Catholicism, only to revert to Protestantism after graduation. The difference between a "true" and "fictious" conversion was hardly identifiable and, consequently, not easily traceable in the sources. A student labeled as *conversus* could either genuinely shift his confessional views or merely simulate such a conversion.

Certain students at some point became Jesuits and assumed teaching positions within the colleges. However, even this was not a guarantee of obedience and strict adherence to Catholicism. The cases of five renegades underscored the limits of confessional homogeneity within the core of the Jesuit educational system. Years spent with the Jesuits did not strengthen their religious loyalty. Drawing on the terminology of Paul Florenius, they managed to maintain a "neutral" stance to the Jesuit indoctrination and remained receptive to unorthodox ideas. Moreover, their positions in the college (*regens convictorum* or theology professor) provided them with opportunities to spread anti-Catholic teachings among students. The attitudes of these dissenters toward the Jesuit order varied. Adam Höller kept a respectful view of his former colleagues and lamented their alignment with what he considered the wrong side. Conversely, Paul Florenius and, to some extent, Sebastian Francken exhibited their extreme contempt for the "Jesuit religion." The Jesuits always sought to admonish the renegades. Even continuous misconduct and overt propagandizing of the Protestant doctrines did not stop the rector from attempting to reassure the dissenters. In some instances, experienced Jesuit preachers managed to reconcile with the troublemakers and reunite them with the order. Yet, for the most part they became successful Protestant priests. Similar careers were also made by some graduates of the Jesuit schools who did not enter the order.

The examination of the fates of non-Catholics within Jesuit schools sheds light on the ambiguities of confessional identifications in late sixteenth-century Central Europe. Aligning with one of the confessional groups was not stable and was often driven by pragmatic considerations. Formal affiliation with a group associated with a particular confession

did not necessarily lead to persistent adherence. On a practical level, the blurred boundaries between confessions impeded a precise attribution of certain actors to one of the camps. The rector of the Prague college admitted that he could not clearly differentiate between "Protestants" and "Catholics" struggling to adopt appropriate Catholic conduct. Confessional ambiguities also resulted in sophisticated "conversion careers." The stories of the Jesuit defectors highlight the distinction between self-identification and ascribed identity. While Francken identified as a fervent Protestant, his new co-religionists tended to stress his Jesuit background.

It is important to consider the context of the Habsburg lands in the 1560s–1580s when examining the confessional turbulence in the Jesuit colleges. While the ruling dynasty was Catholic and supportive of the Jesuits, most members of the nobility and burghers were still hostile to Catholicism. Protestant teachings freely circulated throughout the monarchy, and irenicism was still a norm at court and in intellectual circles. In such an environment, it was challenging to cultivate a strictly Catholic spirit in the Jesuit schools.

Given all the complexities surrounding confessional shifts at Jesuit schools, it would be an exaggeration to argue that the Jesuit conversion policy completely failed. Although the five renegades offer rich insights into the heterogeneity of Jesuit communities, they were still exceptions. There are numerous examples of Jesuits and graduates of their schools who became Catholic priests and teachers and contributed to the re-Catholicization of the Habsburg lands. Although it is difficult to quantify this progress statistically, tracing the careers of graduates and Jesuit teachers may prove that at least in many instances the Jesuit schools effectively fulfilled their task. The investigation of the Protestant elements of Jesuit college communities helps not to overstate the progress.

ORCID:
Dmitry Zharov https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4653-8837