

Catholics in Restoration Britain



Timeline of the Stuart Era

1603-1625

Accession of James I

James I tried to continue the relative stability of the Elizabethan period but did so by pursuing a more draconian approach towards both Puritans and Catholics (particularly in the aftermath of the Gunpowder plot of 1605).

1649-1660

Interregnum

During the interregnum many previously proscribed Protestant sects were permitted and censorship laws were relaxed. This allowed for the rise of new Protestant movements like Baptists, Quakers, Muggletonians, Familists and many others.

1685-1688

Reign of James II

James II was the last Catholic King of England. His accession saw a constitutional crisis which resulted in the Glorious Revolution and eventually the accession of William III.

1625-1642

Reign of Charles I

Charles I acceded to the throne and immediately appointed bishops who were from the Arminian (anti-Calvinist) wing of the Church of England. In particular Archbishop Laud was seen by Protestants as almost Catholic in his attitudes.

1642-1649

The English Civil War

The war pit Parliamentary forces - many of whom were supportive of 'Independent' ecclesiology - against Royalist forces - many of whom were 'Laudians.'

1660-1685

Restoration of Charles II

With the restoration Charles enacted the so-called Clarendon Code which dramatically curtailed the rights of non-conformists. Charles II was personally very tolerant of Catholicism within his court, married a Catholic and converted to Catholicism on his deathbed.

The Religious Climate in 1678

Anti-Catholicism had fomented in Britain for over a century. With the restoration of a monarch with close ties to Catholic Europe (via his wife and his brother) suspicion grew that the Papacy would once more attempt to usurp power in Britain. In 1677 Charles signed a royal indulgence, suspending some penal laws against Catholics and non-conformists. The same year, Andrew Marvell published a popular pamphlet entitled: *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*. One of the key complaints in the pamphlet concerns the King's brother - future James II - and his marriage to the Catholic Princess of Modena.



An Account of the Growth of Popery

The same year, Andrew Marvell published a popular pamphlet entitled: *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*. One of the key complaints in the pamphlet concerns the King's brother - future James II - and his marriage to the Catholic Princess of Modena.



An Account of the Growth of Popery

“That for his Royal Highnesse to marry any other of that Religion, had very dangerous consequences and the mindes of his Majesties Protestant subjects will be much disquieted, filled with infinite discontents, and jealousies. That his Majesty would thereby be linked into such a foraine Alliance, which will be of great disadvantage and possibly to the Ruine of the Protestant Religion. That they have found by bad experience how such marriages have always increased Popery, and incorraged Priests and Jesuits to pervert his Majesty's subjects. That the Popish party already lift up their heads in hopes of his marriage. That they fear it may diminish the affection of the people toward his Royal Highnesse, who is by blood so near-related to the Crown. That it is now more then one Age, that the subjects have lived in continual apprehensions of the increafe of Popery, and the decay of the Protestant Religion.”

- Andrew Marvell, *An Account of the Growth of Popery*.



Claude de la Colombiere

Claude de la Colombiere was born in 1640 into an upper middle-class family in South-Eastern France and was educated in Lyon. In 1658 he joined the Jesuit novitiate and was ordained in 1669 having studied theology in Avignon and Paris. In 1675 he became chaplain of a Jesuit community in Burgundy and to a Visitationist community of nuns. It was there that he encountered Margaret Mary Alacoque.



Claude de la Colombiere

In the same year Margaret Mary Alacoque began having visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She confessed to Claude de la Colombiere that she had had these visions and he supported her in making them public. According to Margaret Mary, Christ gave her a number of instructions which included:

- "He desires to enter pompously and magnificently into the house of princes and kings, to be honored."
- "To build a building where the painting of this divine Heart will be, to receive the homage of the King and the court."
- "To be painted on his standards and engraved on his weapons to make him victorious over all his enemies."



Claude de la Colombiere

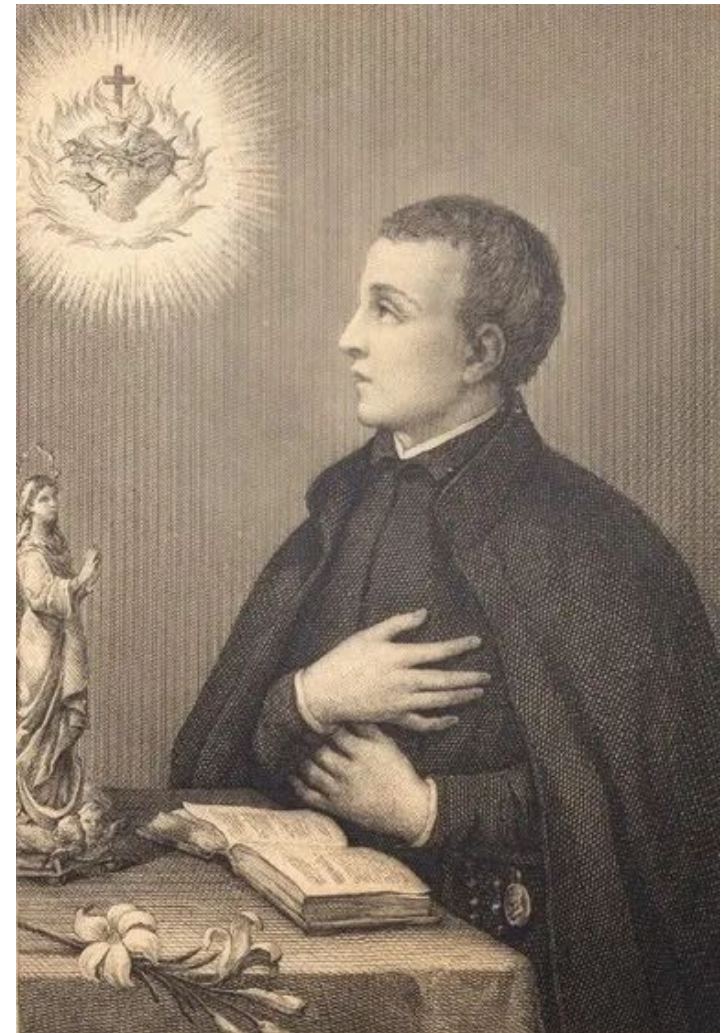
The following year, Colombiere was sent to England where he would serve as a personal chaplain to Princess Mary of Modena, wife of the future James II. As such, he immediately became the most well connected Catholic priest in England.



Ministry in London

“I fear not but that I shall find God in England since it was He Himself who sent me there.”

– letter to his sister Margeurite.



Ministry in London

“A guest in St James Palace, Father Colombiere lived there in the quietest manner, a stranger to the excitements and tumults of the court, knowing only those parts of the palace through which he was obliged to pass to reach the apartments of the Duchess of York... He only went out to visit the sick or those to whom he hoped to be of service...He was admitted to the Duchess' presence once a week.”

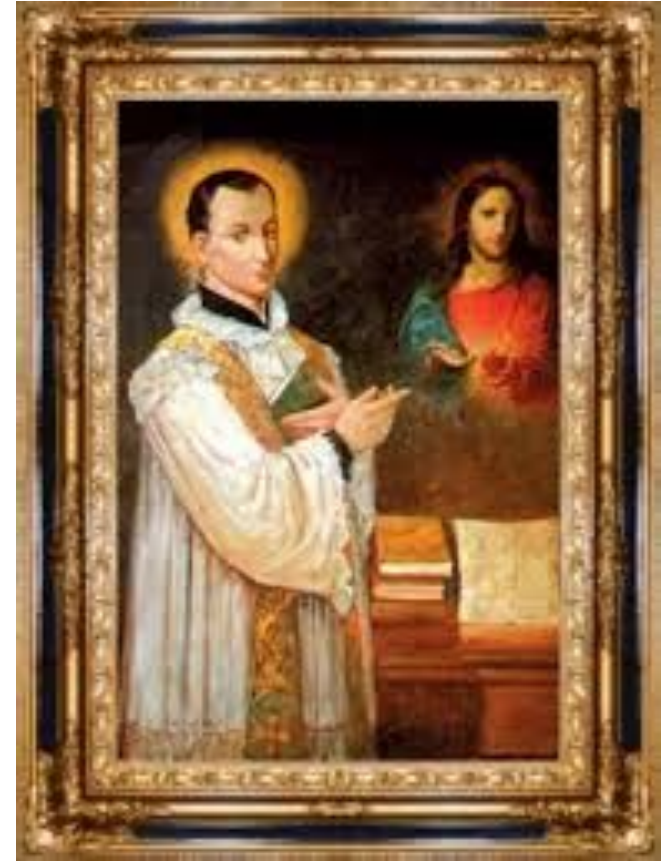
- *Letter from P. Nicolas de la Pesse, 1676.*



Ministry in London

“I am already as much accustomed to English life as if I had been born in London. I find a great many Catholics here, but am assured the number of devout persons amongst them is small. At this I am not surprised, for had we as little spiritual help in France as they have here, I think our state would be worse than theirs. No English subject is allowed to enter the Ambassador’s chapel to hear Mass, and since my arrival men have been placed at the doors of all the chapels, even at those of the Queen’s chapel, to arrest any Englishman who might be seen entering. There are indeed many Frenchmen in the town, but it is now a year since they have received any instruction. We may well say that the Word of God is rarely heard in this country.”

- Letter to Marguerite, 11 November 1676.



Ministry in London

“This nation was gradually corrupted by the wealth of its trade with countries abounding in gold and silver, by avarice and luxury. Could their enervation and voluptuous style of living, fail to provoke the anger of the Lord? And can we mistake the terrible effects of His wrath, in the thick darkness of doubt which enshrouds the land, the shock of rival creeds, the widespread diversities of belief, of feeling, of opinion, which sow enmity between town and town, between village and village, between members of the same family; in that multitude of sects, each reviling the other, wherein doubt is for ever triumphant, confidence altogether wanting... Most men have little religion, and many none. I make no personal accusation, but if there be but one road to Heaven, it is clear that under a system, in which each seeks a path for himself, many will go astray to their eternal loss.”

- *Letter to Margaret Mary Alacoque, 14 December 1676.*



Ministry in London

““If the Catholics of this country possessed but half the religious privileges which abound in France, there would be found amongst them many saints. But it is terrible to see the way they are persecuted, and the few helps to devotion they can obtain. Without spiritual instruction, and forbidden to hear Mass, can we wonder they are not more fervent. It is indeed a sadly desolate Church, and it seems to me that the prayers of the faithful could not be better employed than in supplicating the religious revival of this kingdom.”

- *Letter to Margaret Mary Alacoque, 1677.*



Ministry in London

“I serve a Princess pious in every sense of the word, gentle, amiable, and an example of all that is good. For myself, I am as little troubled by the excitements of the Court as if I were in a desert.”

- Letter to his brother Humbert.



Ministry in London

“The Princess who, in the very flower of her age, in a rank of life to which it is too often supposed everything is permissible, openly declares herself on the side of piety, and daily observes its practice with zealous exactness.”

- *Sermon in the Royal Chapel on the Feast of All Saints, 1676.*



Ministry in London

“There is at this Court a young widow of from seven to eight-and-twenty years of age, who in the midst of the almost universal corruption of manners has preserved her reputation unblemished, though exposed by her wit and beauty to many temptations. This lady, who is of the highest rank, never fails to attend my sermons, nor is she ashamed to allow the emotions they awaken in her to be seen. She often feels drawn to give herself to God—indeed, at times, to leave all and follow Him. But she is the centre of a brilliant circle, and cannot yet determine absolutely to renounce the world and its allurements. She is of a most amiable disposition. I speak to her very urgently on these matters, and she always listens with the utmost deference to my exhortations, but as yet I have been unable to induce her to take any decided step. She admires the religious life extremely in the abstract, but fears to encounter the sacrifices which embracing it entails. My visits to her are great acts of self-denial on my part, but I shall continue them, since under similar circumstances God has blessed my perseverance to the benefit of souls. My only fear is that I may be giving time to this case which might be better employed elsewhere. Could this lady be persuaded to give herself to God, her example would be of great weight. She is the most highly gifted woman, both in mind and person, at the Court. I beg you to remember this subject in your prayers. I have good hope [he says in a letter] that after Easter I may see the lady, on whose behalf I have been so anxious, treading the narrow way. During my last conversation with her at her house, she wept bitterly at the resistance of her will to the will of God, assuring me that the vanity and vexation of the world and the value of religion had never, she believed, been more clearly revealed to any one than herself. Hers is indeed a finely tempered soul united to a person of great external advantages; her example would make a forcible impression on many.”

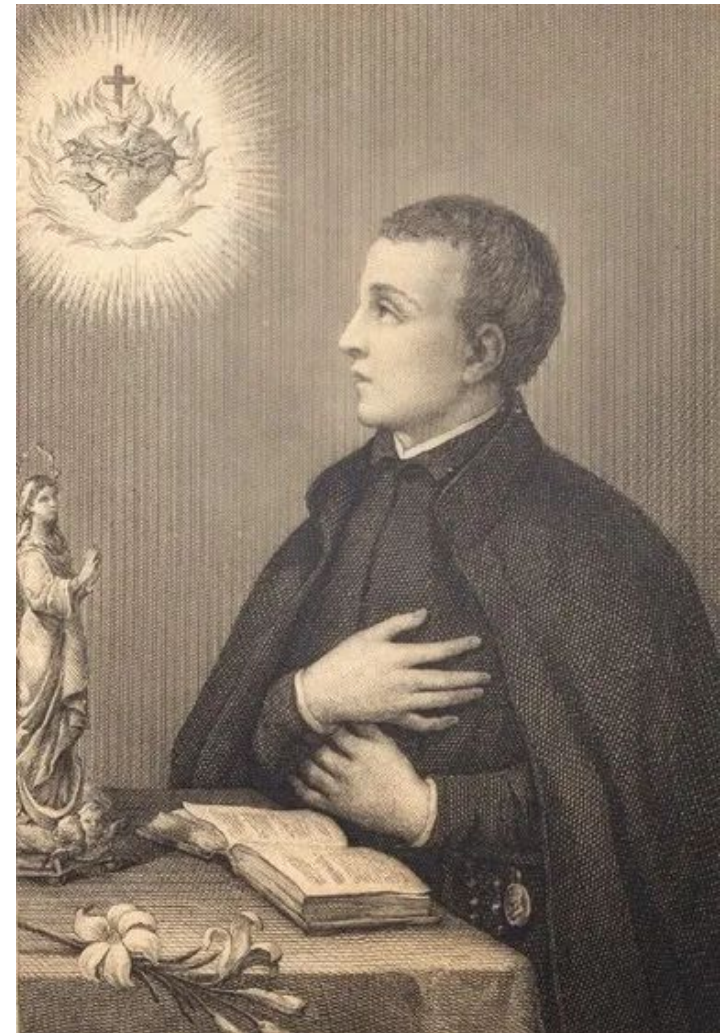
Ministry in London

“Yesterday evening I was again with the lady of whom I spoke to you. Strangely enough, the devil employs to her hurt a certain false respect to the Body of our Lord, which so deters her from Holy Communion that it is the one thing she dreads in the religious life. On my requiring of her to receive the Blessed Sacrament at least once a fortnight for three months, her distress was so great that I quite felt for her. She implored me to believe that nothing I could ask would be as painful to her as this request. However, I held my ground, and she eventually promised obedience. Most earnestly do I recommend her to your prayers.”

“I have five persons coming to see me with the intention of abjuring Protestantism, two were formerly monks, two are young French ladies, the other is an Englishman.”

“I have just received the submission of a young lady who has for long resisted the Divine call: pray God for her. Only eight days since I received another heretic.”

- Letters to Margaret Mary Alacoque.



Ministry in London

“Do not direct to me as Reverend Father for the opening of your letters by the post-office officials might cause me much annoyance. Call me father if you please in your letters. There is no danger in that, provided you are careful to avoid it in the address for did some Protestant see the words he would be liable to throw the letter into the river.”

- *Letter to anonymous correspondent, March 1677.*



Ministry in London

“The permission of my Superiors having been obtained I was on the point of making the journey to France, to which I was greatly urged by my friends, when a fresh loss of blood from the lungs brought me to the verge of the grave. Now the doctors forbid my moving, saying I am not strong enough to travel and am more likely to get well here. I know not what the Lord may have in store for me, whether I am to live or die, to remain or to return, to preach or to be silent. I have scarcely strength enough either to write or speak, barely to pray. I see around me a whitening harvest, never has there seemed to me so rich a promise of souls, but I am powerless. God’s will be done. I am unworthy to serve Him.”

- *Letter to Marguerite*, June 1677.



Ministry in London

“The permission of my Superiors having been obtained I was on the point of making the journey to France, to which I was greatly urged by my friends, when a fresh loss of blood from the lungs brought me to the verge of the grave. Now the doctors forbid my moving, saying I am not strong enough to travel and am more likely to get well here. I know not what the Lord may have in store for me, whether I am to live or die, to remain or to return, to preach or to be silent. I have scarcely strength enough either to write or speak, barely to pray. I see around me a whitening harvest, never has there seemed to me so rich a promise of souls, but I am powerless. God’s will be done. I am unworthy to serve Him.”

- *Letter to Mere Saumaise*, May 1678.



Israel Tonge and Titus Oates

Israel Tonge was a Protestant clergyman who was held an obsessive hatred of Catholicism and Jesuits in particular. He developed a manuscript which purported to document a plot involving one hundred Jesuits to assassinate King Charles. Titus Oates, Tonge's co-conspirator, delivered the document to a chemist Charles Kirby who approached the King while the latter was walking in St James' Park. Kirby alleged that the Queen's personal physician - a Catholic named George Wakeman - was also involved in the plot and would attempt to poison the King.



The Privy Council Investigation

Charles II was dismissive of the plot but prominent members of his court, in particular Lord Danby, took it seriously. They brought Oates and Tonge before the Privy Council where they were questioned. Oates gave a full and detailed account of various plots to overthrow the government, naming and implicating over five hundred Jesuit priests who he claimed were involved in the plot. After this Oates was given apartments in Whitehall, a salary, and a brigade of armed 'inspectors' with whom he was charged to root out Popish conspirators. In short order five Jesuit priests were arrested under Oates' orders and were executed.



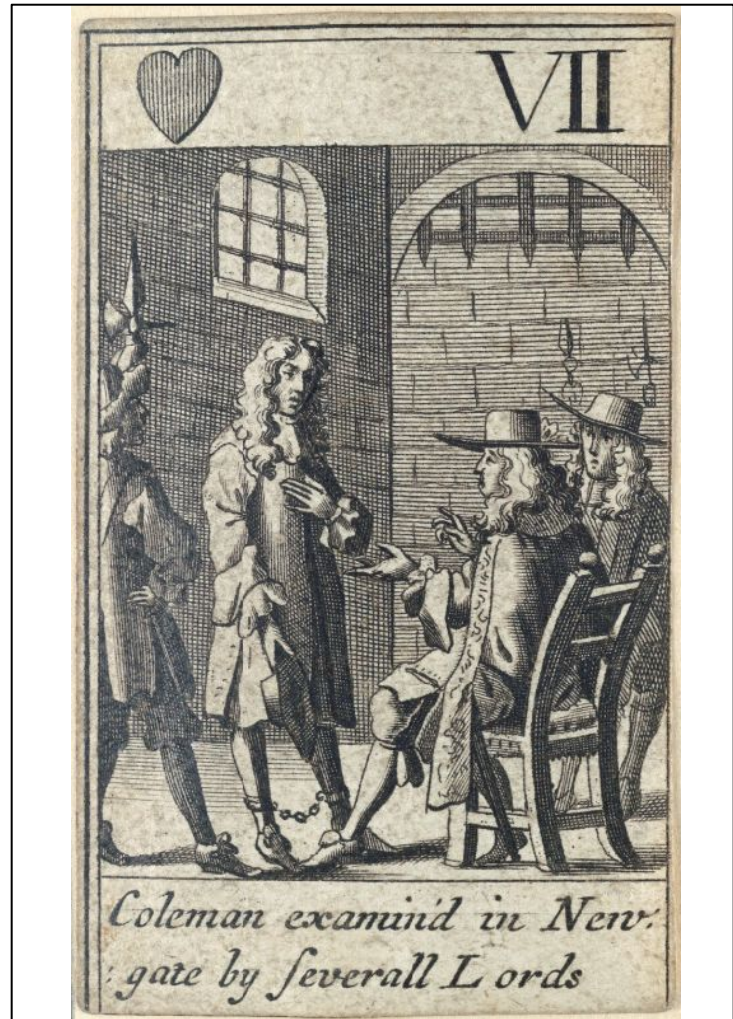
The Death of Godfrey

There was a boon to Titus Oates on 12 October 1678 when the Protestant magistrate Edmund Godfrey disappeared. A week later, Godfrey's mutilated body was discovered. There were riots in London as the news spread. Oates seized the momentum claiming that he had personally attended a meeting of Jesuit priests at the White Horse Tavern and that he had seen contracts taken out on the life of Edward Godfrey signed by the Superior of the Society of Jesus.



The Coleman Scandal

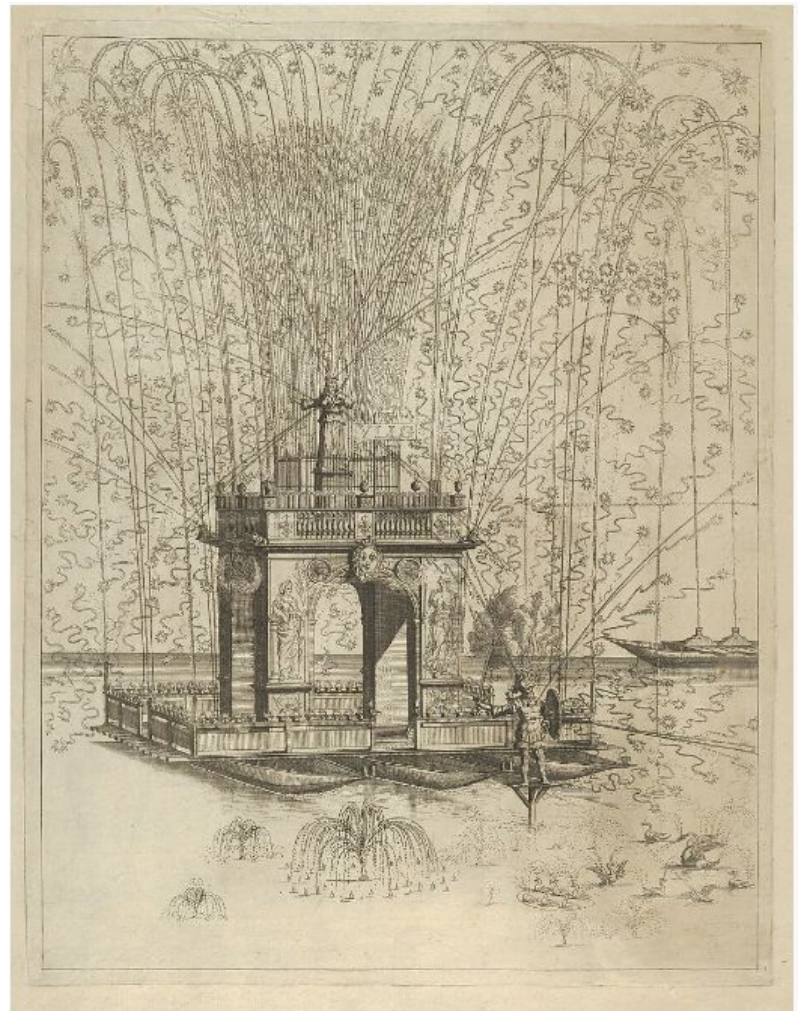
Oates' cause was further vindicated when Edward Coleman - a Catholic courtier - was discovered to have been receiving money from the French court. Even worse, Coleman had conducted a long correspondence with P. Jean Ferrier, a Jesuit priest and confessor to King Louis XIV. Coleman was tried and executed on 3 December 1678.



The Choqueux Discovery

“L. Butler of Moore Park acquaints the Committee that there being a report that a great many so-called manacles were found in Somerset House, his Majesty sent him to see them, etc., but his Lordship found none there ; but in Choqueux's house he found about 200 of these things called manacles, two of which he now produces. Mr. Choqueux is called in. Says he brought those that were full from France, and those that are empty he prepared so that the King might have occasion for them for any show. The House be moved that a guard may be set upon Choqueux's house till the cartridges, rockets, etc., be removed to the Tower. A certificate is read, stating that they have tried some of all the fireworks, and that all the composition burned very well and fired, but the corn powder in most of them was much decayed; and further that all the fireworks in M. Choqueux's house were made only for recreation, and could not burn any house except they were filled with straw.”

- *State Papers Domestic, 1 November 1678.*



The Trial of the Popish Lords

Next, Titus Oates accused five senior Catholic Lords of participating in the plot: William Herbert, 1st Marquess of Powis, William Howard, 1st Viscount Stafford, Henry Arundell, 3rd Baron Arundell of Wardour, William Petre, 4th Baron Petre and John Belasyse, 1st Baron Belasyse. King Charles did not believe these accusations but nevertheless, under the orders of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Chancellor of the Exchequer, the five Lords were convicted and imprisoned in the Tower of London. William Petre died while in prison whilst the others remained in prison until the accession of James II.



The Arrest of Claude Colombiere

“The Duchess of York’s Jesuit chaplain, Father de la Colombière, has been taken into custody, charged with attempting to convert a Protestant, and with having told about that the English King was really a Catholic. According to the report of the Lords Commissioners appointed to investigate the horrible plot against the, King’s life and his Government, the result of the questions put to Olivier du Fiquet and François Verdier, both answering on their oath, is, that Colombiere the Jesuit, Chaplain of the Duchess of York, and now prisoner in the King’s Bench, had had long and frequent interviews with Coleman, and that he had held a voluminous correspondence with Pere de la Chaise and Cardinal Bouillon; that he had attempted to pervert the said Olivier du Fiquet, François Verdier, and others to Popery, using for this purpose highly dangerous arguments, that he had received in his room a vast number of abjurations from both French and English subjects, and that he had also secretly sent missionaries to Virginia — amongst them a certain MacCarthy, an Irish priest. These things promising serious consequences, constitute an obstacle to the national peace and the Government of the Kingdom; it is now ordained by the Lords spiritual and temporal in this present Parliament assembled, that the Peers, accompanied by White Rod, present an address to his Majesty: That it will please his Majesty to command that the said Colombiere may be for ever banished from this Kingdom and from all the territories and dominions of the Crown.”

— Judgment of Lord Maynard, House of Lords, November 23rd 1678.

Colombiere's Response to the Crisis

“The name of the Jesuit is hated here above all else, even by priests both secular and regular, and by the Catholic laity as well, because it is said that the Jesuits have caused this raging storm, which is likely to overthrow the whole Catholic religion..”

- *Letter to anonymous correspondent, May 1678.*



Colombiere's Response to the Crisis

“I should be tedious were I to give details of this little matter. I must fail in recounting the numberless mercies that God bestowed on me at every turn and at every moment; but what I will say is, that I have seldom experienced more joy than I did in the midst of that tempest, from which I emerged with regret, and now am in truth prepared to welcome others. I was unworthy of such happiness, and I reflect with heartfelt sorrow that our Lord withdrew me from His vineyard, finding me wanting in the fervent zeal which He demands from His labourers.”



Antoine Arnauld

“Omnia que Omnia que loquitur populus iste conjuratio est — To these men all is a conspiracy. A Jesuit, living under the royal authority, chaplain to the King’s sister-in-law, advises an apostate monk to return to his convent—a conspiracy. He is the director of some ladies in London who wish to live the religious life—again a conspiracy. He is anxious that some priests should go and preach the Gospel in the part of the Empire colonized by the English—another conspiracy. Could anything be more absurd ? It was in reality a signal outrage on the first lady of the country after the Queen, to have actually arrested her confessor in the palace, and then to have imprisoned him for what was in one sense the merest trifle, and in another, considering his religion and his profession, conduct worthy of all praise ; this, too, whilst he was living under the personal protection of royalty itself. And thus it came to pass that Father de la Colombière was one of the most illustrious victims of calumny in the English persecution.”

- Antoine Arnauld

