



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede autori Atti costitutivi, ordinamenti, agiografie, etc.

Francisco De Borja y Aragon

Francis Borgia, born 28 October, 1510, was the son of [Juan Borgia](#), third Duke of Gandia, and of Juana of Aragon; died 30 September, 1572. The future saint was unhappy in his ancestry. His grandfather, Juan Borgia, the second son of [Alexander VI](#), was assassinated in Rome on 14 June, 1497, by an unknown hand, which his family always believed to be that of [Caesar Borgia](#). Rodrigo Borgia, elected pope in 1402 under the name of Alexander VI, had eight children. The eldest, [Pedro Luis](#), had acquired in 1485 the hereditary Duchy of Gandia in the Kingdom of Valencia, which, at his death, passed to his brother Juan, who had married [Maria Enriquez de Luna](#). Having been left a widow by the murder of her husband, Maria Enriquez withdrew to her duchy and devoted herself piously to the education of her two children, Juan and Isabel. After the marriage of her son in 1509, she followed the example of her daughter, who had entered the convent of Poor Clares in Gandia, and it was through these two women that sanctity entered the Borgia family, and in the House of Gandia was begun the work of reparation which Francis Borgia was to crown. Great-grandson of Alexander VI, on the paternal side, he was, on his mother's side, the great-grandson of the Catholic King [Ferdinand of Aragon](#). This monarch had procured the appointment of his natural son, [Alfonso](#), to the Archbishopric of Saragossa at the age of nine years. By Anna de Gurrea, Alfonso had two sons, who succeeded him in his archiepiscopal see, and two daughters, one of whom, Juana, married Duke Juan of Gandia and became the mother of our saint. By this marriage Juan had three sons and four daughters. By a second, contracted in 1523, he had five sons and five daughters. The eldest of all and heir to the dukedom was Francis. Piously reared in a court which felt the influence of the two Poor Clares, the mother and sister of the reigning duke, Francis lost his own mother when he was but ten. In 1521, a sedition amongst the populace imperilled the child's life, and the position of the nobility. When the disturbance was suppressed, Francis was sent to Saragossa to continue his education at the court of his uncle, the archbishop, an ostentatious prelate who had never been consecrated nor even ordained priest. Although in this court the Spanish faith retained its fervour, it lapsed nevertheless into the inconsistencies permitted by the times, and Francis could not disguise from himself the relation in which his grandmother stood to the dead archbishop, although he was much indebted to her for his early religious training. While at Saragossa Francis cultivated his mind and attracted the attention of his relatives by his fervour. They being desirous of assuring the fortune of the heir of Gandia, sent him at the age of twelve to Tordesillas as page to the [Infanta Catarina](#), the youngest child and companion in solitude of the unfortunate queen, Juana the Mad.

In 1525 the Infanta married [King Juan III of Portugal](#), and Francis returned to Saragossa to complete his education. At last, in 1528, the court of [Charles V](#) was opened to him, and the most brilliant future awaited him. On the way to Valladolid, while passing, brilliantly escorted, through Alcalá de Henares, Francis encountered a poor man whom the servants of the Inquisition were leading to prison. It was [Ignatius of Loyola](#). The young nobleman exchanged a glance of emotion





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with the prisoner, little dreaming that one day they should be united by the closest ties. The emperor and empress welcomed Borgia less as a subject than as a kinsman. He was seventeen, endowed with every charm, accompanied by a magnificent train of followers, and, after the emperor, his presence was the most gallant and knightly at court. In 1529, at the desire of the empress, Charles V gave him in marriage the hand of Eleanor de Castro, at the same time making him Marquess of Lombay, master of the hounds, and equerry to the empress, and appointing Eleanor Camarera Mayor. The newly-created Marquess of Lombay enjoyed a privileged station. Whenever the emperor was travelling or conducting a campaign, he confided to the young equerry the care of the empress, and on his return to Spain treated him as a confidant and friend. In 1535, Charles V led the expedition against Tunis unaccompanied by Borgia, but in the following year the favourite followed his sovereign on the unfortunate campaign in Provence. Besides the virtues which made him the model of the court and the personal attractions which made him its ornament, the Marquess of Lombay possessed a cultivated musical taste. He delighted above all in ecclesiastical compositions, and these display a remarkable contrapuntal style and bear witness to the skill of the composer, justifying indeed the assertion that, in the sixteenth century and prior to Palestrina, Borgia was one of the chief restorers of sacred music.

In 1538, at Toledo, an eighth child was born to the Marquess of Lombay, and on 1 May of the next year the Empress Isabella died. The equerry was commissioned to convey her remains to Granada, where they were interred on 17 May. The death of the empress caused the first break in the brilliant career of the Marquess and Marchioness of Lombay. It detached them from the court and taught the nobleman the vanity of life and of its grandeurs. Blessed John of Avila preached the funeral sermon, and Francis, having made known to him his desire of reforming his life, returned to Toledo resolved to become a perfect Christian. On 26 June, 1539, Charles V named Borgia Viceroy of Catalonia, and the importance of the charge tested the sterling qualities of the courtier. Precise instructions determined his course of action. He was to reform the administration of justice, put the finances in order, fortify the city of Barcelona, and repress outlawry. On his arrival at the viceregal city, on 23 August, he at once proceeded, with an energy which no opposition could daunt, to build the ramparts, rid the country of the brigands who terrorized it, reform the monasteries, and develop learning. During his vice-regency he showed himself an inflexible justiciary, and above all an exemplary Christian. But a series of grievous trials were destined to develop in him the work of sanctification begun at Granada. In 1543 he became, by the death of his father, Duke of Gandia, and was named by the emperor master of the household of Prince Philip of Spain, who was betrothed to the Princess of Portugal. This appointment seemed to indicate Francis as the chief minister of the future reign, but by God's permission the sovereigns of Portugal opposed the appointment. Francis then retired to his Duchy of Gandia, and for three years awaited the termination of the displeasure which barred him from court. He profited by this leisure to reorganize his duchy, to found a university in which he himself took the degree of Doctor of Theology, and to attain to a still higher degree of virtue. In 1546 his wife died. The duke had invited the Jesuits to Gandia and become their protector and disciple, and even at that time their model. But he desired still more, and on 1 February, 1548, became one of them by the pronunciation of the solemn vows of religion, although authorized by the pope to remain in the world, until he should have fulfilled his obligations towards his children and his estates—his obligations as father and as ruler.

On 31 August, 1550, the Duke of Gandia left his estates to see them no more. On 23 October he arrived at Rome, threw himself at the feet of St. Ignatius, and edified by his rare humility those especially who recalled the ancient power of the Borgias. Quick to conceive great projects, he even



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then urged St. Ignatius to found the Roman College. On 4 February, 1551, he left Rome, without making known his intention of departure. On 4 April, he reached Azpeitia in Guipuzcoa, and chose as his abode the hermitage of Santa Magdalena near Oñate. Charles V having permitted him to relinquish his possessions, he abdicated in favour of his eldest son, was ordained priest 25 May, and at once began to deliver a series of sermons in Guipuzcoa which revived the faith of the country. Nothing was talked of throughout Spain but this change of life, and Oñate became the object of incessant pilgrimage. The neophyte was obliged to tear himself from prayer in order to preach in the cities which called him, and which his burning words, his example, and even his mere appearance, stirred profoundly. In 1553 he was invited to visit Portugal. The court received him as a messenger from God and vowed to him, thenceforth, a veneration which it has always preserved. On his return from this journey, Francis learned that, at the request of the emperor, [Pope Julius III](#) was willing to bestow on him the cardinalate. St. Ignatius prevailed upon the pope to reconsider this decision, but two years later the project was renewed and Borgia anxiously inquired whether he might in conscience oppose the desire of the pope. St. Ignatius again relieved his embarrassment by requesting him to pronounce the solemn vows of profession, by which he engaged not to accept any dignities save at the formal command of the pope. Thenceforth the saint was reassured. [Pius IV](#) and [Pius V](#) loved him too well to impose upon him a dignity which would have caused him distress. [Gregory XIII](#), it is true, appeared resolved, in 1572, to overcome his reluctance, but on this occasion death saved him from the elevation he had so long feared.

On 10 June, 1554, St. Ignatius named Francis Borgia commissary-general of the Society in Spain. Two years later he confided to him the care of the missions of the East and West Indies, that is to say of all the missions of the Society. To do this was to entrust to a recruit the future of his order in the peninsula, but in this choice the founder displayed his rare knowledge of men, for within seven years Francis was to transform the provinces confided to him. He found them poor in subjects, containing but few houses, and those scarcely known. He left them strengthened by his influence and rich in disciples drawn from the highest grades of society. These latter, whom his example had done so much to attract, were assembled chiefly in his novitiate at Simancas, and were sufficient for numerous foundations. Everything aided Borgia — his name, his sanctity, his eager power of initiative, and his influence with the [Princess Juana](#), who governed Castile in the absence of her brother Philip. On 22 April, 1555, Queen Juana the Mad died at Tordesillas, attended by Borgia. To the saint's presence has been ascribed the serenity enjoyed by the queen in her last moments. The veneration which he inspired was thereby increased, and furthermore his extreme austerity, the care which he lavished on the poor in the hospitals, the marvellous graces with which God surrounded his apostolate contributed to augment a renown by which he profited to further God's work. In 1565 and 1566 he founded the missions of Florida, New Spain, and Peru, thus extending even to the New World the effects of his insatiable zeal.

In December, 1556, and three other times, Charles V shut himself up at Yuste. He at once summoned thither his old favourite, whose example had done so much to inspire him with the desire to abdicate. In the following month of August, he sent him to Lisbon to deal with various questions concerning the succession of Juan III. When the emperor died, 21 September, 1558, Borgia was unable to be present at his bedside, but he was one of the testamentary executors appointed by the monarch, and it was he who, at the solemn services at Valladolid, pronounced the eulogy of the deceased sovereign. A trial was to close this period of success. In 1559 [Philip II](#) returned to reign in Spain. Prejudiced for various reasons (and his prejudice was fomented by many who were envious of Borgia, some of whose interpolated works had been recently condemned by



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the Inquisition), Philip seemed to have forgotten his old friendship for the Marquess of Lombay, and he manifested towards him a displeasure which increased when he learned that the saint had gone to Lisbon. Indifferent to this storm, Francis continued for two years in Portugal his preaching and his foundations, and then, at the request of Pope Pius IV, went to Rome in 1561. But storms have their providential mission. It may be questioned whether but for the disgrace of 1543 the Duke of Gandia would have become a religious, and whether, but for the trial which took him away from Spain, he would have accomplished the work which awaited him in Italy. At Rome it was not long before he won the veneration of the public. Cardinals [Otho Truchsess](#), Archbishop of Augsburg, [Stanislaus Hosius](#), and [Alexander Farnese](#) evinced towards him a sincere friendship. Two men above all rejoiced at his coming. They were Michael Chisleri, the future Pope Pius V, and [Charles Borromeo](#), whom Borgia's example aided to become a saint.

On 16 February, 1564, Francis Borgia was named assistant general in Spain and Portugal, and on 20 January, 1565, was elected vicar-general of the Society of Jesus. He was elected general 2 July, 1565, by thirty-one votes out of thirty-nine, to succeed Father James Laynez. Although much weakened by his austerities, worn by attacks of gout and an affection of the stomach, the new general still possessed much strength, which, added to his abundant store of initiative, his daring in the conception and execution of vast designs, and the influence which he exercised over the Christian princes and at Rome, made him for the Society at once the exemplary model and the providential head. In Spain he had had other cares in addition to those of government. Henceforth he was to be only the general. The preacher was silent. The director of souls ceased to exercise his activity, except through his correspondence, which, it is true, was immense and which carried throughout the entire world light and strength to kings, bishops and apostles, to nearly all who in his day served the Catholic cause. His chief anxiety being to strengthen and develop his order, he sent visitors to all the provinces of Europe, to Brazil, India, and Japan. The instructions, with which he furnished them were models of prudence, kindness, and breadth of mind. For the missionaries as well as for the fathers delegated by the pope to the Diet of Augsburg, for the confessors of princes and the professors of colleges he mapped out wide and secure paths. While too much a man of duty to permit relaxation or abuse, he attracted chiefly by his kindness, and won souls to good by his example. The edition of the rules, at which he laboured incessantly, was completed in 1567. He published them at Rome, dispatched them (throughout the Society), and strongly urged their observance. The text of those now in force was edited after his death, in 1580, but it differs little from that issued by Borgia, to whom the Society owes the chief edition of its rules as well as that of the Spiritual, of which he had borne the expense in 1548. In order to ensure the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young religious and the apostolic character of the whole order, it became necessary to take other measures. The task of Borgia was to establish, first at Rome, then in all the provinces, wisely regulated novitiates and flourishing houses of study, and to develop the cultivation of the interior life by establishing in all of these the custom of a daily hour of prayer.

He completed at Rome the house and church of S. Andrea in Quirinale, in 1567. Illustrious novices flocked thither, among them [Stanislaus Kostka](#) (d. 1568), and the future martyr [Rudolph Acquaviva](#). Since his first journey to Rome, Borgia had been preoccupied with the idea of founding a Roman college, and while in Spain had generously supported the project. In 1567, he built the church of the college, assured it even then an income of six thousand ducats, and at the same time drew up the rule of studies, which, in 1583, inspired the compilers of the [Ratio Studiorum](#) of the Society. Being a man of prayer as well as of action, the saintly general, despite overwhelming occupations, did not permit his soul to be distracted from continual contemplation. Strengthened by



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so vigilant and holy an administration the Society could not but develop. Spain and Portugal numbered many foundations; in Italy Borgia created the Roman province, and founded several colleges in Piedmont. France and the Northern province, however, were the chief field of his triumphs. His relations with the Cardinal de Lorraine and his influence with the French Court made it possible for him to put an end to numerous misunderstandings, to secure the revocation of several hostile edicts, and to found eight colleges in France. In Flanders and Bohemia, in the Tyrol and in Germany, he maintained and multiplied important foundations. The province of Poland was entirely his work. At Rome everything was transformed under his hands. He had built S. Andrea and the church of the Roman college. He assisted generously in the building of the Gesù, and although the official founder of that church was Cardinal Farnese, and the Roman College has taken the name of one of its greatest benefactors, Gregory XIII, Borgia contributed more than anyone towards these foundations. During the seven years of his government, Borgia had introduced so many reforms into his order as to deserve to be called its second founder. Three saints of this epoch laboured incessantly to further the renaissance of Catholicism. They were St. Francis Borgia, St. Pius V, and St. Charles Borromeo.

The pontificate of Pius V and the generalship of Borgia began within an interval of a few months and ended at almost the same time. The saintly pope had entire confidence in the saintly general, who conformed with intelligent devotion to every desire of the pontiff. It was he who inspired the pope with the idea of demanding from the Universities of Perugia and Bologna, and eventually from all the Catholic universities, a profession of the Catholic faith. It was also he who, in 1568, desired the pope to appoint a commission of cardinals charged with promoting the conversion of infidels and heretics, which was the germ of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, established later by [Gregory XV](#) in 1622. A pestilential fever invaded Rome in 1566, and Borgia organized methods of relief, established ambulances, and distributed forty of his religious to such purpose that the same fever having broken out two years later it was to Borgia that the pope at once confided the task of safeguarding the city.

Francis Borgia had always greatly loved the foreign missions. He reformed those of India and the Far East and created those of America. Within a few years, he had the glory of numbering among his sons sixty-six martyrs, the most illustrious of whom were the fifty-three missionaries of Brazil who with their superior, [Ignacio Azevedo](#), were massacred by Huguenot corsairs. It remained for Francis to terminate his beautiful life with a splendid act of obedience to the pope and devotion to the Church.

On 7 June, 1571, Pius V requested him to accompany his nephew, [Cardinal Bonelli](#), on an embassy to Spain and Portugal. Francis was then recovering from a severe illness; it was feared that he had not the strength to bear fatigue, and he himself felt that such a journey would cost him his life, but he gave it generously. Spain welcomed him with transports. The old distrust of Philip II was forgotten. Barcelona and Valencia hastened to meet their former viceroy and saintly duke. The crowds in the streets cried: "Where is the saint?" They found him emaciated by penance. Wherever he went, he reconciled differences and soothed discord. At Madrid, Philip II received him with open arms, the Inquisition approved and recommended his genuine works. The reparation was complete, and it seemed as though God wished by this journey to give Spain to understand for the last time this living sermon, the sight of a saint. Gandia ardently desired to behold its holy duke, but he would never consent to return thither. The embassy to Lisbon was no less consoling to Borgia. Among other happy results he prevailed upon the king, Don Sebastian, to ask in marriage the hand of [Marguerite of Valois](#), the sister of [Charles IX](#). This was the desire of St. Pius V, but this project,



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being formulated too late, was frustrated by the Queen of Navarre, who had meanwhile secured the hand of Marguerite for her son. An order from the pope expressed his wish that the embassy should also reach the French court. The winter promised to be severe and was destined to prove fatal to Borgia. Still more grievous to him was to be the spectacle of the devastation which heresy had caused in that country, and which struck sorrow to the heart of the saint. At Blois, Charles IX and [Catherine de' Medici](#) accorded Borgia the reception due to a Spanish grandee, but to the cardinal legate as well as to him they gave only fair words in which there was little sincerity. On 25 February they left Blois. By the time they reached Lyons, Borgia's lungs were already affected. Under these conditions the passage of Mt. Cenis over snow-covered roads was extremely painful. By exerting all his strength the invalid reached Turin. On the way the people came out of the villages crying: "We wish to see the saint". Advised of his cousin's condition, [Alfonso of Este](#), Duke of Ferrara, sent to Alexandria and had him brought to his ducal city, where he remained from 19 April until 3 September. His recovery was despaired of and it was said that he would not survive the autumn. Wishing to die either at Loretto or at Rome, he departed in a litter on 3 September, spent eight days at Loretto, and then, despite the sufferings caused by the slightest jolt, ordered the bearers to push forward with the utmost speed for Rome. It was expected that any instant might see the end of his agony. They reached the "Porta del Popolo" on 28 September. The dying man halted his litter and thanked God that he had been able to accomplish this act of obedience. He was borne to his cell which was soon invaded by cardinals and prelates. For two days Francis Borgia, fully conscious, awaited death, receiving those who visited him and blessing through his younger brother, Thomas Borgia, all his children and grandchildren. Shortly after midnight on 30 September, his beautiful life came to a peaceful and painless close. In the Catholic Church he had been one of the most striking examples of the conversion of souls after the Renaissance, and for the Society of Jesus he had been the protector chosen by Providence to whom, after St. Ignatius, it owes most.

In 1607 the [Duke of Lerma](#), minister of [Philip III](#) and grandson of the holy religious, having seen his granddaughter miraculously cured through the intercession of Francis, caused the process for his canonization to be begun. The ordinary process, begun at once in several cities, was followed, in 1637, by the Apostolic process. In 1617 Madrid received the remains of the saint. In 1624 the Congregation of Rites announced that his beatification and canonization might be proceeded with. The beatification was celebrated at Madrid with incomparable splendour. [Urban VIII](#) having decreed, in 1631, that a Blessed might not be canonized without a new procedure, a new process was begun. It was reserved for [Clement X](#) to sign the Bull of canonization of St. Francis Borgia, on 20 June, 1670. Spared from the decree of [Joseph Bonaparte](#) who, in 1809, ordered the confiscation of all shrines and precious objects, the silver shrine containing the remains of the saint, after various vicissitudes, was removed, in 1901, to the church of the Society at Madrid, where it is honoured at the present time.

It is with good reason that Spain and the Church venerate in St. Francis Borgia a great man and a great saint. The highest nobles of Spain are proud of their descent from, or their connexion with him. By his penitent and apostolic life he repaired the sins of his family and rendered glorious a name, which but for him, would have remained a source of humiliation for the Church. His feast is celebrated 10 October.

Sources: Archives of Osuna (Madrid), of Simancas; National Archives of Paris; Archives of the Society of Jesus; Regeste du généralat de Laynez et de Borgia, etc. Literature: *Monumenta historica S. J.* (Madrid); Mon. Borgia; Chronicon Polanci; Epistolæ Mixtæ; Quadrimetres; Epistolæ Patris



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Vedi anche: [profilo di Francisco De Borjia y Aragon \(Francisco santo\) nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)