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## Two unpublished letters by Peter Canisius (1521-1597) to Cardinal Scipione Rebiba, 1577

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In 1883 Moritz Meschler<sup>1</sup>, Provincial Superior of the German Jesuit Province, commissioned the 33 year old Jesuit priest Otto Braunsberger<sup>2</sup> to edit the voluminous correspondence of Peter Canisius (1521-1597)<sup>3</sup>, in preparation of his beatification which took place in 1864; his canonization would follow in 1925. Braunsberger devoted forty years of his life to the work. Between 1888 and 1891 he visited libraries and archives in Great-Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and France, where he collected letters and documents. In countries that he was unable to visit, viz. Sweden, Denmark, Spain and Portugal, other Jesuits copied letters and documents for him. By 1896, when the first volume appeared, he and his associates had visited 260 libraries and archives. This total would later rise to 300. The eight volumes, published between 1896 and 1923, count in total 8002 pages and contain 2420 letters written by or to Peter Canisius, and 1623 other documents regarding him, such as testimonies, information about his publications, extracts from homilies, etc. It remains the standard work on Canisius.

As he worked Braunsberger discovered more letters and documents and he planned a kind of gleaning of ears, a miscellaneous collection in a ninth volume. By 1921 he estimated that he would need six more years to complete the work. He had finished more than three-quarters of the project before his death on 27 March 1926 in Roermond, the Netherlands.

Braunsberger's legacy was first entrusted to Jesuit historian Fritz Streicher<sup>4</sup>. Demands of teaching and other tasks prevented him from completing the proposed ninth volume. Another Jesuit historian, Burkhard Schneider<sup>5</sup>, continued the project after Streicher's death, but he also was unable to finish the job. After Schneider's death, the material collected by Braunsberger vanished. Inquiries, especially in Rome and Munich, unearthed nothing. Only at the end of 1985 some papers were rediscovered at the Gregorian University in Rome. All the material was forwarded to the Jesuit archives in Munich where an inventory of the 880 sheets was made in April of 1986.<sup>6</sup>

Upon closer inspection it was obvious that only a part of the ninth volume had been found. The original manuscript consisted of two sections: a handwritten text, labeled *PCE IX\_MS*, and a typewritten text, labeled *PCE IX\_HS*. Both sections were at the Gregorian University as late as 1973, when they were consulted by Engelbert Maximilian Buxbaum as he researched his dissertation on Peter Canisius and the ecclesiastical renewal of Bavaria 1549-1556.<sup>7</sup> Even though Fritz Streicher added a few new documents to the collection, the loss of much of the Braunsberger collection is a serious setback.

*PCE IX\_HS* has been lost altogether. *PCE IX\_MS* consists of two parts: in the first are 351 letters, either complete copies, fragments or listings, written by or to

Canisius, and not contained in the eight volumes; in the second, 281 documents regarding the life and publications of Canisius, marked with the letter M. However neither part is complete. In the correspondence, there is nothing between 1549 and 1552. Fortunately Buxbaum's dissertation can fill this gap. The collection of documents seems to be complete up to 1557. For subsequent years, there are only documents from 1559, 1565, 1571, 1578, and 1585-88.

Buxbaum, having done his research while the collection was complete, drew some remarkable conclusions.<sup>8</sup> Pre-1559 letters from Jesuit Generals Ignatius of Loyola and Diego Laínez were very rare in volumes I and II of Braunsberger's edition. Indeed any such letters included were not copied from originals but from unreliable nineteenth-century copies. Interestingly about 80 letters from Ignatius of Loyola to Peter Canisius between 1548 and 1556 were included in the *Monumenta Ignatiana. Series prima*, volumes II-XII, printed in Madrid 1904-1911. In the *Monumenta Lainii*, volumes II-VIII, printed in Madrid 1912-1917, can be found letters from Diego Laínez to Peter Canisius between 1557 and 1565. Obviously Braunsberger was not allowed to include these letters in his collection because the Spanish editors of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* had been granted preferential rights to the publication of the letters from Jesuit Generals Ignatius of Loyola, Diego Laínez and Francisco de Borja. From 1893 to 1939, the general archives of the Society of Jesus were located in the Netherlands (first at Exaten, and later at Valkenburg). The pertinent correspondence, therefore, was probably given on loan to the Jesuit editors in Madrid.

The projected ninth volume contains the letters printed in the *Monumenta Historica*; other letters written by or to Canisius but edited elsewhere<sup>9</sup>; and unpublished letters from various sources. The total number of letters, not included in the eight earlier volumes is about 475. The editing of these letters and documents started in the summer of 1997 by the two authors of this article. The Italian historian Patrizio Foresta, who wrote a thesis on Peter Canisius<sup>10</sup>, joined them later.

In this article two unpublished letters by Peter Canisius are presented, written to Cardinal Scipione Rebiba only a few months before his death on July 23, 1577, at the age of 73. He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Chieti in 1541, created a Cardinal in 1555, appointed Archbishop of Pisa in 1566, Bishop of Albano in 1573, and Bishop of Sabina e Poggio Mirteto in 1574. During the final years of his life he was President of the Roman Inquisition. More than 90 percent of the world's more than 4000 Catholic bishops alive today trace their Episcopal lineage back to him.<sup>11</sup> In February 1577 Rebiba had asked Canisius to inspect the library of Philipp Fugger, son of Georg II Fugger who had died in 1569, and send him a report about his findings

Both letters are preceded by a summary.

**1.**  
**Peter Canisius**  
**to**  
**Scipione Rebiba**

**Ingolstadt, 10 March 1577**

Citta del Vaticano, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, St. St. TT 1-a, without page number.

PCEA VII, p.391, nr. 1972, knew about the letter, but was not able to publish the content.

1. I received your letter and understand your request. I offered my help to master Fugger to inspect and judge his books. 2. Meanwhile I remain here to help the printer with the publication of my book on Mary, with the consent of Philip himself. So please excuse him: he voluntarily offers his books for inspection and he is waiting for me. As soon as I have done here, I will go to him and form my judgment on the books. 3. I recommend myself to you. May the Lord grant you, a supporter of our Society, his eternal spiritual gifts.

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Pax Christi nobis aeterna, illustrissime et reverendissime domine.

1. Amplitudinis tuae literas ad me datas reverenter accepi, et quid S.D.N. a me infimo postulet, probe intellexi. Scripsi ergo ad magnificum dominum Philippum Fuccherum,<sup>12</sup> meamque operam obtuli ad libros eius inspiciendos simul et diiudicandos.

2. Versor interim hoc loco et meam operam typographo<sup>13</sup> dare cogor, ut opus nostrum de sanctissima Deipara propediem in lucem edendum<sup>14</sup> rectius absolvatur. Quod cum dictus dominus Philippus intelligeret, pro sua humanitate consensit, ut ego post librum editum ad se venirem Augustam ac praesens de libris iudicium ferrem. Proinde maiorem in modum illustrissimae et reverendissimae D.V. rogo, ut eundem dominum Fuccherum excusatum hoc tempore habeat, qui libros omnes examinandos offert ac meum nunc adventum expectat. Ego vero, ut primum hoc opus absolverit typographus, quod certe ad finem nunc properat, Augustam duce Christo properabo, et de ratione librorum quos invenero meum quaecumque iudicium isthuc bona fide perscribam.

3. Quod superest, illustrissimae et reverendissimae D.V. me quamvis indignum officiose commendo semperque commendatum esse cupio in Christo Iesu Domino nostro, qui eandem minimae Societatis nostrae faventem, spiritualibus aeternisque muneribus cumulare dignetur.

Datum Ingolstadii 10 die Martii 1577.

Illustrissimae et reverendissimae D.V. servus Petrus Canisius de Societate Jesu

2.  
**Peter Canisius**  
to  
**Scipione Rebiba**

**Augsburg, 25 April 1577**

Citta del Vaticano, Archivio della Congregazione per la dottrina della fede, St. St. TT 1-a, without page numbers.

PCEA VII, p.402, nr.1928, knew about the letter, but was not able to publish the content.

In the margins and at the bottom of the page there are several notes written by another hand, probably by the receiver of the letter himself, commenting on observations in Canisius' report regarding various authors and books.

1. You will remember that I had been given the task to inspect and judge Fugger's books. I wrote earlier that I was occupied in Ingolstadt but wished to perform this task as soon as possible. Now after Easter, I visited master Fugger and devoted

myself to his books. Here is my report. 2. Indeed, I found his library to be rich and varied in every sense, including books on various sciences, written in all kinds of languages, bound and unbound. Due to their sheer mass, a detailed judgement on every volume would require much time of many men. To give you an idea of just the Church Fathers: there were works by Tertullian, Origin, Chrysostomus, Jerome, Augustine, Hilary, and other Greek and Latin Fathers, but with marginal notes, indexes and translations by modernist or heretics. 3. Since the Index of Prohibited Books has not been published in Germany, and since reading books on religious matters and using German Bibles is encouraged here, I have not taken any drastic measures. I thought it fit not to condemn books that have become familiar to Catholics here in their daily confrontations with heretics. This remains for you and the inquisitors to decide. 4. Meanwhile, in passing I have done my best to single out and reject Calvinist and Lutheran books, as well as, of course, books listed in the Index. But I suspended judgement concerning various books of love poetry (both modern Italian and classical, also in translation), which seem excusable on account of their elegant language. 5. I also doubted what to do with the enormous amount of books on astrology, the secrets of nature, the origin of man, magic, incantations, chiromancy and the like. A judgment was difficult here, but I rejected much that comes close to necromancy and divination, along with Agrippa. There also was much by Lullus, Paracelsus and Cardanus, which I could not read all, even if I had wanted to. 6. I saw less danger, on the other hand, in books on medicine, geometrics, mathematics, philosophy, history and fine literature (even if their authors, translators, or printers were heretics). I do not doubt that you will grant master Fugger dispensation here, because he is a good Catholic and he has inherited most of the books from his father; moreover, in all these years no inquisitor ever presented himself, and separating of good and bad books was never a point of concern here. 7. In view of all this, I hope you will approve what I have done. Please let me warmly recommend master Fugger to you, when the matter will be dealt with in your presence. He is a very pious man and he has few who equal him in this land: he is anxious to have a clear conscience with regard to prohibited or bad books, whereas most Catholics here are used to reading just about everything that is not utterly impious. May the Lord save you for us and the Church. - Written in haste.

†

Pax Christi nobis aeterna,  
reverendissime et illustrissime domine.<sup>a</sup>

1. Meminit haud dubie Amplitudo Tua illustrissima non ita pridem datum esse mihi munus libros Fuggericos Augustae tum inspiciendi, tum iudicandi. Scripsi antea,<sup>15</sup> si meae tamen literae isthuc perlatae sunt, me Ingolstadii in edendo libro novo<sup>16</sup> versari, et ad praestandum obedientiae officium Augustam, quum primum liceret, velle proficisci. Proinde sancto Paschate<sup>17</sup> celebrato, D. Philippum Fuggerum Augustae conveni et ad libros eius examinandos me totum contuli, multis quidem diebus in hoc examen insumptis. Dicam nunc de tota bibliotheca et quid ego de libris inspectis iudicem, ut S.D.N. mandato satisfiat.

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<sup>a</sup> Added by another hand: 1577.

2. Inveni sane apud D. Philippum dictam bibliothecam plurimis libris instructissimam,<sup>b</sup> qui essent sacri et prophani, veteres et novi in omni propemodum genere disciplinarum, et e linguis variis, ut ego nec omnes quidem possem cognoscere. Adsunt etiam Hebraici, Graeci, Syriaci, Gallici, Hispanici, Italici scriptores, tractantque non modo theologiam et jurisprudentiam, sed etiam magna ex parte philosophiam, medicinam, astrologiam, mathematicam,<sup>c</sup> poesin, historiam, rhetoricam,<sup>d</sup> grammaticen.<sup>e</sup> Breviter, innumerabilia et promiscua librorum ligatorum et non ligatorum copia se mihi obtulit, de quibus singillatim iudicare vix possent multi homines valde ociosi, si multis mensibus in hoc unum incumberent, ut quae passim expungenda vel expurganda essent accurate notarent. Ut<sup>f</sup> enim de solis patribus dicam, extant illic opera Tertulliani, Origenis, Chrysostomi, Hieronymi, Augustini, Hilarii et reliquorum Graecorum et Latinorum,<sup>g</sup> extant inquam, cum impuris adnotationibus, indicibus et translationibus novatorum sive haeticorum.

3. Deinde quoniam Index librorum prohibitorum in Germania non est publicatus, et ordinarii non modo permittunt, sed probant etiam a populo legi scriptos catholicorum libros<sup>h</sup> de controversiis religionis et Germanica biblia, non mihi faciendum putavi ut ad vivum resecarem omnia librosque damnarem, quorum usus catholicis hodie tam est familiaris, qui quotidianos cum haeticis congressus habere coguntur hoc loco et tempore. Qua in re iudicium sit integrum penes reverendissimos et illustrissimos dominos inquisitores.

4. Ego<sup>i</sup> vero in hoc transcursu operam dedi, ut Calvinianos et Lutheranos libros, qui sacra ex professo tractarent, seponerem<sup>j</sup> atque reiicerem, magnamque rationem, ut par est, habui librorum in Indice prohibitorum. Quanquam in quibusdam suspendi iudicium neque temere damnare volui tot libros amatorios, quos vocant, facie,<sup>kl</sup> motti, burle et altre cose amorse del Boccacio, Dante, Petrarca, Orlando, Parabosco, Aretino, Ovidio, Propertio, Tibullo. Et huiusmodi libelli in varias linguas transfusi propter sermonis elegantiam a quibusdam excusantur.

5. Dubitavi etiam quid faciendum esset de innumerabili copia librorum de iudiciis astrorum sive de astrologia<sup>m</sup> iudicatoria, de naturae secretis, de hominis nativitate, de magia et incantationibus, de cheromantia etc. tractantium. Difficile sit de singulis pronuntiare, an naturae cognitionem excedant, an fidei synceritatem violent, an aliqua ex parte tolerari et permitti possint. Et multa tamen abiecti,<sup>n</sup> quae cum Cornelio Agrippa<sup>o18</sup> omnino ad necromantiam et divinationem accedunt. Lulli et

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<sup>b</sup> Corrected from *instructissiman*.

<sup>c</sup> Corrected from *mathematica*.

<sup>d</sup> Corrected from *rhetorica*.

<sup>e</sup> Corrected from *grammatien*.

<sup>f</sup> In the margin: *In his tollantur epistolae, annotationes, censurae, scholia haeticas*.

<sup>g</sup> Corrected from *Latinonorum*.

<sup>h</sup> In the margin: *Tolerandum videtur quantum fieri potest; instruendi rudes, ut haeticas dolos evitare [?] possint*.

<sup>i</sup> In the margin: *Hoc merito factum est et faciendum de libris, in quibus impugnatur fides catholica et haeresis traderetur*.

<sup>j</sup> Corrected from *seponeram*.

<sup>k</sup> Corrected from *facelie*.

<sup>l</sup> In the margin: *Hi permittuntur exceptis Decadibus Boccacii et Aretini, et servanda est regula septima Indicis*.

<sup>m</sup> In the margin: *Regula nona Indicis satis explicat quid de his factum oportet*.

<sup>n</sup> Corrected from *abieri*.

<sup>o</sup> In the margin: *Hic autor totus reiiciendus*.

Paracelsi<sup>P19</sup> et Cardani<sup>20</sup> opera<sup>Q</sup> non pauca immiscentur ; perlegere omnia nec libuit, nec licuit ob alias graves occupationes.

6. Minus<sup>r</sup> periculi esse duco in libris medicinae, geometriae, mathematicae, philosophiae; adiungam et historicos et qui ad politioem literaturam pertinent, etiamsi authores vel interpretes aut typographos haereticos habeant. Nec enim dubito, Sm.Dm.Nm. pro sua clementia D. Philippo Fuggero, qui vere catholicus perpetuo sit,<sup>s</sup> facile aliquid consonaturum, ut circa huiusmodi libr. dispensationem apostolicam habeat, praesertim quum maiorem horum librorum partem a patre acceperit, et nullus inquisitor tot annis appareat, ipsique ordinarii nullam adhibere cautionem soleant ut boni libri a malis sive prohibitis in Germania secernantur.

7. Quapropter etiam atque etiam rogo, ut amplitudo tua illustriss. in bonam partem quod a me gestum est accipiat et hoc<sup>t</sup> qualecunque studium meum benigne interpretur, ipsumque D. Philippum sibi commendatum habeat, quum de toto instituto apud S.D.N. coram agetur. Est ille quidem rarae pietatis paucosque sibi habet in hac Rep. similes, qui ob libros prohibitos vel suspectos conscientiam suam securam habere curent. Adeo, proh dolor, invaluit abusus apud catholicos in hisce locis, ut sine delectu libris utantur, qui non omnino impios habent authores.

Dominus Jesus illustriss. cels. tuam nobis et ecclesiae diu incolumem servet.  
Datum raptim Augustae 25 Aprilis 1577.

Servus in Christo minimus Petrus Canisius

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<sup>1</sup> Moritz Meschler, \* 1830 Brig (Switzerland), SJ Münster 1850, † Exaten (Netherlands) 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Otto Braunsberger, \* Füssen am Lech 1850, SJ Exaten (Netherlands) 1878, † Roermond 1926.

<sup>3</sup> More detailed information on the person and work of Otto Braunsberger in: Paul Begheyn, 'The edition of the letters of Saint Peter Canisius by Otto Braunsberger SJ and the vicissitudes of its ninth volume', in: Rainer Berndt (ed.), *Petrus Canisius (1521-1597). Humanist und Europäer*, Berlin 2000, p. 303-311.

<sup>4</sup> Fritz Streicher, \* Meerseburg 1881, SJ Tisis 1907, † Basel 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Burkhardt Schneider, \* Kappel 1917, SJ Feldkirch 1936, † Waldkirch 1976.

<sup>6</sup> A typewritten inventory by Paul Begheyn SJ is kept in the archives of the German Jesuits in Munich.

<sup>7</sup> Engelbert Maria Buxbaum, *Petrus Canisius und die kirchliche Erneuerung des Herzogtums Bayern 1549-1556*, Roma 1973, p. xviii.

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<sup>P</sup> At the bottom of the page: *Chirurgia Paracelsi magna, continent quaedam haeretica.*

<sup>Q</sup> At the bottom of the page: *Cardani opera in medicina permittuntur. De subtilitatibus, de varietatibus rebus, de sapientia, de somniis reiiciuntur.*

<sup>r</sup> Written in the margin: *Permitti possunt, hoc uno animadverso nequid <mali?> epistolae dedicatariae vel annotatio haereticorum contineant. Quare cautius erit ab iis etiam libris amovere epistolas et annotationes haereticorum.*

<sup>s</sup> Corrected from *fi...*

<sup>t</sup> Corrected from *hos.*

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<sup>8</sup> Buxbaum, *Petrus Canisius*, p. 205-210: 'Anhang I. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Quellenbenützung durch Braunsberger im Generalatsarchiv der Gesellschaft Jesu'.

<sup>9</sup> Twenty-six letters and documents not included in the Braunsberger edition, are listed in Paul Beghey, 'Six unpublished letters of Saint Peter Canisius to his relatives', in: *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 55 (1986), p. 142-143.

<sup>10</sup> Patrizio Foresta, *Il "secondo apostolo della Germania". L'attività di San Pietro Canisio negli anni 1543-1555*, Roma 1998 (Tesi di Laurea La Sapienza, Roma).

<sup>11</sup> Rinaudo Basilio & Salvatore Miracola, *Il cardinal Scipione Rebiba (1504-1577). Vita e azione pastorale di un vescovo riformatore*, Patti 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Philipp Eduard Fugger (1546-1618).

<sup>13</sup> David Sartorius (1550-1592).

<sup>14</sup> *De Maria Virgine incomparabili, et Dei genitrice sacrosancta, libri quinque. Atque hic secundus liber est commentariorum de verbi Dei corruptelis, adversus novos et veteres sectariorum errores nunc primum editus*. Ingolstadii, excudebat David Sartorius, 1577.

<sup>15</sup> See the letter written from Ingolstadt, 10 March 1577.

<sup>16</sup> De Maria Virgine.

<sup>17</sup> Easter, 7 April.

<sup>18</sup> Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (Cologne 1486-Antwerp 1535).

<sup>19</sup> Paracelsus (Einsiedeln 1493/94-Salzburg 1541), medical doctor, nature philosopher, and lay theologian.

<sup>20</sup> Girolamo Cardano (Pavia 1501-Rome 1576), medical doctor, mathematician, philosopher.