CHAPTER FOUR

JESUIT OPPOSITION TO THE PURITY-OF-BLOOD DISCRIMINATION (1576–1608)

Thus there is no Poland, no Spain, no Germany, no France, but one Society, one God in all, all in one Lord Jesus Christ, whose members you are.

Everard Mercurian, S.J., 1573

The prior purity-of-blood legislation promulgated in Toledo that we have analyzed in Chapters One and Three—Mayor Sarmiento’s in 1449, Inquisitor Silíceo’s in 1547, and the anti-converso decree of the Jesuit Fifth General Congregation (1593)—provoked a fifteen-year-long storm of opposition that eventually led to the limitation, if only superficial, of the lineage inquiry (up to the fifth generation) by General Congregation Six (1608).¹ Five influential Jesuits, who have frequently appeared on previous pages of this book, constituted the vanguard of this opposition: Antonio Possevino, Pedro de Ribadeneyra, Diego de Guzmán, Juan de Mariana, and García Girón de Alarcón. This chapter examines their pro-converso writings within their historical context.

García Girón de Alarcón is virtually unknown, yet his memorial from 1597 is the most comprehensive critique of the Jesuit purity-of-blood discrimination. This is why we shall dedicate to him and his text much space in this chapter. Juan de Mariana, a member of the memorialistas movement, authored a work entitled De rege et regis institutione, in which he expressed his views on the discrimination against the conversos. It was Antonio Possevino who explicitly mentioned Mariana’s Jewish ancestry.² Diego de Guzmán—whom

¹ Harald E. Braun, in his recent Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), p. 93, incorrectly stated that General Congregation 6 (1608) revoked the 1593 decree. Juan de Mariana and his friend Pedro de Ribadeneyra did contribute, through their writings, to the defense of the conversos’ status, as we shall see below, but their success was only partial, for General Congregation 6 just limited the genealogical inquiry. The 1593 decree was revoked only in 1946.

² See Possevino’s “Memorial,” ARSI, Congr. 20b, f. 208v; see also Mariana’s, “De rege et regis institutione,” in Juan de Mariana, Obras (Madrid: Biblioteca de
historians consider an Old Christian—may have been motivated to write his pro-converso letter to Superior General Acquaviva by his profound friendship with his converso master, Juan de Ávila, and another of his converso disciples, Gaspar de Loarte, who—as we have seen in Chapter Two—encountered apparently insurmountable obstacles in joining the Society of Jesus due to his Jewish lineage. Obvious also is Guzmán’s affinity for the closet-converso Ribadeneyra, who employed in his anti-discrimination writings his authority as one of only a few surviving disciples of Ignatius of Loyola and as a man of government—he had held important offices in the Jesuit administration for decades until Mercurian’s “house cleansing.” Possevino—the only Italian in this Spanish-dominated quintet—was almost certainly a closet-converso and became one of the earliest and fiercest opponents of purity-of-blood discrimination in the Society. His first memorial was penned as early as 1576, i.e., three years after General Congregation 3, during which Possevino personally witnessed the head-on collision between the anti- and pro-converso parties that concluded with the rigged election of Mercurian, as we have seen in the previous chapter. His is the only text of the genre that has been fully studied in the Anglophone historiography on the subject. Possevino composed his second memorial on 13 October 1598—already after the promulgation of the anti-converso decree by General Congregation 5. The synoptic reading of both memorials that we offer here for the first time allows de-coding of the author’s often secret-style prose. We first turn our attention to his memorial from 1576.

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3 See ARSI, Cong. 20b, ff. 206–12.