

## Formal Approval of the Society of Jesus, 1540

One year after the verbal pre-approval of the Society of Jesus, which had the force of law, the Formula of the Institute is received and the Society of Jesus is formally recognized by Pope Paul III in his bull, *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*, September 27, 1540.<sup>1</sup>

[The Papal Bull of approval of the Society of Jesus did contain the full text of the Formula of the Institute. It is not included here, but the point at which it was inserted is acknowledged.]



Pope Paul III (1468-1549) receives rule book of Jesuit order from St. Ignatius Loyola, 1539.  
Museum: Church of Il Gesu, Rome, Italy.

“Paul, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, for a Perpetual Remembrance of the Deed The Lord having charged us, despite our unworthiness, to direct the government of the church militant, we bend our efforts to seeking the salvation of souls, as we are obliged to do by the duty of the pastoral office; and so we support with the grace of apostolic favor any of the faithful who desire the same, and we distribute other graces as well which we see in the Lord will be of benefit, in accordance with times and places.

We have accordingly recently learned that our dear sons Ignatius of Loyola, Pierre Favre, Diego Lainez, and Claude Jay, Paschase Broet, Francis Xavier, and also Alfonso Salmeron, Simao Rodrigues, Jean Codure and Nicolas Bobadilla, priests of the cities and dioceses of Pamplona, Geneva, Sigiienza, Toledo, Viseu, Embrun, and Palentia, respectively, Masters of Arts, graduates of the University of Paris, and trained in theological studies for many years, had been inspired by the Holy Spirit, as is piously believed, to depart from the various regions of the world and meet one another some time before. They had become companions and, renouncing the enticements of this world, had dedicated their lives forever to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ and to ours, and to that of the other Roman Pontiffs, our successors.

For a great many years now they have labored worthily in the Lord's vineyard, preaching the word of God in public places with full permission, exhorting the faithful in private to live well and blessedly, stirring them to religious reflection, serving in hospitals, teaching boys and uneducated persons what is necessary for the Christian education of people, and,

in a word, performing to high praise, wherever on earth they have stayed, all of the duties of charity and those directed to the consolation of souls. And when they had come to this beloved city and were remaining in the bond of charity, and they had produced a formula for living in order to complete and preserve the union of their Society in Christ, one which was according to what they had learned by experience would be conducive to the goal they had set themselves and was fashioned after the evangelical counsels and the canonical rules of the Fathers, it has happened that the way of life of these companions, as summarized in this formula, is not only praised by many good men zealous for God, but has met with such approval from some that they even want to follow it.

*The text of the Formula [of the Institute] was inserted at this point.<sup>2</sup> It is not being included here.*

“Now since there is nothing in the above which is not devout and holy, we by apostolic authority and the text of this document approve, confirm, and bless from our certain knowledge, and strengthen by the bulwark of perpetual firmness, each and all of the foregoing as favorable to the spiritual progress of the members and of the rest of the Christian flock, in order that the members, who implored this of us in deepest humility, may be the readier to live the devout life they intend, the greater the grace of the Apostolic See it is by which they realize they have been embraced, and may see that the foregoing has been approved by us.

“We also receive the members under our protection and that of this Holy See, and grant to them in addition that they may freely and licitly institute the particular constitutions among them which they have judged to be suited to the end of this Society,<sup>3</sup> and to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the benefit of our neighbor. This holds notwithstanding [the texts] of the general council, and of Pope Gregory X, of happy memory, our predecessor, and any other apostolic constitutions and ordinations, and anything else to the contrary. It is our wish, however, that in this Society up to sixty persons only, and no more, who desire to profess this rule of life, may be admitted, and be joined to the said Society.

“It is therefore not allowed to any human being whomsoever to violate this document of our approbation, confirmation, benediction, reinforcement, acceptance, concession, and will, or to oppose it in thoughtless rashness. Those who presume to attempt this should know that they will incur the displeasure of almighty God and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

Given in Rome at St. Mark's in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord 1540, on the twenty-seventh of September, the sixth year of our pontificate.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Latin text appears in *Institution Societatis Iesu*, 3 vols. (Florence, 1892/1893), 1:3-7. Technically, the Society was founded twelve months earlier, when Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (1483-1542) read aloud to Pope Paul III (1549-1549) the so-called "Five Chapters," i.e., the initial draft of the Formula of the Institute that Ignatius and his companions had composed. After hearing

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the reading, Paul 111 gave his oral approval, which carried force of law. He then ordered the approval to be written and promulgated, but objections within the curia to the establishment of new religious orders postponed the release of the bull by one year.

<sup>2</sup> The Formula of the Institute is often confused with the bull Regimini. The Formula is the official charter of the Society that outlines its essential characteristics. The First Companions composed it, and curial officials lightly edited it, before it was inserted into the bull Regimini. In the bull, the pope expresses his approval of the Formula's contents. At the time, curial officials commonly nested one text within another. Here, the Formula is italicized to distinguish it.

<sup>3</sup> Normally, new religious institutes had to submit their constitutions to the pope for his approval. Here, the pope approves the Society's constitutions in advance, sight unseen. This extraordinary privilege angered critics of the early Society, for which reason, later papal documents repeat and elaborate the approval.