

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 240118c

Thursday 18.01.2024

Press Conference to present the events organized for the bicentenary of the death of Cardinal Ercole Consalvi

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the events organized on the occasion of the bicentenary of the death of Cardinal Ercole Consalvi.

The speakers were Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations of the Secretariat of State; Fr. Marek Andrzej Inglot, S.J., president of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences; Professor Maurice Whitehead, director of Heritage Collections and research fellow of the Venerable English College, and Msgr. Marco Agostini, official of the Secretariat of State.

The following are the interventions of Fr. Marek Andrzej Inglot, S.J., and Professor Maurice Whitehead:

Intervention of Fr. Marek Andrzej Inglot, S.J.

The great political career of Ercole Consalvi began with the opening of the conclave in Venice on 30 November 1799, after the death of Pius VI (29 August). Born in Rome on 8 June 1757, son of the Marquis Giuseppe of Toscanella and Countess Claudia Carandini, and a former student of the Academy of the ecclesiastical nobles of Rome from 1776 to 1782, Consalvi, who had been secretary of the Venetian conclave, was appointed by the pope-elect, Pius VII Chiaramonti, first pro-secretary of State on 15 March 1800 – despite being a simple prelate – and then secretary of State on 11 August of the same year. In December he was ordained a deacon and only agreed to this not to displease Pius VII. Thus began what can be justly defined as the great and multi-faced “diplomatic adventure” of Cardinal Consalvi, which extended in times of great institutional, ideological and economic turbulence over a vast international field, spreading from the Church States to France, England, Austria and the Americas: an ecclesial and diplomatic commitment of high political calibre and rare strategic finesse, which made him an icon-model of the quintessential Secretary of State, capable of defending the reasons of doctrine and adapting to the contingencies of the times.

It was, therefore, with particular enthusiasm that the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences, under the

presidency of my predecessor, the Reverend Fr. Bernard Ardura, O. Praem., welcomed the proposal of the Secretariat of State of His Holiness, and in particular the Section for Relations with States, presided over by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, to organize an international study conference on the occasion of the bicentenary of the death of Cardinal Consalvi (1824-2024).

The organization of the Symposium, which will take place on 22 and 23 January in the Conference Hall of the Vatican Museums, has also benefited from the precious collaboration offered by the Vatican Museums, thanks to the exquisite proximity of the Director, the distinguished Dr. Barbara Jatta, assisted by the impeccable and generous team of their Events Office.

A decisive contribution to the scientific structure of the Symposium has been given by Professor Don Roberto Regoli of the Pontifical Gregorian University, one of the most renowned experts on Consalvi; the representatives of the Venerable English College, the Embassies of France, Austria and Italy to the Holy See; the Vatican Museums; and the Secretariat of State itself, principal and primary promotor of this international study meeting.

The Symposium is divided into four sessions, which are intended to take into account the breadth and dynamism of Cardinal Consalvi's work, examining the relevant ecclesial and state dimensions and even its considerable implications in the field of the arts: 1. *From Consalvi to "Consalvism"*; 2. *Church and State government*; 3. *Diplomacy. Between Europe and America*; and 4. *Cultural policies*.

Fifteen speakers, of five different nationalities, thanks to their esteemed expertise in textual criticism and historiography, will offer the best of their knowledge on topics related both to Consalvi's personality and his diplomatic action and to the different ecclesial, political and ideological contexts in which he was called upon to safeguard, strengthen and preserve the *libertas Ecclesiae* and the universal ministry of the Roman pontiff, both of which were once again inflected in response to the onerous and demanding political emergencies of his time.

His personal life, so-called "Consalvism", his action in the government of the Papal State, his multilateral politics in Napoleonic Europe and in relations with Vienna, London and Saint Petersburg, the protection he exercised over cultural heritage in concordance with Pius VII's cultural sensibility – these and many other subject of study and historiographical analysis will be taken into consideration in our study conference, in an attempt to reconstruct an comprehensive and at the same time detailed memorial of Cardinal Consalvi, Pius VII's skilled and tireless aide.

Overall, Consalvi could be defined as the tireless and indefatigable servant of the Universal Church and the Successor of Peter. As we learn from his *Biography*, printed in Venice in 1824:

"Twelve days after his appointment as Prefect of Propaganda, Consalvi passed away; on his deathbed the penitentiary gave him the Pontiff's blessing, and asked if he had anything to confide to him, he made the sign of no with his hand. His last words were: *I am calm*"[1].

Consalvi died in Rome on 24 January 1824, and his last words, *I am calm*, resound like an ideal testament to his industrious serenity in such troubled times, like a legacy, almost a mandate, that Cardinal Consalvi hands down to future generations, and our International Study Conference wishes to be a discreet yet convinced acceptance of it.

[1] *Cenni Biografici sul Cardinale Ercole Consalvi Segretario di Stato di S. S. Pio VII. Di gloriosa memoria*, Venice 1824, p. 82.

Brief historical background

The visit of Cardinal Ercole Consalvi to the United Kingdom in June 1814, *en route* to the Congress of Vienna – the first visit by a cardinal to Britain since that of Reginald Pole as papal legate in 1554 – marked a veritable turning point in the history of Anglo-Papal relations.

From the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) onwards, the Catholics of England and Wales became a persecuted minority: for some 270 years, they were deprived of many civic rights. The highly skilled diplomatic manner in which Cardinal Consalvi presented himself to all echelons of British society in 1814, including to the then Prince Regent (*the future King George IV – reigned 1820–1830*), did much to reduce anti-Catholic prejudice in Britain and left a deep and lasting positive impression, helping to pave the way towards the Catholic Emancipation Bill passed by Parliament at Westminster in 1829.

The forthcoming bicentenary

At the invitation of the Secretariat of State, and to mark the bicentenary of Cardinal Consalvi's death, the Venerable English College in Rome¹ and the British Embassy to the Holy See² – two institutions which have a long track record of working together closely – are jointly promoting two events honouring the cardinal's memory:

- a symposium entitled *Consalvi and the United Kingdom* (an invitation-only event, because of limitations of space, to be held at the Venerable English College on Wednesday 24 January 2024);
- a concert open to all, entitled *Power, Patronage, & Diplomacy: Cardinal Ercole Consalvi (1757–1824) and music*, to be given by a professional English ensemble, Cappella Fede³, directed by Dr Peter Leech of Cardiff University (UK).

The concert is to be held at the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso, the church where Consalvi was baptized and which is also the parish church of the Venerable English College, on Wednesday 24 January 2024 at 20:00.

The symposium will be presented by four speakers:

- Dr John Martin Robinson (the English biographer of Ercole Consalvi), who will give a paper entitled 'The Young Consalvi': this will focus on his education, not least at the diocesan seminary at Frascati as a protégé of the then bishop, Cardinal Henry Benedict Stuart (1725–1807), the Jacobite pretender to the throne of England;
- Professor Judith Champ (Oscott College, Birmingham) – 'England, Ireland and Rome: Ercole Consalvi and the struggle for Catholic Emancipation';
- Tim Knox (Director of the Royal Collection, London) – 'Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of Cardinal Consalvi for the Waterloo Chamber at Windsor Castle';
- Alice Martin (Head of the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth) – 'Consalvi and the Devonshires' - a paper exploring Consalvi's friendship with Elizabeth Christiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1758–1824).

The papers, chaired by Dr Richard Smith, Principal Historian of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in London, will explore the impact of Consalvi on Britain, including his key role as Cardinal Protector of the Venerable English College (VEC) in Rome from 1818 until his death.

The concert will recreate, for the first time since 1824, the sophisticated sound worlds of Ercole Consalvi in three church settings that he knew well, at:

- the cathedral at Frascati that he knew as a youth;

- St Peter's Basilica in Rome;
- San Lorenzo in Damaso.

Drawing on a range of recently re-discovered, high quality late baroque manuscript music which has never been published, the concert will include exciting modern first performances by composers including Sebastiano Bolis (c.1750–1804), Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi (1728–1804), and Niccolò Zingarelli (1752–1837) who were all active in Ercole Consalvi's circle. The concert will also include a work by Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), whose compositions were much admired by Consalvi.

Taken together, this largely unknown music will help explode the myth that Italian baroque music ended with the death of Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725). In an ecclesiastical context at least, late baroque music survived and flourished down to the time of Cardinal Ercole Consalvi.

1 <https://www.vecrome.org/>A seminary since 1579 for the formation of future priests for England and Wales, but originally founded in 1362 as a hospice for pilgrims to Rome from England and Wales, the Venerable English College is today the oldest British institution outside the United Kingdom.

2 <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/british-embassy-holy-see>

3 <https://www.peterleech.com/cappella-fede>
