



An Act against Jesuits and Popish Priests (1700)

This law was enacted in the colony of New York; a nearly identical law had been enacted earlier that same year in Massachusetts. In part, these laws reflect the residual anti-Catholicism of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which in England had dethroned King James II, a Catholic, and replaced him with Protestant rulers William and Mary. That revolution had been immediately followed, in New York and Massachusetts, by uprisings against the governors whom James II had installed there. In addition, the passing of laws against Catholic priests in these colonies reflects the ongoing competition between England and France to control that part of North America: the English feared that Catholic missionaries would persuade indigenous peoples in the region to ally with the French against the English.

Whereas divers Jesuits, priests, and popish missionaries have of late come and for some time have had their residence in the remote parts of this province and other his Majesty's adjacent colonies, who, by their wicked and subtle insinuations, industriously labor to debauch, seduce, and withdraw the Indians from their due obedience unto his most sacred Majesty and to excite and stir them up to sedition, rebellion, and open hostility against his Majesty's government—

For prevention whereof, be it enacted by his Excellency the Governor, Council, and Representatives convened in General Assembly, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same: That all and every Jesuit and seminary priest, missionary, or other spiritual or ecclesiastical person made or ordained by any authority, power, or jurisdiction derived, challenged, or pretended from the Pope or See of Rome, now residing within this province or any part thereof, shall depart from and out of the same at or before the first day of November next in this present year, seventeen hundred.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid: That all and every Jesuit, seminary priest, missionary, or other spiritual or ecclesiastical person made or ordained by any authority, power, or jurisdiction derived, challenged, or pretended from the Pope or See of Rome—or that shall profess himself, or otherwise appear to be such, by preaching and teaching of others to say any popish prayers, by celebrating masses, granting of absolutions, or using any other of the Romish ceremonies and rites of worship, by what name, title, or degree soever such a person shall be called or known—who shall continue, abide, remain, or come into this province, or any part thereof, after the first day of November aforesaid shall be deemed and accounted an incendiary and disturber of the public peace and safety and an enemy to the true Christian religion, and shall be adjudged to suffer perpetual imprisonment; and if any person, being so sentenced and actually imprisoned, shall break prison and make his escape and be afterwards retaken, he shall suffer such pains of death, penalties, and forfeitures as in cases of felony.

And it is further enacted by the authority aforesaid: That every person that shall wittingly and willingly receive, harbor, conceal, aid, succor, and relieve any Jesuit priest, missionary, or other ecclesiastical person of the Romish clergy, knowing him to be such, and be thereof lawfully convicted before any of his Majesty's Courts of Records within this province, which Courts are hereby empowered and authorized to hear, try, and determine the same, he shall forfeit the sum

of two hundred pounds current money of this province, one half to his Majesty, for and towards the support of the government, and the other half to the informer who shall sue for the same in any Court of Record within this province [...]; and such person shall be further punished by being set in the pillory on three several days and also be bound to the good behavior at the discretion of the Court.

Source: Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America* [...], 4th ed. (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), 92-93, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433070794213>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

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