THE RELIGIOUS ADVICE OF YOUNG BACON TO HIS QUEEN

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On 17 November 1558, Lady Elizabeth became the Queen of England. Three years later Francis Bacon was born in London, the son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of England. Francis Bacon's father was an eloquent man fond of Literature. His mother, his father's second wife, was a cultivated religious woman, who belonged to a Calvinist family. According to James Spedding, his mother;

> was a learned, eloquent and religious woman, full of affection and puritanical fervour deeply interested in the condition of the Church and perfectly believing that the cause of the Nonconformist was the whole cause of Christ.[1]

He resembled his mother much more than he did his father and he inherited from her his capacity for reasoning. When he was thirteen, he was sent to Trinity College in Cambridge, which University was considered the intellectual centre of Puritanism, though Oxford had her representatives as well. Two years later, he returned to London to study Law, probably following his father's desire, to be prepared for the service of the State. State and Church were not two separate institutions in Elizabethan times, but two aspects of the same political institution, in fact this was the Queen's point of view. Bacon continued his education in Paris, where he spent three years at the English Embassy.

His "Letter of Advice" addressed to the Queen in 1584 dealt with issues concerning Catholics and Puritans that constituted the main religious problems of Elizabeth's reign.

Bacon wrote three works on religion including "The Letter", "Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England" (1589) about the Puritans and the Anglican Bishops and "Certain Observations Made upon a Libel Published this First Year" (1592), where he dealt mainly with Catholics again and incidentally with Puritans and some other minority sects.

"The Letter of Advice", subject of this paper, is "one of the most interesting of his occasional writings", says Spedding (ibid., p. 46). When Spedding found the letter as an anonymous paper, the resemblance with Bacon's writings made him think that the letter was his. Its authorship has been discussed since it has been taken as a part of "Certain Observations Made upon a Libel". It has also been claimed to be Burghley's, Bacon's uncle and Principal Minister and adviser to the Queen. Spedding has refused this thesis on the basis of other memorials of advice written by Burghley that "have no resemblance to this in form, style, method or character". (Ibid., p. 45). In Spedding's opinion, the style is "very like [Bacon's]" (ibid., p. 46):

> It is not to be forgotten, however, that it was written earlier, by four or five years, than any found composition that has come to us, and therefore it would naturally exhibit some peculiarities of manner not to be found on his other writings. All young writers begin by affecting the approved style of the day; as they find their own strength , they mould their own style (ibid., p. 46).

"The Letter" is written by a mature, intelligent, sensible, cautious, experienced man; it is like the letter of an old man. It was probably written about the end of 1584, before the death of Pope Gregory XIII. "The Letter" had no date, no title, and was written "on a bad paper of the quarto size" (ibid., p. 46). Bacon was very young at the time, twenty-three or twenty-four years old, depending on the date of the letter, but his reputation was already great. It was at this time, on 23 November 1584, that his uncle Lord Burghley married a sister of his mother's and obtained a seat for his nephew.

"The Letter" written to Elizabeth was probably encouraged by the Sovereign; the Queen liked to promote young people and she was especially fond of young Bacon. In 1580, Francis Bacon wrote in a letter to Lord Burghley about the Queen's "gracious opinion and meaning towards me" (ibid., p. 14). Some years later, in 1598, he declared in a letter to the Earl of Essex that he had advised the Queen because sometimes "he trains me on" (ibid., p. 46); besides, Bacon was a man deeply attached to his Queen.

Even though our writer had been accused of being an opportunist politician with a half-spiritual, half-materialistic personality, he was a man who

loved and respected his Sovereign. It is quite certain that Francis Bacon, as the son of the Lord Keeper had the fortune of meeting the Queen as a child, when he was old enough to attend the opening of Parliament and several other Court ceremonies. As early as October 1580, the young Bacon seemed sincere in a letter written to his uncle Lord Burghley where he showed his affection and gratitude to the Queen for some employment as a lawyer, what exactly we are not sure:

> First (I am moved) humbly to beseech your Lordship to present to her Majesty my more than most humble thanks therefore, and withal having regard to mine own unworthiness to receive such favour, and to the small possibility in me to satisfy and answer what her Majesty conceiveth, I am moved to become a most humble suitor unto her Majesty [...] I address myself unto him (God) in unfeigned prayer for the multiplying of her Majesty prosperities (ibid., pp. 14-15).

Many a time he demonstrated his love and gratitude to the Queen and the most well-known writing is his "Discourse in the Praise of his Sovereign".

Bacon was a typical figure of the Renaissance. He had a limitless passion for knowledge, curiosity for Science, enthusiasm for Greek Art and Literature and a longing for Beauty. Also he was an innovator of philosophical ideas as well as a pioneer of new scientific theories. He stated, for example, that light required time for its transmission and in his research on instruments for transmitting sound, he foresaw something which could be a device we all know today as the telephone. However, he did not accept Copernicus' discoveries, nor was he interested in Harvey's theories about the circulation of blood.

This man of such wide-ranging interests must necessarily be worried with the religious controversies occurring in his country. We must take into account that throughout Bacon's life, Religion was a most important political issue. In addition, he belonged to a Puritan family on his mother's side and his father was working alongside the Queen to reconcile Politics and Anglican interests. It was Lord Nicholas Bacon, who in his opening speech in the first Parliament of Elizabeth on 25 January 1559, said that "her majesty's desire was to secure and unite the people of the realm in one uniform order to the glory

of God and to general tranquillity", and for this reason she wanted to avoid "contumetious and opprobious words, as heretic, schismatic and papists, as causes of displeasure and malice, enemies to concord and unit".[2]

It was a difficult time for the Queen when she came to the throne: the treasury was empty, England owed more than 266,000 to foreign creditors, and internal religious problems menaced peace in the country. The Queen was a wise, cautious, courageous woman who resembled her father in her temperament. She had lived in an atmosphere of plot and intrigue. She was an interesting alternative for the enemies of her sister Mary, but experience had been a good school to enable her to overcome all dangers. On the other hand she was a highly cultivated woman who could speak French, Italian and read Latin and Greek. Elizabeth does not seem to have been a woman with deep religious feelings. Neither was Bacon. Elizabeth saw religion as a matter of state. Such questions as religion and the succession were handled by her; they were matters "which Parliament could discuss only at her invitation".[3] In 1559 Parliament declared that she had the supreme authority in ecclesiastical matters. Although her power was absolute in matters concerning the Church, she did not agree to be its Supreme Head, but her intelligent, witty, sharp mind is again shown in the subterfuge she observed in her royal title: Queen of England, France, Ireland, etc. The word *etc.* left the door open for a later amendment.

Her government was controlled by laymen, not by ecclesiastics. At the beginning of her reign her Principal Secretary was Sir William Cecil who was defined by the Spanish Ambassador as a man of "intelligence and virtue" (Black, ***op. cit.***, p. 7).

Elizabeth wanted to avoid the conflicts of doctrines and theories and find a balance between religion, politics and society. The Queen did not claim to penalize religious beliefs; she thought her duty was to keep an external order to prevent men from persecuting each other and avoid interference with men's convictions. Elizabeth was not in favour of executions; she preferred either banishment or exile for those who opposed the Church of England. In Bindoff's opinion "Those whom she punished, she punished not to save their souls in the next world, but to save her state in this" (Bindoff, ***op. cit.***, p. 244), and according to Rowse, the execution of the Jesuit Campion "seemed to have shocked her".[4] She was much more tolerant than her sister Mary who had executed about 300 persons in five years, whereas the number of executions was about the same in the thirty years of Elizabeth's reign.

On 5 February 1570, Pius V opened a trial for heresy against Elizabeth at Rome. With the Bull *Regnans in Excelsis*, Elizabeth was excommunicated and deposed; she was also declared a heretic and a bastard. The Bull was a failure as a political document; the emperor Maximilian II and Philip of Spain were surprised and angry with the Pope for not having consulted them. Both of them declared to the Queen that they had nothing to do with the Pope's measures. After this papal move, attitudes towards the Catholics changed. They were suspected of being traitors to the Queen and they were treated as such. In fact any good Catholic had to face the dilemma of either being disobedient to the Pope or to the Queen. J. B. Black recognised the heroism of the priests: "The moral stature of men like Campion and Souhtwell has won them a place among the truly great" (Black, ***op. cit.***, p. 150).

When in 1572 Gregory XIII succeeded Pius V, the relationship between Elizabeth's government and Rome was not any better. Like his predecessor he believed in authoritarian methods, so he sent a Jesuit mission to England in the summer of 1580. The Pope tried to save the Catholics in England but he did not think of withdrawing his predecessor's Bull; instead he tried to involve Spain in an attack against England. In the summer of 1577, a plot was prepared to send Stukeley, an Englishman who had fought under Don Juan de Austria at Lepanto, to Ireland with papal troops. Catholics hoped that Elizabeth would die and Mary of Scotland succeed her. The Pope and Spain would support Mary, and Catholicism would be restored. This menace served to join Protestants around Elizabeth. Therefore in October 1584 a voluntary association was created in defence of the Queen against all her enemies.In spite of this, there were several plots against Elizabeth and it seemed that they had Mary's connivance. It was the Parliament of 1586 which required Elizabeth to sign the death sentence against her.

In his "Letter of Advice", Francis Bacon advocated tolerance of Roman Catholics and he declared himself against executions: "You shall neither execute any but very traitors" (Spedding, ***op. cit.***, p. 52). Bacon was aware that death would not lessen the number of Catholics, "since we find by experience that death works no such effects, but that, like Hydra's heads, upon one cut off, seven grow up" (ibid., p. 50). The writer was intelligent enough to realize that making martyrs was of no use for the Queen, "they should never have the honour to take any pretence of martyrdom", says he (ibid., p. 51). Francis Bacon advised the Queen to deprive them of every kind of power. They would

not be allowed to have arms in their houses, "not one should have or keep in his house as much as a halbert without the same condition" (ibid., pp. 51-52); they should also be excluded from military forces "I would wish that no one man, either great or small, should so much as be trained up in your musters". (Ibid., p. 51).

He insisted that no Catholic should take part in any office of government "from the highest counsellor to the lowest constable" (ibid., p. 51). The adviser was also worried about some Catholics landlords: "Popish landlords" (ibid., p. 51), harassed their tenants because they had embraced and "live after the authorized and true religion" (ibid., p. 51). Hereafter, Bacon suggested that the Queen "should give strict order to [...] trusty and religious gentlemen" (ibid., p. 51), to survey those landlords so that their tenants "paying as others do, they be not thrust out of their livings nor otherwise unreasonably molested". (Ibid, p. 51).

Bacon thought prosecution was not a practical way to lessen the Catholics, and he proposed Education as the only way of bringing them into a position of loyalty. In his opinion the Queen should force;

> the parents of each shire to send their children to be virtuously and religiously brought up at a certain place for that end appointed; [...] and by this means, you shall, under colour of education, have them as hostages of all the parents' fidelity that have any power in England. (Ibid, p. 50).

The writer's proposal of using Catholic children as hostages would prevent the rebellion of their parents. Francis Bacon also raised the question of men's consciences. The Oath of Allegiance required that man could not think without the special grace of God. Bacon urged the Queen to change the Oath in such a way that the Catholics who took the Oath would become perjurers and if they refused to take it, they would become traitors. This is how the Oath should read:

> that whosoever would not bear arms against all foreign princes, and namely the Pope, that should any way invade your Majesty's dominions, he should be a traitor'. (Ibid., p. 48).

Therefore a Catholic who refused to take the amended Oath could not be considered as a martyr for his religious beliefs, but as a suspected traitor to his Queen and country.

Young Bacon, secondly, recommended that Elizabeth pay attention to her foreign enemies always ready "to hurt" (ibid., p. 52) his Queen, the main ones being: Scotland "for his pretence and neighbourhood" (ibid., p. 52), and Spain for "his religion and power" (ibid., p. 52). In the following advice, Bacon showed his sharp politician's mind; he exploited the fear of France and the hate of the Dutch countries and the Italian states against Spain, their greatest enemy. Our writer counselled Elizabeth to cultivate the friendship with France "for though he agree not with your Majesty in matter of conscience and religion [...] he fears the greatness of Spain" (ibid., pp. 52-53); he even insisted on the promotion of an alliance with France "in respect of the common enemy of both kingdoms" (ibid., p. 53). In Bacon's opinion, Spain was the greatest enemy because he acted as an agent of the Pope, "in religion he [King Philip] is so much the Pope's". (Ibid., p. 54). Consequently, cautious Bacon wondered "whether it be better to procure his amity or stop the course of his enmity?" (Ibid., p. 54).

The adviser was not sure whether it was better to trust him or to fight him. As his advice was dealing with a tricky subject: peace or war, Bacon showed his sharpness again by telling the Queen that this "requires a longer and larger discourse and a better discourser than myself" (ibid., p. 54). Regarding an alliance, he counselled the Queen to make sure this alliance was trustworthy; if she should decide to stop him, Francis Bacon continued giving advice to strengthen Elizabeth's position and to weaken Philip's. The best way to act would be "by joining in good confederacy" (ibid., p. 55) with those that opposed him. According to Bacon's view, the Queen should seek the aid of Florence, Ferrara and "especially Venice" (ibid., p. 55), because all of them "fear and abhor the King of Spain's greatness". (Ibid., p. 55). At the same time he proposed an alliance with the Dutch princes: "I cannot think but that their alliance may be firm" (ibid., p. 55) said Bacon, because they all shared the Queen's religion. In order to weaken Philip's power, young Bacon suggested aiding the Low Countries in their fight against Spain for Bacon was afraid that once Philip had reduced the Low Countries he would know no "limits" (ibid., p. 55). Furthermore the writer encouraged attacks on Spain's possessions in the Indies and he was also in favour of intrigues with the Prince of Parma and

Ranuccio, the great grand-son of Manuel, King of Portugal. The author thought it might be useful for the Queen "to seek either the winning of the Prince of Parma from the King of Spain, or at least to have it handled so as jealousy thereof might arise between them" (ibid., p. 56); he even suggested that the best way of dealing with Ranuccio would be through the Venetian ambassador in Paris and with his own father in Italy "both which are in their hearts mortal enemies of the greatness of Spain". (Ibid., p. 56).

Regarding Puritans, Bacon found them less dangerous for Elizabeth than Catholics. However, the Queen deeply disliked the Puritans. Rowse says Elizabeth;

> was the greatest anti-Puritan in the country [...]. The Puritans were personally antipathetic to her as well as politically: a civilised woman, she hated their cant; a tolerant one she was disgusted by their hateful, Biblical intolerance; with her Renaissance view of life she could not bear their narrowness.
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> (Rowse, ***op. cit.***, p. 473).

It was in the fifteen-fifties that the Puritan movement was born, though its origins are to be found in earlier decades. Puritanism strengthened among the English who had gone into exile escaping from the Catholic Queen, Mary. They had rejected the Prayer Book and with it the authority of the English Reformation. They followed the Calvinist faith, believing in a God who predestinated every man either to salvation or damnation. The Puritans firmly believed that the State and the Church were two separate institutions. There existed Calvinist clergy in the early Elizabethan Church and counties where sympathies were with the Puritans such as Norwich, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, etc. With regard to social classes, it was among the middle class that the leading Puritans could be found, but there were also Puritans among the aristocracy and intellectuals. Among its most well-known intellectual leaders we should mention Cartwright, who was deposed as Professor in Cambridge in 1570, and in 1574 had to seek refuge in exile.

As far as religious services were concerned, great confusion prevailed in the Church; in some churches the Prayer Book was strictly followed, in others psalms were added, children were sometimes baptized in a font, sometimes in a basin. The Queen wanted uniformity and Parker in his ***Book of***

Advertisement (1566) gave fixed rules for church services but Puritans did not obey him. In 1571 Walter Strickland demanded from the Commons a bill to reform the Prayer Book. The Queen was angry at this interference in the Commons and reminded him that Parliament should not overstep its duties: the State was ruled through it, but the Church was ruled through convocation. As a matter of fact Strickland was suspended from Parliament.

Puritans were treated with tolerance until Elizabeth ordered Whitgift to reduce the Puritans and to establish order in the Church. Three points should be accepted by every man in England: the supremacy of the Crown in ecclesiastical problems, ***The Common Prayer Book*** and the Thirty Nine Articles. Repression against Puritans began with Bishop John Whitgift, Grindal's successor, in 1583. Grindal, Burghley's candidate, succeeded Parker and was confined to his house for opposing the Queen's orders regarding preaching. Grindal favoured preaching rather than the reading of homilies and he dared to write to the Queen reminding her that she was mortal and reprimanding her for pronouncing so "resolutely and peremptorily" (ibid., p. 472) in matters of faith, religion and Church.

As for Bacon himself, in his "Letter of Advice" he told the Queen that he himself was "not given over, nor so much addicted to their (the Puritans) preciseness" (Spedding, ***op. cit.***, p. 49). Young Bacon, very cautiously again declared that, "till I think that you think otherwise" (ibid., p. 49), he did not agree with the Bishops who "drive them (the Puritans) from their cures". (Ibid., p. 49). The author gave two reasons for this statement. The first was that the Queen should avoid the unfavourable image produced by revealing dissensions in her country:

> First because it doth discredit the reputation and estimation of your power, when other princes shall perceive and know [...] there is so great and heart-burning a division. (ibid., p. 50).

and he continued reminding Elizabeth that the Catholics kept together in supporting the Roman Catholic doctrines, "in the main points of Popery they agree and hold together" (Ibid., p. 50), although there existed dissensions between the religious orders: Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Benedictines.

Secondly, Francis Bacon reminded his Queen that the Puritans' "careful catechizing and diligent preaching" (ibid., p. 50), were giving the "fruit" (ibid., p. 50) of "the lessening and diminishing of the Papistical number" (ibid., p. 50). The writer was aware that the danger existed that Puritans could gain authority in the Church, but he considered it a remote and uncertain evil, "inter remota et incerta mala" (ibid., p. 50).

Bacon even pointed out to the Queen that Puritans could be allies in the fight against Rome and suggested that they should be trusted, as Frederick II did with Saracen soldiers whom he used "against the Pope because he knew they would not spare his Sanctity" (ibid., p. 50).

NOTES

1.- James Sppeding, ***The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon***. Vol. I, 1861. In ***The Works of Francis Bacon***. James Spedding; Robert, Leslie Ellis; Douglas, Denon Heath (eds). 8 Vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862), vol. I, pp. 2-3.

2.- J. B. Black, ***The Reign of Elizabeth 1558-1603. The Oxford History of England.*** (1936; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 9.

3.- S. T. Bindoff, ***Tudor England. The Pelican Guide History of England***. Vol. 5 (1951; rpt. Hardmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1937), vol. 5, p. 222.

4.- A. L. Rowse, ***The England of Elizabeth. The Structure of Society***. (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 443.