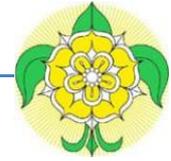


The Rendezvous of Cracked Brains



A commentary on Francis Bacon's 'Advertisement Touching a Holy War'.

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Libellous statements about Francis Bacon tend to propagate like wind-blown seeds of garden weeds. Some of these defamatory remarks argue, for instance, that Bacon was not as idealistic as his utopian works suggest, but rather that he was what might today be considered an advocate of genocidal eugenics. This seriously incorrect point of view is based on Bacon's *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War* which he wrote in 1622, at a time when he was no longer Lord Chancellor. It is only a fragment, left unfinished, and this fact is important to note, otherwise it is easy to miss the point of Bacon's writing, how it is written and why, and therefore what Bacon's real point of view was.

According to Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words* (1604), the first English dictionary, the 17th century meaning of 'advertise' is to give knowledge, advice or counsel. An 'advertisement', in the then current meaning as used by Bacon, refers to a written statement giving knowledge, advice or counsel. Bacon's *Advertisement Touching a Holy War* was clearly being written by him in an effort to provide reasoned advice for someone, possibly the King, in respect of a war that was either already occurring (probably the Palatinate war) or in the process of being considered.¹ It was never finished by him, so we will never know what his final advice might have been, but on his death the manuscript was inherited by William Rawley, who published it in 1679 in his *Certain Miscellany Works*, a collection of Bacon's writings. Although unfinished, there is enough written to show that Bacon's intention was to present arguments from various viewpoints, such as in a debate carried out in a university or in Parliament, or by advocates in a court of law.

There are six characters, of whom four are the ones who will put forward their views as to why they believe there is such a thing as a Holy War and what they think is meant by the term. The four consist of a "Moderate Divine", a "Protestant Zealant", a "Romish Catholic Zealant" and a "Militar Man". These are presented as a foursome, like the four alchemical elements. There is a fifth person, described as a "Politique" (i.e. Politician), who presumably forms the fifth element, the one who ties the other four together and makes the final decision, which indeed is the role of a politician. Through these five characters Bacon is presenting the arguments, as he knows them from all his years of experience, of these five principal 'institutions' or collective minds that direct and govern society. The sixth person is a "Courtier", obviously Bacon himself, who is of the opinion that "the Philosopher's Stone, and an Holy War, were but the *rendez-vous* of cracked brains." He is, however, willing to hear the arguments of the other five, provided they were willing to hear his.

The Courtier is asked to wait to give his opinion until all the other five have given theirs. This approach is a fairly normal style of writing for Bacon, as an advocate and judge who had held the position of Lord Chancellor. In many of his essays, for instance, he often presents first a selection of the various thoughts, viewpoints and behaviours of society, both past and present, and then at the end gives his own final view or summation, which is sometimes in contradistinction from much of what has been previously presented (i.e. debated). It is also Bacon's methodology for his Great Instauration, wherein a wide-ranging 'history' of facts,

thoughts, ideas, opinions, observations, etc., is first collected and then presented to the mind, out of which a better opinion or idea may be made which, when put into action and the results observed, will provide an even better judgment as to whether the speculative idea is the real truth or not. If it is a real truth then it will obey and act according to the Divine Truth, the “summary law of nature”, which Bacon defines as love in action.

Having introduced the characters, the debate about a holy war then begins, but it only gets as far as the Roman Catholic zealot (who speaks first) putting forth his argument for a holy war and what he thinks the term ‘holy war’ covers. The rest of the text was left unfinished. It is the Roman Catholic zealot who states:-

“Of examples enough: except we should add the labours of Hercules; an example which, though it be flourished with much fabulous matter, yet so much it hath, that it doth notably set forth the consent of all nations and ages in the approbation of the extirpating and debellating of giants, monsters, and foreign tyrants, not only as lawful, but as meritorious even of divine honour: and this although the deliverer came from the one end of the world unto the other.”

This was the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church’s hierarchy at the time.

Bacon, as the Courtier, having let the various representatives of our governing society—religious and secular—have their say, was then going to put forth his argument as to why he thought that a “Holy War” was “but the *rendez-vous* of cracked brains”. It would be left to the reader, the one to whom this advice was being given, to make up his mind accordingly.

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Endnotes

¹ At the time Bacon was writing his *Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, the war in the Palatinate was still continuing, and various mercenary leaders were helping Frederick V to defend his countries, the Upper and the Rhine Palatinate, from the Spanish and Imperial armies. Mannheim and Heidelberg fell in 1622, and two years later Frankenthal was lost, leaving the Palatinate in the hands of the Spanish. James I of England was being urged to provide military support to his son-in-law, Frederick, whose wife, Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James, was described by her supporters as the “Jewel of Europe”. Tens of thousands of volunteers rallied to her cause throughout the course of the continental Thirty Years’ War. After the battle of Stadtlohn in August 1623, in which the Protestant armies were decisively defeated, Frederick V, already in exile in The Hague and under growing pressure from his father-in-law to end his involvement in the war, was forced to abandon any hope of continuing the fight.