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TEXTUS INEDITI

ANTONIO POSSEVINO'S TRIBUTE TO EDMUND CAMPION

JOHN PATRICK DONNELLY, S.J. – Marquette University, Milwaukee.

During June of 1580 Edmund Campion and Robert Persons were smuggled into England and worked with marked success until Campion's capture by the English government on July 17, 1581. He was tried for treason and executed December 1, 1581. The treason charges were widely disbelieved in England and on the Continent; indeed the execution caused such resentment throughout Catholic Europe that the English government felt compelled to justify its action. The most important English apology was *The Execution of Justice in England*, which first appeared anonymously on December 17, 1583¹. Its real author was William Cecil, Lord Burghley. An expanded edition was published in 1584; since the English government wanted to present its case to the larger European world as well as to its own subjects, there were Latin, French, Dutch, and probably Italian and German translations as early as 1584².

The news of Campion's execution created considerable stir in far away Poland. Even before Campion's martyrdom the famous Jesuit writer Peter Skarga had incorporated considerable material on the English martyrs in his popular *Lives of the Saints* of 1579. In 1583 there appeared at Vilna a Polish translation of Campion's *Decem Rationes* together with a short life of the author³.

During the years following Campion's death Antonio Possevino was serving as papal legate to Northern and Eastern Europe⁴. Most of his time was spent in Poland, where he developed close relations with the Polish King

¹ Robert M. KINGDON, editor, *The Execution of Justice in England* by William Cecil and *A True, Sincere and Modest Defense of English Catholics* by William Allen (Ithaca, N.Y. 1965) 3-41.

² *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

³ Paul SKWARCZYŃSKI, *Elsinore 1580: John Rodgers and James Bosgrave*. *Recusant History* 16 (1982) 11-12.

⁴ The only biography of Possevino is Jean DORIGNY, *La vie du Père Antoine Possevin de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris 1712), which is now totally out of date. I am preparing a modern biography. The best studies of Possevino's diplomatic activity are Oskar GARSTEIN, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia* (Oslo 1963-1980), I and II, and Stanislas POLČIN, *Une tentative d'union au XVI^e siècle: la mission religieuse du Père Antoine Possevin S.J. en Moscovie (1581-1582)* (Rome 1957) (= *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 150).

Stephen Bathory. Certainly Possevino was abreast of events in England and bitter over the execution of Campion – in a letter to King Stephen dated December 10, 1583, he referred to Queen Elizabeth as «the Tisiphone [one of the Furies] who continuously spills the blood of Catholics»⁵.

Probably sometime in 1584 Possevino obtained a copy of Cecil's *The Execution of Justice in England*, most likely in the Latin translation⁶. Possevino prepared a refutation which took the form of a letter addressed directly to Queen Elizabeth, perhaps because he did not know the real author of the English apology⁷. From the style and content of Possevino's letter it is clear that it was meant for publication. There is no evidence that it was ever sent to the Queen; if it was sent, she probably never saw it since its tone is so bitter that any minister handing her a copy would have been exercising considerable courage. Neither was the letter ever published.

We cannot be certain why Possevino's refutation was never published. It may be that the Jesuit censors considered its publication imprudent – later they blocked the publication of three other books by Possevino for that reason – but there is no direct evidence on the point. More likely Possevino himself decided not to publish after he learned that there were other and more effective Catholic answers in print. During 1584 Robert Persons published his *Leicester's Commonwealth*. Even more effective and more directly aimed at Cecil's *Execution of Justice* was William Allen's *A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics* (1584)⁸. Both works were better attuned to the English situation and both wisely took the traditional form of attacking the monarch's wicked counsellors rather than of a frontal attack on the monarch such as Possevino launched. A Latin translation of Allen's *Defense of English Catholics* appeared in December, 1584⁹; Possevino's refutation of Cecil contains no reference to it, which strongly suggests that Possevino had not seen it when he wrote. At some point he certainly saw it, for he described it briefly in his *Apparatus Sacer* (1603)¹⁰. It seems probable that Possevino's

⁵ *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana* (Cracow 1938), VII-2, 708.

⁶ Possevino's refutation cannot be dated exactly. The earliest possible date of composition is 1584. It must have been written before 1588, since it makes no reference to the Spanish Armada. There are frequent references to Gregory XIII (1572-1585) but none to Sixtus V (1585-1592), which suggests composition in 1584 or 1585.

⁷ Two known manuscript copies exist; both contain many defects. The better copy is at the ARSI, *Opp. NN.* 335 113-33. The text is in a copyist's hand, but the title and an interpolation on f. 127v are in Possevino's autograph. The title, which is partly cut off, reads *Adversus librum de Justitia Britannica, ejus mandato editum*. The *ejus* probably refers to Queen Elizabeth. The other copy is Bibliotheca Vaticana, *Urbinate Latino* 814, pars I, 126-97; which is in a different copyist's hand. Its title reads *Rev. Patris Possevini de Statu Reginae Angliae ac eius regni*.

⁸ Both works are discussed by Peter HOLMES, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of English Catholics*, (Cambridge 1982) 131-35. HOLMES, argues for Person's authorship of *Leicester's Commonwealth* in *The Authorship of 'Leicester's Commonwealth'*. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (1982) 424-30. KINGDON discusses (XXII-XXXVII) and prints Allen's *Defense of English Catholics* (53-268).

⁹ KINGDON XXIII.

¹⁰ *Apparatus Sacer* ... (Venice 1603) 697.

encounter with Allen's superior response discouraged Possevino from publishing his refutation of Cecil.

The bulk of Possevino's tract is a complex historical-judicial argument that has little interest. There is one section, however, that is worth reproducing, a eulogy of Edmund Campion, that has been ignored by scholars and was unknown to the postulators of Campion's canonization¹¹. Admittedly the eulogy of Campion is partly conventional praise of a martyr, but Possevino had known Campion personally at Prague in 1577¹². Indeed their acquaintance may go back to April, 1573, when Campion entered the Jesuits at Rome. That same month Possevino was in Rome and played a prominent role in the Third General Congregation of the Jesuit order; he then served at Rome for five years as Secretary of the Society. As witness to Campion's sanctity Possevino's eulogy may take on added importance from the fact that Possevino had dealings with an extraordinary range of other saints: Pius V, Charles Borromeo, Peter Canisius, Robert Bellarmine, Francis Borgia, and Bernardino Realino. Among his penitents was a student at Padua, Francis de Sales.

Possevino directly addresses the Queen and denounces her as a Jezebel for her hideous barbarity against Campion, the other Jesuits, and the seminary priests whom she has had executed. Her hack writers have tried to hide the truth of this, but Campion's zeal and saintly life cry out against her. His mission to England had but two motives, love of God and obedience to his superiors. Possevino records Campion's zeal during the years he taught at Prague and the acclaim his work there earned in the highest circles as well as his later success as a missionary in England. The Queen tried and failed to win him to her cause by both trickery and the rack. The Queen's hands have been busy, one shedding blood and the other spilling ink to justify her crimes, but these efforts only insure her lasting infamy. Campion embraced the religious life so that freed from merely human concerns, he could help his English homeland at the cost of certain martyrdom. The Jesuit order entered the English mission at the urgent request of English secular priests because the abundant catch of souls needed more fishermen. The Society of Jesus saw

¹¹ Neither the Jesuit postulator's office in Rome nor the Office of the Vice-Postulation for the Cause of the English and Welsh Martyrs in London knew of the text when I made inquiries. The only printed reference to Possevino's refutation is John H. POLLEN, *The English Catholics in the Reign of Elizabeth, 1558-1580* (London 1920) 294 n., which merely states, «He [Possevino] also composed an answer to Burghley's *De Justitia Britannica*, which, though never printed, exists in MS». He gives no reference to its location. The Vatican copy was the subject of Andrew M. Stawowy's 'Antonio Possevino's Reply to Lord Burghley's *Execution of British Justice*', an unpublished M.A. digest in the Department of History, St. Louis University, 1960, pp. vi, 85. Stawowy is unaware of the superior copy at the Jesuit Archives and gives only a passing glance (p.45) to the section on Campion.

¹² In January, 1577, Campion wrote in a letter from Prague to Franz Coster at Cologne, «I was troubled about a parcel of manuscripts which is due to me from France, when F. Antony Possevino, who passed through this place on his way from Rome to Sweden, told me that ... you ... could lend me your aid in the business». Richard SIMPSON, *Edmund Campion: A Biography* (London 1867) 82.

this work as a prophetic challenge; she ignored the danger, as she did in her other apostolates everywhere around the world that she is called to serve God.

Many English Jesuits volunteered to return to England and risk their lives for their countrymen, but superiors chose Campion to pioneer the new apostolate. A scholar trained from boyhood at Oxford, he was outstanding for probity, learning and eloquence. It was Campion who obtained from Gregory XIII permission for Englishmen who wished to ease their conscience to go on calling Elizabeth queen despite her excommunication. Obviously not even her cruelty could curtail the Pope's zeal for the salvation of England. Elizabeth reacted to the Pope's action like a hellish Alecto by attacking certain parts of the papal documents while suppressing the passages that indicated papal zeal for the return and salvation of Englishmen generally and the Queen in particular. Instead she subjected the priests sent to her kingdom to rigged tests, while that new Judas, (Cecil), called them traitors. She vilified the Pope as the Antichrist because in his love for her and her nation he tried to win them to Christ. Possevino concluded his tribute to Campion with a terrible threat: «You will suffer, wicked woman, you will suffer eternal punishment»¹³.

This article cannot end on such a strident note. Among the prisoners tried with Campion was James Bosgrave, S.J., who taught humanities and mathematics at the Jesuit college at Vilna. In the wake of Campion's execution Possevino went to King Stephan Bathory, with whom he was on intimate terms, and persuaded him to intervene as a Catholic king on behalf of his English co-religionists, particularly Bosgrave. The King agreed to Possevino's request but secured the approval of the Polish senators before writing a letter to Queen Elizabeth on January 29, 1583. Pointing out the religious liberty enjoyed by Englishmen in Poland, he appealed for release of Catholics who were imprisoned simply because of their Catholic faith. Specifically he requested the release of Bosgrave, who had served well at the College of Vilna. On January 21, 1585, Bosgrave and twenty-one other prisoners were released and sent into exile. In spite of his impaired health Bosgrave returned to Poland to work and live a long, useful life until 1623¹⁴.

In conclusion another tribute that Possevino paid to Campion should be noted: Possevino's most important book, the *Bibliotheca Selecta*, reprints Campion's *Decem Rationes*¹⁵.

¹³ *Opp. NN.* 335 121r-22r. Despite his years as a papal diplomat Possevino was a strongly emotional person. In February, 1585, Marcus Pitačić, S.J. described him to the Jesuit Provincial of the Austrian Province thus: «P. Possevino est homo vehementis ingenii et non possit res aliquas dissimulare, sed mox omnia prodere ut qui os habet in corde et cor in ore ...» Ladislaus LUKÁCS, editor, *Mon. Ant. Hung.* II 768.

¹⁴ SKWARCZYŃSKI notes Possevino's role in securing Bosgrave's release. Possevino described his intervention with King Stephen Bathory in a letter of January 1, 1583, to the Cardinal of Como, Gregory XIII's cardinal secretary: *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana* VII-2, 1-2; also see 172-73. The King's letter to Elizabeth and material on Bosgrave is printed in Henry MORE, *The Elizabethan Jesuits* edited by Francis Edwards (London 1981) 168 174-76.

¹⁵ *Bibliotheca Selecta* (Rome 1593) 480-504. There were later editions at Venice in 1603 and Cologne in 1607.

DOCUMENT

ARSI *Opp. NN.* 335 121r-122r.

Verum enim vero, quod ad Campianum, ad Personium atque ad alios eiusdem ordinis quem societatem nomine Jesu vocamus praestantissimos athletas attinet, quae item ad eos spectant, quos tu seminarios nominas, nefanda sunt, quae tu adversus innocentissimum eorum sanguinem patrast; uti nefaria, quae tui nunc ad tegendam teterrimam immanitatem tuam impie scriptitant.

Et Edmundi quidem Campiani vita sanctissime acta, et legitima nec procurata a se ipso in istam Insulam missio haec cum timore Dei suscepta, perpes autem anteactae vitae in verbo Dei docendo studium, idque praesertim octennii postremi spatio, quo Pragae urbis celeberrimae¹, tamquam in orbis Christiani theatro², ob Maximiliani et Rodulphi Caesarum praesentiam, summa cum laude, docuit; praeterea pietas ardentissima, qua sive pernoctaret, sive sederet in equo, singulis unius anni diebus, christianam isthic religionem summis periculis in plurimis restituit; ad extremum mirae illae circumventiones tuorum, quibus illum equulis iam distractum et pene discerptum, pertrahere tamen in suas partes nequiverunt; et vero falsissima testimonia, quae in ipso Iudicum tribunali (si pestes illae merentur hoc nomen) manifestissime deprehensa sunt, ac sanguis ipse, quo innocentiam, avitamque fidem intrepide cum aliis beatissimis suis collegis fudit³, clamant adversus te, o Jezabel, iamque testatam orbi christiano sic veritatem fecerunt, ut quanto magis sceleratas manus ad fundendum altera sanguinem, altera atramentum, vos qui aedificatis Sion in sanguinibus adhibetis⁴, tanto attollat altius ipsa veritas caput, vestrorumque [121v] facinorum memoria latius futura sit sempiterna.

Quod autem Gregorii tertiidecimi partem diplomatis aut declarationis iis concessam tuo isti scripto inservisti, reliquum suppressisti⁵, sic decebat ut omnem iniustitiam impleretis⁶, et in hoc etiam fraudes vestras aperiretis. Romam Edmundus Campianus a Praeposito suo Generali evocatus⁷ venit, non ut sanctimonialis aliqua e Monasteriis seducta, vel ut excussa religione, initium deinceps secundum Evangelium vestrum praedicationis isthic faceret, sed ut in Anglia sua patria humanis omnibus rebus pridem expeditus, cum certissimo capitis discrimine, animas suorum iuaret. Nempe plurimi Angli, quibus fidam alii optimi Sacerdotes clanculum operam spiritualem na-

¹ Campion's period in Prague did not last eight years. He first arrived there toward the end of August, 1573, but left two months later for a year of novitiate at Brno in Moravia. He was back in Prague from September, 1574, to March 25, 1580.

² This may be a polite reference to Campion's work as a dramatist. He wrote and produced plays on King Saul and on St. Ambrose and Emperor Theodosius which had command performances for the Imperial household in 1577: SIMPSON 82 83 90. About the Latin-English edition of *Ambrosia* see AHSI 41 (1972) 322.

³ Alexander Briant and Ralph Sherwin were executed with Campion. Three other priests were executed on May 28, 1582, as were four other priests two days later: Philip HUGHES, *The Reformation in England* (London 1954) III 314.

⁴ This is a bitter twist on Mich. 3: 10 in the Vulgate.

⁵ KINGDON 18.

⁶ This is a play on the Vulgate of Mt. 3: 15.

⁷ The choice of Campion for the English mission was made by the Jesuit General Everard Mercurian, probably at the suggestion of William Allen.

vaverant, eandem Jesu societatem per aliquot annos litteris, precibus, legationibus invitarant, ut et ipsi ad capturam piscium, quibus eorum implebantur retia, manus admoverent⁸. Societas onus et pericula non detrectabat, quae satis prodiga imprimis patrimonii et dignitatis, deinde et corporum, ac sanguinis, atque (quod caput est) voluntatis quaquaversus ad extremas Mundi partes, ubi divinae vocationis minimum signum apparet, excurrit; at ne temere illud suscipere videretur, aut ansam tibi et tuis praerbet in perniciem infirmorum eos calumniandi, expectabat, si quid maturius effici potuisset, cum interim iidem ipsi de eadem Societate Angli praefectos suos saepe urgerent, ut sese ad istas martyriorum epulas mitterent, ac (quod mundus capere non potest) animas suas pro fratribus exponerent⁹. Ubi apparuit tempus, prima sors cecidit super Edmundum Campianum Civem Londinensem, et Oxoniensi Academiae iam inde a puero cognitum, honestissimis moribus, singulari doctrina, et christiana quadam eloquentia divinitus praeditum¹⁰. Is, quod intellexisset Anglos Catholicos plebsque angi, quod cum te scirent neque Reginam esse, et, variis haeresibus et foeditatibus inquinatam, ab Ecclesia Dei proiectam fuisse, ac tamen vel tecum tanquam cum Regina agenda [= agendum], vel de te tanquam de Regina loquendum, a Gregorio Tertio Romano Pontifice petiit, ut pii illi eo scrupulo eximerentur, atque si te quoque Reginam appellarent, id non minus illis liceret, quod Davide iam Rege consecrato, licuerat tamen antiquis, Saulem iam a facie Dei proiectum, et per Samuelem ita pronunciatum¹¹, regem tamen adhuc vocare. Id Campianus iam salutem [f. 122r] suorum dies noctesque meditans, ab optimo Pontifice facile obtinuit¹²; ut perspicere posses, nisi mentis aciem amisisses, plus ab Romanis Pontificibus vestram omnium salutem sitiri, quam quod ulla tantarum immanitatum vestrarum mole, pietas eorum erga istam Insulam opprimi possit. Tu vero, cum eadem verba vidisti, quasi summum facinus adversus te perpetratum fuisset, incessisti omnibus furiis, et tanquam infernalis Alecto anguineos illos crines explicans¹³, sententiam dirissimi supplicii tulisti adversus sanctos Dei, reliquam autem Pontificii diplomatis partem reticuisti, ex qua omnibus constare poterat, divinae misericordiae thesaurum quem Christus Ecclesiae suae reliquit, per eundem Pontificem Romanum Anglis qualibuscunque (etiam tibi ipsi) proponi, licet haeresi, sacrilegiis, et pessimis quibusque rebus impliciti, [si] ad cor redire voluissent. Et tu tamen mulier adeo es nequam, cum Deus ipse ita sit bonus? Ac Sanctissimos eius Sacerdotes extentae rationi flammibusque addicis, quoniam ut te, coeterosque ex aeternis flammis eripiant, tantum itineris periculique subeant? Et

⁸ William Allen was the main petitioner. HUGHES III 305.

⁹ Philip Hughes says of the missions of Campion and Persons, «The Jesuit superiors thought the whole thing out very carefully». Ibid. 306.

¹⁰ Campion was a fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, at seventeen.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 16 and 22.

¹² On the papal response, see POLLEN 293-95. It has been published with an introduction by Mandell CREIGHTON, *The Excommunication of Queen Elizabeth*. English Historical Review 7 (1892) 81-88. POLLEN (294) points out that Possevino may have been responsible for a covering memorandum to the papal response which argued that since the bull excommunicating Queen Elizabeth was issued for a specific occasion and set of circumstances (the Northern Rising) that no longer obtained, the bull was no longer binding on Catholics. To Pollen's remarks I can add the specific reference to the memorandum (*Opp. NN 315 36r-37v*), but unfortunately I have found no evidence that would confirm Possevino as author, aside from the fact that the manuscript of the memorandum is found among his other papers relating to his dealings with various popes.

¹³ Alecto was one of the three furies according to Virgil's *Aeneid*: «Talibus Alecto dictis exarsit in iras ... et geminos erexit crinibus angues» (VII, 445, 450).

proditores, novus iste Judas Christi proditor et scriptor tuus vocat eos, cui lacrimis et sanguine salutem aeternam Campianus et reliqui procuraverunt¹⁴? Et Romanum denique Pontificem tamquam Antichristum traducis, quoniam te, ac tuos, ad Christi Ecclesiam summa charitate conatur adducere. Dabis, dabis, impia, sempiternas poenas.

¹⁴ Cecil repeatedly called Campion and his companions traitors (KINGDON 7 8 17 32 35-40) and likens them to Judas (KINGDON 39).

RIASSUNTO

Davanti all'ondata di indignazione che aveva provocato nel continente la barbara esecuzione, avvenuta ai primi di dicembre del 1581 a Londra, del gesuita Edmondo Campion e di altri sacerdoti cattolici inglesi, il governo della regina Elisabetta dovette difendersi. L'apologia più importante fu *The Execution of Justice in England*, apparsa anonima nel dicembre 1583 e presto tradotta in varie lingue. Ne era autore lo stesso William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Presto scesero in campo a rispondere due campioni, R. Persons e W. Allen. Forse proprio perché conobbe che le loro risposte erano più efficaci, Possevino non pubblicò quella che anch'egli aveva composta, tra il 1584 e la prima metà dell'85, quando stava ancora nell'Europa centrale. Così, rimasta essa fra le sue carte, non venne finora conosciuta una bella pagina, che vi si conteneva, relativa a s. E. Campion, da Possevino conosciuto personalmente a Praga e a Roma.

Il tono dello scritto concorda bene col ritratto che si faceva dell'autore proprio nel febbraio 1585: «Possevino è di carattere veemente; non può dissimular nulla, ma deve dir subito tutto, come quegli che ha la bocca nel cuore e il cuore in bocca». Qui tale veemenza si dispiega in tutta la sua foga, servita dallo stile latino ampio e sofisticato e dagli spunti culturali, secondo il solito dell'autore: gli impropri alla regina e ai suoi ministri si sprecano.

Di Campion si tracciano brevemente, ma con efficacia, le spiccate doti naturali, la cultura e la vita virtuosa e zelante. In particolare – e chi scrive doveva ben saperlo – si afferma che fu lui a ottenere da Gregorio XIII che, nonostante la bolla piana di scomunica, i cattolici inglesi potessero continuare a chiamare Elisabetta regina.