CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE LAST WILLS OF ALFONSO X

1. First Last Will. The Great Surprise

The harsh “curse and disinher tance sentence” of don Sancho is complemented, in terms of the Learned King’s position regarding succession and the future rule of the kingdom, by two other documents: his two last wills.1 On November 8, 1283, Alfonso drafted his first will. It is a complex document because it attempts to justify the change in the terms of succession he made in order to favor don Sancho, against what he had determined in his previous legislation, where he had favored the de la Cerda princes.2 This first will is, besides a synthesis of his political thought, a personal confession that reveals his state of mind regarding the political crisis in the kingdom in the days in which he drafted it.

The dominant political themes are the contemporary ones: the betrayal of don Sancho and the search for a successor now that the declared heir had been cursed and disinherited. According to the Learned King, greed and disobedience were the two dominant vices that led don Sancho to betrayal, the reasons why he could not be his heir. Alfonso did not think even for a second that the discontent of the nobility and the people could have been the catalysts for the princes’ rebellion. The Learned King insisted on the legal illegitimacy of don Sancho, basing his judgment on a charge of moral corruption:

Because in all the evil deeds he performed against us, he clearly showed that his behavior was guided by these two vices [greed and disobedience]…Because divine justice requires and demands that whoever obstructs justice must lose the power over all things he might use to obstruct it. Likewise, since he goes against natural law, because not

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1 Both last wills were published in the MHE, II, nos. CCXXVIII–CCXXIX, pp. 110–122 and 122–134; and in Latin by G. Daumet, “Les testaments d’Alphonse le Savant, roi de Castille,” Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes, 67 (1906), pp. 70–99, with explanatory comments. See also the edition in Diplomatario andaluz de Alfonso X, n. 518. The Castilian text is reproduced by A. García Solalinde, Antología de Alfonso X el Sabio, pp. 224–242.

2 See the passage of the last will quoted above, chap. 11, p. 375.
recognizing the debt that by nature he has contracted with his father, it is the will of God and the decree of law and justice that he be disinherited from what the father owns, and that he not participate in anything that would by natural right belong to him; and the son who inherits [something] from the father against the command of God and what the law prescribes, and the son who disinherits his father or mother, may he die for that. Therefore, don Sancho, because of the deeds he performed against us...may he be disinherited from God and Holy Mary, and we disinherit him...and may he be cursed by God and by Holy Mary and by all the heavenly court and by us...Thus we declare him a traitor in all the things he did against us, in such a way that he should not only receive the punishment accorded to traitors in Spain, but also in all lands, wherever he may be, dead or alive.3

Alfonso was directly countering the arrogant assertion by Sancho “Sir, you did not make me—it was God who made me,” that the son used to challenge his dependency on his father to inherit the kingdom. The rebel, in Alfonso’s thought, puts himself between God and his creation, hindering the functioning of laws established by the Creator. According to Alfonso, his son’s belief that he did not need him in order to inherit the throne went against the principles of natural law, which established the dependency of child on the father, from whom he proceeds in all senses, and it also goes against divine and human law. Therefore, if the rebellious son attempted to alter such an order established by nature and by God, disowning his father or his mother, he would deserve the greatest punishment, namely, death: “may he die for that.”

These ideas had also appeared in another document drafted on May 4 of that same year, 1283. It is a privilege on behalf of his daughter, Beatriz of Portugal, in which he grants her the city of Niebla as a reward for having accompanied him during his Sevillian retreat, when everyone else had abandoned him: “And when she saw this [Alfonso’s abandonment] and recognized what others failed to notice, she left her children and her inheritance and all the things she had, and she came to share in our suffering, to live and die with us.”4 In the same privilege, the Learned King affirms once again the doctrine of the inviolability of natural law:

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4 In Ballesteros, Alfonso X, p. 1015.