BOOK 3, CHAPTER 24

The Edict's Cruelty against the Seminarians and the Jesuits

Though the queen's edicts against the seminary priests and the Jesuits are so cruel and inhuman, the rigor with which they are enforced so extreme and barbaric that in content and in deed they exceed every decree and law, however bloody, of every tyrant who has hitherto persecuted the Catholic Church, Elizabeth adds to this proclamation further, ampler procedures for hunting them, sniffing them out, and running them to ground, lest a single one escape her clutches. For, not satisfied with the ordinary judges, courts, and magistrates of the whole kingdom, and the infinity of executioners, jailers, wardens, bailiffs, and other agents who serve her, her edict provides for the designation and creation of special commissioners, to be sent to each and every one of the provinces or counties of the realm (of which there are approximately forty), to seek out, investigate, and apprehend the said priests with the utmost diligence and exquisite means. And these commissioners have not only been instituted and dispatched into every province, but in every city, town, village, and parish of every county they have named and designated persons who vigilantly assist in these inquisitions and inquiries. They have been given secret instructions, commanded to divide among themselves the boundaries and jurisdictions of their commission, to assemble diligently every forty days, at the least, to confer about what they have done and give order for what is to be done. And whenever they get word that some person they suspect has disappeared, they are secretly to alert the commissioners of the other provinces, so as to find and seize them and send them back securely. In these instructions they are given the form they are to use in interrogations and the questions they are to ask the Catholics, and they are commanded to write to the queen and the council every three months about everything they have found, and to substitute or deputize further commissioners as seems good to them, to do in their names all that they themselves do, and this with the most sweeping, generous powers.

Above all and in addition to all the edict's other provisions, the knights and lords and grandees of the kingdom, and the queen's own ministers and attendants, of whatsoever rank or prominence, and all fathers and heads of families throughout the realm, are commanded under the steepest penalties (and under a warrant, which they execute without any exception, mitigation,
or respect of persons) to make inquiries of every person who has frequented
their houses in the past fourteen months, or entered, eaten, drunk, or slept
there. And everything they find is to be written down in certain books, marked
out for the purpose, which they are to keep for the benefit of the commis-sion-
ers. Those who do not respond promptly, or hesitate when they are questioned,
are to be immediately seized and sent to the commissioners under heavy
guard. And the aforesaid fathers of each household are also to be punished if
they are negligent in performing this investigation, in writing it down, in keep-
ing it, or in displaying the books. And he who has aided such priests or failed
to uncover them is to be punished with the penalties customarily given to the
accomplices and abettors of traitors and rebels. Two further details render this
draconian mandate yet more terrifying, and the condition of the Catholics
of England yet more wretched and miserable. The first, that under the terms
of this edict there is no man so downtrodden and base, be he the very dregs of
the people, who is not free to harass any Catholic whatsoever, however exalted;
the innkeeper, the publican, of any station whatsoever, even to the town crier
or the laborer, has the prerogative to investigate, accuse, apprehend, drag to
the tribunals and the jails, abuse, and oppress any Catholic he pleases, or to
be revenged upon his enemies—even if they are heretics—by claiming that
they are Catholics and disobey the queen's laws. And it often happens that
the most perfidious men, the thieves and murderers, the liars and scoundrels,
and the malcontents of the realm, find a way to escape the penalties and pun-
ishments deserved by their crimes—the most effective means to be found in
the kingdom these days—in investigating and accusing some Catholic. By this
means, not only are they not punished, but they even win rewards and favor.
The second thing is that, because flattery and the desire to please princes is
so common and so strong, and because the queen and her foremost advisers
have so openly and vehemently declared the hatred they bear toward our sa-
cred religion and the priests of God who teach and preach it, you would not
believe how people appear each day to become inquisitors, investigators, spies,
and enforcers of the edict against the Catholics, to curry favor with the queen
and her intimates and to show themselves zealous in her service (though it is
not their office, nor their affair)—imagining thus to win a reputation as loyal
subjects and passionate servants of the queen, and the attendant rewards.
And it is not only the common, lowborn folk who do this: some of the most
prominent lords of the realm have clamored to perform the office of infor-mant
and spy, personally searching and ransacking the corners of their homes
to find and arrest a seminary priest, Jesuit, or some other Catholic who had
been received in their house. Witness the unbounded hatred they have for the
true and sacred religion of the Roman Church, and how heresy renders men