Entre Rome, Bruxelles et l’Espagne : le confesseur du gouverneur-général, quelles loyautés ?

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Princely confessors’ names – 1598-1659

Archduke Albert (1596-1621):
Iñigo de Brizuela, o.p. (1595-1621)

Isabel Clara Eugenia (1598-1621-1633):
Andrés de Soto, o.f.m. (1598(?)-1625)
Pomérius de Barbançon, o.f.m. (1625)
Pierre Paunet, o.f.m. (1625-1627/1631)
Pedro de Castro, o.f.m. (1627/1631-1633)

Marquess of Aytona (1633-1634):
Pedro de Vivero, s.j. (1633-1634)(?)

Cardinal-infant don Fernando (1634-1641):
Juan de San Agustín, o.s.a. (1634-1640)
Gonzalo Pacheco, o.s.a. (1640)
Juan de la Madre de Dios, o.c.d. (1640-1641)

Francisco de Melo (1641-1644): ?

Marquess de Castel-Rodrigo (1644-1647):
Pedro de Vivero, s.j. (1644-1647)

Piccolomini, duke of Amalfi (1644-1647)
(Gobernador de las armas):
Johannes Baptista van Hollandt, s.j. (1644-1647)

Archduke Leopold Wilhelm(1647-1656):
Johann Schega, s.j. (1647(?)-1656(?))
Johannes Baptista van Hollandt, s.j. (1647-1656)

Don Juan Jose of Austria (1656-1659):
Francisco de Gamboa, o.s.a. (1655-1659(?))
Gabriel Mettermans, o.s.a. (1656(?)-1657(?))
A valuable reputation

Princely confessors enjoyed a reputation of influence over their penitent which made them very valuable to Rome and Madrid.

Which role did these centers of power give them?

Which resources were granted to them, and for which result?
Rome’s view of the position

- Princely confessors were seen as advocates of Roman interests in the Catholic Netherlands.
- Nuncios used to think of them as means to bypass the governmental institutions and to have a direct access to the Prince.
- In addition, they were seen as a valuable source of information.
A strategy set up in Rome

At the Archduke’s court, “one [= the nuncio] should be on good terms with Father Iñigo de Brizuela, confessor of the Archduke, as he is more powerful than anyone in matters of State and Church.”

“The nuncio has to be on good terms with Father Andres de Soto, confessor of the Infanta; he doesn’t influence State affairs, but he has a great influence on religious matters.”

This strategy had to be tailored by the nuncios who enjoyed a *de facto* autonomy.

Their correspondence depicted these confessors: personality, cooperation with the nuncio, health reports and, in case of decease, names of possible successors.

The roman strategy has not been found as efficient as expected: confessors acted as agent of the Crown, for the benefit of the king and the general governor.

This attitude was no coincidence: Brussels’ confessors were chosen in Madrid, on the basis of their ability to run religious institutions which was seen as a proof of capability within Brussels’ government.

The goal was to make a royal authority control agent out of him, and to put him in front of Calvinist rebels, of general governors’ willingness of autonomy and of Rome’s influence in the country.
Means of action

The confessors worked closely with the Prince.

They were often members of decision-making organs:

- State Council (Brizuela, San Agustín)
- Juntas (for the renewal of the Twelve Years’ Truce, finances, justice, foreign affairs)
- General governor’s Secret councils

Effective control of the princely casa, which offered him the possibility to oversee the princely entourage.
Princely confessors were seen as royal agents, but the king was not the only recipient of their action:

E.G. Brizuela supported the conclusion of the Twelve Years’ Truce from the beginning, while initially the king was reluctant to conclude it (1608-1609).

E.G. Juan de San Agustín raised objections to the appointment of Falconieri as nuncio, following Cardinal-infante’s opinion, while Madrid was not against it. (1634)
Final thoughts

The action of the confessors never was exclusive.

It was variable, changing, and linked to political circumstances.

Their ability to influence policies was due to their proximity with the Prince: they were amongst the Prince’s immediate collaborators.

The office of confessor was loosely defined: this allowed for the confessor to be appointed in several governing organs.

This access to power was closely monitored by Madrid and Rome which, in turn, developed political strategies aiming to take advantage of the situation.

Studies of diplomatic and political mechanisms of power within European courts should include a chapter dedicated to princely confessors, as their role in this matter remains unrecognized.
Thanks!

ANY QUESTIONS?

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