

to which he so clearly belongs. Firstly, challenged with the view that Luther would have been found guilty if judged by the terms of the *Ordinance*, the writer of the *Vindication* asserted a limited doctrine of the evolution of truth: 'in the beginning of the Reformation... there had not been such meanes of conviction, nor such a clearing or settling of truth as there is among us specially in the fundamentall Doctrines, the contrary to which are threatened with death.' Secondly, replying to the objection that the *Ordinance* would make even the entertaining of certain opinions punishable, the writer of the *Vindication* says: 'No man is *punishable* for his *meere mistake* in matters of great consequence, as that he will not forbear to publish his mistake, for the infection of others, and the mischief of their soules, and to the ruine, or at least miserable disturbance of the Church of God.'¹⁰

By having a principal role in defining the terms of the *Ordinance* Bacon shows himself accepting both the responsibility, and the problems, which attend the possession of political power. If to think correctly is a crucial element in the stability and security of the state, then the state evidently has a fundamental interest in what its members think in so far as they seek to persuade others to their point of view. As Bacon puts it, the state is charged with the protection of its members 'in matters of greatest consequence'. In this he shows himself consistent in a context of ideological conflict which is perceived to have as its ultimate terms, salvation or damnation for the individual, reformation or destruction for the nation.

The other work which I wish to notice was published posthumously in 1664. It is entitled *The History of Athanasius, with the Rise, Growth and Downfall of the Arian Heresie*, a subject which, in the first instance, seems to have little direct connection with his other work. However, I think it right to describe the work as Bacon's most personal, the one in which he expresses in its full maturity his understanding of the relation between ideas and political action, and of the life of the individual whose first commitment is to the truth which his conscience confirms. It can be dated to the 1650s by its reference to the Quakers, but it is at large an essay on the abuse of political power, the violent consequences of doctrinal disagreements within the Christian Church, and the perpetual insecurity of those who would persist in asserting the truth when the government of both church and state is corrupt.

Bacon is quite explicit in this work about the kind of reader to whom he is writing, and the principles upon which the history is composed. Firstly, chronological and geographical breadth is necessary, because '*Athanasius* his endowments cannot well be discovered but by his actions and sufferings; nor they considered without the concurrence of like actions of his contemporaries...