

Of Unity in Religion by Francis

Bacon

Francis Bacon wrote the essay *Of Unity in Religion* during a period of religious change in England during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. It was during this period that Protestantism was establishing itself as the predominant religion in England under the Church of England. However, the reformation and the Church of England itself were fraught with dispute. Bacon, an experienced politician, saw the importance of a unified church for the stability and advancement of the English empire, and he authored the essay to transmit the idea of protestant religion unification.

Of Unity in Religion was originally published in 1612, but was expanded to its current length in 1625. The essay receives significance primarily due to the circumstances surrounding its production. Nonetheless, it retains some relevance today. Bacon establishes religion as the primary glue that holds human society together in this essay because, at the time it was written, there were numerous theological disagreements, plots, intrigues, persecutions, and assassination attempts on rulers. He insists that pagan religion be free of strife and division due to the fact that

it was based on rites and ceremonies rather than set beliefs.

The essay's fundamental argument is that religious divisions are detrimental to religion, charity, and peace and should thus be avoided. Religion is meant to maintain the unity of human civilization. As such, it should be a unified force in and of itself. According to Bacon, Christians should remain united around their religion's fundamental principles. He sees no damage in quarrels about little issues or irrelevant points. This allows for a range of viewpoints on non-essential issues to be permitted. For example, different forms of church government and ritual and worship are permissible, as the Bible contains no definitive rule on these subjects. However, when the Bible expressly establishes a rule or doctrine, it must be accepted without reservation. In other words, unity on essential points is compatible with disagreement on non-essential points. Christ's clothing was seamless, consisting of a single piece; nevertheless, the Queen's garment, which represents the church, was multicoloured. Bacon's advise is unquestionably valuable and applicable to members of other religions as well. Not only Christians, but adherents of any religion would be wise to retain a sense of unity on their

religion's fundamentals while tolerating disagreements over small points.

According to Bacon, men must not violate the laws of human society or human charity in order to maintain religious unity. Christians have two swords at their disposal to defend their Church: the spiritual sword symbolised by priestly authority and the temporal sword symbolised by the secular power of the government when invited by the Church to defend it. However, Christians should abstain from using the third sword "the sword of the Prophet Mohammed" which implied resorting to bloodshed and conflict in order to convert people to a certain religion. Furthermore, persecution and rebellion are not justified in the name of the Church's unity. Persecution infringes on the rights of others, whereas rebellion is directed against the divinely ordained and declared institution of government. Man's obligation to God should not negate man's obligation to man.

Bacon argues in this article that the Church's unity is the surest method to safeguard religion. He cites three advantages of religious unity, including the ability to please God and accomplish religious objectives. Secondly, to quell mockery of the

Church; and finally, through religious unity, members of the Church can bring about peace, strengthen faith, and promote charity. He has also made recommendations: the church should reject unity based on ignorance of inconsistencies, as well as patchwork unity that is artificial or false unity. He implores both church and state not to be rebellious toward one another, as this would contradict the fundamental principles of man's duty to God and mankind. One should not act like a devil with the goal of obtaining God's throne. He asserts categorically that those who convert people through coercion are doing so for personal gain, not for the sake of religion.

Bacon is portrayed in this essay as an insightful observer and practical thinker who was cognizant of the dangers associated with religious debates. He appears to reject prejudices in this essay and makes a strong case for tolerance and a liberal outlook on religion's attitudes that are still important in the twenty-first century.