
Unam Sanctam (1302)

Description

(Latin the One Holy, i.e. Church), the Bull on papal supremacy issued 18 November, 1302, by Boniface VIII during the dispute with Philip the Fair, King of France. It is named from its opening words (see BONIFACE VIII). The Bull was promulgated in connection with the Roman Council of October, 1302, at which it had probably been discussed. It is not impossible that Boniface VIII himself revised the Bull; still it also appears that Aegidius Colonna, Archbishop of Bourges, who had come to the council at Rome notwithstanding the royal prohibition, influenced the text. The original of the Bull is no longer in existence; the oldest text is to be found in the registers of Boniface VIII in the Vatican archives ["Reg. Vatic.", L, fol. 387]. It was also incorporated in the "Corpus juris canonici" ("Extravag. Comm.", I, vii, 1; ed. Friedberg, II, 1245). The genuineness of the Bull is absolutely established by the entry of it in the official registers of the papal Briefs, and its incorporation in the canon law. The objections to its genuineness raised by such scholars as Damberger, Mury, and Verlaque are fully removed by this external testimony. At a later date Mury withdrew his opinion.

The Bull lays down dogmatic propositions on the unity of the Church, the necessity of belonging to it for eternal salvation, the position of the pope as supreme head of the Church, and the duty thence arising of submission to the pope in order to belong to the Church and thus to attain salvation. The pope further emphasizes the higher position of the spiritual in comparison with the secular order. From these premises he then draws conclusions concerning the relation between the spiritual power of the Church and secular authority. The main propositions of the Bull are the following: First, the unity of the Church and its necessity for salvation are declared and established by various passages from the Bible and by reference to the one Ark of the Flood, and to the seamless garment of Christ. The pope then affirms that, as the unity of the body of the Church so is the unity of its head established in Peter and his successors. Consequently, all who wish to belong to the fold of Christ are placed under the dominion of Peter and his successors. When, therefore, the Greeks and others say they are not subject to the authority of Peter and his successors, they thus acknowledge that they do not belong to Christ's sheep.

Then follow some principles and conclusions concerning the spiritual and the secular power:

Under the control of the Church are two swords, that is two powers, the expression referring to the medieval theory of the two swords, the spiritual and the secular. This is substantiated by the customary reference to the swords of the Apostles at the arrest of Christ (Luke, xxii, 38; Matt., xxvi, 52).

Both swords are in the power of the Church; the spiritual is wielded in the Church by the hand of the clergy; the secular is to be employed for the Church by the hand of the civil authority, but under the direction of the spiritual power.

The one sword must be subordinate to the other: the earthly power must submit to the spiritual authority, as this has precedence of the secular on account of its greatness and sublimity; for the spiritual power has the right to establish and guide the secular power, and also to judge it when it does not act rightly. When, however, the earthly power goes astray, it is judged by the spiritual power; a lower spiritual power is judged by a higher, the highest spiritual power is judged by God.

This authority, although granted to man, and exercised by man, is not a human authority, but rather a Divine one, granted to Peter by Divine commission and confirmed in him and his successors. Consequently, whoever opposes this power ordained of God opposes the law of God and seems, like a Manichaeon, to accept two principles.

"Now, therefore, we declare, say, determine and pronounce that for every human creature it is necessary for salvation to be subject to the authority of the Roman pontiff" (Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, definimus, et pronuntiamus omnino esse de necessitate salutis). The Bull is universal in character. As its content shows, a careful distinction is made between the fundamental principles concerning the Roman primacy and the declarations as to the application of these to the secular power and its representatives. In the registers, on the margin of the text of the record, the last sentence is noted as its real definition: "Declaratio quod subesse Romano Pontifici est omni humanae creaturae de necessitate salutis" (It is here stated that for salvation it is necessary that every human creature be subject to the authority of the Roman pontiff). This definition, the meaning and importance of which are clearly evident from the connection with the first part on the necessity of the one Church for salvation, and on the pope as the one supreme head of the Church, expresses the necessity for everyone who wishes to attain salvation of belonging to the Church, and therefore of being subject to the authority of the pope in all religious matters. This has been the constant teaching of the Church, and it was declared in the same sense by the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the Lateran, in 1516: "De necessitate esse salutis omnes Christi fideles Romano Pontifici subesse" (That it is of the necessity of salvation for all Christ's faithful to be subject to the Roman pontiff). The translation by Berchtold of the expression humanae creaturae by "temporal authorities" is absolutely wrong. The Bull also proclaims the subjection of the secular power to the spiritual as the one higher in rank, and draws from it the conclusion that the representatives of the spiritual power can install the possessors of secular authority and exercise judgment over their administration, should it be contrary to Christian law.

This is a fundamental principle which had grown out of the entire development in the early Middle Ages of the central position of the papacy in the Christian national family of Western Europe. It had been expressed from the eleventh century by theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux and John of Salisbury, and by popes like Nicholas II and Leo IX. Boniface VIII gave it precise expression in opposing the procedure of the French king. The main propositions are drawn from the writings of St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Thomas Aquinas, and letters of Innocent III. Both from these authorities and from declarations made by Boniface VIII himself, it is also evident that the jurisdiction of the spiritual power over the secular has for its basis the concept of the Church as guardian of the Christian law of morals, hence her jurisdiction extends as far as this law is concerned. Consequently, when King Philip protested, Clement V was able, in his Brief "Meruit", of 1 February, 1306, to declare that the French king and France were to suffer no disadvantage on account of the Bull "Unam Sanctam", and that the issuing of this Bull had not made them subject to the authority of the Roman Church in any other manner than formerly. In this way, Clement V was able to give France and its ruler a guarantee of

security from the ecclesiastico-political results of the opinions elaborated in the Bull, while its dogmatic decision suffered no detriment of any kind. In the struggles of the Gallican party against the authority of the Roman See, and also in the writings of non-Catholic authors against the definition of Papal Infallibility, the Bull "Unam Sanctam" was used against Boniface VIII as well as against the papal primacy in a manner not justified by its content. The statements concerning the relations between the spiritual and the secular power are of a purely historical character, so far as they do not refer to the nature of the spiritual power, and are based on the actual conditions of medieval Western Europe.

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