

fragment the Church rather than to unify it. We are given a clear, succinct statement of Bacon's constitutional thinking (and preferences) when he considers Constantine's acceptance of a Council's verdict that Arius was not guilty of heresy, Athanasius' refusal to agree and Constantine's threat to depose Athanasius. In a tone of direct engagement with the situation he writes, 'Said like an Emperor, and not a Christian Magistrate that must govern by Law, nor like a Parliament whose Vote must make a Law... And therefore in all these there can be no president of the Christian Magistrates interest above the Ecclesiastical, nor of the Ecclesiastical interest independent upon the Christian Magistrate, in regard the general Councils were not purely Ecclesiastical, but mixt of both interests, and so continued until the Mystery of Iniquity was fully settled in the Roman Chair, and the Civil Power turned out of Doors.' One other seat of power not mentioned here is the Court, of which Bacon is consistently judgmental in tone. He explains much of the Arians' success as deriving from their being the dominant party at court, and he shows both why they should be powerful and what consequences follow. Although the Arians had little popular support, he argues, they 'bear it out as the Faith Imperial, and as the Faith of Great Men... and to be observed of all that expect preferment'. In another place he speaks harshly of churchmen who become involved in the life of the Court: 'These Church-men whose conscience will allow them to forsake their pastoral charge, to live at the Court, that conscience will also allow them to turn Apostates to any error that shall come into fashion there.' He does not say that Constantine was simply the creature of the Arian party but he does show how his actions towards Athanasius and, in the end, towards orthodox Christianity, were powerfully influenced by those close to him who were of the Arian persuasion. His assessment of Constantine's character and achievement shows both a strong prejudice and an attempt to strike a balance: 'in the general stream of his government he shewed himself wise, courageous, and after his manner zealous in advancement of Gods Worship, though in his later times more for the Ceremony, and scarce short of Superstition, the ordinary fault of Christian Princes.'¹⁵

There are two aspects of the distortions in Church and State brought about by Arians at court which are particularly pertinent to our understanding of Bacon's interest in Spira, and his attitude to religious controversy. In general terms the significance of Athanasius' story for Bacon lies in his defence of orthodox Christianity against heresy on the one hand and state power on the other. Constantine comes to power at a time in the history of the Church when 'professors affecting the repute of extraordinary insight in