

CONSTANTINE AND CHRISTIANITY:
THE FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN STATE CHURCH

Katherine E. Willems

Abstract

The relationship of religion and government can be intricate and dynamic and has often had important consequences for both. This is especially evident in the change that took place in both the Christian Church and the Roman Empire during the reign of the Emperor Constantine (A.D. 312-337). This paper discusses the effects of the events and legislation of that period on both church and state. It will attempt to explain how as a result of Constantine's policies, the Christian Church and the Roman State each gained control of and influence over the other. This in turn resulted in a mutual dependency which allowed and maintained control of the people.

The essay begins with an introduction to the subject and a description of the circumstances of Constantine's rise to power.

Katherine E. Willems is a Freshman in the Honors Program at Seattle Pacific University. She wrote this International Baccalaureate Extended Essay for Ms. Jeanie Angersbach at Mt. Rainier High School in Des Moines, Washington, during her Senior Year, 1991/1992.

This is followed by a discussion of Constantine's Christian conversion, the motives behind it, and the implications of those motives. Next, an account of Constantine's most important pro-Christian legislation is presented, with an analysis of its effects on church and empire. The focus shifts to his policy development in regard to involvement in church affairs, concentrating on the two major church councils of Arles and Nicaea. Finally the long term results of Constantine's policies are discussed. The gain, loss and exchange of power are analyzed from both church and government perspectives. The conclusion is followed by two appendices: a more detailed discussion of Constantine's conversion to Christianity, and a simple timeline to aid the reader in understanding the progression of the church-state relationship.

This paper does not attempt to reach a solid conclusion about the motives behind Constantine's policies. It does, however, conclude that these policies were instrumental in the fusion of church and state. Moreover, it concludes that the ultimate result of these policies was the interdependence of church and state, which made them virtually inseparable and ushered in the era of the ecclesiastical state.

Introduction

Government and religion have always been important forces in the lives and thoughts of the common people. The relationship between the two institutions has the potential to profoundly change both religion and state, and to transform society. In the first three centuries after Christ, the Christian religion was developing the influence necessary to effect a change in the Roman Empire. At the end of the fourth century A.D., that change had occurred. The formerly pagan Empire had united with the Christian Church, combining the power of both institutions to form the ecclesiastical state. What was responsible for this change? While certain historians posit that it would have been an inevitable result of the growth of Christianity,¹ the immediate

cause of the union of church and state can be traced to the reign of the Emperor Constantine (A.D. 312-337). As a result of Constantine's policies, the Christian Church and the Roman State each gained control of the other and simultaneously became dependent on one another to maintain control of the people.

Constantine's Rise to Power

In order to understand the immense changes that came about during the reign of Constantine it is necessary to be familiar with the state of the Empire before his ascension to power. In A.D. 300 the Roman Empire was gradually declining. Wars in the east and trouble with the barbarians in the north were putting a strain on the Empire from the outside while a division of rule² weakened it from within.³ The social classes became more distinct and moral standards were in decline.⁴ In the religious arena, paganism was an integral part of life and government. It was a form of patriotism and national celebration accepted as a matter of course by most of the Empire.⁵ It was being challenged by a Christian minority that had been increasing in strength and number for more than two centuries.

The emerging Christian Church had grown considerably since its foundation, even in the face of severe persecution.⁶ Disliked by their pagan neighbors and mistrusted by the government, the followers of Christ encountered opposition at every turn. Under the emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284-305), the Christians suffered the most serious and prolonged persecution that they had yet faced.⁷ Persecution, however, didn't seem to hinder Christian expansion, which was apparent in the new role religion was playing in politics. Christianity was a factor that the Roman rulers could no longer ignore.

In the Roman mind, religion was a government department, and it was the duty of the government to maintain favor in the eyes of the gods.⁸ From the Christian point of view there was a distinct difference between God and emperor, and the former

had priority. Pagans saw Christians as a dangerous threat to the crown. Christians simply wanted relief from persecution. Clearly the two could not coexist without some change in the existing order. When Diocletian⁹ abdicated in A.D. 305, “none of the contestants [for emperor] could avoid the religious issue, and each had his own policy.”¹⁰

With Diocletian out of the way, several candidates for emperor appeared on the scene. One was Constantine. Upon the death of his father, Constantius,¹¹ Constantine was named Augustus in his place.¹² Following the elimination of the other three members of the ruling Tetrarchy,¹³ Constantine had only to conquer Maxentius, the son of Maximin, to gain complete control of the western portion of the empire. In A.D. 312, in the battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine defeated Maxentius and rode into Rome as the victorious Augustus of the West.¹⁴

Constantine’s Conversion

This episode at Milvian Bridge marked perhaps the most important turning point in the history of the Empire. It was here that Constantine became a supporter of Christianity. There is much discussion of the circumstances surrounding Constantine’s “conversion.” There is no doubt that he was, in some way, converted to the cause; the debate revolves around his motivation.¹⁵ Historian Alexander Flick states it this way:

Whatever the theories may be, the fact remains that for some reason Constantine invoked the aid of the Christians’ God, and carried the Christian emblem in front of his troops to one victory after another until he became the sole ruler of the Empire. If it was merely experimenting with the name and cross of Jesus, the experiment brought convincing belief, for the sacred emblem was employed in all later military campaigns.¹⁶

From that time on, Constantine was recognized as a Christian by pagan and Christian alike.¹⁷

Constantine’s motivations are of major concern, since they would guide his policies toward the church in years to come.

Purely political motivations would result in an effort to shamelessly manipulate and dominate the church, while purely religious motives would allow the church to dominate him. Evidence indicates that Constantine's motives were mixed. He had some Christian background, and the influences of his mother and his traveling companion, Hosius, Bishop of Cordoba, made him fairly sympathetic to Christianity on a theological basis.¹⁸ In addition, on a political level, he had continued his father's policies of religious toleration in the northwestern portion of the Empire. Thus it wasn't completely out of character for Constantine to embrace the Christian religion. However, there were some obvious political benefits from his conversion. As a politician he understood the increasing importance of the Christian minority. "Apparently every ruler of consequence had recognized that persecution had failed and that anyone who hoped to control the Empire or even an important part of it must make his peace with the Church."¹⁹ It was certainly to Constantine's political advantage to gain the support of the church.

Perhaps the more compelling reason for Constantine's "conversion," however, lies in his superstition. Maxentius, his adversary, relied heavily on pagan magic. Constantine's adherence to the Christian God was quite possibly an effort to combat that.²⁰ He would pragmatically give his allegiance to the god who served him best. In his early years of Christianity, Constantine seems to have looked upon the new religion as a type of formula for success.²¹ Piety led to victory. If he served God, God would serve him. The arrangement worked well, and as he marched to victory after victory under the sign of the cross, his devotion to the Christian faith increased. To him Christianity was a more efficient means, and certainly a successful one, of accomplishing that which was expected of paganism.

Although his grasp of Christianity was, especially in the beginning, regrettably shallow, Constantine seems to have been sincere in his beliefs. Certainly he was guided by political necessity as well as religious fervor. His first obligation was to the Empire. As time went on, he portrayed himself as God's appointed sovereign,

rewarded with divine favor. “It thus appeared that Constantine gained rather than lost his willingness to exchange the style and title of a god for that of God’s vice-regent.”²² Constantine’s pragmatic view of Christianity and Christian theology was an important factor in his policy-making, and in the relationship of church and state that resulted from it.

Development of Government Policy

Constantine’s “conversion” experience soon became evident in his government policy. Early in A.D. 313 he met in Milan with Licinius, Augustus in the East, where the two developed a policy of religious toleration. The Edict of Milan,²³ the “Magna Charta of religious liberty,”²⁴ had a profound impact on the Empire. It ended the persecution of the Christians and “put Christianity on an equality with paganism.”²⁵ Christianity was now considered a *religio licita*, a licensed cult.²⁶ This meant that Christians had a right to profess their faith without fear of legal obstacles. In addition, those who had been deprived of their status and legal power regained their position. They were given freedom of assembly, and property which had been confiscated during periods of persecution was returned to its original owner.²⁷ The edict recognized the church as a corporation by authorizing it to hold property.²⁸ With astounding rapidity the position of the Christians had been reversed. At last they were legally equal to other religions.

It is not surprising that the Edict of Milan was enthusiastically welcomed by the church. Emerging from an era of torture and martyrdom,²⁹ they hailed Constantine as the champion of their cause. Alexander Flick describes the results of the Edict like this:

It did not make Christianity the state religion, as is generally asserted, but only legalized it, and popularized it. Now people could and did openly desert the old and join the new faith...[The Edict] gave it opportunity for public organization, thus paving the way for the Catholic hierarchy already begun; and marks a new era in the history

of the Christian church, because at last a great Roman Emperor and his conquering army had taken up the sword in defense of persecuted Christianity.³⁰

The church was not the only party that benefited from the Edict of Milan. Constantine gained substantive advantages from his new policy. By ending the persecutions he gained the support of his Christian subjects. By allowing the church to legally organize, he strengthened and institutionalized this support. A powerful, unified church, so long as it was loyal to him, could be a tremendous political advantage. However, the church also had the potential to exert a significant amount of power over his policies. In 313, Constantine's motives were probably ambiguous, and focused on immediate concerns.³¹ It is doubtful that he gave sufficient thought to the implications of the precedent that he was establishing. Nevertheless, "whatever was done at Milan in 313 still remains the most significant of the many milestones in the road by which the church and the state moved toward co-operation."³² Constantine had begun to rely on the church for support, and it was dependent on him for protection. Already the Church and the Empire were joining forces.

The Edict of Milan was followed by other decrees which also favored the Christians. The clergy were exempted from municipal and military duties (a privilege already granted to pagan priests and Jewish rabbis), and Christian slaves were emancipated. In A.D. 316 various customs and ordinances which were offensive to Christians were abolished, and by 323 the pagan symbols of Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, and Hercules had disappeared from imperial coins.³³ It is interesting to note that most of Constantine's decrees before A.D. 323 seem to be aimed at maintaining equality and toleration for Christianity. It was not until he defeated Licinius and became sole emperor in 324 that he began to actively promote the religion.³⁴

Licinius was by no means a supporter of Christianity. He apparently agreed to Constantine's policies out of political necessity rather than a sympathy for the faith. When the two rulers clashed, each determined to gain full control of the Empire,

Licinius made a belated attempt to rid his Eastern domain of Christian influence. Ironically his policies backfired, and he only succeeded in alienating a large segment of the population, which then backed Constantine in the battle for the Empire.³⁵ Constantine manipulated growing ecclesiastical favor to increase his power and undermine Licinius' equal status.³⁶ With enthusiasm and what appears to be genuine sincerity, he played out the role of the Christian warrior. The struggle for power culminated in A.D. 324 when his victory in the battle of Chrysopolis "made Constantine sole ruler of the Roman world, and sealed the fate of the immortal gods under whose banner Licinius had belatedly fought."³⁷ In defeating Licinius, Constantine believed that he was waging war for the sake of Christianity,³⁸ and in A.D. 324 he demonstrated this proselytizing outlook by issuing a "general exhortation to all Romans to embrace the new creed for the common weal."³⁹ All indications are that Constantine had progressed in his understanding and appreciation for the Christian faith.⁴⁰ He now gave complete allegiance to the Christian God, spoke of himself as a servant of God,⁴¹ and set about to "legislate the millennium in a generation."⁴²

Formation of Policy Through Church Councils

In his role as protector of the church, Constantine felt that he was also responsible for solving its internal problems. His involvement in deciding church doctrine and practice is most readily seen in the events at the Council of Arles (A.D. 314) and the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). In both of these church councils Constantine had considerable influence on the development and enforcement of church doctrine.

In A.D. 313 the unity of the Christians was threatened by the Donatist faction, a fanatical and militant minority that disagreed with the generally accepted doctrines surrounding the sacraments.⁴³ When the matter couldn't be solved internally, Constantine got involved:

The failure of an African synod to reach a settlement led to an appeal to the emperor, as a consequence of which the issue was brought to trial before ecclesiastical boards successively convoked at Rome and Arles and finally, before Constantine himself at Rome. Whereupon the emperor, no doubt as the self-appointed 'overseer of those outside,' undertook to implement the verdict of the courts.⁴⁴

The verdict favored the Catholic⁴⁵ majority, which became more powerful as a result of the Emperor's backing.

As a consequence of the events surrounding Arles the church gained power and lost freedom. In bringing their case before the emperor, the Christian leaders were introduced into the political sphere. "Henceforth bishops became men of power and influence in political as well as religious life."⁴⁶ In his efforts to reconcile conflicting teachings within the church Constantine gave church leaders more power and elevated them in society by giving weight to their opinions.⁴⁷ This increased influence, however, came with a price. It is interesting to note that at this point of Constantine's reign the church appealed to him; he did not actively seek to control its doctrine. This act of appeal set the precedent for government involvement in church doctrine. Henceforth Constantine would take an active role in settling church disputes. An important example of this is seen in the Council of Nicaea.

During the time that Constantine became sole Roman Emperor, the church was confronted with the Arian heresy. Briefly stated, Arianism taught that Christ, God the Son, was subordinate to God the Father. Neither fully human nor fully divine, he was created rather than the Creator, and was subject to change.⁴⁸ This had gravely serious implications for orthodox Christian theology, and the idea was violently opposed by most of the bishops. Although Constantine hadn't the vaguest idea of the importance of the dispute,⁴⁹ or even the issues involved, he was disturbed by the division it caused. The Arian controversy became the primary issue in Christian circles, and polarized the church.⁵⁰

In a short time the whole Eastern Church became a 'metaphysical battle-field.' Finally both sides appealed to Constantine, who, viewing the contest as a war of words, wrote a common letter and sent it by his

court-bishop to both leaders in which he said that the quarrel was childish and unworthy of such churchmen; that moreover it displeased him personally, hence they were asked to stop it. When the imperial request failed, Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea to settle the dispute.⁵¹

On June 9, 325, the Council of Nicaea convened, commissioned with the purpose of settling disputes which posed a danger to the Empire.⁵² More than 2,000 church leaders (including over 300 bishops) attended this first universal council of Christendom; the whole Empire was represented.⁵³ Conspicuous among those present was the Emperor himself.

The political significance of this council lies in Constantine's participation in it and influence over it. In an effort to unite the bishops, "Constantine himself attended the sessions—some two months of them—and bore the chief burden of controlling them."⁵⁴ This demonstrates the magnitude of government control over the church, and the rapidity with which it came about. The church, in receiving approval and support from the state, was fast relinquishing its rights to self-government. At the same time, however, church teachings were being integrated into the state government. When the orthodox bishops triumphed and wrote the Nicene Creed,⁵⁵ "the fundamental law and charter of Trinitarian Christianity,"⁵⁶ Constantine required all the bishops to subscribe to it.⁵⁷ He then denounced the dissenters (Chiefly Arius and his followers, who had perpetuated the controversy) and decreed that all their works be destroyed. The penalty for owning a work written by Arius and refusing to burn it was death.⁵⁸ Most importantly, the Nicene Creed was universally proclaimed as imperial law.⁵⁹ Thus, through Constantine's involvement, Christian doctrine was legislated throughout the Empire. As the state increased its control of the church, the church was gaining influence over the state. The tradition which had been established in the resolution of the Donatist schism was now firmly entrenched:

Interference in the most vital concerns of the Church was recognized as an imperial prerogative. The Emperor called the Council, presided over its proceedings, acted as mediator between contending factions,

forced the Nicene Creed on the Church, fixed the day for celebrating Easter, and approved the first ecclesiastical canons.⁶⁰

Church and State, united in the person of Constantine, had become almost inseparable.

Long-Term Effects of Constantine's Policies

The effects of this unexpected marriage of church and state shook the Empire, and had profound and irreversible effects on both institutions. One important result, and the basis for most others, was the gradual conversion of the Empire. This increased the power of the Christian church as well as that of the Christian state, and joined them even more closely together. As Constantine legislated Christian principles, a large segment of the population gradually drifted into the Christian camp:

For vast numbers who were content not to think but simply to follow the leadership of the emperor, it was merely a matter of substituting Christ for Jupiter, the Eucharist for the sacrifice, baptism for the *taurobolium*, and pretending to themselves that otherwise everything was the same.⁶¹

For the masses, obeying the law soon translated into accepting the basic tenets of Christianity. Civil law promoted Christian values. Change in criminal law blurred the distinction between the theological notions of sin and legal consequences of crime.⁶² They may not have understood Christianity or sincerely believed it, but they were subject to it nonetheless through civil laws. Constantine himself heavily promoted Christianity, especially in his later years:

He tried to convert his subjects to Christianity through Christian governors in the provinces, by letters and sermons, by rewarding towns for converting temples into churches, and by conforming to Christian worship.⁶³

The state no longer had sole control of the hearts and minds of its subjects as it had in the era of pagan state-worship. The church was gradually gaining the moral allegiance of the people. Henceforth the Empire would have to work through the church to maintain

their loyalty. In creating a Christian State and fusing politics with religion, Constantine in a sense put himself at the mercy of the church. He was dependent on its support for the support of the people. Rather than gaining full control over it himself, he put it in a position to control him.

The church gained the illusion of even more control as necessity eventually filled the government with those who were, if not sincere Christians, at least willing to promote Christianity for their own well-being. For example:

An edict forbidding the discharge of pagan sacrificial rites by imperial officials had the effect of packing the administrative services, from the great praetorian prefectures down to the government of the meanest province, with nominal Christians.⁶⁴

It must be taken into account, however, that this nominal adherence to the Christian faith, while strengthening the political influence of the church, weakened its spiritual power and integrity. "Before the reign was over, pagans and Christians alike could discern, with pretended or genuine distress, the contamination of the Church by persons converted only on the surface, or for the wrong reasons."⁶⁵ Equating Roman law with God's law, accommodating citizens could easily allow the state to shape their theology. Although the Christians gained numerous converts, they gained relatively little serious commitment. Thus, in legislating Christianity, Constantine also diluted it with confused and insincere converts, regaining some of his control over it. If the people followed the doctrine as defined by the state, the effect of church control over hearts and minds was largely neutralized.

There were, still, many sincere and well-educated Christians, bishops and other church leaders, who had a great deal of direct influence on Constantine and his policies. "Clergy were being recognized as civic as well as religious leaders and accorded a corresponding status."⁶⁶ Ecclesiastical councils functioned as "parliaments embodying the philosophic, if not political, wisdom of the empire."⁶⁷ The Christian intellectuals did much to mobilize enlightened opinion in support of Christian principles.⁶⁸ Several important bishops, among them Hosius, Lactantius and Eusebius,

were Constantine's trusted political advisors.⁶⁹ In this coveted position they worked hard to promote their religion. Constantine relied on the support of these advisors, and their position was dependent on his favor. The church hierarchy and the government hierarchy, parallel institutions, found themselves inevitably fused together. Each would be rendered weak and ineffective without the other.

In exchange for the numerous privileges he granted to the church, Constantine enjoyed its enthusiastic approval. His biographer, the influential Eusebius of Caesarea, praised the Emperor to an excess, lauding him as the hand of God in human history.⁷⁰ "Contemporary Christian thinking seemed to provide a fresh vindication of imperial authority,"⁷¹ and most church leaders were more than willing to acknowledge his divine right to rule.⁷² Constantine had become a sort of "political saint whom it was not considered impious to designate as 'equal to the Apostles.'"⁷³ This image contributed to the ease with which he influenced the church, and reinforced the security of his authoritative position among the Christian leaders. Their confidence in him made them willing to accept his judgment:

The church recognized its subjection to the Emperor without a complaint and permitted him to appoint and dispose its officers, to call and dismiss synods and councils, like Arles (314) and Nicaea (325), and almost to replace the Holy Ghost itself in determining the proceedings.⁷⁴

Constantine had become part of the church, and both emperor and bishops were willing to work together.

There were, however, subtle dangers in this position. The exchange of favor between emperor and church provided a means for unscrupulous people to take advantage of both. Often the church was used as a vehicle to gain the benevolence of the emperor.⁷⁵ In this regard, Constantine had introduced the government, as well as the church, to a new source of corruption and manipulation. Since the institutions were inextricably linked, neither could escape this contamination; rather they made each other more vulnerable to attack. This vulnerability, in its turn,

increased their reliance on one another. As the church-state relationship progressed, the church would rely on the government to validate its doctrines, and the government would rely on the pulpit to preach its politics.

Concluding Analysis

The marriage of church and state came about gradually:

[Constantine's] age possesses all the ambiguities of a period of violent transition. Those ambiguities were dramatically epitomized in the person of the emperor himself. He is perhaps unique as the one human being to have enjoyed the distinction of being deified as a pagan god, while at the same time, he was popularly venerated as a Christian saint.⁷⁶

In his lifetime Constantine was gradually transformed from protector of Christianity to its proselyte, and soon felt it necessary to promote his new religion. As Roman Emperor, it was his traditional duty to secure the favor of the gods.⁷⁷ He felt that he owed his allegiance to the Christian God, and thus he legislated Christianity with the intent of converting the empire and protecting the church.⁷⁸

It is difficult to believe that Constantine was insincere in his Christianity. His methods would probably have been very different if he had simply used Christianity as a political weapon. It is much more fitting to accuse him of being short-sighted. Putting Christianity on an equal footing with paganism, as he did in the Edict of Milan, was a pragmatic policy to maintain peace in the empire. It was also probably sufficient to gain influential support of the church. At first he kept the two religions fairly balanced, but toward the latter part of his reign he openly favored Christianity and showed a tendency to actively suppress paganism.⁷⁹ This gradual shift in policy had staggering implications as it paved the way for the official state church.⁸⁰ Under Constantine, paganism was still legal; “nevertheless the triumphs of Christianity were all won at the expense of paganism.”⁸¹ By promoting Christianity, Constantine allowed the church to become a partner with

him in controlling the empire. Although this gave him more authority over the church, in the long run it diminished imperial power. His successors had to contend with a politicized church that demanded a large degree of control over the government.

As the church became more integrated into the government, the emperors found it necessary to assume more authority over it. Following Constantine, imperial control of church-related issues became even more all-encompassing. Imperial sanction was required for all important acts connected with the church. Councils were called and dismissed in the name of the sovereign, and were not valid without imperial approval.⁸² Clearly the church was paying a price for its new-found status. Still, the rewards of this status were outstanding:

That the union [of church and state] did paganize and materialize the Church no one can deny, but in compensation the Empire was Christianized and spiritualised. The result was mediaeval Christianity and the ecclesiastical Empire...After the time of Constantine, the Church [became] such a vital and integral part of the life of Europe that history for a thousand years must be viewed through the eyes of the Church and estimated by her standards.⁸³

In joining together, both church and state sacrificed a great deal. The church sacrificed its freedom and the state sacrificed its power. Constantine's policies "marked a revolution in the relation of the Church to the Empire, for each made a conquest of the other."⁸⁴

In this mutual "conquest," it is impossible to declare a victor. The two institutions became one force. The empire sacrificed some of its power to the church, yet gained more control over the church itself. The government ruled through the church; the church ruled through the government. Neither could rule without the support and cooperation of the other. Under Constantine and because of his actions, the development of this Christian state church ushered in a new age, and its ideas were passed down to the successors of the Empire. The Roman Empire has long since disappeared, but in governments throughout Europe and the world, Constantine's legacy lives on.

Appendix A: Constantine's Conversion

There is a fair amount of controversy surrounding the circumstances of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Historian Alexander Flick summarizes the popular account from a variety of sources:

Tradition tells us that Constantine was converted to Christianity suddenly by a miracle. One day, during the conflict with Maxentius at Milvian Bridge, he and his whole army saw a bright cross in the heavens with this inscription in Greek on it: 'In this sign, conquer.' In a dream that night Christ appeared to him and commanded him to use the emblem of the cross as his battle ensign, and promised him victory in consequence. Constantine immediately had the costly *labarum*⁸⁵ made to be carried before his army and with it at Milvian bridge, ten miles from Rome, he vanquished his foe.⁸⁶

This is the account which is presented by Eusebius, Constantine's biographer, as being the emperor's own. There are three major views of this account. Some historians, especially older ones, uphold the "miracle" as genuine, citing the fact that the army witnessed the change in Constantine and the soldiers were required to put the new emblem on their shields.⁸⁷ The "miraculous sign" can also be attributed to a combination of natural phenomena and Constantine's overactive imagination.⁸⁸ Finally, there exists the possibility that the whole story is a deliberate fabrication invented by either Constantine or Eusebius. Although it is impossible to be certain which explanation is the correct one, there is little reason to doubt Constantine's eventual conversion. In view of all the evidence, it can only be concluded that Constantine's real, sincere conversion to the Christian faith was a gradual process, and not the result of a miracle.

Appendix B: Timeline of Major Events

- A.D. 303 - The Great Persecution begins under Diocletian. This was a concentrated effort to rid the Roman Empire of Christians
- 305 - Diocletian and Maximian abdicate. Constantius, Galerius named Augustus; Severus, Maximinus as Caesar
- 306 - Constantius dies; Constantine hailed as Augustus
- 307 - Licinius becomes Augustus in the East
- 311 - Galerius issues Edict of Toleration, relieving persecution of Christians in some areas
- 312 - Constantine defeats Maxentius at Milvian Bridge; converts to Christianity
- 313 - Constantine and Licinius meet at Milan, proclaim universal toleration of Christians
- 314 - Council of Arles
- 324 - Licinius defeated at Chrysopolis; Constantine becomes sole emperor
- 325 - Council of Nicaea
- 330 - Constantinople dedicated
- 337 - Constantine baptized; dies

¹ Alexander C. Flick, The Rise of the Mediaeval Church (New York: Burt Franklin, 1909) p. 293

² Under Diocletian (A.D. 284-305) authority was divided between two rulers holding the title of Augustus, each with an associate, who was referred to as Caesar

³ Flick, p. 112

⁴ Ibid., p. 112

⁵ Ibid., p. 112

⁶ Ibid., p. 112

⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, The First Five Centuries: A History of the Expansion of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936) p. 155

⁸ A.H.M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) p. 202

⁹ Diocletian became emperor in A.D. 284. Later the first Tetrarchy was established, and he shared power with Maximian (Augustus), Constantius and Galerius (Caesars).

¹⁰ Latourette, p. 155

¹¹ Upon the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, Constantius and Galerius were elevated to Augusti. With Maximian and Severus as Caesars, they constituted the second Tetrarchy.

¹² This title was bestowed on Constantine by his father's army, and was not welcomed by the other men in pursuit of power.

¹³ The second Tetrarchy. Most of the contenders for power, through war and political intrigues, gradually succeeded in eliminating each other. For an in-depth discussion of this, see Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, no date) pp. 341-370

¹⁴ Licinius was named Augustus in the East in A.D. 307.

¹⁵ Jones, p. 73

¹⁶ Flick, p. 117

¹⁷ Jones, p. 83

¹⁸ W.H.C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 482

¹⁹ Latourette, p. 160

²⁰ Ibid., p. 158

²¹ Charles Norris Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957) p. 184

²² Ibid., p. 186

²³ There is controversy surrounding the actual occurrences at Milan. Some say that the Edict didn't exist as such, although the policies that it represented certainly changed the existing order. For a more in-depth discussion see Latourette, pp. 158-160

²⁴ Flick, p. 119

²⁵ Ibid., p. 119

²⁶ Cochrane, p. 178

²⁷ Ibid., p. 178

²⁸ Ibid., p. 178

²⁹ The persecution had been especially severe in the East. The Western provinces had been granted some relief in A.D. 311 when Galerius issued his Edict of Toleration.

³⁰ Flick, p. 119

³¹ Cochrane, p. 180

³² Latourette, p. 159

³³ Flick, p. 119

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124

³⁵ Frend, p. 484

³⁶ Cochrane, p. 207

³⁷ Frend, p. 484

³⁸ Flick, p. 119

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119

⁴⁰ Frend, p. 484

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 486

⁴² Cochrane, p. 211. The millennium is mentioned in the book of Revelation as a thousand-year period during which Christ will reign on earth and holiness will prevail. It can also refer more generally to a perfect government.

⁴³ The Donatists, a Christian sect, believed that the validity of the sacraments derived from the righteousness of the adminster. They challenged the reinstatement of priests who had been branded traitors during the persecutions, and the validity of sacraments administered by such people. Cochrane, p. 206

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206

⁴⁵ Here the term Catholic refers to the universal Christian church.

⁴⁶ Frend., p. 505

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 505

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Arianism and its implications, see Cochrane, pp. 233-235.

⁴⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, Constantine (New York: The Dial Press, 1969) p. 168

⁵⁰ Flick, p. 139

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 140

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 140

⁵⁴ MacMullen, Constantine, p. 172

⁵⁵ This carefully-worded statement of faith summarized the orthodox position on the Trinity, and thoroughly condemned all Arian ideas.

⁵⁶ Cochrane, p. 210

⁵⁷ Flick, p. 142

⁵⁸ Cochrane, p. 210

⁵⁹ Flick, p. 142

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 143

⁶¹ Cochrane, p. 248

⁶² Ibid., p. 203

⁶³ Flick, p. 122

⁶⁴ Cochrane, p. 208

⁶⁵ MacMullen, Constantine, p. 161

⁶⁶ Frend, p. 488

⁶⁷ Cochrane, p. 190

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 190

⁶⁹ Flick, p. 118

⁷⁰ Cochrane, p. 183. Also see Eusebius' own Ecclesiastical History which contains numerous flowery and highly complimentary references to the Emperor.

⁷¹ Cochrane, p. 189

⁷² Ibid., p. 185

⁷³ Ibid., p. 208

⁷⁴ Flick, p. 292

⁷⁵ Cochrane, p. 208

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 212

⁷⁷ Jones, p. 203

⁷⁸ Cochrane, p. 197

⁷⁹ Flick, p. 124

⁸⁰ Christianity became the sole religion of the Roman Empire in A.D. 378, under the emperor Theodosius.

⁸¹ Flick, p. 120

⁸² Ibid., p. 294

⁸³ Ibid., p. 293

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 293

⁸⁵ The labarum was Constantine's imperial standard, with the two Greek letters *Chi* and *Ro*, the first letters in Christ's name, forming the sign of the cross.

⁸⁶ Flick, p. 116

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 117

⁸⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this view, see A.H.M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) pp. 84-85

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Eusebius Pamphilus, Ecclesiastical History Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984

Secondary Sources:

Cochrane, Charles Norris, Christianity and Classical Culture New York: Oxford University Press, 1957

Flick, Alexander C., The Rise and Fall of the Mediaeval Church New York: Burt Franklin, 1909

Frend, W.H.C., The Rise of Christianity Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984

Gibbon, Edward, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire Vol. 1, New York: The Modern Library, no date

Hardy, E.G., Christianity and the Roman Government New York: Burt Franklin, 1971

Jones, A.H.M., Constantine and the Conversion of Europe Toronto: University of Toronto, 1978

Latourette, Kenneth Scott, The First Five Centuries: A History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol. 1, New York: Harper Brothers, 1937

MacMullen, Ramsay, Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400) New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984

MacMullen, Ramsay, Constantine New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1969

Sayers, Dorothy, The Emperor Constantine New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1951

Stephenson, Carl and Bryce Lyon, Mediaeval History 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1962

Walker, Williston, A History of the Christian Church Revised ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959

