

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AND THE EDICT OF MILAN

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I.

10 "To God above all things our thanks, to the All-Governing and All-Director, and abundant thanks also to the Savior and Redeemer of our souls, Jesus Christ, through whom we pray at all times to preserve the blessings of peace steadfast and intact in all external dangers and spiritual necessities!"

15 Thus, jubilant from an expanded and grateful heart, resounds the joyful song of Eusebius at the beginning of the tenth book of his Church History.

20 And he continues: "Henceforth a clear and brilliant day dawned, veiled by no cloud, which let its rays of heavenly light descend upon the entire earth upon the churches of Christ". Lactantius also concurs with these tones of joy. "We must give thanks to God's eternal mercy," he exults, "who has finally looked upon the earth, that He has deigned to raise and gather His flock, partly torn by ravenous wolves and partly scattered, and to exterminate the wild beasts that trample the pastures of the divine flock, whom they had driven from their lair... Let us therefore celebrate God's triumph with joy, let us glorify the Lord's victory with praise, praying day and night that He may confirm forever the peace restored to His people after ten years".

25 The hour of liberation had struck. The Christians finally breathed a sigh of relief from the long, bloody reign of terror. The day on which Eusebius sinned would not, however, remain unglamorous. Black clouds loomed on the horizon, heavy thunderclaps rolled in with a distant dullness, ominous harbingers of approaching storms. Julian's reaction would not only remove the "Galileans" from high office, but also ignite a school war for the first time. The young 30 Church would still be reeling from the blows of the Barbarians, would be internally torn by rampant heresies; perhaps the most disastrous would be the Gnostic attempts to reconcile Christianity and paganism.

35 Yes, even more: the edict guaranteeing legal equality, which soon became a privileged state, would cause pagans, especially those closest to the throne, to storm into the Church in droves, tainted only with a veneer of Christianity. Then weeds and thorns flourish among the wheat in the field of Christianity. Conviction remains distant, favoritism and ambition become the driving force. Disbelief, pagan customs, and pagan practices penetrate the Church of God, and morality becomes more skewed among the vast majority who practice or are supposed to practice the moral laws. Christianity on the throne degenerates into Caesaropapism, "in

40 reality a humiliation, a lowering of higher principles into the sphere of lower interests". 1)

45 Yet, Eusebius was fully justified in raising a hymn of praise. For herein lay the great significance of the edict that forced paganism to admit its defeat and impotence. Despite all persecutions, Christianity had triumphed over the Roman state and Roman paganism. Neither the systematic actions of Maximinus the Thracian, nor the organized massacres of Decius and Valerian, nor the reign of terror of Diocletian, were able to destroy the Christian community. What gave Christianity this silent strength was a certain analogous spiritual direction, not to mention, first and foremost, the grace and omnipotent decree of God, which also granted the blood witnesses and confessors that heroism and contempt for death that mocks any naturalistic explanation. But Christianity, thanks to its exalted character, also stood strong by maintaining its own nature, by recreating and Christianizing the old culture, demonstrating a remarkable adaptability, and by reforming the deeply degraded Roman society. It purified and ennobled ancient Hellenistic civilization, infusing it with a new and higher life.

50 The Edict of Milan concludes the Early Christian cultural period, which I have elsewhere characterized as the period of ethical revival. It crowns the civilizing work of the young Church, until then confined to a limited circle, now extending across the entire cultural world. It signifies the triumph over the violence of pagan rule. Constantine the Great understood, and this is to his credit, that he could only expect a rebirth for the world from a cultural power like Christianity.

60 Roman society as a whole could look forward to it with confidence. The edict bears his name above all; but the indispensable relationships that gave rise to the edict, the foundation on which it rests, are not the work of Constantine, but of Christianity.

65 Since then, sixteen centuries have completed its epic journey. Heavy storms have raged over the Church, and it has endured tremendous schisms and turmoil within itself. In keeping with its universalistic character, it has turned to ever new peoples and nations, has extended its activities to new continents, has transferred its cultural work to other domains, and adapted it to new conditions and relationships. But at all turning points in history, it has proven itself to be the cultural power par excellence, strong through its divine origins, radiant in unfading youth, drawing its life force from sources that never dry up. Firmly grounded on earth, she has never lost sight of heavenly ideals. And so she still stands today, on the sixteenth century tide of Church Peace, amidst the rising and disappearing generations and peoples, the Holy Roman, Catholic, Apostolic Church, as the only enduring cultural power amid the changing times, ever victorious under the sign of the Cross.

## II.

75 The Christian community, freed from eschatological expectations, having outgrown its Primitive Christian enthusiasm, and yet without damage to the inspiration instilled by its divine Founder, we encounter on the threshold of the 21st century, at its entrance into the Greco-Roman cultural world.

80 There, a grand, comprehensive task awaited Christianity. First, self-defense, a task forced upon Christianity by the hostile attitude of the pagan masses, which attitude was the main factor and driving force behind the first persecutions of Christians. Then, maintenance of one's own independence; rowing against the powerful current of Hellenization, of secularization, which threatened the young Church with certain downfall by attempting to tear it away from its supernatural foundation. Finally, self-development by following the direction of universalist currents, one's own inherent, unquestionably active pursuit, conquering the cultural world, permeating all aspects of civilization with the spirit of one's Founder. It is beyond the scope of this celebratory publication to enumerate what the lauded army of Early Christian Apologists accomplished in this titanic struggle, both when it came to confronting the brutal violence of persecution and in that other phase, when the struggle shifted from politics to the realm of the spiritual.<sup>1)</sup> I will point out only a few points. It is well known that during the first period of Christian persecution, popular hatred was the real driving factor. This popular hatred, fueled by the Jews, sometimes flared up to a furious incandescence. The first imperial rebuke, that of Trajan to Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia (112 or 113), bears only the character of a repressive measure regarding Christian trials. The investigation of Christians and the acceptance of anonymous complaints against them were prohibited; On condition of invoking the Roman gods, the past will not be taken into account. Even more favorable were the rescripts of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. But the extent to which popular anger was unleashed in those times can be seen from the martyrdom of the elderly Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna (23 February 155). The events of this torture were brought to the attention of the whole of Christendom by the community of Smyrna, and the freshness and warmth of the account already exclude all suspicion of falsification. This account, the Martyrium 5 of Polycarp, relates that a large crowd of Jews had gathered in the stadium; so tremendous was their shouting and clamoring that they were deafening. When the herald publicly proclaimed that Polycarp had confessed to being a Christian, the entire crowd shouted with undisguised rage: "There is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who urges many neither to sacrifice nor to worship". They then demanded that the Asiar Philip release a lion against him. When Philip refused, they demanded that Polycarp be burned alive, which was done.

100 110 We will remain silent about the reason for this popular anger; it is, in a sense, understandable. Christianity was, and had to be, exclusivist; it opposed all deities and all the ceremonies customary in the Roman Empire; it braced itself against the imperial cult, which had eventually become the true imperial religion. More than that, it was felt that Christianity cut through the roots of so many cultural institutions that were connected with paganism and the pagan.

115 120 125 The spirit of the people had, as it were, coalesced. We wish only to point out the very remarkable phenomenon that during the second period of persecution, which began with the massacres of Decius (249), popular anger increasingly disappeared from the scene of its somber activity. From then on, state power was the sole factor; one no longer needed to suppress popular anger, one had to fan it. Fanatical outbursts of grim hatred were no longer observed; and towards the end of this period, in the last great days of persecution, the constant murder and bloodshed were not only unsympathetic to the people, but the people even loudly expressed their sincere feeling of pity and compassion for so many bloody demonstrations of loyalty to religious conviction. But the strongest evidence is what Eusebius testifies of Maxentius: that he initially showed tolerance, "to please and flatter the Romans" 1). Why this remarkable change? Franz Görres is certainly right when he locates the main cause in the increasing familiarity with the lofty principles of Christian morality, in the fading of prejudices and accusations circulating against Christians. 3 But even more powerful, as Sdralek rightly observes, was the force emanating from the heroism of Christian charity. 1) The Roman Empire 130 was repeatedly ravaged by the plague, most severely from 252 to 254. Social ties dissolved, even blood ties weakened; the stricken, unburied and unmourned, lay uncared for in the streets and squares. Everyone was only concerned with self-preservation, and those who could tried to save their lives by fleeing. But it was precisely in such times that Christian charity unfolded in its most exuberant splendor. Then a certain Cyprian gathered the Christian 135 community and spoke to them about the virtue of mercy: in such times, the Lord only wanted to ascertain "whether the healthy would help the sick, whether members of the same family would show each other loving service, whether masters felt pity for their slaves" 1). Effective aid was immediately provided according to their position and ability; and those who could not pay due to poverty performed personal services more valuable than gold.

140 145 A similar scene was witnessed by the crowds when Alexandria was ravaged by the plague in 259. We read in Eusebius how many who took the bodies of their Christian brothers in their arms or laps, closed their eyes and mouths, and buried them with all due care, soon followed them into death. "The best among the brethren," writes Bishop Dionysius, "priests, deacons, and eminent laymen, ended their lives thus; their death, because of their heroic witness of charity and faith, resembled a martyrdom". 1) And such a display of love was not reserved for Christians alone: those of other faiths also embraced their compassion and piety. This was the case during a similar popular disaster in the time of Maximinus Daza. "One must surely realize," writes Harnack, "that such a fool, as Eusebius also said, might have a profound impact on the

non-Christians and mightily promoted propaganda". 5) Their spirit of forgiveness was also heroic. It is an archaeological fact that, during the long period of persecution, Christianity left no trace of mourning, no sign of hurt, no expression of vengefulness. "If I am not entirely mistaken," says Raoul Rochette, "observing this fact casts ancient Christianity in a light that, more than any other feature of its history, than all other monuments of the spirit it breathed, demands our reverence and love".

1) This heroic practice of charity, however, constitutes only one of the many facets of the glorious jewel in the crown of glory of the early Christians: the harmony that existed between their actions and their teachings. They were not fond of mere rhetoric about love, mortification, and morality; their teaching, "was not merely a language: it was strength and deed". 2) This harmony struck even a mocker like Lucian. Like Tacitus, he had no understanding of the world-shaking significance of Christianity. He considered it one of the many follies of his time. He considered Christians blind and misguided. But what he lacked in the philosophers, he found in the Christians, and he candidly presents the results of his findings. 3) How wonderfully fitting are Justin's words to this testimony: "Those who are not found to live as He taught, prove by this that they are not true Christians, even if they profess the teaching of Christ with their mouths; for not to those who merely profess, but to those who also practice works, has He promised salvation". 1) Christianity has also managed to maintain its own religious independence. It cannot be denied that with the entry of the Gospel into the orbit of the Hellenistic-Roman cultural world, a psychological process took place, leading to an exchange between ancient worldviews and younger Christian ideas. But this should not be called a Hellenization of Christianity or a secularization of the Gospel. If one wishes to use a powerful word at all costs, it is more accurate to speak of a Christianization of Hellenism. It was agreed that pagan philosophy, besides countless errors, also contained many precious elements of truth. It provided a highly valued form, but never penetrated the essential content of the Christian faith. In other ways as well, mutual influence occurred. With many Christian concepts, the monotheistic current, so remarkable in the syncretism of the third century, penetrated paganism; in any case, such a current was fostered by Christianity. On the other hand, countless pagan institutions were spared; useful pagan customs and concepts were either deliberately purified, Christianized, or adopted by the people, gradually accepted by the Church. And thus one explains the fact that "many ancient elements can be found in its festival circle, which ennobled the popular festival, in its legends, which purified the popular spirit, in its customs and concepts, its mysticism, its liturgy, which lifted the multitude from the cesspool of impurity to the luminous heights of morality and truth". 1) But the treasure of doctrinal truths remained untouched. Christianity, in particular, has managed to maintain its independence against the coaxing and allure of Gnosticism, the Modernism of Antiquity. The Hellenic spirit, taken by storm by the firmness of Christian conviction and the purity of Christian life, sought irresistibly to win over Christian practice to its enchanting theories. But the Christian apologists proved steadfast in the battle against this false doctrine: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Theophilus, and others. They pointed to the rationality and necessity of faith, to the harmony between faith and intellectual knowledge, to the concrete manifestation of Christianity in the Catholic and Apostolic Church: the Church of the Logos, the form instituted by God himself. And it is precisely this staunch resistance, precisely this decisive rejection of the tempting Gnostic advances, that must be credited to Christianity in this regard.

Hand in hand with this twofold apologetic activity went the conquest of the cultural world, the permeation of all socio-psychological factors with the spirit of Christ. The religious development of the people by no means discarded all ancient forms, but those forms henceforth breathed spirit and truth. On the soil of private life, morality flourished into a supreme morality, the institution of the family, whose distortion and elevation began with the natural-rational component of pagan culture, was completed and ennobled: marital fidelity, parental and filial love, respect for the rights and dignity of women and children, the distortion of the essence of slavery-these are the noble fruits, ripened in the sun's warmth of Christianity. The Early Christian community also demonstrated its high ethical standards in fulfilling the duties and exercising the rights guaranteed by the state; in bridging the gap between social classes through the doctrine of property rights, by valuing labor, and by the virtues of self-denial and selfless charity. Christianity also left its mark on the Veronica canvas of art. It reformed, though not by leaps and bounds, but in alignment with existing practices in time and space. It knew how to create new directions and open new paths, including in the field of literature. But above all, it knew how to elevate literature and art to higher ethical ideals through novelty of subject matter and sublimity of conception. Philosophy has already been discussed. In exchange for the gratefully accepted services offered, particularly by Neoplatonism, Christianity offered the gold coin of its principles. One should think especially of the appreciation of the full concept of duty, which pagan antiquity had never attained. The foundation of a theological science was also laid by the merging of rational and revelatory reasoning, by developing the truths of faith on the solid foundation of Revelation; this occurred in the School of Catechetics, or rather, in the Theological University of Alexandria. Add to this the transformation and suppression of the vernacular, without it losing its distinctive character. Thus, it seems that Christianity, connecting with the national character (folk religion, vernacular, folk art, etc.), as every true high culture must do, fertilized every cultural area with new ideas, indeed imprinted its own distinctive mark on the entire pre-Constantinian period, by endowing it with a decidedly

ethical-religious character. 1 This dominant influence did not suddenly break through: mixed feelings, gross dissociations, rigorism, and hyper-ascetic tendencies of all kinds characterized the course of the 11th century. With Tertullian and Hippolytus, extreme rigorism crossed the threshold of the 11th century. But Pope Callixtus steadfastly maintained the milder view, taking into account reality and the fragility of human nature, and also showed himself a decided advocate of milder penitential discipline. In the same spirit, Popes Pontian and Cornelius, as well as Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, strove, with the result that by the end of the eleventh century, "Cathar" Novatianism had only a few adherents. Perhaps the reconciliation of Pontian and Hippolytus in Sardinia could be considered the prelude to victory, and the resistance of Heraclius under Pope Eusebius2) an echo from the times of dissonance. Some dissidents chose monastic life in the desert.

The barriers have now fallen. The Christian idea can now expand freely and frankly to form a new intellectual and emotional life, to implement a higher view of life in all branches of civilization.

One can say that the Church at the end of the eleventh century has completed its universalist organization, but also that its triumph over the entire breadth of culture is an accomplished fact3). She awaits only the grace of the times to share herself with the entirety of Roman society, with "the whole world," as the expression of the time 1).

For at the beginning of the 4th century, Christians constituted less than a tenth of the population. They formed only a relatively limited, yet enclosed cultural community. The sharply contrasting pagan worldviews were bound to lead to a certain isolation. Yet, that community maintained sufficient contact with national pagan beliefs and traditions to give rise to a powerful interaction between Christian and pagan concepts; yet the Christians were sufficiently Roman in their dealings and conduct, yet they maintained sufficient contact with their fellow citizens to be able to exert a salutary influence on them and their culture, and above all, to be able to prepare for the full, all-encompassing impact of the future. The writer of the letter to Diognetus says: "Christians differ from other people neither in place of residence, nor in language, nor in customs. For they do not inhabit separate cities, speak no unusual language, and lead no distinct way of life". 1) This also shows that one should not imagine the Christians of the Roman center of faith and culture during those first centuries constantly hiding in the catacombs, as it were living underground in those gloomy tuff quarries, to withdraw from the light and life that played and roared in the bustling atmosphere above them. The first Christians certainly did not live under, but above ground. The catacombs were therefore primarily burial places; and when, towards the end of the second century, the Church organized itself as a kind of burial guild, it was even officially recognized as its owner and also received the right to perform religious ceremonies there that were considered burial ceremonies by the state. Here the Church simply stood on the basis of established law. It exercised this right, in or above the catacombs, for burials on the anniversaries of the next of kin, especially on the feasts (natalitia) of martyrs; however, regular religious services were also celebrated in private homes during the persecution periods. From the 3rd century onward, the catacombs also became places of refuge, which had previously been the case only exceptionally. In 257, Emperor Valerian banned Christian cemeteries, actually more as gathering places; but through a restitution order issued by Gallienus (260), the Church was restored to possession of the holy places. Finally, through Diocletian's edict of persecution, the catacombs were confiscated.

### III.

What the Christians had already achieved before Constantine, thanks to their activities outlined above, is evident from their condition at the beginning of the 3rd century. The four edicts of Diocletian from the years 303 and 304 offer a system of persecution so gruesomely radical that, humanly speaking, they would certainly have resulted in the destruction of Christianity, had it not been too late. But it was too late. The resistance of the Christians could no longer be broken. 1). When Diocletian and Maximian resigned their positions on May 1, 305, the persecution was essentially limited to the East, until in 311, the oldest of the reigning principals, Galerius, issued an edict in the face of death that was merely a thinly veiled confession of his own inability 1), in which he requested the Christians' prayers for his salvation and for the prosperity of the Roman Empire! This edict was co-signed by Licinius, a personal friend of Galerius, who had been appointed Augustus by Galerius in 307 with Diocletian's support, and by Constantinus, who had also held the title of Supreme Emperor since the Congress of Carnuntum. Constantine was nineteen years old when his father, Constantius Chlorus, was appointed Caesar by Diocletian over Spain and Gaul, and also over Britain, if he succeeded in taming the rebellious Britons. This appointment dissolved Constantius's family. He broke off marriage with Constantine's mother, Helena, a native of Naissus in Serbia, to enter into a political marriage with the stepdaughter of the Supreme Emperor Maximian, with whom Diocletian had shared the burdens and pleasures of imperial government. As for Constantine, he departed for Nicomedia, to Diocletian's court, ostensibly to complete his military career under the watchful eye of Augustus and Caesar, indeed to be held as a hostage for his father's loyalty.

But from those early years, Constantine had brought with him a favorable disposition toward Christians. It is true, we can hardly attach any value to the account of Theodoret, that his mother Helena gave him the first food of piety. More credible is Eusebius's assertion that Constantine so instilled in his mother a fear of God, a fear she had not previously shown, that it seemed as if she had become a disciple of Christ from the very beginning. 5) Most likely, she did not embrace Christianity before 313. But certainly, the image of his excellent

father, who had never been able to agree with the persecutory policy of his fellow emperors and protected Christians as much as possible, accompanied him on his life's path. Eusebius praises him lavishly and expressly testifies that Constantine proved himself a zealous follower of his father's goodwill toward the Christian religion. 3) In Trier and York, several of his courtiers were Christians; indeed, it is said that the Holy Mysteries were celebrated daily in his palace. And this in spite of his fellow emperors? "A man, from whom England was even liberated "He who had won again," says Zahn, "had kept a close watch on the constantly driven Rhine border and was rightly honored by his subordinates as a true father of the land, dared to venture anything". 4) Without a doubt, the Christians hoped that the son of their sole protector would ascend the imperial throne.

There is something else. Monotheistic movements were not uncommon during the imperial period, the result of religious syncretism, especially in the 3rd century. Perhaps no pagan religion has achieved such a relatively high level of monotheism as the worship of Mithras in the form it took in the Roman Empire. 5) The Sol Invictus, the "Unconquered Sun," was considered by many to be the highest deity or even the deity. Monotheism, which emerged from the soil of philosophy, also experienced a certain heyday. entered. Now, as already mentioned, it is a fact that it was precisely the young Christianity that largely engendered or promoted this monotheistic trend,<sup>2</sup> and, on the other hand, that philosophers like Celsus and Lucian were among the most vehement opponents of the Church; finally, that the cult of Mithras became the most formidable rival to the Christian religion. But can't this bitter hostility be explained by the fact that the transition from Mithras to Christ was so relatively easy and gradual? Grupp rightly calls the Mithraic Sun worship "similarly a means of annihilation, understanding, and transition for many to Christianity".<sup>3</sup> Now, not only Emperor Commodus was a zealous Mithras worshipper, but also Constantius; and it is not unlikely that the monotheism of his father, however vague, had a considerable influence on Constantine's conversion was effective. For he did not suddenly come to Christianity, not struck by a lightning-struck death blow like Paul on the road to Damascus. Despite their great differences, the conversions of Constantine and Augustine have this in common: both were led to the truth by divine grace, carried and lulled by the currents of the times: the latter by Neoplatonic philosophy, which helped him overcome his worldly-adherence, the latter by the survival of theistic [?]. the inclinations of the family circle in which he was raised. This also explains the fact that the Sun God later occupied a place in Constantine's somewhat syncretistic Christianity. While he had visited the famous sanctuary of Apollo at Augustodunum in 311 and received a rich gift, coins minted after 313 repeatedly bear the inscription: Soli Invicto Comiti, "To the Sun God, the Guide". 1).

Finally, and this is, in our opinion, the most important, in Nicomedia, Constantine had learned to appreciate Christianity in its full strength. When the persecution broke out in 303, he could see "with what fortitude the select group of pious people daily endured the most exquisite abuses". 2). The pity and good opinion of Christians, which he had inherited from his father, were here heightened into firm sympathy and admiration; And with this sympathy, his monotheistic worldview and philosophy of life grew. But not only was he struck by the invincible energies of Christianity, which proved ineradicable despite all the violence of persecution, but he also came to know and appreciate the religion as a cultural force that had already exerted such a beneficial influence on the society of the East at that time. He now knew where true strength resided, from which elements reformative power could emanate. These elements were present in large numbers in the army, and it was precisely with the army, as a social group, as part of the state complex, that this reformation first came into the light of public view. "The world-historical transformation from heathenism to Christianity has... been absorbed by the Lord. From here the public recognition of the Christian religion has taken its beginning". Diocletian had believed he could still avert the danger by launching his persecution with a so-called purge of the soldiery; "he believed, after he had first conquered them, that he would then easily be able to overpower the rest" 2). The result was only that he freed the Church and Christian society from the half-hearted and weak. The majority remained faithful to the God of Christians; and when, during the campaign against Maxentius, the monogram of Christ was raised as a military standard and adorned shields, this was the first act not only of interpretation, but even of privileging the Christian faith and cultural community. The Church showed itself grateful for this by imposing the penalty of excommunication, already at the Synod of Arles (314), for the previously so frequent practice of desertion 3).

#### IV.

Towards the end of his life, Constantius summoned his son: it was his unquestionable right. On July 25, 306, he died in Eburacum (York); and now the soldiers proclaimed Constantine Imperator Augustus. This, of course, was in direct conflict with the Diocletian principle of imperial succession. But Galerius saw no way to effectively oppose the army's demand and even sent Constantine a purple robe. He only requested that the youngest member of the ruling college be content with the title of Caesar, leaving the office of Augustus II to Severus. But this was not the end of the story. What had happened in the army at Eburacum resonated with the imperial guard in Rome. What one emperor's son had achieved, it was believed, should not be unattainable for another either; And so, on October 28 of the same year, a group of praetorians invested Maxentius, the son of Maximian, with the purple and proclaimed him Augustus. Insignificant, indeed repulsive in stature, puffed up with foolish arrogance, cruel, lustful, and superstitious, incapable of governing, Maxentius had nothing to show for himself except his high birth, however little that might have been considered within the existing

system. This title, however, seemed sufficient to the dissatisfied faction to elevate him to the throne; but as a title alone, it naturally seemed worthless to Galerius, who therefore immediately ordered Severus to march against Rome to stifle the mutiny in the blood of the troublemakers.

375 But Maxentius, along with his father Maximian, who resumed the relinquished title of Augustus, succeeded in holding his own against Severus and Galerius, and even in gaining Constantine's recognition. Whether Maximian was qualified to resume power is debatable; but the Senate, whose electoral authority remained legally intact, had offered him the crown again, and it would have been least fitting for Constantine to refuse recognition to the old man who had elevated his father to the throne. In gratitude, Maximian granted him the hand of his daughter Fausta along with the title of Augustus. But a rift with Maxentius developed; and when Constantine's elevation and marriage to Fausta were celebrated in Trier in 307, and the orators refused to even mention the name of Maxentius. In the same year, the congress took place at Carnuntum, attended by the elderly Diocletian, Galerius, and Maximian, who probably 380 also negotiated on behalf of Constantine. Diocletian was to resolve the matter. It was decided that Maximian would withdraw, while, in accordance with the original principle of succession, two Augusti with two Caesars would defend the empire. Galerius and Maximinus Daza would retain their positions as Augustus and Caesar, respectively. In the West, Licinius, an old friend and comrade-in-arms of Galerius, was appointed Augustus in place of the murdered Severus; however, 385 Constantine would have to content himself with the title of Caesar. He could not accept this provision, even if he had wanted to. "If his troops, in their turn to victory, had become notorious for mocking their entire power," says Otto Seeck, "the title of Augustus would fall, which, in his victory saga, had been so heavily scorned that it had twice been given to the side".<sup>1)</sup> Maximinus Daza also claimed the title of Augustus, so that in reality the empire was 390 divided into four parts.

395 But the beginning of the denouement soon followed. After having attacked his son-in-law for the second time, Maximinus was hanged in a palace room shortly after the capture of Marseille, not surprisingly on Constantine's orders (310). A year later, the persecutor of the Church, Galerius, died after a long illness,<sup>1</sup> a victim of the most severe tortures.

400 Galerius's estate was divided between Licinius and Maximinus Daza. Only Constantine considered no expansion of his territory, but honestly sought to combine the unity of the empire with multi-rule. This was evidenced, among other things, by his successful negotiations with Licinius, who became engaged to Constantia, the sister of the powerful ruler of Gaul. However, 405 the course of events would ultimately force sole power upon him. The greatest difficulty in maintaining or restoring the unity of the empire, besides the fragility of the principle itself, lay with the counter-emperor Maxentius, the usurper of Italy, Spain, and Africa—the fierce champion of languishing paganism, yet challenging it to a decisive struggle. Now, religion was precisely "the pivot around which the governing policies of all successive emperors revolved," says Professor v. Gelder. )• If ever, then here it became clear that 410 religion is the social factor par excellence. After all, the struggle between Constantine and Maxentius would become not only a struggle for power, a struggle for the right to property, but also a war of faith, even more so, a struggle for a new world order.

415 Constantine had gradually come to this conviction, while meanwhile his belief in one God matured in the sun of grace of Christianity. While his father had already shown himself benevolent toward Christians, he himself favored them even more generously. He had also become accustomed to considering the success of his undertakings as a blessing, as a reward from heaven, and this view was confirmed by the disastrous end of the persecutors of the church, Maximian, Severus, and Galerius, whose efforts, moreover, had proved completely fruitless. 420 Their Persecution had only led to the weakening of the state. These considerations are also expressed repeatedly in his letters. Yet, he could still hesitate. The Christians, as already mentioned, were far outnumbered, and then, paganism had grown so intimately with the state system. But there Maxentius sets himself up as champion of the pagans in the West. x) Now his decision is made. "It is Constantine's merit," says Professor van Gelder again, "to have averted this turn of events, unfavorable for him and for Christianity, through brilliant 425 fortitude".<sup>1)</sup>

Relying on the power of the God of the Christians, Constantine invaded Italy from France in the spring of 312. If Maxentius had the pagan gods as allies, well, then he would seek help from the God of the oppressed but never suppressed sect, whose paladin he had become. To that God his thoughts and expectations go. His prayer, a true prayer. For "however much motivated 430 by self-interest and the desire for self-preservation, it contains a humble confession of his misery and weakness; the desire for truth is mixed with selfishness, but it is a true desire" 3).

435 When the enemy still believed him to be on the Rhine, he was already at the gates of Susa. Soon the fortress was taken, and the army displayed miracles of discipline and self-control. As if in triumph, they now marched through the cities of Upper Italy. Verona was forced to surrender to the impetuous Emperor. Finally, on October 28, the decisive battle was fought just beneath the walls of Rome at the Milvian bridge delivered<sup>1)</sup>. To bring his large force 440 into contact more quickly with the enemy, who was advancing along the Flaminian road, Maxentius had hastily constructed a pontoon bridge next to the stone bridge. However, a lateral maneuver by his opponent paralyzed the action of a large part of his troops. Nevertheless, the forces not trapped between the mountain and the Tiber still constituted a considerable superiority; but even this left wing would prove his undoing. The last ranks stood close to the Tiber and, with every retreat, no matter how momentarily necessary, had to be forced into the river.

445 High on horseback and adorned with the insignia of his imperial dignity, Constantine charged into the dense enemy throngs. The very first clash caused terrible confusion among Maxentius' troops. The praetorians fought for their emperor with the courage of desperation, but in vain. The vast crowd rushed madly toward the bridges; the stones held, but the pontoon bridge buckled under the load. The right wing was now utterly powerless and had only the choice

450 between surrender and utter destruction. Among those struggling with death in the waves of the Tiber was Maxentius. He lost crown and life, and with his champion ended the armed supremacy of paganism. Amid the exuberant cheers of the crowd, Constantine, as Christian Emperor, now made his triumphant entry into the city.

455 What had happened? How had this victory been achieved? From a purely human perspective, the denouement of the course of events is particularly puzzling. Constantine's campaign against Rome, even after the victories in Northern Italy, seems a hopeless plan. With 10,000 men, under favorable circumstances, and with military genius and discipline compensating for the lack of strength, one might perhaps defeat 100,000 men in a single battle; but when such a force lies within a fortified city, any attempt at attack is madness. That Maxentius would

460 risk a battle outside the city gates was highly implausible. But suppose he did, and lost half his army on the battlefield; as soon as he could retreat to Rome with the other half, he would still be far superior, and the situation would remain as before. But the expedition against Rome was also completely unnecessary. For the sea supply of food had been cut off, and one day Rome's granaries would run out anyway; then hunger would force Maxentius to venture far from his base of operations in northern Italy. The only reasonable military plan Constantine could have followed was to wait and remain where he was. If he, the sharp-sighted and calm general, failed to do this, and charged madly toward a goal that was almost unattainable, then this is proof that he was guided by calculations other than ordinary human calculations.

465 2) Moreover, the whole world regarded as something superhuman the fact that within two months Rome and all of Italy, the islands, and Africa, lay before the conqueror's feet like a morning gift from heaven. Pagan panegyrists explicitly express their conviction that Maxentius was blinded by the highest deity, who granted its servant Constantine wisdom, courage, and strength. Christians and non-Christians agreed, and even today one cannot fail to acknowledge that something extraordinary had taken place.

470 475 That the Christian historians of this period presented the events of the campaign against Rome in the halo of glorification can hardly be denied; Yes, it would be an extraordinary exception if events of such far-reaching significance as the victory at the Milvian Bridge had escaped the common fate of weighty historical events. Caution is therefore advised.

475 480 Lactantius 1) recounts a dream vision in which Constantine was admonished to have the "heavenly sign of God" placed on his soldiers' shields and thus to risk battle; which he did. Armed with the sign of the cross, the army went into battle. Now, this account in itself is not entirely reliable, for the same historian recounts that Licinius, during the battle with Maximinus, also had a dream vision in which an angel taught him a certain prayer, which he had distributed among the soldiers before the battle. But besides this is the report of Eusebius

485 490 both in his Church History (IX, 9) and in the Life of Constantine (1, 40), according to which the conqueror immediately after his victory gave orders to erect a statue in Rome, which would represent him with the salvific sign of the cross in his hand, and below this the inscription: "By this salvific sign, the true badge of recognition of bravery, I have delivered the city from the yoke of the tyrant. \*1

495 500 The report in the Church History is all the more valuable to us now, since the author in this writing knows nothing of the help provided by the sign of the cross; he only mentions a prayer to Jesus Christ. The erection of this statue, as far as I know, is also doubted by anyone. 2) Divine intervention is further evident from the inscription on the triumphal arch, which the Senate and the Roman people had erected in honor of the victory over Maxentius (312-315). The immediate proximity of the Colosseum with its somber-glorious memories gives this syncretistic memorial a peculiar, higher consecration. The reliefs, mostly from an Arch of Trajan, also give the striking impression of belonging to the spolia gentium, the "spoils taken from the heathen". The whole, however, testifies more to feverish haste and impetuous thanksgiving than to high-mindedness. art, and this largely excuses the relative crudeness of the sculpture. The most valuable thing for us in this monument, along with its depiction of the popular vote, is the inscription:

"The Emperor and Caesar Flavius Constantinus, the Great, the Fortunate, the Exalted, the Senate and People of Rome, because, at the inspiration of the Deity, through the loftiness of his spirit, he and his army simultaneously avenged the state with just force of arms against both the Tyrant and his partisans, have dedicated this triumphal arch to the Senate and People of Rome".

505 Instinctu Divinitatis: "on the inspiration, at the instigation of the Deity". It has been claimed that the original reading Nutu /. O. M. was "at the beckoning of the highest and best Jupiter" 1). This is definitely untrue. The expression is somewhat vague, but the Senate, which at that time still consisted largely of pagans existed. The core meaning, however, escapes no one and is further reinforced by expressions such as that of the pagan rhetorician Eumenius, who, as early as the middle of 313, speaks of a promissi divinitus Victoria, a "victory promised by the Deity," and of the emperor's immediate intercourse with the Deity. We are therefore faced with this fact: on his campaign against Maxentius, Constantine, under greater pressure, made a pact with Christianity, and the seal on this pact was the cross. This is also the essence of that other story by Eusebius in his Life of Constantine, that the emperor saw a flaming sign of the cross above the sun in the afternoon with the words TOTXXI NIKA, "Conquer with this"; and that the following night Christ appeared to him with this same

sign and also with the instruction to have a standard made according to it. 1) It is certainly surprising that this appearance of the cross, which was nevertheless the "whole army" was considered to be unknown to Lactantius and, what is more, to Eusebius himself at the time he wrote his Church History3). To this must be added the character of the Vita Constantini. "Less easily than church history do the... writings on Kaiser Konstantin take the false position of the Thoseselves in protection against the often-existing accusation. Obviously, Eusebius is not a historical writer here either than a much more beautiful or overly reliant Lobredner 1). But Eusebius relies decisively on Constantine, even on his oath, so I find no reason to consider this story, along with O. Seeck, as "naturally erroneous". 1) While the time interval between events and the story may have somewhat altered the accurate presentation of the facts, the vision with the cross as a sign of salvation remains the historical core of the various accounts, true and in any case.

What Eusebius and others were able to recount regarding this event ultimately goes back in its entirety to the person of Constantine, and reveals to us his convictions, his spiritual life, his state of mind at that important time. And this, as L. von Ranke rightly notes in a remarkable study on this subject, "reputed "...by a longer hand, in the depths of the soul, a quiet religious superstition, which, in the midst of the crisis, held up the upper hand". 3). The complex of facts as it lies before us: the course of events, the monuments, the reports of historians—all of this, taken as a whole, testifies to the fact that Constantine was not only convinced of the truth of his vision, but also that he had complete confidence in the sign of the cross.

That Constantine, and even more so his soldiers, may have used the cross for superstitious purposes, can, in my opinion, be readily accepted. 1). But this does not detract from the purity of his insights regarding the sign of the cross. Incidentally, there is no distinction between the terms "magic" and "defense," "antidote," as a magic wand, but as a symbol of the higher power, whose help he accepted—of the higher, transcendental power.

The emperor considered the sign of the cross in connection with the doctrine to which he leaned and which he would profess. I have shown how Constantine had gradually come closer to Christianity. The cross, too, would not have remained unfamiliar to him. Fully compelled by the events, he had declared himself a defender of the Christians and embarked on his campaign as such. But then the God of the Christians could not refuse him His protection. This conviction grew during the march. He had advanced against the advice of the pagan high priests; he wanted to test whether the pagan gods could also do anything against the God of the Christians. But then this God would also visibly demonstrate his protection and testify to his approval with a sign. Then follows the vision of the sign of the cross. Soon it adorns the emperor's helmet and the soldiers' shields; after all, the victory of Christianity would proceed from the army. Later, it adorned imperial coins. Above all, however, it rested on the crossbar of the imperial war standard: the labarum.

The form displayed by the Constantine Cross is that of the monogram of Christ. This belongs to the group of so-called crucis dissimulatae, i.e., symbolic forms that had some connection with the cross and were therefore used to conceal it; for example, the Buddhist Svas\\tika cross, which can be seen on the tunic of the fossor, the catacomb-digger, Diogenes. The cross did not appear without any covering before the 5th century, which is related to the fact that the first scene of the crucifixion also dates from that century, namely one of the reliefs on the wooden door of St. Sabina. Now, we do find the Christ-monogram repeatedly in inscriptions before Constantine, but almost exclusively not in isolation, but only as an abbreviation of the name of Christ. For example, "Pax Domini et cum Faustino".

The letters 1 H or 1 H C were also used to abbreviate the name Jesus. Only towards the end of the 1st century did the monogram begin to be used independently as a sign of Christ. However, a second form is found, namely [namely] ... During the course of the fourth century, the form of the Christogram was repeatedly modified; towards the end of that century, the apocalyptic letters A Cf were often associated with it. Let me add here that after Constantine, the formulas tovту vhtx; hoe vince, in hoe vinges, in hoe signo vinges, hoe signo victor eris, etc., also appear in Christian epigraphy and coinage, albeit rather late.

Now, it is certainly true that symbols strikingly resembling the Christogram appear on the coins of Asian rulers, specifically as field and victory signs; for example, on the coins of the Syrian king Alexander Bala (146 AD), of the Bactrian dynast Hermaeus (138-120 AD), etc. But how can we explain that Constantine suddenly adopted these Asian symbols and wore them on his helmet? At most, pagan symbolism may have contributed to paving the way for Christian symbolism. "The explanation of the symbols of Attic and Ptolemaic coins can be overridden by the knowledge of the coins," Keim believes, "because the main point is that between your coins and Constantine, there is no such connection".

## VI.

With Constantine, religion, which for almost three centuries had been considered incompatible with the well-being of the state and persecuted with fire and sword, had ascended the throne. After all, the emperor had declared himself in favor of Christianity. The immediate consequence of this far-reaching fact had to be: the cessation of persecution, the political interpretation of Christianity. This indeed happened through the Edict of Milan. In early 313, Constantine traveled from Rome to Milan to celebrate the marriage of his sister Constantia to Licinius. The negotiations went smoothly; and the edict was soon issued. But, says Otto Seeck, the Edict of Milan does not exist. Christians did not obtain religious freedom until 313, but already in 311, specifically through the decree of Galerius. A certain document, communicated to us by Eusebius and Lactantius, does indeed go by the name "Edict of

595 Milan"; but this is, firstly, not an edict; secondly, not issued in Milan; thirdly, not from Constantine; and fourthly, it does not grant legal tolerance throughout the empire. 1) What can be said of this?

In itself, it is difficult to assume that the historians of antiquity, who were contemporaries or practically contemporaries, would have glorified with the most exuberant praise an edict that never existed. But indeed, if its sole purpose were to abolish the preposterous provisions of Maximinus Daza, then it is nothing more than a local regulation issued by 600 Licinius in Nicomedia, after he, with Constantine's support, had defeated Maximinus' troops, who soon died of overexertion in Tarsus. But this is a mere assumption, based on insignificant details, while some formal deviations can already be explained by the fact that we are dealing here, as Lactantius explicitly states, with a letter-form edict, addressed by Licinius to the magistrates of the East at the beginning of June. It is also not impossible that the readings in Lactantius and Eusebius are based on two varying texts 1). But this does not alter the fact that we readily side with Gaston Boissier, when he says that the Edict of Milan is one of those documents of ancient history whose integrity remains the best preserved. 3).

605 But above all: this edict of ours cannot in any way be equated with the toleration edict of Galerius, if only because every concession on the part of the victor at the Ponte Molle is cast in a completely different light by the fact of his victory and his openly siding with Christianity. Speaking of this edict, Paul Allard says: "These dispositions were not for a prince who was amoindri like Gallien, who was movable like Galere, or contested like Maxence, but for a sovereign who was a victim whose palates were also recognized as some divine choice to yield to the uncontested master of the Occident, and who was then to make a show of 610 wronging the Empire".3

This is how things stood: in the territory of Maxentius, the Christians had initially experienced a certain goodwill 1), but generally speaking, they had never been granted legal tolerance. Furthermore, the onerous conditions on which the Galere edict made tolerance dependent gave rise to great difficulties everywhere; locally, it was even completely ignored. 615 It was therefore essential to provide adequate benefit and assistance and to regulate the situation. To this end, Constantine first proposed the concept of religious freedom, a concept decidedly alien to antiquity. State religion in the modern sense was, of course, out of the question in ancient times. But the imperial cult constituted a personal element in ancient religion, closely linked to the state; sacredness also belonged to the foundations of the 620 state. For full and fair equality, the state had to completely abandon the concept of state religion. And this happened. The passage in question in the edict reads:

"We have decided to grant both Christians and all others the freedom to follow whatever religion they choose, so that the Deity and the Heavenly Being, whatever it may be, may be favorable and gracious to us and all our subjects. It therefore seemed to us a salutary and 625 most prudent policy to determine that absolutely no one should be denied the freedom to choose and follow the worship of Christians, but that everyone should be permitted to adhere to the faith that seems most suitable to them; so that the Deity may continue to grant us its usual favor and goodwill in all circumstances".

As can be seen, we are here at the very foundation, not of Christianity, but of monotheism. 630 However, it should not be forgotten that Licinius helped issue the edict, and that pagans were still by far in the majority. How strange even the concept of equal treatment of religions before the law must have seemed to them is evident from the fact that it is repeated five times, in almost identical terms: "that Christians, like all others, are permitted to practice their religion in complete freedom".

635 Subsequently, Christianity is no longer considered a tolerated religion, a *religio licita*, but rather a form of religion for a legally recognized group of citizens who were granted legal personality as Christians, no longer as constituting a burial guild: the *corpus Christianorum* (the Christian body), the legal entity of Christians, is repeatedly mentioned.

640 Another provision, which indeed demonstrates boldness, should not be underestimated: restitution will take place not only of the meeting places, i.e., churches and church grounds—something similar had already happened once before—but also of all church property that had been taken from Christians during the persecution; restitution, not only by the state, but also by or all private individuals endowed with church property; however, the temporary owners were promised compensation from the state.

645 The edict concludes with the decree to the civil service that it should be stamped everywhere and made known. As mentioned, it was promulgated in the East by Emperor Licinius in June of the same year. Since then, following the death of Maximinus, it applied to the entire Roman Empire, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates and Tigris.

650 However, it would not end there. "The Religion of the Cross had to resist tribulation to the equal treatment of the heathen," writes Dr. Faulhaber, "and with its own strength, it 655 consciously strives for truth from equal justice to sole justice" (1). Indeed, privilege grew out of equality. Constantine certainly anticipated, probably desired, and actually prepared and promoted this gradual development. The clergy was exempted from all public service, the Church obtained the right to accept legacies, Sunday became a public day of worship with mandatory Sunday rest, and considerable state funds were allocated to the churches of Africa. 660 Indeed, this privilege kept pace with the development of Constantine's autocracy: more than ever before, politics was now guided by religion. Licinius had already been defeated twice in 314 and forced to relinquish almost all of his European possessions. Under him, the Christians once again suffered hard times for a time: many were deprived of property and freedom, synods were banned, the celebration of the Holy Mysteries was hampered, Christians were expelled from the court and, what's more, even from the army; in some places, blood was even shed. But these 665

were the last gasps of paganism. In the battles at Adrianople, Callipolis, and Chrysopolis, Licinius lost his empire and a year later his life: by the end of 324, Constantine was sole ruler.

670 Gradually, the higher positions in government were filled by Christians; magnificent Christian churches sprang up everywhere; the spread of the true religion was even promoted in imperial manifestos. The Roman Empire increasingly displayed a specifically Christian character. This Christian empire also had to have a Christian center. For this purpose, Rome, which, incidentally, lay too far to the west, with its still distinctly pagan character, seemed unsuitable to the emperor. He founded Constantinople by transforming the old Byzantium into a truly Christian city, and established his imperial residence there (330).

675 Let us also take a cursory look at the Christian social and economic character of the new legislation. The provisions of the Julia and Papia Poppaea laws, directed against celibacy and childlessness, were repealed, and not only, as Funk rightly observes, for the benefit of the Church, which was particularly affected by these provisions: "The full Church with its 800-year-old legal position finds a satisfactory explanation, but one could write otherwise than one's original Christian thought" 1). Some of his decrees were directed against divorce and cohabitation, or aimed to protect defenseless innocence and threatened infanticide with the most severe penalties. His actions against slavery deserve special mention; Constantine took a decidedly Christian stand on this point. He accepted slavery as a social institution. He did not want a social upheaval, the consequences of which would have been incalculable.

680 Christianity fundamentally reformed the institution of slavery by cutting off its roots, rejecting the inferiority of the slave under natural law, and proclaiming the theory of inner freedom. Now the yoke was bearable, because a different spirit had been instilled in the organism. Within the framework of the old legal system, a new ethical and social formation was created. And that Constantine embraced this spirit is demonstrated by his validating ecclesiastical manumissions and demarcating the boundaries between just punishment and punishable abuse. He declared the deliberate killing of a slave to be murder. Anyone who would accuse Constantine of a certain transaction with slavery demonstrates gross ignorance. In 325,

685 he banned gladiatorial combat in the East. He established various charitable institutions, such as burial funds and grain foundations for the needy. 1)

690 Constantine's laws form an impressive series that commands respect and gratitude. 1) Elaborating further on the governing actions of the first Christian emperor is beyond the scope of this festival. The above also serves only to better equip us to form a general judgment about Constantine's intentions and disposition in issuing the Edict of Milan. From Gibbon to Burckhardt, this act has been regarded only as a consequence of shrewdly calculated policy. Burckhardt, in particular, dipped his pen in bile and hatred. He found better appreciation in Keim; Otto Seeck initiated a de facto rehabilitation1). Meanwhile, how should we assess a relatively moderate statement like Brieger's: "It is entirely... undeniably true that Constantine the Great did not, because of Christianity, receive tolerance and state favor, because he inwardly espouses the truth of this religion, because he personally was a Christ" 1). So, it was not as a Christian that Constantine accomplished what he accomplished; In any case, "he presents himself with his external religious beliefs until the end as a broader, more comprehensive solution and seeks no solution to the confusion". Then, indeed, 700 only one way out remains: "to consider his world-historical truth as an outlet for his policy".3)

705 We strongly protest against this: Thus Constantine's Christianity becomes a lie, thus he himself becomes an actor and a hypocrite, while sincerity and honesty are evident in all his actions and statements. Funk is spot on when he says: "Those things speak for themselves. May a few of them, in themselves, be considered a blushing escape from politics, for the sake of the whole, this interpretation is crucial" 4); and Gaston Boissier expresses his conviction: "Christianity can be both material and substantial, but whatever we say, it has been since" 1). Among the deeds that speak of the emperor's sincerity are the aforementioned imperial decrees, and the declarations made on more than one occasion. When the Donatists appealed to 710 his judgment after the second synod, he responded with this key word: "They demand my judgment, while I await the judgment of Christ". Among these deeds we especially consider the two decrees that Constantine addressed to his new subjects after the victory over Licinius and the establishment of the autocracy,1 and whose authenticity is beyond doubt: they bear brilliant and irrefutable testimony to the emperor's Christian disposition.

715 Constantine was no hypocrite! From the moment he took up the fight against Maxentius, he considered himself a divinely called, chosen instrument, and he increasingly embraced that thought, that calling. Choosing his side was not only a matter of the heart; it was also a matter of conviction—indeed, I would say, more of reason than of heart. And thus one of the 720 motives that led the prince to the Edict of Milan is established: the consciousness of fulfilling a mission imposed upon him by the God of the Christians, the satisfaction of a wounded sense of justice, and the reparation of a grievous injustice, endured for so many years. Faith in the truth of Christianity was thus the primary motive for his actions. A second motive undoubtedly lies in his sincere gratitude for the divine favor he had enjoyed in such momentous circumstances. According to the text of the edict, he also wishes to 725 preserve this favor and grace in the future for the good of the kingdom. This motive also played a significant role in his conversion to Christianity itself, and thus this conversion, as Professor Geurts rightly observes in one of his fine articles, becomes a striking parallel to the conversion of Clovis.

730 But there is a third motive. If one wishes to call this political, so be it; But then one should also call it a sound policy, not only justified by the circumstances, but entirely

necessary. Constantine was deeply convinced that persecution achieved nothing but a continuous weakening of the state. Christianity proved ineradicable; like the pelican, it continued to nourish its offspring with its blood. Moreover, as mentioned, Constantine had come to recognize Christians as the most excellent elements with whom he could venture to inaugurate a new imperial arena, from whom he could confidently anticipate a rebirth of society. Add to this that circumstances confirmed his ideas and the Christianized army led him to victory: should not the natural consequence then be a public act, which guaranteed the Christians equality, at least for the time being, perhaps giving them decisive dominance in the foreseeable future, and that in relation to the well-understood interests of the empire?

745 In my opinion, one has... The Edict of Milan is often viewed too one-sidedly, as an isolated fact, the fruit of the emperor's personal conversion and the victory over Maxentius. This view doesn't touch the reality of the facts and circumstances. Constantine was no *deus ex machina*, granting unexpected freedom after centuries of fruitless striving. The edict owed much more to the Christians, or rather to Christianity itself, than to the favor of the Christian emperor.

750 It is nothing but the official recognition of an already existing situation. The Christians themselves, thanks to the grace of God and the vital force of their teachings, had slowly, but unconsciously, prepared for this triumph, so that the edict of freedom seemed to them a sudden liberation. In truth, however, only the last barrier had fallen at the Milvian Bridge. That liberation was primarily the fruit of their striving, their blood, their patience, their ethical excellence, their social dominance.

755 That official privilege could not be obtained all at once; that Christian culture had to have time to expand and conquer at the risk of losing its own purity—Constantine was too great a statesman not to understand this, and I cannot see how it is possible to reproach him for it. Besides, pagan religion was too deeply ingrained, had grown too deeply into the consciousness of ancient humanity through centuries of development, to be eradicated in one go. "Religions die slowly," says Dr. Faulhaber, and he continues: "Kaiser Konstantin sought to suppress pagan cult, without allowing the decree to force religious development out of Eight, which required a massive push forward". 1) And with this agrees Prof. Van Gelder, when he writes: "Knowing what was to come, and probably wishing it too, he nevertheless did not want to rush things, he held back as much as he could, like a wise statesman who feared shocks and sharp shifts". 2)

760 The question is whether Constantine acted well by continuing to support certain pagan institutions or practices more or less firmly. It is certain that he not only demonstrated himself to be entirely Christian in legislation and privileging benevolence, but that he also suppressed more than one pagan institution. Private sacrificial oblations, as well as various sacrificial ceremonies and some immoral religions in Syria and Egypt, were banned, temples closed, and idols torn down. 2) But on the other hand, it is certain that he remained deeply superstitious. Nor did he renounce the title of Supreme Priest; he remained *Pontifex Maximus*, and had himself depicted as such with a veiled head: "he does not manifest by any public act his intention of renouncing being the supreme head of a religion to which he does not appear more," says Boissier. 2 One can interpret this favorably and argue that he did not want to relinquish supervision of the pagan cult. Subsequent emperors also bore this title until Gratian, who renounced it in 375. Had bearing the title become a mere formality, there would have been no objection; but I somewhat doubt whether this was already the case with Constantine. It seems to me that he continued to fulfill some of the obligations attached to the title, for example, by occasionally practicing divination for state interests. In *Codex Theodosianus* IX, paragraph 16, and XVI, paragraph 10, we find, moreover, quite a few regulations concerning pagan cult. The pagan historian Zosimus even claims that he offered pagan sacrifices until the year 326; this report is highly improbable, but must contain a grain of truth, since he appears as High Priest on coins and in inscriptions until 328. In the last year of his life, as appears from an authentic inscription, he gave permission to the Italian town of Spello to build a temple for his family, the gens Flavia; however, no sacrifices were allowed to be offered there. Now, with particular reference to the coins: as already mentioned, they continue to show pagan emblems for quite some time. This certainly need not be regarded as proof of a clearly expressed sun worship; Besides the Sun God, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Isis, the Genius (Guardian Spirit) of the Roman people, etc. also appear. a. But "there is no doubt", explains Grisar, "there is a strong, symbolic, undiluted presence here that is based on Helios in the religious Manifestations of the Christian Kaisers, which is the only reason for the reigns of 313 to 324, and is not visible anymore, but perhaps the sun god on the coins symbolized the emperor himself as Roi Soleil."

765 800 It is certainly unlawful to conclude from this and similar data with Keim that the emperor was also at that time "neither *bis auf* a Punkt ein Heide"2). But in my opinion a certain religious syncretism is unacceptable. not to be denied, or, if this expression is too strong, his Christianity was somewhat Syncretistic in tone. Such was the situation with several of his contemporaries. Konstantin certainly saw Christianity as the religion God intended, and himself as the perfect instrument for its spread. In this role, as we have already mentioned, he increasingly and seriously immersed himself in his thoughts. Yet, the highest value and significance of Christianity remained hidden from him, and therefore he never dared to fully implement Christian state policy. Nor did he ever adopt full Christian morality: too much blood clings to his memory. Despite the sincerity of his convictions and the purity of his intentions, despite his great service to the Church of God, one must admit with Ehrhard: "He has... not inherited the religious nature of Christianity in its deepest foundations and most sacred souls, and much less taken his physical ideal for the unconditional guidance of his actions. Constantine was no saint!" 1).

805 810 Shouldn't one also see confirmation of this in the postponement of his Holy Baptism until his

815 deathbed? After all, Constantine was not yet a Christian in the ordinary sense of the word. Even if he held Christianity in high esteem and declared himself the God of the Christians, he remained a pagan until the end of his life. We know that the report of his baptism in Rome by Pope Sylvester and of the cleansing from his leprosy is a fable. When he felt his end approaching in 337 at the castle of Achyron near Nicomedia, he was baptized by Eusebius, the bishop of that city. It is certainly true that baptism was often postponed until old age or even until the end of life. The great Cappadocian saints Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as Saint Chrysostom, were not baptized until around the age of thirty. However, this view and practice was most widely held in the time of Tertullian, when he spoke of a *pondus baptismi*: a "burden of baptism," either out of excessive fear of defiling baptismal grace or because people were repelled by the heavy burden of penance. This changed significantly with the more lenient penitential discipline of the third century. People will also grant me that the main reason can hardly be found in the expectation of one day receiving baptism in the waters of the Jordan. Perhaps Constantine himself offered the explanation on his deathbed. "If the Lord of life and death should wish to grant us a longer life here on earth," he said, "... it is determined once and for all, to give my life such laws as are worthy of God". 1) Constantine is not confessing here to having violated God's law, but to having not yet chosen God's law as the guideline for his life and actions. A dying mouth does not lie. This testimony expresses true respect for Christianity, but also perfect honesty, self-knowledge, and self-esteem.

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When the emperor had put on the white baptismal robe, he no longer wanted to touch the purple. Did he perhaps, like Tertullian, consider the exercise of the Principate in its full scope incompatible with the dignity of a Christian?

#### VII.

840 With the promulgation of the Edict of Milan, the Church casts off its mourning veil and, unshackled by fetters, walks the path of light, leading to the highest, the sovereign cultural goal, which radiates its beams of light across the entire field of human civilization. Suffering and strife are forgotten; jubilant hymns of peace resound through the free lands; indeed, the Christian hosts now feel more closely united with their triumphant brothers in better regions: they are no longer the militant, but the triumphant Church on earth.

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The worship due to God is rendered freely and unshackled. Churches are rising everywhere, and Christian architecture reveals itself in a wealth of forms and novelty of creations: as a triumph of conquered paganism, basilicas and domed churches arise; and in the new house of God and the new cycle of figures, Christian art bestows aesthetic pleasure with an ethically and religiously purer and more exalted purpose. The historical element breaks through everywhere. The catacombs are abandoned, or rather, change their purpose and henceforth serve almost exclusively as places of pilgrimage for the veneration of the sacred martyrs: Pope Damasus will better arrange and adorn them for this purpose with his artistic inscriptions. Henceforth, the Christian family may manifest itself in freedom, for the Princeps is the zealous protector of its sanctity and inviolability; wife and child find their defender on the throne. The slave, too, is confirmed and strengthened in the awakened sense of self-worth and moral responsibility. The barriers to full participation in government fall an ever more complete elimination of religious objections to the exercise of government office. For the Christian economy, a period of theoretical and practical appreciation begins, along with an increased scientific striving to develop sound principles, which led to "the economic ethics of St. Augustine, the most complete publication of the teachings of the Gospel under Father over the right, godly evaluation of Irish goods". 1). With Augustine, the Christian philosophy of antiquity also celebrated its finest triumphs; with the hymn compositions of Ambrose and Prudentius, literature offers the ripest fruit of the assimilation process of ancient formal civilization with the spirit of Christianity. Thus, the ethical revival found its crowning achievement in the Edict of Milan; thus, it could safely develop in the shadow of the throne.

Christians have been able to symbolize this world-famous triumph in a striking way. The Agnus Dei begins with the Peace of the Church, especially in the magnificent mosaics of that period. On a mountain stands Christ as the "Lamb of God" with a halo or cross or the monogram of Christ; and from that mountain flow four rivers of paradise, while Jews and pagans rush to drink from the fresh waters. On either side rise palm trees, the apocopes of paradise. Elsewhere, in fresco paintings, on gold glassware and sarcophagi, the Lamb of God is surrounded by a flock of lambs, the symbol of the faithful. They indeed represent the now triumphant Church. For the lambs carry wreaths or palm branches, while several figures invite them to enter the gates of heavenly Eden.

The triumph of the Church is still depicted by the so-called Maiestas Domini, the image of Christ, enthroned in all his glory and splendor. As King, He holds court among His Apostles. He is also the supreme Lawgiver and Teacher. It is a scene that could only be born in the splendor of the temples; it is no longer adorned by the mysterious light of cemeteries, but richly bathed in the jubilee sunshine of the basilicas.

#### VIII.

885 "It is necessary to ask, above the church, whether the victory was to be fought without Constantine," says Harnack. "In the meantime, Constantine must have fought, only if it had become lighter from year to year, than Constantine would have been". 1) Is this a reason to dispute the nickname Constantine, which posterity deemed him worthy of? Not at all! That name remains His inalienable property. He certainly does not belong to those

personalities who fascinate the historian solely for the facts associated with their name, and certainly not for the strength of their intimate conviction. 2) On the contrary. He was a robust, self-confident personality, who had the courage not only to express in words, but to embody in deeds, what he had come to know as truth. And that he dared, by acting in this way, to break with a centuries-old system that seemed intertwined with the essence and well-being of the state, that he dared to inaugurate a new arena and face the far-reaching consequences of his actions, undoubtedly testifies to unusual energy and power of command.

But also to a masterful genius. Constantine was not a caricature, as those who, shutting themselves in the narrow confines of their prejudices, failed to grasp the great struggle of ideas during the Constantine period have tried to reduce him to. He was the first to understand that Christianity belonged to the future and what Christianity meant for the revival of Roman society as a whole. And that he did not proceed with haste in the intended reformation, but gradually, also testifies to a wise moderation, not always the property of those of superior intelligence. Nowhere has any resistance from paganism to this privileging of Christianity been observed. Furthermore, great is his fame as a commander, as a patron of the arts and sciences; and although his theological insight may have been deficient, he cannot be denied the praise for having striven with rare spiritual strength to keep the Church free from error, to eliminate schisms, to maintain and confirm unity. Constantine may therefore rightly receive a name from the hand of history, which it has and will continue to hold for Diocletian.

Nevertheless, the full measure of greatness belongs to Constantine, because His name is forever associated with the liberation, and later with the enthronement, of Christianity. His gigantic figure rises at one of the most important turning points in world and church history: the period when Christianity, after bloody insults, achieved recognition and equality, when Christians, despite their number,

The elite minority felt definitively in possession of the majority of their power. The Edict of Milan depicts the triumph of the Cross, not through the favor of a sovereign, not as a result of shrewd calculation or statesmanlike wisdom, but thanks to the transcendent character of religion, whose world-conquering and world-reforming power radiates so gloriously in this letter of freedom from the Church of God.

Christianity had triumphed, then. Why not paganism, with its formidable armed forces and legions of influential patrons? Why not, in particular, the worship of Mithras, which seemingly offered so much more, which so harmonized with the imperial cult, and which, as evidenced by the monuments, could boast such a vast extent? Clönp, Harnack, and Dietrich have listed several causes: the Mithras cult remained too Asiatic, it was too flexible, too transient, it did not accept women for propagation, it was not supported by sacred literature, it could not forge an alliance with Hellenism... Certainly, all of this may offer some explanation. But is this the last word of history? Then the triumph of Christianity breaks the historical law, which demands proportionality between means and ends, which demands that every significant historical phenomenon be the result of various forces proportional to the consequences. And in humble adoration we bow our heads before the higher power that led Christianity to victory. But also with grateful hearts and unwavering trust: for we know that the God who led Constantine to victory and who caused the sun of glory to rise on the day of Milan's liberation still remains with his Church today and will know how to guide his faithful to the lands of light through storm and darkness.

## IMPRIMATUR.

Dr. LEO BEKE, O. E. S. Aug.

Libr. Cens.

ULTRAI, die Mensis Aprilis 1913

1) De mortibus persecutorum LII.

1) Prof. Dr. S. D. van Veen, *The Christian Church and the Powers of the World* (Utrecht 1907), p. 16.

1) Cf. my speech on The Value of the Cultural-Historical Method for the Knowledge of Christian Antiquity (Amsterdam 1910), p. 42.

1) See my essay on the History of Apology in *Congressional Record*, 1912.

<sup>1)</sup> Hist. Eccles. VIII, 14; S7n dtpcauiaf<sup>6</sup> wu) uKat uai<sup>6</sup>

1) *Hist. Eccles.* VIII, 14: S/r dtpsaixsici. xx) xokot.xsici, rov "hypeou 'Pcortxialiv.  
 2) *Real-Encyclopdie der Christlichen Altertumer* I, p. 232.  
 3) *Max. Sdralék* Ueber die Ursachen, welche den Sieg des Christentums im r'ómischen Reiche

(Breslau 1907), p. 31.

1) De mortalitate XVI [ed. Hart

2) Hist. Eccles. VII, 22, 8, 9.

3) Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums (Leipzig 1906) I, p. 150.  
 1) Premier Mémoire sur les antiquités chrétiennes, by Kraus, Roma Sotterranea (Freiburg i/B.

1879), p. 296.

2) Harnack, Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums I, p. 128.  
3) Karl Meissner, Studien zu Lukian in de Sitzungsbericht der philos.-philol. Class of the K. Akademie in Wien, 1896, 268.

B. Akad. der Wisse

1) The Value of Culture-historical method, p. 21

1) Cf. The Value of the cultural-historical method, p. 15.

2) Best known for the famous epigram of Pope Damasus: "Heraclius vetuit labsos peccata dolere" etc. ed. Ihm No. 18.

965 3) See about this my study *La Couronne nuptiale dans l'antiquité chrétienne* in the *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* publ. par l'école française de Rome (1912).

1) Already the OMOUF/Jvy" of Saint Luke (Ev. II: i, Acts XI, 28) has this meaning.

2) V, 1-3 (Funk, *Patres apostolici I*, bl. 397], cf. *Tertullianus, Apologeticus XLII*.

970 1) Cf. Dr. Alb. Ehrhard, *Das Christentum in dem Römischen Reiche bis Konstantin* (Strassburg 1911), p. 41.

1) Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles. VIII*, 17: "ivx otus-;? u<rt %pitrTixvol". So he wanted to make it appear as if the Christians had become unfaithful to their own principles.

975 1) Fog. *Eccles. I*, 17. On this see Dr. F. M. Flasch, *Constantin der Grosse als erster Christlicher Kaiser* (Würzburg 1891), p. 4.

2) *Vita Const. III*, 47.

3) *Hist. Eccles. VIII*, 12, 13, 14.

4) Theodor Zahn, *Skizzen aus dem Leben der alten Kirche* (Leipzig 1908), p. 212.

980 1) Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg 1889) II, p. 292; F. von Arneth, *Das classical Heidentum und die Christliche Religion*. (Wien 1895) IC bl. 122.

2) See above, pg. 14.

3) Georg Grupp, *Kulturgeschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Munich 1904) II, p. 130.

985 1) See also Franz Cumont, *Les Myst'eres de Mithra I* (Bruxelles 1902), page 169.

2) *Vita Const. II*, 52.

1) Harnack, *Militia Christi* (Tübingen 1905), p. 86, 87.

2) Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles. VIII*, 4.

3) "De his qui arma proiciunt in pace placuit abstineri eos a communione".

990 1) Otto Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* (Berlin 1895) I, p. 98

1) General History (Groningen 1912) III, p. 69; cf. his treatise in the Report of the Provincial Utrecht Society of Arts and Sciences 1909, p. 30.

1) This is not inconsistent with the fact that Maxentius initially stopped the persecution in Rome and returned the confiscated property to the churches.

2) Report of the Utrecht Society, pp. 29-30.

3) Prof. P. Geurts, A Centenary of the Catholic World in *De Tijd*, 21 January 1913, III.

995 1) Probably not at the Red Rocks (Saxa Rubra), as Aurelius Victor relates and Moltke assumes. They were only the furthest point to which Maxentius's troops extended. See O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt I*, pp. 455-1) Maxentius did not originally intend this, but changed his mind after examining the Sibylline books.

2) Cf. O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, pp. 120.

1000 1) *De mortibus per sec. XLIV*.

2) *De mortibus per sec. XLVI*. The prayer is given in its entirety.

1) Maxentius is called "the tyrant" also in the inscription on the triumphal arch and in the epigrams of Damasus [ed. Ihm Nos. 48, 48 in the formula feritate tyranni].

2) One need not take into account some assumptions that Eusebius had seen a cross in a good Roman lance.

1005 1) "Man entdeckte die Correctur, als zur französischen Zeit der Bogen mit Gerüsten umgeben wurde, um die Bildwerke abzuformen": Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantin's des Grossen* 2 (Leipzig 1880), p. 323.

2) *Vita Const. I*, 28-31.

3) On this whole question, see F. 1-23; A.B.

1010 1) O. Bardenhewer, *Patrology 2* (Freiburg i/B. 1901), p. 215, 216; cf. *Geschichte der Altkirchlichen Literatur* (Freiburg i/B 1912) III, p. 454.

2) *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt I*.

3) *Weltgeschichte* (Leipzig 1883) IV, p. 261.

1015 1) Eusebius, *Vita Const. II*, 7-9.

2) See the description in Eusebius, *Vita Const. I*.  
The Labarum of Constantijn in the *Studiën LX* (1903), pp. 82; P. Albers, *Handbook of General Church History* (Nijmegen 1905) I, p. 50; H. Stevenson in the *Real-Encyclopddie der Christ. Altert. s. v. Labarum*.

1020 1) The *mortibus per sec. XLIV*: "Transversa X litera, summo capite circumilexo."

1) Dr. Theod. Keim, *Der Uebertritt Constantins zum Christenthum* (Zürich 1862), p. 87.

1) *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte XII* (1891), p. 381

1) Resp. *The mortibus per sec. XLVIII*, and *Hist. Eccles. X*, 5.

1025 2) *La fin du paganisme I* (Paris 1891) I, p. 42.

3) *Le Christianisme et l'Empire Romain* (Paris 1 p. isi. See also Dr. J. Sassen, *On the sixteenth century of the edict of Milan* in *De Katholieke Dl. CXLIII*, p. 95.

1) Cf. b. 28 and Kraus, *Roma Sotteranea*, p. 163.

1) Cf. Franz Görres in the *Real-Encyklopédie der Christ. Altert. II*, p. 898.

1030 1) Dr. M. Faulhaber, *Die griechischen Apoleten der Klassischen ?terzeit* (Würzburg 1896) I, p. 2.

1) *Abhandl. you. Unters. II*, p. 9; Eusebius, *Vita Const. IV*, 26.

1) See Dr. Ign. Seipel, *Die Wirtschaftsethischen Lehren der Kirchenvaier* (Wien 1907), p. 30, 31, 74, 235; cf. Zahn, *Skizzen*, p. 222; Grupp, *Kulturgeschichte II*, p. 305; Paul Allard, *Le Christiciisme et l'Empire romain*, p. 159.

1035 2) The main source is of course the *Codex Theodosianus*. On the chronological order of the laws, see the excellent study by O. Seeck, *Die Zeitfolge der Gesetze Constantins in the*

Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte 1, 177.

1) Otherwise not an unqualified admirer of Christianity at all! Witness e.g. his Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt III, 8th chap.: Das Christentum, p. 173.

1040 2) Constantin's Religionspolitik in the Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte IV, p. 169.

3) Ib. b. 171.

4) Abhandl. you. Unters. II, p. 21.

5) La fin du paganisme I, p. 59.

1045 1) Eusebius, Vita Const. II, 24–42; 48–60. Burckhardt's objections are narrow-minded; see Funk, Abhandl. you. Unters. II, p. 10 and especially O. Seeck, Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte XVIII, p. 321.

1) A Centenary of the Catholic World, t. a.p. II.

1) The Greek Apologists, p. 2, 3.

2) Report of the Utrechtsch Prov. Gene. 1909, pg. 36.

1050 1) Eusebius, Vita Const. II, 44; III, 54; IV, 23.

2) La fin du paganisme I, p. 56.

3) Historia nova II, 29.

2) Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie II (1882), p. 597.

3) Der Uebertritt Constantins des Grossen, p. 40.

1055 1) Das Christentum im römischen Reiche, p. 45.

2) P.Ch. de Smedt S. J., Principes de la Critique historique (Liège-Paris 1883), p. 137.

1) Eusebius, Vita Const. IV, 62.

2) Apollo. XXII "Sed et Caesares credidissent super Christo, si aut Caesares non essent saeculo necessarii, aut si et Christiani potuissent esse Caesares".

1060 1) Seipel, Die Wirtschafts-ethischen Lehren der Kirchenväter, p. 304,

1) Mission and spread of Christianity II, bl. 285.

2) As H. BESTMANN, History of Christian Customs (Nördlingen 1885) II, bl. 466.