

Church History - Theo 352
 Adjunct Professor - Rev. Jacquelyn E. Winston
 Constantine – The First Christian Roman Emperor

- I. Constantine – Conversion or political maneuver? (Emperor 306-337 AD)
 - A. Setting of the Institutionalization of the Church:
 1. The Great Persecution – Diocletian sought to restore glory of Rome by centralizing power and enforcing social uniformity. He established four leaders (2 Augusti and 2 Caesars) to rule eastern and western empire. East – Diocletian as emperor (augustus), Galerius as Caesar; West – Maximian as Augustus, Constantius Chlorus as Caesar (Gonzalez, 102).
 2. Galerius (Diocletian’s son-in-law and Caesar) encourages persecution of Christians:
 - a. Expelled from army and govt positions
 - b. Property taken from leaders
 - c. Sacred books destroyed
 - d. Many martyred
 3. Galerius forced abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, giving rise to: East – Galerius as Augustus; West – Constantius Chlorus as Augustus. 2 weak Caesars – Severus (west) and Maximinus Daia (east). Popular sons – Constantine and Maxentius begin to struggle for power instead. Gave rise to: Western emperor – Constantine with his Caesar Maxentius and eastern emperor Galerius with his Caesar Maximinius Daia and later Licinius.
 4. After death of Galerius, who ended persecution of Christians just before his death: East – Licinius emperor, Maximinus Daia his Caesar; West – Constantine emperor, his Caesar Maxentius. Maxentius’ rule viewed as illegitimate. (Gonzalez 107).
 5. During his rule in Trier (Gaul), Constantine reinforced borders against barbarians, taxed people, gave extravagant entertainment in the circus (execution of barbarian captives) (Gonzalez 114)
 6. Constantine at the Milvian Bridge – 312 AD – according to Eusebius, he had vision prior to his battle against Maxentius. *In hoc signo vinces* (“By this sign, you will conquer”). He put the symbol on the standards and shields of his soldiers (chi + rho) and defeated Maxentius who drowned in river. Licinius defeated Maximinus Daia.

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7. Empire divided between Constantine and Licinius – Edict of Milan (313) which also included agreement to stop persecution of Christians, return their property.
 8. In 322 AD, Licinius and Constantine fought. Constantine won and forced Licinius to abdicate, but later he was accused of conspiring vs. Constantine and was murdered (Gonzalez, 118).
- B. Constantine's conversion – real or political?
1. Constantine builds churches and pays salaries of those who move to New Rome (Constantine's upgraded capital city, now called Constantinople, previously called Byzantium). Constantine gave tax exemption and exemption from military service for those who moved there (Gonzalez, 120). Also gave grain, oil, and wine to citizens. Also gave money for building churches in other cities (*A Global History*, 56)
 2. Constantine's conversion different – didn't put himself under direction of a Christian teacher or bishop according to Gonzalez (121), but Bishop Lactantius and Bishop Hosius were part of his entourage.
 3. Constantine established his own religious practices, intervened in direction of church and considered himself bishop of bishops.
 4. Constantine took part in pagan rites (as *pontifex maximus*) and consulted oracle of Apollo.
 5. Constantine not baptized until on his death bed.
 6. Constantine's decision to put chi-rho on his standard done at inopportune time if he wasn't really a Christian since he did this before fighting in Rome which had strong pagans, whereas strong Christians were in east.
 7. He had his wife, son, and other relatives killed for treason (*A Global History*, 56).
 8. Constantine's coins had names and symbols of ancient gods as well as the chi-rho symbolizing Christ (Gonzalez, 123).

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9. Imperial edict of 324 ordered soldiers to worship Supreme God on the first day of the week (Sunday). It was day of Christian celebration of resurrection of their Lord as well as the day of the Unconquered Sun observed by pagans.
10. First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea called by Constantine in 325 AD.
11. Constantine sponsored building of large basilicas based on model of public buildings (St. Irene in Constantinople, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Gonzalez, 126).

For Further Reading:

- Barnes, Timothy D. *Constantine and Eusebius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Constantine. *Letters, Appendices in Optatus, Against the Donatists*. Translated by Mark Edwards. Translated Texts for Historians 27. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997.
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- Kelly, Christopher. "Empire Building." In *Interpreting Late Antiquity*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown & Oleg Grabar. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001, 170-195.
- Lieu, Samuel and Dominic Montserrat, eds. *Constantine: History, Historiography, and Legend*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
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