

CONSTANTINE

by *Brian Luke* ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

A POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE

When we review the landscape of Roman history, there are principal figures who stand out in bold relief. In the pagan era of the Empire the names of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus stand out above the others, which is why their names have found their way into our calendar. The months of “July” and “August” recall their vast achievements in the expansion and organization, respectively, of the Empire. After their early influence there is no one who even nears the significance of Constantine.

It was in York in northern Britain that Constantine burst upon the international scene in the year AD 306. His father was Constantius, one of four “Caesars” according to the new organization of the sprawling empire, instituted by the brilliant yet bitter reformer, Diocletian. Pressures of disintegration and division had been growing for a hundred years and so Diocletian, the ultimate dictator, surprisingly designated four quarters of the Empire to be ruled over by four Caesars. Constantius was given the Western region, meaning Britain, Gaulle (France) and Germany with headquarters at Trier, some 70 miles west of the Rhine where so much recent military activity had been concentrated.

His son Constantine was in his late teens (about 17 years old) and gaining experience in the army of Licinius, another Caesar based in Nicomedia, Illyricum, the area of the Balkans as we know it today. By every account he was an impressive, superior young man combining organizational skills with a natural perception in the making of war

and the leadership of men and all this came with an august presence and powerful physique. However, such talents made him vulnerable, for the eye of suspicion was upon him—and for this cause he fled the camp of Licinius hastily by night to cross the breadth of the Empire and accompany his father who was then involved in restoring the boundary of the Empire against the restless incursions of the barbarians of northern Britain (AD 306). He arrived in time, but only just, for his father became ill and died in York. Such was the natural appeal of Constantine that the legions there, without reference to Rome, proclaimed him “Caesar” which he accepted with some outward reluctance yet with a vigour and command that betrayed his inward delight!

From York to Trier

Constantius was more than one of the four Caesars. He was also one of the two “Emperors,” bearing a special seniority among the four. In his communication with Rome, Constantine acknowledged that the senior role should go to Maximian, the Caesar in Italy and further evidenced his desire to cooperate by marrying Fausta, the daughter of Maximian! But Constantine’s true ambitions were apparent from his other actions, for he had removed from York and brought his legions into Europe to Trier, between Gaulle and Germany and there built himself a majestic palace fit for a Roman Emperor! In the year 310 he convincingly defeated Maximian at Marseille in southern France. In fact, he killed his father-in-law Maximian personally!

Meanwhile back in Rome another, Maxentius, asserted his right to be the

Emperor of the West. Constantine’s confidence was growing, for with fewer forces and in his first campaign he had destroyed an Emperor and his legions. His ranks contained a higher percentage of Christian converts, for his father Constantius had largely ignored the edict of persecution proclaimed by Diocletian in 303, being so far west and in fact being married to Helena, a Christian convert! Diocletian’s outrageous decree—“The Edictus Terminalis”—had brought deep suffering upon Christians in the other regions of the Empire, and their churches were almost completely destroyed throughout the eastern provinces. So the leniency of Constantius, continued by his son, had attracted response from Christians who came with added zeal to the banner of their liberator! “Christians” swarmed the legions of Constantine, even though his moves now were essentially provocations for civil war within the Empire!

So he led his army into Italy and southwards towards Rome.

Milvian Bridge AD 312

The young man Constantine was clearly at the cross-roads of his life: if he won this battle, outside the gates of Rome itself, then half of the Empire was his and he was the most powerful man in the world. If he lost then ruin and death awaited him. With his new army a thousand miles from home and Maxentius enjoying the patrimony of all the local people the stakes against Constantine were very high.

However on the night before the battle he announced that he had received a vision of a cross in the sky with the accompanying legend “In Hoc Signo Vinces,” meaning “In this sign, con-



THE MILVIAN BRIDGE north of Rome, pictured as it was three centuries ago (left) and as it is today (right). The four central

arches date back to about 109 BC. Repairs and some alterations were made to the bridge in the 19th century.

quer.” When this matter was reported to his soldiers there was a renewal of fervor and confidence as they believed that it signified an endorsement from the God of the Christians. The sign was inscribed upon their banners and shields and forward they marched to a brilliant victory with Constantine actually throwing Maxentius into the Tiber River where he drowned before his disheartened soldiers. So Constantine took the Milvian Bridge and Rome and the central quarter of the Empire fell to his hand.

In the history of the world this victory was of great significance. It becomes the date upon which Constantine spoke of

himself as a converted Christian. Having employed the vision to inspire his soldiers, the Christian cross, symbol of the crucifixion of Christ became the common symbol of the Roman Emperor. It also meant that having attributed his victory to Christ he had now to fully integrate Christians and Christianity into his army and public service. There could be no turning back to paganism, nor any vacillation, for whilst half of the Empire was in his hands, great numbers of his subjects were yet to be converted to Christianity. This was an enormous work and it proceeded by evangelizing, coercion and by the advocacy of the Emperor. It represented a moral and religious revolution in the very center of the Empire that inevitably would spread to every province.

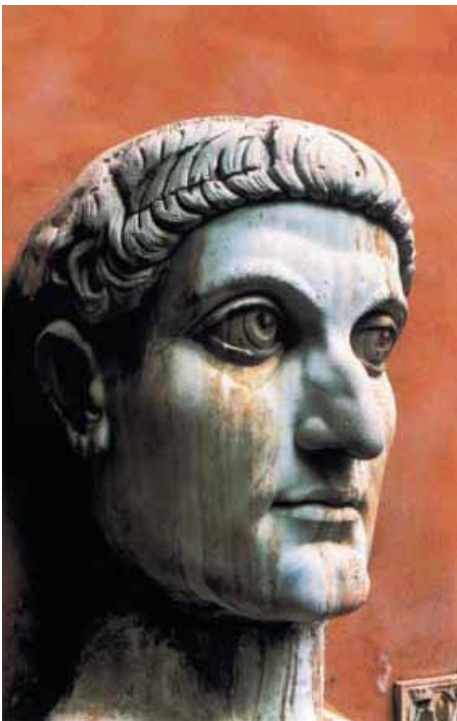
It also meant that further civil war was inevitable. The sheer momentum of Constantine and his new Christian empire placed pressure on Maximin and Licinius, the Caesars of the other two quarters of the Empire. It also meant that there now must be unanimity among the Christians. Christianity was now on the throne! Many of his generals and principle ministers were Christians, but now there must be agreement upon the doctrine and practice of Christians! Divergence meant confusion and frustration in the conversion campaign. So only three years after Milvian Bridge any divergence of doctrine was viewed as heresy, not only to be opposed by the Church but also by the Emperor himself—with all his absolute authority. Christianity was now the state religion, building and expanding with the full support of the Emperor of Rome; but

the awful cost was the independence of the Church. The teachings and way of life of the lowly and crucified Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, were now in the hands of a totalitarian regime with an absolute ruler and general at its head to whom all religious issues were brought and by whom the future of Christianity would be determined. Christians had gone from a persecuted minority to the high places of authority and power. Their numbers rapidly increased in the golden age of Constantine until by the end of the 4th century they were a majority of the Empire and bore a new name, the Roman Catholic Church. This was a cross roads in history of the greatest significance.

“In a way, this is the second-greatest story ever told, at least concerning what we think of as Western civilization. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the conversion of Constantine may have been the most implication-laden event in Western history” (James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, pg. 171).

Christendom or the Kingdom of Christ

In the year 324 Constantine completed his dominance over the entire Roman Empire. The last remaining pagan leader was Emperor Licinius who met the forces of Constantine at Adrianople, on the eastern side of the Bosphorus. It was a crushing defeat that spoke more than the vindication of Constantine. The ancient pagan religion of Rome with its gods many and varied was eclipsed and vanquished. Before the battle Licinius had implored the gods of



Constantine: The Founder of a “Christian” Empire.



A Solidus depicts Constantine

paganism for victory over the champion of Christianity whose confident forces portrayed the emblem of the cross upon their banners. Constantine now was sole Emperor of the Romans and the fortunes of the Christians rose with him.

Christianity henceforth was Christendom. It was widely proclaimed that Constantine was reigning on behalf of Christ. Whereas true disciples had believed and taught the second coming of Christ to establish his Kingdom upon earth and rule from Jerusalem for a thousand years, that doctrine was now replaced by the assumption that Constantine was king in the place of Christ, and his Empire was already the Kingdom of God. A vast revolution was taking place in the teaching of the Church. Gibbon describes it like this: "the doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism."

The concept of the return of Christ had been based upon many texts of Scripture, but these same passages were now being applied to Constantine. The following quotations from Eusebius catch the drama of the times:

"Wherefore, also, Constantine the protector of the good, combining his hatred of wickedness with the love of goodness, went forth with his son Crispus, to extend a saving arm to all those that were perishing. Both, therefore, the father and son (Constantine & his son) having as it were God the universal King, and his Son our Saviour, as their leader and

aid, drawing up the army on all sides against the enemies of God, bore away an easy victory; all things being prospered to them by God."

"All fear, therefore, of those who had previously afflicted them (the Christians), was now wholly removed. They celebrated splendid and festive days with joy and hilarity. All things were filled with light, and all who before were sunk in sorrow, beheld each other with smiling and cheerful faces. With choirs and hymns, in the cities and villages, at the same time they celebrated the praises of the pious emperor, and with him all his divinely favored children. There was a perfect oblivion of past evils, and past wickedness was buried in forgetfulness. There was nothing but enjoyment of the present blessings, and expectation of those yet to come. Edicts were published and issued by the victorious emperor, full of clemency, and laws were enacted indicative of munificence and genuine religion." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*)

The historian T.C. Robertson writes of the final battle of Constantine against Licinius' pagan legions:

"The emperors mustered their hosts under the standards of Christ and of heathenism respectively; each party relied on presages and visions which were supposed to come from heaven; and the triumph of Constantine was especially ascribed to the God of Christians. From that time pagan emblems disappear from his coins, and he declares himself in his edicts to be an instrument of God for spreading the true faith."

This new euphoria among Christian disciples led many to join the ranks of Constantine and commit their faith into his reign. Throughout the Empire there were large numbers that exalted in Constantine's victories. In the year AD 313 he had cancelled the Edictus Terminalis of Diocletian and declared an Edict of Toleration for all Christians. The Emperor had hitched his fortunes to the rising star of Christianity and the Christians had warmly accepted his embrace.

The Consequences

Jesus Christ had told his disciples that

they were to be in the world but not of it (John 17:15-16). The disciples were spoken of as a bride who in this present world is preparing for the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). Christ's command to his servants is to refuse personal revenge, "put up again thy sword...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:55). But now all this understanding had been put aside. Eminent members of the Church had openly thrown in their lot with Constantine, a military general who had cast the Empire into civil war and who was now playing a key and dominating influence in the policies of the Church.

In his last words to his people, Jesus had said this: "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). Despite this very clear instruction the majority of Christians in the era of Constantine forsook the teaching of Christ and openly "married" the cause of the Emperor. To faithfully wait for the Kingdom of Christ was the desire of only a minority!

Worse than that, when Constantine turned his wrath upon the objectors the Church supported him! Christians began persecuting Christians! Another dissenting group were the Jews who certainly knew from their Old Testament scriptures that Constantine's Roman Empire was nothing to do with the Kingdom of God as taught in the Bible. So they also came under pressure, their privileges revoked and in 315 a law passed prohibiting their proselytizing.

Constantine's military achievements had enormous consequences upon the course of history. Because he claimed Divine intervention in the use of the cross upon his banners he had divided the Christian community, and compelled the vast majority into what became known as the Roman Catholic Church. He had estranged the Jewish people and opened the path for their persecution by both civil and Catholic authorities.

In our next two articles we will trace the consequences of these matters.

(continued)



Arch of Constantine
and part of the
Colosseum in Rome.

CONSTANTINE'S LEGACY FOR CHRISTIANS

"Constantine's military achievements had enormous consequences upon the course of history. Because he claimed Divine intervention in the use of the cross upon his banners he had divided the Christian community and yet compelled the vast majority of the citizens of the empire into what became known as the Roman Catholic Church. He had estranged the Jewish people and opened the path for their persecution by both civil and Catholic authorities."

by **Brian Luke** ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

PART TWO

Alongside the Colosseum in Rome there is a grand arch standing in singular glory called the Arch of Constantine. Even today, after the erosion of more than 1600 years, it is an impressive statement of the importance of Constantine and in particular his vast effects upon the Roman empire after his conversion to Christianity. This conversion is dated as the 28th October 312 AD, the day on which his smaller but energetic forces defeated the emperor Maxentius just to the north of the walled city of Rome, at a crossing of the River Tiber known as Milvian Bridge. Up to that day all the

Roman Caesars, all aspects of government, were essentially loyal to the ancient Roman pantheon of gods, with crude rites and practices inherited from their pagan forebears. All official aspects of life in the Roman Empire revolved around these heathen gods.

Why then this conversion of Constantine on 28th October 312? As the story was told 12 years later in 325 AD by Constantine himself, he received a vision at noon on the previous day of a flaming cross, with the words "In this conquer" and in the evening a second vision, of Christ bearing a standard and the cross symbol on the standard. On relaying this information to his relatively young and untried legions a great

excitement and a new confidence took hold upon them and the symbol was duly placed on banners and shields. An overwhelming victory ensued! It was highly significant for many reasons. Firstly, Constantine was an outsider to Rome. He was looked down upon by the aristocracy of the Empire in Rome and he had come all the way from Trier in northwestern Europe to the gates of the ancient and eternal city! This young commander was now an Emperor in Rome itself, the famous capital of the empire. By several victorious wars—civil wars—he had come in from the far west and was now undisputed monarch of half of the Empire.



Golden Solidus with Labarum

Christian Soldiers

As explained in our first article in this series, the consequences of this battle were more than the subjection of a defeated people. Constantine, like his father Constantius before him, had been quite lenient with the slowly growing Christian community in his quarter of the empire (Germany, Gaul and Britain). The draconian *Edictus Terminalis* announced and enforced by Diocletian in AD303 had been largely ignored in the far west, for which cause there were considerable numbers of Christians in his public service and army. They appreciated his moderation; he valued their loyalty. Yet after Milvian Bridge, after the story of the vision of Christ and the cross with the command "Conquer in this," things could never be the same. Having hitched his fortunes to the rising star of Christianity he was bound to go forward with the momentum of Christian enthusiasm. Their cause was now his; his future was now dependent upon them. His conversion is thus dated from this event. Having cast in their lots together, Christianity and Constantine now had to stay together. They had to be united for although there was jubilation among many Christians, the vast majority of the people of the Empire, even in the half that was now under the control of Constantine, were still pagans and worshippers of the Roman pantheon of gods.

There was an immense program of evangelization required to convert the Empire to Christianity, or more particularly, to membership of the Roman Catholic Church. "Catholic" meant universal, and was the prevailing word now because a church that was wedded to the

Emperor and, in fact, which the Emperor required for the progress of his power and authority, must be universal and undivided. If divided, then his empire would divide and fragment. So whilst the Church preened itself in its new found status, the price of its exultation was its independence. A soldier, a mighty prince indeed, was its master and patron, and he had no hesitation in interfering with the customs and appointments of the Church or even its doctrine. In the company of the highest theologians of the Church, Constantine considered himself as Bishop of Bishops! The calling of a general Church Council was dependent on the will of the Emperor, a strange concept that still, however, prevails in the arrangement of the Eastern Church and in that of the Anglican Church.

The sweeping influence of the Emperor may be seen in those many items in which his legislation directly affected the Church. In the next year 313 he reversed the *Edictus Terminalis* with the Edict of Toleration, followed by the decree of observance of Sunday (in place of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday). Official prayers had to be offered for the army, crucifixion was rescinded as a means of punishment, emancipation of slaves encouraged, prohibition of private divinations and of licentious and cruel entertainment with all its rituals followed. Some of these reforms, based upon the principles of Christ's teaching, were very beneficial to the empire and the whole world thereafter, but we can imagine the resentment generated among the common people as such revolutionary changes impinged upon their hitherto pagan customs.

The Eclipse of Paganism & the Corruption of Christianity

In the year 324AD Constantine defeated the last of the remaining pagan Caesars. The battle took place at Hadrianople where Licinius and his legions were routed by an Emperor now in the peak of his powers. It is recorded that Licinius (who was actually brother-in-law to Constantine, being married to Constantia his sister) before the battle consulted the gods of his fathers being petrified at the prospect of confronting the confident Constantine, bearing so brazenly the symbol of the Cross, Gibbon says:

"The same symbol, (the Cross) sanctified the arms of the soldiers of Constantine. The cross glittered on their helmet, was engraved on their shields,

was interwoven into their banners; and the consecrated emblem which adorned the person of the emperor himself was distinguished only by richer materials and more exquisite workmanship. But the principal standard which displayed the triumph of the cross was styled the Labarum ... The summit of the pike supported a crown of gold. Which enclosed the mysterious monogram, at once expressive of the figure of the cross and the initial letters of the name of Christ... in the second civil war Licinius felt and dreaded the power of the consecrated banner, the sight of which in the distress of battle animated the soldiers of Constantine with the invincible enthusiasm, and scattered terror and dismay through the ranks of



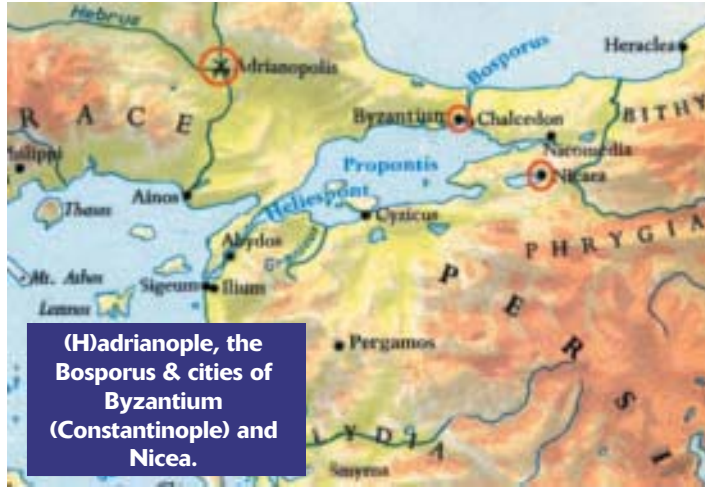
Constantine's Column in Constantinople (now Istanbul) is said to have originally held a statue of Apollo, but it was changed for one of Constantine himself, and later still Theodosius.

the adverse legions.” Gibbon II, XX, p.229.

The intention of Constantine to give mysterious power to the sign of the cross had become so successful that even his enemies quaked with fear before its presentation! The cross which should have been a symbol of submission and self-denial had now become a powerful symbol of fear, and its main shaft converted from a pole to a spear!

The whole significance of the cross, so obviously related to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, had been utterly perverted. When Jesus was upon the cross it was a triumph of God’s will over the human will. “Not my will but Thine be done” was his neat summary. There was no physical triumph over others, only over his own will as he carried out the will of his Father. “Conqueror” he was, but not by leading armies of soldiers in civil war, wielding death to their enemies. So much was this the life of Constantine that “Conqueror” was his synonym! He had inverted the sense of Christ’s death and teaching, turning the cross into a sword and placing a crown on its head! No crown of thorns for Constantine. Thus the teaching of true Christianity was totally polluted by Constantine, yet receiving the applause of the elders of the Church for the pre-eminence and protection he afforded them. This was the advent of Christendom, the calamity of the Church’s compact with the world, with the temporal powers of the present evil world; a tragic fall from which the Church never escaped and leading on to the Papacy where the twin swords of spiritual and temporal power were wielded by one man.

The basis of all that historic evil comes back to Constantine; he came with present temporal power, and wedded himself to the Church. It was easy and natural later for Popes to come from the religious side and wed themselves and their Catholic Church to temporal, governmental power. Constantine laid the foundations for all this historic evil. The pattern was established. What an amazingly significant man was this emperor!



From the days of Christ and the apostles to the second coming of Christ no man has so significantly affected the course of human history.

The Council of Nicea & the Trinity Doctrine

One year later, in AD 325, the Emperor revisited Hadrianople for the purpose of celebrating his victory over Licinius, when the Catholic forces behind the symbol of the Cross, defeated the last pagan legions. But his purposes were two-fold, for he had arranged that after this anniversary celebration all the bishops of the Church should come together at the nearby city of Nicea in a general Council involving some 300 bishops plus their attendants. So great was his desire for the Council that he indicated that he would himself attend, confident that his presence would abet the outcome of their discussions.

So all eyes awaited the arrival of the great Emperor.

“He entered. His towering stature, his strong-built frame, his broad shoulders, his handsome features, were worthy of his grand position. There was a brightness in his look and a mingled expression of fierceness and gentleness in his lion-like eye which well became one who, as Augustus before him, had fancied, and perhaps well-fancied, himself to be the favorite of the Sun-god Apollo. The Bishops were further struck by the dazzling, perhaps barbaric, magnificence of his dress. Always careful of his appearance, he was so on this occasion in an eminent degree. His long hair, false or real, was crowned with the imperial diadem of pearls, his purple or

scarlet robe blazed with precious stones and gold embroidery, he was shod no doubt in the scarlet shoes then confined to the Emperors, now perpetuated in the Pope and Cardinals.” (*Stanley’s Eastern Church*, page 122).

Seated upon a richly ornamental throne the Emperor was present throughout the debate and events of the Council; in fact the first speech was from him.

Wherein lay his concerns?

For the previous ten years there had been a lively discussion of views on the actual personage of Christ and the degree of unity with his Father. On the one hand there were the followers of Athanasius, the fiery young theologian of Alexandria, who believed that Jesus was absolutely equal with his Father, coequal and co-eternal, never made; in fact the equal Maker of heaven and earth. The other view was represented by Arius and he taught that Jesus was nothing more than a man begotten by Mary, and with no existence before that event, and that his present immortality was given to him by his Father after his death and resurrection. And there was every other shade of opinion in between—and faction and rivalry on the subject were threatening division of the Church. Constantine knew he must act or his so recently unified Empire would be rent by the disputes of his loyal Catholic supporters. Here are the final words of his opening address:

“...but the moment that I shall consider the chief fulfillment of my prayers will be when I see you all joined together in heart and soul, and determining on one peaceful harmony for all, which it should well become you who are consecrated to God to preach to others. Do not, then, delay, my friends; do not delay, ministers of God and the good servants of our common Lord and Savior, to remove all grounds of difference, and to wind up by laws of peace every link of controversy, thus will you have done what is most pleasing to the God who is over all, and you will render the greatest boon to me, your fellow-servant.” (*Stanley’s Eastern Church*, page 126).

By common consent the concern of



the Emperor was not the precise form of Christian doctrine that should triumph at the Council but that the conclusion, whatever it should be, may be received with unanimity.

Homoousion, "One Substance"

When all was done over many days of disputations, the debate focused upon a single Greek word *HOMOOUSION*, signifying "one substance." The final document that came out of this Council was called the Nicene Creed and in its context the famous phrase was declaring that Jesus Christ was one substance with his Father. It was the key phrase that the Athanasius group wanted, to ensure that no one with Arius' views would be able to accept the decree of the Council! The Emperor, seeing the possibility of a common solution, swung his immense influence behind Homoousion even though it was very difficult because several of his closest allies among the clergy were strong Arians! But he perceived that these may well be persuaded by pressure of fear or favor to join the majority. "He therefore took the course the most likely to procure the result, and professed himself the patron and also the interpreter of the new phrase!" (Stanley)

The Council voted for this Nicene Creed by a large majority and gradually all but a handful of objectors were whittled down to compliance. Arius himself was banished, his books and writings burnt and his name defamed

throughout the Empire, together with his few supporters.

The Doctrine of the Trinity Arrives

The reader of these things cannot but see the spiritual corruption of Christianity. The whole impetus of this Council of Nicea was the political exigencies of the Emperor Constantine. He was no Bible student even though he liked to speak and preach at principal occasions. In fact he was not even baptized into the name of Christ and would remain unbaptized until three days before his death in 337 AD. His "conversion" was a mixed affair at best for he still had a great respect for the sun god Apollo, the pagan inspiration of his youth, hence the imperial appointment of Sun-day as the day for Christian worship. Two statues told the story of the duplicity of the Emperor's mind. In the garden of his palace in Rome he erected a statue of himself afflicting death upon the dragon by the symbol of the cross that he had seen in the dream before Milvian Bridge. The cross had become a sword and upon its head was now a crown! The statue was a grave perversion of the doctrine of Christ, who taught that "he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword" Revelation 13:10. At his new palace in Constantinople he erected a statue with the very key features of Apollo and this in the latter years of his life.

It is said that the removal of his capital from Rome to Constantinople, was to put space between himself and his crimes. Shortly after the Nicene Creed was announced to the world as the true doctrine of Christ's relationship with his Father (is there a more important matter of Christian doctrine?) his hands

were soiled by the blood of his son and successor Crispus who had before frequently stood with his Father before the public! Then it was the murder of his second wife Fausta, who seems to have besmirked the standing of Crispus. Then followed the murder of young Licinius the son of his sister Constantia. This is the legacy of Emperor Constantine and it shows in terrible light the motives behind the announcement of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not surprising really that the one, who for his own interests could turn the Roman Empire into twelve years of civil war, could also believe that he could quietly eradicate those of the royal family that he saw as potential rivals. 'Absolute power corrupts absolutely' says the proverb, and Constantine's life sadly confirms it. The Council had been called for his own political purposes, he attended in person and, finally, dominated the outcome to ensure the unity of his vast empire! What had Christian doctrine to do with imperial politics?

The Simplicity of Scripture

The Holy Scriptures alone should have been the basis for discussion on the status of Christ. This is what they say, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1Timothy 2:5). The Trinity speaks of three persons in the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD" is the Bible's simple reply. As to the nature of Christ, the Bible is beyond doubt: "For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same..." Hebrews 2:14. Hence the absolute dependence of the Son upon the Father: "The Son can do nothing of himself but what things he seeth the Father do;" "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:19, 30). Unity with his Father indeed, but certainly not equality. His Father was spirit nature and Jesus was flesh and blood nature: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh". The grand victory of the Lord Jesus Christ was his overcoming the flesh; but if he is defined as "one substance" with the Father, then the central truth of Jesus Christ is annulled.

In 1999 Richard E. Rubenstein published a brilliant book on this subject and called it *When Jesus Became God*. The title is obviously satirical because no one becomes God, the singular, eternal, omnipotent God! His story traces in fascinating detail the involvement of Constantine in this central area of Christian doctrine, the vacillations of the Emperor and then of his sons, and the fluctuant fortunes of the principle theologians as they came in and out of imperial favour! The story is an eye opener for anyone who wishes to look into the foundations of the Trinity.

The Spirit of Anti-Christ

Always aware of the mind of evil men, God had marvelously foretold of these things. Before the close of the first century the Apostle John wrote this,

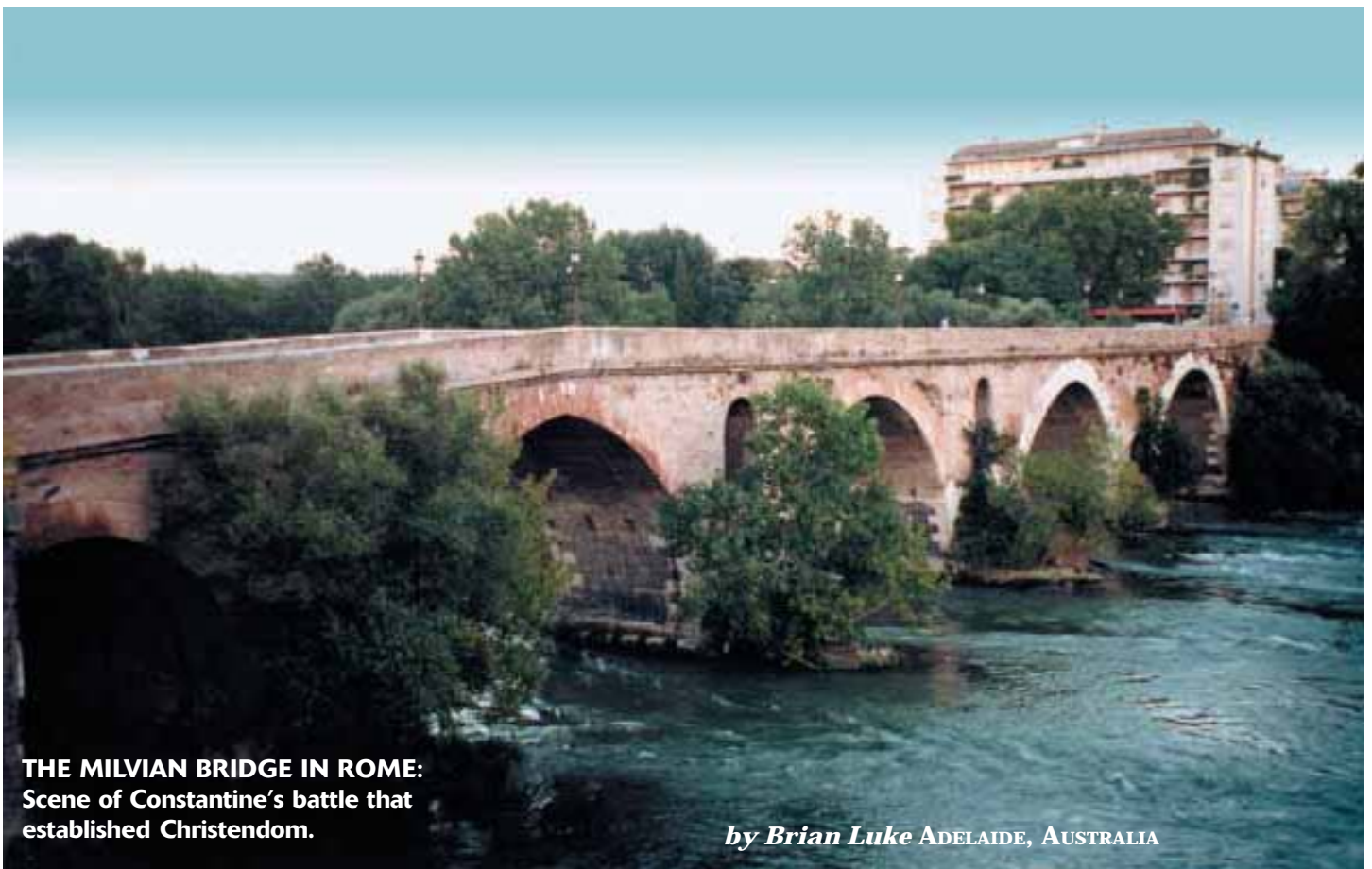
“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God; Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: And this is that spirit of anti-Christ whereof ye have heard that it should come...” 1 John 4:2-3.

The doctrine of anti-Christ would be

the denial that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Many philosophers and theologians tinkered with the nature of Jesus until Constantine’s Council decreed boldly in the Nicene Creed that he was “one substance,” *HOMOIOUSION*, with the Father.

The apostle John’s prophecy shone in brilliance. “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ” 2 John verse 7.

Let us beware!



THE MILVIAN BRIDGE IN ROME:
Scene of Constantine’s battle that established Christendom.

by Brian Luke ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

CONSTANTINE’S LEGACY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

How a corrupt form of Christianity turned the cross into a weapon against the Jews.

PART THREE

In the former two articles in this series we saw how Emperor Constantine married the Church to the State and by a series of vast civil wars

overthrew the armies of the other Caesars and systematically set about the conversion of the Empire to Christianity, at the cost of the pagan religion that hitherto had been the Empire’s domi-

nant influence. This remarkable achievement had enormous consequences upon the direction of the civilized world, for not only was the character of the Roman world drastically changed but also, equally, the nature of the Christian Church. The persecuted minority that composed the Christian community before Constantine now became the advance guard of the Empire, openly revelling in the spoils of civil wars, rising to the head of government and public service, recipients of

special endowments from the Sovereign and appointed among his principal confidants and ministers.

Christianity, however corrupt, was now in power. The sword, refused by the believers for 280 years (AD33—313), was now openly espoused and believing generals and soldiers gloried in their new power, always inspired by the cross of Christ emblazoned upon their military banners and other weapons of war. After the Emperor's account of a vision on the eve of the battle of Milvian Bridge, when he said a cross of gold was presented high in the heavens and a voice was heard, "Conquer in this," from that time the world was changed. Constantine gathered his officers about him and inspired them with this account, replacing their anxieties with this premonition of Divine favor and sure victory. It was as though he who said, "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt 26:52) had now reversed his principle and encouraged his people to military conquest!

Corruption of the Doctrine of the Cross

Constantine later said that it was this "vision" and the consequent victory over Maxentius that convinced him of Christianity. Though he was not baptized until three days before his death twenty-five years later (AD 337), he claimed that Milvian Bridge was the occasion of his conversion. What dark corruption is in these things! The cross in the Bible is the symbol of submission, as the crucified Jesus has portrayed to the world ever since it occurred. "Not my will but thine be done" is the essence of the meaning of the cross. His disciples are encouraged to follow in kind: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Now we have a Christian emperor at the opening of a 13-year campaign of brutal and unnecessary civil wars, proclaiming that those who used the sword in the name of the cross of Christ would be blessed!

Thus the symbol of Christian submission was turned into a token of military prowess! The doctrine of Christ was critically corrupted and the way opened for those many religious wars that have darkened the annals of history.

Once this course was taken the

Church could never be independent. Depicted in the Scriptures as "a chaste virgin" waiting for Christ it now had another master! What's more the state of the Church was a prime concern to the Emperor. He had hitched his fortunes to the rising star of Christianity, so any disputes or doctrinal disturbances had to be resolved, for what would it be if the Emperor had founded his confidence upon Christian support only to later find the Church divided!

As we said in our last article this meant that the Emperor took a serious interest in all matters of the Church, giving his opinion and his commands in respect to many things. He even called the Council of Nicea: he was present in person and it was he that took hold of the crucial phrase, "one substance" that defined the relationship of the Son to the Father in the Nicene Creed. So the doctrine of the Trinity can be fairly laid at the feet of Emperor Constantine. His enormous presence was fundamental to all that happened at that Council. The doctrine of the unity of God was thereafter confused.

More Overtones — Persecution for Non-Conformists

The next obvious question soon arose. What was to be done to believing Christians who did not endorse the doctrine

espoused by the Emperor? On many issues there were varying opinions among the disciples of Christ. So it was about the decisions at Nicea; there were many who did not believe that Jesus was "very God of very God," as the (Emperor's) Creed now said it, but rather that he was of the same flesh as all other men (eg Hebrews 2:14). There were therefore quite a number of widely scattered groups who wished to hold themselves independent of the now established Catholic Church because they felt, essentially, that true Christians should never be bound up with the State but rather wait for their Master's return when he should be conqueror and king over all the earth. Some of these groups were called Arians, Donatists, Circumcellions, Waldenses, etc. Their independence of conscience in their Christian beliefs now threatened their own lives and circumstances. The Emperor could not accept them and feared the break-up of his united realm. So these people of quiet and submissive behavior were now attacked, imprisoned, exiled or slain and their buildings demolished. Corruption of the principles of Christ had now led to persecution of fellow Christians. There could be no toleration of independence: the Emperor must have his subjects joined in one body upon his own principles.



...he said a cross of gold was presented high in the heavens and a voice was heard, "Conquer in this."

Where did the Jew stand?

Since the days of the early Greek Empire the Jewish people had enjoyed wide acceptance of their religious beliefs and practices and what was negotiated in the Greek Empire was largely endorsed in the Roman Empire. The pagan Roman gods were the orthodox deities of the Roman government and people but they allowed the Jews their Sabbath and feasts and other practices in the synagogues.

Yet trouble now lay ahead for if Arians were exiled and persecuted for some refined item of Christian doctrine what was the position of a people who, though having the same Bible (or the Old Testament, at least) refused even the person of Jesus Christ and all his claims with him? Furthermore they argued that the Church (now called the Catholic Church) though using the Scriptures, had misinterpreted their basic teachings. It is not surprising to learn that restrictions were now coming upon Judaism that hitherto had been a recognized religion of the Jews in the Empire. In AD 315, only 2 years after Constantine's "Edict of Toleration" (!) Jews were forbidden to preach or proselytize...the first anti-Semitic law in centuries! Within a hundred years Jewish proselytizing became a crime punishable by death! In the year 429 a lineal descendant of Constantine abolished the patriarchate of Israel, "Not even the Caesars, who twice leveled Jerusalem, had eliminated Jewish political autonomy — an abolition that would not be reversed until 1948. One could almost say that for Jews, the Age of Constantine came to an end only with David ben Gurion!" (*Constantine's Sword*, J. Carroll, pg 176). The legacy of Constantine casts a long shadow upon the history of the Jews. When the Catholic Church embraced an Emperor who could pervert the cross of Christ into a sword of temporal power, then many evils were possible.

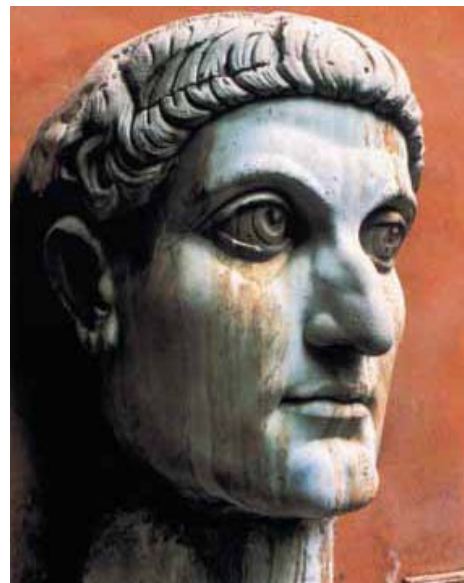
Super Cessionism and the Hope of Israel

When the apostle Paul was brought in chains to Rome and permitted to speak to the Jewish elders of the capital, he made the statement, "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain"

(Acts 28:20). Again, before king Agrippa, he said, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6-7). The Hope of Israel is that spoken of in the Old Testament, of a Messiah in the line of King David, to rise in Jerusalem and bring blessings to the natural children of Abraham; to reign over all the earth and with special favors to a renewed Israel. This message is all through the Old Testament, from Moses, the Psalms and the prophets. We note that the Apostle Paul was an open preacher of that message. So were all the Apostles, who asked of Jesus after his resurrection, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). It is foolish to ignore these passages for this is the Gospel of the kingdom propounded by Jesus and his Apostles — Matt 8:11-12, 19:28, Luke 19:41-42. The death and resurrection of Christ, though not perceived by the Jews, were equally proclaimed by the prophets, complementing the Gospel of the kingdom. Salvation from sin and death is offered in the name of Christ and that salvation will find its expression in the kingdom of God when Christ will be king over all the earth. The two aspects are the covers of one book, the whole Gospel of Christ.

However, when Constantine converted the cross into a temporal sword then the kingdom of God phase became, it seemed, redundant. There was a resplendent Christian emperor in absolute dominion and members of his Catholic Church (as he now called it) in the highest prominence and influence. The Church that sought his protection and succor was now in his control, even as to what they believed. The Emperor's will was stamped on all, yet his ministry and generals were from Christian ranks and enjoyed such an intimate working relationship with the palace that it seemed just like a dream come true. The persecuted were now princes and ministers of a world empire. In a short time they and their Church were themselves persecutors!

What further need for the Hope of Is-



"Helena (whose sarcophagus is pictured below), the mother of the Emperor, with much royal majesty had visited the Holy Land and made 'discoveries', among them ... believe it or not, the very cross upon which he (Jesus) died!"



rael? All the relevant passages of the prophets and psalms were applied to Constantine and his glorious world wide Empire! The Gospel of the Kingdom was eclipsed, or rather fulfilled in Constantine's royal empire. Even the principal theologians of the time saw it this way. So what was once the "reigning sentiment" of early Christians, the return of Jesus Christ, the "king of the Jews," became by degrees but the belief of old-fashioned "fanatics" (*Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 15).

So the hope of Israel, the Gospel of the kingdom, was no longer a hope, rather a present reality! There was no future role for the Jewish people in the purpose of God and all their special titles and promises were transferred to the Catholic Church of Constantine. The

Church was the kingdom! — and Constantine was Messiah! This teaching, sometimes called supercessionism, became orthodox by the end of the 4th Century.

What of the Jew?

The Jewish people, scattered very widely through the Empire became very isolated. They had shared an understanding with many Christians in former times but now had nothing in common with the vast majority of the Church. They were out in the cold and no one cared because almost no one saw any future purpose for them. In the view of a Trinitarian the Jews had killed God so they were an accused people shunned by God and man! They were outside the pact between Church and State; fair game for verbal invective and malicious persecution.

Helena, the mother of the Emperor, with much royal majesty had visited the Holy Land and made “discoveries,” among them the seamless robe that Jesus wore to the crucifixion and, believe it or not, the very cross upon which he died. Now these relics were brought back to Trier, in northwest Germany, Constantine’s formal capital and became the focus of an even greater concentration upon the death and crucifixion of the cross. There was no parallel symbol for the life and resurrection of Christ, just an increasing obsession upon the Cross. The Hope of Israel was forgotten. The Gospel became the Cross. Queen Helena’s wooden relic, now in the cathedral of Trier, had created an infatuated interest throughout the Church. The cross had center stage, there was no Gospel of the kingdom, Jerusalem’s Messiah was a lost chord! So the earlier actions of the Emperor in placing the Cross upon all military banners and equipment of all his legions was now further accentuated by the mysterious discoveries of his mother.

Christianity had become Crosstianity, as it still largely is today. And where was the Jew in this picture? Right out in the cold! Even worse it was reported by the Queen mother that it was a Jew, indeed, that had betrayed his people by informing her of the site of the wooden cross! It was someone like the original betrayer, Judas the Jew — for although all

of the Apostles were Jews, time and history had conspired to portray Judas Iscariot as the Jew among the Apostles!

The following is from the account of Bishop Ambrose concerning the legend of Helena’s finding the “True Cross”:

“The Spirit inspired her to search for the wood of the Cross,” Ambrose declared. “She drew near to Golgotha and said: ‘Behold the place of combat: where is thy victory?...Why did you labor to hide the wood, O Devil, except to be vanquished a second time? You were vanquished by Mary, who gave the Conqueror birth’” (*Constantine’s Sword*, J. Carroll, page 201).

Ambrose and Augustine, Fathers of Anti-Semitism

The above words were from an oration of Bishop Ambrose (339 - 397) at the funeral of emperor Theodosius in 395. They express in the most bitter terms the despisement of the Jew in the Catholic Church of the 4th Century, in the legacy years of Constantine

and all in the name of Helena, “the saint, the queen, the friend of nuns and priests.” The Jew is the Devil personified, once defeated by Christ upon the Cross and a second time now that this True Cross had been rediscovered! Such was the mind of the principle theologian of the Church as he expounds on the Legend of Helena. “The Church mani-



fest joy, the Jew blushes. Not only does he blush, but he is tormented also, because he himself is the author of his own confusion” (*Constantine’s Sword*, J. Carroll, page 201).

In the year 388 the Emperor Theodosius protested the wanton destruction of a Jewish Synagogue by some irresponsible mob of Christians.

Here now is the written reply of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, to the Emperor expressing his total support of the mob: "that there might not be a place where Christ is denied. A synagogue is a haunt of infidels, a home of the impious, a hiding place of mad men, under the damnation of God Himself. To order the rebuilding of such a place was an act of treason to the Faith."

It is not hard to imagine Adolf Hitler taking pleasure in these words.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is frequently represented as the greatest theologian since the Apostles. In fact he was a disciple of Ambrose, baptized by him in 387. When the Church is reproached by critics of anti-Semitism, the claim is made that the Church has never been anti-Jew and that Augustine preached leniency to the Israelites. What is the truth?

Augustine's teaching was not to kill the Jews as frequently occurred in his era. The Jews he said were guilty of the death of God (!) and were a witness to the judgments of God as spoken in the Bible. If the Jew was eradicated then that witness would be lost. So the unbelieving Jew was to be allowed to live, albeit in shame, ignominy, exile and privation, to witness to the Word of God!

Is it any wonder that Europe's history has been stained for 1,500 years with anti-Semitism, pogroms and the Holocaust?

The first pogrom in history occurred in Alexandria in AD414, wiping out for a time that city's extensive Jewish community. This was nearby on the same continent as Augustine and in the height of his influence! So much for the amelioration of Augustine's doctrine.

The Anti-Semitic legacy of Constantine

This story began at Trier where the new Emperor Constantine set up his new capital of the western quarter. It was to that city that Helena brought "The True Cross" that became a catalyst for Jew hatred in Christians of early times. It is a quaint fact of history that the first organized murder of a Jewish community also began in Trier. The soldiers of the First Crusade carried, after the example of Constantine, the symbol of the cross on their shields. They amassed an army of hundreds of thousands at the stirring behest of Pope Urban II, gathering at Trier! But if the actual purpose was the elimination of unbelieving Muslims from the Holy Land, then what about the unbelieving Jew in their local cities? So beginning in 1096 at Trier and moving east through Europe to Asia Minor and Palestine went this marauding, murderous Christian army, destroying Jewish communities along the way, gaining practice for their eventual assault on Islam in the Holy Land.

Subsequent "crusades" followed the same course with the same behavior. Only Nazis could be pleased with such abhorrent behavior.

"Come out of Her, My People"

The gruesome sequel of this story goes on to the Inquisition, the Holy Office, the legal discrimination against Jews throughout European history, to the Dreyfus affair, to Russian pogroms, to Hitler, Mein Kampf doctrine, to the Holocaust. Nor were the Protestant churches much better; Martin Luther was a strident anti-Semite!

In all of this history, though, the fact

stands out that anti-Semitism goes back preeminently to Constantine, to his perversion of the doctrine of the cross whereby the Christian symbol of self-denial was turned into a token of military brutality. The Catholic Church responded to his overtures and sought temporal power in this world at his side. Subsequently the Popes have justified this behavior and those opposed whether "heretics" or Jews have suffered cruelly at their command.

To Abraham it was said, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee!" (Gen 12:3). Paul the Apostle many times warned against arrogant behavior against Israel. "Boast not against the branches (Jews)... Be not high-minded, but fear... God is able to graft them in again... And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:16,18, 20, 23, 26).

The Hope of Israel remains the Hope of the Bible. That is the significance of the re-birth of the nation of Israel. God is telling us that the return of their Messiah is near at hand.

The Bible also speaks of terrible judgments upon those who have destroyed the truth of the Gospel and persecuted the Jewish people and made war against those that have stood for the Truth.

Dear reader, think upon these appealing words,

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (Rev 18:4-5).