

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

She is returning already, and when she shall re-enter her cold marble palace-pile this time, guiltless, humble, hand in hand with sweet-faced faith, and convoyed by the angels of God's revelation, she shall discover to her unutterable joy that the glistening structure, which in the days of her proud self-sufficiency was so empty and magnificently desolate, has been suddenly transformed into the real, eternal house of God — the house not made with hands, — the same old temple of David and the saintly fathers, infinitely enlarged and beautified.

---

#### ARTICLE IV.

### CONSTANTINE THE GREAT, AND THE DOWNFALL OF PAGANISM IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE.<sup>1</sup>

BY DR. PHILIP SCHAFF.

IT is agreed on all hands that Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, the founder of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire, marks one of the most important epochs in the history of Christianity and the world. He was the chief instrument, in the hands of Providence, by which the church was delivered from oppression and persecution, and elevated to a position of honor and power in the proud empire of Rome; from him dates the union of church and state; his reign sealed the doom of Graeco-Roman paganism, and secured the triumph of Christianity. But opinions are not yet quite harmonized as to his personal character and the motives which induced him to favor the Christian religion

<sup>1</sup> Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen, von J. Jacob Burkhardt. Basel. 1853.

Der Uebertritt Constantins des Grossen zum Christenthum. Akademischer Vortrag, gehalten am 12 Dec., 1861, im Grossrathsale in Zürich, nebst geschichtlichem Nachweis von Dr. Theodor Keim. Zurich. 1862.

Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church. By E. P. Stanley. New York: 1862. Lect. VI.

above the religion of his fathers and predecessors on the throne of the Caesars. The Greek church has gone so far as to enroll him among her saints, and, in strange perversion of the term, to honor him with the title of the "equal of the apostles" (*Isapostolos*). The Latin and the Protestant church are contented to call him the *Great*, and to assign him a similar position in history as that occupied by Charlemagne. Some modern writers, especially those of the rationalistic school, represent him as a political and military genius, without moral principle and without sincere interest in the Christian or any other religion. He was great undoubtedly, though not in the first, but in the second order; and more by what he *did* than by what he *was*; more by the favor of circumstances and position than by personal character and merit. He was one of the most gifted, energetic, and successful among the Roman emperors, and the first friend and patron of Christianity. He had a naturally strong, clear, and shrewd mind, a tolerable, though by no means thorough, cultivation, a good knowledge of human nature, administrative energy and tact, and military and political genius. His prominent trait as a ruler was practical good sense: He had the sagacity and policy of a genuine statesman in discerning the signs of the times and placing himself at the head of true progress; while his equally gifted and more learned, but far less practical, nephew Julian mistook the true character of the age, vainly endeavored to stem or divert the current of history, and incurred the fate of a fruitless reactionist and the disgrace of an apostate. As to his moral character, he was neither as bad as the later heathen historian Zosimus, nor as pure as his Christian friend and eulogist Eusebius, the famous church historian, endeavored to represent him: the one by direct and malignant perversions; the other, from pious motives, by exaggerating his virtues and holding him up as the pattern of a truly Christian prince, and ignorantly or wilfully passing by his vices. They represent the extremes of partiality for and against Constantine. A just estimate of his

be formed from the facts admitted by both, and from the effects of his political and ecclesiastical policy and legislation. He had indeed noble traits, among which a chastity rare for the time, and especially at a court just emerging from heathenism, and a liberality and beneficence bordering on wastefulness, are especially prominent. Many of his laws and regulations breathed the humane spirit of Christianity, elevated the condition of woman, of the slave, and the unfortunate, and gave free play to the efficiency of the church throughout the whole empire. Altogether, if he had not professed Christianity, he would without controversy be numbered among the best as well as the greatest of Roman emperors. But the execution of Licinius, his conquered rival and brother-in-law, and of Crispus his own son, on suspicion of political conspiracy, while they are not sufficient to destroy his title to greatness (remember the double crime of David, and similar crimes in the life of Charlemagne and Peter the Great), show conclusively that Christianity did not produce in him a thorough moral transformation, and that his character is by no means, in all respects, a model for imitation. He stood on the transition of two ages and two religions, and clearly bore the marks of both. He himself acknowledged the duplicity of his position in his dying moments in Nicomedia, when, after a long delay which can be easily explained from the combined influence of policy and superstition, he took the final step and was baptized in the name of Christ, whom he had revered for nearly thirty years as the God of victory.

In judging of this remarkable man and his reign, many writers have lost sight of the great historical principle, that all representative characters act, consciously or unconsciously, as the free and responsible organs of the spirit of their age, which moulds them first before they can mould it in turn; and that the spirit of the age, whether good or bad or mixed, is itself but an instrument in the hands of divine Providence which rules and overrules all the actions and motives of men. It is unhistorical<sup>1</sup> and absurd to suppose,

that the Christian church was indebted to the personal favor of Constantine for her social position and victory in the Roman empire. Through a history of three centuries Christianity had already inwardly overcome the world, and thus rendered such an outward revolution as has attached itself to the name of this prince, both possible and unavoidable. The intellectual and moral victory preceded the political and military triumph, and was necessarily followed by it. The Christian religion, after outliving so many persecutions and literary assaults of Judaism and heathenism, and sending so many thousand martyrs to the scaffold and the stake, could not for ever remain a church of the desert and a proscribed sect. It deserved to be reorganized by the government as a legitimate religion, and to have a fair chance to show its power in the world on a larger and more comprehensive scale. The crucifixion was to be followed once more by the resurrection, and the state of humiliation had to give way to the state of exaltation.

Constantine possessed that genuine political wisdom which, from a high and comprehensive view of the general condition and tendency of the age, clearly saw that idolatry had outlived itself in the Roman empire, and that Christianity alone could breathe new vigor into it and furnish its moral support. He understood the tendency of the age and the signs of the time, and acted accordingly. Christianity appeared to him, as it was in fact, the only hopeful religion and the only efficient power for a political reformation of the empire, from which the ancient spirit of Rome was fast departing, while internal civil and religious dissensions and the outward pressure of the barbarians threatened a gradual dissolution of society. His personal interest as a ruler, in this case, coincided with the true interests of the state. But he had by no means a purely political interest in Christianity. His whole family was swayed by religious sentiment, which manifested itself in very different forms: in the devout pilgrimages of Helena, his mother, the fanatical Arianism of Constantia, his sister, and Constantine his

son, and the fanatical paganism of Julian, his nephew. Constantine was perfectly sincere in his course towards Christianity, as far as he understood it. He adopted it first as a superstition, in the spirit of the New-Platonic syncretism of the more earnest thinkers of the age, till finally, in his conviction, the Christian God vanquished the heathen gods; yet he never rose to a pure and enlightened faith and a corresponding purity of moral character, and delayed even a formal profession of the religion he had uniformly protected, till a few days before his death.

The latest biographer of Constantine, Professor Burkhart of Basel, has done him great injustice in denying the sincerity of his religious profession and ecclesiastical acts. He represents him as a purely military and political character of the Napoleonic order, whose only possible religion is fatalism and a belief in his own star; and he does not hesitate to treat the famous vision of a cross as a deliberate fabrication of the emperor or of Eusebius, or of both. But since that time Theodor Keim, in the essay mentioned at the head of this Article, on Constantine's conversion, and Stanley in the sixth of his able and interesting lectures on Greek Christianity, which contains a graphic picture of the first Christian emperor, have done him more justice under this view, and strike a middle course between the older over-estimate and the modern depreciation of his religious character.

The famous vision of the cross as related by Eusebius (not in his church history, but in his eulogistic biography of Constantine) will hardly be received by any critical historian at the present day without a considerable deduction. It certainly cannot be regarded any longer in the light of a sudden and thorough conversion which produced a corresponding wonderful change in the whole age by raising Christianity to the throne of the Caesars. Yet the general fact of some extraordinary phenomenon or experience preceding the decisive victory over Maxentius in October, 312, is well supported by contemporaneous testimonies of the

author of the work *De Mortibus persecutorum*, written A. D. 314, and the heathen panegyrist of Constantine, especially Nazarius, in 321. We resolve the facts in the case into a prophetic dream, which may be traced to a special providence without resorting to a proper miracle.

All other hypotheses are surrounded by insurmountable difficulties. The old orthodox view of a personal appearance of Christ to Constantine and his army, is hardly justified even by the great significance of the victory which followed; and, besides the critical objections to the Eusebian narrative, it assumes such a union of the Prince of Peace with the god of war, and the holy symbol of redemption with the bloody ensign of conquest, as is incompatible with the dignity of the Saviour and the genius of his religion, and would require us to stretch the theory of accommodation far beyond the limits of strict propriety and truthfulness. We should suppose, moreover, that Christ, if he had actually appeared to the young captain, either in person (according to Eusebius and Theodoretus) or through angels (as Rufinus and Sozomenus modify the story), would have exhorted him to repent and be baptized, rather than to construct a military ensign for a bloody battle. But it is a fact that he was not baptized till twenty-five years later. The opposite view of an intentional falsehood of Constantine or Eusebius, or both, is in itself too unworthy to be resorted to without absolute necessity; it ill agrees with the general character of the prince and his biographer, and it is overthrown by the three independent and contemporary testimonies of Lactantius, or whoever wrote the work on the death of persecutors, and two heathen panegyrist, which agree as to some extraordinary vision or dream at this remarkable turning point of history. Finally, the rationalistic hypothesis of a peculiar cross-like formation in the clouds, resorted to by Gieseler and adopted by Stanley, derives some show of evidence from similar cross-like clouds which appeared in Germany in December, 1517 and 1552, and were mistaken by contemporary Lutherans for supernatural signs. The

parhelion, likewise, is said to assume not unfrequently, in an afternoon sky, almost the form of a cross. Stanley even refers to the aurora borealis which appeared in November, 1848, and was interpreted in France as forming the letters "L. N." in view of the approaching election of Louis Napoleon. But this hypothesis leaves the inscription "Hoc vince" and the figure of Christ unexplained; derives one of the most important events in history from a mere accidental mistake, and substitutes a natural for a supernatural miracle, thus reminding us of the exploded exegesis of Paulus in his commentary on the Gospels and his Life of Jesus.

The theory of a prophetic dream, on the other hand, is free from any reasonable objection. It leaves a sufficient foundation of fact to save the character of Constantine and Eusebius from unnecessary reproach, and to account for the unquestionable results and the great change in the prospects of Christianity which followed the victory over Maxentius. It constitutes the main point, and the only point, of agreement between the different accounts of the famous event, and assumes additional support from the universal Christian and pagan belief of that age in the supernatural character of visions and dreams. Constantine and his friends referred the most important facts of his life, as the knowledge of the approach of hostile armies, the discovery of the Holy Sepulchre, the founding of Constantinople, to divine revelation through visions and dreams. Julian the Apostate was even more superstitious in this respect than his Christian uncle, and fully addicted to the whole neo-Platonic theory and superstition of omens, presages, prodigies, spectres, dreams, visions, auguries, and oracles. On his expedition against the Persians, he was supposed by Libanius to have been surrounded by a whole army of gods, which, however, in the view of Gregory of Nazianzen, was a host of demons. Licinius, Constantine's brother-in-law and rival, before the battle with Maximin, had a vision of an angel, who taught him a prayer for victory. Tertullian, Origen, and other Nicene and ante-Nicene Fathers attributed many conversions to nocturnal dreams

and visions. Nor was this mere superstition. The Bible itself sanctions the general theory of providential or prophetic dreams, through which divine revelations and admonitions are communicated to men. "I the Lord will make myself known in a vision, and will speak in a dream." Num. xii. 6. "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then he openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction." Job xxxiii. 15, 16. Compare, for actual facts, Gen. xxxi. 10, 24; xxxvii. 5; 1 Kings iii. 5; Dan. ii. 4, 36; vii. 1; Matt. i. 20; ii. 12, 13, 19, 22; Acts x. 17; xxii. 17, 18. We may also refer to a modern, somewhat similar, though far less important, vision in the life of the pious English Col. James Gardiner, as related by his distinguished friend Dr. Doddridge, who learned the facts from Gardiner himself, as Eusebius derived his account from the mouth of Constantine. When engaged, we are told, in serious meditation, on a Sabbath night in July, 1719, Gardiner "suddenly thought he saw an unusual blaze of light fall on the book while he was reading, which he at first imagined might have happened by some accident in the candle. But lifting up his eyes he apprehended, to his exteme amazement, that there was before him, as it were suspended in the air, a visible representation of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, surrounded with a glory; and was impressed as if a voice, or something equivalent to a voice, had come to him, to the effect: 'O sinner, did I suffer this for thee, and are these the returns?'" After this event he became, from a dissolute worldling, an earnest and godly man. But the whole apparition was probably, after all, merely an inward one. For the report adds, as to the voice: "Whether this was an audible voice, or *only a strong impression on his mind*, equally striking, he did not seem confident, though he judged it to be the former." He thought he was awake; but every body knows how easy it is towards midnight to fall into a doze over a dull or even a good book. It is very probable, then, that this apparition resolves itself into a significant dream, which marked an epoch in his life. No

reflecting person will, on that account, doubt the seriousness of Gardiner's conversion, which was amply proved by his whole subsequent life, even far more so than Constantine proved his.

To return to Constantine. The causes and antecedents of the victory over Maxentius in October, 312, may be resolved into the following facts. Before the battle the young captain, leaning already towards Christianity, according to his father's example, as being probably the best and most hopeful of the various religions of the empire, seriously sought in prayer, as he related to Eusebius, the assistance of the God of the Christians, while his heathen antagonist Maxentius, according to Zosimus, was consulting the sibylline books and offering sacrifice to the old idols. Filled with mingled fears and hopes about the issue of the conflict, he fell asleep, and saw in a dream the sign of the cross of Christ, with the significant inscription and promise of victory. Being already familiar with the general use of this sign among the numerous Christians of the empire, many of whom no doubt were in his own army, he ordered the sign of the cross to be put upon the shields of the soldiers (according to Lactantius), and also (according to Eusebius) the construction of the *labarum*, afterwards so called, that is, the sacred standard of the Christian cross, with the Greek monogram of Christ, or the letter  $\chi$  and  $P$  so written upon one another as to make the form of the cross, with or without the Alpha and Omega = *Christos* — the beginning and the end. The cross and the monogram had been in use long before, and the only thing new in this case was the application and the union of this Christian's symbol with the Roman military standard in the place of the Roman eagles.

To this cross-standard Constantine attributed the decisive victory over his heathen rival. Accordingly, after his triumphal entrance into Rome, he ordered the erection of his statue upon the forum with the *labarum* in his right hand, and the inscription beneath: "By this saving sign, the true

token of bravery (τούτω τῷ σωτηριώδει — *salutari*, not *singulari*, as Rufinus has it — σημείῳ, τῷ ἀληθινῷ ἐλέγχῳ τῆς ἀνδρίας), I have delivered your city from the yoke of the tyrant." Three years afterwards the senate erected to him a triumphal arch of marble, which to this day, within sight of the sublime ruins of the pagan Colosseum, indicates to every visitor of the "urbs aeterna" at once the downfall of heathenism and the decline of ancient art; as the neighboring arch of Titus commemorates the downfall of Judaism and the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, The inscription on this arch of Constantine, however, ascribes his victory, naturally enough, to his master mind and to the impulse of the Deity, "instinctui Divinitatis" — an ambiguous term, like "Providence," which veils Constantine's passage from paganism to Christianity; the Christian referring it to the true God, while a heathen, like the eulogist Nazarius, took it for the celestial guardian power of ancient Rome.

At all events the victory at the Milvian bridge was a military and political triumph of Christianity, but no more; the intellectual and moral victory having been already accomplished by the literature, life, and martyrdom of the Church during the three preceding centuries. The emblem of ignominy and oppression, of which Cicero once said (pro Raberio, c. s.): "Nomen ipsum *crucis* absit non modo a corpore civium Romanorum, sed etiam a cogitatione, oculis, auribus": now became the badge of honor and dominion, and was invested in the emperor's view, according to the spirit of the Church of his age, with a magic virtue. It now took the place of the eagle and other field-badges, under which the heathen Romans had conquered the world. It was stamped on the imperial coins, and on the standards, helmets, and shields of the soldiers. Above all military representations of the cross the original imperial *labarum* shone in the richest decorations of gold and gems; was intrusted to the truest and bravest fifty of the body guard, filled the Christians with the spirit of victory, and spread fear and terror among their enemies, until under the weak

successors of Theodosius II. it fell out of use, and was lodged as a venerable relic in the imperial palace of Constantinople.

This rising significance of the cross was a faithful symbol of the extraordinary change in the empire. The Graeco-Roman heathenism surrendered, after a three-hundred-years' struggle, to Christianity, and died of incurable consumption. The ruler of the civilized world laid his crown at the feet of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The successor of Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian, who had done their best to exterminate the pestilential sect, appeared a few years after the last and most bloody persecution in the imperial purple at the council of Nice as protector of this very sect; and took his golden throne at the nod of bishops, many of whom still bore the scars of persecution. The despised religion, which for three centuries, like its Founder in the days of his humiliation, had not where to lay its head, was raised to sovereign authority in the state; entered into the prerogatives of the pagan priesthood; grew rich and powerful; built countless churches and altars out of the stones of idol temples to the honor of Christ and his martyrs; employed the wisdom of Greece and Rome to vindicate the foolishness of the cross; exerted a moulding influence upon civil legislation; ruled the life of the people, and began to control the general course of civilization.

At first Constantine did not contemplate a full union of church and state. He pursued the policy of a wise and timely toleration, to which he substantially adhered to the close of his reign. Soon after the final victory over Maxentius, by which he became the sole ruler of the West, he issued from Milan, in January, 313, in connection with Licinius, his brother-in-law and co-ruler in the East, the famous edict of toleration still extant in Latin and Greek, which granted full liberty to all existing forms of worship, and removed the restrictions which the two previous edicts of toleration (of 311 and 312) had still put upon the Christian religion. He allowed every heathen subject to adopt

it with impunity. At the same time the church buildings and property confiscated in the Dioclesian persecution were ordered to be restored, and private-property owners to be indemnified from the imperial treasury.<sup>1</sup>

In this notable edict we must not look, indeed, for the modern Protestant and Anglo-American theory of religious liberty, as one of the universal and inalienable rights of man, like the liberty of thought and speech or the right to pursue happiness and to do good. Sundry voices, it is true, in the Christian church itself, at that time and before, in the period of persecution, declared clearly and firmly against all compulsion in matters of religion, and some passages of Tertullian and Lactantius on this subject sound as if they had been written by Vinet or Bunsen, or by an American divine of the nineteenth century. But the spirit of the Roman empire was too absolutistic to abandon the prerogative of a supervision of public worship altogether. The Constantinian toleration was simply a temporary measure of state

<sup>1</sup> *Haec ordinanda esse credimus, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem, quam quisque voluisset . . . . ut nulli omnino facultatem obnegandam putaremus, qui vel observationi Christianorum, vel ei religioni mentem suam dederet, quam ipse sibi aptissimam esse sentiret . . . . ut a motis omnibus omnino conditionibus [by which are meant, no doubt, the restrictions of toleration in the two former edicts], nunc libere ac simpliciter unusquisque eorum qui eandem observandae religioni Christianorum gerunt voluntatem, citra ullam inquietudinem et molestiam sui id ipsum observare contendat* — *Lact. De mort. persec. c. 48* (*Opera Lact. Vol. II. p. 282, ed. Fritzsche*). Eusebius gives the edict in a stiff and obscure Greek translation, with some variations, *H. E. X. 5. Comp. Nicephorus, H. E. VII. 41*. Also a special essay on the three edicts of toleration by Theod. Keim in the *Tübingen Theolog. Jahrbücher* for 1852. This edict does not go so far as some remarkable passages of Tertullian, Lactantius, and other ante-Nicene Fathers, who first, in midst of persecution, proclaimed the true principles of religious liberty. Compare the passages of Tertullian quoted in the writer's *General Church History. Vol. I. § 51*. Lactantius likewise, in the beginning of the fourth century, says. *Instit. div. l. v. c. 19* (*I. p. 267 sq., ed. Lips.*): *Non est opus vi et injuria, quia religio cogi non potest; verbis potius, quam verberibus res agenda est, ut sit voluntas. . . . Defendenda religio est, non occidendo, sed moriendo; non servitia, sed patientia; non scelere, sed fide . . . . Nam si sanguine, si tormentis, si malo religionem defendere velis, jam non defendetur illa, polluetur atque violabitur. Nihil est enim tam voluntarium, quam religio, in qua si animus sacrificantis aversus est, jam sublata, jam nulla est.* *Comp. c.*

policy, which, as indeed the edict of 313 expressly states the motive, promised the greatest security to the public peace and the protection of all divine and heavenly powers, for the emperor and his subjects. It was, as the result teaches, the easy and necessary transition to a new order of things. It opened the door for the elevation of Christianity to the same position which the old Roman idolatry had hitherto enjoyed in the empire. It was the first step towards the union of church and state.

Constantine thus was the first imperial representative of religious toleration, but at the same time also the first representative of state-church Christianity, or of that system which assumes all subjects to be Christians, connects civil and religious rights, and regards church and state as the two arms of one and the same divine government on earth. He did, indeed, not carry it out in full; he adhered upon the whole, as already observed, to the wise toleration policy proclaimed in the edict of 313, and abstained, with a few exceptions, from violent proceedings against idolatry. But he openly protected and favored Christianity after that time in his legislation and various public acts, and professed it at last in form by submitting to baptism on his death-bed. The system inaugurated by him was matured and carried out by his successors in the Byzantine empire. It then, under various modifications, prevailed during the whole mediaeval period of Christianity; it was re-enacted in the Calvinistic republic of Geneva and the various Protestant church establishments of the sixteenth century; it still reigns, nominally at least, all over Europe, and it flourished even in Puritan New England and in Episcopal Virginia down to the period of the American Revolution, or still later.

In judging of this system we should guard against those extreme and unjust views which men are apt to take in making their own individual or national point of view and preferences the measure and rule of all ages and stations.

The union of church and state as inaugurated by Constantine the Great was neither an unmixed blessing, nor a source of all evil and corruption of Christianity. It presents two aspects, which must be kept in view.

It was on the one hand an unavoidable political and social result of the preceding intellectual and moral triumph of Christianity over heathenism, and a just and well-deserved tribute of the secular power to the spiritual. The deadly hostility of these two powers was not natural; and had sooner or later to come to an end. For God ordained the state as well as the church; the one for the temporal, the other for the eternal, welfare of man. Nor was the Christian religion ever hostile to the state as such; it was only opposed to idolatry which controlled the heathen government, and with the overthrow of which the government itself assumed its natural and normal position towards the church, by granting to it not only toleration, but all the necessary rights of a legal corporation.

And this is a point on which our American separation of church and state essentially differs from the ante-Nicene separation. The latter implied a deadly opposition and bloody persecution of the state against the church; the former rests on a friendly recognition and peaceful co-operation. Our churches owe to Constantine and his age a large debt of gratitude in the enjoyment of rights which they justly claim as essential and inalienable.

The greatest American divine, Jonathan Edwards, acknowledged this in his *History of Redemption*, which was written, it is true, long before the separation of church and state in New England (A. D. 1739), but which gives nevertheless a more just estimate of that great event, than many modern popular writers, who ignorantly derive all corruptions of Christianity from the age of Constantine, as if there had been no corruptions before him, or in our American churches, and as if there was nothing but unmixed evil in the state-churches of Europe. Edwards ascribes to the rise and influence of Constantine the following salutary effects:

1. The Christian church was thereby wholly delivered from persecution ; 2. God now appeared to execute terrible judgments on his enemies ; 3. Heathenism now was in a great measure abolished throughout the Roman empire ; 4. the Christian church was brought into a state of great peace and prosperity. But he entirely overestimates that revolution when he calls it " the greatest which occurred since the flood," and adds, " Satan, the prince of darkness, that king and god of the heathen world, was cast out. The roaring lion was conquered by the Lamb of God in the strongest dominion he ever had. This was a remarkable accomplishment of Jerem. x. ii : ' The gods that have not made the heaven and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.' "

The union of church and state, moreover, freed the clergy from many onerous public burdens and military duties, from which the heathen priests, and even the Jewish elders, also, in part at least, physicians and rhetoricians, were exempt. It facilitated the support of a regular ministry. It gave the church the right to hold property and to receive legacies, and thus greatly enlarged her capacity for usefulness. It legalized the episcopal jurisdiction, and conferred on the clergy the right of intercession in behalf of prisoners, fugitives, and criminals. It gave to all sanctuaries the right of asylum, which the heathen temples and altars had always enjoyed. It recognized the sacred seasons of the Christians, and secured to them the undisturbed exercise of public worship. It made the Christian Sunday a civil institution, and thus facilitated its observance by the pious, and prevented, at least in great part, its public desecration by the wicked. It enabled Christianity to influence civil legislation, to infuse into it the spirit of justice and humanity, to elevate the condition of woman and the character of the family, to benefit the unfortunate, to ameliorate and finally to abolish slavery, to urge the prohibition of gladiatorial shows, and the reform or abolition of innumerable social evils. Thus the church's opportunity of usefulness was immeas-

urably enlarged. It now became a church of the people, and its field was the world and the history of the race.

But with these very advantages, which date in their beginnings from the age of Constantine, were closely connected certain dangers and temptations, which showed themselves simultaneously. The greatest and most general danger was the secularization of the church, which now took in the whole population of the empire, from the crowned Caesar to the meanest slave, and became mixed up with the world to an extent it never had been before. Discipline formerly so severe, now necessarily relaxed, although there still remained bishops like Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Synesius to exercise it in its primitive vigor, even against emperors and courtiers. The clergy with increasing wealth and power became indolent, arrogant, and hierarchical, especially the occupants of the metropolitan and patriarchal sees. Hypocrisy and vice crept into the rank of nominal Christians. The state intermeddled with all the affairs of the church, and the intrigues and caprices of the Byzantine court exerted an unhallowed influence even upon the most important controversies on Christian doctrine and duty. From that age date all the evils of Caesaropapism or Erastianism, which may be traced to the famous remark of Constantine at a convivial feast of bishops, that he too was a divinely constituted bishop, namely of the external affairs of the church (*ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτὸς τῆς ἐκκλησίας*), while they were the bishops of the internal affairs (*ἐπίσκοποι τῶν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*). Finally the union of church and state, being the union of the government to a particular ecclesiastical organization, the catholic hierarchy, was necessarily also a restriction of religious liberty, and a recognition of the right of persecution against all dissenting sects. A crime against the established church became a crime against the state and social order, and hence subject to civil as well as spiritual punishment. So early as the fourth century the dominant party, the orthodox as well as the heterodox, with help of the imperial authority, practised depositio

and banishment upon its opponents. It was but one step thence to the penalties of torture and death, which were ordained in the Middle Ages, and practised even down to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only in Roman Catholic but even in Protestant countries, as Geneva, Sweden, England, and New England, against religious dissenters of every kind, as enemies of the established order of things. Augustine, in his controversy with the Donatists, sanctioned the principle of forcible coercion and compulsion in matters of conscience, although his heart revolted against it and prompted him to say: *Non vincit nisi veritas; victoria veritatis est caritas.* Under Theodosius I. the theory of heretical persecution was incorporated in the legislation of the empire, and the first victims to it, who suffered death, were the Priscillianists, who were executed at Treves, A. D. 385, for their Manichean opinions and practices. Absolute freedom of religion and public worship is in fact logically impossible on the state-church system. It requires the separation of the spiritual and temporal power, or at least the relinquishment of the claim to exclusive catholicity on the side of the ruling ecclesiastical organization. Yet from the very beginning of ecclesiastico-political persecution, loud voices were raised against it, and in behalf of the rights of conscience, though the plea always came from the oppressed parties, so that the blood of martyrs became the seed of religious freedom.

All these dangers and evils of the union of church and state could, of course, not destroy, or even seriously impede, the vital force and influence of Christianity, which acted and reacted against them, and made them the occasion for solving new problems, producing new remedies, and opening new avenues of thought and action, and controlling the destinies of nations in the interest of truth, justice, and humanity.

The conquest of Christianity over paganism was seriously disputed during the short reign of

nephew of Constantine. Never was there a more systematic and vigorous effort made by any monarch to undo the results of a former reign. Whatever political and military power, wit, zeal, and untiring energy could accomplish, was done by Julian for the destruction of Christianity and for the restoration of heathenism. Constantine's work and policy were submitted to the severest test, but only to be crowned with the most complete vindication. If there ever was a complete failure in history, it was the reign of Julian. His attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, thrice repeated and thrice frustrated, is characteristic of the whole reign. It was truly "the baseless fabric of a vision, which left no wreck behind." It proved beyond the possibility of doubt that Constantine, with his plain, strong common sense, which was worth much more than the uncommon but perverted sense of his nephew, had rightly understood the signs of the times, and had acted in the interest of genuine progress. It is useless and impossible to swim against the mighty current of history. Failure and disgrace is the inevitable fate of a reactionist, who sins, not only against his age, but also against that almighty wisdom which rules the world, and rules it in the interest of Christianity. Paganism was gone, irretrievably gone, and all attempts to galvanize it into an artificial existence only brought out this fact more clearly and strongly. When Julian, after many preparations, appeared in great pomp and solemnity at the rededication of a temple of Apollo, near Antioch, the only representatives of old heathenism, to his great and just mortification, were a priest and an old woman, offering — a goose!

After the death of Julian, the line of Christian emperors was no more interrupted. His first successor, Jovian, restored to the Christians their rights, and proclaimed anew Constantine's policy of toleration. Under Theodosius severe laws were issued against sacrifices, but not vigorously executed. Occasionally emperors, bishops, and monks disgraced the cause of Christianity they professed, by acts of violence and injustice against the remains of

these instances were comparatively rare, and not to be compared for a moment with the fierce and bloody persecution to which the Christian religion had been subjected for three hundred years. Idolatry approached, with slow but sure strides, towards the grave, and would have perished in the Roman empire, if no law had been issued against it. It died of hopeless consumption, and was ingloriously buried in the confusion of the migration of nations and the ruins of the Western Roman empire. Already, before the close of the fourth century, it was officially called "paganismus," i. e. country or peasant religion, because it had nearly died out in the cities and civilized towns. Theodosius II. caused the last temple to be destroyed in 435. Justinian I., in 529, abolished the last intellectual nursery of heathenism, the Athenian school of seven philosophers, — the shades of the seven sages of ancient Greece! A significant coincidence and poetic fitness, like the diminutive resemblance of the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, to the founder of the empire. In the West a few lingering remains of idolatry continued towards the middle of the sixth century, but only in remote mountain districts, or in cruel habits and customs, as the gladiatorial shows. The northern barbarians labored as zealously for the destruction of idolatry as of the empire, and generally embraced Christianity with great promptness, from an instinctive sense that it would prove to them the mother of civilization and a source of countless blessings. Thus the conquered Romans gave laws to the conquering barbarians, as the conquered Greeks and Jews had given laws to the victorious Romans. Christianity conquered them all, and fell heir to the inheritance of the past.

The downfall of Graeco-Roman heathenism, the noblest and most powerful form of heathenism known in history, is a sublime tragedy which, with all abhorrence of idolatry, we cannot behold without a certain sad sympathy. When Christianity first appeared on earth, the Roman gods and eagles commanded the political and military power, wisdom, letters and arts of the entire civilized world and led them into

battle against the defenceless religion of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. After an unequal conflict of four or five hundred years, heathenism, with all its power and beauty, lay prostrate in the dust, without the hope of a resurrection. With the temporal support of the civil arm, it lost all vitality and energy, and had not even the courage of martyrdom, while the Christian church had furnished a countless army of martyrs and confessors, and Judaism, in spite of all persecution, continues to this day. Pagan Hellenism and Romanism died of internal self-dissolution, which no human power could arrest. Its last sign of life was the pitiful pleas for toleration in remembrance of ancient glories, raised by Libanius, Symmachus, and the New-Platonists, and their doleful complaint of the decay and approaching downfall of the empire. Its best elements took refuge in the church, or propagated themselves under new Christian names. The gods were dethroned; the oracles and prodigies were dumb; the sibylline books consigned to the flames; the smoke of sacrifices disappeared; the temples and altars were destroyed, or their ruins still stand as trophies of Christianity. Augustine could thus address the heathen of his day:<sup>1</sup> "Videtis simulacrorum templa partim sine reparatione collapsa, partim diruta, partim clausa, partim in usus alienos commutata; ipsaque simulacra, vel confringi, vel incendi, vel includi, vel destrui, atque ipsas hujus saeculi potestates, quae aliquando pro simulacris populum Christianum persequebantur, victas et domitas, non a repugnantibus, sed a morientibus Christianis, et contra eadem simulacra, pro quibus Christianos occidebant, impetus suos legesque vertisse, et imperii nobilissimi eminentissimum culmen ad sepulcrum piscatoris Petri submisso diademate supplicare."

Yet, although ancient Greece and Rome have perished for ever, the genius and spirit of classical culture and literature still remain.

It lives, first, in the natural heart of man, which is as much

<sup>1</sup> Epist. 232.

in need of a regeneration by the grace of God now as it was in ages past.

Then, the spirit of ancient heathenism lives in many idolatrous and superstitious rites of the Greek and Roman church, against which the genuine spirit of Christianity always protested, especially at the time of the Reformation, and will continue to protest, until every vestige of gross and refined idolatry shall be swept away, or be baptized not only with water, but with fire and the Holy Ghost.

Finally, the genius of Greece and Rome still lives in the immortal works of their poets, philosophers, historians, and orators, yet no more as an enemy, but as an ally of Christian theology and science. What is truly beautiful, true, and good can never perish. Classical literature once prepared the way for the introduction of Christianity in the order of intellectual culture and general civilization, and the Greek language became the most appropriate organ for the expression and propagation of the everlasting truths of the gospel. Henceforward the same literature was to serve as a weapon in the defence of the truth, and to prepare Christian scholars for a scientific comprehension of the Christian religion and all the higher branches of a Christian education. It became the rightful property of the church, like the Old Testament scriptures. The word of the apostle was here fulfilled: "All is yours." The ancient classics, relieved of the demoniac pressure of idolatry, have become servants of the only true God, once unknown to them, but now gloriously revealed. They now fulfil their highest mission as handmaids of religion and virtue. This is the noblest and most complete victory of Christianity, which converted its former foe into its permanent friend and ally.