

**Constantine the Great**  
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In the beginning of the tenth persecution, Dioclesian, being made emperor, took to him Maximian. These two, governing as emperors together, chose out two other Caesars under them, to wit, Galerius and Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great.

Thus then Dioclesian, reigning with Maximian, in the nineteenth year of his reign began his furious persecution against the Christians, whose reign after the same continued not long. For it pleased God to put such a snaffle in the tyrant's mouth, that within two years after, he caused both him and Maximian to give over their imperial function, and so remain not as emperors anymore, but as private persons.

They being now dispossessed, the imperial dominion remained with Constantius and Galerius, which two divided the whole monarchy between them: so that Galerius should govern the east countries, and Constantius the west parts. But Constantius, as a modest prince, refused Italy and Africa, contenting himself with France, Spain, and Britain, refusing the other kingdoms for the troublesome and difficult government of the same.

Galerius chose to him Maximian and Severus, as Caesars. Likewise Constantius took Constantine his son Caesar under him.

In the meantime, while Galerius with his two Caesars were in Asia, the Roman soldiers set up for their emperor Maxentius, the son of Maximian who had before deposed himself. Against whom Galerius the emperor of the East sent his son Severus, which Severus in the same voyage was slain of Maxentius; in whose place then Galerius took Licinius.

And these were the emperors and Caesars, who, succeeding after Dioclesian and Maximian, prosecuted the rest of that persecution, which Dioclesian and Maximian before began, during near the space of seven or eight years, which was to the year of our Lord 313; save only that Constantius, with his son Constantine, was no great doer therein, but rather a maintainer and supporter of the Christians.

Which Constantius was a prince, very excellent, civil, meek, gentle, liberal, and desirous to do good unto those that had any private authority under him. And as Cyrus once said, that he got treasure for himself when he made friends rich, even so it is said that Constantius would oftentimes say that it were better that his subjects had the public wealth than he to have it hoarded in his own treasure-house. Also he was by nature sufficed with a little, insomuch that he used to eat and drink in earthen vessels (which thing was counted in Agathocles the Sicilian a great commendation); and if at any time cause required to garnish his table, he would send for plate and other furniture to his friends. In consequence of which virtues ensued great peace and tranquility in all his provinces.

To these virtues he added a yet more worthy ornament, that is, devotion, love, and affection towards the Word of God. By which Word being guided, he neither levied any wars contrary to piety and Christian religion, neither aided he any others that did the same, neither destroyed he the churches, but commanded that the Christians should be preserved and defended, and kept safe from all contumelious injuries. And when in the

other jurisdictions of the empire the churches were molested with persecution, he alone gave license unto the Christians to live after their accustomed manner.

Constantius minding at a certain time to try what sincere and good Christians he had yet in his court, called together all his officers and servants, feigning himself to choose out such as would do sacrifice to devils, and that those only should dwell there and keep their offices; and that those who would refuse to do the same, should be thrust out and banished the court. At this appointment, all the courtiers divided themselves into companies: the emperor marked who were the constantest and godliest from the rest. And when some said they would willingly do sacrifice, others openly and boldly refused to do the same; then the emperor sharply rebuked those who were so ready to do sacrifice, and judged them as false traitors unto God, accounting them unworthy to be in his court, who were such traitors to God; and forthwith commanded that they only should be banished the same. But greatly he commended those who refused to do sacrifice, and confessed God; affirming that they only were worthy to be about a prince; forthwith commanding that thenceforth they should be the trusty counsellors and defenders both of his person and kingdom; saying thus much more, that they only were worthy to be in office, whom he might make account of as his assured friends, and that he meant to have them in more estimation than the substance he had in his treasury.

Constantius died in the third year of the persecution, in the year of our Lord 306, and was buried at York. After whom succeeded Constantine, as a second Moses sent and set up of God, to deliver His people out of their so miserable captivity into liberty most joyful.

He, Constantine, was the good and virtuous child of a good and virtuous father; born in Britain. His mother was named Helena, daughter of king Coilus. He was a most bountiful and gracious prince, having a desire to nourish learning and good arts, and did oftentimes use to read, write, and study himself. He had marvelous good success and prosperous achieving of all things he took in hand, which then was (and truly) supposed to proceed of this, for that he was so great a favourer of the Christian faith. Which faith when he had once embraced, he did ever after most devoutly and religiously reverence.

As touching his natural disposition and wit, he was very eloquent, a good philosopher, and in disputation sharp and ingenious. He was accustomed to say that an emperor ought to refuse no labour for the utility of the common-weal. An empire was given by the determinate purpose of God; and he to whom it was given, should so employ his diligence, as that he might be thought worthy of the same at the hands of the Giver.

It showed before how Maxentius, the son of Maximian, was set up at Rome by the praetorian soldiers to be emperor. Whereunto the senate, although they were not consenting, yet, for fear, they were not resisting. Maximian his father, who had before deprived himself, hearing of this, took hart again to resume his dignity, and labored to persuade Dioclesian to do the same: but when he could not move him thereunto, he repaireth to Rome, thinking to wrest the empire out of his son's hands. But when the soldiers would not suffer that, of a crafty purpose he flieth to Constantine in France, under pretence to complain of Maxentius his son, but in very deed to kill Constantine. That conspiracy being detected by Fausta, the daughter of Maximian, whom Constantine had married, Constantine through the grace of God was preserved, and Maximian retired back: in his flight he was apprehended, and put to death.

Maxentius all this while reigned at Rome with tyranny and wickedness intolerable, much like to another Pharaoh or Nero; for he slew the most part of his noblemen, and took from them their goods. And sometimes in his rage he would destroy great multitudes of the people of Rome by his soldiers. Also he left no mischievous nor lascivious act unattempted.

He was also much addicted to the art magical, which to execute he was more fit than for the imperial dignity. Often he would invoke devils in a secret manner, and by the answers of them he sought to repel the wars which he knew Constantine prepared against him. And to the end he might the better perpetrate his mischievous and wicked attempts, he feigned himself in the beginning of his reign to be a favourer of the Christians; and thinking to make the people of Rome his friends, he commended that they should cease from persecuting the Christians. He himself abstained from no contumelious vexation of them, till that he began at the last to show himself an open persecutor of them.

The citizens and senators of Rome being much grieved and oppressed by the grievous tyranny and unspeakable wickedness of Maxentius sent their complaints with letters unto Constantine, with much suit and most hearty petitions, desiring him to help and release their country and city of Rome; who, hearing and understanding their miserable and pitiful state, and grieved therewith not a little, first sendeth by letters to Maxentius, desiring and exhorting him to restrain his corrupt doings and great cruelty. But when no letters nor exhortations would prevail, at length, pitying the woeful case of the Romans, he gathered together his army in Britain and France, therewith to repress the violent rage of that tyrant.

Thus Constantine, sufficiently appointed with strength of men but especially with strength of God, entered his journey coming towards Italy, which was about the last year of the persecution, 313 A.D. Maxentius, understanding of the coming of Constantine, and trusting more to his devilish art of magic than to the good-will of his subjects, which he little deserved, durst not show himself out of the city, nor encounter him in the open field, but with privy garrisons laid wait for him by the way in sundry straits, as he should come; with whom Constantine had divers skirmishes, and by the power of the Lord did ever vanquish them and put them to flight.

Notwithstanding, Constantine yet was in no great comfort, but in great care and dread in his mind (approaching now near unto Rome) for the magical charms and sorceries of Maxentius, wherewith he had vanquished before Severus, sent by Galerius against him. Wherefore, being in great doubt and perplexity in himself, and revolving many things in his mind, what help he might have against the operations of his charming, Constantine, in his journey drawing toward the city, and casting up his eyes many times to heaven, in the south part, about the going down of the sun, saw a great brightness in heaven, appearing in the similitude of a cross, giving this inscription, *In hoc vince*, that is, "In this overcome."

Eusebius Pamphilus doth witness that he had heard the said Constantine himself oftentimes report, and also to swear this to be true and certain, which he did see with his own eyes in heaven, and also his soldiers about him. At the sight whereof when he was greatly astonished, and consulting with his men upon the meaning thereof, behold, in the night season in his sleep, Christ appeared to him with the sign of the same cross which he had seen before, bidding him to make the figuration thereof, and to carry it in his way before him, and so should he have the victory.

Wherein is to be noted, good reader, that this sign of the cross, and these letters added withal *In hoc vince*, was given to him of God, not to induce any superstitious worship or opinion of the cross, as though the cross itself had any such power or strength in it, to obtain victory; but only to bear the meaning of another thing, that is, to be an admonition to him to seek and inspire to the knowledge and faith of Him Who was crucified upon the cross, for the salvation of him and of all the world, and so to set forth the glory of His name.

The day following this vision, Constantine caused a cross after the same figuration to be made of gold and precious stone, and to be borne before him instead of his standard; and so with much hope of victory, and great confidence, as one armed from heaven, he speedeth himself toward his enemy. Against whom Maxentius, being constrained perforce to issue out of the city, sendeth all his power to join with him in the field beyond the river Tiber; where Maxentius, craftily breaking down the Bridge called 'Pons Milvius,' caused another deceitful bridge to be made of boats and wherries, being joined together and covered over with boards and planks, in manner of a bridge, thinking therewith to take Constantine as in a trap.

But herein came to pass, that which in the seventh Psalm is written. 'He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made; his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate:' which here in this Maxentius was rightly verified; for after the two hosts did meet, he, being not able to sustain the force of Constantine fighting under the cross of Christ against him, was put to such a flight, and driven to such an exigence, that, in retiring back upon the same bridge which he did lay for Constantine (for haste, thinking to get the city), he was overturned by the fall of his horse into the bottom of the flood; and there with the weight of his armour he was drowned: and his host drowned in the Red Sea. Pharaoh not unaptly seemeth to bear a propheticall figuration of this Maxentius.

For the children of Israel were in long thralldom and persecution in Egypt till the drowning of their last persecutor; so was this Maxentius the last persecutor in the Roman monarchy of the Christians; whom this Constantine, fighting under the cross of Christ did vanquish, setting the Christians at liberty; who before had been persecuted now three hundred years in Rome.

In histories we read of many victories and great conquests gotten, yet we never read, nor ever shall, of any victory so wholesome, so commodious, so opportune to mankind as this was; which made an end of so much bloodshed, and obtained so much liberty and life to the posterity of so many generations.

Constantine so established the peace of the Church, that for the space of a thousand years we read of no set persecution against the Christians, unto the time of John Wickliffe.

So happy, so glorious was this victory of Constantine, surnamed the Great. For the joy and gladness whereof, the citizens who had sent for him before, with exceeding triumph brought him into the city of Rome, where he was most honourably received, and celebrated the space of seven days together; having, moreover, in the market-place, his image set up, holding in his right hand the sign of the cross, with this inscription: 'With this wholesome sign, the true token of fortitude, I have rescued and delivered our city from the yoke of the tyrant.'

Constantine, with his fellow Licinius eftsoons set forth their general proclamation not constraining any man to any religion, but giving liberty to all men, both for the Christians to persist in their profession without any danger, and for other men freely to adjoin with them, whosoever pleased. Which thing was very well taken, and highly allowed of the Romans and all wise men.

I doubt not, good reader, but thou dost right well consider with thyself the marvelous working of God's mighty power; to see so many emperors confederate together against the Lord and Christ His anointed, who, having the subjection of the whole world under their dominion, did bend their whole might and devices to extirpate the name of Christ, and of all Christians. Wherein, if the power of man could have prevailed, what could they not do? or what could they do more than they did? If policy or devices could have served, what policy was there lacking? If torments or pains of death could have helped, what cruelty of torment by man could be invented which was not attempted? If laws, edicts, proclamations, written not only in tables, but engraven in brass, could have stood, all this was practiced against the weak Christians. And yet, notwithstanding, to see how no counsel can stand against the Lord, not how all these be gone, and yet Christ and his Church doth stand.

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