



Historians have segmented the history of mankind into nine “Big Eras”—periods that have seen significant changes in mankind’s relation to the cosmos and to each other. The year 300 marked the beginning of what historians call Big Era Five, which lasted until the start of the 16th century. This was a time when empire building nearly ended and, for a time, even reversed itself. Independent city-states, kingdoms, and empires began to appear in West Africa and the Americas. Early in the era the Roman Empire began to fade, and throughout the era it would eventually be fragmented into independent nations that resided primarily throughout Western Europe and Asia Minor.

As we saw in previous chapters, the anti-Christ philosophy of ecclesiastical hierarchy had begun to take root as early as the latter part of the first century. So-called “bishops” were installed as authoritarian personalities among the previously autonomous assemblies of believers in Jesus, and new assemblies, which would come to be called “churches,” would be established upon that foundational structure.

Until the fourth century, Christianity was an outcast religion among every society in which it found converts. At the start of the fourth century, however, it began to enjoy official recognition by the kingdom of Armenia, becoming the state religion in AD 301.

Older even than Roman Catholicism, today the Armenian Apostolic Church holds the distinction of being the world’s oldest national church as part of Oriental Orthodoxy. Oriental Orthodoxy is not to be confused with Eastern Orthodoxy which holds some distinct doctrines and affiliations primarily within Eastern European nations.

The departure from autonomy for independent assemblies does not diminish the legitimacy of those church’s claims to historical succession to the apostles of Jesus. All Christianity can lay that claim. But the penchant for hierarchical authority caused them to confuse historical succession with apostolic succession. That is, they claim that because their community was initially founded under the headship of “bishops” who had been trained

by other “bishops” in a continuous line back to the apostles, their legitimacy as the one true church should be recognized by all of Christianity. Nearly every church that can trace its roots to antiquity makes this claim.

But historical succession does not equate to apostolic succession. The departure from apostolic succession was realized during the second century with the general acceptance of “bishops” who enjoyed autocratic rule over the faithful; that autocratic rule grew into widespread acceptance during the third century. As we have seen, the various bishops gave primacy to the bishop at Rome, largely because of proximity to the central power of the empire.

As early as the second century the bishops began to actively move their adherents away from the idea that Gentile believers in Jesus were grafted into the faith of Abraham through the New Covenant that Jesus made with the houses of Judah and Israel (Jeremiah 33:33; Hebrews 8:8; Romans 1:1-25). They began to adopt pagan festivals in place of the Hebrew feasts, and convoluted Scripture to fit their desire to separate from their Hebrew roots. The Babylonian feast to Ishtar took the place of the Passover feast under the name “Easter.” The worship of the Sun god melded with worship of the Son of God with the false claim that Jesus rose on a Sunday morning. It became an excuse to replace the Sabbath with the so-called “Lord’s day” (See our special report, *Facts and Fallacies of the Resurrection*). By the time the fourth century came around, the churches had become so far removed from their biblical roots that they were easy prey for anti-Christ to lead into full-blown apostasy those who had escaped persecution.

Although Christians in Armenia found favor with their king, Christians throughout the Roman Empire were still suffering persecution. We can discern how assimilation into the world system such as happened in Armenia would work to anti-Christ’s advantage by eventually rendering Christians apathetic and even dismissive of biblical truth. Yet in the early fourth century anti-Christ’s primary method of attacking the true faith in Jesus remained persecution.

In AD 302, Emperor Diocletian began to purge his army and his court of Christians. One year later his co-emperor Galerius Valerius Maximus persuaded Diocletian to forbid Christians to worship in groups. His edict would result in thousands of Christians being put to death over the following ten years.

Diocletian's appetite for killing Christians was whetted further by four more edicts specifically aimed at destroying Christianity. Church buildings were destroyed, clergymen were arrested, and Christians were forced to make sacrifices to the Roman gods upon sentence of death.

One martyr was Agnes, a 12-year-old girl who had refused marriage in order to consecrate her virginity to God. She would become honored as the "patron saint" of virgins by a church that, even as it suffered for its faith, was gradually being undermined by anti-Christ to incorporate pagan beliefs and practices, but in the name of Christ. "Patron saints" were devised by the Roman church as an answer to the Roman pantheon of specific gods worshipped and petitioned for specific causes. This may be attributed somewhat to the penchant of converts to want to hang on to some of the comfortable traditions of the religions they ostensibly renounced in receiving Jesus as their Savior.

In 304, the bishop of Rome, Marcellinus, died after an eight-year reign as "pope." He would have no successor until 308.

Another well-known martyr was Catherine, a young woman of royal lineage. Upon making a public confession of the Gospel at a sacrificial feast ordered by Galerius, she was tortured on a spiked wheel, then beheaded.

Because the expansion of the Roman Empire demanded more oversight than one emperor could handle effectively, Diocletian had elevated Maximianus Herculus as co-emperor in AD 285. Diocletian administered affairs in the eastern regions of the empire while Herculus took charge of the western regions. In 293 the two mutually consented to expansion of the imperial college by appointing two Caesars, Constantius Chlorus and Galerius, thus forming the first Roman Tetrarchy (rule by four). Constantius as Caesar was responsible to Herculus as Augustus in the west, while Galerius was the Caesar responsible to Diocletian as Augustus in the east.

In 305 Diocletian and Herculus abdicated to retire, which allowed Constantius and Galerius to be elevated to the positions of Augusti. They in turn appointed two new Caesars—Severus in the east under Constantius, and Maximinus in the west under Galerius.

In October, 306, Herculus' son Maxentius was proclaimed emperor at Rome to the disapproval of Galerius. We will dispense with the political intrigue that ensued involving the Tetrarchy and Maxentius. The important thing is that Maxentius brought some comparative peace to Roman Christians. Yet it took two years for the alleged papal line of succession to be revived with the election of a cleric named only as Marcellus I.

Finding Christians in great confusion due to persecution, the destruction of their meeting places, and dissension as a result of many falling away because of the severe persecution, Marcellus divided the territorial administration of Rome's Christians into twenty-five districts and appointed over each a pastor or presbyter who would oversee the ritual aspects of the developing Roman

Catholic Church, including baptism, marriage, burial of the dead, and various celebrations, particularly those commemorating the deaths of martyrs.

Marcellus insisted that those who had lapsed from the faith (the *lapsi*) because of persecution must perform the prescribed penance in order to be reinstated to fellowship. This caused great dissension and even violence among the *lapsi*, many of whom were led by an apostate (unnamed by historians) who had evidently denied the faith even before the persecutions broke out.

Although Maxentius had scaled back the persecution of Christians to a great degree, he was, nevertheless, despotic. Perhaps to quell the dissension among Christians, he had Marcellus exiled sometime around the new year's beginning. Marcellus died shortly after, in January, 309, to be succeeded by Eusebius, whose reign as "pope" would also be brief—a mere four months.

The next few years saw a significant change in the political landscape of the Roman Empire. Of particular importance was the rise of Constantius' son Constantine, who initially was rejected as the successor to Diocletian in favor of Galerius. Serving in peril under Galerius in the east, Constantine appealed to his father to rescue him. Using subterfuge, Constantius convinced Galerius to give leave to Constantine, ostensibly to help in Constantius' campaign in Britain.

Succumbing to illness in 306, and aware of his impending death, Constantius declared his support for raising Constantine to the position of Augustus. The army, loyal to Constantius, put their support behind Constantine. Upon receiving Constantine's request for recognition as Augustus, Galerius became furious. His advisors cautioned him that refusal of Constantine's claim to the title would mean war. Galerius compromised, granting Constantine the title of "Caesar" instead, and giving the position of Augustus to Severus. Constantine accepted the lesser position knowing that it would cement his legitimacy, and he ruled Britain, Gaul and Spain at the head of one of the largest Roman armies.

In 310 Maximium rebelled against Constantine while the latter was engaged in combat against the Franks. Constantine drove Maximium to Massilia (Marseille) where he hoped to find asylum. He was captured by Constantine when the townspeople opened the gates to allow Constantine's army entrance. Constantine granted Maximium clemency but strongly urged him to commit suicide, which he did in July, 310, by hanging himself.

In 311, Galerius, in a final act before death, issued an edict ending the persecution of Christians and granting them tolerance in the Roman Empire. They were allowed to rebuild their places of worship and resume normal activities. That same year, the brief vacancy in the papal line of succession ended with the election of Miltiadea (aka Melchisedech), a native of Africa. He was given by the emperors the right to receive back all buildings and possessions that had been confiscated during the persecutions. This gave greater power to the "pope" to reorganize the ecclesiastical administration and religious life of Christians in the Roman Empire.

Meanwhile, the Tetrarchy was falling apart as the various members continued to conflict with each other. Ultimately it came to a showdown between Constantine and Maxentius—a battle that would have the most far-reaching effect on Christianity, lasting until the present day. And it will last until the Lord returns.

On October 28, 312, Constantine met Maxentius in battle at the Milvian Bridge. Maxentius, whose forces were twice those of Constantine, took his stand in front of the bridge that crossed the Tiber River en route to Rome. He mustered his army in long lines with their backs to the river. When Constantine's army arrived to battle they bore a strange symbol on their standards and shields—the letter *Chi* (X) traversed by *Rho* (P), the first two letters of the Greek spelling for *Cristos* (Christ).



CONSTANTINE'S LABARUM WITH THE "CHI-RHO" ABOVE

Constantine's victory was decisive, ending with Maxentius drowning in the Tiber from the press of his retreating troops.

Alternate histories have Constantine putting Maxentius to death the day after the battle, but the former account is held to be more authentic.

Eventually the Tetrarchy crumbled, leaving Constantine and Licinius as co-emperors of Rome. In 313 the two secured an alliance, with Licinius taking Constantine's half-sister Constantia as his wife. The two emperors enacted the Edict of Milan, granting full tolerance to all religions in the empire, including Christianity. The edict legalized Christianity as one of the official religions of the Roman Empire.

Ultimately, Constantine and Licinius would meet at the Battle of Cibalae, and Constantine would emerge victorious. At another conflict, the Battle of Mardia, in 317, the two agreed to a settlement in which Constantine's two sons, Crispus and Constantine II, would be made Caesars along with Licinius' son Licinianus.

The next several years saw Constantine and Licinius at constant odds, culminating in Constantine ultimately defeating Licinius at the Battle of Chrysopolis. Although Constantine promised to spare the lives of Licinius and his Caesar Marinianus if they surrendered, eventually he had them both put to death on the suspicion that Licinius had plotted against him. He also had Licinius' son, his nephew by his half-sister, put to death, thus solidifying his position as sole emperor.

Constantine's triumph over Licinius represented in the minds of many the defeat of the pagan and Greek-speaking East by the Christian and Latin-speaking Rome. To impress his authority

over both the east and west portions of the empire Constantine rebuilt the city of Byzantium and renamed it Constantinopolis ("Constantine's City"), or in English, Constantinople.

To understand anti-Christ's role in the rise of Constantine we must go back to Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge.

According to the Christian author Lactantius, Constantine experienced a dream on the eve of the battle. In the dream he was told to "mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers....By means of a slanted letter X with the top of its head bent round, he marked Christ on their shields."

This account is told differently by Eusebius who stated, "He saw with his own eyes in the heavens a trophy of the cross arising from the light of the sun, carrying the message, *In Hoc Signo Vinces* ("In this sign, you will conquer")."

Eusebius further states that Constantine had a dream the night after the battle, in which Christ appeared with the same sign, telling him to make a standard, the *labarum*, for his army, placing the "*Chi-Rho*" (or "*Khi-Rho*") symbol above.

Today the *Chi-Rho* is a universal sign in Christianity passed on by Roman Catholicism to represent Jesus Christ. But there is more to this ancient symbol than is understood by Christians. Long before Constantine, the *Chi-Rho* represented the Egyptian Pharaoh. An example are coins depicting the likeness of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222BC) which also bear the *Chi-Rho* (seen between the eagle's legs, below). This is attributed to the use of



COIN DEPICTING EGYPTIAN KING PTOLEMY III EUERGETES

the *Chi-Rho* to symbolize Horus, the Egyptian god of the Sky, god of War and god of Protection. The Pharaoh was believed to be the embodiment of Horus. Egyptologist and archaeologist W.M. Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) states:

The well-known Christian monogram (*khi-rho*) may be seen in course of gradual formation in Egypt—or possibly in course of alteration; but the *rho* is usually figured as an upright staff with the lock of Horus at the top, and not the letter *rho*. Essentially it is the sign of Horus, and only became Christian by adoption.¹

The *Rho* (X) portion of the symbol is often portrayed in later versions as two transoms at right angles. However, the more ancient versions have them at angles that represent the Celestial *Chi* formed by the solar ecliptic path and the celestial equator.

¹ W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Religion and Conscience in Ancient Egypt* (Norwich, GB; Jarrold and Sons, 1898) p. 24.

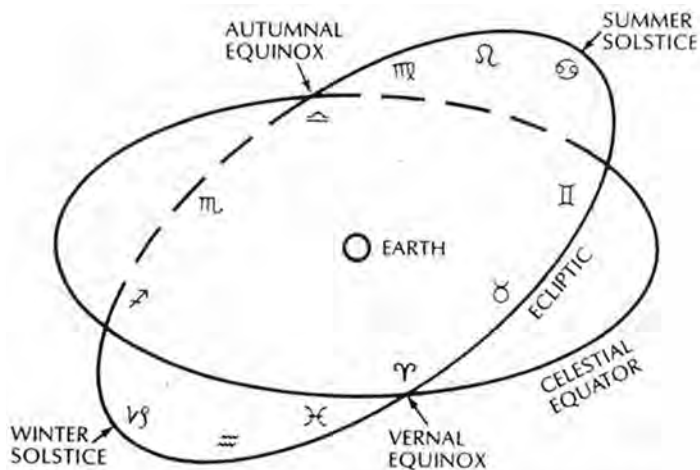


DIAGRAM OF ECLIPTIC AND CELESTIAL EQUATOR

The ancient mystery religions have been adopted from Babel by every empire, and all have centered on a god of primacy associated with the Sun. Constantine maintained his pagan loyalty to the Mithraic sun god Sol. His victory at Milvian Bridge under the sign of the “*Chi-Rho*” caused Christians to associate his victory with Jesus Christ by adopting the *Chi-Rho* symbol to represent the Lord. This tendency to convert pagan symbols and practices to Christianity grew through the centuries under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. This is not to disparage Catholics. Many Catholics love the Lord with limited understanding because of their church’s false teachings. They are victims of their religious institution no less than members of other religious cults. I would say this about many Catholic priests and nuns as well. Their church provides a sense of community and wellbeing that hides the spiritual deception.

The Roman Catholic Church cites the claims by Lactantius and Eusebius to lend legitimacy to Constantine’s role in establishing Christianity as the only true religion, and particularly to the papacy. Apart from these two conflicting accounts no one can state unequivocally that Constantine was given a vision or a dream by God. The truth is that Constantine’s mother Helena may have played a part in his alleged conversion rather than any “miraculous” sign from Heaven. Helena is variously described by historians as Constantius’ “wife,” “consort” or “concubine.” There is no definitive record of a legal marriage, but Jerome, the third-century Roman Catholic priest, theologian and historian, uses both “wife” and “concubine” in describing their relationship.

In any case, Helena is recognized as a Christian empress whose journeys to Palestine netted her some alleged relics of Jesus’ life, including the nails from His cross. It is believed that she had one of the nails placed in Constantine’s helmet and another in the bridle of his horse to provide miraculous advantage in his battles.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches’ usage of relics as miraculous talismans is no doubt traceable to Helena, if not as the originator of the practice, certainly as a major proponent. We see in the veneration of relics a Christianizing of the pagan practice of attributing magical (or, in this case,

alleged miraculous) power to inanimate objects (talismans). This has been one way in which anti-Christ has deluded Christians into thinking they can manipulate God or their church’s “saints” into granting their petitions. It is nothing more than magic dressed in Christian clothing—no different than today’s Christian television hucksters promising miraculous power in the trinkets they peddle for donations.

There is no doubt that Helena’s influence on her son caused him to look upon Christianity with some semblance of tolerance. But it was not until 337 when he was on his deathbed that Constantine consented to be baptized.

Although anti-Christ has never left off entirely the persecution of believers in Jesus, he has been wise in adopting other means to render the faith ineffective in its mission to witness for the Kingdom of God and salvation in Jesus Christ alone. The most effective means has been to introduce damnable heresies that nullify the Gospel while demeaning the stature of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the Word of God. In part, it was in response to heretical teachings rising within the assemblies that the consolidation of authority among bishops was established. It was believed that a more central authority could issue statements of faith to which all Christians should adhere in order to remain in the communion of the faith. It should be stated that this was done with all good intentions on the part of the developing ecclesiastical authority. There is no doubt they wished to keep the faith pure from such false teachings. Unfortunately, the very system they developed was in itself a false system of religion that would eventually produce its own set of false teachings.

By AD 325 the religious controversies had come to a head. The primary issue in question rested upon the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father. There had arisen disputes among Christians as to whether or not Jesus as the Son of God had existed from eternity with the Father. Prominent in the dispute was Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt, who emphasized the divinity of the Father as superior to that of the Son. Hearing a sermon by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, in which Alexander expounded on the similarity of the Son to the Father as God, Arius interpreted the teaching to be similar to Sabellianism (the belief that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different modes or aspects of one God rather than three distinct persons in the Godhead). Condemning Alexander’s oration, Arius declared, “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing.” In essence, Arianism teaches that Jesus was more than human but not fully divine.

The conflict pitted Arius against the teachings of the well-respected second-century theologian Origen whose teaching on the *Logos* theorized that the relation of the Son to the Father had no beginning. This question had been left unsettled from earlier times. The general consensus among the bishops was in favor of those who opposed the theological position of *homoousios* (of one substance)—the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity. On that basis, Arius found strength to argue his position.

From the time of the twelve apostles much Christian doctrine had been unsettled. Due to the influence of Jewish, pagan, Gnostic and Greek philosophy, converts to Christ brought with them different views of God, nature, Christ, the Holy Spirit, even the Body of Christ itself. The writings of the Hebrew prophets and the Lord's apostles were not available to the people at large, and were jealously guarded by a few of the bishops. Copies that circulated among the assemblies were held dear, but their influence in the everyday lives of believers was not as pronounced as the influence of the bishops over the assemblies who believed they were entrusted with the truth. However they interpreted the Scriptures was how their particular congregations understood the nature of these things. Often, bishops were novices to the faith themselves, having just escaped paganism. The influences of their past lives would certainly affect how they delineated truth from error, sometimes discerning error as truth.

Because the Arian controversy threatened the stability of the newly recognized church at Rome, Constantine called upon the bishops to once-and-for-all settle the issue. In 325 he took the unprecedented step of calling together in one council prelates from all parts of the Roman Empire. With the exception of Roman Britain, all sent one or more representatives. Arius himself attended with his bishop, Alexander. This would be the First Council of Nicaea, one of several councils that would come together over the succeeding centuries. Constantine presided over the Council and even led some of its discussions.

Twenty-two bishops, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, supported Arius, at least at first. The opposition was led by a young archdeacon named Athanasius. The debate raged for some two months, each side appealing to Scripture to support their positions. Arius insisted that the Son was a creature of God through whom God created everything else that exists in the cosmos. The opposition countered that the Father and the Son are of one essence, "consubstantial" and, thus, equal in nature.

Constantine ultimately influenced the majority of the bishops to agree upon a creed or statement of doctrine that should be adhered to by all the churches throughout the empire. The result was the Nicene Creed, which included the word *homoousios* to describe the nature of the Godhead. The purpose was to reconcile the Hebrew Scriptures' statement that YHWH is one YHWH with the apostles' writings that reveal Jesus as the Word of God who is God, and who created all things (John 1:1-14).

The Council as well established the doctrine of the Trinity, declaring that in addition to the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Godhead is also of the same essence and nature, yet distinct in personage. Prior to the writings of the apostles, the Jews knew of the Holy Spirit only from two references in the Tanakh: Psalms 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10-11.

Arius had taught that the Holy Spirit was a created being, while Athanasius claimed that the Holy Spirit is divine in the same manner as the Father and the Son. Yet while the Nicene Council supported Athanasius on the nature of Jesus, it did not delineate any doctrine on the nature of the Holy Spirit. The original Nicene Creed merely stated, "We believe in the Holy Spirit."

The Nicene Creed became the first definitive document that would separate Christians on the basis of a statement of faith created by an elite body of clergy.

Constantine then issued an edict pronouncing death to anyone in the empire who supported the teachings of Arius, part of which follows:

The great and victorious Constantine Augustus to the bishops and laity:

Since Arius is an imitator of the wicked and the ungodly, it is only right that he should suffer the same dishonor as they. Porphyry, who was hostile to anyone who feared God, composed a book which transgressed against our religion, and has found a suitable reward: namely that he has been disgraced from that time onward, his reputation is completely terrible, and his ungodly writings have been destroyed. In the same way it seems appropriate that Arius and those of like mind with Arius should from now on be called Porphyrians, so that their name is taken from those whose ways they have imitated.

In addition, if any writing composed by Arius should be found, it should be handed over to the flames, so that not only will the wickedness of his teaching be obliterated, but nothing will be left even to remind anyone of him. And I hereby make a public order, that if someone should be discovered to have hidden a writing composed by Arius, and not to have immediately brought it forward and destroyed it by fire, his penalty shall be death. As soon as he is discovered in this offense, he shall be submitted for capital punishment.²

As a result, there is a dearth of history remaining sympathetic to Arius. Constantine's condemnation was accepted by the bishops without controversy or objection, and anti-Christ's design to conjure bloodshed among Christians was inaugurated. As well, church historians have generally deemed Arius a heretic.

What the Council of Nicaea came down to was doctrine by majority vote. That doesn't necessarily mean the Council was in error in its conclusions. In truth, they got this one right. But the truth does not rest on the consensus of bishops. It rests on the Word of God. And God's Word does affirm Jesus as divine in His nature as the Word of God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into existence that has come into existence.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appeared in the darkness and the darkness did not understand it.

There was a man whose name was John, sent from God. He came as a witness so that he might testify concern-

² "Part of an edict against Arius and his followers," Fourth-Century Christianity, Wisconsin Lutheran College, <http://www.fourthcentury.com/index.php/urkunde-33>.

ing the light so that all men might believe through him. He was not the light, but that he might testify concerning the light. The true light was that who enlightens every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into existence through Him, and the world did not know Him.

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But to as many as received Him, He gave power to be the children of God—to those who believe in His name, who were born not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us (and we saw His glory—the glory of the only-begotten by the Father), full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

Arius' appeal to John 14:28—"the Father is greater than I"—missed the point that Jesus was merely iterating what He had said elsewhere, that He had come to earth to do the will of the Father. His affirmation as the Word of God incarnate clarifies His nature as divine. Arius' other proof text, Colossians 1:15, that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, also missed the mark. Had Arius (and others who deny the divinity of Jesus) read just a little further he would understand that this means Jesus was the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18)—the first among all creation to be resurrected.

Do any of the writings of the Hebrew prophets affirm that Jesus, as the Word of God, is of the same nature and essence as the Father? Isaiah 66:5-24 tells us that YHWH will come to rescue Jerusalem and to make an end of her enemies. Who will come but Jesus? Often the Word of God is described in the same terms as the resurrected Jesus, and He is called "YHWH."

YHWH is the name of God and His only-begotten Son. Just as my name is Dager, inherited from my father, so the Word of God's name is YHWH, inherited from His Father. He came out of the Father and therefore is of the same essence and nature as the Father—divine, God.

Just as we existed in Adam from the time he was created, so the Word existed in the Father from eternity. There is no beginning or end to either of them.

Yes, this is a great mystery, but who can understand fully the nature of God? The problem with doctrine by consensus is that it seeks to bring all men into subjection to a teaching without being able to say anything more than that it must be taken by "faith." Faith in what? Faith in the consensus, or faith in God Himself and in His Word rightly divided?

The problem with the bishops at Nicaea is that either they did not disagree with Constantine's edict of persecution to death of anyone holding or disseminating Arius' writings, or they did not have the moral fiber to resist it as an ungodly affront to the name of Jesus. In either case, they proved themselves unworthy to claim leading by the Holy Spirit. The great schisms, bloodshed and wrangling among the bishops fairly begged for the emperor's intervention. And the problems did not end with the First Council of Nicaea. They begged for more and more councils to bring about some semblance of unity. But unity procured by the flesh cannot stand unless it imposes itself unfavorably upon those

who do not see eye-to-eye with the power of the state religion, in this case, the church in Rome influenced heavily by a pagan/quasi-Christian Constantine.

There were many church councils held during the fourth century. Besides the First Council of Nicaea, the next most important was the Council of Constantinople called by Constantine's successor Theodosius I in 381. The topics under discussion were: Apollinarism (Jesus had a human body and lower soul, but a divine mind); Sabellianism, the nature of the Holy Spirit, and, again, Arianism. Out of this council came a revision of the Nicene Creed, called "The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed."

Although the personhood and divinity of the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinitarian Godhead was held by many of the bishops prior to the Council of Constantinople, it was here that this doctrine was first formalized in the Creed. The words were changed from [We believe in...] "the Holy Ghost" to [We believe in...] "the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."

This doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is central to orthodox Christianity, but has been disputed throughout the centuries, particularly by certain sects that believe in the Oneness doctrine, which leans somewhat toward modalism. Just as the two principles in the debate over the nature of Christ were Arius and Athanasius, the same two led the debate over the nature of the Holy Spirit. Arius argued that the Holy Spirit is a "creature," and "angel." Athanasius countered that the Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes such as the ability to sanctify, is immutable and transcendent above creation, actually being involved in the creation. And just as Athanasius' position won the day at the First Council of Nicaea, it was adopted by the bishops at Constantinople.

Today there are many who dispute the idea of the Holy Spirit being a person; he is spoken of as the "active force" of God, something like energy that emanates from the Father. This is most common among Jehovah's Witnesses, but is also held by some who believe Jesus is the Word of God incarnate (which the Jehovah's Witnesses deny) and trust in Him for their salvation.

This is a topic of study that requires and deserves its own attention, and with which we do not have the space to address adequately here. The issue is not the need to separate on the basis of false teachings; the issue is whether or not love forms the basis for that separation. There must always be a desire to receive back those who are found in serious error that threatens the purity of the faith. Certainly there is no excuse for violence against those with whom we find disagreement. The violence of Roman Catholicism toward those it has considered heretics testifies to the ungodly nature of its hierarchy.

Our concern is the anti-Christ's means of causing dissension among believers in Jesus, even to the point of bloodshed, which he has been able to accomplish to great degrees over the centuries since the bishops gave their allegiance to Constantine, largely because of his claim of conversion and the mythic proportions of his conquests under the sign of the "*Chi-Rho*."

The mists of antiquity leave a lot of unanswered questions which pious Catholics and Orthodox Christians claim require faith to answer. So it is left to believers in Jesus to ascertain by Scripture, and whatever history does confirm, whether or not Constantine's vision and/or dream was from God (if in fact such a vision/dream did occur).

Would the true God or His Son give such a vision or dream to Constantine, ordering him to go out and slay his enemies in the name of Christ? First, let us consider what Scripture has to say:

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again and called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered him, "Do you say this by yourself, or did others say it about Me to you?"

Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your nation and the chief priests delivered You to me. What did You do?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world My servants would fight so that I would not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:33-36)

It may be argued that, yes, at that time Jesus denied that the world is His kingdom. But that was just so He might go to the cross. But, then, was Jesus lying?

Perhaps, then, the world became His kingdom when He rose from the grave and ascended into Heaven? Well, His teachings indicate that His disciples were to look forward to eating and drinking with Him in His Kingdom after the resurrection of the saints:

And He said to them, "The kings of the nations exercise lordship over them, and they who exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so, but he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who is chief, as he who serves. For which is greater, he who sits at the meal, or he who serves? Is not He who sits at the meal? But I am among you as He who serves. You are they who have continued with Me in My trials. And I appoint a kingdom to you, as My Father has appointed to Me, so that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:25-30)

No one is sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel at this time, nor have they since Jesus uttered these words.

There is nothing in Scripture to allow for anyone to wage warfare in the name of Jesus. His Kingdom is a heavenly Kingdom that will not be established over the nations until He returns:

And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in Heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

This is yet future, the context being the return of the Lord to the earth. In the meantime, Satan remains the god of this world to test the hearts of men (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan has the world's kingdoms in his hands to do with as he wills until the end of this age:

And taking Him up into a high mountain, the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give all this jurisdiction and their glory to You because it is given to me, and I give it to whomever I will. Therefore, if You will worship me, all shall be Yours." (Luke 4:5-7)

The Lord did not reply, "The kingdoms of the world have not been given to you; they are Mine." He merely replied, "Get behind Me, Satan, for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'"

The apostle Paul further reminds us that our warfare is not in the flesh but in the spirit (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The context is spiritual warfare, the only discipline being within the Body of Christ to maintain the truth. And even that discipline can go no further than expulsion from the assembly at the worst.

With these truths in mind, we determine that if Constantine was given a vision commanding him to conquer armies, then that vision was from Satan, not from God. It follows, then, that his influence in building a religious institution that would seek dominion over the earth must be of Satan as well.

But would Satan give a vision in the name of Christ?

The answer is unequivocally yes. How many false belief systems operate today in the name of Christ Jesus? We are warned by God's Word:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also are transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:12-15)

Ministers of righteousness. Satan's emissaries pose as righteous men, preaching holiness and conformity to the Law (contrary to the teachings of the apostles). What they say sounds good, pious and reasonable. But Jesus said:

"Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and in Your name have cast out devils, and in Your name done many wonderful works?'

"And then I will say to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work iniquity.'" (Matt 7:22-23)

Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks upon the heart. And God's Word is the only litmus on which we may make judgments regarding spiritual matters.

Anti-Christ used Constantine's victory to establish the basis for the Roman church to declare itself the Kingdom of God on earth, justifying dominion over the nations and trying to rule

them with a rod of iron. It is the first attempt at dominion theology, and was carried into Reformed Theology with many of the Reformers.

Constantine's victory was of God, yes. All authority on this earth is given by God (Romans 13:1-2). But not all authority is godly; in truth, the vast majority of authority is ungodly. And that applies to religious authority as much as it does to secular authority; perhaps even more so. When religious authority and secular authority are held in the same hands, that authority is all the more ungodly as evidenced throughout history. The fruit of Constantine's religious conversion has been fertilized with the blood of martyrs as well as the blood of Jews and other unbelievers who have throughout the centuries refused to bow to papal authority.

Although Constantine did elevate Christianity to preferred status within the Roman Empire, he not only tolerated all other pagan religions (which, as emperor, he saw as his duty), but he continued to honor those religions in various ways. Acquiescing to the bishops' desire to establish Christianity's own traditions above its Hebrew roots, Constantine consented to establish Sunday as the day of worship for the empire. But he did this not in the name of Jesus who was erroneously believed to have risen on Sunday, but in deference to the Roman Sun god. His decree stated:

On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for grain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.

Sol Invictus ("Unconquered Sun" or "Invincible Sun") was the name of the Roman Sun god, an official cult established in AD 274 by Aurelian. The term *Invictus* (unconquered) was an appellation bestowed upon certain deities within the Roman Empire (e.g., *Mars Invictus*; *Jupiter Invictus*; *Mithras Invictus*, etc.). It was especially associated with solar deities. The earliest known use of *Sol Invictus* was in AD 158. So Constantine's decree was an attempt to associate *Sol Invictus* with Jesus' resurrection by declaring Sunday the official day of worship for the Roman Empire regardless which religion one ascribed to.

His veneration of Sol played a role when Constantine erected his triumphal arch in Rome. He made sure that it aligned with the colossal statue of Sol which stood by the Colosseum, allowing Sol to form the dominant backdrop when traveling along the direction of the main approach to the arch.

In truth, he clearly had one foot in the Roman church and the other in the pagan world. While commissioning the building of the first Basilica of St. Peter, begun ca. 326-333, Constantine had the architects orient the apse containing the altar to face west so that the rising sun would shine in through the doors at the east. Thus *Sol Invictus* would play a part in the Roman mass. Pagan sun-worship symbolism in the mass has since evolved even more with the disc-shaped Communion wafer and the mon-

strance used to hold it after being consecrated by a Roman Catholic priest. The corruption of the faith by anti-Christ was effected greatly by the creation of Constantine's pagan-Christian hybrid religion.

Constantine's decree establishing Sun-Day as the day for Romans to worship their gods pandered to the pagan-influenced Christian bishops at Rome who melded Roman mythology with Christianity. The influence of Sol in Roman Catholicism is easily discerned in the use of the monstrance to house the "sacred host" or wafer shaped like the sun, which has since become known as the Eucharist (Latin: *eucharistia*, "thankful") and believed to be the actual body of Jesus, transubstantiated from bread by a priest's incantations (although the official doctrine of transubstantiation was not proclaimed *ex cathedra* until 1215).

Upon the death of Constantine in 337 the Roman Empire began a slow but steady decline. All the emperors after Constantine professed Christianity except for Julian who reigned from December, 361 until June, 363. Known as Julian the Apostate because of his rejection of Christianity, in his short tenure he attempted to combat much corruption within the government that had grown under the alleged "Christian" emperors who preceded him. Those who followed him, though professing Christianity, were generally corrupt.

Upon the death of Emperor Jovian a triarchy was established beginning with joint rule by Valentinian I and his brother Valens in 364, who were joined by Valentinian's son Gratian in 367. After Valentinian's death, his son Valentinian II was proclaimed emperor by the Pannonian army, and accepted as co-Augustus for the west by Gratian. Upon the death of Valens, Theodosius I was elevated to co-Augustus and reigned with Gratian and Valentinian II.

Eventually the influence of the Christian bishops became such that on February 27, 380, the Edict of Thessalonica was delivered by the three emperors, making Christianity the official state religion:

EMPERORS GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN AND THEODOSIUS AUGUSTI

EDICT TO THE PEOPLE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue to profess that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition, and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the

name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict.

GIVEN IN THESSALONICA ON THE THIRD DAY
FROM THE CALENDAS OF MARCH, DURING THE
FIFTH CONSULATE OF GRATIAN AUGUSTUS
AND FIRST OF THEODOSIUS AUGUSTUS

This is the origin of the English word “church” to signify the institutions into which Christians in the Roman Empire would be channeled. It is not a correct translation of the Greek *ecclesia* found in Scripture.

The objective of the Edict was not so much to compel pagans to become Christians as it was to force all Christians under penalty of death to adhere to Nicene Christianity. In a short time, however, the power of the bishops was such that pagans were also persecuted. Their homes and places of worship were destroyed, and many were coerced into accepting Christianity and the rule of the bishops over their lives. The emperors, wishing to placate the growing strength of Roman Christianity did little to quell the persecutions.

During the fourth century we see a four-pronged attack by anti-Christ against true believers in Jesus. The first prong of attack was through persecution by the enemies of the Gospel. The second prong came through the fomenting of division through the introduction of false teachings, necessitating the defense of truth through a hierarchical system of bishops. The third prong was the melding of the faith with secular government through Constantine and his successors. The fourth prong was the elevating of the “church” to the status of state religion, allowing for the implantation of creeds to which all believers must adhere or suffer consequences, even unto death.

In all cases anti-Christ impresses his standing as god of this world upon the humble pilgrims who trod the earth as aliens.

Anti-Christ’s four-pronged attack against the faith seemed to be working well. The more believers were persecuted, the more they sought organizational strength to resist and maintain their faith. Yet persecution did cause much of the Roman populace to sympathize with Christians, causing them to accept Christians as equals, and contributing to many conversions, even within the royal palace. But this also caused power struggles that often resulted in bloodshed. The organizational strength granted by the emperors would prove to be a greater undoing to the purity of the faith than persecution could ever be.

Yet even in the midst of this great apostasy there remained a remnant of believers scattered throughout the world, living humbly and often in secret to avoid the wrath of the wealthy papacy that was developing, and would develop as the central power throughout the Roman Empire. That remnant has always been fodder for anti-Christ’s desire to purge the earth of God’s glory.

That, of course, will never happen.