

Emperor Diocletian



The last great persecution of Catholic Christians was conducted under the rule of the Emperor Diocletian. In AD 303 Diocletian issued an edict that all Christians must comply with Roman religious practices and offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods of the Roman Empire. The edict decreed: "tear down the churches to the foundations and destroy the Sacred Scriptures by fire." The edict also ordered that bishops, priests and deacons and lay people should be imprisoned, tortured and compelled by every means to offer a sacrifice to the emperor.

In his *History of the Church*, Eusebius writing in AD 330 tells us about this great persecution:

"Some of them, after scrapings and racking's and severest scourging's, and numberless other kinds of tortures, terrible even to hear of, were committed to the flames; some were drowned in the sea; some offered their heads bravely to those who cut them off; some died under their tortures, and others perished with hunger. And yet others were crucified; some according to the method commonly employed for malefactors; others yet more cruelly, being nailed to the cross with their heads downward, and being kept alive until they perished on the cross with hunger.....some were scraped over the entire body with shells instead of hooks until they died. Women were bound by one foot and raised aloft in the air by machines, and with their bodies altogether bare and uncovered, presented to all beholders this most shameful, cruel, and inhuman spectacle.....Others being bound to the branches and trunks of trees perished. For they drew the stoutest branches together with machines, and bound the limbs of the martyrs to them; and then, allowing the branches to assume their natural position, they tore asunder instantly their limbsSome, raised on high by the feet, with their heads down, while a gentle fire burned beneath them, were suffocated by the smoke which arose from the burning wood, as was done in Mesopotamia. Others were mutilated by cutting off their noses and ears and hands, and cutting to pieces the other members and parts of their bodies, as in Alexandria..... those in Antioch who were roasted on grates, not so as to kill them, but so as to subject them to a lingering punishment.....it was impossible to tell the incalculable number of those whose right eyes had first been cut out with the sword, and then had been cauterized with fire; or who had been disabled in the left foot by burning the joints, and afterward condemned to the provincial copper mines..... In these conflicts the noble martyrs of Christ shone illustrious over the entire world, and everywhere astonished those who beheld their manliness; and the evidences of the truly divine and unspeakable power of our Savior were made manifest through them. To mention each by name would be a long task, if not indeed impossible." *Book VIII Chapter 8-12*

“CONQUER BY THIS”



In AD 312 the pagan Emperor Constantine and his army of 20,000 men were preparing for battle against the 100,000 man army of his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge near Rome. Constantine told the historian Eusebius what he saw. Eusebius writes:

“He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS. At this he was struck with amazement and his whole army which followed him on this expedition witnessed the miracle”

That night, Christ appeared to the Roman emperor in a dream and told him to make a replica of the sign he had seen in the sky. Seeing this as a divine sign, he had his soldiers paint the Greek symbol of Christ on their shields.

This symbol is known as the Chi Rho. It is formed by superimposing the first two letters chi and rho (XP) of the Greek word "ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ" =*Christ*.



Constantine’s military standard consisted of a flag suspended from the crossbar of a cross to symbolize the crucifixion of Christ. With this symbol Constantine defeated his enemies and he attributed his victories to the Christian God.



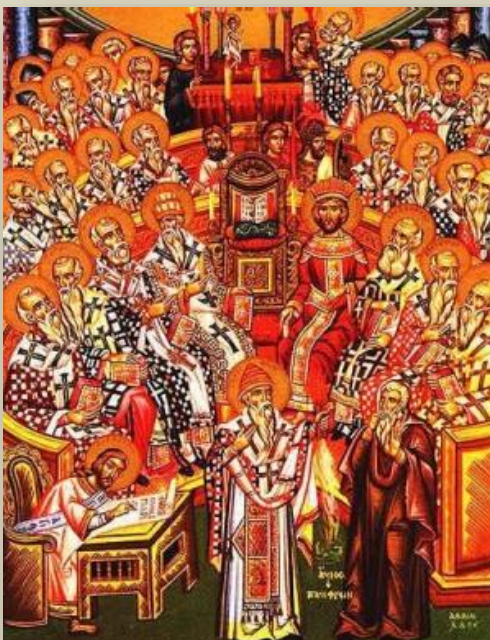
Constantine's acceptance of Christianity was a turning point for the Catholic Church. He ended the persecution of the Catholic Church by the Romans with the Edict of Milan in AD 313

The Edict of Milan established religious tolerance of *all religions*. The edict reads:

"And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the **observance of the Christian religion**, or that religion **which he should think best for himself**, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence."

Constantine supported the Church financially and had an extraordinary number of churches built, granted an exemption from certain taxes to clergy and he promoted Christians to high-ranking offices. He returned property confiscated during the Great Persecution of Diocletian and endowed the church with land and other wealth.

Council of



During his reign as Emperor a teaching from a priest named Arius infected the Church. This heresy was called Arianism and it denied the Divinity of Christ. It denied that the Son is of one essence, nature, or substance with God; He is not consubstantial with the Father, and therefore not like Him, or equal in dignity, or co-eternal. In AD 320 Saint Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, convoked a council at Alexandria where more than one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya condemned the teachings of Arius.

In AD 325 the first ecumenical council of the Catholic Church was called for by the Emperor Constantine to address the heresy. 318 bishops from all over the world and two legates representing the aging Pope Sylvester convened the Council of Nicaea. The result of the Council was the Nicene Creed.

Arianism and a heresy denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit continued to flourish and therefore the Council of Constantinople was called in AD 381. It is from this Council that we get the final version of the Nicene Creed that is still said today in the Catholic Mass.

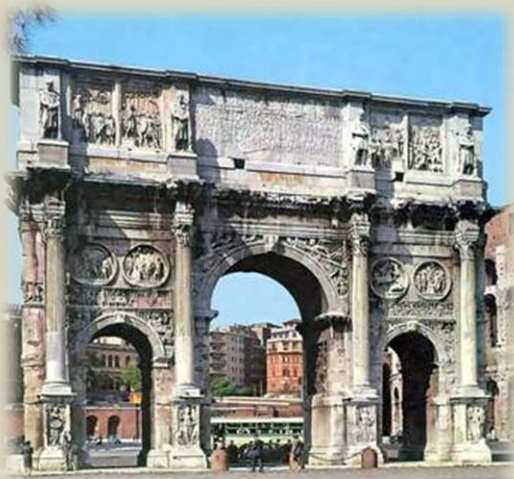
To identify any Arians that might be attending Mass it was required for every Catholic to recite the following creed:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. God of God light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven. And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary and was made man; was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried; and the third day rose again according to the Scriptures. And ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, and shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose Kingdom there shall be no end. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is to be adored and glorified, who spoke by the Prophets. I believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen."



Saint Constantine

Constantine was baptized into the Catholic Church in AD 337 as he approached death. His feast day is celebrated in the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church as well as the Orthodox Church on May 21.



The Arch of Constantine

The arch was erected by the Roman Senate in 315 to commemorate Constantine's victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge on October 28, 312 and it can be seen in the city of Rome.

Emperor Constantine the Great



You may hear from non-Catholics the false belief that the Catholic Church was founded in AD 313 by the Emperor Constantine. In his book *Catholicism and Christianity* Protestant Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart writes:

“Catholicism is basically a Roman institution. It arose from the ruins of the “Holy” Roman Empire.....It brought itself to power through the glory of Rome and the name of Christ, by force and deception it has maintained that power.....sadly many persons today are held captive by this religiopolitical power, which has not only has been responsible for the deaths of millions of martyrs over the centuries but is even now responsible for damning the deceived souls of multitudinous millions.”

Protestant Dave Hunt writes in his book *A Woman Rides the Beast* with the coming of Constantine the stage was set “for an apostasy that would envelop Christendom for more than a millennium. Christ’s bride had been wedded to paganism.”

Saint Helena



Constantine’s mother is known to Catholics as Saint Helena.

Helena erected two Churches, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem.

Saint Helena also found the True Cross and the tomb of Jesus. Her son Constantine ordered the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over the tomb of Jesus.



Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem built by Constantine

Protestant Objection: Constantine started the Catholic Church

Catholic Answer: The Catholic Church existed almost 300 years before Constantine. Constantine ended the persecution of the Catholic Church which allowed the Church to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

Protestant Objection: Constantine introduced paganism into the Catholic Church.

Catholic Answer: The Church that existed before Constantine was the same Church that existed after Constantine. Thirty years after the death of Constantine in 337, the Emperor Julian the Apostate rejected Christianity. He wanted to rebuild pagan temples and bring back animal sacrifices. If the Catholic Church had introduced paganism into her worship why would Julian leave the Catholic Church to rebuild pagan temples?

The Edict of Milan allowed paganism to continue. If paganism entered into the Church why would the Edict treat them as separate religions?

Protestant Objection: Constantine called for the Council of Nicaea.

Catholic Answer: At that time Constantine was the only one with the power to call a Council. The Church was subjected to the Roman Emperor. Constantine called for the Council paying the cost of every representative coming to Nicaea.

Protestant Objection: Constantine had his second wife, his son and his son-in-law executed after his conversion. How can he be called Constantine the Great? How can he be a saint?

Catholic Answer: Constantine's conversion took [several decades](#). It wasn't until the end of his life that he became a Christian when he was baptized where according to scripture all his sins were forgiven. (Acts 3:28)

We know from the historian Eusebius that towards the end of his life Constantine read the bible and prayed every day. Eusebius tells us, "at a fixed hour he shut himself up in the most secluded part of the palace, as if to assist at the Sacred Mysteries, and there commune with God alone ardently beseeching Him, on bended knees, for his necessities".

"As a catechumen he was not permitted to assist at the sacred Eucharistic mysteries. He remained a catechumen to the end of his life but not because he lacked conviction or because, owing to his passionate disposition, he desired to lead a pagan life. He obeyed as strictly as possible the precepts of Christianity, observing especially the virtue of chastity, which his parents had impressed upon him; he respected celibacy, freed it from legal disadvantages, sought to elevate morality, and punished with great severity the offenses against morals which the pagan worship had encouraged. He brought up his children as Christians. Thus his life became more and more Christian, and thus gradually turned away from the feeble syncretism which at times he seemed to favor." *Catholic Encyclopedia*

Here is a video by Catholic apologist Jimmy Akin on Constantine.

Click [HERE](#)

Additional resources:

Books: *Triumph: The Power and Glory of the Catholic Church* by H.W. Crocker

Next topic: Do Catholics worship statues as some non-Catholics claim?