

**Constantine the Great**

## 1. Augustine on Constantine

In the fourth and fifth books of *De civitate dei*, Augustine deals with the question on what grounds one may call Roman emperors happy, *felices*. In the penultimate capita of the fifth book, which was published with the fourth at the end of 415, he gives the following extensive argument, which culminates in the image he had formed of Constantine the Great, and which at the same time expresses a profound problem in world history. Augustine writes (*De civitate dei* V 24, 25):

"We do not call certain Christian emperors *felices* because they reigned long or died quietly, leaving the government to their sons<sup>2</sup>, or subdued the enemies of the commonwealth, or subdued and subdued internal enemies who rose up against them. These and other favors and consolations in this difficult life have also been experienced by some servants of idols, who do not belong to the kingdom of God like the former; and this has happened through the mercy of the same God, to make sure that those who believe in Him would not desire those things from Him as the highest good. But we call them *felices* if they rule justly."

Augustine continues: "if under the words of those who honor them very highly, and the obeisances of those who greet them humbly, they do not exalt themselves (exceedingly), but consider that they are (only) men; if they use their power in the service of the majesty of God to exalt His worship as highly as possible; if they fear, love, and honor God; if they love that kingdom most where they have no rivals to fear; if they are slow to punish, and easy to forgive; if they use their power of punishment (only) where it is necessary for the government and protection of the commonwealth, not to gratify their anger against enemies, and if they use that

forgiveness not for impunity for evil, but in the hope of amendment; if they meet the severe decrees, which they are often forced to make, with compassion and charity; if they abstain from luxury as it is more easily attainable to them; if they prefer to subdue (their own) evil desires than other peoples, and if they do all this not from their burning desire for vain glory, but from love of eternal *felicitas*; if they do

not fail to offer to God for their sins the sacrifice of humility, submission, and prayer. Such Christian emperors we call *felices*, for the time being in hope, later in reality, when what we expect shall have come. (25) "For the good God, in order that men who believe that they must worship Him for eternal life, should not think that no one can obtain these earthly favors and kingdoms except by praying to idols - since

these spirits have great power in such things - (the good God) has filled the emperor Constantine, who did not pray to idols but honored Him, the true God, with so many earthly gifts as no one would dare ask. He has allowed him to found a *civitas* next to the Roman empire as a daughter of Rome, but without any temple or image of the demons. He has reigned for a long time, as the only *Augustus* he has held and defended

the entire Roman world; in organizing and waging wars he has won the greatest victories, in suppressing tyrants (usurpers) he has been successful in all respects; in old age he died from illness and old age, leaving his sons as emperors. But again, in order that no emperor should be a Christian in order to obtain the *felicitas* of Constantine, since every one for the sake of eternal life must be a Christian, (God) took away Jovian much more quickly than Julian (Apostata); and suffered Gratian to be

killed by the tyrannical sword, though much more gently than the great Pompey, who worshipped the so-called Roman gods. For Pompey could not be avenged by Cato, to whom he had, so to speak, bequeathed the civil war as a legacy. Yet Gratian, although pious souls do not ask for such consolations, was avenged by Theodosius, whom he had taken into his government as a partner, although he had a little brother, because he preferred a faithful ally to too great a (domestic) power".

The last chapter of the fifth book is then devoted to Theodosius as a Christian emperor.

The moral image that Augustine draws of the *Felix Imperator* here is prepared in the preceding book (IV 23), where he asked the question why the Romans, if *Felicitas* is a goddess, did not worship her independently, since she was nevertheless able to give everything and to make (man) happy in the shortest way.

"Why did Romulus himself, who wanted a happy state to found, did not erect a temple for her, and, for whatever, did not implore the other gods, since he lacked nothing if she only assisted him?" Powers of other gods were worshipped and when *Felicitas* finally came along, the republic did not go so well at all, perhaps, Augustine mocks, because *Felicitas* had come so late (2). Jupiter's kingdom also depends on *Felicitas* and "potior est *felicitas regno*", happiness is worth more than kingship. One easily finds a person who dreads becoming king; "nullus autem invenitur qui se nolit esse *felicem*", but there is no one who does not want to be *Felix* (3). Besides *Felicitas*, the other gods are in principle superfluous, from her alone one asks happiness, and no more from the others. What more could one wish for? But - and now the reasoning is

reversed - "if Felicitas is not a goddess but - what she really is - is a gift from God, then one must seek that God who can give happiness and let go of the harmful 70 troop of false gods who follow the stupid masses, make the gifts of God into gods for themselves and thereby offend Him Himself, whose gifts they are, through the resistance of their proud self-will. For one cannot escape infelicitas - misfortune - if one worships Felicitas as a goddess and abandons God, who is the giver of felicitas, any more than one can escape hunger if one licks a painted loaf of bread 75 and does not ask it of the one who has one" (4).

Augustine was concerned with making known, in contrast to polytheism, the unknown God from whom felicitas comes, with whom man finds felicitas. He believed he could conclude that the Romans themselves believed that felicitas was given by a god whom they did not know (25).

80 The distinction is that between material happiness and windfalls on the one hand, entirely within the framework of this visible world, and which Augustine then lets coincide with what the Romans expect from their gods, and moral action on the other hand, through which emperors also show that they participate in the other world, now still in hope, one day in reality. It now lies undisturbed in this world. The 85 difference between the two worlds would can be seen as the quality of existence. Augustine is meanwhile critical enough not only to acknowledge that one can experience earthly happiness outside the kingdom of God, but also that one should not serve God in order to obtain the incomparable happiness that Constantine had - "as much good as no one would dare ask". It must be for eternal life, i.e. to do the 90 kingdom of God. Earthly gifts are not the yardstick of God's favor. Augustine ends this entire period about the Christian emperors thus: All other honors or riches of this life God gives as He gives the whole world the light, the air, the earth, the water, the fruits, and the soul and body of man himself, his senses, spirit and life, to the good and to the evil; to this also belongs the greatness of the kingdom, which 95 He awards with a view to the government that falls in time (in quibus est etiam quaelibet imperii magnitudo, quam pro temporum gubernatione dispensat). We think here of Mt. 5:45, where it says that God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. This word makes it clear that it is extremely difficult to derive a judgment about someone's true felicitas from visible things. Here, as I referred to at the 100 beginning, an important problem for our judgment about the leadership in world history comes to light. Augustine says that a person's felicitas depends on his participation in the vita aeterna, which is another way of saying the civitas dei. However, he also says that it does not help much to strive for it in a certain way, for example by imitating someone else; that is looking at it too narrowly. "Do from 105 des" does not apply here. Felicitas is not grasped, it is essentially a gift. God intended it for Constantine.

## 2. Julianus Apostata on Constantine

Half a century earlier, Julianus Apostata had written the satire *Symposion of Caesares* (361, in Constantinople), in which a number of emperors were allowed to 110 unburden their consciences before the assembled gods to find a patron among them and then to see who of them would receive the prize of honor. Last up is Constantine, who is presented as a good warrior but otherwise as highly addicted to pleasure. While he recounts his heroic deeds to the gods, he keeps his gaze furtively fixed on Tryphe, the demon of luxury. Silenus asks him if he does not have any Adonis flowers with 115 him, which bloom briefly and quickly wither, whereupon Constantine blushes in the realization that this might indeed be the case with his work. He admits that he wanted to raise money to satisfy the desires of himself and his friends. "Then you should have become a banker", Silenus mocked, "but you have lived like a pastry chef and a hairdresser, your hair and your delicious smell prove it". Constantine also no 120 longer wore a beard like his predecessors and Julian, for whom the beard was the symbol of his philosophical pretensions, which makes one think of Horace: "sapientem pascere barbam". Of course, Constantine could not find support from any of the gods and so he sought his solace in Tryphe and Asotia, the debauchery, and there he also found Jesus, who called to him all who were seducers, murderers, sacrileges and 125 rascals, with the promise to wash them clean immediately with this water - the baptismal water. "And if anyone is guilty of the same thing again, I will cleanse him again if he strikes his breast and forehead". Constantine went to him with his sons in good spirits, but the gods nevertheless punished them for their impiety and the bloodshed of their kinsmen, until Zeus granted them mercy for the sake of Claudius Goticus (268-270) - from whom Constantine derived his descent - and of his father 130 Constantius Chlorus.

The historical authority of Julian is entirely doubtful. To write a satire is everyone's right, but to give in it the representation of Constantine's flight to

135 Christianity in 326 instead of 312 is unforgivable for a member of the dynasty himself, who could have known all about it. Nor is it easy to swallow what Julian wrote in his panegyrics on Constantius in 355 before he left for Gaul, and when he was there. In the extermination of the members of the dynasty - two uncles, seven nephews and some of the highest officials - Constantius, to whom Julian in his letter to the Athenians of 6 years later attributed all this, had spared him and his half-brother Gallus, from whom the title of Caesar was taken away. That Constantius did not trust Julian in the least, however, was evident from the limited military assignment that he was given to Gaul. That Julian was terribly afraid of Emperor Constantius is particularly evident from the same letter. He had always spared the great ruler in every respect and therefore, when he was proclaimed emperor by the 140 soldiers themselves in Paris, he hesitated to accept this election. He asked Zeus for a sign, then modestly agreed: ὡς ίσασιν οἱ θεοί, στένων της καρδίας, and continued to call himself Caesar in his correspondence. Thus reality developed, but in the oration mentioned of 355, i.e. 18 years after the massacres of 337, he had still exuberantly 145 praised the education of Constantius - although he was Christian - and his character: "it seemed as if Constantine himself was still present, in the government of his son" and of the son himself he said: ἀρχῶν πράως καὶ φιλανθρώπως while his δικαιότης was praised. Julianus found it praiseworthy that Constantius himself also praised his father. The fact that one is dealing here with only a panegyric cannot take away the 150 fact that Julianus spoke against his conscience, and on top of that said that Constantius tried to imitate the divine nature on earth. He expressly added to this 155 that he would not tell a lie instead of the truth, but the reader wonders how he could have gotten all this out of his pen. Julian then permits himself in another connection to call the church historian Eusebius a worthless author and to disparage Christianity with the worn-out terms ἀθεότης and ἀποστασία, "a malicious invention of 160 the Galileans", while he himself adheres to the Hellenic tradition, the traditional order. Julian's criticism of Christianity in Κατά Γαλιλαίων is not impressive; it remains the judgment of an outsider and is partly not original either. The mocking 165 description in Caesares of Jesus' constant readiness to forgive sins and cleanse the most impure people is reminiscent of the corresponding mockery in Celsus's Λόγος ἀληθῆς, two centuries earlier. In the sarcastic Misopogon, addressed to the Antiochenes, who had little time for him, Julianus proved himself unfit for the 170 emperorship only with his reconstructed Hellenism, although he had managed to bring his own military deeds into the light. He had enough humour to ascribe to himself οὐδέν καλόν θέαμα, not a pretty sight in public (364D). Boissier's verdict on Julianus raisonnements was: subtils, obscurs, dialectiques, enseignement secret pour les privilégiés and on similar grounds Toynbee explains the failure of Julianus' 175 artificial intellectual undertakings. The biographer Julianus is certainly not convincing.

175 Julian was the first of the pagan historians or cultural critics to express the view that with Constantine's conversion to Christianity the great turning point in the history of the Roman Empire had begun, which was taken over by Ammianus Marcellinus, while the writers who came after them, Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, the Anonymus Valesianus and the author of the Epitome, seem to underestimate the Christian 180 conversion as a historical phenomenon. Zosimus called the murders and the subsequent conversion of Constantine the beginning of impiety (ἀρχήν της ἀσεβείας). He took over this motif for the downfall of the Roman empire, and the image of Constantine as created by Julian, in his Historia nova a century later, called him someone who had surrendered his life to Tryphe, and connected Constantine's conversion with his 185 remorse over the death of Crispus, his eldest son from his first marriage, and of his second wife Fausta; the death of Licinius Jr. is not mentioned. The chronological confusion in the sloppy story, the importance of which F. Paschoud recently attempted to demonstrate, is almost inextricable. It comes down to this: Constantine could find no help for atonement for his crimes from pagan priests, but an Egyptian from Spain, who had managed to get through to the ladies of the court, told him that the doctrine 190 of the Christians could wipe away all crime and that the evildoer who accepted it was immediately freed from all sin (ἀμαρτία) (II 29, 3-5). Constantine then took the decisive step, took no further part in the sacrifice for Jupiter on the Capitoline, and thereby immediately incurred the hatred of the Senate and the people of Rome. The 195 confusion lies in the fact that Zosimus places Constantine's conversion in 326, while the military ceremony in Rome should be placed in 312, after Constantine's victory over Maxentius. Everyone could have known that Constantine had accepted Christianity long before 326, and also that he had been welcomed with jubilation as a liberator in Rome in 312. Yet this story, as appears from the Church History of Sozomenus, who wrote half a century before Zosimus (439-450), was more or less the usual version of 200 Constantine's conversion in pagan circles. According to Photius, Bibl. cod. 98, Zosimus had read Eunapius of Sardis, who wrote even earlier, around 400, and who may

have borrowed Roman data from the Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus. If so, these were bad or he made bad use of them. Sozomenus tells the story differently again. Constantine is said to have heard from the philosopher Sopatros, who was his friend at the time, that there was no reconciliation possible for crimes such as his. A chance meeting with bishops then brought the emperor to Christianity. But Sozomenus himself did not believe this. It seems to me, he says, that this has been invented by those who wish to slander the Christian religion, and he continues: "even if we assume that the emperor spoke to Sopatros or inquired of him by letter about his desire (for reconciliation), it is certainly still very improbable that the philosopher would not have known that Hercules, son of Alcmene, was purified at Athens by the mysteries of Demeter, after the slaughter of his children and after the murder of Iphitos, whom he killed in spite of all justice while he was his host and friend. Since, then, the Greeks had to offer purifications for sins of this kind, this is sufficient to expose the lie of those who have invented that Sopatros would have said the opposite; for I, for my part, would not dare to assert that the man who was then the most famous among the Greeks for his knowledge, did not know these things." To make the confusion even greater, Zosimus also links to his story the statement that Constantine showed his impiety by suspecting and prohibiting the *μοντική*, the haruspicy, because it could be used in a hostile way against him (II 29, 4). We know, however, that the provisions against the haruspicia date back to 319 and 320. According to Zosimus, Constantine took part in the parade in awe of his soldiers at Rome, but, warned by the "Egyptian" that a *φάσμα*, an apparition, disapproved of the ascent of the Capitol, he was able to withdraw in time from further participation in the sacrifice. Paschoud calls the whole story "une construction mensongère élaborée avec des renseignements exacts". We can do little with it, but we do learn from it how the pagan world in the fourth centuries later thought of Emperor Constantine: not the "abstentissimus imperator" of the panegyricus Nazarius forty years earlier (Panegyr. X (4), XXXIV), but: an unstable and immoral man, a murderer, for whom no reconciliation was conceivable and who therefore converted to Christianity. For the sake of comparison I add the picture that Aurelius Victor gives of Constantine. "From his youth his powerful mind burned with desire to rule" (Caes. 40, 2). He was incredibly fond of praise. He adorned his princely garments with precious stones and his head always with the diadem. But in many things he acted excellently: with very strict laws he restrained slander, he promoted the *bonae artes*, especially the study of letters, he wrote laws himself and thought about them, responded to legations and complaints from the provinces. A mocker rather than a flatterer. The common people called him Trachala (thick-necked): during the first 10 years of his life excellent, the next 12 years a robber (latro = usurper?), the last 10 years childish and so called because of his excessive waste (Epitome 41, 11-16). Aurelius Victor has not a word to say about religion. It is remarkable that so soon after the event, the chronology of Constantine's transition was so little established. Zosimus mentions as an intermediary in the transition an Egyptian (or someone called Aegyptios), from Spain. Cardinal Baronius in his *Annales ecclesiastici* in the year 324 has assumed for certain that this must have been Ossius or Hosius, bishop of Cordova. The great importance of this adviser of Constantine in ecclesiastical affairs - who has been compared with the "imperial minister in charge of ecclesiastical affairs" and with the cardinal secretary of state - is well known and his American biographer De Clercq also assumes this in the conversion of Constantine, before or in 312, to be precise, but he cannot do anything with the designation. Constantine himself, Eusebius and Lactantius do not mention him in this connection.

### 3. Constantine's conversion to Christianity

We have essentially the two stories of Constantine's conversion, one as he himself is said to have told it to Eusebius, who included it in his *Vita Constantini*, I 27-29, the other in Lactantius' *De morte persecutorum*. Under oath, but long after the fact, Constantine told Eusebius how, before he went to fight Maxentius for Rome, he had deliberated which god he would choose as an ally. His polytheistic predecessors had usually been disappointed, but his father, who had chosen the opposite path, had found a true protector in the one true God. (28) He therefore humbly prayed to this God to reveal to him who He was and to help him, and then, in the afternoon, he saw in the sky a luminous cross (*σταυρου τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτός συνιστάμενον* above the sun, with the words: *τοιτο νίκα*). The army with which he was marching also observed the phenomenon. (29) He did not understand it, but the following night Christ, the Son of God, appeared to him in a dream with the same sign that he had seen in the sky, who commanded him to copy it and to use it as *άλεξημα*, protection, when confronting the enemy. (30) The next morning he orders his goldsmiths and jewelers to prepare this. Eusebius connects this (31) with the description of the *λάβαρον* which consisted of a cross-shaped lance with the Christ monogram in a wreath at the top, a banner on the

270 crossbar and the images of the emperor and his sons; all made very expensively. Especially from this last we see that Eusebius is also confused with history, because Constantine did not yet have sons in 312; he apparently saw a much later copy of the labarum, after 325. The whole story seems distorted and we do not know from which time it is. In his book *De morte persecutorum* (On the death of the persecutors),

275 which was certainly written before 321, possibly 318/9, Lactantius describes the event more briefly and without mentioning an informant. His text reads: "The anniversary of Maxentius' reign was at hand, namely October 27 [312], on which the five years were completed. In his sleep Constantine was admonished to apply the heavenly sign of God to the shields and thus to fight. He does as he is commanded and with the letter X, crossed out with [sign] of which the upper end was bent over, he indicates Christ on the shields. Protected by this sign the army takes up arms".

280 Ranke gave a different interpretation, namely that Constantine allowed his soldiers to put the monogram on their shields - if it was the monogram at all. Both stories differ from each other and show similarities.

285 The main thing is that the story in Eusebius begins with the cross and that Constantine did not understand the meaning of this, while Lactantius speaks directly of the monogram of Christ. The main similarity is the dream. In his addition Eusebius also comes to speak about the monogram. We feel that we are on shaky ground here. Especially because Eusebius in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, which appeared in several

290 editions, the last in 325, does not mention the vision, while there is room for it, and it would even have been necessary, especially where he compares the nature of Constantine's victory over Maxentius with the passage of the people of Israel through the Red Sea with God's help (IX 8, 4-8). The *panegyrici* of 312 and 321 do not mention it either. The highly critical Belgian Byzantinologist Henri Grégoire - who rejected

295 the entire *Vita Constantini* as the work of Eusebius - sought the origin of the legend in the *Vile Panegyrie*. This was pronounced in Trier in 310 after the downfall of Maximianus, Constantine's father-in-law, who had been guilty of foolish policy and treason. Gibbon could not contradict this last point, but did note that it would have been more humane of Constantine not to have let it get that far. "But the actions of

300 Constantine were guided by reason and not by resentment". Constantine visited a temple of Apollo at Autun (Autessiodorum) and saw the god himself there, who, accompanied by Victoria, offered him laurel wreaths, each a sign of thirty years, so-called "vota publica", as they appear on coins and medals. Lactantius is said to have given this a Christian meaning and Constantine himself accepted the way in which the

305 X - ten years - was applied to the shields as a symbol that the Christians were welcome without in the least deterring the Pagans. This resembles the interpretation of Ranke mentioned above. Grégoire was very sure of himself; according to him, religion had nothing to do with the struggle between Constantine and Maxentius. "Tout est dit sur la victoire couronnante de Saxa Rubra ou du Pont Milvius. Tout est dit, sauf peut-être la vérité". This "verity" indeed includes the fact that the panegyrics

310 do not mention the vision. The IXth, from 313, after the event, pronounced at Trier, says: "Habes profecto aliquod cum illa mente divina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegata nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere", you, Constantine, certainly have some secret communication with the divine spirit, who

315 leaves the care of us to the lower deities and deigns to reveal himself to you alone, a statement that from a distance might remind one of Augustine's argument about the felicitas. But there is nothing Christian in this panegyric. That of Nazarius from 321, would lead one to expect something different, because this orator himself came into contact with Christianity. He is at length about the military deeds of

320 Constantine, likes to play with the past, lets the Dioscuri (XV 4), Fortuna (XXVII), Fama and Victoria (XXXII 4) play their part, on the other hand knows a cælestis favor (II 6), a divinitas (XIII 5), cælestis exercitus (XXIX 1 2), who support the emperor as a general, but whom the human eye does not see. The religious value of the following passage VII 3-4 is difficult to determine precisely: "From on high God

325 looks down on us as judge and, although the human mind has its depths in which it hides its thoughts, the divinitas nevertheless penetrates there to search them out completely and it is impossible that the divine power, which gives us the spirit by which we live and so many good gifts with which we nourish ourselves, should withdraw itself from the cares of the world and make no distinction between the behavior of the people whose lives it provides for". And so on. Perhaps there is something Christian in these words: "dubitare quisquam potest te per omnia subnixum deo vadere?" (X 18,4), can anyone doubt that you advance in all circumstances trusting in God? Who that God is, is not specified. When he describes in detail the battle against Maxentius, Nazarius - in 321, that is - appears to know nothing of the vision of Christ; he speaks only of the military skill of Constantine and the fighting power of his army. "Fulget nobilis galea et corusca luce gemmarum divinum verticem monstrat. Auro clipeus, auro arma collucent" (XXIX 5): Your noble helmet shines and with the flickering light of precious stones it adorns your divine head. Your shield

gleams with gold, your weapons flash with gold. Not a word about the cross or the monogram of Christ. With the panegyrici we do not get any further than this neutral transitional thought and language. With the Christian authors the vision occurs late or not at all.

That Constantine believed to have won the victory over Maxentius under the protection or through the power of the cross on 27 October 312 and to have brought Rome under his power and liberated it, is confirmed in the meantime by the report of Eusebius about the statue of the emperor, which with "the victory sign of the saving suffering", that is, the cross, in the right hand, was placed on the most crowded place in Rome. Constantine had this inscription put on it: "By this saving sign, the proof of true courage, I have liberated your city, torn from the yoke of the tyrant, and with this freedom I have also restored the Senate and the people of Rome to their old glory and splendor". In the *Vita Constantini* (I 40) it is worded somewhat differently: In the middle of the imperial city he had this sign of victory (*τρόπαιον*) over his enemies erected and expressly engraved in it with indelible letters: this salutary sign as protection (*φυλακτήριον*) of the Roman empire and the entire empire. He immediately had a long lance in the form of a cross (*σταυρού σχήματι*) placed in the hand of his own statue in the most crowded place in Rome and ordered this inscription to be engraved in it in his own words in Latin: these are literally the same words. Eusebius wanted to tell us that Constantine had the salutary sign of the cross placed in many places, of which the statue in Rome is the most important example. In the *Laus Constantini* (IX 40) this general frame of thought returns, specified in this later developed sense, that he taught the people with it that not military power but God is the giver of all good and in particular of victory. The inscription is missing here. We find this in the Latin translation of Eusebius' church history by Rufinus as follows: "quia in hoc singulari signo, quod est verae virtutis insigne (badge), urbem Romam senatumque et populum Romanum iugo tyrannicae dominationis eruptam pristinæ libertati nobilitatique restitui". The difference with the Greek text is that Rufinus speaks of the sign of true bravery and Eusebius of the true sign of bravery; Rufinus will probably have the correct text. The statue with the cross as an attribute signified Constantine's recognition of the God who had given him victory, the first statue of an emperor holding a standard himself, according to Alfoldi. Eusebius tells us that Constantine, thanks to his innate piety (*έμφυτος εύσεβεια*) was not at all so keen on the applause of the people and was not at all haughty because of it, but rather was grateful to the giver of the victory (h.e. IX 9, 10; V.C. I 39,3, Heikel I, p. 26, 11-15), hence the statue in this form.

On the occasion of the Decennalia, which Constantine celebrated in Rome in 315, the triumphal arch, still in its original state, was consecrated to him by the Senate, the second important monument. The inscription reads: "IMP. CAES. FL. CONSTANTINO MAXIMO P. F. AUGUSTO SPQR QUOD INSTINCTU DIVINITATIS MENTIS MAGNITUDINE CUM EXERCITU SUO TAM DE TYRANNO QUAM DE OMNI EIUS FACTIONE UNO TEMPORE JUSTIS REMPUBLICAM ULTUS EST ARMIS ARCUM TRIUMPHIS INSIGNEM DILCAVIT" (C.LL. VI, 1139). The tyrant refers to Maxentius, who must have had a significant following (factio). Constantine's arms restored a better legal situation (iustis armis). And that happened "instinctu divinitatis mentis magnitudine", at the inspiration of the deity and thanks to his greatness of mind. We cannot say what influence Constantine himself exercised on the wording of the inscription. The words "instinctu divinitatis" may be his. A. Alfoldi compares in the *Vita Constantini* III 12, 3, the emperor's opening speech to the Synod of Nicaea, 325. In it the emperor recalls his victories over the enemies thanks to the beck (will) and assistance of the Almighty (*νευματι καὶ συνεργείᾳ του κρείττονος*, Heikel, p. 82, 27). This is then, ten years later, still a corresponding, one might almost say lasting terminology, which leaves open the possibility of thinking of divinitas or ὁ κρείττων (or τό θεῖον), although nameless, as the God of the Christians. More specificity cannot be extracted from it. According to L'Orange, the "dei militares", under whose protection Constantine's army had marched against Maxentius, were Sol Invictus and Victoria: this pair of gods is depicted three times on the frieze and pedestal reliefs of the arch. In the eastern passage, the bust of Sol Invictus is located directly opposite Constantine. L'Orange then wants to interpret the abstract "divinitas" of the large inscription on the basis of these concrete representations. The inscription can only mean that divinitas which the reliefs of the arch really present to us. The "Sol Invictus Aeternus Augustus" - as he also appears on coins - reveals himself in the emperor. In the form and with the gesture of the Sun God, the raised right hand, he stands before the viewer. L'Orange believes that these images of the cosmic powers Sol (and Luna) fit "reibungslos" into the new, beginning Christian world of thought, the end of which is the metamorphosis of the entire ancient world, under the rising of a new sun, namely the Sol Iustitiae above the Sol Invictus.

## 4. The consolidation of Constantine's transition

With all this in mind, we must not imagine that after the conquest of Rome by Constantine under the sign of Christ, cross or monogram, everything in the entire imperial and religious life and thought was immediately set on hairs and strings. There is a single, increasingly firmly working starting point, but otherwise we observe a kind of tolerant or liberal, sometimes almost neutral policy. This fixed starting point is the acceptance by Constantine of Christ as his patron god in the field. We shall have to accept this historical form, even if it costs us some effort. Around that also the whole style of the panegyrici with their big words, their glorying in bloody victories, no more persecutions of Christians, but cruel punishments - the disgusting messing about with the head of Maxentius, which reminds us of the same with the head of Gaspard de Coligny - magnificent animal games and then again clemency towards the vanquished, all that seems as pagan as possible. The statues and the triumphal arch are Roman and not evangelical. The only change is that complete religious tolerance now prevails in the empire.

Between the two inscriptions of 312 and 315 falls the decision for tolerance of 313. We know it from two texts, by Eusebius and by Lactantius in the form of executive decrees, which go back to discussions between Constantine and Licinius, Augustus of the East, which were held in Milan in February 313, where Licinius married Constantine's stepsister, Constantia. The starting point is complete freedom of religion for Christians and all others, without any disturbance or molestia, and indeed so that the "summa divinitas, whose religio - veneration - we serve in spiritual freedom, may grant us her favor and goodwill in everything". This "summa divinitas" had been described as broadly and vaguely as possible a few lines earlier as "quidquid est divinitatis in se de caelesti", whatever divinity is enthroned in heaven. Now in April 311 Galerius, as Augustus of the second tetrarchy, had already issued a toleration edict a few days before his death, also in the name of Constantine, which allowed everyone to be Christians again and to restore the church buildings "provided that they would do nothing against good order". The Christians were ordered "to pray to their God for our salvation and that of the state and of themselves, so that the state may prosper in every respect and they may live safely in their own places". With this palinodia [=withdrawal] an end had already been put to the last great persecutions, which Galerius had instigated Emperor Diocletian, but which had failed in their effect. "Their own God" (*τον ἑαυτῶν Θεόν*) is actually more clearly defined in this text than in that of 313, which speaks of the summa divinitas or whatever lives in heaven. It seems to indicate an attempt to create as gradual a transition as possible from Roman to Christian concepts in the new text of 313. No explicit contrast, where it can still be avoided.

This can also be read from the money that was put into circulation. The small change often reflects the political situation. At the beginning of our period, the coins of Constantius Chlorus and Constantine often show Mars as a Gallic deity and later, apparently as a personal choice of Constantine, Sol Invictus.

Around 319, however, the gods slowly begin to disappear from the special productions. Licinius mints a coin for the last time with an emperor making a sacrifice. A cautious line is maintained, only in certain editions do Christian elements penetrate, which only become dominant towards the end of Constantine's life. According to von Schoenebeck, while A. Alfoldi already starts the Christian symbolism, in particular the Christ monogram, earlier. He explains the star on the emperor's helmet that appears on a silver coin from Trier, 312/313, as a simplified Christ monogram. From 315 dates a silver penny from Ticinum (Pavia), which clearly shows the monogram XP on the emperor's helmet and above the left shoulder the scepter, i.e. a cross with the globe on it. From 320 onwards the vexillum appears and from 326 dates a special edition that shows the labarum, as Eusebius describes it, with the legend *urn: "spes publica"*. The conclusion is that the money was only gradually Christianized, if one may express it that way. It should not be imagined that the coin dies could be changed from one day to the next. The emperor did, however, concern himself with many large and small coins in various cities; the official images of the "sacra vestis" were very important. Here, a two-sidedness, promoted by the loss of content and meaning of the old religious symbols, can be repeatedly observed; they were, so to speak, harmless. From Sirmium, the capital of Illyricum, a Constantine solidus is known, in which Constantine is depicted with the labarum and protected by the Sun God. Syncretism in Constantine's thinking certainly does not mean this. It is one of those unimportant but understandable phenomena, which did not disturb his cautious policy.

A similar picture is provided by Constantine's legislation. Admiring contemporaries declare that the exceptionally gifted emperor personally collaborated on the formulation. Until the end of his life Constantine did not issue an absolute ban on the adherence to and practice of pagan religions, although Eusebius does speak of the

475 demolition of temples. The first law is from his son Constantius, 341 (Cod. Theod. XVI 10, 2), with the bold words: "cesset supersticio, sacrificiorum aboleatur insania". He was convinced that he was acting in accordance with the "lex divi principis parentis nostri". Now we do not know of such a formal law of Constantine himself, so that the words must have been those of the compilers of the Codex

480 Theodosianus. But it may be assumed with certainty that for them and for Constantius this law of 341 was the inevitable realization of Constantine's unspoken wishes. All the more interesting in this later light is the cautious development in the very frequent legislative work of Constantine. A few examples from the larger whole must suffice. In 313 Constantine began to grant privileges, such as exemption from "munera

485 civilia", to clerics of the Catholic Church, who were placed on an equal footing with state priests and officials. He did not grant this freedom to clerics of the Donatist schism, only to "Catholics" and, moreover, in the long run he took measures against the profiting from these commercial, and not for personal advantage, privileges (Cod. Theod. XVI 2, 1, of 313, October 31; cf. Eusebius, h.e. X 7, 1.2; X 6, 1-5; Cod.

490 Theod. XVI 2, 2, of 319, October 21; XVI 2, 3, of 320, July 18; XVI 2, 4, of 321, July 3; XVI 2, 6, of 326, June 1; XVI 2, 7, of 330, February 5 4 • In 315 the sentence to participate in the gladiatorial games was still a punishment (Cod. Theod. IX 18, 1) and games in general continued to exist under certain restrictions (XV 12,1, of 325, October 1), gladiatorial games were later completely forbidden,

495 although even then without sufficient effect: for Valentinian I and Valens again forbade condemning Christians to the games (IX 40, 8, of 365, January 15). In 316 the first law appeared, which made the manumissio of slaves possible before the clergy and church community, followed by further extension in accordance with the increasing public authority of the clergy (IV 8, 1a, of 316, June 8, cf. 1, of 321, April 18 and Cod. Just. VII 1, 4). Of even more far-reaching importance is the regulation of the

500 "episcopalis audientia", the decision of which was "pro sanctis habeatur", i.e. episcopal jurisdiction without appeal, to which each party could force the other in civil cases even against their will (Cod. Theod. I 27, of 318, June 23; Const. Sirm. of 333, May 5). This jurisdiction, according to Dörries, paved a way out of the

505 snares of 1001 legal provisions and promoted the finding of the truth with the authority of religion, the "superna potentia", which the "secreta pectoris" knows how to discover. With this correct point of view, Dörries somewhat weakens his own starting point, that this jurisdiction was not so much intended to combat corruption: it was. The two arguments are difficult to separate. The "episcopalis audientia" already existed before Constantine. That the constitution in question may be regarded as an important testimony to the personal religious attitude of the emperor, one can agree with Dörries. The first Sunday laws, which prescribed rest at courts, because there was fighting there, and for the craftsmen - because they seemed to make so much noise - are from 321 (Cod. Theod. II 8, Ia and) and speak of the "venerabilis dies

510 515 solis", the day to which "veneratio" is due, i.e. the Christian Sunday. It is also called the day of salvation, day of light and day of the sun (V.C. IV 18, 3, Heikel p. 124, 19) and as late as 409 it occurs:

Dominica die, quam vulgo solis appellant (Cod. Theod. I 8, 25). Farmers remained free to harvest if necessary, in view of the weather conditions. Conversion from Judaism was welcomed (Cod. Theod. XVI 8, 1, of 315, October 18; Const. Sirm. IV, of 336, October 21); the terminology is that the convert opens himself "ianuam vitae perpetuae". Favourable provisions were made for full-time patriarchae vel presbyteri of synagogues so that they could properly perform their office; the Jewish religion was recognised as a "lex" and permitted, but renegotiation from Christianity to Judaism was not.

525 The strongest prohibition was the haruspicinia, which was a "praeterita usurpatio" (Cod. Theod. IX 16, 1.2.3. of 321 or 324 and 319; XVI of 10, 1 of 320 or 321, December 17). An exception was only made for the investigation following lightning strikes in the palace or other public buildings; this was considered an old

530 consuetudo, a "mos veteris observantiae". A good illustration of the paganism that still dominated in the army can be found in the acclamation of "praefecti, tribuni et viri eminentissimi" to the emperor: "Auguste Constantine, dii te nobis servent: vestra salus nostra salus: vere dicimus, iurati dicimus". Unfortunately, this text cannot be dated; the years 326 and 320, but also 316 or earlier are mentioned; certainly after 312. Constantine will not have made too much objection to this polytheistic acclamation; in the Codex Justinianus it is nevertheless Christianized and reads there: "deus te nobis servet". More important is that the emperor uses these words in a provision with which he facilitates the rapprochement with himself: may the "summa divinitas" always be gracious to me and preserve me unharmed, as I desire, while the state is in a happy and flourishing condition (Cod. Theod. IX 1, 4, of 325, September 14). This text is from 325, the year of the Council of Nicaea, which dealt with pointed theological questions, in which the emperor himself chose a certain position. The term: "summa divinitas" as a general designation of God with

545 the omission of a name, therefore, as has already been noted, does not occur only in the earliest or in the pre-Christian period of Constantine. In a constitution already mentioned, which forbade making things difficult for a Jew who converted to Christianity, these words appear: we trust that everyone through love for the deity, "divinitatis affectu", will be safe in the entire Roman empire, while the honour due to us remains assured (Const. Sirm. IV, of 336, October 21). This text, which renews an older one, is from the last year of Constantine's life. He gave protection to both a free Christian and a pagan slave, without discrimination. Dörries considers it characteristic of Constantine's way of thinking that a prospective Christian thus enjoys God's protection within the framework of the state order, of which the recognition or veneration of the emperor is the main pillar. The remark is important, 555 but we doubt whether a different way of thinking and practice would have been possible for the Roman statesman who had become or was becoming a Christian. This need not be understood as a personal, excessive desire for power, self-overestimation or *ὕβρις*. It is rather an expression of Constantine's sense of calling. However conscious he was of this, he at the same time sets limits to imperial absolutism: 560 decisions once established are not arbitrarily replaced by others (Cod. Theod. IV (17), 1 Mommsen IV 16, 1, of 319, December 26). Policy, method and a good feeling for living tradition show themselves again and again. "Consuetudo" and "usus longaevus" are attributed "non vilis auctoritas" (Cod. Theod. V 27, 1, of 319, April 24). Again, we cannot say which words here are explicitly Constantine's own. The general train of 565 thought in the legislation remains thoroughly Roman. There is, if we cannot now keep our own standards of feeling out of the judgment, a certain degree of Christian humanization and moralization in the legislation to be recognized, but there are also hard elements in it, as we have already noticed in the panegyrics, and which we should not criticize with modern sentiment. The total picture is that of a profound 570 change of thinking, which, however, does not disturb the forms where preservation is still possible. With this limitation, one can agree with Carl Andresen's judgment that after the victory over Maxentius all political measures were imperatively prescribed by the situation. Because the unity of the empire was the emperor's great aspiration, he also acted accordingly with the new religion. He had gained an 575 understanding of another world.

##### 5. Controlled policy

That is a characteristic of Constantine's government. The great and unassailable place occupied by the church in it is clearly shown by the application of the complete tolerance which had been granted to Christendom - the great theme of 580 Eusebius' jubilation in the tenth book of his Church History -; secondly, by Constantine's attitude towards Donatism in Africa; and thirdly, by his conduct in the Melitian and the strife caused by Arius, both in Egypt. As for complete tolerance, this term seems too weak in the case of an emperor who personally chose for the church. But it is appropriate because he was the Augustus of the pagan Roman empire. 585 Thus he decided that the church should recover all its possessions, and that the servants of the church should have exemption from *munera civilia* in order to be able to perform their ecclesiastical service without hindrance. Christianity takes its place in the political whole, insofar as worship is public and even promoted, but without the church playing a role as a political instrument; it remains under its own 590 order. Instrument, and indeed in God's hand, Constantine feels himself, between state and church. When Donatism appears in the province of Africa, calls for the emperor's intervention against the Catholic authority in the church and the emperor responds, he regulates, organizes and orders the procedure, but this takes place entirely according to ecclesiastical order. When the Donatists do not like the course of 595 events and they appeal to the emperor himself, the latter answers to the council of Arles (314): "They demand my judgment while I myself await the judgment of Christ", by which Constantine meant the pronouncement of the council. How deep ecclesiastical disputes tend to be, because they simply have religious roots, Constantine has underestimated in the matter of Donatism, but also in the matter of the third point, especially the Arian struggle. In all cases he cared about the unity of those who provided the worship recognized as lawful. Public worship was a central issue in Constantine's Roman Christianity. He did not dominate the church. From the beginning we repeatedly find the term *ο συνθεράπων ὑμῶν*, your fellow servant, as he positions himself next to, not above, the bishops. It sounds modest, and it is, and should in 600 no way give the impression that the emperor, who was still a catechumen and unbaptized, fulfills a function in the church comparable to that of the bishops; fellow servant means less than this. With the words *Θεράπων γνήσιος* one should not think of the church but of God: Your true servant. When one quotes Constantine's famous statement to the bishops: *ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς μέν είσω της εκκλησίας, ἐγώ δέ των ἔκτος ὑπό θεου καθεσταμένος ἐπισκοπος ὃν είνης* you are bishop over those within, I am appointed by God as bishop over those outside the Church, then the word "bishop", 610

overseer, is clearly used the second time in a figure of speech, nothing more. In no case is it meant that the real bishops were entitled to the government of the church, and the non-real bishop, the emperor, only to the management of the goods of the church, as was previously thought. A serious underestimation of the theological problems - which can hardly be attributed to Ossius as Constantine's ecclesiastical advisor - is already apparent from the first imperial letter to Alexander, bishop of Alexandria and Arius from words such as: not at all worthy of such great hostility, small and insignificant cause, useless analysis, etc. Constantine found in his annoyance at this that insufficient thought had been given; questions such as those now being raised should have been postponed and not answered, certainly not in public. The council of Nicaea was then convened by the emperor to discuss these controversial issues. It cannot be said that he dominated this, but it can be said that the church listened to him - until he himself later came under the influence of the Arians. His aim was to do εύταξια, ἐνωσις and ὄμονια, πίστις εἰρήνη. If necessary, the emperor threatened police intervention against ἀταξια. His impulsive character often led him to use harsh insults in his letters, as one encounters everywhere in the polemics of that time. But the demand to obey his ὄροι is then again essentially specified: ἀκολούθως τω ἐκκλησιαστικω και ἀποστολικω κάνονι, in accordance with the ecclesiastical and apostolic rule. In summary, Seeck has rightly said that Constantine could have seized power over the church, but did not do so and did not want to. In the church he encountered that other world, which no people, not even the emperor, have at their disposal.

6. Attempt at interpretation

So far some generally known facts from many. Now the theory - if it can be found. In his famous commentary on the adage: Dulce bellum inexpertis Erasmus makes the simple and lucid remark: "mundus habebat su as leges antequam exoriretur euangelium", the world had its own laws before the Gospel appeared. Herein were rooted the difficulties of the encounter between world and Gospel, between the Roman Empire and Christianity. With these words it is also explained as simply as clearly how one should weigh the task to which Constantine felt called. One can also extend them to the idea that world and Gospel both have and keep their own laws. In his Apologeticum Tertullian said around 195 that Pontius Pilate was a Christian in his heart and reported everything about Christ to the emperor. To this unhistorical statement, which already occurs in Justin Martyr, he links the remark: even the emperors would have believed in Christ, if they were not necessary to the world or if they could have been emperor and Christian at the same time. This is the main problem that will occupy us now. "Nothing is so foreign to us as politics". With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, begun by Constantine the Great, the validity of this statement of Tertullian seems to end. Unless one argues that Constantine's conversion to Christianity and Christianization also became the downfall of the Roman Empire, as Julian the Apostate and Zosimus taught. Gibbon argued at the end of chapter 14 of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire that the wars, accompanying the autocracy of Constantine, did much to weaken the empire by the great cost in blood and money and the constant increase in military burdens. He spoke of a revolution, of which the foundation of Constantinople and the establishment of the Christian religion were the immediate and memorable consequences, the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire. What really happened and what was going on in Constantine himself? People have often tried to penetrate into the religious life of Constantine and to form a picture of the probable phases in his religious conviction, wrote Jakob Burckhardt at the beginning of the last chapter of Die Zeit Konstantins des Grossen (1852). "This is a completely superfluous Mühe", he continues: "in a man of genius, to whom ambition and lust for power grant not an hour of rest, there can be no question of Christianity or paganism, of conscious religious or irreligious disposition: such a person is essentially completely irreligious, even if he imagines himself to be in the midst of a church community. He knows the sacred only as a vague memory or superstitious temptation". After having once again rejected Eusebius as a reliable source for the knowledge of Constantine, Burckhardt then speaks in a great paradox of: "the moronic egoists, who demand the great merit, understand Christianity as a world power and then treat it as such". Otto Seeck - antipode of Burckhardt, as Stähelin says - (1921) has in his Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt a very critical chapter on Christianity as a doctrine, a particularly bad caricature, but nevertheless draws a highly plausible picture of Constantine as a Christian and explains his historical position with this principle: "Whoever has the sow for the master, is always anxious and must be, because otherwise his profession is to be revealed". H.-I. Marrou recently stated that the historian would like to be able to make clear the connection between Constantine's very important political decisions, his personal convictions and his inner development. Unfortunately, he says, it is easier to formulate hypotheses in this regard than to state precise and established

680 facts. It is from Constantine's sense of calling that one must, I think, start, acknowledge it, let it be in its place and apply it in order to understand him in his career. Whatever forms it took in practice, in any case there lay the gateway of the other world into his life and thought. He himself repeatedly gave expression to it. A letter to Bishop Alexander and Arius begins as follows: In the first place, it was my endeavor to unite the conception of God of all peoples into one form, in the second place to restore and harmonize the entire oikoumene, which lay prostrate as if in a serious illness. These things I endeavored to achieve, one with the inner eye of insight, the other to bring about by the power of the army, in the knowledge that, if I could bring about unanimity for all God's servants according to my wishes (εύχαις), the state would also be as the fruit thereof would reap a change in keeping with all pious insights. He saw himself as an instrument (ήμετέρα ύπηρεσία) and regarded this service (διάκονία) as a gift entrusted to him (δωρον). He was not and did not see himself as God on earth, but as his servant. It is perhaps not out of place to think of the lines: "But God shall govern me as a good instrument". Or of the wise saying of Augustine, that the just man who seems to command, in reality serves (De civ. dei XIX 14). This is an evaluation completely contrary to the coarseness of Voltaire: "Si l'on pense, que Constantin fit tout servir à ce qu'il crut son intérêt, on ne se trompera pas". In truth, ecclesiastical politics was an indispensable or separable element in, and inspiration for, his politics, and this complex whole was a divine assignment for him. Among German-writing church historians, this difficult-to-analyze structure has given rise to speak of "reichskatholische Kirche", "reichskatholische Theologie". The objection to this is that these terms can give the impression that the empire or the state constitutes the norm of the church and determines theology. That was precisely not the case under Constantine. A rendering of the German terminology that does not cause misunderstanding in Dutch is not easy to find; one must resort to a description: the church and theology recognized (or accepted) by the emperor and the empire, perhaps one can briefly say: the public or official church and theology, which is not pretty, however, and is too reminiscent of the position of the Reformed Church during the Republic of the United Netherlands. Only Justinian

700 treated the Christian faith as the "empire ideology" more than Constantine and even more than Theodosius, not fundamentally different, but with rare consistency and this must always be clear in the words that we use for the different periods. That consequence certainly changed what Constantine did. In fact, it was not a linear, evolving consequence, but new, uncontrolled elements of power had entered into it.

705 Constantine, who always showed that he wanted to respect tradition and maintain continuity, governed with a controlled policy. But he governed firmly. It has been said that he never lost a battle. What Emperor Valens said to the bishops at the Synod of Milan in 355: ὅπερ ἔγω βούλομαι τούτο κανών, ἐλεγε νομίζεσθω, you must regard my will as ecclesiastical law, was never said by Constantine, that was not his theory. As an emperor, however, he was irresistible. To quote Seeck again, whose critical judgment no one will underestimate: autocracy was more forced upon Constantine than he pursued it, "the Sultanism, which the man he accuses has, lays his nature all the way far". Eusebius sketches certain features of Constantine's character in the words: το στερρον του τρόπου τη συμφύτω φιλανθρωπία κερασάμενος "he mixed an inflexible sternness with an innate humanity, and with an understanding of the psychological problem of religious change. Since the κοινωνία was so precious to him, the emperor did not want anyone to make it difficult for his neighbor. "Everyone keeps what his soul desires, and let him live accordingly." But Constantine also prays that these may have the θυηδίαν, the inner joy may be received. And then

715 literally in the long letter to the provinces against polytheism: "No one may harm another by what he has accepted with conviction. What one has learned and understood, he may serve the other if possible; if it is impossible, he shall refrain from it. For it is one thing to fight for immortality voluntarily, another to force it by punishment. That is my opinion, I have explained it more fully than I intended,

720 because I did not want to hide my belief in the truth, especially since some, as I hear, say that the customs of the temples and the power of darkness are now over. I would like to wish that for all people. If only the great resistance of the evil error had not, to the detriment of the common good, become immeasurably fixed in the hearts of some".

725 All these and many more varied expressions - and actions - of Constantine are only nuances in his policy. This shows no real hesitations, rather a firm conviction, but also the admirable insight into, or at least feeling of Constantine for, what he could do as emperor and where the limits of the possible were set by the hard reality.

730 We have already heard from Gibbon that Constantine's actions were governed more by reason than by resentment. The serious reproaches that were made to the statesman and the Christian Constantine at all times, concern in the first place his warfare, or, more precisely, the use he made of the cross, of the monogram of Christ, which was

shown on the armor and carried as labarum (λάβαρον) by a very distinguished standard guard before the troops. Here lies for many the fall of Christianity, it is the sting of the unnatural combination of Gospel and world in the dominant form of the Roman Empire. Historically it happened that way, the texts do not allow us to argue about it. On the contrary: in the Vita Eusebius describes that the emperor surrounded himself with clerics and that he had a separate tent outside the camp - comparable to the tabernacle of Israel on the desert journey - where he often withdrew to pray and deliberate. There he sometimes had a divine appearance and with this inspiration he would rush out of the tent and order his soldiers to immediately break camp and draw their swords. They attacked immediately and struck the enemy in such a way that the victory was soon won and they could erect the trophies - τρόπαια. This played a role, if we may trust Eusebius, still in 324, during the battle against Licinius, that is, 12 years after the story of the vision of the cross. We must try all the more to understand this as a factor in Constantine's thinking, however much there might be to say about the problem of military service in the first centuries of Christianity. The data are complicated. Tertullian says that Christians, as loyal citizens of the Roman state, not only pray for "fortes exercitus", but even that Christians are to be found everywhere in social life: "vobiscum militamus"; on the other hand, however, he also declares: "how can anyone serve in war, or even be a soldier in peacetime, without a sword, because the Lord has taken it from them? Even if soldiers have come to John [the Baptist] and accepted his precepts, even if the centurion has come to the faith, every soldier has later ungirded the Lord by disarming Peter". This also has to do with idololatry, which was inseparable from the military essence. Conversely, canon III of the Council of Arles, convened by Constantine in 314 for quite different reasons (namely Donatism), stated that those who threw away their weapons in peacetime were excommunicated. At the court of Diocletian there were many Christians among the officials and staff - the large church was opposite the palace - but there were few soldiers. Lactantius goes particularly far when he declares that all deaths - and that was actually the main point - not only in games, but also in war and even as a result of a judicial sentence, are forbidden by God: there is no exception to this.

In contrast to this exaggeration there is an important policy provision of Emperor Constantine, namely that ex-soldiers who had been wrongfully dismissed because they had allowed their Christian confession to prevail over their function, were now free either to return to military service and their former rank, or to request an honourable discharge. For, it was added, it is fair and fitting that he who has shown such great courage and steadfastness in the danger that befell him, may now enjoy rest or an honourable position of his own choosing. It is therefore not at all questionable whether there were Christian soldiers in service. But it is also certain that Constantine did not demand the Christian confession from any of them. Coercion did not occur here either. Constantine remained true to the good Roman conviction, formulated by Tertullian: sed nec religionis est cogere religionem. There is mention of soldiers who go to church with the emperor and those who do not go to church; for the latter there is a formula prayer that they had to pray on Sunday in the open field outside the city, nothing more. H. Grégoire believes that the text of this comes from Licinius, and from his struggle with Maximinus, and was attributed to Constantine by Eusebius in his Vita in another context - one of Grégoire's arguments for the unreliability of Eusebius. Although there seems to be much to be said for Grégoire's textual criticism, the report about Constantine's tolerant ecclesiastical policy towards his soldiers remains unaffected by it. It would go too far to go into the historical reliability of the Vita Constantini in more detail here. It may be recalled that this has been strongly confirmed by the identification of the papyrus London 878 by A. H. M. Jones (of the Dept. of MSS., British Museum) in 1954. Equally or even more serious reproaches which historians are wont to bring against Constantine's government policy concern four executions. The death of Maximian in 310 at Marseilles, probably suicide, has already been mentioned. The high treason of Maximian, who after his abdication continually sought the recapture of the purple, is certain. He is called ambitious and untrustworthy (ἀπιστος). It is not right to approach a political verdict of Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century with the standard of modern humanism, as Gibbon did, while one often forgets the numerous judicial murders of which Licinius was guilty. The execution of Licinius himself must certainly be attributed to his attempts, after being defeated by Constantine and after Constantine's promise to his sister, wife of Licinius, to spare him, to come into military contact with enemies of the empire again. Zosimus considers it a breach of promise by Constantine, according to his custom (ήν γαρ τούτο αύτω σύνηθες), but this is a meaningless traditional judgment. Much more heavily on Constantine's conscience seems to be the death of Crispus and Fausta, which Julianus Apostate brings so strongly to the fore. Crispus was the eldest son (307) of Constantine and his first - legal or not - wife Minervina, gifted and

beloved by the army, who became governor of Gaul at the age of 17 and made a rapid, brilliant military career. He was then suspected and accused of having taken part in a conspiracy. Before or during the vicennalia, which Constantine celebrated in Rome, he was unexpectedly brought before a closed court and put to death at Pola in Istria. Someone has suggested that during the vicennalia he may have reminded his father in a very tactless manner of the agreed 20-year period of the first tetrarchy. The fact that the son of Licinius was also killed at that time may suggest that a political game was indeed being played, in which Fausta wanted to clear the way to the thrones for her own sons. In tradition, however, the reason is considered to be that Crispus, 20 years old and already a father himself, had an affair with Fausta, then about 28 years old. Helena, Constantine's mother - who had converted to Christianity with him - deeply upset about the death of her beloved grandson, is said to have convinced Constantine that not Crispus, but Fausta was the culprit, like the wife of Potiphar (Genesis 39, 11-20), whereupon Constantine knew no other solution than to have Fausta killed in an overheated bath. "Es steht fest, zegt Seeck, dass Untreue der Grund war" and Helena has retained her reputation as "magna femina", for example in Ambrosius. Burckhardt's verdict is that anyone who acts in this way is not a Christian: "The Christian Church has nothing to lose from these fearful, but politically large-scale people, just as the Paganism has nothing to gain from them". Neither Eusebius nor any other writer who should have known about it mentions a word about it; the matter was deliberately concealed and was apparently obscure to the contemporaries themselves. The damnatio memoriae of Crispus - and of Fausta -, which can be found on various monuments, was never undone by the father, from which it can be concluded that he was not able to convince himself of his son's innocence even later. No historian has ever considered for long what these executions must have cost Constantine personally. In the absence of historical texts, everyone seems to think that he got away with all this easily, and then judges accordingly. In the literature on Constantine the Great, the work of Jakob Burckhardt will never lose its classical place, even though the historical judgment of both the emperor and his eulogist Eusebius Pamphili, bishop of Caesarea Palestinae, has now been greatly changed by many, it has a quality that makes it difficult to dismiss as outdated, even with changed insight and more knowledge of the subject. Anyone who concerns himself with Constantine will, if necessary without speaking about it, feel the need to test himself against Burckhardt and to justify himself to him, certainly on certain points. Also in comparison with Eusebius' Vita Constantini, rightly characterized as ἐγκωμιαστικη τετράβιβλος, eulogy in four books by Photius, Bibl. cod. 127. Renewed study of the Vita gave me cause to revise the judgment I pronounced on it during the Academy Days IV in 1951 in Middelburg (pp. 31-49) and therefore to make a different use of it now for the history of Constantine than I did at the time. My image of Constantine himself has hardly changed in the meantime. The Vita is a biography that proclaims the praise of its hero, but on the basis of facts and with the help of documents, and without sinking into rhetoric. Eduard Schwartz recalls with good reason that Burckhardt, who did not understand its language and had no insight into the literary form of the Vita, passed the harshest judgment on it. "He who, however, is not out to judge but to understand, will not appreciate the historical value of this period that emerged from living history," he says. To interpret Constantine's attitude towards Christianity is more difficult but more useful than to moralize about the "court bishop". Eusebius believed in the blessing of the union of the emperor and the church. Even if that were a wicked error, one may not condemn him because he believed what all his colleagues believed and according to which they also acted". The West only gave Constantine cause for praise on festive occasions, but the Greek world has given him a biographer who, despite the praise to which he was forced by the prescribed style, did not forget that he was a historian, according to Hans Lietzmann. He continues: this man was Eusebius of Caesarea, who in a certain sense may be regarded as the spiritual representative of the time of Constantine. In his life's work - the Church History and the Life of Constantine - the turning point of the times is faithfully reflected, his words resound with the joy of victory that people enjoyed and the hope with which they looked to the future. This is the situation that must be taken as a starting point if one wants to judge Eusebius correctly. "Then one easily avoids the temptation to follow the example of a brilliant but not impartial judge "den ersten durch und durch unredlichen Geschichtsschreiber des Altertums". No greater injustice can be done to the honest man". Felix Stähelin has given us extensive information about the creation and history of Die Zeit Konstantins des Grossen in the second volume of the Jakob Burckhardt Gesamtausgabe (Berlin and Leipzig 1929) in the introduction to the reprint of the second edition. In connection with this, my friend H. Schulte Nordholt once again pointed out to me the conversation between the Byzantinologist Heinrich Gelzer and Burckhardt mentioned there. To Friedrich von Preen, who insisted on a reprint of the book published in 1852, Burckhardt wrote (31 May 1874) that he greatly

appreciated that he still showed so much interest in "meinen alten vergessenen Constanti". In this connection, Stähelin also quotes Geizer. His article on Burckhardt begins with the beautiful words: "Während fünf Semestern I am an experienced student with a clear understanding of the truth, with Jakob Burckhardt being able to listen to the history of the whole body of knowledge and a new version of the originality, and the human beings ranges in my view, who are present in my life schwächlichen Epigonenzeitalter immer seltener zijn". Gelzer and Burckhardt talked a lot about Constantine. The former stated that he had come to serious Byzantine study through Burckhardt's book. Burckhardt laughed and replied: "Mein guter Konstantin! Who was I, yet green, if I was the writer. Was woolen Sie? Das Buch is a long time ago!" Yet Gelzer noticed that Burckhardt still liked to talk about it. It is his only work, of which the great man single-handedly and with great care prepared the second edition (1874). They did not agree on the content, and Geiser saw in it the continuation of Burckhardt's aversion to Christianity; the first two years he had studied theology but then turned to history. Gottfried Kinkel then played a major role in the thinking of the young Burckhardt. In this way he arrived at a, according to Geiser, harsh and unjustified judgment of Eusebius and other churchmen (p. 340), after which Geiser concludes by - more strongly than Stähelin does - recalling the influence of Gibbon, Voltaire and the encyclopedists on Burckhardt. "So konstruierte er einen Konstantin à la Pompal, Tanucci or Kaunitz, von dem der historische Konstantin natürlich toto coelo versreden ist" (p. 355).

#### 7. The "Constantinian period"

Before coming to a conclusion, a few words about a concept that is not so much used by church historians as by politicizing theologians today. It is said that we are experiencing "the end of the Constantinian era" in our time. A decade ago, W. Kahle (Marburg) criticized this use of words in an article. The criticism begins with the simple observation that, strictly speaking, the Constantinian period lasted from 306 until his death in 337 and that therefore, when it is said that we are now experiencing its end, Constantine is thought of as the one symbolic figure for relations between state and church that lasted more than 16 centuries. The impression is thus created that these relations have remained the same throughout all that time, generally speaking. It is evident that this is not the case. Already from Constantine to Theodosius, and to Justinian, such significant developments occur that even then one can no longer speak of agreement. Throughout the centuries, in the East and in our West, and especially since the national churches came into being through the Reformation, all possible forms in the relations between states and churches, including the state church, have been seen and can still be seen. The separation of church and state in the French Revolution has become a new starting point in this area. Kahle rightly says that the slogan: "das Ende des konstantinischen Zeitalters" is not a church-historical observation, but that there is a program in it. That program amounts to this, that everything must be done to destroy the existing relations between church and state, between church and people, between church and social structure. Only then would a new freedom, a clearer understanding of, and better possibilities for the service of the church to the world arise. In 1974, W. Schneemelcher, church historian in Bonn, was equally critical of the slogan. In our country, too, this theme has been of special interest, and has been since 1946 due to H. Berkhof's book, *The Church and the Emperor*, which has also attracted much attention in a Swiss edition. This historical study, stimulated by the war experiences, devotes its first four chapters to the period before and after Constantine, after which the book crosses this boundary and concerns itself primarily with the difference in the historical position of the church in the East and the West, Byzantinism and theocracy. The reduction of the problem that lies in these terms has rightly aroused criticism from the German church historian K. Aland (Münster). However, the book is separate from the activist modern formulation of the problem and could still have a remedial influence on it now because it is fundamental in a historical sense. The difference between the two methods of approach, the politicized and the historical, is well indicated by a modern writer, who declared that just as "the Constantinian period" did not begin until 313, neither does it end in 1960 (or whenever). But then it would be better not to call it that. Moreover, it remains difficult to understand what convinced Christians see as the importance of a dechristianized public life.

#### 8. Conclusion

After having indicated this confusing phenomenon, it may perhaps be permissible in conclusion to test the general question of the relationship between church and state, between Christianity and the world, to which Constantine gave a first answer for his time, against the judgment of Augustine, born three quarters of a century after him, a Western theologian, who spoke wisely about it in *De civitate dei*. His "mirror of

princes" was already recalled at the beginning, and the expression "the quality of existence" was used (p. 7). The historical portrait of Constantine has not received much drawing from it, Augustine was apparently not aware of the facts in detail. For him, Constantine and Theodosius were but examples in his grand distinction between *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*. These are two different worlds, each with its own reality, in which man lives, but between which he must choose. Both worlds are mixed: "perplexae sunt istae duae civitates in hoc saeculo invicemque permixtae, donec ultimo iudicio dirimantur", these two states are confused and mixed with each other in this world until they are separated in the last judgment (*De civ. dei* I 35). This therefore applies for the entire duration of history: "ab initio usque in finem permixtae", and all that time both civitates enjoy the temporal goods equally but "in different faith, different hope and different love" (XVIII 54). Although mixed, they are thus qualitatively clearly distinguished. In the general phenomena of life, meanwhile, hardly anything of this can be observed externally: "temporalia bona et mala utrisque Deus voluit esse communia". He rules over the evil and the good, as we have already heard. "Quamdiu permixtae sunt ambae civitates utimur et nos pace Babylonis" (XIX 26), as long as both states are still mixed, we too enjoy the peace of Babylon. This applies to ordinary believers, but what about the imperator, who is responsible for the world and for that peace of Babylon, for the felicitas terrena? Augustine does not diminish his task and its weight, his responsibility. Is the "Tertullianische Zeitalter" with the experimental doctrine that the Roman emperor could not be a Christian, over for him? History has spoken, and differently than Tertullian could ever have thought. But Augustine does not become the theoretician of the Christian empire. The true God alone gives the power to rule to the pious and the ungodly "as it pleases Him in whom nothing wrongly pleases" (V 21). It matters little to a mortal man under whose empire he lives, as long as those who rule over him do not force him to commit impieties and injustices (V 17). The law of gloria, honor and imperium is *virtus*, and he therefore applauds the fact that the ancient Romans possessed temples to *Virtus* and *Honor* (V 12, 3). Judging and accepting in such relative terms, the *civitas dei*, who makes a pilgrimage on earth, obeys the laws of the state without hesitation (XIX 17), and, insofar as this is in keeping with *pietas* and *religio*, takes up the cause of the state and adapts itself (XIX 18). It can even use the strong arm of the state when the "suadibilis doctrina", the convincing consultation, remains without prospect; then "terribilis disciplina" may be unavoidable (XVIII 57). These and similar points were not foreign to Constantine. We have also heard how Augustine praised Theodosius for his positive, very just and merciful legislation in favour of the toiling church (*laboranti ecclesiae*, V 26). Augustine's own experiences with the stubborn Donatists had strengthened him in this line of thought.

Nevertheless, Constantine the Great and Augustine are far apart in many respects. The concepts of *civitas terrena* and *civitas dei* did not yet exist for Constantine and he also did not possess the view of the duality as expressed by Augustine in these terms. For Eusebius, Constantine had messianic significance and he was chosen by God to realise what was potentially given with the theophany - which in Eusebius takes the place of the incarnation. This does not allow for dualism. For Constantine himself, it was still different. A certain reserve with regard to church and theology was a clear characteristic of his imperial policy, which incidentally makes an absolutist impression. Not everything he wanted, believed and thought he could realize, reality simply did not lend itself to that, and he recognized that. He did say of himself: "I am that man who has dedicated his thinking with pure faith to God, man of God", ὁ του Θεου ἀνθρωπος" for I am Your man", ἐγώ γαρ ὁ σος ἀνθρωπος, Yours in short. As θεραπευτης του κρείτονος, servant of the Highest, his task was to establish peace in the world, there he was alone ruler for a *pax* comparable to the *pax Romana* but with a great new element in it. He wanted that in the *oikoumenē* that *pax* would be based partly on the worship of the one true God. He tried to achieve it in ecclesiastical matters, which were hardly ever in the air, by *προσφάνησις* and *vouθεσία*, persuasion, which can be compared with the "suadibilis doctrina" in Augustine. The strong arm was also available if necessary to promote unity in the church within the home as an example and interest of the first order for the world. "One should not abandon erring ones to error". Fear of divine wrath in case of negligence made him intervene. It is simply not possible to always indicate the boundary in a modern way between cool government responsibility and - let us say - missionary consciousness in a great man like Constantine. "All too often that which essentially belongs to the higher level turns out to be a task of the emperor, and then unmistakably in a pre-Christian form", according to Dörries. One can adopt Seeck's judgment that Constantine did not sin in one way or another more than was inevitable for an emperor. To put it in Augustinian terminology: both civitates are *perplexae* and *permixtae*, and that has its consequences, in a personal sense, for those who are called to rule.

Constantine was not the Christian emperor, whose image the early Middle Ages had formed, even before Charlemagne from Augustine's *De civitate dei*, the *rex iustus*, who creates the "aetas aurea", the *imperator felix*, whom we already got to know at the beginning. It is known from the *Vita Caroli Einhardi* that Charlemagne liked to have Augustine, and in particular *De civitate dei*, read to him. Ernst Bernheim devoted an important book to the development of the medieval conception of the "imperator felix" in 1918, which was heavily contested, among others by W. Kamlah, who seems to destroy the entire historical theory of Charlemagne's ideology based on Augustine.

Kamlah's work is entitled *Christentum und Geschichtlichkeit* and raises the question of whether and how Christianity, which is a religion, can take on historical form. If we assume that he translates the concept of "civitas dei" not as "Gottesstaat" but as "Bürgerschaft Gottes", it is clear from the outset that we will no longer get out of the dialectical train of thought. And, I believe, unavoidably; but the extensive discussion on the entire subject cannot be discussed here in more detail.

Kamlah also deals with the Constantine period. To begin with, he calls Eusebius the first Byzantine court theologian - which is not correct, one can at most call this ecclesiastical archivist a forerunner of the Byzantine court theologians - and says that Augustine does not follow in his footsteps, insofar as he is reserved about the possibility of identifying *imperium romanum* and church by Constantine and Theodosius. This is, however, too much said, it was not so with Constantine, in distinction from Theodosius. But leaving this aside, Kamlah means by this what has already been noted, namely that it matters less by whom one is governed, provided that no matters are required that conflict with religion. Not only was the church, according to Kamlah, already prepared for Constantine, the Roman state had also already come a long way towards the church. A "profane" state without any political cult was unthinkable in the fourth century. "Roma aeterna" was a confession of faith. The experiment of Heliogabalus with the Syrian Baal and that of Aurelian with the *Deus Sol Invictus* had failed. The Christian experiment of Constantine, however, succeeded in the shortest possible time, in which Christianity was abused as a state religion - says Kamlah - in a role that did not originate from Christian, but from pagan-Roman tradition. This view, which also occurs in others, is much too general and does not do Constantine justice. Of course Constantine did not stand outside the framework of thought of his time, and the emperor was also strongly framed in his function. But we have repeatedly seen how he spared the church's own authority. He knew in the church, or rather in what the church, which was a new and unheard-of well-organized element in Roman society, advocated, that is, in the Christian religion, that he was dealing with a greatness that went far beyond and above all his own imperial thinking and power. Constantine did not manipulate the church. Kamlah maintains that the court theologian Eusebius, following in the footsteps of Origen, built up a theology of the Christian Roman polis and that he saw the Old Testament promise of peace for all peoples already fulfilled in the *pax romana*, and therefore all the more in the *pax constantiniana*. It is important to note here, what is often overlooked

it is seen that there is a great difference whether one hears Constantine speaking about himself or Eusebius speaking about Constantine. This is actually what Kamlah starts from and he devotes a separate paragraph to it under the title "Augustins Absage an die eusebianische Reichstheologie". He explains that for Augustine, in contrast to Origen and the early apologists, it is unthinkable that the *civitas* of the Romans would transform itself into the *civitas dei*. "But it would be conceivable, if necessary, a polis that abolishes its bond with the gods and replaces it with the bond with Christ. In this spirit, Constantine and his successors have caused the altars of the gods to fall and granted privileges of them to the churches. In this way a Christian empire had come into being insofar as public worship had become the service of Christ. But even a Christian state in this sense is not known or acknowledged by Augustine, at least not in *De civitate dei*". So much for Kamlah. After the *capita* on the *felices imperatores*, with which I began above, and in which Constantine and Theodosius were the great examples, Augustine does not arrive at a doctrine of Christian emperorship and he only acknowledges the possibility that God's grace from time to time gives the world a Christian emperor. God sometimes entrusts earthly rule to a pious, then again to an unpious prince according to His good pleasure. These were alternately Marius, Caesar, Augustus, also Nero, the *Vespasiani*, *suavissimi imperatores*, the terrible Domitian, the Christian Constantine and the apostate Julian. From these changes Christians must learn that a Christian government belongs to the temporal goods that one can do without if one realizes that one is only in a foreign land on earth. Augustine is, however, not always entirely consistent in this terminology. Although he does not and cannot acknowledge a "Konstantinian Turn" according to the relativizing principles developed here, he nevertheless uses, especially in the apologetic chapters of *De civitate dei*, the expression "christiana tempora". He makes it clear, for example, that it was thanks

to christiana tempora, to the Christian character of the times that were then experienced, that the destruction of Rome in 410 by Alaric had not gone much further. This term also occurs in Ambrose. We now live in Christian times, said the Milanese bishop, and therefore the ara Victoriae must leave the curia and the Roman cult can no longer claim state subsidies. Although there seems to be a strong consolidation in this, Ambrose nevertheless, dialectically, also had an eye, thanks to certain experiences, for the other side. In his funeral oration De obitu Valentiniani he let slip: "it is better that emperors persecute bishops than that they love them". It remains that paradoxical. Thus Augustine cannot have meant a solid "christianum imperium" with "christiana tempora". Civitas terrena and civitas dei cannot merge or merge into each other, the Middle Ages did not interpret Augustine rightly in this respect. Augustine did not agree with the Historia adversus paganos of his pupil and friend Orosius. But that does not yet interpret Constantine the Great. Constantine accepted Christianity instead of the religio romana and gave it its place. That had great consequences. That he saw the perspective of a Christianized Roman empire cannot be denied on the basis of his own words, but he did not have a theory about it. In vain will one search in his history for a word such as Alcuin addressed to Charlemagne in certain circumstances: ecce in te sola salus ecclesiarum Christi recumbit, on you indeed rests the entire welfare of Christ's churches. He was in a duality of thought because he was emperor and Christian. The fact of his late baptism, namely on his deathbed, proves this. He did not postpone baptism for convenience, but precisely because he believed in it and took this sacrament completely seriously. He lived in an enormous problematic, and this makes the image of the first Christian emperor in his majestic figure and with his incomparable powers and merits so approachable.

Two other answers to the great question: what to think of the Christian faith of Constantine, what to think of Christianity that obtained its great public place in the Roman Empire under his reign, may find a place here. It is necessary for the historian to try to adapt his thinking to that of the first half of the fourth century. But therein lies the great difficulty, which makes him feel constantly uncertain. A good start was made in our time by the American church historian K. Scott Latourette in his original History of the Expansion of Christianity. He breaks open the problem by this to ask whether Christianity would have achieved victory without Constantine. Although no one can give an answer to this, he states that any reasonable ruler would have had to see that the persecutions had failed and that whoever had the hope and ambition to bring the empire - or a significant part of it - under his authority, had in any case to try to come to an agreement with the church, which, despite all pressure, had become a new and highly important, clear and strong organization in society. It is therefore obvious to assume that, if Constantine had not come to power or had acted less positively towards it, another would soon have arisen who would have made Christianity the public religion. In response to the further, more specific question of how the Christian religion achieved spiritual victory, Latourette proposes ten points of view for consideration, which I will briefly summarize here. The victory of Christianity came about:

Thanks to the support of Constantine...

As a result of the increasing disintegration of society...

Thanks to the excellently developed organization of the church...

By the "inclusiveness" of Christianity that embraced all classes and races... Thanks to the intransigence as well as the flexibility of Christianity...

Because Christianity provided what the Greco-Roman world expected and desired from religion and philosophy, and did this better than its competitors...

Thanks to its ancient Jewish origins and its revered Scriptures...

By the belief in miracles...

Thanks to its high moral quality.

And finally, by the creative force behind all this, which brought about a revolution in the lives of all who opened themselves to it: Jesus.

Here Latourette has approached the limit at which the historian is inclined to stop. Yet "the uniqueness of Jesus", which Latourette thus mentions by name, cannot be sidelined, if one does not want to remain at a level where only apparently rationally verifiable motives apply, which have their inspiration from nowhere and therefore remain essentially unexplained. The historian of religion or church must dare to cross that boundary here. This becomes apparent if one places, for example, the argument of Arnold Toynbee next to that of Latourette.

Religiously, philosophically and politically, says Toynbee, the times had changed since Heliogabalus and Aurelian. The religious vacuum in the hearts of the subjects had to be filled by a living, not a constructed, religion. This was there, not imposed from above, but revealed in the social underclass, and Constantine had

understood this: the service of the almighty God was set against the tame and  
 1160 impotent Sol invictus, who was truly strong and could not be trifled with  
 (intractable). No God who, although formally the emperor's patron, was in reality  
 only his puppet, unable to win the hearts of the emperor's subjects. There remained  
 only one alternative: the imperial authority itself had to place itself under the  
 1165 aegis of a living religion, which had its own independent existence and was not  
 critically examined by the subjects because it had been put together by the  
 authorities for its *raison d'état*. These conditions were fulfilled in the Roman  
 empire by Christianity, whose spiritual independence from all politics had been  
 proven by a long history of martyria, at the beginning of which stood the cross of  
 the Founder. The step that Constantine took was revolutionary, especially in this  
 1170 respect, that he bought the new religious sanction of the empire at the price of his  
 subjection to the spiritual authority of the church - the form in which Christianity  
 was visible and tangible - which was not under government supervision, on the  
 contrary, had hitherto shown itself to be unmanageable. In this way the emperor-  
 convert made himself dependent on the grace of the church. That became a permanent  
 1175 decision. The inability of a subsequent emperor to dethrone the thus officially  
 established higher religion has been demonstrated by the failure of Julian.  
 Toynbee works with the terms: religions and higher religions, and he contrasts "the  
 1180 old order and the new gospel", of which he says that in this case new and old are  
 irreconcilable. He also uses the gospel words: I have not come to bring peace but a  
 sword (Mt. 10:34) and: woe to you when men speak well of you! For that is what their  
 1185 fathers did of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). The problem of the relationship of the  
 higher religions to the old order, he says, is simple, as long as the old order  
 prohibits and persecutes them; it becomes complicated and difficult when the old  
 order proves willing to negotiate. Then the dangers of weakening and the consequences  
 of mass conversions threaten - and that is what happened. All the means to share a  
 1190 concordat with institutions that embody and maintain something of "the old order" is  
 as much as to blunt the edge of the sword that the higher religion - the church -  
 needs precisely to fulfill its own spiritual mission. And so it can be diverted from  
 its mission, even channeled back into the service of the old establishment.  
 These observations, the last of which take on a more general character, are  
 1195 consistent with what church historians have been saying for so long about the history  
 of the fourth century. If we now compare Toynbee's views with those of Latourette,  
 they agree above all in that both observe a religious vacuum in which there was room  
 for, perhaps we may say: that called for fulfillment. The difference is that Toynbee  
 1200 speaks of a new living religion that had come to light in the social underclass,  
 without saying from what source or inspiration, while Latourette explicitly names the  
 "uniqueness of Jesus" as the source, as the actual explanation, behind the many  
 phenomena that can be observed in the great change. In my opinion, the church  
 historian may well supplement the cultural historian in this way. Even further, the  
 Berlin church historian Karl Holl at the time went into the question of why  
 1205 Christianity had won over the religions in the old world, in which he also in fact  
 put the actual religious problem more sharply. Unlike Latourette and Toynbee and so  
 many others, he assumed that the old religions were not at all so empty, meaningless  
 and dead, but alive and still possessed power, as Joh. Geffcken depicted them. Not  
 through flexibility, syncretistic adaptation and absorption did Christianity rise  
 1210 above all others, but through its most essential depth, which Celsus and Julian could  
 only mock, but which struck those who opened themselves up to it in the heart and  
 renewed them: the forgiveness of sins. Harnack, who himself, as a historian, had  
 always followed a somewhat different path to explanation, has called Holl's brilliant  
 examination of this great religious-historical problem from late antiquity the best  
 1215 that had been said about it for a long time. Although this was half a century ago, it  
 is still just as valid.  
 Let us return to Constantine himself. In the Roman Empire, Christianity acquired the  
 place of recognized religion under his leadership. This did not happen without the  
 1220 inner conviction of the emperor himself; and this conviction was not an opinion that  
 he had formed for himself or to which a realistic policy had led him, but an effect  
 that had taken possession of him, to which he first submitted and which he then  
 vigorously advocated in all situations. From the documents in Eusebius one can follow  
 this development. It is more adequately expressed than with the quoted words of Seeck  
 that, once begun, the following phases were prescribed to him in a compelling manner.  
 Although it may have looked rather remarkable in the beginning, and on the many  
 1225 battlefields, according to our strongly evolved feelings and concepts, we must  
 realize that the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the hands of the emperor  
 could hardly have begun otherwise than with cultic and legal forms, and had to work  
 from outside, one might even say, inward. Without institutions, Christianity does not  
 come to fruition either. That was the case in the culture of Roman society in any  
 case. Tolerance on both sides did not guarantee that everything would proceed without

shocks, but it did guarantee that the goal would be approached. Of Constantine, the central figure, it can at least be said that he had a sense of the other world - which Augustine would call the *civitas dei* - and, according to a happy saying, from *crédule* to *croyant* appears to have become. Eusebius knew something of the emperor's inner, unspoken feelings.

On the occasion of his emperor's tricennalis, Eusebius delivered the festive speech, the *Triakontaeterikos*, which we quote as *Laus Constantini*. It begins thus: "This is the feast day of the great king... Great I call the truly great king. Him I mean - the emperor present here will not take it amiss but will agree with the (that is: our speaking about God) - who stands above the universe, the highest of all, the most exalted, the most great, whose throne is the vault of heaven and the earth is the footstool of his feet" (Ps. 110, 1). Who does not think here of the first words of the funeral oration of Massillon in the *Sainte Chapelle* at the bier of Louis XIV in 1715: "God himself is great, my brothers, and in these last moments above all, or presides over the death of the kings of the earth: the more their glory and their power have shone forth and then perish, the more do they pay homage to His greatness. God proves to be all that He is, and man nothing more of all that he is? It meant to be". But this was the beginning of a funeral oration, the words of Eusebius were spoken in the presence of a living jubilant prince, who himself agreed with them. And the orator - wrongly belittled by church historians as a court theologian - said something more. He praised Constantine's personal qualities: elevated above material things, controlling his desires and lusts, not controlled by passion and anger, in every respect a true ???, one who is master of himself. But then it follows that precisely such a person is able to see the brevity of ruling over people in this mortal and temporary life, which is not worth much more than what a goatherd or cowherd has to do. That brings us back to Augustine, who reminds us that man is only called to rule over unreasonable creatures: *non hominem homini sed hominem pecori*, and that therefore there have been just shepherds rather than kings. The acclamations, thus Eusebius, he found the people and the voices of the flatterers rather troublesome than a pleasure, thanks to his strict reasonableness and the true civility of his mind. Constantine was apparently able to judge his own position from a distance and objectively, even at an enormous celebration. On another occasion he himself spoke of a *ἀπλούς βίος*, a life in simplicity and honesty, without a double bottom and which does not hide its anger behind beautiful hypocrisy. It remains undesirable to use the slogan: end of the Constantinian period. It creates the greatest historical confusion. It is better to return to the simple classical formula of Eusebius: "pax ecclesiae", because to have achieved this was first and foremost Constantine's revolutionary, creative act in history. And nothing more. Constantine is not the creator of Byzantinism. With the panegyric of Nazarius (321) we therefore say, not in a negative but in an appreciative sense: "una demum Constantini oblivio est humani generis occasus", Constantine will not be forgotten until the whole of humanity perishes.