

IV Constantine's Miracle

It is demonstrably true that the Imperial so-called *Catholic* Church of the Roman Empire promoted a general change of Christian faith and morals and church discipline in many areas, and that it substantially modified basic Christian doctrines. As did the Imperial so-called *Orthodox* Church of the eastern empire.

(It is the false claim of mainstream Protestantism that the Reformation restored the original Christian faith, which was allegedly perverted, not by the advent of the Imperial Church, but long afterwards, by the Pope's assumption of secular power. Luther accepted the church of Constantine and the Reformers were followers of Augustine. Luther and Calvin both sanctioned the State Church, to which they owed their positions.)

Development of Doctrine ? or Corruption of the Faith ?

After he became a Catholic, John Henry Newman argued that *development of doctrine* does not necessarily mean corruption of faith and morals. But one of the prime examples he gives of a **DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE** is a striking instance of just how great a change there was.

In *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (5.1.3 page 172-173) "Genuine Developments Contrasted With Corruptions" he writes: "In like manner, it has been argued by a late writer, [Milman] whether fairly or not does not interfere with the illustration, that the miraculous vision and dream of the Labarum could not have really taken place, as reported by Eusebius, because it is counter to the original type of Christianity. *For the first time*, he says, *on occasion of Constantine's introduction of the standard into his armies, the meek and peaceful Jesus became a God of battle, and the Cross, the holy sign of Christian Redemption, a banner of bloody strife. . . . This was the first advance to the military Christianity of the middle ages, a modification of the pure religion of the Gospel, if directly opposed to its genuine principles, still apparently indispensable to the social progress of men.*"

And then Newman comments: "On the other hand, a popular leader may go through a variety of professions, he may court parties and break with them, he may contradict himself in words, and undo his own measures, yet there may be a steady fulfillment of certain objects, or adherence to certain plain doctrines, which gives a unity to his career, and impresses on beholders an image of directness and large consistency which shows a fidelity to his type from first to last."

In short, Jesus Christ, like Disraeli or Bill Clinton, may have shifted his policies from one time to the next. He may have been the Prince of Peace at one time but that didn't prevent Him from becoming the new war god of the Roman Empire at another time. Like a popular politician looking for votes, Jesus Christ sometimes took a position just the opposite of that which he had formerly espoused. Like Disraeli or Bill Clinton, he may have left some of his followers dismayed and confounded, but the more sophisticated understood what he was doing.

It is apparent that both Milman and Newman perceive the obvious contradiction between these two beliefs as to what Jesus Christ stands for, but neither one is able to state it

plainly. Newman lets Milman state it for him while he preserves his "neutrality" on a radical and fundamental change in Christian history and Christian faith and Christian morals. Milman does state it: *directly opposed to its genuine principles* and then backs away from it. Because both men are bound to the state church tradition, neither can say bluntly and unequivocally what is obvious to both of them: Constantine's "miracle" was a perversion of the Christian faith. Constantine's "Jesus Christ" is the negation of the real Jesus Christ, is the anti-Christ.

These men illustrate here the fallacy that "ideas" or purely intellectual truth can ever be the real Christian truth about anything. Without the Spirit of Truth you do not have the Spirit of Courage that is required to stand up for the Truth. It is obvious that the nit-picking intellectualism of the Imperial Church "theologians" served to hide from themselves and others their cowardly abandonment and betrayal of Christian faith and morals in a dozen major ways.

worldly power

The writer of the eb 9 essay on *Constantine* does a similar duck out: *he endowed the new religion for the first time with that instrument of worldly power . . . whether for good or for evil or for both . . .* (VI 301c) Like the world to which it has now conformed, the new Christianity is inevitably a murky mixture of good and evil with no way of separating the two. The murky analysis of these scholars arises from their own compromised positions.

The latest benefits of the merger of the Church with *worldly power* include 60 million killed in World War II. In conformity with the morality of the State Church, the Catholics and Lutherans of Germany marched off to carry out the grand vision of the new German Caesar to establish a world empire. Franz Jaggerstatter shows what the difference could have been. How easily these Christian nations submitted to Stalin and Hitler, how readily they embraced their mission of mass murder. Of course it was the great war which erupted in the middle of Christendom in 1914 that produced Bolshevism and Nazism in two supposedly Christian Nations. The endless wars of Worldly Christianity are the sure sign of its moral apostasy.

Newman's lack of moral courage here is not surprising. It is conspicuous in shaping the decision he made which he discusses in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. There is a striking contrast with the courage that John Wesley showed in following his conscience in a similar predicament. Newman apparently could not imagine how to live outside the safe sinecure of a state church establishment. If he wasn't an Anglican in his rooms at Oxford, he had to be a Catholic in the best University they had to offer. It was beyond him to follow the Spirit of Truth, if it meant that he might wind up like Wesley did, out in a field somewhere preaching to a bunch of colliers. So his remarkable insights into the truth of the Christian faith are always subordinated, as here, by the final necessity of conforming to the establishment line.

Newman is twitting his former Anglican colleagues by diffidently pointing out that they are not in a position to argue about the corruption of basic Christian beliefs in the Catholic Church. *Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones*. If there is idolatry in promoting Mary to **GOD THE MOTHER**, the new mother goddess of the Imperial pagan & "Christian" Church, there is a far more pernicious idolatry and perversion in the establishment of a State Church which promotes Jesus Christ into the **NEW MARS**. If the authority claimed by the

Pontifex Maximus over the Christian Church is a usurpation, what about the authority that the Emperor and the King assumed over the Church ? That is, the Anglicans had better refrain from seriously pursuing the question of "development of doctrine" in the Church. They are stuck with defending **MILITARY CHRISTIANITY** and the State Church just like the Catholics.

The Conquering Cross

As given in Socrates I.2 what happened is that as Constantine *was hesitating what divinity's aid he should invoke for the successful conduct of the war, it occurred to him that Diocletian had profited but little by the Pagan deities, whom he had so sedulously sought to propitiate; but that his own father Constantius, who had renounced the idolatrous worship of the Greeks, had passed through life far more prosperously. In this state of uncertainty, a preternatural vision, which transcends all description, appeared to him as he was marching at the head of his troops: he saw, about that part of the day when the sun after passing the meridian begins to decline towards the west, a pillar of light in the heavens, in the form of a cross, on which were inscribed these words, BY THIS CONQUER. . . . In his slumbers on the following night he saw Christ, who directed him to prepare a standard according to the pattern of that which had been seen; and to use it against his enemies as an assured trophy of victory.* Which he did and that is how he became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, with the help of Jesus Christ.

As Milman points out, the **MILITARY CHRISTIANITY** of the middle ages begins with this miracle and ensuing vision which were given to the Emperor Constantine. It is a turning point in the history of Christianity. In fact it is a 180 degree turn. Henry Milman notes *the unimpeached and unquestioned authority of this miracle during . . . many centuries.* [*History of Christianity*, Volume 2, book 3, chapter 1]

So those that promoted the new Imperial Church not only came up with new scripture (as argued later) they also came up with new miracles whereby the new faith and morals of the Imperial Church was established.

You can argue as a matter of history that Constantine's miracle was a later fabrication. As Gibbon points out (chapter XX p 649 footnote 48) the story is found in Eusebius **LIFE OF CONSTANTINE** but not in his **HISTORY**. He notes that the Ecclesiastical writers of the 4th and 5th century were unaware of the story. (649 fn 52) He points out a passage in Cyril of Jerusalem which shows that Cyril did not know the story. (XXI fn 88 page 695) He argues from Eusebius himself that the *labarum* did not in fact appear in front of Constantine's army until his expedition against Licinius in 323 A.D. (XX 645 fn 36)

Faith of the Christian historian

But aside from the question of when the story was first told, a Christian historian has to decide whether he believes in Constantine's miracle or not. He has to confront the question that Newman lets Milman raise: Could this have really happened ? Isn't it *counter to the original type of Christianity* ?

It makes all the difference in how you write the history of the Christian Church. If you believe in this miracle, then you believe that Jesus Christ founded the Imperial Church of the

Roman Empire. If you dis-believe in this miracle, you believe that this was an anti-Church characterized by the lies and violence that mark Satan's establishment. It is not a minor question. Did the Imperial Church of Constantine represent a "development" of the Christian Church? Or was it a perversion of the Christian faith which produced an anti-Church?

That question is fundamental to the "Catholic" / "donatist" dispute. The reason the "donatists" insisted on re-baptizing those who came to them from the "Catholic Church" is that they believed it to be a "Church" of Satan. They believed it to be a Church of Satan because it was founded by the Emperor as a Church of War.

A devout Christian, who believes in the Jesus Christ of the gospels, would reject Constantine's "miracle" as a fraud and a blasphemy without hesitation. And therefore he would reject the "Church" which is built upon the acceptance of this "miracle" as a) apostate b) heretical and c) schismatic. It represents a fundamental apostasy of Christian morals in respect to taking up arms for the kingdoms of this world. It represents an extreme heresy, a blasphemy in fact, in the way it turns the Prince of Peace into the war god of an evil empire. Those who join this evil "Church" have necessarily parted company with the true Christian Church.

faithless history

Of course there is such a thing as faithless history, if you can call it "history." What is often presented as Christian history is only bad sociology. (Not that there is really any such thing as good sociology.) This new Oxford *HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY* offers good examples of this "objective" or faithless history. It notes as a fact (pp 389-390) that young people in the church have increasingly accepted contraception and abortion. So you can note that Christians once thought divorce was wrong. Now they think it is all right. Christians once thought war was wrong. Then they decided it was all right. They once thought that the emperor was Satan's man. Then they decided that he was Jesus Christ's man. So whatever "Christians" think is all right is Christian morality. Whatever they believe in is Christian faith. Christians used to believe that Jesus Christ was God. Now most of them don't. They used to believe in heaven and hell. Now they don't. So "Christian" means whatever anyone wants it to mean. It includes anything and everything which calls itself "Christian" whether the Mormons or the Bahai.

But you can't write anything resembling history without some kind of faith. It may be a faith in the Roman Empire--that is what inspired Edward Gibbon. But he does have a faith which gives him a focus and a way of deciding, among an infinite number of supposed "facts," which are really facts and which ones are relevant to his history. If you don't have some kind of faith, then you get lost in the data banks. You endlessly invent theses to fit various sets of "facts." There is no end to it and it never arrives anywhere.

Gibbon is a good example of a skeptical historian, even a cynical historian, in respect to the miracles of Christianity. He reserves his faith for the Empire. As to Christianity, he treats the miracles of early Christianity and the miracles of Imperial Christianity with the same detached skepticism. He mocks the state church historians for their stories of miracles, but he has no faith in the early Christian church either by which he might draw a contrast.

credulous history

The state church historians are credulous historians. They believe in any and all miracles. They believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and in his miraculous partnership with Constantine. They believe in the miraculous cures of Jesus of Nazareth and the miraculous poisoning of Arius and the miraculous arson of the pagan temple that Julian restored near Antioch. They believe in the miracle of Constantine and they believe in the Christian Empire which was thereby established. They combine faith with superstition into a kind of Christian credulity that has marked **CHRISTENDOM** ever since. It is a faith in the power of the Holy Spirit and a faith in the power of armies and an inability, a refusal, to distinguish one from the other. It is a combined faith in the Christian Church and the Roman Empire.

You can't write Christian History without a faith that Jesus Christ is the central fact of history, that his life and death really do mark the beginning of the history that matters. But if your faith in Jesus Christ includes a faith in the Emperor Constantine then it becomes an entirely different history. These are two contrary histories.

Of course there are "developments" in Christian history. Saul becoming Saint Paul is an important development in Christian history. But what is Constantine? Does he represent a "development" or does he represent a betrayal? A Christian historian has to face up squarely to that question. If he evades the question, he can never give a true answer to other basic questions about the history of Christianity. That is really what has happened. That is why the history we have is bad history. Because it is cowardly and dishonest history, as in the section of Newman's book that I quoted. Having evaded the essential question, Newman wanders off into what is essentially garbage, for all its sophistication. Here is a rare intellect, thoroughly knowledgeable about the history of the Church, who writes interminable twaddle because he doesn't have the courage to truthfully answer an essential question about the history of Christianity.

Constantine's "miracle" was not just a one time event that can be disregarded as a fable. It was, as Milman says, the beginning of **MILITARY CHRISTIANITY**. It was a **MODIFICATION OF THE PURE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL . . . DIRECTLY OPPOSED TO ITS GENUINE PRINCIPLES . . .** And, if he could have brought himself to put a period there, his history of the church would have been entirely different from the one he wrote.

Whether Constantine's vision was real or not, the Imperial Church he founded was real. And the faith in Secular Christianity was real. It shaped history for 1600 years thereafter. This was the first of many military marvels and miracles upon which the faith of Secular Christianity was established. Constantine's mother discovers the true cross in Jerusalem through a series of miracles. Most of the cross is placed inside the statue of the Emperor Constantine in Constantinople where it becomes a center of devotion. (Philostorgius II 17, Socrates I 17 & Theodoret I 34) The presence of the true cross in Constantinople guarantees the military safety of Constantine's capitol. Constantine makes a bridle bit for his war horse with the nails from the cross. He takes the martyr's title of **VICTOR** to show that by his sword he has fulfilled the victory that the Christian martyrs won by submitting to the sword of Imperial persecution.

Mary the mother of battles

As Milman says, *MILITARY CHRISTIANITY* was thereby established. Like Jesus himself, his apostles are now enlisted in the wars of the empire. The Emperor Theodosius I supposedly won his great victory over Eugenius in 394 A.D. thanks to the miraculous help of Saints Philip & John. (eb9 XXIII 257c) Mary, the mother of Jesus, also thereafter plays an important role as a goddess of battles. Narses, the eunuch general of Justinian in the 6th century, never went into battle until he received a sign from the Virgin. (eb9 XVII 234c)

The *holy lance* with a point supposedly made from the nails of the Cross helps Otho the Great defeat the pagan Hungarians in a battle of the 10th century. These miracles and signs and wonders of Constantine and the other so-called "Christian" emperors, if they are accepted as an authentic part of the Christian faith, have the effect of transforming the Christian faith. They are far more potent than changes in church discipline or theology, but of course they are accompanied by the changes in morality and theology which are necessary to justify them. Seventy-five years later, Augustine became the major architect of the changes in theology which the new Church of the Empire required. He developed the theoretical framework for the new Secular Faith. But the practical changes in faith and morals had already been made.

If Jesus Christ is now Constantine's partner, then it is right for Christians to serve in Constantine's armies. It is right for Christians to fight in a "just war" or an unjust war according to Augustine's doctrine because no one except the emperor can decide whether or not it is just. It isn't up to the individual Christian to decide whether or not a war is just. If it isn't, the emperor must answer to God, but the duty of the individual Christian is to obey the emperor. (*c. Faust 22.74-75*) Peter's injunction that *we must obey God rather than man* is obsolete doctrine now that we have an emperor who calls himself a "Christian."

When Pope Pius XI blessed the army of Mussolini on its way to the rape of Ethiopia, he was re-affirming the partnership between Church and State that was established by Constantine's miracle 1600 years earlier. When German Catholics and German Lutherans put on their uniforms and went off to kill whoever Der Kaiser or Der Fuhrer ordered them to kill, they were acting in conformity with the teaching of Augustine of Hippo. But was it the teaching of Jesus Christ ? That is the question that Newman and Milman could not answer honestly.

The credibility of the later **cross in the sky** story is undermined by the original **cross of triumph** story which Eusebius tells in ix.9.10-11 of his *Church History* and in I.40 of his *Life of Constantine*: When he entered Rome in A.D. 312, Constantine immediately ordered a statue of himself with a cross in his hand to be set up *in the most public place in Rome* with an inscription stating that *BY THIS SALUTARY SIGN, THE TRUE PROOF OF BRAVERY, I SAVED AND DELIVERED YOUR CITY FROM THE YOKE OF THE TYRANT*. Constantine did erect a triumphal arch, made over from the arch of Trajan. It is still standing and many later visitors to Rome have seen it and read the inscription--which neglects to say anything about the cross of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, no one except Eusebius seems ever to have seen the statue of Constantine holding the cross and the inscription which accompanied it. Even though it was presumably made of durable material, it vanished as quickly as the vision of the cross in the sky !

This article is a chapter from my book The Church of the Empire, an historical analysis of the Church founded by the Roman Emperor Constantine and the 100 year persecution of the non-conforming Christian Church of North Africa. Based upon Optatus, Augustine, Eusebius, and other documents and histories of the period.

To order a CD-ROM containing The Church of the Empire, please send a \$20 check or money order to Terry Sullivan 1526 East 35th Avenue, Denver, Colorado 80205.