**“How the Catholic Creed Was Made. The Catholic Church Established under Constantine” The Present Truth 13, 25, pp. 385-388.**

[The “falling away,” predicted by the apostle Paul (2 Thessalonians 2.), very soon alter the apostles’ days resolved the great body of the professed church into warring factious. Through the second and third centuries rival bishoprics strove for the supremacy. At the opening of the fourth century the last great effort of the old Paganism to overthrow the now was made under Diocletian. The common resistance of this persecution restored a semblance of outward unity to the churches. Following Diocletian there was for eighteen years continuous discord in the Roman State. Rival emperors intrigued and fought one another to get sole control. It was in this struggle that Constantine, who was a pagan, conceived the idea of securing the support of the bishops and the church party. In return for this help he was to favour the churches. The worldly churches, bereft of the power of the Gospel, and ambitious for political power, hailed him as a Divine deliverer. By their help, and by his own ability and unscrupulous use of power, he soon his cause and became sole emperor. And, although guilty of every crime and treachery, even to the murder of his own wife and son, the bishops flattered him in life and deified him at his death, and be is set down in church history as the first Christian emperor.] {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 385.1}

IF the mutual flattery of Constantine and the bishops had concerned only themselves, it would have been a matter of very slight importance indeed; but this was not so. Each side represented an important interest. Constantine represented the State, and the bishops the church; and their mutual flattery was only the covering of a deep-laid and far-reaching scheme which each party was determined to work to the utmost, for its own interests. “It was the aim of Constantine,” says Draper, “to make theology a branch of politics; it was the hope of every bishop in the empire to make politics a branch of theology.” Consequently, in their relations were involved the interests of both the Church and the State, and the welfare of human society for ages to come. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 385.2}

Therefore, “To the reign of Constantine the Great oust be referred the commencement of those dark and dismal times which oppressed Europe for a thousand years. It is the true close of the Roman empire, the beginning of the Greek. The transition from one to the other is emphatically and abruptly marked by a new metropolis, a new religion, a new code, and, above all, a new policy. An ambitious man has attained to imperial power by personating the interests of a rapidly growing party. The unavoidable consequences were a union between the Church and the State, a diverting of the dangerous classes from civil to ecclesiastical paths, and the decay and materialisation of religion.” (“Draper’s Intellectual Development of Europe.”) {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 385.3}

**WHAT CONSTANTINE EXPECTED**

WHEN the alliance was formed between Constantine and what was represents to him as Christianity, it was with the idea on his part that this religion formed a united body throughout the empire. This was true in a certain sense, because the persecution as carried on under the edicts of Diocletian, was against Christianity as a profession, without any distinction whatever as to its phases, and this caused all the different sects to stand together as one in defence of the principles that were common to all. Therefore the essential unity of all the professions of Christianity he supposed to be a fact; and from all his actions and writings afterward it is certain that representations had been made to him by the bishops in a stronger measure than was true, and in an infinitely stronger measure than he found it in practice to be. The alliance with Christianity on his part was wholly political, and merely a part of the political machinery by which he designed to bring together again the divided elements of the empire into one harmonious whole. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 385.4}

It had been easy enough for all the sects in which Christianity claimed at that time to be represented, to stand together against an effort of the imperial power to crush out of existence the very name, as well as the right to profess it. It was not so easy for these same denominations to stand together as one, representing the charity and unifying influence of Christianity, when imperial support, imperial influence, and imperial power, were the prizes to be gained. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.1}

**THE STATE DECIDING RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES**

THEREFORE, although the alliance was formed with what was supposed to be Christianity as a whole, without any respect to internal divisions, it was very soon discovered that each particular faction of the Christian profession was ambitious to be recognised as the one in which, above all others, Christianity was most certainly represented. The bishops were ready and willing to represent to Constantine that Christianity was one. They did so represent it to him. And although he entered the alliance with that understanding, the alliance had no sooner been well formed than it devolved upon him to decide among the conflicting factions and divisions just where that one was to he found. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.2}

An edict issued at Milan had ordered that the church property confiscated by the edicts of Diocletian, should be, restored to “*the whole body of Christians*,” without any distinction as to particular sects or names. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.3}

This was proper enough in itself. But Constantine and the bishops had formed an alliance for political purposes. The bishops had lent to Constantine their support, the fruit of which he was enjoying; and now they demanded that the expected return should be rendered. Accordingly, the restoration of the property of the Christians, under the Edict of Milan, had no sooner begun, than the contentions which had been raised before the late persecution, between the church of Rome and the churches of Africa, were not only made to assume new and political significance, but were made an issue upon which to secure the imperial recognition and the legal establishment of the Catholic Church. As the rule had already been established that all who did not agree with the bishops of the Catholic Church were necessarily heretics, and not Christians, it was now claimed by the Catholic Church that therefore none such could be partakers of the benefits of the edict restoring property to the Christians. The Catholic Church disputed the right of heretics to receive property or money under the Edict of Milan, by disputing their right to the title of Christians. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.4}

This forced an imperial decision upon the question as to who were Christians. The question was raised in Africa. To settle this question, Constantine issued an edict in which he declared:— {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.5}

It is our will, that when thou shalt receive this epistle, if any of those things belonging to the Catholic Church of the Christians in the several cities or other places, are now possessed either by the decurious, or any others, these thou shalt cause immediately to be restored to their churches. Since we have previously determined, that whatsoever these same churches before possessed, shall be restored to their right. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.6}

By this it was made evident that the imperial favours were only for the Catholic Church. Nor was it enough that Constantine should decide that his favours were for the Catholic Church; he must next decide which was the Catholic Church. This was brought about by a division which was created in the church at Carthage, having its origin in the late persecution. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.7}

**HOW RIVAL BISHOPS INTRIGUED FOR PATRONAGE**

THE edict issued by Diocletian had commanded the magistrates everywhere to compel the Christians to deliver up the Scriptures. Some did so; others refused and suffered. When Constantine formed his alliance with the bishops, Mensurius was Bishop of Carthage, and some of his enemies had falsely accused him of being one of those who had delivered up the Scriptures rather than to suffer. They were supported by a certain Donatus, bishop of a city in Numidia, and they separated themselves from communion with Mensurius. When Mensurius died, as the “primacy of the African church was the object of ambition to these two parties,” and as this primacy carried with it imperial patronage, there were several candidates. A certain Cecilianus was elected, however, “in spite of the cabals and intrigue of Botrus and Celesius, two chief presbyters who aspired to that dignity.” {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.8}

Botrus and Celesius were now joined by Donatus and his party, and these all were further joined and supported by a certain Lucilla, a woman of great qualities, wealth, and interest, and an avowed enemy to Cecilianus. This faction gathered together about seventy of the bishops of Numidia for the purpose of deposing Cecilianus as one having been illegally chosen. When they came together at Carthage, they found that the great majority of the people were in favor of Cecilianus; nevertheless they summoned him to the council. He refused to go, and it was well that he did so, because one of them had already said of him, “If he comes among us, instead of laying our hands on him by way of ordination, we ought to knock out his brains by way of penance.” A council composed of men of this character, it is easy to believe, were readily susceptible to whatever influence might be brought to bear upon them to bring them to a decision. Lucilla, by the free use of money, succeeded in persuading them to declare the election of Cecilianus void, and the bishopric of Carthage vacant. They pronounced him and all who held with him separated from their communion, and proceeded to elect and ordain a certain Majorinus, who had formerly been one of Lucilla’s servants, but was now a reader in the church. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.9}

Thus matters stood in the church in Africa when in March, A.D. 313, Constantine sent to the proconsul Anulinus the following edict declaring that, as it appeared that the exercise of the “legally adopted” religion afforded prosperity to the state, it was his will {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.10}

that these men within the province entrusted to thee in the Catholic Church over which Cecilianus *presides*, who give their services to this holy religion, and whom they commonly call clergy, shall be held totally free and exempt from all public offices, to the end that they may not, by any error or sacrilegious deviation, be drawn away from the service due to the Divinity, but rather may devote themselves to their proper law, without any molestation. So that, whilst they exhibit the greatest possible reverence to the Deity, it appears the greatest good will be conferred on the State.—(*Eusebius’s “Ecclesiastical History*.”) {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 386.11}

As will be seen later, this exemption was a most material benefit. And when the party of Majorinus saw themselves excluded from it, they claimed that they were the Catholic Church, and therefore really the ones who were entitled to it. Accordingly, they drew up a petition to the emperor, entitled, “The petition of the Catholic Church, containing the crimes of Cecilianus, by the party of Majorinus.” This petition requested the emperor to refer to the bishops of Gaul the controversy between them and Cecilianus. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.1}

**CHURCH COUNCILS CALLED**

WHEN Constantine received the petition and the accompanying papers, he appointed three of the principal bishops of Gaul to meet with the Bishop of Rome to examine the matter. When the council met, there were nineteen members of it. Melchiades, Bishop of Rome, presided in the council, and thus began to reap in imperial recognition and joint authority, the fruit of the offers which he made when in A.D. 311, he sent that letter and delegation of bishops to Constantine in Gaul, inviting him to the conquest of Rome and the deliverance of the church. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.2}

The council met in the apartments of the empress, in the Lateran Palace in Rome, Oct. 2, 313. Cecilianus appeared in person, and Donatus came as his accuser. The council decided that none of the charges were proved, pronounced Cecilianus innocent, and Donatus a slanderer. The Donatists appealed from the council to the emperor, demanding a larger council, on the plea that the bishops who composed this one were partial, prejudiced, and had acted hastily, and besides this, were too few in number properly to decide a matter of so great importance. Constantine ordered another council to be held at Arles, to be composed of “many bishops.” {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.3}

This council met according to appointment, August, A.D. 314, and was composed of the bishops from almost all the provinces of the western division of the empire. Sylvester, who was now bishop of Rome, was summoned to the council but declined on account of age, sending two presbyters and two deacons as his representatives. This council also declared Cecilianus innocent of the crimes laid against him by the Donatists. The council also decided that whoever should falsely accuse his brethren should be cut off from the communion of the church without hope of ever being received again, except at the point of death. It further decided that such bishops as had been ordained by the Donatists should officiate alternately with the Catholic bishops till one or the other should die. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.4}

**LEGISLATING IN DISCIPLINE AND EXALTING THE ROMAN BISHOPRIC**

BUT the council did not stop with the consideration of the question which it was summoned to consider. The bishops in council now took it upon themselves to legislate in matters of discipline for the world, and to bestow special preference and dignity upon the Bishop of Rome. They “ordained that Easter should be kept on the same day, and on a Sunday, by all the churches in the world” (Bower’s “History of the Popes”), and that the Bishop of Rome should announce to the churches the particular Sunday upon which it should be celebrated. Before adjourning, the council sent to the Bishop of Rome an account of their proceedings, with a copy of the decrees which they had adopted concerning the discipline of the churches, that he might publish them to all the churches. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.5}

The Donatists appealed again, not for a council, but to the emperor himself. Constantine held a consistory and heard their appeal, and in harmony with the council already held, pronounced in favor of Cecilianus and against the Donatists. Upon this the Donatists claimed that the emperor had been influenced by Hosius, one of his favourite bishops, and denied that he had any jurisdiction in the matter at all, because *it was not right for civil magistrates to have anything to do with religion!* {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.6}

This claim was true enough, if they had made it at the beginning, and had refused from the first to allow their controversy to be touched upon in any way by the imperial authority. Then they would have stood upon proper ground; but when they themselves were the first to appeal to the civil authority, when they had asked the emperor to consider the matter again and again, with the hope of getting the imperial power on their side, and when they had carried to the last extreme their efforts in this direction,—when they had done all this in vain, and then turned about to protest, their protest was robbed of every shadow of force or merit. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.7}

The question as to which was the Catholic Church having now been decided, Constantine, in his next epistle, could add yet another distinguishing title. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.8}

**SUCCESSIVE STEPS IN ESTABLISHING THE STATE RELIGION**

AS we have seen, the Edict of Milan—March, A.D. 313—ordered that the churches should be restored to the Christians—“the whole body of Christians”—without distinction. When the Catholic Church asserted its sole right to the designation “Christian,” and backed its assertion with political reasons which were then peculiarly cogent, the imperial epistle ran—March, A.D. 313—“to the *Catholic Church* of the Christians.” When the emperor wrote to Melchiades appointing the first council under the imperial authority, his epistle ran—autumn, A.D. 313—“the *holy* Catholic Church.” When he wrote to Chrestus—summer, A.D. 314—summoning him to the second council under imperial authority, he referred to the doctrine of the Catholic Church as embodying the “*most* holy religion.” When it had been decided which was “the most holy Catholic religion,” he addressed an epistle to Cecilianus—A.D. 316—announcing imperial favours to “the *legitimate* and most holy Catholic religion,” and empowering Cecilianus to assist the imperial officers in preventing any diversion from the most holy Catholic Church. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.9}

**RESULT OF IMPERIAL PATRONAGE, IN CHURCH AND STATE**

When the Donatists rejected the decision of the emperor himself, and denied his right to say anything in the controversy in which they had invited him and over again to participate, as announced in the above letter to Cecilianus he carried against them—A.D. 316—the interference which they had solicited, to the full extent to which it would undoubtedly have been carried against the Catholics if the Donatists had secured the decision in their favor. The Donatist bishops were driven out, and Constantine ordered that all their churches be delivered to the Catholic party. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.10}

As this was done in the interest, and by the direct counsel, of the Catholic party, through Hosius, the emperor’s chief counselor, the imperial authority thus became wholly partisan, and to both parties was given a dignity which was far, far beyond any merit that was in the question at issue. To the Catholic party it gave the dignity of an imperial alliance and the assurance of imperial favor. The Donatist party it elevated to a dignity and clothed with an importance which placed it before the world as worthy of imperial antagonism. Into the Catholic party it infused more than ever the pride of place, power, and imperial favor. To the Donatist party it gave the dignity and fame of a persecuted people, and increased the evil which it attempted to destroy. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 387.11}

More than this, when the governmental authority, which should be for the protection of all alike from violence, became itself a party to the controversy, it forsook the place of impartial protector, and assumed that of a partisan. This deepened the sense of injury felt by the defeated party, and magnified the triumph of the victor; and the antagonism was only the more embittered. “The implacable faction darkened into a sanguinary fend. For the first time, human blood was shed in conflicts between followers of the Prince of Peace.” (Milman’s “History of Christianity.”) {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 388.1}

*And the government, by becoming a partisan, had lost the power to keep the peace*. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 388.2}

By becoming a party to *religious controversy* it had lost the power to prevent *civil violence* between religious factions. “Each party recriminated on the other, but neither denies the barbarous scenes of massacre and license which devastated the African cities. The Donatists boasted of their martyrs, and the cruelties of the Catholic party rest on their own admission; they deny not, they proudly vindicate, their barbarities: ‘Is the vengeance of God to be defrauded of its victims?’ and they appealed to the Old Testament to justify, by the examples of Moses, of Phineas, and of Elijah, the Christian duty of slaying by thousands the renegades and unbelievers.” (Milman.) This, though a shameful perversion of Scripture, was but the practical working out of the theocratical theory of government, which was the basis of the whole system of the union of church and State which had been created by Constantine and the bishops. {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 388.3}

Constantine issued an edict commanding peace, but it was all in vain. The tumult went on, constantly increasing in violence, until the only alternative was for the imperial authority either to enter upon the horrors of a protracted war with its own subjects, or openly refuse to go any further. The latter step was taken. In A.D. 321, upon the advice of the civil officers of Africa, Constantine “repealed the laws against the Donatists, and gave the African people full liberty to follow either of the contending parties, as they liked best.” (Mosheim’s “Ecclesiastical History.”) {PTUK June 24, 1897, p. 388.4}

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