

The Constantinian Revolution



In hoc signo vinces
("In this sign you conquer")

Roman Emperors of the Fourth Century (usurpers in italics)

Western Part

Eastern Part

	Augustus	Caesar	Augustus	Caesar
Dioceses	Italy, Rhaetia, Africa	Gaul, Britain, Spain	Thrace, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Nicomedia	Illyricum, Greece, Dalmatia, Pannonia, Sirmium, Thessalonica
Courts	Milan, Aquileia	Trier, York		
305	Abdication of the First Tetrarchy under Diocletian, Second Tetrarchy:			
	Constantius Chlorus (d. 306) (father of Constantine)	Severus	Galerius (d. 311)	Maximinus Daia (d. 313)
306	Severus (d. 307)	Constantine		
306	<i>Maxentius</i> (d. 312)			
307	Constantine			
308	Licinius	Constantine		
311			Licinius (d. 325)	
312	Constantine			
313				Licinius (d. 325)
324	Constantine the Great, sole ruler (d. 337)			
337	Constans (Caesar): Italy, Africa, Pannonia, Dalmatia	Constantine II (d. 340)	Flavius Dalmatius (Caesar): Thrace with Constantinople (d. 337)	Constantius II: East, incl. Egypt

First Tetrarchy

Divided East and West
A.D. 293

Emperor (East)

Diocletian

Emperor (West)

Maximian

Caesar

Galerius

Caesar

Constantius

Constantine (Flavius Valerius Constantius)

Feb 27, 272 or 274 – May 22, 337



Bronze Statue of Constantine at York, where he was proclaimed emperor in 306

Tetrarchy

Divided East and West
A.D. 305

Emperor (East)

Galerius

Emperor (West)

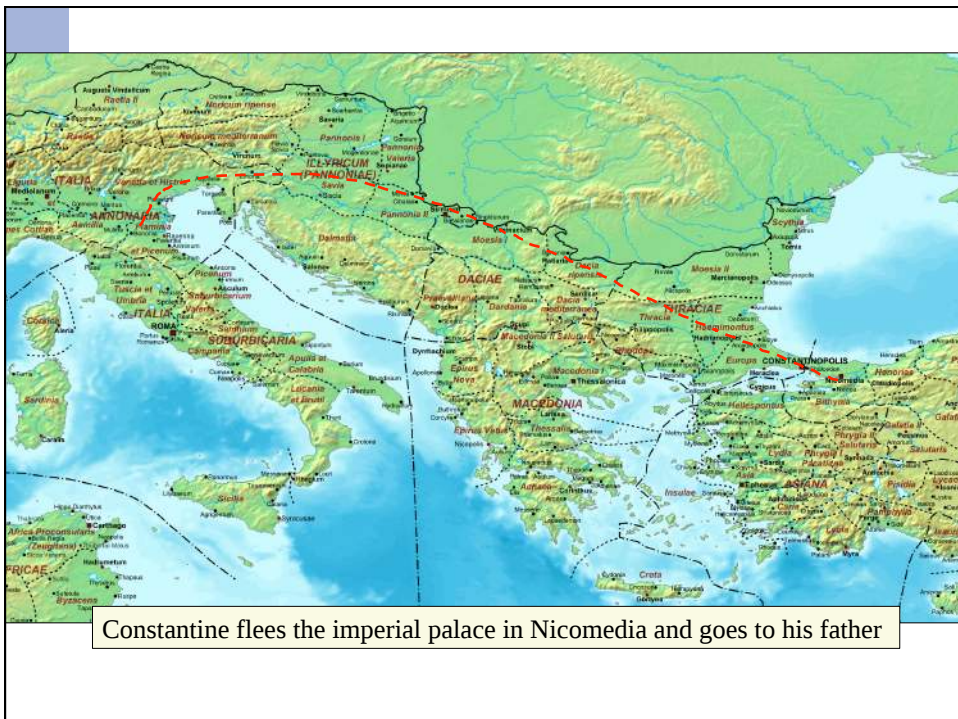
Constantius

Caesar

Maximinus Daia

Caesar

F. Valerius Severus



Constantine flees the imperial palace in Nicomedia and goes to his father

Tetrarchy

Divided East and West
A.D. 308

Emperor (East)

Galerius/Licinius

Emperor (West)

Maxentius

Caesar

Maximinus Daia

Caesar

Constantine



Coin of Maxentius

EDICT OF TOLERATION (A.D. 311)

34. Among other arrangements which we are always accustomed to make for the prosperity and welfare of the republic, we had desired formerly to bring all things into harmony with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans, and to provide that even the Christians who had left the religion of their fathers should come back to reason; since, indeed, the Christians themselves, for some reason, had followed such a caprice and had fallen into such a folly that they would not obey the institutes of antiquity, which perchance their own ancestors had first established; but at their own will and pleasure, they would thus make laws unto themselves which they should observe and would collect various peoples in diverse places in congregations. Finally when our law had been promulgated to the effect that they should conform to the institutes of antiquity, many were subdued by the fear of danger, many even suffered death. And yet since most of them persevered in their determination, and we saw that they neither paid the reverence and awe due to the gods nor worshipped the God of the Christians, in view of our most mild clemency and the constant habit by which we are accustomed to grant indulgence to all, we thought that we ought to grant our most prompt indulgence also to these, so that they may again be Christians and may hold their conventicles, provided they do nothing contrary to good order. But we shall tell the magistrates in another letter what they ought to do. Wherefore, for this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our safety, for that of the republic, and for their own, that the republic may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes.

35. This edict is published at Nicomedia on the day before the Kalends of May, in our eighth consulship and the second of Maximinus.

Lactantius, *Mort.* 34–35

EDICT OF TOLERATION (A.D. 311)

And the Emperor Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus Pius Felix Invictus Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, holding the Tribunician Power, Emperor for the fifth time, Consul, Father of his country, Proconsul : [And the Emperor Caesar Valerius Licinianus Licinius Pius Felix Invictus Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, holding the Tribunician Power for the fourth time, Emperor for the third time, Consul, Father of his country, Proconsul: to the people of their provinces, greeting.]

Among the other measures that we frame for the use and profit of the state, it had been our own wish formerly that all things should be set to rights in accordance with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans; and to make provision for this, namely, that the Christians also, such as had abandoned the persuasion of their own ancestors, should return to a sound mind; seeing that through some reasoning they had been possessed of such self-will and seized with such folly that, instead of following the institutions of the ancients, which perchance their own forefathers had formerly established, they made for themselves, and were observing, laws merely in accordance with their own disposition and as each one wished, and were assembling various multitudes in divers places: Therefore when a command of ours soon followed to the intent that they should betake themselves to the institutions of the ancients, very many indeed were subjected to peril, while very many were harassed and endured all kinds of death; And since the majority held to the same folly, and we perceived that they were neither paying the worship due to the gods of heaven nor honouring the god of the Christians; having regard to our clemency and the invariable custom by which we are wont to accord pardon to all men, we thought it right in this case also to extend most willingly our indulgence: That Christians may exist again and build the houses in which they used to assemble, always provided that they do nothing contrary to order. In another letter we shall indicate to the judges how they should proceed. Wherefore, in accordance with this our indulgence, they will be bound to beseech their own god for our welfare, and that of the state, and their own; that in every way both the well being of the state may be secured, and they may be enabled to live free from care in their own homes."

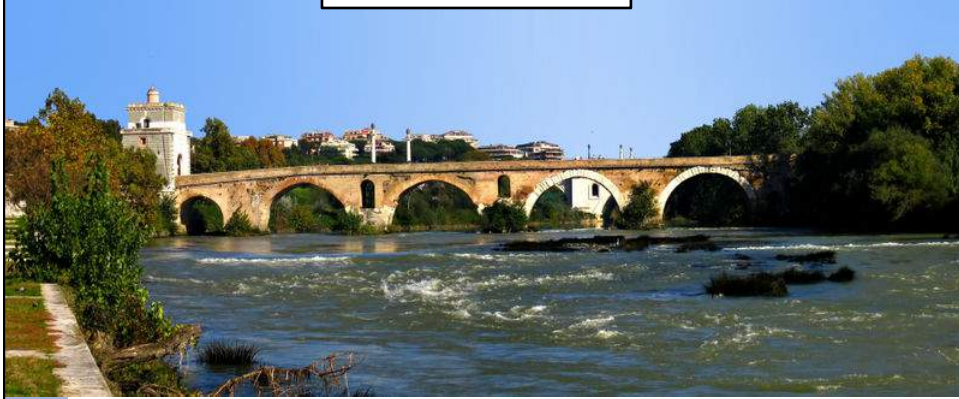
Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.17. 3–10

Petition to Maximin against the Christians, A.D. 312

The gods, your kinsman, most illustrious emperors, having always shown manifest acts of kindness to all who have their religion earnestly at heart and pray to them for the perpetual health of you, our invincible lords, we have thought it well to have recourse to your immortal sovereignty, and to request that the Christians, who have long been disloyal, and still persist in the same mischievous intent, should be put down and not be suffered, by any absurd novelty, to offend against the honor due to the gods. This end will best be attained, if by your divine and perpetual decree, commandment be laid upon all that the villainy of the detestable practices of the atheists be forbidden and prevented; and all be required to attend constantly upon the cult of the gods your kinsmen, on behalf of your eternal and incorruptible sovereignty, as is most patently to the advantage of all your subjects.

CIL 3.12132

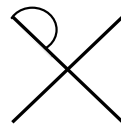
Battle of the Milvian Bridge
28 October 312



Battle of the Milvian Bridge
Giulio Romano

“Meanwhile, Constantine, having defeated the tyrant [Maxentius] at Verona, sought out Rome. When Constantine was coming to the city, Maxentius, coming out of the city, chose a plain above the Tiber as the place where they would fight. There he was defeated and, fleeing with all his men, perished, trapped in the crowd of people and thrown down by his horse into the river. On the following day, his body was taken up from the river, and his head was cut off and brought to the city [Rome].”

Origo, 12

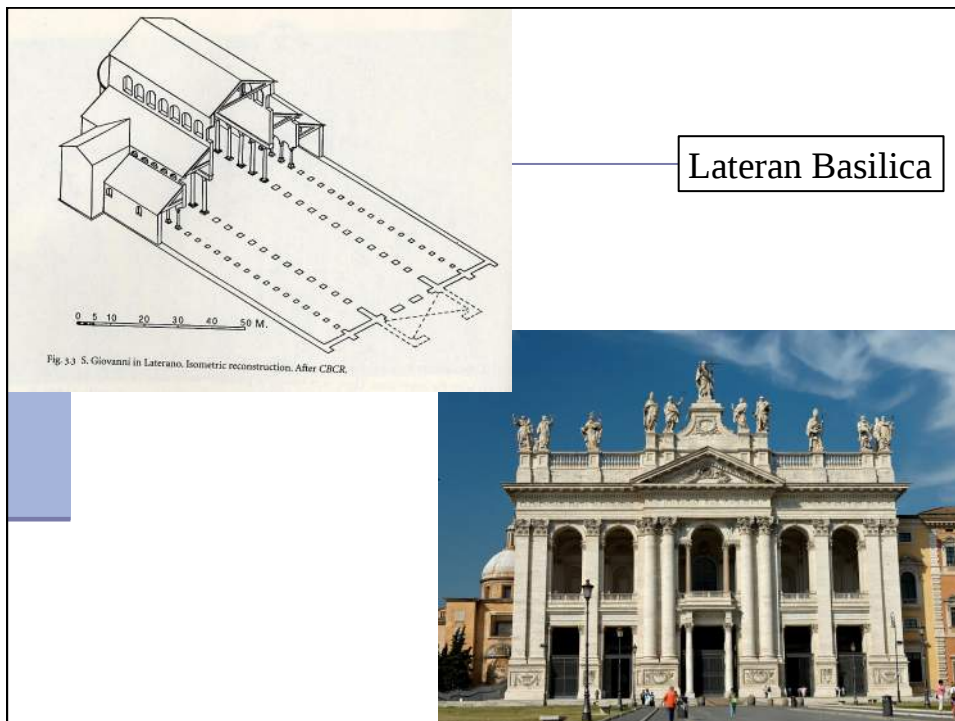


Constantine was directed in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and thus join battle. He did as he was ordered and with the cross-shaped letter X, with its top bent over, he marked Christ on the shields. (**Lactantius, *Mort.* 44.3-6**)

Now it was made in the following manner. A long spear, overlaid with gold, formed the figure of the cross by means of a transverse bar laid over it. On the top of the whole was fixed a wreath of gold and precious stones; and within this, the symbol of the Saviour's name, two letters indicating the name of Christ by means of its initial characters, the letter P being intersected by X in its centre: and these letters the emperor was in the habit of wearing on his helmet at a later period. From the cross-bar of the spear was suspended a cloth, a royal piece, covered with a profuse embroidery of most brilliant precious stones; and which, being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder. This banner was of a square form, and the upright staff, whose lower section was of great length, bore a golden half-length portrait of the pious emperor and his children on its upper part, beneath the trophy of the cross, and immediately above the embroidered banner. The emperor constantly made use of this sign of salvation as a safeguard against every adverse and hostile power, and commanded that others similar to it should be carried at the head of all his armies. (**Eusebius, *V.C.* 31**)



Sarcophagus from the Catacomb of Domitilla (c. A.D. 350)



Restitution of Church Property, A.D. 313
Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 10.15–17

Copy of another imperial decree which they issued, indicating that the grant was made to the Catholic Church alone.

15. “Greeting to thee, our most esteemed Anulinus. It is the custom of our benevolence, most esteemed Anulinus, to will that those things which belong of right to another should not only be left unmolested, but should also be restored.

16. Wherefore it is our will that when thou receivest this letter, if any such things belonged to the Catholic Church of the Christians, in any city or other place, but are now held by citizens or by any others, thou shalt cause them to be restored immediately to the said churches. For we have already determined that those things which these same churches formerly possessed shall be restored to them.

17. Since therefore thy devotedness perceives that this command of ours is most explicit, do thou make haste to restore to them, as quickly as possible, everything which formerly belonged to the said churches,—whether gardens or buildings or whatever they may be,—that we may learn that thou hast obeyed this decree of ours most carefully. Farewell, our most esteemed and beloved Anulinus.”

Exemption from Public Office for the Catholic Clergy, A.D. 313

¹ Greeting, Anulinus, our most honoured Sir. Since from many facts it appears that the setting at naught of divine worship, by which the highest reverence for the most holy and heavenly [power] is preserved, has brought great dangers upon public affairs, and that its lawful restoration and preservation have bestowed the greatest good fortune on the Roman name and singular prosperity on all the affairs of mankind (for it is the Divine Providence which bestows these blessings): it has seemed good that those men who, with due holiness and constant observance of this law, bestow their services on the performance of divine worship, should receive the rewards of their ² own labours, most honoured Anulinus. Wherefore it is my wish that those persons who, within the province committed to thee, in the Catholic Church over which Caecilian presides, bestow their service on this holy worship—those whom they are accustomed to call clerics should once for all be kept absolutely free from all the public offices, that they be not drawn away by any error or sacrilegious fault from the worship which they owe to the Divinity, but rather without any hindrance serve to the utmost their own law. For when they render supreme service to the Deity, it seems that they confer. Incalculable benefit on the affairs of the State. Fare thee well, Anulmus, our most honoured and esteemed Sir.

Constantine to Anulinus, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 10.7



A gold multiple of Constantine with Sol Invictus, minted in 313.



Arch of Constantine, A.D. 315 (CIL VI.1139)

The Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine, Maximus, Pius, Felix, Augustus, the Roman Senate and People dedicated this arch, decorated with his victories, because, by the promoting of the Divinity, by the greatness of his mind, he with his army, at one moment by a just victory avenged the State on the tyrant and on all his party. To the liberator of the city. To the establisher of peace.

Dealing with Schisms



1. Donatism (North Africa)

2. Melitianism (Egypt)



Donatism

- Donatism has its origin in the “Great Persecution” and the status of those who yielded to imperial commands and handed over scriptures to be destroyed
 - i.e. *traditor* (from Latin and means “betrayor” or “traitor”; from *trado* that means “to hand over,” or “to surrender”)
- At the consecration of bishop Caecilian of Carthage in A.D. 311 (died in A.D. 313), one of the three bishops, Felix, bishop of Aptunga, who consecrated Caecilian, had given copies of the Bible to the Roman authorities during the persecution.
- A group of about 70 bishops formed a synod and declared the consecration of bishop Caecilian to be invalid. Thereupon a great debate arose concerning the validity of the sacraments (baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc.) by one who had sinned and whether they were still valid.
- In A.D. 313 Donatus was consecrated as a rival bishop; during this time he and his “Donatist” associates began to rebaptize people because they believed the ordinances performed by clergy who were *traditores* were not valid
- This causes all kinds of controversy because it challenged the authority of the “Catholic Church”

Donatist Controversy: Council of Arles, 1 Aug 314



Constantine



Licinius



Council of Nicaea

May–June A.D. 325

