

Tackling the *Da Vinci Code* 3

How and When Did the Early
Church Understand Jesus Was
Both Human and Divine?

The Da Vinci Code
says...

The Da Vinci Code says...

“**[Jesus was] a moral prophet... a great and powerful man, but *a man* nonetheless. A mortal”**

- Leigh Teabing, fictional historian

The Da Vinci Code says...

- The notion that Jesus was *divine* was first proposed by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD at the Council of Nicene to:
 - Solidify his power
 - Solidify the power of the “new Vatican power base” of the Catholic Church
- **“until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet”** (Teabing, p. 233)

The Da Vinci Code says...

- Emperor Constantine's proposal that Jesus was God passed by a **“relatively close vote”** at the Council of Nicene
- Constantine then **“commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned”** (p. 234)

The Da Vinci Code says...

- **“Fortunately for historians... some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s in a cave near Qumran in the Judea desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. *In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ’s ministry in very human terms...*”**

The Da Vinci Code says...

- Henceforth, Christians could “redeem themselves” only through the “established sacred channel” of the Catholic Church

The Early Church's View of Jesus

Introduction

Early Church's View of Jesus

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

- **Christology:** the study of:
 - Who was Jesus?
 - What role, what purpose did he play in God's divine plan?
- There is unanimity among serious scholars and historians, that from the earliest days of Church, the followers of Jesus believed:
 - Jesus was God
 - Jesus' was the Messiah (= the Christ, the "anointed one"), the Redeemer, the bringer of salvation

Early Church's View of Jesus

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

“The problem of Christology, in the narrow sense of the word, is to define the relation of the divine and the human in Christ. For a full-dress attack on the issues involved, we must wait until the fourth century... Nevertheless, the all but universal Christian conviction in the preceding centuries had been that Jesus Christ was divine as well as human.”

- J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 138

Early Church's View of Jesus

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

“Amid the varieties of metaphor in which they conceived the meaning of salvation, all Christians shared the conviction that salvation was the work of no being less than the Lord of heaven and earth... Christians were sure that the Redeemer did not belong to some lower order of divine reality, but was God himself.”

- Jaroslav Pelikan. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, p 173

The Early Church's View of Jesus

New Testament Period

30 to 95 AD

New Testament Period

Messiah or Christ

■ Messiah

- = “the anointed one” (Greek: *Christos*; Christ)
- Jewish expectations: the anointed king of the House of David who would:
 - defeat Israel’s enemies
 - inaugurate a kingdom (Egypt to Mesopotamia) of prosperity, peace, justice
 - not necessarily divine

New Testament Period

Messiah or Christ

■ Messiah

- Christian View of Jesus as the Messiah (= the Christ):
 - defeated Satan and the forces of evil
 - inaugurated a Kingdom of God, without borders, over all of creation
- Christian: one who accepted Jesus as Christ (= the Messiah)

New Testament Period

Lord or Adonai

- Lord
 - Adonai
 - Greek *kyrios*
 - Whenever the holy name of God (YHWH) encountered in the scriptures, devout Jews substituted “Adonai” instead.

New Testament Period

Son of God

■ Son of God

- In the Old Testament, implied a special relationship to God:
 - Angels in the Old Testament: “sons of God”
 - Davidic king: treated as God’s son
 - Nation of Israel referred to as God’s son in Hosea 11:1
- For Christians, “Son of God” implied a *unique* relationship to God

New Testament Period

New Testament Period (30-95 AD)

- Letters of Paul (~50 to 65 AD)
- Gospels
 - Mark, Matthew, Luke (70 to 80's AD)
 - John (90's AD)

New Testament Period

Oldest Liturgical Prayer

- Oldest surviving liturgical prayer of the Church: **The Maranatha Prayer:**
“Our Lord, come!”
- Preserved in:
 - Transliterated Aramaic (1 Corinthians 16:22)
 - Greek translation (Revelation 22:20)
 - Plausibly dates back to Paul’s first experiences with Christians in the 30’s

New Testament Period

Hymn in Philippians 2:6-11

- Possible early hymn found in Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:6-11 (~52 – 62 AD)
 - Some scholars suggest Paul did not write this hymn, but that it originally was composed in Aramaic, and dated to Palestine of the late 30's

Christ Jesus

who, though he was in the form of God

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death

— even death on a cross.

**Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”**

New Testament Period

Hymn in Colossians 1:15-20

- Colossians 1:15-20:
 - Another hymn that some scholars feel was part of the liturgy of the very early Church and included by the author of Colossians (perhaps Paul)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

New Testament Period

Hymn in Colossians 1:15-20

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (NRSV)

New Testament Period

View of the Church in Rome, 40's AD

- Romans 1:3-4: Paul quotes a gospel formulation he expects the Roman to recognize, thought to date from the 40's, when the Roman church was founded by missionaries from Jerusalem:

[God's] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (NRSV)

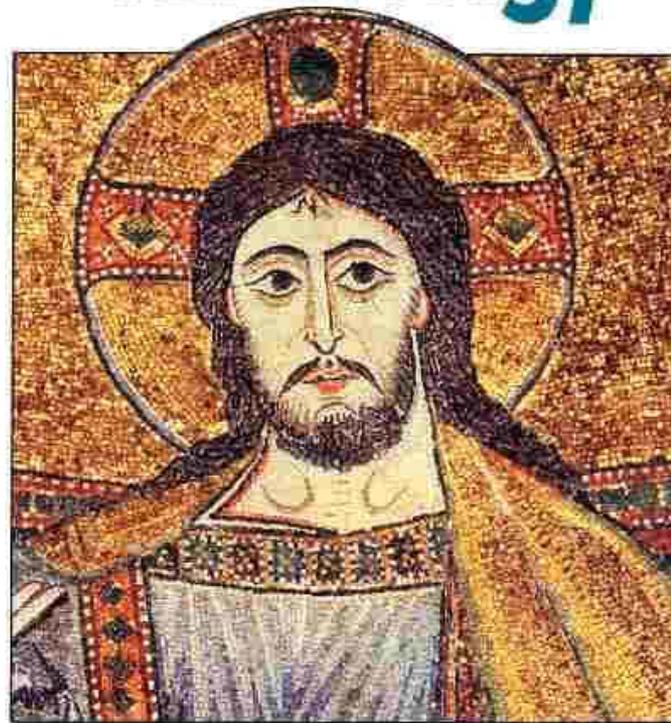
**New
Testament
Period
Four Gospels**

*An Introduction to New
Testament Christology.*

Raymond Edward
Brown, Paulist Press,
New York, 1994.

Raymond E. Brown

**An Introduction
to New Testament
Christology**



New Testament Period

Four Gospels

- All four gospel writers agree that Jesus during his ministry was the Messiah and the Son of God
- Each gospel gives a different emphasis in the tension between Jesus as fully human versus Jesus as fully God
 - Emphasis on Jesus' servanthood and humanity: Mark > Luke > Matthew > John
 - Jesus' divinity is the most important message of John

New Testament Period

Four Gospels

“No one gospel would enable us to see the whole picture, and only when the four are kept in tension among themselves has the church come to appreciate who Jesus is.”

- Father Raymond Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*

New Testament Period

Early Symbol for Jesus

- An early symbol of Jesus was the fish (Greek *ichthus*)
 - I-CH-TH-U-S represented slogan (in Greek)
“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”

The Early Church's View of Jesus

A Sampling from the
Early Pre-Nicene Period
(95 to ~200 AD)

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Earliest Sermon After the New Testament

- Earlier surviving sermon of the Church after the New Testament:

“Brethren, we must think about Jesus Christ as we think about God, as about the judge of the living and the dead. And we must not give little thought to our salvation.

For when we think little about him, we also hope to receive but little.”

- *Second Epistle of Clement* 1:1-2 (mid second century)

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Oldest Account of a Christian Martyr

- Oldest surviving account of a Christian martyr:
“It will be impossible for us to forsake Christ... or to worship any other. For him, being the Son of God, we adore, but the martyrs... we cherish.”
- *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17:2-3 (mid second century)

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Oldest Pagan Report

- Oldest surviving pagan report about the Church (Pliny the Younger*, *Epistles*, 10.96.7) describes Christians as gathering before sunrise and **“singing a hymn to Christ as though to [a] god.”**

*Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus or Pliny the Younger (61 to 112 AD), Roman Governor of Bithynia. Wrote 10 books of *Epistles* 100-112 AD giving an informal account of the daily life of a rich and cultured Roman gentleman

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Justin Martyr's early "Creed"

- Justin Martyr, 100-165 AD. *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*:
**In the name of this very Son of God and the first-
begotten of all creation,
who was born through the Virgin,
and became a passible man,
and was crucified under Pontius Pilate by your
people,
and died,
and rose again from the dead,
and ascended to heaven...**

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Baptismal Creed ~200 AD

- Description of baptism by Hippolytus of Rome 170-235 AD, in *Apostolic Tradition*:

When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say: “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?” And the person being baptized shall say: “I believe.” Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once.

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Baptismal Creed ~200 AD

And then he shall say: “Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontus Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?” And when the person says: “I believe,” he is baptized again.

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Baptismal Creed ~200 AD

And again the deacon shall say: “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and in the resurrection of the body?” Then the person being baptized shall say: “I believe,” and he is baptized a third time.

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Early Theologies

- Justin Martyr (100-165 AD):
 - Took concept of the “*Logos*” from Greek Stoicism and Platonism
 - *Logos*: the ultimate source of all human knowledge
 - Christ is the *Logos* and brings the *Logos* to its fullest revelation
 - *logos spermatikos*: the divine *Logos* had sown seeds throughout human history, so even non-Christians knew the Christ in part
 - Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism and the pagan philosophers

Early Pre-Nicene Period

Early Theologies

- Origen (185-254 AD)
 - In the Incarnation, the human soul of Jesus is united with the *Logos* and comes to share the properties of the *Logos*:
 - **If a lump of iron is constantly kept in a fire, it will absorb its heat through all its pores and veins. If the fire is continuous, and the iron is not removed, it becomes totally converted to the other... In the same way, the soul which has been constantly placed in the Logos and Wisdom of God, is God in all that it does, feels and understands**

The Early Church's View of Jesus

The Late Pre-Nicene Period
(~200 to 325 AD)

The Struggle to Understand Jesus as
Both Human and Divine

Late Pre-Nicene Period

Both Human and Divine

- Christians throughout the Pre-Nicene Period believed Jesus was both human and divine (not some mere mortal prophet)
- The struggle in the Church during the Late Pre-Nicene period was understanding the meaning and implications of saying Jesus was both human and divine:
 - How human was Jesus?
 - How divine was Jesus?
 - How did Jesus' human nature and the divine nature co-exist?

Both Human and Divine

Councils of Nicaea & Chalcedon

- 325 AD: Council of Nicaea
- 451 AD: Council of Chalcedon
- Jesus
 - *One* person, with *two* natures, a full divine nature, and a full human nature. He was fully human and fully divine
 - Equal to God the Father
 - Existed from all eternity

Both Human and Divine Councils of Nicaea & Chalcedon

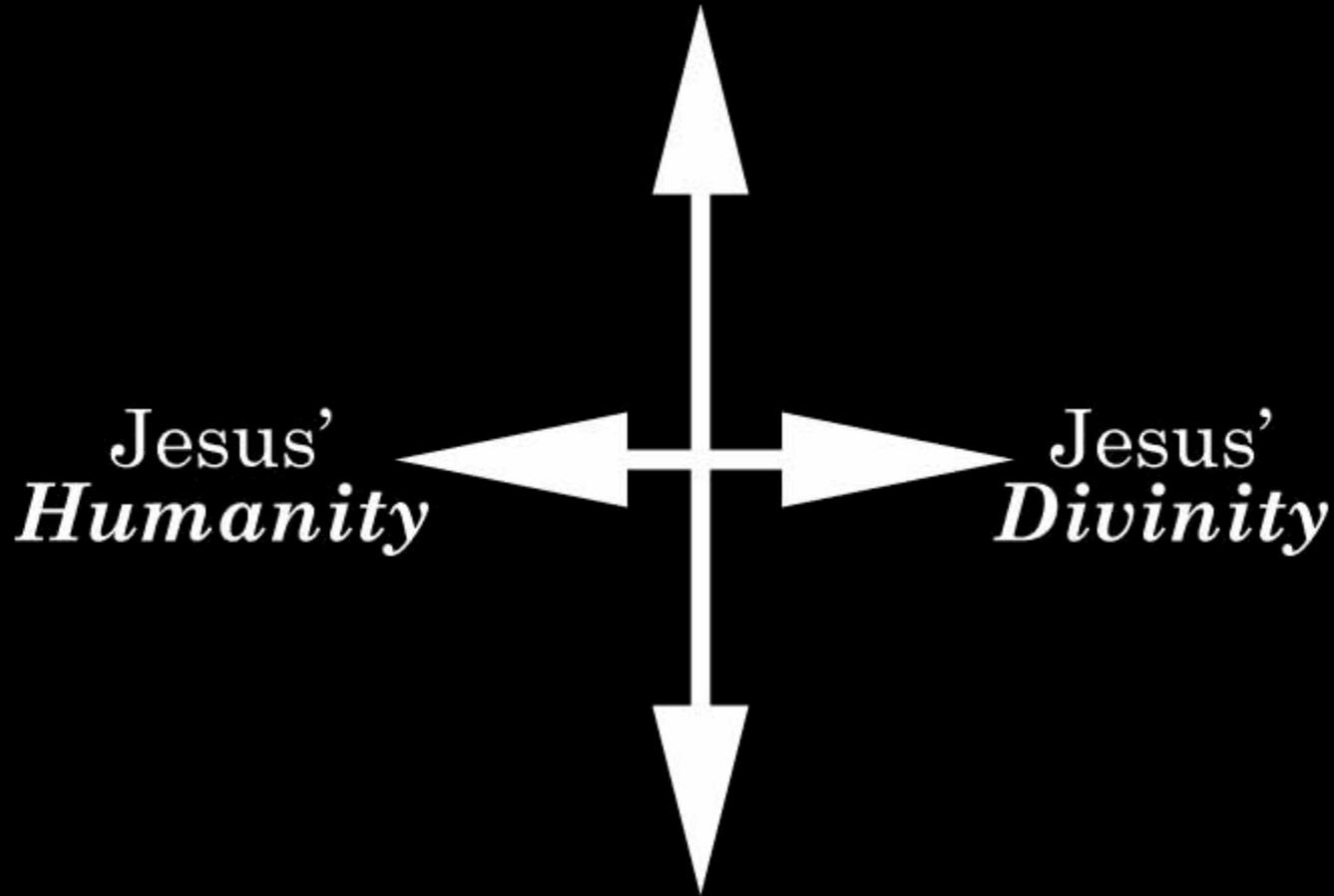
- We believe this fourth century understanding was a divine revelation about Jesus
- It does not mean early believers fully comprehended this revelation
- Christian understanding, like any human understanding, developed and grew

Both Human and Divine Councils of Nicaea & Chalcedon

“... orthodox Christology does not attempt to explain the substance of Christology, that is, how the two natures are united in one person. It attempts to indicate where the mystery lies, so to speak, and to defend the mystery against attempts to dissolve it into a neat formula that would distort it.”

- Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd Edition, p. 164

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects



Jesus'
Humanity

Jesus'
Divinity

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- Arius (250-336 AD)
 - “God was not always a father. There was a time when God was all alone. And was not yet a father; only later did he become a father. The Son did not always exist. Everything created is out of nothing... so the Logos of God came into existence out of nothing. **There was a time when he was not.** Before he was brought into being, he did not exist. He also had a beginning to his created existence”

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- Jesus, the Son of God, was created by God the Father
 - Jesus is a created being, like us
 - Jesus is first among all created beings
 - Use of “Son” a metaphor, an honorific term to underscore Jesus as first among created beings

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Arianism Jesus' *Humanity* ← → Jesus' *Divinity*

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- Athanasius (296-373)
 - Elected Bishop of Alexandria 328 AD
 - Argued against Arius, noting:
 - 1. No creature can redeem another creature. According to Arius, Jesus Christ is a creature. Therefore, according to Arius, Jesus Christ cannot redeem humanity
 - 2. Only God is worthy of our worship. According to Arius, Jesus Christ is a creature. Therefore, according to Arius, Christians are worshiping a creature and are guilty of idolatry

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- Forced the Church to reflect further on the relationship between the Father and the Son
- Terminology:
 - *ousia* (Greek) = *substantia* (Latin) = substance or essence. The fundamental reality of something; that which make a thing what it is
 - *homoousios* = of the **same** substance or *ousia*
 - *homoiousios* = of **similar** substance or *ousia*
- After intense debate, *homoousios* was ultimately to gain the upper hand

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- Rejected at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD
- Nicene Creed of 325 AD:
 - We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.
 - And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Arianism

- And in the Holy Spirit.
- But those who say that there was when He was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from that which is not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance [*hypostasis*] or essence [*ousia*], or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes

Both Human and Divine

Alexandrian School

- Jesus Christ is the redeemer of humanity
- Redemption = “being taken up into the life of God” or “being made divine” (deification)
- In the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature
 - God became human, in order that human beings might become divine
 - Logos “assumed” a “general” human nature; the divine and human natures commingled

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Arianism Jesus'
Humanity

Jesus'
Divinity

Alexandrian School of Christology

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Apollinarius

- Apollinarius of Laodicea (310-390 AD)
 - Worried the union of the Logos with human nature would contaminate the Logos with the weakness of human nature
 - Human beings have:
 - Physical body
 - Human animal soul
 - Human rational soul (*nous* = soul, mind, reason)
 - Jesus had:
 - Human physical body
 - Human animal soul
 - Did not however have a human rational soul or mind. It was replaced by the mind of God

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Apollinarius

- Thus Apollinarius implied Jesus was not fully human (only two-thirds human). Jesus more divine than human
- **“We confess that the Word of God had not descended upon a holy man, which was what happened in the case of the prophets. Rather, the Word himself has become flesh without having assumed a human mind – that is, a changeable mind, which is enslaved to filthy thoughts – but which exists as an immutable and heavenly divine mind”**

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Arianism Jesus' *Humanity* **Apollinarius** Jesus' *Divinity*

Alexandrian School of Christology

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine

Heresy of Apollinarius

- Rejected at the Council at Constantinople in 381 AD

Both Human and Divine

Antiochene School

- The rival to the school of theologians in Alexandria were the school of theologians in Antioch in ancient Syria
- Redemption:
 - Because of their disobedience, human beings existed in a state of corruption from which they cannot extricate themselves
 - The Logos of God took on a specific human nature in Jesus to re-establish the obedience of the people of God

Both Human and Divine

Antiochene School

- Rather than the “confusion” or “commingling” of the divine and human natures advocated by the Alexandria School, they imagined the divine and human natures within Jesus existed more like watertight compartments side by side, held together by the “good pleasure” of God
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428): a purely moral union, like that of husband and wife

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Antiochene School

Arianism Jesus'
Humanity

Apollinarius Jesus'
Divinity

Alexandrian School of Christology

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine

Nestoriansim

- Nestorius
 - born?; died 451 AD
 - Major representative of the Antiochene School
 - Patriarch of Constantinople in 428-431 AD
- Objected to calling Mary *theotokos* “God bearer” or “mother of God”
 - Suggested *anthropotokos* (bearer of humanity) or *Christotokos* (bearer of Christ)

Both Human and Divine

Nestoriansim

- Nestorius accused of saying Jesus was two persons rather than one person, each person with its own nature:
 - “Son of God” (Mary not involved in this birth)
 - “Son of Man” (the Son Mary gave birth to)
- Nestorianism (= doctrine of Jesus as “two persons”) rejected at Council of Ephesus in 431 AD

Nestorianism
Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Antiochene School

Arianism Jesus'
Humanity

Apollinarius Jesus'
Divinity

Alexandrian School of Christology

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Both Human and Divine Monophysitism

- Eutyches (378-454 AD)
 - Archimandrite of the monastery in Constantinople
 - Vigorously opposed Nestorianism
 - Said Jesus:
 - One person
 - One nature (a unique “human-divine” nature)
 - **Monophysitism** = one nature, as opposed to the Dyophysitism, two natures
- Eutychianism (Monophysitism) rejected at Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD

Nestorianism

Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Antiochene School



Arianism

Jesus'
Humanity



Apollinarius

Jesus'
Divinity

Alexandrian School of Christology

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects

Eutychianism, Monophysitism

Both Human and Divine

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Constantine and His Successors

Constantine and His Successors

Constantine the Great

- Father was Constantius I, a believer in the sun god
 - controlled Gaul and Britain as caesar in the tetrarchy established by Emperor Diocletian
- Mother Helena a Christian
- **305 AD:** Emperor Diocletian abdicated the imperial diadem “to grow cabbages” at Salona. Constantius I became senior emperor (augustus) in the West
- **306 AD:** Constantine’s father died in York; Constantine became the “junior” caesar in the West and began planning a strategy that would give him control of the entire empire

Constantine and His Successors

Constantine the Great

- **313 AD:** he won control of the Western half the empire against rival Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge
 - Reportedly had a vision of a cross of light shining through the rays of the sun, and the words “In this sign, conquer.”
- **313 AD:** issued **Edict of Milan** with Eastern Emperor Licinius, giving tolerance to all religions

Constantine and His Successors

Constantine the Great

- **314 AD:** wrote letter to Ablabius, governor of North Africa “**God has entrusted by his divine will the rule over the whole world in order that I should watch over it... I shall not be really or fully secure and able to trust God’s Almighty goodness which freely dispenses happiness and salvation until all men offer worship in harmony and brotherliness to the all-Holy God in the prescribed forms of the Christian religion”**
- **Sep. 18, 324:** defeated the Eastern Emperor Licinius and became sole Emperor. Then openly embraced Christianity

Constantine and His Successors

Constantine the Great

- **325 AD:** called the Council of Nicaea
 - Suggested language of *homoousios*
- **326 AD:** abolished gladiatorial shows (largely ineffective)
- Took measures to check Jewish hostility to Christians
- Forbade pagan practice of exposure of new-born infants
- Clergy exempted from certain taxes. Bishops given certain privileges, such as freedom from being tortured if they were deemed a hostile witness by a judge

Constantine and His Successors

Constantine the Great

- Early Christian emperors did not follow a coercive anti-pagan policy, hoping it would die out from lack of support
- Kept title of *pontifex maximus* (pagan high priest); Emperor Gratian (359-383) was the first emperor to refuse the title
- Was not baptized until his death (common to early emperors)

Constantine and His Successors

Successors

- Constantine died 337 AD; civil war ensued; his son Constantius II ultimately became sole emperor (337-361)
 - Was Arian
 - St Jerome wrote: “The entire world woke from a deep slumber and discovered that it had become Arian”
- Julian (361-363)
 - Pagan; restored some pagan practices, rebuilt pagan temples
 - Killed in battle with the Persian Empire

Constantine and His Successors

Successors

- Jovian (363-364)
 - Friendly to supporters of Nicene Council
- Valens (364-378)
 - Staunch supporter of Arianism
- Theodosius (379-395)
 - Friendly to the supporters of the Nicene Council
- The survival of “Orthodoxy” cannot be attributed to sustained imperial favor in the fourth century

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