

Constantine, Nicea and Chalcedon

The Conversion of an Empire and
Theological Clarifications

Opening Question

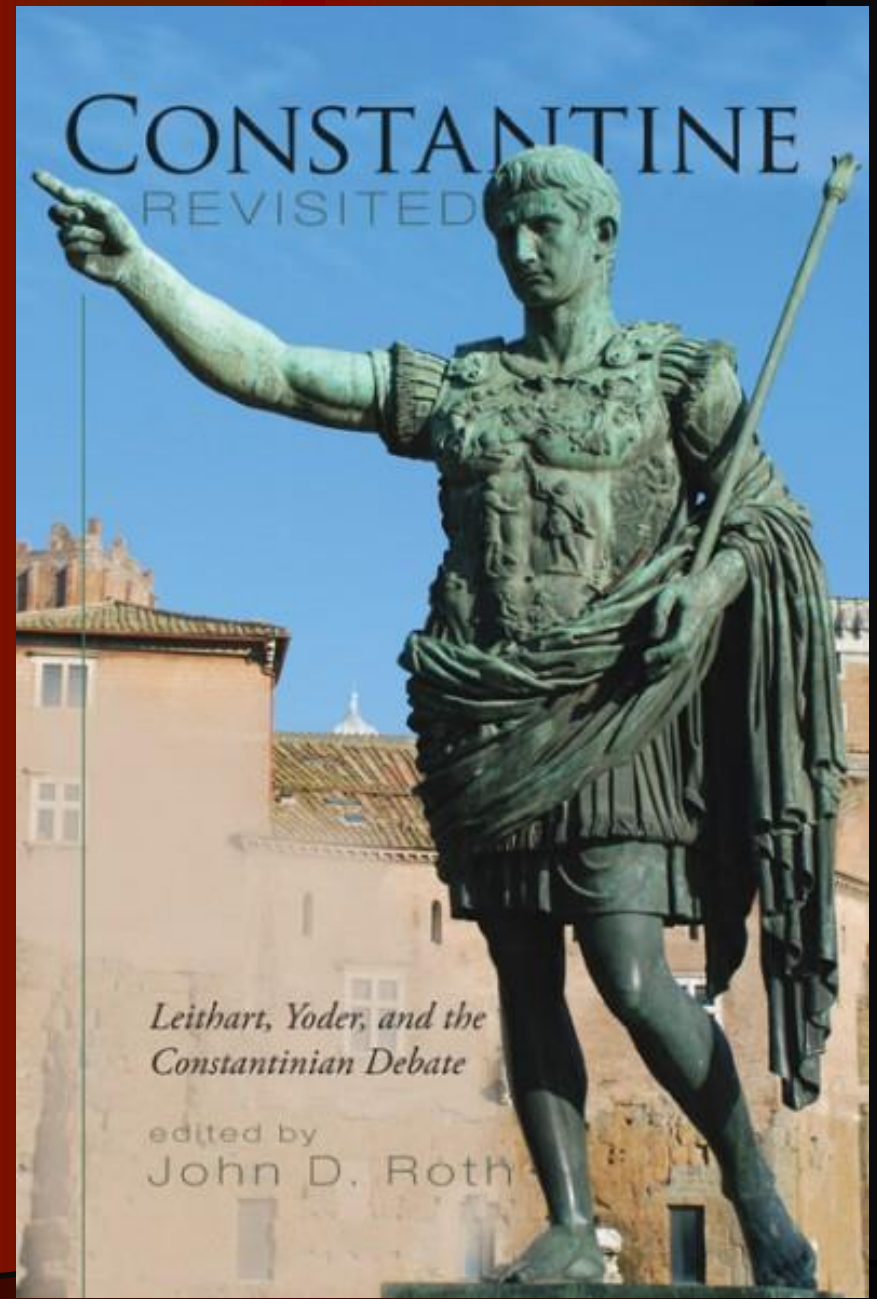
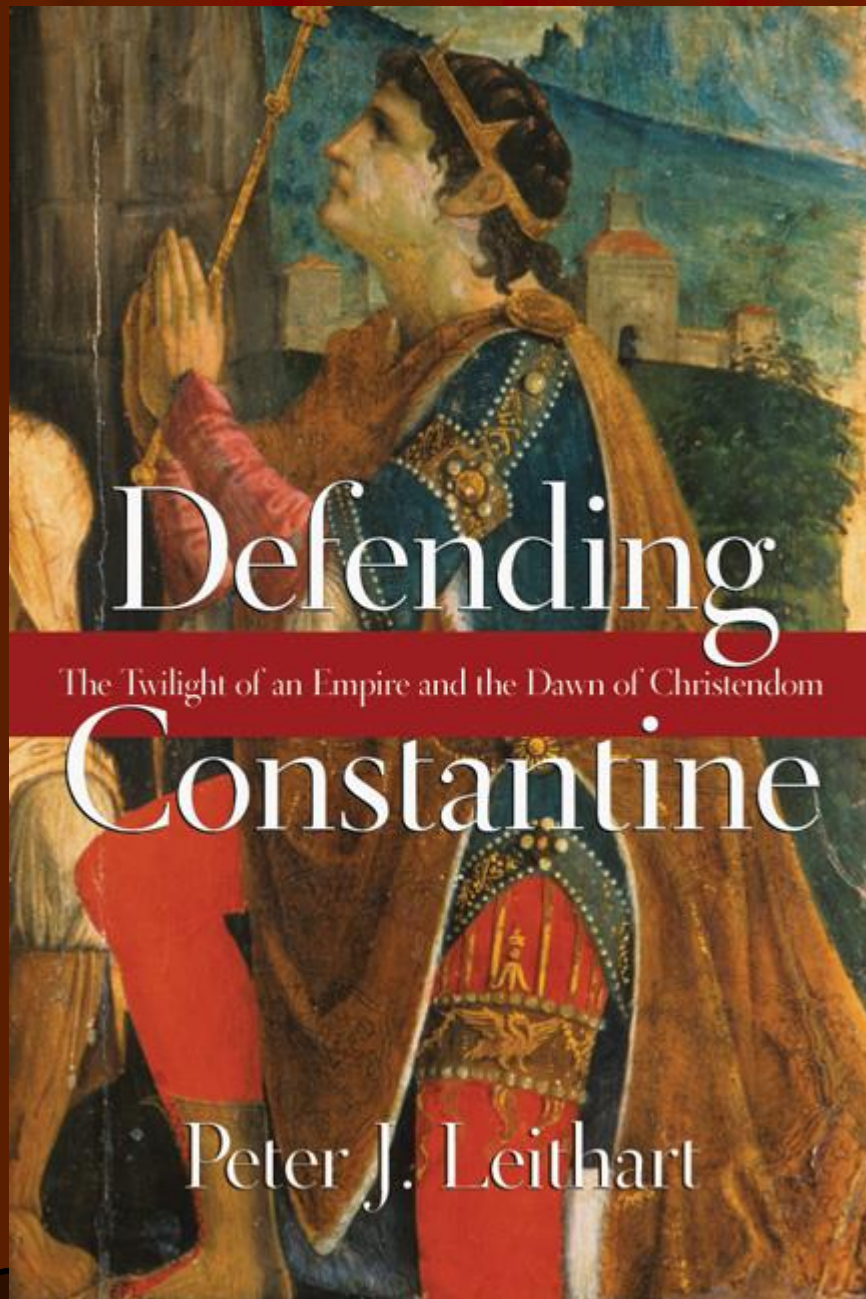
- Does Christianity operate best at the margins of society among the poor, outcasts, and rejected, or in the centers of power among the rich and well connected?
- Or, how are you handling the transition to a post-Christian America?

From Christ to Constantine, AD 30-305—waves of persecution

- Mt. 5: 10-12
- Emperor Nero AD 64
- Over 275 years, 10 major waves of persecution. (12 persecuting emperors out of 54)
- Options in the face of persecution
 - Martyrdom – very frequent
 - Apologetics

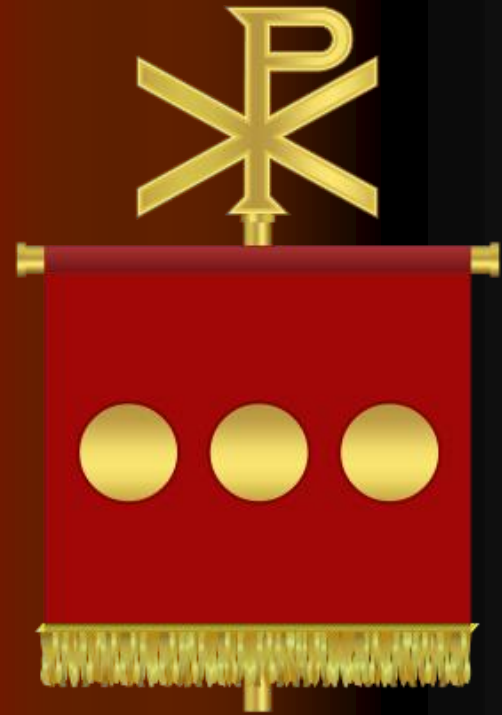


"Rome-Capitole-StatueConstantin" by I, Jean-Christophe BENOIST. Licensed under CC BY 2.5 via Wikimedia Commons - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rome-Capitole-StatueConstantin.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Rome-Capitole-StatueConstantin.jpg>



Battle of Milvian Bridge 312

- When invading Italy and challenging a major rival emperor (Maxentius),
- The Vision:
 - "*Ἐν Τούτῳ Νικά*" (-in this sign, conquer!)
 - "In hoc signo vinces" (-in this sign, you will conquer).
 - (Chi-Rho - affixed to the shields of his army).



"Labarum of Constantine the Great" by Labarum_of_Constantine_I.svg: TRAJAN 117This vector image was created with Inkscape. - Labarum_of_Constantine_I.svg (reconstruction by Eugene Ipavec, 2006)Vexilloid_of_the_Roman_Empire.svg. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Labarum_of_Constantine_the_Great.svg#mediaviewer/File:Labarum_of_Constantine_the_Great.svg



Peter Paul Rubens - <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/romanciv/end%20and%20legacy/constantine.jpg>

Edict of Milan – 311, 313

- Provided official toleration for Christianity
- "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 commonwealth may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes."
- "the same shall be restored to the Christians without payment or any claim of recompense and without any kind of fraud or deception"

Impact of Conversion

- From “pilgrim community” to center of Imperial power.
- Rulers began to promote, support and dictate to the church.
- 314 - Christian cross appears on Roman coins.
- 321 - Ordered that Sunday be day of rest.
- 323 - Constantine defeated Licinius.
- 324 – 330 Built Constantinople – taxed non-Christians to support church building.



"Hagia Irene2" by Sébah & Joaillier - Library of Congress[1]. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hagia_Irene2.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Hagia_Irene2.jpg

Eusebius' Version

- As you read his account: Consider and discuss the following:
 - What excited you? What did you like?
 - What bothers you about the story? Any lingering questions?
 - Is this history, hagiography, or propaganda?

Council of Nicea (325)

- Constantine's concern for unity
- "My design then was, first to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of a grievous disease."

Major Players and the Issue

- The primary protagonists: Arius and Athanasius (both from Alexandria)
- Is Jesus God?

The Decision

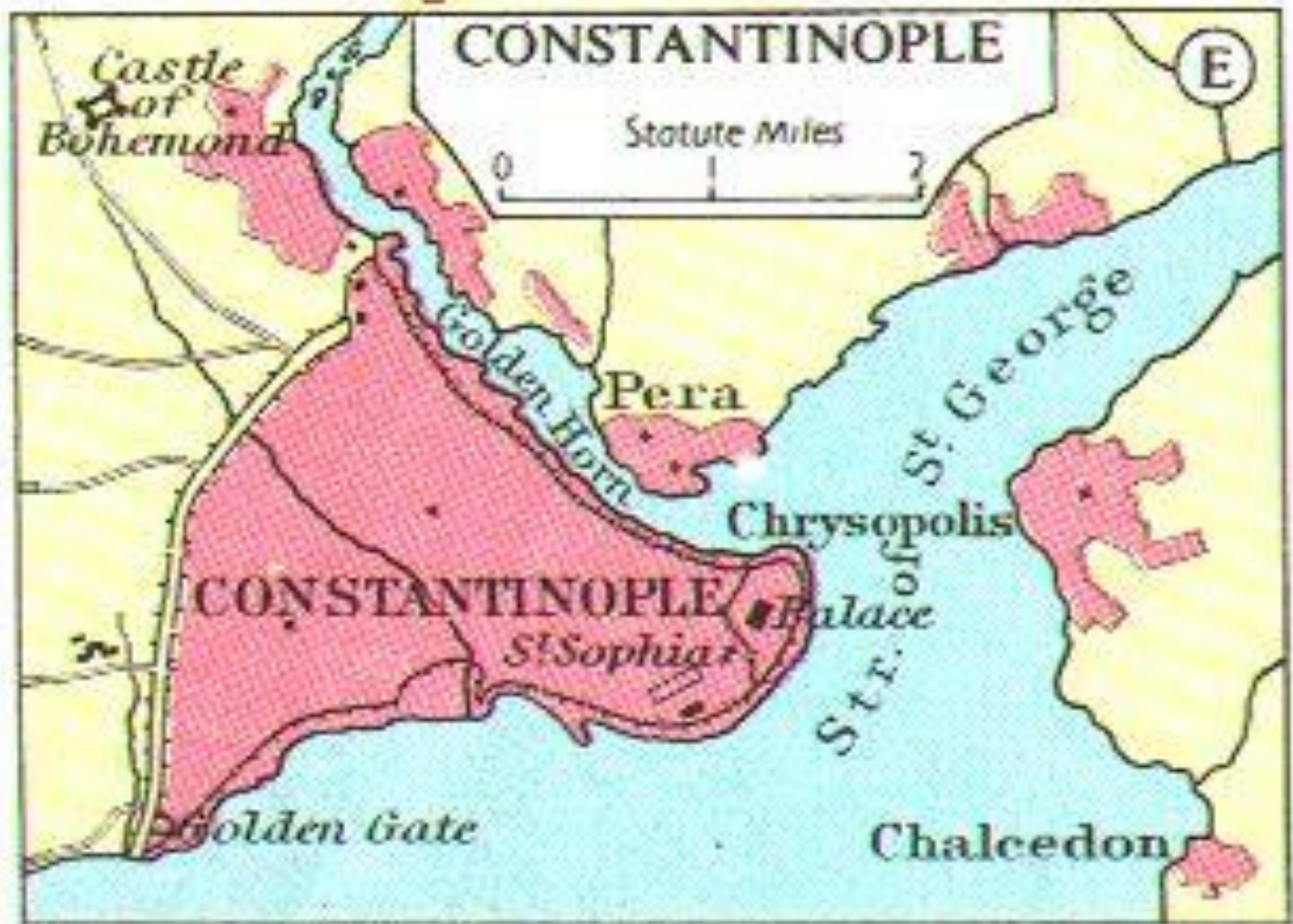
- Christ was very God of very God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit--all truly God)
- Christ was of one substance with the Father (not similar, but same, homoousios)
- Christ was begotten, not made (eternally the Son of God)
- Christ became human for us men, and for our salvation.

Why?

- Scripture: John 1:1; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3; 1 Cor. 2:8; Heb. 13:8
- Logic of salvation: Need to be God
- Opposition from ordinary believers
 - prayer, baptism, hymns
- Confirmed/reaffirmed in 381 at Council of Constantinople

Council of Chalcedon (451)

- Having established Jesus divinity, how were Christians to understand His humanity?
- One nature or two?
 - Word-Flesh Christology
 - Word-Man Christology



Political Background

- 395 Empire divided into East and West
- Political power shifting to Eastern Roman Empire but theological power remains in Rome, not Constantinople
- Alexandria (North Africa) and Antioch (Syria) fighting to exert control over Constantinople

Theological Players

- Alexandria (Word-Flesh Christology)
 - Appolinaris and Cyril of Alexandria emphasized Christ's full divinity, denying his full humanity
 - Emphasis on Mary as the Theotokos, not the Christotokos
- Antioch (Word-Man Christology)
 - Theodore of Mopuestia and Nestorius the Archbishop of Constantinople responded that Jesus was fully man and fully God with two separate natures, but one person



Saint Cyril of
Alexandria



Theotokos Hodegetria

The God Bearer
Showing the Way

First Attempt

- Council of Ephesus (431)
 - Alexandrians begin before the Antiochians arrive and declare victory and depose the representatives of Antioch including Nestorius
 - John of Antioch organizes a rival council which deposes Cyril and the Alexandrians
 - Emperor Theodosius deposes both Cyril and Nestorius
He was torn between his wife Eudokia (an Alexandrian) and his sister Pulcheria (a supporter of Antioch)

Image of Pulcheria



Chalcedonian Compromise

- Nestorius banished, Theodosius dies, Pope Leo I begins to have influence, Pulcheria marries Emperor Marcian
- Convened the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and adopts the position of Antioch (Word-Man Christology) but balances the Alexandrian concept of the "one and same Christ" "without division" "without separation"

“ . . . Our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in his divinity, the same perfect in his humanity, truly God and truly man, with a rational soul and body, consubstantial (*homooousios*) with the Father in his divinity and consubstantial with us in his humanity, like us in all things except for sin; before the ages begotten from the father in his divinity, and in the last days for us and for our salvation, [begotten] from Mary the Virgin, the *Theotokos*, in his humanity.

He is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. The difference of the natures is in no way removed because of the union, but rather, the specific property of each of the two natures is preserved and they come together in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ."

Not the End

- Translation issues led some in the East to reject Chalcedon
 - “Christ was one person in whom were united two natures or substances.”
 - Person = *persona* = φυσικς (physis)
 - Natures = *naturae* = φυσεις (physeis)
 - Monophysites (Jesus has “one nature”) reject Chalcedon as claiming that Christ had two persons.
 - Coptic Church of Egypt still retains Monophysite Christology

Questions to Ponder

- Whom do you see as in charge of the events leading to the Chalcedon Compromise? Church or government?
- What are the differences between legislating/imposing religion and protecting the freedom of religion?

Contemporary Applications

- What are the boundaries of theological speculation?
 - How should we respond to those whom we believe are drifting beyond those boundaries?
- How do we maintain the unity of the Church in the face of cultural, linguistic, national, and theological disputes that threaten to tear it apart?
- What is our Christian responsibility when we see extremes visible in the Church (e.g. focusing only on God's "grace and forgiveness" and not God's "holiness")?