

"Constantine"

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In 312, Constantine defeated his brother-in-law Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge ending certain indiscretions and consolidating power. In 313, Constantine gave credit for that victory to a God who had given him a sign beneath which he would win the aforementioned battle. Constantine might not have recognized the sign or that it belonged to the God-man. Upon making inquiries, he found the group that used the sign and worshiped the God. The Edict of Milan legalized Christianity, because under the sign of Christ, Constantine had conquered. Let's not over-romanticize the emperor, he was a shrewd man, but let's also admit that he took extraordinary pains to promote a faith he would likely adopt only when following its precepts would no longer interfere with the consolidation of power.

So it was that in the year 325, that the Emperor called a council in Nicea to end a battle which he was not himself fighting, but which threatened his power to maintain the stability of the empire. The Council of Nicea affirmed that the God-man was in fact fully God and fully Man, contrary to the heresy of the Arians and in accord with Constantine's vision, which promised victory under the sign of not just any God, but this Triune and Incarnate God.

One can frame this as a power play, and indeed it was for Constantine, but for the Church it was a matter of truth. It certainly did not hurt the Church, and it's always beneficial to have an emperor who allows both public worship and property ownership for that purpose, but even builds churches and moves mountains so that said worship can occur at the places where it had already been secretly practiced during the previous persecutions. The Romans always recognized prayer as a public act which had a connection with the good of the state and not only with some private, personal good.

Now, almost 1700 years later, a pope and a patriarch have proposed an

ecumenical encounter in the same city. This patriarch is in as precarious a position as the pre-constantinian Christians were, isolated and besieged although officially allowed to pray as long as he's not too public about it.

And this pope is convinced that the role of any salty follower of the Godman will not only value public prayer, but a prayer which leads to a public, lived concern for fellow-man. May the emperors of our time see this not as an opportunity for consolidating power plays, but may they make edicts and move mountains (and may they have visions!) so that the God whose sign Constantine saw may give victory again to the Church and even to the emperor.