The Papacy And The Civil Power – Chapter X. Part 1 Constantine

The legalization of Christianity by Emperor Constantine

Continued from Chapter IX. Argument of Archbishop Kenrick.

Churches Independent before Constantine.—Victor I. endeavored to establish the Supremacy of Rome.— Ambition of the Popes.—Aided Constantine to overthrow Maxentius.—Consequences.—Constantine a Usurper.— Maxentius the Lawful Emperor.—Constantine baptized just before his Death. His Motives.—Influence upon Roman Clergy.—Arianism.—The Council of Nice.—The Pope had Nothing to do with It.—Called by the Emperor. The Pope did not preside by his Legates.—He did not approve the Decrees as Necessary to their Validity.—Constantine was the Master Spirit. He dictated the Creed.—He fixed Infallibility in the Council.—The Council did not decree the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome.—It enacted only Twenty Canons.—All other pretended Ones are Forgeries.

THE many schisms which have occurred in the Roman Catholic Church, and the frequent elections of rival and hostile popes, lead to the conclusion that there is something inherent in the papal system which renders entire unity impossible. As all minds of any intelligence naturally repel any attack upon their independence, the harshness and severity employed by the popes to keep this class of minds in subjection have necessarily induced antagonisms. The ignorant alone, outside the governing class, have proved submissive; and they only because they are unconscious of their inferiority. These, for many centuries, constituted the mercenary armies of the papacy.

There is no difficulty in tracing this want of unity to its real source, or in showing that, but for the disturbance of Christian harmony in the Church by such popes as subordinated the interests of Christianity to the accomplishment of their own personal ends, Roman Catholicism might have been, today, a very different thing from what it is. It might have been one of the most powerful and effective instruments in carrying on the work of improving and elevating the world. And the present pope, instead of sending forth mingled curses and groans from a pretended prison, might have united in the general rejoicing at the advanced condition into which modern Christianity and civilization have brought the nations.

The Church of Christ was undoubtedly established upon a rock, because the faith upon which it rested was designed to be more immovable than the mountains. Love, charity, harmony, and all the heavenly virtues clustered

together at its foundation, and there can be nothing rightfully about it to destroy its symmetry or mar its beauty. But the papal system is constructed out of uncongenial and inharmonious materials. It was the work of man—not God. Erected out of beautiful materials gathered from the partial wreck of apostolic Christianity, by mingling them with the rude fragments of pagan Rome, it lacks the symmetry of a perfect plan, and displays the conflicting designs of its various architects. Its external organization has grown out of illiberal and unchristian divisions, fomented by designing popes and prelates, with no higher object than to gain authority and distinction for themselves, even at the sacrifice of the simple faith and worship of the early Christians. Its own factions have never ceased to prey upon its vitals from the hour of its birth, and have been to each other what the plagues sent down from the gods were to those who first stole fire from heaven. It has made fierce and cruel war upon everything that stood in its path or endeavored to check its ambition; and if, at any time, it has been met by intolerance, the weapons used against it have been supplied from its own armory, and belong to the brood of monsters which itself has hatched.

Before the time of Constantine, each of the several churches planted by the apostles and the early fathers exercised its own jurisdiction over its own members, and thus preserved harmony in faith and worship. The right of visitorial guardianship, exercised by the apostles while planting and watering them in infancy, existed no longer, because there was no longer any necessity for it. But while each church governed its own affairs, they all realized the necessity of preserving a spirit of unity, and such brotherhood and fellowship among the whole as would enable them to sympathize with and assist each other in the adjustment of their local disagreements, if any should arise. A harmonious and beautiful Christian system was thus created, worthy of the divine approval, and under it the Catholic Apostolic Church was able to stand up and ward off the staggering blows of the pagan emperors.

The first efforts to disturb this harmony were made by the bishops of Rome. About the beginning of the third century, Victor I., with a view to establish the primacy of the Church of Rome, endeavored to compel the Asiatic churches, by threats of excommunication, to conform to its custom in keeping the festival of Easter. About half a century afterward, Stephen I. attempted to assume jurisdiction over the Church of Spain; and, still later, Dionysius made a like attempt over the Church of Alexandria. These attempts at ecclesiastical absolutism at Rome were so sternly rebuked by the great fathers, Ireneus and Cyprian, as to demonstrate that the leading churches could not be subjugated, unless by some power they were unable to resist. The bishops of Rome soon saw that this power was political imperialism; and they availed themselves of the first opportunity of uniting Church and State at Rome, in order to obtain possession of it. This opportunity was the arrival of Constantine, at a time when the corrupt materials necessary for such a union were abundant at Rome. Eusebius, who was a prelate of eminence at that time, gives this account of the clergy:

“But when, by reason of excessive liberty, we sunk into negligence and sloth, one envying and reviling another in different ways, and we were almost, as it were, on the point of taking up arms against each other, and we were

assailing each other with words as with darts and spears, prelates inveighing against prelates, and people rising up against people, and hypocrisy and dissimulation had arisen to the greatest height of malignity, then the divine judgment…. began to afflict its episcopacy…. But some that appeared to be our pastors, deserting the law of piety, were inflamed against each other with mutual strifes, only accumulating quarrels and threats, rivalship, hostility and hatred to each other, only anxious to assert the government as a kind of *sovereignty for themselves*." ("Eccl. Hist.," by Eusebius, bk. viii., ch. i.)

It has even been charged that Marcellinus, who was Bishop of Rome in 304, shortly before the arrival of Constantine, solemnly abjured (renounced) the Christian religion" and "offered incense to idols in the temples of Isis and Vesta." (Cormenin, vol i., p. 48.) However this may be, it is not at all wonderful, in view of the condition of things pictured by Eusebius, that when Milchiades, a few years after, became Bishop of Rome, he was willing that the reigning emperor should be removed and the empire seized by Constantine, in order thereby to unite his fortunes with the State, and those of the State with the Roman Church. Constantine was not a member of the Church then the only visible sign of Christianity; but the bishop and clergy of Rome assisted him to expel Maxentius, the reigning emperor, expecting to receive—if not upon the express condition that they should receive—the direct favor and protection of the empire. With the emperor on their side, they could readily see how easy it would be to draw all the religious controversies throughout the empire to Rome, and thus lay the foundation for the supremacy of the Church there.

But, even without this, their rebellion against Maxentius(*) was followed with results both direct and consequential. The direct were: the union of Church and State, the introduction of secular affairs into the Church, the increase of ambition and corruption among the clergy, and the planting of the foundations upon which the monstrous usurpations of the papacy have since rested. The consequential were: the introduction of measures which overthrew the primitive Church, the spreading of discord, jealousy, and divisions throughout all the churches, and, finally, the great schism which separated the Eastern and Western Christians.

* Maxentius persecuted the Christians, but was the legitimate emperor; and, therefore, if Constantine had failed, all who assisted him would have been rebels against the law of the empire.

It is worthy to be repeated that, before the time of Constantine, each of the churches of Asia, Africa, and Europe had enjoyed its own independence, with no asserted or recognized principality in either over the others. Rome had no more power than Alexandria, or Alexandria than Antioch, or Antioch than Jerusalem. As the most ancient and first—established churches, those of Jerusalem and Antioch had a sort of precedence of honor, derived from the association of the names of the apostles James (the Lord's brother) and Peter and Paul, with their history. But in neither of them had there been any pretense of authority or primacy set up. They were content to adhere, in what they did and taught, to the practice of that forbearance, charity, and

toleration exhibited in the apostolic assembly at Jerusalem, by which they hoped to lead the world into that condition of meekness and humility which is experienced at the genuine impress of true Christianity upon the heart, whether it be that of prince or peasant.

Eusebius gives also an account of the rapid progress of Christianity under these influences. He speaks of “those vast collections of men that flocked to the religion of Christ, and those multitudes crowding in from every city, and the illustrious concourse in the houses of worship.” (Eusebius, bk. viii., ch. i.)

Such results could have been produced only by the example of pious and holy lives on the part of the ministers of religion—of such lives as would arrest the attention of the multitude, and prove to them how far preferable, and how much more ennobling and elevating, was practical Christianity than any of the old philosophies. The reverse of this flattering picture, which he likewise painted, could only have been produced by other examples of the very opposite character, such as had their birth in the prevailing pride and ambition of Rome.

When Constantine reached Rome—not yet being a Christian, even by profession—he manifestly desired to secure the co—operation of both pagans and Christians, in order to maintain possession of the empire, which was his chief desire. He had no legal claim to rule in Rome. At the division of the empire by Diocletian, he selected three colleagues to govern it jointly with himself—Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius, the father of Constantine. None of these had any other claim to the title of Caesar than this. The distribution of the empire was as follows: to Constantius were given Gaul, Spain, and Britain; to Galerius, the valley of the Danube; to Maximian, Italy and Africa; and Diocletian retained Thrace, Egypt, and Asia. (“Decline and Fall,” etc., by Gibbon (Milman’s), vol. i., pp. 406, 407.)

Maximian, therefore, was emperor at Rome. At his death, in 306, Maxentius, his son, became his successor, by the act of “the applauding senate and people,” (*Ibid*., p. 461.) which placed him lawfully in possession of that part of the empire. About that time, Constantius died in Britain, while administering his part of the empire. (*Ibid*., p. 457.) Constantine was present, and upon him his father “committed the administration of the empire;” upon the principle that, being his eldest son, he was entitled to it by the law of inheritance. (“Life of Constantine,” by Ensebius, bk. i., ch. xxi., p. 21.)

In no possible view of this act can it be said to have conferred upon Constantine any right to that part of the empire in which Rome was situated. Giving to his right by inheritance, or gift from his father, the utmost extent, his jurisdiction as emperor was confined to the countries over which Constantius ruled; that is, Gaul, Spain, and Britain. He, however, was not content with this; the field was not large enough for the gratification of inordinate ambition like his. Eusebius, his only biographer, tells us that he “drove from his dominions, like untamed and savage beasts,” those who seemed incapable of civilization; “reduced to submission” parts of Britain; and “then proceeded to consider the state of the remaining portions of the

empire." No part of it attracted his attention so much as Rome, "the imperial city," and he therefore "prepared himself for the effectual suppression of the tyranny" which prevailed there under Maxentius; that is, for snatching the imperial crown from the brow of Maxentius and putting it upon his own. (*Ibid*., clih. xxv., xxvi., pp. 23, 24.)

The pretense that he desired to go to Rome to relieve the Christians there from the oppression of Maxentius is idle, for he was not yet a Christian. He desired the empire, and for that purpose alone he marched his army to Rome. Upon reaching there, he had two things to do in order to secure the desired success: first, to drive out Maxentius, and, second, to conciliate the inhabitants. The first accomplished, he undertook the second by granting equal freedom of religious worship to both Christians and pagans, thereby signifying his condemnation of religious persecution. This was altogether conformable to the wishes of the Christians, for, up to that period, the example of toleration set by the apostles and early Christians had been universally practiced by them, except in the instances where the bishops of Rome had endeavored to establish their primacy over those of the other churches.

Thus established in Rome, Constantine entered immediately upon a system of measures by means of which the clergy were greatly advanced, as a reward for their support of his cause. He conferred great favors upon them, such as they had never before enjoyed. (Ante, ch. viii.) Those already corrupted by the prevailing disorders of which Eusebius speaks were, beyond all doubt, quite ready to accept this arrangement, without any inquiry beyond the mere question of personal benefit to themselves; and as these had control of the Church at Rome, it soon resulted in uniting the Church and the State together in such a way as to make one dependent on the other. Even then he had not become a Christian by uniting with the Church; nor did he do so for a number of years after the Council of Nice. Yet he convened that council, was present during its sessions, participated in its deliberations, and dictated its decisions. It is a gross perversion of history to call him a "Christian emperor" in the sense that the papists continually do, for none of the fathers from whom we derive information of those times give any account of his baptism into the Church until he was about to die, long after his capture of Rome.

Socrates says that, in the sixty–fifth year of his age, he received "Christian baptism," in Nicomnedia, and died in a few days. ("Eccl. Hist.," by Socrates, bk. i., ch. xxxix.) Sozomen says the same thing, adding that it was in the thirty–fifth year of his reign. ("Eccl. Hist.," by Sozomen, bk. ii., ch. xxxiv.) And so does Theodoret. ("Eccl. Hist.," by Theodoret, bk. i., ch. xxxii.) And also Eusebius. ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iv., ch. lxi.) Eusebius talks about God having frequently manifested himself to him, and everybody is familiar with his story about the sign of the cross in the heavens; and it is undoubtedly true that he had great respect for Christianity.

But all this does not go to show, against other acknowledged facts, that he had become so connected with the Church at Rome as to be moved by motives of piety alone to bestow so many royal favors upon it. The fact is, he never

united with the Church of Rome at all. When baptized in Nicomedia, the ceremony was performed by Arian bishops and in an Arian church; so that he never was, according to the teachings of the Roman Church, an orthodox Christian, but died, as he had lived, a heretic. When he allied himself; therefore, with the clergy at Rome, that act must, of necessity, be referred to some other motive than the service of God, or the special advancement of Christianity. There could have been no other than a temporal motive, that of securing and retaining possession of the imperial crown. And it is equally conclusive also, that the clergy of Rome had no other than a temporal motive in forming so close and intimate alliance with a prince who had not demonstrated his devotion to Christianity by uniting with their Church; which, we are now told by those who profess to be their successors, is the only sure passport to heaven. Thus, the union formed under these circumstances, and by these contracting parties, between the Church and the State was, on the part of both, a mere scheme of ambition, designed for no other purpose than to acquire power. If Christianity had any thing to do with it, it was of secondary consideration.

Understanding perfectly well the wishes of such of the clergy as had brought the Church into the condition described by Eusebius, and how they were to be kept faithful to him, one of the first steps of Constantine was to issue an edict commanding large sums of money to be paid to “certain ministers.” (“Eccl. Hist.,” by Eusebius, bk. x., ch. vi.) He exempted the clergy from public service. (*Ibid*., bk. x., ch. vii.) He placed the Christians “in almost all the principal posts of the Roman Government.” (“Eccl. Hist.,” by Sozomen, bk. i., ch. viii.) He decreed that part of the funds levied from tributary countries should be sent “to the bishops and clergy.” (*Ibid*.) He enacted a law giving immunity to the clergy in reference to taxation. (“Eccl. Hist.,” by Du Pin, vol. ii., p. xvi.) Also another permitting appeals from the secular courts to the bishops. (“Eccl. Hist.,” by Sozomen, bk. i., ch. ix.) He provided, for the first time, that persons should be allowed to leave their property to the Church by will. (Eccl. Hist.,” by Du Pin, vol. ii., p. xvi.) Who could doubt the result of such unbounded favoritism as this? It soon raised the Church at Rome to an unparalleled condition of grandeur. The clergy became a privileged class, sheltered and protected as they thus were by the emperor. When the emperor was gone—for he remained there but a little while—they did as they pleased, for everybody understood the terrible vengeance in store for those who resisted. The compact was faithfully executed by both parties, to the temporal profit of both.

The men of that day are not supposed to have been materially different from those of the present times. Hence the splendor and magnificence introduced into the Roman Church led to such departures from the simple modes of apostolic worship as were supposed to be necessary to arrest the attention of the pagan part of the population, and to attract them to that Church. Much of this splendor was, in fact, borrowed from the pagan worship—while much of it originated in the pride and vanity of the clergy. It should not surprise us now to know that, in the midst of such a state of things as this, the bishops struggled with each other for the ascendancy, as Eusebius tells us, while, at the same time, *they were thoroughly united in the wish and purpose to make the Roman Church the “mistress” and ruler of all the other churches.*

Certainly there is no example of such struggles and contentions found in the lives of the apostles; no question about personal or official supremacy. Paul rebuked Peter at Antioch for his course toward the Jews; but no controversy about authority grew out of it. And Cyprian, one of the great fathers of the third century, strongly condemned anything of the kind, in these expressive words: “For none of us ought to make himself a bishop of bishops, or pretend to awe his brethren by a tyrannical fear, because every bishop is at liberty to do as he pleases, and can *no more be judged by another than he can judge others himself*.” (“Eccl. Hist.,”by Dn Pin, vols. i., ii., p. 132.)

It is more than probable that the controversy about Arianism, which did so much to retard the progress of Christianity, grew out of the pride and vanity of the original contestants—Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, one of his presbyters. Such was the opinion of Constantine. He “wrote to rebuke them” for having originated a disturbance “of a truly insignificant character, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention.” He cared nothing about the point of doctrine involved—whether the Son was of the same or of like substance with the Father, or whether the three persons in the Trinity were equal or not. The probability is that he had no well—defined views about it. At all events, his chief complaint was that they had made “a controversy public which it was in their power to have concealed;” also that it was “the disputatious caviling of ill—employed leisure,” and was “rather consistent with puerile thoughtlessness than suitable to the intelligence of priests and prudent men. (“Life of Constantine,”) by Eusebius, bk. ii., ch. lxviii.; Sozomen, bk. i., chb. xvi., xvii.)

But this useless controversy, on account of the virulence and malignity with which it was carried on by the bishops and clergy on both sides, led to the Council of Nice, in 325 — the first ecumenical council. The Christian world had got along well enough for nearly three hundred years without any such assemblage. Innumerable heresies had sprung up between the planting of the Church at Jerusalem and that time; and the influence of the greater part of them, if not nearly all, had been dispelled by the love and charity which the apostolic fathers and their immediate descendants reflected in their lives and example. To none of them had occurred the idea of an external church organization with powers of compulsion. And yet the Council of Nice, in one respect, was one of the most important assemblages ever held, in this: that it placed the Christian sentiment of the apostolic age in the formula of a creed which, if it had never been disturbed, would at all times have furnished—it would yet furnish—the common ground of Christian union throughout the world. This, however, is to be attributed mainly to the fact that the purity of Christian life and Church government had been preserved in the ancient churches, whose influence dictated all the fundamentals of the Nicene Creed; so that the result was in no sense aggressive, but simply responsive to the existing Christian sentiment of the age.

In another respect, the cause of true Christianity would have fared better if it never had been held, or, if held, it had grown out of other causes, and had been controlled, in some of its aspects, by other influences. We find demonstration of this in the fact that the papal writers yet refer to it in proof of the supremacy and infallibility of the pope and Church of Rome;

whereas, apart from the causes which led to it and the external influences brought to bear upon it—that is, in so far as it concerns the Christian faith—it proves neither, but the reverse.

Bolder than those who have higher reputations to maintain, a recent writer, to whom reference has heretofore been made, has carried this claim to its extremest limit by alleging that all the ecumenical councils, including that at Nice, as well as the whole Church from the beginning, have recognized papal infallibility as the only true Christian faith. It scarcely need be said that he is a *Jesuit*. He says:

"The first Council of Nice, intended to give greater publicity to the condemnation of Arius, was convoked by Pope Silvester, under the reign of Constantine the Great, who used his imperial authority to facilitate the meeting of the fathers. The sovereign pontiff presided by his three legates, one of whom was Osius, Bishop of Cordova. The other two were priests. Osius, whom Athanasius styles the *leader* of the council, occupied the first place, attended by his two companions. How great the deference here shown to the papal authority, since the mere reflection of it gave even simple priests the precedence over bishops, who, on the present occasion, were either Orientals or Greeks, and yet never objected to this conduct of the legates, as implying an undue assumption of power! This fact alone suffices to show that *the prerogatives of the Holy See were then recognized all over the Christian world*. No one, therefore, will be at all startled by the fact that, even previous to any measures taken by the councils, the legates, acting under instructions, condemned the blasphemous doctrines of Arius. The fathers were guided in their deliberations by these instructions, as well as by the symbol of faith prescribed by Silvester and brought from Rome, together with a number of disciplinary regulations. At the close of the council, *all the acts were sent to Rome for confirmation*." ("Apostolical and Infallible Authority of the Pope," etc., by Weninger, pp. 104, 105.)

When Sir Walter Scott wrote about the "tangled web" woven by those who "practice to deceive," he must have had in his mind some such monstrous perversion of facts as is contained in this brief extract. It would be difficult to find elsewhere so much misrepresentation upon important points of history in so brief a compass. And yet it is deliberately put forth, and largely circulated in this country, as veritable history—as one of the chief foundation-stones upon which the superstructure of the papal edifice has been erected.

We occasionally meet with individuals who so frequently repeat romantic and improbable stories, that they come at last to believe them true. And such would seem to be the only apology for those who give utterance to these unfounded and unsupported assertions. They might be left to indulge in their delusion, but for the uses they now make of them. Since, however, they base upon them the right of the papacy to confront the world and command all human progress to cease, they themselves create the necessity for the discovery of the precise truth. Having, by their vindictive assaults upon Protestantism, invited the investigation, they will have no right to complain if, when the truth is discovered, their whole system of papal supremacy should topple and fall before it.

This author supports his statements by references to no other of the “Greek fathers” but Sozomen. He, however, cites Athanasius to prove that Osius, or Hosius, was “the leader of the Council of Nice,” and the eighteenth and twenty–ninth canons of the council to show that the supremacy and primacy of the pope was formally acknowledged by it. Why should we not apply to the investigation of such matters as these the same rules of evidence by which we test the truth or falsehood of any other statements we find in history? Undoubtedly he did not expect them to be subjected to so severe a test, but that does not release from the responsibility of doing so those who desire to ascertain the truth.

Sozomen is supposed to have written his “Ecclesiastical History” about 440–’45–more than a hundred years after the Council of Nice. That of Socrates was written about the same time, probably a little later. Eusebius, who was a member of the Council of Nice, preceded both of them with his “Ecclesiastical History,” and, of course, wrote about many things of which he had personal knowledge. In his “History,” however, he does not speak of the proceedings of the council, but of matters preceding it. All we learn from him about the council is found in his “Life of Constantine.”

Theodoret’s “Ecclesiastical History ” was designed as a continuation of those of Sozomen and Socrates, and must have been written a few years only before his death, which occurred about 458. These are the “Greek fathers,” from whom must be learned all that can now be known of the history of the Council of Nice, whenever we turn aside from mere guess–work and speculation and enter into the region of fact.

Not one of these authors connects the Bishop of Rome in any direct form with the Arian controversy *before* the Council of Nice. Eusebius, who took part in it, does not, either in his “History” or “Life of Constantine.” Yet this mere omission on his part might not be held conclusive, if the others had done so upon the strength of tradition only. He tells us that he “thought proper to pass by” many things, “particularly the circumstances of the different heads of the churches, who from being shepherds of the reasonable flocks of Christ that did not govern in a legal or becoming manner, were condemned by divine justice as unworthy of such a charge;” and also, “the ambitious aspirings of many to office, and the injudicious and unlawful ordinations that took place, the divisions among the confessors themselves, the great schisms and difficulties industriously fomented by the new members against the relics of the Church, devising one innovation after another, and unmercifully thrusting them into the midst of all these calamities, heaping up affliction upon affliction.” (Eusebius’s ” Book of Martyrs,” ch. xii.) He speaks here of the “heads of churches,” in the plural, which excludes the idea of there having been any such thing known in his day as the Church of Rome being the head and “mistress” of all the churches: but as we must conclude, from what he elsewhere said, that he intended to picture the melancholy condition of things existing at Rome, in consequence of the alliance between Constantine and the Roman clergy, it is easy to see that he also included Rome when he spoke of” the ambitious aspirings of many to office,” and the consequent “divisions” and “innovations.” Prudential reasons, therefore, may have re strained him from any special reference to the connection of the Bishop of

Rome with the Arian controversy. However this may be, he is silent on that subject, and we have now no means of supplying, the omission, if it is merely an omission, unless it call be gathered from what he may have left to be inferred, or from the other authors named, or be specially manufactured in support of some preconceived theory. So far from his having said anything justifying such an inference, he excludes any such idea entirely in his "Life of Constantine," where, speaking of "the people being thus in every place divided," and the prevalence of "the bitterest disunion," he says that "Constantine appeared to be the only one on earth capable of being His [God's] minister," to provide "the healing of these differences," without referring to the Bishop of Rome as having any agency or authority in the matter. ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iii., ch. v.)

Sozomen gives an account of the origin of the controversy between Arius and the Bishop of Alexandria, and states the fact that the latter convened a council of African bishops within his own ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and "cast him [Arius] out of the Church," together with certain African presbyters and deacons who agreed with him. Arius, in defense, sought "the favor of the bishops of other churches," and addressed letters to them. The Bishop of Alexandria also "wrote to the bishops of every church "not to Rome specially, where alone it would have been necessary to write if that had been the seat of headship and primacy in the Church Universal. Numerous synods were held. "Arius sent messengelrs to Paulinus, Bishop of Tyre; to Eusebius Pamphilus,(The author of the "Ecclesiastical History.") who presided over the Church of Cesarea in Palestine, and to Patrophilus, Bishop of Scythopolis."

Intelligence of these dissensions having reached Constantine, the emperor, who had been a long time absent from Rome, he was "greatly troubled," probably because he sincerely desired, by this time, that the cause of Christianity should not be injured by them, and probably also because he feared that these perpetual divisions among the clergy would weaken his hold upon the imperial throne at Rome. He accordingly went to work at once to employ his temporal authority to heal the breach, and "rebuked" the contestants, Arius and Alexander, as already stated. (Sozomen, bk. i., chh. xv., xvi.)

Sozomen does not give this letter of Constantine, but Eusebius does; and it shows very clearly that he acted in the matter wholly without reference to the Bishop of Rome. It, moreover, shows too that he had a just and intelligent appreciation of the great principle upon which Protestantism is based; for, after characterizing the dispute between Arius and Alexander as upon "truly insignificant questions," merely "some trifling and foolish verbal difference," he points them to the example of the philosophers, who, "though they may differ as to the perfection of a principle, they are recalled to harmony of sentiment by *the uniting power of their common doctrines*," and counsels them not to let "the circumstance which has led to a slight difference between you, since it affects not the general principles of truth, be allowed to prolong any division or schism among you;"…."for we are not all of us like-minded on every subject, nor is there such a thing as one disposition and judgment common to all alike." ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, chh. lxiv.–lxxii.)

It is therefore manifest that the Christian sentiment which Eusebius attributes to Constantine was not that exclusive and sectarian sentiment which the clergy at Rome were then endeavoring to establish, and which, as he could readily foresee, would widen rather than close up the breach. Although he may have favored the Christians there from a general conviction of Christian duty, and given temporal authority to the clergy from motives of State policy only; yet it is also manifest that he did not intend to permit any church organization to grow up at Rome, with exterior authority sufficient to control or absorb the legitimate power of the other churches. However much a Christian he may have been, he was now at the head of a pagan empire, and no doubt thought that his whole public duty was performed by the establishment of religious toleration. Hence, in dealing with the Arian controversy, he ignored entirely any claim of exclusive jurisdiction on the part of the Bishop of Rome, if any such was set up, which is not probable, and treated the question as one which he, as emperor, was required to submit to all the bishops alike. And this view of the policy of Constantine will sufficiently explain his subsequent dealings with the Roman clergy.

Socrates gives substantially the same general account as Eusebius and Sozomen, adding the letter of the Bishop of Alexandria. This letter is as conclusive as it is possible for negative evidence to be upon the question of Romish supremacy at that time. It is addressed “to the bishops constituted in the several cities”—not to the Bishop of Rome alone. This great orthodox bishop employs this language: “To our beloved and most honored fellow—ministers of the Catholic [not Roman Catholic] Church everywhere.” He complains especially that Eusebius of Nicomnedia (Not the historian.) had taken the side of Arius, and argues at length to show the heretical tendency of their teachings.

Matters, however, only became worse: “To so disgraceful an extent,” says Socrates, “was this affair carried, that Christianity became a subject of popular ridicule, even in the theaters.” Eusebius of Nicomedia demanded of the Bishop of Alexandria that the sentence of excommunication he had pronounced against Arius should be rescinded; and many letters were written on both sides, some favoring and some opposing this proposition. The opposing factions became divided into “sects,” and these, with the Eunomians, Macedonians, and Melitians, threatened to put an end to all the harmony that had previously existed in the several churches. And yet Socrates, like Eusebius and Sozomen, omits any mention of the Bishop or Church of Rome, either as appealed to by the parties, or as interfering to quiet the dissensions. He makes Hosius the messenger by whom Constantine sent his letter of rebuke to Alexander and Arius, but does not connect him in any way with the Bishop of Rome. (Socrates, bk. i., chh. v., vi., vii.)

Theodoret also refers to the beginning of the controversy. He inserts a letter from the Bishop of Alexandria to the Bishop of Constantinople, wherein several other “sects” are named, besides those mentioned by Socrates: to wit, the Ebionites, Artemontes, Sabellians, and Valentinians (a branch of the Gnostics); thus demonstrating that sects did not grow out of Protestantism, but justifying the inference that if they did not necessarily arise out of the attempt to establish Roman exclusiveness, they were increased by it. He

publishes the letter of Arius to Eusebius, wherein he calls the Bishop of Alexandria “the Pope Alexander.” This is the first time that the title of *pope* appears in any of these “Greek fathers” in connection with the Arian controversy. And he gives also a letter from Eusebius to the Bishop of Tyre. Nowhere, however, does he refer to the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope of Rome, as having anything whatever to do with either Alexander or Arius, or with their respective adherents. But, in enumerating the bishops of Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, he says, “The Church of Rome was at this time ruled by Silvester;” and neither says nor intimates that he ruled any other of the churches, or that he had any more authority than the bishop of any other Church. (“Eccl. Hist.,” by Theodoret, bk. i., chh. ii.–vi.) Manifestly, it is a just inference,from the fact that no letter is shown to have been addressed to or from him, that he was then considered by the whole Christian world as having no such exclusive authority.

The evidence, therefore, both affirmative and negative, furnished by these early fathers, rendering it almost positively certain that, before the Council of Nice, the Bishop of Rome was not referred to, by appeal or otherwise, as a judge or arbiter to settle the dispute about Arianism, it is necessary, in order to ascertain his true relation to that council, to know by whom it was convened, and under whose auspices its business was conducted. These same authors must also settle this question.

Eusebius says: “Resolved, therefore, to bring, as it were, a divine array against this enemy, he [Constantine] convoked a general council, and invited the speedy attendance of bishops from all quarters, in letters expressive of the honorable estimation in which he held them.” And he speaks of his summons as a “command” and an “imperial injunction.” (“Life of Constantine,” by Eusebius, bk. iii., ch. vi.)

Sozomen says that after the letter of the emperor, sent by Hosius to Alexander and Arius, had failed to restore harmony,” Constantine convened a synod at Nicaea, in Bithynia, and wrote to the most eminent men of the churches in every country, directing them to be there on an appointed day.” (Sozomen, bk. i., ch. xvii.) Socrates says, “When, therefore, the emperor beheld the Church agitated by both these causes, he convoked a general council, summoning all the bishops by letter to meet him at Nice, in Bithynia.” (Socrates, bk. i., ch. viii.) Theodoret, referring to the failure of Constantine to bring about a reconciliation, says, “He, therefore, proceeded to summon the celebrated Council of Nice; and commanded that the bishops, and those connected with them, should be mounted on the asses, mules, and horses belonging to the public, in order to repair thither.” (Theodoret, bk. i., ch. vii. See also Du Pin, vol. ii., pp. 12, 250.)

Now, with this evidence before us – and this is all we have from these early fathers, beginning with Eusebius, who personally knew all about it–are we not justified in saying that, when papal writers say, as Weninger does, that the Council of Nice was “convoked by Pope Silvester,” they state as a fact that which is not a fact–to speak in the mildest terms? The plain and well–established truth is that he had nothing more to do with it than the bishops of the other churches, and not so much as some of them–especially those to whom Alexander and Arius had addressed their letters. It was wholly

and entirely the work of Constantine, the emperor, who never even became a catechumen, by baptism, in the Church of Rome; whose only Christianity was Catholic, in the sense of universality, and not in the sectarian sense of Rome, and who had not yet become so unselfish as to overlook the worldly object he had in view when he employed the clergy to aid him in the administration of civil affairs; which was, to keep himself firmly seated upon the imperial throne. He was willing to unite the Church with the State; but no word ever escaped him, so far as his biographer has reported, signifying any other purpose than that of keeping the Church below and inferior to the State.

On one occasion, when addressing a company of bishops in the presence of Eusebius, he said to them, "You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained by God to overlook whatever is external to the Church;" ("Life of Constantine," by Eusebius, bk. iv., ch. xxiv.) whereby he intended to have it distinctly understood that he should permit no church organization with external powers, either of coercion or otherwise, to inter-meddle, directly or indirectly, with the affairs of the empire.

The assignment of a direct and immediate agency to the Bishop of Rome in convoking the Council of Nice being false, the other statements of Weninger might be held, inferentially, to be false also. "Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus," (False in one thing, false in everything) is an old and well–approved law maxim. But as it is a maxim which, though sometimes true, is said not to be of general application, and grave matters like those we are discussing should not be left to inference merely, his other statements should likewise be tested by the proofs.

He says, "The sovereign pontiff presided by his three legates, one of whom was Osius, Bishop of Cordova." This statement is more false than the one preceding it. Spenser says, in "The Faerie Queene,"

> "For he that once hath missed the right way,
> The further he doth go, the further he doth stray."

Continued in Chapter X. Part 2 The Council of Nice