Conversion of Constantine and its Implications

May 4, 2006

- Diocletian to Constantine
- Eusebius, and the triumphalist moment
- Councils, imperial intervention, consensus, and fragmentation

Diocletian to Constantine

- Diocletian, 284–305
  - At the end of a long period of Roman imperial crisis (economic, political, military)
  - Reforms of currency and taxation, military, provincial structures
  - Institutes a division of duties (beg. 286, a tetrarchy: Diocletian, Maximianus, Constantius (f. of Constantine), Galerius (possibly the instigator of the persecution))
  - Period of political contest and war
  - Constantine 306–337
    - Battle of Milvian Bridge (against supp. of Maxentius, 312, a vision: “in this sign conquer”, establishes control in Western empire
    - Period of persecution persists in East under Licinius (308–324)
    - Constantine establishes control over entire empire, 324
    - Imperial foundations and endowments: Constantinople (324), Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Golden Octagon (Antioch)
The tetrarchs, San Marco, Venice, 293–305

Eusebius, and the triumphalist moment

- Emperor is analogous to Christ:
  - Rules according to the divine pattern on which his eyes are fixed.
- Monarchy is best; democracy is anarchy
  - Hence there is one God, and not two, or three, or more... There is one Sovereign, and His Word and royal Law is one
- Imperial establishment of Christianity
  - "Peaceful" desecration of temples, and appropriation of gold and silver—No soldiers, just some friends!
  - Prohibition of sacrifice
  - Note that Roman legal codes do not reflect anything like this until the end of the fourth century!
- Philosophical footnote to EMC's lecture: Christ as Word (logos), necessary intermediary, pervades all being.
  - Uses philosophical vocabulary for Christian ideas, but understands those ideas philosophically.

Constantinople
Councils, imperial intervention, consensus, and fragmentation

- Council of Nicea (325), called by Constantine to resolve a crisis sparked by Arius (NOT: to banish the feminine divine)
- “Arian Controversy” dominated Christian controversies throughout the 4th C.
- Council of Constantinople I (381), called by Theodosius I; followed by emperor-sanctioned active expulsion from churches of non-orthodox bishops
- Same emperor, Theodosius I, formally forbade pagan worship in the temples (391)
- Lim: Controversies hardened mutually exclusive orthodoxies
- Theological controversies in the streets: 5th century (can already be noted in 4th)
  - Monks as vandals of pagan, heretical, or Jewish property
  - Bishops and others deploy followers in the streets
  - Egs: destruction of synagogue and Valentinian shrine, ca 383; Hypatia stoned 415; Bar Sauma's rampages in Palestine

Final thoughts

Goal of councils and imperial fiat is unity and consensus (see Lim). Yet the work of the fourth and fifth centuries generated the major divisions within Christianity before the reformation

- Roman Catholic
- Orthodox (hard division is later, 11th C)
- Monophysite
- Nestorian