

The Third Angel's Message. The Making of the Beast.

THE death of Maxentius and the conquest of Rome by Constantine, secured to Constantine one stroke, the whole of the Western empire of Rome. As before related, it occurred Oct. 8, A.D. 312.

In the month of March, A.D. 313, Constantine and Licinius met at Milan, and formed an alliance, and jointly issued an edict, granting "to the Christians, and to all, the free choice to follow that mode of worship which they may wish: "decreeing" that no freedom at all shall be refused to Christians to follow or to keep their observances or worship, but that to each one power be granted to devote his mind to that worship which he may think adapted to himself." This freedom was "absolutely granted to them." The privilege was "also granted to others to pursue that worship and religion they wish, . . . that each may have the privilege to select and to worship whatsoever divinity he pleases."

Plainly, with reference to the separation of religion and the state, this edict put the Roman empire exactly in the attitude in which the United States government stood at its organization and under its Constitution.

But, as we have seen, the rulers of the apostate church were anxious "to assert the government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves;" and there was another portion of this edict upon which they seized and which they made to work to their advantage, in securing a union of the church with the state, by which they could indeed assert the imperial government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves. That other portion of the edict commanded that all the property of the Christians which had been destroyed, or confiscated, in the late persecution, should be restored "to the Christians." And it was definitely stated in the edict that this contemplated "the right of the *whole body* of Christians," and commanded that this property should "without any hesitancy," "be restored to *these same* Christians; that is, *to their body*, and to *each conventicle* respectively."

Now no sooner were the claims presented, and restitution begun, according to the edict, than the Catholic Church raised the issue that only those in communion with her were Christians: and so insisted that only these were entitled to the restored property. She thus forced a governmental interpretation of the term "Christians," and a governmental decision as to who could properly bear the title of "Christians." And, since that church had given to Constantine her active support, in his campaign against Maxentius, which brought to him the whole power of the Western empire, this issue which she raised, was pressed with this added force of *the political favor* which she had rendered to him, and for which she demanded a corresponding return.

Accordingly, upon the first appeal, Constantine issued an edict to the proconsul in the province from which the appeal came, in which he said: "It is our will that when thou shalt receive this epistle, if any of those things belonging to the *Catholic Church* of the Christians in the several cities of other places, are now possessed either by the

decurions or any others, these thou shalt cause immediately to be restored to their churches; since we have *previously determined* that whatsoever *these same churches* before possessed, shall be restored to their right." This was not true in fact; it was not "the Catholic Church of the Christians," but "the Christians," "the whole body of Christians," to whom it was "previously determined" that the property should be restored. Yet this interpretation being that of the supreme imperial power, was final as to what was implied in this edict. And this *interpretation* was in effect a decision that those of the Catholic Church were the only Christians, and made the edict of Milan, from the beginning, bear that meaning.

It having now been decided that only those of the *Catholic Church* were Christians, the issue was next raised as to what was in truth the Catholic Church. A division of the church in Africa, that was not just then in communion with the bishop of Rome, claimed, equally with the communion of Rome, to be the Catholic Church. This also called for a decision on the part of the emperor.

Accordingly, still in the same month of the issue of the original edict of Milan,—March, A.D. 313,—Constantine addressed an edict to the proconsul of the province in which the question was raised, in which he specified that to be "the Catholic Church, *over which Cæcilianus presides.*" Cæcilianus was the principal bishop in that province over that portion of the church which was in communion with the bishop of Rome. This was, therefore, in effect, with the decisions already made, to settle it that only those of the Catholic Church were Christians, and only those who were in communion with the bishop of Rome were the Catholic Church. The effect of this was, of course, to make the Church of Rome the standard in the new imperial religion.

However, the opposite party was not satisfied with this decision, but sent a petition to the emperor, requesting that he refer the matter to the bishops of Gaul for a decision. Constantine accepted their petition, and responded, so far as to refer it to a council of bishops. But, instead of having the council composed of the bishops of Gaul, he had it composed of the *bishop of Rome* and eighteen others, of Italy, before whom the contending parties were required to appear *in Rome* for the hearing.

The bishop of Rome here concerned and definitely named in the edict, was "Miltiades;" the same as "Melchiades" who was the very bishop who had invited Constantine to come from Gaul to the rescue of oppressed Israel under the Pharaoh, Maxentius; and who thus early began to reap in imperial and joint authority, the fruit of that episcopal-political endeavor. And, thus, one of the very first steps in that union of church and state, was that "the bishop of Rome sits, *by the imperial authority*, at the head of a synod of Italian bishops, to judge the disputes of the African Donatists."—*Milman*. The council met Oct. 2, A.D. 313.

Of course, the council decided in favor of the Church of Rome. The defeated party appealed again to the emperor, asking for a larger council to consider the matters involved. Again their appeal was heard, and a council composed of "many bishops" was appointed and held at Arles, in Gaul, August, A.D. 314. This council confirmed the decision of the previous council, in favor of the Church of Rome as the Catholic Church.

The defeated party again appealed—this time for a decision from the emperor himself. Constantine held a consistory, listened to their plea, and, in harmony with the councils already held, pronounced in favor of the Church of Rome as the Catholic Church.

The course of the positive growth, in favor and distinction, of the Catholic Church, throughout this whole procedure, is distinctly and most suggestively marked in the expressions *used* by the emperor in the successive documents which he issued in connection with the question.

As we have seen, in the edict of Milan, March, A.D. 313, "the whole body of Christians" were included, without any distinctions or any suggestion as to any distinction.

But, when the issue was raised that only those of the Catholic Church were Christians, the next edict ran, in *the same month*: "The *Catholic Church* of the Christians."

Next, in his epistle summoning the first council, in the autumn of A. D. 313, he calls it "*the holy Catholic Church*."

Next, in the summer of A. D. 314, in his epistle summoning the second council, he referred to the doctrine of the Catholic Church as embodying "our *most holy religion*."

Then, at last, when the controversy had run its course of appeal to where it came to him in person, and he had rendered the final decision, a document, issued A.D. 316, granted money, and announced the imperial favor, to the "ministers of the *legitimate* and most holy Catholic religion."

This final document also gave to Cæcilianus and to the party who, with him, were in communion with the bishop of Rome, authority to call upon *the imperial officers* of the province, to *enforce conformity* upon those who "wished to divert the people from the most holy Catholic Church by a certain pernicious adulteration;" and commanded him: "If thou seest any of these men persevering in this madness, thou shalt without any hesitancy proceed to the aforesaid judges, and report it to them, that they may animadvert upon them, as I have commanded them when present."

Thus was formed the union of the church and state, out of which came the Beast, and all that the papacy has ever been, or ever can be. And it all grew out of the interpretation of a governmental document that was perfectly just and innocent in itself.

Next week we shall set down here events *in the likeness of this* which have already appeared in the United States, and which go that far to show here the making of the Image of the Beast.

A. T. Jones.

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