

Milan Edict

August 31, 2013

In our days when liberalism taking over the Society of St Pius X looks like merely the last in a long line of defeats of the Catholic Church, it is difficult to imagine that there was once a time when the Church scored one victory after another. Nevertheless this year we celebrate the 1700th anniversary of one of those victories, the Edict of Milan, dating from 313 AD.

The Roman Emperor Constantine, known as “Constantine the Great,” was born in 272 and he was baptised Christian only shortly before his death in 337, but he had been seriously sympathetic to Christianity for many years beforehand. When in 312 he marched on Rome to fight his rival, Emperor Maxentius, Our Lord promised him victory if he would put on his battle standards the “labarum,” the X with a P imposed on it, the first two Greek letters of the word Christ. Constantine did what Our Lord said, and defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge. Once in firm control of Rome, Constantine issued the following year the Edict of Milan.

In the course of the previous 250 years, worshippers of Christ had suffered ten bloody persecutions under the Roman Emperors, from Nero (37–68) to Diocletian (243–316). Christians had refused the pagan State religion, so the State had banned Christianity. What the Edict of Milan did was to make Christianity for the first time legal alongside other religions allowed in the Empire. It was the decisive step in the conversion of Rome to Christianity. In 325 Constantine endorsed the orthodoxy of the dogmatic Council of Nicaea. In 380 the Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of Rome, and in 392 Theodosius forbade pagan worship.

Thus Constantine began that union of (Catholic) Church and State which was the foundation of Christendom, better known

today as "Western civilisation." Whatever may have been down the ages the abuse of that union in practice, it is in principle immensely fruitful for the salvation of souls. One need only think of how any township even today will profit from a sane priest and a sane policeman complementing one another. For 1600 years the Catholic Church held to that principle of the union of Church and State, whereas for the last 200 years Revolutionary liberalism has constantly sought to undermine it. Only with Vatican II did the Church at last give way and repudiate the doctrine of the Catholic State by its teaching on religious liberty in *Dignitatis Humanae*. A ringleader of the neo-modernists at the Council, Fr Yves Congar rejoiced that the Council had put an end to the "Constantinian Church."

Now it is true that the churchmen being linked to the worldly authorities will bring temptations of worldliness with it, but any State is bound to enforce laws that correspond to some religious or anti-religious view of God and man. To see how difficult it is to lead a Catholic life when that view of the State accords with the anti-religion of secular humanism, just look around you. It was the all-surrounding pressure of modern irreligious States upon the bishops of Vatican II that made them want to change the Catholic Church to fit the modern world. The same pressure is now making the leadership of the Society of St Pius X go the way of the Revolution.

Constantine on the contrary must down the ages have contributed to the salvation of millions of souls, an achievement for which he is surely in Heaven. Emperor Constantine, pray for us.

Kyrie eleison.