The Impact of Constantine's Conversion on Religious and Secular History

By

Iheanacho Mendel Alala, PhD
Department of Religious Studies
Clifford University, Owerrinta, Abia State.
achoimalala@gmail.com, alalai@cliffordduni.edu.ng

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Divinepower Chidiebere Justice
Department of Religious Studies
Clifford University, Owerrinta, Abia State.

Abstract

The thrust of this paper is on the impact of the conversion of Constantine on religious and secular history in the Roman empire. The paper reviewed the history of the life of Constantine the Great, a monumental and epoch-making emperor of the Roman Empire in the third century, analyzing how his conversion affected the relationship between the church and the state. The paper utilized historical-analytical method and this was as a result of the relevance of the method to the study and its nature as a historical study. The work is significant in the field of Church history and is also significant historically because it detailed the conversion of Constantine the Great as a record setting event in history. The study indicates that the impacts of the conversion of Constantine the Great includes the involvement of the church in the politics of the state and the church's gradual rise to power in the form of the Papacy. The study concludes that the church has affected the policies of the state as a result of its union with it. The study recommends that the union of church and state should not eclipse the distinctive nature and growth of the church and should try to preserve its uniqueness whether it deems it fit to be united with the state or not.

Keywords: Constantine, Conversion, Religion, Secular History and Roman Empire

Introduction

The Roman Empire at the time of Emperor Constantine underwent serious revolution that changed the pattern of occurrences and impacted the course of world history over the centuries. Prior to the reign of Emperor Constantine however, the Roman Empire was dominated by pagans and the practice of paganism. The prevalence of paganism was such as lent credence to the persecution of Christians, labeling such an act as lawful. According to Bomgardner (2000) Christians suffered from sporadic and localized persecutions over a period of two and a half centuries. The refusal of Christians to participate in the imperial cult was considered an act of treason punishable by execution. The most widespread official persecution was carried out by Diocletian which began in A. D. 303. During the Great Persecution, the emperor ordered the complete demolition of Christian buildings and the homes of Christians burnt and their sacred books collected and destroyed. Christians were arrested, tortured, mutilated, burnt, starved, and condemned to gladiatorial contests to the amusement of the spectators. Wylen (1995) states that the first recorded official persecution of Christians on behalf of the Roman Empire occurred in AD 64, when Emperor Nero attempted to blame Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. The main reason behind this persecution meted out on Christians was that the Romans were predominantly polytheistic pagans. The Romans thought of themselves as highly religious, and attributed their success as a world power to their collective piety (*pietas*) in maintaining good relations with the gods. Their polytheistic religion is known for having honored many deities. This practice was in stark contrast to the monotheistic idiosyncrasies of Judaism and Christianity (Baaren, 2023).

This trend of persecution against Christians was however, reversed following the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine under vague circumstances. The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine the great was spurred by a vision as accounted variously by ancient historians–Eusebius and Lactantius–occurring around the period preceding the battle of the Milvian bridge on the 28th of October, A.D. 312. It was the major turning point in the global acceptance of Christianity, which was after the imperial decree made by Galerius the senior emperor of the Roman Tetrarchy in the west (Henry, 1963). Events following after that date have concurrently been in favour of the expansion of the Christianity. Most notable is

the effect that the momentous conversion of Constantine had on the relationship that existed between the church and the state. Moreover, although in previous times the Christian church had a strong wave of apathy and hate radiating towards it from the church, especially in its designation by the Roman Emperor Nero as *'religio illicita'* , it was placed on an equal footing with other religious confessions that were already accorded the status of '*religio licita*' by the Emperor Constantine (Ramelli, 2013).This elevation in status granted to the Christian religion is however, not comparable to the later elevation of Christianity to the level of sole state religion accorded to it by subsequent Roman Emperors like the last of the emperors who supervened over the entire Roman empire; Theodosius 1 who prohibited the observance of public pagan rituals and promulgated the 'Theodosian decrees'; a body of laws aimed at extirpating paganism from his domain (McIntosh, 2022).

Constantine's vision and Goal

We shall now discuss the Vision and goal of Constantine. This is perhaps the most pivotal moment in the course of events that precipitated the rise of Christianity from its intolerable status to one of high deference and adherence in the Roman empire and as a byproduct, the change in the relationship between the Church and the state; of course, one of the most fundamental after-effects of Constantine the Great's conversion. In Eusebius' narrative, which he claims was obtained directly from Constantine the Great on an oath of its veracity (Eusebius, 1999), the vision occurred early one bright afternoon, seventeen centuries ago, while Constantine gazed at the sun. According to his self-appointed biographer, Eusebius, who claimed to have heard the story from Constantine himself, the emperor was on a campaign when he saw a shining cross of light over the sun with the attached text, 'By this conquer', expressed in the Greek words "*τούτω νικα*" (Nicholson, 2000). The startled ruler slept on the matter, and Christ appeared to him in a dream, instructing him to make a copy of the holy sign, which would protect him against his enemies. He did as he was told, took Christian clerics as his advisers, and soon set off for Italy to fight his rival, Maxentius (Flower, 2012). Eusebius concludes his narrative with a statement to the effect that the compliance of Constantine the Great with the instructions he obtained in the vision was very germane to his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (Eusebius, 1999).

Lactantius on his own part has a different account of the vision seen by Constantine the Great. According to Lactantius' pamphlet, "*De Mortibus Persecutorum*," is an important and valuable source for understanding the battle and Constantine's beliefs. This is because it is the earliest reference we have of Constantine acknowledging the Christian God. According to Lactantius, the night before the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he saw a divine vision instructing him to place a symbol of the Christian God on his soldiers' shields for protection. This dream was taken as a sign from God and Constantine acted on it, marking his soldiers' shields with the symbol of the Chi-Rho, which is a symbol of Christ. By doing this, Constantine showed his faith in the Christian God and his willingness to fight in His name. This event is considered to be a significant turning point in the history of Christianity and the Roman Empire. It is relevant at this point to state that the account of the vision of Constantine the Great shows remarkable disparities, with at least one common feature. This means that both share the same source of the vision shown to Constantine the Great; both claim that the God of the Christian faith revealed the vision to Constantine the Great. Additionally, both indicate that the vision was shown directly to Constantine the Great; no messenger was used as an intermediary in communicating the vision to him. Instead, he was shown the vision personally, perhaps as a gesture to clinch in his mind the ultimate relevance of the vision for his existence.

Constantine in Religious and Secular History

It has been shown from history how Constantine the Great was planted on the path to the adoption of Christianity both as a personal religion and a state religion. It is however pertinent for an inquirer to ask thus: who was Constantine the Great before his conversion to Christianity? Studies by various scholars have shown that Constantine's conversion was instrumental in the spread and legalization of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Doniger (2006) states that Constantine launched the era of the State church of the Roman empire. On this point, a lot of scholars unequivocally find consensus. They however do this with the side effect of almost obliterating the life history of this iconic man prior to October 28, A.D. 312. And the most possible reason for this elision could be that it has facts that run counter to the later history of his life and its Christian affiliations. Odahl (2001) states that, Constantine the Great was born on February 27, AD 272 in *Naissus* which is now known as Niš in present day Serbia. He was born in the Dardania

province of Moesia. His father, Flavius Constantius, was an Illyrian who was also born in the same region, then known as Dacia Ripensis. Flavius Constantius was a native of the province of Moesia. Additionally, his mother was Helena, one who is known to have been a woman of lowly estate and a Christian, hence the ascription of credit to his mother for his conversion by some students of history and other regular pundits.

Despite the notable Christian sentiments of his mother, it must also be pointed out that Constantine the Great was born into a Patriarchal society which preached the overall eminence of the man in the home and the total and worship-like subservience which the females were expected to complement this with (Megan, 2019). As a result, the religious sentiments of Constantine the Great's mother were inconsequential in the home comparative to that of the father who was a declared pagan. Hence, it seems safe to infer that Constantine the Great subscribed early in life to a system of pagan worship by default. Hence, it stands clear to see that Constantine the Great – the highest proponent for the Christian religion's legalization, the great advocate for the abandonment of paganism in favour of adopting Christianity, the chief element in the religious activities of the latter half of the 4th century A.D – was not a Christian by birth.

Before his conversion, he worshipped family gods, these are gods worshipped in the army (being an army officer), and the gods of the empire. One could say that Constantine the Great, being a native of North Balkan descent subscribed automatically to the worship system prevalent in his region which constituted veneration of Thracian rider gods, depicted as divine beings astride horses. This is a significant reference to family religion here. In the same vein, it could also be that Constantine the Great was also an observer of emperor veneration – the worship of all Roman emperors, both past and present – at that time due to his Roman origin which was a system of worship that enjoyed compulsory nation-wide observance and was one of the grounds for the persecution of Christians by the great imperial persecutors of Christianity (Butler, 2016). This means that Constantine did not start out his journey in life as a Christian, but instead became Christian due to a shift in loyalties from paganism to Christianity.

Constantine's Conversion

Constantine the Great was a pagan who eventually converted to the Christian religion, thus becoming the first Christian Roman emperor (Jonathan, 2017). One could say that his conversion was beneficial in the sense that it made Christianity to be accepted as a religion in Roman Empire. However, according to Jonathan (2017), some modern scholars debate his beliefs and are even in doubt as to the strength of his comprehension of Christianity. In fact, not only his level of understanding of the "mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3: 16) expressed in Christianity is on trial among modern day Christian scholars, but also his motive for being converted from paganism to Christianity. This is why the question of why Constantine's conversion to Christianity remains controversial among scholars of church history in particular and others in general. To better understand the rationale behind his decision, historians have examined the demographics of the Roman Empire during the period around 300 CE. Christianity had been growing steadily since the 1st century CE, and by 300 CE, it is estimated that out of a total population of 60 million, around 3 million were Christians. In contrast, Jews still numbered about 11 million. There are several reasons given by many scholars on why Constantine was converted to Christianity. Some argue that he was a shrewd politician who saw the writing on the wall. At the time, Christianity was gaining popularity and influence, and many Romans were becoming disillusioned with the traditional pagan religions. By embracing Christianity, Constantine could win the support of the growing Christian population and weaken the power of the old pagan elites. Others, however, suggest that Constantine's conversion was genuine and personal. Some historians point to his reported vision of a cross in the sky before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, which he interpreted as a sign from God. This experience may have convinced Constantine to convert to Christianity and adopt it as the official religion of the Roman Empire. However, regardless of the true motivation behind Constantine's conversion, it is clear that his decision had a profound impact on the course of world history. Christianity became the dominant religion of Europe and played a key role in shaping Western civilization.

Hence for some, Constantine the Great's conversion was a matter of political expediency, an issue of applying shrewd political insights, envisioning the change in the trends of religious adherence in his empire and an action which was apt and

concurrent with the results of his evaluation, whereas for others, his conversion was not a matter of mere politic or an avenue for the manipulation of the forces in operation within his empire to his favor; instead he was genuinely awed by the portent which was revealed to him in the heavens and was consequently converted. According to Denova (2021), during the reign of Emperor Aurelian (r. 270-275 CE), he promoted the cult of Sol Invictus as his family's cult. This cult represented the concepts of Jupiter, Apollo, and Helios and was merged with another popular military cult, that of Mithras. At the same time, Aurelian reorganized the imperial finances and regulated imports and the price of food throughout the provinces. His ideals were summarized as "one god, one empire". Both Constantius and his son Constantine were members of the cult of Sol Invictus. This corroborates what has already been established about Constantine the Great's prior pagan loyalties before his conversion to Christianity. Furthermore, Denova (2021) stated a number of issues which she adjudged pivotal in the arguments of skeptics to the originality of Constantine the Great's conversion. The items she enumerated include the following:

1. The Edict of Milan legalized Christians but left all the native cults in place.
2. The Arch of Constantine (erected in 315 CE near the **Colosseum)** lacks Christian symbols and contains sculptures of offerings to Apollo, Diana, and Hercules.
3. Constantine issued coins with himself in the figure of Sol Invictus and Helios.
4. Constantine was not baptized as a Christian until he was on his deathbed.

These arguments, plausible as they appear do not represent a general sentiment that operates in the minds of all individuals. Rather, another class of modern-day scholars has tried to explain all these possible points which scholars in medieval period regarded as insincerity of Constantine the Great's conversion. On the issue of the Arch of Constantine, study has shown that the Arch of Constantine, a triumphal arch in Rome, was constructed in 315 CE to commemorate Constantine's victory over Maxentius. There is a debate among scholars about whether the arch was built using elements from older arches dedicated to Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius to explain the incorporation of these symbols. It remains unclear how many Christians were present in the Senate at that time, but the Senate was historically a conservative institution. That is to say the arch may not necessarily have been erected with any religious sentiments embodied in it.

On the issue of his deathbed baptism, it has been explained that during his reign, civil wars were rampant, and it is believed that he knew that as emperor, he would have to engage in bloodshed. This made him quite typical of the period. In fact, he even executed one of his wives and their son, possibly due to rumors of sexual immorality. Given this context, it made perfect sense for him to wait until the very end to have his sins forgiven. Despite delaying his baptism, Constantine was openly expressive about his Christian convictions in his speeches and letters throughout his rule. One such letters is recorded in the account of Constantine the Great's written by the great church historian Eusebius. It reads thus:

> This God I invoke with bended knees, and recoil with horror from the blood of sacrifices, from their foul and detestable odors, and from every earth-born magic fire: for the profane and impious superstitions which are defiled by these rites have cast down and consigned to perdition many, nay, whole nations of the Gentile world (Eusebius, 1999).

It is obvious from the brief statement described above that Constantine may have been unequivocal and extremely proud of his identity as a Christian. At the same time, the researcher argues that he was a convert of convenience, and used his conversion experience as a process which enabled him to make the best use of his new empire. This is why the motives behind Constantine the Great's conversion have been questioned by the world of scholars. People have varying opinions as to whether he was a genuine convert to Christianity or he never really changed but used the conversion as a strategy for his main end; the preservation of the empire's unity and structure as well as his own position on the throne as the emperor of Rome. Perhaps a brief look at his leadership in the years succeeding the battle of the Milvian Bridge provides an insight.

Understandably, one could commence the analysis of the work done by Constantine from the famous Edict of Milan passed in A.D 313. Frend (1965) states, that, the Edict of Milan is "the February 313 AD agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire." He further states that the Milan decrees were enforced when the Western Roman Emperor Constantine the Great and the emperor Licinius who controlled the Eastern sphere (comprised chiefly of the

Balkans) met at Mediolanum (contemporary Milan) to discuss the change of policies towards Christianity. This act of instituting toleration for the Christian religion already had at least a precedent in the Edict of Galerius while he ruled as emperor. Galerius had ordered the toleration of the Christians and their religions in the event of their persistence in the practice of their religion on the 30th of April A.D 311 (Stevenson, 1965). However, the Edict of Milan was not in itself a declarative statement placing Christianity in a position of ultimate predominance over pagan religious traditions. Instead, like the order of Galerius in A. D 311, it merely provided for toleration in the event of persistence by Christians to remain true to their religion. Another issue that is obvious through an examination of the Edict is that there is no unfavorable statement made in relation to the pagan traditions. Whereas Christianity rose from a status of total rejection to mere toleration, paganism which had been the object of imperial practice for long ages remained an official religion with equal rights as Christianity did.

Constantine went on to delegate his representative to preside over the meeting on his behalf. His own appearance at the meeting is described simply by Carroll (1987) as being resplendent in purple and gold, and including a ceremonial entrance at the opening of the Council. In the end, the result of the meeting was not so much the consensus of the house as it was the opinion of the emperor Constantine. In essence, the impact of Constantine the Great's presence as the first Christian emperor in the Christian world is profound and reasonable and rich in history to the extent that, he pave the way for the interference of the state in church matters in the future, as well as a reciprocal interference of the church in the matters of the state, leading to the unification of the Church and State. However, the book "Life of Constantine (Vita Constantini)" written by Eusebius a renowned church historian of the Medieval era and published by the Clarendon Press has the most relevance to the subject addressed in this study, particularly in its second (2nd) chapter because of the biographic information it provides about the Emperor Constantine and most importantly because it was written by an eyewitness close associate of Constantine's.

The influence of Constantine on Church Councils

Already, a brief statement has been made on the nature of Constantine the Great's first interference in the matters of the church, specifically in the issues revolving

around the convocation of the Council of Nicaea, and the role he played in setting a precedent for mutual interloping in functions among the two entities (Church and State). More light will be thrown on the information which has been revealed in the preceding chapter and other events which have similarities to it.

The Council of Nicaea:

From the inception of his reign as the emperor of the western Roman empire, Constantine the Great had not hesitated to show his fealty for Christianity, and one way in which he displayed that fealty was in his attempt to put a stop to the Arian controversy of the 4th century which threatened to destroy the structural cohesion of the church in that era. Carroll (1987) posits that the chief reason for the convocation of the Council of Nicaea was to resolve disagreements brought about by the Arian controversy in the Greek-speaking east. A disagreement arose within the Church of Alexandria regarding the nature of Jesus and his relationship with the Father. The argument was centered on whether the Son had been "begotten" by the Father from his own essence, and therefore had no beginning, or whether he had been created out of nothing, and therefore had a beginning. On the side of the first argument were Alexander of Alexandria and Athanasius while Arius, from whom the controversy was named, favoured the second argument. According to Ware (1991) most bishops felt the teachings of Arius were heretical and therefore dangerous and unwholesome for the salvation of souls. As has already been detailed in the preceding chapter, Constantine the Great stepped in at the height of this controversy, first seeking to draw the opposing sides in the conflict into a buffer zone of compromise. However, his inability to do this led him to move to the next available option; he took matters into his hands, calling together 1800 clergy from across the length and breadth of the empire and convening the council of Nicaea in A.D 325.

Before then however, according to Hanson (1988) a council opposing Arianism met in Antioch a few months before the Council of Nicaea in 325. The attendees were primarily sympathetic to Alexander. Also, Constantine the Great had his representative Ossius present at the gathering, thereby giving the meeting his authorization. It may be interesting to note that ecclesiastical meetings of such nature were not allowed to proceed without the authorization of the emperor. Hanson (1988) says the following to that effect:

> Even Damasus [a later bishop of Rome] would have admitted that he could not call a general council on his own authority. Everybody recognized the right of an Emperor to call a council, or even to veto or quash its being called.

This is perhaps a strong indicator of the relationship that had blossomed between the church and state. Another interesting fact about this ecclesiastical convocation is that Constantine the Great who was its convener had no tangible knowledge of the import of the gathering. McGiffert (1954) states that "Constantine himself of course neither knew nor cared anything about the matter in dispute." Instead, for Pavao (2014) "the Council of Nicea was first and foremost an attempt by the Roman emperor Constantine the Great to keep his empire from splitting." Hence, according to Ayres (2004), "Constantine's attitude reflects deeply embedded Roman attitudes about the social function of religion." The council had a number of results which are monumental in the reckoning of Christian history. Arianism was denounced as heretical, its supporters, the Eusebians' leader, Eusebius was excommunicated a few months preceding the Nicaean council at the anti-Arian council convoked at Antioch, supposedly at the prompting of Constantine the Great, showing the extent of his influence on the proceeding of events at the council (Ayres, 2004). Doctrinal changes were also brought into effect and those changes shaped the trend of Christianity in the years that have followed up till date.

One significant doctrinal change at the Nicaean council was the introduction of the term "Homoousios" which means of the same essence in a bid to describe the relationship that exists between the Father and Son in the Trinity. During the Nicene Council, the term "Homoousios", meaning "same substance," was highly debated. Many delegates had doubts about using this term since it was only previously used by Sabellians and was not part of the standard Christian language of the time. Additionally, the Bible does not mention God's substance (ousia), and the term was considered to be borrowed from pagan philosophy. Ulrich (1997) avers that Constantine dominated the proceedings of the Nicaean council because he was able to compel the adoption of the "Homoousios" clause as a doctrinal tenet of the Christian church across the empire. Constantine's power and authority over the Nicene Council is therefore made evident by his ability to impose the

word 'Homoousios' into the creed. In fact, it is believed that Constantine himself added the words 'Homoousios' and 'from the essence of the Father' to the creed, which highlights the extent of his influence over the council. According Hanson (1988), Constantine strongly advocated for the inclusion of these words. Many bishops, despite their reluctance, signed the creed due to the emperor's intimidating presence. Only two bishops refused to sign. It is thus credible to infer that Constantine the Great at the onset of his leadership over the empire was determined to assert his supremacy over all institutions operational within his empire, including religious institutions. This can be clearly seen in his act of gathering the religious leaders of Christianity within his empire for a decisive meeting as the Council of Nicaea, and as well can be seen in his imposition of the "Homoousios" clause on the council as a parameter for describing the relationship between the Father and the Son. This readiness to assert his imperial authority over the empire led subtly to the introduction of state interference in politics and much later as we shall see, spawned also the interference of the church in the politics of the state. Other doctrinal developments that were accomplished at the Nicaean council include among others the settling of the date for the celebration of the Pascha/Easter, the resolution of the Meletian schism, and the formation of 20 canons which together comprised the Nicene Creed.

The Church and Political Power

The study has considered in minute but clear detail how the emperor Constantine the Great began the process that saw the elevation of the papacy to temporal/secular power. The study has also examined how the church used a forged document to strengthen their quest for control of the politics of the empire. However, there is a need to find out how the church went about the assumption of political power and control over the empire. Bernhard (1992) states that in the past, the bishop of Rome held a lesser position. He however states that with the passage of time, the bishop expanded the authority of his role as the Vicar of Christ, which meant he was seen as the living embodiment of Christ's will. Previously, the Pope would serve secular rulers and their wishes, but he had now become crucial in crowning and legitimizing Catholic kings in Europe. It is thus obvious that the process ensuring the elevation of the Papal authority to precedence over even state rulers was not an abrupt one but took a long time in getting concluded. This also goes to show that the Pope's assumption of

supremacy in the politics of the Roman empire did not necessarily excuse the role of the Emperors in the administration of the state, instead they became known by the title "Holy Roman Emperor" – a reference to their respect and submission to papal control. As regards to the commencement and dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire and the adjunct title ascribed to its head, Sullivan et al (2023) agrees that in 800, Pope Leo III proclaimed Charlemagne the "emperor of the Romans," making him the first such leader. The Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in 1806 during the Napoleonic Wars by Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor.

Church Influence on Secular Politics

In the previous section, we have established that the papacy had a stage of gradual rise to power, marked by the papacy's assumption of the prerogative to name and crown the candidates for the thrones of kingdoms within the Holy Roman Empire. It may perhaps be a bit incredulous to accept the thesis thus presented above without reasonable substantiation. What follows in this section will therefore be a presentation of a few corroboratory incidents showing the reality of the Papacy's interference in the politics of the Medieval Roman Empire. A quite striking instance of the Pope's assertion of supremacy over the Roman emperors is perhaps the Investiture Controversy. The Investiture Controversy is a tousle that raged between the Pope of the Catholic church [Pope Gregory VII] and the German king [Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV] which led up to the epic event labeled by Historians as the event of The Road to Canossa or The Humiliation of Canossa (Sohns, 2005).

The Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor had been in a dispute over the precedence of ecclesiastical or secular power since the Gregorian Reforms spread in the 11th century. In 1073, when Gregory VII was acclaimed Pope by the people of Rome and attempted to enact reforms to the investiture process through his *Dictatus papae* decree, he faced resistance from Henry IV. The king insisted on reserving the right of previous emperors to "invest" bishops, abbots and other clergymen, despite the papal decree. After suppressing the Saxon Rebellion in the Battle of Langensalza in June 1075, King Henry's conflict with Pope Gregory VII became increasingly severe. In September of that year, the King appointed a new Bishop of Milan which angered the Pope who demanded obedience. Shortly thereafter, Pope Gregory was attacked and imprisoned by a mob while leading the 1075

Christmas celebrations. However, the next day, his supporters stormed the prison and brought him back to the church where he resumed his Mass. On 24 January 1076, King Henry gathered several German bishops in a synod at Worms where they renounced all commitments to the Pope. The King eventually demanded the Pope's abdication, citing the rules of papal election according to the In nomine Domini bull of 1059. Löffler (1910) concludes that this chain of incidents led finally to the excommunication of the emperor Henry IV by the pope Gregory VII. The events that followed the excommunication of the emperor Henry IV are of utmost significance to the discourse on the relationship between the church and state, especially as it relates to the papal authority of the church.

The Zenith of Church involvement in the State and Politics

The union between the church involvement and the state reached a breaking pont in its history, a point at which the papacy could wield its politico-ecclesiastical power no more, a point at which it could no longer boast of being able to bring down the pride of kings or stand over them as the vice regent of God on earth. All this was duly captured in the preceding chapter. However, it is a matter of fact that the power formerly wielded by the medieval papal authority is now in the process of being fully recouped and exercised again by the contemporary offspring of the Medieval Roman Catholic church. For Maxwell (1934) the Prophecy of Revelation 13 can be viewed as half fulfilled in the 'wounding' of the head of the sea beast. The other half of the prophecy which has to deal with the healing of the beast's wounded head is explained by him to be a four-phased process. The Papacy's rise to power was a process that was gradual, spanning as much as two (2) centuries and more and consisted of a series of events which showed the interplay of the church in political activities in decisive fashions. Furthermore, in corroboration of this fact, Kathie (2015), writing on the involvement of the Pope Francis in the diplomatic relations of the US and Cuba and global climate change proceedings stated that pundits argue against the Pope's involvement, terming it an encroachment on the responsibilities of the political arm of society. According to Kathie (2015), the popular refrain chorused by the people at that time was that the Pope stayed out of politics, a sign that he was actually getting involved in really serious ways. Thus, at the close of the age of the reformation and the start of the early modern era, the Pope had begun unequivocally to assert the authority it once asserted over the state, trying to make obtainable a firm unity between the church

and state, perhaps even an unbreakable one. Overall, the text provides a detailed account of the different periods in the history of the Papacy, highlighting the various challenges and victories that it experienced at different times.

The rise of church leadership to politics

As has been emphasized already in the preceding section, the Papacy had begun to regain the power which it lost in the episode of the 'deadly' wound inflicted on it. It has also been made clear that this re-accession to political power never came instantly, nor was it a spontaneously radical event, but was rather one of steady and gradual progression up till date, implying that the church has not in fact reached the crux of its power as it was wielded in the medieval times past. It has also been demonstrated in a clear albeit concise instance the way in which the Papacy had begun to re-assert its power, claiming that the state could not claim for itself an existence disparate from that of the church. Developments in the most recent of times point towards the rising eminence of the Papal instrument in the political arena.

In an interview conducted by Gabrielle (2022), a respondent called Timothy Brynes spoke on the extent of influence wielded by the Pope, stating that the Pope has a lot of power, considering the vast reach of his religious authority over more than a billion humans across the globe, and the presence of Catholics across 183 countries in the world. Timothy also pointed out that interestingly the Pope has a department of state, much like that which can be found in every other developed political nation-state, thus implying that the Pope is a diplomat, or at least has a diplomatic apparatus in operation under his command. In fact, to crown it all, Timothy points out that the Vatican is a country of its own. This means that it has a political entity with full sovereignty. All this leads to the question, if the Pope lost his power at the close of the medieval age, how did he regain it? The most plausible opinion in this regard is the incidence of the Lateran treaty. John et al (2010) state a fact that is corroborative to the idea stated above. They reveal that the Pope was granted full sovereignty over the Vatican, although the Papal states were lost. Yet, according to John et al (2010) that was not even an actual loss since compensation in money was paid for the lands lost. Looking back in retrospect to the medieval ages, one can easily see that the Pope's exercising of temporal power had not been replicated again, at least not as fully as it was established at the event

of the Lateran treaty. And ever since the event of the Lateran treaty's expedition, the Popes have ever retained sovereignty over the Vatican, while spreading their influence over the rest of the world.

Implications of the Church's Rise to Power in Contemporary Times

The impacts which the Catholic Church has exerted as a religious body on the direction of political policies in society have been regarded in a positive light by some scholars as beneficial to society. This conforms to the idea of Bosch (1999) which holds that the church is instrumental in effecting transformational change in society. Pillay (2017) tries to endorse this notion, drawing his motivation from the historical advancement of the church through the different epochs of world history and how the church has served the function of transformation and change to society, maintaining that this trend has persisted up till the present time. In the present dispensation, the church has been involved primarily in the activity of changing the world through its involvement in the societal vehicle of politics.

Glatz (2015) corroborates the notion expressed above as she points out that in 2015, Pope Francis declared that Catholics have a responsibility to engage in politics to improve the world. This statement and efforts from several quarters, Catholics and non-Catholics inclusive have been very impactful on the tide that politics has taken in contemporary. It is pertinent to the discussion to say that the church's rise to power in contemporary times has had serious effects and implications on the world. It should also be noted that there are mixed feelings among members of the public, scholars and non-scholars alike, on the ideal or expected implications the church's rise to political power and involvement should have on the world. Some individuals have the opinion that politics is germane to the church's survival as an entity because political involvement guarantees the application and use of the political freedom Citizens of various countries are accorded by their constitutions, while others who are of the conservative cadre of the Christian faith do not accept such lines of reasoning conforming to that stated above, claiming that as a group with a unique profile and a unique mission in the world, Christians are to abstain from whatever is affiliated with the world, including politics.

There is no doubt that Church leaders' involvement in public affairs can help Africa maintain its identity. They have cautioned that the government might take

away the freedom of worship granted by the state. However, the retention of the religious freedom of the Africans countries and the involvement of their leaders in politics had made waves in recent past. However, political scholars consider Christian Democratic parties as a means for the Catholic Church to drive policy changes (Van Kersbergen and Manow, 2009), although historically the relationship between the two has been uneasy (Kalyvas, 1996). Instances abound to this effect, pointing out how the Catholic Church has influenced vital policies of the government, which have serious affectations on citizens.

Tatarczyk (2018) opines that the church's ability to ensure the conformity of state policies to its doctrine is a sign of its power in politics. He proceeds to point out that there are five key areas of policy where the church has made remarkable strides in its quest to influence state policies. These areas of policy include abortion, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, capital punishment, same-sex marriage, religious education in schools, and divorce. Allen (2014) comments that the Catholic Church places a clear emphasis on the defense of human life, including opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell study. It also prioritizes the defense of the traditional family which is based on a lifelong union between a man and a woman. Therefore, the Church is against same-sex marriage. It is therefore obvious that the position of the church on these key socio-religious issues if proposed strongly will be germane to the formation of the policy of society on the same issues.

Conclusion

Drawing from this study, it can be concluded that the legacy of Constantine the Great transcends many religions in the world. The church actually has been amalgamated with the state and its politics since the days of the conversion of Constantine the Great and that this union between the church and the state has given rise in the creation and utilization of several chances for the church to be effectively given freedom of worship and also involve in peace-making activities of the nation. This union of the church with the state has a long history both in existence and its effectiveness. The paper further reveals that the impact of Constantine's conversion on the church and state is a true reflection and transformation of the status of Christianity from an illicit religion to a legitimate religion.

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