

That religion, politics, and civic affairs were nearly inextricable throughout Roman history is difficult to dispute. Constantine's rise to power over the first two decades of the fourth century CE and conversion to Christianity, however, began to problematize this coexistence. For some, the installation of a Christian emperor spelled hope and promise for the future of Christianity; for others, it brought either indifference or concern for the welfare of both the empire and the religion. In the meantime, Christianity itself lacked a unified doctrine: despite the fact that a consensus could be reached regarding some matters, this was largely a period of continued theological debate and upheaval, of the drawing of lines between proto-orthodox and proto-heterodox groups.

We have, then, on the one hand, strife and dissension within and between Christian communities, and on the other hand, a newly minted Christian emperor. In this paper, I examine the arenas and consequences of civic and religious discord in this period and seek to contribute to questions about political and theological conceptions of justice, abstract and practical. To what degree could the Christian faith, particularly with its emphasis on eradicating violence, influence or determine policy and political matters? What did it mean for Constantine to be a Christian emperor - was it one thing to be Christian, another to hold such a powerful position? Should this, or any, emperor have control over all facets of the empire, and thus also power over the church and ecclesiastical affairs?

These were precisely the questions with which Constantine would have had to come to terms throughout his reign. A consideration of his edicts, policies, and interventions indicates a consistent movement in the direction of an increasingly closely linked relationship between the emperor and the church. One might think of the Council of Nicea, held in 325CE, as an example to this effect. While it often fell to the emperor to regulate important disputes, what we have in this case is a council of bishops, convened and presided over by the emperor himself, with the explicit intention of resolving a matter of Christian doctrine. The *Appendices* to Optatus are similarly informative: here Constantine represents himself as having been placed on earth and given such stature so as to carry out God's work and will.

The apologist Lactantius would have been aware of the instances in which Constantine sought to take on the role of Christian judge, mediator, or spokesman. But unlike many of his contemporaries, most notably Eusebius of Caesarea, Lactantius took issue with this convergence of empire and religion. In the last portion of my paper, I argue that *De ira Dei*, written in 316CE, can be read as an attempt to exhort Constantine to withdraw from ecclesiastical matters. Lactantius devotes space to a consideration of the proper place and actions of the law, of a judge, and of God (17-18). Part of his argument is that Constantine ought to look to the Christian God as a model of power, and by implication, that it is correct to react with just anger against an offender. At the same time, Lactantius suggests that Constantine ought to leave to God what is God's, and concern himself only with the business and battles of empire. Although Lactantius' voice was not that which prevailed in antiquity, the debate in which he attempted to intervene was as significant in the early fourth century as it is today.