Central to the 'Byzantine idea' is the concept of Constantinople as New Rome. The name implied first equality with Rome as the seat of ecumenical authority in Church and State. Then, when Old Rome and the West had passed under the rule of heretics and barbarians, the title of New Rome carried with it the aura of religious orthodoxy and the claim to be the sole legitimate heir to the ancient Empire. After Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, these notions were transferred to Moscow 'the Third Rome', and they may well be thought to have influenced not only the Tsars of All the Russias, but, after their own fashion, also the rulers of the USSR. From the beginning, the existence of Constantinople implied a programme, which may fittingly be called 'Byzantinism'.

On 3 November, 324, as the outward and visible sign of the establishment of his new order in Society, Constantine the Great refounded the ancient city of Byzantium and named it after himself. The city served as the Emperor's chief residence. What is more, it was intended from the beginning to be the second capital of the Empire. Since the mid-third century, the Emperors had tended to live elsewhere than in Rome which they seldom even visited. Because of its remoteness from the frontiers, the old capital was no longer a suitable centre from which to conduct what had become the most pressing business of government, the defence of the Empire. Diocletian had resided at Nicomedia, and earlier Emperors at Antioch and other cities of the East. The change of residence represents a shift of preponderance in the Empire away from the West and towards the East, which was more populous, wealthy, and civilized. Constantine's choice of Byzantium, which he claimed to have derived from divine inspiration, has been much praised. Byzantium was founded in the seventh century B.C. as a colony of Megara. Together with its twin foundation Chalcedon, it controlled the passage of the Bosphorus and so made possible the extension of Greek commerce and civilization into the Black Sea region. Byzantium later played a key-role in each of the great crises of ancient Greek history, the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, and the expansion of Macedonian power. For the needs of the later Roman Empire, Constantinople could hardly have been better suited. The city was strategically close to both the Eastern and the Danubian borders and also, as the next thousand years were to demonstrate, could be made impregnable. It commanded the Black Sea and the Aegean and possessed magnificent harbours. Finally, it united in a grand symbolism the continents of Europe and Asia.

Socrates the church historian states that Constantine made his city 'equal to imperial Rome' and gave it by law the title of Second or New Rome. In fact, 1. Historia Ecclesiastica, i.16.1.
this fifth century writer attributes to Constantine himself what was only brought about as the result of a fairly long process of development. However, that development was begun by Constantine, who does seem to have intended his city to be a sort of second Rome. A Bishop of Byzantium is styled Bishop of New Rome in a document of 324.\(^2\) Constantine even bestowed on his new foundation the hallowed epithet 'Eternal'.\(^3\) Successive Emperors gave Constantinople a form of government and certain privileges which no other city possessed and which were modelled on those of Rome. The earliest steps in this development are obscure. It is known that Constantine initiated at Constantinople a free distribution of corn such as had been made for hundreds of years at Rome.\(^4\) The same Emperor gave the title of 'Senate' to the town council of his city. At this stage, however, Constantinople was governed by a Proconsul, nor did the city yet boast the traditional Roman magistrates.\(^5\) In constitutional law, Constantinople was still no more than Nicomedia or Trier, an imperial residence. But the city on the Bosphorus was destined to enjoy an essentially different position. Those others, despite their importance as seats of government, could never match the numinous prestige of Rome, The City, which even though abandoned by her sovereign, was still the peerless head of the Empire to which she gave her name. It was, however, just that unique exaltation that Constantinople was to share.

The foundation was decided upon after Constantine's defeat of Licinius in 324. That event left the victor sole master of the Empire, and Constantine, whose troops had fought under the Christian standard of the labarum, interpreted it as Christ's seal of approval upon his reign. As after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, some signal mark of gratitude was called for to the Emperor's divine Protector. It seems that Constantinople was intended from the first to be a Christian city. Eusebius claims that pagan worship was never offered there.\(^6\) Constantine undertook to provide his city with a crown of splendid churches.

For Constantinople was to be not only a second imperial Rome, but also a second Christian Rome. At Rome, Constantine had honoured Christ by building the basilica of the Holy Saviour at the Lateran, and had honoured the Apostles Peter and Paul with basilicas at their traditional places of burial on the Vatican and the Ostian Way. At Constantinople, he built the church of the Holy Wisdom in the centre of the city, and also the church of the Holy Apostles near the city wall. (It has often been pointed out that even the situations of the churches at Constantinople are meant to recall those of their counterparts at Rome.) Constantine was buried by his son in a mausoleum adjacent to the church of the Apostles. In it were twelve cenotaphs and in the midst the tomb of the Emperor

---

who was called the ‘Peer of the Apostles’.⁷

Constantius II was Emperor in the East from 337 and the only Augustus from 353 until his death in 361. He continued his father’s policy with regard to Constantinople. In fact, it was during his reign that the city received the largest extension of its privileges and made the greatest steps towards parity with Rome. Constantius created a true Senate at Constantinople, assigning to it all those of senatorial rank who lived in the Eastern parts of the Empire. The new body was made the equal in law of the Roman Senate, and its members possessed the enviable privileges of Roman Senators. The Senate of Constantinople never acquired in fact the same prestige as the Roman Senate enjoyed. Its members were less wealthy and grand by and large than the Western aristocracy, and in the government of the Empire the Eastern Senate tended to be overshadowed by the imperial Council of State called the Consistory. However, nothing could have expressed more clearly the intention that Constantinople should be a sort of mirror image of Rome than the duplication there of the Roman Senate. The likeness was further brought out by the creation at Constantinople of the magistrates traditionally associated with the city of Rome. In the year 340, Constantius II instituted Praetors at Constantinople who produced annual games, as at Rome. The highest magistracy of the ancient republican constitution, the consulate, was still a much sought after honour, despite the great expenses which it entailed, since the year was named after the ordinary Consuls. From the time of Constantius consular games were also given at Constantinople. Further, Consuls could enter upon their office at Constantinople as well as at Rome, and in later years, when there was regularly an Emperor in the East and an Emperor in the West, it was usual for each to nominate a Consul for each of the ‘two Romes’. In 359, Constantinople received the first of the Urban Prefects by whom the city was thenceforth to be administered on behalf of the imperial government, as Rome had been ruled by Prefects since the time of Augustus.⁵ Eventually, Constantinople’s imitation of Rome was to go to the extent of such things as the naming of Seven Hills. But from the beginning, the Emperor’s intentions were clear in the ways in which they referred to Constantinople. It was a standard form in imperial documents to style Constantinople, like Rome, ‘the royal city’.⁹

From the foundation of Constantinople, its Bishop, owing to the importance of the city and the frequent presence there of the Emperor, had a considerable influence in the Church at large. Although Byzantium had ranked as a suffragan see of Heraclea, the old metropolis of Thrace, Constantinople nevertheless attracted the ambitious Bishop Eusebius from Nicomedia. In the reign of

---

⁹ Thus, e.g., *Codex Iustinianus*, ii.2.4.
Constantius II, a start was made in acquiring for the Church of Constantinople prerogatives modelled upon those of the Church of Rome. This was a great age for the translation to Constantinople of the relics of martyrs, so that Constantinople too like Rome should be a city of the saints and be blessed by their physical presence. In 356, the relics of St Timothy, the fellow-worker of St Paul, were brought to Constantinople.\(^{10}\) In the following year, there took place an even more significant translation, that of the bones of Sts Andrew and Luke.\(^{11}\) When account is taken of the close connexion between Andrew and St Peter and between Luke and St Paul, the possession of their relics may be seen as Constantinople’s counterpart to the possession by Rome of the tombs of the Apostles.

The next important stage in the development of Constantinople as New Rome was reached in the reign of Theodosius the Great, who was Emperor from 378 to 395. In 381, a Church Council, since reckoned as the Second Ecumenical, which met at Constantinople, decreed that ‘the Bishop of Constantinople should have the prerogatives of honour after the Bishop of Rome, because that (city) is New Rome’.\(^{12}\) The reign of Theodosius brought to Constantinople a lustre which it had not really enjoyed in the years immediately preceding, but which it was never thenceforth to lose. Theodosius’ predecessors, Julian, Jovian, and Valens, had seldom resided at Constantinople, since they were often with the armies on the frontiers or at Antioch, which was close to the Persian border. In Church affairs too, Constantinople’s recent career had not been brilliant. The Bishops, Eusebius, Eudoxius, and Demophilus, were ‘Semi-Arians’ and in the eyes of the Orthodox, whose cause was prevailing all over the Church, so many heretics. All this changed with the coming of Theodosius, who entered Constantinople towards the end of 380. Constantinople was the habitual seat of Theodosius when he was in the East, although it was only from the time of his son Arcadius that an Emperor was in continuous residence in the city. Theodosius installed as Bishop of Constantinople one of the great teachers of the Orthodox faith, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory’s successor Nectarius was a worthy and respectable Bishop. The Roman and Christian world was ready to hear the proud title ‘New Rome’.

The Council of 381, in using the phrase ‘New Rome’ can be assumed to have shared the current ideas of contemporaries about Constantinople. Rome on the Tiber had been reproduced on the Bosphorus. It was not simply a matter of declaring that Constantinople was to be regarded as the capital of the Empire alongside Rome. Rather, as has been shown, steps were taken to make Constantinople the ‘double’ of Rome. This is evident in such diverse events as the creation of a Senate and the translation of St Andrew; it is evident even in

11. Ibid., sub anno 357; compare *Cod.Th.*, ix 17.6.
12. Canon III.
the placing of buildings. At the same time, Constantinople had not superseded Rome; in fact, Constantinople was not yet the perfect equal of Rome, which was still held to possess a certain seniority. Constantinople was the twin sister of Rome, but the twin who came later to birth. So the Fathers of the Council, drawing the conclusion that all the privileges of Rome were to be shared by New Rome, decreed that the Bishop of Constantinople should have the prerogatives of honour after the Bishop of Rome. In the usage of the East seventy years later, Rome was still consistently referred to as 'the Elder Rome' and Constantinople as 'the Younger Rome'.

At this point notice should be taken of a further element which had entered into the concept of Constantinople as New Rome, namely that of Constantinople as the capital of an Eastern Empire. Constantinople had served as a capital from which to govern the whole Roman Empire for Constantine and those of his successors, such as Constantius II and Theodosius I, who were for substantial periods (at least in practice) sole Emperors. However, after the death of Theodosius in 395, Constantinople became the seat of a line of Emperors who governed what was practically an Eastern Empire, while their colleagues ruled the West. Earlier ages had known the joint reign of more than one Emperor, such as the 'divi fratres' Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in the second century, and Caracalla and Geta in the early third century. However, it was only under Diocletian, at the end of the third century, that the Empire was divided for administrative purposes and governed by two senior Emperors, one in the East and the other in the West. Diocletian's precise arrangements did not last long after his own retirement. Nevertheless, in the course of the fourth century, there were several other occasions on which the territory of the Empire was parcelled out between imperial colleagues, such as the sons of Constantine and the brothers Valentinian I and Valens, and the division became permanent under the sons of Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius. During that century, it might be said, people got used to the division of the Roman Empire into an Eastern Part and a Western Part.

Diocletian's division had, in fact, been more than a simple administrative convenience. He had broadly speaking followed the line which divided the Greek-speaking Eastern regions from the Latin-speaking Western regions. The fourth century was precisely the period when people on both sides of this line became more conscious of their cultural distinctness, almost of a certain 'nationalism'. It was an age when the Western aristocracy cultivated the Latin

13. For 'the Elder Rome' see the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon passim, e.g. *Mansi* vi. 935-8; for 'the Younger Rome' see the letter of the Emperor Marcian to Pope Leo, *P.L.* liv. 970-4.

language and the Latin classics, especially Virgil the poet of Rome's greatness. It was an age when Eastern Bishops gathered in Council expressed a sense of superiority to the Western Church on the grounds that 'it was in the East that Christ was born'. Gregory Nazianzen could remark that East and West 'now seem to be not less regions of minds and wills than of territories' and described the Westerners as 'foreigners'. It is true that he had in mind a particular quarrel between the Eastern and Western Churches, but the fact that there were now an Eastern Church and a Western Church is indicative. In law the Roman Empire was still one, and the several Emperors exercised jointly a collegial authority, so that down to the mid-fifth century, the laws of each Emperor bore the names of his colleagues and were applicable throughout the entire Empire. However, the reality was that by the end of the fourth century, the Eastern and Western parts of the Empire constituted practically autonomous realms, each with its own sovereign. Constantinople was able to take the place of Rome for the East.

The concept of Constantinople as New Rome which was held in the East in the late fourth century was thus expressed in verse by Gregory Nazianzen:

Nature has not given two sons
but two Romes, the lights of the whole world,
the ancient power and the new,
differing between themselves only as
one illumines the East and the other the West.
But beauty matches beauty in equal measure.

15. Thus Gregory Nazianzen, *De Vita Sua*, 1635-1637.