
The question of the conversion of Constantine to Christianity is one which always agitated the scholars. The emergence of the Christian Church as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine is an event of such far-reaching importance that it is irritating not to be able to ascribe it to a single clear-cut cause. And so the argument goes on: Was Constantine converted to Christianity at one blow? Was he a pagan who somehow adopted the Christian God? Was he a superstitious but sincere Christian? Was he converted by degrees?

This small book does not give the answer. It is a brief compilation of the different answers that have been given down the years, from those of Eusebius and Lactantius, contemporaries of Constantine, to Joseph Vogt's answer in our own time. In all fifteen versions are given — Eusebius, Lactantius, Gibbon, Burkhardt, Grégoire, Hatt, Piganiol, Moreau, Baynes, Palanque, Alfoldi, Bruun, MacMullen, Jones and Vogt. Their attitudes and decisions on the matter are as various as one would expect.

Eadie does not attempt to decide between the different theories but simply presents them for the reader to decide. However, it would need more evidence than that given here to provide grounds for a full and mature decision. For example, only one author, Vogt, takes account of the archeological evidence — the spate of Christian building and the evolving of a new kind of ecclesiastical architecture under Constantine.

The nearer one gets to modern times the less doctrinaire are the opinions quoted. It does seem to me that if one is to take account of all the evidence the answer cannot be a simple one — Constantine must have been somewhat confused himself to vary in his attitudes as much as he did. The syncretist gradually became a Christian, and he does not ever seem to have fully understood the issues involved in theological controversy, for example, in the Arian controversy.

I would like to have seen Eusebius quoted at greater length. The brief excerpts given do not reflect at all the adulatory character of Eusebius' treatment of Constantine, which makes his reticence about some aspects of the 'vision' the more surprising and convincing.

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