

Saint Constantine: From Legend to Revilement

By Protopresbyter Fr. Constantine Strategopoulos

First and foremost, I wish to offer my heartfelt thanks to the local bishop, His Eminence Metropolitan of Piraeus, for the blessing he has bestowed upon us to carry out these lectures within his diocese; and, of course, my utmost thanks go to the vicars and the superintendent of this holy temple for extending a loving invitation to us.

As mentioned before, all these lectures revolve around Saint Constantine and the Edict of Milan. If I were to give this lecture a specific title, to present you with a rough idea of what I am about to discuss, I would call it "From Legend to Revilement". You will soon understand what I mean by this. And, of course, I cannot help but being personal; it cannot be otherwise, it is impossible for me to speak about Saint Constantine and his mother in a purely theoretical, scientific and historical manner; I will do it to the best of my ability and to the extent that my powers allow. But since that place, the city of Constantine, has marked our lives – it is, after all, my birthplace – I can never speak about it without a sense of deep involvement when I recollect the circumstances that introduced us to Saint Constantine.

Constantine's City, Constantinople. The city that gives us, that has given me personally, the opportunity to become familiar with Saint Constantine – and our very first introduction to the Saint was by getting to know him as a legend. You know, it is one thing to hear about Saint Constantine and another to experience something so staggering, such a legend and such a legacy, in your daily life. We were not just listening to tales about Saint Constantine in that place; the narratives were our living reality. Legendary events and stories that centred around his name and had been passed down in writing characterized our childhood and our very beings. What is related in these stories has been recorded

even by historians. When Saint Constantine was marking out the boundary line for the City, an Angel was leading the way; and when his attendants, who could not see the Angel – only visible to the Saint – asked him "How far will you take us? How much longer are the boundaries that you are tracing going to be?" he answered: "I am not the one who is tracing them, I am only following the one who is advancing before me". That, for us, was living history. We were living in a City that had been marked by an Angel. Saint Constantine's life was linked to it, so this City was no random place – it was "the" place in our eyes! It was a legend that could captivate a child's heart and totally transform it. It prompted you to exclaim "What a place to be! A place that is the stuff of legend!"

Oracles, legends, traditions... The inscriptions on Saint Constantine's tomb spoke of traditions that were passed down to us; they spoke of prophecies that had a significant bearing on our lives, on everything that was happening around us. We would always recall with amusement what we had heard about the Asian shore opposite to Constantinople where Chalcedon is situated. That was the place that had been called "the land of the blind". They had failed to see the beauty of Constantine's City and decided to settle on the other side across the sea. To us it was the land of the blind.

Everything was imbued with the presence of Saint Constantine! Everything! Even things that were apparently symbolic. Isn't the double-headed eagle the symbol of the Eastern Roman Empire? It's a symbol, for sure; but for us, it was a presence. Scores of eagles, large eagles, were flying above our heads in the City. We didn't call it the land of the symbol of the double-headed eagle; we called it the land of high-flying eagles. How many more such things there were that were shaping the life of a child who felt the impact of a legend! When you arrive at Constantine's City, traditionally you enter from two directions. Either through land, by train, or through sea, the Golden Horn gulf,

by boat. I should not include airplanes, since there weren't many in those days.

The people there, made everything beautiful. We used to say, how beautiful sunsets are in Constantine's City. No, it is Saint Constantine that makes them so stunning. The famous sunsets of Constantinople! A natural phenomenon, you might say. No, it is the grace of Saint Constantine. And the sweet scent in the air when we enter the City from the Galata area. Is that the smell of fried skipjack? No, no, no, what are you talking about? It is another manifestation of Saint Constantine's grace! How splendid it is to arrive by train at Sirkeci, where other fragrances fill the air. It's Saint Constantine again, I won't have any arguments! With such a wealth of experience, you become infused with a legend and feel that you bear a certain obligation.

Then you come to the other legend, when you are led to the square where the riots, the "Nika Revolt", took place and you are told "do you see this column here? This is where the statue of Saint Constantine used to stand before it was demolished. And do you know what is inside this column? It contains the nails that Saint Helen found along with the Holy Cross; they are still buried deep in there". That was the legend, the breathtaking legend whose power goes beyond turning you into a history expert; it brings you to the point where you stand in awe of the place where you live. It isn't fairy-tale stuff, because the whole Empire must have experienced a similar state of awe for being grounded in such a place. Even today, what Saint Constantine left behind him, not as historical memory but as a living heritage, compels us to go beyond the sense of awe of "what was". If we have experienced it, we won't say "what a wondrous place we used to live in!", but "what a wondrous place we live in now!" That was the legend I am referring to.

But when we moved from the legend of Constantine's City to the harsh reality of Athens, we were confronted with

defamation and revilement. Everything changed. Textbooks, people, historians, were reviling Saint Constantine. That is why I named this speech "From Legend to Revilement". I can hardly describe what a shock that was. They weren't just maligning a historical figure; they were reviling a saint who was, for us, the most iconic figure of Romanity. And then, everything went crumbling down, everything turned to slander, echoing this or that historian.

The first time I managed to hold my head up, a few years after I moved to Athens, was when I was appointed to serve as a priest at the church of St Constantine in Glyfada. Until then, I had lingered in that state of inner conflict between the revilement and the legend. Which one would prevail? It was at that point, before I even studied history sources in depth that I began to experience something else. We, as clergymen, are so indebted to our laity, the people of God! Because these people can be – if they embrace this role – a living manifestation of our tradition. It was there, then, in St Constantine's church at Glyfada beach, that as a young priest I first heard about the staggering experiences of old parishioners, elderly men and women, regarding incidents that testified to Saint Constantine's very real presence. There were so many of them, people who would casually tell me "I saw Constantis"! "Who is that?" I would ask. "Saint Constantine". "Then why don't you call him 'Saint'?" "But he came to me and said 'I am Constantis'". When the testimonies of Constantis' presence became too numerous for my heart to bear, I gradually began to re-discover the legend, and to ask myself where the legend stands in relation to the revilement. At that point, I had to start researching, too, so that I could think as a realist as well as a theologian and, instead of keeping my head in the clouds, be a down-to-earth pragmatist and have a thorough knowledge of history. So, I began by exploring the issue of revilement, but the more I delved into it, the more I discovered the goodness and beauty it sought to cover.

My first personal experience, other than hearing of the encounters that those blessed people among the laity had with Constantine - pardon my expression, but it is based on what the elderly ladies used to tell me in Glyfada - was when I learned about Saint Constantine's spiritual guide. I don't know if you have ever heard of him, the man who stood behind Constantine, if you have wondered who his confessor was, the man who guided him for many years before he became a Christian and kept guiding him towards the revelation of that sacred beauty that led to his sanctification. Maybe you have heard his name; he is a saint of our Church, but he is not known to many people. To me he provided an initial point of access whereby I could see what happened in Constantine's heart. His name is Hosius, Saint Hosius the Confessor, Bishop of Cordova. Cordova in those days was the Spanish city we still know as Cordova. Saint Hosius was no common man; he was a great hierarch who participated in an Ecumenical Council and reached sainthood. Remember his name: Saint Hosius of Cordova. I was really impressed to discover that the person behind Constantine was a saint of this stature, an outstanding figure, and, according to the texts, a man of profound discernment who – amid the uproar of heresies and the upheaval that eventually led the Church to its First Ecumenical Council – maintained a very discreet outlook and kept a very subtle balance in theological matters. That was my first realization of who put “Constantine” on the road to sainthood. From then on, other life experiences followed and were recorded in history, but this was the initial spark. Who is the hidden force behind a saint? It is always a holy person, a spiritual guide and confessor; actually, it is the grace of God that places such people in such a key role. At that point I embarked on the long journey of tracing the historical sources on Saint Constantine's life. I will not tire you, but since we are covering this distance from legend to revilement, I would like you to reach a deeper understanding of this matter and, if possible, overcome your concerns or the temptation of giving in to

slandrous accusations that, I dare say at the outset, are totally unsubstantiated and ludicrous.

We need to keep in mind that our Church has acknowledged scores of repentant sinners as saints. The Church does not dismiss repentance; it embraces it. Consider how many of its saints had committed sins in their past. That is one thing, but it is a different story when someone tries to charge a historical personality – for reasons that I will shortly mention – with excessive, false sins with the aim of either vindicating or condemning an entire civilization. Was there ever a saint who used to be sinless? No. It is an entirely different thing, however, to heap lies and fabrications on the personality of Saint Constantine.

Among the historians who wrote about Saint Constantine, there are several who stand out as the most fundamental and thoroughly analyzed sources on his life. First among them is the well-known historian and Church Father Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. The second is another historian, Lactantius. Now, Lactantius is of particular significance, because he was the best and closest friend of Crispus, Saint Constantine's son who, according to Constantine's detractors, was murdered by his father. I will say more on this, but please take a note of the fact that Lactantius was a childhood friend, a bosom friend of the son whom Saint Constantine allegedly put to death, as those who revile him repeatedly claim. Significantly, both Lactantius and Eusebius give high praise to Saint Constantine in their works. How is that for an argument? Can a man exalt the murderer of his best friend? I will let you ponder on the idea for a while.

Furthermore, there were other historians as well, both pagan and Christian ones, who left us accounts and it is remarkable that not only Christian writers praise Saint Constantine unanimously, but even Gentiles speak well of him – except one. There is one single writer who contradicts the others and his name is Zosimus. All modern historians – or, rather, pseudo-historians – who revile

and recriminate Saint Constantine use Zosimus as their source. They do not draw on either Eusebius or Lactantius or any of the secondary historians who occasionally referred to Saint Constantine. So, something is seriously amiss here. Out of the seven historians who wrote on Saint Constantine – the most significant accounts being those of Eusebius, Lactantius and Zosimus – only Zosimus makes slanderous attacks against him, and all the circles that portray Saint Constantine not as a saint but as a despicable personality rely solely on Zosimus. One more thing to consider: Eusebius and Lactantius were contemporaries of Saint Constantine, whereas Zosimus lived 150 years after him. Is he a chronicler who merely records a story that he heard? Or does he relate a made-up story? In any case, he is not the historian who had a first-hand experience of his subject. The others actually lived alongside the man.

I do not mean to sway you by these arguments, but the facts are too powerful and overwhelming. Zosimus, who lived a hundred and fifty years after Saint Constantine and persistently accused him, became the primary source that is being used to this day by neo-pagans and neo-idolaters, by all adversaries who could not stand the splendour of the Orthodox Eastern Empire. Allow me a brief digression here in order to remind you that the empire's name wasn't "Byzantine". The term was first coined by historians after the Fall of Constantinople, in 1520. It wasn't the Byzantine Empire; it was Romania, or the Orthodox Eastern Roman Empire. It is no coincidence that all those who have brought accusations against Saint Constantine shared a deep hatred for that Orthodox Eastern Empire. Let me say a few words on what is actually a very large topic: In 326 A.D., one year after the Ecumenical Council, Constantine – who detested Rome and was already making plans for Constantinople, came to Rome as emperor, in order to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his imperial rule, his second Decennalia, as the name went. Naturally, and according to the age-old custom, he

was summoned at the Capitol, to take part in a pagan military festival and offer sacrifices to the heathen gods. He refused to do so! You realize that refusing to honour the gods inside the Capitol itself was like turning his back to an entire civilization!

We need to realize that this event was the main reason behind the launching of a vilifying campaign against Constantine, although it had been preceded by the Edict of Milan thirteen years earlier. Note that the Edict of Milan did not cause as much apprehension. The Edict simply gave Christians equal status; it did not put the pagans at a disadvantage. And it couldn't have been otherwise, since the vast majority of the Empire's population were pagans. In today's terms, we would describe them as a predominantly pagan electorate. Constantine did not strike a direct blow at them. He only said that it would be unfair to deny one religion the right to enjoy the same prerogatives as any other. That was not a critical issue. It did vex them, but it wasn't of great consequence, because Christians represented only 10% of the population. According to historians, the critical moment was the one I just mentioned: when he went to Rome and refused to offer any more sacrifices, when he practically renounced the entire ancient world, an act that definitely resonated with the words of the apostle Paul: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". The renouncement was inevitable. And this is where the tragedy began.

One year before he refused to sacrifice to the idols, in 365 A.D., Saint Constantine attended the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council, where the Church Fathers recited the Trisagion ("Thrice Holy") hymn – "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal..." - as an Orthodox doctrine. It was the most crucial point in my opinion, which is also the opinion of historians who study these issues. Constantine did not sacrifice to the Caesar, in other words to himself, because he acknowledged that there is no other "Caesar" on earth but God. Not surprisingly,

Zosimus seized the opportunity to interpret this fact as evidence of Constantine's hatred and enmity towards all Romans. In his eyes he was sacrilegious, an enemy of justice, a foul villain. All because he had rejected a tradition. A tradition, you know, has real value only if it carries true meaning. Our salvation does not rest on an arbitrary notion of "tradition". We, as Orthodox Christians, speak of Tradition in the name of the Holy Spirit. A tradition that is devoid of the Holy Spirit makes no sense. What good is it, if it just serves the perpetuation of certain habits or the preservation of mores and customs? What significance does it have, especially if it happens to be a demonic tradition [as in the aforementioned case]? This is something that Zosimus could never understand.

Naturally, based on Zosimus' accounts, all subsequent western historians wrote against Saint Constantine. Gibbon, Voltaire and many, many others viewed him as the enemy of an entire civilization. And, of course, the entire western world, the Vaticanian world, followed suit. They resented Constantine with a deep-seated hatred, because it was he who relocated the world's centre from the Old Rome to the New. Have you ever wondered why the name Constantine is so rare in the western world? It is very rare indeed and that signifies a certain degree of animosity, doesn't it? There are hardly any prelates named "Constantine" in the western Church after the Schism either. Doesn't that tell you something? Effectively, all representatives of the "Enlightenment" resorted to Zosimus and to every means at their disposal in order to defame Saint Constantine.

In the first place, Constantine did not abolish [the pagan] religion. Having said that, he did blaze new trails when he grappled with a number of issues. You see, today when the discussion revolves around various regimes, concepts like dictatorship and democracy come up and, of course, dictatorship is so out of the question that people would laugh at the suggestion. Democracy is the standard we uphold. Back in those days,

however, the form of administration was not just absolutist; the emperor was not only an absolute dictator, he was a god in the eyes of the people! They bent the knee and offered him sacrifices. That went beyond dictatorial rule. And what did Saint Constantine do, first via the Edict of Milan in 311 and then in the context of the First Ecumenical Council?

It was around 311, or to be more precise and faithful to historical sources, it was in the years 313-314 that a terrible heresy broke out: the major heresy of Donatism. I will not go into further details now. In his capacity as emperor, Constantine had to take a stance. How was the problem to be tackled? Miltiades, who was the Bishop of Rome in those days, went to the emperor and said: "The Empire is in great turmoil and the solution rests upon you". Saint Constantine's answer was, and I quote: "You have a Synod, (i.e. a Council), you should resolve these matters in the synodical assembly". Do you realize the significance of these words in the context of that world? It was the equivalent of a democratic statement. The decision-making is passed to the assembly; what is more, this is an assembly – a council – of hierarchs. A staggering event in those days!

One small observation: have you considered the fact that even today, in the institution that represents the Vaticanian version of the formation of the Church, whenever a council convenes, even if there are some twelve hundred bishops assembled to resolve an issue and they reach a decision, if their Primate, the "infallible" Pope of Rome, says "no", the votes of the twelve hundred bishops are annulled. An absolute dictatorship, isn't it? This was the aftermath of the Schism in the West. They could not live up to the new standards that Constantine set. This is a crucial consideration. The granting of decision-making rights to a group of faithful Christians – more specifically, to an assembly, a council of hierarchs – is the second element that tipped the scales

against the Saint and in favour of his revilement.

And, of course, we have those written records that are so hard to overlook. Many of them – truly gripping documents – were left to us by the historian Eusebius, a friend of Constantine's; a friend, not his confessor – his confessor was the bishop of Cordova, as I mentioned before. So, it was at Constantine's behest that the First Ecumenical Council assembled and here is what his enemies say: "See? The Church was following orders, it had no freedom, it was at the beck and call of the state". Wrong. Those detractors are ignorant of history. What they don't realize is that in the vast Roman Empire no one, especially no person of rank (mayor, governor, Church hierarch...) could make a single move or travel from one place to another without the emperor's leave and authorization. Anything could raise suspicions of conspiracy and sedition. That is why Constantine himself summoned the council and granted the bishops legal permits to travel from all corners of the world to Nicaea. Furthermore, he only called for the assembly; he did not preside over it. There are documents describing his entrance in the First Ecumenical Council. It has gone down on record, although the abstracts of the council were not preserved. We do have its decisions, but, contrary to the subsequent Ecumenical Councils, no further records of its sessions survived. So, Constantine arrived at the Council with no military escort, no attendants. For an emperor, that was unheard of, unthinkable! What is more, he went to the head of the assembly (St Eustathius of Antioch) and humbly asked where he should sit. He was shown his place and did as instructed. How outrageous that was for the head of the Empire! Totally preposterous for that time and age. What is more, who dares say to the Emperor "you should sit there"? Yet, he did take a seat and attended the sessions in silence – a humble presence throughout the proceedings. He ratified the Council's stance in its entirety. This marks the beginnings of true democracy within the

Church. I'm sure I do not need to remind you of the statement he made in the context of that synodical proclamation: "You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church, over spiritual matters, whereas my place is outside, by necessity. I rule over the world and all these issues affect the entire world". Thus he began his outstanding work on so many levels that upset some of his subjects. Hatred towards Saint Constantine [still] runs high today.

In the first place, he gave slaves the potential to be free. Keep that in mind. When we go back to the apostle Paul, we realize that he did not call for a formal abolition of slavery, either. What did he say instead? That masters should have a change of heart, such that it would no longer allow them to own slaves. A revolution that happens by force is always fake. A revolution that takes place in our hearts is always true! This is the course Saint Constantine also pursued. He did not enforce laws for the liberation of slaves. What did he do? He proposed what I have just mentioned: "If you are Christians and live by the principle of love, free those people". That would spell disaster, so to speak, for the powerful – or, if you wish, for the capitalists – of that age (I hope you will excuse the term). Saint Constantine paved the way for a change of heart. The theological groundwork was already laid in Paul's epistle to Philemon, which you can easily find and read. Another step, of minor significance for us, is that he dissolved the Praetorian Guard, a powerful body that steered the fortunes of the realm. In today's world, we could compare praetorians to the parties that rule the land: well-organized task forces with utter disregard for the will of the people. That is how I would translate it in modern terms.

Constantine also abolished the penalty of death by crucifixion, but what merits even more attention is another decree that he issued and that brought about the severest and most slanderous attacks against him. Take a note of this, because it is a most crucial point – a decisive law over which he

was reviled more than ever before. What was this decree about? It concerned adultery, which was henceforth designated as a capital offence, one of the gravest, most serious offences under civil law. Consequently, the edicts he issued against adulterers were most severe. It was in this context that, if I may use the expression, the devil pulled his trick. I will explain this story in a few minutes, if you wish. It is, after all, the major foothold that the most insolent slanderers have been using. The fact that Constantine relegated Rome to a secondary position and denounced idol worship is no longer their primary concern. The repudiation of idolatry pales in comparison to the accusation that he killed his own son and his wife. A most serious accusation: the murder of his son, Crispus, and of his wife, Fausta. What heart could bear such a thing? An apologist for Christianity might give an answer, based on what I mentioned in the beginning: all saints have sinned; it is the common truth. However, doesn't that leave a sting behind, like any thorny issue that remains unresolved? "He actually killed his son and wife? What kind of saint is this?" We know that in the Church, everyone can become a saint, even the greatest villains whose words or actions are an affront to God, but this was not the case here, so I will not make a false apology; I will attempt a historical vindication, on the basis of the existing documents. Of course, even if Constantine had murdered his son and his wife, only God knows how saints are designated. Just think how many reached sainthood on these terms. Christ's crucifiers themselves became saints. Saint Longinus is a good example, right? Quite a powerful example, I would say. However, this is not what we are dealing with here. Constantine's case is different. Unfortunately, the law he proposed against adultery became the springboard for launching an attack comprised of the most meandering falsehoods and shocking fabrications, which would stick to him for the rest of his life. Let us briefly consider the facts, while we are at it. It is important because this is the story upon which historians will focus nowadays.

They no longer linger on the fact that he transferred the centre of the empire to New Rome. This is secondary now. Today they focus on the crimes.

I will explain in a few words, giving a condensed account from the historians who handled this topic. Saint Constantine was initially married to an excellent young woman. However, in the context of the political power-game that was prevalent in the Empire at the time, he was forced by Maximianus to divorce his first wife, with whom he had a son, Crispus, and wed Maximianus' daughter. It was necessary, for the purpose of maintaining an equilibrium in the Empire and for the termination of hostilities. Thus, he got married to Fausta. One can hardly avoid making a pun with Fausta's name at this point – presumably you are all familiar with Faust, that demonic hero of European literature. What happened next? It was only a few days after Saint Constantine issued the decree that condemned adultery as a major crime and grievous sin. Only a short time had passed before Fausta brought forth an accusation that involved her husband. She claimed Crispus, Constantine's son from his first wife had made an attempt to sexually assault her.

You ought to keep in mind that this woman had given Saint Constantine three more sons. All three of them became emperors after him. Now, who was the target of her accusations? Crispus, the first-born who had to be removed, because as long as he was alive, her own children could not hope to become emperors. And who was at the centre of her allegations? The very emperor who detested adultery but now had to face the fact that his own son was being charged with it! A "palpable hit" indeed. As historians have observed, how could Saint Constantine summon the political courage to say "I forgive the perpetrator because he is my son"? What about the people? Would they be wrong to assume that the law was relative [i.e. selectively applied]? Fausta's initial statement reflects her cunning: she claimed that Crispus had attacked her and

Constantine's immediate reaction was to have his son arrested and confined in prison. Before any of the allegations could be verified, he gave the order. It is paramount to note what historical research has revealed: that there was no order by Constantine to execute his son. Crispus had to be arrested, however. Nowadays, if the son of the Parliament Speaker commits an offence, he must suffer the consequences, regardless. That was Saint Constantine's reasoning, too.

Before Constantine had the chance to analyze the facts and determine what actually happened (or didn't happen), an order was given and Crispus was summarily executed in the prison where he was being held. Contemporary historians tried to locate the written order for Crispus' assassination. No one has been able to find it. For such an order to take effect, it would have to be a Golden Bull, i.e. bear the emperor's golden seal, which only Constantine had in his room and to which Fausta also had access. Modern historians, without being biased, admit that Fausta was in a hurry to execute Crispus before the scandal could be made public and the falseness of the accusations exposed, and so, faking Constantine's signature, she forged the golden bull and had Crispus murdered.

I do not mean to act as an apologist for Saint Constantine, but you see, how modern historical research searches for answers everywhere and needs to consider all aspects of an issue. Shortly after Crispus's execution, in his immense grief, Constantine tried to find the murderer. Presumably – at this point we can only make conjectures since there is no direct evidence – he discovered that Fausta was behind the plot and gave orders for her removal. All of a sudden, Fausta is sent away! Historical accounts reveal that she lived for four more years and died from a disease. This death by disease four years later, was “translated” by pseudo-historians into death by suffocation immediately after Crispus's murder, as soon as Constantine became aware of Fausta's

deception and realized that she was the perpetrator. There is historical evidence that she lived four more years and was away from Constantine when she died of unknown causes.

To this day, these two events continue to give occasion for charging Saint Constantine with murder. Because I love the Saint, as you love him, too, I will not presume to be his advocate. Nor am I easily convinced by historians, although I am eager to study them, provided that they are true historians. But, in my heart, I wonder how an emperor who introduced such humane laws and abolished autocratic practices could have killed his favorite child, the son who had been appointed as head of the imperial fleet and whom he loved so dearly! Crispus was a charming and charismatic child, endowed with many good qualities, which is more than can be said about the three younger sons who eventually ruled over Byzantium – the Roman Empire – and caused so much harm to it by endorsing heresies. They could not help being Fausta's sons, but sadly it was they who followed in the line of succession.

There are a few more facts worth laying before you, especially certain laws that reveal Saint Constantine's immense benevolence. With reference to judicial procedures, he issued decrees for the clarification of procedural law, specifying the number of witnesses, as well as the process of taking testimonies, checking and verifying court statements and the people assigned with these tasks. And while he instituted laws along these lines, a whole game of lies was being played behind his back. He smote state corruption and, notwithstanding the fact that his own wife was rotten, he issued laws to check this abuse of power – government corruption, as we would call it today.

He introduced a body of welfare laws that had profound social impact, providing all-around protection for widows, under-age children and orphans, something that is lacking today, in the age of memorandums!

His legislation was far too progressive for those times. He strove for a fair taxation system, as he felt that the state was mistreating its citizens and was practically pushing them over the edge! Consequently, he reformed the entire structure of the legal system. Think how often we, today, raise our voices to complain about this or that [case of injustice]. Back in those days, everything changed! The emperor forced state officials who had been levying outrageous taxes, to return to the people every sum they had unjustly collected in the previous years – retroactively! How many of you have heard of that? A measure of retroactive effect! Also, he asked for appeals to be made towards the governors of “Themes” (the administrative districts of the Empire). He examined the appeals and wherever he spotted an injustice, he required the state to pay back the full sum that had been illegally levied. Does that mean anything to you? It is something that we do not see happening today! Needless to say that besides all that, he never persecuted any of the other religions. He respected everyone. Their downfall can only be blamed on themselves.

There is a lot to be said about Saint Constantine and the scope of his social work. Do not look for the immaculate man in his person; undoubtedly, he did commit sins, but not the ones that he has been accused of, not those that led to a global tragedy – the tragic conflict between the West and the East. As soon as I realized these things, I found myself again! I rediscovered the legend! The legend that I had experienced in Constantine’s City, the place where every day we were told “the reason that the sun shines so brightly here is because this is the chosen City of Saint Constantine, that is why!”

When I was forced to come to Athens, I felt ashamed because I was about to start living in another city. Yet everything turned out fine! Can you see why? It is here that I rediscovered Saint Constantine! Everything is so grand when reflected on his person. Everything becomes so awesome and so

singular in his presence that I would have to spend hours talking about him. And, because the love for the Saint grows in a human heart, it is through such personal experiences that the legend re-emerges – a legend that was so unjustly bashed and eventually re-emerged through the accounts of elderly ladies in Glyfada. This love always overwhelms me every time I talk about Saint Constantine.

It was such a joy for me today that I had the opportunity, the honor and the blessing of the reverend Fathers, as well as Saint Constantine, to pay the smallest of tributes that my heart, a heart born and bred in Constantine’s City, can offer to him. It is a small thing, but it gave me so much joy because, unworthy as I am, I had the chance to talk about this great Saint. So, I thank both God and him, for allowing me to do so. Keep your faith in our Church alive within you. And take heed, because much of the talk you hear today about the Church can be of the sort I have just described. It can be of the same devious type. I have already given you a sample, so please use it every time you hear a rumour, to check your sources and understand facts.

Finally, I would like to say the following regarding Saint Constantine. There have been claims that his christening was performed by a heretic, that Eusebius, who administered the sacrament, wasn’t a proper Christian. It is a lie! Eusebius sided with Arius for a short time; however, he participated in the First Ecumenical Council and signed the Nicene Creed (the Symbol of Faith) in its entirety. He merely had some reservations as to whether Arius should be proclaimed an arch-heretic. Yet, he signed the Statement of Faith! Saint Constantine was not baptized by a heretic, contrary to the claims of those who wish to undermine him and the validity of his christening. He not only received the true baptism, but from that moment onwards he always wore his baptismal robe, instead of the imperial purple tunic. That is how he spent the few remaining days of his life and he closed his eyes wearing that baptismal robe. “A robe

of divine light bestow upon me", as the Psalm goes.

Let those who can make an honest statement about Saint Constantine speak up. It is impossible not to be captivated and full of gratitude to him, for making it possible for us to live the way we do? Remember what I said? "How beautiful our life is in Constantine's City, a City whose birth and creation was the work of Saint Constantine and his gift to us!" Shouldn't we also be saying how grand it is to live within the compass of our Orthodoxy, this "Empire" that Saint Constantine founded, established and empowered, by granting it civic status and upholding its Creed?

Thank you for listening. I am grateful to all of you for coming here and particularly indebted to Saint Constantine! God bless you!

[SOURCE:](#) TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE IN THE CHURCH OF SAINT CONSTANTINE, OF THE HOLY METROPOLIS OF PIRAEUS, ON FRIDAY THE 24TH OF MAY 2013.