

AN EVENING WITH CONSTANTINE, THE GREAT

A New Play

By Tom Attea

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## ABOUT THE PLAY

Constantine, whom history has called great, was the first Roman emperor to become a Christian. His life is a curious mixture of saint and murderer. He raised Christianity from a persecuted sect to the official religion of the Roman Empire, yet he ordered the execution of, among many others, his first son, an apparently admirable and courageous young man, and his second wife, with whom he had three sons.

He waited until he was about to die to be baptized, because he believed, as ancient Christians did, that the rite cleanses one of all sins. The play picks him up at this time and asks him to justify his life. Should he be saved or damned?

The play is, as it should be, primarily a work of the imagination and must finally be judged as such. Yet, given the nature of the subject, an essential goal I set for it is historical accuracy. I believe I have achieved it within the reliability of history as it has come down to us. If you find the work interesting, I have achieved my goal. If you are offended by any part of it, I can only refer you to history.

## NOTE ABOUT SOURCES

Of the many books I consulted to create the play, I would like to credit the following. They provided facts, understanding and, at times, inspiration. I would like to give special credit to the works by Gibbon and Durant, which first interested me in the subject, and the book by Jones, which, in its combination of thoroughness and conciseness, provided a final chronology and accuracy check in a history that is at times fragmentary but in its main events convincingly intact.

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## THE CHARACTERS

CONSTANTINE, THE GREAT -- a tall, stately, and forceful man.

EUSEBIUS -- An elderly bishop with a beard.

CRISPUS -- The proud but amiable son of Constantine.

MAXIMIAN -- A Roman emperor of some wile.

FAUSTA -- The beautiful and flirtatious wife of Constantine.

LICINIUS -- A Roman emperor, alternately imperial or petulant.

TIME: The present, recalling the late 3rd and early 4th Centuries, A. D.

PLACE: The theater to which Constantine has been invited.

## ACT I

At center, a large chair painted gold, facing the audience. To one side, a bench or five chairs, which will become the location of part of our implied jury; the audience will become the other part. The bust of a noble Roman is optional. On the wall at center is a representation of CONSTANTINE's famous Labarum. (It consists of a modified cross: the top of the vertical is bent over into the shape of a "P"; the bottom of the vertical has an "X" placed over it. These are the "Chi" and "Rho" of the Greek alphabet and stand for the first two letters of Christ's name.)

CONSTANTINE, THE GREAT -- a tall, powerful-looking but now mortally ill man -- strides out. HE is dressed in a white silk toga with gold trim and a crimson cape. HE is wearing a gold crown, along with other jewelry. At his waist is an ornamented knife in its sheath.

## CONSTANTINE

(to audience: excited, with a sense of wonder)

Constantine -- Victor, Maximus, Augustus -- to the audience. Greetings. Greetings to you all -- after over 1600 years of silence and quite a few years of -- oh, how is it possible? -- astonishing neglect. How undeserving I am of such a destiny! Come on, tell me, have many of you really all but forgotten about me? I, Constantine Augustus, whom history has called "great"? I can see it in your eyes: you know more about Alexander, even more about Caesar. And yet I did much more, so much more, to shape the world.

Thankfully, I've finally been given the chance to straighten things out. There I was, lying in my gold sarcophagus -- of my own design, I might add -- since 337 A. D., almost as forgotten as the average palace attendant, until -- oh, I can hardly believe it! -- the author decided to bring me back to life so I could talk to you for a couple of hours. I am so grateful!

## CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

I do wish he could have brought me back when I was younger, though -- you know, just starting out and full of imperial vim and vigor. But he chose a time when I was ill and knew my days were few -- in fact, at the very moment when I asked myself the most frightening question of my life -- a question I never thought would occur to me. But when I felt the hand of death reach out of the ground for me, it did. And, I confess, the question shook me to the bottom of my soul, my immortal -- at least, I hope, my immortal -- soul.

And I have the same question for you. Really, I request your opinion. Do you think that someone who led the life I did could be forgiven all of his sins -- and go straight to heaven? I planned my ascension with perfect timing. I waited until now, as we often did in my day, before I allowed myself to be baptized. As many of you must know, that's the sacrament whereby all of one's sins are forgiven. So why not wait until near the end? There you are, suddenly with a clean slate -- and ready to wing your way straight up to your place beside God?

But could I be sure I'd qualify? Doubt seized me. And I will tell you why: I knew the details of my life.

(LIGHTS come up on EUSEBIUS, an elderly bishop with a beard;  
HE has a few books with him)

## EUSEBIUS

Blessed Emperor, savior of the church!

## CONSTANTINE

Eusebius? Back, too?

## EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty. Somebody has to baptize you.

## CONSTANTINE

But it was the other Eusebius, not of Caesaria but of Nicomedia, whom I chose to perform the rite.

## EUSEBIUS

I know, my Emperor. But the author has chosen me to represent the many hundreds of bishops and other ecclesiastics you knew.

(to audience)

And, I might say, if he was to choose one person, I deserved the nomination.

(to CONSTANTINE)

I hope you agree.

CONSTANTINE

What about Hosius of Cordova, my court adviser in religious matters?

EUSEBIUS

Would you rather have had him? Let me share something with you. After you were dead, I, not he, wrote a long funeral oration in your honor.

(holds up one of his books)

It came to be known as your official biography, despite the fact that I only praised you.

CONSTANTINE

What else would you do, scholarly Eusebius?

EUSEBIUS

What else, indeed, mighty Augustus -- for praise is truly all you deserve.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you. You always had a wonderfully accurate conception of my worth. I'm glad to have you here.

(puts out his hand)

Welcome.

EUSEBIUS

The honor is mine, gracious Emperor. When would it serve your royal convenience to be baptized?

CONSTANTINE

Not just yet. I have some things to do before then.

EUSEBIUS

May I, in the meantime, be of any other assistance?

CONSTANTINE

(indicates audience)

Well, you might take it upon yourself to say a few words to them about me. Then they'd have some corroboration of my own efforts to enlighten them.

EUSEBIUS

I will do so with the greatest pleasure.

(to audience)

Here, my dear audience, you have before you the greatest and most welcome surprise in the history of Christianity -- the first Roman emperor to become a Christian. A surprise of immeasurable value, as well as quite a relief, since he came right after the dark time of the Great Persecution under Diocletian and Galerius. Here you have a blessed man chosen by ...

EUSEBIUS (CONT'D)

... Almighty God to raise Christianity from a small, persecuted faith to the official religion of the Roman Empire. Here a servant of our Savior, Jesus Christ, a just emperor who wreaked vengeance on the persecutors, restored the property of the Christians, funded ecclesiastical support out of public funds, built countless churches, and erected a great city dedicated to Christianity, a city to which he so rightly and generously gave his own name -- Constantinople.

CONSTANTINE

It's still there, isn't it?

EUSEBIUS

It was when I died.

CONSTANTINE

Good. But, Eusebius, if you'll excuse me for saying so, that was quite a long time ago. I need an update. Will the author please bring me up to date on Constantinople?

(listens OFF; to audience)

During my visit with you, I have privileged access to him.

(pained expression)

No! No!

EUSEBIUS

What, Imperial Majesty?

CONSTANTINE

He's telling me it's gone.

EUSEBIUS

No! God would never let that happen. There must be a mistake.

CONSTANTINE

It's true, all too true! He says it outlasted Imperial Rome.

EUSEBIUS

That's gone, too?

CONSTANTINE

If the author is to be believed -- and, if not, are we really here?

EUSEBIUS

We seem to be.

CONSTANTINE

True, true. And I would say that argues for his credulity.

EUSEBIUS

I would agree. Does he say anything more?

CONSTANTINE

A truth too terrible and yet, in a way, consoling. My glorious city remained unconquered until 1203, when the scheming Venetians sent the Fourth Crusade against it.

EUSEBIUS

Why would the Venetians, Italians one and all, send an army against your New Rome?

CONSTANTINE

Treachery, I'm sure! Blind treachery! Yet he says it stood for two-and-a-half centuries more, until it fell to somebody named Mohammed, the Conqueror.

EUSEBIUS

I'm sure no equal of Constantine, the Great.

CONSTANTINE

Was anyone, ever? Oh, if only I had been alive! I would have sallied forth and decimated him and his forces.

EUSEBIUS

Of that there can be no doubt. You were invincible -- the right arm of Jesus Christ.

CONSTANTINE

I'm convinced of that. Oh, I wish I could get my hands on him now. I'd cut him to pieces -- and throw his remains to the lions.

EUSEBIUS

Is nothing left of your great city?

CONSTANTINE

Yes, disappointment. Not even the name remains. The author says the city there today is called Istanbul.

EUSEBIUS

Istanbul?

CONSTANTINE

Yes. And what kind of bull is that? Oh, to live in a world where nearly everything one knows changes and eventually disappears! Perhaps the dream of the pharaohs, and our own dream, of eternal life is a cruel one.

EUSEBIUS

Yet better, I think, than eternal death.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, far better than just to rot. But do you suppose that one knows if he does? Could life be the only experience -- and death only something the living observe? Could it be pure nothing, and in that, a blessing?

EUSEBIUS

Oh, holy Emperor, doubt not! What hope is there in this harsh and disease-plagued world but salvation through Christ? Rest assured, this life of woe and torment is but a preparation for the glorious life to come, this fragile body but a tomb of the immortal spirit.

CONSTANTINE

(looks at his hand; moves it)

Yet it works so well to be called merely a tomb. And, brother Eusebius, we've just come from there.

EUSEBIUS

True, but --

CONSTANTINE

-- I heard no laughter or tears in the grave. Did you? I remember no more about what happened after I died than what happened to me before I was born. Oh, my! Do you suppose that means I didn't go to heaven?

EUSEBIUS

Think not another moment of that, most saintly Emperor. You were destined, as one of our far-seeing bishops told you at the celebration of the 30th year of your blessed rule, not only to ascend to heaven, but to reign forever side by side with the Son of God.

CONSTANTINE

You are too generous.

EUSEBIUS

Never generous enough, kind Majesty. The church has not the means to repay your incalculable services to it.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you, Eusebius. But could the good bishop's promise have been only flattery? I got quite a lot of that, you know.

(to audience)

And found it either delectable or tiresome, depending on the source.

(looks about)

I need an answer, now. Can the author please tell me whether I went to heaven or not? He can't? Oh, dear, how unfortunate!

EUSEBIUS

How could he know, patient Emperor -- mere mortal that he is? Or how could we, these petty reincarnations by him?

CONSTANTINE

Oh, what insight you have, Eusebius! How could we possibly know now, since we're supposed to be alive again and, therefore, once again the fools of finitude -- or, at least, the slaves of it?

EUSEBIUS

But know without question, mighty Augustus, you were granted eternal bliss. You, if anyone. And, I trust, I was, too.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you. Did you not say you wrote my life?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty. My glorious *Vita Constantini*

CONSTANTINE

Enough of a service, I think, to save any man, especially one who led a life as praiseworthy as your own.

EUSEBIUS

May your words wing their way straight up to heaven.

CONSTANTINE

I don't see why they wouldn't. They always did -- from the day Christ selected me to be his viceregent.

EUSEBIUS

Of that there can be no doubt, our earthly savior. It was by a sign, a sign in the sky, witnessed by you yourself and many of your troops.

CONSTANTINE

Then take comfort, brother Eusebius, in knowing my influence is yours.

EUSEBIUS

Thank you, your Benevolence.

CONSTANTINE

Oh, I must have gone to heaven! I'm sure of it.

(to audience)

And don't you doubt me. Not for a minute. I deserved to go there. And I can convince you.

(looks about)

Does the author grant me the right to tell the audience why I deserved to go straight to heaven?

Ah-ha, he has just informed me that that is, in fact, the very reason he has brought me before you -- to justify myself. Naturally, I accept the challenge. I had exactly the same thing in mind.

Excuse me a moment.

(aside)

Do I have to tell them everything?

(concerned)

Everything? Of course, I want my two hours of life, mortal though it is.

(resolved)

All right, then, everything!

(to audience)

My dear, wise, and, I'm sure, quite understanding audience, will you listen while I tell you about - all about! -- my life? Then surely you'll believe that I was granted eternal salvation, and, in your conviction, I will find additional confirmation of my own. To begin with, what else could I deserve? Tell them, honest Eusebius, about some of my achievements. Dwell especially on the most sacred ones.

EUSEBIUS

It is my sublime honor to do so, greatest of all the Emperors.

(to audience)

In his untiring zeal to champion Catholicism, it was he who stilled the arm of the persecutors. He who raised Christ above even Jupiter. He who declared that Sunday, named after light and sun, be observed in all the Empire as the official day of the Lord. He who, rightly angered by dissension within the most holy Church, summoned the first great ecumenical council, at Nicaea, which he himself presided over and where he masterfully suggested the only universally ...

(lowers voice)

... I should say, almost universally ...

(resumes usual voice level)

... acceptable description of the Holy Trinity.

CONSTANTINE

That's right. But you whispered something to them, didn't you? Come now, Eusebius, tell me.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, your Imperial Understanding. I know you want to be scrupulously honest with them, so --

CONSTANTINE

-- Yes, yes?

EUSEBIUS

I thought you'd want them to know there were a few bishops who refused to sign the creed, even though you had so wisely improved it.

CONSTANTINE

True, but only three of them -- three out of nearly 300. Has there ever been more unanimity in a great theological matter? Not according to my experience. And you signed it, didn't you? Go ahead and tell them.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, mighty Augustus.

(to audience)

I did sign it, despite some minor reservations.

CONSTANTINE

Reservations -- even you, dutiful Eusebius?

EUSEBIUS

Rest assured, glorious mediator, I triumphed over them.

(to audience; hushed)

But did I sin by doing so? I, who, like my wise and blessed teacher Origin, believed the Son was subsequent to the Father, not co-eternal with Him? Worse yet, did I mislead some of my followers into sin? Did, in fact, my great hero by his influence over me damn my immortal soul?

CONSTANTINE

Please, speak up. I don't want them to miss a word.

(to audience)

Are you surprised that I, someone many of you aren't as acquainted with as you really ought to be, actually did the things he has enumerated? Well, if you disagree, don't be upset with him or me; be upset with history.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Go on, your Thoughtfulness.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, arm of God. Before he would dismiss the council, he also insisted that we all agree to celebrate Easter on the same date.

CONSTANTINE

That's right. About time someone did.

(to audience)

The all-powerful and all-seeing God commanded me to unify the Church in every way -- and I gave all my energy and influence to the task. The fact is, the humble and somewhat anonymous servant before you did so much for the Church that I described myself to the other bishops as a bishop established by God of those outside the church. And not one of them offered an objection.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, quite the opposite, my Imperial Majesty. We were most grateful that you would want to describe yourself that way ...

(to audience)

... even when he would refer to himself as the 13th Apostle.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, an Apostle! I liked to think of myself that way.

(to audience)

In fact, so great was my reverence for the Apostles that at Constantinople I erected a great basilica that I named The Church of the Holy Apostles.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, holy man!

(to audience)

So near the divine that in that church he had twelve wooden caskets placed, one to symbolize each of the Apostles, and in the very middle of them --

CONSTANTINE

-- a gold sarcophagus for myself.

EUSEBIUS

Blessed act!

(to audience)

What greater sign of holiness could you ask for?

CONSTANTINE

Should not a man who showed such splendid devotion be granted eternal salvation?

EUSEBIUS

Most assuredly.

(to audience)

This man, this humble and holy man who comes before you, did more, in fact, to spread Christianity than anyone, except, perhaps, our most sacred Founder, Jesus himself.

CONSTANTINE

Don't, I pray, find offense in what he says. With the power of the Christian God as my ally, I raised up all the Empire to firm hopes of salvation -- raised up all the regions that were enslaved and tormented by tyrants and revived them as if they were under the care of a physician. And, beyond the Empire, how many barbarian tribes, impressed by the invincible power of my army, marching under the symbol of Christ, were converted to the one true Church! Yes, I say, instead of finding offense, ask how Christianity fared where no Christian emperor held sway? How, for example, in Persia, where I could only write a letter to King Sapor, entreating him to be tolerant of the Christians?

(surprised)

What? No more Persian Empire?

EUSEBIUS

Ah, yet another tyrant ground into the sand by the invincible will of God! Can that be true?

CONSTANTINE

The author has just informed me that the Persian Empire is no more.

EUSEBIUS

And all its proud towers toppled? Oh, what can mortals do but raise up the earth, knowing all their works, even the most sturdy, must one day fall back down into it? Don't disagree. What else do people have to work with but things of the earth?

CONSTANTINE

Yet, he tells me, Christianity has survived.

EUSEBIUS

For that we thank God and, of course, you.

(to audience)

Oh, hear me. This man, Flavius Constantine, exalted his earthly life with holy acts so numerous --

CONSTANTINE

-- But mine was not, I admit, a perfect life.

(to audience)

And now, toward my end -- oh, how heavily my sins, my few sins --

EUSEBIUS

-- Very few, as an emperor's life goes.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, but how heavily they weigh upon me -- and one that seems beyond any hope of ... of forgiveness.

(LIGHTS come up on his eldest son, CRISPUS,  
a proud young Caesar)

CONSTANTINE

(sees him; startled)  
Crispus!

EUSEBIUS

It is him -- your first son! Oh, miraculous event!

CONSTANTINE

(points)  
Yes, there! Alive again. Suddenly, I feel sicker -- much sicker than I did.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, amiable and intrepid youth! Image of your own blessed father! Yet a sinner, like us all.

CRISPUS

Not enough of one for my fate. How, Father, could you have had me executed?

CONSTANTINE

You know the answer.

CRISPUS

Not answer enough. Wasn't I, not only your son, but your closest ally?

CONSTANTINE

You were.

CRISPUS

And so like-minded that I could have been your greatest successor?

CONSTANTINE

The prospect overwhelms me. Leave me, please.

EUSEBIUS

He has much to do.

CRISPUS

And I have much to ask.

CONSTANTINE

Not now. Later. Much later.

EUSEBIUS

Come back again, good and noble Caesar.

CRISPUS

I will prove my worth -- and be more generous to him than he was to me. But I will return when I sense the time is right. Yes, I will be back!

(LIGHTS go down on him)

CONSTANTINE

Gone? Is he gone?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, gentle Emperor, gone. Do not trouble your mind further.

CONSTANTINE

But --

EUSEBIUS

-- Remember, mighty Augustus, even mortal sins are forgiven by the sacred rite of baptism.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, or so I believe.

(to audience)

And what do you believe? I will go on. I will unfold the tale of my life. Oh, how did I survive so long when even my early memories contain the first threat to my life. Yet that's how things were in those days, quite savage. So savage we sought safety for ourselves -- and justice, yes, I will say justice -- in the death of others. As I look back, I realize I was fortunate, fortunate indeed, even to live and reign at all.

EUSEBIUS

And, needless to say, regent of Christ, so was the holy Catholic church.

(to audience)

In fact, where would we have been without him? Still, I'm sure, condemned to be torn limb from limb by the beasts of the arena, burned alive, or cut to pieces and thrown into the ocean as food for fish.

CONSTANTINE

May I?

EUSEBIUS

Please. But, oh, even to imagine a world without you!

CONSTANTINE

Thank you.

(to audience)

The danger began with great news for my father, Flavius Constantius.

EUSEBIUS

Exceptional father!

(to audience)

He did not persecute. But unlike his twice-blessed son, he merely tolerated Christians -- and, sad to say, he did knock down some churches.

CONSTANTINE

In his time, he was as great as you had. I will go on.

(to audience)

He was named Caesar of Gaul and Britain by Diocletian, who had ruled as supreme Augustus for many years and had a great talent for organization. He had divided the empire into many dioceses and had put them under the rule of a tetrarchy, consisting of two Augusti and two more junior Caesars to help them. He thought the job of ruling the empire was too much for one person; I guess he never imagined someone like me would come along.

When he first divided his rule, he selected Maximian, an officer of peasant birth --

EUSEBIUS

-- who hated us and took delight in torturing and executing us!

CONSTANTINE

As many before me did. He was appointed Caesar and then elevated to co-Augustus with Diocletian, who didn't have a son and also adopted him as his own. This Maximian would, much later in my life, attempt to usurp my power.

(LIGHTS come up on MAXIMIAN, an older but still strong emperor, with a wily look; HE wears a sword)

EUSEBIUS

Look!

(crosses himself)

Oh, dear God in heaven, it's Maximian -- brought back without merit!

(to audience)

Woe unto the persecutors! Oh, how he relished our blood and death!

MAXIMIAN

You mocked the ancient Gods -- crime enough to die. And so eager were many of your faith for heaven that they invited death -- indeed, often courted it like eager lovers.

(to audience)

Diocletian was Jovius, the deputy of Jupiter, king of the gods, and I, Maximian, was the deputy of Hercules, the son of Jupiter, a god who did his best for the welfare of mankind, regardless of what this Christian says.

CONSTANTINE

You up from the grave, too, Maximian?

MAXIMIAN

Yes, one of the murdered.

CONSTANTINE

You deserved your fate.

MAXIMIAN

No, no, I of all people, deserved to live -- to live and to rule.

CONSTANTINE

A conviction you only share with yourself. Silence. This is my night.

MAXIMIAN

Then why am I here? I will have my say.

(to audience)

Listen carefully. You will know the man he is. And a man he killed.

CONSTANTINE

I did not kill you.

MAXIMIAN

That is correct.

(to audience)

He was kind enough to allow me the manner of my death.

CONSTANTINE

Sit, or die again.

(reaches for his knife)

I am still fearless.

MAXIMIAN

(grasps handle of his sword)

As I am. But I choose to watch -- and have my say in time.

CONSTANTINE

If you must.

(to audience)

Ah, they just keep popping up. Yet I will go on. My father's elevation came when Diocletian decided to choose a Caesar for each of them to help rule the empire. He named as his Caesar in the East Galerius --

EUSEBIUS

-- Oh, how that name curdles my soul! He is the evil one who drove Diocletian to persecute and --

CONSTANTINE

-- Please, when we get to that part!

EUSEBIUS

Yes, greatest of the Augusti!

## CONSTANTINE

To strengthen their ties, Diocletian married him to his daughter, Valeria. Now, this Galerius was the son of a barbarian priestess and a soldier with a reputation for brutality. One day he would also plot against my young life. The saving news came when Diocletian chose my father as Caesar in the West and married him to his step-daughter, Theodora.

## MAXIMIAN

(rises; to audience)

It's true! His own father was selected to assist me with the rule of the Western Empire. Yet his son, this incarnation of ambition, wrapped in the cloak of an impious religion, would be so ungrateful that --

## CONSTANTINE

-- As you yourself assured them, your time will come. Then they can decide on my merits, as well as yours.

(to audience)

I remember how happy my father was. After all, he had begun, I will admit, as a peasant himself and he had moved up through the ranks of the army. Well, what of it? By that time most emperors, including Diocletian himself, came from a peasant background and rose up through the army. The rumor was, in fact, that in those days every soldier kept a purple cape, which, I'm told, is a color you call crimson, tucked away, in case the honor of being acclaimed emperor should by some chance fall to him.

I also remember how sad my mother, Helena, was when Diocletian insisted that my father divorce her and take the wife deemed more suited to his new station. Helena was, I later learned, also of humble origin; she was, in fact, an innkeeper's daughter and, at times, a barmaid. My father had met her when he was on a campaign.

## EUSEBIUS

(to audience; refers to CONSTANTINE)

Yet her kind son would one day raise her up again, and she would become a saintly woman who built many churches, especially in the Holy Land. Count among them the magnificent Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and another splendid one on the Mount of Olives, which is, as I'm sure you know, the sacred place of Christ's Ascension. Oh, holy, holy woman!

(to CONSTANTINE)

Heaven welcomed her, I know it! There is also a high place for her with our Savior!

CONSTANTINE

Thank you, your Consideration. She built as many as I could afford.  
(to audience)

Now, some friendly souls tried to find a bit of royal heritage for her, but none of it seemed to stick. I myself, as he said, raised her from obscurity about 30 years after the divorce, and I gave her the title of Augusta -- Helena Augusta! And she actually became a great help to me. In particular, she advised me about a subject I can barely speak of without fury, fury and remorse -- the unforgivable misconduct of my second wife, Fausta, who was ...

(points to Maximian)  
... his faithless daughter.

MAXIMIAN

Yes, she was my daughter!  
(to audience)  
And faithless she was, even to me!  
(to CONSTANTINE)  
You convinced her to betray me!

CONSTANTINE

If responding properly to the truth is betrayal.  
(looks around)  
Will Fausta appear, too? Fausta? No? At least, not yet!  
(to MAXIMIAN)  
I will get to the unforgivable injuries she inflicted on me. For now, be silent.  
(to audience)

When my father was named Caesar, Diocletian asked that I be sent to his court, no doubt as a hostage to ensure my father's loyalty. I was innocent then -- so innocent that once, when we visited Maximian's palace, I had to pose for a painting with the families of the two Augusti. The artist liked Maximian's daughter and asked her to hold out a helmet to me. I remember she was so small and it was so heavy that she could hardly lift it. How cute she looked then -- and how unsuspecting I was.

MAXIMIAN

And I, too. I did not know then that she would --

CONSTANTINE

-- Sit.  
(to audience)  
It was during my twelve years in the royal entourage that I became aware of my special capacities. I learned that I was strong, skillful in arms, and, as my playmates discovered, intrepid. I may not have applied myself to my intellectual studies as much as my teachers wanted me to, but I ...

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... had a reason -- a very clear vision of who I wanted to be: a great soldier like my father. And I succeeded. In fact, by the time I reached my teens the barbarians had already discovered my capacities in several battles. I even had the pleasure of throwing a couple of their young princes to the lions.

EUSEBIUS

Ah, far better to feed barbarians than Christians to those sharp-toothed monsters!

(to audience)

It was about that time that I saw his majestic presence for the first time. He was traveling in the royal entourage, and I observed that he had grown from childhood to adolescence. What an impressive young man he appeared to be. Even then celestial light seemed to radiate from him.

CONSTANTINE

You are too kind.

(to audience)

Oh, the things I witnessed during those years at court! One event that affected me deeply occurred at the royal palace of Nicomedia, the city from which Diocletian ruled. He and Galerius were sacrificing to the gods to obtain omens for a war against Persia. When the soothsayers cut open the sacrificial animals and examined their livers, they didn't see the markings they expected to find. The chief soothsayer said the sacrifice wasn't working because profane people were present. These, it turned out, were some Christian palace officials, who had been crossing themselves for protection against what they considered an evil practice that was directed toward demons. Diocletian got very angry and ordered them to sacrifice or be flogged.

EUSEBIUS

At that moment, he became a persecutor! An evil persecutor of God's Church!

CONSTANTINE

Yes. But remember: he had been tolerant of the Christians for nearly twenty years. It was Galerius --

EUSEBIUS

-- Oh, that fanatical pagan!

CONSTANTINE

As well as a most unhappy man, who persuaded Diocletian to take further steps.

EUSEBIUS

And the lord took vengeance on him! His bowels rotted, flies swarmed over his body --

CONSTANTINE

-- My good Bishop, please, calm down. I will get to his illness in time.

EUSEBIUS

But they must know what his foul advice brought upon us. The Great Persecution!

(to audience)

Diocletian posted an edict commanding that all copies of the Holy Scriptures be burned and all the Catholic churches be torn down. The next day another edict was posted that deprived all Christians of any official rank. One courageous Christian tore it down. He was tortured and put to death.

CONSTANTINE

May I tell the story, Eusebius? Great a historian as you are, I have a certain advantage. I was there.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, my Imperial Majesty.

(sits)

Please, I beg you to go on.

CONSTANTINE

Not long afterward, a fire occurred at the palace. The Christians were accused of starting it to kill Diocletian and Galerius. The Christians in the imperial household were tortured to force them to reveal information. Then they were executed.

EUSEBIUS

Even their holy bishop was executed -- their bishop!

CONSTANTINE

Within two weeks another fire broke out in the palace, and an edict was sent out that --

EUSEBIUS

-- commanded the arrest of all bishops and priests.

CONSTANTINE

The emperors believed the Christians were provoking the ancient gods and that, as a result, great harm would befall the empire. So they were determined to turn them into good pagans.

EUSEBIUS

And for that hopeless goal thousands were tortured and died.

(to audience)

Let me tell you about one form of torture used by the enemies of God. It is called slow burning.

The victims were tortured and then bound. Now, a small flame was applied to their feet, until it tore the skin from their bones. Next, torches were applied to one area and then another, until not an unburned spot remained on their bodies. And, while this evil madness was proceeding, the faces of these holy martyrs were splashed with cold water and their mouths moistened, so they wouldn't die too quickly. Death would only come long into the day when the fire reached their vital parts. The persecutors, not satisfied even with this, had a great fire built and the bodies were heaped on it. Last of all this horror, their bones were collected, ground into powder, and thrown into rivers, lakes, and the sea.

CONSTANTINE

All too true, all too sorrowful. Yet an emperor is an emperor --

MAXIMIAN

-- who has the welfare of Empire and his subjects at heart.

EUSEBIUS

Never in this --

MAXIMIAN

-- Come, come. By and large the only ones killed were those who proved especially provocative.

EUSEBIUS

Can faith be provocative?

MAXIMIAN

Yours? All too often.

CONSTANTINE

Enough! Please, our minutes here are racing by.

(to audience)

I can, at least, say with pride that my father was not completely obedient to the edicts.

EUSEBIUS

A redeeming merit, but nothing like you, nothing --

CONSTANTINE

-- Yes, yes.

(to audience)

Now, when Diocletian had been Senior Augustus for more than twenty years, he became seriously ill.

EUSEBIUS

The wrath of God was finally upon him.

CONSTANTINE

He recovered but had been greatly weakened and announced that he wished to retire. He abdicated, and, at his request, Maximian, his co-Augustus, also abdicated.

MAXIMIAN

The beginning of my troubles. I should never have done it.

CONSTANTINE

He was wise to insist on it.

(to audience)

He didn't want him to cause trouble among their successors.

MAXIMIAN

I would have been noble.

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps, but never with me.

(to audience)

In their places, Diocletian promoted their former Caesars to the rank of Augusti. Unfortunately for me, Galerius now ruled the East. My father was supreme in the West. Two new Caesars were appointed to assist them, and so the tetrarchy was preserved. I might have been nominated as one of the new Caesars, but, to my own dismay and that of many others present, I was passed over. The excuse was that I was still too young.

EUSEBIUS

Even then you would have ruled more wisely than any of them.

CONSTANTINE

I am tempted to share your opinion.

(to audience)

Unfortunately, I now found myself at the mercy of Galerius, who, I knew, did not trust me or my destiny.

MAXIMIAN

With ample reason.

CONSTANTINE

Most amply of all he should not have trusted you ...

(to audience)

... as time would reveal.

My suspicions about Galerius were confirmed when my father, who became ill and began to think he might be near his end, requested that I be sent to him. Galerius denied his request. He was obviously afraid that, if I was present when my father died, I might be acclaimed in his place.

MAXIMIAN

A not unreasonable concern, given your ambitious nature.

CONSTANTINE

Not my nature, but the good judgement of my father's army.

(to audience)

He continued to act friendly toward me, but I could sense that there was treachery in his heart. My father sent more requests, saying he wanted to see me before he died. Galerius finally realized that continuing to refuse could lead to civil war. So at last he granted me permission to depart.

I didn't waste a moment. I knew Galerius usually made all of his decisions in the morning. Then he would feast. He let it be known that any decisions he made after he began to indulge were not to be acted on. What, I wondered, might he decide the next morning?

As I had guessed, he changed his mind. But, to his surprise, I was already gone. I learned later that he sent a troop of cavalry to bring me back. But I had anticipated his change of heart and did something I regretted, but found necessary -- a trap of circumstance I found myself doomed to so often in my life. At every post, I slashed the tendons of the horses. So my pursuers couldn't keep up with me.

MAXIMIAN

Ruthless, ruthless even as a youth.

EUSEBIUS

Given the mind of Galerius, most would say judicious.

CONSTANTINE

I did no more than I had to.

(to audience)

Soon, I reached my father. He was at Boulogne, preparing to cross over to Britain, where a rebellion had taken place. I joined the expedition. The campaign was swift and decisive....

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... Victory was ours. Afterward, we returned to York. Then it happened -- the thing that only happens to a son once in his life. My father became very ill and, on July 25, 306, he died. In his last moments, he entrusted to me the care of his wife -- and the six children he had with her.

EUSEBIUS

And he was very good to them all. He provided them with educations and heaped honors on them.

MAXIMIAN

How many did he kill?

EUSEBIUS

Not one.

CONSTANTINE

That's right. Not one. They were younger and, I'm pleased to say, submitted to my leadership with gratitude. What a thing it is for a son to know that the man he has looked up to all his life is gone, and, harder yet, that he must now become him, at least, in his mind. But for me I also had to become him in the Empire.

I also knew that, given the mind of Galerius, I had to reign if I wanted to live. Yet I told the army that I had no intention of influencing their decision and secluded myself with becoming modesty.

But I was confident of the outcome. The army of Britain proclaimed me Augustus -- Augustus in my father's place of Gaul, Britain, and Spain. I accepted their nomination. Spain, which had only recently come under my father's rule, I must admit, rejected me.

EUSEBIUS

In time wisdom would prevail and it would also be yours to rule.

CONSTANTINE

Yes. But don't let me get ahead of myself.

(to audience)

Upon my acclamation by the troops, I sent word to Galerius, along with an image of myself wreathed in laurel. He was now Senior Augustus. My father had attained that title as well, and I might have claimed it for myself, but I decided to be modest and claimed the lesser title of Caesar. But even that wasn't enough to appease Galerius. Word came back that the news of my acclamation had made him furious. He considered it, in fact, a usurpation and talked about appointing someone else -- no doubt someone he knew he could control, but then he reconsidered. He had enough to worry about without provoking a war with me....

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... Three months later he was made furious for another reason. Severus, the Caesar he and Diocletian had appointed in the West, was conducting a census in Italy. The most provocative thing is, he had the audacity to conduct it in Rome itself, where the people had enjoyed a tax-free status for centuries. The troops there rebelled and proclaimed Maxentius ...

(refers to MAXIMIAN)

... his son, Caesar.

MAXIMIAN

Maxentius! The son who would betray me!

CONSTANTINE

Betrayal seems to run in your family.

MAXIMIAN

As if not in yours.

CONSTANTINE

Quiet, traitor.

(to audience)

Maxentius asked Galerius to recognize him, but Galerius refused -- refused even though he had married him to his daughter. He felt another usurpation had taken place and, son-in-law or not, ordered Severus to attack and depose him. In the face of this danger, Maxentius proclaimed himself Augustus. Now, much as he ...

(indicates MAXIMIAN)

... might not want to admit it, Maxentius was actually a bastard.

MAXIMIAN

The same description could apply to you!

(to audience)

A soldier on the move can't keep track of all his liaisons.

CONSTANTINE

I did of mine.

MAXIMIAN

(to audience)

He was always odd that way -- able to control his desires, even as a young man. He put all of his energy into his ambitions!

CONSTANTINE

You mean to say, I put it to positive use.

(to audience)

To legitimize his elevation, Maxentius proclaimed Maximian, who was never happy in retirement --

MAXIMIAN

-- Augustus for the second time!

CONSTANTINE

Galerius felt betrayed by him.

(points to MAXIMIAN)

And he had reason for concern.

MAXIMIAN

You bet he did! I was a veteran of many, many campaigns, and the troops knew me well. Meanwhile, his man Severus was a slave of pleasure. I was able to inspire my son's army -- and win over a great number of Severus' troops. So many, in fact, that Severus fled to Ravenna even before our armies engaged. I pursued him right to the walls but knew a siege would be difficult. So I decided to wage a psychological war against him and persuaded him to surrender, on the promise that his life would be spared.

CONSTANTINE

Poor, unfortunate Severus put himself in his hands and was sent off to prison. The fool. When news of the disaster reached Galerius, he prepared to attack him and his son. And when he entered Italy, Severus learned what perfidy is. Tell them.

MAXIMIAN

He was allowed to open his veins. But Galerius had been warned what would happen to him!

CONSTANTINE

Yet you had given your word. You broke it to Severus, as you would break it to me.

(to audience)

At the time, I was settling into a just and generous rule in Gaul and Britain. I followed my father's principles and did not persecute the Christians but allowed everyone -- pagans and Christians alike -- freedom of choice. With apologies to Eusebius, I confess that I myself still gave my allegiance to Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun, as well as to the Preservers, Mars and Jupiter.

EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

Yet even then Christ had his eyes on him.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Soon, he would appear to you and you would be converted. Oh, blessed, blessed vision in the sky -- and by it redemption of the Catholic church!

CONSTANTINE

The most important event of my life. But in time.

(to audience)

Now, Maximian contacted me and asked --

MAXIMIAN

-- if he would join us in the war against Galerius. And I did not come empty handed. I offered to elevate him to the title of Augustus, which I knew he craved. I also came with the promise of my beautiful daughter, Fausta, in marriage --

CONSTANTINE

-- Fausta! Dear Fausta! How time can bend even the straightest tree!

MAXIMIAN

Bend us all.

CONSTANTINE

(to MAXIMIAN)

And how complex the grain is in an old tree.

MAXIMIAN

I was straightforward enough with you.

(to audience)

Little did I know that one day he would grant me --

CONSTANTINE

-- You brought your death upon yourself.

MAXIMIAN

I thought you had been killed by the barbarians.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

A tale he invented to gain mastery over my troops and my treasury.

MAXIMIAN

No, no, I was convinced --

CONSTANTINE

-- Of your own delusions!

MAXIMIAN

But to sentence me to death! Couldn't you have found a more merciful fate for an aged man, and the father of your wife, your own father-in-law?

CONSTANTINE

Even she agreed that I had no choice but to condemn you.

MAXIMIAN

How is such a thing possible?

CONSTANTINE

It is true.

EUSEBIUS

And, let us never forget, Maximian, your days as a persecutor.

MAXIMIAN

I only listened to Diocletian.

EUSEBIUS

And who did Galerius listen to? Can the martyrs hear your excuses? They have no ears, no life. Oh, woe unto the persecutors! Woe unto --

CONSTANTINE

-- We know and we weep. Yet might not God's mercy extend even to --

EUSEBIUS

-- the persecutors? No, that cannot be. No forgiveness, ever!

CONSTANTINE

I wish to go on with my life.

MAXIMIAN

What about my version of it?

CONSTANTINE

I don't believe you've been invited to give it.

MAXIMIAN

(refers to EUSEBIUS)

But, regardless of his exaggerations, certainly the audience wants to hear what was done to me -- done to me not only by you but by my son, my own son.

(to audience)

When Maxentius no longer needed me, he betrayed me. Betrayed me! He took away my title, and, when I appealed to the troops, they chose him. Why? Because he was more generous with them. Too generous ever to be called wise.

(indicates CONSTANTINE)

And I, with innocent trust, fled to him for protection.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

What he says is true.

MAXIMIAN

Thank you, at least, for that.

CONSTANTINE

Resume your seat. I know a son can be treacherous. Out of that root also grew the greatest tragedy of my life.

(to audience)

I welcomed this man and gave him a high place in my court. In fact, at times I let him appear at my right side. Yet he would prove treasonous.

MAXIMIAN

You are mistaken.

CONSTANTINE

Of course, I am. Do not arouse my anger.

MAXIMIAN

What more do I have to fear from you? A man can only be killed once.

CONSTANTINE

Can he? What is your evidence?

(MAXIMIAN takes his seat again)

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

(to audience)

I can't stand when people won't admit why they had to be killed. When he called on me, I decided to accept his offers. I knew that Galerius, although he had recognized my appointment as Caesar, might one day revoke it. And here I had a chance to be promoted by a man who had one day ruled beside Diocletian himself.

MAXIMIAN

Beside the great Diocletian -- whose demand for my resignation provoked my ruin. Ah, how often the favors of the powerful prove to be a mixed blessing. Or, should I say, a mixed curse?

CONSTANTINE

When he offered me Fausta, she was very young, but I could tell she would grow into a beauty. My marriage to her also recommended itself for a practical reason. By it, I would become part of --

MAXIMIAN

-- my royal lineage of Hercules.

CONSTANTINE

And then my credentials to rule would be unassailable. I agreed to divorce the bride of my youth, Minervina, with whom I had one son, my dear, dear Crispus. Crispus! How the name haunts me!

(LIGHT begins to glow and reveals CRISPUS)

No, no! Do not come back, Son! Grant me peace!

(turns eyes and hands upward)

Oh, holy Savior, grant me peace!

EUSEBIUS

Be calm, my blessed Emperor. Remember all the good you did.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, the good I did!

EUSEBIUS

(to CRISPUS)

Please, not now, I beg you.

(LIGHT fades down on CRISPUS)

EUSEBIUS (CONT'D)

He is gone again, Majesty.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, thank you. But for how long?

(to audience)

Let me go on.

(refers to MAXIMIAN)

To show my appreciation, I assured him that I endorsed his and his son's rule at Rome.

MAXIMIAN

What an assurance! When Galerius moved on us, he withheld his aid -- just decided to sit things out. Well, as it turns out, we didn't need him. Although Galerius was a better soldier than Severus, he didn't do much better. In fact, when he got within a few miles of Rome, he too became concerned about the loyalty of his troops. And the high walls Aurelian had built around the city apparently seemed higher and higher to him. To make a long story short, he made a quick retreat, ravaging the blessed soil of Italy so he couldn't be followed. Sad to say, he got away with his life. Now, my son and I were secure in our triumph. And how success lets out a man's true character. Within months of the victory, my thankless son proclaimed himself sole Augustus in the West.

CONSTANTINE

Obviously, he never intended to share power with you.

MAXIMIAN

I realized that too late. I was terribly offended -- and infuriated. In fact, when I denounced him in front of the troops, I tore his purple robe right off of him.

CONSTANTINE

But the troops knew you all too well.

MAXIMIAN

No, no! He merely had youth -- and more money for bribery -- on his side. What could I do but flee?

CONSTANTINE

And I welcomed you -- even though I knew Galerius and your son would be upset. Not only ...

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... welcomed you, but heaped honors on you.

(to audience)

I gave him everything but the power he still yearned for.

MAXIMIAN

Yes, but --

CONSTANTINE

-- Enough!

(to audience)

Galerius, after his shameful retreat, asked Diocletian to come out of retirement long enough to intervene. There was a conference to which Maximian was invited. Diocletian persuaded him to retire formally for a second time. Painful as ever, wasn't it?

MAXIMIAN

Wouldn't it have been for you?

CONSTANTINE

I never had the experience.

(to audience)

Still unwilling to recognize Maxentius, Galerius now chose Licinius, a former military companion of his, to succeed Severus in the West. He was given the title of Junior Augustus. Maximin -- not Maximian or Maxentius -- was now Caesar in the East. A little confusing? It was for many people. Listen, and you'll sort things out, especially since, as my conquests multiply, things will get much simpler

MAXIMIAN

Deadly simple.

CONSTANTINE

As if you, or any of them, would have spared me.

(to audience)

I was again recognized but only as Caesar. Maxentius was ignored as a usurper.

MAXIMIAN

Which he no doubt was.

CONSTANTINE

And you would attempt to be.

(to audience)

Maximin and I weren't willing to settle for the titles we were given, and by the spring Galerius agreed to grant us the title of Augustus, too. Now, four Augusti were recognized to rule, and Maxentius was recognized as nothing at all.

MAXIMIAN

A trace of justice, but a mere trace.

CONSTANTINE

Amid all the title switching, I received excellent news from Spain. It had revolted against Maxentius and wished to accept my rule. Now my domains were the same of those of my father.

(refers to MAXIMIAN)

It was at this time that he showed his ingratitude

MAXIMIAN

Not true!

CONSTANTINE

Oh, no? Let them hear.

(to audience)

He embarked on the piece of treachery that would, I'm sorry to say, cost him his life.

MAXIMIAN

I was worried.

(to audience)

Now that he was recognized as Augustus by Galerius, he didn't need me. My son didn't need me. I felt threatened!

CONSTANTINE

Nothing could excuse your behavior.

(to audience)

I left my capital, at Arles, to repel an incursion of the Bructeri, a German tribe who lived along the Rhine. No sooner was I gone than word reached me that he was spreading the lie that I had been killed.

MAXIMIAN

It wasn't a lie! I really thought you were dead!

CONSTANTINE

Of course, you did. Sit down. Or I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

MAXIMIAN

No, not that. I don't want to hurry back to the grave anymore than you do.

(sits down)

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Regardless of what he says, he used the opportunity to proclaim himself emperor in my place. Imagine the old ingrate! Well, he didn't know who he was fooling with. As soon as I heard what he had done, I returned with my soldiers with such alacrity that he didn't even have time to field an army. How did we do it? We built rafts, gathered together barges and floated down the Soane and the Rhone. And, I might add, my troops were so eager and loyal that they even rowed with the current to speed us on our way. Result: I arrived so suddenly he fled --

MAXIMIAN

-- retreated --

CONSTANTINE

-- fled to Marseilles. I pursued him and began an assault. My ladders were too short, but the troops defending the city were unwilling to fight for the likes of him.

MAXIMIAN

You bribed them.

CONSTANTINE

I did no such thing. I didn't have to. They opened the gates of their own accord.

MAXIMIAN

He stripped --

CONSTANTINE

-- the old traitor of the purple he had donned and brought him back to Arles. I told Fausta he could no longer be trusted. Our of regard for my safety, she put her love for him second.

MAXIMIAN

I don't believe it! You forced her!

CONSTANTINE

No. I didn't have to. How faithful she was then!

(LIGHTS come up on FAUSTA)

FAUSTA

I was always faithful, Constantine!

CONSTANTINE

Fausta? Somehow, I knew you'd arrive.

(to audience)

Once a man marries, can he ever truly leave his wife behind?

FAUSTA

Not this wife.

(to MAXIMIAN)

Father!

MAXIMIAN

My dear child. Is he telling the truth?

CONSTANTINE

(to FAUSTA)

Tell him! Didn't you agree that he had to die?

MAXIMIAN

He made you hide your true feelings, didn't he?

FAUSTA

He convinced me to make a mistake. I'm sorry.

MAXIMIAN

Then you --

FAUSTA

-- should have known that if he could condemn you, he could do the same to me.

MAXIMIAN

He condemned you, too?

FAUSTA

Yes, father. The brute!

MAXIMIAN

Forgive me. I didn't know. I was dead by then.

(to CONSTANTINE)

You killed my daughter, too?

CONSTANTINE

She proved untrustworthy. Apparently, it runs in the blood.

MAXIMIAN

You dare to insult --

CONSTANTINE

-- Calm down, old man.  
(draws his knife)  
I am still valiant.

MAXIMIAN

But where is my sword?  
(finds it)  
Ah, here --

CONSTANTINE

-- It's good you're slow. It has preserved you. Have a seat with your daughter and let me continue.

MAXIMIAN

But --

CONSTANTINE

(brandishes knife)  
-- I said, have a seat.  
(to FAUSTA)  
That goes for you, too -- my lovely adulteress.  
(gestures to audience)  
This is my time to explain myself to them. Watch if you want. Or return to your death. But don't interrupt me anymore!

FAUSTA

I wouldn't leave for anything. Murderer!

CONSTANTINE

Justice, my dear, is not murder.

FAUSTA

Who's justice? I want to tell them my side of the story.

CONSTANTINE

I doubt that I shall long prevent you. But not now.

FAUSTA

I will do so when I choose.

(to MAXIMIAN)

Father, how long since I've seen you!

MAXIMIAN

And I you, child.

(embraces her)

How much I've missed you!

FAUSTA

Yes, Father, we've missed each other.

(sits beside him)

I must tell you how he had me killed.

CONSTANTINE

Not yet! I will get to it, I promise you.

(to audience)

So many interruptions! I don't know how the author can expect me to go on. Yet I will.

(puts knife back in sheath)

When I gave him the choice of his death, he hung himself.

MAXIMIAN

I can still feel the rope -- agh, agh!

FAUSTA

Poor daddy! How awful! I was so sad you had to die.

CONSTANTINE

I consoled her as best I could. She had proved to be my wife more than his daughter.

FAUSTA

Yet you killed me, too! Oh, what a dreadful death.

(grasps her own throat)

Agh! I can feel the hot steam now! Choked, I was choked to death like my father but in a different way! Not from a rope but from hot steam! I went to my bath and he -- my own husband! -- ordered it to be overheated. The steam rose up. I tried to escape but the door was locked. And I choked, choked to death on the steam! Not a husband but only a fiend would contrive such a death -- and for the woman who loved you -- and still might!

CONSTANTINE

Why did I suspect you wouldn't restrain yourself?  
(to audience)

I know what she said sounds cruel, but when you hear what she did to me, you'll understand. I have always been kind.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, yes, if he had any fault, it was his kindness. People took advantage. Even court officials cheated with impunity. Yes, he was much too kind.

FAUSTA

Who are you kidding?

MAXIMIAN

That's what I'd like to know.  
(to audience)

What you just heard is an indication of what he really liked about the Christians. They were taught to be docile, to obey -- and, best of all, to forgive -- yes, to be good slaves one and all.

EUSEBIUS

To forgive is not slavery but God-like. To be docile can be prudent. And to obey such a one as he, wise, wise always.

CONSTANTINE

And, besides, what he says isn't true. I really came to believe in the Christian God.  
(to EUSEBIUS)

You know that.

EUSEBIUS

Know it beyond any doubt, mighty Emperor.  
(refers to audience)

Why not give them proof of your great kindness?

CONSTANTINE

I was about to. Kindness despite his attempt at my usurpation.  
(to audience)

That I granted him the right to choose how he would die was considered, at the time, too kind to be believed. Most would have immediately had their way with him. Yet I was so well thought of that an even kinder tale was spread that I had pardoned him, but he, thinking he was unworthy to live, killed himself.

MAXIMIAN

I might have done that.

CONSTANTINE

You were never the man for such a sacrifice.

(to audience)

The most interesting version was told by good Lactantius.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, how the name thrills me. He was a fellow Christian author -- and how he could describe the suffering our martyrs went through!

CONSTANTINE

A most blessed man.

(to audience)

I myself hired him as a tutor for my son Crispus, and he was always generous in spirit toward me. But he did have a lively imagination. I don't know why, but he wrote that I had spared Maximian's life and he couldn't forgive my generosity. So he talked Fausta into reducing the number of guards at my bedroom. As the story goes, she pretended to agree but told me about his plan.

MAXIMIAN

You did?

FAUSTA

Dad, it's only a story.

CONSTANTINE

I supposedly put a eunuch in my place. He got past the remaining guards by telling them he had some important news for me. He entered my bedroom and, he thought, stabbed me right in the heart. When he came out, bragging about what he had done, I was waiting for him.

MAXIMIAN

I wish I'd had time for a scheme like that before I agreed to kill myself. I wouldn't have been fooled by any eunuch.

CONSTANTINE

Let me be too kind to dispute that.

(to audience)

I resumed my tolerant rule. Meanwhile, in the East, both Galerius and Maximin began to prosecute the Christians again. Then Galerius developed a mortal and terrible disease.

EUSEBIUS

God on high took vengeance on him!

CONSTANTINE

Even he might have thought so, because now he published an edict of toleration.

EUSEBIUS

Too late for forgiveness!

CONSTANTINE

Is it ever too late?

EUSEBIUS

I was only referring to him, holy Emperor.

(to audience)

Soon, he died! Died, by the will of God, like all of the persecutors!

FAUSTA

Like all of us must, dear Bishop.

CONSTANTINE

After his death, Licinius and Maximin divided his dominions. Their two armies faced off but didn't engage. Now, a curious thing happened. Soon, Maximin, ceased his persecutions.

EUSEBIUS

He knew Galerius had been punished by Christ himself.

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps, he did. At this time, I also began to show more interest in the Christian God. But now I had to turn my attention to my emerging confrontation with ...

(points to MAXIMIAN)

... his son. Not long after his death, Maxentius began to provoke me. Pretending to venerate his father, despite the fact that he himself had deposed him, he issued coins to honor him -- and, as an added insult, coins to honor my own father. This last act of his was more treacherous than it seems. My father's second wife, Theodora, was his half-sister. So he could claim to be my father's brother by adoption. Remote as that relationship seems, he could use it to claim my dominions.

When he firmed up his position by a reconquest of Africa, I decided it would be prudent to make an ally out of Licinius, who was by then Augustus in the East. So I offered him my half-sister, Constantia, in marriage. In a way my plan backfired. Maximin, the other Augustus in the East, felt left out and made an alliance with Maxentius. But he would not intrude in the coming war....

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... It was finally provoked by another one of his insults. He commanded that all my statues and pictures at Rome be destroyed.

EUSEBIUS

Little did he know that even then he was ruling by the grace of your patience.

CONSTANTINE

That's correct.

(to audience)

You see, the Romans had grown to hate Maxentius. He had placed heavy new taxes on them, and, worse yet, he had become licentious. As a result, a secret embassy of senators had come to me and asked if I would remove him and reign in his place. It's true. So wise and merciful was my rule that, almost as suppliants, they invited me to become emperor of Italy and Africa. At the time, I thought it was prudent to decline.

MAXIMIAN

Prudent? I'd say plain cowardly.

CONSTANTINE

Never that -- as you know all too well.

(to audience)

Soon another attempt was made to persuade me. Maxentius did not persecute the Christians. But I had made them feel so welcome in my territories that not a few pilgrimaged to me and asked if I might extend my most blessed reign to Rome and his other dominions. Despite my deep sympathy for them, I still declined.

MAXIMIAN

Oh, modest, modest man! The soul of modesty! Isn't he, though?

FAUSTA

Not a trace of ambition.

EUSEBIUS

At times, too unambitious. He let you remain here and deserves, at least, your patience. Please, let him --

FAUSTA

-- He deserves nothing.

MAXIMIAN

Less than nothing.

## CONSTANTINE

Thank you for your effort, Eusebius. To go on.

(to audience)

I had, in truth, real concerns about an invasion. Would I have any more luck than Severus and Galerius before the high walls of Aurelian? Yet the man's insults continued to raise their foul plume from Rome. He actually began to describe himself as the only true emperor. Imagine that! The only one considered a usurper now claims to be the only true one. We others were, if anything at all, junior to him. Now, his insults sharpened into a real threat. News arrived that he had begun to assemble his troops and planned to invade Gaul through the province of Rhaetia. It is all well and good to be patient and weigh facts carefully. But all great men know they must finally act. I decided to strike first.

Now, intelligence reports told me that he had at his command about 170,000 infantry and 18,000 cavalry. Thankfully, many of them were garrisoned in Africa and other far-away dominions, but he could still field about half the total against me. I myself had only about 90,000 men on foot and 8,000 horse. And I could only use a fraction of them against him. I didn't dare leave my frontier along the Rhine unprotected, or the barbarians would be at my back.

As a result, I would be outnumbered by more than two to one. I knew only one consolation. My troops had been hardened by continual wars along the frontiers, while his had grown soft in the lap of Rome's luxuries. But, despite confidence in my troops, I still grew anxious.

## EUSEBIUS

You had no need for that. Christ would be with you.

## CONSTANTINE

I didn't know that yet. But soon I would.

(to audience)

And that brings me to the most momentous event of my life. I felt I could be victorious in human terms, but I knew Maxentius was devoted to magic and soothsaying. I needed something to combat the power of those things.

And it was then that the miraculous event occurred -- yes, miraculous -- vouchsafed to me by Jesus Christ himself. Yes, by a sign in the sky, the highest God, through his divine Son, selected me as his instrument on earth. It happened one day when I was out training my troops. I looked up at the sun and saw -- yes, saw, with my own eyes -- a golden cross appear before it, a special cross meant only for me.

(LABARUM illuminates brightly)

## EUSEBIUS

Christ be praised! God be praised! It was truly a sign for you from on high, worthy Emperor!

CONSTANTINE

I know, I know. There it was -- the gleaming cross, and above it were written the words "By this conquer." There can be no doubt that this miracle occurred.

EUSEBIUS

No doubt at all. You yourself told me that many of your troops also saw the divine sign.

MAXIMIAN

Come on. You were so worried about meeting my son in battle that you were seeing things.

EUSEBIUS

Only a died-in-the-wool pagan would say that.

MAXIMIAN

And proud to be one. All honor to the ancient gods -- the true protectors of the Empire!

EUSEBIUS

Blasphemy! Oh, horrible blasphemy!

CONSTANTINE

Don't pay any attention to him. You'll just get upset.

EUSEBIUS

But it's so maddening to --

CONSTANTINE

-- Please, calm down.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Now, it's true that some wondered if natural conditions might create such a cross of gold, much like a rainbow is made.

(seems to hear something OFF)

And the author is trying to tell me that there could be a scientific explanation. According to that piece of nonsense, what I saw was caused by ice crystals, instead of rain, falling across the sun. It's called, he says, the halo phenomenon. Well, I don't care about such things. I dismiss any such reservations as nonsense, even if he sends me back to the grave right now. Anyone who tries to explain away the miracle I saw simply wasn't there to witness its heavenly majesty. And I'll ...

## CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... share with you conclusive proof. That very night Jesus Christ appeared to me in my tent. Yes, Jesus Christ himself. He came to me, holding high in His hands the exact symbol I had seen in the sky. And He told me to use it as the new standard of my army.

Suddenly, everything I believed made sense to me. The Unconquered Son had sent me a sign by his own image -- a sign that from now on the Son of God, the God of the Christians, would be on my side.

## EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

What can I say? In time, he would realize that the Unconquered Sun has nothing to do with the Son of God. But why quibble? This is the blessed event that redeemed Christianity from its long martyrdom -- and made it triumphant in the Empire. Oh, wondrous event, holy event, God and Christ be praised for it! Naturally, our young hero wished to pay the greatest homage to it that he could.

## CONSTANTINE

That's right. The next day I summoned artificers in gold and gems to my tent and commanded them to make a large replica of the symbol, which I named the Labarum.

(points to Labarum)

It must be, I told them, a golden cross with the top curved over into a circle, all studded with precious stones, and with an equally splendid "X" over the lower part. The symbol in the sky, I explained, formed the Chi and Rho of the Greek alphabet, which are the first two letters of Christ's name. I also told them that, as soon as possible, I wanted to add a splendid banner to the crossbar with my image embroidered on it.

Then I went out and ordered my troops to paint the symbol on their shields, and I myself had it painted on my helmet. I now felt we were ready for battle.

## EUSEBIUS

Ready to march under the protection of Almighty God and his divine Son.

## CONSTANTINE

Yes, let proud Maxentius put his trust in the ancient gods! I now had a God on my side who, I was certain, was much more powerful.

## EUSEBIUS

Listen to this great man. Listen to him now. And venerate the moment -- for this celestial vision also marks the moment he became a Christian.

CONSTANTINE

Eusebius, may I qualify that just a bit?

EUSEBIUS

Of course. What matters is that his transformation truly began.

CONSTANTINE

Let me be totally honest with you. First, I wanted to wait to see how I would fare in the coming battle. And I had other reasons for moving slowly. I still -- I admit it -- had a lingering faith in the immortal gods of my ancestors. Yes, it's true. And I didn't want to insult them, lest I bring down their wrath on me and the Empire. In addition, all of the senate and most of the influential people were still pagans; I didn't want to offend them, at least, not yet. It would be much more diplomatic to say that from that day forward I favored the Christians and their God to the extent that seemed prudent.

EUSEBIUS

Even that, divine Emperor, was already more than we could hope for, given the evil behavior of many emperors before you. And how splendidly you would grow in your new faith.

CONSTANTINE

We will get to that. Now, it is time for my war with Maxentius.

MAXIMIAN

(to FAUSTA)

Did he defeat my son?

FAUSTA

Yes, Father.

MAXIMIAN

With a trick from heaven. Now, even the gods were against Maxentius. He deserved no better. Go on with the tale. I long to hear of his defeat.

CONSTANTINE

And his death.

(to audience)

Now, marching with the Labarum before my troops, I crossed the Alps and descended into Italy. I met some early resistance at Susa but quickly prevailed. Once the city surrendered, I ordered my troops to put out the fires and not to pillage. It was a Roman town, and I wished to plant the seeds of my rule. Now, I advanced on Turin. A large army came out to meet me, with ...

## CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... heavily armored cavalry. I instructed my troops as to how to deal with them. "Open the line," I said, "and let them rush past you. Then, when they are among you and their charge has lost its force, close in and beat them to death with clubs." The strategy worked. The cavalry perished, and soon the infantry was routed. We discovered that Turin had closed its gates to them, and we inflicted great slaughter before its walls. Word of my generosity had spread, and the city opened its gates to me. Soon, Milan was also mine.

## EUSEBIUS

Invincible under Christ -- you were invincible!

## CONSTANTINE

And so it seemed to me. I met the greatest resistance at Verona. There was a large army under the command of Ruricius Pompeianus, who was Maxentius's praetorian prefect. I knew I had to surround the city and crossed the river above it. He sent out troops to meet me and I routed them. He slipped out of the city for reinforcements. When he returned, I met him with only a small part of my army. The battle was desperate at times, and I myself engaged in it. Ruricius perished and soon after so did his reinforcements. We took so many prisoners that we ran out of handcuffs and made more out of their own swords. When my officers congratulated me on the victory, they were kind enough to request if, in the future, I would show greater concern for my own safety.

## EUSEBIUS

Yet the power of the sacred Labarum had proved itself to you!

## CONSTANTINE

More than enough. My troops had repeatedly carried it to whatever part of the field we were experiencing difficulties. And what miracles it performed! Time after time I saw immediately after its arrival the tide of battle turn our way.

## EUSEBIUS

Oh, wonderful symbol of Christ, our Lord. Oh, majestic sign from heaven! There can be no doubt. You, Constantine Augustus, had been chosen to be Christ's regent on earth!

## CONSTANTINE

All too generous Eusebius. Yet, as I witnessed the wonders the Labarum worked, I myself began to have such thoughts. I decided, in fact, that from now on, my army would carry it into every battle.

## EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

And, as a result, he would know only victory.

MAXIMIAN

You never once tasted defeat?

CONSTANTINE

Whose hands might inflict it?

(to audience)

Now, the way to Rome was open. The Aemilian and Flaminian highways provided an easy march there of about 400 miles.

FAUSTA

(to audience)

Oh, how I loved him then -- so brave, so noble. And he could march 400 miles. But he would change. Later on in his life he would wear fancy robes and expensive jewelry and, worst of all, he would become short tempered -- impatient with me and almost everyone else and at times frighteningly fierce.

EUSEBIUS

You must forgive him. He had to endure many, many years of stressful rule. And you have to admit that you yourself were not always perfect.

FAUSTA

What do you know? I loved him, and that should have been enough to save me. Didn't I, sweetheart?

CONSTANTINE

Nothing could save you from your sins against me -- against me and, yes, Crispus -- and against the laws of God himself!

FAUSTA

Listen to him. He thinks he's got a direct connection with the infinite. And he wouldn't be content with less. Yet he addresses you with such modesty.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Now that I'm back alive, gentle husband, would you kill me again? Or, after all these years, do you feel regret -- and perhaps some flicker of love and, if not love, at least, desire?

MAXIMIAN

Offer him nothing. Remember, he killed me, too.

FAUSTA

I offer him merely time for remorse and agony.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Despite all of my achievements and my good nature -- yes, my good nature -- I found no peace in my first life, and I can't even find it in my second one. Let me return to something much safer -- the war. I was always safe when at war.

Now, so swift was my movement toward Rome that, even as I neared it, Maxentius had yet to mobilize his troops. He had probably decided to depend once again on the high walls of Aurelian.

EUSEBIUS

And no doubt he was indulging in his licentious behavior.

(to audience)

Oh, wicked, wicked tyrant! Abomination of a man! There was not a dissolute act that he did not commit -- adulteries, rape, even separating wives from their husbands, and especially wives of Roman senators, and returning them after he had dishonored them.

MAXIMIAN

He did that?

EUSEBIUS

Yes.

MAXIMIAN

Ah, what a son. I grieve, not for his death, but his character. If I had been alive --

CONSTANTINE

-- What?

MAXIMIAN

I was never guilty of such things.

EUSEBIUS

Yet guilty of enough.

(to audience)

All could only cower before his godless son and endure his wickedness.

CONSTANTINE

Almost all.

MAXIMIAN

What do you mean, godless? Is not Jupiter god?

EUSEBIUS

No match for Christ ...  
(to audience)  
... as our great hero was learning.

CONSTANTINE

May I continue to learn?

EUSEBIUS

Please.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you.  
(to audience)

Back to Maxentius. As I approached, things began to heat up for him. I learned later that, during the chariot races presented to celebrate his accession, some citizens actually taunted him in his box by shouting "Constantine is invincible!"

EUSEBIUS

He would soon discover that they were correct, thank God.

CONSTANTINE

I moved my troops to within a few miles of Rome. I did not want to attempt a siege of the capital, not only because of the difficulties posed by the walls, but also out of respect for its ancient place in the annals of the Empire.

Maxentius was, by report to me, uncertain of what to do and asked the senate that the Sybilline Books be consulted.

EUSEBIUS

What a vain and foolish hope!

CONSTANTINE

At any rate, they agreed and the head of the soothsayers was summoned. He announced that the enemy of Rome would perish. Maxentius took that to mean that he would triumph and decided to take the field. He crossed the Tiber at the Milvian Bridge, destroying the end near the city, so that his army would know there could no retreat.

MAXIMIAN

What an idiot! I could have told him not to do that. You always leave yourself room for a tactical retreat.

EUSEBIUS

It does not matter. Nothing he could do would have saved him. The Highest God, God the most powerful, dragged your son away from the city as if with chains.

MAXIMIAN

A good general makes quick work of anybody's god.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, blasphemy! Blasphemy beneath even a pagan!

MAXIMIAN

If the lessons of experience can be called blasphemy.

CONSTANTINE

May I go on?

(to audience)

He was an idiot. He should have known he'd need a way to flee. Although I would be far outnumbered --

EUSEBIUS

-- He was now fighting under the invincible strength of the Labarum.

CONSTANTINE

I had positioned my troops in a defile about a mile from Rome. As I had guessed, Maxentius took the Flaminian Way along the Tiber. I sent some troops down along the Cassian Way to flank him and attack from his rear. He was hardly expert at the evolutions of troops in battle. My plan worked. His army fought well and many gained an honorable death; their bodies were found in the places where they had stood. Yet, after many thousands perished and hope was lost, the remainder made a disorderly retreat.

MAXIMIAN

You would have died beneath your cursed Labarum if I was in command of the troops.

CONSTANTINE

Blame your son that you weren't.

(to audience)

We followed, inflicting more slaughter. Knowledge that the bridge had been destroyed no doubt added to their hysteria. In desperation, he and his troops, with all their oxen and supply wagons, tried to get back into the city on a bridge they quickly made out of boats. But their weight was too great. Thousands drowned. Maxentius himself, while still mounted on his horse, was forced off the bridge by the desperate crowd. He quickly sank from the weight of his armor.

EUSEBIUS

As in the days of Moses when, as the holy scripture says, "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea, his chosen horsemen, even captains, they were sunk in the Red Sea, the deep covered them." So it was for Maxentius and all his throng.

CONSTANTINE

And now the true meaning of the oracle had been revealed.

MAXIMIAN

The enemy of Rome was dead.

CONSTANTINE

That's right. And he was your son.

MAXIMIAN

A sad fate, even for a son who betrays his father.

FAUSTA

He was my brother, and he was dead -- killed by my husband.

CONSTANTINE

You agreed at the time. He had to die -- or I might.

FAUSTA

(to MAXIMIAN)

He also put your son's two sons to death -- killed off his whole family!

CONSTANTINE

You know the same fate would have fallen on us if I had been defeated.

FAUSTA

He would not have killed his own sister.

CONSTANTINE

Believe as you wish, you would have been dead.

FAUSTA

And would be soon enough.

EUSEBIUS

Everything considered, our Emperor was, in victory, merciful. As proof, when the people of Rome demanded more deaths, he refused.

CONSTANTINE

That's true. I had had enough of death.

(looks about)

What? All of these hard truths about Maxentius, and he has not arrived to torment me, too? Come on, I challenge you to appear. Confront me again, unsteady foe! I yet have might in these old muscles. I am yet intrepid!

(to Maximian)

Your son does not appear.

MAXIMIAN

One of his few admirable decisions. So this is how he died -- the enemy of Rome. May he and his armor rot in the Tiber forever.

CONSTANTINE

Not quite. I ordered a search for his body. The next day it was found in the mud. To prove that he was dead, I commanded that his head be mounted on a lance and paraded through the streets.

MAXIMIAN

Oh, vengeful man! Did you have to do that, too? Not even I --

FAUSTA

-- I told him that wasn't nice, too, though I still loved him.

EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

But you must understand. If he couldn't prove that Maxentius was dead, how could he expect Rome and the other dominions to agree to his rule?

MAXIMIAN

Is everyone to lose his head as proof of victory?

EUSEBIUS

Oh, no, I would never suggest that. But, if he decided it was necessary, and Christ guided his every thought and action, then we must assume it was the right thing to do.

(to audience)

Maybe God knew that one day Maxentius or one of his children would kill our savior on earth, unless he put an end to them first.

MAXIMIAN

Please, a little less flattery, a little more reality.

CONSTANTINE

I will give you more than enough reality. I also instructed that his head be shipped to Africa, so that there could be no doubt there that I had supplanted him.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Perhaps that's why he does not appear. Maybe if you lost your head it's impossible to return from the dead.

EUSEBIUS

A quaint thought, Majesty. But it cannot be true. What would become of all the martyrs who were dismembered by beasts? Could they not rise to heaven whole once again?

CONSTANTINE

A good point. Yet he does not appear.

MAXIMIAN

The man jokes about the dead. No God would tell him to behave as he did and does, not even the God of the Christians.

CONSTANTINE

See it from the other side, Maximian. Think of me as your avenger.

MAXIMIAN

My avenger and my executioner! That's too much to ask.

CONSTANTINE

Yet there's truth in it. And so be it. Your son's death does not haunt me. He deserved his end.

(to EUSEBIUS)

When I think of how my troops were outnumbered and how easily I conquered, I know that it was Christ, through the Labarum, who strengthened my army so that I could vanquish him.

EUSEBIUS

Christ was with you. Our Savior was your sword's might.

MAXIMIAN

Rather, I was not with my son, which was his weakness.

CONSTANTINE

I would like, if I may, to move on to happier matters.

(to audience)

I entered the city in triumph. The senate saluted me as the new Senior Augustus of Rome and all of Maxentius' dominions. Now, I was master of the Western Empire, from Britain to Africa. Galerius, along with Maximin ...

CONSTANTINE

(gestures to Maximian)

... different than Maximian... still ruled in the East. So now three Augusti commanded the empire.

MAXIMIAN

The end of our great tetrarchy!

CONSTANTINE

Yes, it was.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Tell them what I did right after my victory.

EUSEBIUS

He began to make the great changes that would one day cause him to be proclaimed, at least, in the East, a saint.

CONSTANTINE

A saint in the East? Not bad.

EUSEBIUS

And the peer of the Apostles.

CONSTANTINE

Did you hear that? The peer of the Apostles!

EUSEBIUS

Oh, blessed were his acts, as he implemented the commands he received from God, ruling the Empire with his eyes and arms raised toward heaven, like Christ himself.

CONSTANTINE

Tell them, if you would, about some of the good things I did.

EUSEBIUS

Of course, my Emperor.

(to audience)

Now, he went much further than toleration of the holy Catholic church. He began to restore our churches and other property and to subsidize our priesthood so we could devote ourselves to the profession of our faith. He knew beyond a doubt that the safety and welfare of the Empire depended on pleasing the one true God -- which he now knew is the God of the Christians. And holy, holy man -- so generous of soul was he that, to speed the return of our property, he declared that anyone who suffered a loss could go to him for compensation.

MAXIMIAN

Could I go to him and reclaim my life?

EUSEBIUS

If it had been in his power to restore it, I dare say he might have. But some things are not allowed to mortal man, even a Godly man like him.

CONSTANTINE

I did make some amends for you son's behavior. I rescinded the heavy taxes he had imposed on Rome.

FAUSTA

Trust me. Later, he imposed his own.

CONSTANTINE

True, but you know I only did it out of necessity. I always had a soft spot for Rome, even though I spent as little time there as possible. And Rome was grateful. I remember how the senate, wishing to commemorate my victory, commanded that a triumphal arch be erected in my honor. I hope it's still there.

(as if listening for an answer)

It is? Oh, the author tells me it is! How grand! How splendid!

(listens again)

Oh, my. He says, however, in a deteriorated condition. Have you ever seen it? It was built on a really magnificent scale. And the dedication pleased me greatly.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Do you remember the exact wording?

(to audience)

He records everything.

EUSEBIUS

I think so.

(picks up book and leafs through it)

Yes, I have it right here.

(reads)

"To the Emperor, Flavius Constantine, the Greatest, the Pious, the Fortunate, Augustus, because, by the prompting of the Divinity and the greatness of his soul, he with his forces avenged the commonwealth with just arms both on the tyrant and on all his faction, the Senate and people of Rome dedicated this triumphal arch."

MAXIMIAN

How quickly they changed their allegiance!

CONSTANTINE

And how many reasons they had!

(to EUSEBIUS)

Thank you, good scholar.

## CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

(to audience)

If you get a chance to see it, please do so. But, I pray, view it at a certain distance. When it was made, the artisans of the empire had sunk in quality and the new figures that were required were, I could see, rendered with a bit of clumsiness. In addition, to speed things along, many of the figures had to be borrowed from other monuments. Naturally, some mistakes occurred. No doubt the worst one is that the head of the great Trajan was placed on a barbarian -- a barbarian I'm in the process of slaying.

(looks toward sky)

Oh, mighty Trajan, I tender my apology. But I assure you that there is absolutely no need for you to make a personal appearance to avenge the insult.

(back to earth)

Well, nothing in this world is perfect, and, despite its few shortcomings, there it was, and still is - a colossal monument to my triumph.

When I entered the senate, I treated its members cordially. I was conscious of its past. But we all knew the truth. By now the center of the Empire was not Rome but wherever the emperor built his palace or pitched his tent. And that was usually not even in the West, but in the East, so he could keep a closer watch on the frontiers with the Persians and the Germans. Diocletian and now Galerius ruled from Nicomedia. So, after three months at Rome, I myself departed. I wanted to be in Gaul and rule the Western Empire from Arles.

Not long after I returned, news reached me from the East that Galerius was ill.

(to EUSEBIUS)

I told you we'd get to this part. Go ahead and elaborate.

## EUSEBIUS

Thank you, good Emperor. I have been waiting most impatiently.

(to audience)

Every time I hear the name Galerius, I'm really beside myself. He had persecuted us severely, and, at last, God sent his vengeance upon him. His disease was horrible. No one could treat it.

## CONSTANTINE

(listens OFF)

I've just been informed by the author that he probably had what's now called cancer of the bowels.

## EUSEBIUS

Never heard of it! Divine vengeance -- that's what it was!

## CONSTANTINE

Come on. He wasn't all bad. Remember, he finally issued an edict that all persecution of the Christians in the East should stop.

EUSEBIUS

But only because he suspected his disease was a punishment from Almighty God!

CONSTANTINE

You could be right.

(to audience)

In the edict, he did ask the Christians to pray for his health and the welfare of the Empire.

EUSEBIUS

Fat chance of that! He deserved his torment -- every pain and more. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, punished him for the martyrs he had made and the churches he had pulled down! His bowels broke open. Worms crawled out. He was covered with bugs. An abominable odor filled the palace. Even his most faithful servants held their noses.

CONSTANTINE

One day you must tire of the obvious delight you take in his illness and death.

EUSEBIUS

Not until I forget the blood of the martyrs.

CONSTANTINE

When you speak that way, you remind me of Lactantius.

(to audience)

How much that impassioned scholar talked and wrote about the death of the persecutors! What did he call his book?

EUSEBIUS

*De Mortibus Persecutorum.* And what a fine work it is!

CONSTANTINE

You might have written as good a book about it.

EUSEBIUS

No, Majesty. My talent was to write the history of the early Church and the story of your great life.

(to audience)

I know, however, that Lactantius would agree with me when I say may Galerius rot in hell for all eternity!

CONSTANTINE

Shh! You don't want to provoke Galerius to show up here, do you? Then he wouldn't be in the grave anymore.

EUSEBIUS

God forbid. I've had my say. I'm sure he's in hell -- and may he stay put!

CONSTANTINE

May he, indeed, emperor though he was.

(to audience)

Knowing he would soon die, Galerius summoned Licinius, who had been, as I said, a comrade in arms, and appointed him to rule in his place. He was now, along with me, Senior Augustus.

And, to tell you the truth, his new title just didn't sit right with me. Certainly, I deserved more.

And what higher title could there be but sole Augustus?

EUSEBIUS

A title you were destined for, mighty Constantine!

MAXIMIAN

Who destined him for it?

CONSTANTINE

Behave yourself!

(to EUSEBIUS)

Thank you, Bishop Eusebius. But let's not jump ahead.

(to audience)

Maximin, the other Augustus in the East, didn't like his title anymore than I did. Apparently, he didn't like sharing power with him, either. And as soon as Galerius' died, he moved his troops toward Licinius, who saw the confrontation coming and mustered his troops. They faced off across the Hellespont. But no battle took place. Instead, they agreed to mutual toleration. But I knew that soon enough they would be at war. I began at this time to wonder if I should make Licinius an ally of mine.

(LIGHTS come up on LICINIUS)

LICINIUS

I should have known better than to trust you.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

They just keep leaping out of the grave.

(to LICINIUS)

You got what you deserved.

LICINIUS

But you promised my wife --

(to audience)

LICINIUS (CONT'D)

-- his own half-sister, whom he married to me --

(to CONSTANTINE)

-- that you would spare my life!

CONSTANTINE

I did what I had to.

LICINIUS

My death became your necessity?

MAXIMIAN

Yours, too, Licinius?

LICINIUS

Yes, I regret to say.

CONSTANTINE

Let me tell the tale, and they will judge for themselves.

LICINIUS

Why you and not me?

CONSTANTINE

(indicates OTHERS)

If their behavior forecasts your own, you, too, will have your say.

LICINIUS

I will. But when?

CONSTANTINE

In the course of your impatience. I will speak now.

LICINIUS

Then do so truly. I will be here to make sure of that.

CONSTANTINE

Join the crowd.

(to audience)

I thought forming an alliance with him might help me extend my influence. And I had a noble goal. I wanted, among other things, to help encourage fair treatment of the Christians in the Eastern part of the Empire.

EUSEBIUS

(rises)

Where we were far too long under the yolk of evil!

(points to CONSTANTINE)

Oh, blessed man -- blessed man of God!

LICINIUS

Who are you trying to fool?

(takes a seat)

Never call a killer blessed.

EUSEBIUS

I merely state the truth.

LICINIUS

We all know better.

MAXIMIAN

You said it! But have a seat, will you? He can't help but convict himself.

CONSTANTINE

You mean, distinguish myself.

(to audience)

I decided to use the same kind of persuasion on him that Maximian had used on me. I offered him the hand of my lovely half-sister Constantia.

MAXIMIAN

See! Even after I was dead, I helped you. And still you made me kill myself!

LICINIUS

That's his favorite way of firing people.

MAXIMIAN

Talk about ingratitude!

FAUSTA

Calm down, Father. I always like to hear about weddings.

CONSTANTINE

Thanks for your help, dear.

(to ALL others)

May I go on?

MAXIMIAN

All right, all right.

LICINIUS

Go ahead. Nothing you say can encompass your forgiveness.

CONSTANTINE

(to AUDIENCE)

I proposed that we meet at Milan. We celebrated his marriage to Constantia.

(to FAUSTA)

It was a nice ceremony.

FAUSTA

That's it? Give me some details. What was her wedding gown like?

CONSTANTINE

You know I'm not good at that kind of stuff.

(looks around)

Is my dear sister going to show up, too? No? Good. I won't have to explain his fate to her all over again.

LICINIUS

(to FAUSTA)

What happened to my wife?

FAUSTA

She became a widow. Nothing more.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Besides the marriage, he and I also discussed policy, and we issued our famous Edict of Milan. It confirmed Galerius' edict of toleration in his provinces and provided freedom of worship to all.

LICINIUS

What can I say? I went along with my new father-in-law.

EUSEBIUS

You should never have stopped doing that. When you listened to him, you actually did good things.

(to audience)

The Edict went much farther than our modest Majesty has admitted. It also provided for an income for the Christian clergy in the Eastern Empire out of public funds, so they, like their brethren in the West, could devote themselves --

LICINIUS

-- What he really wanted was to gain your God's protection for himself.

EUSEBIUS

He already had that.

LICINIUS

He never thought he had enough.

CONSTANTINE

Enough to defeat you. I'll get to that, if you'll let me.

(to audience)

Unfortunately, when we were right in the middle of our deliberations, news arrived that Maximin was moving on his domains again. He had to depart immediately.

LICINIUS

He was so far lost to pretensions of the Christian faith by now that he insisted I have my troops recite a Christian prayer before battle.

CONSTANTINE

Why not? I had just married him to Constantia, and I wanted him to prevail. So I helped him put his army, like mine, under the protection of the all-powerful God and his Son.

LICINIUS

I said all right. After all, he was now my relative. But I couldn't agree to a prayer that would offend the pagans in my army.

EUSEBIUS

At least, you used one that was addressed to the Highest God.

(reaches for book)

I have a copy of it here, if you'd like me to read it.

LICINIUS

I have no taste for it.

CONSTANTINE

But you won, didn't you?

LICINIUS

Yes. But I do not credit your God, except perhaps as the instrument of my own perfidious defeat and death.

(to audience)

The battle was quick and decisive. Maximin became better known for the manner of his flight than for his skill in battle. The coward disguised himself as a slave and fled.

CONSTANTINE

Yet he did assemble his troops for a second battle.

EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

Maximin was now so convinced that God was on Licinius' side that he actually granted freedom of worship to the Christians in his dominions and restored their churches. But, as it turned out, his so-called change of heart didn't matter at all. He was a persecutor, and he would persecute again.

LICINIUS

You don't seem too forgiving. Neither was I. In time, my army caught up with him, and he committed suicide.

MAXIMIAN

I'm familiar with that method of dying. Did he commit suicide without any help from you?

LICINIUS

I never laid a hand on him.

MAXIMIAN

Sometimes a word can be stronger.

LICINIUS

He took his own poison.

EUSEBIUS

Divine justice! It was the fate God intended for all the persecutors of the faithful!

CONSTANTINE

(to LICINIUS)

Now, tell them who, in victory, you killed. Go on.

(to audience)

This man, who accuses me of foul play, had no compassion. He had both of Maximin's children put to death -- a boy of eight and a girl of seven. He also found the son of Severus, and though Severus had never in his brief reign done him harm, executed him. Worse yet, he executed the son of Galerius, the son of the man who had made him Caesar. And then the merciless monster capped his crimes by having Diocletian's totally harmless wife and daughter hunted down and beheaded.

MAXIMIAN

The wife and daughter of Diocletian? Oh, too awful, Licinius! Have you no reverence for greatness and its posterity?

EUSEBIUS

He has only what you have heard -- oh, repellent signs of a wicked nature!

LICINIUS

I did only what was required for my future safety.

(to CONSTANTINE)

You're familiar with that activity, aren't you?

CONSTANTINE

Get on with your story.

LICINIUS

Thank you for your kindness.

(to audience)

The result was, I was now sole Augustus in the East, as he was in the West. We were co-Augusti.

CONSTANTINE

Right. We had supplanted the tetrarchy of Diocletian with ourselves.

MAXIMIAN

Down to two!

LICINIUS

You'd think that would have been enough for him.

CONSTANTINE

Did the thought of being sole Emperor never cross your mind?

LICINIUS

On occasion.

CONSTANTINE

I knew it!

LICINIUS

But, I'm sure, never as often as it crossed yours. Come on, be honest with them.

CONSTANTINE

All right, I admit that once in a while, once in a great while, I wondered if I might in time rule the whole Empire -- rule from the rising of the sun to its setting.

EUSEBIUS

(to CONSTANTINE)

It was the great role that God, the Father, and Christ, Our Savior, destined you for.

MAXIMIAN

Come on, your man --

LICINIUS

-- You think I didn't know the Christians were hoping and praying for that?

EUSEBIUS

Is that why you started to persecute again?

CONSTANTINE

If you two keep going like that, I'll never get anywhere.

(to audience)

The fact is, he and I got along pretty well for about eight years.

EUSEBIUS

If, your Graciousness, I may comment on those years. I have something good to say about both of you.

LICINIUS

There's a surprise.

CONSTANTINE

Be brief, I pray. Double praise is always at war with itself.

EUSEBIUS

Forgive me, Emperor, but during that period, I thought you were both true champions of peace and Christian piety.

(to audience)

Now, as never before, two Emperors, two men above all other men, recognized all they had received from our God and, shunning the old falsehoods, spit in the faces of the lifeless idols and trampled underfoot the lawless demons.

(to BOTH)

You, both of you, acknowledged one God alone as your benefactor and the benefactor of all who worship him and know Christ is his Son and King of all.

CONSTANTINE

I thought you were going to be brief.

(to audience)

He does get a bit carried away, doesn't he? Unfortunately, he would soon discover that he was only half right.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

ACT II

The same, a short time later.

EUSEBIUS

(to CONSTANTINE)

Gentle Majesty, I know it's a great deal to ask, but may I speak first?

CONSTANTINE

I assume you have a good reason.

EUSEBIUS

I think so, your Blessedness.

CONSTANTINE

Then proceed.

EUSEBIUS

Thank you.

(to audience, referring to CONSTANTINE)

He was right. I was wrong about one of them -- terribly wrong.

(indicating LICINIUS)

He, out of a lingering and evil allegiance to the ancient gods, began to persecute the holy Catholic Church.

LICINIUS

(to audience)

I tried to be tolerant, even knowing the Christians would never side with me against him.

EUSEBIUS

If there had been no war, who would have had to take sides? You, you who were one of the two emperors dearly beloved of God, one of the two who cleansed the world of God-hating tyrants, must have sunk into madness. Utter madness!

(to audience)

He became a murderer, a murderer of helpless and holy people!

CONSTANTINE

It became clear that I had to step in.

EUSEBIUS

And, praise be to God, you did, noble defender of Christ's church.

LICINIUS

He only used saving the Christians as a pretext to invade my territories -- and to establish himself as sole Augustus.

CONSTANTINE

I? Never!

EUSEBIUS

How absurd even to mention such a thing!

(to audience)

The arm of God, with his most humane son, Crispus, stretched out his hand and brought salvation to all who were tormented and perishing.

LICINIUS

Sure, he did -- and from purely selfless motives!

(to FAUSTA)

You lived with him. Tell them. Is he or is he not the very incarnation of ambition?

FAUSTA

(to LICINIUS)

They're already aware of that. You know, I never realized how handsome you are.

CONSTANTINE

Did you hear that? And the temptress proclaims her faithfulness!

FAUSTA

Temptress? Only for you, darling. Faithful! I was always faithful to you -- unless someone forced me to do something -- forced me. I say I was forced!

MAXIMIAN

What are you talking about, child? Did he force you to side with him against me?

FAUSTA

No. I'm sorry, he didn't. But Crispus --

CONSTANTINE

-- Don't even let that young man's name pass your lying lips.

MAXIMIAN

She has a right to tell me whatever she wants to.

CONSTANTINE

You wouldn't be so eager if you knew the truth about her -- and soon you may. Now, if you please, I will go on.

(to audience, indicating LICINIUS)

I'll tell you about my war with him, but before I get into it, I want share one of my greatest disappointments. Forgive me, gentle Eusebius, but, as you'll recall, it had to do with a dangerous development in the holy Church. Division! After all I had done to preserve the Christians, you inflicted division on yourselves! And over such an insignificant matter.

EUSEBIUS

I'm sorry, your Imperial Patience.

(to audience)

His complaint, I acknowledge, has merit.

(to CONSTANTINE)

But I always did my best to aid you. And, kind Emperor, while affirming my greatest respect for your nearly unlimited knowledge, I must admit that we did not think you were quite as sensitive as we had hoped you would be to the delicacy with which even the smallest theological matter must be approached. I'm sorry I said that, gentle one, but I had to.

CONSTANTINE

Eusebius, you can go on like that all you want. But you'd think you and the other bishops would've feared for the Empire enough not to risk provoking the Highest God with your foolishness -- foolishness born of idleness. But no! Division it was -- and not six months after I had established Christianity at Rome.

EUSEBIUS

But, Majesty, there was some cause for it.

CONSTANTINE

What?

(to audience)

If you can believe it, a certain bishop -- Caecilian by name -- had been appointed to the see of Antioch. But some bishops raised objections.

EUSEBIUS

They were serious objections, holy Emperor.

(to audience)

They believed that during one of the persecutions he had surrendered the Holy Scriptures to the authorities -- and had agreed to sacrifice to the pagan gods. So, as you might expect, they refused to recognize him.

CONSTANTINE

Refused -- and wouldn't even relent after the leader of their faction passed away. In fact, along came his successor, Donatus, the inflexible bishop of Carthage, from whom the whole infuriating tangle took its name. Now, alarmed as I was, I counseled myself to be understanding -- and lend a fair ear to the matter. So I proposed that a commission of enquiry meet at Rome. And what did they do?

EUSEBIUS

They approved Caecilian.

CONSTANTINE

But was that good enough for the Donatists? Not a chance! Yet did I lay down the law? No. I summoned a second council at Arles -- and even took time out from my imperial duties to write letters appealing for agreement.

(to EUSEBIUS)

You probably have a copy of one or two handy.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Emperor. I happen to have one of your blessed letters right here.

CONSTANTINE

Please, read from it.

EUSEBIUS

Of course.

(holds up letter; reads)

"It's deplorable that the very persons who ought to practice brotherly and harmonious concord shamefully and indeed sinfully quarrel with one another and afford an occasion for mockery to men whose souls are alienated from this most holy worship....."

(looks up)

And you go on to say that as a result of these disagreements ...

(reads)

"... the Highest Divinity may perhaps be moved to wrath, not only against the human race, but also against me myself, to whose care He has, by His celestial will, committed the government of all earthly things, and that He may be so far moved as to take some untoward step...."

EUSEBIUS (CONT'D)

(looks up)

... And you add that ...

(reads)

"... I shall really and fully be able to feel secure and always to hope for prosperity and happiness from the ready kindness of the most mighty God only when I see all venerating the most holy God in the proper cult of the Catholic religion with harmonious brotherhood of worship."

(looks up)

OK, brother Constantine?

CONSTANTINE

I think that covers it.

(to audience)

I, still the unseasoned optimist, thought my letters would do some good. Forget it. Even though the verdict at Arles, which was rendered by over thirty bishops, was the same as at Rome, what happened?

(to EUSEBIUS)

Go on. Tell them.

EUSEBIUS

The Donatists still objected.

CONSTANTINE

Fortunately, for them, I was called away to something much safer than a theological dispute, or, as I said earlier, marriage. A war with the barbarians. No problem. I put them in their place and returned. By now I had gotten a little distance on the situation and decided, despite my very justifiable impatience, to make yet one more attempt to settle things amicably.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Didn't I, great scholar of the Church?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty, at Milan.

CONSTANTINE

Fool that I was to expect concord.

(to audience)

You already know the answer. I experienced another failure. The ecclesiastics who claimed to be Catholics were on the side of Caecilian, and the Donatists continued to object. Well, I'm sorry. I couldn't hold back anymore. I was too angry -- so angry I did something I will always regret and never would've thought myself capable of. I -- Constantine, imperial protector of the Church -- initiated the first persecution of Christians by Christians.

EUSEBIUS

Sad to say.

CONSTANTINE

Very sad. But the division could not be allowed to continue. I feared that, if I did not act, the wrath of God would be upon us. So I took the steps I felt necessary. I banished the leaders of the Donatists and confiscated their churches. Yes, I did that and more. I saw to it that they endured imprisonment, torture, and -- I confess -- even death. How could I do such things? I could only tell myself how little was my wrath compared to what awful vengeance might have shot down from heaven.

EUSEBIUS

How he suffers. Thankfully, he soon grew sick of such things. After only three months, our emperor commanded that their punishment cease and he granted them restitution.

CONSTANTINE

What I really did is decide to leave them to the judgement of God. And now I know I was right more than ever. The author has just informed me that the divisions precipitated by the controversy didn't end until -- oh, no, I can't believe it! -- the saddest fate of all befell the Church in the Eastern Empire -- the virtual end of Christianity under the rule of the Turks.

EUSEBIUS

The end of Christianity in the Eastern Empire? Impossible!

CONSTANTINE

At least, it didn't happen till long after we were dead.

EUSEBIUS

But Christ would never allow such a thing to occur. You better ask the author to check his facts - double-check them -- before he says something as irresponsible as that.

CONSTANTINE

Did you hear him? We don't believe you. What do you think about that?

(to audience)

He prefers not to argue. He says there's still too much to cover.

(to OFF)

All right, all right. I'll continue.

(to audience)

Worse was still ahead. In fact, the Donatist controversy, which began in the West and spread from there, was almost insignificant compared to the greatest division that erupted in the East -- disagreement about one of the most sacred doctrines of the Church: the composition of the Holy Trinity. Talk about treading on sacred ground!

EUSEBIUS

There can be none more sacred. Yet I proved especially helpful to you in regard to that, didn't I?

CONSTANTINE

As a matter of fact, you did.  
(to audience)

Luckily, I had retained the ancient imperial title of Pontifex Maximus, and now I intended to live up to it. In fact, when I settled the matter, the bishops who didn't know before then discovered they not only had a protector, but an Emperor who intended, if necessary, to be their master. But before I move on to that diplomatic triumph, let me tell you how I took action to protect the Christians from him.

(indicates LICINIUS)

LICINIUS

Ah, the man tells himself fairy tales and believes them.

CONSTANTINE

Your behavior provided more than enough provocation.  
(to audience)

And I determined to attack him.

LICINIUS

First, he makes me his brother-in-law. Then he attacks me. Very coherent behavior!

CONSTANTINE

It was your change of heart that was incoherent.

EUSEBIUS

Worse than that. Intolerable!

CONSTANTINE

For us all! When I thought about my fellow Christians under the burden of his persecution, I had no choice.

(to LICINIUS)

I told you at Milan that the ruler of the Universe had selected me to be the champion and defender of his Church on earth.

LICINIUS

Will you come off it? Don't even talk to me about religion!  
(to audience)

He turned his back on the ancient gods of the Empire, our true protectors, for this new and fanatical faith -- a faith, unlike wide-armed paganism, that tolerated no others. Worse yet, a faith based on the teachings of a convicted criminal, who was executed by a Roman governor.

CONSTANTINE

What I did I know to be right. God and Christ appeared to me a few nights every week and advised me.

LICINIUS

How long did that go on?

EUSEBIUS

Ever since his conquest of Maxentius. God Almighty and his blessed Son had --

LICINIUS

-- Too bad They didn't teach him to honor your word among men.

CONSTANTINE

I didn't have to be taught that.

LICINIUS

Didn't you promise Constantia you would spare my life? Come on, didn't you?

CONSTANTINE

I allowed you to choose your death.

LICINIUS

Ah, I offer up my eternal gratitude. You, Constantine, are an ambitious fiend, and nothing more! First, you -- you, who began as a usurper, with only the acclamation of your father's army, and don't deny it -- give yourself the title of Senior Augustus. And then you use the pretense -- and only the pretense -- of defending this fanatical new religion of yours to subjugate the entire Empire!

CONSTANTINE

You're wrong, Licinius. Totally wrong.

EUSEBIUS

His faith is true -- true as the Scriptures themselves.

LICINIUS

What is true is my pain and my loss.

(to CONSTANTINE)

You deprived me of my dominions and finally my life.

CONSTANTINE

And how many helpless Christians did you deprive of life?

EUSEBIUS

You deserved what you got -- and worse, if it were possible.

CONSTANTINE

No doubt about it.

(to audience)

I can even give you a provocation of his that happened right inside my own palace.

LICINIUS

I don't know what he's talking about.

CONSTANTINE

How about ingratitude?

(to audience)

He was, if the truth be told, Augustus over more of the Empire than I was and his dominions were richer, too. Am I right?

LICINIUS

What's your point?

CONSTANTINE

I decided to be thoughtful -- and assure him that I didn't have any designs for expansion. So, entirely on my own, I told him I'd be willing to give up Italy -- and suggested that a new Caesar be appointed to govern it. Well, didn't I?

LICINIUS

I knew there had to be some kind of treachery in the idea.

CONSTANTINE

And it was yours. Does the name Bassianus ring a bell?

(to audience)

I had married him to another one of my three half-sisters, Anastasia, and he was my choice for Caesar. How did honest Licinius pay me back for my attempted goodwill? He tried to undermine Bassianus' loyalty to me.

LICINIUS

That's not true!

CONSTANTINE

Is there anything you won't try to outface?  
(to audience)

I found out everything. He enlisted Bassianus' brother, Senecio, to make the offer. What could I do when the evidence proved undeniable?

LICINIUS

Undeniable? Sure!

CONSTANTINE

Enough to fill more ears than I have -- or require.  
(to audience)

I had Bassianus arrested and, yes, executed.

MAXIMIAN

Yet another one, gone.

FAUSTA

Oh, yes, the bodies just keep piling up.

CONSTANTINE

How else could I be sure to survive treachery so close to home?

LICINIUS

How many deaths does your survival require?  
(to audience)

That should tell you something. Now, imagine! This short-tempered prevaricator also demanded that I turn over my friend, Senecio, to his paranoid activities. Of course, I declined. I don't send my friends to certain death.

CONSTANTINE

Your refusal confirmed your guilt even more.

LICINIUS

Oh, no doubt.

(to audience; refers to CONSTANTINE)

Can you believe this guy? Let me tell you, his accusations -- and the real intentions beneath them -- made me furious. Absolutely furious! So I did something about it -- just a warning. I ordered that his statues in one of my frontier cities be knocked down.

CONSTANTINE

Can you believe how he twisted my generous offer into such a shameful outcome? Well, let me tell you, that was it for me -- the final insult.

(to audience)

Now, I made short work of driving back an incursion of the Franks and marched on him. At the time, I had only with 20,000 troops with me. He had 35,000.

LICINIUS

That's a bit of an exaggeration, but go on.

CONSTANTINE

We met. I won. And he fled.

LICINIUS

You mean I made a retreat.

(to audience)

And I decided to shore things up by elevating one of my generals to the rank of Caesar.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Does the name Valens ring a bell?

(to audience)

He promptly demanded his execution.

(to MAXIMIAN)

Another body.

MAXIMIAN

And I'm sure there will be more.

LICINIUS

Never doubt it.

(to audience)

I reassembled my forces and now, from a position of strength, did something truly generous. I proposed peace.

CONSTANTINE

If you were in a position of strength, why was I in a position where you expected mercy?

LICINIUS

What mercy are you talking about?

(to audience)

Our delegates met at Philippi but there was no way we could agree to his terms....

(to CONSTANTINE)

LICINIUS (CONT'D)

... And you knew it, didn't you?  
(to audience)  
He wanted war -- and only war.

EUSEBIUS

It was a holy war, a war to rescue --

LICINIUS

-- Come on, tell the good bishop. You wanted to gain control over my share of the Empire.

CONSTANTINE

Well --

LICINIUS

-- Victory! He would stop at nothing but total victory!

CONSTANTINE

What general doesn't want victory?

LICINIUS

And even my life! Admit it!

CONSTANTINE

Out of consideration for my sister, I would have settled for less.

LICINIUS

Then why didn't you?

CONSTANTINE

Your stubborn resistance forecast a future I was uneasy with. If you had made peace then, I would have spared your life.

LICINIUS

Why don't I believe you?  
(to audience)

CONSTANTINE

Let's get on with the war.  
(to audience)

After fighting a hard battle, we somehow missed each other's army at night. He had managed to cut my communications.

LICINIUS

No wonder we missed each other. You had cut mine. Anyway, we decided to talk again. Once again, his terms were not to my liking. He wanted to annex two of my dioceses and still demanded that I surrender Valens to his malevolence. Yet I felt I was now -- and not until now -- in a pretty weak position. So --

CONSTANTINE

-- He agreed to my terms.

LICINIUS

And, much to my regret, the fate of Valens was, I knew, sealed. He had him executed.

MAXIMIAN

Yet one more.

CONSTANTINE

That's not fair.

MAXIMIAN

What's wrong?

CONSTANTINE

You already counted him. I'm sure he'll show up to object.

(looks around)

Valens? OK, where are you? Killed twice and still not coming?

(to audience)

Mercy again shines its smiling face on me. Now, the peace between us actually lasted for about eight years. And we got along surprisingly well, wouldn't you say?

LICINIUS

As well, you might say, as a viper and a mouse.

CONSTANTINE

During that time --

(looks around)

-- dare I mention the name? -- Crispus, my son Crispus, was elevated to Caesar --

LICINIUS

-- Along with my own son.

CONSTANTINE

Crispus was only seventeen at the time but I felt he was champing at the bit and awarded him command of the Rhine. And, within three years, the boy distinguished himself in a number of victories over the Franks and Alamani.

EUSEBIUS

He was a very likable youth, who taught the barbarians to dread the son of Constantine and the grandson of Constantius. Oh, he was the image of his father's perfections! The very image!

CONSTANTINE

Enough, please, Eusebius.

LICINIUS

Get to how you insulted me.

CONSTANTINE

It was a trifling matter, really.

LICINIUS

Trifling? Not in my terms.

(to audience)

He proclaimed two of his sons consuls without even consulting me. Imagine that! And worse was yet to come. Tell them how you finally shattered the peace.

CONSTANTINE

Another small matter that he's exaggerating. During a campaign I was waging against the Goths, I happened to trespass on one of his domains.

LICINIUS

You did it on purpose, and you know it.

(to audience)

He and his whole army just came marching into my territory. Of course, I objected. And talk about trifling? He refused to apologize. Now, guess what was on his mind. Could it be war and conquest?

CONSTANTINE

That was the farthest thing from my mind.

LICINIUS

Oh, sure. So far it took until spring to arrive. And he was clearly the aggressor.

CONSTANTINE

By now I had more than sufficient cause.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, yes! Let us never forget the woe he was inflicting on the faithful! But at last the time --

LICINIUS

-- The Christians deserved to be persecuted. They were the enemy of Jupiter, and I -- I was his champion. They tolerated no other religion and sewed division among us. They cared not for the Empire but only for their mysterious heaven. They took no joy in this life but lived far too much in hope of another one. They would have weakened the spirit of the army and opened the Empire to the ferocity of the barbarians.

EUSEBIUS

That's not true. We agreed to excommunicate soldiers who threw away their arms.

CONSTANTINE

The deeper truth is, you were only concerned about the great loyalty they felt toward me. You knew all their prayers --

EUSEBIUS

-- Were for you. Now, only for you, blessed Emperor.

LICINIUS

Prayers can't drown out the truth. It was a war he wanted for a long time.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Don't deny it! You wanted to be master of the entire empire -- and I was the only obstacle left.

CONSTANTINE

Not true! Not true at all!

(to audience)

I owed it to the Divinity who gave me power over my part of the Empire to remove the persecutor, and I could wait no longer.

EUSEBIUS

We pleaded with our pious protector to rescue the faithful. The learned Lactantius also urged him to take action on behalf of the just in the East. Then, in response to our many entreaties, our great emperor distinguished himself by launching a crusade against him -- I tell you, a crusade! And, to prove he was doing so out of true belief in our God, he now announced to the whole Empire his unconditional faith in Christianity.

CONSTANTINE

And proud I was to do so!

LICINIUS

He was just playing politics.  
(to CONSTANTINE)

You liked the Christians because they knew how to suffer and, most of all, to be grateful for your ill-advised favors.

CONSTANTINE

Then how do you explain the fact that I now removed from my coins, once and for all, the Unconquered Sun -- the only pagan God I still allowed to appear on them?

EUSEBIUS

Finally. Christ be praised!

LICINIUS

I'll tell you why. Because the true gods of the empire now meant nothing to you.  
(to audience)

Trust me. His new God was no more than a pretense that enabled him to tender worship to his only real Deity -- ambition! Yes, it's true! He worshipped only ambition. Ambition was his only god!

MAXIMIAN

I often said so myself.

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Don't pay any attention to them. Listen, instead, to the evidence of my faith. When I told the bishops I would liberate his dominions, I called on them to assist me. I even had a tent designed with a chapel in it, so I could retire there to pray and seek guidance. And so great was my faith in the Labarum that I upped the number of men guarding it to fifty. Their only duty would be to carry it to whatever part of the battlefield where danger threatened. In addition, I ordered my pagan soldiers to recite a prayer I felt would be acceptable to God, as well as to them.

EUSEBIUS

And, wishing to inspire as many of them as possible to convert, in order to be in command of an army that would be most pleasing to God, he gave the Christian soldiers Sunday leave.

CONSTANTINE

Correct.

(to LICINIUS)

Does all that sound like mere political expediency?

LICINIUS

I heard about your preparations, and do you know what I decided?  
(to audience)

That he was no more than an atheist.

CONSTANTINE

You call me an atheist?

LICINIUS

What else can you call anyone who worshipped this strange Christian God?  
(to audience)

I decided to do perfect justice to his ambitions -- and wage war on him in the name of the ancient gods and the eternal glory of the Empire.

(to CONSTANTINE)

I would wage a crusade against you!

EUSEBIUS

A crusade? The pagan talks of a crusade! Will lightening strike? Where is God's might? Almighty God, put your wrath into a bolt from on high and strike this man dead. Nothing? A sign! The silence is a sign to remind me of the truth of history. After all, what had we to fear of his gods?

CONSTANTINE

What indeed, compared to the most-powerful God?

LICINIUS

I was determined to prove my cause and mustered 150,000 men on foot and 15,000 cavalry. I also assembled a navy consisting of 350 ships.

CONSTANTINE

I had about 120,000 men on land, but only about 200 galleys.

LICINIUS

You had a great number of merchant ships, too. I saw them from the walls of Byzantium.

CONSTANTINE

So what? I needed them to carry my army and supplies.

MAXIMIAN

Those are both very big armies.

CONSTANTINE

The two largest of the century. I decided to command the land forces and to trust ...  
(pauses emotionally)  
... to trust my brave son, Crispus, with command of the navy.

FAUSTA

The son you --

CONSTANTINE

-- Silence. I will get to the matter.  
(to audience)

I advanced on Hadrianople, where I knew he held a strong position. We engaged. To prevail, I myself crossed a river with only twelve horsemen and fought in the field. I was wounded in the thigh. And once again I saw for myself the Labarum work its miracles. It turned the battle our way wherever it was carried. I even saw it block spears that were hurled at its bearer.

LICINIUS

The ancient gods fought on my side. How else do you think you were wounded?

CONSTANTINE

But then, you must admit, they proved to be weaker Gods. How else can you explain that ...  
(to audience)

... I was victorious? Yes, with the help of Jesus Christ and the discipline of my men, I prevailed. He retreated with great losses to Byzantium.

LICINIUS

I'm glad you used the word retreated. I never fled in my life.  
(to audience)

Once there, I named Martinianus co-Augustus to strengthen my command.

MAXIMIAN

Did he prove to be another Valens?

LICINIUS

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

CONSTANTINE

I pursued him and laid siege to the city. I knew supplies were flowing into it from the sea. So, despite the smaller size of my navy, I ordered Crispus to sail in from the Aegean and force his way into the harbor.

LICINIUS

I will never understand why Abantus, my admiral, didn't sail out and attack him in open water. He just sat in the harbor, where our greater numbers were useless. Do you suppose he was a crypto-Christian?

MAXIMIAN

Maybe he was just indecisive.

EUSEBIUS

There is only one explanation. God held him back.

LICINIUS

I would rather say the wind was against him -- and against me.

CONSTANTINE

It was, instead, with Crispus.

EUSEBIUS

Driven, no doubt, by the will of Almighty God.

CONSTANTINE

That may well be. The wind was timely.

(to audience)

Crispus made it past the Hellespont and crushed his fleet.

LICINIUS

The wind, it was the wind that defeated Abantus.

EUSEBIUS

With the wings of angels, beating at it, by the grace of God.

CONSTANTINE

Apparently, the breeze was also with you.

(to audience)

He retreated like the wind.

LICINIUS

I was reorganizing my forces.

CONSTANTINE

Did you a lot of good, didn't it?  
(to audience)

I took the city. He had crossed the Bosphorus, and I went in pursuit. The second battle was joined at Crysopolis.

EUSEBIUS

And once again the Labarum prevailed against the false idols of the pagans.

LICINIUS

The thing that really happened is --

CONSTANTINE

-- He retreated to Nicomedia and sent his wife to beg for his life.

LICINIUS

Not to beg, to discuss terms of --

CONSTANTINE

-- What could I say to my own sister? Had I not, in happier times, married her to him? I agreed to spare his life.

LICINIUS

And to spare the life of my co-Augustus, Martinianus.  
(to audience)

I demanded it. But he would betray both of his promises.

CONSTANTINE

That's not entirely true. I welcomed him and invited him to dine with me.

LICINIUS

And no sooner was I fed than shuffled off to Thessalonica. And Martinianus to Cappadocia.

CONSTANTINE

You were only to be interned.

LICINIUS

Then why was I executed?

MAXIMIAN

I have a similar question about myself.

FAUSTA

I do, too.

CONSTANTINE

(to LICINIUS)

Why? I'll tell you. I knew in your soul, as I knew in his ...

(refers to MAXIMIAN)

... that your craving for power would never die until you did.

(to audience)

And, sure enough, he plotted a conspiracy with the barbarians to --

LICINIUS

-- I never did that!

(to audience)

And I never was convicted of such a thing.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Admit you had me executed.

CONSTANTINE

How else would it have happened?

LICINIUS

And Martinianus?

CONSTANTINE

He, too, had tasted power -- and would race to assist your plot to usurp me.

LICINIUS

And so, in your mind, we both had to die.

CONSTANTINE

Sorry. There was no way out.

(to audience)

Now that rule of the entire Empire had fallen to me, I just had too many concerns to let such threats continue. I was simply be too busy to keep my eyes on both of them.

LICINIUS

We had to die because you were busy. How wonderfully logical!

CONSTANTINE

A man survives not only because he is wise but because he knows what to fear. For the same reason, I executed your son.

LICINIUS

Licinianus, too? You executed him? Oh, loathsome man! But he was only eleven -- a harmless youth of eleven!

MAXIMIAN

Father and son both, I know that story.

LICINIUS

Oh, you foul and ruthless monster! For such an atrocity there can be nothing but damnation, no matter what god judges you!

CONSTANTINE

(to audience)

Certainly, you can understand my position. Diocletian had divided the Empire among four rulers. Now, I had to do the work of all of them. I had no choice. I broke my word.

(to LICINIUS)

Your end and that of your son freed me to rule with confidence and a clear mind.

LICINIUS

How about a clear conscience?

CONSTANTINE

I only did what I knew was necessary for the good of the Empire. Nothing would have hurt it or the Catholic religion more than my death.

EUSEBIUS

There is much truth in that. Nothing imaginable could have been worse for the infant Church. Yes, yes, seen that way, there can be no doubt that our far-seeing Emperor only did what God must have commanded him to do!

LICINIUS

Oh, then, what a God! How can you excuse the murder of a child? Does your God allow that? Or my own murder? I want no part of such a God! Yours is a God unworthy even of the name of God, who belongs not in the wide universe. Why, if He can condone, and even, as you say, encourage such acts, He has not as much kindness as --

CONSTANTINE

-- as who? You?

LICINIUS

I would not have rebelled.

CONSTANTINE

I had no evidence.  
(to audience)  
I have made my case.

LICINIUS

(to audience)  
I'm telling you, he had me and my son killed for nothing. I would have been very content to live out my days in Thessalonica. And my young son was pure innocence.  
(to EUSEBIUS)  
Surely, you cannot think as well of your Catholic hero now?

EUSEBIUS

In my way, I also took action against you.

LICINIUS

Really? How is that?

EUSEBIUS

When your rule was just, I had praised you in my *Vita Constantini*. Now, I edited out any significant mention of you. I removed you from history as best I could. More than that, I could not let you have any significant presence in the life of this great man of God.

LICINIUS

This great man of God? Oh, how virtue is twisted for the powerful!

CONSTANTINE

You did that for me?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Constantine Augustus. But, dear friend, by then you had passed on to the welcoming arms of Jesus Christ.

CONSTANTINE

I wonder if I really did?

EUSEBIUS

Never doubt it!

CONSTANTINE

But then why don't I remember arriving there? Or days and nights spent there, if there are days and nights in heaven?

EUSEBIUS

But, blessed Majesty, do you remember arriving anywhere else?

CONSTANTINE

No, as a matter of fact, I don't.

EUSEBIUS

Then what more proof do you need? This mortal reincarnation of you can have no knowledge of your divine destiny. Believe me, you went straight up to heaven.

CONSTANTINE

I hope so.

LICINIUS

Going to anybody's heaven is the most unlikely destiny I can imagine for you!

CONSTANTINE

I regret that you and your son had to die. Blame yourself for both deaths.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, the blame goes there. The persecutors will be struck down!

FAUSTA

And how will you excuse my death -- and the death of his own son?

(LIGHTS come up on CRISPUS)

CRISPUS

Yes, how can anyone excuse my death?

FAUSTA

How but by the death of your father -- his eternal death?

CONSTANTINE

No, no!

CRISPUS

How, Father? How, Eusebius, if you thought so highly of me?

EUSEBIUS

I --

CONSTANTINE

-- Not now, Crispus! I will confess my deed! I will do it!

EUSEBIUS

He must, before he can be baptized -- and rise up, rise up to heaven!

FAUSTA

You mean, be cast down! Down to lasting damnation!

CONSTANTINE

Please, my son, your time will come soon. You have my word.

EUSEBIUS

Have mercy, once again, for a short time -- only a short time.

CRISPUS

All right. But I won't wait much longer.

(LIGHTS FADE on CRISPUS)

EUSEBIUS

He was, and still seems, good.

CONSTANTINE

I will not disagree, except in the matter of -- but, I will get to it. I will get to it.

(to audience)

Let me continue. I am now far into my story. As soon as I assumed rule over Licinius's dominions, I issued a constitution to my new subjects. And now I did more than remedy the losses the Christians had suffered. I decided the time had come to turn the tables on the pagans. I blamed them for the famines and other ills of the Empire that they traditionally blamed on the Christians.

EUSEBIUS

For once -- and he showed great courage to act so.

CONSTANTINE

But kindness, too, always kindness. I did not force anyone to convert. I only encouraged the pagans as best I could to join in the worship of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ -- join in it for the good of the Empire.

EUSEBIUS

Now, he could truly claim to be, as he often described himself, the bishop of those outside the church.

CONSTANTINE

And not even the Bishop of Alexandria, nor even the Bishop of Rome, took issue with my claim.

EUSEBIUS

But, on the contrary, honored it, your Imperial Highness.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, honored it -- I agree, they did. Still, they did not always honor my wishes.  
(to audience)

Now, you'd think that, when I had become master of the whole Roman Empire and righted the wrongs done against God's favorites, I could rest on my laurels, as it were. I should have know that I had only solved the earthly problems of the Empire. Now that the Church found itself well protected, up welled a host of well-meaning but overly zealous ecclesiastics, inflicting one harmful division after another on it.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Is that not correct, Eusebius?

EUSEBIUS

There were many divisions, it is true, your Glorious Patience.

CONSTANTINE

And what inflamed these men so? What I and any common-sensical person must call insignificant theological details. Yet the advocates of these intolerant factions began to tear apart the unity of the one true Church -- a unity I so much prized and felt Christ demanded -- began to tear it apart almost as ferociously as the wild beasts of the arena once tore the Christians to pieces. Among the numerous disagreements I found in the my new dioceses is what came to be called the Arian controversy.

(to EUSEBIUS)

You're the expert. Tell them about it.

EUSEBIUS

It concerned the make up of the Holy Trinity.

CONSTANTINE

And who was the culprit at the center of it?

EUSEBIUS

It was named after one of the elderly priests at Alexandria -- the fervent Arius.

CONSTANTINE

Arius! And the man just couldn't keep his disagreement to himself. In fact, to reach the masses, he even wrote out his doctrines in verse. Now, the composition of the Trinity, sacred as it is, seems simple enough to me: God the Father, Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit. One, two, three, all in one, like three gold rings hooked together. Why demand to know more? Knowing even that many details about God is enough of a miracle, don't you think? Yet the disagreement raged, and there seemed to be no way to stop it.

EUSEBIUS

Well, Alexander made an attempt. He, by a coincidence of names, was the Bishop of Alexandria. At any rate, he called a council to settle the matter. Arius was invited and expressed his views. Unfortunately, his doctrine was condemned, and he, along with his followers, was excommunicated.

CONSTANTINE

Unfortunately? Even you had a certain sympathy with his views, didn't you?

EUSEBIUS

I cannot deny it, Majesty -- and I suffered greatly for it.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, and we will get to that. Poor Arius. So holy, so righteous and yet, I hear, he had quite a way with women.

(to audience)

Rumor had it that at one time he numbered among his followers seven-hundred virgins.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Blessed Augustus -- but they were virgins one and all.

(to audience)

He was a most temperate man.

CONSTANTINE

Temperate, no doubt, but a troublemaker.

MAXIMIAN

(to EUSEBIUS)

Please, we know all about your secret Christian love feasts.

EUSEBIUS

They have nothing to do with physical love, but with the teachings of our sacred Founder, who taught us to love our neighbor.

MAXIMIAN

The question is, how many neighbors?

LICINIUS

Did he include the barbarians? I'd like to see him try to love some of the ones I've met.

EUSEBIUS

He said we should love everyone.

MAXIMIAN

I never had that much energy, even in the days of my youth.

FAUSTA

I don't know, Dad. Mom told me you were a pretty hot guy.

EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

How misunderstood we were before our second savior rescued us!

(to MAXIMIAN)

Christ's teachings grow out of the Hebrew *Old Testament*. For example, Moses said "Thou shalt not kill." Christ enunciated the positive statement, that is, not just to refrain from killing, but to love others, love them as you love yourself. So, you see, the old and the *New Testament* make up the two sides of Christian worship, like two hands pointed up to God.

(LIGHT comes up and reveals CRISPUS)

CONSTANTINE

Again, so soon?

CRISPUS

This isn't about you.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Eusebius, I know I gave my word, but I couldn't resist.

EUSEBIUS

What's on your mind, impatient but good, overall good, Caesar?

CRISPUS

Thanks for the compliment. I always wanted to ask Lactantius, but I never had the courage. How does Christian love compare with all the kinds of love described in Plato's *Symposium*?  
(to audience)

It was my favorite work. All these guys are sitting around a table, drinking and eating. They start to talk about love. As the night goes on and they get more and more potted, they really get carried away and describe it in all kinds of ways -- physical love and spiritual love, brotherly love, love of beauty and art, glory and immortality, love of the good and the gods.

EUSEBIUS

The gods, Crispus? Certainly, Lactantius taught you better than that. But to answer your question. Plato's work has a place. But it hardly compares with *The Book of John*.

MAXIMIAN

Who's John?

FAUSTA

What I want to know is, do any of these books cover love of the very good life?

MAXIMIAN

Not much of an ethic, my daughter, for a soldier.

CRISPUS

I don't know about that. Did a good soldier ever fight and die for anything but to save life?

MAXIMIAN

Well, let me think about that.

FAUSTA

What about what I asked you, Eusebius?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Fausta. You certainly deserve an answer, too. I think it depends on what you mean by "the very good life." Surely, God gave us life, and to love it must be good. But clearly you must do so with high thoughts about yourself and with consideration for others. Did you do that, my dear?

(to MAXIMIAN)

Did any pagan ever?

MAXIMIAN

Did any Christian?

EUSEBIUS

There have been good men, many good men --

(to FAUSTA)

-- and good women.

(to audience)

But, in truth, how can one give much of himself to this life of woe?

FAUSTA

I don't know. I always thought life was a great blessing, especially compared to the alternative.

EUSEBIUS

Now, now, my dear. As the *Bible* says, we have been sent here to suffer because Adam and Eve at the forbidden apple, not to enjoy this wretched life. What other explanation but original sin, and our countless subsequent sins, can there be for our miserable state -- so often exposed as we are to the harsh elements, ravaged by famine, and brought down at any moment by diseases beyond cure?

FAUSTA

But --

EUSEBIUS

-- If life were better, perhaps it could be seen as somewhat of a blessing. But surely you must understand. In the midst of all our pain, we have found hope in Jesus Christ, who became man and died -- died on a Roman cross -- to make salvation for us possible.

LICINIUS

Many men have paid a deadly price, I among them, but with hardly as much fame.

MAXIMIAN

I'm sure I was totally, or almost totally, folded into the sands of time. Compared to me, your Christ did well by his death.

EUSEBIUS

And what patience He has to sit up in the clouds, looking down on you both, and not strike you dead again.

(to audience)

Ignorance in power -- has there ever been anything more dangerous?

CONSTANTINE

Gentlemen, can we go on with the religious matter at hand?

(to audience)

These guys could go on for hours.

EUSEBIUS

I'm sorry, your Understanding. It's just that I was so rudely interrupted.

(to CRISPUS)

Please, excuse us for a short time longer.

CRISPUS

If I must. But next time I'm really staying.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Count on it.

CONSTANTINE

I'll be here, Son.

(LIGHTS fade down on CRISPUS)

CONSTANTINE

(to EUSEBIUS)

Thanks again.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty. If I were you, I wouldn't be alarmed by Crispus. He seems, despite the circumstances, quite pleasant.

CONSTANTINE

With you. Please, let us continue.

(to audience)

Now, my court adviser on religious matters, Hosius, attempted to fill me in on the details of the dispute, but it still seemed trifling to me. I wrote a letter to both Alexander and Arius and gave it to Hosius to deliver to them, urging them to stop the plague of controversy and, above all, not to expose their disagreement to the ears of the public, who are not, with the exception of you ...

(refers to audience)

... my most insightful and understanding audience, equipped to weigh such matters. And what news did Hosius bring back? Not only was the problem much worse than I had thought, there were two more schisms tearing at the sacred garment of the Eastern Church. And --

EUSEBIUS

-- Our earthly savior realized that a much greater effort was required.

CONSTANTINE

I called for a church council to be held at Antioch. Result: the council supported Alexander, and Arius was once again condemned for his views. Not only Arius but --

(to EUSEBIUS)

-- you might as well tell them now and get it over with.

EUSEBIUS

Oh, tragic and undeserved fate! Simply for agreeing with Arius three bishops were excommunicated, and I was one of them. Yes, I was excommunicated, but only for a mercifully short time.

CONSTANTINE

Well, Eusebius, you were an Arian, weren't you?

EUSEBIUS

In the tradition of the great Origin, I --

CONSTANTINE

-- Why did you have to take sides at all?

(to audience)

Now, all my hopes for unity seemed hopeless. It was then that, at the suggestion of God, I called for a universal council at Niceae that would be representative of the entire Church. And I decided to preside over it myself. I wrote a letter, summoning all the bishops of the West, including the Pope at Rome, and all the bishops of the East, to attend it. I even volunteered to pay their travel expenses.

EUSEBIUS

It would go down in history as the first ecumenical council of the Church.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, it would. Now, can you believe that, despite my generous offer, as well as the promise of my own sublime presence, many bishops, especially in the West, neglected to attend. Yet I can forgive their lack of interest. The disagreement was so Eastern! Like me, many from the West simply didn't understand the controversy or thought it was too slight to be concerned about. In other words, they had some common sense, which I was learning has very little to do with a great deal of what is considered theological sense. I discovered, in fact, that the less a subject is amenable to reason, the more unreasonable many theologians become.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Tell them about the council. Wasn't it grand?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, cordial Augustus. The bishops who did attend came from far and wide -- over two hundred and fifty of them. The mere sight of them was magnificent. Many of them, especially those from Africa, wore strange and colorful robes I had never seen before. We assembled in the great hall of our blessed Emperor's palace at Niceae and awaited his arrival. After we were all seated, he made his majestic entrance. We rose.

CONSTANTINE

And I made my way with great humility to the gold chair I had placed among them for myself.

EUSEBIUS

After the prayer of convocation, we all turned our eyes toward him. What, we thought, did our most insightful emperor have to say to us?

CONSTANTINE

Plenty. I made a speech, urging them to seize the opportunity I had given them to achieve harmony. Go on.

EUSEBIUS

Now, we all sat down and began our discussions in earnest. There were quite a few attempts to arrive at a description of the Holy Trinity that we could all agree to. But there were objections --

CONSTANTINE

-- Minute, an infinity of minute, objections to every version.

EUSEBIUS

Even, I admit, to my own humble effort, which some found so offensive it was, in fact, torn up.

CONSTANTINE

Yet you would come through for me to a certain extent.

(to audience)

The author tells me many historians consider this council to mark the end of the ancient world and the beginning of the Middle Ages. He tells me, in fact, that a work called the Cambridge Ancient History ends with it. When you consider the details of the theological disagreement, you'll understand why.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Hosius still had confidence in you, as I did. And he felt that you, as a relatively moderate theologian, could, if properly guided, enunciate a creed that could at least serve as something for us to work with. So --

EUSEBIUS

-- Despite the fact that my views had recently been condemned, our gracious Emperor asked me to provide a traditional description of it.

CONSTANTINE

Read the version you put forth.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, your Holiness.

(to audience)

But first let me say that what you are about to witness is, in my humble judgement, one of his finest moments as savior of the Church triumphant.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you. I am in agreement. Please, continue.

EUSEBIUS

(to audience)

You are also about to witness, if I may say so, what is perhaps the most important function I ever performed.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Especially since it was a help to you and the holy Church.

CONSTANTINE

Of course. But hold on. Don't slight the book you said you wrote about my life, even though, the author tells me, I've sunk so low in the estimation of the world that it's difficult to find an English translation of it.

EUSEBIUS

Can that be true?

CONSTANTINE

Imagine! The bookstores in New York City don't even seem to stock it. Not even a Barnes & Noble superstore.

EUSEBIUS

I don't know exactly where New York City is, but I cannot believe that such a thing could happen anywhere -- even in the most barbaric city!

CONSTANTINE

He says that's the city we're in.

EUSEBIUS

This metropolis? Oh, my, that's not good.

CONSTANTINE

Not good at all. But we have only the author's word.

EUSEBIUS

Yet, kind Majesty, what else do we have but our own hopes?

CONSTANTINE

You're right. Then, in this matter, if the author will allow me one exception, let us trust that those glorious hopes are correct.

EUSEBIUS

Do you think we're allowed to do that?

CONSTANTINE

(listens OFF)

The authors says we can believe anything we want to, as long as we get on with the story. And I agree.

(to audience)

We've got something of immense importance to tell you about now.

(to EUSEBIUS)

Please, read the creed.

(to audience)

Then you can understand the brilliance of the suggestion I made -- at least, partially understand it.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, blessed Emperor.

(takes up book; clears throat; reads)

"I believe in one God, Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light of Light, Life of Life, the only-begotten Son, First-born of all creation, begotten of the Father before all ages, through Whom all things were made. He was made flesh for our salvation. He lived among men, and suffered, and rose on the third day, and ascended to His Father. And He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. I also believe in one Holy Spirit, for our Lord said, when sending his disciples to preach the Gospel, "Go forth and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I affirm that this is my faith, that it was always so, and that until I die I shall hold it, anathematizing all ungodly heresy.

(looks up)

Our most pious Emperor was the first to testify that what I had read was completely orthodox.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, I was.

(to audience)

Now, I ask you, do you hear anything wrong with that? I couldn't either, but then Hosius helped me along. Let me do the same for you. Here is, if you can believe it, the cause of the entire controversy. One faction believed that the Father and the Son always existed; they were, in ...

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

... the words of the theologians who favored the view, co-eternal. The Son was not created in time, but was as eternal as the Father. Another faction, the Arians, believed that only the Father was eternal and that the Son, while made differently from the rest of creation, came after Him. The Son was subsequent in time to the Father. That's it! That's why the whole Church was divided! That's why I had to call the council. And that's why divine wrath might have descended on me and the Holy Roman Empire!

EUSEBIUS

In his more than earthly wisdom, our divine Emperor knew there had to be a way for all of us to agree.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, I did. And now I made my suggestion. It was the insertion of the word "homoousion." An unusual word, I admit, so I'll say it one more time. "Homoousion."

EUSEBIUS

Oh, devoted one, I'm sorry to confess this to you, but I was never a great fan of that particular piece of nomenclature.

CONSTANTINE

Eusebius, don't let me hear even a breath of objection to it.  
(to audience)

Well, the truth is, he wasn't alone. A lot of other bishops didn't like it, either. It wasn't, of course, a completely new idea. In fact, the word had already been rejected by the Arians before the council. Yet I felt it still had possibilities. Why? It had the saving grace of many an adroit solution: it could, with a proper explanation, be interpreted in various ways. As a result, it could satisfy people with different beliefs. You'll get what I did if you just keep in mind that "ousia" means essence or substance, so "homoousian" means "of the same substance" or "consubstantial." I must say the word hit the council like a bolt from heaven.

EUSEBIUS

I was one of those struck, blessed Augustus.

CONSTANTINE

What?

EUSEBIUS

Never mind, kind Majesty.  
(to audience)

Now, he had me read the improved version.  
(hushed)

And for this I might have gone to hell!

CONSTANTINE

What? Speak up, Eusebius, and read the version I helped frame.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, my most wise Emperor.  
(reads)

"We believe in one God, Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, He is of the substance of the Father, God of God, true God of true God, begotten and not made, consubstantial with the Father; by Him all things in heaven and earth were made. For us men and for our salvation He came down and was made flesh and became man. He suffered and rose on the third day. He ascended into heaven and is coming to judge the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church condemns those who say that there was once a time when He was not, that He was not before He was begotten, that He came into being out of nothing, that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis and substance from the Father, that He is a creature, or that He is susceptible to change or variation."

CONSTANTINE

(to EUSEBIUS)

Thank you.

EUSEBIUS

But, Imperial Holiness, I can't deny it any longer. I was not entirely at ease with the changes.

CONSTANTINE

Many weren't. But thankfully you agreed to sign the creed as I had improved it.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, I did do that.  
(to audience)

But I had to write a long letter to my followers back home explaining why.

CONSTANTINE

All you had to tell them is that my brilliant suggestion made it possible for you to do so.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, mighty Augustus.

(to audience; hushed)

We suspected that he got that word, "homoousian," from Hosius.

CONSTANTINE

Eusebius, are you whispering to them again?

EUSEBIUS

I was merely making peace with myself, Majesty, because that is precisely what I did.

CONSTANTINE

Good. And how could you possibly have any reservations after I provided my adroit explanation?

(to audience)

Here's the inspired way I made agreement possible. I explained to the council that "consubstantial" did not refer to any bodily experience. The Son did not exist by a division or cutting off from the Father. An incorporeal being couldn't partake in a bodily experience. These things had to be understood in divine and mysterious terms.

EUSEBIUS

That was the reasoning of our great Emperor, who was granted a special communication with those on high. The Son is consubstantial with the Father but not in a way that has anything to do with mortal life. It is purely a spiritual matter. I accepted "begotten and not made" for the same reason. "Made" applies to the rest of creation, and Christ is by nature superior to it. Yet He became man and thereby partook of a bodily experience. Oh, my, well --

MAXIMIAN

Not even the multitudinous pagan pantheon was ever this confusing.

CONSTANTINE

-- Don't anybody -- and that includes you, questioning Eusebius -- be concerned if you're still a little confused. I sensed that even many at the council seemed somewhat puzzled. But that doesn't really matter. All of those present except Arius and two of his followers signed the amended creed.

EUSEBIUS

Due in no small part to your gracious presence, your Blessedness.

(to audience)

I'm sorry to say that all three dissenters were excommunicated. Fortunately, I was not among them.

CONSTANTINE

Their stubbornness was an unfortunate marring of an otherwise perfect outcome. But I was still determined to have total unity -- without, I might add, persecution. So I simply decided to do my best over time to have Arius and his followers readmitted to the Catholic worship. Regrettably, I ran into a stone wall in Alexander's successor, Athanasius, who would not relent, even when I threatened to depose him.

EUSEBIUS

Yet you did succeed, Majesty.

(to audience)

Arius was at last received back into the fold.

CONSTANTINE

Over the painfully annoying objections of Athanasius.

(to audience)

I can still hear him repeating, as Alexander did before him -- "Always the Father, always the Son! There was never a time when the Son was not!" I finally lost my patience and banished him to Gaul. You want to talk about stubbornness? He was still in exile when I died.

(upset)

No, no, will the disappointing news never stop? Now, the author is telling me that not long after my death, you bishops got rid of the word "homoousion."

EUSEBIUS

We did?

CONSTANTINE

Got rid of it and settled for the idea of the mere likeness of the Father and Son. And, if the author is to be believed, my own son Constantius presided over the council. Is all this true, Bishop Eusebius?

EUSEBIUS

It was after my time, too, holy Augustus. I was, as luck would have it, dead.

CONSTANTINE

Ah, will they never learn! I mean, how often does information come straight down from heaven, as it came to me?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, your Benevolence. But take heart. From what you've said, you can see that they at least retained its meaning in a certain sense.

CONSTANTINE

I'm not impressed. Yet I will go on.

(to audience)

Before I dismissed the council, I tried to take care of other, relatively minor schisms. But the eternal arguments finally exhausted my patience -- and I decided the leaders of them were enemies of the truth; not only that but foes of life and counselors of destruction. But by now, as I mentioned, I had decided that being patient would be better than persecuting any of my fellow Christians, no matter how misguided they were. So I decided that I would do what I could to mend things over time. The most important remaining matter I wanted to address was an especially important goal I had set for the holy Church.

EUSEBIUS

In his wisdom, he wanted us to settle on a uniform date for Easter. Churches in different areas celebrated it on different dates.

CONSTANTINE

And I knew God wanted all Christians to celebrate it on the same date. So I suggested one and they agreed to it.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Mighty Augustus.

(to audience)

But in doing so we had to neglect, I'm afraid to say, the fact that Easter is related to the spring equinox, which doesn't occur in all geographical areas of the Empire at the same time.

CONSTANTINE

What does that matter, compared to unity? We are only finite minds trying to settle infinite issues. And the Savior entrusted me to establish the unity of the Catholic Church on earth. Didn't He?

EUSEBIUS

By all means, your Majesty.

CONSTANTINE

As for the other matters we dealt with, I will only mention the Novatians, who were granted their rights on condition that they moderate their views a little. They were strict beyond belief. In fact, they believed there could be no forgiveness for any mortal sins except, thankfully, through baptism. They also considered second marriages mortal sins. The leader of this group was Acesius, who was so inflexible I once told him, "Acesius, take a ladder and climb up to heaven by yourself." Yet, sometimes, I wondered if their beliefs could be true -- harsh news for us all.

EUSEBIUS

But remember, dearest brother, no forgiveness except through baptism.

CONSTANTINE

Oh, saving grace! Blessed rite!

(to audience)

Now, the council was over and the great rift had been healed. After all, can't the decision of nearly three hundred bishops be considered the judgement of God? Yes, now the holy Catholic Church could go on, shining light of the holy Roman Empire, unified and pleasing to the most powerful God.

So I concluded the council. Now, I felt I could live, and die, in peace. I had done my job.

EUSEBIUS

A miraculous job. Christ was undoubtedly there to inspire you.

(to audience)

Otherwise, I never would have signed the document.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you for your flexibility. You did what was right.

EUSEBIUS

Yes, my Understanding.

(to audience; hushed voice)

We all knew it would be futile to try to make any changes during his most blessed lifetime.

CONSTANTINE

For the last time, will you please stop whispering? What did you say now?

EUSEBIUS

That we all knew how blessed you are for guiding us to what seemed, at the time, a perfect and eternal answer.

(looks down; to self)

Oh, God in heaven forgive me!

CONSTANTINE

You could have said that loud enough for me to hear. I would not have taken offense.

(to audience)

At the conclusion of the council, I invited the bishops to join me at the Imperial Palace and help me celebrate my vicinellia, the 20th anniversary of my reign.

EUSEBIUS

I remember when I arrived for the celebration. I walked through the majestic building, past guards standing with drawn swords, and, in the innermost hall, I saw the Emperor reclining at his table. I had the honor of joining him there. As we dined, I felt as if we were all part of the Kingdom of Christ, and that what was happening was not reality, but a dream of heaven.

CONSTANTINE

Ah, blessed event! And well-deserved, too!

(to audience)

Settling on a description of the Holy Trinity is no easy matter. Yet how soon my joy turned to bitter tragedy.

EUSEBIUS

Bitter for us all, dear heart.

CONSTANTINE

It happened only about six months later. I was on my way for the celebration of my vicenallia at Rome when the event -- oh, how can I say it? -- the event occurred that haunts me, haunts the depths of my soul and makes me fear for my own salvation. My eldest son, Crispus -- oh, dear Crispus, how can I say what I now must?

EUSEBIUS

Strength, holy Emperor, strength. You had your reasons.

FAUSTA

He murdered him.

CONSTANTINE

You drove me to it -- drove me to it with your lies.

FAUSTA

With the truth, I swear!

EUSEBIUS

Please, let him go on with his doubly sad tale.

CONSTANTINE

He was traveling with me. I received intelligence that he -- my brave, brilliant, and beloved, yes, beloved, first son, the son who had saved my expedition against Licinius, had attempted --

(SPOTLIGHT comes up on CRISPUS.

CONSTANTINE covers his face with his arm)

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

-- And now you have returned.

CRISPUS

Yes, Father. I am here -- this time for keeps.

CONSTANTINE

(looks out)

Oh, Crispus, dear son, how could I have done it?

(throws himself on his knees)

Can you ever forgive me, you who were so faithful and valiant? You who saved the day for me at Byzantium?

CRISPUS

Forgive you? How can I do that? I was your first son, and, despite my distinguished services to you, what did you do? Less than if I had not performed them.

(to audience)

Not only did he have me executed, he didn't even raise me to the title of Augustus, which everyone but him thought I had earned. Instead, he kept me in his court like a prisoner, until --

CONSTANTINE

-- You seduced my wife!

CRISPUS

No, no! Until you had me poisoned.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, but --

CRISPUS

-- How, Father? How, in God's name, could you have had me killed?

CONSTANTINE

You were told the reason. My wife --

CRISPUS

-- But not my mother, Father.

CONSTANTINE

No, no, not your mother. She said that you --

FAUSTA

-- All I said is true! I swear!

CRISPUS

Stop lying. We both died for it.

(to CONSTANTINE)

How could you believe her?

CONSTANTINE

I trusted her. How was I to know --

CRISPUS

-- that she lied! That she was only paving the way for her own sons by you.

FAUSTA

Not true!

CONSTANTINE

Ah, the knot's too tight! I can't unwind it.

(to FAUSTA)

Silence! I will have silence from you!

(to CRISPUS)

Are you certain?

CRISPUS

Of my innocence in that? I profess it. Though, as a young man, I cannot profess my innocence in everything.

CONSTANTINE

Are you referring to the young girl you abducted?

CRISPUS

I proclaim my innocence in regard to my mother!

CONSTANTINE

And the young girl, even though you were already married?

CRISPUS

Why could she not be my concubine?

CONSTANTINE

Why indeed? Have you no sense of sin?

CRISPUS

I do not equate a moment's pleasure with the sentence of death. You should have at least given yourself a few days to reconsider.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, I should have done that. But I was too furious. The thought that you, my own son, had sought -- and got -- the sexual favors of my wife! Incest! Incest, it was! And punishable by death!

CRISPUS

Incest, with a woman not my mother? It wouldn't have been that, if it had been anything, which it wasn't.

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps, not to you, but --

CRISPUS

Your judgement was confused by your temper.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, that could be.

CRISPUS

One of your shortcomings, but not an excuse. You always had a bad temper -- and the privilege of exercising it. Next to all your kindness was your ruthlessness.

LICINIUS

Yes, ruthlessness!

MAXIMIAN

I said so myself.

CONSTANTINE

(to CRISPUS)

Can you forgive me, Son?

(refers to audience)

I'm trying to explain my actions to them -- all of my actions and need --

CRISPUS

-- Explain? How? Can there be forgiveness without fairness? Can you give me back my breath, my years, and the glory I might have brought upon myself and the Empire?

CONSTANTINE

I --

CRISPUS

-- shall have a seat and watch your circumlocutions. To be awake again, after such a long oblivion, is also a delight to me.

CONSTANTINE

But you'll make me self-conscious.

CRISPUS

You made me a bit worse than that. Let me hear your explanation, along with the audience. If there is any chance I might forgive you, it is only by doing so.

CONSTANTINE

Then you might forgive me?

CRISPUS

I will sit and listen. How can I know more before I hear? Remember, I died long before you did.

CONSTANTINE

If you only knew how sorry I am. But good, good, have a seat, dear Son. And listen to the unfolding of your dear father's life. A great deal happened after, after ...

CRISPUS

... say it! You had me executed.

(takes a seat)

Go on, Father. I want to hear about your long and distinguished life.

CONSTANTINE

All right. Listen, and may I unlock your pity. And, dare I hope, your forgiveness?

(to audience)

I admit it! His death is one thing you must consider. But I did so many wondrous and sacred, yes, sacred, things. It was I, and only I, who grasped the sacrificial knives of the pagans and cut the Christians free. I, who made the Roman Empire the Holy Roman Empire, with the bishops at my right hand. Should I not be among them in heaven? And, as I tried to tell my son, I was misled by my wife, my second wife. It was she who --

FAUSTA

-- paid for your righteousness with my own life!

CONSTANTINE

But I loved --

FAUSTA

-- and killed me. How little I knew when I went to take my bath that you would have the temperature --

CONSTANTINE

-- Please, Fausta. Must we go into that again?

FAUSTA

Why not? It is the story and agony of my death.

(grabs her throat; gasps)

The heat, the steam -- I can't breath! Agh! I'm choking! Such was the death he contrived for me, his wife, for the mere sin of telling him the truth. Condemn him! Condemn him, I beg you.

(to CONSTANTINE)

May you roast, as I did, but in the eternity of your Christian hell!

(to audience)

He deserves it -- and no better!

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps, in your eyes. But God sees, God understands, and, God willing, I will be forgiven.

FAUSTA

Your treachery --

CONSTANTINE

-- No, no, your treachery! Yours! It was she, Crispus, who drove me to it! You know it! Blame her!

FAUSTA

My dear Crispus.

(adopts a romantic tone)

Beloved!

(goes toward him)

How we were torn apart by him!

CRISPUS

(turns away)

Please, don't compound your sin.

(to CONSTANTINE)

She's pretending again, Father. I never --

FAUSTA

-- should have been parted from me -- and both of us murdered! How can you sit there and feel nothing for me? You, dear, ever-so-handsome young man, who took me in your arms breathlessly and poured your youth --

CRISPUS

-- stop it, Fausta! Isn't it enough that I was killed?

FAUSTA

-- I died for our love, too.

CRISPUS

What love? I never knew your romantic love, any more than your motherly love.

(to CONSTANTINE)

I was not her lover, not even loved as her adopted son.

FAUSTA

What are you saying?

CRISPUS

You know as well as I do. He's the only one who doesn't.

CONSTANTINE

What is that? Tell me now?

CRISPUS

I will say it. She was already too involved with another member of the palace staff to have a place in her arms for me.

FAUSTA

That's not true -- not true! Don't believe him!

CRISPUS

Everyone knew about you and your slave.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Everyone but you. And what did you know, but the revenge of a ill-informed father?

FAUSTA

Don't listen to his lies! I was faithful, darling, always faithful!

CONSTANTINE

I wasn't as uninformed as both of you seem to think.

(to audience)

I learned of her other interest --

FAUSTA

-- And what about his?

(points to CRISPUS)

You know he was cheating on me and his wife with that young girl who --

CONSTANTINE

-- Adultery! It was the snake in my palace! It destroyed my family!

EUSEBIUS

Yet God works in strange ways.

CONSTANTINE

What do you mean?

EUSEBIUS

Did not these events, regrettable as they are, inspire you to made stern laws against adultery!

CONSTANTINE

In this case, my preference would have been for God to work in a more usual way.

(to audience)

Yes, I made harsh laws against it. Laws that demanded death -- not only of the perpetrators, but of their parents if they tried to conceal the crime, yes, the crime.

EUSEBIUS

Yet sometimes our gentle Majesty's kindness won him over even on this issue, and he looked the other way when --

CONSTANTINE

-- I sought justice! Justice for the ill done me! Justice for morality and for Christ! And with such worthy intentions --

(to audience)

-- don't I deserve your mercy? Haven't you heard enough to know that I was provoked -- by both of them? Well, I'll tell you, God did! And God saw that justice was done! They were punished, while I ruled on, granted dominion, by the grace of God, dominion for thirty-three years.

FAUSTA

Yet you did kill us.

LICINIUS

Killed us all!

MAXIMIAN

Every last one of us.

FAUSTA

(to audience)

No wonder that one day somebody placed satirical verses on the palace gate comparing his bloody reign with Nero's.

MAXIMIAN

Really? Oh, good!

EUSEBIUS

Never compare this blessed man with that licentious persecutor ...

(to audience)

... who blamed the burning of Rome on us -- and, oh, how many innocent Christians were tortured and killed for that lie, right in his garden!

CONSTANTINE

No, no, the comparison is completely unfair! And you all led me to your deaths.

FAUSTA

I --

CONSTANTINE

-- Yes, you especially. Didn't you know I planned to raise your own three sons to the purple, along with him?

FAUSTA

Let's not involve my other sons in this. They were too pure --

CONSTANTINE

-- Too pure? Too bad the same can't be said of you. All of you.

FAUSTA

Ah, what a loving husband.

(to audience)

Condemn him to hell, forever!

CONSTANTINE

Forever?

(to audience)

No, no, I don't deserve that! No one deserves such a sentence! Especially me -- whose life was filled with so many blessed and heroic acts! Acts worthy of the Apostles! Acts as numerous as the gold statues and coins I minted out of the spoils of the temples of the pagans. More numerous even than those! And I trust you'll see -- you and Almighty God -- that I deserve forgiveness -- yes, forgiveness, and, hopefully, its supreme blessing, immortal life.

EUSEBIUS

Don't be concerned, blessed Majesty. Remember, God knows everything. And He knows that you acted only out of necessity.

LICINIUS

How can you possibly --

CONSTANTINE

-- Yes, yes, and He advised me personally.

EUSEBIUS

See there. I myself expect eternal salvation, yet He never came to me. Think then, good Emperor, how surpassingly worthy you are of divine mercy.

FAUSTA

(to audience)

Forget this nonsense. Damn him, I pray you! Damn him, while I watch.

CONSTANTINE

Don't listen to her. She's just trying to get back at me.

CRISPUS

I ask again, how could you have believed her? Couldn't you have come and asked me?

CONSTANTINE

Not at the time. You must understand. Ruling the empire for twenty years had taken a toll on my nerves. It made me -- OK, I admit it -- more and more impatient. Can't someone who has done so much good be forgiven? After all, I'm only human.

LICINIUS

At least, he acknowledges that.

CRISPUS

(to audience)

You decide. Just remember, I died for his impatience.

(to SELF)

Impatience? Oh, come on. It had to be more than that.

(contemplates)

I've got it. I died too soon to realize it! You were jealous of me.

CONSTANTINE

Jealous of you?

CRISPUS

Yes! Why else did you behave as you did toward me? Don't deny it. I see it now. Incredible as it sounds, you were jealous even of what little glory I had.

LICINIUS

I think you're on to something, kid.

CONSTANTINE

Stay out of this or die.

LICINIUS

What, again?

MAXIMIAN

He threatened to kill me twice, too.

CRISPUS

You just couldn't stand any light that might distract attention from your own -- even my little flicker of fame.

MAXIMIAN

(to OTHERS)

He's probably right.

CRISPUS

Yeah. He was blinded by the majesty of his own light.

FAUSTA

And what pitiful light!

CRISPUS

And, in the darkness behind it, jealousy --

CONSTANTINE

-- No, not jealousy of you, Son. Never that. Believe me --

CRISPUS

-- Then what -- fear that I would supplant you?

CONSTANTINE

No, no, not that! I simply felt, at the time, that your incest --

(points to FAUSTA)

-- your incestuous relationship with her -- had to be punished.

FAUSTA

You --

CONSTANTINE

-- Silence, woman.

(to CRISPUS)

Son -- and you, Fausta -- what would Christ, the Lord, have done to me if I had overlooked that sin?

CRISPUS

Oh, Father, if only you had seen that religion, like everything else, should be taken in moderation.

EUSEBIUS

Religion in moderation? How can you --

CRISPUS

-- I learned and believed the golden mean of Aristotle.

(to CONSTANTINE)

And you, Father, should have taken your studies more seriously as a youth.

EUSEBIUS

How can you say such a thing to that learned and blessed man?

CRISPUS

Having given my life, I feel I have a certain right to state the truth.

EUSEBIUS

But religion in moderation? Aristotle did not have religious belief in mind! My, my Crispus, I never thought I'd hear you say something like that? What about great and passionate faith?

CRISPUS

What about a small and ignominious death?

LICINIUS

Sentence him!

FAUSTA

The truth of his life is clear.

CONSTANTINE

No, don't listen to them.

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

(to AUDIENCE)

How much I've suffered.

(to FAUSTA)

Adulteress! Not only was your conduct a sin against me -- but against divine law!

FAUSTA

Who says you can speak for that?

CONSTANTINE

I have been commanded to, by God, the Avenger, and Christ, the Protector. They came to me. They talked to me. They commanded me.

MAXIMIAN

Did they command you to kill me?

CONSTANTINE

You died by your own acts and hands.

LICINIUS

(to audience)

Condemn him. There can be no excuse for killing me. He broke his word to me.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Die! As I did!

FAUSTA

Damned! You are damned!

MAXIMIAN

That's certain, if his Gods are true, they will condemn him.

CONSTANTINE

No, no, you're all wrong.

(to audience)

God loved me. And I built many churches to him -- among them, St. Peter's and St. Paul's in Rome and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. And my mother, Helena Augusta ...

(to FAUSTA)

... who helped me understand your treachery --

FAUSTA

(to audience)

-- I never did get along with my mother-in-law.

EUSEBIUS

Don't blaspheme against her! She built many great churches in the Holy Land.

FAUSTA

Does that a holy woman make -- or a holy man?

CRISPUS

(looks skyward)

If so, my dear mother, send me down bricks and mortar.

CONSTANTINE

Then you admit guilt!

CRISPUS

Not the kind I died for.

FAUSTA

Who here died for guilt?

CONSTANTINE

I can't stand it. If you won't face up to the truth, what hope is there? I will go on now. I have one more important thing to tell them.

(to audience)

It's one of my proudest achievements -- and proof that God loved me. Why else would he command me to build my own city, dedicated to Christianity?

EUSEBIUS

(to ALL)

Sit, I beg you, a moment longer, while he tells them of that most holy achievement.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, yes, surely that will win me your forgiveness.

(to audience)

Now, at the command of God I embarked on a great project. I built a new capital for the Empire.

EUSEBIUS

A Christian capital, dedicated to the one true God and never to be sullied with pagan sacrifices.

(to OTHERS)

Grant him, I pray you, time to describe this wondrous service to the Lord.

CONSTANTINE

I considered a variety of locations, but finally settled on Byzantium.

LICINIUS

My Byzantium!

CONSTANTINE

You mean, your former Byzantium.

(to audience)

This city was, I thought, much better suited for the role than Rome. Among other considerations, it was protected by the Hellespont and the Bosphorus on three sides. And it was situated so I could keep an eye on the Persians in the East and the barbarian tribes along the Danube. True, it was a bit too far East for me to keep as careful a watch as I would have liked to on the westernmost parts of the Empire, especially the German tribes along the Rhine, but, all in all, I felt it was by far the best location. It would also make a great center for trade by land and by sea.

(pained)

No, no! I refuse to believe it. The author is telling me that moving the center of the Empire sped up the fall of Rome and all of the Western Empire. I'm sure he's wrong. Anyway, I was far from the first to rule from other than Rome. And God would not have so misled me. He, in fact, guided my every decision. I mapped out the border of the city on foot, with a lance in my hand. None of the workers who walked with me believed how big I intended the capital to be. I told them, "I will advance until the invisible guide who marches before me thinks I should stop."

EUSEBIUS

And how magnificent it would turn out!

CONSTANTINE

Magnificent, at least.

(to audience)

The job turned out to be even bigger than I expected. In fact, the city took six years to build. And I expended -- who would have believed it when I began? -- 60,000 pounds of gold on it. Where did I get it? Partly from taxes.

FAUSTA

I told you he'd bring back the taxes he once relieved.

CONSTANTINE

I only did what was required in the service of God. I also hit on another plentiful source of revenue. By now I had become confident that Christ the Savior was the most powerful God and that I had nothing to fear from the gods of the pagans.

EUSEBIUS

Now, at last, he began to suppress the worship of the pagans, while he encouraged them to convert. He wanted to rule over a Holy Roman Empire and make it the worthy home of the holy Catholic Church.

## CONSTANTINE

You know it. So I stripped the pagan temples of their gold idols and removed their brass doors and roofs. I also commanded that famous works of art be brought from other parts of the empire to decorate my Christian city. I especially wanted Greek art. What else could compare with it? The world could not give me my Phidias, so I brought him to me. Yet even one Phidias would have been insufficient. My design would require a legion of his like.

## EUSEBIUS

I played a part, too. He wrote to me to send him fifty copies of the Scriptures for the new churches he had built. Didn't I provide excellent copies?

## CONSTANTINE

First-rate ones. I perused them myself.

(to audience)

Most tenderly of all, I built the Church of the Holy Apostles, which I intended as my final resting place. Now, as the city neared completion, I realized I could time the dedication to coincide with the celebration of my tricennialia.

## MAXIMIAN

Thirty years! Imagine, the ruthless tyrant was allowed to rule for thirty years! And I had to step down twice.

## LICINIUS

Talk about a crime.

## CRISPUS

By then we were so long dead.

## FAUSTA

Quite dead.

## EUSEBIUS

Let him go on. He will have unfolded his life soon.

## CONSTANTINE

Yes, soon. And then -- baptism.

## FAUSTA

It won't work. Not for you!

## EUSEBIUS

Please, God forgives.

CRISPUS

Does He?

FAUSTA

Or She? Remember, many of the gods are women. I always thought I resembled Athena.

LICINIUS

How much can any god forgive?

EUSEBIUS

A question no mortal can answer. Pray, let him continue.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, by the grace of God, I had been allowed by then to reign for thirty years. And now I had founded a New Rome -- my Constantinople. I invited bishops from all over the empire to attend the dedication. The event took place on May 11th, 330 A.D. There was a grand procession and chariot races. How splendid it all was! And, oh, how well I knew then that God loved me! I could feel it in every fiber of my being!

EUSEBIUS

Why else would He let you live to celebrate 30 years as our most blessed Emperor?

(to audience)

The first emperor in many a year to reign so long.

(to CONSTANTINE)

May I mention the part I played, Majesty?

CONSTANTINE

Go right ahead. Anybody who asks in a cordial way receives royal favor.

EUSEBIUS

Thank you, noble Emperor.

(to audience)

At the celebration I gave a speech in which I praised him -- rightly praised him. For I described him as he really is -- the spokesman of our Universal King who calls the flock to the knowledge of the truth -- the friend of God, who steers the Empire in imitation of the Mighty One.

CONSTANTINE

Eloquently said. Yes, I remember your sublime eloquence on that occasion. You make me believe that my reign was, everything considered, pure and wonderful?

MAXIMIAN

Pure and wonderful? Did he say pure --

FAUSTA

-- and wonderful? Ask his wife about that.

LICINIUS

Neither pure nor wonderful to me. Rather, filthy awful or something like that.

CONSTANTINE

(refers to OTHERS)

Only sullied by all of you!

(to audience)

Oh, how the misconduct of others diminishes our lives! But to continue. Now, I want you to know the whole truth. Yes, you should know it all. In the later years of my reign, I did indulge myself a bit in the luxuries of the palace, but never with illicit sexual desire.

EUSEBIUS

His ability to restrain himself was impressive, even to me.

CONSTANTINE

Yes, somehow I could do that.

FAUSTA

Except when he looked at me. How do you suppose we had three sons?

CONSTANTINE

I did what a man does to live on. And to show that was purely my motive, listen to what I named them: Constantius, Constans, and Constantine.

FAUSTA

Imagine trying to pick a name for your child with a man like him! Not one Fausto in the batch.

MAXIMIAN

Yes, how modest his choices were.

LICINIUS

Humility itself.

EUSEBIUS

What about your precious Licinianus?

CONSTANTINE

Enough! I am almost done.

(to audience)

I also confess that in my later years, I did take to wearing a crown -- a rather pleasant habit I picked up in the East. And I took a liking to beautiful jewelry, too.

(shows off some)

Don't you like it? And my clothes were so elegantly trimmed with gold.

(indicates gold trim on toga)

But, despite all this finery, never doubt it. I was still a man and had great energy.

EUSEBIUS

And he burned it well -- like the careful steward of a precious lamp. Why, he had so much energy he still attempted to convert the members of his court with long and, I must say, downright thrilling speeches. And he was always very respectful of me. In fact, once when I gave a very long sermon at his palace myself, he stood for every word.

CONSTANTINE

I --

EUSEBIUS

-- Don't deny it, Majesty. You insisted on standing, even though I begged you to have a seat.

CONSTANTINE

All right, all right. So I did.

(to audience)

I was still active in war, too. I was, in fact, planning a new campaign against the barbarians when I suddenly feel ill. Mortally ill. Yes, all of a sudden, I felt my life begin to fade away.

EUSEBIUS

God, who bestows all good, decided that the time had come to bring him to a better inheritance. The affairs of the Empire had been looked after well, and He called on him to pay the debt of nature.

CONSTANTINE

By then I had provided for the succession. I had named my three sons by her and my --

(refers to FAUSTA)

CRISPUS

-- I should have had the first place.

CONSTANTINE

True, my son, if you had lived. Accept my sorrow.  
(to audience)

Why did I divide the rule of the empire again? I'm the only person I ever met with the mind and strength to protect and discipline the whole thing.

CRISPUS

I could have done it, too.

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps, you could have. Unfortunately, no one will ever know.  
(great pain)

Oh, my God, no! The author has just informed me that the son I trusted the most, Constantius, named after my own father, soon after my death, on a pretence of treachery and in the absence of his brothers, annihilated almost all of my family. Oh, sorrow, sorrow, and more sorrow! Why was I even brought back? But what about my other sons? No, no, I don't even want to know. How often does greatness arise in one family?

CRISPUS

In ours, at least twice.

CONSTANTINE

I agree, Son. And now I will conclude my visit.  
(to audience)

As my illness progressed, I knew the time had come for me to be baptized. I traveled to Eusebius and invited a number of bishops for the occasion.  
(to EUSEBIUS)

The time has come. I am ready to be baptized.

LICINIUS

Oh, mockery, mockery!

MAXIMIAN

Can a murderer go to heaven?

FAUSTA

It wouldn't be fair -- unless he can take us all with him on angel's wings.

MAXIMIAN

Look at them -- already sprouting from his back!

LICINIUS

But hardly as grand as the wings of Mercury.

EUSEBIUS

Please, cease with your blasphemy.

(to CONSTANTINE)

Are you ready, Constantine Augustus?

CONSTANTINE

Yes. Let me remove the purple.

(takes off his crimson robe and hands it to EUSEBIUS)

As I hand it over to your care, I now resign all political power forever. From now on, I shall live with you and the other bishops, live as one of you, a brother among brothers, until my last moment.

(looks up)

Oh, Almighty God and Christ our Savior, since the day I saw the vision you vouchsafed to me in the sky, in the very light of the sun, I have labored with one goal -- to make the Roman Empire a safe and prosperous home for the Catholic Church and thereby worthy of the name of Holy.

Now I quit my labors and hope only to pass on to my place beside you.

EUSEBIUS

(holds out white cassock)

Imperial Majesty, the cloak of a catechumen.

(helps him put it on)

CONSTANTINE

I'm ready, blessed Eusebius.

(to audience)

You know my life. Judge for yourselves if I shall be granted eternal salvation.

FAUSTA

Or sent to hell!

LICINIUS

If there is one, to the deepest part of it!

MAXIMIAN

And, if I had the power, I would push him yet deeper.

CONSTANTINE

And you, noble Son, what of you?

CRISPUS

(refers to audience)

They have heard. They will judge you, Father.

CONSTANTINE

But what about you?

CRISPUS

Apparently, we have all decided.

EUSEBIUS

(raises his hand to silence them)

Enough! You are now in the presence of the Lord, who has certainly descended for this glorious and momentous rite.

CONSTANTINE

Thank you, blessed Eusebius. Then let there be no delay.

(falls on his knees)

EUSEBIUS

Yes, my Emperor.

(raises eyes and arms)

Oh, God most high and Jesus Christ, holy Savior, look down upon your servant, Constantine Augustus, who has labored mightily all through his blessed reign to help establish, preserve and unify your one true holy Catholic Church, and grant him eternal salvation. Forgive him the sins of his past life, all the mortal and all the venial sins, too, and welcome him at the moment of his death with joyful arms to a most high place in heaven beside you, a place that he, more than any other man of his time, so rightly deserves. And in order that I, acting on behalf of the Church you so greatly love, may help bring you to that most blissful and triumphant end ...

(anoints him with holy water and makes the sign  
of the cross over him, as LIGHTS begin to fade)

... I baptize you, Flavius Constantine, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CONSTANTINE

Am I baptized now?

EUSEBIUS

Yes, Majesty. And free of all sin.

(SPOT illuminates CONSTANTINE)

CONSTANTINE

Oh, wondrous rite! Oh, holy rite! Too good for human hopes! Now, I'm certain that I shall have eternal life! Free of all sin, I shall at the very moment of my death ascend to heaven -- and reign, as a dear bishop once promised me, alongside of Almighty God and his only-begotten son, Jesus Christ -- reign with them for all time. I know it. Oh, Jesus Christ, help me! I know it! I do so know it!

(looks up)

Well, don't I?

BLACKOUT

END OF THE PLAY