

A GODLY TOLERANCE

by

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We have written elsewhere about the subject of religious tolerance.* Recently, one of the fathers at Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, MA. showed me a text he had found in Eusbesius' *Life of Constantine*. Actually, the text is a very beautiful prayer which Saint Constantine the Great addresses to God. This prayer reveals — once again — the wonderful influence that Lactantius, Saint Constantine's instructor, had on his young student — to the benefit of the entire race of man.

Here is Saint Constantine's Prayer:

My own desire is, for the common good of the world and the advantage of all mankind, that Thy people should enjoy a life of peace and undisturbed concord. Let those, therefore, who still delight in error, be made welcome to the same degree of peace and tranquility which they have who believe. For it may be that this restoration of equal privileges to all will prevail to lead them into the straight path. Let no one molest another, but let everyone believe as his soul desires. Only let men of sound judgment be assured of this, that those only can live a life of holiness and purity, whom Thou callest to a reliance on Thy holy laws. With regard to those who will hold themselves aloof from us, let them have, if they please, their temples of falsehood: we have the glorious edifice of Thy truth. We pray, however, that they too may receive the same blessing which Thou hast given in accordance with Thy Nature, and thus experience that heartfelt joy which unity of sentiment inspires.

(Book II, 56)

So, as Lactantius taught, if you prefer, you may still hug your crocodile, and adore your tree** or you may even worship the true God. However, we pray and hope that this tolerance that we have been taught may help bring

* See my previous articles, "God Bless Lactantius," Parts One and Two.

** Metropolitan Ephraim's Comment: Did I get that right, or is it the other way around?

you to the realization that you should turn to the only Creator of heaven and earth, and not worship things which are only His creatures.

As Orthodox Christians, we pray that "all men may come to the knowledge of the truth."

No inquisitions, no jihads, no burnings at the stake, no beheadings, no honor killings, no gulags, no genocides, no death marches or death camps, no pogroms, no Klu Klux Klans, no skinheads, no persecutions of those who do not commemorate you as their bishop in the Divine Liturgy. Just persuasion and a good and holy example. Just "so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in the Heavens" (Matt. 5:16). Just "acquire the Spirit of peace — the Holy Spirit — and thousands will be saved around you" (St. Seraphim of Sarov). Just "we follow in the footsteps of the Holy Fathers" (the Fourth Ecumenical Council). Just tending to our own failings, and not judging others.

Just fidelity to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith delivered to the world by God's holy ones, including Saint Constantine the Great.