

GOD BLESS LACTANTIUS!

Part Two

“The Edict of Milan”

When we, Constantine and Licinius, emperors, had an interview at Milan, and conferred together with respect to the good and security of the commonweal, it seemed to us that, amongst those things that are profitable to mankind in general, the reverence paid to the Divinity merited our first and chief attention, and that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best; so that the God, Who is seated in Heaven, might be benign and propitious to us and to every one under our government. And therefore we judged it a salutary measure, and one highly consonant to right reason, that no man should be denied permission to attach himself to the rites of the Christians, or to whatever other religion his mind directed him, that thus the supreme Divinity, to Whose worship we freely devote ourselves, might continue to vouchsafe His favour and beneficence to us. And accordingly we give you to know that, without regard to any provisos in our former order to you concerning the Christians, all who choose that religion are to be permitted, freely and absolutely, to remain in it, and not to be disturbed in any way, or molested. And we thought fit to be thus special in the things committed to your charge, that you might understand that the indulgence which we have granted in matters of religion to the Christians is ample and unconditional; and perceive at the same time that the open and free exercise of their respective religions is granted to all others, as well as to the Christians. For it befits the well-ordered state and the tranquillity of our times that each individual be allowed, according to his own choice, to worship the Divinity; and we mean not to detract anything from the honour due to any religion or its votaries. Moreover, with respect to the Christians, we formerly gave certain orders concerning the places appropriated for their religious assemblies; but now we will that all persons who have purchased such places, either from our exchequer or from any one else, do restore them to the Christians, without money demanded or price claimed, and that this be performed immediately and unambiguously; and we will also that they who have obtained any right to such places by form of gift do forthwith restore them to the Christians: reserving always to such persons, who have either purchased for a price, or gratuitously acquired them, to make application to the judge of the district, if they look on themselves as entitled to any equivalent from our beneficence.

All those places are, by your intervention, to be immediately restored to the Christians. And because it appears that, besides the places appropriated to religious worship, the Christians did possess other places, which belonged not to individuals, but to their society in general, that is, to their churches, we include all such within the regulation aforesaid, and we will that you cause them all to be restored to the society or churches, and *that* without hesitation or controversy: Provided always, that the persons making restitution without a price paid shall be at liberty to seek indemnification from our bounty. In furthering all these things for the benefit of the Christians, you are to use your utmost diligence, to the end that our orders be speedily obeyed, and our gracious purpose in securing the public tranquillity promoted. So shall that divine favour which, in affairs of the mightiest importance, we have already experienced, continue to give success to us, and in our successes make the commonweal happy. And that the significance of this our gracious ordinance may be made known unto all, we will that you cause it by your authority to be published everywhere.*

June 13, 312

Metropolitan Ephraim's Note: One of the problems in the world today is that the persecution of people for their religious beliefs is so widespread, it is a pandemic. Such being the case, all we can do is pick our battles. For example, in Uganda there are millions of orphans that need help, but we cannot possibly help them all. However, we can lend assistance to at least a handful. This is certainly better than doing nothing, or telling ourselves, "It's not my problem."

It might be a good idea for all of us to read again the Gospel lection for Meatfare Sunday—the Gospel that deals with the Last Judgment (Luke 25:31-46).

* From Lactantius' *On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, chap. 48. It is important to remember that the Edict of Milan, which taught toleration for *all* religions, was inspired by the teachings of an Orthodox Christian catechist, Lactantius himself.