|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of the Challenge | **The Rise of Constantine** |
| Source of the Challenge | In the fourth century the Roman Catholic Church faced a significant external challenge from the Caesar of the West, Constantine, rising to take power, first of the West, by defeating Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312CE and later by capturing the Eastern part of the empire, by ending the uneasy association with Lucinius in 324CE. By 330CE, Constantine had moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium and the religious face of Europe was altered forever. |
| Details of the Challenge | The challenge to the Christian movement took a number of forms. Constantine’s rise was firstly a push for unity of the Empire and then for unity in the faith of the Empire: one empire, one emperor, one God, one faith. The Christians had been a diverse bunch and this new development of acceptance by the empire challenged a number of aspects of the church. Each Christian community had evolved independently and while unified in belief in Jesus as the Christ and son of God, there was a great deal of variety in the details of that belief and its practice.  **Beliefs:** The traditional belief that Jesus was the saviour of the world begged a further question, who is Jesus in himself? There were divergent answers to the question. Some said that Jesus was God (Athansius). Others claimed that Jesus was God’s son and could not possibly by God (Arius).  **Sacred texts:** Also the sacred texts of the Christians were many and diverse. An official listing or canon had not been finally agreed upon.  **Rituals:** There were differences in the dating of celebration of the most important annual Christian festival, Easter.  Constantine saw the potential instability of the situation and acted. In 325, in response to this disharmony, Constantine ordered the Council of Nicaea.  **Social Structure:** This council was the largest gathering of Christian bishops in the history of the Church to that time, and though the majority of those present were representing the eastern churches of Egypt and Greece. There were delegates from Rome, and thus the title "ecumenical" (meaning "of the whole world") was attached. Constantine attended as well, describing himself as "bishop of external things," and kept a secular position on the issues, but it was clear that he wanted Christianity to be united and harmonious. |
| Era | The historical context of the challenge is the period known in Church history as the beginnings of the Age of the Christian Empire. Beginning with the Edict of Milan, co-authored by Lucinius and Constantine, and lasting through to the fall of Rome in 476CE. This period is characterised by the eventual acceptance of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire (both East and West). |
| Dates & Events | 312 Battle of the Milvian Bridge  313 Edict of Milan  325 Council of Nicea |
| Places | Rome  Constantinople  Nicea |
| People | Constantine  Arius  Athanasius |
| Aspects of Religious Traditions effected by the challenge or used to respond to the challenge | The beliefs concerning ultimate reality of the faith system were in jeopardy. Orthodoxy (what constitutes true belief) was being questioned.  The sacred texts of the tradition were in the process of being accepted and ordered.  Social structure was invoked in a new way to serve the needs of the emperor and the faith. |
| Stance taken by the tradition | The stance of the church was to accept the demands of the emperor for unity. |
| Responses taken by the tradition | The church responded to the challenge by agreeing to some demands from Constantine.  **Social Structure and Beliefs:** The emperor insisted that a meeting of Church leaders be held at Nicea in 325CE to sort out the matter of the Arian heresy. Shortly, the die was cast for a Trinitarian Christianity, the Christian Bible and the major Christian festival.  The impact of the responses of the religious tradition in the tradition were profound.  **Beliefs:** The church fathers at Nicea torn up the Arian writings and affirmed that Jesus and the Father are *consubstantial* in being. The Nicene Creed, the great contribution of the Council and a statement still used by Christians to this day, was composed by Saint Athanasius, a young Egyptian deacon who would later follow Alexandros as patriarch of Alexandria.  **Sacred Texts:** There is conjecture over the how much discussion of the canon of the bible was ever held at Nicea, but soon after the council, Constantine (perhaps in 331 CE) ordered the preparation of 50 bibles for Constantinople (according to Eusebius of Caesarea, who fulfilled the order). This act confirmed the content of the Christian scriptures from that point on. Some of these may well be the oldest existing bibles (Codex Vaticanus; Codex Siniaticus). With more historical certainty the fathers agreed that a single dating system for Easter should be established without reference to the Jewish Paschal calendar.  The impact of the responses of the religious tradition in the wider society was ultimately to see Christianity become the official state religion in 394 CE, under the final emperor of a united empire, Theodosius. In the west the evolving political vacuum was being filled by the Church. The growth of power of Church officials and properties was explosive. The papacy in Rome continued to assert itself under Leo the Great (Pope 440-461 CE) and survived the fall of the west to the barbarians. Meanwhile, Byzantine Christianity in the East had begun to blossom under the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople. By the end of the fifth century, the Western empire had fallen. The idea of one God, one Church and one Empire was not lost in the East or West. |
| Significance of the Challenge | The impact of the responses of the religious tradition to other religious communities was profound for the Roman pantheon and for Judaism. Within the space of seventy years, the Christian faith from Nicea was to be declared the official religion of the Roman empire under an edict proclaimed by emperor Theodosius I on February 28, 380 CE. The Nicea-Constantinople creed was promulgated at the first Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. Between 389–392 CE, Theodosian decrees outlawed most pagan rituals still practiced in Rome, thereby encouraging much of the population to convert to Christianity. The Jews faired less and less well as Christianity rose and sporadic persecution of Jews commenced in some regions. In the beginning of the fifth century, the Emperor Theodosius issued a set of decrees establishing official persecution against Jews. Jews were not allowed to own slaves, build new synagogues, hold public office or try cases between a Jew and a non-Jew. Intermarriage between Jew and non-Jew was made a capital offence, as was a Christian converting to Judaism. |
| Theological /  Ethical /  Continued existence | The challenge was theological and brought into question the existence of the tradition as it had existed in the times of the persecutions.  In another sense it brought the Catholic tradition into existence. |
| Sources | "Edict of Milan", from Ecclesiastical History, Book 10, Ch. 5 by Eusebius, translated by C.F. Cruse  *… we have resolved to communicate most fully to your care and diligence, that you may know we have granted liberty and full freedom to the Christians, to observe their own mode of worship; which as your fidelity understands absolutely granted to them by us, the privilege is also granted to others to pursue that worship and religion they wish, which it is obvious is consistent with the peace and tranquillity of our times; that each may have the privilege to select and to worship whatsoever divinity he pleases.*  <http://wadsworth.com/history_d/special_features/ilrn_legacy/wawc1c01c/content/wciv1/readings/eusebius.html> (11/07/2019) |
| References | <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Milan> (11/07/2019)  <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/constantine/> (20/7/2017)  <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/rulers/constantine.html> (20/7/2017)  <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-85/how-arianism-almost-won.html> (20/7/2017)  <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Constantine-I-Roman-emperor> (20/7/2017)  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_the_Great> (20/7/2017)  [https://web.archive.org/web/20150215120014/http://www.the-orb.net/textbooks/eccles/constantine.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20150215120014/http:/www.the-orb.net/textbooks/eccles/constantine.html) (11/07/2019) |