

### **Religious Toleration for All: The Edict of Milan**

When Constantine (r. 306-337) and Licinius, co-emperors in A.D. 324 Constantine would defeat Licinius and become sole ruler of the Roman Empire, met near Mediolanum (present-day Milan) and issued the Edict of Milan, presented in this selection, a new era began. Reversing the centuries-old anti-Christian policies, Constantine began a process that resulted in Christianity becoming the official religion of the Empire. Prior to 313, Constantine had been a pagan sun worshipper, but on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge (312) he dreamed that Christ had come to him and told him to place the first two letters of his name (XP in Greek) on the shields of all the soldiers. The next day Constantine is reported to have seen a vision of the cross superimposed on the sun with the words *in hoc signo vinces* (in this sign you will be the victor). In that battle Constantine's army defeated that of his rival Maxentius. Constantine now saw the Christian God as the guarantor of victory. While religious toleration is usually considered an enlightened and positive thing, often such policies have a practical stimulus and a mundane goal.

*Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1898), 4/1:29.

## **Chapter 6: The Pax Romana**

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#### Questions

1. Why would Constantine have chosen a policy of religious toleration, for all religions?
2. Even though toleration was granted to all religions, Christianity seems to have been singled out. Why?