



# Christianity becomes the Official Religion of the Roman Empire

The first Historic Moment, selected for the launch of the CSF, is **27 February 380**. This event was selected, because

- It is arguably one of the most significant historic events of all time, which had an enormous impact on the Western World and the entire planet
- Today is its 1,642nd commemoration.

On 27 Feb 380 the Edict of Thessalonica (or "Cunctos Populos") was issued jointly by all 3 Emperors of the Roman Empire: Emperor Theodosius I (the Eastern Emperor), Emperor Gratius (the Western Emperor) and Valentinian II (Gratius' 9 year old half-brother and junior co-Emperor).

## The Edict of Thessalonica:

- Proclaimed Christianity (specifically the Nicæan Creed formulated in 325) as the official and compulsory state religion of the Roman Empire
- Outlawed heresies (other Christian views not fully in agreement with the Nicæan Creed) and branded them "heretics" and "foolish madmen"
- Brought the power of the State to bear to inflict punishment "in accordance with the will of Heaven".

## The full text of this rather short Edict, as preserved in Codex Theodosianus XVI.1.2 [1]

"It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue to profess that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition, and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the one deity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We order the followers of this law to embrace the name of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict."

This Edict built upon the Edict of Milan issued in 313 by Constantine I, which legalized Christianity, and provided Christians religious tolerance to practice their own religion. The Edict of Thessalonica was issued unilaterally by the 3 Roman Emperors, without consultation with church leaders. Theodosius I is regarded as the main driver behind the Edict for several reasons:

- The fact that he was baptized the previous year (379) in Thessalonica, during an illness

- His public statements of faith and support for Christianity
- The fact that he called the Council of Constantinople in 381, and the big role he played in shaping Christian dogma. A good example is the reference to the Trinity in this edict, before it was official Church Doctrine.
- The fact that he became the sole Emperor of the Roman Empire in 392.

"We order the followers of this law to embrace the name of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics" - Edict of Thessalonica [1]

In one fell swoop the humble religion of the underdog preached by Jesus, not only became the state religion of the mighty Roman Empire, but the foundation was also laid for the next 1,500 years of persecution. What we today call "Church and State" were combined on 27 Feb 380, and it took a very long time to counter this development and the damage it caused over centuries.

The "Historic Moments" category will typically not contain much commentary, but will rather focus on the historical facts. Articles to analyze and comment will be published in the "CSF Articles" category. Articles currently scheduled to analyze this historic event further include:

- "The Secrets of Christianity's Success" (to be published on 22 April 2022)
- "The Supposed Judeo-Christian Foundation of Western Civilization" (to be published on 22 July 2022).

### **The next "Historic Moments" article:**

"Christianity commences its 1,500 years of Persecution" (scheduled for 6 May 2022).

### **Sources**

For the full text of the Edict of Thessalonica

[1] <https://www.dw.com/en/christianity-becomes-the-religion-of-the-roman-empire-february-27-380/a-4602728>

Author: JJ Brits

Published on [thecsf.xyz](https://thecsf.xyz) on 27 Feb 2022