Name _____ Mod _____ Ms. Pojer Euro. Civ. HGHS

Constantine's Dilemma – Part I

You are Constantine, Emperor of Rome. You have called an important meeting to discuss the future of the empire you rule. To this meeting you have summoned your strongest and most trusted general, your most able government advisor, and Pope Sylvester 1. As these three enter the room, they are unaware of the reason for the meeting. They seat themselves and stare at you in silence. "My friends, you say, "I have called you before me to inform you of a decision I have made."

"I have explored all of the alternatives and studied every possible course of action. I believe that I have no other choice in this matter. The conditions of the city of Rome and of the empire seem to have dictated what my decision must be.

"First let me tell you of the current conditions of the empire and of what created them. Perhaps then you will better understand why my decision is the only one possible.

"As you know, many misfortunes have befallen the empire over the last two hundred years. There has been much trouble on the frontiers. Lately our armies have been forced to put down terrible revolts in Persia, Egypt, and elsewhere. Barbarian tribes from the north have streamed across our weakened borders. Fighting among Roman politicians and generals has seriously weakened the empire. We Romans have killed in battle more Romans than we have killed barbarians or other enemies of the empire. Look at me: I have had to win five civil wars over the past eighteen years in order to be the only emperor of the empire.

"Rome has declined in other areas as well. Our economy has suffered in many ways. Too many people have little or no money to spend. Too many merchants have no customers to buy their goods. Inflation has lowered the value of gold and silver. The money available no longer buys what it used to buy. At this time, the city of Rome in particular is on the verge of economic ruin.

"Rome has also experienced an intellectual decline. Her citizens have made few contributions to the arts or literature. Instead we have been content merely to imitate the works of the Greek artists, sculptors, writers, and administrators. We are mocked as being only copiers of the Greeks. In the areas of human arts, we Romans have made few major contributions.

"Conditions are worse for lower-class citizens than for those of the upper classes. These people do not understand what is taking place and why they are so miserable. Their uncertainty is increased by the waves of famine and plague that continually cross the Italian countryside, cutting the population by one-fourth and wiping out large numbers of our work force. Large plots of land are not being cultivated. The survivors have been forced to pay higher and higher taxes with money they do not have. Each year, thousands of peasants abandon their farms and become bandits. To stay alive, honest men have become thieves and murderers.

"Because of these problems, I, Constantine, have already taken the following actions: I freed the military from direct civilian controls. I wrote a new constitution. I reorganized some of the government agencies and set up the imperial government. Most important, to counteract the

social and economic confusion that exists, I took steps to regulate the jobs that our citizens can hold. By royal decree, I forbade all farmers from leaving their lands and ordered all artisans and craftsmen to follow the occupation of their fathers. These actions were necessary to stop the severe drop in the supplies of cheap labor and of farm foods reaching our city.

"But these steps have had little or no effect. Each day Rome grows more and more rotten. And as Rome declines, the rest of the empire will be pulled down with her. I do not believe anything else can be done to save the city of Rome. She has dug her own grave and now is eager to fall into it. But
that does not mean that I have to let her pull the empire into the grave with her. The empire can still be saved. It no longer needs the city of Rome. After considering all factors involved and every alternative available, I have arrived at what I believe to be the only and final solution to the Roman problem."

With this you end your report. Without saying a word, you pick up and unroll a scroll that was lying on the table before you. Reading from it, you announce to your three advisors the following: "I, Constantine, Emperor of all the Ro-man Empire, do hereby decree that the capital of the empire and the headquarters of the Most Holy Christian Church shall cease to be the city of Rome and shall hereafter be the city of Byzantium."