

Against Christianity
Peter J. Leithart
(Canon Press, 2003)

Week 5: Chapter 5
“For Constantine”

Having been brazenly against everything that most Christians accept as given, in this last chapter, Leithart finally comes out and says what he is *for*. But what he is for seems disappointingly antiquated. What does the conversion of a fourth-century ruler have to do with the situation in which we find ourselves as twenty-first-century Christians? In order to explain himself, Leithart dialogues with some contemporary scholars, primarily Anabaptists John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas,* who have argued against Christendom (“the adoption of the Church as providing the official religion”). At stake in this argument is the very mission of the Church: to carry out “a new, eschatological ordering of human life.”

Opening Question:

What connotations do you or people you know associate with Constantine and Christendom?

Study Questions:

1. Much of this chapter consists of an argument between Leithart and his chosen conversation partners: John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. In sections 6 and 7, Leithart is careful to define his terms before proceeding. Review what Leithart means by “Constantine” and “Christendom” and spend some time discussing what the objections are — raised by Yoder, Hauerwas, and company — to Christendom. In what sense does Leithart agree with Yoder and Hauerwas?
2. What does Leithart say is truly the issue underlying the debate about Christendom? And what is it within the “anti-Constantine” approach that Leithart is arguing *against*?
3. What are some of the consequences of the “systematic pessimism” that Leithart exposes in the anti-Christendom view?
4. If the “mere presence of the Church means the end to ‘business as usual,’” what responses should the Church anticipate from its surrounding culture? What should we be prepared for?
5. Do you think that your understanding of “the Church” was altered as a result of reading this book? What was the most important epiphany or moment of insight that you grasped while reading?

* Leithart later wrote a book called *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (IVP Academic, 2010) in which he expands his dialogue with Yoder and Hauerwas and details more precisely the historical context and events of Constantine’s reign.