to the God of the Christians. Constantine seems to have converted to Christianity; he
certainly favored it, building and endowing church buildings, making sure that prop-
erty was restored to churches that had been stripped during the persecutions, and giving
priests special privileges. Under him, the ancient Greek city of Byzantium became a new
Christian city, residence of emperors, and named for the emperor himself: Constantinople.
The bishop of Constantinople became a patriarch, a “superbishop,” equal to the bishops
of Antioch and Alexandria, although not as important as the bishop of Rome. In one of
the crowning measures of his career, Constantine called and then presided over the first
ecumenical (universal) church council, the Council of Nicaea, in 325. There the assem-
bled bishops hammered out some of the canon law and doctrines of the Christian church.

After Constantine, it was simply a matter of time before most people considered it both
good and expedient to convert. Though several emperors espoused “heretical”—unac-
ceptable—forms of Christianity, and one (Julian, the “Apostate”) professed paganism,
the die had been cast. In a series of laws starting in 380 with the Edict of Thessalonica
and continuing throughout his reign, Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395) declared that the
form of Christianity determined at the Council of Nicaea applied to all Romans, and he
outlawed all the old public and private cults. Christianity was now the official religion of
the Roman Empire. In some places, Christian mobs took to smashing local pagan temples.