

Quo Vadis, Christianity?

Remarkable anniversary: In 313, Roman Emperor granted religious freedom

Bratislava, Slovakia, 27. November 2013



In 2013 it's been 1700 years since religious freedom was declared in the Roman Empire. In 313 the emperors Constantine and Licinius announced "that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best". Many historians consider the imperial decree as the birth date of "religious freedom" granted by a constitution.* Surprisingly, this great historic date received little public attention, even in Christian circles. UPF members felt obliged to highlight the historic watershed. The event title "Quo vadis, Christianity?" was chosen because there is much debate about the future of Christianity in Europe's secular societies

Our event was held on November 27, 2013 at the Hussite Church in Bratislava; about 40 participants came. Among the speakers were two bishops and two theologians; UPF secretary general Milos Klas was the presenter. Bishop **Jan Hradil** of the Hussite church opened the panel discussion with welcoming remarks. Next Milos Klas read the address of Professor **Peter Gazik** from the Department of Religious Studies of Comenius University, who could not participate personally. Archbishop **Augustin Bacinsky** compared the situation of Christians in the Roman Empire before 313, and in the Communist countries before 1989. In both cases Christians displayed more enthusiasm and active involvement during the period of persecution. As

bishops were pampered by the Imperial court, the church leaders were spoiled by the post-communist governments; privileges and property became the main concerns. Rev. **Miroslav Rybar** emphasized that though the Christians experienced discrimination and intolerance, they were no better. They were intolerant among themselves, and later persecuted the believers of other faiths. The Catholic theologian **Martin Deininger** explained that some church circles consider the privileges granted by Constantine and his successors as a mistake, because it corrupted the spirit of Christianity. He also said remarkable things about the lineage of Constantine the Great.

Renowned persons, among them a presidential candidate as well as the director of the Department for churches of the Slovak Ministry of Culture, praised our initiative to make this "meaningful event".

**Before the Edict of Milan was issued in 313 AD, Christians suffered severe persecution. Their refusal to venerate the supreme Roman God Jupiter as well as the "divine" emperor was considered an act of treason. During the Great Persecution (303–311), the Roman authorities ordered Christian buildings and homes to be torn down, their sacred books collected and burned, the believers were arrested, tortured, mutilated, burned, starved, or condemned to death.*