One of the readers of this blog pointed out to me in a comment a *third* thing that is commonly said about the emperor Constantine and the council of Nicea that is also wrong (the first two being the ones I mentioned: that at the council they [or even he, Constantine!] decided which books would be in the canon of the New Testament and that it was at the council that a vote was taken on whether or not Jesus was to be considered the Son of God. Wrong, wrong, wrong – both of them). It is widely believed (for some inscrutable reason) that Constantine made Christianity the “state religion” of the Roman empire. This too is wrong.

So just a very brief bit of background, which will involve another (more or less unrelated) bit of misinformation that is commonly held having to do with the history of Christian persecution up to Constantine’s time.

Many people appear to think that Christianity from the very beginning was an illegal religion that was constantly persecuted by the Roman authorities, that the Christians had to avoid persecution by hiding out in the catacombs, and that they only way they could communicate with each other was through secret signs, such as drawing the “fish.”

It is true that the “fish” did become a symbol in early Christianity. That’s because if you spell out the words “Jesus Christ Son of God Savior” (in Greek it is Ιησους Χριστος Υιος Θεου Σωτηρ) and then take the first letter of each word and put them together, they spell ΙΧΘΟΥΣ (English = ICHTHOUS), which just happens to be the Greek word for “fish.”

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