

THE USE OF APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY IN CONSTANTINE'S CHRISTIAN PROPAGANDA

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Constantine's Pierced Dragon Coin

In the autumn of A.D. 324 Constantine, the Christian Roman emperor of the west, defeated Licinius, the pagan Roman emperor of the east, in a civil war.¹ Constantine thereby united the whole empire under his sole control and finally ended the pagan persecutions of the Christian Church. On the Bosphorus Strait, in the vicinity of the last battle of the civil war, he soon began to expand and transform an old Greek colonial outpost into a new Christian capital for the Roman Empire—the city of Constantinople. Among the first bronze coin types issued from the imperial mint of the emperor's new capital city were several which commemorated his victory over Licinius.² Three of these contained traditional motifs and legends celebrating the GLORIA EXERCITVS ("Glory of the Army"), GLORIA ROMANORVM ("Glory of the Romans"), and LIBERTAS PVBLICA (the restoration of "Public Liberty"). The fourth type was different. It displayed reverse iconography strongly suggesting biblical imagery. The motif depicted a *labarum* piercing a dragon or crooked serpent whose head plunged downward. The *labarum* shown on the coin was the Christian war standard originated by Constantine, and described by a contemporary as a spear with a Christogram at the top, and a crossbar carrying a banner with portraits of the emperor and his sons overlaid on the descending staff.³ Stamped across the field of the coin was the legend SPES PVBLICA ("Hope of the Commonwealth"—Figures 1-2).⁴

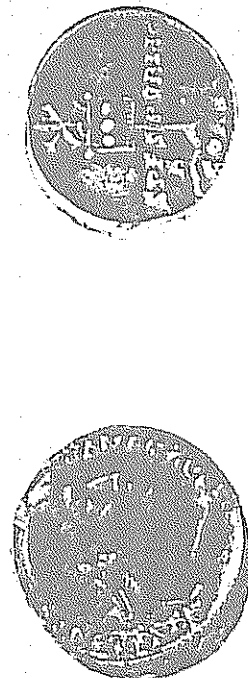


Figure 1: Obv. CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG, Laur. head, r: Aes follis.
Rev. SPES PVBLICA, *Labarum* piercing serpent; A off., Constantinople
mint (British Museum specimen).



Figure 2: Obv. CONSTAN-TINVS AVG, contemporary forgery of Constantine's pierced dragon coin: Aes 3.
Rev. SPES PVBLICA, with clear iconographical features showing the dragon's head plunging toward the abyss—Rv 20:3 (British Museum specimen).

Christian imagery did not occur frequently on the coins of Constantine. When it did, it usually took the form of a cross or monogram employed as a mark of issue, or, at best, as a decorative element on the imperial visage such as a helmet or shield marking. Therefore, this coin type with its novel imagery of the *labarum* piercing a serpent covering the whole reverse flan has usually been regarded by scholars as one of the most important of Constantine's "Christian coin types." This being the case, one may be justified in asking what Constantine and his mint officials had in mind when devising and circulating such a motif. At whom was this coin imagery aimed, and what message was it expected to convey?

Modern interpretations seem to fall into three categories. First, there is a secular line of reasoning that has been offered by Patrick Bruun.⁵ He suggests that the serpent represented either barbaric hordes threatening destruction to the empire from without, or the dangerous enemy Licinius from within. In either case, the emperor's war standard was seen crushing the empire's foes. Since Constantine himself and his Christian biographer Eusebius both referred to Licinius as a "dragon" or "crooked and wriggling serpent,"⁶ and the coin type in question was minted after the civil war, the temporal reference of the numismatic motif most probably pointed back to the defeat of Licinius. However, I think that the coupling of the monogram of Christ with the pierced dragon imagery is too pregnant with biblical overtones to be merely a secular summing up of a Roman civil conflict. The ancient sources relate, after all, that the war between Constantine and Licinius was waged as much for religious as for secular considerations.⁷

A second explanation more sensitive to the religious ferment of the era has been expressed by Jules Maurice, Andrew Alföldi and Guido Bruck.⁸ They feel that the motif was especially commissioned by Constantine, and represented a pro-Christian propaganda attack against paganism. The triumph of Christianity over paganism was thus graphically portrayed by the *labarum* piercing the wriggling serpent. I agree with these scholars that the subject matter of the coin represented the emperor's thinking and was religiously inspired, but not that it was issued as a direct propaganda attack against pagans. Would not such a move have conflicted with Constantine's public policy of religious toleration? A contemporary edict did express his preference for

Christianity, but firmly established "equal privileges to all" in religious matters.⁹ The numismatic evidence would not support their interpretations either, since only one out of the four bronze types commemorating the civil war had any Christian imagery. Thus, it seems better to contend that the iconography on the coin was a kind of propaganda directed toward Constantine's Christian subjects, rather than against his pagan subjects.

A third view has been presented by Ethelbert Stauffer, Hermann Dörries, and Ramsey MacMullen.¹⁰ They underscore the theological character of the motif, and posit that the slaying of the dragon-serpent referred to Constantine's triumph over the Devil or Satan in his earthly manifestation. Stauffer recognizes the biblical origin of the imagery, while Dörries relates it to the emperor's sense of mission as a special servant of God appointed to initiate a new era of blessing for Christianity. I feel that this third interpretation comes closest to the originally intended meaning of the coin motif, for its iconography did echo biblical imagery and reflect Constantine's conception of his mission. The comments offered by these scholars, however, are of a skeletal nature due to the larger frameworks in which they are encompassed. Therefore, I would like to follow this line of thought further in the hope of providing some new and deeper insights into the meaning of the motif, and its intended message for Constantine's Christian subjects.¹¹

I propose, first of all, that the origins of the coin motif lie in the apocalyptic portions of scripture so popular with the persecuted Christians of the early fourth century; second, that the coin motif was only part of a wider use of apocalyptic imagery made by Constantine to communicate the religious significance of his victories to the Church of his day; and third, that the message of this imperial propaganda was related to the eschatological hopes of the contemporary Christian community. The evidence which has led me to these conclusions may be found in the contemporary documents of the Christian community and Constantine's chancellery.¹² Chief among such documents is the *Vita Constantini*, or *Life of Constantine*, written by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea and friend of the emperor. It contains an interpretative description of a palace painting with imagery similar to that on the coin, and preserves several letters and edicts of Constantine which shed light on his Christian beliefs and provide clues to the sources of the ideas underlying the coin's iconography.

Eusebius and the Apocalyptic Origin of the Pierced Dragon Motif

In Book 3, chapter 3 of the *Vita* Eusebius described a monumental painting that Constantine had posted above the imperial palace portico. It depicted the victorious emperor and his sons, with the sacred monogram of the *labarum* above their heads. Wriggling beneath their feet was "the hateful and savage beast (*αἰὼς*) who had besieged the Church of God." He was shown "in the form of a dragon, . . . pierced in the middle of his back with a spear, and falling headlong toward the abyss." Eusebius maintained that Constantine chose this motif because "the oracles in the books of God's prophets had described the beast as a dragon and a crooked serpent" (*ὁ δράκων καὶ σκολιό, ὄντις*). He expressed his wonder at "the intellectual greatness of the emperor for . . . giving visual form to the words of the prophets concerning the end of the beast." He then quoted a passage from the apocalyptic portion of Isaiah where the imagery of God piercing the dragon and crooked serpent is found (Is 27:1).

This palace painting was probably the artistic prototype for the pierced dragon coin. If Eusebius was correct, the origin of the imagery in both painting and coin lay in a type of biblical literature known as apocalyptic—coded revelations which attempted to give strength and hope to the faithful in times of persecution.¹⁹ A particular aspect of apocalyptic literature dealt with the “day of Yahweh” or the *eschaton*, a decisive act of divine intervention which would bring judgment and destruction to the enemies of God’s chosen people, and a new age of blessing for Yahweh’s faithful adherents. In this literature, a pierced dragon was a symbol of the *eschaton*.¹⁴

In Old Testament apocalyptic imagery the dragon-serpent represented the oppressor(s) of the faithful Jewish remnant. Its slaying and consignment to the abyss symbolized Yahweh’s historical intervention on behalf of his persecuted people over against their enemies. The exodus from Egyptian oppression had been recalled with such imagery in Psalm 74:12-13: “Yet God my king is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy might; thou didst break the heads of the dragons on the waters.” Ezekiel 29:3 described the Egyptian Pharaoh as “the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams.” The piercing of the dragon-serpent in the Isaiah apocalypse looked forward to Yahweh’s end-time victory and the final deliverance of his people, followed by the new order with its resurrection of the dead and messianic banquet (Is 24-27).¹⁵

This dragon-serpent imagery was adopted by New Testament writers, particularly the author of Revelation, to describe God’s eschatological victories over the Devil. John’s Apocalypse depicted him as “the great dragon, the primeval serpent, who is cast down to the earth, he was shown handing over his power and authority to a beast from the sea (the ἀντίχριστος of Rv 12-13). To Christians, the beast of the Apocalypse symbolized the persecuting Roman emperors who would one day be defeated with the dragon and thrown into the abyss. This saving act of God would usher in the Millennial Kingdom of their Lord where the saints would reign in glory for a thousand years before the final Judgment Day (Rv 17; 19:11ff).¹⁶

Under the stress of the final and “Great Persecution” of the Church in the early fourth century, Christians turned to their apocalyptic literary heritage for consolation and hope. Christian writings of the time bristled with apocalyptic symbolism. The persecuting emperors were described as “beasts” and “serpents.”¹⁷ The governmental division, wars, famine and pestilence all round were interpreted in the light of scriptural warnings about the end of the age.¹⁸ Victorinus, a bishop in Pannonia, wrote the oldest extant Latin *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* at this time, making passionate references to the Roman Antichrist and the coming millennial era.¹⁹ The great Christian rhetorician Lactantius saw the times as “the last old age of the wearied and wasting world,” and predicted that divine judgment and the Millennial Kingdom were close at hand.²⁰ He did not expect that the “evil beasts” who were raging against the Church would go unpunished. On the contrary, he predicted a divine *ultio* or vengeance that would exterminate these *bestiae maleae* from off the face of the earth.²¹ Eusebius employed the same kind of apocalyptic imagery in his descriptions of the persecution, and identified Licinius with the “savage beast or wriggling serpent” of scriptures—δεινὸν ἄνθρωπον, τις θῆρ δεινὸς ἢ ἀκόλως βέβη.²²

Thus, when the first Christian emperor defeated the last of the pagan persecutors, and commemorated his triumph with pierced dragon motifs on his palace paintings

and imperial coinage, he could be sure that this imagery would have special meaning to the Christian community. The fact that Eusebius identified the dragon in the palace painting with the “beast” of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature indicates that he understood the eschatological significance of this imagery and its symbolization of a new epoch in Christian history.

Constantine and the Use of Apocalyptic Imagery in Art & Letters

Eusebius credited Constantine with the choice of the pierced dragon motif for the palace painting.²³ There are many reasons for believing that the first Christian emperor had the capability to draw upon biblical imagery for an artistic propaganda message to his Christian subjects. Eusebius reported in the *Vita* that the emperor became a devoted student of the Bible immediately after his conversion in 312, and continued this study throughout his reign.²⁴ Ancient tradition was unanimous about the emperor’s participation in the theological debates at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and about his habit of sermonizing on theology before his court.²⁵ The imperial court itself was filled with Christian clergy and laymen after Constantine’s adoption of the faith, for he preferred having his co-religionists as counselors and bureaucrats. Lactantius, bishops Hosius of Cordova and Eusebius of Caesarea, as well as many other leading Churchmen were among the emperor’s trusted confidants.²⁶ Constantine, therefore, had plenty of opportunity to learn the theology and thinking of apocalyptic minded Christians.

Constantine’s use of apocalyptic imagery was not confined to the coins and painting so far discussed. He employed apocalyptic allusions in other art projects, and in sermons and letters to Christian audiences as well. He decorated the public fountains in Constantinople, for instance, with sculptural representations of Daniel in the lions’ den, and the good shepherd.²⁷ By so doing, he celebrated in symbolic imagery the faith and fortitude of the Christian confessors who had refused to abjure their Lord during the recent persecution, just as Daniel and his friends had refused to worship foreign gods in old Babylon. In one of his palace sermons, he used the same kind of Danielic references and connected his victory over the evil persecutors and the consequent restoration of liberty with the perishing of the ancient serpent.²⁸ In a letter written to the eastern bishops shortly after his triumph over Licinius, the emperor referred to his pagan enemy and the persecution with similar apocalyptic allusions:

Until this present time the unholy and willful rule of tyranny has persecuted the servants of our Savior. . . . But now that liberty is restored, and that dragon (ὁ δράκων ἐκείνος) driven from the administration of public affairs by the providence of the Supreme God and our instrumentality, we trust that all can see the efficacy of the Divine power (θεῖα δύναμις), and that they who through fear of persecution or through unbelief have fallen into any errors, will now acknowledge the true God. . . .²⁹

The palace sermon and episcopal letter contain the use of dragon imagery in Constantine’s own words, and thus provide support for Eusebius’ suggestion that the pierced dragon motif in the palace painting (and, one must also assume, on the bronze coins) was due to imperial initiative.³⁰ Both texts also reveal the emperor’s faith in the power of the Christian Deity, and his sense of mission in service to that Divinity. Two contemporary edicts of Constantine elucidate further this sense of mission, and explain why he employed the Christogram in his apocalyptic pierced dragon propaganda.³¹

In the first edict, which he addressed to the eastern provinces at the conclusion of the civil war (324), Constantine described the calamities afflicted upon the Christians in particular and the commonwealth in general by the persecuting emperors (Diocletian to Licinius, 303-324). He then stated that the "Deity, who is alone and truly God, the possessor of almighty and eternal power, sought out and chose me as the instrument for his special purpose"—that purpose being the defeat of the Devil-inspired persecutors and the propagation of the Christian faith.³²

In the second edict to the eastern provinces (326), Constantine specified how he was empowered to carry out this divine purpose. Referring to his recent victory over the last persecutor, he rhetorically told God: "Under your guidance I undertook these blessed acts; preceded everywhere by your sign I led my army to victory. And wherever the state is endangered I will pursue the enemy with the symbol of your prowess." The victory bringing sign to which the emperor referred was the *labarum* that he would soon display in the palace painting and on his coins as the instrument piercing the dragon. The constitutive element of this Christian war standard was the symbol of Christ's name: the monogram. Proof of this is in the emperor's next sentence: "For your name (*ὄνομα*) I truly love, and I regard with reverence its power (*δύναμις*), which you have shown with abundant proofs to the increase of my steadfast faith."³³ In this edict, then, one finds the emperor's own confession that it was the name of Christ which had given him the power to gain the victory that restored public liberty and drove the persecuting dragon from the commonwealth.

Yet how is power through Christ's name related conceptually with the apocalyptic pierced dragon motif? Where in the Christian scriptural tradition could Constantine have found a text that connects Christ's name with Satan's fall, serpents and power over the enemy? There is a passage in Luke 10:17-19 that would have met his needs. In this text the disciples of Christ are seen returning to their master reporting that "even demons are subject to us through your name" (*ὄνομα*). Responding with an apocalyptic vision, Christ beholds Satan (*σατάν*) falling from heaven (cf. Rv 12); and then commits to his followers "authority to tread upon serpents (*ὄφεις*) and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy" (*δύναμις τοῦ ἐχθροῦ*), . . . assuring them that . . . "nothing shall in anywise injure you." How apropos was this passage to Constantine's own experience!³⁴ He had invoked the name of Christ as a victory bringing talisman in his war against Maxentius for control of Rome in 312, and twice against Licinius in a struggle for the east (316 & 324). The Christogram each time protected him against injury and enabled him to overcome the power of his enemy.

The Lukan text very neatly brings together the pictorial imagery of Constantine's apocalyptic propaganda motifs. It looks back to the Isaiah serpent imagery, and forward to Revelation's fall of Satan, drawing both together with the power of Christ's name. Constantine saw this power as the means to fulfilling the assignment that God had committed to him. Eusebius supports this interpretation by stating in his palace painting description: "It was through the power of the salutary trophy that the secret enemy of mankind was cast down to the abyss of destruction."³⁵

Since his conversion after a miraculous experience on the battlefield in 312,³⁶ Constantine's consciousness of divine service had been increasing. He believed that the Christian God had given him, through an unmerited benevolence, control of the Roman Empire. In return for divine favor, Constantine felt it incumbent upon himself to protect and promote the earthly fortunes of the Christian Church.³⁷ His decision to

aid the eastern Church through a military campaign against its pagan oppressor occurred at a time when Christian eschatological expectations for some form of divine deliverance were at their height. Therefore, when Constantine conquered Licinius, and ended the persecutions once and for all, he saw no better way to communicate the theological significance of this event than by employing the language and imagery that was then so prevalent in Christian circles—apocalypticism. This kind of symbolic expression of his triumph may also have been useful in that it would have been less offensive to the still pagan majority of the empire than a more overt type of anti-pagan propaganda.³⁸ Nevertheless, in Constantine's religious thinking, divine favor was essential for victory in war and prosperity in peace.³⁹ So, while still granting religious toleration to the pagans, he did all in his power to forge a new and co-operative relationship between the Church which worshipped the true God, and the Roman state which needed that Divinity's aid. This policy resulted in a Church-state alliance, and a new era of material blessings for the Christian community—developments which could be symbolized in the apocalyptic imagery of eschatological fulfillment.

The Emperor's Apocalyptic Message

The Christians of the eastern provinces had experienced some twenty years of intermittent but often severe oppression during the "Great Persecution." Through such a time of testing and hardship they had closely identified with the apocalyptic literature in their scriptures which held out hopes of God's intervention against the oppressors of his people. By drawing upon imagery from that very literature for his coins, paintings, sculpture, speeches and letters, Constantine was proffering a message that his co-religionists would understand. The motif of a dragon pierced and cast down to the abyss announced that the old era of imperial persecution had come to an end, and that a new age of imperial favor had begun. Christ may not have appeared on the clouds of heaven to carry out the final act of judgment; but Constantine had arrived behind the monogram and cross of Christ, claiming divine election as a special servant of God to initiate a new era of terrestrial bliss. An empire led by a God-fearing prince and aided by the prayers and service of the Christian community could hope for a bright future, or so proclaimed Constantine's coin legend SPES PVBLICA.

Implicit in the message of the apocalyptic motifs examined here was an invitation to the Christian population to join with their Christian emperor in establishing a new world order. Those Christians who formerly had felt reluctant to serve the empire because it had seemed to be in the camp of the Devil, did not need to hold back any longer.⁴⁰ The pierced dragon falling to the abyss symbolized the end of the Devil's earthly reign and the start of the Christ's Millennial Kingdom. It may be doubted that many Christians actually thought the reign of Christ had begun with Constantine's victory over Licinius. However, Eusebius did compare Constantine's festive *Vicennalia* or twentieth anniversary banquet in the company of Christian bishops to "a picture of Christ's kingdom";⁴¹ and the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to the "second and New Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets."⁴² In any case, with their euphoric release from the tortures and troubles of the long night of persecution, all Christians could at least agree with Eusebius "that a new and fresh era of existence had begun to appear, and a light heretofore unknown suddenly to dawn from the midst of darkness over the human race."⁴³ It was in this atmosphere of eschatological fulfillment that the first of many attempts in Christian

history to build the Lord's kingdom on earth was initiated through the establishment of a Church-state partnership in the reign of Constantine the Great.⁴⁴

NOTES

¹ The most comprehensive ancient accounts of the war are those of the fourth century Christian historian, Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10. 8-9, and *Vita Constantini* 1. 49-2. 18; and the fifth century pagan historian, Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 2. 18-28. For some modern reconstructions, see: A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 109-15; Ramsey MacMullen, *Constantine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 123-38; and Hermann Dörries, *Constantine the Great*, trans. R. Bainton (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 50-60.

² R.A.G. Carson, P.V. Hill, & J.P.C. Kent, *Late Roman Bronze Coinage: A.D. 324-498* (London: Spink & Son, 1972), pp. 23-24, date these types to the years 326-27. Patrick Bruun, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. 7 (London: Spink & Son, 1966), pp. 566-67, & 572-73, dates them slightly later to 327-28.

³ Euseb., *Vit Const* 2. 31. This description also included a wreath encircling the Christogram.

⁴ The four regular specimens of this coin type in museum collections contain obverses only of Constantine I (none for his sons). Two of these are in Vienna's Bundessammlung von Münzen und Medaillen, Kunsthist. Museum, and are described by the museum's late Roman curator, Guido Bruck in "Die Verwendung christlicher Symbole auf Münzen von Constantine I. bis Magnentius," *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 76 (1955), p. 27; and two are in the British Museum in London. The latter also has two contemporary forgeries of slightly smaller diameter. The specimens printed in this article are from the British Museum collection whose Constantinian coins I examined in 1974-75 on a research grant from the University of California.

⁵ Patrick Bruun, "The Christian Signs on the Coins of Constantine," *Arctos*, n. s. 3 (1962), pp. 21-23, and *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. 7, pp. 62-64, & 566-67.

⁶ Constantine quoted in Euseb., *Vit Const* 2.46; and Eusebius in *Vit Const* 2.1.

⁷ Euseb., *Vit Const* 1. 49-2. 18; and Constantine's own comments in post-war edicts and letters recorded by Euseb., *Vit Const* 2. 24-28, & 2. 46.

⁸ Jules Maurice, *Numismatique Constantinienne* (Paris: Leroux, 1908-11), Vol. 1, pp. CXXXIV-CXXXV, & CXLV, & Vol. 2, pp. VIII, & LXXI; Andrew Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, trans. H. Mattingly (Oxford: University Press, 1969), pp. 84-85; and Guido Bruck, "Die Verwendung christlicher Symbole," p. 27.

⁹ In Euseb., *Vit Const* 2. 56.

¹⁰ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, trans. K. & R. Gregor Smith (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 272-75; Hermann Dörries, *Constantine the Great*, pp. 58-67; and Ramsey MacMullen, *Constantine*, pp. 136-37.

¹¹ For a limited attempt at this, see my "Eschatological Interpretation of Constantine's Labarum Coin," *SAN: Journal of the Society for Ancient Numismatics*, Vol. VI, 3 (Spring, 1975), pp. 47-51.

¹² The Greek scriptural quotations in this paper are from *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Kurt Aland (New York: American Bible Society, 1968); the English translations are from *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952), and/or *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966). For post-biblical literature, the Greek texts employed are those of J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), and/or *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1897ff)—abbr. as *PG* and *GCS*. The Latin texts are those of J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* (Paris, 1844-64), and/or the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Completus* (Vienna, 1866ff)—abbr. as *PL* or *CSEL*. English translations are those of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952-71)—abbr. as *ANF* and *NPNF*. *Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952-71)—abbr. as *ANF* and *NPNF*.

¹³ The term apocalyptic comes from the Greek verb ἀποκαλύπτω, meaning "to disclose," or "to uncover." For a discussion of the general characteristics of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature as exemplified in Daniel and Revelation, see: James Kallas, *Revelation: God and Satan in the Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), pp. 41-51.

¹⁴ ἐσχάτος is the Greek word for "last" or "end." E. Schillebeeckx and B. Willems, eds., *The Problem of Eschatology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1969); and R.T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1971), pp. 83ff, offer general treatments of biblical eschatology. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 40-50, deals with the dragon-serpent motif in biblical literature; and Otto Ploger, *Theocracy & Eschatology* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), pp. 53-78, provides the original context of Is 27:1.

¹⁵ Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, p. 43.

¹⁶ Cecil J. Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925; rept. 1955), pp. 166-72, 339-48, & *passim*.

¹⁷ Lactantius, *Divinae Institutionis* 5. 11 & 24; Euseb., *Hist Eccl* 10. 9. 3, & *Vit Const* 2. 1.

¹⁸ Euseb., *Hist Eccl* 9. 7. 15-8. 15 (quotes Mt 24:24); Lactant., *Div Inst* 7. 15-16.

¹⁹ Cf. Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, p. 261.

²⁰ *Div Inst* 7. 14.

²¹ *Div Inst* 5. 23-24. See N.H. Baynes, "Lactantius, The Divine Institutes," *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1960), pp. 348-54, for an excellent treatment of *utilio* in the *Div Inst*, and its relation to the expression of vengeance fulfilled in Lactant., *De Mortibus Persecutorum*.

²² *Hist Eccl* 10. 9. 3, & *Vit Const* 2. 1.

²³ *Vit Const* 3. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1. 32; 4. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. 12-13; 4. 29, 32. Appended to the *Vita* was one of the emperor's sermons entitled *Oratio ad Coetum Sanctorum* ("Oration to the Assembly of the Saints"). See also Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1. 8; Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1. 19-20; and Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1. 6.

²⁶ Euseb., *Vit Const* 1. 32, 42; 2. 4; 4. 52; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 80, Soc., *Hist Eccl* 1. 6; Soz., *Hist Eccl* 1. 8; 2. 5. Cf. J-R Palanque, *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire*, trans. E.C. Messenger (New York: MacMillan, 1953), Vol. 1, pp. 24-27; and MacMullen, *Constantine*, pp. 125-29, 160-62, & 208-12.

²⁷ Euseb., *Vit Const* 3. 49 = Dn 6, & Ez 34.

²⁸ *Orat ad Coet Sancti* 17-26.

²⁹ In Euseb., *Vit Const* 2. 46. Cf. Rv 12: 9-10.

³⁰ The references to "liberty . . . restored" and the perishing dragon-serpents in the palace sermon and the episcopal letter must be the literary twins of the LIBERTAS PVBLICA and pierced dragon coins issued about the same time.

³¹ In *Vit Const* 2. 24-42 (324), and 2. 48-60 (326). Chapters 26-29 of the first edict were recently

discovered on a papyrus role in Egypt. This text, now owned by the British Museum and known as *Papyrus Londinensis* 878, is discussed by A.H.M. Jones & T.C. Skeat in "Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius' Life of Constantine," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954), pp. 196-200. Before this discovery, many scholars had doubted the authenticity of the documents preserved by Eusebius in the *Vita*. But as Jones has remarked, "the papyrus proves beyond all reasonable doubt the authenticity of one of the Constantinian documents cited by Eusebius in the Life, and implies that of the rest" (p. 200). Hermann Dörries, who probably knows the mind of Constantine better than any other modern scholar, sees the emperor's personal touch in the episcopal letter and two edicts under discussion here (*Constantine the Great*, pp. 59-67). For literature relevant to the Eusebian authenticity issue, see: Friedhelm Winkelmann, "Zur Geschichte des Authentizitätsproblems der Vita Constantini," *Klio* 40 (1962), pp. 187-243; J. Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, Maryland: Neuman Press, 1962), Vol. 3, pp. 319-24; & John W. Eadie, *The Conversion of Constantine* (New York: Krieger Pub. Co., 1976).

³² *Vit Const* 2. 28 = *Pap Lond* 878 in Jones, "Notes," p. 199.

³³ *Vit Const* 2. 55.

³⁴ The tradition that Constantine got the idea to use Christ's name in war through a vision and a dream before his battle against Maxentius for control of Rome in 312 (Euseb., *Vit Const* 1. 26-31; Lactant., *De Mort Pers* 44) is well-known. Less often stressed is the report that after the dream he went to Christian teachers for an interpretation (*Vit Const* 1. 32). What better text could they have pointed to than this one in the very pro-Roman Gospel of St. Luke that we are discussing?

³⁵ *Vit Const* 3. 3.

³⁶ Lactant., *De Mort Pers* 44; & Euseb., *Vit Const* 1. 26-40.

³⁷ *Epistola Constantini ad Episcopos post Concilium Arelatense* (314), in Migne, *PL* 8, 487; Jones, *Constantine and Conversion*, p. 97; & J. Straub, "Constantine as KOINOS EΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 21 (Washington, 1967), p. 48.

³⁸ The pagans had themselves used serpent imagery on occasion to represent the forces of evil (Vergil, *Aeneid* 2. 201ff, for instance). However, Alföldi, *Conversion of Constantine*, p. 84, and Bruck, "Die Verwendung christlicher Symbole," p. 27, feel that the pagan aristocracy may have seen the symbolism of the pierced dragon coin motif as a type of propaganda directed against them, and protested, causing Constantine to suspend the issue. This would account, they maintain, for the scarcity of these coins in the major museum collections. Three comments might be offered on this. First, because this coin type was among those summing up the end of the civil war—in other words it was minted to commemorate a specific event—it would naturally have been a smaller issue than other long-lasting, general types. Second, since it has obvious Christian symbolism, it is a very popular item for private collectors (I know of some in private hands). Third, since Alföldi and Bruck wrote, another regular specimen of the coin has been acquired by the British Museum (from B. McNall in 1972). It is of a different die than the museum's previous one, and both BM specimens are of different dies than those in Vienna. Therefore, this coin type may not have been as minute an issue as formerly thought, and was at least of wide enough currency to inspire contemporary forgeries. The BM has two of the latter.

³⁹ *Ep ad Aelafium*, *PL* 8, 485-86; *Second Epistle to Anulinus*, in Euseb., *Hist Eccl* 10. 7.

⁴⁰ Euseb., *Vit Const* 4. 52, reports that at the end of Constantine's reign "the military officers of the highest rank, and those who had control of the public business" were Christians. It would therefore seem that the emperor's apocalyptic summons to his eastern co-religionists had been heartily accepted. I have dealt with this issue at great length in my doctoral dissertation on "Constantine and the Militarization of Christianity" for the University of California, San Diego (1976).

⁴¹ *Vit Const* 3. 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3. 33 = *Rv* 21:2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3. 1.

⁴⁴ If there was a Christian answer to the eschatological symbolism of Constantine's apocalyptic propaganda it was surely the *Oration in Praise of Constantine* delivered by Eusebius on the thirtieth anniversary of the emperor's accession to power (336). The Christian world-empire emerging under Constantine was there praised as a terrestrial *mimesis* (imitation) of the celestial commonwealth. As such, it approached the blessedness of Christ's Millennial Kingdom, and gave visible fulfillment to the ancient oracles and predictions of the prophets—*De Laudibus Constantini* 1. 6, 2. 4, 3. 5-4, 2. 7. 13, & 16. 7-8 = Is 2:4. For commentary, see: R. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War & Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), pp. 86-87; Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972; orig. pub., 1940), pp. 184-87; S.L. Greenslade, *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius* (London: SCM Press, 1954), pp. 10-12; Kenneth M. Setton, *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), pp. 46-49; and the new translation and historical study of the work by H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).