

# APOSTOLIC HISTORY AND THE GOSPEL

*Biblical and Historical Essays*

*presented to*

*F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday*

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THE CHI-RHO SIGN - CHISTOGRAM AND/OR  
STAUROGRAM?

MATTHEW BLACK

NEXT TO THE UBIQUITOUS IHS, THE *CHI-RHO* SIGN HAS ESTABLISHED itself in Christian tradition as perhaps the most popular of all Christian monograms. Its widespread use in the Church Catholic is usually attributed to its employment by the Emperor Constantine in the banner or *Labarum* – a word of still unexplained origin – which the first Christian Emperor commissioned for himself and his armies after his conquest of Rome and adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire.

The monogram is found in Christian art and tradition in two variant forms. The more familiar form is  $\chi\rho$ , with the Chi superimposed on the Rho, the traditional explanation of the sign as a monogram for *Χριστός* being obvious at a glance. The alternative form is that of a plain cross, the perpendicular stroke forming a *Rho*; thus  $\rho$ , the *Chi* letter apparently having been turned round to form out of what we now call a St. Andrew's cross, a traditional upright cross.

It is now certain that both forms of the "sign" are pre-Constantinian. Constantine may have popularized the monogram, in particular in the *Chi-Rho* formation; but he did not invent the sign; the discovery of both forms in pre-Constantinian graffiti in the Vatican<sup>1</sup> and of the perpendicular form in the Bodmer papyri (ca. A.D. 250) provide incontrovertible proof of their use long before the age of Constantine. Moreover, in the papyri, the perpendicular form is found as a contraction for *Tau Rho* in the Greek word *σταυρός* 'Cross', written, *σρος*<sup>2</sup> and this latter discovery raises a number of new problems in connexion with the traditional sign.

Was it originally a sign for the Cross and not a *Chi-Rho* contraction for *Χριστός*, i.e., a *staurogram* rather than a *christogram*? Which of the two forms was the earlier? Was the *staurogram* sign original and later turned into a *christogram*, the *Chi-Rho* – *Χριστός* monogram being the result of an aetiological explanation of the sign after its original meaning as a *staurogram* had been forgotten? Or are there other explanations? What is known about the origins and history of these "signs"?

<sup>1</sup> Margherita Guarducci, *The Tomb of St. Peter* (London, 1960), p. III.

<sup>2</sup> See below. p. 327.

The purpose of this essay is to look for some possible answers to these new questions raised by the recent discoveries.

## I

Before the new discoveries the fundamental work on the subject was that of Max Sulzberger.<sup>1</sup> In substantial agreement with the views of his predecessor, J. B. de Rossi, Sulzberger concluded that that most ancient monogram of Christ appeared in the form  $\chi\rho\iota$  in Asia Minor and in Rome about the year A.D. 270: the traditional Christian monogram  $\chi\rho$  was not attested before the time of Constantine. Another form of the monogram, combining the christogram with the Cross, was simplified as  $\rho$ , and appeared a little before the middle of the fourth century A.D. at the same time as the first simple crosses (+), i.e., the  $\rho$  form was also post-Constantine. A serious difficulty in Sulzberger's theory, of which he himself was fully aware, was the existence of a Christian inscription from Egypt, dated in the third century (on the grounds of script), where the form  $\rho$  was preceded by an *A* and followed by an  $\Omega$ .<sup>2</sup> Sulzberger argued that this particular sign had been added to the inscription at a later date. In line with a popular form of explanation in earlier theories, Sulzberger also maintained: "Les monogrammes de Jésus sont de simples abréviations, empruntées à l'écriture païenne, qui peu à peu sont devenus des symboles assimilés à la croix" (p. 447).

The next significant contribution to the subject was made, almost incidentally, in a notice by Jean de Savignac of the Bodmer Papyri XIV (Luke) and XV (John):<sup>3</sup> Savignac drew attention to the abbreviation  $\rho$  which is uniquely employed at Luke 9:23 and 14:27 in P<sup>75</sup> in the writing of *αρον* (*σταυρόν*) and *αρωθηναι* (*σταυρωθηναι*), the latter also occurring in Bodmer II, P66. "Il faut en conclure que le monogramme  $\rho$ , date, en Egypte tout au moins, du IIe s. et qu'il est en réalité le plus ancien de tous".<sup>4</sup> The monogram in this form, therefore, must have belonged to the third-century Egyptian inscription under which it had been inscribed and cannot have been (as Sulzberger argued) a later addition. This particular form of abbreviation was evidently chosen – Savignac thinks – because it was shaped like a cross (it is still apparently assumed that it is with a christogram, i.e., an abbreviation for 'Christ' with which we have to do). At the same time Savignac also continues the theory of pagan borrowing, and considers that resemblance of  $\rho$  with the Egyptian hieroglyph  $\rho$  read as *ankh* and meaning 'life', has also contributed to the choice of this particular shape: the historical development of the Christ monogram is reconstructed in

<sup>1</sup> "Le Symbole de la croix et les monogrammes de Jésus chez les premiers chrétiens" in *Byzantion* t. II (1925), pp. 337–448.

<sup>2</sup> See further below.

<sup>3</sup> P<sup>75</sup> "Les Papyrus XIV et XV" in *Scriptorium* XVII (1963), *Chronique*, pp. 50 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

the following order:  $\chi\rho\iota$   $\rho$   $\chi\rho$ .<sup>1</sup> Scriptural precedent or support for the connexion is sought at I Corinthians 1:18: *ὁ λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν*, Colossians 3:4, *ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ἡμῶν*, and in Johannine passages which make a similar connexion of Christ and life, e.g., 3:14, 7:28, 12:32, 33. Savignac admits a difficulty in the acceptance of a pagan symbol by a religion born out of Judaism. Gnostic Christianity, however, had no such scruples, and provided the channel for the introduction of the "pagan" symbol. Valentinus, who gives a central place to the Cross in his thought, has already associated it with the Tree of Life, as does also the gospel of Truth (f. IX, p. 18, X, p. 20). At f. X, p. 20, line 27 in the latter, the same contraction is found as in P<sup>75</sup>, P<sup>66</sup>, viz., CPOC, and Savignac maintains that the Egyptian *Ankh* sign is found on the last page of the Codex Jung.


The next significant contribution to the discussion was made by Professor K. Aland.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Savignac had confined himself to a few observations of the contracted form  $\rho$  in P<sup>75</sup> and P<sup>66</sup>, Aland investigated all occurrences of both noun and verb and, extending his inquiries to other papyrus texts of the New Testament. The contraction occurs frequently in both P<sup>75</sup> and P<sup>66</sup>, in both noun and verb. It seems to have established itself more securely in P<sup>66</sup>, but it is also attested in other Papyrus texts. The evidence is more than sufficient to prove that the contraction was a regular one at this early period (mid-third century).

Aland argues that the new Papyrus data give us "not only the oldest form of the christogram, but also the possibility of explaining this much discussed sign" (p. 174). He suggests that in this form of the sign, we have an "Urform" or "Vorform" of the christogram, itself originally not a christogram at all, but a *staurogram*, i.e., a symbol of the Cross. He cites in support Lactantius' account of the vision of Constantine: 'commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut caeleste signum dei notaret in scutis atque ita proelium committeret. facit ut iussus est et transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo, Christum in scutis notat' (*de mort. pers.* 44:5): this is interpreted by Aland: 'Transversa X littera, d.h. doch wohl: er lässt das X senkrecht stellen und biegt den nun senkrechten einen Balken zu einem P um, so dass sich genau das Zeichen ergibt, das wir in P<sup>66</sup> "und seinen Nachfolgern finden:  $\rho$ '.

The Lactantius passage is one on which there have been wide differences of interpretation. Since Lactantius evidently understands the heavenly "sign" to be the christogram (*Christum in scutis notat*), the text has been emended to give this result, the most widely accepted conjecture being that

<sup>1</sup> Savignac cites G. Lefèvre, *Recueil*, No. 423, and recently Maria Crammer, *Das Altägyptische Lebenszeichen in christlichen (koptischen) Ägypten* (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 8, 9, fig. 7 (1).

<sup>2</sup> "Bemerkungen zum Alter und zur Entstehung des Christogrammes anhand von Beobachtungen bei P<sup>66</sup> und P<sup>75</sup>", in *Studien zur Überlieferung des neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 173 ff. Cf. his "Neue neutestamentliche Papyri" in *NTS* 10 (1963), pp. 62–79 and 11 (1964), pp. 1–3.


of Gregoire, to supply the capital letter I, viz., *transversa X littera* <I>, "the letter X being crossed by I with the head bent into a circle", (i.e., , the regular christogram).<sup>1</sup> This "emendation" of Lactantius does not seem to have been entirely unconnected with the desire to find a *Chi-Rho* symbol in the text. Aland's translation seems the most natural one ("the letter X having been turned round (*transversa*), its top having been given a loop"). The objection of Sulzberger that the latter sign was unknown before the middle of the fourth century is no longer valid, with the new discoveries. The "heavenly sign" which Lactantius so describes was a *staurogram*; and this fully accords with his universal use of the expression *caeleste signum* as the sign of the Cross.<sup>2</sup> We are then obliged, however, to assume that, in his interpretation of the *staurogram*, Lactantius has explained it as a christogram or confused it with a christogram (*Christum in scutis notat*). With this explanation there is no need to indulge in doubtful interpretations of the verb *notat* as meaning "inscrire le nom de Dieu au moyen d'un signe, d'un monogramme".<sup>3</sup>

## II

The new discoveries shed fresh light on Eusebius's account of the vision of Constantine and its sequel. The story is told in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* (i:26-31). When the Emperor was seeking divine help against Maxentius, he and his army saw "the *tropaion* of the Cross" (*σταῦρον τρόπαιον*) illumined in the heavens with a written message attached to it: 'By this conquer' (*τούτω νικᾷ*). On the following night Christ appeared to the Emperor in a dream "with the same sign that had appeared in heaven" (*σὺν τῷ φανέντι κατ' οὐρανὸν σημεῖω*) and commanded him to make a copy of it. This he did, placing a transverse bar on a long spear encased in gold to form a Cross. At the top of this cruciform standard there was fastened a wreath woven of precious stones and gold in which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Moreau, ed. *Lactance*, "De la Mort des Persécuteurs" in *Sources chrétiennes*, no. 39 (Paris), p. 435.


<sup>2</sup> *Institut*, IV. 26, 42; 27:2; 27:8; de Mort. X. 2, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Moreau, *op. cit.*, p. 433: "*Caeleste signum*, employé seul, ne peut, en effet, signifier *monogramma Dei* (Fr Altheim, *Literatur u. Gesellschaft im ausgehenden Altertum*, I [Halle, 1948], p. 145, n. 13). Mais le verbe *notare* a un sens très particulier: il signifie 'exprimer un mot, une idée, au moyen d'une abréviation, en une ou deux lettres' (Altheim, o.l., pp. 145-6); *notare signum*, c'est *significare nota* (cf. *Christum notat* et Serv., ad *Aen.*, III, 44: la Sibylle fait connaître ses prophéties par des *signa*, ce qui veut, dire *notis litterarum - significet aliquid*). Fr Altheim, dans le travail cité, remarque justement que la différence entre *signum* et *nota* n'est pas nette. Il a tort cependant de croire que *caeleste signum Dei* ne peut être autre chose que le signe de la croix; il oublie le caractère unique de l'expression chez Lactance. Dans tous les textes de cet auteur que nous avons cités, il s'agit ou bien de *signum* employé sans détermination, ou de symbole de la passion. Mais dans le cas qui nous occupe, *signum* est déterminé par *Deum*, et *signum Dei notare* signifie *Deum nota significare*, 'inscrire le nom de Dieu au moyen d'un signe, d'un monogramme'. Il est dès lors inutile de supposer que le signe adopté devait nécessairement être cruciforme, et de lui donner la forme . Cette croix monogrammatique n'apparaît guère avant le milieu du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle." (sic!)

was the symbol of the Saviour's epithet (lit., the 'saving epithet'), two letters signifying the name of Christ in which the Rho in the middle was crossed by a X.

ὑψηλὸν δόρυ χρυσῶ κατημφιεσμένῳ κέρας εἶχεν ἐγκάρσιον σταυρου σχήματι πεποιημένον. ἄνω δὲ πρὸς ἄκρῳ τοῦ παντὸς στέφανος ἐκ λίθων πολυτελῶν καὶ χρυσοῦ συμπεπληγμένους κατεστήρικτο, καθ' οὗ τῆς σωτηρίου ἐπιγραφίας τὸ σύμβολον, δύο στοιχεῖα τὸ Χριστοῦ ὄνομα παραδηλοῦντα . . . χιαζομένου τοῦ ῥῶ κατὰ τὸ μεσαίτατον.

Below this was a portrait of Constantine and his children, and from the cross-bar there hung a banner, the standard known as the *Labarum*.

From coins of the period<sup>1</sup> it is clear that the basic design of the cruciform, gold-encased lance with the "crown" or "wreath" was . What is of special interest is that the 'cross-structure' with the Chi-Rho sign at the top has the *staurogram* foundation, with a christogram surmounting it. The report in the legend that it was an illumined Cross which Constantine saw and that it was the "trophy of the Cross" he modelled is substantially correct: the "sign" by which he conquered was the sign of the cross, a *staurogram*, but at the same time this was ingeniously combined with the *christogram* symbol in the artistic reproduction of the "divine sign".

This combination of both forms of this early Christian symbol in the Constantinian banner suggests that they both come out of pre-Constantinian tradition. Archaeological discoveries, as well as the Papyrus evidence, support the pre-Constantinian origin of both forms: as noted above,<sup>2</sup> particularly rich inscriptional material in this connexion has been discovered in the graffiti in the Vatican excavations.

## III

Savignac's theory of a pagan origin for these symbols, mediated by Gnosticism, e.g., the tracing of the *staurogram* form to Valentinus, is regarded as doubtful by Aland;<sup>3</sup> more convincing evidence would require to be produced. Certainly, as Aland points out, the alleged presence of an *Ankh* symbol on the last folio of the Jung Codex does not appear to be borne out by the actual evidence: what is found, as the editors have noted, is the phrase  $\delta \text{ X } \alpha \mu \iota \sigma$ , i.e., *Le Christ saint*. On the other hand, Margherita Guarducci reports the presence of the *Ankh* sign among the Vatican graffiti,<sup>4</sup> and it has been found elsewhere in Christian inscriptions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. the reproduction in George Pitt-Rivers, *The Riddle of the Labarum and the origin of Christian Symbols* (London, 1966), p. 19, fig. (c).

<sup>2</sup> P. 319.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. on an amulet with the inscription  $\Theta \epsilon \delta \varsigma \delta \mu \acute{o} \nu \omicron \varsigma \Theta \epsilon \delta \varsigma \text{ I } \eta \varsigma$ . See E. Peterson, *EIS THEOS* (Göttingen, 1926), p. 310, reproduced in E. Stauffer, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart, 1947), Abh. 51 (p. 352).

Whether this may have in any way influenced the *staurogram* is a debatable question; it may conceivably be an independent sign for ζωὴ αἰώνιος which entered Christian tradition, through Gnosticism, from Egyptian sources.

F.-J. Dölger<sup>1</sup> and E. Dinkler<sup>2</sup> have sought to trace the origins of the staurogram/christogram symbols in the Hebrew-Jewish tradition rather than in Egyptian pagan sources. Impressive evidence from inscriptions on tombs and ossuaries has been produced to show that the cross sign was already used in pre-Christian Hebrew tradition, in both the perpendicular and Chi-form (+ X): in every case examined "Die Fundstelle oder der Text der Inschrift machen die jüdische Herkunft teils zweifellos, teils wahrscheinlich" (Dinkler, p. 161). Both forms of the cross represent the North Semitic, but also the old Hebraic, Phoenician and Aramaic letter for the Hebrew *Tau* (ט), the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, which has not only the meaning "sign", but also "sign of a cross" (Dinkler, p. 163 ff.) and is used with the meaning of a "saving sign" or talisman at Ezekiel 9:4 ff.

Dinkler rightly attaches great importance to the Ezekiel passage for the subsequent development of the *Tau* symbolism. In the context of Ezekiel's first Temple vision, Jahweh says to the "man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side": "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark (Tau, + or X) upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it. And to the others he said in my hearing. 'Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark.'" G. A. Cooke comments (ICC Ezekiel, *in loc.*): "The form of the mark is suggested by the word used, *tau*, the last letter of the Heb. alphabet, written + in the ancient script; the simplest of signs to make, and as such it served to attest a document among both Hebrews (Job 31:35) and Babylonians . . ." In Ezekiel the "sign" is a kind of sacred "seal" allotted to those "who sigh and groan", i.e., show evidence of repentance by disassociating themselves from the evil in the world and adhering to the Torah of Jahweh. The "sign" is a "protective" sign (*Schutzzeichen*), here closely associated with the thought of repentance: those who repent are so marked out that they may be spared on the coming day of judgment. There is also quite certainly (as the commentaries note) a connexion with the "sign" or "mark" of ownership, the branding of slaves or cattle. The sign marks out those who belong to Jahweh and, therefore, are under his protection. The "sign" on the lintels of the doors in the Exodus story (Exod. 12:22 ff.) is to be similarly understood.

As B. Stade<sup>4</sup> pointed out, this idea of being the "property" of deity is

<sup>1</sup> *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens, 1958-61.

<sup>2</sup> "Zur Geschichte des Kreuzsymbols" *ZThK* 48 (1951), pp. 148-72.

<sup>3</sup> Ezek. 9:4-6.

<sup>4</sup> "Beiträge zur Pentateuchkritik I: Das Kainszeichen", *ZATW* 14 (1894), pp. 250 ff.

more widely attested in the Old Testament than might at first appear; and the assumption of a widespread custom of religious marking or "sealing" is also supported in many passages, if it is not always easy or possible to distinguish cases of literal "cult-marks" from metaphorical language. The context of Genesis 4:15 the "mark of Cain" makes it clear that this was originally also a *protective* mark and not a mark of shame: it is called 'oth, "a sign", and was no doubt envisaged as a sign on the forehead. Stade argued further that it is to be regarded as a "tribal sign"; Cain is branded not as an individual but as a representative of his tribe. Ezekiel 9:4, however, tells against this view, for here it is a mark on a selected few out of Israel, a saved Remnant. But the "sign of Cain" is no doubt Jahweh's "sign": cf. Isaiah 44:5: "This one will say, 'I am the Lord's', another will call himself by the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hands 'The Lord's' and so name himself by the name of Israel." This last verse seems to imply, at any rate for exilic times, the practice of physical marking, on the forehead or the hand of the sign of Jahweh - possibly the Tau sign (+ or X). Leviticus 19:28, 21:5 ff. and Deuteronomy 14:1 are also relevant: the prohibition of "tattooing" only serves to show how prevalent the custom was. I Kings 20:41 is interpreted by Stade as meaning that the removal of the bandage from the prophet's eyes meant the revealing to the king of Jahweh's "mark" on his forehead.

What more natural than to mark one's flesh indelibly - forehead or palm especially - with the sign of the deity to whom one belonged and whose protection and help one sought.

Dinkler goes on to show that the idea of an "Eigentums- and Schutzzeichen" of Jahweh does not cease in post-exilic times. He cites *Psalms of Solomon* 15:6-9.

For the mark of God (τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ)

is upon the righteous that they may be saved.

Famine and sword and pestilence (shall be) far from the righteous, . . .

And they that do lawlessness shall not escape the judgment of God; . . .

For the mark of destruction (τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ἀπωλείας)

is upon their forehead.

The imagery is the same as in Ezekiel 9:4 and Exodus 12:22 f. Specially important for the New Testament is the Damascus Document (CD ix.10-12B).

"These [the 'poor of the flock', i.e., the Qumran community] shall escape during the period of visitation, but the rest shall be handed over to the sword when the Messiah comes from Aaron and Israel. Just as it was during the period of the first visitation, concerning which He spake through Ezekiel 'to set a mark upon the foreheads' of them that sigh and cry, but the rest were delivered to 'the sword that avengeth with the vengeance of the covenant'" (Trans. Charles).

These passages show not only that the "sign of Jahweh" survived in certain circles as a kind of talisman and sign of divine ownership, but that it received a special emphasis in Jewish eschatology as a "messianic" sign with the same connotation.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it can scarcely be coincidence that the imagery in the New Testament and early Christian literature of the "signing" or "sealing" of the faithful are most numerous where a Jewish background or Jewish sources are most in evidence. Bousset surmised that the frequent mention in such passages of the "sealing" implied "dass auch bei Christen zur Zeit der Apokalypse es noch hier und da Brauch war, sich durch der Haut einigeritzte Namen (Gottes oder Jesu) gegen allerlei Gefahren zu schützen".<sup>2</sup> As Dinkler remarks, the marking of the names of the Lamb or the Father, on the one hand, on the foreheads of those who were thus "sealed" as *δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ* (Rev. 7:3 f.; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4) and, on the other, those who bore the *χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου* on head or forehead (Rev. 13:6 f.; 14:9; 16:2; 20:4) has its basis and inspiration in the Old Testament imagery, especially the ideas of Ezekiel 9:4 and *Psalms of Solomon* 15:6-9.

## IV

The contribution of archaeology and the Papyri to our knowledge of such customs and practices is evident. If we can be confident - and the evidence from Jewish ossuaries and inscriptions seems conclusive - that the *σημείωσις τοῦ ταυ* in the double form +, X was familiar in Judaism, then the origin of the double form of the Christian symbol  $\text{P}$  and  $\text{X}$  may be explicable as deriving from such Jewish "signs of Jahweh". The Chi (X) alone is attested in inscriptions for Christ;<sup>3</sup> it occasionally is written  $\text{X}^*$ . The vertical stroke may have been simply a means of distinguishing the Christian symbol from the Hebrew-Jewish Tau. In the Letter of Barnabas (9:8) the Greek Tau has already become a symbol of the Cross.<sup>5</sup>

The evidence of the Papyri seems to point to the  $\text{P}$  sign as the more primitive. The Vatican inscriptions, however, which have both, reveal that the *Chi-Rho* sign was also a pre-Constantinian one. Since both forms of the Hebrew Tau, + and X, are found together, it is attractive to conjecture that the addition of the loop or the *Rho* was originally intended to indicate the word *Χριστός*, the first two letters of the name (as in most

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dinkler, *op. cit.*, p. 147. Dinkler is inclined to believe that the "Stigmatisierung" in a physical sense (a tattooing on the head or palm of the Tau in the Old Hebrew script) also survived.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Offenbarung Johannes* (Göttingen, 1906), p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Guarducci, *op. cit.*, p. III.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, p. 320.

<sup>5</sup> Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

abbreviations). The Tau-Rho contraction seems secondary and aetiological, for the use of the contraction  $\text{P}$  for *σταυρός*, from the second and fourth letters, seems a little artificial. It seems to me probable, however, that the original sign, whether its base was a *Chi* or a *Tau*, symbolized a Cross, and that the addition of the loop or the *Rho* giving the contraction for *Χριστός*, not only identified the sign as a Christian talisman, but turned it into a *christo-staurogram*, i.e., it was, as Eusebius and Lactantius respectively describe it, *σωτήριον σημεῖον, τοῦ σωτηρίου τροπαῖον πάθους* (*Hist. Ecc.* ix. 9, 10; *de vita Constant.* 1,40, 2; 41); a *signum veri et divini sanguinis, signum passionis, signum immortale* (*Instit.* IV, 26, 42; 27:2; 27:8; *Epit.* 46, 6-7; *de Mort.* X.2).

In his rhetorical description of the Banner of Constantine with its mysterious Labarum, Gibbon<sup>1</sup> (drawing on the *Vita Const.*, but interpreting it freely) understood the symbolism of the *Chi-Rho* monogram in just such a manner (italics mine): ". . . the principal standard which displayed the triumph of the cross was styled the LABARUM, an obscure, though celebrated, name, which has been variously derived from all the languages of the world. It is described (Eusebius in *Vita Constantine.*, l.c. 30, 31) as a long pike intersected by a transversal beam. The silken veil which hung down from the beam was curiously inwrought with the images of the reigning monarch and his children. The summit of the pike supported a crown of gold, which enclosed the mysterious monogram, at once expressive of the figure of the Cross and the initial letters of the name of Christ."

## V

There are two possible answers to the questions this essay raised on the meaning, relationships and origins of the two traditional forms of the "*Chi-Rho*" sign. (1) The original Christian sign was  $\text{P}$ , a *staurogram*, and this was aetiological explained as a *Chi-Rho*, and turned into a *christogram*, a monogram of Christ. (2) In the light of the antiquity of the two forms of the Hebrew letter ט, + and X, as a sign for Jahweh in Hebrew and Jewish tradition, especially in its messianic and eschatological connotation, the addition of a loop in the first form, + becoming  $\text{P}$ , and a *Rho* in the second, X becoming  $\text{X}^*$ , turned this Jewish "Eigentums und Schutzzeichens Jahweh" into a Christian *tropaion*, a victory-sign of the Passion, designating not simply Christus, but *Christus crucifixus*.

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xx (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon [New York, 1899 edit.] vol. ii, pp. 260, 261).