With the exception of the activities of a few bishops such as Innocent I and John of Ephesus, physical opposition to Montanism from 324 onwards was left to the secular authorities. The change in church-state relations brought about by Constantine, especially after his victory over Licinius, meant that the state turned from persecuting the mainstream (‘catholic’) church to preserving it. This preservation not only involved the cessation of persecution, but included the active rooting out of non-mainstream Christians (‘heretics’ and ‘schismatics’).

This chapter identifies the emperors and imperial agents involved in the persecution of Montanism and examines the specific measures taken by the state to force Montanists to convert to emperor-supported ‘catholic’ Christianity. The chapter also describes the consequences of non-compliance for Montanists and Montanism.

Rather than discussing the anti-Montanist action of each emperor separately and chronologically, the chapter is divided into six thematic sections. Section I explains the rationale underlying the persecution of Montanists by Constantine and his successors. The second surveys the general anti-heretical legislation which, while not naming Montanists or Montanism per se, affected Montanists. Section III classifies the major types of anti-heretical measures enacted from 325/6 to 398, that is, from the time of Constantine’s anti-Montanist legislation to the first specifically anti-Montanist legislation of the later (again divided) Empire. Section IV discusses all the known specifically anti-Montanist legislation from 398 to 438 issued jointly by the emperors of the Eastern and Western Empires after the Empire had been divided by Theodosius I in 395. The fifth section examines the special case of Justinian I’s anti-heretical legislation and his action against the Montanists which led to the end of the movement. The sixth and final section deals with the legislation against various sects which either were, or were claimed to be, related to the Montanists in some way and, therefore, may provide additional data regarding imperial opposition to Montanism.
I. Preserving the *Pax Dei*

Imperial opposition to Montanism commenced with Constantine (306–337; West, 306–324). Earlier emperors had persecuted Montanists but had done so inadvertently in the process of persecuting Christianity as a whole. They had not singled out Montanists; indeed it is most unlikely that they could distinguish Montanists from ‘catholics.’ It was only when a Christian emperor came to the throne that a distinction was made. Constantine saw himself as the ‘bishop from without’ whose authority safeguarded the very existence of the church (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 4.24; cf. 1.44). Constantine’s self-image was reinforced by the eulogies of Eusebius who portrayed Constantine as the viceroy of God sent to defeat the enemies of truth (e.g., Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 9.8; 9.9.1; 10.4; 10.9.6–9). These enemies, in Eusebius’ view, were primarily the persecuting emperors who, as Satan’s tools, had been allowed by God to chastise and purify a church which had grown to be proud and hypocritical (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.1.7–9). But the persecuting emperors were not the only enemies of truth: heretics were similarly the tools of the devil who aimed to destroy the church (e.g., Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.1–2). Constantine’s God-given task, therefore, was not only to defeat the wicked emperors, but also to root out heresy.

Constantine’s own understanding of the need to destroy heresy was undoubtedly not as profoundly theological as that of Eusebius, but Constantine nevertheless took the task seriously. There was an essential religious motivation behind Constantine’s persecution of heretics but there

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1 See Chapter Five.


