CHAPTER 6

# *Imperial Christians*
## *Palace and Churches in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Constantinople*

### Introduction

Sometime in the years 400–402, John Chrysostom gave a remarkable sermon.[1] The location was a *martyrium* at Drypia in the suburbs of his episcopal see of Constantinople. His audience was an impromptu assembly drawn from every class of people present in the city. The occasion was the end of a procession – led by the empress Eudoxia, the wife of the emperor Arcadius (r. 395–408) – which had brought the relics of an unnamed saint to their new resting place. John spoke at an inflection point in the development of Constantinople as a Christian imperial city. A generation had passed since Arcadius' father Theodosius I had relocated both his own residence and that of the praetorian prefecture of the East. Constantinople would be the permanent centre of government in the Eastern Mediterranean for the next two centuries, as the shift to a model of static emperorship meant emperors and their households were in almost continuous residence from Arcadius' accession in 395 until the personal campaigns of Heraclius (r. 610–41) in the 620s.[2] Amongst the many ways in which the city was reshaped around the needs of the emperor and his household, perhaps the most striking is the impact on its Christian institutions, topography, and liturgical calendar. John Chrysostom's sermon captures an early experiment in the imperial family's communication of distinctly Christian virtues through public ceremonial in Constantinople. According to John, the *Augusta* had removed her imperial regalia and danced barefoot behind the relics.[3] As numerous studies have demonstrated, Eudoxia's humble progress to Drypia – and her husband's more straightforward state visit on the following day – encapsulate forms of

[1] John Chrys. *Hom.* 2; date: e.g. Holum (1982), 56.
[2] See esp. Pfeilschrifter (2013), 41–75; Pfeilschrifter (2014); and now Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 313–16.
[3] John Chrys. *Hom.* 2, PG 63: 469–71.



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pious Christian behaviour that soon became standard parts of the repertoire of imperial ceremonial in the Eastern capital.[4] Late fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century imperial regimes increasingly sought to legitimise their rule through processions like this one and, in so doing, shaped the Christian life of the city. Arcadius and Eudoxia's patronage of this new *martyrium* is likewise representative of the wider process by which members of the imperial family left their mark on the ecclesiastical topography of the city through church foundations.[5] As John Chrysostom would discover (to his cost), the bishop of Constantinople himself was to play his part in this redevelopment of the city's Christian institutions to be fit for imperial purposes. As the court of highest appeal in the empire, the imperial palace now expected to forward ecclesiastical disputes to their local bishop. John's refusal to work outside his canonical jurisdiction (at least in this case) was one of several offences that made him unacceptable to Arcadius and Eudoxia (and thus) unfit for this most political of episcopal offices.[6]

Eudoxia's procession and John's sermon capture another key feature of the transformation of Christian Constantinople. In his effusive enumeration of the crowd before him, John referred (amongst others) to the 'magistrates' (*tōn archontōn*) present.[7] The bishop later returned to these distinguished attendees as part of his account of how the power of the relics had miraculously subverted the social distinctions and hierarchical relationships that normally structured urban life. As John described it, 'even magistrates left behind their carriages and staff-bearers and bodyguards and rubbed shoulders with the common people'.[8] The presence of a Roman emperor in the Great Palace on the Bosphorus brought the wider apparatus of state with it. Thousands of elite men and their households came to the city as serving, former, or budding imperial officials and current or potential future members of the Constantinopolitan Senate.[9] As John's reference to the magistrates trailing behind Eudoxia implies, the emperor's service aristocracy contributed to this recasting of the city's

[4] Kelly (2013b), at 223–24 with previous refs at n. 6. For the wider picture: Diefenbach (1996); Tiersch (2002), 183–228; Meier (2007); Croke (2010); Van Nuffelen (2012); Pfeilschrifter (2013), 76–122; McLynn (2018).

[5] See esp. Bowes (2008), 106–16; McEvoy (2022), 434–37; Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 339–40.

[6] On this specific refusal: see e.g. John Chrys. *Ep. 1 to Innocent*, 42–52, ed. Malingrey, 72; Liebeschuetz (1985), 11; Tiersch (2002), 345–46. Fall reflecting wider imperial expectations of the bishop: esp. Liebeschuetz (1985); Tiersch (2002), esp. 352–53; Van Nuffelen (2012), 193–99; McLynn (2018); Pigott (2019).

[7] John Chrys. *Hom.* 2, PG 63: 467, 468.

[8] John Chrys. *Hom.* 2, PG 63: 469, trans. Mayer and Allen (2000), 87.

[9] Matthews (1975), 101–21; Heather (1998), 189; McLynn (2018), 318–19. For the longer term development of the Senate in the fourth century, Moser (2018).

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Christian landscape. Their participation in this public performance of humility was not a one-off. In her superlative examination of Chrysostom's episcopate, Claudia Tiersch has captured how the elites of the capital knitted Christian piety and patronage into their traditional patterns of display and competition.[10] Late fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century Eastern senatorial families made their own church foundations, represented a powerful constituency at the Great Church, and patronised clerics and ascetics.[11] The presence of the imperial bureaucracy and wider senatorial elite played a significant role in making Constantinople a properly (and distinctly imperial) Christian city.

The manner in which the city of Constantinople – and its Christian life in particular – was transformed by the permanent presence of the emperor and his service aristocracy has been traced in detail. Part III of this book considers the same problem from the opposite direction: the impact of serving the state on the religious identities of elite Christian men. This chapter uses attested episodes where officials practised forms of Christian observance in Constantinople to consider the interplay of imperial, episcopal, and domestic communities, loyalties, and norms in forming the religious profile of those who served the state in the Eastern imperial capital. There is surprisingly little evidence for explicit requirements for church attendance despite regimes' recurring concern to ensure that their appointees were orthodox Christians. Officials seem to have been expected to attend church when the emperor did, but this was likely limited to major festivals and liturgical occasions; this ceremonial presence also seems to have been connected more to political loyalty than desires for religious conformity. Many officials were much more regular attendees at Hagia Sophia, as evinced by reports on their displeasure and withdrawal from communion when controversial bishops of Constantinople were plunged into crisis. Despite this routine presence in the episcopal church, the bishop remained a peripheral figure, not only in growing efforts to regulate the orthodoxy of imperial appointees but also more generally in the discourse around their religious identities. The limited pastoral significance of the bishop seems partly to have pertained to the distinctive topography and forms of Christian community in the imperial capital that encouraged semi-autonomous liturgical choices. Like other members of the city's power elite, officials engaged in the patronage of churches, clerics, and ascetics. This encouraged a sense of independence amongst an official class

[10] Tiersch (2002), 232–35; see too Matthews (1975), 127–45; Liebeschuetz (1984). [11] See n. 72.

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over-equipped with putative theological advisers, alternative pastoral relationships, and possible domestic liturgical arrangements. At the same time, their role as representatives of an emperor who acted as the ultimate arbiter of orthodox doctrine encouraged in officials a sense of superiority to the current holder of the episcopal see. This condescension was solidified by their regular receipt of theological and ecclesiastical reports from bishops, clerics, and ascetics, not only in Constantinople but across the Eastern Empire, who petitioned them for aid in ecclesiastical politics. Accounts of episcopal crises suggest an attitude that, in the final instance, it was officials who judged the orthodoxy and moral character of the bishop and not the other way around. From all this, officials emerge as participants in a distinctly imperial Christianity, whose most significant communal manifestations and cultural influences were rooted in the palace and imperial bureaucracy.

## 6.1 The Palace Goes to Church

Emperors were not avid public churchgoers. In the normative pattern of imperial attendance identified by Neil McLynn, late fourth- and early fifth-century emperors seem to have visited episcopal or other 'public' churches only during major Christian festivals and other special occasions like relic translations, baptisms, funerals, and other distinctive moments of liturgical commemoration.[12] This pattern holds for the later fifth and sixth centuries: when late ancient and early Byzantine historians discuss the emperor's presence in church, they do so on the occasion of major festivals or dedication ceremonies.[13] One key indicator is a law in the *Justinianic Code* dating to the late 520s or early 530s, whereby the *quaestor* and prefect of the city were enjoined to accompany Justinian on festival days to receive

[12] For this pattern: McLynn (2004) on Constantine to Theodosius; McLynn (2018) on Theodosius I to Theodosius II in Constantinople; though note possibilities of more frequent public attendance by certain emperors.

[13] McCormick (2000), 159–60; Pfeilschrifter (2013), 339 n. 89. For examples of the emperor in church in late fifth- and sixth-century Constantinople on festivals and other special occasions: Theodore Lector, *Epit.* 20 (355) (Marcian, after accession); *V. Marc. Oec.* 5 (Leo at dedication of church); Ps.-Zach. *HE* 7.8.b (Anastasius and Ariadne at dedication of martyr's shrine in 511); Ps.-Dion. *Chron.* (= John of Ephesus), a. 517/18 (Justin and Lupicina on a festival day); Malalas 17.16 (after earthquake in Antioch, Justin attends at Pentecost without diadem); Ps.-Dion. *Chron.* (= John of Ephesus), a. 568 (during period of grief after earthquake, Justinian only leaves palace to go to church at Christmas and Epiphany); Theophanes a. 6050, a. 6054 (Justinian in church at Christmas 557 and 562); Constantine VII, *Three Military Treatises*, 497–98 (Reiske)/138–40 (Haldon) (Justinian leads procession to Holy Apostles after victory of Kutrigurs in 559); John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.2.9 (Justin II and Easter), 3.2.29 (Justin II and court for festival of Holy Cross).

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petitions and ensure crowd control (respectively). This law implies that the emperor normally attended the 'Most Holy Great Church' and 'other churches' only on those days: unless, of course, subjects could be expected *not* to bother him or start a fracas on an ordinary Sunday.[14] Of course, the number of such festivals likely increased over the course of fifth and sixth centuries as additional days were added to regular liturgical commemoration at Constantinople.[15] Reports from the reigns of Anastasius, Justin, Justinian, and Justin II nevertheless suggest the imperial presence in church remained a special occasion.

For the rest of the year, emperors and their families would normally have used appropriate spaces on their own property, mirroring the practices of elite Christians across the Roman world.[16] There is considerable evidence for imperial foundations built in fifth- and sixth-century Constantinople, including chapels in and attached to various palaces and residences.[17] There are also tantalising glimpses of routine forms of Christian observance within these palaces and their ecclesiastical spaces. For example, the *Church History* of the Constantinopolitan Theodore Lector – written under Anastasius and published under Justin I – describes how a supposed autograph copy of the Gospel of Matthew, transferred from Cyprus to Constantinople under Zeno, was read on Maundy Thursday every year in the chapel of St Stephen in the Daphne palace.[18] Such occasions shaded off into less obviously liturgical observances at court, which were still nevertheless connected to major Christian festivals, as when Justin II held some form of audience there at Easter 571.[19] According to John Rufus in his *Life of Peter the Iberian* (written c. 500), it was customary under Theodosius II for senators to pay the emperor a social call at the palace at Epiphany.[20] Alongside these more formal occasions, late ancient palaces also saw more spontaneous and personal

[14] *CJ* 1.12.8 (undated), trans. Blume/Frier, 255; see e.g. Connolly (2010), esp. 47–62, 137–58 on the volume of petitions received daily by emperors; see also Ps.-Dion. *Chron.* (= John of Ephesus), a. 517/18 (Justin and Lupicina normally attend on festivals).

[15] For the likelihood that many of the processions attested in middle Byzantine compilations originated in this period: Baldovin (1987), 181–204; Meier (2003), 489–502 (with useful lists of anniversaries at 493–94, nn. 332–36), 610–11; Croke (2010), 256–57, 264. The precise relationship of these catalogues to regular late ancient practice (as opposed to tenth or eleventh-century practice or antiquarian reconstruction) remains unknowable: see esp. Pfeilschrifter (2013), 86–89; though compare now Rollinger (2024), 45–47, 50–51. On these developments in general: Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 323–46, at 329–30.

[16] Bowes (2008), 61–216.

[17] Dagron (1989); Bowes (2008), 106–16; Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 330, 339–40.

[18] Theodore Lector, *Epit.* 95 (436); Alex. Mon. *Laudatio Barnabae* 44; Kosiński (2021), 118–24.

[19] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.2.9.

[20] *V. Petr. Iber.* 27.

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expressions of religious piety, as with Theodosius II's apparent resolutions to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays and sing responsories with his sisters each morning.[21] Those who served in the palace at Constantinople were thus exposed to various forms of Christian observance whose nature and frequency were defined both by long-standing traditions and by the character of individual rulers.

Just whom emperors expected to join in this more 'private' – or, better, public but domestic – religious observance represents something of a black box.[22] As with Theodosius II's family band, the surviving evidence for domestic observance tends to present rulers worshipping alone with family members or priests. But of course rulers were never truly alone.[23] Such is the implication of the one report on regular palace worship in Constantinople that provides a window on this problem.[24] The *Life of Peter the Iberian* portrays its protagonist's ascetic progress when exposed to the 'diligence' of Theodosius II, Eudocia 'and of the men and women serving them, and especially of the eunuchs, who are called *cubicularii*. For they were all living in the palace as in a monastery, with prayers, fasts, night services, and the other [exercises] that are pleasing to God.'[25] John Rufus' specific frame of reference introduces Peter's own following amongst the staff of the bedchamber and his lifelong collaboration with one of them, John the Eunuch.[26] Other aspects of this (later) account might be suspected: not least how close both Theodosius II's palace and the Georgian royal palace of Peter's childhood come to becoming real (and not simply metaphorical) monasteries.[27] It nevertheless seems plausible that the daily or weekly religious observances of the emperor and his family were witnessed by a more restricted group of personal attendants.[28] Where a broader invitation list appears (in the reports of John Rufus and John of Ephesus), it is once again connected to the main liturgical festivals.

The usual pattern is much clearer for public ceremonial attendance. When Eastern emperors crossed the road from the Great Palace to the Great Church, they brought a substantial retinue with them. Various

[21] Theodosius II's devotions: Soc. 7.22. See also Peter the Iberian smuggling a relic into his private quarters in the Great Palace: *V. Petr. Iber.* 26 with Bowes (2008), 111; on both, Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 329–30. Justinian discussing Scripture with priests at night at Proc. *BG* 3.32.9; for wider references to the emperor's bodily *askēsis*, see Meier (2003), 608–41; Leppin (2009).

[22] Public but domestic: Bowes (2008), 4–15 and esp. 103, 115 for Constantinople, and on imperial churches, see the important comments of Pfeilschrifter (2013), 340 n. 92.

[23] E.g. McCormick (2000), 135.

[24] Compare Sidonius on Theoderic, see Chapter 7, 249–50.

[25] *V. Petr. Iber.* 25, trans. Horn and Phenix Jr (2008), 33.

[26] Horn (2006), 125–26.

[27] Horn (2006), 12 (date), 124–25 (on Georgian parallel and other features shaped by later concerns).

[28] Cf. McCormick (2000), 141, 159 stressing 'seclusion'.

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contemporary texts attest that emperors were accompanied by their bodyguard, although at some point under Theodosius II, the guardsmen started checking their weapons at the door.[29] Extant reports of imperial processions to and presence at churches also often include the information that specific attendants and officials, or the 'Senate' as a collective, accompanied the emperor.[30] When these (often sixth- or seventh-century) accounts speak of the Senate, they are effectively referring to the emperor's most important officials and counsellors or past or future imperial servants. The late fifth and early sixth centuries saw an amalgamation of the consistory and Senate and their personnel and functions, codified by Justinian. Even before that point, those senators who were present in Constantinople were most likely current, former, or possible future officials: hence the increasing overlap of terminology and function even in the middle decades of the fifth century.[31] Some accounts are also explicit that the collective that accompanied the imperial family on their ecclesiastical walkabouts were office-holders.[32] The ceremonial staging of Christian emperorship in Constantinople routinely involved the presence both of individual office-holders and of the ruling elite as a corporate body.

We can see officials and senators in church with the emperor; the question that remains is whether they *had* to be there. It might be assumed that Christian emperors would require their officials and attendants to practise forms of collective religious observance with them. Yet unlike moments where rulers forbade attendance at assemblies or with clerics they saw as heretical, explicit orders for the ruler's appointees to attend a particular church are very rare. I am aware of only one episode where an emperor pronounced this requirement for the purpose of ensuring

[29] CV 137.7, ACO 1.1.4, 64, with Kelly (2013b), 228; McLynn (2018), 333–34. It is unclear how far Theodosius' choice set an ongoing precedent. It might explain why Anastasius decided he needed to be accompanied by the urban prefect (who was the individual responsible for maintaining order in the city); Theod. Lect. *Epit* 118 (469), with Pfeilschrifter (2013), 236–38.

[30] Generally: Kelly (2013a), 42–43. E.g. *Chron. Pasch.* a. 406, ed. Dindorf, 569 (relic translation, Arcadius with PVC, PPO, and Senate); a. 415, ed. Dindorf, 572–73 (relic translation, bishop of Constantinople, PVC and Senate); *V. Marc. Oec.* 5 (emperors, Senate and people); Marc. Diac. *V. Porph.* 47 (Arcadius with Senate at Theodosius II's baptism); Malalas 14.8 (Theodosius and Senate go to church at Epiphany); John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.2.29 (emperor and Senate at festival of Holy Cross); Constantine VII, *Three Military Treatises*, 497–48 (Reiske)/138–40 (Haldon) (Justinian and Senate process to Holy Apostles). Cf. also *Chron. Pasch.* a. 450, ed. Dindorf, 589 and Malalas 14.22 (public processions and prayer after earthquake: Theodosius II, clergy and Senate).

[31] Begass (2018), 31–57.

[32] See esp. John Chrys. *Hom.* 2; Evagrius, *HE* 2.3, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 40–41 (officials customarily attend festival of Euphemia at Chalcedon); Constantine VII, *Three Military Treatises*, 497–98 (Reiske)/138–40 (Haldon) (Justinian to Holy Apostles with itemised list of civil officials and palace guards).

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religious conformity within the state. According to John of Ephesus, Justin II ordered in 571 that no one would be able to greet him on Easter Sunday unless they took communion with him.[33] Justin was seeking to enforce yet another new doctrinal compromise to unite the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches in his empire: a compromise that John had originally signed but now disavowed given the absence of an explicit condemnation of the council of 451.[34] Before celebrating the constancy of certain pious Miaphysites at the court who refused to join in, John noted that many had been cowed into communion by the emperor's threats (with the loss of office and access that they entailed).[35] Divine agency – and discontent at the violent coercion that ensued – eventually led Justin to back down, allowing John's heroes to attain key posts at court and conduct critical peace negotiations with the Persian *shah*.[36] The moral of this story is obviously shaped by the historian's partisan portrayal of Justin II's efforts at compromise, which were presented as a persecutory attempt to force John's pious co-religionists into communion with Chalcedonian traitors. This episode nevertheless demonstrates the potential dangers of such a concrete demand to demonstrate political and ecclesiastical allegiance at a court that was (throughout this period) patterned by various forms of religious diversity. Outside of the context of a nascent (and extremely fragile) doctrinal compromise – an unusual moment requiring public performance of religious uniformity – it is unlikely that regimes felt they had to demand attendance as the price of a continued imperial career and to do so as a test of both orthodoxy and loyalty.[37]

Of course, even without explicit requirements, there was likely significant social pressure to attend public church services when the emperor turned up.[38] Attendance on the person of the ruler was a tacit assumption for other key moments of imperial ceremonial.[39] Reports of imperial visits to church in the fifth and sixth centuries articulate the ideal of a carefully choreographed ceremonial occasion where the unanimity of the Senate and people with the emperor or empress was on view.[40] The (most likely sixth-century) description of the baptism of Theodosius II given by Mark the

[33] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.2.9. [34] On this context, see now Roggo (2022), 110–18, at 113–14.
[35] HE 3.2.9. [36] HE 3.2.11.
[37] Justin II's demand also clearly stems from the particular charge that the Eucharist had gained as a dividing line between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians over the course of the sixth century: esp. Menze (2008), 158–65.
[38] See similarly: Davenport and McEvoy (2023), 330.
[39] For its significance for aristocratic honour: Rollinger (2024), esp. 181–202, 267–80, 663–64.
[40] See n. 30.

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Deacon in his *Life of Porphyry of Gaza* waxes particularly eloquent on the serried ranks of senators (he imagined) accompanied the imperial family on their exit from the Great Church.

> Once the young Theodosius had been baptized and left the church for the palace, there could at once be seen the nobility of the crowd of those going before him and the brightness of their clothing. For all were dressed in white, so it seemed that the crowd was covered in snow. There went before him patricians, *illustres* and all the dignitaries, with the military units. All were bearing candles, so it seemed like the stars were appearing on earth. And the emperor Arcadius himself was next to the baby being carried, with a happy countenance brighter than the purple of the clothing he was wearing, and one of the great men carried the baby in his bright clothing.[41]

In this grand procession from the church to the palace, those senators present in Constantinople were ordered (as on other ceremonial occasions) by their particular grade within the hierarchy of status jealously managed by imperial regimes.[42] When all of these 'stars' were supposed to take their correct place within the imperial firmament, it is easy to imagine that the absence of one member of a particular constellation might be noticed. Certainly, that is the situation implied by an overlooked detail in another sixth-century story about early fifth-century Constantinople.[43] In this piece of court gossip, first recorded by John Malalas, Theodosius II came to believe his wife Eudocia had committed adultery with the *magister officiorum* Paulinus because of their unfortunate regifting of a massive apple that the emperor had been given on his way to celebrate Epiphany. Theodosius gave this (rather too obviously symbolic) curiosity to the empress, who passed it on to Paulinus, who sent it back to the emperor; Theodosius exiled Eudocia and executed Paulinus. The unfortunate *magister* was unaware of the emperor's original receipt of the incriminating apple because foot problems had kept him at home. Malalas' version of the story (and the later texts dependent upon it) suggest that Paulinus had sent apologies for his absence beforehand. That a prominent official would need to make excuses for non-attendance suggests – by the time of writing in the 530s at the latest – that leading officials and courtiers in

[41] Marc. Diac. *V. Porph.* 47. For the date: Barnes (2010), 260–83; though still (at least) suggesting sixth-century perceptions of standard practice in Constantinople. See too John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.2.29 on a celebration of the festival of the Holy Cross, where Justin II, the whole Senate, and the whole people proceed in rows to adore the relic in the Great Church; with McCormick (2000), 160.

[42] On which, see Introduction, n. 18.

[43] Malalas 14.8; *Chronicon Paschale* a. 444. On the anecdote: Holum (1982), 176–78; Alan Cameron (1982), 258–59 = (2016b), 59; Pfeilschrifter (2013), 492–93 with n. 96; Bevan (2016), 281–86; Scott (2016).

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Constantinople were normally expected to accompany the emperor on his public visits to church at major festivals. At the same time, the ease of Paulinus' excuse suggests (once again) a pragmatic approach to the stage management of this public demonstration of the emperor's Christian polity.

Expectations of attendance and possibilities for flexibility are also suggested by a letter that Severus of Antioch sent during his exile (c. 519–35) to one of his privileged contacts at the imperial court, the *patricia* Caesaria. Caesaria had asked whether 'some of the orthodox [i.e. Miaphysites] are doing well in not communicating with the heretics, but listening to the reading of the holy Gospel, or even staying during the time of the mysterious prayers, but not communicating in the rites that are being performed'.[44] Severus offered a succession of stark Scriptural warnings not to consort with heretics before indicating that his trawl of biblical precedents had identified an important exception.

> I find that men who hold ministerial posts or high offices, and are obliged to accompany and attend upon rulers, receive an indulgence if, when they go in with them and hear a lesson and prayers, they keep themselves perfect: I mean if they do not communicate in the communion from which they are divided.[45]

Severus took for granted that officials would have to go to church with the emperor as part of their duties. Yet he also assumed that Miaphysites in imperial service would be able to refrain from communion with a Chalcedonian emperor (whether Justin or Justinian). This is of course precisely the flexibility of liturgical practice in a Christologically divided court that Justin II sought to override at Easter 571. Going to church (if possible) when the emperor did thus seems to have been a normal part of life at the Eastern imperial court in Constantinople. The character of that attendance gave space for contemporaries to interpret it more as an indication of loyalty, and a fulfilment of ceremonial obligations, than an expression of personal religious affiliation.

## 6.2 Conformity and Churchgoing

Imperial officials had other reasons for regular public church attendance, especially those members of this service aristocracy whose religious

[44] Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 4.10, ed. Brooks, 1.2: 306, trans. Brooks, 2.2: 272.
[45] Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 4.10, ed. Brooks, 1.2: 307, trans. Brooks, 2.2: 273.

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affiliations might have been called into question. Eastern regimes from the 390s onwards periodically legislated to prevent members of the imperial service from attending specific heretical or schismatic church assemblies.[46] Although these laws did not require proof of attendance at (what was seen as) the 'orthodox' or 'Catholic' church, it is plausible that some officials would have attended to avoid future suspicion. This potential need for communion with the bishop of Constantinople is most obvious in the polarised aftermath of the second deposition of John Chrysostom. In 406, the emperor Arcadius sought to suppress the substantial splinter group of 'Johannites' who had stayed loyal to the exiled bishop and continued to avoid the church of Atticus (his replacement-but-one, 406–25). Amongst the various groups within the laity of Constantinople named in this law – as quoted by Palladius in his *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom* – it included provisions 'to remove from those in positions of dignity the honour which pertains to their office, and to take the belt of office from those in imperial service'.[47] John's advocate does not spell out what precisely these imperial officials would lose their positions *for*, but given that he goes on to stress that the Johannite laity continued to meet and pray 'in the open air' despite this law, it is likely that it simply punished those caught attending these schismatic services.[48] Palladius' stress on the significance ascribed to communion with Atticus – a central feature of the regime's other responses to this crisis – nevertheless suggest that a visible presence in the episcopal church would have been politic for those who had recently been absent.[49]

Such considerations became more pronounced as later fifth- and early sixth-century regimes began to introduce positive requirements for Christianity, framed around baptism, oaths, and witnesses to orthodoxy.[50] Such laws and administrative protocols introduced a potential need for officials not only to be Christians but to develop a relationship with the episcopal church of the city and a sense of 'good standing' through attendance. Certainly, the anxieties over religious insincerity expressed by the laws of Justinian – and episodic show-trials of crypto-pagans in his reign – imply that outward conformity to Christian public religious practice represented an entry-level requirement in mid-sixth-century

[46] See 60–63. [47] Pall. *Dial.* 11.54–56; Tiersch (2002), 392–93.
[48] Cf. Liebeschuetz (1985), 26 (implying a positive requirement as opposed to a negative prohibition).
[49] See esp. *CTh* 16.4.6; Pall. *Dial.* 11.37–53 (laws requiring bishops to enter communion with John's successors Arsacius and Atticus); Liebeschuetz (1985), 23–26; Tiersch (2002), 381–96 (suppression of Johannite assemblies).
[50] See Chapter 1, 69–71.

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Constantinopolitan court society.[51] These anxieties regarding the problems of ensuring inward devotion through external acts had an obvious significance for church attendance. Suspicions around the religious commitment of officials were often expressed through observation of their behaviour in church.[52] Various sixth-century historians include character assassinations of particular appointees, using their supposed religious insincerity as part of a wider argument about their immorality and unfitness for office. These poisoned pen portraits substantiated that accusation of feigned conformity by the way these individuals acted during Christian observances. So, for example, Procopius of Caesarea claimed that the infamous praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian dressed and acted more like a pagan when he visited Christian sanctuaries.

> He was completely without thought of God – if ever he went into a church to pray and to spend the night in vigil there, he did not observe Christian practices, but put on a rough cloak more appropriate for a priest of the old faith, which they now call 'pagan', and recited all night long sacrilegious words which he had learnt by heart, so that the emperor's will might be even more subject to him and that he himself might be immune from harm at the hands of any person.[53]

When John of Ephesus accused Justin II's *quaestor* Anastasius of secretly being both a pagan and a Samaritan, he went even further, depicting a vivid scene of discovery at the festival of the Holy Cross in the Great Church in 572 or 573. As Anastasius joined the senators queuing up to venerate the cross, he had some form of fit that required him to be carried out to a private apartment while the service continued. At least according to John, he never fully recovered before his death a year and a half later. This unfortunately timed episode was interpreted by John as a form of demonic possession and divine proof of the *quaestor*'s religious hypocrisy, revealed by the power of the cross.[54] Such vivid tableaus suggest that officials in church had to expect observation of their conduct.[55] At the same time, the nature of these character assassinations suggests that there were particular reasons why these individuals were subject to such scrutiny (and, indeed, that this was more a useful accusation to throw against a political opponent than an everyday feature of life in the churches of

[51] See e.g. Ps.-Dion. *Chron*. a. 545/6 (= John of Ephesus): after show-trials, elite pagans of Constantinople sent to church for catechism; with Meier (2003), 300–301; on the episode: e.g. Whitby (1991), 118–19; Maas (1992), 71; Cameron (2016a), 262–65; Roggo (2022), 148.
[52] See 108. [53] Proc. *BP* 1.25.10, trans. Greatrex (2022), 110. [54] John Eph. *HE* 3.1.29.
[55] See also the acclamations against the *cubicularius* Amantius as a new Chrysaphius in Hagia Sophia on 16 July 518: CS27, ACO 3, 74.

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Constantinople).[56] It should be stressed that no (earthly) action was taken against either (supposed) crypto-pagan. Outside of these polemical episodes, there is not a sense that the individual conduct of officials and senators was a subject of consistent focus. Instead, as noted above, our reports tend to sketch their unanimous and neatly ordered collective presence as the backdrop to the pious conduct of the emperor. Turning up to church may have been enough in most cases: part of the reason that contemporaries questioned the religious sincerity of contemporary officials.

## 6.3 Officials and the Episcopal Church

Some imperial officials and courtiers were regular attendees at the episcopal church without the need for imperial prompting. This routine presence in Hagia Sophia is most clearly visible during crisis moments for late fourth-, fifth- and sixth-century bishops of Constantinople, when the presence or absence of officials and senators became a barometer of the continued viability of their episcopate. Gregory of Nazianzus used his retirement speech in 381 to highlight how his congregation had grown during his time in office. As Neil McLynn has argued, this increased attendance was most likely a result of the arrival of the court of Theodosius I; prominent amongst the categories of late arrivals Gregory listed were 'rulers', 'soldiers' (i.e. those in imperial service), and 'nobles'.[57] Reconstructions of the two depositions of John Chrysostom in 403/4 include imperial officials and the wider senatorial elite amongst the groups who conspired towards his downfall.[58] As Claudia Tiersch has explored, a number of sermons and several recurring themes in Chrysostom's preaching provoked anger amongst the senatorial elite: not least, the bishop's uncompromising denunciation of wealth and its display and attacks on fundamental requirements of public advancement as incompatible with Christian virtue.[59] As a result of these attacks, according to the (apologetic) account of an unknown supporter of John in his *Funerary Speech* for the bishop, many of the rich no longer felt welcome to attend his church (implying they were normally present).[60] The recorded audience response to sermons

[56] Rochow (1991).
[57] McLynn (2018), 318–19, also noting the proximity of Hagia Sophia and Senate House and likely presence of senators in church already before the arrival of Theodosius I.
[58] Note Ps.-Martyrius, *Funerary Speech* 14 on senatorial opposition. See esp. Liebeschuetz (1984); (1985); Tiersch (2002), 229–50; Van Nuffelen (2012), 193–200; Pfeilschrifter (2013), 301–6, 383–94; Pigott (2019).
[59] Tiersch (2002), 229–50. [60] Ps.-Martyrius, *Funerary Speech* 40; Liebeschuetz (1985), 10.

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concerning the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Eutropius and the empress Eudoxia likewise suggests that members of the imperial household and consistory were regular attendees.[61] Similar dynamics can be seen in competing claims made as the controversy over another uncompromising Syrian appointee to the see, Nestorius, came to a head in 430. In a letter to Celestine of Rome from the spring or summer, Cyril of Alexandria noted that he had heard that many of the Senate had stopped going to the episcopal church 'in fear of being harmed in their faith'.[62] By contrast, Nestorius claimed in a letter to John of Antioch in November 430 that he had given a sermon by which he had 'won . . . yet greater support from the clergy, the people, and those at the imperial court' (hos qui in imperialibus sunt aulis).[63] A further episcopal crisis in the reign of Anastasius also highlights this assumption that key imperial officials would be regular congregants. In an extraordinary meeting of the consistory on Sunday, 31 July 511, the emperor informed his courtiers that they should not attend the service held by bishop Macedonius on the next (ordinary) Sunday.[64] All of these moments of controversy suggest that it was commonplace for officials as Christians to go to the episcopal church.

This routine presence makes sense given the close (if sometimes fraught) relationship between palace and church, symbolised, above all, by mutual expectations of privileged access.[65] The forms of sociability evident between representatives of the episcopal church and the imperial family also seem to have encapsulated members of the household, court, and administration. So, for example, in speeches to the Cyrilline assembly at Ephesus on 22 June 431, the bishops Theopemptus of Cabasa and Daniel of Darnis, who brought Celestine and Cyril's final demand for Nestorius' recantation to Constantinople in November 430, testified that they found the bishop engaged in a liturgical celebration in the episcopal palace. Cyril's agents noted that almost all of the *illustres* were present when they handed over this document (presumably to invoke them as potential

[61] See 231–33.
[62] Cyril, *Ep.* 11.3 = CV 144.3, ACO 1.1.5, 11; trans. Price and Graumann, 130; date: Price and Graumann (2020), 127. See also John Rufus, *Plerophories* 1; with Horn (2006), 136–37.
[63] CC 78.6, ACO 1.4, 6, trans. Price and Graumann, 182 (in sixth-century Latin translation).
[64] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 7.8.i.
[65] Pfeilschrifter (2013), 357–451, at 357 for John Chrysostom's claims regarding episcopal access; though compare Tiersch (2002), 183 on the rarity of attested meetings; and note esp. Pulcheria's anger that Nestorius did not allow her and the ladies of the court their customary dining rights at the episcopal palace at *Letter to Cosmas*, 5, with McLynn (2018), 331–32, and the bishop's access to the emperor Leo in *V. Dan. Styl.* 27, cf. 42. Routine forwarding of ecclesiastical cases from emperor to bishop: see n. 6.

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witnesses to Nestorius' receipt of a demand to which he had still yet to reply).[66] The *patricius* Florentius had similar access to the bishop's residence after the Home Synod of 448, which condemned Eutyches. Florentius was able to enter Flavian's upstairs apartment to inform him of an appeal made (quietly) by the archimandrite after the bishop had left the hearing.[67] Such access was not simply a matter of liturgical occasions or imperial business. Imperial officials appear more broadly as allies of bishops of Constantinople, whom the latter might call upon for favours at court.[68]

Given this regular presence of officials in the episcopal church, and the formation of relationships between bishops and office-holders, we might expect the bishop to play a prominent role in shaping the religious identities of officials whose Christianity was (at least theoretically) subject to state regulation. Pastoral oversight remains a remarkably peripheral feature of both the legal framework and the historiographical discourse around official Christianity. That the compilers of the *Justinianic Code* included the laws of Leo I and Justinian requiring that appointees prove their Christianity within the section on the episcopal court implies that this problem was, in part, a matter for the bishop of Constantinople.[69] Yet it is not obvious what precisely his role was, in contrast to other laws in that section that pertain to the bishop's legal jurisdiction or mark out a specific action item for the patriarch. Oversight over official Christianity in the capital emerges from these laws as an in-house affair. It was up to department heads to ensure the orthodoxy of appointees: oaths would be sworn and witness statements recorded before them; they were to receive punishment in the breach.[70] It seems telling that reports on misbehaviour in church and accusations of crypto-paganism place weight on the views of observers within the official classs.[71] The bishop's care for the souls of the

[66] CV 50, ACO 1.1.2, 37. [67] Actio I, 819, 821, ACO 2.1.1, 175–76.

[68] On Chrysostom's allies (more obvious once in exile): esp. Liebeschuetz (1984), 106–9; Delmaire (1989); Tiersch (2002), 403–4; on Nestorius' allies: CV14.1, ACO 1.1.1, 93; CC78.2, ACO 1.4, 5; CV31, ACO 1.1.1, 121; *PLRE* II: 624–25 (Irenaeus 2); Millar (2006), 168–90; CV162, ACO 1.1.5, 133; CC103, ACO 1.4, 51–53 (with wider circle at c. 5); *PLRE* II: 982 (Scholasticius 1); cf. CV143, ACO 1.1.5, 7–10 and CV84.2, ACO 1.1.3, 11 (for accusations regarding powerful supporters in general and the count Candidianus respectively); on the episcopal church and the circle of Troilus: Van Nuffelen (2004), 14–36. See also Marc. Diac. *V. Porph.* 36–38 on Amantius and Chrysostom (likely legendary but implying a sixth-century expectation).

[69] Though the views of the compilers in the 530s should not necessarily be retrojected for the original constitutions, especially in the case of the *episcopalis audientia*: see best, Humfress (2011).

[70] See Chapter 1, 70–71.

[71] John of Ephesus' account of the fit suffered by Anastasius notably features the patriarch of the Great Church coming to the *quaestor*'s aid. It is the congregation of the church – filled with senators – and not the clergy who see this as divine judgement.

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officials in his congregation does not obviously come into the equation. From the perspective of the imperial state, the bishop seems a peripheral figure who could be called upon to help with the necessary bureaucratic processes to ensure officials adhered to a corporate Christianity defined internally.

## 6.4 Patronage and Praxis: Officials and Domestic Christianity

Part of the reason for this marginalisation of the bishop of Constantinople must be his peculiar position within the ecclesiastical landscape of the imperial capital. The bishop was not the only Christian authority figure with whom officials entered into relationships of reciprocal patronage, and the episcopal church was far from the only site of official Christian agency and piety.[72] Critical again are the limited expectations of public churchgoing in general and especially of elites for whom domestic worship was standard most of the time. Correspondingly, what we see in fifth- and sixth-century Constantinople is much greater plurality and choice in churchgoing and patronage. As Gilbert Dagron neatly captured, in the absence of anything resembling a medieval parish church, even ordinary Christians in Constantinople had free rein to go to a particular saint's church for healing because of the timing of their festival in the liturgical calendar or because of a personal sense of dedication to them.[73] For most of this period, these shrines were rarely founded or controlled – and only partially regulated – by the bishop of Constantinople. From Constantine's rededication of the city and especially since the arrival of the Theodosian establishment in Constantinople, the prime movers behind church building in the imperial capital had been its major landowners: aristocratic dynasties, the women of the imperial family, and, latterly, the emperors themselves.[74] These martyria, oratories, and domestic shrines were supported by groups of clerics or monks normally chosen for that purpose by the church's patron who also, of course, owned the land on which it was sited (and perhaps even lived in the townhouse to which it was attached). Bishops of Constantinople from Chrysostom onwards made recurring attempts to bring the financing, staffing, and liturgical arrangements of these churches under the aegis of the episcopal church, sometimes with the help of their emperors. Tighter canonical and imperial regulation was

[72] For all of the following: Thomas (1987), 5–58, 111–18; Dagron (1989); Caner (2002), 158–241; Hatlie (2007), 78–88; Bowes (2008), 103–25; Pigott (2019).
[73] Dagron (1989), 1083–85. [74] McEvoy (2022), 433–37.

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pursued – most notably, at the Council of Chalcedon (451) and in the reign of Justinian – which increased episcopal oversight. The character of these domestic shrines and their forms of worship nevertheless remained largely at the volition of the communities or clerics attached to them and, more fundamentally, of the patrons on whose property they resided and on whose continuing financial largesse they depended.[75] In this decentralised ecclesiastical landscape of imperial and elite foundations, the Great Church looms rather smaller on the horizon.

For the Christian residents of Constantinople, even regular religious observance frequently pulled them out of the orbit of the episcopal church. For the richest members of the city's service aristocracy, the possibilities of alternative foci for the expression and definition of their Christian identities are all the more evident. The most ostentatious elite manifestations of this Christian self-determination come in the form of those very church foundations. Current and former officials were amongst the grandees who constructed churches on their properties in the city and its suburbs. The roll-call of those known to have built churches, founded monasteries, or donated to pre-existing shrines and communities in Constantinople and its environs is a veritable who's who of the imperial grandees of the late fourth to late sixth centuries. These churches were often set up to house monastic communities. In the mid-390s, the prefect Rufinus brought Egyptian monks to the church of Peter and Paul attached to his palace in Chalcedon to conduct services; seven decades later, the consul Studius transferred members of the community of 'Sleepless' monks established by the Syrian ascetic Alexander to his church of St John the Baptist.[76] If the authors of the *Lives* of the late fourth-century ascetic Isaac and the late fifth-century stylite Daniel are to be believed, current and former imperial officials and their families competed to house the Syrian ascetics in bespoke churches on their estates; after Isaac's death, the praetorian prefect Aurelianus built a special shrine in his residence to house the corpse.[77] Incorporation into their townhouses was not the only domestic feature of

[75] Esp. Thomas (1987), 37–58; Caner (2002), 206–41; Bowes (2008), 116–23.

[76] Rufinus: Soz. *HE*. 8.17; Matthews (1975), 134–36; Thomas (1987), 21–22; Tiersch (2002), 233–35; Bowes (2008), 112. Studius: Theod. Lect. *Epit*. 49 (384); though see *Anth. Gr*. 1.4; Kosiński et al. (2021), 278 n. 207 on the dating problem; Croke (2023), 41 on his other foundations.

[77] *V. Isaac*. 4.14–18 with Dagron (1970), 232–33; Matthews (1975), 130–31; Thomas (1987), 17; McLynn (1998), 480–81; Caner (2002), 190–99, at 193; Tiersch (2002), 232–33; Hatlie (2007), 66–68; Bowes (2008), 112–15, 122; McEvoy (2022), 433; *V. Dan. Styl*. 23–36, 49, 55–56, 80, 89, 99–100 with Lane Fox (1997), esp. 178–80, 219; Hatlie (2007), 114–17; Kosiński (2016), 171–89; McEvoy (2022).

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these monastic start-ups: the chamberlains Gratissimus (in the 460s) and Narses (in the 560s) were said to have built so that, on retirement, they could join the monastery they had sponsored (although only the former had the chance to execute his plan).[78]

Even when (ex-)officials did not dedicate themselves to their foundations in such a fundamental way, these churches could represent an ongoing investment with the potential to act as a focus for their religious identity. Such was certainly the case for Rufinus' shrine for the relics of the apostles, which witnessed his baptism. In an account preserved in one manuscript of Palladius' *Lausiac History*, the prefect hosted a council of bishops in this domestic *martyrium* and was baptised in their presence.[79] The prefect's use of his church of Peter and Paul to stage his Christianity continued after his death. After his dramatic fall from grace and assassination in 395, Rufinus' palace was confiscated by the treasury but not before he was buried in his church.[80] Such post mortem commemoration was clearly a central motive for these constructions.[81] Of course, as the fate of Rufinus' *martyrium* implies, dynastic plans did not always come to fruition. Monastic experiments failed, imperial powerbrokers rose and fell, and properties changed hands. Other elite domestic churches had greater longevity as sites of familial commemoration. The *Palatine Anthology* records dedication inscriptions for both the construction of the church of Theodore by the *comes domesticorum peditum* Sporacius and his burial in the same church by his son; the same collection includes several verses commemorating church buildings as the inheritance of, and refurbishments as acts of dynastic piety by, imperial and aristocratic women.[82] Continued investment in these sites is also implied by later fifth- and early sixth-century imperial regulation of ecclesiastical patronage. Even with attempts to introduce episcopal oversight, donors were heavily involved in the running of churches and monastic communities, not least by choosing abbots, clerics, and administrators, paying salaries, and managing (and sometimes reappropriating) land.[83] Where domestic churches remained a going concern, it is easy to see how they could become an important *locus* for the Christian self-expression of an elite family.

[78] Theod. Lect. *Epit.* 49 (384); John Eph. *HE* 3.1.39; McCormick (2000), 153; see also Hatlie (2007), 187 for later sixth-century examples.
[79] Pall. *LH* 11, ed. Butler, 34–35.
[80] Pall. *LH* 11, ed. Butler, 35.
[81] See also Soz. *HE* 9.2; Thomas (1987), 16–17; Caner (2002), 191; Bowes (2008), 112.
[82] *Anth. Gr.* 1.6 and 1.7. Parallel cases: esp. *Anth. Gr.* 1.10, 1.12, with McEvoy (2022), 435–36, 438–39.
[83] Thomas (1987), 25–44, 47–58.

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Any assertion beyond this has to remain somewhat speculative, not least because it is hard to tell what exactly happened in these domestic churches.[84] We can rarely actually see current officials worshipping in (as opposed to simply founding) domestic churches in surviving texts, but they presumably represented important sites for their religious observances. Such a function is implied by the prevalence amongst elite Christians of the reserved Eucharist, that is, the delivery of consecrated bread and wine to select congregants to be consumed in private. There is plentiful evidence for both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian senatorial aristocrats securing this privilege in sixth-century Constantinople (wherever in their homes they chose to receive it).[85] The possibilities of the domestic sphere as a focus for the religious observances of imperial officials are likewise suggested by accounts of those saintly figures who sought to engage in ascetic praxis while serving in the imperial palace, like the Georgian prince Peter the Iberian (in the reign of Theodosius II) and the *cubicularii* Misael, Theodore, and John (in the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian).[86] The most startling example, already discussed in Chapter 5, is that of the senator John Vincomalus in the reign of Marcian. According to Theodore Lector, Vincomalus would spend the day in the palace in the guise of a senator, before returning home to the monastery of Bassianus (founded by the former *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Gratissimus), where he would put on a monastic habit and scrub dishes in the kitchen.[87] It seems prudent to doubt the veracity of this story, where the moral about these two forms of service hovers rather too obviously over its protagonist.[88] The ideal combination of imperial office and domestic piety presented by the ecclesiastical historian nevertheless distills a wider set of cultural possibilities that could be practised even by officials whose Christianity was called into question by contemporaries. Another way of reading Procopius' account of John the Cappadocian's church attendance (quoted above) is that the praetorian prefect was known to partake of regular nightly vigils at martyr's shrines; the 'rough cloak' he wore could just as easily be seen as a monastic habit.[89] Imperial officials were part of the wider picture of elite domestic religious praxis

[84] See esp. Bowes (2015). [85] Menze (2011); Bowes (2015), 71–74.
[86] *V. Petr. Iber.* 24–29; Severus, *Ep. Sel.* 11.1; with Whelan (2018), 385–87, 393–99; John Eph. *V. SS Or.* 57 ('Life of Theodore the Castrensis'); see also now Caner (2021), 7–8.
[87] Theod. Lect. *Epit.* 52 (387).
[88] Hatlie (2007), 104–5; compare Kompa (2021), 279–81 (greater plausibility).
[89] Proc. *BP* 1.25.10, trans. Greatrex (2022), 110.

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that was normative in Constantinopolitan court society from the late fourth to the late sixth centuries.[90]

These forms of domestic piety were rooted in, and helped to cultivate, reciprocal relationships with authority figures and institutions outside the direct remit of the episcopal church. Official patronage of clerics and ascetics went beyond the staffing of domestic churches and establishment of monastic communities. A notable feature of the lives of saints who lived in or visited Constantinople is their recording of the patronage offered by prominent figures at court and amongst the senatorial aristocracy.[91] Imperial officials provided housing and hospitality and financial, political, and bureaucratic support, while requesting healing and doctrinal and spiritual advice. Polemical writings against doctrinal and clerical opponents similarly attest the significance of elite patronage of wandering monks and visiting clerics (including bishops who should really have been back in their own dioceses).[92] As Justin Pigott has neatly put it, 'with an abundance of willing patrons and the draw of the imperial court, Constantinople began to attract a continuous stream of itinerant preachers and monks from throughout the empire seeking lucrative patronage and imperial appointment'.[93] Bishops of Constantinople sought to bring these unaffiliated Christian authority figures under institutional control, with some success in the aftermath of Chalcedon. (Chalcedonian) bishops and local (Chalcedonian) monastic communities were more closely allied – and the latter less likely to engage in public protest – in the decades following the council. Recurrent doctrinal conflicts and the ongoing influx of clerical and monastic visitors and petitioners nevertheless meant that alternative pastoral and social relationships persisted

[90] See esp. Bowes (2015), 80–83 on the middle Byzantine transition.

[91] Isaac: see n. 77. See (in general): Dagron (1970), 231–38; Hatlie (2007), 65–89. Hypatius at the *Rufinianae*: *V. Hyp*. 12, 15, 21, 44; Kosiński (2016), 47–65. Dalmatius: Caner (2002), 218–20. Marcian: *V. Marc. Oec*. 16 with Pfeilschrifter (2013), 519–20; McEvoy (2016), 496. Daniel: see n. 77; Severus in Constantinople (508–11): *V. Sev*. 146–48 Brock and Fitzgerald (ed. Kugener, 104–6); Greatrex (1996), 125, 128–29; Alpi (2009), 1.45; Meier (2009), 259; Begass (2018), 409–10; Sabas: Cyr. Scyth., *V. Sab*. 50–55, ed. Schwartz, 139.20–48.5; Leppin (2009), 156–59, 162; Begass (2018), 410–11; Mare: John of Ephesus, *V. SS Or*. 36, ed. Brooks: 630–41; cf. John Eph. *HE* 3.2.41; Thomas (1987), 52; Hatlie (2007), 142; plus 133–36, 142–43 (more broadly on patronage of Miaphysite monks); Leppin (2009), 159–62.

[92] Rivals of John Chrysostom: Liebeschuetz (1985); Caner (2002), 169–77, 190–99; Tiersch (2002), 135–82, 220–24, 309–78; Pigott (2019). (Polemic against) Eutyches: Fraisse-Coué (1998), 36; Caner (2002), 223–35; Gaddis (2005), 292–93; Smith (2018), 148–49. For patronage of monastic and clerical visitors in later fifth and sixth centuries: Hatlie (2007), 118–26, 162–66; Dijkstra and Greatrex (2009), 232–33, 258–62.

[93] Pigott (2019), 766.

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throughout this period.[94] The emperor's appointees were likely members – and occasional or semi-regular attendees – of the episcopal church, but that community and its bishop was only one institutional and social context for their Christianity.

Against this backdrop, Hagia Sophia appears as one of many potential sites of official piety and patronage. Indeed, the Great Church seems as much an 'imperial' church as an episcopal one. Neil McLynn has observed the confidence of the regime of Theodosius II in appropriating Hagia Sophia as a space for ceremonial display.[95] A similar ease within this ecclesiastical space can be seen in brief reports on the actions of officials within it. It seems to have been common practice for palatine dignitaries to visit the church independently to pray. The best evidence for this comes from two dramatic incidents in and around Hagia Sophia. In an entry for 419, the *Chronicon Paschale* records that the urban prefect Aëtius was stabbed on his way from the church to the palace by an old man pretending to be a petitioner.[96] (He had hidden the dagger in a scroll.) Again, I am going to skip over what would otherwise be the most exciting bit of the story and focus on the incidental detail: Aëtius had been praying in the Great Church when he was summoned to the palace, and his attempted murderer expected to find him there. This sense of the commonplace nature of official visits to the episcopal church also comes from another incident discussed by John Malalas and the *Chronicon Paschale*.[97] In this episode, the emperor Zeno ordered that his praetorian prefect Arcadius be murdered when he arrived at the palace. Once summoned, the prefect avoided this fate by stopping off at Hagia Sophia en route and pretending that he needed to pray but actually staying there to claim asylum. Both stories suggest that this was something imperial officials might normally do on their way to and from the palace.[98] They also suggest the deliberate visibility of such acts: Aëtius attended 'with pomp' (*meta tou schēmatos*); Arcadius was travelling (as was customary) in his carriage.[99] Christian piety could be publicly displayed in the Great Church with or without the attendance or intervention of the bishop.[100]

[94] See Dijkstra and Greatrex (2009), 255–57, esp. 255 n. 101 (with extensive literature); Leppin (2009); Pfeilschrifter (2013), 428–33 for continued conflict; Hatlie (2007), 150–53 for later retreat of Miaphysite confrontation in reign of Justinian.

[95] McLynn (2018), 327–39, at 339.

[96] *Chron. Pasch.* a. 419, ed. Dindorf, 574.16–22.

[97] Malalas 15.16; *Chron. Pasch.* a. 490, ed. Dindorf, 606.

[98] See also CA 45, c. 5, ACO 1.1.7, 68: the *comes sacrarum largitionum* John, on a mission to the Council of Ephesus in August 431, goes to the cathedral late in the evening to pray.

[99] See nn. 96 and 97.

[100] As one of the readers for the Cambridge University Press pointed out, the bishop must (eventually) have been present to grant Arcadius asylum. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the bishop of

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## 6.5 Overmighty Congregants

In the summer of 511, the episcopal church of Constantinople saw a tumultuous few months as its bishop Macedonius was deposed and exiled at the will of the emperor Anastasius.[101] As the rift between palace and church began to widen, a group of 'honourable dignitaries' visited the bishop's residence for talks on 20 July 511. A letter of Severus records some of the discussions at this meeting, which the prominent Miaphysite ascetic leader (and future bishop of Antioch) attended. In the surviving sections of the letter, Severus quotes Macedonius accusing the imperial household of causing him trouble, followed by a firm (if not unsympathetic) reply by the patrician and consul Secundinus (the emperor's brother-in-law): it was the bishop's own fault, and divine support was on the side of the emperor. Most strikingly, Secundinus made clear his independence of judgement regarding the bishop's orthodoxy.

> I know your heart, as I have said just now, because I know what kind of person you are; for unless I had seen you subscribe to the *Henotikon* of Zeno, of pious memory, I would not have communicated with you from the beginning; now, again, if you do not assure me, you will not find me communicating with you henceforth.[102]

The patrician turned the tables on the bishop: it was his orthodoxy that was in question and had to be evaluated according to his adherence to the *Henotikon*: the consensus formula that the regime of Anastasius maintained as the key touchstone for doctrinal rectitude.[103] Secundinus reserved the right to withdraw communion from Macedonius, just as his brother-in-law would do two days later at the consecration of a martyr's shrine at the Hebdomon.[104] Both Anastasius and Secundinus had to be convinced (on an ongoing basis) that the bishop held the imperial line on the true faith.

The limited pastoral significance of the bishop of Constantinople for Christians serving the imperial state can partly be explained by the

Constantinople and the priests of Hagia Sophia are entirely absent from these stories, as too any formal liturgical event.

[101] On Macedonius' fall: see best, Dijkstra and Greatrex (2009); see also Haarer (2006), 145–52; Meier (2009), 259–69.

[102] Sev. *First Letter to Soterichus*, ed. and trans. Dijkstra and Greatrex, 242; see also John of Beth-Apthonia, *V. Sev.* 45 Brock and Fitzgerald (ed. Kugener, 153).

[103] On the *Henotikon*: see Chapter 2, 82, n. 15. For Macedonius' previous subscription: Dijkstra and Greatrex (2009), 245.

[104] Ps. Zach, *HE* 7.8.b; with Dijkstra and Greatrex (2009), 237.

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prevalence of opportunities for domestic religious arrangements and the patronage of clerics and ascetics. It also resulted from the presence of the palace as an alternative *locus* for the definition of correct doctrine and practice. The central role of the emperor in the definition of orthodoxy in the churches of the East – and, of course, in the appointment of bishops of Constantinople – resulted in a peculiar balance of power that went beyond even the usual destabilising effect of the presence of Christian aristocrats for episcopal authority.[105] As a result, bishops were as likely to be judged by these officials (in their role as enforcers of the emperor's doctrinal line) as judges of them (in their pastoral capacity). As discussed above, the best evidence for regular attendance at the Great Church by imperial officials is precisely their withdrawal from communion in times of episcopal crisis.[106] These references to absenteeism form part of wider reports that depict officials and members of the senatorial elite passing judgement on the bishop's fitness for office. Such ongoing assessments and audience responses were part and parcel of the often complex relationship between bishops and their congregations. Yet their membership of the imperial state made officials more likely than most to take up such a critical stance regarding the conduct and doctrinal positioning of a bishop. Their receipt of petitions, role as intermediaries and ecclesiastical troubleshooters, presence in the consistory, and patronage of interested parties in the city gave them a much wider framework in which to place themselves as members of the church and (orthodox) Christians. The doctrinal and ecclesiastical discretion of imperial officials was a tacit and often remarkably explicit feature of ecclesiastical controversy. Service to the state in Constantinople inculcated a particular form of Christian whose adherence to an imperial agenda, access to alternative sources of doctrinal and ecclesiastical information, and privileged relationships with (sometimes rival) representatives of the institutional church allowed them to maintain a certain distance from the episcopal community.

Secundinus was far from the only fifth- or sixth-century imperial grandee to decide that they knew better than the current bishop what they should teach or how they should conduct themselves. Members of the palace, consistory, and Senate similarly withdrew from communion with the bishop during other episcopal crises. John Chrysostom's provocative sermons against the iniquitous behaviour of the rich led members of the

[105] Episcopal appointments: for useful surveys, see Norton (2007), 83–91; Pfeilschrifter (2013), 357–83.
[106] See 221–22.

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senatorial elite to decide they had been (effectively) excluded from his church.[107] Ps.-Martyrius described this sense of exclusion in the context of Theophilus of Alexandria's visits to 'the houses of the wealthy' in Constantinople to build a coalition to depose the bishop.[108]

> Sounding out everyone's disposition towards the saint and inquiring secretly what sort of man they judged John to be in character, he heard some say that he was harsh, that he was impudent (for bad people call freedom of speech 'impudence'), that he barred their entry to the church with his sermons by discoursing against greed or avarice and directing the eyes of all to them with a shout.[109]

The preacher portrays these complaints as a reflection of the laxity and self-interest of a ruling class given to land grabs and sexual immorality.[110] It is nevertheless clear that these senatorial opponents felt they were in a position to judge John's conduct and suitability for the episcopate. Various reports on his downfall suggest this critical perspective also extended to other confrontational sermons. John's crowing sermon on the asylum of Eutropius – given with the erstwhile *praepositus sacri cubiculi* present in the apse – provoked unsurprising dissatisfaction from attendees who might have been clients of the formerly dominant figure in the regime of Arcadius.[111] Likewise, as McLynn has noted, the hostile (and somewhat tendentious) reports that got back to Arcadius and Eudoxia about a misogynistic sermon – and helped to precipitate their withdrawal of favour – likely stemmed from the presence of courtiers in the congregation.[112] In his *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, Palladius of Helenopolis suggests that the bishop's enemies 'changed his sermons into attacks on . . . other members of the imperial court' (heterōn tōn en tē aulē tou Basileōs).[113] Wolf Liebeschuetz and Claudia Tiersch have neatly captured the distinctive 'Rezeptionsdynamik' that formed amongst John's Constantinopolitan audience, who tended to interpret his abstract criticisms of worldly wealth and power as specific attacks on the current imperial regime and senatorial elite.[114] If this alleged misprision led to

[107] See 147–48. [108] Ps.-Martyrius, *Funerary Sermon* 39, quotation trans. Barnes and Bevan, 61.
[109] Ps.-Martyrius, *Funerary Sermon* 40, trans. Barnes and Bevan, 62. This reference clearly refers not to a formal exclusion or excommunication by John himself but a choice made by these congregants in response to the bishop, though it may also connect with John's threats regarding the withdrawal of communion for those who attended games which these men would have had to sponsor: Tiersch (2002), 243–49.
[110] Ps.-Martyrius, *Funerary Sermon* 40. [111] Soc. *HE* 6.5, with Tiersch (2002), 247–48, 265–80.
[112] McLynn (2004), 266; Soc. *HE* 6.15; Soz. *HE* 8.16. [113] Pall. *Dial.* 6.5–7.
[114] Liebeschuetz (1985), 10; (1990), 205; Tiersch (2002), 227 (quoted phrase); see also Van Nuffelen (2012), 199.

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introspection amongst the emperor's appointees in the congregation, it does not appear in our sources (keen to explain the fall of a prophet and confessor); whatever his supposed pastoral authority, John's critiques of their behaviour seem to have had limited purchase. When his moral provocations offended them, these senators could simply stop turning up.

Something similar seems to have occurred in the spring or summer of 430 because of divisions in the Constantinopolitan church over the term *Theotokos* and the reluctance of the bishop Nestorius fully to support its use. Nestorius' rival Cyril of Alexandria had apparently gleaned intelligence that many senators were no longer coming to church for fear of complicity in heresy.[115] This is (of course) hardly a neutral report: it comes as part of an attempt to persuade his ally Celestine of Rome that action had to be taken against their episcopal colleague.[116] Yet given the known doubts and open critiques already expressed by representatives of the imperial state – as well as the numerous allies at court whom Cyril and his faction felt they could count upon a year later – such absenteeism seems plausible.[117] In both cases, members of the imperial establishment felt able to take a critical stance towards the bishop, whose pronouncements and conduct they were entitled to assess for themselves. Of course, imperial officials and senatorial grandees were not the only individuals who brought such scepticism to their interactions with their local bishop. Late ancient bishops had complex and sometimes difficult relationships with their congregations. Members of the Constantinopolitan power elite were not the only opponents of John, Nestorius, and Macedonius; Cyril was keen also to claim that 'the people' as a collective had refused to take the Eucharist because of Nestorius' supposed pronouncements on Mary.[118] Yet service in the palace, consistory, and bureaucracy made these men particularly prone to take a critical stance towards claims of episcopal authority and orthodoxy.

[115] Cyril, *Ep.* 11.3 = CV 144.3, ACO 1.1.5, 11.

[116] For the context: Fraisse-Coué (1995), 512–13; Wessel (2004), 103–11; Bevan (2016), 130–34; Price and Graumann (2020), 127.

[117] In 428 or 429, the *agens in rebus* Eusebius circulated a treatise against Nestorius in Constantinople: *Contestatio*, CV 18, ACO 1.1.1, 101–2; Leontius, *Deprehensio et Triumphus super Nestorianos*, 41, ed. Daley, 500; Price and Graumann (2020), 93–97, at 94 n. 7. In August 430, Celestine mentions his receipt of Nestorius' works from 'our son the *vir illustris* Antiochus', either a former or current praetorian prefect: Celestine, *Ep.* 13.4 = CVer 2, ACO 1.2, 8; *PLRE* II: 102–3 (Antiochus 6) or 103–4 (Antiochus 7); Price and Graumann (2020), 139 n. 150. Cyril's allies at court: CC293–4, ACO 1.5, 222–25; *Coptic Acts of Ephesus*, ed. Bouriant, 7, trans. Kraatz, 6 (for Lausus); see further, 238–39.

[118] Cyril, *Ep.* 11.3 = CV 144.3, ACO 1.1.5, 11.

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Such a mindset seems plausible not least because officials might be appointed to resolve ecclesiastical disputes as special commissioners sent to ecclesiastical councils or particular episcopal churches, or act as the bearers or enforcers of imperial laws on correct religion.[119] The doctrinal authority of officials in such contexts was (of course) delimited by the generally accepted truism that they, as laymen, could be taught but could not teach.[120] Even when sticking close to those precepts of non-intervention in doctrinal debate, imperial officials (like emperors) felt able to lecture bishops on the consequences of a failure to live up to their own standards of harmony and consensus.[121] The *comes sacrarum largitionum* John was particularly scathing when sent to Ephesus in August 431 to repair the damage done by the rival conciliar meetings of the previous two months. John's report back to Theodosius II on his first meeting with the conciliar fathers from both sides of the schism included a brief account of a speech where he chastised them for their contentiousness. 'Because I needed to address the most God-beloved bishops on the subject of peace as well (about the orthodox religion being spared heresies and divisions), I gave myself free rein on this theme.'[122] It is hardly surprising that representatives of an imperial state that legislated to regulate the membership, conduct, activities, and doctrinal formation of the episcopate as a whole – not to mention specifically intervened in episcopal appointments to major sees – felt that they were above the authority of the bishop of Constantinople.[123]

The work of imperial commissioners in various forms of ecclesiastical mediation went far beyond simple facilitation of dialogue through the maintenance of order and protocol.[124] Attempts to resolve disputes over doctrine, practice, and ecclesiastical discipline required officials to engage directly with theological issues. As when Secundinus was sent with other dignitaries to negotiate with Macedonius, this involved working with bishops to ensure they aligned with imperial orthodoxy and standards

[119] On the role of officials as envoys to various councils: Price and Gaddis (2005), 41–42; De Ste. Croix (2006); Bevan and Gray (2009), 638–57; Price (2009), 29–30; Graumann (2013), 118–27; Amirav (2015), 90–173; Leuenberger-Wenger (2019), 154–57; Whelan (forthcoming a).

[120] E.g. Millar (2006), 162.

[121] See e.g. Soc. *HE* 2.40.35–37 (Leonas at Seleucia (359)); CC84–86, ACO 1.4, 31–33 (Candidianus at Ephesus (431)); 'Actio 1', 111, ACO 2.1, 85–86 (Helpidius at Ephesus II (449)).

[122] CA45 c. 6, ACO 1.1.7, 68, trans. Price and Graumann (2020), 495.

[123] Laws regulating bishops: Rapp (2005), 276–79. Episcopal appointments: see n. 105.

[124] For acute analysis, see studies of Chalcedon: esp. De Ste. Croix (2006), esp. 273–94; Amirav (2015), 95–98, 103–73; Leuenberger-Wenger (2019), 154–57, 213–24, 236–40, 286–89, 317–19; more broadly: Von Haehling (1978), 42.

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and even judging them for the extent to which they did so. In the context of ongoing disputes over the theological and ecclesiastical settlements at Ephesus (431), Ephesus II (449), and Chalcedon (451), fifth- and sixth-century regimes sent special envoys from the palace to work out doctrinal compromises or persuade recalcitrant bishops and Christian communities to return to communion with the rest of the imperial church.[125] To effectively carry out these missions required mediators to be familiar with the imperial line on a given dispute as formulated in the consistory. Contemporary accounts sometimes refer to the instructions with which envoys were provided or the degree to which they 'shared the opinion' of the emperor on correct doctrine.[126] At the same time, the discretion enjoyed by those who undertook such roles is evident from discussions over those appointed to represent the emperor, both at the Council of Ephesus in the spring of 431 and in the additional missions that followed its failure. The later (and not entirely reliable) *Coptic Acts of Ephesus* suggest that the role of imperial envoy was the subject of rival representations by and for pro-Nestorian and pro-Cyrillian candidates: the *comes* Irenaeus and the *cubicularius* Lausus.[127] Some discussion of competing claimants within the consistory is plausible: in his *sacra* convoking the council, Theodosius II felt the need specifically to state that Irenaeus was travelling to Ephesus to support Nestorius as a private citizen and not as a representative of imperial authority.[128] The *comes* would later act as an ambassador to the

[125] For various missions during and after Ephesus (431): *PLRE* II: 819–20 (Palladius 5); 596 (Ioannes 12); 146–47 (Aristolaus); Millar (2006), 159–60; Bevan (2016), 210–26; Price and Graumann (2020), 49–54, 297–98, 352–53, 489–91, 617–18; Whelan (forthcoming a). Florentius to Home Synod in 448/9: Bevan and Gray (2009), 638–57; Whelan (forthcoming a). John the Silentiary to Alexandria in 454: *PLRE* II: 598 (Ioannes 19); Whelan (forthcoming b). Official missions at promulgation of *Henotikon*: *PLRE* II: 1186–87 (Vranius 4); 859 (Pergamius 2); 152 (Arsenius 2); 326–27 (Cosmas 3); Blaudeau (2006), 227–30; Greatrex et al. (2011), 195–202, 203–4, 213–17 (notes on the translation). For official missions during resolution of Acacian Schism (518–20): *PLRE* II: 420 (Eulogius 8), 519 (Gratus); Gillett (2003), 235 n. 56. Official direction of various imperial negotiations with Miaphysites under Justinian and Justin II: *PLRE* II: 1034–36 (Strategius 9) (in 532); *PLRE* III: 672–74 (Ioannes 81); 1411–12 (Zacharias 2) (Callinicum in 567), 64–65 (Anastasius 14) (570/1); John Eph. *HE* 3.1.19, 3.1.24, 3.1.27, 3.1.29, 3.2.2 (unnamed officials and senators in 570–1); *PLRE* III: 676–77 (Ioannes 90), 1003–4 (Petrus 17), 1255–56 (Theodorus 34) with John Eph. *HE* 3.4.35 (Syria in 576/7); McCormick (2000), 143–44; Begass (2018), 339, 413; Roggo (2022), 81–136.

[126] Instructions: CV 128.2–3, ACO 1.1.4, 21; with Bevan (2016), 211 (Aristolaus in 432); 'shared the opinion': Zach. *HE* 3.11.a on John the *decurio silentiarum* (sent by Marcian to the anti-Chalcedonian faction in Alexandria in 454). See also Theophanes AM 6003 = Theod. Lect. *Epit*. 497 (Eutropius 4 supposedly gets Council of Side to write what Anastasius wants); CA147.5: Justinian to Hormisdas 7 September 518, describing the envoy Gratus, *magister memoriae*, as 'a friend who is fully in agreement with me' (*unanimum mihi amicum*).

[127] *Coptic Acts of Ephesus*, ed. Bouriant, 7, trans. Kraatz, 6.

[128] CV 31, ACO 1.1.1, 121; on Irenaeus' role: Whelan (2025).

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court for John of Antioch and his synod in August 431. In his missive back to the Eastern bishops, Irenaeus reported back on the manoeuvres he had observed amongst the official class.

> There are yet others who do everything and make every exertion in the hope of being sent by the most pious emperor to Ephesus with some decrees and, according to what they observe and can accomplish, as they put it, settle the whole matter – something that those who love you pray may not be realised, knowing as they do the intentions of those exerting themselves and what led them to this plan.[129]

Irenaeus communicated that various officials were canvassing to be sent to Ephesus, with a strong implication, both that they were sympathetic to Cyril and that their allegiances had been bought. Whatever their motivations, those 'sent with some decrees' evidently had the authority to shape the doctrinal settlement in the church.[130]

Not every official would be selected to manage an empire-wide ecclesiastical dispute. Yet whether or not they were chosen for (or pursued) such a commission, those who served in the imperial palace and consistory gained a wider perspective from their participation within those institutions. In a context where the policy stances of imperial regimes frequently represented the de facto standard of orthodoxy, bishops implicated in doctrinal disputes sent representations to the court to influence opinion and secure specific imperial decisions and legal enactments. Work on the letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus (in particular) has shown how key officials in the household, consistory, and central bureaucracy could expect to receive missives (alongside the empress, other members of the imperial family, and anyone else thought to have traction within decision-making circles).[131] As Fergus Millar put it, '[Theodoret's letters] represent extraordinary testimony to the perceived openness of the ruling elite in Constantinople, and to the conviction that it was possible to bring about change through the medium of the persuasion of individuals who belonged to that elite.'[132] These written missives are only the textual traces of wider

[129] CV 164.5, ACO 1.1.5, 136, trans. Price and Graumann, 425.

[130] For contemporary accusations of bribery and partiality: e.g. Cyrillian accusations versus Candidianus, the imperial commissioner at Ephesus: CV 101, ACO 1.1.3, 46; CV 84.2, 84.4, ACO 1.1.3, 11; *Coptic Acts of Ephesus* ed. Bouriant, 18–23, trans. Kraatz, 15–20; cf. Graumann (2013), 119 n. 33; Nestorian accusations against the *comes sacrarum largitionum* John: Nestorius, *Book of Heracleides*, ed. Bedjan, 385–89, trans. Hodgson and Driver, 279–82; Barhadbeshaba, *HE* 24–25; against Scholasticius: CC130, ACO 1.4, 85; against Cyril: see n. 142.

[131] Millar (2006), 192–234, esp. 198–201, 222–24; De Ste. Croix (2006) 291–94; Schor (2011), 81–179; Leuenberger-Wenger (2019), 155–56.

[132] Millar (2006), 222.

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campaigns. Contemporary accounts refer to the attempts of provincial bishops and other ecclesiastical envoys to seek support in person at court; a scenario implied by the physical transportation of letters to Constantinople by carefully chosen couriers. Officials granted hearings to these ecclesiastical representations and were exposed to their arguments if the emperor or empress themselves granted an audience.[133] Whether or not they themselves received such petitions and visits, the emperor's closest advisers would have been present for discussions of doctrinal questions. A useful example is provided by another account of the deposition of Macedonius in 511. A letter of an otherwise unknown priest named Symeon present in Constantinople at that time, preserved in Ps.-Zachariah's *Ecclesiastical History*, provides a detailed account of the crisis as it unfolded.[134] It notably reports discussions between Anastasius and his officials in the imperial consistory on 27 and 31 July regarding Macedonius' orthodoxy and fitness for the episcopate, which, as Geoffrey Greatrex has suggested, likely went back to the regime's own (rather schematic) representation of the deliberations.[135] Such discussions in the consistory are only rarely preserved or even alluded to in contemporary texts; they must have been behind countless specific decisions regarding religious policies.[136] As a result, the imperial palace was a site of ongoing theological discussion and deliberation.

It is not simply that those serving in the palace and consistory were in a position both to internalise a corporate imperial line and to pursue their own independent perspectives on the character of orthodoxy. Bishops, clerics, and ascetics also accepted their doctrinal discretion and sought to secure their favour. Those implicated in ecclesiastical controversy regularly claimed that the majority at court or in the Senate supported their position – or, at the very least, would do so in the absence of constraint

[133] See e.g. John Chrysostom's enemies: see n. 108; Cyril's complaints about opponents frequenting gatherings of officials: Cyril, *Ep.* 4.1 = *2nd Letter to Nestorius*, c. 1, CV 4, ACO 1.1.1, 25–26; Theodosius II ordering Cilician bishops to stop bothering the imperial court: CC214, ACO 1.4, 156; Timothy Aelurus and Miaphysite monks at the court of Basiliscus: Ps.-Zach. *HE* 5.1; and on Justinian's repeated imperial audiences for Miaphysite clerics (independent of the bishop of Constantinople): see now Roggo (2022), 81–91, esp. 85–86.

[134] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 7.8. [135] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 7.8.d and h–i; Greatrex et al. (2011), 257 n. 146.

[136] See e.g. CC212, ACO 1.4, 155: praetorian prefect Taurus persuades Theodosius II to annul a rescript regarding the bishops of Cilicia in 433/4; with Brown (1995), 42; Elton (2009), 140–41; Lee (2013), 152 n. 34. Ps.-Zach *HE* 4.7; Theophanes AM 5952: *magister militum* Aspar persuades Leo not to punish dissenting respondents to his encyclical letter in 458; with Blaudeau (2006), 333–34.

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or corruption.[137] As previously discussed, Nestorius was keen to trumpet the success of a sermon in persuading 'those at the imperial court' in November 430.[138] Such opinion forming was also a result of the Christian sociability and elite patronage in the capital discussed in Section 6.4. We know about many of these relationships between officials and ascetics, clerics, and monastic communities precisely because those resident archimandrites and visiting impresarios were also central participants in doctrinal controversies.[139] The efforts of controversialists did not just aim at winning over particular imperial officials; they also included requests for allies within the imperial establishment to work on their colleagues in the palace, consistory, and Senate.[140] The most infamous of these attempts to shape opinion at the court from within came in the latter part of the Council of Ephesus in the autumn of 431. A memorandum from Cyril of Alexandria – appended, somewhat unwisely, to a letter sent a year later by his archdeacon Epiphanius – included a schedule of payments that were to be delivered to key members of the imperial households and consistory.[141] Scholarly attention has largely been devoted to explaining how these 'blessings' could be squared with the pious pursuit of orthodoxy (with reference to wider patterns of ecclesiastical economy and imperial governance).[142] Yet these bribes were only part of the process this document envisaged. The bishop's 'blessings' were to encourage those around the emperor and empress to make representations to them in Cyril's favour, and the wives and *domestici* of *those* prefects, *praepositi*, *cubicularii*, and *magistri* to persuade *them* to act. The memorandum notably suggests that Cyril and his agents had done the work to identify those officials and attendants who could be trusted to try to make a case on his behalf (the *praepositus* Paul, the *tribunus et notarius* Aristolaus, the *cubiculariae* Marcella and Droseria) and those who would need persuading to abandon entrenched views (the *cubicularii* Chryseros and Scholasticius). The ready money and luxurious gifts offered would only mean so much if those

[137] CV 164.3–5, ACO 1.1.5, 135–36 (Irenaeus); CA66, ACO 1.1.7, 77, CA69.3–5, ACO 1.1.7, 80 (Theodoret): consistory and 'most magnificent officials' supporting Easterners in summer and autumn 431 outwith bribery; *Hist. Diosc.* 3, 7, 9: patricians supporting Dioscorus in 451; John Eph. *HE* 3.2.9: *cubicularii* as Miaphysites in 571.

[138] CC 78.6, ACO 1.4, 6, trans. Price and Graumann, 182.

[139] See 150, n. 92 and 222.

[140] See e.g. CC127, ACO 1.4, 79–80: John of Antioch in winter 431, asking (unnamed) praetorian prefect of the East to persuade emperor, *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, consistory and Senate of his version of recent events; with Frenkel (2014).

[141] For all the following: CC294, ACO 1.5, 224–25; CC293, ACO 1.5, 222–24, seeking to activate those networks again in the autumn of 432.

[142] On these bribes: e.g. Brown (1992), 15–17; Kelly (2004), 171–81 (with previous refs at 285 n. 112); Caner (2006), 352–60; Beers (2016), De Leeuw (2020); Slootjes (2023), 257–60.

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officials (and those in their households) were unable to put forward accurately and convincingly the Cyrilline view of what should happen after the failure of dialogue at Ephesus (and why).[143]

Cyril and his agents at Constantinople could not know what precise impact their bribes might have; indeed, it has been suggested that the bishop got little return for the money he sent to the emperor's sister Pulcheria.[144] The likely volume of such competing requests for aid – and not simply in ecclesiastical politics – should make us wary of suggesting too close a relationship between imperial dignitaries and those who sought their help.[145] Certain imperial officials do also appear as remarkably trusted allies and agents of particular bishops and ascetics.[146] A neat example comes from another letter sent by Severus (now bishop of Antioch), to Eleusinius, bishop of Sasima, on the occasion of the appointment of John (II) as bishop of Constantinople in 518. Severus reassured Eleusinius of the new bishop's credentials by reference to a discussion the silentiary Conon had had with him. 'The magnificent and believing silentiary Conon, when in conversation with him who now ranks before me, found that with regard to unity and with regard to our meanness he said such things as those who are exceedingly orthodox would say.'[147] The bishop of Antioch was happy to take the word of a palace attendant that the new bishop of Constantinople was a fellow traveller, if one whose long-term dedication to a Miaphysite formula could not be taken for granted.[148] The doctrinal expertise and ecclesiastical independence of imperial officials was not only acknowledged by contemporary Christian authority figures; it was also put to use by them.

## Conclusion

Imperial officials were not ordinary congregants. They were one of several overlapping groups that helped to make late ancient Constantinople such a peculiar Christian city. In her recent book on the development of this

[143] See similarly: Slootjes (2023), 259.
[144] CC293.5, ACO 1.4, 223; Price (2004), 32–34; Bevan (2016), 86–87.
[145] See Chapter 2, 89.
[146] E.g. Cyril and the *tribunus et notarius* Aristolaus: Whelan (forthcoming a); Nestorius and John of Antioch and *comes* Irenaeus: Millar (2006), 168–91; Whelan (2025); Eutyches and the *spatharius* Chrysaphius: e.g. Fraisse-Coué (1995), 36; though note the skepticism of De Ste. Croix (2006), 273 (countered by Whitby in his addition to n. 39); Bevan and Gray (2009), 621; Severus and the praetorian prefect Marinus and *cubicularius* Misael: Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 7.6, 11.1, with Alpi (2009), I 211, II 149, 150; Whelan (2018), 385–87, 393–99. Note also praise for help: e.g. CC287.5, ACO 1.4, 210 (John of Antioch on PSC Felix); Theodoret, *Ep.* 141 (Theodoret to *magister officiorum* John Vincomalus); note also *Ep.* 139–40 (*magister militum* Anatolius and *magister militum* Aspar).
[147] Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 6.1, ed. Brooks, 1.2: 409; trans Brooks, 2.2: 362–63.
[148] Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 6.1, ed. Brooks, 1.2: 409.

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distinctive cultic life, Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos has argued that the reign of Theodosius II established a new religious framework evident in the flattening of a more diverse fourth-century past by fifth-century ecclesiastical histories. As Stephens Falcasantos puts it, 'When we read this literature, we are witnessing the creation of imperial Christianity as a defined social category dependent upon the person of the emperor and his city.'[149] This 'imperial Christianity' stamped the religious practices of imperial officials and shaped their sense of themselves as Christians. Recent work has stressed the strong sense of collective identity cultivated amongst those in imperial service and within the various institutions of state in which they were embedded – the palace, the Senate, the *officia* of the central bureaucracy.[150] The Christian identities of Constantinopolitan officials match up to this wider sense of communal solidarity. Though officials were rarely explicitly 'required' to go to church, the expectations of this institutional community played an important role in their choices of religious observance. On key liturgical occasions, officials attended church as part of an identifiable group of 'senators' or 'rulers'. The most obvious disciplinary context for their wider public religious praxis was the oversight and application by their managers and colleagues of requirements for orthodoxy and good standing as a Christian. What they heard their bishop preach in church was, for them, just one version of correct doctrine and Christian conduct; the palace and bureaux represented alternative (and potentially superior) sites for the definition of orthodoxy. Officials were party to (and themselves helped to determine) discussions of doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline in the palace and consistory; those further down the imperial hierarchy would receive and interpret those orders in the main *officia* of the capital. This participation in the formulation of orthodoxy as 'policy' inculcated a critical distance from the episcopal church of the city even as palatine officials may have been some of the most devoted members of the bishop's congregation. Patterns of both official and domestic patronage gave officials the capacity to choose their own pastoral relationships, doctrinal experts, and liturgical arrangements. This milieu of Christian aristocratic self-determination was one that savvy bishops, clerics, and ascetics embraced or, at a minimum, treated as the cost of doing business in the imperial capital. Those petitioners who sought the

[149] Stephens Falcasantos (2020), 143–89, quotation at 188.

[150] See e.g. McCormick (2000), 135–36 on the palace; Kelly (2004) and Schmidt-Hofner (2021) on bureaucratic office in general, with important comments of Wiemer (2024); Begass (2018), 31–57 on the Senate.

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aid of imperial officials treated them as potential collaborators whose pretensions to doctrinal and ecclesiastical expertise had (at the very least) to be humoured. The repeated identification of prefects, generals, chamberlains, silentiaries, and notaries as trusted theological allies only underlines the importance of the palace, consistory, and Senate as sites of Christian communal formation. Contemporary discourse around official churchgoing helps to reveal the peculiarly imperial Christianity that shaped the religious practices of those who served the state in Constantinople, with implications for official church structures and the definition of orthodoxy.

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