CHAPTER 4

Terms of Service
Representing Christian Officials in Late Ancient Texts

Introduction

Sometime in the last decades of the fourth century, a luxurious mausoleum was constructed next to St Peter's in Rome. The building and its decoration were destroyed in 1453, but the antiquarian Maffeo Vegio recorded those contents that had survived the previous millennium. These included a marble sarcophagus (now in the Vatican Museum) containing traces of gold from the clothing of the deceased. Vegio also transcribed two verse epitaphs that identified the mausoleum's inhabitant as Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus (c. 328–90), one of the most powerful senatorial aristocrats of the fourth century.[1] As Dennis Trout has noted in his superlative study of the poems, the first of these epitaphs (A) commemorates Probus' life in terms traditional in the funerary arrangements of senatorial families: 'the address to the spectator; the comparison with distinguished ancestors; the recall of high office; the assertion of unmatched *fama*; the cataloging of *virtus, fides, pietas, honor, largitas*; and the consolation of a shared tomb held out to [his wife] Proba'.[2] The opening lines present the edited highlights of Probus' imperial *curriculum uitae*.

Whoever you are who will wonder at the lofty heights of this tomb,
will say: how great was the Probus who lies here.
Greater than his consular forefathers and father-in-law, and greater than a (mere) consul,
because a consul himself he restored twin households.
Prefect for the fourth time, beloved throughout the world,
but surpassing in his glory every mortal in the world.[3]

Probus was infamous for his unusual enthusiasm for office-holding. As Ammianus Marcellinus put it, he was a fish out of water when he was out

[1] On the mausoleum and epitaphs, see best: Trout (2001); Matthews (2009).
[2] Trout (2001), 162.
[3] CIL VI, appended to 1751–56 = ILCV 63 = ICVR 4219, 'A', lines 1–6; text and translation at Trout (2001), 161–62.

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of the praetorian prefecture, which – as the author of his epitaph was keen to note – he occupied four times.[4]

Were this the only inscription in the mausoleum, we might think that Probus, Proba, and any other family members involved in the arrangements had simply adopted a standard means of preserving family honour through monumental commemoration of the dead.[5] Epitaph A presents Probus' expectation of a happy afterlife amongst the stars (and, it is implied, continued dynastic prosperity) as the result of a career spent fulfilling and surpassing expectations of public office and private conduct. But the second verse epitaph (B) puts a radically different spin on this same retrospective: something we might anyway expect given the location of this family mausoleum abutting the apse of St Peter's. Its opening lines celebrate Probus' baptism ('washed clean by the Jordan'), which had allowed him to attain 'the expanse of heaven'.[6] The habitual prefect had received a new commission in the afterlife, which brought even greater honour.

> Rich in wealth, of noble birth, lofty in honour,
> distinguished by the *fasces*, worthy of a consular grandfather,
> a prefect twice governing the people in your twofold office,
> these ornaments of the world, these nobles' titles,
> you surpass, having been given Christ's gift in your later years.
> This is true honor, this is your nobility.
> Before you rejoiced in the honor of a royal table,
> in the conversation of the emperor, the friendship of a king:
> now nearer to Christ, having gained the abode of the saints,
> you enjoy a new light: Christ is present as your light.[7]

No longer clothed in the belt of earthly office, Probus had 'put on the new garments of his heavenly post'.[8] As John Matthews has nicely put it, 'the epitaph almost persuades us that Probus had simply received yet another promotion in his political career'.[9]

Epitaph B in the mausoleum of Petronius Probus presents an extended version of a ubiquitous metaphor in late ancient Christianity. The piety and conduct of bishops, ascetics, and martyrs was frequently presented as a form of 'service' (*militia*) to their heavenly 'king'.[10] Probus' ascetic

[4] AM 27.11.3. On his career: *PLRE* I: 736–40 (Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus 5); Matthews (1975), esp. 10–11, 37–38, 186–87, 195–97; (1989), 22, 277–78; (2009), 134–38; Novak (1980); Alan Cameron (1985); (2012), 136–40; Cooper (1996), 103–4; Barnes (1998), 117–19; Trout (2001), esp. 159–61.

[5] Trout (2001), 166–67. [6] 'B' lines 4 and 2; Trout (2001), 163–64, translation at 164.

[7] 'B', lines 5–14; Trout (2001), 164. [8] 'B', lines 24–25; Trout (2001), 164.

[9] Matthews (1975), 195; see also Matthews (2009), 136. [10] Warner (2020), 78–176.

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contemporaries saw these commitments as mutually exclusive. Saints' lives and conversion narratives stress the moment when their protagonists broke from serving the world to serve God.[11] Probus and his family, by contrast, saw less conflict between these competing forms of service: in fact, they presented one as a natural development of the other. The ex-prefect preserved his worldly prestige while claiming it as a qualification for status within the Christian community: both in the heavenly kingdom and (implicitly) within his earthly one. This combination of Christian commitment and traditional aristocratic values is typical of late fourth- and early fifth-century texts written by or addressed to members of the senatorial elite. The presentation of Probus' conversion in his mausoleum has thus often been taken as a paradigm of the process by which the Roman aristocracy became Christian.[12] It encapsulates the wider phenomenon in which Christian commitment was conceived in terms of aristocratic honour, not only to justify comparatively novel forms of authority and life course within late Roman society, but to make it amenable to elite men and women accustomed to deference. What has gone unremarked is the degree to which the mausoleum's presentation of Probus' imperial career remains untouched by his Christian commitment. The combination of the two epitaphs and the explicit framing of B suggest the same forms of virtuous conduct applied in both contexts. But the relationship between Probus' two 'terms' of service remains chronological: it only flows one way. From the *post mortem* and post-baptismal perspective of Epitaph B, the virtues Probus put to use in his public career now served a different ruler in the heavenly court. Neither epitaph gives any indication that Christian piety had previously conditioned his conduct. In that sense, Probus' mausoleum still commemorates a conversion event, analogous to those recorded for many late ancient bishops and ascetics: a moment of increased Christian commitment provoking a switch from public office to a superior, Christian form of service.[13] It is impossible to discern what form this increased commitment took for Probus (at least on earth). Epitaph B telescopes Probus' baptism (only attested here) and his death c. 390 to present the aftermath of the former as his heavenly residency. It is possible that this initiation did not long predate his death or was even motivated by

[11] See the Introduction, 24, n. 103; and note Warner (2020), 281, 307–8 on *militia* as a metaphor for worldly life in general.

[12] Brown (1961), 9; cf. Barnes (1995), 142; Matthews (1975), 195; (2009); Curran (2000), 311–19; with Humphries (2001), 56; Salzman (2002), 202–3; with Mathisen (2002), 268; Salzman (2005), 131–2; Grig (2007), 383.

[13] For a similar pattern in historiography: see the Introduction.

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a terminal illness, although Paulinus' later *Life of Ambrose* suggests that Probus had been a Christian from the mid-370s at the latest.[14] The prefect's epitaph thus hints at the possibilities of combining these two forms of 'service' without taking them up.

Part II of this book explores the territory that Probus and his heirs sidestepped. The next two chapters argue that late ancient political culture offered ways for Christian officials to reconcile their careers and their religious identities. Chapter 5 will delineate a taxonomy of late ancient approaches to Christian political service that moved beyond ascetic demands for withdrawal from the 'world'. These ideas have often been noted as features of particular texts, authors, and contexts. It is my contention that distinctly Christian notions of political service in fact formed part of the shared cultural values of the late ancient Mediterranean. Tracing these common ideas requires an expansive approach that synthesises texts and objects from across the Roman world from the late fourth to the late sixth centuries. To set up that discursive account, this chapter explores how, when, and why positive accounts of Christian administrators appear in different late ancient literary genres.

4.1 Officials (and Others) on Their Christian Governance

Part of why historians of late ancient religion have yet to pursue this question in a systematic fashion is a problem of evidence. It is rare that we find sources like Probus' epitaph that allow us to see officials discussing the relationship between Christian piety and political service. The usual protagonists of the Christianisation of the Roman world are well studied for a reason. What individual bishops and ascetics thought about the connection between piety and authority is the central theme of an enormous literature, lovingly preserved in the Middle Ages as the writings of authoritative Church Fathers. Investigations of their authority can take as a point of departure one of the many surviving lives of saints, monastic rules, and treatises on the episcopate. There is no equivalent tradition of Christian biographies about officials, except when they went on to positions of episcopal or ascetic authority.[15] Likewise, when officials theorise about government in surviving texts, they tend not to discuss their religious commitments. It is easy to see why, when pursuing the transformation of Roman thought about public office within the predominantly Christian aristocracy of the late fourth to sixth centuries, historians have

[14] Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 8. [15] See 155–57.

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tended to think about the appropriation of such values by clerics and ascetics.

It is rare that we can catch current imperial or royal officials talking at any length about how their Christian identities related to their office-holding. A notable exception is Magnus Felix Cassiodorus Senator – Cassiodorus for short – whose twelve-book *Variae* compiles letters he sent while serving as *quaestor* (507–11) and *magister officiorum* (523–27) in Ravenna for the Ostrogothic king Theoderic and his successor Athalaric, and praetorian prefect (533–38(?)) for Athalaric, Amalasuintha, Theodahad, and Witigis.[16] As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the letters from his time as prefect include a notably Christian and even ascetic conception of his official practice. Cassiodorus repeatedly compared his role in government to that of the Jewish patriarch and pharaonic official Joseph, advertised how he would act as 'such a judge as the Catholic Church would send out as its son', and rooted his ethical formation in reading of Scripture.[17] These statements (spread across various letters) could be combined to generate a cohesive Christian ethic of office-holding, which inspired Cassiodorus as he conducted governmental business in Ostrogothic Ravenna. Yet this would be to misconstrue not only their original context within specific administrative letters but also their preponderance within this collection of bureaucratic verbiage. For the most part, the letters of the *Variae* present a traditional sense of virtuous governance marked by occasional reference to God's overarching power; indeed, Cassiodorus has rightly been used as a witness to sixth-century classicising ideals of office-holding.[18] His invocations of Christian cultural resources remain specific and situational. They refer mostly to his own practice, and many of the most striking formulations appear in letters to bishops. In this sense, Cassiodorus is representative of the complex cultural makeup of Christians in office in late antiquity more broadly.

Cassiodorus' differing portrayals of his own authority act as a reminder that Christian formation was just one influence even on those who sought explicitly to combine Christian commitment with political careers. These were not general autobiographical statements but rhetorical representations designed for particular audiences and purposes. This partiality and intermittency does not negate the significance of Christian cultural

[16] O'Donnell (1979); Averil Cameron (1981); Barnish (1989); (2008); Bjornlie (2013), 23–24; Heydemann (2024), 45–57; Wiemer (2024), 52–61, 69–71.

[17] Cass. *Var.* 6.3.1 (first praetorian prefect), 8.20.3, 12.25.7, 12.28.7–10 (Joseph); 11.2 (ascetic governance); 9.25.11 (biblical knowledge and ethics). See 194–97.

[18] Esp. Bjornlie (2013), 48–123.

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frameworks and resources for their political conduct.[19] Abandoning a quest for the (implausibly) unified and consistent individual allows us to exploit a wider set of texts and objects to, for, and about imperial and royal officials in which investment in a Christian understanding of their authority can be detected.[20] Current office-holders were involved in letter exchanges with bishops and ascetics: a context in which they were likely to see their religious identities as a subject for reflection and self-justification. For the most part we only get one side of the discussion, preserved as part of the literary corpus of those bishops and ascetics.[21] But in some cases, the official half of the conversation does survive with indications of their (sometimes idiosyncratic) sense of what they were doing as Christian rulers.[22] Facets of this self-portrayal can be captured in various objects produced on their behalf (sometimes known only through literary descriptions).[23] They can also be explored through speech recorded in various sorts of text. These reports can be placed on a sliding scale of likely faithfulness to *ipsissima verba* or 'real' antecedent events: from the (supposedly) verbatim transcripts of conciliar acts,[24] through letters reporting face-to-face meetings, to write-ups and imaginings in various forms of narrative. For the most part, such accounts must be treated as what the author imagined was the sort of thing an official might say. In some contexts, the form of the text, the position of the author, and the nature of the intended audience make it more likely that reported

[19] Rightly stressed by Wiemer (2024), 70–71.

[20] Multiple identities: see the Introduction, 16–17.

[21] One-sided conversations: e.g. Ebbeler (2012), 19–20; Gillett (2012), 835.

[22] Aug. *Ep.* 132–37 (Marcellinus and Volusianus); 152–55 (Macedonius); 229–31 (Darius); 238–41 (Pascentius). For discussion of these exchanges: see 171–72, 197–98, 284–87. Avitus, *Ep.* 53–54, 95–96 (Heraclius). Further discussion: see 190, 261. See also various letters sent during and after Ephesus (431): CA45, ACO 1.1.7, 67–68 (report of *comes sacrarum largitionum* John to Theodosius II on discussions with bishops); CA55–56, ACO 1.1.7, 71 (letter exchange between Antiochus and Nestorius); CV164, ACO 1.1.5, 135–36 (report of *comes* Irenaeus to Eastern bishops); CC213, ACO 1.4, 155–56 (Dometianus to Helladius of Tarsus), cf. 212, ACO 1.4, 155; CC230–31, 262–63, 269–74, ACO 1.4, 168–69, 192–95, 198–201 (exchanges between *magister militum* Dionysius, *comes et vicarius* Titus, governor Libianius, and Eastern bishops). Further discussion: see 199.

[23] See 199–201.

[24] See the recorded remarks of various presiding officers: Fl. Marcellinus at Carthage (411): *Gesta*, *passim*, esp. 1.3, see also 'Edictum Cognitoris'; Candidianus at Ephesus (431): CV 151, ACO 1.1.5, 119–24, see also CC 84–86, ACO 1.4, 31–33; Florentius at meetings in 448 and 449: Actio I, 458–828, ACO 2.1.1, 137–76; Fl. Chaereas in minuted meetings at church of Edessa in 448: *Syriac Acts of Ephesus II* (449), ed. Flemming, 14–54; Helpidius at Ephesus II (449): Actio I, 111–13, 118, 151, ACO 2.1.1, 85–86, 89; Fl. Anatolius at Chalcedon (451), *passim*; Fl. Strategius at meeting between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites in Constantinople in 532: Innocent of Maronea, *Ep. coll. cum. Sev.* at 8, ACO 4.2, 170. On the relationship between *acta* and original speech: see now Graumann (2021).

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speech resembled an actual statement. The surviving evidence thus affords glimpses of officials construing their authority in decidedly Christian terms, sometimes within sources that they wrote or commissioned and in statements designed for contexts in which such claims would be welcomed.

The self-presentation of late ancient authority figures was both intended for, and normally mediated through, the perspectives of their subjects.[25] It is thus both necessary and fruitful to draw on the much greater volume of texts written to, for, and about specific imperial and royal office-holders by clerics and ascetics. Officials were the recipients of letters and petitions sent by ecclesiastical correspondents (Section 4.2) and sometimes the similarly explicit addressee (or target) of sermons preached in their presence (Section 4.3). They also featured, if less prominently, as supporting characters in church histories (Section 4.4) and saints' lives (Section 4.5). All these genres and situations could encourage Christian writers to reflect on the connection between an official's religious identity and their political conduct. One recourse for the ascetically minded was to set state service and the character of named officials in opposition to Christian virtue. It is also possible to trace more positive ways of construing the relationship between piety and political service in all these genres. In each case, distinctive demands of audience and literary form led them to articulate how pious Christians might take part in earthly government. In this way, these texts can take us beyond what churchmen thought about Christian officials and towards what officials thought about themselves. Numerous studies have shown how clerics and ascetics wrote advice letters and sermons to appeal to aristocratic audiences.[26] This concern is particularly apparent in letters and petitions addressed to officials, which had to present their authority in a way which they could accept, both out of the politeness expected in letter writing and because it was the best way for the petitioner to achieve their goal. But the position of officials as potential patrons and explicit addressees led Christian authors in all these genres to finesse or even spurn oppositional frameworks. These presentations of the compatibility of pious commitment and political service were not (always) a matter of strategic pandering; they may also have been part of how these authors genuinely understood the place of earthly administrators within the church. The recurring tropes, cultural resources, and intellectual positions visible across these different genres – in texts written across the Roman

[25] I draw particular inspiration here from Lenski (2016). [26] See the Introduction, 25, n. 112.

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world over a period of two and a half centuries – suggest a late ancient Christian discourse of political service.

4.2 Letters

Late ancient bishops and monks sent letters to imperial and royal administrators. Many connected the character and duties of these officials to their Christian identities.[27] Discussions that combine religious identity and office are present within a string of letter collections from across the Roman world from the mid-fourth to the early seventh century: those of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Paulinus of Nola, Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370–413), Isidore of Pelusium (fl. 390s to c. 435/40), Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Severus of Antioch (c. 456–538), Fulgentius of Ruspe (c. 468–533), Ruricius of Limoges (fl. 485–507), Avitus of Vienne (fl. 494–518), Ferrandus of Carthage (fl. mid-510s to 540s), and Gregory the Great.[28] They also feature in letters preserved in documentary collections rooted in ecclesiastical controversies and church councils (and, indeed, these two categories overlap).[29] The relevant missives range from short calling cards to extended treatises.[30] They include various of the major categories of traditional and more distinctively ecclesiastical *epistula* identified in ancient and modern theoretical accounts: not least, friendship letters, letters of recommendation, requests for specific acts of patronage, letters of consolation, and advice letters on issues of doctrine and practice.[31]

The basic situation of these exchanges makes their discussions of Christian governance particularly useful. Letters could not simply present eloquent grandstanding on the ideal (or less than ideal) exercise of worldly power for readers within the author's echo chamber (though fellow clerics and ascetics were undoubtedly also a principal audience). Rather, they were texts designed, in the first place, to be delivered for representatives of the state and those within their circles to hear and read. Surviving letters thus provide valuable traces of the connections between clerical or ascetic

[27] See Whelan (2018a); (2018b) for my previous discussions.
[28] On letter collections (including many of these): Sogno, Storin, and Watts (2016). I have also consulted letters to officials, and other episcopal and ascetic collections, which do not speak to this particular issue.
[29] See e.g. Azéma (1955–98), vol. 4, which gathers together letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus from various conciliar collections; Schor (2016), 269.
[30] Capacious definitions of the ancient 'letter': Gibson and Morrison (2007); Gillett (2012), 826–27.
[31] For succinct accounting of letter types in particular collections: e.g. Schor (2014), 308–11, 317–20; (2016), 271; Storin (2019), 115–16.

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epistolographers and imperial or royal officials. They stem from situations that forced these Christian intellectuals to ground their political theology in the business of government. Above all, the delivery of letters to specific named officials gives them purchase on what was said and done within late ancient political institutions. Norms of epistolary politeness made it necessary for all but the most adventurous to discuss their addressees in a manner acceptable to them.[32] The common cultural understanding of the letter as a representation of elite friendship and community made the recipient's perspective crucial. Concerns to establish 'common ground'[33] played a particular role when a gulf in social status separated author and recipient. The asymmetrical relationship between putative Christian advisors and their aristocratic patrons has been stressed by important recent studies of asceticism and the household. Excellent treatments have used these adaptations to reconstruct how elite men and women might have navigated the competing demands of Christian piety and the maintenance of an aristocratic *domus*.[34] Missives sent by clerics and monks to elite men offer similar possibilities for the identification of their attitudes towards public office.

Far from pursuing novel approaches to letter writing, most Christian writers continued long-standing traditions of the letter as an expression of *amicitia*/*philia*.[35] Many of the letters that ascetics and bishops sent to officials thus adopt what Bradley Storin has called the 'standard mode of epistolary interaction with a government official'.[36] Episcopal and ascetic petitioners accorded their addressees their appropriate titulature and praised them for possession of time-honoured virtues, with a special focus on whatever ideal attribute they hoped an office-holder would show on that particular occasion.[37] Indeed, letters sent by late fourth- and fifth-century Greek bishops and ascetics often addressed imperial officials

[32] E.g. Rebillard (1998), 128–29; on this fundamental contrast between friendly *epistulae* and aggressive *libelli*, see esp. Ebbeler (2012).

[33] Schor (2011), 159–63.

[34] Curran (2000), 260–320; Salzman (2002), 200–219; Cooper (2007); Kurdock (2007); Sessa (2012); Wilkinson (2015).

[35] E.g. Ebbeler (2009), summary at 282; Storin (2019), 108 ('Gregory (of Nazianzus) was no radical'); Ruprecht (2021), 189–296, at 270–72.

[36] Storin (2012), 192.

[37] Appropriate titulature and targeted attributes (amid wider pursuit of elite *amicitia*/*philia* and patronage) by various Christian letter writers: Darling (1981), 148–49; Rousseau (1994), 158–62; Lendon (1997), 63–66; Shanzer and Wood (2002), 391–94; Tiersch (2002), 232, 405; Van Dam (2003), 119–22, 132; Schor (2011), 163–66; (2014), 302–3, 308–311, 318–20; Mathisen (2016), 339; Schor (2016), 271; Storin (2012), 189–95; (2019), 101–20, at 112–13; Whelan (2018b), 91; Washburn (2016), 196–99; Ruprecht (2021), 205–6.

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without invoking a specifically Christian frame of reference, or limited such remarks to their own positioning with respect to the Christian God without making assumptions about whether their addressee would want Him involved. Such absences contrast with the attitudes these authors express in other genres.[38] This conservatism makes sense in terms of the fundamental purpose of these texts as 'performances tailored to encourage generosity and secure social connections'.[39] It also likely stems from the authors' own understanding of the relationship between worldly service and Christian piety. When writing in other genres, authors like Gregory of Nazianzus and Theodoret of Cyrrhus used these same models to construct various ideal forms of Christian lifestyle.[40] In this context, it is not always helpful to differentiate too sharply between the cultural assumptions of sender and recipient. These letters' recourse to traditional notions of legitimate political behaviour could be seen as a concession to the likely values of a particular official; they might also stem from the author's understanding of the most fitting way for a Christian administrator to pursue virtue and even to serve God.[41]

Conventional accounts of political virtue thus represented a basic starting point for bishops and monks when writing to imperial and royal officials. These tropes continue to feature when the likes of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus ventured into more distinctly Christian territory.[42] They remained a point of departure even for those Christian letter writers who were happier to risk offence. Brent Shaw has recently stressed Augustine's divergence from the norm when addressing 'Roman men of imperial power' with 'forthright statements . . . on the basis of his Christian duties and convictions'.[43] Similar combinations of episcopal intercessions, confrontational stances, and distinctly Christian ethical demands can be seen in the letters of Gregory the Great (in the West) and Severus of Antioch (in the East).[44] Yet even as Augustine and Gregory (in particular) emphasised

[38] See esp. (on John Chrysostom) Tiersch (2002), 232, 401–5; Flower (2009), 542–43.
[39] Schor (2011), 15.
[40] Gregory: esp. Elm (2012); see also Storin (2019), 108–9. Theodoret: Papadogiannakis (2012), 13–28.
[41] See 29–31.
[42] Rousseau (1994), 163–70; Schor (2011), 159–66; (2014), 309–10, 320, 323; Storin (2012), 153–54, 207–14; Ruprecht (2021), 207–11.
[43] Shaw (2015), 58.
[44] E.g. Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 1.8, 1.40, 1.45 and for confrontation see esp. 1.44, 5.1. Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 1.2, 1.59, 1.72–74, 2.20, 2.29, 3.28, 3.31, 3.37, 3.51, 3.64, 4.7, 4.25, 4.32, 5.19, 5.34, 5.46, 6.17, 6.59, 6.62, 7.27, 8.33, 9.9, 9.44, 9.142, 9.155, 9.159, 9.161–62, 9.226, 10.8, 10.10, 10.16, 11.4, 11.7,

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the need for officials to rule as Christians, what that meant in practice often diverged little from standard political behaviour, except insofar as the latter was construed polemically as a form of injustice.[45] Rather, a distinction between 'Christian' and 'secular' modes of action tended to be deployed in particular situations to justify prioritising the interests of the church – *qua* the author and his allies – over other considerations. Even as they downplayed the significance of worldly honours and dignities for a true Christian, Augustine, Severus, and Gregory nevertheless paid lip service to the usual forms: praise for the well-earned attainment of earthly power and distinction and recognition of the noble character traits which allowed them to use it for the common good.[46] Even for the most confrontational epistolographers, serving the state as a Christian did not mean a fundamental reorientation of traditional ethical strictures.

Those letters that did put forward more radical propositions represent an exception that proves the rule. Men engaged in political careers were, on occasion, recipients of exhortations to give up their secular ambitions. Basil, Paulinus, Isidore, Augustine, Severus, Fulgentius, and Gregory the Great each rehearsed familiar arguments about the basic incompatibility of 'service' to state and church.[47] Paulinus articulated the issue in particularly sharp terms when writing to try to persuade one Crispinianus that a political career was a bad idea; he reminded him that 'as Scripture says, no-one should serve two masters'.[48] But bishops and ascetics did not go around telling every Christian official they met that they had to hand in

11.12, 11.43, 13.34, 14.10. A general account of Severus' epistolary style remains a scholarly *desideratum*: see Allen (2006), 10; on letters to officials: Darling (1981), 148–49; Whelan (2018a), 397–98. On Gregory's distinctive account of authority (which frames his letters to officials): Straw (1991); Markus (1997), 83–96 (drawing together previous studies); Hipshon (2002); Dal Santo (2013).

[45] The focus on ecclesiastical matters in Severus' *Select Letters* precludes a clear sense of how he might have distinguished 'ruling in general' and 'ruling as a Christian' (if indeed he would have separated the two); issues of orthodoxy, episcopal ordination, and canonical practice more straightforwardly implicated the Christian identities of his correspondents.

[46] E.g. Aug. *Ep.* 86, 96.1, 96.3, 112.1–2, 153.1, 189.1, 229.1; Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 1.8, 1.17, 1.21, 1.24, 1.40, 1.45, 2.1, 4.6, 10.4, 11.1; Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 1.2, 1.22, 1.46, 1.74, 7.3, 9.9, 9.56, 9.226, 10.16. See esp. Whelan (2018b), 91 on Augustine; Darling (1981), 148–49 on Severus.

[47] Paulinus, *Ep.* 8, 25, 25* (to Licentius and Crispinianus); for similar rhetoric, see *Ep.* 1.7; Isid. Pel. *Ep.* 1.165, 1426 = 5.152; Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 3.3 (to Misael); Fulg. *Ep.* 5.3 (to the consul Theodore); Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 1.30 (to ex-consul John), 7.26 (to *uir magnificus* Andreas). See also Aug. *Ep.* 203 to possible former proconsul Largus, though without specific reference to office-holding; note Shaw (2015), 33 n. 2 against this identification.

[48] Paulinus, *Ep.* 25*.2. On this letter exchange: Warner (2020), 39–40. On Paulinus' distinctive approach to friendship and letter writing: Conybeare (2000), esp. 60–90; Ebbeler (2009), 273; cf. Mratschek (2002), 489–93.

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their belts of office.[49] Despite the universalising framing of this advice, such missives were sent to carefully selected recipients at suitable times. They encouraged correspondents to abandon political careers while between official postings or, as in the case of another of Paulinus' advisees, a young senatorial aristocrat named Licentius, when he had yet to enter service.[50] In some cases, these elite men had already signalled an intention to make their period of retirement permanent.[51] Specific letters of Basil, Paulinus, and Gregory the Great are exceptional in confronting current soldiers and political appointees with the stark necessity of serving their sole true master.[52] Yet even these admonitions were guided by indications of their potential receptivity. Paulinus' letter to Licentius came at the prompting of Augustine and the urging of his father, Romanianus, both of whom thought he could be persuaded to greater Christian commitment. While Paulinus set out the incommensurability of earthly and heavenly *militia*, he prudently foreswore his capacity to convince Licentius, drew attention to the potential offence he might cause, and leant conspicuously on the teachings and example of his correspondent's (spiritual) father.[53] As Jonathan Warner has shrewdly noted, Paulinus' was determinedly vague on what exactly he was encouraging Licentius to do instead. His 'opportunistic critiques' sought 'a reordering of priorities, not necessarily a career change'.[54] In this regard, Paulinus' missives are representative of the much wider body of advice letters sent to serving officials by bishops and ascetics. However strongly these authors might stress the superiority of those who (like them) had abandoned the world, their efforts to persuade careerists to join them are imbued with a deep caution. Indeed, bishops could also seek to dissuade administrators from giving up office because they were too useful to the church in their worldly posting.[55] Exhortations towards ascetic renunciation show the same concerns for timeliness and receptivity on the part of their official addressees evident in more conventional patronage and networking letters.

[49] For parallel argumentation: Warner (2020), 37–42, 259–316.
[50] Paulinus, *Ep.* 8; Isid. Pel. *Ep.* 5.152 = 1426; Rur. *Ep.* 2.13.
[51] E.g. Isid. Pel. *Ep.* 1.165; Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 3.3, Fulg. *Ep.* 5; Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 7.26.
[52] Basil, *Ep.* 26; Paulinus, *Ep.* 25, 25*; Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 1.30.
[53] Paulinus, *Ep.* 8; with Trout (1999), 134–45, at 134–36; Mratschek (2002), 164–70; Salzman (2002), 203–4; Warner (2020), 133–34, 283, 297–301. See also Paulinus, *Ep.* 25, 25*, where Crispinianus' comrade Victor has already indicated his potential receptivity to ascetic encouragement.
[54] Warner (2020), quotations at 297, 283, further discussion at 297–301. Something similar can be said for the allusive exhortations of Aug. *Ep.* 203 and Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 1.30.
[55] Basil, *Ep.* 299; Aug. *Ep.* 220.3; Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 11.1.

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Prior knowledge of and contact with an addressee made it more likely that letter writers would bring distinctly Christian cultural frameworks to bear on office-holding. It is easy to be cynical about the extent to which most imperial and royal officials would have been concerned about living up to Christian moral standards in their public careers. A more nuanced picture emerges from surviving letter collections, which show bishops and ascetics answering requests from named officials for guidance on correct doctrine, practice, biblical exegesis, and moral dilemmas in both public and domestic life.[56] Most striking are letters written by Augustine, Isidore, and Ferrandus in response to queries about how to be a good Christian while serving the state.[57] Even without antecedent questions of this sort, the tone and argumentation of certain requests for official intercession suggests that the author felt able to take greater liberties in deploying Scriptural allusions and Christian moral frameworks. Studies of particular Christian authority figures have used dossiers of letters to specific officials to track the cultivation of closer relationships of patronage and friendship; we can sometimes use these letters (and texts outside the collection) to trace the real-world contacts upon which their rhetoric leant.[58] When writing to these correspondents, bishops and ascetics felt more confident in discussing the connection between Christian commitment and service to the state.

Relatively few extant letters stemmed from a demonstrably familiar relationship with their recipients (however often their rhetorical framing claimed an idealised mutual connection).[59] The generically formalised

[56] E.g. Isid. Pel. *Ep.* 1.18, 1.20, 1.55, 1.136, 1.259, 1.267, 5.249 = 1551, 5.273 = 1587; Aug. *Ep.* 185, 187, 200, 203–4, 206; Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 10.4; *Coll. Ep.* 1–3, 19–21, 62, 64–68, 78–79, 85–86, 95, 113; Greg. Mag. *Reg.* 5.46, 6.14, 7.27, 9.13, 10.16.

[57] Aug. *Ep.* 152–55 responding to *uicarius Africae* Macedonius, 189 responding to *comes Africae* Boniface and 136.2 responding to (less earnest) question of former *proconsul Africae* Volusianus; Isid. Pel. *Ep.* 2.216 = 716 responding to probable *corrector Augustamnicae*; Ferr. *Ad Reg.* responding to *dux* Reginus.

[58] Close contacts: Evieux (1995), 105–8 on Isidore and Ausonius (Dionysius); McLynn (1999) on Augustine and Flavius Marcellinus; Schor (2011), 173–76 on Theodoret and Anatolius; McLynn (2013) on Gregory of Nazianzus and Olympius; Whelan (forthcoming a) on Cyril of Alexandria and Aristolaus. For wider studies of their official/elite networks largely rooted in letter collections: Van Dam (2003), 77–156 on the Cappadocians; McLynn (1999); Shaw (2015); Clark (2019) on Augustine; Delmaire (1989) on John Chrysostom; Delmaire (1988); Evieux (1995), 91–126; Boivin (2014) on Isidore of Pelusium; Puech (2011); Schor (2011), esp. 166–79 on Theodoret of Cyrrhus; Alpi (2009), I 117–24 on Severus of Antioch. For shifts in rhetorical and cultural registers between elite lay correspondents: esp. Schor (2011), 159–66; (2014); Storin (2012), 180–236.

[59] A useful parallel: sceptical studies of Jerome's epistolary self-presentation as favoured counsellor of senatorial women: esp. Cooper (2007), at 60 ('literary lapdog'); Kurdock (2007), at 192–203; Cain (2009); and see now Vessey (2023).

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prose of serial petitions rarely gives a modern reader purchase on what a particular official would have thought (since the late ancient author does not seem to have been sure, either).[60] Yet in terms of understanding shared cultural assumptions around religious identity and political service, the frequently impersonal quality of this polite discourse is an advantage rather than a defect. The recurring deployment of standard tropes gives a sense of what an author thought was a safe rhetorical recourse when writing to a Christian in service of the state. Reference to a more decisively Christian conception of office-holding was not simply for trusted correspondents. As Seraina Ruprecht has noted, epistolographers could extend the mutually beneficial relationship of reciprocity assumed by the letter exchange to include the Christian God.[61] In this context, the official recipient's ideal exercise of earthly authority was overlaid by the workings of divine providence. Addressees were still given appropriate praise for their nobility, virtuous character, and attainment of office but also reminded that these were gifts from God, who would reward them for displaying these virtues, undertaking righteous actions, and supporting the church and orthodoxy (i.e. granting the author's petition).[62] A standard invitation for an official to demonstrate their legitimate exercise of authority through the granting of a request thus became a chance to do so on specifically Christian terms. In this sense, even highly formulaic letters can help to reveal aspects of Christian thought that had become a standard part of the political culture (s) in which officials operated.

4.3 Sermons

Letters were not the only genre in which reflections on Christian governance could be addressed to a current official in person. Sermons afforded a similar opportunity to bishops and clerics, at least when these men deigned to turn up to their churches.[63] The collections of various late ancient preachers preserve the text of sermons delivered in the presence of Christians who served the state. Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Shenoute of Atripe (c. 350–466?!) explicitly mention the presence of specific officials or groups of dignitaries during individual discourses; Maximus of Turin implies something similar in a

[60] Esp. Schor (2011), 160 on deliberate ambiguity. On petitions and stereotypes: Hillner (2019a).
[61] Ruprecht (2021), 207–11, esp. 207–9; see also Storin (2012), 213. [62] See 179–85.
[63] See the Introduction, 35–38 and Chapters 6–8 for the problem of attendance.

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sermon responding to complaints about soldiers and administrators within his community.[64] In major political centres, such an audience was unlikely to be a one-off. Controversies around the episcopal tenures of John and Nestorius in Constantinople provoked contemporaries to write about responses to their preaching from members of the palace and Senate.[65]

It is plausible that longer runs of extant sermons delivered by preachers in imperial, royal, and provincial capitals were heard by current, former, or future officials.[66] But given the vagaries of church attendance, we cannot assume this without explicit indications in the text itself. The extant sermons of Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna (c. 426–50) are a case in point. On particular occasions, Peter discussed the moral demands placed by Scripture on those who served the state and used *militia* as a metaphor for vigilant dedication to Christ.[67] These were very suitable themes for an audience of courtiers and bureaucrats in the western imperial capital; we know that Galla Placidia (c. 390–450) and Valentinian III occasionally went to Peter's church.[68] Late ancient preachers were apt to use metaphors from their congregants' ordinary lives; alongside apostrophes of specific groups, these images have been central to debates around who went to church in this period.[69] Yet these topics cannot be taken as proof of the presence of imperial administrators, given both the ubiquity of

[64] Greg. Naz. *Or*. 17, 19 to Olympius and Julianus, with Holman (2001); Van Dam (2003), 89–92; McLynn (2013). Ambrose, *De obit. Theod*. (though primarily with references to Stilicho and army), with McLynn (1994), 356–60; for the imperial presence at other sermons by Ambrose: see Chapter 7, 264, n. 103. Chrysostom in Antioch: John Chrys. *Hom. in Mart*. for governor at martyr festival, with Sandwell (2007), 136; note also the presence of the pagan *consularis* Celsus in his church in John Chrys. *Hom. de Stat*. 16.1, with Kolbeck (2024), 20–24, though Celsus seems to have left the building before this sermon. Chrysostom in Constantinople: John. Chrys. *In Eutropium*; with Tiersch (2002), 265–80. Shenoute, D4.8 ('I have heard about your wisdom'), D4.9 ('Blessed are they who observe justice'); D8.20 ('And after a few days'); with Hahn (1991); Foat (1993); Behlmer (1998), 346–51; Lopez (2013), 29–34. Max. Tur. *Serm*. 26; with Fahey (2002), 275–76.

[65] See Chapter 6, 231–33; and note CC78, c. 6, ACO 1.4, 6, where Nestorius himself claims his sermon had received a good reception within the palace, which might imply officials were in attendance.

[66] See e.g. McLynn (1994), 220–21 on Ambrose's congregation; and see esp. Gaud. *Tract*. pref.: a set of Easter sermons dedicated to his regular congregant, the former *magister memoriae* Benevolus, who had been absent from the episcopal church of Brescia through illness.

[67] See esp. Petr. Chrys. *Serm*. 26, 54.7, 109, 137.10–12; and Ristuccia (2011) on his systematic use of legal and bureaucratic themes, esp. at 155.

[68] Petr. Chrys. *Serm*. 85ter.3, 130.1–3; Ristuccia (2011), 124–25.

[69] See esp. Maxwell (2006), 65–87; (2018), 352–53; Sandwell (2007), 54–55; Dossey (2010), 147–72; Rebillard (2018), 88–90. These studies are among the many that seek to rebut the characterisation by MacMullen (1989) of (for the most part) a 'distinctly upper-class audience' (510) from the tone and content of extant sermons. Of course, the features identified by MacMullen suggest that preachers saw, as a significant part of their imagined audience, men who had, did, or might serve the state in some fashion.

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this analogy in Christian discourse and the similar discussions of the ethics of governance in sermons delivered in urban centres with less significant populations of state functionaries. When all attendees shared the universal (and sometimes invasive) experience of imperial governance,[70] references to the moral duties and failings of governors, soldiers, and tax collectors did not necessarily indicate a specific audience. In any case, it is unlikely that the presence of officials provoked clerics to harp on this theme every time they ascended the *bēma*. As with letter collections, these texts preserve a particular rhetorical performance, which is often the only remaining trace of wider interactions between clerics and official(s), which must be combed for signs of the occasion of delivery and of interactions outside of this particular exchange.[71] In several surviving sermons, preachers show good reason to offer comments on the place of imperial governance within God's providential ordering of the world. The theme was provoked by an incident that called into question the relationship between the cleric's community and the imperial state.[72] Whether or not they were representative of what officials normally heard in church, the attested or likely presence of current, former, or future imperial or royal officials makes certain sermons particularly valuable. They provide indications of how the authority of state agents was represented to their Christian subjects, and those courtiers, governors, and administrators were provoked to think about their Christian identities and their conduct of office.

Whether or not officials were in the room, preserved sermons are remarkably consistent in arguing that those in imperial service could both govern well and demonstrate Christian piety. Gregory, Ambrose, Maximus, Augustine, Nestorius, Peter – and even John Chrysostom when the mood took him – all argued that officials could be pious Christians.[73] When their sermons discuss the duties of those involved in secular government, these clerics developed similar themes to those in extant letters. They stress the necessity of basic principles of political virtue: not least, the avoidance of corruption and the prevention of injustice. At the same time, these transcripts show significant divergences from

[70] E.g. Sessa (2018), 125–58.

[71] See e.g. debates around the precise *mise en scène* for sermons of Augustine involving the conversion of a tax official and the actions taken by a governor regarding a statue of Hercules: Magalhães de Oliveira (2012), 227–51; Rebillard (2012), 88–91; Kelly (2015).

[72] See esp. Greg. Naz. *Or.* 17; John Chrys. *Hom. in Stat.* 16; Aug. *Serm.* 24, 279.11–12 = Morin 1.2–3, 302.15–22; Max. Tur. *Serm.* 26.

[73] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 17.8–13; *Or.* 19; Ambrose, *Exp. euang. sec. Luc.* 10.100; John Chrys. *Hom. 13 in Philipp.*; Aug. *Serm.* 302.15–16, 22; Max. Tur. *Serm.* 26; CC78, c. 6, ACO 1.4, 6; Petr. Chrys. *Serm.* 137.10–12.

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the polite and culturally sensitive approaches evident in epistolary exchanges. The essential purpose of the sermon genre and situation as a vehicle of instruction and biblical explanation led preachers to adopt a more consistently Christian and Scriptural frame of reference for the legitimate exercise of power.[74] Surviving texts connect the good practice of state agents to biblical passages, images, and personalities and distinctively Christian doctrinal and ethical standards. Future salvation is presented as a prime consideration for these soldiers, tax collectors, judges, and courtiers. In their petitions, clerics and monks could suggest that the pursuit or attainment of Christian piety made officials better at ruling;[75] here, political virtue is a means to be a better Christian. Above all, clerics diverge from their own epistolary practice by subjecting officials to moral admonition. This is not the panegyrical best of all possible worlds: the stereotypical ethical failings of state agents are frequently invoked. Such sermons portray virtue and piety not as a given but something that officials (like all Christians) had to strive to achieve.[76] Preachers assume that the officials in their churches should accept the significance of a Christian cultural framework, membership of the church, and the pastoral authority of the cleric for their political conduct.

The portrayal of virtue as a possible, but not necessary, characteristic of Christian officials is a recurring feature. In articulating this position, preachers carved out a neat compromise between competing expectations. Normative aspects of the sermon as genre and event made demands for cultural common ground and polite deference less urgent (and potentially inappropriate). This was a form of rhetorical performance sharply distinguished from secular eloquence (at least in theory).[77] Still, preachers could not ignore the preferences of the powerful when delivering sermons. Recent work on late fourth- and fifth-century Constantinople (in particular) has stressed the importance of the approval of the palace and patronage of the senatorial elite for bishops in a context of ecclesiastical competition. As Peter Van Nuffelen has persuasively argued, preaching was one way in which clerics in the Eastern imperial capital sought the favour of the powerful.[78] John Chrysostom's abrasive denunciations of the lifestyles of the elite in his sermons played a significant role in his eventual fall; one

[74] For useful recent discussions of sermons as genre and source: Bailey (2010), 16–28; Maxwell (2018); Mayer (2018); Rebillard (2018).
[75] See Chapter 5, 176–79. [76] Particularly striking in Greg. Naz. *Or.* 17.8–13.
[77] Maxwell (2018), 347–51; though see e.g. Maxwell (2006); Van Nuffelen (2015) for how this generic ideal obscures features shared with secular oratory.
[78] Van Nuffelen (2015).

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target of his admonition was the senatorial pursuit of honour and self-enrichment in office.[79] At the same time, the pastoral grandstanding of other surviving texts may have seemed less confrontational to the audience in the room than it does on the page of a modern edition.[80] The uncompromising tone of (for example) Gregory of Nazianzus' remarks to Julian and Olympius in his church is misleading if, as Susan Holman and Neil McLynn have persuasively suggested, the tax adjuster and governor had worked with Gregory in advance to stage manage their visits.[81] When addressed to specific, named attendees, these admonitions can sometimes approach the panegyrical qualities evident in epistolary prose, as with Shenoute's praise of the *dux Thebaidis* Flavianus during his visit to the White Monastery.[82] For all his self-portrayal as a fearless parrhesiast, Shenoute is remarkably conventional in his approach. Rather like the Gallic orators of the *Panegyrici Latini*, the abbot encouraged the military governor to show particular qualities and develop a specific sort of relationship with his provincial subjects by suggesting that he had already done so.[83] Such praise is rare in extant sermons to officials; given the dangers of causing offence to the powerful, it may have been more prevalent than surviving collections suggest, not least in major political centres.

The sort of direct praise for innate virtue that Shenoute provided to Flavian may be underrepresented in surviving collections. Alternatively, officials may have learned not to expect outright deference in a public basilica. Preachers had to balance the interests of these powerful constituents against the expectations of the other Christians who turned up to their churches. Blatant kowtowing to visiting representatives of imperial power would undermine the image of searching moral scrutiny that many bishops sought to present in their preaching. It may also have sat uneasily with the views of worldly political institutions held by more regular attendees. When Maximus and Augustine discussed the potential for state agents to

[79] Fall of Chrysostom: See Chapter 6, 231–33. Invective against office-holders: e.g. *In Eutropium*; *Hom. in Coll.* 2, ed. Field and trans. Allen, esp. 68–71; *Hom. in Coll.* 7 with 8.1 on audience taking offence, ed. Field and trans. Allen, 164–79, 180–1; *Hom. de Stat.* 16.6.

[80] E.g. McLynn (1994), 247–8, Tiersch (2002), 198, and Maxwell (2006), 109–10 suggesting that generic moralising was largely inoffensive, so long as preacher (and audience) did not attach a specific target.

[81] Holman (2001) and the Introduction, 1–3; McLynn (2013), 54–55; likewise McLynn (2012) on another visit of a tax official to Nazianzus.

[82] Hahn (1991), 252; Behlmer (1998), 349; Lopez (2013), 31.

[83] Shenoute, D4.8 ('I have heard about your wisdom'). For this sort of strategy: see, most recently, Omissi and Ross (2020), 12.

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be good Christians, they did so in direct response to criticisms of secular authority that they attributed to their congregations.[84] As Éric Rebillard has stressed, we cannot know if members of their churches really voiced such concerns, but they must, at the very least, have been plausible enough for the bishop to feel they required addressing.[85] Both preachers give space to but ultimately reject the notion that the imperial state was inherently corrupt and political actors beyond redemption. For Augustine, challenging this cynicism was necessary as a response to subversive political acts: calls to destroy pagan statues, the murder of one imperial official, and demonstrations against another's suspiciously timed conversion.[86] Vindicating the legitimate authority and potential Christian piety of those who served the state was thus part of the bishop's role as 'controller of crowds' (in the words of Peter Brown): an intermediary whose clout with the authorities rested on a capacity to keep a lid on the violent energies of the Christian 'masses'.[87] Bishops sought to direct enthusiasm for more radical features of the Christian cultural inheritance into less subversive channels.[88] Given their own entanglement with worldly political institutions, networks, and processes, bishops were unlikely to amplify the view that (to borrow a contemporary phrase) all officials were bastards. At the same time, preserving their own authority over their communities may have required bishops not to let Christian officials off the hook.

Preachers frequently articulated an essentially pastoral view of the possibility that those who served the state could be good Christians. In this sense, sermons to and about imperial and royal officials reflect a central function of this genre. Recent studies have repeatedly (and rightly) emphasised that late ancient sermons show clerics trying to build communities out of the disparate people who happened to come to their church on a given day.[89] Whether they were a named audience or an implicit presence, a specific individual or a generic point of reference, preachers attempted to integrate those who served the state into their church.[90] They reminded named individuals that they, like the rest of those present, were

[84] Max. Tur. *Serm.* 26; Aug. *Serm.* 302.15–22; see also *Serm.* 62.13.
[85] Esp. Rebillard (2018), 95–97. [86] See nn. 71 and 84.
[87] Quotation: Brown (1992), 103; for an important critical reassessment: Magalhães de Oliveira (2012); and for a good recent synthesis, Kahlos (2019b), 74–79.
[88] Esp. Gaddis (2005), 170–79.
[89] Maxwell (2006); Sandwell (2007); Bailey (2010); Rebillard (2012), 61–91; Williams (2017); and see e.g. Van Nuffelen (2015), 201–2; Allen (2018), 151 for neat summaries.
[90] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 17, esp. at 13, *Or.* 19, esp. at 6; John. Chrys. *Hom. 13 in Philipp.*; *Hom. in Matt.* 61.2; *Hom. 2 (cum imperatrix media nocte)*; *In Eutropium*; Max. Tur. *Serm.* 26.1; see also Aug. *Serm.* 302.15–16 turning back critiques of imperial agents against his own community.

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members of the church, whether they belonged to that particular church or to the universal *ecclesia* of which it was a constituent part. Preachers were also apt to include officials within capacious visions of the various walks of life that made up the Christian community.[91] As Nestorius put it in a sermon whose favourable reception in the palace he himself trumpeted:

> While various activities on earth benefit various people – some profit from state service, others from the work of the forum, some from maritime skills, and others from business on land – the knowledge of piety is useful for all men alike, princes and priests, the powerful and the common people.[92]

Courtiers, governors, tax collectors, and soldiers could be included amongst the social groups upon whom membership of the church placed distinct demands. All these sorts of people were called to do good; all had ways they could achieve piety; all had models in Scripture that they might follow. This sort of pastoral perspective features elsewhere – not least, in advice letters – but the communal context of the sermon makes it a marked feature of depictions of Christian officials in that genre. Even when officials were not (necessarily) listening in, these preachers had good reasons to stress both the ethical demands upon those who served the state and the potential that they could be good Christians.

4.4 Church Histories

Letters and orations were genres specifically directed to current officials. Other forms of late ancient Christian literature were less focused on their experiences and less likely to centre their perspectives. Church histories tended to close off the possibilities of pious governance highlighted in direct political communication.[93] Imperial and royal officials were not the focus of the histories of Eusebius, Rufinus, Philostorgius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, Zachariah Rhetor, Theodore Lector, or Evagrius. They were not amongst the protagonists named in the prefaces and provided extended treatment within the text. Subordinate political actors were largely redundant in narratives of good (orthodox) or bad (pagan or heretical) emperors supporting or harming those bishops and monks who

[91] E.g. Maxwell (2006), 67–74 on Chrysostom.
[92] CC78.7, ACO 1.4, 6, trans. Price and Graumann, 183; also CP 24, ACO 1.5, 45.
[93] More detailed studies of imperial officials in church histories: Whelan (2023); (forthcoming b). Important wider studies of the genre: Leppin (1996, 2003); Urbainczyk (1997); (1998); Van Nuffelen (2004); (2018; (2019); Blaudeau (2006); Gardiner (2012); Lankina (2018); Corke-Webster (2019).

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championed a predetermined orthodoxy.[94] Under good Christian rulers, there was not much point including them, insofar as the decisions taken by Constantine, or Theodosius I, or Theodosius II to back the true church constituted sufficient narrative explanation; the reader did not need to see an imperial agent implementing these self-evidently positive orders. In fact, depictions of subordinates influencing or enforcing the decisions would obscure the historian's efforts to delineate the correct relationship between emperor and priests. Church histories thus often cut out the middlemen to portray unmediated contact between churchmen and emperors.[95] In any case, periods of good governance of the church under orthodox emperors were exceptional within texts that remained, to a remarkable degree, histories of persecution, even after Constantine.[96] When officials appear, they are usually represented according to the classic tropes of the persecuting agent of the Roman state.[97] Such a depiction was generally less about these individuals than it was an indictment of the emperors who appointed and commanded them.[98] These histories' sense of doctrinal and moral closure blocked off opportunities to depict the salutary agency of imperial officials. If orthodoxy was already decided – as, too, the position of rulers and key bishops with respect to it – there was no space for officials to intervene on its behalf.

Pious political servants did not have an obvious place in narratives driven by conflict between persecuting authorities and persecuted Christians.[99] The imperial officials who become the centre of attention (and sometimes receive positive write-ups) in late ancient church histories are those who resist heretical or pagan rulers. The most straightforwardly praiseworthy were official martyrs and confessors. Church historians from Eusebius onwards portrayed (orthodox) Christians in service of pagan or

[94] Good/bad: e.g. Leppin (2003), 240.

[95] For differing depictions of this relationship in the fifth-century Nicene historians: Leppin (2003), 238–46.

[96] E.g. Leppin (1996), 1–2 on Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret; Humphries (2008), 155–56 on Rufinus.

[97] Ruf. *HE* 10.16–20, 10.35, 10.37, 11.2–3, 11.5, 11.9; Soc. *HE* 2.2, 2.11, 2.13, 2.16, 2.28, 3.14–15, 3.19, 4.13, 4.15–16, 4.18, 4.20–22, 4.24, 4.26; Soz. *HE* 2.22–23, 2.25, 3.1, 3.6–7, 3.9, 4.3, 4.9–11, 4.30, 5.6, 5.8–11, 5.20, 6.5, 6.12, 6.14, 6.16, 6.18–20, 6.31; Theodoret, *HE.* 2.9, 2.13–16, 2.19.14, 3.9, 3.11–12, 3.15–20, 4.17–18, 4.19, 4.22, 4.26, 4.33–34; Ps.-Zach. *HE* 4.1, 5.5.c.

[98] A point well made for Eusebius and Lactantius by Corke-Webster (2019), 249–79 and Corke-Webster (2022), 344–46. Note also (in reverse) the evil counsellors trope: Leppin (1996), 60–66; Kahlos (2019a), 65–66.

[99] Soc. *HE* 7.48 and Theodoret, *HE* 5.41[39].26 with Leppin (1996), 217; Gardiner (2012), 132; Livneh (2019), 99–102.

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heretical rulers giving up their belts of office and/or suffering torture and execution for their faith.[100] Such choices did not directly implicate their agency on behalf of the state; in fact, it involved them giving up that position (and, in some cases, incurring death) to prioritise their devotion to the Christian God. Church historians nevertheless often used such moments as an opportunity to suggest that these confessors and martyrs were especially effective and valued administrators.[101] More ambivalent praise was also directed to other individuals who refused to carry out orders by emperors viewed by the authors as heterodox tyrants: Julian, Valens, and Marcian. The value of these acts of insubordination was complicated by the fact that the conscientious objectors were often themselves pagans or heretics.[102] Their salutary refusal could likewise be portrayed as a form of confession; an act of *parrhēsia* before a violent tyrant.[103] It could also simply be seen as a pragmatic prioritising of peace and order unrelated to religious identities or ethical scruples. Socrates, in particular, would emphasise the superficial benefits of this pragmatism: for example, orthodox clerics not punished in public but murdered in private or in exile.[104] Reluctance to punish could even be portrayed as a form of persecution in itself, as it denied Christians the chance to become martyrs.[105] Within the continuing oppositional model of church histories, imperial officials were for the most part good when they refused to do their jobs. The possibilities of being both a pious Christian and a good political servant were alluded to but fell outside the parameters of the narrative.

These portrayals of persecutors and refuseniks suggest the broad brushstrokes with which church historians generally depicted officials. Imperial or royal agents were normally introduced because they were useful for the stories the historian wanted to tell and the argument that he sought to

[100] Eusebius *HE* 8.1.3–4, 8.6.1–5 and Ruf. *HE* 8.1.3–4, 8.6.5 on Dorotheus and Gorgonius under Diocletian; Ruf. *HE* 10.9–10, Soc. *HE* 1.19, Soz. *HE* 2.24, Theodoret, *HE* 1.23 on Frumentius in Axoum; Ruf. *HE* 11.2 on Valentinian under Julian; Soc. *HE* 3.13, 4.1 on Valentinian and Valens under Julian; Soz. *HE* 6.6 on Valentinian under Julian; Soz. *HE* 2.9, 2.11 on Uzathanes and Azades under Shapur; see also Ps.-Zach. *HE* 4.9.a on Stilas joining Timothy Aelurus in the baptistery of the Great Church in Alexandria.

[101] See discussions in Chapters 3 and 5, 111–14, 189–90.

[102] See esp. Ruf. *HE* 10.37; Soc. *HE* 3.19; Soz. *HE* 5.20, Theodoret, *HE* 3.11 (the pagan praetorian prefect Sallust under Julian ending his torture of Antiochene Christians) and Ruf. *HE* 11.5, Soc. *HE* 4.18; Soz. *HE* 6.18; Theodoret, *HE* 4.17 (the heterodox praetorian prefect Modestus under Valens refusing to massacre the Nicene Christians of Edessa); Ps.-Zach. *HE* 3.11 (the Chalcedonian decurion of the silentiaries John under Marcian refusing to punish the anti-Chalcedonian community of Alexandria). On these accounts: Whelan (2023); (forthcoming b).

[103] See esp. Thélamon (1981), 288–90 (on Rufinus); Gaddis (2005), 255–56 (on all of the accounts of Sallust and Modestus).

[104] Soc. *HE* 2.16, 4.16.

[105] Theodoret, *HE* 3.11, 4.17.

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advance. In that sense they are like the imperial women recently discussed by Julia Hillner: another group who were not the main characters of these church histories and thus cast light on the real protagonists.[106] The likes of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret do not give a sense of the collaboration between churchmen and the imperial administration in the definition of correct doctrine. These historians do not portray the role of officials within these intricate negotiations, nor do they reproduce the documentary evidence that substantiates their roles as mediators and targets of ecclesiastical lobbying.[107] Such omissions are most startling in the case of Theodoret, whose letters show him actively pursuing these strategies of persuasion in the very period in which he seems to have written his *Church History*.[108] One exception to this rule is the history written by the anti-Chalcedonian lawyer Zachariah Rhetor in Constantinople c. 492–95.[109] The Syriac epitome of this Greek text (known as Ps.-Zachariah for convenience) preserves a series of episodes where imperial agents were sent from Constantinople to Alexandria to try to reconcile its warring church factions. In these sections, the history takes the official mission as its basic narrative unit, recounting the work of John, Pergamius, Cosmas, and Arsenius from their departure from the imperial city, through meetings with key stakeholders, to their debrief on their return to the palace.[110] These accounts provide a vivid sense of their agency on the ground and praise for their 'astute' or 'prudent' arbitration of these church disputes.[111] Zachariah's willingness to show the work that went into securing consensus likely stemmed from his own support of a moderate anti-Chalcedonian interpretation of the *Henotikon*: a formulation of orthodoxy rooted in compromise. In a forthcoming paper, I argue that the likely sources for his accounts were the officials' own reports on their missions.[112] Zachariah recast their attention to bureaucratic procedure as an ideal form of official conduct in church politics.

It is not a coincidence that Zachariah's *Church History* is the sole surviving example of the genre explicitly addressed to a current imperial official. The preface claims he wrote the history at the behest of Eupraxius,

[106] Hillner (2019b). [107] See esp. Soc. *HE* 7.34.13 with Frenkel (2014), 260.
[108] See Chapter 2, 89, Chapter 5, 184–85.
[109] On the text, its reconstruction, and its themes, see Allen (1980); Whitby (2003), 459–66; Blaudeau (2006), 493–668, esp. 581–617; Greatrex et al. (2011).
[110] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 3.11 (John), 5.7–9 (Pergamius), 6.2–3 (Cosmas), 6.4 (Arsenius). The case of Pergamius is slightly different insofar as he stays on as governor, and so no return audience with the emperor is included.
[111] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 3.11.a, 5.7.c. [112] Whelan (forthcoming b).

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a chamberlain in the palace of Anastasius and prominent patron of the anti-Chalcedonian church faction.[113] Geoffrey Greatrex and Philippe Blaudeau have persuasively argued that the text was meant to convince the emperor and his functionaries that Zachariah's favoured interpretation of the *Henotikon* should be orthodoxy.[114] Earlier church histories did not have such a direct official addressee. The likely or named dedicatees of Eusebius, Rufinus, Socrates, and Theodoret's histories were all clerics.[115] Nevertheless, these previous texts were likely also read by former, current, or future officials. Sozomen's (possibly unfinished) *Church History* was dedicated to the empress Pulcheria and likely intended to solicit imperial patronage and office; at the very least, it was meant to be read in the palace.[116] Other church histories indicate potential official sources and audiences. Rufinus and Socrates provide positive pen portraits of current and former officials: the former *magister memoriae* Benevolus and the *comes domesticorum* Bacurius (for Rufinus), and the former praetorian prefect Anthemius, his advisor Troilus, and the officials-turned-Nicene or Novatian bishops Nectarius, Chrysanthus, and Thalassius (for Socrates). Several of these individuals were within the social networks of the authors and thus plausibly amongst their intended readers.[117] If so, as with letters, this direct contact led to panegyrical prose, although one tending to a much more banal presentation of virtue – and one largely outside the flow of events in the history.[118] These character summaries suggest how the church historian might envisage the virtuous behaviour of committed Christians in government. So, when Rufinus refers to Bacurius as his source for the conversion of the Georgians, he describes him as 'most faithful' and an individual 'whose greatest concern was religion and truth'; in his account of the Battle of the Frigidus, the *comes domesticorum* returns as 'a man distinguished in faith, piety, and strength of mind and body, who deserved to be a companion and ally (*comes et socius*) of

[113] Ps.-Zach. *HE* 3.1.a; *PLRE* II: 426 (Eupraxius).
[114] Blaudeau (2006), 533, 554–55, 558–60, 611–17; Greatrex et al. (2011), 30–31.
[115] Eusebius: see now Corke-Webster (2019), 62–65 (with useful summary of previous work). Ruf. *HE* preface (to Chromatius of Aquileia); Soc. *HE* 2.1.6 (bishop Theodore); Theodoret, *HE* 1.prol (friends). On these respective dedications, see best Thélamon (2001); Van Nuffelen (2004), 10–14; Blaudeau (2006), 506 n. 77; Schor (2011), 58–77, at 58–59.
[116] Soz. *HE* preface, 9.1. On the dedication, see esp. Van Nuffelen (2004), 53–59.
[117] Ruf. *HE* 10.11, 11.33 on Bacurius; 11.16 on Benivolus with *PLRE* I: 144 (Bacurius), 161 (Benivolus); see 145, n. 66. Soc. *HE* 7.1.3 for Anthemius and Troilus, 5.8.12 on Nectarius, 7.12.2 on Chrysanthus, 7.48 on Thalassius; see esp. Van Nuffelen (2004), 14–36 for the visibility of Troilus' circle in the text and influence on Socrates' attitudes.
[118] Compare Urbainczyk (1998), 304–5 on this sort of praise as 'more predictable and thus less potent'.

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Theodosius'.[119] This sense of Christian commitment as a qualification for office parallels Rufinus' treatment of official martyrs. Socrates implies a similar perspective when ending his work on the decision of the former praetorian prefect of Illyricum Thalassius to spurn imperial employment to become bishop of Caesarea.[120] In the age of Theodosius II, the traits required by imperial and ecclesiastical office-holders had apparently converged. Yet these are small glimpses of pious Christian governance. The contrast is most marked in Theodoret, whose *History* shows no trace of the rhetoric of providential service that shapes his letters to high officials. As Peter Van Nuffelen has recently stressed, it is important not to treat the narratives of church histories as straightforward indices of the 'views' of their authors.[121] The shape and purposes of these texts could only accommodate certain aspects of contemporary thought about Christianity and office-holding. Even within these narratives of conflict, there remain glimpses of their compatibility.

4.5 Saints' Lives

The many forms of hagiographical literature produced in late antiquity tend to present a similarly oppositional model of the relationship between Christian piety and the imperial state. The purposes and audiences of these accounts of the lives of saints made them less than amenable to traditional claims of virtuous aristocratic behaviour, whether in household, city, or in service of the state.[122] This opposition begins early, with the hagiographers' descriptions of the saint's upbringing and activities prior to their adoption of an ascetic lifestyle or appointment to episcopal office. Again and again, these *Lives* start by airing (and dismissing) the worldly status and career of their subjects, which paled beside their dedication to Christ. Where appropriate, these recurrent plays on earthly and heavenly *militia* included the saint's renunciation of imperial or royal office.[123] This sense of the incompatibility of political service and Christian commitment is also evident in a standard episode repeated across numerous *Lives*. In these

[119] Ruf. *HE* 10.11, 11.33. [120] Soc. *HE* 7.48. [121] Van Nuffelen (2019), 310.

[122] On the varied purposes and forms of this 'experimental' genre, see now Corke-Webster and Gray (2020). Centrality of monastic contexts and audiences and their edification, see esp. Rapp (2010). And see e.g. Praet (2016), 135–36 on Sulpicius Severus' engagement with traditional norms in *V. Mart.*

[123] See esp. *V. Alex.* 5–6; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 5, 8; *V. Fulg.* 1–2; *V. Germ.* 1–2; Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.* 2–3; Pall. *LH* 44, 62; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 1.22, 2.11; Theodoret, *HR* 3.2, 12.2; see Cain (2013), 62 for a useful list of 'people known to have resigned from either military service or the imperial administration to pursue a career in the church or monasticism'.

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stories, the saint triumphs over violent, corrupt, or demonically inspired officials, whether through miraculous or more mundane means.[124] As in contemporary ecclesiastical histories, the authors of saints' lives moulded their representatives of imperial or royal authority to discourses of persecution, as 'secular' antagonists irrationally hostile to the sanctified power of the protagonist.[125] These exemplars of the world rejected their intercessions, mocked their pretensions to holiness, and did violence to them, their monastic or ecclesiastical allies, and the subjects over whom they claimed the responsibility of protection. Of course, these chamberlains, governors, counts, and generals normally receive their comeuppance, often through a marvellous occurrence explicable only with recourse to the miraculous capabilities of the individual whom they had scorned. They are forced to recognise the power of the saint and, if they are lucky, show appropriate contrition before it is too late. The staging of episcopal and ascetic authority in these texts benefited from secular antagonists. Partly as a result, these *Lives* explored a spectrum of negative associations for the state: from an unsuitable place for a good Christian to a location of actively villainous and even demonic conduct.

This basic opposition between worldly and heavenly service permeates hagiographical literature. Yet it was not the only approach that these texts took to imperial or royal office-holding.[126] Central concerns on the part of their authors also required more neutral and even positive presentations of administrative conduct and its potential compatibility with Christian piety. Biographers of holy people who had embarked upon asceticism from childhood or adolescence could straightforwardly dismiss the concerns of 'the world'; the past careers of saints who had served the state required more finesse.[127] Certain *Lives* come remarkably close to an apology for their conduct in office, whose significance in the evaluation of their character could not entirely be firewalled. It was not simply that these individuals were able to govern virtuously before the call of the desert

[124] There are too many examples of conflict between saints and officials to cite here. For recognition of the saint's power and/or miraculous comeuppance, see esp. Eugippius, *V. Severin*. 44.2; Paulinus, *V. Ambr*. 12, 18, 37; *V. Fulg*. 14; Ger. *V. Mel. Iun*. 52; *V. Petr. Iber.* 36; Sulp. Sev. *Dial*. 2.3, 3.4, 3.8; *V. Sym. Styl.* 58, 60, 68; Theodoret *HR* 8.9; for less supernatural consequences: *V. Hil*. 13; Pall. *LH* 46.3–4; *V. Hyp*. 21; and throughout Marc. Diac. *V. Porph.* (where the secular officials in Gaza are pagan persecutors). For such confrontations as a topos of later Byzantine hagiography: Pratsch (2005), 178–80; in later Merovingian lives: Kreiner (2014), 52–71.

[125] For the link, see e.g. Kreiner (2014), 58.

[126] See also Kolbeck (forthcoming).

[127] Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart*. 2–4, with Fontaine (1967–69), I 143–46, II 428–538, esp. 461–67; Stancliffe (1983), 149–50; Praet (2016), 141–43; Hier. *Ep*. 60.9; Paulinus, *V. Ambr*. 5, 8, *V. Alex*. 5–6 with Kosiński (2016), 101–2, *V. Germ*. 1–2, *V. Petr. Iber*.; *V. Fulg*. 1–2; Pall. *LH*, preface, 71.5–6, with Rapp (2001), 282, 286, 288–89; see also Kreiner (2014), 68–69 discussing Merovingian examples.

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or episcopate became too strong. The *Lives* of Martin of Tours, Ambrose of Milan, and Epiphanius of Pavia make the claim that their subjects were able to act like bishops or monks while governors or soldiers.[128] This premise worked both ways: bishops and abbots could also be praised for bringing skill sets from their past career into the service of urban communities and monastic institutions.[129] The past of their subjects and the character of their episcopal and ascetic duties meant that hagiographers could not entirely write off *militia saeculi*.

These saints were not the only individuals treated to more optimistic accounts of Christian political service. Similarly positive write-ups were accorded to the contingent of current and former officials who gain walk-on parts. These dignitaries appear in various capacities.[130] When holy people seek to secure imperial or royal interventions, pious Christian officials appear as intermediaries who recognise their sanctity and help them to achieve their goals. It is in such moments that their combination of Christian piety and administrative acumen is most germane to the hagiographer's discussion.[131] Such grandees also appear in a less public capacity, seeking the advice, blessings, and healing powers of holy people and giving them land and moveable wealth.[132] Even these more domestic scenarios can lead hagiographers to comment on the virtues of these individuals both as Christians and in their public careers.[133]

Such praise was, in part, an attempt to lend credence to their recognition of the remarkable virtues of the holy person: the central case that these texts sought to make.[134] It was also a matter of polite discourse in the context of a (potentially ongoing) patronage relationship. Numerous

[128] Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.* 2–3; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 5, 8; Ennod. *V. Epiph.* 151 on Rusticus of Lyon; see also Hier. *Ep.* 60.9 with Cain (2013), 3.

[129] On which, see esp. Rapp (2005), 23–55.

[130] For a useful taxonomy of episodes in a series of fifth-century Constantinopolitan lives: Kosiński (2016), 235–39.

[131] *V. Dan. Styl.* 28, 42, 48–49, 56, 71, 76, 83–84; Ennod. *V. Epiph.* 85, 168–70 and *V. Germ.* 35; with Gillett (2003), 134, 155, 161; *V. Hil.* 9, 22; Marc. Diac. *V. Porph.* 36–39, 43, 51–52.

[132] Advice: Pall. *LH* 35.5–7; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 1.20; Theodoret, *HR* 8.2. Healing and miraculous help: *V. Ambr.* 21, 28, 43–44; *V. Caes.* 1.39–40, 1.49, 2.10–15, 2.39–42; *V. Germ.* 7, 22, 27, 38–39 with Gillett (2003), 119–20; Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.* 8, 17, 19; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.2, 3.3, 3.8, 3.14; *V. Sym. Styl.* 81, 83–84. Theodoret, *HR* 2.20, 3.9, 8.11, 9.5. Donors: Cyr. Scyth. *V. Abr.* 2, ed. Schwartz, 244.13–21; *V. Caes.* 1.38; *V. Dan. Styl.* 23–24, 28–36, 89; *V. Germ.* 44; *V. Isaac.* 4.14–18; *V. Marcell.* 12; *V. Petr. Iber.* 36; Cyr. Scyth. *V. Theod.* 3, 5, ed. Schwartz, 238.1–23, 240.15–24; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 3.14; Theodoret, *HR* 8.4.

[133] *V. Dan. Styl.* 31; *V. Germ.* 24; *V. Hyp.* 12, 15, 44 with Maxwell (2016), 94–96, 103–4; Cyr. Scyth. *V. Ioh. Hes.* 3, ed. Schwartz, 203.5–15; Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.* 20; Pall. *LH* 35.5–7; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 1.25; Theodoret, *HR* 13.15, 24.8.

[134] See e.g. Gillett (2003), 155.

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studies have used these episodes to reconstruct the networks of aristocratic patrons upon whom these bishops and ascetics could draw during their lifetimes.[135] In many cases, it seems plausible that these textual accounts were themselves an attempt to continue such relationships and encourage others to emulate them by supporting the communities and institutions that bishops and monastic founders had left behind. Certain hagiographical texts were written specifically for current officials, as with the *Lausiac History* of Palladius of Helenopolis (c. 362–420), dedicated to Lausus, the chamberlain of Theodosius II.[136] In similar terms, Meaghan McEvoy has recently suggested that the *Life of Daniel the Stylite* was written, in part, to invite continued patronage for Daniel's community from the Constantinopolitan power elite.[137] Other *Lives* were likewise bound up in networks of current and former imperial officials and invested in the cultural capital of political institutions.[138] The *Life of Ambrose*, Sulpicius Severus' *Dialogues*, and the *Life of Caesarius of Arles* explicitly refer to particular officials as the eyewitnesses for specific stories; the *Dialogues* even included two senatorial aristocrats as characters who joined Severus and his companions to hear stories of Martin's sanctity.[139] It is plausible that other individuals listed as patrons, intermediaries, and recipients of healing in these lives were in fact the sources for these miraculous accounts and envisaged as potential audiences for these works. These continuing ties to the world of public power may have been part of what made some saints' lives remarkably amenable to claims of Christian piety in government.[140]

Conclusion

There is no one single genre of writing (or tradition of official biography) that allows us access to the religious identities of officials and contemporary thought about its implications for their governance. Those who served the state could not always count on the imaginative sympathy of their

[135] E.g. Matthews (1975), 78, 154–56 (Martin), 127–39 (Constantinopolitan saints); Stancliffe (1983), 326 (Martin); Klingshirn (1994), 173 (Caesarius); Bowes (2008), 122 (Isaac); Kosiński (2016), 47–65, 171–89, 238–39 (Hypatius and Daniel).

[136] Pall. *LH*, preface, and 160–61; with Rapp (2001); Katos (2011), 98–124, esp. 99–104.

[137] McEvoy (2022).

[138] See e.g. Natal (2015), 152–54, 159.

[139] *Life of Ambrose* 30 (cupbearer of Arbogast); Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 3.5, 3.7, 3.10 (Avitianus, Dagridus, Romulus and Arborius), 3.1.6–7 (Eucherius and Celsus listening), with Stancliffe (1983), 161, 166; *V. Caes.* 2.10–12 (Liberius) and also 2.13–15 (his wife Agrestia).

[140] For conciliatory approaches to secular power in hagiography, see esp. Rapp (2001); Gillett (2003), 121–22, 156; Kosiński (2016), 175, 188–89, 235–39; Kolbeck (forthcoming). On Merovingian hagiography as 'of and for the ruling classes', see Kreiner (2014), 14–18, at 14.

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contemporaries; in some genres, they tend to have little more than walk-on parts. It is exceedingly rare that we can reconstruct the individual perspective of a single office-holder. Chapter 5 is necessarily based on brief references to specific individuals and comments on what represented virtuous practice and legitimate Christian exercise of office across disparate forms of literature and material culture. The fragmentary character of this evidence requires a wide-angle lens: an approach justified by indications of common ways of thinking and talking about the Christian identities of state actors throughout the late fourth to late sixth centuries and across the Roman world. It is my contention that these sources reflect, and can allow us to reconstruct, a late ancient discourse around Christian political service that had real purchase on the practice of governance and the culture of political institutions in this period. Some texts and objects provide us relatively unmediated evidence for how office-holders presented their religious identities (at least on specific occasions). Otherwise, we must (of necessity) work with literary depictions of officials and political service by other Christians: most notably, letter writers, preachers, ecclesiastical historians, and hagiographers. Their versions of imperial and royal officials of course stemmed, in the first place, from their own political thinking and, perhaps even before that, the rhetorical and literary needs of the text they were writing. Yet texts in all these genres show a significant and sometimes surprising need to appeal to the interests of those officials who represented their intended or potential audiences. Even when these writers are more divorced from their official subjects, such positive accounts of Christian governance can be useful, insofar as they suggest authorial assumptions regarding how those who served the state might wish their agency to be depicted. It is these common expectations regarding the character of Christian political service that Chapter 5 seeks to reconstruct.

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