# *Introduction*

## I.1 Official Religion

In December 374 or January 375 CE, the cathedral church of Nazianzus witnessed an unusual sermon.[1] Nazianzus was an unremarkable provincial town in the recently reorganised Roman province of Cappadocia II.[2] Its significance for historians of late antiquity stems from its most famous son, who also happened to be the preacher on this occasion. Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–90) would go on to become bishop of the imperial capital of Constantinople and a saint in the Greek Orthodox tradition. In the winter of 374/5, he was still a priest in his hometown church, somewhat reluctantly serving as a *locum* after the death of the bishop – his father, Gregory the Elder.[3] Our sermon was a special occasion, and not just because it was Christmas. More importantly, there was an imperial tax assessor in the room: a *peraequator* ('adjuster') named Julian, who also happened to be an old friend of Gregory.[4] Julian was in Nazianzus to sort out its citizens' contributions to the tax payment that the city owed to the emperor. Like any good late Roman grandee, Gregory had prepared for this visit. His letters show him intervening for his clients (and especially the priests and monks of Nazianzus) to reduce or remove their liability.[5] In this speech to his congregation – delivered at Julian's apparent request – Gregory couched these requests in a much broader picture of the correct ethical approach of a Christian tax official.

[1] On this episode: Holman (2001), at 103 n. 3 for the likely date; McGuckin (2001), 221–23; Van Dam (2003), 89–92; Storin (2012), 44 n. 127. On a parallel episode: McLynn (2012).

[2] Though on its significance: Elm (2012), 19–21.

[3] For various interpretations of his ambiguous position after the death of his father (whom he had served as co-adjutor bishop after an abortive episcopate at Sasima): e.g. Rousseau (1994), 233–39, McGuckin (2001), 223–27; Storin (2012), 41–45; Storin (2019), 6–7. I thank Susanna Elm for her help with this question.

[4] *PLRE* I: 472 (Iulianus 17).

[5] Greg. Naz. *Ep*. 67–69; *Carm* 2.2.2; also Greg. Naz. *Or*. 19.16.



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Midway through the address, Gregory turned to the familiar pastoral theme of the respective 'gifts' that different sorts of Christian were to offer God.[6] Within a litany of the obligations required of various professions and social stations, the preacher used Scripture to set out ground rules for how an imperial official like Julian could be a good Christian.

> Soldiers, *be content with* your *wages*; do not seek more than *is appointed you* (Luke 3:13–14). These orders, which I confirm, come to you from John, the great herald of truth, the voice that was precursor of the Word. What do I mean by wages? The imperial allowance, clearly, and the legally sanctioned perquisites of rank. And as for whatever is more, to whom does that belong? I am reluctant to use ill-omened language, but I am sure you understand my meaning even if I hold back. *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's* (Matt. 22:21; also Luke 20:25, Mark 12:17). You who bear the name of the realm, pay your taxes to the one, but your fear to the other. And when I speak of fear, I do so to inhibit covetousness.[7]

Gregory cited famous soundbites from John the Baptist and Jesus to demand a God-fearing approach to tax collection through which Julian would limit (but not eliminate) his own financial gain.[8] Directly addressing the *peraequator*, Gregory stressed that tax collectors were part of the wider Christian community and subject to the same ethical demands as any other Christian. In so doing, he slyly repackaged a fundamental apologetic argument to fit his friend's official business at Christmas in Nazianzus.

> Now these injunctions apply to everyone, not just to those in authority. Moral disease is common to all and its treatment the same for all. And so, you who assess our taxes, assess us justly. Apply yourself not to an assessment of my sermon . . . but rather to a benevolent and righteous assessment of my people, out of regard for the occasion itself if for nothing else, for even our Savior is born during a period of assessment.[9]

Christian apologists had long cited the synchronicity of the birth of Christ and the peace achieved in the reign of Augustus as the first Roman emperor as proof of the legitimacy and superiority of Christianity as a Roman imperial religion.[10] Gregory used Jesus' birth during the imperial census – which had required his (human) parents to return to Bethlehem – to justify a Christian approach to tax collection. The preacher went on to say that God took flesh specifically so that tax assessors would learn to be

[6] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 19.7–11.
[7] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 19.11, trans. Vinson, 101.
[8] See further 171, with n. 48.
[9] Greg. Naz, *Or.* 19.12, trans. Vinson, 102; see also Van Dam (2003), 90; McGuckin (2001), 222.
[10] E.g. Leppin (2023), 308.

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humble.[11] Indeed, Julian's Christian identity was supposed to shape his administrative praxis in a fundamental way. 'It is with Christ that you compile your accounts, with Christ that you form your appraisals; it is with him as your head that you make your scrutiny, with him as the Logos that you reconcile your logbook (*meta tou logou logizē*).'[12] Gregory used Julian's visit to draw a larger moral lesson, both for the taxman and for his congregation: about the place of the Roman state within God's providential plan for the world and about how agents of that state could be virtuous, both by imperial and by Christian standards.

That a Roman official could be addressed in this way, in this setting, would have been inconceivable only three generations before. What had changed is that, with one notable exception, the Roman Empire had now been ruled by Christian emperors for over half a century. The conversion of Constantine (r. 306–37) in 312 may no longer be seen as a 'lightbulb' moment of sudden change, but it still represents a key turning point.[13] Prior to his reign, Christianity had represented a prohibited (if largely tolerated) religion in the empire, and one that had recently been subject to systematic imperial persecution. After Constantine, it became, not only a legal, but a privileged, and eventually the dominant religion of the Roman world. The progress of the following centuries of religious change has become ever clearer from several decades of sustained scholarly analysis.[14] Christian orthodoxy would become the sole legitimate form of religious belief, practice, and community, with heretics, Jews, and worshippers of the traditional Greco-Roman gods ('pagans') suffering civil disabilities. Churches were built in every city – and small towns and villages, too. Bishops and ascetics attained new forms of power and influence within late Roman society, and these Christian institutions and authority figures increasingly reshaped life in household, city, and empire according to distinctive cultural values. Above all, imperial support for Christianity produced incremental change in the cast of political life in the late Roman world. Historians of late antiquity have tracked in exquisite detail

[11] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 19.13.
[12] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 19.13, trans. Vinson, 103; with similar arguments in Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 2.2.2.
[13] I am not even going to attempt a comprehensive footnote here; I do have a word limit, after all. For useful sketches of the debates: Drake (2000), 3–34; Flower (2012); Lenski (2016), 4–6. Modern accounts stressing Constantine's more mundane priorities: e.g. Evans Grubbs (1995); Kelly (2006); Dillon (2012); Harries (2012), 106–84; Van Dam (2007), 11; and note esp. the multivalent approach of Lenski (2016).
[14] Summaries: Lim (1999); (2009); Maxwell (2012); Averil Cameron (2015a); (2015b), 58–83.

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the subtle shifts in the representation of the emperor, his relationship with the Christian church, and the character of political discourse that ensued.

This religious change – the Christianisation of the Roman world – effectively shapes late antiquity as a period and a discipline. It has been the subject of massive scholarly debate over the nature, speed, and extent of these changes, with a general revisionist tendency to suggest that they took much longer – and were less far-reaching in practice – than the very brief summary that the last paragraph offered might suggest. One way historians have tracked this change is through looking at imperial officials like Julian (or, rather, his superiors). Important prosopographical studies have used known appointees to key posts in the army, the central bureaucracy, and provincial administration as a dataset to quantify conversion.[15] By counting known or likely Christians or pagans across the fourth and fifth centuries, they have shown that it took several decades before emperors started consistently preferring Christians to serve them; the shift seems to have happened around the time that Gregory delivered his sermon to Julian.[16] These findings have been fundamental to efforts to challenge older narratives of an existential conflict between Christianity and paganism in the fourth century (including periodic pagan 'reactions' and 'revivals').[17] They have been used to suggest, both that Christianity was less central to individual emperors' policies than previously thought, and that the empire as a whole saw a lower rate of religious change, because of the persistence of traditional Greco-Roman religion within the elite population from which officials were drawn. Close attention to the religious self-expression of this service aristocracy – and the depictions of these elites by their contemporaries – has thus allowed historians of late antiquity to document a slower process of conversion and accommodation.[18]

Analysing when imperial administrators became Christian has been crucial to changing views of the Christianisation of the Roman world. Historians of late antiquity have yet to explore what happened next: what it meant for officials to be Christians and serve the imperial state. Part of the reason for their omission is a continued sense of the fourth century as a definitive period of religious change. Where these studies push on into the fifth or sixth centuries, it is to contextualise and deconstruct supposed

[15] Von Haehling (1978); Barnes (1989); (1995); Salzman (2002). See further, Section I.3, and Chapter 1.
[16] See 14–15. [17] On which, Maxwell (2012) is a superb summary.
[18] See esp. P. R. L. Brown (1961); (1995); (2012); Salzman (2002); Cooper (2007b); Kahlos (2007); Alan Cameron (2011); Watts (2015). Service aristocracy: A. H. M. Jones (1964), II 529; Heather (1994); Weisweiler (2015); Rollinger (2024), 74–78.

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'pagans' as opposed to thinking about their more straightforwardly Christian colleagues.[19] Wider accounts of Christianisation tend to move on to explain the next stage of the conversion of the Roman aristocracy, as senators and town councillors took up office in the church itself.[20] But, of course, only a minority of the late Roman elite became bishops or monks. As Jonathan Warner has recently reiterated, enthusiasm for the desert did not produce the sort of 'ecclesiastical brain-drain' from the late Roman bureaucracy that Edward Gibbon hypothesised.[21] Throughout this period, there were thousands of Christians serving emperors and kings in their political institutions across the Roman world at any given moment.[22] If we want to understand how the late Roman world became Christian, we have to think about these people.

This is not to suggest that the role of imperial and royal officials in the Christianisation of the Roman world has been completely overlooked. Within recent work on religious change in late antiquity, imperial and royal officials have represented a consistent but marginal presence: of interest, not for their own agency but for the light they cast on the main protagonists of this process (emperors, empresses, bishops, monks, martyrs, and other holy people). By their continued pursuit of traditional public careers, they have acted as a control group for other elite men and women who gave up 'worldly' ambitions for forms of ascetic retreat, or transferred their aspirations for office into episcopal or monastic leadership.[23] As agents of imperial religious coercion and violence, they have played supporting roles in accounts of the discourse of persecution ubiquitous in late ancient Christian texts.[24] At the same time, their punctilious concern for bureaucratic protocol, civic order, and the common good not infrequently frustrated the desires for uniformity expressed by zealous holy people and centralising emperors. As a result, they have represented a useful check on religious violence for those seeking to challenge the traditional view of a period marked by Christian intolerance.[25] In all these ways, work on religious change in late antiquity has proceeded from the premise that the late Roman state and its personnel were not normally amenable to the requests of churchmen and the demands of Christian commitment.

[19] See esp. Alan Cameron (2011), 187–205.
[20] See e.g. Salzman (2001); Rapp (2005), 172–207; Watts (2015), 149–220.
[21] Warner (2020), 273–78, at 277.
[22] For neat guesstimates of the personnel of the Roman state: see Heather (1994), 19; (1998), 189–90 on c. 400 CE; Kelly (2004), 111 on c. 500 CE. See also I. Wood (2018), 67, 79, on equivalent numbers of clerics and monks by c. 600.
[23] 23–26. [24] 24–25. [25] 27–28.

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In this sense, it has rather oddly reproduced the views of late ancient religious hardliners (both pagan and Christian).[26] For members of both groups, the distinctive ethical demands posed by the Bible could not be squared with the effective governance of empire. For the most strident proponents of Christian asceticism, political service was an inherently 'worldly' field of activity which true Christians had to give up. This sense of the incompatibility of Christian piety and political service – and the essential 'secularity' of imperial administration – still shapes our understanding of the state and political culture in late antiquity. And yet, as Gregory's injunctions to Julian suggest, contemporaries had other ways of thinking about the relationship between Christianity and political service – and not just that Christians had to stop doing it.

This book investigates how and why it mattered that Christians served in late and post-Roman political institutions and that their duties now potentially included the areas of administrative competence opened up by their rulers' patronage of Christian communities. It traces Christian expectations of these imperial and royal officials over the late fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries across the Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire and its successors. It pursues that question in three main ways. In Part I, I reconstruct the baseline assumptions regarding all who served rulers – whatever their precise forms of religious belief or practice – both by explicit regulations and by the implicit requirements of the state's institutional culture. In Part II, I explore what contemporaries expected of those in imperial or royal service who sought to present their authority, like that of the rulers they served, as legitimated by their own personal piety or even as a form of service to God. And in Part III, I consider the ways in which Christian officials were tangled up with specific ecclesiastical institutions, their authority figures, and their communities. In this introduction, I tie each of these analytical strands back to recent work on religious identity in late antiquity (in Sections I.3–5). Before doing so, I justify the chronological parameters of the book and the definition of the 'state' and 'political service' with which it proceeds (in Section I.2). All in all, this book seeks to fit an oddly neglected set of late ancient people and field of activity into the broader picture of Christianisation advanced in the last generation of scholarship. Its central contention is that those who served the state in late antiquity could be seen – indeed, could see themselves – as distinctly Christian authority figures, just as much as the emperors and kings whom they served, and the bishops, ascetics, and other holy people whom they governed.

[26] 23–25.

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## I.2 Serving the Christian State in Late Antiquity

This is a book about the Christian identities and entanglements of imperial and royal officials in late antiquity. It seeks, in the first place, to reconstruct contemporary expectations of what it meant to serve the state as a Christian. Its focus on the religious identities of imperial and royal officials has led to a self-professedly partial vision of late ancient government that requires some explanation. The office-holders considered in this book are defined by their direct relationship to late and post-Roman regimes. They serve in imperial or royal palaces, in central bureaux, and in the various strata of the provincial administration. Adopting this (theoretically!) simple definition of the state and its personnel has necessitated a pragmatic approach to the policing of various fuzzy conceptual boundaries (which only became fuzzier over this period): not least, between 'civilian' and 'military' competences, 'public' and 'private' agency, and 'state' and 'ecclesiastical' functions. It has also helped to define the chronological parameters of the study, which are bounded, at one end, by the emergence of a substantial presence of Christians in imperial service and, at the other, by the breakdown of a sense that civilian officials acted on behalf of public government structures that we might define as separate from the private, military, and ecclesiastical spheres. The framework of political service explored here should not be taken to represent a comprehensive mapping of power and its exercise in late antiquity. My strategic choice to adopt a narrow definition of the 'state', as opposed to the more expansive models now rightly prevalent in the study of this period, has the benefit of isolating particular strands of contemporary political thinking and practice in a manner that allows for systematic comparison. It is my contention that, across the Roman world between c. 370 and c. 600, we can see a common understanding of the character of a distinctly Christian form of political service. This shared cultural framework led to similar requirements, ideals, and expectations regarding Christian imperial and royal officials in East and West.

First: some missing persons. This book focuses on 'civil' administrators in imperial and royal service. It thus largely excludes military contexts and members of late and post-Roman armies. Considering the impact of religious change on the institutional context of the army would mean exploring problems that require separate study:[27] the practical liturgical

[27] On all this: esp. Tomlin (1998); Haensch (2004); Lee (2007), 176–211; Emion (2018); J. Wood (2021).

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arrangements for armies on the move,[28] the religious character of victory ideology,[29] the use of oaths,[30] and the ethics of killing and the potential for 'just' war.[31] Military officials do nevertheless feature when they are involved in church business,[32] affected by laws on correct religion within the state,[33] or used as a springboard for wider reflections on the nature of Christian 'service' (framed by the ubiquitous language of *militia*).[34] Similarly absent from this definition of public office are individuals who participated in structures of civic governance, whether formal town councils, or less formal groups of 'leading men' or 'notables'.[35] Membership of these local governing structures involved distinct dynamics around financial qualification and obligation, and contemporaries themselves distinguished service to city and empire: indeed, pursuit of an imperial post was seen as a means to escape onerous local duties.[36] The same rationale explains my exclusion of members of the Senate of Rome unless currently engaged as imperial or royal officials. The situation is different for its counterpart in Constantinople, whose significant overlap with the resident court and bureaucracy means that the actions of those simply described as 'senators' more directly reflected the practices and priorities of a ruling cadre.[37] Perhaps most surprisingly for some readers, ecclesiastical authority figures do not feature in this book as individuals serving the Christian state. For all sorts of reasons, bishops, priests, abbots, ascetics, and monks held a legitimate claim to be considered 'public' political actors in various late ancient contexts.[38] Numerous pre-existing studies have explored how contemporaries understood and contested the socio-political roles played by ecclesiastical authority figures and holy people; indeed, 'service' as a bishop or ascetic has often been taken as the natural context in which elite traditions of office-holding found Christian expression. I seek to capture the other side of this picture: the religious parameters of the role of Christians in service to 'secular' political institutions.

My exploration of Christian ideas of office-holding thus takes in a subset of the many different wielders of 'public' power in late antiquity. It also

[28] Mathisen (1997); Rance (2014).
[29] McCormick (1986), 100–11; Faber (2013); Puech (2018), 234–40.
[30] On which, see Wuk (forthcoming).
[31] E.g. Markus (1983); Iosif (2013); Burton (2017), 147–51.
[32] E.g. 86–88, 183, 199.
[33] E.g. 62, 83, 118.
[34] E.g. 169, 174, 178, 180–81.
[35] On the transition from the former to the latter, esp. Liebeschuetz (2001), esp. 104–68; Laniado (2002).
[36] See note 35 and Carrié (2018).
[37] Chapter 6, 215.
[38] For synthesis: esp. Liebeschuetz (2001), 137–67; Rapp (2005), 208–71; and note the important comments of Halfond (2019), 28–62.

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means a partial reversion to a hard distinction between 'public' and 'private'.[39] The agency of those employed in service of the state and in civic and ecclesiastical institutions by no means exhausts what could or should be called 'politics' in late antiquity. The household was central to late ancient constellations of power.[40] The domestic patterned the state itself: the centre of power, the imperial or royal palace, was a household centred on the ruler's family; government itself was conceived of, and sometimes functioned as, an extension of the position of the emperor or king as *paterfamilias*.[41] Recent work has rightly stressed the significance of elite households and the interdependence of 'public' and 'private' *mores* in how contemporaries thought about governance.[42] The authority of aristocratic landowners over their dependents intersected with that of the state over its subjects in numerous ways; for many rural inhabitants of the Roman world, these two forms of domination may well have been experienced together (as when the same bailiff collected tax and rent).[43] Contemporaries could understand Christian ideals to suffuse and recast the asymmetrical relationships that not only structured elite households but also helped to shape provincial societies around them.[44] In returning to the 'public' political agency of (predominantly) male householders, I do not seek to displace the *domus* as a *locus* for government. Indeed, my chapters on the entanglements of current imperial and royal officials with Christian institutions rely on previous work on the importance of the cultic activities of elite households and domestic patronage of clerics and ascetics.[45] Rather, I seek to situate the more narrowly 'public' careers of these elites within the wider strategies of Christian aristocratic adaptation and experimentation captured in recent work.

By making this a book about those contexts of formal office-holding, I have inevitably made it a book predominantly about men. The recent historiographical focus on the domestic sphere as a 'public' space and a context for the ordering of society has been driven, in part, by a desire to salvage female political agency. Exploration of the palace as a household

[39] Problems with this divide: e.g. Matthews (1975), 1–31; Cooper (2007a), 17–24; Bowes (2008), esp. 12–13.
[40] Esp. Cooper (2007a).
[41] Esp. Nelson (2004); Smith (2009); and see more broadly Kelly (1998); McCormick (2000); Davenport and McEvoy (2023c).
[42] Esp. Kelly (2004); Cooper (2007b); Corke-Webster (2019); Corke-Webster (2022).
[43] E.g. Grey (2011a), 200–201.
[44] E.g. Cooper (2007b); Bowes (2008), 125–88; Glancy (2011); Grey (2011b), 492–94, 506–7; Harper (2012), 209–14, 320–25, 345–48, 506–8; Sessa (2012); Cooper and Wood (2020).
[45] See esp. Chapters 6–8.

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has brought a better understanding of the extent (and limitations) of the authority of imperial and royal women.[46] Centring the elite *domus* has rehabilitated the Roman *matrona* as a figure of effectively public socio-political agency, not least when it came to Christian institutions and church politics.[47] These granular analyses of the roles of empresses, queens, and other *dominae* required a move beyond public administrative institutions. This is not to say that women did not serve in the political institutions that I consider here. They appear most notably in imperial and royal palaces, both in formal roles as functionaries (e.g. *cubiculariae*) and as part of the broader group of hangers-on who habituated the court.[48] That women could be included within contemporary definitions of office-holding is implied by occasions where rulers sought to regulate the religious beliefs and practices of those who served in their palaces. On various occasions, female attendants were amongst those punished for perceived heterodoxy.[49] I consider the roles of particular women in this book as and when they are included in this predominantly masculine discourse of office.[50] But it is notable that, for the most part, when the women of political influence highlighted in recent work acted on behalf of the church, their interventions were not conceptualised in such terms. In this sense, a book exploring the particular cultural configuration of Christianity and political service – as opposed to the development of Christian conceptions of governance more broadly – has to be a book largely about men. At the same time, the role of late ancient gender norms in shaping this study has a major analytical side benefit. The aristocratic men who pursued traditional public careers have tended to be overlooked in narratives of Christianisation that see new forms of piety and patronage as the recourse of women exploiting new possibilities for agency.[51] Close attention to the religious identities and activities of office-holders suggests that Christian piety could underpin the social prestige and public profile even of male aristocrats with access to more traditional forms of political agency.

This book treats the period from the last quarter of the fourth to the last quarter of the sixth century, with brief flashes back to the earlier fourth

[46] Classic studies: Nelson (1984), esp. 45–46; Nelson (2004), esp. 195–96. Useful recent surveys of late and post-Roman consorts: Busch (2015); (2023); Washington (2016); Vitiello (2017). And for an acute exploration of this central problem: Hillner (2022).

[47] See esp. Cooper (2007b); Kurdock (2007); Wilkinson (2015); Chin and Schroeder (2016).

[48] See now Davenport and McEvoy (2023b), esp. 4–7, 20–31; (2023a), 347–56; Rollinger and Viermann (2024), esp. 1–2, 7–9.

[49] See 93–94, 252.

[50] See e.g. Leyser (1998), 162.

[51] Classic studies (with notable critiques): Salzman (1989); Cooper (1992); and note the remarks of Harries (2013), 69–70.

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century.[52] The precise chronological parameters of individual chapters vary depending on the problem considered as well as political and ecclesiastical developments in different parts of the Roman world. Starting c. 370 makes sense in terms of the central questions of each part. This is the point at which late Roman regimes began largely to appoint Christians to serve the state and, just as importantly, to see a state staffed predominantly by Christians as an ideal.[53] The last quarter of the fourth century is when surviving texts begin to present developed reflections on the compatibility of Christian piety and office-holding.[54] It is also when those texts start to present public churchgoing as a regular part of imperial ceremonial.[55] Above all, the 'Theodosian era' of the late fourth century saw the flourishing of the various forms of Christian literature that describe the religious beliefs and practices of imperial and royal officials: most notably, letters, sermons, saints' lives, and church histories.[56] As with late Roman law, the sense of a step change under Theodosius I (r. 379–95) and his successors may be, in part, a product of uneven textual preservation.[57] It nevertheless makes sense to begin here, insofar as this is when we get to see a substantial population of Christian officials and surviving texts allow us to reconstruct expectations about what that meant.

The book considers contemporary expectations of Christian political service across the following two centuries over (almost) the whole Roman world. Its geographical scope has involved consulting modern scholarly editions of texts written in the main languages of Christian late antiquity: Latin, Greek, and Syriac, as well as Coptic in translation. I have explored these central problems through textual sources in a variety of genres: histories, laws, letters, saints' lives, sermons, theological treatises, and conciliar documents. Where relevant, I have also used forms of material evidence: inscriptions, mosaics, and lead seals.[58] The chronological scope means that the book considers not just the later Roman Empire but also its barbarian successors after the end of the western empire in the fifth century: most notably, the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, the Vandal

[52] For which, see Chapter 1, 48–56, and Chapter 8, 266–67.
[53] See 15; ideal: Chapter 1 (also showing the absence of this ideal c. 300–80 CE).
[54] See Chapter 4. [55] See 35–37.
[56] On the depiction of Christian officials in all these genres: Chapter 4. Theodosian era as critical: see e.g. Markus (1990), 19 ('watershed . . . in the religious history of Europe'); and see now Letteney (2023).
[57] E.g. Hunt (1993). For sophisticated accounts of the development and survival of texts in these genres: Vessey (2013); Sogno, Storin, and Watts (2016); Dupont et al. (2018); Van Nuffelen (2018); Corke-Webster and Gray (2020).
[58] On sources: see further, Chapter 4.

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kingdom in North Africa, the Burgundian kingdom in the Rhône valley, the Merovingian kingdoms across Gaul, and the Visigothic kingdom in South-West Gaul and Spain. These kingdoms saw considerable continuities in governance, political structures, and religious culture, which justify their inclusion alongside the continuing Eastern Roman Empire. As the following chapters demonstrate, this included continuities in the perception of how royal officials could be, and indeed needed to be, pious and/or orthodox Christians.[59] This is not to say that institutional structures and governing ideologies remained static through the various processes of conquest and settlement in the western provinces.[60] The establishment of these new rulers and warbands implied significant ongoing adaptations (often concealed by rhetorics of business as usual).[61] Yet contemporaries in all these contexts addressed and discussed agents of these regimes and their activities in similar terms to their predecessors and contemporaries under imperial rule. It does not make sense to separate Cassiodorus (c. 485–585) from John Vincomalus (fl. 451–64), Victor of Vita (fl. 480s) from John of Ephesus (c. 507–86), or the courts of Gundobad (r. 493/4–516) and Anastasius (r. 491–518).[62]

The book ends in the late sixth century with another historical conjunction. Moving into the early seventh century would mean reckoning with the profound transformations of state structures and political ideology in the Eastern Mediterranean wrought by consecutive Persian and Arab conquests.[63] A fundamental realignment is apparent even before the East Roman state began to reorganise itself in response to crisis. Work on both East and West has identified the years around 600 as a key moment in the reshaping of governance along various axes, with a renegotiation of the boundaries between 'public' and 'private',[64] 'civil' and 'military',[65] and

[59] See Chapter 2, 90–99; Chapter 5, 194–97; Chapter 7; Chapter 8, 287–92.

[60] Overarching surveys: Wickham (2005), 80–124, 144–50; Halsall (2007), 284–370. Recent accounts of specific kingdoms: Merrills and Miles (2010), 77–81; Conant (2012), 45–46, 143–46; Bjornlie (2016); Callander Murray (2016); Hen (2020); Sarti (2020).

[61] See esp. debates around the social reality behind the *ciuilitas* ideology of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic: e.g. Bjornlie (2013); (2014); Heather (2013), 52–102; Lafferty (2013); Heydemann (2016); Wiemer (2023), 130–79.

[62] See 87–90, 97, 111–14, 134–35, 193–97, 227.

[63] Byzantine reorganisation: e.g. Brubaker and Haldon (2011); Humphreys (2014); Haldon (2016). Early Islamic governance: e.g. the studies in Marsham (2020).

[64] Wickham (2005), 56–150.

[65] For critical studies of this process across the early middle ages, see now Bennett et al. (2021). Militarisation in West (with key shift from late sixth century): e.g. Heather (2000); (2010); Halsall (2004); (2007), 455–98; Wickham (2005), 80–124, 168–232 (in wider context of political and socio-economic change). Militarisation in East (with key shift from early seventh century): see Haldon (1993); Rance (2021) with helpful synthesis of previous literature.

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'secular' and 'ecclesiastical' authority.[66] This could still be seen as an arbitrary cut-off point; elsewhere in my work I have queried Robert Markus' notion of a 'closing down' of the secular in the age of Gregory the Great (bishop of Rome, 590–604).[67] These developments were already latent in the practical exercise of authority and ordering of society across late antiquity. Moreover, many of the processes highlighted here – the militarisation of governance and elite society, the ordinary implication of bishops in royal and urban governance, and the appropriation of the functions of the state by landed interests – were also significantly progressed in many parts of the West earlier in the sixth century and can be identified from the reign of Justinian (r. 527–65) in the East.[68] At the same time, questions of Christian identity and 'secular' public office can be pursued throughout the early middle ages.[69] My choice here again is largely strategic. The culmination of these processes by the end of the sixth century means it no longer makes sense to hold civilian officials analytically separate from other categories of political agent. The 'transformations of the year 600' produce a different landscape of Christian governance and new conceptions of the intersection between religious identity and 'public' office.[70]

If the geographical, chronological, and analytical scope of this book is broad, it is because the problems it seeks to tackle need to be approached in a holistic manner. This is not to say that the following chapters seek to be comprehensive. I have not tried to reproduce the 'religious' beliefs and practices of every attested imperial or royal official, or capture what every ruler, official, subject, bishop, or ascetic thought about Christians within the state. If I had tried to do so, you would not be reading this book (because I would still be writing it). My central organising principles throughout have been analytical: to identify what political institutions required of officials in Christian terms (Part I), to delineate the ways in which late ancient officials could understand their duties in the light of their Christian identities (Part II), and to isolate how entanglements with

[66] Classic statements: Averil Cameron (1979); Markus (1990). [67] Whelan (2021).

[68] Militarisation: see n. 65. Bishops in governance: n. 38. Landed aristocracy and 'privatisation' of government: see n. 64. On the (endlessly contested) questions of land and settlement in West: Halsall (2007), 422–54 remains the best starting point.

[69] See esp. O'Brien (2017); (2021); (2022); (2026). For parallel questions of lay morality and office-holding: Stone (2011).

[70] I take the phrase from the title of a much-awaited book by Guy Halsall. For changing notions of aristocratic status and office: T. S. Brown (1984); Salzman (2021), 282–84, 300–36 (on Italy); A. Jones (2009), 74–128 (on Gaul). See too O'Brien (2026); 143–212, 329–48 for a fundamental shift in conceptions of Christian kingship in the West c. 600 CE.

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Christian communities shaped their conduct in government (Part III). I have aimed to pursue problems and go where the sources are, as opposed to providing consistent geographical or chronological coverage. It is my contention that this topic benefits from – and indeed demands – this wide angle of approach. Previous work has tended to focus on individual authors, episodes, rulers, and kingdoms or regions. This is unsurprising given the fragmentary character of the sources for the religious identities of officials, which encourages a sense that the churchmen who wrote to and about specific attested office-holders were idiosyncratic in offering visions of Christian political service. Bringing together evidence from Gaul to Mesopotamia allows this book to develop a meaningful register of comparison through which to better contextualise individual sources, events, and political structures. The result is a series of frameworks through which to understand the intersection of religious identity and political service in different geographical and institutional contexts across this period.

## I.3 Appointments and Religious Identities

The century following the conversion of Constantine saw a fundamental modification to the late Roman state: official posts at all levels were increasingly and eventually overwhelmingly staffed by Christians. This change in the character of the emperor's advisors at court, subordinates in the central bureaucracy, and representatives in the provinces has been central to our understanding of the wider process of Christianisation in the later Roman Empire. Recovering the religious affiliations of high officials has been seen as a particularly fruitful means to track conversion to Christianity more generally, since these appointees represent many of the most visible of the empire's inhabitants, and something that at least passes for a controllable dataset.[71] Studies by Raban Von Haehling, Timothy Barnes, and Michele Salzman have attempted to reconstruct the religious affiliations of consuls, praetorian prefects, urban prefects, *magistri militum*, and proconsuls, amongst other posts. They have done so to quantify the spread of Christianity, not only within the empire's political institutions, but also the wider senatorial aristocracy, and perhaps even the general population.[72]

[71] Dataset: see e.g. Barnes (1989), 312; Salzman (2002), most explicitly at 6–10, 231–42; implications of this characterisation debated in Mathisen (2002); (2007); Salzman (2005).
[72] Von Haehling (1978); Barnes (1989); (1995); Salzman (2002).

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The basic parameters of this process are uncontested. Christians constituted a minority, albeit an increasingly visible one, within the court, army, and provincial administration in the last decades of the third century and the first decade of the fourth.[73] By the end of the fourth century, Christians seem to have formed a majority within the state. A wide consensus holds that political institutions were largely staffed by Christians in the last quarter of the fourth century and that there were far fewer non-Christians in the highest offices of the civil administration in the first half of the fifth century.[74] Where (sometimes heated) disagreement remains is over how to shape the contours of the period between the conversion of Constantine and the death of Theodosius I, and, in particular, where to place what the late Alan Cameron described as the 'tipping point' in this process.[75] For Barnes, we should envisage a sustained shift driven by the preferences of Constantine and his sons and only checked by a brief reversal under Julian (r. 361–63);[76] according to Von Haehling and Salzman, we should see a much slower and more piecemeal process, partly begun by Constantine, stalled in the middle decades of the fourth century, and only accelerated in the reigns of Gratian (r. 367–83) and Theodosius I. Salzman has also persuasively argued that this change was only indirectly a result of imperial preferences; it reflected a wider shift in the religious makeup of the elites from whom officials were drawn, as the result of a concatenation of social, cultural, and political factors bundled up with the Christianisation of the empire.[77]

These prosopographical studies have provided welcome nuance to sweeping generalisations regarding the impact of Christianisation on the late Roman state and its elites. They helpfully complicate monolithic (and sometimes hyperbolic) late ancient depictions of the religious policies of

[73] Christians in service to Diocletian and the Great Persecution: Clarke (2005), 648–50, 653, 655 (cf. 664 on Licinius' purge of Christians); Van Dam (2007), 6 n. 7; Digeser (2012), 1–5; Corcoran (2015), 72–73; Shin (2018), 43–55. Christians in the senatorial elite in this period: Eck (1971); Novak (1979), 286–306; Barnes (1995) 135–36.

[74] See Von Haehling (1978), Table VI; Salzman (2002), Table 4.3 and esp. 185–88; with Kahlos (2019), 3 n. 7 for c. 400 as the emerging consensus; cf. P. R. L. Brown (1961) and (implicitly) (2012), 31–52, 201–7, giving a similar shape to this process, though without the number crunching; Barnes (1995) arguing this occurred earlier (but without disputing this characterisation of the Theodosian era); and Alan Cameron (2011), 187–205 revisiting Von Haehling's attributions of paganism to fifth-century office-holders.

[75] Alan Cameron (2011), 185. Note Mathisen (2002), 263 and C. Jones (2014), 114 ('tipping point').

[76] For a high estimate of proportion of Christians appointed under Constantius II: Barnes (1989), 313–21; (1995), 138–47; followed (with significant reservations) by Heather and Moncur (2001), 57–59 and Alan Cameron (2011), 185–87 (at 185 for an earlier 'drift').

[77] See n. 74 and cf. Alan Cameron (2011), 184. Only indirectly: Salzman (2002), 194.

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individual emperors.[78] Perhaps ironically, these statistical studies have proven more successful in demonstrating the messiness of this process of religious change and the complexities of decisions around appointments than in bringing the clarity that tends to be associated with 'hard' numbers. As Cameron systematically argued in *The Last Pagans of Rome*, it is not obvious that the surviving prosopographical data or the methods used to process it can adjudicate competing visions of relative change.[79] In the first place, the 'dataset' presents a frustratingly partial picture. Von Haehling identified 584 office-holders between 324 and 450 in the East and 455 in the West: of these, he considered the religious affiliations of 306 unknowable.[80] The percentages of Christian or pagan appointees listed for each emperor in neatly tabulated form are thus only a sub-set of a much greater number of consuls, prefects, *magistri militum*, and proconsuls whose affiliations we simply cannot reconstruct. The criteria deployed to ascertain the affiliations of those considered identifiable are themselves often questionable, based on fleeting references in single sources and official actions that do not necessarily carry information about the person themselves.[81] Most fundamentally, the ascription of fixed and monolithic identities on the basis of individual actions does not account for the ambiguities of religious belonging in the middle decades of the fourth century.[82] Numerous recent studies have sought in differing ways to encapsulate the wide middle ground of (in particular) elite individuals whose choices did not map onto fixed and discrete identities and communities; who sometimes deliberately obfuscated their religious attitudes and entanglements; and who (fundamentally) did not see differing relationships to a god or gods as worthy of comment or politic to scrutinise too

[78] Von Haehling (1978), 10; Lenski (2002), 211–18, at 214–16 on Valens and Valentinian; Errington (2006), esp. 258–59 on Theodosius I.

[79] Alan Cameron (2011), 177–85 and see further, Chapter 3, 208–10.

[80] Von Haehling (1978), 502. It is worth noting that Von Haehling's precise numbers and categories have been repeatedly challenged in the studies cited above; I use them here simply to illustrate the scale of the problem.

[81] For example, Barnes (1989) stakes his case for a deliberate policy of appointing Christians on the part of Constantius II, in part, on assumptions that involvement in administrative business pertaining to churchmen required a Christian official, that officials with Christian relatives would be Christians, that any official with marriage links to the imperial dynasty must have been Christian, and even that individuals previously appointed as prefects or proconsuls by Constantine must have been Christian (unless otherwise stated). See the queries and critiques of Pietri and Noetlichs in the discussion at 340–42; Salzman (2002), 236–38; Moser (2018), 92–94, 112; and compare Dagron (1974), 291–93; Von Haehling (1978), 28–31.

[82] See also Cribiore (2013), 169–70.

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closely.[83] The neat categorisation of individuals as 'Christians' and 'pagans' inevitably flattens the complexities, not only of the religious makeup of the fourth-century empire's service aristocracy, but also of the nature, quality and treatment of the information available to the emperor and his subordinates regarding the religious affiliations of elite individuals. Greater (though still far from perfect) clarity around both the makeup of the senatorial elite and the openly stated requirements of emperors emerges only at the end of this process, with the almost exclusively Christian appointments of the heirs of Theodosius I and the more robust legislation on religious uniformity with which it harmonised.[84]

Reducing these appointees to 'Christians' or 'pagans' inevitably simplifies the forms that their identities took and the rationales that motivated their selection. It also obscures the events that led to their appointment, which did not necessarily revolve around (or even feature) the emperor himself. As Michele Salzman has rightly stressed, appointments were not made in isolation; they were, at every level of the state, the product of the complex networks of patronage that criss-crossed the late Roman world and structured the lives of its elite inhabitants.[85] Officials gained their positions through a 'bewildering variety of tactics', including but not limited to connections at court, favours, and payments, sometimes at legally sanctioned prices.[86] Provincial and civic grandees submitted reports on the conduct of governors and welcomed or discouraged their reappointment in the future: a practice that emperors encouraged.[87] Grammarians and rhetoricians produced letters for their pupils as they made their first steps along the *cursus honorum*.[88] Fourth-century letter collections are full of such recommendations for postings as these epistolographers (or their posthumous editors) sought to burnish their reputations as generous patrons. These letters stressed, not just the relevant capabilities of those put forward, but also, where appropriate, their lineage,

[83] Kahlos (2007), 26–34; Sandwell (2007); Alan Cameron (2011), 176–77, Rebillard (2012), 1–5, 86–91, and esp. 94–95; Kelly (2015), 148–51; Gassman (2025).
[84] On that legislation: Chapter 1; continuing ambiguities, Chapters 2–3.
[85] For all the following: Salzman (2002), 114–16, 187–88, 193–94.
[86] For the most comprehensive account of the dynamics of appointment, see Kelly (2004), with quotation at 212; cf. 228: 'conflicting and ambiguous criteria: seniority, merit, money, inheritance, imperial favor'.
[87] Harries (1999), 153–71, at 154–55 for specific encouragement; Slootjes (2006), 77–104; Schor (2011), 145–46; and Meyer-Zwiffelhoffer (2011).
[88] Kaster (1988), 201–30; Cribiore (2007), 83–106.

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prestige, and connections.[89] Religious affiliation rarely looms as a determining factor when the likes of Libanius (314–93) and Symmachus (345–402) make the case for an individual's suitability for appointment. Nor does it seem to have determined the socio-political networks through whose careful cultivation careers were made: Libanius and Symmachus advocated the interests of, and sought favours from, both Christians and pagans.[90] It is such considerations that have led so many historians of the later Roman Empire to identify *paideia* as a cohesive force.[91] If the religious affiliations of fourth-century officials are so frequently uncertain – and so rarely discussed as grounds for appointment – it is a result of an elite social milieu only faintly impacted by religious loyalties and dominated by concerns that cut across them. Basic demands of honour and patronage most obviously structured the networks that brought about their appointments and framed the expectations of the subjects, clients, and superiors who might help to advance their careers in future.

The fluidity of elite religious identities in the fourth century calls into question any attempt (however sophisticated) to quantify the Christianisation of the empire's service aristocracy through the counting of Christians and pagans. In terms of the impact of religious change on the late Roman state, it challenges an even more fundamental assumption. While considerable attention has been devoted to questions of the speed and timing of this shift in the religious affiliations of the state's personnel, there has been less discussion of what it meant in practice. The premise of prosopographical studies is that identifying office-holders as 'certain' or 'probable' Christians or pagans captures a meaningful change in the empire's political institutions. Yet the last generation of scholarship on religious identity in late antiquity has demonstrated that the mere fact of an individual's attested affiliation does not tell us – and, more critically, did not tell contemporaries – very much about their precise beliefs, attitudes, or chosen forms of behaviour.[92] There were many ways to be Christian, pagan, Jewish – or whatever else – in late antiquity; a Christian official did not necessarily bring with them distinctive ethical frameworks, social

[89] The distinction drawn here is often blurred, as these capabilities are portrayed as the innate qualities of men of birth and social status and intrinsic qualification for appointment to posts characterised as 'honours' or 'dignities', see esp. Matthews (1975), 9–12; Lendon (1997), 176–236.

[90] Symmachus: Matthews (1974), 87–91; Salzman (2006), 362. Libanius: Sandwell (2007), esp. 111–13, 231–39, at 236–37; Cribiore (2013), esp. 155–60; with important qualification by Van Nuffelen (2014), 297–99.

[91] Kaster (1988), 23–30; P. R. L. Brown (1992), 35–70; (1995), esp. 37–49; Watts (2006), 1–8; and papers in Van Nuffelen and Van Hoof (2015).

[92] Cf. Barnes (1989), 312 n. 39.

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networks, or modes of governing tied to their religious membership. As a result, we cannot take for granted that, by appointing Christians to positions within the empire's civil administration, regimes and their subordinates would change the character of the state – or, for that matter, sought actively to do so. Given the continuing hold of traditional ways of thinking about governance, office, and status on the part of governing elites and subjects alike,[93] the major impetus for such a change had to come from those regimes, through a commitment to police the beliefs and behaviours of their subordinates. Instead of worrying about how many Christians served these regimes, we should instead concern ourselves with why their being Christian was thought to be significant. The ways in which this change of personnel was understood to alter late ancient governance have to be investigated, rather than simply assumed.

Part I of this book will consider why, when, and how it mattered to imperial regimes in late antiquity that their subordinates were (orthodox) Christians. In so doing, it will begin to consider the political environment in which individual office-holders operated: how the expectations, requirements, and broader institutional culture of late and post-Roman states set the parameters for their attitudes and behaviours as Christian officials. Chapter 1 will argue that the religious affiliation of their representatives as a collective was rarely portrayed as a concern for emperors in the first eight decades after the conversion of Constantine. Such an absence seems particularly surprising given the recent precedent of Tetrarchic concerns regarding the immorality, irrationality, and polluting presence of Christian courtiers.[94] Even as the imperial court, central bureaucracy, and provincial administration were staffed by an increasing number of Christians in the reigns of Constantine's successors, religious affiliation does not seem to have been a determinative factor in appointments at any level before the reign of Theodosius I. It has long been appreciated that religious affiliation was neither a sole nor a sufficient criterion for office-holding – and indeed, this remained the case well beyond the fourth century.[95] The absence of reports of preferences for co-religionists either in general terms or in relation to specific appointments – with the exceptions of Constantine and Julian – should give further pause.[96] I will argue that the conciliatory and piecemeal approach of mid-fourth-century regimes to issues of

[93] Powerfully evoked by Kaster (1988), 13–14. [94] Chapter 1, 48–50.
[95] E.g. Tomlin (1998), 37–39; Salzman (2002) 178–79, 188–97; 114–16.
[96] I use 'co-religionist' here to denote individuals understood to share (in whatever terms were understood as crucial at a given moment) the religious beliefs or practices of the emperor. By this term I do not intend to exaggerate the unity or collective identity of adherents to the gods in the

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religious pluralism meant that uniformity was only rarely articulated as even an aspiration for the state itself. Efforts to police the religious behaviour and affiliations of the emperor's subordinates become apparent only in the reign of Theodosius, as part of a broader trend towards the exclusion of those who participated in heterodox and non-Christian communities and practices from aspects of Roman public life. This absence underlines the extent to which the religious makeup of the late Roman state's political institutions mirrored that of the senatorial and curial elites that supplied their personnel. It was only when those elites became predominantly Christian that religious uniformity within the state became a feasible goal for individual regimes.[97] In that sense, for the Christianisation of the Roman state, the conversion of the Roman aristocracy only represents the beginning of the story.

Moving on from the putative affiliations of appointees to the concerns of regimes regarding religious uniformity thus requires a shift of chronological focus. Studies framed around those affiliations have inevitably tended to peter out in the first decades of the fifth century, since there are few visibly attested pagans left to explain.[98] Even as the space previously accorded to the traditional public cults of the Greco-Roman world was effectively shut down, the religious pluralism that had marked the senatorial and curial elites who supplied the personnel of the fourth-century imperial state did not go away. Indeed, from the point of view of late ancient regimes, the problem of potential non-conformity would only be exacerbated by shifting and contested definitions of Christian orthodoxy and increasingly capacious definitions of what constituted 'pagan' behaviour and thought. Chapter 1 (and this book as a whole) thus pursues this problem further into late antiquity, by considering the ways late and post-Roman regimes saw the religious affiliation of their subordinates mattering in the fifth and sixth centuries. Theodosius I's successors

pre-Constantinian empire and under Julian – nor, for that matter, of Christians under Constantine and his successors.

[97] Salzman (2002), 194–97, and cf. Von Haehling (1978), 603.

[98] For the fifth century: Von Haehling (1982); Noethlichs (1998), 20; C. Jones (2014), 107–25 (with a wider angle). Petering out: Von Haehling (1978) ending in 450/5, though see 590–608 for notable analytical focus on heterodox Christian and pagan appointees from 395 onwards; Alan Cameron (2011), 187–205 seeks to rebut these identifications of pagans; Salzman (2002), ending in 423 (see 235); Barnes (1989); (1995) up to 361 and Barnes and Westall (1991) working back from era of Theodosius I; Humphries (2018), 78 for persistence of pagan officials into late fourth century and beyond as a 'peculiarity'; cf. Averil Cameron (2015a), 11–12 for the problem of attaching an end-point to Christianisation. New impetus for this question is provided by debates over changes in political ideology and religious uniformity under Justinian: esp. Whitby (1991); Maas (1992); Kaldellis (2003); Kaldellis (2004); Meier (2003), 202–7, 298–302; Alan Cameron (2016a).

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promulgated increasingly generalising laws that sought to exclude heretics, pagans, Jews, and Samaritans from specific departments of the imperial state, as part of wider efforts to bestow the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship only upon orthodox Christians. With these laws, the correct religion of the emperor's subordinates as a collective comes into view as an object of imperial concern. Their provisions acted as a model and precedent whenever fifth- and sixth-century regimes in East and West sought to reassert religious uniformity after the 'discovery' of non-conformists within the palace or wider administration. Such enactments nevertheless represented piecemeal and retroactive responses to the problem of ongoing religious pluralism: individuals or groups drummed out when they were alleged to have engaged in illicit practices. Eastern Roman emperors in the late fifth and early sixth centuries went further by introducing positive, pre-emptive requirements to demonstrate (orthodox) Christianity at the point of entry into office. The impact of these demands for proof of baptism, oaths, and witnesses to orthodoxy can be seen in the changing character of those accused of crypto-paganism in sixth-century Constantinople. That it was better to appoint co-religionists was likely a basic assumption for late ancient political actors. How this notion was conceived of and acted upon evolved considerably across the fourth to sixth centuries: from a matter of individual preference, patronage, and promotion; to a subject of systemic concern, if only in the retrospective exclusion of the members of specified sects; to a generic entry level requirement (at least in sixth-century Constantinople). These shifting mentalities suggest that demands for religious uniformity within the state were not simply the logical extension of Christian intolerance and Roman political norms but the product and indeed the cause of specific cultural shifts within fifth- and sixth-century political institutions.

Of course, political institutions remained a site for religious diversity across the fifth and sixth centuries. This continued diversity stemmed, in part, from the form that their desired Christian uniformity took. Chapter 2 shows how the pursuit of doctrinal and ecclesiastical consensus led to more flexible notions of sufficient administrative conformity in both East and West. The significant implication of Constantinopolitan regimes in the new Christological disputes that split the churches of the Eastern Mediterranean rarely led to the identification and exclusion of Christian non-conformists within the imperial state. The recurring pursuit of a broad-ranging consensus within the church – and the personal and institutional flexibility that such a policy required – seems to have turned attention away from the personal religious affiliations of appointees (which

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were often tricky to pin down). Eastern regimes seem instead to have sought a public conformity to the emperor's religious policies and his current formulation of orthodoxy. Similar concerns are evident in the post-imperial West, where the installation of Homoian ('Arian') kings and their warbands held the potential to reopen the Trinitarian debates of the previous century. In Vandal Africa, the efforts of the Hasding dynasty to ensure (their) orthodoxy included repeated proscriptions of 'Homoousian' (that is, Nicene) Christians in palace and administration. Elsewhere in the late fifth- and sixth-century West, there is a notable absence of such laws, even as earlier prohibitions regarding Jews, Manichaeans, and pagans were repeated in law codes and conciliar canons. The need to integrate provincial Roman aristocrats into the new power-sharing arrangements seems to have led to more conciliatory approaches to what could have been seen as a clear-cut issue of orthodoxy and heresy. Just as Eastern emperors often sought to treat supporters and opponents of Chalcedon alike as participants in the imperial church, so too Burgundian, Ostrogothic, and Visigothic kings patronised representatives of the 'other church' or 'other communion'. Decisively Christian rulers could continue to allow members of different ecclesiastical factions and even separate churches to serve them, so long as those divergent strands of thought and rival institutions could be contained within their (capacious) definitions of legitimate Christianity.

If religious diversity marked the personnel of imperial and royal administration it was, in part, a result of the continuing ambiguity and recurring flexibility of Christian orthodoxy. The limits of Christian uniformity within state structures could also stem from the pragmatic acceptance of what was, at least at first glance, even more profound religious difference. Officials considered by contemporaries as 'heretics', 'pagans', Jews, and Samaritans continued to serve in the political institutions of the fifth- and sixth-century Mediterranean. These individuals have been the subject of considerable scholarly interest as a means of gauging the status of religious 'minorities' and charting the practical and philosophical limits of intolerance in a Christian empire. Taking these reports as a starting point, Chapter 3 sets attempts to ensure religious uniformity in the state within the wider priorities of imperial and post-imperial regimes. Contemporary accounts of the terms of office of these religious 'non-conformists' suggest that rulers could make exceptions on the basis of loyalty and expertise; on the flipside, those office-holders subject to punishment were often singled out because of political disfavour or factional rivalry. Yet I argue that this acceptance of continued religious pluralism was not simply the result of a

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hard-headed political mindset: rulers turning a blind eye to the implications of their own laws and self-presentation. A principal justification for laws against pagans, heretics, and Jews was their capacity to use their position of authority to block the ruler's religious policies and inflict harm upon Christians. The implication is that those who did not act so obviously on the basis of their own religious affiliations were less likely to be accused by their subjects, suspected by their colleagues, or fall foul of their superiors. In this sense, regimes could seek a Christian state while employing those they or their contemporaries might consider to be heretics or non-Christians. Tracing the expectations of regimes regarding the religious affiliations of their appointees and their engagement with what might be termed 'imperial' or 'royal' Christianity thus significantly complicates an assumption of a preference for co-religionists waived in exceptional circumstances. The presence of 'heretics', 'pagans', Jews, and Samaritans within late and post-Roman bureaucracies has most commonly been used to counteract a too complacent sense of a straightforwardly Christian Roman Empire in late antiquity. It is the contention of Part I of this book that the discourse around their continued involvement in political institutions shows more clearly the precise manner in which those institutions were meant to be Christian in the fifth and sixth centuries.

## I.4 Denial of Service?

For much of late antiquity, imperial and post-imperial regimes and political institutions demanded remarkably limited religious requirements from their appointees. Contemporaries nevertheless saw the potential that the Christian identities of office-holders would be significant for their conduct in government. These perceptions of Christian office-holding have often been passed over, and it is easy to see why. There is no straightforward archive or single genre of literature that can be used to explore how administrators understood the relationship between their religious identities and their authority. Canonical texts on governance written by administrators generally adopt a classicising (and largely religiously neutral) frame of reference. As a result, we must turn to discussions of their beliefs and attitudes in the writings of their contemporaries: most notably, those of clerics and ascetics. First impressions are similarly unpromising. Late ancient writers frequently argued that Christian commitment was not compatible with a traditional public career.[99] On the one hand, more

[99] See e.g. Salzman (2005), 130–34.

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traditionally minded representatives of the state and aristocracy (both pagan and Christian) could see the putative ethical demands on Christians as a problem. The emperor Julian is said to have banned Christians from governorships because the commandment 'thou shalt not kill' might prevent them ordering executions.[100] Along similar lines, the early fifth-century senatorial aristocrat Rufinus Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus was overheard at a dinner party stating that New Testament maxims like 'turn the other cheek' were not 'appropriate to the customs of the *res publica*'.[101] One of the many reasons for the visibility of adult baptism in this period was precisely a concern amongst those engaged in public life that they would be forced to act in sinful ways after they had had their sins washed clean.[102] On the other hand, ascetically minded Christians thought that a life of piety required elite men to give up political service. This was the narrative framework of any number of stories of conversion, in which promising careers within the state and in the adjacent fields of law and rhetoric were cut short by an irrevocable moment of renunciation.[103] In this context, the ideal conduct of bishops, ascetics, and martyrs was frequently presented as a superior – perhaps even the one true – form of 'service' (*militia*): that which they owed to their heavenly 'king'.[104] The famous late fourth-century senatorial dropout Meropius Pontius Anicius Paulinus (c. 354–431) articulated the issue in particularly sharp terms, when writing to try to persuade one Crispinianus that a political career was a bad idea. Paulinus reminded him that 'as Scripture says, no-one should serve two masters'.[105] Paulinus spoke from experience: he had become something of a poster boy amongst elite Christians (and a cautionary tale for senatorial families), having renounced both wealth and a public career, which had included governorships and the consulate.[106] Of course, even then this transition was potentially fraught: various fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century church councils sought to prohibit former imperial officials from attaining certain grades of the priesthood.[107] These bans principally resulted from the complicity of administrators in the quotidian violence of the imperial state. Ubiquitous stories of persecution

[100] Ruf. *HE* 10.33; Soc. *HE* 3.13. [101] Aug. *Ep.* 136.2; see 171–72.
[102] E.g. A. H. M. Jones (1964), I 110; P. R. L. Brown (2000), 99; Pignot (2016).
[103] To name just a few famous examples, see Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.*; Aug. *Conf.*; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.*; Zach. *V. Sev.*
[104] See now Warner (2020). [105] Paulinus, *Ep.* 25*.2. See further, 141–42.
[106] On Paulinus' fame, see esp. Trout (1999), 1–22; Conybeare (2000), 1–18; P. R. L. Brown (2012), 208–40.
[107] E.g. MacMullen (1988), 153–54; Salzman (2005), 132–33; Lee (2007), 187–88; Iosif (2013), 287–303.

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acted as a constant reminder to Christians that this violence had been, and potentially still could be, inflicted by imperial and royal officials on their co-religionists.[108] Like property, family, and sexual activity, office-holding could be seen as a part of 'secular' life that committed Christians had to give up.

In the light of these unpromising discursive frameworks, Christian political service might seem a contradiction in terms. Yet sharp antitheses between 'worldly' and 'heavenly' loyalties represent just one approach that contemporaries took to the problem of Christians in service to the state. In reconstructing these alternative schemas, I take inspiration from several decades of work that has fundamentally rethought the relationship between Christianity and aristocratic culture in late antiquity. The key point of departure is a classic article from 1961, in which Peter Brown charted the 'drift' of the late Roman aristocracy into a 'respectable Christianity'.[109] Brown pointed out that confident pronouncements of an inevitable opposition between Christianity and the senatorial elite stemmed in large part from over-reliance on a 'peculiar current in Christianity'.[110] Our understanding of this process of religious change is mediated by a group of ascetic observers who sought to define the terms of an appropriately Christian lifestyle in contrast to the traditional cultural values of a (stereotypically pagan) aristocracy. In fact, the conversion of the late Roman elite both depended upon, and helped to encourage, forms of Christian thought and practice more conducive to traditional aristocratic norms. Indeed, close attention to the texts of the ascetic writers highlighted by Brown has shown how they could adopt those very cultural values in an attempt to persuade their aristocratic patrons to pursue Christian commitment.[111] Studies by the likes of Michele Salzman, Kate Cooper, Kim Bowes, Tina Sessa, and Kate Wilkinson have used these advice texts to sketch the distinctive perspectives of elite Christians with respect to their activities in the domestic sphere. They have reconsidered how these pious aristocrats likely thought about property, patronage, marriage, and sexual ethics.[112] And yet, barring important studies of individual texts by Kate Cooper and Claudia Rapp, this approach has yet to be applied to imperial

[108] See esp. Shaw (1996); (2011); Castelli (2004); Grig (2004); Gaddis (2005); Sizgorich (2009); Fournier and Mayer (2019).
[109] P. R. L. Brown (1961), 9. [110] P. R. L. Brown (1961), 5.
[111] For the Roman senatorial aristocracy, see esp. Curran (2000), 260–320; Salzman (2001); (2002), 200–19.
[112] Cooper (2007b); Bowes (2008); P. R. L. Brown (2012); Sessa (2012); Wilkinson (2015).

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or royal office-holding.[113] The possibilities are suggested by Jonathan Warner's recent PhD dissertation, in which he has offered a sophisticated exploration of the redeployment by Paulinus, Ambrose (bishop of Milan, 374–97), Jerome (c. 347–420) and Augustine (c. 354–430) of notions of *militia* to encourage government officials to increased Christian commitment.[114] It is my contention that a much broader array of analogous texts addressed to aristocrats engaged in political service provide us access to how Christian officials might have wished their authority to be presented.

I do not mean to suggest that Christian ideas of political service have gone totally unnoticed. I build on numerous studies of individual authors and texts that have explored how clerics and ascetics wrote to, and about, imperial officials.[115] Attempts to capture the political thinking of these church fathers sometimes pull in texts written to and about courtiers, generals, and governors. Work on episcopal and ascetic letter writers has emphasised how savvy networkers praised the virtuous conduct of correspondents in imperial administration and appealed to their cultural values, so as to cultivate, maintain, and activate influential patrons. It has also shown how, with the right addressee, churchmen would bring to bear distinctly Christian ethical demands in petitions, orations, and admonitions. As Philip Rousseau put it in characterising the patronage strategies of Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–78), 'Those appealed to in the cause of some judicial or administrative issue ... were approached just as often (how could it be otherwise, in an increasingly Christian society?) within the content of religious expectations and demands.'[116] Jamie Kreiner, Rafał Kosiński, and Meaghan McEvoy have likewise tracked the surprisingly positive accounts of political grandees within Merovingian and Constantinopolitan saints' lives.[117] All of these studies have highlighted various aspects of a late ancient Christian interpretation of political service as they feature in the thought and rhetoric of individual authors and texts. They use them better to place the bishop, cleric, or ascetic who articulated them, whether it is to sketch their view of empire, locate them within wider networks, or identify the strategies they used to make their authority legible within late Roman society. Part II of this book demonstrates that Christian authors across the fourth to sixth centuries made repeated recourse to a common set of biblical exempla, providential concepts, and ethical frameworks. Set in this context, the articulation of such ideas is not

[113] Rapp (2001) on Palladius; Cooper (2007b), 31–37 on Ferrandus.
[114] Warner (2020), 259–316. [115] See Chapter 4. [116] Rousseau (1994), 167.
[117] Kreiner (2014); Kosiński (2016); McEvoy (2022).

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simply the result of idiosyncratic theorising, pragmatic adaptation, or shrewd lobbying. When Augustine, Basil, or Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–late 450s/60s) deployed Christian ideas of political service, they spoke to aspects of a shared late ancient political culture.

Recent work has been happier to see claims about the religious identities of officials as reflections of the strategies of individual bishops rather than attitudes that might have been prevalent within the state itself. Important studies have repeatedly emphasised the continued hold of 'secular' ways of thinking about governance amongst those who served late ancient political institutions.[118] This sense of the distance between the attitudes of clerics and elites in political service has been critical to what has become the new consensus on the character of religious change 'on the ground'. A more robust sense of the (limited) purchase of ecclesiastical authority on the agency of central and provincial administrators has helped to qualify maximalist accounts of the 'rise of the bishop'.[119] Work on the letters of Augustine (in particular) has wound back idealistic accounts of the impact of his political thought on provincial administration in late Roman Africa.[120] The gulfs in social status and everyday priorities between bishop and governor have led Neil McLynn and Brent Shaw to stress the likely indifference of many of the bishop of Hippo's correspondents, both to his requests for the application (or not) of the coercive force of the state to Donatists and pagans and to the pastoral admonitions in which he packaged them.[121] Augustine's frustrations have formed part of a necessary corrective to traditional ideas of late antiquity as a period defined by religious violence.[122] Imperial officials are frequently positioned by contemporaries as obstacles in the path of their Christianising agendas, whether it is emperors complaining that governors did not enforce laws on religious uniformity, crowds demanding the destruction of statues and temples, or bishops lamenting the indifference of agents of state to their petitions. Recent work has thus characterised the 'robustly secular' mindsets of late Roman aristocrats in political service as a brake on the intolerant (and socially disruptive) agendas of agents of Christianisation.[123]

[118] E.g. P. R. L. Brown (2012), 377, 380–84, 451–52, 529; Watts (2015), 149–220.
[119] On which, see (in general): Liebeschuetz (2001), 137–67. Limited authority in specific cases: Van Dam (2003), 77–94; McLynn (2013) on Gregory of Nazianzus; Liebeschuetz (1986); Allen (2011); de Francisco Heredero (2017) on Synesius of Cyrene.
[120] For useful sketches of various positions, see Kaufman (2003); (2009).
[121] McLynn (1999); Shaw (2011), 195–206, 499–508; (2015).
[122] Recently revived by Nixey (2017), see Kahlos (2019) for direct rebuttal.
[123] Phrase: P. R. L. Brown (2012), 383. Positioning e.g. P. R. L. Brown (1995), 38–54; Hahn (2004), 285–91; Meyer-Zwiffelhoffer (2011); Shaw (2011), 195–206, 499–508; Magalhães de Oliveira (2012), esp. 273–74; Kahlos (2019), 54–56.

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I do not seek to dispute this characterisation of the divergent interests of imperial and royal officials from the clerics and ascetics who sought to capture their authority. Provincial governors, courtiers, and generals often seem to have been more worried about tax income, urban unrest, or their future career prospects than the strict application of religious uniformity. Rather, I want to suggest that it is useful to detach the religious identities and attitudes of those involved in late ancient governance from their application of *raison d'état*. The prioritisation of peace and order did not make officials insufficiently Christian; on other occasions, the emperors, bishops, ascetics, and ordinary Christians who bemoaned their inactivity made the same choices.[124] Defusing religious conflict often required imperial administrators to possess expertise in Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical culture.[125] Officials could articulate their profound concern for their souls while in office, even as they quibbled with, side-stepped, or rejected the petitions of bishops.[126] As Caroline Humfress has shown in her studies of anti-heretical legislation, agents of the late Roman state had their own, distinctive ways of thinking about the implications of Christian ideology and the alignment (or not) between correct religion and the common good.[127] In this context, we should separate their responses to particular requests from their wider sense of their role within the state. Being a divinely supported and piously Christian political actor did not necessarily mean doing what a particular churchman told you to do. On the contrary: such providential rhetoric was used not only for brusque admonition but also as a persuasive strategy. Episcopal and ascetic petitioners clearly thought some officials would be more likely to fulfil requests articulated in these terms. In so doing, they suggest that those within the state were keen to have their authority presented in this way – whatever actions they eventually took regarding definitions of orthodoxy or the tax affairs of monks.

Of course, portrayals of late ancient administrators as indifferent or even suspicious regarding the demands of Christian commitment draw strength from many of the most influential late ancient texts on government written by imperial and royal officials. The likes of Boethius, Cassiodorus, John Lydus, and the anonymous author of the *Dialogue on Political Science* characterised the ethical administrator in terms of Neoplatonic philosophy

[124] Kahlos (2019), 27–82 for good recent overview.
[125] See Whelan (forthcoming a); (forthcoming b).
[126] See 134–37, 191, 198–99, 284–86.
[127] Esp. Humfress (2018).

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and classical ideals of the statesman.[128] The classicising frame of reference in these texts (and many others like them) has been interpreted in different ways as part of the wider historiographical concerns of different parts of the fifth- and sixth-century Roman world. In the Eastern Empire, it has been seen as a vehicle for subversive thinking and oppositional networks amongst the elites of Constantinople, especially in the age of Justinian. Anthony Kaldellis, Peter Sarris, Shane Bjornlie, and Marion Kruse portray classicising political discourse as a means to demonstrate dissent, not only towards Justinian's policies but also the wider Christian ideological framework in which his regime packaged them.[129] For historians of the post-imperial West, by contrast, such texts have helped to explain the particular forms of mutual accommodation reached between the new rulers and their elite subjects. The traditional notions of government by educated gentlemen articulated by Gallo-Roman, Italo-Roman, and Romano-African elites are deployed as proof of the continued significance of 'Romanness' and the ideals and practices of imperial governance in the successor kingdoms.[130] Once again, this sense of the dominant cultural norms in the late (and post-) Roman bureaucracy captures only part of the picture. Post-Roman kings were equally keen to portray themselves as ideal rulers according to Christian standards.[131] At the same time, the relationship between 'Christian' and 'classical' conceptions of government and the intellectuals who articulated them in sixth-century Constantinople was likely rather less freighted than some of the more alarmist pictures of Justinianic autocracy might suggest.[132] Above all, as I show below, sixth-century officials in both East and West conformed to, and made use of, these new resources of Christian ruler ideology as part of their efforts to legitimise their authority.[133]

Part II of this book seeks to capture the ways in which Christian piety was understood to be compatible with, advantageous to, and potentially even necessary for, political service. This is not to suggest that all officials thought these two forms of commitment could be combined or sought to

[128] Boethius, *Cons. Phil.*; Cass. *Var.*; John Lydus, *De mag.*; *Dial. Pol.* On these texts, see esp. Averil Cameron (1985), 242–60; Maas (1986); (1992); (2003); Kaldellis (2004), 94–164; Kelly (2004), 9–104; Pazdernik (2005); Bjornlie (2013); Schmidt-Hofner (2021); Hassall (forthcoming).

[129] Kaldellis (2004); Sarris (2006), 205–8, 221; Bjornlie (2013), 48–123; Kruse (2019).

[130] Cassiodorus and Ennodius in Italy: esp. Vitiello (2006); Arnold (2014); Heydemann (2016). Sidonius in Gaul: esp. Kitchen (2010); Mratschek (2020) (with a sweep of previous literature). Classicising poets in North Africa: esp. Merrills (2004a); Miles (2005); Merrills and Miles (2010), 204–27; and, in general, Conant (2012).

[131] O'Brien (2026); (forthcoming); and see the Conclusion for a return to this point.

[132] Hassall (forthcoming).

[133] See Chapter 5, 194–202.

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do so. Traditional views of the science of government remained prevalent within the state, just as many contemporaries continued to think that pious devotion required a retreat from public life or pursuit of new forms of office in the church. As Michael Maas and Alan Cameron have rightly stressed, classicising visions of government were also articulated by individuals whom we know to have been Christians.[134] This is hardly surprising when bishops, monks, and otherwise doctrinaire emperors still presented their ideal behaviour in terms familiar from Plato and Cicero. It has long been recognised that late ancient Christian depictions of emperors appropriated neo-Platonic ideas of divinised political agency.[135] More recently, Richard Flower has demonstrated how fourth-century Christian writers constructed their images of emperors using the standard toolkit of panegyric and invective, adding the increasingly potent cultural resources of Scripture and ecclesiastical history to their repertoire.[136] In similar terms, the contours of the Christian accounts of political service considered here often map onto philosophical and especially neo-Platonic traditions of thinking about government.[137] In the first place, ascetic proponents of renunciation often self-consciously reproduced the basic premises of neo-Platonic ideas about withdrawal from the world, reluctant assumption of office, and pastoral responsibility, only pressed into service of their 'true' philosophy.[138] Even the more positive visions of ethical Christian office-holding considered here draw on these ongoing philosophical traditions, whose theoretical and practical detachment from government has often been overstated. Dominic O'Meara has shown how various late ancient neo-Platonists portrayed the possibility for the philosopher to cultivate virtue while participating in political life.[139] I do not mean to imply that Christians were the only people in late antiquity who might think this way about office-holding. Nevertheless, in the context of texts written to and about Christian officials, by clerics and ascetics, these ethical premises became a form of Christian political thought, insofar as they addressed – more or less explicitly, and in more or less distinctively scriptural or ecclesiological terms – what Christians should or should not do.

[134] Maas (1992); Alan Cameron (2016a).
[135] Dvornik (1966); accessible discussion in Heather and Moncur (2001), 62–68.
[136] Flower (2013).
[137] I thank one of the readers for Cambridge University Press for a clear and helpful articulation of this point.
[138] See esp. O'Meara (2003); Elm (2012); Niccolai (2023).
[139] O'Meara (2003), esp. 73–86, 106–15, 132–39; for notable parallels, see Iamblichus, *Ep.* 6; Sopater, *Letter to Himerius*.

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Outwith polarised contexts like the Justinianic purges of supposed 'pagans', this was not an either/or situation for elites in late antiquity. To separate aspects of contemporary discourse into exclusive categories of the 'Christian' and the 'classical' is both reductive and counter-productive.[140] Late ancient Christian writers used 'classical' ideas of virtuous behaviour to define and legitimate various forms of 'Christian' lifestyle.[141] Such a recourse came naturally to men whose intellectual and social formation was shaped by engagement with these texts and the dominant cultural codes that they were understood to embody. Political actors (and their handlers) could be strategic in choosing from the panoply of available images of authority. Noel Lenski has developed a particularly sophisticated model for this multiplicity in exploring how the regime of Constantine chose to emphasise different facets of his rulership for different audiences and in different contexts.[142] Ongoing adherence to (potentially) conflicting cultural norms could also play out in the lives of individuals. Michael Maas has captured the multiple overlapping 'allegiances' of a fifth- or early sixth-century Constantinopolitan aristocrat. 'In the course of a single day he might read Plato, be healed at a saint's shrine, deliver a panegyric in Latin, praise or criticize the emperor, and sing the Trisagion hymn – without any sense of contradiction.'[143] In this context, it is best to understand Christian ideas of office-holding, not as a hegemonic intellectual framework but rather one of many possible ways of thinking about government. The contours and significance of these ideas are still to be explored.[144] These chapters reconstruct the possibilities for office-holders, their superiors, their ecclesiastical interlocutors, and their subjects, to cast their agency in decisively Christian terms.

Chapter 4 considers how imperial and royal officials are depicted in various genres of Christian literature across the fourth to sixth centuries. Given the paucity of texts written by officials about their own religious identities, most of our evidence for Christian ideas of office-holding comes from discussions of administrators and administration in texts written by clerics and ascetics. This chapter considers the portrayals of imperial and royal officials in letters, sermons, church histories, and saints' lives. In all these literary forms, Christian authors could reproduce the (now standard)

[140] Averil Cameron (1991); Elm (2012); Storin (2016); Niccolai (2023). [141] See 140 n. 40.
[142] Lenski (2016). [143] Maas (1992), 4.
[144] In my view, the state of the question three decades on from Maas's book has flipped over. Compare Maas (1992), 4: 'What has to be explained is not the religious transformation of the state – there is no question that a "respectable, aristocratic Christianity" existed at Constantinople when Lydus wrote – but his reluctance to admit it.'

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premise of what constituted sufficient piety within their own networks of clerics and ascetics. Letter writers could advise men in political service to give up their careers, just as the protagonists of saints' lives did. Preachers could bemoan the excessively 'worldly' duties and attitudes of Christians in service to the state. Church historians demonstrated the malign consequences in terms of complicity with the persecution of orthodox Christians; saints' lives staged the power of the holy person to defeat powerful men who had doubted them. Yet authors in all these genres also showed more positive ways of depicting official agency. It is notable that letter writers rarely suggested that their addressees should renounce political service without clear indications that their correspondent already intended to make a career change. Advice letters and petitions tended instead to delineate what the author saw as the best way for an individual official to act virtuously through a careful deployment of traditional classical and distinctly Christian ethical demands. Extant sermons adopt the same basic approach, although with a much greater willingness to prioritise the latter and drive the point home. Officials were members of the church who had their own 'gift' from God and scriptural models for how to use it to serve Him. Both these genres are particularly useful insofar as they directly addressed serving officials: agents of the state were in the room when these texts were delivered. Church histories and saints' lives were less straightforwardly positive about the beneficial agency of the officials who gain walk-on parts in their narratives. As portrayed by fifth-century church historians, good officials were, for the most part, conscientious objectors, whether they refused to carry out orders to persecute the orthodox or gave up their own office and suffered themselves. These texts nevertheless present similar features when authors wrote to and about officials within their networks. Panegyrical pen portraits occur particularly frequently in saints' lives as courtiers and governors recognised the holiness of the protagonist, requested their miraculous agency, provided them material support, and helped them to access the power of the state. The presence of officials as addressees, patrons, and potential readers of all these texts helped to shape a more positive account of what Christians could do within the state. Given this readership, it is my contention that these literary representations do not simply provide us the political thought of individual clerics and ascetics. They also suggest the ways in which Christian administrators might have wished their authority to be presented and what constituted the polite ideal of Christian political service.

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Chapter 5 uses these texts to trace how contemporaries understood the compatibility of Christian piety and political service. It synthesises their depictions of good official conduct so as to delineate recurring models of Christian behaviour within political institutions. In the first place, contemporaries could present traditional forms of political virtue as a way to be a good Christian. This recourse to what already constituted 'best practice' could stem from the pragmatic expectations of clerics habituated to compromise from dealings with the laity. Biblical injunctions and exempla justified continued involvement in government on those terms. Entanglement in worldly governance might stop Christians from attaining perfection, but it was nevertheless a context in which they (like other laypersons) could do their best. It could also draw strength from the Panglossian idealism of earlier apologetic discourse. Despite what ascetic impresarios suggested, the corruption and violence of the political institutions was not necessarily an impediment to Christian virtue. Optimistic contemporaries claimed that devotion to God would allow officials to attain the superior self-control needed to pursue virtue while confronting violence and corruption. Indeed, better Christians would be better officials and, by acting as models for their superiors, colleagues, and subjects, they would benefit the state as a whole. This good conduct could be presented in providential terms: as a way for officials to serve their ruler and serve God at the same time. A pervasive sense of the earthly empire as an image of the heavenly kingdom encouraged contemporaries to set the authority of imperial and royal administrators in the context of their hopes for individual salvation. Officials had been appointed by God, who had cultivated their virtues and given them as a gift to benefit their subjects. Appointees were reminded to govern in the awareness that they would have to 'render an account' for their conduct at the Last Judgement; in the meantime, God would punish or reward them appropriately in this life – perhaps even through a promotion. These recurring metaphors take as their basic premise that those who pursued political careers did not have to give up the state to serve God: whatever Jesus might have said (according to Matthew 6:24), it was their obligation to serve two masters. If anything, appointment to imperial or royal office brought into sharper relief the shadow duties of these men as members of Christ's *militia*.

Contemporaries could swerve oppositional models and present the state as a context in which officials could, and should, serve God. That service could even be construed in the terms of those very cultural norms that encouraged some late ancient men to give up a political career. Political

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institutions were portrayed as a place where exceptional Christians could suffer for their faith. Late ancient texts depict officials adopting forms of ascetic rigour and monastic community in political environments. These individuals were presented as exceptionally pious for their attempts to combine extreme dedication with participation in worldly government. Not renouncing the world was, for those who wished for the desert, a paradoxical form of deprivation. Political service could also be seen as the site of salutary suffering modelled on the pious behaviour of Old Testament courtiers and early Christian martyrs. Advice letters encouraged ideal officials to be similarly ready for martyrdom, whether that meant objecting to orders inimical to the true faith, or simply subjecting themselves to the vicissitudes of court politics. The desires of consuls and chamberlains to portray themselves as martyrs to their own immense power shows the extent to which even radical critiques of the Roman state could be turned to justify Christian political service. They also suggest that these Christian discursive frameworks could shape the attitudes of imperial and royal officials. In this sense, texts and objects produced by and for officials confirm what literary representations written to and about them imply: that agents of the state might wish to portray their authority in distinctly Christian terms. Letters, mosaics, inscriptions, and lead seals were used to proclaim that individuals had received their office from God, modelled their conduct on biblical exempla, and devoted themselves in government to divine and holy intercessors: not least, the Virgin, the saints, and the archangels. For much of this period, these strategies of legitimation appear almost exclusively in matters pertaining to the church. Officials can be seen slipping into a providential language of power in letter exchanges with churchmen and statements regarding debates over orthodoxy. These cultural resources also increasingly held a wider frame of reference. From the middle decades of the sixth century – not coincidentally, the point at which these same norms became part of the requirements of East Roman regimes – officials can also be seen seeking to legitimate their authority in these terms in contexts pertaining to their subjects more broadly. These texts and objects suggest that Christian ideas of pious administration had become part of the mainstream of political discourse by the age of Justinian. All in all, Part II of this book reconstructs how contemporaries understood political service as a field of activity for pious Christians. It argues that these ideas were part of the shared political culture of the Roman world between the late fourth and sixth centuries, part of how some officials might have understood their own political service, and part of how they knew they might be seen and judged by a growing constituency amongst their subjects.

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## I.5 The State in Church

Not all officials will have understood their political service in Christian terms. Service in the palace or provincial administration nevertheless exposed office-holders to situations that implicated their Christian identities. Part III explores the practical implications for officials of their theoretical membership of the church. It considers the Christian entanglements of fifth- and sixth-century imperial and royal officials in three distinct political environments: the Eastern imperial court in Constantinople (Chapter 6), the royal courts of the post-imperial West (Chapter 7), and the palaces of provincial governors (Chapter 8). These chapters seek to reconstruct the normal patterns of official churchgoing in these political centres and capture the social realities that underlay the claims of their episcopal and ascetic subjects to exercise pastoral authority. I will not be considering every time an official had contact with an ecclesiastical authority figure, nor every visit they made to a church. My focus on their Christian identities will lead me largely to exclude situations where officials entered churches solely to enact specific imperial orders: for example, to take possession of the basilica of a 'heretical' sect or extricate an individual who had claimed asylum.[145] The potential that officials might bring the violence of the state into these sacred spaces was nevertheless part of what made even routine attendees into extraordinary congregants. It is my contention that careers in imperial and royal service shaped distinctive forms of Christian practice.

My approach to these questions builds on the insights of numerous excellent studies of expectations of churchgoing and of the political strategies of Christian authority figures. The significance of those occasions where rulers went to church has long been recognised. Studies of the Christianisation of the imperial image, the development of Christian imperial ceremonial, and the relationship between 'church' and 'state' have returned again and again to a series of symbolically charged moments when emperors and bishops met in person within (or notably outside) the walls of the basilica. As Neil McLynn has shown in a definitive essay, routine reports of public imperial churchgoing do not emerge for several decades after Constantine's conversion.[146] The critical inflection point is (once again) the last quarter of the fourth century, because of a series of related developments in the character of imperial rule. As McLynn notes, this period saw previously mobile military emperors settling down in court

[145] Ducloux (1994). [146] McLynn (2004).

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cities: first, Valens (r. 364–78) in Antioch, then Theodosius I and his successors in Constantinople and Milan, and later, Ravenna and Rome.[147] Part of the reason for this transition to a static court – especially in Constantinople, where emperors would remain in almost unbroken residence for the next two centuries – was the prevalence of child emperors who (even in maturity) rarely took on the military duties of an adult ruler. This stable, long-term presence moved imperial church attendance from largely improvised affairs to regular fixtures of the ceremonial calendar of both palace and episcopal church, if ones that still required considerable ongoing negotiation and experimentation on the part of both parties.[148] More than that, as Meaghan McEvoy has persuasively argued, the prevalence of child emperors raised the stakes of these occasions because of their increased dependence on Christian forms of legitimation.[149] For all these reasons, imperial churchgoing became a regular part of court ceremonial at the point where this book starts.

This transition to routine churchgoing shifted the parameters of Christian emperorship. It entangled emperors in Christian communities, not simply in the theoretical terms traced in intricate accounts of the relationship between church and state, but by their physical presence in public episcopal churches. Excellent recent studies have explored the competing and potentially conflicting narratives, interests, and social scripts when emperors, kings, their consorts, and their families went to church.[150] But ruling dynasties were not the only representatives of the state to play prominent roles in forms of religious observance. Officials accompanied emperors, empresses, kings, and queens when they left the palace to go to church. Beyond these court cities, church attendance also entered the routine of political ceremonial. Officials can be seen going to provincial churches in their guise as the local representatives of imperial or royal power. Taking the lead from McLynn's studies, these chapters explore contemporary expectations of when imperial and royal officials would go to church. Chapters 6–8 extend his work to reconstruct, not only when Eastern emperors, post-imperial kings, and provincial governors normally went to church in the fifth and sixth centuries, but also when and why their subordinates customarily went along with them. They also investigate patterns of domestic religious observance in imperial and royal

[147] McLynn (2004), 250–70; (2018).
[148] Diefenbach (1996); Meier (2007); Croke (2010); Humphries (2012); Van Nuffelen (2012); McEvoy (2010); (2013); Kelly (2013); Pfeilschrifter (2013); (2014).
[149] McEvoy (2013), esp. 117–30, 204–13, 274–81, 319–21. [150] See n. 148.

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palaces and highlight indications of the attendants and officials involved on those occasions. These chapters thus capture how political service led to participation in Christian churches and forms of public religious practice.

Christian officials did not just go to church with their rulers. They attended services and engaged in acts of public piety unrelated to the business of court ceremonial. But imperial and royal officials could never be ordinary members of the faithful. Everything we can see suggests that their individual or collective presence continued to be understood in the light of their political service and membership of political institutions. These chapters thus also seek to reconstruct, for each of these political environments, the extent of official attendance at public churches in general and the character of the relationship with the bishop that this created. Given wider patterns of churchgoing, their regular presence cannot be assumed. Preachers frequently commented on the larger gatherings they saw on festival days and complained about absenteeism during the rest of the year.[151] This pattern seems to have been the routine for most (if not all) emperors and kings in this period.[152] The last generation of scholarship has shifted our sense of where late ancient people focused their Christian identities away from the institutional church and the jurisdiction of its bishops. Numerous studies have stressed the overwhelming importance of domestic religious spaces and practices, especially for the elites from whom the personnel of political institutions were predominantly drawn.[153] We can often only glimpse the Christian activities of officials within their own households, but these observances form an essential context to those moments where palace attendants and bureaucrats went to public churches. As Kim Bowes has recently stressed, this domestic Christianity cannot simply be treated as an autonomous sphere of religious practice.[154] The religious choices that imperial and royal officials made in their households intersected with their membership of political and ecclesiastical institutions. These domestic arrangements were themselves of interest to both regimes and bishops as they sought to police the religious identities of their subordinates and congregants, although these claims to oversight likely gained limited purchase in practical terms.[155] The porous boundaries between the domestic, imperial, and

[151] Maxwell (2006), 133–36; (2012), 866; Sandwell (2007), 189–90; Rebillard (2012), 66–8; Bailey (2016), 108.
[152] See 212–13, 246–47.
[153] Esp. Cooper (2007b); Cooper and Hillner (2007); Bowes (2008); (2015); Sessa (2012); McEvoy (2022).
[154] Bowes (2015), 56. [155] See esp. Sessa (2012).

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ecclesiastical are most obvious when it comes to official patronage of clerics and ascetics. These relationships could bundle together seemingly 'domestic' arrangements like board and lodging, liturgical employment, and doctrinal and moral guidance with support for the theological, ecclesiastical, and financial interests of these Christian impresarios in the palace and the episcopal church. As a result, the relationships between officials (on the one hand) and bishops, clerics, or ascetics (on the other) were simultaneously subject to multiple overlapping frameworks rooted in these different institutional contexts: ruler/subject; intermediary/petitioner; father/son; pastor/congregant; patron/client; employer/liturgical expert. Interactions between Christian officials and clerics were inevitably overdetermined. These chapters proceed from the assumption that when officials went to church, they brought this baggage with them.

Tracing the significance of officials' membership of church is not simply a question of charting their visits to sacred spaces and household observances. This group membership could also be activated in the course of their administrative duties. When bishops, clerics, and ascetics petitioned officials for interventions on a wide array of subjects, they could appeal to the Christian identity of their addressees and invoke their own pastoral authority. Such claims have received considerable attention as part of grand narratives of the transformation of rulership, the rise of the bishop, and the development of the institutional church in late antiquity.[156] Excellent revisionist work has corrected some of the more overblown claims that have been made regarding the contemporary political authority of (later) church fathers.[157] These studies have relocated these exchanges from the terrain of a (largely theoretical) ecclesiastical jurisdiction to situate them within contemporary practices of elite sociability and administrative practice. Claims to pastoral authority were just one of multiple rhetorical strategies that bishops and ascetics deployed when petitioning officials: the overlapping relationships between ecclesiastical and secular office-holders are perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the letters that preserve these appeals. Most crucially, recent work has stressed the extent to which the articulation of such claims depended upon the level of familiarity between ecclesiastical petitioner and Christian official. Building on this work, these chapters seek to reconstruct the social realities behind assertions of pastoral authority and the ways in which the regular receipt of such petitions could

[156] E.g. Bowersock (1986); Meier (2014), 149–73, 198–211; Drake (2015).
[157] See 27, nn. 119 and 121; see also e.g. Flower (2013) on Athanasius, Hilary and Lucifer; Demacopoulos (2013), 89–95 on Gelasius.

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produce specific expectations of officials as Christians. All in all, Part III seeks to trace the significance of officials' membership of the church (perceived and real) within these varied social interactions and institutional constellations.

Chapter 6 considers the relationship between imperial officials and Christian communities in fifth- and sixth-century Constantinople. It situates their agency within the expectations of emperors, bishops, and ascetics by reconstructing patterns of imperial, episcopal, and domestic religious observance. With one exception, emperors did not explicitly require officials to go to church. It was nevertheless customary for the official cadre and wider senatorial aristocracy to attend with the emperor when he went to public churches and for a more intimate group to accompany him in the palace. Demands for religious conformity likely encouraged those with potentially suspect religious affiliations to turn up to the episcopal church. Other officials were more regular attendees, yet signs of the bishop's pastoral oversight remain largely illusory in a city whose Christian life was shaped by the preferences of the emperor and senatorial aristocracy. Current and former officials were amongst those aristocrats who can be seen patronising the bishop's rivals and constructing their own shrines. Domestic observances and ascetic impresarios provided alternative foci for their Christian identities; so too, the institutions of palace, court, consistory, and central bureaucracy. The capacity of officials to shape and enforce ecclesiastical policy seems to have inculcated a certain hauteur towards the bishop, whom they might judge for his moral and theological probity. In this sense, officials were in, but not of, the cathedral community in the city of Constantinople.

Chapter 7 reconsiders the intersection of ecclesiastical affiliation and political service in the successor kingdoms of the post-imperial West. It uses attested episodes of royal and official churchgoing and interactions with Christian authority figures to explore when and why belonging to a particular church mattered. These overlapping group loyalties and institutional contexts had distinct implications for those who served in the palaces of Homoian rulers. Partly as a result of this ecclesiastical divide, normal patterns of church attendance are easier to reconstruct for the palaces of Nicene Merovingian and Burgundian kings than their Homoian counterparts; the lower intensity of Christian life in post-imperial capitals also likely contributes to the limits of our evidence. There is nevertheless enough to suggest that various forms of Christian observance were part of the routine of the royal court. Reports on such moments support a similar pattern to ceremonial practices at

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Constantinople: a small group accompanying the king to daily or weekly services, and an expectation that the court would come together for major festivals. Those same contemporary observers offer ways that court societies could negotiate doctrinal differences in their Christian ceremonial, whether by offering concessions to those who did not share the ecclesiastical affiliation of the king or discounting attendance as simply 'rendering unto Caesar'. Political necessities produced a similar disconnect between the practical pastoral authority of bishops and the conduct of Christian officials and palace attendants. Rare cases of excommunication from Burgundian Lyon and Merovingian Trier show both sides of the equation: the possibilities that courtiers could be actual (and not just metaphorical) members of Christian communities, and the subordination of episcopal oversight to the will of the king at whose pleasure they served. Where petitioners appealed to the ecclesiastical affiliation of their official patrons, they recognised the intermittent and partial significance of this group identity. Religiously minded individuals tended to be portrayed as exceptional figures by western bishops keen to establish the separate institutional cultures and jurisdictions of worldly officials and pious priests. This recourse to the explanatory model of the secular state should not blind us to indications that post-imperial palaces were sites of Christian observance and communal formation.

These chapters show how service in late ancient palaces could shape the Christian attitudes and practices of elite men. Chapter 8 considers a starkly different version of this dynamic: the interaction between provincial Christian communities and those appointed to govern them. For much of this period, provincial governors were uniquely isolated in political terms: distant from the imperial court, and foreign to the permanent staffs and local networks of power on which they would rely for their short terms of office. The same went for their relationships to provincial Christian communities and authority figures. Unsurprisingly, late fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century governors do not seem to have been regular attendees at public churches during their terms of office. It is unlikely that many appointees integrated themselves into the congregations of metropolitan sees. As the conflict between Synesius and Andronicus attests, the putative pastoral authority of bishops over governors was detached from the cathedral church; if it was to be exercised, it was in the governor's praetorium (if and when the bishop or his agent could get an interview). Although they were not treated as 'members', the special visits of governors to public churches seem to have been significant occasions for both parties. Governors and their episcopal and ascetic subjects used them to stage

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the appointee's legitimacy – and the preacher's access – before Christian provincial audiences and their own staffs. Similar concerns to maintain face as a stern (but Christian) ruler could structure interactions in the palace (and the correspondence that attests them). Astute office-holders accepted the intercessions and admonitions of local 'pastors' as part of wider efforts to maintain good relations with members of provincial society who could undermine their basic responsibilities in the present and their career prospects in the future. These possibilities for pastoral oversight were strengthened by the transformation of civic governance across the later fifth- and sixth-century Mediterranean and codified by sixth-century rulers in East and West. The switch to local appointees partly chosen by the metropolitan himself likely brought governors into the orbit of the public church. The pastoral authority of mid-to-late sixth-century bishops nevertheless remained subject to, and dependent on, the judgement of the governor's political superiors. This necessary recourse to the approval of rulers and the assumptions of bureaucratic structures conditions the exercise of church jurisdiction over officials across this period. Tracing the ecclesiastical entanglements of these office-holders helps to delineate institutional norms regarding the performance of their Christian identities and its significance for governance in particular political environments.

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