

**AN ASCETIC STATE? FASHIONING CHRISTIAN POLITICAL SERVICE
ACROSS THE EARLY SIXTH-CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN**

(NOT) RENOUNCING THE WORLD, YET LEADING THE CHURCH

At some point in his episcopate (513-518 CE), Severus, bishop of Antioch, sent a letter to Misael, a cubicularius at the Eastern imperial court in Constantinople.

Severus wrote because he had heard Misael was thinking of quitting the imperial court for ‘the philosophical and solitary life’.¹ A reader with any knowledge of late ancient Christian literature might expect the bishop of Antioch to cheer on his contact in the imperial bedchamber. By the early sixth century, the path Misael had in mind was well trodden. A switch from the traditional public career of the aristocratic male to the rigors of an ascetic life course was a hagiographic staple.² Before becoming bishop of Antioch, Severus himself had abandoned a legal career, trading the *chlamys* of an advocate for the monastic habit.³ Instead, Severus rebukes Misael.

But **this wounds me greatly that**, because your soul has been **struck** with divine love, it should **dream of a philosophical** and solitary life, though it is living in a **philosophical** manner and has within that which it seeks as if it were at a distance. For **through the grace of God**, while you conduct yourself in so chaste and ascetic a fashion, you have this privilege also that has been bestowed from above, I mean not only to believe **in** Christ, but also to suffer for his sake, and endure distress with Israel when in turmoil; whence also the illustrious crown of martyrdom is being woven for you.⁴

The reason Severus sought to dissuade Misael soon becomes clear. The cubicularius was simply too useful for Severus and his allies in the constantly shifting ecclesiastical politics of the Eastern Empire in the reign of Anastasius I (491-518), an era defined by conflicting views of the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the precarious consensus of Zeno's *Henoticon* (482).⁵ Although Severus does not address him as such, at some stage in Anastasius' reign, Misael seems to have held the office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi*: the chief official of the imperial household.⁶ Located at the very heart of imperial power, Misael was perfectly positioned to push for a stricter anti-Chalcedonian line at the court. To abandon his position for the solitary life was to abandon the cause of the church.

Severus' counter-intuitive rebuke to Misael highlights an issue surprisingly marginal to the historiography of both late ancient Christianity and the later Roman Empire: the Christian identities of imperial officials. Within the former, that marginalization stems from the emphases of late ancient texts, which reduce the state to a mere point of departure for those who pursued the true life of a Christian. Fifth- and sixth-century saints' lives narrate elite men giving up hopes of public office for ascetic retreat or monastic community, thus 'renouncing the world'.⁷ The last generation of scholarship has precisely worried about how to interpret this (near-ubiquitous) distinction between the 'Christian' and the 'secular'.⁸ Recent accounts of monastic rules and saints' lives have shown how such rhetoric was not about a total break with 'the world', but rather the appropriate calibration of relationships and activities under that umbrella, like the affective ties of family or economic links of production and exchange.⁹ Books by Conrad Leyser, Andrea Sterk and Claudia Rapp have shown how debates about the applicability of 'ascetic' ideals permeated discussions of

episcopal authority, even as bishops became civic and imperial functionaries.¹⁰ Similarly, perceptive studies have shown how the ascetically-minded aristocrats who received congratulations and advice from Christian troubleshooters like Severus were still bound up in the world through the management of their households.¹¹ But this turn in scholarship on late antiquity has yet to reach those men who continued to pursue more traditional career paths—likely the vast majority of elite men across the Mediterranean in Severus’ lifetime—who remain in the ‘secular’ category in which it suited ascetic writers to place them. Severus’ letter to Misael suggests that imperial officials, too, could be thought of as individuals obligated and qualified to fulfill the demands of Christian group membership.

Attempts to fashion a distinctly Christian subjectivity for those who served the state have been similarly peripheral to late Roman political history. This is perhaps surprising, given that studies often focus on the progressive synthesis of Christianity and imperial ideology through to the reign of Justinian (527-565) and beyond. Of course, ever since Constantine’s conversion, regimes had made Christian terms of reference one of the overlapping (and sometimes contradictory) registers through which they broadcast the legitimate, divinely sanctioned power of the emperor.¹² By the time of Severus and Anastasius, representations of the emperor’s religious identity and his privileged relationship with the divine were becoming rather less ambiguous. Recent work has emphasized the intensification of the Christian ceremonial life of the imperial court in Constantinople across the fifth and sixth centuries, the interlocking competencies of imperial and ecclesiastical functionaries, and the increasing focus on the personal (Christian) piety and orthodoxy of the emperor in contemporary discourse.¹³ The systematizing Christian rhetoric of Justinian’s legislation, in

particular, has made the first half of the sixth century a recurrent recourse for historians seeking to take a snapshot of this transformation of the imperial office.¹⁴ No imperial or royal capital in the West quite matched Constantinople's ceremonial echo chamber, but similar processes and discourses have been identified in the actions and pronouncements of the western imperial court and of rulers in the first successor kingdoms.¹⁵ This was not the only way the legitimate power of emperors or kings could be understood.¹⁶ Nevertheless, this period saw the firm rooting of imperial and royal self-representation in Christian attitudes and cultural resources.

If the effects of this transformation of late ancient political culture on officials are rarely considered, it is partly because well-known texts from this period present the ideal morality of imperial functionaries within a much more traditional set of parameters. Justinian's reign saw the flourishing of classicizing bureaucratic discourse. The likes of John Lydus and the anonymous *Dialogue on Political Science* in Constantinople, and Cassiodorus and Boethius in Italy, thought hard about the correct role of a palatine official serving an autocratic regime, drawing on Neoplatonic philosophy and ideals of the statesman.¹⁷ As a result of its predominantly classical frame of reference, accounts of this political thought often portray its authors as dissenting voices, whether they are seen as resisting Justinian himself, his reforms, or their Christian ideological framework.¹⁸ But Severus' letter to Misael suggests the possibility of a very different understanding of service to the imperial state in this period, which drew strength from broader trends towards the Christianization of the imperial office instead of countervailing them. The practical effects of such processes on the actual officials who populated these political institutions might already be inferred from their participation in administrative business affecting ecclesiastical

actors, in court ceremonial, and in the drafting, promulgation and enforcement of the legislation which propagated images of the emperor's power.¹⁹ Misael's desire to quit the court shows the potential for their Christian identities to affect those who served within it.

This article considers what contemporaries thought Christian commitment meant in the context of political office in the early sixth century. It analyses three authors whose letters tackle this issue head-on, starting with Severus. The letters preserved in the collection compiled (in a Syriac translation) in 669 CE by Athanasius, a presbyter of Nisibis, span his time as a prominent Palestinian monastic leader from the late 490s, his tenure of episcopal office in Antioch (513-518), and his exile (518-538). A number address or discuss prominent Eastern imperial officials, both at court and in the provincial administration of Syria.²⁰ The second is the *Variae* of Cassiodorus (c. 485-585), the twelve-book collection of administrative letters from his time in the service of Ostrogothic regimes which the Italian senator compiled at some point in the late 530s, 540s or early 550s.²¹ The Christian formation of administrators rarely features in the letters which Cassiodorus wrote to and about them on behalf of Theoderic and his successors.²² But the role of a specifically Christian political actor becomes central to Cassiodorus' own self-fashioning in the last two books of letters, sent under his own name as praetorian prefect. The third text is a letter of Ferrandus, a deacon at Carthage (fl. 510s to 540s), to Reginus, an imperial dux new in the province of Africa after its reintegration into the Eastern Empire in the wake of the reconquest of 533-534. Ferrandus responded to the latter's request by discussing the correct behavior of a Christian military governor embedded in a province and a larger administrative hierarchy. All these letters were addressed to specific individuals, but

given the nature of late ancient letter writing, they were likely intended for wider networks of contacts around the sender, the recipient, and (later) the collector.²³

These texts show how, for at least some Christian writers and imperial officials in the early sixth century, ascetic discourse had reshaped what political service might mean. Severus, Cassiodorus, and Ferrandus set up the possibilities of a committed Christian lifestyle within the state in differing but complementary ways, rooted in the attainment of an idealized inner state. They use biblical exempla, concepts of progress, and ecclesiological ideas to frame the duties of an administrator. The articulation of a Christian image of governance did not require wholesale transformation of official agency (although these new emphases drew strength from officeholders' engagement with ecclesiastical institutions). Rather, Christian cultural resources and presuppositions inflected pre-existing ideas about ethical administration. In this sense, these texts speak to the wider sixth-century debates about good governance which have received so much scholarly attention, only with biblical, canonical and patristic notions of authority supplementing and supplanting classical exempla and philosophical precepts. At the same time, it is clear that these authors saw political institutions as a specific (and not always suitable) context for virtuous Christian behavior. Severus and Ferrandus position Misael and Reginus—and Cassiodorus positions himself—as rare in their capacity to translate the most intensive demands of Christian identity to their conduct of office. We would not expect these men to be representative of the imperial or royal administration as a whole—but, crucially, neither do they. In this sense, even if Misael, Cassiodorus and Reginus were unusual, they provide a sense of the impact of Christianization on the character of late ancient political institutions, precisely because the contemporaries

who discussed them also saw them as limit cases, and used them as a springboard for wider discussions of the conduct of those who served regimes in the sixth-century East, Italy, and North Africa.

These authors' geographical spread might attract comment. Histories of Christian political discourse often portray an essential split between Greek East and Latin West across late antiquity, and in the early sixth century in particular (as symbolized by the distance between Gelasius and Justinian's views of the relationship between *imperium* and *sacerdotium*).²⁴ Certainly, these texts show differing emphases: for example, the influence of Gelasius himself on Cassiodorus and *City of God* on Ferrandus, as against the more straightforwardly imperial vision of Severus. Nevertheless, I contend that these three authors dealt with the same basic problem and came up with similar answers, drawing on shared cultural resources about what made for good Christians. Similarities between these 'Eastern' and 'Western' writers are only to be expected, since all three were involved in pan-Mediterranean political and ecclesiastical networks. Both the westerners wrote (at least in part) for Eastern audiences. Ferrandus' immediate audience was an Eastern military commander and his advice shows clear links to contemporary Justinianic political discourse; one of Cassiodorus' likely audiences for his letter collection was the Constantinopolitan bureaucracy.²⁵ These texts demonstrate both the continued connectivity of the early sixth-century Mediterranean, and the ways in which the adoption of Christian patterns of thought and practice had had similar long-term consequences for the character of political institutions and their representatives in East and West.

SEVERUS, MISAEL, AND THE EASTERN IMPERIAL STATE

Although Severus cast his response to Misael's potential retirement as a rebuke, it seems likely that the cubicularius was open to the bishop's persuasion, and even keen to have his ongoing political career portrayed in this way. When the pair's mutual friend, Zachariah, a non-Chalcedonian lawyer and low-level functionary at Constantinople, dedicated his lives of Isaiah, Peter and **Theodore** to Misael, most likely at some point in the mid-to-late 510s, he characterized Misael's ideal behavior in similar terms. Zachariah invoked the saintly triumvirate's prayers that 'despite the government of the royal bedchamber, your life might be governed virtuously, and you might flee entirely from the temptation of the furnace which is this place'.²⁶ Misael seems to have spent most of his career in such an ambiguous state. He was banished to Serdica in 518, after his supposed involvement in a coup against the new (Chalcedonian) emperor Justin I.²⁷ At some point after 518, the former cubicularius was ordained as a priest. Severus' letters from exile to 'Misael the deacon' place him back in court circles at some point before 534, and later in service of Theodora (c. 537) with a role looking after the finances of a non-Chalcedonian community, most likely those under the empress' protection in the Palace of Hormisdas in Constantinople.²⁸ John of Ephesus in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints* paints a familiar portrait of Misael's conduct in the later years of his career, even claiming that he inspired two other chamberlains to adopt an ascetic lifestyle. But the narrative he offers is rather different to Severus' evidence. According to John, Misael was restored to his former position on his return to Constantinople (some years after 518), before a more permanent retirement.²⁹ Various combinations of these biographical data are possible.³⁰ However these references are reconciled, what is clear from all of them is Misael's continued pursuit of Christian virtue while bound up in the political networks of the imperial court. These subsequent developments suggest that (as we

might expect) Misael was exceptionally devoted to ascetic praxis and thus perhaps unlikely to be representative in understanding his own life course in this way.

Nevertheless, the manner in which Severus justified his suggestion that the cubicularius stayed in the palace is revealing of his wider thought. The basic premises of this missive can be used to flesh out Severus' depictions of the agency of various other key figures in the administration of the East. His perspective is essentially pastoral: each was to serve God, the true faith, and the church as much as possible according to their own capacities.³¹ The state was as good a place as any to do so.

To justify his assertion that Misael should not renounce the world, Severus repackaged late ancient discourses of ascetic progress. The Antiochene bishop presented Misael as an individual already living 'philosophically' while at the imperial court, drawing on widespread perceptions of an ascetic life as the true philosophy.³² Misael became a figure with exceptional powers of self-control. Saints' lives and *apophthegmata* often refer to desert fathers and other solitaries who, through the adoption of a strict ascetic regimen in isolation from the world, attained a sufficiently ordered interior state to return to human society. This return was presented as part of a duty of care, whether in terms of the acceptance of a priestly office or, more exceptionally, in the context of doctrinal controversies.³³ The bishop himself made this connection, comparing Misael's dilemma to that of two anonymous solitaries during the Arian controversy which he had heard from aged ascetics. This is a seemingly unique story in this form, though it resembles episodes in the *Life of Antony* and Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* and *Religious History*.³⁴ While living in the desert, the ascetics were called back to use their debating skills to refute the heretics, but were reluctant 'because they clung to philosophy, and action seemed to

them irksome'. One put his own desires to one side and returned; the other stayed in the desert and suffered demonic torments until he changed his mind.³⁵ Severus depicted Misael's intention to leave the imperial court as a shirking of divine commands on a par with the latter's refusal to return. Of course, in Severus' letter, the cubicularius has short-circuited this stage of ascetic 'training', having attained a philosophical inner state without testing himself in the desert.

This is not to say that Severus portrays the court as an ideal setting for an ascetic virtuoso. Instead, Misael's continuing service is a form of suffering for his faith (as with the solitaries' return to the world). A series of suitable Old Testament episodes are retailed as types for pious (if not exactly straightforward) political service: the three royal servants (including his namesake) thrown into the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar (who gained promotions for themselves and protection for the Jews of Babylon), Obadiah serving Ahab (who protected one hundred prophets in the cave), and Joseph and the wife of his master, Potiphar, the captain of the pharaoh's guard (a story whose import apparently went without saying).³⁶ The bishop of Antioch used the fiery furnace in particular as a rhetorical comparison through which to model correct conduct.³⁷ If those three could suffer in this way for their faith, 'how then can you, when the king is pious, flee from the **contest** with the heretics, **when you are goaded** by a God-loving thought, and **will not** endure their blasphemies...?'³⁸ These individuals both suffering under and profitably serving tyrants present intriguingly awkward analogies for Misael's contemporary context, given Anastasius' **(qualified)** support for Severus and his **uncompromisingly** non-Chalcedonian allies.³⁹ The most plausible reading of these comparisons is as a way of gesturing towards the

ambivalent nature of imperial service in general. The imperial court was both an unsuitable and—potentially—an extremely advantageous place for an ascetic.

This ambivalent characterization was designed specifically for Misael's case, as an individual with an exceptional capacity for *philosophia*. In Severus' other letters, service to the state is never portrayed as inherently problematic for a Christian. His overall attitude comes through most clearly in a letter sent during his stay at Constantinople before his episcopacy (c. 508-511) to an unspecified group of patricians (whether the Senate as a corporate body or particular contacts is unclear).⁴⁰ Severus' refutation of certain accusations made against his non-Chalcedonian allies before Anastasius led him to discuss the pursuit of Christian *askēsis*. 'It is in fact the custom of our fathers to look to the soul's profit only, and, for those who have once taken upon themselves to practise philosophy, whether they be priests or whether they be kings, to lead them on through the performance of humble services, in order that by trampling upon pride they may imitate him who humbled himself for our salvation... For the correct definition of philosophy is this, that one imitate God as much as possible.'⁴¹ Although this statement reflects the contribution of an ascetic lifestyle to priestly authority, its presence in a letter addressed to senators does not seem coincidental. For Severus, kings (and their subordinates?) too, could practice philosophy—as anyone could, and should, in as far as they were able. Such a differentiated perspective regarding officials fits with Severus' broader view of the capacities of ordinary Christians.⁴² In a string of letters to Eastern aristocrats about matters of sexual ethics from the time of his episcopate and his later period in exile, Severus similarly argues that each Christian must look to their own position and capabilities. In this sense, his approach shows a pronounced similarity to that taken by

John Chrysostom over a century previously, who likewise married high expectations of the 'lay' people whom he sought to counsel with a practical acceptance of greater latitude.⁴³ Rather as Chrysostom (among others) had done previously, the bishop defends marriage as a valid state and opposes unilateral vows of continence by married men and women.⁴⁴ From Severus' pastoral perspective, a person's location was less important than the fact of conforming to Christian norms as far as was possible. In the case of Misael, this meant a decidedly ascetic lifestyle; for others, greater moderation was potentially valid.

How Severus thought this should translate into specific conduct on the part of individual officials in Constantinople and the Eastern provinces is less clear. Numerous of his extant letters discuss (directly or in passing) the agency of specific officials.⁴⁵ But these passages are concerned less with the Christian behavior or interior state of these officials than with their contribution to the preservation of the correct faith within church and empire. The routine implication of court and administration in the affairs of the church resulted in a broad portfolio of activities which Severus presents as basically unproblematic. The bishop adduces his joint agency with officials in regards to legal cases involving doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline,⁴⁶ seeks their patronage and their mediation with Anastasius,⁴⁷ encourages them to more active enforcement of orthodoxy against heretics⁴⁸, participates in theological discussions at their homes,⁴⁹ and responds to their inquiries and complaints regarding clients who had sought ordination.⁵⁰ Most strikingly, Severus notes in passing the doctrinal expertise of specific imperial contacts.⁵¹ The collaboration of imperial officials in ecclesiastical matters led Severus to expect their competence in such problems.

Of course, such agency within the church reflected back on their status as Christians just as much as Misael's attempts at spiritual perfection, as is evident in a letter which Severus sent c. 515-518 to Eutychianus, the governor of Syria II.⁵² Severus complained about Eutychianus' attendance at the consecration of a church on the occasion of a martyrial festival by a deposed bishop, almost certainly a Chalcedonian rival to the non-Chalcedonian Peter of Apamea.⁵³ Severus rebuked the governor for this act, and pre-emptively defended himself against an accusation of contentiousness. 'I will immediately quote to you the actual canon and law of the Spirit, and you will know clearly that to do something like that without consideration is not without danger for a man who is in the service of the pious king and is the ruler of a people.'⁵⁴ Eutychianus' status as both a subordinate of the emperor and a governor of subjects made the public display of his own personal ecclesiastical affiliation particularly important. Severus concludes the letter by showing how, in this case, the implications of service to an earthly king and service to God were coterminous.⁵⁵ The demands presented by the maintenance of Christian orthodoxy could translate directly to the context of the imperial state, aligning the demands of imperial service and a properly Christian subjectivity.

Unsurprisingly, Severus did not see Misael's attainment of the heights of asceticism in the opulent surroundings of the imperial bedchamber in Constantinople as a model for imperial officials. Moreover, his presentation of the character and conduct of the cubicularius was related to his own desire to keep an influential supporter in a helpfully intimate position within the court. But the bishop of Antioch's indication of Misael's capacity to fulfill his own potential as a Christian within the palace does

represent a pastoral perspective which could be applied to Christian officials more broadly, as his earlier letter to a group of patricians suggests. Reading Severus' letters as a whole leads to a paradoxical conclusion. The letter to Misael suggests that the imperial administration was not a place for most ascetically minded Christians: only superstars could maintain such a regimen of self-control in that context. And yet, it does appear as a suitable place for most Christians. In most of the letters, there is little sense of how this role might affect their behavior as a whole, although both the letter to the patricians and Severus' broader ecclesiology suggests a carefully differentiated pastoral perspective. Nonetheless, the agency of officials within political institutions deeply enmeshed in the doctrinal politics of the Eastern Mediterranean led Severus to expect them to develop, and act according to, a sophisticated understanding of doctrine, discipline and ecclesiastical culture. What emerges, above all, from Severus' letters is that such qualities of discernment—which we might associate more with bishops and archimandrites—were all but taken for granted.⁵⁶ In such a context, it is not surprising that Severus sought to groom one of these officials, the comes Orientis Oecumenius, for ordination.⁵⁷ If Severus did not expect imperial representatives in Constantinople and Syria to live like ascetics, he nevertheless saw within the state the possibility for officials to exercise the signal virtues of Christian authority figures.

CASSIODORUS AS PRAETORIAN PREFECT

Severus' letters present a perspective on official agency cast almost entirely in terms of ecclesiastical politics and Christian cultural resources. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the letters preserved by Severus' seventh-century editor—whether or not they are representative of the bishop's wider output—pertain almost exclusively to doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline. Yet it was not only former

solitaries and current ecclesiastical controversialists who made recourse to biblical exempla and ascetic discourse when thinking through the power of early sixth-century officeholders. In Book VI of his *Variae*, compiled some time between 538 and 554, the Italian senator Cassiodorus presents formulary letters for appointments to high offices within the Ostrogothic administration. The formula for the praetorian prefecture opens with a startling account of its first holder.

If the origin of any honour is praiseworthy, if a good beginning can give renown to subsequent events, the praetorian prefecture may glory in such a founder, who is approved as most prudent according to the world and greatly pleasing to the divinity. For when Pharaoh the Egyptian king was troubled by unthinkable dreams concerning the danger of future famine, and human counsel could not explain such a vision, the blessed man Joseph was found, who could both truthfully predict the future and assist most providentially a people in danger. He first consecrated the insignia of this dignity... from this patriarch, [the praetorian prefect] is called the father of the empire even now.⁵⁸

Cassiodorus goes on to provide a catalogue of the duties and ideal moral formation of a prefect, framed within the classicizing discourse of ethical magistracy which permeates the collection. But he returns to his biblical *exemplum* for a final sign-off, which recalibrates the demands made of his generic prefect: ‘for if that aforementioned, most holy founder is recalled, to perform the dignity of the praetorian prefecture competently is a sort of priesthood’.⁵⁹ Severus was not the only early sixth-century author to see Joseph at the court of Pharaoh as a paradigm for Christian behavior in service to an earthly regime.⁶⁰

The *Variae* represent, in the first place, Cassiodorus' contribution to a sixth-century, pan-Mediterranean—and decidedly classical—discourse about bureaucracy and political service.⁶¹ Yet this letter hints at the possibilities of a rather different conception of officeholding within earthly regimes. In characterizing the ideal prefect, Cassiodorus conjures exactly the sort of cunning Christian *comparatio* so fundamental to modern accounts of the transformation of political leadership in late antiquity. For many recent commentators, this fusing of classical comparison and biblical typology was integral to how what might be called a Christian imaginary came to reshape political life in the late ancient Mediterranean. Perceptive studies have explored the use of Old Testament patriarchs as models for emperors, bishops and monks.⁶² In this formulary letter, Cassiodorus does something similar for officials, just as Severus had done when reeling off biblical royal servants in his efforts to persuade Misael. Moreover, in conceiving of that role as *quoddam sacerdotium*, Cassiodorus suggested that the job of a bureaucrat was comparable both to that of a bishop and, more subtly, that of an appropriately Christian emperor or king, who were also often praised for their priestly qualities.⁶³ Such an allusion was particularly apt in a letter portraying the praetorian prefect as the king's *alter ego*.⁶⁴ As Sam Barnish has observed, the precise implications are obscure. A maximal position might take Cassiodorus at his word, and suggest the ceremonial of appointment involved acclamation of the appointee as Joseph's successor.⁶⁵ At the very least, the Italian senator—like the bishop of Antioch—demonstrates that officeholding could be understood by contemporaries according to the dense complex of biblical and ecclesiastical stories and figures which informed the late ancient Christian imagination.

The rest of the *Variae*, by and large, do not fulfill the promise of this formulary letter. Cassiodorus' letter collection presents a largely traditional bureaucratic culture. This institutional mindset is presented as moral on its own terms, invoking classical ideas of the good magistrate and citizen. Such an emphasis chimed with the broader intent of the letters as an *apologia* for the regimes of Theoderic and his successors (as well as Cassiodorus' participation within them), both at the time when they were originally sent, and for audiences in Italy and Constantinople at the time of their collection.⁶⁶ Cassiodorus' ideal of officeholding is not without a certain Christian self-fashioning. As Barnish and Shane Bjornlie have rightly noted, Christian adaptations include the frequent invocation of a Christian God and the stress laid upon decidedly Christian virtues like *humilitas* and *caritas*.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, his image of the functioning of governance only marginally and occasionally incorporates the demands of Christian commitment. Cassiodorus does, however, take up the possibilities of a more decisively Christian image of political agency within the state for one exceptional figure. That exceptional Christian actor was the author himself during his tenure—perhaps not coincidentally—as praetorian prefect in Ravenna from 533-537/8.⁶⁸ These letters have received significant attention as part of Cassiodorus' biography, as demonstrations of the extended run-up towards his conversion and the essential continuities in his thought on either side of his retirement from public office.⁶⁹ Their contents also speak to the broader possibilities of a Christian understanding of officeholding in sixth-century Italy.

This new emphasis comes through from Athalaric's letter to the Senate announcing Cassiodorus' appointment, presumably ghostwritten by the latter (*Variae* 9.25). The

Ostrogothic king praised his new prefect for a string of traditional political virtues, including moderation and control of emotions, a severity checked by mercy, and liberality. Athalaric portrayed the extent of these qualities as resulting from Cassiodorus' biblical formation. 'Consequently, reading Scripture (*diuina lectio*) has consolidated those mores, since a person is always well governed, if heavenly fear is opposed to human instincts. For from this the manifest recognition of all virtues arises; from this wisdom is salted by the savour of truth, thus he is made humble in all things, whom heavenly doctrine imbues.'⁷⁰ The virtuous political conduct of the new appointee was rooted in his attainment of a particular state of self-government oriented around Scripture, a project central to the regimens of late ancient Christian ascetics.⁷¹ Letters of Cassiodorus on behalf of Athalaric's successor Theodahad similarly point to such reading as an adornment of royal power, and biblical exempla as an inspiration for its correct usage. Addresses to the Senate and city of Rome claimed that the king's readings of *Kings* had helped to form him as a ruler.⁷² For Cassiodorus, Joseph, the (supposed) first holder of his office, appears as a recurring referent, including in a lengthy comparison of his own decision-making in a time of food shortage in the city of Rome with that of the patriarch during famine in Egypt.⁷³ Like Severus in his letter to Misael, Cassiodorus showed how one of the basic tasks of a committed Christian—reflection upon Scripture—could transfer to a position of government.

The import of this Christian formation for government is given sharpest definition in Cassiodorus' letter to John, bishop of Rome, announcing his appointment as prefect in 533 (*Variae* 11.2). Cassiodorus attributes his new post to a surprising source. 'I must beseech you, most blessed father, that the joy which, by God's generosity, I have

obtained through you, I may know to be preserved for me by your prayers.’⁷⁴

Cassiodorus put to one side the rather more mundane reality of his appointment by the regime of Athalaric and Amalasuintha; the bishop of Rome’s intercessions had gained him his office from God. In fact, Cassiodorus makes continual reference to this pastoral relationship. John was Cassiodorus’ ‘father’. Their spiritual kinship was supposed to have a direct bearing on his political agency: Cassiodorus was a ‘palatine judge’ but also John’s ‘disciple’; he would strive to be ‘such a judge as the Catholic Church sends out as a son’.⁷⁵ We can imagine that the bishop of Rome would have been particularly receptive to Cassiodorus’ portrayal of his pastoral and moral subordination. It reflected back to John aspects of papal ideology stressed by bishops of Rome for decades. Since Leo, letters from holders of that see had addressed emperors and kings as their sons.⁷⁶ The potential moral authority which this paternal relationship implied was made manifest by Gelasius in his letter to Emperor Anastasius of 494, when he famously characterized the superiority of episcopal *auctoritas* over imperial *potestas* in terms of the bishop’s fearsome duty to stand surety for the emperor’s soul before God at the Last Judgement.⁷⁷ By Cassiodorus’ day, such paternal language may have bordered on the routine for political actors writing to bishops of Rome. Letters sent between prominent Eastern officials and Hormisdas as part of efforts to resolve the Acacian schism in the late 510s, and preserved in the *Collectio Avellana*, set up a similar father/son relationship.⁷⁸ By alluding to the success of John’s prayers in gaining him the prefecture and the bishop’s continuing intercessions on his behalf, Cassiodorus appropriated the Roman Church’s projection of paternal authority for his own project of Christian self-fashioning.

Simultaneous status as papal disciple and palatine judge in Ravenna required a certain interior state. The new prefect prayed for divine inspiration in his new role. ‘May that rational force of the soul give me counsel... may that which shines with the light of heaven illumine me.’⁷⁹ Cassiodorus used the contemporary language of ascetic conversion to describe an inward turning towards God.⁸⁰ The distinctly ascetic cast to his ideal future administrative conduct is obvious from another exhortation: ‘may holy virtue guard me even among her gifts, since when I receive her favours, I then endure the deadlier wiles of the ancient adversary.’⁸¹ Cassiodorus envisaged his performance of office as involving the temptations of the devil. This is precisely the challenge late ancient monastic rules, lives of holy men and letters to committed Christians emphasize as the day-to-day trial of monks and ascetics.⁸² Once again, Cassiodorus transferred it to his conduct as praetorian prefect in Ravenna.

In a contemporaneous letter announcing his appointment to ‘diverse bishops’ within the Ostrogothic kingdom, Cassiodorus made clear the practical implications of his desired Christian judicial ethics (*Variae* 11.3). Having sought the bishop’s prayers to God that ‘he might make an inoffensive judge, lest he should condemn an errant one’ (11.3.2), Cassiodorus also sought their practical aid in both helping and overseeing his subordinates in the civil administration: routine duties for sixth-century bishops in societies across the Mediterranean.⁸³ Rather like Gelasius, the praetorian prefect used these responsibilities to set up a symbiotic relationship between bishops and agents of the state.⁸⁴ ‘May the bishop teach, lest the judge might find something which he might punish. The administration of innocence has been given to you. But if your preaching does not put a stop (to something), it is necessary that penal action takes over.’⁸⁵ This passage provides a sense that, even as the ‘public’ careers of bishops and ‘secular’

officials were converging, the institutional contexts and cultures of state and church required different forms of behavior from Christians. A general amnesty sent out by Cassiodorus during his tenure as prefect makes the same point forcefully.⁸⁶

Cassiodorus justified this act of judicial clemency through the fallen state of humanity. Everyone sinned; since the judge, too would require divine clemency, he should imitate it. Yet this judicial clemency is exceptional: a limited time offer for the duration of a Christian festival (most likely, Easter).⁸⁷ The letter's graphic descriptions of torture, imprisonment and punishment make clear the usual practice during the rest of the year. The degree to which the necessities of state continued to impinge on Cassiodorus and his conduct of office is significant. It does not seem a coincidence that Cassiodorus was most able to present his official agency in terms of his Christian identity in his letter to the bishop of Rome; in that context he was able to root himself more firmly within the *ecclesia* as well as the state. As Barnish has astutely put it, Cassiodorus, 'like Augustine, seems to isolate the Christian in his role as public servant from secular structures, flawed and transitory'.⁸⁸

It is, of course, possible that this image of an ascetic bureaucrat was the result of retrospective autobiographical concerns: a gloss on his later years in office applied during his rather ambiguous middle years at Constantinople (c. 540-554)—no longer an agent of the Ostrogothic state, not yet living in monastic retirement on his estates at Vivarium.⁸⁹ Bjornlie has plausibly argued that the *Variae* were compiled in this crucial period of transition, and that this process of compilation could have involved the rewriting of the letters.⁹⁰ Certainly, the language of ethical formation from the letter to John recurs in *De anima*, and the image of Joseph as praetorian prefect features in the *Expositio Psalmorum*, produced in these years.⁹¹ Yet there is no

particular reason why this self-presentation could not be contemporary. It accords well with what we know of the overlap of elite and ecclesiastical culture in early sixth-century Italy.⁹² In his letters, Ennodius of Pavia similarly strove to inflect the traditional elite life course of education and public office with the language and thought world of Christian piety.⁹³ Such a context implies that the wider Italo-Roman elite might see such Christian self-fashioning as a means of legitimating the wielding of power. After all, when Cassiodorus framed both his (and Theodahad's) conduct in terms of devoted attention to Scripture, he did so in letters directed to the Roman Senate.⁹⁴

In the final analysis, the *Variae* leave us with a similarly mixed picture to that of Severus' letters. A number of Cassiodorus' letters regarding his tenure as praetorian prefect paint a remarkable picture of an ascetically-minded Christian in office. **These letters suggest something important about their wider audiences within the Italo-Roman elite and the Constantinopolitan bureaucracy. Cassiodorus clearly expected at least some among these constituencies to react favorably to his distinctive self-presentation and the close connection between Christian and administrative ethics which it took for granted. Nevertheless,** other letters from this period retain the essentially classicizing patina of the collection as a whole. In that sense, the effects of Christian identity appear in the *Variae* as an intermittently totalizing discourse, occasionally featuring as the universal referent for ethical conduct before disappearing once again.⁹⁵ Cassiodorus does not generally seem to have expected his colleagues to be receptive to such presentation of their own authority when he wrote to order them to deploy it. Instead, he seems to have expected them to maintain a much more traditional sense of legitimate political conduct, only now under the

umbrella of divine providence. In this context, it seems that Cassiodorus wanted to present himself as an exceptional political actor, within an elite milieu of Christians happy both to integrate and to trumpet their classical inheritance. The *Variae* show both the possibilities and the limits of a decisively Christian political agency in sixth-century Italy.

FERRANDUS AND REGINUS

Cassiodorus portrayed a self-consciously Christian official as exceptional within an institutional culture ideally shaped by classical political morality. At about the same time that the Italian praetorian prefect was broadcasting his appointment, on the other side of the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Carthaginian deacon Ferrandus set out a similar portrayal of an exceptional Christian official, although this time, within a state marked by sinful practices. An imperial dux named Reginus had written to Ferrandus' mentor, Fulgentius of Ruspe, to seek 'a spiritual rule (*regula*) for one occupied by military affairs'.⁹⁶ The two had previously corresponded about Christ's incorruptibility.⁹⁷ Since Fulgentius died before he could respond, Ferrandus took up his mantle with self-conscious reluctance.⁹⁸ Reginus' ignorance of Fulgentius' death (c. 533) provides the best indication of the letter's approximate date: the immediate aftermath of the reconquest of 533-534.⁹⁹ Ferrandus stuck closely to the terms of Reginus' request, providing seven 'rules of integrity' (*regulae innocentiae*).¹⁰⁰

1. Believe that the aid of the grace of God is necessary for you in all your actions, saying with the apostle, 'by the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor 15.10).
2. Your life should be a mirror, where your soldiers see how they ought to act.

3. Do not strive to lord it over others, but to be useful.
4. Love the commonwealth like yourself.
5. Place divine things before human ones.
6. Do not be too just. [That is, do not simply decide a case on its merits, but practise mercy.]
7. Remember you are a Christian.¹⁰¹

Ferrandus elaborates these seven rules over a substantial letter of 20 chapters (23 columns in the *Patrologia Latina*).

With the exception of an important discussion by Kate Cooper, this intriguing text has received little to no scholarly attention.¹⁰² It is easy to see why: the writing of a quasi-monastic rule for a military commander might seem like a rather recondite exercise. And yet, Ferrandus' letter shows a sustained desire to make this model plausible and practical. Traces of the specific situation of an Eastern dux in 530s North Africa can be identified. Ferrandus' references to the need to restore a province or commonwealth that had collapsed may allude to the military crises of the last years of the Vandal kingdom and the first of the new Byzantine dispensation,¹⁰³ or reflect the Justinianic propaganda of restoration.¹⁰⁴ In discussing the rule 'place divine things before human ones', Ferrandus repeatedly mentions the presence of heretics in the army and the province, while providing an explicitly anti-Arian creedal statement.¹⁰⁵ Such features make sense in terms of the previous century of political support for Homoian Christianity in the African provinces, and the presence of 'Arian' soldiers in the occupying armies.¹⁰⁶ The deacon's detailed advice on 'civil' matters like justice and tax collection also accord with the practical overlap of civilian and military

competences in the reconquered province.¹⁰⁷ Ferrandus' letter provides a plausible guide to Christian governance 'on the ground' for his correspondent.

In fact, it is possible that Ferrandus had in mind the demands made by Justinian on Africa's new civil and military administrators in edicts promulgated in April 534. These laws setting up provincial administration in the new diocese of Africa took in many of the same themes: concern for the state of the province, avoidance of corruption (especially in terms of tax collection and the actions of subordinates), and the ethical responsibility of officials towards God.¹⁰⁸ These common themes may simply represent shared complaints about official corruption. Yet even if Justinian's laws of April 534 did not directly influence the deacon, it is striking that his text mapped on so closely to the imperial regime's expectations of its administrators. Like Cassiodorus' *Variae*, Ferrandus' letter lines up with contemporary debates about ethical governance in Justinianic Constantinople.

Specific aspects of the government of Africa in the 530s may feature, but Ferrandus' intent in this letter was much more general. As Cooper has described, he makes a set of demands for the Christian dux comparable to advice received by earlier ascetically-minded aristocrats in the late ancient West.¹⁰⁹ Like aristocrats who had chosen to give up worldly life, Reginus was supposed to attribute his achievements to God (rule 1) and set an example for his dependents (rule 2: both his household and his soldiers).¹¹⁰ What marked this missive out from those earlier conduct letters was Reginus' agency within the imperial state as well as the household. To set out how a Christian official might act in service of the common good, Ferrandus reappropriated discourses of ethical magistracy and ideal citizenship which had been taken over by apologists to

legitimize various forms of Christian life course: those of ordinary Christians, bishops, monks and even martyrs.¹¹¹ His Christian official was a composite of all of these roles, cast in the light of Latin Christian political discourse and, above all, concepts and concerns derived from Augustine.

The transfer of virtuous Christian conduct to the commander's headquarters was far from straightforward. Ferrandus made the problematic ethics of Christian political service clear from his first lines. Before answering the request, Ferrandus established a basic taxonomy of men as social creatures (and while their gender and status are not marked, it is obvious that it is elite males like Reginus whom the deacon had in mind).

For one engaged in the trials of a social life, it soon comes about that, as a rational person, he loses the ignorance of youth, and he either begins to serve God or the world (*saeculum*), illustrious dux Reginus. About this the apostle Paul says, 'No-one serving God should involve himself in secular matters' (2 Tim 2.4)... Therefore the two types of service signify two types of soldiers: bodily service obliges some to work with the world (*laborare cum mundo*), according to the will of an earthly king; spiritual service leads others to heavenly camps through the benevolent grace of the heavenly emperor.¹¹²

In setting up this dichotomy between those who served the emperor and those who served God, Ferrandus played on the rich semantic range of 'service' (*militia*) in late antiquity. He opposed its use for a subordinate of an emperor or king in any form of administrative role (military or civilian) to its frequent deployment as an evocative

description of the various forms of Christian behavior undertaken by ‘soldiers of Christ’.¹¹³ Ferrandus elaborates this essential contrast through a series of antitheses.

Secular soldiers are held liable to various passions and desires; soldiers of God crucify their flesh with sins and desires. The first are nourished by feasts; the second by virtues. The first try to take things from others; the second seek either to lose their own things patiently or to pay them out mercifully. The first pay attention to their own benefit; the second to the common good (*utilitatibus... communibus*).¹¹⁴

(And nine more oppositions follow.) Drawing on centuries of apologetic, the deacon portrayed Christians as the true fulfillment of ideals of citizenship, and used the stereotypical moral bankruptcy of imperial officials to widen the gap between the life courses of those who ‘worked with the world’ and those who ‘inhabited heavenly camps’. The renunciation of the world—‘spiritual service’—was (paradoxically) the best way for human beings to inhabit it.

If Reginus—and the reader of this article—might be wondering at this point how exactly that would help a Christian serving in an earthly *militia*, Ferrandus (finally) blurs his distinction. The imperial state was not simply made up of earthly soldiers.

Whenever the hidden dispensation of the most pious creator has given the power of judging and administering the earthly commonwealth to those hearing and obeying this salubrious admonition [i.e. 1 John 2.15-17: ‘Do not love the world, nor those things which are in the world’ etc], because of them

the army of the world [*militia saeculi*: i.e. the collectivity of those serving the state] is not filled with graver sins.¹¹⁵

Divine providence ensured those engaged in spiritual service could also be part of the imperial state. The Augustinian framing is only too apparent here, as in the division into two types of people and the reference to Babylon and Jerusalem as the ‘cities’ they served.¹¹⁶ In *City of God*, Augustine stressed that Christians were supposed to live in the world in such a way as to keep the heavenly city in mind, a mindset he also encouraged in his letters to representatives of the imperial state in the African provinces and at Ravenna.¹¹⁷ Implicit references run throughout the text. Reginus was supposed to do ‘nothing forbidden by the laws or contrary to the custom of a city or *gens*, though only if that custom does not injure religion’.¹¹⁸ He was supposed ‘not to lord it over others, but to be useful’ (rule 3), appropriating Augustine’s injunction against (specifically episcopal) pride.¹¹⁹ Ferrandus returns to Augustine’s framing of the future existence of Christians in the heavenly city as the truly happy life (*beata uita*) in *City of God* in the final sentence of the letter.¹²⁰ If Reginus obeyed the seventh rule, ‘remember you are a Christian’, he might ‘deserve to live happily both in this age and in the next, where the perpetual empire (*perpetuus principatus*) will be given to all Christian commanders’.¹²¹ As in Augustine’s earlier advice—and Severus and Cassiodorus’ near-contemporary treatments—to serve God while serving an earthly emperor required a particular ethical orientation and inner state.

What makes Ferrandus’ account more than a simple recapitulation of Augustine is the degree to which he takes on board the bishop of Hippo’s portrayal of the mixed body of the two cities on earth as a model for understanding the collectivity of those

serving the state in particular, rather than simply a way of conceiving of Christians in general (if one rooted in classical ideas of the statesman).¹²² The deacon's characterization of the 'soldiers of the world' and 'soldiers of Christ' shows the distance of his North Africa from that of Augustine, whose characterization of the earthly city was, at least in part, a vehicle for attacks on traditional Roman religion.¹²³ Ferrandus portrayed the state as an institution which saw the intermingling of more or less sinful Christians. Men like Reginus were not representative, and the benefit they brought was crucially circumscribed by the essentially negative activities of their colleagues. In this sense, Ferrandus' view of the culture of the state might seem closer to that of Salvian who, in his *On the Governance of God*, was keen both to document the iniquities of Roman officials and to generalize from them to the Roman state as a whole.¹²⁴ Certainly, his picture of the state resembles Salvian's ecclesiology, neatly characterized by David Lambert: 'a church divided into two groups, a minority of sincere Christians, and a majority that is guilty of sustained, willful disobedience to God.'¹²⁵ Yet unlike Salvian, Ferrandus did not allow for a previous time in which the emperor's servants had provided an idealized manly agency.¹²⁶ This leads to a certain resignation. The dux was useful (rule 3) when he averted the excessive and debilitating fiscal exactions caused by corrupt practices: most notably, sale of services and false reports of prosperity. Ferrandus exhorts Reginus to offer accurate reports up the chain of command, and not to attempt to curry favour by claiming that all was good on his watch. Incorrect information about the yields of the province would make his administration look good, but increase the tax burden of the 'poor provincials'.¹²⁷ Ferrandus' *optimus dux* can break with the norms of the imperial state, but the best he can achieve is to prevent the excesses inherent in the culture of a flawed earthly institution.

Like Severus and Cassiodorus, Ferrandus saw the maintenance of an appropriate relationship with ecclesiastical authority figures and agency on behalf of the true faith as key characteristics of a virtuous imperial official. He discussed these activities at greatest length as part of rule 5 ('place divine things before human ones'). Like Cassiodorus, Ferrandus portrayed his ideal political servant as a member of the church. The dux was to maintain a respectful and occasionally subordinate relationship with ecclesiastical authority figures. He would be placing human things before divine ones if he dared 'to teach the church—although a commander, yet still a disciple of the church.'¹²⁸ Ferrandus recommended that Reginus 'consult bishops with your neck bent'.¹²⁹ This was precisely the posture which Gelasius had advised to Anastasius four decades previously, although Ferrandus most likely derived his own version from a discussion of the ideal Christian emperor by his mentor, Fulgentius.¹³⁰ Reginus, like Cassiodorus, was to act as a disciple of the church while engaged in administration, entailing respect for ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the role of bishops in the governance of Africa. At the same time, putting divine things before human ones involved Reginus in a much wider portfolio of salutary activities.¹³¹ It was the dux's duty to prevent sin on the part of soldiers and subjects, and even to preach correct doctrine to them (insofar as he was able). In this way, Reginus was presented as an autonomous agent for the diffusion of Catholic Christianity and the reformation of individual Christian souls, as a figure of almost episcopal pastoral authority. The deacon envisages a series of contexts where Reginus might need to stand up for the true faith: as commander of heretical soldiers in his army unit; when travelling to a region where there were few or no orthodox Christians; discovering heretics among his subordinates; receiving orders from superiors who disagreed with the true faith. In

the context of the latter, Reginus was supposed to be ready for martyrdom.¹³² This consideration of orders (presumably) from the court at Constantinople is particularly interesting in the light of Ferrandus' later involvement in the Three Chapters Controversy and advocacy of resistance to Justinian's attempts to produce doctrinal uniformity.¹³³ As in the actions taken by Severus' doctrinally informed official correspondents, maintenance of the correct faith resulted, in part, from the (semi-autonomous) decision-making of the emperor's most prominent subordinates.

The *dux's* difficulties were characterized not just in terms of the sins and errors of his colleagues, but also more essential problems of earthly government. In the seventh and final rule, 'Remember you are a Christian', Ferrandus recalled the key biblical teachings which Reginus had to follow, including some familiar precepts. The *dux* was supposed to turn the other cheek, walk an extra mile with one forcing him, and love his enemies.¹³⁴ This was not the first time such injunctions to peace, love, mercy and forgiveness had been discussed in the context of service to late Roman state. They were precisely the 'teachings of Christ' at stake in the questions posed to Augustine by the skeptical senatorial aristocrat Volusianus c. 412/413.¹³⁵ Volusianus asked how the governor of a Roman province could turn the other cheek (and so on), questions which would lead Augustine to a developed account of the dilemmas of the judge in *City of God*.¹³⁶ In his more immediate epistolary response to Volusianus, Augustine set out a sweeping counter-factual, where the realization of a fully Christian political agency along the lines of the Gospel injunctions would require the rest of society to become similarly (indeed, implausibly) Christianized. Ferrandus, too, was pragmatic. The deacon pushed for Reginus to avoid executing criminals, but stopped short of forbidding him from doing so.¹³⁷ If Reginus had to deal with a majority of heretical

soldiers, Ferrandus' (studiously ambiguous) advice was to 'rely on the strongest men so that, should the grace of God provide (*gratia dei respexerit*), you might make all the strongest soldiers Catholics and dismiss a few heretics'.¹³⁸ No alternative action was suggested for the eventuality that divine providence did not intervene.

At the start of the text, Ferrandus provided a litany of disavowals of his own capacity to meet Reginus' requests, which included his lack of relevant experience. 'Behold, I am bound by the chains of ecclesiastical service (*militiae ecclesiasticae uincula*), I am unconnected to secular cares.'¹³⁹ And yet, his clear-sighted take on the problems of misadministration and the demands placed on an individual administrator by their connections to superiors, colleagues and subordinates gives the lie to this claim.

Ferrandus' rule for a military commander should be taken much more seriously as a text of late ancient political thought and a product of the age of Justinian. The main lines of his account can be traced back to Augustine. Ferrandus took from the bishop of Hippo ways to characterize both the institutional culture of the state as a whole and the correct agency of an individual Christian within it. Both his general debt to *City of God* and his appropriation of specific passages locate him within wider intellectual networks of the period. Ferrandus was just one of a number of Christian authors in the fifth- and sixth-century West who entered into dialogue with Augustine's work as they thought about earthly authority in a variety of social contexts—not just that of 'secular' government.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, what the Carthaginian deacon supplied Reginus is not simply a light revision of advice for monks or priests. His letter really is a 'rule' for an imperial functionary: it strives to fashion a Christian subjectivity for someone involved in the practical business of government. The ethical demands it makes correlate with the demands of Justinian's regime on provincial officials, both

in Africa and beyond. By framing it as a *regula*, Ferrandus opens up the possibility that this individual advice could be ‘scaled up’—that is, that the greater mass of those serving the imperial state could adopt this ideal Christian administrative *habitus*. And yet, building on Augustine’s political thought in *City of God* and his letters to imperial officials, this does not seem to have been his expectation. Ferrandus characterized the late Roman state in its most dystopian terms: as a *locus* for corruption, oppression, favouritism and self-interest. In that sense, Ferrandus’ text is the most pessimistic of the early sixth-century views of the Christian state discussed in this article. In the letter to Reginus, the truly Christian political servant is exceptional within a body of officials whose institutional culture was essentially inimical both to Christian commitment and to the common good. Nevertheless, despite this contrast, Ferrandus—like Severus and Cassiodorus—highlighted the potential to combine Christian virtue with service to the imperial state.

CONCLUSION

In the important essay on ‘Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity’ from which I took the rhetorical question in my title, Averil Cameron explores the compatibility of ascetic discourse with the central presuppositions of late ancient and Byzantine governance. For Cameron, such an ideological fit helps to explain the apparent shutting down of the ‘secular’ at the end of antiquity and the Byzantine state’s increasing concern for orthodoxy and uniformity.¹⁴¹ This article has sought to trace a different product of the compatibility of Christian regimes of self-control with wider patterns in the political culture of late antiquity: efforts to reframe what it meant to serve an earthly regime using the cultural resources of ascetic discourse. Major differences of intellectual formation and socio-political context separated Severus,

Cassiodorus, and Ferrandus. Yet all three thought through what it meant to be a committed Christian within early sixth-century political institutions, drawing on both shared and distinct traditions of Christian thought. For Severus, the necessity of Misael's continued service resulted from his realization of *philosophia* in the imperial bedchamber and the requirement for all Christians to seek virtue insofar as they could. Cassiodorus' virtuous Christian agency was occasioned by contemplation of Scripture and awareness of his place within the church. Ferrandus, meanwhile, characterized Reginus' ideal behavior through an Augustinian sense of how Christians might live in the world and deploy earthly authority (inside and outside political institutions). Although they diverged in the specifics, each author set out the possibilities of a decisively Christian understanding of such roles. They show that the duties of officials, and in particular their contact with ecclesiastical institutions, might require them to think about their roles in terms of their Christian identities. The letters of Severus, Cassiodorus, and Ferrandus demonstrate how—at least for some people, some of the time—Christian morality inflected the administrative culture of the state, and contemporary debates about good government within the Constantinopolitan bureaucratic cadre and beyond.

Of course, these letter-writers saw obvious limits on the possibility or acceptability of recasting individual officeholders or service to the state in Christian terms. These limits partly derived from mismatches between committed Christian behavior and the culture of political institutions. Such problems are most obvious in Ferrandus' letter to Reginus, which imports the hostility of Christian apologetic and Augustine's ecclesiology of the 'two cities' into his advice for the dux. For Ferrandus, *milites Christi* were both a minority and uncharacteristic actors within the *militia*. Although,

in general, Cassiodorus is much more positive in his picture of the activities of the state and its representatives, some of his letters reflect an understanding of the state as a problematic context for Christians, not least his portrayal of a division of functions (reform and punishment) with bishops. Severus shows the greatest possibility of conceiving of the state as a whole as a Christian body (partly because of the less problematic combination of service to emperor and God in the Greek East). Still, there are traces of a more hostile view of the state in his depiction of the court of Anastasius as a site of martyrdom for Misael. The limits to these accounts of the ascetic statesman were not simply about suspicion of the 'world' in general and the (post-)Roman state in particular. They also stemmed from the decisions of all three authors to leave space for more integrative versions of political agency. Cassiodorus' letters evince an expectation that ethical norms articulated in a more traditional fashion were more suitable either for political agency in general, or for the recipients of his letters. The essentially classical morality of the *Variae* was nonetheless set in the context of divine providence and, occasionally, bracketed by references to *doctrina caelestis* and *diuina lectio*. Severus permitted varying individual capacities to fulfill Christian demands. Ferrandus was much more categorical in his division of the state into 'soldiers of the world' and 'soldiers of Christ'. Yet even he left space for the necessary violation of basic Christian commandments. In their combination of high standards and rather lower expectations, these letters deploy the rhetorical strategies of the much wider body of literature which sought to articulate what a Christian identity should actually mean in practice for the people who increasingly came to be called the 'laity'.¹⁴²

Although their appeals to inner states and generic virtues may sometimes seem divorced from the actual business of government, these letters were not simply theoretical discussions. They reflect real changes in their authors' societies, not least, the various processes often aggregated by modern historians under the heading of Christianization. The compound forms of Christian political agency set out in these texts show trace elements of attempts to account for the involvement of bishops and other Christian authority figures in the ordering of society, the emergence of priestly office or monastic leadership as a parallel 'public' career path, and the concomitant infusion of Christian piety into elite lifestyles. The complex integration of Christian patterns of thought into the lives of sixth-century aristocrats—their decisions about education, property, and sexual ethics—is now well known.¹⁴³ By imagining the everyday lives and dilemmas of Christian officials in the imperial bedchamber, the bureau of the praetorian prefect, or the headquarters of a military commander, these texts allow us to begin to trace their implications for another, central aspect of the life course of an elite male. Above all, the letters of Severus, Cassiodorus, and Ferrandus show how sixth-century ideas of governance had been reshaped by a set of processes common to Constantinople, Syria, Italy, and North Africa.

¹ Severus of Antioch, *Select Letters* (hereafter *Sev. Ep. Sel.*) 11.1, ed. E. W. Brooks, *The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902-1904), 1.2: 516. On Misael: A. H. M. Jones and J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (hereafter *PLRE*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970-1992), 2: 763-64; *PLRE* III: 892-93; P. Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London: Routledge, 2004), 53; S.

Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London: Routledge, 2008), 79-80, 101, 157; G. Greatrex et al, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity*, Translated Texts for Historians 55 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 3. For introductions to Severus' life: Allen and Hayward, *Severus*, 3-30; F. Alpi, *La route royale: Sévère d'Antioche et les Églises d'Orient (512-518)*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 188 (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2009) 1: 39-56.

² In assimilating Misael's career choices to the wider possibilities of elite men in late antiquity, I should note that, as a cubicularius, he may well have been a eunuch (though no source explicitly states this): Tougher, *Eunuch*, 157, cf. 21. This might be seen to reduce the utility of extrapolating from him to elite men in general. Yet this is what both Severus and his translator Athanasius of Nisibis (in his rubric for the letter) do, by simply treating him as someone serving the state who wished to quit that position for a monastic profession. See too Tougher, *Eunuch*, 45-47 (on problems with differentiating too strongly the social position of eunuchs from other men).

³ Zachariah Rhetor, *Life of Severus* 128-29 (Patrologia Orientalis 2.1: 92-93), using the new section numbers of S. Brock and B. Fitzgerald, *Two Early Lives of Severos, Patriarch of Antioch*, Translated Texts for Historians 59 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); on Severus' asceticism: K. M. Hay, 'Severus of Antioch: an Inheritor of Palestinian Monasticism', *Aram* 15 (2003): 159-71.

⁴ Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 11.1 (Brooks 1.2: 516-17). Translation adapted from Brooks, *Selected Letters*, 2.2: 460.

⁵ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 2: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604), Part One: Reception and Contradiction*, trans. P. Allen and J. Cawte (London: Mowbray, 1987), 247-317. M. Meier, *Anastasios I.:*

die Entstehung des Byzantinischen Reiches (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2009), 84-92, 250-324, esp. 289-95, 313-16 (on Severus' episcopate).

⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 57 (PO 19: 200), with *PLRE* 3: 893; cf. Meier, *Anastasios*, 61-62 on the offices.

⁷ E.g. P. Hatlie, 'Spiritual Authority and Monasticism in Constantinople during the Dark Ages (ca. 650-800)', in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 137 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 203-204.

⁸ The classic study is R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹ Family: e.g. R. Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church": Monastic Families', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11.3 (2003): 283-307. Production and exchange: e.g. A. G. Lopez, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty: Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict, and Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 50 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 46-101.

¹⁰ C. Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church: the Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 37 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

¹¹ See esp. K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); J. Weisweiler, 'Domesticating the Senatorial Elite: Universal Monarchy and Transregional Aristocracy in the Fourth Century AD', in *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, ed. J. Wienand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17-41; K. Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty*

in *Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On problems with applying a public/private distinction to elite households: K. Cooper, 'Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure, and Private Power in the Roman *Domus*', *Past and Present* 197.1 (2007): 3-33.

¹² For a wonderful recent treatment of Constantine's image making: N. Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

¹³ In general: F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408-450*, Sather Classical Lectures 64 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 130-234; Meier, *Anastasios*, 38-52, 64-75; H. Leppin, *Justinian: Das christliche Experiment* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010), summaries at 337-38, 340-43, 351-53, specifics at 92-126, 167-91, 203-204, 233, 241-49, 276-80, 284-308, 326-27, 329-34; M. McEvoy, *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West AD 367-455* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. 117-27, 204-213, 274-81. Ceremonial and personal piety: M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 252-58; S. Diefenbach, 'Frömmigkeit und Kaiserakzeptanz im frühen Byzanz', *Saeculum* 47 (1996): 35-66; C. M. Kelly, 'Stooping to Conquer: The Power of Imperial Humility', in *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 221-43.

¹⁴ C. Humfress, 'Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 161-84. Justinianic moment: useful summary by A. D. Lee, *From Rome to Byzantium, AD 363 to 565* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 264-85, esp. 264.

¹⁵ Western court: M. McEvoy, 'Rome and the Transformation of the Imperial Office in the Late Fourth—Mid Fifth Centuries AD', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010): 151-92. Successors: R. E. Whelan, *Being Christian in Vandal Africa: The Politics of Orthodoxy in the Post-Imperial West*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 59 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 16-17, 147-49, 226-33.

¹⁶ See e.g. H. Leppin, 'Zwei Reiche: Prokopios von Gaza und Priscian von Caesarea zu Anastasios', in *Chlodwigs Welt: Herrschaft um 500*, ed. M. Meier and S. Patzold, Roma Aeterna 3 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 93-109 on two contemporaries of Severus; R. Miles, 'The *Anthologia Latina* and the Creation of Secular Space in Vandal North Africa', *Antiquité Tardive* 13 (2005): 305-320 on classicizing panegyric in North Africa.

¹⁷ Important accounts: Av. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 242-60; M. Maas, 'Roman History and Christian Ideology in Justinianic Reform Legislation', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (1986): 17-31; M. Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian* (London: Routledge, 1992); M. Maas, *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 94-164; C. M. Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, *Revealing Antiquity* 15 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9-104; C. Pazdernik, 'Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185-212; P. Bell, *Three*

Political Voices from the Age of Justinian, Translated Texts for Historians 52

(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); M. S. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527-554*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th Series, 89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ See esp. Kaldellis, *Procopius*; P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), at 205-208, 221; Bjornlie, *Politics*, 48-123, esp. 51-53, 67, 72, 82-123.

¹⁹ Business: esp. (though an earlier period) Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, esp. 130-67; Court: above, n. 00. Law and ideology: Maas, *Exegesis*, 4-5, 12-13, 65-75, 111-15 on Junillus; cf. also Bell, *Political Voices*, 27-49, on Agapetus' *Ekthesis*.

²⁰ For a full list: Alpi, *Route royale*, 1: 126-28. On Severus' letters and the collection: Allen and Hayward, *Severus*, 52-54; P. Allen, 'The Syrian Church through Bishops' Eyes: the Letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Severus of Antioch', *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006): 3-21, at 7-9.

²¹ On the problem of dating: Bjornlie, *Politics*, 19-26, at 19 n. 58 for consensus of c. 538-540.

²² For an illustration, see the formulary letters of appointment in Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6-7 (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi [hereafter MGH AA] 12: 174-227); see below for an important exception.

²³ For this approach to late ancient epistolography, see esp. J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ Most recently: M. Meier, ‘Nachdenken über “Herrschaft”. Die Bedeutung des Jahres 476’, in *Chlodwigs Welt: Organisation von Herrschaft um 500*, ed. M. Meier and S. Patzold, Roma Aeterna 3 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), at 206-207.

²⁵ On African involvement in the Three Chapters (in which Ferrandus took part): Y. Modéran, ‘L’Afrique reconquise et les trois chapitres’, in *The Crisis of the Oikoumene: the Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean*, ed. C. M. Chazelle and C. Cubitt, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 39-82. Cassiodorus: Bjornlie, *Politics*. For a vivid illustration of the pan-Mediterranean ecclesiastical disputes in which Severus was implicated: V. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12-105.

²⁶ Zachariah Rhetor, *Life of Isaiah* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Syri 7-8: Syriac edition at 15-16, cf. Latin trans. at 10). On Severus and Zachariah: Greatrex et al, *Pseudo-Zachariah*, 3-12; Brock and Fitzgerald, *Severos*, 17-19; on the two of them and Misael: Greatrex et al, *Pseudo-Zachariah*, 3, 9-10 with n. 22, 13.

²⁷ For details: *PLRE* II: 763.

²⁸ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.63, 3.3-4, (Brooks 1.1: 217-21; 1.2: 267-82); non-Chalcedonians under Theodora: Menze, *Justinian*, 208-28, at 220-21 for Misael.

²⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 57 (PO 19: 200-201).

³⁰ Cf. *PLRE* II: 763-64 which is unaware of John of Ephesus’ reference to his restoration; *PLRE* III: 892-93, which is skeptical of this restoration given his ordination, but does not rule out simultaneous possession of palatine and priestly office; D. Potter, *Theodora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 124, who puts Misael in Theodora’ service (without reference to his ordination, certainly before

537); and G. Tate, *Justinien* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 81-82, who puts the diaconate after M's (unforced) retirement, though without mention of his relationship with Theodora. G. Greatrex, 'The Early Years of Justin I's Reign in the Sources', *Electrum* 12 (2007): 104 shows prudent caution.

³¹ Cf. P. Allen, 'Severus of Antioch and Pastoral Care', in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 2, ed. P. Allen, W. Mayer, and L. Cross (Brisbane: Centre for Early Christian Studies, 1999), 394-97.

³² See e.g. S. Rubenson, 'Monasticism and the Philosophical Heritage', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 487-512.

³³ For this issue more broadly in the Eastern Empire: Sterk, *Renouncing*.

³⁴ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 69-70, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanase de Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine* (Sources Chrétiennes 400: 314-18); Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.24, ed. L. Parmentier and G. C. Hansen, *Theodoret: Kirchengeschichte, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*, n. F. 5 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1998), 262-63; Theodoret, *Religious History* 2.16 (Sources Chrétiennes 234: 230-32).

³⁵ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 11.1 (Brooks 1.2: 518-19); translation from Brooks, *Selected Letters*, 2.2: 462.

³⁶ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 11.1, (Brooks 1.2: 517-19). Joseph as referent: cf. Cassiodorus, below, 000-000.

³⁷ Cf. M. Gaddis, *There is No Crime for Those who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 39 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 170-75, on the rhetorical function of such comparisons.

³⁸ Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 11.1 (Brooks 1.2: 517-18). Translation adapted from Brooks, *Selected Letters*, 2.2: 461.

³⁹ Grillmeier, *Christ*, 273-88; Meier, *Anastasios*, 289-95, 313-16.

⁴⁰ Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 2.1, (Brooks 1.1: 222-26, with direct address to members of Senate at 222). On Severus' connections at court in this period, see Zachariah Rhetor, *Life of Severus* 146-48 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 2.1: 104-106); Allen and Hayward, *Severus*, 11; Meier, *Anastasios*, 259. Connections during his episcopate: Alpi, *Route royale*, 1: 120-28.

⁴¹ Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 2.1 (Brooks 1.1: 226). Translation by Brooks, *Selected Letters*, 203, lightly adapted.

⁴² R. Darling, 'The Patriarchate of Severus of Antioch, 512-518', University of Chicago PhD Dissertation (1982), esp. 95, 112-25.

⁴³ J. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129-33; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 188-90, 194-98. For a preliminary account of Chrysostom's influence on Severus: P. Allen, 'Severus of Antioch: Heir of John Chrysostom?', in *Severus of Antioch*, ed. Y. Youssef and J. D'Alton, *Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1-13.

⁴⁴ Sev. *Ep. Sel.* 10 (Brooks 1.2: 483-515). Chrysostom on marriage: E. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 158-59, 263, 265-66; Augustine's similar perspective: Markus, *The End*, 45-62.

⁴⁵ For a full list: Alpi, *Route royale*, 1: 126-28.

⁴⁶ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.15, 1.40, 1.46, 7.4 (Brooks 1.1: 66-67, 126-29, 143, 1.2: 420-26); *PLRE* II: 252-53 (Calliopius 6), 577-81 (Hypatius 6), 607 (John 59); 1228

(Anonymus 52).

⁴⁷ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.21, 1.23 (Brooks 1.1: 83, 92); *PLRE* II: 277 (Celer 2); 673 (Leontius 24), 794 (Oecumenius).

⁴⁸ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.21, 1.45 (Brooks 1.1: 83, 140); *PLRE* II: 252-53 (Calliopius 6), 307-308 (Conon 6); cf. Severus of Antioch, *Letter* 21 (PO 12: 214), *PLRE* II: 631 (Isidorus 7).

⁴⁹ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.1 (Brooks 1.1: 4); *PLRE* II: 840-42 (Patricius 14).

⁵⁰ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.17, 7.6; cf. 1.8 (Brooks 1.1: 72-73, 1.2: 428-29, 1.1: 45-48); *PLRE* II: 390 (Eleutherius 4), 726-28 (Marinus 4), 1119-20 (Timostratus).

⁵¹ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 6.1 (Brooks 1.2: 409); *PLRE* II: 307 (Conon 5). See also *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 4.6 (Brooks 1.2: 297-300); *PLRE* II: 607 (John 59).

⁵² Date: Alpi, *Route royale*, 2: 133.

⁵³ Eutychianus would later judge Peter in the reign of Justin: *PLRE* II: 446 (Eutychianus 4).

⁵⁴ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.44 (Brooks 1.1: 138). Translation adapted from Brooks, *Selected Letters*, 124.

⁵⁵ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.44 (Brooks 1.1: 139).

⁵⁶ Discernment as key quality of bishops and abbots: K. Uhalde, *Expectations of Justice in the Age of Augustine* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 77-104. For the classical philosophical context, as applied to rulers: see Bjornlie, *Politics*, 283-305.

⁵⁷ *Sev. Ep. Sel.* 1.5 (Brooks 1.1: 38).

⁵⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.3.1 (MGH AA 12: 175-76). Translations of Cassiodorus are my own unless stated; where relevant, I have of course consulted the excellent translation of S. J. B. Barnish, *Selected Variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, Translated Texts for Historians 12 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992). This passage has received frequent (and often startled) commentary: Barnish, *Variae*, xxi, li-ii; Maas, *John Lydus*, 83; J. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: the Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 184 n. 44; M. Vitiello, *Il principe, il filosofo, il guerriero: lineamenti di pensiero politico nell'Italia ostrogota*, Hermes Einzelschriften 97 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 191-96; S. J. B. Barnish, 'Roman Responses to an Unstable World: Cassiodorus' *Variae* in Context', in *Vivarium in Context*, ed. S. J. B. Barnish et al (Vicenza: Centre for Mediaeval Studies Leonard Boyle, 2008), 14-16; Bjornlie, *Politics*, 308-309.

⁵⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.3.9 (MGH AA 12: 177).

⁶⁰ For a similar use of Joseph later in the century, see Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum* 8.33.18-25 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 140A: 558).

⁶¹ Above, n. 00.

⁶² See esp. Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 125-36; C. Rapp, 'Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium', in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino and R. S. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), 175-97; M. S. Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: between Eusebius and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); R. A. Flower, *Emperors and Bishops in Late Roman Invective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶³ This is not the only possible reading of *sacerdotium*: Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 16 notes that Cassiodorus makes this comparison of a number of offices. On other

occasions (esp. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.2 [MGH AA 12: 175] on the patriciate), the frame of reference is older Roman priestly magistrates. Here, though, the modeling of the prefect as the king's alter ego and the reference to Joseph suggest a more stridently Christian connotation. Priestly qualities of rulers: cf. J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: the Church, 450-680 AD* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 37-38; G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: the Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 305-306.

⁶⁴ Esp. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.3.3-4 (MGH AA 12: 176).

⁶⁵ Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 14-15, with n. 62.

⁶⁶ Barnish, *Variae*, xv; Bjornlie, *Politics*; cf. P. J. Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders* (London: Macmillan, 2013), 418 n. 3.

⁶⁷ S. J. B. Barnish, 'Sacred Texts of the Secular: Writing, Hearing, and Reading Cassiodorus' *Variae*', *Studia Patristica* 38 (2001): 362-70; Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 14-16; Bjornlie, *Politics*, 309-10.

⁶⁸ On Cassiodorus' tenure: Barnish, *Variae*, l-liii.

⁶⁹ See above, n. 00. The broader problem: J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Av. Cameron, 'Cassiodorus Deflated', *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 183-86; S. J. B. Barnish, 'The Work of Cassiodorus after his Conversion', *Latomus* 48 (1989): 157-87; Bjornlie, *Politics*, 23-24, at 24.

⁷⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 9.25.11 (MGH AA 12: 292-93); with Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 15 and n. 68.

⁷¹ See esp. [Clark, *Reading Renunciation*](#).

⁷² Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3.5, 10.16.2 (*Kings*), 10.17.2; cf. 10.4.6 (MGH AA 12: 299, 308, 308-309, cf. 300); with Vitiello, *Il principe*, 193-94.

⁷³ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.20.3, 12.25.7, 12.28.7-10 (MGH AA 12: 251, 382, 384-85).

⁷⁴ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.2.1 (MGH AA 12: 331); translation from Barnish, *Variae*, 150; Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 15.

⁷⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.2.5, 11.2.3 (MGH AA 12: 331).

⁷⁶ E.g. P. Blaudeau, *Le siège de Rome et l'Orient (448-536): étude géo-ecclésiologique*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 460 (Rome: École française de Rome, 2012), 156-58.

⁷⁷ See best: A. Cottrell, 'Auctoritas and Potestas: a Reevaluation of the Correspondence of Gelasius I on Papal-Imperial Relations', *Mediaeval Studies* 55 (1993): 95-109; G. E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 89-95, at 91.

⁷⁸ E.g. *Collectio Avellana* 142.5, 144.6, 147.5, 152.2, 197.1, 197.4 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 35.2: 587, 589, 593, 600, 657); with *PLRE* II: 519 (Gratus), 275-77 (Celer 2), 839 (Patricius 11); cf. Barnish, *Variae*, lii.

⁷⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.2.3 (MGH AA 12: 331). Translation from Barnish, *Variae*, 151.

⁸⁰ Cf. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 109-16, 125-30 for similar language in *De anima* (book 13 of the *Variae*).

⁸¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.2.3 (MGH AA 12: 331). Translation from Barnish, *Variae*, 151.

⁸² See esp. D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸³ Barnish, 'Roman Responses', 14-15; on sixth-century episcopal oversight of officials, cf. Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 263-64; on the authority and resources of bishops in Ostrogothic Italy: R. Lizzi Testa, 'Bishops, Ecclesiastical Institutions, and the Ostrogothic Regime', in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, ed. J. Arnold, M. S. Bjornlie, and K. Sessa, Brill's Companions to European History 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 451-79, esp. 470-74.

⁸⁴ On the symbiosis (and not conflict) of *imperium* and *sacerdotium* in Gelasius: esp. Cottrell, 'Auctoritas'.

⁸⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.3.6 (MGH AA 12: 333).

⁸⁶ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.40 (MGH AA 12: 353-55).

⁸⁷ J. Hillner, *Prison, Punishment, and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 104 with n. 63.

⁸⁸ Barnish, 'Roman Responses' 16.

⁸⁹ Bjornlie, *Politics*, 18-19.

⁹⁰ Bjornlie, *Politics*, esp. 19-33; though compare the responses of e.g. Heather, *Restoration*, 418 n. 3 and H.-U. Wiemer in *Sehepunkte* 13 (2013): <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2013/11/22995.html>; cf. Barnish, *Variae*, xvii.

⁹¹ Above, n. 00. On these passages in *EP*: esp. Vitiello, *Il principe*, 193; more broadly, G. Heydemann, 'The Orator as Exegete: Cassiodorus as a Reader of the Psalms', in *Reading the Bible in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. N. Nelson and D. Kempf (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 19-42.

⁹² C. Pietri, 'Aristocratie et société cléricale dans l'Italie chrétienne au temps d'Odoacre et de Théodoric', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité* 93 (1981): 417-67; K. Cooper and J. Hillner (ed.) *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); K.

Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹³ Esp. S. Kennell, *Magnus Felix Ennodius: A Gentleman of the Church* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000), 43-84, programmatic statement at 168-69; S. Gioanni, *Ennode de Pavie: Lettres* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006-2010), lii-lxvii, lxxiii-lxxxii, cxxxi-cxxxii; cf. Barnish, 'The Work', 174-83 for Cassidorus' own project along these lines.

⁹⁴ Above, n. 00.

⁹⁵ For Christianity as a 'totalizing discourse': Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Sather Classical Lectures 55 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

⁹⁶ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 2 (PL 67: 929C).

⁹⁷ Fulgentius, *Ep.* 18 (CCSL 91A: 619-24).

⁹⁸ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 2-3 (PL 67: 929B-930B).

⁹⁹ For Fulgentius' death date: Y. Modéran, 'La chronologie de la *Vie de Saint Fulgence de Ruspe* et ses incidences sur l'histoire de l'Afrique vandale', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Antiquité* 105 (1993) 135-62.

¹⁰⁰ For the translation: Cooper, *The Fall*, 34.

¹⁰¹ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 3 (PL 67: 930B-C).

¹⁰² Cooper, *The Fall*, 31-37; very brief references are sometimes made in work on the Three Chapters: e.g. R. B. Eno, 'Doctrinal Authority in the African Ecclesiology of the Sixth Century: Facundus and Ferrandus', *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 22 (1976): 97; Maas, *Exegesis*, 60 n. 253; Modéran, 'L'Afrique', 60.

¹⁰³ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 7, 8 (PL 67: 935A, 936A-B). On these crises, see now A. H. Merrills, 'Gelimer's Slaughter: the Case for Late Vandal Africa', in *North Africa*

under Byzantium and Early Islam, ed. J. P. Conant and S. T. Stevens (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), 23-40.

¹⁰⁴ See best, J. P. Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th Series, 82 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 306-16.

¹⁰⁵ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 11-14 (PL 67: 939A-942D).

¹⁰⁶ Homoian Christianity in Vandal Africa: Whelan, *Being Christian*, esp. 85-108. Arian soldiers: Procopius, *History of the Wars* 4.14.11-21; A. H. Merrills and R. Miles, *The Vandals* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 252-53.

¹⁰⁷ Overlap: Conant, *Staying Roman*, 197-99; S. Puliatti, *Ricerche sulla legislazione "regionale" di Giustiniano: lo statuto civile e l'ordinamento militare della prefettura africana*, Seminario Giuridico della Università di Bologna 84 (Milan: Giuffrè, 1980), 110-11; though cf. *Codex Iustinianus* (hereafter *CJ*) 1.27.1-2, ed. P. Krüger, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 2, 11th edition (Berlin: Weidmann, 1954), 77-81 for intended separation.

¹⁰⁸ See esp. *CJ* 1.27.1.10 (Africa to receive best administration through God's mercy), 1.27.1.15-16 (civil administrators to avoid harm to provincial taxpayers); 1.27.2.11 (ditto for military officials and taxpayers), 1.27.2.15 (duces to pass on accurate information about state of frontier settlements) (Krüger: 77, 80); with Puliatti, *Legislazione "regionale"*, 80-82, 101-10.

¹⁰⁹ Cooper, *The Fall*, 31-37.

¹¹⁰ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 4-6 (PL 67: 931A-934D).

¹¹¹ Bishops: e.g. R. Lizzi Testa, 'The Late Antique Bishop: Image and Reality', in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Rousseau (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 535-36; monks and martyrs: e.g. Y. Papadogiannakis, *Christianity and Hellenism in*

the Fifth-Century Greek East: Theodoret's Apologetics against the Greeks in Context, Hellenic Studies 49 (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2012).

¹¹² Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 1 (PL 67: 928B-C).

¹¹³ Kelly, *Ruling*, 20, 134; J. Leclercq, “‘Militare deo’ dans la tradition patristique et monastique”, in *‘Militia Christi’ e Crociata nei secoli XI-XIII*, Scienze storiche 48 (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacra Cuore, 1992), 3-18.

¹¹⁴ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 1 (PL 67: 928C-928D; further oppositions to 929A).

¹¹⁵ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 1 (PL 67: 929B).

¹¹⁶ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 1 (PL 67: 928D) for Babylon and Jerusalem.

¹¹⁷ On Augustine’s characterization of this mindset in *City of God* and his letters to imperial officials: see esp. R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 45-71; R. Dodaro, ‘Augustine on the Statesman and the Two Cities’, in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 386-97 (with useful references). On the dynamics of the letters: É. Rebillard, ‘Augustin et le rituel épistolaire de l’élite sociale et culturelle de son temps: éléments pour une analyse processuelle des relations de l’évêque et de la cité dans l’antiquité tardive’, in *L’évêque dans la cité du IVe et Ve siècles: image et autorité*, ed. É. Rebillard and C. Sotinel, Collection de l’École française de Rome 248 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1998), 127-52; N. B. McLynn, ‘Augustine’s Roman Empire’, *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 29-44; B. D. Shaw, ‘Augustine and Men of Imperial Power’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8 (2015): 32-61.

¹¹⁸ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 5 (PL 67: 933B); cf. Augustine, *De ciuitate dei* 19.17 (CCSL 48: 685).

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *De ciuitate dei* 19.19 (CCSL 48: 687); Cooper, *The Fall*, 35-36.

¹²⁰ Happy life: the overall framing of Augustine, *De civitate dei* 19 (CCSL 48: 657-99).

¹²¹ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 20 (PL 67: 950A).

¹²² Ferrandus also shows no interest in the questions of theodicy central to Augustine's work (which were, in any case, above the pay grade of his dux, except in the event that his superiors ordered him to act against the interests of religion).

¹²³ On this problem: J. Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: a Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 93-163.

¹²⁴ On Salvian: see best, D. Lambert, 'The Uses of Decay: History in Salvian's *De Gubernatione Dei*', *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999) 115-30; D. Lambert, 'History and Community in the Works of Salvian of Marseille', Oxford University DPhil Thesis (2003).

¹²⁵ Lambert, 'Decay', 120.

¹²⁶ Lambert, 'Decay', 125.

¹²⁷ All of this: Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 6-8, quotation at 8 (PL 67: 935A-936D, at 936B).

¹²⁸ Ferr. *Ad Reginum* 16 (PL 67: 945A).

¹²⁹ Ferr. *Ad Reginum* 17 (PL 67: 945B).

¹³⁰ Fulgentius, *De ueritate praedestinationis et gratiae* 2.39 (CCSL 91A: 516-17); Modéran, 'L'Afrique', 61.

¹³¹ Ferr. *Ad Reginum* 15-16 (PL 67: 942D-944C), discussing the avoidance of oaths, protection of widows and orphans in the courtroom, and the exercise of mercy.

¹³² Ferr. *Ad Reginum* 14 (PL 67: 942B-D, at 942D).

¹³³ Ferrandus and the Three Chapters: see Ferrandus, *Ep.* 6 (PL 67: 921D-928B), with Eno, ‘Doctrinal Authority’; Modéran, ‘L’Afrique’; Conant, *Staying Roman*, 318-20.

References to Reginus’ superiors in the letter consistently suggest that they will not know what is happening on the ground in Africa (see above, n. 000), implying that he has the distant court in mind.

¹³⁴ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 19 (PL 67: 947D-948A).

¹³⁵ Augustine, *Epistulae* 132, 135-38: 136.2 for Volusianus’ questions, 138 at 138.15 for Augustine’s counter-factual (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiorum Latinorum 44: 79-80, 88-148). On the exchanges: McLynn, ‘Empire’, 34, 41-42; Rebillard, ‘Augustin’, 131-33; Shaw, ‘Augustine’, 43. Recent accounts of Volusianus’ religious identity: Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 196-97; É. Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity: North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 81-82.

¹³⁶ On which, see esp. G. Clark, ‘Desires of the Hangman: Augustine on Legitimized Violence’, in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H. A. Drake (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 137-46.

¹³⁷ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 20 (PL 67: 948C-948D); on late ancient concerns about execution: Hillner, *Prisons*, 91-92.

¹³⁸ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 14 (PL 67: 942B).

¹³⁹ Ferrandus, *Ad Reginum* 3 (PL 67: 930A).

¹⁴⁰ See esp. Markus, *The End*; Leyser, *Authority*.

¹⁴¹ Av. Cameron, ‘Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity’, in *Asceticism*, ed. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), at 157.

¹⁴² See now L. K. Bailey, *The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), with helpful historiographical discussion.

¹⁴³ Esp. Cooper, *The Fall*; Sessa, *Formation*.