Introduction

During the lengthy, complex, and uneven process of Christianization in Late Antiquity, various aspects of "common sense" were changing.[1] Recent studies of attitudes about sexuality, wealth and poverty, and slavery have examined how worldviews adjusted while traditional Roman culture was absorbing Christian values, and vice versa.[2] This book aims to contribute to these discussions by examining the friction between the traditional social values of the Roman elite and the potential social radicalism of Christian teachings.[3] How did upper-class Christian authorities make sense of their own social, economic, and cultural privileges while embracing a religious tradition founded by carpenters and fishermen? What social values did well-born Christian writers exhibit or promote when they addressed each other and laypeople in their letters and treatises? What social values did they exhibit or promote when they addressed laypeople in their sermons?

Certain elements inherited from Judaism and key aspects of the New Testament – such as the championing of the poor and humble, the condemnation of the wealthy and exalted, and the rejection of worldly wisdom – would not easily fit into traditional worldviews among the elite in the Roman Empire.[4] Many of the central figures in the founding of

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[1] See Clifford Geertz on "common sense" as a system of thought drawing on a coherent cultural system, "Common Sense as a Cultural System," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000). See Peter Brown's use of the term in *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 54–8.

[2] See, for instance, K. Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[3] In this book, I use the terms "elite" and "upper class" interchangeably to refer to the minority of people who were affluent enough to live comfortably (well above subsistence level), be influential in their communities, and to afford advanced education for their sons.

[4] On early Jewish and Christian texts on the theme of social reversal, see H. Rhee, "Wealth, Poverty, and Eschatology: Pre-Constantine Christian Social Thought and the Hope for the World to Come," in J. Leemans, B. J. Matz, and J. Verstraeten (eds.), *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 64–84, at 68–75.

Christianity, including Jesus himself, were remembered as manual work-
ers, a group that was traditionally viewed with scorn by upper-class Greeks
and Romans. Christian writers, however, did not ignore these challenges to
the status quo. Instead, based on these biblical models, sometimes they
promoted respect and admiration for lower-class people and their signature
virtues of humility and simplicity. Or, they found ways to translate these
ideas into terms that were more easily accepted by the emerging Christian
elite. Sometimes, they did a little of both. Their responses to potential
challenges to elite dominance would then influence how later generations
of Christians understood these potentially subversive biblical passages.

During the period studied in this book – the second half of the fourth
century and the first decades of the fifth century – Christian beliefs and
virtues were not yet "common sense," even though the religion was
becoming not only mainstream but also dominant. While Christian "com-
mon sense" was taking shape, several interconnected developments influ-
enced how upper-class Christians understood their place in society. During
this period, educated men began to dominate the episcopacy. Unlike
previous generations of church leaders, these men were consistently
drawn from the leading families of their regions.[5] At the same time, ascetic
virtue played an increasingly important role in determining and expressing
spiritual authority, while almsgiving became crucial for Christian commu-
nities, which were growing in numbers and wealth. In all of these matters –
episcopal leadership, asceticism, and almsgiving – biblical teachings about
wealth, poverty, work, power, and inequality called into question certain
aspects of elite worldviews. While discussions of the social implications of
Christian teachings would continue through the centuries, this book is
focused on the decades when Christian leaders were first settling into their
dominant roles in their society.

In order to examine the changing social attitudes in detail, this book
centers on selected Greek authors from the Eastern Roman Empire:
primarily the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa,
and Gregory of Nazianzus) and John Chrysostom. These men were influ-
ential in their own day as theologians, preachers, and bishops; starting

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[5] C. Rapp, "The Elite Status of Bishops in Late Antiquity in Ecclesiastical, Spiritual, and Social
Contexts," *Arethusa*, 33.3 (2000), 379–99; F. Gilliard, "Senatorial Bishops in the Fourth Century,"
Harvard Theological Review, 77.2 (1984), 153–75; T. Kopecek, "The Social Class of the Cappadocian
Fathers," *Church History*, 42.4 (1973), 453–66. On Gregory of Nazianzus as an example of the clergy
becoming an appealing option for upper-class men, see N. McLynn, "*Curiales* into Churchmen: The
Case of Gregory of Nazianzen," in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Le Trasformazioni delle Élites in Età
Tardoantica*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale Perugia, 15–16 Marzo 2004 (Rome: L'Erma di
Bretscheider, 2006), 277–96.

around the year 500, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom
were included in the Western lists of the Doctors of the Church and
portrayed in Byzantine texts and images as the "Three Holy Hierarchs"
(Gregory of Nyssa, although not part of this exclusive group, was acknow-
ledged as a saint).[6] Their theological commentaries, sermons, and letters
would have a lasting influence on later Christian thought. The church
histories by Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret provide add-
itional perspectives on the interplay between Christian ideals and the
upper-class culture of church leaders in the midst of theological controver-
sies. All of these authors, based mostly in Antioch, Constantinople, and
Cappadocia, were part of the wave of educated men who dominated
church leadership during this period: their writings reflect how they
understood Christian social values and the extent to which upper-class
assumptions colored their views and their teachings. These texts frequently
reflect the social and economic disparities of their day – in the authors'
references to the world around them and in their assumptions about social,
economic, and cultural hierarchies.

By examining how certain Greek theologians and historians understood
the social challenges posed by the Bible – in particular, how they viewed
the apostles' simplicity and humility – this book will hopefully spark
interest in further analysis of the social and economic context of
Christian worldviews in Late Antiquity. Studies of the social attitudes
expressed by church leaders in the Latin West, Egypt, and the Syriac
East would complement (and possibly complicate) the discussions offered
here; for example, the writings of Ambrose and Jerome provide additional
examples of the worldviews of upper-class churchmen, while the works of
Shenoute of Atripe reflect the perspective of a church leader who aligned
himself with the poor.[7]

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[6] See R. Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers From the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 186–8.

[7] Several important recent studies of changing social values and ideas focus on Latin authors. See Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* and *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); J. C. M. de Oliveira, *Potestas Populi: Participation Populaire et Action Collective dans les Villes de l'Afrique Romaine Tardive: vers 300–430 apr. J.-C.* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); C. Freu, *Les Figures du Pauvre dans les Sources Italiennes de l'Antiquité Tardive* (Paris: De Boccard, 2007); J.-M. Salamito, *Les Virtuoses et la Multitude. Aspects Sociaux de la Controverse entre Augustin et les Pélagiens* (Grenoble: Millon, 2005); M. R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). On Shenoute, see A. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty: Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict, and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

By examining multiple authors' understandings of the apostles and their virtues of simplicity and humility, it is possible to find similarities among them, as well as some noteworthy divergences. The differences among the authors discussed here – and the range of ideas that can be found within a single author's writings – show how Christian social teachings and traditional elite (and often elitist) sentiments could combine or resist each other in various ways, and how these views could shift depending on individual circumstances and personalities. Moreover, the Cappadocian Fathers allow us to see the inner workings of a rural, yet cosmopolitan, elite family, while John Chrysostom, having spent his adult life as an ascetic and then as a clergyman in Antioch and Constantinople, was situated firmly within an urban setting and was much less involved with his relatives. The study of these influential bishops and church historians can tell us how the social milieu of educated men from well-off families influenced their religious beliefs, their understanding of their own privileges, and their views of lower-status people.

Social Relations, Christian Virtues, and Aristocratic Mentality

A surge of scholarly attention in recent years has revealed many of the complexities of Christian views about wealth and poverty in Late Antiquity. We have learned that the focus on the poor in numerous genres, especially homilies, was not due to rising inequality, but rather to a shift in the "social imagination" regarding the meaning of poverty and almsgiving.[8] The Christian emphasis on providing for "the poor" in particular (rather than for citizens, as Greeks and Romans had traditionally done) introduced a new dimension to social relations. New religious institutions, such as hospitals and almshouses, arose in tandem with greater esteem for the familiar virtues of piety, hospitality, and giving.[9] This book aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the "social

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[8] On the relationship between traditional euergetism and Christian almsgiving, see E. Patlagean, *Pauvreté Économique et Pauvreté Sociale à Byzance, 4e-7e Siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1977; repr. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2017), and, more recently, R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313–450)* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 32–3. On the change in "social imagination" rather than economic realities, see P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), 74.

[9] P. Van Nuffelen, "Social Ethics and Moral Discourse in Late Antiquity," in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics*, 45–63. On hospitals, see A. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

imagination" of Late Antiquity by continuing to focus on the encounter between religious beliefs and social and economic structures, while at the same time shifting attention away from poverty and, instead, toward the Christian virtues of humility and simplicity. Like poverty, both simplicity and humility were closely associated with lower-class, lower-status, and less-educated people. The emergence of these traits as Christian virtues traced back to the Bible, and in particular, the social contexts of Jesus and the apostles as manual workers with little or no formal education. With these lowly traits now touted as estimable virtues, questions arose about the Christian elite's self-definition and how they should regard their social inferiors. What did prominent bishops make of the apostles' social and economic backgrounds? How would educated, well-connected Christians understand simplicity and humility? Elizabeth Clark has observed that these seemingly contradictory identities and values coexisted, rather than one replacing the other:

> [O]nce "simplicity" had been accepted as a prime Christian virtue, its cultivation was encouraged by and for all believers, even those who were far from "simple." For sophisticated writers such as Augustine and John Chrysostom, the "simple" Christian virtues were to be pursued after the acquisition of *paideia* – not in place of it.[10]

Jean-Marie Salamito and Michele Salzman have made similar observations about the reaction of the economic and cultural elite to a religion with such humble beginnings.[11] To what extent were members of the upper classes won over to Christianity by its teachings, and to what extent were Christian teachings adjusted to fit elite values?[12] Drawing mostly on Latin authors in his studies, Salamito calls attention to how upper-class church authorities expressed new views about social hierarchy, asserting that Christian virtues led to a "mental revolution" for the elite.[13] For

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[10] E. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1999) 55.

[11] M. R. Salzman, "Elite Realities and Mentalités: The Making of a Western Christian Aristocracy," *Arethusa*, 33.3 (2000), 347–62; J.-M. Salamito, "La Christianisation et les Nouvelles Règles de la Vie Sociale," in C. Pietri and L. Pietri (eds.), *Histoire du Christianisme: des Origines à nos Jours. Tome 2: Naissance d'une Chrétienté (250–430)* (Paris: Désclee, 1995), 675–717; "Prédication Chrétienne et Mentalité Aristocratique: Aspects Occidentaux d'une Confrontation (IVe-Ve Siècle)," in J. Santos and R. Teja (eds.), *El Cristianismo: Aspectos Históricos de su Origen y Difusión en Hispania. Actas del Symposium de Vitoria-Gasteiz* (November 25–27, 1996) (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Universidad de País Vasco, 2000), 37–52; "Christianisation et Démocratisation de la Culture: Aspects Aristocratiques et Aspects Populaires de l'Être-Chrétien aux IIIe et IVe Siècles," *Antiquité Tardive* 9 (2002), 165–78. Salamito also examines the connections between spiritual merit and worldly social standing in his book on the Pelagian controversy, *Les Virtuoses et la Multitude*.

[12] Salamito, "Prédication Chrétienne," 38.   [13] Ibid., 44.

instance, Ambrose's view of humanity as dependent "day-workers of God" contrasted starkly with typical aristocratic values of leisure and autonomy.[14] Salzman's research on Western aristocratic Christians emphasizes the resilience of elitist worldviews and how bishops shaped the Christian message to fit upper-class expectations.[15] Both of these scholars have observed how conceptions of virtue and nobility became intertwined in a way that tended to cede spiritual advantages to elite Christians.[16] These discussions of the merging of Christianity with a late antique aristocratic *mentalité* demonstrate that there is much more to learn about the shifts in common sense regarding social identity and virtue: how deeply did the Christian "mental revolution" reach?

The Sociology of Elites and Their Adaptations of New Social Values

By explicitly treating late antique figures such as the Cappadocian Fathers in terms of both their elite worldly standing and their ecclesiastical roles, we can observe how they viewed the implications of Christian teachings through the lens of their own social standing; the strength of these lenses varied depending on the context and the individual.[17] Many leading church authorities were distinguished by their wealth, education, church office, and social networks.[18] In a time of episcopal rivalries and theological controversies, they could not take their authority and influence for granted: they faced competition from rival bishops, theologians, and ascetics. While upper-class men were increasingly the ones with theological expertise and church offices in Late Antiquity, there were other individuals with spiritual mystique but without traditional social credentials who were also claiming these resources and vying with the educated, well-connected men for influence in their communities.[19] As we shall see, the church authorities' concerns about protecting their own standing in the church

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[14] Ibid., 43, citing Ambrose *De Tobia*, 24.92.   [15] Salzman, "Elite Realities," 355–62.

[16] Ibid., 358–9; Salamito,"Prédication Chrétienne," 46–51.

[17] Pauline Allen makes a similar point in "Challenges in Approaching Patristic Texts from the Perspective of Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching," in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics,* 30–42, at 33.

[18] On the shared culture of pagan and Christian elites, see S. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[19] On how theological controversies increased episcopal power, see C. Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

and in the broader society led them to condemn these charismatic upstarts. The social and cultural dimension of these rivalries would then affect their understanding of spiritual leadership and how it related to an individual's socioeconomic background.

Alongside the problems posed by rival spiritual leaders, elites within and outside of the church were facing other challenges to their authority. Constantine's establishment of a new senate in Constantinople had disrupted the higher levels of the social hierarchy in the Roman East. "New men" were making their way to the top ranks of society, obtaining imperial offices through education and personal recognition, rather than relying on inherited wealth and family connections.[20] In addition to these factors, the church was becoming an increasingly powerful institution and another source of status in its own right. As part of a new hierarchy within late Roman society, clerical and monastic leaders were another elite group, often possessing "spiritual capital" in addition to wealth and political power.[21] Like any elite group, they aimed to control access to the resources that were valuable to them and protect their claims from rivals. But the resources they aimed to control were somewhat different from those of other powerful groups. Even prosperous and refined men needed at least to appear to base their claims to ecclesiastical power on spiritual virtue rather than on wealth, status, or education. Paradoxically, espousing the typically lower-class traits of humility and simplicity as virtues allowed upper-class Christians to claim greater spiritual authority. But did this mean that they would need to hide or diminish their prestige and education, which were otherwise so highly valued?

This book tries to understand how certain leading Christians responded to this shift in ideas about virtue and to what extent they embraced ideas that would be problematic to any elite – the idealization of simplicity and humility. A contemporary comparison might help us to appreciate the complexity of elite self-understanding within a culture that rejects or has low regard for the criteria by which the elite is identified. Many of today's social, economic, and cultural elites often use the language of equality and meritocracy to describe their success and standing in society. In doing so, they are responding to the widespread embrace of these values by claiming (and presumably, for many, believing) that their achievements come from their own hard work and talent. At the same time, they downplay their

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[20]   Brown, "The Study of Elites in Late Antiquity," *Arethusa*, 33.3 (2000), 321–46.
[21]   On "spiritual capital," see B. Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory*, 21:2 (June 2003), 150–74.

privileges or deny that the deck was stacked in their favor due to their socioeconomic origins and access to elite education.[22] Along the same lines, elites in a society that idealizes middle-class values might avoid acknowledging their membership in the upper class (imagining only those with even higher incomes as "truly wealthy"), while also claiming to deserve their good fortune because of their hard work and good manners (i.e. their middle-class virtues).[23] While today's elites present themselves as success stories in a meritocracy, late antique ecclesiastical elites presented their authority as based on their spiritual virtue. In both cases, we can see individuals downplaying certain privileges, including access to education and family connections, but all the while continuing to rely on these advantages that they claim are unimportant. These sociological studies highlight the anxiety and defensiveness that result from these tensions for some contemporary elites. In the examples examined in this book, we will see how similar tensions influenced how upper-class Christian leaders viewed their society, and how they understood their religion's social teachings.

In addition to drawing on "the sociology of elites" as a framework for understanding late antique social attitudes, social psychology can also help to explain why upper-class values were so resistant to change. For instance, when Christian elites continued to cherish their education and family connections despite scriptural passages favoring the meek over the exalted, this could be seen as a form of "confirmation bias" or "motivated reasoning." Often discussed in the context of the spread of conspiracy theories or the problem of bias in the scientific method, these terms refer to the tendency to focus on information that supports one's preexisting beliefs and to ignore information that runs counter to those beliefs.[24] When we apply these concepts to Late Antiquity, we can observe how this tendency played out when educated, upper-class church authorities interpreted elements of their religious tradition that seemed to promote social equality or even social reversal. Their conflicting beliefs would have created a sort of cognitive dissonance.[25] That is, when faced with dissonant beliefs about the

[22] S. Rahman Khan, "The Sociology of Elites," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38 (2012), 361–77.
[23] See R. Sherman, *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence* (Princeton University Press, 2017). On the anxiety of the elite regarding their own privileges and their wish for ritual or symbolic status reversal (which ultimately reinforces social hierarchies), see V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 201.
[24] Z. Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin*, 108.3 (1990), 480–98.
[25] According to Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, when a belief or a behavior conflicts with one's view of the world, "if the cognitive elements do not correspond with a certain reality which impinges, certain pressures must exist." *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University Press, 1957), 11.

world (e.g. high status and education are essential for leaders; at the same time, the apostles were manual workers and yet ideal spiritual leaders), they could not easily hold onto both worldviews. According to cognitive dissonance theory, the pressure of conflicting beliefs results in psychological discomfort, which leads people to try to resolve the conflict, sometimes through "motivated" or biased reasoning that can in turn lead to self-deception. In these cases, people resolve the conflict by ignoring evidence that goes against their preexisting inclinations.[26] According to the social psychologist Leon Festinger, this selective decision-making is due to a drive for consistency and is largely, if not entirely, subconscious.[27] So, when we find bishops articulating elite values that seem to go against biblical teachings, biased reasoning and cognitive dissonance are, I would argue, more useful ways to understand the inconsistency, rather than simply attributing it to hypocrisy or a deliberate attempt to "aristocratize" their religion.[28]

Overview of Chapters

Although numerous Christian authors devoted treatises, sermons, and letters to the issues of wealth, poverty, and almsgiving, their writings reflect a less systematic approach to other aspects of social relations. There are few direct discussions of how high-status, educated Christians should treat each other and their social inferiors in light of the biblical promise that "those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."[29] Instead of systematic examinations of the implications of biblical teachings about social status, their references to this topic are found scattered across different sermons, letters, histories, and theological treatises.[30] With the exception of homilies and treatises on poverty and almsgiving, social attitudes and social relations were not often in the spotlight of patristic discussions. These discussions usually

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[26] D. Scott-Kakures, "Unsettling Questions: Cognitive Dissonance in Self-Deception," *Social Theory & Practice*, 35.1 (2009), 73–106, at 73–5.

[27] Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 6.

[28] For examples of beliefs that seem to conflict, see Nonna Verna Harrison's discussion of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom's belief in fundamental equality of humans as well as their acceptance of earthly inequality: "Greek Patristic Perspectives on the Origins of Social Injustice," in N. V. Harrison and D. G. Hunter (eds.), *Suffering and Evil in Early Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 81–96.

[29] Mt. 23:12.

[30] A rare example of an extended discussion of virtue and social standing, focused on how upper-class Christians should transform their behavior, can be found in Clement of Alexandria's (c. 150–215) *Paedagogus*.

remained in the background: in the references to the apostles and other biblical role models, in discussions of how Christian values differed from pagan values, in contrasts between worldly and spiritual matters, and in critiques of rivals in theological controversies. By examining these references and anecdotes, we can observe how traditional elite social values affected these authors' understanding of their religion, and vice versa.

In order to understand the prevailing "common sense" about social and economic class in Late Antiquity that determined much of how church leaders viewed their world, the first two chapters provide overviews of Roman, early Christian, and late antique Christian attitudes toward social and economic inequality, manual labor, and elite status-markers (such as formal education). The introduction of Christian values and role models changed social expectations in some respects – such as the new emphasis on the practice of almsgiving – but did not completely transform older assumptions about social hierarchy. This background will help us to understand the context of upper-class bishops and theologians' social attitudes and thus their starting point from which they understood the social implications of Christian teachings.

The subsequent chapters examine the tension between traditional elite values based on wealth, education, and prestige versus the apostolic ideals of hard work, simplicity, and humility. Chapter 3 demonstrates how virtues associated with the apostles introduced new social values in a variety of contexts. In particular, the tentmakers and fishermen influenced how church leaders envisioned the qualities of the ideal bishop as well as how they considered the role of educated discourse in discussions among Christians. In some contexts, inspired by the apostles, church leaders expressed their admiration for a simple, uneducated faith and for the virtues of manual workers. In other cases, however, they professed more traditional values, preferring educated, well-connected men in positions of church leadership. The apostles would remain role models for Christian leaders in some respects, but their social, economic, and educational standing were qualities that were not often emulated or promoted.

Chapter 4 turns to the theological controversies of this period and how the virtue of simplicity became a complicated, even dangerous, issue. In addition to articulating their understanding of Christian doctrine and way of life, bishops and theologians had to defend themselves amid theological divisions. In this context, a simple statement of faith would not suffice. Church authorities' attacks against enemies and praise for their friends often revealed their assumptions about education and social values –