

PART II

The Ritual Making of *Res Sacrae*

LIKE PART I, PART II CONSISTS OF TWO CLOSELY KNIT CHAPTERS, followed by a third that challenges them. Chapters 4 and 5 form a pair, employing theories of social anthropologists to capture succinctly how ritual discourses produced in the making of *res sacrae* differed from the regulatory discourse. Chapter 4 relies on Igor Kopytoff's highly influential insights: that things have lives; that the commoditization of things is a process; and that there is in fact a process opposite to that of commoditization, which Kopytoff calls "singularization." I argue that the regulatory discourse singularized *res sacrae*. By contrast, the ritual discourse was perceived as recommoditizing *res sacrae*. This distinction explains conflicts between bishops and donors. The latter insisted on the legal singularity of their donations and resisted what they perceived as recommoditization. The former tried to convince donors that the regifting of *res sacrae* actually increased their value. Chapter 5 offers an analysis of exactly how bishops downplayed the value of *res sacrae* during the very ritual that legally singularized them, effectively "singularizing" human souls instead. By contrast, chapter 6 turns to bishops who lacked imperial endorsement and therefore used the ritual discourse to disengage *res sacrae* from the imperial clutch. The goal of part II is not to mark late antique Christian ritual practices of dedicatory, consecratory, and anniversary celebrations as somehow unique. Instead, the purpose is to highlight how they generated ideas of sacralization that were at variance with the regulatory discourse and that thereby gave rise to tensions among bishops, donors, and jurists. Ritual discourses could be deployed not only to support the legal anchors but also to destabilize them. The following chapters focus on the latter, showing how certain ritual discourses rhetorically unraveled legal knots.

Dedications

*Do walls make Christians?*¹

In the late fourth century, Prudentius left a life of legal practice and political posts to write Christian literary works. One of them was a poem celebrating the martyr Laurentius (Saint Lawrence or Laurence), who was executed in 258 when Christian practice was illicit in the Roman Empire.² Prudentius imagines how the prefect of Rome and Laurentius interacted, when the prefect ordered the confiscation of the church treasury for which Laurentius was responsible.

In Prudentius's poem, Laurentius promises to perform a proper inventory in the course of three days and then to hand over the ecclesial property.³ When the prefect arrives at the appointed time, Laurentius announces to the prefect: "Marvel at the wealth set out before you, which our exceeding rich God has in his sanctuaries. You will see the great nave gleaming with vessels of gold, and along the open colonnades course on course of precious metal."⁴ With this imagined speech, Prudentius retrojects late fourth- and early fifth-century expectations of what the interior of a great church in the city of Rome would look like into the mid-third century.

When the prefect enters through the church doors, he is startled to see "crowds of poor people standing, a disfigured swarm" and to hear the loud "din" of their appeals to him.⁵ Laurentius explains:

Here then are the golden coins which a short while ago I promised, coins which tumbling walls cannot bury under burning ashes, nor thief carry away by stealth. And now I give you noble jewels also, so that you need not think Christ is poor, jewels of flashing light with which this temple is adorned. You see the consecrated virgins, and marvel at the pure old women who after the loss of their first husbands have known no second love. These are the Church's necklace, the jewels with which she decks herself; thus dowered she is pleasing to Christ, and thus she adorns her high head. There are her riches, take them up; with them you will adorn the city of Romulus and enrich the emperor's estate, and yourself be made richer too.⁶

Laurentius claims that the true wealth of the church consists of the poor and the widows. To the prefect, Laurentius offers the poor as the golden coins and the widows as the shimmering jewels. In a rage, the prefect exclaims, “We are being deceived to a stupendous extent through so many allegories!”⁷

As this chapter and the next will demonstrate, Prudentius’s imagined confrontation between Laurentius and the prefect dramatically captures conflicts that occurred again and again in the fourth and fifth centuries. However, the struggles were not between ecclesiastical stewards and city prefects. Instead, bishops wishing to perform acts of mercy confronted donors who wished to protect their ecclesial donations. The inalienability of ecclesial property clashed with the bishop’s primary duty to care for the poor. Some bishops used the contexts of dedication and consecration to convey allegorical lessons akin to Prudentius’s Laurentius. Other bishops went a step further: they used such dedicatory and consecratory lessons to justify the alienation of *res sacrae*. This chapter concerns the context of dedication; the next chapter concerns that of consecration.

As part I showed, the legal and canonical imagination regarding *res sacrae* created mechanisms for both disciplining and preventing episcopal misconduct. By contrast, bishops and other patrons employed ritual practices to broadcast exemplary conduct. Through their installation of dedicatory images and inscriptions in churches, patrons constructed church buildings as visual and textual embodiments of sacred exchanges to be imitated by churchgoers.

Not everyone agreed, however, as to how a church should look, and the variety in types of donors’ images and inscriptions attests to that. In some churches, donors were depicted in ways that marked the abundance of their offerings without direct reference to the purpose of their gift, the exchange process, the return, and so on. At the same time, a number of writers made attempts to regulate what the walls of a church ought to convey. They claimed that ecclesial images should not simply be pleasing to the eyes but should unambiguously educate viewers as to what is holy and how to become holy. In other words, ecclesial images and inscriptions were to give as little interpretive space as possible for the viewer to read them with reference to the nonsacred rather than the sacred. The purpose of church adornment was to broadcast what exactly sacred exchanges entailed. Certain types of donors’ images and inscriptions did commemorate offerings in ways that directly invoked holiness and holy exchanges. Artists posed donors in gestures of pious supplication, illustrating how patronage led these donors to triumph with Christ and to receive divine largesse from him. Some donor portraits of bishops advertised such messages at focal points of church architecture: the eastern apse or the triumphal arch. Such episcopal images show how the concepts of supplication, triumph, and divine largesse, found widely among dedicatory practices, reproduce the legal-canonical imaginary on *res sacrae* explained in part I, with one important exception. In the

regulatory discourse, *res sacrae* were permitted to be protecting, on the condition that this did not infringe on *res sacrae*'s status as protected. By contrast, in the ritual context of making *res sacrae*, it was the protecting role of churches that took center stage.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

To elucidate the significance of this difference between legal and ritual discourses on *res sacrae*, it will be helpful to draw a distinction between two kinds of economies. I will borrow vocabulary about commodities and exchange processes from a theorist of material culture, Igor Kopytoff.⁸ Such vocabulary will help describe the two sorts of economies of exchange in which church buildings operated, one legal and the other ritual. My focus, however, will center on how the material culture of dedicatory practices visualized the ritual economy of exchange.

The ritual of consecration turned a building and its land into a church. For both legal practitioners and ritual agents, the ritual of consecration marked a transaction; but for legal practitioners that transaction was one thing and for the ritual agents it was another. Churches participated in two economies of exchange, depending on whether one looked at churches from a legal standpoint or from a ritual one. According to legal practitioners, the ritual of consecration "singularized" churches. The ritual took churches out of the sphere of the economy, out of the sphere of commodity exchange altogether. But for ritual agents, the consecration marked one link in an endless series of exchanges between the human and the celestial realms. The church was one gift in a continuous chain of gift exchanges. The purpose of these exchanges was to mark a relationship between pious Christians and celestial beings.

Legally, a church was not exchangeable, but ritually it was. This difference created some significant tension for bishops. Because church properties were singularized legally, they could not be sold even to perform acts of mercy, though bishops did successfully petition for some exceptions.⁹ And yet, acts of mercy were the most prized gifts that could be offered in the endless chain of gift exchange with the heavenly realm.

In fact, the singularization of ecclesial property effectively turned it into a person—an unexchangeable free person. Donors had the law on their side, but bishops tried to persuade them that their donations were merely things, not persons.¹⁰ The needy were persons. Repurposing donors' gifts for the needy's sake opened a larger investment with God than did beautification of the church. In addressing donors, bishops had to reconcile an ethos that resisted the liquidation of pious investments of wealth with the need to amass funds for the redemption of captives and for other acts of mercy. Their strategy was to emphasize the *res* part of *res sacrae*. The use of sacred things to perform acts of mercy for persons actually

increased the value of donors' pious investment of wealth. As chapter 5 will show, this perspective was part and parcel of a larger episcopal endeavor to spiritualize the sacrality of material things.

In what follows, I first offer examples of how types of donors' images and inscriptions varied widely and how certain writers tried to regulate the appearance of their respective local church spaces. Then, I focus on one type of dedicatory practice, one that showcased how church buildings functioned in exchanges between humans on earth and beings of the celestial realm. Finally, I show how some donors resisted the ritual economy of the "sacred," preferring instead the legal one.

HOW TO ADORN *RES SACRAE*

While certain dedicatory images and inscriptions installed in churches illustrate understandings of sanctity, others do not make explicit reference to "the sacred." When a donor is depicted in the act of engaging in his or her craft or simply states in an inscription how many square feet of a mosaic floor he or she donated, it is difficult to discern what a late antique viewer would have recognized about the sanctity of donors in such dedicatory pieces, aside from the awareness that an olive picker contributed to the adornment of God's house¹¹ or that a certain Januarius donated 830 feet of a mosaic pavement.¹² By contrast, some late antique writers (Nilus of Ancyra, Paulinus of Nola, Choricus of Gaza, and Anastasius of Gerasa) preferred a narrow repertoire of images and inscriptions for churches, one that unambiguously conveyed spiritual truths.

Even a cursory sample of images and inscriptions from both the East and the West attests to the multiplicity of ways churches could be adorned. Numerous mosaic programs preserved in churches of the prefecture of the East visualize how patrons' estates thrived and flourished. For example, pavement mosaics completed on August 4, 576 in the nave of a church in modern-day Kissufim near the Gaza Strip depict three patrons in the north aisle.¹³ Dates, coins, and fowl attest to the abundance of these patrons' assets. One named Orbicon holds a cluster of dates in one hand and transports baskets and jars on camelback.¹⁴ A church at Umm al-Rasas in Jordan offers further examples of how mosaics visualized patronal abundance. Most of the donors are portrayed on the nave floor conducting various agricultural activities, including plowing, hunting, slaughtering, and harvesting. All the donors were probably identified by name via a mosaic inscription beside their portrayal, but not all names survive. The figures themselves only remain in outline form.¹⁵

The same general observation holds of western regions. Many mosaic pavements in Italy identify the patron and the number of mosaic pavement feet he or she donated.¹⁶ For instance, at the cathedral church of Florence, thought to date

to the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth, an inscription lists the names of those whose donations funded parts of the mosaic floor.¹⁷ The Church of Aquileia (built under Bishop Theodore sometime between 304 and 325) simply depicts portraits of donors on the mosaic pavement without accompanying names.¹⁸ Some of them are shown engaging in their occupational activity.¹⁹ They may all have been members of one wealthy household.²⁰

I do not suggest that there could be no theological interpretation of such images and inscriptions at all, only that the donors are not depicted in any immediately identifiable “holy” way.²¹ Images of abundant yield and inscriptions of exact footage underscore the labor invested and the magnitude of the gift. They do not necessarily call attention to specific notions of sacrality.

In the midst of multiple, varied practices for adorning church buildings, a number of writers expressed their view that ecclesial images ought to convey the successes of spiritual athletes unambiguously. Since images of prosperity ran the risk of allowing their beholders to feast their eyes on the pleasures of earthly life, Nilus of Ancyra, Paulinus of Nola, Choricus of Gaza, and Anastasius of Gerasa all wrote in favor of ecclesial artwork that clearly expressed spiritual wealth.²²

Nilus of Ancyra (d. 430) reacted vehemently against the idea of installing genre scenes when the prefect Olympiodorus expressed his perspective about how he wished to adorn a church built for the holy martyrs.²³ According to Nilus, Olympiodorus suggested that the eastern wall of the sanctuary be reserved for images of the martyrs, while the northern and southern wall would display scenes of animal hunts both on land and at sea. As for the nave, Olympiodorus proposed pictures of crosses, birds, beasts, reptiles, and plants. In response, Nilus distinguished images that merely delight the eyes for delight’s sake from images that edify the faithful. Not only do genre scenes fail to educate the faithful; they in fact distract (*περιπλανήσαι*) churchgoers from the holy lessons they ought to receive at church.²⁴ To emphasize the importance of spiritual edification, Nilus contrasts Olympiodorus’s infantile (*νηπιῶδες*) and childish (*βρεφοπρεπές*) proposal for an ecclesial artistic program with a mature (*στερρός*) and adult (*ἀνδρώδης*) vision.²⁵ The latter kind of program allows no space for “unnecessary images” (*περιττά*), only crosses and illustrations of scenes from the Old and New Testaments,²⁶ so that “the illiterate who are unable to read the Holy Scriptures, may, by gazing at the pictures, become mindful of the manly deeds of those who have genuinely served the true God, and may be roused to emulate those glorious and celebrated feats.”²⁷ For Nilus, the visual speech of church walls ought to teach churchgoers the successful practices of holy athletes.

Paulinus of Nola (ca. 354–431), on the other hand, acknowledged that it was unusual to depict saintly figures in decorative programs. Like Nilus, however, he promoted the practice of using artistic programs for pious educational purposes. Paulinus delivered an oration on the feast day of Saint Felix at the church bearing

the saint's name in Cimitile, while it was still in the process of renovation and one year before it would be consecrated. In his speech, Paulinus raised a question that he expected the audience members would have in mind as they witnessed the decorative work in progress: "You may perhaps ask what motive implanted in us this decision to adorn the holy houses with representations of living persons, an unusual custom."²⁸ The motive, he explains, was educational in nature: to train formerly pagan Christians to celebrate Saint Felix's festival with Christian devotional habits, not pagan ones. Instead of feasting with food and drink, the paintings would inspire former pagans to feast with virtue:

As the paintings beguile their hunger, their astonishment may allow better behaviour to develop in them. Those reading the holy accounts of chastity in action are infiltrated by virtue and inspired by saintly example. As they gape, their drink is sobriety, and they forget the longing for excessive wine. As they pass the day sightseeing over this quite large area, their cups are rarely filled. They have spent their time on the wonders of the place, and only a few hours subsequently remain for feasting.²⁹

For Paulinus, it was not genre scenes that risked inhibiting the attainment of virtue, but pagan feasting habits. Like Nilus, Paulinus preferred to sponsor ecclesial visual programs that would hold their audience captive toward one end: to keep viewers' eyes fixed on examples of successful holy athletes.

In one of his panegyrics for Bishop Marcianus of Gaza, Choricus of the same city (fl. late fifth or early sixth century) offers an explanation as to why artists depicted only certain types of birds in the churches Marcianus founded. The pictures of some birds would call to mind poets' stories—false fables, instead of true ones:

The birds of the poets, nightingale and cicada, the artist has done well to reject, lest even the memory of those fables intrude upon the sacred place. Instead of them he has enjoyed depicting a host of other birds and a flock of partridges: perhaps he would have rendered the very music of their cries, had not the sound hindered the hearing of God's word.³⁰

Choricus imagines that certain images can "intrude into the pious place" (*ἐν εὐσεβείῳ χωρίῳ συννεισέρχηται*) and the artist that Bishop Marcianus entrusted with adorning the church avoided such intrusive subjects in his work.³¹ Since the birds of the poets ran the risk of directing viewers' attention away from the pious place and instead to poets' legends, Choricus praises Bishop Marcianus's artist for choosing to depict certain kinds of feathered creatures over others.

According to such writers as Nilus, Paulinus, and Choricus, the church should serve as a narrow, direct visual training ground for the attainment of holiness, one that provided as little room as possible for viewers to delight in earthly pleasures over celestial ones. At Gerasa, Bishop Anastasius had the inscription itself voice such a purpose. The dedicatory inscription at the Church of Saints Peter

and Paul (ca. 540) speaks of “my bishop,” so that the floor itself declares the founder’s success in visually teaching “the faithful counsels of God.” The mosaic text reads:

Indeed, my bishop brings beautiful marvels to those who inhabit this city and land; for, *in order to teach the faithful counsels of God*, the renowned Anastasius built a house for Peter and Paul, the leading disciples (for the Savior granted them authority), and adorned it with silver and beautifully colored stones.³²

It is the floor that declares the purpose of the church’s “silver and beautifully colored stones”—namely, “to teach the faithful counsels of God.”

DEDICATORY PRACTICES AND *RES SACRAE* IN ECONOMIES OF EXCHANGE

Nilus, Paulinus, Choricus, and Anastasius promoted in various ways the idea that choices regarding church adornment should be made with only one aim in view: to broadcast what it means to be sacred. While the images of donors mentioned above depict them in portrait form or in the exercise of their daily occupation with abundant yield, other pieces of dedicatory imagery portray supplicant donors requesting triumph with Christ and divine largesse. Such donor imagery creates of the church a place where viewers are invited into the same act of supplication with the hope of the same returns. The church speaks to the beholder through the nonverbal language of gestures and the verbal language of inscriptions to surround the viewer with a multitude of prayers for favor. By interacting with the images and texts, the viewer learns how to participate in an intercessory exchange that locates the church as the place where divine gifts can be sought, received, and celebrated. The exchange process visually taught on the church walls broadcasted how ritual agents understood the function of church property, which fundamentally differed from how legal practitioners understood it. Before analyzing material examples of such visual education, it will be helpful to introduce a theoretical distinction.

As mentioned at the outset, legal practitioners “singularized” church property. The anthropologist Igor Kopytoff draws a distinction between two different processes in economies of exchange: singularization and commoditization.³³ Singularization is the opposite of commoditization. The more something is exchangeable for other things, the more it is commoditized. In the United States and in many countries today, money is the most commoditized thing because almost any object can be exchanged for money. In nonmonetary economies, other objects can be commoditized. For example, Kopytoff cites the spheres of exchange among the Tiv people in central Nigeria prior to the colonial period, who are said to have had three separate spheres of exchange. In the sphere of subsistence items, yams,

cereals, chickens, goats, utensils, and so on could be exchanged for each other. In the sphere of prestige items, cattle, slaves, special cloths, medicines, brass rods, and so on could be exchanged for each other. Finally, there was the sphere of rights in people—rights in wives, wards, and offspring. The item that allowed for exchanges across the three separate spheres was brass rods, which could be exchanged for subsistence items and which could also initiate transactions in the sphere of rights in people.³⁴ Therefore, the most commoditized things among the Tiv were brass rods. The opposite of what becomes “common” or “commoditized” is that which becomes “singular.” Singularization means that something that could otherwise be a commodity is taken out of the sphere of commodity exchange altogether. One can make personal choices to singularize items like a private diary or a special heirloom—items one would never exchange. Likewise, governments can publicly singularize items. The British monarchy singularized the Star of India into the “crown jewel.”³⁵

Singularization is the term Kopytoff would use to describe the process that churches legally underwent in the Roman Empire. The name for the process among Roman jurists, however, was not “singularization” but *consecration*. The ritual of consecration made something a “sacred thing” (*res sacra*). Gaius, a jurist of the second century, articulated this legal principle with regard to the sacred places of Roman religion. In a textbook for students, he explained how “things” are categorized: “The main division of things is divided into two limbs; some are under divine law, others under human [law]. Under divine law, for instance, are sacred things and religious [things]. Sacred [things] are those consecrated to the gods above [. . .]. What indeed is under divine law belongs to no one.”³⁶ In other words, only things that fall under human law are commodities. Things under divine law, such as *res sacrae*, are singular. They lie outside the spheres of exchange because they belong to no one. As part I shows, this definition of sacred things started to be applied to Christian places consecrated to God in the fourth century. Civil laws and ecclesiastical canons written in the fourth and fifth centuries make it clear that this legal principle was applied to churches. However, it would not be until Justinian issued a new and updated textbook of law in the sixth century that the principle would be rewritten with explicit reference to churches. Justinian’s textbook reads: “Now, belonging to no one are sacred things [. . .]: for what is under divine law belongs to no one. Sacred are those things that are consecrated to God ritually and by the pontiffs, such as sacred buildings and gifts, which are ritually dedicated to the service of God.”³⁷ Justinian’s textbook explicitly states that churches do not belong to any human entity, whether individual or corporate.

What did it mean for ecclesial property to be taken out of the spheres of exchange? What did it mean for ecclesial property’s status as a commodity to be revoked? What did it mean for ecclesial property’s status to be made singular?

Or, to use the language of Roman jurists, what did it mean for ecclesial property to be made sacred? According to the jurists who wrote civil laws and the bishops who wrote ecclesiastical canons, singularization meant that churches were protected places and protecting places.³⁸ Ecclesial property was protected because it belonged to no one, and thus could not be the object of transactions. Ecclesial property enjoyed special privileges that favored the increase of assets. Churches were protecting places because violence was not permitted there; criminals and refugees could seek asylum there; captives could be ransomed there; and slaves could be manumitted or freed there. The legal singularization of churches made them places that were not commodities and places where protection could be sought.

In the horizontal economy—that is to say, in exchanges among humans—churches were not commodities. By contrast, the vertical economy operated under the opposite arrangement. In the vertical economy—that is to say, in exchanges between humans and celestial beings—churches were not singularized. Rather, ecclesial property was exchangeable. Dedicatory images and inscriptions installed in churches emphasize the vertical exchange of votive offerings for divine favors. Donors offered churches and church assets as gifts to Christ and patron saints. In return, donors received divine favors from Christ and patron saints. This initial exchange of gifts paved the way for a relationship between pious Christians and celestial beings.

To initiate a relationship with a celestial being, a pious Christian would offer a donation with a request for a return gift. The pious Christian—that is, the donor—would receive the return gift as divine largesse and the exchanges would continue. None of the transactions was considered a terminal one. Instead, the transactions served to initiate or mark the relationship. The final goal of all the transactions was triumph with Christ.

A good analogy is the relationship of marriage. Some cultures use gift exchanges between two families to initiate a reciprocal relationship.³⁹ The gift exchange is made with the expectation that the new relationship will result in a marriage between two specific members. Likewise, gift exchanges between pious Christians and celestial beings initiated a reciprocal relationship. The relationship was expected to result in triumph with Christ. A church building was one of the commodities offered as a gift to initiate or reinforce the relationship.

As both this chapter and the next will show, the dedication and consecration of a church in ritual practice contributed to the making and binding of networks of social relations among humans and celestial beings. Studies on gifts to saints have made a similar point.⁴⁰ The difference here lies in my attention to the practice of alienation. Alienating gifts that had been made to saints was an even more effective way of generating the same social bonds, according to some bishops.

Ritual practice placed no limitations on ecclesial property's social and economic function. It was not the gift that is singular. If anything was singular ritually speaking, it was the soul's triumph with Christ, the inalienable victory. Churches, crowns, and other trophies of victory merely signaled the "athletic" or "military" triumph at once assured by Christ and also attained by earthly and celestial saints. If the alienation of the trophy signaled the triumph too, then there could be no reason to object, ritually speaking.

Bishops' Donor Portraits and the Ritual Economy

Late antique mosaics of bishops as founders of church buildings illustrate vertical interactions and what those vertical interactions entailed. Each image depicts a bishop carrying a miniature of the church he founded while standing in the company of celestial beings. Interpretations of these images have usually focused on one aspect of the scene: the bishop's offer of his newly founded church to Christ.⁴¹ However, these scenes capture much more than the bishop's offer. These scenes are snapshots of how the vertical exchange works: the donor makes a supplication and an offer to Christ via the patron saint of the church, and Christ gives the donor divine largesse in return. Most significantly, the scenes celebrate Christ's triumph, the saints' triumph with him, and the donor's expected triumph.

The images in question portray Christ as triumphant and as giver par excellence who bestows benefactions on his triumphant officials—namely, his martyrs and bishops. The late antique examples of this motif—the eastern apse mosaics of Saints Cosmas and Damian, of San Vitale, and of Saint Maurus, as well as of the triumphal arch mosaic of San Lorenzo—all come from the region of Italy and date to the sixth century. The action portrayed represents the bishops offering a church to Christ and yet receiving that church from Christ, too. The images simultaneously depict episcopal offering and divine largesse.

The mosaics share three important motifs. First, they depict Christ as the central triumphant figure. In the eastern apse of the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Rome, Christ ascends in the clouds over the River Jordan with his right hand outstretched in a gesture of triumph (fig. 1).⁴² The two figures immediately flanking Christ—Peter and Paul—raise their hands to offer acclamations in celebration of Christ's triumph. At the Basilica of San Lorenzo, also in Rome, the mosaic announces Christ's triumph in a different way. The mosaic lies not on the apse like that of Saints Cosmas and Damian but on an architectural structure that itself signifies triumph: the triumphal arch. As at the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Peter and Paul at San Lorenzo offer acclamations to the triumphant Christ, here enthroned on a blue orb (fig. 2).⁴³

Second, the mosaics juxtapose the bishop with the patron saint of the church building. At the Basilica of San Lorenzo, Saint Laurentius himself recommends Bishop Pelagius (bishop from 579 to 590) to Christ (fig. 2). In the eastern apse



FIGURE 1. Bishop's donor portrait, eastern apse mosaic, Basilica of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, Rome. Photo credit: Basilica dei Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome, Italy.



FIGURE 2. Bishop's donor portrait, triumphal arch mosaic, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Photo credit: Charles Barber.



FIGURE 3. Bishop's donor portrait, eastern apse mosaic, Basilica of St. Maurus, Poreč. Photo credit: Henry Maguire and Ann Terry Poreč Archive, 1990s–2000s, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.

of the Basilica of Saint Maurus, Bishop Euphrasius (bishop from 539 to 553) follows the lead of Saint Maurus himself (fig. 3).⁴⁴ Likewise, at the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Bishop Felix IV (bishop from 526 to 530) follows Saint Cosmas himself in a line toward Christ triumphant (fig. 1).⁴⁵ Finally, at the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, the eastern apse mosaic (fig. 4) shows Saint Vitalis in symmetry with Bishop Ecclesius (bishop from 522 to 532).⁴⁶ Unnamed angels recommend both Saint Vitalis and Bishop Ecclesius to the triumphant Christ. Each of these mosaics thus establishes a relationship between the patron saint of the church and the bishop who founded the church. At San Vitale, the relationship is one of symmetry; at the churches of Saints Cosmas and Damian and Saint Maurus, the patron saint leads the bishop forward; and at San Lorenzo, the patron saint recommends or intercedes on behalf of the bishop.

Third, just as the bishop is juxtaposed to the patron saint, so too the church model is presented alongside the martyr's crown. At San Vitale, scholars agree that Christ extends the crown of martyrdom to Saint Vitalis.⁴⁷ The scene creates symmetry between the crown offered to Saint Vitalis and the church model in Bishop Ecclesius's hands. The triumphal arch at San Lorenzo depicts the same symmetry between Bishop Pelagius's church model and Saint Hippolytus's crown. At the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Bishop Felix's church model stands in symmetry to the martyr Theodore's crown on the opposite side of the scene. At the Basilica of Saint Maurus, the symmetrical relationship is more complex. Bishop Euphrasius's church stands in symmetry to a jeweled book. Behind Bishop Euphrasius, the archdeacon Claudius's jeweled book



FIGURE 4. Bishop's donor portrait, eastern apse mosaic, San Vitale, Ravenna. Photo credit: Alfredo Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY.

stands in symmetry to a martyr's crown. At Saint Maurus, church is to book as book is to crown. To summarize: the four mosaics (1) depict a triumphant Christ, (2) portray the patron saint of the church recommending or leading the bishop of the church, (3) and juxtapose models of church buildings with martyrs' crowns.

Unlike the other images, the mosaic in the eastern apse of San Vitale portrays the martyr Vitalis empty-handed. As mentioned above, scholars agree that while Saint Vitalis stands ready to *receive* his martyr's crown from Christ, by contrast Bishop Ecclesius *offers* his church model to Christ.⁴⁸ But the symmetry of the figures suggests rather that the actions, too, are symmetrical. In other words, if Christ awards Saint Vitalis the crown of martyrdom, then Christ also gives Bishop Ecclesius the church building. Late antique Christians could imagine Christ simultaneously receiving Bishop Ecclesius's church model and giving it back, as the following visual comparisons to imperial images show.

The *aurum coronarium*, "the golden crown," characterizes imperial images of triumph, in which citizens acknowledge the triumphant emperor as protector of the empire by giving him a crown or other offerings.⁴⁹ For example, an ivory



FIGURE 5. Ivory diptych of Justinian. Photo credit: Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Les frères Chuzeville / Art Resource, NY.

diptych depicts Justinian victoriously seated on a rearing horse, while a citizen in the lower zone offers him a wreath crown (fig. 5). Other citizens in the lower zone hold different kinds of offerings.⁵⁰ The obelisk of Theodosius I at the hippodrome in Constantinople presents another example.⁵¹ The western face depicts the imperial family seated in the upper zone, as kneeling figures reverently



FIGURE 6. Obelisk of Theodosius I, Hippodrome at Constantinople, western face. Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons.

bear gifts in the lower zone (fig. 6). The worn face of the relief prevents us from identifying the types of gifts the figures offer. Christian images display homage to Christ triumphant in similar ways. At the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna, the dome mosaic portrays Christ's baptism in the Jordan (fig. 7).⁵² Encircling the central image in the "lower zone," so to speak, are two lines of apostles, who meet to Christ's right and left. Each apostle carries a golden crown of victory for Christ on the occasion of his victory at the Jordan. The apostles offer gifts to Christ on an occasion of his triumph.

Some celebrations of imperial triumph portray the emperor *receiving* crowns and other gifts, but others depict the emperor *distributing* gifts at games held in honor of imperial triumph. For example, consuls of the Roman Empire hosted games on the occasion of their accession to office. They would hold out their insignia to indicate the start of the games but also to "provoke a theophany of Victory."⁵³ Victorious athletes would receive gifts, such as a crown. The eastern face of the Theodosian obelisk, opposite to the western face we saw earlier, shows Theodosius I extending the victor's wreath in the upper zone, as spectators watch the games



FIGURE 7. Orthodox baptistery, dome mosaic, Ravenna. Photo credit: Alfredo Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY.

in the lower zone (fig. 8).⁵⁴ A golden medallion of Constantius II depicts him in the gesture of triumph standing on a chariot. The lower zone portrays the variety of gifts he distributed to victors at the games held in honor of his triumph, which includes laurel crowns among other things.⁵⁵

Imperial visual propaganda offers precedent for both kinds of triumphant actions: the victor's reception of gifts and the victor's distribution of them. The Christian mosaics coalesce into one image both the actions celebrated in imperial triumphal propaganda—that of receiving gifts and giving them.

The wider iconographic context in which the mosaics at Saint Maurus and San Lorenzo are set point to the interpretation that Christ is the victor who distributes largesse to those worthy of his favor. Christ is the supreme benefactor from whom all good things come.⁵⁶ At Saint Maurus, if the apses to the north and south



FIGURE 8. Obelisk of Theodosius I, Hippodrome at Constantinople, eastern face. Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons.

inform one's interpretation of the central one, then one discerns the way in which reception of divine largesse took place.⁵⁷ The side apses depict divine epiphanies in which Christ awards his martyrs the crown of victory and enlists them into the heavenly ranks. In the northeast mosaic, Christ appears with each hand holding a crown that hovers over the heads of the martyrs Cosmas and Damian (fig. 9).⁵⁸ In the southeast mosaic, Christ again appears, but with each hand holding a crown directly on the heads of two martyrs, Hermacor and Severus (fig. 10).⁵⁹ The epiphanies of the side apses mirror that of the central apse (fig. 3). Just as those to the left of Christ in the central mosaic have already received their largesse, so those in the apse of the southeast side have already been crowned. Just as those to the right of Christ in the central mosaic approach to receive their largesse, so those in the apse of the northeast side await the descent of the crowns hovering over their heads.

The hands of the attendant angels in the central apse guide our vision in the same way. The angel to the left of the throne points away from Christ to those who have already received their largesse, while the angel to the right of the throne leads the pious line toward Christ. At the hippodrome that is the church, the site of spiritual athletic contests, Christ extends the gift of victory to those who participate in his triumph. For the bishops, that gift takes the form of a trust: the bishops are entrusted with the care of ecclesial property.



FIGURE 9. Northeast apse mosaic, Basilica of St. Maurus, Poreč. Photo credit: Henry Maguire and Ann Terry Poreč Archive, 1990s–2000s, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.



FIGURE 10. Southeast apse mosaic, Basilica of St. Maurus, Poreč. Photo credit: Henry Maguire and Ann Terry Poreč Archive, 1990s–2000s, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.

The mosaic inscriptions at San Lorenzo also support the interpretation that the bishops and martyrs receive their gifts from Christ.⁶⁰ The inscriptions announce the victories of the spiritual athletes and acknowledge divine favor. Beside Bishop Pelagius stands the patron saint of the church, Laurentius, with a book open to Psalm 111(112):9, “He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor” (*dispersit, dedit pauperibus*). The psalm verse announces that Bishop Pelagius has been faithful to the primary task of a bishop: to show mercy to the poor. In symmetry with the Laurentius-Pelagius pair, the protomartyr Saint Stephen carries a book open to Psalm 62:9 (63:8): “My soul has kept close” (*adesit anima mea*). This psalm verse announces Hippolytus’s faithfulness as a martyr: his soul stayed close to Christ. Saint Laurentius and Saint Stephen intercede on behalf of Bishop Pelagius and Saint Hippolytus, recommending them with psalm verses that proclaim their faithfulness. Bishop Pelagius “has distributed freely” and “has given to the poor” and therefore receives in exchange the divine favor that brought the construction of the church to its completion. Hippolytus “kept [his soul] close” and therefore receives in exchange the divine favor of a martyr’s crown. The scene depicts the distribution of divine largesse to the martyr Hippolytus and the bishop Pelagius.

In return, Christ gives Hippolytus the divine favor of a martyr’s crown. The crown marks Hippolytus’s triumph with Christ. Likewise, Bishop Pelagius receives the divine favor that brought the construction of the church to its completion. In fact, the inscription that Pelagius installed above the triumphal arch records the favor that Pelagius received from Saint Laurentius’s intercessions to complete the church despite violent upheavals:

The Lord drove out darkness with the creation of light. Splendor belongs to these formerly hidden places. The venerable body [i.e., the church] had narrow entrances. Now a more spacious court fascinates the peoples. Excavated level ground has returned under the mountain; for menacing ruins have been held back by means of great labor. *The martyr Laurentius resolved that his temple at that time should be given to the presider Pelagius as a precious thing.* Wonder at the faith in the midst of hostile swords and anger, that the pontiff keeps a festival with their favors. *You with the stature of the saints, whose fixed determination it was to amplify the honors, grant that the abodes consecrated for you be revered in peace.*⁶¹

The inscription does not deny that there was earthly effort involved in the restoration of the basilica under Pelagius’s episcopacy; rather, it refers explicitly to “great labor” (*gravi mole*).⁶² At the same time, the inscription credits the celestial favor secured by the intercessions of the patron saint Laurentius for the basilica’s completion and the fulfillment of consecratory festivities. “Laurentius resolved” that Pelagius should restore his temple as “a precious thing.” It was Laurentius’s “fixed determination” that the consecratory festivities be fulfilled despite violent upheavals. It is Pelagius’s reception of such celestial favor that the accompanying image

celebrates. The scene captures several aspects of vertical exchanges—exchanges that mark relationships of patronage between humans and celestial beings: human supplication, human offering, saintly intercession, Christ’s distribution of divine largesse, and the triumph of all in Christ.

Christians in late antiquity could imagine Christ simultaneously receiving Bishop Pelagius’s church and giving it back to him. In the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea described an imperial situation in which the moment of offering was the same as the moment of reception. Eusebius writes that he has witnessed individuals go to the imperial court to offer the emperor precious gifts, such as the *aurum coronarium*, the golden crowns. The emperor would receive each gift separately, carefully set them aside, and acknowledge them with munificent return gifts.⁶³ One can offer the emperor gifts, but, as the patron par excellence, the emperor responds with an even greater show of largesse. Likewise, Christ triumphant fills the center of the mosaic scene as supreme patron. Martyrs offer up their lives and receive the imperishable victor’s crown in return. Bishops offer up their building and receive the same building back. By installing the mosaic, Bishop Pelagius publicly acknowledges the divine favor he received. What is more, Bishop Pelagius publicizes his relationship to the celestial patrons, Saint Laurentius and Christ.

If the mosaics celebrate the bishops’ reception of divine favor, is it possible that the mosaics also celebrate the bishop as the founder offering the building to Christ? Yes. In Latin, two terms differentiated the actions of offering a building and receiving a church. *Dedicare*, “to dedicate,” referred to the bishop’s handing over of the building to God.⁶⁴ *Consecrare*, “to consecrate,” referred to God’s sanctification of the place.⁶⁵ In legal parlance, consecrated places belonged to “no one,” but in theological parlance, consecrated places were thought to be God’s property. Canons refer to τὸ κυριακόν, “the Lord’s place,”⁶⁶ or *rerum dominicarum*, the “things of the Lord.”⁶⁷ Homilies more often than not refer to churches as “God’s house” or the “Lord’s house.”⁶⁸ For a bishop to offer a building to God meant that the bishop dedicated the building to God. For a bishop to receive a church from God meant that the bishop consecrated the church: that God sanctified the church, that God took possession of the church and entrusted the church to the bishop’s care. The mosaics simultaneously depict the dedication and consecration.

Coins of the Roman imperial period supply early visual parallels to the sixth-century mosaics cited above, in which, as I have argued, bishops simultaneously offer a building and receive a consecrated church. The coins commemorate the designation of a Hellenistic city as *neokoros* (temple warden) after the city consecrated a temple dedicated to the cult of the emperor.⁶⁹ Some of the coins depict a deity, the emperor, and a small model of the newly consecrated temple. Sometimes it is the deity who holds the temple; other times it is the emperor; and still



FIGURE 11. Lesbos coin. Photo credit: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18271650. Photographed by Benjamin Seifert.



FIGURE 12. Kyzikos coin. Photo credit: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18221354. Photographed by Reinhard Saczewski.



FIGURE 13. Philippolis coin. Photo credit: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18207397. Photographed by Reinhard Saczewski.

other times, both the deity and the emperor carry the temple model together. For example, on one coin, the island goddess of Lesbos stands to Emperor Commodus's right, holding the temple with her left hand and a scepter in her right (fig. 11).⁷⁰ Between them stands an altar. Commodus holds a spear in his left hand and probably a patera (a libation bowl) over the altar with his right hand.⁷¹ On another coin, Emperor Caracalla stands directly in front of the city goddess of Kyzikos and with both hands carries the temple toward her right hand (fig. 12). Her left hand carries another temple.⁷² On still another coin, Elagabalus stands to the left and Apollo to the right, together carrying the central temple (fig. 13).⁷³ Elagabalus holds the temple with both hands, while Apollo bears the temple in his right hand and an archer's bow in his left. Who offers the temple to whom? Who receives the temple from whom? The coins underscore the reciprocity between the city and the emperor. Neither one is exclusively the giver or the receiver. The city builds the temple for the emperor and offers it to him. The emperor receives it, but he gives the very same temple back to the city by granting authorization for its consecration and designating the city as *neokoros*.

Like such temples of the imperial period, churches were at once gifts given and favors received. As the emperors and deities share the temple model, offering it in each direction or holding it together, so the bishops bearing church models participate in a complex exchange in which the church model signifies at once both that which is given and that which is received. The bishop builds the church, but it is Christ and his saints who bestow the divine favor that brings the project to completion. It is Christ and his saints who entrust their house to the bishop's care.

As was mentioned earlier, Igor Kopytoff cited marriage gifts to describe exchanges that create and reinforce a relationship. In the Coptic Orthodox Christian ritual of marriage, it is the bride and groom who purchase wedding rings and give them to the celebrant, yet it is the celebrant who gives the same rings back to the bride and groom by blessing the rings and outfitting the bride and groom with the bands.⁷⁴ The couple gives the rings to the celebrant only to receive the very same objects back, blessed and ritually marked, as a result of changing hands in both directions. Likewise, mosaic depictions of miniature churches in the heavenly courts do not convey a simple act but a complex exchange process, teaching viewers how bishops succeeded in Christ's court.

Contributing Donors and the Vertical Exchange

Dedicatory images illustrated and celebrated the vertical exchange of commodities. But it was not only bishops and founders who set up such images. Contributing donors did too. At Thessaloniki, donors installed a four-part visual narrative in the Church of Hagios Demetrios.⁷⁵ The sixth-century mosaic program was severely damaged by a fire in 1917, but the documentation that W. S. George made in watercolors still allows one to study the images.⁷⁶ Spandrels D–G of the northern arcade portray a narrative sequence concerning a child Maria and her parents, the donors. By means of the gestures of the figures depicted and the text of inscriptions, the visual sequence “draw[s] the viewer into the dramatic spectacle of the scene[s].”⁷⁷ The series serves as a “practical demonstration of [Saint Demetrios's] accessibility to human prayer and intercession.”⁷⁸

In spandrel D, a mother receives a child with reverently draped hands from Saint Demetrios (fig. 14).⁷⁹ Saint Demetrios's left hand is extended upward to receive something from the figure in a medallion, probably Christ. Saint Demetrios's right hand touches the child Maria and leaves a golden cross on her forehead. To the right of the medallion stands Saint Mary, whose right hand points toward Christ and whose left hand is raised in an *adlocutio* gesture.⁸⁰ The gesture calls on the viewer to attend to her narration of what is taking place: Maria's parents supplicating Saint Demetrios, Saint Demetrios making intercessions, and Christ bestowing divine largesse.



FIGURE 14. Watercolor painting of spandrel D, northern arcade, Hagios Demetrios, Thessaloniki by W. S. George. Image from the Byzantine Research Fund Archive. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens.



FIGURE 15. Watercolor painting of spandrel E and apex of arch 6, northern arcade, Hagios Demetrios, Thessaloniki by W. S. George. Image from the Byzantine Research Fund Archive. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens.

In spandrel E, two attendant angels, Maria in her mother's draped arms, and Maria's father flank Saint Mary standing in the center (fig. 15). Saint Mary continues to guide the viewer's eyes. This time, Saint Mary gestures with her hands to the inscription on her left. The words address the viewer: "Made young again in the times of Leo, you see the church of Demetrios, previously burnt."⁸¹ Three medallions above the inscription depict the patron saint of the church, Saint Demetrios, with two clerical founders (the bishop to his right and the deacon to his left).⁸² In thanksgiving for the favor they received, Maria's parents contributed to the restoration of the Church of Hagios Demetrios.

Spandrels F (fig. 16) and G (fig. 17) depict the family making further offerings of thanksgiving to Saint Demetrios. The family uses the same reverential gesture to make offerings as that previously used to request benefaction. In spandrel F, mother and child each offer two candles to Saint Demetrios. The inscription below indicates that their offering is made also to Saint Mary. It reads: "And the lady, the holy Mother of God."⁸³ In spandrel G, the child Maria offers two doves to Saint Demetrios, and the parents make a final supplication for divine favor in the accompanying inscription: "And you, my Lord Saint Demetrios, aid us your servants and your servant Maria, whom you gave to us."⁸⁴

This series of images puts Saint Mary in the role of a narrator to the viewer. Saint Mary's story is about gift exchanges between parents and Saint Demetrios. By the end of the story, the viewer learns that a couple asked Saint Demetrios for a child, and Saint Demetrios obtained a child for them from Christ. In thanksgiving, the family made donations toward the restoration of Saint Demetrios's church and



FIGURE 17. Watercolor painting of spandrel G, northern arcade, Hagios Demetrios, Thessaloniki by W. S. George. Image from the Byzantine Research Fund Archive. Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens.

offered the artistic program, candles, and doves. Yet in the midst of thanksgiving for divine largesse already received, the parents continue to ask the patron Saint Demetrios for his help. The viewer is visually and textually guided through a lesson—a lesson about the method and efficacy of vertical exchanges, taught by Saint Mary herself.

A presbyter Leopardus supplies detailed instructions about the vertical exchange to viewers through an inscription he installed at San Lorenzo in Rome in the early fifth century. The words of the inscription address viewers directly in the second person, commanding visitors to advance peacefully through the church and behold greater and greater wonders. In particular, the inscription invites viewers to notice a hand coming down from heaven and bestowing divine largesse,



FIGURE 18. *Opus sectile* in the depression under the altar of the tomb church at Abu Mina, Egypt. DAI photo archive number L 53300–03. Photo credit: DAI Cairo.

explaining furthermore that divine largesse is awarded for “suitable achievements in the church of Christ”:

Greater wonders follow you who gaze, [wonders that] the labor of Leopardus constructed with care and vigilance. He adorned these walls of Christ with his own expenses. Look at the new sights by advancing peacefully. Behold, a hand of heaven bestows the reward of God, which you see are suitable achievements in the church of Christ.⁸⁵

The inscription not only teaches the viewer how to walk through the space (peacefully) and what to notice (greater and greater wonders, especially the celestial hand granting God’s rewards), but even how the viewer might attain divine largesse.

At a small basilica at Abu Mina in Egypt there is a simple dedicatory image as well as an inscription that succinctly summarizes the key features of the vertical exchange process (fig. 18). In the first half of the fifth century, a certain Gerōn commissioned an *opus-sectile* image of the *chi-rho* cross crowned with the laurel wreath of triumph. Below it, he inscribed: “Gerōn dedicated [it] in thanksgiving” (ΓΕΡΩΝ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΩΝ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΑ).⁸⁶ We do not know for what exactly Gerōn is thankful, but we do have his “thank-you card,” so to speak, his dedication and installation of an expensive *chi-rho* cross. To make a public “thank-you card” for an unknown divine gift he received, Gerōn set up an image that acknowledges Christ’s triumph: Christ’s victorious crucifixion. Bishop Pelagius at Rome, the couple at Thessaloniki, presbyter Leopardus at Rome, and Gerōn at Abu Mina all made public, monumental “thank-you cards” to celebrate a gift exchange that would lead to their triumph with Christ.⁸⁷

IS CHURCH PROPERTY A COMMODITY?

Donors' Resistance to Churches as Protecting Places

Ritually speaking, or in the vertical economy, the church building and its artistic installations were exchangeable gifts transacted to create and maintain reciprocal relationships. By contrast, the church building was not for exchange legally speaking, or in the horizontal economy. This economic discrepancy created a “Catch-22” for bishops, the chief administrators of ecclesial property. Bishops occupied a leading position in both the legal and ritual economies. On the one hand, the primary duty of a bishop was to care for the needy, to offer up gifts of mercy to the celestial realm. On the other hand, the riches lavished on churches did not result in accessible liquid wealth—wealth necessary for making gifts of mercy. Bishops were caught between a ritual system and a legal system—a system in which churches were “commodifiable” and a system in which churches were singularized.

The fact that dedicatory practices broadcasted “the holy” in the most extravagant material way conflicted with a spiritually more significant way of embodying holiness: care for the poor. A “good bishop” neither neglected the beauty of the church nor the needs of the poor. One text calls the “greatest virtue in a bishop [. . .] the gift of giving to the needy,”⁸⁸ but, owing to the inalienability of sacred things, bishops were generally restricted to the use of liquid donations and income from revenue-producing lands to amass assets for the needy. Exceptions were made for sacred bronze, silver, and gold *res sacrae*, which could be melted down to generate funds for the redemption of captives.⁸⁹ Donors of such objects, however, resisted their alienation, even for exceptional reasons.

From the donors' perspective, bishops were trying to recommoditize their gifts.⁹⁰ Dedicatory practices provided a means not for the “pious disposal of wealth”⁹¹ but for the pious investment of wealth. Patrons invested their wealth in the hopes of a return, divine largesse, whether in the form of forgiveness, repose, salvation, remembrance, or other things. Dedicatory images and inscriptions often commemorated not only the investment but the anticipated return as well.

In response, bishops tried to persuade donors that their gifts would not be recommoditized at all. Rather, their gifts would increase in value. Donors' gifts could have an immediate, tangible return that increased and did not diminish the expected spiritual return. Metal objects in the Roman Empire were commonly used to store wealth for future use, since they could be melted and used for their cash value. Bishops used liturgical metal to quickly amass the large amounts of money required to redeem captives. Since donors feared that their gifts were recommoditized, that the sacred things they dedicated were no longer testimony to their desire for sanctity and victory, bishops assuaged their qualms by explaining that their investment was already producing divine largesse in the form of mercy, which in turn could only amplify the eternal spiritual return.

In persuading donors of metalware, bishops had to work around not only legal strictures, but, more broadly speaking, a late antique ethos that frowned on

recycling processes that undercut or inflated the original value of an object. Ruth Leader-Newby cites hagiographical examples of donations rejected owing to their infamous *curriculum vitae* or genealogy.⁹² Objects used by a prostitute were not to be refashioned into an ecclesial donation because such recycling would inflate the morality of the object. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus recounts a situation in which a banquet guest accused the host of recycling imperial *chlamydes* for use as domestic textiles, such as tablecloths.⁹³ Such recycling undercut the sacrality of imperial dress. Recycling objects from the nonsacred to the sacred or vice versa dishonored and defiled the sacred.⁹⁴

It is because of this ethos that the alienation of ecclesial property was such a contested issue. Writers like Ambrose of Milan, Rabbula of Edessa's hagiographer, and Caesarius of Arles's hagiographer had an uphill battle to fight in order to oppose donors' views that their donations should not be repurposed. For donors believed that their expected return dissolved with the liquidation of their donated metalware. Ambrose and the two hagiographers argued that dissolution did not occur at all; what did (or would) occur was an amplification of the expected return. Ambrose of Milan insisted that it is "far more advantageous to preserve souls for the Lord than to preserve gold."⁹⁵ Souls matter more to the Lord than mere things (donated liturgical vessels). As for Rabbula, his efforts were not only resisted; they were also blocked; his hagiographer reports that he was prevented from alienating liturgical vessels. The *Heroic Deeds of Mar Rabbula* describes the rationale that Rabbula employed to convince his people that donations should be recycled: human souls have priority over liturgical things. Elaborate gold and silver vessels materially express the glory of God, but it is in human hearts that God's spirit dwells: "It is clear to those who know that adorned liturgical vessels of gold and silver are not especially necessary for the glory of God, but that the spirit of God rests in pure hearts."⁹⁶ As the hagiographer explains, Rabbula's rationale did not convince his people. The now deceased donors "had offered them [liturgical vessels] to God for the redemption of their spirit."⁹⁷ Rabbula was not allowed to interfere, even if his repurposing of the deceased donors' offerings would increase the spiritual value of their gifts, not reduce it. The *Life of Caesarius of Arles* justifies the recycling of donations by locating the "true church" in the human person: "when the censers, chalices, and patens had been given for the redemption of these men, the consecrated ornaments of the church were sold for the redemption of the true church."⁹⁸ As I will show in chapter 5, this rationale for using sacred things to ransom captives (in the case of Ambrose and Caesarius) or to support the poor (in the case of Rabbula) echoes a perspective preached by bishops at the consecration of churches: the sanctity of the church as a community takes precedence over the sanctity of the church as an edifice. Performances at the very occasions of church consecrations underscored this hierarchy and thereby lent support to the views of Ambrose and the hagiographers who wrote about Rabbula and Caesarius.

Donors had to be persuaded that a donation for the salvation of one's soul was not undercut by its alienation for the redemption of captives. Donors' expected

return on the investment did not follow the tracks of the material object. Though the material object, the metalware, would be liquidated—literally melted down—the investment would not suffer the same fate. The investment would not be dissolved in the process. On the contrary, the investment grew as a result of the liquidation. Since the salvation of a captive was priceless by comparison to the metal liquidated to secure the ransom, the investment exponentially grew from the value of the metalware to the measureless value of the saved captive's soul. The alienation did not demote the donation but promoted it. The donation was inflated in a positive sense that furthered the original purpose of the gift rather than undercutting it. In other words, the face-value demotion of the gift actually served as a vehicle for its spiritualization. From the donors' perspective, by contrast, their singularized gifts were being recommoditized.

As this chapter has shown, the term “singularization” is helpful for describing the nature of the exchange process that took place horizontally, a process that differed significantly from the kind of exchange that took place vertically between the earthly and celestial realms. In the laws and canons analyzed in part I, churches were taken out of the sphere of commodity exchange and made singular. However, in ritual practice, the consecration of a church only marked one link in a long chain of exchanges. The consecration of a church forged a relationship with the celestial realm, a relationship that had to be cultivated and sustained through more and more exchanges that strengthened the tie between the earthly and celestial realms, such as Maria's parents' offering of candles and doves at Hagios Demetrios.

The material culture installed in churches celebrated the vertical exchange process. Dedicatory images and inscriptions portray donors as the clients of the celestial patrons—Christ and his saints. The saints recommend donors to Christ so that Christ might accept gifts from them and in return offer divine largesse. The exchange of gifts does not mark a terminal transaction. Instead, the exchange of gifts initiates and marks a relationship that is expected to culminate in donors' triumph with Christ.

Churches existed in two different economies of exchange in late antiquity: a legal economy and a ritual economy. The discrepancy in the legal and ritual possibilities of exchange caused bishops to operate within one economic system that revoked churches' commodity status, while simultaneously practicing a different economic system that celebrated churches as exchangeable things. Caught between these two systems, bishops like John Chrysostom, who prioritized the vertical economy over the horizontal one, could be tried for violating laws and canons. In late antiquity, building a church meant making a singular, unexchangeable thing as far as legal experts were concerned; but, ritually speaking, building a church meant making a nonterminal gift: the gift of a house for Christ and his cotriumphant saints—a prized gift, but not so prized as the gift of mercy.