

Manipulating the Message: Letters of Gelasius and Nicholas I on Papal Authority

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Abstract: Gelasius I, bishop of Rome during the problematic period of Odoacer's replacement as *rex Italiae* in 493, was greatly concerned with the power of the bishop of Rome. While Gelasius was one of the most significant bishops of the first five hundred years of the Roman church, he is primarily known for his letter to the Byzantine emperor Anastasius in 494. His *Epistula* 12 introduced the controversial theory of "two powers" or "two swords." The idea was taken up in the mid-ninth century by another champion for papal primacy, when Nicholas I embedded a quote from Gelasius in his denunciation of the Byzantine emperor Michael III. I examine the use of political rhetoric in ecclesiastical contexts in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in particular the way that extracts from such letters could go on to have a life of their own in canon law. Finally, I measure the historical impact of each letter as a form of soft diplomacy.

While Gelasius I (492–96) was one of the most significant bishops of the first five hundred years of the Roman church, he is primarily known today for one letter. His *Epistula* 12 introduced the controversial theory of "two powers" or "two swords," as it came to be known.¹ The idea was taken up by another champion for papal primacy, when Nicholas I (858–67) embedded quotes from it in his excoriation of the Byzantine emperor Michael III.² In this article I examine the use of political rhetoric in each case, asking three questions. The first is, what was the historical and political context of the letter, that is, what was it really about? Papal primacy looms large in each instance. Second, what strategies of manipulation did its author employ? These include pulling spiritual rank, uttering veiled threats, and cajoling by allusions to scripture and by obsequious titles. Third, who was the intended audience? The audiences, both the external correspondents explicitly named and the assumed local readers in Rome, played an important role in the shaping of the message. Finally, I measure the historical impact of each letter as a form of soft diplomacy and compare each to a similar example from twenty-first-century global politics.

Diplomatic Papal Letters

Little is known of Gelasius's life before he became deacon and letter writer for Pope Felix III (483–92), who died just before the problematic period of Odoacer's replacement by Theodoric as *rex Italiae* in 493.³ Both Felix III and his protégé Gelasius were greatly concerned with the power of the bishop of Rome *vis-à-vis* the northern overlords and the emperors based in Constantinople.⁴ The resistance he faced at home was the context for his famous decree condemning the pagan festival of the Lupercalia, against Andromachus, leader of a senatorial faction who wanted to continue the pre-Christian traditions of the city.⁵ Two other decretal letters had a substantial shelf life. One is his decree on the canon, containing a list of books which were not to be read by Christians or included in the liturgy.⁶ The other is the letter under examination

here, written to the Byzantine emperor Anastasius in 494, in which he introduced a controversial new theory of the division of spiritual and temporal power between the bishop of Rome and the emperor.

While we are familiar with the exchange of diplomatic letters between modern leaders of state as a form of soft power, in the fifth century this was a new type of letter. It combined many functions of classical epistolography—including administrative letters, letters of friendship, letters of recommendation, letters of consolation, and doctrinal tracts—but not exactly like any of these.⁷ In terms of form, this letter is perhaps most like an imperial edict.⁸ It might remind us of Pliny the Younger's letters to Roman emperors Trajan and Domitian or the tracts that early Christian apologists addressed to emperors, such as those by Tertullian or Justin Martyr.⁹ But the tone is markedly different. It demonstrates a posturing of latent power—to both a local and an eastern audience. The author claims to have God on his side, with the implied punishment that entails for anyone who would cross the Divinity.

A third of Gelasius's large epistolary output of over 100 letters and fragments concerned more mundane matters of clerical discipline.¹⁰ These include decisions on cases of rape, murder, abduction, disputes over family estates, theft of lay and church property, absconding slaves and bondsmen who had escaped to join the clergy, and the management of papal properties that spread from Sicily in the south to Dalmatia in the northeast.¹¹

Another third of Gelasius's correspondence is related to the Acacian schism, sparked by the promulgation in 482 of a problematic document known as the *Henotikon*. The emperor Zeno coauthored this text together with the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius (472–89), in an effort to gain unity between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian factions of the wider church. Pope Felix III rejected the *Henotikon* upon his succession in 483 and condemned Acacius with anathema in 484. Specifically, Felix rejected Acacius's acceptance of two non-Chalcedonian patriarchs, Peter of Alexandria and Peter of Antioch, for the sake of the unity of the broader church. The names of Acacius and both Peters were to be omitted from the Roman diptychs. Acacius, backed into a corner, reacted in kind and broke from communion with Rome. Although Acacius died in 489, the schism that bore his name and the anathemas it spawned endured on both sides for another thirty years. Gelasius wrote *Epistula* 12 ten years into the Acacian schism, in response to increasing imperial pressure on Rome to drop its condemnation of Acacius and other Alexandrian and Antiochene bishops.

Gelasius to Emperor Anastasius: Strategies of Manipulation

When Gelasius took the papal throne in March 492, he inherited a diplomatic nightmare. Zeno had been replaced three years earlier by Anastasius I, who continued to maintain his predecessor's hard line against Rome. Fortunately, Gelasius knew exactly what to do: nothing. He did not write the customary letter to Constantinople seeking approval of his election. For two years, he sent no delegates to the court of Constantinople but simply waited for the emperor to do something to which he could react. Finally, he heard that Anastasius was beginning to grumble and composed his first letter to the emperor in 494.

Prefacing the letter with a weak excuse for not having written earlier because he feared his overtures to the new emperor would not be welcome (chapter 1), Gelasius discusses the two powers, ecclesiastical and royal (chapters 2 and 3), and beseeches the emperor not to allow the church to be torn apart in his time by the case of Acacius (chapter 4). The bulk of the letter tempers the various objections proposed for the defense of the schism (chapters 5–10). Finally, he defends his choices of eternal life over death and the will of God over the will of human emperors (chapters 11–12). Much of the long-winded rhetoric adopted in Gelasius's epistolary output rests upon the bishop of Rome's claim to supreme power over the universal church, as

we will see.¹² This was just one of several strategies of rhetorical manipulation that we can identify in *Epistula* 12.

The first strategy employed by Gelasius may be colloquially dubbed, “Don’t mention the war.” Gelasius never once mentions the mutual anathema of the bishops of Constantinople and Rome that has been going on for a decade, or the fact that Pope Felix III had started it. He does not get around to speaking about the doctrinal causes of the standoff until two-thirds of the way through this lengthy letter (chapter 8). He attempts to shift blame onto the current patriarch, Peter “Mongus” III of Alexandria (477–89), without mentioning the previous non-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, Timothy Aelurus, who held two periods of office (457–60 and 475–77).

Gelasius’s second strategy is to profess his own humility and loyalty as a true Roman subject of the emperor. He calls himself “My Humility” and expresses deference through his use of titles such as “Your Piety,” “Your Serenity,” and “Your Clemency.”¹³ Such titles are unique to episcopal correspondence and used protreptically by Gelasius to express the virtues he wants the emperor to employ towards him.¹⁴ He stresses his Roman origins as follows: “Glorious Son, I love, cherish, and respect the Roman emperor just as one who is Roman born. And insofar as I am a Christian along with him who is ardent for God, I desire to possess knowledge in accordance with the truth. And as vicar of the apostolic see (whatever my worth), I shall endeavour to make good with suitable suggestions according to my measure what I ascertain to be missing anywhere in the full catholic faith.”¹⁵ The title “Glorious Son” reveals his true rhetorical purpose: to position the emperor as an obedient servant of the church and therefore as a subject of the bishop of Rome. The message is clear from the third chapter of this letter: the security of Anastasius’s reign depends on his obedience to the head of the church, ordained by Peter himself. No one could have raised himself by human power alone “to the privilege or acknowledgement of that one whom the voice of Christ set before all, whom the venerable church has always acknowledged and in her devotedness holds as primate.”¹⁶

A third strategy is to back up papal claims with appeals to New Testament verses, as in the following passage, also from the third chapter: “The ordinances established by divine judgement can be assailed by acts of human presumption, but they cannot be overcome by the power of any of them. And if only the insolence against those who struggle were not so destructive, as what is fixed by the instigator (*auctore*) of our sacred religion himself cannot be distorted by any force! For *God’s firm foundation stands* (2 Tim. 2:19)!”¹⁷ In Chapter 1, as authorization for his stewardship, he cites 1 Cor. 9:16, “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel” and the classic statement of Peter’s primacy as the “chosen vessel” of the Lord from Acts 9:15.¹⁸ Urging the emperor to refute the heretics, Gelasius cites James 2:10: “For whoever offends in one point is guilty of all” (*Epistula* 12.5); 1 Tim. 1:5: “Love from a heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (*Epistula* 12.6); and Rom. 1:32: “Not only those who do things that should not be done are seen to be guilty, but also those who approve those who do them” (*Epistula* 12.7).

The fourth and most lasting strategy is to argue that “God is on our side.” Gelasius introduces what was to become known as the “two powers” theory in the second chapter of his letter: “In fact, august Emperor, there are two ways in which this world is chiefly ruled: the hallowed power (*auctoritas*) of the pontiffs and royal power (*potestas*). In these two ‘powers’ the responsibility of bishops is so much greater, to the extent that, at the time of divine judgement, they will render an account even for the very rulers of human beings.”¹⁹ The emperor’s rule is only guaranteed by his obedience to the pontiff’s authority to make judgements in church matters, which trumps the imperial power to govern temporal affairs:

Indeed, my most indulgent son, you must know that you are permitted to superintend through high office of a human kind. However, in your devotedness you bow your head

to the leaders (*praesulibus*) of divine affairs, and from them you await the occasions for your salvation, and, in both taking the heavenly sacraments and being suitably disposed to them, you acknowledge that you must be subject to the order of religion, rather than be in control of it.²⁰

The corollary of this division of power is that, just as bishops obey imperial laws, the emperor should obey divine laws, especially in the field of liturgical ministry. Gelasius admits that his own expertise lies outside worldly matters. Assuming a *quid pro quo*, he poses this clearly rhetorical question:

For if the overseers (*antistites*) of religion themselves also obey your laws—as far as they pertain to the order of public discipline—by acknowledging that the imperial rule has been conferred on you by heavenly dispensation, lest their opinions which are extrinsic to worldly affairs be regarded as standing in opposition to them, with what willingness, I entreat you, should you obey those who have been assigned to the most excellent and venerable mysteries?²¹

In his reference to the sacred liturgy there is a veiled reference to the diptychs or the recitation in the liturgy of the names of the saints. Gelasius implies that the liturgy would be polluted by the mention of those under anathema, that is, enemies of the church. The omission of their names was a form of *damnatio memoriae*.²²

The pope's fourth strategy includes clouding the issue with legalese. Gelasius developed a quasi-legal ideology of Roman primacy based on the Petrine commission and the authority of previous popes, as handed down by their writings and the canons of earlier councils. Above all he prized the canons of the first, third, and fourth ecumenical councils, but notably excluded the Council of Constantinople I (381), which claimed equal honour for Constantinople. Gelasius delivered veiled threats by using strategic omissions, empty professions of humility and obsequious expressions of respect, the metaphorical language of father and son, steward and household, and appeals to the authority of St. Peter with bolstering quotes from scripture. He invented a specious legal argument about the division of power between church and *imperium*, and issued veiled threats of liturgical sanctions and eternal damnation if compliance was not forthcoming. As Gelasius declares at the conclusion of his letter to Anastasius, "truth herself will make it obvious where a spirit of arrogance truly stands and fights." It was left up to the reader to draw the line between what was bluff and what was a real threat.

All this rhetorical posturing poses the question: how much power or authority did the bishop of Rome actually enjoy at the end of the fifth century? There have been two main schools of thought on the theoretical underpinnings of Gelasius's understanding of his own authority as bishop of Rome and vicar of the first apostle, Peter. The traditional view is that of Erich Caspar, who saw Gelasius as accepting a traditional division of power between the secular ruler (*potestas*) and the spiritual leader (*auctoritas*).²³ Walter Ullmann argued for a much loftier conception of the medieval papacy beginning in the fifth century with Leo I (440–61) and a quasi-legal basis for the pope's claim to be the heir of Peter.²⁴ Contrary to the arguments of both Caspar and Ullmann, George Demacopoulos has demonstrated that it is a testament to Gelasius's rhetorical skill that subsequent generations have understood the pontiff to possess a measure of domestic and international influence that he never actually enjoyed at this time.²⁵ While Demacopoulos puts all the emphasis on the local audience for *Epistula* 12, I suggest that its eastern audience was at least equally important. Let us now move on to the reception of the letter five centuries on, in another papal letter to an eastern emperor.

The Afterlife of Epistula 12

Gelasius's letter to Anastasius failed to make any immediate impact. It is conspicuously absent from Dionysius Exiguus's compilation of papal correspondence for his second recension of canon law documents, known later as the *Collectio Dionysiana*, which he started just after Gelasius's death, as he mentions in his preface to the work. The reason for its omission may lie in Dionysius's irenic agenda, to bring peace between the eastern and western churches after two decades of schism.

The letter was to come into play again in the mid-ninth century, when the bishops of Rome were again fighting an ideological war on two fronts: with the Carolingian kings of the north and with the Roman emperors in the east. Nicholas I, a prodigious letter writer, ably abetted by his secretary Anastasius Bibliothecarius, was at the forefront of the western Roman struggle to assert its independence from the east.²⁶ As Frederick Norwood put it, "Few popes hold a more dominating role in the history of the Catholic Church than Nicholas I."²⁷ Nicholas held the see for only nine years and wrote over 150 extant letters.²⁸ Nicholas was the most frequent user of the term *decretales* to describe his and his predecessors' letters to other bishops, implying that they were applicable for the universal church. By his epistolary diplomacy, he managed to establish his preeminence over the western church of the late Carolingian empire. He aimed to do the same with regard to the eastern church but had less success. He addressed *Epistula* 88 (JE 2796) to the eastern emperor Michael III, in the middle of a crisis over the jurisdiction of the nascent church of Bulgaria, to which both the Byzantine and Roman churches laid claim.²⁹

The issue at stake in this letter of September 28, 865, was ongoing disagreement over the deposition of Ignatius, who had been replaced as the Byzantine patriarch by Photius in 858.³⁰ Ignatius and Photius held opposing views on Roman jurisdiction over Bulgaria, among other things. Photius was also the archenemy of Nicholas's librarian and unofficial secretary, Anastasius Bibliothecarius. Like Anastasius, Photius had overseen epistolary archives in his patriarchate (*chartophylax*) before his appointment. In rejecting Photius's right to take over the highest role in the Constantinopolitan church, in which capacity he served also as advisor to the emperor on matters ecclesiastical, Pope Nicholas was making a play for primacy, with the Bulgarian khan Boris as his prime target. Both Nicholas and Photius sent lengthy letters to Boris in the period from 865 to 866, instructing him on fitting behavior for a Christian prince and his subjects.³¹

Nicholas cites Gelasius several times in *Epistula* 88, along with other popes including Leo I, Gregory I, and Benedict I. In the second of two brief quotations from Gelasius's first tome on the bond of anathema (JK 501), in regard to his "fellow-minister Ignatius," Nicholas quotes Gelasius thus: "with these things [revealed] through imperial judgement, in absolutely no way could he have been [expelled]."³² He also quotes the law code (*Corpus iuris civilis*) of Justinian and previous emperors, and the acts of church councils, to back up his claim that Rome should be the final court of appeal in any disputed patriarchal appointments, even those of Constantinople. Many Gospel and Pauline texts on obedience and the penalties for disobeying God are adduced to this end.³³ His rhetoric is overblown and sententious, using the usual threats of divine reprisal if his dictates are not followed. He accuses the emperor of hypocrisy for calling himself "emperor of the Romans" while being ignorant of the Latin language.

One of the most potent sources on the imperial duty to obey the bishop of Rome available to Nicholas was chapter 3 of Gelasius's *Epistula* 12 to Anastasius. He quotes this at length, but the first sentence sums up the gist perfectly: "Accordingly, just as a charge of no light weight presses upon the pontiffs to remain silent because of the worship of the Divinity, as is proper, so there is no middling danger for those (heaven forbid!) who despise those whom they

should obey.”³⁴ Having warned him of the dangers of spiritual disobedience, Nicholas concludes his diplomatic attack with a final quote from *Epistula* 12, stressing the heavenly rewards that lay in store for an obedient emperor:

In the sight of God I pray, entreat, and exhort Your Piety truly and sincerely to accept my petition with no displeasure: I ask, I really do, that you hear my prayer in this life, rather than (heaven forbid!) experience my accusation before the divine tribunal.... [And] on this account, I pray, please do not be angry with me if I love you so much that I wish you to have in perpetuity the reign that you have procured for a limited time, and that you who govern in this world might reign with Christ.... [For] with what confidence, I ask you, will you seek his rewards there when you do not prevent his losses here? I beg you, do not let the statements made about your eternal salvation be burdensome. You have read what is written: *Better are wounds from a friend than [fake] kisses from an enemy* (Prov. 27:6).³⁵

Excerpts from *Epistula* 88 were frequently reiterated in canon law collections due to its bold statement of Roman primacy.³⁶ Indeed the whole letter was once included twice in a single manuscript, along with Nicholas’s *Epistula* 99, also dealing with the Bulgarian question.³⁷ Like Gelasius in *Epistula* 12, Nicholas’s rhetoric in *Epistula* 88 relies on the idea that the apostle Peter was the origin of the episcopal office and founder of the apostolic succession.³⁸

A Modern Parallel in American Diplomacy

Letter exchange between heads of state remains an important part of diplomacy, even in our own electronic age. The rhetorical strategies employed to manipulate the message for maximum impact in Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 can usefully be compared with the letter of President Donald Trump to Chairman Kim Jung Un. In this letter of May 2018, Trump announced to the North Korean leader his intention to cancel the long-awaited summit in Singapore with the leaders of North and South Korea. The letter was written in response to Kim Jong Un’s pronouncement that South Korea’s president was a “dummy” for allowing western interference in the region. In the international uproar of the following days, the White House administration stressed that Trump wrote this letter himself and did not dictate it. It was not clear from this statement whether the President was taking full responsibility or if the administration was denying any involvement. Trump’s letter reads in part as follows:

We greatly appreciate your time, patience, and effort with respect to our recent negotiations and discussions relative to a summit long sought by both parties ... I was very much looking forward to being there with you. Sadly, based on the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement, I feel it is inappropriate, at this time, to have this long-planned meeting....

You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used....

If you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write. The world, and North Korea in particular, has lost a great opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth. The missed opportunity is a truly sad moment in history.³⁹

Trump’s letter is an excellent example of his presidential style. “[H]ighly Trumpian in its bombastic swagger, theatrical menace and plangent sentimentality,” it contains veiled but clear threats of nuclear destruction and loss of prosperity on the one hand, while on the other lamenting the loss of the opportunity for the two Korean leaders coming together in person, which

would have been “a beautiful gesture.”⁴⁰ Trump makes no mention of the long-running conflict on the Korean peninsula or the U.S. army’s continuing role in the region, just as Gelasius omitted to mention his part in exacerbating hostilities between east and west by not sending the proper letter of recognition to the emperor. Just like Gelasius, the author assumes that God is on his side, an assumption made explicit in his reference to America’s superior nuclear powers: “I pray to God they will never have to be used.” Trump assumes the moral high ground while making obsequious expressions of respect. Similar to Gelasian use of the titles “Your Clemency” and “Your Serenity,” he thanks the North Korean leader for his “time, patience and effort”. He blames the recipient for the breakdown of diplomatic relations and for disturbing the peace of the world by suspending the face-to-face meeting between leaders. The emphasis is on compliance with the President’s wishes for the sake of “lasting peace and great prosperity,” an echo of Gelasius’s promise of a long and prosperous reign for Emperor Anastasius if he complies with the papal dictates. Like Gelasius’s bid for authority over the whole church, including the eastern emperor, who had never recognised Roman ecclesiastical authority to the extent that Gelasius demands in *Epistula* 12, Trump is making a huge bid for power, exaggerating his influence over both the North Korean dictator and America’s ally and protégé in the south of the Korean peninsula. Both the presidential and papal letters amounted to little more than a bluff.

In Trump’s case, the gamble paid off. Kim Jong Un responded to Trump with a formal letter of reconciliation and the promised summit between the leaders of North and South Korea eventually took place in the presence of the U.S. president. In Gelasius’s case, there was no such peaceful resolution, and the stalemate of reciprocal anathemas continued until a new emperor took the helm.

Conclusion: The Limits of Epistolary Diplomacy

Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 and Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 reveal that epistolary exchange was the primary means of papal diplomacy from late antiquity to the early medieval period. They reveal how their authors employed rhetorical carrots on sticks to achieve their political ends, even when addressing emperors and patriarchs. The bombastic rhetoric of Popes Gelasius and Nicholas was, however, of limited effectiveness. No reply exists from Emperor Anastasius to Gelasius, and the Acacian schism was to continue until a détente was negotiated by Pope Hormisdas and the new emperor Justin I in 519. Emperor Michael III’s reply to Nicholas, if he made any, likewise does not survive, but after Khan Boris voted to join the Greek church, then under Photius’s direction, Bulgaria was permanently lost to Rome even though it returned to Roman jurisdiction after the council of Constantinople in 870.⁴¹ Roman threats would surely have been more efficacious if there had been a nuclear arsenal at the bishops’ disposal to back up their claims to world domination.

In the west, however, the triumphalist papal rhetoric was more successful. Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 was a key plank for the reforms to the episcopacy introduced by Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), by which reformers sought to elevate the pope’s authority to make binding judgments and to reaffirm the privileges of the Apostolic See. The bulk of citations from Nicholas’s thirteen letters in Deusdedit’s canonical collection (c. 1087) and that of Anselm of Lucca were taken from this one letter.⁴² With their inclusion in the decretal collection of the medieval canonist Gratian in the mid-twelfth century, Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 and Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 were often cited by medieval canonists and modern scholars alike as evidence for papal primacy stretching back to late antiquity.

The ongoing importance of the doctrine of two swords or two powers in Roman circles is evidenced by the coverage of *Epistula* 12 in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* as recently as

2018, where it was cited without any recognition of its origins or reconfiguration in the medieval west, or of its patent lack of impact on its Greek recipients.⁴³ The very different eastern and western trajectories of two letters on the same subject—papal authority—remind us that historical letters, and especially papal letters, cannot be taken at face value. When we examine the contexts of conflict in which their rhetoric was shaped, we gain a glimpse behind the bluff and bluster at their authors' true powerlessness to influence ecclesiastical decisions made in the east, much less temporal affairs outside their own city of Rome.

NOTES

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¹ Philip Jaffé, Samuel Loewenfeld, and Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner, eds., *Regesta pontificum romanorum, editionem secundam curaverunt Samuel Loewenfeld et Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner (ab condita ecclesia ad annum 590)* (Leipzig, 1885; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956) (hereafter abbreviated as JK in text), number 632.

² Philip Jaffé and Paul Ewald, eds., *Regesta pontificum romanorum, editionem secundam curavit Paul Ewald (an. 590–882)* (Leipzig, 1885; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956) (hereafter abbreviated as JE in text), number 2796.

³ John Moorhead, *The Popes and the Church of Rome in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 38, accepts Hugo Koch's suggestion that Gelasius also drafted correspondence for Felix's predecessor Simplicius but this is more difficult to prove: Hugo Koch, *Gelasius im kirchenpolitischen Dienste seiner Vorgänger, der Päpste Simplicius (468–488) und Felix III. (483–492): Ein Beitrag zur Sprache des Papste Gelasius (492–496) und frühere Papstbriefe* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935). See also Aloysius K. Ziegler, "Pope Gelasius I and His Teaching on the Relation of Church and State," *The Catholic Historical Review* 27.4 (1942): 413–14.

⁴ Odoacer and his successor Theodoric were both Homoian Christians rather than orthodox Catholics. Samuel Cohen, "Religious Diversity," in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, ed. Michael Shane Bjornlie, Kristina Sessa, and Jonathan J. Arnold (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 503–32, gives a comprehensive survey of religious politics in late fifth-century Italy.

⁵ See the arguments put forward by George E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 73–101. The text is edited by Gilbert Pomarès, *Gélase Ier, Lettre contre les Lupercales et dix-huit Messes du Sacramentaire Léonien* (Paris: Cerf, 1959).

⁶ *Epistula* 42, known as the *Gelasian Decretal*, ed. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Libri recipiendi et non recipiendi* (Leipzig: August Pries, 1912). Eduard Schwartz, "Zum Decretum Gelasianum," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 29 (1930): 161–68, questioned the attribution to Gelasius in favour of a sixth-century southern Gallic provenance. It is also treated as spurious by Detlev Jasper and Horst Fuhmann, *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 64–65. See however Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen, intro. and trans., *The Letters of Gelasius I (492–496): Pastor and Micromanager of the Church of Rome* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 142.

⁷ On these types of classical letters and how they were adapted by Christians in late antiquity, see Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *The Greek and Roman Letter in Late Antiquity: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁸ The Vatican remains to this day the only church headquarters that is recognized as a state in its own right, with diplomatic representation.

⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Pliny minoris epistulae recognovit R. A. B. Mynors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Books 6 and 7. On the epistolary correspondents of Book 6, see Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47–73.

¹⁰ Forty-two letters survive in full, the rest in fragments. The majority are edited by Andreas Thiel, *Epistulae sancti Gelasii papae in Epistulae Romanorum pontificum genuinae et quae ad eos scriptae sunt a s. Hilario usque ad Pelagium II*, 2nd ed. (Braunsberg, 1867; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olm, 2004), 287–510, with some additional letters in Samuel Löwenfeld, ed., *Epistolae pontificum Romanorum ineditae* (Leipzig, 1895; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1–11. A few fragments are edited by Paul Ewald, "Die Papstbriefe der Britischen Sammlung 2.," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für Ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde zur Beförderung*

einer Gesamtausgabe der Quellschriften Deutscher Geschichte des Mittelalters 5 (1880): 503–96, in his catalogue of the British collections. On the sources and editions, see, further, Samuel Cohen, “Heresy, Authority and the Bishops of Rome in the Fifth Century: Leo I (440–461) and Gelasius (492–496),” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2014), 135–45. On Gelasius as a letter writer, see Neil and Allen, *Letters of Gelasius*, 8–11. Letter 12 and a further thirty-five letters and fragments are translated in Part 2 of that volume.

¹¹ On his management of property, see Kristina Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antiquity: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121, 124, 167–69, *et passim*.

¹² The Latin text is edited by Thiel, *Epistulae pontificum Romanorum*, 349–58. It is translated by Matthew Briel in Demacopoulos, *Invention of Peter*, 173–80. I have used my own translation from Neil and Allen, *Letters of Gelasius*, 73–80.

¹³ See, for example, *Epistula* 12.1: “On their return to the city, the servants of Your Piety, my sons Faustus the *magister* and Irenaeus, *virii illustres*, and their companions who took part in the official legation, said that Your Clemency had asked why I had not sent my greetings in written form to you.”

¹⁴ I thank Ruth Morello for this suggestion, made during a masterclass on “Late Antique Letter-Writing” at Manchester University, July 7, 2018.

¹⁵ *Epistula* 12.1.

¹⁶ *Epistula* 12.3.

¹⁷ *Epistula* 12.3.

¹⁸ Compare 2 Cor. 4:7. See also Sessa, *Formation of Papal Authority*, 18–19, on the Roman bishops’ application of the metaphor of God’s steward to their management of the ‘household’ of the fifth- and sixth-century Roman church. From the pontificate of Damasus, the cult of St. Peter in Rome played an important part in the affirmation that the bishops of Rome were the heirs of Peter: see Demacopoulos, *Invention of Peter*, 32–38.

¹⁹ *Epistula* 12.2.

²⁰ *Epistula* 12.2.

²¹ *Epistula* 12.2.

²² Other examples of this practice in the same period are given by Kosta Simic, “Remembering the Damned: Byzantine Liturgical Hymns as Instruments of Religious Polemics,” in *Memories of the Future: Rewriting Texts and Landscapes in Late Antiquity*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Kosta Simic (London: Routledge, 2019), 156–70.

²³ Erich Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums 2. Das Papsttum unter byzantinischer Herrschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), 70–71; he is followed by Francis Dvornik, “Pope Gelasius and Emperor Anastasius I,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 44 (1951): 111–16; and W. Ensslin, “*Auctoritas und potestas: Zur Zweigewaltenlehre des Papstes Gelasius I.*,” *Historische Jahrbuch* 74 (1955): 661–68.

²⁴ Walter Ullmann, *Gelasius I. (492–496): Das Papsttum an der Wende der Spätantike zum Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981).

²⁵ George E. Demacopoulos, “Are All Universalist Politics Local?,” *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Dunn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 142. For the same argument in reference to Gelasius’s *Adversus Andromachum*, see Neil McLynn, “Crying Wolf: the Pope and the Lupercalia,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 98 (2008): 161–75.

²⁶ On Anastasius’s unofficial role in the papal secretariat under Nicholas, see Bronwen Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes and Martyrs: The Political Hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 14–17.

²⁷ Frederick A. Norwood, “The Political Pretensions of Pope Nicholas I,” *Church History* 15.4 (1946): 271.

²⁸ Ernst Perels judged 153 of the 170 letters genuine in his *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica edition (Berlin, 1925).

²⁹ See Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes*, 28–32. Compare Nicholas I, *Epistulae* 26, 99, and 100 on the Bulgarian question.

³⁰ Nicholas argued that Ignatius had been uncanonically deposed in 858 and anathematised Photius, prompting the “Photian schism” between Constantinople and the Roman church. Ignatius was returned to office briefly in 867 and replaced on his death by Photius in 877. For a detailed study of Photius’s close relationships, especially with Bardas Caesar, uncle of Michael III—and how these shaped his ecclesiastical career, allowing him to be raised rapidly from layman to patriarch—see Patricia Varona Codeso and Óscar Prieto Domínguez, “Deconstructing Photios: family relationship and political kinship in middle Byzantium,” *Revue des études byzantines* 71 (2013): 105–48.

³¹ Photius I, *Epistula* 1 to Boris-Michael of Bulgaria: Despina S. White and Joseph R. Berrigan, trans., *The Patriarch and the Prince: The Letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Khan Boris of Bulgaria* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982). Nicholas, *Epistula* 99 to Boris, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 568–600.

³² Gelasius, *Tract 4: De anathematis vinculo*, ed. Thiel, *Epistulae Romanorum*, 557–70. Cited in *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 486; see n. 7. The second, much longer passage, from chapter 11 of *Tract 4*, is Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485–86, lines 36–17, which explains that before Christ there had been some

who were kings and priests, like Melchisedech, but none since; compare Gelasius, ed. Thiel, *Epistulae Romanorum*, 567–68.

³³ For example, Luke 10:14; Matt. 25:24–29; 2 Tim. 3:2.

³⁴ *Epistula* 12.3 cited in Nicholas, *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485. He continues: “And if, in general, when all the bishops are administering their divine affairs properly, it is appropriate for the hearts of the faithful to be subject to them, how much more should agreement with the leader of that [pontifical] see be adhered to, whom ... the collective loyalty of the whole church has celebrated continually?” Nicholas’s addition to the text is marked in square brackets; his omission of several sentences are also marked by ellipses.

³⁵ *Epistula* 12.4–5.

³⁶ Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 115.

³⁷ Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 114–15.

³⁸ Gelasius, *Epistula* 12.3, cited in Nicholas, *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485: “Wherever Your Piety turns a clear gaze, never has anybody been able to raise himself by any completely human counsel to the privilege or acknowledgement of that one whom the voice of Christ set before all, whom the venerable church has always acknowledged and in her devotedness holds as primate.” On the Bulgarian issue, see also Nicholas, *Epistulae* 69 (JE 2783) and 71 (JE 2785). See Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 10 n. 24.

³⁹ Donald Trump to His Excellency Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, May 24, 2018: Simon Sebag Montefiore, ed., *Written in History. Letters that Changed the World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2018), 212.

⁴⁰ Montefiore, *Written in History*, 211–12.

⁴¹ It has been suggested that Photius’s possible familial links with the Armenian Bardas Caesar, uncle and adviser of Michael III, gave him an extra stake in the success of the Byzantine mission to Bulgaria: Codeso and Domínguez, “Deconstructing Photios,” 128.

⁴² Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 120–21.

⁴³ Eugenio Russomanno, “Gelasio I e la teoria dei due poteri spirituale e temporale,” *Vatican Insider Documenti*, April 10, 2018. Russomanno only names one source: Rajko Bratož, “Gelasio I, Papa,” in *Enciclopedia dei Papi* (Rome: Treccani, 2000), 1:458–61.