Historical Foundations
In this chapter I look at the fourth century as the period that gave birth to Christendom and was determinative in the shaping of Western law and church-state relations. There is a long minority tradition within Christian history that has identified the conversion of the emperor Constantine the Great in the fourth century, including the events leading up to that conversion and its subsequent workings out, as the Fall of the Church from the original intent of its founder Jesus Christ and his Apostles. Already in the fourth century, the monastic movement (anchorites and cenobites), in their retreat from the centers of power and culture into the desert to live out the teaching of Jesus, as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, were implicitly if not explicitly protesting the Constantinian synthesis of Christ and culture, the Christian church and state. Some early Christian

1 I say implicitly if not explicitly because the relationship between these monastics and the urban centers is a complex one. There were individuals (such as St. Anthony) who escaped into a life of solitude into the desert caves of Egypt (anchorites), there were monastics who lived in isolated communities (cenobites), but there were later also those who retreated into monastic communities in the middle of urban centers. In many cases there was traffic (physical or by means of correspondence) between these monastic communities and the centers of power. Rulers and others would seek the advice of desert fathers on any conceivable problem, from how to rule justly to how to deal with children. Sometimes rulers (political or ecclesiastical) would