

## REVIEW

PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS IN LATE ANTIQUITY:  
FIFTY YEARS AFTER MOMIGLIANO'S *CONFLICT*

Peter Brown and Rita Lizzi Testa, edd., *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue (IVth–VIth Century A.D.): Proceedings of the International Conference at the Monastery of Bose (October 2008)* Christianity and History: Series of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna, vol. 9. Zurich/Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011. Pp. 648. Paper, €79.90. ISBN 978-3-643-90069-2.

A specific stimulus for the 2008 conference whose proceedings are gathered in this volume is signalled in Rita Lizzi Testa's introduction: a wish to take the measure, in the light of fifty years' subsequent scholarship, of a celebrated earlier collection of papers addressing the 'Pagans and Christians' theme—the set first delivered by eight eminent contributors at a Warburg Institute seminar of 1958/9, and later edited for publication by Arnaldo Momigliano under the title *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963). That earlier collection, in its nature, was quite selective in the angles on which it focused: it did not purport to offer a comprehensive survey (and to be clear, nor does the new collection, though it ranges more widely). But as published with an introductory essay by Momigliano—who himself had contributed one of the eight pieces, and who had been involved in the selection of other speakers<sup>1</sup>—the *Conflict* volume certainly deserves recognition and retrospective attention as a landmark of mid-20th century scholarly study in its field. The contributors to it were all seasoned authorities on the particular topics on which they wrote, and they were writing at a time when perceptions of 'conflict' had particular resonances (their propensity to characterise the fourth century as an era of grand two-sided 'conflict' between opposed ideologies may have owed something to memories of a recent world war, and a sense of deepening 'Cold

<sup>1</sup> Formally, at least, it was Gertrude Bing, the Director of the Warburg at the time, who had invited the speakers. In just what degree Momigliano could be said to have selected the participants and directed the particular agenda of the 1958 seminar is a question: one learns from the volume here reviewed (p. 42) that he himself had not attended three of the lectures; nor had he yet read any written drafts of these when he accepted Bing's proposal (which was only put to him after the series had run its course) that he should edit the collection for publication.

War' political and ideological division). Some of the papers—Momigliano's, for one, and those of A. H. M. Jones, H.-I. Marrou and P. Courcelle—were classic on their subjects; and for anyone interested in the general field, there is still some food for thought in all of them. But it is a field, of course, whose contours since 1963 have been transformed in scholarly vision—in good part, through the brilliant rethinking of it pioneered by Momigliano's one-time supervisee Peter Brown, who with Lizzi Testa has co-edited the new collection of papers. As a mark of how much has changed in scholarly pre-suppositions and approaches since the Warburg lectures were given (the young Brown, one reads, was among the listeners), one need only recall the opening of Momigliano's 'Introduction' in *Conflict* ('I may perhaps begin with a piece of good news. In this year 1959 it can still be considered an historical truth that the Roman empire declined and fell'). Or one could register how the title of the book here reviewed has altered the old one's terminology and period-frame: in place of the old title's 'conflict' between the abstract '-isms' of 'paganism and Christianity', there is now a 'breaking of a dialogue' between 'pagans and Christians'—and the break is no longer centred 'in the fourth century': it unfolds gradually over the fourth to sixth, in the frame of Brown's model of a long Late Antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Another immediately evident difference is worth noting, too, as an indicator of the boom in academic interest in the field that has occurred in the interim: whereas 220 pages sufficed for Momigliano's 'eight-man' collection, the new one runs to 640 pages and contains items by twenty-nine scholars. A good dozen of the contributors are Italian (hardly a noteworthy point *per se*, in view of the 2008 conference's venue in Piedmont, and the established tradition of 'impero tardoantico' scholarship in Italy, but a marker, in this case, of the special interest that Momigliano's own career and thought holds for Italian scholars).

The twenty-nine individual contributions are loosely arranged by theme under six titled (but unnumbered) section-headings. The first section, 'Il cris-

<sup>2</sup> To postulate a 'dialogue' rather than a starkly bi-polar 'conflict' in this connexion is no recent innovation, of course: the usage had currency well before the 'invention' of 'Late Antiquity' as adumbrated in Brown (1971). Even in the early 1960s, it should be observed, an eminent scholar with whom Momigliano was personally acquainted already thought it apt to emphasise 'dialogue' in this context: the last chapter of Dodds (1965) bears the title 'The Dialogue of Paganism with Christianity'. That book comprised the Wiles Lectures that Dodds had delivered in 1963, the year that *Conflict* was published—and in its preface he named and thanked Momigliano as one of several experts who had attended the lectures and their associated colloquia. In the title of the volume here reviewed, 'dialogue' presumably nods to Dodds' book (famously, Brown was to dispute the aptness of 'the Age of Anxiety' as a summative characterisation of the era; but he praised the book as a masterpiece in an early review (*EHR* 83 (1968) 542), and the start of Brown (1978) attests (p. 5) his deep and abiding admiration of Dodds' humane scholarship).

tianesimo di A. Momigliano' (a teasing title: his judgement of Christianity's historical significance in late antiquity is the point at issue), underscores and exemplifies the emergence of 'Momigliano studies' as a field of sophisticated scholarly activity in its own right. It opens with 'Back to the Future', a short piece that Brown had delivered as an hors d'œuvre at the 2008 conference: he deftly evokes the spirit of the 1958 seminar, reflecting on presuppositions shared by its participants and editor which seem distorted at fifty years' distance (not least, the model of a bi-polar religious 'conflict' as a fundamental driver of fourth century change),<sup>3</sup> and on what now seem some striking 'elephants in the room' about which the *Conflict* volume was largely silent. Subsequent papers dilate on some of these matters (Averil Cameron, on Momigliano's editorial introduction to *Conflict*; G. Clemente, touching on a third party that was notably neglected in its pages, the Jewish communities of the late empire; G. Zamagni, on the affinities (and their limits) to be discerned between Erik Petersen's 1935 *Der Monotheismus als politische Problem* and Momigliano's approach to that 'problem' in *Conflict* and in a well-known late essay (*CP* 81 (1986) 285–97) in which he returned to 'the disadvantages of monotheism for a universal state'). On a different tack, A. Melloni draws on the Einaudi archives to document Momigliano's contacts with the house in the 1950s and '60s, and his concern to ensure a sound translation of *Conflict* in its Italian version (published in 1968).

The titles of all but the last of the five succeeding sections are culled from a passage in another text that Momigliano had published with Einaudi in the 1960s, his introduction to the Italian translation (1962) of Syme's *Roman Revolution*: 'Ma come tutti i grandi libri questo di Syme contiene in se stesso i germi delle più vere critiche future, appunto perché impone ricerche nuove ... I documenti si scoprono se si cercano'. Thus (to English the titles, here) six papers sit under the umbrella-heading 'Like all great books ...', five under 'It contains within itself the seeds of the most telling future criticism ...', and so on. That is to be construed as an editorial flourish, surely, not a claim made in earnest for the 1963 *Conflict* volume to stand as a classic of the first water;<sup>4</sup> but the title-headings serve well enough as a way of arranging a

<sup>3</sup> Brown was not meaning, of course, to deny the aptness of 'religious conflict' as a term used to describe a significant aspect of fourth century historical reality—and in his closing remarks (p. 604) he readily acknowledges that in some contexts the conflict was intense. The question at issue is whether or not its impact should be construed as fundamental: on Brown's view, its impact was delimited in the round 'by the massive and diffuse weight of the values of the *saeculum*'.

<sup>4</sup> For all its excellences and its editor's acumen in pulling its contents and implications together in his 'Introduction', *Conflict* is at bottom a collection of seminar papers delivered by eight hands—and not *all* of its papers are classic. The focus of Barb's learned piece, say, on 'the survival of the magical arts', was disappointingly myopic: in assuming

good score of papers—quite disparate in length and density—that treat a wide variety of topics (the contributors at the conference had clearly been given a broad remit).

Is not practicable to itemise and discuss all of these pieces in the confines of this short review; but to notice a broad sample can indicate something of the volume's flavour and variety. Some contributions revisit, with new factual details or nuances, subjects on which their authors have previously published major monographs: Lepelley, for instance, on the vibrant texture of civic life in late Roman Africa as disclosed by municipal epigraphy, and the passage 'from pagan reaction to secularization' among its local elites; or Liebeschuetz on the Christianisation of an eastern metropolis over the mid-fourth to sixth centuries, in the shifting 'view from Antioch' that he extracts from the works of Libanius, John Chrysostom and Malalas (Christians and pagans were rubbing along quite well for the most part, he thinks, in a city in which the Christians already had the upper hand before Julian's arrival in 362; Liebeschuetz intriguingly likens the process by which blood sacrifice fell into desuetude there to the recent decline of tobacco-smoking in western Europe). The Emperor Julian's own politics—oddly, a topic scarcely discussed in *Conflict*—get more attention now, in papers by J. Hahn and F. Fatti. Other contributions give tasters of things that were soon to appear in major works not yet published at the time of the 2008 conference: Alan Cameron, for instance, on the late antique Virgilian commentators, prefiguring arguments in his *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011); or there is Brown himself, in his brief opening piece and 'Concluding Remarks', pointing *inter alia* to the questions of social status, wealth and 'poverty' now so splendidly explored in his memorable *Through the Eye of a Needle*.<sup>5</sup>

Two related lines of approach in the study of the period that have strikingly advanced over the half-century since the Warburg Lecture series—the archaeology of late antiquity, and the study of its visual art—figure less prominently in the new collection than one might have expected. A few of the papers do attend to one or the other, with various degrees of emphasis (A. Marcone, on iconographic items embedded in Aquileian mosaics and inscriptions; C. Goddard, on *adventus*-ceremonial; C. Machado, on aristo-

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that the topic boiled down to mere superstition, it conveyed no sense of the intellectual subtlety of theurgy in some Neoplatonist discourse (Knipe in the new volume is a brief corrective), or of the social function and setting of sorcery-accusations (on which see Brown's anthropologically angled paper—truly a classic—in Brown (1972) 119–45).

<sup>5</sup> *Through the Eye* has received fulsome praise from almost everyone who has reviewed it since its publication in 2012—and it wholly deserves all the praise: in G. Bowersock's phrase (*New Republic*, 6 December 2012), 'it is a tremendous achievement'.

crats' mausoleum- and church-building activities at Rome).<sup>6</sup> But Brown's closing piece highlights 'the quickening pace of textuality' in late antiquity as a defining feature of the age, and in most of the contributions the discussion turns mainly on textual evidence and on interpretation of ancient practice in textual discourse. One of the book's sections focuses on Greek and Latin literary items, in five papers: M. Kahlos on 'the creation of "paganism"' in Christian literature; G. Agosti on the 'dialogo interculturale' in late Greek Christian poetry; P. Chuvin on 'Homère christianisé'; K. Cooper on a fifth century martyr-act's depiction of the dynamics of Christianisation within a family network; and G. Cecconi on traditional patterns of instruction and practice in the rhetorical schools. Elsewhere, L. Cracco Ruggini attends to the linguistic nuances of 'Pontifex' as deployed in late historiographic and epigraphic texts, and S. Orlandi systematically collects and interprets the inscriptions that witness the demise of Rome's traditional pagan priesthoods. Lizzi Testa touches on the priesthoods, too, in discussing 'limits of conflict' with reference to 'anti-pagan' imperial legislation extant in the Theodosian Code, and the chimera of 'pagan reaction' to it. (In *Conflict*, Herbert Bloch had conjured a grand 'last stand' by Roman pagans in the 390s: that mirage has long since dissolved, of course—so much so that Bloch's paper now passes unmentioned in Lizzi Testa's).

There are some contributions in the volume—three pieces, especially—that a *Histos* review ought to signal as of particular interest for their explicit focus on historiographic material and issues.

In her 'Thoughts on the "Introduction" to *The Conflict*', Averil Cameron reflects on Momigliano's own historical practice and intellectual affinities, placing his *Introduction* against the background of his earlier academic career in Italy and in England. She nicely contextualises a tension in his Introduction's representation of Christianity in the fourth century empire: he is insistent there that 'the triumph of Christianity' did directly relate to the empire's 'decline'; but Cameron observes that there is an inclination, nonetheless, to assess the social impact of Christianisation in positive terms—an inclination which she traces back to the interest Momigliano had developed in the history of liberty in the 1930s, and to Croce and De Sanctis as intellectual influences on that score.

<sup>6</sup> Church-building (not only at Rome) also figures in a contribution by P. Liverani placed as one of three items in 'Silenti epiloghi', the volume's sixth and final section. (The section's other two items focus mainly on fifth and sixth century textual evidence: B. Caseau discusses 'le crypto-paganisme' and its survival-strategies, adducing vivid details from Sophronius, especially; G. Cracco traces 'un conflitto dentro il cristianesimo' to the age of Gregory the Great and his *Dialogi*.)

Hervé Inglebert is impressive (and provocative) in his ‘L’historiographie au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle entre païens et chrétiens: faux dialogue et vrai débat’—an acute critique of the classic paper on fourth century historiography that Momigliano first published in *Conflict*. Momigliano had surveyed there the body of texts he took to be relevant, and had proposed a two-phase development—Christians innovating to create ecclesiastical history as a new historiographic form in (roughly speaking) the first half of the century, then a traditionalist revival of sorts in pagan historiography in the second half. Inglebert—a connoisseur of ‘les mutations des savoirs dan l’Antiquité chrétienne’<sup>7</sup>—argues that the two-phase model was predicated on too restrictive a view of what could count as historical discourse in late antiquity: fifty years on, the model is outworn, and ‘la question de la christianisation de l’historiographie est donc à repenser totalement. Il y faudra bien un autre demi-siècle’ (p. 104). On this view, study of the Christianisation of historiography must seek in future to integrate material from a significantly wider range of texts than Momigliano envisaged, and must allow for more interplay in their generic elements than he did—‘car ce n’est pas seulement dans l’*historia* littéraire que l’on parle des *res gestae*’ (p. 101): as examples of the kinds of material at issue, Inglebert mentions Julian’s *Caesars* and texts in the *Alexander Romance* tradition.

Inglebert’s prescription would apply to the historiography of the fifth century, too, and an equally apt text to cite would have been the curious fiction discussed in the final item I will pick out for notice here: Jan Willem Drijvers’ paper on ‘Religious Conflict in the Syriac *Julian Romance*’. It is admirable: Drijvers is lucid on his composite text’s components and generic mix (he attends chiefly to the last and longest of the three separate narratives that make up the *Romance*, with an eye to its likely borrowings from earlier sources, and its author’s possible purposes); and alert to the historical implications of narrative details (the writer’s antipathy to Antioch, for instance, or his hostile depiction of Jews as in cahoots with the demonised Julian). Previous attempts to fix a composition-date for this section of the *Romance* have ranged from the late fourth to the early sixth centuries. Drijvers persuasively places it in a specific historical context at Edessa in the 430s: seventy years after the death of Julian, an Edessene author was embroidering historical

<sup>7</sup> I quote the subtitle of Inglebert’s 2001 monograph *Interpretatio Christiana*. In his critique of Momigliano’s paper, Inglebert’s perspective is plainly informed in a general sense by a reading of Foucault (named in passing at p. 98). *Les Mots et les choses* (1966) [Eng. trans. *The Order of Things* (1970)] and *L’Archéologie du savoir* (1969) post-date Momigliano’s *Conflict*, of course; but it should be noted that in the 1970s and ’80s Momigliano did engage guardedly with Foucauldian ‘genealogy’: see most recently Gould (2014), esp. 212–15.

fiction in the wake of the Council of Ephesus to advertise his city as a staunch bastion of monophysite rectitude.

Taken in the round, the papers collected by Brown and Lizzi Testa offer the reader a clear indication of the vitality and variety of text-focused scholarship on the ‘late antique pagans and Christians’ theme as currently practised—and of the advances in knowledge and innovations in approach that have altered our perceptions of the *status quaestionis* since Momigliano and his colleagues delivered their lectures in the civilised setting of the Warburg Institute, half a century ago. The 2008 ‘Pagans and Christians’ conference, held at the Monastery of Bose, sounds to have been a congenially civilised occasion, in its turn: the venue, Brown notes in his closing remarks, was close to Augustine’s haven at Cassiciacum—that ‘mountain of rich milk and abundance’ for a studious mind (*Confessions* 9.3.5). Augustine’s world, he goes on to say, had become ‘a world awash with textuality’—a fact, he suggests, with revolutionary cultural implications that scholars today are much better placed to appreciate than the speakers at the Warburg in 1958 were, or ever could be. To convey his own impression of the sense that late antique persons came to have of the swelling quantity of books to be read and to be written, Brown draws a characteristically vivid parallel: the awareness, in the early 21st century, that a reader has of the rapid proliferation of electronic textual material in a tide of e-books, on-line editions and translations of primary sources, internet journals, web-based research-projects and discussion-sites and the like. On that score, students of the late antique ‘dialogue’ of pagans and Christians will have plenty to read and edit and write about for the next half-century and more: ‘we still have a lot to learn’, Brown says in closing.

True enough—and the field is fascinating. But in the civilised setting of Bose, a practical consideration was left unspoken. Work of this sort, if it is to prosper in academic institutions, depends partly on the institutional directorates’ adherence to a cultural consensus that regards the work as worth sustaining and supporting. The current threat to the work and integrity of the Warburg Institute is a case in point. The *Conflict* lecture-series that was held there in 1958/9 fortuitously coincided with a significant development in the Institute’s history: it was in 1958—some thirty years after Fritz Saxl transferred the Institute and its invaluable library from Hamburg to London to protect it from Nazi depredation—that the Warburg finally acquired a (supposedly) permanent home, in the University of London building it has occupied ever since. It would be nice to imagine a future ‘Pagans and Christians’ conference being held there in 2058, to mark the centenary of the 1958/9 lectures—presuming that the Institute still exists by then. It was reported in the press in summer 2014 that the University of London is seeking to challenge the deed of trust it signed in 1944, by which it undertook to

keep the Warburg collection in perpetuity as an independent unit, appropriately housed in Bloomsbury. Needless to say, financial calculations and pressures, and the rental and sales values of real-estate in central London, are at the bottom of the challenge. If this deplorable attempt by the University to invalidate the deed of trust and shuffle off its legal responsibility of care is successful, the outcome will most likely be the breaking up of an irreplaceable library collection and the wrecking of a unique and world-famous research environment.

The Friends of the Warburg Institute have organised a petition to save it, accessible online at: <http://www.change.org/p/petition-save-the-warburg-institute>.

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