

V. Messina: *La politica religiosa di Graziano* (SEIA n.s. 3). Pp. 101. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1998 [1999], pbk. ISBN: 88-7689-156-0 / ISSN 1126-3393.

Gratian is not an emperor who usually attracts attention in his own right, but more often lurks in the shadows cast by his more distinguished contemporaries, notably Theodosius I and Ambrose of Milan. The topic of his religious policy, however, is important. He was the first emperor over whom Ambrose sought to wield influence. Moreover, by his rejection of the title *pontifex maximus* and his removal of the altar of Victory from the senatorial *curia* in Rome, he signalled an important change in the attitudes of Christian emperors towards paganism. It is a virtue of M.'s short monograph that it seeks to investigate the topic from Gratian's vantage point. Yet this is a difficult task, given that most of the extant sources tend to focus on individuals other than Gratian. His attitudes and policies must be elucidated from texts written by others, often (as is particularly the case with those penned by Ambrose) with a particular polemical agenda. For all these problems, there is a general consensus among scholars that Gratian's religious policies were characterised at first by tolerance, but later manifested overt hostility towards paganism and the enemies of Nicene orthodoxy. With one important exception, this is a portrait with which M. broadly concurs.

M. begins by establishing the context within which Gratian's religious policies were formed. He identifies the court of Gratian's father Valentinian I as (unsurprisingly) influential, in that its lack of a 'dogmatically motivated ecclesiastical policy' existed side-by-side with generally pro-Nicene sentiments (pp. 10-15). Such attitudes persisted into

the early years of Gratian's reign (pp. 37-48). For this period M. agrees with (e.g.) D. H. Williams and N. McLynn in minimising the influence of Ambrose over the emperor (pp. 20-37). Indeed, M. argues that Ambrose's ascendancy over Gratian was never complete, even in the later years of the reign (pp. 68-78). To be sure, Ambrose was able to bully the bishops assembled for the council of Aquileia in 381, but his influence over officials at court was much less secure. It is telling, for instance, that the Spanish Priscillianists, seeking to defend themselves against charges of heresy, achieved an audience with Gratian even after they had been rebuffed by Ambrose (pp. 70-1). In general, M. sees the adoption of pro-Nicene policies by the eastern emperor Theodosius after 379 as being the most important stimulus for a change in Gratian's conduct towards the church (pp. 49-59).

M. similarly minimises Ambrose's role in the development of Gratian's measures against paganism. He argues instead that the emperor developed a consistent policy that amounted to 'a sort of laicisation' of the Christian empire vis-à-vis those responsibilities towards traditional cults that it had inherited from pagan emperors (p. 91). For M., this was the agenda that underpinned Gratian's repudiation of the title *pontifex maximus*, his withdrawal of state funding for the cults of Rome, and his removal of the altar of Victory from the senate house (pp. 82-99). Moreover, M. suggests (against the *communis opinio* outlined above that Gratian's hard-line measures against paganism and heresy emerged only later in his reign) that the rejection of the pontificate may have occurred as early as 376 (pp. 88-9). This requires him to argue that the use of the title in Ausonius' *Gratiarum*

*actio* of 379 should not be understood in a technical sense (pp. 86-7). I imagine that I will not be the only reader who will find it difficult to agree with this argument.

M.'s study is useful, not least in that it re-emphasises the arguments of Williams and McLynn that Ambrose's account of his dealings with emperors cannot be taken at face value. There can be no disguising the fact that what M. has written is essentially a long article (beefed up by extensive quotations from the sources in the footnotes).

Nevertheless, its presentation as a monograph should have called for at least a bibliography, if not also an index. As it is, the footnotes are numbered in a single continuous sequence, and the reader gets no help other than 'cit.' for direction to works already cited. Similarly, abbreviations abound, but there is no list of them, or even an indication of which conventions have been adopted. Much perplexity and flicking back and forth ensues.

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