The field will be left, I suspect, to the more simplistic but more readable books whose judgment Syme attacks.

*F.M. Ahl*


Two papers delivered to the Macquarie Ancient History Association during 1978 have been published by that Association. Both are deserving of the wider publicity thus given to them.

The modern social tensions referred to by Professor Judge are those created by the opposing views enshrined in the Classical tradition on the one hand and Christian doctrine on the other—‘the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem’ as he describes it in his introductory paragraph. He demonstrates, by reference to papyri and a wide range of authors both Christian and Pagan from the first four centuries just how tangled these traditions have become, and how difficult it is to separate them in modern thought.

‘I hear Catholic Nuns strenuously advocating humanistic ideas of self development, and humanists taking their stand on such distinctively Christian slogans as integrity and commitment. And so it was in late antiquity. It is not easy to say in individual cases how much is owed to Athens and how much to Jerusalem. But historically it is this conflict built into our cultural tradition that has brought us to the argumentative, progressive, open societies of the West.’ (p.19).

Judge begins his argument by quoting four secular papyri from the villages of Egypt and dated between c250 and 350 AD. In each, Christianity is shown to have permeated rural peasant life, and by the mid-fourth century to have become an accepted institution not only in the cities but also in the more remote areas.

Not that Christianity is thus shown to have sprung up and taken society captive from below. The New Testament shows that the cities were the centre of early Christian influence and activity. The Pauline Churches were characterised by intellectual debate, and the style that had been the preserve of the philosophers was taken over and widely diffused in the early Christian context.
From the consideration of the papyri the argument moves to such questions as the moral impact of Christianity on the Graeco-Roman world, and the extent to which Christianity became an established religion and began to fulfil the formal functions of the hellenistic religions. The contribution of the early monks is considered, together with various attitudes to their activities from within the Church and outside it. The conversion of Marius Victorinus is seen as illustrating the ‘coupling together of the new ideas of the gospel with the social force represented by the Church which . . . was the fulcrum for the conversion of Rome’.

Judge sums up his basic proposition thus: ‘The conversion of Rome was effected through a combination of intellectual and social forces unprecedented in the Classical experience. For the first time a powerful new set of ideas, such as would normally have been confined to the philosophical schools, was promoted systematically at other levels of the community’. (p.8).

This is a stimulating paper, although not particularly easy to read owing to the density of its argument. The papyri are printed in full at the back, and a translation and full notes are provided. There is plenty here to assist those who wish to engage in further investigation of the theme.

At a time when it is impossible to go into the city or onto a University campus without finding advertisements for transcendental meditation or being accosted by the adherents of some religious group with Eastern connections, it is very useful to read a sympathetic and instructive paper on some of the principal ancient antecedents of the varied expressions of mysticism as we encounter them day by day.

* * * * *

Dr. Mortley begins with ‘The Memorial’ of Blaise Pascal, and comments that ‘most world religions have had their mystics, and it is in their mysticism that they most resemble one another . . .’

There is a discussion of Jewish mysticism as it is found in some Jewish sects and described by Philo, together with a Jewish assessment of Paul’s mystical experience ‘which he interpreted in such a way that it shattered the traditional (Jewish) authority’. However it is Neo-platonism that dominates the mystical thinking of the early Christian centuries.

There follows a summary of the early Greek view of ‘rationality and reason as the only avenue to knowledge’, from Parmenides to Aristotle. However reason was questioned by the Sceptics and ‘Middle Platonists’ of the last Century BC and the first two centuries AD, and apophasis (negation) replaces affirmation—i.e. God is best understood, in so far as he can be understood, by saying what he is not. ‘Properly practised this method of
intellectual ascent will lead to a sudden change in the mind and a sudden encounter with conceptual blank space, and this is the mystical experience'.

Through Plotinus with his emphasis on self-knowledge, the discussion moves to Christian mysticism in the Pseudo-Dionysius and other Patristic writers of the early centuries. The remainder of the paper investigates the influence of Buddhism and its methods, and discusses its probable points of contact with Graeco-Christian mysticism.

This is a very readable paper and contains much that is of interest to anyone who seeks to understand the nature of mysticism in the ancient world and in its modern manifestations.

Calum Gilmour