THE POOR YE HAVE ALWAYS WITH YOU

P. Brown: *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire. The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures*. Pp. ix + 160. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2002. Paper, $15.95. ISBN: 1-58465-146-6 (1-58465-145-8 hbk).

This book is the product of a series of lectures delivered in May 2000 by Peter Brown to the Historical Society of Israel in memory of the late Professor Menahem Stern. The theme, the effects on late antique society of the transformation of the 'poor' in the social imagination, is appropriately bound in with the impact of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a whole on religious and social culture in a period of complex and nuanced transition.

B.'s three chapters address cultural shift from different perspectives. The first, 'Lover of the Poor', addresses the evolution of a new awareness of 'the poor', as contrasted with the generalized classical civic concept of the 'people', *plebs* or *demos*. This in turn led to the reconfiguration of euergetism as reaching out to the frontiers of society, the most socially excluded groups. But this created problems. Who were the poor? One constant image is of the beggar, passively awaiting succour. Another is the Church's own poor, the widows, orphans, and other needy people whom it was the Church's duty to succour as its own. However (Chapter 2), the new leadership's duty to the poor was about power as well as love. Out in the wider community drawn into the fourth-century bishop's ambit by ecclesiastical wealth and the fast justice of the episcopal hearing there were also the middling folk who lived on the edge of destitution, conscious of their vulnerability in an uncertain world. These also were the bishop's care (although slaves, in a survival from the civic 'model', were not).

In the third lecture/chapter, B. moves to the heart of a late antique paradox, the competing claims of distance and solidarity. While talking of equality, he argues, the Christian empire fostered a more vertical construction of society, which risked stranding both God and the emperor at the top, remote from Christians and subjects alike. The response was a set of bridge-building exercises, through the rhetoric of petitions (and law), the exploration of the 'poverty' of the incarnated Christ (and the resultant strains created in the Nestorian controversies), and the efforts of that underrated emperor Theodosius II, who laid aside his imperial regalia to identify with the Hippodrome crowd in prayer and celebration, and mortified the flesh in recognition (and advertisment) of the imperial humanity.

As ever, B. is learned, eloquent, and visionary, a poet of transformation who exalts understanding of the past, persuading and inspiring in equal measure. With a scholar's wariness, he acknowledges evidence for opposing tendencies: B.'s world of late antiquity is never simple. Alongside the newly configured poor were the traditional groupings of *plebs* and *civis*; and the new-style 'cheerful giver' to the poor cohabits with the all-too-familiar oppressive governor and tax collector. The new discourses B. identifies may have been the dominant ones and foreshadowed the future, but they were not the only shows in town. Given the growing appreciation among students of late antiquity of the importance of the classical heritage, there is much to be said for the continuing vitality of the *civitas* in the fourth and even the fifth centuries. It does not come as news to the biographer of Augustine that the bishop's formulation of the citizen-community of God depends heavily on Cicero's *Republic*; and the broad-brush social inclusivity of the concept of the 'consensus universorum', which characterized

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the classical community, continued to flourish in imperial rhetoric and was crucial for the legitimation of imperial rule.

Such discourse had its downside, in its adoption by inappropriate advocates. The poor had always been with us, even if they had not been categorized as such, and not all who celebrated the poverty of others were credible champions of the destitute. What were the Roman poor to make of wealthy aristocrats' patronage of St Laurence the deacon, who had famously informed the greedy persecutor that the poor were the wealth of the Church (Prudentius, *Peristephanon* II)? How many wealthy courtiers in late fourth-century Milan were reformed by Ambrose's generalized strictures on the iniquities of power and oppression? Was the illustrious Sidonius Apollinaris concerned with the opinions of the 'pauperes Christi' when he appointed one of his aristocratic cronies as bishop of Bourges in 4707? In Blair's Britain, 'spin' on social inclusivity and the abolition of poverty is contradicted by the persistence of traditional structures and networks, and the continuing divergence between rich and poor; similar questions may be asked of the advocates of the *pauperes* of late antiquity.

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THE ROMAN LIFE COURSE

M. HARLOW, R. LAURENCE: *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome. A Life Course Approach*. Pp. viii + 184, ills, pls. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Paper, £14.99. ISBN: 0-415-20201-9 (0-415-20200-0 hbk).

How were the stages of life from childhood to old age that together make up the life course understood in Roman antiquity? That is the question this book sets itself. Its answer lies not in the areas of biology or chronology, but in the sphere of social construction: H. & L. occupy themselves with describing Roman perceptions of the stages of human life—an approach, they maintain, made inevitable by the partial nature, in both senses, of the evidence available (literary works composed by mature élite men)—and thus avoid more objective criteria even as they set their descriptions in the context of new advances in Roman demography. After background statements on goals and the Roman household, H. & L. present chapters on infancy and childhood, the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage and its familial consequences, the participation of mature élite men in politics, old age, and death. They claim not to have written a book of family history, but because they offer for the most part syntheses of works published by various Roman family historians over the last two decades—the product of teaching preparation in the first instance—it is difficult to see what else it is. Their syntheses, however, are far from comprehensive, and the overall results are not encouraging. To illustrate the difficulties that characterize the book as a whole I refer to sundry items from Chapter 3, 'The Beginning of Life: Infancy and Childhood'.

H. & L. maintain (p. 43) that, apart from a few details in the Elder Pliny, there is little evidence to support their (reasonable) view that interest was readily shown in the health of children beyond infancy. This is both unfair to Pliny, who allows much to be learned about children's illnesses from the scores of remedies he prescribes in the

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