

constructed, a sheer gift; not the realization of latent human potential, but the rejection of the old self and the assumption of the new, that of Christ. The water, as with the material elements in the other sacraments, communicates without words, and even the words are taken from the ritual and not devised by the minister's eloquence. This may raise the further question of how Chrysostom integrated into his overall ministry the sacramental elements which, however wordlessly, contributed to the formation of the mental images he considered so important to the building up of his flock.

Neither question is meant as criticisms of Rylaasrdam's work, which should encourage a reading of Chrysostom that is informed by a critical awareness of his intended audience.

Philip Amidon, SJ
Creighton University

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The Final Pagan Generation. By **Edward J. Watts.** Transformation of the Classical Heritage 53. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. xvii + 327 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

Modern scholars write grandly about the consequential transformations of the later Roman empire, such as, most notably, the rise of Christianity and its churchmen. But were the later Romans themselves aware of living in an era of great transitions? In *The Final Pagan Generation*, Edward Watts examines the biographies of four celebrities from the fourth century. Their careers lead Watts to an intriguing response to the question about contemporary awareness. While these elites were indeed constantly adjusting their activities and values in response to immediate circumstances, the larger social transformations were not so substantial after all. Our macro-histories about great transformations do not coordinate well to their micro-biographies of stable expectations.

Most of Watts's chapters include parallel narratives. One focuses on the political and religious policies of emperors, from the Tetrarchs to Theodosius. The starting point is the ubiquity of temples, statues, and rituals devoted to the traditional pagan gods. In the 310s children still grew up "in a world that . . . always would be full of gods" (36). A hidebound educational system and the need for cooperation with local notables consistently tempered the personal disapproval and the legal penalties of Christian emperors. The emperors Valentinian and Valens hence did little to restrict traditional cults. "They were . . . to be the last emperors who shared this idea

about the need to work within the social consensus that the post-tetrarchic system had created" (148).

The other narrative is built around biographies of men born during the 310s. Praetextatus was a senator who became prefect of Rome. Ausonius was a teacher at Bordeaux who became praetorian prefect in Gaul and a consul. Libanius was a teacher at Antioch who influenced emperors through his letters and orations. Themistius was a teacher at Constantinople who also served as prefect of the new capital. For all four the reign of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, had little immediate impact. While schoolboys "it is unlikely that they realized that they were living through what later historians would see as a transformative age" (58). As adults they remained pliable. Themistius and Libanius may have had reservations about Constantius's attempts to hamper traditional cults, but both delivered panegyrics in honor of the emperor, and both were handsomely rewarded. For pagans, the reign of the pagan emperor Julian was oddly awkward. Themistius lost influence; Libanius was tainted by his incessant promotion of the emperor's legacy; Praetextatus was even more successful under Julian's Christian successors.

In Watts's political narrative the reign of Valentinian marked a significant shift in attitudes. Increasingly more young men decided instead to become bishops, monks, or ascetics. The prominent members of this new generation of what Watts describes as "young Christian dropouts" (150) included the bishops Ambrose of Milan, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzus. These were the baby boomers of the fourth century, who challenged the staid attitudes of the greatest generation of their parents with the counterculture of ascetic Christianity. These changes in attitude substantially affected the careers of the last pagan generation too. In the later fourth century emperors progressively sidelined the older establishment figures in order to rely upon churchmen who had opted out of the imperial system. With the approval of Ambrose and Bishop Damasus of Rome, Gratian eliminated imperial funding for the public cults at Rome. Theodosius hoped that Nectarius, a senator who became bishop of Constantinople, would provide ecclesiastical leadership for the eastern provinces. Now "the empire was steadily passing into the hands of a younger generation that had less faith in and ties to the social and political regime of their parents" (189).

Watts's use of generational theory and life course studies is an important reminder that men in different age groups reacted differently to events and policies. But as an interpretive perspective, generational theory also poses great challenges. One is the rather arbitrary definition of the boundaries of cohorts or generations. Watts defines his generations largely by calendar decades and imperial reigns; they could also have been defined by office-holding or church councils. A second challenge is whether the behaviors and values of the members of a particular age cohort were alike enough for us to generalize about them collectively. Watts finds enough similarities among the

elites born during the 310s that he is prepared to include even Ausonius, a Christian, as a typical member of this final pagan generation.

Yet another challenge is defining the trajectory of a normal life course. All four men had very long lives, with at least one surviving into his eighties. Although their long lives certainly facilitate Watts's survey of the entire fourth century, great age was atypical in antiquity. The usual demographic assumptions about Roman society suggest that only about eight percent of an age cohort would survive to age seventy, and less than two percent to age eighty. Almost half of a defined generation died as children, and most of the survivors died in their forties or fifties. As a result, the period that Watts designates as the apogee of his final pagan generation, the reigns of Julian and Jovian in the early 360s, can be characterized more properly as the end. The generation of Libanius, Themistius, Praetextatus, and Ausonius would hardly have overlapped and competed with the next generation of ecclesiastical dropouts. Although these four men were among the fortunate few who lived on, most of their peers had already died.

Integrating "the seemingly mundane concerns" of biographical studies with the "impersonal historical forces" (16) of modern narratives has a promising future. The four aristocrats whom Watts selected had charmed lives; now we need to figure out how to include the failures, the peasants, and, especially, the women and girls. Watts's stimulating book is also incentive to reconsider just what changed during the fourth century. In terms of religion, his conclusion is remarkably similar to his starting point: "The cities of the empire remained nearly as full of the sights, sounds, and smells of the traditional gods in the 390s as they had been in the 310s" (209).

Raymond Van Dam
University of Michigan

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Faithful Narratives: Historians, Religion, and the Challenge of Objectivity. Edited by **Andrea Sterk and Nina Caputo.** Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014. viii + 278 pp. \$83.95 cloth; \$26.95 paper.

For the past thirty or so years, various forms of postmodernism have challenged historians' commitment to the nineteenth-century notions of objectivity foundational to the modern academic discipline of history. Peter Novick's magisterial *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) showed