Marta Szada
Conversions between Nicene and Homoian Christianity

Report by: Neil McLynn

This thesis is a far-ranging, meticulous examination of dozens of specific cases of conversion from Homoian Christianity to Nicene 'orthodoxy', as described in a wide variety of sources (and so requiring a wide range of analytical techniques), and stretching across the whole of the former western Roman empire, and through three centuries. The exercise is a great success: the conclusions offered by the thesis are careful and largely convincing, and there is evidence presented of great scholarly expertise and critical judgement. The English is clear and accurate, and notably idiomatic (for each chapter I list some errors or infelicities; mostly these are typographic errors). This ranks among the best theses I have examined, in Oxford, the rest of the UK, and in Europe, and I have no hesitation in recommending that the doctorate be awarded.

The great strength of the thesis is the empirical, text-by-text approach that it takes to the material. Questions might be asked about each of the interpretations offered, and alternatives suggested (and in my comments on each chapter I offer some examples of these, which I hope might form the basis for discussion at the thesis defence); but the cumulative effect of these discussions is compelling. The candidate has shown that questions about conversion can usefully be put to the texts that supply our evidence, and that the picture which emerges is a much more varied and nuanced one than previous studies have suggested.

The one significant flaw in the thesis is that the concept of 'conversion' employed is somewhat undifferentiated. It might be suggested that for the period under discussion here, at least three overlapping models of Christian conversion existed. One was the formal process of becoming a Christian, through baptism into the church. Although the shift towards early baptism was changing the significance of this initiation as the period progressed, it remained central: indeed, baptism and its alternatives remains a constant point of reference in the thesis. Another model was focused on the retrospective self, and involved the decisive rejection of a life which it was now realized had been wrong-headed; a third, forward- rather than backward-looking, was focused on the life in Christ and among the community of saints that would follow conversion. The second and third of these versions, moreover, could be construed variously as predominately moral or doctrinal—with important implications for those who were considering putting themselves forward for admission into the 'Catholic' church. Each of these models comes into play at different points in the thesis; it would have been helpful to have some thematic consideration of how they might have related to one another.

The thesis could be enhanced by such a discussion, and I hope that one is introduced in the monograph that should emerge from this thesis. To repeat, this is a very impressive performance indeed.

Chapter-by-chapter discussion:

Introduction

The introductory chapter sets out clearly and economically the organization of the thesis, the trajectory of previous scholarship on the subject, the methodology to be followed in the thesis, and the nature of the sources. The one point that is underplayed here, as mentioned in my initial remarks, is on the concept of 'conversion' being applied here; an opportunity is missed here to engage in debate with the extensive modern literature on the subject (not least in respect to how 'conversion' from heresy relates to conversion from outside the Christian tradition).

13 popularized=popularizing
Noticeable twice in last three lines—change one to 'prominent'

Chapter 1 Fourth-Century Goths

This chapter sets the scene for the more detailed discussions to follow in the next three chapters, and presents a picture which radically minimizes the concept of a specific Germanic, 'Wulfilan' type of Arianism, and instead postulates a prolonged acculturation through contacts across the Danubian border. This is generally convincing, but more specific arguments might have been adduced—the implications of the Life of Saba deserve consideration, and also comparison with other aspects of acculturation across the frontiers which recent archaeological studies have discussed.

55n168 aspidete=aspide
56n179 blood-thirsty Desiderius Erasmus (!)= blood-thirsty: Desiderius Erasmus (and no need to attribute authorship to him)
66 insurgence=insurgency
66n27 that "that…--delete second that
67 fabulous=fictitious/fabricated

Chapter 2 Ostrogothic Italy

The highlight of this chapter is the discussion of the 'politics of tolerance' in Ostrogothic Italy, especially the section from p. 68ff. The lineage of such politics, and the language in which they were expressed, might be treated at more length.

Good, crisp treatment of the Ariagni/Ariadne hypothesis (p. 72)

The discussion of Matasuntha's possible 'conversion'(p. 75ff) is crisp and effective, but more could be said about the pressures at work in matrimonial contexts: to show how this case (marriage into the Roman imperial family) relates to the dynastic matches to be discussed later in the thesis.

Comments on the economics of repossession of heretical buildings (p. 83) are interesting; it is worth thinking of the reputational cost of claiming one of these buildings, and failing to

attract a viable congregation (Gregory Nazianzen mentions this as an issue in Constantinople, in 381)

It would be good to have more exploration of 'reconciliation' (p. 89) as a means of integrating heretics. The term is applied in very different circumstances—are we looking at a single, well-understood and accepted ritual, or is there change over time and place, and indeed scope for innovation?

74n49 p. page (also 89n107)
75 Belisariusover= Belisarius over (cf. 81: Belisariusin=Belisarius in
76 manifestation=protest/demonstration
77 while other=while the other
77 have been=had been (the pluperfect is a recurrent blind spot)
87 meaningfully=significantly
88 at poorly preserved= a poorly preserved
90n120 effecctum=effectum (this last clause is omitted from the accompanying translation)
91 decisive strike=decisive blow

Chapter 3 Lombard Italy

Crisp summary of status quaestionis; thesis argues not for Lombard indifference to religious allegiance, but a culture of toleration. Sees this (p. 99) as 'almost the opposite' of Gothic condition; might it be seen as in some sense a continuation (a response to existing expectations)?

Good discussion of Nicetius' letter to Chlodosinda, pp. 100-102. But more to be said? N refers only to relics not under Lombard political control—so access not possible there. Did Lombard Homoian clergy have access to relics in Verona, Pavia, Milan?

And 'furtive tollent' deserves unpacking: 'receive them furtively' seems weak; the verb implies acquisition/appropriation.

Gregory the Great and Lombard baptism: more might be said about the Easter context; an perceived need to include baptism? The question of adult vs child baptisms might be explored in more detail (106n32 slightly casual). The important point is made on p. 107 about 'conversion' being a moral (separately from a doctrinal) process; the implications of this might be followed through. The stories of 'non-conversion' discuss relate predominantly to clergymen and kings (p. 107-p.108); it would be good to think more about how they were a separate conceptual category (who might have been usefully unconvertable).

Good on impact of Three Chapters; very important and interesting point on p. 111 on rulers' 'ideological profile as independent Christian leaders'; this provides a convincing context for the Sisebut-Adaoald correspondence (pp. 112-114), although the focus here is on Sisebut's preoccupations.

The conversion of Anastasius of Pavia: Paul's account is accepted as genuine (p. 116-117); but (here again) it would be worth asking what it would have meant in practice. No local Nicene opponent is mentioned, so presumably Anastasius enters communion with other bishops—Rome? Would anything actually change locally? (the assumption here, that 'his conversion must have had a serious impact on other bishops and clergy and on lay homoians,' 116, is worth interrogating.)

Very interesting on palimpsests/erasures: it would be good to have some context. For example, are other Bobbio texts similarly overwritten on earlier material—but material that is outdated or deemed irrelevant, rather than heretical (like the Plautus and Seneca already

overwritten in Ambrosianus G82, p. 119)? The Luke commentary is not VERY obviously heretical—no more than the Matthew commentary which survived as pseudo-Chrysostom. The conclusion restates the significance of the 'moral turn' in conversion discourse; more might be made of this.

97 unperturbed=relaxed
99 Rome the Three Chapters=Rome during the
106n34 repeats text from 104n27, for no evident reason
114 lonely=alone
119 constainss=contains
121 imminent=immediate

Chapter 4 Vandal Africa

Sets the scene economically and effectively. The point made on p. 126-7 about 'Catholic' caution in exploiting evidence for Donatist subordinationism is a good one, and might be developed further: in much of the landscape covered by this thesis, antagonists in theological controversy probably had little clear idea of the actual positions held by their opponents, and were probably aware of problems in their own genealogy.
Good account (following Whelan) of 'Roman' Latinity of Homoian agents at work in Augustine's Africa; perhaps more could be said about what sort of 'conversions' (p. 130) both sides were looking for—how feasible would it be for those disenchanted with clerical demands to straddle the border?
Follows Whelan again on Vandal church as autonomous rather than instrument of royal authority (p. 137); the survey that follows is again clear and confident, but t would be helpful to have some indication of where Szada disagrees with Whelan.
On large number of African sees, Shaw *Sacred Violence* updates and corrects Jones (139n72); Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (2010) is also worth invoking here.
Takes a persuasive position about the reality of debate in late antique culture (142); similar arguments are made by Averil Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity* (2014). Good on the potential scope available to the 'losers' to reframe a contest: this might apply to the 'great Catholic triumph' (p. 145) of 411 (McLynn, 'The Conference of Carthage Reconsidered': in *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts*, ed. R. Miles [Liverpool, LUP, 2016)).
Persuasive that the point of debate was not conversion of opponents but reassurance of own side (p. 148)—this could be applied more directly to the fascinating texts discussed in the following pages, where analysis does not reach down to the level of specific argument (eg p. 152, 'a compendium of scriptural testimonies to refute the standard Homoian arguments'). More could be said about how the faithful could be 'deceived' (eg p. 151): not just into apostasy, presumably, but into a number of intermediate positions (eg misunderstanding what 'orthodox' theology actually claimed).
In the discussion of almsgiving, Quodvultdeus' 'colorata' (p. 159) should be translated as 'painted' rather than stained; the allure of Homoian benefactions is being acknowledged. The point made (correctly) in n155 becomes clearer if nomen confictum alienum is translated more literally: the pretended name (sc. 'of church') which does not belong to them'. I wonder whether Quodvultdeus' concern here was not so much definitive defections, as habits of church-hopping between the rival establishments—especially as regarded the martyrs' graves?

Good discussion of the role of the state, and its limitations. Convincingly takes sides against Courtois (165).

On prohibition of shared meals (p. 171): the Nicene examples given are all ecclesiastical rather than state legislation; so perhaps there *is* a new development here?

The clash between Felix and Fulgentius is well handled, and brings out a number of the themes that are central to the work. It seems to me that the Vita's claim that Fulgentius did not 'reconcile' people (p. 175) reflects the formality whereby as a layman he could not offer a proper ritual of reconciliation; this again raises the question of the various categories of 'conversion' available at the time.

The discussion of the Notitia is clear and convincing (p. 176-177); also on Rome synod of 487 (p. 178)—anxieties about neo-Donatism a very convincing explanation for the severity. But it is also relevant that these are provisions made from abroad—scope for more flexibility in Africa itself?

Very good also on the religious politics of Justinian's invasion. The Herul mutiny deserves a little more analysis (p. 184)—the linkage between Easter and baptism is telling.

Good on Ferrandus (p. 185ff), although there might be clearer comment on how realistic his blueprint was—perhaps this is an example of the difficulties that authorities faced from proselytizing lobbyists when they were too successful?

Good on dynamics at work in decision-making about status of converted Homoians (p. 189-90); tensions within restored Nicene episcopate might also be relevant here (particularly in regard to attempts to impose/resist hierarchy)

125 boasted=claimed
139 diminishment=diminution
       Do not apply=did not apply (unless governed by 'seem to have remained', in which case 'with …not applicable')
141 4.3 The Verbal Contest=The Rhetorical Contest
145 moods in=mood of
146 verbal confrontation=formal disputation
149 polemics=polemic
154 listeners victims=listeners as victims
155 nouveau riche=nouveaux riches   lush=lavish
157n151 punctuation missing (comma needed after Brown; period after 38)
161 Mascula –named Masculas on p. 168
165 mishap=disadvantage
166 had long=had a long
167 estate received=estate had received (there are a number of other instances of lost pluperfects
167n189 power of the landlord= power of the landlord was
169 apart of=apart from (also p. 184, p. 216 and elsewhere)
170n204 mismatched pronoun: although one's role….a person
176 did, the anti-Nicene policy= did the anti-Nicene policy (redundant or missing commas not uncommon elsewhere)
177 to die in spiritually=to die spiritually
182n252 first sentence incomplete
186 blueprint of=blueprint for

Chapter 5 Gaul and Hispania

One general point: this is by far the longest chapter, as long as chs 3 and 4 together; there are reasons for putting Gaul and Hispania together, but might there have been more benefit

in separating the material into two chapters? There seem to be distinctive features in each region, which could be more fully articulated by separate treatment.

Here again the chapter is introduced very clearly, with a road-map that remains a useful point of reference for the reader when navigating the often intricate turns that the argument takes. The three themes identified at the outset (royal domestic arrangements, episcopal and other clerical lobbying, and royal ideological projects: p. 195) provide useful categories in the discussion that follows—it would be useful to have some correlation of these with the previous two chapters, and some thoughts upon the different salience.

The discussion of the fourth-century 'Nicene restoration' in Hispania (p. 201) could be more critical—even more than Gaul, there was very little direct involvement, and what emerged was perhaps less Nicene clarity than a complacently bland orthodox soup.
The account of the Priscilianists, 'traitors and deceivers' (p. 203) is interesting, and might yield more—as well as being both a real phenomenon and a lasting bugbear, Priscillianism probably provided a useful descriptor for confused clergymen dealing with provocatively recalcitrant laymen, and a helpful point of reference for the latter (by offering a set of criteria that the semi-detached could prove they did not match).

The comments on Motodaris, p. 207, are astute.
The discussion of cities without bishops (p. 210) call to mind the earlier discussion concerning the Vandals. More could be said about exactly what sort of disruption this caused—and what opportunities it provided. How intrinsic were bishops to 'conversion management' (nice comment on p. 211)

The episode discussed on p. 211-212 is again an Easter ceremony: more could be made of this. What pressures did the expectation that Easter would yield new 'converts', in the sense of newly baptized Christians to provide the centerpiece of the ceremony, create its own pressures?
I am not wholly sure that Gregory's Latin here precludes the possibility that those baptized in the church are Gothic children—Gregory might be attributing them with a wider strategy through the 'ut' clause.

The use of Gregory's burning belcher (p. 217) is another good example of how the thesis extracts social history from unlikely sources.

It would be good to open up the discussion of whether a Visigothic royal bride 'stayed loyal to her parental religious allegiances' (p. 218) by asking what options would be available—and I suspect that we are looking at a spectrum rather than a binary. Given that the liturgies were near-identical, could the privileged slide from one to the other, and congratulate themselves for being above the churchmen's petty sectarianism?
We are told of 'family wavering' (p. 218)—but might this not be something to the Lombard distancing analysed so well in the previous chapter (an issue throughout: there could usefully be much more cross-referencing)

On the conversion of Sigistrix (p. 220): was it a ready-made media event, or does the text suggest hype?

Interesting suggestion about the role of retinues for those 'staying homoian' (p. 221); here too, more digging would help. One thinks of cross-confessional marriages in Early Modern Europe—Catherine Jagiellon and John III an obvious Polish case; Henrietta Maria and Charles I the oven-ready British one. How similar a situation is being envisaged?

Good account of the intrinsically political character of royal conversions. But perhaps this could be nuanced: different perceptions of what counted as conversion might apply to royals themselves, their own clergy (and the opposing ones), and the court.

The account of Avitus and Gundobad (p. 230-236) is excellent, and breaks new ground; the way that the focus is shifted to moral aspects of conversion extremely interesting. Here the cross-reference to p. 107 is very helpful.

There is good discussion of John of Bichar on Leovigild (p. 240-242): but I am not wholly convinced by the translation of *impulsio* as 'coercion' (this recurs at p. 271). The logic of the sentence might suggest that the 'seduction' led to many defecting to Arianism, from greed rather than because they were actually persuaded. (impulsio often has a weak sense, akin to influence)

The discussion of royal initiative in large-scale conversion (p. 242-243) could be developed; what would the practical implications be for the Homoians? Perhaps it felt more like a rebranding, or rather a rebooting, than a surrender.

interesting on low profile of Gervasius/Protasius, p. 247-248—this is characteristic of the alert insights that the thesis continues to offer.
Good, nuanced reading of the struggle for Eulalia (pp. 249-253), and of Martin's many vectors (256-259). Might this latter point (also Gervasius/Protasius) be related to the scope for individual devotions at martyr shrines—Homoians could visit and find their own meanings, which could not be decisively contested by Nicene spokesmen?
Good on the confiscation (or not) of churches (pp. 265-267)—more might have been said about what might have happened with the non-appropriated churches. Are they still available to their Homoian owners, perhaps on a non-liturgical basis?

The discussion of Reccared's ritual activity (pp. 275-279) raises the question to what extent he was able to shift from the awkward doctrinal element of conversion to the more inclusive moral one—the whole church of sinners, Nicene bishops included, would be implicated in the fast-driven call for renewal. A suggestion to this effect is made on p. 280, but it could perhaps be strengthened: had Reccared created a situation where the lost sheep were not the losers but the lead players?

Another good, incisive discussion of the consequences. Rightly notes the disappearance of 'diehard Homoians' (p. 285); but more scope could be allowed for the reconciled Homoains, in their own basilicas with their own flocks and clergy, to create their own narratives.

194 smoothly ...rather smoothly—a smoothly too many
195 require an for explanation: delete for
196 Arius' affair=the Arius affair

215n74 intedictum=interdictum (in my edition)
    Be it as it may=Be that as it may
229 is, the king—superfluous comma.
237 Hermengild revolt= Hermengild's revolt
249 abstained from=cast off/rejected.
capital already=delete already
252 if the king were successful=had the king been successful (sequence of tenses in conditionals sometimes uncertain elsewhere)
255 import=importation
261 wanted to have=wanted to pursue
263 loose=lose
Undoable=impracticable
264 disdainful=despicable
265 put their plan to life==put their plan into action
Waged=used
272 Justin the Martyr=Justin Martyr
276 discretion=discrimination
284 one of the senior bishop=...bishops
285 with the resistance of=with resistance from

The Conclusions (pp. 287-295) draw together the themes of the thesis clearly, patiently and with scrupulous concern not to overstate the evidence of to impose a convenient pattern.

And my own general conclusion is that this work succeeds in demonstrating that there was conversion from Homoian 'heresy' was a far less straightforward and uniform process than has been assumed, and that the Homoians (whether rulers, churchmen or ordinary laity) had much more agency within this process than has been appreciated. The fifth chapter, in particular, is a major achievement, and puts our understanding of a number of key events on a whole new footing.
There are certainly imperfections, and questions which should be pursued further; but overall this is a major contribution to scholarship, thoroughly meriting the award of a doctorate.

Neil McLynn
Unversity Lecturer in Later Roman History
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