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Pagans and Christians

Fifty Years of Anxiety

Teresa Morgan

Introduction: 1963

1963 was a memorable one: a year of global crisis and change, in politics, war, and popular culture. In the relatively peaceful world of classical scholarship, 1963 is remembered not (only) for the assassination of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King's dream, or the Profumo affair; not even for the beginning of sex, Beatlemania, or *Dr Who*; but for the delivery, by Professor E.R. Dodds, of the Wiles Lectures at the University of Belfast. Published in 1965 as *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Dodds's lectures mark a pivotal moment in the modern study of late antiquity.[1]

Since the rise of research specialisms in the research university, few classicists, unless they had become patrologists, had taken much interest in the history of Christianity. Exceptions included Arthur Darby Nock, who had been writing about early Christianity since the late 1920s, Charles Cochrane, who published *Christianity and Classical Culture* in 1940, A.H.M. Jones (*Constantine and the Conversion of Europe,* 1948), Werner Jaeger (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia,* 1961), and Arnaldo Momigliano (*The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century,* 1963). More surprisingly, perhaps, few patrologists (all of whom, at least if brought up in Europe, had received a classical education) had written on the world to which their sources belonged. Adolf von Harnack had pioneered the study of the expansion of Christianity in the Roman world in a series of studies from the 1870s on, but few had followed him.[2] Closer in age to Dodds, W.H.C. Frend had published his social history

[1] On the term 'late antiquity', which originated in German scholarship of the early twentieth century and was popularized in English especially by Brown 1971; see e.g. Giardana 1999.

[2] Cf. Dölger 1929, Giordani 1944.

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of Donatism in 1952, while Henri-Irénée Marrou and Henry Chadwick had written on the interaction of early Christianity and classical culture (highlighting, in the process, the importance of sub-literary and documentary sources for the study of ancient cultural history).[3] Nock's friend and interlocutor C.H. Dodd was unusual among New Testament scholars at the time in taking an interest in the intellectual world of the first Christians. The Oxford International Patristics Conference had been started in 1951 by F.L. Cross, and from the beginning attracted a few inter-disciplinary papers. But on the whole, in 1963, there had been remarkably little recent interaction between classics and patristics. The explosion of cross-disciplinary interest which has made the study of late antiquity so productive in recent years was still a gleam in the eye of the next generation.

One thing classics and patristics had (and still largely have) in common was that neither had been noticeably affected by the growing field of the phenomenology of religion: the study of religion, paying particular attention to insiders' own understanding of it, which originated in the mid-nineteenth century and was made famous in the Anglophone world by William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In patristics, this omission was less obvious because early Christianity had always been studied by Christian insiders and there was a long tradition of interest in Christian spirituality. It is more notable, in retrospect, that the study of Greek and Roman religions, which owed so much to the anthropology of religion, had taken no significant interest in phenomenology.

In *Pagan and Christian*, Dodds cites as one of his starting points on the classical side a comment by Martin Nilsson in *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, that the spiritual soil of the late antique syncretism between Greek religion and Christianity had not been enough discussed, but that there was plenty of material for a study of late antique spirituality along the lines of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[4] Dodds would have been hard pressed, at the time, to find any similar observation in another author. *Pagan and Christian* also cites Nock, to whose memory Dodds dedicates the book, and André-Jean Festugière as precursors in his field.[5] In fact, Nock's interest in early Christianity, and in religion in general, was substantially 'outsider' in approach. Though *Conversion,* for example, is famous for its analysis of Lucius' experience of Isis, most of that book (like his study of early gentile Christianity and his biography of Paul of Tarsus) is more interested in the

[3] E.g. Marrou 1948, 1955, Chadwick 1959; cf. Jaeger 1961.
[4] 1965, 1–2.
[5] E.g. pp. 3, 22.

evolution of religion as an expression of social change and contributor to it than in participants' own understanding of their religious experiences. Festugière's aim in *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* was closer in spirit to that of Dodds in *Pagan and Christian,* and is the closest precursor in classical scholarship to Dodds's book.

It is significant that Festugière, like many of the pioneers in this field, was personally religious.[6] He does not find it difficult to see, in the remains of Greek religions, evidence of sincere individual piety or (as he sometimes calls it) faith, as well as of the civic religion of collectives. It seems to have been Festugière's own faith that inspired his interest in Greek personal religion: at any rate, his definition of personal religion at the start of the book is his own, he sometimes draws parallels, for instance, between popular Christian and ancient Greek piety, and, apart from one reference to Nilsson's *Greek Popular Religion* (p. 8), he does not mention any other scholar as informing his approach. Dodds's interests arose from a very different religious background, and, though encouraged by Festugière's work, developed in a significantly different direction.

It is worth mentioning one other figure in the background as Dodds worked on *Pagan and Christian:* his contemporary, the great scholar of Hellenistic Judaism Erwin Goodenough, who, together with Jones and Momigliano, is thanked in Dodds's preface.[7] Goodenough had already published extensively on both Judaism and early Christianity, including on the mysticism of Philo of Alexandria, and was about to publish (in 1965) *The Psychology of Religious Experiences.* Goodenough's interest in religious experience in general and parallels between Christian and Jewish experiences in particular surely encouraged Dodds as he set Greek and Christian experiences side by side.

Into this landscape Dodds's lectures and book burst dramatically, generating instant admiration and wide discussion in both classics and patristics, and significantly influencing the study of late antique Greek religion, early Christian history, and the later Roman Empire as a whole.

Dodds had retired in 1960. In *Missing Persons*, he says that he accepted the invitation to give the Wiles Lectures, and a year later the Eitrem Lectures at the University of Oslo, partly because he missed teaching, which he had always found a stimulus to research.[8] He had lectured on Greek religion at Oxford since 1948,[9] while his interest in Neoplatonism went back to the

[6] He was a Dominican friar. [7] 1965, ix. [8] 1977, 188.
[9] I am grateful to Richard Rutherford for excavating the history of Dodds's lectures.

beginning of his career and had dominated his early research. In other directions, the roots of *Pagan and Christian* went deeper still. Dodds had first read William James and Sigmund Freud, both of whom loom large over the book, as an undergraduate, in connection with his interest in psychical research.[10] The Church Fathers, in contrast, had not been a longstanding interest, and it shows. Dodds says himself that *Pagan and Christian* would have been a better book if he had known the Fathers better, but 'I did not like [them], though I tried to; my whole being revolted against their arrogant self-assurance'.[11] It cannot have helped Dodds's appreciation of these writers that he was not only an agnostic, but an Ulster Protestant agnostic, while (outside Germany, at least) the Church Fathers had been, since their rediscovery in the early nineteenth century, mainly the preserve of Catholics and Anglo-Catholics.[12] This lack of sympathy, however, which does less than justice to the fears and uncertainties of patristic writers, the exploratory nature of their thinking, their intellectual subtlety, and their sensitivity to their social and intellectual environment, is one of the book's real weaknesses.

Anxieties

In 1963, then, the Hellenist and philosopher, Freudian, psychically curious, former Calvinist Dodds set out to investigate the religious experience of a handful of (mostly) late antique intellectuals, some of them Christians. His intellectual affinities are more than usually relevant to his project, not only because he wears them on his sleeve but because they shape both his approach and his conclusions.

Both approach and conclusions have been challenged even by sympathetic readers. The first thing that strikes any reader now is Dodds's untroubled acceptance of a 'decline and fall' narrative of the Roman empire, which went back, almost unchallenged, to Gibbon, but would not survive more than another few years. By 1984, when a collection of essays was published in honour of *Pagan and Christian*, Jay Bregman could observe

[10] 1977, 32–3, 98–9. [11] 1977, 188.

[12] Dodds describes himself as an atheist in *Missing Persons* (pp. 21, 44–5, cf. 84) and implies that he never moved away from that position, but in *Pagan and Christian* (pp. 4–5) he says, 'The historian's interpretation of this period is inevitably coloured in some degree by his own religious beliefs. It is therefore right that I should declare my interest, so that readers may make the appropriate allowances . . . As an agnostic . . . '

that it was one of the very last works to be written within the Gibbonian framework.[13] The wealth of scholarship on late antiquity which followed it showed that the political, social, economic, and cultural evolution of the high Roman empire and later antiquity was much more complex than Gibbon or Dodds recognized.

As it happens, the dismantling of the 'decline and fall' model does not necessarily vitiate the argument of *Pagan and Christian*. One could ignore the causal link Dodds makes between (what he regards as) individual psychological crises and social crisis, and read the book as showing some of the ways in which individuals, during a particular period, responded to some of the anxieties of human life which are endemic in almost any society. Alternatively, one could preserve Dodds's link between late antique psychology and society (while recognizing that the link remains thought-provoking rather than proven) but challenge his view that either is symptomatic of a crisis. Both approaches could plausibly be defended and both preserve much of interest and significance in Dodds's argument. More difficult to defend is Dodds's approach of making the recorded experiences of a handful of individuals, most of whom must have been exceptional as intellectuals, if in no other way, represent the mentality of a whole society. As Dodds was writing, *l'histoire des mentalités* was just beginning to develop out of the *Annales* school and microhistoriography; its leading theorist, Roger Chartier, was still a student. Even so, there is a certain commonsense difficulty about treating Marcus Aurelius and Plotinus, Aelius Aristides and Origen, Lucian's Peregrinus and the martyr Perpetua as typical of a whole culture. Significantly, the limitations of this approach were immediately evident to Peter Brown, who criticized Dodds for focusing too much on the unusual and from the beginning took a different approach in his own work.[14]

In his review of *Pagan and Christian* in *Church History*, the patrologist William Schoedel asked the 'friendly question', did not Dodds's approach constitute a form of reductionism? 'When religious phenomena are brought into line with psychoanalytical (and sociological) theories, is not precisely that which is religious lost?'[15] Classicists have not been much disturbed by this possibility because most studies of Greek and Roman religion are, in Schoedel's terms, reductionist: their concern is to analyse religion as an expression of psychological and social phenomena (such as the need to

[13] 1984, 228. [14] E.g. Brown 1972, 74–80. [15] 1966, 107.

ensure a good harvest or articulate a social group) rather than as a set of attitudes and practices *sui generis*. Festugière had largely avoided this pitfall by not seeking to connect his case studies closely with their social world,[16] but Schoedel is surely right that Dodds falls into it.

All religions and religious thinking and practice, of course, are socially embedded and articulated, and the scrolls of an individual's dreambook are no less a social artefact than a temple or a public ritual. It is always a possible and defensible part of any account of religion to see it in reductionist, and even functionalist, terms.[17] At the same time, most historians or sociologists of religion, and all phenomenologists, accept that neither reductionism nor functionalism is the whole story. Religion and religiosity do not simply express psychological or social needs or seek to secure certain outcomes for an individual or a group. They are also *sui generis*, expressing intuitions of the divine and negotiating divine/human relationships in ways which do more than reflect or further individual or corporate needs and desires.

Dodds's debt to William James struggles here with his debt to Freud and the ingrained assumptions of classical scholarship. In one passage, James is routed completely and Dodds's argument becomes not merely reductionist, but fully functionalist. The result is an explanation of the 'triumph' of Christianity which is not only, in the eyes of many reviewers, crude and outdated, but which undermines the premise of the book. Christianity was ultimately more successful than paganism, Dodds claims (pp. 133–8), because Christians were clear, in a religiously highly complex environment, that only they were right; because churches were open to all; because Christians had the most optimistic eschatology of any cult; and, above all, because churches formed strong and supportive social communities.[18] This classically functionalist claim not only is discontinuous with Dodds's programmatic assumption, at the start of the book, that changes in outlook on the world are a factor in their own right in creating social and political change, but implicitly contradicts it.[19] It suggests that in looking for reasons for religious change we must, after all, assume that the successful cult spoke

[16] Though Dodds quotes him approvingly as claiming elsewhere that social misery and mysticism go together (1965, 100).

[17] I distinguish here between reductionism, functionalism, and instrumentalism. Reductionism interprets religion as an expression of other (especially social) phenomena. Functionalism also considers the contribution of religion to social structures, processes, or change. Many studies of Greek and Roman religions are functionalist, but most of *Pagan and Christian* is not.

[18] Ideas that have already been explored by von Harnack (e.g. 1924) and others.

[19] See p. 185.

particularly effectively to certain social needs and offered effective solutions to them. The role of the phenomena (daemonology, asceticism, mysticism, and dreams) which form most of the subject matter of the book is reduced, at best, to that of a set of symptoms of social problems.[20]

Dodds's explanation of Christianity's success, unexpected and unsatisfying as it is in context, underlines the fact that, despite his ambivalent relationship with the Oxford faculty, Dodds remained, in many ways, a very Oxonian classicist of his time: deeply interested in the analysis of texts and much less interested in methodology.[21] It is his only significant moment of functionalism, but elsewhere his reductionism leads him to draw other conclusions and make specific judgements which many readers also find unhelpful. To demand of Christian asceticism 'Where did all this madness come from?' (p. 34) is entertaining but not historically illuminating. To call Aelius Aristides 'brainsick' and 'neurotic' (p. 43) does not help us understand him or his world. To call dreams and daemonic experiences part of the 'pathology of religion' (p. 69) undermines Dodds's own claim of scholarly objectivity. Occasionally Dodds even undermines the reader's confidence by yielding to the temptation to be witty. In his chapter on man and the daemonic world, for example, he discusses Perpetua's first dream, in which she mounts a ladder to a place where she meets a heavenly shepherd. The shepherd milks curds or cheese from his sheep and gives it to her to eat. This, Dodds says airily, has all the hallmarks of a genuine dream, but there is little that is distinctively Christian about it. 'Cheese-eating in Heaven is quite unorthodox . . . ' He prefers a Freudian interpretation: 'the "curds" offered by a male personage at the top of a "ladder" could well have a latent sexual meaning' (p. 51 n. 2). Entertaining as this thought is, it is both trivializing of his evidence and obviously nonsense. Christian images of heaven draw heavily on those of the promised land, the land of 'milk and honey' (Exod. 3.8, 33.3), while Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28.12) was a favourite image of how the chosen reach heaven. The heavenly shepherd is easily identifiable with the good shepherd, Christ, who, among other things, feeds his people (cf. Ps. 40.11, Jn 10.11, 21.15–17).[22] In the logic of the dream, for Christ to feed his daughter with sheep's curds does not represent much imaginative

[20] Shepherd's review (1967, 111) notes that in explaining the triumph of Christianity in these terms Dodds does not, as he surely needs to do, account for the failure of paganism as well.

[21] Noted by Lloyd 1966, 253–4.

[22] The newly baptized were often given milk and honey with their first Eucharist (e.g. Tert. *Coron.* 3.3, *Trad. Apostol.* 21.27-30), identifying their first Eucharistic encounter with Christ as an arrival in the promised land.

elaboration of the mainstream and orthodox idea that when Perpetua reaches heaven, she will encounter the good shepherd who looks after her.

These and other anxieties about the book were shared by a number of reviewers and still worry readers today.[23] They are, arguably, outweighed by the book's sparkling originality, insight, influence, and sheer charm, and by the methodological questions and debates that were prompted even by its difficulties.

Pagans and Christians in a new age

By 1963, Dodds had a long history of combining his scholarly and other interests to create new fields of study. *Pagan and Christian* draws both on his non-academic interests and on his past research into Neoplatonism, Greek literature, Greek religion, and the 'irrational', encompassing the supernormal or paranormal in antiquity.[24]

Some of the most important and lasting contributions made by the book were recognized immediately and widely praised by reviewers.[25] Dodds brought together sources which were not usually discussed side by side (or, in some cases, at all). He argued for seeing common ground between pagan and Christian mentalities in a way which can now be taken for granted, but was anything but typical at the time. In the process, he created a new field of study and, if not many scholars have followed him in studying the whole breadth of the field, there has been much more serious discussion since of many of its elements (notably dreams, asceticism, and daemonology).[26] He helped to bring his interest in Neoplatonism, which had been regarded as eccentric in a Greek scholar, into the mainstream, not just of philosophy but of intellectual history.

Dodds demolished at a stroke the assumption that there was a qualitative difference between Christian religiosity and that of others in the ancient world. By treating both types without being confessionally invested in either,

[23] E.g. Dodds's casual way with classification (e.g. of dreams and mysticism, pp. 50, 69, 86), and his passing assumptions about the 'inevitable' decline of certain forms of Christianity, such as Montanism (p. 67), as well as of 'paganism'.

[24] E.g. Dodds 1931–2, 1936, 1951, 1961.

[25] E.g. Hamilton Baird 1966, 464, Podlecki 1966, 272, Rist 1966, 349–52, Schneider 1966, 219, Shepherd 1967, 110–12, Weltin 1968, 674–5.

[26] E.g. (on dreams) Miller 1994, Pelling 1997b, Harris 2009; (on daemonology) Pietersma 1994, Clarke, Dillon and Herschbell 2004, Luck 2006, Phillips 2009; studies of asceticism since the 1960s are too numerous to mention.

he sought to side-step value judgements and questions of truth. He was not the first scholar to do this but, writing when he did, he was particularly influential. He made it easier for classicists and patrologists to study both Christian and Graeco-Roman religious experiences in their social context without assuming that the former were radically discontinuous with that context or that the latter were not worth studying because they were not in a confessional sense 'true'.

Dodds also helped to shift the study of religions in antiquity away from either the study of beliefs and doctrines (on the Christian side) or that of institutions and communities (on both sides). All those fields, of course, have gone on being intensively worked but, thanks to Dodds, new areas of research have joined them and the relationship between religious mentality and practice has become a matter of scholarly debate in its own right.[27]

To say that Dodds was not confessionally invested in his religious subject matter is not to say that there is no confessional aspect to the book. His personal investment in *Pagan and Christian* is one of its most striking qualities. It is worth discussing briefly three aspects of this investment which helped, in different ways, to make the book remarkable: Dodds's interest in psychology, his interest in the study of religions, and his conviction that what classicists study and write should be relevant to the world they live in.

In addition to his debt to William James, Dodds draws on a number of other writers in the study of religions. R.J. Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961) helps him to argue that some experiences of union with the divine, among which he includes Christian baptism and the experience of 'regeneration' in the thirteenth Hermetic tract, should be distinguished from other kinds of mysticism or temporary possession because they bring about a radical and permanent change of identity (pp. 76–7). This classification of different kinds of union with the divine (a category which Dodds argues includes, among other things, oracular possession, *unio mystica*, and *homoiōsis theōi*) is still among the most nuanced and influential by a classicist. Dodds draws on three other major students of religion, Rudolf Otto, W.T. Stace, and R.C. Zaehner, to develop his distinction between extrovertive and introvertive mystical experience, on which he bases his extended, sympathetic, and perceptive discussion of the mysticism of Plotinus (pp. 79–91). Fifty years on, rather few classicists have

[27] E.g. Scheid 2005, Mikalson 2010, Morgan 2015, 124–8.

followed Dodds's interest in the study of religions, but those who have are among the most creative and influential in the field.

Dodds's absorption and use of Freud and James is thorough and extensive. The two giants of psychology and phenomenology are in many ways very different, but they have features in common which attracted Dodds. Both juggle insider and outsider perspectives on the phenomena they study. Both are willing to pass value judgements on those phenomena. Though neither is a social functionalist, and James, at least, is not a reductionist, both are (in somewhat different senses) instrumentalists. For Freud, experiences, from a desire for self-punishment to sensations of eternity, are useful insofar as they allow a person and her analyst to understand her psychological pathologies and combat them.[28] For James, we can evaluate the validity of religious experiences, first by the 'delight' they bring as they are being experienced, and secondly by how well they fit with our 'moral needs and the rest of what we hold as true'—whether they help us to live in a way that in other moods we would recognize as good or right.[29]

The instrumentalism of Freud and James was ingeniously adapted by Dodds to historiography. *Pagan and Christian* opens with the claim that changes in the outlook of historical agents on the world form a factor in wider social and political change. This is more than a reductionist claim that the outlook of historical agents is an expression of their social situation; it takes change in outlook as a historical phenomenon in its own right which causes change independently of other factors. This hypothesis is derived, as Dodds says, partly from Rostovtzeff, who expressed the view without pursuing it (p. 1). But it was Freud and James who provided Dodds with a methodology for investigating psychological phenomena and changes in such phenomena with a view to explaining historical change.

Of the two, Dodds's debt to Freud perhaps leads to more mixed results for most readers. The idea that psychological states affect all our actions—personal, social, and political—is crucial for Dodds and Freud is a compelling exponent of it. On the other hand, it is Freud who encourages Dodds to dismiss asceticism as nothing more than the self-punishment of a 'nagging Super-ego' and to see Perpetua's vision of the good shepherd in sexual rather

[28] Dodds 1965a, 28, 82 n. 2. At p. 88 n. 4, Dodds quotes Freud's *New Introductory Lectures* with approval: 'Certain practices of the mystics may succeed in upsetting the normal relations between the different regions of the mind, so that, for example, the perceptual system becomes able to grasp relations in the deeper layers of the Ego, and in the Id, which would otherwise be inaccessible to it.'

[29] James 1902/1985, 15–18.

than theological terms.[30] Discussing whether Plotinus' mystical experience is an isolated phenomenon, 'the accidental product of an exceptional personality-structure', or whether it is evidence of an aspect of late-antique mentality, Dodds nearly derails his own argument that it is the latter by suggesting that Freud would have thought it an extension of an infantile feeling of unity between self and other arising from the fact that Plotinus was not weaned until he was eight (p. 91). In his overall argument, therefore, Freud plays a central part; in its details, he sometimes seems to undermine the enterprise more than supporting it.

James's contribution is more consistently benign. His basic claim that personal religious experience is significant and accessible to systematic analysis, and his argument that such experience can and does (and, for James, should) affect people's behaviour, provide key justifications for Dodds's project. His contributions to the detail of Dodds's analyses seem more often to march with the direction of Dodds's argument than do Freud's. James provides parallels to some of the experiences Dodds explores, such as the sense of 'drawing in' the divine breath in the process of Hermetist 'regeneration', which help Dodds to argue persuasively that these are real and literal descriptions of religious experiences, not simply fictional, fanciful, or metaphorical.[31] Even the limitations of James's sympathies, paradoxically, seem to have stimulated Dodds to argue more strongly for the comparability of Greek, Roman, and Christian experiences. James argued that religious experiences are widely shared across modern religious traditions—but he could not convince himself that they were part of Greek religion. Dodds, with his abundant sympathy for Greek *mentalité* in general, has no sympathy with that argument, and most students of Greek religion would now agree with him.[32]

It was noted above that, in 1963, the historiography of mentalities was in its infancy. *Pagan and Christian,* as a study in *l'histoire des mentalités avant la lettre*, did as much as any work to make the developing field attractive to classicists. Since 1965, the study of all aspects of Greek and Roman mentality has burgeoned (I can trace my own fascination with it back to reading first *The Greeks and the Irrational*, then *Pagan and Christian*, when I was about sixteen).

As an exercise in the historiography of mentality, *Pagan and Christian* has strengths and weaknesses. Compared with most studies, it focuses on a

[30] pp. 28, 49. [31] e.g. pp. 76–7. [32] e.g. pp. 80–1.

very small number of texts. Nearly all those texts are produced by members of intellectual and social elites. Nearly all are works of individual writers, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to know how representative of their period their experiences or their interpretations are. Dodds, moreover, makes little attempt to argue that their experiences or interpretations are representative. The result, for readers interested in mentality, is a sense of a significant argument too narrowly founded. More recent studies of mentality have addressed this problem by widening the scope of their evidence or limiting the scope of their claims. One might supplement Dodds's work with a certain amount of the former: there is more evidence than he cited, especially if one is content to move away from his interest in individual personalities. But there is not as much evidence as one would like, nor does it come from as wide a social range as one would like.

One might alternatively think of *Pagan and Christian* as an exercise in a sub-field of *l'histoire des mentalités* which has scarcely yet been identified, but which deserves to be more explored: the micro-history of mentalities. The claim of micro-historiography is that a study of a very specific place, time, or set of ideas can illuminate a much larger social or intellectual world. Classicists and patrologists could both make use of such an approach to religion. To do so, one would need to consider under what conditions one could plausibly argue that a small number of sources for an aspect of ancient religion illuminated a wider social context. I suggest that four conditions, at least, would need to be met. The phenomenon under discussion would need to be attested in at least two sources which there was no reason to think were interdependent (and the more the better). Attestations would need to include some material which was *prima facie* plausibly typical of wider thinking, either because it derived from a popular genre, such as proverbs or fables, or because it did not contribute to the author's argument where it appeared, suggesting that the author had little incentive to adapt it to his own purposes. Attestations would need to occur within a reasonably short time-frame (though 'reasonably short' might be defined in different ways in different contexts). And it would need to be reasonable to think that the idea(s) under consideration could have been held by a wider range of people. Some, at least, of Dodds's topics might already fulfil these criteria—dreams are the obvious example—and others might do so with some supplementary investigation. If this idea were taken up, *Pagan and Christian* might be seen in the future as a text as seminal for the micro-history of mentalities as it is for the history of mentality as a whole.

Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning the significance of *Pagan and Christian* as an expression of Dodds's conviction that the study of classics should be relevant to a wider audience. This was a topic, as he reports in *Missing Persons* (p. 172), which had been much on his mind since at least the 1940s, and he returned to it, while writing *Pagan and Christian,* in his 1964 Presidential Address to the Classical Association. Did the decline of Greek and Latin language teaching and the study of classics in general, Dodds asked, really matter? In *Missing Persons*, that large question gets rather lost in the discussion which follows of the importance of teaching languages *ab initio* at university level (now a universal practice in Anglophone countries for which Dodds deserves some of the credit). But it is clear that Dodds does believe in the continuing value of the study of classical literature and civilization. It enlarges our understanding of human society, he suggests, 'its perils and its possibilities', by introducing us to the (or a) society which was a parent of our own (pp. 173–4). In the 1960s, in a time when so much was changing and both 'critical standards' and 'moral judgements' were under fire, he thought it particularly important to introduce people to a 'high culture which had subsisted for more than a thousand years without the support of a sacred book or the guidance of anything that we should call a Church' (p. 174).

Debate over the value of classics (and the humanities in general) has moved on since the 1960s. Few contributors to it then, even if working on religion themselves, would have identified religion as a key area in which the study of classics could contribute to contemporary society. Fewer, if any, would do so now (the fact that Dodds did is testimony, among other things, to the ongoing seriousness of his agnosticism or atheism). Classics (especially ancient philosophy) has, however, been identified increasingly often in recent years as a source of moral thinking and moral guidance in the modern world (the many examples include Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit* (2010), Richard Mohr and Barbara Sattler's *One Book, the Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today* (2010), and Donald Robertson's *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (2013)). One might take the view that more classicists could follow Dodds's example and argue more often and more explicitly for the ethical value—in whatever sense they wanted to construe that phrase—of studying, not just philosophy, but many different aspects of classical antiquity. The ethical significance, in a broad sense, of all kinds of high culture was, after all, taken for granted throughout classical antiquity and well into the modern world. The study of classics, moreover, is (still, if decreasingly) publicly funded in many universities and schools, especially in

Europe and North America.[33] Public funding is an affirmation, among other things, of the usefulness of a subject: of its social, not just personal significance. If classicists aim to maintain the study of the subject, to which Dodds made such remarkable contributions, for the next generation, maybe more of us should be taking more seriously his conviction that it speaks to our present social and existential situation in ways which our generation needs to hear.

Post scriptum

In *Missing Persons* (p. 188), Dodds observes that some of his reviewers pointed out the parallels one might draw between the ancient 'age of anxiety' and their own. In this, as in other ways, the critical response was more or less univocal. The book was extensively praised for its erudition and its originality in setting pagan and Christian sources side by side (though several reviewers commented that Dodds's interpretations of the Church Fathers were not very original).[34] Several reviewers (on the whole, rather gently) queried Dodds's use of Freud, or more generally what they saw as his reductionism.[35] Almost none queried Dodds's 'age of anxiety' framework (Peter Brown was again an exception, as was the Plato scholar Heinrich Dörrie, who saw the anxieties Dodds described as developing over a much longer period[36]). While praising Dodds's overall conception, several reviewers and later commentators were critical of individual readings and arguments: John Rist, for example, of Dodds's view of Gnosticism, Stevan Davies of his interpretation of asceticism, Betty Barrett of his definition of mysticism, and Warren Hovland of his understanding of the dialogue between Christians and Neoplatonists.[37]

Neither then nor subsequently did such queries and criticisms prevent the book from having a wide and deep impact, above all on the developing field of late antique historiography. Few studies of the sixties or seventies in either classics or patristics neglected to mention it. Its influence in patristics was gradually overtaken by the publication of new sources and the burgeoning

[33] See e.g. Small 2013.

[34] Weltin 1968, 674 and Shepherd 1967, 110 note Dodds's few precursors in this exercise.

[35] On the Fathers, e.g. Lloyd 1966, 353; on Freud or reductionism, e.g. Podlecki 1966, 272, Schoedel 1966, 107, Shepherd 1967, 112.

[36] Dörrie 1968, 638–40.

[37] Rist 1966, 350–1, Davies 1984, Barrett 1984, 113–7, Hovland 1984.

sociology of early churches.[38] On the classical side, some of the most ground-breaking recent studies in Greek and Roman religions, early Christianity, and late antiquity cite *Pagan and Christian* as still influential (examples include H.S. Versnel's *Coping with the Gods* (2011), Peter Brown's *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012), and Jörg Rüpke's *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (2013)).

Fifty years on, the disciplines with which Dodds engaged are all almost unrecognizable. The growth of scholarship, the publication of most of the Qumran texts, all the Nag Hammadi texts, new post-testamental Christian texts and many more late antique and Christian documentary papyri and inscriptions, together with increasing interest in the continuity of late antiquity with the Byzantine and very early mediaeval worlds, have changed the size and shape of the field and our approaches to it in almost every way. *Pagan and Christian,* however, continues to be read and relished for its lucid vision, its literary elegance, its attempt at an even-handed treatment of Christians and (what we no longer tend to call) pagans, and its remarkably original ideas.

Society, too, has changed dramatically since 1963. The upheavals of that year have been succeeded by multiple political, social, economic, cultural, scientific, and technological revolutions. Throughout this turbulent period classics has survived and in many places thriven, despite often being under threat from a cultural environment in which the humanities are trivialized and marginalized (and occasionally, perhaps, as Dodds joked, from 'suffocation arising from its exponents' industry'[39]). Christianity, in the UK and some other parts of the world, is under fire more now even more than it was in 1963, the year John Robinson's *Honest to God* provoked a storm of controversy about Anglican liberalism. (What some see as the threat of liberalism does not seem to have resonated at all with Dodds, who obliquely criticized, rather, the narrow rigidity of his remembered Calvinism in the concluding pages of *Pagan and Christian* (pp. 133–4).) One wonders whether, if Dodds had been writing now, it would have occurred to him to point either to the doctrinal exclusivity of Christianity or to its social inclusiveness as reasons *prima facie* why it was so successful. On the other hand, in the former Roman Empire, religious diversity and even, in a new sense, paganism have, if anything, grown and become more

[38] In studies of patristic theology, as of late antique philosophy, it is Dodds's essays on Neoplatonism, rather than *Pagan and Christian*, that have continued to be widely cited.

[39] 1977, 172.

mainstream. In some ways Europe is reverting to a pluralism which would have looked rather familiar to the Romans, though where religious exclusivism and battles do occur, they take a somewhat different shape. Whatever classicists' and patrologists', or pagans' and Christians' anxieties now, however, in one area there is little or no cause for anxiety at all. Thanks in no small part to Dodds, the study of late antiquity, which he explored and opened up for subsequent generations, grows and thrives.