

Eckhart could certainly not be accused of being bland. Famous in the thirteenth century as a theologian and mystic, he then went into eclipse, but interest in him has now revived among Christians and others. Yet, as Radcliffe remarks, while he is difficult to understand because of the cultural gulf between his era and ours his images are often so startling that they reach across the centuries and grab our hearts and minds (p. 11). Demkovich here provides a helpful introduction. He first puts Eckhart into his historical context, as a Dominican friar of the next generation from Albert and Aquinas. Eckhart fondly recalled Albert, invoking him in his writings. Alain de Libera has promulgated the notion of a distinct school of 'Rhenish mysticism' originating from Albert's priory in Cologne which more emphasised the Neoplatonic and Augustinian strands of the Christian tradition than the novel Aristotelianism prevalent in Paris. For mystical thinkers in this tradition, introspection – the examination of the innermost self, the soul – is the privileged route for knowing God. This is because the intellectual soul can learn to become unattached from particular things, from this or that, and recognise the origin of itself (and everything else) in God.

Demkovich sees the concept of the soul, 'the active principle that unites and integrates the whole of a person's life...integrating material and mental or spiritual realities', as the key notion in Eckhart's Christian anthropology. It is decidedly not the subjective ego, and to (mis)read Eckhart in this way is to misunderstand him profoundly. We become our authentic selves, most truly human, when we forget ourselves in our relationship with God (and through him, each other). Another crucial aspect is his theory of transformative knowing. As Demkovich notes, Eckhart fabricates a word – deiformity – our conformity to God which he renders into German as God-birthing. This allows the reality of God that is already in us to come to life in us. This does not, however, mean that we become God. Demkovich suggests that we can understand spiritual unity as being a bit like what we mean when we say 'they were all of one mind'. That is, he says, 'we are not guaranteed oneness with God by virtue of our soul, for our freedoms can thwart the soul's becoming one [with God] by not cooperating with grace. However, when the soul is one with God, all distinction ceases, for they are not united but are in fact one: they are intellectually indistinguishable' (p. 132). We might describe this process – sometimes termed 'detachment', but more accurately, Demkovich suggests, 'unattachment' (p. 165) – as learning to see as God sees (which then carries the moral imperative to act as God would act, justly) disinterested, impartial, but still able to acknowledge the goodness of creation.

In the third part of the book, Demkovich guides the reader into appropriating Eckhart's teaching through ten illustrative examples from his preaching with questions for reflection and commentary. Eckhart's illustrations, Demkovich notes, were not graphic but auditory, appealing to the imagination of his hearers (p. 134). Our culture tends to be more visual – hence the illustrations, by Bob Staes, intended to help us get the ideas. I rather like them.

GREGORY MURPHY OP

SÄKULARISIERUNG. BILANZ UND PERSPEKTIVEN EINER UMSTRITTENEN THESE edited by Christina von Braun, Wilhelm Gräß, and Johannes Zachhuber, *Lit Verlag*, Münster, 2007, Pp. 201, €19.90 pbk.

In the past twenty years secularization has indeed become a 'controversial thesis' [*umstrittene These*], its once-axiomatic status shaken by a series of strident critiques. Briefly put: drastic declines in religious belief, practice and/or influence are apparent only in (parts of) Europe; the rest of the modern – and *modernized*

– world, meanwhile, is awash with religion. Furthermore, it is argued, a closer look at unchurched Europe suggests that even here, despite Eastern violence and Western neglect, God's vital signs remain defiantly robust. Influenced and informed by these developments in the sociology of religion, the contributions to *Säkularisierung* (most of which began life as part of a Winter 2002/3 lecture series at Humboldt-Universität in Berlin) thus offer 'balance and perspectives' [*Bilanz und Perspektiven*] from the fields of theology, philosophy, and religious and cultural studies.

The purpose of the volume, as stated in the editors' introduction, is not to argue for or against the secularization thesis, but rather to better understand 'certain societal developments which have, whether rightly or wrongly, been described as secularization'. To do this effectively, 'the authors have quite consciously placed themselves in a position in which it is no longer possible to view the European – specifically the Western European – development simply as the normal case for modernization' (p. 9). This approach, in line with Eisenstadt's notion of *multiple modernities* (championed in British sociology by Grace Davie), comes especially to the fore in the latter half of the collection, resulting in several of its most interesting essays. Prior to these are three more theoretical studies, firmly situating secularization's development and reception within the history of ideas.

Johannes Zachhuber surveys the history of the secularization paradigm, from its 'classic form' in the work of Weber and Durkheim, via challenges made to it in the middle decades of the twentieth century (e.g., is "church-going" legitimately identified with "religion", such that a decline in one signals the demise of the other? Was there ever "a golden age of faith"?), up until the 'crisis of the secularization paradigm' in the past decade or so, before offering some 'practical conclusions' for philosophy, theology and the churches. Hermann Lübke, in a paper tellingly subtitled 'towards the enlightenment of the Enlightenment', critiques the alleged connection between modernization and secularization, making much of the idea of 'pluralization' [*Pluralisierung*]. Richard Schröder, taking as his inspiration post-9/11 pleas for the secularization of the Islamic world, comments that 'In order to test the fitness of this advice, we need to know what "secularization" is' (p. 61). He then proceeds, in engaging and clearly-written German, to trace the origins of the Latin term *saecularisatio*, and to chart its subsequent diverse meanings and applications. Schröder finally, and persuasively, argues both that 'secularization is [fundamentally] a category of European self-interpretation', and that 'The idea that we could, should, or must initiate a secularization process in the *Islamic world*, is [...] a new variety of colonialism, albeit a colonialism which is not at all realizable' (p. 72).

Broadly speaking, the remaining essays are 'case studies', each examining the applicability – or *not* – of secularization to a specific national and/or religious culture: reunified Germany (Wilhelm Gräß), the USA (Rolf Schieder), post-communist Russia (Heinz Ohme), the secular Jewish-American 'Independent Order of B'nai B'rith' (Cornelia Wilhelm), Buddhism (Ulrich Dehn), religious "sleepers" in Western societies (Christina von Braun), and Islam (Peter Heine). To comment briefly on just two of these: Gräß's optimism at German Christianity's alleged liberation from 'churchliness' [*Kirchlichkeit*], and its diffusion 'in multiple implicit ways into secular society' (p. 84), relies far too heavily on a dubiously plastic meaning of "the religious", incorporating such things as 'the cult of brand names as [a form of] icon veneration,' and the 'secular liturgies' enacted at football stadia (p. 86); Ohme's study of the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church since *perestroika*, on the other hand, is a masterfully nuanced study of an ambiguous phenomenon, making strong use of hard sociological data. Surprisingly, it is the only essay really to do so.

Generally this is a valuable new volume, offering a wealth of illuminating perspectives, both abstract and applied, on what its editors rightly describe as being

‘Perhaps the most influential theory [...] trying to describe the connection between religion and modernization’ (p. 8). Taken as a whole, however, the collection is marred by the absence of any real *defence* of secularization (such as, in Britain, has been achieved by Steve Bruce). If nothing else, greater balance, and an empirical counterweight to some of the contributor’s more speculative claims, would have been achieved by its inclusion. That one criticism aside, *Säkularisierung* remains an impressively wide-ranging work, and a worthy new addition to secularization’s burgeoning secondary literature.

STEPHEN BULLIVANT