

impervious to one another or culturally porous, hard-edged or fuzzy (not only as to their boundaries but also intrasystematically), and so on. As I read it, various types of scholarly evidence are converging towards establishing the second of the preceding alternatives. Kraemer's 'penetrative' ideology also does not have true reciprocity in mind in that it is intended self-confessedly as destructive of religion: 'The object of this book has been to show that Biblical thinking, the whole world of attitudes and decisions and modes of being implied in the Biblical revelation, is a type wholly *sui generis*. . . In the furnace of Biblical thinking religion is at the same time abolished and radically reevaluated', *ibid.* p.449. There are other stances bearing on the relationship between religions which seem to lend themselves to 'religionist' conclusions. One such may well be the view formulated by George Lindbeck in his *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (SPCK, London, 1984). For Lindbeck, the Christian religion is a 'cultural-linguistic' matrix in which adherents are learning the skill of speaking in the sole idiom which can shape one according to 'the mind of Christ', viz. in saving grace. This implies that non-Christian modes of discourse are not salvific, and that their (even proficient) users are religiously illiterate if not barbaric. It is hard to form relationships of justice, love and peace in this context.

Reviews

MEISTER ECKHART: MYSTICAL THEOLOGIAN by Oliver Davies.
SPCK, 1991. pp. 267. £12.99.

The scholar who expounds the thought of a medieval theologian or mystic must find and locate the work in its own historical context. Ideally, however, the work should not be left there, but rather, if possible, should be made relevant to the modern reader. The first step is essential if our perception of the author is not to be hopelessly distorted, but the second step is necessary if the study is to go beyond mere history (fascinating though mere history may be). Oliver Davies has succeeded in applying this twofold method to Meister Eckhart. In the brief survey of ways of reading Eckhart with which the book begins, Davies points out how some authors have recreated Eckhart in their own image. As if to emphasize the necessity of a proper regard for historical context and verisimilitude, he devotes the three following chapters to Eckhart's historical background: that is, to the man himself and to his thought vis-à-vis the religious women of his age and the German Dominican school. This is a risky procedure, for historical evidence is necessarily often complicated or indecisive. The reader seeking to be introduced to Eckhart may lose interest before the preamble is done. But this historical survey is judicious and useful.

Davies pieces together the regrettably fragmentary evidence regarding Eckhart's life and career and provides some convincing speculation regarding the circumstances of the Bull *In agro dominico* (1329), in which twenty-six articles deriving from Eckhart's works were found to be either heretical or suspect. Eckhart received part, at least, of

his academic training in the University of Paris, where he appears as a *lector sententiarum* in 1294. After this he served simultaneously as Prior of the Dominican convent at Erfurt and as Vicar of Thuringia. He returned to Paris in 1302, to occupy one of the Dominican chairs in theology for one year. From 1303 to 1311 he seems to have served as Provincial of the new Dominican province of Saxonia, a job which involved a heavy load of pastoral and administrative duties and a good deal of travelling (on foot). After a second term as a professor in Paris (1311–13), he was sent to Strasbourg, in the province of Teutonia, apparently with special responsibility over the women's communities of Southern Germany. Eckhart's troubles began when he was moved from there to Cologne in the mid 1320s, where he was regent master of the Dominican *studium generale*. Matters came to a head in 1326, when the Bishop of Cologne, Henry of Virneburg, instituted inquisitorial proceedings against him. Davies argues that Henry, who was a zealous opponent of heresy, must have associated Eckhart with the Beguinages of Southern Germany, some of which were either affiliated with the Dominicans or became Dominican convents. The pious women of these extra-regular communities were suspected of heresy, and especially of the antinomian heresy of the Free Spirit. The proceedings against Eckhart were in due course transferred to the papal court in Avignon, in which city Eckhart died before the Bull against him was promulgated. Davies argues that the extent and intensity of Nicholas XXII's involvement was due to a political and opportunistic alliance between the Pope and Henry pertaining especially to the German succession and to Italy's very real interests in this. Davies' account sheds an unfavourable light upon the bishops of Cologne and Rome, and underlines the need for a sober re-investigation of the case. (There are those, however, who consider Eckhart's condemnation to be part of his charm, and those also who while favourably disposed towards Eckhart consider that it may be better to let sleeping dogs lie.)

A chapter on Eckhart and the religious women of his age treats of two broad topics: first, the possible influence of Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtild of Magdeburg and Margaret Porete on Eckhart, and secondly Eckhart's position vis-à-vis the prevalent currents of female spirituality in general and among the women in his pastoral care in particular. Davies' treatment of the possible influence of the writings of Hildegard and Mechtild is scholarly and judicious, but the evidence is not entirely decisive. Moreover, such influence as there may have been from these sources seems to this reader to be not very significant or illuminating. The case of Margaret Porete, who was burned for heresy, is intriguing, for there are convincing indications that Eckhart borrowed from the letter, if not from the spirit, of her *Mirror of Simple Souls*, with its theme of willing nothing. Moreover, there is good reason to assume that Eckhart would have heard of the contents of her book at second hand, even if he did not read it for himself.

Despite some thematic similarities, Eckhart's "wayless way" seems to have been diametrically opposed to the affective, phenomenal and

self-punishing forms of spirituality which were becoming fashionable in his era and which he would have encountered among female contemplatives. Although Davies emphasizes that Eckhart's precise attitude to these trends is difficult to ascertain, he appears to agree broadly with those scholars who maintain that Eckhart's pastoral teaching was intended in part as a corrective to these trends.

As to Eckhart's intellectual influences, Davies emphasizes the influence of the Albertian school, and especially of Albert's pupil Dietrich of Freiburg, with his theory of the intellect and its primacy. More could be said here and elsewhere in the book about the influence of Thomas Aquinas on Eckhart, for example regarding Thomas's reduction of the created image of God to rationality, his affirmation that the agent intellect is a participation in God's intellect (cf. *Summa theol.* 1.84.5), and his reduction of grace and glory to the supernatural acts of knowing and loving God. The relation between Eckhart and Thomas is complicated, and is not simply one of antithesis.

Turning to Eckhart's own thought, Davies wisely and courageously begins his discussion of Eckhart's theology of union with a discussion of the Meister's curious treatment of analogy, which has the effect both of voiding creatures of their own being (which is merely on loan from God, as it were), and of underlining the immediacy and intimacy of the divine presence (because every something, inasmuch as it is not nothing, is God himself). It is easy (and in some contexts necessary) to get bogged down in this kind of rather technical material, but Davies handles it lightly and succinctly. The chapter continues with sections on God as Being, as Intellect and as the One and the negation of negation. Here and elsewhere Davies emphasizes and attempts to account for the fluidity in Eckhart's treatment of the divine attributes (so that Being is sometimes prior to Intellect, for example, while Intellect is sometimes prior to Being). The following chapter, on the imagery of union, contains good accounts of Eckhart on the soul's ground and on the birth of God in the soul, but its introductory survey of traditional accounts of the image of God in the human person is superficial and less than satisfactory, amounting to little more than a listing of themes without enough in the way of context and analysis in each case to convey what was really going on.

Oliver Davies' treatment of the spirituality of union in Eckhart is centred on the theme of detachment. Here the author underlines the close relation between Eckhart's metaphysics and his spirituality, suggesting that in this respect Eckhart is closer to the Eastern than to the Western tradition. Closely related to this issue is a topic that turns up at various points throughout the book and about which Davies has some interesting and provocative things to say: namely, that of whether Eckhart was a theorizer or a doer, one who knew about God or one who knew God, a theologian or a mystic. Davies claims that Eckhart was above all someone who was conscious of God and was inspired thereby to live according to this consciousness and to counsel others to do so. Eckhart's theology, according to this interpretation, was subordinate to his spirituality; or, as the author puts it more poetically, Eckhart "is in

essence a mystic who sings, and theology is his song". The same idea is reflected in the epithet "mystical theologian" applied to Eckhart in the book's title.

The third section of book, on understanding Eckhart, treats of the Meister's language and of the question of his orthodoxy. (To these is appended a useful survey of his influence.) Davies' survey of Eckhart's rhetorical techniques is clear and well researched. I am not convinced, however, by Davies' assertion that Eckhart poeticized theological language by loosening the relation between the signifier and the signified (nor by his claim earlier in the book that in Eckhart theology becomes a *manière de parler*). It seems to me that we should assume that Eckhart means what he says except when he is being frankly metaphorical (as when he likens God to a horse) or frankly self-contradictory. Moreover, the notion that logic and concepts are applied to the world, rather than grounded in it, is a modern one. Eckhart was too much of a Neoplatonist not to assume that discourse mirrors and is in some sense embodied in reality itself. In my view the peculiarities of Eckhart's scholasticism (for example, his treatment of analogy) arise not because he is willing to talk nonsense if it has a good effect, but because he is willing to take a partial, one-sided and as it were mischievous view of a complex reality.

There are many points in this book with which one could take issue at length. This is among its merits. The book is admirably lucid, and marked throughout by a certain sincerity and directness that engages the reader and does full justice to Eckhart. Davies conveys a high regard for the Meister, but he is by no means an abject devotee, and is ready to admit or suggest weaknesses. There are some errors: for example, Averroes was not in fact an Arab (see page 130), and the popular notion that Thomas and the Dominicans subordinated loving God to understanding him while Bonaventure and the Franciscans subordinated understanding God to loving him, a thesis to which Davies appeals at several points, should be taken with a large pinch of salt. There is some unevenness, especially pertaining to the Latin tradition of the preceding centuries. But the book is a very welcome contribution to the literature on Eckhart and is in my view the best introduction to Eckhart available in English.

P.L. REYNOLDS

SCIENCE AND THE SOUL: NEW COSMOLOGY, THE SELF AND GOD by Angela Tilby. SPCK. 1992. Pp. 275. £12.99.

During the present century our knowledge of the universe has been transformed by Einstein's relativity, by quantum mechanics, by nuclear physics and by cosmological studies of its early development, generally referred to as the big bang. This has profoundly affected our views of our relation to the material world, and the theme of this book is the effects of this new knowledge on theology. It is written by the producer of the BBC television series *Soul*. The author, a theologian, interviewed many scientists, including Hawking, Weinberg, Davies and Guth, and describes