

# Reviews

**MEISTER ECKHART, SERMONS AND TREATISES, Vol I, translated and edited by M.O.C. Walshe. Watkins, 1979 pp lvi + 299. £6.80.**

It has long been apparent that a new, complete, English translation of the German works of Eckhart was needed; research on the text, particularly that done by Josef Quint, has rendered the translation by Evans as out of date as the edition by Pfeiffer on which it was based. M.O.C. Walshe has now published the first volume of just such a new translation, which is intended to be complete, and to replace the Evans translation in Watkins' list.

The translator basically follows, as one would expect, the text and interpretation of Quint, though he occasionally diverges. Thus he includes Pfeiffer's Sermon 3, which Quint rejects; but he points out the uncertainty of its authenticity, and it is probably better, in moderation, to run the risk of including some doubtful material, provided the reader is duly warned, than to cut the Eckhart corpus down to its barest and most indubitable minimum. The Sermons are, however, given in Pfeiffer's order. Since we do not in fact know in what order they were preached, it does not really matter in what order they are printed, except that it is tiresome that there is no standard numbering for them. Walshe gives yet another new set of numbers to the Sermons, though he also gives the numbering found in Pfeiffer and in Quint's edition and in Quint's modern German translation. Since Quint's edition is likely to be definitive for some time to come, it might have been better to retain his numbering without further ado.

The translation is, on the whole, excel-

lent, and Walshe admirably fulfils his stated intention of aiming primarily at accuracy but without sacrificing elegance. In general the translation stays very close to the German original, but is still quite readable as an English text. Just occasionally the wording of the English is misleading. Thus, for instance, on p. 60 we read, "He utters all rational spirits in that Word as equal to that Word", where surely *gleich* means "like" rather than "equal to". Even more unfortunately, on p. 77 *gote gleich* is rendered "the same as God", where again "like God" seems to be what Eckhart means. On p. 82 "a life of light is too little, being subject to spells of darkness" suggests that something other than a life of light is to be desired; the German surely means "a life of light in which there is still something of darkness etc". There are a few other places like this where the translation is not as clear as it might be, but only a few.

There are also a few places where the translation seems to be incomplete. For instance on p. 61 it looks as if a whole line has been missed out. "The soul ... flows into herself and beyond all things" should be "The soul ... flows into herself and out of herself and beyond herself and beyond all things". I noticed several other places (though not many) where a few words seem to have got lost like this.

There are one or two unaccountable minor changes in what Eckhart says. Thus for instance, on p. 115 Eckhart's "rich king" has become a "mighty king", and on

p. 258 the question where we should worship (it is in connexion with the woman of Samaria) has become a question of how we should pray (the German is *waj*), and on p. 259 Damascene is quoted as defining prayer as a "true ascent into God", which does not do justice to *vernunftic ufklimmen* ("ascent of the mind").

It is also slightly unfortunate that Walshe frequently varies his rendering of particular words or phrases, even in the space of a single paragraph. This sometimes obscures the continuity of Eckhart's exposition. Thus *ledic*, for example, is translated "empty", "void" and "free", all on p. 71, and "exempt" on p. 76. On p. 80 *lust* is rendered "delight" and "longing", the former surely being more correct. On p. 112 *andaucht* is both "devotion" (which is precisely right) and "contemplation" (which is misleading). On p. 118 the same phrase is both "Let God be" and "Let God be God", the latter being more accurate. On p. 128 *so stuende er wol glich* is translated "be the same (in weal and woe)", which is better than "indifferent" on p. 87.

There is also a slight tendency to distort some of the devotional words used by Eckhart; thus *innerkeit* is surely "recollection" rather than "meditation", and *suezicheit* is "consolation" rather than "ecstasy" or "rapture". *Andaucht* I have already referred to.

But these are, on the whole, minor and rare blemishes; this is a translation which it is a pleasure to use and a relief to be able to recommend to would-be students of Eckhart who cannot read him in German.

The notes are rather less satisfactory. Walshe has been inconsistent in sometimes indicating the patristic or medieval sources referred to by Eckhart, and sometimes not; this is all the more unfortunate because of one note which informs us that Eckhart often quoted freely and from memory, so that his quotations are often hard to verify, but "where this has been done, usually by Quint, the source is given in these notes" (p. 12). But in fact Quint has verified far more quotations than Walshe indicates, and the unwary reader of Walshe might well get a very exaggerated view of

the unreliability of Eckhart's citations.

Walshe has also sometimes been careless in his use of Quint's notes. Thus, for instance, on p. 52 Quint is given as the authority for saying that Peter Lombard and St Thomas teach that "the love that is in us is the Holy Ghost", but in fact Quint, correctly, indicates that this is the doctrine of Peter Lombard, and that St Thomas attacks it.

Walshe is also not entirely true to his promise to indicate in the Notes any passages where he differs from Quint's readings or interpretations (p.ix). In his Sermon 9 (Quint's 86), for instance, I noticed nine places where he does not follow Quint's final text in DW (though he is following Quint's earlier beliefs enshrined in the modern German translation), which are not indicated in the notes. Not that any substantial point of doctrine is affected. The Introduction gives a useful brief account of what is known of Eckhart's life, and a sensible discussion of his condemnation, together with a translation of the Bull of condemnation. There is also a useful account of the problem of the authenticity especially of the Trêatises contained in Pfeiffer and Evans. Less useful is the discussion of whether or not Eckhart was a mystic. Walshe is either unaware of, or chooses to ignore, the important, if difficult, study by Kelly, which gives good grounds for regarding it as somewhat irrelevant to the study of Eckhart to enquire into his putative mystical experiences. But there are already good studies of Eckhart in English; what was needed was a complete translation. In undertaking at least a complete translation of the German works, Walshe has earned our deepest gratitude, and his first volume can be regarded as being as near to complete success as any such publication is ever likely to be.

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