

**RELIGION, MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY** edited by Paul Heelas *Blackwell Publishers* 1998. 338 pp., £50 hardback, £16.99 paperback.

While the mainstream churches steadily decline wherever the modern world spreads, religion only extends its hold on people's lives, for better and (more often) for worse. This book inaugurates a major new series in which scholars are commissioned to make recent study of religion available in a non-technical way to a wider audience, as well as to meet the insatiable needs of university courses in cultural studies, history, philosophy, sociology, etc., besides theology and religious studies. Steve Bruce, as a sociologist, ploddingly charts the move from churches to cults; Mark C. Taylor, exotically as ever, offers another example of the 'deconstructive a/theology' through which he gives expression to the postmodern religious sensibility; Zygmunt Bauman, another old-fashioned social scientist, centres on fundamentalism (and must surely think Taylor's contribution worthless); Ninian Smart, Grand Old Man of religious studies, argues very interestingly that, for all the 'detraditionalization' that has taken place in liberal-consumerist societies, there is also a 're-traditionalization' (e.g. ethnicism); and Bruce B. Lawrence analyzes the multiple forms of religious fundamentalism. We then have increasingly alarming forays into Latin American Pentecostalism (Bernice Martin); Muslim Indonesia (Robert W. Hefner); and 'Theory of Japanese Culture' (Winston Davis). We return to Europe, with Richard H. Roberts, in a wide-ranging, richly documented study, which concludes with the thought that, if the Christian churches in Europe are not simply in terminal decline, they may continue as 'commodified "heritage"'—'Even prison camps may survive ... as theme parks'. Next, Don Cupitt recapitulates his well-known prescription: 'it does not matter in the least whether in the end it is described as a mutation of Christianity, or a new religion that may succeed Christianity'. Immensely more demanding, the book concludes with a re-creation of the Christian doctrine of kenosis (Graham Ward); an attack on the Kantian notion of the sublime (John Milbank); an even more ferocious attack on the 'immanentist subjectivity' of post-Kantian 'Protestant thinking' (Phillip Blond); and finally an essay on poetry and the sacred (Kevin Hart). The last four essays have a noticeably anti-Protestant undercurrent; it helps to know something about Derrida, Kristeva, Lyotard, Merleau-Ponty, Bataille, Blanchot and Bonnefoy, as well as Barth and von Balthasar. Paul Heelas, professor at Lancaster University and author of *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Blackwell 1996), shows flair and ingenuity in bringing fairly traditional sociology of religion together with fairly (or unfairly!) disruptive post-metaphysical theorization ('David Martin and Ninian Smart meet John Milbank and Mark C. Taylor')—plenty for seminars to discuss, whatever the wider audience makes of it all.