

THE NEW WINE OF DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY by Paul Murray OP, *Burns & Oates (Continuum)*, London, 2006, Pp 198, pbk; **INTRODUCING MEISTER ECKHART** by Michael Demkovich OP, *Novalis*, Ottawa, 2005, Pp 178, £10.50, pbk.

Timothy Radcliffe, who has contributed prefaces to both of these books, begins his introduction to Paul Murray's book by remarking that as a young friar he was taught to be rather suspicious of spirituality: it was seen as a sixteenth-century invention, marking the dislocation of theological reflection from the lived experience of Christianity, complicating getting in touch with God, not 'our sort of thing at all'. Murray, however, demonstrates that there is such a thing as Dominican spirituality, and that it is not about special ways of praying; rather, it is about 'being alive in God and for others' (p. v). Murray draws on early Dominican experience exemplified by Dominic himself, his successor Jordan of Saxony, and such luminaries as Aquinas, Eckhart, and Catherine of Siena, in which certain themes and concerns recur with some frequency, especially in relation to preaching and prayer. Perhaps surprisingly to some, a key metaphor which emerges is inebriation: becoming drunk on the new wine of the Gospel, the importance given, in their lives as preachers, to becoming drunk on the Word (p 3).

Murray sees the Dominican understanding of contemplation as having a plain and down-to-earth connotation, often meaning little more than a simple act of prayerful attention or study (p.14); and, while agreeing with Newman's characterisation of Dominican spirituality as 'scientific' also wants to stress its apostolic, exuberant, evangelical and risk-taking aspects. This exuberant approach is captured in his chapter titles, adopting ancient Dominican mottos of 'eating the book' for study and 'drinking the new wine' of the Gospel in preaching. Citing Pascal's observation that 'nobody is as happy as a real Christian' with Nietzsche's '[Christ's] disciples should look more redeemed' (p. 45–46) Murray emphasises the importance of happiness in the spiritual life: it is a serious matter, but that does not mean we must be miserable pursuing it. Jordan defended brothers seized with laughter in choir; in her *Dialogue* Catherine is informed by God the Father that the Dominican order is 'delightful... Dominic [built his ship] very happy [so that] both the perfect and the not-so-perfect fare well' (pp. 51–52); Eckhart and his disciple Suso describe the gift of expansive joy which is nothing less than a participation in the joy of God despite life's vicissitudes. For Aquinas, morality begins with the search for happiness, and is happiness: by giving attention to God and neighbour, by seeking to bring fullness of life and joy to others, happiness comes in abundance.

This happiness was linked to freedom: Dominic was committed to study, and study frees us from imprisonment to the prevailing ethos. Dominicans liked the image of drinking, Murray suggests, because it responded so well to their sense of the Gospel, their joyous and expansive spirituality, in contrast to the dour asceticism of their Albigensian opponents; and they could sometimes push that metaphor to surprising extremes. So Catherine talks of God being 'drunk with love for our good'; Aquinas in his *Commentary on John* talks of the Eucharist as 'capable of making man divine and inebriating him with divinity'. And this wasn't just metaphorical: Aquinas remarks in the *Summa* that 'if a person knows that, by refusing to take wine, an oppressive burden will be placed on nature that person is not without fault' although he elsewhere remarks dryly that 'wine does not love man the way man loves wine' (p. 154). The key point, Murray concludes, is that those who heard the early Dominicans heard them as if 'their words... had somehow caught fire' depicting the extravagant range and scope of the vision of the gospel. Are we then too sane and sensible to become drunk on the Word, merely repeating the bland commonplaces of popular wisdom? (p. 168–170).

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*