

Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789. By Mary Anne Perkins (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), xiv + 385 pp. E88.00/\$98.00 cloth.

When the Deutsches Historische Museum staged the exhibition "Idee Europa" in the Pei-Bau in Berlin (2003), it provided the occasion for a flurry of newspaper articles, op-ed pieces and loftier debates over the questions that it raised, involving most notably Habermas and Derrida. The vast, erudite display of maps, treaties, and objects of all kinds, illustrated the concept of European identity from the "pax romana zur Europa"ische Union," and yet the construction of the narrative proved controversial in the light of pressing problems of expanding the European Union (i.e., whether Turkey could be included in the idea of Europe), discontent over immigration, the problem of terrorism, and the revival of European nationalisms. What should Europe mean now, and how might a unifying historical consciousness contribute to, or hinder, the crafting of a new identity for Europe? It can always be suggested that what Europeans really have in common is a legacy of pain, going back to the Black Death of 1347–50. The fine book by Mary Anne Perkins here reviewed, can provide a much-needed resource for such discussions and reflections.

The book is an intellectual history of the idea of Europe, an examination that spans the period from 1789 up to the very recent past, which explores efforts made by intellectuals, politicians and religious leaders, to define and shape the idea of Europe (or European identity) in political, religious, historiographical and philosophical terms. The theme, to be more exact, is the pervasive conceptualization of Europe as Christendom, and the narrative of "Europe-as-Christendom" that has served as the constant backdrop for so many discussions of the meaning of Europe, the future of Europe or the past of Europe throughout the modern period.

Perkins offers this work as an essay in intellectual history, attempting to convey in a single clear account how the cultural and political ideas of European thinkers revolved around the "Christian narrative" of European history. It provides "a history of ideas rather than a philosophical analysis." In other words, despite the philosophical awareness of the

author, she does not attempt to rethink the question and thereby to delve into the truth of European identity. This book deserves to be widely known, as it will prove to be a treasured companion for many scholars.

This is the only book known to me that gives equal deep attention to Left and Right in European intellectual politics. One effect of Perkins's clear expositions is to give the impression that the Left and Right should not be viewed as binary opposites: these two rich and far-spreading trees grew side by side, shaping each other continually, their branches intermingling: in this complex interweaving we discover a shared concern and passion for proclaiming and strengthening the Christian shape of European culture, even as Left and Right made competing claims to inherit the Christian patrimony (or to have done with it). Novalis and Guizot both longed for a return of the stable hieratic unity of old Catholic Europe. Tocqueville and Mazzini both believed that the continuation of the ideal of Christendom would guarantee the goodness of governments in a democratic world and offer hope during periods of profound social change. Perkins carries the discussion across a quite broad range of thinkers, reaching from Suarez to G. K. Chesterton and to Samuel Huntington. Thus Hegel's understanding of Europe as the culminating phase of the developing World Spirit is shown to rely on a reinterpretation and sublimation of this same Christendom narrative. As a political idea, this narrative is traced like an intricate red thread from Dante's *De monarchia* to Proudhon and on to Robert Schuman's *Pour l'Europe* of 1963. Part 2, "'Christendom' as the Realm of Universal History," is especially important for its discussion of the philosophical and

Book Reviews 823

historiographical dimension of this problem. Thinkers from Hegel to Jaspers, and historians from Ranke onward were convinced of the centrality of Europe for world history, and that Europe was the home of "history" as a type of consciousness. Even Gadamer saw Europe as "saturated with history" (116). Perkins handles the connection between hermeneutics and the concept of universal history with a crispness that is refreshing for anyone who has lurked long in the atmosphere of Ranke's Prussia—or Hegel's Prussia.

It is especially pleasing to find here a discussion of Jan Patoc̃ka. A member of Charter

77, Patoc̃ka held that “the European spirit, the spirit of reason, is universally human, and second . . . it is only via philosophy as it developed in Europe that it can become manifest to us.” By now Perkins has made us wary of the Christendom narrative as it appears in this passage, and yet we are free to reflect that Patoc̃ka’s personal history and political courage were centered in a concept of “care for the soul” which he developed from his own understanding of a European inheritance: the traditional combination of Athens and Jerusalem. This durable theme, reflected in the title of his priceless lectures, *Plato and Europe*, or more clearly in the title of a book by Jaroslav Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* has been avoided here in favor of a concentration on the purely Christian discourse.

The Christendom narrative did not merely attempt to establish a distinctive identity for European peoples and states, it was also exclusionary. Jews and Judaism were offered no home in the storyline, any more than they had been in the medieval kingdoms that first conceived of themselves as the political form of the Church. The long history of this exclusion took on a particular tone in the modern era, as Jews were held not to fit into the Enlightenment project of rational and cosmopolitan state sovereignty. It is painful to reflect that Christendom still appears as a motif (in what a sinful guise it seems) for nationalist politicians such as Le Pen, who belittles the Holocaust. Those who cooperated with, supported, and worked for the Nazi regime also adopted the Christendom narrative, no matter how improbably. Carl Schmitt often spoke of the “concept of Europe as neo-Christendom” (315). In the case of Schmitt, one is reminded of a phrase of the medieval theologian Hrabanus Maurus who complained that certain men are like sheep, who “muddy with their feet the water that they drink” (*De clericorum institutione*).

The identity of Europe, the question of its historical purpose and proper shape, is not only a question of historical and cultural factors—duration, influence and change—but also a philosophical problem. This raises a further point of reflection, for many of the thinkers involved in the development of the philosophy and practice of history, for example Karl Loewith, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem and on to Arnaldo Momigliano, were of course Jewish.

Momigliano was friends with Jean Danie'lou (Catholic theologian and later a cardinal), and had a certain wry appreciation for his work of 1958, *The'ologie du jude'ochristianisme*, which argued that there is no cleavage, historically or religiously, between Judaism and Christianity. It would be interesting to see how the development of the concept of a "Judaeo-Christian tradition" would fit, or not fit, with Perkins's argument. Her book offers sympathetic and interesting discussions of attempts, after WWI and WWII, to retrieve whatever was valuable and salvageable from the European tradition, on the part of theologians such as Jacques Maritain and Christopher Dawson, and politicians such as Konrad Adenauer. Although it is important to maintain a critical distance from their insistence on a Christian Europe, one must also point to the fact that some lessons were finally learned from the legacy of pain. The developing identification of Christian origins and the Christian God with Judaism and the Jewish God has given a different complexion to relations between Judaism and the Catholic Church. At the same time, many thinkers were attracted to the conceptualization of Athens plus Jerusalem as a more complete narrative for Europe.

But this leaves Islam, which in our current situation seems to lack any avenue forward. Moslems were also left out of the Christendom narrative, and recent debates about the nature of Europe link up to the older discourse precisely so as to exclude and go on excluding. Terrorism of course exacerbates this. The Moslem contribution to European culture was a scandal for those who wanted to claim Europe as purely Christian; but modern thinkers cannot bear to think about

824 Book Reviews

Al-Andalus any more than could the crusade-minded French of old. Here, in the land of the Three Rings, Jewish thinkers like Maimonides wrote in Arabic, and there was an exceptional degree of exchange among the three religions. Now some of the old accusations hurled at the Jews are dusted off for the Moslems, for example, that a strict traditional religion is not compatible with a civil society—and that Moslems have divided loyalties.

For those of us who teach a course entitled "Western Civilization" or "European History from . . . to . . .," the book provides a useful entry to the critical and historiographical

questions that should now inform the crafting of narratives, not only for modern history but also for the medieval past, whose narrative treatment has so often been a projection of modern aspirations. Charlemagne, as a symbol more than a person, often recurs in Perkins's book. More importantly, perhaps, many historians now follow the lead of Arnaldo

Momigliano in making historiography the initial context of historical exploration, and Perkins offers a fascinating and profound treatment of the interplay of hermeneutics and history and of the projects of universal history and European history. Historiographical awareness has inspired attempts to develop a new narrative of European history—for example, in the remarkable new work by Michael Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmannen* (2006) in the Siedler *Geschichte Europas* series. Here the old Christendom narrative is expanded to fully incorporate Christianity, Judaism and Islam so as to provide a fuller statement of European origins and identity. Maybe the philosophers, public intellectuals and politicians will find their way along such paths as well.

This is the clearly expressed hope of Perkins, who wonders, in her conclusion:

If . . . the Christendom narrative continues to shape European thought, culture, politics and identity-consciousness . . . one issue must be urgently addressed: whether it can be open to, and include, those whose own narratives of identity have different origins (345).

Michael E. Moore

Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville, USA