

3-1-2012

Review of Christmas in Germany: A Cultural History, by J. Perry

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Joseph F., "Review of Christmas in Germany: A Cultural History, by J. Perry" (2012). *Theology & Religious Studies*. 34.
http://collected.jcu.edu/theo_rels-facpub/34

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argument, and a refusal to jump to conclusions that are not supported by the evidence. But to scholars of church-state relations in the United States—be they historians interested in religion in American culture during the nineteenth century, or political scientists interested in church-state debates in American politics during the twentieth—this book is a must read. In examining unabashedly the actual historical evidence, Drakeman has written a volume that produces much light on the development of church-state relations and rhetoric. Given the politics of the topic, it is a volume likely to produce some heat as well.

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doi 10.1017/S0009640712000455

Christmas in Germany: A Cultural History By Joe Perry Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2010 xiii + 399 pp \$49.95 cloth

This fine book has a somewhat misleading title. It does not deal with Christmas in Germany *ab initio*, which would have dated to the eighth century, but rather with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perry has provided a thorough and well-balanced account that moves chronologically rather than topically.

The book's central theme is that the Germans have always seen Christmas as particularly theirs, and Perry agrees, repeatedly demonstrating how Christmas interacted with so many areas of German life, including politics, but, as the subtitle suggests, he focuses on culture. "Christmas, supposedly a private family celebration, was and is Germany's national holiday" (7).

As was typical for the nineteenth century in several countries, the upper middle class set the tone for the Christmas celebration (landed aristocrats had their own traditions). This group solidly emphasized family values that could, but did not always, transcend the confessional gaps, in general the nineteenth-century Christmas reflected Protestant customs and ideals. No less than Friedrich Schleiermacher pointed the way. His 1806 *The Christmas Celebration* recounts a fictional "dialogue in which the characters—enlightened bourgeois intellectuals in a comfortable salon-style atmosphere—debate the meaning of the birth of Jesus" (19). Three women talk about how Christmas reinforces the spiritual bond between mother and child, while their husbands debate moral and intellectual issues, including the lack of historicity in the gospel of John! Soon after this came E. A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker* which also had a family setting but, reflecting the values of the German Romantics, focused on children's capacity for the magical and mystical.

Yet the future belonged to neither of these men but to the *bourgeoisie* who would enshrine middle-class standards of sacrifice and reward (Christmas presents for good children). Confessional differences impacted the celebrations. Protestants observed the holy day as a family day, in contrast to the Catholic emphasis upon grandiose liturgical celebrations. Protestants adopted the Christmas tree and its legendary association with Luther while Catholics stuck to "the church-approved crèche"(31). But the middle-class character of the feast transcended the two religious observances.

For example, holiday stories did not deal with the consequences of industrialization. Instead, many stories focused on impoverished children and their widowed mother who struggled to give the family any kind of Christmas. Often, however, help appeared in the form of a generous Christian or even a supernatural visitor. Naturally these women wished to get ahead, thus sharing bourgeois values and making them deserving of a better state in life. The Socialists did produce stories which addressed the economic system that produced poverty and which tried to get people to look at Christmas through the eyes of the suffering, but such tales had limited popularity during a joyous season.

The Franco-Prussian War produced the first "War Christmas," a central theme of the book and of the German Christmas. This war resulted in an overwhelming German victory, but Perry says much about how the myth of the "War Christmas"—the absent, lonely *Vater* fighting for *Reich und Volk*—originated with this conflict and survived through two world wars.

By the late nineteenth century the traditional Christmas had encountered commercialism. People came to like it, but inevitably critics warned of what it was doing to the traditional celebration. At the same time, many German scholars and cultural leaders "discovered" the Yule feast, about which little is known historically. They used it to proclaim that the true German Christmas actually antedated the Nativity and thus the arrival of a Jewish/Mediterranean religion in the North. What should have been a cultural oddity became a central theme of Christmas in the 1930s.

Not surprisingly, the most arresting chapter deals with Christmas under the Third Reich. The government approached Christmas the way it approached everything in German society—service to the Reich. Perry details much of the activity but observes, "Perhaps the most striking feature of Christmas in the Third Reich was its reinvention as a neopagan holiday that celebrated the supposed Nordic roots of the 'Aryan race'" (194). To insure the success of this new understanding the holiday, the Nazis set out guidelines on how to observe it. The careful but sustained resistance by the churches kept Christmas Christian. The book finishes with a brief account of the German Christmas from 1945 until today with the gradual triumph of the commercial holiday which Cold War politicians used to demonstrate

the superiority of West Germany to the impoverished Communist states in Eastern Europe.

My reservations are few. First, the book makes much of the "War Christmas" but never deals with how that observation of this changed during WWI and WWII as it became clear that Germany would be defeated. Second, Perry uses abbreviations for some German organizations but provides no guide to them, a particular problem for a reader with no German who would not know that *HJ* stands for *Hitler Jugend*, the Hitler Youth. Third, the book does not make it clear that developments in the German celebration of Christmas were paralleled elsewhere. For example, like the Germans, nineteenth-century middle-class American parents also gave their children didactic gifts such as books which espoused, via fiction, bourgeois values. Knowledge of this broader background would alert readers that the German Christmas was not so idiosyncratic.

This is a fine study, well researched, well organized, easy to follow, and thorough. Given its specialized nature, it may have limited appeal to *Church History* readers, but it belongs in the university or seminary library and definitely on the shelves of those doing research on Christmas, on religious holidays, and on nineteenth- and twentieth-century German Christianity.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640712000467

"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal.

By **Paul Kjoss Helseth**. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2010.

Xxv + 257 pp. \$21.99 paper.

At the conclusion of his magisterial biography of Charles Hodge, Paul Gutjahr observes that many conservative American Protestants "still carry some portion of Princeton Seminary's cane of orthodoxy" with them today as they seek to articulate their theological commitments to contemporary audiences (*Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 385). Paul Helseth's study of the relationship between religious psychology and doctrine in the thought of the Seminary's theological architects is a potent example of this phenomenon. He offers a lucid, cogent argument aimed at the theological rehabilitation of the Princeton School's appropriation of modernity.