

**Cameron,** Euan, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, & Religion, 1250–1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; hardback; pp. 473; R.R.P US\$55.00; ISBN 978019925782.

The distinction between superstitious and religious practice is often blurry. What is perceived to be a deep religious ritual by one religion can be seen as nothing but a superstitious custom by another. What is regarded in one religion as engaging with God and the Angels can be perceived in another as communicating with Satan and the demons. The distinction seemed particularly clear at the time of the Reformation, but for the theological establishment it was true for the entire period between the medieval era and the Enlightenment, although not always clear in the minds of the common people. *Enchanted Europe* is a study of these differing perceptions.

From the beginning, Euan Cameron makes it clear what this book aims to address within the bounds of this study. It is an analysis of literature, concentrating on superstitions and the learned response to them. The arguments that are presented in the book are rooted in history, and not in anthropology, philosophy, or religious studies. Within this framework the study presents a fascinating overview of the ever-moving distinguishing line between superstitious and religious practice.

Cameron does not attempt to resolve the differences but he presents a scholarly synopsis of each period within the years 1250–1750. To this end, he divides the book into four parts. Part I is entitled ‘Discerning and Controlling Invisible Forces: the Image of Superstition in the Literature’. This section presents the image of the folkloric world between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries. In a pre-scientific world, the ordinary people constructed the universe and their place in it through folklore, and mental or physical illnesses were treated by traditional ‘healing’ practices, customs, and sympathetic magic. Although Christian thinkers of this period challenged this body of popular knowledge and custom, to the local clergy and the ordinary people many of these practices became enmeshed into Christian religious culture, leaving the distinction between Christian and folklore practices difficult to discern.

Part II, ‘The Learned Response to Superstitions in the Middle Ages: Angels and Demons’, examines the demonological tradition in medieval ecclesiastical writing which raised the questions of human worship and the divine governance of the cosmos and, importantly, provided a defence of God’s goodness despite the existence of evil in the world. The theological establishment denounced popular superstitions or sympathetic magic – which was often practised by the ordinary people to protect them against

the evil of the world – as demonic. However, the clergy felt that demonizing the folklorized religion was too extreme and that many people would not see anything wrong with their practices.

Part III, 'Superstitions in Controversy: Renaissance and Reformations', reveals a time of dramatic change where attempts were made to persuade the people from their superstitious belief systems. During the Reformation, both the Protestant and Catholic hierarchy sought to encourage a uniform belief system and ritual practices that distinguished their religion from others. The result was that Protestant and Catholic parishioners accused each other of practising superstitious rites and beliefs that were possibly demonically motivated. Superstition was becoming something to fear. This fear often resulted in accusations and persecution of those suspected of witchcraft that instilled further fear.

Part IV, 'The Cosmos Changes Shape: Superstition is Defined', describes how, with the decline of religious absolutism during the Enlightenment, 'superstition' became a term used to describe a particular religious frame of mind rather than another religion. It extended to dogmatic militancy of all kinds, including the accuser's own religion. However, the Enlightenment also saw the romanticization of some aspects of folklore, particularly the spirits, spells, and sympathetic magic.

Cameron does not attempt to write a comprehensive study of superstition, reason, and religion between the years 1250–1750; such a study would take many volumes. He does, however, present a study that captures the ambience of each era through the use of numerous interesting examples, and by comparing the writings of the theological establishment with the practices of the common people. Superstitious and religious practices reveal how people perceived their place in the cosmos and how they dealt with the problems that arose in their place. Cameron creates a highly readable narrative, supplemented with a comprehensive index and bibliography. *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, & Religion, 1250–1750* is a worthy addition to all university libraries.

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