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Davie, Heelas, and Woodhead's "Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures" - Book Review

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focus to the American scene gracefully and with clarity.

Chapter Three, 'Their Separate Ways: American Friends Since 1800', makes the most of Hamm's specialism in nineteenth century Quakerism. The portrayal of the separations and the diverging trajectories of Friends is masterful. The chapter helpfully traces the evangelical impetus of Gurney and subsequent revivalism, leading to the formation of the Five Years Meeting and Rufus Jones' early efforts to liberalise Orthodox Quakerism. It continues these trajectories through the post-war twentieth century, adding helpful summary paragraphs with statistical overviews of the various branches.

Chapter Four, 'Quaker Faiths and Practices', begins with the apt comment, 'Generalisation about American Quakers today is almost impossible.' This excellent chapter sketches the wide range of beliefs and practices among American Friends, all generating around five commonly shared convictions: worship based on the leading of the Spirit; the ministry of all believers; decision making through the traditional Quaker business process; simplicity as a basic philosophy of life; and a commitment to education as a manifestation of Quaker faith' (p. 64). Hamm introduces a vast array of specimen statements and pithy comments from the wide spectrum of contemporary Friends, amply illustrating the diversity of American Quakerism. However, while the breadth of research and the masterful organisation of data are impressive, I wished for more interpretation of these divergences, according to wider cultural influences upon Friends. What influences from the wider evangelical movement or liberal humanist currents are pulling on Friends today?

Chapter Five, 'Contemporary Quaker Debates', summarises some of the nagging disagreements and unclarities among Friends today. The main issues treated are the Christian nature of Quakerism, leadership, authority, sexuality, Quaker identity, unity/diversity, growth/decline. While no major split have come from these differences, they continue to widen. Some of these issues are unique to Friends, others are causing concern in religious groups across the spectrum.

Chapter Six, 'Quakers and the World', examines the very different ways Evangelical and Liberal Friends carry on the traditional Quaker concern for the world. This treatment is carried on under the categories of peace, race relations, world service, Native Americans, and alternative futures. The chapters that follow are divided into three sections. The first short section is headed 'Secularisation Theory Examined' includes papers by Casanova, Martin and Tschannen. The second section is entitled 'Predicting Christianity' and comprises papers by Bruce, Wilson, Chambers, Hirst, Percy, Cameron and Taylor. Finally, Section Three, 'Predicting Alternatives', includes papers by Yip, Pilgrim, Hunt, Pearson, Green, Karaflogka, Sjödin, Spencer and Heelas and Seel.

The authors were obviously given a clear brief and a word limit of around 5000 - enabling the editors to increase the numbers of papers and broaden, to some extent, the range of theoretical and substantive issues presented. The volume has been exceptionally well edited - all of the papers are clearly written and authors have done well to minimise jargon. It remains true, however, that the faith groups described are either Christian or what the editors have called 'alternative'. My feeling is that this decision was taken in order that the central issue of the book, the secularisation thesis, be more readily explored. The result is a coherent and interesting set of papers which raise many old and several new questions relating to this venerable stalking horse of sociologists of religion. However, if you want to know a little more about the ways Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists or Hindus envisage the future of their religious faith and practice then, as the subtitle suggests, do not look here. I should add that the geographical range of interests is also relatively narrow, the papers focus largely on Britain.

There is not sufficient space here to discuss, even briefly, all of the chapters collected by Davie, Heelas and Woodhead. The chapters that follow are divided into three sections. The first short section is headed 'Secularisation Theory Examined' includes papers by Casanova, Martin and Tschannen. The second section is entitled 'Predicting Christianity' and comprises papers by Bruce, Wilson, Chambers, Hirst, Percy, Cameron and Taylor. Finally, Section Three, 'Predicting Alternatives', includes papers by Yip, Pilgrim, Hunt, Pearson, Green, Karaflogka, Sjödin, Spencer and Heelas and Seel.

Global Perspective. Casanova, as some readers will know already (perhaps having read his Public Religions in the Modern World, 1994) is an extraordinarily incisive and dependably interesting writer. If you wish to read one short contemporaneous piece on the secularisation thesis then let it be this chapter. In a nutshell, Casanova argues that in relation to the secularisation thesis, generalising from the case of either (northern) Europe or the USA is misguided: either from the trend of steady church membership (in the USA) or of declining church membership (as in Britain and some other European countries). Casanova rightly prompts us to adopt a more global perspective which provides not only national, regional and local but transnational situations and tendencies which are particular and therefore necessarily peculiar and certainly not easily explicable in terms of the trends plotted in either Britain or the USA. Indeed, when contextualised in this way, each becomes the exception rather than rule.

I'd like, next, to introduce Helen Cameron's essay 'The Decline of the Church in England as a Local Membership Organisation: predicting the nature of civil society in 2050'. Do not be put off by the title, the essay is well argued and presents a novel argument. Cameron accepts the fact that church membership is broadly in decline and that this decline will probably continue. However, by drawing on the work of Adalbert Evers, she argues, cogently in my view, that the voluntary sector is prone to change due to pressures exerted by the processes of commodification, co-optation and privatisation and that this claim, if true, has three clear implications for church membership (one type of voluntary association); first, commodification 'turns the member into a user who pays a fee in order to receive a product or service' (p.115). Second, churches and church members are increasingly co-opted into statutory consultation systems – most densely clustered in inner cities but found everywhere these days. Finally, the pressure on churches to privatise leads to members being increasingly drawn towards events and (often temporary) groupings which encourage clients to explore their own, particular spirituality. From this, Cameron boldly predicts that church members (and others) will become increasingly affiliated to more or less secular bodies, becoming, in the process, semi-detached from their church. It is particularly interesting to consider the argument in the light of recent developments with the Religious Society of Friends.

Finally, given the context of this review how could I not comment on Gay Pilgrim's 'The Quakers: towards an Alternate Ordering'. Having listened to Pilgrim sketch out the essence of this paper a while ago I was delighted to read her initial idea properly developed. Her argument begins with the claim that Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia' defines the Quaker movement from its earliest beginnings to the present day. Heterotopia can be understood as a home for the incongruous; heterotopia is that place where the ambiguous, the incongruous, the absurd, the frankly disturbing abides. The heterotopic is decidedly other and is defined as such for its lack of affinity with and for that which is orthodox; taken for granted, 'normal'. Pilgrim argues, convincingly that Quakers – or to be more precise – Quakerism falls into this category. It is an interesting theory. Although at various times different terminologies would have been used the idea has a sound parentage, and has been developed recently by anthropologists such as Frederick Barth and Anthony Cohen. This broader idea is that we (individuals and groups) are defined primarily in relation to what we are not. When that 'what we are not' is represented by the State in all its myriad forms then the 'we' is in big trouble – the kind that was faced by Friends in the seventeenth and to a lesser extent the eighteenth century. But does the argument hold for contemporary Quakerism? I rather believe that it does though not perhaps in so striking a way. I would argue (pace Pilgrim) that the position of Quakerism can not be entirely accounted for within the concept of heterotopic space. There have been plenty of Quakers down the ages who have had at least one foot and sometimes two in that space occupied by the orthodox – certainly when it is defined in non-religious terms.

Taking the collection as a whole it seems that the secularisation thesis does not fare well. Either it is said to be relevant only in statistical terms – in relation to declining church membership for instance; or, it is considered an important but predominately local phenomenon, restricted not only in space (to Europe) but also time (modernity). At worst (and I admit, candidly, that this is my own view), it might be considered a dead-end which has tended to stifle other more stimulating analyses which might fall under the rubric 'sociology of religion' – some of which are happily presented in this collection.

Together, the papers presented here form a limited but nevertheless stimulating overview of the state of religion in Britain today. The overwhelming majority of contributors largely side-step the incitement to predict, preferring to account for the historical trajectory and current condition of the group on which their attention rests. Where predictions are offered they are either cautious or decidedly tongue-in cheek. For the sake of compositional symmetry let me conclude, as I began, with a quotation (this time from the playwright Eugène Ionesco): 'You can only predict things after they have happened!'

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