

Davie, G., Heelas P. and Woodhead L., (eds), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*, Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series, Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003, pp. xii + 253 ISBN 0 7546 3010 2, Paper, Price: £16.99.

Bacon once wrote (in 'Of Prophecies') that dreams and predictions 'ought to serve but for winter talk by the fireside'. And, on the whole, social scientists (economists aside of course) have concurred, averring that social life is nothing if not fundamentally unpredictable. But then again, if we do feel the urge to prophesy then what better time than at the birth of a new millennium? Having missed the conference, held in Exeter in 2001, on which this collection is based, I was particularly looking forward to this book, in so far as I wondered how the authors would handle a challenge which they would not normally consider worth the trouble.

Predicting Religion consists of an introduction written, as has become the norm, by the editors (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.

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 and so I intend to say a little about the three or four that impressed me most. First, then, I shall say a little about José Casanova's piece 'Beyond European and American Exceptionalisms: towards a

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 contemporary 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 become 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, cooption 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 coopted 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 predominantly 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.'

Peter Collins
University of Durham, England