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Book Reviews

Davie, Grace, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead (eds.), 2003, *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*. Aldershot: Ashgate. x + 253pp. £16.99. ISBN: 0754630102.

Predicting religion would seem to be a hazardous task for most commentators of contemporary British religious life, especially those from the discipline of sociology which has an illustrious history of forecasting its decline and eventual disappearance dating back to the subject's founding fathers. However, most of the contributors to this timely collection of articles do not risk making concrete predictions for the future, with the noted exception of Steve Bruce who boldly asserts the disappearance of Christianity from Britain by 2030 in Chapter 4. In this respect, Professor Bruce remains consistent with his well-known position in defence of classic secularization theory. The collection also offers succinct contributions from well-known figures in this debate such as the late Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Paul Heelas, José Casanova and Martyn Percy. The book is organized into three sections—three contributions that re-examine secularization theory; seven chapters that predict the future of British Christianity, and nine chapters that attempt to predict the future of alternative religions. It is in the latter two sections that we find a number of contributions by new scholars that provide a balance to those whose reputations in this area are already well-established.

Although a number of chapters provide case studies based on both quantitative and qualitative fieldwork, on the whole these tend to be micro studies of particular movements or trends in contemporary religious life of great interest to the specialist but not necessarily providing insight into the wider future of British religious life. It would seem to me that very few, with good reason, would rise to the challenge offered to the contributors *to make a prediction about the state of religion in 30 or 50 years from now and to be as bold and as concrete in the prediction as you can* (p. 1). For myself I would question the methodology here, although acknowledging that prediction is part of the task of social science research. It is true that interested parties such as educationists, politicians, religious professionals, and health practitioners would be the beneficiaries of accurate prediction of British religious life but the best we can offer is to hazard guesses based on current trends. Yes, church attendance in institutional forms of Christianity continues to decline and personal spiritualities to grow, but, as pointed out by Bryan Wilson, the element of prophecy and other various forms of charisma can at any time create renewals, revivals, and renaissances that make social science predictions extremely hazardous. David Martin reminds us that secularization theorists are not neutral observers of an objective social phenomenon but rather carry their own ideological baggage (p. 30) but more significantly, for those engaged in field work, who need to take note of their own loyalties and autobiographies, is the fact that in our post-modern world we face serious rapid transformation and 'turbulence' in most institutions. The combination of the demands of reflexivity on the researcher and the volatile nature of the world of the researched would, I suggest, dampen the ardour of even the committed 'predictor' of religion.

On the whole, the collection assumes the classic European definition of secularization made familiar to us by Bryan Wilson and restated with strength by Steve Bruce, in which the

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process is linked to modernization. However, José Casanova's contribution provides a very useful comparative overview of the USA and other nations in Europe with the British experience and provides the reader with a pause for thought with regard to simplistic cause and effect arguments that link secularization and modernization. A variation of the modernization theme was found in the introduction written by the editors in which 'hard religions' with a 'dynamic of danger' were linked to conditions of suffering and poverty. The example was cited of the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, I did not find this convincing. After all, there was no less poverty in Afghanistan when it was a tolerant Sufi-influenced nation prior to the Russian invasion. Nor does the argument of poverty explain the rise of certain forms of Christianity in the USA, or Jewish orthodox revival in Israel or the manifestations of Hinduva in India. It would seem to me that an exploration of colonialism and nationalism is called for here.

However, the book does not present only one point of view and there is much to provoke thought and discussion in its contents. In spite of my small differences of opinion, this is an excellent collection and essential reading for undergraduate and postgraduate students of contemporary Western spirituality and recent transformations of British religious life. It should be read alongside the recent publication of the Kendal project findings by two of the same authors.

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Heelas, P., L. Woodhead, B. Seel, B. Szerszynski, K. Tusting, (2005), *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell. xi + 204pp. £15.99. ISBN: 1405119594.

The changing place of religion in western societies has been for decades, and continues to be, one of the central debates within the sociology of religion and allied disciplines. For some commentators, religious practice and belief are in terminal decline, others see belief persisting—if not flourishing—beyond the institutional confines of church and chapel. This volume, which draws on the results of a two year research project conducted in the town of Kendal, aims to contribute to this debate by testing the claim that a 'spiritual revolution' is taking place in the west.

The central argument developed in the volume is that a cultural process which the authors term 'the subjective turn' is radically transforming all aspects of social life, including in the area of religious belief and practice where, they argue, religions which emphasize a transcendent source of spiritual authority are slowly giving way to spiritualities which emphasize the subjective life of the individual. Thus, in the case of Kendal, while the number of those attending congregational services on an average Sunday has fallen to roughly 7.9 percent of the population over the course of the last few decades, the number of those attending holistic events has risen from almost zero to 1.6 percent. More broadly, the authors note that a number of recent polls in the UK have shown that the numbers of individuals professing belief in a personal God have been eclipsed by those who belief in 'some sort of spirit or life force'.

While making these broad claims, however, the authors are also attentive to the varying fortunes of the different types of religious congregations. Drawing on their earlier fourfold typology of congregations, they note that congregations of experiential humanity and experiential difference are faring better than congregations of difference and humanity. Thus, while the Quakers, Unitarians, and Spiritualists, for example, are faring 'relatively well', Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are faring 'relatively badly', while the Roman Catholics, Methodists, and the Church of England are faring worst. In addition, the authors are also aware of the varying patterns of engagement with the holistic milieu and offer some possible explanations for the

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preponderance of females and those in the mid-life-onwards age cohorts within such activities (although, interestingly, there is no discussion of the impact of social class on engagement with the holistic milieu).

As well as examining the relative fortunes of congregational religion and holistic spirituality in the UK, the authors also offer a comparative analysis of the fortunes of both in the USA. Here they find congregational religion in much more robust shape, involving more of the population (approx 24 percent) and declining slower than in the UK. However, they also note a large number of people involved within the holistic milieu (around 8 percent of the population). On this basis, perhaps counter-intuitively, they claim that, if there is indeed a spiritual revolution taking place, it is more advanced in the USA than in the UK.

This is on the whole an excellent book, which no doubt will influence debates and research in the area for years to come. The authors' discussion is wide-ranging, covering both qualitative and quantitative data gathered during their fieldwork along with the findings of various surveys into religious belief and practice in the UK and the USA. While eschewing predictions, they also offer a series of possible scenarios for how both congregational religion and holistic spirituality may fare over the next few decades, concluding that by the middle of the century both will probably be similar in size (with roughly 3-4 percent of the population being active in each during a typical week).

The only issue I would raise with this volume is a theoretical one and concerns the authors' notion of 'the subjective turn'. As this is really the driving force for the changes in the religious landscape outlined in the book, I would have expected to have seen more discussion of the broad sociocultural factors that have brought this process about rather than it being taken as a given.

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Harris, Elizabeth J., and Ramona Kauth (eds.), 2004, *Meeting Buddhists*. Leicester: Christians Aware. 300pp. £11.50. ISBN 187337223X (pbk).
(Obtainable from Christians Aware, + £3.25 p&p, 2 Saxby Street, Leicester, LE2 0ND.)

This is the fourth volume in a multi-authored series which the Leicester-based organization called Christians Aware has sponsored over the years. The other volumes focus on Meeting Muslims; Meeting Hindus and Meeting Sikhs. They are intended as a resource for people, mainly Christians, who seek to understand something of the other, and the emphasis on 'meeting' means in this case reading essays on a variety of themes by different Buddhists and those engaged in dialogue with Buddhists. Of the 26 contributors, 21 are Buddhists from a variety of traditions (Theravada, Zen, Nichiren NRMs, Tibetan, FWBO, Shingon and Pure Land) and cultural backgrounds (France, Burma, Japan [2], South Africa, Tibet, Sri Lanka and the UK [14]). The interest of the volume for those whose focus is fieldwork is an emphasis made by Elizabeth Harris in her Introduction that the challenge is to 'try to enter Buddhism on its own terms' and in Ramona Kauth's encouragement to the reader to visit some of the many Buddhist centres in UK and meet practitioners, using the text of the book as a starting point for face to face meetings.

The main text of the book begins with excellent introductory histories of Buddhism worldwide by Peter Harvey, well known for his writing on Buddhism, and of Buddhism in the UK by Helen Waterhouse who has done pioneering local fieldwork written up in her Buddhism in Bath. The next sections give three personal views of the Buddha, followed by very different presentations of the Dharma or core teaching from Theravada, Zen and Tibetan standpoints

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and then views of the Sangha with voices from a Theravada, Western Buddhist Order and Vajrayana practitioners. These three headings reflect the 'three jewels' or 'three refuges' of Buddhist teaching. There follows a section on Places and Symbols which gives an insight into a range of centres in UK and is followed by a focus on the variety and commonality of practice in seven different Buddhist groups. In this section the detailed pieces by Shenpen Hookham on 'Key Ideas Common to All Buddhist Traditions' and that by the late Venerable Rewata Dhamma on 'Samatha and Vipassana Meditation' are notable. The final two themes are 'Buddhism and Women and Christian Approaches to Buddhism'. In the section on women Elizabeth Harris' Introduction and the insights of Martine Batchelor (based on her experience in Korea) and Koko Kawanami (based on her knowledge of Japan and Burma) weave a rich and realistic tapestry of women's lives and the issues being worked out by Buddhists in relation to their texts and history. In the final section the writers are very open and honest about how their lives and faiths have changed as a result of their encounters with Buddhists.

One of the striking features of this volume is its excellent colour illustrations, many of them full-page, of Buddhist sites and activities from all over the Buddhist world. Some are of classical works of art and architecture, but many are contemporary, such as the striking sculptural presentations of The Four Signs of Old Age, Sickness, Death and a Holy Renouncer seen by the Buddha and which triggered his search for Enlightenment. These are by P.D. Ranjith and are reproduced separately on pp. 74-77 and together on p. 103. All the photographs, most of which come from the camera of Elizabeth Harris, give a real sense of vitality to the text and evoke a living tradition with people of all ages and from many countries involved in making offerings, talking, celebrating etc. So many inexpensive books resort to black and white photographs and very dull images without people and any sense of activity. These are vibrant and full of interest, which is so appropriate for something as dynamic as religious life.

Each chapter is fully annotated and accompanied by an appendix of further reading on the chosen themes. Other appendices give useful web sites, places to visit, details of contributors, a glossary of terms in Pali and Sanskrit, extracts from texts and basic lists which summarize some Buddhist teachings.

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Savage-Smith, Emilie (ed.), 2004, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 400pp. £82.50. ISBN 086078715X (hbk).

Magic and Divination in Early Islam is a book of two parts: the first provides four contributions on magic, whilst the latter section has five dedicated to divination. The editor of the book makes a distinction between magic, which seeks to change the course of events by calling upon a superhuman power, and divination which merely seeks to predict future events (p. xiii). Both are put under the microscope of some detailed historical research which examines the manifestations and roles of amulets, talismans, astrology, the occult powers of plants, the evil eye, supernatural beings such as demons and *djinn* in everyday Muslim life.

Francis Peters in his article 'Hermes and Harran: The Roots of Arabic-Islamic Occultism' allows the reader to become aware of the syncretic nature of occult beliefs and practices in the early Islamic world. Although many Arabs continued to live in rural environs, relatively isolated from the great urban civilizations, maintaining folk-beliefs and practices inherited from their forefathers, increasingly from the eighth century onwards, the great centres of the Near East belonged to them by right of conquest. Peters argues that the occult works associated with Hermes Trismegistos were absorbed into the Muslim world as much as a generation

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before Plato and Aristotle. In addition, Persian, Indian and Greek astronomy, astrology, medicine and alchemy were known as early as the late-eighth century.

Such syncretism has always been anathema to the conservatively religious, and both magic and divination were to have their critics, and although Yahya Michot provides us with examples of Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwas* against astrology (pp. 277-340), nevertheless, as demonstrated by George Saliba's article 'The Role of Astrology in Mediaeval Islamic Society', the criticisms of the more orthodox *ulema* did not prevent the widespread practices both in the marketplace and in the court.

One of the positive aspects of this work, is that it demonstrates that magic and divination, at least in the classical Islamic world, is beginning to attract serious consideration. But as pointed out by Michael Dols, the study of magic has received little attention from contemporary Islamic scholars (p. 262). Dols suggests a 'cover-up' which may not accurately describe the reasons for its absence in the literature. Modern scholarship written by Muslims tends to be apologetic in tone and often functions as a defence of Islam, promoting the religion as rational. Thus magical beliefs and practices tend to be perceived as part of the decline of Islamic civilization in the late Middle Ages. In addition, the term 'magic' used in opposition to 'religion' is problematic. The editor remarks that a 'strictly anthropological approach can also blur the margins of religion and magic' (p. xvi) but in doing so, the anthropological 'blurring' may in this case be more true to the spirit of Islam. As pointed out by Dols, social anthropologists have helped historians to deal with magical practices and beliefs as a natural part of social life and not as an 'exotic or embarrassing excrescence' (p. 89). However, in the Muslim perception of the world, religion and magic were always indistinguishable. When the editor defines magic as seeking to change the course of events by calling upon a superhuman power, it should be remembered that even up to the present day, for Muslims the superhuman power is God or one of his chosen intercessors. Emilie Savage-Smith is correct to point out that dichotomies characteristic of European categorizations of magic and religion such as 'high' and 'low', 'learned' and 'popular', 'prayers' and 'spells', 'white' and 'black' do not work successfully in Islam (p. xi).

First, this is because the Qur'an itself not only affirms the existence of supernatural beings such as the *djinn*, but the book is used as the strongest protection to counteract the work of evil. Its verses form the talismans that protect against disease and the evil eye and the religious leaders of the Muslim world have traditionally played their role in popular medicine. Tewfik Canaan reminds us that the 'ancient peoples as well as the present inhabitants of the Orient resort to supernatural beings who are believed to be stronger than the evil powers causing disease and misfortune, namely to God, angels, prophets, saints and holy books' (p. 129). As pointed out by Dols, magic for the Muslim was often 'supercharged prayer' (p. 88) and sanctioned by the authority of countless Hadith attributed to the Prophet. When Dols states that magic was a sensitive issue because it 'encroached upon the preserve of established religion', I would agree up to a point—for the ultra-conservative it may have encroached, in that it provided an alternative rival source of authority, namely the exorcist and the magician but for many it was established religion, or, at least, the only one that they knew.

The genius of early Islam was to transform the beliefs and practices of the Arab tribes into a religion that could be adapted to very different civilizations, yet maintaining the primacy of the Arab revelation. The role of the magician and the exorcist in the ancient world became the domain of the religious specialist, someone with a more intimate relationship with the one God, in the Islamic world. When Dols points out that by the later Middle Ages, magic seems to have come out of the closet and like Sufism gain a modicum of respectability (p. 93), I would argue that it is because the two have become virtually synonymous with each other. And so it remains to the present day in much of the Muslim world. When the editor critiques anthropologists for assuming that practices current today remain essentially unchanged from those

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in antiquity or the medieval period, she may be right. However, the importance of this book is that it allows for comparison. The fieldworker of contemporary practices belonging to the realm of the 'pragmatic' dimension of religious life in the Muslim world can only welcome the such excellent historical scholarship. I only have one small criticism: the anachronism of the term 'Muhammedan' used in Tewfik Canaan's excellent piece of research on deciphering Arabic talismans belongs to another age. The article was first published in 1936 when such terminology to describe Muslims was considered acceptable by non-Muslim scholars. It is inaccurate to continue using it, and at least a proviso by the editor in the introduction may have helped to alleviate any offence caused.

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