

Reviews

READING RELIGION IN TEXT AND CONTEXT: REFLECTIONS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE IN RELIGIOUS MATERIALS, by Elisabeth Arweck and Peter Collins (eds), (*Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006*). Pp. xvi+193, £47.50 hbk.

MATERIALIZING RELIGION: EXPRESSION, PERFORMANCE AND RITUAL, by Elisabeth Arweck and William Keenan (eds), (*Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006*), Pp. xvi+242, £55.00 hbk.

For a number of reasons, these two collections of essays deserve critical attention. Both emerge from recent conferences convened by the British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group. Surprisingly, this study group is the third largest in the British Sociological Association and in international terms it is second only to its equivalent in the U.S.A. The publishing record of the group is significant in sociology in the U.K., these volumes being the third and fourth to emerge from Ashgate. There is another reason for interest in these volumes. Many prominent figures in the sociology of religion have died or retired recently so it interesting to appraise the vigour of the study group and see if it can still punch far above its weight in international comparisons.

While there are no dominant figures in these collections, the diversity of interests, the creativity and the quality of the papers indicates that the study group is in good shape. With eleven essays in the volume edited with Peter Collins, and fifteen in the volumes edited with William Keenan, Elisabeth Arweck has been very industrious in producing two volumes in the same year. Impeccably edited, with good quality indexes in each, and extensive bibliographies attached to the 26 essays in the two collections, there is much that is stimulating, original and insightful in these volumes. Each volume has a well cast and detailed introductory chapter written by the editors. The volumes are well worth having and are likely to be excellent teaching resources.

The strength of the two volumes lies in their organisation of a large number of topics in terms of grounded practice, where text requires manifestation and response and where religious imperatives need to be given material forms of expression. Materialization refers to the embedded and embodied properties of religions and their need to make and mark cultural distinctions. Dealing with forms of channelling and realisation for text and material necessity, the essays amply illustrate the diversity of settings under which religions operate. The religions examined range from Quakerism, Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, Islam and Sikhism to feminist and pagan forms of worship. Music, architecture, pilgrimage, religious clothing, aesthetics and taste, dance, the stance of females in relation to the dying, not forgetting a sparkling essay on the left hand, Tibetans in exile in North America are amongst topics covered in both volumes.

In reading all the essays, one is struck by the unexpected directions from which some contributors come to topics in original and illuminating ways that throw unexpected light on larger adjacent areas in the sociology of religion. For instance, the volume on materializing religion contains an unexpected treat from New Zealand by Rountree on magical power in feminist witches' rituals. Sensitive, insightful, and persuasive, much can be learnt from this account when some of its insights are taken back to characterise Catholic liturgies. A companion essay

in the same volume by Harrington, 'Magical Ritual in Modern Pagan Witchcraft' is also highly recommended for its originality and its ethnography. These essays relate to another striking point in both collections: the excellence of the writing in all contributions where space is limited and where a lot of ethnography on some unexpected topics needs to be fleshed out on a cramped terrain. In both collections some essays manage to plant flowers on stony territories in ways that seem foolhardy, but which draw out some wonderful insights.

These emerge in the valiant efforts of Bernice Martin to demonstrate that South American Pentecostalism has an aesthetic and that charges of bad taste are untenable. A similar sense of wresting sociological insights from improbable material emerges in David Martin's account of the Englishness and Protestant qualities of Handel. Both essays appear in the materializing volume. Similar creative efforts against the odds emerge in considerations of sacred space in both volumes. These arise in three superb essays on ritual, embodiment and architectural expression in Quakerism, Pentecostal and Charismatic Assemblies. The essays on architecture elegantly indicate how layouts of places for worship take on subtle characteristics to reflect needs and changing styles of worship. The forms of worship of Quakerism, Pentecostals and Charismatic groups might seem to offer little fodder for characterisation in terms of ritual, yet the analyses of Collins, Coleman and Gold yield rich and telling insights. While ingenuous in its use, the term 'wrappings' employed by Collins and Dandelion, in the materialization volume to characterise their rites does not really work. In their account 'wrappings' are used in relation to the ambiguities surrounding the regulation of silence in Quaker groups and in non-Conformist forms of worship. Again, the sociology is subtle. Somehow, what emerges is an endemic facet of such assemblies, something attributed to these non-Conformist and Quaker styles of worship. A more intentional property to the term would emerge if 'wrappings' were to be applied to rich complex rites, such as those of Catholicism and the Orthodox churches. Perhaps this concept illustrates the way sociologists invoke metaphors theologians would find estranging and pastorally unhelpful. Yet, it is the sociologists who are revealing how ritual 'works'; not how it should.

The essays in the text volume are more variable than those in the companion volume. Sweeney has produced an elegant but odd defence of *Dignitatis Humanae* against charges of Bryan Wilson of totalitarianism in Catholicism that seems to justify his notion of secularisation. An insignificant document is used to smash an insignificant contribution to the debate on religion. The essays on relics and 'Baraka' among Sufis in Nottingham (U.K.) and on text and context in Sikkim are scholarly and striking in ethnographic terms, but are curiously unproductive in yielding interesting insights. They are worthy rather than illuminating, certainly by comparison with another contribution in the same volume from Schaefer. She has produced a vivid piece of writing, with flashes of immediacy on music and revivalism well illustrating the themes of the volume on how text is put into practice in some unexpected settings.

The other Catholic contribution in the volume, from Ewan Ingleby is a pleasing little diamond to find. Drawing from his Ph.D. on seminary life, he provides a lucid, generous and appreciative account that owes much to his own two years at the English College in Rome where he studied for the priesthood. Far from producing an embittered, cliché-ridden and cynical account of seminary, as might sadly be expected, Ingleby has written a warm, gentle, elegiac, insightful and persuasive reflection on seminary life where students are there to test their vocations. His essay is original and salutary in indicating how life in the seminary can sometimes be about *not* finding a vocation. This is a very useful essay to have. Another creative essay is by Kim Knott on how the left hand and text can be combined to yield unexpected understandings. Pointing in other directions, Chambers has a very well written and clear contribution on Human Rights and Texts. Finally,

Gold has produced a very apt account of the response of American Evangelical audiences to the *Left Behind* series of books where science fiction and biblical insight are woven together in unexpected ways. This is a fascinating and original piece of work.

In some ways, the materialising volume is the more pungent of the two and perhaps the most surprising in the contrasts drawn in its contributions. The brief on materializing religion is undoubtedly wider and perhaps the diversity of essays in the volumes is not something surprising to find. Apart from the contributions mentioned earlier, four essays in this volume relate to Catholic considerations. The contribution on the Festival of St. Joseph at Valencia, Spain and on Fátima contains good quality ethnography but is a bit too gentle in drawing distinctions of theoretical importance from the field. The essay on the appropriation and regulation of the sacred at Fátima is likewise interesting, particularly for being the product of a Turkish sociologist of religion with an Islamic background. His account is fresh and sympathetic to Catholic considerations, but is a little inconclusive. The other two contributions are rather more provocative and might cause some theologians to wonder at what sociologists of religion select for their analyses. Again, some useful insights emerge from material that seems slight, perhaps indicating that if theologians bask in grace to realise their insights, some sociologists seem to operate with a Divine alchemy to produce a plethora of pleasing insights. These contributions are not perfect, but they are interesting.

William Keenan, who writes exceedingly well on the relationship between sociology and theology, returns to a theme he has explored earlier. Religious dress as a matter of sociological concern might exasperate theologians, yet Keenan has written brilliantly before in this unexpected area. His concerns are with the politics of religious attire for Marist Brothers at the point of the foundation of the order in early nineteenth century France. As he indicates, 'religious is riven with sartorial angst' (p. 118). He points to an irony that detraditionalization of religious dress occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as it took on enormous significance in other sectors of society, notably in relation to Islam. Of late, perhaps the most unexpected term to enter the argot of sociology is the *hijab*. Its public use lies at the heart of debate on the politics of veiling. Bizarrely, Catholicism ejected as impediments to modernity forms of religious clothing which in the case of Islam, have become symbolic markers for contested identities in secular worlds their religion finds estranging. The sections dealing with Marist sartorial politics gets a bit internal and overly detailed. The conclusion to the essay is oddly diffuse. Yet, there is much to be learnt from this particular contribution.

The unexpected nature of the other essay, written by a Finnish sociologist of religion is well expressed in its title: 'The Modern *Pietà*: Gendered Embodiment and the Religious Imaginary by the Side of the Dying'. The comparison is stimulating between those 'being there' for the dying who are predominantly female and the image of the *pietà* as cradling those passing on from life. This thesis on the feminisation of death involves a degree of imperialism regarding male capacities to cope with the dying, which are given short shrift. As she indicates 'the sacred image of a motherly woman escorting the dying . . . [does] not "invite" or encourage men to take the embodied position by the side of the dying' (p. 212). Oddly, apart from the use of the metaphor, the religious dimension of dying seems to vanish in the advancement of recognition of the significance of the female in facilitating a 'good death' by 'being there'. The essay is very sensitively written, even if at times it reveals a less than humane treatment of the dying in Finnish hospices. Seldom has a gap been better chronicled that justifies recourse to the last rites of the Church. Despite efforts to be compassionate, there something cold about this account. Rather than affirm stereotypes regarding gender, the dying might yearn instead for sacramental help in their departure from this vale of tears.

All the essays in these collections make their own individual contributions and deserve careful study. In presenting such a diversity of topics in a coherent way in these two volumes, the editors of both are to be congratulated. On the basis of these two volumes, the study group is well capable of producing the sociological goods with a new generation of practitioners.

KIERAN FLANAGAN

CTS Concise Histories: HERESY THROUGH THE AGES by Fr Jerome Bertram; THE INQUISITION by Fernando Cervantes; THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND by Raymond Edwards; THE EARLY CHURCH by Fr Anthony Meredith SJ; THE CRUSADES by Jonathan Riley-Smith (Catholic Truth Society: London, 2006–7). Pp. 80 (approx. each), £1.95 (each) pbk.

The media is the main source of ideas about history, and especially the history of the Church. Books such as *Q* and *The Name of the Rose* and films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, amongst myriads of others, can be powerful vehicles for misinformation and negative bias. Given that most people have neither the time nor the interest to sit down and read real history books, as opposed to watching a film or reading a novel, there is always a market for short, authoritative but accessible works which can both present real history and thus counter such misinformation. This collection of pamphlets from CTS are precisely such works. They tackle head on some of the most controversial aspects of Church history and while never avoiding the mistakes made and sins committed by those involved, they put their subjects into context and provide what might be, for some, surprising information and analysis. They are all excellent, and written in an engaged but non-polemical style.

Fr Jerome's work on heresy begins by making the very reasonable point that all societies censure and punish certain sorts of behaviour, and that such behaviour stems from certain erroneous ideas. He gives theories of racial superiority and the system of apartheid as one example among others. Given that the Christian Church is a real society it has had to deal with ideas and behavior which threatened the saving truths upon which it is built. It is not the purpose of the work to examine the best way of dealing with heresy, but to establish its reality and then divide it into several distinct but related categories. Thus the rest of the work deals with heresies concerning; the nature of God, the nature of Christ, Salvation, the nature of the Church. The final section is entitled *A Compendium of all the Heresies: Modernism*, where Fr Jerome explains Pius X's views. He concludes that Truth matters and that the proper response to untruth is 'not anger but sorrow and patient explanation...'

Fernando Cervantes' work, while it opens with the origins of the Papal Inquisition, deals largely with the Spanish inquisition. This is reasonable enough, as this is what most people mean when they talk about 'The Inquisition'. The most important point here is that it was a royal institution, albeit authorized by the Papacy and staffed by churchmen. While decrying such royal policies as the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and the later expulsion of the Moriscos, Cervantes shows that the Spanish Inquisition was not fuelled by racial and ethnic hatred, but a desire, shared by most European countries of the time, for religious unity (p. 34). The Inquisition itself, especially after 1484, was stringently overseen, and inquisitors acting illegally or over-zealously were duly removed and punished. It had no authority over Jews or Muslims. He also points out the facts that many Conversos supported the establishment of the Inquisition, that Spain was spared