

way, the book is a valuable contribution for anyone who is looking for a deeper understanding of church teaching on marriage and family life.

PIA MATTHEWS

MASS EXODUS: CATHOLIC DISAFFILIATION IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA SINCE VATICAN II by Stephen Bullivant, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019*, pp. 309, £25.00, hbk

The state of religion in British society presents an odd polarity of the virtual disappearance of Christianity from the public square counterbalanced by the rise of Islam. It has come to dominate the concerns of the sociology of religion as reflected in publications, conference themes and research grants. Such is the erosion of Christianity that it is now commonplace to speak of Britain being a post-Christian society. Further evidence of this demise is illustrated in the substantial numbers listing themselves as of 'no religion' in the Census of England and Wales 2011, hence the assumption that secularisation has triumphed in a society denoted as post-secular, a term which has gained widespread sociological acceptance. Its ascendance coincides with a wider societal sense of fracture, distrust in public institutions and the reign of cynicism and disbelief. This bleak state of affairs has drawn attention to three interesting queries.

First, why is Islam so viable and thriving as a religion with apparently few problems of transmission? This vitality might suggest that religious survival is based on resistance to modernity rather than a capitulation to it as reflected in the strategies of modernisation and of opening to the world which Vatican II inaugurated. This leads to the second question, one which the sociologist Kes de Groot has well documented in the case of the Netherlands, as to why renewal and decline have gone hand in hand since Vatican II? Thirdly, although presumed dead, secularisation has sprouted into many-headed-hydra, whose heads can be identified as virtual religions ranging from the Jedi and Vegans to zealous advocates of climate change, so leaving organised religions, such as Catholicism, with Wilson's cutting diagnosis as inconsequential. Clearly, something has gone wrong in Catholicism in its readings of how to connect with contemporary culture. By tracing matters back to Vatican II and the Spirit of it which followed, Bullivant has supplied a courageous, timely and well documented verdict for an inquest on the unanticipated outcomes of that pivotal Council.

Many items and insights will be familiar, but unfamiliar when brought into a critical narrative backed up by a 33-page bibliography. Very much a researcher whose interests relate to sociology and history, Bullivant is concerned with the issue of disaffiliation, or disengagement from Catholicism. An attraction of the study is that it pairs the United Kingdom with the United States to draw out convergences of similarity thus undermining

charges of exceptionalism against secularisation which were deemed to make the term unviable. Much of the value of the work lies in the way Bullivant explores the paradox of Vatican II of opening out to the recognition of the place of the laity in the Church but who disaffiliated in increasing numbers after the Council. This decline is well analysed in the amount of quantitative data explored in chapter 2. Consideration of immigration to the United Kingdom from the European Union, Africa and Asia might have indicated that the weakening of affiliation, commitment and identity was even greater in the United Kingdom. This data is well supplemented by some excellent qualitative material in chapter 3 on stages of disaffiliation and the reasons given by some of the laity for their departures. Particularly valuable in the study is an excellent chapter 4, 'The Night before', on the decline in Catholic practice before the Council.

In his pivotal chapter 5, he suggests a 'liturgical time bomb' went off in the 1960s and the 1970s leading to his chapter 6, aptly entitled 'the morning after' where the self-induced destabilisation of rite ran rampant. Whereas conferences and consultations on liturgy attracted thousands, before during and immediately after the Council now, hardly anybody would turn up to such gatherings, such is the indifference the issue of the right rite for the times has generated. For Catholics already weakened in liturgical affiliation, the revelations regarding child abuse from 2002 was a blow too much. In an almost fatalistically titled chapter 'Unto the Third and Fourth Generations' Bullivant surveys their outcomes notably with the collapse of plausibility structures that bound the laity into commitment and identity.

Bullivant makes many credible points, one being that the discouragement of devotions during and after the Council had a significant impact on the decline in mass attendance, as commitment unravelled. As with Douglas and others, the loosening to the virtual point of obliteration of the Friday fast had serious implications for the loss of Catholic identity. He is also telling on the degree to which *Humanae Vitae* 'invented' the dissident theologian but had a catastrophic effect with the decline in confessions, but less so on mass attendance which was falling two years before the document emerged in 1968 (pp. 171–187; 203).

It is likely that the study will receive a cold response from sociologists, theologians and liturgists, which would be a great pity. Sociologists will dislike the study for rendering the issue of secularisation complex for theological reasons. Too often falls in church attendance are treated in terms of supposedly fated social processes such as urbanisation or of the loss of the power of religion to bind communal affiliations. These have enabled sociology to detach religion from its theological superstructure. Inconveniently, and even if the consequences seem negative, Bullivant binds sociological insight into theological diagnosis of how to read the signs of the times. This suggests that Vatican II inaugurated an intractable process likely to discomfort theologians more than sociologists who are more habituated to wrestling with issues of contingency. The question is raised over the priority of theology over such social and cultural issues. The

dilemma was encapsulated by Isambert's notion of internal secularisation, published in French in 1976. The term referred to the way the churches treated surrounding beliefs as dominant and as posing the ultimate criteria of accommodation. But that trust in the hegemony of modernity expressed in Vatican II was misplaced, for two decades later disbelief in its dominance gave rise to a replacement term: post-modernity. It secured the continued existence of secularisation but leaving it with an awkward query as to what replacement beliefs should constitute.

Vatican II has had little domestic impact on sociological thought. It only shifted in the 1980s when intermittent but highly critical responses were made to what seemed counter-productive outcomes to the Council. These comments came from sociology's super stars such as Bourdieu, whose writings on culture have had a pervasive impact on the modernity theologians have sought to scrutinise. His theories on institution in culture came from the discovery of an outraged work published in French in 1972 on the effects of liturgical reform after Vatican II. It provided for Bourdieu the basis for his understanding of the symbolic revolution wrought by Manet. The disquieting facet of Bullivant's study is the gap he exposes between the rhetoric of expectation in the documents of Vatican II, perhaps reflecting the cultural needs of the times and the forms of accountability sociology generates in response. It is one thing to admire Newman's stress on the place of the laity in the Church and another to see this recognition as a form of misrecognition of their needs, hence the mass exodus which Bullivant chronicles.

Bravely, in his epilogue to the study, Bullivant raises a question which theologians would be reluctant to pose: 'did the Council fail?' Certainly, he documents well that stated in their own terms, the aspirations of the Council failed, and were seen to, in the early stages of its implementation. In his conclusion, Bullivant rightly suggests that reversal of the mass exodus after the Council would require a separate study, hopefully, one which he will undertake. The thrust of his work is to indicate that the present slide into disaffiliation is not to be understood by reference to dialogue with science but with sociology. Shifts in its reflections on contemporary culture, such as on the need to attend to the re-invention of tradition would have drawn the attention of theologians to memory and the heritage industry, suggesting linkages with the past and not their uncoupling as in Vatican II.

It would be easy to dismiss this work as the product of a conservative, another disillusioned survivor of past liturgical wars. But Bullivant is young, a convert to Catholicism in 2008 and one with notable publications on atheism to his credit, but is one whose exposure of what Weber would describe as 'inconvenient facts' gives him a certain immunity from such facile dismissals. Given the expectations surrounding reflexivity (disciplinary self-awareness), the study should have incorporated more than a footnote reference (p. 11) to his views on moral and religious issues. These should have appeared either as an appendix or as part of the introduction. But the second reason for attending to this study is the

growing realisation of decline in church attendance over the past 60 years, where the long sounding echo of 1968 is fading into history. Contrary, or perhaps because of the ordination of women, the Anglican Church in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. are facing the implications of a projected 'zero-member date', one which varies from 2040 to 2064. Catholicism is not immune to such possibilities, but might be in a better position to re-calibrate its strategies for reading the signs of the times, even if the outcomes are radically conservative and unfashionable, involving as they might, the rehabilitation of notions of sin and salvation which bear on the dark side of modernity which Vatican II so downplayed.

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