

casting light on basic historical material which has been ignored in previous histories. Most of this material is biographical in nature. Thus we have Hugh Fenning OP's sketch of the neglected eighteenth century archbishops of Dublin, and Donal Kerr revives Daniel Murray, the forgotten archbishop of Dublin who was, so we are told, the rock on which the well known pastoral achievements of Cullen were to be built. Cullen himself is looked at afresh by Ciaran O'Carroll, as is the more recent John McQuaid who it seems has suffered since his death in the 1970s with the reputation of being simply an agent of reaction in the post conciliar Irish Church.

Thirdly, many of the authors have attempted to widen what the introduction refers to as the vertical and clerical tradition of ecclesiastical history which has been so dominant in the treatment of Dublin. So the editors have included essays on lay movements, female religious orders, and patterns of devotion and 'religiosity', which although well written, make a somewhat vague contribution to the work as a whole. Two articles on architecture may seem excessive, although McCarthy's treatment of the Greek Pro-Cathedral makes interesting reading.

This book sets itself an ambitious project, with the hope of injecting sudden life into this neglected corner of Irish history. And considering the heavy weight historians who have contributed to it, and the quality of their research and writing, it is very likely to prove a success. It would however prove unsatisfactory to those with only a general interest in Irish church history, or as an introduction to the narrative framework of this subject.

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RELIGION AS A CHAIN OF MEMORY by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, trans. by Simon Lee *Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000. Pp. x + 204, £50.00 hbk, £14.99 pbk.*

Although French thinkers, such as Foucault, Bourdieu and Maffesoli have made their mark on sociology with their concerns with power, culture and the tribe, the writings of those working in sociology of religion are less well known. Whereas Anglo-American sociology of religion is dominated by an agenda of secularisation, sects and individualism of belief that betrays a Protestantism, French specialists operate with a symbiotic, if not stormy relationship to Catholicism. It operates as a foil that marks French sociology of religion with panache, a wonderful theoretical and conceptual imagination, an assiduous concern with classification and a vibrant sense of context of the field of belief and its social construction. Unfortunately, the writings of many French sociologists of religion, such as Séguy, Isambert, Suaud and Dibie remain untranslated. It is against this background, that one greatly welcomes this translation of Hervieu-Léger's *La Religion pour Mémoire*, first published in 1993. As editor of the Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions and Director of Studies at the Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, in Paris, she stands at the centre of French sociology of religion. With a distinguished range of research into

secularisation and modernity, charismatic movements, ecology and religion, and conversion and pilgrimage, she is in a good position to convey a grasp of the domestic contours of French debates on the sociology of religion.

This is very much a sociologist's book in its concerns with the definitional problems of religion. Although the prose is complex, and the analysis is terse and cast in unexpected turns of phraseology, this book is well worth the struggle for non-sociologists. It opens out many new vistas of understanding of religion, secularisation, the sacred, modernity and collective memory. The study has much to commend to the theologian willing to work at what sociologists are striving to articulate about religious belief, its construction and destruction in postmodernity. Rather than being an instrument of the demise of religion, tradition is treated as a basis of its resuscitation. This positive reading of tradition does not purely reflect the exigencies of religion and its propagation, but relates to wider issues of collective recollection, notably those raised about French culture in Pierre Nora's volumes, *Realms of Memory*. For some, however, religion might well denote memories best forgotten.

Thus, a cultural amnesia regarding religious memories has attractions for a society that is increasingly post-Christian. Such amnesia seems all too justified in obliterating the religious memories fuelling the tribal disputes in Northern Ireland. Invoking religious traditions also seems a strategy at odds with the Blairite vision of a civil religion composed of faith communities. In this setting, religious memories seem dangerous and divisive. They sabotage the theology the third way likes to coin. Hervieu-Léger's moves religious memory away from such reductionist and secularising tendencies. Far from being a deadening force, Hervieu-Léger treats tradition as a text to be re-read in the light of contemporary circumstance. This gives it positive functions in the transmission and reproduction of religious belief. Memory is the capacity of religion to live. The emotive and symbolic evocation of a chain of memory, in liturgy, and the elaboration of a body of belief, operates in a dialectic, which 'one can see as tradition in the act of becoming itself (and this) constitutes in our opinion the central dynamic of all religion'. (p. 127. See also pp. 88–92)

The book is divided into three parts: sociological characterisations of religion and the sacred; ways of believing in relation to tradition; and the loss and gain of chains of religious memory. Chapter 1 is illuminating on the politics of the characterisation of religion in French sociology as it sought to move between the demands of science and the ties of Catholicism. In the 1970s, sociologists of religion confused the fragmentation of religion in traditional formats with its demise. As Hervieu-Léger indicates, in the 1990s, religious matters changed unexpectedly with new forms of spirituality emerging in ways that necessitated sociological scrutiny. These changes generated acute problems of characterisation of religion in terms of metaphors of the sacred, a problem endemic in French sociology since Durkheim. She is excellent at drawing attention to the way that such metaphors are

constructed on the basis of a Christian model. Readings of the sacred, at least in France, return the discipline to the implicit sociology of Catholicism, which operates as the root of sociological characterisations of religion, a point she derives from her reading of Isambert. (pp. 48–51) One of the problems the study faces is of characterising the re-circulation of belief from traditional religious forms into ways of believing in other but more profane milieux, such as sport, a point pursued in Chapter 6.

In chapter 4, she draws on Séguy's approach to metaphorical religion. This refers to the way religious concepts are used metaphorically as a resource for coping with modernity. Weber rather than Durkheim is the source of this argument. But Hervieu-Léger sees in Séguy's approach to religion a far more important point: religion is treated as a way of believing. Thus, the sociological issue regarding religion is one of reconstitution. The drawing of metaphors from religion is a crucial means of survival in the dolorous conditions of modernity. (pp. 70–1) Certainly, there is a danger of theologians confusing their own originals with the metaphors of the sacred through which society makes sense of itself. This risk only endorses the need for theologians to attend to the maintenance of their own chains of religious memory, and not just to capitulate to imitations in some sort of moral panic in the face of the forces of secularisation.

Religion, treated as a way of believing, permits a new way of reading an old debate, one where memory has to be invoked to sustain its persistence. It is this emphasis that releases religion from a supposedly fated demise in the face of secularisation. This is to endorse that which theologians would fear: a strategy of resistance to the world. It is curious that it should be left to sociologists to charge theologians with a failure of nerve in this regard. In this chapter, Hervieu-Léger changes the sociological centre of gravity of treatments of religion by moving its consideration from a fracturing social milieu into issues of strategy of re-invention where memory is the ingredient that permits the symbolic to have a lineage, one that secures its credibility. (See especially pp. 79–82)

Her definition of religion entails: the expression of believing; the memory of continuity; and the use of 'legitimizing reference to an authorised version of such memory, that is to say to a tradition'. (p. 97) Memory legitimises the basis of emulation and provides a legitimacy to what is promulgated. It supplies an indispensable root of and for identity. A sociological mandate is given to the need to cultivate chains of religious memory as an antidote to the individualism and fractures wrought by a culture of postmodernity. Thus, Hervieu-Léger marks an advance on Séguy by treating religious memory as the decisive instrument for the reconstitution of religion in the circumstances of postmodernity.

Chapter 7 on the loss of religious memory deals with the loss of an ideal image, a rural peasant form of piety which urbanisation and the values of the 1950s destroyed. This broke a parochial image of memory and the chains of tradition that it forged, where identity was rooted in local lineages that linked to an immediate past. In this regard, secularisation diminishes the bonds of religious memory and in so loosening, it undermines the capacity to believe.

It is chapter 8, on the reinvention of the chain of memory, that convinces one of the importance of this study. The symbolic vacuum and the dislocation of memory modernity effects prompt a need for re-inventions of tradition to legitimise social movements that are distinct outcomes of present circumstances. These religious movements that re-make identity, that re-cast memory, are treated in a highly important section on the notion of elective fraternities. (pp. 149–56) These embody relationships which ties of blood no longer supply. In dealing with new religious communities in France, which can be treated as elective fraternities, she draws out well why these groups need to find past emblems of commitment, such as religious habits, to signify membership and to confirm an identity that needs to be constructed. (pp. 155–56) Far from being an unthinking rehabilitation of what seems best discarded, these elements signify re-inventions that are radical in the social needs they fulfil for those electing to join such fraternities. This need to emblematised religious tokens arises also in the emergence of ethnic religions where the imperative to re-establish identity is equally pressing. Pilgrimage is also treated as a form of rehabilitation of collective memory, a journeying in belief that has expanded enormously in modernity.

In this study, her main concern is with the effects of de-institutionalisation on traditional religions. Like most sociologists who write on religion, she ends in a contempt for Catholic and Protestant liberals who seek to compromise belief with worldly attitudes and who moan at an incapacity to speak the language of the day. (p. 168) These worries miss the point. The main imperative for traditional religious institutions is how to cope with the flexibility of belief, whose believers often exercise a 'subjective fundamentalism', a definiteness of belief, often mis-described as conservative. These searches of orthodoxy often come from those with high scientific and technological qualifications. The totality they derive from their occupations becomes an expectation of subjective realisation in the religious sphere. A similar completeness is required from their religion. These expectations of completeness affirm an enduring sociological point that religions that make demands, which have a definite identity and sets of obligations, thrive, whilst those that transmit an uncertainty of expectation wither.

The central issue for Hervieu-Léger arises over how these subjective and individualised expectations might relate to the strictures and demands of traditional religion. In concluding, she provides an illuminating contrast between Protestantism and Catholicism in the ways they cope with these expectations and how they stand to the issue of the chains of memory and the cultural and symbolic forces they can invoke. (pp. 171–75) One can only endorse her conclusion that 'there is a vast field of investigation for a comparative sociology of traditional religions, which might open onto a more general sociology of the problems of transmission in modern societies'. (p. 176) The absence of a subject index in such an important book is a matter of regret.

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