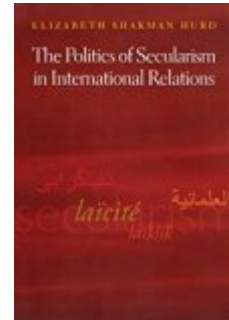


Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations.* Princeton Studies in International History and Politics Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 264 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-691-13466-6.



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Scholars used to take for granted the notion that there was a link between modernization and secularization, based on the radical Enlightenment assumption that the combination of science, education, and democracy would gradually dissolve the religious mindset of the educated classes and eventually also that of the ordinary people. Events in recent decades have forced scholars to rethink the inexorable forward march of the secularization hypothesis and its teleology of modernity. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* is an extremely valuable and thought-provoking contribution to this process. Her main argument is premised on the need to acknowledge secularism as a socially constructed form of political authority in order to better grasp critical, theoretical, and empirical problems in international relations. The book is particularly concerned with the cultural foundations of the U.S.-Iran conflict, the social and religious basis of European opposition to Turkish accession to the European Union, and the role of political Islam in religious resurgence. She provides

an insightful critique of forms of secular authority that emerged out of a profoundly Christian Westphalian moral order.

Hurd argues that we should analyze and evaluate the consequences of secularism as a form of political authority in its own right. It is her contention that traditions of secularism dominate Western ways of organizing religion and politics and yet remain among our most significant unexamined ways and preferences. She seeks to explain “how, why and in what ways does secular political authority form part of the foundation of contemporary international relations theory and practice, and what are the political consequences of this authority in international relations” (p. 1)? Arguing, correctly, that the secularist division between religion and politics is socially and historically constructed, Hurd suggests it is the failure of students of international relations to recognize this that has caused their inability “to properly recognize the power of religion in world politics” (p. 1).

Prior to 9/11, scholars of international relations failed to give a proper accounting of the role of religion and paid it insufficient attention. However, despite popular assumptions about secularization, governments throughout the world during the twentieth century, and certainly no less than they had in preceding centuries, did not neglect religion, its representatives or adherents, and were all too aware of the extent and reach of religious influence and power. From the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which removed religion as a justification for war, the salience of religion for international affairs seemingly declined.[1] Nonetheless, the widespread separation of religion from the ensemble of political institutions that constitute the modern national state and geopolitical system did not mean that religion ceased to play a role in politics or in the constitution of the world order.[2] The potency of religious “soft power” meant that religion was never discarded from state arsenals.[3]

The neglect by scholars of the profound extent to which politics and religion implicated one another can be explained, albeit the reasons are varied and complex. At the most mundane level, the neglect of religion can be attributed, in part, to the fact that international relations was, for a long time, dominated by American scholars working in North American “secular” universities which adopted rather a frigid attitude toward church history and religious studies. Defended by many as a necessary adjunct to the separation of church and state, John Conway also blames the controversial misinterpretation of the alleged conflict between science and religion.[4] In addition, despite the growth of departments devoted to religion, departmental barriers too often prevented profitable collaboration. Perhaps even more instrumental in the neglect of religion is the fact that it is exceedingly complex and too intertwined with other cultural and social forms to be easily isolated. It also raises difficult enough questions on its own. What does “religion” mean? What is the history of this word? What happens

when religion and particular religions are reified in legal and political language? Can we talk about religion without privileging Christianity?

Hurd joins a growing field of international relations scholars tackling these tough questions, who understand that religion is as intricately intertwined with the political as it is with the social and the cultural. While some see the way forward requiring collective scholarly endeavors, Hurd shows much can still be achieved in a single-authored monograph. She adds her voice to those of a range of scholars insistent that religion has never ceased to be an important component of international relations as they call for a fundamental reappraisal of existing paradigms. Peter Berger now argues that the relationship is not between modernization and secularization, as he once thought, but between modernization and religious pluralism.[5] Certainly this is a hypothesis that contributes one way of interpreting the last century and a half. Hurd provides us with an equally important model, one that complements and adds to that of Olivier Roy, who draws clear distinctions between *laïcité* as a characteristically French phenomenon and the secularism of other Western democracies.[6]

At the core of Hurd’s argument is the claim that there are two trajectories of secularism, or two strategies for managing the relationship between religion and politics: laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism. The former represents a separationist narrative in which religion is excluded from politics. The latter is a more accommodationist narrative that presents the Judeo-Christian tradition as the unique basis of secular democracy. While each trajectory defends the separation of church and state, they do so in different ways and with different justifications and political effects. Laicism is portrayed as pretending to be neutral, as regards the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to achieve a fixed and final separation between religion and politics. Although seemingly above and beyond the separa-

tion debate, the politics of laicism is, in fact, quite complex. In contrast, Judeo-Christian secularism does not repudiate religion, rather it sees itself as the basis for secular public order and democratic political institutions. It perceives its dispositions and cultural instincts as having culminated in and contributed to the unique Western achievement of the separation of church and state, one that allows political order in the West to remain firmly embedded in a common set of core values derived from Latin Christendom.

The perceived resurgence of religion in global society has heightened awareness of its potency as a political force and re-legitimized it as an object of study. International relations theorists are thus confronted with the same challenge that was represented by the end of the Cold War or the emergence of globalization. There are four areas in which Hurd seeks to make a significant contribution to international relations theory: first, in examining secularism as an example of "productive power"; second, in examining the connections between secularist tradition and contemporary forms of nationalism; third, in challenging the separation of the domestic and international spheres; and fourth, by presenting an alternative to the assumption that religion is a private affair. In addressing the ways in which traditions of secularism are an important source of political authority in international relations, she vividly illustrates their epistemological limits and adverse consequences.

Hurd argues that both the traditions of secularism that she addresses, like the French and American national identities to which they are related, have, in part, been constituted through opposition to particular representations of Islam. By examining Turkey and Iran as case studies to illustrate how they have constructed, contested, and renegotiated the "secular," she shows that the rise of Islamic forms of modern politics are not a backlash against modernization, nor a revival of premodern Islamic tradition. They rather reflect a

struggle in which Islam represents powerful sets of discursive traditions mobilized in different ways and with differing political effects by Kemalists in Turkey, the Shah in Iran, and their various challengers to legitimate their respective political positions. Separate chapters are devoted to exploring the European Union and Turkey and the United States and Iran, showing how authoritative cultural and religious systems of belief and practice are powerful determinants of modern domestic politics and contemporary international relations in the West as much as the Islamic world.

Hurd naturally pays a great deal of attention to the United States, the quintessentially modern and deeply religious country, and, of course, the world's most powerful international player. In looking at American identity and the link between Christian superiority and American exceptionalism, she highlights how these were forged, at least in part, in opposition to and victory over Muslims, as is reflected in the American national anthem. She also addresses how Euro-American secularist traditions evolved out of Christianity, meaning that the political role of Christianity is rarely, if ever, equated to "political Islam." She emphasizes the failure to recognize that there is nowhere that religion and politics are fully and finally differentiated.

Hurd provides an excellent discussion on "political Islam," no mean feat amid the proliferation of pseudo scholarship that has appeared since 9/11. She succinctly dissects the way in which political Islam is designated as dogmatic, fanatical, and a threat to the private sphere as it moves inexorably toward theocracy, linked, of course, to the alleged Muslim inclination toward terrorism and totalitarianism. Hurd confronts widely held notions about political Islam, suggesting instead that it is "a modern language of politics that challenges, sometimes works outside of, and (occasionally) overturns fundamental assumptions about religion and politics that are embedded in

the forms of Western secularism that emerged out of Latin Christendom" (p. 119). She goes on to explain and illustrate how these assumptions have influenced both the way in which Western statesmen have engaged with the Muslim world and how scholars subsequently interpreted their encounters.

In the final chapter, Hurd joins a growing group of scholars who have challenged the concept that a religious resurgence is a threat to modern social order. She questions the secularist apparatus used to interpret what she defines as "a public struggle over authoritative, historically contingent, and often state enforced divisions between the secular, the sacred and the political" (p. 137). Changes in the international system following the end of the Second World War undeniably contributed to a resurgence in the role of religion. However, focusing on these can, as Hurd points out, mean insufficient consideration is given to the contested politics of secularism.

Hurd has produced a timely and compelling book that will be of interest to a wide range of scholars well beyond the discipline of international relations theory.

Notes

[1]. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph has argued that religion is not a "master variable" in international relations, but one that acquires or loses salience in particular historical moments. Patricia R. Hill, "Commentary: Religion as a Category of Diplomatic Analysis," *Diplomatic History* 24 (2000): 633.

[2]. For a survey of the debates surrounding religion in the international arena, see Jeffrey Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (London: Pearson Education, 2007).

[3]. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

[4]. John Conway, "Editorial," *Association of Contemporary Church Historians' Newsletter* (September 2000): 2.

[5]. Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999); and Peter Berger and Samuel P. Huntington, eds., *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[6]. Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, trans. George Holoch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

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