

Book Reviews

***The Politics of Secularism in International Relations.* By Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. xiii + 247. \$50.00 Cloth, \$22.95 Paper**

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This book argues for a basic rethinking of the way international relations scholarship engages with the concept of secularism and, by extension, religion. Hurd begins by rejecting the dominant conception that secularism equals the separation of politics from religion. She argues that it is instead a concept *embedded* in religion, and its deployment is simultaneously a move in theological debates and a move in political debates. Secularism is thus intrinsically both religious and political. The politics of secularism is a struggle over where on the “spectrum of theological politics” a society adopts a degree or kind of secularism. Forms of secularism vary across location, time, and culture, and are subject to modification as history brings them into re-negotiation.

The heart of this book looks at the effect of secularism on Western relations with the Islamic world. Western secularism takes on two primary forms. Laicism seeks to exclude religion from the realm of politics. Judeo-Christian secularism contends that the Judeo-Christian tradition uniquely creates a stratum of religiously grounded moral principles that provide the foundation for tolerant politics and governance. Because those principles are shared across the Judeo-Christian tradition, politics and governance are buffered from sectarian disputes. Western secularism cannot be understood solely as endogenous to Western civilization. Both forms were generated — and now are reproduced — by interactions with the Islamic world. They were defined as being what Islam is not. Western secularism shaped Western responses to the emergence of Islamist political movements in Turkey and Iran. In both instances, events were misunderstood because of the framework created by the secular-religious dichotomy. Unable to conceptualize events as being anything besides

secularist or religious, and unwilling to recognize that events were a “working out” of a new solution on the spectrum of theological politics; the West misclassified events and responded inappropriately. Europe’s difficulty deciding on the place of Turkey still stems from its inability to recognize that opposition to Kemalism (the ideology underlying Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s reforms of the 1920s) represents an effort to define and implement an Islamic secularism, a third way between laicism (of which Kemalism was essentially the Turkish variety) and Judeo-Christian secularism. Moreover, the effort to create a third form of secularism by implying that Europe’s secularism is neither logically nor historically inevitable is politically destabilizing for Europe. In the case of Iran, American misperception of the Iranian Revolution and subsequent hostility to it derived from the challenge that the 1979 revolution posed to the United States secularist commitments, especially insofar as it exposed a tension between secularism and democracy, thus threatening the United States self-understanding. More generally, both forms of secularism fuel misperceptions of political Islam as homogeneous and misconceived foreign policy responses to it: laicism supports conversion while Judeo-Christian secularism supports efforts to isolate and defeat it.

Ultimately, “religious resurgence” cannot be understood through the lenses of laicism (that is, a backlash against modernity) or Judeo-Christian secularism (that is, proof that separation of church and state is a unique and irreproducible accomplishment of Judeo-Christian tradition). International relations scholarship and practice, by adopting Western lenses (which Hurd sees as blinders), cannot understand or cope with religious resurgence. Seeing it as an effort to renegotiate the relationship between politics and religion, and constitute different forms of secularism, opens the study of international relations to more apt scholarship about it and the practice of international relations to more appropriate responses to it.

There is much to like about this exhaustively researched book. Its innovative argument calls on those who study the relationship of religion to international relations to rethink how they view their subject at the most fundamental level. I would recommend it to anyone doing research in this field, especially those working on the responses of the West to political Islam. It is a book that must be approached cautiously, however. It is not an easy read. The theoretical sections are burdened by jargon and superfluous literature review. More importantly, I found the empirical analyses unconvincing. The claims that laicism and Judeo-Christian secularism brought about misunderstandings and foreign policy missteps seem to assert

causation more than they demonstrate it. Hurd's argument supports a plausible expectation that secularism would have had those consequences, but empirical demonstration of the connection is lacking. Moreover, I often found myself wondering how significant a causal factor secularism was, assuming that it was, given other causal forces at work.

***The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America.* By David Domke and Kevin Coe. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008. 231 pp. \$30.00 Cloth**

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David Domke and Kevin Coe have produced an impressive and potentially seminal piece of scholarship on religion and presidential rhetoric. According to Domke and Coe, the "God Strategy" is "a mixture of voice and agenda that has been primarily secularized, while . . . deliberately finding opportunities to 'signal' sympathies for religious conservatives' views . . . At the heart of the God Strategy have been four signals:

1. Acting as political priests by speaking the language of the faithful.
2. Fusing God and country by linking America with divine will.
3. Embracing important religious symbols, practices, and rituals.
4. Engaging in morality politics by trumpeting bellwether issues" (pp. 18–19).

After detailing what they mean by the God Strategy, the authors move to empirical analyses of each of the four signals identified above. Chapter 2 focuses on how frequently and regularly presidents invoke both God and faith in their major national addresses. In an analysis that begins with the first term of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and ends two years into the second term of George W. Bush, Domke and Coe present several important findings. First, American presidents since FDR tend to invoke God quite a bit. Of the 12 presidents in the time period examined here, only three (John Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter) failed to invoke God in at least 50 percent of their major national addresses; all presidents except these three averaged at least one invocation per address. What is truly impressive,

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