

***When Politics Meets Religion: Navigating Old Challenges and New Perspectives*, edited by Marko Veković and Miroljub Jevtić. London and New York: Routledge, 2025, 230 pp.; ISBN: 9781032729060**

Rastko Jović¹ 

At a time when the nexus of faith and power appears more urgent and less understood than ever, *When Politics Meets Religion* arrives as an ambitious volume. Edited by both Marko Veković and Miroljub Jevtić, both practitioners of the “politology of religion” discipline that was cultivated at the University of Belgrade’s Faculty of Political Science, the book compiles 14 chapters from the Fourth Biannual Politology of Religion Conference in Belgrade held in May 2023, offering a geographically broad and methodologically varied assembly that should receive a warm reception among academics and more advanced students of politics, religion, and international affairs.

The volume begins with a familiar, clear introductory chapter by Jeffrey Haynes, the series editor and one of the field’s pioneers whose first book on religion and politics was published in 1993. Haynes brings a broad overview of how the field has evolved - from being largely ignored by mainstream political science, through the shock of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution and the events of 9/11, to the present moment in which the study of religion and politics has become a recognized and prolific subfield. His diagnosis of the secularization thesis is moderate: the broad resurgence of religion has not transformed the secular logic of state power, but it has complicated the analytical frameworks political scientists rely on and can no longer be treated as a residual or epiphenomenal variable. This introductory chapter is both an orientation and an intellectual provocation and is an opening salvo for the rest of the book. One of the strongest virtues of the book is the diversity of issues it covers.

The chapters on European religion deal with the ideological roots of far-right identity politics (Smeets), the unstable boundaries of “European identity” as defined by religious cleavages (Foret, Guth, and Nelsen), and the relationship between religious loyalty and secular values across the continent (Bešić). Those chapters are

¹ Rastko Jović is Full Professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Christian Theology - University of Belgrade, Serbia. Contact E-mail: rastko.jovic@outlook.com

some of the most methodologically robust in the volume, as they use survey data and multivariable analysis to test propositions that otherwise would be taken as natural facts in the secondary literature. Bešić's chapter remains particularly impressive in how it tests the determinants of religious identity and atheism for twenty countries in an elegant way and leaves the reader with an idea of how quantitative sociology of religion can enhance understanding of the political realm without becoming trivial.

Even examples from beyond Europe can contribute valuable insights. Koellner's chapter on Russia offers theoretical nuance on a common subject: rather than retreat to the familiar caesaropapism-symphonia dichotomy, he offers a third way, "entanglement", as a model of Orthodox relations with the Russian state that is neither a purely instrumental partnership nor unconditional reconciliation. That such an innovative notion is worthy of a stand-alone volume is a testament to the strength of this excellent book; it is a concept that alone would not be enough to sustain a monograph, but in the scope of a comparative project the reader becomes more perceptive of a dozen case studies. Also, Gözaydın and Öztürk on Turkey's Diyanet offer a historically grounded account of how that institution has served as both a mechanism of state control over religion and a vehicle for the gradual Islamization of Turkish public life under the ruling party (the Justice and Development Party) - a paradox that the authors navigate with admirable care.

The most provocative contribution to the volume is Corwin Smidt's treatment of Christian nationalism in the United States, at a time when the subject has commanded enormous popular and scholarly attention. With data from multiple survey instruments, Smidt develops a typology of the actual political positionings of Christian nationalists relative to the "civic republicans" and "radical secularists" identified in other chapters and demonstrates how this typology is a predictor of electoral behavior and party identification, including preferences related to Donald Trump. The picture painted in this chapter is more nuanced than the polemics would have us believe, or the more uncritical media coverage might suggest. The data show that Christian nationalism is not a monolith but encompasses a spectrum of positions with distinct social and ideological profiles - a finding with real implications for how both analysts and policymakers understand the phenomenon.

Another interesting editorial decision regarding geographic scope is the volume's engagement with Asia. The chapter on the Philippines (Eballo) tracks whether the Catholic Church still has political influence after the 2022 national elections. It offers an authentic assessment of how populist politics and social media have weakened the Church's and clerical traditional authority. Dao Zhou's chapter on Chinese attitudes toward religious deprivatization employs latent profile analysis of survey data to challenge the prevailing "secular authoritarian state" frame, revealing the nuances of Chinese public opinion on religion in public life. And, going completely off the radar of the rest of the volume, Aljamal's chapter on how liberation theology journeyed from Latin America to the Holy Land offers a fascinating account of the development

of this Catholic theological-political strain influencing Palestinian intellectual and activist circles, something that is rarely examined in the English literature.

The last thematic section of the volume investigates law, society, and religion. Calo's chapter on religious mediation and political conflict is perhaps the densest analytical piece in the collection, invoking both international law and conflict resolution theory to argue that religious actors possess distinctive capacities for mediation that secular institutions cannot easily replicate. Frédéric's chapter on laïcité and the Orthodox Jewish community in France raises questions about whether France's model of strict secularism - designed in the context of a hegemonic Catholicism - can accommodate the very different institutional structures and the today's context in which we have evolving needs of minority religious communities. Tmušić's chapter on instituting a taxation scheme on church economic activities, and Čustović's article arguing that Muslims should conceive of Sharia not as a legal code but as a moral one in the context of universal human rights, round out the volume with normative reflections that complement the empirical analyses developed in the earlier sections.

Achieving its primary goal, *When Politics Meets Religion* confirms, with a truly global range of case studies, that religion cannot simply be read as a residual form of politics, but instead as a structuring, if at times elusive, feature of contemporary statehood in different world settings. Veković and Jevtić have assembled a volume that confirms both the growth and ongoing vitality of the religion-politics literature. For students, researchers, and thoughtful readers on international relations, political theology, nationalism, or recent world conflicts, this book offers an invaluable, even-handed, rigorously argued, stimulating, and rewarding treatment of what is perhaps the most important issue of our age.