

Anna Grzymała-Busse

Nations under God. How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy

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The increasing role of religions in the public sphere of societies is one of the most important topics within the contemporary sociology of religion. This topic has attracted the attention of scholars of religion mostly with regard to debate within the paradigm of secularisation, observing and discussing changes in the field of religion. The observation of changes within the field of religion in contemporary Western societies has given way to the new ideas of religious deprivatisation (Casanova 1994) and desecularisation (Berger 1999), which may perhaps better explain the ongoing social processes and their consequences than the secularisation paradigm.

The first, and for a long time, the most referenced social scientific work on public religions was Jose Casanova's book *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994). In his book Casanova argued that the deprivatisation process occurs in contemporary Western societies, and manifests itself with the increasing participation of religious organisations in the public sphere. He argued that religions, and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, in contemporary Western societies have adjusted to the reality of civil society and its requirements for civil organisations and their participation.

Anna Grzymała-Busse's book *Nations under God. How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, published in 2015, has the potential to become another most-referenced book on the role of religions in the public sphere of contemporary societies. The author raises the question of how the churches use their moral authority to influence policy and searches for the answer by providing case studies of diverse societies and the role of the Roman Catholic Church within them.

Grzymała-Busse continues the social scientific investigation started by Casanova concerning the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the public lives of Western societies by providing examples from Western Europe (Italy and Ireland), post-Communist European societies (Poland and Croatia) and North American societies (the US and Canada). These three directions within scientific analysis help the author to discuss the peculiarities of social context and its influence on the way that churches influence policy. These peculiarities are conditioned by the position of the church within the field of religion of the society under discussion, whether it is in a dominant position or whether it is one among several religious alternatives within a religiously diverse field. Grzymała-Busse shows that the social context influences how and when the church chooses to present and protect its values and how allies are found within the public sphere. One of the key elements of the book's argument relates to the fusion between religion and nationalism that enables churches to acquire the power to influence politics.

In the beginning of her book, Grzymała-Busse provides an example from post-Communist Poland where in 1988 a group of Catholic bishops met privately with Communist leaders in a Polish parliamentary commission to discuss the legislative proposal that would outlaw abortion. This example begins the discussion of the fusion of religion and nationalism when being Polish means being Catholic and this notion enables church leaders to engage secular political actors. However, this opportunity is available only in those social contexts where historical churches had not lost their authority by supporting former autocratic regimes.

Having said this, the author stresses that decisions about engaging in secular politics must be grounded on a doctrinal decision to enter politics, especially with socially-sensitive and moral issues like abortion, stem cell research and reproductive technologies, euthanasia, divorce, and marriage and civil partnerships. This decision may be followed by indirect and direct influences on policy. The latter is the subject of this new and enlightening book, which contributes to the growing field of interest in public religions.

The book consists of five chapters and conclusions. In the first chapter, the author introduces the main questions of the book and the strategy used to seek for their answers. The reader is acknowledged within the scheme of the author's argument and the methodology used to measure the influence of the churches on policy. The second chapter discusses a number of theoretical approaches concerning the fusion of national and religious identities, provides the methodological tools for research into church influence on politics and stresses that, despite the piousness of the population of a certain country, this should not lead to the conclusion that its church would influence its policy. The third chapter provides an analysis of two Western societies that are dominated by the Roman Catholic Church – Ireland and Italy. The analysis of the two country cases leads the author to the conclusion that “religious monopolies (and specifically, hierarchical monopolies) have a built-in advantage in that the clergy and their political leaders share the same theological commitments” (p. 144).

The fourth chapter discusses the cases of two post-Communist countries – Poland and Croatia – again, both dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, which has enormous moral authority due to its resistance activities during the Communist period. However, its moral authority was supported by different levels of institutional access, which in the Polish case was continued and in Croatia was never obtained during the Communist period. Both countries were highly homogenised during the Communist period and this, according to Grzymała-Busse, made the fusion of religion and nationalism much easier (p. 226).

The fifth chapter of the book analyses two cases of religiously diverse countries – the United States and Canada – and the impact of the Catholic Church there. Although both countries are relatively young and do not have a single national identity, Grzymała-Busse shows that the United States demonstrates how Judeo-Christian religious traditions became fused with the nation, enabling a variety of religious denominations to speak in its name. Meanwhile, in Canada, the history of Quebec demonstrates how the church lost its power and became a part of historical heritage. The author reveals that in religiously diverse countries the churches have to adjust to social reality by calling on politicians to implement their agendas, but there is always a chance for politicians to lose these ideas during elections.

The last part of the book, entitled “Where Churches Matter”, generalises the issues discussed above and concludes that the churches and their activities have left the private and organisational levels of public life and entered the macro level by calling on individual politicians and/or political parties for the achievement of their aims and the dissemination of their values. The book also provides an appendix, which further tests the argument, and references.

To sum up Anna Grzymała-Busse's book, it must be stated that it makes a solid contribution to social scientific knowledge about the changing role of public religions in contemporary societies and can be highly recommended for university students, their teachers and anyone who is interested in the trajectories of the changing relationships between religion and the state.

REFERENCES

CASANOVA, José. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

BERGER, Peter L. (ed.) 1999. *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington and Grand Rapids: Ethics and Public Policy Center/Eerdmans.