RASCEE *Book Reviews*

Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas

Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations

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Reviewed by **Roman Vido, Masaryk University Brno, Czech Republic**

The contrast between the United States and Europe has been for several decades a widely debated topic in the sociology of religion. Framed within the language of "exceptions", each has been labeled as an "exception" from the supposedly general rule (be it secularization or religious vitality). The book, written by two prominent scholars, Peter Berger and Grace Davie (themselves being among the authors participating in the discourse), jointly with Effie Fokas, goes beyond this framework. Its primary goal is to closely examine the manifold differences related to religion in these two geographical areas, popularly grasped by the cliché "religious America, secular Europe". Europe and its secularity is here of primary concern, with "America" as a contrasting case. The basic question the authors pose can be expressed as follows: "[...] is Europe secular because it is modern, or is Europe secular because it is European?" (p. 6). Such a question suggests that a more general topic is at stake – namely, the classical secularization thesis, with its expectation of religious decline accompanying modernization process.

The new theoretical perspective employed by Berger, Davie and Fokas is inspired by the concept of "multiple modernities" elaborated by Shmuel Eisenstadt (p. 44). In his view, modernity should be understood principally as "a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt cited on p. 64). From such a formulation, an important conclusion arises: the European model of modernity, as well as the European model of the relationship between religion, the state and society, is not the only possible constellation, let alone the norm of modernity. The United States and Europe are not exceptions from any general rule, but just two particular versions of modernity. Their specific religious contours have has been moulded by various cultural, political and social factors working throughout their historical development. If we want to understand the nature of the European situation, we have to focus our attention on several dimensions: the history of church-state relations, prevailing intellectual traditions, the role of institutional carriers and the relationship between religion and social differences (social class, ethnicity, gender and age).

Concerning the first dimension, the key to the difference between the United States and Europe can be found in the dominant pattern of religious life (pp. 23-43). While in European history the parochial (state) church system, with its firm local embeddedness, was the cornerstone, in the United States, the denominational model (separated from the state) associated with individualism, voluntarism and mobility represented the determining force. This fixation on a territory (or its absence) explains to a large extent the different impact of pluralism on religion on both sides of the Atlantic. Europe followed the line sketched by the classical

work of Peter Berger on the "sacred canopy"; in the United States, in contrast, the logic of the religious market exposed by proponents of rational choice theory played a considerable role. Such a difference also translates itself into specific European and American understandings of "churches". Here, the concept of "vicarious religion" proposed by Davie is relevant. While unsuitable (and hardly comprehensible) for Americans, in Europe this conception of churches as public utilities "available" for all without requiring mass regular participation meets with high resonance.

Not only structural but also cultural factors must be taken into account in explaining the different paths taken by Americans and Europeans on their "road to modernity" (pp. 47-61). Drawing from the analysis of Gertrude Himmelfarb, the authors emphasize the distinctive appropriation of the Enlightenment in the United States and in Europe. The American case, partly inspired by the British intellectual heritage, did not bring about a conflict between religion and modernity – here, emancipation was compatible with religious belief. In Europe, on the other hand, the modern scenario was, more or less, characterized by an open clash between (modern) reason and tradition embodied in (church) religion, with France and its idea of laïcité as the most radical example. This fact is also reflected in the significance and the nature of cultural elites, where the prominent role of secularist intellectuals in Europe must be reckoned with. As José Casanova has put it, in Europe, the belief that historical progress rests on the "exit" from religion promoted by influential European intellectuals was responsible for a great deal of the success of secularization processes.

Ideas alone, however, can change the world only to a limited extent. To intensify their impact they must "materialize" within societal institutions (pp. 71-93). For that reason, Berger, Davie and Fokas monitor four key institutions of modern societies: the state (state-church relations), the judiciary, the educational system and the welfare system. In this context, the specific position of the First Amendment (with its two "religion clauses") of the U.S. Constitution and the role of the Supreme Court as its "guardian" are stressed. The strict separation of state and religion in the United States is contrasted with a seemingly similar separation in France. While in the first case the main motivation for separation lies in the protection of religion from intervention of the state, in the French case, the situation is almost the opposite – here, it is the state (and the public sphere) that must be defended against inappropriate invasion of religion. The same could be said about the place of religion within the educational system. In both countries, the presence of religion in state schools is prohibited by law, but the underlying motives are again dissimilar. Crucial differences can also be seen with respect to the provision of welfare. The general decline in social significance of churches in Europe has much to do with the strong role of the modern state in providing for the social welfare of its citizens, thereby replacing churches traditionally responsible for activities like charity or health care. In the United States, on the contrary, the state has been more limited in its welfare-based interventions, leaving much of the social agenda to religious organizations and congregations.

As far as the dimension of social differences is concerned, here the questions of immigration and ethnicity appear to be the most distinguishing elements in comparing Europe and the United States (pp. 101-108). As Will Herberg demonstrated more than half a century ago, religious affiliation represents one of the key mechanisms of integration into the American "immigrant" society. The European situation has until quite recently differed in the sense that European countries were more "sending countries" than "immigrant countries". However, in the last decades, the situation has changed significantly, especially with the postwar immigrant waves of cheap labour into Western European countries. In this context, widely debated "problems" with Islam and its "compatibility" with the "European tradition," combining within itself the politics of secularism and "Christian roots," emerge. Here, the broadest dif-

ference in the view of religion and its role in a society (especially in the public sphere) between the United States and Europe comes to the surface: while in the first case, religion is considered a resource for solving social problems, in the second case, religion is seen as a part of them.

In the concluding chapter (pp. 123-143), the authors reflect on the policy implications of the outlined differences for domestic as well as foreign policy. They refer to the stereotypes that both sides have about each other, which "are as much false as true" (p. 124), and the current tensions between them that concern more than matters of religion. They also emphasize that the comparisons they have made in the book have their limits: "[...] the United States is one country, Europe is not and contains within itself a huge variety of solutions, or non-solutions, to the resurgence of religion in public life" (pp. 125-126). The take-away message of this book lies, however, in their call for bridging such divides in the face of new global (post-Cold War) threats and challenges for the West. In the authors' words: "[...] the United States and Europe share common values of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy; they also share (with whatever variations) the political institutions by which these values can be realized. If one assents to these values, one must hope that the current tensions between the two will diminish and that, consequently, there will be a higher degree of cooperation on various international issues" (p. 125).

This assertion might be read as expressing the main intent of the reviewed text, which appears not as primarily analytical but (in a broader sense) political and/or polemical. Despite the fact that the reader finds a handful of refreshing impulses, the book as a whole has a rather summarizing and organizing character. For scholars from Central and Eastern Europe, the text would be perhaps "too Western", with only a few remarks dedicated to the region – "secular Europe" from the title is basically "Western Europe" (with the partial exception of Greece). On the other hand, its structure and its overarching framework of "multiple modernities" represent good examples for directing future research centered on the notable region of Central and Eastern Europe, with its diverse paths to modernity and its relationships between the state, society and religion. A potential book structured in the manner of the work of Berger, Davie and Fokas, contrasting, for example, Western Europe with Central and Eastern Europe, would be undoubtedly a welcome contribution to the scholarly literature on the sociology of religion.

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