
I very much enjoyed this well-written book which puts into an historical context the antipathy that many Europeans—notably the political class, significant numbers of journalists, and the educated public—feel towards America in general and towards American religion in particular. Howard reveals with great clarity the long-standing nature of these sentiments, countering the notion that they have emerged in response to the political views of relatively recent administrations.

Recognizing what Howard terms “the transatlantic religious gap” (p. 2)—i.e. the abiding religiousness of the United States and the relative secularity of Europe—is now commonplace. Increasing numbers of scholars are, moreover, beginning to realize that it is Europe which is out of step with most of the modern world rather than America. Considerably fewer appreciate what Howard demonstrates so clearly: that nineteenth-century writers and travellers were as struck by these issues as their 21st-century equivalents.

The book is divided into five chapters. It begins with an admirably clear introduction which indicates what is to come. The following two chapters are concerned with European reactions to the religious life of America. The conservative or traditionalist view is taken first, followed by the radical and primarily secularist critique. The two in fact are mirror images of each other. Thereafter the narrative changes direction. The fourth and fifth chapters introduce two carefully chosen Europeans who take a more generous view. The first is Philip Schaff—a nineteenth-century Swiss-German Protestant trained in church history; the second is Jacques Maritain—a twentieth-century Catholic philosopher from France. Alexis de Tocqueville, interestingly, remains firmly on the sidelines.

Taking the more critical chapters first, the scope is impressive. Howard covers the British, German, French, and Italian literature in some detail—his work is based on an unusually wide range of sources. The critique from the traditionalist right includes three schools of thought: a range of British voices loyal to the Anglican Church, a selection of German (continental) Romantics, and—finally—the reactions of “embattled” Catholics. All of these people regarded the religious life of the United States as erroneous in the sense that it has moved away from the notion of a dominant, usually state, church. The emphasis on religious freedom (a “freedom to believe”) has got out of hand, ceding far too much to subjective individualism.
The left, conversely, were critical of the religiousness of the America per se, bearing in mind that the left in Europe was increasingly seduced by secularism. In this chapter Howard covers French social thought (from Condorcet to Comte), Hegel and Marx, and the 1848 republicans. He concludes with an interesting section on the ethos of secularization and its taken-for-grantedness, until very recently, amongst European scholars of many disciplines. Both tendencies—those of the right and of the left—display an unnerving degree of arrogance which remains to this day. Such attitudes are very largely based on the idea that European ways of doing things are normative, and that other forms of economic, social, and indeed religious organization are necessarily inferior.

Given my own attempts to understand the transatlantic religious divide I read these reflections with great interest and wished very much that they had been available to me and my co-authors when we were writing *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations*.\(^1\) Had that been so, the historical aspects of our account would have been a better-informed.

The final chapters containing the portraits of Philip Schaff and Jacques Maritain are rather different. Here the material in question lies beyond my usual reading. That said I appreciated the common factor that bound these two more sympathetic voices together. Both Schaff and Maritain spent considerable amounts of time in the United States and both were prepared to take the American situation on its own terms. This implied an imaginative leap in order to escape the familiar, but necessarily misleading, ways of thinking beloved of Europeans. Little will be gained by seeing American forms of religion as an aberration of the European norm. The relationship between a dominant church and the state is not the best place to begin in order to gain insight into American voluntarism. The latter should be recognized for what it is: a vibrant, effective, and continuing market in religion.

Appreciating this point, moreover, raises highly significant questions about the links between modernization and secularization. Are these intrinsic or extrinsic? The latter is the most likely scenario. Modernization does not imply secularization: this may or may not be the case and must be determined empirically. Such a conclusion constitutes an exercise in humility for many Europeans who need to understand that Europe is not secular because it is modern, but because it is European. Grasping the significance of this statement opens an entirely new research agenda. It also puts paid to the notion that the