Book Review

Martikainen, Tuomas, & Francois Gauthier, 2013


The first chapter by Joanildo Burity, “Entrepreneurial Spirituality and Ecumenical Alterglobalism: Two Religious Responses to Global Neoliberalism” looks at the relationship between neoliberalism and the rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America. Burity distinguishes between traditional Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, both of which have arisen among the poor (pp. 28-29). Even though associated with the prosperity gospel, not all neo-Pentecostalism has been politically conservative (p. 31). Burity observes that “the relationship between religion and neoliberalism is” not unidirectional. As neoliberalism spread “globally, it produced impacts on, but also responses from, religious identities and organizations” (p. 21).

In Chapter Two, “Making Religion Irrelevant: The ‘Resurgent Religion’ Narrative and the Critique of Neoliberalism,” contrary to the secularisation thesis, James Spickard points out that “rather than modernity leading to irreligion,” it produces “a conservative religious reaction” (p. 41). Borrowing the term from a former World Bank economist, Spickard describes neoliberalism as a kind of “market fundamentalism”. It is “the belief – against evidence – that all economic problems are the result of government regulation and” (p. 47) that free trade will create growth.

Jens Schlamelcher in Chapter Three, “The Decline of the Parishes and the Rise of City Churches: The German Evangelical Church in the Age of Neoliberalism” observes that neoliberal discourse has penetrated the Evangelical Church in
Germany since it now sees its laity as “customers” and orients itself to them as such (pp. 61-62). Religion thus becomes “an item of consumption”. “The church takes on the character of a . . . consumer-oriented organization” and makes no demands “of commitment on its ‘customers’” (p. 67).

Using the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, Breda Grey in Chapter Four, “Catholic Church Civil Society Activism and the Neoliberal Governmental Project of Migrant Integration in Ireland” examines the role the Catholic Church in Ireland plays in a neoliberal economy. She looks at the role that religious and faith-based organisations play as “agents of neoliberal governance due to their perceived unique capacities in the shaping of the conduct of conduct” (p. 78). Economic resources have been shifted away from state welfare apparatuses to a marketised civil society in which religious organisations (including the Catholic Church) play a decisive role (p. 89).

Like Gray, Jason Hackworth in Chapter Five, “Faith, Welfare and the Formation of the Modern American Right” looks at the relationship between neoliberalism and religious fundamentalism by focusing on the issue of welfare reform and the outsourcing of social services to religious Non-Governmental Organisations. As he notes, the relationship between religious and market fundamentalism has been a politically uneasy one but the outsourcing of these contracts has strengthened these bonds. Ideologically, this relationship is expressed as “religious neoliberalism,” which provides cohesion to the “neoliberal-religious fundamentalist coalition” (p. 105). Likewise, Bill Clinton’s welfare reform pushed people off of government assistance. While the government reduced its own direct role in providing social assistance, it subcontracted much of this work out to Faith Based Organizations (p. 101, pp. 103-104).

The title of Part Two is “Political Governance of Religion.” David Ashley and Ryan Sandefer in Chapter Six, “Neoliberalism and the Privatization of Welfare and Religious Organizations” continue the thread of the transference and outsourcing of social welfare services from the government to religious institutions particularly under the presidencies of Clinton, G.W. Bush and Obama. Using a Habermasian framework, they discuss how neoliberalism has coincided with a decline in civil society and the public sphere (p. 126).

Chapter Seven, “Multilevel and Pluricentric Network Governance of Religion” by Tuomas Martikainen deals with church-state relations and the “ways in which states interact with religion” (p. 130). It discusses the ways in which the state manages and regulates religion. This is relevant to how European countries govern Islam and Muslim immigration. It is also pertinent to the role that religious organisations play in providing welfare provisions. Martikainen distinguishes between three different modalities of governance: