
*Religious America, Secular Europe?* is divided into 7 chapters, a bibliography, and an index. The three authors have joint authorship of the finished work; the Introduction, however, states which authors wrote the first draft of each chapter. Chapter 1, “Introduction,” sets out the major aim of the book, which is to compare religion and religiosity in the United States and Europe. This aim is pursued throughout the following five chapters, capped with a conclusion.

Chapter 2, “Religious America, Secular Europe?” starts out by describing the religious differences between the United States and Europe. The scenario is, in its bare essentials, well known: Europeans are rather irreligious and European politics is largely devoid of religious references, whereas Americans are highly religious and American politics is imbued with multiple references to religion. The authors claim that in order to understand the differences between the religious landscape of the United States and that of Europe, one must let go of the notions that America is the exceptional case and that modernity brings about a decline in religion. Religion in both the United States and Europe has to adapt to religious pluralism, but this pluralism leads to very different results, due to differences in church-state relations, religious competition, interpretations of the Enlightenment, intellectual milieus, definitions of high culture, institutional vehicles of Enlightenment thought, and the churches’ role as markers of class and as agents of immigrant absorption in the two sites.

The third chapter, “Contrasting Histories,” describes the historical differences between the United States and Europe to the extent that these are relevant for religion. With regard to Europe the presence of state churches, the predominance of churches in the sociological sense of the word, and the fact that European churches tend to be territorially embedded is highlighted. As for the United States, the chapter singles out the separation of church and state, the predominance of congregations, churches as voluntary associations, and the fact that these congregations tend to be locally embedded, as important factors. The authors criticize secularization theory for not being able to explain these differences, and suggest that rational choice theory is better suited for this purpose.

Chapter 4, “Different Intellectual Traditions,” claims that the Enlightenment was interpreted differently in the United States and Europe. In the American context, religion became a vehicle of the Enlightenment, and the existence of many and very diverse congregations became an expression of political liberty. The European, or rather the French, version of Enlightenment thought was linked with the opposition to religion, as represented by the Catholic Church, and hence became an expression of secularism. This fundamental difference has affected the intellectual milieus and their impact on the general population.
Chapter 5, "Institutional Carriers," deals with the ways in which differences in church-state relations, the judicial system, the educational system, and welfare systems influence religion in the United States and Europe. The different ways in which issues of religion are being handled in the United States and Europe are discussed, with emphasis on the multiple problems this gives rise to in the Europe context, due to the existence of many different judicial systems and traditions in Europe.

Chapter 6, “Religion and Social Difference,” covers a lot of ground. It focuses on how churches in the United States and Europe play different roles in relation to issues of social class, immigration and ethnicity, and concludes that whereas the churches play a (positive) role in the United States, they do not in Europe. It observes that religiosity is connected to gender in roughly the same way in the United States and in Europe, and attempts to explain this phenomenon by means of rational choice theory. It also addresses questions concerning generational and life cycle effects upon religion in the United States and Europe.

Chapter 7, “So What? Policy Implications,” sets out to formulate policy recommendations that will help ameliorate the strained relationship between the United States and Europe. The recommendations relate to the handling of religion on the home front as well as in foreign policy. It is also argued that the concept of secularization should be dropped in favor of the idea of multiple modernities when analyzing religion in the United States and Europe.

The book promises to describe and explain the religious differences between the United States and Europe, and the key question is therefore whether the authors succeed in fulfilling their aim. Their main problem in achieving their ambitious goal is one of format: description, causal analysis, theory discussion, and policy recommendations are compressed into a mere 145 pages. To take on just one of the tasks in the allotted space would be a formidable undertaking; managing to cover all of that ground in such a slender volume is next to impossible. The end result is a book that briefly discusses each of the many dimensions of the European and American religious landscapes that the authors attempt to address, but without dealing with any of them in particular depth and without really managing to tie the various themes together. The choice to conclude the book with a number of policy recommendations seems particularly odd. A summary of the religious differences between the United States and Europe and their most likely causes would have been more fitting.

The core of the book, the description and discussion of the religious differences between the United States and Europe, is interesting and gives much food for thought. Unfortunately valuable space is taken up by superficial discussions of theory and coverage of seemingly irrelevant topics (e.g. gender similarities) which distract the reader from the key topic. The discussions of the factors behind the religious differences between the United States and Europe tend to be somewhat abstract and historical, rather than sociological, and would have greatly benefitted