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Alec G. Hargreaves, John Kelsay, and Sumner B. Twiss, eds., *Politics and Religion in France and the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. xii + 200 pp. Notes. \$27.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN-13:978-0-7391-1930-3; \$20.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 10:0-7391-1930-3.

Review by Joseph Byrnes, Oklahoma State University.

If churchgoing and “godtalk” are the criteria, religion matters much more in the United States than any European country. This is *the* American socio-cultural particularity with—one always assumes and this book clearly shows—a strong relationship to politics. And Europe? European countries differ from one another for reasons that can be properly, if only partially, explained by their individual histories. The complete opposite of the United States might be Sweden, where virtually every citizen is considered a member of the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden unless otherwise self-declared, but where only a tiny minority go to church at all. Even Poland, Ireland, and Spain have cooled the churchgoing and religious discourse. “Catholic” Italy and “Catholic” France each has its own unique mixture of social and cultural religion, resulting these days in *catholicisme lite* on the national scene.^[1] But France arguably remains the most complex of the European countries, for reasons that are partially explained in *Politics and Religion in France and the United States*. *Politics and Religion in France and the United States* grew out of a conference held at Florida State University in 2005, where participants attended to historical developments and political structures in both the United States and France, with separate sections on Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam. The papers themselves are rich in documentation, statistics, and the insights of specialists in each area—much more varied than the orderly, programmatic set-up would lead one to believe. As with virtually all collections of this sort it is best to read the body of the book first, and then maneuver around the introductory and closing commentaries for usable insights.

To begin with, Jeremy Gunn and Rémy Schwartz present the historical and constitutional frameworks of the religion-state relationship in the United States and France. From these two papers emerges the striking contrast between American and French public religious discourse: in the United States, from enthusiastic to fanatic; in France, considerably restrained, not only at all state and public functions but in everyday life as well. Gunn begins with the contemporary “liberal” and “conservative” interpretations of the Constitution on the establishment-of-religion prohibition. Liberals and conservatives largely and loudly differ on interpretations of prayer/bible teaching in the schools, the biblical references allowable in public functions, and religious expression on state property. Schwartz begins with a look at *laïcité*, protected by laws from 1877 on and culminating in the Law of Separation of Church and State. Gunn—and I believe most would agree with him—believes that conservatives have framed the issues with greater visibility and stamina. If you go against their chosen expression of religion, you go against all religion. Schwartz presents a France that “remains the ‘eldest daughter’ of the church,’ welcomes dynamic Protestant churches and has the largest Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe” (p. 24). Throw *laïcité* back into the mix, and you have a situation where, relative to the United States, the historical and structural features of church and state are no longer in serious controversy.

In the body of the book, the United States-France contrasts are developed in four sets of papers on the principal religious traditions of the two countries: Catholic and Protestant Christianity (taken

separately, of course), Jewish and Muslim. Inasmuch as the religious and political lives of the members of these traditions depend on the role assigned to religion in the public of the two countries *and* the cultural expression/reception of the individual religious tradition, the papers do not always deal with the same issues.

In his paper on American Protestantism, David Little presents classical texts from Paul through Calvin to colonial American writers, with special emphasis on Roger Williams, who broke with the pure Calvinist emphasis on the civil order's responsibility to regulate the "things of this life" in order to promote full religious liberty. Subsequent to Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom passed by the Virginia legislature in 1786, one form of Presbyterian political theology dominated, namely "that wing of Calvinism favoring the civil indispensability of religion and the desirability of governmental regulation" (p. 39). Altogether, the religious majority dominated: from decisions on Mormons through "dismissive attitudes" (p. 41) toward pacifists from WWI on. Now conservative forces (David Little throws in the Protestants Bush and Robertson, and the Catholics William J. Bennett and Richard Neuhaus) push the government responsibility for the promotion of religious values and behavior, ensuring that a majority with specific beliefs gets to impose its will. In France, movement has been in the opposite direction. Sébastien Fath points out the diminishing ability of the Catholic hierarchy to impose its will. There were variations, of course, in that the major Protestant groups had so benefitted from the long-standing French Concordat with papal Rome, that they were reluctant to wholeheartedly support the 1905 law on the Separation of Church and State. Today, with some reaction against what they take to be the disfavored position of religion in public life, a majority of French Protestants vote with the left. Ultimately, numbers are so small that *Conseil National des Évangéliques* is still, as Fath tells it, working out a European identity.

American Catholicism of recent decades is surveyed Scott Appleby. Statistics show the movement of Catholics, with a population concentrated in ten largest Electoral College states, toward the Republican Party. The principal Catholic orientation of the post-war 1940s and 1950s was "fervid patriotism, virulent anti-communism, and strong identification with the working class and labor unions" (p. 67), but the youngest boomers were different from the New Deal holdovers. Catholics voted for John F. Kennedy, but not for George McGovern and even less for the Orthodox Michael Dukakis. Nowadays, writes Appleby, voting according to conscience means different things for different Catholics. Churchgoing evangelical-type Catholics vote Democratic on economic issues and Republican on social issues; more secularized Catholics who seldom attend church vote Republican on economic issues and Democratic on social issues. This secularization can be interpreted as indifference, as the conservative Catholic theologians of decades ago would have it, or as the result of internal pluralism, with Vatican II-era Catholic theologians, and laity working to maintain intellectual independence from pope and bishops without losing their Catholic identity. They privileged Catholic social teaching over such issues as divorce and contraception.

French surveys of Catholicism, according to Blandine Chélini-Pont, show that secularization theories are simplistic. In 2005, 56 percent of those interviewed thought that religion was more important in society than ten years earlier, but about the same number thought that too much importance was given to religion. In other surveys, 64 percent of French people referred to themselves as Catholic (a large majority of those remaining have no religious faith) and 78 percent said that people have a basic need for religion. But Chélini-Pont writes, "Despite the Catholic funeral of former President François Mitterrand, the weekly act of worship of President Jacques Chirac, and the unexpectedly large gathering of a million young people in Paris during the Catholic Church's Journée Mondiale de la Jeunesse (World Youth Day) in 1997, there is no sign of religious revival among the French in general or in favor of French Catholicism in particular. Opinion surveys consistently suggest that Catholicism is continuing to lose ground in French society" (p. 81). There is widespread rejection of Catholic norms on sexual and family matters, with 60 percent believing that the church was overstepping its role when taking positions on moral questions and 55 percent saying that abortion was a personal matter. For all

that, there is a species of Catholic vote. Catholics voted for the Right in varying proportions according to church attendance, but not for the far right: “National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen took 16 percent of the vote among non-practicing Catholics and 15 percent among votes with no religion but only 8 percent of the vote among practicing Catholics.” (p. 89). There is a Catholic difference, too, in the “refusal to accept the same symbolic and legal status for homosexual as for heterosexual couples or the same status for same-sex parents as for opposite sex parents.” (p. 90) These specific issues need to be interpreted against the background of Catholic generic attachment to *laïcité*, shown in 2003 to be the same as it is in the general population.

Michael Berenbaum’s study of the American Jews privileges broad historical and cultural analysis over statistics. In the early days of the nation’s history, the immigrants were relatively poor and unaccompanied by scholars or rabbis, but the Protestant ascendancy favored them over Irish or Italian Catholics and African-Americans. In the first part of the twentieth century, Czarist pogroms drove increasing numbers of Jews to the United States, where their new-found freedoms had a dramatic effect, allowing them to “assimilate” at the 40-50 percent rate. Contrariwise, a many younger Jews considered it appropriate and valuable to manifest Jewishness. For ultra- Orthodox Jews that meant wholesale embrace of American marketing, business practices, and ways of funding, along with single-minded preservation of tradition. The voting patterns of the Orthodox tend to follow those of evangelical Christians, but otherwise American Jews are resolutely democratic. Berenbaum believes that preoccupation with the Holocaust came to dominate Jewish consciousness, and was accompanied by a disconnection to the institutions of American Judaism. At least for a while, Berenbaum writes, “American Jews were building their identity not on what they were, but on what they were not” (p. 105). A new, fuller identity will have to come to grips with smaller numbers—three percent of the population—in a culturally diverse twenty-first century.

For Jews in France, Michel Wievorka, negative on the apparently liberating maneuvers of the Revolution and Napoleon, sees a trajectory from assimilation to post-republicanism. Jews in the nineteenth century became increasingly active in French political and institutional life; Wievorka cites Pierre Birnbaum’s labels for the most engaged, i.e., “Republican fanatics” and “State Jews” (p. 113). What Wievorka, bracketing the Holocaust, calls “The Great Change” came after the Eichmann trial, the anti-Israel remarks of de Gaulle, and the revelation of the real role of the Vichy government. French Jews returned to “the classic republican model, but without necessarily abandoning the gains made in the past, and thus without ceasing to declare support for the State of Israel, while also trusting Jewish community institutions to ensure their symbolic protection” (p. 117). They are now in what Wievorka takes to be a post-republican phase, closely following Paris-Jerusalem politics and manifestations of Islamic anti-semitism: an assimilated minority paradoxically blamed for the non-assimilation of members of another minority.

The story of Islam in the United States is certainly less dramatic and complex than the story of Islam in France. The paper of Liyakat Takim on American Islam is, therefore, more limited in its scope than the other papers. Lebanese Muslims settled in Detroit and the surrounding area between 1900 and 1922, whereas Black Muslims only latterly and after considerable reorganization, joined world Islam. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson enacted legislation allowing more immigrants from non-European countries. From here Takim jumps to the post 9/11 contemporary situation and Arab-American efforts to overcome stereotypes of Islam and terrorism. Christian Lebanese took the lead here and new specifically Muslim organizations established in the 1980s and 1990s joined in. Simple civil rights were at stake after the government established a program to secretly check on radiation levels in a representative sample of Muslim homes, businesses, and mosques. Many Muslims refused to engage with the government or public; leaders tried to convince their people that it was religiously forbidden to participate in any way in a secular state. Others promoted voting registration and the formation of a meaningful Muslim voting bloc. Subsequently, but not necessarily consequently, there were references to Muslims in presidential discourse and accommodation to Muslim holidays and symbols.

French Islam, on the contrary, is a major factor in public life, less because of Muslim voting power than because of the overall discussion of the place of Muslims, citizens or not, in national life. Catherine Withol de Wenden puts up front the statistic that France has four million out of the twelve million European Muslims and the largest Muslim population of any country in Western Europe. At the beginning of the 1984–1994 decade, the government decided to cut off random immigration of workers from non-European Community countries—proof required that such immigration was *not* economically harmful for the country. As immigrants from Turkey, French African countries, and the Maghreb settled in run-down *banlieue* neighborhoods, children and teenagers were regularly killed or hurt in incidents with the police. The granting of ten-year residence permits and the accommodation of specifically Muslim needs in the workplace did lead to some social progress. Other reform and legislation efforts aimed at integration of Muslim immigrants into national life. Studies of the number of mixed marriages, the observance of Islamic religious practices, and the use of the French language in private life showed that Algerians were the best-integrated into French life; Turks, the least. The decade 1994–2005 began with bomb attacks, followed, however, by a series of special efforts by a series of government efforts to speed up integration into all areas of life. The Conseil français du Culte musulman encouraged a republic-friendly Islam, even though such *culte* (if the word is taken to mean public worship), was the practice of only 5–10 percent of Muslims. Education was the problem, because few young people got into the *lycées* that would prepared them for the *grandes écoles*. And out of the small group who did succeed in upwardly mobile professional paths emerged the principal terrorists! Then came the headscarf affair in response to three young girls who insisted on the right to wear the headscarf in the public schools, and it still is a major issue in French official and unofficial discussion of *laïcisme*, religion, and the state.

Although public commentary on *laïcité* and the headscarf affair appears to be waning, the remarks of the church historian Amanda Porterfield in the concluding set of papers bear repeating here: “The French have an admirable substitute for the unifying communal aspect of religion in their reverence for reason. And appeals to human reason may [be] the most straightforward means of ensuring liberty and equality in public life, more straightforward and less easily encumbered than appeals to God. But reason may not offer everyone the effervescent vitality, the feeling of connection to transcendent power, or the sense of belonging that religion does. Religion may offer a matrix for human creativity out of which new solutions for the future may emerge” (p. 181). Perhaps a religious matrix will benefit a France *laïque* in the long run.[2] But at the moment, one cannot expect such positive results out of the American religious matrix, permeated as it is by a fundamentalist Right which, as Porterfield puts it, “deploys the symbols of American civil religion and the principles of religious freedom and equality in ways that vitiate diversity and suppress dissent” (p. 180). So, perhaps, a home-grown version of *laïcité* will benefit a United States “under God” in the long run.[3]

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NOTES

[1] In some recent sociological writings, tables are turned and Europe is made to be the exception to world-wide religious expression—or at least the practice of Christianity in other parts of the world. See Peter Berger, Grace Davies, and Effie Fokas, eds., *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

[2] See Steven L. Englund, "How Catholic is France? You Might be Surprised," *Commonweal*, November 7, 2008.

[3] For excellent current commentary on the roles assumed for or attributed to religion in American public life, see *Sightings*, the biweekly online (e-mail) publication of the Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago.

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