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Review, World Religions and Democracy

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WORLD RELIGIONS AND DEMOCRACY. Edited by Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Philip J. Costopoulos. Johns Hopkins Press 2005. Pp. xxvi, 262. \$45.00. ISBN: 0-801-88079-3.

Is religion a help or hindrance to the development of democracy? Unsurprisingly, the answer is that sometimes religion is a help, othertimes a hindrance, but this fine book is still full of insights. It is a collection of articles drawn from the *Journal of Democracy*: two essays on Confucianism, one on Hinduism, two on Buddhism, one each on Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, nine on Islam, two comparative, and an Introduction and Epilogue. Plainly, the challenge of Islam for democracy is what chiefly engages the editors.

There are at least two intellectual contexts for the book. The first is set out by Alexis de Tocqueville, mentioned early in the "Introduction" (ix-xxvi) by co-editor Philip J. Costopoulos, executive editor of the *Journal of Democracy*:

Despite Alexis de Tocqueville's warnings that a healthy liberal democracy will require a vibrant religious element, the prevailing view over most of the past half-century at least has been that democracy's progress is naturally accompanied not merely by the advance of secularism but by the waning of religion. Social scientists generally embraced secularization theory, which boils down to the idea that modernization advances in lockstep with the decline of religious belief, activity, and organization. This is a version of the historicist notion that religion belongs to the childhood of the human race, and is destined to fade away with the rise of science, mass politics (democratic or otherwise), the sundry dislocations occasioned by urbanization, and other phenomena characteristic of modernity. Such an account may seem to offer a relatively accurate rendering of developments in Western Europe, and the contrary example of the United States, where high levels of religious affiliation and belief persist, has often been chalked up to "American exceptionalism." Influenced perhaps by the West European experience, students of democracy and democratization have paid the whole subject of religion relatively little attention.

There are growing signs, however, of a reversal in this trend as scholars of democracy increasingly grapple with the issues raised by the interactions between democratization and various religious traditions. Before the Second World War, democracy was found

almost solely in historically Christian lands. Since then, the second and third global waves of democratization have carried this form of rule (or influences associated with it) to countries inhabited by all the world's major religious communities. It should be anything but surprising that the challenges which flow from the need to work out accommodations between democracy on the one hand and spiritual traditions such as Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam on the other have raised a host of intellectually fascinating and at times politically arduous questions for scholars and politicians alike. (ix)

De Tocqueville is picked up again in the "Epilogue" (245-252) by Hillel Fradkin, Senior Fellow and Director of the Project on the Muslim World at the Hudson Institute. In an essay that might be usefully read first or second, Fradkin writes:

"On my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention," Tocqueville reports in *Democracy in America* (I, 308). Tocqueville's wonder embraces admiration as well as surprise. Though religion is not formally a part of the American political system, Tocqueville goes so far as to describe it as the first of America's political institutions by virtue of its indirect effects upon political life (I, 305). For him, only one other extrapolitical factor is more important—that when America became a political democracy it already enjoyed "equality of conditions." Yet he regards the latter as almost certain to endure under any and all foreseeable future political arrangements; the future vitality of religion he sees as far less certain. Accordingly, the role of religion forms one of the most important themes of his reflections on the blessings, problems, and prospects of democracy as such. He not only devotes several chapters and even groups of chapters to the subject but also presents observations about it throughout the rest of the work. (245)

The most significant part of Fradkin's "Epilogue" is an exegesis of de Tocqueville on religion in America. Religion provides the moral basis preventing American "democracy from degenerating into despotism." (246) America does a better job than Europe in harmonizing democracy and religion, a "triumph rest[ing] on the principle of the separation of church and state." (247-248) American democracy influences American religion, leading American religion to embrace "the love of well-being," including the acceptance of wealth as a good thing. (249) The continued health of both democracy and religion in the United States demonstrates the wisdom of the American

democracy/religion model: "It may be the case, however, that over the long run other democracies will not thrive unless religion plays a role similar to that which is played in America." (252)

Fradkin's account of de Tocqueville notes the importance of the separation of church and state, a theme developed more elaborately in the second intellectual context provided by the book. This is best elaborated in the first comparative chapter, Chapter 1, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations'" (3-23), written by Alfred Stepan, Wallace Sayre Professor of Government at Columbia University. Stepan begins with the question animating the book: "Are all, or only some, of the world's religious systems politically compatible with democracy?" (3) No real answer is given here; it is a question set for the reader. However, Stepan does fine work in describing what it is that will tend to make religion supportive of democracy. Central for Stepan are what he calls:

the "twin tolerations"—that is, the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions. (3)

How well do the various religions measure up to the democratic expectations of de Tocqueville and Stepan? The book, of course, attempts to provide the answer and I commend the essays to the reader, who will find much grist for many mills. Here are a few samples.

In Chapter 9, "The Pioneering Protestants," (117-131) Robert D. Woodberry, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas, and Timothy S. Shah, Senior Fellow in Religion and International Affairs at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, note that modern democracies mostly grew up in Protestant nations and Protestant America was de Tocqueville's model. Herewith, a good example of their theme:

We argue that there is nonetheless compelling cross-national evidence of a causal association between Protestantism and democracy. At the same time, we emphasize that the association is not direct or automatic but mediated and contingent. Among the major mediating influences or mechanisms, we number: 1) the rise of religious pluralism and what Alfred Stepan terms the "twin tolerations" or the mutual independence of church and state; 2) the development of democratic theory and practice; 3) civil society and independent associational life; 4) mass education; 5) printing and the origins of a public sphere; 6) economic development; and 7) the reduction of corruption. These mechanisms help to explain how and why Protestantism tends, on balance to promote

democracy and democratization over time.

Protestantism's contribution to democracy via such mediating mechanisms explains both the strength and the contingency of the relationship. These mechanisms *often* directly result from Protestant influences, and when present, *often* directly foster democratization. Yet "often" is different from "always." Various factors, including not only changing material conditions but also the complex interests and motives of Protestant actors themselves, may disrupt the positive relationship and cause Protestantism to have neutral or even negative effects on democracy. (118) (emphasis in original) (footnote omitted)

Protestantism may be particularly inclined to democracy, but Catholicism and Hinduism are examples of religious traditions that have been turned around from anti-democratic to pro-democratic faiths. Daniel Philpott, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, in Chapter 8, "The Catholic Wave," (102-116) describes the increasing accommodation of Catholicism with democracy. Again, Stepan's twin tolerations play an important analytical role:

Catholicism and democracy? Historically, the two have clashed. Latter-day liberals still thrust with reminders of nineteenth-century papal condemnations of religious liberty and twentieth-century concordats between the Church and fascist dictatorships; contemporary Catholics still parry with the irony of French revolutionaries decapitating Catholic men in order to advance the rights of man. How, then, did democracy break out in Catholic-majority states the world over? The Catholic wave in fact culminated a centuries-long rapprochement by which the Church and the democratic state each slowly came to tolerate the other in doctrine and practice, eventually arriving at a mutual and reciprocal agreement upon what Alfred Stepan has termed the "twin tolerations." The tolerations are essential to liberal democracy: the state respects the rights of all religious bodies to practice and express their faith and to participate in democratic politics, while religious bodies accept religious freedom for people of all faiths (and no faith) and renounce claims to special constitutional status or prerogatives. (102) (footnote omitted)

An even more conscious transformation of a religious faith's commitment to democracy seems to have taken place in Hinduism. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President of the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, writes in Chapter 4, "Hinduism and Self-Rule" (56-69):

“Democracy,” runs a revealing Indian quip, “is like cricket—a quintessentially Indian game that just happens to have been invented elsewhere.” Adopting democracy in India required a radical transformation of Hindus’ self-understanding, not least because it required them to make real a polity which was, at that time, barely even imaginable. One can readily see how Hindus would have had to satisfy themselves that democracy was at least not against Hindu traditions. What surprises is the extent to which Hindus went beyond this: The early twentieth century on the subcontinent saw a torrent of literature contending that Hinduism required a positive commitment to democracy. Some arguments, including Gandhi’s sought to prove that *swaraj* (self-rule) in all its senses was at Hinduism’s core. Others tried to show that a certain conception of democratic practice had always been central to Indian society. (58) (footnote omitted)

And, of course, most importantly nowadays there is the problem of Islam and democracy. Among the nine fine essays on Islam, let me turn to just one, Chapter 13, “A Historical Overview” (168-179) by Bernard Lewis, Cleveland E. Dodge Professor (Emeritus) of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Lewis neatly encapsulates one of the fundamental historical differences between Islam and Christianity in history, their relationships to the State:

In Islam . . . there is from the beginning an interpenetration, almost an identification, of cult and power, or religion and the state: Mohammed was not only a prophet, but a ruler. In this respect, Islam resembles Old Testament Judaism and looks quite different from Christianity. Christianity, to repeat, began and endured for centuries under official persecution. Even after it became the state religion of Rome under the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, a distinction was maintained between spiritual and temporal powers. Ever since then, all Christian states without exception have distinguished between throne and altar, church and state. The two powers might be closely associated, as under the caesaropapism of the Byzantine Empire, or they might be separated; they might work in harmony or they might come into conflict; one might dominate for a time and the other might displace it; but the duality remains, corresponding to the distinction in Christian Rome between *imperium* (imperial power) and *sacerdotium* (priestly power).

Islam in its classical form has no organizational equivalent. It has no clergy or clerical hierarchy in anything like the Christian sense of the word, and no ecclesiastical organization. The mosque is a building, not an institution in the sense that the church is. At least