

J. Christopher Soper & Joel S. Fetzer

Book review

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„RELIGION AND NATIONALISM IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE“

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At the very beginning of their book, J. Christopher Soper and Joel S. Fetzer recognized religion and nationalism as one of the most potent forces in the modern world. Due to the interdependence between these forces, it is too difficult to propose one unifying analytical framework for them. Soper and Fetzer tried to tackle this problem in their last book *Religion and Nationalism in Global Perspective*.

Structurally, this book consists of a list of figures, a list of tables, a preface, eight chapters, a bibliography, and an index. In general, this study is divided into three logical units: theoretical framework, case studies, and conclusion.

The first chapter offers a theoretical basis for the inter-influence between religion and nationalism. Even though they confirm there is no simple framework for the interaction between religion and nationalism, the authors find three main fields for this interaction. First, in the historical field, religion has been „one of the strongest pillars of, and reason for, nationalism and nation-state formation“¹. Second, theoretically, nationalism frequently adopts religious language and concepts on the occasion of forging a national identity. Finally, in the empirical field, religious actors can take a supportive, opposite, or indifferent stand toward the national state and nationalism. Their research question deals with „differing models of religion and nationalism, how those models are defined and measured, why they emerge, and what explains the continuing nexus between civic and spiritual identities within states“². They argue there are three predominant models: secular nationalism, religious nationalism, and civil-religious nationalism. Surely, these are ideal types.

Each model is constructed from institutional and ideological components. Secular nationalism leads to the separation of Church and State, and the forging of secular national ideology, especially in post-colonial countries. Religious nationalism institutionally leads to the declaration of official religion, while ideologically it takes religion as the foundation for national collective identity and the source of universal values. Finally, civil-religious nationalism institutionally varies from benign separation to pluralistic accommodation between religion and nationalism, whereas ideological links between religion and nationalism „create a sense of solidarity

1 J. Christopher Soper & Joel S. Fetzer, *Religion and Nationalism in Global Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, p. 2.

2 Ibid.

and collective identity among the people based on shared religious and political values³; without referring to some concrete religious tradition.

The second part of this book is devoted to case studies arranged in six chapters. Two representative countries were selected for each model of religion and nationalism. One country from each pair represents a stable model, while the other shows signs of instability, i.e. moving towards another model. The authors find four factors that determine the selection of countries. The first and key factor is „the role and status of religion at the point of state formation“⁴. The second factor is the position of religion in the Constitution, while the third factor deals with demographic peculiarities, specifically the degree of religious diversity. The fourth and last factor applies to empirical data: public opinion and the place of religion and nationalism in national leaders' public statements and periodicals.

Chapters 2 and 3 refer to civil-religious nationalism, namely to the United States of America (USA) as the example of a stable form, and to Israel as the example of an unstable form of this model. Despite numerous religious traditions in both countries, the authors confirm the salient distinction between religiously diverse countries, like the USA, and religiously divided countries, such as Israel. In the USA, „[a] religious establishment was neither plausible nor attractive to most, but unity under a common Christian morality was“⁵. Therefore, civil religion was strengthening as new religious groups migrated into the country, which means that civil-religious nationalism did not erase political divisions based on religion. Instead, this model tends to be stable because, even though „the relative power of religious traditions wax and wane, new groups emerge and old ones decline, yet the connecting thread between religion of virtually any stripe and the American nation remains strong“⁶. In the Israeli case, this model was a middle-of-the-road choice at the moment of establishment of independent state due to the existence of several extremes: secular and socialist view, and religious and Revisionists' Zionism. Consequently, the state was defined as both democratic and Jewish. That is why „the roots of the contemporary tension around matters of religion and state, or religion and national loyalties, were formalized at the moment of state formation“⁷. Immigration of numerous religiously traditional Jews, growth of the Arab population, strengthening of the religious political parties and conflicts with non-Jewish neighbors – all of those are huge challenges for civil-religious nationalism in Israel.

3 Ibid, p. 9.

4 Ibid, p. 33.

5 Ibid, p. 41.

6 Ibid, p. 71.

7 Ibid, p. 74.

The model of religious nationalism is subject of the chapters 4 and 5, in which Greece is used as a stable form of the model, and Malaysia is an unstable one. Even though it changed the Constitution, the attitude of the Greek state towards the Church of Greece remained the same, i.e. its status as the official Church was maintained. This model is also strengthened by the „historical Other“, which is Muslim Turkey (formerly the Ottoman Empire). Church of Greece became a symbol of national identity, and the autocephaly obtained from the Ecumenical Patriarchate has modernized the Church and helped to create „Greek“ Christian Orthodoxy in opposition to „Ecumenical“.⁸ On the other hand, Malaysia represents the opposite example because Islam has been declared the state religion even though the Muslim population (Malays) represents only relative majority, which is not the case in ninety percent Christian Orthodox Greece. Hence the constant threat of ethno-religious conflicts and religiously based violence between the Muslim majority (Malays) and the Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu (Tamils) minority. The authors conclude that when the model of religious nationalism is established in a country where there is no overwhelming majority of members of the official religion, the rights of the minority are limited and the majority is privileged. This is supported by the words of the founder of the state, Tunku Abdul Rahman: „The Malays will decide who the „Malayans“ should be“.⁹

Finally, chapters 6 and 7 deal with the model of secular nationalism, in the cases of Uruguay, as the example of a stable form, and India, as an unstable one. Uruguay is a rare case in Latin America due to the high percentage of atheists, agnostic, and religiously unaffiliated (42%). Secular nationalism in Uruguay has been established as a consequence of the weakness of the Roman Catholic clergy and institution. Public opinion research confirmed the existence of a high level of nationalism resistant to religious affiliation and praxis.¹⁰ On the contrary, India chose this model due to the deep ethno-religious cleavages and the high percentage of the interest in religion among the population (67%). Problems in Kashmir and Punjab, the rise of the religious nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, the presentation of secularism as a Hindu religious concept (Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee), the increase in the number of Muslims at the expense of the Hindu viewpoint, and numerous other issues have made Indian secular nationalism extremely unstable.

8 Ibid, p. 120.

9 Ibid, p. 136.

10 Ibid, p. 176.

In the last part of the book, chapter 8, the authors consider the „pitfalls and opportunities on the religious path to nationalism“.¹¹ They emphasize that none of the three models of religion and nationalism is inherently stable or unstable. Only the forms of these models are stable or unstable. From this, they conclude that „it is misguided to presume that a model that works or well in one country would necessarily function in the same way in a very different context“.¹²

Soper and Fetzer tackled an extremely important task: they made three models out of the myriad of relationships between religion and nationalism. For science is important that Soper&Fetzer's models can be investigated in new studies. In the introductory part, the authors provided numerous examples of countries that correspond to one of the models, which they did not investigate in the case studies. They also put forward important hypotheses, such as that „civil-religious states will encourage high levels of nationalism for disparate religious traditions“,¹³ which researchers can test in new studies.

This book stands out for its careful selection of examples. The countries for the case studies were not chosen only according to the paradigmatic nature of the stable or unstable form of their model, but also according to their confessional and geographical diversity. Thus, the book includes predominantly Protestant USA and atheist-Catholic Uruguay (from the region of North America and Latin America & Caribbean), nominally Muslim Malaysia and Hindu India (from the region of Asia-Pacific), and Christian Orthodox Greece and Jewish Israel (from the region of Europe and Middle East-North Africa).

The significance of this book lies in unexplored parts of the world, such as the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Researchers can „drop anchor“ anywhere in the world and test Soper&Fetzer's models. Their contribution is that they enriched the discipline of politics and religion with a theoretical framework that can be practically examined on the example of any region or country. Nevertheless, there is a vague moment: terms such as nationalism, national loyalty, patriotism, and national feelings are used as synonyms. If the concept of nationalism itself were to be more clearly defined, the field would be opened for a re-examination of empirical findings in the study of the level of abstract or concrete nationalism, which also offers space for new research.

11 Ibid, p. 225.

12 Ibid, p. 227.

13 Ibid, p. 30.

The book is intended for social scientists, especially for researchers in the field of politics and religion. But, also for analysts, officials, students, and others. Although the study uses, among other things, statistical procedures that are not widely known and understandable, it can be said that the book is written in informative, precise, and simple language. Each section within the case studies, whether historical overview, normative framework, or empirical analysis, can be considered individually depending on one's interest. There lies its social and commercial potential.

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