

Review - Religion and Foreign Affairs

Written by Jennifer S. Bryson

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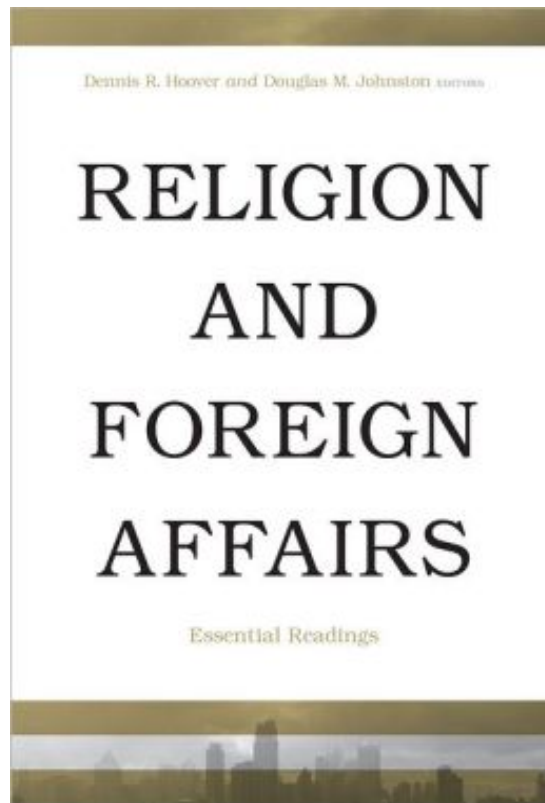
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JENNIFER S. BRYSON, JUL 4 2013

Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings

Edited by Dennis R. Hoover and Douglas M. Johnston

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012.



The new anthology *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings* is a unique and valuable contribution to the study of international relations. The authors have gathered 59 essays and articles, mostly 3-6 pages, by noted scholars covering multiple ways religion intersects, and at times collides, with international affairs. This book provides a resource on topics which for many years received relatively scant attention.

In their introduction, Hoover and Johnston observe that until recently there was, and to some extent still is, a “cycle of ignoring or at least sidelining religion in academia and public policy” (p. 2). Yet “[t]oday,” they observe, “if anything reigns in the field [of international relations], it is confusion – but at least there is now widespread determination to sort through the complexities and make progress in matters both theoretical and practical” (p. 3).

56 of the 59 essays are from the late 20th and early 21st centuries; the exceptions are the “Melian Dialogue” from

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Thucydides, a passage from *City of God* by Augustine, and an excerpt from “Of War” out of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. The titles and authors of all 59 essays are accessible at the Baylor University Press page for this book.

The essays in *Religion and Foreign Affairs* are organized into ten sections:

1. Secularization, Desecularization, and the Disciplines of International Affairs
2. Theoretical Foundations from Antiquity
3. Ethics of Force
4. Religion and Conflict
5. Religion and Peacemaking
6. Religion, Globalization, and Transnationalism
7. Religion and Economic Development
8. Religion, Democracy, and the State
9. Religious Freedom and Human Rights
10. Religion and the Future of U.S. Foreign Policy

Hoover and Johnston avoid, wisely I think, extensive debates over definitions of “religion.” After all, they could have edited the entire 635-page anthology just on *that* question alone. They recognize that the definition of religion is complicated and that consensus on this is not self-evident. But for their already long book they have chosen to handle this in the introduction so that the heart of the book can delve into international affairs. Hoover and Johnston adapt the view used by Daniel Philpott in his essay in this anthology. “Religion,” explains Philpott, “is a set of beliefs about the ultimate ground of existence, that which is unconditional, not itself created or caused, and the communities and practices that form around these beliefs” (p. 34).

This book has a decidedly western academic and religiously monotheistic approach to the topics of religion and foreign policy. For example, the explicitly religious perspectives included are Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Also, one of the ten sections is devoted to “Religion and the Future of U.S. Foreign Policy.”

The only lacuna I find in this otherwise thorough volume is the intersection of modern human rights discourse and religion. Granted, there is a section on “Religious Freedom and Human Rights” with essays addressing issues related to religious freedom, including controversial ones such as proselytism. Also there is an essay by Paul Brink which considers a conceptual framework for how religious believers might consider human rights. Essays by Kevin Hasson and Allen Hertzke devote some attention to examining how religion supports rights, but still in both the focus is the right of religious freedom. Katherine Marshall devotes some attention to tensions between religion and some gender rights promotion efforts, as well as contributions of religious actors on issues such as countering human trafficking. But these treatments only touch here and there on how religion relates to broader frameworks of human rights. The book does not have a section addressing how religion and religious actors may, and indeed sometimes do, collide with human rights other than religious freedom, while at other times religion and human rights build a unique and powerful synergy.

Particularly as debates expand and heat up across the globe regarding sexual categories, sexual practices, and whether some of these deserve special protection with the status of “rights,” religion and religious believers are bound to cross paths with these issues; at these crossings I anticipate some traffic delays, some traffic snarls, and even some collisions will emerge in coming years. For example, now that the U.S. State Department has expanded its office for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues, there is bound to be at least occasional tension in promoting both LGBT concerns as well as the freedom of religious believers, some of whom oppose various LGBT issues. This intersection of religion and LGBT concerns in foreign policy is relatively new, so perhaps there is not yet a body of literature easily accessible for inclusion in an anthology such as this. At the very least I think this set of issues needs to be considered should there be a second edition of this anthology, or as a topic for another volume.

On the whole *Religion and Foreign Affairs* provides a broad, solid foundation for the study of how religion is a factor in international affairs. *Religion and Foreign Policy* has value both for teaching and as a reference book. In

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particular, I think *Religion and Foreign Policy* would be a valuable addition to undergraduate and M.A. level courses in international relations, political theory, and public policy, and also for introducing seminary students to ways religion intersects with foreign affairs. Hoover and Johnston's book would be a valuable addition to university, government, and also seminary libraries. In addition I recommend this volume for public libraries which serve a predominantly college educated public.

Precisely because this is such a good book it is unfortunate that it is not available as an e-book. This may pose a problem for professors who would like to assign selections from this book for their courses. The book itself lists at \$59.95 by Baylor Press. This would be a hefty price, even if discounted, for students to pay for a book from which professors might assign just a few essays. When I asked Dennis Hoover via e-mail whether there is an e-version, he responded, "Unfortunately no, we couldn't afford electronic rights on so many articles." Perhaps in the future Baylor Press might find a way to make select essays from this collection available electronically on an "a la carte" basis. While many of these essays have been published previously and are available, sometimes electronically, through other avenues, trying to chase them down individually would be time consuming, and potentially inordinately expensive. There is value in the service Hoover and Johnston have provided by so thoughtfully selecting and gathering these essays all into one place. For now, however, that one place is physical in a paperback book. For now, virtual access remains a hope for the future.

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