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Book Reviews

***Religion in American Politics: A Short History*. By Frank Lambert. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. x + 294 pp. $24.95 cloth**

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Can one write "a short history" of religion in American politics? Probably not, and Frank Lambert doesn't really try. Rather, he focuses chronologically on "some of the public moments when religion and politics have intersected" (10). The eight moments emphasized are the Founding, the era of the Second Great Awakening, the Gilded Age, the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, the New Deal and Cold War, the civil rights era, the rise of the Religious Right, and the reply of the Religious Left. In each period, Lambert "examines moral issues within specific contexts" and "addresses the character and composition of the prevailing religious pluralism, the coalition or coalitions that emerge to give voice to a moral vision in the political arena, and the political expression of that vision" (10).

Thus, Lambert makes no claims to the comprehensive review implied in the main title. And indeed, various readers will question the omission of the Prohibition movement, the interwar peace movement, and other favorites in American political history. Still, the episodes examined certainly include some major intersections of religion and political life, and they afford Lambert an opportunity to pursue several themes from the time of the Founding to the present.

This approach has both strengths and weaknesses. As an introduction to formative periods and issues in the confluence of religion and American politics, the book succeeds admirably. Each episode is treated as a coherent whole, but is also placed within the larger historical themes of competing religious (and secular) views of political life. The reader is introduced to important actors and arguments and, after reading this volume, will have enough direction to pursue further investigation. The book is also a joy

to read; Lambert not only has a felicitous style, but often finds just the right quotation from a protagonist or scholar to make a particular point without belaboring it. For general readers, or as a starter for an undergraduate course in American religion and politics, this book would be a fine choice.

The political scientist, however, is bound to find problems. Political philosophers might find Lambert's contending "moral visions" overly simplistic and dualistic: it often seems that the only choice is whether one wants a theocracy or doesn't. Political historians and voting specialists will search in vain for the promised descriptions of competing religious coalitions; there is no treatment whatsoever of the electoral behavior of religious groups. Although a book such as this one invariably relies both on the author's specialized expertise and on a careful reading of secondary sources, there are a lot of strange omissions here. Indeed, Lambert fails to use obvious sources in almost every chapter. For example, Richard Carwardine does not appear in the chapter on antebellum religion and politics; Henry May, Aaron Abell, and Charles Hopkins are absent from the analysis of religion in the Gilded Age; James Findlay and Jeffrey Hadden are not cited in the civil rights chapter, despite its emphasis on white Protestant reaction to the movement; and so on. Such puzzling omissions mean that vital perspectives are missing from analysis of the chosen "episodes."

The source problem becomes more critical as Lambert moves further from his expertise on early American religious politics to more recent episodes. The chapter on the Religious Right is especially thin, as the author has apparently read very little of the massive literature on the movement, although he does cite William Martin's fine 1996 history as well as Kevin Phillips' ludicrous *American Theocracy*. Perhaps as a result, the chapter jumps from the movement's origins in the 1970s all the way to George W. Bush without any treatment of the intervening decades (203–204). The final chapter on the Religious Left is ahistorical, missing entirely the long story covered so well in Steven Tipton's *Public Pulpits* (2007). Indeed, the last chapters give the distinct impression of an author rushing the volume to press in time for election year distribution.

A final complaint is in order. Lambert offers a variant of "Whig history" when it comes to religion and politics. Throughout the narrative, his favorites are "strict separationists" on church-state disputes and "progressives" on great moral and political questions. And the story of religion in American politics is the (almost) inevitable triumph of both over their opponents. Although this frame appears even at the beginning, it emerges full-blown in the last two chapters, in contrasting treatments of the Religious Right and the Religious Left, and in Lambert's abrupt

conclusion. Although he clearly prefers the Left to the Right, his main hope and confidence lies in the ultimate vindication of strict secularism in politics. After complaining that religious politics from both sides has been responsible for polarization in American political life, he concludes that "[t]wo hundred and twenty years after the new republic's birth, critics of both the Religious Right and the Religious Left think the delegates were wise to keep religion out of national politics" (250).

If only it had been that simple. If only it were that simple.

***Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt*. By Meir Hatina. London: Tauris, 2007. x + 264 pp. $80.95 cloth**

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Meir Hatina's book examines intellectual debates about the role of Islam in the state in twentieth-century Egypt. After a historical discussion of the subject until roughly the present, Hatina examines the life and ideas of Faraj Fuda, an important Egyptian liberal thinker who was assassinated in 1992. Hatina examines Fuda's ideas and writings in part as a window into debates between liberal and Islamist ideological currents in Egypt in the second half of the twentieth century.

The first two chapters are largely historical and establish a genealogy of liberal thought in early twentieth-century Egypt. This section includes a discussion and analysis of the intellectual debates generated by, 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq and his important work, *Islam and the Sources of Political Authority*, as well as the writings of Khalid Muhammad Khalid. Chapter 2 surveys the revival of religious politics under presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak and includes a discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas and political participation during this period.

Chapter 3 begins the discussion of Faraj Fuda's life and intellectual engagement. The single largest section of the book focuses on Fuda's championing of liberal principles and secular politics. Fuda also spent considerable energy challenging the Islamist trend in Egypt. Hatina recounts Fuda's family and educational background and his early