Journal of American Studies, **46** (2012), e59 © Cambridge University Press 2012

Round Table

Journal of American Studies, **46** (2012), e59. doi:10.1017/S0021875812002010

Thomas Albert Howard, *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, $45.00). Pp. xii + 256. ISBN 978 1995 6551 1.

In this richly documented and beautifully written book, Thomas Albert Howard has identified and skilfully analysed one important strand in the relationship between the United States and Europe (which means here principally Germany and France). As he demonstrates, American religion has frequently puzzled, exasperated, even angered many European observers. He carefully disentangles the diverse and often contradictory forms that these objections could take. As he shows there is a basic distinction between the "traditionalist" and the "secularist" versions of this critique. The former camp included many Catholics, whether observant or, like Auguste Comte, secular, who saw the United States as an extreme example of the dangers of Protestantism. Equally negative were many Anglicans and Lutherans. American religion was condemned as "rowdy" and "fanatical" and the clergy as uneducated. Some observers feared that religion might die out without state support and guidance. Some at least of the criticisms had a measure of truth, as with the comment by a German journalist in the 1920s that separation of church and state was hypocritical, since the President was expected to be a Protestant, and, he suggested, preferably a Calvinist. Those who saw American religion as reflecting more general deficiencies in American society and culture ranged from Comte, Matthew Arnold and Heidegger in the traditionalist camp to Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Marx and Engels among the radicals. Max Weber seems to have been unusually ambivalent, caught between distaste for some aspects of American religion and admiration for its "modernity." The complaints of these as well as of many less eminent writers are expounded with lucidity and evenhandedness. Some of the most interesting sections relate to these more obscure figures, such as the many German "48ers" who escaped to the United States with high hopes that were often disappointed. One of them was so disgusted by the number of Jesuits in his adopted country that he wanted to make membership of the order a capital offence. At the same time the multiplicity of negative observations is balanced by detailed studies of two converts to the merits of American religion, the Swiss Reformed Philip Schaff and the French Catholic Jacques Maritain, the former being especially interesting because of the more concrete nature of his observations.

Howard also notes important philo-American currents in European history, while making the important point (8) that "Anti-Americanism and philo-Americanism are often structurally linked with one another, in that anti-American statements frequently constitute responses to European philo-American perspectives, not necessarily to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

America per se." In view of this, Howard might have placed more emphasis on those nineteenth-century Europeans whose evaluation of American religion was much more positive than that of the figures quoted here. Even Schaff was initially hostile, though his views changed radically after several years in his new home. But there were also many others who were consistently admiring of most things American, including their religion. Not for nothing, for example, did Matthew Arnold complain that America offered a warning of what England might be if the Dissenters had their way. And, as Howard notes, Dickens's dislike of American religion followed on naturally from his ridicule of English Nonconformist ministers. British Liberals frequently presented the United States as a model for Europeans to follow, and Nonconformists were among the most fervent of these Americanophiles. For example, the Welsh Methodist and Liberal imperialist Hugh Price Hughes thought that the world's future lay with "the Anglo-Saxon peoples." He even looked forward to a day when the United States and the British Empire were joined together in a federation whose parliament met alternately in London and in Washington. Like other Nonconformist "pulpit princes" of his day he greatly enjoyed travelling to the United States and preaching in American pulpits, and he liked most of what he saw there.[1]

Except at one point I found Howard's argument convincing. My reservation concerns his claim that there is a continuity between the forms of anti-Americanism that were widespread from the later eighteenth century to the early twentieth, and which are presented so vividly in the first two chapters of this book, and the anti-American sentiments expressed by European journalists in the early twenty-first century. This jumps over a period from the early 1940s to the mid-1960s when the prestige of the United States was very high, and which is scarcely represented in this book, except in the chapter on Maritain. It also jumps over a period that was pivotal for the so-called "Atlantic gap" in religious matters, namely the 1970s, when accelerating secularization in Europe coincided with an increasingly high profile for religion in American politics. So far as the high point of European philo-Americanism is concerned, it is worth quoting a recent book by the British journalist Godfrey Hodgson, who claims to belong "to that generation of Europeans who saw Americans as our saviors."[2] He went to study as a graduate student in Philadelphia and "jumped" at the opportunity to become his paper's correspondent in Washington. During this period the United States gained prestige across wide sections of public opinion in Europe, excluding only the far left and far right because of its role in World War II, its leadership of the "free world" during the earlier stages of the Cold War, and its image as the most modern, intellectually exciting and culturally innovative of Western societies. John Kennedy was far more admired in Europe than any European political leader of his time and at first Lyndon Johnson was seen as a worthy successor, as Hodgson attests. The main reason why American prestige dwindled in the last third of the twentieth century was disillusion with American foreign policy. The key catalyst was Vietnam. But almost equally important was support by United States governments for military coups in Latin America, often leading to the overthrow of elected governments. In Hodgson's case disillusion came later and very gradually. It seems to

[1] [Dorothea Hughes], *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), 326–67, 552–53.

[2] Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), ix.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have been prompted initially more by the growing economic and social inequalities within the United States, reinforced under the presidencies of Clinton and, more especially, George W. Bush, than by urgent doubts about American foreign policy.[3]

While Hodgson says relatively little about religion, events in the 1970s and 1980s were preparing the way for a revival of the religious dimension of European critiques of the United States. In the 1960s nearly all Western countries, including the United States, saw a substantial decline in churchgoing. However, around 1972 the level of churchgoing stabilized in the United States and remained at around the same level through the rest of that decade, whereas in most parts of Western Europe the decline continued unabated. Moreover, at a time when most of Europe's once very powerful Christian Democratic parties were in decline, the religious dimension of American politics was boosted by the emergence in the later 1970s of the "Christian right." Moreover, 1980 saw the election of Ronald Reagan, who reinforced his appeal by the use of religious rhetoric to an extent not seen in the preceding fifty years.[4] The result of this was that religion became a marker of European/American differences in a way that it had not been for many years. An added reason for this was that the kind of American religion that was growing then, combining as it often did very conservative kinds of Protestant theology with very conservative politics, was as uncongenial to most religiously minded Europeans as it was to secularists or the indifferent. As is now evident, the seeming defeat of fundamentalism in the 1920s was only temporary. Whether in its older unreconstructed forms, or in the modernized form of the new evangelicalism associated from the 1950s with the journal *Christianity Today*, it remained a widely supported and deeply rooted force in American society, especially in the South and the Mid-west. In the 1970s, as the Catholics and the "mainline" Protestant churches faced a serious decline in active membership, evangelicals and fundamentalists were ready to move to the centre stage. And as international disillusion with the United States mounted under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, reaching unparalleled levels during the second Bush presidency, American religion offered critics of its government an apparently attractive way of explaining the President's mindset and how he had come to be elected. From there it was a short step to suggesting that America was inherently religious and Europe inherently secular. And indeed this bald contrast was being drawn as much by admirers of America as by its critics, and in heavyweight scholarship as well as in more popular books and newspaper articles.[5]

However, it needs to be emphasized here that the image of Europe as a continent deeply rooted in secularity owes more to conservative nostalgia or secularist propaganda than to objective reality. Until the 1970s, at the earliest, Western Europe was religiously highly diverse. Even in France, often regarded as the stronghold of European secularism, many rural regions remained highly devout; and even among the intelligentsia, for every Sartre there was a Maritain. Such figures as Max Weber or Karl

[3] Ibid., xi–xv.

[4] David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40–41. Their analysis only starts in 1933.

[5] As an example of the former, see Berger's contributions to Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and of the latter, John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (London: Penguin, 2004).

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Marx, influential as they were, were not representative of contemporary European attitudes to religion, but came from some of the most secularized sections of European society. In the nineteenth century, the religious similarities between Britain and the United States were more significant than the differences; and at the middle of twentieth century, levels of religious practice in the United States, though higher than in Germany, France or Britain, were similar to those in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy or Austria, and much lower than in Ireland.[6]

The religious diversity of Europe in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was reflected in a large body of literature commenting, often critically, on the religion of neighbouring countries. As late as 1940 the Anglican *Church Times* was seeing the defeat of France as reflecting a moral and religious as much as a military failure, and blaming it on a combination of "bourgeois atheism" and Catholic sympathies towards Fascism.[7] In the nineteenth century, British piety elicited as many comments from French and German visitors as did American piety. Hippolyte Taine, who came to England in 1858 and 1862, was on the whole favourably impressed. He thought that the Anglican clergy were a great improvement on French Catholic priests, and he was struck by the fact that so many men of the middle and upper classes went to church, that few students at Oxford and Cambridge University were freethinkers, and that standards of sexual morality were much stricter than in France.[8] On the other hand, in Theodor Fontane's novel *Der Stechlin* (1898) one of the characters refers to the "exaggerated piety" of the English, and it is the pastor who accuses them of sanctimonious hypocrisy: "They say Christ and mean cotton."[9] And of course Marx and Engels were no more enthusiastic about British than about American religion.

In conclusion, then, this is an excellent study of the interaction between the United States and two important traditions of European thought from the later eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. It also offers interesting reflections on European–American tensions in the early twenty-first century. However, we should be cautious about assuming continuities between the former period and the latter. To complete the story, we need to look more closely at the period from the 1940s to the 1970s. And, at all times, claims (whether by admirers or by critics) for an American exceptionalism need to be taken with a pinch of salt and an eye to the writer's angle of vision and polemical agenda.

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In his contribution to a forum held by the American Society of Church History in 2005, Thomas Albert Howard quoted literary theorist Stanley Fish as stating that

[6] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 246–49.

[7] Gavin White, "The Fall of France," in W. J. Sheils, ed., *The Church and War* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 431–41, 435.

[8] Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England* (English translation, London: Strahan & Co., 1957), 96, 116, 158–59, 290.

[9] Theodor Fontane, *Der Stechlin*, in Fontane, *Romane und Gedichte* (Munich: Droemersche Verlagsanstalt, n.d.), 899, 955.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"the topic of religion is the new order of the day."[1] And it does seem plausible for religion to attract special attention from scholars who have become more and more interested in symbols, rituals, perceptions, and patterns of interpretation – as cultural historians have since the 1980s. However, Howard went on to summarize Fish as saying that a "religious turn" should include "not just religion as the object of detached study but religion as an increasingly accepted source informing other objects of study,"[2] and he added that this would "presumably" include "secularism, too." He speculated to what extent the envisaged "turn" in European historiography might be "an American, or at least Anglo-American, and not a Continental, phenomenon," adding that the secularization paradigm had first been challenged by American scholars. And he concluded by asking if "historians of Continental Europe" might "have something to learn from the American academy on this score" or whether this might be seen as "just another example of those ever-too-religious Americans clinging to perspectives that the decrees of history have consigned to extinction."[3] How exactly could religion become a "source informing" the historical study of irreligion? I wondered.

Five years on, Howard has expanded on the subject in *God and the Atlantic*, which illuminates his ambiguous quote from Fish's even more ambiguous article. His topic is one of the most compelling and influential, but also one of the most contentiously debated grand narratives in modern historiography. Broadly speaking, this narrative relates how the waning influence of religion goes hand in hand with the "modernization," or transformation, of traditional into more advanced societies. Scholars have felt the need to challenge both modernization theory and the secularization thesis for many reasons. One very obvious reason is the undeniable fact that the United States of America is (by all established standards) among the most "modern" states in the world – yet also among those with the most vibrant religious life and greatest religious diversity. There have been many attempts at explaining this seeming paradox.

Howard has chosen a different approach by asking how "secularization" and "modernization" have become so closely associated in European intellectuals' minds in the first place. He shows how these intellectuals have described the US (and specifically its separation between church and state, which has protected religious diversity since the First Amendment to the US Constitution came into place) in increasingly negative terms. Traditionalists' misgivings overlapped in significant ways with those of secularists, although the former preceded the latter. The two groups criticized US religious life for very different reasons: while traditionalists were horrified at what they saw as sectarianism, fragmentation, and degeneracy, secularists were frustrated because religion in the US did not seem to go away in spite of their contrary predictions. In a sense, then, the US was too secular in the traditionalists' eyes while it was not secular enough in those of the secularists (though why Howard chose the image of a "double helix" to visualize this constellation remains unclear).

[1] The European historiography forum included longer articles by Jeffrey Cox, Thomas Kselman, and George S. Williamson, while Howard's contribution was a commentary. It was published in *Church History*, 75, 1 (2006), 120–62, 157–58. Also see Thomas Albert Howard, "A 'Religious Turn', in Modern European Historiography?", *Historically Speaking*, 4 (2003), 24–26.

[2] Compare Stanley Fish, "One University Under God?", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 Jan. 2005, C1–C4.

[3] European historiography forum, 162.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Howard digs into the period immediately following the French Revolution to unearth these two strands of anti-American thinking and locates them especially (but not exclusively) in France, Britain, and Germany. He also presents two case studies of Europeans who stayed in the US over an extended period of time to demonstrate how some, less ideologically biased, Europeans were capable of more sympathetic views.

Howard's analysis of both anti- and philo-American discourses results in a complex picture – but it reads in parts like a vendetta against those Continental intellectuals who first identified the US as the "odd man out."[4] He claims that present-day anti-American sentiment has a "much deeper and more complex cultural (and specifically religious) backdrop or 'pre-history' than contemporary commentators ... normally suppose" (199–200). The lingering presence of past anti-Americanism in the European "social imaginary" (Charles Taylor's term) he characterizes as a "simmering cultural *ressentiment*, which can be aggravated by contemporary events and trends in American society, even as it significantly predates them" (133–34).

Howard's sweeping exposure of this mental relic's genealogy is readable and sometimes entertaining. He reveals the different interests which moved British Anglicans, Continental Romantics, and Vatican officials on the political right as well as early proponents of academic sociology, German idealists, Marxists, and anticlerical republicans on the left to denounce US religious vitality. He does not tread lightly in his march across two centuries, tracing the "problem with America" in intellectual heavyweights like Frances Trollope, Nikolaus Lenau, Barthold Georg Niebuhr, and Martin Heidegger on the one hand and Auguste Comte, Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim on the other (to name but a few). At the end of this anti-American pedigree, he locates prominent contemporary thinkers like E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Jean Baudrillard. Summarizing the "problem" itself, he senses nothing but condescension and contempt toward US religiousness: "What chutzpah had possessed religion in this upstart land to flout the learned prophets of its demise?" (199).

As counterexamples, Howard advances the advocates of religious pluralism Philip Schaff and Jacques Maritain. While by no means obscure, both have been overshadowed in the history of transatlantic relations by the towering figure of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835–40) remains a classic of political science today. Despite their initial bias, Schaff and Maritain were capable of overcoming (and, to some extent, bridging) the Atlantic gap. Howard detects a "striking intellectual kinship" between the Lutheran church historian Schaff and the Catholic philosopher Maritain (160). This is the main strength in his study to which I shall presently return.

On the whole, however, his spirited exposure of European (mis)perceptions conveys the impression that the "religious divide" in the book's title was a very one-sided affair. It seems largely to have been opened up by Eurocentric ideologists who viewed religiousness as one symptom of all they deplored in American culture; who cultivated anti-American sentiment for political and other reasons; and who, by constantly talking about it, made that "divide" a reality. But was this actually so? Should the origins of the "divide" not be sought considerably further back in time? Much maligned as the Puritans later were by anti-Americanist intellectuals, they had come to North America in the hope of establishing a radically different society to that on which they had

[4] European historiography forum, 161.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

turned their backs – a society firmly based on those religious principles that they thought were woefully disregarded in Europe. While Howard (understandably) rejects the notion of "American exceptionalism" inherent in the secularization thesis as superimposed and Eurocentric, the term is also used in other senses which have little to do with the European and everything with the US "social imaginary."

Thus, while the book's title suggests a much broader scope, Howard restricts himself to only one aspect of the religious divide. And while he promotes the concept of "transatlantic history" – a concept that embraces the complexity of transatlantic relations and the mutual entanglements between different cultures in the Atlantic region since at least 1500 – he does not go back any further than 1789 (except where he refers to post-1648 arrangements in Germany). In all fairness, it has to be said that nobody could have told the whole story of the "religious divide" in less than three hundred pages. But this is more than a labelling problem – it would have helped if Howard had clearly contextualized his subject. I think we cannot elude scrutinizing the "divide" over a longer period of time and from different angles.

One of the book's merits is that it points out Maritain and Schaff as transatlantic broker figures. This seems to me to be a promising route. It can reveal intellectual cross-currents to prevailing cultural and political trends. It underscores the power of personal experience against a dominant ideological climate, as Howard observes in Maritain's writings, which represent to him the "triumph of experience over theory" (175). Focussing on cultural mediators can help to put historical master narratives into perspective by identifying both their inventors and their critics. It adds complexity by calling into question the putative inevitability of such narratives' success and by readmitting rivalling narratives. Such a focus on transatlantic brokerage seems to me especially pertinent because historians have stressed the need to pay more attention to the role migration has played and continues to play in social transformations. With immigration from all corners of the world, increasing religious diversity and vitality within Europe itself have even prompted the question whether secularization might possibly only have been "an episode ... of limited impact, that may be forgotten within a generation or two," rather than the civilizational blueprint it was once thought to be.[5]

While Howard's study shows that much remains to be done, secularization, as conceived by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Eurocentric intellectuals, has already been thoroughly modified, reformulated, and even wholeheartedly discarded – and not just by Anglo-American scholars. Many Continental European historians would agree today that European secularization has been rashly extrapolated to other parts of the globe, including North America. In Germany, leading scholars in religious studies (Hans Kippenberg), sociology (Hans Joas), and theology (Friedrich Wilhelm Graf) have recently engaged critically with secularization. Like Howard, historian Manuel Borutta has tried to reconstruct the "genealogy" of secularization with a focus on the nineteenth century.[6] In seeking to strengthen the transatlantic perspective, acknowledging such work would help. Insinuating (as Howard seems to do in his sarcastic question in the 2005 forum and in the passages quoted above) that all

[5] Hartmut Lehmann, "Secular Europe versus Christian America? Re-examination of the Secularization Thesis," in Lehmann, ed., *Transatlantische Religionsgeschichte: 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2006), 146–61, 158.

[6] Manuel Borutta, "Genealogie der Säkularisierungsthese: Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 36 (2010), 347–76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

European criticism of US religious culture derives at least partly from outdated ideologies and Old World cultural arrogance can only be counterproductive.

Two contentious and interrelated issues lurk at the end of Howard's line of reasoning: first, whether, contrary to what secularists have been saying, religion should be allowed to influence other spheres, such as academia. Since secularization has been debunked and secularists have been exposed as the most unashamed Eurocentric ideologists, the implication seems to be, there is new room for debate. And second, whether US liberalism should be redefined to accommodate a specifically Christian dimension. Here, Howard's appraisal of Maritain's idea of a "new Christendom" is interesting: he commends this idea as having a lot in common with "modern liberalism generally, but a liberalism mindful of the theological bases of human dignity" (172). Of course, contentiousness will not disappear if opposing views are relegated to the other side of the Atlantic – discussing European history, European historiography, or current European criticism of religion's role in US society will not resolve these issues. And identifying nineteenth- and twentieth-century European intellectuals as creators of the "religious divide" or imputing to present-day European historians an enduring contempt for US religious life cannot obscure the fact that in both Europe and the US many liberal academics would shudder to see religion become an established "candidate for the truth" (in Stanley Fish's words) in academic inquiry. By contrast, those most eager to promote such a development have chosen *God and the Atlantic* for the 2012 book award of the country's leading evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*. In one way, then, Howard's book says more about current debates and front lines in the US than it says about past European perceptions.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin SÜNNE JUTERCZENKA

God and the Atlantic is a book with several facets. Broadly speaking, it is a study of how attitudes to the relationship between religion and the state evolved between the late eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth. It also takes up the question of the Atlantic "religious divide," locating it in how a somewhat narrowly defined group of writers and intellectuals understood the contrasting aims and effects of the revolutions in America and France, and how they came to assess the character of American religion from traditionalist and secularist perspectives. And it presents two detailed case studies of attempts by the Protestant church historian Philip Schaff and the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain to answer this weight of opinion and present some redeeming features of the survival of American religiosity in a world dominated by Marxists and liberals. Finally, it seeks to furnish a perspective on the problem of religious tolerance in Western democracies, where radicalism and extremism form a major link between domestic social policy and the ethos of foreign military intervention. Of the four, it is the last theme that appears to supply the agenda for the whole. This book, in short, is partly an intellectual history in its own right, and partly a defence of a pattern of theistic politics whose premise is a firm scepticism concerning the necessary link between modernity and secularism.

For historians of political thought (though not of religion), the master narrative of modernity takes a standard form. The course of Western history, they argue, is defined by the emergence of the modern state, and the concomitant subtraction of religion

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from discourses of public power. But this narrative has lately been challenged.[1] To consider the example of England, the Reformation is often described as "an act of state," in which the once independent power of the clergy was subsumed under that of law and Parliament. But this does not mean that religion vanished from public life. Instead, historians have suggested that tension between the civil and the sacred constituted one of the key dynamics of political thought between the Reformation and the age of reform in the early nineteenth century.[2] Nominally, the state was "Erastian" – that is, supreme over all affairs of religion – and committed to religious toleration; however, the continuing influence of the clergy in public life and as counsel to kings, combined with the lingering and frequently disruptive presence of Catholics and Protestant dissenters, meant that the state was obliged to remain vigilant lest religious factions trigger a religious war.[3] Meanwhile, a key dynamic of European politics was confessional, pulled back and forth between Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and exacerbated by the immense power of the Holy Roman Empire and the rivalry between Catholic and Protestant modes of empire that did so much to shape the dynamics of the Atlantic world.[4]

A book that examines the religious and political culture of the postrevolutionary Atlantic should, one might argue, deal with some elements of this backstory. However, apart from some capsule surveys of the French religious wars and the Westphalian settlement that drew the Thirty Years War to a close, the signal events in this analysis are the great revolutions in America and France. And even then, the events themselves are not examined in any detail. Rather, the interest here is to recover what Howard, following Charles Taylor, calls the "social imaginary," the "environing backgrounds of thought" that people use to "consider social reality . . . where their selves and their collectives" are situated in time and space (12). The social reality that dominates the thought world of Howard's subjects is the creeping realization that the French Revolution had failed, while its American counterpart produced a social order where proper philosophical reflection was stifled by chaotic sectarianism.

Howard's first two substantive chapters are therefore devoted to examples of this social imaginary in action, presented in a neat schematic of "master narratives" concocted by a very disparate group of writers, historians, philosophers, intellectuals and public figures. In the "traditionalist" camp – who attributed America's noisy religious pluralism to the absence of an established church – Charles Dickens stands alongside the statesman Metternich and the Savoyard Joseph de Maistre. While generally united in their dislike of America, their means of expressing it varied: some sounded a

[1] Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[2] Glenn Burgess, *British Political Thought, 1500–1660: The Politics of the Post-Reformation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009); J. G. A. Pocock, "A Discourse of Sovereignty," in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 377–428, 381.

[3] Ethan H. Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2011).

[4] Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

quasi-Burkean tone that the new republic lacked history, tradition or piety, guiding itself instead by "abstract" natural rights. German commentators frequently described it as mechanistic, without the moral and intellectual ties of the "fatherland." For the French, the landscapes were dreary and the wine undrinkable.

Opposing the traditionalists – though there is no evidence here of a debate between representatives of either group – are the secularists. Among them are Condorcet, Proudhon, Hegel, Marx and the "young Hegelians," and various radicals, republicans and socialists united in their disappointment in the revolutionary process and the reversals of 1815 and 1848. Here, the critiques of America were more philosophical in tone: its people were "strangers" to the developments in the Old World, which Hegel described as the "theatre of world history." For Marx, the Americans were too rich and well fed to foment revolution; for Engels, they were not sufficiently theoretical. Most distressing was the survival of religion after 1776, an aberration which served to discredit the political and social norms that defined the postrevolutionary settlement and which betrayed the secular and rational values of figures like Franklin, Paine and Jefferson (120).

Howard has thus reconstructed the opinions of two factions in the European republic of letters. Some of his subjects actually visited America, but most remained at the distance required by intellectuals who affect to be progressive and alienated all at once. Nevertheless, two interesting lines of thought cut across the traditionalist–secular divide. The first is the frequent description of the Americans as "mechanized" and technocratic, wholly lacking a culture and, presumably, individually lacking redeemable souls. A second shared line of argument is the notion (made doctrine by Max Weber) of the link between "puritanism" and bourgeois culture, and the two coalesced in Edward Aveling's study *The Working-Class Movement in America* (1891), which he cowrote with Marx's daughter. Seeing the American worker for themselves, they concluded that workers were "machines" in a nation which languished under "deformed Puritanism" (115).

Schaff and Maritain are thus presented as the reasonable foils to this trend of ignorance and overly theorized angst. But not before each is shown expounding elements of the traditional and secular critiques presented in the opening chapters. After a visit to America in the 1840s, Schaff expressed his horror at the wild landscape populated by beggars and "liberty dreamers"; he saw revivalist preachers of the second Great Awakening as mere hucksters (151). Similarly, Maritain came of age in France at the high point of anti-Americanism, and his early writings linked the evils of "liberalism, *Americanism* [and] modernism," and lamented the soulless rationalism of "petit-bourgeois" man (167–68, added emphasis).

Yet each man had his conversion. For Schaff, it was the gradual acceptance of the logic of the constitutional separation of church and state, which took its place as a world-historical moment that ushered in a new age where civil and religious liberty were combined as one. It is worth quoting Howard at length on this point:

> In essence, Schaff felt that the withdrawal of state support for churches in the United States amounted to an abrupt, unprecedented rolling back of historical forces, first set in motion by Emperor Constantine, who enabled Christianity's transition from persecuted sect to the eventual established religion of the Roman Empire. Developments in the Roman Empire after Constantine served, *mutatis mutandis*, as the prototypes for forms of official establishment in Europe from the Middle Ages up through the Peace of Westphalia and beyond. (154)

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In America, there was no equivalent of the Constantinian establishment (as there was in England) or a persecuting impulse whereby the state went out of its way to impose its will on religious groups. Instead, there was a "friendly separation" of church and state. Maritain also came to see that religion served as a bulwark to democratic ideals, and here he borrowed from long traditions in religious thought from Aquinas to discussions of natural religion and toleration that dominated debates on ecclesiology in late seventeenth-century England. His ultimate position was framed by a critique of Enlightenment, in which the doctrine of natural law was secularized and thus robbed of its essence. However, this essence was preserved in the American Declaration of Independence, which "adhered more closely to the original Christian character of natural rights" (180). In other words, democracy in America was more authentic because it had not lost touch with its Christian roots; it was also broadly tolerationist, as conscience itself was a natural right that could not legitimately be coerced.

Here is the nub of the argument, and the point at which the historical sketch presented in the four core chapters of the book serves as the basis for a meditation on religion and its relationship with modernity. Howard suggests that the true basis of modernity (our present condition, if you like) lies not in the secular and rational philosophical scepticism of the Enlightenment, but in the civil religion of the American republic, in which "Christianity and democratic self-government" are reconciled (197).[5] As regards the historical development of the "state" in its modern form, America has defied the trend whereby the ultimate source of political authority is the impersonal, rational and secular state.[6] In this sense, Howard is offering what amounts to a complete rewriting of the history of the state, at least in its American setting. But he is doing more than this. Turning in the closing pages to a discussion of the efforts by the French state to regulate the behaviour of Muslims, he notes that "militant secularism" only serves to provoke religious groups into militancy of a non-secular kind. In short, a solution to the problems of multiculturalism and religious pluralism lies not in secularism but in a theistic politics animated by the spirit of St. Augustine's "restless heart" (205). The likelihood of the emergence of a "different *novi ordines seclorum*, perhaps arising far beyond our old Atlantic world," calls for a politics infused with religious values (205). Which new world orders Howard has in mind is not clear, but they are obviously neither Christian nor Democratic.

[5] Howard's position runs the risk of simplifying a complex issue. The landmark Supreme Court cases (*Engel* v. *Vitale* on prayer in schools; *Roe* v. *Wade* on abortion; *Lawrence* v. *Texas* on consenting homosexuality) have been and remain the subject of fervent and occasionally vitriolic debates between those who wish to protect the sovereignty of individual choice and those who argue that a society of over 350 million people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds should take their moral cues from various glosses on a text which some regard as the revealed word of a supreme being. The administration of George W. Bush will likely go down in history as one which betrayed the constitutional order for a combination of political expediency and the need to play to the religious dogmatism of the Republican base. To suppose that religion can be mixed with politics and not produce a species of sectarianism is to impose a very selective reading on the historical record.

[6] Quentin Skinner, "A Genealogy of the Modern State," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 162 (2009), 325–70.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the final analysis, this book has less to do with the history of the state or the character of modernity than it does with the attempt to historicize a pattern of theistic politics. In that sense, it strongly resembles works like Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989), and Hugh Heclo's *Christianity and Modern Democracy* (2007). Taylor in particular argued that the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition were the "best hope" for the dignity of humanity. Proponents of this view fail to recognize its inherent contradiction; that is, to deal with the vagaries of multiculturalism, the best way forward is to adopt the normative principles of the religious system of *one* culture. Democracy allows us all to be citizens without further obliging us to adhere to one understanding of revealed religion and its hegemony in world history. Those who suggest otherwise, and who speak of religion as the agent of modernity, are in danger of using history rather than writing it.

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God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide by Thomas A. Howard, a professor of history at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts, is an excellent book examining European intellectuals' perceptions of religion in America in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. As such, this book makes an important contribution to a neglected aspect of transatlantic relations. While scholars have devoted much less attention to religion than to politics and immigration in this period, it is clearly an important subject in light of the growing religious divide between Europe and America. In this regard, Howard offers a historical exposé concerning the nineteenth-century American–European religious relationship which serves present attempts to trace and assess religious directions on the two continents. This combination of a scholarly contribution to the history of European–American relations and an American appeal for the necessity of revisiting intellectual assumptions in the current debate – particularly regarding the nature of secularization – makes this book both fascinating and a great stimulus for further research.

Howard observes that a negative assessment of religion in America is a common ingredient of anti-Americanism in Europe. The fact that so few intellectuals in Europe feel any sympathy for American religion inspired Howard first to investigate the origin of this reticence or partiality and then to introduce two intellectuals whose positive assessments broaden the horizon of European perceptions concerning religion in America. It is a daring attempt that might either open the eyes of European scholars, or kill the debate by provoking a premature response that his approach is characterized by advocacy and not by pure research. Readers might conclude that Howard's main aim is to present religion in America in a positive light, but that would be a misreading of the book. It does, however, adopt a position in the debate about the Atlantic divide over religion. His *status quaestionis* reveals one of the key differences in this debate by contrasting the accepted (but contested) position of religion in the public sphere in North America over and against a much more isolated, and therefore private, place for religion in Europe. I appreciate this explicit exploration of a historical episode with a moral agenda, because it challenges European researchers to reconsider their own concepts and biases, which can function as obstacles to their identification of the liberating aspects of American religion. As long as researchers on both sides of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ocean are aware of the pitfalls of dogmatism regarding the range of religion on one's own side, an expanded fruitful exchange is possible.[1]

Howard traces the vitality of religion in the US back to its liberalism: i.e. the absence of feudalism and established churches. This liberalism connects the American Revolution with the French Revolution, but also separates the two. Howard argues that the American process of liberation succeeded in preserving religion for modernity, where France succeeded in setting them apart. These two responses to modernity created two geographically divided master narratives. Whether one was a conservative or a progressive in Europe, both parts of the political spectrum were negative about the American solution of voluntary religion. Reactionary Europeans – mostly from Britain and Germany – saw a connection between the two revolutions and rejected both. They feared chaos and anarchy as a result of severing the ties between the state and the church. In their opinion, religious liberty had to lead to religious confusion. Catholics found the arrangement in the US too relativistic. They feared the result of private judgement, which would lead to heterodoxy. Protestants judged the developments in America to be a degeneration of European structures. Both parties believed that religious freedom would result in indifference.

Secular progressive thinkers emphasized the differences between the two revolutions and preferred the French Revolution, despite their admiration for the American political experiment. They were not worried about the scattering of religion, but about its comprehensive presence and vitality. Three subgroups (sociologists, Marxists, and revolutionary republicans) shared a confidence in a predictable course of a universal, historical process, leading to greater human freedom at the cost of religion. They actually reached the same conclusion as their conservative opponents: the increase in religious enthusiasm moved America backward, not forward, in history. A second criticism linked conservatives and secularists: the lack of a central religious agency in America. French thinkers operated within a framework of unity (created by both a strong state and the overarching Catholic Church) and derided the American Revolution as a conservative Protestant rebellion that would lead to fragmentation. For such thinkers, true liberation came from a spiritual unity guided by science. In the Hegelian tradition churches were either subject to the state or redundant. The more radical Marxists considered religiosity an illness and a result of the limitations of a bourgeois state. In this framework, America was also an anomaly. The third group of revolutionaries of 1848 believed that the churches blocked progress and they claimed to have found evidence for this in the lack of intellectual development in America. Howard has drawn two conclusions from this survey of European critics. First, he concludes that the presuppositions of these commentators – their worldview – prevented a fair investigation of religion in America because they offered economic explanations for religious phenomena. Second, they were not so much observers, but rather missionaries who wanted to secularize America. In their efforts to liberate Europe from the confines of religion, they could only feel puzzled by the resurgence of religion in America.

The second part of the book offers two different, positive stories of Europeans who praised religion in America: Swiss-born German Reformed Pietist Philip Schaff (1819–93) and French Catholic convert Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). They were

[1] See, for instance, the collection edited by Bruce Kuklick and D. G. Hart, *Religious Advocacy and American History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

transatlantic personalities coming from a traditional and progressive background respectively who shared an initial critical attitude towards religion in America before changing their minds. After spending time in America, they embraced its religious space and defended its promises of fulfilment and vitality. In so doing they revealed an alternative assessment of American religion, which suggested that perhaps readings of American religion depended on the "eye of the beholder." Schaff was favourably disposed to American religion as a believer who feared rationalism and sectarianism. He was an influential theologian at the Mercersburg Seminary in Pennsylvania, to which he moved in 1844. He quickly discovered the value of the separation of church and state, and became its missionary back in Europe, which he frequently visited. He proclaimed that religion had received a new shape in America: the church neither received favours from the state, nor was it suppressed by the state. While Schaff did not have strong anti-American feelings, Maritain was raised in an agnostic conservative family and was surrounded by the anti-American culture of the 1920s when French disappointment about the US and its anti-intellectualism reached its apex. In 1906 he converted to Catholicism and constructed a Christian humanism in response to the negative prospects of modern humanism, which he believed had lost its religious moorings. His optimism about Western culture was fed by the situation in America, where he lived between 1940 and 1960 as a refugee from Nazi persecution. His sympathies for his host society increased during his residence in the country.

By introducing Schaff and Maritain, Howard creates a contrast between the many predisposed intellectual critics who are blind to the positive elements of religion in America because they stayed in Europe and the few engaged religious intellectuals who discover the positive value of religion and move to America. Howard uses the second group to castigate the first. He blames them for rejecting an image of America that they themselves had constructed but failed to investigate critically. Howard's emphasis on the different religious underpinnings of the American and French revolutions points to a creative tension between America and Europe, which could help both sides to gain a fresh perspective on religion. On the one hand he observes a Europeanization of American religion, where the leading paradigm of the continuity of a constructive relation between religion and culture can be challenged by a dialectic framework that sees religion and culture as opposing forces. On the other hand he also notes an Americanization of religion in Europe, where religious and political leaders look to the US for strengthening the positive (civic) forces of religion in society. However, this is not a simultaneous exchange: the second trend follows the first after at least a fifty-year gap.

Howard does not aim for a totalizing explanation of the emergence and development of the religious divide, but instead limits his discourse to its intellectual origins. In the conclusion he grounds these findings within a larger historical perspective. The establishment of churches in Europe was not a result of principled choices, but of compromises between Catholics and Protestants, leading to regional confessional monopolies enforced by their rulers. The situation in America separated religion from the political order but simultaneously created a society in which religion held a major influence over politics. This "double helix," as Howard calls it, is responsible for the confusions in transatlantic religious discussions in light of the fact that religion and civic authority are sometimes polar opposites and sometimes partners. This observation deserves more emphasis, because it helps to contextualize the intellectual trajectories of European critics. They not only frowned upon the role of religion in America but also criticized a weak state. Most European countries closely

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

connected the state with its established churches and failed to see that civil religion in America assumed that role.

God and the Altantic articulates a clear thesis by proposing useful categories for analysing European ideas about America, such as the similarities between secular progressive and conservative thinkers in Europe. The book offers a strong argument regarding its intellectual agenda of advancing a secularization theory, and is written with clarity and elegance. My remarks aim at restoring an imbalance in the evidence which calls for further research and is caused by the current focus of the volume. Although the title of the book alludes to equality in the European–American relationship, it deals mostly with European observers of America. This is a wise restriction, but it also curtails the larger goal of bridging the transatlantic religious gap. An assessment of the perceived vitality of American religion is best examined in comparison with Europe and thus by a survey of how Americans perceived European religion. It might be difficult to find Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who assessed religion in Europe positively, because most American observers, whether believers or not, were alarmist about the religious decline in Europe. Potential candidates to fill this narrative gap may range from Robert Baird (1798–1863), the Presbyterian missionary and temperance advocate from Pennsylvania who travelled widely in Europe and published about his experiences, to Philip Jenkins, author of *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (2007). What I mean to say is that contrasts in religious modes of thinking were a result of diverse and competing representations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Further, I see some difficulties with regard to the timing of the negative and positive assessments of American religion in Europe. The negative reports are mostly from the early nineteenth century, while the positive reports are from the later nineteenth century and the twentieth. This suggests an increasingly positive trend in European views of American culture and religion. British conservative cultural critics were much more negative about American culture than their radical opponents, but changed their tone in the late 1880s. They followed the assessment of the British politician James Bryce. Robert P. Frankel's 2007 book *Observing America* documents this shift in British observations between 1890 and 1950. A similar shift might be visible among intellectuals in other European countries. This plausible conclusion could be a useful stepping-stone for carrying the story on into the twentieth century in another book. In his conclusion Howard briefly mentions Jürgen Habermas and Jean Baubérot as European intellectuals who criticized the secularist agenda. It would have been better had the author continued to follow the arguments of both secularists and conservatives in the twentieth century, since it would have revealed the forces that corrected older paradigms. Such an analysis would easily have doubled the size of the book, however. And clearly this was not necessary for the purpose of this book, which offers an analysis of the impact of ideological assumptions on the debate about religion and modernity.

A more serious area of concern is that the critics and defenders of religion in America dwell in different places. One could expect that those who emigrated or fled to the US had a stake in defending the religious–political arrangements, but what about the intellectuals who stayed in Europe? In this case Maritain is a better choice than Schaff, because the former returned to France, which strengthens his position as a European. One might be led to the conclusion that only those who lived in the US can appreciate the positive value of its religious dynamics. Further evidence for the importance of place in assessing another culture is the response of visitors, and especially

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

immigrants. Many of them were positive about the opportunities they received in the new country. They used the pluralistic situation to shape their own communities and were often critical of their own country. Philip Schaff represents in this context an intriguing case. Should he be considered a European, after he decided to move? Or does he act like an American? Or does he perhaps qualify as a transnational figure? In that case, it might mean that the divide is less profound than assumed. Whatever the verdict, it proves how important this topic is as we are fortunate that Howard has analysed and presented these debates with such originality of vision, impressive intellectual rigour and effortless eloquence.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812002010 Published online by Cambridge University Press