

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Sultan Tepe**, *Beyond Sacred and Secular: Politics of Religion in Israel and Turkey*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008, 413 pp. \$US 39.95 hardcover (978-0-8047-5864-2)

**T**he return of religion to the public and political spheres in the contemporary world is one of the most intriguing phenomena of modern politics, especially given the falsified assumptions of dominant theories in the social sciences that modernity will cause the inevitable decline and eventual disappearance of religion as a significant social and political force. The recent resurgence of religion in politics manifests itself throughout the globe in various ways, electoral and social, peaceful and violent. Among these, undoubtedly one of the most significant illustrations of religious empowerment is the electoral success of religious parties in democratic countries, which is the main focus of Sultan Tepe's *Beyond Sacred and Secular*.

Tepe investigates the reasons for the recent rise to power of religious parties in Turkey and Israel. While not attempting to offer a generalizable model to explain the rise in popularity of religious parties in democracies, Tepe skillfully convinces her readers to overcome the oversimplified and static dichotomy that dominates discourse about religion and democracy and start thinking of it as a dynamic process with constitutive and reciprocal influences over time between the secular and religious realms (p. 49). In particular, Tepe suggests that students of religion should notice how the two meld with each other in two parallel and intermingled processes: 1) internal secularization – the secularization of religious contents, and 2) sacralization – giving secular issues religious sacred meanings (p. 55). Tepe combines a variety of research methods, including historical sources, personal interviews, and quantitative analysis of election surveys, reflecting her conviction that sophisticated analyses of religious politics should integrate ideational, historical, and structural factors as well as the choices of rational agents. The wealth of resources and methods results in a very sensitive and compelling treatment of religious parties' organization and ideological setting, and generates some surprising and counterintuitive findings and conclusions.

Both Israel and Turkey experienced a significant rise to power of so-called religious parties, especially the rise of Shas in Israel and the

even more impressive acquisition of power by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in Turkey since 2002. Tepe's findings demonstrate that conventional theories of conflict, crisis, or choice cannot by themselves explain these electoral successes. Only by combining these theories and adding an ideational factor can one grasp the reasons for the success of these parties in their national contexts. One remarkable conclusion is that parties that remained strictly loyal to their religious identification, such as Mafdal in Israel and the Prosperity Party in Turkey, lost the support of the electorate compared with parties that took a more multidimensional ideology, like Shas and JDP that took a more multidimensional ideology offering original social and economic agendas through the religious prism. These parties succeeded due to their ability to accurately analyze the political space and occupy a unique niche that many voters found appealing, instead of maintaining a narrow religious approach. Thus, religious parties should be seen, first and foremost, as political parties and should be analyzed as such and not as alien manifestations of religion in an exclusive secular realm. In addition, Tepe shows that the religious segment is far from being homogenous and that the same theological doctrine can produce very different political standpoints on the nation, the state, the political community and its level of inclusion/exclusion, and the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. The cases of Turkey and Israel also reveal the limited power of institutional arrangements without sufficient social backup to enforce social perceptions and political realities. In contrast "religion, as a resilient force, has the capacity to evade official restrictions and mold institutional practices" (p. 346). This is especially true in the Turkish case given the concentrated, and in retrospect failed, effort of the Kemalist regime to uproot religion from the public sphere.

Notwithstanding the superior quality of the research, three methodological and comparative comments are appropriate. First, the literature review concentrates on sociological research on religion. While arguably sociology has provided a more advanced and nuanced literature on religion, the literature review would have been enriched if it considered research on religion in political science, such as Alfred Stepan's influential "Twin Toleration" theory (2000) or Anthony Gill's work on Catholicism in Latin America (1998). Second, Tepe takes an innovative approach in comparing two countries that vary on the religion variable – Judaism and Islam — and still finds significant similarities between them. This novel comparison demonstrates that the interaction of religion and politics is not influenced primarily by the specific doctrinal content of each religion but rather by the political and institutional settings that determine the nature of the interaction. This encourages us to move beyond "religious ex-

ceptionalism” into wider and more telling cross-religious comparisons. Third, while Tepe’s research covers the full spectrum of religious parties in Turkey, the book discusses only two out of the four religious parties in Israel, neglecting both the ultra orthodox *Yahadut Hatora* (Tora Judaism) and the ultra nationalist *Ichud Leumi* (National Union) parties. While there may have been good reasons to exclude these parties, the book does not provide any explanation for their neglect and leaves the reader with a somewhat asymmetric comparison.

*Beyond Sacred and Secular* is research of rare quality and sophistication. It is highly recommended, not only for students of religion and politics, but also for those who are interested in the complex political systems of Turkey and Israel, as well as for students of party politics and electoral studies. The book offers new paths of research and thinking about the role of religion in politics in the era of modernity and provides very important lessons relevant to every society that deals with the presence of religion in the public sphere.

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