

## Book Review

### *Religion and Political Power*

*By Gustavo Benavides and M.W. Daly (eds). NY: State University of New York Press, 1989, 240 pp.*

The upheaval in contemporary world politics reveals a renewed interest in religion; similarly, the current anarchy in religious thought and institutions often demonstrates a not-so-subtle interest in politics. Hence, for political scientists, among others, new studies of religion and politics are always welcome. Except for two essays in this volume, all were presented in 1986 at a seminar on "Religion and Nationalism," held under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The two essays mentioned, those of Alexandre Benningsten and Stephen Feuchtwang (who did not attend the seminar) were commissioned separately.

The editors of this collection are Gustavo Benavides, a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Villanova University; and M. W. Daly, an assistant professor in the Department of History at Memphis State University.

The broad-ranging seminar explored the role played by religion in the emergence of the political life of modern states. From India and Sri Lanka to the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the resurgence of religious fundamentalism in the United States and its persistence in Israel, the participants discussed the many forms that the tension between religion and the modern state assumes. However, the thematic thread running through most of the discussions proved to be something more general than the state itself, although it is the state in which it is now manifested. That theme is the exercise of political power; more precisely, the exercise of political power in a context that mobilizes religious representations.

This volume, then, examines the interaction between two of the most charged topics in the modern world: religion and politics. It shows the inextricable connection between religious attitudes and responsibilities and political activities.

Following an introductory chapter which explores the religious articulations of political power, the authors examine the role played by religion in the current political situation in several countries. Approaching these cases as anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and political scientists, the authors make visible the dialectical relationship between religion and the pursuit of political power. On the one hand, they demonstrate the political significance

of religious choices and, on the other, the almost unavoidable need to articulate in religious terms a group's attempt to acquire, maintain, or expand political power.

The eleven subsequent essays look into the issue of religion and politics in India, Sri Lanka, China, the Soviet Union, the Sudan, Iran, Israel, the United States, Mexico, and Peru. These are indeed diverse countries when it comes to religion and politics. In terms of religions, the book covers Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The underlying similarity in all these essays is the use of the method of sociology of religion to elucidate the relevance of the past to the present and to explain the traditionalization of modernity in an age of ideology.

In addition to the essays, the book contains pertinent notes and an index. All in all, the work may be seen as a religious articulation of power. Hans Morgenthau, the celebrated author of *Politics Among Nations*, first wrote in 1948 that politics "is a struggle for power." Probably unwittingly, one of the editors of the present study pushed the Morgenthau concept of power further when he said, in the first essay: "Power is a tension between interests, ideologies, classes, or individuals, and is always defended and contested, using all the weapons—physical and ideological at the group's disposal" (p. 1). The book, however, essentially ignores the present religious controversies surrounding the concept of power. It may be that the complexities arising from an analysis of the doctrinalization of religion made it difficult to tell the complete story about religions so numerous and so diverse in a compressed format. Nevertheless, the present work will stimulate both discussion and debate about the place of religion in our society.

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