
FAITH IN POLITICS.

By A. James Reichley. Brookings Institution Press. 429 pp. \$52.95 cloth, \$20.95 paper

Much of A. James Reichley's latest book reads like a backgrounder for Beltway insiders who don't know much about religion in American politics but who think that it's back, big time, and need to get up to speed. While liberals will find bones to pick with the author's center-right interpretation of history—and the constitutional jurisprudence that goes with it—they will be hard pressed to deny that he has served up a good deal of solid information in easily digestible form.

But the useful summary comes wrapped in a larger argument, and this makes the book at once more interesting and more problematic. The issue Reichley poses is whether “a free society depends ultimately on religious values for coherence and vindication of human rights.” He believes that it does. Is he correct?

According to *Faith in Politics*, the four values on which democracy rests are “personal freedom, distributive justice, citizen participation in social decisionmaking, and social discipline.” In *The Values Connection* (2001), in which he addresses the same issue at greater length and without the American political history, Reichley lists 10 “crucial moral foundations for a functioning free society,” including “tolerance of differences in behavior and belief” and “a sense of personal and social honor.”

Whatever their precise number and nature, do democratic values in fact come from religion, and if so, from what religion in particular? That's an empirical inquiry Reichley chooses not to bother with. Indeed, he grants that democratic values can be derived equally well from secular humanism (which he prefers to call civil humanism) as from “Transcendent Idealism,” a generic theistic outlook that, he says, balances “individual rights against social authority by rooting both in God's transcendental purpose.”

What makes Transcendent Idealism the superior outlook, in Reichley's opinion, for a free society is that it convinces citizens that their values come from on high. Civil humanism, by rooting those values merely in self and society, fails to provide democracy with sufficient “moral support.” As Thomas Jefferson, in one of Reichley's favorite quotes, asked rhetorically in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”

That popular religious belief is required to create a strong and well-ordered society is an idea dating back to classical antiquity, and one that Western political thinkers such as Machiavelli and Rousseau, whom Reichley puts in the civil humanist camp, devoutly embraced. But ever since Augustine assailed Roman “civil theology” in *The City of God*, the Western Chris-



A Transcendent Idealist? President George W. Bush marks Martin Luther King Day in January.

tian tradition has been ambivalent about making the case for religion on the grounds of its social utility, and Reichley often seems reluctant to admit that he is doing just that.

He makes it clear that America's Founding Fathers from time to time expressed the view that religion, though not a nationally established church, should be an important prop to their new republic. He establishes that Americans today are pretty religious, or say they are. And he shows that a lot of religion has washed through American public life over the past 200

Current Books

years. But none of this proves that the citizens of the United States and every other successful democracy need to subscribe to Transcendent Idealism. The Bush administration will be happy to think they should. The citizens of the free societies of old Europe will say, “*Pas du tout.*”

—MARK SILK

THE NEW ANTI-CATHOLICISM: *The Last Acceptable Prejudice.*

By Philip Jenkins. Oxford Univ. Press.
258 pp. \$27

What might the United States look like without the Catholic Church to kick around? If not for parochial schools and the Papacy’s dogmatic rejection of artificial contraception to rail against, public schools and abortion on demand likely wouldn’t exist in their current forms. Were it not for the Catholic Church, perhaps, Americans would still be British subjects; Britain’s reluctant decision to recognize the Catholic religion in Quebec helped sow seeds of unrest among the colonists, unrest that led to the Revolutionary War.

According to Philip Jenkins, a professor of history and religion at Pennsylvania State University, anti-Catholicism is nearly as American as apple pie. *The New Anti-Catholicism* grew out of his response to the crisis over pedophilic priests, which has figured so prominently in recent headlines. The author of *Pedophiles and Priests* (1996), Jenkins watched with a sort of bemused horror as much of the media coverage in 2002 “slid” beyond the current scandals “into much more dubious attacks on the Church as a whole.”

Most of the familiar anti-Catholic tropes were trotted out: priests as sexually frustrated perverts who prey upon the young, bishops as calculating Machiavels, lay Catholics as subservient sheep, too timid to raise a fuss until

The Boston Globe began exposing some of the most horrific offenders. Newspaper cartoonists and late-night talk shows adopted the basic formula Priest = Child Molester. Some priests reportedly stopped wearing their religious garb in public to avoid the glares and spittle.

Jenkins argues that the reaction was hysterical. According to the available evidence, “sexual misconduct [by clergy] appears to be spread fairly evenly across denominations,” its incidence rate hovering somewhere between two and three percent among the cleric population. Further, many of the cases that have been labeled pedophilia were actually relationships between priests and young people well above the age of consent. But anti-Catholic attitudes are too ingrained to be displaced by facts. “Of course bishops hate women and gays, priests molest children, and the Church supported the Holocaust: everybody knows that,” Jenkins writes. These prejudices are so pervasive “that they are scarcely even recognized as prejudices.”

The book’s survey of anti-Catholicism in America is brief but convincing. From the Know-Nothing movement of the 19th century to the iconoclastic gay rights protests of the 1980s and ’90s, critics of the Catholic Church have demonstrated a remarkable ability to overlook any truth, any scrap of goodness, that the church might offer. In the last chapter, Jenkins urges reporters, entertainers, and professors to give the Catholic Church a fair shake, but he doesn’t expect the call to be heeded. Even if a hypothetical Vatican III were to edge Rome closer to modern liberal Protestantism, he writes, the “indestructible” prejudice would simply mutate: “Its strength lies in its flexibility, its capacity to adapt to almost any circumstances.” Quite a depressing thought.

—JEREMY LOTT

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

NO END TO WAR: *Terrorism in the 21st Century.*

By Walter Laqueur. Continuum.
288 pp. \$24.95

The first great merit of Walter Laqueur’s

characteristically judicious book on the new terrorism is its comprehensiveness. For cool and clear-eyed analysis of the differences between the narcoterrorists of Colombia and traditional national terrorists such as the