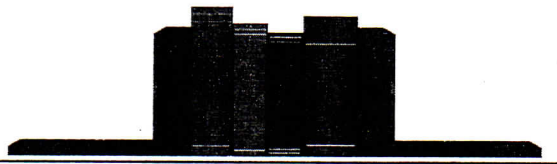


# Book Reviews



## **Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft with a forward by Jimmy Carter**

Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (editors)  
Oxford University Press, 1994

After it was published, *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, rapidly became one of those books in American governmental circles that changed the way strategic leaders thought about diplomacy. The 13 distinguished authors who contributed chapters to this anthology challenged the long-held belief that statesmanship could achieve results defined in terms of geopolitical power, prestige and international security without paying much attention to the role religion played in countries of interest. There had been, for many years, the assumption on the part of the U.S. Department of State, the Foreign Service and senior diplomats around the world, that governmental affairs were different and separate from religious beliefs and cultural practices, except for occasional ceremonial observances, in most countries around the world. Dr. Douglas Johnston, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 1994, explained why this assumption needed a reassessment in light of America's engagement in the Middle East:

"This study was prompted in part by a concern that the rigorous separation of church and state in the United States has desensitized many citizens to the fact that much of the rest of the world does not operate on a similar basis. Foreign policy practitioners in the United States, for example, are often inadequately equipped to deal with situations involving other nation-states where the imperatives of religious doctrine blend intimately with those of politics and economics. At times this has led to uninformed policy choices, particularly in our dealings with countries of the Middle East.

"Because of the degree to which we as Americans

separate our spiritual lives from our public lives, we face a certain difficulty in comprehending the depths to which religious and political considerations interact in shaping the perceptions and motivations of individuals from other societies. *We also inadequately appreciate the transformational possibilities that exist when the parties involved in a conflict can be appealed to on the basis of shared spiritual convictions or values. Implicit in the latter is the prospect that, under the right conditions, the parties can operate at a higher level of trust than would otherwise be possible in the realm of realpolitik.* This is not to suggest that it is necessarily an "either-or" proposition with regard to the spiritual and the secular. More likely, it is a "both-and" phenomenon in which a breakthrough at the spiritual level is made possible once the political, economic, and security "planets" have been brought into some kind of proximate alignment."<sup>1</sup>

The methodology the author-editors used in providing evidence for their theses involves analytical case studies related to international conflict resolution. Although preventing, ameliorating or resolving disputes is only a part of the whole range of diplomatic activities with which the United States is involved, conflict resolution may be the among most urgent tasks American diplomats routinely encounter.

The seven major case studies of conflict resolution and social change presented in the book deal with Europe, Africa, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. Dr. Johnston noted that not all desirable objectives were achieved by the authors:

"A concerted effort was made to identify cases that would be representative of a range of situations and religious traditions. Although the first objective was largely achieved, the second was not. Other than Christianity, in which the peacemaking mandate is clear and has been pursued with some frequency, examples of similar attempts in other religious traditions have been more difficult to find. Situations

that initially appeared promising either had not yet achieved closure or had occurred so long ago that the principal actors were no longer alive to provide researchers with the kind of confirmation and insights that would be required to support sound scholarship.”<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from the case studies and the analysis of the roles religion can play in conflict resolution that this is still a new field of study in the art and science of international diplomacy. Whereas religious leaders might find common ground for discussion based on similar beliefs, the transition of faith-based discourse to political action may still be a long process. Dr. Johnston concluded that:

“The principal contribution that religious actors can bring to secular confrontations is their unique potential for mediating conflict in situations where a mutually debilitating impasse has been reached or where the major political, economic, and security issues have largely been resolved. Without the higher level of trust elicited by their involvement, breakthroughs to settlement would undoubtedly take longer or might not take place at all. By its very nature, any spiritual contribution to conflict resolution will be impossible to isolate and measure. But at least it is possible to determine with some degree of certainty that strictly secular approaches would have even greater difficulty in achieving similar results. The central lesson of these case studies is that religion does not always have to be a negative factor in the policymaking equation. Its potential contribution to peacemaking is substantial and worthy of further study.”<sup>3</sup>

This book may not appeal to every reader because it requires, like the field of peacemaking itself, time to study and reflect on a wide variety of complex ideas. Nevertheless, the central thesis of the book should be familiar to all who confront the immense task of operating in a strategic environment characterized by competing religious and political ideologies. In that regard this review carries not only a recommendation for reading *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, but also for adopting it as a textbook or personal resource for serious study.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (eds.) *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp. 4-5. Italics provided by the reviewer.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 265.

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