



## BOOK REVIEW

# **Karpov V., Svensson M. (Eds.). (2020). Secularization, Desecularization, and Toleration. Cross-Disciplinary Challenges to a Modern Myth. Palgrave Macmillan.**

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The book under review examines the relationship between secularization and tolerance. For a long time the conventional view on this problem has been that secular societies provide religious tolerance better than religious ones. Karpov and Svensson question this statement and use particular cases to demonstrate that it is not true. On the other hand, the statement that the religious societies provide religious tolerance better than the secular ones is also false. The situation is much more complicated—the secular/religious status of the state/society does not influence the perception of and attitude towards the adherents of different religious traditions and non-believers.

But let me start with an overview of the editors' introduction to the book. Vyacheslav Karpov and Manfred Svensson write about the ups and downs of the secularization theory and its relation to the ideas of the Enlightenment. They claim that the direct link between secularization and tolerance is also rooted in the Age of Reason. The origins of tolerance were connected to the rationalization of society, to the development of secular and non-orthodox religious thought, whereas the religious mainstream was considered to be a source of intolerance and violence. Such assumptions were conventional and they existed if not as a part of the secularization theory but at least as parallel to it. At a certain point, however, social sciences started to seriously question the universality of the secularization process and the situation in Europe started to be regarded not as an example for all the rest of the world but rather as an exception. In this case, such a connection between toleration and secularization, according to the book editors, should also be questioned. The imagined or real connections could be proved or disproved by the study of real cases, which is the idea underlying the

whole book. Its main focus, however, is to show the absence rather than existence of such connection.

Karpov and Svensson represent two distinct research traditions or rather research areas: one of them specializes in the history of tolerance and the other, in secularization/secularity theory. Therefore, the book is divided into two parts: *Religion, Secularization, and Toleration in the History of Ideas* and *Secularizations and Regimes of Toleration: Comparative Perspectives*. In the first part, the chapters are dedicated to tolerance in the works of Augustine, Aquinas, John Owen, Ibn 'Arabī, William Penn, Moses Mendelssohn, and Abraham Kuyper. For example, Manfred Svensson studies the development of a concept of toleration by Western Christian theologians. His essay explores the relationship between tolerance, on the one hand, and patience, endurance, power, permission, justice, respect, recognition, and hospitality, on the other. In his discussion of Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of tolerance, Stephen Hirtenstein also provides an overview of the general idea of tolerance in Islam, contending that "Islamic civilization is founded on principles of toleration" (p. 63). Andrew R. Murphy describes not only Penn's theoretical justification of tolerance, but also its political implementations. Mendelssohn's understanding of secular state and individual religious freedom is discussed by Holger Zaborowski. The views of a Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper on freedom of conscience and pluralist society are examined in George Harinck's chapter (it is especially interesting how Harinck links Kuyper's views with the current affairs).

There are two more contributions to the first part. Steven D. Smith proposes to doubt the secularization thesis. He argues that there was no decline of religion but substitution of its old forms with a new one and instead of the disappearance of religion there was its privatization. By the new forms of religion, Smith understands *immanent religion*, Dworkin's "Religion without God", or a-theistic religion. In this case, the "secular"/"religious" dichotomy is not working, and as a result secularization theory loses its meaning. The author demonstrates that the notion "tolerance" has also been revised and become useless. In that way, the question about the link between secularization and toleration is meaningless.

Eduardo Fuentes claims that there is no "clear line between religious and secular practices" (p. 153) and even *shopping* could be described as a religious phenomenon. In this context, the religious tolerance exists in this dual description: killing a calf could be seen as a secular practice and as a religious one—a sacrifice.

In the second part of the book, we find texts dealing with social, legal, and historical issues. For instance, Jean Meyer and Fenggang Yang in their contributions on Mexico and China respectively trace the history of religious (in)tolerance in particular regimes. Barbara A. McGraw, James T. Richardson and Effie Fokas investigate the legal aspects of religious toleration in the U.S. Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights. Carol and Ilan Troen claim that in the discussions around the Israel/Palestinian conflict, the secular and religious arguments are intertwined and reinforce each other.

The chapter that I find the most interesting in this part of the book is written by Daniel Philpott, who demonstrates the absence of any connection between Islam

and religious (in)tolerance in Muslim-majority countries. Philpott asks the question “Is Islam tolerant?” and tries to find the answer by analyzing the data collected by the Pew Research Center. He identifies three types of Muslim-majority states: states with religious freedom (11 countries, in particular, Albania, Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, and Senegal); secular repressive states (36 countries, in particular, post-Soviet Central Asian countries, Kemalist Turkey, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq); and states considered as religiously repressive (21 countries, in particular, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia). In his view, although the Muslim world is less free, we cannot hold Islam responsible for this fact. Secularism, according to Philpott, can be both positive and negative. The secular repression of religion in the Muslim world is a result of the imported Western ideology, according to which religion can be the enemy of economic and technological progress.

The final chapter of the book is written by one of the editor—Vyacheslav Karpov. Karpov disproves the statement that “secularization begets toleration while society’s movement from secularity leads to intolerance” (p. 299) by looking at the case of the USSR and ex-Soviet countries. Karpov not only compares contemporary Ukraine and Russia, but also draws some historical parallels. For instance, Karpov writes about the differences between the Ukrainian religious cultures of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Karpov links the pluralistic situation of the religious landscape of contemporary Ukraine to Russia’s regime of desecularization and tolerance. It is important to note that the chapter reflects the latest events in Ukraine—the Revolution of Dignity, Russia’s annexation of the Crimea, and the military conflict in Donbass.

Then Karpov goes on to the theoretical conclusions. Here we encounter some remarkable insights into (de)secularization and *dedifferentiation*. Karpov argues that desecularization can be analyzed as dedifferentiation, but then notes that “[s]ecularization can combine differentiation and dedifferentiation” and that “[i]n some cases, a secular dedifferentiation takes time” (p. 318). Secular differentiation can be illustrated by the case of the Soviet Union. In the end, Karpov confirms the main idea of the chapter—desecularization can lead to toleration (at least limited and selective) or even to the emergence of a pluralistic and inclusive regime.

The main question that arises with respect to the analysis presented in the book is the understanding of the secular state. It appears that when we are looking to (dis)prove the relationship between secularization and secular state (as we see in some of the book’s contributions), on the one hand, and toleration, on the other, we should first define what a secular state is. For instance, if we consider the USSR as a secular state, it means that it should be neutral towards religion<sup>2</sup> (Casanova, 2011). In the case of the USSR, however, the state used force against religion and, therefore, cannot be defined as secular. Victoria Smolkin writes that seeing religion as a private matter, as well as a neutrality towards religion, were never considered acceptable in the USSR (Smolkin, 2018, p. 242). A similar situation was characteristic of Communist China and Kemalist Turkey. At the same time, Smolkin in her study of Soviet atheism points out that in the late Soviet period, sociological surveys showed people’s indifference towards religion, as well as atheism. During the *perestroika*

<sup>1</sup> Kosovo (officially the Republic of Kosovo) is a partially recognised state in Southeastern Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Such understanding is also found in some of the book’s contributions.

period, however, there was a surge of interest in religion, which turned into its revival after the collapse of the USSR. Therefore, the forced secularization in the USSR, in my opinion, should be studied separately—as a special case of secularization, leading to indifference and what can be described as neutrality towards religion (and that is what we mean by *secularity*). The liberalization of the Soviet religious policy (*or better to say—loosening of the state control over religion and public demonstration of non-atheistic views*) instantly increased desecularization.

I would like to comment on one more point about the desecularization and (in)tolerance in post-Soviet Ukraine. There was a considerable unrest in the religious sphere in the 1990s and early 2000s. For instance, there were clashes between Orthodox Christians from various churches and Greek-Catholics; traditional churches used hate speech towards Protestant missionaries and preachers of new religious movements; the Orthodox Church and the Muslim community had conflicts in the Crimea concerning the use of toponyms and religious symbols. As a result, some scholars evaluated religious pluralism or multiconfessionalism as a negative phenomenon because it brought about religious conflicts (Zdioruk, 2005, p. 91). A similar situation was observed in Ukraine after Tomos was given to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the Ecumenical Patriarch: the stigmatization of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has become a norm of public discourse. These facts prove the main statement of the book—there is no straightforward connection between (de)secularization and religious tolerance, but at the same time the scholars should be more careful in their evaluation of the relationship between them. One should not examine only general trends in state-church and inter-confessional relations, but rather follow “the devil is in the detail” principle.

## References

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