Book Review. Choosing the Dream: The Future of Religion in American Public Life by F. M. Gedicks and R. Hendrix

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By Frederick Mark Gedicks and Roger Hendrix. New York:  

Despite the continuing strength of religion in the private sphere,  
American public life has become increasingly secular. In this provoca-
tive book, Frederick Mark Gedicks and Roger Hendrix contend that  
the American paradox of private religiosity and public secularity is  
working to alienate many religious citizens, including and especially  
fundamentalists. They argue that this alienation is placing our political  
system in serious jeopardy, and that, although unlikely, it might even  
result in religious violence. “These are critical times,” the authors  
write. “If religion is not accepted into American public life, then  
ultimately religious Americans could become so frustrated in their assaults  
upon the secularism of public life that they would threaten the viability  
of the current social order—they might revolt.”

Gedicks and Hendrix argue that we should admit religion, including  
fundamentalist religion, as an equal and legitimate participant in  
American public life. They contend that this not only would serve our  
interest in political stability, but that it also would bring our public life  
into harmony with postmodern theory. Postmodernism rejects the  
correspondence theory of truth. It views secular reason and science as  
far less “objective” than the precepts of the Enlightenment might sug-
gest. At the same time, religious claims themselves can be tested in  
various ways, with the question being not whether the claims are true  
in a correspondence sense, but rather whether they “work.” In short,  
Gedicks and Hendrix argue that in a postmodern world, secular and  
religious claims stand on a similar footing, and that, in our public dis-
course, there is no a priori reason to prefer the former to the latter.

This reviewer is not convinced that we are facing an impending  
political crisis as the result of religious alienation. But assuming we  
are, it seems doubtful that religious fundamentalists would be either  
pleased or placated by a public discourse grounded on postmodern  
theory, which is dramatically at odds with fundamentalist understand-
ings of truth. Even so, Gedicks and Hendrix present a powerful argu-
ment that America’s public secularity is theoretically indefensible.  
Their book is must reading for anyone interested in the role of religion  
in public life.

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