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

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Choosing the Dream: The Future of Religion in American Public Life.
By Frederick Mark Gedicks and Roger Hendrix. New York:
Greenwood Press, 1991. 196 pp. \$42.95.

Despite the continuing strength of religion in the private sphere, American public life has become increasingly secular. In this provocative 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 suggest. 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 discourse, 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 understandings of truth. Even so, Gedicks and Hendrix present a powerful argument 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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