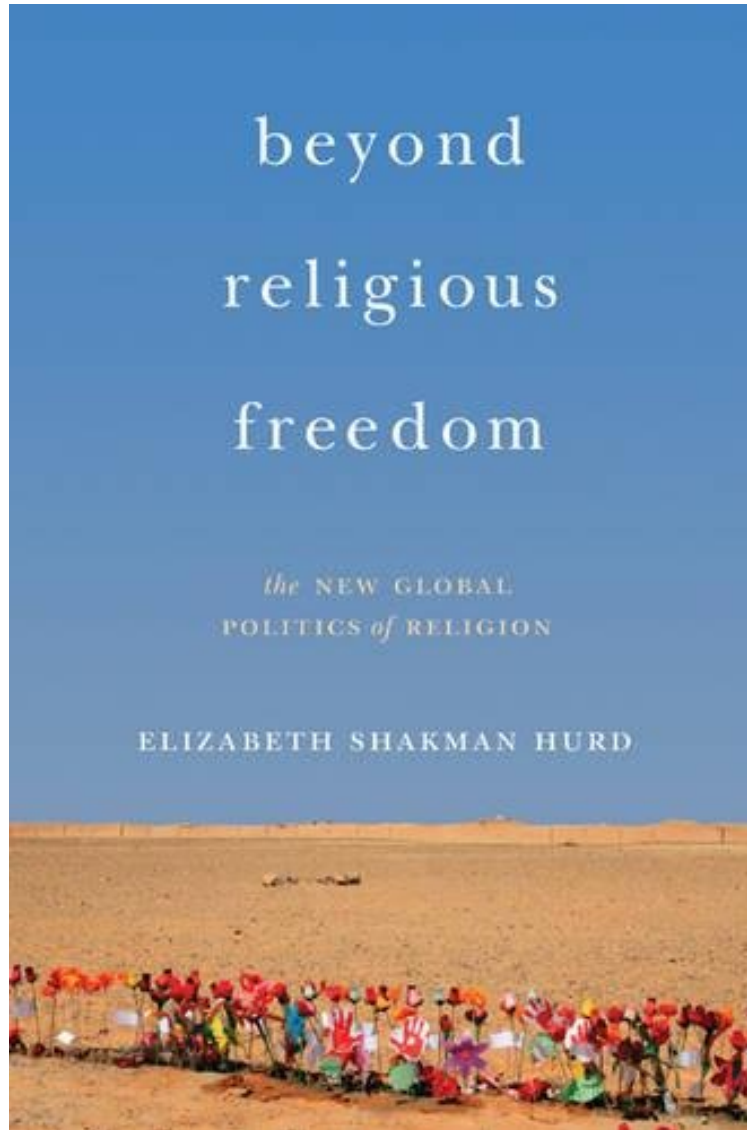


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Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

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Elizabeth Shakman Hurd : Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Eye OpeningBy Joshua Lewis BergGiven humankind's propensity to simplify things for the ease of mental consumption, we are accustomed to imagining religion as having a concrete and self-evident definition. However, the term religion is not universally representative, even though it has come to be

considered as such. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, in her new book from Princeton University Press, *Beyond Religious Freedom: the New Global Politics of Religion*, challenges this assumption. Populations and governments historically alternate between periods of enlightened thought and often oppressive religiosity and theocracy. Governments have moved into new territory by undertaking to define and actively defend what is termed religious freedom, for believers and nonbelievers alike. Given this fact, in spite of a plethora of heterodox views and practices along a continuum of belief, *Beyond Religions Freedom* undertakes an exploration into what is meant by religion as an explanatory category, and subsequently, a reconsideration of how we look at religious freedom and religious persecution. In the introduction, the reader is confronted with this fact that is so obvious, it is jarring to realize we have largely been oblivious to it; the term religion is not so sweeping as we have given it credit. It truly defies definition and cannot possibly represent the disparate multitude of belief systems, lived practices and ethnic associations worldwide. In the preface, Hurd gives us actual numbers as a sample of the distortion and propaganda leading to, and from, advocacy for religious freedom and religious rights when a politics defined by religious difference, privilege (sic) forms of religion favored by those who write laws, control resources, and govern societies, and marginalize other modes of belief, being and belonging. The number she adduces is from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. In an effort to showcase supposed prejudice against Christians, they recently published the number of Christian martyrs as 100,000 annually when, arguably, the number of people who actually died because they were Christians, was just a tiny fraction thereof. In her introduction, she goes on to give us a concise overview of her process and conclusion. In order to understand the drive to operationalize religion and the consequences thereof, she develops three related arguments. First, she considers how constructs of religious rights are being packaged into political projects and delivered around the world. Second, she analyzes, through the lense of history and politics, the attempt at incorporation of a concern for religion, as a supposed self-evident category, into global politics. Third, she explores the relation between international projects relating to religious rights and the social, religious, and political contexts in which they are deployed. She focuses on the lacunas created between sanctioned religion and lived religion. Hurd separates the idea of religion into three separate admittedly somewhat arbitrary and porous, but nonetheless very helpful categories: expert religion, lived religion and governed religion. Aided by these heuristics, she objectively seeks to open the study of religion and global politics up to a broader social and interpretive field. The conclusion she draws is that neither religions nor religious actors are singular, agentive forces that can be analyzed, quantified, engaged, celebrated, or condemned--and divided between good and bad. To rely for policy purposes on the category of religious actor is, rather, to presume a certain form of actorship motivated by religion that is neither intellectually coherent nor sociologically defensible. Hurd begins her discussion with an interesting dichotomy known as the two faces of faith, the idea that religion is simultaneously the problem and the solution. Using the Sahrawi refugees in Southwestern Algeria as a real life example, she highlights some programs that strive to protect peaceful religion and project it internationally and other programs, even sometimes the same ones, which strive to suppress intolerant religion. She then breaks down what can be meant by international religious freedom, how it manifests, especially in North America and Western Europe, as an institutionalization of external religious rights promotion, and the consequences thereof. Next, she moves into religious engagement, including deploying chaplains as well as engaging certain and specific religious institutions and minences grises and not others. The argument is that government-sponsored religious outreach activities are not, and cannot be, evenhanded efforts to bring religion back in to international relations to compensate for its alleged exclusion or to secure its free exercise. An extended case study of the Alevis of Turkey, explores the implications of adopting religion as a category to draw together individuals and communities as corporate bodies that are depicted as in need of legal protection to achieve their freedom: minorities under law. The creation of this category creates a world in which citizens are governed as religious subjects, contributing to the consolidation of a social order in which groups are distinguished by perceived religious differences creating apostates and insurgents on the margins of legal religion. The final chapter looks beyond religious freedom; it delves into religious violence, intergovernmental efforts to contain it and the folly thereof; and it again proposes thinking otherwise about religion. The religion that is chosen for protection under modern law, the religion that is subjected to state and international legal administration, does not, and cannot, exhaust this vast and diverse field of human goings-on. Hurd is an academic and her overall style reflects that. Her dialectic is necessarily repetitive as she builds her case. Far from tiresome, this reinforcement helps the reader navigate and absorb the text. She also enables perspective and better comprehension and elicits empathy, by substantiating her arguments with real life examples. Religious freedom is important but implementation is confounding. Can and should governments just step out of the way and let people have their lived experiences, or do minorities need protection and, if so, how is that accomplished without promoting one group while marginalizing others? Are distortions meant to curry government sympathy and favors, like the inflated numbers of the CSGC, avoidable? What about the problems caused by multiple and diverging exogenous categorizations of complex groups like the Alevis? Since the global religious landscape is so vast, encompassing autochthonous and imported religion, strict orthodoxy as well as fluid syncretism, belief and nonbelief, and cultural traditions and practices that defy definition, incorporating politics, art, media and popular culture, what is religion anyway? Hurd's thesis is a vital one and in need of further investigation. We should be stepping back and asking the proper questions, the questions Hurd

rightfully proposes we must; Which activities in the vast sea of human affiliations and actions are designated as religious and primed for engagement, partnership, and dialogue, and which are not? Whose version of which religion is under scrutiny? Which authorities speak in its name, and on whose behalf? What is the relationship between these authorities and the individuals and communities in whose name they allegedly speak? How do researchers account for the practices of individuals that may have tense or nonexistent ties to such institutions or authorities? Conversely, how do researchers consider those who have ties to many simultaneously? Much of the world, either due to complacency or ignorance, has unconditionally accepted religion as a category no longer in need of analyzation and Western religious freedom as a panacea. Hurd illuminates quite clearly the inherent danger in persisting, guided by this illusion. Anyone concerned with truly protecting the rights of all humankind must read this book and pass a copy to their government representative.

In recent years, North American and European nations have sought to legally remake religion in other countries through an unprecedented array of international initiatives. Policymakers have rallied around the notion that the fostering of religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and protections for religious minorities are the keys to combating persecution and discrimination. *Beyond Religious Freedom* persuasively argues that these initiatives create the very social tensions and divisions they are meant to overcome. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd looks at three critical channels of state-sponsored intervention: international religious freedom advocacy, development assistance and nation building, and international law. She shows how these initiatives make religious difference a matter of law, resulting in a divide that favors forms of religion authorized by those in power and excludes other ways of being and belonging. In exploring the dizzying power dynamics and blurred boundaries that characterize relations between "expert religion," "governed religion," and "lived religion," Hurd charts new territory in the study of religion in global politics. A forceful and timely critique of the politics of promoting religious freedom, *Beyond Religious Freedom* provides new insights into today's most pressing dilemmas of power, difference, and governance.