

John P. Bartkowski

**Charles F. Andrain, Political Justice and Religious Values. New York: Routledge, 2008, 248 pp.**

(doi: 10.2383/32064)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 1, gennaio-aprile 2010

**Ente di afferenza:**

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

**Licenza d'uso**

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

**Charles F. Andrain, *Political Justice and Religious Values*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 248 pp.**

doi: 10.2383/32064

*Political Justice and Religious Values* is a thoughtful exploration of the linkages between religion and social justice orientations. Andrain convincingly demonstrates how religious involvement provides a foundation for what he calls “spiritual justice,” that is, theological conceptualizations of hierarchy, individualism, egalitarianism, and fatalism, along with views of the relationship between God, society, and the person. His intent, however, is not merely to contrast how conceptualizations of spiritual justice vary by faith tradition, or to explore how they compare along religious versus secular lines. Rather, Andrain wishes to explain how distinctive orientations toward spiritual justice give way to different perspectives on political justice (e.g., divergent understandings of the relationship between religious institutions, government, and citizens) and, ultimately, how political justice dispositions lead to different orientations toward procedural and distributive justice. As defined in this volume, procedural and distributive justice consist of public policy preferences toward civil liberties, as well as sexual, gender, and economic equality.

Chapter 1 articulates the basic aims of the volume and attends to key definitional issues. Andrain is to be applauded for providing clear definitions of key concepts. He takes pains to define justice in its various permutations, even as he stakes out the justice orientations of various groups, which he identifies as hierarchs, libertarian individualists, egalitarians, and fatalists. The intergroup distinctions offered by Andrain are quite clearly articulated at this juncture. In subsequent chapters, he contrasts classical Judeo-Christian conceptualizations of justice (Jesus versus Paul) [chapter 2], as well as those articulated by Catholic and Protestant Social Gospel proponents [chapters 3-4] and New Thought advocates ranging from transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson to Religious Science founder Ernest Holmes [chapter 5].

Andrain thoughtfully examines how distinctive theological views serve as the foundation for diverse orientations toward spiritual and political justice. For instance, rather than lumping together Social Gospel proponents with New Thought advocates given their shared left-of-center politics, Andrain is sensitive to the points at which these worldviews converge, and those where they diverge. Both Social Gospel and New Thought proponents are animated by commitments to human equality and God’s transcendence. Yet, Social Gospel advocates believe that structural change is the avenue through which social transformation must occur, while those in the New Thought movement are more individualistic in their pursuit of social betterment. Thus, while both are situated at similar locations on the political spectrum, the Social Gospel goal to reform social institutions through political protest contrasts quite markedly with the New Thought aim to bring about a “revolution from within” through prayer and meditation.

To its credit, this book is not simply a comparison of the rhetoric offered by prominent religious leaders of the past. Analyses of General Social Survey data presented in chapter 7, the capstone chapter of the volume, demonstrate how religious involvement influences spiritual justice orientations and public policy positions among contemporary Americans. The results generally provide support for the arguments laid out up to that point in the volume.

I have one quibble with this book, though it is not a major criticism. The use of categorical terms in much of the book—hierarchs, libertarian individualists, egalitarians, and fatalists—struck me, at times, as indicative of overly “concretized” political factions rather than ideological leanings that are capable of being amended and reformulated depending on particular issues, contexts, or framings. Are “hierarchs” uniformly hierarchical in the way they approach issues of faith and political justice? Perhaps not. For instance, for some time now, considerable research has problematized the culture wars thesis. One stream of that research, even some quantitative scholarship, has revealed conservative (evangelical) Protestants to be much more internally diverse on political and cultural issues than had been previously recognized. There is also more recent evidence that religious conservatives are more compassionate and altruistic, by some measures, than political liberals. And, these types of complexities are not altogether surprising, because conservative Protestantism is a large slice of the American pie (about 20% by some estimates), and embraces both hierarchical conceptualizations of God (Sovereign Father) and more egalitarian formulations (Jesus Christ as the believer’s “friend” and ally).

Other research has shown that theologically conservative Protestants have very different political outlooks when race-ethnicity is factored into the mix, with African American theological conservatives evincing more politically liberal views on many social justice issues than their white theologically conservative counterparts. Thus, *Political Justice and Religious Values* could have paid more attention to the dynamism and heterogeneity within its conceptual categories, particularly on the theologically conservative side of the political spectrum. In fairness, Andrain is quite sensitive to internal factionalism exhibited within American Catholicism, though less so with respect to conservative Protestantism.

This criticism does not detract from a volume that is, in general, an excellent exploration of the connections between theological views, justice orientations, and public policy preferences. This book is appropriate for courses in the sociology of religion, political sociology, and public policy. It is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on religion and politics.

John P. Bartkowski  
University of Texas, San Antonio