



The Americanization of Religious Minorities: Confronting the Constitutional Order

Professor Eric Michael Mazur

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What happens when a minority religious group's beliefs run counter to the laws and principles of the American constitution? How do Americans reconcile the conflicting demands of church and state? In *The Americanization of Religious Minorities*, Eric Michael Mazur recounts the experiences of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Native Americans as cases in which minority religious groups seek to practice their faith in a constitutional order that recognizes a higher authority different from, and sometimes incompatible with, their own.

Mazur identifies three basic strategies these minority religious groups can follow: establishing a separate peace; accommodating their theology to political realities; and engaging in sustained conflict. He shows that, in order to practice its faith without hindrance from the law, a member of a religious minority must somehow buy into the principles and values of America's constitutional government. He also concludes that the closer a minority's beliefs are to Protestant Christianity, the easier the accommodation. Throughout, Mazur emphasizes the experience of religious minorities in dealing with this problem.

A fascinating investigation of religious groups' right to practice their faith, *The Americanization of Religious Minorities* will be of interest to students and scholars of American religion, American politics, and sociology.

"[I believe] the First Amendment represents the gift with the greatest potential to be given by this country to the world. But I also believe it is a promise that, like the messiah, is always coming but never here. We must understand what we have done to others who have faced the dilemma of being religious minorities in this culture so that we can better understand the limits, and the potential, of our hopes for greater religious freedom." -- from the Preface

"It has long been accepted that no freedom is absolute, but we do not often examine the implicit boundaries set on religious freedom or think about the ramifications for religious communities that -- for any number of reasons -- do not consider themselves, or are not considered by others, part of the mainstream. Part of the value of this analysis rests in its exploration of how minority religious communities balance the desire to join the dominant culture, on the one hand, with the sometimes conflicting desire to maintain a particularistic community identity, on the other." -- from the Introduction

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