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## The Role of Religion in the Politics

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### Abstract

Religious freedom and the separation of church and state are two topics that continue to be discussed in political philosophy, even though there is increasing consensus on these issues in both theoretical and practical political settings, such as the United Nations. Many religions demand absolute loyalty from their followers, and the demands of global religions are universal, not limited to any one group. This makes the topic all the more pressing. For instance, submission to Allah's will is a universally held responsibility in Islamic faith. However, political needs and religious commitments will inevitably clash from time to time. Religious ideas and practices could, nevertheless, support political causes in many ways. Equally important to the amount and make-up of this support, according to political thinkers, is the possibility of confrontation.

*Keywords: Public sphere, religion, secularism, beliefs, minority, groups, rights*

### Introduction

A wide variety of philosophical questions may emerge from the various potential points of contact between religion and politics, and this article offers a general outline of these topics. While the latter two sections address similar but more pressing problems in modern political theory, the former two focus on topics that were important in bygone eras, especially the early modern one: establishing a house of worship vs complete separation of church and state, and (3) the ongoing conflicts between religious practice and official authority. Topics that have, for the most part, only recently been discussed are covered in the following sections: (3) the importance of religious liberty and personal accountability as liberal citizens; and (4) the function of religion in societal discourse.

### Literature Review

Although it is less prevalent currently, the concept of establishment has been central to Western political theory since at least the time of Constantine. While discussions of establishment were prevalent throughout the Middle Ages, they reached a fever pitch in the early modern period as European communities sought to reconcile the newfound tensions between church and state in the wake of the Protestant Reformation (Dante, 1995).

Note that these policies are not mutually exclusive and that a state may opt to adopt more than one. They revolve around promoting someone to a higher-ranking job at their heart. "Civil religion" is a weaker form of the established church, says Robert Bellah (1967: 3-4). This paradigm proposes that the state openly employ religious values in public life without formally recognising any one religion or denomination. As evidence of civil religion, he points to Abraham Lincoln's elucidation of the American Civil War through Christian concepts of liberty and servitude.

Despite the dearth of contemporary philosophical arguments in favour of the openly religious establishment of a church or religion, T. S. Eliot is widely recognised as having offered one in the previous century (1936, 1967). Eliot was deeply influenced by Aristotle and trained as a philosopher (he completed but did not defend a Harvard dissertation on F. H. Bradley's philosophy). He believed that democratic societies would lose the ethical wisdom that comes from being part of a tradition if they rejected the influence of established churches. His main point was that societies like these inevitably devolve into authoritarianism and social and cultural collapse. By stressing the benefits to society and government, certain conservative organisations keep pushing for institutionalisation



(Scruton, 1980). According to this school of thought, a polis can't function well unless its citizens are very united in matters other than politics. Specifically, for individuals to desire to cooperate politically, they must feel socially related to one another, and for collective political decisions to make sense, there must be a shared framework for understanding these decisions. As a result, for there to be harmony, there must be cultural conformity, especially when it comes to the adoption of certain values. The aforementioned forms of establishment can be used to ensure this kind of uniformity; for example, religious symbols can be placed on political monuments and structures or a particular religion can be addressed at political ceremonies.

Therefore, in order for the state to foster a sense of cultural unity among its citizens, it may, or may not, provide preferential treatment to a certain religious group or ideology. Of course, one might simply argue that salvation is good and that a certain religion is true in a modified version of this argument, but given the intractable nature of both issues, this would be an extremely difficult case to make.

In reaction to these kinds of thinking, liberal philosophy has always opposed the establishment. Liberals of today frequently make reference to the importance of justice. Some contend that the state ought to refrain from taking a stand on matters of religion, citing the fact that it would be unjust for any government—and especially a democratic one that professes to speak for its people—to favour or discriminate against any group in their pursuit of happiness (Rawls, 1971). It is wrong to force non-believers to pay for faiths they do not support, according to liberals, who often argue that government funds shouldn't go to religious institutions. As an alternate, liberals can bring up the right to religious practice, a part of the freedom of conscience, straightaway. If the right to religious freedom were universally recognised, it would be morally wrong for the government to force its citizens to participate in religious activities they do not want to, such being forced to pray in public. The same reasoning can be applied to the morally reprehensible conduct of taxing people or companies to finance religious institutions that they do not wish to support.

Moreover, liberal consequentialists are concerned that religious persecution and limitations on personal freedoms might result from or be exacerbated by establishment (Audi, 2000: 37-41). Despite promises that members of a particular faith will not face persecution in return for certain rights, the state's increasing meddling in religious affairs brings it closer to plainly unfair interferences and gives religious groups irrational incentives to seek out political power in order to gain an edge over their opponents. A lot of religious people are afraid that getting involved in politics would make their communities and their missions less trustworthy.

### **Religious Belief and Practice**

Addressing the growing religious variety in early modern European and American communities and institutions was a critical social concern. Many people still look to John Locke's classic work, *The Letter Concerning Toleration*, as an authority on the topic. Despite being a political exile at the time of its writing, Locke makes the following arguments: (a) propositions cannot be freely accepted or rejected; (b) it is wrong to restrict religious practice unless doing so violates the rights of others; and (c) allowing different religious groups will probably prevent any one of them from becoming powerful enough to threaten peace. In contrast to the earlier mediaeval view of the church as having dominion over the residents of a particular region, his arguments centre on the Protestant notion of a church as an independent community whose members are selected at random. Tolerance is most severely limited in Protestantism according to Locke. Since Catholics are obedient to a foreign ruler (the Pope) and atheists do not believe they are bound by divine law, it is unreasonable to expect these groups to live happily together. A more tolerant and diverse society is still one of Locke's primary aims in his *Letter*. When it comes to the link between religious conflict and political unrest, Thomas



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Hobbes disagrees with John Locke. See Leviathan xviii, 9 for Hobbes's argument that the sovereign should be able to regulate the spread of certain ideas for the sake of peace.

Conflicts involving religion and politics can arise in places other than schools. Just one example: a new rule in France prohibits pupils from donning anything with a religious motif. The rule was strongly opposed by students whose religion forbids them to wear specific types of headscarves or other religious head coverings. The French government justified the decision by arguing that it would help unite French citizens of all faiths and that it was necessary to protect France's secular character. The counterargument would be that this rule is an excessive intrusion by the state into people's private religious lives. If the freedom to freely believe involves the right to publicly express one's thoughts, then people should be able to openly show their religious beliefs by the clothes they wear.

### Liberalism

A lot of recent studies have looked into practical questions of tolerance and accommodation, as well as theological questions of the desirableness or undesirableness of particular political doctrines. One reason for this concentration is the growth of the political liberal tradition. An innovative liberal strategy was alluded to by John Rawls (1996) in his namesake book, and the idea of a "overlapping consensus" captures this strategy. An overlapping consensus occurs when individuals with diverse comprehensive doctrines (including but not limited to religious views, metaphysical stances, conceptions of morality and the good life, etc.) reach a rational agreement on principles of justice. Beliefs such as theories of epistemic justification might also be included in this category. A theory of justice ought to aim to extract concepts that individuals might rightfully embrace from their own liberal philosophy, rather than attempting to compel individuals to embrace a particular liberal theory. Because everyone is in agreement on the values rather than the reasons behind them, this "political" rather than "metaphysical" perspective on justice is born. Many have questioned how far A Theory of Justice deviates from Rawls's earlier "metaphysical" liberalism considers the new liberal justice viewpoint and evaluates its efficacy. For a political justice theory to be successful, it must ensure that all reasonable people may uphold justice principles without sacrificing their own personal beliefs. However, there are writers who argue that this is impossible as even a "thin" political concept of justice threatens certain comprehensive beliefs, which religious people may find particularly challenging. Eomann Callan presents one such case in his book *Creating Citizens*. Callan emphasises the significance of Rawls' theory of "the burdens of judgement" (see Rawls, 1996: § 2): fundamentalists are unable to personally embrace this theory because it forces them to view competing faiths and beliefs as having nearly equal epistemic worth. Joining the overlapping agreement may be difficult for some religious citizens if they are expected to shoulder the obligations of judging according to Rawlsian liberalism".

Citizens who practise their faith may so experience profound internal strife as they try to reconcile their identities as citizens and believers. Making the case that one facet of her identity is more important than the other could help end the argument. Check out the internal struggle that Sophocles' *Antigone* goes through when she refuses to obey Creon's order and burys her brother instead. By doing this, she admits that her religious responsibilities take precedence over her civic ones, at least in that particular situation. Political power is seen by many religious citizens as secondary to, or even a direct result of, heavenly authority. As a result, many citizens prioritise their religious obligations over their civic duties. Contrarily, civic republicanism has generally held that political engagement is essential to human flourishing and so places a premium on citizens' civic responsibilities (Dagger, 1997).

Liberal thought, in contrast to these schools of thought, has traditionally rejected the idea of giving any one facet of an individual's identity more weight than another, instead arguing that each person must decide for herself what parts of her identity are most vital (Kymlicka, 2002). However, liberals find it more difficult to resolve disputes involving religion and politics due to this inclination. A



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liberal could argue that, among other things, the importance of fairness trumps that of seeking happiness (which would encompass religious activity).

### Conclusion

Even while secularism is rapidly spreading in many societies across the world and seems to be associated with economic progress, religion remains a major political phenomenon for a number of reasons. There are still sizable religious communities even in highly secularised countries. Many point to Sweden as an example. In addition, many of these communities are seeing an influx of religiously extreme individuals who practise faiths that are foreign to the traditions of the host nations. Formal citizenship and other significant democratic privileges are sometimes bestowed to these individuals. The clash between Western nations and extremist Islam is not going away any time soon. That being said, political philosophers can expect to keep focusing on the aforementioned issues for the time being.

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