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978-0-521-61273-9 - The Political Origins of Religious Liberty

Anthony Gill

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THE POLITICAL ORIGINS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The issue of religious liberty has gained ever-increasing attention among policy makers and the public at large. Whereas politicians have long championed the idea of religious freedom and tolerance, the actual achievement of these goals has been an arduous battle for religious minorities. What motivates political leaders to create laws providing for greater religious liberty? In contrast to scholars who argue that religious liberty results from the spread of secularization and modern ideas, Anthony Gill argues that religious liberty results from interest-based calculations of secular rulers. Using insights from political economists dating back to Adam Smith, Gill develops a theory of the origins of religious liberty based on the political and economic interests of governing officials. Political leaders are most likely to permit religious freedom when it enhances their own political survival, tax revenue, and the economic welfare of their country. He explores his theory using cases from British America, Latin America, Russia, and the Baltic states.

Anthony Gill is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington, where he specializes in the study of religion, economics, and politics. He is the author of *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* and numerous articles on religion and politics. Professor Gill was awarded the University of Washington's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1999 and is a nonresident scholar at Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion.

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The most enduring and illuminating bodies of late-nineteenth-century social theory – by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and others – emphasized the integration of religion, polity, and economy through time and place. Once a staple of classic social theory, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity Poland; the dissolution of the Soviet empire; various South American, Southern African, and South Asian liberation movements; the Christian Right in the United States; and Al Qaeda have reawakened scholarly interest in religious-based political conflict. At the same time, fundamental questions are once again being asked about the role of religion in stable political regimes, public policies, and constitutional orders. The series *Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics* will produce volumes that study religion and politics by drawing on classic social theory and more recent social scientific research traditions. Books in the series offer theoretically grounded, comparative, empirical studies that raise “big” questions about a timely subject that has long engaged the best minds in social science.

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For Victor H. Gill and his shining city on the hill.

Never forget the value of freedom.

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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
1 Introduction: Of Liberty, Laws, Religion, and Regulation	1
2 The Political Origins of Religious Liberty	26
3 Colonial British America	60
4 Mexico and Latin America	114
5 Russia and the Baltics (with Cheryl Žilinskas)	168
6 We Gather Together: The Consequences of Religious Liberty	224
Appendix: List of Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions	231
<i>Bibliography</i>	235
<i>Index</i>	255

vii

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[More information](#)

Preface

I am not sure how many people read prefaces, but if you have made it this far I urge you to continue. In the course of the next few short paragraphs, I hope to provide you with a little insight into why this book was written and how to read it.

This work is an extension of my earlier research that began while I was in graduate school and which resulted in a dissertation and a previously published book, *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*. The primary conclusion of that book was that religious competition, primarily from evangelical Protestants, prompted the Latin American Catholic Church to pay attention to the needs of its parishioners more closely. In countries where the number of Protestants was expanding rapidly, the Catholic Church tended to take a more preferential option for the poor and denounce governmental institutions deleterious to the nation's citizenry. In the final analysis, I concluded that this is a good thing. However, the one question that I never got around to answering was why Protestants happened to be more numerous in some countries than in others. In a subsequent article published in *Rationality and Society*, I discovered that religious liberty accounted for the varying growth rates of Protestants throughout Latin American countries. This finding would seem rather mundane; of course minority religions would expand where there were fewer laws preventing them from expanding. Despite this obvious conclusion, some

early reviewers of that manuscript commented that such logic was counter-intuitive. Nonetheless, I persevered in my belief that religious freedom and religious vitality were linked.

The next question that naturally arose from my course of study was why some countries would have more liberal regulations governing religious groups and others would maintain stricter laws. The fact that there were significant degrees of difference throughout countries with similar cultural backgrounds and religious traditions ruled out the possibility that culture was at work. Moreover, other research I conducted with my graduate student Arang Keshavarzian revealed that similar patterns of church-state relations could be seen in countries with radically different cultural traditions, most notably Mexico and Iran. All of that set me to thinking about the role that political interests play in regulating religions. Because religious liberty is really just the accumulation of numerous laws telling churches and believers what they can and cannot do, it would make sense that the interests of lawmakers would be of crucial importance in determining the shape of those laws.

The process of exploring this idea led me first to examine Mexico and a few other countries in Latin America. I then turned my attention to the United States, realizing that the writing of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was a major milestone in the history of religious liberty, at least in the modern era. I found great joy in going back and reading U.S. colonial history, and I found additional pleasure in the fact that it took me back into European history. Finally, I decided to pursue an exploration of Russia, which in 1997 implemented a highly restrictive set of regulations on religious minorities. Though not an expert in Russian politics or history, I gathered up the courage to move ahead, realizing that this case offered up a remarkable test of my hypothesis. Fearing my lack of knowledge would inhibit me in this area, I recruited a graduate student who was taking one of my classes at the time – Cheryl Žilinskas. Cheryl suggested that the Soviet-dominated Baltic States would also make a great case study, and because she was planning a dissertation on the topic, I agreed to let her help me. The result of my thinking on this topic is what you now hold in your hands. I hope you enjoy it.

And speaking of enjoyment, I hope that this work finds a broader audience than most scholarly books. I think it will. The topic is of great concern to the waves of religious believers who have refused to go away despite the coaxing of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Steve Bruce, and others. The book should also provide good reading to those interested in the general topic of liberty. Because freedom of conscience is often considered the “first

freedom,” understanding how it flourishes (or is repressed) should help us understand how other liberties are won or lost. To reach out to this wider audience, I tried to minimize the use of jargon wherever possible, or at least to explain that jargon when it appears in the text. I firmly believe that lay readers are capable of reading whatever academic scholars can dream up, so long as the language they write in does not come from some esoteric secret society. Too much scholarly writing today is thick with pedantic meanderings. If you are a lay reader of this work, I invite you to contact me and let me know if you found this work inspirational. Of course, if you are reading this work some sixty years from now, I probably won’t be around, but you could always try a séance.

To further help the cause of reaching a broad audience, I have also tried to include some wit in the text and footnotes.¹ Deciding whether I have succeeded in this task will be up to the reader, but I sincerely hope that you get at least one chuckle. As with my concern over arcane writing, I also think that too many scholars take their work far too seriously, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. I understand there are serious topics that demand a serious mind, but part of the reason I enjoy my profession so much is that it gives me the joy of discovering new things, including all varieties of human quirks and foibles. Being a person who is not immune from possessing such quirks and foibles, I figure it is best to celebrate them. And the bottom line is this – on average, human beings get about seventy-five years to enjoy life. If I cannot find the opportunity to smile in the course of that time, including the portion of it when I am at work, then I sincerely wonder if I spent my time wisely.

¹ Speaking of footnotes, I encourage readers to read them. For graduate students and other interested parties, I have put a number of unanswered questions in the footnotes. Many of these would make great dissertation topics or research projects.

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Standard operating procedures in academic circles require me to thank all of those who helped shape my ideas. Personally, I would like to take all the credit for everything that is correct in this work and pass blame for all errors on to some unsuspecting soul. Alas, my internal moral compass tells me that this is not a good thing to do. Moreover, I am truly a grateful person deep down inside and all the acknowledgments here are sincere and heartfelt. I may forget a few people who helped me along the way, so let me start by apologizing for this shortcoming.

First, I would like to recognize Roger Finke, whose 1990 article in *The Journal of Church and State* was a significant inspiration for this work. Roger also provided exceptionally thoughtful comments on the prospectus for this work and the completed manuscript. Larry Iannaccone and Rod Stark also deserve major praise for being sources of continual inspiration in my work and models whom I seek to emulate. Each of these three scholars – Roger, Larry, and Rod – have been influential in my intellectual development, and they have been good mentors and friends to boot. Even though they don't know this, they have been responsible for keeping me in the academic profession when times looked tough. But let's keep that as our little secret.

Several good friends and colleagues – Steve Hanson, David Lege, Matt Manweller, Steve Pfaff, Ken Wald, and Carolyn Warner – read significant chunks of this manuscript and presented helpful comments on both content

and style. I didn't always take their suggestions (this is my book after all), but I greatly appreciate the time and effort it took to slog through my various drafts. All of these folks have been strong confidantes over the years, finding ways to tolerate this academic misfit (and several of them know what I mean by that). Steve Pfaff deserves special mention; he's a great storyteller and an even better friend.

Many other people have read portions of this work and/or have been forced to sit through tedious and monochromatic Microsoft PowerPoint presentations outlining the various arguments posited here. These include John Anderson, Robert Barro, David S. Brown, Paul Froese, Kirk Hawkins, Michael Hechter, Wade Jacoby, Stathis Kalyvas, Edgar Kiser, Ahmet Kuru, Margaret Levi, Chris Marsh, Rachel McCleary, Michael Mousseau, Dan Nielson, Mark A. Smith, Murat Somer, Bill Talbott, Clyde Wilcox, and John Witte Jr. I also thank all of those who participated in the various university seminars at which I presented this work, including Arizona State, Baylor, Brigham Young, Emory, Harvard, Koç University (Istanbul), and Rice. I particularly enjoyed the enormous hospitality shown to me at Brigham Young University, which has a remarkably energetic and prolific political science department. The good folks at the University of Washington's Political Economy Drinks and Discussion group also provided needed commentary at the early stages in this process. The University of Washington's Royalty Research Fund provided funding for my research in Latin America.

Several students were instrumental in a variety of ways in bringing this book to fruition. My greatest appreciation here goes to Cheryl Zilinskas, who not only read my manuscript and provided commentary but also crucially assisted in writing the chapter on Russia and the Baltics. This was Cheryl's first foray into the world of academic publishing, and I know that she put enormous pressure on herself to do a good job. The result was a truly amazing job, and I could not have finished this book without her help. I also took inspiration from her missionary work, which showed a great deal of courage and faith. Cheryl's husband, Rimas, also provided a couple of noteworthy comments and proved to be tolerant of Cheryl's heroic late-night efforts to finish her portions of the chapter. They both earned themselves a movie night. Other graduate students helped me research portions of this book including Stefan Hamberg, Erik Lundsgaarde, Diana Pallais, and Anthony Pezzola. Some hard-working undergraduates also lent a hand in the research for this book (and on related topics). Recognition goes to Ivan Barron, Etan Basseri, Franklin Donahoe, Monya Kian, Kim Mabee, Erica Monges, Lech Radzinski, Don Rasmussen, Lindsay Scola, and Claudia Zeibe. Many more undergraduate and graduate students were

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xv

exposed to my ideas in various courses that I taught at the University of Washington.

Lew Bateman, David Leege, and Ken Wald gave me an incredibly long leash as editors at Cambridge University Press. I really appreciate that. Any author should feel blessed if they get a chance to work with these fine folks. Lew even took me out for breakfast when I was in New York City. Who could ask for anything more in an editor? Monica Finley and Shelby Peak did a great job shepherding this manuscript through the production process and putting up with my jocular e-mails. And Christine Dunn did a fantastic job copyediting the manuscript and had a great sense of humor. I recommend DunnWrite Editorial for all copyediting jobs. A few other people deserve mention for listening to my ideas, offering encouragement, being an inspiration, or just being plain old good folks that kept me going: Chris and Janet Campton, Katie Carlton, Charles Daniels, Greg and Jill Esau, Christopher Gibson, Joel and Mary Green, Lois Gustafson, Barbara Kautz, Dave and Mary Kautz, Ted Lester, Brian and Theresa Pedersen, Tim and Kathy Sinclair, Kirby and Trina Wilbur, and Shelly and Steve Young. Bullet, “C,” and Quinn also provided support in their own particular ways. None of these folks know they’ve helped so let’s keep that a secret too.

And who can forget the family? My wife, Becky, put up with this thing causing me all sorts of angst over the past six years. She allowed me to complain and take more than a few extra weekends to devote work to this effort. She was always there for support. My parents – Jim and Arlene – were also there to keep asking if I had finished yet. Apparently writing a book is a lot like mowing the grass when you’re a teenager. And then there’s my son, Victor. He has given me lots of hugs and kisses when I needed them most and has never been at a loss for inspirational and funny words at just the right time. His excitement over me writing a book that was dedicated to him has certainly made an impression on him. He even sat down to write his own book at age six just to be like his daddy. And he keeps telling me how he wants to go to college wherever I happen to be working so that he can become a scientist and have lunch with me. Now how cool is that? I hope he still shares that goal in some form or another as he grows up. But as for the immediate future I think he and I earned some good fishing time together next summer.

Finally, special gratitude goes to the greatest cowboy of them all. We’ve talked a lot over the past few years and these conversations have definitely made me a better, stronger, and more patient person. But I’m still trying.