Religious Persecution and Political Order in the United States

Religious freedom is a foundational value of the United States, but not all religious minorities have been shielded from religious persecution in America. This book examines why the state has acted to protect some religious minorities while allowing others to be persecuted or actively persecuting them. It details the persecution experiences of Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholics, Jews, the Nation of Islam, and orthodox Muslims in America, developing a theory for why the state intervened to protect some but not others. This book argues that the state will persecute religious minorities if state actors consider them a threat to political order, but they will protect religious minorities if they believe persecution is a greater threat to political order. From the beginning of the republic to post-9/11, religious freedom in America has depended on the state’s perception of political threats.

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Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics

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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, however, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity in 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 religiously 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 upon 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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Religious Persecution and Political Order in the United States

DAVID T. SMITH

University of Sydney, Australia
To my parents,

Brian and Sue Smith
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