

Governing the faithful

A discussion of religious freedom and liberal democracies with particular focus on the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article examines the tension between liberal democratic government and citizens of faith with a particular focus on Christians in Great Britain. The article examines the reality of increasing cases of marginalization of Christians in liberal democracies and the contest of rights which is at the heart of these cases. The article questions the rise of a hierarchy of rights, representing a totalistic pluralism which threatens the foundational nature of a liberal democracy: freedom of conscience and belief. It closes with a discussion of the implications of this clash for believers living in Western states.

Keywords Religious freedom, liberal democracy, marginalization, faith, hierarchy, rights.

“Despotism may govern without faith, but liberty cannot” **Alexis DeToqueville**

“Freedom of religion is indeed the oldest of the international recognized human freedoms”
John Humphrey, *principal writer of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

1. Introduction

This paper interrogates the relationship between the state and the faithful, those of religious faith who subscribe to traditional teachings and reside within liberal western democracies. Alexis DeToqueville made a clear claim for the primacy which religious freedom should be afforded within democracy where the very idea of freedom is founded on theological conceptions. This paper examines the relationship between liberal democratic government and religious believers who hold to traditional interpretations of their faith. It draws attention away from the much criticized lack of religious liberty in non-Western states² to look at the gradual erosion

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² For a few examples see the US State Department's Report on International Religious Freedom at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/index.htm>.

of religious rights and the increasing conflict between liberal progressive views and those of religious groups, with particular focus being placed on groups following traditional or evangelical Christian teaching. The United Kingdom is the principal case study for this paper, but it will also draw on theory from further afield.³ The paper will firstly show the reality of marginalization, hostility and persecution (MHP) of traditional Christian beliefs including the major points of tension and opposition, will highlight major legislation leading to these “rights conflicts” and will discuss some of the current and potential outcomes for the faithful if they are, or perceive to be, increasingly marginalized. The issue of religious liberty is, and will continue to be, a defining feature of domestic and international politics. It has the ability to radically alter the social, legal and moral framework of liberal democratic states and realize a transnational Christian allegiance that will contest the state for the ultimate loyalty of the faithful.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the role of Christianity in securing democracy, enhancing pluralism and the general importance of religious freedom, but a few brief points can be made. There is, for example, a clear link between Christianity and freedom. Over 80% of free countries as defined by Freedom House are Christian majorities and many of the remaining have Christian minorities influential in the democratization process (Hertzke 2004:26). As a historical fact, modern democracies emerged out of Christian societies. Pluralism, the value of every human life, the historic struggle for freedom and autonomy of power apart from the state, all mark Christian history and Christianity’s continuing contributions to democracy (Hertzke 2004:26).

The contribution of Christianity to the formation of western states and trends against Christians in these same states are subjects given little attention by scholars, who are either uninterested or particularly antithetical to Christianity. Secular myopia ignores the role of religion in society and in particular the incredibly vast suffering of believers. Hundreds of thousands of Christians have for decades suffered horrific persecution around the world with hardly a mention within Western academia (Marshall 1997:181-210). Why should a far less violent form of opposition attract attention? But attract attention it must. Not only is this a matter of basic human rights, enshrined in European and international law, but, if it should begin to result in disobedience, the consequences for the state are difficult to predict. One thing is certain. The evangelical and charismatic church is growing, and growing fast. The liberal church is largely dying. If church-state relations are to be defined,

³ Thanks to Jon Davies who pointed out the importance of appreciating the different experiences felt by traditional religious majorities and more recent immigrant based minority religious communities. While the latter is a necessary area of study, the former category – Christian believers – are the focus of this study.

it will be by the more passionate, proselytizing groups of Christians represented in these churches and not a latitudinarian remnant. It is, in other words, exactly that form of Christian expression which is leading to the clash of rights which is growing – the accommodating, liberalizing churches are, on the whole, dying. We don't live in an age of secularity; we live in an age of explosive, pervasive religiosity and conflict over rights is only likely to increase (Berger 2006).

2. The reality of MHP: Cases and surveys

The Pew Forum, in research released in late 2010, found that Christians face hostility in 71% of European states (Grim 2010:5). Christians in Western states, or at least Christians who adhere to traditional understanding of their faith, are facing increasing hostility within Western democracies.

It is not the purpose of this paper to question the legal merit of the following cases but to point to the contest of rights of which traditional Christian views form one side. It is, in the context of this paper, the appearance of MHP which is as important as its reality, for perception of hostility can be as powerful as reality in creating divisions between the state and the faithful. Two organizations in the UK handle the majority of MHP cases, the Christian Legal Centre (CLC) and the Christian Institute. The following cases all represent clients of these two organizations. This is, however, a fraction of actual incidents and are principally those that appear in the popular media or are pursued in court.

Gary McFarlane, an attorney and part-time marriage counselor, was fired for requesting not to advise homosexual clients. Lillian Ladele was fired for refusing to officiate civil partnerships and not only lost her case, but was refused right to appeal. A colleague of Mrs. Ladele, Theresa Davies, was demoted to a receptionist position for refusing to conduct civil partnerships of homosexual couples. These three cases all relate to Christians declaring that their faith could not allow them to support gay-marriage and that they should therefore not have to engage with such couples in the line of their work. In each case the right to religious freedom was subordinated to those of homosexual clients.

Caroline Petrie, a nurse, was suspended for offering to pray for a patient who was not herself offended by the prayer. Mrs. Petrie, a nurse with an outstanding career, was told that she could not bring her faith into her work. Medical work was essentially to be God free – an ironic situation for the faith at the center of charity and modern medicine. Mrs. Petrie was subsequently reinstated after a lengthy arbitration process. Shirley Chaplain, a nurse, was suspended for wearing a cross deemed a health hazard despite 30 years of excellent service while wearing a cross. Mrs. Chaplain was reinstated to a desk job pending her final 6 months prior to retirement. This is a less clear case of hostility to religious belief given the “health

hazard” claims. It is, however, an important case as the expression of Mrs. Chaplain’s faith was subordinated to health policies which reflect a clear lack of concern for her faith. The wearing of a cross had not been problematic for 30 years and could not be shown to be a clear hazard to patients. Margaret Forrester, an NHS health worker, was suspended for airing views and presenting literature in private conversation with colleagues, that women having abortions were not being told of the full consequences of this act. In this case Mrs. Forrester was suspended for handing out Christian based information to colleagues, not clients. Her professional opinion even in discussion with colleagues was regarded as offensive because it was rooted in Christian belief. Mrs. Forrester was reinstated after action by the Christian Legal Centre.

Olive Jones, a teacher, was suspended for offering to pray for a sick pupil, but was later reinstated when, it is claimed, her employers realized she had not been appropriately briefed. This was only an offer to pray and here again it was effectively argued that a Christian did not have the right to express their faith in the course of their employment.

Peter and Hazelmary Bull, hotel owners, were fined for refusing a homosexual couple accommodation in a double-room, a policy also applied to unmarried heterosexuals. Mr. and Mrs. Bull’s case again represented a hierarchy of rights in which religious belief is subordinated to the right to receive services. Duke Amachree was suspended for advising a terminally sick housing benefit recipient to put trust in God, in response to a discussion of faith initiated by the client. Mr. Amachree’s lawyers were told that even saying “God bless you” would have been considered grounds for suspension. Even given the client’s initiation of the conversation, state lawyers essentially argued for the complete privatization of faith – that it could play no role in Mr. Amachree’s work.

Eunice and Owen Johns, who boasted a successful record of fostering, were denied further foster children on the basis of their faith. On appeal to the British courts, this ban was upheld because the Johns would not declare homosexual relationships acceptable. The British court essentially ruled that an evangelical belief system was no longer appropriate for fostering children because of their position on homosexuality.

These are a fraction of cases in the United Kingdom over the past two years. The Christian Legal Centre, which represented Eunice and Owen Johns in the UK High Court, are currently considering a further fifty requests for legal assistance.

In a 2009 survey conducted by ComRes, Christians were asked whether they thought that the risk of persecution in the UK had increased, decreased or stayed the same (ComRes, 2009/10). 23% thought it unchanged, 1% that it had decreased and a significant 76% that it had increased. This is a noteworthy statistic as it speaks

to a view, whether perceived or real, that the place of Christians in the UK is becoming increasingly difficult. Note that the question did not ask about marginalization, but used the strongly emotive term of persecution. When asked of the expected pattern of persecution in the next 5 years, those seeing a decrease were 2% of respondents, no change at 19% and those predicting a continuing trend of persecution 80%. What is a person of faith to do when faced with such a view, that freedom from persecution would not be absent from a liberal democracy founded not only on liberal democratic freedoms, but freedoms won in large part by the church itself? To add further nuance to this survey, 66% of respondents stated that Christians were discriminated against more than other faith groups, while 20% saw all faiths facing discrimination.

In 2010, ComRes completed a similar poll, this time targeting not Christians, but a broad range of respondents (ComRes, 2009/10). In this poll, the terminology referenced marginalization or “the pushing out or disregard of Christians’ views in public life”. The poll reveals some fascinating statistics. First, approximately 20% of respondents did not have an opinion on the matter. But here again, the highest category was amongst those who saw marginalization increasing, across all categories: “in public, media, workplace and government”, numbering 38, 34, 31 and 31% respectively. Of these respondents, the highest category was consistently amongst those who had no religious affiliation and never attended church, showing that the perception of marginalization was not confined to the faithful.

When questioned on whether Christianity would be more or less marginalized over the next five years, the figures increased across the categories to 43, 40, 39 and 37%. Both Christian and non-Christian respondents again saw an increase in anti-Christian activity. This survey was also conducted after the general elections, when the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat alliance government was in power.

When asked whether Christians are free to express their faith, further interesting statistics emerged. While public and the press were still seen as avenues in which Christians are free to express their faith, a clear majority saw that the workplace and government were now restrictive of personal faith. As gay British historian David Starkey warns, “It seems to me that what we are doing is producing a tyrannous new morality that is every bit as oppressive as the old”, arguing for a balance rather than hierarchy of rights. “I am very, very concerned that a new sort of liberal morality is coming in, which as I said, is as intolerant, is as oppressive, is as intrusive into family life” (Starkey 2011).

As the cases above show, Christians are being forced to choose between their occupation and religious belief as if faith is something which can be removed from personal choice and action when not in the home. If the guarantee of religious freedom is to have any meaning, it cannot only be referenced to private faith. Freedom

is not freedom if it is limited to weekends and evenings – religious belief must be tolerated in the workplace (Boucher 2010:20). Equality cannot be used to deprive people of their livelihood by forcing a choice between faith and work.. In summary, as Roger Trigg states, “Surveys show that a majority of church-going Christians tend to think that religious freedom, both of speech and practice, is under threat in what often appears to be an increasingly ‘secular’ country” (Trigg 2010:10).

3. Unequal equality

In liberal democracies, the principal area of contest is in law and in the United Kingdom, this is most powerfully felt in reference to the equalities project, initiated by the Labour government, but showing no signs of being altered by the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. The equalities project is increasingly ensuring the rights of some minorities against religion and the emergence of a hierarchy of rights. This is contrary to the heart of a liberal democracy which should include the even-handed treatment of different equality interests – none should dominate the other. Indeed, as Trigg argues, “The right to manifest a religion is considered so unimportant in the face of the ‘equality agenda’ that merely expressing an opinion can become harassment” (Trigg 2010:10) as many of the cases against Christians have proved. Boucher argues: “In the context of the maturing of this liberal democratic form, the rights of minorities have been upheld on the basis of two key principles: ‘different (appropriate) treatment under the law’ and the ‘even-handed’ treatment of different equality interests” (Boucher 2010:11). What is occurring in the United Kingdom is a shift from the government issuing legislation to protect minorities from laws designed with the majority in mind, to the enactment of laws designed with minorities in mind (Boucher 2010:12). The result is growing tension between differing minorities and the establishment of a hierarchy of rights which now threatens certain minorities, especially the religious, but Christians in particular.⁴

As Canadian Justice J. A. McKenzie argues, “A religiously informed conscience should not be accorded any privilege, but neither should it be placed under a disability. In a truly free society moral positions advance or retreat in their influence on law and public policy through decisions of public officials who are not required to pass a religious litmus test” (quoted in Benson 2004:93). If a religiously informed conscience is disadvantaged, this is a distortion of the very liberal values apparently being protected (Benson 2004:94).

⁴ Cases relating to sexual morality are common, but cases against prayer, wearing of crosses and council orders to prevent worship music point to a deeper antagonism against Christianity which goes beyond equality legislation.

As the cases listed above demonstrate, the two areas where the contest of rights is principally being fought is in relation to employment and the provision of goods and services. The case of Lillian Ladele is illustrative of a missed opportunity to employ an even-handed and balanced approach, as well as revealing the contested nature of legal decision making. Ladele's principal defense rested on her view that she could not actively enable same-sex unions and reconcile such actions with her faith. Islington Council declared this clear discrimination against homosexuals and as she was employed to administer UK law, she could not pick and choose which parts of the law to uphold. The Employment Tribunal handed down its ruling in July 2008, recognizing the direct conflict between two protected rights – religion/belief and sexual orientation, neither of which should override the other. The tribunal ruled that Mrs. Ladele's faith should be accommodated and also criticized the council for the manner in which Mrs. Ladele "was less favorably treated on the grounds of her orthodox Christian religion" (Trigg 2010:11). The tribunal's ruling was a clear attempt to balance competing rights. It was, however, overturned by the Employment Appeal Tribunal, held in December 2008, which ruled that the council could require all registrars to perform all services without claims to religious objections, clearly signaling that religious belief should not be given equal weight. Moreover, the tribunal argued that employees could not claim freedom to manifest their beliefs as they "could resign and take up other employment" – referencing an earlier decision by the European Court. Furthermore, the tribunal ruled that "the limitations imposed on freedom of religion are particularly strong where a person has to carry out state functions" (Trigg 2010:11). This is an alarming ruling. Similarly, in the case of the Johns, the court "noted that there was tension between the equality provisions concerning religious discrimination and those concerning sexual orientation, but ruled that in regards to fostering, 'the equality provisions concerning sexual orientation should take precedence'" (Mackay 2011). The court, quoting a European court's previous ruling deemed the traditional Christian views of the Johns as "infectious" – a dehumanizing and dangerous term.

In viewing the June 2007 Report "Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: State, Religion, Secularity and Human Rights", there is no doubt that in a clash between a particular religion and human rights, it is human rights which must always prevail. The explanatory memorandum attached to the recommendations says that "if there is ever a conflict between human rights and the dictates of faith, the state must always defend human rights". Thus potential battles between religion and an ideology of human rights become explicit: if human rights are at stake, religion must always give way (Trigg 2010:35). But, how can religious freedom be separated from basic human rights when it is a protected human right in itself? In fact not only is freedom of religion a human right, it is, within a broader freedom of

conscience, arguably the foundation of all human rights. As the religious freedom policy center of the Hudson Institute, led by Paul Marshall notes:

Religious freedom is pivotal to a free society. Thomas Jefferson and America's founders called it the "first freedom" . . . freedom of thought, conscience and religion is the prerequisite for the exercise of all other basic human rights. In theory and practice, free expression, freedom of press and freedom of association depend on the prior guarantee of a free conscience. The historical reality is that where religious freedom is denied, so too are other basic human rights.⁵

What appears to occur in this report is the downgrading of "religious freedom when its exercise is liable to cut across the will of the state. Yet it is precisely at such a time that the right to such freedom means something. A freedom merely to conform is no great freedom" (Trigg 2010:36). As Trigg goes on to argue, "It is thus perverse in the extreme to appeal to human rights as justification for the marginalization of Christianity in our society. To do that is to begin to dig up the roots of the belief in freedom which our democracy upholds. It is to challenge a major foundation of precisely those rights" (Trigg 2010:57). Or, as Nicholas Wolterstorff contends, all UN documents pertaining to human rights are grounded in human dignity, Judeo-Christian identity. Any secular grounds for determining human dignity are at best arguable and even the slightest doubt as to the place and saliency of religious rights in upholding broader rights should provide caution in the silencing or downgrading of the religious voice in Western states. Human rights will be better protected ultimately if the religious voice is one that is allowed to speak and contest (Foreword to Trigg 2010:8-9). Secularists argue that Christians should not be able to discriminate if they are in state employment. But the state should be the model equalities employer – creating space for all equality strands (Boucher 2010:20). It seems particularly problematic that public work can be identified as a religious-free environment, when the very legislature that formulates regulations is officially led by the monarch, the protector of the faith; is passed by a parliament which opens with prayer and a state in which every public servant receives authority through the "Queen in Parliament under God".

The advancement of equality strands should not damage other rights, whether religious, gender, sexual or otherwise (Boucher 2010:22). The Sexual Orientation Regulations (SOR) of 2007 are, however, a strong example of the failure of equalities legislation. One result of these regulations was changes in the Charity Commission's treatment of religious adoption agencies. In particular, Catholic agencies, some of which had operated for a century were told they could no longer limit potential

⁵ The Religious Freedom Policy Center, Hudson Institute: "Why Religious Freedom" <http://crf.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=mission>.

adoptive parents to heterosexuals. Catholic adoption agencies were few in number but very successful, catering especially for Catholics. There were far more adoption agencies that would place children with homosexual couples. On the basis of a single complaint, the Charity Commission forced these adoption agencies to abandon their faith principles or lose government funding and thereby be forced to close (Boucher 2010:25). In addition, the Catholic agencies were refused a right of discrimination which is given to same-sex groups. Regulation 18 of the SOR allows for discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation if the charity was established for the provision of services to a particular sexual orientation. This regulation was drafted in order to empower homosexual groups, although homosexual groups are not specifically listed in this regulation; the government consultation confirmed that this regulation was designed to only cover “charities that promote LGB rights or provide counseling services for LGB victims of domestic abuse”⁶. Catholic adoption agencies seeking permission to discriminate on sexual grounds in order to only place children with heterosexual couples were refused in what can only be deemed a double standard – in other words one can discriminate on a sexual basis if one is a sexual group, but not if one is a religious group. The state is essentially empowering a system of conflict.

The UK’s Equality Bill of 2009-2010 was a further example of the attempted establishment of a hierarchy of rights. Passed by parliament, this legislation would have prevented religious organizations discriminating against non-believers for positions of employment. This would mean that no faith group could deny homosexuals, Muslims, Sikhs, Satanists or atheists from employment positions on the basis of their faith position. The legislation would likely have led to increased marginalization of traditional Christian views. Exemptions for religious organizations were secured through a vote in the House of Lords, with one Lord stating that “the Equality Bill was, for Christian freedom, the ‘single most damaging Bill’ to come before her in 18 years as a member of the House of Lords” (Carey 2009). Religions require the right to freely associate and organize their communal gatherings for worship. Those people whom churches select to lead their worship must be of the same faith. Similarly, the previous EU Equal Treatment Directive of 2000 denied religious groups the right to discriminate on a faith basis, except for clergy. How is it that political parties can discriminate on the basis of political belief, but religious groups were threatened with discrimination should they refuse to employ someone outside their faith tradition (Boucher 2010:18)? Even when the UK government’s Genuine Occupational Requirements gave churches more freedom, this did not prevent humanist and homosexual lobby groups challenging religious organizations on the basis of discrimination.

⁶ Paragraph 3.39 of the Government SOR consultation.

Unfortunately for the contest of rights and the possibility of resolution within liberal democracies, it is the acquiescing faiths that are dying. Evangelicals and Pentecostals are thriving, with renewalist congregations having grown from 6% to 25% of all Christians and is now the fastest growing religious movement in the world – including in many liberal democracies. Renewalist churches generally have a high regard for traditional understandings of scripture and stand opposed to a liberalizing political movement (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009:217). Given that secularization as a general rule seeks to eliminate the “acknowledgement of the supernatural”, renewalist churches are particularly problematic for any attempt to secularize liberal democracies (Horton 1994:62).

Ian Hall, paraphrasing Martin Wight, writes of his contention, even in 1948 that we were in an age which was “‘a transparent moment in history’, a time of great peril for Christianity and all Christians. Faith had been abandoned and assailed; for the first time since Constantine’s conversion of the Roman Empire, secularism and ‘paganism’ were dominant” (Hall 2006:21). Martin Wight also argued against the dominance of any political form, whether this be revolutionary Marxism or liberal democracies. Christianity has stood as the *fait accompli* of Western states for several hundred years. Even as the boundaries of its dominance and political influence have retracted it has been the accepted religion of European, North American and several post-colonial states on every continent. Indeed, it was at the heart of the international system (Philpott 2000). What is now occurring is a pronounced separation of not just church and state, but secular and sacred as certain traditional Christian understandings are being marginalized by decisions of the court and acts of government. As the severe treatment of Christians by communist regimes has shown, religion can provide a troubling source of alternate power and challenge to a state. Are liberal democracies becoming “impatient with those who, in the name of a religion, refuse to accept what is the current conception of individual freedom”? With the imposition of law on the faithful, religious freedom is being challenged in a manner more reminiscent of coercion by a totalitarian regime than tolerant democratic practice; or as Campos puts it:

Political Liberalism is ultimately a paean to a secular creed that has within it the potential to become every bit as monistic, compulsory, and intolerant of any significant deviation from social verities as the traditional modes of belief it replaced and derided (quoted in Benson 2004:95).

Benson adds a very important element to this discussion. Focused on religious freedom in Canada, Benson argues that pluralistic society has a distinct choice between structural or shared pluralism in which differing beliefs are tolerated or relativistic or totalistic pluralism. This latter pluralism “views society as moving towards the ar-

articulation of only one public policy, and such a view is antagonistic to the notion of plurality and tolerance of diversity” (Benson 2010:3). To refer back to Justice MacKenzie, “moral positions are to be accorded standing in the public square irrespective of whether the position flows out of a conscience that is religiously informed or not” (quoted in Benson 2010:22). This reflects philosopher John Gray’s *modus vivendi*. The lack of living together with different values pushes liberal democracies ever closer to a “species of fundamentalism” (Gray 2000:21).

It is not yet clear where these trends will lead, but one thing is clear – a traditional Christian worldview has shifted away from its foundational position in the establishment of International Society to take its place alongside other challengers to the state for ultimate loyalty.

4. Conclusion

As liberal democracies experience decreasing consensus, it has become necessary to increase law, to find in the instrumentality of the state solutions to public problems (Hunter 2010:102). There exists within this role of the state a myth that the state is and indeed can be neutral. As Hunter argues, this is impossible: “Law infers a moral judgment; policy implies a worldview” (Hunter 2010:102). The state is increasingly the area for the contest of moral positions each declaring its good, with many areas of life which for centuries reflected Christian thought being challenged by alternate ideologies. In such a politicized environment the cases which reflect tolerance of views based on faith become even more important. As new agendas have arisen, these have increasingly become zero sum games, rooted in power rather than persuasion, and compromise. There are of course areas over which faith groups will not compromise, but the power that is enforcing uniformity upon faith will lead to either the alteration of that faith or the alienation of the faithful from not only the state, but the democratic and legal process which is supposed to be their protector.

Thomas Jefferson argued that democracy itself is only safe when citizens are convinced that “liberties are the gift of God” in contrast to the modern liberal democratic state in which it is politicians and judges who define our rights and liberties – and as such are no more certain than the prevailing preferences of culture or power (quoted in Farr 2008:87). James Madison went even further than Jefferson, arguing that the duty that is owed to God is both prior to and more important than any claim of Civil Society, and furthermore, that this duty was to be exercised freely without punishment or restraint of the Magistrate (ibid). Even at a most basic level, “the citizen whose public self is guided by religious faith might reasonably ask why the will of any of the brilliant philosophers of the liberal tradition, or, for that matter, the will of the Supreme Court... is more relevant to moral decisions than the

will of God. So far, liberal theory has not presented an adequate answer” (Carter 1993:226). Evangelical and traditionally minded Christians will continue to find their primary loyalty and understanding of morality in their faith.

We are, in essence, experiencing the first modern cases of western democracies declaring what is and is not legal with regards to traditional and established religious beliefs. The ultimate impact of this movement is to move those of faith towards questions of identity and loyalty. Just as many second generation British Muslims identify more with their suffering Muslim “brothers” overseas, so too will Christians increasingly look past the state to other localities of leadership and identity. This was an often overlooked weakness in Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, a failure to demarcate in the Western civilization a people who would remain more loyal to their faith than their state or civilization. Huntington did of course prioritize religion as an identity marker, but this was largely still contained within civilizations. What we are likely to see in the future is a break-up of civilizational loyalties, not because of the power of globalization, but an increasing unity of faith empowered by globalization. It is likely, for example, that China already has more committed Christians than Europe, as do some African states. The complexity of Christianity is dramatically changing and patterns of loyalty are likely to change. Ugandan Bishops overseeing a mainly white evangelical American church is a sign of transnational authority and loyalty that will not just have implications for the Anglican Communion but for the state itself.

Not dissimilar to the Three-Self-Church in China, liberal democracies will find Christians who agree with a shifting moral position, helping justify further discriminatory views of orthodox belief and driving believers away from the state and towards transnational unions. Christianity will increasingly look to transnational alliances which will vie for space in the state-centric international system as religious bodies attract loyalties once reserved for the state (Carlson and Owens 2003:9). The church, a key founding institution and driver of the state-system, will likely be forced to shift its loyalties away from the state, becoming one of a plethora of non-state actors pressurizing the state. As Richard Neuhaus argues with regards to the free exercise of religion:

No other regime in human history had ever supposed that it could deny itself the right to attempt to control what its people believed about things most binding... The free exercise of religion is the most radical form of free speech and free association in that it enables people to speak and act under the auspices of an authority expressly declared to be greater than the authority of the state, and greater than the authority of the people from whom the state derives its authority (quoted in Hunter 2010:113-4).

Ultimately, as Roger Trigg argues, “It must be the mark of any free democratic society that it can tolerate the existence of practices of which it disapproves” (Trigg 2010:16). This is not merely for religion’s sake, for it is “the autonomy of the religions . . . [which] makes them worth protecting” (Carter 1993:147). The United Kingdom and other liberal democracies are showing an increasing inability to balance faith and other human rights, whether firing Christian employees, banning minarets in Switzerland or veils in France, liberal democracies risk alienating the faithful with profound consequences for the state and international society.

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