

What happens when politics meets religion?

Marko Veković & Miroljub Jevtić (eds), *When Politics Meets Religion: Navigating Old Challenges and New Perspectives*, Routledge, London and New York, 2025, p. 212

While there is still significant opportunity for a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion and politics within political science, the field has experienced rapid growth in recent years.¹ Alongside well-established institutions focusing on this connection, the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Belgrade has established itself by incorporating this topic into its curriculum and scholarly pursuits. More notably, it has become a hub for global scholars, hosting an international conference nine years ago. The articles presented at the latest Politology of Religion: IV Biannual Conference 2023 were compiled in the distinctive edited volume *When Politics Meets Religion: Navigating Old Challenges and New Perspectives* (Routledge, 2025), edited by Marko Veković and Miroljub Jevtić.

The book comprises fourteen chapters.

In *Studying Religion and Politics in the Aftermath of Widespread Religious Revival*, Jeffrey Haynes introduces the field, noting his 1993 book was among the first to discuss religion's return to the public sphere. He explores religion's role in politics, from party platforms to conflicts, especially in the MENA region. However, he argues this resurgence does not require a fundamental shift in political science theory.

¹ Jeffrey Haynes (ed.), *Handbook on Religion and International Relations*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2021; Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, 2018; Maciej Potz, *Political Science of Religion: Theorising the Political Role of Religion*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020; Monica Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's century: resurgent religion and global politics*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2011.

In *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Russia: Entanglements, Identity Making, and Nation Building*, Tobias Koellner introduces the concept of “entanglement” as a more precise term than the vague notions of caesaropapism or symphony to describe the relationship between religion and politics in contemporary Russia.

In *Religious Contra-Identities Within the Political Rhetoric of the European Far Right*, Kirsten Smeets analyses how the European far right constructs religious contra-identities, framing “Christian Europe” in opposition to the “Muslim Other”, and investigates the characteristics of these identity attributions as “religious contra-identities”.

In *Religion and the Contours of “European” Identity*, François Foret, James L. Guth, and Brent F. Nelsen examine faith’s role in shaping “national” and “European” identities. They identify four societal groups—National Only, National Primary, European Primary, and European Only—each showing significant correlations with religious factors and attitudes on religion-related issues.

In *Religious Cleavage and Value Orientations in Europe*, Miloš Bešić examines the value divide between atheists and devoutly religious individuals across Europe. He finds a significant cleavage, with key factors such as permissiveness, gender equality, political orientation, and trust in institutions shaping this divide.

In *Christian Nationalism, Civic Republicanism, and Radical Secularism in Contemporary American Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt examines distinctions among these groups and their views on Trump. He argues that, while traditional assessments assume civic Republicans differ only in their support for Christianity, they actually evaluated Trump significantly differently.

Religious Governance and Political Evolution: A Historical Analysis of Turkey’s Diyanet in Shaping State–Religion Relations, by İstar Gözaydin and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, explores the Diyanet’s role in state-religion relations. Founded by Atatürk to fill the void left by the Ottoman Caliphate, it was intended as a secular institution. However, the authors highlight its ongoing susceptibility to political influence, revealing how its mission has evolved.

In his work, *Is the Catholic Church’s Political Influence in the Philippines Declining?* In *A Postmortem Analysis of the 2022 National Elections*, Arvin D. Eballo analyses the 2022 Philippine elections, in which the Catholic Church’s opposition failed to prevent the victory of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Although the vast majority of Filipinos identify as Catholic, and the Church has played a significant role in removing authoritarian regimes, he wonders why its public influence has diminished.

In *Chinese Attitudes Towards Religious Deprivatisation and Its Determinants*, Dao Zhou examines religious deprivatisation in China, finding that higher education correlates with opposition. He also identifies a utilitarian perspective, where smaller congregations support deprivatisation for government backing, while larger ones resist to maintain autonomy.

Yousef M. Aljamal's *Liberation Theology: From Latin America to the Holy Land* examines the influence of liberation theology on the Palestinian situation. Aljamal highlights that the Kairos Palestine document serves as a rallying point for churches around the world, expressing solidarity with Palestinian Christians and their rights.

In *Religion, Mediation, and Political Conflict*, Zachary R. Calo discusses the premise that religion plays a significant role in conflict and its resolution. Calo emphasises the importance of understanding how religion influences conflict to formulate appropriate responses.

In *Laïcité, Public Governance of Religion, and the Orthodox Jews in France*, Frédéric Strack explores how *laïcité* affects Orthodox Jews in France. He finds that Orthodox Jews receive little support from other religious groups, leading them to adopt a self-reliant strategy that balances public visibility with legal and theoretical discretion.

In *"Render Unto Caesar the Things That Are Caesar's, and Unto God the Things That Are God's", but What About the People? Taxing Church's Economic Activities as a Contribution to the Common Good*, Marko Tmušić examines how taxing church activities can strengthen Church-State relations and social welfare. He argues that applying tax morale principles could enhance the church's position and reduce tax evasion. He also considers applying this approach to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In *Progressive Islamic Interpretation of Tradition: Why Should Muslims Treat Sharia Law Only as a Moral Code in the Context of Universal Human Rights?*, Ajla Čustović explores Islam's relationship with universal human rights. She argues that Sharia is a human construct, not a divine mandate, and highlights how progressive Islamic thought reinterprets it as a moral code aligned with universal human rights.

This edited volume addresses a wide array of contemporary topics in the field, specifically the interplay between religion and various forms of identity, state institutions, elections, conflict mediation, state taxation, and human rights. Some chapters offer fresh perspectives on established topics, while others present new theoretical and empirical insights. The book features diverse geographical coverage and a balanced representation of major world religions, including Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, and also Atheism. Combining qualitative and

quantitative research, it employs methods ranging from discourse analysis and ethnography to statistical analysis.

While maintaining cohesion in such a diverse collection is challenging, the volume remains engaging with a hint of unpredictability. The topics were carefully selected, offering an excellent balance between structure and creative freedom of the authors. This collection, contributed to by a wide range of scholars, emphasises the significance of understanding what happens *when politics meets religion*. Therefore, it serves as a valuable resource for scholars and students in political science, particularly for those interested in international relations and the intersection of politics and religion globally.

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