

# Changing socio-religious realities: Practical negotiation of transitions in the governance of Religion or Belief, State and Society

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## Changing socio-religious realities

Practical negotiation of transitions in the governance of Religion or Belief, State and Society.

### **Abstract**

This article argues for the importance of developing forms of governance with regard to the relationship between religion or belief, state and society in Europe so as to better reflect and “reality-match” the contemporary socio-religious realities characteristic of a continuing Christian inheritance along with an increasing secularity and growth in religious plurality, than do current patterns that usually embody privilege for a particular Christian Church or Churches largely derived from Christendom models. Having noted that recognising a need for change, deciding on a direction for change, and actually implementing change are three different things, the article draws on a social contextualist approach to the application of negotiation theory in relation to organizational change as developed by Charles Samuelson and David Messick (1995) in order to illuminate factors that can either hinder and / or facilitate such developments.

### **Author Note**

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### **Introduction**

This article discusses the issue of socio-religious change that is taking place in western, especially European and UK societies and I argue for the importance of developing forms of governance in respect of the relationship between religion or belief, state and society in Europe. Furthermore, I argue this will better reflect and “reality-match” contemporary socio-religious realities characteristic of a continuing Christian inheritance, along with an increasing secularity and growth in religious plurality, than is the case with current patterns. Three models of governance change for religion or belief, state and society relationships are posited and discussed. This is followed by a more extensive discussion of negotiation theory as developed by Charles Samuelson and David Messick (1995). The article concludes with a comment on the timeliness of a change to the understanding and implementation of changed governance modalities so as to result in better and more apposite relationships between

religion and belief communities, on the one hand, and states and societies, on the other.<sup>1</sup>

### **Socio-Religious Change and Reality Matching**

The first major step in all political life is to search for basic metaphors that are used to explain our political existence to ourselves and to others. Constitutional arrangements – whether in written forms (as in the USA) or in unwritten forms (as in the UK) provide such basic metaphors which narrate to itself and to others, the fundamental self-understandings of the society concerned. And this, in principle, also includes a society's understanding of the relationships within it between religion or belief, on the one side, and state and society on the other. In the middle of the twentieth century, under the influence of the progress of secularization via capitalism in western Europe, and of the existing state socialism in central and Eastern Europe, these issues were, however, seen by many to have become a matter of what might be called “political archaeology” rather than of real and immediate social choices and consequences. However, in the immediate wake of the end of the Cold War, as the veteran and now deceased British socialist politician, Tony Benn, then put it:

Now all of a sudden, arguments which had almost disappeared into the mists of time have come into sharp focus and are hotly contested across the world, involving diplomatic relations, trade arrangements and stretching into the heart of religious communities where people of different religious convictions have to live side by side (Benn, 1989).

As alluded to by Benn, one of the reasons why questions to do with the relationships between religion or belief, state and society are once again current is because, negatively speaking, religion and belief have again become a focus for conflict and competition between groups that are defined in terms of religion, especially in relation to differences of culture and ethnicity, but also in relation to the rise of violent extremism associated with religion. At the same time, and more positively speaking, in a number of contexts where religion or belief was once seen as an entirely private matter, there has been an increasing recognition of the ways in which religion or belief groups can act as bearers of important forms of social capital within civil society (Kaasa, 2011).

However, regardless of whether the issues arising from these changes are evaluated more in positive or negative terms, what is certainly now the case is that all states and societies, as well as religion or belief communities and groups, need now to take serious account of, and to engage with, such issues. Indeed, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Council of Europe urged both states and societies and majority religious bodies with relatively powerful social and legal positions within them, to recognize a normative set of responsibilities in relation to such matters. Thus, in 1996, a report from the Council of Europe

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws in part upon some earlier references to, and discussions of, negotiation theory (see P. Weller 2005), updated with reference to a broader European context and using an argument that is not so theologically or ecclesiologically focused.

Group of Consultants on Religious and Cultural Aspects of Opportunities for Immigrants (1996: 22) argued that:

The increasing religious diversity of Europe constitutes a major challenge to both the governments of the member states and to their societies. The governments and the historical religious communities must adopt a policy which aims to establish an effective equality of rights and treatments for the new religious minorities in Europe. Failure to establish such a policy would amount to a violation by Europe of its declared principles and those of the Council of Europe.

In a number of publications, the present author has argued that the need for such new policies arises from a changed European socio-religious reality that, in different combinations and balances in various European countries, can best be described as a “three dimensional” (Weller, 2005; Weller 2016). What is meant by such a “three dimensional” socio-religious reality is the sociological fact of societies that are “exhibiting contours that are ‘Christian, secular and religiously plural’” (Weller, 2005: 73) as compared with the more “one dimensional” European inheritance of Christendom or the “two dimensional” religious-secular modifications made to that reality in the decades and centuries following the Enlightenment. The increasing religious plurality largely, but not exclusively, consequent upon the migratory and refugee movements of people in the second half of the twentieth and early parts of the twenty-first century is a new element, and brings in the “third dimension”.

Of course, the balance between each of the three elements is different in each European country and they are also in continuing development relative to each other rather than being completely stable. Thus, for example, on the basis of responses to the question on religious affiliation asked in the England and Wales Census of 2011 compared to those of 2001, in relation to at least self-identifying religious affiliation (as distinct from the question of belief or practice) a clear trajectory is showing of a society that is, over time, becoming more secular, less Christian, and more religiously plural (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

Such developments in the socio-political reality in turn sharpen historic questions and debates about the degree to which models of governance relating to religion or belief, state and society either have actually changed, sociologically speaking or, normatively speaking, should change in order to take account of this new socio-religious landscape via processes of what the present author has previously called “reality matching” (Weller, 2005: 185). In relation to this in Europe – albeit with the important exception of the Lutheran former State Church of Sweden (see Grazia Martino, 2015) – although there is some evidence of changes in some regional and local levels, generally speaking such changes have not yet occurred at national levels. Therefore, for example, in the UK, despite its relatively high degree of secularity and religious plurality, the Anglican Church of England remains (via its so-called “establishment in law”) in a special relationship with the state, especially in regards to the Monarchy and Parliament, including, through the presence of twenty-six of its Bishops who play an active part, as of right, in the second chamber of the UK Parliament, the House of Lords.

### **Three Models for Change in Religion or Belief, State and Society Governance**

As argued in a research report communicating the results of a UK government commissioned study on the nature and extent of religious discrimination in England and Wales: “For policy to be effective, it needs to be grounded in the experiences and worldview of those most likely to be affected” (Weller, Feldman and Purdam, 2001: 159). In terms of the current European context, this article argues that this means the normative imperative to move from a position in which a contemporary “three dimensional” socio-religious reality is recognized as such in sociologically descriptive terms only, to one in which a “three dimensional” socio-religious policy is enacted by the state and society, and (in the European context where some Christian Churches are the socially more dominant forms of religion or belief) by relatively powerful Christian Churches adopting a new approach to theological reflection and ecclesiological self-understanding and practice that is more in keeping with the socio-religious realities than what Stuart Murray calls “the vestiges of Christendom” (Murray, 2004).

However, when arguing for more “reality matching” in the way that this author does, it is also important to recognize that socio-religious change does not come about through intellectual argument alone – however forceful or persuasive it might be in political, moral or religious terms. Rather, both on the part of the state authorities, and also among religion and belief communities and groups themselves, there can be multiple reasons for a reluctance to consider the possibility of change. And what can be especially challenging about this is, as also pointed out by William Montgomery Watt, there is the difficulty that:

our time cannot be neatly divided into a period when we study the situation objectively and a period when we consider what to do about this situation we have studied. Often the two processes go on concurrently and influence one another. Even if they are not contemporaneous, the interests which are promoted by the activity also influence the study of the situation. It was for this reason that (...) social and ideational factors are complementary (Montgomery Watt, 1993: 9).

Having stated and acknowledged the complexity that can be involved in the attempt to achieve a better “reality match” between a “three dimensional” socio-religious reality and national level structures for governance of religion or belief, state and society relationships, and recognising that leaving things as they are is also a choice (even if more passive in nature than active, and that has real social and religious implications), in fundamental and basic terms the active choices that can be made are relatively few in number and relatively clear in their overall trajectories and implications, even though each one could have subtle variants according to the particularities of historical inheritance and contemporary context. Where particular religions already have relatively powerful status, with social, political and legal privilege built into the constitutional and legal fabric of a state and society, these three basic models might be characterized as those

of “secular abolition/disestablishment”, “evolutionary extension” and “pluralist invention”.

#### *The Model of Secular Abolition/Disestablishment*

The option of seeking to abolish all forms of religious privilege is one that has often been argued for, especially from the perspective of ideological secularists, although it has also been advocated on religious grounds by those within the Free Church traditions of Christianity whose stance was informed by a theology that affirmed freedom of conscience in religious belief and practice rather than restriction for those of some religious groups and privilege for others (Weller, 2014). This was based on an ecclesiology that understands the Christian Church much more as a fellowship of people of varying national and ethnic backgrounds freely covenanting together, rather than a nation at prayer according to legally authorized forms of worship. It was the combination of these theological and ecclesiological principles with an existential experience of social disadvantage that gave the nineteenth century English disestablishment movement its particular passion and power (Larsen, 1999). In Ireland in 1871, and in Wales in 1920, the Church of England’s special established position was abolished, without replacement. However, the Church of England has remained privileged within the UK state nonetheless.

Since the mid- to later part of the nineteenth century high-water mark of the Free Church inspired movement for disestablishment, the majority of abolition arguments have been put forward on the basis of specifically ideologically secularist grounds (as, for example, by the National Secular Society) or on (at least ostensibly less ideological) more generally pragmatic grounds concerned with social and political equity. Thus, in many respects, modern abolition initiatives of these kinds tend towards wanting to achieve their goal by, in effect, privatising religion and replacing it with a new secular paradigm, rather than on the basis of reconfiguring the overall relationships between religion or belief, state and society in the course of which religion(s) can have a continued but different role within public life. In general, though, religions themselves cannot accept such a limitation upon the scope of their vision and relevance without their religious integrity becoming impaired.

Furthermore, in societies that have tried to banish religion to the private sphere, the evidence would seem to suggest that such a policy is ultimately ineffective; that it impoverishes civic society; and that it also risks provoking the growth of reactive and aggressive forms of religious expression and organization. The Indian political scientist, Achin Vanaik, reflected on this from within his own context in India, but in a way that arguably has a wider applicability:

To say that politics and religion should be kept separate is understandable, especially at a time like ours... But what it really should mean is that politicians should not use religions for short-term political ends and religious leaders should not use politicians for narrowly communal gains... But surely every religion has a social and public dimension. To say that religions should be a private affair is to misunderstand both religion and politics (Vanaik, 1992: 56).

### *The Model of Evolutionary Extension*

In again using examples from the UK, while recognising and not passing too quickly over the ways in which, in the past, the Church of England used its privileged position through both law and social practice to disadvantage and discriminate against other people and organizations of other Christian traditions and of other religions and none, in many ways the contemporary practice of the established Church of England can be seen as a good example of the potential that may be offered by this model. In the latter part of the twentieth and early part of the twenty-first century, while not fundamentally changing its unique position in the British state, in a number of domains in which it is active the Church of England has, in fact, used its privileged position to open up space for participation by people and groups of other religious traditions. In relation to this, as the religious historian John Wolffe (1994: 102) suggested, “one prognosis for the establishment” is that of its potential “...for the established Church of England to find a new role in a multi-cultural society, as a bridge between the mutual incomprehensions of secular liberalism and minority religious conviction.”

At first sight, perhaps surprisingly, there are many leaders of minority religious traditions who can be found also supporting such a model. For example, in his 1990 Reith Lectures the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Jonathan (now Lord) Sacks, argued that minorities ought to support the Church of England as a national institution, commenting that, “It might seem paradoxical that one who speaks from within the Jewish tradition should seek to support institutions that are intrinsically Christian” (Sacks, 1991: 97-98) while explaining that he held this position on the basis that, “...each of the many faiths that constitute culturally plural Britain is diminished by a weakening of the faith of the majority” and because, in his view, disestablishment would “have the effect of signalling a further dissociation between religion and public culture and would intensify the dangers of a collapse in our moral ecology” (Sacks, 1991: 97).

### *The Model of Pluralist Invention*

The third basic possible model for change is one of neither “abolition/disestablishment” of any existing religious privilege, nor its “evolutionary extension” to include other religions and none, but rather, the “pluralist invention” of something new. In the UK context, for example, this was the radical option proposed by the Scottish commentator Stewart Lamont following a review of various forms of Church-state relations undertaken in his book, *Church and State: Uneasy Alliances*, and in the light of which he proposed that the UK Parliament should:

set up a National Religious Council for the United Kingdom. Assuming that it is the democratic will to retain Christianity as the historic faith of the nation (and I believe that any poll would back such a view), then the majority of places on this Council would go to the Christian Churches. ... It would have places for the principal non-Christian faiths such as Islam, Judaism and Sikhism and

could act as a liaison body between parliament and the religious bodies (Lamont, 1989: 204).

He then went on to propose that such a body should primarily be “consultative”, but also that it could “carve out an influential role for itself by organising assemblies on subjects of common concern to those of religious faith”, and that the creation of such a Council would, he claimed, “simply be to give institutional form to a process which has been gathering force over the years” (Lamont, 1989: 204). A development of this kind has not yet occurred. But an example from the UK, of what is possible when new contextual conditions open up new opportunities, can be drawn from the re-founding in 1999 of the Scottish Parliament (that had been closed in 1707) following the Scottish devolution referendum.

Given this new beginning in devolved Scottish governance, and in the light of the fact that UK’s Westminster Parliament has long had a tradition of being opened with prayers by its Church of England chaplain, the question was raised as to whether the re-established Scottish Parliament should or should not have prayers and, if there were to be prayers, what kind of prayers these might be and who should lead them. Which representatives and of what groups and communities ought to be involved? Faced with this question and the freedom to make choices unconstrained by historical precedent, it was agreed that the Parliament should adopt what could properly be called a new “pluralist invention” of holding a “time for reflection” to be led, in broadly proportionate terms, by representatives of the various religion or belief groups in Scotland. (Scottish Parliament, 2005; Bonney, 2013; Bonney and Carling, 2016).

### **Social Contextualist Negotiation Theory and Pathways to Change**

Recognising a need for change, deciding on a direction for change, and actually implementing change, are three different things. Subjected to close examination, it might be that none of the three basic models sketched out above would seem to be fully appropriate for the current and future configuration of religion or belief, state and society in European countries. However, the question still needs to be pressed as to whether there can in practice be models that would neither presuppose the predominance of one religion or religious tradition in the public life of society, nor the exclusion of all religions. Also, any evaluation of the “reality-matching” adequacy of models for change in relation to the national level of governance of religion or belief, state and society, needs to include an evaluation of practical realism, including the transitional potential of any models, as well as of their ultimate appropriateness.

#### *Negotiation Theory*

In the remainder of this article, it is argued that some thinking that comes beyond the theoretical frameworks offered by theology, ecclesiology and political science can helpfully illuminate many of the key issues that are at stake in terms of what might help and/or hinder progress towards a more “reality-matching” change – and this, perhaps precisely because it comes from outside of these frameworks and therefore enables a fresh perspective to be taken on old issues



when religiously and politically couched. It is therefore argued that negotiation theory offers to a new consideration of these old issues, some helpful analytical tools developed in relation to organizational change more generally, while drawing on perspectives taken from a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, social psychology, political science and behavioural economics, each of which has resulted in a particular theoretical and practical emphasis along structural, psychological, cognitive or normative lines.

Overall, it is argued that a “social contextualist” approach to negotiation theory is of particular relevance to the issues with which this article is concerned. This draws upon the full range of insights found in more general negotiation theory but (of evident relevance in relation to the communitarian dimensions of religion and belief groups), it also posits the importance of “conceptualising individuals as fundamentally and essentially social decision-makers” and of taking into full account “the impact of the social and organizational environments” (Kramer and Messick, 1995: ix).

In Samuelson and Messick’s essay, “Let’s Make Some New Rules: Social Factors That Make Freedom Unattractive”, published in Kramer and Messick’s (1995) edited book on *Negotiation as Social Process*, the authors highlight a number of critically important factors involved in the negotiation of change. They articulate and explore these with reference to the what they call the “transition costs” involved in any change, and the consequent tendency among potential participants in consequences of such change towards risk aversion that makes agreement on the substance and direction of any change challenging to achieve. As they explain in detail:

First, any change in a social institution will involve transition costs. Replacing the status quo with any alternative system will generally involve costs that simply maintaining the status quo avoids. Such transition costs tend to add to the attractiveness of what is relative to what might be. Second, people are generally familiar with the properties of the status quo, whereas the qualities of an alternative system may only be guessed at. There is, in short, less uncertainty about the status quo than about rival systems. Risk aversion would therefore cause one to view competing systems somewhat less favourably, even if the status quo’s deficiencies were clear. Better to have a system whose flaws are known than one that might bring unpleasant surprises (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 63).

#### *Change and Risk Aversion*

Samuelson’s and Messick’s observations about risk aversion are particularly relevant to contexts where many, both in the organs of the state and among religious bodies and organizations, can seem reluctant to question current arrangements and/or to try to envision new ones that might more appropriately replace these. Thus, even when it is recognized that there are less than ideal or even unjust things in the present arrangements, since these arrangements are often so deeply embedded in the states and societies concerned there can be, at one and the same time, a comforting familiarity about the known quality of such arrangements, even when their flaws and weaknesses are acknowledged.

The extent of the “transition costs” that may be involved in changing present arrangements can be seen from the UK example that, even when there were really quite acute tensions between the established Church of England and the Government of Margaret Thatcher over a range of public issues from the condition of the Inner Cities through to the Falklands / Malvinas War, disestablishment did not appear on that Government’s radical political agenda despite its readiness to take on a range of other traditional and powerful social institutions. As the historian of religion John Wolffe observed in relation to this, “the majority of both church leaders and of Parliament seemed happy – or at least not unhappy – with the status quo. They had no desire to face the distraction and conflict that would almost certainly have resulted from any serious attempt to achieve radical change” (Wolffe, 1994: 93).

Analysing this kind of situation according to their theory, Samuelson and Messick note that: “Transition costs and risks of unfamiliarity will have to be compensated for if structural change is to occur. Other dimensions of evaluation must promise sufficient benefits to make the change worthwhile” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 63). In light of this, they go on to suggest that in any negotiation of change at least the “dimensions of evaluation of efficiency, fairness, freedom and self-interest” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 63) need to be brought into use by the various parties concerned in assessing the potential benefits and costs of change relative to the various models for change.

#### *Dimensions of Evaluation: Efficiency*

As noted above, the first of Samuelson’s and Messick’s “dimensions of evaluation” is that of “efficiency.” They define this in terms of “the extent to which an allocation system can provide satisfactory levels of a resource to a group without depleting the resource” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 63-64). Applying this principle to the question of the most appropriate forms for structuring the relationship between religion or belief, state and society, one could think of the “resource” involved in terms of the social significance of religion, in its symbolic, structural and operational senses. Informed by such an understanding, the potential for “depleting the resource” is linked, from a religious perspective, with the risks of secularization, privatization and marginalization of religion.

For much of human history, religion has provided the integrative symbols of ultimate meaning within which the diversities of social life have been enabled to find their coherence. However, since the Enlightenment, religious believing and belonging has at least been relativized and also partially privatized. Those advocating for a secular settlement of the relationships between religion or belief, state and society have often argued that it has been the rise of the secular spirit that has enabled religious absolutism to be overcome and a degree of religious co-existence to be developed. And the argument that a secular state can better deal with the plural nature of modern societies than the inheritance of an established religion is a powerful one that needs to be considered carefully.

On the other hand, echoing the evocative lines in W.B. Yates’ (1919) poem, *The Second Coming*, as the Christian theologian Lesslie Newbigin put it – “To acknowledge that ultimate symbol, to reverence the sacred, was the precondition

for knowledge and understanding. If that is destroyed, things fall apart” (Newbiggin, 1990: 17). One is then left with a world in which an unrestrained capitalism dominates social, political, cultural and economic life to the detriment of all other values. Because the state has tendencies to claim absolute power for itself, it is arguable the presence of an established religion can act as an institutionalized reminder that the state is not the only significant reality; that it does not represent the only form of authority; and that the authority that it does have is not absolute.

It is for such reasons that many people of all religions (as well some traditionalists of no specific religious commitment) are often nervous about the abolitionist option of a secularising disestablishment. However, for many other people it is also the case that the socio-religious “centre” provided by Christendom, let alone that of a particular Christian Church, can no longer command widespread assent.

#### *Dimensions of Evaluation: Fairness*

The second of the “dimensions of evaluation” for assessing the “transition costs” involved in negotiated change identified by Samuelson and Messick is that of “fairness”. And this is understood in relation to “the degree to which distribution of the resource satisfies the principles of equality or equity” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 64). In principle, it is clear that an unmodified (for example by “evolutionary extension” to include other religions) social, political and legal privileging of one religious tradition or corporate expression of it, does not facilitate a “distribution of the resource” (in other words the symbolic and operational social significance of religion) in a way that satisfies the principles of “equality or equity”.

At the same time, as distinct from theory, in practice it may be the case that a precise mathematical equality is neither desirable nor achievable. Arguably, in a society with a Christian inheritance and in which a comparatively large proportion of the population continues to identify in some way as Christian, a contextual and balanced understanding of equity is needed more than a formal equality. Indeed, it needs to be acknowledged that despite the religious disadvantage experienced by all non-privileged religions, even where there are individuals from within minority religious communities who question this, there are also others who do not identify this as a problem. In this regard, some minority religious leaders may be mirroring the stances taken up by some among the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Free Church leaders in England wherein, as their social and religious disadvantages became gradually ameliorated, they became more concerned with the positioning of their place at the existing “table” of power and place, rather than with the nature of the “table” as such.

#### *Dimensions of Evaluation: Freedom*

Samuelson and Messick’s third “dimension of evaluation” is “freedom”, defined in terms of “the extent to which a system permits individuals to make resource use decisions for themselves” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 64). This relates to the proper autonomy of each group within a plural society. In turn, it relates

to the extent to which any existing privileged religious group might lose its autonomy if changes to the governance structures for religion or belief, state and society arrangements were externally manufactured and carried through. Apropos of this, Stewart Lamont's review of the relationship between Church and state concluded with the challenging, but also hopeful, words that:

The case for disestablishment is now both historical and constitutional, statistical and equitable, moral and theological – but it is also practical and political on the basis that it is better to make the change willingly from strength, and from faith in the future, than unwillingly from weakness (Lamont, 1989: 196).

A willingness to face the inadequacy of the present arrangements now, and out of a choice of “freedom” instead of being driven by external necessity of dealing with any post hoc consequences of change brought about externally would arguably allow all involved to draw with integrity upon their own traditions in negotiating through, and transitioning to, such change. In Samuelson's and Messick's terms it would be a case of privileged ecclesiastical bodies making for themselves a “resource use decision”, rather than having a change forced upon them.

#### *Dimensions of Evaluation: Self-Interest*

The final “dimension of evaluation” identified by Samuelson and Messick (1995: 64) is that of “self-interest” which is defined in terms of “one's own view of how one's own resource status would be affected by an allocation system”. From the perspective of relatively less powerful religion or belief groups, this implies that they need to make a contextual judgement in relation to which “allocation system” – either the current one or one of its models for replacement – is most likely to deliver an improvement in their “resource status”. Matters of both pragmatism and of principle are likely to be involved in such an evaluation. Because of this, as noted above, especially among the official leaderships of minority religion or belief communities and groups there can be those who see the possibility of sharing in the current “allocation system” – even as junior and dependent partners in an “extended establishment” approach – as the most likely possibility in practice of increasing the overall “resource status” of their tradition.

For those in majority privilege positions, the factor of “self-interest”, when taken in a straightforward way, might necessarily seem to indicate that there would always and only be continued support for current arrangements. However, in addition to more straightforward views of self-interest, it can be argued that the “self-interest” of a religious group and its “own view” of its “resource status” can, in addition, be considered on different grounds than those which apply in other organizations. Within the self-understanding of religious organizations, “self-interest” may be considered not only in terms of observable and therefore also penultimate strengths and weaknesses. Rather, if they are to attempt to be true to themselves, then as well as these penultimate forms of “self-interest”, religious organizations will at least try to be guided by the ultimate

goals to which they are called to bear witness, and which therefore form a part of their self-interest understood in an ultimate way.

Therefore it is at least possible that, modified and enriched by other theological and ecclesiological traditions from the undersides and margins of Church history, those Churches in Europe that have more social, political and legal power may draw upon a more “ultimate” kind of “self-interest” informed by an eschatological horizon rather than approaching the issues involved solely on the basis of a pragmatic calculation of potential costs and benefits.

#### *A Multiattribute Utility Problem: Change and Complexity*

Samuelson’s and Messick’s analysis of the factors and dynamics involved in the negotiation of change concludes that what is involved in making a choice between alternative systems is what they call by the somewhat less than elegant phrase, “a multiattribute utility problem” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 65). In other words, the “dimensions of evaluation” which have been considered above are not to be evaluated in isolation but as a complex and unified whole. As explained by Samuelson and Messick (1995: 64), “the attractiveness of each allocation system is represented by its weighted average, and group members compare overall attractiveness measures of the different systems in order to make choices or comparative evaluations of two or more systems”. This is because the individual “dimensions of evaluation” are not always correlated and, depending on the circumstances, a differential importance can be attached to each individual dimension. And indeed, it is this which brings us back to why it is that why what might abstractly appear to be a logic of change to the current governance arrangements for the relationships between religion or belief, state and society does not always command the support even of those who might be expected to support this.

#### *The Relative Importance of the Evaluation Dimensions and Experience of the System*

Samuelson and Messick highlight “two systematic factors” which influence perceptions of the “allocation systems” and which determine a group’s formulation of the “overall attractiveness measures” in analysing a possible change. These are the “relative importance attached to the dimensions” and the “experience subjects have had with the system” (Samuelson and Messick, 1995: 64). In terms of the “relative importance attached to the dimensions” both secularists and religious believers opposed to current arrangements recognize the inequality and inequity in them. But secularists and believers who share this evaluation may well give a different relative weighting to the functions of “fairness” and “efficiency”. Secularists are likely to be attracted to a model (the abolition model) that is based on a high evaluation of the criterion of “fairness”, while many religious believers might find this less attractive on the grounds of concerns about “efficiency” in the sense of being concerned about the danger that the “resource” of the symbolic and operational public influence of religion might thereby be “depleted”. The second systematic factor identified by Samuelson and Messick as influencing the “overall attractiveness measures”

when analysing the possibilities for change is the “experience subjects have had with the system”.

### **Conclusion: Time for a Change?**

While, in principle, many people might recognize the case for a “reality matching” change, there is also an argument that in a liberal democratic environment there are other issues of a more pressing theological, ecclesiological and political nature that take precedence over any reconfiguration of the relationships between religion or belief, state and society. This kind of stance is taken on the basis that what remains of establishment is, by comparison with its history, only a cosmetic piece of political archaeology, or a kind of historical embellishment in the heritage theme park of national life inhabited by Beefeaters and town criers. This is the idea that the relations that are reflected in established religions are (by implication, *merely*) “symbolic” rather “real” and “actual”.

Indeed, there are those who argue that if privileging of one or more Church largely has continuing significance in what are generally more symbolic than actual terms, then it is not worth the trouble of initiating the inevitable complexities and upheavals involved in the attempt to bring about any real change. But arguably such a position does not give sufficient weight to the “real” and “actual” influence of the “symbolic”. While the nineteenth century English constitutionalist, Walter Bagehot, drew a distinction between what he called the “dignified” and the “effective” parts of the constitution, the “dignified” parts are not, in fact, “merely symbolic”. They are themselves connected with the “effective” constitution through the social power of the symbolic to shape and form assumptions at all levels of social and political life.

It is partly because of this that such patterns may seem to offer security. However, it is also arguable that, in the face of what in fact are changed socio-religious realities, the actual possibility of maintaining those historic patterns may turn out to be both illusory and irresponsible, contributing to the creation of conditions that could end up, whether intended or not, in fanning the flames of religious bigotry and conflict. Making conscious decisions to try to work for new and more “reality-matched” governance arrangements for the relationships between religion or belief, state and society, is likely to entail a readiness to embrace at least some degree of risk rather than allowing the power of “risk aversion” to exercise a determining control over the possible shapes of the future. Nevertheless, this paper has posited the need and models for change and argued that, indeed, some measure of change is desirable if not needful now.

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